

Stance

An International
Undergraduate
Philosophy Journal



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Stance \ˈstan(t)s\: A rationalized position or mental attitude



When thoughts transcend the very minds that have begotten them, they materialize into smoke

*Looking at all possible angles
Then choosing for oneself what to believe
That is taking a Stance.*

When we do philosophy, we become more aware of the world and ourselves as players within it. Then we grow into our own beliefs and ideas until we have a firm stance. We should not just take a stance about anything... It is only when we strive for knowledge and understanding that we are justified in taking a stance. We then become more aware of the world. Once we arrive at an articulate and defensible stance, we can move forward and share our ideas with the philosophic community through journals like ours. Yet, the stance itself is what is central to our own vision and makes philosophic dialogue possible.

Stance

An International Undergraduate Philosophy Journal

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Stance is published annually in April. The deadline for submission is in mid-December. All papers are carefully considered by multiple blind reviewers. Notification of initial decision is early February. All authors receive constructive feedback concerning submissions.

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Further information regarding *Stance* is available at:

<http://stance.iweb.bsu.edu>. Back issues can be found on the Ball State University Virtual Press at: <http://www.bsu.edu/library/virtualpress/stance>

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Stance gratefully acknowledges Ball State University's support of the publication of this journal.

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The Skeptic's Guide to the Genealogy

ABSTRACT: This paper seeks to evaluate Nietzsche's positive ethical vision through a focus on the plausibility of his moral-historical account as it appears in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. It is then argued that Nietzsche's account of the "slave revolt in morality" contains shortcomings that necessitate further inquiry into Nietzsche's consequent ethical vision. Furthermore, the paper goes on to demonstrate that if a proper historical context for the "slave revolt in morality" cannot be identified, or if it cannot be shown that Nietzsche's ethical vision can stand without such a context, then a neo-Nietzschean ethic must be set aside.



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Though Friedrich Nietzsche attacks modern conventional morality, there exists within his body of work a prescriptive understanding of man-as-he-really-is. Pursuit of the fulfillment of human nature as Nietzsche sees it will hereafter be referred to as Nietzsche's positive ethical vision. The general effort approached herein is an evaluation of this ethical vision. The specific problem which attaches to the general effort is the plausibility of his moral-historical account in *On The Genealogy Of Morals*. Insofar as the latter is seen to effect the former, a revaluation of Nietzsche's

positive ethic is suggested. Specifically, shortcomings in Nietzsche's account of the "slave revolt in morality" motivate an inquiry into the ethic which, in part, follows from it.¹ I propose that any assent to a neo-Nietzschean ethic must be set aside until an appropriate historical context can be found, or it can be convincingly shown that there is no necessary connection between his ethic and any putative historical account which justifies it. Those views considered herein are largely original, with the occasional help of Nickolas Pappas' *The Nietzsche Disappointment*, to which I am indebted.

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals And Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 36.



Nietzsche's Positive Ethical Vision

In the absence of a proper treatise from Friedrich Nietzsche on his positive ethics, any systematic account of which – hampered by his oft indirect and polemical style – may proceed only from a patient analysis of “(1) what Nietzsche values, (2) what his criteria of evaluation are, and (3) what evaluative structure, if any, is exhibited by the answers to (1) and (2).”² Our expectations, then, are tempered by the difficulty of Nietzschean exegesis and the speculative nature of the effort. Indeed, Leiter warns, “We go wrong at the start...if we expect Nietzsche to produce a normative theory of any familiar kind.”³ Since reams have been written in pursuit of such an account and its utility here is merely prefatory, I submit to scholarly analysis. After all, Pappas advises that Nietzsche will yield his secrets more readily to a “sly reconnoitering” than a full-on “frontal assault.”⁴ For Ernst Behler, whether Nietzsche’s thought can be systematized is the “central question that perhaps every interpretation of Nietzsche must raise; namely, whether the philosopher’s aphoristic and fragmentary text, which apparently rejects final principles and systematic coherence, nevertheless can be read in the style of traditional metaphysics.”⁵ Finding Leiter’s three analytic criteria pursuant to

this end, we proceed with caution.

Several prescriptive themes are discovered by the application of said criteria to Nietzsche’s writings. First, we find that “higher types are solitary and deal with others only instrumentally.”⁶ Second, we find that the “well-turned out person... has a taste only for what is good for him; his pleasure, his delight cease where the measure of what is good for him is transgressed.”⁷ Third, self-reverence – “to revere and respect oneself as one might a god” – is arguably the highest Nietzschean virtue.⁸ These are core tenets of Nietzsche’s loose normative schema and the extent of that which, albeit meager and rather ambiguous, may be concluded positively.

Ultimately, we find that we must resort to that which is critical in Nietzsche’s moral philosophy – of which there is, by contrast, no paucity – to fill out our understanding of his positive ethical vision. It is not a question of how Nietzsche would have us conduct ourselves, for this kind of question commonly has in view some code of conduct – a set of moral imperatives which directs human behavior. This is exactly the kind of morality that Nietzsche abhors. The question to ask Nietzsche is, “What kind of lifestyle worst conforms to human nature?” And, of course, the answer differentiates with respect to the character of the questioner, whether higher or lower in Nietzsche’s estimation,

with exclusive preference given to his higher type. It suffices to say that I should think the vast majority of readers would take issue with this kind of morality or lack thereof (I am not sure how to tell between the two in this case), if not in principle, then most assuredly in practice. Moreover, there is a strong case to be made that a world full of Nietzscheans would be a most dysfunctional world. But this kind of visceral reaction is entirely beside the point. If we take issue with Nietzsche’s positive ethical vision, it must be for a more substantive reason. Thus is the argument which follows.

Nietzsche’s Moral Account

The Slave Revolt in Morality A précis of Nietzsche’s argument is in order: Dissatisfied with the myopic attempts of “English” psychologists (e.g. Paul Rée), with their utilitarian bias, to explain the origin of morality as the unegoistic action forgotten, Nietzsche endeavors to explain the “good” in terms - literally speaking - of those whom themselves were “good” (i.e. the noble and the powerful), rather than those to whom goodness was first shown.⁹ Nietzsche’s philologic inclination is made evident as he elaborates on this thesis. Employing linguistic analysis to support it, he remarks that the word for “good,” in many languages, shares a root with the words “powerful,” “rich,” and “master”. By contrast, he notes the association between the German word “bad,” and the words, “plain” and “simple.”¹⁰ These linguistic observations motivate the

hypothetical framework for understanding the origin of morality which follows.

In what seems the central idea of Nietzsche’s Genealogy, he points to the interaction between what he labels elsewhere “master morality” and “slave morality” and the proliferation of the latter as responsible for the Judeo-Christian ethic which prevails in modernity. Master morality belonged to the masters - powerful noble and warrior archetypes - who understood and defined themselves as “good,” true to its etymological past. Their attributes of wealth, power, health, and happiness were “good” by association. The master, moreover, concerned himself with little else than the interests of self. Thus, his understanding of the “bad” developed only as an afterthought, enhancing self-perception by the contrast the master saw between himself and the plebeian “slaves” and ascetics, who were generally poor and weak and often sick. At variance with the masters and their robust attributes, the impotence of the slaves and, in turn, the slaves themselves embodied the “bad.” This understanding of “good” and “bad” constitutes master morality.¹¹

In the face of opposition and oppression, the slaves began to resent the warrior caste. Yet powerless, the slaves could not seek revenge outwardly; rather, this resentment became a creative force, turning inward to invent an imaginary revenge – the slave morality. Negative and reactive, the slave morality condemned the master and his “evil” character. Further, the slaves invented

2. Brian Leiter, “Nietzsche’s Moral and Political Philosophy,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, July 27, 2007, Stanford University Metaphysics Research Lab, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche-moral-political/#2> (accessed May 3, 2008).

3. Leiter.

4. Nickolas Pappas, *The Nietzsche Disappointment* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), xiii.

5. Ernst Behler, *Confrontations: Derrida, Heidegger, Nietzsche* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 10.

6. Leiter.

7. *Ecce Homo* I2.

8. Leiter.

9. *On the Genealogy of Morals* II.

10. *On the Genealogy of Morals* 5-13.

11. *Ibid*



promises of blessing and eternal bliss for the meek to vindicate their temporal suffering and inferiority. Diametrically, the “good” for the slaves came as an afterthought, necessarily emphasizing kindness, humility, patience and other virtues that stood in contrast to master morality. As resentment poisoned and consumed the slaves, they schemed together against the masters, becoming cleverer and craftier than the unsuspecting nobles. This conspiracy ultimately led to the “slave revolt in morality,” the forceful overthrow of the masters and the universal imposition of the slave morality. Thus, the perverse moral revaluation employed thereafter disoriented moral language, supplanting the “good” of the masters with the “evil” of the slaves.¹²

Nietzsche’s Historical Account: the Judeo-Roman Context

The questions must then be asked: Within what historical context is Nietzsche’s genealogy to be understood? How is it properly and accurately manifest? Colloquially, we could ask just how does this account map onto history? Hitherto, I have, for the sake of concision, been compelled to summarize Nietzsche’s arguments. Hereafter, I cannot deny the reader access to Nietzsche proper. Listen to Nietzsche himself, from the first essay of the Genealogy, on the dawn of the slave revolt:

All that has been done on earth against “the noble,” “the powerful,” “the masters,” “the rulers,” fades into nothing compared with

what the Jews have done against them; the Jews... were ultimately satisfied with nothing less than a radical revaluation of their enemies’ values... It was the Jews, who, with awe-inspiring consistency, dared to invert the aristocratic value-equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God) and to hang on to this inversion with their teeth... saying “the wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God, blessedness is for them alone – and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity; and you shall be in all eternity the unblessed, accursed, and damned!” – that with the Jews there begins the slave revolt in morality...¹³

How did this happen? Nietzsche elaborates

This Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate gospel of love, this “Redeemer” who brought blessedness and victory to the poor, the sick, and the sinners – was he not this seduction in its most uncanny and irresistible form... Was it not part of the secret black art of truly grand politics of revenge, of a farseeing, subterranean, slowly advancing, and premeditated revenge, that Israel must itself deny the real instrument of its revenge before all the world as a mortal enemy and nail it to the cross, so that... all the opponents of Israel, could unhesitatingly swallow just this bait?¹⁴

There are three essential observations of the Jewish “slave revolt in morality.” First, though not explicitly identified in either of these passages, one may reasonably infer that the master caste is that of the Roman occupation of Judea, which had been conquered by the Roman general Pompey in 63 B.C.¹⁵ Nietzsche clarifies this point later in the First Essay, pitting “Judea against Rome.”¹⁶ Second, Nietzsche affirms that the slave revolt begins with the Jews through Jesus of Nazareth. Third, the Jews succeed in the dissemination of a “radical revaluation of their enemies’ values.”

The Plausibility of Nietzsche’s Moral-Historical Account

The Judeo-Roman context for the slave revolt sounds plausible *prima facie*. However, scrupulous attention to the Gospel account, upon which Nietzsche’s contextualization rests, and germane histories of this period yields discord with the aforementioned third observation. I will, in turn, attempt to reveal this discord with three conflicting observations from the Gospel and other records.

First, there is a strong case to be made from the Acts of the Apostles, immediately succeeding the four gospels in the New Testament, that Jesus was no ally of the Jews. Acts records, at length, the martyrdom of the Early Church at the hands of militant Jews. Moreover, an excerpt concerning Jesus from Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* 18:63 (ca. A.D. 93) seems to preclude

the possibility of a Jewish conspiracy: “And the tribe of the Christians, so named from [Christ], are not extinct at this day.”¹⁷ If Jesus was a covert agent of revolt for the Jews, a feigned enemy, why was there still a distinct following of Christians 60 years after the crucifixion – 60 years after Rome swallowed the “bait?”

Second, it is exceedingly clear from the Gospel account that Jesus’ “new ideals” were not new at all. Rather, the moral instruction of Christ was, by his own acknowledgement in the Gospel of Matthew, not his own, but that of another: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”¹⁸ “The Law” and “the Prophets” are portions of the *Hebrew Tanakh* (i.e. Hebrew Bible), which even the most liberal scholar would admit could not have been written any later than the 2nd century B.C. – that is, unequivocally, before the Roman occupation of Judea even began – hardly “new.” Further, comparison between the teachings of Christ and that of the *Tanakh* bear out the truth of his assent to them. When asked in the Gospel of Matthew (by the Pharisees and Sadducees) which was the greatest of the commandments, Jesus responded famously, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”¹⁹ The first commandment is found verbatim in Deuteronomy 6:5 and the second in Leviticus 19:18, both books of the Torah which antedate Christ by hundreds of years. Even the

12. Ibid.

13. On the Genealogy of Morals I 7.

14. On the Genealogy of Morals I 8.

15. S.B. Luce, “Professor Carter’s Lowell Lectures on the Religious Life of the Romans,” *The Classical Journal* 7, no. 2 (1911), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3287190> (accessed February 28, 2009).

16. Nietzsche, 52. 17. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, quoted in Pappas, 134.

18. Mt. 5:17 (New American Standard Bible).

19. Mt. 22:37-39 NASB.



Christian virtue of humility in the Beatitudes, which Nietzsche alludes to, is commended in Psalm 37:11: “But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.”²⁰ Moreover, the putative ethic of the twelve tribes of Israel – to which Nietzsche apparently subscribes – is one of ingroup loyalty and outgroup hostility. Whereas, Moses records the following command of God in Leviticus 19:33-34: “When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong... The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you...”²¹ With regard to “evil,” Jesus says, in Mark’s Gospel, “[O]ut of men’s hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.”²² This is supposedly the thrust of the “slave morality,” yet it is a reiteration of the pre-existing value system of the Levitical Covenant.

Third, any Roman acceptance of the gospel was largely irrespective of the Jews; scrutiny of Roman history reveals the untenability of any other conclusion. As Pappas points out:

There is Suetonius [in Life of Claudius] in the second century mentioning a ‘Chrestus’ who stirred up the Jews... : if he means ‘Christos’ he is lumping Jews and Christians together. A generation later Galen occasionally criticizes Christianity, likewise speaking without differentiation of the ‘followers of Moses and Christ’... The

purported enmity between the religions could hardly be stirring Romans who did not even notice it.²³

After Galen and until the signing of the Edict of Milan by Constantine I, Roman sentiments toward Christianity only become more hostile.²⁴

In holding the Genealogy accountable for solidarity with history, we must not neglect its plausibility in a less literal sense - we might engage it with a symbolical hermeneutic. However, we find immediately that Nietzsche himself will not let us do so. His examples throughout the book are consistently historical, complete with etymological support. Why else would he praise Napoleon as “the last signpost” to the master race?²⁵ However tempting it may be to engage the Genealogy symbolically, it is clear that Nietzsche purports to deliver the genealogy of morality.

Even if we could take Nietzsche less than literally, where are the masters we now resent? How does the ascetic ideal, such an anti-human perversion, perpetuate in the face of human nature and instinct? The gap between the slave revolt and modernity is left unexplored. We may well charge Nietzsche as he charged the “English” psychologists concerning their theory of the unegoistic action forgotten – for deficit of explication.²⁶ Other questions abound. Could the weaker caste really overcome the stronger? As Pappas

remarks, “How does weakness triumph and still deserve the name?”²⁷ Are we really to “wed to bad conscience the unnatural inclinations,” i.e., to turn the self-effacing faculty of the bad conscience against the slave sickness, as Nietzsche suggests?²⁸ These are speculative and compelling questions which deserve greater attention than the scope and intent of this effort allow.

Objections Addressed

I now pause to address several foreseeable objections which may be made to either the premise of this effort or the arguments therein. The reader’s initial reaction to arguments against the satiety of the Judeo-Roman context may well be that there are other historical contexts to consider. This is true; I would only submit that Nietzsche gives none which is not contingent upon the Jewish revolt. Ignoring more speculative concerns about the genealogy and as a matter of objective history, the slave revolt is, without context, left “explicable, merely not yet explicated.”²⁹ A corollary objection of the first could entertain the view that the slave revolt neither needs nor desires a definitive context, that its consummation is covert and gradual rather than so forcefully abrupt, and, consequently, that, given Nietzsche’s style, the Jewish conspiracy is appropriately metaphorical or symbolic. But it is certain that Nietzsche does not contextualize the slave revolt in this manner. Moreover, it is in this case which Nietzsche’s causal explanations,

already strained, defy near-insurmountable odds. As Pappas writes, “The cause cannot work, or stands in need of a cause itself.”³⁰ Specifically, a protracted understanding of the revolt denies it the paradigm-shifting dynamic, which is perhaps its single virtue to Nietzsche (it lends humanity greater depth and makes it more “interesting”). From the sociodynamic lexicon, the slave revolt never reaches “critical mass,” too anemic and unequipped for ascendance to power. Roughly speaking, the revolt is never galvanized; there is no nexus between resentment and revolution.

It might also be said that I take the gospel account too literally, ignoring the possibility that it could have been seriously manipulated by the Early Church to conceal elements of Jewish conspiracy. However, I wager no more on the gospel account than Nietzsche himself – I think that is evident. That the evangelists could have written whatever they liked concerning the life and instruction of Jesus is almost a truism. Notwithstanding, that instruction as recorded in the gospels derives from a Mosaic Law which predates any possible Judeo-Roman slave revolt. Of this tension between assent to the historicity of the *Gospel* and denial of its invested theology, Pappas notes, “[Nietzsche] needs the *Gospel of John* to exist so that the astonishment of the *Genealogy* may shine forth. But he also needs it not too exist so that his thoughts can have the spontaneity and independence he prizes so highly.”³¹

There is one fourth and final objection which deserves consideration especially as a matter of thesis defense. That is, it challenges the premise

20. Ps. 37:11 NASB.

21. Lv. 19:33-34 NASB.

22. Mk. 7:20-22 NASB.

23. Pappas, 134.

24. Luce.

25. On the Genealogy of Morals I 16.

26. On the Genealogy of Morals I 2.

27. Pappas, 132.

28. On the Genealogy of Morals II 24. 29. Pappas, 134.

30. Pappas, xii.

31. Pappas, xiii.



of this effort and calls for the natural conclusion of the argument. Namely, the evaluation of Nietzsche's positive ethic does not involve his moral-historical genealogy. On the contrary, the evidence against this objection is twofold. First, Nietzsche denies this himself:

I end up with three question marks; that seems plain. 'What are you really doing, erecting an ideal or knocking one down?' I may perhaps be asked. But have you ever asked yourselves sufficiently how much the erection of every ideal on earth has cost? How much reality has had to be misunderstood and slandered, how many lies have had to be sanctified, how many consciences disturbed, how much 'God' sacrificed every time? If a temple is to be erected a temple must be destroyed: that is the law – let anyone who can show me a case in which this is not fulfilled.³²

Here, it seems, Nietzsche emphasizes that the destruction of an ideal is necessarily antecedent to the "erection" of another, as if to say that by sabotaging the herd mentality – by revealing the lies and slander it sanctified and the perversion it promulgated – he has cleared the way for his positive ethical vision. Second, there is substance in the question, "how does Nietzsche's genealogy inform his positive ethic, informally, things as they should be?" In his critique of modern morality, Nietzsche

expresses particular disdain for its infringement on his "higher men," a patrilineage which finds its distinctive source in the genealogy.³³ If the genealogy is defunct, is it conceivable that the slave mentality is less a subversion of human nature than Nietzsche would have us think and more a consequence of it? If this takes the argument too far, there remains at least worthy consideration in the possibility that the higher mentality was never overcome by the lower but that it fell extinct autonomously from the human psychological genome. This, in turn, begs the question, "Can it even be revived?"

It is beyond the scope of this effort to consider in detail what all of this means for Nietzsche's moral – rather anti-moral – reasoning. I can say, however, as a consequence of the evidence detailed herein, that any assent to a neo-Nietzschean ethic must be set aside until a historical context can be found or it can be convincingly shown that there is no necessary connection between his anti-morality and any putative historical account which justifies it. What is Nietzsche without his genealogy? Certainly, the *Genealogy* remains an astonishing and monumental development in the history of moral philosophy. I have endeavored not to dismiss it, but, by challenging it, to add some small contribution to the field and perhaps encourage further investigation of Nietzsche's work. ♦

32. On Morals of Genealogy II 24.

33. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966).

Acknowledgement: I am indebted to Dr. Jeffrey Stephenson, Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Case Western Reserve University, without whose encouragement, critique, and insight this paper would not have reached publication. I also acknowledge with thanks fellow student Ryan Pierce, who reviewed the penultimate draft and posed worthy objections.

Generation Lobotomy: Kinase Inhibition Therapy, Memory Erasure and Identity Loss

ABSTRACT: This paper primarily explores the ethical debate surrounding the use of memory erasure for therapeutic ends. It argues that procedures such as kinase inhibition therapy, which can entail memory erasure in the individual, incur a high cost in terms of the integrity of our individual identities, thus jeopardizing our claim to individual rights and accountability. Therefore, we should reserve such therapies for the extreme cases in which the procedures have the potential to actually restore a person's autonomy. Furthermore, this paper goes on to explore which situations might fit this criterion, while still accounting for the cost of memory erasure in each instance.



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Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufman's 2004 production of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* portrays two people who volunteer to erase each other from their memories after a bad fight. While the particular way in which the film depicts the memory erasure procedure does not exist, neurologists have been experimenting with an effective chemically based memory erasure process since 2006. Many other recent films play with the concept of memory erasure and loss, such as *Memento*, *Minority Report*, *50 First Dates*,

The Butterfly Effect, and more.¹ A fascination of the brain and mind and a desire to control them has leaked into modern popular culture, and science reflects the trend. Just because we possess the ability to manipulate memory and possibly cure many psychoses, however, does not mean that we should do so. Personal identity theory expressed by John Locke and David Shoemaker equate memory on a fundamental level with identity. As today's younger generations erase their memories – be it with kinase inhibitors, vodka or reality television – they also erase who they are,

1. James, Nick. *I Forgot to Remember to Forget*. Sight & Sound. 15.5 (May 2004): 16.



and undermine the relevance of human rights and moral responsibility. All forms of memory erasure, but especially institutionalized kinase blocking procedures, should remain a last resort alongside surgery for extreme cases of psychosis which hinder an individual's opportunity to live a meaningful life. Each memory erasure, after all, signifies a mini psychological lobotomy of personal identity.

Generally, laymen think of the memory as a filing system with memories and facts which we can access at will – hide that memory away in the folder of painful experiences, pull up the Spanish vocabulary files, keep that phone number readily accessible in the top drawer. The actual memory works nothing like this. As we have experiences and learn new things, we form a memory in our minds with a protein called Ca^{2+} /Calmodulin-Dependent Protein Kinase II (or just kinase, for short). Kinase presence forms proportionally to Long-term Potentiation (LTP), which indicates the creation of a memory.² This forms synaptic connections between the brain's different networks of neurons, the underlying mechanism of memory storage.³ Each time we remember something, this process happens again – that is, we recreate the experience or knowledge with the kinase protein and reform the neural connections in our brains.

Medical memory erasure procedures work

by blocking the formation of kinase with a chemical inhibitor while recalling – and therefore attempting to recreate – a memory. A group of scientists from la Universidad de Chile and Brandeis University studied the effects of using a kinase blocking compound which they call CaMKIINtide on rats while engaging them in learning activities. CaMKIINtide effectively blocked LTP in both potentiated (already neurologically connected) and naïve (not yet connected) pathways.⁴ This means that blocking kinase can both prevent new memory formation and degrade already formed memories. The mice could not achieve a full recovery even when all traces of the CaMKIINtide had left their systems. The study concluded that kinase “inhibition in the hippocampus leads to erasure of memory.”⁵ Todd C. Sacktor of the State University of New York also studied kinase inhibition and concluded that the procedure does not damage the brain or prevent new memories from forming.⁶ If performed repeatedly, kinase inhibition can effectively expunge a memory from the brain.⁷ Neurologists believe that, in humans, this procedure could target specific experiences, leaving the rest of the brain completely unharmed.⁸

Kinase inhibition could be the next advance in psychotherapy, as psychologists could potentially use it to ease trauma, depression, anxiety, extreme

aggression, and a variety of other disorders. The scientific literature surrounding kinase inhibition research hints at its therapeutic benefits.⁹ We should also imagine the arguments that could spring from this new technology for erasing memories of serial killers in hopes of reforming their behavior. Kinase inhibition therapy could make our society safer. Gondry and Kaufman hint towards a popular use of the procedure in the fictional world of *Eternal Sunshine for the Spotless Mind* for easing pain in the instance of the death of a loved one. Certainly most people can think of an event they would rather not remember. As autonomous persons with control over our own bodies, we should have free access to any procedure which might ease our suffering. Of course, decisions regarding the morality and legality of kinase inhibition therapy are not this simple. An argument for the legalization of heroin might echo this logic. With the capability of event specific memory erasure, as with narcotics, we bear the responsibility to analyze its implications in terms of who should have access to memory erasure, in what cases, and at what cost.

The kinase inhibition procedure would likely scare the living daylights out of John Locke, David Shoemaker, and the numerous other philosophers who for centuries have considered memory as an essential part of personal identity. The idea that memory plays a role in identity extends thousands of years into history. For example, Plotinus, a 3rd century

philosopher, whose ideas preceded Locke's, believed that the human soul comprises of knowledge and experiences which develop a unity of consciousness.¹⁰ Two hundred years later, Augustine granted memory exclusive determination of self when he exclaimed, “What a great faculty memory is, how awesome a mystery! It is the mind, and this is nothing other than my very self.”¹¹ Identity theory morphed through the rise and fall of religion and paradigm, but memory remained a popular theme throughout.

