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William Allen—A Reflection on the Shelby/Mills Debate: The Limits of Reforming Rawls

In this paper I would like to provide an assessment of the recent debate between Charles Mills and Tommie Shelby concerning whether Rawls’s political liberalism can adequately address racial injustice. Specifically can political liberalism, which is situated in ideal theory, address nonideal concrete issues such as African-American reparations? Mills argues that Rawls’s ideal principles of justice and their reliance on distributive justice are insufficient to address racial injustice; as an alternative Mills proposes reforming political liberalism by replacing the existing principles of justice with nonideal principles that explicitly address the impact of white supremacy on issues of racial justice. Shelby concedes that Rawls’s theory is rooted in ideal theory and does not directly address nonideal problems such as racial injustice; however he argues that Rawls’s principles of justice serve as fundamental guidelines to addressing such issues.

The debate between Shelby and Mills is somewhat abstract in that it is focused on the theoretical features of political liberalism, (although Mills occasionally references arguments for African-American reparations.) I believe a concrete analysis of the black underclass as a group due corrective justice not only supports Mills’s argument but reveals the limits of distributive justice in application to psychic harm such communities have endured. Ultimately although I am sympathetic to Mills’s negative argument, I surmise that Mills’s reform would fail to meet the requirement of public justification within political liberalism such that his proposal is untenable.

The aim of political liberalism as conceived by Rawls in A Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism is to provide a procedure for constructing principles of justice (POJ) which free and rational people who subscribe to liberal values would choose if they were in a state of equality. The selected principles would be used to form a constitution and subsequent institutions. Reconceptualizing the
social contract of classical liberal theorists, Rawls devises the “original position” as a procedure for constructing the principles of justice. The original position is conceived of as a hypothetical scenario in which representatives of the various segments of society deliberate to choose the POJ. In order to ensure impartiality in the decision making process, representatives are equal in power and agree to fair terms of cooperation. Furthermore they are constrained by what Rawls calls the “veil of ignorance” in which representatives are unaware of the existential circumstances of the group they are representing (race, gender, class, intelligence, religious values, etc.) Most importantly Rawls stresses that knowledge of any group’s comprehensive views are to be excluded. Comprehensive views are understood as a worldview that encompasses a person’s conception of the good (e.g. Christian morality, Utilitarianism etc.) Given the multiplicity of comprehensive views in a pluralist liberal state, the allowance of any comprehensive view in the construction of the POJ problematizes the justification of such principles once they are made public. Ultimately, the original position is intended to construct POJ which any reasonable liberal person would accept because they find that the principles of justice are embedded in or not in conflict with their comprehensive view.

The two principles of justice Rawls claims are indicative any liberal state are: 1. the provision of basic rights and liberties, and 2. fair equality of opportunity to public offices and positions (FEO), in addition to the “difference principle” which calls for the best economic arrangement for the least advantaged. The principles are intentionally abstract for they are understood as guides for forming a constitution, political institutions and particular policies in what he calls a “well-ordered society” (a fully reasonable [in his sense of the term], democratic society regulated by a public political conception

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1 See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.), 48-54. Reasonable persons for Rawls refers to people who recognize that for the sake of the ends of society at large, they must consider the ends of other citizens (ends which may sometimes conflict with one’s own.)
of justice.) Rawls admittedly seeks to formulate an ideal state that serves as a model for reforming existing liberal states. He does not consider his project utopian in that the original position and POJ are logically consistent and reflective of the values shared by liberal persons.

Since the publication of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls’s procedure of construction and the POJ have been criticized. Criticisms have ranged from claims that the original position is embedded with a metaphysical conception of the person to faults with the difference principle and its aim to provide the best economic conditions for the least advantaged. Charles Mills’s criticism follows a line of criticism begun by feminist philosophers who argue that liberal political theory in general is reflective of white male thought and promotes white male dominance such that theories and issues of justice concerning women are marginalized. Following such work, Charles Mills’s criticism of Rawls and hence his debate with Tommie Shelby (a supporter of Rawls) stems from the argument that liberal political philosophy has ignored or minimized the role of white supremacy in the exclusion of non-whites from participating and benefiting fully from liberal societies.

Mills argues that embedded in liberal theory is a social ontology that abstracts away from actual oppressive and exploitative relations non-whites have been subjected to for the sake of maintaining white male privilege. For example, liberal values such as the right to property and equality of persons historically have been used to oppress non-whites by denying that non-whites are fully human and thus are subject to being property and treated unequally. A contemporary example, it has been argued, is the use of the liberal concept of the person as an atomistic autonomous individual to oppress minority groups. This conception of the self has been used to ignore and perpetuate the condition of minorities in disadvantaged urban communities. The operating idea is that the condition of these

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communities is due solely to individual choice and not due to structural constraints on their agency. Such a conception of the person coupled with an idealization of social institutions (e.g. Rawls’s well-ordered society) leads to a failure to adequately address oppression in actual nonideal societies, while maintaining power in the hands of the privileged. These arguments and other characteristics of liberalism serve to support Mills’s conclusion that liberal theory perpetuates white supremacy.

Mills recognizes that Rawls’s political liberalism (in contrast to his Enlightenment period predecessors) does not explicitly promote the exclusion and oppression of non-whites. However, Rawls’s failure to adequately address racial injustice is, according to Mills, a contemporary manifestation of the tendency of liberal political philosophers to marginalize the experience of non-whites and ignore the importance of white supremacy in doing social and political philosophy. In particular, Rawls’s choice to focus his work solely within the framework of ideal theory avoids addressing concrete problems of racial injustice in actual nonideal liberal societies.

Mills concedes that occasionally Rawls references racial and gender injustice, but Rawls does so only briefly, justifying the paucity of such discussion to the fact that his project is situated in ideal theory. In Mills’s textual reading of Rawls, Rawls not only recognizes the omission of nonideal scenarios but Rawls admits that his two principles of justice may not be adequate to address matters of racial injustice. Mills provides the following quote from Rawls:

The principles and their lexical order were not acknowledged with these situations in mind (unjust institutions) and so it is possible that they no longer hold. I shall not attempt to give a systematic answer to these questions. . . . The intuitive idea is to split the theory of justice into two parts. The first or ideal part assumes strict compliance. . . My main concern is with this part of the theory. Nonideal theory, the second part, is worked out after
an ideal conception of justice has been chosen; only then do the parties ask which principles to adopt under less happy conditions. . . . The conception of justice as fairness does not directly apply to [these issues].\(^3\)

Among our most basic problems are those of race, ethnicity, and gender. These may seem of an altogether different character calling for different principles of justice, which Theory does not discuss.\(^4\)

From passages such as these Mills infers that Rawls believes that special principles of justice may have to be constructed to address racial justice since the provided POJ pertain only to an ideal society without injustice. Mills is particularly interested in the issue of reparations to African-Americans as a problem case for political liberalism. Rawls does not seem to have a theoretical apparatus to address reparations because the POJ were not designed to address rectificatory justice. Mills surmises that Rawls would propose a special form of the Difference Principle to address reparations rather than merely applying the principle of FEO as Shelby suggests. Mills himself seems to advocate a more radical position in which Rawls’s POJ are replaced with nonideal principles of justice that explicitly prohibit the socialization and institutionalization of white supremacist ideology (it must be noted that Mills does not provide a formulation of such principles in his articles.\(^5\))


\(^5\) In a handout given at one of his talks he provides a tentative formulation of such principles. They entail statements such as ending racially unequal citizenship, ending racial exploitation and ending racial disrespect. However, since these principles have not been published they should not be taken as definitive principles he proposes.
Shelby, in opposition, claims that not only is Mills’s radical reform unnecessary, but Rawls’s existing POJ are capable of serving as a fundamental guide to inform nonideal matters of justice. Shelby concedes that Rawls does not address issues of rectificatory justice because Rawls’s project is rooted in ideal theory. However, Shelby does not see this as problematic. He argues that in order to determine how to evaluate particular instances of injustice (falling in the category of nonideal theory) the general standards of justice (found in ideal theory) must be available. Before we are capable of evaluating particular instances of injustice, we first must know what criterion is used to determine what is unjust.

The demand of the universal constraining the particular in relation justice can be traced back to Plato in his exploration of what justice is intrinsically. For example, within the context of Plato’s conception of justice, because justice foundationally entails citizens acting according to their natural predetermined roles within the polis, Plato’s conception of justice does not support particular instantiations of liberal justice such as equal opportunities for public office (I am putting aside Mills’s and others criticism that liberal justice traditionally excluded nonwhites from such opportunities.)

In forming the basic structure of a liberal society, Rawls’s POJ are meant to reflect the fundamentally shared conception of justice in a liberal society and thus serves as a guide for particular instances of injustice. Shelby states:

I explained how Rawls’s theory could help us understand what institutional racism and racial discrimination are and what makes them unjust. And I highlighted that Rawls would have us understand the ideal of racial equality as equal civic standing in a democratic polity, which is grounded in the presumption that all, regardless of race, are capable of fully participating in social life on fair terms. My ultimate aim was to explain how the Rawlsian framework
could help us understand how racial justice fits within an overall conception of social justice.\textsuperscript{6}

So even though Rawls does not specifically address rectificatory justice, reparations is an instance of an infraction on the right of all citizens to have certain freedoms, and fair and equal opportunities to participate in a liberal state. In the case of African-Americans historically, both principles of justice have been violated. Ultimately Shelby’s point is that before the demand can be made that African-Americans are due reparations from the standpoint of justice, it must be established, in principle, that violations of personal freedom, equal and fair participation in society, etc. are wrong. This is what Rawls’s POJ serve as such that they are a sufficient guide to addressing reparations.

At this point I wish to take a slight deviation from the broad issue of reparations to African-Americans as a whole and turn to the particular issue of reparations owed to the black underclass.\textsuperscript{7} As I will argue, the black underclass provides a hard case for analyzing corrective justice within liberalism in that it entails rectification and reform. Additionally, it requires the redress of material and psychic harm. According to Shelby rectification refers to backward looking proposals to correct past injustice (what is normally called reparations); reform refers to forward looking proposals to address present injustice and prevent future injustice. The plight of the black underclass, I will argue requires both, such that the line between the two is somewhat blurred. Through this concrete case I intend to


\textsuperscript{7} The black underclass traditionally understood refers to disadvantaged African-American urban communities. Contemporarily such communities can be found in American small cities and towns. A good starting point for discussion about the black underclass is William Julius Wilson, \textit{The Truly Disadvantaged} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.)
highlight some of the problems in applying the POJ to corrective justice.

Due to the failure and neglect of government to provide the black underclass the same opportunities and public services as mainstream America, the black underclass can be understood as a group due reparations. Support for my argument is that the genesis of the black underclass is partly the result of integrationist public policies beginning in the sixties (such as Affirmative Action) which only served to better the condition of the black middle class. Blue collar African-Americans with limited skill sets were unprepared for the advent of the Information Age and were provided with little means to compete in such a market. Poor public services such as education, police enforcement, health services etc. coupled with high unemployment and poverty only exacerbated the problem which led to the proliferation and perpetuation of the black underclass. Sociologists such as William Julius Wilson note that other factors such as the exodus of the black middle class from previously segregated African-American communities and a recession during the seventies also contributed to the proliferation and maintenance of the black underclass. However, poor public policy and services, unemployment, and general public apathy (or antipathy) towards such communities are large contributors as well.\footnote{William Julius Wilson, \textit{The Truly Disadvantaged} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.)}

The result of such neglect has produced an environment in which black underclass residents are subjected material harm in the form of severe unemployment, poverty, poor education, and crime. Furthermore philosophers such as Cornel West argue that psychic harm in the form of meaninglessness, hopelessness and lovelessness are the result of living in such an oppressive environment.\footnote{Cornel West, \textit{Race Matters} (New York: Vintage Books, 1994.)} Given the material and psychic harm done to the black underclass, partly
due to government action and inaction, the black underclass is a group due reparations.

However since the plight of the black underclass presently exists it also serves as an issue of justice calling for government reform. In this sense revitalizing the black underclass is not merely a backward looking task in which reparations is given to the group and the government thereafter is absolved of its duties to such communities. It is also a forward looking issue in which government has a present and future duty to help transform the black underclass into a strong sustainable community. This requires supporting grassroots organizations and black institutions within the black underclass in addition to providing adequate public services. Additionally, in response to the psychic harm, public institutions must change the nature of its relationships with the black underclass, which requires institutional changes beyond the distribution of goods and services. As a matter of policy and organizational culture, public servants must interact with such communities in way that empowers residents rather than disempowers, fosters trust rather than distrust and promote a sense of civic belonging locally and nationally. The police, for example, are generally perceived in such communities as a force that not only fails to provide security, but due to police harassment and a perceived attitude of antipathy or apathy for the black underclass, promotes distrust and disempowerment in such communities. If the policies for police reform are confined to merely “cracking down” on criminal elements without police officers establishing amicable relations with residents and recognizing that they serve as models of public servants, types of adults, different races of people, etc., then the demand for addressing psychic harm has not been met.

The challenges that this provides for Rawls are multiple, beginning with the fact that his theory does not substantially address rectificatory justice (a point that seems to be conceded by all parties.) However, Shelby believes that the fundamental principles entailed in rectificatory justice can found in FEO. Before providing a critique of applying FEO, it should be noted that Shelby does not provide a
defense against Mills’s textual argument that Rawls in fact surmises that new principles of justice may be needed to address racial justice.

Shelby’s criticism that Mills’s rejection of ideal theory fails to recognize that a standard of justice must first be established before particular cases of justice can be addressed misses Mills’s point. In my understanding of Mills, he recognizes this relationship. Mills’s rejection of Rawls’s ideal principles of justice for nonideal principles is reflective of his metatheoretical critique of liberalism. Mills’s nonideal POJ (whatever they may be) stem from the fundamental standard of liberal values in which Rawls’s ideal principles are derived. The difference is that, according to Mills, Rawls rejects or fails to recognize white supremacy as a fundamental feature underlying the applicability of liberal values. This is the real heart of Mills and Shelby’s debate. Their disagreement is not whether a standard of justice is needed to determine particular instance of injustice, but how the standard of justice should be understood.

Shelby does address the claim that white supremacy is embedded in liberalism, his refutation is that Mills erroneously attributes Rawls to being subject to an “ideology” in the Marxist sense. However, the issue of ideology within liberalism is an important point which Shelby dismisses too quickly. He summarizes Mills’s argument in the following:

Mills extending insights from Marxism, argues that ideal theory obscures the actual conditions of social life, which are rife with racialized forms of domination, exploitation, and brutality. He contends that by abstracting away from the facts of oppression in its search for valid justice principles, ideal theory conceals the need for rectificatory justice, which is, he maintains, where the real action is with respect to racial justice.

I believe the Marxist critique of ideology is important for thinking about and addressing racial injustice. And I would not deny that moral theories can be ideological or that
philosophers (past and present) have contributed to the production of moral ideology. However, I do not think that ideal theory, as Rawls understands this, is ideological in the relevant sense.\(^\text{10}\)

Shelby thereafter points out that the original position intentionally constructs the POJ through the lens of impartiality to exclude biased views and the POJ (particularly FEO) explicitly excludes institutional discrimination of basic rights and opportunities. By turning to theoretical claims made by Rawls as a defense, Shelby misses Mills’s point. Mills’s critique is that despite possible theoretical applications of political liberalism, the concrete application of liberal theory historically has been used to promote or ignore issues of racial injustice. In this sense political liberalism is ideological in that it masks the interests of white supremacy under the guise of egalitarian liberal values. In Rawls’s case the omission of the importance of white supremacy to issues of justice opens the door for racial justice (African-American reparations or otherwise) to be ignored or marginalized by political actors. The POJ do not necessitate the formulation of secondary principles of rectification that adequately address African-American reparations. Mills points out that since Rawls’s principles are reflective of class relations primarily (which Mills adds is rooted in a Eurocentric conception of the person), issues of race and gender would be subsumed under the paradigm of class relations, thus it is possible that important elements of racial and gender injustice (which the paradigm of class relations cannot address) would be ignored or marginalized.

A related criticism which Mills mentions briefly (but is important to my analysis of the black underclass) is that FEO relies on distributive justice and thus fails to adequately address psychic harm. For example, through distributive justice, the correction of injustice in the black underclass would require the provision of material recompense in some form, whether it is monetary, job

opportunities, etc. However Mills notes the limitations of such a solution:

Moreover, even apart from the material transfer, whatever form it might take, many theorists have argued that other measures, including symbolic ones, are crucial also. Truth and reconciliation commissions, acknowledgments of wrongdoing, apologies, genuine repentance, community repair, restoration of civic trust, have all been put forward as necessary elements for outstanding wrongs to be corrected...None of these issues is addressed by FEO redistribution, which is unsurprising, since it is not a principle motivated by and constructed for dealing with this kind of problem in the first place.11

In the case of the black underclass, the restoration of civic trust and community repair are necessary features of reparations; other factors such as acknowledgement of wrong doing and an apology, someone may argue are just as important as well. Although correcting the material harm done to the black underclass contributes to helping restore civic trust and community repair, it is insufficient.

It is conceivable that having provided adequate public schools, police enforcement, job training etc. some members of the black underclass would continue to distrust government due to the lack of admission of wrong doing on behalf of government; the progress of the community may be stymied without support for actions internal and external to government that help build communal relations, provide positive role models, and empower residents to have a sense of control over the various aspects of their lives. In agreement with Mills, it is not apparent how FEO would address such concerns and Shelby does not address psychic harm in his response to Mills.

I have been critical of Shelby’s argument thus far; however, although I am sympathetic to Mills’s critique of liberalism, Mills’s reform of political liberalism is problematic as well. In consideration of his position that white supremacy is embedded in liberalism, Mills proposes nonideal principles of justice that explicitly prohibit white supremacy. His proposal is a contentious to say the least, but more importantly it presents a problem concerning public justification of his principles. Rawls conceives of liberal values (and thus the POJ) as reflective of the values embodied in traditional liberal texts and a shared understanding of liberalism amongst reasonable liberal persons. The latter is understood as being consistent with the former. Ultimately, a shared understanding of liberalism is important for the goal of public justification. As discussed earlier, upon reflecting on the POJ against deeply held convictions, reasonable citizens will find that the POJ are consistent or not in conflict with their comprehensive views. When this occurs amongst the majority of citizens, an “overlapping consensus” has been reached and the POJ have met the criteria for public justification. Rawls is explicit that liberal values and the POJ are not justifiable due to being self-evident. They are objectively justifiable in respect to having their origin in traditional liberal texts and institutions and more importantly the shared public political culture of liberal persons. Reasonable liberal persons value fairness, equality, toleration, etc. Ultimately public justification is important for the goal of stability; if other reasonable liberal persons accept the principles as just, they will not dispute their application to structuring the liberal state and the state’s laws. This presents a problem for Mills.

Mills’s claim that white supremacy is foundational to liberalism challenges the notion of liberalism which Rawls, Shelby and I suspect many other “reasonable liberal persons” accept. Even if Mills’s contention is correct (which I am lead to believe that it is) I surmise that it would be rejected by the majority of citizens in America.12 I believe there are probably more Shelby-minded people

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12 The assumption here, which is intrinsic to Rawls’s theory, is that the majority of Americans are reasonable liberal persons. The
than Mills-minded people. A Shelby-minded person may concede that in the past white supremacy was the hidden (or not so hidden) agenda of American political thought, but deny that it was ever intrinsic to liberalism theoretically, or they may concede the white supremacy was embedded theoretically, but it is not any more. The general contention being that America has made substantial progress to realize liberal ideals and the continued realization of such ideals is a fundamental goal of American institutions and indicative of American thought (although politicians do not always do a good job at manifesting such ideals into policy.)

If my assumption is correct, Mills’s reform would not be tenable within Rawls’s framework in the context of contemporary America. The weight Mills places on the role of white supremacy does not fit into the public narrative of liberalism; in fact it radically challenges it. Some empirical evidence for my claim is the belief among the majority of Americans that institutional racism is a thing of the past. In a 2013 Pew Report, the majority of Americans (with whites comprising a large percentage) believe that blacks are treated fairly by institutions such as the criminal justice system, public schools, and employment, despite evidence to the contrary. 13

I suspect that some people may view Mills’s position as the injection of a black radical comprehensive view. If such a claim is accurate, then Rawls’s system would immediately reject such Mill’s proposal because it violates the impartiality condition of the original position. The primary task for Mills then is not reforming Rawls, but transforming the narrative of liberalism such that it accounts for the problem for Rawls is not how to form a state with unreasonable citizens but how to form a state with such reasonable liberal citizens who have comprehensive views that sometimes conflict.

role of white supremacy in guiding liberal thought and texts. is well aware of this issue; his academic work, most notably *The Racial Contract*, argues that there is a normative demand to alter the paradigm of liberalism in light of the history of white supremacy. Changing the public understanding of any issue is a daunting mission philosophers face and generally are at a loss solve. However, in the case of Mills, such a goal is particularly salient because Mills’s reform of Rawls depends on the prior condition that the public accepts his view of liberalism. Without such a condition his proposed reform theoretically cannot get off the ground.

In conclusion, what does all of this mean in terms of understanding Rawls? To start it is clear that the POJ fails to adequately address nonideal theory; a point Rawls himself concedes. Furthermore based on the textual evidence Mills provides, Rawls was aware that particularly in terms of racial and gender injustice, new principles of justice may be required. Given these two points, Mills’s position that political liberalism does not sufficiently have the apparatus to address concerns of rectificatory injustice has some merit. Additionally, the fact that FEO is rooted in distributive justice and cannot account for psychic harm further supports Mills’s position. I find this point particularly problematic in relation to oppressed groups such as the black underclass, who not only suffer the loss of material goods and services but have been subjected to a loss of respect, empowerment and healthy communal relations.

I am sympathetic to Mills’s proposal that the recognition of the impact of white supremacy needs to be explicitly addressed in political liberalism. However, considering my argument concerning public justification, I do not think that Mills’s radical reform is tenable within Rawls’s theory, at least in the context of contemporary America. For political liberalism to work it is necessary that there is a shared public understanding about the nature of liberalism, its history, and its values; this is important because it solves for Rawls how a liberal state can be formed and sustained in a society with a plurality of comprehensive views.
A compromise between Mills and Shelby may be solution. Instead of replacing the POJ (Mills) or relying on the existing principles (Shelby), I tentatively propose (taking a hint from Rawls) the addition of principles that explicitly prohibit racial injustice, addresses rectificatory justice, and accounts for psychic harm. Such principles would not conflict with the shared understanding of liberalism and conceivable could be produced from the original position. The major concession of my proposal is that political liberalism would no longer be purely rooted in ideal theory, nonideal issues would be incorporated within the theory. One substantial problem of this concession is the possibility of the principles becoming overly particularistic. Other groups conceivably could claim the political liberalism needs principles to address their particular histories of injustice (e.g. women, LGBT, etc.)

I will not attempt here to explicitly state what the amending principles should be nor solve the problem of multiplying principles. However, if political liberalism takes seriously Mills’s criticisms, I believe my proposal is a better solution that meets Rawls’s criteria for public justification. Some may argue that my proposal is still too radical due to its admittance of nonideal theory. I leave the question open as well as to whether Rawls’s confinement of political liberalism to ideal theory is central to his project. However I will point out that nonideal matters of justice were not completely out of the purview of Rawls (as both Mills and Shelby argue), therefore my reform could be conceived as merely a correction of political liberalism that only serves to strengthen the theory.
Bibliography


Fred Comeau—Heidegger’s solution to Solipsism

Heidegger’s Solution to Solipsism

Abstract
I examine solipsism, or what Heidegger calls the problem of empathy: the problem of guaranteeing the existence of a concrete other. Heidegger rejects this problem, for it presupposes a world already populated with others. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre claims that Heidegger has failed to give us the most primordial structure to guarantee the existence of others. He will further claim that Heidegger’s *a priori* theory fails to guarantee access to concrete others. Through an examination of these criticisms I will defend Heidegger’s analysis against Sartre’s challenges; in particular, I will claim that Sartre fails to fully appreciate that Heidegger’s *a priori* analysis gives essential structure to experience. This will lead me to an account of Da-sein’s appropriation of average everyday practices, and I will argue that it guarantees the significance and commonality involved in concrete interactions with others. Through these two claims, I conclude that Sartre’s criticisms fall short, and Heidegger’s rejection of the problem of empathy stands.

