apeiron:
[noun; from ἄπειρον (Greek): unlimited, indefinite indeterminate]

1. Term used by Anaximander to refer to ultimate reality; the unbounded, indeterminate, or unlimited principle of all that exists.
2. An undergraduate journal of philosophy for students of all majors at Washington College.
Since 2003, *Apeiron* has been Washington College's premier venue for student writing in philosophy and religious studies. Past editions have treated a broad range of topics, from Confucian political philosophy, to problems in contemporary philosophy of mind; from the relationship between neurophilosophy and theology, to pressing issues in environmental ethics. The eleventh edition is no exception: contributors explore the nature of religious belief, the existence of the physical world, the proper attitude towards death, and the possibility of immortality. Nevertheless, overarching themes emerged as editing progressed, some of which the editors hoped to capture in the structure of the volume.

This edition takes the form of a tryptich of essays on Socrates flanked by a pair of papers on skepticism. Each paper on Socrates presents a perceptive on his conception of the quest for knowledge, designed to illuminate its practical implications, while the first and last papers assess challenges to the very possibility of knowledge and explore what it would mean to live according to the principles of skepticism. The papers in this edition are, then, unified by an interest in the practical consequences of epistemological convictions, though they approach this topic through different texts and by raising very different kinds of questions.

The first paper is James Reith’s prize-winning essay on Hilary Putnam’s response to global skepticism. Reith argues that even if Putnam succeeds, his response raises
the skeptical possibility that it might be impossible to communicate with other people about a shared external world.

**Dale Frymark**, in the second paper, presents an interpretation of Socrates’ claim from the *Apology* that true political activism cannot be conducted in the public sphere. Frymark considers this claim in light of related discussions in the *Republic* and offers an even-handed analysis of Socrates’ position. He concludes that it is well-motivated and more plausible than it might seem.

The third paper develops an interpretation of the *Phaedo* which focuses on the relationship between the form of the dialogue and the philosophical views it explores. **Lisa Anderson** argues that Socrates’ triumph over the fear of death should be seen as a reenactment of Theseus’ triumph over the Minotaur, and she offers a new characterization of Socrates’ victory.

**Steven Bushar’s** paper considers a challenge raised, in a general way, by Reith’s paper as it applies to the Socratic project that Anderson and Frymark describe: why should Socrates, or anyone for that matter, believe that inquiry is possible in the first place? Bushar considers Socrates’ suggestion that acquiring knowledge is possible if we assume that learning is really the recollection of what the soul has always already known and concludes that this theory cannot explain the acquisition of much of what is typically considered to be knowledge.
In the fifth and last paper, Bonnie Douglas treats Hume’s comparative analysis of religious mysticism, dogmatism, and skepticism from his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Her close reading of the *Dialogues* convinces her that Philo, the skeptic, holds the most reasonable position of the three interlocutors. Douglas supports this claim by highlighting what she sees as some of the worst consequences of religious dogmatism: violence, intolerance, and insensitivity.

Finally, a word about the cover: this striking image was created for the eleventh edition by Sarah Roy. Entitled *omenist*, the image could be seen as a representation of one respect in which a principle of boundlessness, the *apeiron*, could function as the fundamental principle of a finite and apparently bounded living being. The staff is grateful to Sarah for this provocative and fitting cover.
Editorial Staff

Editor in Chief: Lisa Anderson
Assistant Editor: E. Temperance Field
Director of Advertising: C. Patrick Derrickson
Advertising Assistant: Hailee Marsh
Copy Editors: Adele Bovis
            Kecheri Votaw
            Sawyer West
Faculty Editor: Matthew Holtzman
SUBMISSIONS

All undergraduates of Washington College are encouraged to submit papers for the twelfth edition of *Apeiron*, which will appear in April 2014. Papers can be sent at any time before the deadline in early March to the editors at apeironjournal@gmail.com and review of submissions begins early in the spring semester. For more details about the journal and guidelines for submission, or to download a digital copy of this or any previous edition of the journal, please see the *Apeiron* website for more information: http://www.washcoll.edu/clubs/philosophy/apeiron.php.

Submissions may be eligible for the Apeiron Prize for the Most Distinguished Essay in Philosophy or Religion. Details will be announced next spring.
CONTENTS

Skepticism, Language, and the Nature of Reality  1
James Reith

* Recipient of the 2013 Apeiron Prize for the Most Distinguished Essay in Philosophy or Religious Studies *

Socrates on Political Activism  9
Dale Frymark

Socrates’ Labyrinth  13
Lisa Anderson

Knowledge as Recollection in the Meno  25
Steven Bushar

Hume on Religious Belief and Religious Dogma  30
Bonnie Douglas

Contributors  38
Nothing is real. If you can feel this paper in your hands then you are hallucinating. There are no words on this page, nor are there any words on any page ever. Your perceived consciousness is nothing but a complex computer game played by a small child in a world which is real and separate and completely unlike the world in which you believe. It is an idea akin to this which René Descartes originally posits in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. He wonders whether it is possible that everything he had thought to be real was an illusion created by an all-powerful evil demon. In a modern reworking of this problem, Hilary Putnam asks us to consider the case of "Brains in a Vat". Is it possible that we are really only brains living in a vat, kept alive and fed memories and sensory information by some computer program designed by an evil scientist? Both the “Brains in a Vat” and “Evil Demon” scenarios refer to a mode of philosophical thought called global skepticism. That is, we must consider that our life experiences and conscious thoughts could be completely and totally false. Putnam believes that through an examination of language and meaning, he can show that the “Brains in a Vat” scenario is impossible, and thus refute

---

global skepticism. However, after examining Putnam’s analysis of the problem it may seem as though he has only provided a semantic answer to the problem. If this is the case, is it possible that Putnam also unwittingly creates a case for a fleeting and subjective understanding of reality as opposed to one that is concrete and objective?

