

METAPHYSICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA  
62<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting  
Emory University  
March 10-12, 2011

Draft of Program

**Thursday Evening, March 10**

6:30-8:30

Society for the Study of Process Philosophies

Moderator: *Jude Jones* (Fordham University)

Speaker: *Daniel Dombrowski* (Seattle University)

“Hartshorne, Plato, and the Concept of God”

Respondent: *Brian G. Henning* (Gonzaga University)

**Friday, March, 11**

8:30 Welcome

9:00-10:10 **Session I**

Moderator Michal Gleitman (Emory University )

Speaker: *James Murray Murdoch, Jr.* (Villanova University)

“Humanism and Levinasian Metaphysics”

Respondent: Kent Still (Emory University)

10:20- 11:30 **Session II**

Moderator Colin McQuillan (Ogelthorpe University)

Speaker: *Richard Parry* (Agnes Scott College)

“Virtue Ethics and Metaphysics”

Respondent: Edward C. Halper (University of Georgia)

11:30-1:00 **Lunch**

1:00-2:10 **Session III**

Moderator Verena Erlenbusch (University of Sussex, UK)

Speaker *Anne Wiles* (James Madison University)

“Modes of Being: Plato and Roman Ingarden”

Respondent Jude Jones (Fordham University)

2:20-3:30      **Session IV**

Moderator      Eric Morelli (Emory University)

Speaker        *Owen Goldin* (Marquette University)  
                     “Humanism, Baboonism, and Being in Plato’s Theaetetus”

Respondent     Peter Wakefield (Emory University)

  

3:40-4:10      **Business Meeting**

  

4:15-5:25      **Session V**

Moderator      Andrew H. Ryder (Emory University)

Speaker        *Jeffrey Wilson* (Catholic University of America)  
                     “Foucault as Inverted Neo-Platonist in ‘A Preface to Transgression’”

Respondent     Mark Causey (Georgia State College and University)

  

5:30-6:45      **Session VI** Keynote Address

Introduction    Alan E White (Williams College)

Speaker        *Lorenz B. Puntel* (University of Munich)  
                     “Metaphysics : A Traditional Mainstay in Philosophy in Need of Radical Rethinking”

  

7:00-8:00      **Reception** (Faculty Lounge, 200 Mathematics and Science Center)

## **Saturday, March 12**

### **9:00-10:05 Session VII**

Moderator Richard Dien Winfield (University of Georgia)

Speaker *Nathan R. Strunk* (Boston University)  
“Is the Doctrine of Transcendentals Viable Today?”

Respondent Alexander Hall (Clayton State University)

### **10:10-11:15 Session VIII**

Moderator Dominic Balestra (Fordham University)

Speaker *Jude P. Dougherty* (Catholic University of America)  
“Induction: Perennial Value of the Aristotelian Perspective”

Respondent Fred Marcus (Emory University)

### **11:20-12:25 Session IX**

Moderator Elizabeth Butterfield (Georgia Southern University)

Speaker *Paul Santilli* (Siena College)  
“Ontological Crimes against Humanity”

Respondent Michael Sullivan (Emory University)

### **12:30-1:30 Lunch**

### **1:30-2:35 Session X**

Moderator David S. Pacini (Emory University)

Speaker *Elizabeth Ann Robinson* (Boston University)  
“Kant on Freedom, Causality and Natural Disasters”

Respondent Apaar Kumar (Emory at Oxford)

### **2:40-3:45 Session XI**

Moderator Sebastian Rand (Georgia State University)

Speaker *J.D. Singer* (De Paul University)  
“Sharing the Flesh of the World: Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of

Animal Minds” (Aristotle Prize)

Respondent William Hamrick (Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville)

3:50-4:55 **Session XII**

Moderator Paul Gaffney (St. John’s University)

Speaker *Eric Thomas Weber* (University of Mississippi)  
“Humanism and Leadership”

Respondent Wes De Marco (Clark University)

5:00-6:30 **Presidential Address**

Introduction Edward C. Halper (University of Georgia, President elect, MSA)

Speaker *Thomas R. Flynn* (Emory University)

“What ever Happened to Humanism?”

Reconciling the Being of Language and the Being of Man

7:00 pm **Banquet**

Presentation of the Findlay Award to Lorenz B. Puntel for *Structured and Being: A Theoretical Framework for a Systematic Philosophy*, trans. Alan White (Penn State University Press, 2008)

by Francis P. Coolidge, Jr. (Loyola University, New Orleans)

Houston Mill House, 849 Houston Mill Road

Emory University

"Hartshorne, Plato, and the Concept of God"

By Daniel A. Dombrowski (Seattle University)

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1. Introduction. Both religious believers and religious skeptics alike tend to assume that they understand the concept of God quite well. They may disagree regarding the existence of God, but they generally have the same concept in mind. God, it is alleged, is an omnipotent, omniscient (even with respect to future contingencies), and omnibenevolent being who is eternal (in the sense of existing outside of time and history), and who, as a consequence, is strictly immutable. It is to Charles Hartshorne's credit that he realizes that this concept of God is sedimented in the sense that it is the result of decisions made long ago. These were literal decisions that involved the cutting off of some possibilities so that others remained unscathed. Even after the reasons for these decisions were long forgotten, the conceptual sediment remained.

The purpose of the present article is to both desedimentize the concept of God and to briefly indicate the superiority of a process or neoclassical concept of God to the classical theistic concept mentioned above. More particularly, my thesis is that a Hartshornian perspective on a Platonic view of God has been largely neglected and that this neglect impoverishes both our view of Plato and more importantly our view of what could profitably be said in contemporary philosophy of religion about the concept of God from a process or neoclassical point of view.

At the outset I would like to address the concern that some readers will no doubt have that we are not likely to

get very far with a process theism that appeals to Plato in that he was a staunch opponent to the world of becoming. It would be a mistake, however, not to notice that there are two significant ways in which God (theos) is discussed in Plato's dialogues.

First, Plato inherited from Parmenides the notion that being is eternal, immutable, and self-same. This notion was the starting point for the tradition of classical theism in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) in that the extent to which Plato is associated with the strict split between being and becoming would seem to indicate that for him there is an exclusion of all shadow of change in divinity. A perfect being could not change in that any change it might exhibit would have to be for the worse. This tendency is evidenced in Book 2 and elsewhere in the Republic, in the Phaedo (78-80), and in the Symposium (202-203). We will see that Hartshorne does not so much reject this view of divine perfection as he tries to situate it within a more inclusive view of God (Hartshorne 1953, 31, 56).

Second, however, there is no textual foundation for the popular identification of Plato's God with the form of the good. The Platonic locus for divinity is soul (psyche) or mind (nous). It comes as a shock to some readers of Plato who have read only the Republic, Phaedo, and Symposium that in the Phaedrus (245, etc.) love (eros) is claimed to be divine. Here Plato discovers a new, dynamic meaning for perfection, similar to the one that Hartshorne defends. The perfection that is dynamic is the perfection of life itself, treated not only in the Phaedrus but in Book 10 of the Laws as well, where soul is defined in terms

of self-motion; hence the divine soul would be preeminent self-motion.

In the Timaeus and the Sophist both poles in Plato's theism are brought together: the perfection of divine immutability and the perfection of divine life. The former is identified in the Timaeus with the Demiurge, who always contemplates the everlasting forms. The latter is identified with the World Soul, whose essence is self-motion. Unfortunately, Aristotle's notion of divinity as completely unmoved loses the second tendency in Plato's theism, and the mesmerizing influence Aristotle has had on the history of classical theism (through the neoplatonists, who are in many respects really neoaristotelians) has prevented progress from being made in the Platonic project of bringing the two poles or tendencies in God's nature together.

The next three sections of the article will sketch how this project sheds light on three traditional divine attributes: omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, the last of which is integrally connected to a fourth attribute, namely omnibenevolence.

2. Omnipresence. In a way, all talk about God short of univocity contains some negativity in that God does not know, love, and so on, as we do. With regard to divine embodiment, however, classical theists have allowed this negativity to run wild in that God is claimed by classical theists to be a strictly immaterial being outside of, or above, the natural world. Hartshorne's use of Plato is an attempt to remedy this imbalance.

This remedy starts by noticing the following ironic shift. Plato is famous for his dipolar categorical scheme wherein form is contrasted to matter and being is

contrasted to becoming, with the former element in each of these pairs highlighted at the expense of the latter element in each pair. From this dipolar categorical scheme, however, he concludes to a cosmological monism wherein God is seen as the World Soul (panta psyche) who animates not this or that particular body, but the whole body of the world. By way of contrast, Aristotle is famous for his monopolar categorical scheme of embodied form or informed matter. But from this monopolar categorical scheme he concludes to a cosmological dualism that is more severe than anything found in Plato's dialogues in that Aristotle's actus purus concept of divinity involves unmoved being that transcends altogether the embodied world.

To put this ironic shift in different terms, Aristotle is usually thought of as a hylomorphist who emphasizes the necessity of an integral connection between form and matter, with soul as the form of a living body. But when he discusses divinity he abandons hylomorphism in that divinity for him is strictly disembodied and unmoved by the material world and does not know or care for it. In fact, divinity is so removed from the natural world that the only things it could possibly know are its own thoughts. By way of contrast, Plato is usually seen as an opponent to hylomorphism (cf., Dombrowski 2009) and as giving evidence of supporting some type of dualism. Yet in the passages that treat God as the soul for the body of the entire world can be found the basis for cosmic hylomorphism and, as a result, a robust conception of divine omnipresence.

I am arguing that if, in response to the question "does God have a body?," one gives an entirely negative answer, as classical theists do, then one is explicitly or



implicitly committing to cosmological dualism. By contrast, the ubiquity of deity is affirmed if God is hylomorphically seen as the World Soul or World Mind for the body of the world, as Plato does in at least five of the late dialogues (Statesman, Philebus, Timaeus, Epinomis, and Laws). In the relevant passages in these dialogues the autokinesis of soul, in general, is found in supreme form.

Granted, a great deal of interpretive industry is required in order to understand the relationship between the Platonic World Soul and the Demiurge, but these do not have to be seen as two different gods. Indeed, on Hartshorne's view, if the World Soul is taken seriously so as to explain the world as an orderly cosmos or as a universe, then monotheism is close to the surface of Plato's thought (despite the fact that he sometimes resorts to polytheism, presumably as a concession to popular piety). The demiurgic function is to forever contemplate the abstract objects, the forms. That is, one way to make sense of the relationship between the World Soul and the Demiurge is to see the latter as the Divine Mind, the intellectual capacity of the World Soul for the body of the world. This body of the world is quite explicitly referred to as the divine animal (zoon) that is endowed with life and reason (phronesis)--see Statesman 269c-d. In a peculiar way the Feuerbachian critique did not go far enough. Rather than say that God is anthropomorphic we should say that God is zoomorphic.

It would be a superficial interpretation of the Timaeus to allege that Plato was arguing for two supreme beings, although it must be admitted that this option is vividly presented in mythic form in the dialogue. The more philosophical interpretation is that the Demiurge is the

World Soul in abstraction, just as I live concretely from moment to moment but nonetheless possess a relatively unchanged abstract identity as "Dan." The demiurgic identity of God, however, is everlasting, in contrast to my temporally finite identity.

For several decades in the twentieth century Hartshorne was almost alone among philosophers in offering a defense of the sort of divine omnipresence (organic as opposed to merely virtual) affirmed when seeing God as the World Soul. Because his concept of God involves the idea that God is a person who is alive and rational, this sort of omnipresence is clearly not to be understood in impersonal pantheist terms (literally, all is God--see Levine 1994), but rather as a sort of panenttheism (literally, all is in God), to use a term coined by K. C. F. Krause in the nineteenth century. God is diffused throughout the body of the world (and hence does not have a merely virtual or epiphenomenal relationship to the natural world), while nonetheless retaining an identity in partial contrast to the embodied world. Analogously, yet in an inferior way, I am diffused throughout my body (hurt my cells and you hurt me), yet I am not to be literally identified with my body. After all, I could lose a limb and still be a whole person. It should be noted, however, that use of the mind-body analogy to understand the cosmos does not necessarily commit one to dualism, especially when Hartshorne's explicit panpsychism and Plato's implicit use of this position are considered (see Dombrowski 1991).

The soul-body or mind-body analogy cannot be pushed to the point where the World Soul would cease to exist due to an alien force in that the existence of God is either impossible or necessary. That is, St. Anselm's great

discovery, anticipated by Plato and then rediscovered and refined by Hartshorne, is that the existence of that than which no greater can be conceived cannot be merely contingent (Dombrowski 2006). Thus, it should not surprise us as much as it does that Plutarch claimed that all of the ancient philosophers, except Aristotle and the atomists, believed that the world was necessarily informed with a divine soul! In this regard Hartshorne is trying to revive an ancient tradition that was found in Plato, Origen (specifically, the notion of an omnipresent logos), and many other ancient thinkers (see Plutarch 1870, vol. 3, 133--"Whether the World Be an Animal"). It may even be implied in the biblical claim that it is in God that we live and move and have our being (Acts 17: 28). And it is certainly found in several liberal philosophers of religion or theologians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g., Gustav Fechner and Otto Pfliegerer--see Hartshorne 1953, 243-257, 269-271).

After Plato's death theists tended to move in one of two directions: Aristotle moved toward a concept of divinity as strictly transcendent and the Stoics moved toward pantheism, leaving no one, as it were, to develop the more complex Platonic view. Friedrich Solmsen largely agrees with Hartshorne that the Abrahamic religions have largely accepted the Aristotelian move, albeit designated at times as "Platonic," by relying almost exclusively on Plato's form of the good (see Solmsen 1942). But there was nothing necessary in this acceptance.

3. Contra Omnipotence. Hartshorne is committed to what can be called perfect being philosophy of religion or perfect being theology. But what does it mean to be a perfect being? Classical theists have assumed,

problematically, that it means being immutable in every respect and as a consequence transcending the natural world and all of its obvious changes. Likewise, classical theists have assumed that a perfect being would be omnipotent in that, it is alleged, if a perfect being lacked any degree of power it would not be perfect (see Rogers 2000). But the claim that a perfect being would have to be omnipotent is also both sedimented and problematic, indeed unintelligible.

Process thinkers, in general, including Hartshorne, highlight a passage from Plato's Sophist (247e) that they think is one of the most important in Plato's writings and that even exhibits the height of Plato's genius as a metaphysician (see Whitehead 1961, 120; 1966, 119; also see Eslick 1953). In this passage the Eleatic Stranger (presumably Plato) says that:

I suggest that anything has real being that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected, in however small a degree, by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once. I am proposing as a mark to distinguish real things that they are nothing but power.

Here we should first notice that the definition (horon) offered of being in this passage is in terms of the Greek word dynamis, which in the F. M. Cornford translation above is rendered as "power." But the unmistakable connection between this Greek word and the English word "dynamic" leads me to think that a better translation of dynamis would be in terms of "dynamic power." Cornford's commentary facilitates this translation in that he notes that dynamis is the substantive answering to the verb "to

be able" (dynasthai). Likewise, Hermann Bonitz's translation of dynamis as "living power" is also instructive (see Cornford 1935; Bonitz 1886).

What Hartshorne admires in Plato is the fact that he provides a tertium quid between the external imposition of law on the world found in Abrahamic classical theism, on the one hand, and Stoic pantheism, on the other. That is, implied here is a moderate view between these extremes wherein there is both: (a) an active and passive divine creator (who persuades the world and dialogues with it rather than delivers to it authoritarian dictation); and (b) the action and reaction of the other constituents of reality. Plato's dialogue style is instructive here: one does something with (not to) one's dialectical partner. Hartshorne, along with Whitehead, views this victory of persuasion over force as one of the greatest intellectual discoveries in the history of religion (Whitehead 1961, 83; Hartshorne 1983, 25-28).

Action and reaction belong to the essence of being, hence the "or" (eite) in the above quotation needs examination. If this "or" is not meant in a mutually exclusive way (which I think is the correct interpretation), then less confusion would occur in the mind of the reader if it were made explicit that it is both action and passion that characterize being. Hence the spirit of the passage would have been better served, I think, if the "or" were replaced with an "and" (kai).

This view of the power to act and to be acted upon as the dynamic drive of the universe (i.e., the view of being as power) has profound ramifications for the concept of God. If the stubborn facts of the world have their own dynamic power, then an alleged omnipotent power would be an

unintelligible power over the powerless and the un-influence-able. We can utter the words "God is omnipotent" or "God has all power," but we cannot really conceive what these words mean if there are other beings in existence (on the definition of being as power). And it does not much matter whether the beings in question are corporeal or incorporeal, subjects or predicates.

If the term "metaphysics" refers to the noncontingent features of reality, then "being is dynamic power" is a metaphysical claim in that its scope is as wide as reality itself. Beings, if they are instances of dynamic power, can be influenced by God, but they cannot be utterly coerced. As Hartshorne deftly puts the point, "power is influence, perfect power is perfect influence" (Hartshorne 1941, xvi, also 14, 89, 198-199, 294; 1991, 650, 703-704). To have perfect power over all individuals is not to have all power. On this view, power must be exercised on something, but this something must offer some resistance, however slight, hence the divine power that is resisted cannot be absolute. If being is dynamic power, then any relation with the wholly powerless would be (per impossible) a relation with absolute nothingness. But when parricide is committed on "Father Parmenides" in the Sophist (241d), the result is only the existence of relative nothingness (or otherness), not the existence of absolute nothingness, which remains impossible, as Parmenides argued.

The Hartshornian view being defended here is compatible with the claim that there is nothing uninfluenced by divine love, but this is a far cry from a defense of divine omnipotence and the related concept of creation ex nihilo. If omnipotence refers to a monopoly of

power over the ultimately powerless (which is implied, I think, in the doctrine of creation ex nihilo), then such is incompatible with the doctrine that being is dynamic power. Here we should not fail to notice that creation ex nihilo became sedimented into the tradition not until the intertestamental biblical period and was not defended by Christian thinkers until the end of the second century, perhaps more as a testimony to Caesar than to that than which no greater can be conceived (May 1994; Whitehead 1961, ch. 8). For all we can tell, Platonic self-motion or Hartshornian creativity (both divine and nondivine) is itself uncreated.

It is crucial on Hartshorne's view to insist that a critique of omnipotence does not demean God in that God would still exhibit ideal power. This is because, on the neoclassical or process view, God's power is not separated from divine beauty or goodness (see Dombrowski 2004). Indeed, divine beauty and goodness just are the divine power to inspire worship. As the perennial inability of classical theists to deal adequately with the theodicy problem shows, the recalcitrance of the material will not go away. But on Hartshorne's view this recalcitrance should be understood more precisely as the problem of harmonizing the self-motions of an infinite number of partially free centers of dynamic power. That is, the lack of complete order in the world is due to the fact that there are a plurality of dynamic centers of power that frequently get in each other's way. God is an omnibenevolent self-mover of others who is partially moved by these other self-movers.

Hartshorne follows Plato quite carefully in the claim that God does not control everything that happens. In

fact, this claim is obvious from Hartshorne's standpoint in that if God did control everything that happens, God would not be that than which no greater can be conceived (i.e., God would not be God), given the extent of intense and unmerited suffering and tragedy in the world. Of course Plato does not in his dialogues have one of his characters argue against omnipotence in that no one before Plato had affirmed such a doctrine. For Plato there was no need to explicitly refute such a position, whereas for Hartshorne there is such a need (see Hartshorne 1984a). There is a family resemblance among several words and conditions that make belief in divine omnipotence unintelligible for both Plato and Hartshorne: necessity (anangke), fate (moira), chance (tyche), and destiny (heimarmene). Along with God we do not so much contend against necessity as work with it or cajole it so as to elicit as much order and goodness as is needed in order to bring about a beautiful world in ourselves, our political institutions, and the natural world. That is, the above terms and conditions were Plato's somewhat confusing ways to make Hartshorne's point regarding the connection between the claim that being is dynamic power and the unintelligibility of omnipotence (Hartshorne 1953, 436).

That God cannot "make us do" certain things does not "limit" divine power, for there is no such thing as power to make nonsense true. "Power over us" would not be power over us if our existences and actions counted for absolutely nothing. Of course the classical theist will retort that there is no good news in learning that God is trying very hard and just might succeed in imposing goodness on the world. But is it better news to learn from the classical theist that God could have prevented



egregious suffering (say an infant deformity), but chose not to do so? God's "size" is diminished in the neoclassical view only if power is associated exclusively with initiative and aggressiveness and nonrelationality. It is perhaps not irrelevant at this point to notice that in some famous texts in the Christian scriptures Jesus stands at the bottom of coercive, unilateral power, but at the apex of persuasive, relational power.

4. Omniscience (Neoclassically Understood) and Omnibenevolence. The Platonic view of God that both Hartshorne and I defend is now starting to take shape. God's omnipresence as the soul for the body of the world and God's permanent and ideal (yet not omnipotent) power are crucial parts of this view. But any concept of God that is Platonic needs to say something regarding the relationship between God and the forms, specifically regarding the extradeical and intradeical interpretations of this relationship (see Wolfson 1961).

The debate here concerns the concept of independence or separation (chorismos). If "X is independent of Y" has a sharp meaning it is that X could exist even if Y did not, which implies that Y is contingent. If X stands for the forms and Y stands for God, then the nonexistence of God is being taken as possible. But this suggestion conflicts with the treatments of the existence of God in the Timaeus, Book 10 of the Laws, and Plato's flirtation with the ontological argument in the Republic, as detailed by Hartshorne (see Hartshorne 1965; Dombrowski 2006). That is, the extradeical account, wherein the forms are in a state of independence or separation even from God, is not defensible. The neoplatonists, on Hartshorne's account, were off the mark in their concept of God, but they were on

the mark in thinking that the forms are ideas inseparable from divine intelligence (nous) or the Demiurge.

On this latter view even the most abstract of abstract objects find a location in the mind of God, as defended in the intradeical interpretation. The abstract objects (the forms) and God are both everlasting, and independence has no clear meaning between these two everlasting realities. The most extreme type of Platonism (i.e., the extradeical view) would see the abstract objects as real in themselves apart from embodiment (or "embodiment") in the divine mind. On the more defensible intradeical view, if God is the greatest conceivable knower then God could not fail to know all that can be known, including abstract objects, hence these abstract objects could not fail to be known by God.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that for Hartshorne all abstract objects are changeless, as perhaps they are in Plato. Although the metaphysical categories themselves (e.g., being v. becoming) are everlasting, as are the most abstract aspects of logic and mathematics, some abstract objects are emergent universals, as in "different from Habermas" or as in the precise shade and hue of blue in a certain iris or in a certain experience of the flower at a certain moment. In this regard Hartshorne is more of a process philosopher than Whitehead, whose eternal objects are closer to Plato's changeless forms than they are to Hartshorne's emergent universals.

Nonetheless Hartshorne is very much like Plato and Whitehead in thinking that those abstract objects that are everlasting (i.e., existing throughout time rather than outside of time), as in the most abstract constituents of logic and mathematics, can only be understood if there is an ontological place for them in the mind of God. To

believe, as many or most mathematicians still do, in the everlastingness of such abstract objects, but not to believe in a divine mind that is their repository, is to imagine something like Lewis Carroll's absurd Cheshire cat, whose grin remained without the cat. Contemporary process Platonism consists in the effort to acknowledge the divine cat behind the grin, as it were (see Hersh 1997).

By "omniscience" Hartshorne does not mean exactly what the classical theist means by this term: that God knows with absolute assurance and in minute detail the outcome of what are, from a human point of view, future contingencies. Rather, Hartshorne has in mind by this term ideal knowledge of everything that is logically knowable: past actualities as determinately actualized, present realities in their presentness (subject to the laws of physics, which prohibit causal relations among contemporaries), and future possibilities or probabilities as possibilities or probabilities. The only future realities that can be known as necessary, even by an ideal knower, are those covered by very abstract metaphysical truths that obtain at all times and under all contingencies (e.g., that some contingencies or other will exist in the future; that God, as that than which no greater can be conceived, will continue to exist necessarily, per the ontological argument; etc.). That is, no knower, not even the highest one, can know with absolute assurance and in minute detail the outcome of future contingencies.

On the process, asymmetrical view of time, whereas the past is determinate, the future is the region of determinables. At the clutch of vivid immediacy in the present these determinables are made determinate by the decisions enacted by sentient agents. Before these

decisions occur it is not logically possible to know with absolute assurance and in minute detail how future determinables will be rendered determinate. Hence it does not make sense to say, as the classical theist does, that the process God is "ignorant" of the future in that this word only makes sense with respect to a failure to know something that is logically knowable. Further, to claim to know a future possibility as already actualized is not to exhibit ideal knowledge, but is rather to exhibit a sort of nescience with respect to the modal status of the future. To be specific, there just are no specific or determinate future events, only the possibility or probability of such.

This Hartshornian view of omniscience is Platonic in at least two senses. First, given the long-standing difficulties in resolving the contradiction between divine omniscience in the classical theistic sense and human freedom (i.e., any choice that a "free" being might make would eternally be known absolutely, and hence in a way it would be determined, in the divine mind), it is worthwhile to note that real freedom seems to be a non-negotiable item for Plato. The evidence for this claim is the frequently used, above-mentioned definition of soul in Plato's dialogues in terms of self-motion (autokinesis), which is the Platonic equivalent to freedom. And second, despite Plato's frequent mention of the fact that real wisdom and knowledge are divine rather than human, this real wisdom and knowledge are not much evidenced in the dialogues in terms of divine ability to predict the future, but rather in terms of divine ability to know abstract objects, etc.

The following connection between divine omniscience and omnibenevolence should be noted. If we take seriously Plato's famous intuition about the coextensiveness of

knowledge and virtue, then omniscience in a sense is the key to the other divine attributes. It may very well be the case that unsurpassable benevolence is analytic of the idea of omniscience (see Hartshorne 1948, 124-127).

("Unsurpassable" here means unsurpassable except by divinity itself at a later moment, say when some being who previously did not suffer now starts to suffer, bringing a new opportunity for divine benevolence to be exhibited.)

The reason why knowledge is not identical with virtue in us is that human knowing seems not to involve the concrete, exact awareness of things found in an ideal knower, but rather a vague, virtual awareness of them. That is, our misdeeds are in God, not as misdeeds on God's part but as concretely felt misfortunes.

To sum up, the evidence from Plato's dialogues in favor of the claim that (a) the forms have always existed is massive, as is the evidence from the dialogues for the claims that (b) God has always existed and that (c) God knows the forms. It is Hartshorne, however, who puts these three claims together so as to reach the inference that God could not fail to know the forms; to imagine objects of knowledge that would be outside the ken of the greatest knower is impossible. Likewise, the evidence from Plato's dialogues that (d) God is all wise and the greatest knower is massive, as is evidence for the claims that (e) God is all good and that (f) knowledge is coextensive with virtue. It is Hartshorne, however, who puts these three claims together so as to reach the inference that belief in divine omniscience is connected to belief in divine omnibenevolence. And this inference, like the first, can be seen as Platonic even if it relies on interpretation of

the subject matter in question that is not made explicit in the dialogues.

There is an obvious danger that one could make unwarranted associations with Christianity when interpreting Plato for the purposes of contemporary philosophy of religion. But there is also the opposing danger of ignoring altogether the providential and soteriological dimensions of Plato's thoughts on God. In this regard one should note that it is claimed in Plato's dialogues that the greatest gift from God to human beings, a gift that is nothing less than providential, is philosophy itself. In fact, God is our savior (sotera) through the gift of intellect (see, e.g., Timaeus 48d-e, also 30a, 44c, 47a-b). These twin dangers also face us when we see a description of divine forgiveness (Philebus 65d) and mercy (Laws 665a). The evidence seems to point us toward the conclusion that an omnibenevolent God tries to bring about as much good as possible in a tragic world, given the limits of recalcitrant necessity and multiple self-movers (Timaeus 68e, 71d).

5. Dipolar Theism. More needs to be said regarding the dipolar theism that Hartshorne derives from Plato. Granted, some conceptual contrasts involve an invidious element that cannot be applied to God if God is that than which no greater can be conceived. Or, to use Platonic terms, if God is in every way the best possible (Republic 381b--ta tou theou pantei arista echei), or exhibits perfect or superlative goodness (Laws 900d, 901e--pasan areten, aristous), or as the World Soul is the perfect animal (Timaeus 31a--pantelei zoi) animated with a supremely good soul (Laws 897c--aristen psychen). Excellent-inferior is an example of such an invidious

contrast in that inferiority itself, by definition, contradicts the logic of perfection.

It is a mistake, however, to assume that all conceptual contrasts involve such an invidious element. Classical theists commit precisely this mistake. And they are led to commit this mistake due to their tendentious monopolarity. Consider the following two columns of attributes in polar contrast to each other. Although only four terms are found in each column, these columns could be expanded dramatically:

being	becoming
permanence	change
unity	variety
activity	passivity

Classical theism tends toward oversimplification. It is comparatively easy to say that God is permanent rather than changing, etc. In each case the classical theist decides which member of the contrasting pair is good (on the left) and then attributes it to God, while wholly denying the contrasting term (on the right).

The prejudice involved in this monopolar approach can be seen by analyzing the attributes in the right-hand column. For example, both activity and passivity can be good or bad. Good passivity is likely to be called "sensitivity," "responsiveness," "adaptability," "sympathy," and the like. Insufficiently subtle or defective passivity is called "wooden inflexibility," "mulish stubbornness," "inadaptability," "unresponsiveness," and the like. To deny God passivity altogether is to deny God those aspects of passivity that are excellences. Or, put another way, to altogether deny God the ability to change does avoid fickleness, but at the

expense of the ability to benevolently react to the sufferings of others.

The task when thinking of God is to attribute to God all excellences (left and right sides) and not to attribute to God any inferiorities (right and left sides). Within each pole of a noninvidious contrast (e.g., permanence-change) there are invidious or injurious elements (inferior permanence or inferior change), but also noninvidious, good elements (excellent permanence or excellent change). A dipolar, process theist such as Plato does not necessarily believe in two gods, one permanent and one changing. Rather, what are often thought to be contradictories or contraries are really mutually interdependent correlatives, as Hartshorne indicates: "The good as we know it is unity-in-variety or variety-in-unity; if the variety overbalances, we have chaos or discord; if the unity, we have monotony or triviality" (Hartshorne 1953,3).

Supreme excellence, to be truly so, must somehow be able to integrate all of the complexity there is in the world into itself as one spiritual whole, as Plato would seem to agree in his doctrine of the World Soul. The word "must" indicates divine necessity, along with God's essence, which is to necessarily exist. The word "complexity" indicates the contingency that affects God through decisions made by self-moving creatures. In the classical theistic view, however, God is identified solely with the stony immobility of the absolute, implying nonrelatedness to the world. God's abstract nature, God's being, may in a way escape from the temporal flux, but a living God is related to the world of becoming, which entails a divine becoming as well, if the world in some way



is internally related to God as the divine animating presence for the whole world.

The classical theist's alternative to this view suggests that all relationships to God are external to divinity, once again threatening not only God's concern for the world, but also God's nobility. A dog's being behind a particular rock affects the dog in certain ways; thus this relation is an internal relation to the dog, but it does not affect the rock, whose relationship with the dog is external to the rock's nature. Does this not show the superiority of canine consciousness, which is aware of the rock, to rocklike existence, which is unaware of the dog? Is it not therefore peculiar that God has been described solely in rocklike (Aristotelian) terms: pure actuality, permanence, having only external relations, unmoved, being and not becoming?

In short, God always changes. Both of these emphasized words are needed. There is no reason to leave the two poles in the divine nature in a paradoxical state. As Hartshorne puts the point, "There is no law of logic against attributing contrasting predicates to the same individual, provided they apply to diverse aspects of this individual" (Hartshorne 1953, 14-15). The remedy for "ontolatry," the unqualified worship of being, is not the contrary pole, "gignolatry," the unqualified worship of becoming. "God is neither being as contrasted to becoming nor becoming as contrasted to being, but categorically supreme becoming in which there is a factor of categorically supreme being, as contrasted to inferior becoming, in which there is inferior being" (Hartshorne 1953, 24). In dipolar theism the divine becoming is more ultimate than the divine being only for the reason that it

is more inclusive, an inclusiveness that is crucial to support Plato's defense of the World Soul. That is, to the extent that Plato adheres to monopolar theism in his first facet (or stage) he has a difficult time justifying his adherence to belief in God as the World Soul in his second facet (or stage). As before, the best clues we have regarding how to reconcile these two facets (or stages) are found in the Timaeus and Sophist.

Like a child begging for both, Plato declares through the Eleatic Stranger in the Sophist (249d) that reality (as dynamic power) is both at once: the unchangeable and that which changes. This view has significant consequences for theism. For the sake of argument, Hartshorne would drop his thesis regarding stages of Platonic development, but he refuses to give up the thesis that there are two facets in Plato's thought. The first is a diaeresis of existence into the quantitative and the qualitative, the mutable and the immutable; or better, the material and the formal (or ideational). Soul, including divine soul, is put in the latter, immobile pole of these pairs in the first facet (or stage). However, in the second facet (or stage) of Plato's thought, motion is granted to soul, including the World Soul. The real opposition here is between dependent and independent mobility, between body and soul. Within the World Soul there is a principle of immutability (in that the World Soul's existence cannot end if an orderly cosmos is to continue to exist), a principle that characterizes (divine) soul per se in the first facet (or stage).

This complex of contrasting concepts is not simplified by reducing God to the form of the good. Not even in the first facet (or stage) did Plato ever make this equation. Rather, the good, although it is not God, is nonetheless

compatible with the rule of supreme being-in-becoming in that it is the most exalted intellectual content contemplated by the demiurgic function of God. The issue is complicated by the form of the good being described in the Republic as beyond being (hyperousia). This understandably leads some to speak apophatically. I have no problem with apophaticism as long as two conditions are met. First, it should be admitted that any apophatic discourse implies correlative kataphatic discourse (e.g., to say that God's goodness is beyond human goodness is nonetheless to admit that God is good). And second, it should be noted that apophaticism applies in a dipolar way, in contrast to the classical theist's monopolar apophaticism (e.g., it makes sense to say both that God is more permanent in divine existence than permanence as humanly experienced and that God changes in more ways and in better ways than the sort of changes that we experience as human beings).

In short, the conflict of contrasting categories must, then, be viewed as inherent in the Platonic framework. Reality, including divine reality, is one, but this unity can only be discursively or metaphysically understood as two, like centripetal and centrifugal forces in equilibrium. Hartshorne's process theism, in general, can be seen as a partial return to Plato because of his World Soul as the divine self-moved, but not unmoved, mover of all other self-movers and as the soul aware of all that is possible. As Hartshorne himself puts the point, "I have always been something of a Platonist" (Hartshorne 1984b, 164-165).

When the topic of conversation is God's bare existence (that God is), one can legitimately claim that God is

unchanged, self-sufficient, invariable, indissoluble, and abides forever. But when the topic of conversation is God's actuality (how God is), it is crucial to admit divine change, becoming, passivity, even tragedy. By contrast, classical theistic belief in strict divine immutability is often a veiled theodicy that is not terribly convincing. On this view there is ultimately no need to be troubled by evil and pain in the world because God, who is not changed by these, magically makes everything turn out fine in the end. Hartshorne and Whitehead, however, in their mode of appropriating Plato, as opposed to that of the classical theists, are also interested in appropriating the Greek sense of life, even divine life, as tragic but worth living nonetheless.

My claim is that permanence-change is a conceptual contrast that does not involve an element that is invidious per se. Granted, there are inferior examples of both permanence (e.g., monotonous regularity--as in the joke from Henri Bergson's essay on "Laughter" where the customs official, when he greeted desperate people who had just been rescued from a shipwreck, asked them if they had any goods to declare) and change (e.g., chaotic arbitrariness). But there are also excellent types of permanence (e.g., everlasting existence, moral steadfastness) and change (e.g., the ability to be eminently moved by the sufferings of others, the loving desire to be altered by the beloved). In contrast, good-evil is an invidious contrast because one of its elements is invidious per se. This is evidenced in the analysis of this contrast, which involves the useless distinction between good-good (a redundancy) and evil-good (a contradiction); likewise regarding good-evil (a contradiction) and evil-evil (a redundancy).

