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# ΔΙΑΝΟΙΑ διάνοια



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Featuring an Interview with Gadamer Chair Professor Jean-Luc Marion  
(page 7)

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THE UNDERGRADUATE PHILOSOPHY JOURNAL OF BOSTON COLLEGE



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Spring 2024

Managing Editors: Meriel Zhao, Yitian (Sky) Lyu, Aniella Zaslavsky, Elliott Jones  
General Editors: Jacob Chapelear, Gabriel Margolies, Thomas Wilkins, Christopher Casale, Kenneth Goetz, Qitai Zhu  
Graphic Designer: Madeline Townsend  
Graduate Advisors: Sean Haefner  
Faculty Advisor: Ronald Tacelli, S.J.

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- 4 **Acknowledgements**
- 5 **A Letter From an Editor**  
*Elliott Jones, Boston College*
- 7 **Interview with Gadamer Chair Professor Jean-Luc Marion**
- 17 **The Human Synthesis: An Exploration of Anxiety, Love, and Selfhood under the Domain of the Will to Power**  
*Daniel Andrews, Boston College*
- 38 **A Symmetrical Argument for Personhood and Abortion**  
*Arthur deCarle, University of Central Florida*
- 50 **Against Evolutionary Ethics**  
*Roberto Ureña, SUNY New Paltz*
- 67 **A Natural Interpretation of Aristotelian Teleology**  
*Jordan Smith, Colby College*
- 89 **Contributors**

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Dear Reader,

May 5, 2024

With great pleasure I present Issue XI of *Dianoia*: the Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College. This year we received over 40 submissions and following a great shortage of editors from the editorial board of Issue X, we are proud to present this journal as the consistent work of the few for the enjoyment of many. This year, we were fortunate to be able to publish four thoughtful papers, all of which are examples of the excellence of undergraduate scholarship and philosophical inquiry from around the country.

As a short preview of the contents of the papers, we offer a work of anthropological and existentialist philosophy, two pieces in moral philosophy, one arguing, through a definition of personhood a justification for abortion and the second arguing against the rise of evolutionary ethics. Lastly, we offer a rigorously defended paper of Aristotle's notion of Final Cause or teleology. We hope that these papers inspire thoughtful reflection, challenge our set beliefs, and most of all spark questions.

Thanks to the support from Department Chair, Professor Jeffrey Bloechl, two of our General Editors were able to conduct an interview with the Gadamer Chair of Philosophy, Professor Jean-Luc Marion. This interview offers an introduction to Marion's phenomenology as well as an in-depth discussion of his most influential and radical ideas such as "saturated phenomena", "the gift", and the possible end of metaphysics.

The editorial board chose William Bradford's *Shipwreck off Nantucket* for the cover art of this year's issue. We felt this represented the initial struggle of the editorial board to get Issue XI into the publication process. It was only with the help of our faculty and graduate advisors, and inner department supporters-represented by Bradford's life boats-that we acknowledge with great gratitude that Issue XI was able to be published. Furthermore, we believe that as Professor Marion in our interview remarks, the desire of all philosophers should be to "go in the regions you have never visited before", just as we see in the ambitious drive of Bradford's portrayal of the 19th century whaling industry.

The chance encounter I had this spring in meeting one of the cofounders of *Dianoia* is a testament not only to the far-reaching influence of this journal, but also to the people whose support makes it possible. On this note, we must offer our thanks and gratitude to

the relentless support of former Editor-In Chief Tanner Loper, our faculty advisor, Fr. Ronald Tacelli, S.J., and our graduate advisor, Sean Heafner.

Lastly, I offer thanks to those consistent members of the editorial board by whose diligence and passion this issue has been able to be published. I hope that you, our reader, continue to offer your support as we prepare Issue XII next spring.

Until then, enjoy this issue.

Sincerely,

On Behalf of the Editorial Board of Dianoia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elliott Jones", written over a faint, large watermark of the number "18" in the background.

Elliott Jones, Managing Editor

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-LUC MARION, GADAMER CHAIR AT BOSTON COLLEGE

### §1: INTRODUCTION ABOUT PROF. MARION'S TEACHING AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF GIVENNESS

Sky Lyu, *Managing Editor* Prof. Marion, you were appointed Gadamer chair in 2020 and during the past four years, have given lectures and taught courses. One of the most interesting and common comments from my peers about your philosophy is that it is very “healing,” since it offers a philosophical hope for them. So did you expect this impact to students and what would your mission be through your teachings here?

Jean-Luc Marion I’m sorry some students had suffered some intellectual disease. But I would be glad that my philosophy may heal, because (bad) philosophy can harm as well as a good one may help. But this was not intended: I am doing philosophy, without predetermined outcomes or any apologetic intention. However, a clear distinction could be drawn between what we may call metaphysics, and what we may call phenomenology, that is, between *a priori* or closed philosophy (closed as once it was spoken of the “closing of the American mind”) and phenomenology—which has a long history because it started around the beginning of the 19th century—which today is perhaps the opening, or reopening of philosophy. Perhaps, perhaps it is a positive experience for those who are interested in that [reopening]. That’s the difference: in the perspective of phenomenology, as Heidegger said once, higher than the effectivity, stands the possibility. On the opposite, metaphysics—in analytical philosophy, formal philosophy, systematic idealism—the possibility is



left behind the effectivity, encapsulated within objectivity.

**Elliott Jones, Managing Editor** For our introductory readers, what is the role phenomenology has had in the history of philosophy? More particularly: your work is frequently cited in theological discussions. What do you believe your work can offer theology in contemporary dialogue?

**JLM** You understand that it is impossible to answer that kind of question shortly. What I can tell, is that I started by asking questions about the questions: philosophy should proceed that way, by asking new questions. So in my first books about the question of God and *The Idol and Distance* and *God without Being*, I questioned the question, very widespread in the seventies, whether we can truly *think* that “God is dead”. And I made the point that the death of God means that what dies was by definition not God. And if not God, what was it? It was an idol. Saying that, I was just repeating what Nietzsche had already said. Idols are the main concepts of philosophy—including the concepts of being, cause, consciousness, free will, and so on. And you can verify it easily provided you are an historian of philosophy (which is what I started out trying to be, studying Descartes and Aristotle). And we have to destroy idols, whatever they are. And curiously, in that case, God does not stand on the side of the idols. In fact, “God is dead” means only that what we thought as a dead God was simply no God at all. And so, to some extent, the “death of God” reopened the question of God. That was the first paradox.

How far this is connected with phenomenology? It may be absolutely no connection in so far as this is a *theological* argument. But phenomenology means a kind of philosophy which allows you to ask whether concepts supposed to be completely beyond ordinary question within philosophy might not be questioned as well. Another example: even if to know is to know an object (limited and certain), knowledge is not *only* the subjective construction of the object. The opposition, subjectivity/objectivity, though admitted by roughly everyone, does not stand. If you study the history of philosophy, you discover that the object is always connected with the subject and that both concepts were born at the same period. For the ancient Greeks, there was no object, and there was no subject. And what is the modern definition of the object? Something which can be perfectly well known by the subject—because, in the sciences, for example, it was *built* by the subject. So the fact that any object is consti-

tuted by a subject means that nothing is more subjective than objectivity. Something is said to be objective which has become the same objectified by a community of qualified subjects. So objectivity amounts only to an intersubjectivity. And all philosophers today will agree to that. Therefore the idea that science is objective means only that within science there is an agreement between subjects. But in other fields we discover other different agreements between subjects which lead to other kinds of intersubjectivity: in art, in morals, in politics, and in religion. So there is no absolute border. The question lies in understanding how we reach non-objective knowledge about what cannot nevertheless be constituted by us. And so the divide between objective science and subjective science appears problematic.

**EJ** What you said about idols leads to the next question. You spoke about the history of philosophy and these metaphysical constraints or “idols”, and how they limit our understanding—limit us from talking about certain phenomena. What are these metaphysical idols and why is phenomenology and your work a solution beyond them?

**JLM** I think that metaphysics was and remains a very successful endeavor. Being hard to produce intelligibility, the achievement of metaphysics was to say: we may know in advance everything certainly by using the same set of concepts and of principles, categories, and determinations, in whatever field we work in. For instance, one of the most famous principles we use: avoid contradictory definitions, the principle of identity. Or again: we should always be able to give a reason for whatever we claim to exist or be thought; any sentence has to be proved by reasons, hence the principle of sufficient reason. Having those principles (and all sciences use those standards), we have to stick to them and reject any other knowledge which could not yield to them as non-objective—a non-object for science. The problem is that we quite often meet with phenomena which contradict those standards, and does appear without doubt. Should we not, in those cases, modify our standards? De facto, from time to time, we can't not modify those standards. So we have in modern fundamental physics. So the today question amounts to when and how to modify the standards to fit some phenomena, or whether or how we are allowed to modify the phenomena if they don't fit the old standards. And in phenomenology, we deal with the same question: are there phenomena which don't yield to any previously known paradigm and nevertheless impose themselves beyond question. Among them, God, for God is an exception by definition. Would it not be the case, this “god” would not be God. Let us consider, for instance, the impos-

sible. We universally admit that nothing is impossible, because, were something impossible to a God, then this “god” would not deserve to be admitted as God.

A similar remark can be expressed about man: there is no definition of man, not of man-hood, nor of the humanity of man; not only is there no definition, but there *should be* no definition of man, for any definition of man, imposed by, for example, a political leader or political regime, this leads to totalitarianism. Why a totalitarian definition of man would be a threat? Not only because it will prove very likely *wrong* — a definition on based race, social class, religion, and so on — but because any definition would result in an exclusion by a persecution. In other words, when any official definition of what a man is allows the disqualification and the exclusion of those individuals who doesn't apply to it, by constraint or even terror. Activists use the word “genocide” too easily; however genuine genocide means more the mass murder, it means suppressing human beings as *non-human being*, on the basis of a definition of what is human and what is not. *This* is genocide, which kills all the more, kills the body because it denies first the soul of mankind. So war itself is not yet a real genocide, though violent and mortal, remaining in some cases unavoidable.



This leads to a remark about history: history is not a science, a very serious field of study, but it is not a science, because it cannot make any prediction and prove any law by rehearsing any experience...And why not? Because history means either the study of the past or what is going on in the present; however what is going on never pertains to a chain of objects occurring by strict determinism. There is properly no determinism in history. Not because there is no cause— on the opposite, there are too many of them — but because no one can predict it. There was someone who made himself famous by predicting that we have reached the end of history, the whole humanity having agreed about free market, global capitalism and democracy...

SL Fukuyama?

JLM No name dropping, please. But we are aware that this was not the case, for history refers only to the unexpected, the unpredictable, to the events in time, not to objects in determinism. And the event comes

as what is *not yet*, afar of any strict chain of objects. I would not say it comes out of the blue, but dare say that it comes from *elsewhere*. And it is why we should not master the event, but only to face it and *answer it*.

Another case that is central to my work: is the question of the “gift”. At least, provided that we do not interpret it as a mere exchange, which alone pertains to economy (*do ut des*), transferring the possession of an object from one owner to another through the mean of money, which is enough an objective interpretation of the exchange. But the gift is *not* an exchange, because it has no sufficient reason, no good (or bad) reason to give. It needs no reason at all, and it is why it remains always possible always. No reason, because it is based on inequality and non-reciprocity. Expecting no fair return, it frees itself from any possibility of being paid back, and, admitting no condition of possibility, it has not condition of possibility. To that extent the gift appears always unequal, unfair, not about justice, but beyond it. Those cases, the unknowability of man, the incomprehensibility of God, the gratuity of the gift, or the unpredictability of history—all of these become intelligible, if to some they may be explained, only by contradicting the usual understanding of the beings, produced by metaphysics.

## §2: PHENOMENOLOGY OF GIVENNESS AS A BREAKTHROUGH. WHAT DOES IT OPEN FOR US, AND WHAT IS THE RISK?

SL We finally get to the “gift”. I think that your phenomenology or the phenomenology of “givenness” is somehow a breakthrough of traditional phenomenology. So, to facilitate discussion, let’s situate ourselves in a context. I want to bring in here the dialogue between you and Derrida, conducted by Prof. Kearney. It was a fascinating dialogue of course. But during the dialogue Derrida made a heavy critique saying that your phenomenology is without “as such”; and you responded by pushing back even further, stating: “A real phenomenology would be to give up the concept of the horizon”—which is opposed to Levinas. To this extent, your phenomenology of “givenness” *is* a radical breakthrough, departing from traditional phenomenology. But the question remains, to what extent is it still a phenomenology?

JLM Because there is nothing like *a* phenomenology *as such*—I agree on this point with Derrida, as well as with Heidegger. There is neverthe-

less an ongoing tradition of thinkers who each time claimed to make a breakthrough against their predecessors, but on the same track. So Husserl made a breakthrough by enlarging the realm of intuition, and he made similar breakthroughs during all of his lifetime. So Heidegger admitted that he has killed the father again with a breakthrough to the question of Being. Likewise Levinas made a breakthrough against Heidegger by saying that ontology is *not* fundamental, and ethics is. And Derrida make a breakthrough with deconstruction, and so on. So each phenomenology is made by those who disagree with the previous phenomenologists by *relying* on them. And that's why phenomenology keeps going. I don't know whether I deserve to be listed among them, but, anyway I kept going that way. If you dare to criticize Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida, Levinas or Michel Henry, it is because you *agree* with the questions and only intend to go a step forward. To criticize a philosopher is not to contradict him, but to jump beyond his last jump. If you break a record in sports, you don't erase the previous one, but improve it; in philosophy we do the same. Real philosophers don't properly disagree, but try to use, in a better way, the result of the previous one.

So now, let's go to the question of horizon. Indeed there is a horizon for regular phenomena: each phenomenon makes sense in the horizon of other related phenomena, within which a new one can be situated and seen. However there are cases where there is no horizon, because any comparison remains impossible—for instance, with the case of the event, the case of God. There is no horizon to the question of God because God is unconditioned, cannot be compared; for, if it could be compared, it would not mean God. Otherwise, God is incomprehensible, because, would it be comprehended by us, it would not mean God. And so on. So, in that case, we have no horizon. And, when Derrida told me that the “gift” is impossible because, as soon as a gift is identified as a gift, it is cancelled as a gift, and reduced to an exchange— he was absolutely correct. But, nevertheless, the “gift” can be done, possible for us *or not*. So, the impossibility of the gift means that the gift has no sufficient reason, cannot be reduced to an object, to an exchange, but, provided it is reduced to givenness, includes its own impossibility. And Derrida and I agreed about that— the impossibility of the gift—, but we disagreed about its meaning: far from erasing the phenomenon of the gift, I acknowledge that this very impossibility enacts the “gift”. In other words, the intersection between the possible in the impossible cannot apply here.

**SL** If the “gift” is possible, does it have risks? Just as John J. Caputo

remarks: “Do we not come into a universal indebted-ness to God the giver, even though the gift has been released from a causal economy?”. Would the “gift” then be dangerous?

**JLM** The gift is indeed dangerous, it even may be seen as the most dangerous, the *deinotaton* [of Sophocles’]. About God, if meant as the Christian God, indeed we are all indebted to God, if only because God has loved (i.e. created) us before we even were.