Before the nature of reality is tackled, one must first attempt to understand how Putnam intends to refute a Cartesian concept of skepticism. For Putnam, language and understanding are not just occurring in the mind of the individual. Putnam contends that the words and images in someone’s mind must be connected to an external object interpreted by the senses. For Putnam, “thoughts, words, and mental pictures do not intrinsically represent what they are about,” (4). In order to understand what he means here, consider the case of a person who knocks a can of paint off of a counter, which subsequently explodes on the floor, creating what appears to be a scaled likeness of the entire Great Wall of China. Now this person has never heard of, read about, or seen the Great Wall of China. Putnam would argue that just because the person is now looking at this paint spill, which for us would look like the Great Wall of China, the paint spill does not actually depict anything because the person who caused this spill did so unintentionally. Furthermore, the person did not have any past experience with the Great Wall of China and therefore would not have been able to deliberately create its likeness (2). In order to accurately refer to something in our imagination or our language, Putnam believes the meaning must be attached to the appropriate referents; we must have an appropriate causal connection (8).
According to Putnam, an appropriate causal connection exists when the images or words within someone's mind are being connected with an accurate and appropriate external object, or with some reference idea or object for which the individual has appropriate sensory and cognitive experience. Although this is somewhat confusing and is not clearly defined throughout his text, Putnam provides one interesting example to attempt to prove his point. Putnam asks the reader to consider two identical persons with the same thoughts and experiences. The twist is that one lives on Earth and the other on the fictional planet called Twin Earth (12). Twin Earth is identical to Earth in every possible way, except for one small and seemingly insignificant detail: water is XYZ instead of H$_2$O, molecularly speaking. Now, the person living on Earth and the person living on Twin Earth have the same exact experiences, which are interpreted the same way in their thoughts; they are truly identical in every conceivable way. When they get up in the morning they drink a cool glass of water, take a shower, and go swim in a lake. Putnam's point is that even when you asked each of them to describe their experiences with water, they would necessarily be identical in their speech and thought. However, they are actually describing two different things. This is because, fundamentally, XYZ is not H$_2$O. For Putnam, meanings do not exist solely in the mind; the persons on Earth and Twin Earth have appropriate causal connections to different referents, and therefore are speaking of two separate things, despite their indistinguishable experiences and thoughts about water itself (12).

Now one can begin to see how Putnam will attempt to prove that the 'Brain in the Vat' scenario could not ever
really exist to begin with. For Putnam, one must assume that these “Brains in Vats” have always been brains and thus are not privy to external sensory information, as they would have no means of gathering this data anyway, i.e. they lack sense organs. Therefore, if a brain in a vat said it was a brain in a vat it would not be referring to being a brain in a vat; there would not be an appropriate causal connection to this referent. So the brain that said it was a brain in a vat would be making a false statement. Thus, it is not possible that we have been systematically and totally deceived. We cannot accurately say we are brains in a vat; therefore, we cannot actually be brains in a vat (10).

Putnam’s final step is a bit confusing. Essentially, we are to take it that just because in the situation where perceived humans are actually brains in a vat – the brains in the vat cannot actually say they are brains in a vat – it will necessarily follow that humanity cannot be brains in a vat. Here, there is a presupposition that just because someone cannot accurately speak of something, according to Putnam’s qualifications for accurate reference, it cannot be the case in reality.

In order to straighten out this idea and perhaps examine how Putnam’s conclusion might not necessarily hold, let us consider the example of Little Jack. Jack is, by almost every account, a normal little human boy with no outstanding features that make him different from any other human boy, except for the fact that Jack, for whatever hypothetically possible reason, is unable to say the phrase, “I am holding a ball.” In addition, he is not able to picture himself holding a ball or think about himself holding a ball. Jack understands the concept of a ball, and understands the image of a ball; he also understands the concept of himself
in relation to the outside world and can place himself within his perceived universe. It follows that Jack could draw a very good representation of a ball with the appropriate causal connection to the external environment consisting of the ball which is interpreted by his sense organs. Jack can see the ball in other people’s hands, and Jack can say, “Jill is holding the ball.” It seems that the qualifications put forth by Putnam concerning appropriate causal connections to appropriate external referents have been met. Therefore, Putnam would have to say that, even though Jack is capable of holding a ball, because Jack cannot say he is holding the ball, he is not holding the ball. Given an assumed objective reality, the fact that Jack cannot say, think about, or create a representation of himself holding the ball, should not and would not have significant bearing on the fact that he is actually, holding the ball. However, even if this is correct and Putnam has not really defeated the global skepticism point of view, it seems that his suppositions may lead to an intriguing but different conclusion; because of an individual’s understanding of language, meaning, and reference, it is really not sensible to speak of any sort of objective reality in the first place.

Even if there really is one objective reality, how can it be possible to accurately describe and understand this reality? Think about all that has to happen for two persons who are talking together to be speaking of the same thing. For the purpose of this example, let us assume that the outside world is indeed objective. If an individual is going to attempt to speak about a tree, he must have some mental image or thought of a tree. This image is within his own mind; the colors, dimensions, odors, textures and other features are determined by his own sense organs and then
interpreted in his own intellectual understanding. He may, for example, say the tree is green. This is due to his own past experience with his perceived understanding of the color green, as is the case for the way he interprets how the tree looks, smells, and feels. Therefore, you may have two persons very similar in nature and experiences with completely different understandings of the most basic nature of the tree. It would be necessary for them to literally be the same person with the same understanding and experiences, a situation only hypothetically possible, for them to be able to objectively say they are speaking of the same thing.

To expand on this example, consider two persons who are familiar with a tree that exists outside of their apartment. Overnight there was a thunderstorm and the tree was hit by lightning, and neither person is aware of this having happened. When they speak of the tree they are speaking of the status of the tree pre-lightning bolt. Their language is only referring to an idea of the tree which they have had experience with. This idea exists in each of their minds; the idea of the tree is innately subjective. Reality is fleeting and not even the most specific qualifications for appropriate use of language, such as those Putnam proposes, can ever accurately describe a completely objective reality. Perhaps this is the problem with language and communication in general: it is no wonder that the world is such a hectic and confusing place when it is seemingly impossible for two individuals to know for certain that they completely understand each other when speaking of the relatively simple concept of the tree.

The statements “We are or are not all humans,” or “We are or are not brains in a vat,” are objective claims of
knowledge of the true nature of reality. Expanding upon Putnam’s own principles of language, meaning, and reference, it seems that it would be impossible for anyone to extend his own mind or interpretation to make any objective claims about reality. Given that each individual will have different thoughts and mental images, combined with different past experiences and an interpretation of those possibly objective encounters with the external environment, he will necessarily form a claim about the world which is unique and only applicable, in the most extreme and specific sense, to himself. This being the case, and given all of Putnam's own past experiences and conceptions of the power of language and reference, maybe it is possible for him to say for certain that he is not a brain in a vat. However, for someone who agrees with the aforementioned example of Jack and his peculiar problem, it is not possible to assume that just because the referents of the brains in a vat would be different from humans, we are all not brains in vats. In a final examination, perhaps the claim that the perceived subjectivity of reality is substantially different from an assumed objective reality is really just a semantic claim in itself, and there is no functional difference between the two assumptions. On the other hand, maybe there really is a significant difference between the two, and whether or not one understands reality as subjective or objective will drive him to behave in significantly different and meaningful manners.