6. Becoming Like God. Throughout this article I have assumed the existence of God and I have not offered rational arguments for belief in such an existence. Once again, my concern has been with the concept of God rather than with God's existence. It should be briefly noted, however, that the arguments for the existence of God that are either implicit or explicit in Plato's dialogues (the ontological argument in the Republic; and a blended version of cosmological-teleological argument--indeed blended with a third argument from consent--in the Timaeus and Laws) have implications for the concept of God that is retrieved and refined in Hartshorne.

The versions of the ontological argument in Plato, Hartshorne, and my own work help to explicate the attribute of divine permanence in that on the basis of this argument God's existence could not be contingent. That is, the modal status of God's existence is either impossible or necessary. In Platonic terms, it is anhypotheton. Further, the Platonic/Hartshornian teleology provided by God as arche kineseos (the source of motion) is different from that found in classical theistic teleology. The difference can be pinpointed in terms of the modal coextensiveness of the neoclassical God, who is related actually to all actual things and potentially to all potential things. God influences and is influenced by everything real, in contrast to the classical theistic God who influences but is not influenced by the real and who is claimed to be "related" actually to merely possible things.

The abiding lure of Plato for neoclassical theists is his theocentrism, which is displayed most prominently in two passages in his later writings (Theaetetus 176b-c; Timaeus 90a-d). Here the point that is emphasized is that

the goal in life for human beings should be to become as much like the divine as possible (homoiosis theoi kata to dynaton). Once again, Hartshorne was almost alone among philosophers for several decades in the twentieth century in thinking in these Platonic terms.

Once one views philosophy in Platonic or Hartshornian terms not merely as an intellectual exercise, but as a way of life (see Hadot 1995), one can understand the impetus behind Platonic askesis (practice or discipline). This does not so much involve a hatred of the material world or a loathing of the body, as alleged by Nietzsche; nor does it involve an escape from the world, but rather a transformation of it, or at least a transformation of our attitude toward it. When the preparatory work of askesis has taken hold, much like the preparatory work of an athlete before a big event (which fits well with the athletic origin of askesis--see Dombrowski 2009), the process of deification can flourish. I say deification rather than apotheosis in that the latter, but not the former, involves the abandonment of one's humanity. In this regard Platonic or Hartshornian homoiosis reminds one of Eastern Orthodox theosis or St. John of the Cross's endiosada (see Dombrowski 1992), or Whitehead's remark that the very purpose of philosophy is to rationalize mysticism (Whitehead 1966, 174).

In the aforementioned passage in the Timaeus it is clear that assimilation to God is both intrinsically worthwhile and good for its primary effect: happiness. In this regard homoiosis is much like justice in the Republic, which was also both a consummatory good and an instrumental good. But these goods are not intelligible on a classical theistic interpretation. It is here that the key

connection between this section of the article on religious experience and the previous sections on the concept of God can be seen. Assimilation to God as far as possible makes no sense if God is lifeless and strictly unchanging because a living being cannot assimilate to an inert abstraction, but only to another, more inclusive, living being. Platonic/Hartshornian mysticism involves personal contact between a human self-mover and an ever-moving, cosmic soul. Religious believers in the Abrahamic religions therefore do not need to "dehellenize" their beliefs, as is sometimes alleged, but to "rehellenize" them along the lines of a more sophisticated Platonic philosophy of religion as neoclassically understood.

This rehellenization is facilitated by the realization that theos in ancient Greece was primarily a predicative notion. To be precise, rather than say that God is love we might say that loving is divine. The latter locution is perhaps more palatable to contemporary ears (see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1920, 348). In process fashion, it is the predicate that is the true subject of discourse regarding God. The main thing is to avoid both parochial perception and overly anthropocentric urges. But the homoiosis passages do not encourage us to become unworldly or otherworldly in the pejorative senses of these terms. Rather, what is best for the whole need not be seen as detrimental to us as individuals. This is the point to the homoiosis passages (once again, Theaetetus 176b-c; Timaeus 90a-d). One of the main obstacles to a wider appreciation of this point is the assumption that there are only two options, i.e., the false dilemma between the classical theistic view of God as unchanging and omnipotent and a coercive mover the world, on the one hand, and the view

that things in general are directionless and ultimately meaningless, on the other.

Most human beings "prehend" or grasp implicitly (rather than intellectually apprehend in an explicit manner) meaning in a world that they feel is an intelligible whole, a cosmos. Against this background, language regarding the imitation (mimesis) of God or participation (methexis) in divinity seems continuous with normal assumptions. (Most of us do not find ourselves entirely clueless and adrift in a meaningless multi-verse, although admittedly some do so find themselves.) Given the fact that by imitating the form of the good we are indirectly imitating a dynamic God (who everlastingly contemplates the forms, including the form of the good), perhaps the most efficacious of our imitations of God consists in a tireless process to bring about the best world possible. Or again, the religious life consists in an effort to be less distracted away from what is really important in life, to adjust our attitudes to the extent possible (kata to dynaton) to the dynamism of cosmic, divine harmony.



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## *Humanism and Levinasian Metaphysics*

### *I. Question and Thesis*

My thesis in this paper is that Levinasian metaphysics offer a fruitful and timely suggestion for the problem of philosophy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Levinas has famously suggested that ethics is first philosophy. This suggestion does not point to the supercession of philosophy by ethical concerns. Rather, in claiming that ethics is first philosophy, Levinas offers an original direction for philosophy and metaphysics qua philosophy and qua metaphysics. Post-structuralist humanism in the Levinasian sense offers an original direction for metaphysical, philosophical inquiry.

### *A. Metaphysics*

Let me begin with some definitions and a sketch of the classification system which we might consider. Just what do we mean by metaphysics, after all? It seems plausible to consider metaphysics as the queen of the sciences in the classical epoch, from Plato forward, until say Descartes. For these eras, and the thinkers we typically privilege in the history of them, metaphysics precedes specific inquiry. In this context, when we say “metaphysics,” we usually mean ontology, the study of being. So first philosophy is the study of being qua being, as Aristotle defines it in his *Metaphysics*. Descartes disrupts this classical presumption, and shifts first philosophy from ontology to epistemology.

But let me raise another question, specifically at the juncture which Descartes represents. Jesuit curriculum often examines a question of the “metaphysics of knowledge,” here following Thomas, as opposed to epistemology. The difference between the two would be roughly the question of whether we can begin with the

question of epistemology itself, or whether it is required that we understand being qua being, and then, in Thomistic order of progression, understand the being of certain specific kinds of beings, here most relevantly, of objects, and of subjects. This involves, then, further, a propaedeutic study of metaphysics, prior to the possibility of articulating an ethical theory. And as a part of that prior metaphysics, it would be necessary to specify the meaning of human nature, for human knowledge is always the knowledge of human beings, human subjects.

Now this privileged position of metaphysics in the Aristotelian sense, has been challenged from Descartes forward, with Kant also being one of its chief critics. And yet the Metaphysical Society of America persists. So one question would be, how this anachronism manages to continue into the present day. Levinas observes aptly, “In fact, in our times, metaphysics keeps on ending and the end of metaphysics is our metaphysics....”<sup>1</sup> But, honestly, we haven’t even begun to raise this question with sufficient desperation as yet. Post-Kantian developments push us even farther from the glory days of metaphysics.

## ***B. Humanism***

Where metaphysics perhaps was cut off by the Kantian argument, humanism persists through the enlightenment in an unquestioned manner. There are different conceptions of humanism, notably secular and religious, particularly Christian. The American Humanist Association defines humanism in pointedly secularist terms: "Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism and other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity" (AmericanHumanist.org). If Aristotle defines human nature in terms of having a specific end, this definition here and the Thomistic conception of humanism would be similar this far, though the Thomistic conception of human nature would include necessarily defining that end in terms of our relation to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Humanism and An-Archy,” p. 47.

Sartre claims, in “Existentialism is a Humanism,” that there are two major kinds of existentialism: the Christian existentialism of Kierkegaard and Marcel, and the atheistic existentialism of himself and others, Camus, etc. For Sartre, this difference is decisive. Sartre’s own definition of existentialism there suggests a unique place for human beings, different from other beings: human beings are the only beings for whom existence precedes essence. A tree cannot choose its own mode of existence; it has no freedom. A human being has a will, and a free will. A human being can choose what being human means. Human beings are not bound by an essence. So for Sartrean existentialism, it is incorrect or irrelevant to begin with ontology as genus and proceed to the specification of that in specifically human being, since human being does not conform to being qua being. Human existence differs from any other type of being.

On this conception of existentialism, we see two things: First, it is clear why the difference between Christian existentialists and atheist existentialists is paramount for Sartre. For his conception of atheistic existentialism suggests that we are not only free from essence, we are free from any external definition and hence from any source of our own existence who or which might have determined that essence and given it to us. For Sartre, as for Protagoras, “Man is the measure of all things.” Secondly, because of this, we might expect Sartre to argue that *only* existentialism could possibly be a humanism, and furthermore that only an *atheistic* existentialism could be a legitimate humanism. Any theism and particularly one which, as Christianity and Judaism both do, claims that God creates the world and human beings, would render human existence relative to the existence of a divine being. While Sartre doesn’t say so in this essay, it seems he must ultimately conclude that Christian existentialism is a contradiction in terms.

### *C. Structuralism and Marxism*

Many might presume that humanism survives the destruction of metaphysics, and that humanism makes sense after, say, religion and metaphysics together have been debunked. Here Hobbes, Nietzsche, Sartre, or even Kant, though he remained religious, might be mentioned. Now if metaphysics is tinged with an air of naivete after Kant, humanism,

secular and otherwise, might seem just as naïve today. The Enlightenment presumption that humanism might be a meaningful category despite the loss of religion and metaphysics can no longer be taken as axiomatic.

Two strands of thought come to mind here, Marxism and Structuralism. Marx himself would be definitively post-religious humanist, yet his analysis of ideology begins the process of challenging the significance of humanity as a unique being among the world of beings. The early Marx argues that Capitalism has destroyed the meaning of human being, that for capital the worker is only capital, a certain quantity of material production. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, it is specifically because human beings are beings which have some sort of worth (not defined by Marx as such), that Capitalism has committed an evil in destroying human being and human society. Like Sartre, Marx finds religion to be at odds with a properly humanist conception of human being, and like Sartre, he defines this human being in terms of freedom.<sup>2</sup> But Marx' also defines intellectual production as derivative of material production in *The Communist Manifesto*. This claim has often been taken to mean that human beings are determined by material structures; they are not really free to determine the meaning of their own being. Both Marx and Sartre dance on a tightrope between the necessity of certain material and social factors which determine our choices (If I choose to marry, I choose it for my whole society),<sup>3</sup> and their own suggested emphasis on the freedom of human nature.

Subsequently, structuralism and the social sciences more broadly point to certain social institutions and entities which shape the field of choices which an individual encounters. On some accounts, the being of human beings would be subject to determining factors and laws, just like any other type of scientifically observable phenomena. Structuralism and the social sciences raise the question whether human

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<sup>2</sup> Here I am referring to the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* for humanism, and to the *Dissertation* for the definition of humanism in terms of freedom. From the *Dissertation* I am specifically thinking of the famous lengthy footnote which emphasizes the choice Themistocles makes.

<sup>3</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, claims that if I choose marriage, I choose it for my whole society. As in the Marxian footnote, we human beings have the freedom to shape our society. At the same time, we shape a society which then presents certain choices to us as human, social beings.



beings and even and specifically human reason, are really so separated from material conditions (Hobbesian desires, Freudian drives, Marxian economic laws) or other social factors as we might like to think. There is a strand of thought which runs through Marxism, in the description of material and economic laws of history, and structuralism, the social sciences, and psychology, which challenges either the romantic or the Hegelian notion of the self, which gives itself its own existence, as well as the Thomistic-Aristotelian notion of a uniquely rational nature.

#### *D. Question and Thesis*

This brings us to the question of whether it is possible to sketch a post-post-structuralist conception of humanism. Of course none of the above structuralism/ post-structuralism/ post-post-structuralism refers to a “turn” which we are compelled to accept. Still, both structuralism and post-structuralism are a significant part of the present-day philosophical landscape, and I would submit that, whatever portions of these schemas we do or do not accept, it is worthwhile to be in philosophical dialogue with them.

Levinas is a unique figure in the post-structuralist world. One significant reason is that he is a religious thinker, and remains a religious observer in a traditional sense. Levinas is Jewish, as are Sartre, Camus, and Derrida, but unlike these other thinkers Levinas ran a Hebrew school, said daily prayers, and lectured on the Torah regularly. He did not distance himself from his own religious tradition or suggest a naivete or silliness to a belief in God.<sup>4</sup> He does, indeed, criticize certain overly simplistic conceptions of the deity and suggest deeper, more authentic ways of understanding God, and he does at times refer to “atheism” as part of that authentic conception of God, but Levinas begins and ends and remains throughout an unapologetic, unembarrassed, religious thinker.

If Sartre suggests that Christian existentialism produces an entirely different type of existentialism than does atheist existentialism, we might ask the same question about humanism, and ultimately about metaphysics. If Levinas is a uniquely religious post-structuralist thinker, would his conception of humanism differ from other post-

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<sup>4</sup> In this characterization I follow the biography by \*\*\*

structuralist accounts. I think it does, and I think it does specifically for this reason. That is, Levinas conception of humanism and metaphysics is different from that of Derrida or of other post-structuralists specifically because his religious observance is different from those other thinkers. It does not follow from this contention, however, that his metaphysics or his humanism is or requires a fideism. Whether it is possible to sketch a post-structuralist humanism from a non-religious perspective is a question we cannot address from a Levinasian perspective. Whether it is possible to offer a secular version of a Levinasian humanism is another question which we will leave to one side for the purposes of this paper. Levinas' own conception is rooted in Levinas' religiosity, and I would argue that his version of humanism is inextricably linked to that. Hence the sketch of his humanism will proceed from that ground, and will not raise the question of compatible secular accounts.

My thesis in this paper will be that Levinas claim that "ethics is first philosophy" is rightly to be understood not as the supersession of philosophy by "ethical" concerns, but rather as a philosophical and specifically metaphysical claim. So rather than intending that metaphysics be supplanted by ethics, in the way that we might say that modernity replaces ontology with epistemology, Levinas suggests that ethics is metaphysics, that ethics is the ground and the source of philosophy. Ethics is first philosophy. That is, Levinas agrees with Plato in arguing that "the Good" is the primordial transcendental, rather than "Being" or "the True," or the Thomistic God. But unlike Plato, whose "Good" is a universal good, precedent to and independent from human participation in it or our reaction to it or assessment of it, Levinas' conception of the good, or Levinasian ethics, cannot be understood outside of human being.

## *II. Levinasian Metaphysics*

### *A. Ethics is first philosophy*

Levinas' claim that ethics is first philosophy is his philosophical contribution. This claim, in the context of Levinas' writing *is* philosophy, and it *is* metaphysics. This is not

always apparent in the reading of Levinas. First of all, the suggestion might sound as if it were an abdication of philosophical rigor and philosophical themes in favor of edification. Human beings and their suffering, as in some versions of liberation theology, are more important than doctrine or metaphysics. While one might clearly draw an edifying application from Levinas' body of work, to interpret Levinas' analysis of my responsibility before the "face of the Other" in this fashion is to miss the entire philosophical effort for which he has spent his life. His purpose in articulating an ethics as first philosophy is primarily philosophical, not edification.

A second pitfall could lead us to fail to appreciate the philosophical rigor of the Levinasian enterprise: his language and his style of writing. In that Levinas offers a thorough critique of the western tradition of philosophy as thinking of totality, to which he contrasts his own suggested language of infinity and the eschatology of messianic peace, his text resists typical conceptual procedures and definitions. This leads many to reject his writings rather quickly, almost a priori, as non-philosophical or anti-philosophical. This rejection, while perhaps understandable, is unfortunate and erroneous. However, serious readers of Levinas also conclude that Levinas' text fails to offer the type of rigor and conclusive argument which philosophical discourse typically requires.

To cite one example, Michele Saracino has suggested the Levinas "neither has a well-defined method nor a structured anthropology.... Levinas' weakness, in terms of his ambiguous notions of freedom, agency, and justice and his lack of method, are indicative of his descriptive rather than explanatory anthropology."<sup>5</sup> Sinan Kadir Celik approves this diagnosis and extends it, claiming that "Levinas seems to leave the enigmatic concepts like "infinity," "insomnia," and "transcendence," etc. without clearly defining them.... Accordingly, his concepts can really be treated as completely bizarre or highly abstract."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Michele Saracino, *On Being Human: A Conversation with Lonergan and Levinas* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003), p. 207, quoted in Celik, below, p. 278.

<sup>6</sup> Sinan Kadir Celik, "Traces left by Levinas: Is 'Humanism of the other' possible?" [in A-T Tymieniecka, ed., *Analecta Husserliana XCIII*, (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2007): 269-282], p. 278.

This is incorrect. There is a decisive and explicit method to Levinas' argument, and the terms noted above do have specific meanings and definitions which are articulated in the text. Certainly his prose can be enigmatic, his language is descriptive, and the meaning of the terms is often polyvalent, imbued with tension, and highly complex. But it is simply incorrect to claim that he does not define them or that he has no well-defined method. These mistakes lead to the oft-believed misperception that Levinas is a religious thinker or a preacher of an edifying challenge, rather than a philosopher. So Celik concludes: "there is no way for Levinas [to argue], except from praying for us to share his pathos and believe in his 'humanism of the other'."<sup>7</sup> However we might assess the value of Levinas' philosophical argument, I must flatly disagree with this conclusion.

We are familiar with the Levinasian dictum which insists that subjectivity always occurs in relation to an other, and is founded upon this relation to an other truly other without losing its own subjectivity in the relation. Levinas presents subjectivity as key to ethics as first philosophy and subjectivity is presented "as welcoming the Other, as hospitality." Whatever difficulties might persist with this language, it is my point of emphasis here to note that the language points toward a thorough re-structuring of our most basic philosophical assumptions, specifically as philosophy and as metaphysics. Ethics and ethical relations are the basis of humanism, the basis of metaphysical transcendence, and the basis of human subjectivity. Ethics is the key to a proper understanding of metaphysical transcendence: Quoting Levinas, "The traditional opposition between theory and practice will disappear before the metaphysical transcendence by which a relation with the absolutely other, or truth, is established, and of which ethics is the royal road." (p. 29).

That is, ethics *IS* first philosophy. Levinasian ethics as alterity is not bleeding-heart liberalism, nor is it edification. Hospitality does not point us toward the welfare state or the welfare state ideology. Rather, the explication of hospitality and of our responsibility for the other is an articulation *of first philosophy. Philosophy itself* finds truth only outside of, beyond, the totality which would be made up of schematic definitions and of pieces within the whole. Alterity is not structuralism; Alterity is not

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<sup>7</sup> Celik, "Traces," p. 281.

intersubjectivity. Alterity is the ultimate ground of the being which would be specifically human being. The being of the being for whom being is a concern is not to be found in her care for herself or in her facing her own death, it is, rather, to be found in her being always already in a relation to another.

### ***B. Levinasian Humanism.***

Levinas is not typically considered a humanist thinker. In that he is typically classified as a postmodernist, and in that he accepts too much of what we might call “modern anti-humanism,” he aligns poorly with humanism, whether Christian or secular. The tradition of post-Kantian critique, first of metaphysics and then of humanism itself, running though perhaps Nietzsche, Marx, Freud and Heidegger,<sup>8</sup> is not one which Levinas dismisses or repudiates, but rather is a decisive tradition shaping his philosophical thought. However, it is likewise problematic to align Levinas with that critique or with that list of critics.<sup>9</sup>

In an essay entitled “Humanism and An-Archy,” Levinas refuses to espouse or to reject “modern anti-humanism;” he clearly offers both agreement and criticism. He writes:

Modern anti-humanism is undoubtedly right in not finding in man taken as individual of a genus or an ontological reason... a privilege that makes him the aim of reality....

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<sup>8</sup> This characterization and list comes from Peter Atterton’s essay, “Levinas’s skeptical Critique of Metaphysics and Anti-Humanism, *Philosophy Today*, 41:4 (Winter 1997): 495.

<sup>9</sup> Atterton, “Levinas’s skeptical critique,” offers the thesis that Levinas’ stance with respect to this tradition of the end of metaphysics and humanism is ambiguous, and cannot be articulated as a simple agreement or disagreement. I agree with this conclusion, and the quotations I offer here from Levinas’ essay will illustrate the same conclusion.

Modern anti-humanism may be wrong in not finding for man, lost in history and in order, the trace of this pre-historic an-archic saying.<sup>10</sup>

Levinas rejects the anthropocentrism found in a traditional conception of Christian (Levinas calls this “Greek”) metaphysics, such as the Thomistic description of man as the highest of the earthly, created beings, while simultaneously rejecting the reduction of humanity to mere nature or to structures given a priori. Levinas’ conception of subjectivity is one which follows neither the Aristotelian-Thomistic conception of man as an end in itself, nor the reduction of human being to nature or to prototypical categories, whether Hegelian or structuralist. Quoting again from “Humanism and An-Archy,”

Subjectivity, the setting up of intelligible structures, would have no internal finality. We would witness the ruin of the myth of man as end in himself, giving way to the appearance of an order that is neither human nor inhuman, ordained of course through man and the civilizations he produces, but ordaining itself, in the last analysis, by the appropriately rational force of the dialectic or logico-formal system. A non-human order, suited to the name that is anonymity itself: matter.<sup>11</sup>

The critique of anthropocentrism, which dislodges “man” from the center of the universe, cannot be rescinded. Still, Levinas likewise refuses to follow this out to a destruction of the humanity of human beings, the reduction of human existence to mere anonymity or to materiality. Both I and my Other are far too important to Levinas to allow this type of reduction. “Humanism and An-Archy” refers to the primordially of my speech and my responsibility for the Other: primordially in the sense of the Greek arche. I precede the arche, I am the arche, I dwell in a world that has no arche, and the arche only arises when both I and an Other are able to speak to each other. Though on different grounds, Levinas’ text may be even more anthropocentric than the classical anthropocentric axiom

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<sup>10</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Humanism and An-Archy,” in *Humanism of the Other*, trans., Nidra Poller (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003; French, 1972), pp. 56, 57, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Levinas, “Humanism,” p. 48.

it replaces. Levinas concludes this essay with strong language pointing to the unique position of man in the universe:

From a responsibility even more ancient than the *conatus* of substance, more ancient than the beginning and the principle, from the anarchic, the ego returned to self, responsible for Others, hostage of everyone, that is, substituted for everyone by its very non-interchangeability, hostage of all the others who, precisely *others*, do not belong to the same genus as the ego because I am responsible for them without concerning myself about their responsibility for me because I am, in the last analysis and from the start, even responsible for that, the ego, I; I am man holding up the universe “full of all things.”<sup>12</sup>

### *C. Levinasian Metaphysics*

To raise the question of the *arche* is to become as metaphysical as one can possibly be. Levinas' writings are always thoroughly metaphysical in nature, from the early text, *Existence and Existents*, to the mature magnum opus, *Totality and Infinity*, and the later reworking of his philosophy in *Otherwise than Being*, the character of being itself and the being of human beings is the primary topic of Levinas' powerful and probing exposition. But while Levinas is concerned with the being of being, he is not to be understood in classical metaphysical conceptions, which he opposes directly and unflinchingly. *Totality and Infinity* is “An Essay on Exteriority,” which opposes itself to the history of philosophy as the thinking of totality.

Levinasian subjectivity would be founded upon the idea of infinity, which is the ultimate event of being. There must be, for Levinas, an outburst of exteriority. To be a subject is only possible where there is the possibility of the surd. A subject in a totality, Hegelian or structuralist, is merely a piece of the puzzle, a cog in the wheel, an individual who follows certain pre-scribed roles or rituals. The purpose and the question of Totality

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<sup>12</sup> Levinas, “Humanism,” p. 57.

and Infinity, Levinas' most coherent statement of his critique of the western philosophical tradition, is to reject the notion of totality which, Levinas claims, is prevalent in western philosophy from Parmenides and Plato through Hegel and Husserl.

Do the particular beings yield their truth in a Whole in which their exteriority vanishes? Or, on the contrary, is the ultimate event of being enacted in the outburst of this exteriority? Our initial question now assumes this form.

This book then does present itself as a defense of subjectivity, but it will apprehend the subjectivity not at the level of its purely egoist protestation against totality, nor in its anguish before death, but as founded in the idea of infinity (p. 26).

This is sweeping language and a radical, fundamental critique. Levinas wants to replace the notion of totality with a thinking of infinity, the ontology of war with an eschatology of messianic peace, the interiority and mimesis of rationalism with exteriority, and the egoist exploration of the cogito (Cartesian, Hegelian, Husserlian) with hospitality and responsibility for the other. I have insisted above and maintain that the project is fundamentally philosophical and metaphysical, but there can be no doubt, at the same time, that it opposes most of the language and framework within which philosophy and metaphysics have been considered heretofore.

This task, then, is rather ambitious and will doubtless exceed my reach in this paper. But perhaps a couple of indications which might be productive can be offered. I have claimed that there are definitions of the key terms in the Levinasian text, so perhaps we should examine a couple of those here. The idea of infinity is the key idea which he opposes to the history of totality, so I will explicate that idea first, and his conception of metaphysics, in opposition to ontology, second.



## *Infinity*

The central argument of *Totality and Infinity* is that the history of philosophy has been predominantly (there are exceptions) a history of the dominance of the idea of totality. “The meaning of individuals is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to to bring forth its objective meaning.” (TI, 22). While Levinas’ own philosophy is shaped against the totality of the Husserlian ego, the descriptions of the sweep of history and its lack of regard for the individual bring Hegel directly to mind. Levinas suggests an “eschatology of messianic peace,” which would contrast with the thinking of totality. Eschatology does not, in his description, refer to a point in time after the completion of time, rather “eschatology institutes a relation with being beyond the totality or beyond history, and not with being beyond the past and the present” (TI, 22). Eschatology points beyond totality to something not contained in the totality, a surplus, an excess, exteriority. It points to the notion of infinity:

It is a relationship with a surplus always exterior to the totality, as though the objective totality did not fill out the true measure of being, as though another concept, the concept of infinity, were needed to express this transcendence with regard to totality, non-encompassable within a totality and as primordial as totality (TI, p. 23).

Levinas speaks of “the idea of infinity,” which is not a concept, but rather “a revelation... a positing of its idea in me” (TI, 26). “Infinity” in the Levinasian sense is neither the incessant mathematical progression which Hegel discounts nor the Hegelian “notion forged by a subjectivity to reflect the case of an entity encountering on the outside nothing that limits it” (TI, 26). Rather, Levinas claims that “[t]he idea of infinity is the mode of being, the *infiniton*, of infinity.” (TI, 26). What is that, exactly? It is exteriority, it is the actuality, rather difficult to justify on grounds of a logic of consistency, but nonetheless determinative and ubiquitous in human experience, of my own experience of an other being which remains my experience. Hegelian history would

make of my experience a universal progression about which I may or may not care about, with which I may not agree, and of which I may not even be aware. But Levinasian experience is uniquely mine, and as such experiences an other as truly other, not merely as an object of my comprehension or a moment of my act of awareness. In the experience of an other who remains other, I experience what I cannot contain, and remain through that experience separated from that which I experience. I am I and the Other is the Other. Hence, subjectivity consummates the idea of infinity in my own self not as knowledge or as self-consciousness, but rather as hospitality, as welcoming the Other (TI, 27). Infinity is the impossible situation, inexplicable on Hegelian or on Husserlian schemata, that I experience an Other who remains other while remaining myself separated. The infinitude of infinity “is produced in the improbable feat whereby a separated being fixed in its identity, the same, the I, nonetheless contains in itself what it can neither contain nor receive solely by virtue of its own identity” (TI, pp. 26-27).

### *Metaphysics*

Infinity is a separation, the pluralistic non-ontology which allows me to be who I am outside of the universality of history or being, and which, correspondingly allows me to recognize an Other as likewise other. This separation is metaphysics. Metaphysics is contrasted with ontology, the ontology of war, the ontology of the same.

Metaphysics, the relation with exteriority, that is, with superiority, indicates, on the contrary, that the relation between the finite and the infinite does not consist in the finite being absorbed in what faces him, but in remaining in his own being, maintaining himself there, acting here below (TI, 292).

Metaphysics finds its origin in a desire for something which exceeds my own self. Desire propels me outward, toward the exterior, toward an other, and ultimately toward the transcendent and toward infinity. “The metaphysical desire tends toward something else entirely, toward the absolutely other.” (TI, 33). Ultimately, desire leads, not in the

Hegelian sense to something which is an object for me and for my consumption, but to the breach of totality, toward transcendence.

Whereas Hegelian metaphysics, as well as Platonic metaphysics for that matter, involve the completion of a circle of totality, Levinas defines metaphysics as the impossibility of this type of complete grasp. "Ontology" is the term Levinas gives to "theory as comprehension of beings," (TI, 42) and with this definition he opposes himself to Heidegger and to the tradition of metaphysics simultaneously. "Metaphysics," for Levinas, "precedes ontology" (TI, 42). Ontology would be the language of totality, of freedom, of mastery and of war: my mastery not only of nature, in Bacon's sense, but also of history after Hegel, and even my domination of an other race in the sense of national socialism, which always hovers over Levinas' critique of Heidegger. "Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being" (TI, 43).

Levinasian metaphysics is the opposite of "ontology." Rather than my mastery of the totality, metaphysics is the realization that there is real alterity, that the other is not contained in my idea of him, that I am not alone in the world. Metaphysics is not the freedom of a solitary consciousness (be that the entirety of history or a universal spirit) who can have his say without opposition; metaphysics, contrariwise, is the realization that my freedom encounters an Other who is truly other. That my spontaneity is called into question by an Other whom I cannot possess. "Beyond theory and ontology" (TI, 43), beyond Socratic mimesis wherein I already contain the whole world of ideas in my soul, beyond any completed system of rationality as a complete disjunct of ideas, *metaphysics is ethics*. It is the recognition that "being is inherently plural," that exceeds my rationalist grasp. "We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge" (TI, 43).

### *III. Conclusion*

What does it mean, then, to suggest that ethics is first philosophy, if, as I have claimed, this does not mean that we sacrifice philosophical reason for ethical application. If we follow the Platonic suggestion from the middle books of the *Republic* that knowledge of the Good is the ultimate goal of inquiry, and further that it is this knowledge which illuminates other knowledge, then for Plato metaphysics would not be first and preeminently the study of being qua being; metaphysics would be first and ultimately the study of the Good.

Now Levinas is not a Platonic essentialist, he is a twentieth-century phenomenologist in the tradition of Husserl and Heidegger. And in a more Heideggerean than Husserlian vein, he understands phenomenological inquiry to require investigation into the precisely human kind of being which human experience evinces. So Levinasian metaphysics would proceed from human being in the world, not from being itself or from objectivity in a scientific or modern sense. But Levinas' conception of human being is not defined in scientific or structuralist terminology either. So he is neither a classical metaphysician in the pre-Cartesian sense, nor an Enlightenment humanist in the modern sense. He is a definitively and deliberately post-Heideggerean, post-structuralist philosopher, who offers a conception of metaphysics as humanism as ethics. And the Levinasian suggestion for post-structuralist metaphysics and post-structuralist philosophizing begins with human experience and with human experience as ethics and as receptivity to an other human being. As such, the suggestion that ethics is first philosophy represents, I would submit, not the end of metaphysics as the locus of philosophical rigor and supra-factual reasoning, but rather an avenue for considering anew the meaning of metaphysics and of philosophical reason in a post-metaphysical age.

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## Virtue Ethics and Metaphysics in Plato's *Republic*

Contemporary virtue ethics, like its ancient ancestor, is based on claims about the good life. However, in the modern version, these claims usually lack any grounding in metaphysics. Rather, virtue ethics tends to rest on hopeful appeals to common intuitions about good ways to live.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I wish to show one way in which Plato's metaphysical theory is used to surprising advantage in a particular area of the moral life. Passion and desire are often the sources of delusion in immoral actions. It is not just that one's reasons for committing the act prove wrong but that they come to seem illusory. We say that one's reasoning was clouded because the pleasure so ardently desired was exaggerated in the anticipation. Then, in comparison with the consequences of the act, the anticipated pleasure is so insubstantial that its anticipation seems like a dissipated dream. The lesson, then, is that virtue requires an insight that pierces these shadows and images in order to avoid or dismiss illusions caused by desire. In the *Republic* we find that this sort of insight is a result of knowing the real as it is.

The *Republic* has a fundamental structural oddity. In Book 4, Socrates presents the preliminary account of virtue in the soul. Then, in the central books, he presents the outline of the metaphysical and epistemological theory that is meant to complete the account of virtue (504a-e). However, at that point in the dialogue, the relation between the account of virtue and the theory is left hanging.<sup>2</sup> After all, such an important development as the theory of forms might be supposed to have something to do with the other theoretical advance, the account of virtues. Yet one waits impatiently while Socrates sketches an account of the way the knowledge of the forms equips the philosophers to become rulers in the city (484b ff). Of course, adapting the theory of the

central books to the account of virtue presents several problems, not the least of which involves moral psychology. The knowledge of the real is not relevant to the lower two parts—spirit and appetite—because they cannot share in it.<sup>3</sup> Socrates introduces appetite as non-rational, *alogiston* (439d). This description implies that it is unable to calculate or reason—to make distinctions or draw conclusions—precisely what is needed to share in the knowledge of the real; the spirit is no better equipped.

Then, just at the point where one might despair altogether, at the end of Book 9, Socrates sketches out the relation between knowledge of the forms and virtue. The passage in question is the three-part contest between the philosophical and tyrannical souls to decide which is the happiest. The last two of the three contests extends the theoretical framework of the dialogue with a new account of desire and pleasure. Socrates introduces the idea that each part of the soul has its particular type of desire, the satisfaction of which is its particular type of pleasure (580d). Of particular importance for us is his characterization of the pleasure of reason as that of knowing what is true as it is (*tên tou eidenai talêthes hope(i) exei*) (581d-e) as well as that of contemplating being (*tês de tou ontos theas*) (582d). He will further explain this pleasure and enhance its role in the next section of his argument.

In the next contest, Socrates begins by claiming that pleasures, other than those of the intelligence (*tou phronimou*), are not fully true, pure, but are shadow-painted (*eskiagraphêmenê*) (583b). In what follows he explains how pleasures can be shadow-painted, not pure, and not fully true. Distinguishing between pain, pleasure, and the neutral state or calm (*hêsuchia*) between the two, he argues that the calm state is distinct from pleasure and pain. The reason is that pleasures and pains are motions (later we

learn that pleasure is a filling); the calm is obviously not motion, but the cessation of motion. However, in some circumstances, people can view the calm as pleasurable or painful. While the reader might be tempted to think the illusion is about a present state of calm that is taken to be pleasant, the context implies that this type of illusion is an expectation of pleasure. When he describes these illusions, Socrates refers to beliefs about pleasure. He says that sick men say (*legousin*) that nothing is sweeter than health, that they praise (*egkômiazousin*) freedom from pain as the highest pleasure (583c-d). Later he says that it cannot be right to think (*hêgeisthai*) the absence of pain is pleasure (584a), that those escaping pain intensely believe (*oiontai*) that they are approaching pleasure and fulfillment (585a). Socrates calls this kind of illusion a kind of sorcery (*goêteia*).<sup>4</sup>

By his next move, Socrates underlines that this illusion is an expectation of pleasure that ends in its absence. He claims that Glaucon might be tempted to think that pleasure is by nature release from pain. The idea of release from pain is ambiguous between the state of having been released from pain and the process of being released from pain.<sup>5</sup> Does Socrates mean to show Glaucon that pleasure is not by nature the state of having been released from pain or that pleasure is not by nature a process of release from pain? The first alternative is not plausible because both Socrates and Glaucon have already agreed that the state of having been released from pain is neither a pleasure nor a pain. So there is no need to convince Glaucon of this idea.<sup>6</sup> Finally, he has just said that pleasure and pain are motions, i.e., kinds of process. Then, if pleasure is a process and if he thinks it is by nature release from pain, Glaucon would think that it is by nature a process of release from pain. We should conclude, then, that this argument means to

counter Glaucon's idea that pleasure is by nature a process of release from pain.<sup>7</sup> But what of their preceding argument would have led Glaucon to believe that pleasure is by nature a process of release from pain? If Glaucon believed that the process is by nature one that ends in the neutral state, he might think that pleasure is by nature a process of release from pain. If so, he has clearly taken seriously Socrates' argument that those who expect pleasure at the end of this process will not experience pleasure. Pleasure is just the process of getting rid of pain that ends in the neutral state.

