Apeiron: [Gk. απειρον, unlimited, indefinite, indeterminate]

n. 1. Name used by Anaximander to refer to ultimate reality; the unformed source of all that exists.

2. The arche, that is the beginning or principle of all things, the unlimited. (The term is capable of various constructions, depending upon how one understands the term 'unlimited'—indeterminate, unbounded, without form, without beginning or end, without internal limits.)

3. An undergraduate journal of philosophy for students of all majors at Washington College.
Foreword

With the publication of this ninth annual issue of Apeiron, we continue a tradition that was initiated by Professor Peter Weigel in 2003, and sustained by him for six straight years. The first six issues presented many very solid papers written by Washington College students on a broad variety of philosophical topics. While the authors of many of these papers were philosophy majors or minors, some of them majored in other disciplines. We note, too, that submissions of work with philosophical significance by Washington College students are always welcomed to be considered for publication in Apeiron—no matter what their major might be.

Volume Nine opens with an essay by E.C. McGregor Boyle, which eloquently challenges the philosophical definition of consciousness. By addressing the ambiguity of the definition, Boyle offers an element of much-needed clarity to the broader issue of whether we ought to extend rights and moral consideration to non-human entities.

Jeremy Quintin goes on to illustrate the struggle against determinism as portrayed in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Notes From Underground. His essay explores the infamous personality of Dostoevsky’s thought experiment in order to show its deterministic undertones.

Next, Patrick Thomas Cannon deftly reveals how key concepts in Buddhism also apply to Marxist social theory, thereby demonstrating that a unified Buddhist-Marxist philosophy is both feasible and fitting.

In his keenly analytic essay, “The Principle of Sufficient Reason and Absolute Nothing,” Jim Schelberg brings a seemingly dogmatic principle into focus by discussing our conceptual understandings of nothingness.
Kristine Sloan’s poems can tentatively and lightheartedly be termed her *ars philosophica*, though their interpretations are left to the discretionary understandings of their readers.

Finally, the issue concludes with Rachel Field’s compelling argument that an effective, respectful praxis of environmental conservation cannot be supported by anthropocentric value systems, as these systems divide humans from the rest of the biotic community. In her essay, Field contends that we must form a new relationship to the natural world if we are to develop successful conservation strategies rooted in the intrinsic value of nature.
Introduction

In this ninth edition of *Apeiron*, we are enthused to bring you an assortment of essays both intellectually provocative and relevant to our collective cultural experience. The issues raised are challenging and insightful in their eager elucidation, touching upon ripples of meaning in the grand sea of philosophical inquiry. Several of these pieces artfully reflect the ways in which philosophy overflows into other disciplines and mediums. In the tempests of these thoughts, we hope that readers will enjoy participating in this remarkable contemplative exchange.

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A Brief Word on Consciousness: Setting Aside the Obstacle of Internal States

E.C. McGregor Boyle

This piece was inspired by the author’s Senior Thesis, entitled: “The Curious Question of Byerley’s Brain: Asimov and the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.”

When one undertakes the question of ethical treatment of non-human entities, one is sure to encounter the wealth of previous arguments on the subject, and many issues raised but never adequately answered. Often, the ethicist then becomes enmeshed in these unsettled questions, and the answer to the specific question is forever out of reach, contested until the more wide-reaching issues are resolved. Here, I shall endeavor to address one of these problems, which has been known to stand in the way of conclusively treating the issue at hand — the question of consciousness.

Consciousness is often left irritatingly undefined by those who seek to discuss it — and why not, one could reason, since all of us humans who might be reading the literature on the subject have roughly similar brains, and therefore may have comparable inner states, meaning that we have first-hand experience of consciousness, and it needs no definition. This does require a rather large “leap-of-faith” assumption, however, and so for the purposes of this article, I will provide a definition of “consciousness”, so that anyone who is reading this article but lacks experience with consciousness will not claim confusion on those grounds.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\(^1\) gives a variety of different senses in which the word “consciousness” might be discussed. For instance, “consciousness” is often used in casual conversation to mean simply “the state of being awake as

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opposed to asleep”. This is not the sense that gives us trouble, however, so we can ignore that. Some may use “consciousness” in the sense of “sentient”, and others in the sense of “self-aware”. Others say that a thing is conscious if it is “like” something to be that thing—this hits closer to the mark. For the purposes of this discussion, then, we will define “consciousness” as “The subjective, private, or first-person sensation of awareness that normally accompanies human experience.”

The reason this concept is so relevant to the discussion of the ethical treatment of non-human entities, or the rights of said entities, is that the argument is often made that non-humans (birds, for example) are not conscious, that it is not like anything to be them. Among the better-known proponents of this idea was René Descartes, who, in his Discourse on Method, declared that nonhuman animals were mere automata, driven wholly by instinct:

Thus their [animals] doing certain things better than we do is no proof of their being endowed with mind. For on that assumption they would have to possess more of it than any of us do, and ought to surpass us in all things. On the contrary, what it shows is that they are destitute of mind and that it is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs, just as a clock, which is composed only of wheels and weights, can number the hours and measure time more exactly than we can with all our knowledge.²

If we accept that non-human animals are a class of mere organic automata, then there is no need to endow them with rights or treat them ethically, any more than we might a lamp or a wristwatch.

While this opinion is not always stated with the same strength and conviction with which Descartes invested it, it nevertheless remains in modern society in various forms. The

20th-century philosopher Mortimer J. Adler made a very similar statement, saying that:

The instinctive patterns of behavior of such insects as bees, ants, and termites are adequate for all the purposes of life and the survival of the species. Hence they do not need to learn from experience or modify their behavior in consequence of such learning. We are, therefore, justified in saying they have no minds, no intelligence.3

Adler posits something of a spectrum, wherein some of the higher vertebrates and mammals can be said to have a mind, which is more flexible than Descartes’s model, where a dog, a beetle, and a clock are all around the same level. However, Adler insists on maintaining the uniqueness of humanity, declaring that there is “a radical difference”4 between us and the rest of the animal kingdom, namely that we are fully autonomous, while even the more intelligent nonhuman animals are somewhat automatic and steered about by base instinct.

This view tends to persist today in conventional wisdom, such as the claim — oft-made by anglers — that fish cannot feel pain. The question of fish and whether they can feel pain is being handled in a manner that is highly relevant to this discussion. On one side, we have scientific experiments that establish that since fish do, in fact, possess a nervous system, they have the capacity to feel pain, and since they can be observed to react to theoretically-painful stimuli (i.e. bee venom) in a negative way, they can clearly feel pain.5 On the other hand, anglers make the claim that this is instinctual, automatic behavior, and that fish do not possess the mental capacity needed to form internal states like “pain”.6 In short,

4 Ibid.
that fish are automata that do not possess consciousness, and thus cannot be said to “feel pain”. And thus, the discussion of ethical treatment of fish is stalled, because we cannot prove whether or not they are conscious. This is precisely the sort of debate that demonstrates the need to tackle the question of consciousness at once, so as to resolve this and many other questions of non-human rights.

A useful tool in the discussion of consciousness is the concept of the “zombie”, a theoretical entity that is identical to a human being in structure and composition, down to the atom, but is not conscious.\(^7\) The zombie is meant to illustrate the ways in which we can tell that we, personally, have consciousness; it is functionally identical to a human being in every way, but it is not like anything to be it. It does not have experiences or internal states as we do, but merely behaves as though it does. If a zombie were to eat a donut, for instance, it would not truly experience the taste-sensations that a human would. While its taste buds and the relevant parts of its brain function perfectly fine, and there is no method of physical measurement that might show the difference — an EEG, for instance, would not be able to distinguish between a human and a molecule-for-molecule identical zombie — all the zombie has is an automatic mechanism that translates the input to the appropriate output. There is, one might say, “nothing in there”.

The zombie does an excellent job of illustrating the difference between an entity with consciousness and an entity without consciousness. However, it also illuminates one of the problems that arises when we discuss consciousness: internal mental states such as consciousness, as John Searle is quick to remind us, early in his own examination of the topic, are “first-person, subjective phenomena”\(^8\), which cannot be examined through a third-person point of view. This is why we cannot distinguish the human and the zombie through a behavioral

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study, an EEG, or exploratory surgery: these are all third-person points of view, and since consciousness does not affect the way one behaves, or the way one’s neurons produce electrical signals, or any sort of physical structure whatever.

So, imagine for a moment that there are zombies among us, walking the earth. We know that many of the people around us (say, about half) are zombies, and not real human beings; that they have no internal states, that they cannot feel pain or sadness, and cannot be considered “wronged” if they are subjugated or harmed, since they are automata — like Descartes’s clocks or Adler’s ants. As the human/zombie population grows, we soon experience overcrowding, and this is becoming a serious problem until some politician or other has a brainwave: since zombies have no consciousness, it is not wrong to oppress them; they’re really just machines, so why not use them as such? We get a large workforce, and we can redistribute various goods from the zombies (who can’t enjoy them) to the humans (who can). We can store the zombies in cramped quarters, reducing the crowding so that humans are no longer troubled by the problem before us. Thus, a bill is proposed declaring that zombies — or all beings that lack conscious experience — have no rights.