**SL** Already?

**JLM** Already. It’s done, too late to be denied. We try to deny our indebtedness because we are obsessed by it, and this denial appears as its confirmation. That this situation may look to some extent both frightening and comforting, I fully agree. So, I understand quite well why so many people want practically to be atheists, just in order to get rid of this – this what? This opening of the horizon. Yes, willingly or not, we are completely in debt to God.

**SL** I love your analysis of the excessive, saturated phenomenon—for example, revelation. And it seems to me a key to solve Derrida’s impossibility. Do you think this kind of excessiveness exists in other areas, for example, psychoanalysis, or hermeneutics, or even aesthetics? Do you think the analysis of such excessiveness in other areas could open new possibilities?

**JLM** Indeed, there is no question about that. Saturated phenomena or excessiveness, if you prefer, identify themselves by an excess of intuition with no matching concept; this provides us with the only explanation about the question of aesthetic beauty, where we all agree on the intuition, when we find us unable to explain that agreement by common concepts. And in regular psychoanalysis, many people use the word “object”, although clearly desire has no object and “object” sounds like an appropriate word. So when I say “given” or “saturated” phenomenon, that means something, which can be better used. As indeed it can be used in the interest of philosophy. In philosophy, the best way to get confirmation that something you thought and you’ve discovered is right is that it can be used by non-philosophers in their own field. And so I am very glad to see that “saturated phenomenon” is used in theology, in aesthetics, in music—for instance, “saturated sound”— as well as the distinction, say, between icon and idol is used in the theory of painting today. So the vocation of philosophy is not first to be discussed by professional philosophers alone (they are living doing their job, doing their trade in

their discussion, which looks good). But real achievement in philosophy consist in working out notions, concepts, arguments which can be used by non-philosophers.

### §3: QUESTIONS FROM DIANOIA READERS

**SL** I'm sure you are tired of our philosophy questions. So here is a questions from one of our readers. Janice is a freshman at Boston College in the philosophy department. And she learned from one of your interviews that in your youth, when the academy was full of big names like Lacan and Derrida, you secretly received instruction of theology, outside the campus. She is actually doing the same thing. She has founded a Lacanian psychoanalysis group called "Sinthome" outside the campus and they are doing lectures to teach themselves every week. So how do you view this kind of off-campus group—interest- or even faith-based study? And do you have any advice for her?

**JLM** I think that any serious study is self-taught study. When you go to the university you have tutors, but you study by yourself. As I've told my students at the Sorbonne and elsewhere: What matters is how many difficult books you have read. The most difficult are the best. So my classes, the classes I and my colleagues give, are just to help you to read those books. If you can read them without sitting in my class, please don't take my class. Read! And this is what I have done. There were many boring classes at my university. I skipped them. Or I was reading during the class. And it is the best thing the professor could expect from me.

**SL** Great, I will tell her the same thing!

### §4: PROF. MARION'S ADVICE FOR UNDERGRADUATE PHILOSOPHY STUDENTS

**EJ** So our last question, which you've partly already answered: You say to your students "we should only read books we don't understand," because it allows us to philosophize about what we don't understand. Now besides your books, of course, do you have any advice on other books or questions that the next generation of philosophers ought to philosophize

about or read. And secondly, what about the vast history of philosophy and how would you give advice to rising philosophy majors for finding their niche in this two-thousand-plus year history?

**JLM** To study philosophy is to read—if possible in the original languages—Plato, Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and his treatise *On the Soul*, some Augustine, Descartes, Kant, as well as those around Kant (like Hume), Husserl, Heidegger and so on.

**SL** Not Hegel?

**JLM** Yes, but only after reading Kant. Don’t start with Hegel, because Hegel is based on Aristotle and Kant,...and on theology. So don’t try from the beginning to find a small niche for your PhD or something like that. Try to go into the regions you have never visited before. And then you will see.

**EJ** Professor Marion, we thank you very much for your time, it has been a real gift.



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# THE HUMAN SYNTHESIS: AN EXPLORATION OF ANXIETY, LOVE, AND SELFHOOD UNDER THE DOMAIN OF THE WILL TO POWER

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DANIEL ANDREWS

*“This, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,” without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself— do you want a name for this world? A solution for all of its riddles? A light for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?— This world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!”<sup>1</sup>*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

## §1: INTRODUCTION

The will to power leaves us with a fascinating question regarding the nature and purpose of the individual. If life is this will of “eternally self-creating, eternally self-destroying” force, and “[we ourselves] are also this will to power”, are we not destined to annihilate ourselves for the sake of creating beyond ourselves? Correlatively,

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 432.

and perhaps more importantly, why is there an individual at all? In other words, if life is defined as this impetus to self-destruction and re-creation, what is the purpose of sentient life that is *individuated*, i.e., a myriad of different egos and individuals coexisting as opposed to a single, undifferentiated, God-like intelligence?<sup>2</sup> There must be a reason as to why such a singularity<sup>3</sup> cannot exhibit the will to power itself. In reading Nietzsche, and other philosophers whom I will discuss in the paper, it is never able to be expressly understood as to why this ever-striving will to power manifests itself in the ego, in the *human being*. In this paper, I will attempt to examine the ego through the Nietzschean lens. First, I will expound the concept of the will to power more painstakingly. Next, I will outline why a being exhibiting the will to power must be self-conscious and, under a Sartrean analysis of consciousness, examine why a singularity alone cannot do this. After that, I will examine the human condition in our affections of anxiety and love to investigate the nature of selfhood and offer a solution to the fundamental question of “why” under the domain of the will to power.

## §2: BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE WILL TO POWER AND OUR ROLE WITHIN IT

Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is centric around the idea of the “Übermensch”. Translated into English as “overman” and symbolized by the main character Zarathustra, it represents what humans will one day evolve into: “Man is something that shall be overcome... What is the ape to man? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment.”<sup>4</sup> Crucially, becoming an overman is not achievable by anyone in this epoch; it is frequently misinterpreted as an exalted individual who stands out from a crowd in their excellence. Rather, Zarathustra is a symbol for the distant future of intelligent life’s evolution.

Before I analyze man’s role as a “rope tied between beast and

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2 Importantly, this is not a paper questioning the existence of a God; further, my investigation of why there are a multiplicity of egos isn’t denying the existence of a God. Rather, I am exploring why the will to power isn’t *just* a singularity and manifests in the individual as well.

3 Throughout the rest of the paper, what I will refer to as “singularity”, “infinite” being, or any other related term, is, once again, no remark on a “God”. It is simply to offer a point of comparison to an individual.

4 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 124.

overman,”<sup>5</sup> it is worth elucidating in further detail the concept of life as the will to power. This is best explained in Zarathustra’s recollecting of a dialogue he had with life: “And life itself confided this secret to me: ‘Behold’, it said, ‘I am that which must always overcome itself... where there is perishing and a falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself - for power. That I must be struggle and a becoming and an end and an opposition to ends.”<sup>6</sup> We see once again, as in the quotation from *Will to Power*, that life is posited as a self-sacrificing, self-annihilating machine. Fittingly, Nietzsche construes man in a similar vein. One of the central tenets of our role in begetting the overman is the rather dark notion of self-sacrifice. He claims, “What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that is an overture and a going under... I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may some day become the overman’s.”<sup>7</sup> This idea is expressed virtually everywhere in the book. Speaking of our inner “spirit”, he says, “Spirit is the life that itself cuts into life: with its own agony it increases its own knowledge. Did you know that? And the happiness of the spirit is this: to be anointed and through tears be *consecrated as a sacrificial animal*.”<sup>8</sup> And, speaking to his disciples, Zarathustra says, “I have found you out, my disciples: you strive, as I do, for the gift-giving virtue. What do you have in common with cars and wolves? This is your thirst: to *become sacrifices and gifts yourselves*.”<sup>9</sup> Only through our suffering and “going under” do we give way to the overman; our sacrifice is a propagation and gift for our future. Humans, in Nietzsche’s eyes, are tools for the beautiful machine of life. Manifestations of life’s will to power, we act in congruence with it by destroying ourselves for the purpose of self-overcoming. As dark as this may appear, there is a purpose for our self-annihilation: creation.

Nietzsche believed that creating is the best way to give rise to the overman and succeed in “cutting into life”. He thought that in order to create, old values must first be destroyed in giving rise to new ones: “Change of values - that is a change of creators. Whoever must be a creator always annihilates.”<sup>10</sup> Novel creation requires annihilation of

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5 Id., 126.

6 Id., 227.

7 Id., 127.

8 Id., 216.

9 Id., 186.

10 Id., 171.

the old. Just as a demolition unit is required to construct a new building, man must demolish himself in order to recreate himself; he must “wish to consume [himself] in [his] own flame: how could you wish to become new unless you had first become ashes... I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself and thus perishes.”<sup>11</sup>

All this to say, and this is a crucial point, that the ego appears to be *set up for annihilation*. This is done for the purpose of and as a manifestation of life’s will to power, which man is a piece of. Throughout the paper, I will investigate how and why this process unfolds through an analysis of anxiety and love. In doing so, this conclusion will not seem as vague and dark as it does at this juncture.

Crucially, this is Nietzsche’s view of the overman, human beings, and their place in life’s will to power. I am not proclaiming the will to power to be true, nor explicitly endorsing this conception of the role of humans; what I will aim to do in this paper is elucidate the fundamental affections of anxiety and love in the context of the will to power.

### §3: JEAN-PAUL SARTRE AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

The reason for this begins with an understanding of intentional consciousness and nothingness, outlined by Jean-Paul Sartre in his book *Being and Nothingness*. Following Edmund Husserl, Sartre defines consciousness as being intentional, or *about something*<sup>12</sup>. Further, the object of consciousness must transcend consciousness itself. For example, if I am conscious of the computer that I am typing this paper on, the object of my consciousness transcends my consciousness in that it is posited as something other than it. This is best explained by Sartre himself: “Consciousness is consciousness of something. This means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is, that consciousness is born supported by a being which is not itself. This is what we call the ontological proof.”<sup>13</sup> This, as Sartre masterfully examined, raises interesting questions about the notion of being. If a requisite to consciousness is predicated on transcendence, then “nothingness” becomes an integral part of being: “In our introduction we defined consciousness as ‘a being such that in its being, its being

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11 Id., 176-77.

12 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, li, lxi-ii.

13 Id., lxi.

is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself.’ But now that we have examined the meaning of ‘the question,’ we can at present also write the formula thus: ‘Consciousness is a being, the nature of which is to be conscious of the nothingness of its being.’”<sup>14</sup>

Sartre has discovered something crucial, and here is where we begin to examine the problem of individuality under the domain of the will to power. If the will to power coined by Nietzsche manifested in a single, all-encompassing, infinite intelligence, it *would not be able to be conscious of the nothingness of its being* and therefore would not be able to *execute* the will to power. How could the idea of a singularity - which is wholly itself - be conscious if consciousness is defined as a being that is conscious of the nothingness of its being? Correlatively, how could this singularity execute the will to power? If will to power is defined as a self-overcoming life force, this singularity would not be able to self-overcome; it would not be able to envisage “a being other than itself” because it is, by definition, all-encompassing. *There is no being that it is not*. It is every being to have existed, is existing, and will exist. Sartre claims that we are able to transcend because time separates us from our future selves: “The being which is what it is must be able to be the being which is not what it is not. But in the first place this negation, like all others, comes to the surface of being *through human reality*, as we have shown, and *not through a dialectic appropriate just to being*.”<sup>15</sup> He is saying my point exactly: to become what it is not, to exhibit the will to power, a being needs to take form in *humans* and nothing else.

To further establish this point, we must distinguish between what Sartre terms a “being-in-itself” and a “being-for-itself”. A being-in-itself “is what it is” in that there is no distance between its consciousness of itself and itself. An example of a being-in-itself is a chair; it is wholly a chair. There is no reflection or consciousness constituted by an object-subject distance, as in intentionality. More perplexing and relevant to the focus of the paper, another example of a being-in-itself would be an infinite singularity since “In the in-itself there is not a particle of being which is not wholly within itself without distance.”<sup>16</sup> Further, a singularity would be characterized as a being-in-itself because “the density of being of the in-itself is infinite. It is a fullness.”<sup>17</sup>

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14 Id., 47.

15 Id., 77

16 Id., 74.

17 Ibid.

If all intelligent life to ever exist across all time were concentrated to a single being, there would not be an iota of that being which is not being; it wholly and unequivocally constitutes itself. Since, as I stated, it is every being that exists, has existed, and will exist, it is wholly and fully being. It is, therefore, a being-in-itself. Recall that Sartre defined consciousness as “a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself.”<sup>18</sup> Further, a conscious being “does not coincide with itself in a full equivalence [...] The distinguishing characteristic of consciousness, on the other hand, is that it is a decompression of being.”<sup>19</sup> Nothingness is a requisite for consciousness, which is a requisite for the will to power. This, a singularity does not have.

It is worth summarizing at this juncture what we have posited so far. First, we defined the will to power as an eternally self-creating, eternally self-destroying, eternally self-overcoming force of life. Then, we questioned why life, in exhibiting this will to power, manifests in a plurality of individuals as opposed to a singular, infinite intelligence that overcomes itself. Then, using the Sartrean definition of consciousness, we posited the reason why a singularity would not be able to exhibit the will to power. We found that since consciousness requires an aspect of nothingness, a singularity cannot envisage a being other than itself because there is no being that it is not. There is no being which is not by definition of an infinite singularity and because in order to envisage a being other than itself it requires being a finite being that is affected by time. Now, I will posit that life must be in anxiety to exhibit the will to power, which it is unable to do if it is not individuated into fragments. These fragmented individuals are human beings. I will first elucidate how human beings are unique in that they are able to exhibit the will to power. Then, I will offer some commentary on life’s fall into individuality and a multitude of self-aware egos.

#### §4: ANXIETY EXCLUSIVE TO HUMANS AS A CATALYST FOR THE WILL TO POWER

As Sartre claimed, and as I outlined at the end of [§3], a being who is able to become the being that is not what it is not is unique exclusively to “human reality [...] and not through a dialectic appropriate

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18 Id., 47.

19 Id., 74.

to just being.”<sup>20</sup> We now know that a being who wishes to be what it is not, i.e., to exhibit the will to power, must be a human. A singularity, as Sartre would say, is unable to be conscious of a being it is not. But how do humans go about becoming a being which they are not?

The answer to this is that humans are *in a state of anxiety*. Also called angst, it is an affection felt exclusively by humans and analogously has the power to elucidate our condition.

