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"*Sapere Aude!* Have courage to make use of your *own* understanding!"

– *Immanuel Kant*, *"An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?"*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT FROM ELIF HIDAYET AND GRAE ROEDER, *University of Minnesota* 6

CONTRIBUTOR ESSAYS

ISOLATION, MOURNING, AND REORIENTATION IN THE MELANCHOLIC CONDITION *by Bela Khanna, Haverford College* 8

ON LOVING THE UNKNOWABLE *by Zuha Zubair, St. Catherine University* 21

A KIERKEGAARDIAN CRITIQUE OF MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL REFLECTION *by Bora Barut, University of British Columbia* 35

DOXASTIC DISCREPANCY AND WORTHWHILE DISAGREEMENT *by Stephen Ruthy, University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire* 50

SHAME AND THE SELF: WHAT IS THE UTILITY OF SHAME? *by Ace Van Atta, Johns Hopkins University* 69

BEYOND FUN: REIMAGINING REALITY, PLEASURE, AND ART IN THE CULTURE INDUSTRY *by Qishan Wang, University of Chicago* 83

THE COMMUNICABILITY OF BEAUTY AND A ROBUST CONCEPTION OF *SENSUS COMMUNIS* *by Yujie Zeng, University of Chicago* 95

STAFF WRITING

WILD CREATURES IN CONTEXT *by Cameron Doherty* 108

WHY CHOMSKIAN AI FAILED, AND HOW FIXING IT REQUIRED MAKING IT WITTGENSTEINIAN *by Tripp Dow* 112

THE AXIOM OF CONSTRUCTIBILITY *by Blake Briol* 115

STATEMENT FROM ELIF HIDAYET AND GRAE ROEDER, *University of Minnesota*

Before October seventh, Gaza was home to twelve universities; as of the publication of this journal, none of them remain. As students at the University of Minnesota, we are privileged that our access to education–and therefore our access to historically Eurocentric knowledge production, dissemination, and validation–is not under threat. Although the concept of the University must itself be critically examined/decolonized, these institutions can still act as centers of political and social organization in the defense of human life. With the destruction of these institutions in Gaza, we are reminded of our responsibility and obligation to find in this privilege opportunities to assert the importance of human life and community, universities being an institution which ought to uphold this assertion.

Students at the University of Minnesota, alongside students at other universities, have come together this spring in protesting the ongoing genocide and occupation of Palestine by the Israeli government. The University of Minnesota has discouraged this activity by arresting their own students and forcibly taking down encampments. Administration has further avoided conversations surrounding the genocide, although after months of pressure, has finally offered to open up conversations with student groups on the condition that the encampment was taken down. Nonetheless, the University continues to avoid working with students towards a meaningful response to the atrocities in Gaza. As of now, the University has not recognized Israel's attacks as a genocide.

The authors of this paper stand in solidarity with Palestine and those around the world, both students and non-students, protesting the crimes of the Israeli government. We believe that the University of Minnesota has betrayed the values of free speech and free exchange of ideas that the system of the university purports to uphold. We further want to assert the responsibility of universities and their students to orient themselves against violations against human life, regardless of where in the world these infractions occur.

CONTRIBUTOR ESSAYS

ISOLATION, MOURNING, AND LOVE IN THE MELANCHOLIC CONDITION

by Bela Khanna, Haverford College

Abstract: The melancholic condition, historically documented in psychological and philosophical literature, comprises several seemingly disparate dispositional tendencies: withdrawal from social spaces, grand emotional and erotic gestures, and, perhaps most perplexing, prolific creative and intellectual work—the 'genius' that purportedly accompanies the condition. In this paper, I attempt to map the logical connections that bring these signs of melancholia together, beginning with *intellectual disjunction*, an altered system of understanding, which leads to *emotional disjunction*, an intense affective discomfort at their estrangement from the world of others that the melancholic experiences as loss. Finally, this state of mourning causes the melancholic to attempt to repair the severed bond between themself and the world through *acts of love*, construed broadly. Through a reading of several texts, from the ancient works of Aristotle and Avicenna on melancholia to Kay Jamison's 1993 *Touched With Fire* on the related manic-depressive condition, I connect several accounts of the 'heated' or manic phase of melancholia—the verbose, romantic, erotic, artistic, brilliant madness—as manifestations of the same desire to attach to the exterior in order to reorient the self. I argue that the melancholic treats the world apart from themself as a cathectic object in a bid to situate themselves in the exterior.

Among the many symptoms at issue in historical discourse surrounding the melancholic condition is an accompanying *intellectual madness*: a seemingly nonsensical or arbitrary basis for action that accompanies the affective character of the condition. Melancholia, from the Greek μέλαινας χολή,[1] encompasses a myriad of psychological symptoms depending on the condition of the black bile in the body, an excess of which was thought to cause melancholia. In the *Problemata*, Aristotle writes that the black bile "becomes both very hot and very cold,"[2] and that the cold phase of the condition constitutes "torpor or spiritlessness or fear," while the heated phase presents as "high-spiritedness with song, and insanity,"[3] an approximation of the modern psychological conception of mania. The heated or manic phase is also when madness most explicitly presents, as activity is heightened and the subject turns to the exterior, letting fly at the surrounding world with their words and actions; several early texts, including the *Problemata*, note that melancholic mania manifests most explicitly in the

[1] Aristotle, "The Problems," ed. David Mirhady, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 277.
[2] Aristotle, "The Problems," 285.
[3] Ibid., 285.

subject's interpersonal engagement, in that it produces great affection, generosity, and even lust toward others. The question at stake in this paper is precisely what produces these extraversions; I intend to draw out the causal connections between intellectual madness, emotional mania, and love and art, through a reading of several texts, from Aristotle and Avicenna to Kay Jamison's *Touched With Fire* (1993). I see all of the 'acts of love' described in the corpus—sex, love, and reproduction, but also craft, painting, even writing and conversing—as representative of the melancholic's desire to repair their severed emotional bond with the world of others that they feel, as a result of their intellectual disconnection, that they have lost.

The psychological alterity of the melancholic condition is the first step in explaining the melancholic subject's proclivity to produce outpourings of art, oratory, and love. Aristotle begins the relevant chapter of the *Problemata* with the question, "Why is it that all those men who have become extraordinary in philosophy, politics, poetry, or the arts are obviously melancholic[...]?"[4] The cultural perception that madness accompanies genius is a persistent one, but from the Aristotelian corpus to modern psychological texts, the condition has long been primarily associated with poor judgment, irrational behavior, and fallacious modes of understanding. Descriptions of these divergent intellectual modes often occur in the discourse in conjunction with normative statements, contrasting what is common in the melancholic condition with what is 'correct' or 'normal': Avicenna (980–1037 AD) describes "a greatness of fear of things which are not customarily feared"[5]; the *Problemata*, using the metaphor of wine, describes being "induced to kiss those whom, because of appearance or age, no one would kiss when sober"[6] in the heated phase of melancholia. The melancholic's behavior diverges

[4] Aristotle, "The Problems," 277.
[5] Avicenna, "On the Signs of Melancholy's Appearance," in *On Black Bile and Melancholy*. In *The Nature of Melancholy*, ed. Jennifer Radden, (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), ca. 1170–87.
[6] Aristotle, "The Problems," 281.

from what is customary or socially typical, a phenomenon that Jamison's discussion of related conditions of mania and 'madness' confirms millennia later:

> The reason I hadn't washed my clothes or my hair was because *it seemed so silly* [...] It seemed silly to wash one day when I would only have to wash again the next. It made me tired just to think of it.[7]
> One minute I was famous, successful, self-assured Harry Radcliffe in the trick store, looking for inspiration in a favorite spot. The next, I was quietly but very seriously mad, walking out of that shop with two hundred and fifty yellow pencil sharpeners.[8]

Whatever alteration of reasoning prevents Plath from thinking the way others do about hair-washing or laundry is analogous to what happens to Radcliffe to suddenly produce in him a conviction of his need for two hundred and fifty pencil sharpeners; both appear to be manifestations of the same psychological alterity that leads Aristotle's melancholic to kiss an unusual partner or Avicenna's to fear unlikely objects. These divergences of reason, e.g. resisting everyday chores or purchasing 250 pencil sharpeners in one go, are likely signals of the general dispositional issue at play in the melancholic temperament: large-scale systematic differences in understanding that sever the melancholic's connections to the people and world around them.

Disjunction from the dominant understanding positions the melancholic as socially marginal; as the sole proprietor of their frame of understanding, their psychology is unfettered and ungrounded—madness, relative to the norm. If melancholia blocks typical rational pathways and alters the melancholic's decision-making and knowledge formation, this may offer an important insight into the emotional consequences of melancholia, such that intellectual disjunction is a direct cause of the feelings of loneliness often reported in the canon surrounding the condition. Alone in their altered system of understanding, the melancholic often feels a complex of the intellectual and affective consequences of this isolation; author Edward Thomas writes, "there is nothing else in my world but

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[7] Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 142–143, my emphasis. In Kay Jamison, "Endless Night, Fierce Fires and Shramming Cold," *Touched With Fire*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 27.
[8] Jonathan Carroll, *Outside the Dog Museum*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 16–17, in Jamison, "Endless Night," 32.

my dead heart and brain within me and the rain without."[9] The world seems to begin and end with the melancholic themself, the exterior inaccessible and unwelcoming as a result of the psychological barriers removing the melancholic from the world of others. Jamison describes one result of this isolation, that melancholic individuals in the heated or 'manic' phase of the condition "usually have an inflated self-esteem, as well as a certainty of conviction about the correctness and importance of their ideas."[10] Alone in the world, so to speak, the melancholic is convinced of their own correctness without any existing frame against which to verify or disprove whatever thoughts and ideas they may have. This self-importance is most evident in the 'heated' phase of melancholia, which Jamison maps onto hypomania and mania in the modern context, in which the ancient literature reports an overflowing of "mad, clever [...] talkative" behavior and even what Aristotle describes as "diseases of madness or inspiration."[11] These episodes display the consequences of the melancholic's psychological isolation: that, ultimately, they find themself completely untethered from the shared reality of others.

In the pathway from intellectual madness to emotional discomfort, to its relief through acts of love, this is the next step: the melancholic is not simply confused or unsettled relative to the norm, but is in fact completely settled *in* their marginal position, certain of their situation as isolated and different. Having recognized themself as different, even as nominally *mad* in the way that Carroll's character does ("I was quietly but very seriously mad"[12]), the melancholic thus experiences an all-encompassing loss of the exterior world—a loss, as it were, of *everything*. Jamison describes this feeling as "the painful contrast between the subjective experience of an arid, sterile reality and a sense of the external world as an unobtainable, visible, but not [...] habitable place."[13] This particular orientation with regard to the outside world—that the melancholic is aware of it, but unable to partake of its

[9] Edward Thomas, *The Icknield Way,* (London: Constable, 1913), 280–283, in Jamison, "Endless Night," (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 24.
[10] Kay Jamison, "Endless Night, Fierce Fires and Shramming Cold," in *Touched With Fire*, 13.
[11] Aristotle, "The Problems," 287.
[12] Jonathan Carroll, *Outside the Dog Museum*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 16–17, in Jamison, "Endless Night," 32.
[13] Jamison, "Endless Night," in *Touched With Fire*, 21.

sociality and psychological unity—might be seen as the moment of parting, the divergence point at which the melancholic completely loses sight of the world of others. This final parting follows the initial intellectual divergence from normalcy, in which the melancholic at least recognizes themself as alter relative to an existing shared social context; now, though, the melancholic has lost sight of even the world that is lost to them. This distinction is, I think, the difference between a claim like Robert Lowell's, about the idea that evil stalks the mind of the poet—"that's a bad way to talk, but there's some truth in it"[14]—and Edward Thomas's sense that there is *nothing at all* in the world besides his "dead heart and brain within [...] and the rain without."[15] Lowell can recognize his truth as wrong relative to customary standards of good and bad ways to talk, even *good* and *bad* more broadly; his orientation relative to the world of others is just as Jamison describes—it is *there*, but not for him, entirely unattainable. By contrast, Thomas has passed by the state in which he can recognize those standards at all. Not only is the external world beyond him; it has passed beyond his sight, and there seems to be nothing where the world once was.

This disorientation leads the melancholic to a sense of abject solitude, having no way to orient themself relative to a world that no longer exists for them at all. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud draws a parallel between the grief that attaches to the melancholic condition and the grief experienced in the tangible loss of an object or a loved one:

> mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on. As an effect of the same influences, melancholia instead of a state of grief develops in some people.[16]

Freud notes that the loss experienced by the melancholic is difficult to perceive, and "seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that absorbs him so entirely"[17]; however, he also points out that

[14] Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell: A Biography*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1982), 351, in Jamison, "Endless Night," 12.
[15] Edward Thomas, *The Icknield Way,* (London: Constable, 1913), 280–283, in Jamison, "Endless Night," 24.
[16] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ed. Jennifer Radden, (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 283.
[17] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 285.

melancholia, like grief, is marked by an "abrogation of interest in the outside world"[18] even as "the exciting causes of melancholia are of a much wider range than those of grief."[19] This combination of signs—that melancholia presents as mourning without a concrete object, and that the melancholic condition appears to be excited by a range of causes in the world unlike the single inciting loss of mourning—suggests that it is the melancholic's constant, overwhelming, inevitable loss of the *whole world* and everything that exists outside of themself that places them in a perpetual state of grieving—"it [loss] is an element of every love-relation formed by this particular ego."[20] Jamison collects several examples of writers' feelings of loss, loneliness, and disconnection as a result of being always-already in the midst of mourning the world that retreats from their grasp:

> The dreadful sense of being alone in a universe.[21]
> Indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.[22]

This sense of being alone, untethered in an inhospitable universe, is an often-reported sign of the 'cold' or depressive phase of melancholia, wherein the subject is withdrawn from the world and overcome by grief and loss. Like the loss of a loved one, the recognition of their own marginality is a fresh and acute wound, leaving an emptiness that the melancholic individual may spend their life trying to fill. This tense balance between a feeling of loss and attempts to repair the broken bond between themself and the world mirrors the oscillation between cold and heat reported in the melancholic condition.

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[18] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 285.
[19] Ibid., 293.
[20] Ibid., 293.
[21] Hector Berlioz, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, trans. David Cairns (St. Albans, England: Granada, 1970), 142. In Jamison, "Endless Night," 19.
[22] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. T.J.B. Spencer (London: Penguin, 1980), act II, sc. 2, lines 295–303. In Jamison, "Endless Night," 20.

There are, cataloged in the literature, two patterns of positive action in the 'heated' or manic phase of the condition that signal the melancholic's attempts to relieve their emotional wound: by enthusiastically casting themselves into social relationships of various types, and through creative endeavors that produce prolific art, literature, and performance. In the second half of this paper, I intend to attempt to reconcile the two seemingly disparate methods of relief by showing that they are both methods by which an unstable subject can come to know and to see themself reflected in the world around them. Both interpersonal love and the production of creative works fall under a broader category that I am calling *acts of love*, outpourings of the self into the exterior in a bid to assimilate, and to be assimilated by, this world that seems so inaccessible and distant, in order to *feel* the pleasure than accompanies unity with a stable whole.

Freud notes that a direct consequence of the melancholic's loss of the world is that they seek wildly to reorient themself relative to the exterior: "for he runs after new object-cathexis like a starving man after bread."[23] This search for things to which the melancholic can attach themself manifests perhaps most visibly in romantic love, but the field of object-cathexis, to borrow Freud's language, is by no means limited to a human partner. Plato's *Symposium* addresses this need to recognize the self in the exterior:

> All of us are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul, and, as soon as we come to a certain age, we naturally desire to give birth.[24]
> Everyone [...] would look up to Homer, Hesiod, and the other good poets with envy and admiration for the offspring they have left behind—offspring, which, because they are immortal themselves, provide their parents with immortal glory and remembrance.[25]

While Diotima is telling Socrates about the desire for human children, she also notes that this desire is not one intrinsically tied to the children themselves, but rather a desire for the good that she claims is the driving force behind all love between individuals. Diotima defines love as "wanting to possess

[23] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 291.
[24] Plato, "Symposium," in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, D.S. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 206c.
[25] Plato, "Symposium," 209d.

the good forever," and the good as that which is "belonging to me"[26]; in other words, she claims that love represents a desire to lay claim to *something*, to express oneself externally through "giving birth in beauty"[27] to children but also to poetry or art. The acts of love she describes signal a desire to *exist* in a way that is visible, to make contact with the world in a substantive and lasting way in order to realize the self. Diotima says to Socrates that romantic love stems from this desire, for "when he [the lover] makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages."[28] Proximity to another person in *eros* permits the lover to project what is inside them onto the exterior, to birth, in a sense, that with which they have been thus far interminably pregnant.

In this way, it seems that the desire to love and be loved, and the desire to produce works of art or philosophy or science, are deeply connected. Loving others is a way to actualize what is in the self and needs to be seen and to be made real through contact with the exterior. This suggests that the condition of loss that the melancholic individual feels produces pressure or frustration, as they are unable to release or "birth" what is in them as a result of their isolation from others and the world. When the melancholic shifts toward a 'heated' symptomatology, a change often described as an "attack"[29] for its suddenness and unpredictability, we might construe this sudden alteration as a cracking or bursting forth of the building pressure of emotional 'pregnancy' that the melancholic must express externally.

This, then, explains why melancholic people gravitate toward and grasp onto others so intently, why they "run toward new object-cathexis" at all—because we all need things to be attached to in order to produce and to recognize ourselves, and the melancholic is uniquely positioned at the

[26] Plato, "Symposium," 206a.
[27] Ibid., 206b.
[28] Ibid., 209c.
[29] Jamison, "Endless Night," 28.

discursive and social fringes of society as particularly unable to do so. In states of mania, therefore, the melancholic is frantically reaching outward for confirmation of the self, driven to it by isolation. Robert Lowell, in a letter to T.S. Eliot, apologized and cited mania as a direct cause of his need to attach himself to Eliot: "I want to apologize for plaguing you with so many telephone calls last November and December. When the 'enthusiasm' is coming on me it is accompanied by a feverish reaching out to my friends."[30] Lowell, a poet who experienced manic episodes often accompanied by "aggressive pursuing of human contact,"[31] needed, it seems, a way to "conceive[...] and give birth"[32] to that which was inside him, even to himself, through self-affirming contact with his friends. It might be worth noting that, when Lowell's overenthusiasm backfired and resulted in embarrassment, he felt it as not only a blow to his ego, but as a reminder that "self-knowledge [comes] so slow, if at all."[33] After each failed attempt Lowell is reminded again that the relief from isolation, which comes from ecstatic contact with the exterior, is temporary, and does not efface his psychological marginality. The cycle continues unabated, and the melancholic continues to oscillate between withdrawn solitude and feverish extraversions.

Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades, a sort of inverted version of this assimilation, demonstrates how a close relationship with one person who exists in a different system than oneself can allow one to assimilate into the other, gaining access in a sense to their beloved's entire world. In this way, love can allow anyone to orient themself to the world of their beloved; if that beloved exists in a common or dominant context—that which we have said the melancholic feels that everyone but themself has access to—then the lover may find themself suddenly situated comfortably in a common, stable, and recognizable space. If the beloved is, on the other hand, a melancholic themself, like

[30] Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 307, in Jamison, "Endless Night," 32.
[31] Jamison, "Endless Night," 32.
[32] Plato, "Symposium," 209c.
[33] Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 286, in Jamison, "Endless Night," 32.

Socrates, then the lover may find themself with open access to an entirely new, unfamiliar, and largely unknown world: the world that previously existed only in their beloved's head. This is what happens to Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, who deeply emotionally attached to Socrates as a result of everything that Socrates' mind offers him in terms of broadening his understanding:

> He always traps me, you see, and he makes me admit that my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I most neglect [...] So I refuse to listen to him; I stop my ears and tear myself away from him, for, like the Sirens, he could make me stay by his side till I die.[34]

Socrates is able to turn Alcibiades' values, biases, and truths on their heads, offering him a system of understanding entirely distinct from his own that illuminates and threatens Alcibiades' way of life. While Alcibiades is perhaps overtly a more conventional member of society, he has grown, it seems, addicted to the constant destabilization of those conventions that results from his contact with Socrates. This example demonstrates the function of romantic love in permitting the lover to come to a self-actualization through the eyes of their beloved; Alcibiades knows himself—his career, his values—*differently* as a result of his relationship with Socrates. This is unsettling to Alcibiades because the understanding that Socrates offers him is marginal relative to dominant systems of understanding—that which, one can assume, produced Alcibiades' politics in the first place and differs significantly from Socrates' assessment of "all that matters". For the melancholic, however, this method of access to the 'normal' context can be a powerful way to alleviate the mourning and discomfort associated with their prior disjunction from that context. As Diotima says to Socrates, the lover "loves just what he needs and does not have"[35] and desires "that they become his own"[36]; Alcibiades craves access to alterity and thus becomes attached to Socrates. But by loving someone comfortably situated in a dominant context, the melancholic is able to assimilate the world into

[34] Plato, "Symposium," 216a.
[35] Ibid., 201b.
[36] Ibid., 204e.

themselves and conversely to assimilate themselves into the world, healing their isolation and orienting them in the world that, previously, they had lost.