In this paper, I will examine solipsism, or what Heidegger calls the problem of empathy: a problem that I will initially define as that of guaranteeing the existence of a concrete other. Heidegger rejects the problem, for in order to even formulate it, we necessarily presuppose a world already populated with others. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre raises some criticisms of Heidegger’s position in order to develop his own by contrast. In particular, Sartre will claim that Heidegger has failed to give us the most primordial structure to guarantee the existence of others. He will further claim that Heidegger’s *a priori* theory fails to guarantee access to concrete others. I will formulate a Heideggerian defense of Sartre’s challenges; in particular, I will claim that Sartre fails to fully appreciate that Heidegger’s *a priori* analysis gives essential structure to the unfolding of concrete experience. I will furthermore give an account of Da-sein’s appropriation of average everyday practices,
and argue that this guarantees the significance and commonality involved in undertaking concrete interactions with others. Through these two claims, I conclude that Sartre’s criticisms fall short, and Heidegger’s rejection of the problem of empathy stands.

To accomplish this goal, I will divide the subsequent paper into a number of sections. In the one entitled Heidegger, I will first clarify Heidegger’s rejection of the problem of empathy, and then introduce his project of fundamental ontology. Following this I will introduce some of his technical terms, and then proceed to examine relevant aspects of his existential analytic of Da-sein. I will conclude this section with a more detailed and informed clarification of his rejection of the problem. In the section entitled Sartre, I will introduce some of Sartre’s terminology, and then present two of his objections, as Schroeder formulates them. I conclude this section with an initial response to the objections. In the last section, entitled Concrete Others, I continue the response, and develop my account of the necessary concrete encounters we have with others.

**Heidegger**

Heidegger defines the problem of empathy as how “an initially isolated subject reach[es] another.”

That is, given that one typically has privileged access only to one’s own personal subjective experience, anything outside of this, including other subjects, requires some sort of guarantee for its existence. In terms of the “lived experiences of others”, he discards this view as “far from being critical and phenomenally adequate.” Very briefly, Heidegger holds that this position assumes an encapsulated and isolated subject, which contradicts his analysis of experience. Rather, his criticism of the problem of empathy as a question is that the problem already presupposes an understanding “drawn from the world” in order to

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make it possible. That is, in order to claim that one is an isolated subject requiring some sort of bridge to other subjects, one must first have an underlying understanding of a world in which there are other subjects. In other words, to claim that empathy is a problem is to get the order of analysis wrong; there is a prior primordial structure of being-with-others that makes the very question of their existence intelligible. Without this structure, we could not even raise the question about the possible existence of others. To render this claim clear, we must examine Heidegger’s ideas in much greater detail. As a step toward this goal, I first examine the nature of Heidegger’s project.

Heidegger begins Being and Time with an examination of the meaning of being. According to Heidegger, this question of being “aims at an a priori… condition of the possibility of the ontologies which precede the ontic sciences and found them.” This means that one of Heidegger’s goals is to uncover the fundamental structures that necessarily underlie any ontology. To accomplish this goal, Heidegger examines what he calls “Da-sein”, the entity “which we ourselves in each case are.” It is furthermore a being that is “concerned about its very being.” Da-sein as being is not a what, but rather a “pure expression of being;” it understands itself through its own possibilities. Da-sein is not to be understood as the mental states and intentionality of consciousness; it is rather more fundamental and serves to ground the very intelligibility of such

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16 Heidegger, History, 243.
17 Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 11. Note that any references to this edition of Being and Time use the margin page numbers, which correspond to the pages in the original German edition.
18 Heidegger, Being and Time, 7.
19 Heidegger, Being and Time, 12.
20 Heidegger, Being and Time, 12.
things. The being of Da-sein is tied up in existence; this is not the existence of something real such as a stone or a hat, but is rather a self-interpreting activity. Heidegger will later claim that the "‘substance’ of human being… [is] existence." This suggests that his analysis of Da-sein is an attempt to uncover the fundamental a priori ontological structures that ground and underlie the existence of human being. Before delving deeper into Heidegger’s theory, it is worthwhile to examine the self-interpreting activity of Da-sein a little more closely.

As we have seen, Da-sein is not a ‘what’, but rather the purely self-interpreting activity of existence. According to Dreyfus, this activity “is to take a stand on what is essential about one’s being and to be defined by that stand. Thus Da-sein is what, in its social activity, it interprets itself to be.” This stand is necessarily already situated culturally. That is, the activity of Da-sein is never a pure act of creation out of nothingness, but arises only within a particular culture and situation. Heidegger calls this situatedness facticity; it defines the set of possibilities available to Da-sein, and thereby delimits the ways in which Da-sein can be. To render this more concrete, one person may define herself to be a CEO, an airplane pilot, or a farmer; these possibilities are only active ones because they already have meaning within our cultural situation. That is, they are only available because of the social structures and institutions that already exist. Some of these possibilities may not be immediately available to a particular person because of her economic or social status. Furthermore, the same person could not define herself to be a Viking or a gladiator; outside of fictional portrayals, these interpretations of being are no longer live options, for they are

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23 Heidegger, Being and Time, 117.
25 Heidegger, Being and Time, 56.
no longer meaningful possibilities within our culture. We will return to examine this point in greater detail later when we examine Da-sein’s social self. This also emphasizes another of Heidegger’s technical distinctions, a point to which I turn next.

Da-sein understands its existence only “in terms of its possibility to be itself or not be itself... in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities.”26 This is Heidegger’s existentiell understanding; it is an “individual’s understanding of his or her own way to be, that is, of what he or she is.”27 In other words, this first understanding concretely arises within an individual, in terms of his or her own particular existence. The second understanding of existence is “a worked-out understanding of the ontological structures of existence, that is, of what it is to be Da-sein.”28 In other words, the existential understanding is more concerned with structures of experience that are both necessary and general to all Da-sein, rather than the possibilities of a particular individual. The “coherence of these structures” is called by Heidegger existentiality, and the analysis that arises thereof an existential one.29 Although both types of understanding are relevant to Heidegger’s project, we shall focus primarily on the existential side, as we are examining the general problem of empathy rather than a particular concrete example. Now that we have a clear understanding of some of Heidegger’s technical terms, I next turn to his existential analytic.

In introducing his analysis of Da-sein, Heidegger first makes some remarks regarding his methodological approach. In particular, he rejects the method of applying any “arbitrary idea of being and reality” dogmatically to the being of Da-sein.30 Heidegger instead examines the being of Da-sein “as it is initially and for the

26 Heidegger, Being and Time, 12.
29 Heidegger, Being and Time, 12.
30 Heidegger, Being and Time, 16.
most part—in its average everydayness.”31 This approach is further strengthened by Heidegger’s critique of the traditional epistemological project of “reflective, detached observers… subjects contemplating objects.”32 Although such detached observation seems to suggest that the usual subject-object framework is the self-evident starting point for epistemology, Heidegger instead contends that the average everyday mode of being is instead a prereflective mode; it is a mode that is prior to and more primordial than the reflective mode.33 To understand how Heidegger argues for the priority of this mode of being, we must examine the being-in-the-world of Da-sein.

Although Heidegger tackles the analysis of being-in-the-world by decomposing it into its constitutive components, he is quick to point out that this does not imply that being-in-the-world is a pieced-together structure. The constitutive components are instead moments of a primordial and constant whole, and this whole is an “existential determination of Da-sein.”34 As such, they therefore describe ontological structures of existence that are necessary, general, and interdependent. The components include the worldliness of the world, being-in as such, and being-in-the-world as “being a self and being with others.”35 Although at first glance the problem of empathy appears to be primarily with the latter component, it is important to keep in mind that we cannot simply isolate Heidegger’s being-with-others from the worldliness of the world and being-in as such. Any analysis must be faithful to the complete structure that Heidegger presents. For this reason we first examine some relevant points in Heidegger’s presentation of being-in as such and the worldliness of the world.

31 Heidegger, Being and Time, 16.
33 Heidegger, Being and Time, 59.
34 Heidegger, Being and Time, 41, 64.
35 Heidegger, Being and Time, 41.
Because being-in "designates a constitution of being of Da-sein," Heidegger calls it an "existential."\(^{36}\) Here he has in mind the technical designation we noted above; this means that being-in is part of a necessary and general ontological structure of existence. Heidegger designates it as such to differentiate being-in from what he calls the *categorial* sense of "in", which corresponds to the usual sense of objective presence in some part of space. An example of this usage might be the meaning intended when one says, "the dress is "in" the closet."\(^{37}\) What Heidegger seems to be saying here is that underlying the *categorial* 'in' of objective presence there is a primordial *existential* ground; a sort of non-objective substrate of being only through which objective presences in the world are revealed. Da-sein must already be 'in' this substrate before categorial 'in-ness' can even occur.

In examining what he calls the *worldliness* of the world, Heidegger notes that "neither the ontic description of intraworldly beings nor the ontological interpretation of the being of these beings gets as such at the phenomenon of "world"", for each of these *presuppose* a kind of world.\(^{38}\) Because *worldliness* is one of the constitutive moments of Da-sein, it too is an existential determination thereof. This ‘world’ is that which must be necessarily *presupposed* in order for things, or objective presences, to reveal themselves. It is only through the *worldliness* of the world that any of the objective presences contained therein become comprehensible for Da-sein.\(^{39}\) In other words, Da-sein projects or constitutes a world of comprehensibility upon the objects it encounters, and it is only through this activity that something can reveal itself at all.

Heidegger next examines the character of what he calls intraworldly beings. Of particular interest to Heidegger are practical and useful things, for as such they contain essential references to

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\(^{36}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 54.


\(^{38}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 64, emphasis removed.

\(^{39}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 64.
collections of other things. That is, for something like a hammer to be useful, it must contain an essential reference to boards, nails, frames, other tools, and the like. Furthermore, this analysis can be extended to the products produced in the particular activity, or the raw materials required for the activity. The practical work relevant to useful things furthermore presupposes a public world in which the users, tools, equipment, and raw materials can be found. In other words, a “totality of useful things is always already discovered before the individual useful thing.” This leads Heidegger to observe that when one uses a thing such as a hammer, those beings essentially referred to in its usefulness are not grasped “thematically as occurring things… nor does [one] even know of using or the structure of useful things as such.” That is, to hammer in an average everyday situation is not to explicitly bring to mind theoretical propositions relevant to a totality or structure of useful things; it is rather to become absorbed in the practical activity itself. The only time one’s environment, in terms of useful things, becomes an issue is in cases of the breakdown of their usefulness. At this point, and at this point only, the objective character of surrounding useful things may become thematic, as a solution to the breakdown is sought. This suggests a critique of the priority of a subject-object relation over this notion of average everyday practical behaviour. It is to the evaluation of this claim that I examine next.

The idea of a subject-object relationship is one in which we have a distinct and isolated subject encountering objects-in-themselves in the world. When the subject encounters the object, a relationship connects the two. In terms of the useful things mentioned above, the handiness of these encountered objects as beings must somehow be “subjectively colored” in order to be encountered as that which is useful. Heidegger criticizes this position, for in order to

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hold it consistently, one must assume that the beings encountered “would have to be understood before-hand and discovered as purely objectively present”, and therefore have a primordial priority over beings encountered as useful things, in the above-mentioned sense. In other words, Heidegger claims that the most basic and original encounter with useful beings is the average everyday practical activity of using these beings; this takes priority to, and is more primordial than, the encounter with these beings as the objective presences required to describe their usefulness in terms of a subject-object relationship. To make this claim is also to claim that the detached, objective presence of beings achieved in reflection is a subordinate mode of being, dependent upon them first encountered as useful intraworldly beings. Because this is a claim very relevant to Sartre’s position, it is worthwhile to spend some time clarifying Heidegger’s defense.

To understand how Heidegger argues for the priority of the practical absorption in average everyday tasks, we must introduce some additional terminology. The kind of being of the useful beings that we have described above and that Heidegger claims is “first discovered within the world” is handiness; they are the things-at-hand.45 The objective of particular useful things is called by Heidegger the “what-for,” for example, the what-for of a chair produced using a hammer and other useful things might be for sitting on.46 These what-fors are always already encountered in the use we make of things; if one makes shoes, one always already has a sense that shoes are for wearing. If one builds houses, one always already has a sense that they are for shelter. In other words, the what-fors appear also to be tied up in the referential totality of handiness.

Heidegger calls the primary or ultimate what-for a for-the-sake-of-which. This is not simply some sort of overarching goal or objective, but instead something that “concerns the being of Da-sein

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45 Heidegger, Being and Time, 71.
46 Heidegger, Being and Time, 70.
which is essentially concerned about this being itself in its being." 47 This means that Da-sein takes a stand on itself in terms of a for-the-sake-of-which. This stand is "a self-interpretation that informs and orders all my activities." 48 It informs relevance; that is, it lets "things at hand be in such and such a way in factical taking care of things, to let them be as they are and in order that they be such." 49 For example, the for-the-sake-of-which one might assume is to be a parent; in this case things such as job stability or benefit plans become more relevant than they would if one assumes the for-the-sake-of-which of a career-builder. In the latter case, job stability and benefit plans become almost trivial compared to the experience gained or prestige of one’s position, and the opportunities for growth in the company. To assume a for-the-sake-of-which is not necessarily to assign oneself a particular social role or goal. When things are going well, one’s for-the-sake-of-which provides meaning and overlays intelligibility over one’s projects, and this is done without explicit goals in mind. 50 Similar to the things-at-hand, the goals of one’s for-the-sake-of-which become thematically explicit only in cases of breakdown.

To summarize, Heidegger has laid bare a web of relations connecting the things-at-hand to the what-fors and finally to the for-the-sake-of-whiches. The latter is a stand that Da-sein takes upon itself, which informs the relevance and therefore the significance of one’s activities. This combination of relations and significance "constitutes the structure of the world, of that in which Da-sein as such always already is." 51 However, as we have seen, this latter point is simply the worldliness of the world, for it is that which must be presupposed in order for things to reveal themselves as comprehensible. Furthermore, Da-sein is always already in such a situation; Da-sein’s world always already has a worldliness of

47 Heidegger, Being and Time, 84.
49 Heidegger, Being and Time, 84.
50 Dreyfus, Being-in-the-World, 95.
51 Heidegger, Being and Time, 87.
significance and relevance. Of course Da-sein can take a new stand on itself: through this activity Da-sein changes its self-interpretation, shifts its priorities, and thereby ‘changes’ the significance of the worldliness of its world. It is through this analysis that Heidegger claims the priority of Da-sein’s average everyday for-the-sake-of-which over a subject-object relation. As Da-sein, we always already understand the worldliness of significance. The significance of beings that we encounter is always already tied up in our worldliness; to encounter something as an objective presence or thing-in-itself and then apply a subjective coloring seems to get the order of primordiality wrong. In other words, it seems as though an analysis decomposing the world into a set of subject-object relations may instead be another for-the-sake-of-which that we adopt; as such it is merely a stand Da-sein takes on itself and therefore always already situated within a world of significance. Of course, one might object that this suggests that all for-the-sake-of-whiches are innate; therefore this needs to be supplemented with an account of how they are appropriated by Da-sein. We shall return to this point, as well as a more detailed analysis of the order of priority later. I next turn to the last constitutive moment of Da-sein: being-with-others.

In extending his analysis to being-with-others, Heidegger notes that the “surrounding world nearest to us” is rife with essential references to others, such as the wearers of our products, or the producers of our raw materials, or the ones who serve us in a restaurant. Furthermore, the withness of being-with these others must be existentially grounded in a fashion similar to Heidegger’s being-in. Because being-with has an existential status, the others encountered therein are present in the ‘non-objective substrate of being’ mentioned above; it is through this that the possibility of objective presence of these others even exists. That is, whether “there is any particular other there or not… I’m always already involved in a shared world.” Heidegger takes this further when he notes that the

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52 Heidegger, Being and Time, 117.
53 Heidegger, Being and Time, 118.
54 Dreyfus, Being-in-the-World, 149.
who of everyday Da-sein is “the they.” Here the they means not only the ones who are not me; it includes me as well. What Heidegger has in mind in developing this point is that our average everyday practices as for-the-sake-of-whiches always already make room for the anonymous and interchangeable they. As we have seen in our analysis of worldliness, these practices permit us to find intelligibility and significance; with his analysis of being-with Heidegger extends this to include others as the they.

We are now in a position to fully understand why Heidegger rejects the problem of empathy. His analysis has revealed that there are structures underlying our experience that are necessary to give it significance and intelligibility. When reasoning about the problem of empathy, we are always already in a world that includes the they. As a result, it seems odd to claim that we need some sort of transition from an isolated subject to these others, since they are already presupposed in the average everyday practices of our for-the-sake-of-whiches. For this reason, Heidegger rejects the problem of empathy. Of course this is not to say that we cannot reason about others and subject-object relationships; it is instead to claim that to perform this reasoning we are always already situated within a web of significance and intelligibility that necessarily includes the they. Without it, we could not meaningfully perform such reasoning.

Sartre

Although Heidegger’s descriptions are persuasive, Sartre raises some interesting objections. Before we can get to them, we must briefly introduce some of Sartre’s terminology. The first is being-in-itself; it “is what it is;” it is identical to itself. In other words, it is a pure object. A consciousness for Sartre is

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55 Heidegger, Being and Time, 128.
56 Heidegger, Being and Time, 126.
“consciousness of something;” that is, it displays intentionality.\textsuperscript{58} As a result of this intentionality, “transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness.”\textsuperscript{59} This means that consciousness is always directed at something outside of itself; for this reason Sartre refers to it as a “nothingness.”\textsuperscript{60} This leads him to define \textit{being-for-itself} as a “hole in being” that leads the in-itself to the self, and therefore to “consciousness or for-self.”\textsuperscript{61} In other words, \textit{being-for-itself} is a consciousness. Finally there is \textit{being-for-others}, which is the “discovery of my body as an object.”\textsuperscript{62} In this last modality of being, the being-for-itself is somehow stripped of its power of transcendence and thereby transformed into a \textit{being-in-itself}. This transformation arises through what Sartre calls the \textit{Look}; it is an interaction between the \textit{being-for-itself} and the Other.\textsuperscript{63} Although we will not fully examine the \textit{Look}, we will need to examine some aspects of this interaction in more detail. It is to this task that I turn next.

In examining the structure of shame, Sartre observes that shame is “shame of oneself before the Other;” that is, the act of shame necessarily requires an other.\textsuperscript{64} It is through shame that the \textit{being-for-itself} is transformed into \textit{being-for-others}. This observation then leads Sartre to examine the problem of the existence of the other—a problem that he calls solipsism. This corresponds to what we have been calling Heidegger’s problem of empathy. It has, at its origin, “a fundamental presupposition: others are \textit{the Other}, that is the self which \textit{is not} myself.”\textsuperscript{65} In other words, at the root of alterity there is a negation. This negation is furthermore an \textit{internal} negation in that it “posits the original distinction between the Other and myself as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 126.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 126.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 403.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 340.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 303.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 312.
\end{itemize}
being such that it determines me by means of the Other and determines the Other by means of me."\textsuperscript{66} This internal negation is to be contrasted with an external negation that postulates that "there is a nothingness of separation" between myself and the Other; that is, we are in a relation of "indifferent exteriority."\textsuperscript{67} Sartre discards this latter form of negation as problematic for reasons beyond the scope of this paper. However, his analysis leads him to two requirements that any solution to the problem of solipsism must have: any relation between two "human-realities" must be one of being rather than knowledge, and the relation must cause these human-realities to "depend on one another in their essential being."\textsuperscript{68}

Because Heidegger’s \textit{being-with} is a constitutive and essential moment of Da-sein, it satisfies Sartre’s second requirement for the solution of solipsism. Additionally, since Heidegger focuses on the average everyday being of Da-sein, and explicitly criticizes the priority of traditional epistemological approaches, his theory satisfies the first requirement. Sartre agrees with this when he notes that Heidegger has given as “a being which in its own being implies the Other’s being.”\textsuperscript{69} However, he then raises a number of criticisms of Heidegger’s theory.

According to Schroeder, Sartre raises five objections.\textsuperscript{70} In what follows, I will adopt Schroeder’s structure, and examine each of the objections in turn. For brevity, I will only examine the first two objections; however in doing this I will generate a sufficiently strong position to defend Heidegger’s analysis from Sartre’s criticisms.

\textsuperscript{66} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 315.  
\textsuperscript{67} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 313.  
\textsuperscript{68} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 330.  
\textsuperscript{69} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 333.  
In his first objection, Sartre asks for justification that being-with is the “unique foundation of our being.” Here the charge seems to be that Heidegger is merely asserting that his position is a fundamental a priori ontological structure, rather than proving that this is the case. As Schroeder points out, this is not the case; Heidegger gives a number of arguments to support his position. In particular, Heidegger argues that being-with is a universal structure that subsumes all other encounters with others. Schroeder then proceeds to give what he believes to be a counter-example to Heidegger’s claim. I will first examine the counter-example, before returning to the more general argument.

A ‘lived solipsist’ is claimed by Schroeder to be an example of a type of encounter with others that cannot be subsumed under being-with. Such a person does not “acknowledge other bodies as centers of consciousness… they “mean nothing” to him… he experiences them like tools in his workshop.” How plausible or feasible, though, is the life of such a lived solipsist? Although lived solipsism may indeed cause problems for being-with as a subsumptive structure, to treat this as a counter-example to Heidegger’s theory is to fail to completely understand Da-sein. As noted above, being-with is but one of the three constitutive moments of the primordial and constant whole of Da-sein. In particular, the with of being-with is the they; the they is in turn the anonymous participants in one’s for-the-sake-of-which. The for-the-sake-of-which is an average, everyday, and prereflective practice through which Da-sein renders its existence intelligible. The lived solipsist then takes a stand on her being that interprets the others as mere tools. However, the lived solipsist is still already in a social world; by reducing the others to tools she is still already situated in a practice that necessarily acknowledges the others. It is only the meaning applied to the others, within the referential network of significance

71 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 333.
72 Schroeder, Sartre, 146.
73 Schroeder, Sartre, 160.
74 Schroeder, Sartre, 161.
overlaid by the *for-the-sake-of-which*, which has changed. In order for the lived solipsist to be a successful counter-example to Heidegger’s analysis, Schroeder needs to show how it cannot be subsumed under a *for-the-sake-of-which*, rather than *being-with*.

