STANCE

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ABOUT THE COVER

The cover of volume 17 of *Stance* is a great corridor of doors descending downward into infinity. Figures peer out of these doors down into the *Stance* logo. This image is meant to represent one of the fundamental ideas for *Stance* as a journal: its ability to bring many diverse people with great philosophical ideas into one space. These figures, like yourself, have gathered here to appreciate the ideas and new perspectives presented by the amazing philosophers in this journal. We hope to remind you of the importance of sharing philosophy and how it has brought you and others together!

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LEGAL EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

CHRISTOPHER THOMAS PHILLIPPE-RODRIGUEZ

ABSTRACT

Injustices in legal contexts are widespread, yet we usually tend to think of them through a social lens. The study of epistemic injustices increases the resolution of this lens; it identifies how we wrong others as "knowers." In this paper, I propose that the tradition of phenomenology may be invoked to describe and identify instances of epistemic injustice in legal contexts. In order to justify this claim, I establish a phenomenological methodology predicated on the synthesis of two ideas: (1) the phenomenological recognition of the Other, and (2) society's duty to endow its members with an epistemic sphere of action.

I. INTRODUCTION

Epistemic injustice is a phenomenon that occurs when an individual's characteristic as a knower is inhibited. To be a person is to be a knower, a person who can contribute knowledge and share a meaningful perspective with others. The field of epistemology is predicated upon the assumption that we have knowledge, that it and its properties are important, and that we are able to use it in order to exercise our capacities as an individual and form meaningful relationships with others and the world. Epistemic injustice occurs when this ability is stifled—when a person in some instance is done wrong by having their knowledge discredited.[1]

In this paper, I will argue that instances of epistemic injustice that occur in legal contexts may be effectively identified and described using a method derived from the phenomenological tradition, a tradition that seeks to contextualize meaningful aspects of the world through the study of conscious experience. This method will be synthesized using two phenomenological ideas: (1) the recognition of the phenomenological "Other" and (2) the societal duty to facilitate the Other's epistemic freedom of action. I will then apply this method to instances of legal epistemic injustice in an attempt to show the significance of the method and consider objections to the method.

II. PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE OTHER

Phenomenology is based on our experience, our capacity to interpret the world not necessarily as a dichotomy between the "thing that experiences the world" and the "world itself," but as a recognition of the fact that we, as the individuals *doing* the experiencing, are part of the world. We may generate knowledge with our conscious experience *in terms of* this experience and make judgments in light of this. In keeping with such a thesis, it is productive not to view us as minds floating around in an arbitrary field, but rather as embodied persons with our own intentions who engage with the world *as a part of* the world.

However, one may argue that if our medium of analysis is experience, and experience is restricted to individual people, how can we share a world with others? How can we generate knowledge *with* and *about*

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1   Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr., "Introduction" in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1.

other individuals? There may not be a possibility of constructing a phenomenological methodology related to epistemic injustice since the object of analysis in the phenomenological method appears to be strictly relegated to the lived experience of single individuals.

In response, Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out that our actual experience of the world is far from one of being "incarcerated in our separate perspectives."[2] We experience the world already as if there were other individuals who experience the world. He gives an example by describing a scene in which he and his friend, Paul, are before a landscape. Paul points out a church tower to him. He notes that he is not inclined to perceive Paul's finger as "a finger-for-me" or the church tower as a "church-tower-for-me."[3] The perception of the world is not immediately thought of as a set of private, secluded sensations. We have a sense of the Other and can make sense of them through our own conscious experience while still retaining an individual perspective.

At this point, we have reached a preliminary phenomenological conception of the Other. They are not just another object in a set of objects in the world. They cannot be defined in terms of being, in a Heideggerian sense, "present-at-hand," with an attitude that merely observes things with disinterest.[4] The Other is another perspective, another way of seeing the world. We are able to embody this perspective by engaging, interacting, and communicating with them. Lisa Guenther, in describing Edmund Husserl's account of embodying another's consciousness, likens the Other to a "here" outside of ourselves:

> When I encounter another body, who moves and orients itself towards objects in a way that is structurally similar to my own, I spontaneously experience this body as another 'here': an embodied consciousness with their own perspective on the world, to whom I appear conversely as 'there.'[5]

It is reasonable to infer from this account of the Other that part of our being able to embody the Other's perspective is to understand and appreciate their giving of knowledge (i.e., their epistemic status). Their contribution to the world in the form of knowledge is a facet of self-expression—a statement of a novel experience of the world. Our ability to understand and embody the significance of this knowledge is to appreciate their status as a person with a perspective and as an individual

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2   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), 405.

3   Merleau-Ponty, *Perception*, 405.

4   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 103–4.

5   Lisa Guenther, "Epistemic Injustice and Phenomenology," in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 196.

who is capable of making the world their own. This embodiment is commonplace in everyday life. In interacting with others with whom we are comfortable, we already affirm their status as knowers.

III. THE APPLICATION OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL OTHER TO EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

From this account of the phenomenological Other, we may start to understand how epistemic injustices may be committed within this context. If in a normal case we acknowledge another's knowledge as important due to their being perceived as a true perspective endowed and lived with conscious experience, a phenomenological epistemic injustice occurs when this process is somehow dysfunctional. To delineate the characteristics of this possible dysfunction, it may be productive to assume that the primary site of dysfunction occurs at the level of embodying the Other.

While in the previous case, the Other's perspective is affirmed and made real via our recognition and embodiment of their personhood, a dysfunction may occur when we perceive the Other not as a manifestation of lived experience but as an object devoid of any meaningful conscious behavior. When they are perceived in this manner, their status as a knower is diminished. Their statements about the world are not perceived as having come from another perspective, as products of lived experience, but rather as data that do not have a credible bearer—the reduction of another "here" to another set of spatial-temporal coordinates. The Other is not only *perceived* as an object but exists *ontologically* as an object to whoever commits the epistemic injustice, as objects cannot tap into a world of meaningful significance.[6]

The things that would have meaningfully constituted the Other's world would now be denied to them. Their knowledge is taken and perceived as meaningless; they are shut off to the hearer. In this way, they can no longer trust that their own knowledge and perceptions of the world are meaningful or valuable. Miranda Fricker, in discussing testimonial injustice, a type of epistemic injustice, notes that "Persistent testimonial injustice can indeed inhibit the very formation of self."[7] This is the first precursor to establishing our method.

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6   Guenther, "Injustice and Phenomenology," 201.

7   Miranda Fricker, "Testimonial Injustice," in *Contemporary Epistemology: An Anthology*, ed. Jeremy Fantl, Matthew McGrath, and Ernest Sosa (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2019), 150–53.

IV. SOCIETY AND EPISTEMIC FREEDOM

We may take this analysis and extend it from the personal realm onto a larger scale to establish the second idea for our method. Sophie Loidolt notes that from a phenomenological perspective, large-scale societal structures and institutions may be described as affirming one's own perspective and selfhood in modern society. This includes the function of legal systems, which may be viewed as a formal means of actualizing one's personhood in a case where their status as a member of society is endangered. She writes:

> A phenomenological thesis could be that law is not just an instrument or tool by which we realize our intentions. It expresses and mediates our individuality in modern society where human actions are to a large extent realized through formalized legal categories.[8]

Phenomenologically, social frameworks provide a large-scale perception of one's experience; they provide an individual with a "world."[9] The status of the significance and importance of this experience may be influenced by the processes that govern social institutions, which include legal systems.

To strengthen this point, Simone de Beauvoir notes that while one cannot do something for another, as the Other is absolutely free, one may create a situation where the Other can act in the best manner possible.[10] We must use our own freedom in order to ensure that others retain theirs; otherwise, no single person enjoys the benefits of being able to operate in the world.[11]

This may also apply in an epistemic sense. If we deny others the freedom to retain their unique epistemologies and beliefs, those individuals may then be subject to a lesser epistemic status within the social system and discriminated against. In other words, epistemic injustices can occur when a social system or institution does not guarantee its members the freedom to hold, form, exchange, or retain epistemic material freely. This freedom may be called an epistemic "freedom of action," given the multitude of possible epistemically-related actions,

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8   Sophie Loidolt, "Order, Experience, and Critique: The Phenomenological Method in Political and Legal Theory," *Continental Philosophy Review* 54 (March 2021): 163, 10.1007/s11007-021-09535-y.

9   Loidolt, "Method in Political and Legal Theory," 163–64.

10   Simone de Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A Simons, Marybeth Timmermann, and Mary Beth Mader (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 135–37.

11   de Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, 138–39.

and the social system or institution in question facilitates this freedom by providing its members with an epistemic "sphere of action," an environment in which one may express these freedoms without unwarranted recourse. While this theory operates in an ideal sense, it may serve as a useful precursor to understanding individual cases of epistemic injustices in legal systems.

V. THE SYNTHESIS OF RECOGNITION AND THE ACTION FOR OTHERS

We have now set up the necessary precursors to establish our phenomenological method. We have established that (1) meaningful interactions with others occur when someone embodies and recognizes the perspective of the Other and that (2) social systems and institutions in the best case, on the basis of an epistemic freedom of action, create the best possible conditions for action for the Other. Our synthesis is that (2) *requires* (1). A social institution cannot create meaningful spheres of action for other people if its constituents do not recognize their personhood and status as phenomenological agents. Our operation in society is predicated on the assumption that other members of society recognize our personhood and that this characteristic permits us to enjoy the freedoms ensured to us by the available institutions.

Following this, we can use this synthesis to provide our instance of a preliminary social phenomenological epistemic injustice. Since it is the case that (1) it is required that social systems and institutions recognize and embody the perspectives of individuals in order for those bodies to create meaningful epistemic spheres of action for them, and if we assume for the sake of argument that (2) those social bodies deny this recognition and embodiment in some way, then (3) these bodies do not create meaningful epistemic spheres of action for those individuals. An institution's failure to recognize a person's status as a person with meaningful experiences indicates that the institution has, by extension, failed to grant a person some epistemic sphere of action that others in that institution possess. It is therefore impossible for an individual who is not phenomenologically and epistemically recognized to receive the full benefits of societal interaction and participation. We may thus define a social phenomenological epistemic injustice (SPEI) as such:

> The denial of an institution to provide an individual an epistemic sphere of action as a result of the failure of that institution to recognize that individual as a meaningful contributor of phenomenological knowledge.

Since legal institutions are a type of social institution, this definition applies equally well to legal institutions, where we obtain the formulation for a legal phenomenological epistemic injustice (LPEI):

> The denial of a legal system to provide an individual an epistemic sphere of action as a result of the failure of that system to recognize that individual as a meaningful contributor of phenomenological knowledge.

VI. THE IMPORTANCE OF LEGAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL EPISTEMIC INJUSTICES

This formulation is especially important since instances of epistemic injustices in legal contexts are quite prevalent and consequential. This is facilitated by the fact that many legal processes rely on the testimony of other individuals. These testimonies create weak points at which predatory legal actors may desire to diminish and delegitimize the epistemic status of the attestant. The role of the judge in legal contexts may also accentuate this behavior, since the action of the judge, especially within the context of legal realism, is particularly important in the creation of legal norms themselves. The late Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Benjamin Cardozo stated:

> In default of an applicable statute, the judge is to pronounce judgment according to the customary law, and in default of a custom according to the rules which he would establish if he were to assume the part of a legislator.[12]

The late Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. also wrote:

> The felt necessities of the time, the prevalent moral and political theories, intuitions of public policy, avowed or unconscious, even the prejudices which judges share with their fellow-men, have had a good deal more to do than the syllogism in determining the rules by which men should be governed.[13]

The personal biases of the jury are also of foremost importance in the decision of a verdict in criminal trials, which may reflect greater societal biases and prejudices against certain groups of individuals.

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12 Benjamin Nathan Cardozo, *Cardozo on the Law: Including the Nature of Judicial Process, the Growth of Law, Paradoxes of Legal Science, Law and Literature* (Birmingham: The Legal Classics Library, 1982), 140.

13 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Early Forms of Liability," in *The Common Law*, ed. G. Edward White (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

Andrés Páez and Janaina Matida describe particularly potent examples of epistemic injustices as they relate to the Brazilian justice system, which is notable for high rates of legal injustices.[14] Building on Fricker's framework of testimonial and hermeneutical injustices, they provide real-world instances of legal discrimination on the basis of one's race, gender, and socioeconomic status. One notable example concerns a man who was unjustly convicted of stealing on the basis of his race despite having proof of engaging in a legitimate transaction:

> In investigations of thefts, it is often the case that the word of the defendant (black, poor and from the favela) is not taken into account . . . Recently, the Superior Tribunal of Justice had the opportunity to acquit Alexandre Augusto Andrade da Resurreição (HC n. 790.250, Min. Rogerio Schietti), unjustly convicted by the Court of Justice of Rio de Janeiro. The version of the facts offered by the accused was that the car used in the theft of which he was accused had been his, but that he had sold it . . . Despite proof of sale of the car, Alexandre, who is a public servant of the respected Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), with a college degree and enrolled in a master's degree in pharmacy, was convicted because the victim recognized him, based on his photograph, with 100% certainty.[15]

As the authors note, this individual was clearly discriminated against and his defense rendered ineffective by virtue of his background and phenomenological status. Despite clear evidence that he did not engage in theft, his epistemic status was considered illegitimate on the basis of testimony by another individual. Thus, he was denied an epistemic sphere of action by the legal system; namely, an environment in which he could have used his status, as a phenomenological knower, to defend himself in light of evidence against others' testimonies to the contrary. This makes Alexandre's case a clear example of LPEI.

VII. OBJECTIONS AND OTHER CASES

However, we must consider an important objection: based on our definition of LPEI, does denying an actual murderer's testimony also count as an LPEI? By convicting a murderer, are we "denying their

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14   Andrés Páez and Janaina Matida, "Epistemic Injustice in Criminal Procedure," *Revista Brasileira de Direito Processual Penal* 9, no. 1 (2023): 28–29, 10.22197/rbdpp.v9i1.821.

15   Páez and Matida, "Injustice in Criminal Procedure," 29–30.

perspective" and invalidating their ability to contribute epistemic value to society? It appears as if an LPEI can apply to every conviction, which seems to expose a weakness in our definition.

In the case of a murderer (whom we will assume to have indubitably murdered another individual), there would be no prejudice involved in the conviction; the charge would have correctly matched the sentence afforded to them. No epistemic harm was done to the defendant since the defendant was convicted on the basis of *whether they murdered someone or not*, not based on whether or not their testimony was legitimate. If such a basis is what was used, this indicates that the legal system recognized the defendant's perspective as important enough not to deny them an epistemic sphere of action.

Now, it may also be said that if a jury convicted a murderer *on the basis* of prejudice or bias instead of the evidence provided, an LPEI was still committed, even if the conviction was correct. Unfortunately, there might not be a way to avoid these types of cases, at least within the bounds of the legal system; other methods of describing epistemic injustice would run into the same problem. In general, if some method of describing epistemic injustice requires the defendant to be convicted on the basis of some parameter for the conviction to be epistemically unjust, the parameter may still be used to convict a proven criminal without invoking an epistemically just parameter. This topic warrants further discussion.

However, this raises an important question: how can one know when an LPEI is committed when they do not know all the facts of the case in question? Our assumptions so far have been predicated on whether the defendant indubitably committed a crime or not, and it may be unclear as to how an LPEI may be identified when ambiguity is a feature of many cases. As a first pass, it may be important to take a look at potential pre-established systemic biases and evaluate them against the facts of the case that are known *at the time*. This way, the testimony of the defendant can be fairly tested against what is known in a given instance.

For example, let us assume that a stabbing took place at 3:15 PM near a certain city block. The police arrest a man with characteristic C a couple blocks away as a potential suspect. The jury knows that the man happened to be near the crime scene ten minutes earlier at 3:05 PM, but apart from this there is no further evidence to support that he perpetrated the crime. If it happens to be the case that juries in that city's county have historically had biases against persons with characteristic C, the likelihood of an LPEI being committed may be tangible; there may not be enough evidence to convict the man *unless he were to be convicted on the basis of an LPEI*. This probability would suggest that factors other

than the evidence could be used in the judgment, and that his epistemic status may be called into question. Establishing thresholds such as this is crucial to determining whether an LPEI takes place or not, although new evidence may update previous thresholds. If upon further inspection the man was found to have a bloody knife in the trunk of his car, the likelihood of his being convicted on the basis of an LPEI may fall in favor of a more informed conviction.

We may also consider an inverse case. If a jury *acquits* an individual on the basis of prejudice or bias despite the individual being proven beyond a reasonable doubt to have committed an offense, one may call this a *legal phenomenological epistemic prejudice* (LPEP), as the system *prioritizes* a certain contributor of phenomenological knowledge to a greater extent than they would another individual and gives them a special epistemic sphere of action as a result. Roughly, we may define an LPEP as such:

> A legal system's provision of an epistemic sphere of action that others do not possess to an individual as a result of the prioritization of that individual's ability to meaningfully contribute phenomenological knowledge.

This does not qualify as an LPEI since the defendant's recognition as a person was not rendered moot, but it does count as a prejudice since the defendant's perspective and phenomenological epistemic status were prioritized over the facts of the case. This still may be categorized as a type of injustice, although based on our definition, this categorization would have to fall out of the bounds of our phenomenological analysis and into the legal sphere.

It is important to distinguish between an instance of this prioritization as it occurs in the legal sphere and an instance that occurs outside of the legal sphere. Naturally, we tend to favor other individuals' perspectives more than others in everyday life, but granting those individuals privileges in a legal context on the basis of prejudices in their favor may be problematic. For instance, if a celebrity were to be acquitted for a murder charge on the basis of their fame, this would count as a clear example of an LPEP.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have demonstrated that a phenomenological approach to legal epistemic injustice is adequate for describing and evaluating cases of epistemic injustice. The synthesis of the phenomenological Other and society's duty to facilitate the Other was used in order to

generate a satisfactory definition of legal phenomenological epistemic injustice (LPEI). This definition was then applied to various cases in order to demonstrate its significance and possible flaws. This definition and topic are exciting starting points for future discussions related to phenomenology and its relationships to social institutions. It may serve as a precursor to analyses in cases where epistemic injustices are widespread and in need of rectification.

Eighteen-year-old Christopher Thomas Phillippe-Rodriguez recently graduated summa cum laude from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a minor in chemistry. He is seeking a PhD in philosophy and, subsequently, a law degree. He is interested in epistemology, philosophy of language, and jurisprudence.

IN DEFENSE OF IMMORALISM: Can an Ethical Flaw in an Artwork Make It Aesthetically Better?
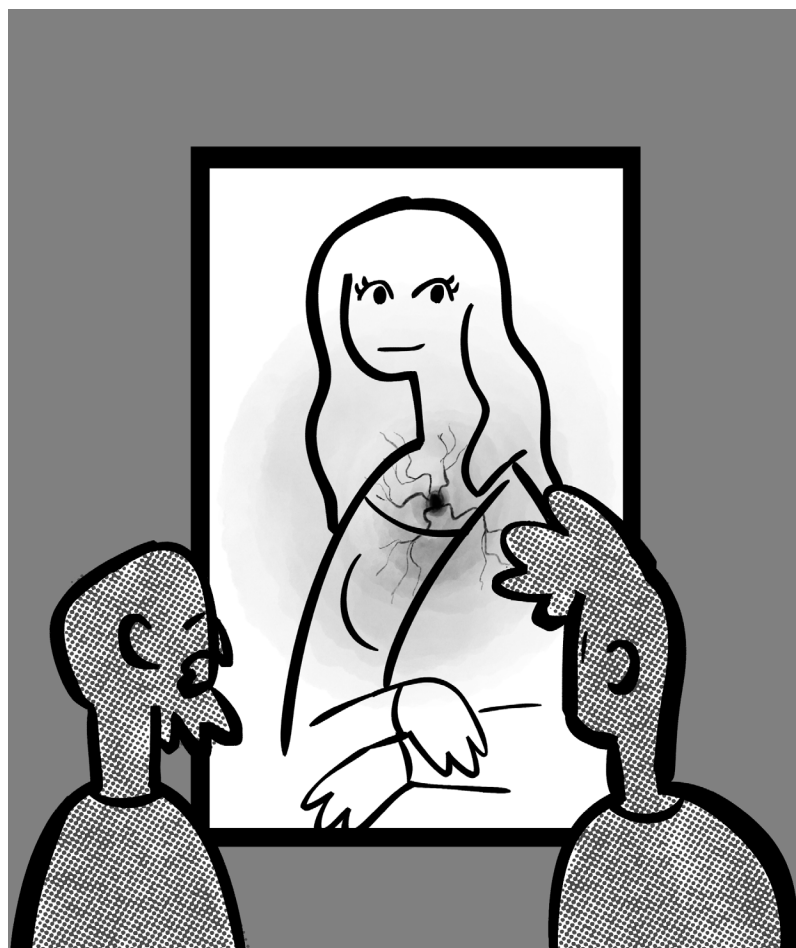
CLAIRE BRONWEN HERBERT

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates whether an ethical flaw in an artwork can be an aesthetic merit. I explore two versions of immoralism from Eaton and Kieran. I will defend the immoralist claim that artworks containing rough heroes are ethically flawed. I will then argue that an indirect connection between an ethical flaw and aesthetic merit is sufficient for immoralism, so long as it is a necessary connection. On this understanding of immoralism, I will argue that Eaton and Kieran are both successful in showing that an ethical flaw in an artwork can make it aesthetically better.

I. INTRODUCTION

Whilst it is generally acknowledged that a work of art can have both ethical and aesthetic values, there is debate about the extent to which these values coincide; do the ethical values of an artwork impact its aesthetic value in any way? Moralism answers that yes, ethical values are tied to aesthetic value. Autonomism, on the other hand, argues that a work of art should not be evaluated morally. Then, there is a relatively new view which goes by the name of immoralism. This is the theory that, in some cases, an ethical defect in an artwork can make it aesthetically better; that the art is aesthetically good *in virtue of* its ethical flaws. In this essay, I will explore immoralism, particularly as it is argued for by A.W. Eaton and Matthew Kieran. I will first defend the claim that works containing rough heroes are ethically flawed. I will then use Panos Paris' distinction between direct and indirect immoralism to argue for robust, indirect immoralism. I will argue that an indirect connection, so long as it is necessary, between an ethical flaw and aesthetic merit is sufficient for immoralism. I will then argue that both Eaton and Kieran succeed in showing that an ethical flaw in an artwork can be an aesthetic merit because they have both shown there to be a necessary, indirect connection between the two.

II. IMMORALISM AND ROUGH HEROES

For an artwork to be ethically flawed, it must endorse an immoral attitude. An artwork contains an ethical flaw if it seems to "*condone, inculcate, advocate* or otherwise invite the audience *actually to endorse* or *to adopt an immoral attitude.*"[1] If a film depicts a brutal murder, it can evoke horror from the audience. Perhaps the murderer is a sadist, intent on inflicting the greatest possible harm, while the victim might be a character that we have grown to love. In instances such as this, where the audience is encouraged to be disturbed by the scene and to condemn the murderer, there is no ethical flaw. Alternatively, a film may depict a brutal murder but encourage viewers to enjoy and condone it. Perhaps the murderer is magnetic and charismatic, whilst the victim is cruel or just dull. Similarly, the murder could be shown in a way that is comical, causing an audience to laugh at the victim's demise. It is this *endorsement* of an immoral attitude that constitutes the ethical flaw in the artwork. If a piece of art contains an ethical flaw, encouraging an immoral attitude,

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1   Panos Paris, "The 'Moralism' in Immoralism: A Critique of Immoralism in Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 59, no.1 (2019): 15-16.

the question is if this takes away from the art's aesthetic value. In other words, if a film is beautifully shot and expertly written, but manifests an immoral attitude, is the aesthetic value of the artwork diminished?

Immoralism has an interesting answer to this question. It argues that, sometimes, an ethical flaw in a work of art can make it aesthetically better. The claim is not that an artwork can be aesthetically great despite being ethically flawed, rather it can be aesthetically great *because* it is ethically flawed. Some immoralist arguments appeal to "rough heroes," or characters who display distinctly likable traits such as being charismatic, funny, or caring, but are in some way deeply immoral, for example they regularly commit immoral acts.[2] According to immoralism, an artwork that encourages us to admire, like, or empathize with overtly immoral characters is both ethically flawed and aesthetically meritorious.

An example of rough heroes can be found in Vincent and Jules from *Pulp Fiction*, for whom murder is part of their daily routine. It hardly needs pointing out that people do not ordinarily condone murder. Despite this, *Pulp Fiction* encourages us to admire and root for Vincent and Jules due to their likable attributes of being charismatic, humorous, and loyal. We know that we should not like them, because they casually murder people throughout the film, and yet we cannot help but love them.

