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... [T]his knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued discussion between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire [puròs] is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes itself.

... ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐστὶν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα, ἀλλ' ἐκ πολλῆς συνουσίας γιγνομένης περὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτὸ καὶ τοῦ συζῆν ἐξαίφνης, οἷον ἀπὸ πυρὸς [341d] πηδῆσαντος ἐξαφθὲν φῶς, ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γενόμενον αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἤδη τρέφει.

—Plato, *Seventh Letter* 341c–d

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CAN OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE EXIST?

Musa Brennan

ABSTRACT: *This essay critically examines allegations against fact and justification objectivism, revealing how they can express attributes of oppressive knowledge. I contend that such allegations reflect oppressive tendencies within knowledge/belief systems, subordinating others without sufficient epistemological justification. While recognizing value in both objective and subjective knowledge systems, I argue that the existence of objective knowledge is demonstrated through various ethical cases. Explicating the historical oppressiveness of alleged objective knowledge, this essay explores the dichotomy between objective and subjective theories of ethics. Through ethical examples, I argue for the existence of objective ethical principles, challenging subjective relativism as a valid epistemological view of the world. The historical influence of racial biases on alleged objective knowledge, as seen in the U.S. Enlightenment era, is dissected, revealing how miseducation perpetuated subjective racial prejudices. The essay critically analyzes the dismissal of racist morals over time, emphasizing the impact of educational reform on disproving subjectively mistaken justifications for knowledge. The critical analysis highlights the utility of objective knowledge compared to subjective knowledge, exemplified by principled versus pathological coups. I argue that objective knowledge, when justified through historical prejudice, may lack utility, but I contend that not all objectivist knowledge is oppressive. The importance of finding the best overall decision in moral teleology is emphasized, with a distinction drawn between subjective claims and undeniable, or objectively correct, statements. This essay argues for the existence of objective knowledge about the world, showcasing how knowledge colonization arises from miseducation and historical prejudices.*

1. Introduction

Allegations against fact and justification objectivism demonstrate how perceptions of them can express attributes of knowledge colonization, which refers to certain types of knowledge asserting dominance over other facts in an attempt to suppress these other types of facts. Further, these allegations against fact and justification objectivism express the tendencies of oppressive knowledge/belief systems to subordinate other systems thereby deemed to arrive at incorrect conclusions about the world, without epistemological justification supporting these conclusions. There are arguments advocating for opposing positions on fact and justification objectivism, demonstrating value in both views of the nature of fact and justification, although this does not necessarily indicate that each view is equally correct. Both views about the nature of fact and justification can come to true conclusions about the world, yet both views also have the potential to arrive at these conclusions in unsound ways. Subjective forms of belief systems can very easily create valid arguments to justify beliefs, although potential for unsoundness is high. Objective forms of belief systems also have potential to justify beliefs with validity and a lack of soundness,

and this can be seen through various historical examples I will soon outline. In this paper, I will argue for the conclusion that objective knowledge about the world exists by demonstration of various ethical cases, and any form of oppressive knowledge—knowledge which subjugates—is mistaken by subjective prejudice.

2. Explication

I will discuss the historical oppressiveness of certain kinds of alleged objective knowledge, which I define as knowledge of undeniable or certain facts about the world. Ethics is a contentious field in philosophy, and one point of contention within *meta-ethics*—which is a related field concerning the metaphysical nature of ethics—involves objective and subjective theories of ethics, where “objective” refers to virtually undeniable facts about the world, and “subjective” refers to conclusions that are relative to a certain perspective. These two views on the nature of ethics are contained within objective and subjective knowledge-formation systems, respectively. The values of objective knowledge theorists express how certain knowledge is independent of the mind, although the means of obtaining the knowledge may be subjective. There are certain facts which cannot be disputed, qualifying it as objective knowledge about the world.¹ Some objectivists may disagree on what claims are truly objective, but they do agree that some exist. Opposed to this is subjectivism, or relativism, which operates under the thesis that all knowledge is subjective, relative to perspectives or social values and interests.² This form of knowledge construction allows for any belief to be truthfully justified insofar as this belief is true relative to some perspective, and this form of knowledge construction is diametrically opposed to objectivist values.

I will use different ethical claims and belief-formation systems as demonstrations for why objective ethical principles exist, in which case it follows that objective knowledge about the world exists insofar as knowledge of these objective ethical principles constitutes objective knowledge. Firstly, there are certain ethical statements which no organized society has been able to justify, one example including “killing babies for fun is permissible.” This statement holds significant moral magnitude, and by virtue of no society being able to rationally justify it, I contend, this indicates that objective ethical claims exist; in this instance, the objective moral claim is “killing babies for fun is impermissible.” Certain societies have been able to justify the killing of babies, although these instances, once examined more closely, demonstrate how there was racial bias, not rational justification, influencing the killing of certain kinds of babies (e.g., Nazi Germany). To make the claim that killing all kinds of babies for fun is justified would be entirely absurd, and I contend that its lack of justification indicates the existence of absolute, or objective, ethical claims.

Next, assessing the Enlightenment and its contributors will detail just how racial biases influenced groups to adhere to miseducation and subjective racial prejudices about the world, although these beliefs were mistaken and preached as objective knowledge claims for centuries. Charles Mills discusses one of the most significant contributors to the Enlightenment, Immanuel

¹ Michael J. Raven, “Subjectivism Is Pointless,” *Logos & Episteme: An International Journal of Epistemology* 4, no. 1 (2013): 56.

² Raven, “Subjectivism Is Pointless,” 56.

Kant, who attempted universalizing morals for all humans, although no matter how unbiased some claims could have been interpreted, Kant only believed these universalizable ethics applied to fellow white men.³ This mistaken argument shows how racial bias can influence even the most important authors in philosophy, and mistaken beliefs can lead one to argue false claims about the world. With regards to Kant, this misunderstanding can be identified as believing that white-skinned men are morally superior to white-skinned women and dark-skinned individuals.⁴ To argue that one human is morally superior to another due to physical or biological appearance has neither *a posteriori* nor *a priori* evidence substantiating such claims, therefore qualifying only some of Kant's moral arguments as substantive.

Historical accounts, especially in the United States during the chattel slavery era (1776-1865), demonstrate the economic and social benefits white men were able to obtain through subordination of women and dark-skinned people, thus proving there was a miseducation on morality that allowed certain social groups to benefit from this standardized subordination. By allowing certain groups to benefit from this weaponized morality, a hierarchy of morality was introduced imposing oppressive knowledge onto groups which disagreed with the oppressors. This miseducation indicates a misunderstanding of morality and objective knowledge by the people who hold social power by allowing historical prejudice and lack of critical thought to cause individuals to misperceive the reality of morals. I think it is safe to say that women and dark-skinned people are not morally inferior to white men, and although this might have been culturally and socially regarded as true 100 years ago, people would refute this claim in accordance with the previous social interests and values. I attribute people's ability to agree with this claim to educational reform causing new generations to adopt this newly discussed moral belief, although, from the birth of America up until the 21st century, these moral claims about moral and biological superiority were discussed as objective knowledge about the world, and with time have been disproven. This demonstrates how subjective knowledge can be mistakenly perceived as objective, specifically knowledge pertaining to morality, which is a kind of knowledge contained under general knowledge about the world by humans as a species. Morality is entirely mind-dependent—meaning moral belief systems require construction by humans in order to exist—although, just because morality requires having a mind, this does not diminish the importance of objectivity within them. This fundamentally incorrect perception of morals, caused by miseducation, expresses how not all alleged objective knowledge should get weighted with equal amounts of utility; after all, the dehumanization of women and dark-skinned individuals was very explicit with hyper-specific social roles when these morals were standardized.

All ethical claims are constructed by the mind, and certain claims can be subjective in the sense that they lack factual evidence yet are mistaken as objective; the disproving of racist morals shows how there are incorrect ways to deduce methods of treating other humans. Over time, Western culture has demonstrated a promotion of the belief in freedom and equality where this

³ Charles W. Mills, "Defending the Radical Enlightenment," *Social Philosophy Today: Truth and Objectivity in Social Ethics* 18 (2002): 21.

⁴ Mills, "Defending the Radical Enlightenment," 21.

directly contradicts the previously standardized racism, and people realized how inhumane it was to subordinate certain groups based on unchangeable characteristics. To realize that it was inhumane to treat others on the basis of racism demonstrates an acknowledgement of false morality, and this false morality is attributed to miseducation practices. By virtue of miseducation, allegedly objective morality or knowledge, in this case racist and sexist morals, can be dismissed, once proven to be subjective, and shows that there are normatively correct ways to treat humans. For example, it is never morally permissible to express acts of aggression towards a dark-skinned person just because of their skin color.

After analyzing multiple ethical claims, one of which has yet to be justified by rational deliberation and one belief system which has substantial amounts of history associated with it, I have shown how any form of oppressive knowledge, objective or subjective, can be dismissed due to standardized miseducation, because the same process of miseducation discussed above is generalizable. The social interests and values of a society determine a lot about how it functions, including the normalized moral principles which guide how people treat each other, although historical accounts express how incorrect means of treating people can exist. I argue that objective knowledge exists, demonstrated through disproven and proven ethical claims about the world, and any claim of objective knowledge which oppresses certain groups is mistaken, and subjectively justified through prejudice. The Western cultural promotion of freedom and equality is foundational to discovering other objective moral principles, which themselves constitute objective knowledge, about the world. I define morality as a means to perpetually improve the welfare of humans as a species, qualifying objective knowledge theorists' principles as correct.

3. Critical Analysis

Within my argument there are a few points which should be critically examined more closely that will make it more convincing, specifically with the practical utility of knowledge. I contend that objective knowledge contains substantial amounts of utility compared to subjective knowledge. An argument presented by Michael Raven effectively proves this through the distinction between pathological and principled coups, where principled coups are directed towards some end goal or purpose, while pathological coups are not.⁵ The intentions associated with a principled coup aim to obtain what philosophy refers to as Capital T Truths about the world. This term—Capital T Truth—can be defined as specific claims which are absolute—or, to stay consistent, objective—and cannot be changed because they explain something undeniable about the world. An element of all coups is subjugation, although contextual evidence allows subjugation to be either justified or unjustified, oppressive or emancipative.⁶ When subjugation is unjustified, this determines it as prejudice and should not be taken seriously due to its lack of utility.

In contrast, an example of a completely justified principled coup can be demonstrated with the case of a child who is mindlessly running into the street, ignorant of a car approaching them, wherein an adult who is aware of the potential consequences yanks the child out of the street by

⁵ Raven, "Subjectivism Is Pointless," 61.

⁶ Raven, "Subjectivism Is Pointless," 61.

the arm, slightly hurting the child's arm in the process. The adult's intention could be identified as saving the child's life, although slightly injuring them in order to prevent far more severe injuries or even loss of life. I justify the adult's actions as being principled, and not tyrannical, because they are protecting the unaware child who is unknowingly putting their life at risk. The intention of the adult can be labeled as a coup because it directly opposed the intention of the child, subjugating them in order to save their life. The adult deduced how dangerous the child's decision to run into street was, which proved the child's misperception of not being in danger to be incorrect, thus proving that saving the child by yanking them out of the street was objectively correct. The end in this scenario is to fulfill the moral principle of saving someone's life when the other person's life is threatened, where only is this principle objective in this scenario due to the context assessed.

Pathological coups have the defining characteristic that they are compulsive and adhere to subjective claims about their justification, demonstrating that the end goal of this form of coups is utterly useless. Subjectivist knowledge-formation systems are contained within relativist philosophy, indicating individuals have the ability to justify anything they desire. This is severely dangerous, and arguably more oppressive than alleged objective knowledge justified through prejudice as I have already discussed. The danger and uselessness associated with pathological coups, or subjective knowledge formation systems, can be demonstrated with another example presented by Michael Raven. Raven supposes that, hypothetically, one of his essays gets criticized by a president's administration, causing him to conclude the president is oppressing him and attempting to stunt his career, ultimately justifying a coup on the United States government.⁷ This is entirely unprincipled, as the allegation of oppression has no substantiation other than Raven's emotions, creating the pathological coup. The utility of subjective justification in this example is lacking, as it rejects the general need to substantiate any allegations of oppression. An objectivist would argue that there is no principled justification for the alleged oppression, thus demonstrating the compulsivity of subjugation and uselessness within pathological coups.

Another point of critical assessment I will discuss is the part of my argument which claims that alleged objective knowledge lacks utility when justified through historical prejudice, qualifying it as subjective knowledge. Mills discusses how objectivist knowledge-formation systems have been historically used to subjugate people; this is how racism has been historically justified.⁸ The moral claim "blacks are inferior to whites" has been effectively refuted through educational reform over time, proving that biological appearances have no relevance to a person's moral capacity. Although this moral claim was previously mistakenly thought to be justified, proving how objectivist knowledge can function oppressively, it cannot generalize all objectivist knowledge as oppressive. According to my argument, subjugation can be either justified or unjustified with contextual evidence deciding whether it is emancipative or oppressive. Using knowledge to oppress certain groups is weaponization of knowledge, making it subjectively justified through miseducation and historical prejudice, thus proving its absence of utility. I defend the teleology, or purpose, of knowledge as a means of providing explanations for why the world is

⁷ Raven, "Subjectivism Is Pointless," 63.

⁸ See Mills, "Defending the Radical Enlightenment," 9–29.

the way it is, in ways which cannot be refuted. According to this definition, racist ideology is entirely composed of subjectivist opinions, although argued as being objectively true, and should not be taken seriously.

Lastly, I would like to discuss how although morals can be perceived mistakenly as subjective in a variety of ways, this does not diminish the importance of finding the best moral and practical decision. I define the teleology of morals as a system of improving the way that people treat each other. When someone says, “these people appear to be in need,” they are making a subjectivist claim, indicating that there is a superior reason as to why a certain group of people are deserving of help, whereas when someone says, “these people are in need,” they are making an objective statement about how a certain group of people are undeniably in need.⁹ The former example is in accordance with my teleology of ethics, because there are certain moral claims which are objectively incorrect and correct. For example, “killing babies for fun is okay” proves that there are objectively false statements, and “all humans have equal moral capacity” proves that there are objectively true statements.

4. Conclusion

In sum, I have argued for the existence of objective knowledge about the world through different ethical statements and examples, proving that knowledge colonization is a consequence of miseducation and historical prejudices. I do not deny the potential for subjective and objective knowledge-formation systems to both arrive at Capital T Truth conclusions about the world, although the utility of knowledge, according to the values of objective knowledge-formation systems, demonstrates how substantially more reliable these systems are per my evidence. Racial prejudice demonstrates the historical misconceptions of morality, especially in Western culture, and how the mainstream Enlightenment enabled certain racial groups to intellectually oppress other racial groups. Ethics are also contained within knowledge about the world, where various ethical claims can demonstrate false or legitimate objective knowledge claims about the world. Therefore, contextual assessment is the most powerful tool when determining alleged versus legitimate objective knowledge and is essential when determining objective morality as well.

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⁹ T. R. Byerly, “Epistemic Subjectivism in the Theory of Character,” *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 4 (September 2019): 280.

RESONANT PERSONALITIES: ELEMENTAL QUALIFIERS

Kurt Bricker

Early Western philosophy is characterized by an intense interest in what is called “natural philosophy,” wherein philosophers were constantly searching for the answers as to what the things in the world around them were made from and how those things interacted together, presenting them with what they saw and experienced every day. The Epicureans were no different, and building on the ideas of their predecessors, they put together a theory of physicalism to explain the world as they observed it in a way that fit into their conception of ethics and how to live the good—simple—life. In this paper, I will argue that the Epicureans’ understanding of physics adapted the elements of Empedocles and the Humoral system of medicine—founded by Hippocrates of Cos—to explain aspects of personality, personal interests, and innate skills, through atomic resonance as follows from the Epicurean system of physics, and that it is through such resonance that one is able to achieve the simple life that the Epicureans support.

Empedocles was an Ancient Greek philosopher who posited four elements as the “roots” from which all things are made. These elements are fire, water, earth, and air.¹ While the Epicureans view the world as being made of different elements, they still number at four and share numerous similarities that make one question how different these conceptions of the elements truly are. For the Epicureans, the elements are heat, air, wind, and the nameless.² One must look at the Empedoclean elements not for their primary characteristics, but instead for their secondary or even tertiary characteristics to be able to match them up to those of the Epicureans.³ I will return to considerations of the elements across these two groups of thought after addressing the elements of the atoms.

Though the Epicureans believe in atomism, Epicurus himself is said to deny the existence of Leucippus (the supposed father of atomism), or rather he could be denying the value of discussing him.⁴ Regardless, there is the shared belief in both atoms and the void⁵ between the two. The conception is different though, which could be put down to Epicurus’s desire to “prove his own originality.”⁶ Ignoring the origin, the Epicureans understand that atoms are part of a cycle

¹ Empedocles, frag. 346 K.R.S.

² Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 3.231–257.

³ The difference between *primary*, *secondary*, and *tertiary* characteristics would be what one thinks of first when considering an element (in this case). For the element of Earth, with the example of a rock, a primary characteristic would be “hard/firm” (dependent of the type of rock), while a secondary characteristic would be “holds heat,” and a tertiary characteristic would be “something one builds with,” where each characteristic gets further from the “first thought” that the original element brings to mind, which would most likely be one of the primary characteristics.

⁴ There is an issue with translation here that makes the distinction unclear. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophers*, 330; Leucippus, frag. 540, K.R.S.

⁵ Void meaning ‘empty’ as Empedocles established. Empedocles, frag. 536, K.R.S.

⁶ Not only is this used by Epicurus to distance his ideas from those of Leucippus, but also to maintain that he instructed himself. K.R.S., *Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 403.

of continual reuse as the organisms of which they are a part go about their life and death cycle. As was discussed in the previous paragraph, there are four types of elements in the Epicurean system, yet only three of those are used as building blocks—the fourth being the seat of mentality. Thus, all atoms must be associated with an element, or better stated, must have an elemental affinity; it is these elemental affinities that can have effects on their embodiments as they move through life instantiations.

Due to the unorthodox nature of the three buildable elements that Epicureanism identifies, I will now endeavor to match up affinities with organismal classes to help make sense of how personalities can be informed by the elements. I will do this by using both mythological comparisons, as were used by Empedocles, and qualitatively correspondent properties—as looking at the former will inform the understanding of the latter. In the Empedoclean system, each of the elements were identified with one of the gods or goddesses of the Greek (and Italian) pantheon(s)⁷ and are mentioned in a fragment of Empedocles: “Hear first the four roots of all things: shining Zeus, life-bringing Hera, Aidoneus and Nestis who with her tears waters mortal springs.”⁸ These correspond with the elements as such: Zeus as fire,⁹ Hera as air, and Aidoneus (Hades hence forth) as earth.¹⁰ Nestis needs no clarification as she clearly aligns with water.¹¹

For the Epicurean system, Zeus—fire—would align with heat, and Hera—air—would align with wind, but the remaining two must be viewed more abstractly in order to properly associate together. Hades, though aligned with earth in the Empedoclean system, would align with the nameless fourth element in the Epicurean system. This is because the nameless is the seat of mentality. It is unknowable, like Tartarus, and feared, as while the physical body remains after death, there is no personhood along with it. That part is believed to be lost in the bowels of the earth—in Hades’ realm. Nestis, on the other hand, seemingly has one of the most drastic differences; while aligned with water in the Empedoclean system, the best alignment in the Epicurean system would be that of air, or rather *aër*.¹² This is due to shared qualitative properties like how both would slip through your fingers if you tried to hold on to them, the ease with which it can suffocate one, and its necessity for life. Though these elements seem to be disparate and inconsistent, they are consistent in symbolism and easily work together to coherently explain the experience of elements across the systems of Empedocles and Epicurus.

⁷ Empedocles is from what is now called Sicily, but during his life it was a Greek city called Akragas. Though he is considered to be a Greek, he is often attributed to the “Italian Tradition” due to the changes in land ownership over the centuries, where Sicily became part of Italy. Hence, his incorporation into what would now be considered the Italian pantheon, and the mixing of it with the Greek pantheon.

⁸ Empedocles, frag. 346, K.R.S.

⁹ This aligns with Book 5 of Lucretius where he mentions that we gained fire not from Prometheus but instead from lightning, a phenomenon easily described as shining.

¹⁰ Empedocles, frag. 346, K.R.S. These elements were identified by Theophrastus, excepting Nestis—water.

¹¹ Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *Presocratic*, 286.

¹² *aër*; I use here to differentiate between the prosaic “visible and obscuring” mist from Homer (*ἀήρ*) and the “invisible atmospheric air” which Hippolytus (Anaximenes, frag. 141, Kirk, Raven, and Schofield) assumed to be what Anaximenes was talking about in his cosmogony around the sixth century B.C., where it played a role as the breath-soul of the world. K.R.S., *Presocratic*, 146-7.

Having discussed the elements, I will now discuss how certain atoms can have affinities to those elements. Suppose that an atom spent a life cycle as part of a tree: it grew from an acorn into a large oak, lived through the life of the oak, then decayed, fertilizing the ground as a result. The atom that lived that lifecycle then acted as fertilizer for a seed that was below the oak's roots and became part of the next plant's lifecycle, continuing this cycle of growth as a plant and then decaying as said plant, continuing the cycle of instantiation, within the class of plants. From this one could reasonably infer that there would be a degree of affiliation to plant life in that atom which had spent some time as various types of plants. However, suppose that a number of those plants in the area, all having gone through this same process, were gathered and consumed by a gestating human, which were then digested and integrated into the growing baby. In this case, one would expect that there would be a carry-over of the elemental affinity of said plant onto the baby. This raises the question of what type of affinity such an organism would have when the elements available to work with are heat, wind, *aër*, and the nameless.

The easiest way to figure out these alignments would be to evaluate the interactions between the elements and the other classes of affectable things—rocks, plants, animals, etc. When I consider heat as an element in conjunction with the roots of Empedocles, the first root that comes to mind is earth. Rocks are heated by the sun, they are used to insulate fireplaces to retain heat but also spread it, in fire pits they ensure a boundary of safety to keep fires bounded yet also to retain and disperse heat as the fire dies down. As such, I will be associating the elemental affinity of heat with atoms that have previously been instantiated as rocks, crystals, and the like.

Plants are slightly more complex in that they have many different functions. They too need heat; however, too much or too little of it spells their certain death. Therefore, I will be assigning to them the affinity of wind, an element I believe them to interact with at least as closely as they interact with earth and water, although I argue that wind is even more vital to life. A plant can live without earth if planted hydroponically, or it can use earth to gather nutrients, or through connected root systems share water, thus not requiring direct access to water on a regular basis to flourish. However, a plant cannot survive without access to carbon dioxide. As Empedocles addresses Hera as “life-bringing,”¹³ this offers the insight into why I align Hera with wind: plants bring life to not only animals and humans, but also other plants as they turn into compost upon their death—if not consumed—and fertilize the ground for the next generation of plant life to benefit. When consumed, they also work as fertilizer, though the process is a longer one involving the complexities of digestion. Furthermore, plants breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen, literally bringing life to the organisms that rely on oxygen for life and breath. Lastly, wind brings and expands life to plants as it acts as a carrier for pollen, allowing for the furtherance of life such as apple trees getting pollinated and thus being able to fruit and go to seed.

The last two affinities I will explain together, as they have easy similes with which I can make the comparisons. The affinity of water I assign to those organisms which live in it: salt or fresh water—fish, crustaceans, subaquatic plant life, etc. While they require oxygen to live, it must

¹³ Empedocles, frag. 346, K.R.S.

come through the medium of water, lest the organisms die for lack of ability to convert it to a usable form. Finally, the nameless, the element of the mind. This affinity can only come from other organisms which contain the capacity for rational thought—humans, and arguably some non-human animals. (Discussion regarding the capability of animal minds in Epicurean philosophies is beyond the scope of this paper, and therefore I will not speculate on that subject here.) I have now identified the four elements in Epicurean philosophy and their association with the Empedoclean roots, and I have explained what elemental affinities are and their atomic connections, so now I will go on to explore how they combine and connect, allowing for complex creations.

The way in which the Empedoclean root elements were said to be able to combine and create those things by which we are surrounded every day is mentioned by Aristotle as “[a mixture] ...composed of the elements, these being preserved in it unaltered but with their small particles juxtaposed each to each. That will be the manner, presumably, in which flesh and every other compound results from the elements.”¹⁴ If we assume that an organism’s body was created using the resources of a location, then we would be right to assume that many of the atoms involved would be of a similar class, e.g., plant. Should a great many atoms of a new organism be of a certain class—be they originated from the same previous instantiation or not—we can assume that they have the same elemental alignment. While it would be a great folly to assume that *all* the atoms of the new organism would be of the same class—as at least some of the atoms would be from the parent organism and, therefore, of a different class than either plant or rock—it would be possible to say that the organism can have multiple, differently aligned atoms within their makeup, and thus there can be different levels of affinities across the elements within the organisms as well. We may question how such disparate elements may be able to coexist in an organism without causing great issues, and while there is the possibility of issues arising, I will first discuss how they may coexist peacefully; the answer we can find in Simplicius on Empedocles and on Lucretius.

We find in Simplicius the fragment that discusses the cycle of change that Empedocles puts forth in his natural philosophy: Love continually pulls the root elements together to combine and make those physical things of the world, and Strife/Hatred is the power that carries them apart, creating an endless cycle of interchange.¹⁵ Lucretius seems to be alluding to this through a mythological lens as he begins *On the Nature of Things* with a prayer to Venus stating,

Thou bringest the eternal generations forth,
Kind after kind. And since ’tis thou alone
Guidest the Cosmos, and without thee naught
Is risen to reach the shining shores of light....¹⁶

¹⁴ Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* 2.7.334a28–30.

¹⁵ Empedocles, frag. 348, K.R.S.

¹⁶ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 1.19–22.

Here Lucretius is recognizing the role the goddess plays in creation and how Venus—Love—is necessary for not just generation, but *eternal* generation. While the use of a prayer or invocation of a god, goddess, or muse is a commonly used method of the Ancient Greek poets for imparting authority to their words—the unquestionable authority of the gods—and Lucretius is indeed using the poetic forms to display the Epicurean philosophies, I argue that this is also the rewrapping of Empedoclean philosophy, for further on in the prayer, he brings up Mars. He writes,

O'er sea and land the savage works of war,
 For thou alone hast power with public peace
 To aid mortality; since he who rules
 The savage works of battle, puissant Mars....¹⁷

Mars dominates the realm of Strife and Hatred:¹⁸ tearing friends and families apart, causing Strife amongst neighbors and Hatred amongst friends. War acts as a physical force of separation, ripping and tearing at what once was whole, leaving pieces in its wake. I see, in Lucretius discussing Venus juxtaposed against Mars, a strong connection to the explanation of Empedocles; the apposition of creations and destruction, yet Lucretius also touches on the impact these forces have on human lives. Lucretius seems to be using a metaphorical explanation to fit with the style of writing he is utilizing. This action is performing three seemingly disparate functions.

First, this is going against the Epicurean belief that the gods are impersonal and stay out of human affairs: an appeal to the goddess would have done nothing in this system as she would not have been listening to the prayer of a human, or if she were, she would not have intervened to answer said prayer. Second, this is performing a function for the general public who would still believe in the day-to-day involvement of the gods and thus it was acting, as I mentioned previously, to provide authority to his words as being the words of the very gods themselves. Third, as F. M. Cornford puts it, “Almost all our philosophical language is unconsciously metaphorical; and even when terms are still felt as metaphors, they may be used to conceal awkward gaps. Sometimes we find that a so-called metaphor enshrines a thought that was once meant literally.”¹⁹ I think this accounts for the once literal belief in divine inspiration that a prayer at the beginning of a presented piece of literature carried, as well as the metaphorical comparison to the doctrines of Love and Strife from the Empedoclean system. This allows for an answer that would have been understood across the two systems, Epicurean and Empedoclean, regarding the coexistence of differently aligned atoms within one body and how they could be generated as such. In the following section, I will propose another possibility utilizing the Humoral system of medicine.

The Hippocratic system of medicine based on the humors of the body, Humoralism, held that there were four liquid humors in the body which needed to be in balance for the body to remain healthy. People were ruled by different humors and, according to Hippocrates, “[A] person is in

¹⁷ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 1.29–31.

¹⁸ These two terms specifically—Strife and Hatred—are used specifically in the fragment of Empedocles discussing the cycle of change he posits. Empedocles, frag. 348, K.R.S.

¹⁹ Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae*, 30.

the best possible condition when his components are concocted and at rest, displaying no specific potency at all.”²⁰ Here, Hippocrates is stating that there cannot be an imbalance in the humors of the body, or rather, none can be more potent than another. He goes on to state that a physician must know natural science and the patient’s relation to food and drink, if they are to be able to perform their duty, and this extends as far as to include general habits and their effects on an individual, as individual constitutions differ. Furthermore, a physician must be familiar with these truths to avoid causing suffering, as to be unaware could cause the physician to instigate or increase their patient’s suffering through their (the physician’s) ignorance.²¹ We can work with this idea of humors metaphorically, as Cornford advises, to avoid the awkward gap of moving between liquid humors and the atomistic elemental affinities of Epicurus, to examine deficiency and excess, and the resultant effects those may have on the body and mind—as mind is one of the corporeal elements of Epicureanism.

The requirement of balance in Hippocratic Humoralism fits well within Epicurean atomism. Let us suppose that a human is born of all the elements, but they have a large preponderance of plant atoms due to a heavily vegetarian diet—or some other such factor that would lead to such a situation—they would have the primary elemental alignment of wind. As previously stated, the person’s physician would need to be aware of not only their elemental alignment, but also that of different foods and drinks, where the patient spends their time, and their habitual actions, so that the physician can ensure that the patient’s treatment causes them (the patient) no suffering, instead helping them to balance their elements. Though one would assume that the abundance of wind-aligned atoms would mean that the elements of the patient would be out of balance, they would not be, as that is the natural constitution of the patient, and thus it must be ensured that they remain wind-primary. Any physician that cares for them must ensure that the primary alignment remains, and that the other elements remain distributed in the correct proportions for the individual and their body. One simple way to balance the alignment, if misaligned, would be to consume (edible) plants and thus introduce more wind-aligned atoms into the body.

To keep from once again falling out of alignment, one ought to avoid consuming those things which would introduce non-wind-aligned atoms into the body, thus they ought to avoid a meat heavy diet. This can be complicated when there are carnivores, omnivores, and herbivores, so as much as the person ought to avoid meat in general, they should specifically avoid carnivores and omnivores, as herbivores would also be wind-primary aligned. So, while there would be a likelihood of gaining additional nameless atoms, they would be outweighed by the wind atoms, thus making it a better option than any other meat for an out-of-balance wind-primary alignment. Now that I have established the elements, how atoms can have alignments to them, and the necessity of balance in a body, I would like to look at the interplay and their effect on the personality of the one whose body it is, and their preferences and predilections. First, however, I must look at how memory can move with atoms across organismal instantiations.

²⁰ Hippocrates, *Ancient Medicine* 19.620.

²¹ Hippocrates, *Ancient Medicine* 19–20.623–624.

Lucretius discusses the Epicurean belief regarding the mutual existential dependence of the mind and soul, thus providing the basis of perceptual abilities through the embodiment of the soul and mind (the nameless), and how with the death of the organism/individual, they believed memory to dissipate.²² I agree with this sentiment and will not argue against this in this paper. I will argue, however, that the memory that dissipates is the experiential memory of conscious recollection. I argue that there is a type of memory that is held in the atom, a sense of the atom “remembering” being in a form with other atoms, instantiating the form that it was. In this sense, it is not the memory we are familiar with, but the same type of memory that one side of a canyon has, remembering the other side, either from the connection of a bridge or from before the river that cut through it made it the canyon that it is—i.e., not the nameless. In this way, the atoms are able to carry a sense of what they once were; however, they do not remember any specifics of what the experience was like of being said thing. There is no conscious recollection—no more than your knee remembers your shin—yet there was once a connection and will always be a leftover “sense” of this connection.

I find this explanation lacking and, though this gives a sense of the idea I am aiming for, I shall endeavor to explain it in another way. Imagine all atoms can sing—each elemental affinity singing at a different pitch. Atoms of like affinities, when their pitches’ waves meet in the air, are able to convey information to each other—not information such as experiences, but that they are of the same affinity and therefore are like of like. They resonate with each other, and as such may harmonize, resulting in emergent qualities of personality. This idea of resonance is stated in another form by Bailey as he discusses the “imperceptible atomic vibrations”²³ and then questions what the relation may be between individual vibrating atoms and the greater body’s motion, which said atoms compose.²⁴ My answer is *resonance*: the way in which atoms are able to communicate and thus share memory, without the nameless atoms themselves carrying memories between instantiated bodies.

This ability for any atom to have an elemental resonance allows for the atoms, when in a large enough quantity, to have large effects on organisms who share in these affinities and thus would also resonate with these atoms. Suppose that a person is extremely fond of plants: they surround themselves with them, care deeply for them, and treat them like friends and as family. This could be a result of said atomic resonance—an effect so strong that the emotions, decisions, and preferences of the person are all affected by said resonance. It could be considered, in a sense, a way for plants to protect themselves. Should a person resonate with them, they would wish the plants no harm, and would even try and protect the plants from others’ committing harm upon them. The resonance would act like, what in modernity is called, a “green thumb,” wherein the person has a gift with plants, and thus, the fact of their atomic composition would play a significant role in their innate skills. A similar effect could be seen for the other elements, and one could even

²² Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 3.347–49.

²³ Bailey, *Greek Atomists*, 332.

²⁴ Bailey, *Greek Atomists*, 332.

make an argument that the resonant atoms for the nameless—the mind—are found in philosophers, and that through philosophizing, they are engaging in the harmonizing of their atoms.

In the context of atomic elemental affinities, Epicurean ethics practically leads one to the answers of how to live simply and be happy. Tranquility found through lack of pain, tranquility considered as a pleasure, and indeed tranquility itself being considered the highest pleasure,²⁵ I argue can all be found in the resonance of atoms. By listening to the resonance within oneself and following the simplicity one's own body leads them towards, I believe that one can reach a tranquil, happy, life—the life the Epicureans so desired and held to be true. The conjunction of Hippocratic Humoralism with Epicurean Elemental Atomism provides many answers for how our atoms tell us exactly what we need and how to make us happy. They are singing for what we will find pleasure in, we simply must listen, and engage.