In other words, *being-with* provides the unique foundation of our being because it is an inseparable part of necessary and constitutive structure of Da-sein. As I have sketched out above, this necessity arises through a *for-the-sake-of-which* that overlays a web of intelligibility over our existence. Without this, we cannot even function in our average, everyday mode of existence, for our projects no longer have meaning. *Being-with* is a necessary part of this structure, for it arises through the ‘placeholders’ put therein by and for *the they*. This analysis suggests two opportunities for successfully running an objection against the foundational nature of *being-with*. First of all, one may argue that there are times when we do not operate under a *for-the-sake-of-which*. This would permit an encounter with an other that was completely unintelligible and devoid of meaning. However, as we have noted above, one is always already bound up in facticity. This necessarily grants any encounter a bare minimum of intelligibility, for we always bring our history to bear on any situation we are presented with. In terms of *for-the-sake-of-whiches*, although perhaps we can operate without one currently active, our facticity means we always have a set ready to deploy to any situation. Because these are always already present in our cultural history, even if we could operate without a *for-the-sake-of-which*, our facticity will always render any encounter with others intelligible, whether we want it to or not. The only remaining possibility for this objection to work is for one to be operating without a *for-the-sake-of-which* and somehow be free of any facticity. As we shall see in the next section, through an analysis of the concrete appropriation of *for-the-sake-of-which*, we can also rule it out as a valid objection.

The second opportunity for objecting to the foundational nature of *being-with* would be to argue that there is a *for-the-sake-of-which* that does not essentially include it. I will also defer the examination
of this point until later in this essay, when I fully examine the appropriation of a *for-the-sake-of-which* for Da-sein. However, it should be now clear that although Heidegger hasn’t done a good job of explicitly arguing for the foundational nature of *being-with*, he has certainly provided us with the tools to do so.

Sartre’s next objection is to wonder “how *being-with* establishes the existence of Others.”75 That is, Sartre claims that *being-with* does not provide a bridge to the *concrete* existence of other people.76 The idea here is that since *being-with* is a sort of *a priori* structure, it can at best provide a placeholder in my experience for the abstract Other. Since this therefore gives us no access to the concretely existing other, we are returned to the position of solipsism.

This is the sort of challenge Heidegger has directly responded to above. In particular, he would note that in order to even raise such a question, we have to be already well situated in the average everyday practices of the *for-the-sake-of-which*. These practices also necessarily include the Others of the *they*. This means that through our sceptical practice, we already assume an audience, a mode of communication to the audience, peers to validate our analysis, and so forth. It is through these references that our sceptical practice obtains its meaning; it is further through them that the Others are presupposed. Of course Heidegger would likely admit that he did not have concrete Others in mind when doing this analysis, for he was describing an *existential* rather than *existentiell* mode of being. The structures he describes ground the concrete; they are structures of *existence* rather than concrete *knowledge*. In other words, the proper objection is not to question the existence of the Other; his analysis has indeed secured this within the structure of the average everyday practice. It is rather to question our concrete knowledge of the Other that builds upon this foundation—something that Heidegger has not explicitly examined. As we have seen, Heidegger would question the priority of this type of explicit, concrete subject-object knowledge.

75 Schroeder, *Sartre*, 143.
76 Schroeder, *Sartre*, 147.
over his structures of average everyday existence. Furthermore, to hold an objection of this variety, Sartre seems to be generating an inconsistency in his own theory. For, as noted above, one of the strengths recognized by Sartre in Heidegger’s position is that it makes the relationship between human realities one of existence, rather than one of knowledge. If this is truly a desideratum for Sartre, then by pursuing an objection based on concrete knowledge of the Other, he is demanding something of Heidegger’s theory that he does not demand of his own.

**Concrete Others**

In spite of all of this, there still remains a problem of ‘concrete solipsism’ that falls outside of Heidegger’s realm of analysis. That is, even if one grants that it is only through the *for-the-sake-of-which* that my encounters with the world are rendered intelligible, and even if one furthermore grants that these average everyday practices include the *they*, one can still ask: how can we be guaranteed that there are any concrete Others to fill these positions?

Schroeder concludes that Heidegger cannot “develop an effective response” without allowing his existentials “to be conditioned by contingent facts.” Since the existentials are *a priori* in nature, Schroeder claims that they cannot be in any way conditioned by experience or grounded in sociality. That is, they are not affected by concrete encounters we have with Others. In responding to this objection, it is first of all important to once again emphasize that Heidegger’s project is to lay bare the *a priori* existential structures that *ground* our existence. This means that the existential moments of the *worldliness* of the world, *being-in*, and *being-with* only constitute the underlying structure; as such, they guide the unfolding of average everyday existence. They do not, however, dictate concrete content. As we mentioned above, the stand that Da-sein takes upon itself in the form of a *for-the-sake-of-which* is always culturally situated. As a result of our modern North-American

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78 Schroeder, *Sartre*, 150.
culture, some options might be a CEO, airplane pilot or farmer; options that are no longer possibilities might be Viking or gladiator. This further means that from within these practices Others can only be encountered within certain possibilities; that is, an administrative assistant is certainly a modern possibility, while a galley slave might not be. Certainly Heidegger would hold that these possibilities, and therefore their associated for-the-sake-of-which are always determined by their facticity. As such, the concrete content of the existentials is certainly conditioned by experience insofar as facticity is conditioned by experience. It is only the structure of the three constitutive moments of Da-sein that is a priori. In other words, there is still a structure of referential significance underlying existence; its particular configuration depends on both the cultural situation one finds oneself in, and the stand one takes on one’s existence. This also means that one’s cultural situation informs and transforms the social roles and interactions of one’s for-the-sake-of-which. In terms of our examples, the typical social interactions of a Viking may seem barbaric, appalling or even nonsensical when dropped into a modern setting. These are furthermore contingent rather than a priori facts.

To summarize, in criticizing Heidegger’s position, we must take care to separate the existential structures from the particularly situated contingent content. In order to complete the response to Sartre’s second objection, we next examine the appropriation of a particular average everyday practice for a particular Da-sein.

As we have noted, Da-sein is always culturally situated. This means that Da-sein always has available a myriad of for-the-sake-of-whiches as well as their associated matrices of reference, significance and intelligibility. However, as emphasized above in our preliminary responses to Schroeder’s presentation of Sartre’s objections, the only a priori structure involved is that which grounds our existence. The content is contingent, and dictated by our facticity. If we carefully examine the appropriation of this content by Da-sein, we will see a concrete aspect previously unreported by Heidegger. To see this, consider one's first day at school. Here, the for-the-sake-of-which that is not yet grasped by Da-sein is that of being a student. One may already have a number of other for-the-sake-of-whiches that may
become relevant. For example, a practice in which one listens to authority figures such as one’s parents or daycare attendants. Another might be reading; yet another interacting with other people one’s age. Before the first day of school, these practices may have been used independently in different situations. But after the first day, through observing others, and listening to the instructions of persons in authority, one appropriates a new for-the-sake-of-which. This is a result of concrete interactions with others, as well as a reconfiguration of the web of intelligibility one projects in the appropriate situation. Indeed, life, and therefore the existence of Da-sein, is filled with new appropriations of practices, as well as the reconfiguration of meanings, intelligibility, and significance within the existing practices.

From this example, we can draw a number of points. First of all, there appears to be a myriad of average everyday for-the-sake-of-whiches already predetermined and ‘floating’ out there in the world, ready for Da-sein to appropriate. This is consistent with the observations we made regarding Heidegger’s facticity above, for it defines the live possibilities available for Da-sein to appropriate and take a stand on itself. I contend that all these for-the-sake-of-whiches that exist externally to Da-sein arise as a result of a concrete interaction with an Other. By concrete here I mean the opposite of abstract or generalized; that is, at some point, some concrete other somehow shared the practice with me. That is, I watched an Other act it out; I was taught it directly by an Other; I read about it in a book written by an Other, and so forth. Indeed it is hard to see how appropriating a practice in this way can be anything but an appropriation through a (direct or indirect) concrete interaction with an Other. A book necessarily has an author, a play necessarily has a playwright; even robots enacting an average everyday practice must necessarily have designers. In each of these cases, a concretely existing other is necessarily assumed to be present, either explicitly or implicitly.

One objection to this might be that a situation could be contrived in which Da-sein appropriates an existing practice that was definitely not created by a concretely existing other; for example, a child that
was raised by wolves. Although this example is admittedly far-fetched, it does emphasize an important point. I would contend that the practices that arise within the context of this example are ‘real’ for-the-sake-of-whiches; they result in a ‘real’ facticity of situatedness for the child in question. Furthermore, they arise from concrete interactions with an Other. The point of the for-the-sake-of-which is only to render the usefulness of things-at-hand intelligible. For example, the child may learn a practice of hunting from her wolf-family; rabbits may be found in a particular place, cover is useful, and the like. The child renders her environment intelligible through an average everyday wolf-practice. Furthermore, the others of being-with are, in this case, wolves. One shares one’s kill with others in the pack; one sleeps with others in a den when one is cold; and so forth. In other words, the a priori structural ground of Da-sein only renders one’s existence intelligible; it provides placeholders for others within the structure of the they. It does not require that the practices that arise thereof are human practices, or that the others are human others—only that the practices render one’s existence intelligible with the concrete others that one encounters.

To summarize, it seems that to appropriate a practice external to oneself, that is, to take a new stand on one’s existence through this appropriation, is to necessarily have a (possibly implied) concrete interaction with an other. In other words, for there to be an average everyday practice external to one, it must have been created by a concrete other. To appropriate this practice is to then have an interaction with this concrete other. Of course the other might have been dead for a thousand years, but the very fact that the practice exists and is a live option for Da-sein attests to that other’s concrete existence. Now that we have established that practices external to Da-sein imply a concrete other, we turn to those created by Da-sein itself.

We now examine the possibility of Da-sein creating a new for-the-sake-of-which from within. This creative activity can take one of two forms. In the first, one that appropriates existing for-the-sake-of-whiches and either transforms or synthesizes them to create a new one. Here the concrete other is implied in the appropriation of the
external practice, as outlined above. In the second case, the practice is created purely from within. Although this case is in theory possible, it is hard to imagine a for-the-sake-of-which that is created purely by the activity of Da-sein, out of nothingness. As such, it would have to be completely produced without leaning on any other practice (and therefore introducing the interaction with a concrete other). Since Da-sein is always already situated within facticity, it is difficult to see how one could suppress this facticity and create something purely new. Furthermore, a totality of useful things must materialize all at once in order for this for-the-sake-of-which to render a situation intelligible. It seems much more likely that existing practices would be transformed or synthesized in order to produce new ones. Although this is certainly not a conclusive argument, it does suggest another final point.

A fact that both Heidegger and Sartre tend to overlook is that any Da-sein, or consciousness, necessarily comes into existence through birth. This means that all of us have grown from a completely helpless infant into beings concerned about their being. Throughout this process some of the more basic practices that we take for granted are necessarily taught to us by a concrete other. Consider something as simple as eating. While perhaps one could argue that hunger combined with innate machinery could account for the practice of breastfeeding, this process is necessarily done through an interaction with a concrete other. More advanced forms of eating also necessarily need a concrete other to provide and prepare safe food for the developing infant, and later teach this developing infant the practices necessary to care for itself. This means that through the developmental process of growing, acquiring average everyday practices, and therefore becoming a Da-sein, one is necessarily in a concrete relationship with an other.

To bring this all together, we have seen that through the appropriation of all, or nearly all, average everyday practices, there is necessarily a connection to a concrete other. While there may be some practices created purely from within, any Da-sein performing such a creation is necessarily born and therefore necessarily appropriates some very
basic practices through interaction with a concrete other. This means that although the structure of Da-sein’s existentials is a priori, the content in the form of particular for-the-sake-of-whiches appropriated by Da-sein is shaped by concrete, and contingent, encounters with others. Furthermore, through the examination of practice appropriation of Da-sein, we noticed that each and every Da-sein is guaranteed concrete interaction with others throughout their development. This means that Schroeder is incorrect in his conclusions about the ability of Da-sein to be conditioned by the contingent; furthermore Sartre’s second objection falls short. Not only does Heidegger’s analysis necessarily provide an a priori structure that includes the they; it also necessarily provides for concrete encounters with others. In other words, Heidegger’s theory has solved the problem of solipsism.

In summary, we have seen Heidegger’s rejection of solipsism. In particular, he rejects it because in order to formulate the problem, we necessarily presuppose a for-the-sake-of-which that includes the they. We have then examined two of Sartre’s objections to Heidegger, and found them inadequate. This inadequacy arose because of Sartre’s, and Schroeder’s, failure to appreciate that Da-sein’s existential nature provides an a priori structure to the contingent content of facticity. We concluded with an account of Da-sein’s appropriation of average everyday practices that led us to the discovery that there are necessarily concrete encounters with others in Da-sein’s development.

Bibliography


Fabio Lampert—Proper Function, Religious Beliefs, and Rational Indefeasibility

There is a wide and recent literature regarding what one should do in a case of peer disagreement. A number of cases discussed in the literature involve ordinary disagreement, for instance, when peers disagree whether the correct value of the check is $40. In this paper, however, I will focus on hard cases of disagreement, especially religious disagreement, since not much was written on this specific topic. In the first section and second sections I will examine Plantinga’s account of rationality as proper function and his notion of intrinsic defeaters. Since his is one of the most eminent works in religious epistemology, I expect to show the implications of his account in what regards peer disagreement. In the third section I examine different responses to cases of peer disagreement that take the notion of an insight into account. After that, in the fourth section I will explore and criticize Richard Feldman’s solution to religious disagreement, especially concerning the ‘Uniqueness Thesis’. Finally, I will suggest a different account at the end by problematizing the notion of evidence, i.e. how the same evidence might justify both sides of a disagreement.

1. Rationality as Proper Function

Plantinga’s account of rationality makes use of the notion of proper function. Our cognitive equipment is functioning properly when, roughly, it produces beliefs in the way that it was supposed to, that is, in the way that any sane cognitive equipment does it, without any kind of malfunctioning, pathology, or impairment. If this is right, then a wide variety of beliefs we may hold are rational. Our beliefs about the reality of the external world, the existence of other minds, the reality of the past, our beliefs on the basis of reliable testimony, perception, etc. Moreover, belief in God would also be rational in

80 Those beliefs are basic in Plantinga’s model, i.e. they do not depend on evidence to be justified.
this sense, given that most of us believe in God (or something alike) and do not suffer from any kind of cognitive malfunction. An important qualification here is that proper function is not the same as normality, in the statistical sense.\textsuperscript{81} I may be normal in this sense – given that I do not suffer from any kind of cognitive dysfunction – while still holding irrational beliefs, such as those produced by wishful thinking, moments of rage, jealous, and other states that even though are not pathologies may still interfere in the way I form my beliefs.

Thus, a belief is rational when produced by a faculty, disposition, process or cognitive mechanism that is functioning in a proper way. In what regards religious beliefs it might be questioned from which processes, if any, these beliefs are generated. There must be a belief-producing process, or faculty, whereof religious beliefs are able to be properly generated. Plantinga defends that such a process is Calvin’s \textit{sensus divinitatis}.\textsuperscript{82} If the latter is working properly it generates true beliefs about God - for that is its purpose, and what ordinarily happens regarding its proper functioning.\textsuperscript{83}

Furthermore, Plantinga draws a distinction between \textit{internal} and \textit{external} rationality. A belief is internally rational if its belief-producing processes ‘downstream from experience’ are functioning in a proper way, i.e. when one is responding properly to its own mental states or doxastic experiences. On the other hand, a belief is externally rational if it is produced by properly functioning cognitive mechanisms generating the correct doxastic experience in those circumstances.\textsuperscript{84} Thus, someone may hold an internally rational belief that is at the same time externally irrational. For instance, I might have some sort of dysfunction such that every time I see a red

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\textsuperscript{81} Cf. Plantinga (1988), p. 32.
\textsuperscript{82} There are difficulties in the claim that what Calvin had in mind was actually a faculty or disposition. I will not, however, address this issue here.
\textsuperscript{83} Cf. Plantinga, 2000, p. 179
\textsuperscript{84} This distinction will be important to Bergmann, 2009.
object at a certain distance I take it as if it was brown. Suppose that I have never had any kind of countervailing experience, such as another person correcting me when I point to a red object far away and say, “Look, that’s brown.” In this case it may be said that I am internally rational in holding that such an object is brown – for that is what my doxastic experience suggests me. However, I still have an external malfunction: the mechanisms generating my perceptual beliefs are not functioning in a proper way. Hence, I am externally irrational.

Now, could we have a model of religious disagreement in this kind of model? Despite the fact that Plantinga did not have the recent discussion surrounding peer disagreement in mind I think we can see, roughly, how his theory of rationality as proper function could be relevant for it. We have already seen what the source of theistic beliefs is in Plantinga’s model. What is it, then, the source of atheistic beliefs? Assuming the sensus divinitatis as the mechanism generating theistic beliefs, the atheist, or unbeliever, will be ‘[displaying] epistemic malfunction.’ The unbeliever fails to believe in God given a dysfunction of the sensus divinitatis. If the latter were functioning in a proper way he would believe in God as well. From the perspective of the theist, then, the atheist is being externally irrational. She might even be internally rational, for she is not going against any kind of doxastic experience that overwhelm her in some sense. She believes that atheism is the appropriate epistemic response to her mental states. On the other hand, it will not be problematic for the theist to grant this: if she believes that theism is true, she believes that the atheist cannot do nothing besides being irrational at least externally. By the same token, the atheist might consider the theist as being externally irrational given a Freudian or Marxist explanation of religious beliefs such as the ones examined by Plantinga in (2000).

According to the foregoing it looks as though the theist and the atheist are in similar predicaments. Each might render the other

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85 Plantinga, 2000, p. 184.
as being externally, though not (necessarily) internally, irrational. Would there be any way to settle the issue? The only way to know whether one of them is actually externally (ir)rational would be if we could know whether theism is true or not. If it is true, theistic beliefs are rationally warranted; if it is false, then they are not. The de jure question of the rationality of religious beliefs is not, according to Plantinga, independent of the de facto question about the existence of God.

In a model like Plantinga’s there seems to be no religious disagreement between peers. For each side might demote the other from peerhood alleging external irrationality at least regarding this particular issue. There is both a theological and a philosophical consequence from the above. Theologically, Plantinga preserves the Calvinist tradition that it is not within one’s power whether one believes in God or not. In what he calls the extended model, roughly, it is the Holy Spirit who will instigate the believer’s sensus divinitatis in order to dispose him to believe. Whether this is right or not is not my worry here, but it needs to be acknowledged that Plantinga can accommodate this aspect of the Christian tradition within is religious epistemology. Philosophically, on the other hand, it is not clear what is the resulting situation regarding religious disagreement. At least one aspect of the motivation for the intellectual debate on religion is that either side could eventually change its mind and the issue could perhaps be settled given eventual new evidence, reconsiderations of one’s positions, &c. If we consider what this model gives us, however, there is nothing one side could do in order to convince the other. It is an external matter whether one believes in God or not. One might do whatever is in one’s power to have a true religious belief and still be incapable to do it given a failure of external rationality. Perhaps Plantinga thinks this result is fine as it is, but the scenario regarding religious peer disagreement looks

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86 Moreover, I think this aspect of his epistemology, i.e. that the atheist is externally irrational, makes him closer to some versions of the doctrine of presuppositionalism that it is usually acknowledged.

87 And there is evidence that he does think so. See his (1981), p. 50.
controversial. If it is not within their power to settle the issue, it is unclear what would motivate either side to engage in the debate. I will not, nevertheless, argue that this a fatal problem for Plantinga, for I do not think it is. Yet I will suggest an answer to the problem of disagreement in the last section that does not involve the claim that one side is being irrational. Before that I will examine Plantinga’s notion of intrinsic defeaters and how it can parallel a Moorean shift in cases of disagreement.

2. Intrinsic Defeaters

During the 80’s and 90’s there was an interesting exchange between Philip Quinn and Plantinga\textsuperscript{88} regarding the latter’s criticisms of classical foundationalism, epistemic criteria for justified beliefs, and the status of religious beliefs itself. Quinn has claimed that the religious beliefs of ‘intellectually sophisticated adult theists’ are confronted with several potential defeaters such as the problem of evil, the Freudian criticism of religion, and so forth. What the theist should do, according to Quinn, is to come up with new arguments to defend her beliefs and preserve their justificatory status. If that happens, however, religious beliefs are not basic anymore, thereby depending on an evidential basis for being justified.\textsuperscript{89} We might restate Quinn’s point within the peer disagreement framework: what should an ‘intellectually sophisticated adult theist’ do when she is aware that most of his peers disagree with him in virtue of projective theories of religion (Freud, Durkheim, &c.), the problem of evil and so on? Should not the theist withhold her belief, or at least diminish her confidence in it? Plantinga’s strategy results in a negative answer to both questions.

Consider the following scenario. There is a letter putting my reputation under serious risk in my department chair’s office. The letter suddenly disappears. I had the opportunity to steal it, the motive and means to do it. Moreover, Prof. X, known as an honest and reliable member of my department, confirms having seen me

\textsuperscript{88}See Quinn (2006a) and (2006b) and Plantinga (1986).

\textsuperscript{89}Cf. Quinn, 2006a.
suspiciously entering the office around the same time the letter have disappeared. If this is not enough, there was stories, true stories, involving me stealing things in the past. My colleagues thus have all the evidence needed to conclude that I am guilty of having stolen the letter. What actually occurred, however, is that I spent the whole afternoon of that fatidic day walking alone in the woods, and I have a clear memory of having done so. I have a basic belief, from a recent memory, that I was walking alone in the woods that afternoon. In spite of all the evidence my colleagues gathered against me, my basic belief is still warranted for me provided that it is a recent memory belief, one that is known to be reliable. The belief in question is an intrinsic defeater of the potential defeater generated by my colleague’s evidence.

Plantinga argues that the same happens with theistic beliefs. It is not because there are several arguments against theism or that a number of intellectually sophisticated adults disagree regarding God’s existence that the theist is not rational in sustaining her beliefs. It may as well be the case that belief in God has a good degree of warrant for the believer whereas philosophical arguments such as the argument from evil are not much warranted for her. Can we give a precise formulation of an intrinsic defeater? Plantinga provides the following one:

(ID) When a basic belief \( p \) has more by way of warrant than a potential defeater \( q \) of \( p \), then \( p \) is an intrinsic defeater of \( q \).

Thus, according to (ID), the theist would not need to come up with arguments to defend his beliefs since his own belief in God, if warranted for him, would be capable of defeating the potential defeater. Therefore, the belief in God might still be basic for the believer. Now what can we say about (ID)? The first thing to notice is that, at least in this formulation, almost every basic belief would

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91 Idem.
be an intrinsic defeater. If a belief is basic, then it has probably more warrant than several potential defeaters. That is because basic beliefs usually have a high degree of warrant for $S$. Our beliefs in a priori necessary truths such as the basic truths of mathematics, or the *Modus Ponens*, are highly warranted. But so are our perceptual beliefs, and our memory beliefs. Accordingly, almost every – if not all – basic beliefs would be intrinsic defeaters. This does not need to imply that such beliefs are indefeasible. Plantinga understands the notion of a defeater as a relation among $B$ (a belief held by $S$), $S$’s noetic structure, and $D$ (a belief or experience that might potentially defeat $B$). It is the proper functioning of $S$’s cognitive faculties, and the fact that $D$ has more warrant for $S$ than $B$, that makes $D$ a defeater of $B$. If $B$ however has more warrant for $S$ than $D$, and $S$’s cognitive faculties are functioning in a proper way, than $B$ itself is able to defeat $D$.

An interesting consequence of Plantinga’s (ID) is that the theist, when facing a potential defeater, is entitled to do a Moorean shift. That is another way we might understand Plantinga’s use of (ID). Since theistic beliefs can be warranted for a subject $S$ she is perfectly rational in using these very beliefs as premises in an argument.\footnote{Cf. Plantinga, 1991, p. 72.} Hence, the theist might believe that the atheist’s argument must be going wrong somehow, since it is more warranted for $S$ that God exists than the atheistic argument. The theist does not need ulterior reasons to justify her position since her own belief being warranted constitutes a reason for her to be justified in claiming that the atheist is going wrong. Plantinga’s well-known parallel between the belief in God and the belief in the external world, the reality of the past, and the existence of other minds, gains a parallel also in their corresponding defeaters: the arguments against the existence of God are on a pair with skeptical arguments for the theist.

