

DIANOIA

The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College



SPRING 2013 ISSUE II

Featured Articles:

- Interview with Professor Emeritus William Richardson, S.J.
- George Massey on *Confronting Death: The Absurd in Camus and Frankl*

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COVER

David, Jacques-Louis. *The Death of Marat*. Oil-on-canvas. 1793. (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium)

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EDITORS' NOTE

David painted the *Death of Marat* during the time that philosophical ideas had a momentous impact upon history. The painting calls to mind not only the Reign of Terror, the beheadings, and the death of great political figures and common men alike, but it also reminds us of the questions concerning man's goodness and his freedom. These ideas, so relevant towards the end of the eighteenth century, are considered by the various essays published in this year's edition of *Dianoia*. Among others, the essays examining the possibility of freedom in the thought of Dostoevsky and Spinoza show that the undergraduates at Boston College are engaged with the same ideas that led the French Revolution. An essay on Cézanne discusses the philosophy of a post-Revolution, but still revolutionary, French artist. Other essays put these ideas into a modern context; Voltaire and Montaigne are examined in light of Disney's *Pocahontas*, the spectacular effect of beheading is understood in light of Nolan's *Batman Begins*, and Tolkien's great character Aragorn frustrates the modern mind with his insistence that Good is always and everywhere the same. It is our hope that these essays will provide an interesting way to look at ideas that have been both prevalent and important in the course of history and the history of thought.

The second issue of *Dianoia* also tried something new. We asked the student body "What is the relationship of Philosophy with Death?" From a surprising number of submissions, George Massey's *Confronting Death: The Absurd in Camus and Frankl* was chosen as the feature article. Also appearing for the first time in *Dianoia* is an interview with a philosopher. Renowned Heidegger scholar, and an excellent philosopher in his own right, Professor Emeritus William Richardson, S.J. sat down with us to discuss the importance of philosophy, of Heidegger, and of faith. We are happy to publish highlights from the interview and would like to thank Fr. Richardson for his generosity in talking with us.

The second incarnation of Boston College's Undergraduate Philosophy Journal is indebted not only to Fr. Richardson and to the seven authors of the published essays, but also to the authors of the more than seventy other essays submitted for consideration. Both the quantity and the quality of the submissions provided cause for lively discussion at the editors' meetings, and we hope that the essays selected provide similarly engaging conversation for our readers. Please enjoy the second edition of *Dianoia*, and we look forward to your continued support.

Sincerely,

Lucia Kim, *Editor-in-Chief*
Nathaniel Sanders, *Managing Editor*
Mike Villafranca, *Managing Editor*

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*Philosophy opens us up to that
dimension—what is a human being?
what does it mean to be a human
being?—across the full spectrum of
human experience.*



Interview with William Richardson, S.J.

While many philosophy undergraduate students might not know of Professor Emeritus William Richardson, S.J., those who do immediately associate him with Martin Heidegger, the influential contemporary philosopher. There are several urban legends regarding Fr. Richardson, but what is known for sure is that he met Heidegger on several occasions. He even attended Heidegger's last lecture course in Germany. He also wrote one of the earliest major—and still one of the best—studies of Heidegger in English, in the early 1960s. In fact, the preface to his book, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, was written by Heidegger himself. The main themes that emerged in our conversation may be summarized in the following terms.

Why should an undergraduate study philosophy? Why is philosophy still relevant in today's society?

The most critical thing that our society is concerned about now seems to be the sort of thing that happened in Colorado. This man, who is a very bright and successful grad student, is charged with 24 counts of first-degree murder and 116 other charges of deliberate attempted murder. How do we account for his negligence of any respect for human life? In searching for the “why,” we look at his age, his academic history, legal history, family background, etc. We can measure most of his history, for these questions are answerable and verifiable, and we all have numbers attached to us.

This is all an attempt to get at the whys, but it's a pleasant kind of thinking. If we think of a “why” as a motivation, how do we explain this particular action of someone whose past is relatively innocent, and appears to be a nice guy? How do we measure the deliberateness? How do we calculate his mental capacity by measuring his IQ? The questions that can be answered numerically do not answer the question “why,” the question that cannot be calculated.

Philosophy asks the questions that are not calculable or measurable. It is this kind of non-calculative thinking that is essential to our human existence. We have the capacity to ask the question “why,” in such a fashion that there is no way of answering it in a calculable or logical way. So what philosophy is, it seems to me, is the capacity to think so as to learn the difference between calculative, scientific thinking and the other kind of thinking: the non-calculative kind. And to learn the difference between the two is to learn

the meaning and importance of life and human experience itself. Certain facts of life are *beyond* reason, and we study philosophy as a way of facing these questions.

I had an experience back in 1940s when I was teaching the G.I.'s from WWII. I was 5 years out of college myself and sent to teach English literature to these men who were the same age as me. What was I going to tell these G.I.'s about poetry and the need to study poetry? It's similar to the need of studying philosophy. I figured that the only thing to do is to get through the material and explain the value of a human being, humanism, getting the sense of a human being through literature. Later that day, after teaching the class, I ran into one of the students at the Dean's Office. The student came up to me and said, "Hey, I liked your lecture." So I said "Thank you," and he went on to



say: "It was a lot of nonsense. Poetry, literature! Listen. I just came out of the war. I shot people, killed them. Watched them scream, squirm to death. Don't talk to me about the beauty of human beings." It was understandable, but stark. Well, I asked him more about the war, and we talked for half an hour or so. And I said to him, look it's only the first day, these things take time; and we agreed we would give it a shot and see how it goes. And, as it happened, we got through the year and he was a fine, serious student. But we never talked about these matters again after that first day.

Two years later, when I was preparing to leave, I made an appointment to see him to wish him well. He came with a baby in his arms and said, "I brought him because I wanted you to meet him, and I wanted him to meet you. Remember that first day in class? What I told you I thought about your lecture?" I said sure I do. "I wanted you to meet him—I just got married last year, and he's my first child. You know, I always thought about that first day, and I always felt generally skeptical about the meaning of philosophy, poetry. I never really understood what you meant until nine months ago when I first held my baby in my arms. Then I understood. I understood what you were talking about, what you meant, about the beauty and wonder of a human being. Thank you for talking about it. I can tell him what I was able to understand."

The point is this: the purpose of philosophy and humanities in general is to open up that sense of wonder, that sense of what a human being is. That's what philosophy is for. Philosophy opens us up to that dimension—what is a human being? what does it mean to be a human being?—across the full spectrum of human experience. I think

philosophy can do that better than anything else.

How about your own personal experience in philosophy? What first got you interested in philosophy? For some of us it's a good course, or a mentor. What was it for you?

I liked debating and I was looking into a career in law while I was also thinking of priesthood. I decided that I'd enter the Society [of Jesus], then go to law school, but it didn't work out that way. Philosophy is a part of training for the Society and I liked it enough to study more. Although I would have preferred at the time to study theology, the decision was that I was to go study philosophy, and I accepted, as one does. I was reluctant at first, but I eventually did get into philosophy. I decided that I wanted to teach metaphysics, the transcendental idea of being. I got to know the name of Martin Heidegger while I was doing graduate studies. I had heard he was interested in metaphysics, so I figured that I would see what he had to say about it. Eventually I got a chance to meet Heidegger and discuss the dissertation topic. So once that happened, I was doing contemporary European philosophy.

Heidegger renounced his Catholic faith and developed a sort of godless philosophy of ultimate being. Do you think there is any possible reconciliation between faith and Heidegger? How did you work through the difficulty?

That's a big question. Christianity and every kind of religion postulates a being as supreme. But that gives us no more than a *metaphysical* answer. Heidegger is asking something beyond that, about the "is" that comes to the "is" of every being—including the Supreme being. So that raises all sorts of subsequent questions. For example, what is knowledge? how do you know? is there—can there be—such a thing as a "god particle," and what would that be? And so forth. Heidegger wants to distinguish his question about this Capital "Is," mysterious and vague as it seems, from the question about *a* Supreme being. So is it possible to be a person of faith and also follow Heidegger in his quest? Yes, I think so. It's not easy; but we're beyond the level of easiness at this point.



Do you think someone's religious life can benefit from examining Heidegger's philosophy?

Yes, oh, yes. Mine, for example. Even Heidegger's enemies recognize his great mind and the importance of studying him, because what makes him great is his interest in truth and the pursuit of it. The first translator of *Being and Time* was a very devout Christian, a very evangelical, Anglican. He wanted to believe and actually believed that the "Being" of Heidegger was basically God. But this was a mistaken view. When I met Heidegger, I wore a black tie and shirt to be appropriate; but the person who recommended that he see me knew that I was a Catholic priest and Jesuit, so Heidegger also surely knew. I started the conversation by saying that I was a Roman Catholic clergyman, a Jesuit. I told him that I wanted to make sure that he understood that I saw that whatever this "Being" might mean, it didn't mean God. So I'm not here to try to convince you of some doctrine; I'm interested in these *questions*. He could accept that; and he was very good to me. So, yes, indeed, I believe it's possible for a person of faith to benefit from Heidegger's philosophy. When he came to die—he died in May, but already in February of that year he had asked one of his former students, a respected priest of the archdiocese, not to say a mass for him but to preach a sermon, say a word for him at his burial. It was a beautiful homily. Is it possible to reconcile part of Heidegger's thinking and, say, that of Meister Eckhart, a Dominican? Yes. The value of Heidegger is in the *question he raises*, the question of Being. You don't have to be a religious believer to recognize the power of his question. But the question is a valid one that believers have to take account of. How you understand truth is crucial—the difference between religious truth, needing some kind of religious source or authority to validate it, and a-religious truth. Heidegger the philosopher is not a theist, and he's not an atheist (or anti-theist). He is a-theist (in the Greek sense). He just doesn't pose the question of God. God is not his question.

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Freedom necessitates the possibility of choice. Everyone must face their circumstances and their sufferings and make a choice of how to bear through them.



Confronting Death: The Absurd in Camus and Frankl

George Massey

Albert Camus perceived that the absurd, although always at work, can emerge into one's consciousness at any moment. As with certain disease-causing bacteria, a person can live with it for quite some time, entirely unaware of its presence—and then, at once, be overcome by the most profoundly acute onset of symptoms: “One day the ‘why’ arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.”¹ This can happen at any moment. When a person takes a step back from their daily routine and asks “why” for the first time, the absurd has been realized in their consciousness. If they go one step further and engage in serious contemplation of the subject, their life will never be quite the same.

In Camus's essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he describes the concept of the “absurd” as the interplay between a person's mind and the external world: “I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world.”² For Camus, the world is irrational and contains no apparent meaning. However, the human mind is always seeking clarity, unity, reason, and meaning. The absurd is fully realized when these two opposites meet. When someone finally asks the question “why,” he has seen the incoherence of the world and is overcome by how absurd the disparity is between his mind and his environment. The absurd is what makes existence so problematic, and what makes Camus's existentialist writings so important. He acknowledges the primacy of the absurd as a philosophical concept later in his essay, saying “I judge the notion of the absurd to be essential and consider that it can stand as the first of my truths.”³

Because the absurd confronts every person—whether they are conscious of it or not—it is a part of the human condition. Because of how deeply the question “why” can penetrate the human psyche, it is not unreasonable to assume that it can hold severe consequences for a person's mental health. If so, then an understanding of the absurd is crucially important to the healthcare professional, especially for those who work with the depressed and the suicidal. These patients regularly present with questions of life's greater meaning—or lack thereof. Camus explored a physician's confrontation with the absurd

metaphorically in his novel *The Plague*. *The Plague* details the struggles of a certain Dr. Rieux against a fictional plague that befalls the Algerian city of Oran. Beyond this particular work of fiction, there are several examples of practicing physicians who have constructed extensive forms of therapy that are very existentialist in character. One such doctor was Viktor Frankl. Dr. Frankl's experiences of suffering in a Nazi concentration camp influenced his medical practice and led to his development of logotherapy. This therapy (the name of which is derived from the Greek *logos*, used here as "meaning") is based upon leading the patient to an understanding of the importance of meaning in life.

The beauty of such theories and therapies is that because they address a basic problem of the human condition (the absurd), they are as universally applicable as the philosophy that begets them. The absurd is everybody's problem—we may confront it as individuals, but no one can avoid it, and many might suffer by it. So, what exactly can a physician do for the patient who is suffering out of a confrontation with the absurd? What does this require of a physician, or what would it mean to be a good physician in this respect? The fictional Dr. Rieux and the historical Dr. Frankl are two examples to cite with regards to these questions. Their philosophical methods are based in an *individualist* philosophy of revolt that demands the *compassion* that characterizes any positive image of the healthcare practitioner. This seeming paradox of the individualist leading to the compassionate and, indeed, the humanitarian, is actually the only possible logical progression of thought.

Given the existence of the absurd, there are options regarding how to deal with it. Perhaps the most absolute option would be suicide. However, according to Camus, suicide is not a reconciliation of the absurd: it is a destruction of it. If "the absurd depends as much on man as on the world," then death, which eliminates man, also eliminates the absurd. As Camus states, "If I attempt to solve a problem, at least I must not by that very solution conjure away one of the terms of the problem."⁴ To kill oneself is to agree and submit to the absurd, to surrender unconditionally according to its own terms. Suicide, then, is nothing more than an escape (*évasion*) from the problem and an affirmation that life is meaningless.

What Camus is looking for instead is the awakening (*éveil*) of mankind towards the absurd, and the ideal answer is the man in revolt. The man in revolt is the man who acknowledges the absurd and goes on living, battling, and struggling against it anyway. Camus describes some of the emotions the man in revolt will feel.