Sartre claims that in humans, “there is already a relation between my future being and my present being. But a nothingness has slipped into the heart of this relation; I am not the self which I will be. First I am not that self because time separates me from it. Secondly, I am not that self because what I am is not the foundation of what I will be. Finally I am not that self because no actual existent can determine strictly what I am going to be.”<sup>21</sup> This first reason is straightforward; I am, for example, not the self that I was in 2017 because that was seven years ago. Correlatively, I am not the self because my past conduct doesn’t determine my present self, and I can’t control or determine my future self with my current actions.<sup>22</sup> Nothingness is constitutive of being human and analogously allows us to have an ambiguous relationship with ourselves. Our past selves are not us; they are objects for us. Sartre uses the example of a recovering gambler who once again faces the gambling table. His past resolution is not him since “it has become an object for [his] consciousness.”<sup>23</sup> However, despite us not being our past or future selves for the aforementioned reasons, we at the same time *are* our past and future selves: “Yet as I am already what I will be (otherwise I would not be interested in anyone being more than another), I am the self which I will be, in the mode of not being it. It is through my horror that I am carried toward the future, and the horror nihilates itself in that it constitutes the future as possible.”<sup>24</sup> There is a distance within us and between our past, present, and future selves rendering the human experience fragmented and ambiguous. As mentioned, our past is not us but an object for us. My future self is not me because I am not it yet; however, “Decisive conduct will emanate

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20 Id., 77.

21 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 31-32.

22 Otherwise, we would not be free. If my future self was constituted solely by my current actions, my actions and character in the future would be determined by my present self and congruently unfree.

23 Id., 33.

24 Id., 32.



from a self which I am not yet.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, “I am the self which I will be, in the mode of not being it.”<sup>26</sup> This is precisely Sartre’s conception of anguish. A singularity does not have this ambiguity for the reasons outlined in §3.

Because humans have this distance between ourselves - a concomitant of which is our anxiety - are we able to *exploit the gap* between our past self or future self and *become anew*, thereby exhibiting the will to power? Only in anguish is the ambiguity and nothingness of our existence posited. Further, anguish is tightly intertwined with freedom: “What we should note at present is that freedom, which manifests itself through anguish, is characterized by a constantly renewed obligation to *remake the Self* which designates the free being.”<sup>27</sup> I italicized the words “remake the self” in order to stress its importance in relation to the will to power. Once again, the will to power is defined as a “self-overcoming”, “self-creating”, and “self-destroying” life force. Only when there is a distance existing in the individual between himself and his consciousness of himself can he become something he is not. Nietzsche describes the will to power as *self-overcoming*. For the “*self*” to be a *self* in “self-overcoming”, it must become fragmented: “The self therefore represents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of not being his own coincidence, of escaping identity while positing it as unity-in short, of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of a multiplicity.”<sup>28</sup>

Individuated human selves are their future selves in the mode of not being them. A singularity is its future self in the mode of being it. Therefore, it can’t create beyond itself because *it is already that which it wants to create*; it’s like a paradox. To solve it, life must be individuated in the forms of humans<sup>29</sup>. Existential philosophy has struggled for decades with the notion of anxiety and a feeling of ambiguity,

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25 Id., 56.

26 Ibid.

27 Id., 34-35.

28 Id., 77.

29 Interesting similarities here can be drawn to a singularity splitting itself up in an act of Sartrean “bad faith”. A singularity cannot self overcome, for the reasons posited so far, if it knows it is infinite. Therefore, it must deceive itself into finitude through a sort of entropic and fragmentation into humans, who are ambiguously infinite and finite. This, however, is presupposing there is a “life” that is doing the “splitting up”; hence, this is mere speculation.

of homelessness, within ourselves. I posit the reason for this being that life needs these fragmented multiplicities characterized by anxiety as opposed to a *complete* singularity in order to self-overcome. How, though, is anxiety born?

## §5: ANXIETY BEFORE THE FALL

For Soren Kierkegaard, this begins with a perspicuous analysis of anxiety itself in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Anxiety is a clue that is utterly crucial in elucidating the fundamental human question of “why” and “what”. Before diving into the text, a few preliminary remarks must be established, as well as some definitions. The first is that Kierkegaard uses the myth of the Christian bible, specifically the fall of Adam, to elucidate the concept of anxiety. A concomitant of this is that much of the language he uses falls under the domain of Christian mythology; however, he claims that “the myth gives an outward expression of something that is inward.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, the myth of the bible is practical and correlatively used for the purpose of illustrating a fundamental truth about humans that may otherwise be opaque. The myth, therefore, should not be viewed exclusively about Adam but interpreted as a metaphor for *every human being*; specifically, their “fall” into a state of “spirit” from a state of “innocence”.

This leads me to my next preliminary remark: much of the language used by Kierkegaard may feel esoteric to those unfamiliar with his philosophy; therefore, some brief definitions must first be outlined:

“Synthesis”: The concept of human beings as syntheses is arguably the most crucial tenet of Kierkegaard’s anthropology. He defines a synthesis as follows: “The human being was, then, a synthesis of soul and body, but also is a *synthesis of the temporal and eternal*.”<sup>31</sup> Humans are, in Kierkegaard’s description, intermediate beings in that we are not purely “physical” nor purely “psychical”. We are not purely body, like animals, nor purely mind. Analogously, we are a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. Our predisposition to and conception of the infinite allows us to realize our finitude; likewise, through our awareness of being finite are we able to conceive of something that is not finite, the infinite.

“Spirit”: Kierkegaard refers to spirit as a sort of glue that

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30 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 57.

31 Id., 104.

makes this synthesis possible. Spirit can also be conceived of as our self-awareness and consciousness. He says that “the human being is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical, but a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit.”<sup>32</sup> Further, in his *The Sickness unto Death*, he claims that “A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation’s relating itself to itself.”<sup>33</sup>

“Innocence” and “the qualitative leap”: Innocence can be characterized as a state of immediacy, before the “qualitative leap” into spirit. Though he compares the state of innocence to that of Adam before his fall into sin, it can be compared to every human’s state of being before they are self-aware, before they are characterized by “spirit”. The qualitative leap is the fall into self-awareness itself.

With this framework, we can now undergo a brief synopsis of Kierkegaardian anxiety. There are two main characterizations of anxiety: the anxiety felt before our qualitative leap into self-awareness and that after; for now, the former will receive most of the analysis. Kierkegaard begins by describing the human experience of anxiety *before* we become self-aware:

“Innocence is ignorance. In innocence the human being is not characterized as spirit but is psychically characterized in immediate unity with its natural condition. Spirit is dreaming in the human being... In this state there is peace and repose, but at the same time there is something else, something that is not dissension and strife, for there is nothing against which to strive. What, then, is it? Nothing. But what effect does nothing have? It begets anxiety. This is the profound secret of innocence, that at the same time it is anxiety. Dreaming, spirit projects its own actuality, yet this actuality is nothing, but innocence always sees this nothing outside itself. Anxiety is an attribute of the dreaming spirit[...] The concept of anxiety is hardly ever seen treated in psychology, so I must point out that it differs altogether from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite; whereas anxiety is freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility.”<sup>34</sup>

The first part of this quotation to dissect is the fact that in a

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32 Id., 53.

33 Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 13.

34 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 50-51.

state of innocence, humans are not yet characterized by spirit.<sup>35</sup> Here, the human is not yet a self; no ego is posited. Innocence is further explicated later in this analysis: “In innocence, the human being is not merely animal, for if at any moment in his life he were merely animal, he would never become a human being. So spirit is present but as intermediate, as dreaming.”<sup>36</sup> Kierkegaard asserts that in a state of innocence our spirit is “dreaming”. Spirit “projects its own actuality” to the being who feels this projection outside of itself as a *nothing*. Put ambiguously, anxiety is “freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility”. It discloses itself *before* itself in time. Before humans become free, they feel anxiety in the sense that they have an inkling within them that communicates that they may *become* free, become a “self” whose actions are free. The reason the being in innocence feels this call as a nothing is because what is pulling us (spirit) is *nothing* to us; we are not it yet. Self-awareness and spirit exists in the future but is a nothing *now*. Why, then, can humans feel what is not yet posited as anxiety? The answer lies in our conception of ourselves as a synthesis.

Life, characterized by the will to power, needs to self-overcome. Life needs to be in anxiety to self-overcome. We now know this. Recall the discussion in §3 of the distinction between a being-in-itself and a being-for-itself. A chair or an animal, in pure finitude, is a being-in-itself insofar as it is what it is; there is no consciousness of the distance that exists between itself because there is no distance. An infinite singularity is a being-in-itself for the same reason. There is no consciousness of itself and therefore no gap to exploit in consciousness. There is no intentional distance between the object and the subject because the singularity is wholly itself and nothing else. Humans, however, are unique. Humans are a synthesis of the infinite and the finite. If we were strictly infinite, we would be beings-in-themselves: “the introduction of infinity into consciousness, aside from the fact that it fixes the phenomenon and obscures it, is only an explicative theory expressly designed to reduce the being of consciousness to that of the in-itself.”<sup>37</sup> Analogously, if we were strictly finite, strictly body, we would also be beings-in-themselves. We would be no different than a chair or a dog, which is what it is and is incapable of self-consciousness that manifests as a result of any distance within itself. Humans, then, need to be a Kierkegaardian synthesis constituted by ambiguity

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35 Recall that this is congruent with being characterized as self-aware and falling under the definition of Sartrean consciousness.

36 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 53.

37 Sarte, *Being and Nothingness*, 76.

- what Sartre similarly fashioned a “being-for-itself”: “The self refers, but it refers precisely to the subject. It indicates a relation between the subject and himself, and this relation is precisely a duality [...] The self therefore represents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of not being his own coincidence, of escaping identity while positing it as unity-in short, of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of a multiplicity. This is what we shall call presence to itself. The law of being of the for-itself.”<sup>38</sup> This “duality” within a human is precisely what Kierkegaard calls the “synthesis”. By being an *ambiguous temporal synthesis*, we can be what we are not and not be what we are. We can be the self from which our past actions originated while simultaneously viewing our past as an object to be negated. We can be the self from which future conduct will emanate despite being separated from that self *through time*. Only in this ambiguity unique to being a human synthesis of the temporal and eternal can the will to power be achieved.

Spirit is the glue that posits this ambiguous synthesis. Spirit, too, is itself ambiguous: “[spirit] is in a sense a hostile power, for it constantly upsets the relation between soul and body, a relation that does have subsistence but then doesn’t have it, because it receives it first through spirit. it is, on the other hand, a friendly power that wishes precisely to constitute the relation.”<sup>39</sup> The relation between soul and body is described as hostile because through its synthesizing soul and body, soul and body realize they are not unified. Spirit gives them the relation only to posit that they are separate. However, this act also is a friendly power since it wishes to reconcile the two. *As a result of this ambiguity, the result of this synthesis, the human, is in a state not only of ambiguity but of anxiety*: “What then is the human being’s relation to this ambiguous power; how does spirit relate to itself and to that which conditions it? It relates as anxiety.”<sup>40</sup>

Spirit allows life to be conscious of itself and become a being it is not. If spirit did not exist: one of two states would exist that would prevent the will to power from manifesting: one, that which seeks to execute the will to power would be *infinite*; or two, that which seeks to execute the will to power would be *finite*. Both are beings-in-themselves for the reasons outlined above, and both are unable to be con-

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38 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 76-77.

39 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 53.

40 Ibid.

scious under the Sartrean conception of consciousness as a being able to be what it is not. Spirit creates an amorphous human that is neither one nor the other, positing that all-crucial distance within the self that allows for self-overcoming. For the “self” in self-overcoming in Nietzsche’s definition of the will to power, the self must “represent an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of not being his own coincidence, of escaping identity while positing it as unity-in short, of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of a multiplicity.”<sup>41</sup> With this definition of spirit and self, we can arrive at a crucial point:

If spirit is the conglutinating force positing the conscious synthesis of temporal and eternal as a *self*, and humans, as this synthesis, relate to spirit in anxiety, this shows that *anxiety can thereby be characterized as a pull into ambiguous selfhood away from a being-in-itself in innocence*. This explains the feeling of anxiety accompanying the all-too-human affection of homelessness, experiencing oneself as “other” and “fragmented”. As humans “fall” into selfhood, their synthesis renders them anxiously aware of their ambiguity and nothingness. We desperately want to be beings-in-themselves, whose existence is a given, who have no internal tension. This explains much of our other fundamental affection, love, which will be expounded in further detail later. However, due to our being syntheses of the finite and the infinite, which both constitute beings-in-themselves, our existence is a constant project, a constant ambiguity, and a constant striving. We are constantly in a state of inner homelessness, of not being at peace and whole with ourselves. *Only in this turbulent and intermediate state as a synthesis of temporal and eternal, however, can we be consciously aware of and exploit the distance wedged between ourselves by time*. This anxiety surrounding selfhood also explains why humans attempt to negate their selfhood through conformity or bad faith.

It is worth once again summarizing the ground we have covered at this juncture. First, we defined the will to power as the “*eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying*” force of life. With this definition, we realized that in order to self-overcome and create beyond itself, life must first be conscious of itself. However, in order for a being to be conscious, it must be “a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than

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41 Sarte, *Being and Nothingness*, 77.

itself.”<sup>42</sup> With this, we posited that a singularity would not be able to be conscious of itself because there is no being other than itself. An infinite singularity is a being-in-itself. Next, we realized that humans are conscious in that we are, through our ambiguous character, able to become beings which we are not. This stems from the conception of a self, which is never a “whole” whose being is a given; rather, selfhood implies a distance and incompleteness existing within the self which is made possible through its being in Sartrean consciousness. This ambiguous character is lent to us in tandem with our being syntheses held together by spirit, which we relate to in anxiety. If we relate to spirit in anxiety, anxiety can thereby be defined as a pull into selfhood. If anxiety is a pull into selfhood, and selfhood allows for creation through its unique condition as a being-for-itself, and the will-to-power requires a being-for-itself in order to envisage and self which it is not, then anxiety is a catalyst for the will to power. Here, we seem to have arrived at the answer to the question of individuality. Only through a fragmented ego who can become what it is not by virtue of its ambiguous being is the will to power manifested. Life, in order to become what it is not, must have a relationship to a self which it is not in the future, something it cannot do if it is an unindividuated singularity. Such a being would be all beings to exist and ever exist and in no way could envisage a being that it can be because it is that being. To exhibit the will to power, a being must take form in an ambiguous, paradoxical, individuated human form: one that is in a state of anxiety due to its incompleteness. In a human, selfhood and being are never a state but a continuous striving, a continuous consciousness of itself and transcendence of itself into a new self.

## §6: SELFHOOD IS SELF-ANNIHILATION

By being ambiguous selves transfixed in time through constant negation and becoming, we are in a state of continuous self-annihilation and self-creating. This means that the ego is, in every sense of the word, set up to be destroyed. Here we arrive at the Nietzschean notions of self-sacrifice, self-annihilation, and “going under” outlined in §2. By virtue of us being syntheses are we never a whole; we are amorphous in that we are beings-for-themselves who can exploit the distance engendered by consciousness and therefore continuously become anew. Nietzsche believed that “Whoever must be a creator always annihi-

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42 Id., 47.

lates.”<sup>43</sup> The ego, in this characterization of continuous self-annihilation, can be conceived of as *a piece of wood making the flame burn brighter by being destroyed. Like fuel to an engine of the monstrous will to power is the ego.* To execute the will to power, we must do as Zarathustra did: “I overcame myself, the sufferer; I carried my own ashes to the mountains; I *invented* a brighter flame for myself.”<sup>44</sup> Only through our destruction can we become anew. Nietzsche told us that “And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides”. Not only are we the will to power - and this is the crucial point of this paper and what Nietzsche never expressly stated - the will to power is nothing without us. To self-overcome and create, it needs the human.