John Locke's ideas connected memory with the concept of personal identity and ethical responsibility in the late 17th century. Locke attributed moral agency to a “self-reflective consciousness” that extends throughout the duration of an individual's life.¹² A “self” results from the unification of a person over time by memory.¹³ So a middle-aged man and his former child self do not form separate entities, but only one identity because of the continuity of their experiences. Locke's claims imply that “one is justifiably held accountable only for those actions performed by a self to whom one's present consciousness extends, i.e., it is only for those actions I remember performing that I can justifiably be held morally responsible.”¹⁴ Without some sort of experiential coherence moral responsibility would not exist; a human's biology and psychology undergo vast changes throughout their lives and only a unified

2. Lisman, John E., McIntyre, Charmian C. and Sanhueza, Magdalena. “Reversal of Synaptic Memory by Ca^{2+} /Calmodulin-Dependent Protein Kinase II Inhibitor.” (The Journal of Neuroscience) : 2. <<http://www.jneurosci.org/cgi/content/full/27/19/5190>> (9 November 2007).
 3. Sacktor, Todd C. M.D. *Protein Kinase C Isozymes in Long-term Hippocampal Synaptic Plasticity and Memory Persistence*. (Albert Einstein College of Medicine, 2007): 1. State University of New York Health Science Center at Brooklyn, <<http://www.downstate.edu/pharmacology/sact.htm>> (9 November 2007).
 4. Lisman, McIntyre and Sanhueza, 4-5.
 5. Lisman, McIntyre and Sanhueza, 7-15.
 6. Sacktor, 1.
 7. Science News. “Inducible and Selective Erasure of Memories in Mice” from Neuroscience Research News, Psychiatric Research. (Science News: A Science News Site, 22 October 2008). <<http://www.molecularstation.com/science-news/tag/memory/>> (28 January 2009).
 8. Science News.

9. Science News.
 10. Barresi, John and Martin, Raymond. *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006): 36-7.
 11. Barresi and Martin, 72.
 12. Shoemaker, David W. “Personal Identity and Ethics.” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.(Stanford University: 13 March 2007): 2-3. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-ethics/>> (9 November 2007).
 13. Barresi and Martin, 143.
 14. Shoemaker, 3.



consciousness, that is relational memories, maintains identity.

David Shoemaker tests and expands on Locke's ideas, sufficiently defending them to classic critiques. Shoemaker's arguments that Locke's assumptions that "survival consists in identity" and "moral responsibility conceptually requires personal identity" stand up to attacks on their relevance, extremism, and minimalism, and come to the conclusion that Locke's ideas provide a stable basis for normative ethics. As far as he can, Shoemaker develops potential criticisms of Locke and attempts to respond to them. As Shoemaker discovers, because Locke's concepts provide solutions to practical concerns, they must pertain to the realm of moral theory and belong in a minimalist approach to ethics.¹⁵ Shoemaker suggests a gradated way of looking at identity cohesion as people lose their older memories over time as a way of softening Locke's rigid understanding of memory cohesion.¹⁶ Because he can respond to fully articulated complaints about Locke's ideas, Shoemaker concludes that they supply an excellent foundation for discourse on moral responsibility and personal identity. Shoemaker's most notable addition to Locke's philosophy says that as coherent entities throughout time, people have a moral obligation to their future selves.¹⁷

Other philosophical contributions reinforce Locke's argument that legitimizing any sort of moral responsibility requires a concept of

personal identity. Traditional stoicism links the idea of self-possession to self-responsibility, which translates into responsibility to humanity. Thus personal identity actually includes a sense of responsibility to the human community.¹⁸ Leibniz articulated the flip side of this idea when he remarked that "it is memory or the knowledge of this self that renders it capable of punishment or reward" in his works released in the mid 18th century.¹⁹ The contemporary criteria of personhood Mary Ann Warren and Michael Tooley outlined involves the ability to conceive of and identify with a future self, as well as possess "the capacity to have a concept of self as a continuing subject of experiences."²⁰ The modern concept of personhood – which provides guidelines for who human rights and responsibilities apply to – echoes Locke's views.

The culmination of history's ruminations on memory, identity and responsibility construct the modern paradigm, expressed by Locke, that a person's identity forms out of her or his collected experiences and elicits moral responsibilities to their self and each other. This conceptualization of identity makes sense when compared to a body-centered identity theory. We could think of identities as centering on an individual's physical body. This kind of identity theory avoids problems arising with Alzheimer's disease, bipolar disorders, and other mental issues. Our bodies are far from

constant, however, especially in comparison to our minds. Nicholas Wade describes how "although people may think of their body as a fairly permanent structure, most of it is in a state of constant flux as old cells are discarded and new ones generated in their place."²¹ According to Wade, skin, bones, blood, and most of the body's tissues regenerate every few days to 15 or 20 years. Even the brain's neurons may experience turnover, and a person's DNA mutates.²² Any theory of identity based on body may only pertain over the amount of time that any given bodily aspect remains intact – should we measure our identities based on our outward appearance, and convert to a new person every two weeks with our skin cells?²³ Do we constitute a new individual with every DNA mutation we experience, or with each new or lost neuron in our brains? In its most generous interpretation, a body-based identity theory at a minimum encounters problems cohering over the span of an entire lifetime, throughout which people not only visibly change but also shed and regenerate most or all of their cells.

Of the mind-based theories, memory best accounts for an entire lifetime and functions effectively under our current social and political person focused climate. Mind-based theories could focus on desires, beliefs, values or virtues. These tend to change just as often as bodily tissues, though. Memory must stitch these aspects of ourselves together to

create any coherent concept of self that lasts more than a moment. The American social and political philosophy assumes Locke's and Shoemaker's memory-based construction of identity; Robert A. Licht condenses this idea into our constitutional striving towards the image of the "truly free and morally autonomous individual."²⁴ Our American system requires a coherent notion of identity over time to which we may assign autonomy in order to reward rights, bestow responsibilities, and exact retribution in cases where people do not fulfill their responsibilities or infringe on other peoples' rights. Memory can provide that coherent notion. Thus a memory-based concept of identity not only seems more plausible in a cursory examination of the alternatives, but also fits the reality of our current American social and political setting, and so should allow us to analyze the ethics of that context.

Given the model of memory-identity-ethics to work from, even targeted memory erasure undermines an individual's autonomy and thus their command of rights and responsibilities. Memory is the fabric that holds an individual's identity together. Without memory, the other aspects of a person such as their beliefs and values have no coherence. Memory erasure punches holes in the coherent experiences which define a person's identity. Much of the current discussion surrounding kinase inhibition therapy would like to suggest

15. Shoemaker, David W. "Personal Identity and Practical Concerns." (Bowling Green, OH: Department of Philosophy Bowling Green State University, 13 March 2007) 9 and 28. <<http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/cas/file27173.pdf>> (9 November 2007).

16. Shoemaker, 44.

17. Shoemaker, David W. "Personal Identity and Ethics," 10.

18. Barresi and Martin, 26.

19. Barresi and Martin, 138.

20. Popich, Michael Dr. *Mary Ann Warren and Michael Tooley's Criteria for Personhood*. History and Philosophy of Science. (Salt Lake City: Westminster College, Fall Semester 2007). Handout and Class Discussion.

21. Wade, Nicholas. "Your Body is Younger than You Think," *The New York Times*, in Science. (The New York Times Company: 02 August 2005). <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/02/science/02cell.html?ei=5088&en=65bd5e6cef9fec79&ex=1280635200&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=all>> (28 January 2009)..

22. Wade.

23. Wade.

24. Licht, Robert A. "Rights and Wrongs About Rights." (Leadership U., 13 July 2002). <<http://www.leaderu.com/ftisues/ft9202/opinion/licht.html>> (28 January 2009).



that these are only minute holes,²⁵ however we cannot begin to understand the full repercussions of memory erasure on personal identity with current research. Although not physically invasive, kinase inhibition affects the brain as permanently and with just as much risk as psychosurgery. Walter Glannon points out that science still does not know just “how all of the different systems of the brain interact... nor how intervening in these systems can affect the beliefs, desires, intentions, and emotions that constitute the human mind.”²⁶ In altering one part of the brain we may well cripple others. Until we know much more about how a particular memory may connect to other memories, to emotions, and to behavior, we might as well perform kinase inhibition as poke sticks through our foreheads and swing them back and forth the way Walter Freeman did in the mid 1900’s when performing lobotomies.²⁷ Kinase inhibition therapy costs, at minimum, minute portion of our identities, our autonomy, our rights and responsibilities, and potentially much more. The more common memory erasure procedures become, the less people have a grasp on the current paradigm of identity, and so the less human rights and responsibilities apply to everyone.

Psychiatrists and neurologists still use psychosurgery as a last resort treatment for dysfunctional individuals.²⁸ Glannon insists that individuals may not consent to a procedure

which may alter their personalities and erase their memories and so must have the support of a surrogate acting in their best interests to consent for them.²⁹ As Locke stipulates that survival consists in identity, erasing or severely altering identity indicates the death of that identity. As patients may not consent to suicide, they may not consent to psychosurgery. Forcing therapeutic psychosurgery on deviant individuals therefore falls out of the bounds of moral limits. A forced lobotomy or memory erasure is tantamount to murder.

Glannon justifies using psychosurgery and memory erasure in severe cases. He rationalizes that “when a neuropsychiatric disorder is so severe that it interferes with a person’s ability to have a normal life, the potential benefits of psychosurgery appear to outweigh the risks.”³⁰ The parameters of a “normal life” remain vague, however. Charles W. Lidz and Lisa S. Parker discuss the relationship between suffering and identity, authenticity and meaning, in developing who should receive therapy for their psychoses and who should not. Suffering, they consider, often forms an essential part of a person’s “authentic nature.”³¹ As many individuals grow older, they lose their loved ones and their physical capabilities. Modern medicine could alleviate this suffering by erasing the incidences of their loved ones’ deaths. Lidz and Parker argue against this treatment, by claiming that “to deny the reality of this loss or to medicalize it

is to deny his [a patient’s] commitments and his identity.”³² The goal of psychotherapy should not be to alleviate suffering but “to restore autonomy as authenticity.”³³ Psychiatrists can do this by subscribing to a commitment-to-self policy. For example, when a loved one dies, an individual will suffer, but they will not undergo an essential change in identity; actually, they fulfill a commitment to their relationship to mourn that individual rather than to forget them. The meaning behind the suffering makes it endurable.³⁴ Lidz and Parker emphasize that they do not mean to play the part of a “sadistic God,” forcing suffering on people for their own sake.³⁵ Rather, they specify that individuals whose suffering hinders the expression of their authentic selves should receive drastic treatment for their condition only after a professional takes sufficient time to get to know a person’s authentic self so that they may accurately judge. They leave it to us to evaluate which cases warrant memory erasure using these criteria.

The cost of memory erasure – some piece of our identities, autonomy, rights and responsibilities – is too great to take any but a strict interpretation of which cases and situations pose a great enough threat to personal autonomy to warrant kinase inhibition therapy. Obviously, vanity cases such as the lovers’ quarrel in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* should not qualify for memory erasure. Criminals should never erase their transgressions because they would no longer hold moral responsibility for them under Locke’s system. A few examples however, such as some rape victims and former

prisoners of war, may benefit from memory erasure as a psychotherapy in spite of its possibly devastating effects on identity. In a rape case in which the victim suffers severe trauma to the point he/she cannot emotionally function, in which psychiatrists have exhausted all other methods of therapy and can detect a definite deterioration of the victim’s autonomy to anxiety caused by trauma, erasing the incident of the rape could allow the victim to reclaim his life and his identity. Trauma can result in positive behavior; a rape victim may teach his friends to carry mace and take self-defense classes in order to prevent another occurrence. In a patient who cannot cognitively function because of the extremity of his trauma, no benefit will arise, and so although he loses an incredibly constructive part of his experiences, he will at least be able to enjoy the benefits of his other experiences once more.

Likewise, a former prisoner of war who suffered torture and humiliation should qualify for memory erasure if he/she fits the same circumstances: loss of autonomy, failure of other treatments, and detriment to her identity because of the trauma. This individual might act differently in the future because of her experience; for example, she might vote against allowing emergency powers in times of war that remove the rights of prisoners in her own country’s camps. If she loses her experience as a POW, however, she may vote the other way. Although kinase inhibition in her case would definitely alter the values and beliefs intrinsic to her identity, she could at least practice some

25. Science News.

26. Glannon, Walter. “Neuroethics.” *Bioethics*. 20.1. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006): 52.

27. Glannon, 45.

28. Glannon, 45.

29. Glannon, 47.

30. Glannon, 46.

31. Lidz, Charles Q. and Parker, Lisa S. “Issues of Ethics and Identity in Diagnosis of Late Life Depression.” *Ethics & Behavior*. 13.3. (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2003): 249.

32. Lidz and Parker, 257.

33. Lidz and Parker, 252.

34. Lidz and Parker, 253-5.

35. Lidz and Parker, 258.



expression of identity. These patients should receive treatment not because they suffer but because they no longer possess autonomy over themselves and can therefore no longer wield any sort of identity. The identity loss they will suffer as a result of kinase inhibition actually improves the situation of those whose experiences prevent them from forming any identity outside of their psychosis. Psychiatrists should only use memory erasure as a last resort preferable to lobotomy only in that kinase inhibition does not physically invade the brain.

Although we do not yet see kinase inhibition procedures often, we do see other forms of memory erasure all the time. Stephen Bertman specifically cites a condition which he calls “Self-induced Oblivion” – that is, “seeking temporary oblivion in a bottle,” or chronic alcoholism.³⁶ Much like kinase inhibition, repeated episodes of alcohol-induced memory loss can result in permanent brain damage. Each time someone drinks so much she can’t remember what she did the night before, she loses memories, disconnects pathways in the brain, and undermines her identity. If an individual drinks to alleviate a specific experience, his repeated reaction to obliterate that memory with alcohol will ultimately result in confusion, disorientation and finally permanent memory loss.³⁷ Alcoholism mirrors kinase inhibition in method and consequence, except that in the extreme cases where kinase inhibition could actually benefit a patient, alcohol would not restore their autonomy. Alcoholics undergo extreme changes in personality and future goals

as they become addicted. Alcohol abuse therefore can only create brain damage and memory loss without hope for repair,³⁸ and therefore undermines an individual’s identity. College as a society promotes universal human rights and yet participates in a culture which promotes bingeing till black-out. Students, when they repeatedly mess up their minds with alcohol, forfeit the lofty ideals which education pursues.

Evaluating portrayals of memory erasure in pop-culture can give us clues as to common social attitudes regarding such procedures as kinase inhibition therapy. Although *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* refrains from explicitly commenting on the moral implications of the memory erasure procedure which it depicts, Mary quotes a few verses of Alexander Pope in the film that frame the movie conceptually and place its plot in the context of a discussion of memory and identity. Mary reads:

How happy is the blameless vessel’s lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot
Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!
Each pray’r accepted, and each wish
resign’d.³⁹

Although Alexander Pope seems to celebrate his forgetful subject through exclamatory punctuation, these lines come across as more melancholy than joyful. The exclamatory phrases feel more like cries of desperation than of actual happiness. Pope creates this melancholic tone by coupling his supposedly

jubilant phrases with connotatively depressing language. The first phrase rhymes the vessel’s “lot” with a reminder that they have “forgot” and been forgotten by the world, and so live in complete isolation. The lighthearted, innocent sunshine imagery of the vessel’s “mind” Pope couples with “resign’d” to remind his reader that the vessel sacrifices his or her dreams when they trade their experiences for mental purity because they lose any reference for future identity. Pope agrees with Locke in that an individual without memory is “blameless” – they have no responsibility but also no rights, which reinforces their isolation and articulates another possible meaning of “each pray’r accepted, and each wish resign’d.” Most poignantly in this passage, Alexander Pope never gives his subject a name or even refers to them as a person. Instead, they have become simply an empty “vessel,” which carried an identity before they sacrificed it alongside their memories. Throughout the film, Gondry juxtaposes the image of Joel, undergoing the memory erasure procedure, with Mary and Stan “fooling around” with alcohol, marijuana and each other.⁴⁰ By including this passage in his film, Gondry casts the situation and the topic

of memory erasure in a melancholic light; the characters of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* achieve peace, but at the price of their identities.

With pseudo-lobotomies potentially entering the market in the form of the kinase inhibition therapy we must consider the damage memory erasure inflicts on personal identity and how that undermines the rights and responsibilities of humanity. The kinase inhibition procedure blocks memory reformation and can effectively erase them from the mind; as the prevalent personal identity paradigm correlates identity with a person’s coherence of experiences, erasing memories weakens personal identity. The danger of sacrificing personal identity lies in that human responsibility and accountability to one another relies on the concept of personhood and identity. Therefore psychiatrists should only resort to kinase memory erasure in extremely severe cases, where leaving the patient untreated would result in an even greater loss of autonomous identity. Reckless use of mind erasure – like the common reckless use of alcohol - will destroy people’s memories, identity and place in society, leaving them effectively lobotomized. ♦

36. Bertman, Stephen. *Cultural Amnesia: America’s Future and the Crisis of Memory*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000): 20-1.

37. Bertman, 21.

38. Bertman 21.

39. Alexander Pope, from *Eloisa to Abelard* in Gondry, Michel. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. (Anonymous Content, Focus Features and This is That Productions, 2004).

40. James 18.



Visualizing a Critical Mixed-Race Theory

ABSTRACT: In this paper, questions regarding the cultural understanding of mixed race are explored, which have the ability to complicate the accepted portrayal of race in society as a black/white binary system. Thus, the acknowledgement of something other than this binary system offers new ways of theorizing about race, particularly concerning the sociopolitical implications of mixed race designation. This paper argues that the visually mixed race person has a certain direct ability to challenge the binary and its racist logic. Furthermore, this paper goes on to offer a unique interpretation of where power for working against a racially oppressive system lies within critical mixed race theory.



Desiree Valentine is currently a junior at Marquette University majoring in both Philosophy and Communication Studies. Her interests across disciplines are focused in social, cultural, and political issues. She enjoys feminist philosophy and the philosophy of race. Desiree is particularly interested in philosophical inquiry that is grounded in lived experience and enjoys questions of identity, subjectivity, and embodiment in terms of one's gendered and raced social reality. As a philosophy major, one of Desiree's main goals is to apply philosophical theory to everyday practice; therefore, she takes a keen interest in social activism and community organizing.

I was in kindergarten when I had a clear understanding of the racialized world in which we live, when I had to check a box on my school registration papers recognizing myself as either black or white. This simple action can be quite complicated when one is a daughter of a black father and white mother. I was finally offered the choice of "mixed" by the time I reached Jr. High. But what is this concept of "mixed" and what does it offer a nation still infused with racism years after the time period known as the "Civil Rights Era" has ended?

Questions of mixed race bring with them complications to the established black/white

binary system and thus offer new ways of theorizing race as well as the sociopolitical implications of mixed race designation. As Lewis Gordon states, "In spite of contemporary resistance to 'binary' analyses, a critical discussion of mixed-race categories calls for an understanding of how binary logic functions in discourses on race and racism. Without binaries, no racism will exist."¹ Can a breakdown of the current binary logic, which places social and political advantages on white individuals, occur with the inception of a critical mixed race theory? And could this lead to a society free of racism?

This essay will focus on the views of theorists

Lewis Gordon and Naomi Zack and their conceptions of the racial binary system and mixed race. I will begin by looking at both theorists' views on the racial binary system, posing the question, "How do we understand the spectrum of race?" From there, I will explore the approaches each theorist offers for deconstructing the binary, followed by a comparison and critique of both theorizations, with the end goal of offering my own interpretation of where power for working against a racially oppressive system lies within a critical mixed race theory. It is my view that what often gets overlooked in these theorizations is the effect of visual incoherency to the black/white binary that can be provided by the mixed race individual. The concept of the "visibly mixed race person" will be used in this essay to explore the transformative areas for a society still enmeshed in the ugly history of racism.

Interpretations of the Racial Binary System

Zack's book *Race and Mixed Race* focuses on American categories of racial inheritance and racial identification. For Zack, the racial binary is understood clearly as black/white because modes of inheritance and identification are set up such that an individual fits in either one or the other. As she describes, the ordinary concept of race rests solely on the 'asymmetrical kinship schema' (commonly referred to as the "one drop rule"). In this schema, having at least one black relative any number of generations back is a sufficient condition to be categorized "black". For an individual to be designated white, all of his or her past relatives must have been white.

As Zack notes,

The schema implies that both whiteness and blackness are defined in terms of blackness. Thus American racial categories are interdependent, and because there is no positive definition of blackness, American racial categories are groundless—they have no empirical foundation.²

Since race has no adequate scientific basis, Zack maintains that "black and white racial designations are themselves racist."³ Furthermore, she argues, the binary American racial system precludes a "mixed race" category. Therefore, for Zack, the binary of race in the United States is understood as distinct poles of black and white, upheld by paradigmatic ideals of "pure" American blacks and "pure" American whites as coded by the racist logic of the kinship schema.

In contrast, Gordon formulates the idea of the binary as a sliding scale hierarchy in which the division is into white and non-white. Gordon bases this on the lived experience and sociopolitical implications of appearing "more white" or "less black." He describes whiteness as the 'sphere of normativity' and against which everything is compared.⁴ Whiteness exists as the norm and stands at the top of the social value system. Thus follows Gordon's more hierarchical yet still Manichean framework. The divisions within each pole describe mutually exclusive, antagonistic categories of value and offer a more fluid concept of "blackness" or "whiteness" based on the varying degree of skin tone. This measure of degree benefits lighter skin by placing it towards the top of the hierarchy.

1. Lewis Gordon, *Her Majesty's Other Children* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997): 66

2. Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 11

3. Ibid: 3

4. Lewis Gordon, *Her Majesty's Other Children* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997)



Gordon describes the binary as having two main principles: “(1) be white ... (2) don’t be black.”⁵ Here is the major difference between Zack and Gordon. Based on Zack’s binary, a mixed race category is disallowed. Gordon’s analysis accounts for mixed race within binary racial logic. However, both agree that any binary construction stands to have racist foundations and thus should be deconstructed.

Approaches to Breaking down the Racial Binary

Zack posits that having more people self-identify as “mixed race” will work as a way to break down her theoretical binary, where any designation other than “black” or “white” violates the established binary. Thus, establishing oneself as “mixed” will work in eradicating racism by causing a breakdown of the system that sustains it.

Zack argues that creating a racial identity is existentially harmful to the individual because race is a myth perpetuated by the oppressors and thus, racial (black/white) designations should be rejected. Rejecting these ordinary concepts of race within the binary (such as ‘black’ or ‘white’) could lead to the eradication of racism in her view. The moment of confusion and the need for new social constructions after eliminating current concepts of race is seen as an opportunity to end racism. The “mixed race” designation stands as the “anti-race” as it refuses to be reduced to established categories and thus creates the opportunity to transform current cultural constructions.

In contrast, Gordon argues against mixed race identification as a method to eradicate racism

because of the antiblack racist context. He argues that a fundamental change in this racial binary logic must occur and a critical mixed race position to this contention cannot accomplish these goals. Both of these principles (1- be white and 2-don’t be black) must be rejected in order to eliminate the racist foundation of the racial binary and therefore, racism itself.

A mixed-race racial position is compatible with the rejection of principle (1), but it is not compatible with the rejection of principle (2). That is because there is no way to reject the thesis that there is something wrong with being black beyond the willingness to “be” black—not in terms of convenient fads of playing blackness, but by paying the social costs of anti-blackness on a global scale. Against the raceless credo, then, racism cannot be rejected without a dialectic in which humanity experiences a blackened world.⁶

Gordon makes the argument that because of the sliding scale hierarchy of binary racial logic and the existence of whiteness as the normative (and thus raceless) standpoint, if a mixed race individual wishes to affirm both her blackness and whiteness as equals, with the outward designation of mixed race, she runs into difficulties. Naturally, one cannot “equalize” elements that are not perceived as equals in the sociopolitical world without gaining “unequal” sociopolitical consequences. We can see that an equalization of white and black racializes whiteness, causing it to lose its normative functioning since whiteness exists as a “pure” category. But because whiteness stands as a negation of blackness, the minute it is equalized, whiteness vanishes, and the mixed

individual lapses into an existence polarized towards blackness. This “mixed” individual is understood as non-white and remains in the racial binary. Gordon suggests a more radical approach of overthrowing the normativity of whiteness. He suggests that humanity must experience a blackened world in order to overcome racism. This notion of a “blackened” world hints towards moral responsibility in an oppressive world. Through the rejection of whiteness and an abstract moral grounding in blackness, one can actively stand to destroy the foundation that advantages whiteness by causing a pressing need to respond to the sociopolitical implications of nonwhiteness. For Gordon, an emancipatory instance arises when a society is created in which there will be a more pressing need to attend to this racism.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Zack and Gordon’s Claims

From here, I will compare and critique both theorists’ claims. In comparison to Gordon, Zack’s more simplistic version of the racial binary system neglects to include the way race functions in terms of the visual coloring of a person. Her focus appears to be on legalistic classificatory conventions rather than what varying degrees of skin color mean to a society infused with the principles that Gordon highlights as setting the conditions for antiblack racism. If we are concerned with a critical mixed race theory that works to solve the problem of racism, there must be at least an understanding of the hierarchical functioning of skin color and the implications a mixed race designation

would include.

Since Zack’s binary oversimplifies, her theory of mixed race is similarly one-dimensional. She posits that mixed race will function as “racelessness” and thus, antirace, but what Zack fails to acknowledge is the way racelessness currently functions in society. As Gordon’s principles of binary racial logic demonstrate, if white stands on top of the value scheme of a society, whiteness is the standard of comparison. If whiteness exists as that which everything is compared against, race then functions below this sphere of normativity.

Zack states, “An American who identifies herself as mixed black and white race is a new person racially, because old racial categories do not allow her to identify herself this way.”⁷ But the claim that one’s “newness racially” provides the choice of racelessness does not account for the way racelessness already functions in society, bringing Zack’s binary logic back into question.

In reference to an earlier quote by Gordon, “...a critical discussion of mixed-race categories calls for an understanding of how binary logic functions in discourses on race and racism. Without binaries, no racism will exist.”⁸ If the primary obligation to eliminating racism is eliminating the binary, a useful mixed race understanding must account for this. A mixed race identity does not work outside Zack’s oversimplified binary—for the very essence of calling oneself “mixed” depends upon the black and white identities created by the binary system. Even if it seeks to act as a transgression of the binary, it relocates racial categories rather than separating from them. Calling oneself “mixed” stunts the development of a more

5. Ibid: 59

6. Ibid: 67

7. Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 164

8. Lewis Gordon, *Her Majesty’s Other Children* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997)



practical and radical way to address the issue of racism from a mixed race standpoint.

Gordon's critique offers a deeper analysis of mixed race and racism. He acknowledges that simply identifying as mixed race does not sufficiently address racism since it does not directly attack the root causes of racism. The problem is the racial binary and its dependence on power hierarchies.

Gordon's advocacy of a "blackening" or "coloring" of the world is shown as a way to promote the urgency of response to racism. This would force a shift in focus away from binary logic, its racist foundation, and white normative logic. I contend that focusing on the visual aspects of persons of mixed race will offer a similar need to shift the binary's focus. "Mixing" the world (having more visually mixed persons) would require deconstruction of the binary by disrupting the established relational hierarchy of visual whiteness and blackness.