Eaton and Kieran offer slightly different arguments for immoralism. In order to grasp Eaton's argument, we must understand what she calls "imaginative resistance," which refers to the reluctance we may feel to empathize with fictional characters that we deem to be immoral.[3] For Eaton, the aesthetic achievement in immoral art is the artist's ability to influence the audience into liking rough heroes, overcoming their imaginative resistance in doing so. It is a mark of aesthetic achievement that we are fond of Vincent and Jules, despite being reluctant to admire murderers. Eaton also argues that works containing rough heroes are aesthetically good because they cause us to be in conflict with ourselves. A part of us knows that we should not sympathize with these immoral characters, yet the other part of us cannot help but do so. Eaton claims that "this indefinite protracted state of ambivalence is precisely what makes certain immoral works *compelling.*"[4]

Kieran begins his argument with the cognitivist claim that "the value of art, at least in part, is a function of the ways a work may deepen our understanding or appreciation."[5] Therefore, an artwork's ability to

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2   A.W. Eaton, "Robust Immoralism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70, no. 3 (2012): 282.

3   Eaton, "Robust Immoralism," 285.

4   Eaton, "Robust Immoralism," 287.

5   Matthew Kieran, "Forbidden Knowledge: The Challenge of Immoralism," in *Art and Morality*, ed. José Luis Bermúdez and Sebastian Gardner (New York: Routledge, 2003), 58.

deepen our understanding is an aesthetic merit. He then argues that ethically flawed works achieve this merit by affording us knowledge that would not be gained without this ethical flaw. Kieran discusses Greene's short story *The Destructors*, in which two boys are competing for the leadership of a London gang. The less likely candidate for leader devises a plan to destroy the house of a widower who gave the boys some chocolates. As a reader, we are delighted by the meticulous and devastating destruction of the house because we are rooting for the underdog to be accepted as the gang's leader. Kieran argues that our ability to empathize with the motivations behind such a vindictive act teaches us how far people may go to be accepted by a group, and why this acceptance is considered so important. Moreover, this story teaches us something about ourselves. We may be shocked to discover that our desire for the boy to become leader takes precedence over our concern about the widower, showing us that "ordinary good people may be seduced in perpetrating and delighting in evil acts."[6] Kieran makes the additional point that "in order to fully appreciate and understand the nature of an experience, we require comparative cases."[7] So, experiencing immoral attitudes and perspectives can actually enhance and enrich our understanding of what it means to be moral.

III. DO WORKS CONTAINING ROUGH HEROES MANIFEST AN IMMORAL ATTITUDE?

Noël Carroll argues that Eaton has not successfully demonstrated that rough hero works are immoral, writing that "liking bad guys is not immoral, so long as you don't endorse their misdeeds."[8] Carroll contends that we are able to separate the admirable traits of a rough hero from their immoral traits, so we can find them funny or charming while still condemning their immoral actions. Of Tony Soprano, another rough hero, Carroll claims that "you can acknowledge his intelligence without morally approving of his use of it to dispose of the bodies of his victims."[9] If Carroll is correct, then there is nothing immoral about liking rough heroes, for we only admire the nonmoral aspects of their character, remaining morally opposed to their wrongdoings. Works containing rough heroes do not endorse an immoral attitude after all, and therefore are not ethically flawed.

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6   Kieran, "Forbidden Knowledge," 69.
7   Kieran, "Forbidden Knowledge," 63.
8   Noël Carroll, "Rough Heroes: A Response to A.W. Eaton," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71, no. 4 (2013): 373.
9   Carroll, "Rough Heroes," 373.

I do not find Carroll's objection convincing. I agree with Eaton that the best rough heroes are the ones whose appealing qualities are caught up in their immoral activities, preventing us from claiming that we only like one aspect of their character. It is also worth noting that this dissecting of personality traits is unnatural, and we are not usually able to isolate certain aspects of a person's character. This artificial way of viewing humans likens our personalities to a pie chart of distinct traits. Instead, we tend to think of our personalities as complicated Venn diagrams, where different traits overlap and influence each other. I also agree with Eaton's point that, on some occasions, we do root for the rough heroes to be immoral. The character of Jim Moriarty in BBC's *Sherlock* is a psychopath, and also incredibly charismatic. In one episode, Moriarty stylishly breaks into three top security locations.[10] We watch as the police scramble to catch him, and root for Moriarty to succeed. In instances like this, we like the character so much that we actively want them to continue with their misdeeds, a straightforward contradiction to Carroll's objection.

Furthermore, even if we do not explicitly condone the rough hero's immoral behavior, our admiration of them is an ethical flaw itself. We are willing to overlook that these characters are deeply immoral because we find them funny or charming. We may say: "I love Vincent and Jules even though they are murderers." According to Carroll, this phrasing suggests that we are able to separate their likable traits from the immoral actions, and thus are not endorsing their crimes. On the contrary, I argue that this statement still displays an immoral attitude. In *Pulp Fiction*, when Vincent accidentally kills an innocent character, neither of the pair show any remorse, but treat it as another problem to deal with. This scene is intended to be comedic, and indeed, we laugh as the characters quibble about what to do. Clearly, our ordinary moral judgements are not at play here. Ordinarily, we would not find it amusing if someone accidentally shot someone else in the face then complained about the mess. Similarly, in real life, if someone said of a charismatic killer: "I love them even though they are a murderer," then we would be appalled. Rough hero works do not need to encourage us to want the character to do immoral things to be ethically flawed. The mere fact these works encourage us to empathize with and admire such immoral characters is in itself manifesting an immoral attitude.

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10   *Sherlock*, series 2, episode 3, "The Reichenbach Fall," written by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, directed by Toby Haynes, aired January 15, 2012, on BBC.

IV. ROBUST, INDIRECT IMMORALISM

I have defended the claim that a rough hero is an ethical flaw in an artwork, but immoralism must also show that this flaw is an aesthetic merit. Paris states that for immoralism to succeed, the connection established between the ethical flaw and aesthetic merit must be a "robust" one.[11] It cannot be that there is a weak connection between the flaw and merit, or that the merit might have been caused by something other than the flaw itself. Paris allows that this robust connection can be direct or indirect. An indirect connection may include a "merit that mediates between the ethical and aesthetic."[12] This connection remains robust if the mediating merit is "part and parcel" of the ethical flaw.[13] For reasons I will shortly discuss, Paris argues that Eaton fails to establish a robust connection of either kind.

Whilst it is clear from the title of her paper that Eaton aims to establish a robust form of immoralism, she does not distinguish between direct and indirect connections. However, her criticisms of Kieran's argument imply that she wishes to posit a direct connection between flaw and merit. Eaton complains that, in identifying the aesthetic merit of immoral work as the ability to deepen our moral understanding, Kieran has shown that "what makes an artwork aesthetically good is not the immoral feature per se but, rather, the moral insight that it yields."[14] He traces the aesthetic merit to the fact that the artwork enhances our understanding rather than to the ethical flaw itself. This objection suggests that Eaton wishes to trace the aesthetic merit to the ethical flaw, not to some intermediate merit. This is further reinforced by the fact that Eaton recognizes that Kieran's merits are achieved by "first drawing the audience into an immoral perspective," but insists that this is not sufficient for immoralism if the resulting merit is not immoral.[15]

If Eaton desires to establish a robust, direct immoralism, then I agree that she fails to do so. This is because, as Paris points out, she identifies the merit of ethically flawed works as a compelling feature caused by moral ambivalence, not as the ethical flaw itself. Interestingly, this is the very issue that she identifies with Kieran's immoralism. The resurfacing of this problem implies that it is not only an issue for Kieran or Eaton's individual arguments, but for immoralism generally. It seems that robust, direct immoralism is a rather difficult position to

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11   Paris, "The 'Moralism' in Immoralism," 15.
12   Paris, "The 'Moralism' in Immoralism," 16.
13   Paris, "The 'Moralism' in Immoralism," 16.
14   Eaton, "Robust Immoralism," 289.
15   Eaton, "Robust Immoralism," 289.

defend. When the immoralist attempts to explain *why* an ethical flaw is also an aesthetic merit, they will inevitably run into the objection that they are identifying the merit as something other than the ethical flaw. Alternatively, if the immoralist states simply that the artwork is meritorious because it is immoral, they will likely be accused of begging the question. Fortunately for immoralism, I do not think that a direct connection between the ethical flaw and aesthetic merit is required to demonstrate that an artwork can be aesthetically better in virtue of an ethical flaw. I will now focus on using both Eaton and Kieran's arguments to defend a robust, indirect immoralism.

When outlining what is required for a robust, indirect connection, Paris reiterates that it must not be possible for the intermediate merit to be caused by anything other than the ethical flaw itself. He argues that Eaton has failed to show this, as her merit of ambivalence could be caused by some other nonmoral feature. He imagines a character who is ridiculous but has many likable attributes, claiming that this character would generate a similar ambivalence in us, albeit a nonmoral one, and would therefore make the work compelling by Eaton's own argument. He then claims that "it neither follows that the aesthetic value is grounded in ridiculousness nor would it be possible to trace aesthetic value there."[16]

I agree that, in this instance, we would not trace the aesthetic value to ridiculousness. However, the point of rough heroes is that they encourage an immoral attitude, and thereby are immoral. This causes the aesthetic merit, not the immorality *of the character* per se. Therefore, this analogy would only succeed if this character encouraged a ridiculous attitude in the audience. So, the immoralist can acknowledge that we would not identify the aesthetic value as ridiculousness but rather deny that this has any relevance to their argument.

Moreover, I do not agree that a similar ambivalence could be created from such a character. There is nothing problematic about liking someone ridiculous. There is no reason for us to feel any imaginative resistance to liking such a character. Perhaps we would be surprised to find that we like someone so ridiculous, but since being ridiculous is quite harmless, I do not see why we would find this disturbing in any way. There is something very different about liking a deeply immoral character, and we are far more resistant to doing so. The uncomfortable feeling we experience when endorsing an immoral attitude is not remotely similar to finding that someone's likable traits outweigh their nonmoral, but otherwise unlikeable traits. It is this troubling ambivalence that makes ethically flawed works compelling, not just any ambivalence. The unsettling "state of irresolvable conflict with ourselves" that Eaton speaks of could not be

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16   Paris, "The 'Moralism' in Immoralism," 22.

brought about by something so mundane.[17] Admiring or rooting for an immoral character violates our most basic principles, and it is this tug-of-war with ourselves that makes the works so compelling. Therefore, the ethical flaw is necessary for the meritorious ambivalence to occur.

A similar argument can be made for Kieran's immoralism. We could not discover that we are able to find pleasure in the destruction of a kind man's house unless *The Destructors* did not encourage us to do so. If we were not rooting for the boy to gain the respect of the gang and were horrified by his plan, then there would be no ethical flaw; but also, the merit of deepening our cognitive understanding about the potential consequences of the human desire for approval could not be achieved. Kieran also argues that we need to experience immorality to gain a deeper appreciation of morality. Once more, this understanding is dependent on us being exposed to an immoral attitude, such as the endorsement of the boys' act. It seems that, again, the merits that Kieran argues for could not have occurred without the ethical flaws.

If a robust, indirect connection between ethical flaw and aesthetic merit requires that the latter be necessarily caused by the former, then both Eaton and Kieran have succeeded in establishing such a connection. I recognize that Eaton would not want her argument grouped in with Kieran's, due to her complaint that his immoralism collapses into moralism, through his identification of the overall aesthetic merit as a moral one. Eaton only seems to be considering one aspect of Kieran's account, as the aesthetic merit of deepening our understanding about ourselves is not necessarily a moral outcome. Even so, identifying the aesthetic merit as enhancing our non-moral understanding would still fall prey to Paris' objections that we saw previously. For this reason, I do not think the fact that Kieran's aesthetic merits have a moral shape is nearly as relevant as Eaton believes. Whether the ultimate merit is moral or not, the crucial point for immoralism is that the ethical flaw in the artwork is necessary for this merit to occur. I argue that Kieran demonstrated this.

Paris would likely respond that I still have not shown the ethical flaw *itself* to be an aesthetic merit. He writes that "immorality contributes to, or even is necessary for, the emotional ambivalence, whilst coherently maintaining that the immorality itself remains a defect."[18] I simply do not see how one could do this. Ethical flaws aside, if we believe a feature of an artwork to cause an aesthetic merit to occur, then we would not label it an aesthetic defect. This can be seen in skilled writing that causes the aesthetic merit of well-developed characters or in skillful camerawork that causes the aesthetic merit of being visually beautiful. Insofar as

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17   Eaton, "Robust Immoralism," 287.
18   Paris, "The 'Moralism' in Immoralism," 22.

these features directly contribute to their meritorious outcome, we consider them to be meritorious themselves. Paris must therefore offer an argument as to why this would be different in the case of an ethical flaw. He attempts to do so by using Eaton's imaginative resistance argument. He claims that, in emphasizing the artistic skill involved in getting us to like rough heroes, Eaton presents immorality as a flaw to be overcome, so in itself it remains a defect. He appears to read Eaton as identifying the immorality of the rough hero as a flaw which the artist skillfully overcomes by endowing them with likable qualities and encouraging us to admire them. In this sense, the immorality of the character is "introduced deliberately as a challenge to be overcome."[19]

This appears to be a straightforward misreading of Eaton and contradicts Paris' own definition of an ethical flaw. Again, for an aspect of a work to be considered immoral, it must encourage an immoral attitude rather than merely depict one. If we were presented with an immoral character but not encouraged to like them, there would be no ethical flaw. The artistic skill involved in getting us to overcome our imaginative resistance to liking such immoral characters *creates* the ethical flaw in the work. It is not that the artist skillfully overcomes the immorality of the character, rather, the skill is in the artist's ability to manifest an immoral attitude in the audience, one that would not be manifested if our imaginative resistance to liking an immoral character was not overcome. If Paris intends here to strengthen his objection that the ethical flaw remains an aesthetic defect, then he fails to do so.

V. CONCLUSION

Immoralism is the theory that some artworks can be aesthetically better because they contain an ethical flaw. An ethical flaw is defined as the endorsement of an immoral attitude. I have defended the immoralist claim that rough hero works, which encourage us to admire and root for immoral characters, do indeed endorse an immoral attitude, and are therefore ethically flawed. A problem occurs when immoralists attempt to explain the aesthetic merit that an ethical flaw produces, as it appears that they are identifying the merit as something other than the flaw itself. This is why Eaton criticizes Kieran and why, in turn, Paris criticizes Eaton. This is only an issue for robust, direct immoralism. I have defended a robust, indirect version of immoralism, arguing that both Eaton and Kieran demonstrate a necessary connection between the ethical flaw and aesthetic merit that it produces. This is sufficient to show that an ethical flaw in an artwork can be an aesthetic merit.

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19   Paris, "The 'Moralism' in Immoralism," 24.

Claire Herbert is studying Philosophy with Creative Writing at Northeastern University London. She is interested in moral philosophy, particularly in applying philosophical thinking to current and future real world ethical debates. She enjoys writing flash fiction and wishes to continue writing after university. Her favorite past-time is reading a book at a park in London.

SCIENCE AND THE QUESTION OF TRUTH: An Examination of Whig Realism

PRANAV VADLAMUDI

ABSTRACT

The pursuit of scientific truth has long engaged philosophers of science. Miriam Solomon's work in *Social Empiricism* introduces "Whig realism," which proposes that empirical success in science reflects some underlying truths within theories. This paper examines Solomon's argument and discusses its response to a traditional scientific realism argument. I then critique Solomon's treatment of decision vectors and their usage in determining when dissent is normatively appropriate. I conclude that, while Solomon's framework provides some insights into the dynamics of scientific progress, concerns arise regarding its application.

I. INTRODUCTION

The discussion regarding scientific progress toward truth is not unfamiliar among philosophers of science. Specifically, the distinction between anti-realists and realists contributes to this extensive discussion. Philosophers such as Miriam Solomon have furthered contemporary arguments regarding science and truth. In *Social Empiricism*, she argues for a novel account of realism which she calls "Whig realism."[1] This account is distinct from a separate account of scientific realism, which, though no one philosopher has made this exact argument, has been extracted from the work of several philosophers, and it is as follows:

1.   That science is phenomenally successful at prediction is not an unexplained mystery for the theory according to which science is approaching the truth.[2]

2.   That science is phenomenally successful at prediction is a significant unexplained mystery for any theory according to which science is not approaching the truth.[3]

3.   Given two theories, it is unreasonable to believe one that leaves significantly more unexplained mysteries.[4]

4.   It is unreasonable to believe the theory that science is not approaching the truth.[5]

In this paper, I will discuss Solomon's argument regarding science and truth in *Social Empiricism*. In doing so, I will illustrate her response to the previous argument and the flaws within her argument for Whig realism. In Section II, I will explain Whig realism and argue that Solomon would agree with the prior argument's conclusion. For example, Whig realism and scientific realism both conclude that science approaches the truth, as Whig realism claims there is some truth within theories. In Section III, I will explain the reason why Solomon would create a different argument for the same conclusion by delving into a criticism she may have towards the first and third premises of the prior argument: a decision to believe and choose one theory over another considers several decision vectors and is not exclusive to just nonempirical decision vectors such as simplicity—which are less reliant on empirical data and

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1   Miriam Solomon, *Social Empiricism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007).
2   Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, 174–79.
3   Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 174–79.
4   Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, 174–79.
5   Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, 174–79.

more reliant on extraneous factors such as elegance. Finally, in Section IV, I will critique aspects of Solomon's response, specifically focusing on Whig realism and its methodological upshot (the issues with Whig realism's applications).

I will address the issues with obtaining truths within theories and explain that nonempirical decision vectors like simplicity are imperative in theory choice despite their nonempirical nature.

II. UNDERSTANDING WHIG REALISM AND EMPIRICAL SUCCESS

Following the discussion regarding the distinctions between the antirealist and realist perspective, Solomon introduced the concept of Whig realism. The following sentence describes Whig realism best:

> Roughly stated, it is the position that when empirical success needs explanation (that is, when it cannot be attributed to chance or intentional choice), it is due to there being some truth in the theories.[6]

Solomon discusses several cases to explain Whig realism in further detail, but I will take a closer look into her discussion regarding the phlogiston theory. In the phlogiston case, phlogiston still referred to something (oxygen) when scientists like Joseph Priestley utilized the phrase "dephlogisticated air."[7] At the time, it was not called oxygen. According to Solomon, this reference is only known in hindsight. The Phlogiston theory provided some truths within the theory that explained its empirical successes; however, it was largely false. As Solomon claims, certain parts of the theory, such as the theoretical structures, explain the empirical successes and are true. When one considers the time when phlogiston theory was procured, Priestley and his allies did not know what parts of the theory were true. Following the development of the theory of oxygen, the true parts of the phlogiston theory revealed themselves. Therefore, truth within empirically successful theories is known in hindsight, and theories contain some truths.

Understanding Whig realism is imperative in creating an argument Solomon would make regarding scientific progress towards the truth. The following argument is as such

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6   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 39.
7   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 37.

1.   Some scientific theories provide some empirical success.[8]

2.   Some scientific theories that provide some empirical success contain some truths within the theories.[9]

3.   New scientific theories build upon previous theories that provided some empirical success.[10]

4.   New scientific theories build upon previous theories that contained some truths within the theories.

5.   Any new theory that builds upon a prior theory attempts to increase the number of truths within the theory that can potentially explain the new empirical successes.

6.   New scientific theories that build upon previous theories attempt to increase the number of truths with the theory that potentially can explain the new empirical successes.

Solomon does not explicitly state the fifth premise, but the underlying assumption allows for the transition from the fourth premise to the conclusion. Many of the case studies Solomon presents contain theories that attempt to increase the truths within previous theories. For example, whether it be the transition from Newtonian mechanics to Einsteinian mechanics and Quantum mechanics or the transition from Lamarckian evolution to Darwinian evolution, the theories following the preceding theories build upon the truths of those theories. However, examples such as cold fusion show that some new theories may have little empirical success and do not increase the number of truths because there are still many falsities. Thus, the word "attempt" is used because even if the number of truths does not increase, the new theories still attempt to build upon previous ones, trying to increase the number of truths. In other words, they attempted to increase the number of truths within the theories by attempting to find truths that were not previously uncovered. Even if scientists did not intend to increase the number of truths, new scientific theories attempt to uncover more truths over time. As more and more truths become uncovered and revealed, theories can approach truth. They will never reach 100% truth, but as more theories emerge, these theories can progress toward truth.

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8   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 39.
9   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 39.
10 Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 49.

III. DECISION VECTORS AND SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS TOWARD TRUTH

Of course, the question arises as to why Solomon would need to form a separate argument for the same conclusion. I had already addressed her position as a Whig realist, but I have yet to address her criticisms of the initial realism argument. Solomon would first discuss problems with the simplicity principle and why Whig realism is a better alternative.

Following the discussion of Whig realism, Solomon delves into the concept of decision vectors. Her claim is that decision vectors are heavily involved in scientific decision-making, such as the preference for one theory over another. According to Solomon, decision vectors are certain factors that influence the direction of a certain decision, which may contribute to some degree of scientific success.[11] Moreover, decision vectors allow an agent to make a rational scientific choice.

While Solomon does not expand upon the definition of a "rational scientific choice," she acknowledges that decision vectors do not have to be rational at the individual level.[12] Therefore, her usage of decision vectors still implies that a certain decision within the scientific community is being made. Furthermore, Solomon creates the distinction between empirical and nonempirical decision vectors. While empirical decision vectors are why some empirically successful theories are preferred, nonempirical decision vectors are why one theory is chosen over the other. For example, a researcher may prefer one successful theory due to the theory being supported by their data—which would be an example of an empirical decision vector—and the same researcher preferring a theory due to its simplicity or complexity is a nonempirical decision vector, as the preference is not determined by how empirically successful the theory is.[13] Simplicity could be argued as a decision vector that is not wholly nonempirical; however, choosing one theory over another based solely on its simplicity is irrespective of the empirical success of that theory. Say I have Theories X and Y. Both theories could have the same degree of success, and perhaps even the same data. However, if I choose Theory X over Y because it is simpler to understand and communicate, then I am choosing Theory X irrespective of the factor of empirical success. Unexplained mysteries could be explained in terms of data, as one theory may have more unexplained data than another, but to choose one theory over another is a matter of simplicity and does not necessarily depend on empirical success. A theory can have unexplained mysteries and still have empirical success. With the current scientific

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11   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 54.
12   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 49.
13   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 57.

tools, knowledge, and technology we have at our disposal, we may not necessarily fully comprehend or explain the outcomes of some of our theories; however, that does not mean the theory has little empirical success, as the theory could still accurately predict certain phenomena.

The following are examples of *empirical* decision vectors that Solomon provides.[14]

1.   Salience of data: choosing a theory because there is some important data that exists.

2.   Availability of data: choosing a theory based on how accessible the data and results of theory is.

3.   Egocentric bias towards one's own data: choosing a theory based on how the theory supports one's data.

4.   Preference for a theory which generates novel predictions: choosing a theory based on the novelty of its data and the overall effort of the research.

The following are some examples of *non-empirical* decision vectors.[15]

1.   Ideology

2.   Pride

3.   Conservativeness

4.   Radicalism

5.   Elegance

6.   Simplicity

Solomon uses these decision vectors to determine whether dissent or consensus is normatively appropriate given the distribution of such vectors. What Solomon means by dissent or consensus is concerning a scientific community and determining whether competing theories or introducing competing theories, which create dissent, are appropriate. The topic of normatively appropriate dissent and consensus is interesting. I will address my concerns to Solomon's account of when both are normatively appropriate in Section IV, so I will focus on the nature of the decision vectors in this section.

Solomon would argue that simplicity is one of many nonempirical decision vectors, so claiming that "it is unreasonable to believe one that leaves significantly more unexplained mysteries" would be disregarding other influential nonempirical and empirical decision vectors. One important note is that Solomon claims that nonempirical decision vectors

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14   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 57–58.
15   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 57–58.

"do not select for or against empirical success or any other primary goal of science (such as truth)."[16] Due to the nature of nonempirical decision vectors, they are not as heavily involved in the preference of empirically successful theories and are not as involved in the progress toward truth. So, preference for one empirically successful theory over another should be based solely on empirical decision vectors equitably distributed to the various empirical successes of different theories. Solomon would still consider nonempirical decision vectors completely. She claims the nonempirical decision vectors should be equally distributed for a normatively appropriate account of dissent. However, given her statement that nonempirical decision vectors do not select for or against empirical success or truth, Solomon would argue that the simplicity principle should not be used as a condition or premise that leads to the conclusion that science progresses toward truth.

IV. CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

Solomon's argument has its merits and demerits. My main issue lies with certain aspects of her response that involve Whig realism and decision vectors as well as her account of when dissent is normatively appropriate. I will address my concerns individually, separating my critiques into three parts. First, I will begin by explaining Solomon's problem by stating that there are truths within theories that we can isolate and use to progress toward truth. Second, I will critique Solomon's usage of decision vectors and her rejection of simplicity and nonempirical decisions in scientific progress toward truth. Finally, I will critique Solomon's vagueness in these decision vectors and how they result in a vague account of when dissent is normatively appropriate. These critiques aim to determine how exactly we can apply the concepts of Whig realism, if we can at all, in a practical sense of how science is conducted. I will utilize the term "methodological upshot" to refer to the methodological and practical implications of Whig realism and Solomon's claims.