Finally, to counter Glaucon's mistake that pleasure is by nature the process of release from pain, Socrates cites the pleasure of smell, which is not preceded by pain. In talking about what pleasure is by nature, Socrates seems to have two mistakes in mind: (a) pleasure just is a process of release from pain and (b) all pleasure includes a process of release from pain. When he cites the pleasure of smell he has clearly shown (b) to be false. His explicit conclusion is that we should not believe that pure pleasure, *sc.* pleasure not preceded by pain, is (a process of) release from pain. But he seems also to think that he has shown (a) to be false because next he concedes that the most and greatest bodily occurrences called pleasures are *a kind of* release from pain (*lupôn tines apallagai*) (584b-c). The claim seems to be that these bodily pleasures are not just a process of release from pain, i.e., they are pleasures; thus (a) is false. Nevertheless, they are still a kind of process of release from pain. A similar idea is found in the *Gorgias* where bodily pleasure is a simultaneous release from the pain of desire (496c-497d).<sup>8</sup> If so, we can understand how these pleasures are shadow-painted and not pure. Because they are mixed with pain they are like painting which achieves its affect by a contrast between light and dark—where light is the analogue of pleasure and dark is that of pain.<sup>9</sup>



In turn, they are not pure pleasures because they are mixed with their opposite, pain; the mixture causes distortion. How these pleasures are not fully true awaits a further development in this passage.

Next Socrates puts together what he has said about false expectations with the idea that bodily pleasure is mixed with pain. He says that, in being a kind of release from pain, these bodily pleasures resemble anticipatory pleasures and pains (*proêsthêseis te kai prolupêseis*), i.e., pleasures or pains taken in some future pleasant state of affairs. To explain this notion, he uses a spatial analogy that depends on the idea that there is in nature an up, down, and middle. The person who had no experience of the true “up” would think, upon arriving at the middle, that he had ascended to the upper region. Just so, those who have no experience of truth and reality think that, when they are going from pain to the neutral state, they are approaching pleasure—because they have no experience of pleasure (584d-585a). That they have no experience of pleasure means that they lack an understanding of the full range of pleasure. In a few lines we will learn that the upper region is the analogue of pure pleasure (586a). So these inexperienced people do not have first hand experience of pleasure unmixed with pain. While the pain causes them to anticipate pleasure, the lack of experience causes them to mistake the kind of pleasure that they anticipate. According to the spatial analogy, they are like those who think they are arriving at the upper region. Since the analogue of the upper region is pure pleasure, they seem to think they are approaching pure pleasure—just as those approaching the mid-region think they are arriving at the upper-region. This anticipation makes sense if we see bodily pleasure as a process mixed with pain. Ignorant of pure

pleasure, one might think that the cessation of the process would result in the cessation of pain only, leaving unmixed pleasure.

In the next section, the account takes a significantly different tack, into the metaphysics of the central books. Hunger and thirst are emptinesses of the body and ignorance and folly are emptinesses of the soul. Food fills the former and wisdom the latter. The truest filling is either with what is less real or with what is more real (*tou mallon ontos*). To explain, he asks which class of things participates more in pure being (*katharas ousias*)—relish, drink, meat, and all food or true opinion, knowledge, and intelligence (585b-c). Claiming that what clings to what is the same always, to immortality, and to truth is itself of this type and comes to be in something of this type is more real, he concludes that the truest filling is with what is more real (*auto mallon on*). Since true opinion, knowledge, and intelligence fit the description of what is more real, filling the soul with them is the more real filling. Finally, since being filled with what is appropriate to our nature is pleasure:

(R1) That which is more filled with things that are more enjoys more really and truly a true pleasure, while that which partakes of things that are less is less truly and surely filled and partakes of a less trustworthy and less true pleasure (585d-586a).<sup>10</sup>

So true pleasure is an ontological—not an epistemological—notion; the pleasure is true in that it conforms to a standard for pleasure, i.e., a more real filling of what is more real.

Then Socrates returns to the spatial analogy in order to correlate the metaphysical distinctions with the account he has just given of the illusion of pleasure. He matches the true pleasures of the soul with the pleasures of the upper region and the less true pleasures of the body with the pleasures of the lower region (585b-586b).<sup>11</sup> The

consequence of putting bodily pleasure in the lower region is that the less true pleasures of the body—those mixed with pain—are susceptible to illusion, i.e., they are shadow-painted.

The next section focuses on a particularly potent such illusion. Turning darkly dramatic, the account focuses on people who have no experience of wisdom and virtue and devote themselves to a life of feasting. Their experience of pleasure is limited to ascending to the mid-region—the place of illusions. They have never been filled with the real nor tasted stable and pure pleasure. These he describes as beast-like in their pursuit of food and sex, bending over their banquet tables like grazing cattle. But then his description turns to their violent behavior. Butting with horns and hooves of iron, they kill one another in their attempt to have more than their share (*pleonexia*) of these pleasures. Their outrageous behavior is driven by insatiable appetite (*diaplêstian*) because, he says, they are filling what is unsound and unreal with what is unreal. Of course, they do not know that they are filling what is unsound and unreal with what is unreal. Rather, they are beguiled by pleasures that are exaggerated by mixture with pain.

(R2) Is it not necessary for them to live with pleasures (*hêdonais*) mixed with pains (*lupais*), phantoms (*eidôlois*) of true pleasure and shadow-painted (*eskiagraphêmenais*), colored by being next to one another, so that they appear intense and engender mad erotic passions (*erôtas ... luttôntas*) for themselves in the foolish and are fought over, just as the phantom (*eidolon*) of Helen, according to Stesichorus, was fought over by those at Troy, through ignorance of the truth? (586a-c).

Socrates has elevated a particularly strong illusion of pleasure—shadow-painted by sharp contrast between pleasure and pain—into the dramatic center of attention. What is developed in this account is the link between a specific psychological state—insatiability—and *pleonexia*, violently grasping for more than their share of food and sex.<sup>12</sup> The link is the phantom of true pleasure.<sup>13</sup>

Since the fundamental illusion in this passage is a false expectation of pleasure, the intense seeming mixture of pleasure and pain—the phantom of true pleasure—creates in the beast-like people an expectation that, when the process of filling the desire ceases, they will experience something that appears to them, under some guise, to be true pleasure. However, it does not matter what the content of their expectation actually is, i.e., what they think true pleasure is; they will be disappointed because what follows the cessation of filling desire is calm, the neutral state. Given their expectation, the experience would have to be disappointing. Yet the strength of the phantom is such that, when the desire for true pleasure is not fulfilled, the expectation is not killed. The failure to achieve true pleasure only leads the beast-like to try harder, thinking that more food and sex will finally fulfill their desire for what they think of as true pleasure.

So far we have seen how the lack of the knowledge of the real has deleterious effects in the soul. Next, Socrates shows how having this knowledge brings with it virtue. Here, Socrates at last fills the lacuna that, up until this point, has left the account of virtues detached from the metaphysical and epistemological theory. First of all, he modifies the earlier account of wisdom as reason's ruling with knowledge of what is beneficial for the parts to include what he has just said about pleasure (442c). Referring to the desires of the gain-loving part of the soul (his general way of referring to the bodily

desires for food, drink, and sex) and of the victory-loving part, i.e., the spirited part, he says:

(R3) ... these desires, following knowledge and reason (*tê(i) epistêmê(i) kai logô(i) hepomenai*) and, in conjunction with them, pursuing (*diôkousai*) those pleasures that the wise part (*to phronimon*) prescribes, would attain (*lambanôsi*) (them) and will receive the truest pleasures insofar as they can receive true pleasures, since they are following the truth. These are also the pleasures proper for them if the best for each of them is the most proper (586d-e).<sup>14</sup>

While the account in Book 4 does not specify what is beneficial for the parts, (R3) specifies what is best for each as “the truest pleasures insofar as they can receive true pleasure.” This carefully constructed phrase obviously depends on the distinction between pleasures previously introduced. Since, in the previous part of this passage, knowledge is knowledge of the real—i.e., filling the emptiness of the soul with the real—we should conclude that (R3) is referring to the same knowledge. In turn, since knowledge of the real is true pleasure, it implies knowing the difference between true and less true pleasure. In the soul which knows this distinction, the phantom of true pleasure would be unbelievable because exposed as an illusion. Reason, guided by this knowledge, would countenance only pleasures that are not obscured by such illusions. In turn, bodily desires would pursue such pleasures, and thus receive “the truest pleasures insofar as they can receive true pleasure.” While these pleasures are true epistemologically in that they are unmixed with illusions, they are not true in the ontological sense in that they are bodily. They are epistemologically true in a category of ontologically less true pleasures.

Socrates also modifies the definition of moderation and justice, introducing true and less true pleasures into the account.

(R4) Then, since the whole soul follows the wisdom-loving part and does not rebel against (*stasiázousês*) it, it belongs to each of the parts to do its own and to be just (*ta heautou prattein kai dikaiô(i) einai*), and, in particular, for each to enjoy its own pleasure (*tas hêdonas tas heautou*), the best for it, and the truest insofar as that is possible (586e-587a).

In Book 4, moderation is each part sharing in the belief that reason should rule and the other two not rebelling against (*stasiázôsin*) reason (442d). By contrast, (R4) shows that it is with respect to pleasure that the whole soul follows the wisdom-loving part and does not rebel against it. Next (R4) recalls the definition of justice in Book 4—when each part does its own with respect to ruling and being ruled (443d). However, in (R4), justice is doing one's own with respect to pleasure. The consequence is that the rule talked about in Book 4 is established by reason's controlling the pleasures of the non-rational parts. This it does by stripping their pleasures of illusion so that they are as true as possible. Reason thereby makes illusion-free, less true pleasure the only ones plausible for them.

This destructive impact on illusion is the burden of the spatial analogy at 584d. The analogy applies to the beast-like people and the plausibility of their expectations. The phantom of true pleasure is the analogue of the pleasure the inexperienced expect when they approach what is really the neutral state, i.e., mid-region. Like the inexperienced, the beast-like are susceptible to phantoms of true pleasure because they have no experience of the true pleasure of knowing the real; they have never ascended to the upper region. By contrast, the analogy implies that someone with this experience

would never be fooled into thinking that bodily pleasure—even the intense mixture of pleasure and pain—would end in true pleasure. Approaching the cessation of this mixture of pleasure and pain, she would expect the neutral state, the calm that is neither pleasure nor pain.<sup>15</sup>

In this passage from Book 9, we find a schema for solving the problem of the relation between the account of virtues in the soul and the metaphysics of the central books. The solution takes the indirect route of connecting the knowledge of the real with the non-rational parts of the soul by means of pleasure. The virtues amount to lucidity about pleasure that depends on knowing the difference between true pleasure and less true pleasure; it has three aspects. First, it recognizes that all pleasures, true and less true, end in the neutral state. Second, it exposes illusions about bodily pleasure. Third, it puts bodily pleasure in its proper place, so to speak. Vice in the soul is the rule by one of the non-rational parts, based on pretensions about the supreme value of the pleasure of that part. However, lucidity nullifies these pretensions by showing that their pleasures are less true than those of the rational part. One then does not expect from filling bodily desire anything more than a limited and not fully satisfying pleasure that ends in the neutral state. True pleasure is reserved for knowing the real, which happens on a higher plain.

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<sup>1</sup> Cp. the chapters on naturalism (Chap. 9 and 10) in Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> At 500c-d Socrates says that the philosopher will imitate the harmony of the forms and will bring order into his soul. However, he does not explain how the philosopher will imitate the forms—especially whether the imitation is automatic or whether it requires effort.

<sup>3</sup> This problem is another version of a more general one: how rational are the lower parts of the soul? According to one line of interpretation, appetite is capable of means-ends calculation with respect to fulfilling its various desires. In the light of these calculations, it can appreciate that reason knows better how to achieve satisfaction for it and can even form a second order desire to follow reason. Cp. Terence Irwin (*Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 218-222).

<sup>4</sup> This reading of the illusion in *Republic* 9 accords with a recurrent theme in the dialogues about illusory expectations of future pleasures. In the *Protagoras* Socrates relates another such illusion, but one based on a visual analogy. The same sized object appears larger when nearby and smaller when farther away. Socrates suggests that temporally closer pleasure, though of the same size as a temporally distant one, can seem bigger. The remedy that will render the appearance without effect is the measuring craft (356c-e). The visual analogy is also found in the *Philebus* (41d-42c). Since in both the analogue of distance is time, Socrates is talking about anticipating future pleasures (or pains) while being in a state of pleasure (or pain). Although the dimension of time is used in these three accounts of illusion, the *Protagoras* and *Philebus* differ from the *Republic*. In the first two, time alone seems to be the cause of the false expectation and the false expectation is about the relative size of the pleasure (or pain). Present pleasure just seems greater than future pain because it is closer in time while the pain is distant in



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time. However, in the *Republic*, not just time but the contrast with pain creates the illusion that there will be pleasure; but, in fact, there will be neither pleasure nor pain. No wonder, then, that Socrates calls this illusion sorcery (*goêteia*).

<sup>5</sup> Gosling and Taylor charge that the account of bodily pleasure in this entire passage is plagued by the failure “to distinguish escape from pain as the condition of having escaped, from escape as the process of escaping.” J.C.B. Gosling and C.W.W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) 114.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Socrates means something other than what he says, i.e., that pleasure is not by nature *the illusion created by* the cessation from pain. First of all, in claiming that pleasure and pain are motions, he implies that pleasure is not by nature illusory. Moreover, the subsequent argument is not about the illusion of pleasure.

<sup>7</sup> If we think of illness as a disruption of the harmony of one’s physical nature, as in the *Philebus*, the process of restoration would be pleasant (31b-32e; 43d-44a).

<sup>8</sup> While the idea that bodily pleasure is associated with release from pain is not explicitly asserted by Socrates in this passage, it is an idea that is found in the dialogue. When the account of bodily appetite (*epithumiai*) is introduced in Book 4, Socrates says the appetitive part (*epithumêtikon*) is associated with fillings and pleasures (*plêrôseôn kai hêdonôn*) (439d-e). Later in Books 8 and 9, Socrates makes the account of appetites more complex. First, he distinguishes between necessary and unnecessary appetites. The former are beneficial and cannot be gotten rid of; the latter are harmful and can be gotten rid of (558e-559a). Second, he distinguishes within unnecessary appetites a type called outlaw appetites—outrageous and anti-social desires for such things as sex with one’s mother, with animals, and even with gods, for shedding of blood, and for forbidden foods

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(571a-d). For most of us these appetites are awakened only in troubled sleep. One can avoid such troubled sleep if he leaves the appetitive part neither empty nor filled up, so that it is lulled to sleep and, not being in a state of pleasure or pain, does not disturb the better part of the soul (571e-572a). So in this passage, Socrates explicitly says that, when the bodily appetites are empty or in need, they are painful. Moreover, the idea that unfulfilled bodily appetite is painful is an important part of Socrates' account of the tyrannical soul. This chaotic personality is taken over by a tyrannical passion and its bodyguard of outlaw appetites. He is forced to consume more and more resources to satisfy these appetites—otherwise he will be afflicted with great travails (like the pangs of birth) and pains (574a). Even at that, the tyrannical soul is like the tyrannical city, which is filled with lamenting, groaning, wailing and pains. The soul is driven mad by appetites and passions (578a-b). The tyrannical man, then, is dominated by his appetites. But, paradoxically, the life given over to extravagant pleasure is filled with pain. The reason is that unfulfilled desires are painful. The intensity of the pleasure seems to be matched by the intensity of the pain of need.

<sup>9</sup> Plato refers to *skiagraphia* in the dialogues ten times—but without ever explaining the phenomenon. Literally the word means shadow-painting. What is important for Plato is that it creates an illusion. Scholars have offered different ways of understanding the phenomenon. E. Keuls (*Plato and Greek Painting* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978)) argues that *skiagraphia* “was a divisionist technique exploiting optical color fusion: patches of color contrasted sharply to the nearby viewer; but seemed to blend when observed from the appropriate distance (79).” As in pointalism, patches of contrasting color, put side by side, blend into a third color when seen from a distance. However, E. Pemberton (“A

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Note on Skiagraphia” *American Journal of Archaeology* 80 (1976): 82-84) argues that *skiagraphia* creates the illusion of depth through contrast of light and dark.

<sup>10</sup> I have modified the Grube-Reeve translation, 1193-4.

<sup>11</sup> The reader of the *Republic* will recognize that the spatial analogy, having been correlated with the ontological distinction between pleasures, is now analogous to the allegory of the cave in Book 7 (514a-516c). The cave represents objects outside the soul; the spatial analogy represents pleasures in the soul. The division between perceptual objects and forms is analogous to the division between less true and true pleasures. In the cave, the prisoner ascends from perceptual objects—i.e., the less real—with their images and shadows to forms—i.e., the fully real. In the soul, the philosopher ascends from bodily—i.e., less true—pleasures, with their susceptibility to illusion, to true pleasures. Like objects in the perceptual world, which have opposite qualities, less true pleasure is mixed with its opposite, pain. In both cases, the mixture is the source of illusion. In the cave, the prisoners watch shadows cast by artificial objects (515c). In the lower region of the soul, pleasure mixed with pain is shadow-painted, giving rise to illusions (583b; 586b-c). Outside the cave, knowledge of the real objects clarifies the shadows in the cave (520c-d). In the upper region of the soul, pleasure is pure; as we shall see, this purity clarifies the mixed nature of pleasure in the lower region and dissipates its illusions. But the description of pleasures as true and less true is not simply an analogy with the metaphysical distinctions of the central books of the *Republic*; true pleasure just is knowledge of the real.

<sup>12</sup> Like the theme of illusion of pleasure, the theme of insatiable appetite recurs in the dialogues. Earlier in the *Republic*, the tyrant, whose outrageous behavior is reminiscent

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of the beast-like, is driven by insatiable appetite (578a). In the *Gorgias*, undisciplined and insatiable appetites are compared to leaky jars (493a-494b). The idea of desires that cannot be satisfied clearly has an important role in explaining uncontrollable appetites; appetites become uncontrollable because they cannot be satisfied. However, in these passages, Socrates does not explain how desires become insatiable. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates compares a part of the soul, in the thoughtless and uninitiated, to a jar (*pithon*) because it is credulous and easy to persuade (*to pithanon kai peistikon*). In this part the desires (*epithumiai*) are like leaky jars because they are insatiable (*dia tēn aplēstian*). The credulity of this part of the soul seems to account for the insatiability of its desires, although Socrates does not explain the connection.

<sup>13</sup> In common usage, insatiable appetite is something like a gluttonous or morbid appetite. A gluttonous appetite is one that is never satisfied no matter how much one tries. Cf. Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 115-122. The superficial satisfaction of eating and drinking, e.g., cannot mask the continuing, underlying hunger and thirst. In a passage in the *Philebus*, Socrates describes a morbid appetite, associated with disease (46c-d). In this situation, there is an underlying pathological condition that affects the appetite. Attempts to satisfy the appetite do not change—or may even exacerbate—the underlying condition. Cf. D. Frede, *Platon Philebus* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997) 277-78. Drinking, e.g., does not quench the thirst of the fevered person and may make it worse. So we are to think that the beast-like people are driven by desires that are like gluttonous or morbid appetites

<sup>14</sup> My translation.

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<sup>15</sup> At the end of Book 9, Socrates sums up the account of moral psychology in the metaphor of the three-part man. The many headed beast represents the appetitive part; a lion, the spirit; and a man, reason. With respect to the appetites, reason is like a farmer; the tame appetites it nourishes and domesticates and the wild it does not allow to grow (588c-589b). One way to not allow a wild appetite to grow would be to rob its object of credibility. Clearly the mad erotic passion is a wild appetite. If the prospect of true pleasure from an intense mixture of bodily pleasure and pain is not believable, the appetitive disposition to desire such a thing is not possible.

## On the Several Modes of Being in Plato

A widely accepted view of Plato's metaphysics is that he held what may be characterized as a "degrees of reality" theory and that his metaphysics can be equated with the theory of forms (or ideas).

In this paper, I argue that the "degrees of reality" model is flawed, that the theory of forms is held by Plato throughout the dialogues, and that a "modes of being" model is a better interpretative model because it retains the value of the theory of forms and shows the relation of the theory to his wider observations on being per se.

### Caveats

In attempting to understand the work of a philosopher, especially when the writings are as rich and complex as those of Plato, one may find that the interpreter, no less than the translator, is a traitor, albeit a traitor unawares, a risk that applies also to the writer of the present paper. However, there are criteria for assessing the value of an interpretation. A good interpretation must consider various contexts of the writing, the historical period, the problems and audience addressed, the relation of the writing to the other works of the author, the writing style, and the writer's terminology, especially when the central concepts are complex, technical, or newly introduced with highly specialized meanings. But perhaps the most important test for an interpretation is whether it provides a deeper, more coherent, and fruitful understanding of the work. In a certain sense, the interpreter should drop out the "I" in interpretation and attend to the work as the true lover attends to his beloved. In this regard, one might well follow Plato's own directive in the *7<sup>th</sup> Letter*, "from constant communion with the subject, the truth springs forth." <sup>1</sup>

Both Plato and Aristotle recognized that truth is the proper object of the human intellect. However, the attempt to understand and to clearly articulate truths in philosophy is well known for its impediments, some of which are identified by Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning*<sup>2</sup> as the idols of the tribe, the den, the marketplace and the theater. In addition to the errors of the tribe, common to human nature, philosophers seem especially prone to errors of the den and of the theater. An “error of the den” occurs when someone, “refracts and discolors the light of nature, owing either to his own proper and peculiar nature; or to his education and conversation with others; or to the reading of books, and the authority of those whom he esteems and admires....” The “errors of the theater” arise from the various dogmas of philosophies and from faulty laws of demonstrations, of which Bacon says, “all the received systems are but so many stage plays, representing worlds of their own creation after an unreal and scenic fashion.” The view presented here may not constitute an actual paradigm shift, but it is to be expected that since it is contrary to much that has been taught and learned about the forms, its acceptance will require some re-thinking.

There are several versions, both ancient and modern, of the degrees of reality view attributed to Plato. Perhaps the best known of the ancient versions is that of Plotinus, who flourished in the mid-third century A.D. Although he is now referred to as a “neo-Platonist,” Plotinus would have considered himself merely a Platonist making his best effort to interpret Plato in light of the various commentaries, including those of Aristotle, that had been written in the six centuries after Plato’s death.

Leaving aside the intricacies of his metaphysics, the important point for the present paper is that Plotinus held as ultimate ontological and explanatory principles the One (or the Good), the

Intellect and the Soul. Here we are especially interested in the principles of the One and the Intellect.

The One is the absolutely first principle that is the cause of all, but is itself simple and uncaused; it is not directly describable and can be grasped only by saying what it is not. According to Gerson,<sup>3</sup> Plotinus found the principle of the One in Plato's *Republic* in the "Idea of the Good," and in the *Parmenides* where it is the subject of the deductions in the second part. In the metaphysics of Plotinus, an eternal and immutable intellect is the locus of all the Platonic forms and whatever properties things have, they owe to forms whose instances these properties are. But why would the existence of forms require an eternal and immutable intellect in which they are contained? Gerson suggests that part of the answer is that Plotinus assumed he was following Plato in the *Timaeus* in the claim that the Form of Intelligible Animal was eternally contemplated by an intellect called the "Demiurge." Since Plotinus holds that the Many is in some sense derived from the One, and from the Divine intellect that contains the Platonic forms, his view is clearly a degrees of reality view.

The neo-Platonist interpretation of Plato's views on reality has been remarkably resistant to alteration. Lovejoy, in *The Great Chain of Being*, first published in 1936, attributes to Plato, as understood in this interpretation, "the indigenous strain of otherworldliness in Occidental philosophy and religion, as distinguished from the imported Oriental varieties,"<sup>4</sup> quoting Dean Inge as saying that it is through Plato "that the conception of an unseen eternal world, of which the visible world is but a pale copy, gains a permanent foothold in the West."<sup>5</sup> Lovejoy, of course, is not claiming that Plato thought the physical world was a mere illusion or a mere evil, but that his writings, especially on the idea of the Good, mark him as "the father of otherworldliness in the West, though Parmenides, no doubt, was its Urgrossvater."<sup>6</sup>



Macrobius, in the early fifth century, sums up the degrees of reality theory of the Neoplatonic cosmology in a passage using the metaphors of the chain and a series of mirrors,

“Since, from the Supreme God Mind arises, and from Mind, Soul, and since this in turn creates all subsequent things and fills them all with life, and since this single radiance illumines all and is reflected in each, as a single face might be reflected in many mirrors placed in a series; and since all things follow in continuous succession, degenerating in sequence to the very bottom of the series, the attentive observer will discover a connection of parts, from the Supreme God down to the last dregs of things, mutually linked together and without a break.”<sup>7</sup>

The remainder of Lovejoy’s book treats how this “scale of being” or, as we may call it, the “ neo-Platonic degrees of reality,” schema plays out in various disciplines and ages, until in the 18<sup>th</sup> century it is rejected by the memorable words of Dr. Johnson: “this Scale of Being I have demonstrated to be raised by presumptuous Imagination, to rest on Nothing at the Bottom, to lean on Nothing at the Top, and to have Vacuities from step to step though which any Order of Being may sink into Nihilicity without any Inconvenience, so far as we can Judge, to the next Rank above or below it.”<sup>8</sup>

While Dr. Johnson, with his 18<sup>th</sup> century tools, chopped down the luxuriant growth of the great scale of being, its Plotinian roots are still alive, the main root being that Plotinus took Plato’s One, equated with the idea of the Good, to be God. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, even so judicious a scholar as Frederick Copleston, in Vol. 1 of *A History of Philosophy*, writes of the idea of the good, “It is, therefore, real in itself and subsistent...Plato is clearly working towards the conception of the Absolute, the absolutely Perfect and Exemplary Pattern of all things, the ultimate ontological Principle.”<sup>9</sup>

Copleston’s statement contains some truth but it also strongly suggests the Neo-Platonist interpretation of the idea of the Good as God. There is no evidence in the dialogues to support this interpretation; moreover, the ontological value of the idea of the Good and the One is supportable without reference to God. Clearly, there *is* evidence that Plato, as Socrates before

him, believed that God is responsible for the order in the universe, but this lends no support to the claim that the idea of the Good should be interpreted to be God.

The idea of the Good, a member of the class of ideas, shares the essential class features of a-temporality, unchangeableness, and intelligibility. However, an idea does not think; it neither has nor is an intellect and therefore cannot be God. The idea of the Good is *different* from every other idea, a difference Plato marks by saying that it exceeds all other ideas in beauty and power. This phrase has often been interpreted to mean that the idea of Good is “beyond being,” which seems to mean that it cannot be defined by genus and species. In Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysical frameworks, it is also said to be one of the “transcendentals.” What Plato actually says of the idea of the Good (*Republic* 508e-509a) is:

This, then, which gives to the objects of knowledge their truth and to him who knows them his power of knowing, is the idea or essential nature of Goodness. It is the cause of knowledge and truth; and so, while you may think of it as an object of knowledge, you will do well to regard it as something beyond truth and knowledge and, precious as these both are, of still higher worth.

In the metaphysics of Plato, the idea of the Good is best understood as a first-order ontological and epistemological principle. That the Good can be called the One, and the One the Good, does not conflict with anything in the dialogues. Gadamer suggests that the One, aka the Good, in the dialogues, be understood *not* as “Plotinus’s “One,” the sole existent and “trans-existent” entity,” but rather as “that which on any given occasion provides what is multiple with the unity of whatever consists in itself. As the unity of what is unitary, the idea of the Good would seem to be presupposed by anything ordered, enduring and consistent.”<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the Good as an epistemological principle, one can hardly do better than endorse the view of Nettleship:

If you take any complex object (and all objects are complex), that is any object which is a whole of parts, the only way to explain it or understand it is to see how the various parts are related to the whole; that is, what function each of them performs in the whole, how each of them serves the good or end (telos) of the whole. The good or end of the thing is the immanent principle which we have to suppose in it in order to explain it, and which is involved in calling it a whole at all. The progress of knowledge is to Plato and Aristotle the increased realization of the fact that each thing has thus its function, and the world is, in Plato's phraseology, luminous just so far as it reveals this fact.<sup>11</sup>

The twentieth century analytic approach to the interpretation of Plato has some limitations, but the seminal paper of Gregory Vlastos, "Degrees of Reality,"<sup>12</sup> while it does not address all the questions that may be raised about the various meanings of "real" and "reality," does establish two crucial points. First, when Plato speaks of a form as "completely" real, or "purely" or "perfectly" real, or "really" real, or more real than its sensible instances, the term 'real' is being used to indicate that the form is cognitively dependable or undeceiving, in contrast to the sensible instances of the form that are constantly changing, confused, unclear and mixed with their opposites. Second, when Plato speaks of some things as more or less real than others, there is absolutely no evidence that he meant one thing exists more or less than another, in the sense in which we commonly use the word, 'exists.'

The analytic approach often assumes that Plato's views "developed" from the "early" to the "late" dialogues. In another paper, "The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides,"<sup>13</sup> Vlastos attempts to find suppressed premises, which, if they were added to the arguments, would show the arguments against the theory of forms to be valid, and, therefore would show that Plato had, or ought to have, abandoned an "earlier" theory he held in the middle dialogues. This assumption of a genetic development surfaces even in the work of contemporary, well-respected interpreters of Plato, as when one speaks of the 'late' ontology of Plato, implying that there was an 'earlier' and different ontology.<sup>14</sup> However, as Jacob Howland convincingly argues in a recent paper,<sup>15</sup> there is no justifiable basis on which to establish any chronology of the dialogues, claiming that

“we can no longer afford to regard the “results” of chronological investigations as key to the understanding of Plato.”<sup>16</sup>

It must be admitted that the metaphors in the *Republic* can lead to a misleading use of language found even in the work of a scholar of the rank of Cornford, who spoke of the ‘world’ of intelligibles as distinguished from the ‘world’ of appearances.<sup>17</sup> So, the question naturally arises “Why would Plato use this sort of language?”

One answer is that Plato is not so closely tied to the use of technical terms as we ordinarily think Aristotle is, and that he adjusts his way of speaking to the audience. As Miller has perceptively pointed out, the audience within the *Republic* is primarily Glaucon and Adimantus, who, although they are more tenacious in inquiry and have more intellectual prowess than others in the dialogue, are yet uneducated in philosophy and this “forces Socrates, in his effort to be intelligible to them, to set aside conceptual discourse for imagery and simile at a number of key points, especially in presenting his theory of forms.”<sup>18</sup>

### Foundational Questions

“What is there?” and “What human knowledge is possible?” are foundational questions in philosophy. A person encounters things and has knowledge long before the metaphysical and epistemological question is explicitly raised. Though interrelated, in order of time, the epistemological question may be raised before the metaphysical question, but the metaphysical question is more fundamental. Plato raises both questions in various ways in different dialogues. What is reality and how is it known?

In this last section, I suggest that Plato’s treatment of these questions is best understood on a “modes of being” model, and that since the essential features of the theory of ideas (or forms) are found throughout the dialogues, the modes of being model does not *replace* the theory

of forms, but incorporates it into a wider metaphysics. This, of course, does not imply that the theory is *discussed*, or even *mentioned*, in each and every dialogue; rather that it is presupposed in the discussion of other matters. In the *Euthyphro*, a central task is to attempt a definition of piety. Forms *per se* are not mentioned, but Socrates keeps pressing Euthyphro to give an account of piety itself, not of instances of piety, nor of types of piety. In the *Theaetetus*, the attempt is to find some account that, if added to sense perception, would enable one to speak of knowledge in relation to sense perception. No such account is forthcoming, but the dialogue cries out for the one type of account that could accomplish this: an account using forms. Plato always and everywhere assumes that the idea (idea) or form (eidos) is to be sought to bring order to, or make intelligible, the other elements of human experience, and that the human intellect, if competent and adequately educated, can discover (and be helped to discover) the inherent eidos—not always and not by one means only, since various methods and techniques are needed depending upon the situation and the individuality of persons. Sometimes irony is used, sometimes hypothesis, or collection or division, or straightforward argument, or a *reductio ad absurdum* argument.

To illustrate, in the first part of the *Parmenides*, young Socrates is being instructed by being led to reflect on and to think through the difference between forms and physical things. The *reductio ad absurdum* is used here. Parmenides and Zeno are dialecticians who have experience in arguing; moreover, they realize that without clarity about the nature of forms, philosophy would be impossible. For the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to enter into the minute details of each argument or the extensive literature on “the third man argument,” but merely to point out, in a general way, what is being rejected, or “reduced to absurdity.”

Using the *reductio*, Parmenides establishes three main points: forms are not physical or sensible; forms are not merely thoughts; and, there is no drastic, unbridgeable, radical separation between forms and their instances. The first argument (*Parmenides*, 131a-132b) shows the absurdity of treating a form as something physical: “if this is assumed, would its instances get a part or the whole of the form?” It is within the context of this first extended argument that one version of the infinite regress argument occurs:<sup>19</sup> “take largeness itself and the other things which are large. Suppose you look at these in the same way in your mind’s eye, will not yet another unity make its appearance—a largeness by virtue of which they all appear large?” The key, often overlooked, suggestion is that the form and its instance be seen “in the same way in your mind’s eye.” The infinite regress argument could only get off the ground if the form and its instance were seen *in the same way*, i.e., as something *physical*, but, as is evident in dialogue after dialogue, this is precisely how a form must *not* be understood. To so understand it, would be, in contemporary terminology, to make a *category mistake* of the deepest dye.

The suggestion that a form is merely a thought (*Parmenides*, 132b-c) is rapidly reduced to absurdity showing that, if this were true, each sensible thing would consist of thoughts, or that there are thoughts which nevertheless do not think.

The final position reduced to absurdity is that there is a radical separation between the “world of forms” and the ordinary things experienced in everyday life such that there is no relation between the two. If this were true, forms would be related solely to each other; only the form of knowledge, or perhaps God (being perfect like the forms) would be able to know the forms, and God would not be able to know anything about this other ordinary world, or us. This would also have the consequence that the human intellect could not know the forms, a position obviously absurd and meant to be rejected, since in all the dialogues, without exception, the

underlying assumption is that forms *are* knowable by the human intellect. Parmenides notes this as the greatest challenge to acceptance of the theory of forms. A person who objects that forms cannot be known could not be convinced that he is wrong, “unless he chanced to be a man of wide experience and natural ability, and were willing to follow one through a long and remote train of argument. Otherwise there would be no way of convincing a man who maintained that the forms were unknowable.”<sup>20</sup>

The basic tenets of the theory of forms, assumed in all the dialogues, and through various techniques, often explicitly delineated, point to some fundamental truths about reality and the possibility of human knowledge. However, as we have seen, misinterpretations of the theory may arise from the difficulty of the subject matter, the inherent limitations of the individual intellect, faulty education or false assumptions, or some combination of these. The only remedy is eternal vigilance and daily discourse of a certain kind.<sup>21</sup>

Although the theory of forms is *central* to Plato’s account of reality and human knowledge, it is not *exhaustive*, which is to say there are other aspects of being that must be considered. In metaphysics, a fundamental problem arises when one type of being is privileged over other types solely on the basis that one is more “real” than another. In the *Sophist*, Plato referred to this problem as a battle between the gods and the giants; post-Kantian articulations often describe it as a conflict between transcendental idealism and a physical reductionism. Embracing either extreme—that only ideas are real or that only physical things are real—obscures or diminishes important features of experiential reality. This occurs in the metaphysics of Plotinus when the “simple” One is privileged over the many “non-simple” ones and provokes the question of how the One gives rise to the many. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Descartes gave such primacy to the *cogito* that the existence of the external world came to be questioned, and in the

18<sup>th</sup> century, Kant offered an idealism that gave rise to a host of problems still current in philosophical discourse.