Both theorists' concentration on the self-identification of race asks whether reliance on the individual to claim mixed-race or engage in blackening the world may be too weak to solve a highly relational problem. Looking solely at the self-identification angle of mixed race neglects the benefits to the social world of individuals appearing mixed race in terms of their epidermal or morphological schema. It is my contention that there is the visual element of mixed race that will bring about a critical mixed race theory focused on eliminating racism.

The Visually Mixed Race Individual

Since racist laws are no longer explicitly coded, the struggle against racism is to alter attitudes and beliefs. Direct action may

be difficult and thus dialogue is crucial as a method to bring people's attitudes and perceptions to the forefront. It is my belief that focus on the mixed race individual and healthy interracial relations offers a unique possibility to directly deal with issues of de facto, opposed to historically coded racism.

The very existence of a mixed individual can spark discussion. The visual transgression of the racial binary actively creates confusion. This confusion has the power to actively debunk notions of firm racial binary logic. Our immediate categorizations based on epidermal schema fall into either white or black. With the mixed race individual, curiosity arises. As the "one-drop" rule fades from cultural understanding, new ways of conceptualizing race emerge. It is important to recognize the mixed individual as one who visibly transgresses the established binary racial distinction, but the solution is not to simply add a new category. The "mixed race" label does little to advance discussion. By merely adding another category, the foundation of logic which promotes racism, (1) to be white and (2) to not be black, is not destroyed but rather set aside in order to incorporate yet another distinction between individuals. This limits opportunity to radically address the racial binary. If racism is socially constructed, how does an individual asserting herself as "mixed race" fundamentally confront racism in any way? Perhaps a turn should be had in looking at the societal level—what would a truly "raceless" or "colorblind" nation look like? Should colorblindness even be the ideal political future? One would have to be physically blind not to see variance in skin tone. Race should not be an "identity" in terms of its self-ascription, but a means of identification in terms of physical characteristics. Therefore

a person would not be white but simply have light skin. I would argue that with a social climate that encouraged interracial relations which in turn fostered an environment of mixed individuals, physical descriptions of race would not fall into a type of "colorblindness" (wherein one did not "see" color) but rather a space where one could quite visibly see a spectrum of color and skin tone to the point where categorizations of individuals based on this factor would have no purpose or logic.

It could be said, however, that group diversity is an important factor of society and the reduction of such group categorizations to the individual level—such that they no longer have purpose—neglects both the sociocultural as well as in some ways, the biological significance of social grouping. As Lucius Outlaw states,

Why argue for the conservation of races?—"I do so because I am thoroughly convinced that a rich diversity of social and cultural life-world-making, decent (breeding) populations are crucial to human species-being. Both the human biological genome and our various cultural genomes, if you will, are enriched by population-group diversity as well as biological and cultural individuality, and the prospects for human survivability and adaptability enhanced accordingly.⁹

While social groupings within a larger society are important and indeed necessary, I am not in agreement that they need to or even should come through our ideas of race and racial identity. Also, with technology and our ability to move about the world quickly and connect with those who might be deemed "cultural others," social groupings and biological groupings based on

geography are becoming less and less exclusive.

Outlaw would also state that the racial binary or simply having what we understand as two distinct races is not in and of itself conducive to racism.¹⁰ However, this vision is only the case from a neutral or removed perspective—one we can never fully grasp. It is an unfortunate fact that we live in a society that continues to oppress individuals through everyday social interactions and political institutions and we, as individuals, are shaped by these interactions. The racial binary's foundation lies within these racist interactions. The binary and its logic go hand in hand here; we cannot neatly separate its functioning from the logic that upholds it. Therefore, through analysis of the logic that sustains the binary, we can conceive of anti-racist practices that work to disrupt this logic by disrupting the binary itself.

Interracial Relations and Individual Racial Identity

As stated, perhaps what is needed to address the issue of racism is not more people identifying as mixed race, but more individuals who are visually incoherent with established black/white binaries. In order for this to occur, it would follow that interracial relations would have to be strengthened to provide for a social climate that encouraged and supported these relations, but this appears as a kind of "catch-22." It seems that healthy interracial relations and thus the creation of more individuals of visibly mixed race would not occur without first getting rid of racism. However, if we were to approach

9. Lucius Outlaw, *Critical Social Theory in the Interests of Black Folks* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005): 182

10. *Ibid*: 159



racism as a social construction coded by binary racial logic, perhaps a dynamic change in the social context would simultaneously include both internal and external changes in terms of interracial relations and mixed race individuals. Approaching the issue from the individual level and the societal level could blur the distinction between cause and effect in terms of how to eradicate racism. Internal changes would address attitudes about interactions between races while external changes to our environment would involve visual opposition to the black/white dichotomy and individuals who did not label themselves with the firm distinction of “mixed race” but rather, as a great matter of their existence, stood as an opportunity for discourses on and deconstruction of binary racial analysis to occur.

Use of both formal programs as well as self-motivated actions can be used to facilitate more contact and interaction between differently raced peoples. Practical engagement in issues of race are crucial in addressing the way racism currently functions in our nation. Using this theoretical approach to mixed race posits the visually mixed race individual as a locus of social change. Conceivably, anyone can actively place himself in the position to be a locus of positive social change, but what is specifically awarded to the visibly mixed race individual is the passive means of inciting confusion and questioning amongst others in the social world, regardless of the mixed individual’s active stance.

With a concentration on the visual appeal, Zack and Gordon’s analyses can be combined to further theorize mixed race and racism. I concede that mixed race identity is going to occur because of one’s need to self-define. It is not my belief that one should actively avoid publicly announcing a

mixed racial makeup, but such designations must know of their ability to essentialize an individual or groups of individuals. In that respect, I find it necessary to go beyond asserting oneself as mixed race. To say that mixed race identity stands as the “antirace” neglects the social sphere and sociopolitical implications. Gordon more functionally approaches the racial binary, positing it as more of a sliding scale hierarchy where the break occurs between whiteness and all else (non-whiteness). Therefore, when one self defines amidst a social world, a sense of allegiance is declared and certain social and political implications develop. This conception of the racial binary incorporates mixed individuals’ position, and thus, Gordon concludes, mixed race identity cannot form a critical theory on eradicating racism, as it does not disrupt the current hierarchical binary logic of race. However, Gordon does not seem to consider the benefits more persons of visual mixed race would have in deconstructing the racial binary today which relies heavily on the visual aspects of race. Perhaps incorporating Zack’s vision of an emancipatory mixed race theory and Gordon’s careful and reflective thought on the subject, a mixed race theory focused on the visual appeal of the mixed race individual, (rather than the public self-identification aspect) compounded with encouraging a healthy space for the creation of more mixed race individuals, will form a line of thought focused on abolishing racism.

Conclusion

Visual transgression of the racial binary can work in a powerful way, both on the individual level as well as the societal. The mixed individual has the power to incite confusion,

especially if a term such as “mixed race” is used to open channels of discourse rather than stand as a closed topic of classificatory convenience. In that sense, it is important that a term such as “mixed race” not become solidified in discourses on race. This creates space for new ways of conceptualizing race and discredits the racial binary. But what about the claim that mixed race is already included in this binary logic? With the slow death of the “one-drop” rule, the binary has shifted and become fairly more fluid, though a firm distinction between white and non-white remains. The power mixed race has on affecting this type of binary comes

on a more massive scale. Similar to Gordon’s idea of “blackening”, increased numbers of visually mixed people creates a pressing need to attend to racism in its anticolored forms while questioning the binary by visibly overcoming the logic that supports it.

The very “newness” of a mixed race identity allows an opportunity for large-scale societal critique on race itself and the structures that uphold binary racial logic. Therefore, through not only theoretical inquiries, but also practical engagement with the topic of mixed race, there exists a key outlet for addressing the problem of racism that cannot be ignored. ♦



Rethinking the Binary of Pure objectivity and Relativistic Chaos

ABSTRACT: This paper seeks to refute some of the common presuppositions of traditional Western epistemologies, which center on the claim that subjectivity cannot be as truth-yielding as 'objectivity'. This paper argues that aspects of the subjective can effectively be utilized in a valid epistemology attempting to approach an understanding of the truth of lived human experience—i.e. that subjectivity can in certain circumstances be as truth-yielding as, or even more so than, the epistemic ideal of objectivity. Ultimately, this paper concludes that the objective-subjective epistemic binary is artificial and disadvantageous in that neither pure objectivity nor absolute relativity are possible.



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Perhaps the most ubiquitous epistemic convention in the West, an entrenched remnant of Enlightenment science and philosophy, is the oppositional duality of objectivity and subjectivity (traditionally associated with reason and affect, respectively). These two faculties/properties of the human disposition are tacitly assumed to be mutually

exclusive in most epistemic endeavors, and any pursuit that involves emotions in any way is seen as epistemically less valuable or less "true." This epistemic assumption is made manifest in the separation and hierarchization of the natural sciences and the social sciences and humanities.¹ It seems to be a mainstream assumption that the social and humanistic pursuits in academia have

less of a right to claims to truth than the natural sciences, specifically because subjective experience and interpretation purportedly play a more central role in their methodologies. Indeed, "Anything too tightly associated with emotion and desire, it turns out, is metaphysically a second-class citizen."² Just what is it that the West fears in attributing truth to subjective experiences and emotions? Why is "objectivity" more epistemically valid for truth claims than "subjectivity"?³ And is "objectivity" truly objective; are objectivity and subjectivity mutually exclusive? And if not, why would this be a problem? Can anything epistemically relevant be found in subjectivity? It is the goal of this paper to explore these epistemological issues by critically reviewing conventional valuations of 'objectivity,' as well as to provide a feminist epistemological critique of the hierarchical separation of objectivity and subjectivity. I will defend the role of the subjective—as both an aspect of methodology and as a "truth-yielding" object of study—in a valid and equitable epistemology that seeks to approach the truth of lived human experience.

I think it would be fair to say that the ultimate reason there exists such an avoidance of the subjective in Western epistemology is because of apprehension concerning relativistic chaos. Since objectivity and subjectivity are so diametrically

opposed, just the hint of subjective experience in any intellectual pursuit immediately threatens that pursuit's capacity to make any claim to the truth about "reality-as-such." The conventional foundationalist and positivist viewpoints that have dominated philosophy of science until recently seem to conceive of truth as that which is universally valid or derived inductively therefrom.⁴ Therefore, it is implicitly claimed that introducing the personal invalidates a proposition's stake in the claim of universal validity, and thus truth. The concern is that the introduction of the personal (into methodology, interpretation, etc.) will ultimately effect an epistemic reduction to absolute relativism, and no claims to the truth can be made at such point by any epistemically valid methodology. It is a blanket assumption that all claims to truth must be divested as best as possible of any personal vestige of the claimant—including gender. Noting that the primary claim of feminist epistemologists is that the category of gender influences all of our knowledge-pursuing and -producing activities, this is clearly a problem.

Given the rigorous demands to objectivity typical of positivist science—such as those proposed by the Vienna Circle or philosophers following them, e.g. A.J. Ayer⁵—it is reasonable

1. These pursuits have conventionally been described as the 'hard' and 'soft' sciences, respectively—a division that carries gendered associations with 'harder' masculine and 'softer' feminine physiques. See Elizabeth Anderson, *Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense*, *Hypatia* 10.3 (Summer 1995): 64.

2. Margaret Olivia Little, "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology," *Hypatia* 10.3 (Summer 1995): 130.

3. To clarify my terminology, objectivity is commonly conceived in the West as: (a) truth-claims that have universal validity, which are (b) expressed free from the influence of personal bias and (c) put forth by a detached, rational knowledge-claimant—the Enlightenment ideal of the detached, rational observer. Subjectivity as dealt with in this paper has two significant meanings: first, the personal (affective, experiential, social, etc.) aspects of the researcher's life and work; second, and more importantly for the social sciences, the personal aspects of the lives of the subjects of study. Both forms of subjectivity will be defended in this paper.

4. For a case for strong foundationalism, see Roderick M. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge* (Edgewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966). He puts forth perhaps the best argument for a strong foundationalism founded in basic beliefs that are either self-evident or incorrigible.

5. For further information concerning logical positivism, please see A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), particularly "Truth and Probability."



to ask: is "objectivity" as practiced (assumed?) in the natural sciences actually devoid of any trace of the individual pursuing these studies? Sandra Harding's work on this question is particularly elucidating here. She is right to ask, "If gender is a variable in the most formal structures of beliefs about the boundaries between nature and culture, or the fundamental constituents of socially constructed realities, why should we assume that the formal structures of natural science belief are immune?"⁶ To begin, the very ideal of completely detached and impartial objectivity may itself be a gendered presupposition. An obsession with the quantitative and a devaluation of the qualitative may simply be a manifestation of the preference of "objective" reason over the "subjective" affect. Since qualitative judgment seems necessarily to involve a degree of subjective interpretation, it is not seen as "purely" objective as quantitative measurement is assumed to be.⁷

Even if we were to humor this assumption—that the ideal of objectivity is sound, desirable, and unbiased—natural science will still inevitably run into instances of subjective influence. No matter how abstracted from our subjective experience numbers, theories, and measurements may be, we as the collectors of numbers, the formulators of theories, and the makers of measurements are subjective beings. The questions we ask, the forms of knowledge we value, the theories we validate with the evidence we collect, what kind of evidence constitutes legitimate data, and so on, will all be affected by our social situation—not least of which are our race, class,

sexual orientation, gender, and nationality, all of which have associated sociocultural values and expectations. What we define as problematic, or more broadly as intellectually interesting, is necessarily affected by our cultural context.⁸ The pursuit of biomedical engineering projects that attempt to improve, say, the versatility of prosthetic limbs would be logically inconceivable if we did not live in a culture where some people are missing limbs and where this is seen as a problem that demands a solution. Likewise, to use a more gender-specific example, we would not be pursuing medical "remedies" to symptoms of PMS if we did not already view the physiological changes that women undergo before and during their menstrual cycles as *problematic*.⁹ "Objectivity," then, is not as objective in the natural sciences as it is made out to be.

What can be done to change this—to approach the truth more 'directly' by becoming aware of subjective bias in our "objective" pursuits? Since the natural sciences have been constructed (allegedly) to utilize a self-correcting empirical methodology, what is needed is a feminist epistemological critique that functions within the accepted methodology of the sciences. Enter feminist epistemology as defined by Elizabeth Anderson, the role of which she argues is both to proffer feminist critiques of sexist scientific praxis and to legitimate feminist scientific practices.¹⁰ "Feminist epistemology can be regarded as the branch of social epistemology that investigates the influence of socially constructed conceptions and norms of gender-specific interests and experiences on the production of knowledge."¹¹ She argues that feminist epistemology is committed

to both 'modest empiricism'—"the view... that observation provides the least defeasible evidence we have about the world"—and 'rationality as reflective endorsability,' or the conscious and systematic evaluation of our "reason for having any attitude or engaging in any practice of inquiry."¹²

As such, feminist epistemology raises issues within the pre-established methodology of scientific inquiry: empirical studies and reflective self-correction. The contentions that feminist epistemology make cannot responsibly be ignored by scientists who claim to follow sound scientific methodology. In this way, Anderson models feminist epistemological critique on the formation of placebo-controlled, double-blind, multi-center pharmaceutical trials. This method of experimentation arose through the critical work of naturalized epistemology and the evaluation of potential biases in scientific praxis; feminist epistemology, she holds, would function in much the same fashion, except with an emphasis on the influence of gender and other social categories on the biasing of scientific pursuits.¹³

What exactly can feminist epistemology reveal about the natural sciences? Anderson breaks down the focus of feminist epistemology into four categories: investigations of gender structures in the division of scientific labor, evaluations of gender symbolism in the representation and modeling of inanimate or nonhuman phenomena, exposures

of androcentrism in the pursuit of scientific inquiry, and criticisms of sexism in either the content or application of scientific theory.¹⁴ Each of these categories provides a critique of science that works on the basis of science's self-correcting methodology; consequently, these claims cannot be ignored by scientists. Apparently, no matter how much we may try to convince ourselves otherwise, our subjective personal and social situation has a noticeable effect on our 'objective' pursuits.

Nonetheless, one might argue that this is simply a reason why we need to correct constantly for the influence of subjectivity on our "objective" pursuits. The underlying assumption in the foregoing argument is that, regardless, objectivity is to be valued epistemologically over subjectivity; our subjectivity will only detract from our ability to comprehend the truth. While I definitely would not want to be taken to insinuate that I think that gender biases should be acceptable in scientific endeavors—far be it from the truth—I still see problematic traces of the devaluation of subjectivity in this argument. Is the subjective really as universally epistemically invalidating as this analysis would suggest? The next half of this paper will argue that in certain studies, the subjective (or personal) may not only aid, but also be necessary to our effective approximation of the truth.¹⁵

Indeed, the value of subjective experience in feminist theory is of central significance:

11. Ibid, 54. Emphasis in the original.

12. Ibid, 51; 53.

13. See *ibid*, 55.

14. See the remainder of Anderson for a detailed exploration of some of the contributions of feminist epistemology in each of these four categories.

15. While I would argue that the subjective can be epistemically valuable for both the social and the natural sciences, it is more immediately evident in the case of the former, and hence the social sciences will be the focus of this claim. For an example of how subjective experience can lead effectively to valid truth-claims in the natural sciences, see Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Keller's discussion of the work of the geneticist Barbara McClintock describes an instance wherein subjective investment in a knowledge pursuit in the natural sciences assisted the search for truth.

6. Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 84-5.

7. See *ibid*, 90-3.

8. See *ibid*, 102-4.

9. I take this example from Anderson.

10. Anderson, 51.



“One of the challenges for feminist theory is to begin to document the culturally specific ways that gender subordination is imposed.”¹⁶ I would argue further that any social science must take the subjective experiences of its subjects—who constitute the social sciences’ “objects” of inquiry—into consideration.¹⁷ The epistemic value of subjective experience in my evaluation extends well beyond just feminist theory and the social sciences, but this is beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁸ Suffice it to say that subjective experience can be a viable, if not always necessary, epistemological means to ascertaining the truth.

To make this more evident, I offer an example: Aida Hurtado clearly demonstrates that one of the major problems with the ‘60s and ‘70s American feminist and Civil Rights movements was the fact that they did not take the full range of personal experience of all members of the group into complete consideration. Women of Color fell in terms of personal identity into both groups, yet neither group took their experience as both women and racial minorities concomitantly as a basis for political and social thought, action, and change. Given the exigencies of the situation, women of Color allied themselves with the Civil Rights movement more so than with the feminist movement due to the vital importance of racial solidarity. “[B]reaking ranks [with men of Color] when they were so severely under

attack by powerful institutions and repressive organizations such as the FBI and the local police” could have subverted the entire Civil Rights movement.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the Civil Rights movement they aided did not regard their lived experience as women of Color.

While this may not seem like an epistemic issue on the surface, the oversight can be understood as one of epistemic ignorance. The leaders of the feminist movement (white women) and the leaders of the Civil Rights movement (men of Color) both assumed that the particular category of oppression that they put at the forefront of their movement—gender and race respectively—was the primarily salient issue; they failed to take into account the effect(s) other categories of oppression—with which they were not personally familiar—had on the oppression of women of Color. In other words, like an example from Hurtado’s work, when a white feminist woman looked at a woman of Color, she saw first and foremost a woman; likewise, when a male Civil Rights activist of Color looked at a woman of Color, he saw first and foremost a person of Color. The category of oppression that was most salient to their lives became, in their minds, *the* category of oppression: they generalized from their experience to the experience of women of Color and failed to take into account any changes that differences of race or gender might bear on their oppression.

What the situation of women of Color called for was a process of “entering her ‘world’—a process very different from accessing other minds through analogical inference”, or generalizing to an ‘understanding’ of the other’s experience through analogy to one’s own.²⁰ Including more viewpoints in the discursive subject position of the theorizer/knowledge-claimant does more than “correct” inaccurate perceptions of how some individuals understand and experience the world; it also changes and expands how the theorizer/knowledge-claimant her/himself understands the world. By overlooking the specific personal experience—the subjectivity—of women of Color, these groups both failed to approximate a truthful understanding of their situation that would have benefited the overall cause of their respective movements by creating a more comprehensive view of mechanisms of oppression. Hence, the failure can be considered epistemic.

The importance of the personal has one further implication for epistemology that Hurtado explores: the structure of discourse about knowledge. Hurtado notes that “the broadening of the paradigm of how gender is conceptualized also requires that other materials besides conventional academic production be used to theorize about women of Color.”²¹ Traditional academic work normally entails writing papers for scholarly journals, presenting lectures, discussion panels at universities, and so forth. When the object of academia is women of Color from the

lower classes, for instance, ironically the very people being studied are excluded from the production of knowledge, let alone access to the intellectual products of this process. This means that scholars are generating knowledge without even taking into consideration the firsthand accounts of the experience of their subjects. Granted, it is not possible in many cases to do so (e.g. the study of infants or of historical peoples). Nevertheless, whenever access to the direct account of the experience of one’s subjects is possible, one should have an epistemic duty, as Hurtado implies, to try to obtain such knowledge if one wants to represent accurately the lived experience of one’s subjects. With a concept as relative to personal experience as gender, it is necessary to broaden our definitions of what constitutes effective knowledge production.

However, I do not wish to advocate a total shift to the personal, since (certain forms of) the personal will not always be relevant to knowledge production. Toril Moi demonstrates this in her *Sex, Gender, and the Body*. Certain aspects of the personal, whether it is the personal experience of a subject or the personal experience of the inquirer, simply have no bearing on the knowledge being sought. The fact that the author of a certain study is having a bad hair day when she writes the study probably has no bearing on the content, methodology, or interpretation of her study. Similarly for the subjects of a study: it is doubtful that their musical preferences will have any bearing on that which is being studied

16. Hurtado, 45. Emphasis added.

17. For example, the misunderstandings of Western anthropological studies of Igbo society described in Nkiru Nzegwu’s *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006) resulted primarily from overlooking the subjective experiences of women, an epistemic error that resulted from the assumption that the men could describe the culture ‘better,’ and therefore that women’s narratives were unimportant to knowledge of the culture.

18. For instance, Little’s work shows the centrality of one’s subjective experience of one’s own emotions in effective moral epistemology and subsequent action based on moral knowledge. Affect provides us a way of seeing the world that yields insight into morality that we would not have from reason alone.

19. Aida Hurtado, *The Color of Privilege: Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 103.

20. Vrinda Dalmiya, “Why Should a Knower Care?,” *Hypatia* 17.1 (Winter 2002): 36-7. See this essay for a convincing argument regarding the importance of caring in an effective epistemology. Her analysis of how ‘care’ works and what it entails is quite nuanced and worth reading.

21. Hurtado, 47.



(unless, of course, the object of inquiry is their musical preferences). To say that the personal is often relevant to knowledge production is not to say that everything personal is categorically relevant to knowledge production.

It is the same situation for the communication of said knowledge. The use of certain obscure theoretical language can be distancing... to some crowds. If I were to give a presentation to a crowd of art historians, I would expect them to know what *trompe l'oeil* and *chiaroscuro* are; the same cannot be said for a group of kindergarteners visiting their local museum for the first time. In the same fashion, the use of personal information in the communication of knowledge can be as distancing or as expedient as the use of technical and obscure terminology can be. If a scholar were presenting her findings on domestic abuse to a crowd of survivors of abuse, sharing her personal experience of abuse may help establish a sense of connection between herself and her audience that may in turn allow for a greater degree of trust. If she were to deliver the same story at a sociology conference, more than likely the situation will become awkward and no one will feel comfortable criticizing her findings for fear of belittling her experience: hence all effective intellectual dialogue is stopped. "Explicitly autobiographical and emotional writing can be genuinely open and revealing or just as "silencing"—just as closed off to engagement from others—as the most arrogantly impersonal prose."²²

When considering the language and style of knowledge communication, "It is impossible to assess the effects of a theoretical style without asking who the theory is addressed to, and what it is actually about."²³ To clarify this point, to make a blanket assumption about the general applicability of the personal is as epistemically dubious as making a blanket assumption about the impartiality, and hence truth-yielding potentiality, of "objective" natural sciences. In a valid epistemology, the context of knowledge dissemination should be considered as well as the social context of the knowledge producer.

It may still be claimed by some that the introduction of the personal and the subjective immediately reduces knowledge to relativism. Even many feminist epistemologists seem to treat relativism as a "necessary evil."²⁴ Similar to Moi, Sharyn Clough argues, based on the linguistic philosophy of Donald Davidson, that "Our beliefs have no content unless we have established a common convergence between ourselves, another speaker (or speakers), and a shared environmental stimulus."²⁵ No disagreement is possible without agreeing on a certain set of background beliefs—or as Wittgenstein would say, we must be playing the same language game in order for any agreement or disagreement to be possible. "In the skeptic's world, the fear that the metaphysical separation between us and the world makes coherent the worry that we are, in principle, unable to speak with confidence about the causal links between our representations and the world represented."²⁶

However, relativity to a particular conceptual scheme does not necessarily entail absolute relativism, and hence does not entail the inability to stake a truth-claim. Personal or political values can themselves have verifiable "empirical content that can, in turn, provide good evidential reasons for rejecting" or accepting certain truth-claims.²⁷ "The hope of agreement constitutes the aspiration towards the universal."²⁸ To assume automatically that the introduction of the personal or subjective immediately instantiates inescapable relativism that invalidates any truth-claims aspiring to the universal is to fall into the trap of the selfsame mutually exclusive objectivity / subjectivity duality that feminist epistemology is trying to revise.

By wrestling down the dualisms that we use to define self and our relation to the world around us, [feminist epistemologists] make considerable strides toward identifying an epistemology that can ground a common resistance for women without ignoring our important differences.²⁹

Through refusing to situate knowledge in an ontological binarism, feminist epistemology structures knowledge with relevance to both the universal and the specific. Epistemic doubt should not necessarily be aroused by anything that invokes subjectivity in its methods of ascertaining truth; on the contrary, suspicion should be provoked by the categorization of any knowledge claim as purely objective or totally subjective.

In short, no knowledge claim can be purely objective or absolutely relativistic.³⁰ Feminist epistemology thus offers us important criticisms and revisions not only of scientific epistemology, but of epistemology in general. In fact, the emphasis on subjectivity is not unique to feminist epistemologists.³¹ Their particular insights, however, offer much more than simply the tools with which concerned epistemologists may correct dominant methodology. Feminist epistemology proposes a correlate claim with its theory of knowledge that brings more immediate relevance to the pursuit of knowledge. As Hurtado says, "What is appealing about a

22. Toril Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body: The Student Edition of What Is a Woman?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 248.

