



Apeiron

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APEIRON

Apeiron: *unlimited, indefinite*

1. The *arche*, that is the beginning or principle of all things was, according to Anaximander, the *apeiron*, the unlimited. The term is capable of various constructions, depending upon how one understands the limit. 2. More generally, indetermination, i.e., without internal limits, and so without beginning or end . . . 3. An undergraduate journal of philosophy for students of all majors at Washington College.

Foreword

Welcome to the sixth annual issue of *Apeiron*. Once again we are blessed with exemplary works of philosophical and theological writing. William James observed that philosophy is “at once the most sublime and the most trivial of human pursuits,” where the seemingly lesser details guide the finished picture.

This year’s authors brave the subtleties shaping the big questions. Andrew Sun suggests raw inconsistencies in our everyday treatment of lower animals. Trevor Williams and Caroline Herman grace us with clever but poignant fictional dialogues. Williams poses a radio conversation on popular music opening into a meditation on the nature of art and its effects on individuals. Herman suggests everyday perceptions of God and man, sin and salvation, turn on careful theological distinctions that deserve every thinking person’s attention. Benjamin Kozlowski examines the semantic consequences of competing theories of how words acquire meaning and reference. This issue continues the tradition of superb analysis and debate, presented in our customarily simple and unassuming format.

Seniors Ben Kozlowski and Andrew Sun gamely took the editorial reigns at the beginning of the year. Their disciplined work and uncompromising standards affords us as lively and well-argued a set of contributions as any we have had in these pages. Our thanks go out to the editors and to this year’s contributors.

Peter Weigel

Introduction

I think it is fitting that the sixth issue of the *Apeiron* presents a wide-ranging, contemporary account of many very traditional themes and problems in philosophy. Here you will not find the dusty treatment of ancient thinkers, as philosophy is often mischaracterized, but contemporary, dynamic attempts to grapple with ancient subjects in a modern world. The four essays included in this volume explore the same topics that Plato and Aristotle considered more than two millennia ago, but they reflect the youthful vigor of their writers, as well as the intervening years of philosophical thought. We, the editors to the *Apeiron*, are truly proud to present their insights in the spirit of the entire philosophical tradition: a tradition devoted both to the timelessness and immediacy of inquiry and contemplation.

The Editors

Editors: Ben Kozlowski, Andrew Sun
Faculty Advisor: Peter Weigel
Cover Image: “The Thinker,” Rodin

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Sphaira: A Dialogue

Trevor Williams

Early-Mid 21st century¹: A satellite talk radio station has invited a very popular band to an open discussion of their music, music in general and the series of events that have led to the band's popularity and growing infamy. The three young members of Sphaira settle into the dark room and listen as the disc jockey opens his show...

Dialogue

DJ Dan: Welcome back to Music Talk Satellite Radio! I am DJ Radio Dan and we're extremely pleased to have with us today a very popular group, growing in popularity as we speak; we have John, Miles and Nadia² from the band Sphaira. We are so pleased to have you with us today. We are broadcasting all over the globe and I know there are plenty of eager listeners waiting to get to know Sphaira. How are you three doing in light of the recent controversy regarding your music, lyrics and fans?

John: Well Dan, we find the controversy quite absurd. While we are okay with the absurd and in fact welcome it, some people are making very strange claims about *our* music and we're just not sure they are justified in branding us as negative influences on young people or society at large.

DJ: Okay now, for those of you listening who are unaware, Sphaira hit the scene a little over six months ago, gathered a loyal fan base and quickly...almost immediately reached billions of people around the world. Can any of you explain just what happened here?

Nadia: What is happening now is that people are unhappy with the current state of things. The only thing that we want to do is expose people to new experiences, new ideas and new possibilities through our art.

DJ: And when you say art you don't mean just music do you? Your band's stage show is known to include various multimedia that exercises all of the senses.

Miles: That's right Dan. Alongside our sounds are visuals such as expressionist and abstract paintings, video and lights. We also have incense and flavored oxygen that accompany many pieces. A number of our suites have dances that the audience is encouraged to participate in. Those are just a few examples; we are always looking for ways to make the show a complete experience.

DJ: Now please explain what you mean by "complete," I mean, shouldn't your music be enough? Why have you become musicians as opposed to writers? Why is music your medium? What does music mean to you?

John: That is a difficult question, Dan, and perhaps we will have to define music in order to determine if one can find meaning in it...though...perhaps not. Many people are moved by music. Since humans have been on earth, every culture has created some form of music. It is often religious or spiritual in nature. It has been used to tell stories and legends. For some it is simply entertainment. But an exact definition of music is impossible; this phenomenon that humans create is widely different from culture to culture, and therefore I'm not sure one can find a universal meaning in music.

DJ: Well then what does it mean to you?

John: That is a very personal question...as a musician you could say it means quite a lot to me, but I still might not be able to tell you why.

Nadia: (*laughing*) John is always so mysterious, aren't you John? I for one find music and the act of creating music to be a wonderfully beautiful and fulfilling experience. It brings me the greatest joy to be able to perform for others and share my musical ideas with the world, and the fact that people really

appreciate my music and seem to understand the notes as I do, well it is the most thrilling thing in the world. In addition to that, I've never been a particularly good writer or visual artist; I've spent most of my creative time playing music. People say do what you love, do what you're good at. Lucky for me they happen to be the same thing. Maybe that's too simple an answer for such a profound question, but that is why I have chosen music specifically as my artistic medium.

Miles: Personally I think that music really has a strong connection to the divine, the universe, the Tao, God, Allah, whatever you want to call it. It really affects people. Also the concept of vibrations, you know, *making* vibrations and sending them out through space, through bodies and through time is a very spiritual experience for me. Music is so unique among the arts and I felt compelled as a youngster to pursue the art of music and to see where it could take me. I've had some rather profound experiences while listening to music and I suppose I wanted to attempt to create that profundity myself. And, well, John, Nadia and I all have differing views on what music is or should be, but we agree at least in one thing. We, as entertainers, as well as musicians and artists, do not want to be boxed in by the usual. Who says that just because we are musicians, we can't also be painters, sculptors, business people, philosophers, writers, social reformers or revolutionaries? In Plato's *Republic* musicians, artists and thinkers such as ourselves would not be allowed within the city. Certain forms and modes of music thought to be too feminine or to cause frenzy and emotions deemed unfit for the republic were to be banned. The entire structure of this republic was in essence a kind of fascism; a city in which everyone has one purpose and it fulfilled the ideals of the philosopher kings. We don't believe that people should be restricted in this way, but in many ways our current world is still heavily influenced by Plato's ideas, which is one reason why we are causing so much unrest.³

DJ: Well that makes a lot of sense, Miles. And I thank you all for sharing your personal thoughts and experiences with music.

But Miles, you said the word ‘revolutionaries’. Can I ask you all, do you consider yourselves revolutionary?

Nadia: Well Dan, music as with everything else is rebellious or revolutionary when what is being said is forbidden or at least frowned upon. I think it is clear that many people are frowning upon us right now...almost as many as those who are enjoying or finding something of worth in our music.

DJ: Don’t you think it is strange that so many protests, even acts of vandalism, and much (as you say) “unrest” has begun to take place so swiftly after Sphaira happened upon the world stage? Graffiti, ten stories tall that reads “Sphaira” or one of your various song or album titles is appearing on city halls, credit card agencies, insurance agencies, government and industrial buildings all over the world!

John: We know all that Dan, and there have been many lawsuits regarding these acts that we are being personally blamed for. It is a bit ridiculous. The only profession in the arts that gets blamed for other people’s mischief is the musician, the “rock-star.” How often do you see painters on trial for their art? In some ways this is pretty typical, except of course, for the mass scale of the influence that we have had, but famous musicians get sued all the time.

Nadia: That’s so true, and it doesn’t help that the subjects we speak about can be so controversial. That, however, does not mean that there has ever been anything in our music that supports violence or tells people to vandalize buildings. Keep in mind, however, that no one has ever been hurt in the incidents involving our names. But, the fact that these acts of vandalism and protest are losing some “Very Important People” money, or causing certain corrupt politicians to be exposed or fall out of favor causes enough irritation in the right circles that we get stuck with the long, boring lawsuits. And don’t get me wrong, I am happy to defend my music against those who find it evil. To hold us responsible for the actions of others is ridiculous. Our music was not a weapon with which

we forced the concerned people of the world to act; it was a catalyst, which triggered a reaction years, if not centuries in the making.

People are waking up, and our music is only a reflection of our time and current environment. The reason so many people respond to our music is not that something in the songs is subliminally controlling them! People are just identifying with our ideas, which aren't our ideas at all; they are the ideas of the times. The music isn't anything particularly special. It is a combination of the musical styles that we have each been exposed to and enjoy. Our own personalities and the things that we don't necessarily want to spell out with language, we turn into music. But I repeat, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with our music and until the courts can prove otherwise, they have no right to charge us with anything.

John: To add to that, we don't really "say" anything with our music. Music is often called a language, but if it is, it is not an objective language. For example, people in the western world hear a minor or diminished chord and think "sad" or "scary." Now many people will say that the dissonances in these chords cause people to have this emotion—that is, sad or scared—but this is only a result of the associations we have come across regarding these sounds. Movies, opera, songs with words, these all make use of a non-musical context bringing with them ideas and concepts foreign to music.

The fact that diminished scales are used in scary movies or suspenseful parts of these musical stories very often plays a large role in the listener's interpretation. But to a listener from a completely different culture, one with a different musical theory, possibly in isolation, not exposed to the radio or television, these associations do not take place. So you see, while music has this effect on people emotionally, the effect will be culturally determined. Nothing in the notes, melodies or combinations of notes creating harmonies and chords has any objective meaning or correlation to language without the human interpretation. Now some people will hear dissonance and think that since these two notes are not ringing

together harmoniously, there must be something wrong or simply may not like the sound. Let me just say that this is perfectly understandable; everyone has their own taste, but one must remember dissonance is still a kind of harmony.

Miles: One can, however, imagine a musical system of language in which one note means one idea or word and by combining these notes into different chords and melodies people could talk to each other. For example in batá, the ritualistic drumming of the Santería religion,⁴ the drum beats and melodies actually correlated to the syllables of the African language and were used for communication over long distances. This is a rather interesting case in which humans turned music into an objective language, but the literal translation of the beats has since been lost. In most cases around the world, the meaning in music is quite subjective. In other cultures, what we call music they call prayer. A great example of this is seen in Islam. A Muslim might become very offended to hear someone calling their prayer music, but it is interesting that the prayers follow commonly accepted musical modes and are often performed by musicians and judged by musicians. Musicians in our sense, however, are often suppressed in these cultures, depending on the current government and political situation.⁵

This suspicion of music most likely dates back at least to the ancient Greeks—again, Plato’s *Republic* spread ideas and suspicions about the nature and value of music. The Greek modes (derived from mood) were scales whose names (like Phrygian, Lydian or Dorian) were derived from various cultures and ethnic groups in the area, and it’s likely they were associated with the various styles, vocal qualities or moods favored in those parts. They were believed to affect human behavior, so only certain modes were considered appropriate—like the Apollonian-associated Dorian mode. Others were believed to induced frenzy, such as in the story of Pythagoras, the famous mathematician, astronomer and musician, who, in observing a young man in a dangerous frenzy, ordered the music to be changed from the Phrygian mode (associated with Dionysius, god of wine) to the Dorian and calmed the

youngster down.⁶ I, for one, have always felt a mystical connection to the world through music. I've seen first hand some of its healing powers. Many years ago I had a friend—actually he was in one of my first bands—whose father suffered a terrible stroke and lost, among other things, his ability to speak. A music therapist came to their house daily, and, despite the fact that he could not speak, he could sing!⁷

DJ: Really interesting stuff. It is difficult to say though...whether it was the music, or the mind that actually helped your friend's father to speak again. I suppose it could be both...I think it is time to take a few calls. First we have Jill from Limestone: Jill you're live with Sphaira!

Jill: Hey DJ Dan! Hey Sphaira! Your band has really helped me see through the conditioned mindset that I've been living in. So much popular music today lacks substance. I just feel like this processed, commercial junk is programming me. I hear a song and see the music video and can't help but notice that it's selling me this image that I should be stick thin and dress like some sexy school girl while being submissive in the face of gangster machismo. It's wrong and harmful to both women and men. I know that I may be generalizing a bit here, but I just can't get behind the popular music scene. And I just wanted to thank you for not going that route.⁸

DJ: Jill, just as a reminder, Sphaira is probably the most popular band in the world right now.

Jill: Right, of course, but I'm talking about prior to Sphaira. They've really opened the doors for musicians that don't want to sell themselves as sex objects and criminals.

Miles: Thanks for sharing, Jill, and we really appreciate your support. I myself sometimes find that I will judge a group or musician negatively and not listen to their music purely because of my political opinions regarding the way in which they have risen to power, so to speak. I have opinions about many musicians, but I've learned over many years that you

have to separate the music from the musician. There is a wealth of great music out there that has been produced by people who, let's face it, have not been the best people, for whatever reason.

Jill: I know, but I still don't want to listen to music that was made by a criminal, a murderer!

Miles: Ah, but you must still ask yourself: is this is unfair to the music? There are some very interesting and passionate musical geniuses whose passion can lead them in bad directions. I once felt like you do now. I was very opposed to listening to types of music or certain artists whose image or politics I simply didn't agree with. However, reflecting on this, I know that there is nothing inherently wrong with this commercial or "pop" music; in fact, I really love a lot of it!

John: If I may interject for a minute. I have thought a great deal about this subject and I've also found myself in the position where maybe I was not giving the music a chance, but was I being unfair to the *music*? If anything, I was being unfair to *myself*, for any one of these pop hits could be one of my favorite songs. But the music doesn't care whether I listen to it. The artist perhaps, as it's their music, their money, their feelings, but...since in this context it is the artist that persuades me *not* to listen to their music in the first place, it is obvious that I shouldn't care about being unfair to them (especially since they are very well off financially if they are popular musicians).

And so I have decided that while this music may be perfectly good, I still need a basis and a reason to give my attention to a piece of music. There are multitudes of magnificent pieces that I have not yet heard and I have sadly come to terms with the idea that I will never hear songs that I would love. It's just impossible to listen to everything; music is time consuming! —Which is to say that it must take place within time; it is a temporal artform. And so, while I add these "pop" or "commercial" or otherwise what some might call "sell-out" songs and artists to my ever-growing list of "things

to listen to,” I still may never be able to find the time to sit down and listen to this music.