In this way, we can understand romantic love somewhat paradoxically as a giving away of the self to the other in order to regain the self; the necessity of externalizing one's self in order to recognize it is visible in the alternative 'acts of love' described in the *Symposium* and *Touched With Fire*. Extensive conversation with others, but also writing, painting, translating, and so many other extraverted acts of production are, I believe, similar both in intent and in effect to romantic love, in that they are all bids to be known externally in order for the melancholic to know themselves. In *Touched With Fire*, Lowell's mania is described as a slipping-into other people, signaling a desire to concretize his own identity:

> He writes and revises translations furiously and with a kind [of] crooked brilliance, and talks about himself in connection with Achilles, Alexander, Hart Crane, Hitler, and Christ, and breaks your heart.[37]

By 'entering' in a sense all of these real other people, Lowell slips in and out of understanding himself through the exterior; if he could just know himself as Achilles, as Alexander, as Christ, then perhaps he could feel himself a part of history, of the world, of the collective understanding. In this way, writing and translating text here are urges toward orientation into the dominant historical and social discourse. Jamison notes the power of crafts like these in that madness/sanity can completely hinge on their execution: "before your eyes the man recited and sang himself in and out of madness."[38] Even Socrates, often described in relation to his silent contemplation and intellectual solitude, makes a similar bid in the *Symposium* when he stays up all night, drinking and monologuing on the virtues of the versatile writer to Agathon and Aristophanes.[39] This is a more clearly visible example, as Socrates is evidently attempting to be understood by people who are physically in front of him, but this is the same sort of artistic production as Lowell's writing, simply in a different medium. Both are pouring

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[37] Hamilton, *Robert Lowell*, 285, in Jamison, "Endless Night," 29.
[38] Saul Bellow, *Humboldt's Gift* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1976), 29–31. In Jamison, "Endless Night," 30.
[39] Plato, "Symposium," 223d.

themselves out into the world in a bid to be taken up by those around them, understood, seen, and known. In describing an attack of mania in writer Virginia Woolf, her husband Leonard Woolf describes her condition as feverishly expressive, an immense urge to externalize the prolific contents of her thought:

> She talked almost without stopping for two or three days, paying no attention to anyone in the room or anything said to her. [...] it was nearly all wildly insane.[40]

In these examples and countless others, the melancholic subjects seek to 'birth' the contents of their interior selves with the goal of stabilizing their otherwise untethered selves. For this reason, I see Aristotle's initial question in the *Problemata*—"Why is it that all those men who have become extraordinary in philosophy, politics, poetry, or the arts are obviously melancholic[...]?"[41]—finding its answer in the so-called heated phase of the condition, in which the subject reorients themself in a stable world by way of self-expression, relieving the solitude and disconnection they feel.

By understanding the melancholic condition as a marginal position relative to a social world that is participatory, discursive, and fundamentally a way of understanding the self, I have attempted in this paper to explain the affective distress of the melancholic condition as a state of *loss* of this world, projected inward onto the self. This loss begins with a purely intellectual alterity and, through the operations of emotional discomfort, leads melancholic individuals to give themselves away, via romance and *eros* but also the expressive intellectual arts, to the exterior in a bid to be understood and thus to understand themselves. Perhaps the melancholic condition can provide a broader insight into the conditions under which we all understand ourselves: that is, through one another. In this way, marginalization of all sorts is not simply an issue of social dynamics *between* us, but one with deep

[40] Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911–1918* (New York: Harcourt, 1964), 172–173. In Jamison, "Endless Night," 29–30.
[41] Aristotle, *The Problems*, 277.

psychological and emotional effects *within* us—and it is only through our reciprocal engagements with one another that we can come to relieve the discomfort of isolation and to know ourselves.

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ON LOVING THE UNKNOWABLE

by Zuha Zubair, St. Catherine University

Abstract: My thesis for this paper is that the basis of love is accepting our limits in knowledge about ourselves and those we love. Based on the aforementioned assertion, I will work to elucidate the natures of two particular components of love as described by love theorists, responsibility and care. The starting point of this paper is "All About Love" by bell hooks. I begin with a cursory discussion of love, delving into an analysis of its nature, foundation, and origin in the human condition. Then, I explain Simone de Beauvoir's ethics of reciprocity. I engage in this inquiry, hoping to ascertain why love may or may not be a choice, and why it may or may not be temporal.

bell hooks opens her book "All About Love" with a preface calling for a return to love, that when we return to love, "we can let our hearts speak."[1] She so strongly advocates for a return to love, because she was robbed of it as she grew older, but more broadly because she observes a sense of lovelessness in society. Throughout the book, hooks cites others testifying to a new era of lovelessness, writers expressing fears of the new generation being raised to be afraid of the risk of loving, as well as artists and young women who express disillusionment with love and relationships. Everyone seems to be thinking about love, but appear to also be allergic to it. Yet an allergy to love is detrimental to us, because according to hooks, part of the benefit of love is a sense of authenticity, gaining the ability to testify about what lies inside us. We all want to be able to testify to ourselves, and authenticity is highly valued in an individualistic culture such as ours. However, as myself a member of a generation after the generation that was raised in an era of lovelessness, loving, at times, feels quite foreign. What is love, and what does it feel like? Opening up to the prospect of being loving or facing the risk of love is beyond the faculties of a loveless society, when what love actually is, is quite elusive. I argue that Simone de Beauvoir's ethic of reciprocity, where we recognize the limits of our knowledge about ourselves and those we love, is an important basis of how love functions. I will elaborate on what

[1] bell hooks, *All About Love*, (William Morrow, 2001), xi.

implications the ethic of reciprocity has for components of love and loving actions that love theorists such as hooks write about. So, let us contemplate, before returning to love, about what love is.

hooks opens her first chapter, "Clarity: Give Love Words", by discussing the disconnect between men and women regarding love; the men in her life use the word sparingly and think that women make too much of love. Different people, and in this case, the different genders, have different understandings of love, contributing to "difficulty in loving." She argues that if society had a shared understanding of love, loving would not be so "mystifying."[2] Essentially, there being varying definitions of love, contributes to the elusiveness of love, and therefore, makes it difficult to engage in. Because we don't know exactly what love is, we struggle to know how to act lovingly, and because we have differing definitions of what love is, we don't love each other in ways we understand. Lacking a definition of love also provides the space for people to claim they love you when they act in ways that may be considered unloving. However, while it is true that defining love would make loving easier, it is not a plausible solution.

It is impractical to seek to define love, particularly in an individualistic and pluralistic society like ours, because agreed-upon definitions are not the norm, especially regarding emotions. It is not feasible to establish a universal, or even societal, definition of an emotion, and get everyone to engage with one another as if they are in agreement. In the case of hooks' theory of love, she argues that love is not an emotion, but an action. Her argument itself is an example of the eternal struggle to define love, we can't even settle on if it's an emotion or an action. Instead, we must discover ways to love while respecting our different beliefs and approaches to love.

Additionally, if we settle on only one conception of love, we may come to a definition that ultimately designates some people incapable of love. Some cases of individuals barred from love based on certain definitions would be those who are neurodivergent; individuals with mental illnesses and

[2] hooks, *All About Love*.

developmental disabilities, such as Autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or cluster B personality disorders, such as Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), and Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD). NPD is a notable example because individuals with the disorder are characterized as having a lack of empathy, as well as seeking out people and relationships to obtain a *supply* of admiration and validation. In the case of someone with NPD, they may treat someone kindly or lovingly out of a desire or need for supply. One may recognize that the loving actions of someone with NPD would not fit many of the definitions of love we come across in society, and so, they are an example of those barred from love. An inquiry into love and neurodivergence open up a new conversation that will not be delved into this paper, such as, should it simply be accepted that some people are barred from love, or that as neurodivergence implies, that there is perhaps divergence in the fashions of love as well.

Recognizing that some people cannot love, not necessarily for eternity but even for bouts of time, would likely be a positive recognition by hooks' standards. As mentioned earlier, according to hooks, love is not an emotion; it is an action.[3] She claims that the emotion we talk about when we say we feel love is actually cathexis, a sense of emotional attachment. The distinction between love and cathexis, according to hooks, is that love is an action that can not coexist with hurting and neglecting. So, if someone says they love you, yet they hurt or neglect you, they are simply talking about the emotional attachment referred to as cathexis.

hooks describes in passing what makes up the experience of genuine love: "a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect."[4] Because love is defined as actions of particular qualities, some actions can also be described as unloving. If a person does not act according to a concept of loving action, then they are incapable, for that moment in time, of being

[3] hooks, *All About Love*, 4-5.
[4] Ibid., 7-8.

loving. This ascription of loving or unloving action is essential to the world of hooks because it makes it so that people who harm us cannot say they love us. However, I would argue that we have many ways in which we can try to explain the emotional states of people who hurt us when they say they love us; "you do not love me, you love the idea of me," or simply, "you do not love me, you are just attached to me," and so it becomes evident, especially the second example of "not love but attachment" that not only do we as a society have a common understanding of the idea that love *is* an emotion, but that love is distinct from an emotion like cathexis. Because we have tools to debate the claims of those who harm us about loving us, even without redefining love from being an emotion to being an action, I question hooks' fixation on redefining love as an action.

I argue that it is not love that makes a healthy functioning relationship. My position may seem to be in contradiction with hooks, but in reality is compatible with her view, because I conceptualized love as what she conceptualizes cathexis. What makes a relationship work are components such as communication, respect, care, etc. My practical alignment with hooks demonstrates, in a sense, the unnecessariness of hooks' semantic task of redefining love. Nonetheless, her reframing *can* have utility in its brevity, where we understand love as a simple umbrella term for all the behaviors that may construct a healthy relationship.

Now that the differences between hooks and I's definition of love have been established, I seek to work on the project of love with her. Whether the reader holds my definition of healthy (or loving, as perhaps hooks would put it) relationships, where we must be communicative, respectful, etc., or holds hooks conception of loving actions, we must ask, what is the origin or root of loving action? We choose to act lovingly, but we cannot decide to do that for just *anybody*, at least not for long. It is challenging to pinpoint what hooks thought the basis of loving action may have been. Perhaps it is being the intentional object of cathexis that makes one eligible to be the receiver of loving action. Not everyone who feels cathexis will act out of loving action, but you will be more capable of

it if you feel cathexis than if you feel nothing towards someone. However, many who feel love or cathexis may act lovingly, but that feeling may be too short-lived, bordering on infatuation.

hooks references psychoanalyst Erich Fromm on multiple occasions throughout her book, and his conception of love seems similar to her passing description of the components of love. Those components are knowledge, respect, responsibility, and care; in that particular order, the preceding element is needed for the one after it.[5] You can only respect someone if you know who you are respecting. If you don't know who you are respecting, you may be respecting someone else, a concept of them that is simply not them. Additionally, Fromm elects to explain respect using its etymological root, *respicere*, which means, "to look at." He emphasizes respect as recognizing someone as they are. He explains that respect also requires independence, where one does not have to exploit or dominate someone else to compensate for their own weakness. I would add that for one to have their own independence, knowledge of oneself is also needed. Continuing through Fromm's components of love, respect is needed to temper responsibility, otherwise it will infringe on people's personhood, becoming controlling. Caring for someone may take some sense of responsibility; as Fromm wrote, "Love is the active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love."[6] hooks also specifically described love as having to do with the spiritual growth of another. Nonetheless, all these components still have each of their implications.

When a parent holds their baby, they feel love for it; in a sense, there is not much to know about a baby other than that it is a being which you care for. As children grow older, they become human beings with complex selves, and their parents have the choice of their knowledge of their child merely being, "This is my child," or "This is who this human being is." Parents usually love their babies, but when they get older, do they love their child, or do they also love the person that their

[5] hooks, *All About Love*, 54.
[6] Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 26.

child is? What if they love their baby, but as they get to know their child as an individual with their own distinct identity, the parent discovers they do not respect them? There is complexity even to the basis of our love, this basis possibly being knowledge itself.

On the subject of knowledge of the self and the other, Ellie Anderson analyzes Simone de Beauvoir's ethics of reciprocity, focusing on the epistemic gap between the self and the other, in her paper, "The Other (Woman): Limits of Knowledge in Beauvoir's Ethics of Reciprocity". Engaging with Beauvoir's work is crucial as she delves into the nature of what knowledge is in ethical relationships. Existential philosophy recognizes that we often find ourselves perceiving those outside us as "others" or objects and ourselves as subjects. Subjects perceive the world, and the world is made up of objects. However, recognizing the consciousness of another threatens our self-perception of being subjects, of being the sole conscious. When we start to recognize the subjectivity of another, the potential that we may be an object becomes more and more apparent to us. Awareness of another's subjectivity feeds into a drive to kill the other to protect our perception of being subjects, not mere objects. In romantic relationships, we may attempt to temper the conflict between ourselves and the other through a conflation of the self that results from intimacy through repeated union, sexually, intellectually, and merely sharing about our daily lives, hoping to become subjects, perceivers, together. In a sense, seeking to become one with another is an attempt to kill the self in the other that has the potential to threaten our selfhood. However, the idea of creating a shared selfhood is a misguided solution to the subjectivity of the other and the objectivity of ourselves, because it rids us of our selfhood as well.

According to Beauvoir as explained by Anderson, the killing of the self has often been more prominently found in women in heterosexual relationships, where the men may still have more of

their distinct selves, with their own futures and ambitions.[7] Women will be found thinking of "our future" or "our ideas," unifying themselves with their partner. Nonetheless Anderson informs us that Beauvoir recognizes the so-called unification of selves between men and women to not be equal. Although it is not equal, it is to be understood that men also experience this killing of the self to some degree, perhaps evidenced in the modern day by sentiments in which they view their wives as a "ball and chain," and if not that, merely the fact that some men do fall into more "We" thinking. However, the diminished occurrence of killing the self in men as compared to women may explain why men more often may fail to understand why women are so hurt by a lack of autonomy even when the lack of autonomy appears "good." Because the experience of men is the integration of the self of the other into a more unified self but still having their own self to some degree, it may be more difficult to empathize with a sense of internal and external othering so acute. These inequalities in the unification process are the result of the oppression of women, or a part of the oppression of women itself.

The recognition of the self-consciousness of another can temper the desire to "possess the other or force the other into a relation of supposed epistemic transparency."[8] True epistemic transparency is not wholly possible, but we desire it so that we may believe our consciousness is combined with that of another, so we do not have to contend that they may also perceive us as the other, threatening our subjectivity. Beauvoir has her own concept of genuine love: the mutual recognition of each other's and one's own simultaneous selfhood and otherness. There is a sense of risk in love because the lover may recognize your self-consciousness, or they may attempt to integrate you into themselves, attempt to possess you; in a sense, they are attempting to kill your self. The erotic is a poignant example of a challenging exercise in balancing viewing oneself as both a self and an other;

[7] Ellie Anderson, "The Other (Woman): Limits of Knowledge in Beauvoir's Ethics of Reciprocity," Journal of Speculative Philosophy, no. 3 (2014): 384.
[8] Anderson, "The Other (Woman)," 6.

"in it they are aware of themselves as flesh and as spirit, as the other and as subject."[9] However, according to Beauvoir as explained by Anderson, because there is no "guarantee of mutual recognition between lovers," reciprocity often fails to occur in erotic engagements.

Reciprocity has much to do with recognizing how unlike us the other is, not losing our self to them, or treating them as though they are a copy of ourselves. Furthermore, according to Beauvoir, as explained by Anderson, we cannot recognize the self in the other, or even fully understand the other itself, because self-knowledge is not possible. We have epistemic opacity; we do not have all the information about ourselves or how we function. If nobody has all the information about themselves, then how can someone outside them fully have the information about them either? Not only that, but we can, at times, have revelations through being perceived as an other by another, which evidences our lack of self-knowledge. We experience the world as subjects, but at the same time, we also view ourselves as the other to the degree that we are elusive to ourselves.

Human subjects are never entirely self-transparent, and so reciprocity requires recognizing the "otherness of the other, the otherness of myself, and the otherness of the other within him- or herself."[10] Being able to recognize the alterity and self-consciousness of another requires a sense of internal honesty. If we feed into the myth of the shared consciousness, we will yet again fail to recognize the "alterity of the other."[11] In chapter 3 of "All About Love", titled "Honesty: Be True to Love", hooks opens by describing justice as seeing "the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be."[12] So, that is honesty in how we perceive the world and, by extension, how we perceive others. Recognizing the alterity of the other is a form of justice; we are recognizing the world for what it is and seeing the freedom that those we love have. But how about honesty regarding ourselves?

[9] Simone de Beauvoir, in Anderson, "The Other (Woman)."
[10] Anderson, "The Other (Woman)," 8.
[11] Ibid., 1.
[12] hooks, *All About Love*, 33.

Beauvoir also claims epistemic transparency is impossible, for one, because we are epistemically opaque, but also because epistemic transparency is an attempt at possessing the other through establishing a shared consciousness.

Thus, according to Beauvoir, as explained by Anderson, we cannot ever truly know someone; we only move towards them.[13] Connecting Beauvoir's ideas with Fromm's, recognizing our incapacity to know someone or ourselves ties in with respect. First, we know of our lack of knowledge and move towards the other. Recognizing the other's alterity, their otherness, and distinctiveness from ourselves is essential to recognizing their self-consciousness. It is difficult for us to recognize that an other has their own distinct self-consciousness if we think we *share* a consciousness. Moreover, recognizing the reciprocal simultaneous self-consciousness and otherness of another and ourselves is essential to respect. However, how does this conception of knowledge and respect play into responsibility and care?

Beauvoir argues that we cannot act for others or create their freedom. However, we are responsible in the sense that "my actions produce the conditions within which the other acts."[14] Beauvoir's conception of responsibility concerns society in general, not only romantic relationships. Nonetheless, her conception of responsibility possibly challenges Fromm's and hooks's conceptions of love. As mentioned earlier, Fromm's conception of care in love has to do with a sense of concern for the life and growth of another. At the same time, hooks defines *love* as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth."[15] This sense of concern or self-extension for the sake of another's growth runs the risk of acting for others. Attempting to act for others is attempting to have power over them, to combine consciousnesses. bell hooks continues

[13] Anderson, "The Other (Woman)," 6.
[14] Debra Bergoffen and Megan Burke, "Simone de Beauvoir," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodleman, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2023.
[15] M. Scott Peck, in hooks, *All About Love*, 92.

her chapter on honesty by discussing how men often start lying to garner power but also learn to lie to protect their mothers. Even protection has to do with power. The lies are made to control the suffering of those we love; to prevent it is an act of power. However, this sense of controlling suffering does not end the oppression that originates it; as Beauvoir argues, we cannot act for others; we are only responsible for the conditions they act according to.

In her chapter on honesty, hooks discusses how men's estrangement from their feelings leads to an inability to assume responsibility for causing pain.[16] Of course, this sense of estrangement is not unique to men but perhaps common to them. It can be understood that if and when people are unaware of their feelings, they manufacture ones they do not have, which are lies. So they build themselves up on lies, justification on justification, supporting hooks' first point of injustice as making the world the way one wants it to be rather than the way it is. In a sense, one gains power by disassociating from themselves. However, this sense of self-disassociation is quite native to Beauvoir's understanding of epistemic opacity. The crux of the issue hooks describes is not necessarily that men do not know how they feel, but rather that they do not hold themselves responsible for how they impact the world of others through an extreme form of responsibility. Extreme forms of responsibility broach respect because extreme responsibility does not recognize alterity. By disassociating from their subjectivity and emotions, they seek to diminish their alterity with those they love, their partners and children. Emotions or subjectivity are viewed as barriers to existing for their loved ones. However, by doing so, they developed a diminished capacity for recognizing how their actions impact the lives of others. Their focus on acting for others eclipses their awareness of how their actions produce the conditions for the actions of others; it is de-autonomizing.

[16] hooks, *All About Love*, 39.

hooks elaborates that women also lie, but in a manner different to men in which they pretend to feel vulnerability and neediness.[17] She explains that women are motivated to act in this manner for the sake of getting what they think they deserve from men. Once again, both men and women do this. However, I argue that women's motivation more often may be a legitimate fear of how men may react when they do not give them vulnerability and neediness, the manifestations of dependence which they expect and want from women. Women pretending to feel vulnerability and neediness is, to some degree, women existing and acting for the sake of men; it is intentional objectification for the sake of survival. Of course, this detrimentally impacts the lives of men who do not instill this fear but are in relations with women who had this fear instilled into them by patriarchy. One must reflect on the case of women putting on a front of vulnerability has to do with power on the part of women, or if it is power on the part of men in which women work to create a reality that the men would so desire. Perhaps in traditional conceptions of heterosexual relationships, men are the actors, and women are the receivers. Men act on behalf of women, and women act as tantamount to objects, acting with a deep awareness of how their actions shape the conditions for the actions of the men in their lives.

Shifting our lens from responsibility to care, the growth of another is inherently tied to care for both hooks and Fromm. I argue that growth is tied to freedom (growing into having freedom). It appears that we cannot act on behalf of others for them to grow into freedom. Instead, our foremost responsibility to those we love must be to act from an ethic of reciprocity, to be deeply aware of the alterity between ourselves and the other. Growth comes about when we can hold all together true, the otherness of another, the otherness of ourselves, and the otherness of the other within another. This awareness is needed for just action so we do not act on behalf of the other, yet still hold ourselves responsible for the conditions to which they act according to. Only then, perhaps, will a significant act of care no longer entail reducing oneself to a component in a combined "We."

[17] hooks, *All About Love*, 43.

We have engaged in all this discussion about the nature and the basis of healthy love, but hooks remains fixated on the idea that love is an action, a choice. She opens her chapter titled "Romance: Sweet Love", by discussing how Toni Morrison describes romantic love as a destructive idea, elaborating that it is destructive due to the belief that we cannot choose who we love.[18] Later, hooks discusses the idea of psychiatrist Scott Peck, who claims that reducing love to a feeling makes it so that love is a finicky emotion that can come and go. However, hooks acknowledges the existence of temporal love, writing about periodic heart and soul connections; how is this reconciled with Morrison's and Peck's conceptions that she brings up?

So, we must ask, now that we have established what love is, what does it mean to choose to love? I wonder if hooks does not mean that we can choose to love just anybody but that we have to choose to love someone we *can* love. We cannot just love anybody, but we can choose to love nobody. It can be speculated that this may perhaps be what hooks is trying to communicate, based on how she writes, "No matter how often we turn our minds and hearts away—or how stubbornly we refuse to believe in its magic—true love exists."[19] What hooks is talking about is turning away from love, not lovelessness. It is when we see love in front of us and say, "No, not for me, it does not exist."

Early on, hooks tells us that love is a verb; it is an action. Eventually, she brings up Scott Peck's claims that love is not just an emotion but an action that persists.[20] However, in her chapter on romance, hooks introduces *temporal love*, love that is over after some time. But why would love ever be over if it is a choice? If there is someone who you are able to love, who you have a soul connection with, why wouldn't you choose to keep on loving them? Initially, there is an apparent contradiction between saying love is an action and saying it is temporal; however, nearing the end of my inquiry, it becomes clear that love is a challenging action to engage in and that it *is* temporal. Engaging in an

[18] hooks, *All About Love*, 170.
[19] Ibid., 197.
[20] Ibid., 171-172.

ethic of reciprocity is a deep struggle, and simultaneously recognizing the otherness in the other, the otherness in ourselves, and the otherness of the other within another will perhaps only occur sometimes in all our moments of effort. Perhaps hooks' exploration of the ideas of psychologist and psychiatrist John Welwood can also help elaborate on the exercise of love. According to Welwood, as hooks explains, soul connections are bonds that form with people whether we like others or not, which, in my view, is dangerously close to the image of a destructive form of emotional love, cathexis, that hooks paints for us. It is possible that, in Beauvoir's view, a soul connection could be the recognition of the self-consciousness of another. Nevertheless, the concept of soul connections does clarify that hooks did believe that we *can* only love those we have involuntary soul connections with, but that we must *decide* to love them.