I must admit that that struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest). Everything that destroys, conjures away, or exorcises these requirements... ruins the absurd... The absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to.⁵

Because the absurd cannot be logically or rationally resolved, the rebel lives on without hope of a definitive answer to it. However, this lack of hope does not cast him into

gloom and disheartenment. He rejects whatever carries any promise of hope or which falsely claims to have reconciled the absurd. His realizing this lack of logical coherence leads to his conscious dissatisfaction with the conditions he has been thrown into. But he cannot agree to the absurd, as that would destroy it and deprive him of even the possibility to give it any meaning.

It is this possibility to create meaning that gives the man in revolt the very opportunity to revolt, and to revolt meaningfully. If “the absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to,” then one must not agree to it and instead strive to give one’s absurd reality—one’s life—a meaning. Does that meaning exist in the external, unconscious, unthinking, irrational world? Certainly not, for the world is not the same as a life, or else there would not be conflicting sides to constitute the absurd. Thus, one could never hope to provide the *world at large* with a comprehensive meaning, but defiance in the face of the absurd can lead one to give their own *life* a meaning, an authentic one, and even one that other people can recognize. Suicide, or agreeing with the absurd, on the other hand, amounts to a denial of a reason to live: “Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering.”⁶

For Camus, to commit suicide is perhaps the highest form of the inauthentic. “While Camus seems to stress here the disastrous results of recognizing the emptiness of most ‘habits,’ the implication is also that living a life of routine without reflection is a kind of waste and an example of inauthenticity.”⁷ And because “we get into the habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking,”⁸ the idea is that “reflection must at some point trump routine, if we are ever to have the chance to develop authenticity.”⁹

The healthcare provider is a prime example of someone who must live their life purposefully and authentically, constantly in confrontation with the absurd and with suffering. Their being informed in this notion of revolt—and not being disheartened by it—is especially important. The just healthcare provider makes the welfare of others their first priority. The very idea sounds absurd, in light of Camus: why should an external take priority over the self? According to Camus, the revolt is an internal conflict that man confronts in his life. Perhaps the healthcare provider sees, in their inner battle against the absurd, a calling to aid others who are victims of it. Disease and pain are aspects of human life that no one can reasonably expect to avoid, but also seem to be a part of the absurdity of existence. There is no good explanation for why one’s little brother suddenly contracts an inoperable cancer in his brain or why a parent is suddenly struck down by a heart attack. Scientific explanations of these phenomena, while correct, are grossly insufficient as answers to the man who witnesses such tragedies and asks “why?” Indeed, it seems that such a moment is exactly like one Camus discusses when he mentions how a person can come to ask the question “why” at what seems like any time, thus beginning the recognition of the absurd.

The importance of this recognition for the medical patient was later studied by Dr. Viktor Frankl, who developed a specific psychotherapy based in his experience as

a physician and a prisoner. He provides both an example of and an answer to Camus' conception of the physician in revolt. "Nowadays, it is admitted more and more that the physician's attitude affects the patient, regardless of what kind of attitude it is, whether it is pandeterministic or one that recognizes the freedom of man. And this is true even if the physician's attitude is not spoken of explicitly during treatment."¹⁰ This report from 1961 came well after Frankl's time spent in Nazi German concentration camps, where his already sophisticated thought was further refined by an indescribable—or even absurd—experience. A keen psychiatrist even before WWII, Frankl saw things during the war that he believed validated his form of existential analysis, called logotherapy:

...in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him—mentally and spiritually. He may retain his human dignity even in a concentration camp. Dostoevski said once, "There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings." These words frequently came to my mind after I became acquainted with those martyrs whose behavior in camp, whose suffering and death, bore witness to the fact that the last inner freedom cannot be lost. It can be said that they were worthy of their sufferings; the way they bore their suffering was a genuine inner achievement. It is this spiritual freedom—which cannot be taken away—that makes life meaningful and purposeful.¹¹

Here Frankl provides the grounds for his existential analytic technique. He saw that even in a place such as a concentration camp—where it is all too easy, even blamelessly so—for a person to merely engage "in the bitter fight for self preservation" and "forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal,"¹² it was still possible for people to retain their dignity via some strength of inner "spiritual freedom." Frankl claims that "even one such example is sufficient proof that man's inner strength may raise him above his outward fate. Such men are not only in concentration camps. Everywhere man is confronted with fate, with the chance of achieving something through his own suffering."¹³

This concept of freedom, of course, necessitates the possibility of choice. Everyone must face their circumstances and their sufferings and make a choice of how to bear through them. For Frankl, faith in the future is central to this choice. As he notes in his observations from the concentration camps: "the prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay."¹⁴ It was not necessarily the strongest, smartest, or even the most physically adaptive who avoided this decay, but rather those who could stand fast to their spiritual self and fight against the absurd.

This idea of faith in the future might seem opposed to the existential notion of living in and for the present, but these two seeming opposites can actually coexist.

Though Camus wrote that hope is worthless given the irrationality of the absurd, he also wrote that with regards to expecting a rational hope to hold up in an irrational world. Of course, Frankl, and those who suffered with him, were aware that what had once been their hopes in life would probably not hold up under the immense absurdity of the Holocaust. The important distinction between Camus and Frankl shows itself here: for Frankl, these hopes have to be adapted to the circumstances. The fact that hope in the future was critical to survival in the concentration camps convinced Frankl of their importance to a person's spirit. A prisoner in a concentration camp could not hope to return to the life they once led, entirely unchanged. However, acknowledging the form of freedom that they still possess even in the camp, the prisoner may yet find something to want to live for, something to return to after the war, something to give life meaning. This constitutes man's moral victory over the absurd. Hence, a *physician's* attitude towards the absurd and its relation to human existence is of the utmost importance for the physician who "takes his task seriously in treating a man, not only illnesses. For doubt about the meaning of life, the despair of a person because of the apparent lack of meaning in his life, is indeed not an illness, but a potential characteristic of the human being."¹⁵

The man who realizes the absurdity of life, as Camus did, and stops looking to life to provide him *its* meaning, must understand that it is rather life that demands a meaning *from him*. For Dr. Rieux, this meaning was in serving his fellow citizen. Thus, the healthcare professional commits *himself*, in his *individualistic* revolt against the absurd, to the service *of others*; but any man giving life this answer of a meaning has answered life's greatest question. Perhaps the most effective psychiatric therapeutic question is also the simplest and the one likely to be Camus' favorite: "So, why *haven't* you committed suicide yet?" A man's answer to this question constitutes a true reason for living and a realization of the greatest message to be found in Frankl's work: *the meaning of life is to give life meaning*. As Frankl observed in the concentration camps, a true reason for living, a true affirmation of life, will rule out any recourse to suicide and may even keep one alive through the deadliest of circumstances.

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- 1 Albert Camus. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Basic Writings of Existentialism. Ed. Gordon Marino (New York: Modern Library, 2004) Print. 448.
 - 2 Ibid., 455.
 - 3 Ibid., 462.
 - 4 Ibid.
 - 5 Ibid., 462-463.
 - 6 Ibid., 443.
 - 7 Harold Weiss. "Teaching and Learning about Suicide," *Teaching Philosophy* 32:1 (2009): 41-51, 47.
 - 8 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 445.
 - 9 Weiss, *Teaching Philosophy*, 47.
 - 10 Viktor E. Frankl, "Psychotherapy and Philosophy," *Philosophy Today*, 5:1 (1961:Spring): 61.
 - 11 Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. trans. Ilse Lasch. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 66.
 - 12 Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 67.
 - 13 Ibid.
 - 14 Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 74.
 - 15 Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Philosophy*, 63
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*The deathly Void that conquers
with sword and scythe is itself
conquered by paper and pen.*

”

Beyond Chiroptophobia: Capital Vision in *Batman Begins*

Robert Williams

In *The Severed Head*, psychoanalyst and contemporary philosopher Julia Kristeva celebrates an artistic engagement with decapitation. From the works of Solario to those of Rembrandt, Caravaggio to de Crayer and beyond, Kristeva traces a recurring and representational beheading that may be, as she states, “our only remaining link to the sacred.”¹ Throughout her discourse on “capital vision,” Kristeva seeks to explain how the figure of the disembodied head can, through artistic representation, provide psychological opportunities for healing, harmony, and even resurrection.² In her conception, the same violence that beheads in the world is challenged and ultimately assuaged in oil and canvas; the deathly Void that conquers with sword and scythe is itself conquered by paper and pen. Although her work in *The Severed Head* deals primarily with these modes of representation—lines and brushstrokes—Kristeva advocates an artistic portrayal of the Void that transcends the realm of flat surfaces and inanimate mediums: theater. According to Kristeva, “the acting out of a breakdown cancels out cruelty” through what she labels a “theatrical pathos.”³ In the 2005 film *Batman Begins*, director Christopher Nolan cuts to the heart of this claim by crafting a deeply psychological re-telling of the Batman legend—one that is relentlessly haunted by Kristeva’s severed head motif. A gritty and visceral character study masquerading as a superhero movie, *Batman Begins* charts the metamorphosis of Bruce Wayne, a tortured and terrorized youth, into an artistic and theatrical representation of the “capital vision.”⁴ Viewed through the lens of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic philosophy, *Batman Begins* treats its eponymous hero as a morbid figuration and, in doing so, demonstrates representation’s power over death as well as its purpose as a “passage to serenity.”⁵

In *Batman Begins*, Nolan’s trademark use of parallel timelines allows the audience nothing more than a fleeting glimpse of Bruce Wayne’s damaged psyche at one time. As his preferred method of exposition is painstakingly gradual, Nolan begins the film—as he begins *The Prestige* and *Memento*—with a single image for the audience to ponder; an image that informs the film’s central theme and facilitates comprehension in light of narrative fragmentation. In this instance, the central image is that of the Void. In a nightmarish recollection of a childhood memory, Bruce tumbles down a dilapidated well and lands broken and bleeding at the doorway to a dark abyss, a great cave that stretches

into crepuscular infinity. As Bruce stares fearfully into the featureless face of death, bats burst out of the shadowy chasm and descend on the screaming child. Traumatized by the experience, Bruce develops a crippling case of Chiroptophobia—fear of bats—which is, in turn, exacerbated by his parents untimely murder.

Confronted by an armed robber after a skittish eight-year-old Bruce begs his parents to leave a performance of *Faust* (actors in bat costumes prove too much for him), his parents are gunned down for his mother's pearl necklace. This is the first beheading of the film—one that Bruce is cruelly forced to witness. Before the trigger is pulled, Nolan focuses in on the neckline of Martha Wayne: the pearls form a luminous line, a cut across her pale skin. As the shot is fired, the gunman grabs ahold of this delicate strand and destroys it, scattering the pearls as Martha falls lifelessly to the ground. The pearls roll this way and that, each a pale little head severed from its connecting fiber. As Bruce will slowly discover, these disembodied pearls along with the Void, the bats, and his subsequent "sadness [are], in the end, good [omens]." ⁶ Kristeva writes, "It is not impossible to compensate for [this] separation . . . by taking control. By concentrating on one's ability to represent." ⁷ As an older and wiser man, Bruce does precisely this—donning a pointy-eared mask of death to fight Gotham's violence through theater. Before he can stand up to the beheaders of Gotham, however, he must nearly become one himself.

Bruce's college years serve to illustrate "a disease that can only be called the delirium of death." ⁸ According to Kristeva, the death drive or *Thanatos* pushes humankind towards destruction and violence. She writes, "fear of death and the prohibition against killing are accompanied by aggressiveness, violence, and hatred" and, thus, "we take revenge for the anguish of our own extinction." ⁹ Fearful as ever and positively enraged at the possibility that his parents' murderer will escape capital punishment, Bruce brings a gun to his trial. Just as he commits himself to gunning the man down, however, a mobster shoots the acquitted murderer to prevent him from testifying against the city's corrupt infrastructure. As the murderer lies bleeding on the ground, Bruce's childhood friend Rachael urges him away from the death and chaos: "We don't need to see this," she says. "Yes," responds Bruce, his eyes fixed on the carnage, "I do." ¹⁰ Bruce hopes that this barbaric display will assuage his suffering and "light up the dark caves of [his] psyche." ¹¹ As Kristeva anticipates, it does no such thing. He does not heal. In fact, his rage is intensified, his bloodlust more pronounced. "Death obsession for death obsession," the frenzy of murder is self-perpetuating, claims Kristeva. ¹² Witnessing it, participating in it, or becoming desensitized to it will never interrupt the cycle of bloodshed. Only by sublimating and representing his fear of death does Bruce liberate himself from the instinctual enslavement of *Thanatos* and become an agent of *Eros*, the life drive.

