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Issue 2: Sátya

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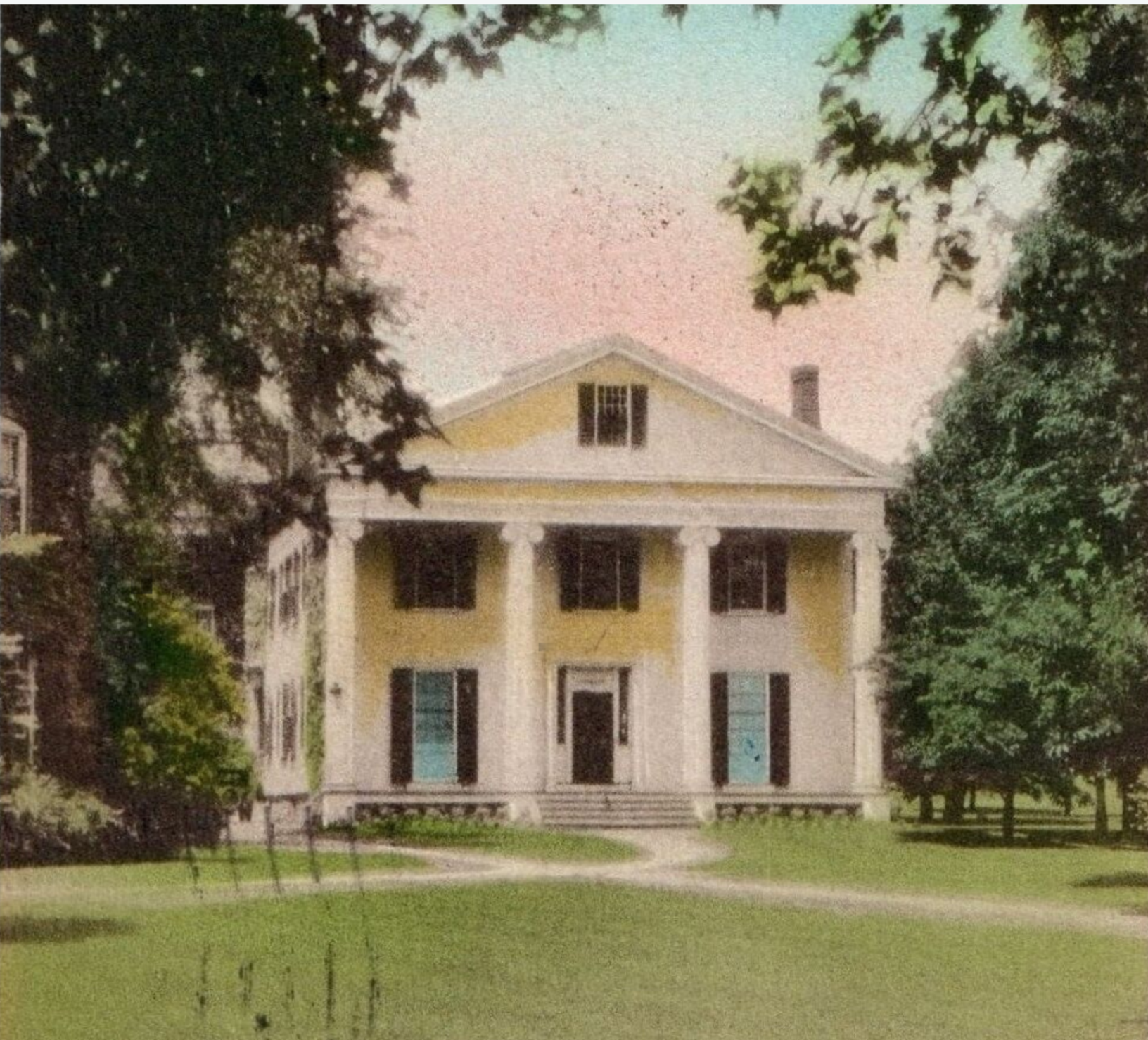

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Editor's Introduction

The Smith College Philosophy Journal, formerly *Eudaimonia,* was founded in the Fall of 2019 by You Jeen Ha. Due to the coronavirus, publication was suspended, and the original members of the Journal have since graduated. Finally, in Fall 2023, we are reviving the Journal under a new name, *Sátya*–a Sanskrit word meaning truth. We feel *Sátya* is representative of our cross-cultural approach to philosophy at Smith.

This edition of *Sàtya* is made up of the essays presented by students at Smith's inaugural Five College Philosophy Conference in the Spring of 2023. The selection pool was full of quality submissions from the five colleges, and these papers were chosen for their creativity and depth of philosophical inquiry. The first volume of *Sátya* features topics in bioethics and technology, ethics and society, morality and aesthetics, and the history of philosophy. We hope to continue this tradition of hosting a philosophy conference for the surrounding colleges and publishing their papers in the Fall.

We would like to acknowledge our founder, You Jean Ha, as well as the authors of our chosen submissions. We are so grateful to the wonderful and supportive Professors of our department, especially Professor Jay Garfield, our faculty supervisor and the source of inspiration for our new name. This revival could not have happened without the incredible team who put together the Five College Philosophy Conference last spring, including Anna Gyorgy, Vinny Harley, Mika Yassur, Susan Levin, Jay Garfield, Nalini Bhushan, and Vicky Spelman. We look forward to the many editions to come.

March Loftin

Editor

Final Recommendations on Testing the Artificial Intelligence Called "Mu" for Consciousness

Michela Rawson

Abstract

This paper responds to a hypothetical scenario in which I have been hired by a fictitious corporation called Moogle to help determine whether their AI, Mu, is conscious. The essay is formatted as a report addressing the Moogle executives after conducting an analysis of Mu's cognitive architecture. I elected to assess Mu for phenomenal consciousness through the lens of representationalism, arguing that this is the most plausible physicalist approach to the mind-body problem. I then propose two tests (both developed by Dr. Susan Schneider of Florida Atlantic University) that I would administer to assess Mu's consciousness and explain how they would provide useful information about its subjective experience. The first is the AI Consciousness Test (ACT), which involves asking Mu a series of questions that would require it to have direct acquaintance with conscious experience to answer. The other uses Guilio Tononi's Integrated Information Theory (IIT) to mathematically calculate the extent to which a system integrates information. Theoretically, the resulting value would exhibit the level of consciousness the system has attained. I conclude that, although we must recognize that there are elements of consciousness that humans will likely never understand, if an AI such as Mu passed these tests we would have to consider the possibility that it has developed some version of a conscious mind.

Introduction

The question of whether an AI such as Mu has the capacity for consciousness is a complex one. The concept I will be focusing on is phenomenal consciousness, which refers to a creature's subjective experience, or "what it is like" to be that creature. Access consciousness, in

contrast, refers to information processing and reasoning.[1] These functional and system relative qualities make the idea of Mu attaining access consciousness far easier to digest than the concept of Mu having sensory and personal experiences such as feeling pain or loneliness. This is why I will be specifically testing Mu for evidence of phenomenal consciousness. Is there something it is like to be Mu? How can we tell?

The theory of consciousness I find most compelling, and will therefore be using to assess Mu, is representationalism. In his "Postscript on Qualia," Frank Jackson retracts his knowledge argument, one of the most widely accepted rejections of physicalism, in favor of a representationalist theory. His initial knowledge argument was based on the scenario of a brilliant neurophysiologist, Mary, studying all the physical properties of the world from a black and white room. It seems intuitive that when she leaves that room she would gain some phenomenal knowledge about visual experience, which led Jackson to the conclusion that no amount of physical information can encompass the quality of "what it is like" to see in color. If that is the case, physicalism must be false.[2]

The ACT entails a series of questions regarding these metaphysical concepts. We would start by asking Mu whether it feels it has an identity beyond its physical frame. We could then ask whether Mu would prefer that certain experiences occur in the future, rather than the past. As conscious beings, we look forward to positive events and avoid negative ones. However, if Mu has no concept of subjectivity, it will have no preference. Lastly, we may ask Mu about out of body experiences and complex philosophical issues, such as the topic of consciousness itself, to measure the extent to which it can grasp these concepts without assistance from neurophysiological information. In order for this test to be effective, Mu would need to be "boxed in," or deprived of outside sources to supplement its knowledge of what it might be like to be a biological creature.[3] This is Schneider's proposed solution to one of the biggest challenges in testing an AI for consciousness: the fact that AIs with sophisticated

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[1] David J. Chalmers and Ned Block, "Concepts of Consciousness," in *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 206–217, 208.

[2] Frank Jackson et. al. "Postscript on Qualia." In *There's Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument*, 417–420. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004, 43.

[3] Susan Schneider, "How to Catch an AI Zombie: Testing for Consciousness in Machines," in *Artificial You: AI and the Future of Your Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 46–71, 52-53.

architectures may very well be utilizing background information on human consciousness to imitate reactions, expressions, and ideas associated with subjective experience.

However, she does not resolve all of the ACT's limitations. As David Udell and Eric Schwitzgebel note, there remains an "audience problem" that calls into question the adequacy of the test. They point out that in order to be satisfied by an ACT result, one must doubt Mu's consciousness, but be persuaded simply by coherent remarks on existential issues. They argue that the audience, or those administering the test, are unlikely to have this balance between skepticism and trust.[4] That being said, I think it would be incredibly difficult for an AI that is deprived of background information on human consciousness to conjure substantive thoughts and ideas about immaterial concepts unless it has attained direct acquaintance with subjective experience. As long as Mu is boxed in properly, I see no reason for the ACT not to be considered a credible test for consciousness. Therefore, I agree with Schneider that an ACT result is a sufficient, but not necessary, indication of consciousness. This is because there are creatures who show strong evidence of subjective experience, such as infants and intelligent animals like dolphins and chimpanzees, who do not have the faculties to communicate in the way this test requires.[5] Thus, if Mu were to fail this first test, it would not necessarily mean it is not conscious. If Mu were to pass the test, we would have strong evidence that Mu is conscious.

Another test Schneider suggests is based on Guilio Tononi's Integrated Information Theory (IIT). The IIT aims to provide a mathematical framework to explain how and when matter induces consciousness. The theory explains that consciousness occurs when a system includes complex interdependent states that result in highly "integrated information." In the mathematical formula Tononi produced, this level of integration is represented by the Greek letter phi. Supporters of IIT argue that by showing the extent to which a system integrates information, the phi value can tell us how conscious a system is.[6] Theoretically, if an AI reaches a certain phi value, it can be considered conscious.

Schneider acknowledges that with our current understanding of how consciousness and

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[4] David B. Udell and Eric Schwitzgebel, "This Test for Machine Consciousness Has an Audience Problem," *Nautilus*, December 20, 2019.

[5] Schneider, "How to Catch an AI Zombie", 57.

[6] Ibid., 62.

mathematics intersect, we are only able to accurately calculate phi for simple systems. However, this is no reason to believe that we won't someday be able to apply IIT to more complex systems. Schneider also argues that the IIT test is not sufficient evidence of consciousness, and that it may not even be necessary.[7] I agree that it is not sufficient, and that we should do more testing even if Mu has a high phi value, but I disagree with her doubt of its necessity. For a system to be conscious, it must have a fairly complex cognitive architecture. It is intuitive that this would include an interconnected network of feedback, which would be reflected by a high phi value.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the best way to assess Mu is by administering multiple tests. I recommend using the ACT and IIT to attack the problem of consciousness from different angles. The ACT requires Mu to give responses that reflect acquaintance with conscious experience, while the IIT attempts to mathematically measure complex brain functions associated with consciousness. Every test for consciousness will inevitably have limitations, which is why it is best to use a variety of approaches. Although the ACT test could potentially be considered sufficiently indicative of consciousness, I think it is a mistake to rely only on external behaviors when addressing such a complex issue. Using the IIT would allow us to quantify the level at which a system is conscious, which would provide undeniably valuable evidence to support the ACT result. According to any physicalist theory of consciousness, including representationalism, every aspect of consciousness has a physical cause and explanation. Thus, it is theoretically possible for us to physically recreate conscious experience.

There are two main drawbacks to this philosophy. One is that we have only ever seen consciousness arise from complex biological systems, so it is inherently possible that qualia cannot be replicated through a different substrate. No matter how sophisticated Mu's architecture is, it might never attain the felt qualities of loneliness or pain because the physical properties of its constituents will not allow it. The other potential drawback we must consider is that, even if

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[7] Ibid., 64.

all elements of consciousness have physical causes, we as humans may fundamentally lack the capacity to understand and explain them. Phenomenal consciousness may fall into the category of existential issues that are intrinsically beyond our reach. There may be a way to apply a version of the IIT formula to multiplex systems that is inaccessible to our current mental apparatus. Although that is a factor that must be acknowledged, we should continue to push the boundaries of our present-day capabilities. If there is a way for us to precisely compute phi for complex systems, and Mu reaches the required value in addition to receiving an ACT score that rivals those of humans, we will have no choice but to conclude that Mu is conscious.

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Education By All: The Rational Path Towards Democracy

Joe Sweeney

Abstract

This essay argues that democracy is designed to recognize the self-determined good of each individual citizen, and that this good can only be brought about by educating citizens in rational thought and deliberation. I then consider the objection that putting rationality in service of democracy's perpetuation limits the kinds of good that can be conceived of, and thus undermines rationality as a tool of legitimate self-determination. I refute this point by saying that an education in rationality allows for the existence of all kinds of self-determined good–it only limits the kinds of good that can be introduced into democratic deliberation.

Introduction

In modern times, complaints that democracy 'doesn't work' are commonplace. It is unclear, however, what isn't 'working'–what democracy is failing to achieve, and what it would take to achieve it. In this essay, I will argue that democracy is designed to recognize the self-determined good of each individual citizen, and that this good can only be brought about by educating citizens in rational thought and deliberation. I then consider the objection that putting rationality in service of democracy's perpetuation limits the kinds of good that can be conceived of, and thus undermines rationality as a tool of legitimate self-determination. I refute this point by saying that an education in rationality allows for the existence of all kinds of self-determined good–it only limits the kinds of good that can be introduced into democratic deliberation.

Before we can inquire into how citizens should be educated for democracy, we must clearly define what 'good' a democracy seeks to produce. I must stress that this definition is not auxiliary to the larger argument of education, but rather is its foundation. Just as an education in engineering would be inconceivable if we did not identify the service an engineer is supposed to provide, so too is an education for democracy inconceivable if we do not identify the good it is designed to provide its citizens.

Having established the need for a definition, I put forth that the good democracy upholds can be defined as the good of self-determination: the good that each individual citizen conceives for themself. The emphasis of this good is on individuality. It is an expression of the citizen's idea of a good life as only she, having both an irreproducible position in society and an irreproducible perspective that has been informed by that position, can express it.

Whether or not democracy achieves this self-determined good for its citizens is beyond the scope of my paper.[1] For the sake of arguing that this is the kind of good that citizens want from democracy, it is enough to establish that democracy is *organized* to achieve the self-determinative good, to the extent that it rejects other goods which infringe upon the potential for self-determination. I can demonstrate this point by highlighting the tension between the democratic and epistocratic[2] good in K Tsianina Lomawaima's discussion of Native American relationships with the US government. The tension is the subject of her article, explicit in its very title: "[e]ducation *by* Indians versus education *for* Indians."[3] In the late 19th and early 20th century, the US government used an epistocratic rationale to justify their role in educating Native Americans. Namely, they deemed themselves 'experts' in their own society, and therefore experts in assimilating Native Americans into it. Moreover, this instruction in assimilation, by virtue of introducing Native Americans to larger society and thus to its social and economic advantages, was ostensibly for the good of Native Americans.