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²⁵ O'Keefe, *Epicureanism*, 117.

TIME HAS IT COVERED: NO NEED TO PUT OUT YOUR RECYCLABLES

Kurt Bricker

Throughout Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, the themes of time, substance, and change are central, and the answers Aristotle posits for their workings form the corpus of his philosophical system as we know it today. Though he covers many aspects of how these themes can and cannot work, there remain questions to be answered. At line 1075b29 in *Metaphysics*¹ Aristotle questions "how is extension, i.e. a *continuum*, to be produced out of unextended parts?" so in this essay I will argue that substance² is not unextended but recycled through the faculty of time, to actualize new potentials through the Reason of the Unmoved Mover. By examining time in a different way, we are able to postulate answers for his question and explain the mechanics underlying the process and the relation to the Unmoved Mover and its Reason. Through expanding upon these two aspects of Aristotle's philosophy we may gain a better understanding of the nature of the Unmoved Mover as it applies to the workings of the cosmos.

If time recycles substance, and there existed a way to travel through time, there would only be a set distance forward or backward you could travel, as any further and there would be no fully substantial place to visit. Trying to go backwards, the world would either look like it is only partially rendered, or it would be a vast void, in the Democritean sense,³ due to parts of the material having already been recycled. To try and go forward would present the same problem: With time actively recycling anything that goes further back than what it is currently in the process of breaking down for reuse, a traveler would run the risk of their substance being instantly recycled and erasing them from the time-belt. Time would, in fact, be more of a loop than a line as it would function similarly to the belt of a treadmill, constantly coming around and around again. The substance that is in the after—or past, as we refer to it—would be fully recycled when the time that the portion of the belt coming around reaches the now. This hard limit on the existence of time in the before or after would mean that time and substance can exist as a continuum without unlimited—or unextended, as Aristotle puts it—parts. For the traveler, attempting to go too far into the future would yield the same result as going beyond the limit of the past, yet instead of erasing them, it would possibly force their substance through the process of change instantaneously, thus

¹ Aristotle. *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vols. 17, 18. Translated by Hugh Tredennick. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1933, 1989.

<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg025.perseus-eng1:12.1075b>

² Substance referring to both physical and the Aristotelian non-physical materials and essences that make up the world. Also referred to as "parts" by Aristotle in some places.

³ Democritean void being the empty space between substance.

also causing them to lose their body in the process, in addition to losing their soul, as it too is a substance.⁴

If one could travel beyond the limit, and successfully arrive in a place fully substantiated and unaffected by the trials of time, then substance would not be limited, but in fact made of extended and unlimited parts. The lack of limit would mean that by necessity, new substance would have to be created from nothing, as all points in the past would exist at the same time as the present, for if all times were capable of being reached from any other time, they must both exist always. Travel would be unlimited throughout time, and it would be like stepping through a doorway and arriving in another room, as it was when it was first perceived in the now, preserved as a snapshot in time, forever static, or possibly existing preserved outside of time. In this case, the only moment that would exist *in* time would be the now. This obviously violates the ban on creation *ex-nihilo*,⁵ as from where would the unlimited substance be coming and where would it stay for the rest of time? This would require space, in addition to substance, to be unlimited, or the infinite substance would completely fill the universe, thus at some point disallowing for motion to occur.

On the other hand, if all substance were all already existent at the beginning of time, and time did not function like a recycler, as outlined above, the limited substance would result in a point in time where the substance would run out and time would not be able to move forward, as it would have no substantial reality with which to interact and no further substance to enact change upon, other than what is already present. Aristotle states, “The infinite exhibits itself in different ways—in time, in the generations of man, and in the division of magnitudes,”⁶ which supports the idea that Aristotle viewed time as infinite; however, time can be both infinite and limited. It is infinite in that the belt never stops coming around again, unless acted upon by an outside force, and it is limited in that time only reaches so far back and so far forward, and contains a set amount of substance which it may recycle. This limit indicates that the set amount of substance is all there will ever be in existence. Agreeing with this theory, we have the modern Law of Conservation of Mass⁷ affirming to us that no matter can be created or destroyed, it can only ever change form.

Aristotle’s creation of a system of logic shows in that he posits certain principles that are applicable here to both time and the Unmoved mover. If Aristotle is correct regarding the principle of non-contradiction, and the structure of reality is constrained by the structure of thought,⁸ then time acting as a recycler for substance works perfectly, as the mind can only dream of what the future has in store, and the memories of the past become less clear the further away from then the now gets. This is mirrored in the substance of the past being broken down for future form actualization, thus making the past less substantial. For the future, the substance that will make it

⁴ Aristotle’s Hylozoism means that once a form is instantiated into materiality, it is then a unified singular whole. So, with the soul being the form of the body, and the body being the material of the soul, it would have them joined together, and the soul would therefore gain the status of substance.

⁵ Creation from nothing.

⁶ Aristotle, *Physics* 3.6, 206a27–8.

⁷ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Conservation of Mass.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 19, 2011. <https://www.britannica.com/science/conservation-of-mass>.

⁸ Sonja Tanner, “Metaphysics” (lecture, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, CO, February 22, 2022).

up has not yet actualized into a final form, thus leaving it open to the possibilities of its potentialities, only to be actualized as the before becomes the now.

Time according to Aristotle is a measure of change, with that change being able to occur at different speeds. It is an interaction between us and nature, and nature—having its own effects—is able to affect the speed at which change occurs through environmental factors, though it is still constrained by the limits of power available to be exercised against it, i.e. hurricanes, tornados, variations in rain fall, etc. The advancement of age is a change that marks the movement of time that humans are able to use to measure its passing.⁹ The speed at which certain substances age (change) is relative to the object, which is how we would have partially substantiated moments in time. As a result of this uneven rate of change, the limits on the distance that time's belt reaches can be stretched thin enough that arriving at that point in time could have nothing but the planet's iron core, or barren rock. Time would at some point no longer reach back that far, but theoretically recycle the entire mass into the next immediate now, actualizing its potential to exist in the near-present. The formal cause here becomes an issue as the forms that have the ability to be actualized would be able to be more abstract than the physicalism that is commonly thought of as it fits easiest with human understanding. The abstract form here would be "existing in the present." Form, therefore, could be argued as existing outside of and independent from time's belt, though still contingent on the presence of certain substances for actualization.

Even though time acting as a recycler would sound like it takes the same material and pushes it through the process of change, the potential exists for the recycling process to fully break down any substance into its very base parts—atoms—allowing for them to be reformed into completely different types of substances than its previous iteration. So, while one would think that the substance of what once was a tree would once again be actualized as a tree, it may be in fact actualize as nothing of the sort. This allows for what seems like new substances to be brought into being, or for the types of items that are man-made as opposed to completely natural. Thus, this allows for "new creations" without said creations ever having existed prior in time. Regardless of whether these creations have ever before physically existed is the fact that the form of said creations have always existed, in the exact same way that all other substances have always existed, as form is another type of substance, only conceptual as opposed to corporeal.

The Unmoved Mover—in addition to being perceiver—is also the efficient cause, using reason to direct substance and form into the final cause. However, such reason is also the source and director, present at each step; reason decides what potential a material is able to actualize as. After all this occurs, the substance is able to assume its new final form. Reason is at every step of the process of change, and thus, so is the Unmoved Mover. As it is present here it has to have always been present, or at least present at the first occurrence of change, for its reason was needed to initiate this system of change. Aristotle posits that the Unmoved Mover is the eternal cause of change and movement, and that desire¹⁰ is what allows for it to initiate motion. The motion that

⁹ Olsen, Eric T. "The Passage of Time," in *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, eds. Robin Le Poidevin, Peter Simons, Andrew McGonigal, and Ross P. Cameron (London: Routledge, 2009), 441.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072a21–28.

the Unmoved Mover initiates would be the movement of time. Now as we already established that time is infinite but limited, it must have begun in a timeless, changeless, and motionless place. The instigation of time would therefore be the point at which the mind of the Unmoved Mover began utilizing the last three causes upon the substances that exist—the substance being the first cause. This existing substance will have never stopped changing, since the movement of time means that everything is constantly changing, constantly being moved through the causes with the slightest of variations in each final cause that would appear as age to humans, though no humans existed at the beginning of time to perceive such a change. The perceiver would have been the Unmoved Mover; however, that brings into question how the Unmoved Mover would know how to judge the effects of age on an object as time passed, a totally new phenomenon for it. Not only did the Unmoved Mover exist before time, but it existed before change and motion, so it would have had to figure out what the strange effects starting time had on the universe when time's belt was pushed into motion.

The Unmoved Mover would have had to utilize the abstract formal causes that substance could potentially actualize into, requiring a degree of reason to match like-to-like between the substance and the potential forms. This reason would have to also be innate to the substance and form pairs as it would also be contingent on the environment it is to be actualized in and if that environment is capable of allowing that final cause to reach its *ἀρχή*. A flower that only partially grows due to inhospitable soil will never actualize its *ἀρχή* for growth and reproduction. This matching of pairs does not have to be a conscious ordering of the Universe and its parts, but it has to have desired something different than What-Was, to have become What-Is. Like humans, the Unmoved Mover does not *need* a reason, but unlike humans, it *is* the reason.

Another way to examine this theory of reason is by considering Democritus's Theory of Phenomena, which holds phenomena as a convention and thought, and, while not being reality, points to an unseen reality that “we get [to] through reason.”¹¹ In the Aristotelian sense, the reason for said phenomena is the Unmoved Mover's Reason as the efficient cause of change: It would be the formal cause—it would have reasoned out the formal causes that exist in the ethereal—and Reason would be the formal cause—Reason would have decided upon what substance, what form, and following through on its actualization, it would be the Reason that certain substances may take certain forms. The Unmoved Mover seems to be attempting to arrive at an “unseen reality” through this Reason, by actualizing the potentiality of the static existence before the Universe “began”—that is, before time, change, and motion occurred. The desire of the Unmoved Mover to have a different experience, to have something more—something that was at that point unseen—has the Unmoved Mover reflecting upon itself and finding its desires, thus resulting in it exercising its Reason as a result. In a similar way, through desire and introspection, humans are able to exert

¹¹ Sonja Tanner, “The Atomists” (lecture, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, CO, November 20, 2018).

their influence on the world around them, instigating things that they themselves are incapable of, yet desiring all the same.¹² In this way we are all unmoved movers.

Reason being enacted on time began the cycle, thus everything that is touched by time is also affected by Reason. It would know the steps needed to have the outcome of the Unmoved Mover's desire fulfilled, and that starting time would be the first step that must be taken. Everything else would logically follow the self-sustaining system. Aristotle would not like the determinacy implied by such a theory;¹³ however, there would be no encroachment on free-will, as the system would only determine what to do with you after you have finished using your body, and as the substance that makes you up needed to be reused. The fact that decomposition results in soil fertility and allows for new life is an example of how the system is self-sustaining.

Time as a recycler offers many ways in which the Universe can have a continuum from unextended parts. Through the Reason of the Unmoved Mover initiating such a cycle, substance and form are able to actualize together, giving us the world as we know it and the cosmos that we have only begun to explore. The cyclical nature of time, allowing for limited parts to continue on *ad infinitum*, demonstrates the intense desire of the Unmoved Mover and its need to exercise its potential for greatness, thus leaving only one more question: Can the Unmoved Mover reach its *ἀρχή*, and if it does, on the come down, will time as we know it cease to be?

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¹² Examples being hiring a sculptor or painter to make a piece of art when lacking the skill, beginning a project for public good that you will not live to see the fruition of due to the longevity of the project, or taking on projects that are too complex or intense for a single person, like damming a river.

¹³ Being the indeterminist that he was. Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause, and Blame*, 242.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS IN *ARRIVAL* (2016)

Hatice Zeynep Can

ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis by analyzing the film Arrival (2016) and links the hypothesis to the fundamental epistemological question raised by many philosophers: What can we know? The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis claims that the language one speaks influences one's perception of the world to the extent that one does not use language to express their world experiences but experiences the world through language. This notion suggests that people speaking different languages perceive and conceptualize the world differently. Arrival (2016) explores the same notion with regards to an alien language, which is non-linear and immediate. The film's narrative unfolds to reveal that the aliens indeed have non-linear and immediate experiences. Such an instance, though fictional, suggests that we should inquire whether language is a determinant of our experience as well as a source of knowledge of the world. Upon investigating Bertrand Russell's "What can we know?: Appearance and Reality" (1912), language serves as a further determinant among factors such as angle, position, and lighting which contribute to the heterogeneous nature of our immediate experiences of concepts.*

1. Introduction

Arrival (2016), a cinematic masterpiece directed by Denis Villeneuve based on the novella "Story of Your Life" written by Ted Chiang, stands at the intersection of science fiction and philosophical inquiry. This film depicts the story of Dr. Louise Banks, a linguistics expert tasked with decoding an alien language to discover the "purpose" for which mysterious extraterrestrial visitors have arrived on Earth. As the plot unfolds, *Arrival* introduces viewers to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or linguistic determinism, which is the thesis about the nature of language and thought that is committed to the proposition that the language one uses has an impact on how one perceives and comprehends reality.¹ The film unfolds a narrative that explores profound themes centered around language, time, and the source of human knowledge.

The film's significance lies in its intellectual depth, challenging conventional notions of language and knowledge. *Arrival* provokes inquiries regarding linguistic determinism, relating it to an exploration of non-linear time, free will, and the diverse sources of knowledge, one source being the Heptapod language. Created for fictional purposes, the Heptapod language serves as a symbolic conduit, its circular, non-linear structure serving as a metaphorical mirror reflecting the power of language in shaping our thoughts, a power reflected by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Through this cinematic odyssey, this essay aims to embark on the never-ending quest of

¹ John A. Lucy, "Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. N. J. Smelser and P. B. Baltes (Pergamon, 2001), 13486-13490, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/03042-4>.

contemplating the perplexity of language, intricacy of time, obscurity of free-will, and the very nature of knowledge. Doing so, the essay proposes the question that Bertrand Russel (1872 – 1970), and many other philosophers, have asked: *What can we know?* Throughout this essay, I will discuss the role of language as a source and a limit to knowledge through the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

Both semantically and syntactically problematized, language serves *inter alia* as a communicative tool that reflects one’s perception of reality. In this essay, reality and one’s subjective perception of it will be compared to deduce that our subjective realities are what we deem to take as the reality itself. Following the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis’s claim, the nature of language will be examined to determine whether it is the source, or the limit, of knowledge of the world. Through this questioning and through references to *Arrival*, this essay aims to propose that language is not the source nor the limit to knowledge, but rather a further determinant among such factors such as angle, position, and lighting which contribute to the heterogeneous nature of our immediate experiences of concepts, as referred to by Russell in his 1912 work. This work does not offer an exhaustive or complete answer to what we can know; however, it serves as a call to recognize the multifaceted dimensions of human knowledge.

2. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

E. K. Koerner discusses the historical roots of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, attributing its origins to Wilhelm von Humboldt, an influential intellectual of the 19th century known for his work in linguistic philosophy and education. Koerner notes that Christmann (1976) has identified essential elements of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in the writings of thinkers from the 17th and 18th centuries, including Vico and Herder. Having a full pedigree, Koerner even displays that the hypothesis was earlier referred to as “Vico-Herder-Humboldt-Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.” Others point to Leibniz as a precursor to the hypothesis. The historical development of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is thus complex and involves contributions from various thinkers spanning multiple centuries.² However, throughout this essay, the notion will be referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

The hypothesis argues that, simply put, the language one speaks influences one’s perception of the world. The meanings of the words we use and the structures we employ have an impact on our thoughts and understanding of reality, implying that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is both semantically and syntactically relevant. Furthermore, the language we use has the ability to determine one’s thoughts, as the title to the strong form of the hypothesis suggests: Linguistic determinism. To give an example, I will utilize two of the languages that I speak fluently, Turkish and English:

First prompt: “Imagine someone.”
 Second prompt in Turkish: “*O yemek yiyor.*”
 Second prompt in English: “*She is eating.*”

² E. F. K. Koerner, “The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis: A Preliminary History and a Bibliographical Essay,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1992): 173-198.

When encountering the first prompt, one is flexible in imagining anyone in any state. Next, the second prompt in Turkish adds the notion that the imagined someone is now eating. Unlike many other languages, Turkish does not distinguish gender in its third-person pronouns. In Turkish, the neutral pronoun “O” stands out as a versatile linguistic element that adds a layer of flexibility to the language. “O” serves as a singular pronoun that encompasses both “he” and “she” in English, making it a neutral and inclusive choice, permitting the speaker to *imagine* just about anyone as in “someone”. While, in the second prompt in English, the feminine pronoun determines what one imagines by limiting the connotations through pre-determined codes accredited to the word, such as its meaning and function. In linguistics, word classes, also known as parts of speech, are categories to which words are assigned based on their grammatical properties and functions within sentences. These classifications serve to organize language and provide structure to communication. Regarding the feminine pronoun specifically, its usage within the word classes of pronouns and its associated connotations can influence perceptions and understandings related to gender roles and identities. Thus, it is possible to argue that, according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the fixed syntactic rule for the word class of the pronouns clarifies one’s understanding, yet limits it as well.

Though this example is quite plain—and though it is unclear whether the practice of translation is even possible due to the hypothesis in question³—this example is included in hopes that it will serve as a basic ground for understanding linguistic determinism. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis delves deep into the notion that one does not utter experiences through language, but rather one experiences through language in the first place. Sapir explains, “The real world is, to a large extent, unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group.”⁴ For example, in *Arrival*, the Heptapods’ collective perception of reality and collective understanding of time are distinct from human perception of reality and our understanding of time, thereby depicting how the realities of the two groups change according to which languages are spoken. Just as an English speaker experiences “a landscape sparkled under crystalline fresh snow untouched by any extraneous footprints”, an Inuk person experiences “*nutaryuk*”. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis questions whether those two experiences are the same. According to the hypothesis, richness or the scarcity of vocabulary is capable of affecting how the speakers experience certain aspects of reality. Do Inuit experience “snow” as an English speaker does at all, as Inuktitut, Inuit language, contains numerous distinct terms to describe various types of snow, suggesting that the speakers of this language have a delicate sensitivity and nuanced understanding of different snow conditions

³ G. M. Hyde, “The Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis and the Translation Muddle,” *Translation and Literature* 2 (1993): 3–16, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40339646>.

⁴ Edward Sapir, “Sapir 1951, 160, quoted in Kay and Kempton 1984,” in “What Is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis?,” *American Anthropologist* 86, no. 1 (1984): 65–79, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/679389>.

compared to English speakers?⁵ Words and signs have meaning for those who use them due to the contextual and relational dynamics that encompass them.⁶

A language which is not linear and continuous but circular and immediate allows its speakers to experience reality as circular and immediate, as well. In *Arrival*, the Heptapods write in circular logograms, one sign representing a whole word or phrase. Therefore, they understand time, like every other notion, in a circular way, and they do not experience past, present, or future. Everything is instant. Moreover, as Dr. Banks gradually learns the Heptapod language, her perception of reality alters to become more similar to that of the extraterrestrial group. She, also, starts experiencing time as the Heptapod language permits. Then she starts having premonitions, to what we know as the future. Thankfully, Dr. Banks saves the world only when she could understand the Heptapod language. This narrative underscores the profound influence of linguistic proficiency on the acquisition of crucial knowledge. Thus, the heroic sequence calls for two epistemological inquiries: (a) Is language the source of knowledge? (b) Does language limit the scope of knowledge?

3. Is Language the Source of Knowledge?

In *Arrival's* fascinating twist, the Heptapods present their language not merely as a means of communication but as a weapon—a tool with the potential to reshape human understanding. The Heptapod language, with its complex structure, enables a deeper understanding of temporal nuances, providing those who grasp it with a unique cognitive advantage of “knowing the future.” As the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis argues that the properties of one’s language determines one’s experience of the world, the Heptapod language becomes a transformative force, granting its speakers with the knowledge of the future. This unique avenue for acquiring knowledge, therefore, is a source of knowledge that would be inaccessible without learning the relevant kind of language. According to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, the answer to the question of whether language is the source of knowledge would undoubtedly be yes. If language determines our experiences, it also arguably determines what we can know and not know of reality. The experience of reality, and reality itself, are distinct yet intertwined concepts. While reality comprises the objective existence of the world around us, our experience of reality is subjective and shaped by our perceptions, beliefs, and interpretations. However, these subjective experiences are what we perceive as our reality. In essence, our experiences shape our understanding and interpretation of reality, influencing how we interact with and navigate the world. Thus, while they are different in nature, our experiences contribute to our construction of reality, making them intimately connected.

Reality, in a certain sense, can be understood as subjective, as it is inherently tied to individual experience. There is no way for us to transcend or go “above” our own experiences, and thus, the reality we perceive is shaped by our unique perspectives and interpretations. Each of us

⁵ Edward Sapir, “A Study in Phonetic Symbolism,” in *Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. D. G. Mandelbaum (University of California Press, 1949).; Benjamin L. Whorf, “Science and Linguistics,” *Technology Review* 42, no. 6 (1940): 229-231, 247-248.

⁶ Francesco Sticchi, “From Spinoza to Contemporary Linguistics,” *Revue Canadienne d'Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 27, no. 2 (2018): 48-65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26645748>.

inhabits a distinct subjective reality, influenced by our personal histories, beliefs, and perceptions. Consequently, it can be admitted that our subjective realities are what we deem as being reality itself. This subjectivity becomes particularly evident when considering the role of language in shaping our understanding of reality. This notion aligns with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which suggests that language shapes thought and perception, thus influencing our experiences of reality. In this framework, the language one speaks becomes a source of the knowledge that they acquire. An example modernized from Roberson et al.'s experiment demonstrates the implications of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in favor of the claim that language is a source of knowledge:⁷

There is a party where everyone is asked to wear green. I, as an English language speaker, notice and differentiate that one guy who, merely because he is a lousy person, wore blue. Therefore, I acquire the knowledge of there being someone wearing blue. Likewise, someone, let's call him Henry, from the Himba Tribe in Northern Namibia also arrives at the party, enjoys the food, dances a little, and leaves.

Henry is neither color blind nor too inattentive to realize the lousy guy. He merely does not process the information of the color blue different from the color green. Henry could not acquire the knowledge of the person wearing blue because the Himba language does not have a word for blue.⁸ Therefore, yet again, the language becomes a distinguishing force, offering an exclusive avenue for acquiring knowledge, and such constitutes the source of knowledge in this case.

However, the question remains: is language *the* source of knowledge? It is evident from the above-mentioned example that it is *a* source of knowledge. However, there are other notions proposed to be the sources of knowledge, such as perception, introspection, memory, reason, and/or consciousness.⁹ Considering perception as a source of knowledge, in *Arrival* Dr. Banks's and Dr. Donnelly's first confrontation with the Heptapods can be given as an example. Two characters visually perceive the Heptapods for the first time behind a glass that separates them from the foggy area where the Heptapods are. This visual perception, for example, grants them the information of the extraterrestrials having seven limbs. Likewise, the collaborative efforts of Dr. Banks and Dr. Donnelly to decipher the circular symbols and understand the Heptapod language through reasoning is a means of acquiring knowledge. Nevertheless, in any case, the second question remains because language's being a source of knowledge may still result in it being the limit to all knowledge. Furthermore, if language is the limit of knowledge, then language is *the* only source of knowledge.

⁷ Deborah Roberson, Jules B. Davidoff, Ian R. L. Davies, and Lorraine R. Shapiro, "Color Categories: Evidence for the Cultural Relativity Hypothesis," *Cognitive Psychology* 50, no. 4 (2005): 378-411, <http://eprints.gold.ac.uk/5673/>.

⁸ Deborah Roberson et al., "Color Categories: Evidence for the Cultural Relativity Hypothesis," 378-411.

⁹ Matthias Steup and Ram Neta, "Epistemology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. N. Zalta, Chapter 5: Sources of Knowledge and Justification, Fall 2020 ed., Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/epistemology/>; Robert Audi, "The Sources of Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. P. K. Moser, online ed. (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195301700.003.0003>.

4. Is Language the Limit of Knowledge?

Languages may lack specific vocabulary to describe abstract or culturally specific concepts, leading to gaps in understanding when attempting to convey or grasp these ideas. Furthermore, the limitations of language can deter our modes of reasoning.¹⁰ Since our thinking processes are shaped by language, the limits of language can potentially hinder our ability to engage in abstract reasoning or to conceptualize ideas beyond the confines of linguistic expression, resulting in a limit to knowledge.

Although the two scientists in *Arrival* encountered information in various means, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis would posit that they could only think as much of the information as their language permits. A concrete example lies in their characterization of the extraterrestrial beings as “Heptapods,” a term derived from the linguistic structure that exclusively permits the identification of “seven (Hepta) – limbs (Pod).” The language determines the boundaries of their conceptualization, demonstrating that our ability to name or identify entities is confined to what the linguistic framework allows, leaving no alternative means for naming the extraterrestrials within the constraints set by language. This notion can be referred to as *semantic constraint*. The presence or absence of specific words in a language can affect how speakers conceptualize and discuss certain phenomena or objects.

To illustrate this point, consider the hypothetical scenario where English possesses specific terms whose sole function it to describe the shape of extraterrestrial beings, terms like “rectangle” or “triangle.” In such a scenario, scientists encountering these beings would likely coin such terms to identify the extraterrestrials. This kind of phenomenon, called the Whorfian Effect,¹¹ suggests that speakers of different languages may develop distinct cognitive frameworks or “thinking styles” influenced by their linguistic background—instead of the name Heptapod, the scientist would likely use the hypothetical term that describes the shape of the extraterrestrials.

An even more prominent illustration can be found in the word “weapon.” The introduction of the term “weapon” by the Heptapods initiates a perceptible shift toward a more assertive stance within humanity. While the researchers in *Arrival* reached their conclusion through reasoning, their linguistic constraints restricted them to interpret the Heptapods’ written word solely as “weapon,” marked by an interpretative understanding of the term as encapsulating the concept of intent to inflict harm, damage, or defeat an opponent. Colonel Weber, as a military leader, takes a defensive stance and prepares for a retaliation. The film subsequently unfolds to reveal that the intended meaning was more aligned with a “gift” or a “tool”. This instance from the film supports the Whorfian idea that language is not just a tool for communication; it serves as a cognitive scaffold, shaping how individuals understand and interpret the world. Speakers of different languages interpret concepts differently because their languages provide them with distinct conceptual frameworks, and this suggests that language is a plausible limit to knowledge.

¹⁰ Jianmei Dong, “A Study on the Relationship Between Language and Thought Based on Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis,” *Journal of Global Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 3 (2022): 83-85, DOI: 10.47852/bonviewGHSS2022030313.

¹¹ Jessica E. Harding, “Intactness and Entity Construal in Chinese and English: The Effect of Classifiers and Count Syntax” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2015).

It is possible to argue that the example given above consists in a misunderstanding in communication for this sequence of the film. However, Sapir refutes such an argument regarding miscommunication because, according to him, miscommunication consists in the fact that “the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.” Thus, the interpretation of the word “weapon” in *Arrival* is not a misinterpretation, but a different label. As a result of different labels, through a strong linguistic determinist approach, it can be argued that all languages with different labels cause different worlds, different perceptions, and thus, different actions.

As discussed above, our subjective realities, shaped by our perceptions and beliefs, contribute to our understanding of reality. Although there might be the objective reality independent of any perception, our experiences influence how we interpret it, forming our subjective reality which is what we refer as “the reality.” The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests that language shapes this reality, which is what we perceive. Therefore, if different languages create different perceived realities, this implies a profound metaphysical conclusion: the nature of reality itself is mutable and contingent upon linguistic constructs. In essence, reality becomes a fluid concept, molded by the linguistic frameworks through which we perceive it. This challenges traditional notions of an objective reality, suggesting instead that reality is inherently subjective and contingent upon linguistic interpretation. Consequently, our subjective realities, influenced by language and its confines, become inseparable from the reality we perceive, blurring the distinction between objective existence and subjective experience.

However, language may not be as decisively limiting to knowledge as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis seems to imply, because it could be argued that this hypothesis neglects the very flexible nature of language. New words are coined, and existing words alter meanings in time. If language were to be taken as the limit of knowledge, our perceived realities would change in time as language does; however, our perceived realities do not always change in time as language does. It is also essential to acknowledge the interplay of cultural and personal influences on language, which significantly shape how language is interpreted and applied in diverse contexts. Though it can still be acknowledged that language is *a* limit to understanding our perceived realities, this limitation may not be absolute. Rather, it might be that language operates within a dynamic framework influenced by cultural, personal, and cognitive factors. By recognizing the interplay of these influences on language, then, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how language shapes our perceptions and interpretations of the world.

5. Linguistic Determinism and Free Will

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, when understood in its strong form, posits that language is the determinant in shaping an individual's reality. Beyond its influence on experiences of reality, the hypothesis further asserts that language functions as a determinant of one's actions as well. In this framework, linguistic structures and categories are believed to mold cognitive processes, influencing not only how individuals interpret their surroundings but also the behavioral responses derived from these interpretations. This perspective suggests a profound interconnection between

language and action, wherein the linguistic framework becomes a fundamental factor in shaping the behavioral dimensions of human experience.

In *Arrival*, Dr. Banks consults her premonitions, initially acquired through the Heptapod language, to gain profound insights. These insights span from deciphering the Heptapod language to acquiring personal information, such as the phone number of the Chinese General Shang and the eventual passing of her daughter Hannah. The film compellingly illustrates how it might be possible for foreknowledge of the future to shape and determine present reality. Mastering the Heptapod Language creates a unique situation where her present knowledge is contingent upon what she will know in the future, which, in turn, relies on her current understanding. This creates an epistemic paradox, wherein her comprehension of the language both shapes and is shaped by her temporal understanding, leading to a circular relationship between her present and future knowledge. Had Dr Banks not foreknown either of her insights, she could not have acted as she has done. Had she not acted as she has done, the future would not have been the same as she foreknew.

This linguistic determinism can be likened to a Frankfurt Case, or a kind of thought experiment presented by philosopher Harry Frankfurt, in which an agent's actions, though carried out voluntarily, imply a lack of alternative possibilities:¹²

Jones is faced with a decision to execute a victim. However, an external force ensures that, regardless of Jones's initial choice, the predetermined action will inevitably occur. Jones willingly decides and executes the victim. However, if Jones hadn't had the motive to execute the victim, he would still act upon what the determinant determined, and execute the victim.

So, did Jones have any free will regarding what he would do, at all? Similarly, if language, as the external force, determines what one will do, regardless of what one decides to do, does one have free will, at all? Likewise, did Dr. Banks have any free will regarding how she would act with the knowledge of her future, which she utilizes to shape the present? Can genuine free will coexist within the framework of linguistic determinism?

One might argue against linguistic determinism through self-determinism, which suggests that decisions are freely made through the likings, desires, and wills of the self. However, there cannot be freedom which is only to be determined by another desire.¹³ Furthermore, self-determinism is consistent with linguistic determinism, so self-determinism fails to undermine linguistic determinism. According to linguistic determinism, desires are, again, predetermined by the characteristics of the agent, which are predetermined by their experiences of the world, which are predetermined by how they perceived the world, which is predetermined by their language.

¹² Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *The Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 23 (1969): 829-839, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2023833>.

¹³ Robert Lockie, *Free Will and Epistemology: A Defence of the Transcendental Argument for Freedom* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 195.

We can use Orwell's groundbreaking work, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as an example.¹⁴ In the novel, people's beliefs are molded by Newspeak, a language constructed to control the inhabitants of a dystopian society. Individuals' beliefs shape their desires, their actions follow suit, aligning with what Newspeak has predetermined for them. This theme from the novel highlights the intrinsic link between self-determinism and linguistic determinism. Moreover, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis extends this idea, suggesting that the languages we use today have similar potential to influence our desires, akin to Newspeak, thus establishing a causal chain that threatens free will.

Insofar as these causal chains are not resolved, they are symptoms of confusion or mistakes in our assumptions about our language.¹⁵ These overarching complications delve into the intricate relationship of language with epistemology, free will, and reality. By acknowledging the potential for language to shape our desires and actions, we confront profound questions about the nature of knowledge, the extent of human agency, and the very fabric of our perceived reality.

6. What Can We Know? *Language and Reality*

In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell posits that appearance and reality should not be hastily equated. According to Russell, the immediate experience of the world, which he terms *appearance*, is susceptible to doubt in various ways and, consequently, cannot be identified with reality. In accordance with Russell's assertion that "we are in the habit of seeing things as they appear,"¹⁶ and considering our inclination to label things within the confines of our language, this section of the essay aims to introduce an additional dimension to Russell's narrative and scrutinize it through the lens of linguistic determinism. It is essential to be aware that Russell's ideas in this context are situated on both ontological and epistemological planes, and one should exercise caution when adding them to the linguistic discussion.

Neither the color, nor the shape, nor the texture of a table can be considered as reality through which they appear to us. In Russell's theory of appearance and reality, he argues that our perception of objects, such as a table, is mediated by sensory experiences, or sense data. According to Russell, what we perceive as the color, shape, or texture of a table are not perceptible qualities of the table itself, but rather mental representations or appearances of the table constructed from sensory input. Russell contends that while we can only directly apprehend the appearances of objects through our senses, we cannot directly access their underlying reality. This creates a gap between appearance and reality, wherein the appearances we experience are not necessarily reflective of the true nature of the object.¹⁷

Furthermore, Russell states that factors such as angle, position, and lighting contribute to the heterogeneous nature of our immediate experiences of concepts, so it is unclear that we can posit that concepts appear in uniformity across individuals. This point can be linked to the Sapir-

¹⁴ See George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949).

¹⁵ Tyler Burge, "Epistemic Paradox," *The Journal of Philosophy* 81, no. 1 (1984): 7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2026102>.

¹⁶ Bertrand Russell, "What Can We Know? Appearance and Reality," in *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), 23.