Curing Bruce's oppressive fear of bats demands a particularly immersive mode of representation. As Kristeva herself states, there are extreme cases where "writing by itself will not be enough to force open the void . . . it will take the agony of the whole body to finally grasp the truth of it." ¹³ By fashioning himself into a monstrous winged creature, Bruce transforms his entire body into an instrument of catharsis. Returning

as an older man to the abyss that spawned his terror, Bruce “[forces] open the void” and ventures inside.¹⁴ Attacked by a cloud of bats that positively dwarfs the swarm of his nightmares, Bruce rises in defiance and, arms outstretched, asserts the power of his mortal body over death. For Kristeva, this is the moment of “passage,” the move to representation that prefigures serenity.¹⁵ Although the figure of Batman is, in this instant, incarnated in the perceptible, he exists as something entirely “beyond the perceptible;” Kristeva is careful to draw a distinction between “an image that represents a lifelike object” and an icon.¹⁶ As an iconic figuration, Batman acts out “an inscription that invites contemplation.”¹⁷ One of the key tenets of Batman’s philosophy clearly defines this inscription: “To conquer fear you must become fear . . . and men fear most what they cannot see”—namely, their own death.¹⁸ By giving his violent, death-driven adversaries a glimpse of their own demise, Batman inspires “an intimate grappling with [their] passions and [their] mortality.”¹⁹

Considering Batman’s theatrical representation as a whole, the word “intimate” seems perfectly accurate if not something of an understatement.²⁰ A visit from the caped crusader forces a person to “face the horror head-on” and on multiple psychological levels.²¹ According to Kristeva, there is an intense power of horror inherent in the mask. In a “hollow-eyed mask,” Kristeva writes, “decapitation is intrinsically implied.”²² Masks force us to wonder what lies beneath; we cannot help but consider that what lies beneath might be nothing, an empty space, a capital Void. In the fierce visage of Batman, only a trace of his mortality is betrayed—just enough to make his implicit decapitation horrifying to the human eye. This horror fades in and out of the visible realm as Batman disappears effortlessly into the darkness and resurfaces at “the speed of thought.”²³ Indeed, Batman’s uncanny ability to pass from the invisible to the visible in an instant derives from his training: “You have to become a terrible thought, a wraith . . . you have to become an idea.”²⁴ Each time a band of gunmen are dispatched by an ephemeral shadow and are made to stand in contemplative awe at the mere notion of death, “the jouissance of thought’s triumph over death” is fully realized.²⁵ If this passion play of terror and triumph is exclusive to hardened criminals, however, how does Batman help those ordinary citizens who are quietly and privately plagued by the death-drive? Here, a familiar image enters the dialogue: the bat symbol. Glowing against the jet-black canvas of the night sky, the floating figure of a bat is far more than a cry for help from the city’s police. It demonstrates that death is omnipresent and must be confronted if we are to live alongside it as mortal beings. It demonstrates that ideas have no limits and that the concept of Batman transcends the physical man. Consider the fearful citizen who sees the symbol and, from his living-room, achieves a moment of cathartic mortal pause; in this instance, Kristeva’s use of the word “intimate” to describe Batman’s power of horror could not be more appropriate.²⁶

Although Bruce is saved and saves others through his cape and cowl, Ra’s al Ghul—his mentor, future nemesis, and the film’s primary antagonist—fails to sublimate his mortal terror and, instead, becomes a terrorist. Encouraging a younger Bruce to use his primal rage to avenge his parents, Ra’s describes his own encounter with the Void. He recounts, “Once I had a wife, my great love. She was taken from me. Like you I

was forced to learn that there are those without decency who must be fought without hesitation, without pity. Your anger gives you great power.”²⁷ Here, Nolan establishes Ra’s aggressively Draconian sense of civic justice. In his mind, “crime cannot be tolerated. Criminals thrive on the indulgence of society’s ‘understanding.’”²⁸ Under the same “guise of an egalitarian institution of decapitation” that veiled the horror of the guillotine, Ra’s and his misguided band of vigilantes behead “civilizations . . . whenever they reach the pinnacle of [their] decadence.”²⁹ By introducing a “psychotropic hallucinogen, a panic-inducing toxin” into Gotham’s water supply, Ra’s hopes to destroy what he sees as a Western “breeding ground for suffering and injustice.”³⁰ As the activation of his insidious toxin requires inhalation, Ra’s integrates a weaponized microwave emitter (ironically developed by the U.S. military to vaporize the water-supply of desert-dwelling terrorists) into a high-speed train to create a guillotine deadly enough to behead the entire city. As the film races towards its climax, a glisteningly metallic train cuts a swift line across Gotham, leaving in its wake a fog of dementia and decapitation. Those forced under its blade are cruelly divorced from their reason, their mental faculties, and, thus, “the capacity for representation.”³¹

Stepping briefly into the realm of the graphic novel that informs Nolan’s film, it should be noted that Ra’s was originally depicted as a man with an obsession for immortality. In some versions of the comic, he actually achieves it through supernatural means. Nolan grounds this obsession in reality by portraying Ra’s as a stylized “exocannibalist”—a barbarian who kills, beheads, and eats his enemies in order to steal their “invisible power” and “reinforce . . . [his] ties to the divine.”³² Dispassionately executing criminals, Ra’s ensures “the livings’ bond with the powers of the dead” by “stealing their evil spells”—as if a murderer’s invisible “control” over death could be appropriated by killing him.³³ Only in representation is such control possible. “Is Ra’s al Ghul immortal,” sneers a seemingly resurrected Ra’s towards the end of the film, “are his methods supernatural?”³⁴ No, answers Kristeva, this murderous “consumption-internalization-assimilation” is nothing more than the savage practice of the “primitive horde.”³⁵

In its treatment of Batman as a morbid figuration, *Batman Begins* demonstrates representation’s power over violence and Void, affirming Kristeva’s belief that artistic decapitation is, above all, “a passage to serenity.”³⁶ Where Ra’s malice is a sad testimony to the fact that murder is self-perpetuating, the figure of Batman stands as a powerful example of the reverse: that resurrection is contagious. When Batman confronts a murderer or astounds an onlooker, that person experiences a violent emotional response, a passion. In an instant of terror, that individual is made to feel the same passionate brush with death that Bruce felt from the bottom of his nightmarish well. Just as Bruce immerses himself in his theatrical portrayal of death, so is the criminal or bystander plunged into Bruce’s drama. Batman does not merely confront others with his passion; through representation, he pushes them to share in his passion and, in doing so, become fundamentally *compassionate*. This is the essence of representational resurrection. Haunted by the ghostly image of the masked and severed head, Gothamites are given a new lease on life. They are reborn with a deeper sense of what it means to be mortal—

risen from the ashes of *Thanatos* as more compassionate, more life-driven citizens. Liberated from anger, hatred, and fear, the people of Gotham can, for the first time, stand up to the death that pervades their city by sublimating their own private passions. The cycle of representation begins. As Kristeva writes, the morbid figuration is “rigid *and* fleeting, violent *and* happy, blood *and* spirit, horror *and* promise.”³⁷ Bruce Wayne puts on the clothes of death, of horror, to fulfill a sacred promise to his fellow man—a promise to “keep on passing” in the sublime defense of human life.³⁸

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- 1 Julia Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. (New York: Columbia UP, 2012). 1.
 - 2 Ibid., 131.
 - 3 Ibid., 120, 70.
 - 4 Ibid., 131.
 - 5 Ibid., 71.
 - 6 Ibid., 6.
 - 7 Ibid.
 - 8 Ibid., 97.
 - 9 Ibid., 15.
 - 10 *Batman Begins*. Directed by Christopher Nolan. 2005. Burbank CA: Warner Bros., 2005. DVD.
 - 11 Kristeva, *Severed Head*, 118.
 - 12 Ibid., 107.
 - 13 Ibid., 109.
 - 14 Ibid.
 - 15 Ibid., 74.
 - 16 Ibid., 3.
 - 17 Ibid.
 - 18 Nolan, *Batman Begins*.
 - 19 Kristeva, *Severed Head*, 10.
 - 20 Ibid.
 - 21 Ibid., 33.
 - 22 Ibid., 116, 106.
 - 23 Ibid., 1.
 - 24 Nolan, *Batman Begins*.
 - 25 Kristeva, *Severed Head*, 4.
 - 26 Ibid., 10.
 - 27 Nolan, *Batman Begins*.
 - 28 Ibid.
 - 29 Kristeva, *Severed Head*, 91 and Nolan, *Batman Begins*.
 - 30 Nolan, *Batman Begins*.
 - 31 Kristeva, *Severed Head*, 130.
 - 32 Ibid., 12, 13, 13.
 - 33 Ibid., 15.
 - 34 Nolan, *Batman Begins*.
 - 35 Kristeva, *Severed Head*, 14, 13.
 - 36 Ibid., 71.
 - 37 Ibid., 66.
 - 38 Ibid., 131.
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Free Will as a Natural Law in a Mechanist World

Eric Marturano

Modern Mechanist philosophy, beginning with Rene Descartes in the early seventeenth century, is based on the basic idea that Nature—the universe and its participants—are similar to complicated machines in composition and activity. This notion has been edited, qualified, attacked, and supported by many subsequent philosophers of the time period, most notably Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton, Baron d’Holbach, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, and Baruch Spinoza. In particular, seventeenth century Jewish-Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza was an important revisionist of prevailing mechanistic philosophical thought. Specifically, Spinoza argued that man is not “a kingdom within a kingdom,”¹ but rather a part of Nature; with no room for free will. However, this assertion is flawed when presented as a compulsory part of a mechanist worldview. In other words, the mechanist argument does not necessarily devoid man of free will—rather, mechanism can indeed be reconciled with the idea of human beings as a “kingdom within a kingdom” and the notion of free will, when the concept of free will is viewed as a Natural law.

According to Spinoza, “in whatever way will is conceived, whether finite or infinite, it requires a cause by which it is determined to exist and to act; and so it cannot be said to be a free cause, but only a necessary or constrained cause.”² This is because “will, like intellect, is only a definite mode of thinking, and so no single volition can exist or be determined to act unless it is determined by another cause, and this cause again by another, and so ad infinitum.”³ Thus, “if will be supposed infinite, it must also be determined to exist and to act by God.”⁴ Additionally, Spinoza contends that “men believe that they are free, precisely because they are conscious of their volitions and desires; yet concerning the causes that have determined them to desire and will they do not think, not even dream about, because they are ignorant to them.”⁵

Put simply, Spinoza’s position on the matter of free will is a result of the mechanism of his metaphysics. The mind, as a finite entity, is fully determined to be and to act according to other entities, chiefly God. To suggest free will—by which the mind is made self-determined and independent of external causal factors—is to remove the mind, and, thus, free will of mankind from Nature. Because Spinoza sees the mind as fully part of Nature, it must be understood according to the same principles that govern all of Nature. In this way,

a “kingdom within a kingdom” cannot exist in his philosophy.

However, in the Mechanist framework—a world where God creates the laws of Nature and sets them in motion—a problem with Spinoza’s reasoning to discount free will arises: Who is to say that free will cannot be a part of this greater mechanism? Working from this context, where one of the laws governing Nature is that mankind has free will, certain puzzling phenomena begin to make more sense. For example, even Spinoza sees God as perfect,⁶ but, if that is true, then what accounts for the evil or mistakes present in the world? The existence of free will for mankind offers an explanation for evil: it is the result of less-than-perfect humans and the choices they make according to their free will as “kingdoms within kingdoms.”

This “kingdom” of free will is one that is, of course, limited by other existing laws of Nature—one cannot simply defy gravity and fly based on mere will to do so. Yet this “kingdom” does not resist Nature, as Spinoza holds. Free will is still fully a part of Nature, but rather than a resultant, it is a law by which Nature operates, much like gravity, motion, and the like. A distinct difference from these concrete laws of Nature is that free will is a cause that can determine nearly infinite outcomes. But this fact does not restrict its ability to be a Natural law—rather, it only implies a different definition of the mind and will than what Spinoza offers. Free will of the mind, in this framework, is fully part of Nature as a law itself, rather than a determinant of any existing natural law. In a sense, the mind does self-determine what it should do—this is the very definition of free will—but its self-determination does not undermine the larger Mechanism that determines its existence. In more simple terms, free will can determine things that occur within nature—just as the law of gravity can determine whether or not something falls when you drop it from a ledge—but its existence as a law of Nature is also determined by the greater Mechanism in which it operates.

In this way, human beings are indeed “kingdoms within kingdoms,” with the caveat that the larger kingdom (God and Nature) supersedes the smaller kingdom (free will), much like how local laws are superseded by state laws, and state laws are superseded by national laws. Ironically, some of Spinoza’s propositions can even be used to support this theory. The proposition that “whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God”⁷—which ultimately leads to the conclusion that “all things that come to pass do so only though the laws of God’s infinite nature”⁸—certainly supports the notion of free will as a Natural law within a greater Mechanistic philosophy. For it is by God’s determination that Natural laws exist, and, if free will is considered as a Natural law, then it must exist according to God’s determination. In other words, the “kingdom” of free will is determined by its larger, parent “kingdom” to exist. And within that smaller “kingdom” of free will operating as a Natural law, mankind can determine infinite outcomes of their choosing by themselves—but only as a distant result of the greater “kingdom’s” original authority.

Furthermore, from the proposition that “from the necessity of divine nature there must follow infinite things in infinite ways,”⁹ free will can be used as a vehicle for which these “infinite things” take place in “infinite ways” within the “kingdom” of mankind—

which, it is important to remember, resides in the larger Mechanist “kingdom” of Nature and God. Moreover, this notion leads to the corollaries that are building blocks of the Mechanist worldview of mechanists like Descartes and subsequently, Spinoza: That, one, “God is the efficient cause of all things,”¹⁰ two, “it follows that God is the cause through himself,”¹¹ and three, “it follows that God is absolutely the first cause.”¹²

However, these assertions lead Spinoza to ultimately reason that “will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary cause.”¹³ Yet free will is both a free and necessary cause, by definition of being titled as “free.” Given Spinoza’s claim that, “if will be supposed infinite, it must also be determined to exist and to act by God,”¹⁴ then the resultants of free will are inescapably “infinite,” “necessary,” operating within a larger determined “kingdom” (of God) and, by definition, “free.” Therefore, free will itself—not its resultants, which are infinite—must be understood to be finite and limited when compared to other Natural laws. Because these Natural laws are “determined to exist and act by God,” when the Natural law of free will operates within the larger Mechanist “kingdom,” it still maintains the “infinite” and freely chosen results and outcomes that occur within its smaller “kingdom”—doing so from an extremely large (but still limited) pool of options. Thus, when proposed as a Natural law itself, functioning within a larger mechanism of Natural laws set by God and Nature, there is no conflict with the idea of free will and a Mechanist view of Nature and God. Free will, therefore, must be a Natural law in order to exist. And, as it does indeed exist, so it is necessarily a Natural law.