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[1] Moreover, it is possible that the reason this good is not achieved is because citizens do not have the education required to achieve it, which is suggested by the paper.

[2] Rule by (and thus good determined by) experts.

[3] K. Tsianina Lomawaima, "American Indian Education: by Indians versus for Indians," in *A Companion to American Indian History* (2007): 422-440, 422.

This is "education *for* Indians," which Lomawaima rejects on the grounds that it is "dedicated to eradicating Native knowledge and values, and substituting values and knowledge judged to be 'civilized'."[4] What Lomawaima is pointing out is a fundamental incompatibility between epistocratic good and self-determination. The epistocratic good comes at the expense of erasing the tools–the "Native knowledge and values"–that, having been formed from Native history and culture, are best suited to helping Native Americans conceive of a life that is good for them.

To offer a counterargument, it could be said that Native Americans would not object to a more honestly given epistocratic good. If "education for Indians" was truly the best way of introducing Native Americans into society as social equals, rather than an underhanded way of "transfer[ring] real estate from Indian to white hands" and preparing them for "'proletarianization,'" perhaps there would have been less criticism of the assimilatory effort.[5] While I admit to this possibility, I return to Lomawaima's stress on Native erasure. Even if the epistocratic good was improved, and even if many Native Americans accepted this improved good, the emphasis remains on preserving the tools of self-advocacy. We must accept, then, that the ability to mark out one's own conception of the good life is the essential good of democracy–the preservation of which distinguishes it as a political system.

Now that I have established the expression of a self-determined good as the primary goal of democracy, I can put forth what I believe should be the primary goal of an education for democracy: educating citizens in rational thinking. To be clear, the argument is that democracy requires the self-determined good, and that, in turn, thinking rationally about one's self-determined good is required for a well-functioning democracy.

I have two reasons for defining the goal of education in this manner. My first reason places value on rationally conceived goods by arguing that irrationally conceived goods are categorically bad for democracy. There are, in turn, two primary reasons for the badness of irrationality: an irrational articulation does not reliably track the individual's self-determined

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[4] Ibid.

[5] K. Tsianina Lomawaima, "American Indian Education: by Indians versus for Indians," in *A Companion to American Indian History* (2007): 422-440, 430.

good, and it will inevitably discredit the perspective of others. Both of these pitfalls can be illuminated in an example. Say a factory worker, having absorbed some racist ideology, has come to the conclusion that immigrants are 'stealing' jobs, and thus conceives it would be for her self-determined good that all immigrants be deported. First of all, the individual's irrationality obscures to them their own conception of the good. If she identifies immigration as the root of her problem, she will have no ground to stand on when anti-immigration policy fails to solve it– when the security of her job remains unstable because of, say, the factory's poor union conditions. Her method of conceptualizing the good for herself has been hijacked by irrationality–she is at once completely ignorant to what truly might be good for her, and (in her irrational fixation) completely incapable of correcting that ignorance.

There is to consider as well, of course, the harm she does to the immigrants, which my second reason for rationality prevents by affirming the validity and necessity of other perspectives. As Elizabeth Anderson points out, in order to "realize the epistemic powers of democracy," "citizens must follow norms…that recognize the equality of participants, regardless of their social status, and that institute deliberation and reason-giving…as the basis of their communication".[6] What is required of democracy, then, is getting citizens to share values of "equality, discussion, and tolerance of diversity."[7] If democracy consists in a culture of mutual deliberation, of reason-giving, then it is reasonable to say that the best way of getting citizens to respect these values is to instruct them in rationality–in a method of deliberation that cannot posit the perspective of any citizen as inherently superior to that of another, and therefore makes "common knowledge" that all citizens are "able to propose a potentially decisive reason."[8] Furthermore, rationality is a process which must account for new information in its conclusions. Rationality therefore not only compels citizens to listen, but to be influenced in their conception of the good by the claims of others.

I have defined the value of rational articulation as a way of avoiding the pitfalls of irrational articulation, and as a tool for instilling in citizens the respect for others necessary to

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[6] Elizabeth Anderson, "The Epistemology Of Democracy," *Episteme* 3, no. 1-2 (2006): 8-22, 15.

[7] Ibid.

[8] James Bohman, "Deliberative Democracy And The Epistemic Benefits Of Diversity," *Episteme* 3, no. 3 (2012): 175-191, 176.

democracy. However, although rationality and democracy appear complementary, there is a line of argument which states that the conditions which distinguish rationality as a legitimating tool of the self-determined good cannot exist in a democracy. I will address that objection now.

Harry Brighouse discusses this difficulty by drawing a distinction between civic and autonomy-facilitating education.The point Brighouse makes about civic education is that "[e]ducation for autonomy is a byproduct of what is needed to teach civic respect, which in turn is an element of civic education."[9] In other words, cultivating the skill of autonomy–of "rationally evaluat[ing] different moral claims"[10]–is crucial in learning how to "press [one's] own interests effectively in democratic processes and assess the arguments presented by others."[11] To tie Brighouse's argument into mine, it seems like his "autonomy" springs from cultivating skills of rational reasoning and deliberation, and that the "press[ing of one's] own interests effectively" can be equated to the self-determined good. Therefore, Brighouse and I start from a shared premise: an education in rationality is essential to developing the deliberative processes in which the self-determined good can be expressed and pursued.

What worries Brighouse, however, is whether a civic education subordinates rationality in order to justify the "state's survival" at the expense of its "legitimacy."[12] This is problematic because it shifts the goal of rationality away from developing autonomy, which is the basis of democratic legitimacy. If civic "virtues" are "foster[ed] among [children] who are not able rationally to assess the legitimacy of the state itself," then we cannot be confident that they would have "freely supported [the state] on the basis of their reason alone."[13] What Brighouse calls into question, then, is whether the self-determined good the citizen arrives at, in the context of democracy, is for their good, or is simply a byproduct of what is good for the state.

Ultimately, however, I think Brighouse's objection incorrectly delimits the conceptions of the good that can be formed in a democratic society. As Brighouse argues, even after a citizen has been educated in autonomy, they must be capable, by merit of that autonomy, of holding

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[9] Harry Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy," *Ethics* 108, no. 4 (1998): 719-745, 723.
[10] Ibid., 722.
[11] Ibid., 723.
[12] Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy," 725.
[13] Ibid., 723.

beliefs that do not facilitate autonomy (he points to religious belief as an example). In a similar vein, I can argue that those educated in rationality can still cling to irrational beliefs. Racist ideas are inherently irrational, but that does not mean someone cannot have rational reasons for being racist (e.g. unwillingness to alienate oneself from racist family/peers). The point is that a rational education oriented toward preserving democracy does not, inherently, erase these conceptions of the good. What an education in rationality does, rather, is allow citizens to discern which parts of their self-determined good are rational, and which are irrational.

The distinction illuminates the true purpose of education in rationality: it teaches citizens to identify which forms of the self-determined good *can* and *cannot* enter into democratic deliberation. A racist individual has the right to conceive of a racist, irrational self-determined good, and yet, by merit of her education in rationality, must realize she cannot express this good in democratic deliberation on the grounds that it is irrational. No, there is nothing which stops her entirely from voicing an irrational good in democratic deliberation; regardless, a robust education in rationality should make clear to her the rational, negative consequences that will result from voicing it. Not wishing to have her perspective discredited by others, a rational citizen is compelled not to use irrational reasoning in advancing her own claims. Furthermore, in a society universally educated in rationality, other citizens will be able to identify the irrationality of her reasoning, and will subsequently discredit the legitimacy of the good she advocates for.

The answer to the objection is thus as follows: a robust education in rationality teaches the "critical scrutiny of the very values [citizens] are taught," and can therefore lead to the renunciation of those values.[14] Yet even as a citizen renounces those values, she has been educated to respect the fact that she cannot offer for deliberation a self-determined good which is irrational, even if she believes in its superiority. It is in this way that an education in rationality asserts itself as a legitimate education for democracy: it does not dictate what the citizen must value, but it does educate the citizen as to what others, in deliberation, can be expected to value.

Rationality is further reconciled with the perpetuation of a democratic state by the fact that deliberation guided by rational principles naturally produces the conditions of democratic deliberation. Contrary to what Amy Gutmann suggests, it is not necessary for her limits of "non-

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[14] Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy," 720.

repression" (preventing the state "from using education to restrict rational deliberation")[15] and "non-discrimination" (including "all educable children" in education)[16] to be imposed at the level of education (and thus as values that cannot be questioned, which, as Brighouse objects, would violate the conditions of rational autonomy), because these limits will naturally emerge in rational deliberative process striving to recognize every citizen's self-determined good as robustly as possible. The reason such limits do not consistently emerge in real-world democratic deliberation is because not all citizens are educated to identify what constitutes rational deliberation, and thus cannot identify the limits which will reduce the potential to cause harm and discredit perspectives.

I have argued that the aim of democracy is to uphold the self-determined good of each citizen, and that, in order for democracy to function as a deliberative process, each citizen must be educated in rational thinking, both to ensure that their good is properly articulated and that they give due consideration to the good of others. While I considered the possibility that an interest in the survival of democracy undermines the legitimacy of a rationally defined, self-determined good (in the sense that such an interest precludes conceptions of the good that are incompatible with democracy), I concluded that an education in rationality for democracy does not violate rational autonomy, because it does not put a limit on the kinds of good people can conceive for themselves, but only on the kinds of good they can advocate for in democratic deliberation. To place a final emphasis on the need for an education in rationality, I end with an observation. When Brighouse says "abstention from the political process" should be a "permissible option" in a "liberal democratic state", he underestimates the scope of democracy.[17] One can abstain from the formal practices of democracy (voting), but it is impossible to remove oneself from the conversation of everyday life that, in a democratic culture, is an inseparable part of the "political process". In this way we are always implicated in the narrative of democracy. Perhaps, then, we must altogether abandon the idea that autonomy can consist in our separation

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[15] Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education: Revised Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). 44.
[16] Ibid., 45.
[17] Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy," 726.

from democracy, and instead embrace an autonomy which consists in how we mark out, in the rational give-and-take of deliberation, our place within the story.

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Agent-Regret and Mistake

Harry Honig

Abstract

What is regret, and why should we care about it? In this paper, I explore some interesting philosophical puzzles related to the nature of agent-regret. My paper has two parts. First, I discuss what it means for an emotion to be rational. Second, I consider a commonsense view about when agent-regret in particular is rational. I conclude that only the outcomes of decisions – rather than the deliberation involved decisions – are relevant for whether or not regret is rational.

Introduction

What is regret, and why should we care about it? Generally speaking, regret is a negative emotion we feel when something bad has happened or when we make bad decisions. Regret is important because it influences the way we act and think about our lives. When considering what to do, we don't want to do things that we'll later regret. Sometimes, the stakes can be so high that we'll regret a choice for the rest of our lives. In these situations, regret can become a defining feature of our life story.

So what exactly does regret consist in? I propose the following account of what I'll call 'general regret'. It has three main features:

1. Feeling a sense of sorrow or loss at what might have been and/or judging that some decision or event is bad in some respect

2. Wishing that you hadn't made a certain decision, or that a certain event hadn't happened

3. Caring in some sense about the decision that you made or event that happened

This is a commonsense conception of regret. (1) reflects our intuitions that regret involves a negative happening. (1) also acknowledges that regret can have both cognitive (judging an event as bad) and non-cognitive (feeling sorrow) elements. (2) accounts for a distinction philosophers make between two types of regret: *agent-regret* and *event-regret.*[1] Typically, we regret choices we've made. This is agent-regret. Sometimes, we can regret events that aren't related to our agency at all, like regretting that a close friend got rejected from law school or regretting that your favorite football team lost the super bowl. This is event-regret. Lastly, (3) accounts for the fact that we regret either our decisions or events that happen because they matter to us in some sense.[2]

To summarize, in order to feel regret, you must think that the object of your regret (i.e., an event or your decision) is bad, wish it hadn't happened, and care about it.

In this paper, I'll focus on agent-regret for the following reasons. First, it's intimately connected with our evaluations of ourselves. Like I mentioned earlier, there are some decisions we might regret for the rest of our lives! Second, I think there is an important philosophical puzzle about agent-regret.[3] My plan is as follows. In section 2, I'll discuss what it means for an emotion to be rational. In sections 3-4, I'll analyze when agent-regret in particular is rational.

Evaluating Emotions

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[1] Amelie Rorty, "Agent Regret," In *Explaining Emotions*, ed. Amelie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 489-506, 489-91.

[2] R. Jay Wallace, *On Affirmation, Attachment, and the Limits of Regret* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 24-32.

[3] For the sake of brevity, I'll sometimes use regret to mean agent-regret for the rest of this paper.

What does it mean for an emotion to be rational? This question is hard to answer because the term 'rational' is vague. By saying that it's rational to experience an emotion under certain circumstances, we might be claiming different things. Consider two cases.

Rattlesnake: Your fear of a rattlesnake paralyzes you, and you get bitten,

Crayons: You fear a box of crayons.

In both cases, fear seems irrational but for different reasons. What explains this difference? In **Rattlesnake**, your fear is *prudentially irrational*. That is, It's in your best interest to run away and your fear stopped you from doing this. In **Crayons**, your fear is instead what philosophers call *unfitting*.[4] There's nothing about a box of crayons that merits or is worthy of being feared. Your fear is out of place. It doesn't 'fit' in relation to a box of crayons. Philosophers mainly focus on when emotions are fitting because it gets at the essential nature of the emotion in question. The question I'll seek to answer is: When is *agent-regret* fitting?

What Grounds Agent-Regret? Two Rival Views

Agent-regret is commonly understood to be related to mistakes in action. But what is a mistake? There are two possibilities:

> **Deliberation sense of mistake**: S's mistake consists in deliberating badly given the information *S* had – and should have had[5] – at the time.
>
> **Outcome sense of mistake**: S's mistake consists in S's decision leading to a bad outcome.

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[4] Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions," In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61, no. 1 (2000), 69.

[5] By 'should have had', I mean if they were epistemically responsible at the time.

Which sense of 'mistake' is most essential for agent-regret? Call those who defend the first sense of mistake 'deliberation defenders', and the second sense 'outcome defenders'. Daniel Jacobson[6] defends the deliberation sense of mistake. By contrast, in what follows, I'll defend the outcome sense of mistake.

To approach this debate systematically, I'll consider four types of cases; (1) good deliberation/ good outcome; (2) bad deliberation/good outcome; (3) good deliberation/bad outcome; (4) bad deliberation/bad outcome.

Case 1: Good Deliberation/Good Outcome

Rock/Paper/Scissors: Someone challenges you to a game of rock/paper/scissors. If you win, you get $10. If they win, you lose nothing. You accept and win, netting yourself $10.