23. *Ibid.*, 133.

24. For a discussion of relativism in the works of Sandra Harding, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Helen Longino, see Sharyn Clough, "A Hasty Retreat From Evidence: The Recalcitrance of Relativism in Feminist Epistemology," *Hypatia* 13.4 (Fall 1998): 88-111.

25. *Ibid.*, 105.

26. *Ibid.*, 108.

27. *Ibid.*, 107.

28. Moi, 236.

29. Laura Sells, "Feminist Epistemology: Rethinking the Dualisms of Atomic Knowledge," *Hypatia* 8.3 (Summer 1993): 210.

30. NB: Just because an experience is uniquely personal does not mean it is completely relativistic. As I hope the above has demonstrated, something that is absolutely relativistic would be strictly unintelligible to any but the original subject of the experience in the first place; commonalities are a prerequisite to understanding, and hence to any kind of disagreement. Likewise for "pure" objectivity: while one may claim that $2 + 2 = 4$ universally, this phrase would have no significance if it were uttered in a social context wherein agents did not have either (a) such terminology as part of their intellectual vocabulary or (b) any valuation of the significance of numeration to their lives.

31. For instance, the arguments of several pragmatists and contextualists parallel many claims of feminist epistemology. William James's focus on "live" and "dead" options attributes much epistemic gravity to the sociocultural situation of the knowledge-claimant. Additionally, David Annis's contextualism calls attention to the situational construction of methodological norms: certain contexts make certain truth-claims/objections possible, while others may invalidate them a priori. See, respectively, William James, *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longman, Greens, and Co., 1897); and David Annis, "A Contextual Theory of Epistemic Justification," in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1979): 213-219.



feminist epistemology... is the struggle to focus on life and the recognition that humans should not be oppressed.... a feminist epistemology assumes that oppression is unnecessary."³² By undermining the prospects of "pure" objectivity on the human level, feminist epistemology eliminates the ability to claim without doubt that oppression is ever a natural or inevitable phenomenon of the universe, like some biological determinists controversially claim about women's social roles in society. Further, by demonstrating that nothing is relativistic, it disallows anybody from categorically dismissing, ignoring, or overlooking the subjective experience of another on the grounds of it being "too" personal.

As Beauvoir expresses in her *Ethics of Ambiguity*, we must learn to live with the realization that our existence is founded in essential ambiguities: while every second is a moment closer to death, every step towards death is a moment of our lives, and more

importantly the individual and the universal are not mutually exclusive. "An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny a priori that separate existants can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all."³³ Essentially, this means that "an action which serves man ought to be careful not to forget him on the way."³⁴ I am by no means arguing that any objectivity is impossible, or that there are no personal experiences that are irrelevant to knowledge creation. Rather, I argue that to hold that only absolutely objective methodologies can yield valid truth-claims or that the personal is universally irrelevant to truth-claims is fundamentally dogmatic. Ultimately, feminist epistemology allows us to expose and to challenge instances of knowledge-as-oppression and to utilize knowledge-as-liberation: it provides a clear and valuable social goal to our knowledge production, as well as a means to achieving this end. ♦

32. Hurtado, 126.

33. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1948), 18.

34. *Ibid.*, 153.

The Environmental Crises: Why We Need Anthropocentrism

ABSTRACT: In the face of an ensuing environmental crisis, this paper suggests that currently accepted modes of environmentalist thought have not been effective enough in enacting positive change. Anthropocentrism provides something that environmental philosophy needs – wide acceptance and public appeal. This paper argues that an environmental ethic that is weakly anthropocentric, in that it finds value in the environment via human values, can be both internally consistent and highly pragmatic. It goes on to examine some pitfalls of Deep Ecological environmental philosophy, which could be avoided if a weakly anthropocentric environmental ethic were adopted now.



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For a system of ethics to be successful, it must be both internally consistent and widely acceptable. There is danger in getting so caught up in the first requirement that we find ourselves defending views that most human beings would be unwilling to accept – such positions are doomed to be ignored by most outside the philosophical community. Environmental ethics, which seek to explain the ethical relationship between humans and the environment, are no exception. The main point of contention among environmental ethicists revolves around the question of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is the

evaluation of reality exclusively in terms of human interests and values. As a way of viewing the world, anthropocentrism has a profound impact on our decision-making calculus. I believe that an anthropocentric environmental ethic can be both internally consistent, and widely accepted, by confirming the intuitions of environmentalists who seek to challenge human destruction of the natural world. In that way, our environmental ethic can effect more change in the way humans treat the environment, and be defensible to a critical audience. The decision to adopt an anthropocentric environmental ethic is one that is both pragmatic and ethical. Its practical appeal



stems from its attraction to a wide audience, while its ethical appeal is generated by its concern for those animals, humans, and ecosystems suffering from the environmental crises.

The description of an environmental ethic as "anthropocentric" needs clarification. The ethic I will extol is not strongly anthropocentric, but weakly so. The distinction here, and much of its explanation, is taken from Bryan G. Norton's definitive article on the subject, entitled "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism". To fully understand the distinction between strong and weak anthropocentrism, we must recognize two types of human desires: felt and considered preferences. According to Norton, a felt preference is one that can be satisfied by some specific experience. For example, my wish to eat a chocolate cupcake is a felt preference because it reflects a desire of mine that can be satisfied by a specific, immediate experience – namely, me eating that cupcake. A considered preference is one that an individual would have after "careful deliberation" that determines the preference to be consistent with a "rationally adopted worldview."¹ By rational worldview, he means a conception of the world in accordance with reason or logic, which informs our decisions about value. My desire to recycle is not a felt preference, because the act of putting the aluminum can in the recycle bin doesn't satisfy any specific desire of mine. It is a considered preference because I only want to recycle in light of my rational worldview about environmental responsibility. An ethic is strongly anthropocentric, according to Norton, if the things it values can all be reduced to felt preferences of human individuals. A weakly anthropocentric ethic, in contrast, finds value

in both felt and considered preferences. Strong anthropocentrism could provide no check against felt preferences that endanger the natural world, since felt preferences are always the basis of value under this view. Weak anthropocentrism determines felt preferences to be rational or irrational based on their consistency with our rational worldview. As a decision-making calculus, weak anthropocentrism explicates its goals by determining what the agent wants (felt preferences), and then how those desires fit in with the agent's rational worldview (constraining felt preferences). Our worldview also generates its own desires – ones that we wouldn't have without careful consideration (considered preferences). Both the weak and strong views are anthropocentric because in both human interests are the source of value, and our worldview is the only one that guides our actions.

Before we begin a discussion of the advantages of a weakly anthropocentric ethic, one further clarification will be helpful. Its application to future generations is at this point unclear. Parfit's paradox, as discussed in the Norton article, explains why we cannot take into account the felt or considered preferences of future individuals, since the choices we make today will determine which future individuals will exist, and they could not reasonably complain about those policies given that they would not have existed without them. Norton again comes to our aid in applying the ethic to future generations. He believes, and I agree, that an environmental ethic should not be individualistic in that it only considers the preference of existing individuals. Our ethic can also find value in the existence of the human race, rooted in the belief that the universe is

better with human consciousness than without it. Accepting this value into our rational worldview will inform considered preferences that aid in protecting the resource base for future generations. Fortunately, the belief that human consciousness is valuable is already a part of many people's humanistic worldview – consider the Judeo-Christian tradition, which believes homicide and suicide are sins because each human life is intrinsically valuable.²

With a working explanation of our weakly anthropocentric, non-individualistic, environmental ethic we can now outline how it speaks to issues in a way most environmentalists would appreciate. In other words, this ethic tells us to do things that environmentalists already think we should do- reduce, reuse, recycle, develop alternative energy, protect species, eliminate pollution, and reduce greenhouse emissions, etc. As such, it could satisfy many environmentalists as a way to justify their goals to themselves and a wider audience. Considered preferences of a weakly anthropocentric ethic can include all of these objectives, based on a rational worldview that values ecological diversity, harmony with nature, and human existence. The first two are easily justified, and the third is a firm conviction widely held, as discussed above. Ecological diversity is valuable to humans for myriad reasons, such as medicine, scenic views, education and tasty foods. Many believe that harmony with nature is important to our spiritual development, or the formation of human values. It is not difficult to imagine a rational worldview that respects these values, and many already exist and are followed today (e.g., Hinduism, Jainism). Even the major

religions of the Judeo-Christian tradition can inform considered preferences such as these, which will be a major advantage to our view.

The weakly anthropocentric view avoids the difficulties of justifying an environmental ethic from either end of the spectrum. On one hand, it avoids controversy over the existence of intrinsic value in non-human organisms, objects, and ecological systems. This is one important characteristic of a nonanthropocentric ethic like Deep Ecology– finding intrinsic value in all living things.³ By intrinsic value, I mean value that exists independent of any observer to give it value. For example, a nonanthropocentric ethicist would see value in an animal that no human could ever benefit from or even know about, simply because of what it is. While possibly justifiable, an ethic that treats all living things and possibly even ecological systems as intrinsically valuable may seem very radical to a large portion of the public. It seems that even the philosophical community remains divided on the issue. On the other hand, our ethic avoids making felt human desire the loci of all value by showing how considered human values can explain the value in our environment. In other words, what humans value, either directly or indirectly, generates value in the environment. In this way, we avoid unchecked felt preferences that would not be able to explain why excessive human consumption is wrong. Avoiding these controversial stances will contribute substantially to the first advantage of a weakly anthropocentric environmental ethic: public appeal.

The importance of public appeal to an environmental ethic cannot be overstated. We are running out of time to slow or reverse the

1. Bryan G. Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism", *Environmental Ethics* 6:2 (1984): 134

2. Richard M. Gula, "Dying Well: A Challenge to Christian Compassion", *The Christian Century* (1999): 501-505

3. Deep Ecology Movement, Foundation for Deep Ecology, 26 August 2008, <http://www.deepecology.org/movement.htm> (22 February 2009)



effects of past environmental degradation, and we will need the support of society to combat them effectively. Hence, the most important advantage of a weakly anthropocentric ethic over a nonanthropocentric one is public appeal because many people feel that nonanthropocentrism is just too radical and contrary to common sense. For many, all value does come from humans, since they believe we are the only species capable of rational thought. Opinions about the environment are certainly changing, but anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that most reasons given for increasing environmental protection all reduce to anthropocentrism. For example, the 2004 book *The Meat You Eat*, by Ken Midkiff, explains why factory farming should be rejected, with a focus on its detrimental effects to human health. The vegan and vegetarian movements have increasingly focused on this angle of the factory farming debate, perhaps because of the broader appeal of human-focused motivations. As Midkiff says, "It is simply impossible to raise animals in concentrated operations and to slaughter these animals by the thousands... without severe health consequences among humans. By treating these animals as units of production, the industrial methods, ultimately and inevitably, produce meats that are unfit to eat."⁴ Even if this justification for ending factory farming is not one defended by deep ecologists, isn't actual change more important? Common justifications for species protection include parents wanting their children to know

what an elephant, or a leopard, or a panda look like, how the beauty of animals increases human satisfaction in much the same way that an art gallery would, or the genetic information they can provide which might cure human diseases. In fact, almost every justification printed or aired in major news media reflects an anthropocentric bias. For example, an April 2008 article from the BBC, entitled "Species Loss Bad for Our Health", surveys "a wide range of threatened species whose biology could hold secrets to possible treatments for a growing variety of ailments."⁵ President-elect Barack Obama has consistently spoken about global warming in terms of its impact on future human generations. In a 2007 speech at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, he stressed the urgency of the issue by saying that "the polar ice caps are now melting faster than science had ever predicted... this is not the future I want for my daughters."⁶ As for the last premise, most people agree that human consciousness is intrinsically valuable. That is the reason why this value needs little explanation. Even if this justification isn't perfect, I believe that the ecological ends justify the philosophical means.

It will be helpful to explore an example of how a weakly anthropocentric environmental ethic can justify environmentally-friendly actions to a non-philosopher, and contrast this with a nonanthropocentric justification. Weak anthropocentrism would advise that we protect a lowly invertebrate because its genetic diversity could yield a cure for some human ailment,

or because it holds some key place in the food chain that sustains an animal that yields benefits to humans. A nonanthropocentrist would have to justify protection of the lowly invertebrate by appealing to its intrinsic value. However, why a worm or sea sponge is valuable in itself is difficult for many to justify.

Another advantage of weak anthropocentrism is its ease as a decision-making calculus. Weighing the intrinsic value of non-human organisms, objects, or systems is significantly more difficult than weighing human values, possibly because of our proximity to and experience with them. If a gorilla has the same intrinsic value as an earthworm, would that justify our killing the gorilla to save two earthworms? If the gorilla does have more intrinsic value, how much more? Why is one ecosystem more valuable than another? If it is not, then why are human-created ecosystems less valuable? All these questions must be answered to act on a nonanthropocentric ethic. Critics may claim that even weak anthropocentrism falls prey to the same problem, but at least the problem is easier to resolve. A gorilla is probably more valuable to human interests than an earthworm, especially since there are fewer gorillas than earthworms. A natural ecosystem is more beneficial to our harmony with nature than a human-made ecosystem. If human consensus about benefit is unclear, we have the guidance of our own conscious. Whether or not I think a gorilla or an earthworm is more valuable is always a relevant question when following a weakly anthropocentric ethic. Admittedly, our ethic may fall prey to the same issue in determinations of the value of one human vs. another, but at least the problem is not as widespread, and we have more experience with human value so that controversy

will be easier to answer. Because this is a problem for all ethical systems, and is not unique to an anthropocentric environmental ethic, we will not address it here. This observation about practicality helps explain why more than just being a benefit, a human-centered view is the only type of environmental ethic we can practically utilize.

As humans, it is probably impossible to escape a human-centered ethic to guide our decision-making. Our subjectivity means we can only experience the world from one perspective, and this perspective colors everything we do. Our self-preservation instincts lead us to value ourselves above the rest of the world. What person would reasonably kill themselves, or their children, friends, and neighbors, to save an ecosystem? Or two ecosystems? Though some radical environmentalists have chained themselves to trees and bulldozers, this is generally a statement to express the direness of the environmental situation, instead of an actual bodily sacrifice. Would the same environmentalist give their life to save two gorillas, or two earthworms? We are all responsible for the world, but we are first and foremost responsible for ourselves. More than that, our subjectivity means that one deep ecologist will observe value in the world differently than the next. Even those who subscribe to the idea that objective deliberations are possible, admit that we can rarely access them.⁷ Believing we can have knowledge of intrinsic value that we cannot access in any meaningful way would require the adoption of moral realism, the idea that we can have knowledge of objective moral facts. The problem with this view is the lack of a perceptual capacity that would enable us to know moral facts the way we can see colors and hear music.

4. Ken Midkiff, *The Meat You Eat: How Corporate Farming has Endangered America's Food Supply*, (City: Macmillan 2005): 42.

5. "Species loss 'bad for our health'", BBC News, 23 April 2008, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7361539.stm>> (18 December 2008)

6. The Obama-Biden Environmental Plan, Obama for America, 8 October 2007, <<http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/Environment-FactSheet.pdf>> (18 December 2008).

7. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 136.



Moral realism has been debated for thousands of years, and endangered species, degrading environments, and the human species do not have time to wait for philosophers to settle this esoteric question. Even if it could be settled, broad appeal is another matter.

Deep ecologists and other nonanthropocentric ethicists often claim that weak anthropocentrism is impossible, that any anthropocentrism taints the whole ethic because it always devolves into appeals to existing human desires. Norton believes, and I agree, that this is not the case as long as we can adequately defend the distinction between felt and considered preferences. Maintaining this distinction will place a constraint on felt preferences, deeming them irrational if they are not consistent with a rational worldview. The key here is finding a worldview that values things like ecological diversity and human consciousness.

Another possible criticism arises from the status of our advocacy as genuine or not. Those who would support a weakly anthropocentric ethic because of its usefulness, and not their genuine belief in it, might undermine effectiveness. This point is made by one of the founders of the deep ecology movement, Arne Naess, in his article "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects." "It is indecent for a teacher to proclaim an ethic for tactical reasons only," he asserts.⁸ Naess does not include warrants for his claim of indecency (he believes it will be obvious), or of undermined effectiveness. Regardless, I believe that many proponents of our ethic will genuinely believe in it, as do the Hindus and Jains. That

means that they genuinely accept a worldview that values things like environmental diversity and a sustainable resource base. Those who would lean towards deep ecology intuitively may also espouse our ethic in an attempt to spread environmentally responsible behavior. Even if this approach would decrease overall effectiveness in the long run, the direness of our current environmental situation fully justifies this sacrifice. Deep ecology, while possibly a better plan for our relationship with the natural world, has failed at wide adoption, and thus done relatively little in actually changing our relationship with the environment. Even Naess seems to endorse the combination of a weakly anthropocentric view with deep ecology as an educational tool later in the article, when he claims that "environmental education campaigns can fortunately combine human-centered arguments with a practical environmental ethic based on either a deeper and more fundamental philosophic or religious perspective, and on a set of norms resting on intrinsic value."⁹ Other than the last part about norms resting on intrinsic value, this claim seems to endorse our more practical ethic. Why does the fundamental philosophic or religious perspective have to rest on a set of norms which themselves rest on intrinsic values?⁹ The answer is unclear.

The best criticism of weak anthropocentrism takes the form of "last human" hypothetical situations, where no action performed by the last human can possibly affect any other human, because the rest are all dead. "If no human use is known, or seems likely to be found, it does not matter if they are destroyed", Naess

explains.¹⁰ The same problem would occur if an entire generation of the human population chose voluntary sterilization, and no future generations were possible. The easiest response to this accusation is the last-human situations are purely hypothetical, and highly unlikely to ever be anything else. This, of course, is to side step the issue, although some will find it a satisfactory response because we are seeking an ethic that will work in the current situation, not one that will work in every unlikely counter-example. Still, we can respond to the voluntary human sterilization example by showing that the sterilization itself would be wrong because there is inherent value in the continuation of the human race. What about after the sterilization occurs? One possible response could be found in the benefit of ecological diversity and natural harmony to human spirituality. This point applies most clearly to the remaining, sterile generation, as many will find a source of spiritual development in the natural world. But what if the last human being is a spiritually bankrupt materialist? In other words, they only find value in consumption of natural resources. In this instance, it isn't so clear how a weakly anthropocentric ethic could constrain the last human's actions to degrade or destroy the environment. Perhaps the possibility of future human existence could be a solution. Parfit's paradox would not apply, because if we

destroyed the Earth no humans could exist as a result, and thus our obligation to the existence of future human consciousness could only advise us to maintain a viable life support system on the Earth and the ecological diversity that would benefit future human lives.

Despite its pragmatic issues, Deep Ecologists need not abandon their philosophical view completely. A weak anthropocentric ethic may, in addition to reversing environmental degradation, serve as a segue to a more fundamental shift in our relationship with nature. Radical shifts in human relationships are rare – see for instance the anti-racism and anti-sexism movements. While weak anthropocentrism may not go as far as Deep Ecologists would like, it is certainly a step in the right direction.¹¹

Even if Deep Ecologists can identify internal inconsistencies or possible abuses of a weakly anthropocentric, non-individualistic, environmental ethic, I think accepting it anyway is well worth the possible risks. Most deep ecologists would agree that the Earth is fast approaching a point-of-no-return for environmental well-being, if it hasn't already. The ecological world desperately needs the destructive human population to adopt an ethic that will slow or reverse environmental degradation. If we do not, the last human scenario might not be so hypothetical, and the last of many species will have already come to pass. ♦

8. Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003)

9. Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003): 264

10. Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects," in *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*, ed. Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston III (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003): 267

11. Charles T. Rubin, *The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Environmentalism*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 1994): 209.



A Consistent Consolation: True Happiness in Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy

ABSTRACT: This paper seeks to defend Philosophy's account of true happiness in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy*. Although philosopher John Marenbon claims that Philosophy provides Boethius with two conflicting accounts of happiness, this paper argues that she consistently advocates a single account of true happiness. Ultimately, the paper claims that Marenbon is mistaken in his interpretation of Philosophy account of true happiness. What Marenbon interprets as an alternate account of the nature of true happiness is actually a component of Philosophy's dialectical method and not a separate account.



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The problem of happiness

Woven amongst the myriad, tangled themes of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* is a lengthy examination of the nature of happiness. Brought low by the turning of fortune's wheel, Boethius turns to his muse, Philosophy, for an explanation of his misfortunes and asks her to show him what true happiness is. The discussion and arguments that ensue are complex. It is difficult to determine what, precisely, Philosophy claims about the nature of true happiness: Does she argue that fortune is an

important component of true happiness, or does she argue that true happiness is independent of fortune and completely self-sufficient? Put another way, does Philosophy ultimately claim that Boethius can be happy without the gifts of fortune, or does she claim that he really has lost something worth mourning?

Commentator John Marenbon argues that Philosophy makes both of these claims. He argues that instead of developing a single, unambiguous account of happiness, Philosophy provides the prisoner with two disparate views. She claims both that true happiness is independent

of fortune and that the gifts of fortune are important for true happiness. According to Marenbon, this inconsistency ultimately derails Philosophy's attempt to provide Boethius with a definition of true happiness. Her inability to advance a consistent account of true happiness renders her untrustworthy.

In this paper, I attempt to defend Philosophy's account of true happiness from Marenbon's charge of inconsistency. I argue that, despite the complexities and apparent incongruities of the text, Philosophy does advance a single, consistent account of true happiness as something independent of fortune. I begin with a brief examination of Marenbon's interpretation of *Consolation*. I then turn to an analysis of the overarching structure of Philosophy's main argument, claiming that this structure is, in its general outlines consistent. Finally, I argue that what Marenbon identifies as Philosophy's second account of true happiness is actually a component of her primary account. It is a dialectical tool designed to assuage Boethius's concerns about the gifts of fortune before presenting him with a new definition of true happiness.

Marenbon's charge of inconsistency

Marenbon argues that Philosophy advances both what he calls a "complex" and a "monolithic" account of true happiness. Philosophy's defense of the monolithic account of happiness takes place primarily in Book III. She begins by arguing

that the human telos is true happiness and that true happiness is the highest Good.¹ She further argues that God, in virtue of his character, must be identified with the highest Good.² And she concludes that, since God and happiness are both the highest Good, "God is happiness itself."³ Thus, according to the monolithic account, true happiness resides in a place (or more aptly, a being) untouchable by the vagaries of fortune.

The gifts of fortune are not necessary conditions of this sort of (monolithic) happiness. Philosophy claims that mortals deceive themselves if they expect to obtain true happiness through the gifts of fortune. She says that things such as riches, honor, kingdoms, glory, and physical pleasure "seem to give mortals images of the true good, perhaps, or some imperfect goods, but the true and perfect good they cannot bestow."⁴ Since the gifts of fortune are not necessary for true happiness, then Boethius, according to the monolithic account, has no reason to mourn his misfortune.⁵ He has lost nothing of any real or lasting value.

Contrast this radical definition of true happiness with what Marenbon calls Philosophy's complex account. This nuanced approach to happiness begins in Book II with Philosophy's discussion of fortune. Although Philosophy encourages Boethius to abandon his foolish dependence on fortune in Book II—a step towards the total self-sufficiency advocated by the monolithic view—she does not make the stronger claim that all the gifts of fortune are unnecessary components of true happiness. In

1. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001): 50-51.

2. Boethius, 73-74.

3. Boethius, 75.

4. Boethius, 70.

5. John Marenbon, "Rationality and Happiness: Interpreting Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*," in *Rationality and Happiness: From the Ancients to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Jiyuan Yu and Jorge J.E. Gracia (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003): 184.



fact, she reminds Boethius that he still possesses a number of valuable gifts of fortune. His father-in-law, wife, and sons are all still alive, and he still has friends.⁶ Philosophy appears to suggest that since Boethius is still in possession of some gifts of fortune, he has no right to be entirely miserable; he might, in fact, have good reason to be happy. The argument that Boethius has good reason to be happy just because he still possesses some of the gifts of fortune makes hash of Philosophy's stern mandates against relying upon fortune for happiness. Contra the monolithic account, her concessions here imply that Boethius has lost (and still possesses) something of value after all.⁷ Happiness, it appears, might not be entirely free of the effects of fortune.

Marenbon argues that the fact that Philosophy develops two inconsistent accounts of happiness undermines her authority as a reliable guide to true happiness.⁸ Even if it does turn out that she ultimately favors the monolithic account rather than the complex account (as Marenbon claims she does), Boethius can have no real incentive to trust Philosophy. Why should he believe that he ought to prefer the monolithic account when Philosophy⁹ has also presented him with a second, conflicting, and in some ways more intuitive account of true happiness?

Establishing the monolithic account

Marenbon's argument looks formidable, but when one considers the overarching structure of Philosophy's arguments, a complex account of happiness never emerges. What does emerge is

a well-developed and consistent account of true happiness that spans both Books II and III. The account begins with a discussion of the gifts of fortune in Book II, considers false goods in III.1-9, and concludes with a definition of true happiness in III.9-12. Though Marenbon claims that Philosophy also develops the complex account of happiness through her discussion of the gifts of fortune, this is not the case. The discussion of fortune that comprises the first stage of Philosophy's argument helps to establish the monolithic (and not the complex) account of true happiness.

As Book II unfolds, Philosophy considers the gifts of fortune from three different angles. She argues that the gifts of fortune are neither instrumentally valuable nor sufficient for true happiness because (a) they are transient, (b) they cannot belong to us, and (c) they are not intrinsically good. Each of these facets of Philosophy's argument provides a negative account of what she later claims is an important characteristic of true happiness.

The claim that the transience of the gifts of fortune renders them both instrumentally valueless and insufficient, for happiness is developed in the first four sections of Book II. Philosophy argues that fortune can never result in true happiness simply because the nature of fortune is completely antithetical to the nature of true happiness. True happiness, she claims, is the highest excellence, and the highest excellence cannot be taken away. The gifts of fortune, on the other hand, can be taken away. Since true happiness and the gifts of fortune are

qualitatively different, the gifts of fortune will not be sufficient for true happiness, nor will they be instrumentally valuable for the person who seeks true happiness.¹⁰

This discussion of the instability (and therefore inadequacy) of the gifts of fortune in Book II blossoms into a positive account of the nature of true happiness in III.10. Philosophy has already claimed in passing that one of the characteristics of true happiness is that it is lasting, but it is not until III.10 that she advances a more sustained argument to support that claim. In III.10, she argues that true happiness is identical with God and the Good. She claims that because an imperfect good exists (i.e., since there are things in this world that we consider capable of providing at least a façade of happiness), there must also exist "a steadfast and perfect good."¹¹ Further, since God also possesses the perfect Good, God and this Good must be identical.¹² Finally, since true happiness and the Good are identical (as discussed above), "true happiness is located in this highest God."¹³ With this argument, Philosophy moves beyond discussing the nature of true happiness in negative terms (i.e., explaining that it is not and cannot be obtained through the gifts of fortune) to a more concrete definition. She argues that the stability that the gifts of fortune lack is a defining characteristic of the ideas of which true happiness is comprised: the Good that must exist is "steadfast," and God is eternal.