Hilary Putnam's thesis on “Brains in a Vat” is a modern reworking of Descartes' problem involving the evil deceiver. Putnam wants to present the case that it is not possible that we have been deceived in such a total and complete manner. He wants to attempt to posit, through
carefully defined terms of meaning, reference, and appropriate causal connections, that the understanding of words and thoughts is not just in the mind, but rather is deeply influenced by encounters with the external environment. Brains in a vat would have different understandings of what it means to be a brain in a vat because their points of reference would necessarily be different from a human's. However, it is possible that Putnam’s conclusion is just a semantic claim and not an actual statement on the reality of the situation. By using Putnam’s work on the significance of language, meaning, and reference, it is possible to see that it may not actually be feasible to attempt to make an objective claim of the reality of things, such as ‘We are not brains in a vat.’ Rather, considering one’s understanding of what it means to be a brain in a vat, the meanings of words, the power of language, and the importance of appropriate referents, the individual may be able to claim, “I am not a brain in a vat.” Putnam attributes an immense power to language and believes that, in conjunction with appropriate causal connections, he can make truth claims about an objective reality. However, it seems that he may be mistaken, and language can only refer to innately subjective ideas present within the mind and shaped by experience within the individual.
Socrates on Political Activism
Dale Frymark

In the *Apology*, Socrates defended himself from Meletus’ accusations of corrupting the youth and believing in gods other than those of the state. While defending his lifestyle and choices, he made the radical claim that “he who would really fight for justice must do so as a private citizen, not as a political figure, if he is to preserve his life, even for a short time” (31e5). In the context of the *Apology*, Socrates’ refusal to participate in political acts he saw as unjust caused him to be scrutinized by politicians and seen as dangerous. This view and his supporting statements explain why he had created tension with the state in the past and why his enemies in the state had wanted to prosecute him. Subtly, this was also an insult to the jurors who participated in the political process and were well known as figures in Athens: if Plato’s statement is indeed true, they would not be truly fighting for justice.

Socrates’ claim that we should fight for justice privately, not publicly, seems to contradict related claims from the *Republic*. In the utopia that Socrates imagines in this dialogue, the philosopher is the person who is truly just, fights for justice, and rules the city. This suggests that in the *Apology*, Plato has made a clear demarcation between his ideal city and the vastly different Athens. Therefore, this statement must be clarified as applying only to the real world and how people who truly value justice should act in

---

it. We don’t live in an idealized world, and never will; we have to account for and respond to unjust motives and actions in our politicians.

Socrates’ explicit proof of this statement involves personal experience and his belief in a divine force that alters and guides behavior. This divine guide, he claimed, is the reason why he never participated in politics unless it was unavoidable. One case in particular had a great effect in shaping his views of the world: he experienced an occasion in which a group of ten generals cowardly retreated in a battle, with no attempt to save the floundering crews of a fallen ship (32b). Athens reacted by seeking to judge the men together in a single trial for their deeds. Socrates asserted that it was clearly illegal and unjust to try the men as a group and deprive them of their normal individual trials, and therefore voted in opposition to the indictment.

At another time, the oligarchic Thirty Tyrants ordered Socrates and four others, including Meletus, to bring Leon the Salaminian from Salamis to Athens so that he could be put to death. But Socrates saw this as a blatant misuse of power, and instead quietly refused to participate and returned to his home. The other four carried out the assignment, and upon learning of Socrates’ actions, they became irate with him (32c). It is, at least in part, because Socrates refused to carry out the wishes of the government in his capacity as a public servant, that Meletus and others named him an enemy of the state. These are the premises supporting the conclusion that people who truly value justice should not participate in politics. But there is also an important implied premise here: the majority of politicians are pursuing morally questionable goals through abuses of power. Defying the multitude of unjust individuals would
be equivalent to social suicide. These corrupt politicians will not tolerate a just individual stalling or potentially crippling their plans just to make a moral stand. This would likely lead to heavy retribution and the social isolation of the individual – and no good would come from it.

Here one might object that it seems necessary, in order to improve or sustain the city, for truly righteous people to participate in politics – they have an obligation to be public figures and reform the political system. Having a just person who takes no part in the public realm will bring no goodness or growth to the society. It is because Socrates defied authority that he has been brought into a public setting to stand trial. His commitment to his moral beliefs of non-participation has now brought him into the public sphere. And he is having a greater impact now, by encouraging others as an example to follow what he has done than he ever did in a private setting. This suggests that pursuing justice in politics should involve leading one’s life as an example, not only to further motivate other good people, but also for the sake of the unjust so that they may change. The just man should be in politics to keep corrupt men in check.

Plato’s reply, in defense of the life that Socrates led, might be that one can make just as much of a difference leading a private life and avoiding notoriety than being in the tumultuous and immoral political sphere. Before the original statement, Socrates described himself as a gadfly annoying a horse that is attempting to sleep, a metaphor for Athens, and forcing it into motion. Without Socrates, the city would slumber on and be perfectly undisturbed instead of striving towards human excellence through discussion and examination. Socrates neglected his own private life so
that he could go to each and every reputedly wise individual and question him about what he knew. In this way, he was not weighed down with politics and concern for his life and could focus on directly impacting individuals.

With regards to bettering the political figures, these were the first people that Socrates approached after he received the message from the oracle claiming that no one was wiser than he was, and he tried to push them towards this path of virtue and justice through the contemplation of human excellence. When discussing how the relatives of his friends and followers supported his innocence, he named a great number of political figures who had altered their views, and were acting justly because of the positive influence Socrates had on them outside of politics. Socrates had not only improved the members of the Athenian Assembly by having followers among them and questioning their leaders, but also made himself available to the entire population of Athens during time he might otherwise have spent in politics. And although he eventually was seen as a threat and angered the city enough to be sentenced to death under false charges, Socrates survived much longer and helped many more people than he would have if he had decided to be a public figure.
Philosophical discussions serve the purpose of examining factors of life and death that are ambiguous and often inexplicable. While it is nearly impossible to prove many philosophical claims, the importance of these discussions lies not in finding answers, but in the process of questioning. In the *Phaedo* by Plato, the main character, Socrates, encourages philosophical debate that utilizes strategies for asking thought-provoking questions and seeking logical answers. Through Socrates, Plato describes a method for problem-solving that is necessary for in-depth analysis of philosophical issues. After emphasizing the importance of this process, often referred to as the “Socratic Method”, Socrates delves into his own interpretation of life and death in response to his friends’ questions. Through the assertion that the soul is eternal, Socrates attempts to convince his comrades that death should be approached not with fear but with understanding, an understanding which could be achieved through the method he has described. The true purpose of the *Phaedo* can be revealed by a close examination of the dialogue’s context and its relationship to the theories Socrates develops in the dialogue. These theories support Plato's intentions by describing experiences that are directly connected to the eternal soul and other ultimate realities. In addressing these concepts as truths, Socrates is able to overcome natural human fears and approach unknown phenomena, such as death, with rationality. He suggests that others do the same to eventually heighten
awareness beyond attachments to the worldly realm. Whether or not an individual agrees with Socrates' claims, a personal grappling with philosophical concepts produces realizations that may lead to acceptance or understanding.