Honestly I would rather listen to a person who got where they are without abiding by the rules of the business, who may never become famous, who has put their heart and soul into something that will never be received as well as the rich television star’s new single. And while that wealthy heiress may have the best producers and musicians in the world working for them, *they don’t need me*. And their music means far less *to me* than the utterances of some poor fool in the street, because while it bothers me that I may never hear a popular song that I may love, it really troubles me that there are and have been millions of poor starving creative people, throughout the ages who will never be appreciated, who have died trying to do what they love, who have written thousands of the most beautiful songs I would love to hear, you know? Just once. And just because they didn’t have the startup capital, or their daddies weren’t rich, or they didn’t conform to whatever was popular during their time, I can’t hear what they had to say. Does that answer your question Jill?

Miles: I hope we helped.

Jill: Well I guess I should start on my list...and try not to be as much of a music snob. Thanks so much for your time.

Miles: Hey not a problem, John and my opinions are a bit different, but I think what we both agree on is that you may really like the music itself, even if you don’t like the musician or songwriter, so it is important to hear the song before making any prejudgments on that person’s art. And if you happen to know that the artist is not a great person, keep in mind that the music might be great...even if you decide to listen to those who you respect more prior to giving them a chance. Artists are often very passionate people and this passion may lead to them making some bad decisions in their lives, just as many of us do.

DJ: Thrilling stuff. Thanks for calling Music Talk Satellite Radio! Shall we take another call?

Sphaira collectively nods in approval

DJ: We have Art from Old York on the line

Art: Hello Sphaira. I really do enjoy your music, but I just wanted to say that your instrumental music is so much more meaningful than your vocal music. You don't even need words in order to communicate your message because the instrumental music taps directly into the real world. Music, pure music that is, the instrumental kind, has nothing standing in the way of the listener's mind and interpretation and the actual music. Words or drama, as in opera, only obscure the purity of the music. But instrumental music is instantly recognizable by everyone. It is a universal language. Schopenhauer describes music as unique from the other arts, which are "a copy of the Ideas" however music is, "*a copy of the will itself*, the objectivity of which are the Ideas."⁹

You see, all other forms of art, including poetry and drama as well as the visual arts, rely upon the ideas that we already have. A painting is mainly *of* something or at least uses colors and shapes found in the world. A poem or other literature uses language of this world. All the other arts need ideas, but music conveys the universal, objective Will, without the representation of ideas. In other words, there is nothing in the way; music provides an unclouded copy of the universal. Schopenhauer sets music apart, "for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence."¹⁰ In this way, Schopenhauer would almost make no distinction between the purpose of music and Ideas in that they are both the objectivity of the will, they are both copies of the universal and only different ways of interpreting the world, he says, "we can regard the phenomenal world, or nature, and music as two different expressions of the same thing."¹¹

The difference is that ideas and language are rational and have one meaning, but music displays the abstract nature of the world. So you see that music alone is enough to get your

messages of freedom, love and harmony across. When you use words, you're just dulling these abstract ideas down. The emotions that music evokes in humans simply from the change from major to minor keys are not only sufficient, they are more pure than the emotions evoked in a sad story.

DJ: Well it certainly seems as though you have thought a lot about this. Sphaira, do you have anything to say about this?

Nadia: Very interesting ideas, Art, but Mr. Schopenhauer really can be a bit of a snob. But first let me correct some of your thoughts. When Schopenhauer speaks of emotion he is not talking about the emotion that you feel when you hear music, that is, a particular emotion. He is speaking of universals. For Schopenhauer, music does not express any particular and definite emotion, pleasure or pain, but rather the abstract and essential nature of emotion itself.

However, since humans can hear these expressions of pleasure and pain *in themselves*, we imagine and bring to mind particular instances from our lives or others' lives. We can even make up stories in which real worldly emotions take place. This is where songs with words and, eventually, opera came from. And so the abstract becomes concrete within the human mind, but the mind is still only referencing past experience. This is going to echo a bit of what John and Miles were discussing earlier, but, you see, our music cannot be instantly recognizable to everyone, because everyone has had different experiences. But, for Mr. Schopenhauer, music expresses universality, a trait no other art form can express. This leads him to believe that music for some reason *shouldn't* try to express worldly reality, as he says in the same text I believe you were referring to—is it *The World as Will and Representation*?

Art: Yes...yes it is.

Nadia: Right, well, Schopenhauer says that, “if music tries to stick too closely to the words, and to mould itself according to the events, it is endeavoring to speak a language not its own.”¹²

He rejects all imitative music, as he finds it absurd that music is used as means of expressing a song or story.

Well, why shouldn't music be used to express a story or used to aid poetic lyrics? Who is he to restrict music in such a way? Suzanne Langer would even say that music is not attempting to speak another language, but rather it is turning poetry, literature and drama into its own language, its own structure, through a process she calls "assimilation."¹³

But still...returning to Schopenhauer just for a moment, I have a lot of trouble accepting all of what he says. While it is possible that music can exist without the world, as he claims, all music in our world is still based on worldly experience and understanding (such as arithmetic or nature), because it is created by those *in the world*. While there is no direct connection between the tones we hear and ideas, it does not necessarily mean that music has a higher connection to the real world, I'm not even convinced that there is a so called "real" or universal, objective world! You sort of have to accept lots of his metaphysical ideas in order to accept his musical ones. He does, however, set music apart from the other arts in very provocative ways. Our music—that is—Sphaira's music, is concerned with *this* world whether it is separate from the "real" world or not. That is why we write stories, some of which are true, and others may be true...could be true. Others are fantasy, but they are still based on many of the experiences of this world.

Art: But...you have a song called "Burning Our Friend's Flags"! I just think that your music could express some of those ideas just as well and you wouldn't be left with all of the legal baggage that goes along with telling people to burn the flags of their homelands!

Nadia: Well, we appreciate your concern, but we don't tell anyone to burn anything in that song...it was a story about those who did. And aside from its satirical intentions, it is a song about togetherness. Its lack of subtlety in the title and lyrics are offset by the flowing and delicately interweaving melodic phrases and harmonies. We think it provides an

interesting dichotomy of the subtle and not so subtle that we find really...well fun and beautiful. But, hey I can understand if it's just not your style. Now, Art...are you still there?

Art: Indeed I am.

Nadia: So, Art, you are not a fan of vocal music. You find it somehow less than instrumental music. But there are some things that you should think about. For example, the voice is considered by many to be an instrument. In fact, many instruments, such as the Middle Eastern oud, are designed or loved because of the qualities they have that are similar to the voice.¹⁴ Often in religious contexts, vocal music is considered most important because of the context of the lyrics, namely sacred texts. Hmm, that reminds me, how do you feel about vocal music without words?

Art: Well...I suppose it is okay as long as the music is untainted by the ideas and concepts found in lyrics. I just think that the purity of music free of the linguistic baggage and concepts of experience is far superior to the combination of music and lyrics. Both would be better off and more effective if they were kept separate.

Nadia: Now, you say “untainted,” but remember Suzanne Langer’s “assimilation.” According to her, “When words are introduced into music they are no longer prose or poetry, they are elements of music.”¹⁵ If anything, it is the music that changes the words. The lyrics become part of the musical structure and composition. This then eliminates the various ways in which one can separate and distinguish the concepts of “pure” and “impure” music. She goes on to say that the so-called “synthesis of the arts” is also impossible. “If the composition is music at all, it is pure music, and not a hybrid of two or more arts. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* is an impossibility, because a work can exist in only one primary illusion, which every element must serve to create, support and develop.”¹⁶

DJ: I’m sorry...Gesamt...kunst verk?

Nadia: Right, that's German for the 'synthesis of the arts.' Basically, since everything that enters into music must become music, distinguishing between various art forms in the context of a musical composition becomes impossible. Rather, it is all to be considered music. And on the other hand when music enters into a situation or art form in which it follows those rules, it is assimilated into that.

DJ: Now correct me if I am wrong, but did you not say that you strive to make your show a complete experience, one not just of music but combining all of the senses and many art forms into the show. What then is the focus, what is being assimilated into what here?

John: It is all assimilated into the experience Dan. I'll explain unless our friend Art has anything else he'd like to say.

DJ: Um...it seems he's disconnected...but before we get into that, I've been wondering, as I'm sure many listening tonight have been what does your name, Sphaira, mean?

Miles: It is actually a Greek term meaning "sphere" or "ball." You see, many ancient Greeks believed in the "music" or the "harmony of the spheres."¹⁷ This was the idea that the heavenly bodies produced musical tones when in balance and that earthly music is attempting to copy the universal, heavenly forms of music. Now the interesting thing about this is that the concept of the "music of the spheres" has been considered somewhat far-fetched for many years since the ancient Greeks. Of course we know now that no sound can occur within the vacuum of space. But it is known that every planet, star and heavenly body produces magnetic pulse waves and has energy fields that astronomers can and have in fact turned into audible sounds!¹⁸ There are albums full of the eerie and very interesting sounds that have been produced as a result of translating these signals into audible sound. So not only is Sphaira a historically relevant name, but our name also reminds

us to constantly check and recheck our understanding and beliefs about the world.

DJ: Well that is something, but I have to ask, can we still consider the sounds that have been translated from magnetic fields in planets music?

John: Excellent question Dan, and I am not sure if anyone can answer that for you. What exactly are you prepared to call music?

DJ: I don't know. I just play the stuff.

John: I suppose, if you want, you can call any sound musical, or, on the other hand, anything musical you might call simply sound or noise. John Cage, a composer and thinker in the mid 20th century wrote and lectured extensively about breaking down the boundaries between musical and non-musical sounds as well as the purposelessness of music. In a compilation of his lectures and writings, entitled *Silence*, Cage illustrates the purposelessness of his new, experimental music: "New music: new listening. Not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for, if something were being said, the sounds would be given the shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of sounds."¹⁹ Cage hoped to bring music to a point where it was indistinct from any other sounds of the world and liberated from the abstract concepts, themes and ideas that people dwell on when listening to music. He wanted instead to let listeners hear his compositions without trying to figure out what was being said or what the artist meant.

Miles: Sounds very eastern to me.

John: Good call Miles. He was highly influenced by his Zen Buddhist beliefs, and his compositions reflect this Buddhist attitude, in that looking for meaning and purpose in his compositions is contrary to the purposelessness of the music itself. Cage describes this new music with a very broad definition in order to avoid the confusion that we ourselves

have just run into. He says that “If this word ‘music’ is sacred and reserved for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instruments, we can substitute a more meaningful term: organization of sound.”²⁰ So with our definition of new or experimental music it seems that any sound can be musical.

DJ: Any sound? But he said organized sound, doesn’t that imply that someone has to be organizing it?

John: Hmm...or *something*. I suppose it could be a human, the acoustics of a room, the leaves on a tree as wind blows through, birds, or, if you are religious, God or gods, spirits, Orisha etc. It doesn’t necessarily have to be organized by a person. Now, Cage used this theory in his own compositions. He recorded twelve radios tuned to different frequencies with people turning the knobs according to his outline. He also composed three movements of silence, which was performed for a live audience who didn’t know that they were really part of the composition themselves! Any sound during the composition was to be considered part of the music and, interestingly, the audience usually reacts in such similar ways (uncomfortable shifting, coughing, soft laughter, angrily storming out of the auditorium...) that it is not too far fetched to say that it is still the same composition after every performance.

DJ: So, what are you saying? That music is purposeless or its purpose is to express its inherent purposelessness?

Nadia: Yeah John...I’m not so sure about this, either. I mean...it seems like Cage’s music does have a purpose even if he says it doesn’t. Isn’t his purpose to show people that music doesn’t have to be meaningful or that people should be listening and enjoying the aesthetic qualities of everyday sound?²¹

John: Well you said it yourself Nadia. The *function* of Cage’s music was to express his theory that sounds are meaningless, but the sounds themselves would be meaningless unless Cage

put them in the context of a performance or song. You see it is not the music's purpose, but the composer's. The paradox of Cage's position is not something unbeknownst to him of course. Take this passage for example:

...I said that since the sounds were just sounds, this gave people hearing them the chance to be people, centered within themselves where they actually are, not off artificially in the distance as they are accustomed to be, trying to figure out what is being said by some artist by means of sounds. Finally I said that the purpose of this purposeless music would be achieved if people learned to listen; that when they listened they might discover that they preferred the sounds of everyday life to the ones they would presently hear in the musical program; that that was alright as far as I was concerned.²²

From a Zen Buddhist or a number of other standpoints the concept of purpose within purposeless music is perfectly acceptable. However, as Noel Carroll points out, many modern philosophers agree with the "Wittgensteinian notion that meaning is a function of the use of a word or gesture within a context that has a structure."²³ Now, Carroll finds that Cage's compositions have a great deal of meaning, but are not enough to offer a solid theory. He states: "Ironically Cage...winds up saying something while trying to say nothing...[he] says something in virtue of the art theory he holds, which theory itself is contradicted by the very works he produces—works which are about something in the teeth of a theory that claims they have no semantic content."²⁴

Nadia: So... Cage's attempts to say nothing are self-refuting—I mean...he says something.

John: But don't you see? Carroll still believes that Cage's music is about something...and it isn't! If Cage wanted the music to be about something, he would have added words, and even then, only the words would be *about* something. And still

words don't necessarily have to *say* anything, they are just sounds, it might be nonsensical! Music is simply sound, and *Cage's* purpose was to help people understand that one can appreciate sounds that are not composed by humans. Just because Cage's sounds exemplify his theory does not mean they are about anything or have inherent...meaning. Cage's purpose is separate from his purposeless creations. Rather, Cage intended his experiments with sound and silence to be appreciated for what they are, for the appreciation of ordinary sound, and consequently the appreciation of everyday experience.

So Dan, do you see now why breaking down boundaries is so important to us? We aren't just attempting to change how people listen and experience music, but we want people to experience life with the same attentiveness and care that connoisseurs appreciate art. The reason this may be causing such trouble is that when people really pay attention, they see a great deal wrong with the world, but they also see a great deal of potential for the future.

DJ: Remarkable, and the future certainly seems to be brightening, especially if ideas and music like Sphaira's continues to grow. We have one last caller...Roger from California, how are you today Roger?

Roger: (*softly*) Am...am I speaking with the band Sphaira?

DJ: Yes, Roger, we *are* live.

Roger: My...son was...a very big fan of yours. He participated in a protest last month with a large group of his friends. Violence broke out in the crowd...he was trampled to death. Other protesters threw themselves off a nearby bridge, all in support of your...Sphaira's cause. They did it for you. How can you lead young people on like this? Don't you know that the world *is* what it *is*? You can't just tell people to go out change the world and make things better. You...damn...idealists! Young impressionable kids going out and getting arrested and killed because of your...filth. Your music is doing

something to people, making them rowdy and unhappy. We can't change the world...you can't change the world, you won't. (*Dial tone*).²⁵

DJ: Um...sorry about that one, guys, we didn't know...it was going to be that kind of call. But...does this change anything? I am sure that you've heard about this incident. *Can* you accept the responsibility that goes along with your fame?