In theory, there is no reason to demand zombie rights. They are, in every possible sense of the phrase, mere organic machines. They feel nothing, and have no ambitions or desires of their own, so subjugating them as a workforce harms nobody. The supporters of the bill argue thusly against its detractors, and soon the bill is passed. At once, a demand goes out for all zombies to report for assignment — and nobody shows up. Well, of course not. Zombies behave exactly like humans, so if humans wouldn’t show up, neither would they. So auditors venture among the populace to locate the zombies. They hand each person a donut, and ask them to describe their taste experiences, knowing that zombies have none. However, everyone who eats the auditors’ donuts reports taste experiences — the zombies are not lying, as they don’t have the necessary internal faculties to “intentionally” lie (or do anything else “intentionally”, for that matter), but the input
from their taste buds prompts the output of a report of taste experiences. So the auditors try punching every person squarely in the jaw. The nerves of the zombies produce the same reaction under unpleasant stimulation as the nerves of the humans, and once again there is no distinction. The auditors try guesswork, maybe identifying the half of the populace with the slowest reaction time, or some other arbitrary measurement, as zombies, and lead those entities off for reassignment, reasoning that, since zombies can’t suffer under oppression, anyone who demands release or claims to have rights will be a human, and should be let go. Except, still, zombies are indistinguishable in behavior from humans, and 100% of the people led off for reassignment angrily protest that they are not zombies and that they have rights. At this point, it sinks in that there is no way to identify which half of the populace is conscious and which is not, and the “zombie workforce” initiative is cancelled.

This is the problem with trying to examine “first-person” phenomena. No matter how clever one might be, at the end of the day, one can examine nobody’s first-person phenomena except one’s own. At all times, one is trapped in a third-person perspective when trying to examine the internal states of someone other than themselves. We are all placed in the situation of the zombie auditors when we try and determine whether something is conscious or not, whether it feels pain or not, whether it can appreciate being given rights or not. There is no method by which we can separate the beings with consciousness from those without. Because of this, statements like “fish can’t feel pain” or “nonhuman animals are automata driven by instinct” are mere guesswork, and cannot be conclusively established.

The difficulty thus encountered — that we cannot know what is conscious and what is not, except by intuition and guesswork — has led some to say that consciousness may be nonexistent, perhaps a mere artifact of the language. Prominent among these is Daniel C. Dennett. In his essay collection *Brainstorms*, Dennett presents us with an analogy regarding the way in which we discuss consciousness:
Suppose we find a society that lacks our knowledge of human physiology, and speaks a language just like English except for one curious family of idioms. When they are tired they talk of being beset by fatigues, of having mental fatigues, muscular fatigues, fatigues in the eyes and fatigues of the spirit. Their sports lore contains such maxims as “too many fatigues spoils your aim” and “five fatigues in the legs are worth ten in the arms”. When we encounter them and tell them of our science, they want to know what fatigues are… One thing we might tell them is that there are simply no such things as fatigues — they have a confused ontology. We can expect some of them to retort: “You don’t think there are fatigues? Run around the block a few times, and you’ll know better! There are many things your science might teach us, but the nonexistence of fatigues isn’t one of them.” … Fatigues are not good theoretical entities, however well entrenched the term “fatigues” is in the habits of thought of the imagined society. The same is true, I hold, of beliefs, desires, pains, mental images, experiences — as all these are ordinarily understood.9

The oft-encountered opinion that these subjective internal states — all part of, or related to, the greater concept of “consciousness” that Dennett lists – are undetectable by outside forces (as discussed above), yet are supremely important when determining the nature of an entity, is awkward and unwieldy. This makes the claim that they simply don’t exist to be extremely tempting.

Moreover, the claim is plausible. Consciousness is not only physically undetectable; it does not participate in the causal loop between input and output. We intuit, through the way that we interpret our behavior, that sensory input is filtered through our conscious thoughts in order to determine our behavioral output. However, the same output would theoretically come from a zombie, without the intervention of consciousness. When the aforementioned fish react in what appears to be pain, but the anglers dismiss it because the fish

are not conscious beings, they are putting forth the implicit claim that consciousness does not affect the relationship between sensory input and behavioral output. In fact, the very fact that consciousness cannot be detected in a being merely by observing its behavior in response to various stimuli is to remove it from the causal loop. So, then, we are faced with a thing that has no detectable effect, no observable cause, and leaves no evidence of its existence. This does sound suspiciously like something that isn’t really there at all.

Rudolf Carnap once introduced the idea of the “pseudo-concept”, a word that “only seems to have a meaning while it really does not”.\(^\text{10}\) If we are considering a thing — like, for example, consciousness — to be an artifact of the language like Dennett suggests, we are accusing it of being a pseudo-concept. Carnap proposed a test for pseudo-concepts based on logical analysis of the language in which they appear, checking each possible connection a thing could have to observable, comprehensible, or otherwise accessible reality. In the notation he uses for the rules, “A” is the thing that we are testing — “consciousness” — and “S(A)” is an elementary sentence containing “A” — “Mary Ann Klopfstock is conscious”. They are as follows:

1. The empirical criteria for A are known.
2. It has been stipulated from what protocol sentence “S(A)” is deducible.
3. The truth-conditions for “S(A)” are fixed.
4. The method of verification of “S(A)” is known.\(^\text{11}\)

Consciousness resoundingly fails these tests. Because of its unobservable nature, as discussed above, there are no known empirical criteria or method of verification for consciousness. In addition, when we assume an entity to be conscious, it is

\(^{10}\) Rudolf Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language,” California State University, Los Angeles.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
usually because it is similar enough to us that we assume it has similar internal states.

This assumption is largely unjustified, and because the concept of consciousness we use is so nebulous, nobody seems to agree on how similar an entity has to be to us in order to possess it. For instance, Searle’s intuition on what is conscious and what is not is fairly clear-cut:

If you think for a moment about how we know that dogs and cats are conscious, and that computers and cars are not conscious (and, by the way, there is no doubt that you and I know both of these things), you will see that the basis of our certainty is not “behavior”… One can see that dogs and cats are in certain important respects relevantly similar to us.¹²

A cat is similar enough to us, then, that Searle is confident in calling it conscious, but a computer is not. However, not only is this pure intuition, as the line between the beings that are similar enough that we can assume them to be conscious and the beings that are not is by no means clear, or even reliably approximated. When Searle says there is “no doubt” that we “know” where the line lies, what he appears to be saying is that there is a degree of consistency in our intuitions, which is not necessarily the best data on which to build any sort of ethical application.

In sum, we are faced with a wide variety of opinions on what has consciousness. Some say only humans have consciousness, some that humans and a range of nonhuman animals have consciousness, some that nobody has consciousness, and there are probably several other takes on the subject that have not made their way into the essay. There is little agreement, and due to the variance between the thinkers on what constitutes proof — empirical evidence, educated guesses, intuition — there likely will not be for quite some time. It looks increasingly as though we cannot, through mere study of the literature of consciousness, conclusively answer

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¹² Searle, p. 21-2.
the question of, for example, whether fish feel pain and gain any sort of widespread acceptance.

The argument on how one should treat nonhuman animals such as fish, ethically speaking, boils down to the question of whether they are conscious beings or automata, which we cannot answer with the data we have. It is at this point that we must consider setting aside the question of consciousness altogether — it’s not clear that it’s even possible to answer it satisfactorily, due to its vague and elusive nature — and instead making an ethical decision based on the information that we do possess. That information is, by necessity of our third-person viewpoint, the way in which the entities we are studying respond to various stimuli. Despite Searle’s objection above to using behavior to make these decisions, the fact remains that that is the only information we have for certain.

Making these decisions via the examination of the observed relationship between sensory input and behavioral output is part of a school of thought known as functionalism. According to functionalists, if two entities respond similarly to similar stimuli, it is permissible to assume that they have similar internal states. Whether or not they actually do possess these similar states is not necessarily proven, as they are inaccessible, but we have to work with the information we have.

If we accept functionalism, we are able to answer questions such as whether fish feel pain. Given that we do not know what it is like to be a fish, we have no way of giving a first-person account of fish pain. A third-person account would be the functionalist approach — if they behave as though they are in pain after being exposed to painful stimuli, then they are likely experiencing pain. The experiment was performed, as cited above, and the fish did behave as though in pain. Therefore, fish feel pain. Some may think this solution seems too neat, too tidy, and that may be true. However, at this point, we can say that we have exactly the same amount of solid, reproducible, falsifiable evidence that fish feel pain as we do that your household pets or your friends and family feel pain.
We are stuck with the third-person perspective whenever we analyze something other than ourselves, and it is most productive to accept that and work with the data we can accumulate via that perspective.