## §7: SELF-ANNIHILATION AND FATAL LOVE

If humans are characterized as ambiguous syntheses, and consequently in a state of self-annihilation, it is worth expounding in more detail this idea of self-sacrifice; something that is interestingly found in our conception of love.

The Swiss writer Denis de Rougemont offers a fascinating commentary on the myth of Tristan and Iseult in his work *Love in the Western World*; one that, independently of the concept of the will to power, paints the individual in a similar fashion as Nietzsche. De Rougemont begins his analysis by emphasizing the prominence of love and death as intertwined themes through European literary history: “Love and death, a fatal love—in these phrases is summed up, if not the whole of poetry, at least whatever is popular, whatever is universally moving in European literature, alike as regards the oldest legends and the sweetest songs. Happy love has no history.”<sup>45</sup> Already we can see overlaps with Nietzschean thought: “Love and perishing: that has rhymed for eternities.”<sup>46</sup> Further, De Rougemont claims that “What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is neither the delight of the senses nor the fruitful contentment of the settled couple; not the satisfaction of love, but its passion. And passion means suffering. There we have the fundamental fact.”<sup>47</sup> Here, we see the theme of annihilation already intertwined with - and seemingly paradoxically - love. What

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43 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 171.

44 Id., 143.

45 De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 15.

46 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 235.

47 De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 15.



has moved human beings for centuries are not stories of happy endings and contentment in our love; rather, we crave the suffering and striving accompanied by the act.

The point of departure De Rougemont takes in his analysis of the Tristan Myth is the mechanics of the plot; to avoid summarizing the entire story, he argues that the two lovers, Tristan and Iseult, do everything in their power *not* to be with each other. Every small obstacle to their unification is met with utter dejection. To this point, De Rougemont proclaims that “Objectively, not one of the barriers to the fulfillment of their love is insuperable, and yet each time they give up. It is not too much to say that they never miss a chance of getting parted. When there is no obstruction, they invent one, as in the case of the drawn sword and of Tristan’s marriage. They invent obstructions as if on purpose, notwithstanding that such barriers are their bane. Can it be in order to please the author and reader?”<sup>48</sup> The act of striving towards each other, the act of overcoming barriers *to* their love, is paramount to the object of their love. In short, Tristan and Iseult love the act of loving more than the object of their love; they love striving *toward* one another. The same can be said of the reader following along. What makes the story interesting and ignites the flame within us is imagining the lovers overcoming the obstacles to their love, not their union.

With this established, De Rougemont proceeds to make a larger claim about what this reveals about human nature; after all, “It is only ‘silly’ questions that can enlighten us; for behind whatever seems obvious lurs something that is not.”<sup>49</sup><sup>50</sup> A myth, he says, discloses a secret. This secret is that we “love love more than the object of love, to love passion for its own sake, has been to love to suffer[...] passionate love, the longing for what sears us and annihilates us in its triumph - there is the secret which Europe has never allowed to be given away.”<sup>51</sup> The question then remains: why do humans flock towards stories of passionate suffering? Why do we crave this suffering, this love whose “effulgence culminates in [our] self-destruction?”<sup>52</sup> The answer, and if the similarities with Nietzsche are not already apparent, is that “Both passion and the longing for death which passion disguises are connected with, and fostered by, a particular notion of how to reach under-

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48 Id., 37.

49 Id., 38.

50 Interestingly, Nietzsche had a strikingly similar quote on page 144 in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “Is not the strangest of all things proved most nearly?”

51 De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 50.

52 Id., 51.

standing [...] man reaches self-awareness and tests himself only by risking his life.”<sup>53</sup>

Here, we see the will to power in the individual not only in anxiety but in love<sup>54</sup> as well. The reason why we love loving more than the object of our love is that “Whatever I create and however much I love it - *soon I must oppose it* and my love; thus my will wills it.”<sup>55</sup> In being defined as amorphous and correlatively self-annihilating creatures substantiating the will to power, we must be in a continual state of striving *towards*, becoming and overcoming. This tendency of creation in self-destruction is so fundamental that it takes root in - at least a part of - our conception of love. In passionate love, we cannot be satisfied with its unity. We *need* the constant opposition, the incessant overcoming of barriers to love. This is precisely the reason the myth of Tristan and Iseult has gripped us for centuries: because we ourselves are characterized by the will to power’s continuous striving. We are drawn to stories such as *Romeo and Juliet* in which the lovers “can never be united till, bereft of all hope and of all possible love, they reach the heart of utter obstruction and experience the supreme exaltation which is destroyed in being fulfilled.”<sup>56</sup> De Rougemont is, of course, referring to death as the “heart of utter obstruction”. The lovers in such stories, whether Tristan and Iseult or Romeo and Juliet, much to our enthrallment, obsess in the ecstasy of what it means to be a human - to constantly overcome obstacles - to the point that they reach unity in the ultimate obstacle of death. This *craving for death* is indicative of the point proved in §8, that the self is set up, by its ambiguous definition, to be constantly annihilated. Tristan and Iseult crave death just as Nietzsche proclaims we do: “Spirit is the life that itself cuts into life: with its own agony it increases its own knowledge. Did you know that? And the happiness of the spirit is this: to be anointed and through tears be *consecrated as a sacrificial animal*.”<sup>57</sup> Just as the will to power is a constant suffering and self-sacrifice, passionate love is “suffering, something undergone [...] To love love more than the object of love, to love passion for its own sake, has been to love to suffer [...] passionate love, the *longing for what sears us and annihilates us in its triumph* -

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53 Ibid.

54 Importantly, in “passionate” love. There are many types and classifications of love, and at this juncture I am only analyzing this one (not to say that the will to power is not present in other classifications of love).

55 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 227.

56 De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 53.

57 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 216.

there is the secret which Europe has never allowed to be given away.”<sup>58</sup>

## §8: SYMPOSIUM LOVE

Passionate love, however, is not the only type of love that elucidates the human condition; we are given another interpretation of love by Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium*. In Diotima’s dialogue with Socrates at the end of *Symposium*, the goddess defines love as love for the infinite, something we achieve through procreation: “Procreation is everlasting and immortal as far as is possible for something mortal. Eros necessarily desires immortality with the good, from what has been agreed, since its object is to possess the good for itself forever. It necessarily follows from this account, then, that Eros is also love of immortality.”<sup>59</sup> In our anguished, fragmented, finite state, we are painfully aware of our mortality; this is the negative concomitant of executing the will to power. In becoming syntheses through spirit do we become conscious of the nothingness of our being. The self, as outlined in §6, is set up for annihilation. As a result, the human self, in its anguished realization of its finitude “seeks so far as it can to exist forever and be immortal. It can do so only in this way, by giving birth, ever leaving behind a different new thing in place of the old, since even in the time in which each single living creature is said to live and to be the same—for example, as a man is said to be the same from youth to old age— though he never has the same things in himself, he nevertheless is called the same, but he is ever becoming new while otherwise perishing, in respect to hair and flesh and bone and blood and the entire body.”<sup>60</sup> Although individual humans are mortal, the will to power of life is immortal. Through our procreation, driven by love, by striving towards one another, we immortalize life. In addition to infantilizing life through physical procreation, we can also achieve a sort of meta-immortality of our knowledge through our unique ability to gain knowledge iteratively through generations: “Study, by introducing again a new memory in place of what departs, preserves the knowledge so that it seems to be the same.”<sup>61</sup>

The individual will not be around forever, and nor will the human race. Some day, and hopefully, humans will evolve into what Nietzsche calls the “overman” just as humans evolved from apes. To

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<sup>58</sup> De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 50-51.

<sup>59</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 207a.

<sup>60</sup> Id., 207d.

<sup>61</sup> Id., 208a.

the overman, humans will be apes.<sup>62</sup> No being, in its ambiguity, can overcome the devastating reality of its finitude. It can, however, eternalize the will to power through love. Through procreation and the iterative passing down of knowledge through generations, intelligent life immortalizes itself. The will to power is *real*; life continually dies only to create something new; in this process, it has discovered amazing things about itself. While the concept of a human as merely a kindling for the eternal flame of the will to power may seem disparaging, I posit that it is beautiful beyond words. Though everything is transitory and finite, we all constitute an awe-inspiring, eternal will to power. Diotima says that “it is in this way that all that is mortal is preserved: not by being ever completely the same, like the divine, but by leaving behind, as it departs and becomes older, a different new thing of the same sort as it was.”<sup>63</sup> For the will to power to be infinitely self-overcoming, to be preserved, it cannot be a singularity. It needs life to be a synthesis that can exploit the nothingness between itself through its ambiguous relationship with time.

## §9: CONCLUSION

Humans are intermediate beings. We are made so by spirit in anxiety, rendering us insatiably craving wholeness in love either through self-annihilation or appeal towards the infinite. The human, however, can never be a being-in-itself. Yet another reason that our existence is ambiguous is that we did not ask for self-consciousness, yet the self is our responsibility.

Knowing that selfhood is what drives the will to power and can beget the overman, let us not hide from it. Let us not subjugate our “self” by hiding from it in conformity. We must embrace the ambiguity of our existence rather than seek some objective truth external to us. Only through self-exploration, suffering, and self-overcoming can we do what is most beautiful: create beyond ourselves.

Humans have, throughout time, gradually adopted more and more de-centering outlooks on the world. It began with geo-centric decentering: humans realize their planet is not the center of the universe. Then, in horror, we realized that man was not specially created and rather is a result of billions of years of evolution. Next, we realize

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<sup>62</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 124.

<sup>63</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 208b.

that even our own egos, our own selves, are mysteries to us.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps now it is time for another de-centering. Let us realize that humans have an ethical duty to safeguard our distant future, and that we must ensure the being into which we will evolve is both something we are proud of and capable of thriving. Humans are not the end of the evolutionary ladder of life. It would be a shame to throw away the gift of the will to power, to make humanity the end of the ladder through our selfishness. Nietzsche believed that it is time for humanity to set itself a goal. It is time to look at humanity's purpose and future more practically. After all, isn't the most disenfranchised being that which isn't born yet?<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>65</sup> This is an aspect of "longtermism", which endorses ethical consideration for beings who are not yet born, i.e., a being such as the overman.

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## A SYMETRICAL ARGUMENT FOR PERSONHOOD AND ABORTION

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ARTHUR DECARLE

This paper will be concerned with the moral status of abortion, defined in this instance as the voluntary termination, or allowing thereof, of a woman's pregnancy. In my opinion, to satisfactorily defend a woman's right to an abortion, one must display that a fetus is unworthy of moral consideration. In this paper, I will craft an argument to display that moral consideration is granted at the first moment conscious experience is possible. Further, I will suggest that fetuses before proper brain development are unworthy of moral consideration, morally justifying a woman's right to abortion.

To adequately assess my claim we will first need to distinguish between a human and a person. The traditional argument against abortion is a perfect example of the necessity to distinguish these terms. The traditional argument, as recounted by Warren is as follows:

It is morally wrong to kill an innocent human being, fetuses are innocent human beings, then it is morally wrong to kill a fetus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Warren, M. A. (1973). "ON THE MORAL AND LEGAL STATUS OF ABORTION". *The Monist*, 57(1), 43–61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27902294>, 12.

The sake of the traditional argument rests on the definition of human. “Human being”, in the philosophical sense, is a term with two definitions. The first is self-evident: an individual belonging to the species *Homo Sapien* and containing the human genome. This definition can be referred to as the genetic human.<sup>2</sup> The moral human, or *person* for the intent and purpose of this paper, is a completely developed member of the moral community and is thus granted full moral consideration. But as I will now attempt to display, the definitional use of “human” begs the question. Premise one is simply a restatement of one of our most basic moral truths, assuming it is specifying a “moral human.” If it is the case that a fetus is an “innocent human”, then by necessity, there must be a new definition of human, as it is illogical to assign moral judgment to an individual based solely on genetics. If premise two is operating on the genetic definition of human, then it begs the question, what makes a genetic being morally innocent? If that is the case, then a new definition of “human” must be used to avoid further logical fallacies. Therefore, either the argument utilizes one definition of “human”, and begs the question, or it uses two definitions of “human”, and the argument becomes unsound. The argument fails to prove that the presence of human genetics is necessary and sufficient for inclusion into the moral community and therefore fails due to the lack of adequate definitions. This paper will attempt to avoid the pitfalls of the traditional argument by further exploring the difference between a genetic human and a moral one.

It deserves emphasis that the elusive nature of the definition of a person is central to the debate over a fetus’ personhood status. Philosophers have notoriously struggled to create a definition of a person and none to this date has been generally accepted. That being said, one cannot act immorally to someone else on the grounds that “person” is not clearly defined, claiming they can mistreat a person for they do not know the definition of one. The lack of a definition does not entail the non-existence of the concept. One may ask, how can I assert a claim regarding personhood without ever defining the term? The answer seems to lie in the fact that one can attribute sufficient conditions for a person without such a definition. If I encounter an individual who fulfills some of the many conditions proposed in the real world, I can be confident I am interacting with a person.

First, to outline our understanding of personhood, we must

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<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, 15.



start with the moral community. While I will not attempt to lay out a complete analysis of moral community, I will develop it sufficiently enough to make my argument. The moral community, used descriptively in this context, is a group owing to a recognized moral philosophy that serves to govern their pursuits.<sup>3</sup> It consists exclusively of people, with all people being included in the moral community. People are individuals who, alone, are granted full moral consideration from the moral community.<sup>4</sup> It is the case that all persons are human, it is *not* the case that all humans are persons are human. To illustrate the point, I present an example: a man has his head surgically removed and discarded while his headless body is kept alive using medical equipment. The headless body is still living and still retains its *homo sapien* status, therefore, it is human. Can the same be said for his personhood? Our intuitions suggest that his lack of head, the part of the body that contributes to every attribute we hold to be like that of a person, is now severed and dead. This example, and others like it are intended to display our intuitive belief that “human” and “person” are not synonymous.

Second, to understand personhood as it is commonly understood, one must address the accepted sufficient conditions. Warren and Dennett both formulate almost identical conditions following the sophisticated cognitive capacity school of thought. In their respective works, entitled *On The Moral And Legal Status of Abortion* and *Conditions of Personhood*, they assert the following:

- 1) consciousness of the objects and events external and/or internal to the being;
- 2) reasoning: the developed capacity to problem-solve relatively complex issues;
- 3) self-motivated activity: activity independent of genetic or direct external control;
- 4) a capacity to communicate, by whatever means;
- 5) the presence of self-identity and self-awareness.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Babst, G.A. (2011). “Moral Community”. In: Chatterjee, D.K. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*. Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5\\_328](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5_328).

4 Dennett, Daniel. “CONDITIONS OF PERSONHOOD.” *Identities of Persons*, 1976, 175–96. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520353060-008>.

5 Id., 5; Warren, M. A. (1973). “ON THE MORAL AND LEGAL STATUS OF ABORTION”. *The Monist*, 57(1), 43–61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27902294>, 17.