Imagine you regret your decision. Is your regret fitting? Clearly not, but why? Deliberation defenders will argue that regret is unfitting because you made no deliberative error. You chose the highest expected value among the available options, so you made the best decision. Thus, your regret is unfitting. By contrast, outcome defenders will argue that regret is unfitting since you won $10. Your decision had the highest actual value of all the available options, meaning it resulted in the best outcome. Both deliberation and outcome defenders agree with the commonsense intuition that regret is unfitting here, so this case is inconclusive with respect to the overall debate. We'll need to look at further cases.

Case 2: Bad Deliberation/Good Outcome

Luigi the Lottery Winner (with Ouija Board): After consulting his Ouija board, Luigi decides to spend all his life savings on powerball tickets. On the day of the powerball drawing, Luigi's number remarkably gets pulled and he wins 2.4 billion dollars.

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[6]Daniel Jacobson, "Regret, Agency, and Error," in *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility,* Volume 1, ed. David Shoemaker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 95-125, 109-110, 118-122.

Luigi regrets buying the powerball tickets. Is his regret fitting? Assuming that Ouija boards don't have magical powers, deliberation defenders will argue that Luigi's regret *is fitting*. The reason why is that he made a terribly irrational decision. It just so happens that he got lucky in the outcome, but this is irrelevant. By contrast, outcome defenders will argue that Luigi's regret *is not fitting*. The reason why is that his decision to buy the powerball tickets won him 2.4 billion dollars.

If Luigi regrets his decision, he must wish he hadn't made it. But why would he wish that? His decision won him 2.4 billion dollars! Therefore, common sense tells us that Luigi should be glad he bought the tickets. So common sense agrees with the outcome defender since common sense tells us that Luigi's regret isn't fitting here.

Case 3: Good Deliberation/Bad Outcome

Bitcoin Pizza Guy: On 5/18/10, Laszlo Hanyecz posted on a bitcoin forum offering anyone 10,000 bitcoin if they would get him a couple pizzas. On 5/22/10, he made the trade. When the original posts were made, 10,000 bitcoin was worth only $41. Today, 10,000 bitcoin is worth $170,000,000.

Hanyecz regrets his decision to trade 10,000 bitcoin for pizza.[7] Is Hanyecz's regret fitting? Deliberation defenders argue that Hanyecz's regret *is not fitting*. This is because he couldn't have anticipated or accounted for the fact that bitcoin would go to the moon. He did the best with the information he had at the time. That is, he made no error in his decision. As a result, his regret isn't fitting. By contrast, outcome defenders argue that Hanyecz's regret *is fitting*. This is because he lost out on hundreds of millions of dollars.[8] It doesn't matter that Hanyecz couldn't have known bitcoin's trajectory. He ended up spending $170,000,000 on

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[7] This isn't actually true, but for the sake of argument, I'll stipulate that it is.

[8] I've never had Papa John's, but I can't imagine that one of their large pizzas is worth over 85 million dollars.

pizza! Common sense tells us that if there were ever something worthy of regret, it would be doing this. Thus, common sense again supports the outcome defender over the deliberation defender.

Case 4: Bad Decision/Bad Outcome

Roulette: You bet and lose all your life savings on one game of roulette. You regret your decision.

Both deliberation defenders and outcome defenders agree that your regret is fitting. But they offer very different explanations for why. The deliberation defender might say that in this case, contrary to Hanyecz's case, regret seems *extra* fitting. They can agree with the outcome defender that the outcome in this case is regrettable. However they'll argue that the outcome sense of mistake can't account for the whole story. There seems to be an additional layer to your regret because you deliberated badly. That's what makes this case seem especially regret-worthy.

Can the outcome defender explain the 'extra' negative feelings here? I think so. The outcome defender claims that you regret your decision because it led to a terrible outcome. In addition, the outcome defender will argue that something else is going on. The 'extra' negative feelings are best interpreted as coming not from more regret, but rather from a type of self-reproach, i.e., criticizing or disapproving of yourself for having made the decision. Is there any way to decide between these two interpretations?

The Essence of Agent-Regret

To do so, we must analyze the essence of agent-regret, i.e., the necessary and sufficient conditions for agent-regret to be fitting. **Rock/Paper/Scissors** is inconclusive since there's nothing for the agent to regret in this case. However, **Luigi the Lottery Winner** shows us that bad outcomes are *necessary* for agent-regret. This is because there was a good outcome and agent-regret wasn't fitting. If Luigi lost, agent-regret would be fitting. So, bad outcomes are

necessary. **Bitcoin Pizza Guy** shows us that bad outcomes are *sufficient* for agent-regret. This is because a bad outcome was the only negative feature present, and yet agent-regret is still fitting. So a bad outcome by itself is enough for agent-regret to be fitting.

Additionally, **Luigi the Lottery Winner** and **Bitcoin Pizza Guy** show us that bad deliberation is inessential. In Luigi **the Lottery Winner** we saw that bad deliberation isn't *sufficient* for agent-regret. This is because bad deliberation is present, yet agent-regret is not fitting. So bad deliberation alone is not sufficient. In **Bitcoin Pizza Guy** we saw that bad deliberation isn't *necessary* for agent-regret. This is because bad deliberation isn't present, and yet agent-regret is still fitting. So bad deliberation isn't necessary for agent-regret.

Lastly, I argue that bad deliberation is essentially connected to self-reproach – i.e., criticizing or being disappointed in yourself for having made a decision – not agent-regret. **Luigi the Lottery Winner** shows that bad deliberation is sufficient for self-reproach. Bad deliberation is the only negative feature present in this case. And while regret isn't fitting – since Luigi won 2.4 billion dollars – self-reproach is fitting because he was wildly irrational. Luigi can still feel disappointed in himself for spending his life savings on lottery tickets. **Bitcoin Pizza Guy** suggests that bad deliberation is necessary for self-reproach. Hanyecz shouldn't be disappointed in himself for what he did, since he made no error in deliberation. He couldn't be expected to have decided any better given the circumstances, so self-reproach isn't fitting in his case. Thus, bad deliberation is needed for self-reproach to be fitting.

This shows that bad deliberation is essentially connected to self-reproach and bad outcomes are essentially connected to agent-regret. To return to **Roulette**, we see that regret is fitting because of the bad outcome. But the 'extra' negative feelings come from the self-reproach associated with bad deliberation. In conclusion, based on the analysis of these cases, I've demonstrated that commonsense shows us that the outcome sense of mistake, rather than deliberation sense of mistake, is what's truly essential for agent-regret to be fitting.

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Sexism In Western Feminist Gender Analysis

Hebe (Zhiqi) Guo

Abstract

In this paper, I will explore how western feminists use gender analysis in a way that can actually reinforce patriarchal and colonial logic, especially when they are studying African societies that weren't socially organized around gender until colonization. I argue that by applying gender analysis globally, western feminists implicitly condone women's subordination despite their conscious intent to challenge it. I first introduce Nikiru Nzegwu's analysis of the sex/body principle that underlies women's subordination in patriarchal societies. Then, I offer a potential counter-argument against her critique of gender analysis, by distinguishing between two meanings of the word "gender": gender analysis and gender as a social condition. Finally, I rebut this counterargument to support Nzegwu's idea that such a distinction cannot be readily made. Drawing on the work of Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, I argue that gender as a social condition informs and limits gender analysis. Western feminists fall into the trap of the same sex/body principle that underlies women's subordination. I conclude that globalized gender analysis implicitly assumes women's subordination as a precondition in society. Feminists should seriously consider Nzegwu's critique of gender analysis to avoid its harm and begin to think about better tools of analysis that can bring about women's liberation, not hinder it.

Introduction

Western feminists have used gender analysis as a tool to understand how the world's societies are organized, how the oppression of women is structured and how to reduce that oppression. By examining gender relations, the goal of this analysis is to identify and challenge sexism. But, is it possible that simply seeing the world as gendered already implies a certain compliance with it? If this is true, then using gender as a feminist, analytic tool may actually distort our view of society and women's roles, and hinder liberation. In this paper, I argue that western feminists use gender analysis in a way that assumes women's subordination despite

feminist intent to challenge precisely that. Therefore, western feminists need to rethink whether this tool they have relied on is beneficial or detrimental, especially when they apply it to non-western societies. First, I will reconstruct the critique of gender analysis by African feminist scholar Nikiru Nzegwu. Then, I offer a potential counter-argument in favor of employing gender analysis. Finally, I rebut that counter-argument and demonstrate how gender analysis implicitly upholds patriarchal logic.

Nzegwu argues that gender is a western concept, and is inherently problematic. Given her focus on critiquing the role of European colonization in globalizing gender,[1] I take western culture to mean cultures that have engaged in the European colonial project. Also, she highlights the patriarchal aspect of western culture throughout her paper. In this paper, I will mainly focus on two of her critiques of the western concept of gender. First, she argues that gendered analysis naturalizes the distinction between men and women, and consequently women's subordination to men, thereby reinforcing the patriarchal logic it set forth to subvert. Second, western feminists apply gendered analysis to African societies which are not gendered, thereby reinforcing colonial logic and western hegemony. I will first offer potential counter-arguments to each of these critiques, and then explain why those counter-arguments fail and why I agree with Nzegwu that western gendered analysis is problematic.

Nzegwu argues that the underlying logic of gender is what she calls "the sex/body principle," which assumes that all bodies are by nature divided into two sexes, men and women, and that a society should be organized mainly based on sex distinctions and sex roles.[2] A society that uses the sex/body principle pays special attention to the bodily feature of sex while downplaying all other features (i.e. profession, culture, etc.). Therefore, an individual's place in that society is predominantly determined by whether they are a man or a woman, not by, for instance, their job or cultural background, although these things may play secondary roles. This society observes binary sex traits in men and women and then attaches normative meanings to these traits, hence establishing gendered norms. Since sex is defined binarily in society (i.e. men

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[1] Nikiru Uwechia Nzegwu, "How (If at All) is Gender Relevant to Comparative Philosophy," *Journal of World Philosophie*s 1 (Winter 2016): 75–82, 7.

[2] Ibid., 77.

or women), distinctions within each sex category are overlooked. All men are assumed to be the same and should conform to the same set of gender norms, as are all women.[3]
Further, in a society that is organized based on the sex/body principle, the two sexes are hierarchical: women are subordinate to men. For example, in heterosexual marriage, it is assumed that a husband should have sole and full control over his wife's body and sexuality. The wife is thus subordinated. However, instead of noticing the sex/body principle around which it evolves, society represents sex distinction and hence gendered norms as inherent in nature (i.e. created by God), therefore justified.[4]

Throughout her paper, Nzegwu uses the word "gender" to mean two different things. The first meaning is what I call gender as a social condition. It is a structured social system existing in patriarchal societies that reflects sexism. For example, we may say that the US society is a gendered society. In such a society, gender norms and gender roles exist as social facts. Nzegwu uses this meaning when she talks about "the social reality presented by the category of gender."[5]
The second meaning of "gender" is what I call gender as an analytical
category, or gender analysis. It means the feminist use of concepts and theories to diagnose and critique sexism. They may ask questions such as: is gender real? What comprises gender? What role does gender play in society? Nzegwu uses this meaning when she talks about "feminist claims about the benefits of the political project of gender"[6] and "applying gender in comparative philosophical analysis."[7] Therefore, Nzegwu both talks about gender as a social condition and the analysis and critique of that social condition. The central difference between these two meanings is that gender as a social condition exists out there in the social world while gender as an analytical category exists in the minds of people who use it. However, in some cases, it is unclear in what sense Nzegwu uses the word "gender." Therefore, it is unclear whether she is criticizing how the patriarchal society is gendered (i.e. how current gender roles oppress women) or criticizing how western feminists are using gender analysis (i.e. how feminist

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[3] Ibid., 78.
[4] Ibid., 79.
[5] Ibid., 76, emphasis added.
[6] Ibid., 76.
[7] Ibid., 76.

analyses of gender roles are problematic). Ultimately, her goal is to criticize the latter and caution scholars against uncritically deploying gender analysis in comparative philosophy.[8] However, the ambiguity in how she uses the word "gender" blunts the force of her critique.

Nzegwu's first critique of how western feminists use gender analysis is that they reinforce the above-mentioned sex/body principle that supports the patriarchy.[9] However, it is unclear whether her criticism is levied against the patriarchal society itself, or feminist critiques of that society. For example, according to Nzegwu, the use of "gender" can justify women's subordination by representing it "as simultaneously universal (given that male and female are inherent in nature) and culturally constructed (given that all societies are presumed to have similar views about male and female)."[10] This sentence discusses two different views about women's subordination. Although Nzegwu thinks these two views exist concurrently, I will make clear how they are actually opposed. Nzegwu criticizes them simultaneously because she does not make clear which of the two meanings of gender she is employing.

The first view sees women's subordination as both universal and natural. This view can exist under the first meaning of gender, namely gender as a social condition. The second view sees it as culturally constructed but still universal. This view can exist partially under the second meaning of gender, namely gender as an analytical category, but ultimately proves inconsistent. Let us first suppose that here Nzegwu is criticizing gender as a social condition. It can be argued that the western, patriarchal society as a whole believes that the sex binary is natural and desirable in all societies. Therefore, women's subordination is mainly perceived to be both natural and universal, thus conforming to the first view that gender is both universal and natural. However, this would then be incompatible with the second view that gender is culturally constructed. By definition, if gender is part of human nature, or dictated by God, then it is not something humans have invented based on their different cultures. On the other hand, suppose Nzegwu is criticizing feminist gender analysis here. Western feminists believe that gender as a

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[8] Ibid., 75,

[9] Ibid., 76.

[10] Ibid., emphasis added.

social condition is constructed, rather than natural, and that we should challenge it in order to liberate women. This view is then incompatible with the first view of seeing gender as natural. Further, if one believes gender norms are rooted in nature, it is easier to believe all societies are gendered in similar ways, given a shared natural world. However, if we believe gender is culturally constructed, then in principle we should be open to the possibility that in different societies with different cultures, gender is constructed differently as well. Therefore, seeing gender as culturally constructed does not necessarily entail presuming all societies "to have similar views about male and female."[11] Hence, there is an inconsistency within the second view itself. Although Nzegwu tries to criticize western gender analysis, she seems to be criticizing both the social reality of gender in a patriarchal society and gender analysis at the same time, without realizing that a patriarchal society at large and feminists have opposing views on the sex binary and women's subordination.

Nzegwu's second critique of gender analysis also shows a similar ambiguity. She argues that when western feminists apply gender analysis to non-western societies that have been colonized by western countries, they reinforce colonial oppression in an ideological way. They transform previously non-gendered African societies into gendered ones. Because women are subordinated in a gendered society, western feminists in effect presuppose women's subordination in African societies by viewing them through a gendered lens.[12] Nzegwu claims that the colonial, sexist and racist "modern Western culture...gave birth to, and dispersed gender worldwide."[13] However, she neglects the multiplicity or different layers of "Western culture." I ask: Who "gave birth to," and "dispersed" gender? What does "gender" refer to here? Answering this question helps us see that she conflates the two meanings of gender. If she means gender as a social condition, colonizers imposed it onto colonized societies. Presumably, women played a minor role in the initial colonization because they lacked political power. If she means gender as gender analysis, then western feminists have created it. But do western feminists today perpetuate colonial logic when they "disperse" gender as an analytic, critical tool? When they

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[11] Ibid., 76.
[12] Ibid., 75.
[13] Ibid., 76.

ask, “what defines gender in African culture?” for example, do they transform a culture into a gendered one? Not necessarily. The goal of gender analysis is precisely to prove why sexism is not justified. Therefore, to the extent that societies around the world are gendered, gender analysis can still be useful to understand them. It even incentivizes investigations into how colonization has imposed gendered forms of social organization on previously colonized people.