A. ISSUES WITH WHIG REALISM'S METHODOLOGICAL UPSHOT

Solomon expands on Whig realism by introducing some of its conditions, and she is correct that truth is known in hindsight. But how can we truly know what truths to extract from previous theories? If an individual were to extract only the truths, she would create a replication of the previous theory without addressing or improving upon the previous theory's falsities. So, it is important to consider the falsities within previous theories to build upon them sufficiently.

16   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 77.

Moreover, how much of the previous theory should she utilize? If a previous theory has several empirical successes but is false in hindsight, how much of each empirical success would she need to take? Some of the successes? All? Solomon does claim that the process of new theories is one of trial and error, but that needs to be more specific. There are many instances where the scientific process is not trial and error, and there are clear methods researchers conduct to achieve their results. Simple trial and error are not orderly enough for a "methodological upshot" of Whig realism.[17]

Solomon's response to this objection would lie in the potential misrepresentation of her account. Solomon claims that new theories seek to increase the number of true statements within theories; however, mistakes can still be considered. Truths can be obtained in addition to improving upon falsities. While this may be true, it is also important to consider that discerning truths from past theories and even replacing the mistaken claims of previous theories with new and true statements can be highly subjective and biased. Solomon makes the claim that a reasonable methodology is that theories should build on various portions of previous theories. However, different researchers may interpret the same body of evidence differently, which can lead to conflicting conclusions about which aspects of past theories constitute truths and which should be discarded. This subjectivity of what portions of previous theories should be built upon introduces uncertainty into the scientific process. Furthermore, by replacing mistaken claims with new, true statements, there is a risk of overlooking the underlying reasons for these past mistakes and failing to address potential systemic issues or biases within the scientific process and theory-building. Ignoring past mistakes and replacing them could hinder scientific progress by perpetuating misconceptions and preventing scientists from understanding the limitations and shortcomings of previous theories.

B. ISSUES WITH DECISION VECTORS

As I have previously mentioned, Solomon would object to the simplicity principle because it is a nonempirical decision vector, so it is not as involved in the preference of one empirically successful theory over another or the progress toward truth. However, through all the examples provided by Solomon, we see that nonempirical decision factors are involved in theory choice. In Solomon's multivariate analysis, they are given the same weight as empirical decision vectors.

Should this be the case? It should not, and certain decision vectors are more influential depending on the context. For example, suppose that

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17   Solomon, *Social Empiricism*, 49.

new theories have been developing and providing empirical successes, but unfortunately, they have not been simple enough, and the theories are complex. Then, a scientist proposes a simpler theory that provides empirical success. The two theories have an equitable distribution of empirical decision vectors and an approximately equal distribution of nonempirical decision vectors. Using Solomon's analysis, all the vectors would be weighted equally. However, in this scenario, simplicity should be weighted more heavily over other potential nonempirical decision vectors such as pride or radicalism because previous theories have been too complex. Thus, we can still protect the simplicity principle even though it is a nonempirical decision vector, for it depends on the context if it should be weighted more heavily when deciding between one empirically successful theory over another. Thus, Solomon is incorrect in dismissing simplicity.

I should also be clear in stating that simplicity serves as a guiding principle that can aid in evaluating and comparing competing hypotheses. It is not the only absolute criterion. Indeed, fields like physics and mathematics often prioritize complex frameworks and theories, and it is often said that simplifying these complexities will lead to inaccuracies and potential oversimplifications. However, the goal is not to unquestioningly favor simplicity at the expense of accuracy, but to strike a balance between simplicity and complexity that captures the essential features of a theory. In cases where simplicity conflicts with mathematical or scientific rigor, researchers must exercise caution and evaluate the trade-offs between simplicity and accuracy. Simplicity should not be dismissed altogether but rather should be utilized as a tool.

C. ISSUES WITH SOLOMON'S ACCOUNT OF NORMATIVELY APPROPRIATE DISSENT

Solomon would respond that the previous argument I made is unnecessary, for she already claimed that nonempirical decision vectors, when equally distributed, determine whether dissent is normatively appropriate. However, her normatively appropriate case of dissent is too vague. For example, deference to authority is a nonempirical decision vector, but who exactly is the authority? Ideology is a nonempirical decision vector, but what ideologies are favored over others? Many of Solomon's decision vectors could be more specific, resulting in a vague account of when dissent is appropriate. Her prescription is so vague that it does not tell the scientific and meta-scientific community exactly what to do. By being vague, Solomon insulates herself against counterarguments on decision vectors and when dissent is appropriate. For example, we can use her criteria to deem that if the nonempirical decision vectors are equally distributed, then scientists devoted to researching Young

Earth creationism or Lamarckian inheritance could do so as their dissent from mainstream views is normatively appropriate. This is a dangerous conclusion, which is why her account does not inform the scientific community of anything that is practical and can be utilized, which is why a greater degree of specificity regarding when dissent is appropriate is necessary. For this reason, the argument I previously proposed, where nonempirical decision vectors should be weighted depending on the context, is stronger and does not overly depend upon nonempirical decision vectors. However, it also needs to pay attention to them.

Solomon may also add that it would be quite difficult to know the influence of some vectors over others since we were not present during previous theories. Hence, adding weight to certain vectors over others is an impossible task. However, much like truth can be known in hindsight, the influence of certain vectors can also be known in hindsight. We can do so by observing the theories that succeed prior theories, the differences between them, and the historical context. For example, historians point to several reasons for the cause of World War II, such as the invasion of Poland, the Nazi regime, the Treaty of Versailles, and many more. There may be disputes over what cause was most influential, however, many historians agree that some were more influential than others, labeling some as proximate causes and others as ultimate causes by using primary and secondary sources. The same can be said for theories. While it may be a difficult task, it is not impossible.

My objections are all concerned with Solomon's response to the first argument. I addressed issues that weaken Solomon's Whig realism argument and issues with decision vectors that weaken her response to the simplicity principle. The contemporary debate regarding scientific realism will persist, whether arguments will build upon the first scientific realism argument or upon Whig realism and formulate a different perspective. There will be more arguments regarding science's ability to build upon previous theories and progress toward truth; those arguments themselves will do the same as they progress. Understanding Whig realism is the first step in a cascade of further arguments that dig at the relationship between science and the question of truth.[18]

Pranav Vadlamudi is a second-year student at Bowdoin College majoring in neuroscience and philosophy. His primary philosophical interests include the philosophy of science, bioethics, and epistemology. Outside of school, Pranav enjoys singing and playing an Indian classical instrument known as the harmonium.

NIETZSCHE AND THE BIRTH OF JOKER

YOUNGHYUN HWANG

ABSTRACT

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche employs the dichotomy of Apollonian and Dionysian to explain artistic phenomena. The film *Joker* shows the origin story of the Joker, a comic-book supervillain. This paper offers a reading of *Joker* through Nietzsche's ideas from *The Birth of Tragedy*. By doing so, it aims to achieve three things: first, to demonstrate the relevance of Nietzsche's aesthetic theory in analyzing culture; second, to reveal the political dimension of Nietzsche's thought in *The Birth of Tragedy*; and third, to shed light on the ominous implications of *Joker*'s popularity.

I. APOLLONIAN AND DIONYSIAN

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche introduces the Apollonian and Dionysian. Nietzsche's purpose in formulating these two drives is to explain artistic phenomena. The Apollonian drive gives rise to "that which appears to us" (i.e., dreams and the visual arts).[1] The Apollonian drive is also associated with the pleasure one feels at such aesthetic phenomena: "our innermost being . . . experiences the state of dreaming with profound pleasure and joyous necessity."[2]

The Dionysian, on the other hand, can be understood as the drive that lures us to "the reality that lies beneath," an experience of which is likened to intoxication.[3] The dissolution of the Apollonian world of semblance leads to a profound ecstatic response, in which the essence of the Dionysian drive in art can be found. The essence of the Dionysian lies in the profound experience of a "blissful ecstasy" that occurs when the Apollonian world breaks down.[4] But there is an inherent terror associated with Dionysian: in the eruption of the Dionysian drive an "enormous *horror* . . . seizes people" because the destruction of the world of semblance leads to confusion and cognitive dissonance.[5] Furthermore, in Dionysian experiences, pain and pleasure are not clearly distinguished; pain seems, in fact, to be an inherent part of Dionysian pleasure. In it are found excessive experiences of "pleasure, suffering and knowledge," "contradiction," and "bliss born of pain."[6]

Thus, Apollonian limitation is necessary to salvage the individual from the overpowering and ecstatic pain/pleasure of Dionysian intoxication. Apollonian allows one to cope with the knowledge of "the terrors and horrors of existence" (i.e., Dionysian), and the Dionysian is necessary because it drives the creation of Apollonian illusions: "[Apollo] shows us that the whole world of agony is needed in order to compel the individual to generate the releasing and redemptive vision."[7]

In short, the Apollonian and Dionysian are antagonistic but also interdependent. The Dionysian brings about the creation of Apollonian illusions, while the Apollonian contains the Dionysian in order to make it bearable. The constant tension between the two gives rise to artistic

1   Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 14–16.
2   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 16.
3   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 17.
4   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 17.
5   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 17.
6   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 27.
7   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 26.

phenomena, and, if they manage to reconcile for a moment, art of a high degree can be born—an example of which is the "sublime and exalted art of *Attic tragedy*."[8]

II. THE APOLLONIAN IN *JOKER*

The 2019 film *Joker* shows the transformation of Arthur—a troubled man suffering from financial and psychological issues—into the supervillain Joker. This transformation is portrayed in a thoroughly Nietzschean way. Arthur's tragic life leads to his transfiguration into the Joker, a Dionysian figure who finds artistic reverie in tragedy and pain.

Throughout the film, several illusions are shown that drive Arthur. The first is his dream of appearing on the late-night show of the comedian Murray. While watching Murray's show, Arthur fantasizes about being present at the show. Arthur's fantasy appears as a semblance of reality, or an Apollonian vision. In his fantasy, Murray and the audience vindicate Arthur's struggles. Murray assures Arthur that there is no shame in living with his mother and shows fatherly affection which seems to have been lacking from Arthur's life.[9] Other illusions function similarly: Arthur's illusory romance with a single mother named Sophie who lives in his same apartment complex, his imaginary success in a stand-up comedy act, and his belief of being the illegitimate son of Thomas Wayne—a millionaire running for mayor.[10]

These illusions all serve to make Arthur's tragic reality bearable. The tragic conditions of Arthur's life give rise to fantasies in which the conditions are justified. His fantasies redeem his suffering, seducing him to go on living. In Nietzsche's words, "by means of an illusion spread over things, the greedy Will always finds some way of detaining its creatures in life and forcing them to carry on living."[11] Thus we are offered a glimpse at the Apollonian drive in Arthur: a will to create illusions that make the tragic conditions of life bearable.

All illusions eventually break down. Murray ridicules Arthur by playing a clip of his failed stand-up act on television.[12] Arthur's relationship with Sophie turns out to have been imaginary.[13] Arthur's supposed relation to Thomas Wayne is revealed as a delusional fantasy

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8   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 28.
9   *Joker*, directed by Todd Phillips (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2019), DVD, 0:12:10 to 0:15:17.
10   *Joker*, 0:43:18 to 0:45:10.
11   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 28.
12   *Joker*, 0:59:37 to 1:00:45.
13   *Joker*, 1:17:23 to 1:18:42.

of his mother.[14] No illusion proves to be sustainable considering Arthur's tragic reality. One might say that the Apollonian drive constantly tried to contain the Dionysian, but eventually lost the struggle. The dissolution of all illusions catalyzes Arthur's transfiguration into the Joker.

III. THE DIONYSIAN IN JOKER

The tragic conditions of Arthur's life strengthen the Dionysian drive in him, resulting in the birth of the Joker. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche points to the wisdom of Silenus as the essence of Dionysian: "The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second-best thing for you is to die soon."[15] Arthur seems to have an intimation of this wisdom: he imitates suicide several times alone and eventually plans on committing it on Murray's show.[16] He writes the following joke in his notebook: "I hope my death makes more cents than my life."[17] The idea that death makes more sense than life is a reformulation of Silenus's wisdom. In the opening scene we see that the Dionysian is on the brink of eruption within Arthur. Arthur is doing his clown makeup, preparing for the day's work. He forces his mouth into a grin with his hands, but a teardrop falls from his eye. He trembles before letting go of his mouth, his face expressing misery afterward. It is as if the smile and frown were struggling agaist each other to take control over his face. Eventually, sorrow breaks through—the coerced semblance of happiness is now powerful enough to suppress the tragic reality.[18] Thus we see that Arthur was always immersed in the tragic view of life.

Furthermore, music serves to accentuate Arthur's transformation into the Joker. Arthur is portrayed as a musical persona. Director Todd Philips states that he conceived Arthur early on as "one of those people that has music in him."[19] Music is intimately related to the Dionysian: "the imageless art of music . . . is that of Dionysus."[20] Whenever the Joker appears it is in conjunction with music, dancing, and rejoicing—a clear indication of his Dionysian nature.

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14   *Joker*, 1:13:37 to 1:15:18.
15   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 23.
16   *Joker*, 1:24:00 to 1:24:13.
17   *Joker*, 0:06:25.
18   *Joker*, 0:01:05 to 0:01:24.
19   The New York Times, "Watch Joaquin Phoenix Do a Creepy Dance in 'Joker' | Anatomy of a Scene," YouTube, October 7, 2019, 1:25 to 1:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTVdN6s3rXY.
20   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 14.

IV. THE JOKER AS TRAGIC "HERO"

As the illusions that sustained him break apart one by one, Arthur is faced with the tragic truth of his life. Not only is his wishful reality proven to be false, but his own maniacal laughing condition turns out to have been the result of abuse he received as a child, one of the causes of which was his mother's neglect. In other words, what Arthur believed as reality—the illusion of a happy life that he had tried to sustain—is now laid bare as a lie, and he gazes into the tragedy that is his true reality and laughs.

In the absence of illusions, Arthur is forced to fully embrace Dionysian wisdom; he kills his mother and plans suicide on Murray's show. This "wisdom" of the "true essence of things" is "an unnatural abomination: whoever plunges nature into the abyss of destruction by what he knows must in turn experience the dissolution of nature in his own person."[21] Having gazed into the tragic truth of his existence, Arthur finds that the solid ground for sustaining his identity as happy and hopeful melts into air; his individuated being is on the verge of breaking apart. Thus, the gaze into tragic truth brings out the Dionysian Joker in Arthur, leading him to dance ecstatically on the staircase. The act of matricide triggers Arthur's full-out descent into the Dionysian underworld of the Joker: "some enormous offence against nature . . . must first have occurred to supply the cause whenever prophetic and magical energies break the spell of . . . the rigid law of individuation."[22] Right before committing the murder, Arthur articulates what is perhaps the central theme of the character of the Joker: "I used to think my life was a tragedy, but now I realize it's a fucking comedy."[23] Arthur's dream was to become a comedian. One might understand this quote as signaling Arthur's sublimation of tragedy into his art, comedy, after having gazed into the terrible truth.

It is at the very end of the film that we see Arthur's full-fledged transformation into the Joker during the "blood smile" scene.[24] A frenzied crowd takes an unconscious Arthur from a crashed vehicle and lays him on the hood of a car, on which Arthur rises as the Joker—a clear imagery of death and rebirth. What dies is the individuality of Arthur; what is born is the mythical figure of the Joker, a Dionysian deity who finds laughter in pain. The car hood is the stage on which the tragic "hero," the Joker, stands. He is surrounded by the tragic chorus, the frenzied protesters who have also lost their individuality in a bacchanal ecstasy

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21 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 48.
22 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 47–48.
23 *Joker*, 1:20:57 to 1:21:12.
24 *Joker*, 1:48:26 to 1:52:20.

of violence, who identify themselves with the Joker by wearing clown masks. They are the "Dionysian chorus which discharges itself over and over again in an Apollonian world of images."[25] Here the singularity of Arthur is transfigured into the universality of the Joker. Like the lyric poet Archilochus, Arthur speaks of the 'I' and "sing[s] the entire chromatic scale of his passions and desires," (i.e., his subjective suffering).[26] However, "the 'I' of the lyric poet sounds out from the deepest abyss of being; his 'subjectivity' . . . is imaginary."[27] Similarly, the tragedy of Arthur does not remain merely individual but achieves universal status in the crowd's eyes. The tragic nature of his subjective life is shared by the poor citizens of Gotham, and thereby transcends the boundaries of his subjectivity. Much like how "Archilochus, the passionately inflamed, loving and hating human being, is nothing but a vision of the genius itself" who is "no longer Archilochus but the genius of the world which expresses its primal pain symbolically in the likeness of the man Archilochus," Arthur is no longer Arthur but the Joker, a mythical figure embodying the universal status of tragic nature of existence and sublimating it into the art of comedy.[28] The blood smile is a symbolic gesture that conveys this message of sublimation: by means of pain, he creates joy.

V. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

In the last scene, the political dimension of *The Birth of Tragedy* becomes apparent. We see that the Apollonian-Dionysian antagonism within Arthur is mirrored in society as well. One might say that the last scene depicts an eruption of the Dionysian truth of tragic sociopolitical conditions against the narrative—the semblance of reality—of the ruling class. In the film, the media does not capture the truth of the subway murders. Nor does the would-be mayor Thomas Wayne, who intends to fix Gotham, understand the tragic lives of its lower-class citizens. He says on TV that "one of the reasons why I'm considering a run for mayor" is because "Gotham's lost its way" and "until [people like Arthur] change for the better, those of us who have made something of our lives will always look at those who haven't as nothing but clowns."[29] The narrative propagated by the ruling class ignores the tragic truth, and so fails to contain it. The illusions of the state break down and eventually the citizens transfigure into Dionysian protesters, intoxicated by "cruelty and

25   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 44.
26   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 29.
27   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 30.
28   Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 31.
29   *Joker*, 0:38:52 to 0:39:43.

sensuality" and "bliss born of pain." In the image of the Joker, they find redemption as he offers a new vision of existence that incorporates the terrible truth: the tragic conditions of their lives, a diabolical existence for which beauty and joy is not different from pain and suffering, and which revels in the chaotic state of the world.

In *Joker* we see how the existential struggles of an individual can have political repercussions. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, we see how art relates to existential issues such as pain and suffering. Analyzing *Joker* through The *Birth of Tragedy* allows us to see that the three spheres—existential, political, and aesthetic—are deeply intertwined. What emerges here is the existential dimension of politics. Political action can be united not only around a specific policy or issue, but also around a shared consciousness of suffering. Furthermore, the aesthetic can provide an answer for both the existential and the political. How can we cope with suffering? Nietzsche says we can do so by creating something beautiful out of it. Much like how an individual's suffering can be redeemed by art, political suffering can be redeemed by a new political vision. The Joker character provides a new myth in which tragedy itself is a precondition for the creation of a new vision, one which offers a new form of existence whose power stems from reverie in a perverse beauty. The film *Joker* offers hope that from turmoil something beautiful and powerful can be created. Thus, the Joker becomes a symbol of political demonstration.

But perhaps this picture is too hopeful. Is *Joker* really a film about social change? Nietzsche claims that the Dionysian individual is driven to inaction: he has "gazed into the true essence of things" and "regard[s] it as laughable or shameful that [he] should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint."[30] Arthur's claim that he is "not political" should be understood in a similar light.[31] The presence of tragic events in his life is so blown out of proportion that it can only invite laughter. Throughout the film, Arthur's jokes become more cynical and absurd. His disgust at the absurd and tragic is discharged by the artistic means of comedy. Indeed, this insight may explain the psychology behind Arthur's strange "joke" on Murray's show:

Arthur: Knock knock.

Murray: Who's there?

Arthur: It's the police, ma'am. Your son's been hit by a drunk

driver. He's dead [*laughs*].[32]

In the face of tragedy, Arthur can do nothing but laugh; the world

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30 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 40.
31 *Joker*, 1:39:30 to 1:39:39.
32 *Joker*, 1:40:34 to 1:41:02.

is inherently tragic, and any attempt to fix it is naïve. If one rejects any hope for actual change, what is left is to suffer through tragic conditions by accepting and reveling in the perversity and irony of tragedy. The sadomasochistic tendency behind this psychology is not too difficult to discern, especially in the case of Arthur's joke. Perhaps this is the source of the ominous feeling that lingers upon viewing *Joker*. After all, the film culminates in social violence and crime.. This is why an attempt to view *Joker* as an incitement toward social change falls short. At best, it can act as an incitement only negatively (i.e., as a preview of what will happen in the absence of social change).

VI. THE JOKER AS MYTH: THE JOKER AND THE MODERN WORLD

It is already a cliché to note that stories of superheroes and villains have taken the place of mythology in the modern era. What then does the recent portrayal of the Joker imply for our times? Nietzsche claims that the Dionysian drive gives rise to myth: "The Dionysian, with the primal pleasure it perceives even in pain, is the common womb from which both music and the tragic myth are born."[33] One might say that the Joker myth was born from the Dionysian universality of pain and suffering, themes that are becoming more prominent in modern life. Perhaps modern culture is returning to the "tragic view of the world" based on Dionysian insight.[34] But could one say, much like how Nietzsche envisioned a "*rebirth of the German myth*," that this tragic insight will engender a "higher" culture in modern times?[35] The pessimistic violence the film portrays leaves room for skepticism.

The fact that this movie resonated with many people may seem foreboding. Perhaps we have reached a point where the visions and dreams of the past are not potent enough to justify and redeem the tragic conditions prevalent in many people's lives. Indeed, in view of history, Nietzsche's discussions about the culture of his times appear in an ominous light:

> If the German should look around with faint heart for a leader to take him back to his long-lost home . . . then let him but listen to the blissfully enticing call of the Dionysian bird . . . which wants to show him the way.[36]

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33 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 114.
34 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 84.
35 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 109.
36 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 111.

One cannot help but be reminded of Hitler in this paragraph, as the "leader" who captivated the "faint heart" of German culture and wanted to "show [it] the way" back to its "long-lost home." If we replace "German" with "modern individual," does the quote not seem appropriate and foreboding for our times as well? In the absence of a powerful vision that incorporates the tragic truth of individuals, society may fall into Dionysian chaos.

Joker perhaps reflects our times in which no illusion is strong enough to justify the tragedy of life. If a figure arises, much like the Joker, who manages to create and embody a new vision that integrates the tragic within it, society will be swayed by it, for better or for worse. Thus, a Nietzschean reading of *Joker* offers insights into modern culture and politics. The dissolution of Apollonian illusions may lead to Dionysian madness and the creation of a new image, one that will have a lasting impact on both the individual and society as a whole.

Younghyun Hwang (he/him) is a second-year philosophy student at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. His interests are German Idealism, Existentialism, and Yam Phenomenology. He is currently working on an essay titled "What Is It Like to Be a Yam?"

THE RELEVANCE OF EMBODIED PRACTICE TO PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERSTANDING: Meditation and Hermeneutic Distanciation

HIERONYMUS WOLD

ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that meditation has a direct bearing upon philosophical discourse by enabling us to distance ourselves from the basic structure of subjectivity that often limits the scope of reason. Recent neurobiological hypotheses are discussed in conjunction with the method of hermeneutic phenomenology to argue that interpretations on the level of our neurobiology underly and construct our experience of ourselves as subjects and the sense of explicit rational understanding that arises from it. This implies that prediscursive embodied practice can play a crucial role in freeing our philosophical understanding from implicit assumptions.

I. INTRODUCTION

In philosophy, the most influential thinkers have been those who challenge our basic assumptions about what is true. In the Western tradition, the predominant method for cutting through misunderstandings to reach the truth has been to engage in rational inquiry and theoretical discourse. Buddhist traditions have similarly emphasized cutting through misunderstandings to reach the truth they obscure, but their primary method has been different, as they tend to de-emphasize rational inquiry in favor of embodied mindfulness practice.[1]

While many Buddhist practitioners engage in theoretical discourse outside of meditation, it is often considered a necessary practice alongside discussion. This mode of uncovering the truth requires the suspension of all thought, including rational thought. Unlike Western philosophy, Buddhist philosophy is derived from a nonconceptual truth directly revealed prior to thinking, rather than asserted rational principles. This way of overcoming misunderstanding, which can appear akin to divine revelation, can seem non-rigorous from the standpoint of current Western philosophical standards. At the very least, it may seem to have no bearing upon the project of Western philosophy, especially because enlightenment purportedly cannot be comprehended as an idea or transmitted through language.

In this paper, I will challenge the seeming irrelevance of meditation to Western philosophy and argue that the practice of meditation has a direct bearing upon rational philosophical discourse. I will argue that meditation can enable us to set aside assumptions that cloud understanding more than mental reflection does. I find that the characterization of Western philosophy as theoretical and discursive neglects the role embodied existence plays in conditioning how we reason about the world. Embodied practices like meditation can help us to become directly aware of interpretations of the world prior to thinking which one's take place on the level of biology.