¹⁷ Bertrand Russell, "What Can We Know? Appearance and Reality," 23.

Whorf hypothesis in that language emerges as a further determinant among these influential factors of our experience of concepts. Just as the color of the table in Russell's original anecdote appears different from different points of view, linguistic elements similarly contribute to the perceptual diversity of any given appearance. The appearance of a table can vary among people who speak different languages because the nuances and connotations associated with the term "table" may vary. When discussing the appearance of a table, we're not solely referring to its physical attributes but also to the perceptual and cognitive interpretations influenced by language, as individuals from different linguistic backgrounds may imbue them with distinct meanings and associations. For an English speaker, the object may be perceived simply as a "table," while a Turkish speaker might view it as a "sofra," implying the presence of food. Furthermore, the English speaker may interpret the same object as a "dinner table," whereas the Turkish speaker might continue to perceive it as a "sofra," irrespective of the time of day, be it breakfast, dinner, or another meal. This may cause a difference in judgment of appearance, consequently resulting in a difference in reality itself, as I have argued before that the reality consists of our subjective perceptions. Similarly, in *Arrival*, the word "weapon" carries connotations of threat and danger to human understanding. However, as humans speaking our own human languages, we lack the cognitive processing capabilities inherent in the Heptapod language, which enables a more nuanced interpretation of this concept. This inability to fully grasp the implications of the Heptapod language leads us to misinterpret their intentions, as what we perceive as a weapon may actually be intended as a "gift."

This highlights how linguistic determinism contributes to differing perceptual appearances of the same concept; hence, linguistic determinism promotes the appearance versus reality argument proposed by Russell. The Heptapod language itself serves as a central example of appearance and reality. For example, as Dr. Banks becomes more proficient in the Heptapod language, her understanding of time undergoes a significant transformation. At first, time seems to follow a linear path, consistent with common human perception. However, as she delves deeper into the complexities of the Heptapod language, her perception of time expands, revealing its non-linear characteristics. One example of this non-linear characteristic is the Heptapods' ability to write entire sentences simultaneously, with the beginning and end appearing at the same time. This means that the sequence of events is not strictly linear, as in human languages, but rather exists as a unified whole. In accordance with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, this suggests that Heptapods perceive reality as a cohesive entity due to the structure of their language. Consequently, they experience the past, present, and future concurrently, blurring the distinction between temporal boundaries. This newfound understanding challenges the notion of time as a one-way progression and reveals its true nature as a multi-dimensional concept. Thus, *Arrival* illustrates how the structure of language can shape our understanding of reality, echoing Russell's exploration of the intricate relationship between appearance and reality.

7. Conclusion

In sum, *Arrival* provides a cinematic canvas upon which the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is artistically explored, weaving a narrative that considers what, if anything, transcends the boundaries of

language and thought. By engaging with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the film invites viewers to ponder the profound ways in which language shapes our perception of reality.

This essay has discussed the implications of the Sapir Whorf hypothesis regarding the nature of human perception. This essay has put forward that what we deem as the underlying reality is merely what we determine to be the case according to a collective agreement with regards to our subjective perceptions, which are, among many other factors, determined by language. It has also discussed in what ways the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has profound metaphysical implications, such as the implication that linguistic determinism may hinder free will. Through instances from the film, it is concluded that language is well capable of being a source and a limit to knowledge. Aligned with Russell's anecdote, this essay argues that in addition to angle, position, and lighting, language serves as another influential factor shaping perception, emphasizing that linguistic elements also contribute to the diverse ways in which appearances are perceived.

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SIMILARITIES IN THE METAPHYSICS OF BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY AND DAVID CHALMERS'S PANPSYCHISM

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ABSTRACT: *This paper discusses the metaphysical perspectives of both Buddhist philosophy and the more contemporary theory of panpsychism. These theories focus specifically on different notions of the self and consciousness and how these concepts relate to one another within a deterministic worldview. This essay compares Buddhist teachings, which reject the concept of a permanent self, with David Chalmers's theory of panpsychist consciousness, which argues that consciousness is a fundamental aspect within all of physicality. By looking at both similarities and differences between Buddhist philosophy and contemporary panpsychism, this paper highlights the similarities between these seemingly opposing views, arguing that while Buddhism might challenge conventional Western philosophical ideas of essence, it doesn't necessarily argue against the existence of consciousness as proposed by Chalmers. By showing the similarities between these perspectives, this essay looks at metaphysics and the human condition, hoping to shorten the gap between both Eastern and Western philosophies.*

The metaphysical stances of Buddhist philosophy constitute various significant frameworks through which to view the world, frameworks which can often seem completely dissimilar to those who are only familiar with the Western philosophical canon. So much of what is to be understood about Buddhism, despite the common cultural perception of it, is the emphasis not on un-rooted faith-based abstract concepts often seen in other religions, but instead an emphasis on the understanding of logically grounded metaphysical concepts. It is from these metaphysical understandings that a Buddhist is then able to extrapolate a logical and coherent worldview from which to operate on their path towards spiritual enlightenment.

One of the most intriguing metaphysical theses in Buddhist philosophy is the notion that we do not have a self, and that the self as we know it is an illusion. In philosophy, there is rarely a question more central to the human condition than "Who am I?". It has been the work of many of the world's most influential philosophers, from Galen Strawson to Kant, to answer this question, with many ideas floating around the intellectual landscape. Some philosophers simply *define* what they mean by "I" or "self" in response to this question. Some *restate* the question and ask "What am I?", never really answering the question at all. Both attempts are interesting, but both fail to explain consciousness and therefore the existence of self from a fundamental, metaphysical level—only narrowly defining the self without addressing its full complexity, or merely rephrasing the question without explaining the fundamental reasoning underlying the phenomena. The contemporary philosopher David Chalmers has wrestled with the same idea and has come up with a theory about the self. Just as Buddhism has offered a response to the question of the self, so, too, Chalmers explains the self and consciousness from a metaphysical perspective, but with a

seemingly completely opposing conclusion. In this paper, I will explore the metaphysical positions of both ancient Buddhist philosophy and the contemporary philosophy of David Chalmers with regard to what both views have to say about the self and consciousness, and I will offer an analysis of how these views oppose each other, if at all.

When trying to understand the fundamental metaphysics of Buddhism, a central principle within the metaphysics of Buddhism is the foundational principle of *pratītyasamutpāda*, which translates to “dependent origination” and describes the interdependence of all phenomena. As such, this principle expresses the idea of determinism, or the idea that every event has some cause.¹ It is important not to get thrown off by seemingly abstract concepts within Buddhist traditions, even if these concepts at first glance may seem “supernatural.” At its core, Buddhist metaphysics bases itself on a plausible deterministic position, which includes the esoteric theory of dependent origination as just another, maybe less-understood, theory of modes of physicality, meaning that these esoteric theories interact with the world according to foundational laws of nature, akin to more familiar materials. These esoteric theories interact with the rest of the world in the same way that more well-understood materials do, and follow the same underlying and foundational laws of nature which a hand follows when interacting with a pen.²

According to Buddhist metaphysics, there is no permanent self. To understand this claim more clearly, for our purposes here it is fairly analogous to use the language of the ancient Greek philosophers, in that the Buddhist believes that there is no *essence*. In Aristotelianism, that which defines an entity is the essence of that entity; that essence is what allows for the individuation of an object or concept, and that is what separates it from the continuous mass of reality: an unwavering baseline structure which allows for the individuality of all things.³ This individuality is something that is understood as your most fundamental truth, a metaphysical entity on top of which a body and mind are placed, but which underscores your true nature. As such, a person’s essence is the true self. However, Buddhism rejects this, saying instead that such an essence is in fact an illusion, for the following reason. An essence as defined is something that cannot allow for change; however, we observe change within the world, so there cannot exist an essence. This argument has the valid argument form *modus tollens*: If P, then Q, but not-Q, so not-P. As such, this argument has a deductive argument form and a valid argument structure, which implies that if the premises are true, then the conclusion must follow from the premises and must also be true. So, let’s break down the premises.

P1: An essence is something that does not allow for change. (This is true given the definition of “essence” we are using for this argument, so this premise is true by definition.)

¹ Geshe Lhundub Sopa, “The Special Theory of Pratityasamutpada: The Cycle of Dependent Origination,” *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 1 (1986): 105–118.

² Sopa, “The Special Theory of Pratityasamutpada: The Cycle of Dependent Origination,” 105–118.

³ S. M. Cohen and C. D.C. Reeve, “Aristotle’s Metaphysics,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified November 21, 2020. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/>

P2: Everything within the world changes. (For example, consider a table. While it may appear to be a solid, unchanging object, when we look closer at it, we find that the table is composed of atoms and molecules which are constantly in motion. These particles are not static entities but are in a perpetual state of flux, continually interacting and changing. Buddhists want to say there is no fixed and unchanging substance underlying the table's properties; rather, it is a manifestation of ever-changing processes, which in Buddhism is the thesis of *anicca*, or the claim that everything in existence is in constant flux.⁴)

C1: Therefore, there cannot be an essence. (It follows from the premises above that—as we have defined an essence to be an unwavering baseline structure which implies the individuality of all things—within a world of constant change, there cannot be such a thing.)

Buddhism explains the metaphysics of our world in a holistic sense, relying less on a sense of individuation and human exceptionalism which separates us or anything else from continuous reality, but rather sees us as a part of a homogenous and inextricably linked reality.⁵ Buddhist metaphysics does not see a world of individual entities, but instead a world of perishables, mere dependents consisting of contingent assemblages of properties. Although some assemblages appear strikingly similar to how they did yesterday, there is no essence underlying their continuity through time and therefore, just as you recognize the same whirlpool in the stream that you did yesterday, it is only a similar assemblage of water, but the water in the stream from yesterday is not the same water that is in the stream today.⁶ The only similarity between the whirlpool of yesterday and the whirlpool of today is that during both days, you decided to name it under the conventional description “whirlpool.” This conventional description of the whirlpool is notably distinct from the ultimate truth of objective reality that the whirlpool holds absolutely none of the same water it held yesterday and is therefore dissimilar from it.

This is what Buddhist philosophers mean when they describe the self as an illusion: they do not mean to say that you don't exist, but rather that there is no continuous, unchanging substance which underlies our experience and gives things their individual definitions. The only “self” that exists according to the Buddhist, is the definition given to something to separate it from a world which, in reality, is interdependent.⁷ In the same way that you might divide a continuous cup of water into two different halves, and define one half as “inside water,” and the other as “outside water,” you have defined yourself as separate from the food you ate this morning, or the blood which runs through your veins, the thoughts you have in your head, and even the floor, without which you would have no way of standing. This is what is meant by the principle of *pratītyasamutpāda*: “When this is, that is. This arises, that arises. This is not, that is not. This stops,

⁴ Thomas William Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1921), 355.

⁵ Sopa, “The Special Theory of Pratityasamutpada: The Cycle of Dependent Origination,” 105–118.

⁶ Sopa, “The Special Theory of Pratityasamutpada: The Cycle of Dependent Origination,” 105–118.

⁷ Sopa, “The Special Theory of Pratityasamutpada: The Cycle of Dependent Origination,” 105–118.

that stops.”⁸ This principle expresses a continuous reality and constitutes a description of the interdependence of all things.

Now, it is my job to compare this theory of self with a more contemporary theory within the philosophical sub-discipline of the philosophy of mind, a theory developed by the leading philosopher at the cutting edge of understanding consciousness—David Chalmers. Chalmers is an Australian philosopher, and his theory on consciousness seems to defy what the Buddhists believe. First, though, I must describe his fundamental metaphysical beliefs to explain how he derives his views.

It is reasonable to say that Chalmers, like Buddhist metaphysics, believes in at least a weak form of determinism, believing that certain deterministic functions of reality govern us as humans and the world around us. This is evident when we analyze his argument because we see a similar understanding of modes of physicality as that given by the Buddhist view of modes of physicality, and an adherence to the laws which govern reality as a foundational setting, on top of which he lays out his argument. His argument implies that even though the scientific field has not yet been able to describe how consciousness is fully explained by physical processes as we understand them, nevertheless it is reasonable to assume the possibility that there are laws that govern the relationship between consciousness and physical properties of the material world.

His argument is as follows. When you look at a human being, or even only the brain, what we see is what seems like a very complex machine. Our brains are full of chemicals and parts and pieces, with neurons firing, and electricity flowing every which way. We come together like an extremely complex robot, pieced together using the objective nuts and bolts of our surrounding experience, to create a human being and a human mind. Using this massive machine, our brain is able to put together a massive multimodal and multifaceted movie of what we call experience, consisting of all our senses—including touch, taste, and smell—as well as our thoughts, feelings, emotions, desires, and other perceptual and cognitive features.⁹ This internal movie is something that you may be able to recognize as describing your own experience—that the inputs of the world through your senses are interpreted by your brain to give you an experience. But alongside this objectively described machine that we call the “mind,” and which science can readily describe, there is then a subjective experience of being the subject of consciousness. All the different inputs of our senses then come together to form an experience, what Chalmers calls “consciousness.” It is here that we uncover what Chalmers calls the “hard problem of consciousness”: Why is it that these objective physical processes should produce any kind of subjective experience at all? Presumably, at some point in the future, we will be able to tell a complete story of the objective mechanisms in the brain that explain processes like behaviors, thoughts, emotions, and reactions that occur—the so-called “easy problems of consciousness” for Chalmers—but we will even then still have no way to explain how these objective processes make possible subjective experience of the world, or really any experience at all.¹⁰ Consequently, Chalmers pushes against reductionism.

⁸ Sopa, “The Special Theory of Pratityasamutpada: The Cycle of Dependent Origination,” 111.

⁹ Serious Science, “Hard Problem of Consciousness - David Chalmers,” YouTube, last modified July 5, 2016, 9:18.

¹⁰ Serious Science, “Hard Problem of Consciousness - David Chalmers,” 9:18.

Instead, what Chalmers pushes for is an idea known as *panpsychism*, the claim that within all physical entities, there is some non-zero amount of subjective consciousness, such that when physical building blocks are formed into a sufficiently complex structure to create an organism or brain, consciousness is expressed in that brain or organism. On this view, most physical forms, like rocks or tables, are not sufficiently complex structures to be able to comprehend the fact that they are conscious in any meaningful way, but when matter and energy are arranged into a sufficiently complex structure, like that of a brain, we see the expression of consciousness. To Chalmers, consciousness—the ability to experience—is a fundamental, irreducible, and underlying fact of reality, like mass or time and space. The only difference between entities is complexity, not consciousness.¹¹

Consequently, an apparent difference between the conclusions that Buddhism and Chalmers come to is this. Both come across a similar problem, namely, the question of what it means to exist as a human being, or how is it that we as individuals exist? Buddhism says that we don't exist, that our existence (in a certain sense) is an illusion, but Chalmers thinks otherwise.¹² He says that if we are only machines constructed out of nothing but chemicals and electricity, then it is unclear why we are able to have an inner movie of experience, interpreted subjectively by an inner consciousness, and so we should reconsider what the very basic building blocks of reality consist of.¹³ Consequently, while Buddhists may deny that consciousness itself is an unchanging substance or essence that constitutes the fundamental nature of reality, it seems that Chalmers, in virtue of his panpsychism, would grant that consciousness constitutes a fundamental substance or essence of the world, alongside the material substance of the physical world.

There are a few similarities between David Chalmers's panpsychism and the Buddhist view, which actively denies the existence of any essence, including consciousness as an essence. It is not unreasonable to think that there is no essence, as we defined it; however, there may be some fundamental similarities between panpsychism and Buddhist philosophy that allow for a compatible metaphysics which maintains both viewpoints. Consequently, perhaps the Buddhist view and Chalmers's panpsychism are not altogether incompatible after all. We must first make the distinction between a panpsychist consciousness and an underlying essence.

One might think that Chalmers's panpsychism and Buddhism are incompatible because panpsychism requires taking consciousness to be a kind of substance: both consciousness according to panpsychism and essence as we have defined it are underlying and unchanging kinds of things. Therefore, if there is change, there can be no continuous consciousness, or consciousness as a kind of essential feature of reality, as consciousness is understood by panpsychism.

I offer a rebuttal to this construal of the situation, however. While we see change in the world, we do not observe change within the rules of nature, or the fundamental rules of reality that govern all modes of physicality. We see matter and physical entities change all the time, but the

¹¹ Charles Fink, "Consciousness as Presence: An Exploration of the Illusion of Self," *Buddhist Studies Review* 30, no. 1 (2013): 113–128. 10.1558/bsrv.v30i1.113

¹² Serious Science, "Hard Problem of Consciousness - David Chalmers," 9:18.

¹³ Serious Science, "Hard Problem of Consciousness - David Chalmers," 9:18.

metaphysical laws of nature which govern those physical entities on the most fundamental level seem to stay constant. Chalmers would argue that all things, including the microscopic mixture of stuff which came together to create you, are conscious, like a scientific axiom or fundamental truth about reality. Things that exist, are conscious, and the things which make you are in a complex enough structure to be self-conscious, understand themselves, and express this self-understanding. There is change, but only in the contingent descriptions of what exists in the world, not in its fundamental structure. There is in reality no separation between “things”; it is all one cumulative reality, which could allow for this underlying reality to be a conscious one. Perhaps, in this way, Buddhism and Chalmers’s panpsychism can be made compatible.

Another seemingly obvious difference between Buddhism and Chalmers’s panpsychism is that Buddhism believes there is no self, and it seems that Chalmers is very set on the idea that we as individuals are able to have subjective experience. It might be easy to see this as an impasse at which panpsychism and Buddhist thought diverge, but to this I offer another rebuttal. The individuation and unique separateness understood as an essence by Buddhists is an illusion; however, there is nothing about the idea of panpsychist belief that entails that consciousness must be understood as a self or unchanging essence. There is nothing about panpsychism which implies the construction of individuation in terms of selves. Wouldn’t it be the case that if all things are the same process as you, there would be no individual self? The concept of a self seems to lose all its significance if it is devoid of its power to individuate entities. If you, the floor, and everything else were all considered one and the same, differing not in reality but only by means of convention or definition, it is consistent with the Buddhist view that since the different pieces which come together to create you have consciousness, that the rest of the world around you does, too. The rest of the world just doesn’t have the sufficient biological complexity required to express this consciousness in most cases, or any structure built of contingent and specific neural assemblages like a brain.

In conclusion, this paper discusses the metaphysical framework of Buddhist philosophy and the contemporary panpsychist theory of David Chalmers as both theories relate to the self and consciousness. While it might first look like they are completely incompatible, with a closer look we can see some similarities between the two views. Buddhist metaphysics is rooted in the concept of dependent origination and rejects the notion of a permanent, unchanging self. It does, however, emphasize the interdependence and impermanence of all things, thereby challenging the Aristotelian concept of essence and individuality. From a Buddhist perspective, the self is thought of as a construct or illusion without any kind of intrinsic or underlying essence, because in reality everything consists of continuous interdependence.

On the other hand, Chalmers’s theory of consciousness argues for a solution to the “hard problem of consciousness,” explaining subjective experience within a panpsychist framework. Buddhism and Chalmers both seem to have a deterministic view of reality. Still, Chalmers argues for panpsychism, suggesting that consciousness is a fundamental aspect of all physical things, and that consciousness can be expressed through varying degrees of complexity. Even though Buddhism rejects the notion of an unchanging and underlying self, it does not necessarily deny the

existence of consciousness as proposed by Chalmers. Both perspectives make you rethink the relationship between consciousness and change, and this paper has the purpose of helping to see the similarities between Eastern and Western philosophies, showing the complexity of metaphysical thought, and prompting thoughts relating to the similarities and differences between these two theories.

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LUCRETIUS, PERSONAL IDENTITY, AND FEAR OF DEATH

Wilfred von Norman Quineas

1. Introduction

Following in Epicurus's footsteps, Lucretius provides a materialist view of the world that is meant to alleviate our fears about the gods and about death. For example, Lucretius, like Epicurus, argues that because the soul is wholly material and composed of atoms, and because the soul depends upon the body for its continued unified existence, upon physical death the soul dies, too. Since there is no one to suffer following physical death, as suffering requires the soul for sense perception, Lucretius concludes that we ought not fear death. On the face of it, Lucretius's view of the person as presented in *On the Nature of Things* suggests that we are the *same* person across our lifetime—each of us has diachronic personal identity extending from birth to death. However, in this paper, I argue that (1) Lucretius's materialistic conception of the soul, (2) his view of personhood as consisting in some feature of the psychophysical complex of body and soul, and (3) his identity criterion for immortality, all imply that there is no persistent person across time. While there may be continuity across time of states of the body and soul, no continually persisting self exists. In addition to arguing this metaphysical point, I also suggest that eliminativism about diachronic personal identity¹ further supports Lucretius's claims about death because his *palingenesis* argument applies not only *across* lives, but *within* our lives.

I begin by outlining Lucretius's materialism about the soul. In this section, I briefly describe contemporary interpretations of Lucretius's views on personal identity which disagree about whether diachronic personal identity consists in material or psychological facts. Then I argue that Lucretius's identity criterion for immortality applies as a general logical principle to mortal things, like the person, and consequently implies that diachronic personal identity does not exist. After showing that Lucretius's views about the soul imply eliminativism about diachronic personal identity, I consider Lucretius's *palingenesis* argument and show how this argument applies *within* our lives—such that we have no reason to fear death, as there is no persistent *self* who is going to die.

2. Lucretius on Materialism and the Soul

¹ *Diachronic* personal identity consists in the identity of a person across time. In contrast, *synchronic* personal identity consists in the identity of a person at any *single* moment in time. Even if Lucretius's materialism entails that there is no diachronic personal identity, one might think that his view nevertheless still entails some account of *synchronic* personal identity. Discussing this point is beyond the scope of this paper, but no matter—it is pointless to discuss synchronic personal identity except for in the context of diachronic personal identity. The notion of synchronic personal identity *without* accompanying diachronic personal identity consists in the misapplication of our concept of personhood—insofar as personhood implies some kind of permanence or identity *across* time—and, thus, synchronic personal identity *alone* strictly does not qualify as being a kind of *personal* identity at all, even if it *does* qualify as constituting some *other* kind of identity.

Metaphysically speaking, Lucretius is a materialist. That is, he believes that there are only two kinds of entities in the universe: matter and void.² Matter consists of tiny, indestructible, impartite atoms that necessarily move about in the void, while all objects with which we are familiar ultimately reduce to compounds composed of these atoms, which cohere together due to random collisions.³ Nothing is immune to this (seemingly reductive) materialist analysis, not even the human soul: “The nature of the mind [or soul] is physical... since mind’s afflicted by real weapons and by tangible blows.”⁴ This brief passage shows that the soul cannot be incorporeal in nature because if an incorporeal nature, distinct from the corporeal nature of atoms in the void, were to exist, then it is unclear how this incorporeal nature could interact with corporeal matter. Consequently, such an incorporeal nature would be purely epiphenomenal, unable to cause anything in the world.

As a material compound, the soul is composed of “rounded, very tiny particles,” which are easily set in motion by the slightest force.⁵ More specifically, the soul is a mixture of air, breath, fire, and an unnamed fourth element, which enables the psychophysical complex of the body and the soul to perceive.⁶ The interactions of the atoms comprising the mixture of these four elements give rise to a new substance, which is the soul.⁷ As the basis for perception, the soul must be *embodied* to exist. Lucretius is explicit that soul and body are mutually dependent and cannot exist independently: “[Soul and body] cannot be sundered without leading to their doom, and since they must be joined together in order to survive, their nature too must be conjoined.”⁸ Furthermore, Lucretius divides the soul up spatially into the *mind* or *animus* and the *spirit* or *anima*.⁹ The mind is the rational arbiter of the soul, and it is located in the chest as the center of psychological activity.¹⁰ On the other hand, the spirit is distributed throughout the body, is activated by the motions of the atoms comprising the mind, and transmits movement to the body’s extremities.¹¹

Evidently, Lucretius considered the soul as the basis of our psychological capacities to be material. The question, though, is whether Lucretius considered the *self* or *person*—that is, that in which diachronic personal identity consists—to consist in the soul *exclusively* or the psychophysical *complex* of soul and body. First, let me clarify what I mean by “self.” To say that *I* have a self—that is, *I am* a self—is to say that *I* exist across time as the same individual or person.

² A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Berkeley Press, 1986), 31; Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. Alicia Stallings (London: Penguin Books, 2007), I.418–19.

³ Robin Brown and James Ladyman, *Materialism: A Historical and Philosophical Inquiry* (London: Routledge, 2019), 31.

⁴ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.175–76.

⁵ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.88–89.

⁶ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 51–52; Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.231–43.

⁷ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 51; Attila Németh, *Epicurus on the Self* (London: Routledge, 2017), 96–97.

⁸ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.347–49.

⁹ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 52; Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.136–44.

¹⁰ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 52.

¹¹ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 52; Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.143–44.

This is *personal identity*. Paraphrasing Parfit,¹² personal identity consists in person *X* at time *t*₁ being the same person *Y* at time *t*₂ iff conditions *C*₁, *C*₂, ..., *C*_{*n*} obtain for both *X* and *Y* at *t*₁ and *t*₂, respectively. The conditions *C*₁, *C*₂, ..., *C*_{*n*} are the necessary and sufficient conditions for personal identity, and we can explicate the content of these conditions in various ways, e.g., physical or bodily identity, psychological identity, etc. When I talk about selfhood, I am talking about personal identity, or numerical identity of a person across time. The question regarding Lucretius's view is in what the necessary and sufficient conditions for personal identity consist (assuming that he has a view about the self).

Varying interpretations of Lucretius's views on personal identity exist. Kaufman argues that Lucretius noted "[t]he importance of psychological personhood for discussions of death," where "psychological personhood" consists in "the psychological features of persons... as persisting self-aware entities united by a continuity of memory."¹³ Thus, Kaufman thinks that Lucretius is ultimately concerned with psychological facts when discussing personhood. Németh reads Lucretius similarly because she regards Lucretius and other Epicureans as considering personal identity to be "essentially based on one's memories of oneself in relation to one's surrounding social, cultural [*sic*] and natural environment."¹⁴ On Németh's reading, memory is a necessary condition for personal identity. In contrast, Warren interprets Lucretius as providing a material or compositional criterion for personal identity: "[P]art of what it is for me to be me... is for me to be composed of a body and a soul. Not *any* body and soul.... Rather, I am me because I am constituted by *this* soul in *this* body."¹⁵ On this reading, the necessary and sufficient conditions for personal identity involve claims about the composition of the psychophysical complex of soul and body, which are *material*, not *psychological*, claims.¹⁶

The fact that there are varied interpretations of Lucretius's views on personal identity is unsurprising. Ultimately, it does not matter for my argument whether the psychological or material interpretation of Lucretius's views is correct, as I show below. Whether we take a psychological or material reading, Lucretius's identity criterion for immortality (outlined below) undermines both interpretations.¹⁷ The result is eliminativism about diachronic personal identity.

¹² Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 202.

¹³ Frederik Kaufman, "Death and Deprivation; Or, Why Lucretius's Symmetry Argument Fails," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74, no. 2 (1996): 307.

¹⁴ Németh, *Epicurus on the Self*, 118.

¹⁵ James Warren, "Lucretian *Palingenesis* Recycled," *Classical Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2006): 500.

¹⁶ Of course, on Lucretius's view, psychological claims are related in important ways to material claims since the soul is composed of atoms and void. However, it is not clear that psychological claims are wholly identical with material claims because it is an open question whether Lucretius is a reductionist about the mind and it is unclear what "reductionism" would mean when applied to Lucretius's philosophy of mind. See Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 52; Robert Wardy, "Lucretius on What Atoms Are Not," *Classical Philology* 83, no. 2 (1988): 112–113. Hence, I make this distinction here.

¹⁷ Even if these interpretations fail because eliminativism follows from premises affirmed on Lucretius's view, this does *not* imply that these interpretations are incorrect textual interpretations. Indeed, I do not suggest that Lucretius affirms eliminativism (although I think he should have, since I think it follows on his view). Insofar as Lucretius does not affirm eliminativism explicitly, it would be incorrect to interpret Lucretius as having *been* an eliminativist. My claim is only that eliminativism *follows* from premises that Lucretius accepts, not that Lucretius himself inferred and accepted eliminativism.

3. Immortality and Selfhood

In his discussion of the soul, Lucretius considers whether the soul is immortal but ultimately denies this claim because he asserts that anything immortal undergoes no change at all:

[W]hat's immortal does not suffer any new arrangement of its members, nor can it be added to, neither can even one iota of it flow away. For anything that does, because of transformation, stray beyond the limits of itself, then from that moment on whatever thing it might have been *before* is dead and gone.¹⁸

The soul cannot be immortal because if it were, then it could not change its structure or be augmented or reduced in any way—in short, the soul could not undergo any sort of change. Lucretius's claim that anything that transforms or changes “stray[s] beyond the limits of itself” is an identity claim. That is, this is a claim of the form “ $x = y$ iff...”

In specific, Lucretius's identity claim seems to be the following: Any two things x and y are the same thing iff x does not change in its properties to become y , and vice versa. If x does not change in its properties to become y , and vice versa, then it follows that x and y must share all the same properties. Otherwise, if x and y do not share all the same properties, then for x to become y , or y to become x , either x or y would have to change at least one of its properties to become either y or x , respectively. With this in mind, we can tentatively posit the following identity claim for Lucretius:

Identity: For any x and y , $x = y$ iff for all properties P of x and properties Q of y , $P_1 = Q_1$, $P_2 = Q_2$, ..., $P_n = Q_n$.

This identity claim is essentially Leibniz's law: Two things are numerically identical just in case they share all the same properties. Given this interpretation of Lucretius's identity claim for immortality, it is easy to see why the soul cannot be immortal: The soul is constantly changing in its properties because its constituent atoms are in constant motion and modifying its structure and composition.

The question is whether this identity claim is meant to apply only to immortal things as a description of their nature, or if it applies more generally as a sort of logical claim. There is both textual evidence and a logical basis for thinking that Lucretius's identity claim is meant to be a general logical claim, not merely a claim about the nature of immortal things. For example, Lucretius assumes this identity claim in other passages:

[W]hat can be divided into parts, what you can sever, obviously relinquishes all claims to last forever.¹⁹

¹⁸ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.515–20.

¹⁹ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.640–41.

[I]f you think that an immortal spirit changes along with the alteration of the flesh, your reasoning is wrong: To change is to dissolve, and to dissolve, to pass away.²⁰

These statements assume the identity claim as a general proposition, not as a claim solely about the nature of immortality, because the discussion of the *nature* of immortality here is couched in terms of the nature of identity in general. A divisible thing is not immortal because its divisibility into parts implies a change in its properties since these parts can be rearranged or recombined, while an immortal soul cannot change, although the body changes, because if the immortal soul were to change in its properties, then it would no longer be the same soul nor immortal. Since the nature of identity in general consists in a logical relation, this identity claim must be a logical claim. Consequently, these passages suggest that the identity claim above is meant as a general logical claim, not a claim solely about the nature of immortal things.

Furthermore, suppose that this identity claim is solely a description of the nature of immortal things, not a general logical claim. Then it would follow that mortal entities differing in their properties could nevertheless be the same entity. This is absurd. Consequently, it follows *a fortiori* that even if the claim above is meant only as a description of the nature of immortal entities, nevertheless an analogous identity claim must likewise hold for mortal entities. Additionally, this claim must hold for mortal entities because it is precisely *in virtue* of this claim's holding for mortal entities that they are *mortal*: “[T]he mind is mortal, since it's changed all through the flesh, and lost the life and sense that it had hitherto.”²¹ An entity is mortal because at some point its properties change or transform, and it ceases to be the same thing, instead transforming or becoming some other thing with different properties.

This identity claim is important because, as I argue, it entails that there is no self or personal identity on Lucretius's view. To see this, consider the two interpretations of Lucretius's views on personal identity. (Undoubtedly, additional interpretations likely exist, but I will discuss only these two for sake of space.)

Psychological criterion: Person X = person Y iff for all psychological properties P of X and all psychological properties Q of Y , $P_1 = Q_1$, $P_2 = Q_2$, ..., $P_n = Q_n$.

Material criterion: Person X = person Y iff the psychophysical complex C_X of X = the psychophysical complex C_Y of Y .

The first interpretation holds that Lucretius considers someone to be the same person across time so long as they instantiate all the same psychological properties, especially memories. An alternative way of putting this is to say that personal identity consists in “non-branching psychological continuity,” or the instantiation of psychological properties by exactly one

²⁰ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.753–55.

²¹ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.766–67.

continuous stream of psychological processes.²² The second interpretation holds that what is important for personal identity are not psychological features, but rather that the person consists in the same soul and body. That is, on this view “body and soul [are] the two from which we are composed into a single whole,”²³ so two persons are identical just in case they are composed of the same body and soul.

If the self exists on Lucretius’s view, then there must be diachronic personal identity on his view. I show that there is no diachronic personal identity, whether we assume the psychological or material criterion for personal identity. The result, then, is that there is no self on Lucretius’s view. The view that there is no self, or that there is no personal identity, is *eliminativism*.²⁴

Consider the psychological criterion for personal identity first. On Lucretius’s view, psychological states are states of the material soul, whose atoms are in constant motion: “We see that nothing acts as fast as the mind imagines and initiates.”²⁵ Presumably, a given psychological state corresponds to (but is not necessarily identical with) a particular state of the soul’s atoms in motion. For example, memory has been understood on Lucretius’s account as consisting in a certain pattern of atomic movement.²⁶ However, if these soul atoms are constantly moving and colliding, then it is inevitable that the constituents of a state of the soul will be perpetually changing position. As Lucretius says, “The spirit’s parts are rearranged, and from their order stray.”²⁷ For example, suppose that I am in a state of fear, so my soul atoms are all arranged in a particular manner to constitute state *S* of my soul. At this time, some particular soul atom is located at some point (x_1, y_1, z_1) of *S*. Suppose, though, that I am in a functionally identical state *S*’ later on (still a fear-state), but that the atom located at (x_1, y_1, z_1) is some distinct atom of the same atomic kind.