John: Those kids died participating in something that they believed in. Listen...I am so sorry that we may have had a part in their deaths, but we did not *cause* their deaths and neither did our music. They weren't...we aren't idealists, but we do know that there is great potential for humanity and right now we, humankind, are not living up to it. There is no *ideal* involved, just betterment. How can so many people be opposed to change for the better? Humans do not have to kill each other or fight over land and possessions and just because we always have does not mean we always will.

Nadia: But...he's right, those kids are dead now and if they hadn't heard of us maybe they would still be alive. We didn't kill those kids, but maybe...maybe we had a hand in their deaths. I don't want anyone to be hurt because of us. I didn't know about this, I thought no one had ever been hurt...they were peaceful protests.

John: Maybe they were peaceful protesters and the authorities instigated the violence, but reported that the protesters attacked first.

Miles: I heard about it, but I didn't know it had anything to do with us. I'm still not sure it does.

Nadia: But you heard the man, his son was a fan of ours, he went to the protest because of us.

John: He went because he felt that he should, not because we told him to and not because our music made him.

DJ: But, don't you all find it strange that your songs have such a universal appeal reaching billions of people around the world? This can't be an isolated incident; there are likely to be other events in which people have been killed or have killed themselves as a result of your songs. Is this music dangerous?

John: Dangerous to whom? To us? Our fans? Our enemies? Perhaps it is dangerous to the world as it currently is. You seem to echo Plato: perhaps we have been using the Phrygian and Lydian modes a bit too much and are causing the world to go into hysterics. Perhaps we should just calm them with the Dorian mode so that everyone in our republic could act like obediently programmed sheep. Personally, I do not believe that music has the power to control people in the way that you think, but, even if it did, how can ideas of peace instigate violence except when introduced in an already violent world?

Miles: Don't be so sure that music doesn't have such power, John. Music has been used as a means to evoke responses both emotional and physical for ages. One of the main functions of batá in Santería is to induce the possession of an initiate by their patron Orisha or deity. The function of program music is to evoke certain emotional responses or bring to mind imagery. What if we have been experimenting too freely with music and it is having an effect on people's minds?

DJ: Whoa, mind control? Hey-O!

Nadia: Slow down, Miles. We aren't experimenting with people's minds, or controlling them, Dan. While a lot of what you say is true, those examples still need a certain mindset in order to achieve their function. Not everyone is an initiate in a possession cult. Not everyone listens to Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" and pictures the changing of seasons without first hearing the name of the song. The mind, our culture and our environment each have a very big role in how each of us interprets the sounds we hear. There is no proof, scientific or otherwise, that tells us that music can control or change people

in the ways you are talking about. But still, maybe we should say something...apologize for any harm we may have done. People, we want you to live!

John: I'm sorry, but it is not fair to blame us for the deaths of any of our fans. It's not like we are playing hateful or violent music. There are bands and artists that support hate and violence; that is their right, but it is not what we are about. When their fans go out and kill, those bands aren't blamed. Most likely, it is Sphaira's popularity level that is causing all the controversy. There are millions of troubled people out there that may just be looking for a way out, and sometimes people get the wrong message or interpret things the way they want to as opposed to how they are intended. But once we release a song into the world, it is separate from us and we have no control how and in what state of mind people will interpret it. When one looks at the world you can see beauty and pain; they are both there in every room, always. Our music attempts to bring out the beauty and challenge the forces in the world that lead to pain. But like the yin and yang, even in our attempts to bring about change for the better there will always be a destructive element to change, violent resistance and fear. Consider the diminished chord. It is thought by many to be ugly. But without it, without the suspense, the dissonance, the conflict, there can be no resolution, because there would be nothing to resolve. If we all rested on the major chord for the entire song, there would be no movement, no story, action or excitement. We wouldn't be here right now, at the peak of our popularity, if the world were in perfect harmony. Of course, that's just my opinion. So blame whom you will. But blaming musicians for the actions of troubled teens, as opposed to the parents who are supposed to protect their children, or the violent world in which we live today, is preposterous.

DJ: I think you've made your point, John. I apologize for bringing up this subject, but as it is my job to play music all day I have to think about whether music can be harmful as well. Without me those kids might still be alive.

Nadia: Well, whatever you do, don't blame music. I mean...how could you? We still don't even know what it is!

Miles: This is true. Nor do we know what music does or what activities and sounds should fall into the category of music.

DJ: I thought we decided that music was 'organized sound.'

John: That's just as good a definition as any other, Dan. At least it is broad enough to cover anything that could be construed as musical.

Miles: It also does not limit itself to what we in the Western tradition might call music. Therefore 'organized sound' can safely apply to an activity like Muslim prayer, acknowledging its aesthetic qualities without offending anyone who might feel put down by having their prayer called music.

Nadia: But aren't we attempting to define *music*?

John: Why don't we just leave that up to the listeners?

DJ: And the subjectivity of aesthetic theory becomes clear as we are just out of time! I'd like to thank Sphaira for the fun, challenging and enlightening conversation that we have had this evening. Stay tuned for the news.

The three leave the studio and the building, out into the street where a crowd of adoring fans meet them, cheering and excited about the interview. Two gunshots ring out. John lurches forward, staggers and falls onto the cold pavement while in the confusion and horror the gunman escapes. Before closing his eyes, John notes that the gunshots that sounded were A-flat.

¹ I have chosen a time period in the "not-too-distant future" in order to draw from the rich history of music (without having to invent too much of a possible future) as well as project a few ideas as to where music and the world could possibly be heading. This future was originally intended to be a futuristic version of Plato's *Republic*

(which could account for some civil unrest as it is essentially fascist in nature), but I didn't have the time (within the confines of this dialogue... which is about music) to get into the specifics of the world in which Sphaira lives. The future has also been a helpful setting because I allow the characters to quote long passages, which, usually quite difficult in our time, should be possible in the near future with the growing number of handheld electronic devices with internet access. So every time a character seemingly quotes something from memory, just imagine that they are consulting the Internet with very fast handheld Internet devices common during this period... in the future.

² The names allude to musicians and thinkers such as Miles Davis whose quote on my wall reads, "Don't play what's there, play what's not there." The Miles character is somewhat mystical in his approach. Nadia is more scientific and playful with her approach and her name comes from Nadia Boulanger who's quote on my wall reads, "Don't play as if you've swallowed the metronome!" And John is a composite of John Cage and John Lennon. John's character is a bit preachy, very serious and makes a good Rock-martyr.

³ Plato, *Republic*, Book II, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2004).

⁴ Dr. Kenneth Schweitzer, lectures at Washington College, 2005.

⁵ Dr. Kenneth Schweitzer, lectures at Washington College, 2005.

⁶ Bryan Simms and Craig Wright, *Music in Western Civilization*. (Belmont CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), 7.

⁷ Kevin McGee, This is an actual account of my friend's father who suffered a terrible stroke and whose recovery was aided greatly by music therapy, 2003.

⁸ Juliana Converse, Brooks Long, Ian Trusheim, this section of the dialogue regarding popular music came from a conversation that I have had with close friends and some subsequent thoughts and conversations that we have made since, 2005-2007.

⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 257.

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- ¹⁰ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume 1 trans. E.F.J. Payne (Indian Hills: Falcon's Wing Press 1958), 257.
- ¹¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 262.
- ¹² Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 262.
- ¹³ Suzanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).
- ¹⁴ Dr. Kenneth Schweitzer, lectures at Washington College, 2005.
- ¹⁵ Suzanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 150.
- ¹⁶ Suzanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 164.
- ¹⁷ Bryan Simms and Craig Wright, *Music in Western Civilization*, 8.
- ¹⁸ There are at least four of these compilations for sale now called "Symphonies of the Planets."
- ¹⁹ John Cage, *Silence*. (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 10.
- ²⁰ John Cage, *Silence*, 3.
- ²¹ Noel Carroll, "Cage and Philosophy," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 52, No. 1, The Philosophy of Music. (Winter, 1994).
- ²² In *Die Reihe* 5 (1959): 116. Quoted in Paul Griffiths *Modern Music: The Avant Garde Since 1945* New York: George Braziller, 1981), 124.
- ²³ Noel Carroll, "Cage and Philosophy," 95.
- ²⁴ Noel Carroll, "Cage and Philosophy," 97.
- ²⁵ I had considered having the assassin call in or even having the DJ end up being the gunman before the first draft and didn't quite know how to go about doing it. Caroline Herman and Tiffany Harrell's

critiques both mentioned an angry caller and possible conflict between the band members as a result, so I was eager to include it.

Expanding the Moral Bubble: Virtue Ethics Toward Posterity, Animals and the Tree

Andrew Sun

Introduction

Discussion of ethics is generally focused on how human beings are to behave towards one another. It is not unreasonable to say that if someone was completely by himself, debating how he should act ethically would be a little peculiar, if not meaningless. The topic is useful because we have the ability to impact not just ourselves, but also the lives of other people. And for a long period of time, these discussions circled solely around humans. It has not been until recently in the history of ethical theory that anything outside the realm of men garnered any true moral consideration. And interestingly enough, for many of us, the only reason anything outside of men has been given that current consideration is because human beings themselves may be in danger if they do not.

There are three major branches that dominate ethical discussion today. The first is known as Deontology, which is famously represented by Immanuel Kant. Kant's theory was based on the categorical imperative; the claim that an action is only ethical if one could universally apply said action without moral (or practical) objection.¹ He also insisted that each human being be treated as an end and never merely a means to an end.² If a given action used a person as an instrument, without at least informed consent, then it would be seen as absolutely wrong. Kant believed there is intrinsic value within all human beings, and this intrinsic value gives them basic rights that should always be respected. Later philosophers will criticize him for not giving non-humans any intrinsic value at all (such as animals); putting his views in their best light, Kant said that we should treat animals kindly because we have an indirect duty to other fellow members of mankind to do so.³ Yet, modern-day Deontologists are in no way obligated to stay true to Kant's view in this belief. When they address the issue of environmental ethics, many have now openly extended this

claim of intrinsic value. Instead of only human beings, intrinsic value is given to future human beings, animals, and perhaps even lakes and forests. This is (at least) one way that Deontologists have managed to extend their branch into addressing environmental issues.

The second branch of ethics is known as Utilitarianism. This group's focus is on happiness and unhappiness, and they make their ethical decisions based on what maximizes the former and minimizes the latter.⁴ What is traditionally meant by 'happiness' is the feeling of pleasure (or "preference satisfaction"), and what is meant by 'unhappiness' is the feeling of pain. The correct ethical action would be the option that follows this "principle of utility" the best; to do any less is to act immorally (from Utilitarianism's strictest perspective).⁵ How does this group field environmental concerns? They do so by pulling a very similar move to that of the Deontologists and their concept of intrinsic value by making an adjustment to their theory of maximizing utility to include more than human beings. And why not? Animals can feel pain and pleasure. Future generations will be able to feel happiness and unhappiness.⁶ And we should even have a vested interest in non-sentient entities on this planet because of how their destruction can ultimately lead to unhappiness/pain for sentient beings. For instance, if we destroyed all oxygen-generating plants, even though those plants cannot feel pain, there would be a great deal of pain and unhappiness caused due to the worldwide suffocation of humans and animals that would take place. This is certainly an extreme example, but one that should get the point across as to how Utilitarians can (again, at least in one way) extend moral consideration to even the environment.

Lastly, the third major branch of ethical theory is known as Virtue Ethics. This group looks for their moral agents to display excellence in a number of virtues in their everyday lives.⁷ How many virtues and which types are determined by the theorist, as there can be a fair amount of variation (this can be seen as a potential weakness in Virtue Ethics). There is also a substantial difference between Virtue Ethics and the other two branches: while actions may or may

not be indicators of how much excellence is being displayed in the area of a given virtue, ultimately the focus of the Virtue Ethicist is not on the action, but on the agent himself. There is something more intuitively beneficial about such an approach since it is generally understood and accepted that occasionally even good people do bad things, making the judgment of an action as good or bad at times not particularly helpful.

The first two listed branches, especially Utilitarianism, seem to have quite a wealth of information available on how the theories can be applied to a world outside of currently living human beings. In contrast, apparently far less attention has been paid to how a Virtue Ethicist could apply *his* theory to posterity, animals, or the environment at large. Does a Virtue Ethicist have anything to say on the subject? This is not a something that has been ignored, but arguably one can say it has been neglected.

The reason for this may very well be due to a common criticism leveled at Virtue Ethics: that the concept of virtues can easily be placed within the theoretical framework of either Deontology or Utilitarianism. Having virtues such as wisdom, justice, honesty, or compassion could certainly help the Deontologist's moral agent better follow the categorical imperative. And many Utilitarians would comfortably admit that displaying excellence in those same virtues can serve a great purpose when attempting to follow the principle of utility. The big question asked at this point is simply, "Why do we need Virtue Ethics at all?" In trying to provide an answer to that specific question, the majority of work done in modern-day Virtue Ethics has been in dealing with humans in an attempt to demonstrate it is just as good as its competitors in handling what I will from now on refer to as "present people ethics."

It is tempting to dwell on this question of whether or not virtue ethics is even needed, yet I believe that asking such a question is not a particularly meaningful pursuit. As easy as it is for either of the two "traditional" branches of ethics to pose that question, it is just as easy for a Virtue Ethicist to reflect it right back. Virtue Ethicists could say that discussion of the categorical imperative or consequential thinking could be used

as a compliment to the heart of their own theory. There is no reason why this kind of adaptation would not go as smoothly as any adaptation made by the Deontologist or the Utilitarian. In addition, it would do neither branch any good to claim to be better due to precedence since both Kant and J.S. Mill (the face of Utilitarianism) died less than a couple of centuries before we were born, while Aristotle (the “founder” of Virtue Ethics) died a number of centuries before Christ was born.

So now operating on the assumption that Virtue Ethics is worthy of serious consideration as a moral theory, I will explore what this particular brand of ethics has to say on the topic of essentially non-*present people ethics*. What kind of moral consideration should be given to posterity? To animals? To a tree? To use a metaphor, the goal here is to see how wide we can expand the bubble of moral consideration using virtue ethics. I believe that a true Virtue Ethicist will find himself obligated to give all the above listed things serious moral “consideration,” especially given the way human moral thinking has progressed. I say this assuming it can be agreed upon that at one time both racism and sexism were accepted practices, and that we also agree neither practice was ever actually ethically acceptable, just at the time unrecognized for what it was. This is not to suggest that we should go around assuming everyone is incapable of making fair moral assessments (whether or not this is true is an essay for another time); I only mean that no entity should be immediately written off as unworthy of consideration. After demonstrating that posterity, animals, and the environment are worth moral consideration, I will explain what a Virtue Ethicist is to do with that information (how he ought to act in order to display excellence in a given virtue). In addition, I will be using language in my arguments that have apparent connotations of both Deontology and Consequentialism within them. As I said, it is my belief that Virtue Ethics has no real problem incorporating ideas from either of them into its main theory; the big difference is, again, that the focus for the Virtue Ethicist will lie in the character performing the act, not on the act itself. It is this separation of focus which allows this arguably “pluralistic” type of thinking to go on without any true conflict.