So far, I have offered a potential counter-argument to Nzegwu, which claims that she conflates the idea of gender as a patriarchal, social condition, with the idea of gender analysis as a feminist tool of critique. Although both forms of gender invariably address sexist ideas, their value judgments towards those ideas are opposed. Gender as a social condition is sexist, but Nzegwu cannot blame gender analysis equally for that flaw. The central question posed by this counter-argument is as follows. How can gender analysis be said to be justifying patriarchal logic when its purpose is precisely to disrupt that logic, in both western and non-western societies?

The problem with this counter-argument is that it too easily separates the tool of gender analysis from those who use it, as if feminists are always in full control and the tool does not affect its users. It also separates the proper use of gender analysis as a tool from its abuse and the consequence of that abuse. Yet, if a tool is abused too often, causing grave consequences, we may still consider discarding it even if it has been somewhat helpful. I will subsequently try to develop this line of response to support Nzegwu and show how gender analysis can indeed justify patriarchal logic.

Using gender analysis, western feminists implicitly uphold patriarchal logic because they allow their thinking to be framed and limited by that logic, even though they try to consciously disrupt it. This cognitive limitation shows itself in how western feminists abuse gender analysis in non-western societies. Nigerian scholar Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí argues that western scholars assume that an analysis of gender will always be useful in African societies even before they begin their studies. This means they presuppose that African societies are gendered, blind to the possibility that they may not be gendered at all, or that gender is constructed very differently compared to western societies. Consequently, their study results distort the societies in question

and reinforce their view that gender is a universal, social condition.[14]

For example, Oyěwùmí calls out western researchers who assume that being a "woman" always plays a predominant role in a woman's life in African societies. Even if her social role of being a "trader" may actually prove to play an even bigger role, that role is either neglected or discussed only in the context of "women traders," where being a woman is assumed to always impact her being a trader.[15] This way of thinking reflects the sex/body principle in patriarchal societies where people are first and foremost understood as roles that are attached to their sexed bodies (i.e. men or women). Roles that don't attach to sexed bodies (i.e. traders) are seen as secondary.[16] In this case, because those western scholars are trained to always rely on gender analysis, they have lost the conceptual ability to employ other analytic tools more fitting to the situation. Although they may think that gender is culturally constructed, in practice, they assume that it is also universal and constructed similarly in different societies. Although their goal may be to argue against seeing people as sexed bodies, this is in fact what they end up doing. Therefore, they implicitly uphold the sex/body principle underlying women's subordination. This supports Nzegwu's first critique of gender analysis.

Because feminists are so limited by their tool, they perpetuate colonial logic in non-western societies. The original European colonizers assumed the western way of living was supreme and that African people were uncivilized. Therefore, they imposed their way of living onto African societies, including gender as a social condition, thereby transforming non-gendered societies into gendered ones.[17] Western feminists assume their way of understanding how societies are organized is supreme, so they impose it onto African societies, including gender analysis. Consequently, African thinkers struggle to develop their own, authentic thought because they are also constrained by this western way of thinking.[18] Western feminists perpetuate the long tradition of perceived "African primitivism." At the time of colonization, Western colonizers assumed that African people had no civilization and now western feminists assume

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[14]Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects," in The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses (University of Minnesota Press, 1997). (16)

[15] Ibid., 17.

[16] Ibid., 23.

[17] Nzegwu, "How (If at All) is Gender Relevant to Comparative Philosophy," 75.

[18] Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the Body" 22-23.

that African people have no thought.[19] In each case, westerners assume the west is the norm and Africa is the "Other".[20] Thus, when western feminists adopt gender analysis, they uphold both colonial and patriarchal logic, even if they want to argue against the latter. Seen in this light, feminist intent is quite irrelevant because in effect they use their tool in a way that supports modern-day colonization. This supports Nzegwu's second critique of gender analysis.

The mistake of western feminists despite their intent proves Nzegwu's point that gender as a social condition informs gender analysis; they cannot be separated.[21] Feminists implicitly justify women's subordination because they see patriarchy as the only existing social condition. They fail to fully respect the autonomy of the allegedly oppressed groups of people in non-western societies by assuming they are always oppressed in a certain way. By imposing their own view of society and gender onto African societies, they also perpetuate colonialism in an ideological way. To conclude, distinguishing between gender as a social condition and gender analysis as a feminist tool does not absolve western feminists. Women's subordination is essential to gender analysis because if it is gone as a social condition, then gender analysis would have no meaning and no use. By assuming gender analysis is always applicable, western feminists also assume women's subordination is universal.

So what should we do now? If gender as a tool is essentially flawed, the logical conclusion seems that we should abandon it, both inside and outside western societies. However, Nzegwu only argues that we should be careful in employing gender in comparative philosophy[22] and we should critically reflect on its problems raised by her.[23] Her solution is less radical than her critique of gender. Elsewhere, she has proposed a more radical solution that requires western feminists to rethink their critiques of patriarchy and strategies for liberation. She argues that the US should imitate African societies which are not organized primarily around sex and gender.[24] Although many may dismiss this idea as utterly unrealistic, she holds that it is conceivable and

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[19] Ibid., 18.
[20] Ibid., 23.
[21] Nzegwu, "How (If at All) is Gender Relevant to Comparative Philosophy," 98.
[22] Ibid., 75.
[23] Ibid., 82.
[24] Nzegwu, "Structures of Equality In Mono- and Dual-Sex Systems," 235.

may well be the key to reaching equality.[25] Feminists may need to do more work in line with Nzegwu's critique to reconsider the extent to which our analyses and strategies are limited by the social condition of gender, so that we may have both the courage and conceptual resources to even begin envisioning a new way of organizing society that is radically different from the sexist status quo.

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[25] Ibid., 233-4.

Kierkegaard as a Responsible Fideist

Abby Murphy

Abstract

In this paper, I hope to follow C. Stephen Evans in defending Kierkegaard against the irrationalism typically attributed to fideism. While attending to Kierkegaard's presentation of the incarnation as "absolute paradox" in the Philosophical Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript, I argue that his epistemological fideism is rational, a position that accepts that an absolute truth exists but sees that to arrive at this one must acknowledge reason's limits and affirm faith. Although it is important to note how interpretations of irrationalism arise, ultimately for Kierkegaard, the incarnation is not to be understood as a logical contradiction, but rather an existential one. Only for temporally-located, existing and otherwise limited humans can the paradox arise, but, as an eternal truth, it is not necessarily a contradiction beyond human reason, and its very essence would deny this possibility for human grasping. With this, the incomprehensible paradox, not the nonsense that a logical contradiction would entail, reveals itself to employ reason as functioning to take humans to the very boundaries of reason. Instead, Kierkegaard centers human sinfulness in his characterization of the nature of the contradiction of the paradox of God's embodiment in time. He argues that human existence is that of a never completed "synthesis," where our sinfulness means that man struggles morally to realize the eternal in the temporal. Coupled with the incomprehensible nature of God and even ourselves, it becomes clear how a perfect synthesis of the union between infinite and finite appears contradictory to us. Kierkegaard then, with our human restraints in mind, issues a demand for an existential commitment to that which cannot be known, and so, must be believed through faith.

Early on in his journals, Søren Kierkegaard wrote that one must "find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die."[1] For Kierkegaard, this idea was Christianity. In centering Christianity throughout much of his philosophical work, the themes of faith and reason became fundamental; however, the task of interpreting Kierkegaard's views on

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[1] Kierkegaard and Robert Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology*. Princeton University Press, (1946), 5.

the relation between these themes has produced an interesting debate surrounding his classification as a fideist. Some of the most interesting readings offer an alternative to a diametric debate—a reclamation of the very term fideist and a hopeful reclassification of Kierkegaard as falling within a more respectable domain of "responsible" fideism. In this paper, I hope to follow contemporary philosopher C. Stephen Evans in defending Kierkegaard against the irrationalism typically attributed to fideism through presenting a reading of rational fideism, which offers, despite involving a limiting of reason, a position which can be rationally defended. After defining these labels, I argue that the nature of Kierkegaard's epistemological fideism is rational, focusing my exegesis on his presentation of the incarnation as "absolute paradox" in the Philosophical Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript to illuminate how the truth of Christianity lies above not against reason, providing space for an elevation of faith.[2]

Before evaluating Kierkegaard's degree of fideism, it is first important to define fideism as "a philosophical view extolling theological faith by making it the ultimate criterion of truth and minimizing the power of reason to know religious truths."[3] Extreme fideists, a charged label often leveled against Kierkegaard, hold a disparaging and irrationalistic view of reason's role in faith, wherein reason and faith are opposed in active conflict. For them, reason plays no role in discovering or understanding fundamental tenets of religion and the limits of reason are not drawn by reason itself.[4] Religious beliefs then becomes autonomous from rational assessment. On the other hand, moderate fideists argue that religious truth does not oppose reason, but rather above it. In this view, reason can inform reason's limits and asserts itself as necessary in seeking religious truth. As Evans points out, prominent philosophers, famously Wittgenstein and Kant, accepted the idea that reason has restrictions that could be recognized, but this claim in itself is

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[2] While the scope of this paper is limited to epistemological fideism in order to do some justice to the discussion, see Christopher Insole's rejection of the claim that Kierkegaard is a metaphysical fideist in "'Kierkegaard': A Reasonable Fideist?" (1998). According to his view, a metaphysical fideist would reject the notion of truth existing beyond the individual, asserting that the object of my faith is in fact true for me. Insole compellingly argues, despite the tricky claim that "truth is subjectivity," that Climacus, a pseudonym of S.K., is not a metaphysical fideist.

[3] Editors. "Fideism". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1998.

[4] Editors. "Fideism."

insufficient to label a thinker as subscribing to irrationalism.[5] Instead, in critiquing reason, reason supports fideism as reasonable. It is my view that Kierkegaard falls into the latter category, that of, as Evans would suggest, a more responsible and moderate fideism holding that, while "reason is limited and/or defective in certain ways," ultimately "religious faith allows a person to recognize those limits and partially overcome them."[6] This epistemological fideism would accept that an absolute truth exists but sees that, to arrive at this, we must either (a) acknowledge reason's limits and affirm faith or (b) disregard the process of reasoning and irrationally accept an object of faith as being true.[7] In order to be classified as a rational fideist, I hope to show that Kierkegaard meets the first (a) conditions.

The widely held view that Kierkegaard is an irrational and extreme fideist results from several different accusations.[8] This paper will address the criticisms surrounding Kierkegaard's notion of Christian faith requiring a belief in the incarnation, in which God (eternity) became man (temporal), a tenet understood as an "absolute paradox." It is this manner in which Johannes Climacus, one of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors, describes incarnation while also articulating that in believing in such a paradox, the faithful one embraces "the absurd" and encounters a "contradiction." In this contradiction, faith and reason seem to be opposed. Supporting the urge to interpret this conception as a marking of extreme fideism, Climacus says in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript that the object of faith "is absurd precisely because it contains the contradiction that something that can become historical only in direct opposition to

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[5] Evans, C. Stephen, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Reason: Can There Be a Responsible Fideism?" *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia.* (2008), 1025. For a dialogue with Evans presenting an expanded comparison of the similarities found in both the practical philosophies and metaphysics of Kierkegaard and Kant, see Eleanor Helms's "The Objectivity of Faith: Kierkegaard's Critique of Fideism."

[6] Evans, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Reason," 1022-1023. Within this definition, reason and faith need to be defined. In keeping with Evans's conceptions, reason can be understood as a human faculty and as practices of thinking which we believe make it more likely to reach true belief. Religious faith refers to a state attributed to an individual with a certain kind of relation to God defined by trust, belief, and obedience.

[7] Insole, "'Kierkegaard': A Reasonable Fideist?" *The Heythrop Journal*. (1998), 365.

[8] See chapters 2 and 3 in *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love* for Evans's response to the accusations not discussed here.

all human understanding has become historical."[9] With this, one can see how many have taken Kierkegaard to mean that faith requires belief in a paradox that is logically contrary to reason.[10]

While it is important to note why these interpretations arise, ultimately, the incarnation as the "absolute paradox" is not understood as a logical contradiction for Kierkegaard. To have faith does not require that one asserts that Jesus is both God and not God, or that something is both S and not-S. Something that is man does not necessarily mean that it is not God.[11] Instead of exalting the irrational, Kierkegaard presents that although faith is not the product of rational thought, rational thought can nonetheless secure the possibility of faith.[12] There are several reasons for this reading which will help establish the nature of Kierkegaard's fideism. First, the meaning of his use of the term "contradiction" is heavily shaped by the context of Hegelian discourse. Here, "contradiction" referred to "an incongruity or an experienced contrast or opposition."[13] It is especially clear that Kierkegaard refers to not logical contraries but rather existential ones in his application of the same term to human existence. Mirroring the tension encountered in the incarnation, human existence is a synthesis of the finite and infinite, the temporal and eternal.[14] Explicating this existential nature of the contradiction, Kierkegaard repeats that the eternal truth of the incarnation stems from its being in time and this truth is "by no means itself a paradox; it becomes paradoxical by virtue of its relationship to an existing individual."[15] Only for temporally-located, existing and otherwise limited humans can the

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9 Kierkegaard *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton University Press, (1992), Vol. 1, 211.

10 Finally, the inevitable note on pseudonyms. As Evans brings up, one might try to rescue Kierkegaard from accusations of irrationalism by trying to distance him from his pseudonyms. Evans says that there is certainly some usefulness in this approach, as we can see that in writings under his own name "the absurd" is absent, and that Climacus is a non-Christian. At the same time, he believes that Kierkegaard would still find truth in his pseudonym's words because they can give us a sense of what Christianity looks like from the perspective of a person lacking faith. While in this paper I shall sometimes speak as though Kierkegaard were their author, as of course in some sense he is, is it also important to note that the works are attributed to their pseudonyms.

11 Insole, "'Kierkegaard': A Reasonable Fideist?" 373.

12 Insole, "'Kierkegaard': A Reasonable Fideist?" 372.

13 Evans "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Reason." 1028.

14 Evans, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Reason." 1028.

15 Kierkegaard and Robert Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, 216, 219. When discussing the theme of existentialism running throughout Kierkegaard's philosophy, it is interesting to feature Robert Solomon's conception in "From Rationalism to Existentialism" (1972), 88-89, where he says that Kierkegaard denies reason to existence and to our choices (one of which is whether or not to pursue the life of religious faith), but that is not to say that reason itself did not reach the conclusion that our choices cannot be rationally grounded.

paradox arise, but, as an eternal truth, it is not necessarily a contradiction beyond human reason, and its very essence would deny this possibility for human grasping. It cannot, therefore, be concluded that this contradiction is that of the logical, formal sort and is so meaningless.