Am I in the same state *S* or not (*S*’ = *S*)? Consider the identity claim above. If the state *S*’ that I am in now is the same state as *S*, then these states should share all the same properties. One of the properties of *S* is that some specific atom is located at (x_1, y_1, z_1) . However, *S*’ does not instantiate this property because a different atom of the same kind now occupies this point. It seems, then, that the state *S*’ I am in now is not the same state *S* I was in before. Perhaps both these states are *tokens* of the same type of state, but they are not in fact *identical* states.

Notice that the psychological properties of the psychological criterion view are token psychological properties, not psychological types. Personal identity is not decided by the *types* of psychological properties instantiated but rather *the* psychological properties instantiated which fall under those types.²⁸ Yet, the case above suggests that the soul *never* instantiates the same psychological properties across time. According to Lucretius’s identity claim, the soul would have to instantiate all the same properties across time, requiring that all atoms constitutive of its states

²² Jim Stone, “Why There Still Are No People,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 70, no. 1 (2005): 175.

²³ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.838–39.

²⁴ See Stone, “Why There Still Are No People,” 174–192.

²⁵ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.182–83.

²⁶ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Skeptics*, 55.

²⁷ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.757.

²⁸ Otherwise, since generally we all instantiate the same *types* of psychological properties, we would *all* be the same person.

remain at the same spatial location across time. Given the nature of soul atoms, however, it is unlikely, if not impossible, that they ever remain at the same location across time. Even if they do, the probability that the exact same state obtains at different moments in time because all atoms return to their prior spatial locations is very low. If such states should occur, they would be rare, in which case we end up with a punctuated view of personal identity on which the self exists at random, discrete intervals of time when the atoms constitutive of its soul-states just happen to occupy the same spatial location again.

One might object that Lucretius presents a non-reductionist view of the mind, whereas my analysis seems to hinge on a reductionist view. A reductionist view of Lucretius holds that psychological properties are identical with the motions of soul atoms, while a non-reductionist view instead holds that consciousness is “something which supervenes as an epiphenomenon” upon this motion.²⁹ However, this objection fails for two reasons. First, it is unclear how we ought to characterize Epicurus’s philosophy of mind,³⁰ and I suspect the same difficulties with characterizing Epicurus’s views on consciousness also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to Lucretius’s views. It is unclear, then, that we should characterize Lucretius’s views as being non-reductionist (or reductionist).

The second reason this objection fails is that it is unclear that non-reductionism avoids the conclusion above. Regardless of whether psychological properties reduce to properties of the material soul, these psychological properties change over time. This point is supported by our own phenomenological experience of ourselves over time. Indeed, if I instantiate some psychological property P_t at time t_1 which I do not instantiate at some other time, the set of psychological properties I instantiate at t_1 differs from the set of psychological properties I instantiate at this other time. Furthermore, it is undeniable that we differ in at least *one* psychological property at different moments in time. We do not instantiate the same emotions, thoughts, intentions, desires, and so on, at all moments in time; rather, we are always changing in at least one of these dimensions from each moment to the next. This is sufficient to infer the conclusion above. Hence, this conclusion does not hinge on whether reductionism or non-reductionism better characterizes Lucretius’s philosophy of mind.

Consider a second problem with the psychological criterion view. Suppose that due to random atomic collisions in the void, it happens that my physically identical doppelgänger comes into existence. Due to the infinite amount of time that the universe has been around, and the constant motion of atoms, it seems plausible that my doppelgänger could come into existence, provided all the right kinds of atoms happened to collide at the same space and time.³¹ My doppelgänger’s psychophysical complex consists of all the same kinds of soul-atoms and body-atoms as compose my own body and soul. Thus, we instantiate all the same kinds of psychological properties.

²⁹ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 54.

³⁰ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 54; Wardy, “Lucretius on What Atoms Are Not,” 117–121.

³¹ See Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, II.1050–1070.

While my doppelgänger and I share the same *kinds* of psychological properties, we do not instantiate the same *token* psychological properties. My soul-atoms are not numerically identical with the soul-atoms of my doppelgänger because they exist at different spatial locations. Notice, though, that the *only* distinguishing feature between my soul-atoms and my doppelgänger's soul-atoms is their spatial location. In all other ways, they are identical because they are the same *kind* of atom, and kinds of atom are individuated by their physical properties, such as shape or size.³² Therefore, my doppelgänger and I are distinct persons for purely *spatial* reasons, not psychological reasons: If my soul-atoms and my doppelgänger's soul-atoms had the same spatial location, then these two sets of soul-atoms would in fact be the same set of numerically *identical* soul-atoms. This result undermines the psychological criterion view because on this view personal identity turns out to hinge on a purely spatial, non-psychological feature. In this way, the psychological criterion view seems to reduce to the *material* criterion view, since spatial features are likely relevant on a material criterion view for individuating material bodies.

A similar problem undermines the material criterion view of personal identity. Here, a person is the same across time iff this person is composed of the same body and soul across time. Suppose that at time t_1 I am in some psychophysical state PS_1 consisting of physical state P_1 of my bodily atoms and psychological or soul state S_1 of my soul-atoms. At this time, some particular bodily atom b_1 occupies the spatial location (x_1, y_1, z_1) , and some soul atom s_1 occupies point (x_2, y_2, z_2) . However, at time t_2 I am in some distinct psychophysical state PS_2 consisting of physical state P_2 and soul state S_2 . I am in a distinct psychophysical state because the atoms comprising my body and soul are perpetually moving and changing location. Consequently, at t_2 some bodily atom b_2 occupies the point (x_1, y_1, z_1) , and some soul atom s_2 occupies (x_2, y_2, z_2) . *Ex hypothesi*, $b_1 \neq b_2$ and $s_1 \neq s_2$. The question, then, is whether I have the same body and soul at t_2 that I have at t_1 .

If I have the same body and soul at t_2 as at t_1 , then by the identity claim above, all the properties of my body and soul at t_2 must be the same properties of my body and soul at t_1 . Clearly, this is false because at t_1 I instantiate the property of b_1 occupying the point (x_1, y_1, z_1) and the property of s_1 occupying the point (x_2, y_2, z_2) , while at t_2 I instantiate the property of b_2 occupying the point (x_1, y_1, z_1) and the property of s_2 occupying the point (x_2, y_2, z_2) . These sets of properties consist of distinct properties. Hence, it follows that I do not have the same body and soul at t_2 that I have at t_1 . According to the material criterion, I must be a different person at t_2 than at t_1 . Consequently, the material criterion also fails as an account of diachronic personal identity, given Lucretius's materialism.

It is unsurprising that the psychological and material criteria for personal identity should fail on Lucretius's materialism. If we hold that (1) there is no third kind of thing in addition to atoms perpetually moving in void, (2) the person consists in some feature of the psychophysical complex of body and soul, and (3) Lucretius's identity claim, then it seems to follow that personal identity is impossible on Lucretius's view. By (1) and (2), the atoms constituting the person as some feature of the psychophysical complex must be constantly moving and changing spatial

³² Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Skeptics*, 32–33, 51; Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, II.581–88, III.179–207.

positions. These changes in the spatial positions of the constitutive atoms constitute changes in the properties of the psychophysical complex, including changes in the feature of the psychophysical complex that constitutes personhood. Thus, by (3), it follows that there is no diachronic personal identity because the psychophysical complex's properties, including whatever property (or properties) constitutes personhood, change over time.

One might object that even if there is no diachronic personal identity, nevertheless *persons* exist who come into existence and vanish the next instant. On this view, every distinct state of the psychophysical complex of body and soul constitutes a unique person. This objection fails, though, because it misapplies our concept of personhood. A *person* is not an instantaneously existing and ceasing entity, but rather a kind of being requiring some kind or degree of permanence. Consequently, if diachronic personal identity fails on Lucretius's view, then genuine persons do not exist on his view, either.

The result of this analysis seems to be that Lucretius's materialism entails eliminativism about the self or person. This should not be surprising if we consider what Stone says about naturalism:

If persons are extra to bodies, brains, and psychophysical events, they are immaterial souls. Naturalism denies that entities exist which lie beyond the scope of scientific explanation.... A consequence of Naturalism [*sic*], therefore, is that there are no persons.³³

If Stone is correct, then any naturalism must entail eliminativism because the sorts of entities available to a scientific explanation of the world are not the sorts of entities that can have personal identity across time. Since Lucretius's materialism is by all accounts a version of naturalism, assuming that Stone is correct, then Lucretius's materialism implies eliminativism for precisely the reasons Stone identifies. Consequently, a Lucretian materialist (or any materialist, following Stone) must be an eliminativist about personal identity.

4. No Persons and Fear of Death

No doubt, eliminativism about personal identity is a counterintuitive view. It goes without saying that we tend to take ourselves to be the *same* person across time. We think that, in normal cases, at least, a person exists from birth to death. Nevertheless, eliminativism is not without proponents. One interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* (no-self) is that this claim is equivalent to eliminativism about personal identity.³⁴ Furthermore, even if eliminativism is counterintuitive, this alone is not a sufficient reason to reject eliminativism. Many counterintuitive conclusions are the result of sound philosophical analysis.

To bolster eliminativism's appeal, I conclude this paper by considering Lucretius's view on the fear of death. I suggest that Lucretius failed to realize that eliminativism obtains on his

³³ Stone, "Why There Still Are No People," 175.

³⁴ See Jay Garfield, *Losing Ourselves: Learning to Live without a Self* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2022); Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2015).

materialistic view. Indeed, Long suggests that Lucretius considers the person to exist between birth and death.³⁵ If this interpretation is correct, and if my own analysis is correct, then it follows that Lucretius was mistaken about what his own views entailed about personal identity. Altogether, I argue that eliminativism is consistent with Lucretius's views on death and in fact gives us further reason not to fear death.

Lucretius proposes the following thought experiment, the *palingenesis* argument:³⁶ Suppose that after you die, the present collection of atoms that compose your body and soul come back together by sheer coincidence to form the same psychophysical complex. Likewise, it is possible that *before* your birth, the same collection of atoms happened to collide and form the same psychophysical complex as you have now. Lucretius notes that, although these psychophysical complexes consist of the same collection of atoms, we do not consider either complex to be "you." For one thing, the collection of atoms after your death would remember nothing of *your* experiences, just as *you* remember nothing of the experiences of the psychophysical complex prior to *your* birth. On this basis, Lucretius concludes that, even if the psychophysical complex after your death will suffer, this should not worry you because this person is no more "you" than is the same collection of atoms that might have existed before your birth, whose prior suffering you do not fear or treat as your own. Both psychophysical complexes constitute entirely different persons, so you have no reason to care about them as you do about yourself. We do not fear bad things that happen to strangers *in the same way* that we fear bad things that happen to *us* (or those close to us).³⁷ As Warren says, "Death is nothing to us since after death we can no longer perceive pleasure or pain... There is simply nothing left after death to be affected at all."³⁸ As a result, we ought not fear our own death. At death, no one exists to suffer, while even if the same body and soul should arise after our death, this complex is someone else, so their suffering is not our own.

I do not adjudicate here whether this thought experiment successfully proves Lucretius's point. For the sake of argument, I assume that it does, although I suspect that there are potentially strong objections to this argument which are beyond this paper's scope to consider. What I show here is that anyone who accepts Lucretius's argument above may *prima facie* appeal to eliminativism to bolster their case. Therefore, I show the consistency of eliminativism with Lucretius's views on death and that Lucretius's *palingenesis* argument applies not only across lives but *within* our own lifetime.

³⁵ Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 50.

³⁶ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.843–861; Warren, "Lucretian *Palingenesis* Recycled," 499–500.

³⁷ Certainly, we *do* fear bad things that happen to strangers. However, I'm not sure that we fear the bad things that happen to strangers *in the same way* that we fear bad things happening to us or those who are closest to us. Exploring or elaborating on this point is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, I think the following example suffices to illustrate the distinction that I mean to suggest here: The way in which we certainly *do* fear bad things happening to strangers is akin to the way in which we react to horror films with fear. While we know that none of the bad things that occur to the people in these films can cause harm to ourselves personally, nevertheless we experience (some kind of) fear in response to the plights of the strangers we encounter in these films. In contrast, if we ourselves were to experience analogous real-life scenarios akin to those we encounter in these horror films, *prima facie* the kind of fear that we would experience in response to these scenarios would be qualitatively different in kind from that which we experience while observing strangers in analogous situations.

³⁸ Warren, "Lucretian *Palingenesis* Recycled," 500.

If I am correct that Lucretius's materialism implies eliminativism about personal identity, then it follows that there is no self that exists throughout any lifetime. Ultimately, then, persons do not exist at all.³⁹ (Nevertheless, perhaps in some conventional sense we may allow the existence of persons.⁴⁰) Rather than persons coming into existence at birth and passing out of existence at death, only the impersonal patterns of the motions of atoms which compose body and soul exist. Furthermore, these atoms themselves never came into existence and will never pass out of existence: "[T]here must be first bodies made of stuff that lasts forever—atoms—and it is these that everything is broken down to in its final hour so there is a supply of matter on hand to re-power the world."⁴¹ In a sense, then, there is not any such thing as birth or death; rather, all that exists consists in the continual collisions of atoms in void, which never began and will never cease.

With this in mind, consider Lucretius's *palingenesis* argument applied *within* a lifetime. Assume for the sake of argument that Lucretius's *palingenesis* argument applied *across* lifetimes is sound. This argument implies that we should not fear the suffering of a post-death psychophysical complex composed of the same atoms as our own because this post-death complex constitutes a different person than who we are presently. Thus, this argument assumes that we should fear the suffering of a psychophysical complex only if that psychophysical complex constitutes our own person. Furthermore, I argued above that Lucretius's materialism implies that there are no such things as persons because diachronic personal identity fails. Consequently, if we should not fear the suffering of a post-death psychophysical complex composed of the same atoms as our own, then by parity of reason we should not fear the suffering of a future state of "our" present psychophysical complex. This follows immediately: Since there are no persons, no psychophysical complex constitutes our person, so we should not fear the suffering of any psychophysical complex, including the future states of "our" own psychophysical complex.

Moreover, Lucretius suggests that if we do not exist at death, then we have no reason to fear death because we ourselves will not exist then: "[I]f someone will ail and suffer at some future day, [s]he must *exist* in that time when the maladies beset. But Death removes [this] possibility.... It's clear, therefore, that Death is absolutely nothing we need fear."⁴² Lucretius suggests that persons cease at death. But this is not necessary for his conclusion to follow. Eliminativism is sufficient for his conclusion here. We have no reason to fear "our" death because no person exists who will perish at death. We ourselves as persons have never existed, and never will exist, so we will not exist at death. Hence, if we have no reason to fear death if we are persons whose existence ceases at death, then by parity of reason we have no reason to fear death as non-persons who have never existed as persons.

The result is that if Lucretius's *palingenesis* argument when applied *across* lifetimes is sound, then by parity of reason this argument applied *within* a lifetime is sound. This is to say that

³⁹ Stone, "Why There Still Are No People," 174.

⁴⁰ On this point, see Garfield, *Losing Ourselves: Learning to Live without a Self*; Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*.

⁴¹ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, I.545–49.

⁴² Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, III.862–66.

we have no reason to fear death because we ourselves are not persons who come into existence and pass out of it. Our fear of death is, as Lucretius suggests, a misunderstanding.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Lucretius's materialism about the soul entails that there is no such thing as diachronic personal identity because the psychophysical complexes whose features would constitute personal identity are constantly changing in their properties. I showed this by arguing that both psychological and material criteria views of personal identity fail on Lucretius's materialism due to his identity criterion for immortal entities, which consists in a general logical claim about identity *simpliciter*. After arguing that Lucretius's materialism entails eliminativism, I briefly argued that his *palingenesis* argument applies not only across lifetimes but *within* the same lifetime. Therefore, even if Lucretius is an eliminativist, this does not undermine his views about death. We have no reason to fear death because there are no persons or selves who come into existence to pass out of it at death.

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THE TECHNO-SLAVE: A FUTILE EXISTENCE IN THE GAZE OF THE DIGITAL PANOPTICON

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ABSTRACT: *Sublimated for the Digital Age, through the concept of commodity fetishism, this essay examines the digitization of the “self” into an abstract, extractable commodity: the techno-slave. Querying the impossibility for raising class-consciousness, the works of Karl Marx, György Lukács and others offer insights for observing how the burgeoning hyper-forms of technological surveillance maintain the status quo: the technopticon.*

1. Eulogy to Existence

A spectacular, technological futility permeates late-stage capitalism. Pink Floyd paints the backdrop. From their 1975 album, *Wish You Were Here*, a particular track encapsulates the co-optation and configuration of consciousness by contemporary techno-capitalism: “Welcome to the Machine.” Setting the sonic scene, the factory hums while the Bokanovsky conveyor belt churns out *human* products—products sifted into pre-determined class slots and fed as fodder—for the purpose of propagating the Machine. Personifying the movement from mechanical industrialism to the post-Fordist digitization, the appendages of late-stage capitalism are assembled: the techno-slave. Receiving software installations which reify the confines and barriers of possibilities, the techno-slave’s existence is directed by forces beyond their control... “What did you dream?” the Machine rhetorically asks. “It’s [all right], we told you what to dream.”¹

The techno-slave’s only viable means of an alternative mode of existence may be through, first, raising consciousness, then practicing consciously consuming commodities. The techno-slave shares a simultaneous existence as abstracted exchange value *and* as commoditized object. An ontological tension arises from the ambiguity of existence, emerging from the *subject’s* appraisal as a *commodity*. The techno-slave—a cybernetic humanoid wirelessly tethered—is ensnared in a dependent relationship with digital surveillance technologies, constantly consuming digital commodities while *becoming* a digital commodity. There is no opting out, and there is no possibility for returning to a previous mode of existence. Everything lies under the omnipresent surveilling eyes of digital capitalism—every bit of existence: commodified.

In the first volume of *Capital*, Karl Marx defines *commodities* as “...social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.”² Approaching the commodity, it initially appears as a trivial thing. The object’s physical appearance *seems* known. A commodity, however, is never a simple object of consumption—it is bound up with

¹ Roger Waters, *Wish You Were Here*, Pink Floyd, Sony Music Entertainment, 1975, Spotify Music, 4:12, <https://open.spotify.com/track/5VWC7v2dC2K0SIIjT9WTLN>.

² Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, vol. 1 (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2011), 83.

“...theological, even metaphysical niceties. Its presence always reflects an invisible transcendence.”³ What are these embedded, mystical properties within the consumable object—a commodity—which presented itself as a presupposed, simple thing? The process of appraisal, introducing the commodity in connection with Other commodities, reveals the commodity’s curious metamorphosis into something complex. Commodities are the products of human labor; labor which remains unseen; labor which is a social relation: “From the moment that men in any way work for one another, their labour assumes a social form.”⁴ The social relation is rooted within the commodity as objectively expressed human labor, insofar as it is quantifiable. Measured in time, human expenditure constitutes “...the form of a social relation between the products.”⁵ When the commodity presents itself to the techno-slave, “...it is changed into something transcendental.”⁶ The techno-slave cannot see the human expenditure that was put into the creation of a commodity, only the physical presentation of the commodity remains visible. The commodity-form emerges, like a live, mutating being: “...it not only stands with its feet on the ground, but in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its... brain grotesque ideas.”⁷ The commodity sprouts limbs as its appearance becomes exclusively exchange value; the infused labor hides and conceals itself. Exchange value is an abstraction of value: a brand. The moment a commodity’s exchange value is abstracted, “...its existence as a material thing is put out of sight,” mystifying perception.⁸

The commodity does not will itself into existence: it is the materialization of human labor; however, the social embodiment of labor remains invisible, and is thus mystified from vision. “A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing,” Marx elucidates, “simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour.”⁹ Marx continues, “...the existence of the things qua commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom.”¹⁰ Therefore, the commodity appears as an independent being, shrouding its infused labor in mist. Developed from the “...mist-enveloped regions of the religious world,” the machinations of the brain *appear* as “independent beings endowed with life.”¹¹ That is, similar to imbuing a spiritual character into an inanimate object, as in the religious realm, the same occurs within the sphere of commodity-structure. Marx refers to this concept as *fetishism*. Fetishism is a map that affixes itself to a territory, which grants the commodity a life of its own, so to speak. Imbuing the commodity with a spiritual essence, a map contains the abstracted exchange value (brand). Maps are

³ “Slavoj Zizek Coca-Cola Commercial (2014) HD,” *YouTube*, uploaded by Video Human, Jun 10, 2014, accessed March 15, 2022, 1:00, <https://youtu.be/DiTy5-RC1-4?si=3w4BEwQt8Cn0A1FA>.

⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 82.

⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 82-83.

⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 82.

⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 82.

⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 44.

⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 83.

¹⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 83.

¹¹ Marx, *Capital*, 83.

“...inseparable from the production of commodities,” insofar as they necessarily reinform the territory they attempt to reference and reflect.¹² The dynamic relationship of the intrinsic entanglement between brand (map) and commodity (territory) begins to unfold.

The fetishized concept of *branding* adds complexity to commodity-structure. Artificial associations, meanings, and symbols signify a potentially greater value than a commodity inherently holds (beyond its labor-power, measured in time, etc.). The techno-slave no longer consumes objects exclusively permeating with labor; rather, the techno-slave simultaneously consumes the signified *brand* instilled within the commodity. Contemporary commodities come prepackaged with an array of synthetically injected signs that signify values, beliefs, ideologies, and so on. This fetishization constitutes *brand* as a status symbol. Commodity fetishism connects signs and symbols that are not apparently visible in the material commodity. The material connection has since been displaced by symbolic exchange. The exploitative working conditions which rendered the commodity’s visibility are invisible to the techno-slave, though the slogan, the sign, are implanted into consciousness—*Just do it!* The *value* of symbolic gesturing attaches itself to the host of public conscience and supersedes an intrinsic labor theory of value. Consumption, therefore, of these symbols influences the commodity’s value **more** than the cost of material production. Corporations are then incentivized to spend more capital on advertising and marketing than the labor cost of producing a quality commodity.

What is materially produced, then, are mirrors, but more specifically abstracted reflections. In *The Mirror of Production* (1973), postmodern thinker Jean Baudrillard posits, “Even before the stage of exchange value and of the equivalent time of abstract social labor, labor and production already constitute an abstraction, a reduction and an outrageous rationalization in the relation to the richness of symbolic exchange.”¹³ A commodity’s value presents itself as a “social hieroglyphic”—a symbol circulated on the market of maps (brands). Commodities are no longer simple material depositories of “...homogenous human labour.”¹⁴ The commodity’s associated brand takes precedence as its primary source of value. This occurs via a brand’s utility as a status symbol, a signifier, a map that precedes its territory, as the map is deemed *more* socially valuable than the object it references. Like Baudrillard, Marx had linked the commodity-structure to linguistics, insofar as the signifier has no necessary connection to its signified: “To stamp an object of utility as a value, is just as much a social product as language,” requiring a collectively agreed upon set of reference points.¹⁵

Language, a collection of reference points, signifiers and signifieds, codifies commodities (including humans) as value-able, through disseminated images (advertisements): “In the eyes of each other we are nothing but exchange values.”¹⁶ The transactable gaze of Others establishes and reinforces value—a commodified gaze—capturing and selling a reflection of the Self. The aesthetic *choice* of words the techno-slave uses to brand one’s Self reflects the values, beliefs,

¹² Marx, *Capital*, 83.

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), 45.

¹⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 85.

¹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 85.

¹⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 95.

ideologies the techno-slave relates to. Realized through the social act of exchanging signs and symbols “...on the borders of a community,” value is derived.¹⁷ Consequently, commodities contain status symbols that affect and alter the perceptions of Others and of the Self—influencing one’s identity. The techno-slave’s identity—brand—becomes a reducible distillation of consumable objects—of collected signs and symbols that *attempt* to express metaphysical messages. The techno-slave becomes an advertisement of one’s Self. Commodities, individuals included (though parts sold separately), only obtain value through the universal equivalence. In short, a commodity, by itself, must be equated to other commodities for its value to unfold—developed, appraised, reproduced.

2. Kid A_{n+1}

The techno-slave is atomized into a brand, and is then *suggested* to sell one’s Self (an abstracted brand) to Others—determining one’s value—the process of appraisal from recognition with Others. The techno-slave’s brand, in its metaphysical abstraction, a detachable identity, obfuscates the liminal lines that segment the silhouette of the Self. The techno-slave, momentarily, may alter and examine one’s brand, before reaffixing it to the ego. The distillation of a subject’s existence into an exchange value lingers, like a ghost, haunting the conscience of the techno-slave: Which signs and symbols should be spectated today, consumed, and reproduced, to maximize the brand’s value? Where does the “I” begin and the “brand” end? The brand becomes currency; a currency that *re-presents* a collection of images, and therefore values, within the spectacular production of Self as social commodity. Guy Debord nihilistically observes this transformation in his 1967 work *Society of the Spectacle*, declaring, “all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.”¹⁸ The current iteration of techno-slave exists as a collection of representations, and is subject to expressing one’s Self exclusively through consumed signs, brands, logos, ideological sound bites, etc. A social existence reduced to an accumulation of spectacles. The spectacle is understood as “[the] concrete inversion of life... the autonomous movement of the non-living,” the perpetuation of the façade and pliable curtain that continuously drapes over an obscured, objective reality.¹⁹

The spectacle subsumes “...the sector which concentrates all gazing and all consciousness.”²⁰ This sector is a veneer, propagating an experience of “false consciousness” from the “deceived gaze” of digital surveilling technologies and the dependent relationships developed therefrom.²¹ Debord’s instantiation of “false consciousness” alludes to Marx, who states that “[People] have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relationships according to [normative

¹⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 100.

¹⁸ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, revised ed., original English publication 1970, revised in 1977. (Detroit: Black & Red, 2018), chapter 1, section 1.

¹⁹ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, chapter 1, section 2.

²⁰ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, chapter 1, section 3.

²¹ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, chapter 1, section 3.

presuppositions].”²² A false consciousness permeates this filtered existence, generating its own language. Returning to Debord: “The language of the spectacle consists of signs of the ruling production, which at the same time are the ultimate goal of this production.”²³ For the appearance of the status quo to remain *stable*, the techno-capitalists—producers of knowledge, commodities, and brands (identities)—control the flow of data and information (production *and* consumption), which mutate and remold the spectacle. This provides the techno-slave with a misapprehended sensation of *choice*, disorienting the techno-slave into desiring pseudo-needs. A state of stasis renders the conscience to nullify alternative modes of being, as an ever-receding horizon of endless digital content is presented and re-presented, curated by the autonomy of the spectacle.

Social exchanges, reconfigured through the lens of spectacular economics, operates through the mediation of screens, filters, which disseminate “image-objects,” *suggesting* to the techno-slave what is desirable enough to see, consume, experience.²⁴ Debord foresaw that “spectacle” technologies—digital surveilling technologies—would become the apparatus of stifling the development of class consciousness:

If the social needs of the epoch in which such techniques are developed can only be satisfied through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact among [people] can no longer take place except through the intermediary of this power of instantaneous communication, it is because this ‘communication’ is essentially unilateral.²⁵

Par excellence, the architects of the spectacle sustain the status quo and reproducibly reinforce the presuppositions of existence—the dependency upon digital technologies—instant communication that comes at the cost of being perpetually surveilled.

3. Another Bit in the Code

“Welcome...” Pink Floyd inaugurates, “Welcome to the machine. Where have you been? It’s [all right] we *know* where you’ve been.”²⁶ Envisioning an Orwellian world of omnipresent surveillance, the concept of the Panopticon was placed in the public’s eye by mid-20th century philosopher Michel Foucault in his work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975). The blueprint of the Panopticon was originally conceived by Jeremy Bentham (1785)—both Bentham and the Panopticon were byproducts of European, Enlightenment-style thinking—wherein rationality and the instrumental use of reason led to the ever-more-effective domination of *nature*. Critiquing the tension between power and knowledge, Foucault unveils this mechanism of domination. A “machinery that assures [an asymmetrical distribution of power],” the structure

²² Karl Marx, preface to *The German Ideology* (1932), *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5, transcribed by Tim Delaney and Bob Schwartz, *Marx/Engels Internet Archive*, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/>.

²³ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, chapter 1, section 7.

²⁴ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, chapter 1, section 15.

²⁵ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, chapter 1, section 24.

²⁶ Waters, *Wish You Were Here*, 1:03.

of the Panopticon positions an annular tower at the center of a circular-shaped prison, providing an uninterrupted view of the inmates.²⁷ The one-way windows of the tower allow a warden to see into every cell of the prison while the prisoners remain unaware of whether they are being watched. Inverting the model of the dungeon (control by means of depriving light, restraining by physical force), the Panopticon opts for perpetual visibility. Internalizing the calculating gaze from a lidless eye, the prisoners engage in Self-surveillance, no physical force needed—assuring “the automatic functioning of power.”²⁸ Through psychical force, prisoners become police unto themselves. The Foucauldian notion of power, *visible yet unverifiable*, emerges as a more efficient means of manipulating *nature*.

Foucault transcends Debord’s spectacular society to a society of surveillance, observing:

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge... We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism.²⁹

The digital Panopticon peers, monitoring *and* regulating every political and economic movement, movements made easily manipulable via the technological singularity. The techno-slave, wirelessly wired with cybernetic, panoptic appendages—the tendrilled internet—now comes prepackaged with increased portability and domination of will! “The scientific method,” the technology to incise and dominate nature, “thus came to provide the pure concepts as well as the instrumentalities for the ever-more-effective domination of man by man *through* the domination of nature.”³⁰ *Humans constitute nature*. As technological efficiency accelerates, *controlling nature* extends to the *controlling of humans*. Human behavior, consumer behavior, the techno-slave as data/commodity, has become more than just predictable. An entire science, data science, aims at collecting information and extracting patterns regarding the *choices* the techno-slave makes with commodities. The instrumental use of reason “provides the great rationalization of the unfreedom of man and demonstrated the ‘technical’ impossibility of being autonomous, of determining one’s own life. For this unfreedom appears neither as irrational nor as political, but rather as a submission to the technical apparatus which enlarges the comforts of life and increases the productivity of labor.”³¹ The instrumental use of reason enables the construction of hyper-efficient mousetraps, subduing the techno-slave into remaining jacked into the matrix and hyper-stimmed (hyper stimulated) by digital content. The techno-slave, subdued, “comfortably numb,” lies willingly

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 200.

²⁸ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 201.

²⁹ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 217.

³⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, second ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 162.

³¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 162.

entrapped within the world wide web of digital commodities, as feedback loops worm their way into the dopaminergic centers of the techno-slave's brain. And the worms eat into their brain.³² Feedback loops subsume the viewer who has devolved into a producer of data, that is, watching digital content (the process of consumption) produces metadata: facial recognition, location, search history, purchasing patterns. Leaving behind a digital footprint of all political and economic activity—sifted and sorted through machine learning programs—the viewer is mined, repurposed, and sold back to the techno-slave.

4. Fodder for the Animals³³

Measurable patterns of behavior generate a “personalized” simulation of “existence,” one governed by the digital Panopticon, seductively so, suppressing the development of class consciousness (hyper-individualized, algorithmically determined reality). In *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Marxist thinker Georg Lukács queries the arresting of collective agency—a condition where society can no longer draw enough distance to dialectically reflect on itself to create a new future of possibility. He questions, “...how far is commodity exchange together with its structural consequences able to influence the *total* outer and inner life of society?”³⁴ As each moment of existence succumbs to commodification, digital surveillance, coupled with machine learning, leaves no space sacred—not even the realm of dreams. Again, “What did you dream? It's [all right] ... We told you what to dream.”³⁵ Through means of Big brother voyeurism, the algorithmic Other observes and calculates the techno-slave's behavior, then intervenes by not simply *recommending* what ought to be desired but limiting the very possibilities of what can even *be* desired. Updating Lukács' sentiments for the Digital Age:

The immediate, practical as well as intellectual confrontation of the individual with [data processing technologies,] the immediate production and reproduction of life—in which for the individual the commodity of all “thing's and their obedience to ‘natural laws’ is found to exist already in a finished form, as something immutably given.”³⁶

The techno-slave as consumer/producer of data is tricked into perceiving one's Self as the ‘owner’ of one's data, alien to the products of labor. The techno-slave's data-producing capabilities remain one's only possession. One does not even *own* the data one produces. This lack of digital property culminates in the techno-slave's alienation from one's data, from one's brand and given identity. The techno-slave's function is to turn one's Self into an object, sets of data, for Others to consume—distorting any semblance of “social relations”—and therefore the possibility for collective agency.

³² An allusion to Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (1979), from the track, “Hey You,” at 3:15.

³³ ...Living on Animal Farm. These lyrics are from “Optimistic,” off Radiohead's *Kid A*. 1:59.

³⁴ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 84.

³⁵ Waters, *Wish You Were Here*, 4:12.

³⁶ Lukács, *History of Class Consciousness*, 92.

On page 92, Lukács describes the commodification of a socially mediatized existence: “this transformation of a human function into a commodity reveals... the dehumanized and dehumanizing function of the commodity relation.”³⁷ The techno-slave remains plugged into the simulation of stimulation, but what are the consequences of consuming commodities via the technological singularity? The atomized techno-slave becomes subsumed by this singularity, the hyper-efficient mode of consumption qua the tendrilled internet—the internet-of-things—which “...progressively [rationalizes] and [digitizes] his lack of will.”³⁸ The substances and digital spaces the techno-slave interfaces with irreversibly reconfigure perceptions. Adjusting the VR goggles, the techno-slave comes to view one’s existence as data, and realizes identity (personality) is constructed through consumption and production of data—which itself has become an evolved form of commodity—a digital commodity. Lukács laments this discovery: “The personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system.”³⁹ Seduced, the techno-slave is convinced that the consumptive *choices* are from one’s own intentionality. Disintegrating the techno-slave into data “...destroys those bonds that had bound individuals to a community in the days when production was still ‘organic,’” whereas production has now become synthetic, inorganic, artificial.⁴⁰ This process is synthetic insofar as it is overseen by the digital Panopticon, a prison lined with invisible, digital walls. Production becomes intertwined with consumption, as the techno-slave, jacked into a hyper-efficient consumer society, feeds and reinforces the circulation of data (feedback loop(s))—loops that respond, react, predict—and ultimately design what the techno-slave can *desire*.