One of the problems that a Virtue Ethicist may run into is that not everyone agrees on the same list of virtues. Some theorists may add virtues to what was originally a “core” list, or even take away some original virtues (such as pride) and replace them with something else (like humility). To respond to this problem, I will construct this essay in the form of a series of “If *A,B,C* are virtues, then *X* is what one must do” statements. Therefore, if you personally disagree that “A” or “B” is a virtue, the statement may *possibly* not apply to you. Though, because I believe my arguments will demonstrate how the numerous virtues are interconnected, it is my opinion that it will be very difficult to sever oneself cleanly from any of these obligations if one is a morally decent person (from a Virtue Ethicist’s perspective). I also wish to make it clear that this essay is targeted primarily towards those of us who are well off enough that we are not concerned with acquiring basic needs on a daily basis (though by no means do I wish to *completely* exclude anyone from this set of obligations, either).

To avoid confusion, I have listed below a number of virtues that I will be using in this essay and the way that I personally wish to define them. This is not an exhaustive list, but merely one that is relevant to the paper at hand.

- a) **Benevolence:** desire to do good for others (often seen as synonymous with charity)
- b) **Compassion:** feeling the pain of others and having the desire to relieve it
- c) **Courage:** ability to control one’s fear and face unfavorable situations when necessary
- d) **Humility:** being modest in opinion about one’s self
- e) **Justice:** fairness; remaining impartial unless there is strong reason to be otherwise
- f) **Practical wisdom:** the ability to make reasonable, unbiased judgment calls
- g) **Prudence:** caution when dealing with matters of importance

These virtues, once accepted as such, compel us to seriously reconsider the way we live our lives and question

whether or not we are truly honoring the above virtues if we ignore the obligations I have presented below.

- 1. If benevolence, compassion, justice and practical wisdom are virtues, one has an obligation to posterity to give them the chance to experience at least the standard of living we, as virtuous agents, should/do experience.**

In extending the bubble of moral consideration, posterity seems to be the best place to start. We are allowed to stay within our realm of anthropocentrism in doing so (if we wish), and so that topic of debate remains closed for this segment. Some people believe that we already think about “our children and our children’s children” when making decisions, but much of our actions that come as a result of those decisions (like how we treat the environment) would suggest otherwise.

Talk of posterity often raises the question of whether future generations really have any right to expect anything from us at all. Our actions towards many of our currently living acquaintances can be crudely seen as exchanges of “reciprocal altruism.”⁸ Ultimately one is hoping to receive something in return for his good actions, so therefore he acts in an altruistic manner towards others. As is clearly obvious, in such a scenario, posterity is out of luck.

For the above reason, two of the virtues I have chosen to start with are benevolence and compassion. We do not seem to (directly) receive any benefits from people on the other side of the planet, yet that does not mean we (assuming we are at least trying to be virtuous agents) should just remain indifferent and uncaring to tragedies such as the Darfur conflict, or more generally the thousands that die daily from starvation and easily curable disease. A virtuous agent that has compassion should be moved by these tragedies and the pain that these people feel, and hopefully they are moved enough to act. Similarly, while future generations do not really help us in any way, a Virtue Ethicist will argue that we should work towards creating a good living situation for them because it is an act of

benevolence to do so, and quite uncompassionate to do otherwise. I refer to compassion in regard to posterity here because of the negative direction our environment seems to be taking as a result (at least partly) of mankind's abuse of Mother Nature. I do not think it too presumptuous to hypothesize that if we continue on this path, there will likely be considerably more suffering felt by future generations than if this current generation takes action to help resolve the environmental problems that both we and past generations helped to create.

Connected to the virtue of compassion is the virtue of justice. They are so interrelated that one often, perhaps even usually, displays compassion for those who are experiencing something we believe to be unjust. And it is because of this virtue that I have arrived at the second part of the above "If...then" statement. It is from a sense of justice that we should care enough about posterity to give them at least the ability to live as we feel we personally "ought" to live. If how I phrased the "If...then" statement sounds rather open, know that it is intentionally so. People are going to have different opinions of how we should be living. Someone very environmentally conscious (believing it to have intrinsic value) may possibly have a dissimilar lifestyle to that of someone who is solely anthropocentric. Despite this difference, it appears as though we cannot escape talking about the environment either way. We are obligated to treat our environment in a manner that will allow posterity to (at the very least) experience the world that we get to experience (the virtue of benevolence may encourage us to strive for even better!). That many of us do not do this is obvious, but we would not call those of us that fit into that group "virtuous" in the areas of benevolence, compassion, or justice.

As people who should at least hope to promote virtue in others, living our lives in a way that keeps the interests of posterity in mind can also have a positive effect on future generations in their quest to become virtuous themselves. The reason for this is the same reason that having a virtuous role model helps us become a virtuous agent personally. Edmund Burke claimed, "People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors."⁹ While some may

disagree with Burke, there does seem to be at least a grain of truth to the idea that if our past generations looked out for our well-being, we would certainly be more inclined to continue that ‘tradition’ by looking out for our own future generations. However, it must be made clear that whether our past generations have or have not actually given us (their future generations) moral consideration the way a virtuous agent should is irrelevant. What is important is that even if they were not, *they should have been*. And in our case, the virtues of benevolence, compassion, and justice compel this current generation to give posterity the consideration and deliberation they deserve.

In his essay, “Limited Obligations to Future Generations,” Martin Golding raises another interesting question that is occasionally used to demonstrate how we cannot really do anything that necessarily favors posterity. An amusing example is given that if a visitor from Mars came to us, we would have no idea what kind of actions would be “good” or “bad” for that visitor.¹⁰ Therefore, how could we have “obligations” towards such a being? Aristotle himself addresses a similar issue in Book III of *The Nicomachean Ethics* when he says a voluntary action (and thus one that can be judged) can only occur under the conditions that a person does not perform a certain action under constraint or ignorance.¹¹ Given that one might say we are ignorant towards the needs and desires of future generations, are we absolved from responsibility towards them?

While the above paragraph presents an interesting argument, it seems peculiar that this would ever be considered a legitimate objection to having obligations towards posterity. In addressing this question, one should exercise practical wisdom. The ignorance Aristotle is speaking of can *only* be used as an excuse if it is *unavoidable* ignorance.¹² For one thing, aliens are not the same as future generations (of humans). We do not expect our future generations to rapidly evolve into beings that desire things contrary to what our currently living humans want. Golding goes on to say that because our social ideals are certainly relevant to posterity, we do indeed have obligations towards them. For instance, it is

foolish to argue that future generations will not desire food, water, clean air, and other basic physiological needs. Therefore, when current generations abuse and exploit our environment the way that we are, we cannot honestly justify our actions by insisting that we are ignorant of what posterity will desire. To make such an argument is in itself ignorant and not practically wise from a Virtue Ethicist perspective.

- 2. If justice, practical wisdom, humility, compassion, and courage are virtues, then we are obligated to treat animals with at least enough respect that we do not violate their well-being unless it is deemed ethically necessary.**

This argument involving animals will have two slightly different viewpoints, both of which I believe can be appropriately referred to as virtuous. The first is one that can remain mostly anthropocentric, but will still ask the general population to make what can, by our standards, be seen as some radical changes. This includes reconsidering our diets, our hunting and fishing habits, and perhaps even more subtle practices which I will argue a virtuous agent should find unacceptable. The second viewpoint is certainly more extreme, and that is the belief that humans have no higher moral status than other any other animal. To expect everyone to reach this kind of moral thinking is quite unreasonable (and arguably a little silly), but I include this group because I do not feel that someone who holds this viewpoint is any less virtuous than his more anthropocentric counterpart. As I will now explain, to say someone who holds such a view is being irrational is to claim that absolutely humans should have more moral worth than other living beings, and logically this is a surprisingly difficult belief to defend.

In Paul Taylor's essay, "Biocentric Egalitarianism," Taylor explains that human beings can in no way view themselves as "superior" to other animals.¹³ On what basis could we do this? Any time we claim superiority, all we have proven is that we are superior in ways that we, personally, believe are adequate deciding factors. For instance, we view

our intelligence as what sets us apart and makes us special from the rest of the animal kingdom. Yet, to claim this makes us superior is to do nothing more than to commit the logical fallacy of ‘begging the question.’ We cannot define superiority as intelligence and then believe anything meaningful has actually been stated when we claim that superiority. As Taylor puts it:

...various nonhuman species have capacities that humans lack. There is the speed of a cheetah, the vision of an eagle, the agility of a monkey. Why should not these be taken as signs of their superiority over humans?¹⁴

In addition, we cannot even claim *moral* superiority over animals, since we must keep in mind the ‘ought-implies-can’ maxim. To say that we are morally superior to a squirrel is relatively absurd, since the squirrel does not act morally or immorally. We are of course assuming that a just and practically wise person would not reasonably expect someone else to do something that they have no capacity to do or even rationally comprehend. Just as we would not claim to be morally *inferior* to the squirrel, we cannot claim moral superiority either.

In continuing on this topic, it does not seem inappropriate to invoke Peter Singer’s argument against “speciesism.”¹⁵ While Singer is a well-known Utilitarian, his arguments for the equality of animals are not so much “Utilitarian” as they are plainly rational, and certainly no one who would consider practical wisdom to be a virtue would deny a rational argument’s worth. What Singer desires is for animals to be given the same amount of moral *consideration* as humans; this does *not* mean we are to be treated in an *equal manner*. By this he means that it is silly to insist that animals should be given less consideration simply because they will be treated differently from humans even in an ideal moral setting. Dogs do not need the right to vote any more than male human beings need the right to have an abortion should they become pregnant.¹⁶ But we are not giving men less consideration than

women even though nobody fights for men to hold such a right. It is clearly a right that is not applicable to men. Yet many try to argue that animals deserve less moral consideration based on the same fallacious logic. Singer states: “Equal consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights.”¹⁷ He goes on to explain that we should find racism and sexism wrong not (at least entirely) because they are not inferior to a different race or sex intellectually. Most people believe this in fact is the reason, but it leaves open a problematic door that is very difficult to shut once such a view is held: if we believe that the reason we should be treated equally is because our intelligence is equal, then we reopen ourselves up to racism and sexism if at some point in the future it is determined scientifically that one race/sex is in fact superior and that all the current differences we see are not just environmental factors (as is the commonly held view among non-racists/sexists these days). Most of us would be appalled by such an idea coming to life. And even if one race had a lower capacity for intelligence, why should that give us the right to give them little to no moral standing? Singer quotes nineteenth-century black feminist Sojourner Truth when summing this point up:

...they talk about this thing in the head; what do they call it? [‘Intellect,’ whispered someone near by.] That’s it. What’s that got to do with women’s rights or Negroes’ rights? If my cup won’t hold but a pint and yours holds a quart, wouldn’t you be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?¹⁸

It is for this reason that Singer focuses on sentience in animals; he cannot find any rational reason to consider humans more worthy of moral consideration on the basis of a personality trait such as intelligence.

Even if human intellect and moral capacity were adequate reasons to discriminate against animals (and potentially other races?), we are left with the issue of infants and the mentally disabled. They have less intelligence than

many fully grown animals, yet we do not write them off from receiving moral consideration. The only reason for this inconsistency is our tendency towards speciesism, which Singer believes to be irrational and the fact that we seem to do it naturally is not a particularly good excuse to discriminate unjustly against beings that have every right to be allowed into our bubble of moral consideration.

So why is humility as a virtue important? Simply because honoring that virtue means wiping away our natural tendency to disregard the moral status of animals. Having humility here will require us to swallow our pride and accept that our intelligence in no way allows us a license to continue many of the activities we practice today. It is also certainly worth mentioning that other virtues such as compassion and benevolence can be mentioned here, both of which are useful in addressing the topics of animal experimentation, the terrible quality of life we force onto livestock, any unnecessary hunting that we do purely for entertainment purposes, and other such activities which completely disregard the right to life that animals possess, or the very real pain they can (and often because of us do) experience. Why should the pain felt by an animal be disregarded simply based on the fact that it is not the same species as us? What they feel is still real pain that does seem to bring out a feeling of compassion from us at times, though arguably with surprising inconsistency.

Even as I write this paper, there is a story in the news that has been receiving national attention about a very famous athlete, Michael Vick, who has just been sentenced to twenty-three months in prison for charges of involvement in an underground dog-fighting ring, in addition to actively taking a part in the hanging and/or drowning of six to eight dogs himself.¹⁹ What is most interesting about this story is the very fact that many of us are outraged by it. It bothers and disturbs us deeply, and of course Singer would argue that it *should*. But why? What separates this from what we do to cattle, pigs, or chickens? Why is this athlete seen to us as a monster? A feeble answer to that question may be due to the fact that we feel a stronger attachment to dogs than to cows. This could possibly be true, but using such a reason to justify the torture

and slaughter of the cow while simultaneously claiming it is wrong to do such actions to canines is not in line with the virtue of justice (not to mention both illogically discriminatory as well as downright cold-hearted). Do we really want to claim that a dog's pain *should* matter more than a cow's based only on the fact that we tend to like dogs better? Justice, and arguably practical wisdom, insists that if we are mad about the dog's suffering, the suffering of the cow should be just as infuriating to us.

How else could we view this athlete as a monster without condemning ourselves to the same moral judgment? Could we say that it is because he *personally* took part in the act of executing those dogs? Is that what sets him apart from you or me? Perhaps. It does appear that an intuitive line in our very nature is drawn (whether it is right or not) between actively doing something immoral and passively allowing the immoral to occur. The athlete's ability to physically drown or hang a dog also probably indicates on some level that he may be at least a little mentally ill, though that is an issue I will not explore further due to the fact that I do not feel it is relevant to the debate of which I am attempting to focus on.²⁰

If we accept that the above listed proposition (the distinction between active and passive immorality) is the reason that this athlete is a moral monster and that we are not, then a new question arises: If you or I had known about the dog-fighting ring and the inhumane executions done by this athlete and simply ignored it, would we be morally clean? Is it okay for a virtuous being to be aware of immoral action and do nothing? And to take it a step further, is it okay for a virtuous being to be aware of immoral action and to even *embrace* it and accept it with open arms (which we do every time we take a bite of steak, pork chops, chicken, etc.)? One would think that the answer should be no.