As a consequence for peer disagreement one side has a reason to claim that the other is being wrong somehow. One might demote, then, the other from peerhood. It is possible however to
make use of the *Moorean shift* independently of Plantinga’s (ID), which assumes rationality as proper function. In the next section I will examine another answer to disagreement taking insights into account. In the end I expect to show that this is also similar to the *Moorean shift*. This will be important for my suggestion contained in the last section of the paper.

3. **Insight (Plantinga, van Inwagen, Bergmann)**

*Plantinga and van Inwagen*

Plantinga (1995), Peter van Inwagen (1995), and more recently Michael Bergmann (2009) have argued that what explains a rational or reasonable stance of sticking to one’s guns in a peer disagreement is the possession of an *insight* that is not available to the other party. Thus, van Inwagen describes his disagreement on the free will debate with David Lewis. Both were familiar with the same arguments, and both can be considered peers with respect to intellectual skills, virtues, and so on. How can they still disagree? There must be some insight possessed by one that is not available for the other, at least regarding the subject of free will in particular. In a similar vein, Plantinga argues that - in cases of disagreement regarding religious pluralism - one might reasonably think that the other party is committing some sort of mistake, or has a *blind spot*, or has not received some grace that she has, &c.

Suppose that $A$ has an insight as a result of inspecting the evidence for $p$. After carefully examining the evidence, $A$ believe that $p$ is evidently true. The degree of credibility that $A$ ascribes to $p$ will also be evidence to support the latter. An objection to this account was raised by Richard Feldman (2007). Suppose that each $A$ and $B$ has her own insight regarding $p$, and that each of them knows about each other’s insight. In this case, $A$ knows that $B$ has evidence for the denial of $p$ - an insight not available for $A$ - and vice-versa. Could $A$ give some sort of special status for her insight despite of her knowledge that $B$ has a contrary insight that *not-p*? Feldman thinks this is a mistake. This would be a case of epistemic error or irresponsibility, for what reason there would be for one to favor his
or her evidence in detriment of the other? In the face of it, it looks as though the theist or the atheist might just say, “I have evidence [insight] that God exists, and you have contrary evidence [insight]. But since my evidence supports my belief, I will just stick to it.” And this seems to be nothing more than intellectual bias or stubbornness.

What can we say about Feldman’s argument? Well, it is not obvious this is a case of epistemic error, bias, or irresponsibility. Insofar as $A$ has an insight she is justified in having, the degree of confidence $A$ has in her own insight $i$ is tantamount to the degree of confidence she has that not-$i$. This gives $A$ a reason to justifiably believe that $B$’s insight that not-$i$ is not a good insight, or a genuine one. This is similar to the move we have seen in Plantinga’s notion of intrinsic defeaters, or the Moorean shift. One’s insight $i$, since it has more warrant for $A$ than the potential defeater $B$’s insight that not-$i$, is an intrinsic defeater of $B$’s insight that not-$i$. We do not need to suppose, moreover, that $A$’s insight is a single belief regarding the status of $p$. Perhaps $A$ has several beliefs counting as insights. It is difficult to cash it out exactly what those beliefs would be, but I think some of them could include the obvious character that $p$ has for $A$, the aesthetic value of $p$ as an explanation for a phenomenon, the simplicity of $p$, the way $p$ coherently fits with the rest of $A$’s beliefs, &c. It may even be the case that those beliefs are not clear for $A$, or that she would not be able to fully access and enumerate them. They might be inscrutable to some degree. Yet, their significance for $A$ might have been overlooked by Feldman.

Bergmann

93 Here Feldman also endorses the principle that evidence of evidence is evidence. For a criticism of this principle though, see Fitelson (2012).

94 Feldman seems to be assuming a similar principle. In the ‘Uniqueness Thesis’, regarding a proposition $p$ and evidence $E$, one body of evidence $E$ cannot justify both believing $p$ and disbelieving $p$, for the degree in which one attitude is justified is tantamount to the degree in which the other is not.
Michael Bergmann (2009) proposed that in cases of hard disagreement both parties have beliefs that are members of a broader outlook, one which includes a theory of error that helps to provide an explanation for the persistent disagreement. The outlook which is part of the theist’s noetic structure (called O1) contains both his belief that God exists and a theory of error (in this case, applied to the atheist’s outlook O2) ‘according to which the apparent insight that the key ingredients of O2 are true is not a genuine insight.’ (p. 338) This broader outlook may be political, religious, moral, philosophical, and so on.

Now, Bergmann argues that both the theist and the atheist are not sharing the exact same amount of evidence in this case. Regardless of the fact that they can both report their apparent insights, that is not the kind of evidence that they can share. The atheist then has the apparent insight that God does not exist, but the only thing available for the theist is the belief that her opponent has that apparent insight. But why this recognition does not provide a defeater for the theist’s belief that God exists? If we concede that she is very confident about her belief in God, and that she is justified in her belief, when she is first aware of the atheist’s disagreement, all things considered, she is still justified. The atheist’s apparent insight that O2 is true is already explained by the theist’s broader outlook O1.

Given the fact that the latter is justified and highly confident in

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95 Although Bergmann is focusing on cases of disagreement between people who view each other as roughly in the same epistemic condition, I think his argument can also work in cases of peer disagreement. The fact that both parties share different apparent insights should not be sufficient for them not to be peers anymore.

96 Bergmann does not talk specifically about religious disagreement. Thus he does not make use of the theist vs. atheist debate in the way I am presenting. However, I do not think this would constitute any significant change to his argument.

97 Cf. p. 339.
holding $O_1$, the fact that the atheist holds $O_2$ is not a defeater. In other words, $O_1$ is an intrinsic defeater of $O_2$.

Bergmann’s solution is very similar to the Moorean shift. Only, in this case, the shift is being explained as a theory of error contained in the believer’s broader outlook. Similar to the other cases we have examined, one’s justified belief $p$ works as an intrinsic defeater of a potential defeater $\neg p$. Could we join Feldman and argue that this is some sort of epistemic error or irresponsibility? Only if one is unjustified in doing the Moorean shift.

4. Feldman and the Uniqueness Thesis

In his (2007) Feldman defended that in a case of peer disagreement with full disclosure of evidence both parties – i.e. the theist and the atheist – cannot persist reasonably in their disagreement. Accordingly, the reasonable thing to do is for both to withhold believe in this case. If both shared their evidence then they have the same body of evidence $E$. Assume that a body of evidence $E$ cannot justify, or favor, both $p$ and $\neg p$. If $E$ favors $p$, and $S$ believes that $p$, then $S$ has a reasonable belief that $p$ – the other options being either to withhold or to disbelieve that $p$. Assuming all this Feldman formulates the ‘Uniqueness Thesis’ (UT):

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98 Cf. p., 339-340. Of course, the same can be said of Tom.
99 Bergmann will accept Plantinga’s distinction between internal and external rationality. While both parties can stick to their guns displaying internal rationality there might be a case in which one is externally irrational; his or her epistemic response is not according to the proper functioning (or, perhaps some other external component) of his or her cognitive faculties (p. 343). Bergmann does not defend, though, any kind of malfunction of the sensus divinitatis or something similar to it. He leave the question open regarding what would be a case of dysfunction in proper function.
(UT) A body of evidence $E$ justifies at most one proposition $p$ out of competing ones, and at most one propositional attitude [belief, disbelief, &c.] towards $p$.

The problem with (UT) is that if we assume that both parties share exactly the same body of evidence we would be only envisaging a solution for *ideal* cases of disagreement. For in the real world it is very unlikely that there is such a thing as sharing the same body of evidence $E$, especially in hard cases of disagreements regarding religion, politics, morality, &c. If that is the case (UT) is not an interesting principle to deal with real cases of disagreement. Feldman anticipate this objection by postulating two instances in which (UT) would fail: when there are different starting points, and thus both would weigh the evidence differently, and when the evidence, though comparable, is not fully shared. We already examined Feldman’s response regarding the latter – to wit, his point about insights. Let us now analyze what he has to say about the former.

Two people might share the same evidence and yet arrive to different conclusions because of their different starting points. They might weigh the evidence differently if they have different prior assumptions, distinct worldviews or fundamental beliefs. The problem now, Feldman argues, is what licenses me to suppose my starting point as having any kind of advantage over yours? We need reasons to justify our different preferences in considering the evidence. In other words, there is no “free lunch” regarding the starting points themselves. The only way different starting points would support reasonable disagreement is if each side could still defend and justify them after they are open to examination and full disclosure.

Before we evaluate Feldman’s argument one point should be made in what regards full disclosure of evidence. It is very controversial to assume that one could fully disclose her evidence,  

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100 This is very similar to the point regarding insights.
especially in hard cases such as religious disagreement. Perhaps it is not even clear for the theist why she believes in God – and the same may be true for the atheist. First, there is a variety of past experiences that each side might count as evidence, though presently they might not be as clear as they once were. You remember having experienced something regarding $p$; maybe you even remember that the experience was vivid at the time. In the case of religion, perhaps you remember having religious experiences such as *God has spoken to me through the Scriptures*, *I felt God’s presence while I was praying*, *God’s grace gave me strength to support tough times*, &c.\textsuperscript{101} It is not clear what would be the weight of these experiences when the theist is assessing the evidence, but that is not to say they will not be significant. A particular trait of religious disagreements is that those kinds of experiences are very significant for those who believe; in fact, they might even be a determinant factor sometimes. A complex network of beliefs, private experiences, intuitions, is at work when we examine our evidence, and most of the time this is not the kind of thing we can share, though we might even have access to it through introspection, memory, &c.

With respect to different starting points, Feldman claims they are a matter of practical choice, involving practical reasons, after we are aware that there are opposing and different worldviews at play. To illustrate his point, suppose we are on our way to an important meeting and we get a map to figure it out the best – shorter, quicker – way to get to our destiny. At one point on the road there is a fork which is not on the map and we might choose either left or right in order to get there sooner. Suppose I choose left whereas you choose the right side of the fork. We both might reasonably have chosen the other side. In this case, there is no better option, neither option is more reasonable than the other.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{101} Plantinga would count those and similar beliefs as properly basic. See his (1981), p. 46.

\textsuperscript{102} This is Feldman’s own analogy.
Now, can we really say that our different starting points are just like different sides of a fork on the road, and while we chose left, we might as well have reasonably chosen right? I cannot comprehend what starting point means besides what influenced and perhaps even justified having chosen one option instead of the other. We do not choose our starting point. We choose from a starting point. A very complex web of social, economic, religious, cultural, and several other factors will be involved in our worldview. It is not clear to what degree those will influence and perhaps even determine one belief over another. But to say that we could put all of those factors on the table, assess them from a neutral perspective, and then choose which worldview we are going to hold from that point on is almost ludicrous. This is a very complicated topic in itself, but I disagree that we could choose and display all the assumptions, beliefs, and elements involved in our worldview. If that is the case, there is no full disclosure of starting points, and the latter plays a significant role in hard cases of disagreement. In the next section I will provide a suggestion on how religious disagreement could be better understood.

5. Disagreement

We have examined three distinct answers for the problem of religious disagreement. In the first case, Plantinga’s notion of rationality as proper function and the sensus divinitatis as the disposition responsible for religious beliefs allows one side to demote the other from peerhood. The believer might be justified in rendering the atheist as externally irrational, at least in what concerns religious beliefs. However, it is arguable that this position leads to somewhat obscure results in what concerns religious disagreement. In principle, neither side could be responsible for convincing the other, and each might as well stick to the belief that the other is being irrational.

103 Of course, different starting points are not significant when we are disagreeing on the correct value of the check. But religion, morality, and politics, are a very different kind of disagreement.
The second answer proposes that each side has comparable evidence plus an insight in the particular case that is not available to the other. The insight, or the belief itself, is an intrinsic defeater of the potential defeater consisting in your peer justifiably believing in the contrary of what you hold. We have seen that this position is quite similar to a Moorean shift. You might be very confident in your belief, and believe it justifiably, this would thereby give you a reason to suppose your peer is going wrong somehow in that particular matter.\textsuperscript{104}

The third thesis concerning disagreement was Feldman’s. We saw some difficulties in accepting (UT) and the motivation behind it. Especially regarding the possibility of getting to full disclosure of evidence in hard cases of disagreement. Also, particularly in religious disagreement, one side might count religious experiences as evidence, which might be significant for the claim that both sides have the same or comparable evidence. In the following I want to suggest another approach in which (UT) cannot be applied, one that is similar in relevant aspects to the insight approach (henceforward (I)).

In both (UT) and (I) it was assumed that both sides of the disagreement are in possession of either the same or comparable evidence, where the comparable evidence only differs regarding an insight on the issue. On the other hand, I think that the notion of evidence is more problematic, particularly concerning religious disagreements.\textsuperscript{105} In the case of a religious disagreement, what $A$ would count as evidence for her belief that $p$ may differ substantially from what $B$ would count as evidence for $\neg p$, even if the evidence is in one sense the same. Suppose that $A$ formulates the following argument for the existence of God:

\vspace{1em}

\textsuperscript{104} Ernest Sosa’s (2010) will also defend a Moorean shift. In what follows, however, I will present an account somewhat different than his.

\textsuperscript{105} Perhaps what I say here also applies, at least to some extent, to both moral and political disagreements.
(A) i) If God exists, there is no gratuitous evil.
   ii) God exists.
   iii) Therefore there is no gratuitous evil.

B, on the other hand, will use a similar argument as evidence that God does not exist, in direct opposition to (A)’s conclusion:

(B) i) If God exists, there is no gratuitous evil.
   ii) There is gratuitous evil.
   iii) Therefore God does not exist.

As it may be familiar, the foregoing illustrates the Moorean shift where A’s modus ponens has the form of a modus tollens when formulated by B. This, as we have seen it, is made possible given A’s justified believe in the second premise of (A), which is sufficient for A to render the second premise of (B) as unjustified or wrong. Now consider the following argument:

(C) i) If God exists, there is no evil.
   ii) God exists.
   iii) There is no evil.

Although this conclusion is more difficult to accept (it is easier to deny that there is gratuitous evil than evil in general), it is made possible given A’s belief in both the first and second premise of (C). B, on the other hand, will say that there is evil, and therefore God does not exist. The debate, again, focus on the second premise. But what about the first premise of (C)? Is A rationally required to believe in it? I think the answer is no, and that this has interesting consequences regarding what one would count as evidence in this case. Perhaps A might object to the first premise of (C) by making use of an Augustinian argument that evil, in a sense, is evidence of the misuse of our free will which was given by God. The existence of evil, therefore, turns out to be evidence for God’s existence, and not against it. Other arguments were also made assuming evil as evidence that there is a paradigmatic goodness, or summum bonum, without which we would not be entitled to call anything evil.106 Whether these arguments have any merit is not my aim here to

106 Perhaps C. S. Lewis has made an argument on these lines.
consider. My point is only this: what one take as evidence in a certain circumstance is at least possibly determined by the rest of one’s background beliefs. It is rather naïve to assume that every member of \( E \), where \( E \) is the total body of evidence available for \( S \), is not dependent on \( S \)’s prior beliefs and assumptions. Evidence is always \textit{evidence of} \( \text{____} \), and one might fill the blank differently from the other, depending on background assumptions and beliefs.\(^{107}\) One can also say that \( A \) and \( B \) have different axioms (or, as perhaps Feldman would call it, \textit{starting points}), and those will determine at least to some extent the rest of the evidential body available for each of them. Furthermore, if the notion of a \textit{Moorean shift} – or intrinsic defeaters in some cases - makes any sense, it is possible thereby to rationally secure one’s axioms in the face of a disagreement.

If something as the foregoing is true, then \( A \) and \( B \) might even have comparable evidence – for instance, both take \textit{evil} as evidence \textit{for or against} God’s existence – but will draw different and warranted conclusions from it. In a sense, then, we say that both have comparable evidence, for both have \textit{evil} as a member of \( E \). On the other hand, one take \textit{evil} as being \textit{evil for God’s existence}, whereas the other take \textit{evil} as being \textit{evil against God’s existence}. In this sense their evidence differ significantly. Hence, given that both parties have different evidence hereof they are entitled to draw opposing beliefs. This also secures that both sides are rational in drawing warranted conclusions regarding an evidential body, though one side might consider the other as being wrong in respect to her fundamental beliefs. This does not imply dogmatism concerning the fundamental beliefs, prior assumptions, or starting points. If one side has reasons to disbelief one of her fundamental beliefs, than she isrationally required to do so. However, the fact that another person as intelligent, epistemically virtuous, and knowledgeable disagrees with her does not need to constitute a reason for her to withhold belief. It is possible that there is no full disclosure concerning prior assumptions, and thus both sides might start from very different, and sometimes hardly

\(^{107}\) Of course, there will have to be restrictions regarding the content of ____.
accessible, starting points. It is not necessary, therefore, to withhold belief in a case of disagreement.

References


Richard Jordan Lavender—On the Best Method for Developing a Concept of God  

Abstract

In this paper, I consider two methods for proceeding from the claim that God is absolutely perfect to other descriptions of the divine nature. Using the first method, we come to know the nature of a perfect being by means of intuitions about what properties are or are not great-making. I argue that theists ought not to adopt this method because it is not likely to yield knowledge of the divine nature. The second method presupposes what I take to be Thomas Aquinas’ account of God’s perfection. I argue that those who accept Aquinas’ account have good reason to adopt this method.

The idea that God is an absolutely or maximally perfect being is often employed in arguments that a given attribute does or does not characterize his nature. Some philosophers argue that the notion of God as a perfect being yields a good method for developing a concept of the divine nature. This way of arriving at descriptions of God has come to be known as perfect being theology.

I shall argue that theists ought not to adopt a perfect being theology based on the method, astutely defended by Thomas Morris, of using intuitions about what properties do or do not characterize a maximally perfect being to determine the nature of God. A more robust account of absolute perfection than that presupposed by many contemporary scholars is necessary.

108. I thank Frank Harrison, members of the UGA Philosophy Club, Joey Carter, and Ophelia Culpepper for insightful criticism and discussion of various drafts of this paper.

109. I shall use the traditional male pronoun to refer to God. However, I do not mean to thereby endorse the view that God has a gender.

110. For endorsements of the project of perfect being theology, see Schlesinger (New Perspectives 16), Morris (“Perfect Being Theology” 20), and Wierenga (140-45).
philosophers, one present in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, does ground a method for thinking about the divine nature which those who accept Aquinas’ account have reason to adopt. I shall frequently use the much-disputed attribute of immutability as a test-case for these perfect being theologies.111

Thomas Morris has presented one of the most articulate and carefully-argued defenses of perfect being theology in the recent (post-1980) literature. Morris is concerned with finding the best “method for developing a philosophically adequate conception of God” (“Perfect Being Theology” 22). He argues that this method is provided by perfect being theology. Morris states that “perfect being theology . . . can reasonably be thought to provide a method which ought to govern our thinking about God, our articulation of a philosophically precise concept of God” (“Perfect Being Theology” 22).

According to Morris, a maximally perfect being is one that exemplifies the best possible set of a certain kind of excellences. In keeping with some contemporary philosophers of religion, Morris calls these excellences “great-making properties” (“Perfect Being Theology” 23).112 Great-making properties are intrinsically good properties (“God of Abraham” 12).113 God exemplifies a “maximally

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111. Essentially, the doctrine of divine immutability is that God does not undergo any real (intrinsic) change. For a more precise definition of the attribute, and a discussion of the notion of intrinsic change, see Leftow’s “Eternity and Immutability.”
112. For other uses of the term, see Rogers (Perfect Being Theology 13), Schlesinger (New Perspectives 16), and Wierenga (144).
113. Morris has specific criteria for when a property is intrinsically better to have than not. It is certainly not sufficient for a property to be one that it is better for some being to have than not. For instance, Morris questions the claim that efficiency is an intrinsically good property because, while it is better for some beings to have than not, this seems to be due to particular deficiencies in beings for which efficiency is a good (“God of Abraham” 13-15). Things that are
perfect set of compossible great-making properties” (“God of Abraham” 12). In other words, God has the set of great-making properties that, out of all possible sets of great-making properties, has the highest value. Hence, our ability to use this account of God's perfection to arrive at descriptions of the divine nature will depend upon our ability to make judgments about what properties are intrinsic goods, and which intrinsic goods are compossible.

Extrinsically good are goods “for standing in some distinct relation R to some object or state of affairs B, something extrinsic or external.” Intrinsically good things are the opposite of extrinsic goods, they are “goods in themselves, and thus are proper ultimate stopping points in explanations of goodness” (Idea of God 37).

Excluding the issue of compossibility (see note 8), I think Morris’ approach is representative of much of the contemporary literature on perfect being theology. However, some do not go so far as to define great-making properties as intrinsic goods. Two alternative definitions of great-making properties seem to be common: (1) a great-making property is any “pure perfection,” which is a perfection that does not entail limitation or deficiency in the being possessing it (see Garrigou-Lagrange 164; Wainwright, Philosophy of Religion 7) and (2) a great-making property is anything that it is better to be than not to be (with various qualifiers after “better:” better for every being, better in itself). Leftow attributes a variant of the second definition to Anselm, also see Wierenga for a discussion of this formula (Leftow, “Anselm’s Perfect Being Theology;” Wierenga 143-45).

The use of intuitions about compossibility marks an apparent divide among advocates of perfect being theology pointed out by Leon Pearl in criticism of George Schlesinger (Pearl 364). There is a distinction between the idea of God as a maximally excellent being and the idea of God as an absolutely perfect being. A maximally excellent being is a being that has the greatest possible value. An absolutely perfect being is one that has every excellence to a supreme degree. Graham Oppy calls this the distinction between maximal and perfect excellence (Oppy 119-120). For instance, if power is a perfection then a maximally excellent being has as much power as it
Properties are intrinsically good that are not good by virtue of standing in relation to some other property. Morris gives no further account of goodness or criterion by which we could determine when this is the case. Rather, it is just intuitively clear that, for instance, knowledge is good for its own sake. Thus, the method for arriving at the account of the divine nature given by perfect being theology is to use “our intuitions concerning what properties are great-making properties, as well as concerning when an array of such properties is compossibly exemplifiable, and, if so, whether or not it is surpassable in value” (“Perfect Being Theology” 23).

Let us suppose we accept that God is a maximally perfect being. This is not in itself sufficient reason to use the method that Morris endorses for developing an account of the divine nature. Morris has two compelling arguments for adopting this method. The first I shall address immediately and the second later. The reason for adopting a method for thinking about God at all is to arrive at a true is logically possible to have, whereas a perfect being would have every power (which may or may not be logically possible).

In some places, Morris seems to be employing the claim that God is absolutely perfect, in other places only the claim that God is maximally excellent. In “Perfect Being Theology” he says our judgment of what properties are divine attributes will depend upon “our intuitions concerning what properties are great-making properties, as well as concerning when an array of such properties is compossibly exemplifiable, and, if so, whether it is or is not surpassable in value” (23; emphasis added). But at one point in “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Anselm,” Morris says that it might be possible to show that the “notion of maximal perfection entails individual properties which are self-contradictory” or that “some two or more properties entailed by maximal perfection are logically incompatible with each other” (23). This is in seeming contradiction to his earlier statement in the same paper that “the Anselmian conception of God is that of a greatest possible” being (“God of Abraham” 12; emphasis added).
account of the divine nature. According to Morris, “supposing sufficiently robust value intuitions concerning intrinsic good . . . perfect being theology in principle can take us the furthest toward a fully adequate conception of God” (“Perfect Being Theology” 24). Furthermore, it seems that most people have robust intuitions about intrinsic goodness. Even debates over attributes such as eternity show this: Some have the intuition that timelessness is an intrinsic good, others have the intuition that it is not an intrinsic good (“Perfect Being Theology” 20-21). Thus, this method allows most people to develop a fully-developed account of the divine nature.