One of the crucial topics addressed in the dialogue is the nature of the soul. Socrates asserts that not only does the soul exist after death, it exists prior to birth as well. Because it is immortal, Socrates claims that the soul must contain all absolute knowledge and argues the theory of recollection: the view that “teaching” is really a matter of reminding a person of what they already know. Through deductive reasoning, Socrates distinguishes between the everlasting Forms of the Realm of Being and the Empirical forms of the Lower Realm. Plato uses this reasoning throughout the dialogue to interweave assertions, connecting the strands of thought together to form a solid web of philosophical beliefs. Within this logical weaving, Plato deliberately incorporates faulty arguments so that his audience will question the validity of his assertions. The problematic claims evoke a response from both Socrates' comrades and the reader, which compels us to engage with the text as directly as possible. We join the conversation, interacting with the presented issues in an attempt to rectify doubts. Thus, Plato guarantees that the Socratic Method will be employed so that the philosophical discussion will be thoroughly conducted.

The *Phaedo* opens with the scene of Socrates in his jail cell, surrounded by friends who are mourning his approaching execution. While the others weep, Socrates sits calmly and speaks of the odd coupling of pleasure and pain he is experiencing. When Socrates remarks that he will be leaving soon and that others should gladly follow, Cebes
asks: "How do you mean...that the philosopher will be willing to follow one who is dying?" (61d). Cebes is incredulous; he cannot fathom how such learned men as philosophers would be willing to forfeit life and all that they have come to know about it. To address this uncertainty, Socrates first defines philosophy, asserting that "the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death" (64a). Here Socrates does not suggest that to properly practice philosophy, one must have a complete philosophical understanding of the world. Instead, he advocates devotion to the exploration of life and its processes as an alternative to conformity to the pre-established beliefs of some institutions. I believe that Plato intended to encourage philosophical discussion with the implementation of proper reasoning strategies, like the Socratic Method, so that every person could embark on the journey to become a philosopher.

Socrates so clearly defines the Socratic Method that it seems clear he wanted others to use it. For instance, he is pleased with the suspicions raised by Cebes and Simmias and responds, "You are both justified in what you say, and I think you mean that I must make a defense against this," (63a). Socrates then proceeds to present his logic, using deductive reasoning to move from one point to the next. This process of argumentation—of assertion followed by explanation and so forth—serves to strengthen Plato's ultimate purpose. In encouraging in-depth speculation, Plato provides a method for engaging in it and also presents an underlying question that must be answered.

---

Consideration of the dialogue’s context provides a foundation for a deeper understanding of its aims and further supports the reading developed above. In establishing the context of the event to Echecrates, Phaedo explains that Socrates’ execution must await the return of a ship from a religious mission—that is, "the ship in which, the Athenians say, Theseus once sailed to Crete, taking with him the two lots of seven victims. He saved them and was himself saved" (58b). Readers are introduced, then, to the idea that Socrates resembles Theseus, a captive who struggles to free his friends from a labyrinth by slaying the monster within it. With this background knowledge, we are able to discern ahead of time the complex nature of Socrates' arguments. This reference to Theseus serves as a warning: we are entering a maze and it will be difficult to navigate, but if we embark on the journey and face our fears, we shall be saved. But a question remains: Who or what is the Minotaur?

In their introduction to the Phaedo, Eva Brann, Eric Salem, and Peter Kalkavage suggest that, "fear of death" and the "hatred of arguments" are the "two 'horns', of a dual-natured monster" and this is the monster from which Socrates, as Theseus, delivers his friends. While this interpretation is reasonable, I feel that the issue is multidimensional and therefore deeper than suggested. Toward the end of the Phaedo, it is impossible to say with certainty that Socrates' friends no longer fear death. Though the claims made by Socrates seem to ease their worries, there are few indications that the other characters approach death with happiness, as Socrates himself does. The actions

---

of the characters in the concluding pages reveal sorrow and anger, so much so that Socrates scolds them. Phaedo remarks that "his words made us ashamed, and we checked our tears" (117e).

It seems to me that Socrates' comrades are only able to restrain their emotions because of his presence, not out of acceptance. This being said, I believe that the first suggestion of dispelling fear can be disregarded, or at the very least modified. If one cannot entirely overcome trepidation, just as the other characters were unable to, it is best to continue to grapple with such issues. As shown in the dialogues, this is often a difficult and unnerving task. The other characters do not appear to exhibit a hatred of arguments; rather, they show reluctance to engage in them. If the characters were truly obstinate against argument, then Cebes and Simmias would not as adamantly present their positions, if at all. For example, Simmias says, "I will tell you my difficulty, and then Cebes will say why he does not accept what was said" (85b). Clearly these two men have no qualms about argumentation; otherwise, they would simply have acquiesced. There is, however, a feeling of uncertainty and fear that underlies the dialogue. It appears to me that the Minotaur represents the fear of self-examination and investigation of the unknown. As logical beings, it is natural to fear what cannot be explained. Thus, many choose to ignore aspects of philosophy or blindly accept a clearly defined set of beliefs. It is disconcerting to reconsider personal beliefs in the face of philosophical debate, especially when no concrete answer can be found. Yet humans have discovered that a belief-system, or at least a provisional ideology, is important to possess. This being
said, Plato attempts to dispel the fear of speculation by encouraging examination in a logical and reasonable way.

With this purpose in mind, Plato (through Socrates) presents his arguments. One of Socrates' most controversial claims is that the soul is eternal and is encumbered by the body. He continues, asserting that death is a philosopher's delight because it is the separation of the soul from superficial attachments. He says that a person who resents death is "not a lover of wisdom but a lover of the body" (68c). Here Socrates establishes that the body is a corrupting agent, and that it prevents the soul from experiencing true knowledge. While the claim itself may not be true, it is logical to view the selfish desires and wants of the body as a preventative force. When applied to a simple situation, one can see how this is possible. For example, if I wanted to educate myself by reading a series of books, I would be inhibited by several bodily needs. My eyes might stray from the page, my ears would detect distant sounds, and eventually I would grow weary and be forced to sleep. Although this example hardly explores the depth of Socrates' claim, it does exemplify how the body can distract the mind. In a later passage, Socrates likens the soul to the mind in that it is the directive force of human beings. He asks Simmias, "of all the parts of a man, can you mention any other part that rules him than his soul, especially if it is a wise soul?" (80a).