In addition, I feel it would be a futile argument to suggest that a major difference is that these dogs were in a much worse situation than our cattle. Even if the lives of those dogs were somewhat worse than that of cattle (which is perhaps a questionable claim as well), how exactly would that relieve us of our responsibility to stop the still great amount of

pain and suffering that is unnecessarily done to cattle? It could be argued that to support such treatment of cows and pigs is less morally repugnant than the way this athlete treated those dogs, but it is *still morally repugnant just the same*. Singer would likely exclaim that this is an unacceptable inconsistency, and that we should be as against the practices of the meat industry as we are against this athlete's despicable actions. And he might even insist that we be as opposed to those practices as much as we are against other horrendous practices such as infant abuse because they are all beings that are capable of feeling terrible pain (and again some animals even more than the infant).

Yet even Singer, the die-hard animal rights activist, admits that there are times when humans should come before animals. For one thing, since he is Utilitarian, he must keep in mind that humans have greater potential than other animals to make a positive impact on the world. And this certainly appears to be true. The fact that this reason is Utilitarian does not mean a Virtue Ethicist has to ignore it. As stated earlier, there is no reason why consequential thinking can not be allowed into the Virtue Ethicist thought pattern. And because of this conclusion, when humans are faced with conflicts of equal status between a human and a non-human, it may very well make sense to choose the human. In this way, we can justify choosing a human over a non-human to live if forced to make such a decision even though both were given equal moral consideration. I said in my "If-then" statement that we should not violate the well-being of an animal unless deemed "ethically necessary." So when is it not necessary? *When our human needs are not at risk*. Animal's essential needs should not come second to human non-essential desires. This will most likely write off our consumption of meat.²¹ In addition, activities such as hunting solely for recreation will be out, and with it will go a large deal of animal experimentation. Depending on one's personal views, one may even be compelled to protest the existence of less obviously one-sided exploitive practices such as zoos.

Even if stopping all these activities entirely is unrealistic, no one said that this was an all-or-nothing deal. If

people cannot give up eating meat, we certainly could eat less of it. Our reasons for doing so have a second function, and that is found in our obligation to the world's starving. It requires 4 pounds of grain to produce one pound of pork²² and 12.9 pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef.²³ Obviously, that is a rather large sum of food that is not available to the world's starving simply because countries like the US feel the need to have a particular taste in their mouths. This is an area where our *present people ethics* actually meets and joins hands with our obligations to treat animals the way they should be treated. It is even in *this* particular country's interest to adopt this policy. The US's heavily meat filled diet causes many health problems such as heart disease, hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and some forms of cancer²⁴ that would lessen if we turned towards a more vegetarian style diet. This may very well be one of the most lopsided ethical "dilemmas" we are faced with today, yet our taste buds alone keep us from doing what is clearly the right thing to do. A virtuous agent must have the *courage*²⁵ to give up this particular taste in food because there does not seem to be any ethical reasons that allow him to maintain it (especially not at our current level of consumption), and a mountain of ethical reasons that do not.

- 3. If prudence, humility, and practical wisdom are virtues, we are obligated to do what is truly best for ourselves by not abusing and exploiting the environment for short-term gains and viewing ourselves as "a part" of nature rather than "apart" from it.**

There is a plethora of authors available to us that discuss the intrinsic rights of the environment. I will not bother to defend such a view for two reasons. First, the notion of intrinsic value can be sticky business even when applying it to humans or other animals. I can only see it getting messier in attempting to defend the intrinsic value of a tree. My second reason for not bothering with the concept of intrinsic value of the environment is that I do not believe it to be necessary (and avoiding messy, potentially pointless debates whenever

possible is a preferable choice). Bill Shaw believed that if prudence was a virtue, then we should be guided by “enlightened self-interest rather than the narrow selfishness of immediate, short-term gratification.”²⁶ We should learn to think long-term; in the sense of what is best for mankind in the future. Humility would be an important virtue in this respect in that it would help the virtuous agent realize that they should not always be acting in an individually selfish manner. It is Shaw’s opinion that the best interests of the environment are also in the best interests of human beings and everything else as well, and this is why it is not necessary for me to quibble about intrinsic value.

Shaw also argues that practical wisdom as a core virtue will allow us to view ourselves as members of the larger biotic community, rather than foolishly and blindly separating human beings from everyone else. And again in no small way would having humility aid us in reaching this world view. How would we be able to do this? Thomas Hill suggests a new definition for our ethics. Rather than putting our focus on treating human beings as ends in themselves or looking to maximize utility, Hill promotes an ethic of human flourishing.²⁷ Once again, this view appears in a way to be aligned with *present people ethics*. Hill explains that someone who suggests it is okay for them personally to exploit the environment is not displaying humility even to his fellow man, and it is likely that he has too high an opinion of himself, “...such a person is more likely to lack sensitivity and gratitude, and will tend to be indifferent to other people.”²⁸ This can be seen as nearly parallel to Immanuel Kant’s previously above mentioned argument that we have an indirect duty to human beings to be kind to animals; in this case the indirect duty is to be kind to the environment. The lone major difference is that our poor treatment of the environment is far more likely to also come back and harm mankind as well, thus giving us a two-fold reason to stop our abuse of Mother Nature.

If we are forced to exploit the environment in some way, we should exercise caution on the general understanding that posterity, animals, and sometimes even human beings, will likely reap the consequences of our actions. Robert Hull lays

out three conditions in which exploitation of the Earth is acceptable. First, any form of “exploitation” should only be done if it fits into the ultimate goal of human flourishing and there is no viable alternative action that could bring about the same ends. Second, that exploitation should be done in the “least intrusive manner possible.” Third, we should attempt to make amends for our acts of exploitation in as good a manner as we can, such as replanting trees in an area we deforested.²⁹

As one can see, actions such as disposing of waste products in bodies of water, rampant deforestation, and refusing to put a soda can in a readily available recycle bin because it is another four feet further to walk are not likely to make the cut of acceptable “exploitation,” and particularly not at the current rate that we maintain these practices. It does not take an ecological expert to see that the way we behave towards our environment will likely come back to haunt the human race later. The virtue of practical wisdom begs us here to exercise our better judgment and to only harm the environment when we absolutely *have to* in order to aid the cause of human flourishing.

Conclusion

Many of my suggestions for how to act can still easily be criticized as too open-ended and vague. I do not say in black and white what one is to do, and certainly this will prove frustrating for those that desire an algorithm for ethical action. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your perspective), just about nothing in the world can in fact be broken into black and white, so expecting moral theories to lay out action guidance in such a way is a peculiar desire at best. From the perspective of a virtuous agent, they will simply have to exercise their practical wisdom and judgment, which is revered fittingly by Virtue Ethicists as the virtue which unites the rest. I say fittingly because even in my more pluralistic outlook, practical wisdom still seems to be the backbone on which everything else rests.

As a species, we are capable of reaching *astoundingly* complicated levels of thought that no other living beings are

able to achieve, and with those thoughts there seems to be almost no limit on where our innovation can take us. We can impact the world in ways no other beings can. In a very real sense, human beings do ‘rule’ the world, whether it is right for us to do so or not. With this ability and the power it gives us, even if we are just ‘a part’ of the environment instead of ‘apart’ from it, it is difficult not to put ourselves on a pedestal. Despite all the reasons listed above that attempt to put human beings “in their place,” I still believe there is something very special about us. Yet I also believe a truly virtuous agent would sense something very wrong with exercising the gifts Mother Earth gave us to exploit the rest of nature the way we currently do.

Tom Morris, a former Philosophy professor at the University of Notre Dame, has previously coined a term known as “The Double Power Principle” which I believe applies to our current situation on Earth. The fancy and compelling name is more exciting than the term’s actual definition, which is the very rational and almost obvious understanding that “the more power something has for good, the more it correspondingly has for ill.”³⁰ Above I have listed many arguments which suggest that the use of our species’ power has been greatly abused, the way an unjust dictator rules over his subjects. A true virtuous agent should cry out against that, for I cannot see any way that he *could not*. He should have the desire to fix the injustice of how we think of and treat animals or the environment, or how we often just toss serious consideration of posterity’s rights aside because it serves our personal immediate self-interests best to do so. What the Double Power Principle also suggests here is that as bad of an impact as we have had, we have just as much ability to do good.

Most importantly, the true virtuous agent needs to *act*. Many of us believe it an accomplishment nowadays that we have even reached where we are now in expanding our bubble of moral consideration. Yet, giving that consideration to everything that needs and deserves it is only the first half of what turns out to be a fruitless battle if we ignore the second. In closing, I will leave you with this quote from an anonymous author who appears to mirror my above sentiment all too well:

“Being good is commendable, but only when it is combined with doing good is it useful.”

¹ Theodore Denise, Nicholas P. White, & Sheldon Peterfreund, eds., *Great Traditions in Ethics*, 11th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2005), 147.

² *Ibid.*, 156.

³ Immanuel Kant. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. T.K. Abbott. (1873). In *Environmental Ethics: Reading in Theory and Application*, eds. Louis Pojman & Paul Pojman, (Belmont, California: Thomson Higher Education, 2008), 64.

⁴ Denise, White & Peterfreund, *Great Traditions in Ethics*, 161.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶ The fact that future generations do not currently exist, however, does mean that they *arguably* get less moral consideration than human beings that do.

⁷ Denise, White & Peterfreund, *Great Traditions in Ethics*, 23-24.

⁸ Garrett Hardin. *Who Cares for Posterity?* (1977). In *Environmental Ethics*, eds. Pojman & Pojman, 351.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 355.

¹⁰ Martin Golding, *Limited Obligations to Future Generations*, (1972). In *Environmental Ethics*, eds. Pojman & Pojman, 361.

¹¹ Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Book III 1111a, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan/Library of the Liberal Arts, 1962).

¹² Kristian Skagen Ekeli. “Environmental Risks, Uncertainty, and Intergenerational Ethics.” *Environmental Values* 13, no. 4 (2004).

¹³ Paul Taylor, *Biocentric Egalitarianism*, (1981). In *Environmental Ethics*, eds. Pojman & Pojman, 148-149.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁵ Peter Singer, "All Animals Are Equal." *Animal Liberation* (New York: New York Review of Books/Random House, 1975), 1-22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ Any information I have mentioned involving Vick's case has been taken from various television news programs. I did not do extensive research on the case's details, since I am mostly interested in addressing the public reaction that was commonly felt in response to the news of what Mr. Vick had allegedly done.

²⁰ An extra consideration to keep in mind is that if we believe Mr. Vick to be mentally ill, we would then be faced with the new problem of whether or not we can blame someone for such heartless action if mental impairment is in the picture.

²¹ Mylan Engel Jr., *Hunger, Duty, and Ecology: On What We Owe Starving Humans*, (2003). In *Environmental Ethics*, eds. Pojman & Pojman, 470-71. There is little to no legitimate support left for the argument that we need meat for its nutritional value these days.

²² Bill McKibben, *A Special Moment in History: The Challenge of Overpopulation and Overconsumption*, (1998). In *Environmental Ethics*, eds. Pojman & Pojman, 381.

²³ Engel Jr., *Hunger, Duty, and Ecology*, 470.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 470.

²⁵ A personal love of how meat tastes is not the only reason why removing it from one's diet may be so hard. Because there are still many who scoff at moral vegetarians, make no mistake that it may very well require a great deal of courage to become one because of how it is looked at socially. In addition, there are simply less available food choices to vegetarians in this country, making vegetarianism more of a hassle than it frankly should be.

²⁶ Bill Shaw, “A Virtue Ethics Approach to Aldo Leopold’s Land Ethic.” *Environmental Ethics*, 19, (1997): 63-66, paraphrased in Robert Hull, “All about EVE: A Report on Environmental Virtue Ethics Today.” *Ethics & the Environment*, vol. 10, no. 3, (2005), 91.

²⁷ Thomas Hill, “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments.” *Environmental Ethics*, no. 5 (1983), 216, paraphrased in Robert Hull, *Ethics & the Environment*, 95.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁹ Robert Hull, All about EVE: A Report on Environmental Virtue Ethics Today. *Ethics & the Environment* 10, no. 3, (2005), 107.

³⁰ Tom Morris & Matt Morris, eds., *Superheroes and Philosophy*. (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 2005), 47.

On Ambiguous Sense and Non-Existent Reference

Benjamin Kozlowski

Frege's notion of the distinction between sense and reference, though compelling and necessary to the full understanding of communication through language, is an incomplete description of the function of language, as Russell points out in his essay, "On Denoting." Russell attacks Frege for being "artificial" and disregarding several critical exceptions to the normal relationships that Frege identifies between sense and reference, specifically in the cases of senses with multiple references, and those with no reference. Russell suggests an alternate solution to analysis, based on primary and secondary reference in a proposition, but his solution is no more than what Frege identified in his essay, "On Sense and Reference."

The structure that Frege describes in "On Sense and Reference" is in the context of explaining the difference between the statements ' $a=a$ ' and ' $a=b$ '. Frege explains that the two statements have obviously different cognitive value, not only in that the two statements have different sign-representations (the sign ' a ' is visually distinct from ' b ') but in that " $a=a$ holds *a priori* and...is to be labeled analytic, while statements of the form $a=b$ often contain very valuable extensions of our knowledge."¹ Frege's chief concern throughout the essay is to explain how $a=b$ is feasible, by distinguishing among sign, sense, and reference.

To Frege, a "sign" is the physical representation of a statement. Words, numbers, and letters are all examples of signs. Examination of a sign occurs without semantic value—a sign is the word as word, rather than what the word represents. The "reference" is the object that the sign represents. In the case of the moon, the word 'moon' is the sign, while the moon itself is the reference. A "sense," on the other hand, "serves to illuminate only a single aspect of the reference,"² such as identifying Plato as the pupil of Socrates. In this way, the statement $a=b$ has cognitive value because it can ascribe one of many senses to a reference, or link any two senses to the same

reference, as in saying that the student of Socrates is also the teacher of Aristotle.

Though Frege's analysis of sense and reference applies to language and proper names in most situations, there are two specific examples that Bertrand Russell brings up in his essay "On Denoting" that Frege does not address, or addresses poorly, in his own work. Russell identifies three different types of denoting phrases, or, in Frege's language, senses that allude to a reference: "(1) A phrase may be denoting, and yet not denote anything...(2) A phrase may denote one definite object...(3) A phrase may denote ambiguously."³ Though Frege is prepared for the second instance and would explain it as a single sense referring to a single reference, his explanation of the first case is lacking and he does not address the third case at all.