Plato's solution is to accept that ideas and physical things, both together, are real. But these do not exhaust "real" things. The human intellect must also be real, if knowledge is to be possible, and, falsehoods must be real, else the Sophist who deals in falsehoods cannot be defined. In these passages, Plato is endorsing a view of reality that distinguishes certain ways or modes of being.

How is this "modes of being" talk related to the theory of forms? Is Plato altering or replacing the theory? To one who has accepted a certain "degrees of reality" interpretation of the theory of forms, or who is committed to a chronological placement of the dialogues in a certain order, this might seem to be the case. However, there is the strongest possible evidence *within* the *Sophist* itself that Plato is neither altering nor abandoning the theory of forms. One explicit purpose of the dialogue is to "capture" the sophist, and from the context of the dialogue, this "capturing" is clearly intended to mean being able to give an adequate account of the nature of the sophist; they are, in fact, searching for the "cognitively dependable or undeceiving"<sup>22</sup> *form* of the sophist. Moreover, concerning the battle between the gods and the giants, the stranger notes that "only one course is open to the philosopher who values knowledge and the rest above all else. He must refuse to accept from the champions either of the one or of the many forms the doctrine that all reality is changeless, and he must turn a deaf ear to the other party who represent reality as everywhere changing. Like a child begging for 'both,' he must declare that reality or the sum of things is both at once—all that is unchangeable and all that is in change."<sup>23</sup> Clearly, this passage is endorsing the view that both forms and their instances exist, in the ordinary sense of 'exist.'<sup>24</sup>



The *Sophist* is an extraordinarily rich dialogue, containing many suggestions for a metaphysics that is yet to be worked out, perhaps along Aristotelian lines, perhaps not entirely so. A careful reading of Brentano's<sup>25</sup> treatment of Aristotelian metaphysics will reveal several parallels between the views of Plato and Aristotle, including that Aristotle also distinguishes different modes of being, "Being is said in various ways..."<sup>26</sup>

In contemporary philosophy, various attempts are made to work out a metaphysics that will accommodate the important contributions made by the phenomenological movement, as for example, the work done by Roman Ingarden.<sup>27</sup> It may turn out that the "modes of being" model that began with Plato will be fruitful here, as well as in discussions in contemporary metaphysics of "possible worlds," for example, in clarifying certain issues relating to "negative being."

Numerous issues of greatest metaphysical importance are treated in the *Sophist*, but they are beyond the scope of the present paper. What I have tried to show here is that Plato has been misinterpreted as postulating a "degrees of reality" view and that his metaphysics is better understood in terms of "modes" rather than "degrees." Correcting these misinterpretations is the first step to a more adequate appreciation of Plato's metaphysics.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Plato. Seventh Letter 341d.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, Bk. xli – xliv.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (Great Britain: Routledge, 1994) p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1960) p. p. 35. Hereinafter cited as GCB.

<sup>5</sup> Dean Inge, *The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought* (1926)p. 9, quoted in GCB, p.35

<sup>6</sup> GCB, p.39.

<sup>7</sup> GCB, p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> GCB, p.254.

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy. Vol.1: Greece and Rome* (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1946) p.176. The context of the remark is "...as Plato clearly asserts that the Good gives being to the objects of knowledge and so is, as it were, the unifying and all-comprehensive Principle of the essential order, while itself excelling even essential being in dignity and power, it is impossible to conclude that the Good is a mere concept or even that it is a non-existent end, a teleological principle, as yet unreal, towards which all things are working: it is not only an epistemological principle, but also—in some, as yet, ill-defined sense—an ontological [sic] principle, a principle of being. It is, therefore, real in itself and subsistent...Plato is clearly working towards the conception of the Absolute, the absolutely Perfect and Exemplary Pattern of all things, the ultimate ontological Principle. This Absolute is immanent, for phenomena embody it, "copy" it, partake in it, manifest it, in their varying degrees; but it is also transcendent, for it is said to transcend even being itself, while the metaphors of participation (methexis) and imitation (mimesis) imply a distinction between the participation and the partaken of, between the imitation and the Imitated or Exemplar. Any attempt to reduce the Platonic Good to a mere logical principle and to disregard the indications that it is an ontological principle, necessarily leads to a denial of the sublimity of the Platonic metaphysic—as also, of course, to the conclusion that the Middle Platonist and Neo-Platonist philosophers entirely misunderstood the essential meaning of the Master."

<sup>10</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Lewis Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1961) p. 223.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory Vlastos, "Degrees of Reality in Plato," *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, ed. Renford Bambrough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul and New York: The Humanities Press, 1965) p.1.

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<sup>13</sup> Gregory Vlastos, “The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides” *Philosophical Review*, 1954. Reprinted in *Studies in Plato’s Metaphysics*, ed., R.E. Allen (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965)

<sup>14</sup> the reference is to Kenneth Sayre’s *Plato’s Late Ontology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press) 1983.

<sup>15</sup> Jacob Howland, “Re-reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology” *Phoenix*, Vol. 45. No. 3 (Autumn, 1991) pp. 189-214.

<sup>16</sup> Howland, p. 190.

<sup>17</sup> Plato *The Republic*, tr. With commentary by F. M. Cornford (London: Oxford University Press, 1941) diagram on p.222.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell H. Miller, Jr. *Plato’s Parmenides* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1986) p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Another version occurs at 132d- 133 a, where it is argued that if an instance is “like” the form, the form must also be “like” the instance; the, somewhat less obvious, flaw still results from treating a form as if it were sensible.

<sup>20</sup> *Parmenides*, 132b-d.

<sup>21</sup> Plato *Apology* 38a-b “if I tell you that daily to discourse about virtue is the greatest good of man, you are not likely to believe me...yet, nonetheless, it is true.

<sup>22</sup> See the point made by Vlastos, p. 6 above, and note 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Sophist* 247c-d.

<sup>24</sup> Vlastos’ second point mentioned above, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Franz Brentano, *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* bk. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Roman Ingarden’s major work in ontology, *Spór o istnienie świata* (“The Controversy Over The Existence of the World”) was written in Polish during the war and was not translated into German until 1964. Except for a small part, printed under the title, *Time and Modes of Being*, (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1964) the work is not available in English. A central issue that dominated Ingarden’s work in epistemology, ontology, metaphysics and value theory, and which makes his position pertinent to the present paper, is the realism/idealism problem.

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## Humanism, Baboonism, and Future Being in Plato's *Theaetetus*

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As will become abundantly clear this weekend, the term “humanism” can refer to a number of different philosophical approaches. It can refer to the pedagogical principle that if the young are going to be good citizens and good people, they need a solid training in the humanities, those disciplines that focus on human achievements and productions. It can refer to a reorientation of human speculation and research away from supernatural and theistic matters towards those that are more amenable to human, rational inquiry. It can refer to the view that human beings are central to truth and meaning of any sort. Is the term what Aristotle would call a *pros hen* equivocal? That is to say, is there one sense which is central, by virtue of which the others are to be understood? Or is the term truly equivocal? Is it an accident of history that the same term refers to intellectual approaches that are related only insofar as all have some relation to human beings?

I raise the question, but do not answer it. Nonetheless, the three varieties of humanism have often been found together, and were apparently so conjoined at the very dawn of the Western intellectual and educational tradition. I am thinking of the early Greek sophistic movement, and, in particular, in the thought and teaching of the most notable of the sophists, Protagoras. For Protagoras advertised himself as one who could train the young in virtue, and an integral part of his educational program was training in literary criticism and interpretation.<sup>1</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup> See Plato, Protagoras, 339a. “I consider, Socrates, that the greatest part of a man’s education is to be in command of poetry, by which I mean the ability to understand the words of the poets, to know when a poem is

was explicitly agnostic concerning the gods, and kept himself from speculation concerning theological matters.<sup>2</sup> And, notoriously, it was Protagoras who opened his book *Truth* with the pronouncement that “Human beings are the measure of all things, but things that are, that they are, and things that are not, that they are not” (Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152a).

Beyond his emphasis on training his students in the ability to argue for both sides of a question,<sup>3</sup> we are certain of very little more of Protagoras and his teachings. But there are two dialogues of Plato, *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*, in which Plato explores Protagoras’ thought in a creative and speculative manner. My focus today is one aspect of the *Theaetetus*’ expansion, elaboration, and refutation of Protagorean relativism. Plato has Socrates offer a Protagoras whose views of truth and reality that put human perception at the center of things. For Plato, Protagoras’ metaphysical humanism, as it were, accounts for his educational program and avoidance of any appeal to a transcendental source of truth or value. The views of Protagoras are discussed here more fully and more charitably than those of nearly any other Socratic interlocutor. For often in the Platonic dialogues, Socrates’ arguments against another’s position leave the interlocutor speechless, that is, without a *logos* by which to defend it. But in the

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correctly composed and when not, and to know how to analyze poems and to respond to questions about it.” tr. Lombardo and Bell.

<sup>2</sup> DK 80 B4: “I can have no knowledge concerning the gods, neither whether they are nor whether they are not, nor what sort of form any of them have. For many things prevent knowledge – the matter is unclear, and life is short.” my translation.

<sup>3</sup> DK 80A1.

*Theaetetus*, Protagoras gives a full and spirited defense of his views, offered by a most able advocate, Socrates himself (166a-168b). This is followed by a series of arguments even more severe than the first (170a-186e), after which Theaetetus and Socrates both abandon Protagoras' views. Yet even as he presents these arguments Socrates mentions that were he able, Protagoras might well poke his head out of the ground and say even more on his behalf, to meet Socrates' critique (171c-d). This may be a mere humorous aside; on the other hand it might be an admission that there is more to say, that dialogue might well continue, and might do so without any prospect of resolution

I here continue the juxtaposition of and dialogue between the two perspectives. My focus is the argument concerning the predictive power of knowledge, which, according to Theodorus, is that by which Protagoras is especially refuted (*malista haliskesthai*, 179b), to the effect that Protagoras' own admission of expertise entails that some people are better than others at predicting the character of future perceptions, from which admission Socrates concludes that not all beliefs are true (177c-179d). I suggest that Protagoras could well have met this objection, on the basis of the denial of the substantiality and continuity of the human person, a denial to which Protagoras is antecedently committed. I suggest that the stance of Protagoras is not as marginal and odd as first appears, and begin to speculate concerning its applicability to two meditative and religious traditions.

I begin by tracing the line of argumentation that leads up to the argument concerning expertise about the future. Theaetetus does not object when Socrates identifies his thesis that knowledge is perception with Protagoras' dictum: "Humans are the measure of all things, both

those that are, that they are, and those that are not, that they are not” (152a). It is not immediately clear why the theses are to be identified. Can one not consistently say that my knowledge that the pen is blue consists in my perceiving it to be so, without thereby making the further claim that the pen is blue *because* I so perceived it? Protagoras’ dictum follows only if we conjoin to the identification of knowledge and perception the empirical truth that different things are perceived differently, both by different perceivers and by the same perceiver differently disposed. In explicating Protagoras’ thought, Socrates provides evidence for this: the same wind will be perceived as cold by one emerging from warm air, and will be perceived as warm by one emerging from cold air. The air, then, is neither warm nor cold in itself. To know the hotness or coldness of the air is simply to perceive it (152a-c).

Socrates proceeds to universalize Protagoras’ point, and draws out two major sets of implications. First, if we conjoin to Protagoras’ principle the apparently uncontroversial premise that all of the characteristics of sensible things are themselves sensible, then there is no stable, nonrelative truth of the perceived object as such. All of its characteristics will be relative to how they are perceived (152d-e). Second, this result can be extended to the sense organ, or the perceiving himself or herself. All three aspects of reality: the perceiver, the cause of the perception, and the perceived characteristics, are dependent on changing circumstances. Because the circumstances by which perceiver and perceived come together are in motion, these circumstances themselves are always different, with the result that all of these three aspects of reality are always changing. Hence, Protagoras’ view is said by Socrates to entail that he attributes to Heraclitus, that all things change and nothing stays the same (156c-157c, 158e-160e).

Second, as I have mentioned *aisthēsis* refers to more than the apprehension of simple sensed features like color or warmth that Aristotle calls *aisthēta*; it includes perception of facts like “Theaetetus is sitting” or for that matter anything of which one is aware or conscious. There is no need to restrict what Protagoras says to direct sensory perception: any sort of belief results from an awareness of the world. This is why Socrates reexpresses Protagoras’ view as to the effect that all beliefs are true to those who hold them (167a-b); within the context of the discussion of Protagoras’ views, “belief” is synonymous with “perception.” All beliefs, including ethical and other normative ones, arise as a result of the interface between certain circumstances and those who are making judgments or choices concerning them. But those circumstances, and the nature of those making them (virtuous or unvirtuous? wise or unwise?) are necessarily a result of the sort of ethical evaluation in question.

At this point Socrates offers two lines of argument to refute Theaetetus’ position. The first is to the effect that neither Protagoras, nor we, can believe the implications of his view: that the mad or the dreaming, as well lower beasts, such as pigs or baboons, are just as much perceivers as are those human beings generally recognized as in their right minds. Are they to be the measure of all things? Further, given that all beliefs are true, why ought we to spend good money to learn from Protagoras at all? The second brings up cases (as when an object is perceived with one eye but not another, or as when something is remembered but not perceived). If knowledge is perception, we must conclude that in such cases something is both known and not known.

Socrates now imagines the sorts of things that Protagoras might say if he were to offer a



spirited defense of his view. After accusing Socrates of unfair argument for the sake of scoring points, Protagoras reaffirms his original position. He strongly suggests (166d), though does not explicitly state, that the first two sets of counterintuitive results that Socrates derived from his position are indeed ones that he would endorse. Things are for the mad or the dreaming as they seem. But why harp on that, if we are (apparently) neither mad nor dreaming? Further, for Protagoras pigs or baboons are indeed just as much the measure of all things as human beings. In not dwelling on the point, Protagoras is in effect saying “well, so what?” For Protagoras is himself a human being, and so are the ones with whom he, and others, need to deal, in convincing others to look at things differently, or in taking note of how things seem to others in order to get them to act in a way that seems best to him. This is why, in saying that the measure of all things is human beings, Protagoras is a humanist and not a baboonist.

Further, it will indeed be the case that one who perceives something in one respect but not in another will both know and not know.<sup>4</sup> Now is not the time to develop this point, but Protagoras is able to avoid a simple and direct refutation on the basis of the principle of noncontradiction by taking all truth claims (including those concerning his own thesis on the relativity of truth) to be relative to those to whom they appear; nonrelativized assertions are as if they were syntactically incomplete. So, in this case, Protagoras could easily evade Socrates’ objection that one with one eye closed both knows and does not know the apple before one,

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<sup>4</sup> At 166a Protagoras is made to say that Theaetetus is frightened by the result that one can both know and not know the same thing, which suggests that this is the fright of a child, to what is neither uncommon nor dangerous.

either by asserting that, to *him*, such a result does not seem impossible, or by showing that, even if one does hold to the principle of noncontradiction, there is no contradiction involved in *one eye's* knowing something and *another eye's* not. Such a response, of course, raises questions concerning the unity of the knowing subject, to which Socrates will soon turn.

Protagoras next turns to the question of his own expertise. All perceptions are indeed true. But we would all agree that not all of our perceptions are good; that is to say, we would rather not have them. Thus, one ill might feel an unpleasant chill, or familiar foods might taste bad. Such a percipient becomes the patient of a doctor, not in order to perceive more correctly, but simply to have those perceptions that would be preferred (in this context, this would mean, more pleasant). The doctor's expertise is an ability to change the bad perceptions to good perceptions. So too, in regard to an individual or society's perceptions concerning the just and the unjust, or the noble and ignoble (166e-167d). Protagoras reaffirms his ethical relativism: a practice or action is just to the one, or ones, who deem it such. What the sophist Protagoras can do, and can teach others to do, is substitute better, not truer, perceptions or beliefs concerning these matters. We note that Protagoras offers his defense in the form of attributing to him and other experts not knowledge, but the action of altering appearances, making them appear, and be, good (*metaballōn poiēsēi agatha phainesthai te kai einai*, 166d). It is not that the expert rids one of false beliefs. "Rather, I believe that he makes the one who, by virtue of a bad disposition of soul, has beliefs that are akin [to that disposition], have other such beliefs, by virtue of a good disposition – beliefs which some, through inexperience, call true appearance, but I call the ones

better, but not truer, than the others” (167b).<sup>5</sup>

Protagoras’ defense is the occasion for a new line of argument by Socrates. The first is the full expression of what has become known as “the turning of the tables argument,” to the effect that, if Socrates does not believe that human beings are the measure, then human beings are not the measure, and, to the extent that those who reject Protagoras’ thesis outnumber those who endorse it, his thesis is falser than it is true (170e-171c). This brings us to the argument that is the focus of this paper. Socrates returns Protagoras’ view, to the effect that the expert changes negative perceptions to positive ones. consists in the ability to transform negative perceptions into positive ones. But note how he restates this point. Protagoras has asserted that some beliefs or perceptions were better than others, but not truer than others, and that the expert *does* something – namely, transform bad perceptions to good ones. Socrates makes the point that the expert, who so effects the transformation, does a better job of having beliefs (*doxazein beltion*, 178d5, cf. e5, *beltion prodoxasais*) since he has the criterion, or basis for making the distinction within him (178c1). Socrates presumes that the power to alter perceptions, granted by Protagoras, involves not better beliefs (the existence of which Protagoras also grants) but believing, better, which Protagoras would not. But how serious is the distortion of Protagoras’ views? For surely Protagoras would grant that the expert not only does this or that; she does it by virtue of beliefs concerning the future effects of her actions. So understood, Protagoras’ account would commit us to two levels of beliefs. First order beliefs are those that everyone has in their interactions with the world, such as “this room is very chilly” or “this tax is unjust.”

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<sup>5</sup> My translation. the text is disputed; I follow Burnyeat.

Protagoras has said that all such beliefs are true, even if some of them are unpleasant or otherwise “bad.” The expert has beliefs concerning how to best substitute positively evaluated beliefs for negatively evaluated ones. Socrates points out that we are necessarily committed to saying that these second order beliefs are either true or false. For the expert either has that ability or he does not, and the matter will be verified by future perceptions. If a doctor promises that a certain medication will take away the chills (that is, the beliefs that the air is chilly), and it does not, the second order beliefs of both the doctor, as well as those of the patient who believes him, will have been shown to have been wrong; likewise in regard to the effects of *logoi* (178e). Hence, Socrates can claim, Protagoras must admit that not all beliefs are true.

Socrates’ argument against Protagorean relativism on the basis of future expertise presupposes a continuity of the perceiving subject, from the asking of advice from the expert, through the taking of the advice, and the determination of whether the action taking indeed worked to change bad perceptions into good ones. But, as Socrates himself pointed out (157a-b), if Protagorean relativism is to be associated with a radical flux theory, there will, indeed, be no continual subject, for the percipient, too, is ever changing. Although this move provides yet another escape hatch for Protagoras, it threatens to do so in a way that makes consultation with Protagoras, or any expert, meaningless. For if it is not the same me that will experience the results of taking Protagoras’ advice, then one could always literally ask in regard to the advice “what’s in it for me?” Likewise, if Protagoras is defending himself, or anyone else, as an expert, should someone hold him responsible for promising what he could not deliver, again, the sophist can slip away by insisting that, he, Protagoras, at the time the accusation is being made, is not the same as the Protagoras who urged his potential follower to receive instruction. Socrates had

cited Epicharmus as one who, Protagoras, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Homer, advocated that all things are in flux (152e). In so doing, he implicitly alludes to how Protagorean relativism, taken so far as to avoid positing the continuity of the subject, ultimately renders meaningless the notion of ethical responsibility. For Epimarchus fr. 136 PCG tells us that in one of his plays, one character asks another to pay his fair share for participating in a symposium. The character refuses: as he has since grown, he is no longer the same individual who incurred the debt. This response is met by blows from the first character who, when charged with battery absolves himself with the remark that he is no longer the same one who threw the punch. Protagoras or any alleged expert could acquit himself likewise.

Accordingly, if we push the Protagorean view as far as we can, what appears to be the case – concerning part, present, and future, is truly the case for the one to which it appears, where that one exists only at the moment of appearance, and future events will not be such as to contradict such appearance, since the future self will be different. How, then, are we to interpret Protagoras' defense of his, and others' expertise, as one who can change bad perceptions into good ones? The only way to do so, which does not become subject to Socrates' criticisms, is to say that Protagoras' expertise is not thought to bear on the future at all. Protagoras has the ability to change one's perceptions *at the moment* from negative to positive. We note how this brings Protagoras' understanding of his craft in line with what Socrates in the *Gorgias* has to say concerning the *empeiriai* of sophistry and rhetoric – they are not true *tekhnai* as they do not have their eye on transforming the current state of affairs into what is truly good, rather, they aim towards the pleasure of the moment, and are forms of flattery (462c-465d). A Protagorean response might be – what is wrong with that, if all there is, is, in fact, for one in the moment?

It is tempting to say that this Protagorean account, pushed to its conclusion in this way, rests on an atomistic account of human identity, according to which the self only exists in an unsplittable instant. But even this would be saying too much. After all, it seems to each of us that the self endures, and Protagoras would be the last to deny the validity of this belief on the basis of a metaphysical account of time. But it would be enough for Protagoras to say that the denial of the identity of the self to be a possible belief, whenever it seems appropriate. And it is for this reason that Protagoras can defend himself from the objection that the denial of human identity through time cannot be sustained since normally we cannot deliberate and act on its basis. For to this Protagoras might well say “Fine – if there are areas in your life that seem to you to require a persistent subject, then it is indeed true that there is a persistent subject – to you. And if there are aspects or areas in your life in which it does not seem to be the case that there is a persistent subject, then there is not, to you, in that respect.”

I myself do not go so far as to endorse the Protagorean point of view, but as I conclude this paper I would like to explore it a bit more, and see how far Protagoreanism can be, and is, taken.

Protagoras is not only telling us that it is possible to substitute positive perceptions for negative ones; he is saying that it is his very teachings that will make this possible. His teachings include his teachings concerning truth, perceptions, and identity. The unstated consequence is that worry concerning the future is a negative perception, which demands substitution for a better one. Protagoras would insist that such worry, itself, results from a faulty perception of oneself as a continuously existing subject. Apparently, in order to achieve

happiness, that is, a state in which one's perceptions are better – is consider oneself as not substantial at all, as only a point of awareness, in the moment.

Protagoras does not tell us how to achieve this sort of realization, not exactly what life would be like were we to achieve it. Here are two ways of thinking about it. Protagoras could be encouraging us to live in the moment, without care for the future at all. So considered, he is indeed encouraging us to live as a pig or a baboon, which is precisely the implication that Socrates first draws once he interprets Theaetetus' suggestion that knowledge as perception in a Protagorean manner (161c). From the Socratic standpoint, the capacity to deliberate concerning the future is distinctive of human beings; accordingly, a good life, for human beings, will involve deliberation concerning the future. If one who takes the good to be constituted by present positive perceptions, that is, pleasures, were to accept that a distinctively human life involves deliberation, and were to also take human identity to be continuous into the future, he would conclude that the good life requires the capacity to accurately measure the sum total of future pleasures that would be consequent from one's actions. I parenthetically note that this is the view that Socrates' derives from what he takes to be Protagoras' presuppositions, within the *Protagoras*.

Of course, "living in the moment" need not take the form of living like a lower animal. For example, one of the professed goals of certain varieties of Buddhist meditative practice is the recognition, through meditation, that there is no substantial ego, only thoughts, without a thinker. A related goal is to cultivate a nonjudgmental attitude in regard to such thoughts, by which they are accepted as they are without their being a springboard for future deliberations. There is more

than a superficial parallel with Protagoras, who, on Socrates' understanding, asks that we not condemn some perceptions as true rather than false, and asks his students to concentrate on the improvement of perceptions in the present moment. But while the promise of Buddhist meditation is direct apprehension of things as they are, without the intermediacy of belief or logos, Protagoras refuses to posit such a thing as things as they are, or direct accurate perception, since he would insist that can never get beyond how things appear.

I leave you with a question. It is not clear to me to what extent the extent to which acceptance of Protagoras' second order beliefs concerning the relativity of all beliefs, including those of the future, is compatible with holding first order beliefs concerning the future. There is no incompatibility between believing that the wind is *now* cold, and believing that the coldness of the wind is relative to the believer. But can one truly believe that one *will* perceive a certain event, and at the same time believe that this belief is true, only for the believer, at the moment of the belief? Or does the second, insofar as it implicitly denies that the believer persists into the future, contradict the first? Again, I draw an example from a religious tradition, this one, unlike Buddhism, with a focus on the future. Could I at the same time believe that the arrival of the Messiah is imminent, in my lifetime, and at the same time hold that this belief is relative to me, now, and that there is no possibility of this predicting being falsified by how things turn out, in the course of my life? If so, the second order belief concerning the nature of the first order belief could, as it were, immunize the first order belief against being disproven by any future course of events, such as the failure of the Messiah to appear. If not, that is, if the first order belief concerning a future perception is incompatible with the second order belief concerning the relativity of that belief to the one who holds it, at the time of its being held, one must conclude



with Socrates that because beliefs concerning the future can be falsified, not all beliefs are true, and knowledge and belief must be distinguished.

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## Ontological Crimes Against Humanity

In a recent article in the *European Journal of International Law*, Christopher Macleod challenged philosophers to provide a conceptual and moral basis for crimes against humanity, noting that the “principal difficulty...is the ambiguity of the word ‘humanity.’”<sup>1</sup> Acts of murder, rape, torture, and enslavement mentioned in international statutes and tribunals since World War II, and now prosecuted in the International Criminal Court, are undeniably crimes in the ordinary sense; but why are they “against humanity;” what is humanity such that some, but not all, crimes are *against* humanity? Macleod observes that humanity in this context has two distinct meanings: “It can be used to refer to the species to which we all belong,” i.e. the human race, and “it can also be used to refer to that thing which is common to the class of all persons, in virtue of which they are all human,” i.e. their human nature.<sup>2</sup> If humanity means all human kind, then the crimes identified in international law injure the collective body of humans, in a manner analogous to harm caused by ordinary domestic crime to the public or “the people.” If, however, humanity is identical to “humanness” or “human nature,” then a crime against humanity need not threaten the human race as such as it would injure or diminish a core feature such as autonomy, rationality, or dignity qualifying someone for membership in the human community. Interpreted this second way the quality of being

human is not a material or genetic feature of biological humanity, but something of moral and/or metaphysical significance.

In this paper I shall examine both options for defining humanity set out by Macleod. They support principles of international criminal law and both appear in the terminology of legal scholars and trial judges commenting on crimes against humanity. I am also going to suggest an alternative approach to understanding the phrase “against humanity,” which is conveyed by neither of Macleod’s two options. Borrowing a phrase from Adriana Cavarero, I shall speak of crimes against humanity, especially the crime of torture, as ‘ontological crimes.’<sup>3</sup> An ontological crime is one that attacks the being of the human being, with the intent either to eliminate or to distort it in a horrific way. Since the ontology of the crime has to be normative for all nations, it should be unhampered by complicated and divergent cultural assumptions about the essence of human beings. I locate that common ontology in the human body and its being in the world. This suggests that it is not necessary for a court to have a normative definition of humanity acceptable to a multitude of diverse religious and ideological viewpoints. An ontological crime against the human body does not need to be judged according to *a priori* universal moral norms. It appears on earth as a horrific fact of inhumanity for any state to condemn using whatever moral and legal norms it wishes to establish, *after* the fact, so to speak. In short, I shall claim, to borrow from Patrick Hayden, that the creation of a cosmopolitan legal regime has been motivated by the “horror that humanity inspires rather than by Kantian awe at the ‘moral law within.’”<sup>4</sup>

I. The development of an international criminal law with respect to crimes against humanity (CAH) culminates in the adoption in 1998 of the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court in The Hague. While the statute is neither definitive nor comprehensive with respect to the juridical interpretation of such crimes, it will serve to introduce us to the most up to date legal understanding of the elements of crimes against humanity. Section 1 of Article 7 lists ten acts that constitute such crimes “when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.” They are (in abridged form): murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment in violation of fundamental rules of international law, torture, sexual crimes including rape and enforced pregnancy, persecution, enforced disappearance of persons, and apartheid.<sup>5</sup> The statute includes a catch all sub section (k), which provides a minimal explanation as to why any and all of these acts are singled out for international prosecution. It notes that crimes against humanity shall also consist of “Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.”<sup>6</sup> The intent of this clause is to single out acts for prosecution that are exceedingly cruel. Commentators have recognized, however, that great suffering and injury are neither sufficient nor necessary reasons for classifying an action as a CAH. Although such crimes do indeed often cause terrible suffering and loss, they a) need not do so and b) if they do, what occurs need not be any worse than the suffering brought about by legitimate acts of war. Indeed the carnage and horror of war itself is often much worse than the torture or persecutions condemned in the Rome Statute.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the killing of combatants and civilians in war, while tragic, need not be criminally inhuman

or inhumane in the intention of the Rome Statute. Indeed the rules and conventions of war are intended to draw a line between violence proper, however massive, and the violence of war crimes and inhuman acts.

Tribunals adjudicating prosecutions of CAH sometimes will point not to the magnitude of the suffering caused by such crimes but to the magnitude of the victim. In those cases what is distinctive about CAH is that humanity itself, not only specific individuals, suffers as a victim of the crime. The trial chamber for the case of Erdemovic (1998), prosecuted at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), writes that “the concept of humanity as a victim....essentially characterizes crimes against humanity.” It notes that “rules proscribing crimes against humanity address the perpetrator’s conduct not only towards the immediate victim, but also towards the whole of humankind.”<sup>8</sup> The court in this case affirms the first of Macleod’s two definitions of “humanity,” wherein the whole of humankind, taken as a collective being, is victimized in such a way as to be damaged by the perpetrator of the crime. In an apt phrase, Macleod speaks of humanity as a *‘grand-etre’*: “Defining a crime against humanity to be damage to the *grand-etre*, then looks philosophically respectable. Damage may be said to be done when a serious violation of the *grand-etre*’s interests occurs...”<sup>9</sup> Macleod emphasizes that it is not the being of a particular person which is injured by a CAH but is rather all humanity taken together as a single (collective, *grand-etre*) being. That then is what makes a CAH an extraordinary crime and separates it from the class of ordinary felonies, not its intensely cruel suffering, injury, and mayhem. How can the interests of humanity as a whole be injured or diminished? In what sense are

actions taking place in a remote corner of Cambodia or Sudan, for example, capable of harming the rest of us?

Larry May addresses this question in his book, *Crimes Against Humanity: A Normative Account*. Like Macleod, May defines humanity as the “community of man,” analogously to the concept of a “people” in the language of domestic criminal law.<sup>10</sup> Just as in ordinary criminal law the accused is prosecuted in the “name of the people,” so also in international crime, the perpetrator comes before the tribunal or the international criminal court in the “name of humanity.” The reason that humanity is implicated, even in the absence of an organized world state, is that some crimes threaten the basic security interests of all human beings. Appealing to what he terms the “International Harm Principle,” May asserts that the minimal interest of the human community is one of security and safety; hence, any action which threatens the safety and well being of humankind is subject to prosecution as a crime against humanity. May writes, “The security principle will provide a moral minimalist basis for understanding *jus cogens* norms in international criminal law.”<sup>11</sup> May does not need what he would regard as metaphysically suspect categories of dignity, ideal value, natural law or human rights to legitimate international regulations.<sup>12</sup> A self-described Hobbesian positivist, he need only draw upon the minimal security interest humankind has in making sure that genocide, slavery, torture or forced deportations not appear in the world.

May’s international harm principle surely applies when crimes against humanity are committed in the course of war, for war cannot with confidence be confined to the parties initially engaged in the conflict.<sup>13</sup> When the agent of a crime against civilians is the state itself, when the crimes are widespread and systematic, and when they are carried

out in a time of civil or national warfare, then a threat to the security interest of all peoples may be realistic. Since human kind has an interest in its own safety, international prosecutions of CAH are plausibly understood to be sought for the sake of this interest. However, the Rome Statute explicitly drops the connection with warfare from its articles and lists crimes like rape, torture, and enforced pregnancy that cannot realistically be assumed to threaten the security interests of all nations, especially in peace time. Indeed, one reason it is easy for the international community to ignore and resist action against atrocities in Burma or Sudan, is that because of their remoteness these atrocities are precisely *not a threat* to the world as a whole. While I may have an interest as a fellow human being that someone in Burma not be tortured, it does not seem plausible that it is because torture will become more widespread and threaten *me!* The question remains as to how a state's attack of its own citizen threatens the rest of humankind and thus rises to the level of an international crime.

May's response to this concern is to emphasize the group-based character of CAH.<sup>14</sup> A civilian population may be attacked because of some shared characteristic, like religion, race, or ethnicity. Crimes against humanity are like domestic hate crimes that target someone for her sexual preferences, the color of her skin or her disability, distinguishing them thereby from ordinary felonies. The core cases of CAH are ones in which Jews, Bosnian Muslims, and sub-Saharan Africans have been targeted for murder, genocidal extermination, forced deportation, and rapes. May's point is that while murder and rape have always been part of the human condition they need not qualify as crimes against our collective humanity within the meaning of international law. When, however, such crimes exhibit an indifference to human personality and target individuals solely

because of some group characteristic they happen to have, then they should attract the attention of the international community.<sup>15</sup>

How does the group based character of CAH correlate with the international harm principle and the judgment that the security interests of all mankind are at risk? May needs to demonstrate that the targeting of a member of a Tutsi ethnic group just because he or she is a Tutsi foreshadows outcomes that threaten the security interests of us non-Tutsis. Humanity does have a stake in the fact that people are being persecuted because they are gay, Muslim, or Tutsi, but is it correct to identify that stake with security alone? If we broaden the interests of mankind beyond those of security then our starting principles cannot be constrained by May's minimalism. In fact, May himself hedges when he tries to explain problem of group based harms. "Group based harms," he writes, "are of interest to the international community because they are more likely *to assault the common humanity of the victims* and to risk crossing borders and damaging the broader international community" (Italics added).<sup>16</sup> Assaulting the "common humanity of victims" cannot be equated to a likelihood of violence actually crossing national borders, but it is a plausible, *non-consequentialist* reason why a crime can be classified as one against humanity. May's use of "common humanity" actually better fits Macleod's second sense of 'humanity' as a shared quality identifying all members of the human race, and not simply members of a group. Assaults against one's gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, and religion would threaten humanity in the second sense, for our group characteristics are indeed ways in which we express and validate our common humanity.



**II.** A trial chamber of the ITCY (Kupreskic, 2000) stated that “it is possible to identify a basic set of rights appertaining to human beings, the infringement of which may amount, depending on the accompanying circumstances, to a crime against humanity.”<sup>17</sup> In another case before the ITCY (Furundzija 1998), the moral principle of respect for human dignity was said to be “the basic underpinning and indeed the very *raison d’être* of international humanitarian law and human rights law.”<sup>18</sup> Crimes against humanity diminish what another court called the “ideal value” of the human being.<sup>19</sup> The language of rights, dignity, and ideal value points to another way of construing the meaning of humanity in Article 7 of the Rome Statute. A CAH need not endanger the security interests of or otherwise damage humanity collectively, but it may wound an important moral feature belonging to each one of us, a feature that we regard as essential to our being human. In religious language we could call that the sacred value or preciousness of man; in the more humanistic, enlightenment language of the jurists we would use terms such as dignity or basic rights. In any case since our value, dignity and rights are strongly connected to our group based identity, it seems reasonable to think that a crime against humanity that assaults populations because of a group based trait also violates their dignity and their right to express their humanity in this way. While group based traits differ, every human being has equal moral significance and it is that which group based harms harm, not the security of humankind.

Do moral properties like dignity, rights, ideal value, and autonomy constitute a sound philosophical basis for defining and justifying international criminal norms? This question, of course, evokes a vast, complicated literature in moral and political theory. To maintain our focus on the more limited issue of CAH I would like to turn the discussion

specifically to the crime of torture and ask about its relation to human dignity. Torture is explicitly named as a crime against humanity in the Rome Statute and is one of the few acts of governments that with little controversy violates *jus cogens* norms.<sup>20</sup> Torture counts as a crime against humanity even if only a single person is tortured by a government, suggesting that the interest of the international community in forbidding torture is not its own security, but rather the peculiar nature of the injury suffered by the torture victim. Most recent moral arguments about torture locate that injury in an affront to the victim's dignity.