It is still difficult to accept that, while one may concede that love can be temporal through an ethic of reciprocity, it can still be justified to end the lifelong project of loving someone. When and why could it ever be so? If we have a soul connection, why should we not persevere in the labor of love? Perhaps it all comes back to recognizing the otherness in all parties. I am a subject, but I am also other to myself; I am an object in my life that shapes the conditions to which I act according to. There are two layers to love; one is the involuntary soul connections, in Beauvoir's conception, an involuntary recognition of the self-consciousness of the other. Then, the second layer to love is to make the decision to not attempt to kill the self of the other, and instead recognize the other in all. It is not seeing the self-consciousness in another that is a choice; it is the decision not to annihilate it, which is a choice. By being other to ourselves, lacking epistemic opacity, and hence lacking epistemic transparency, we are incapable of having complete control over recognizing the self-consciousness of another. Most seem like mere others; some begin to threaten our sense of self-consciousness by becoming increasingly apparent to us.

My inquiry throughout this paper seeks to discern the nature of love, how we can speak about it with one another when we don't have agreed-upon definitions, and how recognizing alterity between ourselves and those we love can set the foundation for an ethical practice of love. By bringing the ideas of hooks, the writers she references, and Beauvoir's ideas into conversation, I demonstrate that we can have fruitful discussions about love without having agreed-upon definitions. Love theorists describe components of love, such as supporting the growth of another and caring for another, and considering Beauvoir's ethic of reciprocity tempers these components of love so that we do not engulf or harm those we love, as perhaps is the human reflex, to subsume and rid subjectivity in the other. Theorists like hooks deeply value knowing oneself to interact with the world as it is, but Beauvoir offers an alternative, where we may seek to interact with the world as it is by acknowledging that we do not know. Something both hooks and Beauvoir agree on is that there is a component to love that is not in our control. The soul connection is involuntary, noticing the subjectivity in the other is involuntary; but we choose to turn towards love when we see it, we decide not to annihilate the other when we start to recognize their subjectivity. Not attempting to annihilate the other but instead accepting the otherness in all, knowing that we can never truly know them, and acting with responsibility for how we shape the conditions of the other, are the ultimate choices of love.

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A KIERKEGAARDIAN CRITIQUE OF MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL REFLECTION

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Abstract: This paper explores Merleau-Ponty's "Phenomenology of Perception," which critiques the dominance of objective thought in understanding phenomena. Despite dismissing objective thought in favor of pre-objective experiences, Merleau-Ponty paradoxically relies on objectifying methods to universalize phenomenology as the supreme reflective philosophy. The paper argues that this reliance on abstract ideas and empirical evidence introduces a threat to phenomenology's goal of removing abstract objective thought from reflective philosophies. The paper then scrutinizes Merleau-Ponty's reliance on empirical studies to support his philosophy, particularly in establishing the "habitual body." It argues that this dependence on external evidence contradicts his emphasis on primacy of personal embodied experience, leading to inaccuracies in his reflections on the body. Unlike the empirical data Merleau-Ponty relies on to establish his notion of the "habitual body," modern empirical findings, especially in newborn imitation studies, challenge Merleau-Ponty's conclusions. Finally, drawing on Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian philosophy, the paper questions the ability of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, as a philosophy that relies on "authentic reflection," to answer whether it is possible to capture the subjective, pre-reflective nature of human experience in a universalizable manner. The paper concludes that Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception, despite challenging objective thought, succumbs to objectifying methods.

I) INTRODUCTION

In his work *Phenomenology Of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty investigates the validity of what Kierkegaard would call "objective thought," namely the scientific/objectivist approach to perception, that encompasses empiricist and intellectualist viewpoints.[1] Throughout the text, objective thought is consistently dismissed in favor of the subject's pre-objective experience, aiming to provide a more concrete account of phenomena. However, driven by the purpose to universalize phenomenology as the supreme reflective philosophy, Merleau-Ponty occasionally resorts to objectifying abstract thoughts or methods that he simultaneously criticizes in the text. This is especially evident in his establishment of the "impersonal/anonymous" pre-reflective body as a phenomenological truth, since for its establishment he contradictorily relies on objectifying empirical evidence. Additionally, his

[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* (Routledge eBooks, 2002), 82.

attempt to ground his phenomenology in a verbal medium restricts his depiction of the phenomenal field to a composition of abstract ideas, a limitation he claims to transcend through "authentic reflection." In this paper, I argue that Kierkegaard's critique that any objectifying reflective philosophical system fails to grasp or fully explain phenomena is one that also applies to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological "authentic reflection." Furthermore, I contend that Merleau-Ponty's reliance on empirical studies of his time in order to provide objective evidence for his philosophy led to inaccuracies in his "authentically" reflected account of the body. To address this issue, I will begin by clarifying Merleau-Ponty's critique of objective thought and his proposed resolution to prevent the abstract knowledge obtained through objective accounts. Subsequently, I will delineate how Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* is vulnerable to Kierkegaard's critique of universal philosophical systems such as science. Following this, I will examine Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "habitual body" as an instance wherein he relies on abstract objectifying conclusions derived from the scientific account, despite critiquing such methodologies within the text. Ultimately, I will draw upon these analyses to conclude that Merleau-Ponty fails to establish his phenomenology as the supreme reflective philosophy since its "authentic reflections" rely on other objective accounts; therefore, its aim to become a reflective intersubjective system of philosophy is contradictory to its goal of prioritizing the pre-objective and pre-reflective experience of the subject.

II) OBJECTIVE THOUGHT PRESENT IN THE SCIENTIFIC ACCOUNT OF PHENOMENA

Merleau-Ponty posits that the objective thought used to understand the world, e.g., the scientific account, can only be formed via the reduction of the subject's lived experience.[2] This posting becomes clearer in an analogy: sheets of music cannot exist without the experience of music. If music itself was never experienced, sheets of music are meaningless entities; however, music as an experience

[2] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 62.

is possible even without sheet music. In this sense, it is inferred that sheet music emerges from experienced music and not the other way around; the subjective experience gives life to the objective account of experience. However, the scientific account mistakenly takes the objective perspective as the starting point when attempting to explain phenomena. As Merleau-Ponty observes, "it conceals rather than reveals subjectivity."

In the scientific explanation of phenomena, the subject, i.e., the for-itself, is just another object to be described among all other objects, i.e., the in-itself, and the primacy of the subject's concrete embodied perception is ignored in favor of abstract scientific objectivism. Consequently, attempting to explicate all worldly phenomena exclusively through the lens of objectivity is comparable to someone attempting to articulate the intricacies of music solely through the medium of sheet music. It becomes evident that genuine music transcends the limitations of these sheets, given that the ineffable subjective experience of music encompasses elements that surpass the expressive capacity of musical notation. For example, music can have players and each player usually has a unique way they handle their instrument; one of the instruments may have “damage” that will cause it to produce unorthodox sounds that will give birth to a musical experience that a sheet can never capture. Understanding this music is exclusive to the particular subject experiencing it through their own body present in the concert hall.

Science presupposes *deafness* while trying to explain music since science needs an objective standard to express itself which it only finds in *universal deafness*. As far as science is concerned nobody can *experience* the music according to a standard due to its subjective nature while everybody can read and *understand* the sheet music due to their universality. This reduction allows the scientific account to be objective and universalized, but it overlooks a crucial essence of the phenomenon, i.e., the music itself, which is present only in the particular subject. According to Merleau-Ponty, in explaining phenomena, science reduces behavior to third-person processes, experience to physical nature, and

the living body into an object without an interior. For instance, he notes that within the field of science, "the emotional and practical attitudes of the living subject [are]... incorporated into a psycho-physiological mechanism." [3] The scientific account can be understood as a musical sheet that tries to explain what it has already been abstracted from, which is the music perceived by the subject; consequently the scientific account fails to fully account for the phenomena as it leaves out the perceiving subject's pre-objective experience. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, perception is not science " but conversely that classical science is a form of perception which loses sight of its origins and believes itself complete." [4]

III) THE PHENOMENAL FIELD

The phenomenal field emerges as the concrete antithesis to the abstract reductionist understanding of the world upon which the scientific account relies. According to Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenal field is simply the experience of the world as it appears to the perceiving subject.[5] While the concept of a phenomenal field can be outlined objectively, its contents remain the subject's unique, pre-objectified and ineffable experiences. The phenomenal field, unlike science, is explored through the subjective lens. The unreflected subjective experiences that form its contents are inaccessible to the objective world and others since they are the world as it is experienced by the subject. However, they are also somewhat ungraspable by the subject, since for the subject to grasp the experience they need to first reflect on the experience which gets disturbed through this reflection. The subject participates in the phenomenal field concretely and grasps the experience only in this sense; they cannot grasp experience abstractly through reflective objective thought. For instance, when the subject verbalizes their experiences, they confine their perception within the boundaries of words. The phenomenal field is pre-reflective and hence pre-personal. Any reflection, including self reflection,

[3] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 64.
[4] Ibid., 66.
[5] Ibid., 239.

disturbs the experience since reflection is always external to the experience. Analogously, lightwaves used to observe electrons alter the electron by interacting because the electrons are small enough; thus the electron observed is not the same as the pre-observed electron; the external lightwave used to observe the pre-reflected electron has already disturbed the pre-reflected electron by reflecting.

The phenomenal field consists of the subject's immediate pre-reflective experience; hence it is necessarily ambiguous, i.e., not clarified by reflection, and cannot be universalized in any medium that requires reflection. The experience exists immediately and solely for the subject. It is given birth by the present subject and the present subject is the experience. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, when he stares blankly at the sky while on the beach, he does not just experience seeing the sky– he is the sky he experiences.[6] Therefore, the sky described by the scientific account as an interaction of certain atoms or molecules is an incomplete illustration. If the sky is described in this objectified way, the word "sky" just becomes a homophone for the sky experienced by the subjects such as Merleau-Ponty. The scientific account fails to acknowledge the reduction that experiences undergo when they are reflected upon (i.e., the experience being reduced to categories and their causal relationships), or at the very least assumes that such reduction is negligible when explaining phenomena.

Analogously, if there is a play going on at a theater, the scientist whispers in the phenomenologist's ear: "I figured out all this to be an act, and the story in the play is not the real one. The real story is that these guys are actors acting for money and the stage they are on is decorated to seem real. If you observe it well you may see it too". In this case, the phenomenologist wishes they did not sit next to the scientist as now the play is ruined. They already heard what the scientist said many times, but wished to ignore it to experience the original play; the phenomenologist tries to forget what the scientist "[with a] prejudice in favor of an objective world" [7] says to try and get back into

[6] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 249.
[7] Ibid., 7.

experiencing the original play rather than experiencing a reflection on it. The scientist is doomed to never understand the original play as it has created a "play" of its own to experience by reflecting on the original play.

IV) THE KIERKEGAARDIAN CRITIQUE

The question that arises is whether Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reflection can explain worldly phenomena for the subject by getting rid of the shackles of a reflective philosophy. As a reflective philosophy, science has already embraced the objectified and reflected experience, which is an abstraction of the phenomenal field, as its building block. In doing so, it relinquished its ability to accurately explain phenomena. As Merleau-Ponty puts it "Reflection can never… bring a complete elucidation of its object." [8] Phenomenology, unlike science, is a transcendental philosophy and instead, it is based on authentic reflections that are "self-aware of [their] inabilities and the change [they bring] to our lives as [phenomena]".[9] Merleau-Ponty argues that the self-awareness of reflection can help the phenomenologist comprehend phenomena in their pre-reflective state. However, he does not elaborate on how authentic reflections, despite being objectifying reflections themselves, can avoid disturbing the phenomena. This is especially concerning since he takes phenomenology to be a descriptive/verbal project and believes phenomena to be preserved as long as it is verbalized through an authentic reflection. However, verbalization is always an objectifying abstraction of non-verbal phenomena. Thus, I am skeptical of this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project as it attempts to account for concrete worldly phenomena through a verbal, i.e., an abstract, medium.

The contents of the phenomenal field are only available to the subject before they are reflected on; therefore, I believe that an attempt to make its contents a universal reflective field of philosophy is a mistake. Merleau-Ponty himself acknowledges that it is "debatable" whether any thought can

[8] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 72.
[9] Ibid., 72.

"[possess the] whole texture of experience" [10] to account for it, yet he tries to establish phenomenology, i.e. a reflective philosophy, as a transcendental philosophy that can somehow overcome this issue through authentic reflection. Similarly, in Hegelian philosophy, all subjective experience could eventually get actualized as a universalized Idea [*Idel*].[11] Kierkegaard has refuted this notion as he did not understand how certain subjective ideas such faith and love could get further actualized through the universal development of the *geist*. In his work *Fear and Trembling*, he has shown that faith exists within the subject and neither its definition nor its experience can be actualized in the universal. In this sense, Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian philosophy also applies to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, a text that poses phenomenology as a project that aims to build a universal framework through our subjective experiences. Unlike the Hegelian system, phenomenology should not be a philosophical system that awaits to be actualized or developed within/into an objective and a universal framework. Otherwise, it risks being constrained like all objectifying reflective philosophies. Yet, in the preface of the text, Merleau-Ponty characterizes phenomenology precisely in this way. [12]

Merleau-Ponty does not only need to refute the objectivist/scientific account, but also to fight against the objectivist/scientific method which he instead uses to establish his phenomenology. The phenomenologist needs to adopt Kierkegaard's interpretation of Abraham's faith when he was ordered to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham did not reflect on the command he had received from God, although it was ambiguous and absurd, because reflecting on it would mean disobeying his philosophy, namely his faith. He knew that reflection had no place in the transcendental. Similarly, Socrates, the father of philosophy, never let objective thought alter his inner knowledge and he protected his

[10] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 73.
[11] "The Spirit that, so developed, knows itself as Spirit, is Science; Science is its actuality and the realm which it builds for itself in its own element." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, et al, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 14.
[12] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, viii.

subjective irony until his death. He never wrote and established his philosophy through a scientific/abstract method, he rather lived it. The objective thought, namely the ethics of his people, could never comprehend Abraham's subjective knowledge, i.e., his faith. Abraham did not have the words to explain his unreflected faith universally because he did not have them himself. Similar to how God can be felt only through faith the phenomena can only be ambiguously felt by the subject through the phenomenal field, and if the phenomenal field is reflected on, similar to faith, it is no longer understood as it should be. Faith/phenomenal field can only be truly grasped if both the subject and the object are transcended which is not possible through any reflection. Kierkegaard showed that the Hegelian project failed because things such as faith, when objectified/universalized, simply lost their meaning, since they are defined with/by a subject. The phenomenal field also is defined with/by the subject and does not wish to be understood by any reflective philosophy. It ambiguously exists in the subject just like faith does. Hence as Merleau-Ponty already contemplates, an attempt to actualize phenomenology as a field by verbalizing it is a limited attempt. As Kierkegaard writes in *Fear and Trembling*, "Abraham cannot speak, for he cannot utter the word which explains all…" [13] Kierkegaard also notes that if Abraham speaks, he is "no longer Abraham", which implies that the essence of Abraham is hidden in his silence. Similarly, phenomenology's essence should be hidden in the subject's ineffable experience.

Kierkegaard further displays his commitment to the primacy of subjective experience in his *On the Concept of Irony*. In this text, Socrates is taken to have reached the highest form of irony as he remains ironic to the bitter end, not surrendering even before his death to the objective state. According to Kierkegaard, Socratic irony marks the initial step toward subjectivity. It's only within this ironic state that all the ineffable aspects of lived phenomena, which objective thought fails to capture, are preserved. Irony does not wish to be understood, and through its dialectic with the objectively

[13] Søren Kierkegaard and Walter Lowrie, *Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric* (Princeton University, 1941), 139.

'understood,' its wisdom gets further revealed. Kierkegaard argues that Socrates undertakes a project to demonstrate the limitations of objective thought to others while remaining committed to his subjective ironic state, which ridicules the objective; at any moment, he can be tempted to enter the objective sphere in order to be 'understood', and align himself with others to reason in a 'philosophical' manner rather than negate their reasoning with his irony. However, by doing so he would end his commitment to the primacy of the subjective, alongside his irony, through which he has shown the Greeks their philosophical ignorance. In his works, Kierkegaard persistently emphasizes that the subjective cannot be encapsulated by the objective and that we should pay attention to the primacy of the subjective. Similar to *Fear and Trembling*, in his *On the Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard also concludes that certain aspects of the subjective cannot be developed within an objective and a universal framework. He writes: "Socrates comes once again to his first thesis, that virtue cannot be taught, since the limitless sum of experience is like a heap of utterly mute letters-the more it grows, the less it can be pronounced." [14] While Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project initially appears to stem from a worry similar to those of Kierkegaard and Socrates, as subsequent sections illustrate, it becomes tempted to explain itself in a non-subjective framework in order to be respected and understood by the objective.

V) THE CRITIQUE OF MERLEAU-PONTY'S ACCOUNT OF THE BODY

Merleau-Ponty's examination of the body appears to deviate from his professed commitment to truth, as he places precedence on the objective over the subjective in this part of the text. Merleau-Ponty, in seeming contradiction to his own critiques of objective thought like scientific thinking, leans on the scientific method to assert the existence of a universal, impersonal pre-reflective body termed the "habitual body." [15] His reliance on science to establish his "phenomenological" account of the

[14] Søren Kierkegaard, Howard Vincent Hong, and Edna Hatlestad Hong, *The Concept of Irony, With Continual Reference to Socrates: Together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures*, Kierkegaard's Writings (Paperb, 1992), 61.
[15] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 95.

body gives his philosophy further objective legitimacy; however, this reliance leads to an abstract understanding of the body, which the phenomenal field, our subjective lived experience, was meant to transcend. Consequently, Merleau-Ponty's account of the body becomes yet another instance where the Kierkegaardian critique of objective philosophies, as discussed in Section IV, becomes further applicable to Merleau-Ponty's "authentic" phenomenological reflection. According to Merleau-Ponty, the habitual body is the pre-reflective general body that all humans possess as a condition of being anchored in the world. This impersonal body is argued to exist because the personal/subjective self establishes itself later (6-12 months) for an infant compared to their pre-reflexive functional body (newborn).[16] Therefore, he concludes that for every subject there must exist an impersonal/general body that comes before the subject's notion of a self. That is why according to him there is "this back-and-forth of existence that sometimes allows itself to exist as a body and sometimes carries itself into personal acts." [17]

Merleau-Ponty writes: "[I]n pre-natal existence, nothing was perceived, and therefore there is nothing to recall. There was nothing but the raw material and adumbration of a natural self and a natural time. This anonymous life is merely the extreme form of that temporal dispersal …" [18] Hence, Merleau-Ponty mostly relies on the empirical data available to him in order to conclude that there must exist an impersonal pre-reflexive body before a self can exist. The prenatal experience of the world is beyond the subject, as Merleau-Ponty notes. for the subject "there is nothing to be known in these unexplored lands."[19] Therefore, a phenomenologist should refrain from attempting to draw conclusions regarding it, as doing so would entail relying on objectified abstract empirical evidence. Merleau-Ponty encounters a paradox by depending on the empirical findings of his era to construct

[16] Shaun Gallagher and Andrew N. Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," *Philosophical Psychology* vol. 9, no. 2 (June 1, 1996): 211–33.
[17] Patricia Moya, "Habit and Embodiment in Merleau-Ponty," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* vol. 8 (July 25, 2014).
[18] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 404.
[19] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 404.

an objective account of a pre-reflective body, contradicting his emphasis on personal embodied experience. This contradiction arises since he criticizes the knowledge obtained outside of one's own phenomenal field in the text, yet for his philosophy to gain objective legitimacy he simultaneously relies on objectifying abstract thinking when he concludes things regarding the *content* of the phenomenal field. Consequently, this reliance on abstract empirical findings contributes to a critical error in his conclusions concerning the relationship between self-perception and body schema.