The first case that Russell describes, what Frege calls a non-existent or imaginary reference, is one often found in philosophy, making it a hard point to overlook. Russell uses the example of the round square and the King of France to demonstrate this special case. The round square is feasible as a sense, but the combined properties of the circle and square are impossible to reconcile. And while France and Kings can both be identified linguistically, no such man exists who is the King of France. Frege addresses this problem by dismissing these examples. He explains that "in grasping a sense, one is not certainly assured of a reference."⁴ This means that in the case of 'the largest integer,' 'the round square,' and 'the King of France,' there is simply no reference, and just an empty sense that will correspond to whatever subjective idea the subject has to correspond to it. To Russell, this is an oversimplification on the part of Frege. He explains that "[Frege's] procedure, though it may not lead to actual logical error, is plainly artificial and does not give an exact analysis of the matter."⁵ Russell sees Frege's 'sense,' as it exists in complex statements, referring only to the summation of the senses of the statement's constituent parts. In the case of "the King of France is bald," Frege is interpreted by Russell to assign a null reference to the phrase 'the King of France,' but the reference is still implied as the statement continues, leading to miscommunication. Frege

attempts to resolve this with the example of ‘Odysseus,’ in that the name may or not have reference, but explains that “it is a matter of no concern...so long as we accept the poem as a work of art,”⁶ and explains in a footnote, that it would be worthwhile to call these senses-without-references by another name: representations.

The third case that Russell sets, that of a sense with an ambiguous reference, Frege does not originally address. Russell uses as an example the phrase ‘a man,’ using the indefinite article ‘a’ which Frege does not assert, by limiting his discussion to proper nouns. But Russell brings up an interesting point. In some cases it is unclear which reference a sense refers to, as in the case of two men with the same name, or in the case that a phrase can have two different meanings depending on context. For example, to borrow Frege’s own term, the ‘morning star’ can refer to Venus as Frege identifies, or, in one context, it can refer to a heavy spiked flail used in the Middle Ages, or in another, as a euphemism for Satan. In this case, the reference may be miscommunicated from speaker to listener, as when the speaker intends one reference and the hearer finds another, or it may be intentionally ambiguous, as in a poem where each interpretation is valid. Frege, I believe, would disregard the former misunderstanding and argue that the reference of the sense was the one the speaker intended, and that the listener was plainly mistaken, and in the latter ambiguity, again posit art as an exception to the rules of normal communication, and would willingly adopt both references in the single sense.

Though Frege may circumvent these two exceptions, Russell still sets a higher mark for him to achieve. In “On Denoting,” Russell sets “three puzzles which a theory as to denoting ought to be able to solve.”⁷ The first puzzle is the one Frege sets out to solve in his essay, namely that of the cognitive value of $a=b$ as different from the principle of identity, $a=a$, because it offers clarification by comparing two senses of the same reference, or identifies the reference to a given sense. Russell identifies the second puzzle with the law of excluded middle, arguing that in the case of a null reference, such as ‘the King of France is bald,’ it must still be true that either he is

bald, or is not bald, though the King of France does not exist. Frege asserts this by identifying that the negation of a statement should include the possibility of the non-existence of the reference. To Frege, the statement and its negation should be, rather than ‘the King of France is bald’ and ‘the King of France is not bald,’ ‘the King of France is bald’ and ‘Either the King of France is not bald or there is no King of France.’ For Frege, this is a failing of language, which he condemns for having symbols “that seem to stand for something but have...no reference.”⁸ Essentially, rather than adopting the solution into his method, Frege moves for a change in language to fit his system.

Frege struggles to accommodate Russell’s exceptions, and circumvents his second criterion for a logical system concerning language, but collapses when faced with the third criterion that Russell sets forth. The third puzzle Russell sets forward is summarized in a question: “How can a non-entity be the subject of a proposition?”⁹ Frege’s answer, as in the second puzzle, is simply that this is the failing of language that senses can exist without references. But to Russell, this is solved by distinguishing between primary and secondary references, which is essentially the same process as the one Frege delineates in his exposition of “proper negation,” in that it is understood implicitly, underlying the meaning of a proposition, that a reference exists. So essentially, each is stymied by the same problem—that of senses with non-existent references—but each approaches the solution in a different way. To Frege, language is flawed and should be corrected. To Russell, it is acceptable to make conscious the presupposition that a reference exists, and to address it in the case of a primary occurrence of the reference in a proposition, namely one in which it is assumed that the reference exists, rather than where the existence of the reference is unnecessary to the interpretation of the proposition, as in the case of Odysseus in the poem.

In short, Russell’s correction of Frege is little more than a methodological repair where Frege suggested a reform of language itself. Though Russell’s analysis of language is more detailed and complete, Frege’s structure holds up, if

precariously, before Russell's exceptional cases, and struggles only where Russell struggles, in the case of propositions with non-existent references. It is only fitting that the difference between the two thinkers' conclusions—one which Russell examines frequently in his text—is little more than a groundless formulation.

¹ Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference," in *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. A. P. Martinich and David Sosa (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 7. Originally published in German as "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" (1892).

² *Ibid.*, 8.

³ Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," in *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. A. P. Martinich and David Sosa (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 32.

⁴ Frege, "On Sense and Reference," 8.

⁵ Russell, "On Denoting," 35.

⁶ Frege, "On Sense and Reference," 10.

⁷ Russell, "On Denoting," 35.

⁸ Frege, "On Sense and Reference," 13.

⁹ Russell, "On Denoting," 35.

**Devils and Apologetics in Abstraction:
A Dialogue Concerning True versus False Christianity**
Caroline Herman

SETTING OF THE DIALOGUE

It is a few minutes past dusk. Two men in professional, bureaucratic-looking suits¹ approach a large, sprawling mansion. They ring the doorbell, are answered by an old, hunched butler, and are ushered inside. The butler shows the arrivals to a sitting parlor, and then gestures to a waiting servant who quietly and promptly pours two snifters of brandy and hands them to the guests. The servants depart unobtrusively, and the two men stand in identical poses in front of the overlarge fireplace, swirling their brandy but not drinking it. After an interval of about seven minutes, the door opens, and the butler announces in a sonorous tone: "Professor Kirk and Miss Plummer."² An aged, eccentrically-attired man with sporadic, untidy tufts of white hair enters with a graceful, well-groomed, silver-haired lady on his arm. The lady pats her companion's arm before gently extricating her own. She then approaches the guests, curtsies, and greets them warmly.³

THE DIALOGUE

POLLY: (nodding to the taller, more distinguished-looking bureaucrat) Screwtape. How very good of you to come.

SCREWTAPE: (stepping forward to take her hand) Nonsense, my dear Miss Plummer. I would not think of missing it; I do so enjoy our meetings.

DIGORY: May I inquire as to the identity of your companion, Screwtape?

SCREWTAPE: But, of course, Professor! Allow me to introduce Wormwood, my nephew.

POLLY: (extending her hand to Wormwood) Welcome, Wormwood.

WORMWOOD: (nodding and taking her hand) At your courtesy, I'm sure.

DIGORY: Rather, it is at *my* courtesy, as this is my house. Your nephew, is he, Screwtape? I wasn't aware such relationships existed for your kind.

SCREWTAPE: Think of him as a sort of apprentice, then. He accompanies me purely for his educational enhancement, I assure you. (Digory gazes critically at Wormwood for a few seconds.) Now, surely, Professor, you, of all men, would be sympathetic to so proper a sentiment? (At this, Digory nods thoughtfully, and Polly gestures to the settee.)

POLLY: Do have a seat, gentledevils. Can I get you anything before we begin?

WORMWOOD: No, thank you, Miss Plummer.

POLLY: Very well, then. Brandy, Digory?

DIGORY: No, thank you, Polly. I prefer not to imbibe during the process of composition.

WORMWOOD: Composition?

POLLY: His newest book. This is the first time he's been on the ground floor for several weeks.

SCREWTAPE: Indeed, Professor? And the subject of this particular tome?

DIGORY: Well, I can hardly limit myself to one subject, now can I, Screwtape? Suffice it to say it involves evolution— or rather human *devolution*—spiritual degeneration, the mania of rationality, the superficiality of skepticism... (At this point, Digory's voice trails off in a series of inarticulate mutterings coupled with emphatic gesturing. Only his final words are intelligible:) ...and, all in all, I do a bit of dabbling in eschatology.

SCREWTAPE: Indeed? Sounds highly fascinating.

DIGORY: Fascinating, yes. Fascin—ah! Yes, exactly so... (Digory now jumps up and runs to a nearby table, and begins to scribble madly on a few sheets of paper. Screwtape and Wormwood sit calmly watching Digory. Polly rings a bell for tea.)

WORMWOOD: Miss Plummer, may I ask you a question?

POLLY: Of course, Wormwood.

WORMWOOD: Well...(pauses) you see, I am rather unsure as to the nature of our meeting.

POLLY: (brow furrowing) Now, surely your uncle would have informed you of our purpose?

WORMWOOD: (mildly embarrassed) No, indeed, ma'am.

POLLY: Well, Wormwood, it is no secret. Every century or so, your uncle, the Professor, and myself meet over tea to discuss the current state and viability of an institution and phenomenon that concerns us all dearly.

WORMWOOD: Ah, I see. I assume you refer to Christianity.

DIGORY: (returning to sit next to Polly, easily rejoining the conversation) Of course we refer to Christianity! You yourself are a product of its ontology! My, my, what do they teach at your schools, Screwtape?

SCREWTAPE: Now, now, Professor, we have all passed through the stage of obvious overstatement under the guise of intellectualism.

DIGORY: Point taken, Screwtape, point taken. Now, boy, do you understand the full implications of Miss Plummer's statement?

WORMWOOD: No, sir, I cannot say that I do entirely.

DIGORY: Think, boy, think!

WORMWOOD: Well, my uncle informed me that you both were advocates of that which we call the Enemy.⁴

DIGORY: Indeed. Go on.

WORMWOOD: Of which it would necessarily follow that we—Uncle Screwtape and myself—are at cross purposes with yourself and Miss Plummer...but all contained solely within the same metaphysical framework of practical action and belief.

DIGORY: Precisely. (He directs a quick nod to Screwtape before continuing.) You see, my boy, we are all literary characters bound to specific identities and existing solely within the fictive realm. However—existing within this infinite and eternal continuum allows us a certain degree of freedom of expression and relation that is otherwise impossible for those bound to the temporal realm, due to the necessary constraints of corporeality—

POLLY: What he means, Wormwood, is that we, as fictional characters, are immortal, beyond the restriction of time and space. As such, however, we are bound to our ontology; we

exist within the Christian framework—and the Christian framework alone.

SCREWTAPE: So what necessarily follows, nephew?

WORMWOOD: What I gather, Uncle, is that our role as philosophers is significantly disparate from that of the hybrids.⁵ Because we are beings that can only exist within a fundamentally Christian worldview and philosophy, we need not establish presuppositions about the existence and identity of the Enemy and his Son.⁶

SCREWTAPE: Quite so. I am pleased with your inference, nephew. Our role, and the purpose of my meetings with the Professor and Miss Plummer, is rather to discuss Christianity in relation to the efficacy of our respective professions. As mortal time progresses, we non-temporal beings discuss the applicability and viability of the Christian religion at a given time.

WORMWOOD: If I may be so bold as to ask—

DIGORY: Ask away, boy! Timidity has no place in genuine inquiry.

WORMWOOD: Indeed, sir. My question is simply—why? As I said before, we are at cross purposes. Your purpose, Professor, and yours, Miss Plummer, is solely to emphasize, enhance, encourage, and foster the true elements in Christianity—while our intention is exactly the opposite. We live to create, maintain, and perpetuate the false elements.

DIGORY: But you have just stated the essential dichotomy—true versus false religion—that answers your question!

POLLY: Think of it as a sort of training that is mutually beneficial. We are not bound by human rational dualism; we know the interconnectedness of Christianity that the humans so often forget. Your purpose and ours are diametrically opposed, I grant you. But these meetings allow us both to study and therefore anticipate the dangers on the current opposing front.

SCREWTAPE: Well, Wormwood? Is your mind now at ease as to my reason for bringing you here?

WORMWOOD: I think, Uncle, your objective in my accompanying you tonight was to prove the necessity of empathetically understanding the positions and arguments of

the Enemy so as to increase both the subtlety and efficacy of our work.

SCREWTAPE: Excellent. Now, Professor, Miss Plummer. Shall we begin?

DIGORY: Indeed, we shall. The issue at hand, Wormwood?

WORMWOOD: We are to explore the problem of true versus false religion, or, rather, true versus false Christianity.

POLLY: Should we not first come at the meaning of those words—‘true versus false religion’?

DIGORY: A capital notion, Polly. Screwtape, have you a definition to help clarify the matter?

SCREWTAPE: Indeed I do. I believe Erich Fromm’s formulation of “authoritarian” versus “humanistic” religion may assist us in this matter. Fromm defines “authoritarian” religion as “recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, reverence, and worship.”⁷

WORMWOOD: Sounds like the Enemy.

POLLY: It is the sense of “entitlement” that Fromm focuses in on, is it not, Screwtape?

SCREWTAPE: Indeed it is. Fromm emphasizes the factor of entitlement so as to criticize religious adherence as not being due to any projected sense of respect for the power or belief in the innate worthiness of the power, but rather as in fear of the power’s superior potency.⁸

WORMWOOD: Based on this, I gather there is an emphasis on intimidation and resultant submission.

SCREWTAPE: Correct. Fromm says, “In authoritarian religion God is a symbol of power and force, He is supreme because He has supreme power, and man in juxtaposition is utterly powerless.”⁹

POLLY: And Fromm equates authoritarian religion with Christianity?

SCREWTAPE: Not equates exactly, but he certainly relates the two.¹⁰

POLLY: And what has he to say about humanistic religion, then?

DIGORY: I believe the quotation is: “Religious experience in this kind of religion is the experience of the oneness with the

All, based on one's relatedness to the world as it is grasped with thought and with love. Man's aim in humanistic religion is to achieve the greatest strength, not the greatest powerlessness; virtue is self-realization, not obedience."¹¹

POLLY: So, both human reason and human compassion factor into understanding of the strength of the human self, and resultantly the interrelation of the self with all aspects of creation.

DIGORY: Yes, but the primary emphasis is on salvation through self rather than dependence on a deity.

POLLY: And does Fromm argue that Christianity is not a humanistic religion?

SCREWTAPE: I believe he identifies early Christianity and mystical strains of Christianity as humanistic.¹²

POLLY: So may I safely assume that you are drawing a parallel relationship between true and false religion and humanistic and authoritarian religion?

SCREWTAPE: At least as an opening template for discussion.

DIGORY: Well, Screwtape, I must say you're slipping! Last century you never would have committed yourself to so narrow a proposition!

WORMWOOD: How so?