One of the most illuminating discussions of torture and dignity can be found in the work of David Luban. In torture, he writes, the victim loses “all the qualities of human dignity that liberalism prizes.”<sup>21</sup> What are these qualities of dignity? Luban, drawing on rabbinic texts, thinks of dignity, not so much as a metaphysical trait of a human soul, but rather as a feature of a relationship between human beings, one of whom is the dignifier and the other is the dignified.<sup>22</sup> Dignity is a relational property functionally dependent on respect, which in turn is a way of treating human beings in such a way as not to humiliate them. In Luban's opinion, non-humiliation offers a minimal, but still effective moral norm: “Non-humiliation may not exhaust the concept of human dignity, but it strikes me as the paradigm of what respecting human dignity means. At worst, non-humiliation will be a useful naturalized stand-in for the more grandiose, but vaguer concept of ‘respecting human dignity.’”<sup>23</sup> When I treat someone in a non-humiliating manner I exhibit respect for her and in that respect her dignity reveals itself as an important feature of her humanity.

Luban's account has the advantage of situating dignity in a human relationship rather than deducing it from an essentialist or naturalist ontology. Because it is not restricted by such an ontology, it might serve a politically diverse international community as a way of conceptualizing the moral offense to 'humanity' in CAH. How specifically does Luban's view of dignity pertain to the crime of torture? While the language of the 1985 UN Convention Against Torture emphasizes extreme pain and suffering in its definition of torture, Luban holds that the inhumanity of torture consists not in pain *simpliciter* but in a tyrannical denial of respect to the victim: "Torture is the living manifestation of cruelty, and the peculiar horror of torture within liberalism arises from the fact that torture is tyranny in microcosm, at its highest level of intensity."<sup>24</sup> Torture's humiliation of its victims is akin to rape—"all torture is rape and rape is tyranny." The awfulness of rape cannot be simply equated to whatever pain and harm, mental or physical the victim suffers. The wrong of rape, in Luban's eyes, lies in its abject subjection of the victim to an overwhelming power that has withdrawn any semblance of respect for the humanity of the victim. The experience of this sheer absence of respect is humiliating, filling the victim with feelings of shame and worthlessness. The same could be said for the victim of torture.

While Luban's characterization of torture captures the awful perversion of human relationships that exist between the torturer and the victim, they do not seem to get at the deeper wrongs it causes. If I re-describe either rape or torture in political terms as an illiberal relationship of domination and humiliation I may say something true but somehow attenuated because that language misses the horror of the event. There is, I think, in Luban too much of an emphasis on *relationship* that leads him to underestimate

the terrible thing that is done to the very *being* of the human being. He does admit that liberals usually link torture to physical violations. He comments on the shameful humiliations of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, observing that while there was probably not an infliction of the excruciating pain that constitutes torture in the meaning of the UN Convention, these violations of the prisoner's bodies, their distorted postures, the perverted sexual games, the forced dehydration, the exposure of genitals, the presence of feces and urine, and so forth, did amount to a degree of torture.<sup>25</sup> But if this is so, then the wrong of torture would not consist entirely in the pain suffered or in disrespectful humiliation, but in an evident *wrong done to the human body*, a wrong wonderfully conveyed in the words of a delegate to the 1949 European Convention on Human Rights: "I say that to take the straight beautiful bodies of men and women and to maim and mutilate by torture is a crime against high heaven and the holy spirit."<sup>26</sup> The contorted state of the "beautiful body" in torture offers repugnant and sufficient evidence of torture's inhumanity. Whatever else humanity means, it means *not* being that crooked, ugly, and maimed thing in the torture chamber.

**III** With this acknowledgment of the importance of the body, we have another perspective for understanding the basis for crimes against humanity. Following Mcleod's lead we have touched upon several reasons why world governments might regard certain acts as being *against humanity*: their exceptional cruelty; the risks they pose to the world order; the deprivations of human making qualities like dignity; and their humiliating distortion of human relationships. Underlying these various ways of defining inhumanity is the fundamental ontology of the human body by virtue of which the human being is a

being in the world. Whatever else a crime against humanity might be it is first of all an act against the “beautiful body,” an outrage against the flesh manifest to anyone from any cultural perspective. It is important, however, to understand what ‘the body’ means in this context.

Louis Seidman, like Luban, believes that the wrong of torture does not solely derive from its amplification of pain but from its concentration on the body: “The challenge, then, is to give an account of torture that captures its physicality and embodiment.”<sup>27</sup> The account of embodiment that Seidman offers is rooted in a Cartesian assumption that normally we identify ourselves with our free and conscious ego that holds sway over our body. Torture abnormally reduces this self to our body, subjugating the mind to the automatic reflexes of the organism. Citing torture victim Jean Amery’s observation that the “the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else,” Seidman concludes that the torture is “about what happens to the mind when we realize that we are only body.”<sup>28</sup> The victim of torture is compelled to confront an unbearable truth, a materialist truth conveyed by modern science, that she is no longer the autonomously free person she thought she was but is merely a substance deterministically regulated by the laws of nature: “What is wrong with torture is that it reminds us of something that we do not want to know: that our belief in materialism and our belief in the existence of human will cannot be reconciled. Moreover, torture forces us to resolve the conflict by admitting, against our ‘will’ ...that we have no will.”<sup>29</sup>

I take Seidman to be making two distinct claims about torture. First, it operatively reduces the human self to bodily functions and secondly, it epistemologically subverts our belief that we are more than bodies. The core wrong of torture lies in dispelling the

conviction that somehow a person by virtue of having a mind and a will had more worth than a robot, animal or other natural object. Apart from the questionable Cartesian assumptions in his argument, I believe that Seidman misrepresents what the self undergoes in torture. The body in torture is a different body than the body we usually are. This is a truism, but it is important to stress the fact because we need to acknowledge in a stronger way than Seidman that torture assaults the bodily being of the human being not simply the will or consciousness. In normal experience my body is the bearer of my being; it *is* 'me,' not a foreign substance that I have to control or over rule. Torture causes unimaginable pain and the perceptible breakdown of the bodily self, expressed in grimaces, screams, grotesque postures, and mutilated flesh, turning that body into an alien being or non-self. The victim is tortured, not by being reduced to his carnality and "nothing more," but by having that carnality itself become horrifyingly monstrous. In order to appreciate properly the comment Seidman quotes from Jean Amery, that in torture one becomes a body and nothing more, one should connect it to Amery's other remarks about how the torture victim loses his trust in the world and can no longer feel at home there. This recognizes that I live in the world as an embodied being, as an upright "beautiful" body and it is that carnal reality which has been distorted and stunted in the torture chamber. I don't lose my mind just because I become my body; I lose my body and so my mind, as well as my worldly existence. This loss is an offense against the being of the human and for that reason I would characterize torture as an ontological crime or a crime against the physical ontology of humanity. As expressed by Cavarero "Whoever shares in the human condition also shares in disgust for an ontological crime."<sup>30</sup>

Elaine Scarry has given us one of the best phenomenological accounts of torture ever written in her book, *The Body in Pain*. The body she describes in powerful, chilling prose is not the Cartesian anatomical object that Seidman believes it to be. The tortured body is a wounded animal body whose voice is a pathetic scream.<sup>31</sup> Torture does not collapse the self *into* the body; it causes the body itself to shrivel while annihilating its being as a living, minded, and world inhabiting organism. Scarry writes that every pain is a kind of death and torture a kind of mock execution. The tortured body is no longer “my body” no more than is a cadaver. In torture as in death, the body dies and so the very being of the human way of being in the world dies as well, leaving behind an anti-body, an anti-human thing. That is why torture is a crime *against the human*.<sup>32</sup> Scarry evokes the strange paintings of Francis Bacon to draw an analogy with the tortured body. Bacon gives us an image in which a being is “mercilessly exposed to us, not merely because he is undressed, unshielded by any material or clothing, but because his melting body is turned inside out, revealing the most inward and secret parts of him.”<sup>33</sup> The torturer in an interrogation quite literally wants the victim “to spill his guts,” to turn himself inside out, and reveal his body as so much excess and waste. If in the expressive, living body we see in each other’s face a common humanity, then in the stripped, soiled and beaten flesh we witness our common inhumanity.<sup>34</sup>

**Conclusion** There is a remarkable scene at the conclusion of Ari Folman’s film, *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), which had been until that point an *animated film* about Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon. The scene takes the viewer into the refugee camp of Shatila in Beirut where Christian Falangists notoriously had massacred hundreds of Palestinian

women, children, and old men. Abruptly the film shifts from animation to documentary footage and we are presented with the shocking sight of children's' crumpled, lifeless, and fly infested corpses. We do not need to ask ourselves at this moment what human making feature has been stripped from the corpses or whether the security interests of mankind have been threatened by the massacre in order to recognize that a crime against humanity has taken place. In this documented carnage evil shows that it has sufficient ontological weight to announce its own inhumanity and to merit universal condemnation. That is really the chief point of these reflections. It is true that I have not provided a sufficient account as to why an ontological crime against the body falls under international law, or how it might differ from ordinary murders, rapes, or assaults, since any act of brutality may destroy the bodily being of the human without thereby becoming a crime against humanity in the eyes of the law. One would need to do a lot more work than I can do here to pair the idea of an ontological crime with more formal legal criteria such as the Rome Statute's proviso that the crimes be "widespread and systematic." Still it is remarkable that with all their immense differences in perspective on world events, the nations of the earth can agree on the sickening nature of certain crimes and resolve to prosecute them in international tribunals if they cannot be dealt with otherwise. The horror of crimes against humanity lies in their repulsive treatment of the human body. On that we can all agree, despite our philosophical and religious differences on the essence of humanness or the meaning of concepts like respect and human rights. Ironically, the best chance we have of a world that acknowledges and safeguards a common humanity is to first agree on what is inhumanly against humanity.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Macleod, “Towards a Philosophical Account of Crimes Against Humanity,” *The European Journal of International Law* XXI (2) (2010), p. 283 .

<sup>2</sup> Macleod., p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, translated by William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Hayden, *Political Evil in a Global Age: Hannah Arendt and International Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Section 7 of the Rome Statute may be found at the U.N. web site:

<http://untreaty.un.org/cod/icc/statute/romefra.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> A similar description had appeared in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in the Akayesu trial (Sept. 2 1998, para 578:) “The act must be inhuman in nature and character, causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.” See *Genocide, War Crimes, and Crimes Against Humanity: Topical Digests of the Case Law of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia*.(New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004), p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Without doubt, however, the magnitude of an atrocity such as the Holocaust may motivate the international community to bring the perpetrators to justice under the title of crimes against humanity. That was the case at Nuremberg. The 1943 Legal Committee of the United War Crimes Commission cited the “magnitude or savagery” of the Nazi atrocities which “shocked the conscience of mankind.” See Richard May and Marieke Wierda, “Is there a Hierarchy of Crimes in International Law?” in Lal Chand Vohrah and others, editors. *Man’s Inhumanity to Man: Essays on International Law in Honour of Antonio Cassese*. (The Hague, London and New York: Kluwer Law International, 2003), p. 525.

<sup>8</sup> Cited by May and Wierda, p. 517.

<sup>9</sup> Macleod, p. 298. Admitting that a “*grand-etre*” might seem to be a strange metaphysical entity, he states, “humanity, thought of as one entity, can be said to have a conscience or interests on its own terms.” p. 293.

<sup>10</sup> Larry May, *Crimes Against Humanity: A Normative Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> May, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> He does say “If *jus cogens* norms are indeed readily apparent to most people, then there are seemingly strong normative reasons for supporting a natural law basis, especially a religiously

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motivated natural law basis, of jus cogens norms to justify prosecutions of international crimes.” p. 36. He obviously wants to provide an alternative route to such norms.

<sup>13</sup> This, of course, was the case with World War II, and this was the context in which the Nuremberg Charter formulated the charge of crime against humanity for the first time. It also the reason that the charter for International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia insisted on keeping a link between crime and war time context, even though the charter for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda eliminated that connection. See the discussion in Margaret McAuliffe deGuzman, “The Road from Rome: The Developing Law of Crimes against Humanity,” *Human Rights Quarterly*. Vol 22 (2), May 2000, pp. 335-403.

<sup>14</sup> May, p. 83.

<sup>15</sup> Historically “widespread and systematic attacks” do target specific groups; however it should be pointed out, a CAH is not limited to such targeting. In particular, torture in particular need not be part of a genocidal program. May admits this: “I am willing to admit that it is not necessary that harms be group-based for them to rise to the level of international crimes.” Of torture he confesses “Torture is the only practice currently seen as condemned by *jus cogens* norms that does not readily have a group orientation.” p.87.

<sup>16</sup> May, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> Cited by May and Wierda, p. 527.

<sup>18</sup> See Navanethem Pillay, “The Rule of International Jurisprudence in Redressing Crimes of Sexual Violence,” in Vohrah and others, p. 690.

<sup>19</sup> In June 1948 the supreme court for the British zone in Hamburg stated that a crime against humanity requires that “a person suffer harm directly to himself or to his property or assets in a way that manifests a total disregard for his ideal value as a human being, with consequences for all of mankind.” See May and Wierda, p. 525. Notice that the court, like May, combines a consequentialist judgment with a deontological principle of “ideal value as a human being.”

<sup>20</sup> See Helen Duffy, who holds that the prohibition of torture has attained *jus cogens* status. *The ‘War on Terror’ and the Framework of International Law*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). p. 312, note #188.

<sup>21</sup> David Luban, “Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Bomb” in Karen Greenberg, editor, *The Torture Debate in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> David Luban, “Human Dignity, Humiliation, and Torture,” *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*. Vol. 19 (3) 2009, p. 216. See also Christopher McCrudden who too takes ‘dignity’ to mean “a shorthand way of summing up how a complex, multi-faceted set of relationships

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involving Man is, or should be, governed: relationships between man and man, man and God, man and animals, man and the natural environment, man and the universe.” “Human Dignity and Judicial Interpretation of Human Rights,” *The European Journal Of International Law*, Vol 19 (4) 2008. p. 675.

<sup>23</sup> Luban (2009), 216

<sup>24</sup> Luban (2006), 43

<sup>25</sup> See Luban(2006) , pp 42-43 and Luban (2009), pp 221-223.

<sup>26</sup> Cited by Edward Peters, in *Torture*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 147.

<sup>27</sup> Louis Michael Seidman,. “Torture’s Truth”, *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 72 (3) Summer, 2005, p. 903.

<sup>28</sup> Seidman, See pp 908 (note 82) and 909.

<sup>29</sup> Seidman, p. 905.

<sup>30</sup> Cavarero, p.16

<sup>31</sup> Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Scarry, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> Scarry, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> Scarry says, “For the torturer, it is not enough that the prisoner experience pain. Its reality, although already incontestable to the sufferer, must be made equally incontestable to those outside the sufferer.” p. 52. We can connect what Scarry writes about the “body in pain” with what the critic Adriana Cavarero calls “horrorism,” a form of violence that she says exceeds death itself. Her example of horrorism is that of a female suicide bomber who not only kills others but explodes her own maternal body. She writes, “In an act that strikes at the human qua human the butchers embrace horror with conviction as though the repugnance horror arouses were more productive than the strategic use of terror.” She adds that the act of horrorism is an “offense to corporeal unity.” Cavarero, p. 9. Applied to torture horrorism suggests torture is inhuman because of what it does to the corporeal being of the human being; it turns it inside out into an entity of disgust and revulsion The appropriate response to this vision is horror. Not all crimes or all deaths arouse horror, for a corpse or a wounded body may elicit sadness, loss, anger, or even terror. When the body, however, appears to have been wasted as so much excess matter then the sight of that superfluous being is one of horror and revulsion.

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## Foucault as Inverted Neo-Platonist in “A Preface to Transgression”

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Michel Foucault paid homage to his friend Georges Bataille in the 1963 essay, “A Preface to Transgression.”<sup>1</sup> In the essay’s opening lines, Foucault states the hope of expressing “in the clear light of language” something about sexuality which had been hidden. It will be argued that for the fullest understanding of Foucault’s pellucid language, “A Preface to Transgression” should be read in relation to the vocabulary and themes of Neo-Platonism. To that end, passages from “A Preface” will be compared with passages from characteristic enneads of Plotinus. Such a comparison is justifiable because it is known that Foucault spent the summer of 1950 reading the works of Plotinus.<sup>2</sup> The claim here is not that Foucault made use of any given ennead, rather that he appropriated characteristic Neo-Platonic vocabulary and themes which he then refigured in his own writing. After establishing a general outline to “A Preface to Transgression,” it will be explained what is meant by “inverted Neo-Platonism.” Thereafter, some Neo-Platonic vocabulary and themes will be indicated in the text. “A Preface” will then be compared to a work by Bataille to which Foucault refers, thereby establishing the originality of Foucault’s use of Neo-Platonic vocabulary and themes. Last, the paper will situate Foucault’s thought as expressed in “A Preface” in relation to Neo-Platonism.

There are three stages to Foucault’s discussion of sexuality in “A Preface”: the Christian mystical account, the modern account “from Sade to Freud,” and his own account in post-modernity. Foucault begins the essay by asserting a common belief—without saying that it is his

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. with an introduction by Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 29, n.3.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Defert et al., “Chronologie” in *Dits et écrits* (Paris : Gallimard, 2001), 18.

own—“that sexuality has regained, in contemporary experience, its full truth as a process of nature.” He then presents a counterfactual to that common belief:

Yet, never did sexuality enjoy a more immediately natural understanding and never did it know a greater “felicity of expression” than in the Christian world of fallen bodies and of sin. The proof is its whole tradition of mysticism and spirituality which was incapable of dividing the continuous forms of desire, of rapture, of penetration, of ecstasy, of that outpouring which leaves us spent: all of these experiences seemed to lead, without interruption or limit, right to the heart of a divine love of which they were both the outpouring and the source returning upon itself.<sup>3</sup>

Foucault then contrasts the happy account of sexuality in Christian mysticism with the second stage, namely the modern denaturing of sexuality, a modality established in the period “from Sade to Freud” and from which, in the third stage, sexuality now needs to be liberated.<sup>4</sup> He writes:

What characterizes modern sexuality from Sade to Freud is not its having found the language of its logic or of its natural process, but rather, through the violence done by such languages, its having been “denatured”—cast into an empty zone where it achieves whatever meager form is bestowed upon it by the establishment of its limits. . . . We have not in the least liberated sexuality, though we have, to be exact, carried it to its limits: the limit of consciousness. . . . Sexuality is a fissure—not one which surrounds us as the basis of our isolation or individuality, but one which marks the limit within us and designates us as a limit.<sup>5</sup>

The “Sade to Freud” state of affairs from which liberation is needed is a divided, discontinuous, and de-natured sexuality which constitutes the human as limit. Foucault writes, “A rigorous language, as it arises from sexuality, will not reveal the secret of man’s being, nor will it express the serenity of anthropological truths, but rather, it will say that he exists without God.”<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> Foucault, “Preface,” 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 30.

liberating engagement is transgressive eroticism which is the means of transcending the human as limit and, further, is aimed at the void where God was.

In order to understand Foucault's move in relation to Christian mysticism—as is explicit in “A Preface”—and the implicit moves he makes with respect to Neo-Platonism—it is imperative to see that Foucault's reception is neither positive nor negative, rather inverted. He makes quite a point about transgression that it “contains nothing negative . . . nothing positive.”<sup>7</sup> A page later, he writes of “solar inversion.”<sup>8</sup> Although this term has an oracular cast to it, I infer its ultimate antecedent to be the Copernican Revolution in which the relationship of Earth and sun are inverted. It is in that sense that I employ “inversion” in relation to Foucault. My argument is that Foucault inverts Neo-Platonic metaphysics for deployment in his own nominalist narrative against metaphysics.

Even when two passages from Plotinus and Foucault show very strong correspondence, Foucault neither agrees nor disagrees with Neo-Platonism, rather he inverts the Neo-Platonic text. One can distinguish then, at least, three kinds of reception. There is positive reception, for example the reception of Aristotle by St. Thomas Aquinas. There is negative reception, for example the reception of Homer by Socrates of the *Republic*. Then there is inverted reception, exemplified by Foucault's reception of Neo-Platonism. Because Foucault does not explicitly quote or cite Plotinus, in order to make the case of Foucault's inverted reception of Neo-

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 37. When I denominate a phenomenon in Foucault's writing “inverted reception” I am pointing to the same methodological move which Father Flynn calls “reversal,” e.g., Thomas R. Flynn, *A Poststructuralist Mapping of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 42, 91, 98, 108, 239. He writes, for example, “He [Foucault] turns (often reverses) the kaleidoscope of our received views to produce new, frequently liberating perspectives. The emergent reconfigurations, including the ‘fit’ of one episteme into the spaces of the prior one, yields an altered vision of Western cultural history.” Ibid., 97. Again, he writes, “What I have been describing as Foucauldian ‘reversals’ reflect a heterotopic vision. They guide our attention in the opposite direction of our accustomed narrative path: effects are seen to be causes, justifications become question-begging, and the narrative landscape is inverted—*die verkehrte Welt* of Hegel and Tieck in the service of social critique.” Ibid., 98.

Platonism, it is necessary to compare passages in which themes and vocabulary are similar. Those points of similarity will be treated as mappable Foucauldian events. As Father Thomas Flynn observes, “The series will establish the intelligible contours, a certain regularity without continuity.”<sup>9</sup> The cartographical approach, to which Father Flynn calls attention,<sup>10</sup> allows the identification of a particular route while at the same time recognizing that the same events might be re-mapped for some other route. The road up and the road down may be one, but that does not preclude the possibility of making a new road. In the spirit of Foucault, this paper maps a series of events, called “inverted Neo-Platonism,” but without precluding some other mapping of the same events.

In the passage already quoted above in which Foucault begins “A Preface” by praising the “‘felicity of expression’ . . . in the Christian world of fallen bodies and of sin,” the reader may well feel startled. Why is it that Foucault begins his essay in remembrance of his friend, Bataille, with this affirmation of Christian mysticism? He begins his essay with his brief, positive assessment of sexuality in the Christian mystical tradition because he is announcing the theme which he will invert throughout the balance of “A Preface.” In the literature of Christian mysticism, he found that “which was incapable of dividing the continuous forms of desire, of rapture, of penetration, of ecstasy . . . which seemed to lead . . . right to the heart of a divine love of which they were both the outpouring and the source returning upon itself.”<sup>11</sup> Here Foucault analyzes the Christian mystical tradition in Neo-Platonic terms of indivisibility, penetration, ecstasy, and procession and return. He has not announced those concepts in order to support them, rather to appropriate and to refigure them as inversions. The inverted character of his Neo-

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<sup>9</sup> Flynn, *Mapping*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, “Preface,” 29.



Platonism becomes clear later in the essay when he affirms that “on the day sexuality began to speak and to be spoken, language no longer served as a veil for the infinite,” rather “in its dark domain, we now encounter the absence of God, our death, limits, and their transgression.”<sup>12</sup> As the sexuality of Christian mystics was aimed at God’s presence, so the transgressive sexuality of post-moderns is aimed at the God’s absence. Foucault’s method of inverted reception, as applied in “A Preface,” is to announce Neo-Platonic themes, then to appropriate and refigure them as he deploys Neo-Platonic metaphysics against itself.

The startlement which the reader experiences when reading Foucault’s encomium of Christian mystical literature only increases when coming to Foucault’s essay fresh from reading Bataille’s *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*.<sup>13</sup> In his chapter, “Mysticism and sensuality,”<sup>14</sup> Bataille sets forth in a very fair-minded fashion the view of Christian mysticism as expressed by mystics themselves. He quotes a passage by St. Theresa of Avila and the analysis of it by Marie Bonaparte, also known as Princess George of Greece and Denmark, in which the Freudian psychoanalyst explains that in the mystical union experienced by St. Theresa, the “descent of God into her had been a violent venereal orgasm.”<sup>15</sup> Bataille further quotes Father Eugène Tesson that “two forces attract us towards God: one, sexuality, is ‘written into our nature’; the other one, mysticism ‘comes from Christ,’ and further that “superficial disagreements may temporarily disrupt but cannot destroy the profound harmony between the two.”<sup>16</sup> The view of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>13</sup> Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1986). This work was first published in English as *Death and Sensuality: a study of Eroticism and the Taboo*.

<sup>14</sup> Bataille, *Erotism*, 221-51.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 227, quoting Eugène Tesson, *Sexualité, Morale, et Mystique*, 359-80.

Father Tesson, however, is not that of Bataille. In fact, Bataille spends the rest of the chapter refuting the claim of harmony. He writes, “I do not see how we can discuss the relationship of these two forms with any clarity if we do not take them when they are most strongly opposed, and also are markedly alike. Their ‘deep-seated harmony’? It may exist, but are we going to find it by attenuating the conflicting characteristics if they are at the same time precisely the ones that make them alike?”<sup>17</sup> Further, in the final two paragraphs of the chapter, he concludes:

The calculations of a tempted religious must be stressed, for they confer a miserliness, a poverty, a dismal discipline on the ascetic life of no matter what religion or sect. . . . Even if the most far-reaching experiences are still possible for all that in the orderly and regulated life of the monk, I cannot forget, as I strive to grasp the significance of the flights of mysticism that constraint in the face of temptation is the key.<sup>18</sup>

There is not a trace of Bataille’s refutation in Foucault’s “A Preface.” Upon comparing the two texts, one arrives at an astonishing conclusion. In the essay written as homage to his friend and teacher, in regard to the relationship between the language of mysticism and sexuality, Foucault adopts the view not of Bataille, rather the views of St. Theresa, Princess George, and Father Tesson. Bataille warns that we must not “spiritualise the domain of sexuality to exalt it to the level of ethereal experiences,”<sup>19</sup> and yet that is precisely what the language of Foucault does when he writes, “the language of sexuality has lifted us into the night where God is absent.”<sup>20</sup> It may be that Foucault is telling his reader that even (or perhaps especially?) his reception of Bataille is inverted when he writes, “We can only hope, now that his [Bataille’s] death has sent us to the pure transgression of his texts, that they will protect those who seek a language for the thought of the limit, that they will serve as a dwelling place for what may already be a ruined

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>20</sup> Foucault, “Preface,” 31.

project.”<sup>21</sup> A second conclusion has to do with the methods of Bataille and Foucault respectively. Bataille presents a very straight-forward argument: first, here are the views of persons A, B, and C, and, second, here is my refutation of their views and the explanation of why my views are correct. Foucault’s method is subtler and much more subversive. He adopts the position of those with whom Bataille disagrees, gets inside their view, then turns and deploys their view to his own end. That is inverted reception. A third conclusion is that Foucault’s Neo-Platonic analysis does not depend upon Bataille or Bataille’s sources. There is nothing of Neo-Platonism to be found in Bataille’s text. To the degree that there is a relationship between the various authors quoted by Bataille and Neo-Platonism, it is slight and merely an implicit commonality which must be discovered by the reader. It is Foucault himself who brings the Neo-Platonic vocabulary and themes to the discussion of transgressive eroticism.<sup>22</sup>

Having discovered differences between Foucault and Bataille in their treatment of the relationship between sexuality and Christian mysticism, it will be all the more interesting to note a series of common events in the texts of Foucault and Plotinus. In “*A Preface*,” Foucault writes:

Transgression opens onto a scintillating and constantly affirmed world, a world without shadow or twilight. . . . It was originally linked to the divine, or rather,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 40. In the notes to “A Preface to Transgression,” the editors point out Foucault’s references to Bataille’s *Erotism*, e.g., 30, n. 1, 33-33, n. 6-9, but they do not point out that Foucault’s stance differs from that of Bataille. First, it should be noted that notes 6-9 refer to the Foucault’s discussion of material from Bataille’s discussion of Pierre Angélique’s *Madame Edwarda*, “the most incongruous book of all” a characterization which Foucault quotes without stating what the book is to which Bataille refers. For example, Foucault proposes “a precise definition of eroticism” as “an experience of sexuality which links, for its own ends, an overcoming of limits to the death of God.” Foucault then quotes Bataille, “Eroticism can say what mysticism never could (its strength failed when it tried): God is nothing if not the surpassing of God in every sense of vulgar being, in that horror or impurity; and ultimately in the sense of nothing.” Foucault, “Preface,” 33. It is Foucault, however, and not Bataille who sets up the analogy as Christian mysticism to the presence of God, so transgressive eroticism is to the absence of God. That line of thought is completely absent from Bataille’s text. Further, Bataille reduces all religious mysticism to one “significance,” “The trances, the states of rapture and the theopathic states prolifically described by mystics of every religious discipline . . . all have the same significance.” Bataille, *Erotism*, 246. Foucault, by contrast, singles out Christian mysticism and makes no mention of any other. Foucault, “Preface,” 29.

<sup>22</sup> Much more could be said about Foucault’s use of Bataille’s text. The primary purpose here is to show that what is called here “Foucault’s inverted Neo-Platonism” is Foucault’s own reception of Neo-Platonism and not something which he takes from Bataille.

from this limit marked by the sacred it opens the space where the divine functions. The discovery of such a category by a philosophy which questions itself upon the existence of the limit is evidently one of the countless signs that our path is circular and that, with each day, we are becoming more Greek. Yet, this motion should not be understood as the promised return to a homeland or the recovery of an original soul which produced and which will naturally resolve every opposition.<sup>23</sup>

Plotinus writes in *Ennead V.9 (5)*, “On Intellect, Forms, and Being”:

But there is a third kind of godlike men who by their greater power and the sharpness of their eyes as if by a special keen-sightedness see the glory above and are raised to it as if above the clouds and the mist of this lower world and remain there, overlooking all things here below and delighting in the true region which is their own, like a man who has come home after long wandering to his own well-ordered country.<sup>24</sup>

In both passages, there is, first, the image of a brilliant light (F: “a scintillating and constantly affirmed world,” P: “the glory above”) in contrast to some kind of half-light (F: “a world without shadow or twilight,” P: “above the clouds and the mist of this lower world”). Foucault is speaking of one and the same world, kataphatically as what it is, and then apophatically as what it is not, while Plotinus contrasts two different realms. Second, both employ the image of homecoming (F: “Yet, this motion should not be understood as the promised return to a homeland or the recovery of an original soul which produced and which will naturally resolve every opposition,” P: “like a man who has come home after long wandering to his own well-ordered country”). This is a nice example of inversion since Foucault says that such a homecoming is precisely what he is not talking about. In fact, what Foucault says the “discovery” is not, is very like what Plotinus in his *ennead on “The One,” VI.9 (9)*, says the “seeing” is. Plotinus writes, “For that One is not absent from any, and absent from all, so that in its presence it is not present except to those who are able and prepared to receive it, so as to be in accord with it and as if

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<sup>23</sup> Foucault, “Preface,” 37.

<sup>24</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead V*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), V.9 (5), 1.16-

grasp it and touch in their likeness.”<sup>25</sup> The inversion is clear. For Plotinus, the end is the embrace of likeness. For Foucault, the end of transgression is to “designate the existence of difference.”<sup>26</sup>

In the already quoted passage from *Ennead* V.9 (5), “On Intellect, Forms, and Being,” Plotinus describes the organ of contemplative seeing, “the sharpness of their eyes” characterized “as if by a special keen-sightedness.” Foucault, for his part, dedicates the final third of “A Preface” to a discussion of the “Eye.”<sup>27</sup> He examines Bataille’s use of the “insistent eye” in a variety of contexts. Foucault compares Bataille’s use of the eye to Descartes’ use of *acies mentis* in the “Third Meditation.”<sup>28</sup> He then immediately moves to find a greater likeness between Bataille’s use of the eye to that of mystics. he writes that it is “somewhat like the interior, diaphanous, and illuminated eye of mystics and spiritualists that marks the point at which the secret language of prayer is embedded and choked by a marvelous communication which silences it.”<sup>29</sup> Compare Foucault’s description to that of Plotinus in the *Ennead* I.6 (1), “On Beauty”: “You have already ascended and need no one to show you; concentrate your gaze and see. This alone is the eye that sees the great beauty.”<sup>30</sup> Not only is Foucault’s description of the eye very like that of Plotinus, but he also uses the analogy of contradiction which is so characteristic in Neo-Platonism.

Analogy of contradiction is a form of one-to-another analogy. There is straight-forward one-to-another analogy: the hat is to the head as the glove is to the hand. There is negative

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<sup>25</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead VI.6-9*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), VI.9 (9), 4.24-28.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, “Preface,” 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-52.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 48, n.34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>30</sup> Plotinus, *Porphyry on Plotinus and Ennead I*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), I.6 (1), 9.23-25.

analogy in which one of the four terms of one-to-another analogy is negated, such as Aristotle's Golden Mean: as the arithmetical mean is to arithmetic, so the ethical mean is NOT to ethics.<sup>31</sup>

Analogy of contradiction is a third kind of one-to-another analogy in which A and not-A have analogously the same relationship to B: thus, as A is to B, so not-A is to B.

Applying this logical schema to Foucault's observation yields this result: "the secret language of prayer" is to speech as "the secret language of prayer" is to not-speech, i.e., silence. In the passage already quoted from *Ennead VI.9 (9)*, one sees the use of the analogy of contradiction as made by Plotinus, "That One is not absent from any, and absent from all."<sup>32</sup> The analogy of contradiction is standard in Plotinian and, overall, in Neo-Platonic thought, but only as it is necessary to speak of the super-intelligible realm. For Neo-Platonists, the Principle of Non-Contradiction obtains in the material and intelligible realms. Here is a clear inversion of Neo-Platonic vocabulary and concepts: what Plotinus employs with respect to the realm beyond knowledge and discursive language, Foucault employs with respect to quotidian normativity. It may be that the general contempt for the principle of non-contradiction expressed by post-modern thinkers arises from this inverted reception of a Neo-Platonic category.<sup>33</sup>

Mention has already been made of Father Flynn's mapping a series of events. He suggests that in trying to understand Foucault's "discontinuous systemization (one might

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<sup>31</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.1106a26-1106b29.

<sup>32</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead VI.6-9*, VI.9 (9), 4.24-25.

<sup>33</sup> As an example of this post-modernist contempt for the Principle of Non-Contradiction, Roland Barthes writes, "Imagine someone (a kind of Monsieur Teste in reverse) who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old specter: *logical contradiction*; who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity; who remains passive in the face of Socratic irony (leading the interlocutor to the supreme disgrace: *self-contradiction*) and legal terrorism (how much the penal evidence is based on a psychology of consistency!) Such a man would be the mockery of our society: court, school, asylum, polite conversation would cast him out: who endures contradiction without shame? Now this anti-hero exists; he is the reader of the text at the moment he takes his pleasure." Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 3.

consider the image of dot matrix printing!).”<sup>34</sup> The suggestion of dot matrix printing is apt, but I should like to suggest a simpler technology of dots, namely the connect-the-dots books of early childhood. Those books consist of pages on which dots are printed. As the child connects the dots on a given page, a picture emerges. The moderate post-modern nominalist objects—in a view that is surely traceable to Hume’s objections to “necessary connexion”—that there are only dots and that the connecting of them is the mere imposition of the mind’s wishful thinking, its longing for coherence and meaning, upon the dots. The radical post-modernist, not unlike Cratylus as Aristotle presents him in the *Metaphysics*,<sup>35</sup> asks, “What dots?” Although Foucault’s nominalism requires him to adopt the moderate post-modernist position, nevertheless, he is willing—recalling Hume’s constant conjunction—that life might be just one damn thing after another, but “after” does signify something. Foucault proposes, therefore, his nominalist series of events. What I suggest is that by mapping events, one can notice where events as dots are and where they are not. If one maps the events described in “A Preface to Transgression,” one can see where those events congregate and where they do not. By tracing the outline of where events congregate, one can see the outline of the void where God once was (or perhaps never was), but—on Foucault’s account—where God no longer is. There is a void, but it is a void about which one can make affirmations. Thereby, through Foucault’s descriptive account of the void, one can map a series of events which delimit the space no longer (or never) occupied by the limitless God.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle *Metaphysics* 4.1010a10-14.

<sup>36</sup> “But what does it mean to kill God if he does not exist, to kill God *who has never existed*? Perhaps it means to kill God both because he does not exist and to guarantee he will not exist—certainly a cause for laughter: to kill God to liberate life from this existence that limits it, but also to bring it back to those limits that are annulled by limitless existence—as a sacrifice.” Foucault, “Preface,” 32.