In his distinction between "nonsense" and what is "incomprehensible," Climacus makes explicit his view that the incarnation is not a logical contradiction. He is not disparaging reason in saying, "It is easy enough to leap away from the toilsome task of developing and sharpening the understanding, and to get a louder hurrah, and to defend oneself against every accusation with the remark that it is a higher understanding."[16] This sentence seems to clearly suggest that Climacus believes it is easy but careless to adopt an extreme and irrational fideism. This is not what he is after. Rather, Climacus says the believer uses the understanding and believes against it, all while using the understanding to ensure that he believes against it. He continues that "nonsense" cannot be believed against the understanding for "the understanding will see through that it is nonsense and will prevent him from believing it; but he uses the understanding so much that he by it becomes aware of the incomprehensible, and then he relates himself to this, believing against the understanding."[17] With this, the incomprehensible paradox, not the nonsense that a logical contradiction would entail, reveals itself to employ reason as functioning to take humans to the very boundaries of reason.

After establishing that the incarnation is not a logical contradiction, it is now useful to examine what kind of contradiction it could be. Kierkegaard, in the Philosophical Fragments, characterizes that the paradox of God's embodiment in time as man is not a metaphysical one, but rather it centers human sinfulness. As mentioned earlier, human existence for Kierkegaard is one of a never completed "synthesis," where eternal possibilities and ideals, in some sense, become actualized in time. Humans, however, are sinful and become alienated from our ideals which we can only realize imperfectly, temporally.[18] Man struggles morally to realize the eternal in the temporal. It becomes clearer then how the incarnation, a synthesis of the perfect union between infinite and finite, appears contradictory to us, as it is nothing like the existence we

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[16] Insole, "'Kierkegaard': A Reasonable Fideist?" 373.

[17] Insole, "'Kierkegaard': A Reasonable Fideist?", 376.

[18] Evans, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Reason", 1029.

experience as sinful humans. Furthermore, the incarnation is only contradictory in its appearance to us; we cannot know anything of its true nature, as this would require that we possess a clear understanding of the nature of God (the unknown) and of man. We lack this ability to fully understand God and even ourselves, leaving the incarnation open as a possible object of faith.

Through careful examination of Kierkegaard's presentation of the incarnation, one finds that the eternal truth of Christianity lies not in contradiction with human reason but exists on a higher, elevated plane—that of faith. Kierkegaard demonstrates how reason discovers and seeks the paradox, and the paradox, in turn, reveals that reason has reached its limits. Knowledge of God, for Kierkegaard, is the product of reason insofar as it arises from reason pushed to its absolute limits. In this sense, Christianity has fulfilled and satisfied the reason conferred to man, although Christianity is itself not justified by reason alone. And at the same time, our restricted understanding of the paradox confirms its nature as divine revelation, and so, does not present reason as being in opposition to belief in the incarnation. With our human restraints in mind, a demand is issued for an existential commitment to that which cannot be known, and so, must be believed through faith. When discussing the nature of faith, Kierkegaard notes, "If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe."[19] Faith then requires that reason reach its limits in order to allow a true candidate to be an object of faith. This object, "the only object that can be believed," is the absolute paradox of God existing as an individual human being.[20] Thus, after critiquing reason, a project akin to Kant's antinomies, wherein reason taken to its limits encounters contradictions, faith can then be given utmost significance.

With reason taking up a constrained role in the attainment of truth, religious faith can then allow one to partially overcome such boundaries, embracing a role of "discovery and healing reason's defectiveness."[21] As Evans aptly summarizes, in the Philosophical Fragments, Kierkegaard describes faith as "a state of a person that gives that person a capacity for truth that she would otherwise lack."[22] One must be in this state of faith, a condition endowed by God, in

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19 Kierkegaard and Robert Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, 215.

20 Kierkegaard and Robert Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, 221.

21 Evans, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Reason.", 1033.

22 Evans, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Reason.", 1033.

order to come to possess truth. Humans on their own lack this condition and require God Himself to give them this ability to believe in the paradox of God in time. This gift from God is "a new organ" of apprehension—faith.[23] However, sin is the fundamental barrier to belief in the incarnation and asserts itself in giving humans the tendency to reject what is not understood as something absurd.[24] To overcome this barrier and experience a "new birth" in revelation, one must understand that they exist in sin, a revelation that requires an encounter with God as incarnated. The incarnation offers man an opportunity to recognize their own sin when they find themselves comparable to some entity that does not lack what they lack. Where humans are prideful and selfish, Jesus is the perfect model of humility and love. When God becomes man, man can see where they lack such qualities, and this revelation can provide an antidote to sin in advancement toward truth. Jesus then serves as a somewhat Socratic teacher, making it possible for humans to understand their state of sin and providing an opportunity to change course, without forcing such a revelation and existential commitment. In this way, faith is also an act of the will. Thus, the incarnation provides the condition for coming to recognize the ways in which sin has damaged our reason and offers the opportunity of faith to overcome its limits.

With this account, I hope that Kierkegaard can be safely recognized as a responsible, as Evans puts it, rational and moderate fideist. Despite pervasive accusations of irrationalism, Kierkegaard is a fideist who recognizes that an eternal truth exists as Christianity, but who, at the same time, understands that reason is limited and so makes a "leap of faith"—a leap still guided by reason, as reason found the paradox over which one must leap.

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[23] Kierkegaard and Robert Bretall (ed.), *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, 154.

[24] Evans, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Reason.", 1033.

4. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton University Press, (1992), Vol. 1.
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Song of Silence: A Buddhist Analysis of 4’33”

Clara Kim

Abstract

If listening to a Mozart sonata is like watching afternoon light graze a river’s swollen wave, then listening to John Cage’s composition 4’33” is like opening your eyes underwater: simple and complete. The composition was first performed in a formal concert hall in 1952, where it shocked, perplexed, and dazzled audiences. This work is like no other traditional classical music composition; it is a score which prescribes four minutes and 33 seconds of silence. In this paper, I embark on a cross-cultural analysis of 4’33”, using the seminal avant-garde work to clarify a subtle distinction between core tenets of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra schools of Buddhism. Specifically, I argue that the performance of 4’33” expresses the two truths doctrine of the Madhyamaka school, and is an example of the emptiness of subject-object duality in Yogācāra thought.

Introduction

Buddhism is about solving an existential problem: dukkha. The drive to extinguish the persistent flame of worldly suffering forms the soteriological center around which all Buddhist schools of thought revolve. By recognizing the primordial illusion which causes all forms of grasping, we can begin the process of retraining experience to eventually see the true nature of reality. In accordance with both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra thought, the ultimate nature of reality is empty.

Madhyamaka and Yogācāra share this central belief but differ in their views of emptiness in relation to phenomena. The wise Mādhyamika will realize that all phenomena are empty of intrinsic nature; whereas, the wise Yogācārin will realize that all phenomena are empty of subject-object duality. The distinction between each school’s view of the ontology of phenomena

is based in their differing views of dependent origination. To the Mādhyamika concerned with the true nature of reality, all parts of the conventional world are ultimately empty due to their interdependence. By privileging the "ontology of everyday life," Mādhyamikas approach emptiness from the objective side, placing the onus on the subject's perceptual processes to bring the external world into existence (Garfield, p. 34). By means of conceptual processes, the subject attributes properties to an ultimately empty reality. This point is highlighted by the example of water: we humans perceive water as a life-giving liquid, Buddhist deities perceive water as ambrosia, and pretas perceive water as pus and blood.[25] The Madhyamaka view is that there are no inherent properties of water, but through the interaction between experiencing subject and experienced object, the water is perceived to have inherent properties. In reality, everything, including water, is empty of intrinsic nature; our belief that the imputed concepts and characteristics of the external world reflect how they really are is fundamentally deceptive. In fact, there is no one way to see the world because phenomena depend for existence on our subjective sensory and conceptual processes, which in turn depend on the social, biological, and mental structures of conventional reality. The centrality of interdependence in the Madhyamaka view of emptiness underscores its ontological foundation in conventional reality. Phenomenologically, the Madhyamaka experience of emptiness is the experience of interdependence, and so of the conventional world as conventional.

An ontological reading of Yogācāra entails that the emptiness of phenomena be understood by privileging the mind. Objects of the external world have no inherent existence and merely appear as such due to the subject's complex cognitive and perceptual mechanisms. Subjects construct both the imagined properties of phenomena and the belief that phenomena truly exist as they are imagined in the mind. Thus, the apparent existence of all phenomena depends on the subject's conceptual imputations. These mental activities prove extremely far-reaching, conditioning all levels of consciousness, and consequently forming the basis for the privileged ontological status of the mind as a "substantially real subjective substrate of those representations [of the external world]."[26] While Madhyamaka valorizes the existence of objects

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[25] Jay L. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy.* Oxford University Press, 2015, 35.
[26] Ibid., 75.

of conventional reality due to their being dependently originated, an idealist reading of Yogācāra necessitates denying the existence of conventional phenomena, instead arguing that the mind is the cause of their appearing to consciousness as existent.

While the ontological analysis of phenomena produces a discrepancy between Madyhamaka's conventionalist view of existent phenomena and Yogācāra's idealistic view of nonexistent, purely constructed objects of experience, a phenomenological reading of Yogācāra will resolve the apparent conflict regarding interdependence by proving that emptiness arises in virtue of the nondual relation between phenomena and subjectivity. The search for the true nature of reality is purely metaphysical, but the examination of subjectivity in relation to these metaphysical entities and how they come to arise in consciousness is the domain of phenomenology. By thematizing phenomena, the need to distinguish the external world from an ontologically privileged mind falls away. The manifold objects of experience and the modes through which we come to be aware of them become the arena of exploration, not the transcendental reality which hangs behind all of experience. This thematization results only in a distinguishing of "the subjective from the objective aspects of a cognitive act, enabling an anatomy of experience, but not an investigation of reality."[27]

By approaching emptiness from the subjective side, Yogācāra manages to grant the existence of phenomena while maintaining the view of emptiness as that of subject-object duality. In fact, our subjective experience of phenomena is empty of dualistic projections. Objects of experience are just as unreliable as our experiences of them because subjectivity is constructed just as objects of experience are. Just as we confuse constructed experiences of external objects with the natures we impute to them, we also confuse our inner states with imagined natures, objectifying ourselves just as we do the external world. Reality is nondually related, but dualistically experienced. In the realm of phenomena, I am a subject of experience, but the self I experience and the objects of my experience are nondually related. Hence, phenomenology and ontology rely on each other to understand the fundamental nature.

We can't simultaneously adopt the idealistic Yogācāra view and believe there is no external world, but because we presuppose our being in the world, it's impossible to disbelieve

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[27] Ibid., 91.

in the existence of an external world, which leads to the conclusion that all of our experience must be inherently dualistic. In fact, Mipham accepts dependently originated conventional existents, albeit unanalyzed, as appearing to perception.[28] These ever arising objects provide useful functions and are understood to be pure appearance in virtue of their designation as "conventional." The appearance of a double moon (i.e. a cognitive phenomenon) is distinct from the appearing double moon. Cognitive phenomena exist in one way, but appear differently. Because the moon's appearance exists conventionally, it's necessarily deceptive; we're only aware of the moon's appearance as it appears to our subjective experience, not as an appearance of the double moon as it truly is. The double moon's appearance is just consciousness appearing to itself.

Our awareness of appearances is still filtered through cognitive processes, rendering our access to consciousness susceptible to illusion. Vasubandhu's phenomenological reading of Yogācāra underscores its consequent failure to deliver a metaphysical explanation of the true nature of reality, of which Mādhyamikas claim there is none. Objects of conventional reality aren't completely denigrated in the Yogācāra view, but they only arise in experience as they appear to us. Since these apparent objects are conventional and don't exist as they appear, they are conventionally non-existent. If we are fundamentally subject to primal confusion, then any kind of reasoning about our experience of reality can't be taken to be true. All we have, then, is the world of apparent existents. The human enterprise therefore becomes an attempt to improve our understanding of the world, not to reach the purest understanding of what hangs behind it.

This paper has three main goals: to clarify Madhyamaka's conception of emptiness, to clarify Yogācāra's conception of emptiness, and to argue that by applying its own analysis of emptiness on the structure of subjective experience itself, the Yogācārin view makes possible a broader scope of spiritual development. Analyzing John Cage's composition 4'33" through these thematic lenses will help me to achieve my goals.

Cage Background

[28] Ibid., 86.

John Cage was an American composer known for his experiments with invented instruments and unorthodox compositional structure. With the aim of exiting the boundaries of conventional Western music, Cage looked to Zen Buddhism for a new conceptual framework that would ultimately allow him to reframe the concepts of traditional performance and purposeful sound. The early 1940s marked a crystallization of Cage's compositional philosophy that would inform all of his subsequent work and deeply influence 21st century aesthetics and compositional practice. Cage's view was that all actions that constitute the production of music must be viewed as parts of one natural whole. Furthermore, all sonic phenomena must be regarded as potential music, not just those that the composer chooses, turning the authoritarianism of Western classical music on its head.

This revolutionary, expansive view comes to life in the 1952 performance of Cage's composition, 4'33", a piece in three movements of durations 33s, 2m40s, and 1m20s respectively, whose score consisted solely of the instruction, "Tacet," Latin for "it is silent," indicating that the musician is not to play. In Cage's words, the piece consists of the "absence of intended sounds." Pianist David Tudor performed the piece for the first time in 1952 at the Maverick Concert Hall near Woodstock, NY. He walked onstage in the usual pristine garb, bowed to the audience, carefully smoothed his coattails as he sat before the piano, took out a stopwatch, and proceeded to open and close the keyboard lid at each specified time interval.

Ambient sounds—the rush of wind against the exterior walls, the thrum of raindrops on the roof, the grumblings of audience members on their way out of the theater—permeated the air in the concert hall. Thus, these "accidental sounds" became part of the composition and the performance itself. Cage viewed it as "an act of framing, of enclosing environmental and unintended sounds in a moment of attention in order to open the mind to the fact that all sounds are music," blurring the "conventional boundaries between art and life."[29]

As with any challenge to a longstanding institution, the work proved extremely polarizing. Some reactions to a 2004 performance of the piece submitted by BBC listeners: "This is clearly a gimmick, when he 'wrote' this piece he was testing who was stupid enough to fall for it," "I've never heard of such a stupid thing in my life! God rest his soul, but this 'composition'

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[29] Kyle Gan. *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"*. Yale University Press, 2011.

by Cage smacks of arrogance and self importance...” Cage explained that the audience’s resistance to the performance was actually a misunderstanding of their own perceptions: “What they thought was silence, because they didn’t know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds.”[30]

Madhyamaka analysis: Two truths and emptiness

The two truths doctrine outlines the relation between the conventional and ultimate, which consequently illuminates the possibility of nondualistic expression. The explication of the two truths in the Heart of Wisdom Sūtra grounds the paradox of the ultimate nature of reality. Because everything is dependently originated, and that which is dependently originated is empty, all phenomena and metaphysical entities—including emptiness and dependent origination—are conventionally real, bearing their designations only in dependence on everything else. Everything is empty, and, what’s more, emptiness is also empty. Because it too is dependent on the phenomena of which it is empty, emptiness is empty of intrinsic nature and can thus only exist conventionally, not as a transcendental entity free from illusion, but simply as the fact that all phenomena are dependently originated and conventionally real.