But it is actually unclear that perfect being theology leads to a developed account of the divine nature. Like timelessness, the much-debated attribute of immutability provides a good test of Morris’ perfect being theology. It seems plausible that what is good about properties such as human steadfastness is that they involve constancy, a lack of change. What is bad about capriciousness is that the capricious person is more susceptible to change. Thus, changelessness is an intrinsic good. Therefore God undergoes no real change – God is immutable. Some do not share the intuition that immutability is an intrinsic good. Daniel Dombrowski argues that traditional theists set up a dichotomy between permanence and change, construing all permanence as good and all change as bad (19-22). Dombrowski does not think that all permanence is good: “to deny God passivity [which entails the ability to be changed] altogether is to deny God those aspects of passivity which are excellences” (21). Some sorts of passivity are bad and others good, but neither permanence nor change is good in itself.

116. Appeals to the notion of a perfect being in arguments for or against God’s immutability are common. For perfect being arguments addressing the attribute of immutability (by philosophers not explicitly concerned with relating the debate to perfect being theology) see Kretzmann and also Hartshorne (Divine Relativity 22-24).

117. William Mann seems to suggest this argument in a paper on the doctrine of immutability (267).
Thus, the method of using intuitions about intrinsic goodness to determine whether God is mutable or immutable yields no definite result. It seems this is the case for other disputed attributes as well. As William Wainwright points out, reliance on perfect being intuitions in general does not tell us “which intuitions are reliable” in cases where such intuitions conflict (“Perfect Being Theology” 234). Hence, while intuitions held in common among theists may provide evidence for a divine attribute, given two conflicting intuitions we have no reason to choose one over the other as evidence. As Wainwright puts it, “There seems to be an equal presumption in favor of my intuitions and the conflicting intuitions of my opponent” (“Perfect Being Theology” 236). Consequently, this method provides no guidance on disputed attributes such as immutability and timelessness. Therefore, the method of Morris’ perfect being theology does not yield a developed concept of God.

There is a response to this argument. Conflicting intuitions render belief in one’s own intuitions unwarranted if intuitions are evidence for conclusions. As evidence, intuitions about many attributes are worthless because they are offset by the conflicting intuitions of others. However, rather than evidence, intuitions may be the outputs of belief-producing (or at least evident-making) faculties that have intrinsic epistemic warrant. Thus, I am prima facie justified in believing that p when I have an intuition that p. Reason to believe not-p may perhaps defeat my epistemic warrant for believing that p.

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118. It is plausible that divine immutability follows from both the doctrine of divine timelessness and the doctrine of divine simplicity. Changes take time. Hence, a being outside of time does not undergo change. And an absolutely simple being could not change without changing essentially and so becoming another thing entirely. Perhaps people have consistent and definite intuitions about timelessness or absolute simplicity? It does not seem probable. There is likely to be as much conflict of intuitions about whether timelessness or simplicity is an intrinsic good as there is about the intrinsic goodness of immutability.
However, not having other reason to believe that-\(p\), or not having reason to believe that my intuition that-\(p\) is reliable, or the fact that others have reason to believe that not-\(p\), does not entail that one should not believe the deliverance of one’s own intuitive faculty. Wainwright suggests just this response, saying, “Ultimately each of us must provisionally trust his or her own reflective intuitions” (“Perfect Being Theology” 238). One is justified in accepting one’s intuitions about intrinsic goodness even if the intuitions of others conflict with these intuitions. Consequently, one’s own intuitions provide a developed account of the divine nature.\(^{119}\)

Now, Morris is concerned with finding “a method for developing a philosophically adequate conception of God” (“Perfect Being Theology” 22). One would expect such a method to be a way of philosophically resolving the many disputes over what attributes characterize the divine nature. But in fact the method provides no such resolution. People have conflicting intuitions about the nature of an absolutely perfect being. Because of this conflict, intuitions about what properties are or are not intrinsic goods do not provide public evidence for any particular view of the divine nature. Rather, the fact that an individual has a given intuition at most justifies her in accepting what the intuition makes evident. Hence, the method given by Morris’ perfect being theology only justifies an account of the nature of God for the person engaging in it. One cannot, based upon the claim that God is absolutely perfect, give an account of the divine nature that is compelling for others. That is, we cannot use this

\(^{119}\). Morris recognizes that “it is a well-known and often lamented fact that philosophical intuitions differ” (“Perfect Being Theology” 6). Furthermore, Morris argues that “if an Anselmian God exists,” then “it makes good sense that [we] should be able to come to know something of his existence and attributes without the need of highly technical arguments” (Morris, “Necessity” 67-68). Hence, we are justified in accepting the results of the noetic faculties that produce intuitions about the nature of an absolutely perfect being (Morris, “Necessity” 66-68).
method to give a publicly justified account of the divine nature, an account that others will have reason to accept.

That the method of developing an account of the divine nature for which Morris argues lacks one significant good that we might hope for from such a method does not mean there is no reason to adopt it. Morris’ argument for the method of perfect being theology is not that it yields a publicly justifiable account of the divine nature, but that it can “take us the furthest toward a fully adequate conception of God” (“Perfect Being Theology” 24).

However, this is not the case. The method of perfect being theology may yield a fully worked-out concept of God, but it does not yield an adequate concept. The theist is seeking a method for obtaining knowledge of the divine nature. Beliefs about the divine nature that are false are not what theists are seeking. Hence, a method that yields an adequate conception of God is a method that yields a concept of God that is both true and well-developed. The theist seeking such an account ought to adopt a method that will yield such an account. It would be unreasonable to adopt a method that is so unreliable that it is likely to yield a developed but largely or partially false account of God’s nature.

The method of perfect being theology is just such a method. As we have seen, intuitions about what properties are intrinsic goods often conflict, as do intuitions about what sets of properties are compossible. It follows that a large proportion of people have mistaken intuitions about the divine nature: When two intuitions lead to conflicting conclusions, at least one must be wrong. A method that involves accepting one’s intuitions about metaphysical value will lead to many false beliefs. Therefore, the method of perfect being

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120. By conflicting intuitions, I mean intuitions that make evident logically contradictory conclusions. As Wainwright points out, it is these intuitions, rather than merely some people having a given intuition and others lacking it, that provide the most difficulty for perfect being theology (“Perfect Being Theology” 235).
theology is one that theists seeking knowledge of the divine nature ought not to adopt.

One might reply that the theist does after all have reason to think that the method leads to true conclusions. We have granted that she is justified in believing that conclusions arrived at by means of this method are correct. But if she believes the conclusions are correct, then she believes that the method yielded true conclusions.

However, while it may be correct that the theist is justified in thinking the conclusions she obtains from this method are true, she is not justified in thinking that by adopting the method she will reach true conclusions about the divine nature — for this is clearly improbable. Hence, a theist who has already adopted the procedure may be justified in believing the intuitions it yields. But this does not mean that a theist seeking to reach true conclusions about the divine nature has good reason to adopt the method in the first place. Indeed, anyone attempting to reach true conclusions about the divine nature ought not to adopt a perfect being theology based on intuition.

Maybe my argument begs the question. After all, I have assumed that the method of Morris’ perfect being theology is unreliable. But perhaps there is a reliable capacity for intuition about intrinsic goodness and logical compatibility. Under some circumstances, however, this capacity is prone to malfunction. After all, Morris notes that “on no plausible account of intuition will such a belief-producing capacity work equally well regardless of context. . . proper circumstances are required for bringing it into play” (“Perfect Being Theology” 23). Those who arrive at the wrong conclusions by the method of perfect being theology may do so because their intuitive faculty is not functioning properly. But this no more impugns the faculty of intuition about intrinsic goodness than the fact that people sometimes reach wrong conclusions about what is logically implied by a statement impugns the faculty of reason.
Let us suppose that there is such a capacity (as Morris argues there is, see “Necessity” 65-68). Incorrect intuitions about the nature of an absolutely perfect being occur in circumstances under which the intuitive faculty malfunctions. Using this faculty under the right circumstances would be a good method for developing a concept of God. But while contemporary advocates of perfect being theology may hold that there exists such a faculty, they do not say under what conditions it functions properly (an objection raised by Wainwright, “Worship” 32). The method of perfect being theology we are considering is careful reflection on the notion of an absolutely perfect being. But we have seen that this method is likely to yield false conclusions. Hence, simply following this method does not guarantee that the faculty will function properly. Perfect being theology still fails to provide a method for thinking about God’s nature that theists ought to adopt.

One might object that we can state the conditions under which the faculty functions properly: It functions properly when we arrive at correct conclusions about the divine nature. Now, one may be justified in believing that others are engaging in the proper method only if they share one’s intuitions. But in this case perfect being theology is not a method for discovering what attributes characterize the divine nature. If one holds that the method is being used properly only if one intuits that an absolutely perfect being would have the set of attributes \( \{x, y, \ldots, z\} \), this is because one believes that God has attributes \( \{x, y, \ldots, z\} \). Thus, the conclusions the capacity yields do not give one any new knowledge of the divine nature.

A stronger reply to my argument is that it prejudices the case against perfect being theology by focusing on attributes about which there are conflicting intuitions, such as immutability and timelessness. One might object that there is no such conflict of intuition over many, perhaps the majority, of divine attributes, such as consciousness, omnibenevolence, omniscience, omnipotence. On these, the intuitions of theists seem to agree. Perfect being theology may not provide a complete true account of the divine nature, but it can provide a substantial and true account.
One problem with this reply is that as a matter of fact these attributes are disputed on the grounds of perfect being theology. Many people have the intuition that some of the omni-attributes are either incoherent taken alone, or not compossible. Proponents of perfect being theology such as Richard Schlesinger and Yujin Nagasawa argue that a perfect being may not be omnipotent, omnibenevolent, or omniscient (Nagasawa 585-88; Schlesinger, “Divine Perfection” 156-57).

Some philosophers object to allowing intuitions about compossibility to determine our concept of an absolutely perfect being. Even so, these attributes can be disputed on the grounds of perfect being theology. Charles Hartshorne, for instance, suggests that an absolutely perfect being would not be omnipotent, because absolute control over creation would be an imperfection. An omnipotent God would be more like a dictator than a loving father (Omnipotence 25-26). Infinite power is not an intrinsic good. Many lack the intuition that consciousness and personality characterize the nature of a perfect being (see Legenhausen 311).

However, even if we grant that among most theists there is substantial agreement about the nature of God, it does not follow that we ought to adopt the method of perfect being theology. The attributes for which one can plausibly claim more or less universally shared intuitions – consciousness, knowledge, power, love – are just the attributes that are most widely accepted by theists. Morris proposes perfect being theology as “a method for developing a philosophically adequate conception of God” (“Perfect Being Theology” 22). Those seeking to use such a method will probably already be theists. But this means their concept of God will likely already include the only attributes on which the method of perfect

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121 Pearl argues that the traditional notion of God is that of an infinitely perfect, not a maximally perfect, being (364-65).
being theology provides reliable guidance. Thus, by adopting the method the theist does not add anything to her concept of God.\footnote{One could object that there is consensus about these attributes because theists do engage in the method of perfect being theology. But this would be an exceedingly dubious empirical claim. The method of perfect being theology is certainly not how most people arrive at a concept of God. And among philosophers there are other methods in use for developing an account of the divine nature, as Morris recognizes (“Metaphysical Dependence” 278-80). If other methods lead to the same conclusions, as consensus on certain attributes would imply, then the fact that perfect being theology leads to these conclusions is no reason to choose it over other methods.}

Morris offers another reason for adopting the method of perfect being theology: “Perfect being theology can incorporate, integrate, and help interpret other plausible sources for a conception of God” (“Perfect Being Theology” 24). Morris gives two examples of what he means by this claim. One is the property of “worship-worthiness.” This property is a plausible guide to a concept of God because many people have intuitions about what attributes worship-worthiness supervenes upon. Perfect being theology incorporates this method because it is plausible that worship-worthiness is an intrinsic good that would be possessed by a maximally perfect being. Perfect being theology supports the method by acting “as a guide to our understanding of the conditions of proper worship” (“Perfect Being Theology” 24).

In both cases, the role of perfect being theology in relation to the method of worship-worthiness is to provide content to our concept of God, either by means of the intuition that worship-worthiness is a divine attribute, or by intuitions about what perfections contribute to worship-worthiness. But we have seen that perfect being theology is not a reliable method for adding content to our concept of God. Thus, this example adds nothing new to Morris’ defense of perfect being theology.
Morris’ other example of the relationship of perfect being theology to a source of knowledge of God is special revelation. On the one hand, Morris suggests that perfect being theology provides content to our idea of God by either extending (God is not just powerful but omnipotent) or guiding the interpretation of (corporeal images of God in the scriptures are metaphorical) special revelation. But he also suggests that “the open texture of perfect being theology allows for its defeasible intuitive specification to be corrected at the bar of special revelation” (“Perfect Being Theology” 24-25). In other words, perfect being theology has the advantage of being open to correction by other sources for knowledge of God.

This may be an advantage, but it is not a sufficient reason for adopting the method. A good method must not only be subject to correction, it must also provide some content that we have reason to accept when it is not corrected. Otherwise, the method provides us with no knowledge of God’s nature.

Perhaps this interpretation of Morris’ examples misses the point. Maybe he is really suggesting that perfect being theology is not a guide to what belongs to our concept of God and what does not, but rather unifies that concept by integrating its various elements under the idea of absolute perfection. God is omnipotent because the attribute contributes to his absolute perfection, or something of that sort.

This may well be true, but it is empty. If we know that God has all and only those attributes that contribute to maximal perfection and we know that God has attribute X, it follows that X contributes to maximal perfection. But this is different from seeing how or why X contributes to maximal perfection. If we understand how the divine attributes contribute to the divine perfection, this will lend a sort of natural unity or integration to our concept of God. However, merely knowing that they do contribute provides no unity to our understanding of God’s nature.

It does not follow that we cannot find some minimal role for the method of perfect being theology to play in our concept of God.
So far, I have referred to “the” method of perfect being theology and argued that we ought not to adopt this method for developing a concept of God. However, the prospects for perfect being theology are not as dismal as I have implied. In fact, a closer investigation of the concept of an absolutely perfect being may yield a method for developing an account of the divine nature that those who accept the analysis have good reason to adopt.\textsuperscript{124} Rather than attempting to undertake and justify such an analysis here, I shall expound an already-given analysis and attempt to show that this analysis leads to a method that those who accept it have reason to adopt.

Anselm of Canterbury is the canonical philosopher most frequently appealed to in discussions of perfect being theology. However, there is a more detailed discussion of the presuppositions and method of perfect being theology in Thomas Aquinas. I shall attempt to expound Aquinas\textsuperscript{\textdagger} analysis of the notion of an absolutely perfect being, and the method for thinking about the nature of a perfect being that follows from this account.

According to Aquinas, as for many other medieval philosophers, things are good insofar as they exist. Goodness and being are identical in reality, though conceptually distinct. This view takes on special significance for Aquinas because of an important feature of his metaphysics: the real distinction between essence and existence. Etienne Gilson states that for Aquinas “the form is such an act as still remains in potency to another act, namely, existence”\footnote{Perhaps we can. However, I shall argue that perfect being theology can actually accomplish far more.\textdaggertextsuperscript{124} Strangely, what it means to say that God is absolutely perfect has been little discussed in the recent (i.e. post-1980) literature. Nonetheless, it will become clear that the success of perfect being theology hinges on how we understand absolute perfection. Among the few who discuss in detail the notion of a perfect being in contemporary perfect being theology are Wainwright (\textit{Philosophy of Religion}), Oppy, and Pearl (364-365).}
(Being 174). Thus “existence is the actuality of every thing” (ST I, Q. 5, Art. 1, co.). For something to be what it is, and for it “to be” – to have the act of existence – are distinct. As a result of this distinction, the identification of goodness and being is developed by Aquinas in such a way that, to quote Gilson again, “The identity of good and of being, as had been taught by his predecessors, becomes for Thomas Aquinas the identity of the good and the act of existing” (Thomism 101). Therefore, “things are perfect inasmuch as they have existence in some way” (ST I, Q. 4, Art. 2, co.).

Aquinas’ understanding of what it is to be absolutely perfect follows from this account of goodness. He further explains this account with an analogy. Suppose that there is a separately existing form of whiteness. Particular white things are white insofar as they participate in this form. Now, these particular white things participate in whiteness in a limited way, and so can lack whiteness to some degree. However, whiteness itself “could not lack any of the power of whiteness” (SCG I.28.2). Likewise, an absolutely perfect being would be one “Who is His Being,” and would therefore have “being according to the whole power of being itself” (SCG I.28.2).

Of course, Aquinas is speaking of God, who is “universally perfect” (SCG I.28.3). According to Aquinas “God is self-subsisting existence” (ST I, Q. 4, Art. 2, co.). What in creatures is essence is in God existence, and so God’s essence is identical with his existence. From this, it follows that God is absolutely perfect. Aquinas gives an argument for this:

. . . just as every excellence and perfection is found in a thing according as that thing is, so every defect is found in it according as in some way it is not. Now, just as God has being wholly, so non-being is wholly absent from Him . . . Hence, all defect is absent from God. He is, therefore, universally perfect. (SCG I.28.3)

Because of Aquinas’ identification of goodness and existence, things are good insofar as they are (or have existence) and things are
defective or imperfect insofar as they are not (or lack existence). But
God is subsisting existence itself, so he does not lack existence in any
way. Thus, God is absolutely perfect. Because God does not lack
existence in any way, “God does not lack the perfection of any thing”
(ST I, Q. 4, Art. 2, co.).

This account of absolute perfection provides a rule for what
we can and cannot say of the divine nature. Given that absolute
perfection is fullness of existence, it would be inappropriate to apply
any term to God that signifies a lack of existence in any way. If a
term signifies perfection insofar as it signifies existence in some way,
then the terms that can be said of God must signify perfection without
any defect; that is, they must signify existence in some way and in no
way signify non-existence.

Aquinas develops this formula in Ch. 30 of the Summa
Contra Gentiles, where he considers “what it is possible to say or not

\[125\] I owe this description of Aquinas’ method to Brian Leftow’s
insightful commentary on Anselm’s perfect being theology. Anselm
specifies a rule for what can be said of a perfect being. Terms that
satisfy this rule can be said of a perfect being; terms that fail to satisfy
it cannot be said of a perfect being (“Anselm’s Perfect Being
Theology” 135).

\[126\] I have avoided the daunting issue of how our language applies to
God. But it is so central to Aquinas’ thought that some comment is
appropriate. While Aquinas grants that some terms may signify
existence and do not in any way signify non-existence, he argues that
what he calls the mode of signification of these terms is always
inappropriate to God’s nature. The term “intelligent” may in no way
signify non-existence, but the mode in which we apply the term to
creatures (this is something like “the way we conceive of”
intelligence) does not apply to God. The intelligence of creatures is
distinct from their love and personality, whereas in the divine nature
these things are identical. Hence, the mode of signification of our
terms always implies limitation, even if they do not signify any
limitation (see SCG I.30.3).
say of God” (SCG I.30.1). He states that “whatever names unqualifiedly designate a perfection without defect are predicated of God and other things” (SCG I.30.2). Thus, we have both a positive and a negative criterion for what terms we can use to speak of the divine nature. The positive criterion is that any term that denotes existence and in no way denotes non-existence may be said of God. The negative criterion is that any term that denotes non-existence in some way must be denied of God.

Aquinas uses this account of perfection to argue that God is immutable. One version of the argument is stated by Aquinas as follows:

\[\ldots\text{ whatever is moved acquires something by that motion and attains something it previously had not attained. But God, since his infinity comprehends in itself every plenitude of perfection of all existence, cannot acquire something or extend himself toward something he had not previously attained. Thus, in no way does motion apply to God. (ST I, Q. 9, Art. 1, co.)}\]

Suppose that God is able to change. Everything that changes comes to be in some way that it was not before (or comes to not-be in some way that it was previously). That is, it gains some existence that it did not have, or loses some existence that it already had. Thus, the attribute of mutability implies that the mutable thing lacks existence in some way at some point. So by Aquinas’ negative criterion for what terms may be said of God’s nature, we must deny mutability of God. Therefore, God is immutable.

After quoting the above passage from the Summa Theologiae, Richard Swinburne objects that “an obvious answer to this point is to suggest that the perfection of a perfect being might consist not in his being in a certain static condition, but in his being in a certain process of change” (222). Perhaps Swinburne does not
see Aquinas’ identification of goodness and being. But there is a more compelling reading of the objection. Swinburne contrasts “being in a static condition” with “being in a process of change.” A change is something, so change has being in some way. Hence, changes participate in the act of existence. Therefore, to say that God is changing is to say that he has existence in some way. And to say that God does not change is to say that he lacks existence in some way. Hence, it is at least possible that an absolutely perfect being is a changing being.

However, that a term signifies existence in some way does not entail that it may be said of God’s nature. The term “change” does signify existence in some way. But to say that a being is changing is to say that it is gaining some existence that it previously lacked or losing some existence that it previously had. Thus, a being characterized by change is a being that lacks existence at some point. An absolutely perfect being is a being that does not lack existence. Therefore an absolutely perfect being does not change. A term that may be said of the divine nature must not only signify existence in some way, but in no way entail a lack of existence.

This is made plausible by Swinburne’s statement that he suspects the doctrine of immutability derives from “neo-Platonism” in which “things which change are inferior to things which do not change” (Swinburne 222). After quoting Aquinas’ argument and suggesting that perhaps perfection consists in “being in a certain process of change,” he states that “only neo-Platonic dogma would lead us to suppose otherwise” (222). However, the neo-Platonic claim that immutable being is superior to mutable being is not what compels Aquinas’ adherence to the claim that God is immutable, rather it is the metaphysical argument deriving from his identification of goodness and the act of existing (cf. Gilson, *Christian Philosophy* 102).

Change is the act of potential *qua* potential (*SCG* II.17.2). I thank Ed Halper for making me aware of this point in the context of another paper.
Perhaps Swinburne’s objection can be construed as an argument that there is no absolutely perfect being. The being of change and static being are distinct and incompatible. God is either changing or unchanging. Either way, he lacks some existence: the existence of change if he is immutable, static existence if he is changing. Thus, if absolute perfection is unlimited existence, there is no absolutely perfect being.\textsuperscript{129}

However, Aquinas’ argument for immutability does not require the premise that if anything is either of one kind or another (i.e. changing or unchanging), then things of either kind lack some existence that things of the other kind have. The objection that an immutable being is not absolutely perfect because it lacks the being of change does require this assumption. Aquinas does not argue that a changing being lacks existence because it does not belong to some kind. Rather, his argument only requires the more plausible premise that a changing being lacks existence because to change is to gain or lose existence. It seems, then, that Aquinas’ argument for the doctrine of divine immutability can survive Swinburne’s objection.

Aquinas’ perfect being theology provides a method for deciding whether we can say of God at least some attributes. Furthermore, the method that Aquinas’ perfect being theology yields is one that those who accept his account of the divine perfection have good reason to adopt. Aquinas’ perfect being theology provides not just content to a concept of God, but its conclusions can be justified by argument. Thus, if we accept Aquinas’ starting point and our arguments are valid, the conclusions we reach by the method will be true. In addition, these conclusions can be publicly justified and so will be compelling for others who accept Aquinas’ perfect being theology. Those who accept Aquinas’ account of God’s perfection have good reason to believe that it provides both a true and a publicly

\textsuperscript{129} Clearly, Aquinas understands God primarily as an absolutely perfect being rather than a being that has the maximal possible degree of perfection.
justified account of the divine nature. Thus, they have good reason to adopt this method.