Now that both the moral community and personhood have been crudely described, I suggest that only consciousness (1) and the presence of self-identity (5) are required for a being to be regarded as a person. Consciousness alone is not a sufficient description without the distinction of human self-identity. A phenomenon that seems to be unique to the human species is the idea of self-identity and how it feels to be a self. An emergent property occurs within humans that permits us to develop from a simple creature, a fetus, to a complex creature capable of advanced consciousness and the subjective experience of what it is like to be oneself. It is hard to dispute that a cat is conscious, but much harder to prove that the cat has the experience of feeling like a *self* and recognizing that same feeling in others in the way a human undoubtedly does. This conscious awareness and “feeling like a self” are the key factors to personhood and will be referred to as one term: *conscious experience*.

Conscious experience, in my view, is the first and most crucial deciding factor in distinguishing a being’s status in the moral community. That is to say, conscious experience serves as a precursor to all other conditions presented by Warren and Dennett. To display the value that modern society places on the conscious experience, I will deploy yet another example. Let us imagine a man who gets in an extremely traumatic accident and is rushed to the hospital. Let us also assume that before his accident, he was healthy and, by all accounts, deploying a conscious experience. Due to his injuries, his heart stops for a few moments and he goes unconscious. Anyone even remotely familiar with modern science would reject the notion that this man is no longer a person, but why? I would contend that his prior conscious experience coupled with the medical capabilities of restarting his heart would allow for possible future conscious experiences. Now let us imagine that, tragically, all attempts to restart the man’s heart failed, his brain has ceased to function, and restoring his original condition is beyond the assistance of medical care. Yet again, I would contend that anyone familiar with personhood could not argue, in good faith, that this man is a person any longer. His current conscious experience has ended and the future conscious experiences are no longer possible (it comes as a given that if future medical advancements allow for the full restoration of brain functions then the hypothetical would simply need to take one step further). Therefore, if death is the ending of brain function, and ostensibly, a conscious experience no longer exists nor is one possible, a human has lost its personhood. This assertion is also borne out in

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modern scientific literature as well, as there exists consensus within the community that the cessation of brain functions constitutes death.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of death itself in the semantic sense separates the genetic human from the moral one. A human corpse by definition is still a genetic human, the species and genome don't change after one dies, but intuitively we treat corpses differently than living humans. A moral individual could never in good conscience bury a "moral human", but could certainly bury a genetic one, assuming it is not a person, with no qualms at all.

Asserting that death is the end of personhood is as innocuous a claim as "a fetus is a human". If we are to accept that a person no longer exists when a future conscious experience is impossible, i.e. the full and irreversible cessation of the brain's functions, then it logically follows that a person exists as long as a prior conscious experience exists and future experiences are possible.

Thus, if a person exists as long as a prior conscious experience exists and future experiences are possible, then a person starts existing at the first moment these experiences are possible. For the sake of clarity, the argument is as follows:

- 1) If a person stops existing when a conscious experience ends and future experiences become impossible then, A person exists as long as a prior conscious experience exists and future experiences are possible;
- 2) If a person exists as long as a prior conscious experience exists and future experiences are possible, then a person starts existing at the first moment conscious experiences are possible;
- 3) A person stops existing when a conscious experience ends and future experiences become impossible;
- 4) Therefore, a person starts existing at the first moment conscious experiences are possible.

The possibility for a first conscious experience is symmetrical with the ending of a conscious experience. If the cessation of the brain ends such an experience, the formation of all of the brain's parts and the

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6 Burkle, Christopher M., Richard R. Sharp, and Eelco F. Wijdicks. "Why Brain Death Is Considered Death and Why There Should Be No Confusion." *Neurology* 83, no. 16 (2014): 1464–69. <https://doi.org/10.1212/wnl.0000000000000883>.

harmonious interaction between them would seem to be the beginning. First, it is generally acknowledged that consciousness is only possible following the development of thalamocortical connections from the sensory organs. These connections are developed from 20-24 gestational weeks, after this period a newborn is aware of itself and minimally of its surroundings.<sup>7</sup> Before this period, the fetus may react to pain and other basic external stimuli, although the fetus is likely unaware due to the lack of said connections. Following the developmental period, biological structures are now developed enough to deploy consciousness (assuming that the fetus is developing in a healthy manner with no traumatic defects) and the fetus has the possibility of future consciousness. From this time frame, a fetus should be regarded as a person and granted moral personhood. To accept the scientific community whilst rejecting a fetus' personhood after the emergence of its consciousness is akin to justifying the killing of an "innocent human" in the words of the traditional argument.

For there to be a person to speak of there must be an underlying conscious experience. To argue that the potentiality of *x* is equally as valued as *x* itself is to work against all ontological notions of existence. This argument is akin to claiming that a blueprint, wood beams, and concrete blocks are the same as a house, as the wood and concrete can potentially become a house, assuming the proper steps occur to realize the change. The same holds true for the potentiality of consciousness. Given the proper nutrients and environment, a fetus has the potential for consciousness and therefore, has the same value as one who has already realized such a development. In nearly all countries, children are restricted from a multitude of rights afforded to adults (they cannot legally consent, drive, or drink alcohol, for example). All children also have the potential to develop into fully grown adults, given proper nutrients and environment. By this logic, children should be afforded all rights granted to adults because they possess the potential to develop into adulthood. An acceptance of this argument would point out the incongruence between the proponents of potentiality and accepted ontological understandings. It cannot be the case that the potentiality for an attribute in the future constitutes the same as the actuality of that attribute.

Other objections commonly raised by critics tend to fall into

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<sup>7</sup> Lagercrantz, Hugo. "The Emergence of Consciousness: Science and Ethics." *Seminars in Fetal and Neonatal Medicine* 19, no. 5 (2014): 300–305. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.siny.2014.08.003>.

two general tropes:

- 1) Claims that personhood valuing the stage of development in which the brain is capable of consciousness is arbitrary;
- 2) Claims that the levels of consciousness exerted by a fetus are incompatible with the general understanding of the term.

Objections of the first variety tend to fall into that of the slippery-slope argument. Critics hailing from the first camp are commonly proponents of personhood at the moment of conception. It appears to be evident that the development of a human being from conception through adolescence and onto adulthood is continuous; therefore the critic would contend that choosing any point on that continuum in which personhood begins is necessarily arbitrary. From this assertion, the conclusion follows that the fetus must be a person from conception as it is the only nonarbitrary position on the continuum. If it were the case that 20-24 gestational weeks were arbitrary, then so would the developmental period for puberty and similarly the growth of a seed into a tree. It certainly does not follow that a seed is a tree or a prepubescent child a fully developed adult. If one was tasked with execution and the sole parameter was to cut the condemned head clean off, taking none of his neck with it, the execution would never take place. The executioner could not go on to claim that the neck is arbitrary because there exists no perceptible line.

Similarly, their line of reasoning can also be utilized against the critic's argument. Past the point of conception, the sperm or the ovum alone certainly could have the potential to become a human life; therefore, their existence would place them further back on the continuum of development. The delineation from sperm and ovum to zygote is seemingly arbitrary as to when the potential for personhood starts and ends. From this realization, contraception and birth control would both constitute the killing of a potential person with moral consideration, reducing the abortion question to absurdity. The final defeater for the slippery slope argument is to assert that the change from sperm and ovum to zygote is that of form and not degree, that being that the change is so drastic that the resulting entity is entirely separate. To agree to this point would be to concede that there exists pivotal changes that occur along human development that permanently alter the previous entity. From this concession, it can be argued that the transition from a fetus without consciousness to one with consciousness is drastic

enough to constitute a change of form.

We have examined critiques of the first trope, whereby the critic utilizes a slippery slope argument, to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of valuing one stage of development over another. Critiques of the second form are far more challenging, as the proponents claim that the level at which a fetus is conscious is incompatible with the general understanding of the term consciousness. Proponents of this argument, such as Robert Larmer, assert a claim along the lines of the following:

The argument that it is not the potential to become conscious, but rather the potential to resume consciousness, that confers a right to life proves too strong, inasmuch as it threatens to justify not only abortion but infanticide since newborn infants are not yet conscious in the sense in which we normally use the term.<sup>8</sup>

Larmer suggests that consciousness, as we are familiar with the term, is only attributed to a human individual five to seven months after birth. He expands on this claim by asserting that even newborn fetuses have a level of consciousness lower than most newborn animals.<sup>9</sup>

Objections of this nature are certainly more stout, but for several reasons, I believe it fails. The argument logically entails that since the valued consciousness of a fetus is diminished by comparison to an adult human, it is necessary to grant personhood to all creatures that embody a level of consciousness akin to or greater than the fetus.

Firstly, Larmer's justification for consciousness developing at ages five to seven months is grounded in outdated studies and runs contrary to more modern assessments of the development of consciousness. That being said, the major contention lies in the suggested levels of consciousness embodied by different creatures. It is a fact that a fetus and even a newborn's level of consciousness is of a "lower mental level" than that of a plethora of other animals. To discredit the claim I believe a thought experiment is an order.

Imagine that conscious experience is like a bucket of water and with each new day in one's development a splash of water is added to the bucket. The level of water in each bucket suggests the level at which you are conscious, a developed adult human having the fullest bucket (human in the genetic human sense). For this thought experi-

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<sup>8</sup> Larmer, Robert. "Abortion, Personhood and the Potential for Consciousness." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (1995): 241–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24354127>, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

ment, a fetus at 20-24 gestational weeks is given a bucket with just a small splash of water in it. Next to the fetus' bucket lies a lizard, an adult dog, and an adult chimpanzee's bucket. The lizard has the same amount of water as the fetus, while the dog has a one-third-full bucket, and the chimp a half-full bucket. There is no debate that both the dog and the chimp are more conscious than the human fetus by orders of magnitude. As the fetus develops into an adolescent, its bucket is filled to two-thirds, now undoubtedly more full than the other animals. Is it the case that the fetus' development, started with a lizard's conscious experience, then the dog, and finally the chimp before assuming a human one? No, it is not the case that the fetus filled the lizard bucket, then the dog, and so forth. It is not the case, in my argument, that one's consciousness rises to a level deemed worthy of personhood, it is the animal in kind and its own genetically unique kind of experience which is valued. A fetus' conscious experience is diminished from that of a human adult, but that statement alone entails that each species has its continuum of conscious development that can be compared but is simply not analogous.

The critic would retort, "Is it not the case that dogs can learn complex tricks and chimps can solve rudimentary puzzles, but a fetus cannot?". Although this is true, these animals are not exerting a *sapiens*' conscious experience of how all conscious *homo sapiens* intrinsically understand. The definition or explanation of how it feels to experience a *sapiens*' conscious experience is in fact impossible, there is no other conscious experience we can analytically compare it to. However, just like in the case of the definition of a *person*, the lack of a definition does not mean we are unable to identify and recognize the existence in others. It seems to be the case that a dog does not have the same sense of self, if it has one at all, that a human does. If that is the case, then the value I assign to both consciousness and sense of self separates a *human* conscious experience from that of any non-human animal. Therefore, a fetus' conscious experience is by a degree less than an adult's but, by kind, greater than that of a dog.

Larmer proposes a thought experiment to challenge the assertion that the resumption of consciousness is superseded by the potential to become conscious (his central anti-abortion claim) as follows:

Suppose someone is in a serious car accident and lapses into a coma as a result of her injuries. Upon arriving at the hospital, doctors ascertain that her injuries will heal, but that she will be in a coma for nine months, after which time she will become conscious. Unfortunate-

ly, she will have suffered total amnesia and there is no chance that she will regain any previous memories or knowledge of past plans. Indeed, the amnesia is so complete that she, like a newborn child, will have to learn how to use language and develop motor skills. Her relatives and friends, for whatever reason, express the desire that her existence be terminated and that she not be allowed to become conscious.<sup>10</sup>

Larmer utilizes this hypothetical to assert that there is a clear obligation to protect the life of the individual that is not accounted for unless the potential to become conscious is the valued condition of personhood.

Although the thought experiment is challenging, it fails to exclude my argument from protecting the injured. It is the case that the injured woman deserves protection as her right to life has not been forfeited by the nature of her personhood. That being said, it is not the potential for her to become conscious that grounds this belief. The prior conscious experience of the woman before her accident is what grants her personhood for the duration of her coma, as it is the case that her future experiences remain possible. The total amnesia as a result of her accident does not create a lack of prior experience, it only serves to remove them from her retrievable memory. It is not debatable that she was not conscious beforehand, the suggestion that she cannot recall the experiences does not refute their existence. This claim is akin to stating that a particularly zealous partygoer is not deploying a conscious experience for the duration of their blacked-out drunkenness. The partygoer in this case experiences total amnesia during the period of their drunkenness but the conscious experience exists nonetheless.

My goal throughout this paper has been to outline my position on the beginning of personhood and to defend the claim that since a fetus, before the development of the thalamocortical connections, does not have the capabilities to deploy a conscious experience, it is not granted personhood. Therefore, abortion is morally permissible for any reason before the 20-24 gestational week period. Thus the limit to acquire a legal abortion should be the twentieth gestational week to prevent the undue killing of persons.

Second, to avoid any dispute over abortions in which the child was consummated through rape or incest or in cases in which the mother's health is in danger, I find it necessary to clarify the position.

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<sup>10</sup> Id., 8.



Personhood and the right to life that is granted with it entails that it is not by any means the right not to be killed, rather it only serves to protect against the unjustified killing of a person. In cases in which the mother's life is in serious and imminent peril, the rights of the unborn may be surpassed by those of the living. Similarly to cases in which a prisoner is sentenced to capital punishment, the right to life of an individual can only be usurped when accompanied by a just reason. For cases of rape and incest, the fetus may be aborted prior to 20-24 weeks, the same being the case for any other reason as the fetus is not yet a person. Following this period, the fetus is granted full moral personhood, and abortion for any reason other than the mother's health is not permissible, in the same way, that killing a 1-year-old child conceived by incest is not permissible.

Lastly, as technology advances at an ever-increasing rate it is also worth clarifying the position with regards to non-human beings with equal, if not greater, forms of conscious experience than our own. Due to the necessity for the human conscious experience to my argument for personhood, artificially intelligent computers would not be granted personhood, and therefore, would have diminished moral consideration. The only caveat is if the creators of these machines were capable of perfectly replicating the human consciousness.

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## AGAINST EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

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ROBERTO UREÑA

The theory of evolutionary ethics suggests that the biological process of natural selection can supply a foundation for morality. I will argue that evolutionary ethics is incapable of providing such a foundation, because it lacks empirical and rational evidence to support it, because it yields unacceptable moral outcomes, and because it cannot overcome the ‘is-ought’ problem.

### §1: THE PLACE OF EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

The theory of evolutionary ethics, once dormant, is stirring in academia again—not so much among professional philosophers as among the biologists and psychologists. More and more, the natural sciences tout their assurance that the origins of moral sentiment, and perhaps of morality itself, are to be found in evolutionary biology.<sup>1</sup> More and more, there is a sense that, as de Waal expresses it, “morality requires and probably has an evolutionary explanation.”<sup>2</sup>

At the present time, such talk is largely relegated to the natural sciences. Philosophically, evolutionary ethics has long been considered an empty ethical theory, having been—so it is supposed—sufficient-

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1 See, for instance, Dennis L. Krebs, “Morality: An Evolutionary Account,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, no. 3 (2008): 149-172, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00072.x>.