Philosophy's second charge against the gifts of fortune is that they do not belong to us and that therefore they are insufficient for happiness: "[W]hat is there in them [the gifts of fortune] that could ever truly belong to you mortals?" she asks Boethius.¹⁴ She cites money, jewels, and tilled fields as examples of things that, because they are external to Boethius, can never completely belong to him: money, she says, is more valuable when it is given away than when it is hoarded; the "brilliance of jewels" belongs to the jewels themselves, not to their observers; and nature operates independently of our individual wills.¹⁵ She argues that since Boethius is a rational human being, he has no need to look outside himself in order to find fulfillment or happiness.¹⁶ In fact, his reliance upon the external gifts of fortune actually devalues his nature as a rational human being.¹⁷

Like Philosophy's claims about the transient nature of the gifts of fortune, her discussion of their externality helps to establish a negative definition of true happiness. By the end of Book II, we know both that true happiness cannot be transient and that it is not found in things external to the rational human being. In III.5, Philosophy develops the latter claim in positive terms. She argues that one of the characteristics of true happiness is that it, unlike the external gifts of fortune (but like the rational human being), is self-sufficient: it is "one and simple by nature" and "has no parts."¹⁸ We will not be

6. Boethius 2001, II.8.7.

7. John Marenbon, *Boethius* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 103.

8. John Marenbon, "Rationality and Happiness," 176.

9. John Marenbon, "Rationality and Happiness," 189.

10. Boethius, 32-33.

11. Boethius, 73.

12. Boethius, 73-74.

13. Boethius, 74.

14. Boethius, 34.

15. Boethius, 34-35.

16. Boethius, 36-37.

17. Boethius, 37.



able to obtain it by cobbling together bits and pieces of an inadequate fortune.¹⁹

Philosophy's third charge against the gifts of fortune is that they are intrinsically worthless: "[W]hat is there in them," she asks, "that. . . would not become worthless upon close inspection and careful consideration?"²⁰ She argues that if the gifts of fortune were inherently good, then they would never "become the possessions of those who are most despicable."²¹ However, it is clearly the case that the gifts of fortune do in fact attach themselves to wicked and despicable people: greedy people sometimes possess wealth, people lacking self-control sometimes abuse the power given them, and unrighteous people sometimes receive positions of honor.²² "It's perfectly clear," Philosophy concludes, "that there is present in Fortune nothing worth pursuing, *nothing that has a goodness that belongs to its own nature.*"²³ Thus the gifts of fortune can offer nothing to the rational, happiness-seeking individual. In virtue of their rationality (a rationality that makes them unique and links them with God), human beings ought to direct their efforts towards the procurement of things that are intrinsically good. The gifts of fortune clearly fail to meet this criterion.

This conclusion dovetails neatly with Philosophy's later argument that true happiness is the highest good. If it is the case that the gifts of fortune are not intrinsically good, then, we want to ask, what is? Philosophy's response to this potential question is to argue that true happiness is itself the Good. All human beings,

she says, "strive to reach only one single goal: true happiness. And that is the good thing. . . . It is in fact the highest of all good things and it contains all good things within itself."²⁴

Thus each of the primary arguments in Book II about the gifts of fortune illuminate an important characteristic of the nature of true (monolithic) happiness. The gifts of fortune are transient, but true happiness is steadfast. The gifts of fortune cannot ever truly belong to us because they are external to us; true happiness, on the other hand, is self-sufficient and can only be obtained through the use of reason. Finally, the gifts of fortune are intrinsically valueless (i.e., they are not intrinsically good), while true happiness is itself the highest Good. The definition of true happiness that emerges from this (positive and negative) characterization is what Marenbon calls the monolithic account of happiness: true happiness is steadfast, self-sufficient, and intrinsically good; true happiness is the same as the Good and God.

Philosophy's medicinal approach to the monolithic account

Since the main arguments in Book II and III work together to establish a single, consistent account of true happiness as monolithic, it seems unlikely that Philosophy would sabotage her work by introducing a competing view of happiness. But according to Marenbon, Philosophy advances a complex account

of happiness in addition to her monolithic account. He argues that she claims both that true happiness is independent of fortune and that true happiness might depend on a certain modicum of the gifts of fortune. However, although Philosophy does sometimes appear to attribute value to the gifts of fortune, the instances in which she does do not comprise a distinct account of true happiness. Instead, they are actually an important component of Philosophy's method of establishing the monolithic account.

Philosophy does not begin Book II by providing Boethius with a precise definition of true happiness. Boethius has spent much of Book I complaining about the things he has lost and the unfairness of his current situation. He is worried, upset, and clearly unready to remodel his conceptions of the universe. He does not want to know how to become truly happy; he wants to know why his life has been destroyed. Thus, although Philosophy might prefer to plunge directly into her account of true happiness (an account that she believes will be Boethius's ultimate cure), she spends Book II discussing the gifts of fortune. She takes the time to address Boethius's concerns and to wean him from his dependence on fortune-born happiness before she attempts to provide him with a concrete definition of true happiness.

Philosophy compares this graduated approach to that of a doctor prescribing a course of medicine to a patient. The patient, she says, must begin with gentle remedies before moving on to "more caustic ones;"²⁵ he must "take in and taste

something mild and agreeable" and "this will prepare the way for the stronger potions after it has been conveyed to [his] inner depths."²⁶ Thus, when Philosophy appears to suggest in Book II that the gifts of fortune are important components of Boethius's happiness, she is not actually advancing an alternate account of true happiness. Instead, she is acknowledging the worth that the gifts of fortune have according to Boethius's current and erroneous worldview. Philosophy begins her enumeration of the supposed goods that Boethius still has left to him by saying, "If it is this empty name of Fortune-born happiness that excites you so, you may now go over with me just how multiform and magnificent is your abundance still."²⁷ Philosophy's claim is only that, according to his faulty and fortune-dependent conception of happiness, Boethius has not lost everything. She does not claim that those things will make him truly happy.

Marenbon rejects this "medicinal approach" as a viable explanation for Philosophy's treatment of happiness in Book II. He argues that if it is the case that Philosophy administers first gentle and then stronger remedies, then Book III ought to begin with a markedly different approach than that advanced in Book II. But, he says, "the argument in Book III up to the end of prose 8 develops a line of thinking which bears out and extends the approach of Book II."²⁸

Marenbon's objection depends on a faulty characterization of the medicinal approach. It is false to assume that Philosophy's emphasis on a progression from gentle to stronger

18. Boethius, 69.

19. Boethius, 69.

20. Boethius, 34.

21. Boethius, 40.

22. Boethius, 41.

23. Boethius, 41 (emphasis mine).

24. Boethius, 51.

25. Boethius, 34.

26. Boethius, 22-23.

27. Boethius, 30.

28. John Marenbon, "Rationality and Happiness," 180.



remedies necessitates that Book III begin with “a different outlook” than that developed in Book II. If she is still trying to cure the same illness, then it makes sense that her stronger remedies will be an extension of the gentler ones. What the method does demand, however, is that Philosophy’s arguments grow continually stronger or, to put it in her own terms, harsher. Over the course of the text, arguments should begin to focus less on Boethius’s concerns and be more directly applicable to her own agenda.

It is just this kind of intensification of focus that we find at the beginning of Book III. Philosophy has most assuredly not changed the subject, but she has plunged deeper into it. In Book II, she discusses gifts of fortune; in Book III, she exchanges the term “gifts of fortune” for the term “false goods.” This exchange marks an important development in Philosophy’s arguments. Instead of talking about the problems surrounding the relationship between fortune and happiness, she is now talking about false happiness. And though she is still only referring to happiness in negative terms (i.e., addressing what happiness is not instead of defining true happiness), her shift in terminology has brought her closer to her ultimate goal: a definition of true happiness.

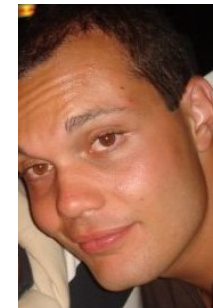
Only after weaning Boethius from his initial worries about the gifts of fortune and showing him the faults of false happiness, is Philosophy free to concretely define true happiness. And accordingly, in III.9ff, Philosophy proceeds to provide her first positive arguments for the definition of true happiness as monolithic.

A Consistent Consolation

Philosophy does indeed provide Boethius with a consistent account of true happiness. Contra Marenbon, she does not claim that happiness is both independent and dependent on fortune. Instead, the arguments in Books II and III constitute a single account of monolithic (fortune-independent) happiness. The discussion of the inadequacy of the gifts of fortune for true happiness in Book II provides a negative characterization of true happiness, while Book III provides a positive definition of true happiness as God and the Good. And what Marenbon interprets as a complex account of true happiness is actually a component of Philosophy’s medicinal approach. Philosophy must first convince Boethius that the gifts of fortune are not worth mourning, before she will be able to demonstrate how it is that he can be perfectly happy without them. ♦

The Ethical Implications of Evolutionary Theory

ABSTRACT: This essay is primarily concerned with important arguments involved in the debate about the relationship between evolution and morality. Though the paper holds that it is plausible that certain natural traits would have evolved into human moral sentiments, it argues that evolutionary theory cannot tell us how to be good people or why moral sentiments ought to take priority over immoral sentiments. Evolutionary theory is in this way an incomplete moral theory, analyzing how humans and human morality evolved through natural selection can uncover implications of evolutionary theory, which have a strong impact on a theory of morality.



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For decades, the issue of evolution’s impact on ethical theories had been understandably shelved because the arguments had become deadlocked and other, more pressing issues emerged. However, now with major advances in biology, especially sociobiology and evolutionary biology, it has been brought back out and examined with renewed vigor. Also, because Darwin’s theory makes up such a large part of the way most of us view our species and the world, evolution and ethics surely deserves a second go around. To introduce the basics of evolutionary moral

theory, we read from William F. Quillian, Jr., this:

The contention of Evolutionary Naturalism is that by the application of the theory of evolution to the investigation of moral phenomena Ethics can be placed for the first time upon a scientific basis. It is supposed that moral sentiments, customs and judgments have been gradually developed over a long period of time by that same process of natural selection which has determined the development of the present structure of animals, including man, from some earlier form.¹

1. William F. Quillian Jr., *The Moral Theory of Evolutionary Naturalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945): 27.



This statement generally describes the central theme of evolutionary ethics from Darwin through the present. Richard D. Alexander, a more recent evolutionary naturalist, has written that “it is necessary to understand the life interests – therefore the life patterns – of humans as outcomes of an evolution guided principally by natural selection,”² and that by “understanding the evolutionary significance of the human organism, and the nature of individuality of its evolved interests, we may derive useful insights into human concerns about morality.”³ What follows now is an attempt to identify some of these insights, and I will put forth three specific ones – the need for adaptability, the importance of natural motives, and the body as a compass. Before that, however, there will be an exposition of what is involved in evolutionary ethics, the traditional debate around it, and my perceived limitations of the position. First it is important to make clear that evolutionary ethicists do not attempt to reduce human nature to biology alone. In an essay on the subject, Matthew H. Nitecki does not cite, but he mentions C. G. Hempel’s assertion from *Philosophy of Natural Science* that biology is not easily reducible to chemistry and physics. He says, “[f]or example, you may resolve penicillin to a chemical equation, but not as a substance produced by a living fungus *Penicillium notatum*.” Nitecki argues that it is even more difficult to reduce morality to biology. Morality never involves the same circumstances, so its components are things such as intentions, beliefs,

and wants which biology cannot describe at the moment.⁴ This is why evolutionary ethics does not attempt to reduce morality simply to genes.

Genes do not independently cause us to be moral. We are not, for instance, genetically coded to refrain from lying. Environment is also as much of a force upon our behavior as our genetic makeup. Alexander explains the way in which forms and functions can be effectively derived from genes:

No trait of an organism is maximized in its own particular function because all traits are part of a compromise in which the singular function of inclusive fitness maximizing remains as the perpetual combined effect of natural selection on the organism. Evolutionary compromises within the evolving organism as a result of conflicts among the “idealizing” of different functions are parliaments not so much in the sense of conflicting interests as in the sense of coordinations of extremely complex programs of effort (and possibly of differences in information among agreeing parties – or parts).⁵

The genes themselves are not in a vacuum within us. They must compromise and are never independent.

The mechanisms for behavior are of these kinds of derived functions. Alexander further points out that “mechanisms evolve which tend to yield particular behaviors in particular environments.” Genes encode traits, traits produce mechanisms by “cooperative

competition,” and mechanisms tend to cause certain behaviors in certain conditions. There are so many internal and external factors playing into our behavior that the whole system is incredibly complex and still quite a mystery. It also implies that any one function from a set of traits is still under the control of the organism as a whole, so free will is not necessarily lost.⁶ Gene reduction and determinism for moral behavior and behavior, in general, are not compatible with this description of the evolution of behavioral mechanisms.

There are many objections, however, to evolution’s relevance to ethics. Those objections begin with Thomas H. Huxley during his famous Romanes Lecture in 1893, and most criticisms since then have stemmed from Huxley’s arguments. Simply stated, it is that the “cosmic process,” as he calls natural selection on a grand scale, the process by which nature develops and undergoes substantial changes, is one of constant struggle and battling, and in contrast, the way of humans is of tolerance and comfort.⁷ For Huxley, human society, made possible by morality, is a matter of artifice – not nature. He tells a story about a gardener as a striking metaphor for this. The gardener must constantly battle nature to continue cultivating his vegetables or flowers, which represents those things which are good for him and those around him, uprooting weeds that would normally be there, keeping away crows, and the like. He hoes, fertilizes, builds a fence, and can never let up or else his garden will become over grown by the types of things that were there before. What Huxley means by all of this is that human morality stands in

complete opposition to the rest of nature, and he thinks, therefore, that we cannot improve it from knowing the evolutionary process, which is inherently amoral or even immoral.

John Dewey’s essay, “Evolution and Ethics,” is largely a response to this lecture by Huxley. Dewey’s underlying idea is that human morality does not contradict nature, or even another part of nature, but that it expands the possibilities of nature. For Dewey, nothing ever battles nature, but, instead, nature sculpts and fiddles with itself, even sometimes by means of human artistic endeavor. Nature is all-encompassing. He takes issue with Huxley’s interpretation of the garden and the gardener. To Dewey, the gardener is actually a component of nature, a natural entity, modifying other components in a certain way that results in what we call a garden. The gardener may have planted seeds that would not normally have been in that spot, but those seeds came from another place in nature. He says that the gardener will modify the amounts of sun and water that reach the area, but that these things still “fall within the wont and use of nature as a whole.” Dewey admits that, yes, the gardener must keep up with the forces trying to break down his or her work. It is a struggle. The gardener’s struggle, though, is not with the whole cosmos, but with his current conditions. This is where Huxley really misapplies the analogy. The ability to grow plants truly is an adaptation to conditions. To maintain the metaphor, then, is to say that morality is an adaptation to conditions. If growing a garden conflicts with nature then I would not know how to argue that bees are not also battling nature. They build a hive for

2. Richard D. Alexander, “Biological Considerations in the Analysis of Morality,” in *Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Matthew H. & Doris V. Nitecki (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993): 178.

3. Alexander, “Biological Considerations”: 181.

4. Matthew H. Nitecki, “Problematic Worldviews of *Evolutionary Ethics*,” in *Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Matthew H. & Doris V. Nitecki (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993): 22-23.

5. Alexander, “Biological Considerations”: 170.

6. Alexander, “Biological Considerations”: 170.

7. Thomas H. Huxley, “Evolution and Ethics,” in *Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Matthew H. & Doris V. Nitecki (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993): 66.



insulation, protection, and convenience, and they run a honey factory inside it. Dewey says that humans do not contend against the whole of nature but that they “[read] the possibilities of a part through its place in the whole.” He goes on to say that “[h]uman intelligence and effort intervene, not as opposing forces but as making this connection [between a part and the whole].”⁸

A part of Huxley’s arguments survives, though. This can be found in his statement that “evolution may teach us how the good and the evil tendencies of man may have come about; but, in itself, it is incompetent to furnish any better reason why what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than we had before.”⁹ I think that Huxley is mistaken in completely dismissing any connection between moral inquiry and evolution, but I think that he rightly recognizes that evolutionary theory is incapable of providing the basis for a general theory of morality.

Larry Arnhart’s evolutionary account of morality in *Darwinian Natural Right* makes clear that while “the evolutionary process does not serve goals, the organisms emerging from that process do. Darwin’s biology does not deny – rather, it reaffirms – the immanent teleology displayed in the striving of each living being to fulfill its specific ends (Lennox 1992, 1993).” However, while it may affirm the teleology, it does not tell what the teleological end is. Arnhart uses Aristotelian eudaimonia to fill in the space, but that description of human ends cannot be derived from evolutionary

theory.¹⁰ Natural selection might tell us that such a teleology is useful for our species’ survival under the circumstances in which it came about, but it does not tell us what it actually is. I think Alexander comes closest to filling the hole with contract theory involving the desire for good reputation, which better enables humans to achieve other ends. This is considered indirect reciprocity because the subject gains long term benefits from his or her good deeds, but these actions would not necessarily give any immediate and direct reward. Good reputation requires consistently doing good things, which requires acting without hesitation within certain conventions agreed upon by the members of society. It then becomes a habit, and that explains why we do what is “right” even when no one is looking.¹¹

There are significant problems with such a contract theory. It neglects the extremely important role that sympathy plays in our moral lives and how it can be the primary motivating factor. Also, it seems to imply that if we were to admire someone who is martyred for the good or the right then we do so under false pretenses. Sometimes doing the right thing damages our reputation and situation for reciprocity. George Herbert Mead stated in a lecture that a man sometimes “has to fly in the face of the whole community in preserving [his] self-respect,” although “he does it from the point of view of what he considers a higher and better society than that which exists.”¹² If this is true, then it

seems highly improbable to explain community concern with only direct and indirect forms of reciprocity as conceived purely on the basis of evolutionary theory.

Evolutionary theory can tell us that all humans are moral creatures, but it cannot tell us why we ought to do anything we say that we ought to do. It may demonstrate that we will surely be altruistic sometimes. It tells us that if we are not ever altruistic then cooperation breaks down and our chances of getting what we want and even living a long time greatly decrease. However, reading *The Origin of Species* cannot help someone decide whether or not to be honest when the truth would hurt someone’s feelings. Evolutionary theory cannot tell someone how to be a “just person,” how to reach eudaimonia, or how to be an “over man.” No great prophet of history could have learned how to liberate or bring justice from it.

However, even though we cannot derive a moral theory from evolutionary theory, that does not mean we cannot learn anything at all about morality from evolution. As mentioned earlier, ethics has not been the same since Darwin. To begin to talk about useful connections between evolution and ethics, I turn to Michael Ruse’s essay, *The New Evolutionary Ethics*. In this excerpt, Ruse gives the starting point for exploring ethical implications of evolution:

[D]espite an evolutionary process, centering on a struggle for existence, organisms are not necessarily perpetually at conflict with weapons of attack and defence. In particular, cooperation can be a good biological strategy. We know also that humans are organisms which have preeminently taken this route of

cooperation and working together. Further, there is good reason to think that a major way in which humans cooperate together is by having an ethical sense. Humans believe that they should work together, and so – with obvious qualifications – they do so.¹³

Keeping this beginning in mind, the next task is to explore the implications it has upon our ethical lives. There may be more, but in this essay I will examine three. The first is that the process of natural selection shows us the importance of change. Natural selection demonstrates that if anything is to survive, then it must be adapted to present conditions. The traits of complex organisms that allow the organism, itself, to adapt to changes in the environment within its own lifetime are precious for survival and reproduction. This ability for a single organism to adapt within its lifetime to constantly changing circumstances matters for the entire species. This is important for ethics because if our traditions, institutions, and even our having an outlook on life are to survive then they must also adapt. Otherwise the natural selection will end their continuation into further generations. Sometimes conditions do mean the end for an institution, but it is usually more beneficial for an institution or tradition to adapt so that society might retain its essential wisdom than for that institution to simply die and that benefit become lost for a time. Since adaptation depends on constantly changing circumstances, when we consciously do this with ourselves and with our societies’ components we can only evaluate how to adapt by, as Dewey says, “empirical determination, not...a priori theorizing,” which rules out some

8. Dewey, John, “Evolution and Ethics,” in *Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Matthew H. & Doris V. Nitecki (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993): 98.

9. Huxley, “Evolution and Ethics”: 66.

10. Larry Arnhart, *Darwinian Natural Right: The Biological Ethics of Human Nature*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998): 245.

11. Alexander, “Biological Considerations”: 184.

12. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934): 389.

13. Michael Ruse, “The New Evolutionary Ethics,” in *Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Matthew H. & Doris V. Nitecki (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993): 152.



unwavering, blind idealism.¹⁴

Evolutionary theory's second contribution to ethics is demonstrating the import of our natural motives. Evolutionary theory tells us that we have natural motives, and we are adapted so that it is good for us to follow them. These natural motives are things such as desires, but they are more than that. They are anything that comes to us by our human nature and that provokes us to act. Hunger, sympathy, empathy, narcissism, sexual desire, and fairness are a few examples. Evolutionary theory's problem is that it cannot tell us which ones to follow when they conflict. One might say that the guidance of reason is the answer, but reason, alone, cannot tell us which motive(s) are best and bare reason is not a motive. However, we also cannot justify the unnecessary denial of any of our motives, and not just our social, ethical motives, either. There have been many traditions and institutions throughout history that have uselessly tried to prevent people from following their natural motives, and some still do today. While I believe customs and traditions come about as an expression of natural motives at work in an environment, as knowledge and conditions progress, customs and traditions should change and possibly be abolished to better suit our natural motives. What this provides is a position from which it is possible to criticize abhorrent customs, institutions, and moral standards of another culture.

Take, for example, how Arnhart works through the case of female circumcision. He says that we must consider both the conditions that caused the practice to come about and also the "natural constitution of desires and powers

[of humans]... that might be either expressed or frustrated by such a custom". Arnhart says that the only way to prudently reform practices like this is to understand the social conditions that could cause such a practice to make sense. The societies in which female circumcision has been adopted are ones with high social stratification, and in those societies, there is usually a limited number of men who control the most resources. Hence, women are forced into a position of competition for high status males, and this often includes showing signs of fidelity, such as female circumcision. Arnhart suggests that males in the society accept the practice because they naturally want assurance that the children in their family are in fact their offspring, assurance given when they are confident of their wives' fidelity.¹⁵ Reform to eliminate female circumcision and other customs that seem morally abominable to us must be done through changes in social circumstances. First the economic welfare of the entire society, and particularly the economic opportunities for women, must improve so that women and their offspring must not rely exclusively upon the man she marries and his control over resources. Second, education is imperative. Inaccurate beliefs about women and female circumcision must be done away with if the practice is to be abolished. In general, the practice should be abolished, and abolished in this or a similar way, because there exists the very real possibility to better fulfill the motives that female circumcision is supposed to serve, such as the parenting desires of both women and men, without also denying other motives, such as women's health and sexual well-being. This

case examination has shown that evolutionary theory implies that we reject cultural relativism, and that there are real grounds for criticizing the moral standards of other societies.

The third point to make is that even though evolutionary naturalism cannot tell us exactly how to be morally virtuous, it can tell us where to look. Evolutionary theory tells us that we have a constitution and an environment, and that everything we have to use is from our constitution constantly fed by the environment. Luckily, we still live in the same basic environment for which our constitution is adapted; if the Earth's biosphere is ruined then our genome's chances of reproduction become much slimmer. So where do we look to be a good human? We look to what Nietzsche means by "the Self" – "[i]t rules and is also the Ego's ruler." He goes on to say that there "is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom" and asks "who knows for what purpose your body requires precisely your best wisdom."¹⁶ Our moral compass is our Selves! In that case, Nietzsche's point of asking for what purpose your body requires precisely your best wisdom is not unlike the way Dewey rejects moral principles as universal imperatives while he accepts them as useful tools in situations of moral deliberation. Personal aims and goods depend on context, and no universal mandate can fit every situation. Someone might say that your aims, or belief about what *you ought to do*, should be so and so, and that this ideal would be your compass. Instead, I would say that we ought to, because to do otherwise would be to

contradict some part of my self, remembering Plato, who said through Socrates that "we must also remember that each one of us will be just, and perform his own proper task, when each of the elements within him is performing its proper task."¹⁷

Nietzsche asks in *The Gay Science* "What does your conscience say?" and then answers with "'You shall become the person you are.'"¹⁸ He is again, referring to the idea that our virtue and what is good is built into who we are right now. I would even admit this for a serial murdering and raping psychopath. Even this person on the low fringes of morality should become the person they are, keeping in mind that psychopaths are people who appear to be born without any moral capacity. However, to be the person that I am, I am obligated to support locking up the violent psychopath to protect children, innocent people, myself, and society. What we can say now is simply that we are moral and that to be moral definitely means something. While that may not tell us much, it does tell us that there are things it is not. There are infinite moral possibilities because we are free beings, but they are infinite within a limited set.

In conclusion, through a look at both sides of the evolutionary ethics debate we have found that Darwin's theory is helpful in at least three ways, but also that it is limited in its ability to produce a moral theory. Also, we see that the three contributions, the necessity of adaptability, the place of natural motives, and the body's sagacity may have more than minor consequences for our moral outlooks. Still, can

14. John Dewey, "Human Nature," in *The Later Works: Volume 6*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Sidney Ratner, and Anne Sharpe (Carbondale: Southern-Illinois University Press, 1985): 38.

15. Arnhart, *Darwinian Natural Right*: 153-156.

16. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. R. J. Hollingdale, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008): 265.

17. Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari. tr. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 441 e.