Ultimately, Spinoza’s argument that man is not “a kingdom within a kingdom,”¹⁵ but rather a part of Nature with no room for free will is flawed when presented as a compulsory part of a mechanist worldview. The “kingdom” of free will can certainly exist within a larger Mechanist “kingdom” of God and Nature. However, it can only do so if the concept of free will is presented as a Natural law, much like gravity, or the conservation of energy, or the other structures that guide the world. By looking at free will as a limited yet free “kingdom” of the greater Mechanist “kingdom” set in place by God and Nature, modern Mechanist philosophy becomes more relatable and makes a little more sense based on the experiences of daily life. The concept of free will is one that is hard to prove or disprove; regardless, it is one that many are familiar with because infinite choices, with infinite outcomes, are made by everyone, each and every day. Whether or not you agree that those choices and outcomes are predetermined entirely is your choice, of course—as a “kingdom within a kingdom,” you have the free will to decide.

1 Baruch Spinoza, *Concerning the Origin and Nature of the Emotions*. Part III. Ethics.

2 Samuel Shirley, ed., “Baruch Spinoza, The Ethics (1677).” *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*. Ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins. Second ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 158.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 160.

6 Ibid., 144.

7 Ibid., 149.

8 Ibid., 151.

9 Ibid.

- 10 Ibid., 152.
 - 11 Ibid.
 - 12 Ibid.
 - 13 Ibid., 158.
 - 14 Ibid.
 - 15 Spinoza, *Concerning the Origin and Nature of the Emotions*.
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Dostoevsky on Human Freedom: Responding to the Gift of Freedom in Modern Society

Alan Lipchin

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and *The Brothers Karamazov* deal with the themes of the new philosophical movement of the time, existentialism, and the defining characteristic of this movement the existence of human freedom to choose one's identity, life-path, relationships, etc. In works of existentialist writers, the concept of freedom roots itself in death and as Heidegger states, living as "beings-towards-death."¹ Similarly, Dostoevsky bases his existential philosophy on a deep-seeded understanding of his own finitude and the fleetingness of life. This mentality may be a result of his life-changing, close encounter with his own death in 1849 after being granted a reprieve by the Czar moments before he was to be executed. This event was one of the major turning points in Dostoevsky's life and the key to understanding his character of the Underground Man, who exemplifies the acceptance of the gift of freedom, which gives humans the ability to make decisions to better their existence. But for Dostoevsky, the human freedom to make decisions about how to live one's life, the centermost part of his existential philosophy, makes human existence all the more difficult as a result of the societal and personal responses to freedom through religion, psychology, and other aspects of one's culture.

To see exactly how the Underground Man exemplifies the existential response to freedom, one can look to the opening of *Notes from the Underground*. In it, the Underground Man describes himself as a "sick" and "spiteful man," who "believe[s] there is something wrong with [his] liver" and, yet "refuse[s] medical treatment out of spite."² He understands that the normal response to pain, especially something as serious as a liver condition, is to seek immediate medical attention, but he chooses not to precisely because he can make that choice. When every decision matters as a result of living one's life with the knowledge that it is short and could end at any moment, personal freedom should take over as the guiding principle of action. Additionally, the Underground Man realizes that he "can't 'hurt' the doctors by refusing to be treated by them" and that he is "only hurting [himself] and no one else," but he still states, "My liver hurts me—well, let it damn well hurt—the more it hurts the better."³ This statement shows that he is conscious of the rational understanding that his rebelliousness is only impeding his own health, but he does not care because all that matters to him is that he is exercising his right to be free and refuses to succumb to nature because "nature has no bind on him."⁴ In existential philosophy, nature does not dictate one's life,

and as a result, the main dictator of one's own future is oneself.

The concept that the laws of nature are at the core of existence, along with the growing popularity of utilitarianism, was pervading Russian culture during Dostoevsky's professional career. This contrary belief to the existential perspective on nature is the reason why the Underground Man does not suppose his readers will understand his decision or that he will be able to explain to his readers who it is he is actually trying to annoy by his spite.⁵ His readers cannot understand his behavior because they may have the typical, utilitarian, rationalistic approach to decision making. This ethical system teaches the belief that if one behaves in the way that aligns with the most of one's own interests, one will be the happiest. But the Underground Man makes it clear that he, like many others, will act in direct opposition to his own interests simply because he can and because he wants to. For example, a gambler rationally knows that he should not gamble or that it is not in his best interest to gamble; yet he still gambles because he chooses to have it as part of his life. That freedom and choice to gamble, in spite of everything telling the gambler not to, is no different than the Underground Man's decision not to go see a doctor for his liver problems or not to return to the Civil Service to continue to make money so that he can get a better room than his "dreadful, horrible hole, on the very outskirts of town," or even not to leave Saint Petersburg even though the "climate isn't good for [him] any more and that with [his] small means it is very expensive to live in Petersburg."⁶ In all these examples, neither reason, nor nature, dictate the Underground Man's choices rather, his personal freedom guides him through his hyperconscious decision-making process. However, as a result of his hyperconsciousness he "renders [himself] incapable of even the simplest actions,"⁷ which makes for the important distinction between the two types of man, according to Dostoevsky.

The Underground Man distinguishes between two types of men found in culture. One is the "man of action" and the other is the "characterless," super-conscious man, similar to the Underground Man, who the "man of the nineteenth century...is indeed morally bound to be."⁸ The major difference between these two types of men is their thought processes. A man of action "goes straight to his goal,"⁹ without serious, conscious reflection about the consequences of his actions and will "capitulate in face of the impossible."¹⁰ Acting purely out of his feelings, the man of action is entirely influenced by rational deductions, or the "stone wall" of Dostoevsky's society, which he sees as "the conclusions of natural science" and "mathematics," which have made people surrender to the "laws of nature," "obliged to accept [nature] as [it] is and, consequently, all [nature's] results" without room for "opinion" or "wishes."¹¹ This type of predetermined and quasi-dictatorial existence is not one that suits the Underground Man. The Underground Man ignores these "stone walls," or laws of nature, because they should not determine his choices. The Underground Man will not succumb to nature just because he has to deal with a "stone wall" and does not have the strength to knock it down.¹² This notion refers to the earlier claim that rationalism and utilitarianism cannot be the bases for the determination or explanation of one's choices and actions. The "final and morally decisive influence"¹³ attributed to the laws of nature will not allow humans to exhibit their deepest, unifying characteristic of freedom. By living in response to nature's laws, one leaves room for freedom to be found

in one's life, the ability to make personal meaning out of the laws, and make decisions based on one's conscience and not on the super-conscience of nature, science, and society. This gift of freedom is the reason man is "morally bound" to be like the Underground Man, refusing to succumb to science or society's laws, but choosing to live freely. But this reality opens up the several possibilities of responding to human freedom, either by having "positive," or "negative" freedom or by completely giving up this freedom, all of which are options discussed in Dostoevsky's later novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the first type of freedom, "negative" freedom, is exemplified by one of the book's characters, Ivan Karamazov. Towards the end of the chapter, *The Grand Inquisitor*, Alyosha becomes upset with his brother, Ivan's, decision to move to America and live out all the "hell in [his] heart and [his] head"¹⁴ instead of staying in Russia with his family. He is implying that Ivan is capable of doing this because of the nihilistic, relativist concept that if there is no God, ultimate Truth, or morality, all is permitted. Ivan replies by agreeing with the statement, "everything is lawful,"¹⁵ giving him the freedom to exercise his desires, even though they may be detrimental to his life and family. This radical nihilism is the type of "negative freedom" that comes from the gift of human freedom, but can be avoided by choosing to act in accordance with "positive freedom."

The type of freedom exemplified by Father Zosima, the wise, spiritual advisor in the local monastery, is "positive freedom," the response to freedom that Dostoevsky seems to be implying is the better option for humans to practice. Father Zosima explains, "There is only one means of salvation" for humanity, which is to "make [oneself] responsible for all men's sins" because as soon as a person genuinely makes himself responsible for everything and for all mankind, one will see at once that he is to be blamed for each and every thing.¹⁶ Father Zosima is directly arguing against the relativist notion that "sin" and "wickedness [are] mighty"¹⁷ because "everything is lawful," and so no one should be held accountable for his own, as well as others', decisions. Father Zosima is promoting "positive freedom," in which individuals who have accepted their rights to freedom and personal decision-making will practice ethics because they take full accountability for their actions as a result of the gift of freedom that they receive from their conscious existences. Dostoevsky's decision to have a religious figure represent this preferable form of ethics speaks to the notion of faith as the basis for freedom. A common practice for monks during the time when Dostoevsky was writing *The Brothers Karamazov* was to continually recite the Prayer of the Heart, or the "Jesus Prayer," opening up their hearts to God because the heart was thought to be the place where "right" and "wrong" were to be found. This "ethics of the heart" is found from the relationship with Jesus because of his embodiment of God's gift of freedom, as seen in *The Grand Inquisitor*. The Grand Inquisitor states that fifteen hundred years prior, Jesus came with the goal to "make [his followers] free."¹⁸ However, "the freedom which [Jesus] didst exalt when [Jesus] wast on earth," which was rooted in his followers' "freedom of their faith" in God, was too much for them to live with, and thus, "people...more persuaded than ever that they have perfect freedom" willingly "brought their freedom to [the Inquisition]," so that Church could make decisions for them.¹⁹

The Grand Inquisitor's remarks to Jesus that the status of freedom during the Inquisition represent the last of the three potential responses to freedom, giving up one's freedom in order to surrender to the control of society and nature and, in turn, becoming less human. This giving up of freedom is seen by the Inquisitor's claim that the Church has "corrected [Jesus'] work," saying that "men rejoiced that they were again led like sheep, and that the terrible gift that had brought them such suffering, was, at last, lifted from their hearts."²⁰ The Inquisitor is referring to the "gift" of freedom that Jesus brought for followers of God in his first incarnation. Freedom is challenging, psychologically, because it requires commitment and authority in one's life and decisions. It is more attractive for humans to have this "easier" type of existence, similar to that of a sheep following its shepherd, which, Dostoyevsky is claiming, humans will willingly exchange for their rights to freedom. Hence, the Church serves the purpose of the super-conscience of society, deciding what is "good" and "evil" for everyone. For example, the Inquisitor explains that the Church "shall allow [people] even sin... and they will love [The Church] like children because [the Church] allow[s] them to sin."²¹ This perversion of freedom into accepted sinning is the type of destruction of humanity, which Dostoyevsky fears, allows a political or religious body to control human consciousness. When freedom is given up to a higher power, ethics is no longer found in one's heart, as seen by the Russian monks reciting the "Jesus Prayer," rather, that higher power serves as the ultimate ethicist for society forbidding the existential calling for each person to take control of his own life.

The Grand Inquisitor says that Jesus deceived those "freed" by his death and resurrection since these people felt abandoned without God's direct intervention and assistance. The Church took it upon itself to "finish building [Jesus' followers'] tower for them....in [Jesus'] name."²² Therefore, the Church is doing all the work of building this "tower," referring to the work of achieving the Kingdom of God, for the followers of the Church, rendering them entirely dependent on the Church, incapable of providing any sustenance for themselves. The Inquisitor tells Jesus, "never, will [people] learn to feed themselves without [the Church's] help" because "no science will ever give them bread so long as they remain free, so long as they refuse to lay that freedom at [the Church's] feet, understand that freedom and daily bread enough to satisfy all are unthinkable and can never be had together."²³ This statement shows that universal sustenance and freedom are mutually exclusive. However, the Inquisitor's claim is incorrect because freedom does not have to be independent from sustenance when one is holding faith in one's heart. The primary example of faith leading to freedom and sustenance is seen by Jesus' response to his interrogation, in which he "suddenly approach[es] [the Inquisitor] in silence and softly kiss[es] him."²⁴ Jesus' answer to the Inquisitor's attempt to control him is the existential response for communication, which is silence, and then a symbolic act of love. Jesus is making his own meaning out of the situation he is in because he knows that God is sustaining him. Jesus' freedom gives him the strength necessary to avoid capitulating in the face of what seems to be his certain end. As a human who has lived through his own death, Jesus is aware of the criticality that each decision in life must be made with personal meaning, as the Underground Man shows in his speech on freedom in the *Notes from the Underground*.