2 Frans B. M. de Waal, et al, “Evolved Morality: The Biology and Philosophy of Human Conscience,” *Behavior* 151 (2014): pp. 137-141; p. 137. See also de Waal’s book by the same name.

ly dealt with by Thomas Huxley, and G. E. Moore.<sup>3</sup> This discrepancy between the opinions of the philosophers and the metaethical speculations of natural scientists, especially at a time when natural scientists are brazen in their claims of a coming explanatory omnipotence,<sup>4</sup> casts philosophers skeptical of such claims in a poor light.<sup>5</sup> There are, however—as I will argue—good reasons to be skeptical. The natural sciences are fully capable, it will be admitted, of describing all natural phenomena—that is, of explaining how things *are*. The natural scientist, however, must ‘remove the sandals from their feet’ when approaching the subject of ethics—for ethics is not the study of how things *are*, but of how things *ought to be*.

Still, there are high hopes by natural scientists that the field of ethics, too, like the fields of physics, biology, and psychology, will succumb to the relentless march of scientific progress. Nearly fifty years ago, biologist E. O. Wilson wrote that “the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologized.”<sup>6</sup> Slowly, steadily, biologists have been marching to the drumbeat of Wilson and others, advancing on the subject of morality.

The purpose of this paper is to check these advances. To that end, it will be important to understand precisely what evolutionary ethics is, before considering the problems with this theory.

## §2: DEFINING EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

The theory of evolutionary ethics has been generally divided into three distinct categories: descriptive evolutionary ethics, prescriptive evolutionary ethics, and evolutionary metaethics.<sup>7</sup> Descriptive evolutionary ethics is concerned with the question of why human beings consider

<sup>3</sup> For a brief discussion of Huxley and Ruse on the subject, see Doris Schroeder, “Evolutionary Ethics,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Accessed 15 Nov 2023), <https://iep.utm.edu/evol-eth/#H2>.

<sup>4</sup> Consider, for instance, a quote from Peter Atkins’ provocatively titled chapter, ‘The Limitless Power of Science’: “There is no reason to suppose that science cannot deal with every aspect of existence.” Peter Atkins, “The Limitless Power of Science,” in *Nature’s Imagination: The Frontiers of Scientific Vision*, ed. John Cornwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 125.

<sup>5</sup> The late Stephen Hawking argued as much in his much-acclaimed book on the interplay between philosophy and science, cited below: “Philosophy is dead,” he pronounced, because it “has not kept up with modern developments in science.” Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*. New York, NY: Bantam Publishing, 2012. Quotes are from page 5.

<sup>6</sup> E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975, 562.

<sup>7</sup> William FitzPatrick, “Morality and Evolutionary Biology,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2021), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/morality-biology/>.

certain actions to be moral or immoral. Prescriptive evolutionary ethics is concerned with grounding ethical theory in the biological evolution of the human being. Evolutionary metaethics is concerned with the question of whether and how evolutionary theory pertains to the field of ethics as a whole.

For the present purposes, this paper will not consider the question of evolutionary metaethics, and will deal solely with the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of evolutionary moral theory. Thus, there are only two claims which this paper will consider with regards to evolutionary ethics. The first claim, which is the descriptive evolutionary ethics claim, is that moral sentiments are grounded in natural selection. In other words, the reason why human beings consider any particular action to be morally ‘good’ or morally ‘evil’ is because nature has selected for human beings with those particular moral sentiments. For example, on this theory, human beings consider the act of murder to be wrong because human beings with an aversion to murder—both to murdering others and to seeing others murdered—are more likely to survive and pass on their genes than human beings without such an aversion. As such, over time, human beings have nearly universally come to consider the act of murder as something which ‘ought not to be done.’

It should be noted, of course, that the question of whether or not moral sentiments can be explained by natural selection is largely a matter of empirical inquiry. While there may be immediate objections to the idea of moral sentiments as a product of natural selection—for instance, on the grounds that such would seem to suggest an equalization of ‘moral sentiment’ and ‘morality’—it is beyond the scope of this paper to address these concerns. Rather than engage in biological investigation or metaethical speculation, I will instead treat this first claim as a given.

The second claim of evolutionary ethics, which is the prescriptive claim, is that the summum bonum is to pass on one’s genes—that is, to reproduce.<sup>8</sup> In other words, “actions that increase the long-term capacity of survival in evolutionary terms are good and actions that decrease this capacity are bad.”<sup>9</sup> As this second postulation made by evolutionary ethics is not empirically falsifiable, but is rather a philosophical statement, the focus of the present paper will be on the validity of this aspect of evolutionary ethics. Henceforth, for the sake of simplicity, when I use the term ‘evolutionary ethics,’ it will be in reference to this second claim. To that end, it will be important to consider

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout this paper, for the sake of simplicity, the terms ‘pass on one’s genes,’ ‘reproduce,’ and ‘procreate’ will be used synonymously.

<sup>9</sup> Doris Schroeder, *op. cit.*

the arguments made in favor of reproduction as the summum bonum by the proponents of evolutionary ethics.

### §3: SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS FOR EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

Perhaps the chief argument made in favor of evolutionary ethics is that—unlike most other moral theories—evolutionary ethics grounds ethics does not require a metaphysical framework, and requires few ambiguous terms. In particular, evolutionary ethics avoids the somewhat problematic task of having to define and explain the existence of ‘moral facts.’<sup>10</sup> On an evolutionary ethical basis, what makes a moral statement ‘true’ or ‘false’ is not the correspondence of that statement to some moral fact, such as a standard of perfection, but whether or not natural selection has so inclined human beings to believe such a moral statement. As stated by John Teehan and Christopher diCarlo:

The notion that ethical truths are “out there” waiting to be discovered is itself the remnant of a pre-scientific mode of thought. It stems back to a time when not only ethics, but science itself was under the magisterium of religion. The progress of modern science can be viewed as a process of freeing the study of nature from religious/metaphysical constraints and establishing its own magisterium.<sup>11</sup>

In an age when all that is not directly established in mathematics or the natural sciences is ‘committed to the flames,’<sup>12</sup> evolutionary ethics enables the moral theorist to avoid metaphysical entanglements by providing a significantly more concrete grounding for morals.

A second argument in favor of evolutionary ethics is its capacity to answer a number troubling moral questions in a more satisfying manner than many other moral theories. For instance, it has been generally observed that, across cultures and ages, most human beings share similar moral codes.<sup>13</sup> Such a fact presents a problem to moral theories which maintain that moral codes—or, at least, moral sentiments—are a product of individual, family, or societal decision. From an evolutionary moral perspective, however, this phenomenon has a simple and

10 See Michael Klenk, “Evolutionary Ethics,” in *Introduction to Philosophy: Ethics*, ed. George Matthews and Christina Hendricks (Montreal, QC, Canada: Rebus Press, 2020), 76-89; 85.

11 John Teehan and Christopher diCarlo, “On the Naturalistic Fallacy: A Conceptual Basis for Evolutionary Ethics,” *Evolutionary Psychology* 2, no. 1 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1177/147470490400200108>.

12 A paraphrase of David Hume’s famous statement in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

13 See, for instance, John C. Gibbs, et al, “Moral Judgment Development Across

empirical explanation: Human moral sentiments are encoded in the common gene pool of humanity, thus accounting for the similarities in moral codes across societies. Richard Dawkins—though not a proponent of evolutionary ethics<sup>14</sup>—seems to agree with this explanation of moral sentiments when he says: “We have a moral sense which is built into our brains, like our sexual instinct or our fear of heights.”<sup>15</sup> Another problem which is readily resolved by the evolutionary moral theory is the question of where the compulsion to act in a morally good way comes from. By addressing the question of morals scientifically, rather than philosophically, evolutionary moral theorists avoid abstract speculation regarding the mechanics of how morality ‘works.’ Without having to posit any transcendent basis of moral compulsion—such as a God who punishes wrongdoing, or a karmic system—evolutionary ethics finds the source for moral compulsion in the natural proclivities of human beings, which are ultimately rooted in the natural desire to procreate and pass on one’s genes.<sup>16</sup>

#### §4: OBJECTIONS TO EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

##### A. Responding to the Positive Arguments

Before considering potential arguments against evolutionary ethics, I wish to assess the validity of the evidences presented in favor of evolutionary ethics. First, there is the assertion that evolutionary ethics does not require a metaphysical framework, and, in particular, does not need to posit the existence of moral facts. I grant that this is true of descriptive evolutionary ethics, but it is not true of prescriptive evolutionary ethics. The instant that evolutionary ethics moves from attempts at explaining moral sentiments to explaining what our moral sentiments *ought* to be, the evolutionary ethicist must posit some reference point—such as a moral fact—by which to judge what ‘ought’ and ‘ought not’ mean. Natural selection cannot, in and of itself, provide a foundation for morality. Something else besides ‘The behavior X is ultimately a product of natural selection’ must be posited before arriving at the conclusion ‘X is a moral good.’ This will be further explored in a moment, in the discussion on the ‘is-ought’ problem, and so I will refrain from further comments on this point until then. The second point made by

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Cultures: Revisiting Kohlberg’s Universality Claims,” *Developmental Review* 27 (2007), 443-500, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2007.04.001>.

14 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 3.

15 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 214.

16 See Robert J. Richards, “Evolutionary Ethics: A Theory of Moral Realism,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, ed. Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 144-145 and 148-149.

evolutionary ethicists—namely, that the broad explanatory power of evolutionary ethics is evidence in its favor—is only a half-truth. To use the example mentioned earlier, it is true that the commonalities in moral codes across ages and cultures is a fact in need of explanation, and it is likewise true that evolutionary ethics provides a powerful solution to this problem. The answer of evolutionary ethics, however, is not the only plausible answer. For instance, quite independent of passing on one’s genes is the seemingly universal human goal of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain.<sup>17</sup> It should, therefore, be at least as plausible to say that all human beings act so as to maximize pleasure and minimize pain as it is to say that human beings act so as to stand a better chance of procreating.

On the question of moral compulsion, once again, evolutionary ethics, if true, would provide a strong answer to the question of why most individuals feel morally compelled to act one way as supposed to another. But the fact that one feels an instinctual compulsion to act in a particular way is by no means an indication that such a person morally *ought* to act that way. By what means does the evolutionary ethicist declare of any one instinct, ‘*That* is the moral instinct’? Take an individual who finds himself in a heated argument with a bitter and obnoxious neighbor. The instinct rises up to find some blunt object and batter the neighbor’s skull in. In the moment, such a thought feels right—the thought may even be pleasurable to the individual’s mind—and yet the individual refrains from doing so, not from lack of instinctual drive to commit the act, but from a sense of moral duty. Indeed, if this hypothetical individual were to follow through with their desires and commit their act of violence, most of society would be morally outraged, and condemn such an individual. It is true, one might argue, that one feels the moral instinct not to batter another’s skull in, and it is this which holds our hypothetical individual back—but this does not answer the question: Why ought our hypothetical individual to follow the ‘moral’ instinct rather than the ‘immoral’ instinct? Once again, the rejoinder may come that it isn’t a matter of ‘ought’—it is simply a fact that human beings generally, as a matter of their evolutionarily-ingrained instincts, follow their ‘moral’ instincts rather than their ‘immoral’ ones.<sup>18</sup> Let it be so—it yet remains a fact that some people do not follow their ‘moral’ instincts, and one must ask why such a person

17 See, for instance, Ruut Veenhoven, “How Universal Is Happiness?” in *International Differences in Well-Being*, ed. Ed Diener, John F. Helliwell, and Daniel Kahneman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 328-350. See also Irwin Goldstein, “Pleasure and Pain: Unconditional, Intrinsic Values,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1, no. 2 (1989), 255-276, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2107959>.

18 This, at least, is the argument made by Richards. See Robert J. Richards, *op. cit.*, 144.



ought to be condemned. After all, society does not normally condemn individuals who act counter to the instincts of the majority. For example, it is a fact that most human beings predominantly use their right hand when holding and using objects.<sup>19</sup> Must society, then, condemn those who are left-handed, for not possessing the same instincts as the majority of their right-handed counterparts? The notion seems preposterous—there appears to be, in this case at least, a clear and qualitative difference between a ‘moral instinct’ and an ‘amoral instinct.’ The theory of evolutionary ethics can explain why human beings feel moral compulsion—it may even serve to explain what the ‘qualitative difference’ between a moral feeling and an amoral feeling consists of—but to claim that the compulsion is a reason in itself to be ethical is a leap of logic.

### B. *Unacceptable Moral Outcomes*

Besides the weaknesses of the positive arguments in favor of evolutionary ethics, there remain several challenges beyond these. The first of these objections is that acting based on an evolutionary moral theory will lead to unacceptable moral outcomes. Now, the word ‘unacceptable,’ of course, carries a moral connotation, and, as such, this objection immediately runs the risk of circular reasoning. This, however, can be avoided: I will use ‘unacceptable moral outcomes’ to mean outcomes which the majority of individuals would feel to be morally wrong. Thus, ‘unacceptable’ refers not to morality itself, but to the moral sentiments of ‘normal’ individuals.

An interesting example of the unacceptability of evolutionary morals can be found in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, wherein Fyodor Karamazov and his son Dmitri are engaged in a violent competition to marry the same woman, named Grushenka. In the midst of this conflict, Ivan Karamazov—the son of Fyodor Karamazov and Dmitri’s half-brother—is asked to comment on the situation, to which he gives the somewhat apathetic reply of: “One reptile will devour the other. And serve them both right, too.”<sup>20</sup> Here, in Ivan’s comment, it seems, is an application of the evolutionary moral theory which—I suspect—yields an outcome which most people would consider to be unacceptable. There is a common moral sentiment that individuals,

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<sup>19</sup> It should be noted, tangentially, for the sake of the argument, that handedness is largely a biological trait, and thus a product of natural selection. Thus, the instinct for right-handedness is analogous to the instinct for morality for the purposes of the present example. See Shan Shan Jing, “Hand Dominance: Nature, Nurture, and Relevance for Hand Surgeons,” *Journal of Hand and Microsurgery* 14, no. 1 (2022), 111-112, DOI: 10.1055/s-0040-1713557.

<sup>20</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, tr. Constance Garnett, (New York, NY: The Lowell Press, 1880), 153.

especially individuals sharing familial ties, should strive to cooperate and behave altruistically toward one another, rather than seek conflict. Nonetheless, on an evolutionary moral basis, where the greatest possible good is to pass on one's genes, it seems that filial competition in this particular case is the inevitable—and perhaps morally favorable—outcome. Cooperation in this situation, after all, is impossible: father and son cannot both 'pass on their genes' through Grushenka—and even if they did, that, too, would grate against typical moral sensibilities. The question then arises: Who *ought* to marry Grushenka? On an evolutionary moral basis, the answer, as Ivan Karamazov suggests, is: Whichever one can physically dominate the other. From a 'survival of the fittest' perspective, in a case where Fyodor and Dmitri must compete to reproduce, the 'fitter' of the two should be the one to procreate. This outcome ultimately benefits humanity as a whole, as it serves to 'strengthen' the human gene pool. Thus, perhaps the evolutionary ethicist can even declare, alongside Ivan, 'Serve them both right'!