18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. R. J. Hollingdale (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008): 226.



we elevate moral good above moral evil? Do I have reason to know why I think of a good person as the morally good one rather than an athletically or an intellectually profound person? It may be that morality has become the highest virtue for humans because it improves sociability and cooperation, and those are the best aides for survival we have as a species. Maybe I admire the great altruism of martyred saints because they are the best at what helps us humans the most. It may be a result of lingering institutional and customary lessons that were necessary for a certain level of cultural development to occur. It might just be the social convention of our time. I can say, though, with confidence that the belief that a good human is a socially virtuous, loving

person runs as deep as marrow within me. I should not try to contort myself into something that cramps or batters any part of my nature, my wants, my motives, my rationality, or anything else that constitutes what I am unless it is for the sake of the whole of me, only in rationing part of my self for the sake of my overall self. We should drop any moral theory or practice that is contrary. Although there is no evidence that there exists a single trait shared by all humans, unless by sheer coincidence, each of us shares at least something with all other humans. Knowing this, it is possible for all humans to become who we are and relate, cooperate, and enjoy it, but to progress at all we must continue to look within, and to be honest with ourselves. ♦

What (Doesn't) Make an Heroic Act?

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the nature of saintly or heroic acts, which, according to J.O. Urmson, exist as a fourth, less traditional category of moral actions. According to this division, heroic acts are those, which have positive moral value, but cannot be demanded of an individual as their duty; however, this paper argues that Urmson is mistaken in his claim that a consequentialist ethical framework is the most capable of accounting for heroic acts. Furthermore, this paper claims that an Aristotelian account is the most appropriate ethical theory to consider, which could better countenance the existence of heroic acts.



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This essay is an examination of J. O. Urmson's article "Saints and Heroes," in which he argues that the categories which modern philosophers use to classify moral actions is insufficient, as it is unable to capture a certain set of actions which clearly have moral value. Therefore, Urmson argues, we need to modify our conception of the rightness and wrongness of actions in order to accommodate them. While I agree with much of what Urmson says in his essay, I take issue with his suggestion that consequentialism is the moral theory which most readily presents itself as amenable to the necessary restructuring. In this essay I will examine

Urmson's argument for the existence for this new category of actions, and explain why I do not think a consequentialist theory of value is suited to capture it. I will argue that the moral value of these actions lies in the character of the agent, and conclude with a discussion of how virtue ethics provides an approach, which can capture their moral value.

At the beginning of his essay, Urmson outlines the three categories in which moral philosophers place human actions: those actions which are right (which we have a duty to perform); those which are permissible (which have no moral weight one way or the other); and those which are wrong (from which we have a duty to refrain).¹

1. J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," in *Twentieth-Century Ethical Theory*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1995): 322.



However, there are certain actions that do not fit into this framework, which Urmson calls 'heroic' or 'saintly.' A person is a saint "if he does actions that are far beyond the limits of his duty, whether by control of contrary inclination and interest or without effort,"² and a hero "if he does actions that are far beyond the bounds of his duty, whether by control of natural fear or without effort."³ The actions which correspond to these terms have positive moral value – and are thus neither wrong nor merely permissible – but which we have no duty to perform, and thus cannot be expected or demanded of us.

To clarify this idea, Urmson gives the example of a squad of soldiers who are practicing throwing live hand-grenades. A grenade falls on the ground after the pin has been pulled, and one of the soldiers – who we will refer to as Smith – throws himself on the grenade in order to stifle the blast. Smith has sacrificed his own life in order to save the lives of the rest of the group. He has clearly done something of great moral worth, but he has not, in so doing, performed an act which we could consider his duty. Urmson makes this clear by posing the question: Can we say of any of the other soldiers in this case that "they failed in their duty by not trying to be the one who sacrificed himself?"⁴ Even if Smith's own conscience led him to believe that, in fact, it was his duty to sacrifice himself, it would be absurd for us to say that he was morally obligated to throw himself on the grenade. Therefore, this act of sacrifice has moral worth, and yet cannot be placed into any of the familiar moral categories.

After laying out the facts as he sees them, Urmson suggests that we need a new kind of moral theory in order to accommodate them. We need a system which will account for those actions which can be considered duties and also those actions that are of moral value, but which cannot be expected of an agent as duties, and which we cannot censure him or her for refraining from doing. Of all the traditional theories, Urmson thinks that consequentialism can best account for our intuitions about heroism and saintliness. The moral value of these actions must be treated in terms of their results; a world that contains saints and heroes is better than a world without them.⁵

I find it unlikely that a consequentialist theory of value can accurately reflect the nature of the phenomena Urmson has demonstrated. We cannot account for the goodness of heroism and saintliness in terms of the consequences of actions, because if we do, those characteristics of the acts that make them heroic or saintly are completely obscured.

The main problem with trying to account for the value of these actions in this way is that, under any sufficiently strong version of consequentialism, the numbers involved would have to play a major role in our judgments. However, that does not seem to be the way we judge these kinds of cases. If a man is sacrificing his life in order to save the lives of others, what difference does it make whether he saves one life, or ten lives, or one hundred, or even one thousand? It is clear that it makes no difference whatsoever. The man is heroic no matter how

many lives he saves, and the degree of heroism which we attribute to him does not increase or decrease with that number, which is what we would expect if the goodness of the act were simply a function of its consequences. To return to the example Urmson gives, suppose that there are five men in the squad besides Smith. We can easily construct cases in which, for one reason or another, Smith's body is unable to stifle the entire blast of the grenade, and we can construct a case in which five lives are saved, or only three, or one, or even none. The point here is that while the case where Smith actually succeeds in saving all five of his squad-mates certainly produces better results than the case in which he saves only one, this does not affect the degree of heroism which we can attribute to him. Thus, our focus on the consequences has in some way obscured the nature of the act, and its moral value.

We might begin to wonder whether the simple fact that lives are being saved – regardless of number – is playing the major role in our judgment of people like Smith. That is, if we can rightly call two acts heroic despite a wide divergence in the number of lives saved, this is *prima facie* evidence that we should be looking elsewhere in our description of these actions for that property which makes them heroic. One aspect of heroic and saintly actions which presents itself as the relevant feature is the fact that, in such cases, the agent makes a great personal sacrifice. This would explain Urmson's claim that heroic actions cannot be demanded of an agent as a duty. There are many ways in which to save a life, some of which can be expected – or indeed demanded – of us, but no one can demand that we lay down our lives. It is this factor that makes the act heroic. But we

have seen that a consequentialist moral theory cannot capture the value of heroism. Therefore, we must turn away from consequentialist considerations in order to focus on the nature of self-sacrifice, and try to determine what is morally valuable about self-sacrifice in and of itself, keeping in mind that whatever theory we use to explain its value must also be able to explain its supererogatory nature.

What I have said up until now has been mostly critical. We have seen that there are certain kinds of actions – saintly and heroic – which have recognizable moral value, and yet cannot be included in the traditional threefold framework of action, which recognizes only obligatory, permissible, and impermissible acts. Saintly and heroic acts have positive moral worth – and so are not impermissible or merely permissible – but are not obligatory. I have argued that consequentialist moral theories leave us unable to explain the distinctive moral character of these acts, and suggested that this distinctiveness lies in their sacrificial nature. Recall that a heroic act involves going beyond duty where most would be held back by fear, and a saintly act involves going beyond duty where most would be held back by self-interest. Thus, the quality of heroic and saintly acts seems to point us away from their consequences, and towards the people performing them. There is something morally praiseworthy about the man who goes beyond what we can expect him to do. Therefore, I will conclude this paper by considering how the theory of virtue ethics might lend itself to Urmson's new category of moral behavior.

Virtue ethics has at its basis a different question than consequentialist theories. While the latter tend to ask 'What makes something a good act?'

2. Urmson, 1995: 324.

3. Urmson, 1995: 324.

4. Urmson, 1995: 324.

5. Urmson, 1995: 328.



the former asks 'What makes someone a good person?' To be sure, the quality of actions is still an issue, but it is subordinated to the quality of the character of the agent. Thus, an act is right or good if done in accordance with one or more of the virtues. The virtues are characterized as states – as opposed to feelings or capacities – by Aristotle⁶ and as excellences of the will by Philippa Foot.⁷ This means, succinctly put, that an act is good not because it follows a universal maxim or because it maximizes utility, but because it is done in accordance with a quality of character which is valuable in and of itself.

Aristotle argued that each virtue is a "mean state" between two vices. So the woman who is never afraid and is over-confident is rash, while the woman who is always afraid and under-confident is cowardly.⁸ The courageous woman is confident and unafraid only to the degree that is rational to be. Therefore, an act which reflects courage – such as resisting injustice without fear or overconfidence – is for that reason good.

While the theory needs to be modified, this seems close to what we are looking for. What makes Smith's act heroic is that it displays a quality of selflessness, a willingness to put aside one's own needs and desires when they conflict with others.⁹ The moral value of a saintly or heroic act lies in the character of the

agent, the selflessness with which such actions are performed. We find such a character trait valuable and praiseworthy in everyday life, but in a hero or a saint we see it taken far beyond what most people can – or could be expected to – achieve. Virtue theory, therefore, supplies us with a plausible explanation of how these actions can be morally valuable without being duties: their value lies in the character of the agent who performs them, their willingness to put aside fear or personal interest in order to satisfy other goods. However, we must rework the concept of virtue as a mean state in order to account for the fact that Smith's action can go beyond moral duty, and yet still be virtuous rather than vicious. That is, we must explain how a virtue can be pushed so far without becoming a vice.

I agree with Urmson's argument for the existence of heroic and saintly acts, and with his statement that, while these acts are valuable, they are not duties. I have argued that focusing on the consequences of such actions only obscures their sacrificial nature, because heroism and saintliness are not functions of consequences; they do not increase or decrease with the quality of results. Finally, I have suggested that by focusing on the agent, we may be able to provide an account of the moral value of those actions which we call saintly or heroic. ♦

Morality with an Accent

ABSTRACT: In this paper, the difficulties inherent in the debate between moral nativists and antinativists, who differ in their beliefs on the nature of systems of morality, are shown to exemplify the need for philosophers to support their views with empirical data. Furthermore, it proposes that an empirical study of first-generation immigrant populations has the potential to resolve the debate over moral nativism, as it would allow researchers to observe the moral "critical period." Based on the recent philosophical advances made through experimental evidence, this paper goes on to argue that empirical data is a valuable source of information from which philosophers ought to draw.



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"A woman's husband was injured in a motorcycle accident and became paralyzed from the waist down. The wife found that many of her expectations of marriage were disappointed. For the rest of his life, her husband would require a lot of care and would be depressed and inactive. But even though the wife felt very unfulfilled by her marriage, she decided not to leave him because she felt that if she did, his life would be even worse."

The reader's heart goes out to the wife in

this story, neglecting her own physical and emotional needs out of a sense of obligation. These feelings just come naturally, provided the reader is American. To an Indian reader, however, it is obvious that the wife is a contented woman, exhibiting admirable self control, and quite satisfied by fulfilling her duty to her husband under trying circumstances.¹

Unlike philosophers, psychologists and sociologists have been documenting variability in moral values between cultures for decades. Philosophers have recently begun to review

6. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Mineola: Dover Publications Inc., 1998): 26

7. Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in *Twentieth-Century Ethical Theory*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1995): 585-586

8. Aristotle, 1998: 28

9. This virtue arguably lies between the vices of asceticism and selfishness.

1. Miller, J. G., & Bersoff, D. M. (1995). "Development in the context of everyday family relationships: Culture, interpersonal morality, and adaptation." In M. Killen & D. Hart (Eds.), *Morality in everyday life: Developmental perspectives* (pp. 259-282). New York: Cambridge University Press.



the results of these studies in hopes of gaining valuable insight into the nature of morality. As they have done so, many have found the information valuable and have gone on to perform experiments of their own. When combined with rational arguments, psychological experimentation provides philosophers a powerful new tool with the ability to resolve many long standing debates in ethics.

One issue to which philosophers have applied experimental methods regards the development of morality. It has long been assumed that children gain the ability to think and behave ethically through experience and exposure to cultural norms. More recently, some philosophers have argued that morality is “native” or innate to mankind, programmed into the human brain.

Experimental philosophy is particularly well suited to provide a solution to the debate over moral nativism. This paper will briefly summarize the recent history of the debate over nativism, with a focus on the transfer of the theory from linguistics to ethics. Relevant experimental studies and results contributing to the debate in ethics will be summarized. Finally, a new experiment with the potential to end the nativist/antinativist debate will be proposed.

Developments in Linguistics

Contemporary moral nativism grows out of a movement in linguistics which began with the work done by Dr. Noam Chomsky in the 1950’s. Chomsky made several observations about child development and linguistic

capability, the combination of which is an argument for nativism. The first is that if language is learned like other skills, using general learning capabilities, then children would require examples of incorrect grammar, known as negative evidence, in addition to correct speech to acquire command of a language. Chomsky’s second observation is that children only receive examples of correct language usage in their daily encounters. The third is that children learn languages. Thus children must not learn language using generalized learning capabilities. Rather, Chomsky proposed that there is a “Universal Grammar,” or set of grammatical principles, universal to all languages and innate to mankind, without which language acquisition would be impossible.²

Further research by proponents of nativist theory has led to the conclusion that there is a critical period for language acquisition. During that time, generally believed to be the first few years of life, a person develops language skills with relative ease when exposed to appropriate stimuli. If, however, the child has no exposure to language during this period, they will never be able to develop a command of language, despite later exposure.³

Antinativist theories reject Chomsky’s account, regarding language acquisition to be the result of more general cognitive processes, rather than that of an otherwise inaccessible system devoted exclusively to language acquisition. There are a variety of theories which fall into this category. Antinativist scholars have made great effort to discredit Chomsky and post-Chomsky

theories of language acquisition either by a priori reasoning or by drawing on experimental evidence to negate Chomsky’s claims. Much of the work has focused on discrediting the premise that children do not receive negative evidence. Pullum, for example, argues that negative evidence is plentiful and learning is possible without the need for a system devoted to language acquisition.⁴

Application to Morality

The rapid progress in linguistics due to the work of Chomsky did not go unnoticed by those in other disciplines. In the field of ethics, Chomsky’s theory was seized upon and adapted in support of moral nativism. Three scholars working independently applied Chomsky’s general approach in linguistics to the field of morality. Gilbert Harman,⁵ Susan Dwyer,⁶ and John Mikhail⁷ all proposed that perhaps morality, like language, is acquired through some innate universal system. Like Chomsky, these academics proposed that, rather than guiding us towards a specific moral code, the “Universal Moral Grammar” provides the mental framework upon which a variety of ethical theories may be built.

For those who believe that there is a biological cause for the development of moral thought,

Chomsky’s concept of innate morality solves many problems. For example, the existence of variation is difficult to explain if morality is determined biologically. Part of the great appeal of using the “linguistic analogy,” as it came to be known, is the ability of a “Universal Moral Grammar” to explain the great variation in morals between cultures while still asserting a universal biological basis.⁶

Since moral nativism posits a complex biological system with the purpose of enabling moral thought, attempts must be made both to provide a mechanism by which such a system would have evolved, as well as to prove the current existence of such a system. Tracing the biological evolution of a moral system through generations of proto-humans to the present day is impossible, so attempts to provide an evolutionary mechanism for a moral system is often presented on theoretical grounds. Such defenses attempt to provide reason to believe that the ability to moralize would be favorable to reproduction and thus evolutionarily selected. Many defenses of this type use game theory to show that in situations that parallel those faced in everyday life, the ability to moralize provides some stable, long-term strategic advantage.⁸

Antinativists are understandably suspicious of such schemes. They argue that the mere

2. Chomsky, Noam (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. MIT Press.

3. Lenneberg, Eric, (1964). *The Capacity of Language Acquisition*. In Fodor, Jerry and Jerrold Katz, (Eds.), *The Structure of Language*. Prentice Hall.

4. Pullum, Geoffrey K. (1996). Learnability, hyperlearning, and the poverty of the stimulus. In J. Johnson, M.L. Juge, and J.L. Moxley (Eds.) *Proceedings of the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society: General Session and Parasession on the Role of Learnability in Grammatical Theory*, 498-513. Berkeley, California.

5. Harman, G. (1999). Moral philosophy and linguistics. In K. Brinkmann (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 20th World Congress of Philosophy: Volume 1: Ethics*. Philosophy Documentation Center, 107-115. Reprinted in *Explaining Value*, Oxford University Press.

6. Dwyer, S. (1999). Moral competence. In K. Murasugi and R. Stainton (Eds.), *Philosophy and Linguistics*. Westview Press.

7. Mikhail, J., Sorrentino, C., and Spelke, E. (1998). Toward a universal moral grammar. In M. Gernsbacher and S. Derry, (Eds.), *Proceedings, Twentieth Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

8. Sripada, Chandra Sekhar (2005). Punishment and the strategic structure of moral systems *Biology and Philosophy* 20:767–789



possibility of advantage in the context of a simple game does not imply the reality of the biological evolution of morality. Rather, they have attempted to provide explanations of how mankind could have evolved to its present condition without the need for a complex biological moral system.⁹

Along with Chomsky's theory, nativists also adopted some of his methodology, relying on empirical data to confound antinativists. Many empirical studies performed by nativists show results which are difficult to explain under existing alternate theories. One such study used a test known as the Wason selection task. Subjects are told that if a card shows an even number on one face, its opposite face should have a primary color. They are then asked to choose which of four cards (showing 3, 8, red, and brown) must be turned over to verify that the rule is being followed. Few subjects are able to successfully solve this logic puzzle; however, when the same problem is presented in a social context, such as checking identification at a bar, and the cards replaced with people and drinks, nearly all subjects are able to solve the puzzle. This result seems to indicate that there is some biological system whose task it is to deal with situations of social interaction.¹⁰

Some nativists have extended the linguistic analogy so far as to posit a critical period for the acquisition of morality. During this stage, the mind would be specially equipped to absorb ethical principles. Finding such a period hardwired into our biology would provide strong evidence in favor of moral nativism. Of course, the existence of such a period is hotly

contested; however, at least one major world culture firmly believes in its existence.

The Chinese government embraces moral nativism. The current Chinese educational system, in fact, depends on its existence. They define the moral critical period to be "a period of time that fosters developing fine traits of moral character or a period of time, in which moral character may proceed in the most positive direction and gain best achievements, resulting from good educational conditions." For Chinese children, this age has been determined to be between seven and nine years old. During this period, Chinese educators focus on instilling "positive" moral values into their pupils so that they will exhibit desired behaviors automatically as they mature.¹¹

While the Chinese themselves draw short of claiming that the effects of moral indoctrination during the critical period are permanent, or at least nearly so, this is clearly the purpose of devoting valuable educational resources to moral education during this period. Indeed, it is the effectiveness of training during this period which distinguishes it as a developmental stage. Beyond this, the linguistic analogy would indicate that training during the critical period for morality would be difficult to modify or overcome.

Moving Forward

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that empirical data can and does have an important role to play in philosophy. Although the general focus of ethics is to

provide an account of how things ought to be, much is to be gained by understanding how things actually are. Particularly in the debate over moral nativism, in which the psychological nature of human beings is the topic of debate, information about the way the mind works is of immeasurable worth. With this in mind, the nativist/antinativist debate may be more easily resolved than previously imagined.

Certain subgroups of the population, many first-generation immigrants for example, are in the unusual position of being raised with one set of values and then living their adult lives in a society holding a completely different set of values. This situation allows the existence of a moral critical period to be experimentally tested. Very different predictions will be made about the intuition of immigrants depending on the existence of the moral critical period.

Let us for the moment assume that no critical period exists. After leaving their home country, first-generation immigrants will be exposed to all sorts of new ideas and moral views in their new homes. After living in the host society for some time, having the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, immigrants should come to adopt many of the views of their new culture. One would expect the change in their moral attitudes to be positively correlated with the amount of time spent in their host country.

Now let us imagine that the linguistic analogy holds and morality is innate. Immigrants who left their home country as young children, before the linguistic critical period has passed, speak the language of their host country without any trace of an accent. As the age at which an

individual immigrates increases, however, so does the strength of the individual's accent. In much the same way, one would expect the presence or absence of a "moral accent" reminiscent of the immigrant's home country to be highly correlated with the age at which the individual immigrated. Thus, those who immigrate at younger ages would be expected to be much more acculturated to the new society's values than older immigrants, regardless of the length of time spent in the host country.

An experiment could be designed using the vignette from the beginning of this paper. Indian and American subjects, as previously noted, responded differently to the story.¹² These differences are broadly reflective of differences in cultural norms between these two societies. Americans value personal freedom and personal satisfaction, while Indians have a greater appreciation of duty and familial loyalty. What, then, of Indian-American immigrants? Confirming or refuting the existence of a moral critical period may be as simple as repeating Miller and Bersoff's experiment among the Indian-American immigrant community.

For clarification, it is useful to consider a scenario in which an Indian family leaves its native country and they become American immigrants. If there is a moral critical period, then those family members who have passed this stage when they leave their home country will continue to reflect the values of their native culture, while the younger generation will adopt typically American values. Speaking in the mode of the linguistic analogy, the older generation will retain a "moral accent" typical of Indians

9. Prinz, Jesse J. (Forthcoming). *Against Moral Nativism*. In D. Murphy and M. Bishop (Eds.), *Stephen Stich and His Critics*. Blackwell Press.
 10. Cosmides, L., Tooby, J. (1992). *Cognitive Adaptions for Social Exchange*. New York: Oxford University Press.
 11. Shao Jing-jin, Xing Xiu-fang, Zeng Xin-ran (2006). On the critical period of Chinese pupils' moral development: Retrospect and prospect. *Frontiers of Education in China* 3: 462-473.

12. Miller, J. G., & Bersoff, D. M. (1995). Development in the context of everyday family relationships: Culture, interpersonal morality, and adaptation. In M. Killen & D. Hart (Eds.), *Morality in everyday life: Developmental perspectives* (pp. 259-282). New York: Cambridge University Press.



Conclusions

Innovative researchers in various fields have contributed greatly to the field of ethics. The debate over nativism sparked by Chomsky and later applied to morality is one example of the value to philosophy of drawing from other disciplines. As has been shown in this article, evidence both for and against moral nativist theory is strong, advanced in large part by

appeal to the results of experimental studies.

I argue that this new technique, namely dependence on empirical data, is a fruitful direction for philosophical inquiry. The study proposed in this paper has the potential to solve a philosophical puzzle irresolvable by a priori reasoning alone. By expanding their arsenal beyond abstract reasoning to include experimentation, philosophers are able to approach difficult problems from interesting new angles, often finding solutions to age-old debates. ♦

A Doctor and a Scholar: Rethinking the Philosophic Significance of Eryximachus in the *Symposium*

ABSTRACT: Too often critics ignore the philosophic significance of Eryximachus, the physician from Plato's *Symposium*, and mistakenly dismiss Eryximachus' presence in the text. However, this paper argues that a review of the role of medicine in the Platonic dialogues, coupled with a close reading of the *Symposium's* structure and language reveals how the physician's emphasis on love as a harmonizing force is analogous to Socrates' emphasis on balance and harmony throughout the dialogues. Also, the description of the good physician is reflective of the way a good philosopher operates. By employing the medical trope, Eryximachus' speech allows the reader greater insight into Platonic philosophy.



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Plato's dialogue the *Symposium* takes place at the playwright Agathon's house the day after Agathon has won an award for one of his tragedies. Exhausted from the day before, the host and his guests decide to relax and deliver encomiums to Eros. The seven speeches that follow represent the opinions of men from a wide variety of backgrounds. There is a tragedian, a comedian, a legal expert, and even Socrates himself. However, one person and his profession often get left behind in critical work on the dialogue.

Many times, critics ignore the philosophic significance of Eryximachus, the physician of the dialogue.

A wide array of philosophers, including Mark Lutz, William Cobb, Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan, Nathan Crick and John Poulakos, Daniel Anderson, and Robert Mitchell, generally view Eryximachus in a negative light. Although their approaches are different, they all tend to dismiss the philosophic weight of Eryximachus' presence in the dialogue. And yet, given Plato's corpus of work, it seems



as if there should be something more to the speech. Eryximachus is, after all, a physician, and given the number of medical metaphors in the Platonic dialogues, it would seem to follow that the one time a physician is given free rein to speak, the reader should engage the passage in a meaningful way.

Because of this association with the medical, I want to reexamine Eryximachus' speech. Plato's use of metaphor and analogy seem to beg the reader to pay attention to what Eryximachus has to say, and I propose to take notice. I believe we disregard the physician's speech at our own peril, as Eryximachus' remarks on the nature of love directly inform our understanding of Plato's works. A review of the place of medicine in Greek philosophy as a whole as well as within specific Platonic dialogues discovers the prominence of the profession within the philosophic tradition. Moving specifically to the *Symposium*, a close reading of the dialogue's structure and language reveals how Eryximachus employs concepts in the medical sense that, when analogized to Platonic philosophy, bear directly on our understanding of Plato's corpus of works.

By engaging this trope of medicine to the Platonic conceptions of justice and the good philosopher, the reader can gain a deeper understanding of Plato's philosophy. Within Eryximachus' discourse, the physician explains how love needs a harmonizing force and how the good physician should operate. The primacy the physician places on love as a harmonizing force is similar to the weight that the character Socrates affords balance and harmony in the dialogues, and the description of the good

physician is a direct reflection on the way that a good philosopher operates. In many of the dialogues, Plato uses the trope of medicine in order to help elucidate his more difficult philosophic thoughts. Eryximachus' speech performs this same function as it allows the reader greater—and perhaps easier—insight into Platonic philosophy. By examining the physician's discourse, the reader achieves a deeper understanding of Platonic philosophy unavailable in other parts of the dialogues.

Scholarship on Eryximachus

Before we proceed further into the argument, it is necessary to examine the critical work that Eryximachus' speech has engendered. In his study of virtue in the Platonic dialogues with a primary focus on the *Symposium*, Mark Lutz only briefly mentions Eryximachus.¹ However, when Lutz does mention the doctor, he identifies the physician as a pedant who is the butt of jokes.² Notice here that not only does Lutz not really take a significant amount of time to analyze Eryximachus, he attacks the physician's person and not his comments. I contend, and will show, that the physician is philosophically important because of his words, not because of how other people in the party view him. Similarly, William Cobb also spends little time with Eryximachus in his analysis of the *Symposium*. Yet, the critic does point out that the doctor is "reduced to giving medical advice of a rather trivial sort."³ This conclusion notes only the medical aspect of Eryximachus' speech and does not then examine it for the manner in which it might employ the medical trope. The physician's

speech only becomes important once we begin to draw the necessary analogies.