One might object that Aquinas’ method merely replaces one set of controversial metaphysical intuitions (what properties are intrinsically good) with another set of controversial metaphysical intuitions (about the nature of goodness). Or, in other words, it only moves the problem of epistemic justification back one step. However, the difficulty with the method of Morris’ perfect being theology is not that it contains basic or otherwise not argumentatively justified beliefs, or that it relies upon intuitions. The difficulty is that it is not a method for reaching conclusions about the divine nature that it would be reasonable to adopt. Given that one accepts Aquinas’ account of the divine perfection, the method for developing a concept of God that follows from it is a method that one has good reason to adopt.

However, Morris is not unreasonable to avoid an analysis of what it means to say that God is absolutely perfect. He rightly notes that an advantage of the method he endorses is that its starting point is “intuitively plausible” (“Perfect Being Theology” 22, 23). The idea that God is a perfect being is intuitive; Aquinas’ account of what it means to say that God is absolutely perfect may not be, and it is certainly not as widely accepted as Morris’ starting point. However, Morris’ perfect being theology does not provide a method for developing an account of the divine nature that theists have good reason to adopt, whereas Aquinas’ perfect being theology does. Perhaps any viable perfect being theology must rest on a metaphysics

130 I thank Ophelia Culpepper for raising this objection.
131 While it might be true that many or all of our basic religious beliefs rest on some sort of intuition, it does not follow that we are justified in using intuitions about intrinsic good to reach conclusions about the nature of God. There are, after all, other methods and sets of intuitions we could employ for thinking about God.
of goodness, or at least a more thorough analysis of the notion of an all-perfect (or perhaps maximally perfect) being.

Bibliography


Zhuoyao Li—Spinoza and Teleology

Introduction

Spinoza is widely represented as antagonistic toward teleology. Although most commentators agree that Spinoza denies divine providence, discussions concerning goal-oriented human action and the so-called “unthoughtful teleology” are by no means conclusive. According to Jonathan Bennett, the reason is that there is confusion between teleology and what Spinoza calls “conatus,” or striving. The coexistence of the two seemingly contrary concepts exposes a serious flaw that would undercut Spinoza’s moral philosophy. Consequently, Bennett concludes that either Spinoza made a huge mistake in the Ethics, or that there is no teleology at all in his philosophy.

Commentators have been trying to defend the existence of teleology in Spinoza’s ethics mostly on technical and epistemological ground that focuses on his metaphysics and philosophy of the mind. In this essay, I will try to defend Spinoza’s teleology on ethical ground. Specifically, I will first examine Bennett’s argument and show that the confusion between teleology and conatus does not necessarily entail the absence of teleology in Spinoza’s Ethics. Then, I will demonstrate that there can be teleology in Spinoza’s ethics by studying teleological theories in general. The thesis I wish to defend is that the sense of confusion in Bennett’s account is reducible to the coincidence of the right and the good in Spinoza’s ethics, which renders his teleology less recognizable than

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its counterparts that usually place the good independently and prior to the right. In the third part, I will show that the influence of the confusion between conatus and teleology is not limited to Spinoza’s ethics. In fact, Spinoza’s “unusual” teleology directly contributes to a similar confusion in Spinoza’s political philosophy, which makes it difficult for commentators to locate Spinoza in the tradition of social contract. In particular, I will focus on the ambiguous relationship between Spinoza’s and Hobbes’ political philosophies and argue that what fundamentally distinguishes them is precisely the former’s commitment to teleology. Last but not least, although Spinoza wrote under the influence of Hobbes and adopted a rather modern approach of rationalism, his ethics and political philosophy are nonetheless traditional in nature. While Hobbes fully adopts the pluralistic and post-metaphysical point of view that has been defining modernity so far, Spinoza still maintains the teleological and metaphysical point of view in the long Western philosophical tradition. Consequently, Spinoza’s political philosophy, despite its intrinsic value and insight, is not applicable in modernity.

Between Teleology and Conatus

In “Teleology and Spinoza’s Conatus,” Bennett argues that there is incoherence in Spinoza’s Ethics. On the one hand, there is a full-blown attack on teleology, most notably in the Appendix of Part I. On the other hand, the central concept of conatus leads Part III and IV of the Ethics to presuppose that human actions, thoughtful or not, are goal-oriented. The source of this incoherence, in Bennett’s opinion, is Spinoza’s confusion between teleology and conatus.

In the Appendix of Part I, Spinoza argues that the teleological point of view is the product of human ignorance of the causes of things and desire to seek their own advantages. Consequently, “this doctrine of Final Causes turns Nature completely

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up side down, for it regards as an effect that which is in fact a cause, and vice versa.”¹³⁶ The goal of Spinoza’s *Ethics* is precisely to get rid of these prejudices and show that “the perfection of things should be measured solely from their own nature and power.”¹³⁷ Later in Part III, the attack on teleology becomes more concrete with the introduction of conatus as the essence of the thing itself.¹³⁸ Conatus is the basis of Spinoza’s conceptions of will, appetite, and desire. In 3p9s, Spinoza defines will as conatus when it is related to the mind alone, appetite as conatus when it is related to the mind and body together, and desire as appetite accompanied by the consciousness of the appetite.¹³⁹ Thus, one’s appetite is reducible to the intrinsically palpable features of oneself rather than extrinsically attractive goals. In other words, “we do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and desire it.”¹⁴⁰ Together with the Appendix of Part I, Spinoza clearly denies human teleology.

However, the word “conatus” is Latin for “striving” or “trying,” which according to Bennett always “involves behavior that is explained by one’s thinking it may have a certain result,” and hence is always “teleological and involves explaining what happens at one time by reference to what might happen later.”¹⁴¹ In other words, “Spinoza’s very choice of the name . . . suggests that he has been covertly thinking of it as teleological.”¹⁴² In Bennett’s opinion, the fact that Spinoza adds in 3p7 that the conatus “is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself” indicates his immediate reaction to deny that he has brought something teleological into his doctrinal

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¹³⁶ Ibid.
¹³⁷ Ibid.
¹³⁸ Ibid., 66.
¹³⁹ Ibid., 67.
¹⁴⁰ Ibid.
¹⁴² Ibid.
structure. Consequently, 3p9s precisely shows Spinoza’s “damage control” to maintain that the teleological conatus really stands for intrinsic Spinozistic appetite. In other words, in “attributing a self-preserving conatus to an organism, [Spinoza] wants us to believe, we are saying only that it has a nature that will cause it to behave in self-preserving ways.” Nevertheless, the damage is done and there is no turning back. The introduction of conatus leads the entire Part III and IV of the *Ethics* to presuppose a teleological point of view, which contradicts his early ambition to get rid of teleology as a prejudice.

The context of Spinoza’s “teleology-conatus” muddle, according to Bennett, is threefold, and Spinoza’s attempt to maintain all three perspectives at the same time produces the confusion. First, Spinoza tries, as he claims in the Appendix of Part I, to get rid of teleology. Second, Spinoza thought it to be a universal truth that humans are always self-interested. Third, Spinoza discovered the argument stretching from 3p4d through 3p6d invalidly brings something teleological into his doctrinal structure, forcing Spinoza to accommodate with 3p7 and the rest of Part III and IV. In other words, what is at stake is the “establishment of a deeply rooted egoism that is no way teleological.” Unfortunately, Spinoza made a mistake that confuses teleology with conatus, which leads to the incoherence in *Ethics*. Therefore, argues Bennett, there is no teleology in Spinoza. In the next section, I will first give an account of teleological theories in general and then show that contrary to Bennett’s view there can be teleology in Spinoza. 

The Right and the Good

The structure of an ethical theory depends on how it defines and connects two basic notions: the right and the good. A teleological theory generally defines the good independently and prior to the

143 Ibid., 12.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid., 14.
146 Ibid., 15.
right, in that the right is defined as that which maximizes the good.\(^{147}\) A deontological theory, on the contrary, either does not define the good independently from the right, or does not define the right as maximizing the good. Thus, whether or not an ethical theory is teleological depends on how it treats the right and the good. Spinoza’s ethical theory, as we shall see, does define the good independently from the right and the right as maximizing the good. However, because of his metaphysics, Spinoza achieves it in such a peculiar way that his teleological ethics bears the appearance of a deontological theory.

In the Appendix of Part I, Spinoza makes it clear that the commonsense evaluative distinction between the good and the bad has no basis in reality, and he further explains this point in the preface to Part IV that these evaluative terms “indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are nothing but modes of thinking, or notions which we form from comparing things with one another. For one and the same thing can at the same time be good and bad, and also indifferent.”\(^{148}\) In the meantime, with the introduction of conatus in 3p7, Spinoza is able to claim in 3p9s that “we do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and desire it.”\(^{149}\) Consequently, in Part IV Spinoza defines good as “that which we certainly know to be useful to us” and bad as “that which we certainly know to be an obstacle to our attainment of some good.”\(^{150}\) By emphasizing knowledge rather than belief Spinoza indicates his rationalist approach that connects epistemology with ethics. In other words, Spinoza’s standard of the


\(^{149}\) Ibid., 67.

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 104.
good must be derived from the very nature of the thing to be evaluated.\textsuperscript{151} Furthermore, Spinoza distinguishes three kinds of knowledge in 2p40s2. First, there is opinion or imagination, which covers knowledge from casual experience and knowledge from symbol, both of which are inadequate ideas. Second, there is reason, which is based on adequate ideas of the properties of things as well as what Spinoza calls "common notions," which are very important in understanding his later transition from individual ethics to political theory. Third, there is the mysterious knowledge of intuition that "proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things."\textsuperscript{152} According to the definition in Part II, by an adequate idea Spinoza means "an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself without relation to its object, has all the properties, that is, intrinsic characteristics, of a true idea."\textsuperscript{153} Thus, opinion or imagination is not adequate knowledge because it is not concerned with the intrinsic characteristics of ideas. In contrast, reason is adequate knowledge because it depends on adequate ideas.

Accordingly, people might think that they know what is useful to them without realizing that the opposite is true, and to really know what is useful and good for us is to know the intrinsic characteristics of ourselves. In 3p7, Spinoza already defines conatus—the striving to increase one's power—as the essence of any thing. Therefore, in 4def8, the connection between knowledge, power, essence, and the good finally come together: "By virtue and power I mean the same thing; that is, virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is man's very essence, or nature, insofar as he has power to bring about that which can be understood solely through the laws of

\textsuperscript{151} Michael Della Rocca, \textit{Spinoza} (New York: Routledge, 2008), 179.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 29.
his own nature.”\textsuperscript{154} The good is thus defined according to conatus. In 4p18s, Spinoza argues that since “reason demands nothing contrary to nature, it therefore demands that every man should love himself, should seek his own advantage (I mean his real advantage), should aim at whatever really leads a man toward greater perfection, and to sum it all up, that each man, as far as in him lies, should endeavor to preserve his own being.”\textsuperscript{155} In other words, Spinoza also defines the right according to conatus. The right and the good coincide in Spinoza’s ethics.

At first glance, this coincidence suggests that Spinoza’s ethical theory is not teleological, because although the right is indeed defined as maximizing the good, the good is not defined independently of the right. This conclusion, however, is mistaken. Specifically, to say that a theory defines the good independently of the right is to mean two things. First, “the theory accounts for our considered judgments as to which things are good (our judgments of value) as a separate class of judgments intuitively distinguished by common sense, and then proposes the hypothesis that the right is maximizing the good as already specified.”\textsuperscript{156} Second, “the theory enables one to judge the goodness of things without referring to what is right.”\textsuperscript{157} Spinoza’s ethics only appears to fail to meet these standards. In fact, the good is not defined in terms of the right but in terms of conatus, and it is possible to make a judgment of what is good according to Spinoza’s ethics without simultaneously making a claim of what is right. The right and the good are indeed connected, but not to each other. Instead, they share a mutual basis in conatus.

To demonstrate this point, it may be argued that there is a parallel between the right and the good in Spinoza’s ethics, not unlike the essential parallelism expressed in 2p7. In the scholium, Spinoza

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 105.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
argues that “thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So, too, a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways.”

Furthermore, although God is the sole cause of the two attributes, Thought and Extension are independent from each other and share no interaction, because modes of thought must explicate the order of the whole of nature through the attribute of Thought alone, and modes of Extension through the attribute of Extension only. The right and the good share a similar parallel, because both are “caused” by and expressions of the same conatus yet they do not depend on each other. An action that increases the agent’s power is both good and right, because the good and the right express the same effect, i.e. the increase of one’s power, in two different ways, and the action can be labeled as good without making any reference to whether it is right. In fact, this ambiguity between the right and the good is reducible to the metaphysical foundation of Spinoza’s ethics. Because there is only one Substance “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself,” everything else, ideas and bodies as we know them, are merely finite modes or affections of the Substance. After offering a version of the principle of sufficient reason in 1p28, Spinoza argues in 1p29: “Nothing in nature is contingent, but all things are from the necessity of the divine nature determined to exist and to act in a definite way.”

In other words, every finite idea and body (Natura naturata) follows the necessity of God (Natura naturans) and is essentially the expression of the nature of the Substance.

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159 Ibid.


161 Ibid., 20.
metaphysical understanding of the universe paves the road for the introduction of conatus in Part III, because the striving to increase one’s power is the necessary expression of God’s essence. Accordingly, the right and the good, like Thought and Extension, are two independent expressions of the same conatus and in turn the same necessary nature of God. Moreover, the right is also defined as maximizing the good, because the right is defined in terms of conatus, which necessarily strives to increase what is truly good for us. Therefore, despite the confusion caused by the ambiguity of conatus and its metaphysical background, Spinoza’s ethics defines the good independently and prior to the right, which suggests that it can indeed be teleological.

Hobbes and Spinoza

In the previous section, I proved that Spinoza’s ethics, contrary to Bennett’s claim, can indeed be teleological. Yet Bennett’s argument on the confusion between teleology and conatus is well taken, because it gives Spinoza’s ethics so peculiar an appearance that mere technical and epistemological studies are likely to only deepen the confusion. As a matter of fact, the ambiguity of conatus also has implications in Spinoza’s political philosophy, most notably in its ambiguous relationship with Thomas Hobbes’ political philosophy, which also puts conatus in the central position. Usually, commentators distinguish Hobbes and Spinoza according to their different interpretations of rights. Based on the conclusion from the previous section, Hobbes and Spinoza can be further distinguished according to the absence and presence of teleology in their political philosophies. In this section, I will first outline the right-based approach, and then I will juxtapose it with their different treatment of teleology.

Like Spinoza, Hobbes also uses the term conatus to express the notion of a thing’s striving for what is advantageous to it. According to Hobbes, in a state of nature where everyone is driven by conatus, a perpetual “war of all against all” is the necessary
In order to leave the state of nature where the “notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place,” people need to be assured that others will not kill them and take over their possessions. This “fear of death,” “desire of such things as . . . commodious living,” and “a hope by their industry to obtain them” finally lead to an agreement to exchange their natural freedom for the security of their natural right to self-preservation. Nevertheless, even with a social compact thus established, individuals still have their distinct ways of life and desires for some good, and it is impossible to satisfy every particular desire to an equal extent. In the meantime, there is also a “general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.” Thus, “the law of nature of themselves, without the terror of some power to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions,” and the problem of stability naturally arises. To deal with this problem, a mere agreement among people is by no means enough. As Hobbes so vividly puts it, “covenants without the sword are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all.” The great Leviathan, with its absolute power in making laws and maintaining orders, is therefore the “common power to keep [citizens] all in awe” so as to solve the stability problem. Consequently, a double transition is made. On the one hand, there is the transition from the state of nature to the commonwealth. On the other hand, there is also the transition from the natural man to the civil man, whose fundamental right of self-preservation is secured in the state.

If one jumps to Spinoza’s conclusion in 4p37s2, it would seem that he proposes something very similar to Hobbes’ account. In

163 Ibid.
164 Ibid., 58.
165 Ibid., 106.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 76.
a state of nature there is “nothing that is universally agreed upon as
good or evil, since every man in a state of nature has regarded only
to his own advantage and decides what is good and what is bad
according to his own way of thinking.” Yet, a civil state “where
good and bad are decided by common agreement and everyone is
bound to obey the state” is nevertheless conceivable, if “it has the
power to prescribe common rules of behavior and to pass laws to
enforce them, not by reason, which is incapable of checking the
emotions, but by threats.” Like Hobbes, Spinoza also makes a
double transition following the premise in 3p7 that conatus is the
fundamental drive of people.

Nevertheless, while Hobbes regards conatus as a natural
right, Spinoza does not, which point distinguishes their political
philosophies. In his letter to Jarig Jelles, Spinoza famously gives an
account for this difference: “With regard to Politics, the difference
between Hobbes and me, about which you enquire, consists in this,
that I ever preserve the natural right intact so that the Supreme Power
in a State has no more right over a subject than is proportionate to the
power by which it is superior to the subject. This is what always takes
place in the State of Nature.” By this claim, Spinoza means that he
consistently equates right with power, which Hobbes does not. For
Hobbes, the state is absolutely superior to its citizens and what it does
is naturally in the right, and the rights of citizens are reduced not to
power but instead to the silence of the law.

168 Benedict de Spinoza, The Essential Spinoza: Ethics and Related
Writings, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael Morgan
123.
169 Ibid.
170 A. Wolf (ed.), Letter 50 in The Correspondence of Spinoza,
171 Henry Allison, Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction (Yale
172 Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. and intro. Edwin Curley
(Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 143.
Because conatus is so fundamental for Hobbes, the insecurity of it in the state of nature makes the joining of the social compact a last resort to make sure that it will not amount to a right for nothing. As our previous analysis shows, Spinoza regards conatus as power, and the transition into a civil state is not to avoid danger but to enhance power. Since Spinoza equates virtue with power, it follows that what is really good enhances our power. Furthermore, in order to know what is really good for us, we need to have adequate knowledge of the intrinsic characteristics of the thing itself. In 2p40s1, Spinoza introduces what he calls the “common notions” that are the “basis of our reasoning processes.”

Unlike transcendental or universal terms that are derived from confusion, common notions are property truly shaped by particular bodies and known not because they produce images but because their truth is already in the essence. One of the implications of common notions is that we will be in a better position to gain adequate knowledge by interacting more with things that have something in common with us, which lays the foundation for the arguments for a rational community in Part IV. Insofar as “a thing is in agreement with our nature, to that extent it is necessarily good,” and “nothing is more advantageous to man than man.” Therefore, joining with other human beings in a community is not a last resort to escape violent death for the sake of self-preservation. On the contrary, so doing is an advantageous and good strategy to enhance our power. Although the only function of the state for Hobbes is the passive security of the natural right, the

174 Beth Lord, Spinoza’s Ethics (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 79.
function of the state is much more active for Spinoza. Consequently, although both philosophers use force to maintain the existence of the state, their purposes nevertheless differ. For Hobbes, fear is the precondition for obedience because everyone has equally fundamental right for self-preservation, which leads to conflict. For Spinoza, the use of threat is not to deal with conflict that arises from inadequate knowledge of what is good for the individual.

This crucial difference between Hobbes and Spinoza can be further elaborated with the help of the conclusion from the previous section. It will be remembered that Spinoza’s ethics, contrary to Bennett’s contention, is teleological. His political philosophy, like his ethics, is also teleological, in the sense that it is “not primarily devoted to telling us what a government cannot do at all or what it cannot do with impunity, however, but to determining what it ought to do if it is to realize the end for which it was established.” This point further distinguishes Spinoza from Hobbes, because Hobbes explicitly attacks the teleological perspective by arguing that “there is no such Finis ultimus nor Summum Bonum as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers”; instead, people have different conceptions of ends, happiness, and ways of life. Although there is an end for Hobbes’ state, i.e., peace and security, there is none for its citizens in connection to the state. The state does not have the responsibility of nurturing its citizens. Instead, its value lies in its function.

Spinoza’s political philosophy, on the other hand, is quite akin to his ethics, thanks to their common source in his metaphysics. In a nutshell, the telos of the Spinozistic state, besides peace and security, is freedom. In Part I, Spinoza gives his definition of freedom: “That thing is said to be free which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself.

alone.” On the contrary, a thing is said to be necessary or constrained “if it is determined by another thing to exist and to act in a definite and determinate way.” Since conatus is the essence of the thing itself, and since what is truly good increases one’s power, it follows that a person is free insofar as he or she strives to increase his or her power with what he or she knows to be good. Contrarily, a person is not free insofar as he or she is determined by external objects to inadequately conceive what is useful to him or her. This point is illustrated by Spinoza through his treatment of emotions, by which he means “the affections of the body by which the body’s power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections.” We are “active” when “something takes place, in us or externally to us, of which we are the adequate cause,” and “passive” when “something takes place in us, or follows from our nature, of which we are only the partial cause.” Because of this further distinction, emotion can become bondage that rather constrains than expresses our nature. The right way to live, on the contrary, is based on adequate understanding of who we are and doing what is truly good for us, which is also what makes a person truly free.

However, “human power is very limited and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes, and so we do not have absolute power to adapt to our purpose thing external to us.” Since “nothing is more advantageous to man than man,” the state precisely serves the purposes of enhancing the power of its citizens and preventing external causes from making them slaves to emotions and

179 Ibid.
180 Ibid., 62.
181 Ibid.
182 Ibid., 142.
unfreedom. This is also why the right of the state is not greater than the right of the individual in Spinoza, because both collective and individual rights serve the same power of increasing one’s power. The right of the sovereign, like that of everything else in nature, is coextensive with its power, and it “does not have the right to do what it does not have the power to do.” Unlike Hobbes, Spinoza contends that the state should be more than an instrument; instead, it “has a central role to play in the creation of the conditions necessary for a meaningful human existence.” Therefore, Spinoza’s political philosophy is different from that of Hobbes because Spinozistic state includes a substantial telos, whereas the Hobbesian state only has a functional end.

Spinozistic Mistake or Spinozistic Curse?

In the previous sections, I first showed that there can be teleology in Spinoza’s ethics. Then, I demonstrated that Spinoza’s and Hobbes’ political philosophies differ precisely because of their different treatment of teleology. Before I conclude, it is worth pointing out that although Spinoza’s ethics and political philosophy are teleological, the modern reality is not. As a matter of fact, Hobbes’ revelation of pluralism precisely marked the beginning of what I the paradigm shift in political philosophy from the teleological and metaphysical point of view in the long Western tradition to the pluralistic and post-metaphysical point of view that is the essence of modernity. Although Spinoza’s teleological ethics may still have great relevance to modern individuals, his teleological political philosophy, despite its emphasis on freedom, will have a difficult time accommodating modernity.