Of course, the case of *The Brothers Karamazov* is not the only conceivable instance in which evolutionary ethics may lead to unacceptable outcomes. For instance, it seems plausible that one might be able to justify rape in certain cases, or slavery, on an evolutionary moral basis. Both involve the subjugation of other human beings against their will—usually considered to be morally wrong—and yet both increase the moral offender's chances of passing on their genes. That this, at times, happens to be to the detriment of other human beings is irrelevant to the question, since all that is important is that the individual passes on their genes, irrespective of how the individual's reproductive strategy affects the reproductive success of others.

Against this charge, the evolutionary ethicist may counter that each of these cases portrays evolutionary ethics in an unfair light. Returning to the case of Fyodor and Dmitri, it may be argued that there is, in fact, no correct answer to the question of who should marry Grushenka. As the situation is both morally ambiguous and morally outrageous from the outset, it would seem that any moral theory would struggle to produce a morally 'acceptable' outcome, and so to attack evolutionary ethics's failure in this case is essentially 'hitting below the belt.' This argument, however, fails to recognize that—while the situation is morally ambiguous and morally outrageous—yet there are possible resolutions to the problem, as long as the summum bonum is not passing on one's genes. For instance, Fyodor and Dmitri might settle their contest with a game of chess to avoid bloodshed, or they might appeal to a third party to help them discuss their difficulties—or, perhaps best of all, Fyodor and Dmitri might allow Grushenka herself

to choose between the two of them.<sup>21</sup> While, from an evolutionary perspective, conflict seems to be the only possible option, there are viable alternatives from other moral theories, and so the failure of evolutionary ethics in this case is a legitimate challenge to the theory.

All in all, however, the case of *The Brothers Karamazov* is a fictional example—and such cases, if they do occur, are rare, and most likely never reach the point showcased in Dostoyevsky’s novel. The cases of rape and slavery, however, are much more serious, as they are certainly not hypothetical.

Against the charge that evolutionary ethics cannot address the moral wrongs of rape or slavery, the evolutionary ethicist may point out that human beings have evolved to be a social species, and as such, an evolutionary moral theory must take this into consideration.<sup>22</sup> Seen thus from a societal perspective, society as a whole benefits most when human beings cooperate, rather than forcibly subdue one another. After all, social groups with intra-group conflict are less likely than social groups without such conflict to survive and pass on their genes. This is also to say nothing of potential societal sanctions which may be levied against those considered to be morally aberrant, thus making it more difficult for offending individuals to pass on their genes in the future. Therefore, while on an individual level, it would seem that there are certain cases when evolutionary ethics yields ‘unacceptable’ moral outcomes, on the societal level such problems are avoided.

This counter-objection, however, forgets that natural selection—the underlying process which provides the basis for evolutionary ethics’ summum bonum—should theoretically select for individuals whose moral sentiments are primarily inclined to their own benefit. Even from a societal perspective, natural selection will favor individuals who seek their own individual good, rather than the good of society.

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21 Someone may comment that this is actually the evolutionarily preferable outcome. I will simply observe that I see little *evolutionary* reason for either male party to concede defeat to the other simply on the basis of the female’s preference. Furthermore, while mating competitions in nature are, of course, for the purpose of winning the right to pass on one’s genes with a female or a group of females, I can think of few if any instances in which the female herself decides the contest. Even if such an instance did occur in nature, however, it remains to be seen that this is the ‘right’ way to settle a dispute, as opposed to merely ‘a’ way.

22 It should be noted that there are two schools of thought with regards to evolutionary biology. The first school maintains that natural selection operates predominantly on the individual level, while the second holds that natural selection operates predominantly on the group level. This, of course, creates two schools of evolutionary ethical thought. The anticipated objection here would presumably come from a proponent of the latter school of thought. See Michael Klenk, *op. cit.*, 83-84.

Consider, for instance, two individuals in society. The first individual seeks the wellbeing of society only insofar as increasing societal wellbeing increases their own reproductive success. The second individual seeks the welfare of society even at their own reproductive expense. Because the individual who seeks their own reproductive success will have a greater chance of passing on their genes than the individual who is willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their fellow society members, natural selection will select for the former type of individual over the latter type. Seeing as those moral sentiments which are favored by natural selection are—almost by definition—strategically selected for their ability to promote the individual’s procreative success, and as procreative success is the supreme ethical goal for any individual on the theory of evolutionary ethics, it stands to reason that individuals ought not to consider societal welfare in their moral decision-making if it is to their reproductive disadvantage. Thus, the evolutionary ethicist may approve of the rapist—as long as the rapist can act with sufficient discreetness, so as to not attract the reproach of society—as well as the slaveholder—so long as the slaveholder holds their slaves with the approval of their society.

But all of this, the evolutionary ethicist might maintain, presupposes that the moral sentiments of individuals are inclined toward such acts as rape and slaveholding. Yet moral sentiments, as they are observed in actuality, are not so inclined—rape and slaveholding are considered to be morally unacceptable, after all—which would seem to undermine the previous counter-argument. All that this fact shows, however, is that the moral sentiments of human beings—whether or not they are products of natural selection—are at least not solely oriented toward the alleged summum bonum of passing on one’s genes.

A second potential objection to the assertion that evolutionary ethics yields unacceptable moral outcomes is that, while there are select occasions in which morally unacceptable acts, such as rape or slaveholding, might be condoned on an evolutionary moral theory, actions such as these are, in general, nonbeneficial for the individual. For the sake of simplicity, let us only consider the case of rape as it pertains to this line of argument. While in certain circumstances a rapist may ‘get away’ with their act without any societal consequences, this is not often the case—more often than not, the rapist is caught and punished. Thus, one ought not to commit the act of rape, as the future consequences of such an act are more likely to be harmful than beneficial to the individual. Another similar, though somewhat distinct, form of this argument might be to take a more Kantian route: While rape may benefit one particular individual at one particular moment in time, if all human beings saw fit to rape one another whenever they chose, the result would be a net detriment to the species. Thus, one ought not to

commit the act of rape, because of the moral ‘non-universalizability’ of the act.<sup>23</sup>

These two objections, however, can be dealt with simultaneously. In both cases, the argument shifts the focus away from the individual’s benefit to society or the species’ detriment. But on what grounds does the evolutionary ethicist make such a move? It has already been established that nature selects for self-concerned individuals over individuals who are not self-concerned. Thus, in the moment of moral decision—that is, when the individual must consider for themselves whether or not an action which they are to undertake is morally right or morally wrong—the individual must not be concerned about the societal consequences of their decision, or about the hypothetical scenario of all human beings acting as they are acting. Rather, the individual must judge for themselves, in their particular moment and in their particular circumstance, whether or not their action will serve to facilitate the passing on of their genes or not. If so, then—irrespective of the means—that action is good. If it be by rape, then by rape; if by marriage, then by marriage. On an evolutionary moral basis, the two would appear to be morally indistinguishable.

### C. *The Is-Ought Problem*<sup>24</sup>

The second attack against the theory of evolutionary ethics is the ‘is-ought’ problem, as made famous by David Hume.<sup>25</sup> The problem involves the question of what kind of argument would be required to be able to conclude that passing on one’s genes is, in fact, the summum bonum. It is true that human beings, generally speaking, pass on their genes and desire to do so—and, moreover, that if all human beings ceased to pass on their genes, then the human species would cease to exist. But this does not answer the question of why one *ought* to pass on their genes. Why, after all, should the cessation of human existence be considered a moral wrong? One may multiply facts about what *is* the case *ad nauseum*—for instance, one may point out that human beings have a natural instinct to pass on their genes and preserve the existence of the species. This, however, still does not answer the challenge. One need only ask: But why ought human beings to act

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23 The logic is paraphrased in part from Kant’s Categorical Imperative. See the first section of Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

24 It may be noticed that I choose to address the more general ‘is-ought’ problem, rather than the more specific ‘naturalistic fallacy,’ as put forward most famously by G. E. Moore. This is because several—and, in my opinion, persuasive—counter-arguments have been made against the naturalistic fallacy. See, for instance, Oliver Curry, “Who’s Afraid of the Naturalistic Fallacy?” *Evolutionary Psychology* 4, no. 1 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1177/147470490600400120>.

25 See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*; Book III, Chapter I.

based on their natural instincts? As philosopher William FitzPatrick points out: “Regardless of why one has a given [instinct], the question for a rational agent is always: is it right for me to exercise it, or should I instead renounce and resist it as far as I am able?”<sup>26</sup> There is no biological fact for the evolutionary ethicist to fall back upon which can justify the idea that human beings ought to consider passing on their genes as the greatest possible good.

Perhaps the strongest reply available to the evolutionary ethicist is to appeal to teleology.<sup>27</sup> While it may be true that no biological fact can justify the summum bonum of passing on one’s genes, the evolutionary ethicist may maintain that, from a biological perspective, the purpose of human life is survival and genetic propagation. As Richard Dawkins once famously put it: “We are machines built by DNA whose purpose is to make more copies of the same DNA. That is exactly what we are here for... It is every living object’s sole reason for living.”<sup>28</sup> The argument may now run as follows<sup>29</sup>: For any thing with a given purpose, the ‘goodness’ of that thing consists in its accomplishing that purpose. For example, if the purpose of a knife is to cut, then the ‘goodness’ of the knife consists in its ability to cut. A knife that cuts well is a ‘good’ knife, whereas a knife which does not cut well is a ‘bad’ knife. Likewise, for all living things: If the purpose of all living things is to pass on their genes, then the ‘goodness’ of a living thing consists in its ability to pass on its genes—and, as human beings are living things, then the ‘goodness’ of human beings also consists in their ability to pass on their genes. As all human actions may thus be measured against this ultimate human goodness, it may thus be safely asserted that the summum bonum is to pass on one’s genes. In this way, by positing the idea of a biological ‘purpose for life,’ the evolutionary ethicist may diffuse the is-ought problem.

There are three problems with this defense. First, it seems arbitrary to choose ‘passing on one’s genes’ as the purpose for the existence of living things. On a biological level, after all, reproduction is merely one of a plethora of functions performed by any living thing. As there is nothing inherently value-laden about reproduction, one may justly ask: Why choose ‘passing on one’s genes’ as the essential life-purpose, rather than some other life function? The evolutionary

26 William FitzPatrick, *op. cit.*

27 This teleological appeal is a common method of overcoming the is-ought problem, perhaps most famously espoused and defended by Alasdair MacIntyre in his 1981 book *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press).

28 Richard Dawkins, “The Ultraviolet Garden,” *Royal Institute Christmas Lecture*, No. 4 (1991).

29 This argument is largely derived from Book I of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.

ethicist may respond that reproduction, as the mechanism by which natural selection operates, constitutes the most essential life-function, and as such, opting for ‘reproductive success’ or ‘passing on one’s genes’ as the *summum bonum* is not arbitrary. This, too, however, has a problem: It is not *a priori* obvious that passing on one’s genes—even from a biological perspective—constitutes the most essential life-function. For instance, by the same line of argumentation presented above, it could be argued that ‘survival’ is the teleological aim of humanity and all living things—and that as such, the ‘goodness’ of human beings consists in their capacity to survive. On what grounds does the evolutionary ethicist claim that reproduction is more essential than survival? Without resorting to some external value system, it seems an impossible task for the evolutionary ethicist to non-arbitrarily determine whether or not reproduction—or any other life-function—is ‘most essential.’ Absent a non-arbitrary purpose for humanity, the is-ought problem remains for the evolutionary ethicist.

The second problem with the teleological defense for evolutionary ethics stems from the source of this teleology. It may be asked: From whence does the evolutionary ethicist derive the notion of purpose? One can speak about the purpose of a knife because the knife was made by some individual who designed the knife for the intended purpose of cutting. Indeed, apart from some intention or design on the part of an individual, a thing cannot be thought of as having a purpose. A body of water, for instance, cannot be thought of as existing for the purpose of swimming in, unless some individual had prepared that body of water with that purpose in mind. But if—as most evolutionary biologists maintain—living things were not made, but are the products of the ‘blind forces’ of natural selection, then the evolutionary ethicist must find some other source for the purpose of human beings. One possible means of doing this might be to understand the purpose of an individual as existing not within the individual, but in a community of individuals.<sup>30</sup> Consider that a single cell has no purpose, unless it is connected to a community of similar cells into an organ—say, a heart. But the heart itself has no purpose, unless it likewise is connected to a community of organs in an organism, for the purpose of facilitating genetic propagation. But even genetic propagation is itself impossible apart from a community of organisms—at least, for sexually reproducing organisms, such as human beings. Thus, one might still, in this ‘hierarchy of purposes’ find a quasi-transcendent source for the purpose of human existence. This argument, however, seems to conflate ‘practical function’ with ‘teleological purpose.’ The two are entirely distinct.

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<sup>30</sup> This argument is put forward by Yoshimi Kawade, “On the Nature of the Subjectivity of Living Things,” *Biosemiotics* 2 (2009), 205-220, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12304-009-9041-9>.

A heart, it is true, may be practically functionless absent the rest of the organism, but this does not necessarily mean that it is teleologically purposeless. Likewise, the heart may be teleologically purposeless, and yet serve a practical function. This attempt too, then, fails to establish reproduction as a real teleological end capable of overcoming the is-ought problem.

The third and final problem with positing ‘passing on one’s genes’ as a teleological end for humanity is that the ‘ought’ which such a teleology produces is an ‘ought of adequacy,’ not a ‘moral ought.’<sup>31</sup> Returning to the example of the knife: It is true that the ‘goodness’ of the knife consists in its capacity to cut, and so one ‘ought’ to use the knife for cutting. It would be strange, however, if this ‘ought’ were construed to be a moral ‘ought’—as though cutting into something with a knife was a moral good. The same argument can be applied to human beings: It may be true that the biological ‘goodness’ of a human being consists in their capacity to reproduce, and so, perhaps, one ‘ought’ to use one’s body for that purpose. This, ‘ought,’ however, like the previous ‘ought,’ is merely an ought of adequacy. It would be strange, merely on this basis, if one were to suggest that reproduction was a moral good.

Here the evolutionary ethicist might object that there is—at least, with regards to human beings—no distinction between an ‘ought of adequacy’ and a ‘moral ought.’ In other words, it may be that what is called an ‘ought of adequacy’ for other things is what human beings consider a ‘moral ought’ in themselves. Hence, there appears to be an essential difference between the statements ‘A knife ought to cut,’ and ‘A human ought to reproduce,’ simply because the latter involves a human being. This argument, however, does not consider that all ‘ought’ statements refer implicitly to human beings. There is no ‘ought’ inherent in a knife, or in any other object, if that object bears no relationship to a human being. This is because, by nature, the concept of ‘ought’—whether it be an ought of adequacy, or a moral ought—exists only in tandem with an agent possessing a will. Furthermore, the ought of adequacy and the moral ought are entirely distinguishable in this ‘willing agent,’ so that the ought of adequacy cannot be equated with the moral ought. For example, a human being may use a knife to cut carrots, or they may use the same knife to cut human fingers off of other people’s hands. Both situations involve the ought of adequacy—in fact, both involve the ‘good’ of the knife—but only the latter situation involves a moral ought, that is, one ought not to cut human fingers, even if ‘cutting’ is the ‘good’ of the knife. Here the ought of adequacy

31 I develop this argument from Shalina Stilley, “Natural Law Theory and the ‘Is’--‘Ought’ Problem: A Critique of Four Solutions.” *Dissertations (2009-)* (2010), Paper 57, [https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations\\_mu/57/](https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/57/).



and the moral ought are neatly distinguished for the human being. But if the ought of adequacy and the moral ought can be so distinguished, then it cannot be argued that the ought of adequacy produced by the evolutionary ethicist's teleological appeal is equivalent to a moral ought. It can thus be seen that—in light of the three problems highlighted here—the theory of evolutionary ethics cannot demonstrate that reproduction constitutes a meaningful teleological end for humanity. Without this teleology, the is-ought problem remains for evolutionary ethics to solve. Satisfying answers are not forthcoming.