The philosophers Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan also comment on Eryximachus' place in the dialogue. Although these two authors see the doctor as slightly extending the conversation of the *Symposium*, they immediately subvert anything positive they might have to say by writing that he has a capacity for the "illogical and pedantic" and that he is "like some ancient inferior Hegelian" who is blinded by his profession and "pomposity."⁴ Even though the two scholars recognize that Eryximachus contributes to the dialogue—however slight they claim the contribution might be—they ultimately undermine their praise of the physician by, like Lutz, largely criticizing him on the basis of his person while not recognizing the philosophic possibility of the medical trope.

The critics Nathan Crick and John Poulakos give Eryximachus a somewhat more sympathetic treatment in their article on the *Symposium*, but only insofar as they do not attack his person directly; rather, the authors see his speech as lacking in any substance. They believe that the physician, while delivering an honest effort at intellectual rigor in his speech, ultimately lacks the scholarly capacity to affect the conversation in a significant manner.⁵ Crick and Poulakos then conclude that Eryximachus makes, "a lame contribution to the party by displaying [a] rehearsed rhetorical appeal."⁶ For Crick and

Poulakos, it is not so much what Eryximachus represents that they critique, but rather they feel that he simply does not have the intellectual prowess to contribute anything substantive to the conversation. However, by containing their analysis to just the *Symposium*, the authors have missed the larger medical trope that is present throughout the Platonic dialogues. Like Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan, Crick and Poulakos miss the power of Eryximachus' words because they do not see the trope within the speech.

In *The Masks of Dionysos*, Daniel Anderson takes the critique of the physician one step further than the previous authors. He believes Eryximachus' speech is actually damaging to the conversation and has to be rectified by Aristophanes' discourse. Anderson writes, "I see Eryximachos' [sic] speech and his [Aristophanes'] as linked by Empedokles [an ancient physician], whose views are distorted by the one and satirically 'corrected' by the other. I do not see Plato as portraying Aristophanes in an unfavorable light. Rather do I see Aristophanes . . . as correcting Eryximachos' distortions of Empedokles."⁷ Thus, according to Anderson, not only does Eryximachus' speech not contribute anything to the conversation, it actually sets the dialogue back. Of course, Anderson's reasoning is grounded in his reading of Eryximachus' speech through the lens of Empedocles. A deeper understanding of the physician requires moving out of a purely medical understanding of his words, and recognizing the manner in which Plato

1. Mark J. Lutz, *Socrates' Education to Virtue: Learning the Love of the Noble* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 62, 78, 132, 135.

2. *Ibid.*, 62.

3. William S. Cobb, ed., *The Symposium; and The Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, by Plato (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 66.

4. Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the Symposium* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2004), 64-67.

5. Nathan Crick and John Poulakos, "Go Tell Alcibiades: Tragedy, Comedy, and Rhetoric in Plato's Symposium," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94.1, (2008), 7.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Daniel E. Anderson, *The Masks of Dionysos: A Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), ix-x.



populates his dialogues with medical analogies, metaphors, and other imagery.

In Robert Mitchell's investigation of the *Symposium* entitled *The Hymn to Eros*, the scholar seems to offer a more positive view of Eryximachus than the previous authors. Mitchell notes how many scholars have, in fact, maligned the physician.⁸ Mitchell then goes on to say, "Eryximachus knows something. . . While listening to him we have been witnesses to the laying of the foundations of technological [sic] culture. And even listening to him as closely as we have, we have barely begun to fathom the complex subtlety of that event as it has unfolded in this speech."⁹ Mitchell's reading aligns well with mine as the scholar gives Eryximachus a sympathetic, even positive reading. The physician does know something; he has knowledge to share with the reader. Even more, as Mitchell points out, many readers have failed to grasp the depth of Eryximachus' comments. However, it appears that Mitchell, too, fails to grasp the entirety of what Plato is getting at in Eryximachus. Mitchell focuses on the technological aspect of the physician's speech and so does not fully recognize the philosophical importance of the encomium. Even the seemingly positive criticism of Eryximachus still fails to recognize the physician's import in Platonic philosophy.

Medicine as Trope: Many scholars have noticed the prevalence of the use of medicine in not just

Plato's work but in Greek philosophy as a whole. As Joel Lidz suggests in his study of medicine as metaphor in the Platonic dialogues, "Greek philosophy can be adequately understood only if one recognizes that it arose in conjunction with ancient medical theory."¹⁰ I concur with Lidz in this regard but wish to narrow its focus to specifically Plato's dialogues. Mark Moses does this in part when he writes, "Plato's dialogues contain many references to Greek medical practice and medical tradition."¹¹ For instance, in the *Gorgias* Socrates states that medicine is the craft to pastry baking's knack,¹² and in the *Republic* Socrates says that as falsehood is a drug, only those who are like doctors should be able to use it.¹³

However, in order to establish Eryximachus' importance in Platonic philosophy, it is not sufficient to demonstrate that medicine exists or that it arose in conjunction with philosophy; given this argument Eryximachus is still Eryximachus, simply an existent character. Rather, medicine must be integral to understanding Plato's philosophy. Later in his article Lidz argues, "Plato makes liberal use of medical analogies."¹⁴ In order to demonstrate this claim and substantiate Lidz's argument, I need only point the reader to the earlier passages from the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*. In the *Gorgias* Plato has Socrates say, "there are two crafts. The one for the soul I call politics; the one for the body . . . has two parts: gymnastics and medicine. And in politics, the

counterpart of gymnastics is legislation, and the part that corresponds to medicine is justice."¹⁵ Here, Plato analogizes medicine to justice. Socrates is attempting to convey a message to his audience, but is unable to do so. In order to facilitate the spectators' understanding, he employs medicine as an analogy for justice. Thus, Plato suggests that for the reader to understand justice, he should—and I argue, he must—comprehend medicine. The use of trope in this instance suggests that the concept which Plato troped (justice) is too complicated for readers to understand by itself; thus, the second concept (medicine) is introduced because proper understanding of it can lead the student to an adequate comprehension of the former, more difficult concept. The implication is that only through an adequate understanding of the workings of medicine can the reader grasp what justice means.

The example in the *Republic* works in a similar manner. Socrates says, "Moreover we have to be concerned about truth as well, for if what we said just now is correct, and falsehood, though of no use to the gods, is useful to people as a form of drug, clearly we must allow only doctors to use it, not private citizens."¹⁶ Later on in the dialogue we find out exactly who these doctors are: the philosopher-rulers. As sovereigns of the ideal city, the philosopher-rulers must use "noble falsehoods" in order to sustain the city.¹⁷ Plato specifically chooses to use doctors as a metaphor for those people he entrusts with ruling his ideal city, and thus in order to conceptualize how Plato wishes for the philosopher-rulers to use noble falsehoods, the

reader must understand the trope to medicine. Therefore, whenever Plato chooses to highlight a link between physicians and philosophers, such as I will later argue he does with the very structure of the *Symposium*, it is important for the reader to investigate the implications. Just as medical tropes shed light on Plato's philosophy, so do the words of the practitioner of medicine enlighten different aspects of that same philosophy. We must be familiar with medicine because we cannot sufficiently grasp the dialogues without it.

The Speech of Eryximachus

Before I begin to examine Eryximachus' actual words, I think it would be useful at this point to examine Eryximachus' position in the dialogue as a whole. As I mentioned, if there is any manner in which Plato connects the physician and the philosopher, then it is most likely worthy of investigation. In fact, Plato seems to do this with the very structure of the dialogue. The *Symposium* consists of an outside frame that sets the scene for the party and an inner frame of seven speeches in praise of love: six from guests at the party and one from Alcibiades who comes late to the symposium. Along with Eryximachus who I have already talked about for some length, the other guests are, in order: Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades. As Alexander Nehamas notes in his introduction to the *Symposium*, the speeches can be separated into two separate sets. He writes, "The praise of erōs in the *Symposium* can

8. Robert L. Mitchell, *The Hymn to Eros: a Reading of Plato's Symposium* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1993), 63.

9. *Ibid.*, 63-4.

10. Joel W. Lidz, "Medicine as a Metaphor in Plato," *Journal of Medicine & Philosophy* 20.5 (1995), 527.

11. Mark Moses, "Plato's Conception of the Relations Between Moral Philosophy and Medicine," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 44.3 (2001), 353.

12. Plato, *Gorgias* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 464d.

13. Plato, *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 389b.

14. Lidz, "Medicine as Metaphor," 353.

15. Plato, *Gorgias*, 464b-c.

16. Plato, *Republic*, 389b.

17. *Ibid.*, 414b-c.



be roughly divided into two groups. The first three speeches, by Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus, naturally fall into one category, and the second three, by Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates, into another.¹⁸ The reason for this categorization, Nehamas explains, is that, “The first group of speeches is rather conventional in its praise of *erōs* for its effects. . . [while the second group moves] from the benefits of love to its nature.”¹⁹ After these two groups of speeches, Alcibiades enters and gives his own encomium, not to love alone, but also to Socrates. It is important to note that Alcibiades’ entrance is not until after the first six speeches have been completed; their structured has already been solidified. Even more, Alcibiades’ actual speech does not really disrupt this order retroactively as it is directed at a different subject than Eros.

Within this structure that Nehamas outlines are two distinct sets of analogies. The first Nehamas has already explained: the second group takes the effects of Eros as explained by the first group and locates the producer of the effects as the nature of love. The second analogy, however, is the one that concerns me more. In the first group of speeches Eryximachus is the last to speak and in the second set, Socrates gets the last word. Thus, the set up of the dialogue draws a very clear parallel between the physician and the philosopher. This parallel is turned into an analogy when we consider the trope of medicine in the Platonic dialogues. As I stated earlier and will return to shortly, the physician is often used as a metaphor for the wise man in the dialogues. Plato continues

this thread by calling the reader’s attention to the relationship—and analogous similarity—between Eryximachus and Socrates by the very structure of the dialogue itself.

As for Eryximachus’ actual discourse, there are two main concepts at work in the speech: the description of a good physician and love necessitating a harmonizing force. The first of these I propose to engage, because it is perhaps the less revelatory of the two, is the idea of love necessitating a harmonizing force. Eryximachus says, “Here, too, Love is the central concern: our object is to try to maintain the proper kind of Love . . . For what is the origin of all impiety? Our refusal to gratify the orderly kind of Love, and our deference to the other sort.”²⁰ Eryximachus then goes on to state, “The task of divination is to keep watch over these two species of Love and to doctor them as necessary.”²¹ Eryximachus tells the reader that we must try to adjust or harmonize these kinds of love in order to make sure the right kind of love is the prevalent one. As one of the themes in the physician’s speech, the reader must investigate it in order to see if, like the placement of the doctor in the structure of the dialogue, this idea of harmony has an analog within Platonic philosophy.

As it turns out, the idea of harmony (as well as things necessitating harmony) is nothing new to the reader of Plato’s dialogues. In the *Republic*, Plato describes the soul such that its three parts need to be harmonized. Socrates says, “And these two [the rational and spirited parts of the soul] . . . will govern the appetitive part, which is the largest part in each person’s soul. They’ll

watch over it to see that it isn’t filled with the so-called pleasures of the body.”²² Thus, just as we must watch over and harmonize love such that good love is always in control, so must we watch over and harmonize our soul so that the rational (with the spirited) is always in control. And so, recalling the interpretive paradigm from earlier, where medicine served as a trope to facilitate our understanding of Plato’s philosophy and then adjusting this paradigm to include the words of the practitioner of medicine, Eryximachus’ comments about love take on a new meaning. By understanding how two parts of love need a unifying force so that the good love is always foremost, the reader may more readily comprehend how the tripartite soul is governed as well. Although this analogy is perhaps the less revelatory of the two, it is nonetheless important as it stands as a touchstone for engaging Eryximachus’ speech. By making this first, more obvious analogy between love and the tripartite soul, the reader is prepared to move on to the more difficult parallel.

Keeping this in mind, we move to the other theme in the physician’s speech, that of the good physician. Eryximachus says, “Everything sound and healthy in the body must be encouraged and gratified; that is precisely the object of medicine. Conversely, whatever is unhealthy and unsound must be frustrated and rebuffed: that’s what it is to be an expert in medicine.”²³ There are two distinct claims in Eryximachus’ account. They are that a physician must encourage what is good in a person and discourage what is bad. As before, this description of the good physician’s practice is

one of the main themes of Eryximachus’ speech. As such, we ought to investigate for possible analogs. Even more, Eryximachus is specifically talking about a physician in this part, not just Eros in general as before. Thus, the reader now has two very important reasons to pay attention to this passage.

However, rather than having an analog within Socrates’ espousal of his philosophy as harmony did, this idea of the good physician actually resonates with the actions of Socrates himself. As Moses reminds us, “The sage [i.e., Socrates] does not coerce others to become more virtuous, but persuades and counsels them . . . in the direction of virtuous living . . . in the same way that the skillful doctor persuades and counsels others in the direction of physical health.”²⁴ Thus, Eryximachus’ comments about the good doctor seem to echo what it is a good philosopher (or sage) is supposed to do. Both kinds of professions have the exact same goals in mind even though they might go about it in different ways.

Therefore, Eryximachus provides the reader with yet another insight into Platonic philosophy. Socrates gives many accounts about the job of the philosopher, but when we take the medical trope seriously and fully engage Eryximachus’ speech, the role of the philosopher becomes clear to us. Through conversation, Socrates, as a philosopher, is first and foremost not trying to expound some kind of dogmatic philosophical theory. Rather, he is trying to encourage the good and discourage the bad in his conversation partners. Lidz, earlier invoked for his comments on medicine in the Platonic dialogues, also suggests this later notion when he writes,

18. Alexander Nehamas, ed., *Symposium*, by Plato (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), 1989, xv.

19. *Ibid.*, xv-xvii.

20. Plato, *Symposium* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 188c.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Plato, *Republic*, 442a.

23. Plato, *Symposium*, 186c.

24. Moses, “Plato’s Conception,” 366.



“The dialogues present us with (among other things) Socrates, an individual, tailoring his speech for specific individuals, unlike a treatise, whose writer addresses any and all in the same manner.”²⁵ I concur with Lidz, but want to take his argument a step further. The reason Socrates tailors his speech for specific individuals is because he is acting in the same manner as Eryximachus’ good doctor. Socrates attempts to encourage the good and discourage the bad in his interlocutors through this tailoring.

Thus, through the power of medical trope in the dialogues, Eryximachus’ speech becomes relevant to examining both the *Symposium* and Platonic philosophy as a whole. As medical metaphor and analogy permeates many of the

dialogues, to disregard the words of a physician would be foolhardy. Rather, we should recognize the possibility for insight in the doctor’s words and read his speech accordingly. The result is that Eryximachus helps to elucidate several of Plato’s ideas so that we may more easily comprehend them. Rather than muddy Plato’s intentions, the physician enlightens us to whole new ways of understanding Platonic philosophy. As Eryximachus states, the task of the physician—and also the philosopher—is to encourage what is good and depress what is bad. We should take this advice when reading the *Symposium*. Let Eryximachus encourage understanding of Platonic philosophy within us while depressing our misconceptions. ♦

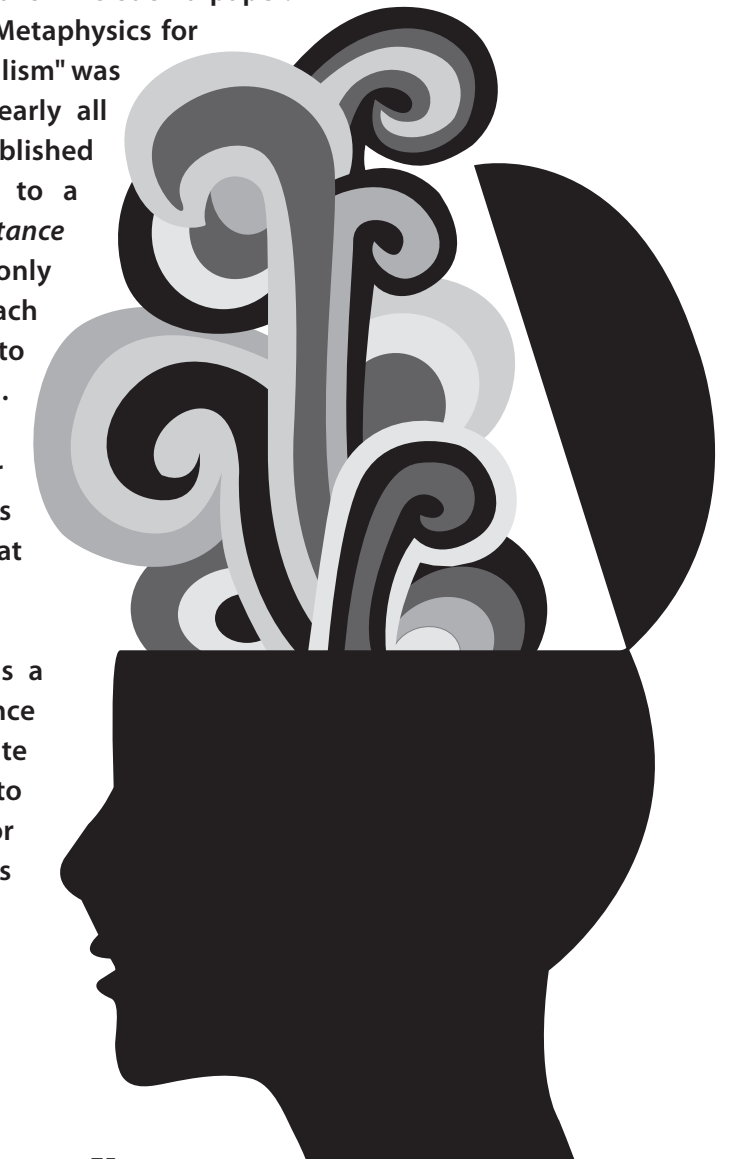
25. Lidz, “Medicine as a Metaphor,” 537.

Special Interest Section

In very rare instances, completely at the discretion of the editors of *Stance*, a paper comes along that is given special consideration and a special place in the journal. “A Metaphysics for Mathematical and Structural Realism” is such a paper.

As an original submission, “A Metaphysics for Mathematical and Structural Realism” was highly impressive and met nearly all the criteria required to be published – all except an accessibility to a wide audience on which *Stance* places a high premium. The only way the paper could reach such an accessibility was to increase drastically in length. In a sense, *Stance* solicited further work from the author in hope of publishing (minus the accessibility issue) a great undergraduate paper.

The Special Interest Section is a safeguard in that it allows *Stance* to recognize great undergraduate work that may not be confined to the Journal’s requirements for submission while retaining its inherent quality.



A Metaphysics for Mathematical and Structural Realism

ABSTRACT: The goal of this paper is to preserve realism in both ontology and truth for the philosophy of mathematics and science. It begins by arguing that scientific realism can only be attained given mathematical realism due to the indispensable nature of the latter to the prior. Ultimately, the paper argues for a position combining both Ontic Structural Realism and Ante Rem Structuralism, or what the author refers to as Strong Ontic Structural Realism, which has the potential to reconcile realism for both science and mathematics. The paper goes on to claims that this theory does not succumb to the same traditional epistemological problems, which have damaged the credibility of its predecessors.



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Introduction and Context

The status of science and mathematics is perhaps one of the most important topics in the contemporary intellectual discourse, and hence one of the most fiercely debated. Since the initiation of the Scientific Revolution, western civilization has come under the governance of rationality, empiricism and reductionism - toward the general trend that epistemological authority has been increasingly surrendered to those involved in the activity called science, from its historical base in philosophy or religion.

This corresponds with the development, and increasing implementation, of rational instruments or mechanisms by which to induce order, predictability and control (administration, standardization, and bureaucracy). Scientists, and societies affected by the Enlightenment, have in turn become increasingly reliant on the activity called mathematics. Thus, the modern world is intimately connected to, and indeed rests upon, the mathematical and scientific realism. However, several alternative programs have significantly challenged these underlying suppositions. The aim of this essay is to engage in this pertinent

debate and to reconcile the objective nature of mathematical and scientific truth.

Why Mathematical and Scientific Realism

Why would one would desire to call him or herself a mathematical and scientific realist? Briefly, philosophical subjects usually divide along realist or antirealist lines. I define 'realism of x' to be (i) the position that those objects which are in the 'domain of discourse of x' are in fact ontologically significant and that these objects exist independently of the human mind and (ii) that statements made about those objects which are in the 'domain of discourse of x' either hold true or false of those objects thereby establishing a truth value account for x . A second way to consider this is that a realist holds that the subject matter in question has a real ontological status and/or that ontological statements about the subject matter in question are not vacuous or fictitious. This is usually taken to mean that this subject matter is somehow "independent of anyone's beliefs, linguistic practices, conceptual schemes, and so on."¹ Antirealism can take many forms but antirealist claims usually rest on the notion that the subject matter is either fictitious, does not exist, or is dependent on someone's beliefs, linguistic practices, cultural constructs, and so on.

Mathematical realists hold that mathematical

objects are real and exist independently of the human mind and that mathematical statements are about those objects and are therefore true or false.² The Quinean dictum "to be is to be the value of a [quantified] variable"³ is the relevant convention for the nature of mathematical objects and their relation to a mathematical statement. Interestingly, it appears that the majority of working mathematicians are "working realists."⁴

A traditional scientific realist holds that scientific objects are real and exist independently of the human mind and therefore scientific statements about those objects are true or false. Or in other words, because science operates on the basis of falsifiability, and the confirmation of individual results, we have good reason to take science and scientific statements "at face value."⁵ Clearly, mathematical or scientific antirealism jeopardizes the ability of mathematicians and scientists to be able to make truth claims, or claims to knowledge. Tentatively, I believe that we should accept realism in both mathematics (MR) and science (SR) on the intuitive grounds that this provides the simplest account for the success of these disciplines - that there being real sets, functions, quarks, electrons (etc.) offers the simplest account for the increasingly descriptive and applicable nature of these two activities. The antirealist will contend, of course, that there is nothing simple about this account. Importantly, the close relation of these two disciplines means that in some way, denying realism in one is bound to have ramifications in the other.⁶

1. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Realism*, 4 Aug 2005, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism/>> (29 November 2008).

2. More technically this might be considered realism in ontology and truth value, respectively.

3. Stewart Shapiro, *Philosophy of Mathematics: Structure and Ontology*, (Oxford University Press, 1997): 4. Stewart Shapiro, 7-8.

4. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Scientific Realism*, 12 June 2002, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scientific-realism/>> (14 February 2009).

5. The strange connection between the sciences and mathematics has been well noted, see Eugene Wigner, "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences," in *Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics* 13.1 (1960): 1-14.

It is my unrepentant assumption that scientific realism is a desirable end – that is I ascribe to the notion that scientific discovery is a progressive march toward the objective nature of reality. This, I feel, is the optimum footing upon which to ground human knowledge. As such, I am sympathetic to Ante Rem Structuralism (ARS) and Ontic Structural Realism (OSR) as they seem like the best-bets to establish MR and SR, respectively. Furthermore, it is my tentative assumption that of the various positions arguing for MR and the various positions arguing for SR that the best chance to eliminate the long-standing epistemological problem in MR is found in a joint ARS and OSR position or what I dub Strong Ontic Structural Realism (SOSR). The principle aim of this paper is to attempt to articulate a tentative metaphysical position that satisfies both MR and SR. However, some of the major problems confronting MR and SR will be discussed. I offer SOSR as a best bet for those seeking both MR and SR. The general assumptions of my argument are as follows:

- (0.0) SR \rightarrow Knowledge
- (0.1) OSR \wedge MR \rightarrow SR
- (0.2) ARS \rightarrow MR
- (0.3) OSR \wedge ARS \rightarrow SOSR

Scientific Structuralism

It is closely related to the mathematical structuralism. Scientific structuralism holds that scientific theories are to be characterized as a collection of models that share the same kind of structure,⁷ and that the objects talked about by a theory are positions in such models.⁸ The semantic view prevails in framing the contemporary scientific structuralism.⁹ This position “rejects the need for, and possibility of, correspondence rules and instead uses models, in the Tarskian sense, to provide an unmediated theory-world connection.”¹⁰ Its opposite, the syntactic view, holds “that a theory is an uninterpreted, or partially interpreted, axiom system plus correspondence rules, or co-ordinating definitions, that mediate so as to provide for the theory-world connection.”¹¹ Scientific structuralism differs strongly from the mathematical structuralism in that a scientific structuralism must realize clear distinctions between kinds of objects and particular objects; as well as between theoretical objects and their physical realization. In mathematics there is no such thing required, because there is no distinction that must be drawn between a theoretical object and a physical realizable object¹² – the reader should grasp that by Quine’s statement above, a mathematical object “exists”

if it is bound by a quantifier in a sentence.

Scientific structuralism, or structural realism, has been offered as an account for SR. In the debate about SR, “arguably the two most compelling arguments around are the ‘no miracles’ argument, and the ‘pessimistic meta-induction.’” These two arguments pull in two different directions: naïve realism on the one hand and antirealism on the other. “In an attempt to break this impasse, and have ‘the best of both worlds’, John Worrall introduced *structural realism*.”¹³ That is, Epistemic Structural Realism (ESR) was originally offered as a sort-of pragmatic account for science, in the same vein as Instrumentalism, while simultaneously attempting to support the validity of realism in scientific truth.

ESR addresses these two problems by not making the success of science seem miraculous and not forcing us to commit to the claim that a theory’s structure describes the world - and by avoiding the force of pessimistic meta-induction, by not committing us to a belief in a theory’s description of the objects of the world - “according to the latter argument, we cannot commit ourselves to the belief in present theories since successful theories throughout the history of science were refuted or abandoned.”¹⁴ “ESR purports to identify the structural content of a theory in such a way as

to ensure cumulative continuity in that kind of content.”¹⁵ Hence, ESR is concerned with the preservation of scientific continuity which has been disputed by such thinkers as Kuhn¹⁶ and is motivated by the notion that while scientific paradigms have shifted radically, certain mathematical equations seem to have remained consistent. Scientific structuralism responds to discontinuity by asserting that certain structural features of differing scientific theories remain stable, even in the face of radically revised scientific ontology.¹⁷ Essentially, ESR asks us to commit only to the mathematical content of scientific theories. Thus, ESR admits that our actual knowledge of things-in-themselves is limited at best. What we can know, are the structural features of whatever there is in reality and that those objects have structural content. Hence, realism in scientific truth is preserved.