Since Dostoevsky's writings on Christianity occurred mostly in his later works, the notion of faith is absent from the *Notes from the Underground*. However, the Underground Man's speech on freedom makes a claim that the acceptance of one's freedom, whether it is "negative" or "positive," is better than surrendering one's freedom to another person or an organizational body. The Underground Man's decisions may or may not be examples of "positive" freedom, but regardless, he is exercising freedom, which, with faith, as seen by Jesus' actions at the end of *The Grand Inquisitor*, could lead to being more like Jesus in his free existence. On the other hand, without freedom, people are capable of living more like sheep than actual human beings, permitting and performing horrendous acts. In a society without freedom for each of its individuals, Dostoevsky is implying that humans would be willing to "kill" God, as seen by the Inquisitor's sentencing of Jesus to be burnt as a result of his hindrance to the Church's control over its "obedient flock" of followers and by his attempt to return freedom to humanity in his second resurrection.²⁵

The underlying theme of *The Grand Inquisitor* and the *Notes from the Underground* is the normality for humans to want control over their lives, whether it is through laws of nature and science or through a religious organization. This control may make one's life easier, but it does not make a person more human. Only when one realizes that life is not be taken as granted and should, therefore, be fully appreciated, does one live a truly, existential existence. Dostoevsky, like Jesus, and seemingly, the Underground Man, is an example of this care for life, because he is living a posthumous existence. A few months after his arrest for being part of the anti-czarist Petrashevsky Circle, Dostoevsky was suddenly taken to the Semyonovsky parade ground to be executed. Just as he was about to be shot, there was a sound of drums and a government courier read the decree saying that Dostoevsky and the other men to be killed were granted a reprieve by the Czar and, instead, were sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. Dostoevsky had essentially lived through a moment of his own death and, as a result, "nothing mattered to him;" he was able to "surrender himself...to the joy of resurrection,"²⁶ as a Christ-like figure, ready to find true meaning in his life, in which everything mattered as a result of each of his decisions. This moment gives insight into the type of relationship one should have to one's freedom. Dostoevsky would want each person to live a life of freedom, instead of living life in slavery to nature, as seen by the growing perception of science as deterministic and, therefore preventing of freedom in modern society.

1 Gordon Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 301.

2 Ibid., 193-194.

3 Ibid., 194.

4 Robert Solomon, *Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37.

5 Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, 194.

6 Ibid., 196.

7 Robert Solomon, *Existentialism*, 37.

8 Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, 195.

9 Ibid., 200.

10 Ibid., 203.

11 Ibid., 203.

12 Ibid., 203.

- 13 Ibid., 200.
 - 14 Ibid., 252.
 - 15 Ibid., 253.
 - 16 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Modern Library, 1996), 358.
 - 17 Ibid., 358.
 - 18 Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, 237.
 - 19 Ibid., 237
 - 20 Ibid., 244.
 - 21 Ibid., 247.
 - 22 Ibid., 239.
 - 23 Ibid., 240.
 - 24 Ibid., 251.
 - 25 Ibid., 248.
 - 26 Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *Dostoevsky: A Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934), 89.
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Montaignian and Voltairian Principles in Disney's *Pocahontas*

Saljoog Asif

The quintessential savage has fascinated thinkers throughout history and continues to capture the imagination of modern-day society. Such topics were the focus of both Michel de Montaigne's and Voltaire's literary works, with each writer possessing his own unique views. Instead of using literature, contemporary media touches upon these concepts through motion pictures, with films like *Dances with Wolves* and *Avatar* being notable examples. Even animated films have grappled with the topics of humanity and indigenous peoples, and Disney's 1995 animated feature *Pocahontas* is no exception. A condensed version of the 1607 historical encounter between the English settlers and Virginian tribes, the Academy Award-winning film was met with mixed reception upon release; the Powhatan Renape Nation took issue with the film for propagating a "dishonest and self-serving myth."¹ Despite being a distorted, kid-friendly retelling, *Pocahontas* remains one of the most mature films of the Disney Renaissance with a variety of themes; indeed, the principles of both Montaigne and Voltaire can be readily applied to the animated feature. In addition to supporting Montaigne's idea of the purity of the native culture and ignorance of the Europeans, the film also exemplifies Voltaire's pessimistic theories on human nature by depicting the Powhatan Indians' aggressive actions. Disney's *Pocahontas* represents an indigenous people who not only live a life incomprehensible to the Englishmen, but also possess vices common to all mankind, ultimately creating Native Americans who embody both Montaignian and Voltairian principles.

The film quickly establishes the settlers' loathing and intolerance towards the natives of the New World, despite the fact that none of the Englishmen have any experiences with the Native Americans on which to base their judgements. Governor Ratcliffe does not hesitate to call the indigenes "bloodthirsty savages"² and "filthy heathens,"³ a sentiment echoed by nearly all the members of the Virginia Company. These intense feelings are further highlighted during the climax of the film, when the English colonists decide to wage war against the Powhatan Indians at daybreak. During the 'Savages' song sequence, Ratcliffe rallies his men to prepare for battle, uniting them by exclaiming, "They're [the Native Americans are] not like you and me / Which mean they must be evil. / We must sound the drums of war!"⁴ As the governor so blatantly states, the felt danger

that the indigenous peoples pose is not founded in their supposed murderous rage or greed for gold, but rather in their difference from the settlers. Certainly, the “hellish red”⁵ Indians with their bows and arrows sharply juxtapose the pale Englishmen with their metal instruments; at first glance, there seems to be no resemblance or common element between them at all. The Europeans’ desire to attack is stirred by a volatile mixture of suspicion, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and is only heightened by the severe dissimilarities between the opposing worlds.

The phobia and prejudice that consume the Englishmen in the film are not historically inaccurate or unrealistic; such emotions filled Europeans whenever they explored a foreign land, as discussed by Montaigne. In his essay *Of Cannibals*, Montaigne claims that men perceive savagery whenever they see things to which they are not accustomed. In regards to the Brazilian tribes, he states:

... I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice; for indeed it seems we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in. There is always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished manners in all things.⁶

According to Montaigne, the Europeans’ ignorance and disdain stems from the belief that their culture is the best culture, complete with superior faith, legislation, and practices. The same principles can be applied to the Englishmen in the film: even before they encounter the Native Americans, the colonists label them as barbarians who only want to exterminate the purer, European race. Ratcliffe emphasizes this idea when he emphatically tells his men, “Murderous thieves [the Native Americans], there’s no room for their kind in civilized society!”⁷ Ratcliffe and the Englishmen, with their narrow mode of thought, are unable to broaden their views or stop focusing on their own, European society. Indeed, the men of the Virginia Company gauge refinement and culture by their own English standards, effectively forming the center of their ignorance. Moreover, the settlers plan to wage war and exterminate the savages based on the fact that the natives ‘are not like you and me / Which means they must be evil.’ Montaignian principles are clearly at work in the film: the Englishmen distrust the Powhatan Indians not only because they are so different, but also because they see themselves as being a part of a better culture, a civilized society.

The clash between the two groups of people is further highlighted by the relationship that develops between Pocahontas and John Smith, in which Pocahontas adopts the role of a Montaignian teacher and guide. During their first conversation, John Smith angers the Powhatan princess when he calls her people “savages,” forcing her to walk away furious and insulted. The quarrel, which leads up to the outcry of the famous song, ‘Colors of the Wind’, sums up the situation between the conflicting peoples:

Pocahontas: Our houses are fine.

John Smith: You think that, only because you don’t know any better... There’s so much we

can teach you. We've improved the lives of savages all over the world.

Pocahontas: Savages!?

John Smith: ... 'Savage' is just a word. You know, a term for... people who are uncivilized.

Pocahontas: Like me.

John Smith: Well, when I say uncivilized, what I mean is, is –

Pocahontas: What you mean is, not like you.⁸

Similar to how the rest of the Englishmen are unable to be open-minded in regards to the Native Americans, John Smith is also condescending when conversing with Pocahontas. Both John Smith and his fellow companions view their culture as superior, complete with more advanced weapons, better buildings, and white skin. Undoubtedly, Pocahontas is correct when she claims the word 'savage' simply refers to someone who does not follow early 17th century European customs and expectations. Her beliefs are echoed once more during 'Colors of the Wind' when she states, "You think the only people who are people / Are the people who look and think like you / But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger / You'll learn things you never knew you never knew."⁹ Pocahontas' statements and views on the matter are in accordance with Montaigne's belief that 'each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice.' As a Montaignian instructor, Pocahontas is ultimately able to show John Smith that civilizations and cultures come in many different forms and that such disparity does not necessarily imply savagery.

In addition to exemplifying Montaigne's beliefs about society and barbarism, Pocahontas and her people also align with Montaigne's views regarding nature and the earth. Montaigne lauds the Brazilians' harmony with nature, believing they "retain alive and vigorous their genuine, their most useful and natural, virtues and properties, which we [Europeans] have debased in the latter in adapting them to gratify our corrupted taste".¹⁰ In regards to land, Montaigne adds:

They [the indigenes] are not fighting for the conquest of new lands, for they still enjoy that natural abundance that provides them without toil and trouble with all necessary things in such profusion that they have no wish to enlarge their boundaries. They are still in that happy state of desiring only as much as their natural needs demand; anything beyond that is superfluous to them.¹¹

The Powhatan Indians in the film are characterized by such ideas and principles. The film begins with them amassing fruits and vegetables from the soil and fish from the rivers, while thanking the Great Spirit and "... all the earth our Mother gives."¹² The Native Americans' strong gratitude for the earth and its bountiful harvest, however, juxtaposes the avarice of the Englishmen. Upon arriving in Virginia, the colonists automatically claim the land in the name of King James I and spend their time trying to unearth the "pebbles that sparkle and shine."¹³ The settlers, especially Governor Ratcliffe, crave the riches that the New World supposedly offers them, though it is only a non-existent store of gold that will satiate their greed. After all, "it's the glory they'll [the gold 'nuggets' will] give me"¹⁴ that really matters. Conversely, Pocahontas, with her way of life deeply rooted in nature, attempts to reform John Smith and his material thinking:

You think you own whatever land you land on.
 You think the earth's a dead thing you can claim.
 ...
 Come run the hidden pine trails of the forest.
 Come taste the sun-sweet berries of the earth.
 Come roll in all the riches all around you,
 And for once, never wonder what they're worth.
 ...
 You can own the earth and still
 All you'll own is earth until
 You can paint with all the colors of the wind.¹⁵

The Englishmen's expansive hunger for land, wealth, and power epitomizes the superfluity that Montaigne so highly criticizes. Unlike the Native Americans, the settlers yearn to dominate the virgin land and obtain a monetary profit, a desire strengthened by the fact that they perceive the earth as a 'dead thing.' John Smith initially follows such thinking, claiming that he and his people can teach the natives "how to use this land properly" and "make the most of it."¹⁶ Pocahontas, however, completes the role of the Montaignian teacher by calling attention to his flawed thinking, advising him to embrace earthly gifts while taking no notice of the fiscal benefit. The Native Americans have no need to fight 'for the conquest of new lands' as they are content with the abundance offered by the earth, which contrasts sharply with the corrupt Englishmen who long to quench their appetite of excess and do not comprehend the spirit of nature.

Although the Powhatan Indians seem relatively serene and tranquil, they also reveal vices and intolerance as the film goes on, mirroring their English counterparts. The Powhatan Indians constantly refer to the foreigners as "ravenous wolves" and "white demons"¹⁷ despite a lack of contact with the Englishmen. Moreover, the Native Americans are given their own portion in the 'Savages' song sequence, in which they declare, "They're different from us / Which means they can't be trusted. / We must sound the drums of war!"¹⁸ This statement clearly parallels the aforementioned lines sung by Governor Ratcliffe: "They're not like you and me / Which means they must be evil. / We must sound the drums of war!" Similar to how the settlers hate and distinguish themselves from the Native Americans, the Powhatan Indians also declare war and discriminate against the Englishmen. Indeed, both groups share the following line in the song, which effectively captures the essence of their disagreement: "It's them or us."¹⁹

Interestingly, although Montaigne spends much of his essay touching upon European views of the natives, he barely discusses the indigenes' opinions of the Europeans. The most he mentions is how the Brazilian men, upon visiting Rouen, were stunned by the wide gap between the social classes, something they deemed as an "injustice."²⁰ Certainly, Montaigne effectively paints the Brazilian tribes as relatively innocent and pure, safeguarded from the corruption that plagued European society at the time. The same can be said of the Native Americans in the Disney film, in

which the Powhatan Indians live without excess and are free from the Englishmen's controlling materialism. Without the drive for material goods, what could be the cause of the natives' loathing of the white men? The climax of the film hinges on a misunderstanding between the two groups, with the Englishmen furious that John Smith has been captured and the Powhatan Indians enraged that their bravest warrior has been killed. As the volatility reaches a zenith between the two worlds, both groups decide to enter warfare without attempting to make peace. What could be the reason for these prejudices and small-mindedness of which both groups are guilty?

The answer lies with Voltaire, who possessed a rather pessimistic view on human nature. In his *Philosophical Dictionary*, Voltaire argues, "All men are born with a sufficiently violent liking for domination, wealth, and pleasure," and therefore have a tendency to wage war and "go to excess in everything when they can."²¹ At first glance, it would seem that such an idea is inapplicable to the Native Americans in the film, as Montaigne defends native peoples' unique style of warfare. He maintains, "Their warfare is wholly noble and generous, and as excusable and beautiful as this human disease can be; its only basis among them is their rivalry in valor... Valor is the strength, not of legs and arms, but of heart and soul."²² It cannot be denied that the Native Americans are valorous and brave, as Chief Powhatan himself states in the beginning of the film after he and his warriors return from defeating the Massawomecks. However, the Native Americans plan to combat the Englishmen out of revenge and pure hatred instead of valor. Indeed, the Powhatan Indians wage war onscreen only once, when they decide to execute John Smith and slaughter the settlers, exclaiming, "Destroy their evil race / Until there's not a trace left."²³ Such a statement does not seem to be championing valor or courage; on the contrary, it is imbued with toxic bigotry, a type of warfare that even Montaigne could not call 'wholly noble and generous.' Voltaire, however, expects such behavior from mankind, writing, "... men still strut and pose on the stage of life; they make love at the risk of destruction, intrigue, carry on war, and form projects, just as if they were to live in luxury and happiness for a thousand ages."²⁴ Certainly, Montaigne and Voltaire have different views on human nature: where the former believes savagery is based on the ignorant perspective of "civilized" Europeans, the latter seems to believe an innate coarseness and savagery plagues all mankind. According to Voltaire and his rather cynical view, all men are inherently capable of evil and warfare, including even "uncivilized," indigenous peoples.