To expand upon this statement, one should apply its meaning to his or her own life and experiences. When Socrates mentions that the soul is the supreme ruler, he clarifies that it is often in conflict with the body. I myself have experienced instances when an inner voice seems to contradict the action that I am about to take. This is often
referred to as the conscience, which serves as a guiding force of reason. I feel that, following Socrates' claims, the soul reveals itself when the conscience "speaks". While everyday consciousness is void of the soul's influence, instances in which surface-level thoughts are opposed gives the individual a glimpse of his or her soul. Similar to Hindu beliefs, this implies that there is a wealth of knowledge in the unconscious or subconscious dimensions of the mind. Socrates remarks that the soul will "converse with desires and passions and fears as if it were one thing talking to a different one" (94d). It is clear that the soul, though dominant, is clouded by the human element. In other words, empirical desires drown out the voice of the conscience and prevent access to the ultimate truth. Socrates claims that once an individual can recognize these flashes of the soul, he or she can understand its supremacy and access the absolute knowledge embedded within.

The theory of opposites helps explain the persistency of the soul and its ability to adapt to elements in the earthly realm. Socrates argues that opposites come to be from one another in a series of stages. The act of becoming is a process in which a new stage of existence arises from the termination of another completely different stage. The term opposites, then, refers to the cycle of stages of existences, reliant on small variations from one instant to the next. The metaphor of the growing flower is helpful in understanding this concept. A flower does not have a direct opposite (an anti-flower), rather, the flower comes into being from not-being, transforming slightly with each stage. One of the earliest phases occurs when the seed is no more than a potential life embedded in the soil. Then, the seed begins to break and the roots of the flower emerge along with a small
sprig that appears above the ground. Surely these two instances are not opposites, yet they are intricately connected in time and differ intrinsically. The emergence of the flower is dependent on the first stage—one could say that it comes into being from the preceding phase.

According to Socrates, the phases are cyclical, which implies that the existence and destruction of empirical matter is eternal. From this claim, Socrates asserts that the soul is also eternal because it arises from death. He says that the living come from the dead because "life" and "death" are opposites (71a). One cannot exist without the other. Socrates concludes: "If the two processes of becoming did not always balance each other as if they were going round in a circle...all things would...cease to become" (72b). If we agree that existence is cyclical in nature, then yes, this claim is accurate. Socrates attempts to convince his listeners that this is so, using deductive reasoning and the Socratic method. His theory of opposites does indicate a relationship between a thing and its contrary, or the stages of transformation that are present in nature. We must, however, follow it to the root in order to validate the claim.

This brings me to the next concept discussed in the *Phaedo*: the theory of recollection. The theory of recollection is born of Socrates' premise that the soul is eternal. He uses this claim both to prove the soul's immortality and to show how true knowledge exists beyond the Empirical Realm. Because Socrates cannot prove these assertions, we must assume that his presuppositions are valid and follow his analogies for better understanding of each concept. Only then can the audience overcome uncertainty to seek the underlying truths that Socrates so boldly explores. For instance, the
theory of recollection provides an explanation for why humans associate one experience with another. As mentioned previously, Socrates claims that the soul exists before birth and is part of a cyclical process of "life" and "death". Thus, the soul itself possesses ultimate knowledge. Socrates says "we must at some previous time have learned what we now recollect" (72e). I believe that this connects directly to the notion of the conscience: the soul revealing itself. If humans hesitate to act because of some conflicting thought, they glimpse the soul in that thought. Likewise, if humans are reminded of another experience, they are glimpsing the absolute knowledge stored within the soul.

Our soul possesses true knowledge but is encumbered by the body. I interpret Socrates to mean that the soul exists in each being in fullness and with absolute knowledge, meaning that we have the potential to realize the truth. Just as the soul's "voice" is smothered by conscious thought, knowledge is clouded by bodily drives. Our mental processes and sensory perceptions restrict our access to knowledge and we are only able to glimpse the soul when it reveals itself. The soul reveals itself when the knowledge stored in the unconscious floats to the surface and conflicts with what we sense or feel, and is then recognized by humans as the conscience. Additionally, the soul appears in our recollection of concepts when we associate one thing with another. Memories, on the other hand, do not qualify as recollection because they are created from empirical experiences. Information gained in the empirical realm from sensory perceptions does not relate to the ultimate realities, or Forms. Socrates claims that "sensory perceptions must surely make us realize that all we perceive through them is striving to reach that which
is Equal but falls short of it" (75b). Here Socrates alludes to the ultimate realities that exist in the Realm of Being and the empirical experiences that mimic those truths. Our only understanding of those truths arises from recollection of knowledge from the soul, a phenomena that most beings do not recognize. If we question this occurrence, however, we have a better chance of comprehending how and why it takes place than if we simply allowed it, remaining blind and unaware of its true nature.

Many philosophers in the past have referenced an ultimate truth or reality, and Plato is no exception. In the Phaedo, Socrates describes the Forms, the intricate concepts of pure existences, or, essentially, what is. Although this claim seems simple, there are many questions to consider about the nature of the Forms. For instance: what makes something a Form? Socrates provides several examples of things that he considers to be Realities, but he never describes the elements that compose them. Perhaps this is because there is no checklist of qualities that make something a Form, though I am fairly confident of some factors that distinguish things that are not Forms from those that are. Socrates states, "I assume the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest" (100b). Socrates does not describe why these things are pure and true, though his statement indicates why certain qualities are not. It is my understanding that qualities that change, such as feelings or perceptions, are not considered Forms because they cannot exist independently of the empirical realm. For instance, the feeling of happiness is not absolute. It is influenced by empirical experiences and human perception of events in the empirical realm. Thus, it cannot exist on its own outside
of human conception. Ultimate Realities, on the other hand, exist separately and are not "things" that can be captured in language. Instead, the Forms are a sort of divine presence that humans can only feel to a small degree.