I will argue for the relevance of meditation by exploring three areas. First, I will introduce the Western philosophical method of hermeneutic phenomenology, one of the most compatible Western philosophical methods with Buddhist thought. I will use it as the standpoint from which I frame understanding and truth within this paper. I will then introduce recent neuroscientific theories that suggest that the very basis of reason is influenced by our physical condition. I will also briefly discuss how these theories reveal that meditation is not a strictly mystical practice, but that there is evidence for it engaging directly with our capacity to

1   Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 11.

understand on a physical level. Finally, I will propose that meditation can facilitate a kind of "hermeneutic distanciation" that releases awareness from the constraints of subjectivity and rational thought. I do not do this to argue against the value of conceptual thought, but to highlight that we engage in rational thought more discerningly after meditating.

II. THE METHOD OF HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is the study of the structure of experience prior to any sort of theoretical interpretation of that experience. The development of phenomenology, beginning with Edmund Husserl, is an attempt to ground philosophy in a return to experiences prior to the conceptual categories imposed upon them.[2] Husserl's phenomenology begins with the method of phenomenological reduction, or bracketing what he calls the "natural attitude," a tendency to make theoretical assumptions about what does or does not exist. By bracketing, we begin with an awareness of what comes to us in raw experience uninterpreted through abstractions.[3] This bracketing is similar in aim to that of meditation, in which thoughts are allowed to dissolve while attention is brought directly to physical sensations without judgment. Husserl and those influenced by him saw this as means to keep philosophy from becoming relegated solely to the realm of mental abstraction.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, in particular, was developed by Martin Heidegger. The introduction of a hermeneutic method to phenomenology was with the aim of correcting a mistake he saw Husserl making, which was assuming it is possible to consciously set aside all prior commitments. Heidegger recognized that it is not possible for us to make sense of experience without a history of understanding upon which sense-making is contingent.[4] Instead, his hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges that how we fundamentally perceive is always shaped by a prior understanding constituted by personal situation, cultural context, and broader historical forces which cannot become fully, consciously explicit to us.

Hermeneutics, on its own, began as the study of how we interpret texts. Philosophical hermeneutics, rather than dealing with texts, deals with the study of interpretation itself. In other words, it is the interpretation of interpretation. It works as a method to integrate with

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2   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 50.

3   Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to A Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 56–59.

4   Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

phenomenology because it takes coming to understand something as a process of appropriation, or to "bring close the far."[5] Appropriation is the process of integrating new meanings into the larger context of what has been previously interpreted. The process of interpretation takes the structure of a "hermeneutic circle" in which new meanings are related to the whole of what is already understood and used to reconfigure the meaning of that whole in light of what has been learned. This new overall understanding serves as an increasingly detailed and holistic standpoint to make further interpretations as the process goes on. Rather than starting from a foundational principle and then building upon that, philosophical hermeneutics begins interpreting what is given "in medias res" and works backwards to increasingly clarify our underlying interpretations. By taking the way we make sense of the world as inherently appropriative, hermeneutic phenomenology is able to take into account that how we make sense of experience is already influenced by our history and situation. The goal of phenomenology becomes to clarify those conditions beginning within the given situation, rather than assuming it is possible to make sense of experience outside of our situatedness.[6]

The significance of this method in contrast to other Western methods is that it calls into question the pursuit of philosophical truth on positivistic grounds. A hermeneutic phenomenological method can bring increasing awareness of the conditions that structure our thinking and judgments and renders a clearer apprehension of experience possible without relying on the basis of an objective foundation. Furthermore, it implies that beginning from an objective basis may actually obscure the nature of how we come to understand things in the first place.[7] For these reasons, hermeneutic phenomenology is especially useful for discussing the nature of understanding within the Buddhist tradition. It can frame the process of coming to understand reality as a non-dualistic phenomenon in which the knower and known transform each other, a perspective which is not facilitated by popular epistemological approaches. Finding truth is the process of unpacking the conditions already immanent in experience and therefore does not necessitate closing a gap between the subject as knower and a noumenal, objective truth.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, however, has limits. The method itself recognizes that it is incapable of fully clarifying understanding. It can engage the conditions of understanding by bringing them to light

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5   Paul Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," *Noûs* 9, no. 1 (1975): 92–93, 10.2307/2214343.

6   Balveer Singh Sikh and Deb Spence, "Methodology, Meditation, and Mindfulness: Toward a Mindfulness Hermeneutic," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 15, no. 1 (2016): 10.1177/1609406916641251.

7   Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," 88–89.

only discursively. I will draw a distinction here between what I will call "discursive" and "nondiscursive" or at other points "prediscursive." What is discursive can be brought to light through conscious, conceptual thought and transmitted to others through language, while what is nondiscursive or prediscursive cannot be captured by conceptual thought and, at best, can only be indirectly gestured at with language. What hermeneutic phenomenology points to is that the conditioning of our conceptual thought runs far deeper than any sort of rational presuppositions and stretches down into the realm of the nondiscursive. While Heidegger worked to uncover the structure of what conditions our understanding of existence, he could only uncover what could be brought to light through written work and verbal discussion. The clarity of understanding facilitated by meditation is not arrived at this way.

Is there, therefore, any way to gain clarity about the prediscursive conditions of experience beyond the limits of concepts and language? I will now argue that embodied practices like meditation can do precisely this by illuminating understanding beyond the limits of what hermeneutic phenomenology can uncover. Meditation can help us to become directly aware of prediscursive interpretations of the world that take place on the level of the nervous system. These conditions must be encountered on an embodied and sensuous, rather than a linguistic or conceptual level. The practice of meditation is a process of reaching clarity of understanding which can work as a nondiscursive counterpart to hermeneutic phenomenology.

III. MEDITATION AND NEUROBIOLOGY

Meditation, specifically *samatha-vipassana* meditation, has been connected to phenomenological reduction by others.[8] The Buddha is said to have returned to "a first-hand test of lived experience" to counter the Hindu reliance on written texts and teachings.[9] The difference between meditation and phenomenological reduction, however, is that meditation is the involuntary cessation of all thought via changes in neurobiological responses rather than just a voluntary setting aside of all conceptual assumptions.[10] Although there are plenty of Buddhist teachings that discuss this involuntary cessation from a firsthand perspective, contemporary theorists in neuroscience can help explain the possibility of this cessation as rooted in our biology. They show that

8   Nathalie Depraz, Francisco J. Varela, and Pierre Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware: Advances in Consciousness Research* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 205–31.

9   Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware*, 208.

10   Depraz, Varera, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware*, 215–16.

prior to thought, there are neurobiological responses that condition how we interpret the world. They also suggest that meditation is a way to decondition and gain a greater awareness of these responses.

Neuroscientist Stephen W. Porges designated the term "neuroception" to refer to unconscious judgments our autonomic nervous system makes about the environment.[11] These judgments play a foundational role in how we construct our worldview and greatly influence how we act and think prior to making rational decisions or conscious observations. Neuroception is selective about what we do and do not pay attention to, what we are likely to emphasize about the environment, and the information we receive from others. This varies depending on the amount of stress we are under, the conditioning of the nervous system from past experiences, and whether or not we are conscious of them.[12]

Other neuroscientists including John Yates and James H. Austin have specifically discussed these unconscious judgments and how meditation alters them.[13] Austin, in his hypothesis on "selfless insight," which is similar to ego death, in the Zen tradition pulls from studies of the experiences of monks to correlate changes in attentional structure during meditation with physical changes in parts of our nervous system.[14] These include the dorsal and ventral attentional networks, which are respectively responsible for voluntarily directed focused attention and unconscious panoramic scanning of the environment.[15] *Samatha-vipassana* is hypothesized to relate to the dorsal and ventral networks and is proposed to decondition neuroceptive judgment, leading us to more awareness of how conceptual judgements and basic perceptions are unconsciously shaped by our attentional networks. During *samatha-vipassana*, all attention is directed towards physical sensation. One is not willfully doing anything, mentally or physically, other than being there in the present moment. This results in a "progressive synchronization between the field of the mental and that of the body."[16] This full synchronization of mind-body is a concrete, nondiscursive state of

11   Stephen W. Porges, "Neuroception: A Subconscious System for Detecting Threats and Safety," *Zero to Three* 24, no. 5, (2004), 19–24

12   Stephan W. Porges, "The polyvagal theory: phylogenetic substrates of a social nervous system" in *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 42, no. 2 (2001), 137, 10.1016/S0167-8760(01)00162-3.

13   John Yates, Jeremy Graves, and Matthew Immergut, *The Mind Illuminated: A Complete Meditation Guide Integrating Buddhist Wisdom and Brain Science* (Chicago: Dharma Treasure Press, 2015).

14   James H. Austin, "The Thalamic Gateway: How the Meditative Training of Attention Evolves toward Selfless Transformations of Consciousness," in *Effortless Attention: A New Perspective in the Cognitive Science of Attention and Action*, ed. Brian Bruya (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2010), 375–77.

15   Austin, "The Thalamic Gateway," 374–75.

16   Depraz, Varera, and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware*, 215–17.

experience prior to the split categories of mind and body generated by discursive thought.

This prediscursive sense of awareness is neurobiologically explainable according to Austin. Discursive thinking is facilitated by the dorsal attentional network. It is the part of the brain that facilitates our ability to think conceptually and to delineate ourselves as beings separate from the environment, enabling the phenomenological experience of being a self. The focused breathing and posture directed by the dorsal system during meditation tells the autonomic nervous system that we are in a safe environment. By downregulating the autonomic nervous system over time, neuroception is conditioned to interpret stimuli in more open and flexible ways. In contrast, the ventral attentional network is nondiscursive. It is not connected to the language center of the brain, and perceives space allocentrically, meaning that it is aware of the environment without reference to things as discrete objects or to the self as a discreet individual. Austin hypothesizes that in some particularly powerful meditative experiences, the dorsal attentional network can go offline entirely, leaving only the ventral attentional network online. This results in a nondual, thoughtless, wordless, and selfless pure awareness.[17] This also entails that conscious awareness is not necessarily tied to a self, meaning it is possible to gain a direct awareness of reality unmediated by subjectivity.

Does this mean that meditation is a way to fully transcend the limits of subjectivity and gain an "objective" view of reality? While both firsthand accounts of practitioners and findings in neurobiology support that it is a way to directly apprehend existence free from reference to the self, to call this view objective would be a misnomer because objectivity as a concept only makes sense in relation to subjectivity. What these theories suggest meditation does, instead, is allow awareness to transcend the subject-object dichotomy that is the basis of abstract and discursive thinking.

IV. MEDITATION AS DISTANCIATION FROM THE SELF

This opportunity to see beyond the constraints of rational thought and gain selfless awareness is valuable to the project of philosophy because it can help us to gain distance from the most basic frameworks through which we are doing philosophy—the thinking subject. Even when meditative practice does not result in a complete cessation of self, the

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17   Austin, "The Thalamic Gateway," 385–86.

theories I have mentioned corroborate that practicing *samatha-vipassana* in any capacity helps to decondition neuroception by downregulating the autonomic nervous system, which enables a fundamentally less judgmental basis upon which we are perceiving the world. When complete cessation of discursive thought happens and the self drops away, however, the cessation can be thought of as radical phenomenological bracketing on the level of neurobiology. Along with any rational or emotional judgements, what is "bracketed" is the very foundation of one's perspective. I propose that this kind of distance and how it is integral to clearer understanding can be understood hermeneutically as a kind of "distanciation."

Distanciation is a counterpart to appropriation that is a key aspect of understanding. In his work, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," Paul Ricoeur discusses the dialectical process of appropriation and distanciation in the comprehension of something. While I have already introduced appropriation, distanciation is—rather than integrating something new into our understanding—stepping back from something in order to see the distance, or difference between it and what is already understood. Without distanciation, appropriation is not possible because the unfamiliar thing cannot be recognized as unfamiliar, and instead will be obscured by preconceived interpretations. Ricoeur states that distanciation is, fundamentally, a disappropriation of the self from the self, lending to its parallel with the dropping away of the self during meditation.[18]

From the standpoint of both hermeneutic phenomenology and Buddhist teaching, because the subject-object divide is not taken as philosophically fundamental, the aggregate of what one knows, understands, and thinks is not different from one's sense of self. In order for distanciation to happen, a kind of distance from oneself is necessary to recognize something unfamiliar as such. This enables what is unfamiliar to then be appropriated and to then expand and clarify how one understands existence. Meditation can be thought of as a practice of the most fundamental kind of distanciation and can be understood without reference to mystical teachings, as I have endeavored to show with the inclusion of neuroscientific theory.[19]

What, then, is appropriated during this extreme self disappropriation? According to Ricoeur, and seemingly paradoxically, the end of this

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18   Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," *Philosophy Today* 17, no. 2 (1973): 129–41, 10.5840/philtoday197317233.

19   I do not mean "mystical teachings" here dismissively, as I believe the spiritual aspects of Buddhism cannot be dismissed without sacrificing the truth of Buddhist teachings.

hermeneutic process is self-understanding.[20] In parallel, hundreds of years earlier is Zen Master Dōgen's well-known statement, "to learn the self is to forget the self."[21] This becomes less paradoxical when we consider that from the standpoint of both hermeneutic phenomenology and Buddhism, what is understood and the one who understands are both integral. In coming to understand the world, we better come to grasp conditions that form us. Our body, which is shown to construct the very way we identify as ourselves—and is in turn formed by all the other conditions of corporeal reality—is a clear example of how the world constitutes us. When the mind drops away as something separate and becomes integrated with the body, we gain a direct awareness of the conditions that give rise to our subjectivity, and enough distance from a sense of self to gain a more panoramic awareness of the self as situated in relation to the rest of the world.

Ricoeur's account of distanciation and appropriation also implies that the process of understanding is inherently transformative, since it requires cultivating enough acceptance to distance oneself from what one knows and embrace something unfamiliar. Meditation, in particular, enables this on a radical level by entirely clearing one's awareness of everything one has ever thought. This can grant us a fundamentally more down-to-earth perspective when we do return to self-identification and discursive thought. I am not here, however, to further elucidate meditative insight itself. I am simply elucidating how meditation can work as a method to gain clearer understanding in general. To grasp the content of what is understood through this method requires direct experience through practice.

V. CONCLUSION

Throughout the history of philosophy, we find that the most revolutionary philosophical turns—such as Descartes' radical doubt, Hume's skepticism, Kant's transcendental move and Heidegger's ontological difference—are from philosophers who gained enough perspective on the ways of thinking they were embedded in. They noticed presuppositions that constituted the basis of how philosophy was done. For cultivating more rigorous philosophical reasoning, meditation can, in a similar vein, serve as an indispensable tool to gain enough distance from our most fundamental concepts. Given the combined evidence of

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20 Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function," 73.

21 Dōgen Kigen, The *Heart of Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, trans. Masao Abe and Norman Waddell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 64.

millennia of firsthand accounts and recent correlating neurobiological evidence, there is reason to believe it can help us gain distance from the self as a thinking subject.

In this paper I have used hermeneutic phenomenology as a standpoint to understand how we come to understand existence. In a hermeneutic fashion, meditation can have a direct bearing upon the rigor of philosophy, not because it gives us access to new information, but because it can help us develop a great enough distance from unconscious conceptual commitments. It can be a direct path to cultivating enough flexibility of perspective to embrace what is not yet explicit to our understanding with as little imposition of bias as possible. Because distanciation is what enables the appropriation of new understanding, distanciation from the foundation of subjectivity can help us to appropriate a holistic understanding of how we situate the self as thinking subjects in pursuit of truth.

I have emphasized that this meditative clearing of perspective happens at the level of the body rather than through rational reflection. This is because to gain distance from subjectivity and reason itself, we must undergo a cessation of the very faculties that would enable us to mentally reflect. The neurobiological possibility that the self and ideas are a construction within awareness, rather than constituting awareness itself, also implies that to properly explore the nature of truth, we should take into consideration cultivating understanding through embodied practice alongside rational discourse.

Hieronymus Wold is a senior at Saint Mary's College of Maryland in southern Maryland. He is a double major in philosophy and English with a minor in anthropology. Hiero plans to study comparative philosophy as a graduate student. His philosophical interests include continental and Japanese traditions, phenomenology, religion, and environmental ethics.

THE FORMATION OF BODY MEMORY UNDER THE PATRIARCHY: Embodiment and Male Validation

VALENCIA WHITE

ABSTRACT

Within this essay, I seek to understand how the patriarchy impacts the concept of body memory and creates gendered bodily behaviors. I first explain and define the relationship between one's incorporative memory and affective framing. Given this relationship, I explore what male validation is and how it becomes embodied. I argue that the formation of the incorporative memory and affective framing under the patriarchy creates an embodied experience of male validation. As women begin to understand gender roles, they shift how they move their bodies, and continue to display this gendered movement because men validate it.

I. INTRODUCTION

Under the philosophical study of embodied cognition, the mind and body are one combined entity, our bodies becoming subjects of knowing and understanding. Following this belief, the idea of a profound and unique bodily sense of memory is now a question that has been posed. Feminist thinkers have begun to use these ideas to explain and understand how gender is displayed and enacted through our bodies. It is notable, however, that feminists have long questioned the relationship of the body and mind, as well as how this relationship has been further shaped by the experience of oppression before those within other disciplines have.

As a feminist philosopher, I seek to understand how the concept of body memory is impacted by the patriarchy and has created gendered bodily behaviors. In this paper, I define body memory from an embodied cognition perspective and affective framing, arguing how the two concepts interact with each other. Furthermore, I use Sandra Bartky's definition of femininity to explore what male validation is and why it is important to many women. Using this framework and the established embodied cognition theories, I argue how male validation becomes an embodied experience for women.

II. UNDERSTANDING INCORPORATIVE MEMORY AND AFFECTIVE FRAMING

Often, memory is regarded as our ability to remember past events and recall information, but memory can be experienced through the body as well. Actions such as riding a bike or writing are examples of the body developing habits and dispositions that are remembered throughout the course of one's life. In "The Phenomenology of Body Memory," Thomas Fuchs expands on these theories and defines implicit memories as a form of knowledge that can only be expressed when a bodily effort is made.[1] Implicit memory exemplifies the body's ability to retain information and achieve it without having to actively retrieve the information. Implicit memory is not simply one's reflexes, but rather a specific kind of bodily habit that is formed through imagined movement and motor execution.[2]

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1   Thomas Fuchs, "The Phenomenology of Body Memory," in *Body Memory, Metaphor, and Movement*, ed. Sabine C. Koch, et al. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 9–22.
2   Fuchs, "The Phenomenology of Body Memory," 16.

One specific form of this implicit body memory is called incorporative memory. According to Fuchs, one begins to develop an embodied personality structure at a young age. Incorporative memory is the shaping of bodily habits by attitudes and roles that are produced by perceiving the behavior of others. It is formed through imitating and identifying another's behavior and understanding the response it receives from the people around them. Therefore, the body becomes externally perceived and is now a body-for-others because it conveys social roles, and one becomes deliberate with their self-expression. This suggests that how we present ourselves is dependent on our interactions with others: noticing how they display their own bodies and behaviors, as well as noticing how others interact with us. One learns how to navigate the world through observation and mirroring others.[3] Engaging in incorporations is an example of body memory because it is not a behavior that we are trying to remember how to do or what it is, it is simply a habit that we are conditioned to take part in. These internalized patterns are often shared with others, and these socially set dispositions can demean one to their general social presence.

According to Fuchs, this can also cause discomfort within oneself because being aware of others' judgments can impact spontaneous bodily movements. A person may constrict their body to comply with social roles, creating feelings such as embarrassment, shame, or pride. This can also impact one's disposition in the long term, shaping one's personality with traits like shyness, sensitivity, or vanity.[4] These traits serve to limit natural bodily impulses because a person becomes fixated on the idea of how their body is viewed by and interacts with others, which, according to Fuchs, can lead to neurotic behavior.[5]

This idea is especially important for understanding embodiment from a feminist perspective. Women's movements can become constricted because they are aware that, as women, they are expected to behave a certain way. The incorporative memory is essential to defining how it looks to move as a woman. As we view others and mimic how other women engage in gender roles from their bodily movements, a woman's incorporative memory begins to form in a way that imitates the behavior of the women that they observe.

While one's body memory, and specifically incorporative memory, is important in understanding why many women pre-reflexively act in ways that afford them male validation, Michelle Maise's writing on affective framing creates a greater understanding of how one's emotional state will impact their actions. According to Maise, one's needs, desires, and interests directly influence the perception of their surroundings, and this

processing of one's environment is called affective framing.[3] In Maise's view, all information processing involves affective framing because through this process we decide what information is important and what can be ignored.[4] Affective framing also impacts the decisions a person makes because they are more prone to act in a way that is aligned with their emotional state.[5] According to Maise, it is impossible to eliminate one's affective framing from their decision making and judgment because our emotions are always present. Additionally, memories are not just simply remembering something that happened, but they are impacted by one's affective framing at the time because their emotional state, needs, and desires played a role in which information they process and hold on to. Memories from people in the same situation can be different because their affect at the moment alters what specific details they hold onto.

Affective framing is particularly important for women because oppression creates different desires and needs that will impact one's affect. Those who benefit from privilege will have different needs and desires from those who do not, and therefore the way that they perceive and move within the world will drastically differ. A lack of systemic power creates a dynamic where those who are oppressed must act in ways that make them appeal to the dominating systems of oppression in order to gain closer proximity to the controlling narrative of the oppressors.

Understanding the framework and concepts as outlined by Fuchs and Maise could be further supplemented by considering more well known concepts within psychology, such as classical and operant conditioning. I acknowledge the complicated and approach notion of embodied cognition and the similarities classical and operant conditioning share with the concept of incorporative memory and affective framing. Although, embodied cognition is more focused on the effect of one's environment on their actions and bodily movements, so I do stress the differences between the psychological and embodied cognitive theories. Further, the relationship to the body that embodies cognition analysis is useful for feminist frameworks, which focus on gender as an embodied experience, making it more relevant to my argument.

I argue that the concepts of incorporative memory and affective framing are related because as we move through the world, affective framing impacts how we engage with our incorporative memory. Incorporative memory is demonstrated through recreating movement, and according to Maise's account, almost all actions are associated with one's affective state. This indicates that how we engage

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3   Michelle Maise, *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 83.

4   Maise, *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition*, 85.

5   Maise, *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition*, 85.

with incorporations depends on our affective framing in the current moment. We move our bodies a certain way because of how we are feeling. Additionally, a large role of the incorporative memory is understanding our relation to others, and this is related to one's affective framing because understanding how others perceive you will impact your affect. The incorporative memory is directly related to affect because it involves moving in a way that aligns with your desire to be perceived a certain way. For example, if I am going to a job interview, and I am confident in my abilities for the job, I will pre-reflexively try to embody my confidence to the interviewer. On the contrary, if I am feeling shy, my body will pre-reflexively convey my shyness.

Further, I argue that our affective framing impacts bodily movement, which evolves into incorporations because our bodies are more likely to grab onto movements with greater affective importance. Moments that elicit a strong affective reaction have a greater chance of being remembered within the body because the emotional reaction is much more significant. If we are continually exposed to an experience that elicits the same affective reaction and also view other's reactions to a similar experience, it will develop as an incorporation because the incorporative memory is formed through the imitation of other's behaviors and understanding the social significance of said behaviors. One example of this is learning how to be sympathetic to others when they are upset. We view how people enact sympathy such as hugging or rubbing someone's back and this becomes a pre-reflexive response when we see someone crying or sad.

III. IDENTIFYING MALE VALIDATION

Before I can begin to elaborate on how male validation can become an embodied experience for women, I must first explain what male validation is and why it is important. In this context, male validation is the approval that a man gives to a woman. For the purpose of this essay, male validation will be defined from an embodied perspective. This means that a man can communicate interest or disinterest, affection or disaffection through body movements. Male validation is not necessarily verbal. This validation is often actively sought out by women, and in many cases, it makes women feel good about themselves due to the power that men hold under the patriarchy. Validation is often only received when women can present themselves in a way that appeases the male gaze. According to Sandra Bartky in "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," there are three different specific

practices that define femininity.[6] The first is the size and configuration of the body which involves standards promoting diets, exercise, and plastic surgery. The second is bodily comportment, which includes policing the way in which women take up space, move, and generally compose themselves. The last practice is the use of the body as a decorative surface, meaning a woman adorns herself with makeup and chooses the right clothes to look like the ideal woman. These practices create a society in which women implicitly view themselves and their bodies as inferior and deficient because men control the narrative of what women should look like to be deemed attractive.[7] This structure places the power of how many women will choose to enact themselves in the hands of men because many women's senses of power regarding control over their looks comes from appeasing men under these conditions. It is important for me to note that this definition and experience of male validation is from a heterosexual viewpoint. Therefore, while women can have a say in gender roles and enactment, considering that this is from the perspective of heterosexuality, the validation from a man will be more meaningful.