To demonstrate Merleau-Ponty's error in relying on empirical findings, I will discuss how shifts in empirical conclusions disagree with his idea of the "habitual body," an abstract concept he argued for using empirical data from his time. In a feminist critique, Shannon Sullivan addresses this disjunction; she points out that the habitual body treated as an impersonal/anonymous general body erases the particular pre-reflectively present through their gender. [20] I find Sullivan's critique to be more authentic than Merleau-Ponty's "authentic reflections" regarding the body. Although Sullivan's critique relies on a phenomenological conclusion, Merleau-Ponty's views on the body heavily rely on scientific conclusions. This leads me to believe that there could be additional flaws in Merleau-Ponty's attempts to generalize what he deems as "authentic" reflections on the body. I believe it was a mistake for Merleau-Ponty to rely on the empirical evidence of his time, knowing that empirical framework is always limited and that new empirical findings could easily contradict the limited findings of his time. Therefore, I only intend to point out the inaccurate conclusions he reaches regarding our pre-reflective body due to relying on the scientific account, and do not wish to repeat his mistake and conclude any truths relating to the body through science. The current scientific understanding of the body is also limited since science objectifies the body and by doing so does not respect the primacy of subjective experience. Hence, understanding the body solely through reliance on empirical evidence at any given

[20] Ruyu Hung, "Living and Learning as Responsive Authoring: Reflections on the Feminist Critiques of Merleau-Ponty's Anonymous Body," *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* vol. 10, no. 1, (2010), 1.

point in time is inadequate. Yet, Merleau-Ponty establishes the body via scientific method, although he claims it to be a phenomenological process. I employ current empirical data to expose the weaknesses in Merleau-Ponty's account of the body that exists due to his premises that rely on empirical data from his era instead of being discovered through a phenomenological process. If he had relied on a purely phenomenological approach, rather than a scientific one, his account wouldn't have to depend on what appears to be inconsistent empirical data that threatens the phenomenological and scientific validity of his account.[21]

Merleau-Ponty identifies the body schema as the condition of possibility for perception, and he also accepts the scientific view at the time, namely Piaget's view, that "imitation requires a developed body schema".[22] And since he thought that "perception of others is postponed in ontogenetic time until the child is at least 6 months of age," he assumed that there is a habitual body that functions pre-personally since the self-other distinction would not be possible prior to perception which for him arrives at 6 months of age alongside body schema.[23] However, modern "studies on newborn imitation suggest that there is a primitive body schema from the very beginning—an innate body schema sufficiently developed to account for the possibility of invisible imitation." This means that the newborn can perform an "imitation of the other's movements using parts of [their] body that are invisible to [themselves]." [24] Hence, Merleau-Ponty's conclusions regarding the self-other relationship, and the impersonal habitual body are no longer supported by empirical conclusions. Gallagher and Meltzoff summarize Merleau-Ponty's account of the self-other-body relationship in light of these modern findings as follows:

> Infants are not only capable of external perception and of imitating the gestures of others much earlier than Merleau-Ponty thought, but they are also able to imitate after

[21] A purely phenomenological account of the body would not have its validity questioned by the current scientific findings since it would not have relied on them in the first place. Ironically, in his pursuit of greater scientific credibility for his account of the body, Merleau-Ponty undermines both its phenomenological and scientific integrity.
[22] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others."
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

> a delay, imitate novel gestures, and monitor their own movements and correct them to match a visually specified target. These abilities involve, in addition to an innate body schema, an innate capacity for proprioceptive experience, an important element of a primitive body image. An infant's gestures, in effect, become an object of attention for the infant and she is able to discriminate between her own gesture and the gesture of the other. The experiential connection between self and other is operative from birth, and is not, as Merleau-Ponty contends, a syncretic confusion. At the very least, for the newborn infant, there is a rudimentary differentiation between self and non-self, so that one's earliest experiences include a sense of self and of others.[25]

Therefore, the habitual body can no longer be excused to exist by relying on an infant's body's behavior before they obtain a self since it turns out that an embodied personal self is possible as soon as the infant is born. Merleau-Ponty's ideas regarding a general habitual body that is impersonal need further revision since the scientific conclusions he relied on to conclude these universal "phenomenological facts" about the body have changed.[26]

VI) THE CASE OF THE ALIEN HAND SYNDROME

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty attempts to infer the habitual body through the case of the phantom limb. As discussed, Merleau-Ponty differentiates between the habitual body, described as "that of general and pre-reflective experience," and the actual body, characterized as "that of personal and reflexive existence." [27] For irregular cases like the phantom limb he argues that "the nexus between the habitual and the actual body are broken"; hence although the patient is able to perform "certain habitual movements" they are unable to perform other actions commanded at them.[28] For example, "a person can perform movements like touching his or her nose with a hand, but cannot respond to an order to touch the nose with a ruler." [29] On the other hand, a healthy person can "come and go from habitual to actual." [30] Through this difference between a regular and an "irregular" body/mind, he tries to differentiate the habitual from the actual body and argues once again that we all possess a

[25] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others."
[26] Ibid.
[27] Moya, "Habit and Embodiment in Merleau-Ponty."
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

general habitual body (which is what this paper refuted above). However, it is ineffectual that he establishes an abstract thing like the habitual body through an abnormal case study.

There are other modern abnormal cases in which the pre-reflective body schema, what Merleau-Ponty would term the habitual body, is experienced in a manner contradicting Merleau-Ponty's inference. Consider the case of the *alien hand syndrome*, where "one hand is not under control of the mind... and it acts as if it has a mind of its own".[31] The hand can perform "purposeful movements" such as stroking the subject without their will which can terrify the subject.[32] In this case, the subject is unable to have a pre-reflective general body that acts in accordance with its habitual ways. Reflectively the subject is aware that the hand is a part of their body, yet pre-reflectively the hand somehow appears to the subject as a separate for-itself in their own body. Thus not only does the pre-reflective habitual body stop acting habitually but the pre-reflective body schema also completely changes like a reflective body image. In this case, the pre-reflective habitual body cannot be considered a general/anonymous body, and Merleau-Ponty would have to concede that the habitual body is as personal as a reflective body. The pre-reflective body instead comes with an innate subjectivity/particularity, and cannot be generalized.

VII) CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception, while challenging the dominance of objective thought in understanding phenomena, paradoxically succumbs to objectifying methods. The attempt to universalize phenomenology through abstract ideas and reliance on empirical evidence introduces a threat to phenomenology's main objective of removing the abstract objectifying thought present in reflective philosophies. Merleau-Ponty's contradictory reliance on the scientific method, especially in establishing the "habitual body," exposes vulnerabilities, as empirical findings

[31] Ragesh Panikkath et al., "The Alien Hand Syndrome," *Baylor University Medical Center Proceedings* vol. 27, no. 3 (July 1, 2014): 219.
[32] Panikkath et al., "The Alien Hand Syndrome," 219.

challenge his conclusions. In this way, Kierkegaard's critique of objectifying reflective philosophies seems applicable, highlighting the challenges in fully grasping or explaining phenomena within Merleau-Ponty's intersubjective phenomenology. Ultimately, the pursuit of a universalized reflective philosophy appears contradictory to the inherently subjective, pre-reflective nature of human experience.

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DOXASTIC DISCREPANCY AND WORTHWHILE DISAGREEMENT

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Abstract: The article critically examines the standard discourse on rational disagreement in philosophy, particularly focusing on its limits. Drawing upon justificationist views, the article defends a permissivist position on rational disagreement, suggesting that different agents may have different rational responses to evidence if they hold different epistemic standards. To better situate disagreement within a broader epistemic framework, the article distinguishes between two things. The first, which I call "doxastic discrepancy," is the mere fact or state of holding a different view. The second, which I call "live disagreement," involves actually engaging with interlocutors who have differing views. I argue that one's moral and epistemic obligations vary according to whether one is situated in a doxastic discrepancy or a live disagreement. Additionally, the article challenges the necessity of epistemic peerhood as a condition for rational disagreement and articulates a novel problem, the "engagement problem," which concerns the determination of moral and epistemic obligation when entering a disagreement. In response, I advocate a subjective value-focused approach to the problem.

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"Why are you booing me? I'm right!" - Hannibal Burress, *The Eric Andre Show*

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If there's one generalization that can truthfully be said of philosophers, it is that they disagree, frequently and readily. Some have pointed out that—given the extreme variety of views philosophers hold and argue for, many of which are fundamentally incompatible—regardless of however many affirm these views, there is a philosophical conundrum at the base of philosophical practice. The conundrum: given people who have roughly the same evidence and ability to assess it—philosophers tend to regard each other as capable participants on these metrics—can said people rationally come to different conclusions? Can they disagree, and rationally—or is at least one party irrational after finding that someone who's just as good at assessing the evidence denies that party's view?

The philosophical discourse on this conundrum focuses on peer disagreement—that is, disagreement between epistemic peers. Definitions of epistemic peerhood abound; in the words of Hilary Kornblith in his article "Belief in the Face of Controversy," peers are "just as smart as I am,

just as well informed, and have thought about the issue just as long as I have and just as carefully."[1] For Richard Feldman in his article "Reasonable Religious Disagreement," peers are "roughly equal with respect to intelligence, reasoning powers, background information, and so on."[2] If one comes to a disagreement with a peer, it seems that, since they have the same evidence as you and are just as good at assessing it as you, you have a few options regarding what the rational response is in such a case.

One plausible option is both peers suspending judgment, neither affirming or denying whatever belief is debated between the peers. Since philosophers frequently disagree, this being the proper rational response would be highly unfavorable; a philosopher would hardly be able to say anything, as—immediately upon a peer starting an argument—both participants to the disagreement would have to set aside their views, as rationality would dictate.

Another response could be that one or more peers could change their mind, revising their belief. Some views, like would have them meet in the middle regarding how confident each would be in their respective beliefs—this has drawbacks similar to suspending judgment, but in terms of confidence in one's beliefs being true. Alternatively, one peer could, responding to the evidence of the peer's denial, take the other's belief; here, both would be rational—but there would no longer be disagreement.

So it seems like, in order for regular philosophical practice to remain rationally possible, at least one peer in a disagreement must be able to retain that belief after encountering the disagreement. This must be done after considering all the evidence, including the evidence of the disagreement itself. Thomas Kelly, in his article "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence" thinks evidence of the

[1] Jennifer Lackey, "What Should We Do When We Disagree?" in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology Volume 3*, ed. Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 277, 281.
[2] Lackey, "What Should We Do When We Disagree?" 277.

disagreement is a special kind of evidence, which he calls higher-order evidence.[3] Higher-order evidence, or second-order evidence, (I will refer to higher-order and second-order evidence interchangeably) is evidence about other evidence—here, evidence that the first order body of evidence is not a closed case and should be reviewed to see if it warrants belief revision.

Further issues in the discourse on disagreement concern whether both participants could hold their position rationally, or whether there is only one of the participants who could be rational, given the body of evidence. The view that there is only one rational response to a given evidence base is called "uniqueness." Conversely, the view that there is more than one available properly rational response is called "permissivism." While uniqueness may seem, to some, implausible, it can seem a more reasonable position if one takes disagreements about empirical matters to be central. For instance, David Christensen, in his article "Epistemology of Disagreement" articulates a thought experiment called the "restaurant case" that is central to the literature on disagreement. The idea is simple: after the meal is done, if your restaurant party agrees on the amount of the tip and by what proportion the bill should be split, there shouldn't be any disagreement about the outcome—according to proper mathematical procedures, there's only one way to split a $\$x + \$y$ tip bill among z people; if two people come to different totals, at best, only one of them can be right.[4]

Ultimately, I find issue with this discourse. It is shortsighted in its domain, and this has negative impacts on the applicability of the discourses' insights to other sorts of disagreements which we care about. In order to address this domain issue whilst retaining the insights already developed, I will make a key distinction to differentiate, and thereby clarify, multiple senses of disagreement which are at play in the discourse. This distinction will afford us greater attentiveness and care to our broader epistemic

[3] Thomas Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence," in *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 200.
[4] David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News," *The Philosophical Review* vol. 116, no. 2 (April 1, 2007): 193.

conditions, to our obligations in both epistemic and moral terms, and most importantly to the people and discussions that matter to us. After clarifying the terrain and building my own account of disagreement, I'll then be able to address the problems I identify as underlying the discourse on disagreement. These problems directly concern peerhood; I find commitments to its necessity to be epistemically vicious—but with the commitments abrogated, we are pushed into a new problem concerning obligation(s) to engage in disagreement, which must be addressed in turn. But to begin our analysis, we need to get clear on what it is we're doing in a disagreement. What is it that we've been disagreeing about?

I – Live Disagreement and Doxastic Discrepancy

Disagreement in its ordinary use has component elements. The everyday sense concerns situations where one party believes some belief p while another holds some other belief—say, ~p, or maybe p_2. But this everyday sense obscures a useful distinction—there is a difference between the expression of a disagreement (in a discussion) and the holding of different beliefs. We can call the situational state of one party holding a different belief than the other party a state of doxastic discrepancy. I use this term differently than Rik Peels in his book Responsible Belief: a Theory in Ethics and Epistemology.[5] One can be in such a state with people one has not met; for instance, I hold different beliefs about the utility of rent control than many economists, which almost uniformly oppose rent control—however, because I don't discuss rent control with economists, I am not in any live disagreements with economists on this issue. How one responds to the live disagreement is an ethical question, and is subject to moral obligations; one's epistemic response to an event of disclosed doxastic discrepancy is another matter.

Rather than treating disagreements as an unusual case, to be addressed with tools uniquely situated for understanding such a case, making this distinction lets us reconceptualize the terrain of

[5] Rik Peels, *Responsible Belief: A Theory in Ethics and Epistemology* (New York (N.Y.): Oxford university press, 2017), 106-7.

the debate.Because the standard literature has focused on questions regarding the rational or epistemic response to disagreement—and not moral considerations, which would pertain to live disagreement—the standard literature centers doxastic discrepancy. Thus, we are able to see that the discussions in this literature are situated within the context of our standard epistemic conditions—the question of what should we believe, given the evidence—but as applied in the social realm. As such, we are more able to notice the close proximity of the discussion's topic to other, long-standing considerations in the epistemic realm, such as discourse on the reliability of testimony. The utility of this distinction will be returned to through the rest of this essay.

II – The Main Position on Doxastic Discrepancy: Justificationist

The main position I hold on the epistemology of disagreement follows Jennifer Lackey in her article "What should we do when we disagree?" I take her justificationist view—that "the amount of doxastic revision required [must] track the degree to which the target belief is confidently held and highly justified"—to be central.[6] I, however, deny that one must be concerned with breaking symmetry of epistemic peerhood. Evidence that justifies the target belief, however, I interpret broadly; Lackey considers what she calls personal information, or evidence one has about one's cognitive capabilities,[7] but this is only one variety of the evidential species which Thomas Kelly, in his article "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence," refers to as higher-order evidence—evidence about other evidence.[8] I will refer to higher-order and second-order evidence interchangeably. There is a wide variety of evidence, and upon encountering a live disagreement, the disagreement—and the doxastic discrepancy thereby disclosed—provides higher-order evidence with respect to the belief in question.

How one evaluates this evidence is important as well. Richard Fumerton argues that appreciating the evidence gives one justification for holding one's belief; one has worked through the

[6] Lackey, "What Should We Do When We Disagree?" 277, 281.
[7] Ibid., 277.
[8] Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence," 200.

evidence, and by one's own lights found it to support that belief—and that appreciation process is robust, such that—by one's own standards—one has "good reason to believe that, should those who disagree with me go through the process, they would end up agreeing with my conclusions."[9]

Fumerton's paradigm case, the Monty Hall Puzzle, might be helpful here. The puzzle, derived from a game show, is that behind three doors are prizes, one prize per door: two of which are goats, and only one of which is a car. The contestant selects a door—but in response, the show host opens a door which conceals a goat. Then the contestant is offered the opportunity to switch. The question is whether it is prudent to do so. Before working through the problem, the intuitive solution might seem that it's 50/50, but the mathematics behind the case actually points to switching being the favored strategy, and it being better than 50/50. If one is shown this to be the case—and one recognizes it and accepts it—or if one works out the math, independently, one has a strong reason to hold the belief that switching is the favored strategy; it is the working through, the processing and appreciating of the evidence, that provides this justification.[10] Fumerton acknowledges the justification provided by evidence appreciation has its limits—but these are related to one's inherent fallibility, and one must, ultimately, overturn one's own reasoning for one's beliefs, when this becomes necessary.[11]

III – Epistemic Standards: Permitting Permissivism

Much of the literature on disagreement concerns whether it can be legitimately rational for evidence to support different beliefs—the discourse is often framed as a question of whether (total) evidence can support both beliefs p and ~p. Many hold that evidence cannot support multiple rational different beliefs—this position is referred to as uniqueness, which denies epistemic permissivism, the position that different beliefs in response to the same evidence can be rational.

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[9] Richard Fumerton, "You Can't Trust a Philosopher," in *Disagreement*, ed. Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield (Oxford University Press, 2010), 94.
[10] Fumerton, "You Can't Trust a Philosopher," 94.
[11] Fumerton, "You Can't Trust a Philosopher," 106.

While there are some strong philosophical objections to epistemic permissivism, which can motivate the position, uniqueness might seem somewhat of a shock to ordinary epistemic intuitions—we encounter disagreement frequently, so how could only one view be rational for any given argument? Philosophers, however, generally find themselves in specialized contexts: live disagreements—differing beliefs expressed in debate—in which both participants are aware of all the major arguments, for and against, in their research specialty. Centering these cases, though—however intriguing, in a philosophical sense—does a disservice to theorizing our ordinary disagreements, which can be similarly vexing to understand. From the academic view, it is easy to overlook puzzling issues without the idealizing constraints of the specialized context—like that, in ordinary disagreements, participants often discover novel evidence or arguments against their position, a feature absent in the academy. In both cases—our academic disagreements and our ordinary disagreements —we can find ourselves seemingly disagreeing with regard to the same base of evidence. The question of how multiple responses can be rationally possible remains relevant. To answer this question, I will argue against uniqueness—to do this, I will discuss epistemic standards, which provide a justification for epistemic permissivism.

Many authors, such as Richard Feldman in his article "Reasonable Religious Disagreements" hold uniqueness to be true.[12] Few, however, give a thorough argument for it. Roger White, in his article "Epistemic Permissiveness", provides a serious account. White's central concern is that, without uniqueness, whichever particular epistemic position one chooses seems arbitrary—if it's rational to believe p1, p2, and p3, why choose to believe p2, and not p3? He makes this concern robust with a thought experiment concerning belief-inducing-pills, where there exist magic pills which induce a belief, either true or false, but where one does not know whether the pill one has taken is one of the

[12] Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements," in *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. Louise Antony (Oxford University Press, 2006), 205.

true-belief-inducers or false-belief-inducers. Supposing permissiveness to be true and that, for the given case it applies—that is, the evidence could point to p being true as well as ~p being true—then it seems like one's credence before making a decision should be 50/50, and if that seems true, then why should there be an advantage "from the point of view of pursuing the truth, in carefully weighing the evidence to draw a conclusion, rather than just taking a belief-inducing-pill?"[13] The concern generalizes to less extreme formulations of epistemic permissivism, which are in terms of permissible epistemic standards—as then the issue, even if one uniquely holds beliefs in response to assessing evidence to one's epistemic standards, becomes why hold my set of standards, and why consider it reasonable for someone else to hold different standards which lead to different beliefs?[14] Concern with arbitrariness is serious for those seeking to defend epistemic permissivism.

This is a serious challenge, but it is overcome by consideration of epistemic standards—but before we can see how this is so, we have to answer some questions about the importance of rationality from an individual's perspective (as compared to societal or group-level rationality, which will not be addressed).

A robust analysis of our epistemic condition must be able to answer what Sophie Horowitz, in her article "Immoderately Rational," calls the value question—that is, why should we bother to be rational at all, what use is rationality to us, what makes rationality beneficial?[15] Horowitz takes rationality to be truth conducive, formalized through Bayesian epistemology as maximizing expected accuracy ("closeness to the truth" with regard to credences)[16], but I think this isn't the complete picture.

As Wayne Riggs points out in his article, "Epistemic Risk and Relativism," rationality has two

[13] Roger White, "Epistemic Permissiveness," *Philosophical Perspectives* vol. 19, no. 1 (2005): 447–448.
[14] White, "Epistemic Permissiveness," 451–452.
[15] Sophie Horowitz, "Immoderately Rational," *Philosophical Studies* vol. 167, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 41.
[16] Horowitz, "Immoderately Rational," 44.

aims: believing beliefs that are true, and disbelieving beliefs that are false.[17] In many cases these two aims can be opposed, especially where the evidence is ambiguous—there is epistemic risk involved, when assessing evidence for beliefs, in inadvertently believing falsehoods or disbelieving truths. In this way, the aims to which rationality is conducive cannot be reduced to a single quality of accuracy that concerns only believing truths.

Due to these split aims in response to epistemic risk, reasonable people can differ in their evaluations of these separate aims; some people think believing truths is more important, and will tend to believe more things (some of which may be false), and other people think disbelieving falsehoods is primary, and will tend to have fewer affirmed beliefs. While some evaluative responses to epistemic risk may be pathological (e.g. radical skepticism or radical affirmation), the possibility of reasonable valuation difference alone gives ground for the legitimacy of reasonable multiple epistemic responses.

Now we can analyze epistemic standards. Miriam Schoenfield, in her article "Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism is True and What It Tells Us About Irrelevant Influences on Belief" argues that epistemic standards can loosely be thought of as "a function from bodies of evidence to doxastic states which the agent takes to be truth conducive" [emphasis omitted].[18] With the insight about epistemic risk provided by Riggs, we can understand truth conduciveness—and, thus, the epistemic standards which produce doxastic states with this quality—as meeting both true beliefs with affirmation and false beliefs with denial, so that forming beliefs appropriate to a person's epistemic standards is responsive to their valuation of epistemic risk.[19]

Schoenfield argues against White—and for permissivism—on the basis of these epistemic standards. Because each person considers evaluating evidence on the basis of their own standards to

[17] Wayne D. Riggs, "Epistemic Risk and Relativism," *Acta Analytica* vol. 23, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 2–8.
[18] Miriam Schoenfield, "Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism Is True and What It Tells Us About Irrelevant Influences on Belief," *Noûs* vol. 48, no. 2 (2014): 199.
[19] Schoenfield, "Permission to Believe," 200-201.

be truth conducive, such a person has reason to prefer to do their own reasoning over arbitrary belief selection, as by a belief-inducing-pill.[20] This defeats the arbitrariness concern. The other main concern which White implicitly raises is the evidence pointing problem, which concerns whether one body of evidence can support different beliefs, especially supporting belief p and also supporting belief ~p. For White, simple formulations of evidential pointing are incoherent, and more nuanced formulations are subject to concerns of arbitrariness.[21] Schoenfield also responds to this concern by specifying what permissivist position is defensible. It's not that different evidence simultaneously points to multiple beliefs (a dial with two points), but that there are multiple rational standards—by which to evaluate evidence—that each uniquely determine the rational response to the evidence base (multiple dials, each with one point).[22]

The question then returns to why to select one's own standard, an arbitrariness concern at the level of standard selection. Schoenfield points out that a defender of uniqueness is subject to the same concern—believing that there is one unique rational standard is insufficient to explain that one's own standard is, in fact, this uniquely rational standard in a way that is independent of one's own standard. In this sense, both a defender of uniqueness and a defender of permissivism are on the same footing—for each epistemic agent, they think their standard is truth conducive, but cannot give a reason independent of that standard to hold the standard. As Schoenfield states, if we were demanded to give a justification of this sort—because of this limitation in our epistemic condition—widespread skepticism would result.