Is there a basis in Foucault's own account for my reading of "A Preface to Transgression" as mapping an affirmation of absence? The answer is that there is such a basis, and it is explicit. After setting forth the modern relationship to sexuality in which the human is established as limit, Foucault writes that the modern truth of sexuality as natural act has eliminated "any positive meaning in the sacred." He continues in a passage that has already been partially quoted:

In that zone . . . transgression prescribes not only the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance, but also a way of recomposing its empty form, its absence, through which it becomes all the more scintillating. A rigorous language, as it arises from sexuality, will not reveal the secret of man's natural being, nor will it express the serenity of anthropological truths, but rather, it will say that he exists without God; the speech given to sexuality is contemporaneous, both in time and in structure, with that through which we announced to ourselves that God is dead. From the moment that Sade delivered its first words and marked out, in a single discourse, the boundaries of what suddenly became its kingdom, the language of sexuality has lifted us into the night where God is absent, and where all of our actions are addressed to this absence in a profanation which at once identifies it, dissipates it, exhausts itself in it, and restores it to the empty purity of its transgression.<sup>37</sup>

Foucault writes of the scintillating re-composition of the empty form which is God's absence.

Just a page later, he writes, "The death of God is not merely an 'event' that gave shape to contemporary experience as we now know it: it continues tracing its great skeletal outline."<sup>38</sup>

There is "no positive meaning to the sacred," but there is, presumably, also no negative meaning to the sacred either since transgression, as Foucault says, "contains nothing negative . . . nothing positive."<sup>39</sup> There may still be an inverted "meaning to the sacred" since the Sade-to-Freud state-of-affairs establishes the human as limit in relation to the absence of God. He writes that in the "dark domain" of sexuality, "We now encounter the absence of God, our death, limits, and their

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 35-36.



transgression.”<sup>40</sup> Transgressive eroticism is the means of transcending the human limit in reaching for the void where God once was. As Foucault says of transgression in the last paragraph of “A Preface,” “*The act which crosses the limit touches absence itself.*”<sup>41</sup> Recalling again what Plotinus says about “The One” in *Ennead VI.9 (9)*, Foucault’s inverted reception can be clearly seen. Plotinus writes that the One “in its presence it is not present except to those who are able and prepared to receive it, so as to be in accord with it and as if grasp it and touch in their likeness.”<sup>42</sup> For Plotinus, the end is to touch the *presence* of the One in likeness; for Foucault, the end is to touch the *absence* of God in difference.

By adopting Foucault’s own method upon Foucault (i.e., by deploying his own narrative in order to invert it), metaphysical truth reappears. By mapping every transgressive act, the outline of God’s absence becomes clear. Based upon that mapping, nothing can be said about God’s presence, rather only about God’s absence. Mapping Foucault’s nominalist series of transgressive events establishes, to use Father Flynn’s phrase again, “the intelligible contours” of divine ontology through the affirmation of absence. A hint that Foucault did himself think along these lines—that is, that he saw the Neo-Platonic enterprise as antecedent to his own—is found in his 1966 essay, “The Thought of the Outside.”<sup>43</sup> He defines “the thought of the outside” when “the being of language only appears for itself with the disappearance of the subject”<sup>44</sup> “in relation to the interiority of our philosophical reflection and the positivity of our knowledge”

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>42</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead VI.6-9*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), VI.9 (9), 4.24-28.

<sup>43</sup> Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, 546-67.

<sup>44</sup> Translation from Flynn, *Mapping*, 187, quoting Foucault, *Essential Writings*, 2.149.

which is to say, “thought outside subjectivity.”<sup>45</sup> He seeks the origin of this “thought of the outside.” He writes, “One can well suppose that it was born of that mystical thought which, since the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius, has prowled within the confines of Christianity. Perhaps it continued, for a millennium or almost, under the forms of a negative theology.”<sup>46</sup> That is to say, it is only with the advent of modernity that this sort of “thought of the outside” dissipated and, therefore, that a circumstance arose in which it needed to be renewed. Thus Foucault situates his own thought in relation to Neo-Platonism and the Christian *via negativa*. If one completes the Foucauldian inversion on Foucault’s inverted Neo-Platonism, that is, if one inverts light and shadow on the stage of Foucault’s text, then the absence of God becomes presence. Considered this way, “A Preface to Transgression” can be read as a preface of another kind, namely as a preface to a radically apophatic vision of God.

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<sup>45</sup> Translation from Flynn, *Mapping*, 187, quoting Foucault, *Essential Writings*, 2.150.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 549. My translation. Father Bernauer discusses Foucault’s “negative theology” in a way consistent with the argument of this paper, “Foucault’s negative theology is a critique not of the conceptualizations employed for God but of that modern figure of finite man whose identity was put forward as capturing the essence of human being. Nevertheless, Foucault’s critical thinking is best described as a negative theology, rather than a negative anthropology, for its flight from man is an escape from yet another conceptualization of the Absolute. The project of modernity was an absolutization of man, the passion to be, as Sartre saw, the ‘*Ens causa sui*, which religions call God.’” James Bernauer, “Foucault’s Ecstatic Thinking,” in *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Branauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994), 68, quoting Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 784.

METAPHYSICS: A TRADITIONAL MAINSTAY OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN NEED OF RADICAL RETHINKING

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper begins by indicating why metaphysics is in need of radical rethinking. The metaphysics that is a traditional mainstay of philosophy is an inquiry with a comprehensive scope. At present, inquiry that is metaphysical in this sense is not characteristic either of (so-called) continental or analytic philosophy. Continental philosophers, for the most part, continue to understand metaphysics as comprehensive, but—in the wake of such thinkers as Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger—tend to exclude metaphysics from philosophy, with some going so far as to dub ours the post-metaphysical era or epoch. Analytic philosophers, on the other hand, have in recent years been producing many “metaphysical” works—including introductions, textbooks, systematic expositions, companions, and handbooks—but the “metaphysics” pursued in these works is an inquiry with a severely *restricted* scope, indeed limited to the subject matter of what was, earlier in the tradition, designated *metaphysica specialis* (although with a few additions, including the issues of categories and universals, and various topics taken to be shared with philosophical logic). The radical rethinking announced in this paper’s title aims to revive metaphysics as inquiry with a comprehensive scope, indeed, as universal science.

Having identified the need for radically rethinking metaphysics, the paper introduces an ambiguity that has plagued the entire metaphysical tradition and that, unresolved, obscures the central question that the rethinking of metaphysics must address. This question is best termed the question of Being, but the “Being” in question must be disambiguated. The English word “being” can translate, on the one hand, the Greek *einai*, the Latin *esse*, and the German *Sein*, but also, on the other, the Greek *on*, the Latin *ens*, and the German *Seiendes*. Ambiguity is avoided if the English word is capitalized (and read “capital-being”) when it corresponds to *einai/esse/Sein*.

The disambiguation just accomplished reveals that any comprehensive metaphysics requires both a theory of Being and a theory of being(s); the latter is appropriately termed “ontology.” Ontological inquiry has characterized the philosophical tradition from the beginning. Plato asked only what we mean when we speak of being (*on*), and Aristotle projected “a science that studies being qua being” (*to on he on*, *Met.* Γ, 1003a21) and writes of “the question of being” (*ti to on*, *Met.* Z, 1028b4. In their wake, metaphysics was understood primarily as a theory of being(s) qua being(s) (*ens quatenus ens*). Thomas Aquinas was the first to make explicit the fundamental distinction between *ens* and *esse*, but he failed to develop an adequate conception of *esse*, having understood *esse* only as *actus essendi* (act of Being). Much later, Heidegger emphasized the need to clearly distinguish between Being (*Sein*) and being(s) (*Seiendes*) and—inappropriately—called this distinction “the ontological difference,” thereby distinguishing it from the differences among beings he called “ontic” differences. (He failed to notice that both “ontic” and “ontological” refer only to *on/ens/being(s)*.)

This paper shows that any current attempt to rethink metaphysics by clearly and directly addressing the question of Being must heed (at least) the following three points. First,

although Heidegger merits praise for having reopened the question of Being, his own way of responding to it is unacceptable, because it does not meet even the most basic theoretical requirements concerning clarity, rigor, or argumentation. Second, the identification of Being and existence accepted by most analytic philosophers in the wake of Quine must be flatly rejected, because it results from and thereby perpetuates the failure to recognize and hence to tackle the question of Being. According to the terminology used in this paper (and in other writings of its author), only beings either do or do not exist; it would be absurd to ask whether or not (the dimension of) Being exists. Third, the grand lessons of the history of philosophy must be radically taken into account. Especially, the most important periods and turning points must be heeded: from the beginning with Plato/Aristotle, through the medieval period, metaphysics was approached on the basis of a kind of naive (unreflective) natural attitude. Things changed dramatically with the turn, in modern times, to the subject (subjectivity, mind, Spirit). Finally, the linguistic turn (accompanied by what can be called the logical turn) once again transformed the entire *status quaestionis*.

The attempt to rethink the question of Being against this extremely complicated background constitutes a huge task. The final part of this paper sketches the approach to the task taken in the author's two books *Structure and Being: A Theoretical Framework for a Systematic Philosophy* (Penn State UP, 2008), and *Being and God: A Systematic Approach in Confrontation with Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Luc Marion* (Northwestern UP, forthcoming 2011).

# Is the Doctrine of the Transcendentals Viable Today? Reflections on Metaphysics and the Doctrine of the Transcendentals

By Nathan R. Strunk<sup>1</sup>

Introduction:

In order to reflect on the question about the possibility of metaphysics today, the following essay considers a specific test case in the doctrine of the transcendentals. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger briefly narrates the genesis of the transcendentals as being the universal conditions grounding Aristotle's *Categories*. Heidegger argues that the transcendentals consists of "those characters of Being which lie beyond every possible way in which an entity may be classified as coming under some generic kind of subject-matter (every *modus specialis entis*), and which belong necessarily to anything, whatever it may be."<sup>2</sup> Heidegger credits Aquinas as taking up the "task of deriving the *transcendentia*", and argues that in order to do so Aquinas must demonstrate that "*verum* is a *transcendens*." This move proves significant for the early Heidegger for it exhibits the compatibility between universal conditions and their existential referent, i.e. a metaphysical turn to the subject. Thus, Heidegger argues that Aquinas can only demonstrate "*verum* as a *transcendens*" by "invoking an entity which, in accordance with its very manner of Being, is properly suited 'to come together with' entities of any sort whatsoever...[and] This distinctive entity, the *ens quod natum est convenire cum omni ente*, is the soul (*anima*)."<sup>3</sup> On the basis of this interpretation, Heidegger concludes, "Here the priority of 'Dasein' over all other entities emerges...this priority has nothing in common with the vicious subjectivizing of the totality of entities." This interpretation of the transcendentals evinces a turn to the subject that offers a one-sided reading of the doctrine of the transcendentals. Heidegger attends to the transcendentals as the first principles of cognition without considering in what way the transcendentals are the first principles of nature. The question thus arises as to whether he can have the former at the disim of the latter? The possibility of metaphysics and the viability of the doctrine of the transcendentals today require being attentive to both. In the following presentation, I wish to briefly give a history of the transcendentals before considering Aquinas' doctrine of the transcendentals as particularly found in *De Veritate*. Next, I intend to consider two modern though considerably different contemporary retrievals of the doctrine of the transcendentals by Jan Aertsen and Olivia Blanchette in order to arrive at my own estimation of Heidegger's interpretation of the transcendental, and its significance for understanding the challenge and yet the promise of the doctrine of the transcendentals today.

Before pursuing our task, let me qualify what I intend to accomplish here and the limitations and challenges of doing so. Without a doubt the foregoing is an ambitious project for a doctoral candidate and for a presentation, both of which are only matched by the unwieldy scope of the title, which would be impossible to answer sufficiently in the brief time allotted here. Any answer given would have to navigate the Charybdis and Scylla of (i) forcing modern concepts into a medieval framework thus abusing modern philosophy to

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<sup>1</sup> I gratefully acknowledge my readers Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Garth W. Green for their invaluable comments. I also thank the Benedictine brothers of Weston Priory for a sacred space that provided the necessary silence and tranquility for completing this essay.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 34. Occasional references to German are from XXX

accommodate medieval philosophy, or (ii) inversely, forcing medieval philosophy into modern philosophy and similarly do injustice to the integrity of its concepts. On the one hand, this is the historical philosopher's concern and, on the other, it is the contemporary philosopher's concern. These concerns are the reason why an answer to the question will not be definitively posed here (to say nothing, of course, of my own ability as a lowly doctoral candidate even to do so). That said, as we will see Heidegger encourages such a comparative study, and how he employs medieval ideas provides a basis for accessing his own work. Thus, the foregoing will simply weigh Heidegger's reading of the transcendentals alongside the doctrine of the transcendentals in Aquinas in order to evaluate Heidegger's account. William Luijpen once stated and I paraphrase, "A philosopher asserts more in what he or she does not disclose."<sup>3</sup> We will come to see that Heidegger left much unsaid.

## I. History of the Transcendental—The Categories and Supra-Categorical

The doctrine of the transcendentals arose in medieval philosophy as a way of amending the list of predicates given in Aristotle's *Categories*.<sup>4</sup> Although there are divergent theories about the general schema of the categories and their intra-coherence, one can generally speak of the categories as the foremost predicates of a substance; anything said about a thing falls into at least one or more of Aristotle's ten categories.<sup>5</sup> Individually the categories are not universal, but taken together they designate the primary predicates of which all things must have at least one. Stated differently, though not every being will have all the categories, a being will have at least one or more of them. The medieval doctrine of the transcendentals originated through consideration of other predicates that are more universal than the categories. Since Aristotle's *Categories* did not appear to be comprehensive nor include terms

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<sup>3</sup> William Luijpen, *Phenomenology and Atheism* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> I owe this insight to Daniel O. Dahlstrom, who introduced me to the work of Jan Aertsen. Although a medieval doctrine, Aristotle was aware of the issue as it arose for him in refutation of Plato's conception of the Good. Jan Aertsen mentions that Aristotle distinguishes between universals and categories in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Metaphysics*. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle states, "good is spoken of in as many senses as is being; it is used in the category of substance...relation...quality, etc." Quoted from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, trans. and ed. by Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8. Aertsen observes from this distinction that it is evident that "Its commonness is consequently of a different nature than the univocal commonness of a category." Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), Defining how the commonness of the transcendentals differ from the commonness of categories motivated the medieval discourse about the nature of the transcendentals—a discourse that hinged on the differing metaphysics of Aristotle and Plato. Although each of these in their own way anticipated the doctrine of the transcendentals by engendering questions from which it arose, it still must be maintained that the doctrine of the transcendentals as a 'doctrine' was unique to medieval philosophy. Aertsen states, "...it is not until the thirteenth century that we can speak of a proper doctrine of the transcendentals, in which these notions [Being, Good, etc.] are interrelated in a systematic way." (113)

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Categories on Interpretation*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. and ed. Harald P. Cooke (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1938). See Paul Studtmann, *The Foundations of Aristotle's Categorical Scheme* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008)

more universal and common than the categories listed by Aristotle, a new genre of predicates needed to be created. Jan Aertsen provides a succinct account of the emergence of the medieval concept *transcendens*:

“The term ‘transcendental’—medievally themselves speak of *transcendens*—suggests a kind of surpassing. What is transcended are the special modes of being that Aristotle called the ‘categories’, in the sense that the transcendentals are not restricted to one determinate category. ‘Being’ and its ‘concomitant conditions’, such as ‘one’, ‘true’ and ‘good’, ‘go through (*circumeunt*) all the categories’ (to use an expression of Thomas Aquinas). The doctrine of the transcendentals is thus concerned with those fundamental philosophical concepts which express universal features of reality.”<sup>6</sup>

What distinguishes the transcendentals from Aristotle’s categories is their unique universality. It should be noted that Heidegger provides a similar account of the history of the transcendentals:

“An understanding of Being is already included in conceiving anything which one apprehends in entities. But the ‘universality’ of Being is not that of a class or genus. The term ‘Being’ does not define that realm of entities which is uppermost when these are articulated conceptually according to genus and species... The ‘universality’ of Being ‘*transcends*’ any universality of genus. In medieval ontology ‘Being’ is designated as a ‘*transcendens*.’”<sup>7</sup>

If the universality of Being differs from the universality ingredient in genus and species, then how should this universality be conceived? It is precisely an answer to this question that Heidegger pursues in the opening pages of *Sein und Zeit* while reflecting on how Being is indefinable to the degree that it does not follow under the definitional guidelines required by logic since it is not an entity and how it is the self-evident insofar “some use is made of Being” whenever “one cognizes anything or makes an assertion.”<sup>8</sup> In his attempt to understand the universality unique to the transcendental Heidegger joins a long tradition for historically how one conceived this universality became the problematic that differentiated

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<sup>6</sup> Jan Aertsen, “The Medieval Doctrine of the Transcendentals: The Current State of Research,” *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*, vol. 33 (1991), 130. Also see *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals* where Aertsen explains, “So they transcend the categories, not because they refer to a reality beyond the categories but because they are not limited to one determinate category.” Although it cannot be considered at length in this essay, it is worth noting that Aertsen argues that this situating of the doctrine of the transcendentals in reference to Aristotle’s *Categories* distinguishes the medieval use from the Kantian use, “While in Kant the transcendental is concerned with the categories of reason, transcendental in the Scholastic sense is opposed to the categorical.” (92)

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 22. [GERMAN]

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. Also see p. 25 regarding the indefinability of Being and p. 27 for Being as a first principle. Heidegger’s use of Being as a ‘basic concept’ [GermanXX] resonates with first principle on pp. 29-30.

one account of the doctrine of the transcendentals from another.<sup>9</sup> For instance, Philip the Chancellor, as the first Western thinker to develop a doctrine of the transcendentals enumerates the transcendentals unique universality in terms of their novel integration of the abstract and the concrete in a way that distinguishes them from other abstract concepts, making evident how they are common (*communitas*) to all things in a way that other predicables are not.<sup>10</sup> Duns Scotus departs significantly from his predecessors (Aertsen calls it a “new phase in the history of the doctrine”) by rejecting “the traditional view that the transcendentals are characterized by being ‘common’ to all things” in favor of a conception of their universality as exceeding every genre; that is, they “cannot be constrained under any genus.”<sup>11</sup> Lastly and crucially for the purposes of this presentation, Aquinas conceives the universality of the transcendentals according to two interrelated trajectories or what Aertsen, following medieval usage, calls “two resolutions (*resolutio*)”: noetically as first conceptions of the intellect and ontologically as the general modes of being.<sup>12</sup> Each of these manifest a different aspect of the universality of the transcendentals: the first with regard to predication (that which is predicated of all things), and the latter with regard to metaphysics (that which is true of all things insofar as they are (*ens commune*)). To explicate the former Aertsen attends to Aquinas’ adoption of Aristotle’s principle of demonstration, and to expound the latter he shows how Aquinas’ conception of *ens commune*—a conception achieved through an innovate conception of *esse* as actuality—alters Aristotle’s metaphysics since with it “the conception of metaphysics itself became transcendental.”<sup>13</sup> Of these three Heidegger often intimates a position closer to Scotus—this may not be terribly surprising in lieu of his dissertation on Scotus<sup>14</sup>—yet it is instructive then that in the closing pages of the introduction he choose

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<sup>9</sup> Aertsen, “The Medieval Doctrine of the ‘Transcendentals,’” 133ff. Elsewhere, Aertsen provocatively extends this to all philosophies that call themselves transcendental, “Even if all transcendental philosophies agree with one another in that they reflect on a surpassing, the differ from one another in the nature and direction of this transcending movement” (*Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 92).

<sup>10</sup> H. Pouillon, “Le premier traité des propriétés transcendentales, la ‘Summa de bono’ du Chancelier Philippe,” in *Revue néoscholastique de philosophie*, 42 (1939), 40-77. Pouillon states, “Being and its properties are for Philip principles, the most universal concepts, first and simple, at least in the sense that there is nothing in which one can logically resolve, nothing else enters their definition. For these notions alone, it is permitted to attribute the concrete in the abstract: being is, unity is one, truth is true, and goodness is good, whereas one cannot say that justice is just nor prudence is prudent.” [translation mine] On Philip the Chancellor, also see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 25-39.

<sup>11</sup> Aertsen, “The Medieval Doctrine of the ‘Transcendentals,’” 136. Aertsen directs us to L. Honnefelder, *Scientia transcendens. Die formale Bestimmung der Seiendheit und Realität in der Metaphysik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit (Duns Scotus-Suárez-Wolff-Kant-Pierre)* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990), 3-199; and A.B. Wolter, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (New York: St. Bonaventure, 1946).

<sup>12</sup> Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 91. “From the perspective of the resolution of knowledge, they are called the prima or ‘first conceptions of the intellect.’ Considered from their extension, they are the *maxime communia*, common to all things.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>14</sup> Titled the *Doctrine of the Categories and Meaning in Duns Scotus* (1915). See Theodore Kisiel, *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Earlier Occasional Writings 1910-1927*



Aquinas as indicative of bringing a crucial move to the history of the transcendentals, and that he has specifically chosen Aquinas' conception of truth as a transcendental. We shall return to this point in a moment after considering the case of Thomas Aquinas as explicated by Jan Aertsen and Olivia Blanchette.

## II. Aquinas's Doctrine of the Transcendentals in *De Veritate*—Aertsen & Blanchette

*De Veritate* 1, 1-2 and *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16 are crucial texts for understanding truth as a transcendental in Aquinas. On the basis of these Aertsen argues that truth is both a logical transcendental and a metaphysical transcendental. By this he means that the being of reason (*ens rationis*) associated with logic and the real being (*ens naturae*) of metaphysics are coextensive (*aequiparantur*).<sup>15</sup> The former, *ens rationis*, pertains to “those concepts that reason attaches (*adinvenit*) to the things it considers, such as the notions of ‘genus’ and species.”<sup>16</sup> Truth is a logical transcendental, then, because it is “applicable to every categorical being” insofar as it is understood. The latter, *ens naturae*, “deals with things themselves by considering what is common to them, i.e. being qua being. Each of these attends to the commonness (*communio*) or what I have called the universality of the transcendentals differently but coextensively or integrally, and each has different implications for understanding truth as a transcendental. Yet, they are coextensive and mutually reciprocal. This is evident in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 3 in which Aquinas states,

“As ‘good’ has the *ratio* of the desirable, so the ‘true’ has an order to knowledge. Now everything is knowable insofar as it has being (*esse*). For this reason it is said in the third book of *De Anima* (431b 21) that ‘the soul is in a sense all things,’ through the senses and the intellect. And therefore, as good is convertible with being, so is the true. But as good adds to being the notion of desirable, so the true adds a relation to the intellect.”<sup>17</sup>

Emphasizing Aquinas' assertion that, “Everything is knowable insofar as it has being (*esse*).” Aertsen comments on this, “the real identity of the ‘true’ and ‘being’ is mediated by the notion of act. Everything is knowable, not insofar as it is in potency but insofar as it is in act [ST q. 87, a. 1]. Insofar as a thing is in act, it is called ‘being’ (*ens*), for the name ‘being’ is taken from the act of being. Actuality is the ground of both the knowability and the entity of things.”<sup>18</sup> If I had to summarize this in my own words I would say that the act generative of

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(Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 2007) S. J. McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Aertsen, “Is Truth Not a Transcendental?” in *Wisdom's Apprentice: Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan, O.P.* (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 2007), 5. On this matter I side with Aertsen over Dewan, who maintains that truth is solely a logical transcendental in “Is Truth a Transcendental for St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, vol. 2, no. 1 (2004), 1-20. See my “The Doctrine of the Transcendentals and Aquinas' *De Veritate*: A Comparative Analysis of Lawrence Dewan and Jan Aertsen,” Presentation to 46<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. For an extensive treatment of the logical sphere of the transcendental see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 243-261; 278-283.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Aertsen, “Is Truth Not a Transcendental?”, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

knowledge resides not only in the intellect but in things, and that an account of the way things are in act is a necessary compliment for understanding the act of intellection.<sup>19</sup> This kind of harmonization is precisely what Aertsen is after when he calls truth a relational transcendental; that is, a transcendental conceived according to the correlation of being and the soul or intellect, and comments on the aforementioned passage, which is worth quoting at length:

“Thomas understands Aristotle’s statement as a reference to the special position of human beings in the world. Man is all things *quodammodo*, namely, not by his being, but by his knowing; it is that in which the perfection of an intellectual substance consists. Knowing beings are distinguished from non-knowing beings in that the latter have only their own form, whereas knowing beings are by nature able to assimilate also the forms of other things. Their nature has ‘a greater amplitude and extension.’ An intellectual substance has ‘more affinity’ to the whole of things than does any other substance. Through its intellect it is able to comprehend the entire being (*totius entis comprehensiva*). The human mind, one could say, is marked by a transcendental openness.”<sup>20</sup>

Aertsen’s concluding sentence is especially profound—“the human mind...is marked by a transcendental openness”—and may intimate more than he himself would be willing to admit. Can we deepen what Aertsen has so perspicuously taught us?

In his major opus *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay*, Olivia Blanchette critiques the modern proclivity to overly accentuate possibility by offering metaphysics of actuality as an alternative. Blanchette’s proposes a twofold trajectory based on the inextricable compatibility of knowing and being; namely, the act of the intellect and the actuality of being.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the former, Blanchette explains how the discipline of metaphysics arises from reflection on the act of judgment itself and our very ability to reflect on this reflection. As Blanchette calls it, “a reflection that seeks understanding in its very transcendence of understanding.”<sup>22</sup> To help clarify this point he makes a distinction—a distinction derived from considering the relation of being and truth—between the act or exercise of judgment, *actu exercito*, and the terms used for making a judgment, *actu signato*. By means of this distinction, Blanchette introduces the occasion for metaphysics as the mind’s transcendental orientation in every act of judgment. This transcendental orientation is evident by mind’s proclivity and residual grasp of truth in every act, *actu exercito*, of judgment. Blanchette writes, “Implicit in the act

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<sup>19</sup> One must be careful here not to misunderstand the point I am trying to make. I am not arguing that the act of the intellect is reducible to and can only be given an account of on the basis of it being activated by things. Fundamentally, transcendental Thomism never departs from an appreciation of the a posteriori while still recognizing the dynamic depth the intellect possesses in every act of intellection. It is not uncommon for this depth to be conceived precisely on the basis of Aristotle’s axiom, *anima est quodammodo omnia* [“the soul is in a sense all things”]. Even a metaphysics of cognition entails a metaphysics of being was the point made by J. Maréchal, *Le Point du Depart*, Cahier V XXX Reference XXX, p. E. STEIN???

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Olivia Blanchette, *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics* (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 2003), see especially p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

[*actu exercito*], though not in the terms [*actu signato*], of a judgment is the claim that we already know, somehow, what truth is, and that what we are saying entails some truth or correspondence with being. The idea of truth here is not so much one of correspondence as one of relation or reference to being, which presents itself.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, this transcendental orientation toward truth fundamentally entails a transcendental orientation toward being. He follows this with a quote from the corpus of Aquinas’ *De Veritate* 1, 1 that further supports the distinction between *actu exercito* and *actu signato*: “That which intelligence first conceives as what is known best [*quasi notissimum*], and in which it resolves all conceptions, is being.”<sup>24</sup> Another way of saying this in line with the language given in the history of the doctrine of the transcendentals above is to say that the supra-categorical becomes evident through every act of judgment in its application of the categories or the predicamental is made possible by the supra-predicamental. With this distinction in place and with establishing the occasion and method of metaphysics, Blanchette arrives a definition of transcendental, distinguishing it slightly from modern conceptions of the term, bringing us closer to understanding the challenge of continuing the doctrine of the transcendentals in modern philosophy:

“We could speak of the method of metaphysics, therefore, as transcendental, but we must be careful to understand the term correctly. First, the method is transcendental in the sense that it transcends any method used in the direct exercise of judgment, such as that of empirical science or phenomenology, the transcendence that we have been at pains to bring out here. But it is not transcendental in the sense that it is concerned only with the form of knowledge, and not with a content of its own, as the transcendental of critical philosophy or phenomenology seems to be. It is transcendental in this modern sense only in that, in order to bring out its particular content, it has to reflect upon the *actual* exercise of judgment that begins directly in experience.”<sup>25</sup>

Blanchette further distinguishes his conception of transcendental from modern conceptions by emphasizing the metaphysical actuality of being. Earlier I noted that Blanchette suggests a twofold trajectory for metaphysics: the act of the intellect that we just briefly discussed and the actuality of being. Regarding the second trajectory, the actuality of being, Blanchette innovatively—to my knowledge the first to do so though undoubtedly with the inspiration of Maurice Blondel to say nothing of the warrant given by Aquinas himself—argues that act is a transcendental property of being. In order to add ‘act’ to the list of transcendentals Blanchette must demonstrate that act of being is more than an accidental property of a substance, and that it is a universal, common property of being as such. This is no minor feat—an accomplishment that accommodates certain trajectories in contemporary phenomenology. To prove act is a transcendental Blanchette subtly distinguished between act as a transcendental and action particular to each substance by “a certain determinancy in their nature that is open to perfection through action.” (185) In this manner, Blanchette

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 54. [Brackets mine]

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 65. Emphasis mine. One can see how important this use of “actuality” in this quote if one considers the following from the previous page: “Metaphysics is the attempt to make this primordial knowledge [first knowledge of being] critical precisely with reference to being in act through reflection upon the actual exercise of judgment in which we come to know being as being in act.” (64) [Brackets mine]

arrives at act being a transcendental by first not making act solely coincide with the essence of thing and second by demarcating this primordial act of being, or as he calls it “a certain determinancy”, from the action produced by individual essences. With this distinction in place, Blanchette argues that action derives from the combination of essence and the act of being thereby making act in general a prerequisite for action in general. He writes, “The act of being does not flow from the essence from the essence that limits it in a finite being. It is simply in composition with this essence, as in the case of human being, where the concrete human essence limits its act of being. Action flows from the composite of an essence and its act of being.”<sup>26</sup> Making act a transcendental puts Blanchette in conversation with phenomenology but the metaphysics required to make it such decidedly offsets him from it. While Blanchette admits that arguing for the transcendental of actuality resonates with the modern turn to the subject and the emphasis on action in phenomenology, he still augments these sympathies with a traditional metaphysical account of act given through the distinction between essence and existence, thereby cleverly connecting the ancient etymology of cause, *aitia*, as deriving from a forensic context having to do with action, responsibility, and imputation.<sup>27</sup> Later on in the work Blanchette enumerates the metaphysics of the act of being in terms of act and potency with act being a perfection of being, the details of which cannot be pursued here. But just as the act of judgment transcends the terms or signifiers used in each judgment, so also the metaphysics of the act of being transcends any attempt to define it essentially. “At this point we might be tempted,” writes Blanchette, “to ask for a definition of act to show what this act of being is. But such a definition cannot be given, since as Aquinas remarks, act is one of those first simple concepts that cannot be defined, because we cannot go on indefinitely in definitions (In Metaph IX, 5, § 1826).”<sup>28</sup>

In sum, Aertsen helped us to see how Aquinas’ notion of truth as a transcendental followed a twofold trajectory: the being of reason (*ens rationis*) associated with logic and the real being (*ens naturae*) of metaphysics. In the course of enumerating each of these, Aertsen intimated the importance of the act of the intellect meeting the act of being in Aquinas’ *De Veritate* 1,1, which he came to describe as a kind of “transcendental openness.” This description prompted us to deepen our understanding of the transcendental by turning to Blanchette’s twofold account of the transcendental according to the act of the intellect and the act of being, paying particular attention to the significance of act for him. Now, having considered Aquinas’ account of the transcendental with the help of Aertsen and Blanchette, we are in a position to reconsider Heidegger’s reading of Aquinas on truth as a transcendental.

### III. Heidegger’s Interpretation of the Transcendentals—The Priority of *Dasein*

Returning to Heidegger’s interpretation of the transcendental in Aquinas, his appeal to Aquinas’ notion of truth as a transcendental corresponds to his argument for the priority of *Dasein*. This priority is founded on *Dasein*’s unique disposition or relation toward Being.<sup>29</sup> Heidegger lists three ways that *Dasein* “takes priority over all other entities,” with the third priority prompting Heidegger to Aristotle’s *anima est quodammodo omnia* and his appeal to

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 186. This is precisely how Blanchette differs from Heidegger when he worries that he reduces action to essence.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32.

Aquinas's consideration of truth as a transcendental. His exposition here is a further elaboration on his pointed description of *Dasein* elsewhere:

“Being as the basic theme of philosophy is no genus of some entities and yet it concerns each entity. Its ‘universality’ is sought on a higher plane. Being and the structure of being lie beyond each entity as such. Being is the *transcendens* simply. The transcendence of the being of *Dasein* in an exceptional [transcendence] insofar as the possibility and necessity of the most radical individuation resides in it. Every disclosure of Being as *transcendens* is transcendental knowledge. Phenomenological truth (disclosedness of Being) is *veritas transcendentalis*.”<sup>30</sup>

If one permits, Heidegger appears to construct an analogy suggestive of the schema that generated the doctrine of the transcendentals: the ontological is to the categorical as the ontic is to the supra-categorical. If one pursues this analogy even further we see that just as the medieval transcendentals surpass the categories by virtue of their universality just as *Dasein* as ontically prior does to any ontological description of it.<sup>31</sup> It is the with this transcending primordially of *Dasein* in place that Heidegger introduces Aristotle's dictum, “Man's soul is, in a certain way, entities”, and lauds Aquinas' move to secure the transcendentals especially truth by turning to an entity who is all things:

“Thomas is engaged in the task of deriving the ‘*transcendentia*’—those characters of Being which lie beyond every possible way in which an entity may be classified as coming under some generic kind of subject-matter (every *modus specialis entis*), and which belong necessarily to anything, whatever it may be. Thomas has to demonstrate that the *verum* is such a *transcendens*. He does this by invoking an entity which, in accordance with its very manner of Being, is properly suited to ‘come together with’ entities of any sort whatever... Here the priority of ‘*Dasein*’ over all other entities emerges, although it has not been ontologically clarified. This priority has obviously nothing in common with a vicious subjectivizing of the totality of entities.”<sup>32</sup>

This is truly a remarkable passage, and it speaks volumes that he sees his own understanding of *Dasein* as somehow compatible with the medieval transcendental tradition in a way that perhaps other descriptions are not. The concluding phrase especially captures the reader. To whom does this refer? Is this a turn away from Kant? If so, in which direction: toward the medieval conception of the transcendental or toward a Husserlian conception of the transcendental? Certainly, more evidence ways toward the latter than to the former no matter what degree he may couch his conception of *Dasein* in Aristotelian-medieval terms. Thus, it can be conceived as an amalgam of both. In his discussion of Heidegger's

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted from Daniel Dahlstrom, “Heidegger's Transcendentalism,” *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 35 (2005), 34.

<sup>31</sup> Heidegger articulates this in terms of the priority of *Dasein*, “But with equal primordially *Dasein* also possesses—as constitutive for its understanding of existence—an understanding of the Being of all entities of a character other than its own. *Dasein* has therefore a third priority as providing the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies.” (34)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

transcendentalism, Daniel Dahlstrom perspicaciously discusses how Heidegger's thought "attempts to root all epistemic or alethic valence in conceptual activity" and as such retains "vestiges of the transcendental turn." As such, Dahlstrom argues that Heidegger "conceives the project of *Sein und Zeit* in terms that combine the medieval concept of 'transcendence' with the modern (Kantian and Husserlian) concept of the transcendental."<sup>33</sup> Much more could be said here, but the gist remains the same; namely, Heidegger's retrieval of the medieval tradition remains highly selective so that he can put in conversation with a modern conception of transcendence thus making evident what he leaves unsaid become more pointed when we compare that to those expositions of the transcendental by Aertsen and Blanchette though some points of contact remain between them.