183 Ibid., 112.
After the fall of the Greek ethical order, a great division has become explicit between the universal and political aspect, and the particular and individual aspect. It seems that the political state and the civil society are necessarily separated and connected only loosely. If one admits the factual existence of this division, then the reasonable conclusion is that the universal appropriately belongs to the state and the particular is better appreciated in civil society where private concerns, mediated through the market, become first priority. Nevertheless, one of the implications of the separation between the state and civil society is that the desire for a common way of life—the criterion for functioning and prosperous ancient communities—disappears, and pluralism—the hallmark of modernity—rises. The moderns thus face a serious dilemma between a nostalgic sense of virtue that still unsettles our conscience and an unprecedented degree of freedom that constantly renews our desires. More fundamentally, previous discussion already suggests that this dilemma springs from the irreconcilability of two distinct points of view. On the one hand, there is the teleological and metaphysical point of view of the universal way of life in the long Western tradition. On the other hand, there is the pluralistic and post-metaphysical point of view of the particular ways of life in modernity. From the perspective of the teleological and metaphysical point of view, the disappearance of the homogeneous background and the separation between the state and civil society have indeed increased the extent of freedom for individuals—choice of lifestyle, choice of vocation, and even the choice to take one’s own life under certain circumstances. Nevertheless, one might argue that this freedom is very much cheapened in the sense that it is no longer directed toward the telos of humanity—Aristotle’s eudaimonia, for instance. What is worse, even if we now recognize the urgency to have a common and noble way of life, modern pluralistic and post-metaphysical society, with its secularizing power, makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. The reason is simple. In order to advocate a common and noble way of life, this goal must itself be higher or outside civil

society. Otherwise it will simply become one of the options that people are free not to choose. In the Greek ethical order, the common and noble way of life could be maintained because of its homogeneous nature. In late antiquity and the medieval world, the common and divine way of life was also maintainable, because God, the author of morality, lies in the beyond. Yet even in the Christian tradition, when God became part of the secular order, that is, through incarnation, he was disobeyed and crucified. The situation worsens in a fully secularized modernity when everything has to do with the here-and-now. Without a proposal of a common, noble, or even divine goal that is not reducible to the civil order, the corresponding way of life cannot be maintained.

Anyone with a pluralistic and post-metaphysical point of view is bound to challenge this picture by arguing that it is people’s inalienable right to choose their ways of life and that modern liberal society precisely offers this advantage for people to actually choose to be noble rather than being imposed to do so. In contrast to the “otherworldly” focused view, it is useful to quote Immanuel Kant’s famous “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” Kant begins by saying: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity,” which immediately distinguishes the pluralistic and post-metaphysical view from its traditional counterpart.\(^{187}\) The attempt to make the good, the noble, or even the divine utterly otherworldly so as to seek guidance from without is treated by the enlightened Kant as mere “immaturity,” or “the inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another.”\(^{188}\) In the mean time, the only requirement for enlightenment and liberation from this self-imposed immaturity, according to Kant, is freedom.\(^{189}\) From this aspect, Plato’s theory of the Forms and Augustine’s division between the two cities are precisely shackles that prevent people from obtaining true freedom, because they, in the

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188 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
name of nobility and divinity, ironically restrain people’s freedom to be free. True freedom has to do with the here-and-now and the maturity to independently examine such concepts as nobility, divinity, and even freedom itself.

This realization immediately leads to an unfortunate and indeed tragic disillusionment: traditional approaches to reconcile the tension between the universal and the particular in modern society have largely failed. Locke’s state of property, Rousseau’s transformative general will, Hegel’s constitutional monarchy, and Kant’s “Kingdom of Ends” all shared the same doom. No matter how sophisticated their solutions might be, they necessarily bear the danger of becoming either too weak to be effective or too strong to offset their tyrannical implications, because any one substantive solution is simply not sufficient to account for the pluralistic fact of modernity.

Hobbes was the first thinker to truly realize how serious the irreconcilability between tradition and modernity could be. Hobbes asks a simple question in the Leviathan: how can a group of people who each wants different things be legitimately brought together under one political principle? With Hobbes began the paradigm shift in political philosophy from the teleological and metaphysical point of view to the pluralistic and post-metaphysical point of view. It will be remembered that Hobbes gets rid of the Greek teleological conceptions and argues that “there is no such *Finis ultimus* nor *Summum Bonum* as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers”; instead, people have different conceptions of ends, happiness, and ways of life.¹⁹⁰ However, Hobbes’ realization was untimely in the sense that the 17th Century England was unable to supply the appropriate social condition and mechanism to accommodate what we now know as pluralism. Consequently, Hobbes resorts to the power of an absolute sovereign that essentially forces members of the community into obedience, which ironically

falls short in terms of applying his original insight of modern pluralism. Thus, Hobbes represents a critical, albeit contradictory, watershed in the history of Western political philosophy, because the lack of validity in his solution betrays his paradigm-shifting observation of modernity.

Modern political theorists realize both the pluralistic nature of modernity and Hobbes’ controversial failure to overcome it. For instance, the conclusion John Rawls draws is that what political theorists and philosophers are able to propose is at best “a framework within which permissible conceptions can be advanced” and mutually acceptable way of resolving disagreements can be publically established.\footnote{John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,” \textit{Collected Papers} (Harvard University Press, 1999), 413.} This insight is inspired by the evolution of the social and historical conditions of modern democratic regimes. According to Rawls, these regimes have origins in “the Wars of Religion following the Reformation and the subsequent development of the principle of toleration, and in the growth of constitutional government and of large industrial market economies.”\footnote{John Rawls, “The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus,” \textit{Collected Papers} (Harvard University Press, 1999), 424.} This tradition requires that a workable conception of justice “must allow for a diversity of general and comprehensive doctrines, and for the plurality of conflicting, and indeed incommensurable, conceptions of the meaning, value, and purpose of human life [i.e. conceptions of the good] affirmed by the citizens of democratic societies.”\footnote{Ibid.} The only reasonable thing to do, therefore, is to “apply the principle of toleration to philosophy itself: the public conception of justice is to be political, not metaphysical.”\footnote{John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,” \textit{Collected Papers} (Harvard University Press, 1999), 388.} In other words, modernity and pluralism demand political theories to subordinate the rational to the reasonable and apply what Rawls call the “method of avoidance” to
avoid disputed philosophical and religious questions.\textsuperscript{195} The reason why political theory must deliberately stay “on the surface” is not because “these questions are unimportant or regarded with indifference, but because we think them too important and recognize that there is no way to resolve them politically.” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{196} Therefore, the most Rawls is able to accomplish is what he calls the “overlapping consensus” that is essentially an agreement limited to the domain of the political. On the contrary, the state endorsement of “comprehensive doctrines,” that is, any conceptions of what are of value in human life, ideals of personal virtue and character, and the like, that inform life as a whole is necessarily tyrannical for those who do not share them.\textsuperscript{197} Thus, what modernity requires is no longer a rational community but a reasonable one instead.

With the denial first of teleology and then metaphysics, modernity requires the opposite of what Spinoza’s teleological ethics and political philosophy can offer. Even with Spinoza’s modern conclusion that democracy is the most natural form of government, the way he arrives at this conclusion nevertheless depends on his commitment to teleology and metaphysics, both of which are doubted in the modern context. Therefore, although Spinoza’s political philosophy differs, and is indeed superior to Hobbes’ political philosophy in many respects, the latter nevertheless has the last laugh. But in the end it does not necessarily mean that Spinoza is wrong. Indeed, with the increasing discontents in modern democracies, it remains an open question whether the incompatibility between Spinoza’s philosophy and modern reality reveals a Spinozistic mistake or a Spinozistic curse.

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 395.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 394.
Conclusion

Through a study mainly focused on Spinoza’s teleology, this essay shows that contrary to Bennett’s argument there is indeed teleology in Spinoza’s ethics. The coincidence of the right and the good makes his teleology less recognizable than its usual counterparts. Furthermore, Spinoza’s teleology is not limited to his ethics. In fact, Spinoza’s “unusual” teleology directly contributes to his political philosophy, which fundamentally distinguishes it from Hobbes’ political philosophy. Finally, although Spinoza wrote under the influence of Hobbes and adopted a rather modern approach of rationalism, his ethics and political philosophy are nonetheless traditional in nature. While Hobbes already stepped into the pluralistic and post-metaphysical point of view that has been defining modernity so far, Spinoza still belonged to the teleological and metaphysical point of view in the long Western philosophical tradition. Consequently, Spinoza’s political philosophy, despite its intrinsic value and insight, is not applicable in modernity.

Bibliography


---“The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus.”


Sonja Moss—Sartre and Psychology

Existentialism, a philosophical theory that offers individuals the freedom to define themselves, has been grossly misunderstood. It is often associated with meaninglessness and hopelessness. American movies, websites, and media continually mock it. For instance, Henri the “hopeless” Existential Cat has received nearly 2 millions views on You Tube. Though it serves as great entertainment, some people may mistake these portrayals of Existentialism to be true, when often the details are skewed. Those who mock the theory often depict a hopeless, meaningless, and essentially depressed, life. This erroneous, pessimistic view could have serious consequences considering that a large portion of the population deals with some sort of psychological suffering, such as depression. While Henri is supposed to mock existentialism, his depressed and hopeless state is not far from reality. Many people who suffer depression arrived at the state from a sense of having a life void of hope and meaning. Some may argue that any attention on an issue is good because people are discussing it, but those who take the issue seriously face challenges because ignorant people attempt to discuss the subject from misconceptions of what they think the subject is about. However, those conversations create opportunities to inject insight and clean up the issue’s reputation. Fortunately, the field of Psychology has begun to realize the positive aspects of Existentialism. This paper will argue that French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre’s [existential] teachings on individual freedom and the meaning of life offer positive benefits to therapeutic strategies for Psychology professionals.

Relationships are an integral part of the human experience and are directly related to one’s sense of meaning in life. While healthy relationships can add meaning and joy, unhealthy, dysfunctional ones (including those that are desired but unobtainable) can create strong internal discord to the degree of emotional suffering and even depression, which are often connected to the question of the meaning of life. The Journal of Psychoactive Drugs features an article by Dr. Gila Chen who notes that holocaust
survivor and psychologist Dr. Victor Frankl suggests: “meaning in life can be found through creating something...(e.g. a meaningful relationship)”\(^{198}\), without it, or if it goes awry, one can feel a sense of disconnection that leads to suffering and depression. However, existentialism can help individuals reconnect to their personal power by emphasizing that relationships are not one-sided, but there is a responsibility that each holds to the person with whom they are relating. When suffering relationship difficulties, individuals can be empowered by knowing that neither the situation nor the other person, makes them who they are, rather, each individual has the ability, indeed responsibility, to freely choose a personal essence of being in the situation, that is, how or whom he or she wants to be—these are defining moments.

Charlotte Macgregor, existential psychotherapist and author of the article *Sartre, Minkowski, and Depression*, says that “The very process of being in contact with another person highlights awareness of some of the dilemmas of existing fluidly in relation that are central to the construction of depression”.\(^{199}\) She further quotes Sartre on the issue: “‘Each other finds his being in the other.’”\(^{200}\) In relating to others, each person is given the opportunity to define the self, which will create the desired existence.

There are two types of existentialism: Christian, which holds that essence precedes existence, meaning God has given everyone the same [human] nature, and Atheist, sometimes referred to as Humanist (which Sartre represents). This type holds that existence precedes essence, meaning humans have no predetermined

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200 Ibid.
nature, because there is no God to assign it. The former (Christian) positions a person in a stagnant or fixed way of being with little room for creative experimentation concerning solutions, as there is a pre-assigned way of being. The latter affords humans the freedom of expression, which allows one to seek non-traditional and even unconventional methods. Whether a person identifies with Christianity, Atheism, or neither, at some point everyone identifies with varying degrees of depression or suffering that have to do with relationships. It is an inescapable aspect of being human. Existential philosophies can be pivotal in addressing this quandary in a way that will offer therapeutic solutions to empower individuals and restore hope and meaning to life. Chen explains, “Existentialists believed that meaning in life may be discovered by revealing the positive in that which is negative, and by finding meaning in suffering by exposing one’s inner powers. According to this view, the responsibility of all human beings is to make our lives meaningful.”

Despite common negative misunderstandings associated with the nature of Existentialism, it should be noted that, overall, the doctrine pays special attention to the personal responsibility of one human to another.

There is a degree of suffering that comes from knowing that every decision made affects another individual, referred to by Sartre as anguish. Sometimes this is what cripples someone from taking action, essentially an unwillingness to take responsibility. Consider the myriad behaviors presented in desperate attempt to avoid responsibility. For instance, a woman likes a man well enough to entertain his advancements but is unsure of her level of interest. Each time he texts or calls she responds with politeness, though she avoids exhibiting any clear behavior concerning her desire for him. When he asks her out she agrees that it would be nice but constantly insists that her schedule is unpredictable. The woman’s behavior exemplifies what Sartre calls bad faith. According to Sartre, one

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should always ask, as a moral principle: “What would happen if everyone did as I am doing?”202 (someone behaves towards the woman above as she is behaving towards the man and so on). Perhaps because of uncertainty, overwhelming plethora of choices, of even fear of consequences, some may find the question disturbing and will therefore dismiss the thought by saying that everyone does not do as he does. Because there is no god in Atheist Existentialism, individuals are free to determine their own moral values. Based on what the decision is thought to mean, each person may choose differently, nevertheless, the principle is still the same—shirking responsibility to choose is bad faith. Individuals who avoid the responsibility of choice may find anxiety to be the result, which can lead to feelings of powerlessness and stagnation.

According to Macgregor and Sartre:

“Exploring what it is like to live with uncertainty and anxiety, and acknowledging these experiences as fundamental givens of existence, helps clients to face more openly how they might be holding onto more static ideas [that] might be part of maintaining stagnation. To enable clients to face how they construct meaning and explore their own sedimentations, it is necessary to openly and critically question those sedimentations that are culturally constructed, such as notions of fixed self…and the sedimentation of distress into psychopathology. For Sartre, the crux of helping somebody experiencing depression would be to focus on discovering a ‘subjective choice by which

each living person makes himself a person’…a therapeutic approach [is] focused on exploring the responsibility we each have to choose what we make of ourselves…the associated implications and limitations of freedom and choice…the temporal thread of our existence and how we connect to and make meaning…

Existentialism encourages individuals to be willing to bear the load of responsibility for their choices and consider that all of humanity is affected.

Bearing this load is part of the consequences that one must accept in the non-existence of God; this is what existentialists mean by abandonment. Seeing that the type of Existentialism being discussed teaches existence prior to essence, there is no script on being human and no pre-set human nature given to everyone as a way of being; man is free to define himself as he chooses. When someone is caught in a situational dilemma and assumes there is a preordained future that must be obtained, in the event that the certain goal appears unattainable, the individual feels stuck and will likely encounter suffering and depression. Perhaps it is better explained through the biography of Gustave Flaubert from Sartre’s novel Nausea: “the young Gustave thought of himself as living out a preordained destiny. As a result he found it almost impossible to live with a future dimension and instead existed in repetitive cycles, thinking himself incapable of any change.” Macgregor supposes that if we imagine for a moment that Flaubert experienced what we understand as depression, we can consider how Sartre might have helped him.

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204 Ibid.
In the example above, Gustave looks for a sign that would make it clear to him what is the right thing to do. He thinks of himself as void of any freedom to choose a new way of being or an alternative to how he thinks he should be according to his perception of a preordained destiny, thus remains in a repetitive cycle that renders him powerless. Ironically, the existence of God is irrelevant because the choice to follow through (or not) with what one thinks is a divine sign is man’s freedom to which Existentialism refers. Here lies the dilemma. Sartre says man is “condemned to freedom” because there is no God that exists to provide the young man a sign as to how he should be in the situation. Even if God did exist, man always assigns his own meaning; hence, man is abandoned to stand on his own, make his own choices, and determine what they mean. In other words, even if Gustave should come about a solution, he would make of it, according to Sartre, whatever meaning he chooses, that is, he would essentially attribute the finding of a solution to God. Macgregor explains that a central task of an existential type of psychotherapy would focus on facing personal responsibility to choose to engage or not with the actions and potential of his life, and how this action (or lack thereof) affects other people. Obviously there are situations that are beyond human control. It is in those times that the reality of abandonment could create feelings of despair causing one to become unwilling to rise to action.

In modern culture it seems a common response to enter into despair when focusing on things that do not depend on the will, which can often lead to mental and emotional suffering. Sartre says despair is to “limit ourselves to reckoning only with those things that depend on our will”. In these situations, Existentialism encourages man to action instead of quietism in order to gain (or regain) a sense of power and control. One must be willing to search for meaning in suffering in order to endure the suffering. Chen acknowledges Dr. Frankl’s claim that “suffering has meaning if it generates change in the

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205 Sartre, Existentialism is Human, 29.
207 Sartre, Existentialism is Humanism, 34.
sufferer, as opposed to despair, which is meaningless suffering. He believed that the will to meaning is the primary motivation for living [...]".₂₀⁸ In this sense despair is meaningless suffering because the power to rise out of the depressing state lies in the individuals choice to do so. Chen exclaims, “according to existentialists we become individuals through our unavoidable choices and actions [...]” ²₀⁹ If man first exists and through experiencing life he defines himself, then defining one’s self happens through experiences, which are as meaningful as the individual chooses to make them. Further, the choosing can be done in a pessimistic or optimistic manner. The beauty of using existential psychotherapy in cases of mental and emotional suffering is that the power lies within the individual’s action (or powerlessness in quietism). This may frighten those who would prefer to blame their despair on circumstance than to take responsibility for their own condition. Seeing that Existentialism posits that man is defined by choice, cowardice for example, is cowardice not because a man is a coward but because the man chooses cowardly action. ²¹⁰ Thus if someone chooses an action that perpetuates mental or emotional distress, the person is then mentally or emotionally distressed, hence, demonstrating despair. This is a crucial factor in psychotherapy that encourages self-change because to advance beyond despair is for man to be willing to seek meaning in the suffering, and then freely choose another action.

Examining Flaubert’s predicament in light of Sartre’s Existential Psychology, Macgregor says that helping Flaubert might have begun with having him “consider how he cast himself as a fixed, determined object, explicitly pointing out the choices that he made to stay in his fixedness…and [he] might have been encouraged to begin to consider what he valued and what his intentions were for creating

₂₀⁹ Ibid.
₂¹⁰ Sartre, Existentialism is Humanism, 38.
something of himself as he reached into the future. This approach suggests that there is no outside factor (even God) to blame for a hopeless and meaningless life; rather, Flaubert’s (and all humans’) power to obtain hope and meaning is dependent action.

In conclusion, the human experience inevitably insists upon encountering bouts of suffering, depression and questioning the meaning of life, which can leave an individual feeling powerless. Sometimes these experiences involve relationships with other people and/or situations that are beyond one’s control. It is fortunate that the field of Psychology is recognizing that Existentialism is an optimistic message of man’s freedom in it’s proclamation that man is defined by his own action(s), determines his destiny, places value where he chooses and can view life subjectively. Therefore, this type of therapy can help reconnect individuals to their power in order to create a meaningful life filled with the deliciousness of hopeful expectations. The case for Existential Psychotherapy has been plead, now you are free to choose what the discussion means.

Bibliography


Philosophers in feminist theory might ask two types of questions concerning gender categories. First, they have tried to identify whether there really are such things as women or men and if there are, what type of things correspond to these terms. Another type of question concerns the role these categories play in the individuals classified as such. For instance, whether being a member of one of these categories can benefit or harm an individual.

Sally Haslanger connects both of these questions insofar as she proposes that social categories, such as gender and race, should be understood in terms of the injustices inflicted upon people subject to these categories. Among other important debates are questions regarding gender and its relation with different views about essentialism. Arguments about whether gender is an essential property; or whether if there is an essential property that all women have in common; or whether gender is essential for individuals in a society. Then one can concluded that Haslanger is a gender realist and her analysis illustrates gender as kind essentialism, which states that there is a set of fundamental properties crucial for membership in a kind. For instance, Haslanger’s definition of women proposes that oppression is the fundamental property all women have in common. Additionally, Haslanger argues that one of the main purposes of gender should be that of tracking injustices.

Although Haslanger’s definition of women works for her theoretical and political purposes her analysis does not give an account of gender’s role in the self-understanding of social individuals. Haslanger’s new definition, I will argue, should incorporate that gender is an essential property for a social individual. Doing so would open the door to the possibility of a social individual constructing her own social identity, instead of being ascribed one. To show why this is the case, I will draw on Charlotte Witt’s use of individual essentialism to explain the metaphysics of gender; individual essentialism is the view that there is/are fundamental propert(ies). Thus Witt’s view provides the foundation for showing
that gender is a fundamental property and a route by which individuals can engage in self-understanding. My argument will thus show that Haslanger’s view is incomplete and that self-identification should be incorporated as an important role of gender.

In what follows, I will explain Haslanger’s new definition of gender and illustrate some concerns derived from her definition. Second, I will explain Charlotte Witt’s uniessentialism model to show that it provides reasons for thinking that a central role of gender is that of self-understanding rather than exclusively tracking injustices.

1. Haslanger’s Gender Analysis

In Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be? Haslanger notes the tendency to confuse sex-male/female- with gender-man/women. According to Haslanger, ‘sex’ refers to the anatomical characteristics of an individual and gender tracks the different social roles expected by individuals with male bodies and female bodies. Haslanger states that because of attempts to differentiate men and women anatomically or socially the concept of gender has had different definitions, thereby making gender’s definition vague.

Given this fact, Haslanger’s main goal was to re-construct the concept of gender by using an analytical approach to figure out the nature of these social identities. Haslanger chose an analytical approach from conceptual and descriptive methodological strategies. She argues that an analytical approach would give us

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212 For the purpose of this paper I will just focus in the analysis made of gender.
213 For example, having an uterus classify someone as female or having a penis classify someone as male.
214 Conceptual inquiry about gender would emphasize in our ordinary usage of the concept. A descriptive method focuses on their
the opportunity to consider what work gender could do for us in a critical social theory. It then follows that it is up to us to decide what in the world gender is (156). Additionally, her task was to create conceptual categories that could help to fight injustices (157).

In what it follows Haslanger offered an analysis that defines gender as a social class because the main problem relies on the social relations that places man as dominant and women as subordinate. According to Haslanger, we should understand oppression as the structural phenomena that involve a relation where certain groups are disadvantage and others are privileged. This ideas is based on the claim that “women are oppressed, and that they are oppressed as women” (159). As explained by Marilyn Frye, an individual that suffers from oppression its because she has being identified as member of a specific category and her properties then gain social meaning, namely that of be disposed to be oppressed. For example, a female that is recognized as women happens only in a society where women is socially meaningful and this indicates that a female, which in this society becomes women, obtains the possibility of suffering oppression as such. Thus Haslanger claimed that gender if anything should indicate social.

Someone might object that, if Haslanger is correct, then how are we to explain societies that do not oppress women in the way described above? Haslanger emphasizes that societies are different, not in all societies women suffer from oppression. But this response produces a potential problem for her view. Namely, it entails that some women would not function socially as women. Haslanger’s definition illustrates that to be a women depends on bodily features, social position, and being part of systematic subordination. Given that Haslanger’s definition does not imply any intrinsic property of what is to be a women, it follows that whether an individual is a woman is entirely determined by the individual’s function in a society- women would not function socially as women. Secondly, extension, for example, that (pointing with the finger) is a women.
Haslanger’s view entails that an individual would be considered a woman entirely in her specific context\textsuperscript{215}, namely, her society or environment is a crucial indicator of she can correspond to the category women.

1.1 Problems

Let’s turn to considering why this view presents problems for understanding the role that gender plays in individual’s self-understanding. One problem relies in the notion that all individuals in the category women have a common and unique property - oppression. Then the question is what happen to individuals that self-identify as women and have not been inflicted injustices or being oppressed? If Haslanger is right then self-identification is not possible because she is not supposed to construct an identity; rather Haslanger’s definition determines how she should understand herself.