DIGORY: Fromm himself spends pages supporting his argument that there exists a wide spectrum in which authoritarian and humanistic religion lie at either end, but most, if not all religions fall somewhere in between the two.¹³

POLLY: In other words, there are humanistic and authoritarian elements in all religions.

WORMWOOD: If I may interject—I had been of the understanding that we were discussing Christianity alone.

SCREWTAPE: An excellent reminder. The question then becomes whether modern Christianity is more authoritarian or humanistic in nature.

DIGORY: No, no, no! You have it all wrong again, Screwtape! You are still presupposing that authoritarian religion may be understood as false religion.

SCREWTAPE: Indeed, I am. And I believe Fromm is projecting that there are more false religious elements in authoritarian religion than there are true.

DIGORY: I disagree most emphatically! This primary reliance on the self that Fromm is terming “humanistic” I find to be indicative of a tendency towards hubris—an egoism so inebriated by its own thought that it cannot see through any other framework of existence!

POLLY: A moment, Digory. I believe you are here equating the “self” with the “ego”—an equation I find to be a distortion of Fromm. Do you not agree, Screwtape?

SCREWTAPE: I do, Miss Plummer, most emphatically. I believe Fromm is rather working towards a spiritual liberation that comes about through human rational perception of the natural world and state of existence as such. The emphasis is placed on a sort of god-within as opposed to the authoritarian god-without.

DIGORY: But that is precisely why this humanistic versus authoritarian dichotomy is so ludicrous! Fromm is presupposing that emphasis on submission and humility do *not* result in that spiritual liberation. Christianity emphasizes abhorrence of the flesh—of the physical materiality that confuses and distracts from this realization of the inner self—the focus on the soul—human empowerment. I contend that humility is the only pathway to liberation and empowerment!

WORMWOOD: (mutters) Oh, now we’re walking dangerous ground.

POLLY: In what sense, Digory?

DIGORY: Let us take the fundamental mystery upon which Catholicism rests. Catholics believe in the actual presence of the simultaneously divine and human Christ in the physical Body of the Eucharist and physical Blood of the wine. The pulsating core of Catholicism is the daily consumption of the Body and Blood of Christ—a physical and metaphysical communion with the Divine—an “experience of the oneness with the All, based on one’s relatedness to the world as it is grasped with thought and with love.” The essence of Catholicism is empowering oneself through participating in the dualistic experience of *com*-union. And yet, simultaneously, the act of communing with the Divine Being—the Creator-God believed to be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, triune and yet One—is an act that inspires humility and submission purely

because of the belief in the nature of the One God. He inspires—is *entitled* to, yes!—obedience, reverence, and worship *because He is not* wholly “other” than the human self, as in Islam. Through consumption of the Eucharist and the Blood, Catholics are submitting to, revering, obeying, and worshipping the God within and the God without!

WORMWOOD: So you are identifying elements of both humanistic and authoritarian religion in Catholicism?

DIGORY: No: I am definitively stating that the authoritarian elements result in the humanistic; they are inextricably interconnected and mutually interdependent in Catholicism.

SCREWTAPE: Catholicism, if not Christianity.

POLLY: So it would seem, at least in light of Digory’s example, that we cannot equate authoritarian religion with false religion. Do you accept this, Screwtape?

SCREWTAPE: For the moment, yes. What, then, Professor, will you identify as false religion?

DIGORY: Oh, that is very simple. False religion or elements of false religion occur as a result of the misuse of religious authority.

POLLY: Religious authority to be distinguished from authoritarian religion?

DIGORY: Yes, I mean religious authority in reference to the structural framework of religion; in Christianity, I am referencing the Mother Church, the pope, Sacred Scripture, and the hierarchical organization of religious officials that supposedly act on behalf of the first-mentioned authorities.

POLLY: It is the abuse of this authority, is it not, that is the primary topic of most anti-Christian criticism?

DIGORY: The primary—if not the only—topic, Polly.

SCREWTAPE: But now you are skipping ahead! We must first arrive at an identification of true religion.

WORMWOOD: My excuses, Uncle, but did we not already do so? The Professor disagreed that Fromm’s authoritarian religion cannot be classified as “false” religion, but does he deny as well that humanitarian religion can be classified as “true” religion?

DIGORY: Indeed, I do not; I simply consider it a fragmented conception of true religion. The difficulty with Fromm is that

he separates the two elements of religion that must be integrated to enable salvation. True Christianity, if not true religion, *must* encompass both authoritarian and humanistic elements. The two are mutually interdependent; the structure of Christianity is what enables self-realization.

WORMWOOD: A dangerous proposition, Professor. Perhaps you could elaborate?

DIGORY: But of course. What I mean here is that the structure of Christianity is what has granted it its longevity; without the authority of the institution of the Church, the Christian religion lacks spiritual foundation.

WORMWOOD: Allow me to clarify here: are you disallowing for the possibility of personal faith? What of those who adhere to philosophically Christian principles but do so wholly separate from the Church?

DIGORY: I assume you are referring to those nondenominational beings who term themselves “spiritual” but anti-structure, having a distaste for what they term “organized religion.” Some fall away from structured Christianity on the predication that it allows for both manipulation and corruption. The more thoughtful among these will often develop a personal conception of spirituality as a sort of create-your-own-religion that offers a veritable cafeteria of possibilities designed to accommodate individual taste. This, I project, is what you are referring to when you mention “personal faith.” Bear it well in mind that without the structure of the religion, only the most thoughtful among these “spiritual people” will actually practice the spirituality he espouses as superior to organized religion. Accordingly, and in an interesting reversal, it may be argued that those who do not conscientiously act on the spirituality they deem to be more genuine and superior to structured Christianity are as culpable as the hypocrites who initially caused them to doubt “organized religion.”

WORMWOOD: So you are contesting that without the structure of the Church, true Christianity is not possible?

DIGORY: Most assuredly.

SCREWTAPE: But this is all much too fast! You both have forgotten our aim: to come at a definition of true religion. Miss Plummer, have you any characterization to assist us?

POLLY: Perhaps a formulation of true religion by Huston Smith may be of use. He claims that “authentic religion is the clearest opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos enter human life...It calls the soul to the highest adventure it can undertake, a proposed journey across the jungles, peaks, and deserts of the human spirit. The call is to confront reality, to master the self.”¹⁴

DIGORY: And so we return to the realization of self that Fromm propagates.

WORMWOOD: So, in summary, true religion is a pathway towards spiritual realization and liberation of the self.

POLLY: Yes: necessarily, then, false religion is any element that misuses or detracts from that ultimate realization.

SCREWTAPE: In that light, allow me to rephrase my earlier question. Are there evidenced more true or false elements of religion in Christianity?

DIGORY: For the sake of argument, Screwtape, would more false than true elements necessitate Christianity’s inviability?

POLLY: If you might, Digory, hold that question until we can first explore Screwtape’s.

DIGORY: Oh, very well, Polly. I know how fussy you are about this sort of thing.

POLLY: Thank you. Wormwood, have you a template upon which to begin answering your uncle’s question?

WORMWOOD: If I’m not mistaken, Miss Plummer, Soren Kierkegaard has a work entitled *Attack Upon “Christendom”* in which he distinguishes true Christianity from false.

POLLY: In what ways, exactly?

WORMWOOD: Well, he classifies New Testament Christianity as true Christianity—the type of religion the Enemy’s Son—or, if you will, Christ—would have lived and created. He describes this as “the direction of denying myself, renouncing the world, dying from it...” By contrast, he determines that “Christendom,” or the practical effect of Christianity nearly two millennia later, is not even an attempt in that direction—is rather convenient, corrupt, and a distortion of the Christianity Christ intended.¹⁵

POLLY: Your use of the word ‘convenient’ here is interesting. Could you elaborate?

WORMWOOD: Well, I take Kierkegaard to be drawing a distinction between early Christianity—the Christianity during the Age of the Martyrs—and modern Christianity. Early Christianity—Christ’s Christianity—required the ultimate sacrifice of self towards the ideal of Christ, whereas modern Christianity “is the means whereby one secures oneself against all sort of inconveniences and discomforts, and the means whereby one secures worldly goods, comforts, profit, etc.”¹⁶

SCREWTAPE: In other words, because to be Christian once meant to be few against many and now means to be many against few, institutionalized Christianity has lost its primary distinguishing feature—namely, self-sacrifice, or annihilation of the self.

WORMWOOD: For Kierkegaard, yes.

POLLY: Ah, so ‘convenience’ is in reference to the assurance of safety in numbers...

DIGORY: ...which results in indolence and lack of genuine integrity.

WORMWOOD: And thus false religion.

SCREWTAPE: To be distinguished from the true religion that indicates a choice counter to ego-concerns.

DIGORY: I understand the discrepancy Kierkegaard is posing here, but cannot it be argued the other way as well?

POLLY: In what sense, Digory?

DIGORY: Christianity turned from a minority into a majority—from a small, courageous sect into the commonplace and standard religion for the West. This proclamation of Christianity as the right and true religion caused many who were not in actuality Christian to “convert” and call themselves Christian. All this is true. True also are the many numbers converted by force rather than volition. But, on some level, is not the spreading predomination of Christianity a testament to its truth? And if not its truth (and by truth here, I mean its relation to the soul), then its adaptability—its universality—its fulfillment of the needs of the human psyche and spirit?

SCREWTAPE: Were every convert able to comprehend such abstractions, perhaps. But how many Christians are Christians by birth or by fear? How many believe because they know

nothing else—because they are told to believe by the priests and bishops?

WORMWOOD: If I may attempt an answer—Kierkegaard addresses both these questions. He poses the following as the proof of the truth of Christianity: “Christianity came into the world, being served by witnesses who were willing absolutely to suffer everything for their faith, and who actually had to suffer, to sacrifice life and blood for the truth. The courage of their faith makes an impression upon the human race...What is able thus to inspire men to sacrifice everything, to venture life and blood, must be truth.”¹⁷ In this sense, the only true Christians were the martyrs who suffered and died for their faith as did Christ, and this truth of self-sacrifice is what so inspires men. But what, as you asked, Uncle, of the men who could not know nor think enough to be inspired by this? What of the pseudo, false Christians who were Christian by habit or by force, but not by inspiration? Kierkegaard lays blame for them at the door of religious officials—your abuse of religious authority, Professor—especially the abuse by the priests. Kierkegaard inveighs loudly and stridently against the hypocrisy of the priests, claiming that the role of a priest is to piggyback off the glory of the martyrs. The priests preach the life of the martyr—the life that above all justifies and proves Christianity—and yet live lives geared towards the single goal of earning a profit, thereby disproving Christianity.¹⁸

POLLY: One moment, Wormwood. If I’m not mistaken, Kierkegaard wrote this attack around the middle of the nineteenth century¹⁹—a time in which corruption and misuse of religious authority was prevalent in Christianity.

DIGORY: Are we to suppose, in that light, that there existed not one humble, Christ-like priest or monk standing firm to the dictates of the New Testament?

POLLY: Or, the more pertinent question is whether this issue of corruption in religious authority is still applicable in the twenty-first century. If I am correct, Kierkegaard’s aim in writing his “Attack” was to awaken nineteenth century Christians to their hypocrisy; to demand that the Church own up to its corruption; perhaps even to start a theological revolution against stagnant Christianity.²⁰

WORMWOOD: I concede your point, Miss Plummer. Although, I should still maintain that the discrepancy between early and modern Christianity is still drastic, and that hypocrisy in religious officials is still rampant, even if not to as great a degree as it once was.

DIGORY: But, boy, you are moving entirely too fast! Cannot all these attacks be classified as *ad hominem*?

WORMWOOD: In what sense, Professor?

DIGORY: In the most basic sense! His attacks are based on elements of force, hypocrisy, corruption—based all on human flaw, or rather on the flaws of a select few Christian authorities. The problem is not Christianity; the problem is Christians.

SCREWTAPE: But you are making the same distinction made by Kierkegaard: Christianity versus Christendom: the ideal versus the actuality.

POLLY: Yes, but I understand Kierkegaard here to be using the actuality to invalidate the ideal.

DIGORY: Precisely. Kierkegaard is claiming that the basic problem of Christianity is the basic problem of humanity—the problem of flawed adherents to Christianity rather than the flawed nature of the Christian philosophy itself.

SCREWTAPE: One moment, Professor—can it not be argued that the Church is no more and no less than its adherents?

DIGORY: No, I would draw a distinction between the two; the problem only arises because finite and imperfect creatures are asked to maintain and perpetuate an infinite and perfect institution.

SCREWTAPE: Come now, Professor, are you truly classifying the Christian Church as “perfect?”

DIGORY: In an ontological sense, Christianity as an institution was created to be a perfect and infinite indicator of the presence of Christ on earth. It is only because it is administered by human adherents that finite and imperfect elements manifest themselves.

WORMWOOD: Simply to clarify, Professor, are you now drawing a parallel between true and false religion and the ideal and actuality of religion?

DIGORY: As a momentary summation, yes.

SCREWTAPE: So then you will agree that the actuality of the Christian religion may be equated with false religion?

DIGORY: Not in any exclusive sense! We have identified several aspects of proven, tangibly false elements in actual Christianity (or Kierkegaard's "Christendom"), and we have thereby deduced the polar nature of the ideal, or the true elements in Christianity—

SCREWTAPE: None of which are evidenced in actuality.

DIGORY: No! That is exactly what I was about to refute. We have not yet identified that true elements are impossible, and without this, you cannot claim the invalidity of Christianity. But before we move onto this, allow me to return a moment to Kierkegaard's conception of false religion. I contest that although the scandals and hypocrisies in the Church are capitalized on, there are degrees of false religion that are far more prevalent and far less remarked upon.

WORMWOOD: Degrees? In what sense?

DIGORY: Most anti-Christian critics will emphasize blatant hypocrisy as the invalidating factor of Christianity and thus as a reason to abandon it as a system of belief. C.S. Lewis, a Christian apologetic, contends that far more Christians are lost to the subtle insinuation of substitutes than to genuine philosophical inquiry. In his essay entitled "Religion: Reality or Substitute?" he describes this pervasive danger of substitutes: "What made it seem so likely that religion was a substitute was not any general philosophical argument about the existence of God, but rather the experienced fact that for the most of us at most times, the spiritual life *tasted* so thin, or insipid, compared with the natural. And I thought that was just what a substitute might be expected to taste like."²¹

POLLY: If I understand him correctly, Lewis is intimating that faith is threatened not by philosophical inquiry or any real pursuit of absolute or indefinite truth, but rather by a world in which we understand reality to be substitute and substitute reality; loss of faith is then a convenience of the moment that often lacks any rational basis.