In his October 1737 letter to Prince Frederick the Great of Prussia, Voltaire overtly mentions cannibals and their supposed savagery. Voltaire writes, "I reply that these savages have the same idea of justice and injustice as we have. They make war as we do from madness and passion; we see the same crimes committed everywhere."²⁵ Voltaire explicitly equates the native 'savages' with civilized Europeans and blames both groups for committing the same misdeeds for the same reasons. All humans, be they savage or European, are stimulated by emotions such as 'madness and passion' that drive them to commit wrongdoings, but they are also able to differentiate between right and wrong. Voltaire emphasizes the latter point later on in the letter when recounting his encounter with a female cannibal:

The wrong is not putting them on the spit but killing them, and I dare to assert that no savage thinks he acts well when he murders his friend... I asked through the interpreter if she [the female savage] had ever eaten the flesh of her enemies and if she liked it; she answered: Yes; I then asked if she would willingly have killed or have caused to be killed any of her compatriots in order to eat them; she replied with a shudder and with a visible horror for this crime.²⁶

If all humans are capable of knowing right and wrong, they must then be guilty whenever they commit or are indifferent to a misdemeanor. Therefore, both the Englishmen and Powhatan Indians are culpable for waging a war spurred by bigotry and intolerance. Voltaire makes his dislike of prejudice clear in the *Philosophical Dictionary*, stating “foolishness is good for nothing, and that persecution is abominable.”²⁷ By the film’s end, the Native Americans and Englishmen are ultimately restrained by Pocahontas, who champions tolerance and whose heart is filled with “courage and understanding.”²⁸

Disney’s *Pocahontas* remains a controversial film: not only was the portrayal of the Native Americans met with criticism, but also the film was attacked for attempting to sugarcoat history. Despite these flaws, it is undeniable that *Pocahontas* represents one of Disney’s most mature and complex works. The Powhatan Indians live in a society free of excess and take only what is needed from nature, while the men of the Virginia Company are materially-driven, ignorant, and insatiable. Pocahontas is ultimately able to bridge the gap between the two dissimilar cultures by taking on the role of a Montaignian guide: aside from advocating peace and love, she teaches John Smith to live with tolerance while promoting a oneness with nature void of monetary benefit. However, the seemingly innocent Native Americans prove to have the same ignorance that Montaigne accuses the Europeans of exercising. Indeed, the film portrays both the Native Americans and Englishmen as hostile and bigoted, a fact essentially related to the principles of Voltaire. The Powhatan Indians and settlers are connected in that they are both human and therefore controlled by the same desires, both driven by blind rage that catalyzes violence and aggression. Ultimately, the Disney film offers an amalgamation of both Montaignian and Voltairian principles: the Powhatan Indians are not only Montaigne’s idealized savage, but also the inherently flawed humans of Voltaire. Indeed, this mixture of philosophies helps transform the Native Americans in the film into individuals who are both spiritually exotic and genuinely human.

1 Chief Roy Crazy Horse, “*The Pocahontas Myth: The Real Story, Not Disney’s Distortion.*” Powhatan Renape Nation. <<http://www.powhatan.org/pocc.html>>. 13 Dec. 2012.

2 *Pocahontas*. Directed by Michael Gabriel and Eric Goldberg. 1995. Walt Disney Featured Animation, 2005. DVD.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne: “Of Cannibals”*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), 152.

- 7 Gabriel and Goldberg, *Pocahontas*.
 - 8 Ibid.
 - 9 Ibid.
 - 10 Montaigne, *Of Cannibals*, 152.
 - 11 Ibid., 156.
 - 12 Gabriel and Goldberg, *Pocahontas*.
 - 13 Ibid.
 - 14 Ibid.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 Ibid.
 - 17 Ibid.
 - 18 Ibid.
 - 19 Ibid.
 - 20 Montaigne, *Of Cannibals*, 159.
 - 21 Voltaire, *The Portable Voltaire: Philosophical Dictionary*, ed. Ben Ray Redman (New York: Penguin, 1977), 115.
 - 22 Montaigne, *Of Cannibals*, 156-157.
 - 23 Gabriel and Goldberg, *Pocahontas*.
 - 24 Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 224.
 - 25 Voltaire, *The Portable Voltaire: Letters*, ed. Ben Ray Redman (New York: Penguin, 1977), 452.
 - 26 Ibid.
 - 27 Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 182, 134-136.
 - 28 Gabriel and Goldberg, *Pocahontas*.
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Cezanne successfully established a middle ground among the bifurcation that united the act of 'appearing' and the objects that actually do appear.

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The Philosophy behind Cezanne and his Recovery of Objectivity: The Decisive Break from Pure Impressionism

James Baylor

French painter Paul Cezanne worked in an era in which the Impressionist movement had gained popularity and become firmly rooted as the mainstream artistic movement of the late 19th - early 20th century in France. Originally shunned and misunderstood, Impressionists including Monet and Renoir, were propelled to fame as their artistic representations became more accepted. Painter Paul Cezanne saw something lacking in the movement and determined to revise the Impressionist way. For this action, he has been classified as Post Impressionist. When philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty turned his scrutiny to the art world he was struck by Paul Cezanne and understood his goal to regain, or recreate, the concreteness that was lacking in the popular movement of the day. Because of this, Cezanne's work artistically manifests the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, whose philosophy, in turn, is heavily intertwined with Cezanne's work. The art and philosophy parallel one another in their quest to revise Impressionism, to find depth and establish meaning.

Painting the surface of nature, as it appeared in a unique time and space, and to capture by the stroke of a brush the fleeting and transitory manifestations that made these surfaces unique, was the foundation of Impressionism. According to *Shades*, "In such impressionism things are to be rendered as they show themselves rather than as sensible images that would present a meaning transcending the sensible presentation."¹ Sensation dominated and eliminated concept and universality. Consequently, artists like Monet would paint a scene over and over again albeit with a new and distinct product each time because of the changing external conditions, such as change in the quality of light or precipitation due to a change in the season. In accordance with Monet's beliefs, each piece stood distinctly isolated and was not a manifestation or interpretation of any great artistic theory. The paintings were to be taken for what they were: namely, the unique impressions that artists received from nature at a specific time and place. These images were in fact exclusive because of their fleeting or transient nature. As a result, the paintings were not subject to any idea greater than themselves. To quote John Sallis, "There is nothing beyond the painting, no meaning to be conveyed somehow by its contours and shades or by rendering of surface that they effect on the surface of the painting."² The content, meaning, and depth of the paintings ceded their importance to

the sensible representation, skill, and detail. Because Impressionism renounced moral depth and even objects themselves, Cezanne and the Post-Impressionists had to fill the void and re-affirm the significance of content, object, and depth.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty dealt with Cezanne and his works, recognizing the latent potential and importance that his work and theory signify. Merleau-Ponty recognized the end goal of Cezanne's art was to establish a unified identity between "appearing" and the objects themselves. Unlike Monet, Cezanne would not paint the "appearing" over the objects (thus making them invisible) but rather render the "appearing" *in and through* the objects included in the paintings. Cezanne's artistic concept of 'la realisation' drew Merleau-Ponty's admiration and was an explicit focus of Merleau-Ponty's acclaim of Cezanne's work.

Merleau-Ponty directed his interests to the art of Cezanne, the perfect correlative artist for his philosophy of art; one of his most famous works is entitled "Cezanne's Doubt." The philosopher and the artist sought the same end: to restore to the objects in the painting the weight, density, and significance that had been wholly stripped from them and blurred by Impressionist principles. In practice, this required an ebbing of the 'atmospheric light,' or Monet's *enveloppe*, to a degree that would allow the penetration of the objects to come forth. In so doing, Cezanne successfully established a middle ground among the bifurcation that united the act of "appearing" and the objects that actually do appear. This middle ground was not divisive but rather unifying as Merleau-Ponty notes, "He [Cezanne] did not want to separate the stable things which we see and the shifting way in which they appear. He wanted to depict matter as it takes on form, the birth of order through spontaneous organization."³ Cezanne called this objective in which something was brought to fruition 'la realisation.' In the case of the painting, 'la realisation' occurred when it was seen. The fruits of Cezanne's labor were realized as he brought together, in his works, the act of "appearing" with *ordinary vision*, a concept purporting that what man sees was mere things or objects and never the forces behind them or their associations. Therefore, it became the job of the painter to illuminate the shadows, spread of light, and "appearing" that were not aspects of ordinary vision. He brought visible existence to things that generally existed invisibly. Again, this marked a distinctive step away from the Impressionists who painted the "appearing" *over* the objects rather than *in and through* the objects; Monet had actually inverted the order of ordinary vision in his paintings by considering only the aspect of "appearing."

In *Cezanne's Doubt*, Merleau-Ponty pointed out that Cezanne's genius stemmed from his ability to reconcile the dichotomy between 'appearing' and objects and to resolve the two aspects into a mutual dependence in his paintings. He represented a shift back toward the objects themselves without sacrificing the Impressionist elements that escape man's *ordinary vision*. In a 1904 letter to Emile Bernard, he demonstrated this analytical approach to nature, advising in the first part to: "treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, everything brought into proper perspective so that each side of an object or a plane is directed towards a central point. Lines parallel to the horizon give breadth... lines perpendicular to this horizon give depth. But nature for us

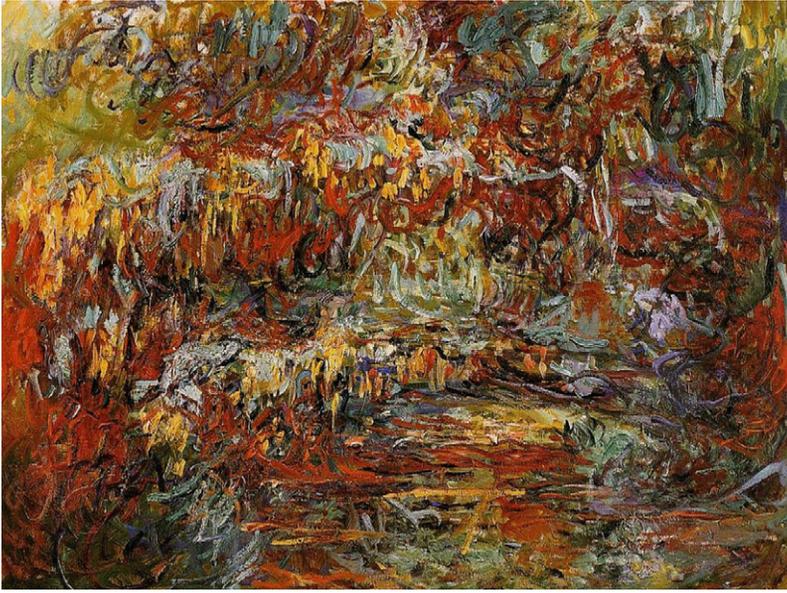
men is more depth than surface, whence the need to introduce into our light vibrations, represented by the reds and yellows, a sufficient amount of blueness to give the feel of air.”⁴ The latter part of the quote was where he reincorporates his Impressionist approach. A completed Cezanne work was a joint-product, contributed by Cezanne the impressionistic artist and Cezanne the analytical student of nature and her geometry. Merleau-Ponty noted, “that when the overall composition of the picture is seen globally, perspective distortions are no longer visible in their own right but rather contribute, as they do in natural vision, to impression of an emerging order, an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes.”⁵ There was a subsequent fullness to Cezanne’s works that set them apart and elevated them beyond pure subjectivity, or *prima facie*, a fullness derived from his ability to shed the “atmospheric light” (*enveloppe*) that deprived objects of density and value.

For Cezanne, standing in the presence of nature and painting the instantiation of her presence did not fully realize the goal of art. He completed most of his works in a studio; Monet painted before nature while withstanding the elements. Time and reflection, two antitheses of Impressionism, were the tools that provided Cezanne the opportunity to realize the fullness. He wrote in a 1905 letter to friend Emile Bernard, “Time and reflection, moreover, modify little by little our vision, and at last comprehension comes to us.” This modification had no place in the artistic process of Impressionists. Including the two aspects of the bifurcation, thus providing a complete perception, was significant because Cezanne burdens himself, and his profession, with the duty of educating and reflecting truth. He famously stated, “I owe you the truth in painting...” This belief motivated him to be an astute student of nature, and perhaps it was responsible for his harsh self-criticism as well. According to the artist, it is through the contact with nature that man revives his inherent, though latent, instincts and artistic sensations. In an earlier letter to Emile Bernard, dated 1904, he exclaimed, “But I must always come back to this: painters must devote themselves entirely to the study of nature and try to produce pictures which will be an education. Talking about art is almost useless. The work which brings about some progress in one’s own craft is sufficient compensation for not being understood by imbeciles.” The truth and the possibility of educating his audience (the spectators) resided beyond the Impressionist ideals of *prima facie* and the moment; a step back was required to realize the fullness of the art work and for the piece to properly exude truth.