Quoting Max Weber, Lukács echoes, “the [techno-capitalist’s] concern is based inwardly above all on *calculation*... a system... whose workings can be *rationally calculated*... just as the probable performance of a *machine* can be calculated” and calibrated.⁴¹ In contemporary, seemingly dystopian times, techno-capitalists control commodity interaction, engulfing interfacing with other human commodities, ultimately governing the social spheres of communicative capital. The structure of the monolithic digital Panopticon oversees how techno-slaves sell and consume data, consume digitized nature, and consumption of... each other. The more efficient data science becomes, “...the more resolutely it will turn its back on the ontological problems of its own sphere of influence... the more highly developed it becomes and the more scientific, the more it will become a formally closed system of partial laws.”⁴² Partial laws that theoretically contain knowledge of controlling the flow of nature, thus controlling consumer behavior at a more and more optimal rate. Lukács would conclude that disconnecting the techno-slave from digital capitalism dissolves into a conceptual, rather than a practical possibility: “[The techno-slave] will then find that the world lying beyond its confines, and in particular the material base which it is its

³⁷ Lukács, *History of Class Consciousness*, 92.

³⁸ Lukács, *History of Class Consciousness*, 89.

³⁹ Lukács, *History of Class Consciousness*, 90.

⁴⁰ Lukács, *History of Class Consciousness*, 90.

⁴¹ Lukács, *History of Class Consciousness*, 96.

⁴² Lukács, *History of Class Consciousness*, 104.

task to understand *its own concrete reality* lies, methodologically, and in principle, *beyond its grasp*.”⁴³

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⁴³ Lukács, *History of Class Consciousness*, 104.

A BIOCENTRIC VIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

Musa Brennan

ABSTRACT: *The essay delves into the contentious realm of constructing legal rights for non-human animals and argues for their inclusion in the same moral community as humans. I contend that despite variations in biology, neurology, and consciousness among animals, there exists a common ground for moral consideration for certain species. This exploration emphasizes the significance of recognizing emotional bonds and non-linguistic communication as vital components in bridging the gap between humans and non-human animals. This essay further addresses the establishment of legal constructs, specifically rights, to safeguard the welfare of all conscious beings within the moral community. I advocate for the application of biocentric ethics, which recognizes the diverse yet equal value each living thing contributes. Through critical analysis, this essay explores the concept of marginal cases within humans, challenging an anthropocentric perspective and fostering a more inclusive understanding of moral relationships. I argue that differences in intellectual capacities do not necessitate hierarchies and highlight the unique ability of humans to engage in non-violent relationships with other animal species. Ultimately, I am advocating for a paradigm shift in how humans perceive and treat non-human animals relative to industrial capitalism's cultural and systemic treatment towards animals, urging a more compassionate and ethically informed coexistence within the shared moral community.*

1. Introduction

Constructing legal rights for humans remains extremely contentious as perceptions of which kinds of rights are valid continuously receive opposing views. This directly translates to providing non-human animal species with legal rights, as well. From domestic house pets to native wildlife that avoid humans at all costs, I will explore how these animals possess varying forms of consciousness and whether other animals are deserving of being categorized as members of the same moral community as humans. I will ultimately claim that non-human animals deserve legal rights.

Regarding consciousness, not all animals possess the same kinds, as not all animals are biologically or neurologically the same, and these biological and neurological differences create inherent differences in cognitive capacities. Philosophically, it is imperative to acknowledge these differences in cognition to appropriately categorize the rights of each animal and ask the right questions about these species. Although, in the case of animals, it can be easy to dismiss their importance due to the lack of communicative abilities with humans, nevertheless they deserve our ethical consideration.

These questions we ask about animal cognition are part of recent developments in the philosophy of mind as of the last 40 or so years, which explore how our relationships with animals are more important than previous generations have believed. Humans and non-human animals play

important roles in each other's lives, and I argue that the lack of linguistic communicative ability does not diminish the importance of allocating rights. Most animals demonstrate cognitive sophistication in their own respective ways, indicating that these differences in cognition do not necessitate hierarchies, only different categories. Generally speaking, humans are the most sophisticated at self-reflection and metacognition, which refers to thinking about one's thinking.¹ Altogether, in this paper, I will argue for the conclusion that non-human animal species are members of the same moral community as humans, and this fact necessitates that other animals possess the right to affirm each other's right to life, entailing the right to the necessary resources to sustain and reproduce conspecifics.

2. Explication

Before I explicate how one gains recognition within the moral community, it is important to understand what constitutes the moral community in the first place. There are certain emotions I take to be morally relevant: empathy, disgust, shame, pride, guilt, compassion, among others. These emotions implicate moral perception of conscious things and the circumstances which the emotions are relevant to. For instance, when someone cheats on a school assignment and they get caught by the teacher, they will probably feel shame, assuming they understand that what they did is morally wrong. The feeling of shame demonstrates a capacity for morality within humans and can qualify the species as members of the moral community. Regarding non-human animal species, specifically house pets, there are instances where these animals express their own moral emotions, and where humans label these animals' behaviors in the same way that they label their own with human-constructed languages. For instance, if a dog's house-owner has had a bad day and their dog sees them experiencing distress, while the dog may not have any context of the person's mental state, they understand enough that resting on the person's lap and giving them attention is enough compassion to remedy their mood. This demonstration of compassion exemplifies a house dog's capacity to experience moral emotions and empathize for other animals. This qualifies the species as members of the same moral community as humans. Although we are unable to linguistically communicate with any animals to confirm their recognition and expression of emotions, these real-world examples overtly express the emotional relationship between humans and certain non-human animals, ultimately categorizing them into the same moral community because both human and some non-human animals are capable of moral emotions.

My criterion for qualifying into this moral community comes from a capacity to experience moral emotions and act on them; there is no requirement for linguistic communication on my view. Although, communication is vital when discussing relationships and duties to one another; if we are unable to communicate with something, then our moral duty to it can significantly change. It appears that non-human animal species are unable to engage in linguistic communication with humans because they have simply not evolved in a way that enables them to, but they do have the capability to engage in non-linguistic forms of communication, such as gestures, auditory sounds,

¹ Nancy Chick, "Metacognition," *Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching*, February 9, 1970, 1.

and indexicals/icons. These three forms of communication are very informal in their nature, and they consist in signaling about very specific wants, needs, or other physical, emotional, or mental states. Gestures, for example, are expressions of ideas through strictly physical movement and lack the element of audition. Auditory forms of communication are mere sounds that don't have any linguistic meanings associated with them. Icons are visual resemblances or depictions of something that physically exists; think of a picture or drawing of a bicycle, which depicts a real bicycle.² Indexicals can be seen as indicators, or signaling evidence, of the presence of something else; for example, dark grey clouds indicating a storm, or smoke in the air indicating a fire on the ground.³ These three forms of communication do not require language, so non-human animals and humans can use them to send and receive signals from each other.

Communication has intentions and ends associated with it. When we look at our pet and pat the seat next to us on the couch, we are intending for our signal to communicate that we would like for them to sit next to us. The end in this scenario is getting the pet to sit with us, and our pet affirms this end by fulfilling the signal's intention. This example is one case that demonstrates how humans and non-human animal species can affirm each other's emotional needs. I argue that this relationship can translate to more than just emotional needs. When a dog stands next to its food bowl and whimpers, it is engaging in non-linguistic intentional auditory communication to signal that it is hungry and wants to eat. Humans affirm this communicative signal by providing the animal with food.

The circumstances can be flipped too. Let's say that a human is physically impaired and requires assistance to retrieve something, but they can point to some object and a dog could retrieve it. As previously stated, animals have different cognitive and physical capacities. In the examples I've explained, the dog is not capable of cooking for the human, as starting a fire is not something we can realistically ask a dog to perform. Although there are cognitive and physical differences, the point of affirming each other's emotional and nutritional needs stands strong, so both humans and dogs are members of the same moral community in virtue of the fact that we share many of the same moral emotions with dogs.

Viewing species as having the capacity to participate in moral communities signifies that there are duties they have to one another. These relationships create duties, and humans have constructed legal means to ensure these duties have consequences if unfulfilled or contradicted through actions. More specifically, we allocate different species legal rights on the basis of our relationships with others, and these rights guarantee certain protections to uphold our duties, such that if these rights are infringed, there are legal processes to determine sufficient consequence depending on the extremity of the violation. Admittedly, allocating rights to species that cannot comprehend or consent to their rights is difficult, especially considering that humans cannot linguistically communicate with them. This inability to consent does not diminish the importance of these animals' right to life, just as the inability of a human child to consent does not undermine their right to life. There are countless benefits humans receive from non-human animal species,

² Arthur W. Burks, "Icon, Index, and Symbol," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9, no. 4 (1949): 675.

³ Arthur W. Burks, "Icon, Index, and Symbol," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9, no. 4 (1949): 677.

where a lot of the symbiosis is never even witnessed, while it happens distances away, yet continues to benefit us. I account for the allocation of rights to non-human animals under biocentric ethics, claiming that all living things provide equal, but different kinds of, value to each other. This entails a sense of species impartiality when discussing coexistence, demonstrating that all animals contribute to symbiosis. Without certain species on this earth, there would no longer be a planet for humans to live on, and as far as we know, there is no alternative option for moving planets once the Earth's resources are irreparably—or in the worst-case scenario, permanently—depleted.

By assigning species the right to life, there are other rights implicitly guaranteed under it. If one has a right to life, I contend there is also the guarantee of necessary resources to sustain and reproduce conspecific life. Without protecting the necessary resources for animal life to sustain and reproduce, the right to life has lost its principal meaning; it is not referring to the right to present life, it is the right to present and future life. Because the right to life guarantees an individual the right to continued existence, it also guarantees that individual the right to reproduce and thereby continue their legacy via their progeny. I use the word necessary very intentionally here. Necessary resources also apply to humans' right to life, indicating that industrialization and maximization of necessary resources is problematic for conspecifics and other species' sustainability. Human waste is an extreme environmental threat, where producing necessary resources in excess for the purpose of capitalizing on them only harms their own and other species' present and especially future generation's livelihoods.⁴ If produced to the point of excess, resources lose their categorization as being necessary, insofar as they have then been created for the purposes of creating capital and profit. The mass production of livestock and reproduction of them is entirely anthropocentric and directly contradicts my use of the word necessary. There are moral duties humans and non-human animals have to each other to ensure their future generation's sustainability on Earth, and these duties ought to be protected by legal constructs, specifically rights. Therefore, these members of the same moral community can affirm each other's right to life and protect their necessary resources to sustain and reproduce conspecifics.

3. Critical Analysis

Scientific research has provided evidence demonstrating how humans' brains and other body parts or organs have the potential to be underdeveloped. This has bred an argument referred to as *the argument from marginal cases*, which advocates for strict, biocentric, moral relationships between humans and non-human animals. There is no perfect biological entity, while there are also non-normative, or abnormal, ways for biological entities to develop; these non-normatively developed individuals can be labeled as "marginal" animals.⁵ These marginalities include physical and psychological deficiencies, where psychological deficiencies can, partially or entirely, exempt humans from moral accountability for their actions. This variation in accountability for one species

⁴ Mohammad Armughan, and Sameen Zafar, "Public Cognizance of E-Waste Effects on Human Health and Environment: Evidence from Punjab, Pakistan," *The Pakistan Development Review* 63, no. 1 (2024): 65.

⁵ Zorana S. Todorović, "The Moral Status of Animals: Degrees of Moral Status and the Interest Based Approach," *Philosophy and Society* 32, no. 2 (2021): 283.

must acknowledge how there are other animals with variable amounts of moral awareness, which means there are also ways of holding non-human animals morally accountable. The *argument from marginal cases* acknowledges that not all humans are completely rational or autonomous, and that some marginal-humans lack the morally relevant characteristics to consider them members of the same moral community as normally developed humans, while other non-human animals have a more developed capacity for moral awareness.⁶ My argument which relies on non-linguistic communication providing sufficient evidence for including non-human animal species in the moral community can also include the marginalities and differences in moral capacity for humans, as I have explicated that differences do not necessitate hierarchies. People are no more intelligent than other species of animals; rather, each species is uniquely intelligent with respective neurological capabilities.

Having differences in intellectual capacities goes for all animal species, especially humans. Our species is unique due to our ability to self-reflect and think metacognitively, which I contend allows us to engage with non-human animals in a non-violent way. Buddhism describes this relationship as *ahimsā*, or nonviolence, where it is explicated in the Buddhist text as the prescription to neither kill nor harm others.⁷ This applies to all sentient creatures, making it biocentric, and not anthropocentric. Humans have no natural duty to treat animals a certain way, this is a part of their ability to self-reflect, and their choice to coexist in peace is a moral decision one must make. A fault of the text is that it does not explicate what a practical relationship with animals would entail to achieve Nirvāṇa, or the goal of Buddhism, which is salvation, but I only take the principal of the claim for the sake of my paper.⁸ This fault does not diminish the moral duty we have to one another as humans and non-human animals, as my argument does not rely on scripture for its substantiation. The emotional and non-linguistic relationship between humans and various non-human animal species alone demonstrates the need to affirm each other's right to life and necessary resources to sustain and reproduce. This is because humans and non-human animals belong to the same moral community in virtue of other animals sharing the same moral emotions as us. Furthermore, all members of the moral community have the right to life, and the right to life entails the right to possess the necessary resources to sustain and reproduce.

The ability to suffer and be pleased is another similarity between the two categories of animals, humans and non-humans, I have discussed. A gazelle's ability to suffer after experiencing torture from a tiger is just as bad as when it is experienced by a human.⁹ Morals and ethics are entirely constructed by humans, as we have the ability to self-reflect, where this becomes my rationale for determining humans have a moral duty to protect non-human animals.¹⁰ People can

⁶ Zorana S. Todorović, "The Moral Status of Animals: Degrees of Moral Status and the Interest Based Approach," *Philosophy and Society* 32, no. 2 (2021): 283.

⁷ Bronwyn Finnigan, "Buddhism and Animal Ethics," *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 7 (26 Apr. 2017): 3.

⁸ Bronwyn Finnigan, "Buddhism and Animal Ethics," *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 7 (26 Apr. 2017): 2.

⁹ Ole M. Moen, "The Ethics of Wild Animal Suffering," *Etikk I Praksis - Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics* 10, no. 1 (May 2016): 97.

¹⁰ David O. Brink, "Rawlsian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (1987): 72.

experience suffering, and, in some cases, avoid it at all costs, and suffering is what matters here, not self-reflection. Claiming that since a non-human animal can't engage in self-reflection, any harm or suffering it experiences is natural and should be disregarded. I claim this to be hypocritical. If a person can experience the same good and bad emotions as members of other species that she can communicate and sustain emotional relationships with, then that person also has a moral duty to protect and serve the members of those other species because they belong to the same moral community in virtue of sharing the same kinds of moral emotions.

4. Conclusion

The exploration of moral, more specifically, legal, rights for non-human animals and their inclusion in the same moral community as humans unveils intricacies of our relationship with them that can be easily overlooked. Consciousness, as discussed, varies among animals due to inherent biological and neurological differences, challenging the traditional perceptions that all species possess similar cognitive capacities that would allow for us to hierarchically compare different species according to intellectual capacities. Despite the absence of linguistic communication, the importance of recognizing the emotional bonds and non-linguistic forms of communication quickly becomes apparent once we consider real world examples. Examples, such as the case of compassionate response of a house dog to its distressed owner, underscore the emotional connections that bridge the gap between humans and non-human animals, categorizing them into the same moral community.

The criterion for qualification into this moral community, emphasizing the capacity to experience and act on moral emotions, dispels the claim that linguistic communication is a prerequisite. The discussion on non-linguistic forms of communication, including gestures, auditory sounds, and indexicals/icons reinforces the idea that these diverse mediums of expression enable mutual understanding between humans and non-human animals. The acknowledgment of duties and relationships within the moral community also necessitates legal constructs, specifically rights, to protect the welfare of all conscious beings. While the allocation of rights to species lacking linguistic communication poses indeterminacy, the application of biocentric ethics, which recognizes the equal but different kinds of value each living thing provides, emerges as a compelling framework for safeguarding the rights of non-human animals.

In considering the right to life and the implicit guarantee of necessary resources, it becomes clear that the preservation of life extends beyond the present moment, encompassing the right to future existence for both humans and non-human animals. Cognitive differences aside, affirming each other's right to life and necessary resources solidifies the interconnectedness of species within the same moral community. Through critical analysis, the concept of marginal cases with humans effectively challenges the anthropocentric perspective, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of moral relationships between humans and non-human animals. Differences in intellectual capacities do not necessitate hierarchies, and the unique ability of humans to self-reflect and engage in non-violent relationships underscores the moral duty we share with other species. The recognition of suffering as a shared experience further emphasizes the moral

responsibility humans bear to protect and serve non-human animals, ultimately disproving the hypocritical stance that dismisses their suffering as morally irrelevant or insignificant. In essence, this exploration advocates for a paradigm shift in how we perceive and treat non-human animals, urging us to embrace a more compassionate and ethically informed coexistence within the shared moral community.

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FASHION, RACE, AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

Tye Carcamo

ABSTRACT: *In this paper, with the context of Pierre Bourdieu's idea of "cultural capital," I will argue that minority groups are faced with cultural appropriation in spaces like the fashion industry, and this concern can be mitigated by those with higher cultural capital proactively working against these harmful situations. Individuals who have characteristics that align with social norms have higher cultural capital, giving them more access and power to influence. Marginalized communities, on the other hand, typically have less cultural capital, and they can be subjected to more unjust and problematic scenarios. Specific examples of cultural appropriation are mentioned, including the misuse of hairstyles and lack of recognition towards fashion trends, to explain the continued harm perpetuated onto minorities. To stop or lower the rate at which this occurs, it is proposed that people in the industry, who have a higher cultural capital, should revise how they interact with these communities. There should be more time spent learning about a culture to ensure any creative inspirations are formed respectfully, and, since fashion designers and companies are interested in diverseness, there should be more advocacy and recognition being had. Before concluding, I consider an objection to the idea of cultural appropriation and demonstrate how this objection fails.*

1. Introduction

America is often described as a melting pot. This claim is undeniable; the 2020 census found that America is growing to be more ethnically diverse,¹ and some social scientists even predict that white Americans will be in the minority by 2045.² These demographic changes have also become visible in adaptations made in American fashion and culture. The heightened exposure of streetwear, for example, puts the style of underrepresented groups into the high fashion arena. However, this inclusion remains surface level as the dominant cultural influence in America is still seeped in white supremacy, capitalism, and heteronormativity. Mainstream American fashion undoubtedly borrows from its marginalized racial and ethnic communities; while this borrowing is often categorized as appreciation, and these aesthetics are taken directly from minority groups, dominant racial and class groups still remain the arbiters of culture and fashion, holding a significant majority of the cultural capital within modern pop culture. This imbalance tends to be swallowed, and subsequently ignored, by those with the power to instill change, but this path

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "The Chance That Two People Chosen at Random Are of Different Race or Ethnicity Groups Has Increased Since 2010," Census.gov, October 11, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/2020-united-states-population-more-racially-ethnically-diverse-than-2010.html>.

² William H. Frey, "The Nation Is Diversifying Even Faster Than Predicted, According to New Census Data," Brookings, July 1, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/new-census-data-shows-the-nation-is-diversifying-even-faster-than-predicted/>.

should be discouraged for the sake of *all* communities. With the utilization of Pierre Bourdieu's concept, "cultural capital," I preface how Western fashion's being largely governed by the hegemonic workings of white supremacy, capitalism, and heteronormativity is problematic. I then argue that those well-established in the fashion industry should continue to interact with minorities and their creativity, but they must divert from cultural appropriation by offering proper recognition and respect towards such communities, subverting the normalcy of the current structure.

2. Cultural Capital and Consumption

To begin this discussion of which groups determine or dominate fashion, we must first examine which groups "decide" American pop culture. To explore this further, I will be using the term, "cultural capital," which was coined by French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu; he described it as being "the various kinds of knowledge, skills, behavior we possess by the virtue of being a part of a specific social group."³ The idea of cultural capital, which includes factors such as social status, education, and access to resources, directly influences the value placements on specific groups, determining their perceived worth in society. The higher the cultural capital one attains, the more influence they have over deciding what is socially accepted and consumed. Thus, mainstream trends and cultural narratives may sway in a direction favorable to views held by those who possess greater cultural capital. In American pop culture and fashion, consumption can be used as a guiding metric for popularity. Therefore, the cultural advantage possessed by those with greater cultural capital directly interacts with and affects modern pop culture.

Thus, we must examine who, in American society, has the highest cultural capital. Bourdieu's theory proposes that cultural capital is based mainly on two parameters: social and economic mobility. Economic mobility is most often afforded to those of the higher classes and works on the index of the higher the amount of generation wealth, the more economic mobility. For example, studies support that a handful of families hold onto 76% of the nation's wealth, implying that their economic mobility is significantly higher than the remainder of the nation.⁴ These wealth differences create a strong class divide, which shows that high cultural capital remains in the hands of the ultra-wealthy. In addition to the ultra-wealthy, dominant social groups are awarded cultural capital based on *social* mobility. These dominant groups include but are not limited to men, the white race, able-bodied people, cis-gendered people, and heterosexuals.⁵ While all of these dimensions of dominant groups have their own nuances, for the sake of this discussion, I will examine how the characteristic of whiteness, specifically, has affected American culture.

The American population is predominantly white due to the history of European settlement in North America, and this fact has had a major impact on our culture. It has been stated that this

³ Sociology Group, "What Is Bourdieu Theory of Cultural Capital?," Sociology Group: Welcome to Social Sciences Blog, July 22, 2020, <https://www.sociologygroup.com/bourdieu-theory-cultural-capital/>.

⁴ Ana Hernández Kent and Lowell Ricketts, "Has Wealth Inequality in America Changed Over Time? Here Are Key Statistics," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, December 2, 2020, <https://www.stlouisfed.org/open-vault/2020/december/has-wealth-inequality-changed-over-time-key-statistics>.

⁵ Sourabh Yadav and Peer Reviewed by Chris Drew, "Dominant Culture: Definition and 10 Examples (2024)," *Helpful Professor* (blog), September 6, 2023, <https://helpfulprofessor.com/dominant-culture/>.

origin has become “the core of understanding race in America. Whiteness and the normalization of white racial identity throughout America’s history have created a culture where non-white persons are seen as inferior or abnormal.”⁶ Essentially, we understand whiteness as a characteristic of the dominant group because whiteness quickly became the default, allowing this idea to carry into the modern day. The homogenization of the American experience through a solely white perspective, thus, can lend white individuals more social mobility. Similarly, the other groups mentioned, male, straight, able-bodied, etc., are, too, given more social mobility for being seen as the “norm.” Therefore, those with the most cultural capital in America are those who fit most nicely within the parameters of the dominant social groups mentioned.

3. Mainstream Fashion and The Black Community

The Black diaspora in America has left its mark on American popular culture, from rock to rap and hip hop; their community continues to influence art and consumption in America.⁷ Black culture’s symbiosis with American mainstream culture provides a unique view by which to understand American racial relations. Fashion has been used repeatedly to examine social circumstances. Sociologists Patrick Aspers and Frederic Godart assert that “hardly any area of contemporary social life is not subject to fashion, and it is a topic in which all classical sociological questions reappear, from the culture/structure conundrum to the micro/macro debate. We argue that the increased interest in fashion...should be acknowledged as a sign of both its importance and its generality.”⁸ Regarding this point, examples should be divulged to fully conceptualize how style has been marked by the Black community.

To wit, the induction of streetwear—a style inspired by hip-hop and urban youth in the late 20th century—into “high fashion” largely highlights the inclusion of Black fashion within the white mainstream. High fashion has been used colloquially to describe fashion that is bought by a small group of elites (exclusion is a central part of the definition) for a relatively extreme amount of money. Since hip-hop music was catapulted into the living rooms of America in the 1990s, style originating from the Black community has been on the rise in popularity and high fashion. Fashion houses with decades-long history of haute couture—or trendy clothing highticketed due to its exclusivity—began referencing Black and Hispanic aesthetics within their work. Christopher Morency, a fashion historian, writes, “everybody from Nicholas Ghesquière at Balenciaga to Alexander Wang had referenced streetwear in some form or another.”⁹ Streetwear has since come

⁶ “Whiteness,” National Museum of African American History and Culture, September 19, 2022, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness>.

⁷ David Lanham, “A Public Letter to the Associated Press: Listen to the Nation and Capitalize Black.,” *Brookings*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-public-letter-to-the-associated-press-listen-to-the-nation-and-capitalize-black/#:~:text=More%20recently%2C%20in%20a%202014,black%20is%20simply%20a%20color.%E2%80%9D>.

⁸ Patrik Aspers and Frédéric Godart, “Sociology of Fashion: Order and Change,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, no. 1 (July 30, 2013): 171–92, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145526>.

⁹ Christopher Morency, “How Luxury Came to Love Streetwear Sites,” *Business of Fashion*, June 5, 2017, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/how-luxury-came-to-love-streetwear-sites-hypebeasthighsnobiety>.

to dominate the high fashion space. However, while this streetwear becomes more expected in the extremely rich and extremely white circles of high fashion, Black people from working and middle-class backgrounds, wearing the same style, are met with prejudice and distasteful stereotypes.¹⁰ This dissidence between the acceptability of these aesthetics illustrates how, despite the “homage” to art created and popularized by Black Americans, cultural and political power remains in the hands of those who appropriate these aesthetics.

In addition to the dynamics of cultural appropriation in mainstream fashion, another significant aspect to consider is the appropriation of Black hairstyles. Black hairdos have a long history of being stigmatized and marginalized, with Black individuals often facing discrimination based on their natural hair texture and style. However, in recent years, there has been a growing trend of appropriating Black hair aesthetics in mainstream fashion. Hairstyles attached to Black culture—such as braids, dreadlocks, and afros—have been appropriated and rebranded by the fashion industry as trendy and fashionable, often without giving credit or recognition to their African and other ancient origins. Fashion shows, magazines, and advertisements have featured models and celebrities donning these hairstyles as “new” and “edgy” looks,¹¹ while Black individuals are targets of bigotry, which includes punishment and legal repercussion,¹² for wearing these same styles in everyday life.

It is important to note here that the majority of the models in the U.S., who would be put in photoshoots and shows wearing such hairstyles, are white.¹³ This appropriation of Black hairdos in mainstream fashion raises important questions about power dynamics and cultural capital. While Black hair aesthetics are now celebrated in high fashion and popularized by non-Black individuals, Black people from working and middle-class backgrounds continually are met with prejudice and unjust responses for wearing their natural hair in its authentic form. In fact, Black individuals are still fighting for legal protection against such instances—specifically, the CROWN Act—to be codified in all 50 U.S. states.¹⁴ The dissonance of Black hairstyles being profitably glamorized in the fashion industry, while simultaneously unjustly disrupting the lives of many Black individuals, emphasizes the systemic power imbalances that exist within the circles of the fashion industry and broader society. Seemingly, the only difference is that, due to their career, fashion designers, models, and others in the fashion world have a cultural capital that is more readily accepted than that of the Black community.

¹⁰ Regan a. R. Gurung et al., “Can Success Deflect Racism? Clothing and Perceptions of African American Men,” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 161, no. 1 (June 29, 2020): 119–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2020.1787938>.

¹¹ Gianluca Russo, “8 Times Fashion Designers Have Appropriated Black Hairstyles at Fashion Week,” *Teen Vogue*, January 23, 2020, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/fashion-designers-appropriate-black-hairstyles-fashion-week>.

¹² Juan A. Lozano, The Associated Press, “Black Student Legally Punished by Houston-area School Over His Hairstyle, Judge Says,” *NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth*, February 22, 2024, <https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/texas-news/trial-to-determine-if-texas-schools-punishment-of-a-black-student-over-his-hair-violates-new-law/3469059/>.

¹³ “Runway Model Demographics and Statistics [2024]: Number of Runway Models in the US,” July 21, 2023, <https://www.zippia.com/runway-model-jobs/demographics/#race-statistics>.

¹⁴ “The Official CROWN Act,” The Official CROWN Act, n.d., <https://www.thecrownact.com/>.

Another issue found in the appropriation of Black hairstyles in fashion is that it perpetuates harmful beauty standards and reinforces Eurocentric ideals of beauty. Black hair is often subjected to harmful chemicals, heat styling, and extensions in order to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards, while the same hairstyles are celebrated and appropriated by non-Black individuals in the fashion industry without facing the same discrimination and bias. This further reinforces the notion that dominant racial and class groups hold the power to appropriate and commodify aspects of Black culture for their own benefit, while Black individuals continue to face systemic barriers and discrimination.

The appropriation of Black hair in mainstream fashion serves as a stark example of how power dynamics and cultural capital operate within the fashion industry and society at large. It illustrates how Black culture and aesthetics are often appropriated and commodified without proper recognition, while Black individuals continue to face discrimination and prejudice for expressing their own cultural identity. By examining the appropriation of Black hair alongside other forms of cultural appropriation in fashion, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between power, fashion, and marginalized groups, and thereby work towards promoting inclusivity, cultural appreciation, and social justice in the fashion industry and beyond.

4. The Queer Community and Mainstream Fashion

The LGBT+ community intersects with the Black community and Black art. Specifically, the queer Black youth of major metropolitan areas have come into the mainstream as of late. The normalcy of drag in everyday media has largely been brought about by the popular television show, *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Hundreds of thousands of viewers tune in each week to an art that was once underground and illegal in many areas of the United States.¹⁵ This increasing acceptance of queer art has also been reflected in the increasingly androgynous styles of many celebrities.¹⁶ The genderless looks of male, female, and nonbinary megastars have catapulted queer ideations of styles into the American public. In addition, the theme of the 2019 Met Gala, an institution of high fashion, was based on a Susan Sontag essay, "Notes On 'Camp.'"^{17,18} It is undoubted that many of the "camp" fashion choices were influenced by transgender individuals and queer drag performers. This is all to say that the media has viewed this art form as being innovative enough to invite it into high fashion spaces. However, despite the inclusion of queerinspired art and fashion, there is, once again, minimal recognition given to their community.

Currently, transgender and queer youth are under attack in America. Despite their contributions paving way for current fashion and trends, they have significantly high suicide rates,

¹⁵ Julia Stoll, "RuPaul's Drag Race Viewers in the U.S. 2021," January 27, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/977761/rupauls-drag-race-viewers/>.

¹⁶ JoJo Iles, "The Rise of Androgynous Fashion," Fashion Capital -, December 2, 2022, <https://www.fashioncapital.co.uk/insights/the-rise-of-androgynous-fashion/>.

¹⁷ Constance Grady, "What Is Camp: This Year's Met Gala Theme, Explained," *Vox*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/5/3/18514408/what-is-camp-explained-met-gala-susan-sontag>.

¹⁸ Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (fall 1964): 515–530.

partly due to lack of support towards their identity,¹⁹ and there has been a significant rise in politicians proposing laws threatening their very existence.²⁰ The success of their creativity has yet to translate into a noteworthy effect on their cultural capital. While there is more tolerance in the modern era than previously, there is still much more that needs to be done to minimize the disconnect found between the popularization of queer creativity and the continuous mistreatment towards their community. Thus, the fashion industry and media, again, have the potential to mitigate this issue. Recognition of the origin of works, such as drag, would not only serve as knowledge to consumers, but it would also give the community the respect that they deserve. For those disinterested in the lives and rights of transgender and queer individuals, the education being a bonus to an enjoyable event or clothing piece could lend them a new, more tolerant perspective towards these communities. Most of all, inviting and collaborating with the LGBTQ+ community can help make members feel welcomed and celebrated in the currently strenuous political climate.

5. Objections to Cultural Appropriation

One objection proposed to the nature of this cultural exchange is that the hybridization of these cultures is not necessarily harmful and is, instead, an essential feature of an increasingly connected, globalized world. Cultural appropriation has been the subject of much controversy and debate, but it can also be seen as a form of creative expression and cultural exchange. As argued by Susan Scafidi in her book, *Who Owns Culture?: Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*, cultures are not static or fixed entities. Rather, they are constantly evolving through interactions in symbiosis with other cultures.²¹ Continuing with the example of fashion, by borrowing elements from other cultures, stylists and designers can create new and innovative styles that push the boundaries of what is considered fashionable. Moreover, as Marissa Smith notes in her article “Cultural Appropriation and Its Effects on Indigenous Cultures,” cultural appropriation can also serve to increase visibility and awareness of minority cultures.

Solely by incorporating elements from these cultures into their work, designers can keep their current clientele who do not explore cultural diversity on their own, while also extending the interests of their clientele into other communities. To add, while it is important to acknowledge power imbalances and injustices, it is also important to recognize the difficulties in presenting a culture that isn't one's own. Fashion designers may not have expertise in a certain culture and feel inadequate to speak on such topics. Ultimately, many argue that the key to responsible cultural exchanges is to approach them with sensitivity, respect, and a willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue. Being labeled as a “cultural appropriator” may stop this connection from happening altogether.

¹⁹ Ashley Austin et al., “Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37, no. 5–6 (April 29, 2020): NP2696–2718, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520915554>.

²⁰ “Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures in 2024 | American Civil Liberties Union,” American Civil Liberties Union, March 15, 2024, <https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2024>.

²¹ Susan Scafidi, *Who Owns Culture?*, Rutgers University Press eBooks, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813537856>.

6. A Response to Objections to Cultural Appropriation

The objection that cultural appropriation in fashion can be seen as a form of creativity inspired by a mix of cultures is valid—to a degree. It is true that cultures are not static and evolve through interactions with other cultures, and borrowing elements from different cultures can lead to new and innovative styles, especially in fashion. Furthermore, incorporating elements from minority cultures can increase visibility and awareness, helping to promote cultural diversity, as previously mentioned by Susan Scafidi and Marissa Smith.