The distinction between the Realm of Being (Upper Realm) and the Empirical Realm is essential to this theory. Forms exist in the Upper Realm in entirety and present themselves as appearances in the Empirical Realm. As Socrates says, "you do not know how else each thing came to be except by sharing in the particular reality in which it shares" (101c). Thus, the human experience of qualities such as "beautiful" and "good" is not complete: these qualities are mere reflections of the true Forms. Because human perceptions are fleeting and ever-changing, it is impossible to experience an ultimate reality. In order for a being to do so, they must renounce all attachments to the fluctuating Empirical Realm. Socrates describes human understanding of the Earth like so: "It is as if someone who lived deep down in the middle of the ocean thought he was living on its surface" (109c). Our understanding is distorted by flowing energies, which Socrates calls "ethers". These ethers affect our senses and encourage pursuit of bodily desires, further encasing our soul in the depths of our being. The only way to free the soul from these false attachments is to separate it from the body, which occurs at death. According to Socrates, if the soul is purified it will return to its true state in the Upper Realm and experience the Forms in their fullness. Therefore, the ultimate goal of Socrates' dialogue is to convince his comrades to pursue knowledge (through philosophical discussion) in an attempt to purify the soul.
Socrates' presentation of arguments in Plato's *Phaedo* can be interpreted in various ways, so long as the major points are understood. It is unclear what exactly Plato is trying to convey to his audience, though it may be assumed that he wants to dispel the fears inherent in human nature. I believe that Plato is encouraging philosophical discussion, using the Socratic Method as a tool for developing sturdy arguments. By engaging in discussion and confronting fears of the unknown, one can better understand life, death, and the nature of existence. Hopefully, this understanding will serve as a guiding force for one's actions and promote morality among people. Plato establishes this purpose through the presentation of the soul as an eternal reality, its purification contingent on human action and awareness. Through the theory of opposites, the theory of recollection, and the explanation of the Forms, Socrates attempts to convince his comrades of the immortality of the soul.

The cyclical processes of nature suggest that it is possible that the soul could have existed before birth and could continue to exist after death. Consequently, the soul possesses absolute knowledge and reveals itself through the conscience and through recollection. In order to reach absolute knowledge, human beings must cultivate their understanding and purify the soul by detaching it from empirical experiences and sensations. Once the soul is separated from the body, it can return to the Realm of Being, where it experiences the Forms in entirety. These arguments, though flawed in some areas, demonstrate why philosophical discussion is important. Plato encourages in-depth thought so that human beings may reach the level of ultimate understanding through purification of the soul.
Plato’s theory that all knowledge is recollection, and that what we call “teaching” is really a matter of reminding us of what the soul has always known, is one that works perfectly with mathematics (85c-e). Socrates illustrates this theory with an example in which a slave boy comes to understand a geometrical theorem, and it seems plausible to suggest that when a student in a geometry class is first learning the area of a square, he or she can most likely reason through the problem without ever needing the teacher to directly explain the reasoning. Simply given the question “What is the amount of one-foot squares within a square with sides of three feet?” a student is sure to be able to get to a correct answer without first being told how to approach and solve the problem. However, despite the fact that this definition of learning seems to be a good explanation for mathematical knowledge, it doesn’t fit well with other fields of study and knowledge.

While not totally rejecting Plato’s theory of knowledge, this paper seeks to demonstrate the flaws of such a broad view of knowledge acquisition; looking at knowledge in one field, math, may not explain how knowledge is acquired in other fields, such as biology or economics. It is important to understand what Plato means by recollection of knowledge and how he developed that theory. It is also essential that his theory be tested on other fields because his premises

---

1 Plato, Complete Works. Eds. John Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (Hackett, 1997)
are so focused on math that there is no reason to think that it could explain every aspect of human knowledge. Since there are so many different kinds of things that can be learned, learning might not be defined as simply as Plato suggests. Maybe the processes of acquiring knowledge deal more with the capacities of the mind than the recollection of the soul.

Another problematic part of Plato’s theory is that immortal souls somehow acquire this knowledge, yet it is never sufficiently explained how they do so. Indeed, although he explains how one remembers something that he or she once knew because of a previous existence that had acquired such knowledge, he never explains how one came to learn anything in the first place.

The argument Socrates makes when discussing geometry with Meno and the slave boy is a great way to understand Plato’s position (82a). If a person has no experience with geometrical theorems, she should not be able to know them without previous education if one believes that knowledge is acquired by mere experience. Socrates insists that he does not teach the slave boy the theorem, and this proves, he believes, that people have an innate capacity to understand the rules of geometry without outside influence (82e). So it must be true that the source of knowledge lies within that person’s soul. Truth about the world around us does not come from mere opinion but rather from the ability to recollect the true nature of things from the human soul which, in some unknown way, has previously come to know the real nature of things.

This theory seems to solve the problem it was designed to solve. Meno wondered how you could learn anything: if
you already know something you don’t need to learn it, but how can you learn when you don’t have an idea of what you are looking for: it cannot possibly be found. It seemed to Meno that pursuing knowledge is pointless. But there is no problem if knowledge is recollection, and no one merely recollects all of his or her previous knowledge. Rather, his or her mind needs to be aimed at a question, so that the object of knowledge can be reasoned with in order for the process of recollection to begin. Knowledge must be sought in order to be recollected. When the slave boy was asked about the square’s area, he could only come to know certain rules of geometry because his soul was directed towards that knowledge seeking the answer. He could not just come to know these rules without being confronted by the question.

Plato’s view can be seen as very problematic since it implies that every soul is immortal and knows all truth within it. That means that no one can plead complete ignorance since all he or she needs is simple recollection. If, as Plato describes, recollection works as a rule for all knowledge, then one can come to accurately know whether an act is good or bad. This definitive stance on innate knowledge faces obstacles in cases where someone accidentally did wrong to another or made a bad judgment call. Additionally, this theory suggests that there are absolute truths about what is good and what is just. Plato’s whole work suggests this, so it isn’t a claim made specifically for the question of learning, but it remains problematic for this issue: Socrates needs to explain what is going on when someone ‘recollects’ one thing about what is good or about what is just, and another ‘recollects’ something entirely incompatible.
These problems aren’t exclusive to the field of morality and justice. As stated in the beginning, natural and social sciences, such as biology and economics, face challenges when confronted with Plato’s view of acquiring knowledge. In the case of biology, certain learned truths cannot be reconciled with the idea that knowledge is innate. Evolution, for example, isn’t a rule that one rationally reaches without input from empirical data. In no way is Plato saying that empirical data can’t help facilitate learning, but he suggests that knowledge is an eternal aspect in the soul that can be recollected, and that no piece of knowledge is truly learned as new but is something akin to a memory. Major scientific discoveries don’t seem to be this kind of purely rational object; rather, they are something based heavily on new empirical knowledge that human reason then filters and conceptualizes into newly found knowledge that has no pre-existence in the soul or mind. The same is true in economics, which heavily studies the behavior of humans. How can a soul know the way humanity’s buying decisions would react to the computer revolution? It seems like new discoveries and phenomena, which are obviously not eternal, cannot be pre-existing in immortal souls since the soul could not have been exposed to a situation where either of these questions could be answered. I think eternal truths like geometry can be argued perfectly with Plato’s theory, but these ‘new truths’ don’t seem to be the kind that Plato could have ‘recollected’.