Now that we have covered Aertsen, Blanchette, and Heidegger regarding the transcendental, we are in a better position to appreciate the similarities and silences in Heidegger's appeal to Aquinas' account of truth as a transcendental. Far from being an overly clever interpretation of Aquinas, Heidegger proves to be quite conscientious, erudite and selective of that which is consistent with what he wishes to convey about *Dasein*. Silences speak louder than words. With Aertsen, we see that Aquinas' conception of the transcendental doubly coincides with the synthesis of knowing (*ens rationis*) and being (*ens naturae*). Teasing out the implications of each of these Aertsen arrives at a consider of Aquinas' interpretation of Aristotle's *anima est quodammodo omnia*, which he describes provocatively as a "transcendental openness." In order to further understand the nature of this "transcendental openness", we sought the help of Blanchette, who furthered our understanding of the transcendental with his exposition of the act of the intellect and the act of being, paying particular attention to the significance of the notion of act. What makes Blanchette particularly relevant for this essay is the way he articulates his conception of transcendental in comparison to Heidegger's. Blanchette confirms that Heidegger was right to begin with *Dasein* and that the modern turn to the subject can be quite complimentary with the medieval conception of the transcendental.<sup>34</sup> Still Heidegger says little about what Blanchette calls the "act of being" and what Aertsen designates as *ens naturae* in his consideration of the transcendental in *Being and Time*.<sup>35</sup>

By way of conclusion, one can say that in a manner I have tacitly answered the question regarding the viability of the doctrine of the transcendentals today; namely, it's viability must come through a conversation with contemporary reflections on the transcendental—a conversation that I hope to have initiated here and hope to pursue in greater detail elsewhere.

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<sup>33</sup> Dahlstrom, "Heidegger's Transcendentalism," 34.

<sup>34</sup> Blanchette, *Philosophy of Being*, 67. Also see p. 70. Blanchette also frequently describes the human being as the primary analogate of being.

<sup>35</sup> However, see Heidegger, *Basic Problems in Phenomenology*

Induction: Perennial Value of the Aristotelian Perspective

A well thumbed Logic in use through most of the 20th century is that of H.W.B. Joseph. First published in 1906 at 608 pages, it became the prototype of many a logic textbook written for classroom use. Joseph opens a chapter devoted to the problem of induction with the observation, "The history of the word Induction is still to be written, but it is certain that it has shifted its meaning in the course of time and that much misunderstanding has arisen thereby." Volumes have been written in the last hundred years, but the conflict between the empiricist and the Aristotelian remains the same. Joseph shows clearly what Aristotle in the Posterior Analytics understood by induction. "Aristotle," he tells us, "gives the name induction to the formal process of inference by which we conclude a proposition to hold universally of some class, or logical whole, because an enumeration shows it to hold for every part of that whole." This may be called induction by complete enumeration or perfect induction. Aristotle shows how it might be thrown into the form of an inductive syllogism. He points out that our knowledge of scientific principles springs historically out of our experience of particular facts; though its certainty rests ultimately on an act of intellectual insight. He gives the name "induction" to the process in which particulars of our experience suggest to us the principles which they exemplify, but this is not a formal process from premises to conclusion. It is not the enumeration which leads us to assent to the universal, but a kind of intellectual penetration.

In Joseph's account, Aristotle goes on to show "where (presumably in default of the necessary insight and assurance from our intellect) we may look for reasons for accepting or rejecting any principles which a science puts forward. He does not give to this procedure, which is of a formal logical kind, the name of "induction" but calls it "dialectic." What he says on this subject is of importance from the standpoint of scientific method and comes close to what modern writers understand by induction. There is no doubt that for Aristotle our knowledge of general principles comes from our experience of particular facts and that we arrive at those principles by induction. Yet the only formal logical process which Aristotle described under the name of induction is that of perfect induction, which clearly neither is nor can be the process by which the sciences establish their laws or general principles. The kinds of reasoning processes or arguments which they really do employ, so far as they appeal merely to the evidence of our experience, are of a different sort

The strength of Aristotle's treatment of induction became an issue only in modernity, notably after Locke and Hume. Medieval schoolmen and their contemporary exponents generally consider inductive reasoning unproblematic. The schoolmen referred to induction as an argument from experience. Albert the Great (1206-1280), for example, writes that our senses teach us the obvious truth about the nature of wine—that it intoxicates—and that our intellect grasps this truth with certainty that cannot be doubted. Modern logicians misunderstand this basic truth when they reduce it to no more than an invalid syllogism. Induction, from an Aristotelian perspective, as Joseph shows, is not mere enumeration. Statistical models of induction miss the point when they reduce it to a mechanical process of enumerating cases. Such models fail to appreciate the cognitive leap, the intellectual discernment that produces the intelligible universal. One does not have to examine all instances of copper to understand that copper conducts electricity, conducts heat, and is malleable. The inductive insight is not mere enumeration, a statistical summary, or an endless enumeration. At some point the intellect recognizes that there is more in the sense report than the senses themselves are able to appreciate. Mere multiplication of instances serves no purpose.

One of the best expositions and defense of the perennial value of the Aristotelian perspective since Joseph is found in three works, which may be read in tandem, of Jacques Maritain. Maritain dismisses perfect induction as the purely verbal and sterile form which modern commentators have the naïveté to regard as the only induction known to the ancients. Using his

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example, we don't have to examine every vertebrate to know what a vertebrate is. We can speak of "vertebrate" as common to man, horse, and crocodile. "It is not from the parts of a collective whole nor from the point of view of a distributed whole or a universal properly so called that we must consider induction if we are to understand it, for induction consists in attributing to an intelligible universal, disengaged, so to speak, by abstraction, a predicate verified by some of the individuals or some of the parts in which the universal is realized. This operation is legitimate when the enumeration of individuals is sufficient and it really furthers knowledge. For to know that every metal conducts electricity is not the same thing as to know that silver, copper are conductors of electricity; it is to know that there is some necessary connection (even though we do not perceive it in itself) between the property and the nature of metal—it is to possess—however obscurely and imperfectly it is nevertheless to possess—a truth *de jure*." At play here is the distinction between what the scholastics call the proper object of the senses (sensible properties, color, shape, magnitude, odor, etc.) and that of the intellect (a spontaneous insight into the essence or nature of the thing under consideration). We will address this at length in our lecture on the principle of substance.

Maritain has his own way of expressing this insight. He writes, "induction by incomplete enumeration does not make us pass from some to all but from some to every. We should avoid saying "all metal conducts electricity," and instead say, "metals conduct electricity." It is the intellect's grasp of the nature of metal that enables it to attribute the same predicate to each individual.

Induction has the double function of inference and proof. When considered as an argument or proof, inductions admits of a certain zone of probability. It is, in fact, neither an inference properly so called nor an argument nor proof: it merely leads the mind to a connection of terms whose intelligible necessity it perceives immediately, for example the principle of identity or the principle of causality. Maritain points out that complete induction is a true inference, a true argumentation by which the mind acquires new knowledge. "If modern authors have denied this, it is 1) because as a result of nominalist prejudice they have failed to recognize the nature and value of the universal and thereby the entire process of human knowledge, and 2) because they have understood induction only from the point of view of the parts of a collective whole." It is one thing to know that Peter and Paul are mortals and another to know that man is mortal. By the universal truth which concerns the nature or quiddity common to the enumerated parts, we implicitly possess the *raison d'être* of the considered property."

Maritain calls attention to a distinction between what belongs to logic itself and what belong to epistemology or metaphysics. It belongs to metaphysics to discuss nominalism and realism and the controversies concerning the nature of science and ordinary knowledge. The discussion of the first principles of thought and being and the order in which they are known to us is also a part of metaphysics. This we will do in subsequent lectures.

As a personalist, Edith Stein approached the topic from the reverse problem of differentiating or accounting for the individual given the universal. In her *habilitationsschrift*, written under the direction of Edmund Husserl and published posthumously as *Finite and Eternal Being*, acknowledging a common human nature, she tackles the problem of individuation. A person is not simply an exemplification of a common human nature. A person is not like all others with the human form. A person has a level of un-repeatability and dignity that the classic Aristotelian position did not emphasize. This leads Stein into an extended discussion of the principle of individuation. Her position may be described as uniquely her own, neither that of the well-known position of Aquinas nor that of Scotus, who took an entirely different tack. She speaks of "a common human form" where Aquinas would speak of "a common human nature." Although influenced by Thomas in much of her work, she has a distinctive metaphysical conception of being and essence. She wants to give an account of how there can be many instances of the same type which differ not only numerically but also qualitatively. She does this by positing a form in addition to the common human form, not exactly Scotus's formal principle of individuation, i.e., the principle of *haecceitas*, but closer to Scotus than Aquinas's signate matter. "Stein's primary concern in positing individual forms," Sarah Bordon Sharkey explains in her excellent book on Stein "is not individuation (as such in the case of Scotus's *haecceitas*), the paradigm for being a universal, or identity, but rather uniqueness." To fully understand Stein's position, we would have

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to review Husserl's theory of parts and wholes as presented in his *Logical Investigations III*, something beyond our present enquiry.

Louis Groarke, in his *An Aristotelian Account of Induction*, develops Maritain's thesis, offering yet another telling critique of the empiricist's account of induction and the empiricist's notion of substance. Like Etienne Gilson and Maritain upon whom he draws, Groarke is conscious of the historical setting of philosophical analysis and debate. He is convinced that no historical idea arrives on the scene without some kind of antecedent. Descartes may have set out to create a new philosophy, both natural and metaphysical, to take the place of Aristotle and St. Thomas, yet Jorge Secada, in his careful study of Descartes, finds it necessary to give his book the subtitle, *the scholastic origins of modern philosophy*. After Bacon, the praise of induction was taken to be a sign of enlightenment. Today popular science writers repeat the all-too-familiar tale about the triumph of modern science over earlier natural philosophy, and the largely uneducated public accepts the story because it lacks the philosophical sophistication to wrestle itself free of the reigning orthodoxy. In fact, those who did the most to advance the sciences did not refute or even repudiate ancient notions concerning the object of science and the nature of scientific explanation; they merely shifted discourse from consideration of the nature or essence of things to that which can be measured, declining to integrate the scientific tableau of the new physics with that of philosophy and common sense.

Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) is not a household name, but in his own day he was engaged in one way or another with the leading intellectual figures of his period. He corresponded with scores of his illustrious contemporaries, notably with Descartes, Galileo, Kepler, Hobbes, Campanella, and Christina of Sweden. Like others at the threshold of modernity he was confronted with the problem we have been addressing. He deserves to be remembered, if for no other reason than his cautionary dictum, "It is not permitted to transfer into Physics something abstractly demonstrated in Geometry." Gassendi clearly stands at the threshold of modernity, anticipating the British empiricists by more than a century. It is Descartes and his artificially created "mind/body problem" that stimulated Gassendi to address the age-old problem of universals and the relation between sense and intellectual knowledge. In his criticism of Descartes, he writes, "When you say that you are simply a thing that thinks, you mention an operation that everyone was already aware of—but you say nothing about the substance carrying out this operation, what sort of substance is it, what it consists in, how it organizes itself in order to carry out its different functions." Gassendi's own understanding of nature leads him to a mechanism, reminiscent of Epicurus's atomism. Having failed to grasp the fact that much of the moral philosophy he was antecedently committed to could be defended with the metaphysics of Aristotle, he seized upon the philosophy of Epicurus to ground both a theory of knowledge and the inherited moral principles to which he was committed. As a consequence, accounting for the incorporeal, i.e., the existence of God, free will, an incorporeal human soul and immortality, always remained a problem. Gassendi's difficulty shows clearly that the implications of one's solution to the problem of individuation for ethical theory cannot be overlooked.

Groarke points out that with a textual knowledge of Aristotelian metaphysics the problem of induction disappears or solves itself. Defending Aristotle against the charge of naïve realism, he is convinced that modern logicians ignore at their peril what medieval philosophers had to say about induction. Hume may have been the first to raise the skeptical doubts about inductive reasoning, but Groarke finds it strange that the problem was overlooked by his predecessors for nearly two millennia. He argues that Locke and Hume and their empiricist followers never attempted a fair understanding of earlier perspectives. There is no textual evidence that Hume had a significant knowledge of Aristotle. In the *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1739), Hume mentions Aristotle twice, once to emphasize his "utterly decayed" reputation and once in a general reference to the four elements. By the time later authors such as Kant and Mill appear on the scene, mainstream philosophy had already lost sight of the original understanding of induction.

If we go back to the Aristotelian texts themselves, Groarke reminds us, we find that Aristotle distinguishes between two different ways of knowing, deduction in which the intellect moves from previously established propositions to a conclusion that follows necessarily, and induction in which the intellect moves from observance of particular instances to general claims about the

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nature of the thing under discussion. Induction moves from the particular to the universal whereas deduction involves inference from previously established data. "Scientific induction," writes Groarke, is for Aristotle a matter of what must be the case; it is the capacity of insight (not argument) that allows us to make logical sense of observation . . . . Confronted with repeated instances of a phenomenon, human reason arrives at a universal principle, and then goes on to use this universal principle in scientific argument." "Induction is the mental ability to some how jump from the experience of a particular to concepts, rules and principles covering a wide variety of cases. We can, then, define Aristotelian induction in two different ways. Induction is, as traditionally understood, an inference from particular to the universal; but it is also in its most basic form, an inference from sense perception to knowledge. We begin in perception and we end up with words or symbols, with propositions made out of some kind of language, with verbal or linguistic claims that ultimately affirm what is true, in a general way, about the world." Thus we have two different ways of knowing, induction in which the intellect moves from previously established propositions to a conclusion that follows necessarily and induction in which the intellect moves from the observance of particular instances about the nature or essence of the kind of thing in question.

As the Scholastics insisted, it is necessary to keep in mind a distinction between the order of nature and the order of experience. In the order of nature, the intelligible nature, the essence, is prior to the sensible fact. To us, the particular sensible is known first, and the intelligible principle by which the sensible is explained is known afterwards. Induction proceeds from what is first in the order of experience to what is first in the order of nature; from the apprehension of the sensible facts to the apprehension of general principles out of which we subsequently construct the sciences. Without sense experience there is no knowledge of intelligible principles. The process of obtaining knowledge out of sense experience is induction. But there is a difference between apprehension and understanding. Apart from knowing the fact itself, we understand why planets move in ellipses, why some materials burn, why salt dissolves in water only when we have a physical theory that provides a causal explanation. Only by resorting to the principles governing the structure of molecules, by alluding to the atomic structure of salt and water, and the laws governing their action, can we understand combustion and solubility. To understand such natural processes as oxidizing and dissolving requires one to understand the underlying causal mechanisms at work. No one will ever see a K-meson or neutrino, but they are among the important non-observable posited in physical theory that enable us to explain a wide range of phenomena. In short, understanding requires an appeal to causal mechanisms largely unseen.

The same is analogously true in the social sciences where, as in the physical sciences, we need to identify causal mechanisms at work. Peter Manicas, writing from an Aristotelian perspective, addresses the problem of explanation in the social sciences in his *A Realist Philosophy of Science: Explanation and Understanding*. Manicas proves to be a compelling critic of David Hume and the positivism of the Vienna Circle and by implication their understanding of induction. He defends the thesis that the fundamental goal of both the natural and social sciences is not prediction and control but rather the understanding of the processes that jointly produce the contingent outcomes of experience. Scientific knowledge, he maintains, consists primarily in knowledge of the internal structures of persisting things and materials and secondarily in knowledge of the statistics of events or the behavior of such things and materials. Scientific understanding occurs when causal analysis enables us to explain how patterns discerned amidst the flux of events are produced by the persisting natures and constitution of things. Manicas makes a distinction between "scientific explanation" and "understanding." Understanding is achieved when explanation includes a well-confirmed theory about the generative mechanism responsible for the phenomena under investigation. Phenomena that are unintelligible in terms of themselves beg to be explained causally. A successful theoretical explanation consists of a representation of the structure of the enduring system in which the events under consideration occur. This is accomplished when the mechanism responsible for its generation is identified.

Drawing heavily on Rom Harré's *Principles of Scientific Thinking* (1970) in which Harré develops an account of explanation in the natural sciences, Manicas analogously employs Harré's thesis as he describes what he call the "ontological status" of the social sciences. Understanding in the social sciences, Manicas argues, is achieved when, as in the natural sciences, we can exhibit a

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causal mechanism responsible for the phenomenon in question. He does not deny that there are important differences between the scientific study of nature and the scientific study of society. "In our world, most events—birth growth, rain, fires earthquakes, depressions, revolutions—are the products of a complex nexus of causes of many kinds, conjunctively at work. It is for this reason that the natural sciences, instead of seeking to explain concrete events, more modestly seek to understand the mechanisms and processes of nature." Without doubt, a social mechanism can be theorized which provides an explanation of why working-class kids get working-class jobs. Typically, suggests Manicas, this would involve identifying their place in society, their beliefs, and their view of the world. Generative social mechanisms in the social sciences are always historically situated. Thus to understand concrete events, such as the collapse of a regime, a depression, or a dramatic increase in divorce, in addition to a pertinent general mechanism, one also needs an historical narrative. "In these cases, explanation takes the form of a narrative that identifies the critical social mechanism and links the sequential to the contingent but causally pertinent acts of persons."

Plato had it right; there is no science of the particular. To explain some event, some actual outcome, one needs to go back in time and identify sequentially the pertinent causes that produce that outcome. To understand Western culture, one needs to examine the classical and Christian origins of that culture and its development through time. To understand Islam is to examine the life and teachings of the Prophet, the Hadiths, and the history of Islamic conquest. "This will require, as Manicas insists, "a narrative which links critical actions and events with ongoing social processes grasped in terms of social mechanisms." In history there are no laws or sets of conditions from which one can make deterministic calculations. An explanation of any event requires the identification of the causal mechanisms as work in the social order. Understanding comes when we have a well-informed theory about the relevant generative mechanism.

I trust that this lecture with the above historical excursions has not only clarified Aristotle's treatment of induction but has shown that any resolution to the problem of induction, be it from the perspective of Wittgenstein's positivism, Edith Stein's personalism, or Gassendi's atomism, is one that has implications for the way we view many other things, notably, scientific explanation. But the implications are not limited to the natural sciences for they influence our understanding of human nature and the social order in its moral and cultural dimensions.

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# **Kant on Freedom, Causality and Natural Disasters<sup>1</sup>**

**Elizabeth Robinson**

## **I. Natural Disaster?**

In his 1763 Essay "The Only Possible Argument for the Existence of God" Kant considers the possibility that catastrophic events in nature could be predestined by God as acts of divine punishment for the sins of humankind. The possibility that natural catastrophes are the result of divine wrath is not one that has altogether disappeared even in our modern era.

Earthquakes in Pakistan, hurricanes in Louisiana as well as various and sundry other natural disasters have recently been blamed on sins such homosexuality, decadence, provocative dressing, etc. by prominent religious and political figures. Whether God does indeed punish our sins via acts of destruction and whether or not all catastrophes can be read as acts of punishment seems, for this reason, to be a question worth at least brief consideration.

The first question Kant considers in his analysis of this issue is whether or not these "natural" catastrophic acts should be considered supernatural. Kant begins by considering what it means for an act to be supernatural. He defines two different types of supernatural acts. The first, the "materially supernatural", takes place as the result of an "immediate efficient cause [which] is external to nature" (*Ak.* 2:104). Materially supernatural acts are those which cannot be attributed to any known natural cause, i.e. rocks floating upwards, fire raining from the clouds, rivers turning to blood, etc. As a result of their defiance of known physical laws these acts must result

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was written in response to a concern about the similarity of the two arguments in question raised to me by Manfred Kuehn. I am grateful for his drawing my attention to this issue and for comments on an early draft of this paper.

directly from a supernatural source. Earthquakes, hurricanes, etc. clearly are not materially supernatural because they happen in accordance with rather than in opposition to known physical laws.

The second kind of supernatural act Kant names the "formally supernatural." The formally supernatural is so called because "the manner in which the forces of nature are directed to producing the effect is not itself subject to a rule of nature" (*Ak.* 2:104). Kant's conception of the formally supernatural is meant to strike a balance between two opposing views. On the one hand, there is no natural law which would allow the evilness of human beings to be the cause directly responsible for a natural disaster such as an earthquake or flood. There is no law, maxim or formula of physics which, given 'x' quantity of sin in one particular location as an input, will universally result in 'y' natural disaster as its output. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for natural catastrophes, when they occur in locations which are also the sites of cities or people considered to be wicked, to be thought of as divine punishment upon evil doing. An event which is *causally* the result of natural laws can still be "especially instituted by the Supreme Being" to serve as a punishment of evil (*Ak.* 2:104). This is what Kant calls the formally supernatural. The event is the direct result of causal laws, but simultaneously serves as the punishing hand of God. It seems then that Kant is, at least in this early stage of his career, willing to answer our initial query with a "yes." Natural disasters can be produced by God as acts of divine punishment. This is perhaps not the answer for which we hoped.

## **II. Philosophical Disaster?**

There are two troubling aspects of this account of natural disasters. The first and more apparent problem is why Kant feels the need to attribute a supernatural element to natural disasters at all. Given the extensive lengths to which he goes later in the essay to show that

natural laws do in fact govern the motions of the universe (and that this need not be seen as a limitation of God's power), it seems oddly out of character for Kant to argue for large scale divine punishment through natural disasters. This is especially strange seeing that, as Kant points out, punishment for evil doing is often directly caused by the evil itself. The drunkard develops liver disease. The licentious person contracts syphilis, etc. Additionally, societies set up various legal and judicial systems to punish other offenses themselves. There does not seem to be a need for supernatural punishments in addition to those already established by laws of man or nature.

The second troubling aspect of Kant's account of natural disasters is less readily apparent but perhaps more concerning. The element of divine wrath in natural disasters does not follow necessarily from the disasters themselves, nor can it be logically deduced. In fact, concerning any particular natural disaster it would be impossible to say with certainty whether or not it serves as an outpouring of God's anger in addition to being the result of already known natural causes. Perhaps all natural disasters convey God's punishment. Perhaps it is only half or a third, but which half, which third? One can speculate as much as one likes, but given that the supernatural element of any occurrence is by definition not going to act in a law-like fashion one can never know for certain. Kant would of course claim that the laws of nature or logic do not preclude natural disasters from being a form of divine punishment. However, given that there is no deductive evidence to support this claim it has the potential to make the reader suspicious of Kant's intentions. Is Kant making allowances for divine punishment through natural disasters because reason compels him, or is he simply attempting to justify a previously held belief?

What makes this last point of particular interest is the similarities between the move made here to make allowance for divine punishment and the move Kant will make later on in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to allow for human freedom. For just as both natural law and divine will

are at work in certain natural disasters, so too both freedom and causality "each in a different relation, might be able to take place simultaneously in one and the same occurrence" (A536/B564). Kant claims that the intelligible cause of an effect (i.e. "that in an object of sense which is not itself appearance," A538/B566) can be thought of as free, while the cause with respect to the effect's appearance is thought of as the result of necessity (A537/B565).<sup>2</sup> In both instances, Kant has argued for a way in which two instigating factors (natural law and divine will, or freedom and causality) can be at work in the same event without contradiction. If, in the first instance, we attribute Kant's motivation to justification of a previously held belief, then what keeps us from making this assertion with regard to the second and more crucial case? Perhaps Kant's claim that we can consider ourselves as having free will without contradicting the laws of nature, a claim upon which the efficacy of his entire moral teaching hinges, is unjustified.<sup>3</sup>

While little can be said to one who wishes to question Kant's rational sincerity and motivation, it is possible to argue that, rather than misguided departures from Kant's normal mode of operation, these discussions of causality contain logical conclusions which work well within the broader picture of Kant's thought. Recognizing the consistency of these two discussions with the wider scope of Kant's philosophy rests on acknowledging the relationship between two key features found in both discussions. The first key feature is the speculative nature of the assertions about non-standard causality; the second is the fact that both claims concern the moral rather than the physical or metaphysical realms. If one keeps these two things in mind, the similarity in structure between the two arguments and their place within Kant's philosophy becomes more natural.

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<sup>2</sup> There is much more to be said regarding this issue, but the characterization provided should be sufficient for our present purposes.

<sup>3</sup> P.F. Strawson, for example, certainly thinks so. See the chapter on the Antinomy of Pure Reason in *The Bounds of Sense*.

### III. First Key Feature: Mere Speculation

In both the discussion of divine punishment and the discussion of freedom, Kant never claims that this alternative mode of causality *must* be at stake in any given event. In our consideration of natural disasters we concluded that one can never know if or when God's wrath comes into play. Kant, in fact, does not claim that divine punishment or freedom ever have to be the root source of any event at all. What is at stake here is not that divine wrath or freedom do serve as instigating factors but that they *could* without contradiction to laws of nature or causality. The crux of the argument rests on the assumption that it is possible for more than one causal factor or instigating force to contribute to the occurrence of an event. Putting aside the specific nature of the forces currently under consideration, this is hardly a controversial claim. We often attribute more than one cause to a given event. For example, think of a talented and successful athlete. What is the source of her success? We might say it is good genes from her mother or the fact that her father instilled in her a love of sports. We might also say hard work, practice, intelligence, skill, financial motivation, determination, physical fitness, proper instruction, luck, expensive equipment, performance enhancing drugs, proper diet, mental focus or a dozen other things. All of these things can be causes and causes at the same time, but they are not all causes in the same way. There seems to be little difference between saying that a woman is a good athlete because she loves the sport and because she has the proper physique to excel at it and saying that the cause of an earthquake was shifting of the earth's tectonic plates and God's desire to punish a wicked city. Or, to take the moral example, my not stealing cars could result from my proper upbringing and moral conditioning as well as my freely chosen desire to spend my time in other ways. Regardless of the *actual* cause or causes of any given



event (something which we can never deductively know) we are free to speculate about possible causes or the lack thereof without making claims which are contrary to reason.

If I assert that the Lisbon earthquake was an act of punishment by God upon sinful people I have not in any way interfered with the explanation of the earthquake as being the result of the shifting of tectonic plates. It seems, likewise, to not create a contradiction when I claim that though human actions in the phenomenal sphere, i.e. only insofar as they are appearances, seem to work in accordance with causal laws, in the noumenal sphere they are freely chosen. Here it becomes apparent that there is in fact a dis-analogy between the natural disaster argument and the argument concerning free will. The natural disaster argument deals with attributing two separate causes to the same event (namely God's wrath and natural laws) while in the case of causal laws and freedom what is at stake is not two types of causality but causality as opposed to non-causality or freedom. Rather than two causes at work in different ways on the same event we have two "instigating factors" (and incompatible ones at that) at work in two different realms- the noumenal and phenomenal. On the one hand, we have solved the original problem through showing a fundamental dis-analogy between the two cases but this at the expense of raising a much larger problem.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the point still stands – Kant's attribution of freedom is merely speculation and speculation in a manner that does not affect the status of whatever causal explanation we posit to explain a particular event or predicate in appearance. An attribution of freedom to my moral actions does not interfere with my view of all things in appearance as happening in accordance with causal laws. I have not posited freedom within my experience but as a possible factor outside of it.

#### **IV. Second Key Feature: the Metaphysical vs. the Moral**

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<sup>4</sup> The larger problem raised (namely the distinction between noumena and phenomena) is well outside the scope of this paper. However, despite the dis-analogy between the arguments at stake I feel that the forms of the arguments are analogous enough that the topic is worth pursuing.

The second key feature of both passages under discussion is that the speculative cause or factor introduced is one of moral rather than physical or metaphysical causality. This is significant for two reasons. First, Kant does not seem to, and it fact cannot, require the same deductive certainty of moral arguments that he does of ones relating to the physical world. One can hypothesize and speculate and at best show that a particular moral claim does not contradict known natural laws or rules of logic, but one can violate a moral claim in the way that one can never violate a law of nature. The moral law may be certain and determined by a metaphysical deduction, but it still remains the case that a moral law will never hold the status of a physical law. A moral “fact of the matter” (i.e. lying is immoral) does not have the same status as a physical fact of the matter (i.e. an object in motion will remain in motion until acted upon by an outside force). I can lie. I cannot break the law of inertia. One has facts of the matter about physical laws and we can at least hope that there are metaphysical facts of the matter (they are there whether or not we can know them), but what constitutes a moral fact? Let us assume that for Kant the categorical imperative constitutes a moral fact. I should only act on a maxim that is universalizable. The claim is certainly not that I *cannot* act on a maxim which I cannot will to be a universal law simply that I *should* not. Lying is the classic example of a nonuniversalizable law and yet I can lie anytime that I wish. The earth is flat. My hair is green. Since moral claims cannot be granted the same certainty that physical or metaphysical claims can hold then it is perfectly sensible of Kant to merely speculate concerning them.

Second, the speculative causal claims do no damage to our physical/metaphysical picture of the empirical world. If we assume the pre-critical Kant is correct about the possible role of divine punishment in natural disasters it poses no threat to the tectonic plate explanation of earthquakes or tsunamis. Likewise, if we assume Kant is correct about noumenal freedom it

poses no threat to the claim that biological or environmental factors can fully explain why certain people become serial killers. My assertions of divine punishment and freedom do not require me to fundamentally alter my view of the world in a way which is incompatible with scientific fact.

Moreover, it shows a consistency in Kant's work that freedom is the result of an argument which is similar in form to that which justifies divine punishment. Rather than make the reader suspicious of Kant's motivation, the similarities between the two discussion should further convince the reader of the great lengths to which Kant goes to maintain consistency and not overstep the bounds of what reason can teach us. What should be noted here is the seriousness with which Kant takes the laws of nature and causality and his unwillingness to simply say that at certain times they do not apply. Within our experience, natural law and causality must apply universally. Kant is unwilling to bend the law even for as upright and benevolent a trespasser as the Almighty himself.

However, Kant's commitment to upholding the natural law does not keep him from ignoring its moral counterpart. Without freedom there is no potential for human beings to choose to reform and improve their behavior. Without fear of punishment there is little motivation for them to desire reform. Though the move made to justify freedom and divine punishment is certainly a controversial one, it is necessary if one desires to attribute absolute authority to natural law while leaving open the possibility of leading a moral life.

## **V. Conclusion**

What the preceding argument was designed to show is that the similarities between Kant's pre-critical argument to justify the attribution of divine punishment to natural disasters and Kant's argument in favor of moral freedom in the *Critique of Pure Reason* do not pose a fundamental problem for the latter. However, the similarity between the two arguments still

points to the strangeness of Kant's notion of freedom. The two arguments, the one concerning moral freedom and the one concerning divine punishment, do seem to work together in the sense that the validity of either argument entails the validity of the other. If I have moral freedom then it must also be the case that God can dole out punishment via tsunami should he so choose. I am free in the same way and to the same degree that God is able to punish human beings through natural disasters.

The troubling aspect of this is not the power which God now has to lord over me as he chooses but the very limited nature of my freedom. According to the critical Kant, the existence of God is the sort of metaphysical question of which we are prevented from having knowledge. If knowledge of God's existence is beyond my rational powers, how much more so his particular acts. It seems unreasonable for me to claim that the God whose existence I am not sure of certainly intended a particular disaster as punishment for a particular sin. Religious leaders may want to claim that a particular set of sins led to a particular natural disaster, but Kant provides them with nothing to verify such a claim.

On the other hand, it seems to follow that my knowledge of my own freedom is likewise limited. Freedom, or the source of any action which lies outside the causal chain, is as black and mysterious to me as the machinations of an unseen God. This is somehow both unsettling and exactly what one would expect. For any given human action I can point to a chain of causes that led to the particular outcome which arrived, but about any contributing factor outside of this chain I can say or know nothing.

## Sharing the Flesh of the World Merleau-Ponty and the Problem of Animal Minds

That my dog is ever “happy” when I arrive home or “sad” when I leave, that he is ever “afraid” to go to the vet, that he ever “wants” me to throw his ball: these, it is often said, are only so many sentimental delusions or anthropomorphic “projections”: I *represent* my dog to myself in my own image; I *transfer* my own emotions to my dog so that they might be reciprocated, but what my dog really “thinks” and “feels” I can never “know” because I can never leap inside his head or his flesh to find out. We therefore confront the following two alternatives: either my dog has no real “interiority” – no real “thoughts”, emotions, or intentions – or his interiority is so “interior” or so alien, so far removed from the horizons of “human” intelligibility that it is absolutely inaccessible to me, and anything that I might say about it would be wild fantasy or untethered speculation. But I think that if “knowledge” means anything anymore, then we *know* that this is not the case, that these two alternatives are neither sound nor exhaustive. We have at least moved beyond Descartes’ view that all non-human animals are insensate automata, but (as I will argue in this paper) we have not moved much farther, and thus we have not moved far enough.

I believe that Merleau-Ponty offers us a way forward, a way to go farther; I believe that Merleau-Ponty’s ontology puts us “back in touch” not just with conspecific (human) others but with *other* (non-human) *others* as well. Merleau-Ponty shows us that originary intersubjective field of projects and possibilities – that shared world, or that shared overlapping of worlds - with which we are always already “in touch” but with which we are also, paradoxically, out of touch. For Merleau-Ponty, we are *always already* involved with others: to be in the world is always already to be entangled with other “minds” or with what we must come to understand as other living, behaving bodies, other *corporeal schemata*; and these other living bodies amidst which I exist – these other sentient-sensible

beings at work in the world, these other exploratory and expressive motor-intentional projects, these other styles of being-in-the-world that diverge from but that also implicate and fold into my own – are not only those of other human beings but of *non-human* beings as well. As I hope to show in this paper, our “knowledge” of non-human (“animal”) others – that is to say, our knowledge of non-human animals *as* others (*not* as machines or “brutes” on the other side of a cognitive-ontological chasm) - is as basic and pervasive as our “knowledge” of other people; countless instances of human-animal interactions attest to this fact, but we are often encouraged to think otherwise.

In what follows, I will argue that Merleau-Ponty’s account of our lived relations with (human) others also embraces and illuminates our lived relations with *other* (non-human) others, that Merleau-Ponty’s solution to the traditional “problem of other minds” is also a solution to what is perhaps the last vestige of Cartesianism: the “problem of *animal* minds” (or the “*other-species-of-mind* problem”). I believe that if the classical problem of other minds is one of the great “scandals” of philosophy (and indeed it is), then so too is the problem of “animal” minds. It is true that the problem of animal minds seems to be far more intractable (and far less counterintuitive) than the old problem of other minds on account of the many apparent deep differences between human beings and many non-human animals. For the purposes of this paper I will not challenge most these alleged differences. However, I maintain (following Merleau-Ponty) that such differences never justify the kinds of skepticism for which they are often employed, and that if the problem of other minds is “scandalous” then the problem of other *animal* minds is *a fortiori* scandalous as well. The “problem of other minds” and the “problem of animal minds” implicate one another, and Merleau-Ponty offers a decisive solution to both.

In brief, the problem of other minds arises from and poses the following question: How do I know that other minds like my own – that is to say, other sentient agents, other

self-cognizant, thinking and feeling subjects - exist? How do I know that there really are other minds in the world besides my own? Merleau-Ponty summarizes this problem as follows:

...How can the word 'I' be put into the plural, how can a general idea of the *I* be formed, how can I speak of an *I* other than my own, how can I know that there are other *I*'s, how can consciousness which, by its nature, and as self-knowledge, is in the mode of the *I*, be grasped in the mode of the Thou...?<sup>1</sup>

To start, the problem of other minds effaces itself as soon as it is raised. The implicit *conditio sine qua non* of the problem is the notion that consciousness is totally *insular*, *transparent self-presence*. This means that only 'I' can live through my experiences and that I can never live through the experiences of another. Thus, I perceive other moving bodies in the world, but how (as Descartes wonders in the *Meditations*) can I know that these bodies are "inhabited" by other *consciousnesses* and are not just complex automata (or "zombies")? How can I really know that "you" are "conscious" if I cannot leap inside your "head" to find out? The problem of other minds can only arise if we assume that this idea of consciousness is true, but if this idea of consciousness is true then the problem contradicts itself as soon as it is posed: If consciousness is truly *private*, then how can I have a notion of *other* consciousnesses (*qua other*) such that I can imagine and verbalize the problem in the first place? If we admit that consciousness is *not* totally closed in on itself, then we give up the premise from which the problem of other minds emerges; but if consciousness *is* always closed in on itself, then the problem of "other" minds *still* cannot really emerge, for this premise entails that one cannot have any notion of the existence of any mind other than one's own: the problem of "other minds" would then really have to be the problem of other "me's" or of other "myselfes", which is absurd. Thus, either I cannot and do not have a conception of consciousnesses other than my own, in which case the problem of other minds could never occur to me, or I do have experiences of others, in which case the only

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge, 1962, p. 348

“problem” is to explicate the character of these experiences and how they are possible; and it is this latter task that Merleau-Ponty takes up in many of his works.