However, we can grant these points, while also acknowledging the problems that nevertheless ensue for various communities when their fashion is culturally appropriated. Power imbalances, historical injustices, and systemic discrimination against marginalized groups cannot continue to be overlooked. While it may seem sufficient for fashion designers to engage in collaborations with members of minority cultures to avoid being accused of cultural appropriation, the manner in which these designers go about this collaboration determines whether they are indeed showing sufficient respect to these minority cultures. It is crucial to ensure that proper credit, recognition, and compensation are given to the original culture and its creators. Consequently, that fashion designers engage in collaborations with members of minority cultures does not entail that these designers are showing sufficient respect to the original cultures and creators.

While cultural exchange in the creative realm can foster appreciation, cultural appropriation is a form of interaction that does not prioritize the culture it takes from. Simply borrowing elements without grasping the cultural significance or context can lead to misappropriation and continue to perpetuate damaging stereotypes. It is dire to recognize that while cultural exchange in fashion may have positive aspects, to avoid cultural exchange becoming cultural appropriation requires responsible and thoughtful engagement, including meaningful dialogue, education, and respect for the cultural origins and context of the appropriated elements.

7. Conclusion

Generally, one's cultural capital plays a significant role in how they are socially perceived and interacted with in a society. In America, there are certain characteristics that can automatically increase a person's cultural capital. Society has repeatedly had a favorable bias towards groups including the white race, the wealthy, heterosexual individuals, and so on. Because the characteristics of these groups are seen as defining the ideal standard for normality, minority cultures are often burdened with systemic oppression and uncomfortable situations—including cultural appropriation. This unjust scenario, seen in examples of appropriated Black hairstyles and queer eccentricity, normalizes the act of taking what is liked from a culture and erasing the history, challenges, and people that are attached to it.

Furthermore, while one may argue that *any* tender exchange between cultures is an expression of appreciation, this is not the case: if a cultural exchange is done carelessly, negative stereotypes or miscommunication can be had, causing more harm than benefit. Additionally,

marginalized communities miss out on the opportunity to increase their cultural capital when they are not properly recognized. The fashion industry, along with other popular media forms, have the ability to reach larger, high-class groups, which could prove beneficial for all parties involved. For creative works inspired by a culture separate from one's own to be truly inclusive the creator or artist must do more than just indicate the source of inspiration itself. Inclusively engaging with another culture also requires education, recognition, compensation, and, most of all, respect on the part of the creator or artist. Those with high cultural capital, such as fashion designers and companies, are in a space with access to an abundance of such resources. Ridding art of cultural appropriation, and increasing cultural appreciation, improves the relationship between the fashion industry and minority groups, rather than ending it. Instead, improving the relationship between the fashion industry and minority groups in this way just may be the change needed to stimulate a more culturally and socially diverse society.

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STOICS AS PRISON ABOLITIONISTS

Tye Carcamo

ABSTRACT: *In this paper, I will argue that the United States' prison system violates the virtues that the Stoics abide by, and, due to this infraction, the Stoics would be advocates for prison abolition. Stoicism calls for its followers to lead a virtuous life to attain eudaimonia—the Greek term for ultimate happiness. To do so, they would need to follow the four virtues: temperance, courage, justice, and prudence. Including oneself in community is also necessary to their philosophy, which opens up the door to politics. Contemporarily, a controversial but consequential political issue in the U.S. is that prisons often mistreat their prisoners and face no repercussions. These atrocities would be problematic to Stoics, for such acts inherently violate their cardinal virtues. Thus, it is argued that the Stoics would encourage abolition of the current prison structure as it does not align with their values. Instead, their support would go towards an arrangement based on reform.*

With decades of misinformed opinions and stereotypes, Stoicism has often been considered as an ideology advocating for the erasure of emotions. With this perception, Stoics have been commonly viewed as being cold and emotionless. This, however, is a claim that cannot be found in their literature. Rather than what the modern interpretation has concluded, their ancient excerpts contend that one should exert *control* over one's emotions. In this context, the absence of an external cue to a felt emotion is evidence of critical effortful control—not a sign of dispassion or disinterest. Having power over reactions, whether it be towards positive or negative stimuli, is an enduring cognitive skill Stoics used and praised. Although this patience was an integral part of their practice, it did not negate their view on social politics. Not only did the Stoics support people from all backgrounds and classes to follow the tenets of Stoicism, but they also commended being involved in the political realm if needed. In regards to justice, Stoicism has been a helpful method for staying mentally coherent during unjust and inflammatory situations. Additionally, they would condemn a person or government when either would act outside the values the Stoics hold deeply. In the current sociopolitical situation, acts within the American prison system can be considered as a problematic concern for society. The way in which it is regulated has allowed for, and even encouraged, the mistreatment of its prisoners. In this paper, I will argue that, based on Stoic ethics, the current U.S. prison system is a misuse of governmental control, and, in being so, the Stoics would advocate prison abolition, arguing for a more rehabilitative arrangement for offenders.

When being introduced to Stoicism, one will quickly learn about their ethics and virtues. Ultimately, much of their ethics refers back to their interpretation of what is the highest goal one can attain—*eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* is a Greek term that roughly translates to happiness.¹ Indeed,

¹ "Eudaemonia," in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, n.d., <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eudaemonia>.

the Stoics argue that this is the pinnacle of their practices, and they offer behaviors that would lead an agent to this fate. Within many of Seneca's texts, a well-known ancient Roman Stoic, he prioritizes these very topics. He writes about how aligning with the virtues of Stoicism is the path towards *eudaimonia* and of the importance of accepting the nature of existence, including the good and bad.² Before explaining further, it should be clarified that the Stoics believe that nature is driven by a force they took to be God.

Unlike some Western religions, God, for the Stoics, is more of an energy than a being with a personal identity. Stoicism is committed to pantheism, or the view that God and the forces of nature are one and the same. However, the performance of their god is very similar to the one found in Abrahamic religions. To wit, David Sedley's article, "The Origins of Stoic God," defines the Stoic God as "the single cause of everything... a supremely intelligent, good and provident being who plans and necessitates the world's entire development."³ Again, though this explanation is clarifying, it is more accurate to omit any language personifying the Stoic God. Nevertheless, the Stoic perspective concludes that God is what facilitates goodness in the world, and, with such a world at their fingertips, it is best to live a virtuous life.

Being a Stoic is more than a matter of having faith in the Stoic God, for Stoicism is a way of life and determines how an individual interacts with their environment. Virtues are held with high regard by the Stoics because it is believed that the virtues are the only mechanisms that can lead to genuine happiness.⁴ In excerpts, John Stobaeus, who compiled the works of many ancient Greeks,⁵ found that "prudence, then, and temperance and justice and courage and great-heartedness and strength of body and soul are virtues."⁶ Accordingly, the vices—which include foolishness, intemperance, injustice, and cowardice—are the opposite of the given virtues.⁷ Therefore, the vices are viewed as inherently unfavorable, and one should avoid actions and beliefs that follow their path. A majority of the developments on virtue are based on the specific four divisions mentioned: prudence, temperance, justice, and courage. If something is not categorized as a virtue or a vice, then Stoicism holds that one should treat such things as indifferent, as being neither objectively good nor bad.

Starting with prudence, the following paragraphs will be used to further define and expand what it means to live by each virtue. Prudence, here, can be understood as living through and by wisdom. In this context, wisdom can be thought of as acting intently by adhering to logical thought.

² "Seneca, Lucius Annaeus," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d., <https://iep.utm.edu/seneca/#H2>.

³ David N Sedley, "The Origins of Stoic God," *Cambridge*, May 26, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/5537101/The_origins_of_Stoic_god.

⁴ "Stoic Ethics," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d., <https://iep.utm.edu/stoiceth/#:~:text=The%20Stoics%20maintained%2C%20quite%20controversially,corruption%20of%20reason%2C%20namely%20vice>.

⁵ Walter Manoel Edwards and Robert Browning, "Stobaeus, 'John of Stobi,'" *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Classics*, March 7, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.6090>.

⁶ Brad Inwood and Lloyd Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoicism* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), [https://online.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9781624662287/epubcfi/6/26\[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dc02\]!/4/1342/3:173\[hy%20%2Che%20\]](https://online.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9781624662287/epubcfi/6/26[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dc02]!/4/1342/3:173[hy%20%2Che%20]).

⁷ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Stoic Ethics."

When going about daily life, one is self-reliant and should be able to make decisions and act on behaviors soundly. Thus, when posed with a choice or question, reason and knowledge should largely contribute to one's consideration of it. Personal opinions should be absent from such cases, for prudence has power in its objectivity and resistance to bias. Furthermore, by aligning with the natural order of the universe, living prudently also means to acknowledge that some problems are inflexible.⁸ One must know when there is no room for change, mitigating the emotional anguish that may rise.

Another of the virtues in Stoicism is temperance. It is defined as having control over oneself, including actions and behaviors.⁹ The value of temperance can be seen all throughout Stoicism. The discipline found in self-restraint is what benefits Stoics in dire times. For example, Marcus Aurelius faced the passing of several of his children, a situation often seen as one of the worst human fates, yet his rhetoric regarding death was not written with sorrow. Rather, the teachings of Stoicism, which view death as natural and necessary, were found in his book, *Meditations*.¹⁰ Essentially, using temperance as a cognitive tool, a Stoic has the ability of composing oneself during any given scenario. Whether it be emotions, a material item, or life event, it is best to do so in moderation, maintaining balance.

The third virtue is justice, which is one of the more prominent virtues for the later discussion of the prison system. However, the definition of justice, according to the Stoics, is not restrained to the legal and judicial fields it is often referred to in now. In order to be *just*, an individual should be honest, civil, and kind. This virtue is viewed as being the most important by Cicero, as well as Marcus Aurelius, for it is a stabilizer that enhances the community and its inner workings.¹¹ Martha Nussbaum expands on this by recognizing Cicero's argument for "not doing any harm to anyone, unless provoked by a wrongful act... the rule is to never use violence or theft against any other human for our advantage."¹² When interacting with others, there should not be advantage or bias included, nor anger and disrespect. Rather, it is pertinent for an individual to maintain a level of respect during exchanges—even if the situation arouses a negative feeling.

The last virtue of Stoicism is courage. Courage is a difficult yet paramount skill to learn for this philosophical system. It means being capable of accepting or interacting with virtually any situation, especially those that are negatively charged.¹³ A Stoic must not be avoidant. This pairs

⁸ Tim Lake, "An In-depth Understanding on the Four Virtues of Stoicism," TheCollector, November 15, 2023, <https://www.thecollector.com/four-cardinal-virtues-stoicism/>.

⁹ Lake, "An In-Depth Understanding on the Four Virtues of Stoicism."

¹⁰ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (New York: Random House, 2002).

¹¹ Paul Meany, ed., "Cicero's Natural Law and Political Philosophy," libertarianism.org, August 31, 2018, <https://www.libertarianism.org/columns/ciceros-natural-law-political-philosophy#:~:text=purpose%20for%20existing,-Cicero%20believed%20that%20humanity's%20ultimate%20goal%20was%20justice.,virtue%20in%20and%20of%20itself.>

¹² Martha Craven Nussbaum, "Duties of Justice, Duties of Material Aid: Cicero's Problematic Legacy," American Academy of Arts & Sciences, July 14, 2021, <https://www.amacad.org/news/duties-justice-duties-material-aid-ciceros-problematic-legacy>.

¹³ Tobias Weaver, "The Stoic Virtue of Courage: How to Master Our Behaviour in the Face of Fear - Orion Philosophy," *Orion Philosophy* (blog), February 21, 2024, <https://orionphilosophy.com/the-stoic-virtue-of-courage/>.

nicely with the virtue of temperance. The more frequently an individual is able to face an event that induces harm or anxiety, the more chances they will have to perfect their capacity for effortful control, which is the modern psychological term for regulating emotions and behaviors.¹⁴

A trend found throughout these philosophical virtues is acting with intentionality and conscientious morality. Stoicism is more of a sanguine philosophy, pushing its followers towards a better, happier life with every chance possible. In this regard, Stoicism may quickly be categorized as being individualistic. However, this claim should not be accepted because it is based on too quick a judgment, for Stoics value humanity in ways that surpass just the individual. Indeed, a large portion of their beliefs are founded in belonging to a community. Charles Harris explains that this community-oriented approach was integrated into their philosophy due to its being “desirous [for] some explanation to fit their changed status from members in a closed city-state to membership in a large empire that was void of laws and rules.”¹⁵ With this transition, it was subsequently recognized that humans *must* live with one another, so it is best to do so as harmoniously as possible. In addition, the Stoics believe that friendships and romantic endeavors can be prominent aspects of life, and each social relation should be built on a foundation of virtue. A genuine friendship is argued to be as natural as life, so establishing them is an act supported by Stoicism.¹⁶ This is incredibly similar to how they regard their own autonomy, for relationships cannot be virtuous if the people, themselves, are not. Furthermore, Stoics are not opposed to political intervention. The practice of Stoicism is centered more on ethics, fate, and knowledge. However, these topics are commonly used for arguments regarding politics, especially when they are morality-based, for all of these matters inherently regard humans and how they coexist. Thus, a Stoic can use their philosophy to benefit the community and enter politics with a clear, sound mindset.

A political issue that has yet to be confronted in the United States is the treatment of prisoners. Prisons house individuals who are given a long-term sentence for being found guilty of a crime. Seemingly, in an area overly populated with criminals and violent offenders, maintaining order would be a priority. Thus, it would be in the best interest of prisoners, and those who watch over them, to avert from chaos. However, while the prevention of this structure’s collapse is detrimental to society’s safety, authority figures have abused their control. This unmanaged system has created numerous injustices, and, by acting with vice, would cause issues with Stoics, given their ethical views.

Before dissecting the reasons as to why a lack of humanity exists in prisons, it should be stated that this argument is presented specifically towards the United States and with the inaccurate presumption that *all* imprisoned individuals are in prison based on their own unlawful actions. This is to parry any arguments that either are (1) based upon a separate system of punishment

¹⁴ Els Santens et al., “Effortful Control – a Transdiagnostic Dimension Underlying Internalizing and Externalizing Psychopathology,” *Neuropsychobiology* 79, no. 4–5 (January 1, 2020): 255–69, <https://doi.org/10.1159/000506134>.

¹⁵ “The Stoics’ ‘Universal Community’ and Its Relation to Modern International Organization on JSTOR,” *Www.Jstor.Org* 30, no. 3 (June 1955): 150–56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41884385?seq=1>.

¹⁶ Robin Weiss, “Stoic Utopia: The Use of Friendship in Creating the Ideal Society,” *Apeiron* 49, no. 2 (January 1, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1515/apeiron-2015-0007>.

found in other countries, which will be discussed later, or (2) advocating for the current system's treatment of prisoners as long as it exempts individuals that are falsely imprisoned. For example, someone may argue that the revolting challenges unjustly placed onto prisoners are deserved, since the victims are criminals. While this paper argues against this, it will firstly skip over the obvious but fruitless rebuttal that not all prisoners are criminals. This should make the process of the argument slightly more simplistic and consistent.

When an individual is convicted of a crime, they are, then, designated to a prison for an allotted amount of time. Based on philosophical interpretations of the purpose of prisons, they seem to have been established in the United States under the guise of being reformatory for those entering the prison system.¹⁷ This occurred during the late 18th century when people were in search of a new, more tolerant mode of punishment than the current modes. Capital punishment was starting to be viewed as too extreme, along with any other physical harm.¹⁸ Being confined to a rehabilitative institution seemed like a much more humane response, and society was hopeful that this kind of institution would be a deterrent to crime. This sounded like a sustainable addition to society, but, since its birth, prisons have only been a plague to those inside.

Prisoners are faced with strenuous working and living conditions, circumstances that were originally meant to be avoided.¹⁹ If the existing living and working conditions of prisons as such were more exposed to the public, they would be rightly perceived as problematic, for these conditions are tip-toeing the Western ideas of morality and the law. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union states, "U.S. law also explicitly excludes incarcerated workers from the most universally recognized workplace protections."²⁰ This includes rights such as working on a livable or minimum wage, being guaranteed safe work conditions, and having the option to unionize. Ironically, the very reason this is legal is due to the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution—the amendment to abolish slavery and involuntary servitude. With prisoners as the exception to this Amendment, prisons have had access to cheap, or even free, labor since being established. Though legal, the disregard for the human rights granted to all Americans is concerning. At first glance, this may not sound like a genuine moral issue insofar as the affected population consists of criminals. Although, these individuals are humans nonetheless. As has been recognized with regards to other minority groups, one's social status, which includes their criminality, is not reason to purposefully lessen their quality of life to an inhumane degree.

Morality and the legal system often intersect, for they are both founded by and interact with people. In fact, the United States' Courts note that the U.S. Constitution "codifies the core

¹⁷ Mary Gibson, "Global Perspectives on the Birth of the Prison," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 1040–63, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.116.4.1040>.

¹⁸ Greg Miller, "The Invention of Incarceration," *Knowable Magazine*, March 18, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1146/knowable-031722-1>.

¹⁹ Miller, "The Invention of Incarceration."

²⁰ ACLU, "Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers | ACLU," *American Civil Liberties Union*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.aclu.org/news/human-rights/captive-labor-exploitation-of-incarcerated-workers>.

values of the people.”²¹ Thus, even with there being diverse beliefs and backgrounds among the masses, there still exists a general consensus among citizens that certain ideas are a staple for humanity and its order. Continuing with the example of the Constitution, the law of the land, there are standardized human rights that *must* be protected—even if an individual is incarcerated. The only rights that are not retained are those that would contradict their sentencing, such as the right to privacy, and the right to vote. An amendment noteworthy to this situation is the Eighth Amendment, which, amongst other things, states cruel and unusual punishments are prohibited. According to the U.S. Supreme Court, this would include neglecting prisoners of medical attention and human decency.²² Therefore, the effects of the working conditions previously presented could fall into this category, as well as the ones soon to be listed. The Stoics are not in favor of power becoming tyrannical,²³ so advocating against this problem would seem to be of their interest.

More atrocities prisoners are met with are lack of reform and basic health services. Aside from sentencing, further punishment can be had by denying early release opportunities, sending prisoners to solitary confinement, and disallowing medical care and mental health treatment. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, roughly three out of five prisoners do not have access to mental health treatments while incarcerated.²⁴ This is a direct violation of the rights that the Supreme Court has argued prisoners have. Furthermore, studies have found a large number of criminals come from poverty or single-parent homes, which are factors known to negatively impact the lives and mental health of individuals.²⁵ Basically, this community is treated as subhuman due to their act(s) in society, having all other (potentially redeeming) attributes completely ignored. If the interest in prisons is to maintain order and lower crime rates, resolving the factors that increase crime should be prioritized. Being that prisons, which are government-sanctioned institutions, do not even follow the legalities of the justice system, it is becoming clearer that they are unjust altogether. Stoics advocate for the state and government, but they would not endorse the power of government being used in such discriminatory ways.²⁶ It should be mentioned, when someone, such as a prison official, is abusing their authority, the Stoics would argue that the harm is being induced on themselves, rather than the prisoners. However, this does not negate the argument that such neglectful treatment should be stopped. Instead, those with

²¹ “Overview - Rule of Law,” United States Courts, n.d., <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/overview-rule-law#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20Constitution%20is%20the,any%20laws%20passed%20by%20Congress.>

²² Priya Cariappa et al., “YOUR RIGHT TO ADEQUATE MEDICAL CARE,” n.d., <https://jlm.law.columbia.edu/files/2017/05/35.-Ch.-23.pdf>.

²³ Massimo Pigliucci, “When Stoicism Is a Political Not Just a Personal Virtue,” Aeon, December 21, 2021, <https://aeon.co/essays/when-stoicism-is-a-political-not-just-a-personal-virtue>.

²⁴ “Mental Health Treatment While Incarcerated,” NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d., <https://www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities/Improving-Health/Mental-Health-Treatment-While-Incarcerated#:~:text=Despite%20court%20mandates%2C%20there%20is,in%20.>

²⁵ Center for Community Change, “The Relationship Between Poverty & Mass Incarceration,” Mass Legal Services, n.d., https://www.masslegalservices.org/system/files/library/The_Relationship_between_Poverty_and_Mass_Incarceration.pdf.

²⁶ Pigliucci, “When Stoicism Is a Political Not Just a Personal Virtue,” Aeon Essays, 2018.

authority choosing to ignore the harm contributes largely to the reason being an abolitionist would suit the Stoics, for such authority figures are acting with vice.

The state is an institution that the Stoics support because they believe that it works to benefit society.²⁷ Although, as the regulations and statistics mentioned have shown, the state's inner workings on the prison system have been in opposition to reform. This is supported by another report declaring the U.S. recidivism rate to be nearly 44% within a year from when a prisoner was released.²⁸ An absence of rehabilitative actions contributes to this incredibly high percentage, which, again, supports the claim that prisons are a system moving in an injurious direction. This is the current organization, but this would not be so if prison officials recognized the harm presented by their actions and chose, in accordance with Stoicism, to live prudently.

Prison authority figures are capable of finding this data themselves and can even witness the cruelty firsthand, yet the conditions have continued to be managed inappropriately. Being exposed to such knowledge and refusing to use it is being imprudent, and this constitutes a vice for the Stoics. If prison officials understand that prisoners are subject to maltreatment, then their choosing to not implement this newfound wisdom constitutes an act of vice. In addition, the virtue of justice signals individuals to implement a basic level of kindness and respect during any interaction with others. Those who have been incarcerated, or have known someone to be, can quickly expand on the troubles caused by the prison system, and these troubles reflect a conflict with the Stoic perception of justice. In an anecdote by an inmate with multiple disorders, Paul, he shared, "I want to be able to have a quality of life...my illness makes it impossible to do that if it's not treated adequately."²⁹ These examples provide evidence of how the current system allows overwhelming unjust instances to occur, highlighting the institution's discrepancy with regard to the virtues upon which Stoicism is founded. Therefore, instead of continuing to support the government's current role in the prison system, it seems more plausible to think that the Stoics would argue for an alternative institution wherein these vices would be omitted in the treatment of individuals, such as in a rehabilitation center.

The most drastic shift that would occur internally by replacing prisons with rehabilitation centers is treating the prisoners as humans in need of help—not in need of punishment. Punishment is often thought to be partnered with discipline, yet the recidivism rates previously shown have found otherwise. Moreover, a meta-analysis of 116 studies concluded that long-term placement in custodial sanctions does not reduce the likelihood of reoffending.³⁰ In fact, it suggested that this structure may even increase recidivism rates, solidifying its problematic use. Actions and

²⁷ Julia Wildberger, "The Stoics and the State: Theory – Practice – Context," 2018, <https://philarchive.org/rec/WILTSA-37>.

²⁸ Wisevoter, "Recidivism Rate by State 2023 - Wisevoter," April 28, 2023, <https://wisevoter.com/state-rankings/recidivism-rates-by-state/#:~:text=Recidivism%20rates%20in%20the%20U.S.,one%20being%20the%20aforementioned%20Arkansas>.

²⁹ "Mental Health 4 Inmates," n.d., <https://www.mentalhealth4inmates.org/inmates-stories>.

³⁰ Damon Petrich et al., "Custodial Sanctions and Reoffending - a Meta-Analytic Review, 2021|Prison Legal News," September 22, 2021, <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/publications/custodial-sanctions-and-reoffending-a-meta-analytic-review-2021/>.

responses focused on the rehabilitation of prisoners would, then, be helpful and also include the benefits of implementing the Stoic virtues in the institution of prison.

Some countries have paved the way for this newer initiative to treat and care for those imprisoned. Instead of silencing a crowd of people locked up for various charges, they provide health care and a safer, more open environment. For example, Norway has rehabilitative prisons that no longer allow for bars on windows and which include job training.³¹ Their goal is to encourage prisoners to pursue a better life after their sentence is completed, which would ultimately stimulate the individual's personal development and the nation's economy. Ideally, someone who has benefited from this system would be better fit to reenter society and contribute to their community socially and financially. Based on their recidivism rate of 70% reducing to 20% within three decades, it seems as though Norway's plan has been successful.³² This is an approach that greatly differs from the United States and other Western countries, but it seems to have much better results. Here, Stoics would be relieved by the exclusion of vices enacting harm towards prisoners as well as felt by prison officials. Furthermore, an institution built to assist those who have acted wrongfully would also, in theory, reduce the actions birthed from the vice of prisoners, as well. Instead of finding criminality their only viable option, an individual could see that there is pleasure in a virtuous life.

Using the lens of Stoic ethics, Stoics would travel down the same path as this paper and argue for a reformed prison system. The cardinal values of Stoicism supply a moral compass and extensive knowledge to the followers of this philosophical system. Consequently, Stoics are consistently prepared to enter discourse including philosophical, political, and social topics with a sound mind. Applying the lens of Stoic ethics to the institution of American justice accentuates the complications and atrocities within prisons. With this disordered arrangement, imprisoned individuals are often met with harsh living conditions and inadequate treatment. The U.S. statistics regarding the effectiveness of the system, too, fail to suggest positive results, reflecting back on those who stand with such institutions. If judicial authorities were to act according to Stoic values, then the percentage of re-offenses might look more similar to that of other countries like Norway. With their organization being much humbler and more progressive, it is apparent that vice is excluded in their structure. For Stoics interested in the ethics of just imprisonment and social justice, advocating for restoration and rehabilitation would be the choice best fit for their ideology.

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³² University of California San Francisco, "Norway's Humane Approach to Prisons Can Work Here Too | UCSF Magazine," *Norway's Humane Approach to Prisons Can Work Here Too | UCSF Magazine*, May 25, 2021, <https://magazine.ucsf.edu/norways-humane-approach-prisons-can-work-here-too#:~:text=That%20changed%20in%20the%201990s,%25%2C%20followed%20three%20basic%20principles.>

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ECOTAGE: IS IT STILL NECESSARY?

Corvo

1. Introduction

In the marketplace of ideas, is it ever necessary to cease civil engagement and resort to violence, especially in the case of climate change? Some argue that civil, non-violent engagement ought to be the only way to interact with others when there is a fundamental rift in how we should resolve issues in the world. Still, this notion is not the viewpoint of all who care about the environment. Some radical environmental activists, such as Earth First!, answer this question by saying that violence against property and infrastructure is permissible as a politically communicative act.¹ I argue in this essay that although many strides have been made to circumvent ecological disaster, a logic of domination² continually persists with regards to the environment. This continuing logic of domination is conducive to the continuation of climate change, and to subvert the logic of domination, ecotage³ is a permissible way of being politically⁴ communicative and should be taken seriously regarding climate change. This essay will begin by laying out my argument syllogistically.

2. Explication of My Argument

Put in premise-conclusion form, this is my argument:

P1: An act of violent non-lethal protest against an entity A^5 is politically permissible if protests serves two functions: (1) it serves to include those who we are in political community with to act against A , and (2) it serves to stop harm that the protesters are experiencing at the hands of A .

P2: Because the logic of domination persists, companies fail to reform their practices to address effects of climate change, and as a result women and the world at large suffer.

P3: Ecotage as a form of political protest serves to include those who we are in political community with to act against companies who employ the logic of domination, and ecotage

¹ This essay does not mean to encourage the use of violence against private property. The purpose of this essay is to analyze the nature of political permissibility and how ecotage as a non-lethal form of protest meets the criteria for what is politically permissible.

² The logic of domination is a concept found in ecofeminism, and I will explain its significance in this paper in section 2.

³ Ecotage is another technical term fundamental to my argument that I will expound upon in section 2.

⁴ For the purposes of this paper permissibility is to be understood as political permissibility from the standpoint of those who are experiencing oppression. This means that the thinking of this essay is explicitly based upon the viewpoint of those who are being oppressed through domination. Permissibility in this paper is only to be understood in this manner from the point of view of oppressed individuals.

⁵ Companies, institutions, etc., that use the logic of domination against the environment.

as a form of political protest serves to prevent harm that women and the world at large are experiencing at the hands of these companies.

C1: Therefore, ecotage as an act of violent non-lethal protest is politically permissible when used against companies who employ a logic of domination.

Before going further, I will first address the two concepts fundamental to my argument: *ecotage* and the *logic of domination*.

Combining the words ecology and sabotage, *ecotage* is civil or uncivil disobedience against private property and infrastructure. Ecotage is done either violently or non-violently.⁶ Tree sitting and road blocking are examples of non-violent ecotage, while arson against tools (pouring sugar into the gas tanks of forest harvesting machines) and potential goods (spiking trees that are slated for harvesting) are violent. It should be noted that, in this essay, I am arguing for both violent and non-violent protests. Moreover, violent protest is neither random nor aimed at humans. Targeted violence against machines rather than non-targeted violence against humans is what makes the activity of ecotage conceptually different from terrorism. Monkeywrenching,⁷ a type of ecotage, also engages in non-violent and violent protests to raise awareness and combat ecological disasters. I will use ‘ecotage’ primarily for this paper, but ‘monkeywrenching’ may also appear. I will not be drawing any meaningful distinctions between either.

The *logic of domination* is a concept contained in the larger philosophical tradition of ecofeminism. To properly understand the logic of domination, it is necessary to expand upon ecofeminism and how the latter conceptually fits within the former. According to Karen Warren in her paper “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” *ecofeminism* can be defined as “the position that there are important connections—historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical—between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to both feminism and environmental ethics.”⁸ Furthermore, for Warren, a logic of domination entails a hierarchical value system that is couched in an oppressive framework that aims to “establish inferiority and to justify subordination.”⁹

These two concepts are central to understanding why ecotage is not only politically permissible, but also why it is a persuasive form of protest as well. Going forward, I will outline how the logic of domination is mitigated, giving credit to genuine efforts to subvert the logic of domination through the use of the cap-and-trade method of carbon regulation. Attempts at curbing the logic of domination in the environment are not present everywhere, though, and this is outlined by the greenwashing epidemic of the zero-deforestation movement.

⁶ Rex Welshon, “ECOTAGE II CRITIQUES OF ECOTAGE” (lecture, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, CO, September 19, 2022).

⁷ Monkeywrenching is a term that originates in Edward Abbey’s book *The Monkeywrench Gang*. Abbey was a strong influence for self-proclaimed eco-warrior, and founding member of Earth First!, Dave Formem.

⁸ Karen J Warren, “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” *Environmental Ethics* 12, no. 2 (1990): 125, <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199012221>.

⁹ Karen J. Warren, “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” 126.

Take the Paris Agreement treaty as an example that has popularized the cap-and-trade method. Cap-and-trade works by having companies purchase pollution permits. Each permit limits how much pollutant can be emitted; over time, this limit decreases. If a company can stay under the cap on how much they pollute, they can sell permits to other companies that cannot stay below their cap. Thus, companies are incentivized to creatively mitigate their CO₂ output to avoid having to buy more pollution permits and are also rewarded by being able to sell off whatever permits they do not use.¹⁰

In their article “Lessons Learned from Three Decades of Experience with Cap-and-Trade,” Richard Schmalensee and Robert Stavins analyze seven different but prominent cap-and-trade methods utilized over the past thirty years.¹¹ They cite the 1990 policy, Title IV Clean Air Act Amendment, by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as an example of one of the many successful cap-and-trade programs. Before the Clean Air Amendment, acidic precipitation created by the greenhouse gas (GHG) SO₂ (sulfur dioxide) was found to be damaging forests and aquatic ecosystems.¹² In their article “Effects of Acid Precipitation,” Glass et al. explain how the increase in acidic precipitation harmed forests and aquatic ecosystems. Acid rain in forested areas removes microorganisms that promote tree health and growth and replaces aluminum and manganese. These elements harm the roots and hurt the tree’s ability to absorb nutrients.¹³

Moreover, Glass et al. and Burtraw et al. consider how acidic rain affected 33 different lakes in the Adirondack area of New York, which experienced a decrease in fish population because the pH threshold for the fish was too high.¹⁴ The result of the Clean Air Act was a 36% decrease in SO₂ emissions from 1990 to 2004. What changed in this timespan was the shift from a command-and-control method of regulation, where hardline policies are set to regulate GHG, to a cap-and-trade method. Command-and-control policies have been found to not be as effective because they force the same rules and regulations upon all companies, regardless of individual circumstance. This disregard for individual circumstance does not consider the different operating costs and margins that different companies utilize. Thus, there is a bigger chance of failure for companies that cannot meet the quotas set by command-and-control policies. As we see here, a significant effort to curb climate change has been accomplished and has also brought about measurable results, undermining the logic of domination. In other arenas operating within the climate change realm, though, the logic of domination persists.

¹⁰ Rex Welshon, “CARBON TRADING AND GREENWASHING” (lecture, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, CO, November 17, 2022).

¹¹ Richard Schmalensee and Robert Stavins, “Lessons Learned from Three Decades of Experience with Cap-and-Trade,” *Review of Environmental Economics and Policy* 11, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w21742>. In their article on page 60, Schmalensee and Stavins point out that although their study accounts for seven cap-and-trade methods, all but one are traditional textbook examples.

¹² Richard Schmalensee and Robert Stavins, “Lessons Learned from Three Decades of Experience with Cap-and-Trade,” 61.

¹³ Norman R. Glass, Gary E. Glass, and Peter J. Rennie, “Effects of Acid Precipitation,” *Environmental Science & Technology* 13, no. 11 (1979): 1353, <https://doi.org/10.1021/es60159a012>.

¹⁴ Burtraw Dallas et al., “Costs and Benefits of Reducing Air Pollutants Related to Acid Rain,” *Contemporary Economic Policy* 16, no. 4 (1998): 383–84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-7287.1998.tb00527.x>.

In her article “Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective,” Karen Warren leaves the realm of the purely abstract and empirically qualifies how the logic of domination affects women and the environment. In 1974, there were twenty-seven Reni women of northern India who came together to stop the deforestation that was being made upon their land.^{15,16} They had engaged in non-violent protest by hugging onto trees that were supposed to be torn down and turned into timber. This act of protest saved 12,000 square kilometers of land. However, the protests done by the Reni Women have not stopped or significantly reduced the harm that the logging industry continues to commit. Their mode of non-violent protest in this example demonstrates the ineffectiveness of halting or mitigating the damage caused by the logging industry. This inability to stop or reduce harm operates on two fronts. The first front is that domination will continue, especially in the face of non-violent protest. The second front is the façade of being eco-friendly that companies put forth when it comes to reducing climate change. Going forward, I will explain the way in which companies say they will address climate change, even though in reality their actions fall short and fail at actually addressing climate change in a manner that reduces or ends harm to the Earth.