DIGORY: Precisely. He is describing a type of false Christianity that is perversely prevalent—an almost lukewarm indifference to faith and gross susceptibility to materialism—

the type of falseness against which Christ would have preached.

POLLY: Very well, then. We have now established that, to a degree, the true danger that threatens Christianity is not the hypocrisy in a few religious officials but rather a sort of spiritual stagnancy that resides to a highly prevalent extent in Church pews and fund raisers. What, then, do we make of the true, ideal elements in Christianity?

SCREWTAPE: And—further—are there any, or is the lukewarm epidemic of spiritual indifference the unspoken modern creed of choice?

DIGORY: Of course there are! This has been my point all along: to delineate the relationship between—no, the mutual interdependence of—the two antitheses! Authoritarian and humanistic—actuality and ideal—false and true: they are symbiotic; it is only through the experience of the false that one can arrive at (and remain devoted to) the true! This is the concept that invalidates all criticisms of Christianity; it is a religion *of sinners for sinners*, and without sin, there can be no salvation. Without salvation, there is no Christianity.

POLLY: Could you clarify what you mean by ‘symbiotic’?

DIGORY: Perhaps another reference to a work of C.S. Lewis may be of use here. In his work entitled *Mere Christianity*, Lewis formulates that Christianity—predicated on the ideal that *is* Christ, for the sole purpose of becoming *like* Christ—is a transformative institution that allows for the individual progress and stagnation of the human spirit. It is in this light that we come to understand the arguments against Christianity by way of its adherents to be both banal and misdirected. Lewis states: “It is very different for the nasty people—the little, low, timid, warped, thin-blooded, lonely people, or the passionate, sensual, unbalanced people. If they make any attempt at goodness at all, they learn, in double-quick time, that they need help. It is Christ or nothing for them. It is taking up the cross and following—or despair.”²² Consider then, who is the better priest: the man who, in all outward senses, demonstrates the uprightness and integrity one expects from a religious leader, but inwardly, content with his own consistency, ceases to strive towards his betterment—or the

pedophile, who, acting on his homosexuality, then despairs of himself and turns towards Christ with a humility and a genuineness foreign to the upright man? Let us take another “for instance“ Who is the better priest: the alcoholic who fathers a child and discovers the depth and passion of his faith through his own failing, or the academic cardinal who prides himself on the strength of the verbosity of his apologetics? Who are we to say the pedophile²³ and the drunk are not the better Christians? Who are we to term the outwardly Christian priests genuine practitioners of the faith? Until we can see into men’s hearts, we cannot determine the hypocrisy or Christian-ness of a man; until we can know with utter certainty that the homosexual priest’s hypocrisy does not strengthen his own faith, we cannot use hypocrisy as an argument against religion. As Lewis questions: “What can you ever really know of other people’s souls—of their temptations, their opportunities, their struggles? One soul in the whole creation you do know: and it is the only one whose fate is placed in your hands.”²⁴ Without this knowledge, arguments against structured Christianity on the predication of hypocritical adherents are inviable.

POLLY: Let me see if I take your meaning. You are proposing that because all the criticisms of anti-Christian agents are directed at the flaws of individual adherents, authoritarian figures or not, it necessarily follows that the criticisms are against the *sins* of these adherents and thus the hypocrisies.

DIGORY: Correct. And as sinners, they are adherents of a religion created for their kind—created for *sinners*.

POLLY: And until we can determine that an action or the perpetuation of an action does not result in the sincere stimulation of faith and constant growth of humility, we can never claim that the religion is not fulfilling its purpose—that is, providing salvation, redemption, and ultimate liberation for sinners through annihilation of the self in Christ.

DIGORY: And the validity or intentionality of a sinner cannot be determined except by entering the sinner’s psychology and spiritual introspection.

POLLY: Screwtape, Wormwood, your thoughts?

SCREWTAPE: Well, I cannot help but understand your above formulation as a sort of fail-proof safeguard against criticism.

Are we supposed to believe that there are secret sinner-saints contained within each pedophile, each hypocrite, each indifferent pew warmer?

DIGORY: By no means. I am simply emphasizing that it is through sin that one finds and realizes spiritual liberation. Thus, criticizing sinners in the struggling stages of that realization process is contrary to the criticizer's intention, namely, exposing the falseness and delineating the truth. The truth relies on the falseness in order to actualize itself; it is the nature of humanity and of the human world.

POLLY: Is there an example you can use to illustrate this concept, Digory?

DIGORY: Of a surety—Lewis himself provides one in the final chapter of *Mere Christianity*, entitled “The New Man.” The following is his metaphor for the transformation into this new man that he projects as the possible and proven salvation for the human being:

God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it has got its wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own game. But there may be a period, while the wings are just beginning to grow, when it cannot do so: and at that stage the lumps on the shoulders—no one could tell by looking at them that they are going to be wings—may even give it an awkward appearance.²⁵

And so comes the exhortation I share with Lewis: perhaps the old kind of man—the man before Christ was better than the new Christian; perhaps the ideal of Christ is an ontological impossibility for mortal men; perhaps the strictures of this religion are harsh and the demands on the human self even harsher...but what if we encounter a more radical happenstance than all these? What if the truth of Christianity is proved—not

in despite of these “perhaps-es” but *because* of them? We could, I suppose, imagine a religion that produced only well-bred, beautifully behaved, smartly-groomed horses with smooth gaits and smoother jumps. But still we would encounter that nagging capacity somewhere after the will stops and before emotion begins—that part of ourselves that will cheer with our hearts in our throats as the stumbling, awkward horse with shoulder lumps only just makes the leap that was so simple for the purebred. And is not his journey—not *despite*, but *because* of the pains and degradations caused by the lumps—in the end more triumphant and glorious than ever the consistent, well-trodden way of the purebred?

POLLY: A passionate illustration, Digory. It seems then that you are advocating not only awareness of the symbiotic relationship between sin and salvation, but also calling for a recommitment at least in principle, if not in practice, to the ideal of Christ.

DIGORY: Yes, Indeed, Polly. Acceptance of oneself as a sinner is crucial to this, however; without humility, there can be no genuine integration of the ideal.

POLLY: I must say that these paradoxes of true versus false, authoritarian versus humanistic, actual versus ideal—seem to mimic the mystery of human nature and the condition of the natural world itself. I am reminded of the work of another Christian apologetic, G.K. Chesterton. In his autobiographical account of his transition from agnosticism to Christianity, entitled *Orthodoxy*, he has a chapter called “The Paradoxes of Christianity.” In it, he asserts that it was the ambivalent contradictions of agnostic criticism that caused his conversion.

WORMWOOD: Indeed? In what way?

POLLY: Well, the young agnostic Chesterton first identified a conflict between assertions that Christianity was first too optimistic and then too pessimistic. Christianity was first the coward’s and the fool’s religion, the safety-blanket, the rose-colored glasses religion, and then it was the religion of damnation, of unyielding dogmas, of chastity, of hell and of purgatory. As he surmised, “Christianity could not at once be the black mask on a white world, and also the white mask on a black world.”²⁶ A second agnostic case revolved around the

arguments that Christianity was too meek and too violent. First, Christianity was a mild and timid religion following an effeminate Christ who turned the other cheek and lay surrendered and beaten on a Cross. Second, Christianity is condemned for mercilessly shedding blood in the many Christian wars, the Crusades, and the Inquisition. As Chesterton puts it, "I had gotten thoroughly angry with the Christian, because he was never angry. And now I was told to be angry with him because his anger had been the most huge and horrible thing in human history; because his anger had soaked the earth and smoked to the sun."²⁷

WORMWOOD: So the disparate, contradicting criticisms of the agnostic scholars caused him to convert?

POLLY: Ultimately, yes. Young Chesterton, in a moment of deep contemplation, postulated a theoretical man at once too fat and too thin, too tall and too short, too white and too black. What if, he asked himself, this man was not either thing but "the right shape?" What if, within "this extraordinary thing is really the ordinary thing; at least the normal thing, the centre."²⁸ What if there existed something that affirmed both extremes, but is neither one nor the other? And so he arrived at the following idea: that humans "want not an amalgam or compromise, but both things at the top of their energy; love and wrath both burning."²⁹ And then the great parallel manifested itself in Chesterton's mind: Christianity affirms Christ as fully human and fully divine; neither one nor the other, but both, both in their full color, fullness of meaning, fullness of identity: Christ as the center paradox around which all Christian paradoxes revolve.

DIGORY: I remember that particular passage. He identifies paradox as lying at the core of humanity and the core of Christianity alike, does he not?

POLLY: Indeed, he does. For him, Christianity allows for the greatest of human potential and the greatest of human flaw. It accounts for all humanity's own paradoxes. Its flaws are no more than the result of tipping one of these extremist dualisms even an inch and thereby utilizing them for ego-driven purpose. For Chesterton, orthodoxy is the great romance, the great paradoxical religion provided for its paradoxical adherents.

SCREWTAPE: Indeed, I must admit I rather despise that particular advantage of the Enemy's—the creation of Christianity as custom-made for the hybrids—in mimicking their own contradicting nature. Our appeal to their “higher” faculty of reason is constantly undermined by their pernicious inclination towards mysticism.

WORMWOOD: I have noticed that the hybrids enjoy allowing the unexplainable; it is only our most successful patients that cannot abide it.

DIGORY: Allowing the unexplainable...explaining the unexpl—yes! Yes! That is precisely where I must end that chapter... (Digory rises and rushes to the table, again scribbling furiously, oblivious to the other occupants of the room.)

SCREWTAPE: That does remind me, Wormwood. I'm to make an appearance tonight at the Tempters' Training College for young Devils.³⁰ Miss Plummer, you'll have to excuse my cutting our meeting so short. Alas, it cannot be avoided. Please give my regrets to the Professor once he has resurfaced.

POLLY: But, of course, Screwtape. Wormwood, it was enlightening making your acquaintance.

WORMWOOD: As it was yours, Miss Plummer.

Polly rings the bell, and the butler arrives to escort the two men out of the room. Polly takes up an old manuscript of Digory's and begins to read, intending to wait for him to finish. After an interval of fifteen minutes, he is still scribbling furiously, and Polly rises, smiling softly, and takes him by the elbow. He is still muttering voraciously to himself as she guides him gently up the stairs to his study.

¹ These characters are from C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977). This book documents the correspondence between a senior devil, Screwtape, and his nephew and “junior tempter” (p. 19), Wormwood. Throughout the book, there is never an indication that the devils are of any material substance; they are “pure spirit” (p. 8) according to Lewis. My choices in the physical manifestations and attire of Screwtape and Wormwood are a result of my creative interpretation of the following passage in Lewis' preface to *The Screwtape Letters*: “I live in the Managerial Age, in a world of ‘Admin.’ The greatest evil is not now

done in those sordid “dens of crime” that Dickens loved to paint...it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried, and minuted) in clean, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voice. Hence, naturally enough, my symbol for Hell is something like the bureaucracy of a police state or the offices of a thoroughly nasty business concern” (p. x).

² These characters are from C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*. They feature in the prequel to *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, entitled *The Magician’s Nephew*, in which the boy Digory and the girl Polly witness the birth of the parallel world of Narnia. Digory ages to become the Professor with whom Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy stay in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. C.S. Lewis modeled the character of Professor Kirk at least in part after himself, and thus I have my version of Digory the Professor quote and espouse positions of C.S. Lewis throughout the dialogue.

³ Although my characters’ names are borrowed from the works of C.S. Lewis, this dialogue neither presupposes nor relies on previous knowledge of Lewis’ works. Furthermore, Lewis’ devils have no physical form; my interpretation and manipulation of these characters is a result of pure artistic license. The setting is deliberately ambiguous, outside of our understanding of time and space, but within the realm of fiction. Finally, Digory’s tangents in regards to his manuscript have little to no bearing on the dialogue itself; they are included more for an illustration of his character as an erudite and intellectual professor.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape refers to the Christian God the Father as the “Enemy.”

⁵ Here, Wormwood uses the word ‘hybrid’ to refer to humans. C.S. Lewis describes devils as “pure spirits” (see endnote 1) and thus, in their perspective, humans are a hybrid between the spirit and the animal.

⁶ I use “the Enemy and his Son” in reference to the first two persons of the Trinity: God the Father and Jesus, His Son. My purpose in the above lines is not to belabor, but rather to emphasize that this dialogue does not concern arguments or questions about the truth of Christianity. C.S. Lewis created these characters in a fundamentally

Christian framework, and I am consequently emphasizing that it would be contrary to their basic existence to debate questions of the validity of Christianity in the face of other religions or in the face of atheism and agnosticism. There exists, in other words, a fundamental presupposition that Jesus Christ existed, died, was resurrected, and instituted a religion that we now refer to as Christianity. The entire dialogue rests upon and within this worldview and framework of understanding.

⁷ Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*. (New York: Vali-Ballou Press, Inc., 1950), 34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36. Here, Screwtape is referring to the passage where Fromm quotes Luther's emphasis on humility and submission in the face of the Divine mind.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 37. Fromm also classifies much of modern liberation theology, especially that of Latin America, as humanistic (explication by Kevin Brien, Philosophy, Dialogue, and Methods, Washington College, on April 30, 2007).

¹² *Ibid.*, 37.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34-64.

¹⁴ Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 9.

¹⁵ Soren Kierkegaard, "The Attack Upon 'Christendom'" from *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall. (New York: Modern Library, 1946), 436-7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 437.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 464.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 464-5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 434.

²⁰ Ibid., 434-9.

²¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Seeing Eye: and Other Selected Essays from Christian Reflections*. ed. by Walter Hooper. (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1967), 50-1.

²² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001), 214.

²³ To clarify, Digory is here projecting a pedophile that has occasional lapses rather than an intentional recurrence of sin. The theorized internal turmoil of a man, held to a higher standard, struggling with his sin in the face of his vocation is the emphasis here.

²⁴ Ibid., 216-7.

²⁵ Ibid., 216.

²⁶ G.K. Chesterton, “The Paradoxes of Christianity” from *Orthodoxy*. (Utah: Waking Lion Press, 2006), 81.

²⁷ Ibid., 82.

²⁸ Ibid., 86.

²⁹ Ibid., 87.

³⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The World’s Last Night: and Other Essays*. (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1960), 51. This comment is in reference to Lewis’ essay “Screwtape Proposes a Toast.” Lewis sets the scene for the essay in the following passage: “(The scene is in Hell at the annual dinner of the Tempters’ Training College for young Devils. The Principal, Dr. Slubgob, has just proposed the health of the guests. Screwtape, a very experienced Devil, who is the guest of honour, rises to reply:).”

Contributors

Trevor Williams is a senior in philosophy.

Andrew Sun is a senior in philosophy.

Benjamin Kozlowski is a senior in philosophy.

Caroline Herman is a senior in philosophy.