It may well be that this conclusion is completely incorrect, that fish are automata, and that they do not feel pain any more than a blender does. However, until we find a way to answer questions about consciousness in the vein of the ones Carnap posed above, we cannot truly base any of our ethical decisions on our perception of consciousness or lack thereof in others. Moreover, since we seem to be embroiled in a quagmire of vastly different, largely incompatible, and sometimes irreconcilable opinions on this matter, it seems as though we will not be able to prove whether or not there is such a thing as consciousness or who/what has it for some time yet, if ever. And yet we must make ethical decisions. For this reason, I advocate ignoring the question of consciousness entirely in ethical matters, and basing our morality on a functionalist approach; it may be the only way to properly resolve the question. And yes, that means you should probably avoid being cruel to fish.
Bibliography


A Literary and Psychological Analysis of the Underground Man in Regards to Free Will

Jeremy Quintin

One of the many concepts assessed with the use of the Underground Man, the vile antihero of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Notes From Underground*, is the concept of free will, and specifically the question of whether human beings do or do not have it. A major argument against free will is “Absolute Determinism,” the theory that all human actions are explained through predetermined beliefs and preceding events outside of the human’s control. Dostoevsky chooses to represent absolute determinism with the vile persona of the Underground Man in order to demonstrate this theory’s effects when illustrated through a negative example. He does so in two ways. First through the Underground Man’s argument against absolute determinism, and second, by applying absolute determinism to the Underground Man himself.

The first presentation of absolute determinism is the Underground Man’s argument against it. When the concept of free will is discussed by the Underground Man in the *Underground* section of the novel, he adopts two perspectives which he argues with: his own perspective, and an imaginary reader’s perspective conjured by the Underground Man as what he imagines is his opponent. The imaginary reader argues for the theory of absolute determinism, the belief that all states of being come about through a process of causality. This theory grinds down even our thoughts, pleasures, desires, and minute actions to the result of preceding events of our lives. The reader argues, “…it should someday be worked out and proved to me that when I made a fig at such-and-such a person, it was precisely because I could not do otherwise…”¹ The idea of the action not being otherwise is not based on fate, but based on

the principle of mechanistic causality. Our mentality has been constructed based on all of our past experiences, which then creates the decision making process we utilize towards an action. Since we have a specific mentality, it is also determined that we should make a specific decision, as our mentality will work in a specific way with each situation it is handed. The cause is our experience, which affects our mentality, which affects our decision making, which affects our action. Therefore an action is not free, but brought about by mechanistic causality. The reader adds to his argument that this process of causality is that of reasoning. All causes are reasoned to be affecting us, and so, “…if wanting someday gets completely in cahoots with reason, then essentially we shall be reasoning and not wanting…” meaning what we want can be explained through causality, and if what we want is not attributed to free will but instead to causality, then there is essentially no room for free will, which in order to exist must have spontaneity of actions.

The Underground Man does not deny this reasoning; he believes it to be true. However, through his own perspective, he still insists upon the freedom of human beings through a fatally flawed argument that oddly also succeeds. The foundation of the Underground Man’s argument is based on the human desire to have free will. He begins by explaining his belief that should a human come to understand some aspect of life that it cannot change, this does not mean that a human being suddenly accepts the aspect as valid. He takes for example the inevitability of the mathematical problem two times two equals four. In response to this logic being irrefutable, he argues:

‘My God, but what do I care about the laws of nature and arithmetic if for some reason these laws and two times two is four are not to my liking? To be sure, I won’t break through such a wall with my forehead if I really have not got strength enough to do it, but neither will I be

\[2\quad \text{Ibid.}\]
reconciled with it simply because I have a stone wall here and have not got strength enough.\textsuperscript{3}

The wall of course being metaphorically for any insurmountable problem, such as making two times two equal to something other than four. A human being may recognize that the problem is insurmountable, but this does not mean the human being will be settled with accepting the problem as okay (as a fact of life certainly, but not as okay).

The Underground Man holds the same issue with absolute determinism. While he recognizes that the reasoning behind the theory is sound, he still does not consent to the idea specifically because he does not like it. This then leads into his next point:

‘...there is only one case, one only, when man may purposely, consciously wish for himself even the harmful, the stupid, even what is stupidest of all: namely, so as to have the right to wish for himself even what is stupidest of all and not be bound by an obligation to wish for himself only what is intelligent.’\textsuperscript{4}

The use of the word obligation is a reference back to the argument that absolute determinism is based on the idea that all actions can be reasoned as to why they occur. Human beings under this theory would not just be obligated to be reasonable. They would in fact have no choice but to be reasonable, as all their actions would be explained, or reasoned, by causality. However, what the Underground Man argues is that, if a human being desires free will, and absolute determinism revokes that privilege, the way in which the human being would attempt to garner free will would be by acting unreasonably, such as wishing for the stupid as opposed to the intelligent.

This is where the Underground Man’s argument falls apart, and very easily. Absolute determinism would argue that the reason a man chooses to be stupid over intelligent is because he sees that he does not have free will, and thus

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid, 13.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid, 28.
searches for a way to have it. He is still trapped, however, in the logic that he is acting due to the cause of not having free will. Even if the man should attempt to be stupid, be evil, and be all the worst things he can imagine, he would still be bound by the fact that he is doing these things out of spite of having no free will, and thus the actions are not free.

However, the Underground Man has a final argument to this:

‘If you say that all this, the chaos and darkness and cursing, can also be calculated according to a little table, so that the mere possibility of a prior calculation will put a stop to it all and reason will claim its own—then he will deliberately go mad for the occasion, so as to do without reason and still have his own way!’

This final argument recognizes that there is no way to argue against absolute determinism. Realizing this, the Underground Man admits that reason is on the side of his imaginary reader, and so he concludes that, “…all that remains is irrationally to negate reason.” If reason cannot prove absolute determinism wrong, then the logical thing to do is be illogical. From the determinist’s perspective the Underground Man has still lost, for the man went mad because he was convinced to in order to obtain freedom. However, the man who has gone mad cannot be aware of this, for it cannot be reasoned to him in his insanity that he is not free. From the determinist’s perspective he has won, and from the madman’s perspective he has also won.

The Underground Man’s argument is not that of reason, but that of an “intuitive-emotional basis”, meaning that the argument is predicting malefic consequences of accepting absolute determinism. What Dostoevsky is portraying with this argument is that the human being desires free will, and in doing

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5 Ibid, 31.
7 Ibid, 550.
anything to obtain it, will bring about more harm than good
when presented with the theory of absolute determinism. In
order to have freedom, insanity and chaos must ensue, and as a
result, “all moral action has become impossible…”\textsuperscript{8} This is
how Dostoevsky portrays one danger of absolute determinism
through the Underground Man.

The second way in which Dostoevsky portrays an ill
effect of absolute determinism is by example. Dostoevsky
applies absolute determinism to the Underground Man himself.
In order to understand how the Underground Man serves as an
example, it is important to understand why he is an antithero.

The Underground Man is an iconic image of the ultimate
detestable character; he is the truly vile being that is hated in
practically every way, shape, and form, to be seen as pitiful or
as a joke, or purely to be hated. He himself acknowledges, in
the very first sentence of the novella, “I am a sick man…I am a
wicked man.”\textsuperscript{9} He has defined himself so that the reader has in
its mindset the idea that this man is “wicked”, and
synonymously “sick”.

So many reoccurring examples exist of the Underground
Man’s repulsive nature that one might as well cite the entire
novella. As a result, he is hardly the representation of any
realistic human being, who generally would have desirable and
undesirable qualities.

What he does however portray is an aspect of society.
Dostoevsky claims that despite the Underground Man being
fictional, “…such persons…not only may but even must exist
in our society, taking into consideration the circumstances
under which our society has generally been formed.”\textsuperscript{10} The
Underground Man is still a fictional character, and thus is not
an entirely true representation of any one person. However the

\textsuperscript{8} Joseph Frank. “Nihilism and Notes From Underground,” in \textit{Critical
Essays on Dostoevsky}, comp. Robin Feuer Miller. (Boston: G. K. Hall
\textsuperscript{9} Dostoevsky, 3.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
existence which Dostoevsky speaks of is a different kind. He is making the claim that aspects of the character exist or potentially exist, perhaps divided up or incompletely assimilated, in society. Some form of this wicked man exists in some sense of our actual society. If the Underground Man is the negative portrayal of absolute determinism, then Dostoevsky is insinuating that absolute determinism represented in society would account for the existence of characteristics of or even people like the Underground Man.

Knowing this, the Underground Man, at his base, is a parody, an argument against what he illustrates. The obtuse, vile, and above all, repulsive design of the “Underground Man” is purposeful to suggest an image of some sort which the reader should choose to disapprove of, and as a result of that disapproval, accept the opposite sense of that image. In terms of traditional logic, if the Underground Man is P, and P is false, then we should accept ~P as true, the opposite of the Underground Man. If the Underground Man does indeed represent absolute determinism, then Dostoevsky is asking us to accept the opposite of absolute determinism, that not all actions are necessarily caused by preceding circumstances, attributing free will to human beings.