Regarding the paintings themselves, the distinction between Cezanne and the Impressionists, specifically Monet, was clearly found by juxtaposing certain pieces from Monet’s *Japanese Bridge* collection with Cezanne’s *Mont Sainte-Victoire* collection. The gulf that separated Post-Impressionism from its predecessor was strikingly apparent when one compares Monet’s Japanese Bride painting (Appendix 1), a model Impressionist piece, with Cezanne’s *Mont Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine Tree* (Appendix 2). The contrast highlighted the interplay, or lack thereof, between the “appearing” and the objects that appear. In the former painting, Monet employed the impressionist principles to the fullest extent as the shining of pure colors (“appearing”) utterly overwhelmed the objects such as the bridge, the pond, and the water-lilies.

Objectivity was completely erased as the profusion of colors obscures all of the objects that Monet saw as he painted the scene. This specific painting captured the fleeting effects, the light, and the brilliant luminosity to such a degree that objectivity, including the geometry of nature, and ordinary vision were rendered invisible so that the painting was indeed one unity. Cezanne created *Mont Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine Tree* with the balance he sought in mind, and this piece successfully attested to his concept of 'la realization.' Rather than rendering the "appearing" *over* the objects, Cezanne rendered it *in and through* the objects of the painting such as the mountain, the valley, and the tree. The mountain was the central focus of the painting but Cezanne painted the surrounding landscape with a divergent perspective that prevented the spectator's eyes from immediately latching onto the mountain. Cezanne gathered the landscape and brought it to the mountain; the surrounding landscape shed light on the mountain, and the mountain in turn shed light on its surroundings. Through this gathering process, Cezanne reveals the "appearing" of the objects. The "appearing" united the painting and its objects and created the unified whole that countered the distance and distinctiveness among the notable objects that develop, such as the mountain in the center, the tree to the left, and the viaduct to the right. Cezanne countered the mystery, "that I see things, each one its place, precisely because they eclipse one another, and that they are rivals before my sight precisely because each one is in its own place," as he realized in the painting the mutual dependence and depth.⁶ The transposition of trace elements, such as color, slope, and shape, from the mountain to the valley and vice versa, effectively demonstrated the self-organization and "appearing." Thus, the valley below did not stand as the foreground of the mountain but rather as a part of it. Furthermore, the tree that branched delicately over the top of the mountain was a visionary counterweight to the prominent mountain, creating even more balance in the painting. Cezanne remained true to nature by rendering correctly her geometric features, while at the same time utilizing his Impressionist style by furnishing the "atmospheric light."

By showing the void inherent in Impressionism, Cezanne was able to visibly present the philosophy of Post-Impressionism. He mitigated the extremism of Impressionism which virtually erased well-defined objects to make way for pure radiance and brilliance. Therefore, he was able to balance the compositional aspects of painting, the "appearing" and the objects that appear. This reformed Impressionism restored density and weight to the objects, adhering to both Cezanne's goal as an artist and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of art. Cezanne undid Monet's inversion of ordinary vision by returning it to its original purpose and emphasizing object itself and depth. In the end, a painting such as *Mont Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine Tree* captured both a fleeting image of spontaneity and a natural, permanent scene, which defined the mutual interplay and unity in Post-Impressionist works. Cezanne presented the beauty and truth that was grounded in reality while at the same time illuminating the ethereal delicacy of fleeting moments in nature revered by the Impressionists. His paintbrush forever captured the whole true picture of reality by combining Impressionism's color theory with the concrete composition, form, and design that Impressionism laid aside in its zeal to capture the moment.



Appendix 1



Appendix 2

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- 1 John Sallis, *Shades – Of Painting at the Limit* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 41.
 - 2 Ibid., 42.
 - 3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Cezanne's Doubt*, trans. Robert L. Innis, <http://faculty.uml.edu/rinnis/cezannedoubt.pdf>.
 - 4 Paul Cezanne, *Paul Cezanne Letters*, ed. John Rewald (Da Capo Press, 1995).
 - 5 Ibid.
 - 6 Sallis, *Shades – Of Painting at the Limit*, 42.
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*It seems as if, on the whole, the modern
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—set on by Socrates—
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On Why it is Hard for Modern Americans to Relate to Aragorn

Gjergji Evangjeli

Among the many difficulties that the modern American faces in reading *The Lord of the Rings*, the issue of Aragorn is worthy of note as he seems almost too good to be true. There are moments where he is afraid or doubts his choices, most notably during the portion of the journey between Moria and Lothlórien, but even then he is automatically recognized by the other members of the fellowship as a natural substitute for Gandalf's leadership.¹ One thing is for sure, the closer he gets to the completion of his destiny, the more insufferable he becomes. Indeed, Aragorn even dares to show himself in the Palantír to Sauron, inciting the latter to attack Gondor faster than he desired. The purpose of this paper is to show that it is Aragorn's heredity and magnanimity rather than arrogance or a flaw on the part of Tolkien's character development that fuels his actions.

There is no greater marker of how far modern American public opinion is from the personality of Aragorn than the radical change of character he received in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* movies. Whereas in the books Aragorn, though afraid, has total faith in what he seeks to accomplish, in the movies he needs the constant push from other characters—most notably Elrond in bringing him Andúril in Harrowdale—to fulfill his destiny. In addition, his authority is challenged more than once, particularly during the siege of Helm's Deep by Legolas, whereas in the books it is only Denethor that truly challenges his claim. The character of Aragorn may be the key to detecting a problem in modern Western culture. The way he is presented in Tolkien's books, he is incompatible with the way of thought of most people today. The question is whether Aragorn should be brought down to fit into the categories of the modern West or the modern West be brought up so as to be able to fit Aragorn into its categories.

I believe that the problem with Aragorn has nothing to do with Aragorn himself, but rather with his audience. Aragorn would fit into a more ancient way of thought, that of Aristotle. One of the eleven virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is magnanimity, which is a very unpopular virtue in today's modern West. It is not arrogance that fuels Aragorn's actions, but a proper exercise of magnanimity on his part. Magnanimity is the correct attitude toward self-esteem, it being the golden mean between too much self-esteem (i.e. arrogance) and too little (i.e. timidity). Though it has basically been forgotten in the modern world, it is very important for Aristotle, so important that he calls it a crown and

a beautifully ordered pattern of the virtues.² It is the quality of the person who not only is virtuous, but also knows that he is virtuous, thereby allowing him to act based on those convictions. A better look at the character of Aragorn can shine further light into this matter.

Let us first examine his heredity. Aragorn can trace his lineage back to Elendil, the leader of the Faithful of Númenor and the First High King of Gondor and Arnor, and King of all the Dúnedain. A long title indeed and a far cry from the lineage that most people today can trace back. That is, however, only the beginning of his story. On his father's side Elendil is the descendant of Elros, who chose to be human. Earendil, Elros' father, is the son of Tuor, who is descended from the second and third ruling families of the original Three Houses of the Edain (Men), and Idril, the descendant of Finwë, the first High King of the Eldar, the high elves. On his mother's side, Aragorn is related to Melian, who is a Maia—the same classification of being as Gandalf, Sauron, and the Balrogs (though the last two are fallen). In short, Aragorn's lineage can be traced to the very beginning of the existence of Elves and Men. He has, in his family tree, all three ruling families of the original subdivisions of Men, the original rulers of two out of the three subdivisions of Elves, a Maia, and many other powerful figures whose history is described in *The Silmarillion*.³

With a family history of these proportions, it is not hard to see why the modern man despises Aragorn. Granted, very few people who do not have a deep love for Tolkien's work would have put together Aragorn's complete genealogy, but "I am Aragorn, son of Arathorn, and am called Elessar, the Elfstone, Dúnadan, the heir of Isildur, Elendil's son of Gondor,"⁴ is enough of a prelude to cause hatred. As to how deep one's envy has to run in order for one to dislike a fictional character for his lineage, I cannot tell. One thing is for sure, the modern man has lost his appreciative love. Upon hearing a lineage of these proportions, a more "primitive" man would have been glad even though he knew he could never measure his lineage up to that of Aragorn. It is better that such a man should exist, though the person may not be him.

As the descendant of Elendil through his son Isildur, Aragorn is entitled to certain privileges. For one, he is the legitimate bearer of the shards of Narsil, the sword of Elendil, which is later re-forged into Andúril, through whose power he is able to call the army of the dead.⁵ Aragorn tells the Doorward of Theoden that the penalty for anyone who touches it except for its rightful owner is death.

Aragorn is also the rightful owner of the Palantírs. This relates to one criticism of Tolkien in relation to Aragorn, i.e. that he made Aragorn too powerful. A conversation in *The Lord of the Rings* is enlightening as to exactly what this entails. Gimli, alarmed at learning that Aragorn has looked in the stone, says, "You have looked in that accursed stone of wizardry! ... Even Gandalf feared that encounter."⁶ Aragorn's response is indicative. He says, "... Nay Gimli, I am the lawful master of the Stone, and I had both the right and the strength to use it, or so I judged. The right cannot be doubted."⁷ Gandalf, a wizard, which is to say, a Maia, is afraid of using the Palantír—and Saruman, another Maia, is corrupted by it. Contrary to how most people see the world today, it

seems that Aragorn is here arguing that right makes might, instead of the other way around.

The answer to this seeming incongruence is *Te*.⁸ Even though Gandalf, on the whole, is a higher being and more powerful than Aragorn, Aragorn has the power of right claim over the Palantír, which is superior against even the power Sauron. There is a bond between an object and its rightful owner that is broader than just simple possession. The sword in the stone responds to Arthur's touch, the golden bough in Cumae responds to Aeneas' touch, and so on and so forth.

Just as Aragorn's many noble privileges enable him throughout the Quest, they also attest to the adage that power and responsibility are inseparable. Many of Aragorn's trials are not recorded in the text proper of *The Lord of the Rings*, though some of them appear in the appendices and the rest are mentioned in other books. After Gandalf, Aragorn is the person with the greatest part in the overthrow of Sauron. His responsibilities continue once the quest of the destruction of Sauron is completed, in his role as the new King of Gondor and Arnor. As Shakespeare reminds us, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."⁹

The intersection of Aragorn's heritage, identity, and his privileges with his responsibilities, in addition to the fact that he is able to carry his responsibilities through, show that Aragorn is a magnanimous man. Magnanimity is to be understood as a correct estimation of one's ability and worth, as opposed to self-doubt. One thing is for sure: Aragorn knows who he is, where he comes from, and where he is going.

It does not take much insight to see how this could infuriate a modern Western reader. Our culture is plagued by self-doubt and insecurity about whether we can know objectively whom one is and what one is supposed to do. We have Justice Kennedy to thank for part of that feeling, in the famous *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decision, which said, "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."¹⁰ This statement goes not only against Christian teaching, but also against secular Classical wisdom. Aristotle points out that the teleology of any being is not self-appointed, but rather comes as "part of the package" with the nature of each thing. It seems as if, on the whole, the modern man has dismissed the age-old quest—set on by Socrates—to objective self-knowledge. Instead, he has decided to appoint subjectively and, quite frankly, violently¹¹ his own meaning to his life, which, so far, does not seem to have had much success. Not so for Aragorn.

The modern reader joins with Éomer in saying, "It is hard to be sure of anything among so many marvels. The world is all grown strange.... How shall a man judge what to do in such times?"¹² Perhaps this is the core of modern man's problem and the root of his confusion with himself and the world. The result of our loss of objectivity, relativism is a poison more dangerous than many people anticipate, and in the words of C.S. Lewis, "[it] will certainly damn our souls and end our species."¹³ In its core, it is a self-refuting argument. Indeed, there are arguments against it, from the *Theatetus* to *The Abolition of Man* and beyond, but, most dramatically, it defeats itself. If relativism

is asserted as *a priori* truth and defended as dogma, its self-destruction is turned toward its bearer.¹⁴ It is, after all, hard to argue that it is objectively true that there is no objective truth. In any case, Éomer's question reflects an uncertainty of judgment that he shares with the reader.

There is an important difference between the modern reader's question and Éomer's, however. His question is not rhetorical. He truly does not know what the right thing to do is, but if he knew it and if he knew the way to find it, he would find it and do it. In other words, Éomer does not know, he knows that he does not know, and is not content with it. The modern man may be too proud to accept that. He asserts himself to be the child of the Enlightenment; the true descendant of Socrates and of all the great minds of the world, though he knows neither Socrates nor wisdom, and though he does not even know that he does not know. Herein lies the problem of our age. It is perfectly fine to be ignorant of how to reach the right choice; that problem can be solved by use of a teacher. In the case of Éomer, Aragorn solves that problem—as shown in his response below. However, the matter of communicating to someone that their problem lies not with their reason but with their will is much harder.

It is not that the modern man needs to read more of Plato, or Augustine, or Aquinas, or any other author that could aid them in their quest—it is a matter of guiding their will away from their accustomed relativism to the true search for the objective truth. That is why Aragorn's response does not “stick” and why Peter Jackson may have found it necessary to take it out of the movie. Aragorn's response to Éomer's question is: “As he has ever judged. . . . Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house”.¹⁵ Because Tolkien is using Aragorn to stab directly at the heart of the modern man's strongest conviction, it is understandable that the modern man is aggravated by Aragorn.