Plato might reply that there is no such thing as ‘new knowledge’ and that understanding things like evolution and buying behavior can be explained by the recollection of certain eternal truths and their subsequent application to these specific examples. He would probably say that the
same governing truths of things apply to these new phenomena and discoveries, and that these governing truths are eternal and are recollected when learning about the ideas to which they apply. Taking these considerations into account, the reply to Plato would be that there is more to learning than mere governing truths, which in this sense refers to rules of logic. Reason is certainly innate, as too is an understanding of certain principles that help us to acquire knowledge about things in the world, but recollection itself is not how one comes to understand evolution; instead, only through reason and experience do we come to make these general conclusions of knowledge. Although the knowledge itself is new, the principles used to discover them are eternal truths.

To some extent, Plato is definitely correct. Some of the details might not be, but the idea that reason is innate and not acquired from the outside world through experience is definitely true. Problems arise when he declares that knowledge is merely recollection by an immortal soul that somehow acquired it previously in a non-human form. Knowledge is more than reason; it is applying reason to the empirical world that is constantly changing with new things coming into being. I strongly believe that evolution and economic theories should be considered just as knowable as geometry, even if they aren’t as perfectly provable. Knowledge isn’t always perfect and agreed upon, so it is not nearly as limited in scope as Plato would suggest.
In his scientific novel *The Grand Design*, theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking states that “it is not necessary to invoke God to... set the Universe going”.¹ Scientific theories and mathematical analyses can explain how the universe began: God has been reasoned out of existence. However, many individuals still choose to believe that some form of a God exists and plays a role in our existence, despite scientific conjecture to the contrary. Moreover, this phenomenon of faith in an unknown and unknowable supreme being remains a mystery to scientists and philosophers alike, as members of both communities have struggled with the topic for centuries.

In *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the philosopher David Hume examines these issues in a dialogue between three characters: Demea, Cleanthes, and Philo. Ultimately, Hume concludes that, while God’s nature may never be completely realized, it is important to continue to question one’s spiritual beliefs. After critiquing his logic, I have also discovered that “skepticism is... the first and most essential step towards” understanding my own concept of a deity (89).²

In order to illuminate alternative perspectives on religious belief, Hume assigns a different perspective to

---

each of the three characters: Demea and Cleanthes cling to traditional Christian ideals, and Philo is developed as the religious skeptic. Demea insists that “the question is not concerning the being but the nature of God” (13-4). Throughout the discourse, each philosopher's argument rests upon some variation of the supposition that a supernatural being invented the universe. However, regarding his nature, Demea and Philo counter Cleanthes in his belief that an individual may come to comprehend God's ethereal perfection through “reasonings” based on “experience”. And, despite their similar positions on God's nature, Philo and Demea use very different logic to argue the same idea; whereas Demea repeatedly calls for “proofs a priori” (15), Philo seeks to define cause and effect in order to explain human understanding of God.

For the purpose of determining the characteristics of its creator, the philosophers first analyze the nature of the universe. In Parts II, IV, and VII respectively, the universe is said to “bear a great likeness to animal bodies and to vegetables” by Demea and Philo (44), while Cleanthes claims it resembles a fine art or machinery. Through Cleanthes' logic, the world functions as “one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines” which are all interconnected and dependent upon each other (15). Accordingly, every analogous machine is known to have a designer or an inventor; architecture must have an architect, and the evidence of this architect is reflected by the architecture (16). Furthermore, it is possible to determine through experience with nature that God is the “Author of Nature” and that he possesses “similarity to [the] human mind” (15). In contrast to this concept, Philo and Demea propose that the universe is rather like an
animal or a vegetable, having originated from “generation or vegetation”, and able to produce “new worlds” in the same manner (44-5). Despite a lack of formal “data” on the subject, Philo states that the universe's essence is “incomprehensible”, and that we may therefore only “infer” about its cause by analyzing similar sets of cause and effect (45-6). When one observes an animal or a plant, it is reasonable to conclude that this living being came forth from another living being—that it was born and that it has the capability to reproduce (45-7). Similarly, the universe is made up of millions of living beings and itself functions as one, leading to the conclusion that it was born in the same manner.

While it may seem trivial to attempt to categorize the universe as a machine or an animal, this classification is imperative to Hume's contemplation of the nature of God. Every object on earth that is not natural – be it a building or a machine or a work of art – points to a builder, an inventor, or an artist. If the universe is more like one of these, then God himself must possess “thought, design, intelligence, such as we discover in men” (19), only infinitely and flawlessly so. Conversely, if the universe is like a living being in that it is the result of a long lineage of ancestors and descendants, then God's characteristics may not be so comparable to man's—or at least not in every way “infinitely superior” (15). As Philo describes, “many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out” (36). A deity may have governed ancestors of this current universe, leading him to develop the laws of nature that are currently implemented in the world today. Consequently, the possibility of past worlds existing as practice templates for
God would indicate flaws in his nature. An infinitely perfect “Supreme Being” would immediately be capable of producing and ruling a perfect world—one without the flaws that Philo, Demea and Cleanthes all exploit throughout their discussion (15). Moreover, the human experience is “so full of vice and misery and disorder” that it seems to disqualify its creator of perfection, leading the philosophers to consider the possibility of both a “limited” deity and a maleficent one (67-8).

Upon being told to imagine a universe controlled by an omniscient, omnipotent being, the average individual would conjecture that this universe would be perfect, much like its inventor (68-9). However, as Philo describes in Part XI, this individual would likely be surprised by the disease, poverty, and pain that so plague this world (68). How could a perfect being allow ills like these to afflict his creation? “Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both willing and able? Whence then is evil?” (63).

The three philosophers grapple with these questions: Philo seeks a reason for pain and Cleanthes and Demea assert that suffering has a purpose in the grand scheme of eternity. Eventually, the conclusion is made that “nature acts by the simplest methods, and chooses the most proper means to any end” (77). Additionally, Philo postulates that:

There may four hypotheses be framed concerning the first causes of the universe: that they are endowed with perfect goodness; that they have perfect malice; that they are opposite and have both goodness and malice; that they have neither goodness nor malice. (75)
Ergo, the universe may have been created for various reasons and with various motives that surpass human comprehension (15). While I personally believe that neither good nor bad plays a role in the overall existence of the universe, it is truly impossible to know.