So what's going on in live disagreements, where differing beliefs are expressed in debate? What is important to note is the difference between whether one's belief is rational or whether one's belief

[20] Schoenfield, "Permission to Believe," 200-201.
[21] White, "Epistemic Permissiveness," 447, 451-454.
[22] Schoenfield, "Permission to Believe," 200.

is true, pointed out by Schoenfield.[23] Often, we confuse whether someone is believing rationally with whether we think they are believing truths. In a live disagreement, we disclose the underlying doxastic discrepancy, finding different beliefs on the basis of the evidence available to each person. After updating one's evidence base, if the evidence points to a different belief than the other participant in the live disagreement, then each can rationally retain their belief on the basis of having different epistemic standards. We do not need to think our interlocutor's belief is true to think them rational, according to their standards, and we can at the same time recognize that neither of us are capable of giving a defense of these standards independent of them. We might think their standards ineffective to achieve the aims of rationality (e.g. responding to epistemic risk by taking an attitude of radical skepticism), and we can fault them for this—but this remains a moral failing, an inadequacy of proper valuing, and not an epistemic failing—at least directly. Strictly, the failing of valuation ramifies to an epistemic failing, but they are separate, cumulative mistakes, and must be addressed as such. Epistemic failings do exist in our non-ideal, lived epistemic condition, but it is discursively uncharitable to attribute this to every interlocutor with which one participates in a live disagreement; to do so might even challenge the possibility of rational disagreement.

IV – Against the Necessity of Epistemic Peerhood

One of the main underlying assumptions in the debate about the rationality of disagreement is that the disagreements under discussion are those between epistemic peers. Peerhood is central to the literature on disagreement; I, however, think the insistence on it is misguided, especially for those defending permissive cases.

The astute reader might have noticed a severe issue during the summary portion in the section above; certainly, it seems that other people can hold different epistemic standards, but why should I then think them to be worthy, sufficiently capable participants in the live disagreement? If another

[23] Schoenfield, "Permission to Believe," 203.

participant holds a different standard and on the basis of that standard forms beliefs differently than I do, and frequently, why should I think them rational in the same way I think myself to be? As asked by David Christensen in his article "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", "if I think her weighting [evidence] does not lead in general to equally accurate beliefs, why should I grant that it's just as rational to form beliefs using that weighting?"[24] If I have reason to think someone doesn't reliably form beliefs that are rational, then I have reason to think we're not epistemic peers—that there is something inadequate in their capability to evaluate evidence.

The problem is that most theories of disagreement center on disagreement between peers; if someone isn't one's peer, then one can't rationally be in a disagreement with them while thinking them also to be rational—they simply cannot evaluate evidence in a properly rational way. Ultimately, because different standards lead to people not being epistemic peers—and because people who aren't peers can't both be rational in a disagreement—then people with different epistemic standards can't disagree and both attribute rationality, if peerhood is a condition of rational disagreement.

One of the ways to avoid doxastic revision upon encountering disagreement in the literature, clearly articulated in Lackey, concerns breaking symmetry of peer status. If I can discover that I am no longer peers with someone, I no longer need to account for their position in determining my own, which allows me to retain my position without doxastic revision.[25] We can call this the peerhood (dis)solution.

I think there are serious problems with employing this maneuver that are ethically vicious and epistemically destructive. I'll start with the ethical issues: in employing the peerhood (dis)solution, one inadvertently attributes irrationality to one's interlocutor, which I find objectionable on grounds of discursive charity.

[24] Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement," 191.
[25] Lackey, "What Should We Do When We Disagree?" 281.

Secondly, I'll address epistemic issues. According to the theories of rational disagreement in the literature, upon encountering a disagreement, if one can break the peerhood, one can avoid doxastic revision. Peerhood (dis)solution is useful if one wants to retain their belief upon encountering the disagreement—but it allows one a *prima facie* justification for dismissing the opinions of those with different beliefs, as having a different belief than oneself provides a reason that the interlocutor is less reliable with regard to truth conduciveness. Most deleteriously, this dismissal can be done without consideration of the interlocutor's position and arguments. In this sense, the necessity of peerhood undermines the possibility of disagreement where both participants are regarded as rational, with a cascading effect on disagreement's capability to provoke epistemic improvement, noted by Christensen.[26] This gives strong motivation to deny the necessity of epistemic peerhood.

My distinction between live disagreement and doxastic discrepancy allows us to circumvent peerhood's necessity. Because we focus on what is rational to believe on the basis of the evidence, when we encounter a disagreement, there is generated second-order evidence—here, evidence that the first order body of evidence is disputable—that must be incorporated in determining belief. This evidential generation occurs regardless of whether the interlocutor is equally accurate in forming beliefs—what matters is this evidence and the belief thereby supported itself; peerhood drops out of the equation entirely. Further, this preserves the possibility of epistemic improvement, as even when discoursing with a non-peer, one still has to evaluate the evidence of one's interlocutor, and thereby possibly improve their epistemic position. Someone employing peerhood (dis)solution, though, would not evaluate the evidence of a non-peer, and so would not have the opportunity to improve their epistemic position or revise their belief.

V – Worthwhile Disagreement and the Engagement Problem

Admittedly, a plausible advantage of peerhood is that the insistence on peerhood achieves

[26] Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement," 194.

other ends that a theory of disagreement without the condition must acknowledge. I think peerhood answers a question that's been implicit to the debate on disagreement, but—as the necessity of peerhood has not been analyzed beforehand—has not been formally articulated. I call the question the engagement problem. Once articulated, future theorization on disagreement can employ the problem explicitly, even for theorists that defend the necessity of peerhood, to the extent that peerhood and the conditions of the engagement problem remain misaligned.

The engagement problem is that it is implausible for there to be a moral or epistemic requirement to debate everything with anyone. We are limited beings, and our time is finite; we must pick our battles, as it were. This problematic is exacerbated by our contemporary epistemic conditions, which one might label a state of epistemic overload—we are bombarded with information, most of it inconclusive, all of it vying for our attention and cognitive capacity. Even professional academics have difficulty keeping up on all the articles in their field. A balance must be struck somehow, and it must be the right one. I have shown above that, implicitly, previous theorizing has given too much weight to disagreement dismissal—but we need not, in response, conduct a perpetual pattern of disputations.

First, to clearly delineate this position from possible misinterpretations, I will address an epistemic principle advanced by Peter van Inwagen in his article "It Is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence." Van Inwagen formulates Clifford's Other Principle, that "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to ignore evidence that is relevant to his beliefs, or to dismiss relevant evidence in a facile way."[27] My suggestion is that violation of the first disjunct of the principle, ignoring relevant evidence, should be applied only when evidence is presented to someone—that negligence with regard to discovering all relevant evidence does not violate the principle, as discovery of all relevant evidence is not possible in a state of epistemic

[27] Peter Van Inwagen, "It Is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence," in *Faith, Freedom and Rationality*, ed. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Savage, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 145.

overload. In this sense, one should not be counted as ignoring what one has not yet, but could have, found; what is epistemically deficient under conditions of epistemic overload is deliberate, chosen ignorance, not mere absence of knowledge. Violation of the principle occurs when relevant evidence is made salient to a person and it is deliberately overlooked—which is more consonant with the second disjunct in the principle's formulation.

Fortunately, the distinction between live disagreement and doxastic discrepancy grants us clarity in distinguishing moral from epistemic obligations. Furthermore, there are significant asymmetries in obligations with respect to initiation of disagreement compared to reception of disagreement.

Discovering a doxastic discrepancy gives one grounds on which to initiate a live disagreement, where the discrepancy can be significant—like affirming ~p while the interlocutor professes belief p—or minor, like thinking belief p is likely to be false, but where the evidence one has supports suspending judgment on belief p, even in (some) cases due to lack of evidence with respect to belief p. However, ground on which to initiate a disagreement is not an obligation to disagree.

It seems that there is stronger epistemic obligation to consider the evidence and arguments of others once they disclose a doxastic discrepancy, but reasoning through the evidence does not require doxastic revision any more than is justified by the new evidence; if the arguments are ineffectual, by one's epistemic standards, one need not revise at all—but before one can make this conclusion, one must first reason through this evidence.

Fortunately, if one encounters the same argument frequently enough, and one still has strong evidence against it—and the second-order evidence itself fails to provoke the necessity of doxastic revision—one has reason to deny the argument. No argument—especially one's own—is invulnerable, though; and one should be concerned with possible changes in the most current state of the evidence. For example, renewable energy has made significant strides in both technological and legislative

efficacy in the past decade—thinking that renewable energy would be inadequate to supply world energy demands might have been more likely to be true in the past, but is now less likely to be true; thus, someone with the same epistemic standard might be inclined to change their position, so long as underlying conditions change.

Unfortunately, this asymmetry, by obligating disputation receivers to work through evidence/argumentation, provides ground for bad actors to initiate disagreements in excessive frequency. In practice, it is a difficult, if not intractable problem to distinguish, preemptive to the debate, good faith from bad faith interlocutors; practice, generally, wades into the waters of ambiguity.

However, epistemic obligation to consider and evaluate evidence need not entail moral obligation to disagree. Moral obligation to engage in a disagreement is a higher bar, as it concerns significant value judgments. The central question to be asked, when either initiating or receiving a disagreement, is whether it is worthwhile, whether it is worth one's time. Sometimes, determining this is harder than it seems. Generally, disagreement with someone only matters to us in specific scenarios—do I care about the person whom I'm conversing with, and what they have to say or what their position is; do I care about the topic we're discussing, whether I can learn from the person with whom I disagree about the topic; do I care about the effects observing this disagreement will have upon onlookers, what they will believe upon hearing the arguments; do I care about the personal or societal outcomes of the content of the debate; or other scenarios of personal or societal significance. This list is non-exhaustive, but hopefully relevant both to concerns of import and admitting a multiplicity of possible concerns—we can reasonably care about different things. There may also be cases—grave, and hopefully infrequent—where one's personal assessment of worth can be overridden by other moral concerns or obligations; usually, and applicable either from a position of initiation or reception, this would be an obligation to prove the interlocutor wrong. Discerning whether such an obligation exists, however, may be difficult, especially in the moment. However, where one is subject

to such an obligation, and one fails to fulfill it, one can be found blameworthy for failing to fulfill an obligation—but it remains a moral, rather than epistemic failing, and must be assessed as such.

VI – Objections

The main objection to my view is that it fails to provide an account of the philosophically interesting case of disagreement among epistemic peers—or, ignoring the peerhood requirement, in cases of disagreement among evidential equals. Directly, I think this is a philosopher's non-problem—as I see it, the only person with the same evidence base as I do at time t is myself at time t. At time t2, no matter when that t2 occurs, the evidence available to me is subtly different—I may have evaluated or reevaluated some evidence, or maybe some relevant evidence, while available to me, is inaccessible at that time. As such, at time t, the rational response to the evidence base for myself at that time is uniquely determined. But what about one's internal sense of disagreement, of not knowing which way the evidence base points? This occurs across a duration in time; at different points in that time, one may weigh the evidence one way or another in order to assess it, but how one should rationally form beliefs in this case is not multiplicitous.

On my account, a situation of strict peerhood that this objector desires has two conditions: for this strict peerhood, not only does it occur that the evidence base available to the interlocutors must be equivalent, but the interlocutors' epistemic standards—and, implicitly, responses to epistemic risk—as well. Because different people, or the same person across time, have subtly different evidence bases *or* epistemic standards as a result of differences in lived experience (which is necessarily different for different people), failure to obtain sufficient mismatch between interlocutors—and as such, for disagreement to be possible on an equivalent evidence base—is nigh impossible.

For both conditions of strict peerhood to obtain requires a stipulation in an argument; it cannot occur in actuality. Should an objector insist upon this stipulation, it is, admittedly, consistent with my position that disagreement under this stipulation is impossible. The question actually relevant

for actually existent philosophical inquiry, where experts assess an evidence base and come to different conclusions—and which actually exists in lived experience, the conditions that inspired the debate on disagreement in the first place—is adequately described by different epistemic standards, even where one attempts to idealize the case with the near-equal evidential base characteristic of academic argument.

VII – Conclusion

It has been my attempt to show that philosophers, in focusing on an academic context, have overlooked some of the difficulties arising in disagreement within regular contexts—many of which also arise in the academy, were academics not to belittle such difficulties as unworthy of study or consideration, as unserious. I have sought to provide an account of the epistemology of disagreement that can accommodate the broad diversity in manifestations of disagreement, but—by being sensitive to important distinctions between the underlying epistemic state and the expressed difference in views—which can help better explicate the interrelation of moral and epistemic complexities in our social interactions. Further, I've hoped to present and critique some of the assumptions implicit in the necessity of epistemic peerhood. This has ultimately been in service of making plausible the adoption and cultivation of certain types of epistemic dispositions—to be less dismissive in our interactions with those whom we have difficulty understanding their perspective, whether online or off, via text or speech, on abstract theorizing or practical matters. It is my hope that together we can disagree better.

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SHAME AND THE SELF: WHAT IS THE UTILITY OF SHAME?

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Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between a self-regarding emotion, namely moral shame, and the self. This investigation requires that we carefully parse through existing accounts of the self and of shame to understand what utility comes with shame. What does it mean for us when we experience shame? And what does it mean for others when we ask them to feel shame? These questions are at the center of this paper. I argue that there ought not to be morally justifiable utility to shame because it is harmful to the self. This paper has salient practical implications for today's society; especially when we consider the use of online shaming and the shaping of personal identity on the internet, considering the interactions between moral shame and the self is of particular importance.

Introduction

What are we asking of ourselves when we feel shame? Is there any utility in the emotion of shame? These questions are at the core of this paper. Indeed, a few critical concepts must be defined as we seek to answer them: shame, utility that comes with this shame, and 'ourselves.' While there exist many competing views of the self, I will be focusing on two contrasting accounts, specifically Strohminger's True Self View and Cocking and Kennett's Drawing View. After parsing through what shame would mean for the self on each account, we can examine what utility may or may not follow. In this paper, I argue that shame is problematically harmful to (two contrasting views of) the self. Although people operate under the assumption that there is a utility to shame and that there is moral justification for this utility, I suggest that there ought not to be morally justifiable utility to shame insofar as it is harmful to the self in (morally) undesirable ways, regardless of how you define the self.

(1) Defining Shame

I begin by exploring a negative account of shame, namely shamelessness, to help us to understand what shame manifests, and what it implies. In this way, we will ultimately reach a satisfactory definition of shame. In any instance, knowing the lack or absence of something can enrich one's understanding of what it means for that thing to be present. According to Michelle Mason,

shamelessness emerges as an attitude of indifference to such ideals of character and the evaluation of one's esteem-worthiness that they support.[1] Shamelessness can be interpreted as a resistance to adhering to moral values that emphasize specific character ideals.[2] Thus, having a sense of shame would signal a sensitivity to a comprehensive moral appraisal of the self with regard to particular character ideals. This seems to be in alignment with the view of shame that states that it is the experience of oneself as "diminished in merited esteem on the ground that one has violated some legitimate ideal of character." [3] The conditions of shame by this definition, then, are that it is a self-directed response to a violation of an *ideal* of the person. Because there exists the expectation or requirement that one resembles the personal ideal of character, the aforementioned violation is one that one holds oneself responsible for.[4]

Shame bears characteristic feelings when we experience it. Most distinctly, shame brings about alienation. We experience this alienation from others because we lack the ideal qualities required of us, and are labeled as being too socially inadequate to be accepted by others. According to Vida Yao, shame is "the painful experience of being viewed in "the wrong way" by a real or imagined (internalized) other."[5] Shame, like guilt, leads to alienation and estrangement. Shame, however, affects the whole self and is oriented towards the self, while guilt is concerned with rules and law and is oriented towards others.[6] When we experience shame, we may think, *I am a terrible person* because I committed a crime, but when we experience guilt, we may think, I am a terrible person *because I committed a crime*. The negative emphasis shifts from ourselves to an action when we compare shame

[1] Michelle Mason, "On Shamelessness," in *Philosophical Papers* vol. 39, no. 3 (November 2010): 419.
[2] Shamelessness may not always be a moral fault, various psychiatric conditions or TBIs might cause or contribute to a diminished moral sensitivity.
[3] Mason, "On Shamelessness," 417-418.
[4] Ibid., 417-418.
[5] Vida Yao, "Grace and Alienation," *Philosophers' Imprint* vol. 20, no. 16 (May 2020): 4.
[6] Fabrice Teroni and Julien Deonna, "Differentiating shame from guilt," in *Consciousness and Cognition* vol. 17 (2008): 725.

to guilt. From this account, we understand that shame affects our *entire* self as we (or others) view us negatively.

We might also consider whether we treat all kinds of shame the same: are there varying degrees of shame? For example, if my family shames me for my tattoos, I am likely to be affected differently than when a stranger does. Does this invoke a different utility, depending on who is doing the shaming? If the subject that prompts the shaming is something like tattoos and not gender identity, the utility invoked would seem to be different as well; thus, feelings of alienation and isolation from the self compared to others can vary depending on the circumstances in which we feel shame.

There is also a distinction between the experience of shame initiated by the self, which I call self-shame, and shaming initiated by others, which I call other-shame. Consider the following example. Say that I am ashamed about struggling with depression. There may be a variety of underlying causes or reasons for this shame: I feel like a burden to those around me, I feel as though I am letting people down, or I think that I am weak because I struggle with mental health. I feel ashamed that I struggle with depression, and this shame has been self-generated insofar as no specific event or action done by another presupposed my experience of shame.[7] Contrast this self-shame with shaming by or from others, which we can call other-shame. Other-shame is the experience of shame explicitly initiated by others. If someone told me that they felt that my depression was too much for them, I may feel ashamed about my depression. The underlying reason would probably be different: I am not meeting this person's expectations of me, and I am failing to meet some standard of health. With these views and considerations of shame laid out, I will define shame as the experience of being viewed (by oneself or others) as being in misalignment with an individual's character ideals.

[7] One might argue that this stems from being aware of some collective consciousness: because someone inevitably will shame me for my depression, I will, therefore, shame myself. This is true, but nevertheless, it is still self-shame; the self invoked the collective.

(2) Utility of Shame

Shame can be divided into two types: preventative and responsive shame. I will discuss each in terms of their definitions, the utility given moral content, and the utility given who does the shaming.

2.1 Preventative Shame

When considering an action/behavior/speech/etc, you might find yourself not going through with it because you anticipate feeling shamed by someone after the fact. This is what we can define as 'preventative shame': anticipating shame is shame acting in a preventative manner. Some people might even feel anticipatory shame for even having thought about doing something; this is a complex intersection of self and collective consciousness and is another kind of preventative shame.

2.1.1 Breakdown of shame regarding moral content versus content not inherently moral

There are two different types of content regarding shame: moral and not inherently moral content. For the sake of space, I will focus only on moral shame. Consider the following example of shame with moral content: cheating in an agreed-upon monogamous relationship (in a non-religious context).[8] The preventative shame would be anticipating the shame of cheating you might feel after the event—the shame we expect to feel if our partner, friends, or family find out. I suggest that the utility of preventative shame is that if you feel preventative shame in this situation, then perhaps you will not cheat and will find a different solution to the problem. Of course, you might end up cheating and feel responsive shame. Still, you likely feel preventative shame—anticipating the aftermath—and simply neglect it.

[8] We must note an exception for religious shame: What if shame (either preventative or responsive) involves institutions like religion? Does this matter? We may say that there is a difference between shaming someone for wearing sneakers without socks versus someone who believes in God doing something sinful. I don't want to dwell on religion much other than to say that the shame might look slightly different because there is a concrete being (God) who, through the church or family or some religious figure, gives a set of right and wrong that you ought to feel good or bad for. Moral rules in society are unwritten, but in religion, they are concretely given. In many instances of shame (in a religious context), you are being shamed for breaking a rule and you (likely) must either amend your transgression(s) or abandon the religion.

2.1.2 Breakdown of shame by who is doing the shaming (someone significant vs not, collective vs not)

We can further examine preventative shame (with moral content) by considering *who* is doing the shaming. There are two categories to consider: degrees of personal closeness and the general collective (perhaps impersonal) consciousness. Regarding the former, the degrees of closeness would look something like this: shame via the self versus shame via family, a partner, close friends, acquaintances, strangers, people who you find to be intolerable, and people who have wronged you). This breakdown may be expanded further depending on individual opinion. This breakdown by degrees of closeness is important insofar as each level of the *other* in relation to the self carries a different utility. If your family shames you for lying to them about skipping class, they are likely to be disappointed with you for your decision to skip class. This disappointment comes with a lack of pride and threatens acceptance or feelings of being good enough in their eyes. In contrast, by not skipping class, your family has one fewer reason to be disappointed in you and, therefore, one fewer reason to be less proud of you. If you feel preventative shame, you would anticipate this shame and disappointment and most likely go to class, assuming that you want your family to be proud of you. But if a stranger shames you for skipping class, then these feelings of pride and disappointment may not be as relevant and might not arise at all.[9] Instead, you may be bothered by the fact that a stranger cares, or you may be momentarily worried that they do not see you as smart or competent.

The second category of significance is shame stemming from various collective consciousnesses. The collective can be a group identity or society in general. Imagine, as a child, you debate whether to sneak a piece of candy from the sweet shop. The preventative shame here is grounded in the common collective knowledge that stealing is bad and that those who steal are viewed as having done something morally wrong. Preventative shame would stop you from stealing the candy

[9] I want to make a note that this comparison of family to strangers with certain degrees of closeness is based on the assumption that people value their family's opinion over a stranger's. This is not true for everyone, though, and the ranking of entities and their respective degrees of closeness to the self may look different for different individuals.

as you would not be conforming to a social tenet, and being viewed as morally wrong could impact your acceptance in society. Despite an underdeveloped moral compass, children still fear doing something wrong and facing consequences that a "bad person" would face. Altogether, given the two categories of who does the shaming, as well as considering the moral content, I suggest that preventative shame generates conformity, maintains pride, and enacts pressure for not wanting to be viewed as a bad person (in moral situations). Preventative shame of any sort threatens acceptance in a group.

2.2 Responsive Shame

Responsive shame is the shame you experience after carrying out an action, behavior, or speech.

2.2.1 Breakdown of shame regarding moral content versus content not inherently moral

Using the same example for shame with moral content as in section 2.1.1, in a non-religious context, responsive shame following cheating in an agreed-upon monogamous relationship could cause regret, threaten your status, and impact how much people like you. The responsive shame could also force you to recognise that your actions caused harm to another. If you end up cheating and experience shame afterward, then you are feeling responsive shame. Your actions are not aligning with your personal character ideals, or they are not aligning with others' expectations of your character ideals. You may be shamed by your partner or family and friends after you cheat. I suggest that considered this way, the utility of responsive shame is the threat to our identity and existence in groups. We may also feel alienation from ourselves— a separation between the self who is in a committed relationship and the self who has cheated. We may fall out of favor with our friends or family after cheating. All of these things threaten the well-being of the self. In short, responsive shame of any sort threatens your existence in a group. This type of shame can affect our status as a kind of existence either as a rank or as your sense of belonging.