OSR is a more radical thesis. OSR denies the epistemic limitations of ESR by asserting a revisionist metaphysical claim: essentially, that our traditional ontological category of object-hood is incorrect, that only structures exist in the world.¹⁸ Objects, are merely conventions to discuss or conceptualize things. This is taken to mean that “‘Structures have ontological primacy over objects’ and this ‘either means [1] that structures are all that exist or [2] that entities are dependent for their own existence on the existence of structures.’”¹⁹

7. The semantic view is the view that a theory is a collection of models (model, in a model-theoretic sense). The syntactic view demands that scientific theories provide some additional non-structural or non-mathematical information to describe theories (theories as sets of natural language sentences).

8. Katherine Brading and Elaine Landry (1), “Scientific Structuralism: Presentation and Representation,” in *Philosophy of Science* 73.5 (2006): 573.

9. Katherine Brading and Elaine Landry (2), “A Minimal Construal of Scientific Structuralism,” 29 January 2005, <<http://philsci-archival.pitt.edu/archive/00002181>> (accessed 20 November 2008): 5.

10. Katherine Brading and Elaine Landry (2), 7.

11. Katherine Brading and Elaine Landry (2), 6.

12. Katherine Brading and Elaine Landry (1), 3.

13. James Ladyman, “What is Structural Realism?” in *Stud. Hist. Phil. Sci.* 29.3 (1998): 409.

14. Aharon Kantorovich, “Particles vs. structures: Weak ontic structuralism,” 2 December 2006, <<http://philsci-archival.pitt.edu/archive/00003068/>> (accessed 16 February 2009): 2.

15. Juha Saatsi, “Whence Ontological Structural Realism,” 11 May 2008, <<http://philsci-archival.pitt.edu/archive/00004016/>> (accessed 21 November 2008): 2.

16. See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

17. Katherine Brading and Elaine Landry (2), 21.

18. Anjan Chakravartty, “The Structuralist Conception of Objects,” in *Philosophy of Science* 70 (2003): 867-68.

19. Aharon Kantorovich, 17.

This position is closely related to the mathematical structuralist's conception of mathematical objects. If only structures exist, then we are justified in taking the structuralist conception of scientific statements at face-value. OSR is significantly motivated by work in Quantum Mechanics²⁰ where the status of individuality and object-hood are underdetermined.²¹ For example, Leibniz's Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles²² appears to suggest that many subatomic particles, which are understood to be "individual objects" are in fact the same object. It should be noted that this particular problem, along with the ontological status of the wave function, has served as a traditional point of division between realists and antirealists.

To give a realist account for science, it must be demonstrated that scientific theories have in some way been characterized by a shared structure or continuity. Scientific structuralism provides grounds to do that, however ESR appears to only shakily satisfy the first criterion of the definition for realism offered in section I, because only the structural content of objects is acquired. The epistemological problem for how exactly abstract mathematical structures in any way are related to physical objects still lingers against this ESR "weak commitment."

Adopting an OSR stance enables the realist to firmly accept both criterion for SR and therefore to take scientific theories at both ontological and epistemic face-value, though the trade-off requires a rewriting of our ontological assumptions.

Hence, OSR carries a heavy metaphysical commitment, or rather uncommitment. However, work in quantum mechanics, seems to indicate that particles at the quantum level seem to violate our principle understanding of what qualifies something as an object, at least in the classical sense. For the antirealist this is merely an artifact of fallible human science. For the realist, the classical conception of physical objects must be incomplete under this picture. Kantorovich clarifies, "individuals can be viewed as 'different representations of the same structure' (ibid). This statement can be understood most clearly when the structure is a symmetry group."²³

As scientists have become more reliant on mathematics to describe the physical features of the world and as mathematical activity itself appears to be heavily characterized by structuralist tendencies²⁴ the antirealist must explain (i) why this strange relationship proves so fruitful to science and technology, and to those insisting on a traditional metaphysical framework I offer a second challenge: (ii) Do we have any good reasons to remain steadfast in our object-based ontology - why must objects take primacy in our ontology?

Mathematical Structuralism

The primary alternative to MR can be found in mathematical constructivism which is a family of related but distinct forms of

antirealism. Two variants stand out: (i) Social Constructivism, maintains that mathematics is primarily a work of human social conventions and (ii) Intuitionism, a finitist mathematical philosophy, asserts that mathematical objects must be finitely constructed, or step by step, because mathematical objects are mental constructions in the mind of the mathematician. I find it difficult to explain, if mathematics is a human construct, how exactly SR can be preserved for those mathematical antirealists leaning toward SR, given the immense connection between the two as noted above.

Social Constructivism faces the challenge that if mathematical concepts are social conventions, then why is it that certain mathematical concepts have held true throughout the ages and across cultures? Intuitively, $1+1=2$ seems universally valid even though our philosophy of mathematics, or understanding and explanation of mathematics, has seen dramatic change. An oft cited counter-example to MR is found in the 18th century conception that Euclidean geometry was to be considered the a priori description of space itself. Clearly this idea was dismissed with the development of hyperbolic and non-standard geometries in the early 19th century. The social constructivist takes this as evidence that mathematics are contingent, that the axioms and assumptions upon which the human mathematical activity rest, as well as the intention of those axiomatic frameworks, are subject to change depending

on the cultural and social contexts of an era. The MR would respond that Euclidean geometry is a real mathematical structure, as is hyperbolic and the non-standard geometries. And, while Euclidean geometry may not be the most fruitful mathematical system to describe space-time, to assert that this in some way violates the absolute nature of mathematics is to confuse applicability of mathematics with mathematics itself. Certainly mathematicians are influenced by the social circumstances of their age, they are human beings after all, but this does not negate that the mathematical enterprise ultimately comprises a description of some objective reality.

Intuitionism faces problems of its own. If mathematical objects are merely mental constructions, how then can we say that the mathematics of one person is the same as another's?²⁵ In addition to this problem, Intuitionism rejects much of that which is classically provable on the grounds that proof requires existence. This, and the additional Intuitionist requirement that both the Law of the Excluded Middle ($P \vee \neg P$)²⁶ and the Law of Double Negation ($\neg\neg P \rightarrow P$)²⁷ are not necessarily universal rules and therefore not valid in proving theorems. Notably, few working mathematicians have adopted Intuitionism on philosophical grounds.²⁸ Of related importance, there is general agreement among the philosophers of mathematics that philosophical positions should "give an account of mathematics as it is practiced, not to recommend sweeping reform."²⁹

20. See Dean Rickles and Steven French, "Quantum Gravity Meets Structuralism: Interweaving Relations in the Foundations of Physics," in *The Structural Foundations of Quantum Gravity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 1-39.

21. Décio Krause, "Remarks on Quantum Ontology," in *Synthese* 125 (2000): 162.

22. Explained in further detail below.

23. Aharon Kantorovich, "Particles vs. structures: Weak ontic structuralism," 2 December 2006, <<http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/archive/00003068/>> (accessed 16 February 2009): 11.

24. A great example of this can be found in the development of Category Theory which takes undefined "objects" in its ontology and attempts to define the more or less structural relations of those objects - viewing objects as placeholders.

25. Penelope Maddy, *Realism in Mathematics*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990): 23.

26. The Law of the Excluded Middle essentially says either something is true or it is false (but not both or neither).

27. The Law of Double Negation essentially reads 'it is false that it is false that P' is the same as P.

28. A significant number of classical mathematicians do work in constructive mathematics because of its important applications in the development of Strong AI and computer science.

29. Penelope Maddy, 23.

There is a second group of antirealist positions found in (iii) nominalism about mathematics, which is part of the larger nominalism which denies the existence of abstract objects.³⁰ This is a complicated view, which essentially denies that abstract mathematical entities exist, a position strongly motivated by naturalism which is the philosophical position that the natural laws and/or the scientific metaphysics is alone sufficient to explain reality. To date, “nominalist mathematics” have failed to generate even a small fraction of what is classically provable. Regarding the naturalist motivation, it appears that at least some universals are required to adequately explain scientific theories.³¹ The last major antirealist contender is Formalism (iv) which holds that mathematics is a meaningless activity characterized by the manipulation of strings of symbols.³² Traditionally, Formalism has also been a finitist philosophy of mathematics but with very different aims than Intuitionism. It was the express goal of Hilbert’s Program to be able to generate a consistent set of axioms from which every possible classical mathematical theorem could be derived procedurally as a means by which to secure the absolute certainty of mathematical truth. However, this activity was more or less halted by Kurt Gödel, a Platonist, who proved with his

famed Incompleteness Theorems that no such axiomatic framework was possible.³³

The Zermelo Ordinals

0	\emptyset	0
1	$\{\emptyset\}$	$\{0\}$
2	$\{\{\emptyset\}\}$	$\{1\}$
3	$\{\{\{\emptyset\}\}\}$	$\{2\}$
.		
.		
.		
	$1 \notin 3$	

The Von Neumann Ordinals

0	\emptyset	0
1	$\{\emptyset\}$	$\{0\}$
2	$\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$	$\{0, 1\}$
3	$\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}\}\}$	$\{0, 1, 2\}$
.		
.		
.		
	$1 \in 3$	

Traditionally, the mathematical realist has held a Platonist conception of mathematics - that there is an abstract independent mathematical reality that “contains” the actual objects talked about by mathematical statements, usually intended to be sets or numbers, and that these

objects act as Platonic Forms in regards to the physical universe. This, of course seems metaphysically problematic. If there are two independent realities how do they relate? This is the epistemological problem. Another famous problem confronting the mathematical realist’s epistemology was raised by Benacerraf: given that a mathematical realist asserts that the natural number line is real, and that we can define the natural number line in an infinite number of ways, how can the mathematical realist instantiate which of these formulations the natural number line is?³⁴

In the prior case the number one stands independent of the number three. In the latter case the number one is understood to be “contained in” the number three. This means that the relevant criterion of individuation, namely, Leibniz’s Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, does not hold.³⁵

$$\forall F(Fx \leftrightarrow Fy) \rightarrow x=y^{36}$$

Identity of Indiscernibles (PI)³⁷

Essentially this antirealist claim contends that there are two principle problems with the traditional Platonist conception of the natural number line: (i) If the natural number line is a universal then, it should be the case that each natural number system should be identical using (PI), and (ii) if the mathematical realist

asserts that mathematical statements are true in virtue of the fact that they name an ontologically significant object then, they should be able to pick out which natural number line they are speaking about. Given that there are no particular reasons why one should be inclined to talk about one natural number system over another, Benacerraf concludes “that numbers are not objects, against realism in ontology.”³⁸ If this is the case then, it seems difficult to accept that most of the mathematical enterprise, which is reliant on the natural number line, conforms to the mathematical realist’s vision which is a criterion for full-blown MR by section I.

Shapiro maintains that ARS enables us to answer this question, and others, thereby preserving the realist position. In the above case, each defined natural number system is a particular instance of an abstract natural-number structure.³⁹ That is to say, the two natural number systems above are isomorphic to each other and thereby demonstrate the existence of an abstract structure that they exemplify - that it is wrong to range (PI) over the individual numbers because there are no natural numbers as particular objects - that is, as existing things whose ‘essence’ or ‘nature’ can be individuated independently of the role they play in a structured system of a given kind.⁴⁰ Thus, (PI) applies to the structural content of the two systems and confirms that they are identical

30. There is a subtle difference when we speak of abstract versus concrete mathematical objects as opposed to “everyday objects” – nominalism in mathematics, asserts that only particular mathematical objects exist, whereas the Platonist in mathematics maintains that there are general mathematical objects and that these objects exist outside of space-time. See Øystein Linnebo, “The Nature of Mathematical Objects,” in *Proof and Other Dilemmas: Mathematics and Philosophy*, eds. B. Gold and R. Simons (Washington: Mathematical Association of America, 2008): 205.

31. See Bernard Linsky and Edward N. Zalta, “Naturalized Platonism vs. Platonized Naturalism.” in *The Journal of Philosophy* XCII.10 (1995):525-555.

32. Penelope Maddy, 23-24.

33. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Hilbert’s Program, 31 July 2003, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hilbert-program/#2>> (accessed 17 February 2009).

34. Stewart Shapiro, 5.

35. Katherine Brading and Elaine Landry (1), 572.

36. This essentially says two things are identical when all the properties that are true of one thing are the same as all the properties that are true of the other (and vice-versa).

37. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, The Identity of Indiscernibles, 31 July 1996, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-indiscernible/>> (accessed 18 November 2008).

38. Stewart Shapiro, 5.

39. Stewart Shapiro, 5-6.

40. Katherine Brading and Elaine Landry (2), 572.

because each “number” in one system lines up in one-to-one correspondence with a “number” in the second – that the relevant criterion for identity is isomorphism⁴¹ – essentially that there exists a one-to-one “structure preserving”⁴² map between two structures that preserves relations and objects in those relations.

Structuralist philosophies of mathematics hold that mathematics is primarily the free exploration of structures. A mathematical structure is a set with defined relations attached to that set.⁴³ A common feature of structuralism is that mathematical objects⁴⁴ are regarded as places or placeholders within a structure. Relations⁴⁵ link these placeholders such that structuralist objects, properly conceived, are defined by their associated relations within a structure.⁴⁶ The inner content or intrinsic properties of objects within a structure cannot be analyzed. To analyze the inner content of an object, one must fix that object as the domain of discourse making it the new structure under study. This process can be repeated indefinitely “downward.” It is understood that to avoid such an infinite regress there is usually a background ontology selected (which is understood to be structurally irreducible) or fixed to a particular structure theory⁴⁷ which Shapiro maintains is a deciding factor for adopting ante rem structuralism over categorical in re structuralism.⁴⁸

There are three predominant types of mathematical structuralism. *In re* or *eliminative* structuralism is friendly to nominalist treatments in mathematics. *In re structuralism* contends that mathematical structures exist only in virtue of actual instanced mathematical systems and that structures are ontologically reducible (hence its close relation to nominalism in mathematics).⁴⁹ Shapiro asserts that ARS is friendly to Platonist treatments of mathematics. ARS holds that structures satisfy the notion of abstract universals. A particular mathematical theory is an instance or system of that abstract universal. These abstract structures are understood to exist regardless of whether or not there exists a system exemplifying that structure.⁵⁰ Both ARS and in re structuralism can utilize the set theoretic background ontology with differing implications, the alternative is categorical structuralism which contends that category theory can serve as a background ontology for mathematics and as a theory to describe the nature of structures in general. Categorical structuralism is usually related to in re structuralism but it may also support ARS (with the addition of a background ontology such as set theory). For the in re structuralist any background ontology may serve as the domain of discourse⁵¹ and, true to its name, no special commitment must be made by the eliminative structuralist. It is the task of

ARS to develop a structure theory to formally model their respective positions⁵² – a theory “strong enough to encompass [the behavior] of all structures.”⁵³ A structure theory is a collection of axioms, or statements, which describe how structures behave. Category theory, as mentioned earlier, does not attempt to say “what is being structured” only that this is how “something would behave” if it were plugged into the language of category theory. Shapiro outlines an axiom highly relevant to our discussion, the Coherence Axiom: “A structure is characterized if the axioms are coherent”⁵⁴ – If P is a coherent sentence in a second-order language, then there is a structure that satisfies (entails or “makes true”) P.⁵⁵

If we are to fulfill the mathematical realist’s mission we must satisfy both criterion outlined in section I, thus it does not suffice to eliminate background ontology – as that is the very thing required to preserve MR. ARS is motivated by three major concerns: (i) addressing the principle challenges to MR (ii) preserving the default position of Platonist realism in mathematics for working mathematicians⁵⁶ (iii) characterizing the actual behavior of mathematical activity.⁵⁷ Clearly, at the present time mathematical structuralism seems like the best-bet for MR, and of its variants, ARS addresses all three concerns whereas the in re structuralist appears to have difficulty with (ii).

Strong Ontic Structural Realism

I have hopefully demonstrated that ESR is not sufficient for a full-blown SR under the requirements laid down in section I, that OSR alone can accomplish this task and that ARS is the best-bet for MR. However, there are several problems confronting the combination of these two into a united MR and SR position. The epistemological problem looms large asking, if we are concrete physical creatures, how do we account for our abstract mathematical knowledge? The distinction between abstract and concrete objects is of significance to contemporary philosophy⁵⁸ – as long as a distinction is made between “nonphysical” and “physical” kinds. Some account for how these interact, or are related, is required. Thus, I approach this problem as a fundamentally metaphysical dilemma. I seek to offer a tentative characterization of SOSR which might aid in the resolution of this problem while simultaneously supporting both MR and SR. This position is partially motivated by Tegmark’s recently defended Mathematical Universe Hypothesis (MUH). In short, Tegmark argues that there is a physical correlate for every mathematical structure and that ultimately “our successful theories are not mathematics approximating physics, but mathematics approximating mathematics.”⁵⁹

41. Stewart Shapiro, 93.

42. Stewart Shapiro, 91.

43. Model theory is the premiere formal tool used to investigate differences between mathematical structures.

44. Such as numbers, sets, groups, etc.

45. Such as ‘+’, ‘<’, etc.

46. Stewart Shapiro, 82.

47. Stewart Shapiro, 82, 86.

48. Stewart Shapiro, 87.

49. Stewart Shapiro, 9, 86.

50. Stewart Shapiro, 84.

51. Stewart Shapiro, 87.

52. Stewart Shapiro, 90.

53. Penelope Maddy, 173-174.

54. Stewart Shapiro, 133.

55. Stewart Shapiro, 95.

56. Øystein Linnebo, “Platonism about mathematics,” forthcoming in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 3 September 2008, <<http://seis.bris.ac.uk/~plxol/SEP-platonism.pdf>> (accessed 16 February 2009).

57. Jessica Carter, “Structuralism as a philosophy of mathematical practice,” in *Synthese* 163.1 (2008): 119.

58. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Abstract Objects, 19 July 2001, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/abstract-objects/>> (accessed 16 February 2009).

59. Mzx Tegmark, “The Mathematical Universe,” in *Foundations of Physics* 38.2 (2008): 105.

(ESR) If we admit that in some way physical structures are associated with mathematical structures

(OSR) And, if we admit that everything that is physical is structural such that individual objects do not exist or are merely places in a structure and that reality is physical

(SR) And, if we admit that scientific knowledge is primarily the investigation of the features of these physical structures

(ARS) And, if we admit that mathematics is primarily the free exploration of abstract structures and that these structures, in some way, act as universals

(MR) And, if we admit that mathematical structures are real, abstract and “independent” of the physical universe in the sense that mathematical structures are not reliant on the physical

(Arg1) Then, the simplest explanation for how mathematics corresponds to the physical universe is that the physical universe is itself an abstract mathematical structure⁶⁰

(Arg2) And, under the assumption that fewer ontological kinds are preferable to the multiple if those fewer kinds are sufficient to describe reality then, it follows only mathematical structures exist.

I will ask the reader to indulge me for a moment and join me in contemplating reality under this picture. First, as mathematics appears to be unified so would a mathematical reality be unified. How we perceive this reality likely divides the world into sense-perception

and “actuality,” as the mechanism by which we view the world may be illusory – clearly we do not see “little ones” floating around. In order to help conceptualize this picture I would like to first draw a distinction between formal languages and abstract mathematical structures and second, to discuss a physical thing as we intuitively grasp it, and a physical thing in-and-of-itself.

As per Coherence Axiom any consistent and coherent sentence in a second-order language has a corresponding abstract mathematical structure which satisfies it. The sentence “ $1+1=2$ ” has a corresponding mathematical structure that is characterized by the model theoretic symbol $\{ |N|, +, 0, <, x \}$ ⁶¹ which satisfies it. The symbols ‘1’ and ‘2’ are describing what is equivalent to the first two places of the natural number line which can likewise be symbolized I, II, III, IIII, ... which is itself characterized by the axioms of ZFC set theory.

When someone “suggests that some mathematical objects can resemble or “approximate” physical objects like pieces of rope, they clearly do not mean that some mathematical objects are solid, flexible and flammable. You cannot twist or burn a number, even approximately.”⁶² One might inquire “how can the number one have a physical counterpart?” The traditional Platonist response is that individual numbers act as universals, such that each singular physical thing participates in the abstract universal. From the SOSR view, mathematical structures act as universals for individual physical things. When we talk about physical objects – say the

piece of paper you are reading – we tend to take the naïve realist view and associate what we see, feel, hear, taste, and smell as being the physical objects in-themselves such that we say “this piece of paper is white, smooth, crinkles when I bend the corner, etc.” Now, the conception of a physical object devoid of those sensations seems to stand in rebellion to our common sense – we do not like the notion that the “physicality” of the paper has nothing to do with its whiteness, its feeling of texture, the crinkle of its edge, etc. However, the status of physicality and what it means to be a physical object is itself a subject of much debate.⁶³ Properly understood, OSR suggests that all there is to physical things is that they are structures or that they stand within a structure – that the naïve realist conception of physical things is illusory. Opponents of OSR have challenged that such a structural view essentially collapses the distinction between physical and mathematical things. I am arguing that such a distinction is faulty in the first place. SOSR suggests that physical and mathematical things are one in the same. A physical entity is physical because it is a position in a mathematical structure.

Under a SOSR scheme our physical universe can be seen as being a finite subset out of an infinite mathematical reality. As for the apparent physical/abstract and concrete/universal oppositions, under SOSR such distinctions are trivial. A mathematical structure is both physical and abstract. Each concrete physical thing is an exemplification of that structure - a place in a universal. The motivations for finitism usually lie along the premise that natural physical reality is finite, and that such a reality is all that

there is. Obviously, under SOSR finitism is an absurd notion. Properly understood, SOSR says that “abstraca” is merely linguistic shorthand for the collection of mathematical structures that we have not yet found a physical correlate to.

On the epistemological problem: if the world is structures then, the mathematician accounts for mathematical knowledge acquisition empirically. The mathematician develops a language sufficient to talk about all structures in the world, and which can consistently talk about the “most” abstract mathematical structures that have not been empirically observed. The languages which accomplish this the best, are the languages which have historically been selected out over those that do not – a clear example is found in the refutation of Cantor’s naïve set theory⁶⁴ for ZFC set theory, the debate over the status of set theory as a foundational language given the suggestion that category theory may serve as a superior language, and the general acceptance of ZFC set theory over Intuitionist set theories as previously mentioned. This provides a resolution to the epistemological problem in three ways: (i) the distinction between concrete and abstract is trivial, (ii) “mathematical intuition” can be replaced with mathematical empiricism and (iii) SOSR grounds the development of mathematical languages in an evolutionary framework.

Lastly, I offer a tentative approach toward the resolution of the problem of universals working from a group-theoretic analogy. Working from the position that all universals are mathematical structures, let us imagine two people looking at a single cardboard box. One person views

60. Max Tegmark, 101.

61. Kees Doets, “Basic Notions” in *Basic Model Theory*, (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1996), 1.

62. Stewart Shapiro, 251.

63. See Henry P. Stapp, “Physicalism Versus Quantum Mechanics,” arXiv.org/ (11 May 2008), <<http://arxiv.org/abs/0803.1625>> (21 February 2009): 1-20.

64. Which allowed paradoxical sets to be formed.

this box from the side, the other person from a top-down bird's eye view perspective. The side of the box is colored blue; the top of the box is colored red. Now, let us imagine that we were to ask these two people if they saw the same object. The person viewing the box from the side would say, "I have seen a blue square" and the person who viewed the paper from the top-down perspective would say "I have seen a red square." Quite naturally, we might presume that these two people wouldn't agree that they had seen the same object. Clearly, two differently colored squares cannot be the same object as it appears that the properties (namely blueness and redness) of the two independent objects are not identical. In a related thought experiment we take the two observers standing at the same position, though at two different times, and rotate the box between those times such that for the first person the "square appears red" and for the second person "the square appears blue." Again these two observers might be inclined to argue that they had seen two different objects. Now we, as omniscient observers in this thought experiment, recognize that objects can undergo rotation, such that for two different observers, or from two different perspectives, the same object can appear as many. Groups, specifically symmetry groups, capture this notion and are an indispensable and fundamental tool in the contemporary physics.

I will extend this rough idea a bit further: if physical objects are positions in universal mathematical structures then, these concrete physical things may appear as individual,

separate entities while actually being "sides," or at least places in, a single mathematical structure, or possibly "rotations" of a higher dimensional mathematical structure that then serves as a universal, giving the illusion of enduring over time. Some related evidence toward this can be found in the theory that our human visual perception of three dimensions is actually captured in a two-dimensional projection surface and/or the theory that the traditional conception of a four dimensional space-time may actually be reducible to two dimensions as per the Holographic Principle - that our experience of three dimensions or three dimensions plus time, and the objects within them, may be somewhat of an illusion and their actual nature may be radically different from how we perceive them.

Closing Remarks

There are a number of significant problems confronting this position. Obviously the status of OSR and ARS is underdetermined and the prevailing philosophical winds could possibly swing toward the antirealist position. There is also the fact that the predominant contemporary metaphysics is framed in nominalism, naturalism and physical reductionism⁶⁶ so SOSR, and related metaphysics, are likely to meet great resistance and to be considered greatly revisionist. Furthermore, SOSR requires a great deal of clarification before any formalization can be undertaken toward a full and extended metaphysical position. And until a formal account is developed to demonstrate how

exactly such a universal mathematical structure might be characterized that it would resolve the problem of universals, such a claim is clearly only speculation.

It is my view, just as science and philosophy stood at a crossroads facing the perplexing contradictions between the long-held Newtonian world-view and the startling new quantum mechanical paradigm – science and philosophy today is likewise undergoing significant changes. Buzzwords like "emergentism,⁶⁷ structuralism and consciousness" represent the striking fact that much of what was considered improper to

the domain of scientific activity has actually been incorporated into the highest levels of scientific activity over the last fifty years. The relevance of mathematics, and its strange connection, to all of these activities inclines me to believe that a fundamental metaphysical revision is required. Thus, I offer SOSR as stepping-stone in that direction. Clearly, substantial is required to flesh out this position – however, given its possibility toward resolving a number of classical philosophical problems, it is an area I hope others will be inclined to find fruitful. ♦

65. Essentially, that n dimensions can be captured in n-1 dimensions. See Leonard Susskind, "The world as a hologram," in *J. Math Phys.* 36.11 (1995): 6377-6396.

66. Thomas B. Fowler, "Reductionism, Naturalism, and Nominalism: the "Unholy Trinity" and its explanation in Zubiri's Philosophy," in *The Xavier Zubiri Review* 9 (2007): 69.

67. The position that reducing a system to its constituent parts does not give one the full mechanics of that system.

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