Following Foucault, Bartky describes this self-awareness of perception from men as the concept of self-surveillance. This self-surveillance is a form of obedience that is displayed under the patriarchy because a woman is conscious of the fact that she is under surveillance in a way that a man is not.[8] The woman surveys herself, viewing herself from the perspective of the male gaze and policing herself as an act of compliance. This self-surveillance manifests in conforming to the standards of the patriarchy because a woman is aware of how she is perceived through the eyes of a man.[9] Women scrutinize themselves to ensure that they have a body that moves and looks acceptable enough to please others. Male validation relies on women's inability to view themselves outside of the standards that men set because women have less power to control the standards that deem them attractive. Regarding the power that men are given in the patriarchy, they have a significant influence on the narrative surrounding women's bodies and, in some ways, control the reality and truth of normative femininity. As men define the value of a woman's beauty, for a woman, receiving validation from a man can often define her own worth because it is a sign that she is accurately depicting herself in a way that attracts men. When a man gives a woman validation of her behavior or appearance, it often secures

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6   Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*, ed. Rose Weitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29–33.
7   Bartky, "Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 33.
8   Bartky, "Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 42.
9   Bartky, "Modernization of Patriarchal Power," 42.

her within her womanhood. While there are some instances where women may act in order to seek other female approval, I still believe that patriarchal validation is deeply engrained into women. Due to its significance, I will soley be focusing on the impact of male validation.

IV. MALE VALIDATION AS AN EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

As explained by Bartky, the concept of femininity is tied to the body, and therefore I believe that the concept of male validation as an embodied experience needs to be examined further. I argue that male validation becomes embodied through incorporative memory as we learn to embody social norms and roles. Furthermore, the incorporative memory that is used when seeking male validation also involves affective framing because of the relationship between the two concepts.

As children, girls are not born with the intention to seek validation from their male counterparts. The behavior of seeking male validation is due to gender roles and norms that are conditioned from a young age. Girls view behavior from the people around them or from media they are exposed to, and this informs their beliefs of what a woman should look like, act like, and overall, what a woman should be. In "Throwing Like a Girl," Iris Marion Young analyzes the difference in movement between men and women. Young notes that the movement of women's bodies are much more hesitant and constricted in comparison to the men, and that this feminine bodily comportment is expected of women and causes them to believe that they are capable of less, even if there is no physical explanation for a woman's limited movement. It is primarily a bodily comportment that is generated because women are taught to take up less space and move with more discipline.[10] This display of one's body is more likely less comfortable for women in comparison to moving freely and without fear of judgment.

Women unconsciously engage in this behavior because it is rooted in them through incorporative memory. Additionally, when women do carry their bodies in this manner, it is not a habit that women are knowingly and consciously engaging in because it has become a conditioned part of their incorporative memory. While this behavior may be more physically uncomfortable, women are moving in a way that they are conditioned to engage in with the purpose of complying with the male gaze and attaining male validation. A woman may ignore her natural bodily disposition

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10   Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality," *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 143, 10.1007/bf02331805.

and form an incorporative memory that acts in accordance with social norms to maintain the facade of femininity as displayed by bodily movements. In this sense, male validation becomes embodied because women's incorporative memory becomes controlled and constricted by social standards that are set by men. While seeking male validation is societally beneficial for women because men have more power, it is still an oppressive habit that women have been conditioned to engage in. It does nothing to break down the unjust power structure that gender establishes and continues to promote behavior that complies to normative femininity. Additionally, affective framing is a pre-reflective response, meaning that one can engage in it without having to think about or notice how their emotions are affecting their actions.

Furthermore, the self-surveillance as described by Bartky can also be used to show male validation as an embodied experience. When women are conforming their bodily movements, they are aware of the perception that their body receives and subconsciously monitor their own movement to move in accordance with patriarchal norms, through the incorporative memory. A woman's incorporative memory is intertwined with her self-surveillance because she is conditioned to behave in a way that is under the guidance of male approval. While self-surveillance seems an active and conscious act, as we become conditioned to embody gender norms, it is internalized as an unconscious act. Women form gendered movements from a young age that are part of the incorporative memory. As they engage in this behavior, they receive male validation. Because a woman understands the importance of male validation, there is positive affective framing that will always be linked to said behavior. Therefore, male validation becomes an embodied process.

Male validation is also sought out by women because it invokes a positive affective response for women through the relationship that affective framing and the incorporative memory creates. As women begin to understand how their bodies are perceived and the response they can get from men, the underlying power structure that is embedded within the performativity and construct of gender creates a positive affective framing with male validation. As a woman begins to embody a behavior that is considered feminine, and then receives validation from a man, that bodily movement now is attached to an incorporative memory with positive affective framing in which male validation becomes a component. When a woman recreates a certain movement, male validation will always be a part of the affective framing that is associated with the body memory because the woman has received validation from the behavior. Women will continue to enact this behavior that receives a positive response from men because of the feeling that is associated

with it and because there is a cultural norm that tells them to behave this way. Said feeling is only given so much weight because of the power men and their validation hold within society. Further, young girls begin to understand the importance of male validation by perceiving the reactions of other women after they view someone else receiving male validation. This shapes the affective and the incorporative memory because, by observation, women learn the importance of appeasing the male gaze, and looking acceptable enough to please others.

V. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have examined the importance of incorporative memory and one's use of affective framing when forming the incorporative memory. Using this framework, I have found that this relationship is key to understanding how women's participation with male validation as a form of sense-making becomes embodied and is internally experienced. Furthermore, the affective framing that women have associated with male validation can cause a woman to unconsciously form oppressive habits. Male validation goes beyond complying with beauty standards or following trends. It is conditioned to be sought out from a young age, as girls are taught to comport their bodies through the incorporative process, to appeal to men and deny their natural bodily instincts. Women continue to comply with these gendered movements because it is so deeply engrained within their bodily memory. Additionally, because the male gaze has a significant hold on the pressure women feel to engage with these movements, the affective framing that is conflated with these movements is positive despite the behaviors being oppressive. For feminist philosophers, understanding how the patriarchy becomes embodied within women is key to progressing past the idea of the patriarchy as purely ideological and instead enacting new ideas on how women can resist oppression. Further discussion of experiencing the patriarchy as embodied and how the patriarchy becomes an essential part of body memory for many women is needed to understand how certain behaviors can be unlearned and how women can reclaim control over their bodies. Using embodied cognition to transform feminist theories into actual embodied experiences that women face is useful in conveying the deep-rooted impacts of gender.

Valencia White is a graduating senior studying philosophy and women's studies at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Her philosophical interests consist of Black feminist philosophy, embodied cognition, decolonial philosophy, and indigenous philosophy. After graduation, Valencia plans to pursue a PhD in philosophy to further expand her philosophical research.

MORE THAN WE CAN CHEW: An Analysis of Discourse Concerning Patriarchy and the Prevalence of Women's Eating Disorders

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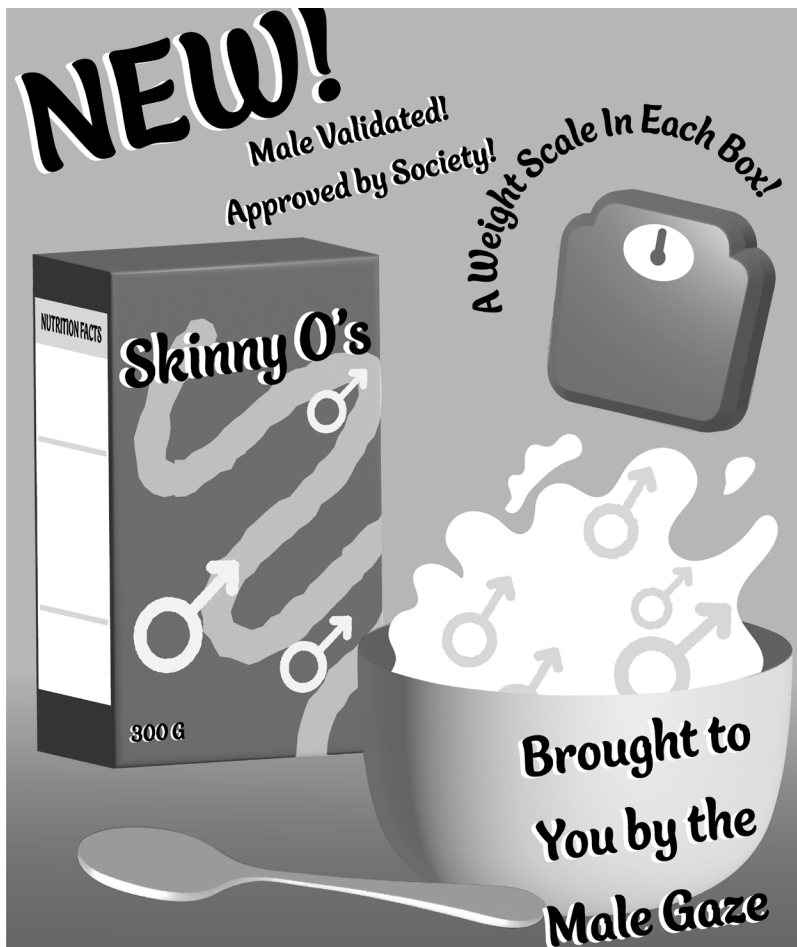
AUGUST VITARBO

ABSTRACT

Western cultural norms resulting from patriarchal oppression contribute to the development of eating disorders in women. As represented by various philosophers, social factors can contribute to self-discipline of the body, which characterizes most image-based eating disorders. Critics of fundamental texts argue over the best way to engage in feminist discussion concerning these eating disorders, given that anorectics are often excluded from mainstream discourse. This paper proposes that the feminist community must approach conversations about eating disorders in three steps: recognition, sympathy, and acknowledgement. This is the only way that we can move towards addressing the cultural causes of individual pathologies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Eating disorders are a phenomenon all too familiar to many women. While not strictly limited to women, the prevalence with which these behaviors develop along gendered lines is astonishing. Data from the National Institute of Mental Health shows that lifetime prevalence of eating disorders is three to five times higher for women than for men.[1] Destructive relationships with dieting, exercise, and body image plague the modern woman, even without diagnoses such as anorexia or bulimia. However, as we will observe, this recent surge in eating disorders is indeed reflective of ancient practices of discipline, specifically a discipline of the female form. Omnipresent patriarchal values that work to oppress or repress women are cemented by western media and capitalist culture. Eating disorders are a common way in which these values present themselves. Within an oppressive structure, women internalize concepts that feed insecurity, self-loathing, and anxiety. Women must respond by adopting their presumed roles within the structure, or by rejecting them. The eating disorder is simultaneously a manifestation of cultural pressures on women and also an act of rebellion against them. As demonstrated by various philosophers, deeply entrenched social norms concerning women's bodies have resulted in worsening eating disorder and diet culture trends. This discipline of the female form results from a patriarchal view of women as consumable objects that has only been intensified by the emergence of social media and agents of consumerist culture.

The first sections of this paper follow a literature review structure highlighting various philosophers that have discussed issues related to eating disorders in a general chronology. Analyzing their messages and how their arguments relate to one another is vital for understanding the scope of the issue. Specifically, the works of Bordo and Grey, as we will see, lie on the extreme ends of eating disorder discourse. Ultimately, these polarized stances are not useful or productive, and instead lead to a stalemate of ideology. This paper argues that areas of feminism must be developed that recognize eating disorders as a complex facet resulting from patriarchal struggle, while simultaneously acknowledging the harm of eating disorders and the blind establishment of "safe-spaces."

II. TO BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

Emerging with early feminist movements, the object-subject dualism has been recognized as oppressive to women as beings. The value of women is inextricably linked to our bodies. To place the issue in the language of the existentialists, women are reduced to their objectivity, or physical form, and are denied subjectivity or transcendence[2]. These reductions are supported by western cultural norms that place women as inferior to men. As the traits that we assign women from birth, namely docility, compassion, and fragility are reinforced through media and behavior, so are the traits that are traditionally masculine, power, aggression, and domination. As we will see, these limitations placed on gender create circumstances in which disordered eating can thrive.

Michel Foucault's analysis of bodily control in his work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, while not focused on gender, is a foundational work feminist writers expand upon.[3] Foucault demonstrates how cultural structure disciplines bodies through the play of spatial distribution, coding of activities, accumulation of time, and composition of forces, largely by drawing analogies to military and penal systems. Foucault ultimately concludes this section of his analysis stating that, "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved."[4] Docility as a feminine characteristic is painfully acute in this analysis. Part of the phenomenon of eating disorders is the reduction of the female body for consumption, and the subsequent need for improvement. That is why, to the anorectic, there is no such thing as "skinny enough." A docile (anorexic) body is one constantly being shaped by the forces of discipline that regulate it, temporally and spatially. While Foucault did not have an objective of analyzing women's oppression in this text, other authors following him have used this deeply analytical view of discipline in the development of feminist arguments surrounding bodies and eating.

III. IT'S NOT ME, IT'S YOU

Susan Bordo highlighted women's relationship to their bodies in her work *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. She

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2   Historically, this argument is made explicitly by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). I will discuss other theorists in the analysis that follows.

3   Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

4   Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 128.

establishes the eating disorder as a "*widespread cultural disorder*" rather than the individual psychopathology that has been widely accepted as a clinical model.[5] She spends time outlining the messages that are expressed to women through commonly held beliefs and sentiments in western culture. The fear of gaining weight, losing sex appeal, and the urge to make oneself shrink stem from homogenized and normalized images of feminine beauty.[6] Slenderness becomes the physical representation of willpower and perfection. Bordo works to decode these ideological messages through a comparison between various advertisements.[7] Ideas of mastery or control over food intake are central to the themes of these advertisements. Women's cravings are demonized, whereas men's appetites are insatiable. Some advertisements link consumption of food to sexual appetite, using suggestive language and imagery to do so. Even when women are shown indulging their cravings or desires, they "are permitted such gratification from food only in measured doses."[8] This restriction feeds into the notion that women achieve their gratification from nourishing others, not themselves.[9] Bordo comments on binge eating, saying that feeding oneself as a woman, since not for pleasure, is usually tied to feelings of shame, despair, and loneliness.[10] With such stigma around eating, "denying oneself food becomes the central micro-practice in the education of feminine self-restraint and containment of impulse."[11] This discipline is deeply rooted in the life of the eating disordered individual. In remembering the self-discipline that I myself imposed, I also recall the intense pride I felt as a result, bragging about the low number of calories I had eaten that day and smiling at the decreasing numbers on the scale. A growling stomach to me was a sign of success. Understanding the cultural forces that drive someone to an eating disorder necessitates an understanding of how they present in the anorexic mind.[12]

Perhaps the most potent of Bordo's insights develop from her essay entitled "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture."[13] Here, Bordo introduces three axes on which anorexia can

5   Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and The Body* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2003), 55.
6   Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women,* ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210.
7   Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and The Body* (Oakland: University of California, 2003), 99–139.
8   Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 112.
9   Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 118.
10   Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 126.
11   Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 130.
12   Helen Malson, *The Thin Woman: Feminism, post-structuralism and the social psychology of anorexia nervosa* (London: Routledge, 1998).
13   Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 139–64.

be understood. The dualist axis refers to mind-body dualism, which is when the body is experienced as alien to one's true self, something of a limitation, burden or even a corruptor. The body comes to be seen as something to be controlled and dominated, which manifests in anorexia as the control over hunger. The physical sensation becomes a source of dread and those with a disordered relationship with food resent their body for needing nourishment, wishing to just avoid eating all together.

The next axis is the control axis, where one has "gotten hooked on the intoxicating feeling of accomplishment and control."[14] Women who starve themselves might feel an uncanny sense of control over what they eat, especially if they lack that in other areas of their lives. In the final axis, we come to the issue of eating disorders as a gendered issue. While Bordo and many other authors comment on generalized dieting and thinness as a cultural ideal without necessarily focusing on eating disorders, she notes that the extreme behaviors associated with anorexia are, "not radically discontinuous . . . from fairly common female misperceptions."[15] Like most women, the anorectic fears ridicule from men for being "fat." The project of thinness becomes all-encompassing, the objective to eat less, to size down, to negate oneself. Eating disordered individuals go to extremes to lessen themselves, "caring desperately, passionately, obsessively about attaining an ideal of coolness, effortless confidence, and casual freedom."[16]

IV. DISCIPLINE IN NUMBERS

Building on Bordo's work, Sandra Lee Bartky's essay "Suffering to Be Beautiful" develops a distinct analysis of the disciplines of femininity in the context of modern social norms.[17] Bartky introduces the ideas of male gaze, ritualized camaraderie, and the fashion-beauty complex into Foucault's analysis of Discipline and Bordo's re-envisioning of cultural pathology. She describes how, in following disciplinary measures and cultural traits associated with women, "the properly feminine body must remain . . . as an ornamented surface."[18]

Dieting is simply another way for us to follow this discipline, to take up less space. She describes how this discipline makes one's body

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14   Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 149.
15   Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 154.
16   Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 164.
17   Sandra Lee Bartky, "*Sympathy and Solidarity" and Other Essays* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).
18   Bartky, *Sympathy and Solidarity*, 16.

the enemy. As we fight with our bodies through supposed willpower and mental strength, weight thereby becomes correlated to moral deficiency and weakness. Through a careful overview of media and advertisements targeted at women, Bartky describes how women have been convinced that their faces or bodies are defective, conditioned to look for imperfections to fix. The body becomes an endless project of self-discipline, with women forced to keep up with culturally imposed standards. However, Bartky also introduces the idea that femininity as a performance of identity can act as a source of solidarity with other women: I suffer as you suffer to be beautiful. This acknowledgement is not always positive, women who defy these normative disciplines of femininity are judged by their peers. I argue that these alienating behaviors are even more potent in the eating disordered individual. At the extremes, the anorectic or bulimic lives to discipline their body, camaraderie over communal suffering eludes them.

V. PHILOSOPHERS FOR EMPATHY

Being someone that suffered from and has since overcome an eating disorder, reading these texts felt oddly invasive, as if someone had read my diary and was now narrating my secrets. Some critics of these texts use this argument not to debunk or disprove anything Bordo states in her foundational work, but to criticize her language or use of the anorectic as something to be expelled. In "A Perfect Loathing: The Feminist Expulsion of the Eating Disorder," Stephanie Houston Grey explores the anorectic as a scapegoat for feminist issues, who, in the process, is stripped of their humanity.[19] She claims that Bordo's writing and other works surrounding it shifted the conversation around eating disorders from one of liberation to one of containment: anorectics had to be quarantined from the feminist community for it to be perfected.

Grey picks up on one thread in Bordo's analysis of women with eating disorders. Bordo posits that they are unaware of their political stance, although others may paint the anorectic in protest. They do this because self-discipline is generally considered a masculine trait, which liberates the anorectic from the confines of femininity. Thereby, she acts as an agent of the patriarchy, operating within the realms of feminism, seeking to destroy it from within. Taken from the individualist perspective, Grey develops the idea—that she later rejects—that anorexic bodies must be construed as something to be eliminated in the feminist's eyes, lest

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19   Stephanie Houston Grey, "A Perfect Loathing: The Feminist Expulsion of The Eating Disorder," *KB Journal* 7, no. 2 (2011).

they be looked at favorably by other anorectics. Isolation is encouraged by relating weight to political awareness and belonging within the feminist realm. If not for this isolation, the anorectic might become a source spreading these conditions, the patient of an epidemic. Grey's counter claim then follows that projecting thin bodies as a symptom of the patriarchy and something to eliminate is not the best way to deal with the issue of eating disorders. She claims that new realms within feminism need to be developed where the eating-disorder community can coalesce.

VI. DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

In Grey's critique of Bordo's writing, her argument follows a logical progression to her conclusion that feminism needs to allow safes spaces for the eating disorder community. She begins by examining the idea that "the projection of the eating-disordered individual as an inauthentic, failed women has become so commonplace in the academic and popular culture that she has been reduced to a stereotype."[20] Grey claims that the more pervasive this model of the anorectic as a non-person becomes, the more ostracized anorectics will feel. This determination leads to the conclusion that there needs to be an integration of anorectic perspectives into the mainstream feminist discussion. It is unclear from her writing, however, exactly how this would proceed. In terms of "spaces" in which anorectics feel safe and heard, they usually follow the lines of pro-ana content and an exaltation of eating disorders.

As someone who has been a part of these spaces before, I know they can be damaging and harmful. While there is undoubtedly an element of Bordo and others' work that casts an exclusionary shadow upon eating disorders, I must question whether or not Grey's call to arms is the best feminist alternative. To bring eating disordered voices into the fold of feminist discourse would undoubtedly introduce different perspectives; however, since these disorders have been recognized as all-consuming, it would often be difficult for these individuals to intellectualize their experiences to the extent necessary for philosophical debate.[21] The closest we could get to an authentic account would be one like a post-recovery retro-analysis. Someone active in their eating disorder would likely be

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20 Grey, "A Perfect Loathing."

21 Janice Moulton, "A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 149–64.

unable to engage in discussion while disengaging themselves from the disordered mind: the ceaseless struggle for control, the comparative and combative nature towards other women, the skewed relationship with sex and sexuality. While each of these items might present differently in each individual, the overall discourses at play cannot accommodate such disordered views without perpetuating the disillusion of the anorectic. Both Bordo's and Grey's instructions for the feminist community are problematic.

How do we continue to discuss and analyze eating disorders without ostracizing anorectics, yet also not hinging the conversations on their disordered views? I believe the answer lies in the way we frame our discourse. Conversations about eating disorders undoubtedly belong in feminist circles. As this paper has set out to acknowledge, eating disorders are a symptom of the same patriarchal oppression that roots all other feminist struggles.[22] To engage in productive debate, we must center the conversation around recovery.[23] By contextualizing the social pressures on the anorectic and unpacking the limitations keeping her from healing, we can understand and analyze eating disorders in a way that is genuinely helpful to the eating disordered individual. This way, we are not simply expelling this group, nor are we feeding into the disorder. While most elements from both Bordo's and Grey's work are incredibly useful analytical tools, it is necessary for the feminist community to find ways to address these issues in an applicable way, one that works toward healing.

What follows here is further development on the parameters for this discourse, and its implications for the realms of feminism. I propose that this works in three moves: recognition, sympathy, and acknowledgement.

The first move is to recognize eating disordered individuals as just that: individuals. Disallowing the continuation of stereotypes and homogenization of story lines surrounding anorexia and other eating disorders allows feminists to acknowledge the complexities and faces of these illnesses. This only works if we are available to share our stories without fear, ridicule, or embarrassment. We often observe discussions where this type of recognition is not present, ones that simply reduce the issue of eating disorders to a distant disease of feminism. Reframing these discussions by focusing on individual perspectives is essential to breaking this mold of judgement.

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22 Natalie Jovanovksi and Tess Jaeger, "Demystifying 'Diet Culture': Exploring the Meaning of Diet Culture in Online 'Anti-Diet' Feminist, Fat Activist, and Health Professional Communities," *Women's Studies International Forum* 90 (2022): 10.10.16/j.wsif.2021.102558.

23 Megan A. Dean, "In Defense of Mindless Eating," *Topoi* 40, no. 3 (2020): 507–16, 10.1007/s11245-020-09721-2.

This recognition then leads into sympathy. Instead of dismissing a single-note, homogenized experience of eating disorders as a distinct and removed phenomenon, women might recognize certain experiences as commonalities. As this work shows, even those without eating disorders are affected by the same pressures of patriarchy and discipline. Even if one does not identify with an eating disorder, searching for the complexity of experience in eating disorders will undoubtedly produce points of similarity between the subject and the discourse. In establishing that we are all victims of this pressure, we have arrived at a common place from which we can produce further discourse and collective action.

The final move is acknowledgement, of which two events must occur. Firstly, we must acknowledge that there has been a historic rejection of eating disordered voices from the folds of feminism. With this, we must commit ourselves to expending the energy and attention that it takes to establish these spaces for discussion. Secondly, we must acknowledge that most spaces for eating disorder discussions that currently exist are detrimental to the health of the individual. With this, we orient ourselves to a certain type of outreach and alteration. We reach those engaged in harmful discussions and involve them in a dynamic discourse that follows the framework of recognition and sympathy as outlined above. These three metrics being reached, we can finally have open and considerate conversation that allows us to move forward and begin to answer more difficult and specific questions about eating disorders and feminism.

VII. ARGUMENTS AND EXAMPLE

Opponents of these methods might argue that this discourse does not accurately describe the harsh reality of existing with an eating disorder. By treating this discussion gently, we miss some of the brutal truths of the issue. I argue however, that the honest discussion of personal experience and recognition of harms being delivered accounts for this. While it is important to engage in sympathetic discourse as described above, this does not mean that difficult conversations surrounding individual experience must be avoided. In fact, this discourse outline would guarantee that these experiences are acknowledged and discussed.

Take the following example: during a discussion among friends while out to lunch, one friend begins to comment on the meals that the group has ordered, pointing out that their meal is much "healthier" and contains fewer calories than what others ordered. They might justify their choice in saying they are being "good" today, making up for a "bad" meal yesterday. As this discussion about food progresses, they begin to

highlight the value of being skinnier, implying that those who follow strict diets are stronger and morally superior. The conversation continues and uncovers concerning details, such as various foods that are off limits, practices of rigorous exercise to burn calories, and improvement of aesthetic worth. While this conversation might be uncomfortable, the friends now face a choice: they can dismiss this experience as common yet alien or they can engage supportively. They start by asking their friend to describe their struggles and anxieties. Since they have maintained a pretense of pride and control, they will initially resist these questions, lashing out upon feeling that their efforts are being criticized. This is where sympathy is important. Probing questions about when and why these compulsions started will over time produce an accurate understanding of their condition and might uncover shared experience. While the anorectic might not recognize the harms of the eating disorder on individual levels, the issue can be demonstrated by asking them how these behaviors influence their mood, habits, or loved ones. Once the friends have arrived at a place where they understand the thorough reality of living with an eating disorder, they can move forward into discussion of cultural causes and ways to heal. While more severe pro-anorexia rhetoric can be found online, this framework for discussion is useful in maintaining respect and compassion in both extreme and casual discussion dynamics.