2.2.2 Breakdown of shame by who is doing the shaming (someone significant vs not, collective vs not)

Again, we can break down shame into many different groups of who is doing the shaming. We can separate this into two categories: shame regarding how close the person shaming is to yourself and shame by various collective consciousnesses. Let us use the same examples as in 2.1.2 to illustrate the differing results of responsive shame compared to preventative shame. If your family shames you for lying to them about skipping class, they are probably disappointed with you for your decision to skip class. This disappointment also brings a lack of pride from your family and threatens your acceptance. A stranger shaming you for skipping class might not generate this same feeling of being a disappointment. The shame you feel when a stranger considers your act of skipping class is less personal and potentially less harmful to the self than the shame stemming from your family. In the presence of a stranger, anonymity protects you and yourself (to some extent) from the undesirable scrutiny of your character. Indeed, you still feel responsive shame that may harm the self, but it seems to be different from the shame generated by your family, as there is more knowledge about yourself and your character to contrast your immoral actions with.

Let us take up the example of stealing candy from a sweet shop to examine shame from various collective consciousnesses. Responsive shame here follows from the common collective knowledge that stealing is bad and that those who steal are viewed as having done something morally wrong. Even if no one catches you, you might still feel shame for having stolen because knowing that others would disapprove is significant enough. In turn, you might not feel as worthy or as good of a person as others. Again, this reaffirms that shame threatens our acceptance in a group, and it carries different sorts of utility depending on who is doing the shaming.

(3) The Self and Shame

Defining various kinds of shame and the respective utilities has set us up to understand how this obtains for different accounts of this self. I will now offer two opposing accounts of the self. For

each account, I discuss the definition of the self and whether the utility of shame is beneficial or harmful for that self. In turn, we are prepared to evaluate whether we ought to accept the utility of shame.

3.1 The True Self View

To begin, we will elucidate Strohminger's account of the self: True Self View. Strohminger defends the notion of a *true self*, specifically that the true self is morally good, perspective-independent, and cross-culturally stable. Moral traits are thought to be deeply central to a person's identity. Using evidence from neuropsychological studies, Strohminger cites the observation of altered moral capacities in individuals with frontotemporal dementia compared to those with impaired memory. Oftentimes, the preservation of self is measured by the preservation of moral capacities. The specific positive valence attributed to the true self is argued to be clear from studies in which participants assign features belonging to the true self compared to the surface self. Participants were cited to assign attributes to the true self based on the goodness of said belief or feeling. The self must be perspective-independent, as we tend to view ourselves differently than we view others. Our bias is only interrupted when we examine the true self. We can consider both ourselves and others to be fundamentally morally good.[10] Finally, different cultures have different beliefs about what is morally good; different cultures show different patterns of true self attributions, but the cross-cultural differences of the self are predicted to show an abstract similarity in their call to morally good behavior.[11]

At first glance, it may appear that both self-shame and other-shame are *beneficial* to the self on Strohminger's account. Both preventative shame stemming from the self and responsive shame from either the self or others would seem to help us regulate our behaviors so that they align with our

[10] There are exceptions with this bias of self-attribution such as psychopaths. This could be further explained, though, by mental disorders and/or brain injury and damage.
[11] Nina Strohminger, Joshua Knobe, and George Newman, "The True Self: A Psychological Concept Distinct From the Self," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* vol. 12, no. (2017): 552-554.

morally good true selves and adhere to moral and societal standards. Further investigation, however, calls this into question; it turns out that both self-shame and other-shame seem harmful to the true self. In short, we realize that shame is actually in direct conflict with Strohminger's true self for several reasons. Firstly, shame asks us to feel immense negative self-regard, meaning that when we shame others, we are telling them to feel poorly about their true self. These things conflict with the morally good self—we would not have to consider being in misalignment with ideal characteristics if we believe that everyone's true self is already morally good. Secondly, shame is not perspective-independent. What one person finds shameful may not be true of the next person. For example, maybe you do not share the same opinion as your parents that sex work is shameful. While your parents think that sex work is immoral and shameful, you may think that sex work can be empowering and valid. This moral disagreement would create conflict for your true self; the inconsistency in what is considered to be shameful could lead to the suppression of your true self and to the adoption of a self that is regulated by others' understanding of what is morally good. In short, if a true self were to be taken seriously, then shame would suggest that we are not inherently morally good and not perspective-independent or cross-culturally stable.

That said, I therefore argue that there ought not to be this morally justifiable utility to shame precisely because it is harmful to the true self. Indeed, we can still protect our true selves and resolve potential conflicts between personal character ideals and the ideals of collective consciousnesses without shame; it is possible to re-align or maintain an aligned self with our character ideals without shaming oneself (or by any negative means). We do not need to take on any negative self-regard, self-alienation, or isolation; we want to learn from our mistakes and behaviors to promote character development/growth, rather than hindering our future self-confidence or harming any neutral or positive self-regard.

3.2 The Drawing View

The Drawing View, proposed by Cocking and Kennett, maintains that both the self and our self-conception can be relationally constructed. Cocking and Kennett examine the view of the self in friendship and the role the self plays in our relationships with others. They argue that relational construction depends on our willingness to engage with a friend's interest, resulting in a gradual shift toward others' interests. Moreover, they argue that our self-conception can be relational so long as we care to remain open to our friend's interpretations of ourselves.[12] In other words, in close relationships, we are notably receptive to being guided and understood by the other: we are drawn and shaped by the other.

On the face of it, shame could be viewed as a tool for the Drawing View to encourage adherence to social norms: it informs us of what others believe and presumably live by. Since we are to seriously consider our relationships and the interests of others, shame would seem to deter us from behaving in morally unacceptable ways, thus emphasizing the utility of preventative and responsive shame. This falls apart, though, when we take a closer look at how shame does more than promote social norms/rules on the Drawing View.

If a friend can potentially hold me in contempt and assert the damages I have inflicted upon my future self, who is to say that I cannot do this to myself, too? On the Drawing View, we must seriously consider the interests of others. If I am to value this friendship, I must be receptive to my friend's interests and opinions–even if I do not accept them myself. I must still *consider* their interpretation of me. In doing so, it is quite possible that I adopt some of the shame bestowed upon me as my own, or, in valuing the opinion of my friend, I begin to question my own ideals and induce a degree of self-shame or self-alienation for any amount of time. This other-shame from my friend encompasses my self and impacts my self-conception by interacting with self-shame.

[12] Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett, "Friendship and the Self," *Ethics* vol. 108, no. 3 (April 1998): 527.

If we seriously consider the Drawing View, then it would seem that shame goes beyond informing the self or taking interest in others; rather, it enables others to dictate and regulate the self. Shame is a significantly stronger form of engagement with others' interests, telling us how others interpret who we are and who we should be. Who we are and who we interact with would be easily influenced by shame. In fact, shame would enable others to reconstruct who we are because others' interests and opinions contribute to the construction and constitution of the self. Furthermore, shame helps to reinforce the artificial structure in social circles and acts as the protector and judge of socially decided moral values and norms. In this way, shame is guiding and shaping rather than just informing.

Precisely this seems to be the problem to my mind. Shame dictates a set of behaviors, actions, or attitudes. It is not only that you have to be open to your friends' interpretations of yourself: you need to abide by this interpretation, too. Shame suppresses both the self and our self-conception as it reinforces the ideals of a collective consciousness rather than building up our own ideals. It limits our agency in deciding who we want to be. One might suggest that the solution here is to just ignore shame. This is notably difficult to do, however, and may be inadvisable. To ignore shame would seem to imply that we do not have any moral compass; we would not consider the moral values and beliefs of others, and this might be too unpalatable for us to accept.

In any case, shame causes problems for the "willingness" (important for Cocking and Kennett) in addition to the problematic dictating that shame does. When there is shame there is decreased willingness (on behalf of the subject) to engage with others, given the alienation and isolation that shame engenders. Regardless of the source of shame (self or other), the experience of shame brings about self-alienation and/or alienation from those around you. We question ourselves and our decisions. Suppose, for instance, that my friend shames me for my tattoos, believing that I will miss out on opportunities and will give off poor impressions to others. This shame affects my whole self: not only do they believe that my tattoos negatively affect my physical self, but they also believe that

my tattoos negatively affect my future career path and my social opportunities. I fail to meet their character ideals. It is plausible, then, to see how I may alter my behavior in response to this shame: I cover up my tattoos, avoid certain conversation topics, and reduce the time spent together in person. I try to minimize the exposure to this other-shame; I reduce my willingness to interact with my friend for fear of further shaming, fear that other things about me could further fracture my sense of belonging in our friendship. In other words, shame damages Cocking and Kennett's self by creating more reason for the self to feel alienated and dictated rather than informed by others.

This shows that shame creates a much stronger relational construction of the self than Cocking and Kennett would want, and that shame harms the self regardless of the type of shame. Thus, as with the previous view of the self, I argue that there ought not to be the moral justification and utility of shame: we would not want to inflict harm upon the self and damage our willingness to interact with others.

Conclusion

Now that we have evaluated shame on different accounts of the self, we can return to our initial question: What are we asking of someone else when we shame them? And what are we asking of ourselves when we shame the self? To most people, the obvious answer to these questions is that shame is useful insofar as it forces self-reflection and pushes self-development towards a particular moral ideal. They might also suggest that moral shame could be beneficial for those who have a diminished capacity for moral reasoning (and cannot help what they are doing). However, I propose that while shame may be useful for maintaining societal expectations with an emphasis on the greater good, this does not outweigh the global negative impact of shame on the self. My aim is not to be in agreement or disagreement with the moral standards that shame adheres to. Rather, I am arguing that shame is harmful to the self and that the existing utility should not outweigh the negative self-regard and suppression of the self that shame brings about. As I have shown on two opposing views of the

self, the True Self View and the Drawing View, there is no normative significance of shame, and we ought not to follow the present moral justification and utility of shame. This might very well extend to other accounts of the self as well, given that these two accounts are radically opposed to one another and still yield the same result.

Now, one might say that we cannot escape moral shame, regardless if it is self-inflicted or cast onto us. We might ask ourselves, *how much moral shame is inevitable?* I suggest that some shame is inevitable because we are all aware of the existence of moral rules and of various collective consciousnesses that follow these rules. And, to some degree, everyone wants to be in accordance with both of these. So it seems that one may always operate with some degree of shame to exist and remain accepted and adhere to the rules. There is a tipping point for this, however: when the intersection between moral ideals and collective consciousness is misguiding, detrimental, or harmful to the self. For example, if my family shames me for being queer, I am going to choose to exist and be accepted to a lesser degree by them than repress my identity at all times to maintain my status and sense of belonging with them. If I operate with any degree of shame here, then this seems that it would be harmful to myself. This reiterates my argument that we should see shame without its utility previously delineated. How exactly to go about shaming without accepting the utility is the project of another paper.

One last point to address is what I consider to be the self-regarding emotion that opposes shame, namely moral pride. To my mind, shame and moral pride can be examined in similar ways—by considering who is feeling the emotion and when the emotion is anticipated or shared (before or after an action/behavior/speech). I have suggested that we ought not to accept the utility of the negative, self-regarding emotion that is shame because of its harmful impact on the self. One might ask, does that, therefore, mean that we ought not to accept the utility for the opposite (positive) self-regarding emotion that is moral pride? Or is there an asymmetrical relationship? That, too, is the

project of another paper. In any case, I hope to have offered answers to the questions with which we began this paper.

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BEYOND FUN: REIMAGINING REALITY, PLEASURE, AND ART IN THE CULTURE INDUSTRY – FRANKFURT SCHOOL AND OTHERS

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Abstract: This paper examines how the culture industry manipulates pleasure, drawing on Theodor Adorno's writings on aesthetics and Walter Benjamin's theorization of art in the era of mechanical reproduction. Contrasting Benjamin's view of art as politically potent in its mass reproducibility with Adorno's emphasis on art's inherent autonomy and resistance to politicization, which is then mediated through the commodification of art, this paper argues that Benjamin's failure to recognize the intrinsic "social asociality" of art identified by Adorno limits Benjamin's understanding. This paper also examines pleasure under the commodification of art, arguing that this process perverts aesthetic experience into a superficial, transient form of 'fun' that prevents us from passing through such experience to gain insight into the social reality that art determinately negates. To guide us toward understanding the implications of these deteriorating effects, this paper suggests adopting a Hegelian approach to reality. It views reality not as an objective entity with inherent purposes but as an ongoing process of self-actualization, graspable only through our transcendence of initial perceptions. Both concepts manifest in our reality through art, yet they transcend our perception.

Introduction

When was the last time you sat in an art museum and stared at a painting so long that time seemed to stop, and you felt almost absorbed by the artwork? Probably a very long time ago. In our fast-paced, digitized world, such moments are rare. We often consume art as we do fast food—quickly and without savoring the flavors. But what if this shift in our consumption habits is not just a byproduct of modern life but a deliberate manipulation of pleasure by the culture industry?

This paper will examine the concept of pleasure and its manipulation by the culture industry, as theorized by Frankfurt School scholars. It will investigate how the culture industry's commodification of art and pleasure leads to a superficial, ephemeral "fun" that serves as a diversion from authentic aesthetic experiences and a deeper understanding of reality. Such commodification not only impacts our perception and enjoyment of art, but it also reflects broader societal and philosophical implications about the nature of reality, pleasure, and the human condition. We are prompted to adopt a Hegelian doctrine, viewing reality not as an objective entity with underlying

purposes and inherent meanings, but rather as an ongoing process of its own actualization. Yet Adorno suggests a position beyond metaphysics, although not beyond reach, arguing that this repositioning is necessary for us to see beyond reality.

To investigate this, the paper will discuss the seemingly unmediated dichotomy of art's political/social and aesthetic values. While Walter Benjamin underscores the propagandistic potential of art as it sheds its unique aura in the age of mechanical reproduction, Adorno insists on art's autonomy, resisting the grasp of historical materialization and commodification. This essay will frame an argument of why, in supporting the dichotomy, Benjamin fails to realize art's intrinsic "social asociability" recognized by Adorno. Finally, this essay will conclude that in overcoming superficial joy provided to us by cultural commodities, it's worth thinking whether such direct negation brings us closer to our social reality, or rather, there needs to be a complete phenomenological re-evaluation of the meaning and significance of "reality".

Art's Autonomy and Sociality

Walter Benjamin's historical materialist approach to art criticizes the transformation of art's function in the wake of its reproducibility. The "aura" of the work of art, which he defines as art's "being-here-and-now", undergoes dissolution in the face of mass production.[1] This decay of aura, Benjamin argues, is a symptom of the changing perception of art in society—namely, art becoming an object of political function and collective experience rather than a unique creation.[2] The replicated art loses its aesthetic value, which, in Benjamin's case, represents traditional ritualistic and "cult" values but gains in its capacity for political engagement and accessibility.[3] Under such conditions, Benjamin advocates for art as an ideological tool for demystifying illusory capitalist propaganda and promoting

[1] W. Benjamin et al, *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility, and other writings on Media* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 21.
[2] Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 41.
[3] Ibid., 25.

progressive ideas.[4] Benjamin believes art should adapt to commodification by utilizing its reproducibility, the same element of art that is exploited as a means of ideology.

While Benjamin holds that art should engage directly as an informative agent in people's political lives, Adorno takes a more idealistic approach, believing that art exists conflictingly in a dichotomy of autonomy and sociality or a sociality that is intrinsic precisely because art is asocial in and for itself, as well as for society. That is to say that "every authentic artwork is essentially revolutionary."[5] The conflicted dichotomy or confrontation mentioned is partially mediated by a materialistic historiographical social structure, since art's opposition to a certain society is a determinate negation.[6] To determinately claim this, however, would be an oversimplification. Aural declination is not so much aligned with reproducibility, but with its own 'autonomous' formal laws, even if there is a declination. That is to say, within the dialectical evolution of society, the truth content of art typically experiences a decline in its criticality. Understanding the truth content is crucial to grasping Adorno's aesthetic theory. Closely related to Hegel's idea of dialectical evolution, truth content is intrinsic to art, not as a condensed essence, but as the "united state" of seemingly conflicting concepts. To some extent, in the epistemological sense, truth content "holds" art together through its interaction with society by being its semblance-but-better. Yet, through the sublation conducted by this negation of certain societal elements, it leaves society unchanged. To put this in Adorno's own words: "Art has truth as the semblance of the illusionless."[7] This does not mean, however, that its autonomous immanence, which is preserved within art themselves, will also diminish.

Although Benjamin somewhat gave in to the commodification and fetishization of art and was ready to advance art within that structure, Adorno refused to follow the same path. He acknowledged

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[4] Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 42.
[5] T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*: *Newly Translated, Edited, and with a Translator's Introduction*, translated by R. Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 228.
[6] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 226.
[7] Ibid., 132.

the internal dialectic movement of art and society, in a Hegelian sense, which is closely related to the concept of truth content, as explained above. That is to say, art's significance emerges from its implicit opposition to social conditions which it cannot escape, i.e. art is the "social antithesis of society," it can only rise above thinghood by becoming a thing.[8] With that, Adorno presupposes a transcendental position for the preservation of the truth value of art, which requires art's distancing of itself from its own sociality. Art here refers to modern art that is not commodified through mechanical reproduction within the culture industry. Instead, it stands out precisely because of its asocial social character, namely that it is "functionless" in a commodity society.[9] Therefore, as an antithesis to the assigned social functionality pervasive in our society, the elevation of art to an unattainable status—considered an inherent property by Adorno—naturally addresses the issue of "aural declination."

It might be a fair criticism of Adorno to argue that his rejection of art's pragmatic value also hinders its use-value as a medium for cultural exchange, which, though present in the contemporary cultural scene, need not be "commercialized" but can remain what is called pure art. As he states, "it is not only through its manifest practical intentions, but rather through its mere existence – indeed, precisely through its impractical nature – that art manifests a polemic, secretly practical character."[10] Yet, Adorno's ideal of art is only explicitly powerless under a capitalistic ideologically established reality, since it is important to know that although skeptical of *l'art pour l'art* as the inward teleological glorification and mystification of art, he nevertheless insists that art's impulse to transcend its own materiality is its essential feature. Hence, his philosophy is impractical only insofar as art is trapped within symbolic impotence which manifests in its dialectic, implying that the art, while attempting to convey significant societal critiques or insights, fails to do so effectively, as it is trapped under the broader context of commercial society. Art is also trapped within its own dialectic—the inherent

[8] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 157.
[9] Ibid., 227.
[10] Ibid., 234.

contradictions and tensions of its existence and purpose. Art's self-distancing is ambiguous in another aspect: it's unclear if this distance, as implied by Adorno, delves into a layer deeper than superficial social reality. This genuine art is believed to represent an unreachable ideal of happiness, existing only in its unattainability, signifying that its very essence is to be elusive, which reveals art's intrinsic unattainability that exists "not by something other than itself, but by itself, precisely insofar as it is an image."[11] This ties to significant questions about that very reality, which will be further explored later in this paper.

So far, Benjamin argues that art can serve a positive role by directly opposing certain ideologies or actively promoting others, both of which are forms of negation. From Adorno, we've gathered that art may not be able to escape the dialectical limitation that it cannot critique alienation without alienating itself. Still, this is somewhat of a simple negation given that art never escapes from itself. From these assumptions, I propose shifting the focus from art's intentions to art's expressions. Namely, instead of viewing art as reformative (although limited) in-and-for-itself, or revolutionary for a specific other (as in Benjamin's case), I suggest considering art's constitutive effect through its interaction with "reality" which is closely related to its truth content and social character. In Adorno's words, art is the medium that, without imitation of current social conditions, creates a somewhat illusory reality. This again has certain trajectories on our so-called objectively materialistic yet deeply ideological social reality. With this in mind, we move on to examine how aesthetic pleasure is bound up with art's political and ideological uses.

Reality and Pleasure in Art

In Adorno's analysis, the experience of culture industry products is characterized less by pleasure than by 'fun', a temporary enjoyment that veils a sense of political domination. The culture

[11] Erica Weitzman, "No fun: Aporias of pleasure in Adorno's aesthetic theory," (Hoboken: The German Quarterly, 2008), 192.

industry manufactures such products which, in the mere commercialist sense, sedate consumers into a sound, illusory, dreamy slumber that mandates their perceptions and judgment, and in such ways controls their essential beings.[12] The term 'essential beings' here refers not only to that which is alienable in an ideological sense but also in an epistemological one. As Adorno argues in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the culture industry prevents us from experiencing profound, soul-crushing moments where we lose all subjectivity –which we will simply consider as 'sense of self' here – and become absorbed into the 'world' of the artwork, which could provoke feelings of ablation and aggregation. From the perspective of control, it ensures our joy remains superficial, adhering to the supreme rule that 'people shall not satisfy their desires at any price; they must laugh and be content with laughter.'This aspect of the cultural commodities necessitates their politicality which, unlike direct political propaganda, is a 'political coercion itself', i.e. 'a sadistic culture mandate to enjoy.'[13]

To some extent, a standardized bourgeois subject is conditioned as someone who is able to enjoy fun in a non-neurotic way.[14] Hence, Benjamin's assertion that the culture industry, through a standardized mechanical reproduction, produces illusory conceptions which blinds us from class struggles in the 'real' world is somewhat accurate. Adorno also points out that art's "deep nature" is paradoxical: it is independent, yet only mirrors suffering instead of truly experiencing it. This creates the contradiction that art cannot depict suffering without becoming detached from the real burdens of it. This coincides with Benjamin's political ideal of reproducibility, both critical of a capitalist culture industry in which politics is aestheticized in such a way that it intoxicates and controls people.

Hence, in contrast to having 'fun', in *Aesthetics and Other Works*, Adorno defines genuine aesthetic experience as a truly transcendental journey in which the subjects involved in this experience essentially take part in this co-enactment, and 'in joining the process of the work of art by being

[12] Weitzman, "No fun," 186.
[13] Ibid., 186.
[14] Ibid., 187.

inside it', they are in fact 'living in it.'[15] Therefore, authentic aesthetic experience is 'a path leading precisely away from the subject', which indicates that with higher engagement, there will be less enjoyment.[16] The artwork can draw viewers into it, provided that it is an ongoing process instead of a fixed set of properties united into a thing that alienates them from the alienated world. Therefore, as inhabitants and perceivers of the alienated world, we have natural rights to question the inconsistencies we discover through such ways of entering an artificial illusion.