The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) is a conglomeration of 400 companies that aimed at ending their role in deforestation by 2020 through a method called “zero deforestation.”¹⁷ Zero deforestation is a commitment companies make that aims at significantly reducing and/or ending deforestation. Companies measure their success in ending deforestation in three different ways. The first is supply chain effectiveness, where suppliers do not engage in deforestation when producing products for the partnered companies. The second measure of success in deforestation is regional. The regional criteria are defined by requiring all companies supplying a specific product in an area engaged in deforestation to halt this practice and resort to different means of providing the product to companies. Finally, the third criterion is a global end to deforestation. This final measure of success is the same as the second, but it takes a global approach to measure their success.¹⁸ Obtaining these different goals is done via certification standards such as Forest Stewardship Council, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, etc.¹⁹ Achieving this goal, however, has been ineffective.

For example, Eric F. Lambin et al. cite that in 2016 only 25% of companies had adopted policies that are time-bound and quantified. It is important to note that the remaining 75% of those 400 companies are using tools and machinery that create GHG emissions. This inability for large groups of companies that aspire towards zero deforestation but fail to commit to ending the role they play in deforestation leads to what is known as *greenwashing*. Greenwashing occurs when a

¹⁵ Karen J. Warren, “Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective,” *Living with Contradictions*, 2018: 645, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429499142-97>.

¹⁶ This was not single protest, but a series that were called the Chipko movement.

¹⁷ Eric F. Lambin et al., “The Role of Supply-Chain Initiatives in Reducing Deforestation,” *Nature Climate Change* 8, no. 2 (29 January 2018): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-017-0061-1>

¹⁸ R.D. Garrett et al., “Criteria for Effective Zero Deforestation Commitments,” *Global Environmental Change* 54 (January 2019): 137, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2018.11.003>

¹⁹ Lambin et al., “The Role of Supply-Chain Initiatives in Reducing Deforestation,” 110.

company selectively releases information about its efforts to ease the effects of climate change by providing only information about the goals that were met. Meanwhile, the same company will withhold information about its shortcomings or failures to meet goals. This withholding of information allows the company to maintain a good outward appearance to those they promised (consumers, stakeholders, etc.) that they would commit to zero deforestation, while still deforesting areas anyway. Though these companies seem to be in lockstep efforts to try and stop or mitigate climate change, real harm is nevertheless being committed.

In their article “Amazon Tipping Point: Last Chance for Action,” Thomas Lovejoy and Carlos Nobre explain that deforestation in the Amazon leads to the deforested areas shifting from rainforests to savannahs. This shift harms biodiversity and humans by reducing by half the rainwater run-off necessary for rainwater to be recycled in the hydrological cycle.²⁰ This inability and/or unwillingness of companies that are engaged in deforestation to change their habits harms ties-in with premise two of my argument by not only harming women first and foremost, but also the land and the Earth more broadly. This unwillingness on the part of companies fits within the logic of domination as an example of how village women and their communities are negatively affected in developing countries by the logic of domination. Fairfax and Fortmann, in their article “American Forestry Professionalism in the Third World: Some Preliminary Observations,” note on page 266-7 that, “...village women are the primary users of forest commodities in most developing countries.... Their day-to-day hands-on involvement with forestry goes far beyond what many professionally trained foresters will ever have. Fuelwood is primarily collected and used by women with some help from children.”²¹ Considering that only a fourth of the CGF has made a tangible effort at curbing their consumption of wood through deforestation if they pull wood from developing countries, these companies are active participants in harming not only these women who are trying to provide for their community. In addition to harming these women and their communities, foresters who take part in deforestation efforts lack the understanding of just how versatile and useful trees are for those in developing countries. Further along in the article, Fairfax and Fortmann go on to mention how foresters do not grasp the many different ways in which trees support these women and their communities. Medicine, dyes, and hedgerows are just a few examples.²²

What we see happening with the CGF and women of developing countries is that companies with a stake in markets that require the use of wood in supply chain, regional, or global deforestation efforts are, for the most part, not participating in environmental sustainability through zero deforestation. Companies that greenwash their deforestation efforts are more concerned with their standing in the market, thus undermining women’s lives and the environment of lands like

²⁰ Thomas E. Lovejoy, and Carlos Nobre, “Amazon Tipping Point: Last Chance for Action,” *Science Advances* 5, no. 12 (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aba2949>.

²¹ Sally K. Fairfax, and Louise Fortmann, “American Forestry Professionalism in the Third World: Some Preliminary Observations,” *Population and Environment* 11, no. 4 (1990): 259–72, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01256459>.

²² Fairfax and Fortmann, “American Forestry Professionalism in the Third World: Some Preliminary Observations,” 268.

the Amazon where deforestation occurs. Though great strides are being made in fixing climate change, there are also ongoing efforts to disregard the impact and harm towards women, their communities, and the Earth at large. This leads one to wonder: *How might someone politically communicate the harm done to them, their community, and their planet?*

When entering the marketplace of ideas, one would want the buying power of what they have to say to be of a considerable amount. If a company that is part of the CGF is harming those of my community and the Earth, and I make a complaint about the active harm they are doing, I would want them to hear me out and cease. This, however, is not the case. Suppose one were to bring the empirical evidence of how climate change via deforestation harms the environment and those who inhabit it to alliance-based groups like CGF. In that case, it does not mean that they will value the complaint, especially if they are operating within a logic of domination, because they consider what is good for their company to be their profit and image.

Sarah Ahmed effectively expresses this kind of incredulity in the opening lines of her book *Complaint!*, writing, “To be heard as complaining is not to be heard. To hear someone as complaining is an effective way of dismissing someone. You do not have to listen to the content of what she is saying is if she is *just* complaining or *always* complaining.”²³ In ecological instances where active harm is being done to people and the Earth, and where there is a distinct lack of both listening to those you harm and making a genuine effort to end the harm, it is permissible to engage in ecotage. Ecotage does not necessarily need to be violent, as evidenced by the Reni women being able to effectively stop deforestation efforts in their homeland. Nevertheless, I do not discount the use of violent protest against property and infrastructure as a means of being politically communicative. If there is injustice²⁴ being done upon you and your people in a way that is actively harmful, and if trying to reason leads those who are perpetuating the injustice to view you as nothing more than somebody with complaints, it may be necessary to engage in ecotage that is violent, but not lethal. Furthermore, one must keep in mind that the goal of this effort is to be both politically communicative and persuasive. Of course, engaging in ecotage or other kinds of violent but non-lethal protest ought to be the very last resort, but what is at stake is whether the lives of those in areas of deforestation and the surrounding ecosystem are worth more or less than the private property of companies. The following points will explore the reasoning that undergirds the political permissibility of non-lethal violent protest.

Violent non-lethal protest is permissible because it serves two functions. The first function is to not exclude those who we are in political community with from being able to act. The second function is that violent non-lethal protest shows how the destruction of property is permissible when what is at stake is the ability for others to stop harm that they are experiencing. Consider the following thought experiment as an intuition pump as to why violent harm against property is permissible if it serves these two functions.

Imagine there are two people who live next to each other, Greg and Michael. Let us suppose that Michael is a florist who grows their flowers on their property and that they use herbicide to

²³ Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 1.

²⁴ For this paper, justice is to be understood as fair treatment towards those who are being oppressed.

prevent damage to their flowers that certain unwanted kinds of vegetation cause. Furthermore, let us suppose that being a florist is their main source of income, but that Michael's use of this herbicide is unsafe to the health of Greg and is progressively making him sicker. When Greg becomes aware that his health's degradation is because of Michael's herbicide, he requests for Michael to cease using the herbicide, but instead Michael decides to try and fool Greg. Michael sees Greg's complaints just as that—as complaints—and instead changes the bottles in which the herbicide is stored but continues using the herbicide nevertheless. Suppose further that the herbicide starts making more community members sick, causing more people than just Greg to come forth, requesting that Michael stop using the herbicide. A formal complaint is made to the city in an attempt to force Michael to stop, but the city deems Michael's use of the herbicide legally acceptable.

If Michael continues to use the herbicide after the request of multiple community members, especially since the herbicide is harming their health, it is permissible for Greg and everybody else to destroy Michael's herbicide. Destruction of Michael's property as a form of protest in this case allows for everyone involved to continue to be part of the political community and to engage Michael in a joint political project, while at the same time aiming to return all those affected back to their former baseline of health. When we consider that the main legal route is of no use to Greg and the rest of those affected, we find that this form of recourse still maintains the two main functions of violent non-lethal protest. To help clarify how the logic of domination further buttresses the conclusions and intuitions behind this thought experiment, I turn to the political philosophy of Megan Mitchell and Jennifer Kling.

Megan Mitchell and Jennifer Kling, in their book *The Philosophy of Protest: Fighting for Justice Without Going to War*,²⁵ touch on the necessity of joint political projects. Suppose that ecotage becomes lethal against the people who are part of the day-to-day ongoings of the objects that are being destroyed or broken. In that case, the monkey-wrenchers or eco-saboteurs will view those whom they have hurt as being outside their joint political project. To be outside the joint political project is to see humans as objects rather than subjects. However, to render a fleet of logging machines inoperable by pouring sugar into their gas tanks, and thereby notifying the company of the damage that they are doing to the surrounding community, treats all humans involved as capable of understanding *why* the local community is thrashing out. Kling and Mitchell say on page 81 that “Property damage treats objects as objects and not subjects as objects, and so is compatible with a basic commitment to others, including the property owners, as co-members in a political community. It can be used symbolically to express condemnation....” What is important to note here is how *companies* treat the surrounding communities that they harm as objects rather than subjects. The logic of domination seeks to reify the inferiority of certain groups and justify their subordination.

The aim of ecotage, however, is to treat those whom they are in political community with as not inferior and not to subordinate them. Rather, eco-saboteurs aim to destroy the tools that

²⁵ Jennifer Kling and Megan Mitchell, *The Philosophy of Protest: Fighting for Justice without Going to War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 81.

oppressors use when subordinating others. In this essay, I am not arguing for the harming or killing of those who subjugate the communities who are affected by climate change. Still, instead, I am arguing that if the oppressors in these instances are unwilling to listen and lessen the damage they cause or stop altogether, then sustaining damage to their property and infrastructure is permissible, in accordance with the main functions of protest that is violent while not being lethal.

3. Critical Analysis

An interlocutor may disagree with the concept of ecotage as a politically communicative effort because of the *possibility* of harming or killing the workers of companies engaged in deforestation. While ecotage is not meant to harm or kill people but is aimed at destroying property and infrastructure, there is no guarantee that harm to other people will not be incurred. Thus, my interlocutor suggests, there is no way in which we can entirely do away with the potential harm against those who work for deforesting companies, so there is simply no case wherein ecotage would be permissible because it would always threaten at least potentially lethal harm.

The argument my interlocutor poses is unsound. The interlocutor is correct that ecotage is not an activity where we can guarantee that humans will not be harmed or killed. Nevertheless, in my view, if all reasonable efforts to prevent lethal harm have been made in advance, it is permissible to allow harm to come to other humans to bring awareness to the harm being done to the environment and those who inhabit said environment, insofar as such lethal harm is likely to be the result of chance and not the intention of the act of protest. In my view, Eco-saboteurs ought to always keep in line with the sentiment Dave Foreman puts forth in his book *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*. Foreman tells readers that if they wish to be eco-saboteurs, they need to be cognizant of the seriousness of their activities.²⁶ Namely, what eco-saboteurs are doing is an activity that needs to be done with gravitas because arrest and injury are real outcomes. If an eco-saboteur's act harms or kills another person, they need to stand down, figure out a new plan of action, and reengage when they can carry out missions that do not end with the loss of life or limb of another human. Consequently, ecotage must only be carried out as a last resort expression of political protest, and all reasonable efforts must be made beforehand to ensure that no human being is harmed, especially intentionally, by the act of protest.

We also need to be mindful of what is at stake when companies take part in climate change without consequence. Environments, ecosystems, and species are killed and harmed, and those who are residents in the damaged environment are harmed. There is only a finite reserve of resources to be extracted, and if companies operate on a model of continuous growth, we will eventually see ecological collapse.²⁷ Where it is possible, eco-saboteurs need to take every step to ensure that what they do does not hurt others. Though harm cannot always be guaranteed to not occur when non-lethal violent protest is occurring, this does not necessarily negate the need or use

²⁶ Dave Foreman, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (New York: Crown, 1993), 116.

²⁷ Consider Mark Fisher's commentary on the continuous growth of capitalism on page 18 of his book *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009). Fisher draws on the fact that eco-disaster and collapse is inevitable when the logic of capitalism is continuous growth because "... capital's 'need of a constantly expanding market,' its 'growth fetish,' mean that capitalism by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability."

of violent but non-lethal protest as a means to stop the oppression of domination. To disregard ecotage as a tactic altogether because it cannot guarantee that someone will not be harmed or accidentally killed means that there is a guaranteed loss of environment and life wherever these companies take resources. To prevent this catastrophic outcome, we cannot disregard ecotage as a viable protest tactic, insofar as it works to alter the normative thinking and acting of oppressors. In the conclusion of Kling's and Mitchell's *The Philosophy of Protest*, they write "... protest tries to talk *to* the governing institutions and other members of society, as well as talking *about* them and the injustices that they perpetuate and maintain."²⁸ Although there is no way to absolutely guarantee that violence, as it is understood in this essay, will not cause harm to others, I maintain that one of the central goals of ecotage is to keep everyone in political community, and that all reasonable attempts must be made to not allow violence to spill over into harm. To say that non-lethal violent protest cannot be used as a tool for persuasive protest because of the threat of potential harm is to completely and hastily reject a tool that can talk about governing institutions as well as members of a society who are engaged in the oppression of domination.

4. Conclusion

Efforts to mitigate climate change have been made in very significant ways. Acidic rain has been cut down tremendously through cap-and-trade methods that seek to reduce GHG emissions. Some companies have promised to end their contributions to deforestation and kept true to their word. Nevertheless, these efforts to end or to lessen climate change are not universally recognized by all companies. Without universal recognition, real people are harmed, and the effects of climate change continue unabated. This continuation leads to the subjugation and harm of these communities and the Earth, and because companies fail to realize this, ecotage as not only a form of protest but also a method of political recognition within a political community may be necessary to address the logic of domination employed by companies who continue to subjugate and harm women and their communities, as well as our common home, the Earth.

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²⁸ Kling and Mitchell, *The Philosophy of Protest: Fighting for Justice without Going to War*, 147.

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ON THE GOODNESS OF HUMANKIND: A COMPARISON BETWEEN
MENGZI'S AND XUNZI'S ACCOUNT OF HUMAN NATURE IN
CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

Madelyn Mayer

Both Mengzi and Xunzi place a great emphasis on human nature and its implications for the applications of virtue, as well as its implications regarding our fundamental relationship with virtue itself. This relationship is particular in the sense that it focuses on our innate tendencies towards virtue or the lack thereof, and it is often exemplified through the comparison of the nature of human beings to that of other animals. Mengzi places a certain level of optimism in human nature, arguing that we are innately born with “sprouts” of benevolence, proven by our unique instincts, that can be cultivated during our life. Xunzi, on the other hand, argues that human beings are not born with any sort of inclination towards virtue, and instead we possess desires that make us similar to any other animal (while Mengzi recognizes these desires within mankind, he upholds his belief that we are virtuous above all), and that virtue is cultivated instead through ritual and dedicated practice. I will argue that while Mengzi certainly presents a relevant and pleasantly hopeful account of humanity, Xunzi ultimately provides a more compelling account as to the nature of humans, how virtue comes about in society, and the ways in which we apply that virtue. I will further exemplify this conclusion by establishing the connections between some of Xunzi's views and early anarchist thought. I will then establish the implications this poses as to the condition of virtue in humanity.

Mengzi, in selections of his work, discusses human beings as a species with an innate tendency towards virtue, which he compares to the tendency of water to flow downwards.¹ He discusses four primary “sprouts” of virtue: compassion, disdain, deference, and approval/disapproval. When cultivated, compassion becomes benevolence, disdain becomes righteousness, deference becomes propriety, and approval/disapproval becomes wisdom. These sprouts, to Mengzi, are exemplified from birth in the form of inherent instincts that we act upon without any conscious intention. Mengzi presents an example of a king who trades an ox for a sheep after seeing the suffering of the sheep: “If they [the king] hear their cries of suffering, they cannot bear to eat their flesh.”² While the rest of the Kingdom believes that this king simply traded out of greed, he is instead acting upon a natural inclination for virtue (in this case, compassion). Mengzi believes that no other animals exemplify this level of innate virtue in the sense that humans do. He further builds on the metaphor of water to propose that human beings acting in malevolent ways is often the result of their environment. Water will naturally flow downwards, but it can be

¹ Boxi Fu, “Water in the *Mencius*: Correlative Reasoning, Conceptual Metaphor, and/or Sacred Performative Narrative?” *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023): 2, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060710>.

² Mengzi, *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008), 1A7.

splashed and forced upwards. However, under the right circumstances, that water will soon return to its natural, virtuous state. In this same way, humans can cultivate virtue by interacting with our environment, but the virtue itself remains engrained in us.

Xunzi takes a contrasting approach in his discussion of human nature, and rather proposes that humans have no natural inclination towards virtue whatsoever, and that we are in fact not very different from apes in our innate capacities: “Humans are born having desires. When they have desires but do not get the objects of their desires, then they cannot but seek some means of satisfaction.”³ The desire he speaks of is a limitless, primitive desire—he argues that human beings will never stop seeking, and that this causes conflict, particularly as we run out of things to seek. This, of course, creates a destructive and brutal state of nature. Xunzi, however, still makes plenty of room for virtue. He proposes that virtue must be cultivated by ritual, and that the incorporation of ritual into our lives allows us to “nurture” virtue within ourselves. Ritual, he emphasizes, is a man-made concept: “The former kings hated such chaos, and so they established rituals and the standards of righteousness in order to allot things to people, to nurture their desires, and to satisfy their seeking.”⁴ Ritual, to Xunzi, is a means of nurturing virtuous tendencies and practices within yourself in order to save yourself, and those you love, from the state of nature—nature being the primitive state of human beings, just like the animals we share this planet with.

Both Mengzi and Xunzi make compelling cases for divergent views of human nature, and it can be difficult to distinguish which is closer to the truth, seeing as both virtue and the lack thereof can be found within human beings. Xunzi, however, makes a much more compelling argument in his depiction of human beings as a species that has learned to cultivate virtue, rather than a species born with it. This can be exemplified by imagining a society under the conditions that Mengzi proposes to obtain. If human nature is naturally engrained with goodness that sprouts into virtue, then it would follow that to live in a governed society would be unnecessary for us. Mengzi does acknowledge that human beings must cultivate their sprouts of goodness so that they may turn into virtue, but if all humans are born with good as an innate capacity, then it would only be natural for us to cultivate that virtue within one another instinctively. Indeed, this concept reflects the notions of early anarchist thought as formulated by William Godwin: “Godwin, in contrast, suggested that human beings are essentially rational creatures, inclined by education and enlightened judgement to live in accordance with truth and universal moral laws.”⁵ While Godwin’s principles about humanity came much later, their inclinations still apply here; under the view of humanity Mengzi provides, it follows that human beings could exist in a natural order in which we engage in collective aid and, ultimately, cultivate virtue in one another. This is because we would develop these capacities and engage in these actions as a matter of the natural, necessary development of the kind of being that we are as a species.

With this in mind, consider the following argument:

³ Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2005), 19.

⁴ Ivanhoe and Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 19.

⁵ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 109.

P1: Any species that requires third-party supervision in order to survive cannot be inherently good.

P2: Human beings need third-party supervision in order to survive.

C1: Therefore, human beings cannot be inherently good.

For the purposes of this argument, survival is referring to the ability of the collective ability for a species to coexist amongst themselves in a harmonious manner, as this is something human beings need for their well-being. The first premise establishes that any species in which third party supervision is needed to establish and maintain this type of happiness cannot be an inherently good species. Ultimately, states are created in order to escape the state of nature in which humans naturally find themselves, because that state of being has become unsatisfactory. If, as Mengzi proposes, a species inherently leans towards virtue, then the initial, natural state of being will be one in which that good is exemplified. If a species must look to outside supervision and resources in order to cultivate and maintain a favorable state of being, then it follows that inherent good was not being exemplified or prioritized in the inherent, natural state.

The second premise establishes that human beings need third party supervision in order to survive in this sense. This is proven true when we look back to humankind before we had substantial states—a history which is full of aggression, murder, and perversion (tendencies which we still continue to express even now, although that is outside the scope of this argument). We agree, as a society, that laws are necessary because, without the incentive that punishment provides, it is likely that humans would commit immoral acts. For example, we can rationally agree that banning murder is a law which is essential to keep in place, because without it, people would be murdering each other frequently. This is because human beings must be held accountable for moral actions in order to recognize the weight of morality for itself. In addition, there are various circumstances within our society in which immoral acts are not treated with significance because they are not illegal. For example, rational individuals who enter a relationship in which established monogamy is expected can agree and recognize that breaking the expected monogamy is immoral. This being said, roughly 70% of people agree that if it was guaranteed there would be no consequences, they would cheat on their partner.⁶ When human beings have no legal or social incentive to behave morally, they are far less likely to do so. And in a world in which there is no incentive not to destroy one another, human beings cannot survive. Therefore, the incentive provided by a state to avoid breaking the law and destroying each other is essential for our survival.

If both premise one and premise two are established to be true, then it follows that human beings cannot be rationally good. If a species that requires a state in order to survive cannot be good, and human beings require a state, then the inherent tendency towards good that would

⁶ Brian Paul, “Infidelity Statistics (2023): How Much Cheating is Going On?” Hack Spirit, updated April 14, 2023, <https://hackspirit.com/infidelity-statistics/>.

prevent the need for third party supervision could not have been present in the initial, natural state of humanity. This is not to say that there is no potential for good within human beings, but rather establishes that the good is not inherent, or natural, but rather something practiced or earned.

When Xunzi's viewpoints are applied to the concept of human nature, it seems to make a lot more sense. If human beings are animals with an inherently aggressive and self-interested nature, then a govern-less society would fall into chaos and war, and ultimately, human beings would sacrifice the state of nature to arrange themselves into an organized society with the presence of ritual. This concept of humanity triumphs over that of Mengzi because if this were not the case, then government would not exist in the first place. Mengzi, ironically, would've seen this firsthand, as he visited many different provinces during the Warring States period, which was a time lacking central governance in ancient China.⁷

While both Mengzi's view of human nature and the idea of the sprouts of benevolence, and Xunzi's emphasis on the necessity of ritual, hold practical applications to human nature and society, Xunzi's point of view presents a much more compelling depiction, as we can see by examining the practical implications of a society of theoretical people who possess the kinds of innate capacities that Mengzi ascribes to human beings. This, however, does not mean that virtue is lost in human society; through dedicating our lives to virtue, and working to banish vicious, and cruel behaviors from our societies, we can save ourselves from our own state of nature, and ultimately work to better those around us as well.

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⁷ Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. Irene Bloom, ed. Philip Ivanhoe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 1.

AN OVERVIEW OF *THE SECOND SEX*: ARE WOMEN STILL “THE OTHER”?

Alara Ortaç

1. Introduction

In this essay, I will give an overview of the introduction to Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, “Introduction: Woman as Other.” I will discuss the general idea underlying the concepts of “the Absolute” and “the Other,” which as concepts represent the roles of men and women in society, and I will compare the most recent place of women in Western society in general with women’s historical place as “the Other.” To this end, for the last part of the essay, I will discuss whether women are still “the Other” or not in the 21st Century.

With the feminist movement starting in the 18th century, the women’s rights movement found a place in history.¹ With the Industrial Revolution, women became workers and their responsibilities changed, and as a consequence of this, they demanded better conditions for themselves: “In 1844, ten years after the first strike in Lowell, hundreds of women united to form the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association. Thousands of workers signed petitions urging the state legislature to pass a law limiting the length of the workday to ten hours.”² This protest culture became permanent in women’s social life, as well. Nevertheless, in today’s world, women are still fighting for their rights. It is true that there have been huge improvements in the rights of women, but there are still major issues. The subject of consideration of this article is this situation.

2. What Are “The Absolute” and “The Other”?

As social animals, humans tend to live as groups. Living in groups increases the chance of survival since surviving in wild nature all alone is harder than surviving with a group. The reason for this is that when people live in groups, they can collaborate to use their strengths together and protect themselves from dangers, like wild animals or extreme weather conditions, by using their limited resources more efficiently. Moreover, living as groups teaches humans to collaborate, share, and help each other. On the other hand, it must be said that conflicts arise between different groups as each group strives to survive in competition with other groups. The resources for surviving—such as food, water, and shelter for protection from outside dangers—are limited, so the strongest groups which have physical strength and are able to adapt themselves to natural environments are able to survive most effectively since they have greater access to resources.

The conflicts between groups historically have caused human beings to develop an understanding of themselves and others as “the Absolute” and “the Other,” respectively. Humans

¹ “Feminism in the 18th Century and Beyond,” Atria: Institute on Gender Equality and Women’s History, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://institute-genderequality.org/news-publications/feminism/feminism-18th-century-and-beyond/>.

² “The Role of Women in the Industrial Revolution,” Tsongas Industrial History Center, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.uml.edu/tsongas/barilla-taylor/women-industrial-revolution.aspx>.

consider themselves and the groups of which they are members “the Absolute” and “us”, while groups of which individuals are not members are taken to be “the Other.” The same mindset can be found in the relationship between men and women as groups, as well. However, when it comes to the positions of the Absolute and the Other for men and women, this raises the important question: “How did all this begin?”³ While the origin of the Absolute and the Other is clear in the case of groups in general, it is less obvious what the origin of the Absolute and the Other is for the more specifically defined groups of men and women.

According to de Beauvoir, we can’t point to a specific historical event to show how and why men took the dominance of the world and made themselves “the Absolute.”⁴ When men established rules for society, they acted as if women were the minority, which is not the case in reality. Thus, men put women in the position of the Other by treating women as a lesser group, and accepted and engaged in this treatment of women for centuries, such as in the Ancient and Medieval ages. Given this relationship, female individuals are expected to follow a set of rules or norms to be considered as “women.” Again, according to de Beauvoir, “biology is not the destiny, one is not born, but becomes a woman.”⁵ These rules were turned into social norms after a while, and they became the innate characteristics of women as a social group. When we deep dive into these norms which can be most obviously observed in the West, we see that they make women completely obedient and submissive. Women are expected to accept that men are their superiors, and that they are not equal to men in a normative sense of equality. Women are also thought to be fragile, such that they always need a male figure to guide them, such as their father, brothers, or husband. They need to be fertile, and they must take their husbands’ last names rather than keeping their own.

According to de Beauvoir, these norms made women the “Other” for most ages of history. Especially from the 13th century to the 15th century, women were seen as witches, or individuals who sold their souls to Satan in order to receive power and magic and the ability to deceive people. Furthermore, since the Catholic Church and clergy constituted the political and social power that dominated the people during this period of time, the classes of both peasants and nobles had to accept everything that the church and clergy declared as true since these classes were religious. Churches were teaching people how easy it is to deceive women and how dangerous they are. Thus, men have always tried to dominate and control women throughout history because they see women as the Other.

On the other hand, as the Absolute, men have the right to be free. They set up rules for society, they have power and control over women, and they can be productive and transcendent (in the sense of being able to improve oneself, to have access to opportunities, and to exercise

³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. HM Parshley, (Penguin 1972), introduction, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm>.

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. HM Parshley, (Penguin 1972), introduction, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm>.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. HM Parshley, (Penguin 1972), introduction, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm>.

freedom). According to de Beauvoir, men have all of these aspects as the Absolute, while women lack these features as the Other.

3. A Comparison: The Latest Place of Women and Women as “The Other”

From ancient ages to the Enlightenment and then the Industrial Revolution, women lived mostly as the Other. As previously mentioned, female individuals followed a set of rules to be seen as women. With the Industrial Revolution, the social position of women as the Other slowly started to change when women demanded their rights. Entering the working life, working for hours every day but receiving lesser compensation than men for equivalent productivity just because they were women, and being expected to do both their jobs and house chores, were some of the reasons that women started a change for their social and legal rights. Although to some extent they continued to be the Other, women made themselves the Absolute this time. However, while seeking equal rights, women as a whole did not intend to conversely dominate men; rather, they fought for equality. A question thus arises: “Why did it take so much time?”

Beauvoir’s answer to this question is that “Women do not say ‘We,’ except at some congress of feminists or similar formal demonstration; men say ‘women,’ and women use the same word in referring to themselves.”⁶ We see that “us” and “others” conflict, which is the point I mentioned above to explain how people see their groups as the main subject of their society and other people as being “Other” and nothing else. One might want to stay as the Other. However, being the Other means that some group of individuals gives decisions for you, while you just have to do what they say and obey. This can sound like an easy way to live, as you are without many responsibilities. However, no subject wants to be an object, and in fact they shouldn’t want this, because to desire this state of objecthood undermines their value as a human being because they turn into objects as subjects.

When we compare historical cases of women as the Other and their most recent place in social life, significant changes can be seen. Women are able to access social goods more easily than past years. For example, a woman can request a divorce from her husband. She can attend university and higher education. Also, women can start their own businesses, and the places of women in the business world are increasing. To wit, according to WBENC, “a group of over 400 of the nation’s largest and most successful corporations, there are 13 million women-owned businesses in the U.S.—and counting. This represents 42% of all American businesses.”⁷ As it can be seen, although women were made to stay in the position of the Other because of patriarchy—for which reason it has been thought that women don’t have rights, must be submissive, and are treated as a minority, and because of which women experience conflicts in themselves—nevertheless, women came together and changed this situation in the direction of ensuring equal rights for men and women and equality under the law.

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. HM Parshley, (Penguin 1972), introduction, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm>.

⁷ Luisa Zhou, “Women in Business Statistics: The Ultimate List of 2024 Trends,” *The Blog* (blog), Luisa Zhou, updated April 13, 2024, <https://www.luisazhou.com/blog/women-in-business-statistics/>.

4. 21st Century: Are Women Still “The Other?”

In the 21st Century, whether women are still the Other does not have a universally agreeable answer. It is clear that women’s right have improved, although major issues still remain. According to UNICEF:

Despite evidence demonstrating how central girls’ education is to development, gender disparities in education persist. Around the world, 129 million girls are out of school, including 32 million of primary school age, 30 million of lower-secondary school age, and 67 million of upper-secondary school age. In countries affected by conflict, girls are more than twice as likely to be out of school than girls living in non-affected countries.⁸

It also can be seen that there is inequality in compensation for women, as relates to the “gender pay gap”: “In 2021, women’s gross hourly earnings were on average 12.7% below those of men in the EU.”⁹

Although these are some of the recent issues for women, we should take a look at women’s achievements throughout the 21st century, as well. For instance, Susan Wojcicki is one of the important figures. She is the former CEO of YouTube, and she has an important role in YouTube’s growth. In 5 years, from 2014 to 2019, YouTube’s value became over \$15 Billion. Wojcicki also paid attention to equality in the company. She led the company to increase the number of women employees and ensured representation of minorities in leadership positions as well. Her efforts made women working in the field of technology more visible.¹⁰

Another significant example is Malala Yousafzai. She is a young Nobel Peace Prize winner. Her story began when she was a child. She opposed Taliban rule of her village because the Taliban prevented women from having an education. Unfortunately, Malala was shot in her head by a masked man. Nevertheless, after moving to the UK, she founded a charity to support women’s education around the world. She spread awareness, and her journey is continuing.¹¹

Besides the incredible personal achievements of many women, there are also foundations and groups founded by women, as well. For example, Women in Research (WiRE) is a non-profit organization founded in 2007. They work in marketing, market researching and networking fields. They hold global events and help women to enter those fields.¹²

As for 2022, 28 countries have female leaders, including Greece, Italy, Sweden, and Bangladesh.¹³ Although the number is low, the role of women in politics is increasing. This statistic

⁸ “Girls’ Education,” UNICEF, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education>.

⁹ “Gender Pay Gap Statistics,” Eurostat, updated March 8, 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_pay_gap_statistics.

¹⁰ David Sargeant, “Female Innovators of the 21st Century,” *LinkedIn*, published March 6, 2023, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/female-innovators-21st-century-david-sargeant>.

¹¹ Layne Deakins, “Women’s History Month: Key Figures of the 21st Century,” *Jetset Times*, March 2, 2021, <https://jetsettimes.com/inspiration/women-empowerment/womens-history-month-key-figures-of-the-21st-century/>.

¹² Conjointly, “International Women’s Day 2020: Women in Statistics,” *Conjointly Blog* (blog), accessed April 14, 2024, <https://conjointly.com/blog/women-in-statistics/>.

¹³ “Countries with Female Leaders 2024,” *World Population Review*, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-female-leaders>.

shows us that voters are paying attention to female candidates' political strategies and solutions to the problems of their countries, and electing them as their countries' leaders.

As a result, women are not powerless compared to prior decades. Women have achieved huge improvements in their personal, social, and professional lives. However, major and recent problems such as inequality in financial compensation and education, relative to men, have to be solved to make the world more equal for women.

From de Beauvoir's point, these kinds of progress would be significant. After being oppressed by men, women came together and gained their freedom by putting together their efforts. For instance, the example of Women in Research shows how women come and work together. de Beauvoir would support these changes women made for their social, work, and educational lives. With these changes, she also would observe how women have significantly changed their status as the Other. The role of women in work, social, and educational spheres has increased, and women have achieved remarkable successes, as shown by the examples of Susan Wojcicki and Malala Yousafzi.

5. Conclusion

In this essay, I discussed de Beauvoir's concepts, "the Absolute" and "the Other." Also, I discussed women's place as the Other, how this status originated historically, and how changes in women's status as the Other have occurred over time. I also considered the difference between the contemporary status of women in Western society and the historical status of women as the Other. Lastly, I discussed whether women are still seen as the Other in contemporary Western society. I have suggested that women as a whole have mostly overcome their status as the "Other," although women still continue to experience sources of inequality, and continue to be affected by the "Other" in a negative way, such as being paid lesser than men for the same amount of work. Despite this, women continue to find ways to decrease the effects of their status as the "Other" by their various kinds of successes—social, political, business, and educational. With their power, women will make the "Other" disappear in the future.