The way in which the Underground Man represents the effects of absolute determinism can be illustrated through both a literary and psychological analysis of his character. Literarily, the Underground Man is defined by a less than typical characterization. By classification, he appears to be some type of crossbreed amongst all the literary character forms. In one sense he is a flat character, who has very few emotions besides contempt, and has little dimension in regard to his past. At the same time, the Underground Man’s process of exaggerated thinking develops his opinions, portraying him as a round character. Similarly, the Underground Man can come across as a static character who does not change in mindset and belief. He remains primarily throughout the novel, and even by the end of the novel, a repulsive being. However, there are rare instances where he exhibits a usual dynamic character trait, such as when he speaks with Liza, a prostitute. The
Underground Man tries explaining to Liza that she is leading her life in a poor direction by becoming a prostitute, telling her, “Wake up while you have time. And you do have time. You’re still young, good-looking; you could find love, marry, be happy…” Then, when he brings Liza to tears over her desperate lifestyle, he feels empathetic towards her and offers her his address, asking Liza to come to him. This is unusually noble of the Underground Man, who throughout the novel has only referred to his own interests and ridicules others for their stupidity, demeaning them. One could argue that this is the sign that the Underground Man is indeed a dynamic character as opposed to a static character. Yet when Liza comes to his house, the Underground Man begins to insult her, telling her his reasons for commenting on her life beforehand was to make her upset. “…I wanted to achieve your tears, your humiliation, your hysterics—that’s what I wanted then!” In saying this, the Underground Man throws himself back into that heartless, static character which has possessed him throughout the novella.

The parameters then of the Underground Man’s character suggest that he is dynamic and static, round and flat. He seems to jump back and forth between each. Even when he ridicules Liza, he acknowledges that he is, “…the most vile, the most ridiculous, the most petty, the most stupid, the most envious of all worms on earth.” When he becomes a static character, it is not long before he exhibits a dynamic like character trait, and then vice versa. The Underground Man’s constant switching between definitions seems to leave him undefined. It is as if he is unable to become one character. However, it isn’t that the Underground Man is not a character, but rather that he is two characters in one, both of whom support opposite points of view.

11 Ibid, 92.
12 Ibid, 104.
13 Ibid, 121.
14 Ibid, 122.
15 Frank, 53.
In fact, multiple instances of the story suggest that the Underground Man is indeed divided up into two separate personalities, which are illustrated through two separate sets of reasoning occurring in his head simultaneously. One example has already been mentioned. The imaginary reader which the Underground Man conjures as his opponent in the debate of free will is more than just a character of his own imagination. The reader is given an individual personality from the man who imagines him, and not only disagrees with the Underground Man, but ridicules him as well for being hypocritical of his own arguments and tells the Underground Man that he speaks nonsense. The reader is in fact so distinct from the Underground Man in personality that it is hard to imagine the Underground Man is not speaking with a real person.

Other examples exist of this duality throughout the novel, specifically in the way which the Underground Man assesses situations. On his way to the whorehouse, for example, the Underground Man is contemplating his reasoning for going there. He intends to find Lieutenant Zverkov, who had insulted him, so that he may take revenge by slapping the lieutenant’s face. He speaks back and forth with himself, in one instance thinking he should not bother to exact his revenge, and in the very next thinking it is the only logical option. He speaks to himself over the dilemma:

‘And wouldn’t it be better...better...to go straight home now? Oh, my God! Why, why did I invite myself to this dinner yesterday! But no, impossible! And that three-hour stroll from table to stove? No, they, they and no one else must pay me for that stroll! They must wash away that dishonor!’

In the first half of this tirade, the Underground Man almost moves himself to give up on his endeavor of revenge, seeing that he himself is responsible for the silly and humiliating circumstance which he is in. Then in the last half of the tirade he switches back to his endeavor of revenge. There is very little

16 Dostoevsky, 38.
17 Ibid, 84.
transition from the first mindset to the next. Only the three word exclamation, “But no, impossible!” illustrates a flip in perspective. The duality is not a transition of reasoning which the average person goes through when changing one’s mind. It is a sudden flip of emotion, splitting the Underground Man’s thought process into halves. One half of revenge, the other half of regret.

Another example is when the Underground Man attempts revenge on a man, who pushed him, by plotting for months on end of how he will bump into the offending man’s shoulder at a park. He spends these months calculating out the correct outfit to wear, the correct walk with which he will approach the man, and the correct reaction to bumping into the man (pretending that it did not happen), and yet when all of the plan comes together and the time comes to act, the Underground Man submits to cowardice. As he explains, “…it would look as if we were just about to bump into each other, and then…I’d give way, and he would pass by without noticing me.”\(^{18}\) The cowardice and commitment to the plan here are once again those two mindsets bumping into each other. One mindset reasons that revenge should be taken, while the second mindset reasons that the problem should be forgotten. It is the second mindset which pulls the Underground Man away from his plan each time at the last second.

In this way, the Underground Man is both the protagonist and the antagonist of the story. Whenever the Underground Man pursues something as the protagonist, he is opposed and thwarted by himself as the antagonist. He is the protagonist who wishes to exact his revenge, and he is the antagonist who tells him he is being foolish. As a result, the protagonist and antagonist fight within him constantly, each gaining and losing ground on the other, and as result of being locked in this battle, the Underground Man does nothing until either the protagonist or antagonist should gain control.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, 55.
On top of this, the way in which the protagonist and antagonist battle is through their individual reasons, which are exact opposites. The protagonist argues in a sense of honor, that a man must uphold his name. The antagonist argues that the dangers of acting are too high in comparison to maintaining one’s honor. The Underground Man’s tragedy then is not that he is void of reason, but that he is subject to all the implications of reason¹⁹, including those which oppose each other. As a result, his mind becomes locked in indecisiveness.

The reasoning which the Underground Man utilizes is not that obscure. His objective is to consider all the possibilities of any action he takes, but this always leads him to either inaction, or poor decision making. If so there is an odd implication here. By being a “complete” rational being, the Underground Man becomes the indecisive being that he is. It is this indecision which Dostoevsky is using to imply another problem of absolute determinism. By taking the implication that all actions can be reasoned to occur (as absolute determinism would suggest), Dostoevsky shows how a deterministic mindset becomes incapable of action through using every sense of reason, and leads to an indecisive, ineffective method of thought.

There is also a psychological perspective of absolute determinism that has been applied to the Underground Man. This perspective is based on the Horneyan theory of neurosis, which occurs in children in their early childhood stages. In summary, a child who receives security, nourishment, and an all around good life, will grow up as his “real self”, meaning he will come to understand what he truly desires and will be able to express and pursue his desire. A child who is raised instead in unfavorable and abusive conditions, will forsake what he truly desires and develops a feeling of hostility towards the world.²⁰ In defense of this theory, when a child is nurtured it

¹⁹ Frank, 52.
realizes that by being itself it has received a good response, and thus continues to be itself. On the other hand, if a child when abused realizes that by being itself it has received a bad response, the child will choose to become something other than itself in hopes of receiving a good response.

The Horneyan theory of neurosis also explains that the child who develops feelings of hostility can develop three neurotic strategies in response to worldly situations: the self-effacing/compliant response, the aggressive/expansive response, and the detached/resigned response. The child who is self-effacing/compliant is overly kind and generous in order to garner friendship, and becomes guilty in response to negative critique. The child who is aggressive/expansive becomes distrustful of everyone, becoming very aggressive and disposed to violence. It considers sentimentality a weakness and perhaps gains friendship by force. The child who is detached/resigned enjoys freedom and desires independence, considering relationships with people unnecessary and even a waste of time. Eventually a child will come to exhibit all three of these neurotic behaviors, and as a result will become self-defeating.21

There are two ways in which the Underground Man had a poor childhood. The first, if believed to be true, is that by his peers he was regarded with, “…spiteful and merciless derision, because [he] was not like any of them.”22 The children rejected the Underground Man because his innate self was (and is) nothing like them. The man, realizing this as a child, would attempt to push away from being himself and begin developing the neurotic behaviors. The only issue with this scenario is due to the Underground Man’s intense exaggeration of situations, which can lead the reader to believe that the Underground Man only thought that the other children saw him with scorn.

The other possibility, however, is based on a tangible instance of the Underground Man’s childhood. The Underground Man, when explaining to Liza that she could

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21 Ibid, 511-512.
22 Dostoevsky, 66.
have a much better life living with her parents rather than in a whorehouse, imagines, “If I’d had a family in my childhood, I wouldn’t be the same as I am now.”

As mentioned in the Horneyan theory, a child, “under unfavorable conditions, when the people around him are pre-vented by their own neurotic needs from relating to him with love and respect,” will develop the neurotic behaviors. By being separated from his family, the parents would be “prevented” from providing their son with love and respect. Since the Underground Man did not receive that love and respect, and also possibly received scorn and contempt instead, he becomes fully subject to the negative results of the Horneyan theory.

With further analysis, it can also be found that the Underground Man exhibits many of the characteristics described in all the neurotic behaviors suggested, and that he is also self-defeated by his use of all of them. He himself admits that, “One moment, I don’t even want to speak with anyone, and the next I go so far that I’m not only chatting away, but am even deciding to become close with them.” This is characteristic of both the compliant neurosis and the detached neurosis, which are clearly at a head with each other, causing the Underground Man to become self-defeated in an endeavor to remain detached and in an endeavor to have friendship. We also know that the Underground Man can be violent, as suggested by the earlier reference to his revenge on Lieutenant Zverkov, and of how he is caught between his desire for revenge and his notion that his revenge is senseless. This is characteristic of the compliant neurosis and the aggressive neurosis, causing the Underground Man to be self-defeated in an endeavor of revenge and in an endeavor of maintaining good relationships.