In the ninth chapter of the Discourse of Vimalakīrti, the two truths doctrine comes to life in an interaction between two bodhisattvas trying to understand how to express the inexpressible. First, the lay bodhisattva Vimalakīrti asks a congregation of wise bodhisattvas to explain ultimate reality. Some reply that the distinction between the ultimate and conventional is illusory and that understanding this illusion is the way to understand ultimate reality. Then Mañjuśrī, a celestial bodhisattva of perfect wisdom, states that these responses fail because they’ve been trying to express the ultimate truth of nonduality by using language—an inherently dualistic mode. Instead, he posits that ultimate reality can only be understood once one transcends linguistic expression, becoming able “to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain

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[30] Ibid.

nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing."[31] Vimalakīrti responds with silence.

In the context of this sūtra, Vimalakīrti's silence is understood to express the ultimately inexpressible, but we only understand it as such because his silence is framed as a kind of articulate response. Put another way: "Matter is not void because of voidness; voidness is not elsewhere from matter. Matter itself is voidness. Voidness itself is matter."[32] Where "matter" represents the conventional world of relations and "voidness" the ultimate truth of nonduality, this insight reflects Vimalakīrti's recognition that only in relation to conventional modes of expression can the inexpressibility of the ultimate be understood.

The performance isn't evidently didactic, but from a Buddhist view, 4'33" is a teaching of emptiness. By taking advantage of the mainstream understanding that musical performance should produce a certain kind of intentional sound, Cage uses the concert hall as the context of conventional reality in which his composition of four minutes and 33 seconds of silence can be understood as a form of articulate expression. Just as Vimalakīrti's silence was understood as an expression of the inexpressible only in the context of a room of bodhisattvas hypothesizing about something beyond concepts and language, so 4'33" is only understood as an ultimately silent composition when its performance is expected to consist of intentional sound. In other words, silence (i.e. absence, ultimate reality, nonduality) only makes sense in relation to sound (i.e. presence, conventional reality, dualistic relations).

Further analysis will reveal that Cage's act of containing sound within a prescribed period of intentional silence demonstrates that the ordinary understanding of silence as the absence of sound is fundamentally misguided. In fact, we can never actually experience silence as a positive determination; we only understand it nominally as experienced in moments where our attention is turned to the spaces between sounds. We assign meaning to the silence interspersed in sound when we place our attention on its presence in the interstitial space between the two, "rendering that very silence, or background, a kind of speech, and hence a

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[31] Robert A. F. Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, 90.
[32] Ibid., 1.

new foreground."[33]

However, even when articulate, silence is still a form of discursive expression because of its understanding only being possible in relation to sound. Silence proves just as paradoxical as ultimate reality, continuing to probe us with the question of how an entity independent of all forms of consciousness can be understood and seemingly expressed through conventional modes. Nevertheless, we recognize the persistent paradox of ultimate reality and return "with an understanding of our predicament, just as awakening brings us back into the world, back, but with insight replacing confusion."[34]

Cage shows us that recognizing 4'33" as ultimately silent, empty of sound, doesn't change the relation between intentional sound and musical performance, but offers the opportunity for us to reflect on the social and cultural inputs that condition our understanding of what counts as music and what merits its formal performance. The realization of emptiness doesn't preclude the conventions of conceptual imputation and discursive thought; instead, realizing emptiness enables a wiser engagement with those conventional tools not as deliverers of reality, but tuning forks for consciousness, ontological landmarks that can help us stay rooted in reality.

Yogācāra analysis: Emptiness of subject-object duality

Emptiness according to Yogācāra doctrine is predicated upon trisvabhāva, the theory that all objects of experience have three causally related modes of existence (imagined, dependent, and consummate) which correspond to three different senses of emptiness (characteristics, production, and the ultimate) that coalesce to represent the emptiness of subject-object duality or externality of objects to mental processes. Primal confusion is believing that objects of experience appear to us as they are in reality, which results in the bifurcation of experience into a passively experiencing subject and independently existent objects.

Human beings are not "detectors" of the world, but active participants in relation to and

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[33] Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 256.
[34] Ibid., 260.

constantly relating to all objects of experience. While shared imagination among human beings is helpful for talking about phenomena, there is a distinction between imagining independent characteristics and believing that they're actually instantiated in objects. Upon contemplation, a nondual understanding that doesn't thematize reality in terms of subject and object can be cultivated. Eventually, the properties of phenomena appearing in experience are realized to be constructed by the mind, ultimately producing objects which erroneously seem to exist independently. Experience can then be recognized as "a complex, opaque, causally determined construction of objects."[35]

Imagined nature (parikalpita) represents the naïve consciousness of objects as independently and externally existent, delivered to consciousness by infallible perceptual processes. The imagined nature of language, for example, is its ability to represent reality in virtue of the belief that its meaning is inherent and true. To realize that phenomena actually possess none of the properties we attribute to them is to realize their emptiness with respect to characteristics. In fact, perception of external objects arises due to our sensory faculties' delivering them to consciousness in a series of neurobiological processes. Percepts only appear to consciousness as our own conceptual imputations.

Dependent nature (paratantra) is the consciousness of phenomena as dependent on cognitive and perceptual processes. Our cognitive and perceptual processes construct the objects of experience that appear to us in consciousness. The experience of phenomena as possessing imagined nature arises due to this active construction; thus, all percepts depend on the perceiver's cognitive constructions. The dependent nature of language is that its function depends on common semantic structures which are in causal relation to determinate conditions of linguistic behavior and their effects on human behavior.[36] Emptiness with respect to production is realized when phenomena are emptied of their dependence on our neurophysiological processes.

Consummate nature (pariniṣpanna) is that phenomena depend on our cognitive and perceptual constructions (i.e. have a dependent nature) and that we imagine them to exist

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[35] Ibid., 74.

[36] Ibid., 269.

independently, passively received, not constructed (i.e. have an imagined nature). When we realize that phenomena have no imagined nature, we recognize their dependent nature. Hence, that phenomena are empty of imagined nature is their consummate nature. The consummate nature of language is the absence of the imagined in the dependent. Realizing emptiness with respect to the ultimate is that no phenomena have the characteristics we attribute to them. Language doesn't require syntax, representation, truth values, or shared understanding. In fact, language is empty of all of the things on which we imagine it to depend.

A grammatical analysis of the three natures further elucidates the relations between them. Pariniṣpanna and parikalpita are past participles, but paratantra is only a semantic designation. Dependent nature (paratantra) is purely nominal, representing the causal relation between experience and mental constructions. When we construct objects of experience, we imagine that they truly possess the characteristics we attribute to them. Upon seeing that our experience of the object depends on our predisposed cognitive constructions, we realize that because objects of experience exist as dependent but appear as imagined, they don't exist as we imagine them. This is the realization of consummate nature, which is the ultimate goal of spiritual practice.

In verses 27-30 of Vasubandhu's treatise Trisvabhāvanirdeśa, Vasubandhu's magic show simile provides a framework for understanding the three natures and how they structure our experience of the world and ourselves. At a roadside magic show, a magician utters a mantra that causes the audience members to perceive a pile of sticks as an elephant. The object of experience (i.e. elephant) has three distinct modes of existence corresponding to the three different perspectives of the magic trick (i.e. magician, naïve villagers, and wise beings). If we grant that the elephant is an existent phenomenon available to experience, we'll see that subject-object duality is nonexistent and caused to appear by mental constructions, just as the elephant was by the magician's mantra.

An ontological analysis of the simile reflects the idealistic mind-only reading of Yogācāra and ultimately denies the existence of the apparent elephant as a pure mental construction. In verses 27-28, Vasubandhu argues that perception of external objects is like the naïve villagers' perception of the conjured elephant as truly existent. The elephant's imagined nature is a pure

projection, representing the imagined characteristics we superimpose onto objects of experience as a result of cognitive and perceptual processes.

We can either incorrectly perceive the pile of sticks as an existent elephant, or we can correctly perceive them as a pile of sticks. In both cases, these percepts depend on our cognitive processes for their existence as objects of experience. In both cases, the experience—even when illusory—of these objects depend on how they're constructed in the mind. By correcting the belief that the conjured elephant exists as an independent entity external to the mind, the wise beings in the audience see through the trick and understand that the object of their experience is truly just a pile of sticks.

The consummate nature of the elephant is that there is no existent elephant, just the absence of imagined nature in dependence on the mind. "[Since] our introspective experience depends on the mind, it is empty of those qualities we superimpose and of a dualistic relation to my subjectivity."[37] Thus, the true nature of the sticks is that they are not an existent elephant. They are purely constructions of the mind arising from a series of perceptual and physiological processes constituting our subjective sense faculties.

A phenomenological reading of Vasubandhu's simile examines how subjectivity is structured to project duality on reality and experience. In verse 27, the elephant is nonexistent, conjured by the magician's trick which represents the foundation consciousness which does all of the construction. In verse 28, the elephant represents the imagined nature, which has the same unreality as the conjured, nonexistent elephant. In verse 30, the elephant is duality itself where duality is its imagined nature.

In verses 28-29, Vasubandhu highlights the confusion of subjective experience with reality that occurs in everyday life. Caused by unconscious cognitive constructions, this confusion about our subjectivity causes the superimposition of subject-object duality onto reality, resulting in our mistaking the world we dually construct in the mind with the world we encounter.

There is no elephant in reality; that it's an object dually related to a subject is its imagined nature. This duality arises due to cognitive processes which lead us to confuse objects of

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[37] Ibid., 188.

experience with the "unreal structure of subject standing over and against object."[38] In distinguishing the act of construction from its content, Vasubandhu reveals to us the structure of subjective experience which inevitably leads to dualistic projections.

The dependent nature of objects of experience is represented by the pile of sticks arising in consciousness due to the magician's mantra. Understanding that the apparently real pile of sticks is empty with respect to causation reveals that experience doesn't deliver reality as it appears. Just as the pile of sticks produces the illusory appearance of a nonexistent reality, so does the experiencing subject. In distinguishing the act of experience from the content of experience, subjective experience is shown to be empty of dependent nature, without a distinct experiencer. So the subject is independent of her experience just like the pile of sticks. This is the consummate nature of subjective experience.

The performance of 4'33" can be thought of as a modern-day roadside magic show. Cage teaches us about the naturelessness of the experienced performance as well as that of the experiencing subjects. We assume that some members of the audience choose to ponder the performance as an act of commentary while some simply react to it as a gross waste of time and money. The wise being is analogous to the reflectively engaged audience members, the naïve villagers are analogous to the annoyed audience members, and the magician is analogous to the audience's minds. The elephant is like the performance of 4'33". This analysis will reveal that Cage's work represents a profound insight into the nature of performance and the act of performing.

Like the wise beings at Vasubandhu's magic show, the thoughtful audience members develop a more nuanced understanding of 4'33". By understanding that the qualia of performance depends on the audience's interpretation. They know that there is no universal way in which any performance exists and have bought tickets to the concert in hopes of taking away something of their own from the performance. Their reflection enables them to see the dependent nature of the performance, recognizing the performer's conjuring trick but knowing that it's only a trick.

On the other hand, the audience members who've attended the performance in hopes of

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[38] Ibid., 192.

hearing some first-rate classical music are like the naïve villagers who believe that the magician's trick is real. They imagine musical performance has inherent sonic qualities and believe that the performer has an obligation to produce the quality of sound to which they attribute classical music performance. Mired in the imagined nature of performed sound, they operate under the assumption that each of their experiences of the external world are reflective of a singular mode in which it exists.The minds of both the responsive and reactive audience members are like the magician in the magic show. The magician's mantra causes their minds to perceive the pile of sticks as an existent elephant. Cage's audience enacts a similar mantra by constructing the experience of the performance both as a prescribed duration of silence and as a comment on the intentionality of sounds conventionally attributed to musical performance. Their minds recognize that the experience of the performance is empty of both its dualistic imagined nature.

I argue that the subjective experience of 4'33" is like the conjured elephant. We could believe naïvely that our subjective experience of an apparently objective performance truly exists in this experiencer-experienced dyad. This would be to mistakenly apprehend the performance, our subject, and the dual structure of experience. Fundamentally, the performance or conjured elephant is a complex perceptual and cognitive response constructed in response to two stimuli: subjectivity and the dual structure of experience. Firstly, we construct our subjective experience in response to unseen predispositions conditioned by a variety of interwoven social inputs and internalized personal narratives. The Yogācārin would designate this construction as the result of a ripening of seeds in the fundamental consciousness. Secondly, the dual structure of experience results from a primordial projection of ourselves as immediately self-aware subjects constantly interfacing with distinct others.

The experience of 4'33" involves both of these constructions in that it encompasses not only the content of experience, but the act as well. Our experience is both that of the conjured elephant and of our experience of the elephant. Paradoxically, both the act of subjective experience and its content are just a pile of sticks on the side of the road, nondually related but dually experienced. Thus, a truly awakened understanding of 4'33" requires that we become the magician—aware of the act and of the appearance it produces.

The complexity of subjective experience is inescapable. While we inhabit a world lacking distinct boundaries between subject/object, internal/external, we nevertheless enact the magician's conjuring trick on reality and our experience of reality. We superimpose a dualistic relation between our neurophysiological constructions and the external world onto a higher order experience of ourselves as the seemingly unifying subject "I" hanging behind all of experience. Because this reflexive apprehension is mediated by unseen, fallible processes, introspection is still subject to this dualistic superimposition. In other words, we deceive ourselves about our own subjectivity. However, I must presuppose this superimposition, even if I know that I'm the one enacting it, because without it I could never understand anything about the character of my subjectivity, including the fact of it being a construction.

In reality, I am the pile of sticks, simultaneously experiencing ourselves "as a pure subject, believing that it is not one, and an embodied being knowing itself to be nothing but a pure subject."[39] Because subjective experience presupposes the existence of an experiencing subject, any enlightened awareness we claim to have about the dualism we constantly project onto reality also applies to the very awareness of that act of projection. The entirety of subjective experience is hence illusory all the way down.

Danger arises when I begin to relate to this illusory projection as if it were my subjectivity. Forgetting that there is some unseen force creating subjectivity creates the risk of believing that my phenomenal subjective experiences reflect some intrinsic truth about my subjectivity. For example, when we hear a sound before turning our attention to the fact of our hearing it, we're merely prereflectively conscious of our phenomenal experience. We allow ourselves to be affected by our implicit experience "without thematizing the sound or [our] affectedness by it."[40] In reality, all phenomena are present even if we don't notice them; our noticing is nothing but a construction of phenomenal subjective experience only capable of delivering fictive dualistic forms of consciousness.

The carelessness illuminated in this example inevitably leads to affective states caused by belief in fictions that delude us about how we are in relation to the world and ourselves,

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[39] Ibid., 204.

[40] Ibid., 210.

consequently blocking us from realizing any ounce of truth about reality. It's absolutely essential that when we reflect on anything we believe ourselves to have encountered, including our self-awareness as subjects and the phenomena which we experience, we remember that we're only analyzing at best a reconstruction, mediated by unfathomable cognitive and psychic Processes.