To some extent, the culture industry does indeed deny authentic aesthetic experiences by providing immediate, hollow 'fun'. This serves effectively as a way to establish a socially accepted normality. It is also noticeable that Adorno claims that what would be called pleasure in its essence represents an 'ever broken promise of happiness', pointing to a deeper underlying fact about art and reality that 'spirit may find neither itself in the world nor in itself; it is possibility promised by its impossibility'.[17] This would point us to a more metaphysical part of Adorno's system.

Art's Dialectics and Reality

It is interesting that Adorno thinks 'the real point will never be reached' because of the temporal structure of our perception, which entails that the enjoyment of any artistic object never occurs in the 'here' and 'now' of our empirical temporal space.[18] This conception in a way contradicts Benjamin's 'aura' which is largely arguing that the authenticity of artwork exists because of its "being-here-and-now", namely a historical and spatial slice that could be perceived and preserved. Adorno contends that the culture industry undermines the critical and transformative essence of art and culture, relegating them to tools of capitalist control and passive consumption. This industry's

[15] T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetics*: 1958/59, (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), 117.
[16] Adorno, *Aesthetics*, 117.
[17] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 136.
[18] Weitzman, "No fun," 186.

replication and distribution of mass-produced cultural products not only reflects, but actively molds societal norms and desires. Undeniably, to understand the very nature of this reality, understanding the nature of the induction of a "cheap thrill" is necessary. However, he has a more complex dialectical understanding of the temporal structure of our reality which, expressed briefly, states that time or space cannot be abstracted from an unfolding process of reality. On the other hand, reality is not only unreachable in a perceptual sense, since with the increase in the adequacy of an artwork, the "context of delusion is also reinforced in a sense."[19] The realm of beauty and aesthetics is somewhat removed from 'reality'. Art inhabits a sphere of "aesthetic semblance," which implies that beauty is often an appearance or an illusion, rather than something immediately available, which ties back to the notion of beauty being idealized and unreachable.[20] Hence, we must understand artworks in such a way that they're 'comprehended as the incomprehensible,'[21] or as an ongoing process in which they end by returning to themselves following their own dialectical process, as explained above.[22]

Understanding reality exactly from its appearance, namely the appearance we perceive, might be the starting point to any form of understanding of not a specific reality**.** So far, we've only been concerned about two types of realities: I presupposed the dichotomous existence of an art-generated reality, which is supposedly a standard for the second reality—the objective, concrete, substantial, materialistic reality. The former applies to both the "social reality" framed by ideological efforts infiltrated in art as commodities, and the genuine transcendental reality where the genuine aesthetic experience truly lies. For genuine aesthetic experience is out of reach, built upon the presupposition that art, by nature, distances audiences from it, as if it exists in an outwardly, unimaginable reality that is different from our own. Either way, we're supposing a reality outside of our reality, instead of one

[19] Adorno, *Aesthetics*, 121.
[20] Ibid., 33.
[21] Ibid., 125.
[22] Ibid., 128.

that's implicit to the dialectics of a single reality. Similarly, Benjamin, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* argues that mechanical reproduction changes not only how art is produced and consumed in the culture industry but also how it relates to reality—the reproduced art creates a new kind of reality, one that can differ significantly from the natural world, opening up new possibilities for representation and interpretation. That is not to say, however, that Adorno adopts a post-structuralist approach which, in deconstructing reality, claims the invalidity of reality, and denies any observation or experience of that, but rather, in investigating the intricacies of subject and object in art, hoping for an answer beyond the innate antagonism of art.[23]

However, I am prompted to provide a more epistemological account of the as-yet incomprehensible reality, primarily because the conquest of an epistemic claim about illusion and reality requires an adequate explanation. We can start by examining the idea of contradiction. As noted, art is ensnared within a broader social context that is highly commercialized, so it may never escape this context, as much as it aims to do so. And it seems like audiences are being fed up with the obviously superficial stimulation provided by a form of art that has degraded to the level of commodities. More importantly, there is an inherent antagonism in our ways of understanding reality, which is revealed through the examination of art from a dialectical perspective. Adorno himself, following a Hegelian understanding of reality, phrases this differently among his works and ultimately believes that appearance emerges alongside essence rather than in opposition to reality, which involves a movement beyond metaphysics. This is particularly significant in his *Negative Dialectics.*

As mentioned above, Adorno identifies an inherent contradiction within art itself, which is crucial to address for understanding and potentially resolving how art is reduced to a mere cultural product and ideologically manipulates the masses. This contradiction arises from the dialectics of art itself, yet Adorno calls for an evaluation of this very dialectics. He believes that thinking in

[23] Benjamin, *The Work of Art,* 159.

contradictions, which is the motif for the dialectics, is a twofold process where both the innate contradiction in the thing [Sache], here as art, and against that contradiction. "A contradiction in reality, [dialectics] is a contradiction against reality"[24]. Here, Adorno rejects the Hegelian dialectics by arguing that after two negations, instead of arriving at a position where the starting point of the dialectic is elevated to a more comprehensively known level which suggests positive outcome, the "outcome" would still be negative. Adorno also criticizes a subjective pre-formation which blocks the identical. Namely that we're accustomed to an ontologically a priori structure which dominates philosophy, and subsequently how we view reality. Adorno condemns this as the simplest negative "spiritualized coercion". To put it simply, not only is art trapped under a certain antagonism, but us as well. From philosophy, we cannot derive anything truly positive that aligns perfectly with our conceptual constructions. This is due to the inherent limitations of our reasoning tools, which themselves must be critically examined and deconstructed. Art becomes part of the same system that imposes predefined categories on the world, stripping it of its unique, nonidentical qualities and using it to manipulate mass ideology.[25] This can be tied back to Adorno's rejection of an immediate understanding of art as a concrete thing that can be pinned down in a particular space-time coordinate, but rather, a comprehensive and dialectic experience. Hence, what Adorno calls for is a comprehensive reflection of the way we perceive phenomena which is conceptualized in such a way that there will always be residues that escape the theoretical framework.

If we scrutinize our late-capitalist society, we find that the culture industry's production of trivial entertainment, exemplified by shows like *Love Island*, does not shy away from disclosing viewers the nature of shallow reality shows. Yet, are the audiences really aware that the ongoing fetishization is eroding their critical conception of reality? Maybe they acknowledge this behavior that Benjamin

[24] T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2015), 144-45.
[25] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 141-142.

would likely not approve of. Nonetheless, they continue engaging in it for the sake of indulging themselves in it, believing that this will bring them joy. Seemingly, this contradicts Benjamin and Adorno's theory of the unconscious indulgence, which paves way for the infiltration of ideologies and control of the audience. More investigation is needed to claim that the real danger of the commodification of products in the culture industry is not so much that capitalistic ideological cultural products might be blinding to whatever predicate, be it reality (although Adorno does not think so) or conscious perception, the very ways through which we frame phenomenological experience that can never fully be accountable of how interactions with art work. Either way, epistemological questions regarding choice and deception could be better explained with a theory that encompasses the realm of the unconscious.

Lastly, in arguing for a re-evaluation of reality in art not as an alternative utopia but as a dialectic process understood under a conceptual framework, through the critical evaluation of which would we arrive at a point which exceeds the everlasting negativity and antagonism, which rejects the Hegelian traditional dialectics. I believe that it is an ambitious project in trying to identify ways through which we can get closer to understanding phenomena that constitutes our ways of understanding reality in order to sublate this understanding. Yet we have come to a point where the notion of reality gets increasingly blurry and mystified, as argued by both Adorno and Benjamin. Therefore, it might be necessary to do so. To answer the title, if there is no reality within reality, we simply must accept the uncertainty of it as phenomenological observers of "our" social reality.

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THE COMMUNICABILITY OF BEAUTY AND A ROBUST CONCEPTION OF *SENSUS COMMUNIS*

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Abstract: Immanuel Kant writes in *Critique of Judgment* that a judgment of beauty--the first form of aesthetic judgment--is universally communicable by virtue of the universal form of judgment actualized in a rational, judging subject. The question arises as to the relation of the communicability of an aesthetic judgment to the representation obtained in the judgment, as to whether communicability belongs to the specific representation itself. Scholars have held either view, affirming or denying communicability as part of the judgment. In this paper I wish to intervene in this debate by bringing up Kant's distinction between objective and subjective communicability, in order to show that one *is* aware of the communicability of one's judgment of beauty--that is, communicability is an attitude immanent to making a judgment of beauty--yet *not* per its character as *subjective*. Kant's analysis of phenomena of making aesthetic judgments is at once more nuanced and more interesting than a mere consciousness, or the lack thereof, of it in the judgment. While an aesthetic judgment presupposes its *subjective* communicability, we act *as if* we are making an *objective* judgment in our act of judging and comparing it with the judgments of others. As I proceed to show, this subtlety in Kant's analysis of the communicability of an aesthetic judgment points to a robust and substantive conception of *sensus communis*, or the shared aesthetic taste. For Kant, common sense is not merely our shared capacity to judge aesthetically, but the *substantially* shared taste which we shall *infinitely* strive to attain through moral cultivation.

In the third *Critique*, Kant associates the aesthetic judgment of beauty, in his discussion of the judgment's logical function of "quantity," with its universal communicability. Kant scholars have commented extensively on the relation of communicability to the representation of beauty. In this paper I will focus on the commentaries of two scholars, Paul Guyer and Béatrice Longuenesse, who express two clearly defined and opposed grasps of this relation. According to Guyer, the universal communicability of an aesthetic judgment is irrelevant to the representation of beauty, the harmony between imagination and understanding free from both sensuous concretion and determinate concepts, since communicability is not part of the representation itself: one is only conscious of the harmony but not of the call on others to agree with one's feeling, i.e., its universal communicability.[1] On the other hand, for Longuenesse, an aesthetic judgment's universal communicability is part of

[1] Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

one's conscious representation because there are two orders in our judgment: first, the representation of beauty or the "first order," and second, the representation of its universal subjective communicability or the "second order."[2]

This paper rejects both positions. I want to show that, in Kant's construal, communicability *is* an indispensable source of the pleasure experienced in a judgment of beauty—*pace* Guyer—yet also reject Longuenesse's two-order conception of an aesthetic judgment, which assumes that for the subjective communicability of beauty to be a source of pleasure one must be explicitly conscious of it as an *additional* representation. My paper will begin with a reconstruction of the two authors' analyses. As I hope to demonstrate, Kant's inclusion of the communicability of an aesthetic judgment into its source of pleasure is at once more nuanced and more interesting than a mere consciousness or the lack thereof in the judgment. While an aesthetic judgment presupposes its *subjective* communicability, we act *as if* we are making an *objective* judgment in our act of judging and comparing it with the judgments of others. I hope to show, further, that this subtle complexity in Kant's analysis of the communicability of an aesthetic judgment points to a more robust and substantive conception of the *sensus communis*, or the shared aesthetic taste that Kant sees as our moral task to cultivate. For Kant, *pace* Longuenesse, common sense is not merely our shared capacity to judge aesthetically, but our *substantially* shared taste for which we shall *infinitely* strive through moral cultivation.

In §9 of *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argues that in a judgment of beauty, the representation of (the form of) the object *precedes* the pleasure one obtains from the judgment. If, Kant reasons, the latter precedes the former, we cannot secure its universal communicability as a judgment due to the involvement of senses. Yet, Guyer argues, Kant seems to have put forward a confusing claim. Kant seems to make communicability, an *aspect* of the judgment of beauty that is based on its presupposed

[2] Béatrice Longuenesse, "Kant's Leading Thread in the Analytic of the Beautiful," in *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, ed. Rebecca Kukla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

subjective capacity, *itself* the source of the representation of harmony.[3] According to Guyer, this amounts to saying that "the communicability of a representation is itself the mental state of a free play."[4] On Guyer's reading, rather, we can simply feel pleasure without simultaneously counting on others to agree; the latter is merely an external aspect of our harmonious representation based on our shared mental capacity.[5] Yet for Kant, communicability being a source of pleasure does not entail that it be part of the representation itself, and Guyer's denial of the latter does not thereby invalidate the former. In fact, Kant's robust claim is that so long as it is a proper judgment that rests on the cooperation, whether free or law-governed, of our cognitive faculties, to judge *is* to make a universally communicable judgment. As Kant points out, since to be communicable is to "refer a given presentation to *cognition in general*,"[6] and since cognition in general is the subjective condition of a judgment of beauty, to experience genuine free play in a judgment of beauty presupposes its intersubjective aspect, and thus to judge so *is* to satisfy the condition for cognition in general and hence its universal communicability. To properly judge *is* to demand, even though we may be wrong, that others agree with us and to claim universality. Thus universal communicability, while not part of the representation, is unmistakably the source of our aesthetic pleasure.

How exactly, then, are we aware of the communicability of our judgment of beauty if communicability does not belong to the concrete representation itself? In her essay "Kant's Leading Thread in the Analytic of the Beautiful," Longuenesse affirms both the role of communicability and our consciousness of it without making communicability part of the representation of harmony itself,

[3] Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 156.
[4] Ibid., 155.
[5] In this passage, Kant does take the representation of beauty apart from its communicability: "Now this merely subjective (aesthetic) judging of the object, or of the presentation by which it is given, precedes the pleasure in the object and is the basis of this pleasure, [a pleasure] in the harmony of the cognitive powers. But the universal subjective validity of this liking, the liking we connect with the presentation of the object we call beautiful, is based solely on the mentioned universality of the subjective conditions for judging objects." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub. Co., 1987), p. 62, 5:218.
[6] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 62, 5:218.

for she distinguishes two levels of consciousness. As discussed, Kant notes that the pleasure of the representation of beauty has its basis in its communicability. Hence, beyond the consciousness of the representation itself, Longuenesse suggests a second-order consciousness of the representation's communicability to account for the overall pleasure in a judgment of beauty.[7] Thus the consciousnesses of a representation's harmony *and* of its universal communicability together constitute the two indispensable sources of the pleasure specific to a judgment of beauty. As Kant writes, "for we are conscious that this subjective relation suitable for cognition in general must hold just as much for everyone…as any determinate cognition."[8]

Certainly, a judgment of beauty whose representation is communicable may simultaneously occasion an awareness of its communicability beside the representation itself, as the previous quote suggests. Yet I take issue with the precise sense in which we are conscious of this communicability. We may distinguish two kinds of communicability. The first is that of the objective empirical judgment in our cognition of objects, and the second that of the subjective feeling of pleasure in the judgment of beauty, which does not refer to the objective qualities of the object. While Kant surely counts communicability as a source of pleasure, his observation on our act of making a judgment of beauty is very subtle:

> When we make a judgment of taste, the pleasure we feel is something we require from everyone else as necessary, just *as if* [my emphasis], when we call something beautiful, we had to regard beauty as a characteristic of the object, determined in it according to concepts, even though *in fact* [my emphasis], apart from a reference to the subject's feeling, beauty is nothing by itself.[9]

My two emphases in the quote aim to bring out Kant's nuanced observation of our practice of making aesthetic judgments. On the one hand, we act "as if" beauty is an objective predicate of the object, yet what we "in fact" are doing–that is, that which is *at work* in our judging yet of which we may not be

[7] Longuenesse, "Kant's Leading Thread in the Analytic of the Beautiful," 278.
[8] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 62, 5:218.
[9] Ibid., p. 62-63, 5:218.

explicitly aware–is demanding universal agreement on how *we* feel. Kant further reports on the "strange" phenomenon in disputes about beauty. When we argue over our judgments of beauty, we do not dispute whether "such a claim is possible;" rather, we "are merely unable to agree in particular cases on the correct way to apply this ability."[10] In other words, we always judge *as if* we are making *objective, empirical* judgments that presuppose and demand universal, objective communicability, which is not what we are *in fact* doing. Recall that Kant draws a distinction between "logical" and "aesthetic" quantity. The logical quantity of a judgment of beauty is singular since it is not subsumed under any objective universal concept. Yet, different from a mere judgment of the agreeable, its aesthetic quantity is universal: it calls on every judger to feel the same way, as they share the mental capacity of judging.[11] In asserting a judgment of beauty, we are *in fact* saying: "You, like any other rational judger, ought to *feel* the way I do about this rose." Yet we appear to be saying, e.g., "*the rose* is beautiful" as if staking an objective claim. Thus it may be too hasty to say that we are simply *conscious* of the communicability of our pleasure, when the true source of our pleasure, i.e., the subjective communicability, arises in the form of an *objective* demand. If we must be conscious of both what we think we are doing and what we actually do, isn't it more possible that we will stop saying "this flower is beautiful," but rather "I am in a jolly good mood right now, as everyone should be, with this flower!"

In this light, then, we can see how Guyer's and Longuenesse's stances on communicability contrast each other while also adopting a shared assumption. In contrast to Guyer, Longuenesse unmistakably locates communicability as a source of our pleasure in judging beauty. Yet, like Guyer, Longuenesse also assumes that for communicability to play a role in producing our representation, we must be explicitly conscious of it. This leads her to posit two orders in our representation. My reading, however, questions the assumption that the relevant communicability of which we are aware is *the* sort

[10] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 58, 5:214.
[11] Ibid., p. 59, 5:215.

of communicability active in our judgments. As Kant has observed, we judge *as if* we are making an *objective* claim, in the manner in which we make objective empirical judgments and demand universal agreement. We judge, that is, as if we are making a universally valid, empirical, and objective claim, in which our demand on others to agree with us is *internal* to our act of judging. This dispenses with Longuenesse's two-order conception of an aesthetic judgment.

This apparently subtle difference between Longuenesse's treatment of communicability and what I see as Kant's more subtle and interesting analysis, points to a more substantive difference in their conceptions of the *sensus communis*. According to Longuenesse, because we can feel the "second-order" pleasure in the universal communicability of our representation, it is not unreasonable to suppose "a similar universal communicability of the state of mind in the free play of imagination and understanding."[12] In other words, our awareness of the claim we make on others to agree to our feeling of pleasure may presuppose a shared capacity to feel pleasure in beauty at all. The common sense we might share, therefore, is not a shared acceptance of what is beautiful, but only of what condition is to be satisfied for something to be judged beautiful, or as Longuenesse puts it, a "norm of truth,"[13] namely, the harmony of faculties. Longuenesse goes on to ward off an objection against the possibility of a universally communicable capacity for the free play of cognitive faculties. The objection questions the possibility of such a universal capacity for taste that departs from the rule-governed understanding in the first *Critique*. In response, Longuenesse notes that Kant does not simply assert but demands it as if it were a moral duty.[14]

Now, if we accept Longuenesse's premise that Kant identifies *sensus communis*--the shared aesthetic taste--with the mere capacity to engage in the free play of the understanding and imagination, then her refutation holds with regard to the immediate objection. Yet this premise is doubtful. In the

[12] Longuenesse, "Kant's Leading Thread in the Analytic of the Beautiful," 286.
[13] Ibid., 286.
[14] Ibid., 288.

passage from §20 that Longuenesse quotes, Kant does seem to make this identification when he writes that the principle of universally communicable concept-free feeling "could only be regarded as *common sense*."[15] He even contrasts it with "common understanding," which judges by determinate concepts. Yet let's note a passage in just the next section (§21):

> But this attunement of the cognitive powers varies in its proportion, depending on what difference there is among the objects that are given. And yet there must be one attunement in which this inner relation is most conducive to the (mutual) quickening of the two mental powers with a view to cognition (of given objects) in general, and the only way this attunement can be determined is by feeling (rather than by concepts).[16]

I take Kant to put forward a more robust conception of *sensus communis*. Of course, as a judgment of beauty, the representation and pleasure concern only the judging subject. Yet the common sense we might share is not just the capacity to feel pleasure in beauty, but a *substantially* shared taste of beauty. It is that "one attunement" that enables the shared feeling of harmony. Kant makes it even more explicit in §40:

> Instead, we must [here] take *sensus communis* to mean the idea of a sense *shared* [by all of us], i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting [something], in order *as it were* to compare our own judgment with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones, an illusion that would have prejudicial influence on the judgment.[17]

By comparing our judgments potentially with all other possible judgments of beauty, we strive to cultivate within ourselves the universal " idea of a sense." Common sense, as it is discussed here, is not merely the universal *ability* to feel pleasure and judge the beautiful, but also a universal taste of beauty and what to feel pleasure for when we judge them.

Yet is a substantially shared taste possible? Does this reading not potentially subject judgers to a tyranny of taste, held in the name of "common sense?" Not, however, if we understand it morally, which I will address later.

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[15] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 87, 5:238.
[16] Ibid., p. 88, 5:238-239.
[17] Ibid., p. 160, 5:293-294.

Returning to Longuenesse's path, we can see that her responses to the objection only explain why it will not be contradictory to have the capacity to judge beauty. Yet Kant has no issue with the existence itself of the capacity of the free play of faculties.[18] It is arguable that Longuenesse confuses the very communicability of sensation, which rests on our shared mental capacities, with *sensus communis*. This is further shown in her comparison of *sensus communis* with Kant's discussion of *Aufklärung*: to think for oneself, to think from the universal standpoint, and to think consistently. The free and active play of faculties and its universal communicability conform to the first two maxims. Equating *sensus communis* with the capacity to judge beauty, Longuenesse writes that "the third maxim is irrelevant: any singular aesthetic judgment carries its own exemplary norm" and thus needs no consistency with other judgments.[19] Yet Kant does not exclude the third maxim from the discussion of common sense. The third maxim of consistent thinking, writes Kant, "can be attained only after repeated compliance with a combination of the first two [maxims]."[20] Is not this what we aim to achieve in judging beauty, as pointed out by Kant in the previously quoted passage from §40? In trying to judge the beautiful free from sensation and determinate concepts, one constantly "thinks for oneself," i.e., to engage in active free thought, and "think for others," i.e., to remain disinterested and always compare our judgments of beauty with others'. Do they not allow us to strive for a shared, consistent taste, and not just a mere capacity to have a universal taste? This difference between Longuenesse's and Kant's conception of common sense is also connected with the difference between their treatments of the consciousness of the communicability of judgments of beauty. If, following Longuenesse, we are fully aware that we, as judgers, demand that others agree with our feelings, then the question becomes merely whether such a capacity for judging does exist, and the relevant moral

[18] In his deduction of judgments of taste, the communicability of a judgment of beauty is based on the shared subjective condition of all judgers. Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* p. 155, 5:290.
[19] Longuenesse, "Kant's Leading Thread in the Analytic of the Beautiful," 289.
[20] Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* p. 161-62, 5:295.

imperative is simply that of establishing such a capacity which we demand of others in a community of judgers. As discussed, however, Kant pays homage to the phenomena that we claim to make an *objective* claim in making a merely subjective judgment of beauty. This suggests that we are *driven to make a genuinely objective, universal judgment of beauty, despite our subjective capacity as judgers.* Precisely because we always judge *as if* the predicate of beauty is objective, we express a much stronger and, as I will show, *moral* impetus to strive for and cultivate a substantially shared taste that, though constitutively postponed, unites subjective and objective purposiveness, rather than just a mere *capacity* for taste.