Absolute determinism would be in agreement with the Horneyan theory, as the theory suggests that our behaviors are formed within us due to circumstances causing them,

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23 Ibid, 96.
24 Paris, 511.
25 Dostoevsky, 45.
suggesting causality. Whether Dostoevsky intended to illustrate the Horneyan theory or not, he ends up demonstrating, purposefully, that should absolute determinism be true, the events dating back to our birth will determine the persons we become. That said, any child in bad conditions will consequentialy turn out bad, and vice versa for good conditions. A child then raised in bad conditions will have no choice but to become bad, and so the determinist admits that a bad person had no choice but to become what he is due to his childhood.

Now we have seen the way in which Dostoevsky has utilized the Underground Man for his depiction of absolute determinism. From a mental perspective, a person desiring free will goes mad in order to have it, thus creating chaos in society. From an applied perspective, a person can become indecisive to the point of being inactive and useless, and by extension this is caused by our childhoods which determined in advance whether we would become good or bad. These are all very negative consequences, and so it is fair to say the Dostoevsky is against the idea of absolute determinism.

However, there are flaws in some of Dostoevsky’s arguments which necessarily exist to make the outcome look bad each time. For example, the bad childhood does not necessarily result in a bad finish. Absolute determinism dictates that we are affected by our past events, but it does not dictate what events of our past affect us the most, the least, or at all. That said, a child that grows up in bad conditions may have many good instances in its life, and this could potentially counteract the bad childhood. Also, the first argument about the desire for free will mandates that people desire free will. This is not universally true. Also, even if it is clear to a person that they are not truly free, this does not mean to the person that they should recognize any of their actions to be constrained enough to suggest that their lack of free will is a problem. The mass of opportunities which life offers suggests that despite not having free will, the human being still has most of the abilities to do what the human mentality needs or wants to do.
However, since Dostoevsky merely showed the dangers of the theory rather than the flaws, this may suggest that Dostoevsky is not entirely against absolute determinism, but that he recognizes how unfortunate life can be presented as under the reasoning of absolute determinism. The Underground Man is perhaps a warning of how a disinterest in caring for people results in hatred, depression, and more disinterest. Knowing that inevitability exists, it becomes the inevitable human job to ensure that a child will inevitably receive a good life, ensuring an inevitable positive future rather than a negative one.
Bibliography


The Red Buddha: A Synthesis of Buddhist and Marxist Ontology

Patrick Thomas Cannon

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama is perhaps the most well-known Buddhist in the world. Which is why it caused such a stir during a Q and A session in 1993 when He expressed on his goal of a synthesis between Marxism and Buddhism:

Of all the modern economic theories, the economic system of Marxism is founded on moral principles, while capitalism is concerned only with gain and profitability. Marxism is concerned with the distribution of wealth on an equal basis and the equitable utilization of the means of production. It is also concerned with the fate of the working classes—that is, the majority—as well as with the fate of those who are underprivileged and in need, and Marxism cares about the victims of minority-imposed exploitation. For those reasons the system appeals to me, and it seems fair...[f]or this reason I still think of myself as half-Marxist, half-Buddhist.26

But is such a synthesis even possible? On the surface the Dalai Lama’s ideal of synthesis seems to be, at the least, overly ideological and, at the worst, a total contradiction in theories (the obvious contradiction being Karl Marx’s stark denunciation of religion as institutions designed to oppress and delude the proletariat). Despite some inconsistencies, I believe the creation of a synthetic Buddhist-Marxism is not only possible, but pragmatic. Such an amalgamation would allow for cross-pollination between the two distinct modes of thought, which would contribute to the mutual invigoration of both. From this symbiotic foundation we can extrapolate a new critical social theory, giving us fresh insights in the social sciences. For the sake of this essay (and simplicity), I would

26 His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Beyond Dogma: Dialogues & Discourses (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1996), 110.
like to compare and contrast specific doctrines of Buddhism with the general elements of Marxist social theory.

The Buddhist doctrine of impermanence (*anicca*\(^27\)) establishes the fleeting existence of reality. Although nothing ceases to exist, all things (physical and mental) are always in constant flux, moving from one “state” or “form” to another. For example, water molecules can be in the state of a refreshing liquid, but left in the sun will evaporate into vapor. So, we can think of different states of phenomena obeying the first law of thermodynamics. To further illustrate, imagine a leaf falling to the ground in autumn. The leaf does not just sit on the ground and retain its form as a “leaf” for eternity. Instead, it decomposes and becomes part of the soil. While the appearance and relative existence of the leaf ceases, the components that formed the leaf go on to form new plants. Thus, when ice melts into water the particulate material once constructing the ice is now in a different state. The important concept to be gained here is that Buddhist ontology is not subject to either eternalism or nihilism, but recognizes the transient nature of all physical and mental phenomena.

*Anicca* finds an analogue with Karl Marx’s critique of human relation to inanimate commodities in bourgeois society. Marx labels this commodity fetishism: the tendency for consumers in a capitalist society to assume the value of a commodity is inherent, when in reality the value of a commodity is only the value added through labor. Marx thought this idea of inherent value marginalized and misunderstood the importance of the laborer. In Marx’s understanding, the society that once understood the actual determinant of value to be the labor, over time, imposes an illusion of inherent value upon a commodity *simply because it is a commodity and not raw material*. To quote Marx:

A commodity appears at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in

reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour [sic]. It is as clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by nature. The form of wood, for instance, is altered by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to dance of its own accord.28

A much less theoretical application of anicca is the world of global finance. In the documentary Sandcastles: Buddhism and Global Finance, sociologist Saskia Sassen comments “It’s not that there are $83 trillion. It is essentially a continuous set of movements. It disappears and it reappears.”29 The film’s basic conclusion is that the world of global finance is essentially illusory, totally divorced from objective reality. The influence and consideration of these arbitrary values exists much like Marx’s commodity fetishism, only as a collective delusion of the bourgeoisie.

The Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda)30 is the root of morality in Buddhism. Essentially, dependent origination posits that all phenomena arise together in a mutually interdependent web of cause and effect. A good way to illustrate this idea is to think of being and existence as a giant ocean. All phenomena (human

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consciousness included) are waves that arise upon the surface of the ocean, one affecting the other in complete mutuality. Simply stated: everything depends on everything else. So, when one performs a negative action and harms another person, the aggressor is actually hurting himself and all other human beings. The large-scale effects of actions are obviously much more indirect. The key concept to be extrapolated from the doctrine of dependent origination is recognizing the interdependence of human actions, while at the same time challenging the Western idea of a completely dependent and autonomous self.\textsuperscript{31}

This key doctrine in Buddhism correlates to Marx’s theory of alienation.\textsuperscript{32} Marx believed that in a privately owned system of economics, the common laborer is forced to function as an instrument of production and thus negates the creativity and intersubjective potential of the individual. Another way to understand Marxist ethics is to think of Marx as adhering to a loose Kantian deontology. To Marx, an immoral act would be any act which contradicts the irreducible rationality of humanity. An example of this would be a factory owner using the workers as merely biological mechanisms of production. Therefore, exploitation is morally wrong because it negates the inherent rational property of human beings. In connection to dependent origination, if a factory owner treats his workers only as instruments of production, the factory owner is also objectifying his own self. Very much like the doctrine of dependent origination, the Marxist ideal of a moral society is a society founded upon empathy and mutual respect; in Buddhist terms: a society founded upon mindfulness and compassion.

The second of the Four Noble Truths (the first being that all existence is suffering) attempts to nail down the cause of worldly suffering. The Buddha is said to have realized the sole root as being grasping, greed, the feeling of dissatisfaction, an

\textsuperscript{31}Mary Francis-Fahey, “The Foundation of Buddhist Ethics” (lecture, American River College, Sacramento, CA, September 14, 2009).

\textsuperscript{32}Nicholas Churchich, Marxism and Alienation (New York: Associated University Press, 1990), 278.
endless hunger (trishna). The word trishna in Sanskrit is often translated as thirst or hunger; the most fundamental meaning for our purposes is simply desire. In Buddhist mythology there are spirits called preta, which are hungry ghosts symbolizing human greed.\textsuperscript{33}

This element of Buddhist philosophy corresponds absolutely to the post-Marxist critique of consumerism. The clearest articulation of which appears in the work of the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard:

> There is all around us today a kind of fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance...the humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by \textbf{objects}...[t]his runs from the very complex organization of the household...to the permanent spectacle of the celebration of the object in advertising...from the minor proliferation fuelled by the nocturnal objects which come to haunt us even in our dreams.\textsuperscript{34}

Baudrillard’s critique of the consumer culture stems from the identity crisis of the consumer such a system has created: the consumer no longer defines herself in the context of other human beings but instead relies upon the conspicuousness of her consumption to affirm her identity. This is based, in part, on Marx’s ideal form of identity, being identity through contribution. A Marxist slogan embodying this idea is: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!”\textsuperscript{35}

What this means is that the individual’s identity is derived from his or her contribution to the society as a whole and that the consumption of the individual will be only what he or she needs, avoiding the bourgeois identity through conspicuous consumption.