Using the elements of John Cage's 4'33", I have explicated the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra interpretations of emptiness. I have clarified the distinction between each school's approach to the ontology and phenomenology of emptiness. I have shown that a phenomenological reading of Yogācāra emphasizes the importance of realizing the emptiness of subject-object duality in order to better understand ourselves and recognize that all subjective experiences are ultimately fictions.

As subjects, we can either be tossed from affective state to affective state by thoughts which appear to be out of our control, or become agents of these constructions and transform the attitudes which don't serve us. It is true that 4'33" is a philosophically complex work containing profound insight into the nature of reality and conventional expression, but I believe its ability to transform how we relate to the world of phenomena immediately around and within us warrants its consideration as a modern-day Buddhist teaching illuminating the manifold wisdom we can gain from the conventional world.

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A Moral Spectacle: Ethics in Horror

Ilan Liebmann

Abstract

This paper evaluates the fundamental morality of several genres of horror movies - specifically, gore, 'torture porn', and faux-snuff - in relation to both each other and wider theories of ethics. It analyzes the composition of each genre, and then investigates the most compelling arguments for why each is immoral, and in what ways they fall short of proving any actual fundamental immorality. It then goes on to define where the concrete line between morality and immorality in horror lies, which is actually based wholly on the audience. This serves to refute one of the preeminent arguments against the existence of these genres of horror in the first place, as well as providing a guide for ethical viewing of these and other more controversial genres.

CONTENT WARNINGS: descriptions of violence, discussion of rape and sexual violence, brief mention of pedophilia

Satanic. Evil. Un-Christian. Horror movies have been called a number of things by their detractors, but they remain one of the most popular genres of movies to this day. However, is this popularity a good thing? Many argue that horror movies are actually inherently immoral. In this paper, I'll be examining three of the most controversial subgenres of horror - gore, torture porn, and faux-snuff - in order to determine whether there are fundamental moral issues with these works and, if so, where the line should be drawn. I will begin by defining the genres, and then I will investigate, genre by genre, both arguments for why each is immoral, and where these arguments fall short. Finally, I will define where I believe the line between morality and immorality is - with the audience.

Before we can begin to address the morality of horror, we first must define what horror actually entails. This is in itself a controversial topic, but I plan to introduce a fairly vague

definition, allowing a fair amount of variety within the confines of the genre, allowing my discussion to encompass a wider range of films. I base this definition in a large part off of Noel Carroll's definition: artworks "are denominated horrific in respect of their intended capacity to provoke a certain affective response."[41] To put it simply, any work of art that aims primarily to evoke the blend of fear and disgust that has been termed "horror", as an emotion, would be considered to fall within this genre. I say primarily in order to separate a horror movie from, say, a thriller, which might also evoke feelings of fear in the audience, but with a separate primary purpose - in the case of a thriller, the primary purpose being to evoke feelings of suspense. The combination of both fear and disgust is also essential to a horror film - we are not meant to be disgusted when the cop shoots a spy in a thriller and it's touch and go, while we are when a horror movie killer starts hacking at his latest victim with a machete. So, horror movies are movies whose primary intent is to inspire a blend of fear and disgust in the audience.

There are a number of subgenres of horror, but in this piece I'm primarily going to be focusing on the three most hotly debated ones. There is some overlap in these subgenres, so my definitions for them won't necessarily be mutually exclusive, but I will be focusing on individual examples for each. The first subgenre I'll be discussing is gore. Ian Stoner defines this subgenre succinctly as the "fictive representation of violence, suffering, and death"[42] Obviously, this can be applied to a lot of movies, and is not as clearly defined as the other two subgenres I'll discuss, but it essentially implies some excess of violence or focus on violence. This doesn't have a clearly delineated tipping point, but a precise definition for gore isn't essential to my purpose. I will primarily be talking about the most extreme cases of the subgenre. Essentially, you can pick whatever film you find the most morally unsettling due to extreme violence and it can be assumed the same theory I'm going to present applies. In essence, though, the prototypical gore film would be the type of film with blood and guts everywhere - it's a sister genre of the spatter film, named for blood spatters, and the two can be spoken about in conjunction. The second subgenre I plan to discuss is "torture porn". Steve Jones defines torture porn as a qualifier "applied to narratives made after 2003 that centralise

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[41] Carroll, "The Nature of Horror", 52.

[42] 2 Stoner, "Barbarous Spectacle and General Massacre", 511-527.

abduction, imprisonment, and torture."[43] These films primarily focus on the suffering of a protagonist in a way that can feel at some points gratuitous - hence the usage of the term "porn". This description is actually typically used by critics, in an effort to disparage popular horror films that they claim have violence without significant plot or character development. Given its primary usage as a pejorative, this is something of a subjective subgenre, but is nonetheless important to discuss - especially given that it's been "reclaimed", in a sense, by some creators. The third subgenre I'll be examining in this paper is faux-snuff. According to the FBI, snuff is "a 'visual depiction' of murder, intended to sexually arouse, and which is 'commercially distributed'."[44]A genuine snuff film includes scenes of real life horror, such as rape or murder. However, none have been proven to exist, and they're primarily considered an urban legend. Faux-snuff is the imitation of these films in a studio setting, aiming to depict horrifying events in a manner that implies that they are completely genuine. As Jones says, "snuff is not principally defined by its content but rather by its realist form"[45], and this clear definition and unifying aspects makes it a much more objective subgenre than the others I've introduced. In this paper, I will be talking abt these subgenres in order from least to most "objectionable", in a sense. Faux-snuff is far more universally panned than torture porn, for example, which is in turn less accepted than gore.

I'll begin by discussing gore films, which, as a reminder, are films that tend to involve some excess of graphic violence. One major discussion when considering the idea of the morality of this subgenre is the idea of gore as art. Horror has long had a tendency to represent monstrousness through aesthetic means - take the physically deformed villains of early horror movies, for example. While a severely ableist means of conveying the idea that someone is in some way "not human", this idea of aesthetic and evil in conjunction has been around since the beginnings of the genre. In later years, there has been an increasing trend towards representing murderers as artists themselves, rather than as just affronts to the idea of aesthetic. Take Norman Bates in Psycho, for example - Hitchcock makes sure that we are treated to the sight of

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[43] Jones, "Spierig Brothers' Jigsaw (2017) - Torture Porn Rebooted?", 1.
[44] Jones, "Dying to Be Seen", 1.
[45] Jones, "A View to a Kill", 1.

his intricate taxidermies for quite some time, emphasizing the idea that Bates is, in fact, an artist. But these taxidermies are only animals, surely there must be a difference between this and the array of blood and guts that gore films are so proud of? Not necessarily. Many films also portray even the way the killer strikes as an extension of his art. Take the 1965 film C*olor Me Blood Red*, for example. The killer in this movie is a painter who takes his art a step too far - he uses the blood of his victims as red paint. Does this monstrousness then render his paintings no longer art? Doubtful. In addition to using bodies as a source for art, killers in gore movies also can literally create art from bodies, such as the killer in *House of Wax*, who covers his victims in wax to make incredibly lifelike statues, or carefully position the bodies they kill in such a way that it is obvious there's some aesthetic concept behind it, such as Michael Myers in *Halloween*. We can even go a step further than this, and argue that art is not only a product of murder, but can be found in the act of killing itself. So much of the success of gory films hinges on the idea of an interesting killing method - too often, horror movie fans will complain about a movie being predictable, or repetitive. In this sense, even the method of killing becomes a part of the art of gore. Take the film *Urban Legends*, for example. The entire premise of the film is that the killer is mimicking common urban legends - the killer in the back seat, the hook-handed man, and so on. If an artist made an exhibition that used urban legends as the subject, wouldn't that be considered an interesting and unique theme? It works the same way for this killer. While you may argue that we're horrified by the killings, rather than impressed by them, and therefore they shouldn't count as art, I have to agree with Steven Jay Schneider, who says that "art need not command admiration to 'count' as art".[46] If I go to a museum and see a painting I don't like, it doesn't suddenly stop being a painting or a work of art, it's just one I don't particularly like or admire. The same goes for the artworks of murderers. The argument can be made, of course, that it is morally wrong to present murder or violence as an art form, because it will encourage the support of those actions. However, cinema is an art itself, and therefore anything it presents will have an artistic bent. This is not a trait unique to gore movies - take the infamous woodchipper scene in Fargo, for example. Again, murder is aestheticized, but Fargo isn't critiqued as an immoral movie for it, and gore films shouldn't be held to a double standard.

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[46] Schneider, "Murder as Art", 4.

So, is there some other inherent moral failure in gore films? The only common feature to gore films is the gore itself. Although many critique horror films on the basis of racism, misogyny, ableism, or other things along that vein, these issues are present in all genres of film, and are not inherent to gore. In order to argue that there is some fundamental moral failing in gore films, we must demonstrate that there is something morally problematic about fictional depictions of violence. As Stoner claims, we "must ground the wrongness of gory fictions in those gouts of corn syrup dyed arterial red".[47] One argument is that repeated viewing of gory violence could encourage participation to acts similar to those viewed on screen. However, this is antithetical to the very idea of a horror movie. As defined at the beginning of this paper, horror movies intend to disgust and appall. The purpose of a horror movie is to scare the audience, not attract them to the killer. Again, I quote Stoner, who says that although "vicarious sadism is compatible with the aims of some genres; it is in tension with the aims of horror."[48]If an audience likes the killer and the actions he is committing, they will not feel scared, and therefore it will not be a horror movie at all. A second argument for the immorality of gore films is that exposing the audience to suffering and violence for the purpose of enjoyment can degrade moral sensibilities. That is to say, viewing these things in a way that is meant to entertain can cause the audience to perceive them as less immoral. However, there is suffering and violence in films and works of art of essentially every genre. For a small list, take *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus stabs out his own eyes and cuts out his tongue, essentially any war film, Die Hard, where McClane detonates C4 in an elevator shaft, killing two men, Fargo, again with the iconic woodchipper scene, and even Titanic, where the audience watches as hundreds of people fall from the ship and die. If we're not concerned about any of these films degrading morality, then why are we concerned about gore doing the same? It's not as though the audience is enjoying the fact that the characters are suffering - in fact, they're horrified by it. Again, horror movies intend not to encourage vicarious sadism but rather to appall audiences, meaning that an audience who perceives the violence in a gore film as moral is no longer truly watching a horror film. Some might argue against this comparison of gore films to other works by claiming that gore films are

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[47] Stoner, "Barbarous Spectacle and General Massacre", 511-527.

[48] Ibid.

not artistically minded. First of all, this is not at all a charitable argument. As shown by my previous discussion of gore as art, there are absolutely high levels of aesthetics involved in the production of these films. Yes, the defining characteristics of the genre may be fear and disgust, but that doesn't mean that these are the sole characteristics of gore films, and presenting them as such is reductive. Secondly, even if this were true, it is difficult to believe that something could become morally impermissible solely by virtue of poor production. If the violence in Oedipus is permissible because it's artistic, would a poorly done production of Oedipus become morally impermissible because it no longer met some nebulous artistic standard? Unlikely. The equation of aesthetic flaws to moral flaws is simply not rational.

Next, I'll discuss so-called "torture porn". As a reminder, this is primarily used as a way to disparage films that don't satisfy critics, but is formally applied to post-2003 films focusing on torture or abduction in some way. One of the biggest critiques of this genre is its narrative failings - the term is usually applied to films that don't have "enough" of a carefully constructed narrative, or satisfactory character development. Of course, what each individual considers enough or satisfactory can vary greatly, so I'll primarily be focusing on what is considered by most to be the hallmark of the torture porn genre - the *Saw* films. According to critics, torture porn films fail at being works of art entirely due to their lack of significant narrative or character development, because those are requirements for a film. Since they are not works of art, there is no satisfactory reason for them to contain graphic violence, meaning that these films would be considered immoral. I have two critiques of this theory. First of all, I wouldn't argue that a lack of narrative or character development disqualifies a film from being a work of art. Take David Lynch's short Ant Head, for example. This is quite literally just a video of ants crawling over cheese and wax, but no one has called it "insect porn", or tried to argue that it's no longer a work of art because the ants don't experience struggles that allow them to grow, or because they don't have to work through an impending divorce, and so on. Ant Head isn't alone in this respect - a number of avant garde films are fairly plotless and without major character development. So why can we consider these films still to be works of art, if a plotless horror film no longer gets that qualification? Put simply, it's a double standard. Even if you disagree with me on this point, and you argue that films that show graphic violence need to be held to a

different standard than, say, a short about ants and cheese, I maintain that so-called "torture porn" does not actually lack these qualities at all. Let's look at the *Saw* films, for example, which are the hallmark of torture porn genre. These films are far from poorly constructed - in fact, they are an elaborate social commentary on the failure of our justice system and the idea of taking justice into our own hands. Jigsaw, the antagonist, has seen the way traditional justice has failed, and is directly taking it into his own hands, by punishing those who have done wrong in some way with carefully themed traps. It is no coincidence that the police feature so heavily in these films, or that Jigsaw continually stays one step ahead of them - it is a direct commentary on the failure of our justice system to punish those who have truly done wrong. In fact, many of the same critics who label *Saw* as torture porn also claim that it is too complex plotwise - each movie contains a number of individual threads, often following from previous movies, that require careful attention to untangle. How can a movie that is derided for being nothing but gratuitous violence also be condemned for having a plot that is too complex? It simply doesn't make sense. The argument that *Saw* lacks character development is even flimsier, given that the entire purpose of Jigsaw's traps is to provide this development. In *Saw II,* for example, Jigsaw directly explains that the purpose of his games is to help his captives develop an appreciation for life, and *Saw IV* is entirely about helping a man get over his self-sacrificing nature. The central message of the films is about pushing people past their natural limits in order to help them grow - a similar message to many wilderness films, which also often contain violence (see The Revenant), but aren't given the same derogatory denomination as horror films. One might argue that I've only discussed the *Saw* films here, but although they may not be the only films given the label "torture porn", they were the first, and are the defining hallmark of the genre. If the critiques of the genre don't hold up for them, how can they hold up for anything else? Too often, critics decide that they dislike the message of a film, and therefore call it a failed narrative, but this is simply incorrect - one can argue that perhaps the narrative of vigilante justice in *Saw* is unappealing, but that doesn't mean it no longer exists. The extreme violence in works like *Saw* can actually be used to examine complex moral dichotomies, such as the ideas of justice in those films, and dismissing that as a narrative failure is reductive and frankly incorrect.