The analogy Kant draws between a judgment of beauty and a moral maxim also points to a more robust conception of common sense. Kant first notes that if we take a "direct interest" in nature, unaffected by sensation or concepts, our demand on others in agreeing with our judgment has the weight of morality.[21] An interest "consists in pleasure in the existence of an object."[22] In contrast to an empirical interest, an "intellectual interest" favors the existence of nature for its mere forms rather than sensuous charms.[23] Two parallels thus present themselves between beauty and morality: neither is based on any sensuous interest, while both give rise to an interest in either the actualization of pure ideas or the representation of pure purposiveness, i.e., the pure intelligible forms of nature.[24] In this sense, both moral judgments and judgments of beauty are *autonomous* in that they are not subject to empirical laws or conditions but determine their content for themselves, either by pure moral maxims or by the pure purposiveness of faculties.

With the analogy at hand, Kant further grounds the moral basis of a judgment of beauty in his solution to the antinomy of taste. The basis we have for claiming universality in a judgment of beauty is an *indeterminate* concept, a concept of *reason*,[25] whose harmony with our faculties points to their

[21] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 164, 5:297.
[22] Ibid., p. 163, 5:296.
[23] Ibid., p. 166, 5:299.
[24] Ibid., p. 167, 5:300.
[25] Ibid., p. 213, 5:340.

supersensible unity.[26] Specially, Kant notes that the basis for a universal claim on taste is not simply inexistent, but epistemically "unknowable;" it is not simply concept*less*, but an *indeterminate* concept, a purposive ruling without being *a* purpose.[27] So construed, a judgment of beauty

1) is not based on any sensuous interest;

2) involves the (though indeterminate) freedom of faculties; and,

3) makes a *universal*, *objective* claim.[28]

In Kant's wonderfully ambiguous term, an interest in beauty is a "transition" to moral interest, which I take to mean that it is the starting point of our free moral self-legislation.[29] A judgment of beauty involves the indeterminate feeling of balance, of freedom from sensation and determinate concepts, which prepares us for fully autonomous and moral actions that have their determining and activating ground solely in the representation of a pure, sensuously free, and universal--i.e., moral--maxim. *Put otherwise, a judgment of beauty approximates the standpoint of the supersensible unity of pure concepts and reality, while a moral action proceeds to realize it*. If we so grasp the kinship between the basis of taste and that of moral acts, between indeterminate concepts and pure moral maxims, then our striving to sensibly represent rational ideas goes along with our practical activity to realize them. In this precise sense, common sense should be understood as the prospect, though *constitutively* postponed, of a shared taste of humanity in a state in which our subjective and objective powers are united, where no difference between representation and reality persists, where the good is no longer separated from the achievement of our material well-being (*Wohl*). Now we can respond to the charge of tyranny: the realization of a shared taste is always postponed, and any fixed ruling on taste cannot but fail its hunger

[26] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 229, 5:353.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., p. 230, 5:354.

for the supersensible. Rather, the postulate of and striving for such a shared taste give us the courage to radically overcome *any* finite prescription of taste.

To conclude, I have argued for the role and moral significance of communicability in a judgment of beauty, as well as for a robust *sensus communis*. Guyer is correct insofar as communicability is not part of the representation itself, yet this does not prevent communicability from being necessarily connected to our representation as its ground. Longuenesse accepts the role of communicability and adds our consciousness of it in addition to the very representation of beauty. I intervene in this debate by bringing up Kant's observation of our practice of judging beauty, which reveals a moral commitment grounded in our drive to *make true* our subjectively grounded aesthetic judgments. This phenomenon points to a more substantial difference between Longuenesse's and Kant's conception of *sensus communis*, which I understand not as the mere capacity to experience harmony but as a substantially shared taste to be cultivated. It is grounded in our moral vocation, the realization of our freedom.

At the end of her essay, Longuenesse writes that accepting a supersensible ground for our judgment of beauty can be "more than most of us can swallow."[30] Instead, we can just accept the moderate requirement of establishing a community of aesthetic judgers. Of course, such a demand is no less radical, as it both demands as an obligation that we overcome contingent, idiosyncratic aesthetic interests, as well as grants an equal status to human art. However, while human art--or, more generously put, a form of aesthetic appreciation cultivated in a determinate community of merely *capable* judgers--can lend itself to aesthetic pleasure, there is always the danger of unwittingly submitting to a ruling, in-itself contingent taste *in the guise of* common sense. Despite its intentions, the appeal to common sense as the result of community and human art may really just be an effort to fortify a *de facto* claim to power, of the finite over the infinite--the warning I envisioned in the middle of the paper.

[30] Longuenesse, "Kant's Leading Thread in the Analytic of the Beautiful," 290.

For those whose taste is not built in such a form of representation, they are not even excluded from the community because they are never within it in the first place. They would, ironically, be fittingly described as *incapable* of judging the beautiful. Paradoxically, we overcome this tyranny of taste by postulating, as our moral vocation, the cultivation of an *actual, substantial* taste. The radical transcendence of the supersensible ground--the utter indeterminacy of the concept whose determination necessitates our eternal, infinite attempts at its realization--allows us to always look beyond a piece of human art or the gaze of others and tell ourselves: there *is* more to like.

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STAFF WRITING

WILD CREATURES IN FURTHER CONTEXT

by Cameron Doherty, University of Minnesota

Some Context

While the suffering of wild creatures is generally recognized as being of moral concern among animal ethicists, what exactly is owed (if anything) has remained contested. Broadly, *capacity-oriented views* and *relational views* have offered two opposing attitudes: *assistance* and *abstention*, respectively.[1] To assist wild creatures requires that we intervene to alleviate their suffering from natural causes, whereas abstinent views do not. Given the regularity of animal capacities, and the irregularity of their relations to moral agents, capacity-oriented views often find reason to ground obligations towards wild creatures where relational views do not. This produces (what is often considered) a problem, one I will refer to as *over-extension*. The problem lies in the extension of moral obligation to the wild world, where intervention is often seen as controversial.[2] I will contend that relational views, too, are susceptible to this extension. To show this, disagreement among two philosophers will be explored, which should provide ample context for, and a path towards, compromise.

The Contextual View

The intuition that "while we have obligations to assist and care for domesticated animals, we have no such obligations towards animals in the wild," is referred to as the *laissez-faire intuition* by philosopher Clare Palmer,[3] and is defended in her *contextual view*. More specifically, Palmer believes that, "While sentient animals are morally considerable, we are not normally morally required to assist suffering wild animals, though this does not mean that it is ethically impermissible to do so."[4] As an animal ethicist Palmer defends this position by maintaining that relations, or *morally-relevant entanglements*

[1] This distinction is somewhat artificial. Capacity-oriented views do not always advocate for assistance to wild creatures, and relational views may not advocate for abstention.
[2] Intervention to alleviate the suffering of wild creatures has long proven controversial, though why it may be controversial is not the focus of this paper.
[3] Palmer, "Animal Ethics in Context," 63.
[4] Palmer, *Against the View That We Are Normally Required to Assist Wild Animals*.

as characterized by Catia Faria, are what ground obligations for assistance, which are normally absent in the case of wild creatures. By relation, Palmer intends to mean:

> "...having an effect, potentially having an effect, or having had an effect on another, or the existence of an interaction between one being and another, such that the effect or interaction makes a difference in states of affairs."[5]

Relations, in this way, describe causal links. Where agents are morally motivated in their pursuits, in interaction with another agent or some moral entity, these causal links become of moral import, generating obligations. But where no causal link exists, there are no such obligations. The latter case is what Palmer thinks is happening in the context of wild creatures. While Palmer acknowledges that certain conditions may ground these sorts of obligations to wild creatures, such as past harms or other anthropogenic interference, these sorts of relations generally do not hold.[6]

Palmer has received criticism for her view. Animal ethicist Catia Faria, in response to Palmer, notes that such morally-relevant entanglements can also fail to be found in the human case. In this way, common intuitions about obligations for assistance to other humans may be permissibly neglected. They offer a thought experiment including a set of buttons to illustrate this:

> "Suppose that you are presented with these choices:
> (i) Press button A: All human beings are immunized against all lethal forms of cancer;
> (ii) Press button B: Only those human beings with whom we are engaged in 'morally-relevant entanglements' are so immunized;
> (iii) Press no button."[7]

It is Faria's contention that we may be required to press button B, but are absolved of any obligation to press button A. This presents a problem for the contextual view, where the scope of moral obligation has now been substantially minimized. It is for this reason that Faria seems to favor other consequentialist, capacity-oriented views over relational views. While Faria's assessment of the

[5] Palmer, "Animal Ethics in Context," 48.
[6] Palmer, *What (If Anything) Do We Owe to Wild Animals?*, 13.
[7] Faria, *Disentangling Obligations of Assistance: A Reply to Clare Palmer*, 6.

contextual view exposes a hole in its' moral accounting, I think it would be mistaken to dismiss the view altogether. Despite my contention, I find Palmer's view has significant upshots over other views which deal with similar subject matter, and so I think is worth preserving. But, then, how do we strengthen the contextual view to resist objections such as Faria's?

Towards a Nexus of Creatures

Faria has identified a problem with the scope of the contextual view; it may preclude the idea that humans have obligations for assistance between one another, even those with whom we are not 'morally-entangled'. So, in a fortified contextual view, we would want to see these intuitions protected. To have this, relations must hold between virtually all humans in a way compatible with Palmer's account of relations, (as shorthand for further discussion, this network of relations which must hold between these humans will be referred to as a *nexus*).

To account for this nexus on the contextual view, *actual* moral entanglements cannot ground all obligations. If we only examined actual entanglements, the problematic exclusion Faria identified would reappear. So, in some way, *non-actual* moral entanglements must also ground these obligations. This is compatible with Palmer's account of relations, if we recall – *potentially* having an effect can successfully establish a relation. More importantly, this seems to imply that wherever the opportunity exists to offer assistance to other humans, we establish a relation which grounds obligations for that assistance. Taking into account the potentiality of relations introduces defense from Faria's objection. Revisiting their thought experiment, we are posed with two options: pressing button A or button B. That we have the opportunity to immunize all humans, instead of just those with whom we are morally entangled, seems now to generate the obligation for pressing button A.

This defense of the contextual view seems to come without revision. However, when considering the importance of this refocused relational account, the laissez-faire intuition becomes indefensible. Rather than permissibly refusing assistance to wild creatures, we seem to now have an

obligation to assist where the opportunity arises. While tangible opportunities for assistance may be minimal, have some barrier to actualization, or are relatively weaker compared to other obligations,[8] this does not preclude a general attitude for wild assistance which endeavors to remove such barriers where possible. In this way, we begin to uncover a nexus which extends to the wild world – a nexus of all creatures.

Conclusion

In fortifying the contextual view from Faria's objections, we have arrived at what I refer to as *a nexus of all creatures*, which stands in contradiction to the laissez-faire intuition. More importantly, maintaining the contextual view, it would seem, requires abandoning this intuition in favor of a current contextual view which maintains obligations for assistance to wild creatures. As a strong instance of a relational view, I think there is good reason to suspect that similar views should similarly anticipate an extension of obligation to wild creatures. This is to say that any ethical project concerned with the world of creatures must simultaneously be concerned with creatures of the wild.

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[8] It is important to note that Palmer has already anticipated this last point, (Palmer 2013, 15). Though it seems she did not have the opportunity to develop the view, I hope I have done it justice here.

WHY CHOMSKIAN AI FAILED, AND HOW FIXING IT REQUIRED MAKING IT WITTGENSTEINIAN

by Tripp Dow, University of Minnesota

Although the public only became widely aware of them in 2022, with the release of OpenAI's ChatGPT, large language models (LLMs) have been under development since the early 2010s. These models are trained to predict probable continuations of input text, generating outputs that are sometimes indistinguishable from human writing. The capabilities of LLMs are remarkable, but such advancements have only recently been achieved—despite long-standing interest from artificial intelligence researchers. I hope to show that early philosophical assumptions about language learning contributed to the slow development of language models, and that multiple false starts could have been avoided if different philosophies were applied.

Historically, early attempts at natural language processing were heavily influenced by Noam Chomsky, who argues in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* that all humans possess mental faculties designed for the acquisition of language. Since these faculties are universal, it follows that language has an innate structure. Contrasting his view with Hume's:

> For Hume, the method of "experimental reasoning" is a basic instinct in animals and humans, on a par with the instinct "which teaches a bird, with such exactness, the art of incubation, and the whole economy and order of its nursery" -it is derived "from the original hand of nature" (Hume, 1748, § IX). The form of knowledge, however, is otherwise quite free. On the other hand, rationalist speculation has assumed that the general form of a system of knowledge is fixed in advance as a disposition of the mind, and the function of experience is to cause this general schematic structure to be realized and more fully differentiated.[1]

Early approaches to text generation were sensitive to these ideas. Researchers attempted to implement systems that utilized the logical manipulation of propositions to draw conclusions about the world, parsed input to understand its syntactic structure, and generated meaningful output according to pre-defined ontologies. Although these attempts were often elegant, and useful in some cases, they were

[1] Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, (MIT Press, 1965), 51-52.

too brittle to account for the variety and complexity of natural language. Well-formed-but-nonsensical texts, misspellings, and contextual inputs (like those including slang, jargon, or references to previous conversation) were not easily understood, as they do not adhere to well-defined rules.

In contrast, the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein has inadvertently paved the way for the more effective approach used in modern LLMs. Wittgenstein proposes that the meaning of a text is best understood through its use as a tool in a particular situation, rather than a universal structure. From his *Philosophical Investigations:* "One learns the game by watching how others play it."[2] Once exposed to the enormous corpus of text that is the internet, LLMs quickly picked up on linguistic norms, exceptions to rules, and contextual idiosyncrasies that earlier approaches were unable to understand. Why? When we learn to speak, we do so by first observing others, coming to understand their language by seeing its purpose. The fuzzy boundaries of words' meanings and the loose rules of natural language are not flaws, but necessary properties of a tool used by human beings.

> One can say that the concept of a game is a concept with blurred edges. "But is a blurred concept a *concept* at all?" Is a photograph that is not sharp a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace a picture that is not sharp by one that is? Isn't one that isn't sharp often just what we need?[3]

The transition from a rules-based to a use-based understanding of language is a particular example of a broader shift in AI research, from attempting to 'hard-code' intelligence (in the form of universal laws and structures) to learning it from large amounts of data. The key to an LLM's success is its capacity to understand language that is not perfectly formed, and specific to a particular context. Although data-driven approaches are certainly limited, they present a more realistic and useful form of generation than before.

It's unlikely that contemporary authors were specifically influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein when transitioning to newer architectures. But, had his philosophy been explicitly applied to problems

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Blackwell Publishing, 1953), § 54.
[3] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 71.

in natural language processing, it's likely that early roadblocks and restarts could have been avoided, and that a richer, more flexible kind of system would take the place of a perfect reasoner as AI research's end goal. As we continue to develop and refine generative systems, it's increasingly clear that our philosophical assumptions play a large role in limiting or maximizing this technology's potential. In the pursuit of realistic text generation, our adherence to flawed theories prevented progress for decades. In the future, these mistakes should encourage us to examine and change our philosophical commitments, and, in doing so, change the way we think about the problem as a whole.

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THE AXIOM OF CONSTRUCTIBILITY

by Blake Briol, University of Minnesota: Twin Cities

Introduction

The Axiom of Constructibility is defined as an equality between Von Nuemann's Hierarchy of sets, $\mathcal{V}$, and Gödel's inner model of $\mathcal{V}$ (also known as the constructible universe), $\mathcal{L}$. It is unlike most axioms within *ZFC* as a result of its high level of restrictiveness over what defines a set. The resulting axiom has the capacity of implying the Axiom of Choice, providing a proof for the truth of the general continuum hypothesis, *GCH*, as well as assisting several other significant areas of set theory.[1] Thus, this axiom has the power to answer many significant problems faced by mathematicians and philosophers of mathematics alike.

Definitions

Systems

Before we discuss the implementation of the Axiom of Constructibility, it is important that we first define what it is. $\mathcal{L}$ is a standard inner model of $\mathcal{V}$ such that it admits further structure and restrictions to $\mathcal{V}$. We observe the comparative structure below:

$\mathcal{V}$[2]	$\mathcal{L}$[3]
1. $\mathcal{V}_0 := \emptyset$	1. $\mathcal{L}_0 := \emptyset$
2. $\mathcal{V}_{\alpha+1} := \mathcal{P}(\mathcal{V}_\alpha)$	2. $\mathcal{L}_{\alpha+1} := \mathcal{P}(\mathcal{L}_\alpha)$
3. $\mathcal{V}_\lambda := \bigcup_{\alpha<\lambda} \mathcal{V}_\alpha$	3. $\mathcal{L}_\lambda := \bigcup_{\alpha<\lambda} \mathcal{L}_\alpha$
4. $\mathcal{V} := \bigcup_{\alpha} \mathcal{V}_\alpha$	4. $\mathcal{L} := \bigcup_{\alpha\in\mathbf{ORD}} \mathcal{L}_\alpha$

In both systems we observe the first ordinal 0 to be representative of the empty set $\emptyset$. In both systems the derivation of the successor ordinal can be obtained via the power set function P ($P(\mathcal{L}_\alpha) = (2^{\mathcal{L}\alpha})$). We will now observe the key differences between $\mathcal{V}$ and $\mathcal{L}$.

As a result of $\mathcal{L}$ being an inner model of $\mathcal{V}$, there exists further structure therein. We define this structure with the set defining operator (**Def**) below as well as how it pertains to $\mathcal{L}_{\alpha+1}$ ordinals:[4]

1. $\mathbf{Def}(X) := \{a \subseteq X | (\exists \phi)[(\exists \overrightarrow{b} \in X, a = \{c \in X | (X, \in) \models \phi(\overrightarrow{b}, c)\}\}$
2. $\mathcal{L}_{\alpha+1} := \mathbf{Def}(\mathcal{L}_\alpha)$

Informally, this can be described as there being a subset of the definable power-set of X, a, iff there exists a formula φ and an element of X, $\underset{b}{\rightarrow}$, such that a represents the set containing all elements of c

[1] John P. Burgess, "The constructible universe," 1998, doi:10.4324/9780415249126-Y029-1, in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis.
[2] Keith J. Devlin, "Chapter II: The Constructible Universe," *Constructibility*, (Berlin: Springer, 1986).
[3] Burgess, "The constructible universe."
[4] Ibid.

in X that satisfy the formula described by φ when $\underset{b}{\rightarrow}$ is used. As a result of this construction, we observe that ordinals are derived from definable power-set functions. Therefore, the sets that we can derive in this universe are constructible via this defined power-set. Thus, the universe $\mathcal{L}$ is constructible. Furthermore, it is notable to point out that $\mathcal{L}$ is also well-ordered.

The Case for the Axiom of Constructibility

Strengths

The first strength found in the Axiom of Constructibility has to do with preciseness. Since the Axiom of Constructibility requires sets to be constructible, it allows all sets to be representable via a first-order logic language i.e. first order predicate logic. This highly restrictive definition of a set allows for the very precise defining and constructing of sets which stands to benefit subjects in application.

As mentioned previously, the Axiom of Constructibility holds significant power as a result of its highly restrictive properties (namely that sets must be constructible). Arguably, there are two demonstrations of this power that are most significant. The first is the implication of the Axiom of Choice. Needless to say, the implication of the Axiom of Choice results in many important theorems such as the Well-Ordering Theorem and the multiplicative axiom.[56] An issue with this, however, is the fact that the Axiom of Choice can stand alone without necessitating the Axiom of Constructibility to imply it. Thus, despite the Axiom of Constructability's implication of the Axiom of Choice, it is still has the capacity to be independent of it. The second significant demonstration of this axiom's power is that the Axiom of Constructibility allows a derivation of a proof for the truth of the general continuum hypothesis, *GCH*. The derivation for a proof of the truth of *GCH* could end the over 100 year old open mathematical problem. The Axiom of Constructibility further implies open problems in set theory such as the negation of Suslin's Problem[7] and the truth of the Whitehead Problem.[8] Whilst these are the problems the Axiom of Constructibility has already provided, there exists further potential in its application including second-order arithmetic. The Axiom of Constructibility seems like a very convenient solution to many set-theoretic problems. So why have set theorists not yet implemented it? An answer lies in the axiom as it pertains to *ZFC*.

Weaknesses

A glaring issue with regards to the Axiom of Constructibility is that there has not yet been an independence proof derived for it.[9] As a result, it is contested as to whether this axiom is true at all. Furthermore, it is still not clear as to whether the Axiom of Constructibility is consistent with the standard axioms of set theory *ZFC*. This reason may be the most significant disadvantage regarding

[5] John L. Bell, "The Axiom of Choice," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta.

[6] Keith J. Devlin, "A Problem in Measure Theory," *Lecture Notes in Mathematics*, vol. 617, no. 29 (August 2006): 65–80.

[7] R. Björn Jensen, "The Fine Structure of the Constructible Hierarchy," *Annals of Mathematical Logic*, vol. 4, no. 3, (22 Nov., 1971): 229–308.

[8] Saharon Shelah, "Infinite abelian groups, whitehead problem and some constructions," *Israel Journal of Mathematics* vol. 18 (1974): 243–256.

[9] J. R. Shoenfield, "On the Independence of the Axiom of Constructibility," *American Journal of Mathematics*, vol. 81, no. 3 (1959): 537–40.

the implementation of the Axiom of Constructibility as it necessitates set theorists to use it with faith alone, rather than a concrete proof.

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