For example, I cannot self-identify my self as being a women until something like the following happens to me. Let’s say that a job position is denied to me because of my gender, and I have never experienced oppression or injustices prior to this moment. If Haslanger is right, only in that moment do I become a woman. However, the doubts arise from the insight that it seems like I was a women, or I thought I was one, before this happened to me. For instance, I said in my interview that I was female or I might refer my self as a few of the woman in the field. My mistake was the self-

\textsuperscript{215} S function as a women in context C iff df: (i) S is observed or imagined in C to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female’s biological role in reproduction; (ii) that S has these features marks S within the background ideology of C as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social positions that are in fact subordinate; and (iii) the fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays role in S’s systematic subordination in C, i.e., along some dimensions, S’s position in C is oppressive, and S’s satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination (Haslanger, 162).
understanding I have of myself. A second problem is the implication that to be women depends in the circumstance of the subject in consideration. The problem is that why is it that to being identify as a women an individual must experience any type of limitation to its abilities. Adopting gender as kind entails that in fact there is common property, however, as it has been shown not all women that understand itself as being a women would share a common property. Some social individuals that self-identify as women would be left out of the definition and would not be consider part of this social identity. A third problem is to show that even Haslanger acknowledged that her definition does not help individuals to frame their personal and political identities. It is my aim to illustrate why Haslanger’s project fails in providing individuals with self-understanding.

In lights of this problem, in the following section I will introduce Charlotte Witt’s argument of gender-uniessentialism model, in order to demonstrate that gender is a property which main function is to provide self-understanding.

2. Solution to the problem: Witt’s Uniessentialism Model.

Witt in *Metaphysics of Gender* she explains individual essentialism applied to gender. Witt argued that gender essentialism “seems to express the centrality of gender in our lived experience”(Witt, 10). According to Witt, essentialism in this context means the set of property/properties that are necessary either to gain membership in a specific kind or that makes the individual the individual it is. Witt prepossess individual essentialism (gender) and distinguishes from two types of individual essentialism: Aristotle’s unification essentialism and Kripke’s identity essentialism. Witt proposes individual essentialism and uses Aristotle’s unification essentialism in order to illustrate that gender is an essential property.

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216 Kripke begins with an existing individual, and asks about which of the individual’s properties are necessary to be that very individual (Witt, 6).
for the individual being the individual that it is. Witt’s explanation of Aristotle’s model shows why the main role of gender is that of self-understanding, which helps the individual to place itself in other social roles besides that of being oppressed.

Witt refers to Aristotle model as the uniessentialism model. According to Witt, Aristotle had a particular way of answering, “what is it?” questions. For Aristotle, the question entails an individual substance that becomes to existence as such depending in unity and organization of material parts. Thus, the existence of an object, according to Aristotle, can be explained by looking at the unity and organization of the material parts that constitute the creation of this new object. These organization and unity is indicated by the functional property of the object. A functional property, using Aristotle’s view, is what indicates why is it that some materials come to unified an individual existence. For example, a house becomes a house after some materials unify and organized in order to develop the functional property –shelter- of being a house (Witt, 6). It is important to illustrate that Aristotle’s uniessentialism model does not imply that the essence of an individual is its function; rather the essence of an object it’s functional property. The difference relies in that an individual and object differ in nature (14). What Aristotle illustrated is that we know that the functional property of a house is to bring shelter to humans and that is why in some circumstances some distinct set of components constitutes a house and not something else. Conversely, there is no functional property that unifies me “Nadia” as an individual. However, there is a functional property about women that can unify my social relations to form the existing “Nadia” as a woman that I am.

Let’s now consider how Witt’s model affects the question of gender. Witt aims to show that gender is uniessential to social beings. The first thing to point out is that Witt is arguing that for social individuals gender is essential for their self understanding. By doing this, Witt discusses the difference between a person and a social individual, which explains why a social individual has social functions and relations. The difference between social individuals
and persons is, Witt argues, that a social individual occupies a social position, for example, parent, professor or immigrant are social positions that individuals might have just by being part of a society. It follows that women exist in a social world, because woman is something that exists as a social kind. At the same time, persons are individuals that have first-person perspective but do not occupy any position in social world. For example, during his time on the island Robinson Crusoe is still a person despite failing to occupy a social position.

Then what is it to have a social role? A social role is what an individual who occupies a social position is expected to do. For Witt, being a woman or man is determined by “a engendering function that individual is recognized by others to have” (59). The engendering function is the functional property of gender, which is a normative function that indicates what the individual ought to do according to its gender (17). It is important to illustrate that, according to Witt, a functional property should not be perform exactly as indicates, meaning that in some cases women differ in their supposes behavior. For example, if the functional property of being a women is to be oppressed, among others, a women if conscious of that and does not see herself in that position, in Witt’s terms, she still can consider herself to be woman. This can be realized because a functional property is a relational property, which means that the function is in relation to other individuals. A social individual then can be expected to perform various functions by which oppression is not the only possible function. Witt then argued that gender is the main functionally property of a social individual. Once an individual realized that its gender is essential to understand its position in its social world environment the individual will gain an understanding of its circumstances, which can be different from other “women”. Witt’s model will not eliminate any of the injustices inflect to women, however, it helps women to understand why is it that they have been treated as such. Is not a conformist view because instead of experiencing unexpected sexist behavior, social individuals would be prevent facing the social world with a stronger character of what are they.
3. Conclusion

After explaining Witt’s uniessentialism model about gender, I can illustrate the main difference and advantages this model has in comparison with Haslanger’s analytical approach. I conclude that:

1.- Witt’s uniessential model illustrates that gender is essential for a social individual to understand its place in its social environment. Pace Haslanger, the purpose of gender is thus not to exclusively to track injustices inflicted upon the individual; rather it will help to create a picture explaining its experience in a social world.

1.1.- Social individuals first, would understand themselves as having a gender and from that they can recognize certain functional roles they are expected to perform. What is of mere importance is to illustrate Witt’s claim that “the engendering function and the social roles are themselves available for normative evaluation and critique”(18). This entails that there is not just one normative function for all women.

2.- Witt proposed to take gender as essential for each social individual with the goal that individuals can engage in self-understanding about their social roles. Recall that, on Haslanger’s view there are social individuals and that their status is indicated by, most notably, their function as oppressed individuals. The difference being that Witt’s view does not limit the social individual to experience and define herself.

3.- The category of women is not a social group, rather is an essential property of a social individual that will help her to develop her agency in its social world. In this case women is something that becomes to existing after the individual had understand herself. In other words, being a woman is
fundamentally relevant for me, “Nadia”, being the person that I am now.

4.- Some might argue that Haslanger’s definition and Witt’s model are not as different as I have argued. However, I have shown that Haslanger’s view about gender describes an idea about identity, namely that its primary role is to construct social groups. Haslanger’s gender realism presupposes women as a group (or category) where membership in this group is fixed by some condition, experience or feature that women supposedly share and that defines their gender (Mikkola CITE).

5.- Haslanger’s definition presupposes that other social individuals would define your identity, which will raises concerns about whether this process can count as individual’s social identity. Identity is a relationship between an object and itself, not about a relationship between an object and its surroundings. On the other hand, Witt’s uniesseentialism model demonstrates that an individual would become into being because of the unification and organization of its functional properties, which have been discovered by her. Then this social individual can associate, as she prefers.

In conclusion, I have demonstrated that in either of the cases gender exists as a social kind. In Haslanger’s definition women is a social category that some social individual can be taken as being part of. However, the purpose of identifying oneself as part of a category is to prevent or to point out inequalities toward the different gender categories. I showed that Witt’s model illustrates a primary function of gender, which is to allow us to identify ourselves as social individuals of a certain type and because of that you are the person in society you are now. The trouble with Haslanger’s view is that thinking of women as a social kind that is by definition oppressed could not liberate women, in principle, from that prejudice.
Work Cited


 Ashley M. Ryan—Anti-heroes as Free Spirits: Nymphets & Paradoxical Madness

Nietzsche describes free spirits as people who have embraced freedom of the will and experienced great liberation from the pillars of society such as religion, morality, government, etc. In Human, All Too Human, A Book for Free Spirits Nietzsche wrote, “‘free spirits’ of this kind do not exit…could one day exist… I see them coming already slowly” (Nietzsche, 6). The authors of the postmodern literary movement wrote novels that reflect this rejection of traditional dogmatism in the structure of the anti-novel and through anti-heroes. I argue that these anti-hero characters acted as group of free spirits. I propose that the anti-heroes, Humbert Humbert from Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita and John Yossarian from Joseph Heller’s Catch-22 can be compared to Nietzsche’s description of a free spirit in that they reject their culture’s maxims. Nevertheless, where these postmodern authors merely tell stories about experimental characters, whereas the free spirits attempt to live experimentally by shunning dogmatism and embracing the independence of the mind and spirit.

Section I will focus on the definition of a Nietzschean free spirit, respectably section II will focus definition the postmodern era and characteristics of an anti-hero. In section III, I will explain the similarities and differences between free spirits and anti-heroes. Lastly, in section IV, I will provide examples of anti-heroes who act as free spirits in their respective stories.

Section I

One theme that Nietzsche emphasizes during his middle and late writings is “the free spirit.” In a brief overview, the free spirit aspires to be free him/herself from the dogmas of society and live independently outside them. Nietzsche describes the nature of the free spirit in several works including, Human, All Too Human, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and Beyond Good and Evil.
Human, All Too Human A Book of Free Spirits one of Nietzsche’s middle works in which he writes in aphorisms (some longer and some shorter) about the nature of the free spirit and the current condition of the culture’s “truths”. In aphorism 225: “Free spirit a relative concept” the definition of a free spirit is, “He is called a free spirit who thinks differently from what, on the basis of his origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of the dominant views of the age, would have expected of him” (“Human”,108). The free spirit is the exception to the culture; one who will be able to become unstuck in the culture and realize “there are no eternal facts, just as there are no absolute truths” (“Human” 13). Once a free spirit has the knowledge of the world’s subjectivity it will embrace it’s “will to freedom” and be able observe the maxim or “truths” of society and how they have been tainted.217 Once the free spirit has done this he will mature into self-mastery and create his own values outside of the culture.

Nietzsche writes heavily on religion and morality (which I will discuss in his later works), but in Human All Too Human he writes about the nature of war in two aphorisms 477: “War indispensable” and 481: “Grand politics and what they cost”. Nietzsche writes that presently “we know of no other means by which that rude energy” can be turned into something better for society that does not require “impersonal hatred” and “proud indifference to great losses” (“Human” 176). However, he also acknowledges, “culture in no way can do without passion, vices and acts of wickedness” but this need for war comes from an spiritually impoverished community (“Human” 176). But that is not an excuse for “the extraordinary number” of men taken “from their proper professions and occupations” to become soldiers and sacrificed for the “national thirst for honor” (“Human”178). Nietzsche acknowledges that he does not have a solution for this problem, but maybe an overman will be able to.

217 According to Nietzsche Christianity has become the main corrupter of art, music, and poetry. Therefore, the free spirit must relieve itself from the binds of religion.
A later work of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, A Book for All and None* is a poetic work written as a fictional narrative (or myth) promoting self-overcoming by describing Zarathustra’s metamorphosis from a camel to a lion. A lion is described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the second metamorphosis of the spirit, or a free spirit. In this work Nietzsche emphasizes the goal of the lion (his freedom of the will) and how he attains it. Zarathustra is antagonistic to the Judeo-Christian worldview, in the opening chapter the prophet Zarathustra proclaims, “God is dead!” (“Zarathustra” 124). One of Nietzsche’s most memorable lines describes a characteristic of the lion, that institutional religion (namely Christianity) is no longer a viable source for standards in ethics, metaphysics, politics, and so forth. From this characteristic is where the parable begins. A camel (fettered spirit) becomes a lion “in the loneliest desert” when he conquers his freedom and becomes “master in his own desert” (“Zarathustra” 138). The lion must fight his last master (or lord) a dragon named “Thou shalt” who “sparkling like gold, and animal covered with scales” and “values, thousands of years old, shine on these scales” (“Zarathustra” 139). Thou shalt claims “I am all created value,” the lion battles the dragon for his freedom of the will and his anomalous values. But the lion is limited in his abilities, he cannot create new values, but he can create “freedom for oneself” (“Zarathustra” 139). The lion is able to live without a guiding hand or transcendent god dictating what his values are.

In Nietzsche’s late work, *Beyond Good and Evil*, he describes the motivations and characteristics free spirit in chapter two cleverly entitled, *The Free Spirit*. Ordinary people will not understand the free spirits their “insights must—and should—sound like follies and sometimes like crimes when they are heard without permission by those who are not predisposed and predestined for them” (“Beyond Good” 232). The three characteristics I will be focusing on in this work are the will to freedom, being critically reflective, and overcoming morality.

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218 Thou Shalt is a direct reference to the Ten Commandments.
A defining characteristic of a free spirit is that he/she has the “will to freedom” and is destined for independence. This freedom is non-traditional and is “a privilege of the strong” (“Beyond” 231). For one who embraces and is destined for independence is “also daring to the point of recklessness” (“Beyond” 231). If a free spirit is to live dangerously and experimentally it means he/she is willing to reject the “truths” of society. Nietzsche writes the free spirit will critically reflect and examine these “truths” and notice how “everything around us [seems] clear and free and easy and simple” (“Beyond” 225). The free spirit is devoted to knowledge and will realize these “truths” are rooted in a “solid, granite foundation of ignorance” (“Beyond” 225). One “truth” that is challenged in this chapter of Beyond Good and Evil is morality. A free spirit must be able to liberate him/herself from the traditional vision of morality because a free spirit cannot bind oneself to conventional beliefs. In the description of modern morality an action is considered praise or blame worthy based on its intentions (“Beyond” 234). This “moral” worldview is advancement from the “pre-moral” worldview because “it involves the first attempt at self-knowledge” (“Beyond” 234). However, Nietzsche wants free spirits or “immoralists” to look into an “extra-moral” world that recognizes that the real value of an action lies under the conscious level in “unintentional” drives (“Beyond”, 234). Traditional morality must be overcome because “in the traditional sense, the morality of intentions was a prejudice,” (“Beyond” 235). However, as in Zarathustra it is emphasized that free spirits do have limitations and boundaries. He/she cannot create a new morality like the overman, but the free spirit can embrace his/her freedom.

Section II

Postmodernism was birthed as a reaction to the strict modernist period. The postmodernist worldview realizes there is no justification for the totalizing and repressing modernist ideals; morality, democracy, religion, and patriarchy are established objectively in an attempt to regulate order and kept for the sake of tradition. The postmodernist movement is the deconstruction of the objective modernist ideals of elitism in art, literature, music,
philosophy, and then replaces objectivism with subjectivism (Brann, 5). Whereas the modernists saw subjectivity as an existential crisis, the postmodernists embrace the existential point of view. Postmodern artists and authors use techniques like parody and irony to diffuse the difference between high and low art, then attempt to create new forms of music, film, and literature that explore the marginalized aspects of life (Begely). Postmodernist literature is difficult to define, but easily understood as the "writing from the 1960s forward characterized by experimentation" (Begely). The authors, Nabokov, Heller, and Vonnegut, set the scene for their anti-heroes by reworking the structure of novel.

The postmodern authors used two experimental techniques in their works, the anti-novel and the anti-hero.\(^{219}\) The anti-novel as the name suggests is the opposite of a traditional novel. Traditionally a novel is long fictional narrative following a plot or character’s journey in the pattern of introduction, body, and conclusion; the anti-novel, as coined by Jean-Paul Sartre, is characterized by being told out of chronological order, in fragmentations, and distortions of the experience of its characters (Begely). In like, the anti-hero is the foil to a traditional hero. A hero in the traditional sense is characterized by exhibiting “admirable” traits such as idealism, courage, and integrity. The anti-hero lacks these and exhibits traits like pitiful, awkward, obnoxious, and in some fundamental way is flawed (Begely). An anti-hero does not trust in conventional values and is unable to commit to any ideals; characteristics like these causes the line between hero and villain become blurred. In postmodern literature the character development explores subjectivism intimately by examining inner states of consciousness of the anti-hero, revealing that the character usually feels helpless by his/her lack of control over their situations and the external world (Begely). Anti-hero can also be characterized as one who constantly moves from one disappointment in their lives to the next in an endless cycle. This is

\(^{219}\) Although, the anti-hero is not a “new” idea, it would have been considered experimental after coming out of the modernist period.
where the differences between anti-heroes and Nietzsche’s free spirits can be seen.

Section III

There are several similarities between the anti-hero and the free spirit. Both the anti-hero and the free spirit praise subjectivism rather than objectivism. The anti-hero and the free spirit both reject the cultural paradigms such as religion, government authority, and morality. Both parties do not fit into the normal culture and feel like outsiders. But, there are some distinct differences that separate the terms of anti-hero and free spirit. One of the differences between the two terms is that while the anti-hero does not trust in conventional values, he/she is unable to commit to any ideals (including his/her own). Free spirits commit to his/her own ideals; they are not free floating without any commitments as the anti-hero is. Anti-heroes can be characterized as one who lives life in an endless cycle of disappointments. The free spirit would not be disappointed in because there is no expectation or defined goal of “success,” he/she is living experimentally and dangerously. The anti-hero also feels as if he/she has no control over the situations in his/her life. This reflects that the anti-hero has not entirely rejected the pillars of society, and perhaps does not have the full drive to the will of freedom. The free spirit lives to make sure that he/she is not being controlled by an outside force, and by rejecting the dogmas the free spirit is acting upon his/her will to freedom. Although, there are these differences between the two terms the similarities are very strong and in postmodern literature the anti-heroes embody those similarities acting as free spirits.

Section IV

*Lolita,* and *Catch 22* are two novels written during the postmodern literary movement that exhibit their anti-hero protagonists as free spirits. These protagonists each respectively reject and attempt to liberate themselves from one or more of the foundations of their culture including morality, respect, authority, the glory or war, and reason.
Humbert Humbert (H.H), the protagonist in Lolita (1955), is an attractive, middle-aged, educated man who lives a dangerous and experimental life in the way he loves. His love for a young nymphet, Dolores Haze (Lolita), is out of synch with the mores of the society he is currently living in. This is a quality of a free spirit and is supported by Aphorism 225 in Human All Too Human, “a free spirit thinks differently from what …the basis of the dominant views of the age would have been excepted of him” (“Human” 108). H.H. has two main characteristics that I argue qualify him as an anti-hero/free spirit: he invents his own morality and uses the language in his memoirs ironically.

Nabokov “insists that Lolita has ‘no moral in tow’” (Kinney, 25). To some readers this may seem strange because the nature of the book is based on pedophilia, how could it possibly have no moral? The beauty of the work is that H.H. does not have a moral standpoint, however, he is not amoral or immoral, but has transcended the morals of the current society. H.H. is acting as a free spirit because living his own version morality. He goes beyond good and evil because according to H.H. he is acting out his will to freedom both in his freedom of expression and of love. What H.H. attempts to do is dislodge the “ideal love” of society based on similar age. He does not see his love for Lolita as “wrong” because his includes all the same criteria as society would use to define love, wanting, desire, passion for the other person. He writes in the opening of his confession, “Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three strep down the palate to tap, at three on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta” (Nabokov, 9). He is in love with Lolita, and justifies his desire for nymphets with the cases of similar love in history. “Marriage and cohabitation before the age of puberty are still not uncommon in certain East Indian provinces. Lepcha old men of eighty copulate with girls of eight, and nobody minds. After all, Dante fell madly in love with his Beatrice when she was nine… and this was in 1274” (Nabokov, 19). H.H. is challenging the “Values of a thousand years” but he did not create a new morality (he cannot do that as a free spirit)
but he is living in his own version of morality, which includes borrowing from previous cultures (“Zarathustra” 139).

H.H. uses language ironically (and effectively) covering the sordid subject\textsuperscript{20} of pedophilia. The modern culture would claim that this subject does not deserve the beauty that H.H. conveys it in. Some readers make claim that H.H. uses language to deceive his readers (the jury of his trial) to empathize with him. H.H. even addresses this on the first page of the novel “You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style (Nabokov, 9). H.H. uses the power of words ironically convey his passion for Lolita in such an intense manner that fettered spirits would not understand. He is expressing himself in an artistic way that goes beyond the “solid, granite foundation” of culture’s “truths” (“Beyond” 225). Nietzsche would certainly approve H.H.’s use of ironic language, rather than using the beauty of his words to shield him from judgment.

The novel Catch-22 is an anti-novel told in non-linear sections leading the reader into the fragmented world of John Yossarian.\textsuperscript{21} Yossarian is a member of a squadron community near the Mediterranean Sea during World War II. Yossarian rejects the romance of war, the catch-22, and authority leading him into the experimental life of a free spirit.

Yossarian takes the war personally and the lesson of death and morality to heart. He does not find the glory in war that had been described in epic poems and great novels, but instead he finds absurdity, death, and insanity. Yossarian’s reflections on war connect back to Nietzsche’s writings in Human All Too Human where the “total sum of all these sacrifices” of war is at “the highest costs” that does not justify “the national thirst for honor” (“Human” 178). Yossarian reveals his anti-hero qualities while he is in the hospital.

\textsuperscript{20} According to the fettered spirits of the current culture

\textsuperscript{21} The subjective manner in which the story is told hints that Yossarian acting as free spirit/anti-hero.
and the reader realizes that he is unmoved by the nationalism of the war.

“Outside the hospital the war was still going on. Men went mad and were rewarded with medals. All over the world, boys on ever side of the bomb line were laying down their lives for what they had been told was their country and no one seemed to mind, least of all the boys who were laying down their young lives” (Heller, 16).

Yossarian reveals more about his feelings of combat showing the reader he is not the typical hero who fights for glory, instead he strips away the romance from combat replacing glory with paradoxical madness. Yossarian spends time in the hospital faking various different illnesses trying to get out of flying missions. He is not heroic in the normal cultural sense because does not risk his life to save others, but rather spends most of the novel trying to avoid risking his life, making him an anti-hero. This fight to save his life is where the catch-22 is brought into the light.

A catch-22 can be explained as “damned if you do damned if you don’t.” It is a paradox that one cannot a way out of. Throughout the novel there are several examples of the catch-22, each a different paradox to the different characters. One version of catch-22 keeps Yossarian flying useless combat mission after combat missions. In a conversation Doc Daneeka,

“There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute
simplicity of this clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle (Heller, 174).

This is one catch-22 that resounds for most of the soldiers, but at the end of the novel Yossarian is caught in his own catch-22. Yossarian must decide between going back to war as a general and forcing his squad mates to fly absurd missions or he will go to jail. This is when his free spirited attributes become strongest. “Catch-22 did not exist, he was positive of that, but it made no difference. What did matter was that everyone thought it existed” (Heller, 47). Yossarian realizes that even if everyone else thinks the catch-22 exists, to him it is only words, and he can find a way out of the paradox. Rather than choose between the options presented to him Yossarian says he will “Desert. Take off. I can turn my back on the whole damned mess and start running” (Heller, 444.) Yossarian flees to neutral Switzerland leads to ultimate rejection of authority. This act is “daring to the point of recklessness” because most soldiers (who act as traditional heroes) would see this as an act of cowardice (“Beyond” 231). But to the anti-hero is hardly cowardly at all it is an act of self-preservation. He must be that anti-hero (the villain) that runs away because he does not want to put his squadrons’ lives in danger but he does not want to put his own in danger either. He chooses taking control of his own life and acting as a free spirit by living experimentally by not taking a choice that is offered but creating his own choice.

Section V

Nietzsche wrote some of his books and aphorisms describing the characteristics and the life of a free spirit. The antiheroes written during the postmodern literary movement have strong similarities to these descriptions. While these terms are not identical, there is enough evidence to support the claim that anti-heroes act as free spirits. There are several similarities between the anti-hero and the free spirit: the praise of subjectivism, the rejection of cultural paradigms such as religion, government authority, and morality, and feeling that one is like an outsider. Humbert Humbert and John Yossarian (attempt to) embrace the independence of the will and mind of a free spirit. These characters respectively reject morality,
authority, and romance of war. However, these characters remain fictional and are not true free spirits because their existence is not actual, as Nietzsche would have hoped. However, perhaps these stories were anecdotes that would help future free spirits to motivate their will to freedom.

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