VIII. CONCLUSION

To engage in fruitful and caring discussions, we must recognize the work of Bordo, Grey, and other authors who have analyzed the social and cultural origins of eating disorders. Understanding the eating disorder as resulting from external pressures and presenting in an individual experience is vital to productive discourse. With this, we must ensure that we frame debates in ways that support the healing of eating disordered individuals and appreciates their presence in feminist circles. We can no longer accept the expulsion of the eating disorder as a flaw or corruption. This work holds implications for future analyses into specific aspects of eating disorders, and mainstream feminist discussion. By maintaining the commitments described, space is made for larger audiences that can work to dismantle these harmful cultural structures.

August Vitarbo (she/her), a junior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts, is a biochemistry major and biology minor. As a student of philosophy outside of her main studies, she focuses mainly on existential work and its relationship to feminism and social justice. She enjoys playing the trumpet, powerlifting, and reading.

A GOOD LITTLE GIRL IS ONE WHO GROWS UP TO BE A WOMAN:

Simone de Beauvoir's Other, Ideas of Social Contagion, and the Future of Feminism
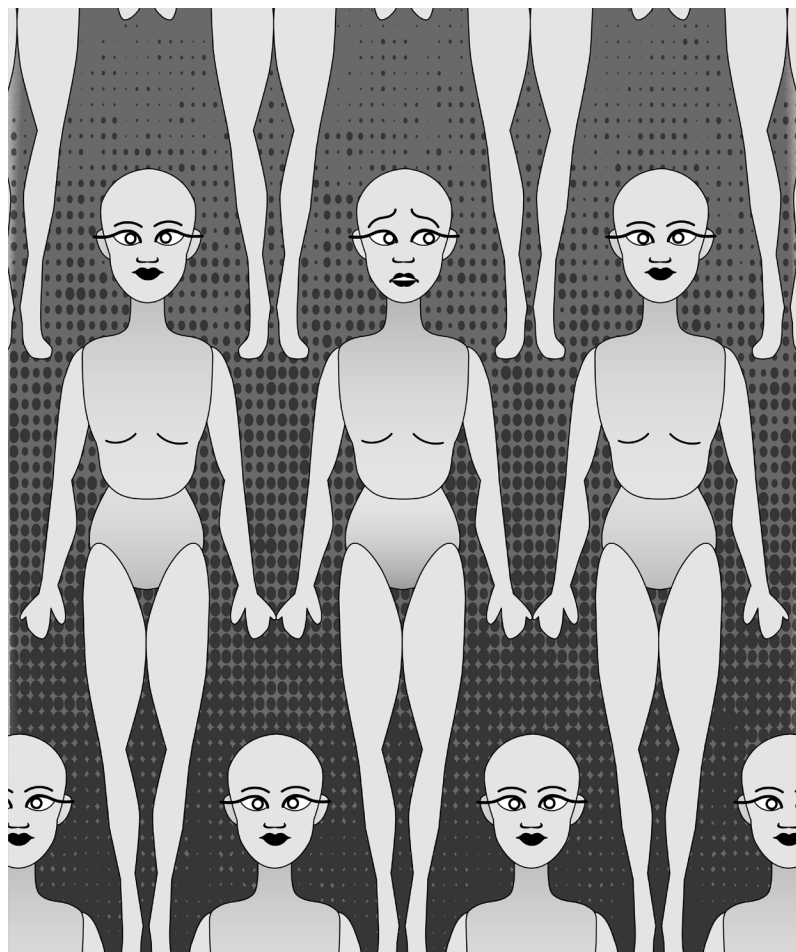
JEMIMA ABALOGU

ABSTRACT

In today's evolving understanding of gender, questions arise about the future of the feminist movement. Using Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Hugh Ryan's "Who's Afraid of Social Contagion," and Ben Kesslen's "How the Idea of a 'Transgender Contagion' Went Viral—and Caused Untold Harm," this paper explores the concept of the Other to analyze social contagion and gender-based oppression. It argues that while feminism must adapt, its future lies in embracing the experiences of all classified as the Other. Through de Beauvoir's work, historical definitions of gender, and social constructivism, this paper proposes a new idea for the future of feminism.

I. INTRODUCTION

"One is not born, but rather becomes, woman."[1] This revolutionary phrase first published in 1949 by feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir has arguably defined conceptions of womanhood in the years since. The category of woman is a series of traits and conditions, placed upon women so that they will become what society needs them to be: caregivers, subservient, and structures of support to a patriarchal system. But in recent years the gender binary of man and woman has begun to shift, some say warp, with new expressions and definitions rising to the cultural surface. It begs the question: What does it mean for feminism if the category of woman were to cease to exist or was no longer a central component to the construction of identity? While we may not be quite there yet, the rise of mainstream understanding of transgender and gender non-conforming identities invites new lines of inquiry into the classic theories of foundational feminist scholars like de Beauvoir and ultimately the future of feminism. Using the work of de Beauvoir, Hugh Ryan, and Ben Kesslen, this paper will describe the idea of the Other to explore the phenomenon of social contagion and gender-based oppression. Ultimately these ideas will show that feminism indeed has a future, however, this future is one where the movement no longer centers on the experience of womanhood, but the experience of the Other which can encapsulate all those caught in the forces of gender-based oppression.

II. SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S OTHER

de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* can remain foundational to theories of feminism, even as feminism shifts away from centering on womanhood. To begin her work, de Beauvoir asserts that femininity, as we have been conditioned to know it, is a myth, meaning that throughout her piece femininity does not refer to a single person or experience, but to the "present state of education and customs" that dictate the experience of femininity and womanhood.[2] This is vital to understanding how de Beauvoir's work can continue to shape the feminist movement as it transforms with the times. Femininity and thus womanhood is a socialized experience, a set of conditions and traits taught to women to

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1   Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Shelia
      Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 283.
2   de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 328.

shape who they must be within the confines of the patriarchy. However, it is divorced from biology or physical characteristics, besides their use as being one of the ways systems of power decipher who should be socialized in this manner. The idea of femininity as a social condition is one of the defining aspects of de Beauvoir's idea of the Other. It is an important baseline as we expand de Beauvoir's theory to describe the gender dynamics at play in the here and now.

Centrally, de Beauvoir argues that women are only defined in relation to others, thus making them the Other. She illustrates this claim through the comparison of the childhood experiences of girls and boys, writing that they share the same first pleasures through breastfeeding, the same experiences of bodily exploration as they grow, and can feel the same jealousy toward new children, showing that it is not biological impulses that separate men and women but, as she goes on to say, social forces. The traits attributed to women having timidness, subservience, and a quiet demeanor are not divinely pre-ordained but "because the intervention of others in the infant's life is almost originary, and her vocation is imperiously breathed into her from the first years of her life."[3] Through socialization, women first recognize themselves "only through the mediation of another."[4]

However, from infancy men are conditioned to see those around them as a means to support their ends; de Beauvoir writes "from the time he recognizes his reflection in a mirror . . . he begins to affirm his identity: his self merges with this reflection in such a way that it is formed only by alienating itself."[5] To adequately become the patriarch, a man must alienate himself: "it is by doing that he makes himself be, in one single movement."[6] Through this tandem conditioning, man self-actualizes as an independent being free to move throughout the world, conditioned to expect support, whereas "the little girl when learning about the world, she grasps herself as a *woman* in it."[7] This conception of identity construction shows how transgender and gender non-conforming individuals' methods of identity construction align with that of de Beauvoir's conceptualization of a woman. Transgender and gender non-conforming people develop their identities within a structure whose paths are built only on the assumption of the sanctity of the gender binary; yet finding no path befitting their experience, they too build their identities as an Other since "only the mediation of another can constitute an individual as Other."[8] Thus, we are all

3   de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 330–31.
4   de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 330.
5   de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 331.
6   de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 342.
7   de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 359.
8   de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 330.

condemned to struggle to resist the forces of socialization that push toward the oppressive path of the gender binary.

III. MODERN CONCEPTIONS OF GENDER

To better characterize this claim, it is pertinent to turn to the work of Hugh Ryan who outlines a brief social history of the definitions of gender that have led us to this current moment. Currently, a person is defined as transgender if they identify with a gender other than their biological sex, according to Maura Priest in *Transgender Children and the Right to Transition*.[9] However, this was not always the case. As Hugh Ryan describes, in Victorian times before sexuality was understood to be a standalone identity from gender, those who did not identify with their assigned gender or who violated the conventions of gender were called "inverts." People who fell into this category were not just thought to be different in their desires or personalities, but to have different physical bodies to their assigned gender; Ryan writes "so-called 'born female' inverts were thought to have bodies more like men, and vice versa."[10] This language and way of thinking persisted until the rise of urban living, which fostered the new social norm of heteronormative relationships and made the gender segregation of the Victorian era virtually impossible. This made any sign of gender inversion an indicator of hidden homosexuality. The conflation between gender identity and sexual orientation led the first generation of queer historians to lump together the experiences of queer people and those of gender non-conforming people.

Today, the internet has dramatically reshaped individuals' abilities to communicate and form community, allowing more queer people to find each other. The internet "has also empowered queer people to spread their own ideas and experiences about sexuality and gender, based on their *internal* feelings, their own self-conceptions: what we call identity."[11] The online era, which changed conceptions of identity, allowed popular knowledge to expand from the assumptions made due to a lack of representation and forced secrecy. Queer history highlights how the paradigm of sex and gender as it has been understood, and as theorists like Simone de Beauvoir would have understood it, rests on

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9   Maura Priest, "Transgender Children and the Right to Transition: Medical Ethics When Parents Mean Well but Cause Harm," *The American Journal of Bioethics* 19, no. 2 (2019): 10.1080/15265161.2018.1557276.

10   Hugh Ryan, "Who's Afraid of Social Contagion?", *Boston Review*, 2023, https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/whos-afraid-of-social-contagion/.

11   Ryan, "Who's Afraid of Social Contagion?"

the binary of man/woman and their preferred object of sexual desire. Ryan asserts in this piece that twentieth-century notions of LGBTQ+ identity cannot adequately answer the questions of gender dynamics today, because they were not developed to understand the experiences of queer people: "they were developed to segment straight cis people off from the rest of us."[12] This encapsulates how de Beauvoir's idea of the Other and identity construction may not have explicitly included transgender and gender non-conforming people, but that it can be expanded and utilized today to help contextualize their experiences.

IV. MODERN REACTIONS TO CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF GENDER IDENTITY

To combat the fact that transgender and gender non-conforming identities fail to fit within and serve the patriarchal system, they have been subjected to punitive theories of disinformation leading to social consequences. Ben Kesslen describes how transgender and gender non-conforming identities have begun to be described as a contagion characterized by the theory of "rapid-onset gender dysphoria." Introduced in 2018 by physician and researcher Lisa Littman, rapid-onset gender dysphoria (ROGD)[13] claims that young people with feelings of gender dysphoria, "the feeling of distress that one's gender and assigned sex do not match," identify as transgender or non-binary as a result of peer influence, especially from online communities.[14] Kesslen explains that the theory of ROGD claims that "they hide behind a false diagnosis of gender dysphoria . . . instead of confronting whatever issues are truly challenging them."[15] Littman argues that children become gender dysphoric through a process of immersion in social media, and once they identify as transgender or non-binary they can unwittingly influence their peers to do the same. She posits that this can explain the rising numbers of transgender-identifying and gender non-conforming adolescents and that the dynamic particularly affects those assigned-female-at-birth.

Since the original publishing of Littman's work and the subsequent critiques surrounding its methodology, the study was reissued with a correction stating that Littman's paper was simply exploratory and had

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12 Ryan, "Who's Afraid of Social Contagion?"
13 Lisa Littman, "Parent Reports of Adolescents and Young Adults Perceived to Show Signs of a Rapid Onset of Gender Dysphoria," *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 8 (2018), 10.1371/journal.pone.0202330.
14 Ben Kesslen, "How the Idea of a 'Transgender Contagion' Went Viral—and Caused Untold Harm," *MIT Technology Review*, 2022, https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/08/18/1057135/transgender-contagion-gender-dysphoria/.
15 Kesslen, "Untold Harm."

not been clinically evaluated. In 2021, *The Journal of Pediatrics* published a comprehensive study that found little to no evidence of ROGD's existence, prompting more than sixty psychology organizations, including the American Psychological Association, to call for the retraction of the term.[16] However, despite the scientific community's outcry and further studies showing that such a phenomenon did not have evidentiary backing, the term rapid-onset gender dysphoria has been adopted by anti-trans activists to further their agenda.

According to Kesslen, Abigail Shrier's allegedly transphobic book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* had sold more than 100,000 copies as of 2022, and Littman's work has been cited in anti-trans legislation—such as Florida's attempt to stop Medicaid funding for adult transition-related health care.[17] Terms like "social contagion" and "rapid-onset gender dysphoria" not only directly contribute to the invalidation of transgender and gender non-conforming people's experience, but to real-world harm as well.

V. MODERN IMPLICATIONS

Though de Beauvoir may not have had the vocabulary to expand her ideas of the Other in *The Second Sex* to transgender and gender non-conforming identities, it is illustrative when speaking to the ideas that Ryan and Kesslen present in their pieces. Individuals with transgender and gender non-conforming identities who have been traditionally socialized as men and women construct their identities relative to the ideas of gender that surround them. Here it is pertinent to turn to the work of Robin Dembroff to further illustrate this matter. In their work "Beyond Binary: Genderqueer as Critical Gender Kind," Dembroff describes how an externalist approach to individuals who "are perceived as *transgressing* binary norms of gender expression . . . or their body is perceived as androgynous, where this is understood as one's body being unreadable as male or female" is not wholly descriptive of a genderqueer person's experience of their identity.[18] This account of the externalist approach to individuals existing outside of the gender binary epitomizes why de Beauvoir's account of the Other is ripe to be

16   Greta R. Bauer, Margaret L. Lawson, and Daniel L. Metzger, "Do Clinical Data from Transgender Adolescents Support the Phenomenon of 'Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria'?", *The Journal of Pediatrics* 243 (2022): 224–27 10.1016/j.jpeds.2021.11.020.

17   Kesslen, "Untold Harm."

18   Robin Dembroff, "Beyond Binary: Genderqueer as Critical Gender Kind," *Philosophers' Imprint* 20, no. 9 (2020): 1–23.

expanded to include not only women but transgender, nonbinary, and gender-fluid people as well.

Unlike cisgender men, all of these individuals are not given adequate space to construct their identities as whole beings. Instead, they are forced to engage in identity construction only relative to the binary of gender that is societally enforced. The binary of man and woman exists as the only frame of reference by which identities are conceptualized. This process directly correlates to the process de Beauvoir describes for women, whose identity is constructed only relative to their roles in the service of men. This socialization process provides two narrow paths which every individual is forced to walk: the path of patriarchal dominance, reserved only for those who present as male, or the path of service to the structures of patriarchy, reserved for femme-presenting people who cannot be categorized as the dominant.

Moreover, the idea of social contagion can be seen as a punitive social paradigm that is meant to deter transgender and gender non-conforming individuals from expressing their identities as it goes against the values intrinsic to the patriarchy. It is the rigidity of the gender roles themselves that preserves the domination of men and successfully stifles the autonomy of women. If gender is fluid, or allowed to be a spectrum, the male dominant loses a large subset of its subservient population. Social contagion directly suppresses the existence of transgender and non-binary people by invalidating their experiences. These ideas are in keeping with the process of socialization that is required for women to fit their patriarchally assigned roles. Social contagion works by convincing parents that their kids have been persuaded to shirk their biological sex in favor of a new and threatening social identity. The crux of the message is that the parents of trans and non-binary kids know their children's identities better than they do. The process and values instilled by social contagion guarantee that parents will continue to carry out the traditional socialization processes that produce men and women willing to take their places within a patriarchal system. Understanding this socialization process is the first step to being able to deconstruct these gender roles, thus signifying the importance of having language like the Other to help conceptualize this process. Being able to identify the points where children are taught to conform to gendered expectations allows for the feminist movement to take decisive action and organize to change these cultural values and ultimately dismantle the systems of gender-based oppression like binary gender roles.

Philosopher Julia Kristeva gives what can be described as an emotional rendering of what it feels like to be socialized as de Beauvoir's Other in her work "Approaching Abjection." Kristeva writes "Abject. It is something rejected from which one is not separated, from which one is

not protected as is the case with an object."[19] Abjection can be understood as the feeling that permeates an identity when there is a dissonance between the authentic self and the socialization that aims to create an individual's identity. As described by Philip Roberts, Kristeva draws "on a psychoanalytic reading of subjective identity as a defensive construction" to weave her theory of abjection.[20] In terms of this argument, the feeling of abjection should be the very aim that feminism seeks to resolve within its work to help liberate those socialized as the Other. The feeling of abjection exists within us all as we contend with the dissonance between our socialized identities and who we believe we truly are. It is a rarity, and some might say a privilege, for one's authentic identity to line up with the social construction of identity. For women and gender non-conforming people alike, the feeling of abjection is central to our very existence as we struggle against the oppressive forces which seek to push us down the narrow path delineated by the gender binary.

VI. THE FUTURE OF FEMINISM

The use of de Beauvoir's language within *The Second Sex* shows that the future of feminism does not lie in forgetting the traditional texts of previous feminists, but in expanding their theories to create a more intersectional and inclusive feminist lens. Thus, the feminist movement must move in a constructivist direction to successfully dismantle the oppressive structures that hold in place these two gendered paths and existences. Scholar Ann Murphy describes de Beauvoir as a nascent constructivist due to "her insistence that women's character was a function of her situation and *not* her essence (biological, metaphysical, or otherwise)."[21] According to Murphy, social constructivism can be understood as expanding the possibilities for understanding the diversity of gendered experiences, which liberates sex and gender by acknowledging the plethora of ways "in which they are historically and culturally instantiated and brought to life."[22]

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19   Julia Kristeva and John Lechte, "Approaching Abjection," *Oxford Literary Review* 5, no. 1 (1982): 125–49.

20   Robert Phillips, "Abjection," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (2014): 19–21, 10.1215/23289252-2399470.

21   Ann V. Murphy, "Feminist Philosophy since 1945: Constructivism and Materialism," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy, 1945–2015*, ed. Kelly Becker and Iain D. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 416–26.

22   Murphy, "Feminist Philosophy since 1945," 421.

Feminism is still needed as a tool for the liberation of women because while there have been meaningful advancements both economically and socially in the realm of gender equality, as conceptions of gender shift, patriarchal systems will attempt to take advantage of the instability caused by the fear of the unknown. Politically, it can only be described as the classic move to capitalize on moments of social unrest to suggest a promise of certainty by harkening back to harmful historical structures of oppression. This has been illustrated through the rise of populist-presenting politicians all over the world in response to unrest caused by refugee crises and economic inequality. Without the feminist movement evolving to meet these times, it risks the positive change that the different waves of the movement have managed to garner. As feminism navigates a new time in which understanding of identity as it is related to sex and gender, for feminism to survive, and more importantly be a useful tool for liberation, the feminist movement cannot remain rooted in one understanding of womanhood.

The feminist movement has already seen influential scholars move away from a rigid conception of what it means to encapsulate the experiences of womanhood. Take for example the work of Judith Butler who read gender as "the cumulative effect of performative acts iterated over time."[23] Butler furthered feminist scholarship through their understanding of gender as a performance that results in a materialized sexed identity. Butler drew inspiration from de Beauvoir, and I charge the feminist movement to do the same. By moving away from centering "the woman" or womanhood, the feminist movement opens itself up to completely dismantling the notion of gender. While historically—and more arguably, currently—the categorization of man and woman was useful for the feminist movement to develop its roots, today the binary is a hindrance. Strict conceptions of womanhood have started to cause strife and division within the feminist movement, with the newer ideals of "gender-critical feminism," which has claimed its charge to be the opposition of gender ideology or simply, the very existence of transgender and gender non-conforming identities. Through these ideals, the feminist movement has been weaponized to perpetuate harm against already marginalized identities.

Yet still we can harken back to the bedrock foundation that the feminist movement was built upon, such as the work of de Beauvoir, and by doing so, feminists will find that the very language needed to guide us into the future is the language that our forebears have already provided. The use of de Beauvoir's theory of the Other provides a conceptual framework that allows for the feminist movement to expand, bringing

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23   Murphy, "Feminist Philosophy since 1945," 422.

into the fold transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. By doing so, not only is feminism allowing itself to become more inclusive and more intersectional, but it is guaranteeing its future.

Feminism can only survive as an ideal for liberation if it is still needed. As the public conversation continues to evolve along the path that it has seemingly laid out, the idea of gender and the existence of the gender binary will begin to break down, and a movement solely for the biological female will become obsolete. Transgender and gender non-conforming people are the brothers, sisters, and siblings of the modern feminist movement and it is time that they are welcomed into our midst.

In closing, it is fitting to reiterate for the final time that de Beauvoir's work of conceptualizing the Other along with Ryan's and Kesslen's discussions of transgender, gender non-conforming identities, and the social phenomenon of social contagion work together to illuminate the future of feminism. The future of feminism, our future, is indeed working to move away from a rigid conception of womanhood and using the conception of the Other to truly liberate *all* people from the forces of gender-based oppression.

Jemima Abalogu (she/her) is a senior at Loyola University Chicago, majoring in political science and philosophy. She is passionate about the intersection of feminism and human rights, while occasionally exploring universality and truth. She is set to pursue a master's in philosophy and public policy at the London School of Economics.

ON THE ESSENCE OF THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS: A Neo-Aristotelian and Phenomenological Approach

HAYDEN MACKLIN

Abstract

Thought experiments feature prominently in both scientific and philosophical methods. In this paper, I investigate two questions surrounding knowledge in the thought experiment process. First, on what implicit knowledge do thought experiments rely? Second, what provides epistemic justification for beliefs acquired through the process? I draw upon neo-Aristotelian metaphysics and Husserlian phenomenology to argue that essence is the object of implicit knowledge that anchors the imagined possibilities involved in thought experiments to the actual world, and that this essentialist knowledge enables the possibility of prima facie justification being conferred by the phenomenological givenness of thought experiment scenarios.

I. INTRODUCTION

Thought experiments play a major role in both scientific and philosophical methodology, but there are important questions concerning their contents and how they work. One such question that arises is what I will call the *metaphysical question*: Given that thought experiments significantly rely on implicit knowledge within the subject, what is this implicit knowledge *of* or *about*? Another question, which I will call the *justification question*, is of an epistemological nature: Since thought experiments are typically meant to result in the subject gaining new knowledge—which in this paper I will assume requires epistemic justification—what provides the justification for this belief? We can better frame these two critical questions as follows:

> *The Metaphysical Question*: What is the implicit background knowledge involved in a thought experiment of or about?

> *The Justification Question*: What provides the justification for the new beliefs the subject acquires through the thought experiment process?

I begin the following discussion by introducing two frameworks for understanding essence in Section II. I continue by answering the metaphysical question in Section III, where I propose that the most important response to the metaphysical question is the subject's implicit knowledge of *essences*. Knowledge of essence not only allows the subject to mentally present objects in imagination, but also serves to link the imagined possibilities to the actual world. In Section IV, I answer the justification question by arguing that the new beliefs acquired through the thought experiment process are given their justificatory force by the phenomenological character of the thought experiment. This phenomenological character includes the "givenness" of the presented thought experiment scenario with all its related objects, whose essences ground the possibility of "frustration," which I argue is necessary for justification. I conclude in Section V by briefly considering limits of essentialist knowledge.

II. NEO-ARISTOTELIAN METAPHYSICS, HUSSERLIAN PHENOMENOLOGY, AND ESSENCE

It seems that thought experiments crucially rely on tacitly introduced background knowledge, yet what the objects of knowledge are remains unclear.[1] My proposal is that the most important answer to the metaphysical question is that the implicit background knowledge involved in a thought experiment concerns *essences*. I will define "essence" more precisely in the following paragraph, but first, because my argument involves essence, I wish to incorporate two sources that I believe might prove fruitful for answering both the metaphysical question and justification question: neo-Aristotelian metaphysics and Husserlian phenomenology. Despite their many dissimilarities, these two views share an understanding that what we refer to as "reality" seems to have a structure involving essentialist notions that is not *merely* imposed by the mind of the subject (an "ordered" view of reality, using Schaffer's terms[2]), but that neither view treats essence as an *entity additional to the associated object*.[3] One can therefore adopt a notion of essence compatible with both views without making weighty ontological commitments, an approach I believe might be useful for addressing thought experiments.

Let us turn to defining essence. Largely owing to the work of Kit Fine, the notion of essence has seen significant revival.[4] The classical modal notion of essence conceives of essence as analyzable in modal terms:

> *Modal Understanding of Essence*: A property is possessed *necessarily* by an object only if it is possessed *essentially* by that object.