Although a definitive knowledge of God's true nature may be impossible to obtain, the pursuit of such knowledge can alleviate the burden of living in such an imperfect world, according to Demea (58). Whereas tangible, earthly comforts often fail to provide long-term relief, “religion suggests some methods of atonement” by which people feel they may appease God: the ultimate oppressor (58). Moreover, in organized religions, individuals who worship and adhere to a strict moral doctrine are said to be sanctified and saved; they are rewarded for their decency with the promise of an eternity with God (58-9; 82-9). Ironically, though, the deity to which people turn for consolation is the same being which inflicts upon them pain and worry! As Philo mentions in rebuttal to Cleanthes, “many religious exercises are entered into with seeming fervor where the heart, at the time, feels cold and languid” (84), a habit that slowly transforms one's endeavor to end pain into a ritualistic practice of “false religion” (86). In other words, both fear of damnation and hope of salvation drive people to join organized religions, which themselves are nothing more than the brainchild of “haughty dogmatists” (89). Both prideful and unrealistic they use philosophy to exploit and manipulate spirituality.

Based on my own experience, I can relate to Philo's perspective of organized religion. While I will not judge anyone for his beliefs, I cannot accept the way in which religious institutions abuse and control the human psyche
through fear, bribery, and even violence. Through critical analysis of Hume's dissertation on the topic it becomes clear that the political hierarchy within churches “will always augment the religious spirit,” and that these organizations promote “nothing but endless disputes, quarrels, factions, persecutions, and civil commotions” (85). Furthermore, Hume uses Philo to question the benefits and detriments of organized religion, at last calling it “absurd, superstitious, and even impious” if the ultimate goal is not “to know God [and] to worship him” (88). As such, in applying Hume’s logic to my own spiritual beliefs, I also come to the conclusion that the institution of religion is more often a misinterpretation of God’s nature and a misuse of his power than a pure attempt to understand and please him.

In addition to defaming the meaning of religion itself, organized religion has had vast impacts on society throughout history, which reaffirms my rejection of its necessity. Beginning with Pope Gregory's crusades in the early centuries of the last millennium, Christianity waged war against alien religions in order to eradicate contradictory doctrines and expand Christendom across the globe well into the Middle Ages. These crusades killed thousands throughout Islamic regions in the Middle East, and pervert Christ's message of love and compassion. Similarly, factions of Islam remain in turmoil today over dogmatic disagreements: bombings have become a daily occurrence in countries like Iraq and Pakistan where Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims must coexist. After observing these horrid ramifications of organized religion, it is obvious that religion is the cause rather than the effect of the world's problems: although God, perhaps, does not oppress and
torture mankind, interpreters of his will often do, through the institutionalization of dogma. Therefore, since “the latter [must] arise from the former, never the former from the latter,” the institution of religion must be the thing that causes human suffering (47). God is the scapegoat: though we have no way of grasping God’s nature, we blame God because we project our flaws upon him.

As is brought out in Part V of the dialogue, no one may ever fully comprehend God's nature because “men are mortal” (37). However, this does not mean that reason cannot and should not be used to mold our own spirituality or to question our own beliefs. Philo states that “thought has no influence upon matter except where that matter is so conjoined with it as to have an equal reciprocal influence upon it,” (52-3). In my interpretation, this indicates that man's understanding of God's nature has no bearing on the reality of his nature except in our “MIND [and] THOUGHT”; our belief system can only define us and is of little consequence to the universe or its designer (80). Moreover, while it may be beneficial to use Socratic questioning and discussion to come to terms with our spirituality, the doctrine and dogma of widespread religion inhibits the individual from achieving this goal. It is imperative that each individual have his own personal relationship with a deity, or with nature, or with whatever being or theory he decides to place trust in—religion works against this end to imprint a generic spirituality upon as many people as possible. Contrasting Cleanthe's belief that “religion, however corrupted, is still better than no religion at all” (82), I agree with Philo that “the terrors of religion... prevail above its comforts” (86).
Taking into account the philosopher's arguments on thought and matter, as well as his contemplations on the nature of God and the nature of organized religion, I have concluded that I am most like the skeptical Philo. Whereas Demea and Cleanthes both at times call for a more scientific approach than what Philo provides (15; 23-5), both of these thinkers cling blindly to faith in a perfect Creator God while Philo fearlessly questions various aspects of his being. Personally, I find faith to exist within the human ego—an attachment we must relinquish before we can attain a “sense of the imperfections of natural reason [and] fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity” (89). Without some skepticism towards our own spirituality, it is impossible to keep an open mind to new ideas about the world around us. Furthermore, we cannot accurately and acutely perceive our own shortcomings if we do not constantly reflect upon our mistakes, achievements, and revelations. Only by letting go of prejudices, biases, and fixations can we reach complete spiritual enlightenment. Therefore, after reading and scrutinizing Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, I found myself in agreement with most of the philosopher's arguments; specifically, my perspective aligns most closely with Philo’s.
CONTRIBUTORS

Lisa Anderson
Lisa Anderson is a sophomore majoring in English and Philosophy, with interests in Creative Writing and the arts. She intends to pursue a career in writing, using philosophical studies to provide a unique perspective in her stories. Lisa is a tutor at the Writing Center, student editor of the Washington College Review, editor-in-chief of the Apeiron philosophy journal, and an athlete on the Varsity Volleyball team. Currently, she is working on a novel that combines elements of magical realism with philosophical thought, which she hopes to complete by graduation. She will continue to produce philosophical writings throughout college.

Steven Bushar
Steven Bushar is a junior, studying Political Science and Economics. He plans to minor in Philosophy and will continue his study of political philosophy in graduate school. He loves logic, reason and knowledge which led him to become a math tutor who helps students in statistics. As treasurer of the E.R.O.S. Alliance, he puts his political philosophy into practice by supporting and advocating for the rights and freedoms of those who are marginalized.

Bonnie Douglas
Bonnie Douglas is a first year Biology major at Washington College. Although her interests are primarily focused within disciplines of hard science, she is also very intrigued by the
study of ethics and scientific philosophy. Moreover, she very much enjoys writing in all fields. During her first semester, she successfully completed Introduction to Philosophy and earned a spot on the Dean’s List. She hopes to continue her studies in philosophy.

**Dale Frymark**

Dale is a Senior Mathematics major, but has always been very interested in philosophy and enjoys reading it in his free time. He is a member of Phi Delta Theta International Fraternity and Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society, and works in the Quantitative Skills Center as a Calculus Tutor. After graduation, Dale will be attending Baylor University in Waco, Texas as a student in their Ph.D in Mathematics program.

**James Reith**

James Reith is a senior who will graduate in May with a degree in Clinical Psychology. He minors in Philosophy where his main area of interest is Existentialism.

**Sarah Roy**

Sarah Roy is a junior majoring in English and Art with a minor in Creative Writing. Her primary interests lie in experimental prose and the visual page. A major focus of her work lies in nature writing and is concerned with the interpretation of the transcendent natural world, universality, the origin of ideas, and shared animal consciousnesses.