As I have just discussed, the problem of other minds presupposes what I call the “*privacy of perception*” thesis: the thesis that experience is a private spectacle arrayed before the gaze of an atomic, self-transparent consciousness; this is the idea that subjectivity is only given in the *first-person singular*, that subjectivity is the total and inalienable “possession” of a monadic subject. This idea of conscious life renders the conscious lives of others (if indeed we can say that there *are* others) forever out of reach, and it is one that Merleau-Ponty vehemently rejects. In short, if we reject any kind of dualism – that is, if we truly accept that consciousness is *embodied* through and through – then consciousness ceases to be trapped in what Daniel Dennett terms the “Cartesian theatre”; experience is no longer the private spectacle of a sovereign, transcendental ego; this “ego” is now an *incarnate* subject – a *living* body - always already *outside itself* in the world and amidst others, and living experience is always “*in the flesh*”. But to say that consciousness is “in” the flesh is not to say that it is “behind” or “within” it like a pilot in a ship; consciousness, rather, is “in” the flesh in the way that an expression is “in” a face. Consciousness *suffuses* the body; indeed, it is the very *physiognomy* of the living body. Thus, we begin to see the “solution” to the problem of other minds once we abandon the idea that consciousness is something *hidden behind* the movements and gestures of the body and learn to see these movements and gestures as *immediate* (not intermediary) *expressions* of conscious life:

...The problem comes close to being solved only on the condition that certain classical prejudices are renounced. We must abandon the fundamental prejudice according to which the psyche is that which is accessible only to myself and cannot be seen from outside. My “psyche” is not a series of “states of consciousness” that are rigorously closed in on themselves and inaccessible to anyone but me. My consciousness is turned primarily toward the world, turned toward things; it is above all a relation to the world. The other’s consciousness as well is chiefly a certain way of comporting himself toward the world.



Thus it is in his conduct, in the manner in which the other deals with the world, that I will be able to discover his consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

Subjectivity, then, is not the possession of a pure, executive subject but the *enactment* of a *living body*, and this living body is primarily what Merleau-Ponty calls a “*postural*” or “*corporeal schema*”. This is to say that the living body is a *style of comportment*; it is the *power to behave*, the *power to cope* with the world in which it finds itself; it is what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the “*I can*” that precedes any “*I think*.”<sup>3</sup> This means that incarnate consciousness is first of all not *positing* (thematic, object-directed) consciousness. The living body spins out what Merleau-Ponty calls “*intentional threads*”: *motor projects* that mark things in the world in relation my body - its needs, desires, and capacities - before these things become objects for analysis and reflection. My body takes up a posture toward the world (and toward others) prior to reflection on the world. The living, conscious body, then, is an expressive, meaning-full style of existence. In short, for Merleau-Ponty, being-in-the-world is always being-*at-grips-with-the-world*. Behavior - living, intentional movement - does not conceal or signify a homuncular mover “behind” or “within” it; but neither is it a mere ensemble of innate and conditioned nervous reflexes. Just as every face bears an irreducible expression, so too does behavior bear a certain kind of physiognomy. Consciousness *pervades* every gesture; it is the pulse and respiration, the very systole and diastole of animate existence, the momentum of embodied being-in-the-world.

Thus, we see that if consciousness is truly embodied, it is in and through the conduct of the living body that we meet it, and our “knowledge” of other “consciousnesses” is no longer a mystery:

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<sup>2</sup> “The Child’s Relations with Others”, trans. William Cobb, published in *The Primacy of Perception*, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 116-117

<sup>3</sup> See *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 137

If I experience this inhering of my consciousness in its body and in its world, the perception of other people and the plurality of consciousnesses no longer present any difficulty. If, for myself who am reflecting on perception, the perceiving subject appears provided with a primordial setting in relation to the world, drawing in its train that bodily thing in the absence of which there would be no other things for it, then why should other bodies which I perceive not be similarly inhabited by consciousnesses? If my consciousness has a body, why should other bodies not 'have' consciousnesses?<sup>4</sup>

Now, a quick reading of this passage might suggest that Merleau-Ponty offers an argument from *analogy*: I analogize from the embodiment of my own consciousness to the consciousnesses of other animate bodies. What Merleau-Ponty has in mind here, however, is nothing of the sort; indeed Merleau-Ponty rightly rejects all such arguments from analogy. In order to analogically infer the consciousness of another I must tacitly presuppose that which *ex hypothesi* I am only able to realize after I have drawn the inference; in other words, an act of analogical judgment can only be occasioned by a perception of behavior that precedes it. Thus, in order to analogically infer the consciousness of another body I must first perceive this body as conscious, but this prior perception renders the analogy circular and redundant. Thus, Merleau-Ponty clarifies his point as follows:

There is nothing here resembling 'reasoning by analogy' ...The other consciousness can be deduced only if the emotional expressions of others are compared and identified with mine, and precise correlations recognized between my physical behavior and my 'psychic events'. Now *the perceptions of others is anterior to, and the condition of, such observations, the observations do not constitute the perception.*<sup>5</sup>

Thus, to encounter the consciousness of an-other is not to find it at the end of a cognitive judgment; one perceives others *immediately* (pre-reflectively) in their bodily bearing in the world. Consciousness bursts forth through the conduct of a living, behaving body. Others can only be encountered *in the flesh*, and it is because I am flesh that others are always already present to me; sentient-sensible others are always already intermingled with my flesh and its vital intentions.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 351

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352, emphasis mine.

We now see Merleau-Ponty's full account of intersubjectivity. For Merleau-Ponty, intersubjectivity is primarily *intercorporeity*; it is what he sometimes calls a kind of "coition." This means that intersubjectivity happens through the *transference* or pre-reflective "*coupling*" of motor projects and corporeal schemata, the synergistic envelopment of bodily intentions. In other words, I immediately recognize the behaviors of others as possible activities and postures for my own body. I also often immediately *take up* the motor-intentional tasks of others, and vice versa. "This conduct which I am able only to see," Merleau-Ponty writes, "I live somehow at a distance. I make it mine...Reciprocally I know that the gestures I make myself can be the objects of another's intention."<sup>6</sup> This is to say that the gestures of another living body are immediately *meaningful* to me *as gestures*, as manners of dealing with the world, as motor-intentional projects polarized toward things and tasks that I might apprehend as well:

...I experience my own body as the power of adopting certain forms of behavior and a certain world, and I am given to myself merely as a certain hold upon the world; now, it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, to perceive a living, behaving body is to perceive a "prolongation" of my own bodily intentions and powers; it is to perceive *not* an "alter-ego" whose indubitable awareness of itself I can never breach or take up but an *alter-body* whose powers and intentions overlap and implicate (and sometimes even limit and motivate) my own. The motor-intentional "threads" of my body are interwoven with those of other living, coping bodies. "If I am a consciousness turned toward things", Merleau-Ponty writes, "I can meet in things the actions of another and find in them a meaning, because they are themes of possible activity for my own body."<sup>8</sup> Objects disclose not only other possible perspectives for *my* living body but possible perspectives for other living bodies as well. The object as a "theme" for

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<sup>6</sup> "The Child's Relations with Others", *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 118

<sup>7</sup> *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 353-354

<sup>8</sup> "The Child's Relations with Others", *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 117

possible perspectives or intentions of my own is where I immediately meet the perspectives and intentions of others. Every object is a nexus of meanings and relations where my motor projects and the motor projects of others are inextricably enmeshed, and this fact alone shows us that subjectivity is always already *intersubjectivity*, that corporeity is always already *intercorporeity*.

To perceive the conduct of a living body is not to perceive a mechanical object or a brute husk of extension, and neither is it to analogically infer the existence of a pure self-present ego on the hither side of it: it is to *bear witness* (pre-reflectively) to an-Other; it is to be dis-possessed or swept up by the conduct of another “self” at work in the world. I see “in” conduct neither the movements of a brute thing nor the executed thoughts of a bare ego but a *corporeal schema*, an incarnate *style of existence* and point of view on the world akin (but *not* equivalent or reducible) to my own. We know, for example, that seeing a human being stride across the street is very different from seeing the leaves of a tree rustle in the wind, that seeing a dog chase after a squirrel is very different from seeing a rock roll down a hill: Human beings, dogs and squirrels *behave*, but trees, leaves, and rocks do not. It is true that we all recognize a radical difference between, say, a living tiger and an animatronic model of a tiger, but this difference makes all the difference.

Merleau-Ponty shows us, then, that the “problem of other minds” is really the “problem of other living, behaving bodies”, but such a problem is, as it were, an oxymoron; to put the problem this way is to dissolve it. However, before I turn to apply Merleau-Ponty’s account of intersubjectivity to our knowledge of “animal minds”, I hasten to underscore the fact that Merleau-Ponty does not reject the distinction between interiority and exteriority but *complicates* it. First, for Merleau-Ponty interiority does not *reduce* to exteriority. This fact refutes the objection that Merleau-Ponty denies the “*what-it-is-like*” or *lived-through* dimension of experience. Merleau-Ponty does not deny that only “*I*” can live

through my pain or that I can never truly live through *your* pain. Thus, “the grief and the anger of another”, Merleau-Ponty writes, “never have quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed.”<sup>9</sup>

However, we have already seen that Merleau-Ponty *does* deny the claim that this lived-through dimension of conscious experience renders the consciousnesses of others radically inaccessible. Even in the most “private” aspects of my life I never cease to be “in touch” with other incarnate beings:

...Our glances are not “acts of consciousness”, each of which claims an invariable priority, but *openings of our flesh which are immediately filled by the universal flesh of the world*. All depends, in short, upon the fact that it is the lot of living bodies to close upon the world and become seeing, touching bodies which...are *a fortiori* perceptible to themselves. The whole enigma lies in the perceptible world, in that tele-vision which makes us *simultaneous with others and the world in the most private aspects of our life*.<sup>10</sup>

Though I cannot fully discuss Merleau-Ponty’s idea of “flesh”, it suffices to say here that the “flesh of the world” is the *intercorporeal tissue of Being*, and it is that in virtue of which interiority is never totally closed in on itself, never wholly “interior”. If interiority were wholly interior, then it would be impossible to bridge self and other; but we have learned that “interiority” is really a misnomer. It is true that interiority does not reduce to exteriority, but it does not follow that interiority and exteriority are *mutually exclusive*; interiority and exteriority are the warp and woof of Being, two aspects of the flesh of the world.

Now, I think that what we said so far about our experiences of *human* others is equally true of our experiences of *non-human* others. If animals *behave* in a variety of ways (however deeply different these ways may often be from our own and from one another), it is natural that we would relate to so many of them not as *things* but as *others*, as others with whom we sometimes exchange emotional experiences and intentional projects. Thus,

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<sup>9</sup> *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 356

<sup>10</sup> *Signs*, “Introduction”, trans. Richard C. McCleary, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 16, emphasis mine.

Merleau-Ponty says about animal conduct what he also says elsewhere about human conduct:

The gestures of behavior, the intentions which it traces in the space around the animal, are not directed to the true world or pure being, but to being-for-the-animal, that is, to a certain milieu characteristic of the species; they do not allow the showing through of a consciousness, that is, a being whose whole essence is to know, but rather a certain manner of treating the world, of "being-in-the-world" or of "existing."<sup>11</sup>

What Merleau-Ponty says here about "animals" is exactly what he says about human beings. If behavior is a *style of being-in-the-world*, then the behaviors of human beings and those of animals are all styles of being-in-the-world, styles that are often deeply divergent but never divorced from one another. The being of the human being and the beings of non-human beings are all *forms of conduct*, ways of coping with the world. Of course, exchanges of corporeal schemata may not be possible in all cases (e.g., I cannot use echolocation like a bat) but divergent styles of being-in-the-world (however deeply divergent they might be) nevertheless overlap and implicate one another in many ways (e.g., human beings and bats are both installed in "sonorous Being"), and exchanges with animals *do* happen. Besides exchanges of emotion and intentionality, there are countless instances of "pairing" between human and animal corporeal schemata; examples of such pairing are often instances of "imitation," where an animal will perform the gestures or the bearing of a human being in the same way that an infant (non-analogically) imitates the expressions of an adult: a transference of motor projects is possible across different forms of flesh. Embodied beings, then, are never "opposed" to one another; sentient-sensible beings are always in some ways "sensible" to one another, for they all belong to what Merleau-Ponty calls the "flesh of the world".

Thus, if (following Merleau-Ponty) we have rediscovered subjectivity in living behavior, then in order to deny subjectivity to animals we must also deny living behavior to them, but this is a bullet that I wager even the most stubborn skeptic would not bite. It

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<sup>11</sup> *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. A.L. Fisher, Beacon Press, 1963, p. 125-126

seems, however, that there is one last rearguard option available to the skeptic. Given the *prima facie* differences between humans and animals, one might say that “attributions” of complex emotions and intentions to animals are mere “anthropomorphic projections.” To say that an animal is anything more complex than an organism that can feel and react to pleasure and pain and act on immediate biological imperatives, so the skeptic argues, is to “anthropomorphize” the animal; it is to “project” into the behavior of the animal human faculties and characteristics. Such charges of “projection”, however, are not only usually *ad hoc* but are also incoherent. Charges of projection do not (and cannot) explain *how* such “projections” are possible (or *why* they happen in the first place). As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

Nothing would be served by saying that it is we, the spectators, who...project into the exterior the intentions of our thinking, since we would still have to discover what it is, what kind of phenomenon is involved upon which this *Einführung* rests, what is the sign that invites us to anthropomorphism.<sup>12</sup>

“Every theory of projection”, Merleau-Ponty later reiterates, “...presupposes what it tries to explain, since we could not project our feelings into the visible behavior of an animal if something in this behavior itself did not suggest the inference.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, if a skeptic alleges that an interpretation of a form of animal behavior is a kind of “projection”, we are right to pose the following question: what *occasioned* this projection in the first place? If the skeptic’s charge is not to be meaningless he or she must explain the possibility of “projection”, but the possibility of projection actually renders the skeptic’s position incoherent. A “projection” of human features into animal behavior (if it does not spring out one’s head *ex nihilo*) could only be occasioned by an experience that evokes the presence of these features in the first place, but then the “projection” is, indeed, no longer a “projection” at all and skepticism lapses either into circularity or an infinite regress. As Merleau-Ponty argues, charges of “projection” beg the question, for they necessarily presuppose the very experiences they are supposed to explain (or explain away). In other words, an experience

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<sup>12</sup>ibid., p. 125

<sup>13</sup> ibid., p. 156

of animal behavior is explained (or explained away) as an instance of anthropomorphic projection, but this anthropomorphic projection is itself only possible on the basis of an experience of behavior that “invites us to anthropomorphism”, an experience of a form of behavior that is *literally* ‘*anthropo-morphic*’ in certain of its aspects. Thus, the skeptic’s position is circular (and self-defeating) insofar as “projections” are only possible on the basis of those very kinds of experiences they are supposed to explain away.

Now, if we do not give up the skeptical thesis of “projection” – or if we try to rescue this thesis from circularity – then it will lapse into an *infinite regress*. I say that my dog is “sad”, and a skeptic says that this apparent sadness is a projection on my part. What, then, occasioned this projection of sadness on my part? As I have just discussed, this “projection” of sadness can only follow upon an experience of my dog that suggests “sadness,” but this experience that “suggests sadness” must *ex hypothesi* be another projection on my part, and *this* projection will have to follow from a prior experience that suggests *it*, and this prior experience will also have to be a projection, and so on *ad infinitum*. This infinite regress directs us to a primary experience that cannot be explained away as a “projection”, and it shows us what Merleau-Ponty argues time and again: living experience is the ultimate foundation of what we call truth and knowledge.

All of this is not to say, however, that we can never *misinterpret* animal behavior, that we can never *falsely* ascribe certain meanings – say, certain emotions or intentions - to the expressions and gestures of an animal. As we have seen, skepticism about other minds (whether human or otherwise) is implausible and incoherent for a number of reasons, but this does not mean that our interpretations of behavior can never be mistaken; all it means is that such mistaken interpretations are not mere “projections.” If every supposed “projection” follows upon a prior (indeed primary) lived experience that elicits it, then living experience is the bedrock ground of sound and mistaken interpretations of behavior



alike, and it is precisely this irreducible, anterior level of living experience to which Merleau-Ponty directs us.

We are always prone to error, but such is the lot of living experience. If the failure of skepticism does not imply the impossibility of error, neither does the possibility of error license skepticism. We can be (and often are) wrong about the interior and intentional lives of animals, but so too are we frequently wrong about the meanings of *human* behaviors: miscommunications between human beings – misperceptions of emotions, desires, motivations, beliefs and intentions – are endemic to human experience. As Merleau-Ponty argues, ambiguity is essential to living perception: so long as we are always already *outside ourselves* and *in the world*, we can never totally expunge or transcend perceptual ambiguity. Thus, if miscommunication between human beings is not solid ground for skepticism about knowledge of “human minds,” then neither is miscommunication between human beings and non-human animals a cause for skepticism about “other species of mind.” We are involved with *animal others* (which is to say, we are involved with animals *as others*) as deeply as we are involved with conspecific (human) others. Indeed, those cases in which we mistakenly impute emotions and intentions to animals only attest to how *profoundly intersubjective* living experience really is, to how deeply we are caught up with others in the skein and flow of life.

Now, we might offer a different reply to skepticism about “other species of mind”, one that I think is tempting to many contemporary philosophers and scientists. We might maintain that ascriptions of subjectivity to animals are justified as “*inferences to the best explanation*”, as the best explanatory accounts of various forms of behavior. This view is well represented by Colin Allen and Marc Bekoff in their book *Species of Mind*.<sup>14</sup> Allen and Bekoff argue that we are right to think that many animals have rich conscious-cognitive

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<sup>14</sup> Collin Allen and Marc Bekoff. *Species of Mind: The Philosophy and Biology of Cognitive Ethology*. The MIT Press, 1997.

lives, for attributions of certain “higher-order mental states” (e.g. emotional and intentional states) to animals are no different from other explanatory, scientific hypotheses or posits: they are justified as inferences to the best explanation of observed phenomena. Thus, Allen and Bekoff write that “...mental-state attributions, when justified, are justified by inference to the best explanation”<sup>15</sup>, and I would say that their view is one that is shared by many contemporary cognitive-behavioral researchers and philosophers of science.

However, I think that this view falls prey to the same problems we have just addressed. That is, this view actually concedes and reproduces the very premises of the kind of skepticism it is supposed to answer. On this view, our *knowledge* of “animal minds” - our access to the conscious lives of non-human others - is always only “*inferential*”, but we have already seen that this kind of view is deeply problematic. Indeed, this view is really just a version (or an inversion) of the skeptical “projection” thesis, and it falls prey to the same objection: “inferences to the best explanation” beg the question. In other words, Merleau-Ponty’s objection to skeptical charges of “projection” also holds against Allen and Bekoff’s view: if we have reason to ask the skeptic “what invites us to anthropomorphism?” then we also have reason to ask Allen and Bekoff “what invites us to infer intentionality?” One can only “infer” intentionality from apparently intentional behavior, and this means that one never *first* “infers” intentionality (or any other mental state) at all. An inference to intentionality can only follow from a prior experience that suggests intentionality. Thus, Allen and Bekoff’s view lapses into circularity because one must implicitly presuppose intentional behavior in order to draw an inference *to* intentional behavior. Indeed, “inferences to the best explanation” are really just rationally justified “projections.” Thus, Allen and Bekoff accept the skeptic’s basic idea of “projection” and only contend that certain “projections” are warranted. Moreover, this apparent solution to the “other species

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<sup>15</sup> *Species of Mind*, p. 56

of mind problem” presupposes the thesis that generates this very problem (as well as the classical problem of other minds) in the first place: the thesis of the *privacy* of consciousness. That is, the “inference to the best explanation” “solution” is only cogent if the conscious lives of others are “*private*”, for only if the conscious lives of others are private are they only accessible *inferentially*.

The failure of Allen and Bekoff’s supposed solution throws into relief what Merleau-Ponty has already shown us: we do not “know” other minds (human and non-human alike) *inferentially*; we are not acquainted with the conscious lives of others only indirectly after an *act of judgment*. The inferential stance of a scientist is only a later-order posture of detachment. We “know” others pre-reflectively through our living, behaving bodies; we know others through the *antepredicative* (pre-inferential) encroachment of our perceptual capacities and motor projects. Thus, intentionality, for example, is neither primarily nor exclusively something that we *ascribe to* behavior: “behavior” *as such* is always already, irreducibly intentional; to “behave” *is* to enact a style of being-in-the-world; it is to “*sing the world*” through a melody of gestures; it is to be polarized toward an originary and transcendent intersubjective field of tasks and possibilities. Knowledge of “other minds” – and knowledge of “*other* other minds” - is grounded in the pre-objective, “elemental” involution of corporeal schemata, in the primordial (pre-judicative) synergy of “self-others-things”. “Other minds” are encountered “in” (not behind) the flesh.

In closing, I hope to have shown that Merleau-Ponty offers us the most compelling account of our experiences with human and non-human others, an account that honors rather than distorts, that foregrounds rather suppresses what we live. Merleau-Ponty shows us that to be in the world is to be open to others and to things beyond oneself, to exist amidst an irreducible, proliferate multiplicity of others; it is to transcend oneself toward an intersubjective world that conditions and outstrips one’s existence and horizons

of possibilities: a world of which one is neither the sole inhabitant nor the sole constituent, a world that is shared. Merleau-Ponty helps us rediscover the *world in which* – and those *others with whom* – we are always already involved but from which we are often so deeply – and so dangerously – estranged. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology helps us dwell in the world more *responsively* – which is to say, more *responsibly* – with each other and with 'other others'.

# Humanism and Leadership

Dr. Eric Thomas Weber

## Introduction

It is remarkable how little the subject of leadership is studied today among philosophers. To be sure, areas of political philosophy, ethics, and epistemology have important implications for theorizing about leadership, but so does metaphysics. In this essay, I will argue that humanism is an approach to philosophy that is fruitful for the development of a democratic theory of leadership, one grounded on mutually supporting ethical, political, epistemological, and metaphysical theories. In short, humanism is a kind of systematic philosophy that addresses myriad concerns necessary for theorizing about leadership. For my purposes, I will draw from the work of humanist Paul Kurtz to show the rich resources that his work has to offer. My attention to metaphysics in the paper will not be my primary concern, but it is worth noting that the subject of metaphysics all too rarely is applied to the study of leadership.

Humanism starts with ethics, with the motivation for inquiry into the problems of human beings, a crucial matter for leadership. This is where I will begin also. But to study ethics depends upon the kinds of things there are to study and the kinds of things that do the studying and acting in question in ethics. Humanism offers a way of thinking about what it means to be human that I believe overcomes difficulties encountered in the essentialist tradition as well as in the postmodern movement against essences. I will address both of these traditions briefly to show how humanism differs from them and avoids their pitfalls, such as racism and speciesism on the one hand and naïve relativism or nihilism on the other. The humanism on which I will draw builds on the pragmatist, empirical tradition of William James and John Dewey, which for

my purposes has helpful similarities with some of Sartre's contributions on humanism. The key factor in each of these scholars' work is the fact that human beings contribute substantially to their own making. Humanism's ideals in this sense are not preexistent absolutes, but are malleable aspirations to be refined in the light of newer and richer experience and science. The second section of the paper will address the metaphysical concerns about humanity, therefore, as they relate to the moral tasks of leadership. Finally, I will address the epistemological position of Kurtz's humanism to show how leaders can seek compromise despite difference given human beings' inherent limitations vis-à-vis knowledge.

The conclusion of the paper will explain in summation the central reasons why I believe that future philosophical work on leadership should be systematic, unifying theories of knowledge, reality, and ethics, since all are involved in public political justification.

## **I. Ethics, Democratic Leadership, and Humanism**

Where one begins an inquiry can have a remarkable effect on how it proceeds. Humanists can come to the subject from a variety of directions, but in general, I suspect that they will often agree that the heart of humanism is ethics. I say this in the broad context of seeing philosophy generally as the three areas: value fields (ethics), metaphysics, and epistemology. My paper will follow this progression in making my case that a total philosophy is necessary for leadership. But after all, why do we need to study leadership? As I see it, leadership is an incredibly important moral ideal, and ethics is at bottom a crucial place to start in philosophy.

Some, such as Simon Critchley,<sup>1</sup> will say that curiosity is the starting point for philosophy or that philosophy is and should be useless, since uses are like convictions, which can

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<sup>1</sup> I heard Dr. Critchley make this point in a paper he gave in Barbados in 2005 at the Cave Hill Philosophy Symposium at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados.

mislead in the search for truth and knowledge. The latter view is sometimes associated with Phenomenologists like Husserl and is the explicit view of analytic philosophers like Gerald Gaus.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, even Husserl writes with a pressing title about *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*<sup>3</sup> – which sounds to me as though it has directive implications for human action. Gerald Gaus, who thinks we should not apply philosophy, contributed to *A Companion to Applied Ethics* on the subject of “Dirty Hands.”<sup>4</sup> Even for Critchley and others who see philosophy as developing out of curiosity, consider that curiosity is a feeling, an inclination, which develops out of discomfort and the pursuit of greater satisfaction about that about which we are curious. As I have argued elsewhere, the claim that a philosophy is necessary for a life worth living appears to me to be a decidedly moral claim.

When we look to empirical studies about ethics today, we find startling results. According to Joseph Nye, author of *The Powers to Lead*, “In each of eleven different fields, no more than 40 percent [of people] said they had a great deal of confidence in their leaders.”<sup>5</sup> It is safe to say, in other words, that people in the United States, and according to Nye’s research abroad as well, believe that there is a dearth of quality leadership. It may be fair to wonder how many times in history people have not felt this way. My point, however, is that there are many fields that are working on this problem, including scholars in psychology, education, business, and history, but there are very few philosophers who directly study leadership. The highest concentration of them is at the University of Richmond, which is truly an anomaly in this regard.

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<sup>2</sup> Gerald Gaus, “Should Philosophers ‘Apply Ethics’?” *Think* Spring (2005): 63-67.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Gaus, “Dirty Hands,” *A Companion to Applied Ethics*, edited by R. G. Frey and Christopher Heath Wellman, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2003, p. 169-79.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *The Powers to Lead*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. ix.

The present essay is an early draft of a paper that will serve as a chapter of a book on democratic leadership. In this project, I explain some very simple ideas about leadership, such as that it requires a context and set of values, information gathering, creative problem framing or reframing, deliberation, communication, and ultimately courage and initiative to act on the right ideas. What makes leadership democratic concerns the ways in which leaders consider the constituencies involved in their decision-making and actions, how they include all people as best as they can as fruitful sources of insight about how to think about and resolve problems, to mention only a few relevant qualities. But at the heart of the matter here is the fact that we want great leaders for the good that they can help facilitate and inspire. In short, leadership is essentially a moral matter.

As a systematic approach to philosophy, humanism has a clear moral initiative. Scholars like Paul Kurtz refute critics like Tim LaHaye,<sup>6</sup> who believe that humanism is amoralist. Kurtz offers clear ideas about how to think about ethics. For instance, in his essay, “On Human Values,” Kurtz lists four key virtues that are empirically observable in all societies, namely integrity, trustworthiness, benevolence, and fairness.<sup>7</sup> He lays out many more values that he believes humanism embraces in his *Humanist Manifesto 2000*.<sup>8</sup> Kurtz and the humanism he defends share important benefits for thinking about leadership. First, they are empirical in an important sense. They avoid, for instance, the essentialism of modernity’s approaches to thinking about human beings and other animals, while also escaping the troubles and excesses of postmodernity’s overstated relativism. Empiricism as we find it in humanist philosophies is a compelling response to the history of ethical metaphysics, since we can witness actual values and draw lessons from various societies about how we wish to live in our own.

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<sup>6</sup> Tim LaHaye, “Godless Society,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no. 4 (2007): 44-46.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Kurtz, “On Human Values,” *Science and Spirit* July-August (2006): 35-37.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto 2000*. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000.



Humanism has a friend in existentialists on this point, furthermore. Both begin with the concrete world of experience. Both see the centerpiece of philosophical inquiry as the fact of human beings' choices and the need to make them, irreversible though they are. Plus, existentialists also see that human beings create themselves through their actions and embody their values through what they do. Humanism and existentialism too, perhaps, offer ways of thinking about a central task of leadership. Leaders frequently must contribute to how their groups identify themselves. They must offer important contributions to the process of self-creation for their societies, through the actions they perform, drawing more inclusively, if democratic, on the greatest variety of sources of insight for living well.

## **II. Metaphysical Concerns for Leadership**

When we think about ethics and leadership, it is crucial to have a sense of whom one is leading and toward what kind of end. These are metaphysical questions, while they are also about ethics. Philosophers think a great deal about issues of personal identity, but less often focus on culture. Culture is one of those vague terms that has many senses, but which appears at once to be of minor importance in particular matters, while in another sense supremely important. Leaders are often people who must significantly shape a culture through the ways they communicate, interact with members of their communities, and help to form the ways in which their fellow citizens think about themselves. This set of ideas may not sound like a traditional set of issues we associate with metaphysics, yet we can ask what seems to me to be a profound metaphysical question: what is culture and how can it be shaped?

Humanism as a term has many senses and often aggravates scholars given its many meanings, yet it is a name given to an identity and a set of beliefs. As such, when Kurtz

presented in 2000 an update to the *Humanist Manifesto* (I and II, 1933 and 1973, respectively), he was making a cultural contribution to enlarge society's options for identity. As he states the matter, humanism is "a philosophical, scientific, and ethical outlook," which combines "a method of inquiry, a cosmic world view, a life stance, and a set of social values."<sup>9</sup>

Humanists have sought to shape cultures in a variety of ways, and Kurtz's manifesto is one. In a sense, it is arguable that cultural contributions to identity formation are practical applications of metaphysical ideas, undertaken for moral goals. Consider another kind of cultural contribution that was attempted, even if unsuccessfully. The language known as *Esperanto* was meant to combine a number of languages together in order to fight the hegemony of a single culture's dominant linguistic and thus ideological influence.<sup>10</sup>

I also like to remind scholars in my background field of pragmatic philosophy, that Dewey said he would in retrospect prefer the term culture over experience in his book, *Experience and Nature*. What makes a word like experience limiting is the singularity of the term, how it therefore seems to lend itself to a Cartesian interpretation, whereas "culture" is decidedly social and rooted in a context.

In Mississippi, I am developing work on the problems of poverty and educational failure. I have found that so many ideas address possible forces which aggravate each concern, yet little if anything addresses what I take to be a root cause of both problems: which I diagnose to include a cultural acceptance and advancement of self-fulfilling prophecies of failure. What it is a leader is to address, then, in fighting poverty and educational failure, if I am right, must include cultural beliefs and practices which contribute to the more direct causes of Mississippi's problems. As a philosopher and defender of humanism, I see profound challenges in addressing

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<sup>9</sup> Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto 2000*, p. 169.

<sup>10</sup> See Peter G. Forster, *The Esperanto Movement*, The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton Publishers, 1982.

the twin questions I raised moments ago: “What is culture?” and “How can culture be influenced or redirected?”

Humanism as a contributing theory for democratic leadership would approach questions like these empirically and constructively, and would look to anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and the like, to find available tools for understanding and influencing cultures. Humanism is a philosophical outlook which sees potential in humanity’s efforts to reform itself and to shape its future. The nature of humanity, therefore, as a metaphysical question, is one that humanists can address, though they would not see the matter as finished, but rather as continually in need of consideration and improvement on past problems. Leadership theory can be guided with the help of a philosophical tradition that suggests ways for thinking about human beings, the practices and areas of study to refer to in seeking tools for this effort, and in maintaining the optimism necessary for achieving social change.

### **III. Epistemological Concerns for Leadership**

Humanism includes an outlook on science and knowledge, as well as on metaphysics and ethics. Humanists are generally fallibilists, believing that at any given time what human beings call knowledge may be revised or refined in the future, but nonetheless is taken to be knowledge given the best of our abilities. Several considerations emerge from humanism’s epistemological stance, especially for a theory of democratic leadership. First, leaders ought always to be ready to learn when they are wrong. This is not the same as having a person mired in self-doubt, who never gets anything done as a result. A good pragmatist and humanist realizes that achieving anything requires acting on imperfect knowledge, fallible knowledge, especially since we seem to have such imperfect knowledge as our only option. This first lesson, of fallibilism, however,

can inspire leaders to see the value of insight that different people bring to debates. This follows the democratic spirit of Kurtz's humanism.

The second issue that humanism addresses in epistemology for leadership concerns a double-barreled moral limitation. In the sciences and medicine we see a parallel to the problem I have in mind. It may be the case that in order to study certain diseases, it would be preferable to have perfectly controlled studies in which proven treatments for diseases are withheld. The trouble here, of course, is that in treating patients, doctors have duties to the patients themselves that are typically thought to override the importance of the study. This was the kind of problem at issue in the infamous Tuskegee syphilis experiments, in which treatment was withheld from African American men without their knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, when it comes to issues in public policy, social scientists and leaders may wish to test the effects of possible policies that can be predicted to harm students in public schools, for instance. Or, they may wish to withhold solutions from some areas to have a control group in a study. Either way, we end up with a problem of knowledge-seeking that can conflict with the imperative of treatment or beneficence.

A humanist can accept limitations to study, given his or her prior recognition of fallibilism. At the same time, humanists believe in the power of the sciences, and might hold optimism for the possibility that studies could be designed differently in the future to avoid the moral problems while shedding light on the matter to be studied. In short, a humanist's view on fallibilism, while maintaining goals of beneficence and justice, can be ready for the necessary limitations on knowledge that leaders have to accept as they do their best to make judgments about how organizations or governments ought to act.

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<sup>11</sup> James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, New and Expanded Edition*, New York: The Free Press, 1993.

Finally, as I have said, humanists can be found of the pragmatist sort, like Paul Kurtz, John Dewey, or William James. Pragmatism, also the humanisms that identify with it, navigates between the hard line modernists in moral theory and the total relativists on the other hand. While they accept that there is no view from nowhere in epistemology, nonetheless, not just any story of the world can make sense and be considered equally valuable with all others. Pragmatists' and humanists in some cases overlap in their recognition of, to paraphrase Hilary Putnam, objectivity without ontological objects.<sup>12</sup> That is, the world and human experience can object to certain ways of living and thinking, while at the same time allowing a plurality of ways of thinking about shared problems or conflicts between different groups. Leaders are people, therefore who must stand up against ways of thinking about knowledge of the world that cannot stand, while on the other hand remaining open to a variety of what Rawls called competing and conflicting doctrines that are each nonetheless reasonable.<sup>13</sup>

Fallibilism as I see it in humanist writings, like those of Paul Kurtz, brings with it an important skeptical outlook. This is important because leaders who act brashly are likely to make many mistakes. At the same time, fallibilism need not be cynicism. We see in Kurtz's writings a profound optimism and joyfulness, such as in his book, *Affirmations: Joyful and Creative Exuberance*.<sup>14</sup> Leaders commonly need both skepticism and at least a modicum of optimism. After all, if one sees problems everywhere, it must be that things could be better than they are now.

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<sup>12</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*,

<sup>14</sup> Paul Kurtz, *Affirmations: Joyful and Creative Exuberance*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004.

### **Conclusion: Why systematic philosophy for a theory of leadership?**

Ultimately, leaders must achieve a variety of tasks. They must exhibit what Kurtz has called “eupraxsophy,” which combines the three notions of the good or beneficence, practice, and the guidance of wisdom. Leaders must be moral, know their own and their community’s identity and virtuous practices, and must seek wisdom in information gathering and intelligent judgment as they choose their actions and create their visions for the future.

A leader who neglects ethics is worrisome from the start. One who has little sense of his own and his communities’ identities, as well as the tools available to him for contributing to the resolution of problems or the pursuit of shared goals, is likely to be ineffective. Finally, the leader who is poorly informed about his or her society’s problems and intelligent processes of inquiry is unlikely to be aware of the wisest choices available for action. In this context, therefore, I hope that I have made a strong case for thinking that leadership is best considered with a systematic philosophical outlook and that humanism as a form of systematic philosophy has much to offer for thinking about democratic moral leadership.