The Finean notion of essence, however, flips the classical relationship between essence and metaphysical necessity:

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1   For examples of other authors that take thought experiments to rely on implicit knowledge, see John D. Norton, "On Thought Experiments: Is There More to the Argument?" *Philosophy of Science* 71, no. 5 (2004): 1139–51, 10.1086/425238; and Tamar Szabó Gendler, "Thought Experiments Rethought—and Reperceived," *Philosophy of Science* 71, no. 5 (2004): 1152–63, 10.1086/425239.

2   Jonathan Schaffer, "On What Grounds What," in *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, ed. David Manley, David J. Chalmers, and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 355.

3   Chang Liu, "Eidetic Variation as a Source of Metaphysical Knowledge: A Phenomenological Contribution to Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics," *Res Philosophica* 100, no. 3 (2023): 333–34, 10.5840/resphilosophica20236899.

4   For a more detailed discussion of essence that I will merely outline here, see Kit Fine, "Essence and Modality," *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994): 1–16, 10.2307/2214160.

Finean Understanding of Essence: A property is possessed *essentially* by an object only if it is possessed *necessarily* by that object.

The reasoning behind this inversion can be seen in Fine's example of a set containing Socrates as its sole member. Though "belonging to the singleton set containing Socrates" is a property that is necessarily had by the object named 'Socrates,' it seems strange to say that this property is *essential* to Socrates, (i.e., that it is part of the *very nature* of Socrates as an object to belong to this set).[5] What we should rather say, as Fine argues, is that Socrates necessarily belongs to the set *because* of the very nature of Socrates, (i.e., *in virtue of what it is to be Socrates*). Additionally, we can notice that imaginatively removing any essential property from Socrates would result in Socrates ceasing to exist as that object. So, an object's essence—which is constituted by all of its essential properties—is best understood as its *intrinsic nature*. While this is a specifically neo-Aristotelian view of essence, I believe this understanding to be broadly compatible with Husserlian phenomenology, which understands essence as that which is invariable in an object—or plurality of objects—of experience. I will therefore assume this definition for the remainder of the paper.

III. ANSWERING THE METAPHYSICAL QUESTION

Now that we have defined essence, we can demonstrate why thought experiments draw on implicit essentialist knowledge. For the subject to bring some particular object to be presented before the mind in imagination, the subject relies on a previously acquired concept in their background knowledge. However, *all* the characteristics of the particular object need not be filled out in imagination. Many of its attributes may be left as indeterminate, with the scope of possible attributes being limited by the previously formed concept. What I wish to argue is that part of the contents of the concept involved include *some* knowledge or understanding of *what it is to be a member of the relevant kind*, *which is part of the essence of the object*. Here I want to emphasize that I do not claim that a *complete* knowledge of essence is necessary for imagining the object, but only *partial* knowledge; a child's concept of a cat might be less developed or filled out than an adult's concept, but both individuals have *some* knowledge of what a cat is such that both can easily imagine an instance of a cat.

The truth of the essentialist claim can be seen by considering a corresponding counterfactual claim: If it were the case that *no* such

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5   Manuel García-Caepintero, "A Non-modal Conception of Secondary Properties," *Philosophical Papers* 36, no. 1 (2007): 22.

categorical knowledge or understanding were present in a subject, the thought experiment would become *inaccessible* for the subject, since *they would not know what kind of object(s) to present in imagination*. But thought experiments *are* accessible for their subjects, provided those subjects are located in a proper context, so their subjects must have at least some knowledge of the essence of the objects involved in the thought experiment. We can state this argument more precisely:

1. If a subject had no knowledge of the essence of an object, a thought experiment that crucially involves the object would not be accessible for the subject

2. A thought experiment crucially involves the object and is accessible for the subject.

3. Therefore, it is not the case that the subject has no knowledge of the essence of the object.

4. Thus, the subject has some knowledge of the essence of the object.

We can also consider a similar counterfactual claim in relation to the language of the thought experiment narrative: If it were the case that the thought experiment narrative contained sentences in which, for example, certain categorical terms were present that were crucial to the design of the thought experiment, but these terms *lacked any semantic meaning or referent for the subject*, those sentences within the thought experiment narrative would become *meaningless for the subject* given that the meaning of a sentence in a language is determined by the meaning of each of the composite terms in that sentence.[6] This would, again, result in the subject being unable to access the thought experiment. So, since thought experiments and their respective narratives are indeed cognitively accessible for their comprehending subjects, it seems that those subjects possess at least partial categorical knowledge or understanding of the *natures* of the objects involved in the thought experiment (i.e., the *essences* of the objects presented in imagination, and their related terms).

The tacit knowledge of essence involved in thought experiments also serves to tether what is metaphysically possible to what is actual. On the neo-Aristotelian view, the ontological picture is squarely "actualist" in nature.[7] That is, for any entity that exists, it exists as actual and *not* as a mere possibility. What is possible therefore finds its grounds, source,

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6   Zoltán Gendler Szabó, "Compositionality," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (2022), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/compositionality/.

7   See Barbara Vetter, "Recent Work: Modality without Possible Worlds," *Analysis* 71, no. 4 (2011): 742–54, 10.1093/analys/anr077.

or truth-maker in what is actual.[8] Though several modal notions may be candidates for fulfilling the role of tying possibilities to the actual world, here I take the broadly essentialist position. I have argued in the current section that essentialist knowledge gets tacitly introduced into the imagined scenario of the thought experiment through our background knowledge, which includes formed concepts whose contents I take to involve some knowledge of essence. Furthermore, my claim is that this implicit essentialist knowledge also serves as a link between the imagined possibilities of thought experiments and the actual world.[9] In other words, following the broader claim of neo-Aristotelian essentialism, essences located in the actual world are to be identified as the grounds, source, or truth-maker of the possibilities imagined by the subject in a thought experiment.

In the epistemology of metaphysical modality, it has been demonstrated that any "mental-operation-based account" of how we come to know modal truths, including truths about possibility, critically relies on an account of our knowledge of essence.[10] As Anand Jayprakash Vaidya and Michael Wallner highlight, without an epistemology of essence to support an epistemology of modality, the "problem of modal epistemic friction" arises. There is nothing to provide the epistemic "pushback" necessary for keeping us from getting off-track or becoming arbitrary in our modal reasoning. Applied to thought experiments, which involve modal reasoning necessarily, we also need something to supply epistemic friction in the possible scenario of a thought experiment to avoid arbitrariness. As in the wider case of modal epistemology, knowledge of essence can bestow such friction. This makes sense since how the scenario unfolds in a thought experiment partially depends on the objects involved, their properties, and the relations between those objects. Thus, the essences of all of these play a determinative role in the outcome of the thought experiment. Other things might also fulfill this role, but here we are interested in what holds across *all* possibilities. Essence seems to fulfill this requirement nicely. Because the essence of an object holds necessarily, it holds across *all* possible scenarios, including the real world. Our implicit knowledge of essence therefore functions to anchor the possibilities imagined in thought experiments to *this* world, furnishing the thought experiment with the epistemic friction needed for us to think that we are tracking modal truths.

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8   Vetter, "Recent Work," 742.

9   For a discussion of what sorts of possibilities thought experiments involve, see Alexander Geddes, "Judgements about Thought Experiments," *Mind* 127, no. 505 (2018): 35–67, 10.1093/mind/fzx005.

10   Anand Jayprakash Vaidya and Michael Wallner, "The Epistemology of Modality and the Problem of Modal Epistemic Friction," *Synthese* 198, no. 8 (2021): 1909–35, 10.1007/s11229-018-1860-2.

IV. ANSWERING THE JUSTIFICATION QUESTION

Thought experiments are usually designed to result in new knowledge in the subject undergoing the process; but what provides justification for the newly formed beliefs constitutive of such knowledge? I propose that Husserlian phenomenology can be of use here. Specifically, I will draw on the work of Harald Wiltsche and Philipp Berghofer's work on a "phenomenological conception of experiential justification" (PCEJ).[11] By doing so, I hope to show that the phenomenological character of thought experiments provides their subjects with *prima facie* justification for new beliefs.[12]

I will begin by discussing Berghofer's phenomenological theory of justification. Berghofer defines PCEJ as follows:

> PCEJ: Certain experiences have a distinctive, justification-conferring phenomenology and if an experience has such a justification-conferring phenomenology with respect to a proposition, the experience provides immediate *prima facie* justification for believing the proposition.[13]

Berghofer clarifies that an experience's "phenomenology" here means the "what-it-is-like-ness" of the experience for the subject.[14] Perceiving an object thus has a different phenomenology than imagining the object.[15] Both of these experiences concern the same *object* but are different *kinds* of experiences.[16]

Before going further, it will be helpful to briefly introduce some terminology. Phenomenologists sometimes refer to an object's *horizons*,

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11 Philipp Berghofer, "Husserl's Conception of Experiential Justification: What It Is and Why It Matters," *Husserl Studies* 34, no. 2 (2018): 145–70, 10.1007/s10743-018-9225-8; Philipp Berghofer, "Towards a Phenomenological Conception of Experiential Justification," *Synthese* 197, no. 1 (2020): 155–83, 10.1007/s11229-018-1744-5.

12 For a somewhat similar view of thought experiments and justification that lacks the essentialist components I emphasize in this paper, see Elijah Chudnoff, "The Place of Expert Intuition in Philosophy," in *Forming Impressions: Expertise in Perception and Intuition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 184–207. For differences between Chudnoff's view of justification and Berghofer's, see Berghofer, "Phenomenological Conception," 168–72.

13 Berghofer, "Phenomenological Conception," 156.

14 Berghofer, "Phenomenological Conception," 156.

15 John Bengson, "The Intellectual Given," *Mind* 124, no. 495 (2015): 707–60, 10.1093/mind/fzv029.

16 Harald A. Wiltsche, "Intuitions, Seemings, and Phenomenology," *Teorema: Revista Internacional de Filosofia* 34, no. 3 (2015): 61.

or a background of possibilities *co-given* with the object in experience.[17] For instance, when I have an experience of perceiving a red cup in front of me, the cup presents one side of itself to me; but it also presents itself as something that has an inside, a backside, etc., with each of these having a possible color, shape, etc., to which I could turn my attention and direct my inquiry. Just as a spotlight on a stage can shift its focus and with it the blurry horizon at the edges of its illumination, so can an object be further investigated by shifting one's attention or perspective with respect to the object, which in turn shifts the implicit background or horizon. Additionally*, fulfillment* and *frustration* refer to the relation between the object as we *anticipate* it to be (the *intentional object* or simply, *intention*) and the object as it is *intuitively presented* before us in experience (in its *givenness*).[18] If the object as it is presented before us matches or corresponds to the object as we anticipate it to be, our anticipations are *intuitively fulfilled*. If the presented object lacks correspondence to our anticipations, then our anticipations are *frustrated*. And, just as the clarity of an object's horizons can come in degrees, so fulfillment and frustration can also come in degrees.

Let us now turn back to perception and imagination as kinds of experiences.[19] As Wiltsche notes, these differ in two important respects: (1) The objects of perception present themselves as actual, whereas the objects of imagination present themselves as non-actual, and (2) in perceptual acts we do not have voluntary control of our experiences, whereas in imaginative acts we do. This means that while our anticipations cannot be arbitrarily fulfilled in perception, we *can* arbitrarily fulfill them in imagination.[20] Thus, the phenomenological character of perceptual experience can be a source of justification, but the phenomenological character of imaginative experience cannot provide justification on its own.[21] So, for belief produced by the imaginative process of a thought experiment to be justified, something else is required. We need something that pushes against the arbitrariness of imaginative acts. Here we are confronted with the problem of modal epistemic friction. Put differently, we need some kind of limitation *that makes frustration of our anticipations possible*, such that our anticipations cannot simply be fulfilled arbitrarily.

17 Wiltsche, "Thought Experiments," 346–48.

18 Wiltsche, "Thought Experiments," 345–46; Wiltsche, "Intuitions," 57–78.

19 For more details on kinds of experiences, see Elijah Chudnoff, "Presentational Phenomenology," in *Consciousness and Subjectivity*, ed. Sofia Miguens and Gerhard Preyer (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2012), 51–72, 10.1515/9783110325843.

20 Harald A. Wiltsche, "Phenomenology and Thought Experiments: Thought Experiments as Anticipation Pumps," in *Routledge Companion to Thought Experiments*, ed. Michael T. Stuart, Yiftach Fehige, and James Robert Brown (New York: Routledge, 2018), 349–51.

21 Berghofer, "Phenomenological Conception," 155–83.

Again, essence seems to be a plausible candidate here. Wiltsche observes, "If we want to learn about the conditions of fulfillment and frustration in a given imaginative process, we have to look closely at the concepts through which the horizontal anticipations are determined."[22] In Section III, I showed that these concepts include knowledge of essence, which offers itself as a plausible source of epistemic friction in modal reasoning. Phenomenologically, the implicit knowledge of essence that allows me to bring particular objects to be given in an imaginative experience on the one hand—and determines the anticipations I have towards those objects in the horizons of my imaginative experience on the other—*also furnishes the possibility of my anticipations being frustrated.*[23] Frustration occurs when my explicit knowledge (i.e., the imaginative experience of the objects and their interactions in the thought experiment scenario that I attentively encounter) surprises me by lacking fulfillment with respect to my *implicit*, anticipatory intentions (which include my implicit knowledge of essence) within the *horizons* of the imaginative experience. I suspect that my surprise here is possible because of a lack or an overabundance of "filling in" of the particular object in imagination, such that what I implicitly know *must* be true of the nature of the object comes into conflict with what I observe in its explicit presentation. Further, I notice that the thought experiment scenario presents itself as *having* to proceed a certain way because of the very natures of the objects and relations involved. Thus, my resulting belief arises due to intuitively observing the outcome, while also intuitively observing co-given *explanations* for the outcome (i.e., the essences of the involved objects and their relations and the kind of experience that the intuitive experience is), such that *I cannot arbitrarily imagine a different outcome.*[24] So, since frustration is made possible by essentialist knowledge in the imaginative scenarios of thought experiments such that anticipations cannot be arbitrarily fulfilled, it is also possible for the phenomenological givenness of a thought experiment—which includes all of its objects and their relations in conjunction with the kind of experience a thought experiment is—to confer *prima facie* justification (i.e., by PCEJ) to beliefs acquired through the thought experiment process.

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22 Wiltsche, "Thought Experiments," 353.

23 I mean 'imaginative experience' to refer specifically to an intuitive presentational state. See Bengson, "Intellectual Given," 725–32.

24 Chudnoff, "Presentational Phenomenology," 57.

V. FINAL THOUGHTS

One might justifiably question whether we really can acquire knowledge of essences and how this is accomplished. Further, it seems clear that there is essentialist knowledge that cannot be ordinarily discerned by us. What if the essentialist knowledge contained in the concepts that we deploy in thought experiments is incomplete or inaccurate?

First, I make no attempt to provide an account of how we *acquire* knowledge of essences in the current paper. My aim has simply been to show that we have at least a partial knowledge of them. Second, while it seems true that there are hidden essences that we are ordinarily unable to discern, it also seems plausible that the evolutionary process has provided us with the ability to discern enough essentialist facts about our immediate environment and the ordinary objects in it for navigation and survival. Consider our everyday use of simple, counterfactual reasoning that helps determine our actions as a kind of simple thought experiment: If you were to drop a glass of water on your floor, what would happen? The outcome depends on at least *some* knowledge of the nature of glass, water, your floor, etc., but it does not depend on your knowing that water is essentially H_2O. Still, this might indicate that there are limits on the completeness or scope of concepts we can accurately deploy in our imaginative reasoning.

Nevertheless, by approaching the metaphysical question and the justification question in the present way, I hope to demonstrate the theoretical promise of essentialist knowledge for thought experiments. On this view, not only is essence the object of our implicit knowledge that we draw upon for thought experiments, linking them to the actual world, but essentialist knowledge allows for the *prima facie* justification of new beliefs we acquire through the thought experiment process—a process of central importance to both scientific and philosophical inquiry.

Hayden Macklin is a senior-level philosophy major at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California. His primary philosophical interests include modal metaphysics, modal epistemology, philosophical logic, and metaphilosophy. He hopes to pursue a PhD in philosophy and to one day support future students in their own philosophical endeavors.

DO MY SIGNALS DECIEVE ME?: An Interview with Jorge Morales, PhD

ABOUT JORGE MORALES, PнD

Jorge Morales is an assistant professor in philosophy and psychology at Northeastern University. He also directs the Subjectivity Lab, where he and his team look for theoretical and empirical answers that help us better understand the mind and the functions of consciousness. Born and raised in Mexico City, he completed his undergraduate and master's degrees in philosophy there before coming to the United States. In 2018, he earned a PhD in philosophy from Columbia University, after which he was a postdoctoral researcher at Johns Hopkins University. Morales' research occupies a unique niche at the intersection of philosophy, psychology and neuroscience. It focuses on understanding visual experiences, how the brain creates them, and how we introspect our own mind. His scholarly work has appeared in top philosophy and scientific journals, and his findings have garnered attention from both the national and international press. In 2023, he won a Rising Star Award from the Association for Psychological Science for his contributions to the discipline.

STANCE: Thanks for talking with us. We really enjoyed reading your work. We found it interesting that you work in both philosophy and psychology. How did you end up with that kind of job?

MORALES: In the last few years, I started doing more empirically based research, where I was not just reading about empirical findings but also trying to produce them. My job is mostly based in the psychology department. I guess I'm still fifty-fifty, but I flipped from full philosophy to a little bit more psychology than philosophy. I'm just very happy to be talking with you. Thank you so much for inviting me.

STANCE: Oh, thank you so much for coming! We're particularly interested in what got you into studying philosophy. What in your educational journey inspired you not only to study it as an undergraduate but also to go on to graduate school to study philosophy of mind and philosophy of perception?

MORALES: I started being interested in philosophy in high school, actually. I was in Mexico City, where I was born and raised, and I was lucky to take a class about the history of culture and philosophy. It included everything from the Pre-Socratic era and St. Thomas Aquinas to Islam, the Industrial Revolution, and philosophy in the twentieth century from Adorno to Wittgenstein. It was a very comprehensive class, and it really made an impression on me. I decided to pick philosophy as my field of study in college and eventually I focused on consciousness.

Grad school was always on my mind, almost since the beginning of college. I had a lot of luck. I worked together with a few professors who were really passionate about research and that helped me get a closer look at what a career in academia might look like before deciding to apply to a master's program. After a couple of years of doing that at Mexico's National University, I had the opportunity to spend a semester at Indiana University working with Colin Allen on a thesis on animal minds and theory of mind. That's where it became very clear to me that I really wanted to keep going and get a PhD. It was there where I had my first real exposure to science as well. Colin Allen, even though he's a philosopher, worked really closely with psychologists. Then I started reading empirical papers about animal minds. Eventually, I ended up going to Columbia University to get my PhD, and I thought I was going to write my dissertation on animal minds. But I had a chance to take a class about

IT WAS THERE WHERE I HAD MY FIRST REAL EXPOSURE TO SCIENCE

consciousness and attention with Ned Block at NYU. At the same time, I volunteered at the Hakwan Lau laboratory in the psychology department at Columbia. These two big influences really shifted what my PhD was eventually going to look like. Basically, I went back to my interests from undergrad and ended up focusing on perceptual awareness and introspection.

STANCE: Awesome. So that relates really well to our second question. Throughout that journey, what got you to move more to the empirical side of research? Was there a particular moment or a study that really inspired you to say, "Okay, I want to contribute to this body of empirical research"?

MORALES: I think I acquired the first seeds of interest in empirical work when I was an undergrad. And it was through the history of philosophy and popular science books, actually. I went to a small liberal arts college in Mexico City, and they were very focused on ancient Greek Philosophy, medieval Christian philosophy, German idealism, and especially Kant. So, I took several classes in Latin, Greek, and German, thinking that this is what I wanted to do because that's what the people around me were doing. But it was during my sophomore year that I just happened to check out a couple books from the library—one being by anthropologists Niles Eldridge and Ian Tattersall. That book was called The Myths of Human Evolution and one of the things that it talked about was the importance of cranium size changes across hominin evolution and how that allowed newer species to develop a more cognitively sophisticated apparatus. The other book that I checked out was by the neurologist Oliver Sacks—a pretty famous guy, some of you probably know him. It was called The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, which again made a huge impression on me about how a little deficit, a little injury, a little disease in the brain can massively change how the human mind operates. And by total coincidence, I was reading De Anima by Aristotle at the time, and I don't know, something just clicked by having these very disparate set of readings—it made me think, "Look, all this stuff that Aristotle was saying is so important and it is so interesting to try and understand how the human mind works, but it cannot be done without a thorough understanding of the brain and psychology."

I think that just planted a seed in me. I wrote my undergrad honors thesis on consciousness, including something of an empirical approach. I abandoned Greek, Latin, and German and started reading analytic philosophers from the twentieth century. But that really set me on a path of caring about science, which was eventually

heavily triggered by Colin Allen and looking at actual scientific papers on that topic. And I guess what sealed the deal was when I started my PhD. I knocked on Hakwan Lau's door, a neuroscientist at Columbia, and I just asked him, "Hey, I want to write my dissertation on these topics that you work on from the empirical side, but I feel a little bit silly just reading philosophy. I think that I should know more about the brain and psychology." I was kind of naïve at the time, so I asked which books or which articles I should read to get more informed. He responded, "Hey, it doesn't work like that in science. If you really want to understand these papers and not just glance over the abstract, you have to do the work. Why don't you come work with me?" And you know, one thing led to the other. I started as a research assistant and then I guess I was never able to stop. For my postdoc, I went to Johns Hopkins University to work with Chaz Firestone—a fantastic psychologist with deep interests in philosophy—with whom I continued to weave these threads of science and philosophy. So now I do the empirical work as well. That experience really made me value the importance of doing both types of research at the same time.

STANCE: So, when it comes to both at the same time, we've heard a bit about the role of the research in the scientific studies. What if a scientist, a psychologist, or a neurologist questioned the value of philosophic foundations or a philosophical approach to scientific discovery? What if they say, "I don't need it. I've gotten by just fine doing research from my perspective." Would you argue that they're missing something?

> THERE'S A HUGE NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS THAT VALUE AND CARE ABOUT PHILOSOPHY

MORALES: I love this question because I actually get it a lot from real psychologists and neuroscientists. I think there's a huge number of scientists that value and care about philosophy, but there's still a good number that just don't get it, or even worse they think it's a waste of time or even pernicious for science. And my first thought is that philosophical reflection is pretty much inescapable, right? As soon as you're asking the type of questions that scientists ask, if they want to actually argue as opposed to just stating that philosophy is useless, they actually have to provide philosophical argument for why. Maybe there is a demarcation issue where science and philosophy should be separate, or one is useless for the other. But in virtue of making that argument, they are actually doing philosophy.

But maybe more importantly, both are theoretical reflections and in the empirical pursuits that they follow, they actually make

philosophical assumptions. In fact, they offer philosophical arguments even if they don't describe them as such. Not every single sentence in an empirical paper is based on empirical evidence, right? There is theory, there is reasoning, there are metaphysical assumptions of how the mind works, and so on. Sometimes if researchers reflect on those assumptions with philosophers, the assumptions can be improved a little bit.

THERE IS THEORY, THERE IS REASONING, THERE ARE METAPHYSICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF HOW THE MIND WORKS

Just to give you an example, Philosopher Ned Block, who I mentioned before, introduced the distinction in consciousness research between phenomenal and access-consciousness. Access-consciousness has to do with availability of information, with rational use of that information, whereas phenomenal consciousness is what it's like to be in a particular mental state, its qualitative character. This distinction was kind of there in the literature; not to take it away from Ned Block, but he did not come to this conclusion in a complete vacuum. Scientists and philosophers were using it before, but he, with careful philosophical reflection, introduced this distinction, making it very useful for philosophers and scientists. These days this distinction has become something that guides empirical research as well. So doing philosophy well is very helpful. Knowing about what philosophers think about is very helpful. Philosophers do a lot of distinctions that help not only consciousness, which happens to be my field, but also geologists, neuroscientists, physicists, and so on. So yeah, I don't think that scientists can really be fine without philosophy, even if they don't accept it.

STANCE: Alright, well, moving on a little bit to your work. We're interested in this concept of mental strength. Could give us a brief explanation of mental strength, and in particular why you think it's a domain-general property of experience?

MORALES: Oh, great. So, mental strength is the intensity of a conscious experience. Pains, for example, can be more or less strong. Mental images can be more or less vivid. Perceptions can be more or less striking, emotion can be more or less intense, and so on. All these variations, according to my view, are variations in the degree of how strong these conscious experiences are felt. They can all be traced down to a property that I call mental strength, which is just a way of describing a phenomenal magnitude: how much of a phenomenal character and the degree of phenomenal intensity that experiences have. And when I was thinking about these issues,

one thing that caught my attention is how little recognition of this property you find in philosophy and in cognitive science these days. It's starting to change, but it's still kind of a secret that people don't talk about.