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UNIVERSAL LIBERATION OR NEW DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Caden Salladay

ABSTRACT: *Does Christian Theology fit within a Social Revolution for the redistribution of wealth? James Cone and Gustavo Gutierrez advocate very similar arguments about our relationship with God. They argue that God is always on the side of the oppressed and identifies only with the oppressed. This claim then is used by Gutierrez, within a Marxist framework, for the radical redistribution of wealth and the necessity of Western churches to advocate this stance on behalf of those who are impoverished because of exploitation by the Capitalist Globalist system we have. In this paper, I delve into the Biblical justifications for these arguments and a discussion of whether or not this position of social revolution is biblically supported, or if there is a different argument about the role of God, the Church, and Christians in their relation to those who have been systematically oppressed.*

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of
wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone:
but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

John 12:24

Do the claims of Liberation theology, Gutierrez, and Cone have the potential to fit within the Universal Christian Claims? Does the claim that God is on the side of the oppressed have any real meaning, or is there another way the relationship between Man and God can be explained?

The Liberation Theology of Gutierrez and Cone have a place within the overarching Christian doctrine—otherwise referred to as the Christian Teaching/Universal Christian Claim—but not in the way that they suggest and certainly as more tame versions of their claims. The belief that God is only on the side of the oppressed, as Cone and Gutierrez suggest, varies between their arguments. Using the history of African Americans in the United States, Cone argues from the perspective of an African American in the United States that God is wholly on the side of the oppressed and does not align with anyone other than the oppressed. In contrast, Gutierrez, the original Liberation theologian, suggests that God is only on the side of those oppressed by globalism and capitalism (especially those living in Latin America), and calls for the radical redistribution of wealth, via the church, into the countries that these systems necessarily harm. Through the study of Biblical text, however, we can see that the universalization of God as solely siding with the oppressed is not entirely true. Ultimately, Liberation theology hopes to show that God has a preferential option for those who are less fortunate throughout history. Both theologians want to apply this rationale to get support from other Christians and change the status quo of their situations.

To wit, in Gutierrez's argument, he comes short of explaining the resulting order of things after his proposed social revolution. Gutierrez uses the same reasoning and claims made by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* to justify his position.¹ Historically, the success of a regime that is void of hierarchy (which is the Communist goal) has made some people unequal and undermines Biblical Principles completely. (I will explain this more thoroughly later on as Gutierrez's arguments are actually articulated.) This belief that God is solely on one side or the other is the result of misinterpretation of scripture. Nevertheless, the arguments given by Gutierrez and Cone do offer some insight into the reality of God being a just being. More specifically, in Cone's case, we can see the universal equality as seen by God being invalidly applied, while in Gutierrez's case, this universal equality is misinterpreted. But their arguments do present God as a being who desires justice to be done by humanity. Both Cone and Gutierrez overlooked justice as a completely encompassing idea in their arguments for Liberation theology. With all of this said, their ideas of Liberation theology do not have a firm basis in Biblical text, and the Biblical text that the two theologians use to justify God solely being a God of the oppressed is cherry-picked for the sake of argument. Furthermore, there are some historical problems that apply to Gutierrez's argument as well to his social revolution of the Church. For example, I think Cone's suggestion that God finds people in their worst state can be seen to be true, but this does not imply that God is only on the side of the oppressed.

I begin by analyzing the claims that Cone and Gutierrez make about God being solely on the side of the oppressed and not others. Because the beginning of the two arguments is similar, I will begin with Cone and then transition to a more Gutierrez-focused analysis because they take different positions regarding where equality should be seen.

Cone's argument begins with the assertion that "[e]ither God is identified with the oppressed, to the point where their existence becomes his, or God is a God of racism."² Cone is suggesting that God, to a white Christian, is not the actual God, and that in electing the Israelites, once slaves, to be his people and "becom[e] the Oppressed One in Jesus Christ," he is a God for the oppressed and for the oppressed only.³ Cone specifically takes this argument into a racial context, especially given that he is writing during the civil rights movement. Cone's point here, I believe, holds more weight—more than Gutierrez's—because of the emphasis on race. Race is a characteristic of ourselves that we have no control over when we are given life. It simply isn't something we can change. However, Gutierrez focuses on material inequality, which an individual has at least some degree of influence over. Due to the fixed nature of race, the verse Galatians 3:28 has more meaning applied to it: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."⁴ This verse reflects what is to be the beginning point of society, or a goal of society to attain, because it reflects the perception

¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *Notes for a Theology of Liberation. Theological Studies* (Sage Journals, 1970), 243-261, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056397003100201>.

² James H. Cone, *God in Black Theology: A Black Theology of Liberation* (J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 120-123.

³ Cone, *Theology of Liberation*, 120-123.

⁴ Galatians 3:28 NIV.

of every individual's equality in Christ's eye. This is an excellent starting point for society, as it sets every person equal when they enter into the world, according to God. The reality is that there are inequalities in the way people view each other, especially historically in terms of race. If Christianity stands by its teachings of living a life like Jesus, then the Church and its people should not be opposed to creating a system that values all people equally.

Because the beginning of the two arguments is similar, I will begin with Cone and then transition to a more Gutierrez-focused analysis because they take different positions regarding where equality should be seen. Cone focuses on equality with regard to race, while Gutierrez focuses on the same point with regard to material inequality. Cone argues that "Either God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes his or he is a God of racism,"⁵ which is the basis of his argument that God is on the side of one singular group—in this case, African Americans in the United States. His argument centers around race being the hinge point of inequality, something that is not supported by the Bible. As previously stated, Galatians 3:28 acts as an explanation for the equality under God experienced by all of humanity. Its language is non-discriminatory and is meant to apply to all of society, a radical idea for the time. All life begins from this radical assertion of equality for every man and woman regardless of the characteristics they begin life with. In this way, Galatians 3:28 argues that mankind should always strive to make a more equal society, in terms of the things that humanity is born into, such as race, nationality, ethnicity, or bondage. Even if this verse doesn't explicitly condemn slavery, it still makes an argument against it in its equality of all humans in God's eyes.

On the other hand, Gutierrez has a similar understanding of God. Gutierrez makes a similar argument to Cone's—mainly, that God is on the side of the oppressed and not on any other side. The difference is that Gutierrez applies this to the material inequality that a capitalist system has caused in developing countries. Gutierrez believes that throughout the Bible, God aligns himself with the poor and the oppressed. Gutierrez uses the example of Exodus and the freeing of the Israelites from slavery via God's will as the strongest example of God being aligned with the oppressed. Gutierrez argues that "first comes the commitment to charity,"⁶ and that "history" should be seen as the "story of man's emancipation," and he explains the "aspiration of poor peoples who primarily consider themselves oppressed."⁷ Gutierrez considers capitalism and its exploitation of less developed countries as the problem that perpetuates the poverty of underdeveloped countries. I do not think that anyone with a basic sense of capitalist economics would argue that capitalism doesn't make winners and losers. In the free market system, some countries benefit and some benefit less than others, such as some underdeveloped countries. Gutierrez applies Marx's idea of social revolution as the solution to this problem of exploitation, arguing that as the country in question engages in social revolution, it is "more than just overcoming economic, social, and political dependence. It also means that humanity is marching

⁵ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 121.

⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, *Notes for a Theology of Liberation. Theological Studies* (Sage Journals, 1970), 243-261, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056397003100201>.

⁷ Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 247.

towards a society in which man can be free of ever servitude and master of his own destiny.”⁸ The Church plays the role of empowering the poverty-stricken people to “seize the reins of their own destiny and shake free from the present servitude, as a symbol of the freedom from sin provided by Christ.”⁹

I do think that Cone and Gutierrez make valid claims about the role God plays in life, especially with the arguments that they make regarding oppression. Working from a position of equality in God’s eye, we can analyze both arguments determine how they fit within the Universal Christian Claim and Biblical scripture. In doing so, we will see that these arguments do fit within the Universal Christian Claim, but not to the extent that Cone and Gutierrez argue. They both argue that God is solely on the side of one group of people through history, but this claim simply isn’t true. Biblical scripture simply does not only side with the oppressed but paints the picture of God as a God of Justice. What the Bible has to say about oppression, the natural state of all peoples, the differences in roles in how to deal with the less fortunate, and the role of justice, all serve to outline the inadequacy of the claim that God is only a God of the oppressed. If we understand Cone’s and Gutierrez’s arguments thus, then the basic principles of their arguments can be understood as being a part of the Universal Christian Claim, but not to the extent that they are suggesting.

With this one example, I think that Cone’s claims can be reasonably justified as being a part of the Universal Christian Claim, but to what extent? Because God has been explained to see everyone as equal, then He has no preferential option for any oppressed group and neither does He always identify with one group over another. This creates a problem for both Cone and Gutierrez that is difficult to reconcile. However, if God were a God of justice, then the problem would seem to right itself. For example, Isaiah 1:17 states “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause,”¹⁰ and Amos 5:24 says, “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never falling stream.”¹¹ Both of these verses emphasize the importance of justice to God. The argument that justice should be done to both African Americans and Latin Americans seems to be in the trajectory of justice. That is, over time both of these people’s situations have gotten better, albeit there are still arguments for more to be done to improve their respective situations. This accounts for Cone’s argument. However, the argument that materially “oppressed peoples,” according to Gutierrez, should be done justice by the Western Church through the redistribution of wealth and social revolution cannot be seen as substantiated by claims within the Bible.

A critique of this argument would be that while Galatians 3:28 argues that everyone is equal in God’s eyes, Paul also later writes in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 that “a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over man; she must be silent.”¹² This account from Paul at first may seem to be an argument for the inequality of woman

⁸ Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 250.

⁹ Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 252.

¹⁰ Isaiah 1:17 NIV.

¹¹ Amos 5:24 NIV.

¹² 1 Tim. 2:11-12 NIV.

and man, but 1 Peter 3:7 says, “Husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gifts of life, so nothing will hinder your prayers.”¹³ This verse is in no way saying that women are worth less than men. It actually suggests that the man belongs to the woman, and vice versa. The verses Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:18 make this abundantly clear and even suggest that men—given their biological predispositions—are commanded through these verses to “love their wives and not be embittered towards them”¹⁴ and to “be considerate and treat them(wives) with respect.”¹⁵ 1 Peter 3:7—and the Bible as a whole—do not suggest that women are not as capable as men, but instead suggests that husband and wife should develop a mutual relationship that plays to each of their biological predispositions. This verse identifies—instead of misogyny—a biological difference between man and woman and seeks to describe the relationship of submission to God above all else. The 1 Timothy passage is not arguing for complete actual, rather than normative, equality, where the biological predispositions of the two are wiped clean, but rather is discussing the normative relation of wife to husband—and vice versa—and not of all women to all men. Consequently, these passages act as commands regarding ways to pray and the authorities of the church and serve as a commentary upon the roles of husband and wife in society, which I do grant have been used incorrectly to justify inequality. Nevertheless, the idea that this passage is supporting misogyny is a hasty interpretation because it comes from a chapter labeled “Instructions on Worship.”

Furthermore, the passage from 1 Peter even goes further and suggests that husbands and wives have duties to each other, and that a man should respect his wife as “heirs to the gracious gifts of life.”¹⁶ This is significant as it shows that both men and women are equal in the reception of life and that husbands should respect their wives, or they will both fail in their duty to God. Ephesians 5:33 recognizes this when it suggests “let each of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects the husband.” These verses recognize that both men and women, while not having the same roles in society—which is our modern idea of equality—have distinct roles in their process of achieving salvation. These verses may not represent complete equality as we presently understand it, and perhaps they echo equity more, but they are rules of life that benefit the whole in their practice of faith. With Galatians 3:28 and these verses, it can be assumed that everyone in God’s eye is equal, no matter sex, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, and that mankind should seek to strive towards this Godly equality that has been presented.

With the equality principle established, and Cone’s argument discussed theologically, it is time to get into Gutierrez’s argument. Gutierrez’s argument still holds to the equality principle which Galatians 3:28 supports, and it also raises the same questions that Cone’s argument has, as well as some more. Gutierrez’s claim that God has preferential concern for the poor is true, but the results of his use of this concern is incorrect. In other words, nobody can say that the Bible does

¹³ 1 Peter 3:7 NIV.

¹⁴ Colossians 3:19 NIV.

¹⁵ 1 Peter 3:7 NIV.

¹⁶ 1 Peter 3:7 NIV.

not ask Christians to care for the poor and needy, but it does not explicitly suggest that radical redistribution of wealth is the solution. Therefore, some of Gutierrez's theology does have implications for the Universal Christian Claim. Gutierrez essentially argues that because of the gospel, "the Christian is, before all else, he who must answer for the hope that is in him,"¹⁷ and hope itself is a very important piece of the Gospel accounts of the New Testament. It is a fair argument that the Bible and its teachings are meant to provide hope for a better life for all. This includes those who experience poverty, but what is emphasized within the gospel isn't your race or socioeconomic status, but your adherence to the word of God and your acceptance of Jesus as your savior. Luke 6:20-21 says, "Looking at his disciples he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.'"¹⁸ I want to focus on the "blessed are the poor" aspect of this verse. Luke 6:20-21 explains situations in life that may befall anyone. This verse contrasts much of the Old Testament and a lot of the New Testament that suggests poverty and the poor are undesirable. Luke 3:11 says, "[Jesus] answered and said to them 'he who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him to the same,'"¹⁹ and Leviticus 25:35 says, "If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you."²⁰ This suggests that giving to the poor so that they may exist more comfortably is imperative and much of the Bible reflects this sentiment. That is why Luke 6:20-21 is so important to understand, especially in conjunction with Mark 14:7 and Matthew 5:3. Mark 14:7 says, "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good, but Me you do not have always."²¹ And Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."²² All of these verses stress a life of poverty, either spiritually or physically.

I want to focus on what Mark 14:7 says about Luke 6:20-21. Mark 14:7 suggests that regardless of how well our keeping of the Covenant with God is, we will never achieve complete eradication of poverty. So, Luke picks up where Mark leaves off by suggesting that living poor and struggling through life, if you live faithfully, allows you to receive the promise of everlasting life in heaven. Luke 6:20-21 also never suggests anything else other than poverty in the physical sense in this verse. To corroborate this interpretation, consider Luke 6:24, which says, "But woe to you who are rich for you have already received your comfort,"²³ and Matthew 19:21, which says, "Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.'"²⁴ All three of these passages

¹⁷ Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 258.

¹⁸ Luke 6:20-21 NIV.

¹⁹ Luke 3:11 NIV.

²⁰ Lev. 25:35 NIV.

²¹ Mark 14:7 NIV.

²² Matt. 5:3 NIV.

²³ Luke 6:24 NIV.

²⁴ Matt. 19:21 NIV.

show the seeming importance of material poverty to the Gospel accounts and a person's acceptance into heaven. All these verses point to material poverty being held higher than vast material riches.

It is a fact that the Bible calls for the support of the poverty-stricken, and this is the key to Gutierrez's argument. Churches do a whole lot of work for the poor, including tithing, missionary work, and various kinds of community outreach, among other things. The problem, as Gutierrez points out, is that it isn't enough to *just help*, especially given the poverty-stricken history of Latin America. I think that this claim holds a valuable critique and should be understood as indicating how the Church in the West can do more for the less fortunate in other countries. This claim certainly has Biblical evidence for its justification. As Gutierrez points out, "There are indeed social conditions of injustice which cry out to heaven and in which there is a need for remedial help and change."²⁵

I began above with the equality principle and appealed to it to help my argument against Cone and Gutierrez that recognizes that while their theologies do offer some tools for the Universal Christian Claim, their theologies do not do so in their entirety. It is from this point that we can speculate whether God is a God of justice or not, and why I think that this can save the valid parts of Cone's and Gutierrez's theologies. The idea of justice and righteousness both come up frequently in the Bible, and Isaiah 42:1-4 explains the role of justice in the life of a Christian:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.²⁶

Justice is foundational to the understanding of God to Christians. Without a just God, Christianity wouldn't provide the hope that Gutierrez and Cone speak of in their arguments. This passage in Isaiah emphasizes the role that God wants man to play in justice on earth. Isaiah 1:17 corroborates this vision, saying, "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."²⁷ These verses suggest that God is on the side of justice, but that the individual and whole of mankind has an ultimate role to play in what justice ends up looking like.

This unique role makes mankind's actions in the world all the more important to Christianity, Cone's, and Gutierrez's arguments. I think that these suggest the importance of critiques of the role the church plays in our world and what Christianity should stand and fight for. Proverbs 28:5-6 says, "Evil men do not understand justice but those who seek the Lord understand it fully," and "Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a rich man whose ways are

²⁵ James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 2nd Ed. (Fortress Press, 2006), 294.

²⁶ Isaiah 42:1-4 NIV.

²⁷ Isaiah 1:17 NIV.

perverse.”²⁸ I think that these verses, being back-to-back, explain something that isn’t necessarily said explicitly. The fact that these verses reside next to each other means that they are connected in some way. Specifically, they show the role that we have in the execution of justice on Earth. Additionally, Luke 18:8 describes the role that God has in justice as well: referring to a persistent widow, this verse says, “I tell you; he will quickly see that they get justice....”²⁹ If an individual is persistent in his pursuit of righteousness and of faith, then God will reward them with justice. The idea of justice proposed in the Bible suggests that God is on the side of justice in both his own accord and inadvertently through his creation. This means that history always bends in favor of justice because God also has a role in justice.

God, instead of being solely on the side of the oppressed, is always on the side of justice for every human being, including the oppressed. Cone and Gutierrez both overextend this point by saying that God only associates with the oppressed, but the equality principle and the gospel discredit the severity of their claims, while not necessarily undermining the general character of their claims. Both Cone and Gutierrez do offer a lot of value to the Universal Christian Claim and theology. Still, understanding God as being a God of justice who is concerned with the interests of all humankind much better explains the relationship between man and God than does understanding God as having some preference for the oppressed, especially because justice is a prominent concern in the Bible. The story of Exodus itself is a story of justice, the story of Job is a story of faithfulness that results in justice, and the story of mankind is injustice righted by the hands of those with courage.

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²⁸ Prov. 28:5-6 NIV.

²⁹ Luke 18:8 NIV.

A CRITIQUE OF UTILITARIAN ADVOCACY FOR THE DEATH PENALTY

Umut Sami Yılmaz

ABSTRACT: *It is still problematic among utilitarian philosophers whether the death penalty benefits society or not. It is also uncertain if the death penalty has a deterrent effect on individuals. In this essay, first, I will briefly introduce utilitarianism, and I will examine various ideas of certain utilitarian philosophers regarding the death penalty. Then, I will discuss whether the death penalty is an effective deterrent regarding individual criminal behaviors. I will argue that the death penalty does not have a deterrent effect that can be supported by a utilitarian. Finally, it will be shown that the current conditions of society are unfavorable to support the use of the death penalty and are even opposed to its purpose for society.*

The death penalty is a controversial issue in applied ethics¹ in various ways. Utilitarians have always constituted a side of this applied ethical controversy and have presented various arguments. In specific, “deterrence” of the death penalty is a significant focal point of these utilitarian arguments. In this essay, first, I will introduce utilitarianism, utilitarian philosophers, and their general positions on the death penalty. Then, I will discuss whether the death penalty has a deterrent effect. Afterward, I will argue that utilitarians’ advocacy for the death penalty contradicts the primary applied ethical principles of utilitarianism.

The word “utilitarianism” comes from the English word “utility,” which can be described in the view of utilitarianism as happiness, good, or pleasure. Utilitarianism is an applied ethical theory that holds that the best moral action in any case is the action that maximizes utility for the greatest number of persons. However, apart from this general definition, utilitarianism has certain kinds. While act utilitarianism defends that the right act in any situation is whatever produces the best outcome/benefit, rule utilitarianism determines which applied ethical rules should be put into practice based on the principle of what would maximize utility if everybody adopted those rules.²

I will proceed through a typical utilitarian argument regarding the death penalty throughout this article. The typical utilitarian stance on the death penalty would support whatever action regarding the death penalty will produce the best overall outcome (most average utility, most total utility, depending on the particular version of utilitarianism appealed to) for society. The utilitarian stance will resort to punishment if and so long as punishment provides a considerable amount of benefit to society. Besides, among the utilitarians, there are different stances about punishment

¹ Although there are many disagreements regarding its definition, in the view of many philosophers, applied ethics is the application of general moral norms or general moral theories in order to solve practical problems. The death penalty, abortion, euthanasia, racism, sexism, etc., can be cited as an example of the issues that applied ethics focuses on. See Tom Lamar Beauchamp, “The Nature of Applied Ethics,” in *A Companion to Applied Ethics*, eds. R. G. Frey and Christopher H. Wellman (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 1–16.

² Tim Mulgan, *Utilitarianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 13–9.

and, specifically, the death penalty. The traditionally strongest and most common utilitarian arguments to support the death penalty are over whether the death penalty constitutes an effective deterrent. James Fitzjames Stephen, an English philosopher who can be considered a utilitarian, asserts, “No other punishment deters men so effectually from committing crimes as the punishment of death.... All that a man has will he give for his life. In any secondary punishment, however terrible, there is hope, but death is death; its terrors cannot be described more forcibly.”³ Utilitarians who accept and support the deterrence effect of the death penalty will not hesitate to advocate the death of a criminal in order to establish justice if the number of people prevented from being killed increases and the crime rate decreases. They consider that, because of deterrence, implementing the death penalty would reduce crime rates in the long run, and it provides a ground to build trust in society. Hence, according to this argument, since the death penalty constitutes the most deterrent punishment, the benefit/good of society will be ensured by implementing this extreme form of deterrence.

However, at this point, Jonathan Glover, also a utilitarian, takes a stance against the implementation of the death penalty. According to Glover, for a utilitarian, the number of lives saved must be crucial to determining the deterrent effect of the death penalty, while on the other hand, he argues, the death penalty cannot be justified merely as an “unqualified maximizing policy.”⁴ He argues that numerical computation at this superficial level cannot justify the death penalty because there are other factors that will inevitably be side effects of this “unqualified maximizing policy,” and these externalities should not be underestimated when engaging in utilitarian reasoning regarding the cost–benefit analysis of implementing the death penalty. The number of people directly affected by the execution, the family and relatives of the convict indirectly affected by the execution, and the possibility of accidentally executing an innocent man, among other things, are factors that have a significant impact on the utility of the death penalty.

Glover gives an absolutist approach to the death penalty by developing a counterargument that is broadly based on the deterrence of the death penalty. Thus, he argues that the stances of certain philosophers who support the death penalty and identify themselves as utilitarians are actually absolutist rather than utilitarian. He starts his argument by arguing that the death penalty is terrible and cruel. He states that it is horrible for the criminal to know when and how they will die. He even extends this discourse and argues that this terrifying character, unique to the death penalty, can be worse than murder. Meanwhile, he gives the utilitarian stance and considers how a utilitarian should take a stance on the death penalty, and he also outlines absolutism and describes which conditions make a person absolutist. From Glover’s perspective, if a person has fully justified and proven the deterrent effect of the death penalty and yet continues to oppose it, he is an absolutist rather than a utilitarian. On the other hand, he also describes those who would still support the death penalty, even if it has been proven to have no deterrent effect, as absolutists as well. Consequently, absolutism about the death penalty consists of either the view that the death

³ James Fitzjames Stephen, “Capital Punishments,” *Fraser’s Magazine*, June 1864, 753.

⁴ Jonathan Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives: The Moral Problems of Abortion, Infanticide, Suicide, Euthanasia, Capital Punishment, War and Other Life-or-Death Choices* (Penguin UK, 1990), 249–228.

penalty is justified, or the view that the death penalty is not justified, where the justification of the death penalty is separate from the question of whether the death penalty acts as an effective deterrent.

For Glover, the most basic and essential point of this whole discussion is the deterrent effect of the death penalty, and we can justify the death penalty only by proving its deterrence. Therefore, Glover's critique of the common utilitarian justification of the death penalty consists in the claim that this kind of justification is not in fact based in the deterrent effect of the death penalty, as utilitarians ought to claim, but rather in a non-utilitarian absolutist argument that is in contradiction to a genuine utilitarian justification of the death penalty. Nevertheless, Glover also shows that there are reasons for thinking that the death penalty is not in fact an effective deterrent, in which case it follows that utilitarians ought not to support the death penalty.

To show this latter point, Glover cites two ways to prove deterrence in his article: statistics and intuitive arguments. As he states,

Those who have studied the figures agree that there is no striking correlation between the absence of capital punishment and any alteration in the curve of the murder rate...If the statistical evidence were conclusive that capital punishment did not deter more than milder punishments, this would leave no room for any further discussion.⁵

He states that because of the unreliability and inadequacy of statistics, the only way to justify the death penalty would be to generate powerful, intuitive arguments.

Although statistical data are not considered by Glover to be sufficient to justify deterrence, information that can be used and cannot be underestimated in order to legitimize the death penalty from a utilitarian stance is still obtained through statistics. The United States is one of the countries where the death penalty is actively applied and where we can access this statistical information in terms of reliability and continuity of data. It is stated that the homicide (murder and non-negligent manslaughter) rate in the U.S. was 4.8 per 100,000 in 1960, and after seventeen years, it increased to 8.8 per 100,000 in the year 1977, the year that the first execution took place after a ten-year moratorium. Then, while it was 10.2 in 1980, it decreased to 7.9 in 1985, five years later, and increased to 9.8 again in 1991.⁶ As we can see from the statistics, there is no consistency between the murder rates and the death penalty. Thus, the deterrence of the death penalty is doubtful at this point. The murder rate was lower in the years without execution than after execution was implemented, whereas if the execution was an effective deterrent, we would expect to see the murder rate decrease after the execution was implemented. Hence, if we look at the relationship between the number of innocent people whose lives were saved and murderers killed by implementing the death penalty from a statistical perspective, it can be concluded that deterrence

⁵ Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives: The Moral Problems of Abortion, Infanticide, Suicide, Euthanasia, Capital Punishment, War and Other Life-or-Death Choices*, 236–37.

⁶ Roger Hood and Carolyn Hoyle, *The Death Penalty: A Worldwide Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 317–349.

is not effective when the death penalty is applied, contrary to the utilitarian claim that the death penalty is a deterrent.

Also, Hood indicates, “According to Illinois Coalition to Abolish Death Penalty, states without the death penalty had an average homicide rate of 4.9 per 100,000, which is a third lower than the rate of 7.4 homicides per 100,000 population in states with the death penalty.”⁷ When we compare the murder rates between the states that impose execution and those that do not, it is again apparent that the death penalty has no positive effect on the murder rates. One of the possible objections to this circumstance by utilitarians advocating the death penalty would be that particular cultures and environments (such as financial conditions, political conditions, human diversity, etc.) have some influence on crime rates. Associating crime with certain regions, depending on the characteristic structures of the regions, can be justified to some extent. However, although differences of human conditions who live in distinct states will have some influence on crime rates, we cannot ignore the fact that the non-implementation of the death penalty is more effective for those who tend to commit crimes, according to the one-third crime rate difference between those states that impose death penalty and those that do not, a difference that cannot be underestimated.⁸

Jeremy Bentham, one of the most famous utilitarian philosophers, argues that it is also possible that justifying the death penalty is simply a matter of misinformation. Once the death penalty turns out not to be a deterrent, its popularity will decline, and it will no longer be supported.⁹ In addition, a relatively recent research article by David P. Philips re-examines the reasons why the deterrence of the death penalty is not justified. He says that, in psychological experiments on deterrence, because researchers use annual data, they have found no deterrent effect. If the deterrent effect of the death penalty is effective for a short period, it may not be detectable using annual data at this point.¹⁰ As Glover says, Philips can be seen as admitting that there is no general justification for deterrence. But, unlike Glover, it can be seen that Philips accepts the short-term deterrent effect of the death penalty by considering current experiments.

However, at this point in Philips’s argument, from the utilitarian perspective, what makes something a deterrent should be discussed. If we consider the duration of the effect, we can observe that the short-term effect, which annual data cannot support, will be at a level at which society may not receive sufficient utility, from the utilitarian perspective, to justify implementing the death penalty. Considering the negative aspects of the death penalty, such as irreversibility, brutality, its effects on the victim’s family, etc., we can see that the short-term deterrent effect cannot produce sufficient utility for society. Consequently, even if Philips is correct that the death penalty has a short-term deterrent effect, it still seems to follow that utilitarianism cannot support the death penalty on this basis.

Albert Camus introduces a story in his famous work “Reflections on the Guillotine.” Although he is not a utilitarian, I will include his work on the death penalty here, which I find

⁷ Hood and Hoyle, *The Death Penalty: A Worldwide Perspective*, 330.

⁸ Hood and Hoyle, *The Death Penalty: A Worldwide Perspective*, 317–349.

⁹ Jeremy Bentham, *The Rationale of Punishment* (London: Robert Heward, 1830), 197-177.

¹⁰ David P. Philips, “The Deterrent Effect of Capital Punishment: New Evidence on an Old Controversy,” *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no.1 (1980): 139-148.

significant, to introduce my argument against the utilitarian argument. His father, present during the execution of a murderous agricultural worker sentenced to death in Algeria, supported the death penalty before execution and thought that even a beheading would be too little for such a monster. When his father returned home after the execution, he did not speak to anyone and suddenly started vomiting after resting in bed for a while. Empathizing with the murderer who committed terrible crimes at the time of execution is akin to witnessing the murder of an innocent victim instead of experiencing a scene of justice.¹¹ According to Camus, the practical application of the death penalty is unlike the theoretical one. If the death penalty transforms a terrible monster into a victimized angel at the moment of execution, it cannot be considered a deterrent effect on society. Also, Michel Foucault, in his book *Discipline and Punish*, examines the concept of punishment closely and from an historical perspective; he refers to the death penalty and punishments in proportion to the magnitude of the crime committed by the criminal in a similar way to Camus's point:

It was as if the punishment was thought to equal, if not to exceed, in savagery the crime itself, to accustom to spectators to a ferocity from which one wished to divert them, to show them the frequency of crime, to make the executioner resemble a criminal, judges murderers, to reverse roles at the last moment, to make the tortured criminal an object of pity or admiration.¹²

From Camus's work, I argue that a criminal gets rid of all negative societal prejudices and is perceived in such a way that his prior criminal actions are abstracted from him and made irrelevant at the moment of execution. This is the crux of my intuitive argument, which will suggest that the death penalty is not a deterrent.

Most people in society have a tendency to empathize with the victim. The concept that finds a response in society is being killed, instead of killing. Hence, disturbing feelings and societal negative prejudices that emerge about the criminal are situations that arise as a natural result of empathy established with the victims. All factors that create a barrier between society and the criminal until the moment of execution disappear at the moment of execution, allowing spectators to feel empathy with the criminal.

At this point, the criminal also becomes a victim in some sense, as the criminal being executed is not the agent of killing. When a criminal, in virtue of being the victim of the act of execution, is rid of all the societal negative prejudices and disturbing feelings that create a barrier between society and the criminal and isolate him from society, the execution moment allows the criminal to become ordinary. This whole process causes the criminal to be re-integrated into society improperly. It happens improperly because it does not contain any justification to re-

¹¹ Albert Camus, "Reflections on the Guillotine," in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: The Modern Library, 1961), 131-179.

¹² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Penguin Books, 1991), 9.

integrate criminal into society. For this reason, I will define this process as the *unjustified reintegration of the criminal into society*.

Even though there is no valid justification for the criminal to re-integrate into society (valid reasons being, among other things, remorse, disappearance of crime tendency, change of the criminal for the better, etc.), the criminal who was excluded from society begins to take part in society again. Since the death of the criminal eliminates the barrier between him and society through empathy, it, in a way, legitimizes talking about the guilty person in society. In fact, at this point, I argue that by removing the barrier between himself and society without justification, the criminal does not suffer his punishment, and since he/she is now dead, the fear and any negative emotions felt towards the criminal in society, cease. Therefore, the death penalty prevents the criminal from being socially punished. From an individual perspective, ending the life of a brutal serial killer can be considered the greatest punishment. However, if we approach the question of whether the death penalty is an effective deterrent from a utilitarian stance, then punishment on a social scale, rather than an individual scale, should be critical. Due to the process of unjustified reintegration into society, though, it is unclear whether the death penalty can serve as an effective deterrent from a utilitarian perspective.

Currently, with the development of social media and the internet, the decreased deterrent effect of the death penalty is another topic of controversy. The death penalty has become a content that feeds all media organs. The main reason why the death penalty can take part effortlessly in the media is due to the peculiarity of the death penalty, which consists in the post-execution reintegration of criminals into society without justification. Due to TV series and documentaries (which have emerged as the result of this unjustified reintegration of the criminal process) about the victims of the death penalty, the reputation of criminals is widely spread. Because of the unjustified reintegration of the criminal—after the moment of execution—the media coverage of the criminal and the production of TV series and documentaries about the serial killer have become widespread. This media effect reduces the deterrent effect of the death penalty. It causes the criminal to be engraved in the social memory without suffering any punishment at the social level because it generates opportunities for the public to empathize with the criminal and thereby be unjustly reintegrated into society. As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, it would be contrary to the utilitarian stance if the criminal was not punished on a social scale. Ultimately, the current state of the internet and the media has created an unfavorable environment for imposing the death penalty as a deterrent, according to a utilitarian understanding of the deterrence of the death penalty.

Considering all the factors, we see that the deterrent effect of the death penalty according to a utilitarian theory has not been proven definitely. At the same time, because the death penalty inherently reintegrates the criminal into society without justification, the current conditions of society, with the help of the media, reduce the effectiveness of the death penalty as a form of punishment and make deterrence, the most critical factor, ineffective. Therefore, we can see that the utilitarian stance, based in the deterrence ability of the death penalty, is not sufficient to support the death penalty, given these social conditions, because it is unclear that the death penalty is the

punishment that gives the best results in terms of the utility of society. Even though the death penalty is a difficult concept to examine and its impact on society is highly controversial, for a utilitarian, it would be best not to take a supportive stance on the death penalty.

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