Trishna fits quite comfortably into the post-Marxist critique of the consumer society. Conspicuous consumption is but a superficial and utterly perverse methodology for assessing an individual's identity within their society. Further more, trishna wants to advance the critique further, saying not only is identity by consumption superficial; it also detracts from the community as a whole. The pride which should be gleaned from contributing to the overall welfare is being wrongly invested in absurd objects. Only, then, by abiding by Marx’s ontology can one transcend the competition for material wealth and invest in communal well-being and happiness.
Bibliography


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The Principle of Sufficient Reason and Absolute Nothing

Jim Schelberg

The Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), or at least the underlying assumption, has underwritten most, if not all, of the scientific advances in recent centuries. However beneficial to scientific progress, the PSR may not be above criticism. This paper will evaluate the PSR in its application to a variety of cosmological scenarios, both theoretical and actual. Ultimately, I will argue that the strong versions of PSR that tie explanation exclusively with causation (CPSR) are *a posteriori* principles built solely upon personal experience and, as such, are unreliable when applied to matters of quantum cosmology, cosmogony and religion. The solution may lie in preserving the PSR in a more flexible form; one whose criteria for the sufficiency of an explanation is dependent upon the peculiar traits of the realm described.

The Anthropic Cosmological Principle stipulates that observations of the universe are limited to the cosmological sites in which observation is possible. An epistemological extension of that principle is that our understanding of how the universe works is limited to those sites in which observation, and thus understanding, is possible. At first glance, these principles seem rather obvious, or even tautological. It seems unnatural to think that we should somehow be able to divine certain universal truths without any experiential evidence to support our claims. The epistemological extension of the Anthropic Principle implies that had our experience in the universe been different, or had we experienced a different realm of the cosmos, then our understanding of the world would be correspondingly different. We can imagine having developed in a part of the universe where speeds above that of light are possible and common, thereby drastically altering our

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conception of time and causality. In the Speed C+ world, time is no longer linear, but intermittently circular. Alarm clocks appear in the middle of a living room from seemingly nowhere for no apparent reason. Things are quite different on Speed C+ World. Having experienced these things so regularly, the inhabitants of that imaginary world would probably come to accept the circularity of time and muddled causality as being “just how things are.” They may even come to think of those operative principles as being self-evident and necessary, just as we have done with the operative principle of causality in our world. Causality reigns over ever aspect of our lives so incessantly and supremely, that we tend to forget that we learn about causality through experience and that it is not a necessary a priori principle that holds in all realms of being. The Anthropic Principle urges us to adopt a sense of epistemic humility; to remember that our understanding of how our cosmological site works may not hold for other sites. Given that CPSR is based solely upon experience, it seems that it has a less than sturdy foundational basis for application in other possible realms of the universe.

Two of these possible realms physicists often deal with are virtual nothing and absolute nothing. Virtual nothing, as described by Daniel Kolak, is “an abyss of unactuality that amounts to a frothing sea of possibility.”37 Such cosmological vacuums may be found in our own universe in the form of black holes, wherein there exists nothing but unactuality. Everything else—time, space, governing laws—is crushed out of existence entirely. However, Edward Tryon showed in a 1973 paper that the universe could come into existence from brief interactions of matter and anti-matter and external universal fluctuation.38 This model of cosmological origin, while keeping in line with the fundamental laws of conservation, is not true creation from nothing since it requires pre-existing external causes. As odd as it may sound, virtual

38 Kolak, 393.
nothing is not actual nothing. It may very well be that causality and the CPSR are well preserved in such a realm. But what happens if we push virtual nothing one step further to become actual, absolute nothing?

Absolute nothing is the “complete and total negation of everything, an utter state of nothingness that cannot remain so because of its own nonexistence.”39 Not only is there no time, space or matter, but there is no information, law or causation. In other words, there is no constraint in any form whatsoever. Causation is not only a positive principle in that it makes events occur, but also a negative principle in that it can keep events from occurring if there is no preceding state of affairs to lead up to that event. With causation, events can’t just occur without a causal reason—this is the explicit negative form of the CPSR.

So what happens when absolute nothing takes causation out of the cosmological picture? What force is there to prevent spontaneous acts from occurring? Infinite unactualized possibilia are no longer constrained to subsist in unactuality but are instead causelessly brought forth into reality. Absolute nothing is the only cosmological scenario in which unactualized possibilia have the opportunity to take advantage of the absence of causal constraint. Such a total vacuum is unsustainable because there is nothing to sustain the nothingness of the nothing. But one is inclined to ask, “What could lead up to the creation of something in absolute nothing?” That very question illustrates the difficulty we have in abandoning our own site-specific understanding of cosmological operation and includes an inherent contradiction. For the verb “to lead” entails a causal process that cannot be said to exist in the concept of absolute nothing because if it did, then absolute nothing would not be absolute. The paraphrased proposition “absolute nothing cannot cause something” is a nonsensical, even contradictory, statement since the negative verb is incongruous with the definition of the subject. Absolute nothing is so contrary to our experience, that we have trouble

39 Ibid., 389.
grasping the conceivability of such an event. We have trouble understanding how a cosmological state could be so unconstrained as to wipe itself out. But given that such a possible cosmological event runs counter to our causally-rooted experience, it seems that any notion of the CPSR has little room on which to stand in this realm of nothingness.

This whole cosmological scheme may seem implausible to many. This is perfectly understandable since no event we have ever consciously experienced has lacked a causal reason, and it is difficult to imagine how it could be otherwise. The Anthropic Principle reminds us, however, that we may have been privy to observe only a portion of the totality of existence, and that our “observed physical values” hold only for this ontological realm. It seems somewhat epistemologically arrogant of us to presume that our operative laws may be reliably applied to all other cosmological sites.

Others may object on the grounds that absolute nothing may have never actually been the case and that, even if it were, a cosmogony from such is presumptuous. If projecting causality onto an unknown realm is unreasonable, then so must be positing that the realm operates in “such and such” manner.

The first part of the objection, the uncertainty of absolute nothing, I readily grant. I would not claim to know if absolute nothing was ever the case—only that if it was ever the case, that it is conceivable for an unconstrained spontaneous event to occur, as long as the nothingness was truly absolute. So, we may think of this cosmogony as being put in a set of figurative parentheses, relevant only if one rejects the notion of infinite regress. (A semantic disclaimer is needed here: the term “was,” when referring to absolute nothing is purely illustrative and should not be taken to indicate that nothing occupies temporal width. Further, the term “infinite regress” must also be used lightly since both cosmogonies that include and do not include nothingness can be said to be infinitely regressive since absolute nothingess never occupied time.)

As for the second point of objection, I must admit that any attempt to describe an inexperiential realm is by its very nature
speculative and impossible to verify empirically. Having said that, my proposed cosmogony is intended to illustrate a plausible conceivability, not a metaphysical necessity. Given the absolutism of the nothingness concept, however, some conceptual ground can be found simply through analysis of the concept. The concept itself may yield some explanation of its non-causal consequences. In other words, some facts may be explained only by the context in which they occur—that is, as long as the contextual explanation suffices for a full explanation. This will become clear in the next section concerning the differences between reason and cause, and how that is relevant to our discussion of the PSR.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason, according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, stipulates, “that everything must have a reason or cause.” The usage of “reason” and “cause” here is not redundant. Rather, it indicates a subtle but crucial distinction between the two terms that will facilitate a proper understanding of the PSR. The distinction lies in understanding that all possible events that have a cause must have a reason (ipso facto the cause), but not all possible events that have a reason have a cause. The latter type of possible event is known as a brute fact. A theological example of a brute fact may be that a certain act of God came to be only because God freely willed it (the reason). But there was no deterministic cause for the act coming to be since God’s free will prohibits deterministic causes. God’s free will is sufficient to understand how the act came to be even though it is not a cause, but a contextual reason. Similarly, in the scientific realm, the indeterminate motion of an electron may simply stem for its inherent unpredictability rather than a set of causal factors that force it into one determinate position. In the examples given, only the reason criterion of the PSR is fulfilled and yet a sufficient explanation has been given.

Beyond the contextual framework within which the event occurred, no other information can be had. If we were to stubbornly stick with our CPSR that depends strictly on causal explanations, we would still be left grasping for further explanations that probably are not there.

A common theme among the three examples in which the CPSR fails is that they are all ontological dimensions that are closed off from direct human experience. While that bodes well for CPSR’s relevance in the investigation of the mundane, it does little to strengthen its case for relevance in the areas for which philosophy has some of the most concern and need for investigation. The CPSR, it has been shown, is unreliable when applied to matters of quantum cosmology, cosmogony and religion.

One may object to this softer interpretation of the PSR on the grounds that it could lead to intellectual laziness. If a few possible events can be sufficiently explained as coming about without determinate causes, then what prevents one from applying that line of thought to all possible phenomena? Why not just suspend the PSR altogether? The answer is simple. The proper interpretation of the PSR is not an intellectual “Get Out of Jail Free” card. Any sufficient non-causal reason for a brute fact must be accompanied by a sufficient illustration of why the cosmological context justifies the non-causal event. In other words, one must illustrate the brute context in order to explain the brute fact-ness of an event. This requires a rather comprehensive knowledge of that realm in which the brute fact is said to occur. For instance, it would be insufficient to call the earth’s tidal patterns a brute fact since all the scientific knowledge of Earth’s operative laws disallow non-causal macro events from occurring. The causal context does not justify labeling tidal patterns as non-causal, brute facts. The proper PSR can be seen as pushing investigation to understand an event holistically within an appropriate context.