Philosophers from the past recognized it and psychologists like William James thought it was very important, but it has flown under the radar in philosophy—at least until recently. I think this is partially because philosophers get anxious to think about degrees of consciousness. They often think that it is an all-or-nothing phenomenon and once you start talking about degrees things will get metaphysically murkier, which might just as well be true. But I think that we can't deny that we have different experiences with different degrees of intensity. I take this evidence as a point of departure to build on the theory. I think that these variations in intensity have to be attributed to an intrinsic property of experiences. It's how much it's felt as opposed to what they are about or what you're representing.

A popular, alternative view in philosophy would be that these changes in intensity are really just a consequence of what the mental state is about. On this view, if I imagine something very vividly, that's because the representational contents of the experience are sharp, not because the experience itself is sharp. The experience itself is not necessarily something that some philosophers think that you have access to; they think that we experience the world through our representations, but the representations are transparent.

But I think that this is wrong. I think that we experience at least some of these phenomenal properties of experiences, like their intensity, which can eventually be determined as distinct from their representational content. And I think mental strength is domain-general. It's either domain-general or domain-specific. So, on the domain-specific view, pains have one type of intensity, mental images have another type of intensity, perceptions have another type of intensity. But on the domain-general view, intensity is the same property shared across different types. And I think the domain-specific view has a hard time explaining "blinding" experiences, or those where a reduction of intensity in one experience takes place when another stronger experience interferes with it.

So, if you're in excruciating pain—I hope none of you have experienced it—but if you have, it's really hard to experience other things, right? It's almost as if your whole existence becomes that pain and what

you hear, what you see, and what you feel in uninjured parts of your body kind of cease to exist. You're not aware of them. It's as if the pain is blinding or blocking other types of experience. If you have a vivid imagination and you're daydreaming, it can get so vivid that you perceptually decouple from the world. You almost stop experiencing what is in front of you. Maybe you even start acting out that imaginary conversation you're having with your partner or whoever it may be.

I think that these kinds of interferences are nicely explained by the fact that mental strength is a limited resource, when it gets spent on one type of property, other states have less of it. You just can't experience everything at the top of its possible degree of intensity. I think that this just speaks in favor of the domain-general view.

STANCE: This quality of one strong experience being able to blind another, this is the kind of relational aspect of mental strength that you bring up, correct?

MORALES: Right, yeah.

STANCE: As we read your explanation of mental strength, particularly in your dissertation, you describe how the mind kind of self-structures in the sense that it has it a series of priorities where it prioritizes mentally stronger experiences and deprioritizes mentally weaker experiences. Could you explain that further?

MORALES: First of all, I think that you're probably like the sixth person that read my dissertation besides my advisor, which is fantastic [laughs]. But, yes, exactly! That's exactly right. I think one very nice consequence of the mental strength theory is that it really portrays our minds, our conscious minds in particular, as being active and self-structuring. I think that other views might have a little bit more trouble getting this picture, and they require the subject to be way more active than I think we actually are in building what our experiences are like.

I think it's true that when you pay attention to different things, you can voluntarily control your attention and so to some extent, we are definitely responsible for contributing to the structuring of our minds. Think about this interview, right? Maybe my voice is kind of prominent in your conscious experience at the moment as opposed to the experience of feeling the chair against your back or the light in the room. Before I mentioned them and your attention was captured by them, they weren't prominent in your conscious field, right? It was just the strength of the external stimulation. Yes, what structures the mind is a little bit of what you're paying

attention to, but I think that attentional effect is secondary. It is one mechanism that we have for structuring the mind, but it is really the mental strength that makes mental states fall into place. And, you know, it's nice when you find that other, smarter people kind of agree with you. William James held a similar view. Like with many other things, I think he got it right when, while he was discussing attention, he said that there is no need for attention to drag ideas before consciousness when we see how perfectly they can drag themselves there.

We don't need to make a voluntary effort to organize our minds. Our minds are already organized. That organization happens at the conscious level, according to me, thanks to mental strength. And that explains why there are ranks, such as why we experience a background and foreground. Everything is set on a foreground or a background, right? The Gestalt psychologists got that right too; it's a necessary trait of our minds. It would be very weird if every single conscious experience that we have is at the exact same level, making it look kind of indistinguishable from everything else. It's very malleable levels that structure how we experience the world.

STANCE: We were interested in taking this self-structuring into an ethical dimension. We're curious if the kind of automatic self-structuring that you describe, the secondary nature of attention, threatens or provides some sort of argument against libertarian accounts of free will. Does the self-structuring that you're talking about prevent agent causation, or something like that, or does it make it more difficult to defend?

MORALES: Yeah, that's a really interesting question that I confess I haven't given enough thought to before. I usually try to avoid ethics because I just think it's very complicated, so I study consciousness instead [laughs]. Although my gut reaction is to think that the self-structuring by the intensity of our experiences does shape the space of possibilities that we can freely act upon. You know, out of sight out of mind. If something is not a part of your consciousness—or if it is, it's not particularly intense—it limits what is available as an actual possibility for you to act upon. It's not just that we can't act, freely or not, upon what's not in your mind, but our decisions are also going to be impacted by what's at the center of the totality of our moment-to-moment experiences. So, I don't know if it makes us not free, but it limits the range of mental states that we can act upon or base upon.

That said, I think that this primacy of salient mental states should be defeasible, right? I think that in many cases we can choose to ignore

our more intense experiences in favor of the less intense ones. It might be harder to act upon the weaker ones, but it doesn't mean that we can't figure how to ignore strong feelings such as hunger in order to carry on with whatever we are doing because we deem it to be more important. But, of course, there's a limit, right? For example, there is extreme pain, hunger, passion, euphoria, sadness—any emotion can become very intense. It's easy to lose ourselves a little bit, or a lot, and struggle to be in control of our actions. I think this is a good result because we know that when people are put to extremes, it's hard to attribute freedom to them. There is a book by Primo Levi, a survivor from Auschwitz, titled *If This Is a Man*. The premise of the book is if someone's body and will have been broken to the extent that prisoners of Auschwitz were, is that a man? One of the questions explored by the book is "Is there free will?" Levi also thought that there was no morality anymore. For example, the stealing of a spoon from another prisoner in Auschwitz might not be immoral because it's out of the realm of morality once the human condition has been broken to that extent. And I think that it's a terrible consequence, but it might be in line with when certain mental states are so extreme, we lose some kind of control and maybe even responsibility. So yeah, I think we can use mental strength to explain, at least a little bit, what the margins are when it comes to operating under freewill.

STANCE: I think you had a great point there, that a blinding effect can occur with mentally stronger experiences. Can we connect this blinding effect to the popular intuition that crimes of passion are less blameworthy? I mean, even the law is structured so that premeditated murders generally receive higher sentencing. So, do you think that the intuition that an absence or reduction of control accounted for in the law could be explained with the blinding effect of mentally stronger experiences?

MORALES: Yeah, I love this question. I was only partially joking when I said that I tend to not think about ethical questions in my professional work often. But yeah, this is a good case for thinking about it. Because being consistent with the self-structuring thesis, yes, you are in control of what you expose yourself to. Just as you can avoid looking at the sun to avoid blinding yourself, you can try to avoid having extreme experiences to avoid making them too dominating, right? But sometimes we fail at that, or

MAYBE WE ARE FREE TO CONTROL OURSELVES AND NOT ACT UPON AN OVERPOWERING EXPERIENCE, BUT WHAT IF LITERALLY THE ONLY THING THAT YOU'RE EXPERIENCING IS ANGER?

life just makes you have these very intense experiences. So, I think that you're right, we do tend to excuse, both morally and legally, actions that stem from extremely intense dominating experiences: maybe bursts of rage; excruciating pain, either physical or mental; extreme sadness; burning lust; blinding desire of vengeance; maybe even intense happiness, as people do silly things when they're extremely happy. There might be fairly well-studied biological and neurological reasons why we can experience an atrophy of reason, but I think at the conscious level, when we talk about the phenomenology, the blinding experience is useful too because an overpowering experience is something that we can't really help. We can't change too much moment-to-moment. Maybe we are free to control ourselves and not act upon an overpowering experience, but what if literally the only thing that you're experiencing is anger? Think about Iago's jealousy in Othello and how it made him act in completely irrational, even self-damaging ways. I think it's not just that the jealousy is very powerful and becomes the only thing in front of you, but it can be so overpowering that it dampens other experiences¬—it prevents you from having other normal emotions or to be able to focus on anything else.

Sometimes in our lab we ask people to focus their gaze on a small dot at the center of a screen. Some people find it very difficult because there is just this gray screen in front of them with this tiny dot and when everything is so homogeneous it's very hard to keep your eyes fixed because we're used to moving them around and shifting our attention. And I think that an analogous problem happens with the mind and with conscious experiences. If you're so dominated at one particular moment, maybe it's very, very hard to look away. You don't have anywhere to move to. I would say that this is a theory of moment-to-moment changes, like mental strength. So, of course, this wouldn't apply to long-term planning or anything like that, but I think that there is some room for mental strength and ethical reflection to take place in the actions that affect you in the moment. I should think more about this.

STANCE: The way that you describe it made me immediately think of full-body relaxation techniques, where the trick is to imagine a particular part of your body and to tighten it and relax it. The idea is, if you're having an overwhelming blinding experience lying there, to focus on points to bring those experiences up and reduce the blinding effect of that anger or the anxiety you're feeling.

MORALES: Yeah, absolutely! I think you're right. That's exactly the effect. And it has been shown that if you focus on your pain, you

can bring that sensation up; and if you shift your focus away from the pain, you reduce how intense it feels even though the stimulation is similar. So, in terms of moral actions, that has to play a role, right? How many options did the defendant have? To understand the *mens rea* and the desire of causing damage, we must ask "To what extent did this person have options?"

STRONGER EXPERIENCES ARE EASIER TO INTROSPECT AND HARDER TO MAKE MISTAKES ABOUT

We usually think of having options and freedom to be crucial for assigning moral responsibility, but if you're blinded by an emotion, maybe that's why we are a little bit more lenient with people who didn't have options mentally speaking.

STANCE: Related to this topic of moral responsibility, we're interested in emotional experiences. While coming up with questions, I was thinking about the times I have had incredibly mentally strong emotions. I was looking back and thinking: "How does the strength of these emotional experiences affect my ability to understand them and to understand how my emotions are affecting me?" Do you think there is any relationship between this kind of introspective success, not just locating that the emotion is there, but understanding how it's affecting you? Or do you think that this is unrelated to the mental strength of an emotion?

MORALES: Yeah, yeah. Again, a super interesting question because I do link mental strength with the accuracy of introspection. In general, I think that stronger experiences are easier to introspect and harder to make mistakes about, whereas a very weak experience might be harder to decipher, and we may lose some of its detail. But your question raises an interesting possibility, which is that there is a limit to how strong an experience may be, right? Maybe it's harder to miss the presence of an extremely strong experience, but then, it's so blinding that it's hard to make out what it's about, almost like looking at the sun. You won't miss the fact that there's a bright source of light in front of you, but you won't be able to make out any of the details of the sun because it's so powerful that you can't actually see it properly.

In philosophy there have been huge debates about introspection and whether we can actually introspect mental states. Emotions are important in that sense, but also other kinds of mental states. The issue is that it seems like if you introspect, then you are—in virtue of introspecting—affecting that mental state. It's very hard to know what an un-introspected mental state feels like, right? When we attempt to introspect it's always a little bit in retrospect.

That is very different from what it feels like when you're not paying attention. I don't know if that means that we wouldn't understand those emotions or those mental states in general, but I think that it's definitely a problem that we have with introspection, that in virtue of using it, we transform the state a little bit. Which, on one hand, is a problem.

On the other hand, it's not that different from how other things work, like perception. You might think that looking at something doesn't change the thing that you're looking at. It's true that the object doesn't change, but it's not true that the way your brain processes that object doesn't change, whether you pay attention to it or not, right? It's hard to know what something looks like when you're not paying attention to it. So, in that sense, I think introspection both affects the state that you're introspecting, but it also helps to boost the signal that you're trying to get. So, as long as it doesn't get too strong, at least on average, you should get a better sense of what your mental state and emotions look like. This is why meditation tends to help people.

STANCE: Kind of related to this topic of emotions and our ability to reckon with them, we're interested in how your concept of mental strength might relate to, or explain, another concept in psychology: stereotype threat. The concept of stereotype threat relies on Cognitive Load Theory, which is similar to, but has important differences with, your theory of mental strength. So, we were wondering if mental strength might help to explain stereotype threat, or if it offers new challenges or problems?

MORALES: On an intuitive level, I would say, of course. Distraction, for whatever reason, might take away important processing resources that affect our performance in a task. Now, with that said, I don't think this is a case where mental strength can help that much, and I think that is because the theory is cached out at a phenomenal level. An experience that is intense might prevent feeling other things as intensely, as we've been discussing. But cognitive processing, reasoning, doing math, and other things that I think the stereotype threat literature has focused on, are centered on cognitive abilities, and not on experiences or their qualitative character. So even though cognitive load and mental strength may have similar implications for how they limit other cognitive capacities and other experiences, respectively, I think that they operate in parallel and in different levels.

Of course, if someone is having a strong experience of anxiety while taking a test, it might be hard for them to do well. But, stereotype

threat, as I understand it, goes beyond just feelings of anxiety, right? It's supposed to explain how cognitive resources are taking away from the task because of what effectively is multitasking. In this case, by trying to spend energy thinking about and trying to avoid fulfilling the stereotype, you fulfill it by underperforming. So, I think there are different levels of explanation. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that, as interesting as the hypothesis is, there have been lots of problems replicating stereotype threat's effects in the last few years. But maybe there is something about stereotype threat: when you become aware of your position in a social hierarchy, it's distracting, and that makes you underperform; but, given all the problems of replicating the effect that we've seen, I think we should be careful. Of course, caution doesn't take away from the everyday struggles that minorities and people who have been discriminated against experience, and the extra cognitive load that they have to put into doing tasks. It just seems that the reasons for underperformance, although not always, are more complicated than the simple activation of the stereotype. There's more research to be done.

STANCE: Thank you for that, I wasn't familiar with the replication issues surrounding stereotype threat. This other component of your work that we're interested in talking about is how you use a Signal Detection Theory model to explain introspection and introspective success. Could explain how you translate the model from perception research into introspection?

MORALES: Yeah, I can say a little about the origins of both mental strength and introspective Signal Detection Theory. I was very impressed by Signal Detection Theory when I was studying it in the lab. I thought this idea that there's noise everywhere—that the jobs of perceptual detectors are to separate signal from noise—was so powerful that I started to find parallels. In the history of science, it's called model migration. We use what we understand well to try to understand what we don't get very well yet. This happens in development when we're children. We try to teach children easy things so they can start understanding harder things,

> THIS IDEA THAT THERE'S NOISE EVERYWHERE—THAT THE JOBS OF PERCEPTUAL DETECTORS ARE TO SEPARATE SIGNAL FROM NOISE—WAS SO POWERFUL THAT I STARTED TO FIND PARALLELS.

and it happens in science too. Think about Michael Faraday, who used the physics of mechanical fluids to explain electromagnetism,

a new phenomenon. And Signal Detection Theory, as it is used in perception, is already a migrated model. The math was developed for assessing radar performance—how to know if a radar is actually detecting targets, missing them, or just false alarming to non-targets. It's a huge problem, so scientists and engineers in the United States created Signal Detection Theory to solve this issue, introducing two main concepts that we use in perception today: sensitivity and response bias—how good you are at detecting something, and how conservative or liberal you are at calling it the thing you're detecting? One is how good your visual system is, and the other is how willing you are to say that you saw something. This is just such a powerful model that I thought that those formalisms could be used in introspection as well, and they can guide us in using something that is very well understood in perception to understand something that is harder to study, which is introspection of conscious experiences.

Just like in perception or radar technology, the mental states are out there in your mind, and introspection's task is to detect them. Is there hunger or not? Is this a craving for pizza or burgers? Am I experiencing crimson or scarlet? It's just hard to study introspection because our experiences are inside our heads, and experimenters cannot look at them. So, the idea is that introspection must operate as cognitive faculties that we know, and there are many of them. Many work as signal detection theory, many use signal and noise separation to perform their tasks. If we can use that, maybe we can understand introspection better. The idea is that mental strength plays the role of stimulus strength, and that role is modulating how likely it is to have an accurate introspection, or how seeing with good light is more likely to yield an accurate perception. Not always, but it's more likely. When the light is off, you are less likely to find what you are looking for. You could find it still—you can still see in the dark, just not very well. So, introspecting a strong relative state should also be something that is more likely to yield an accurate introspection, and weak mental experiences are just a little bit more likely to end up in error.

STANCE: One of the commitments of your theory is indeed the possibility for error, and we can introspect, experience, and detect something that is not there. We debated this idea, and some of us have the intuition that, for the most part, if a person thinks they are in pain, they are in pain, in the sense that felt pain is identical to pain. What would you say we are missing here?

MORALES: I get this question a lot. I totally get it—the idea that someone can be mistaken when reporting that they are experience

pain is counterintuitive. But I think this is a case where intuition can lead us astray. Granted, I think it's really hard to imagine being wrong about a strong pain. But I think that when we consider weak emotions, or weak experiences in general, our confidence should actually go down, and if our confidence about what we're experiencing goes down, we should be more open to error. Imagine that you go to the ER in extreme pain, and the nurse asks you if you're sure that you're in pain. You will probably be very mad and offended by the question and just demand to get a painkiller, but after the painkiller starts reducing your pain, there is a point where it is actually harder to introspect if you're still in pain or not. "Is this pain or am I just numb?" Or "Is this just uncomfortable and I'm actually not in pain anymore?" Or "The pain is actually gone but it was there for so long that I still kind of feel weird, but it's not pain." Even if you think that you can't be wrong, I think these examples illustrate that you can't be equally confident in what you're experiencing in these two extreme cases. What I argue when thinking about Signal Detection Theory is that because there are these weak experiences that are harder to classify, it is possible that we might be wrong about them. It might be that we make a judgment that we're in pain, that we really believe that we're in pain, when there is actually no experience whatsoever of pain.

> THE IDEA THAT SOMEONE CAN BE MISTAKEN WHEN REPORTING THAT THEY ARE EXPERIENCING PAIN IS COUNTERINTUITIVE

I think philosophers really don't think of introspection as just another cognitive capacity. They have provided introspection with the special status and infallible ability to get our mental states. But my view is that this is just another thing that our brain does and if it's just another thing that our brain does, why would it be infallible? This view is part of a family of theories called Inner Sense Theories, where the idea is that introspection works like perception—it's a detection mechanism and philosophers hate this. They literally have described inner sense as a repugnant theory. So, I guess I wear that as a badge of honor in the sense that if our brains are doing it, they can do it wrong. At least to me, introspection is like all other thinking, and I don't think our brains do magic. So, I just propose that introspection is another detection mechanism that is liable to error. Of course, one of the problems is that those

> I JUST PROPOSE THAT INTROSPECTION IS ANOTHER DETECTION MECHANISM THAT IS LIABLE TO ERROR

errors are hard to detect. Like every time you say, "there is some pain," there is no way of confirming that you're right or wrong, and this lack of confirmation gives you some sort of authority over everyone else. But, at least in some cases, we should be a little bit more confident that this infallibility is very implausible, like in a case where the dentist hasn't even touched you yet. You were so certain introspectively that what you experienced was pain, but maybe you just confused vibrations for pain—or something like that. So at least, theoretically, these errors should be possible.

STANCE: So, with that, do you think that it gets a little bit more complicated when the introspective error is long term? Would you consider experiencing placebo effects from a prescription medication a case of on-going introspective error?

MORALES: Well, I guess there could be two types of placebo effect. One is where only your judgments change, but your experience is the same. Another is that the belief that you're being given medication has an actual causal effect on reducing the experience of pain, so your introspection is accurate. Your pain has been reduced, you're just wrong about the cause of it. Feeling like you're dealing with the problem or feeling less stressed now that you got the medicine both might help reducing pain in real ways. So, I guess it's hard to know which one it is.

STANCE: Switching gears a little: we're interested in your value for collaboration, especially between scientists and philosophers. How would you suggest that we foster this kind of collaboration, especially at the undergraduate level? You talked a bit about going to your professor and him inviting you to be a research assistant. Would you recommend that we, as philosophers, put ourselves out there in a similar way?

MORALES: I definitely do. The value of expanding your horizons is undeniable. I think that it is very important, even within philosophy, to read broadly—not just the ancients. Read contemporary philosophy too, or not just contemporary philosophy, read some Germans for a change. And I think that is good to expand your fields in general in life. This is why people travel and try new things. I think exposing yourself to scientific reasoning, to the scientific results, is really a way of broadening not just how you do philosophy, but what you can do philosophy about. I think it creates a very virtuous cycle.

How to foster this? It might depend on your interests and what's available around you; but I would go from reading pop science books that introduce general audiences to a topic that you're interested in to randomly attending science talks at your university. Even if you don't get everything that is being said, that's okay. I think if you're

interested, you just circle around enough until you get it, until you start seeing problems, or learning the language, which is a huge part of doing interdisciplinary work. It's not just learning results as a list of facts, which science is not. Science is not a list of facts, it's a practice. It is an endeavor and in order to get it one of the very important things is to see how it is done. This could be in popular books or in an article. It will be hard to understand half of it, but next time you do it, it will be a little bit easier. Talk to friends or peers who are majoring in scientific fields. Just talk to people. Expose yourself to these things. I think it's just so important to have the tools and a broader sense of what happens. Sometimes it might end up with you getting into an interdisciplinary research program and sometimes it won't, but it will broaden your understanding of the world. And of course, scientists should do the same: they should take philosophy classes

> SCIENCE IS NOT A LIST OF FACTS, IT'S A PRACTICE. IT IS AN ENDEAVOR AND IN ORDER TO GET IT ONE OF THE VERY IMPORTANT THINGS IS TO SEE HOW IT IS DONE.

STANCE: I think reading a lot of your work, especially the experimental work, gave us that experience. A lot of us came into it and when we started reading, it was very new for us. The experimental methodology, different theories about the neural correlates of consciousness, it was all very complicated for us. But I think you are right in that we collaboratively grew and understood a little bit more of the experimentation. We're not quite there yet, but I think that we've at least started the kind of collaboration that you're talking about. Maybe we need to get more scientists in here.

MORALES: That's good to hear, it never works perfectly on the first try, but maybe some of you will be more interested and read a follow-up or another paper on that. It's about being in the same room. Either physically in the same room or in the same head space as people working in another field. That's what it takes, sharing concepts, language, and theories. Eventually you just get it.

STANCE: Alright, thank you so much for coming. It's been a wonderful interview.

MORALES: No, thank you so much. I really, really appreciate it. I feel very lucky that you all read my work, thought carefully about this, and made wonderful questions, it's great. Thank you so much.

STANCE: Thank you, too!

ARTWORK INDEX

PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH
ART BY BEN REISTER

This image shows how the article demonstrates the epistemological injustices relective of the bias of people within the justice system by depicting a judge and witnesses looming over the condemned.

IN DEFENSE OF IMMORALISM
ART BY BEN REISTER

This image represents how art can have subtle moral or ethical flaws, but can still be appreciated by people. Art can be enhanced by the presence of flaws.

SCIENCE AND TRUTH
ART BY RACHEL BERG

This piece depicts the layered nature of Whig realism. The statement from the paper, "New scientific theories build upon previous theories that contained some truths within the theories," inspires thoughts of how many theories are contained within eachother.

NIETZSCHE AND THE JOKER
ART BY ELI KATSIMPALIS

The relationship between positive and negative space within the composition represents the dichotomy of Apollonian and Dionysian. The white space represents the decline of creativity and tragedy while the black represents Nietzsche's desire for a Dionysian society.

EMBODIED PRACTICE
ART BY BEN REISTER

This piece portrays how eastern meditative practices and western philosophy can be brought together to bring human beings to a greater understanding of ourselves.
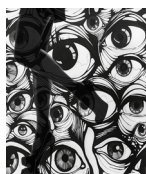
BODY MEMORY UNDER PATRIARCHY
ART BY ELI KATSIMPALIS

The eyes in the background are meant to depict the male gaze and how this leads women to yearn for male validation. The eyes can also signify how women view each other and learn bodily behaviors from each other.

MORE THAN WE CAN CHEW
ART BY RACHEL BERG

The title of this article inspired an illustration that embodies the ridiculousness of society's beauty standards. This design emphasizes how society perceives women and the importance of looking good.
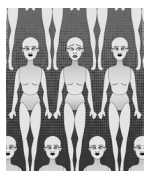
TO BE A WOMAN
ART BY RACHEL BERG

This piece is meant to showcase the uncertainties of understanding one's gender and sexuality. We live in a world that force-feeds boys and girls the normalized way they should present themselves.

ESSENCE OF THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS
ART BY BEN REISTER

This image strives to depict a simple representation of how thought experiments help us question the inner workings of our minds and turn us into more thoughtful, philosophically intelligent beings.

DO MY SIGNALS DECIEVE ME?
ART BY RACHEL BERG

The mind is a tricky thing. The artist was inspired by the interview describing how certain thoughts can be experienced at different levels.

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