Another factor contributing to modern man's dislike of Aragorn is the overarching incorrect sense of humility that plagues popular culture and beyond. Whereas true humility is self-forgetfulness, it does have a certain facet of being proud (in the Aristotelian sense) of its accomplishment, while at the same time realizing that it is God that is the chief conspirer in every good deed. If a work is truly good, then it deserves its proper recognition. As St. John the Chrysostom reminds us, “. . . every good and perfect gift is from above, coming from You, the Father of lights.”¹⁶ Because every “good gift,” comes from God, anything that is produced through it is worthy of recognition. From this, it follows that if a person belittles any of their accomplishments, it is God's gift they are belittling.

It is worth noting that Frodo is as magnanimous as Aragorn.¹⁷ Yet, most modern readers can relate to Frodo more easily than with Aragorn because the source of his psychic superiority to them is subtle, yet to see it would make them dislike Aragorn and Frodo alike and, perhaps, Frodo a little more. Of course, Frodo takes some time to realize and actualize his role in the Fellowship, but, eventually, he makes a jump into his own and does not look back. Frodo's responsibility is quite clear, but he shares

a privilege with Aragorn that has not been yet treated. The genius of Tolkien, among other things, lies in how well this privilege is disguised throughout the book.

That privilege has to do with the one character that is never talked about in the book, that never speaks—at least directly—and that is never directly involved in any event, but His hand can be seen working throughout much of the book. That character is called Éru (the One) or Ilúvatar (the Father of All) in *The Silmarillion*—He is God. The privilege that Aragorn and Frodo both share is His Providence. One can see that Frodo's character is custom-fitted for the quest of the Ring because, even when he is not terribly excited with the idea of going off to a quest, he still has the unquenchable desire that once plagued Bilbo to go beyond the small doings of the Shire. A comparison between all the other privileges that Aragorn has and this one privilege is a comparison between a multitude of finite things and the infinite. Of course, Frodo's magnanimity is much more subtle, because other than Divine Providence, the only other privilege that Frodo has is his being the *true* heir of Bilbo. It should be noted that the importance of Aragorn's inheritance does not come from the fact that he is the biological descendant of everyone in his family tree—rather, it has something to do with the spiritual dimension. Therefore, even though Frodo is not the biological son of Bilbo, he is his true heir and descendant.

The emblematic moment when Frodo “comes into his own” is at the council of Elrond, when he says, “I will take the Ring... though I do not know the way.”¹⁸ One of the moments when Divine Providence is most clearly exhibited is just prior to it, when Frodo “wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice.”¹⁹ In truth, this fact should be more annoying to the modern reader than the issue with Aragorn. When it comes to Aragorn, the problem is that he seems to be above to reader, but when he finds out that Tolkien has been “deceiving” him into falling in love with Frodo, an apparent hero of the proletariat who is actually privy to the very will of God, he will not be happy indeed.

Needless to say, the modern reader's frustration, failure to connect, and dislike of Aragorn and Frodo may be the subtle symptom of another big problem: the modern West has gravitated away from Christianity. It is no secret to all but the most oblivious of Tolkien's readers that he is a devout Christian. As such, the Christian connects with the quest of the fellowship in the sense that there is a common enemy—whether you call him Sauron or simply Evil. Likewise, the Christian, in exercising proper humility, should not envy the magnanimity of others. Further, because Christianity calls the believer to have proper respect and reverence toward all creation—himself included—being magnanimous is nearly expected. However, one who is magnanimous cannot hate another for his magnanimity. Therefore, the Christian has no reason to feel inferior to Aragorn, because he realizes that Aragorn is a brother-in-arms to him; he is the ward of the same Power, striving toward a quest that originates from the same Being as him. The Christian does not feel envy but love toward Aragorn. His existence, albeit imaginary, is beautiful.

Of course, the Christian's heritage is infinitely more impressive. In the end, Aragorn

is the descendant of Finwë and the rest, but the Christian is the adoptive child of God, through the sacrifice of Christ.²⁰ St. Paul, when he points this out, is writing within the context of Roman legal practice, which puts adoption on a very high pedestal. It was fairly easy for a Roman *pater familias* to disown and disinherit one of his biological sons, but it was nearly impossible to do the same to an adopted child. The bond that St. Paul is thinking of when he speaks of Christians as the adopted children of God was one of the strongest and hardest to break in all of Roman legal practice.

It appears that in the end, it comes down to both whether the reader sees Aragorn, and by extension Tolkien, as trustable and trustworthy, and whether he is willing to concede that Aragorn's actions and self-sacrifice are rooted not in pride and conceit, but humility and responsibility. It may be that this willingness follows upon a trust that is more intuitively felt, as is the case with Frodo's first encounter with the then ragged-looking Strider. Contrasting Aragorn's looks with the intuitive trust he felt, Frodo replies to a suggestion that he might be in league with Sauron by saying: "I think one of his spies would—well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand."²¹

The meaning of the word "feel" here is not to be taken in the same way as "feeling hungry" or "feeling sad" or "feeling happy." It is not an emotion. It is to be taken as having the same meaning as "feeling a table." The responsibility for it is not an irrational emotion but the noetic faculty, "the eye of the heart." It is through this faculty that man can also perceive the uncreated light, the glory of God. It is featured in the Patristic writings of the Eastern Church, especially in the writing of the Athonite monks, specifically St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain. It is, however, searched for in Plato, in that Plato says there needs to be a faculty of the soul that learns truth instantly and super-logically. The Fathers defined this process as the remembrance of the perfect image of God, Who is "the Way, the Truth, the Life."²² It is also through this faculty that a person can gauge the moral character of others, though it cannot be logically explained or defined—just as Frodo did with Aragorn. Because the noetic faculty, which is related to the will, has the image of God, it can distinguish between those who seek Him and those who do not.

It seems increasingly apparent that bringing the character of Aragorn down to the categories of modern man would be a mistake—the result of inaccurate judgment. The modern reader challenges Aragorn in his seeming lack of humility, but, in truth, this is because the reader confuses pride with the assurance that is intrinsic to magnanimity. The modern man therefore also does not understand why it is that Aragorn behaves the way he does, confusing arrogance with a proper confidence in one's own abilities. It is also interesting to note that in most character critiques Frodo is left out, because his magnanimity is made to be subtler due to its cause, Divine Providence. However, if one were to overlook the other Will that "spoke" through Frodo at Rivendell, Frodo's decision to be the ring-bearer is the most pretentious action in the book.

So how is one to discern? The underlying question is whether someone can ever know if they can take anyone at face value. The answer to this question is a complete "yes," but with one qualification. It seems that the human soul has been equipped with

the image of God, which it can use to have access to truth super-logically and to sense whether the soul that comes in contact with them is in tune with that same image or not. The access to such a powerful tool, however, is dependent on whether one's will is pure. Of course, the soul of the modern man has no need for such nonsense, for a pure will or for God—he is perfectly happy with what he can access due to his own powers. He is the child of the Enlightenment and that “light” is good enough for him.

We, however, can see that this “light” is not true light, and that it is very limited in what it can reveal. We have settled for a light that illuminates nothing but the ground beneath our feet, and lost our way in the dark as a result. Ever since we turned from seeking wisdom to seeking the conquest of principalities, ever since we turned the ongoing submission of ourselves to the Father to the desire to make nature submissive to us, all has gone amiss. Machiavelli's *Prince* has given us men and women who lust for power and conquest; Bacon's *New Atlantis* has given us “men-without-chests.”²³ With these results at hand, one has to wonder whether we have made a wrong turn, and Aragorn is a constant reminder of what the modern man could have been if he had not taken that wrong turn. Each of modern man's powers has been given to him through science. We have Andúril, weapons that can pierce through the enemy's defenses, but are they in the hands of the “heirs of Elendil?” Are they used only against those about whom no other solution than death can be found? I think not. We have equivalents to the Palantírs, but does the modern man use his unprecedented means to information and impact for the good of the whole? Some, perhaps, do—but many more do not. Many have Aragorn's healing properties; modern medicine has progressed far beyond what people as little as a century ago would have dreamed of, but have we been able to see medicine as more than just business? For the most part, we have not.

The empirical evidence is reflective of a symptom in our spiritual condition, also. We have the spiritual Andúril, the Church, but we have thrust Her aside in favor of a thousand new heresies. We have the spiritual Palantír, the image of God inside us, but we have thrust it aside in favor of the belief that our own judgment is better. We have the spiritual healer of all wounds, Christ, but we have thrust Him aside, espousing instead our pop-psychologists and relativists, who tell us to make our own path, when in reality we have steeped in greater darkness than ever before.

But, in the words of Gandalf, “not all is dark,”²⁴ for “the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it,”²⁵—there is “light and high beauty forever beyond [the darkness'] reach.”²⁶ In realizing the symptoms that highlight the problems of our age, we must not become like Denethor, fatalistically accepting our seeming doom as if there would be nothing to do but wait for the funeral pyre. This is not the Christian way. In its deepest level, this is not the human way, because for many centuries, humans have made it their business to combat overwhelming odds and have succeeded. It is, after all, only due to the comfort of this last century that the modern West has forgotten exactly how much of a struggle life can be.

Thus, despair is no solution. St. Paul reminds us, “If God is for us, who is against us?”²⁷ In the end, Christ's resurrection triumphs over Hades and the gates of Hell

are laid bare before His glory. Therefore, because He was triumphant over death and because He promised us that He would give us anything we ask for in His name, we can overcome even Hell through Him. To despair like Denethor would be to fail to take Christ at His word. Rather, if modern man is to have any hope, he will have to pull the veil of darkness off his eyes and allow himself to see “the true Light which enlightens everyone who comes into the world.”²⁸ Then, he will remember his own strength and see that he has tarried too long in the darkness of men’s misguided thoughts. Then he and his brethren will sing with one voice, “This is the day the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”²⁹

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- 1 If anything can highlight this, it is the conversation between Gandalf and Pippin in *The Return of the Kings*, where Gandalf tells Pippin that Denethor has understood through his recounting that someone other than Boromir led the Fellowship (i.e. that he was higher in status than Boromir) and that he carried a legendary sword.
 - 2 W. F. R. Hardy, “Magnanimity’ in Aristotle’s Ethics”, *Phronesis* Vol. 23, No. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 63-79, cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1124^{a1-2}.
 - 3 The list would take a few pages if all the people worth mentioning were mentioned. Among them are: Fingolfin, Turgon, Huor, Tuor, Barahir (who is given the ring that Jackson puts in the movie in the hand of Aragorn, but in the books is given to Arwen as sign of her betrothal to Aragorn), the Kings of Numenor up to Tar-Elendil, and all the Lords of Andúnie, the leaders of “the Faithful,” the Numenorian who did not give in to the worship of Sauron and Morgoth.
 - 4 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, 28.
 - 5 That is only the tip of the iceberg regarding Narsil and Andúril. It was forged during the First Age by the same smith that forged the knife Angrist, which Beren used to cut one of the Silmarils from the crown of Morgoth and was considered its cousin (i.e. they were forged from the same material). It was imbued with magical powers, the word “Narsil” itself is a combination of the Elvish words for “sun” and “moon.” Andúril means “the flame of the West,” and, at several points during the book, its mesmerizing flash is described in great detail. The story of Narsil/Andúril is more extensive than many plots in today’s literature.
 - 6 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 42.
 - 7 *Ibid.*
 - 8 In the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu hints to *Te* being the power of rightful ownership, the inner strength and bond between the owner/guardian and the object.
 - 9 Shakespeare, *Henry IV: Part II*, Act III, Scene I.
 - 10 *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* 505 U.S. 833 (1992).
 - 11 “Violently” here is not supposed to be taken in its popular meaning, but rather in Aristotelian terms, specifically referring to violent motion or change.
 - 12 J. R. R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, 33.
 - 13 C. S. Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 73
 - 14 A few years ago, Columbia University held a convention to figure out how to salvage relativism from its critique in *Theaetetus*. One need not know much about philosophy to understand the silliness of trying to objectively prove a theory which states that nothing is objectively true, but I digress.
 - 15 J. R. R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, 33.
 - 16 St. John the Chrysostom, *The Divine Liturgy According to St. John the Chrysostom*, (Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1977).
 - 17 I will not entertain at length the point about Gandalf’s magnanimity, because it is rather blindingly obvious and because the modern reader can reconcile with it on account of Gandalf being a wizard.
 - 18 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 303.
 - 19 *Ibid.*
 - 20 Romans 8:15
 - 21 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, 194.
 - 22 John 14:5
 - 23 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 705-717.
 - 24 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, 145.
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- 25 John 1:5
 - 26 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, 238.
 - 27 Romans 8:31
 - 28 John 1:9
 - 29 Psalm 118:24
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James Baylor '14 is majoring in Philosophy and minoring in the International Studies, specifically the Ethics & International Social Justice track. He was born and raised in Boston and currently resides in Newport, RI. Philosophy has turned him on to the art world and cultivated an eagerness in him to explore the Fine Arts further. For now, he is content with accruing knowledge of the world and he studied in Athens, Greece spring semester of his junior year to come in contact where this exact mindset was born. It was Aristotle who long ago deemed that "man thirsts for knowledge."

Gjergji Evangjeli '14 is a junior with a concentration in Philosophy and Classics. He is interested in Ancient Greek philosophy, especially Plato and the synthesis of Philosophy and Theology evident in authors like St. Thomas Aquinas. He is curious about the paradigm shifts that have lead to the philosophical and religious disconnect of most modern Westerners with classical philosophy and religion, particularly Christianity. Gjergji is currently applying for a 5th Year Master's at BC and is considering a PhD afterwards.

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