The proposed cosmogony of creation from absolute nothing, while philosophically sound in itself, is not designed to explain away the origins of the universe, but instead to
illustrate a simple point: Our site-specific understanding of the universe’s operation is only valid locally. In fact, locally, our *a posteriori* understanding of the world is so extremely valid and regular, that it has adopted the guise of a self-evident truth that may be applied to all existence without fail. However tempting this may be, philosophers may fare better in taking a more cautioned epistemological approach.
Bibliography


In the Voice of the Moon

Kristine Sloan

I kindle the empty with a single
flush of white. The sun surpasses brightness,
but my slow wash of color doesn’t need
to speak. A far-off matter finds its way
home, marring obedient skin into
sculpture. But no one will see the markings
from an eased distance. By you, I am small,
bare and beautiful. Always beautiful.
Look up to admire mystery, yet here
reality is large. I bear the weight
of size alone, a choice not fully made
between a faceless figure and nothing.
Still turning. Continue to seek, to ask
a question made from the absence of sound.
I.

A word is made for filling just like a
cup, empty until touched
by a tongue and kissed
with lips that desire meaning
to pour into sensation that can be described
as orange juice,
    ice tea,
    happiness even.

II.

We speak without hearing.
That’s what I love about any unfamiliar foreign language
like Chinese
or Swahili because it’s less
speaking
and more music—
a symphony of phonics I prefer
to never understand.
Intrinsic Value Ethics and the Conservation of the Northern Spotted Owl

Rachel Field

This piece features selections from the author’s Senior Thesis of the same title.

Introduction

Intrinsic value ethics, begun by such environmentalists as Aldo Leopold, focuses on species preservation for the simple fact that all living creatures inherently possess equal value. This is a shift away from the widely held view that the needs of “animals” are subsequent to those of human beings. This system of value, known as anthropocentric value, not only minimizes the role of non-humans in the global ecosystem, it also creates a rift between animals and humans. Humans remove themselves from their own natural environment, and become more able to morally justify taking advantage of other creatures. It is time to adopt a new conservation ethic; one rooted in biocentric rather than anthropocentric values. Adopting a biocentric system of conservation would place all the emphasis on protecting the rights of living beings instead of preserving a species for the benefit of humanity.

Aldo Leopold suggested a radical new approach to conservation that was rooted in one fundamental fact. That fact was that all creatures, including humans, are interdependent parts of an all-encompassing community. Leopold called this theory the “Community Concept” and it has had far-reaching ramifications for the relationship between human beings and the non-human parts of the community. The move Leopold makes in the community concept has some larger philosophical

consequences. First, it draws attention away from humanity. If all creatures exist interdependently, then theoretically each organism is as important to the entire system as another. This means that the role of human beings is reduced. Secondly, it raises the status of other organisms, meaning that they need to have equal moral consideration with humanity. Ethically speaking, giving rights back to the non-human members of the global community means that human beings have a moral imperative to treat them with the same reverence as they would a human being.

In order to enforce real environmental activism, Leopold argues that the content of environmental education needs revision. This would mean the development of an ecological conscience. A change from anthropocentric to biocentric ethics would require real daily sacrifice, not just the occasional purchase of green cleaning products. Leopold argues, “Obligations have no meaning without social conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land”. The ecological conscience represents this application of accepted social values to the environment. For example, one human being cannot take the life of another human being needlessly. If we develop an ecological ethic, this would mean that a human being could not kill something like a Spotted Owl needlessly. This would also mean that activities that we know would cause the needless death of a Spotted Owl, like deforestation, would not be ethically justifiable.

In the case of Northern Spotted Owl conservation, the decline in the owl population was an indication of the overall health of the ecosystem. Top predators in ecosystems can generally be used as indicators of how healthy the ecosystem is as a whole, and the Spotted Owl fills that role for the old growth forests of the Pacific Northwest. The Forest Service officially acknowledged the Spotted Owl as an indicator

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
species in 1983. In fact, the movement that started around the Spotted Owl has increased to include the entire old growth forest ecosystem. This agrees with Leopold’s “Community Concept” because it acknowledges that fact that healthy ecosystems have a wider scope than the health of one creature. It also echoes the knowledge that ecosystems are so connected that disruption in one species of tree can lead to the destruction of countless other creatures.

This knowledge ultimately requires the creation of new conservation goals. Leopold describes conservation as, “the state of harmony between men and the land”. Along these lines, the new conservation goals should be geared toward lessening impact rather than preserving species. For the Spotted Owl that would mean promoting the health of the forest by changing how the logging companies operate rather than intensive rehabilitation of the Owls themselves.

Cost/Benefit Analysis

The more traditional approach for implementing a conservation strategy is to perform a cost/benefit analysis. This approach looks at the costs of preserving a specific animal as well as the benefits. A cost/benefit analysis also considers the cost to industry. In the case of the Northern Spotted Owl the logging companies and the conservationists were pitted against each other. The central issue to the clash is one of ideologies, not of land. The logging companies are interested in use value and the conservationists are interested in non-use or existence value. Use value is derived from the ability for a good to

46 Ibid.
47 Leopold, A Sand County Almanac.
48 Ibid.
provide us with some type of service, and non-use or existence value does not provide any direct service.49

The timber harvested from old growth forests provides important use value. First, the timber itself generates capital. Second, the logging companies employ people from the area and stimulate the local economy. These factors are all involved in use value. The owls provide no service to humanity or to the economy in terms of use value. They are not sold or harvested for food, the value of the owls is entirely aesthetic. This distinction makes the timber seem more profitable because use value generates tangible profit while non-use or existence value does not.

At first glance the cost/benefit analysis of timber versus Spotted Owl does not end well for the owls. However, such an analysis does not factor in some important concerns regarding the timber industry. The biggest concern is in the price value of the timber itself. Typically according to supply and demand laws when something is rare (low supply) then the demand goes up and it becomes more expensive. Old growth does not follow this pattern. Old growth is a relatively rare type of timber, but it is being sold at prices that suggest that it is as common as young growth.50 In fact, the only way that timber companies are able to harvest old growth and turn a profit is because of heavy government subsidies.51

In addition to the actual value of the timber, corresponding social costs or externalities also impact the overall economic value of the old growth timber.52 Decreased water quality, decreased soil quality, increased soil erosion, decreased riparian buffer zones, and decreased quality of fish spawning grounds are the major social externalities.53 The negative externalities of species extinction are not realistically

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
measured, because generally the full impact of the species on their particular environment is not completely understood.\textsuperscript{54}

Some studies have suggested new approaches to managing forests in order to encourage old-growth and to generate the same profit as the existing forests. Hansen et al. propose lengthening the rotation time of managed forests as well as encouraging higher levels of canopy retention.\textsuperscript{55} Increasing rotation from the standard 60-100 years to 240 years would generate the highest avian species richness.\textsuperscript{56} This included mostly birds that prefer older, more complex stand structures and some that are considered indicator species, like the Spotted Owl.\textsuperscript{57} Indicator species point to the overall health of an ecosystem, so if indicator species in an old-growth forest are thriving then the ecosystem has a high level of health. Planting fast-growing trees and lengthening the time of rotation is one method for achieving more old-growth at a lower cost to the ecosystem without reducing economic returns.\textsuperscript{58}

The root of the problem, once again lies in two clashing ideologies. The Spotted Owls and other endangered animals with non-use value will rarely win out against companies looking to develop more land for industry.\textsuperscript{59} That is because

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} James F. Shrogen, John Tschirhart, Terry Anderson, Amy Whitenour Ando, Steven R. Beissinger, David Brookshire, Gardner M. Brown, Don Coursey, Robert Innes, Stephen M. Meyer, & Stephen Polasky, "Why economics matters for endangered species
when the discussion is in terms of economic value, the Spotted Owls have already lost. Economic value is only one type of value, and it resides entirely on what a species can provide for humanity; it unequivocally considers human needs above the needs of any other part of the global ecosystem. The discussion of use and non-use value is driven by the use that humans can derive from an organism, and not from a desire to conserve for the sake of conservation. A biocentric system of conservation would not have the same criteria as an economic or anthrocentric approach.

Superiority Complex

The main way in which intrinsic value systems and anthrocentric value systems differ is in focus. The traditional anthrocentric system relies on the concept that human beings hold central importance, meaning that all other living organisms have a lower priority than humans and human needs. The intrinsic worth or intrinsic value system changes the focus from human beings to living beings. This means that human needs are given equal moral weight with animal and plant life. What is the basis for the decision that human beings have highest importance? The intrinsic value paradigm rejects the claim that human characteristics have more value than non-human characteristics, which is the basis for asserting that human beings have precedence over all other life forms.