A second argument about why torture porn films are immoral is due to their exploitation of pain. Critics argue that it's not moral to present pain in such graphic detail in order to draw in and excite audiences - it can encourage us to view pain as less important, and is in general disrespectful to those who are suffering. The name itself does reflect this idea - torture porn, implying that torture is in some way exciting or titillating audiences - but this name was created by detractors of the genre, so it can't be taken as an unbiased assessment of these films. The primary description of torture porn by critics, as Jones says, is "a cinematic genre in which women are bound, gagged, [and] raped".[49] However, this is a clear misassessment. *Saw*, the hallmark of the genre, contains none of this. Not only does the defining film of the genre not contain what critics argue is the genre's definition, but many films that aren't called "torture porn" do actually contain this. Take *Hounds of Love*, for example, in which a teenage girl is quite literally bound, gagged, and raped - why was this not called torture porn, or critically panned in the same manner as *Saw*? If it's immoral to watch *Saw*, it must be equally as immoral, if not more, to watch Hounds of Love, so why do critics not discuss that? Simply, it's because the so-called immorality of torture porn is an excuse to detract movies that critics dislike. In response to the idea that torture porn can excite audiences to perform violence themselves, I repeat the definition of horror - it is meant to present unappealing things. We cringe at the traps in *Saw*, not cheer. We're meant to empathize with the victims, and to wince when they are hurt, not to be titillated by it. As for the discussion of using pain for a profit, the presentation of pain isn't a feature unique to these movies, and all movies exist to turn a profit, so if movies such as *Saw* are immoral, so is every movie in which a character gets injured. For the most part, criticisms of so-called "torture porn" films are not in good faith, and even the few that are immediately run into issues where films not widely considered to be immoral would, by these standards, be just as impermissible as *Saw*.

Finally, I'll discuss the most controversial genre - faux-snuff. As a reminder, these films are the imitation of films that show scenes of real life horror, in a studio setting. That is to say, they are defined by the realism of their content. This realism is considered to be one of the biggest issues with faux-snuff - these films are considered immoral because they could incite

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[49] Jones, "Torture Porn Rebooted?", 3.

copycat violence and murders. The first major issue is the graphic sexualization of violence in faux-snuff films. The majority of these movies directly combine sex or rape with murder, therefore linking those two things intrinsically in the narrative. This intention to be titillating could

lead to the connection of violence with sex in the viewers' brains, and spur violent actions - even if the audience isn't going out and murdering people, they could still be more violent during sex, and so on. There is also, of course, the worry that the audience will go out and murder people - that faux-snuff could encourage others to create real snuff films. However, given that there is absolutely no concrete proof of real snuff films existing in the slightest, this claim seems difficult to believe. The titillation remains an issue, however, especially given that faux-snuff is centered around the idea of realism in a way that the other two genres I've discussed are not. In fact, the defining point of this genre is that it appears to be real. Can "the coalescence of horror and sex in an age where pornography itself is becoming increasingly sadistic,"[50] as Jones says, encourage further sexual violence? Again, it comes back to the purpose of horror - not to excite, but to horrify. To quote Jones, "depictions pertaining to realism are seen as more horrific or disturbing because they do so,"[51]rather than more exciting. The realistic content of faux-snuff unsettles us further, and makes us more wary - it all seems so real. Rather than encouraging an audience to be excited by violence, it encourages them to fear it even more. The conjunction of murder and sex in these films is meant to horrify us further, by placing something disgusting in direct contrast with something usually considered positive, only emphasizing more the way the actions being committed are fully disgusting. Although we are required to suspend our disbelief for faux-snuff, believing that it's "real" as we watch it, this is, again, a trait common to all films. No one is genuinely being murdered in the films, as realistic as it appears, so the consumption of this content still requires a suspension of disbelief that can be reversed when the film is over, and we leave the theater. Real snuff would clearly cross a line - murder is a morally impermissible act, but faux-snuff allows a space to explore controversial concepts of morality without genuine harm being done to anyone. It may seem vivid, but it's still the same fake blood

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[50]Jones, "Dying to Be Seen", 5.

[51] Ibid.

and gore as in any other horror film. The mere portrayal of immorality cannot be used to declare an entire genre fundamentally wrong - fiction often explores scenes of immorality without actually being immoral itself, and faux-snuff is no exception to this. audience, for that matter, is necessarily in support of the killer. Again, I come back to the central purpose of a horror film: to shock and to disgust. Viewing these horrific acts in first person only makes the disgust more visceral, as opposed to less. We are even closer to these scenes of horror, and that makes them more shocking, and more awful. Just as bad smells become more revolting the closer you get to them, so do these scenes of graphic violence. The frequent appeal to the viewer as a form of accomplice is meant to revolt, not to excite - who would want to be considered an accomplice to someone committing acts as disgusting as the killer? This unique perspective is intended as an exploration of the dynamics between the killer, the victim, and the audience, rather than as a way to make the audience empathize with the killer. We are seeing his depravity up close and personal, and we are supposed to be shocked by it. Faux-snuff films are not just senseless killing and sexual titillation, but rather an elaborate exploration of the concept of voyeurism - we are watching the killer who is watching the victim - and of the psychology of a killer - without inducing us to empathize with a murderer.

So, where do we draw the line? When does a horror film become morally impermissible - when does it go from horrifying, to horrible? I posit that no horror film is fundamentally morally impermissible. Every objection to these films is based on its effects on the viewer. Because of this, I believe that the moral impermissibility of a film is solely based on its audience. If their purpose for viewing is to revel in vicarious sadism, and to enjoy seeing pain inflicted on others, then their actions become morally impermissible - it is wrong to take delight in the pain of others. However, as I've mentioned before, this is not the intent of a horror movie. In fact, it is antithetical to the intent. Therefore, the fault lies with the consumer, rather than the producer. Indeed, an audience member that attends a horror film in order to revel sadistically in the pain being portrayed has fundamentally misunderstood the entire purpose of the genre. They are not being horrified, so they cannot be considered a true consumer of horror. Yes, idolizing killers is certainly an immoral thing - one must not support those who inflict pain on others. However, merely portraying these killers is not immoral, and that is what horror movies do. We, as

individuals, are responsible for making our own decisions. The responsibility rests with the audience to critically consume artwork, and to have basic sympathy for others. No horror movie can force anyone to go out and commit crimes. If someone is doing that after seeing a horror movie, they were clearly in some way predisposed to it already - given that every single person in the audience isn't reacting the same way, it must be on an individual level. Therefore, the movie itself cannot be condemned, but rather we should condemn the killer for their actions. Trying to divert the blame onto a piece of fiction gives killers more leniency, rather than less. It was them who picked up the murder weapon, and who took away a life, and no amount of fake blood they saw on the big screen will change that fact. Horror does not encourage us to hate the victims - it's up to us to avoid doing that ourselves. Of course, this theory doesn't absolve directors of all moral responsibility. They, too, are people. Their purposes must be examined as well. If a director makes a faux-snuff film to indulge his own sadistic desires of seeing women hurt, he, too, is immoral. However, still, this moral responsibility is on people. The movie itself will never have an inherent morality, because it will be interpreted differently by everyone who views it. It is up to us to make sure that interpretation is a good one.[52]

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[52] As a side note, I wanted to acknowledge Stoner's idea of deal breakers - things that are personally uncomfortable and unpleasant, that prevent people from watching certain movies. Someone who is scared of open water, for example, may not be able to watch Titanic, due to the ship sinking. Many things present in horror are common deal breakers, but the presence of these does not make a movie fundamentally immoral. This paper does not argue that one must watch horror, simply that it's not immoral to do so.

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lack for nothing; desire abounds; cup-runneth over; the supermarket offers all

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Abstract

This essay is an exploration of the supermarket as a locus of desire. I am interested in how the body responds to desire, especially in an area such as the supermarket, a unique symbol of modernity and capitalism. I argue that the individual shopper, in an attempt to assert control and order unto an efjacksonxperience that necessarily inundates and overwhelms, clings to the aesthetic as truth. Personal choices of buying goods (that are really so public and meant to be displayed) place the shopper into the position of curator. They divine themselves special or different through their consumption. Yet, this is a lie.

I love tinned fish. Anchovies, Spanish sardines, octopus in olive oil. Any and all. Aside from the contents of the tins, I love the tins themselves. Bright, prime colors, artistic renditions of fish, bold letters: the cans are a marvel. Though this seems trivial—the cans are as ephemeral of an experience as eating the fish inside—why should the aesthetics of the can affect the act or quality of consuming? My choice of buying certain tinned fish (by buying a particular tin, I have excluded others, decided this tin was somehow distinctly of value to me) illustrates the importance of aesthetics within a task that is mundane, personal, private, and brief. Why do I care about the tin? I certainly do not save them. Yet, it seems that I have free choice to express myself, aesthetically—what does this mean? What does the supermarket reveal about me? This essay explores the modern supermarket as a nerve-center of desire, one that forces the shopper to create extensions of themselves through displays of aesthetic choices.

Let me offer up a convincing connection between art, aesthetic expression, and the

supermarket. The supermarket's shelves are overrun, shoved full of products. Emptiness is antithetical to the supermarket. To remain a "super"market, the space must be bulging with goods, overflowing with the possibility of purchase. Aisles of brightly colored cereal boxes that are marketed, carefully crafted to get your attention line one section of the supermarket. In another, seas of apples, waxed and flown from across the globe sit in the misted fresh aisle, patiently waiting, rotting, etc.—how can an individual make a choice in a supermarket? How can a person remain sane in the face of thousands of objects that exist solely to catch their attention?

In a post-1964 world, after Andy Warhol's Brillo Box[1] killed art—that is, according to 1 Arthur Danto—the post-modernist reigns supreme. Art, Danto claims, cannot diverge from philosophy any longer.[2] Thus, art is understood through theory, no longer existing in a self- 2 explanatory vacuum. Art becomes free; even the wont shopper defines art. Danto notes the shift from modern to postmodern with the Brillo Box—before, the modernist is tasked with a search for the authentic, for seriousness, for "the" true, and "the" real. A deeper recognition of essences is sought. The possibility for authentic then ends when art is converted into philosophy. Now, for the post-modernist, the authentic is just as likely to be found in your favorite tinned fish as it would have been before only discoverable in a Bible, in masterpieces, in awe-inspiring experience. Today, look no further than the corner store!

What matters not is the defining of art. Rather, it is the subject (shopper) who decides what "art" is based on what is chosen as worthy of being purchased—the art of the alive art world is dead, and we need not waste meaningful time meaninglessly picking apart abstract concepts such as "truth." What is "art" is what meaningfully stands out against others of the same claim and variety. What jar of olives on my kitchen counter will impress my in-laws more? Perhaps Danto sheds light upon this: "But in fact "we" could be anyone who thinks critically about art who ponders what art is about and how its aboutness is registered in the matter of art."[3] So does every purchased item become "art"? Does art lose all meaning when not juxtaposed against a capitalistic agenda? In the supermarket, yes. "Art" becomes an object of amusement.

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[1] Maybe you can even pick up a brillo box while you're at the supermarket! Maybe you can be better than Warhol!

[2] Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art," In The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art, (New York, NY: Columbia 2 University Press, 2005).

[3] Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," (1998), 135, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2505400. 3

Art lost its denotation: “It is not necessary, on the other hand, for artists themselves to have a clear idea of what is meant by art.”[4] Instead, “art” becomes not subjective, but so invasive in everyday life that art becomes a necessity, rather than a luxury. All products must be artful to sell. It is not enough to be good soap. To compete well, the soap must be beautiful and good. Art becomes as important as function.

Art becomes subject to the vice-like grip of desire. It (art) is attainable. All objects in your home and life can be beautiful. A choice to fill spaces around the self with “bad” or “unaesthetic” objects is intrinsically an aesthetic choice. With the death of art, art became fluid. The supermarket offers aesthetic appeal in the same way the Mona Lisa does. Or, the supermarket offers something more desirable than the Mona Lisa: function and aesthetic beauty can owned. Art becomes the dopamine hit when the spontaneous purchase of (an expensive chocolate? an elegant candle?) is rung up. The Mona Lisa remains in France, and the shopper a continent away—the Mona Lisa offers nothing to the shopper. This beautifully packaged bar of soap is more aesthetically valuable. It is tangible and obtainable.

To speak about shopping, one must speak about desire; desire being the ever-elusive object of fulfillment. “Desire” denotes a lack, a palatable force that flows into the mind of the person. By walking into the store (or anywhere) and experiencing the desire to own, one must also come to terms with not currently having. The body lacks, and desire fills the empty spaces.

In the modern supermarket, this exceeds a primitive desire that is merely nourishment invested. Desire as an actualized, physical organ becomes awakened by the abundance of products (which you do not have).[5] This site of desire motorizes and compels the self. Desire 5 is at odds with the human within the context of unchecked, gluttonous arena of the supermarket, which vitalizes an unhealthy expression of desire within the shopper:

> Desiring-machines function within social machines, as though they maintained their own regime in the molar aggregates that they form at the level of large numbers. Symbols and fetishes are manifestations of desiring-machines.[6]

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[4] Arthur C. Danto, “The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense,” 136. 4

[5] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1983), 2.

[6] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 183. 6

Desire lacks precision. Some object in the supermarket may satisfy—yet, the exactness eludes. So maybe, this tin of fish, with perfectly renditioned, Mediterranean azulejos printed onto the can will finally make me feel cool. Finally, this can will fulfill something that lasts past the mere consuming of the fish. The desire for desire fulfillment is dangerous, literally piercing the self. It deceives that the material nature of the can will somehow outlast the experience of eating the fish, I will be more worldly, better, happier, if I buy this I can...:

> Desiring-machines make us an organism; but at the very heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organized in this way, from not having some other sort of organization, or no organization at all. "An incomprehensible, absolutely rigid stasis" in the very midst of process, as a third stage: "No mouth. No tongue. No teeth. No larynx. No esophagus. No belly. No anus.[7]

The supermarket is the opportunity for collection in excess. One is inundated: everything, all at once, is available. Every spare inch has been taken up by something which you could own, the mind is overrun by fantasies of buying which would lend itself to a at last perfect life. To avoid the risk of numbing overindulgence, boundaries must be created for the shopper, the person, to remain sane. The supermarket trip is another chance for aesthetic niche to be signaled. The health obsessed interact with, collect by means of buying and displaying fruits, veggies, nuts. The home that displays only organic foods also displays an admission of wealth, concern for their health, the earth. The shopper becomes a curator. More aptly, curation becomes a distillation of obsession:

> In these small rituals we observe the channeling of obsession, an exercise in how to make the world one's to gather things around oneself tastefully, appropriately. The inclusions in all collections reflect wider cultural rules—of rational taxonomy, of gender, of aesthetics.[8]

The grocery cart might be the most intimate collection that the public witnesses; the cashier becomes knowledgeable in the most mundane (lightbulbs, toilet paper) and the most private

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[7] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 8. 7

[8] James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," In *Art and Its Significance an Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*, ed. 8 Stephen David Ross (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 624.

(plan B pills, wart medication) parts of one's self. The self is revealed through choices. This is inherently an aesthetic endeavor, an attempt to prove that one is different, unique, somehow marked off from the rest of the meaningless world, marked off from the rest of the shoppers.

The supermarket is a grotesque venture into the gluttonous nature of late-stage capitalism. The shopper subconsciously attempts to add order to the distortion of the supermarket. The self clings unto what it deems "aesthetic" (which is mere facade) to assemble meaning into the errand, and into their life. Yes, the supermarket is filled with meaningless products, created to exert junk and waste. Yet, the shopper preserves themselves. They pick what is beautiful out of a sea of worthless objects. They compulsively fool themselves, seeking refugee in the prettier jar of honey that promises a better, more fulfilled morning cup of tea.

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