The claim that human beings have more value than other creatures is known as the human superiority complex. The argument for human superiority rests on the basis that human traits like rationality, art or creativity, and morality have more value than the traits or characteristics of other biotic life. This seems to make perfect sense initially because human beings are the ones making the classifications. When assigning importance of traits the important question becomes, important

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footnotes:

60 Paul Taylor, “Biocentric Egalitarianism.”
to whom? Clearly this list of important characteristics is important to human beings. If, for example, dolphins decided what traits were valuable they would probably choose different characteristics that would ultimately justify dolphin superiority. If it is true that the list of characteristics that make humans superior is relative, then the justification for maintaining human superiority disappears.

A second way of addressing the idea of human superiority as it is in anthropocentric systems of value is to challenge the idea that intrinsic value can be increased through characteristics. It would seem inhumane to grant one group of people rights over another on the basis of characteristics. This fact is supported by the illegality of practices of slavery and racial discrimination. Why then are we allowed to continue this type of philosophy in our interactions with the natural world? If human beings cannot have differing levels of intrinsic value because of differences in characteristics, then animals and plants should not have less value because they have different characteristics than human beings. For these two main reasons, human superiority is non-justifiable.

But it is also detrimental to the environment. Seeing human beings as a separate and superior species creates a break in the global community that can allow for misuse of ecosystems. When humans are separated from the non-human community this creates a false sense of independence. It is an undeniable fact that human actions impact the total earth ecosystem. Human superiority creates an atmosphere in which human beings act without acknowledging this connectivity.

Respect for Nature

With an understanding of the human tendency for superiority and the problems associated with this system, a new system of interaction with the non-human community needs to be developed. A system of interaction in which the moral needs

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61 Ibid.
and considerations of humans and non-human entities were equal would be such a system. Biocentric ethics exemplifies a system in which human and non-human moral considerations gain equal importance. Central to the claims of biocentric ethics is the idea of intrinsic value. Most simply, intrinsic value means that a living being has inherent worth. It has value because it exists, and this value is not contingent on any external factor. Another way of describing intrinsic value is that each organism is an end in itself and not a means. To use an example, a Spotted Owl would not simply be a blockade to the timber industry, but it would be valued because it exists.

This is called the obligation principle, and it basically states that the use or disrespect of a being that has a telos is an ethical violation. The Greek term telos refers to a thing being an end rather than a means, or having a purpose. Therefore, the obligation principle would apply to any creature that has an end in itself. But how do we determine what has telos? Something that can self-regulate or self-direct is understood to have a telos. Another way of recognizing telos is if a creature has the ability to seek out some things and resist others. This is to say that trees seek out things by opening stomata to allow the exchange of carbon dioxide, but it does not imply that trees are sentient beings. In relation to this definition the obligation principle would apply to Spotted Owls, old growth forest, and even the bacteria growing on the trees! Assigning creatures with telos moral consideration has implications on the species level as well as ecosystems and natural systems.

With the heightened moral consideration of the natural world through intrinsic value and the obligation principle, comes the need for a respectful relationship between humans and the non-human environment. Paul Taylor proposes a new

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64 Paul Taylor, “Biocentric Egalitarianism.”
65 John Rodman, “Ecological Sensibility.”
attitude toward the natural world which he calls the attitude of respect for nature.\textsuperscript{66} Taylor outlines three main components in the attitude of respect. The first is that human beings have an ultimate commitment. This means that the rules for human interaction with the natural world are not derived from any higher norm, so the respect for nature represents the total framework for human interaction with the non-human world.\textsuperscript{67} Secondly, it is important to note that such a relationship between human and non-human components of the ecosystem contains a moral component. This gives the attitude of respect more weight than a simply being a save-the-Earth fan club. Instead of the surface commitment to buying “green” products, the intrinsic value approach involves reorganization of the underlying morality. Respect must involve moral respect as well. Finally, Taylor removes any type of tree hugging from his framework with the assertion that respect for the non-human community is imperative but love is not necessary.\textsuperscript{68} At first this seems counterintuitive, but it represents a fair distinction. One does not have to love traffic lights, but we still respect the fact that they prevent car crashes. Similarly, under the respect for nature attitude love is not required.\textsuperscript{69}

**Conclusion**

In 2010 a revised version of the Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan was released which described the state of recovery and outlined new strategies to protect the Owls.\textsuperscript{70} The recovery plan recommends that the habitat protection continue in earnest for the foreseeable future, an endeavor that is projected to cost $147.1 million over the next 30 years.\textsuperscript{71} This

\textsuperscript{66} Paul Taylor, “Biocentric Egalitarianism.”
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
continued level of protection should ensure that stochastic phenomena couldn’t decimate the population. Unfortunately progress for the Spotted Owls is slow and new threats to their recovery are emerging. Currently Northern Spotted Owls are experiencing loss in genetic diversity, which the Department of Fish and Wildlife is hoping to correct.\footnote{Ibid.} Since logging has been halted, the biggest threat to the survival of the Spotted Owl is a combination of predation by Great Horned Owls (\textit{Bubo virginianus}) and competition from Barred Owls (\textit{Strix varia}). As old growth recovers, Spotted Owls should have better chances to avoid predation because of the aversion Great Horned Owls have to old growth forest structures. However, Barred Owls present a threat because they are out-competing the Spotted Owls within the restored old growth forests.

Barred Owls also prefer old growth forest and rely on the same prey base as Northern Spotted Owls.\footnote{Ibid.} Competition for resources along with the higher reproductive rates of Barred Owls makes them strong competitors against the Northern Spotted Owl. In fact, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Barred Owls have probably reduced the reproductive success and rates in the Spotted Owl.\footnote{Ibid.} Applying conservation from an intrinsic value perspective would mandate that the habitat be protected, but not necessarily the species. This is because the scope of conservation becomes entire ecosystems rather than the success of individual species. In the case of the Northern Spotted Owl this means that as long as conservationists decrease the human impact on old growth forests, the case can be considered a success.

After reviewing the conservation efforts for the Northern Spotted Owl, especially in light of intrinsic value, it is clear that a new relationship with the natural world is necessary. This new relationship would inform decisions of policy, economics, and conservation. In my opinion the three main principles for a new relationship to the non-human world are: respect, mystery,
and reverence. Human beings need to first develop a system of mutual respect between themselves and non-humans. With a heightened sense of respect comes a sense of mystery, or awe at the complex biological processes that take place every day. Finally, with these two principles humanity would develop a relationship of reverence for the natural world. A relationship consisting of respect, mystery, and reverence could not avoid creating a different way for interacting with natural resources because if you revere something it gains more value. Such a system would make choosing profit from old growth over the survival of the Northern Spotted Owl impossible.

The first principle needed for a new worldview is respect. Leopold describes respect in his essay “Thinking Like a Mountain” when he feels remorse for killing a wolf.

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and to the mountain.\(^{(75)}\)

The significance of this interaction is in the acknowledgement Leopold makes for the wolf as a teleological center of being. By recognizing her as a being with wants and needs Leopold cannot continue to treat her expendably. The knowledge that a creature has intrinsic value demands a heightened level of respect; it demands the respect that humans afford each another. Leopold’s reaction to a single wolf amplifies when human actions threaten the destruction of an entire species.

Another reaction implied in Leopold’s comment about the wolf is mystery.\(^{(76)}\) Mystery is important in the relationship between humans and non-human elements of the ecosystem because it lessens the capacity for human arrogance. Leopold’s previous statement\(^{(77)}\) gives power to the wolf and the mountain while taking power away from himself. The mysterious

\(^{(75)}\) Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*.  
\(^{(76)}\) Ibid.  
\(^{(77)}\) Ibid.
connection between the wolf and the mountain cannot be measured or quantified, but it is recognizable. The ecology of the mountain can be explained, but such a neatly constructed description writes out the possibility for true connection between the creatures. Instead of describing a living, changing ecosystem, a strictly scientific description reduces the creatures in the ecosystem into parts in a chain of energy. A forest can be described in terms of Spotted Owls’ use of trees, but this diminishes the value of each participant in that ecosystem. As discussed in natural selection value, each part of each organism has taken millions of years to appear, so how could it simply be another cog in the wheel of a biome? Acknowledgement of mystery dispels the tendency to reduce organisms to steps in a process.

Once feelings of respect and mystery begin to pervade human interactions with the non-human world, then reverence can enter as well. Reverence for the entire earth system does not have to entail animist overtones; rather, reverence demands considering the needs of the non-human world as much as the needs of the human world. David Abram describes an encounter with a spider that instilled reverence in him, much like Leopold and the wolf. While sitting in the mouth of a cave, Abram has the opportunity to closely watch a spider weave a web: “I have never, since that time, been able to encounter a spider without feeling a sense of strangeness and awe”.78 In order to achieve this level of response to the spider Abram needed to really enter into a relationship with the spider. The position of reverence is humble and inquisitive. In order to be in relationship with the non-human elements, human beings need to be able to learn from them. In the case of the Northern Spotted Owl that means learning the value of old growth, not as high-quality timber, but as long-lived sentries of their ecosystem. A relationship of reverence depends on acknowledging the telos of each organism and not violating that existence.

Bibliography


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