## §5: CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the lack of strong evidence in favor of the evolutionary ethical viewpoint, as well as its inability to reasonably resolve either the 'unacceptable' moral outcomes of its theory or the is-ought problem renders it an impossible theory to justifiably support. In all candidness, the evolutionary moral perspective is an overreach of the natural sciences into the ethical sphere. Insofar as there is real content in the word 'morality,' the natural sciences have no place in the field of morals. It is the role of the natural sciences to describe behavior, and to explain the causal connections between natural phenomena, not to distinguish between 'good' and 'evil.'

Of course, the evolutionary ethicist may, in response to all of the arguments here presented, simply reply that morality does not exist anyway—that is, they may adopt the metaethical view that the biological theory of evolution disposes of the possibility of morality in the first place. This paper, however, has not sought to address such concerns, and they must be dealt with separately.

With regards to the descriptive aspect of evolutionary ethics mentioned previously, such a field of study may prove fruitful, as long as the distinction between 'moral sentiment' and 'morality' is maintained. Let descriptive evolutionary ethics demonstrate that my aversion to lying is the result of natural selection. The question of *why* lying is actually wrong, apart from my—or anyone else's—believing it to be so, remains.

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# A NATURAL INTERPRETATION OF ARISTOTELIAN TELEOLOGY

JORDAN SMITH

## §1: AN OVERVIEW OF ARISTOTLE'S FOUR CAUSES

At several key points throughout his works, Aristotle presents his understanding of the causal mechanisms affecting all-natural substances.<sup>1</sup> In this view, there are four distinct types of causes: material, formal, efficient, and final. Though it is impossible to fully explicate any of these modes of causation in isolation from the others,<sup>2</sup> some basic distinctions between them can nonetheless be drawn. To start, the material cause refers to “that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists.”<sup>3</sup> That is to say, it is the matter of which the thing being explained is composed. In contrast to matter, the formal cause is “the definition of the essence”<sup>4</sup> in the sense that it defines matter in such a way as to make a substance what it is. Next, Aristotle explains that the efficient cause is “the primary source of the change or rest” in the way

1 E.g. Aristotle, R. K. Gaye, and R. P. Hardie, “Physics,” essay, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), II.3, 194b24-195a3. Aristotle, “Metaphysics,” essay, in *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. W. D. Ross, vol. 8 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1908), I.3, 983a24-32.

2 D.C. Schindler helpfully describes Aristotle’s four causes as “interdependent.” See D. C. Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 145-148.

3 Aristotle, *Physics* II.3, 194b24-194b26.

4 Id., 194b27-194b29.

that “the father is cause of the child.”<sup>5</sup> Finally, and most interestingly for current purposes, Aristotle affirms the existence of the final cause “in the sense of end or that for the sake of which a thing is done, e.g. health is the cause of walking about.”<sup>6</sup> Given that final causation does not only pertain to humans but all-natural substances, Aristotle’s talk of “ends” and actions being “for the sake” of goals may give the impression that he is projecting anthropomorphic categories onto the natural world. Despite first appearances, an examination of his comments on final causality read within the broader context of his metaphysical worldview reveals that this interpretation completely inverts Aristotle’s priorities. For the Stagirite, human intentions are, in fact, teleological (i.e. directed to an end or *telos*) in a merely derivative manner. Rather than human intentions and desires, the primary sense of teleology for Aristotle is the movement of natural substances to their pre-given natural ends.

## §2: PROBLEMATIC INTERPRETATIONS OF ARISTOTLE’S TELEOLOGY

In order to demonstrate that the primary point of reference for understanding teleology in Aristotle’s thought is nature, a few common misinterpretations of Aristotelian teleology must first be expounded and subsequently refuted. The first and most basic among these misreadings are those models that attempt to reduce Aristotle’s teleology to some other mode of causation, such as efficient or material. Any account of Aristotle’s teleology qua the study of final causes necessarily presupposes that he *did* affirm a unique mode of final causality. To affirm such a theory, as is required by the thesis that teleology is the movement of substances to their natural ends, therefore requires that reductionistic interpretations of Aristotle’s final causes to some other form of causation be rejected. Second, to determine if Aristotle’s understanding of teleology is grounded in his theory of nature, it will be necessary to discern what he means by the term “nature” (*phusis*). Given Aristotle’s several statements concerning the broadly defined character of nature, it is somewhat surprising how many have restricted his use of the term to merely mean the sum total of biological organisms. This interpretation will be shown to be far too narrow to account for all the situations in which Aristotle makes use of the concepts of

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5 Id.,194b30-194b32.

6 Id.,194b33-195a2.

nature and teleology as causal factors. Lastly, any anthropocentric interpretation that claims all things in the universe exists for the sake of mankind as their end runs up against the idea that final causes, in Aristotle, are primarily grounded in the nature of each individual substance and are therefore logically before any consideration of human beings in particular. As shall be demonstrated, the anthropocentric interpretation of Aristotle's teleology goes against his broader metaphysical vision, which affirms the necessity of crafts to make nature useful for mankind. Refuting these three inaccurate understandings of teleology in Aristotle shall constitute the majority of this essay. Once the ground has been cleared, a positive case for a more robust understanding of Aristotelian teleology that is grounded in nature shall be presented.

### §3: REDUCTIONISTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF FINAL CAUSES

Several scholars have, in one way or another, argued that Aristotle's conception of final causality is reducible to some other form of causation, but by far the most influential and sophisticated account of this sort is provided by Allan Gotthelf.<sup>7</sup> He asserts that his understanding of final causes in Aristotle may be summarized as the “‘irreducible potential’ interpretation.”<sup>8</sup> Gotthelf chooses this description because, in his view, “[p]rocesses for the sake of something are distinguished from

7 See Allan Gotthelf, “Aristotle’s Conception of Final Causality,” essay, in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle’s Biology*, ed. Allan Gotthelf and James G. Lennox (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 204–42. This seminal work has birthed other reductionistic interpretations, sometimes even more reductionistic than Gotthelf’s own. E.g. Michael Bradie and Fred D. Miller, “Teleology and Natural Necessity in Aristotle,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (April 1984): 133–46, esp. 142. Cf. Susan Sauve Meyer, “Aristotle, Teleology, and Reduction,” *The Philosophical Review* 101, no. 4 (October 1992): 791–825, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2185925>. Meyer takes a more epistemological approach to the issue of teleological reducibility: “My conclusion is not that something’s efficient cause is its final cause; nor is it that anything with an intrinsic efficient cause thereby has or is a final cause. Rather, my conclusion is simply that some intrinsic efficient causal claims are sufficient for the truth of final-causal claims” (811). The problem with this reading is that, for Aristotle, each type of cause is an “objective factor in nature,” as Balme puts it. David Balme, “Teleology and Necessity,” essay, in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle’s Biology*, ed. Allan Gotthelf and James G. Lennox (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 281. Aristotle’s discussion of causes, therefore, fundamentally concerns ontology (as opposed to merely epistemology, as Meyer’s interpretation suggests).

8 Gotthelf, “Aristotle’s Conception of Final Causality,” 251.

those that are not by the presence in the one case, and the absence in the other, of a potential for form.”<sup>9</sup> In this interpretation, a final cause is the actualization of a potential that something possesses to take on a certain form. Hence, as Gotthelf explains, “For a living organism of a certain form to come to be for the sake of something is precisely for it to result from a sum of actualizations of potentials, one of which—and the most explanatorily important of which—is an irreducible potential for an organism of that form.”<sup>10</sup> What Gotthelf means is that, for Aristotle, the matter out of which, say, a moose is made had the potential to take on many different forms, whether that be the form of some other animal or even a race car. To explain why this matter takes on the form that it does (e.g. that of a moose), one must have recourse to form, which provides a definition of matter. To continue with the moose example, some of the matter composing this animal has its potential to be an antler actualized while other material has the potential to be eyes, hooves, or intestines actualized. What Gotthelf wishes to emphasize is that there is one form which unites together all these parts of the moose together so that it is one organism, and there must therefore be a corresponding potential to be a moose in all the matter that makes up its various parts (in addition to the potentials the matter has to be each part of the moose). Because the form of moose interpenetrates all of the parts of the moose and no one part of it can suffice to make a moose, the potential to be a moose cannot be reduced to any one or even any collection of the moose’s parts. Final causality, for Gotthelf, is the actualization of this irreducible potential for form. This account connects to Aristotle’s teleological language insofar as all the parts of the moose are “for the sake of” the moose as a whole. This whole, in turn, is an “end” in the sense that the organism develops into a fully grown moose, and this stage of development marks its completion. Gotthelf, therefore, presents a respectable interpretation of Aristotle’s teleology that takes into account not only the language he uses to describe final causes but also his broader metaphysical system.

Despite the positive qualities Gotthelf’s interpretation possesses, it must ultimately be rejected because of its (admittedly subtle) reductionism. Before Gotthelf’s theory in particular is addressed, some general preliminary remarks concerning the problems with reductionistic interpretations of final causality in Aristotle must be made. *Prima facie*, it would be strange for Aristotle to systematically distinguish

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.*, 250.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

between final and efficient causes, only for the former to be reducible to the latter.<sup>11</sup> As D. M. Balme puts it, “Aristotle *always* presents the four causes as four separate factors in a causal explanation... They are not one factor plus three alternative descriptions or views of it.”<sup>12</sup> Second, and more to the point, there are multiple places at which Aristotle explicitly denies that final causality is reducible to efficient causality, as Gotthelf implies. To take only the clearest example, in one of his enumerations of the four causes and their distinctions, Aristotle says that the third type of cause is the efficient cause or “the source of the change,” and the final cause or “the purpose and the good” is “opposed to this [i.e. the efficient cause].”<sup>13</sup> These considerations render implausible any reductionistic interpretation of Aristotelian teleology based on the premise that final causality is simply a way to describe a particular type of efficient causality. What remains to be demonstrated is that Gotthelf’s argument does in fact attempt such a reduction.

Before revealing the reduction of true final causes to merely efficient causes in Gotthelf’s work, it should be acknowledged that he does avoid a particular type of reduction. Indeed, Gotthelf himself clearly believes his theory is wholly non-reductionistic (or even anti-reductionistic), as the self-designation of his interpretation as one of “*irreducible* potential” clearly indicates.<sup>14</sup> He certainly has some claim to the title of non-reductionist insofar as he refuses to let matter’s potential to be some organism be reduced down to matter’s potentials to be each of said organism’s parts. That being said, as Rich Cameron rightly notes after conceding this same point in his critique of Gotthelf, “his analysis does count as a form of reduction to the material cause in virtue of the fact that the analysans refers primarily to potentialities and potentialities are material elements in Aristotle’s ontology.”<sup>15</sup> Though

11 For Aristotle’s definitive distinction between the four causes, see Aristotle, *Physics* II.3, 194b24-195a3.

12 Balme, “Teleology and Necessity,” 281. Emphasis mine.

13 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.3, 983a30-32. This example as well as less explicit examples of Aristotle’s distinction between final and efficient causes are explicated in Robert Bolton, “The Origins of Aristotle’s Natural Teleology in *Physics* II,” essay, in *Aristotle’s Physics: A Critical Guide*, ed. Mariska Leunissen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 121–43, esp. 122-125. Michael Bradie and Fred. D. Miller also argue for the distinctiveness of final causes vis-à-vis efficient causes in Aristotle’s thought in Bradie and Miller, “Teleology and Natural Necessity in Aristotle,” 137.

14 E.g. Gotthelf, “Aristotle’s Conception of Final Causality,” 251. Emphasis mine.

15 Rich Cameron, “The Ontology of Aristotle’s Final Cause,” *Apeiron* 35, no. 2 (June 2002): 173, n. 43 and 44, <https://doi.org/10.1515/>



Cameron sees Gotthelf as reducing final causation to material causation in virtue of matter's status as potential in Aristotle's thought, it seems that, in addition to this account, one must also acknowledge that form and efficient causation also play a role in this reduction. After all, Gotthelf is proposing an irreducible potential (the material cause) for form (the formal cause) that must be actualized (by an efficient cause) in order for the conditions of a final cause to obtain. This difference between Cameron's critique and my own, of course, does not detract from the main issue, namely that Gotthelf's interpretation does not present an actual account of final causes but merely reduces them to some other form(s) of causation. Indeed, it seems Gotthelf is willing to acknowledge the reality of every type of cause Aristotle presents, except for final causes! This means that Gotthelf's argument does in fact fall victim to the critiques of reductionistic arguments presented above and that his interpretation, though coherent, is not true to the thought of Aristotle himself who maintains a firm distinction between all four types of causes.

#### §4: RESTRICTIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF TELEOLOGY

The claim that Aristotle's teleology is *intrinsically* grounded in the natures of the various entities that populate the cosmos necessarily entails that anything that has a nature (including everything from dirt to the stars to human beings) can be acted upon by a final cause. But there are many alternate readings of Aristotle, which preclude such a broad understanding of nature and, by extension, teleology. The primary mistake made when restricting the scope of Aristotle's application of final causes is assuming that his conception of teleology entails a transposition of anthropomorphic categories onto the natural world.<sup>16</sup> This mistake can be seen in the work of E. Zeller who claims that "Aristotle cannot conceive of regulated and orderly events except under the analogy of human action directed towards an end."<sup>17</sup> Similar

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apeiron.2002.35.2.153.

<sup>16</sup> Gotthelf, though he does restrict teleological explanation to biological entities, nonetheless identifies this as one of two fundamental misinterpretations of Aristotle. Gotthelf, "Aristotle's Conception of Final Causality," 251, n. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Eduard Zeller, *Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (London, UK: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 459. Zeller additionally claims that Aristotle explicitly states that the natural world, including the material elements, are in some sense alive. Specifically, he cites *Physics*

reasoning leads several other scholars to make the mistake of maintaining that Aristotle held final causality to only be applicable to biological organisms, which likewise evince some degree of desire and intentionality. This path is taken, among others, by D. M. Balme who argues for this restrictive interpretation specifically to the exclusion of material elements: “The sublunary elements, air earth fire and water, act teleologically only when they are part of a living body; outside that (for instance in the occurrence of rainstorms) there is no final cause acting on them... Aristotle confines natural teleology to sublunary life.”<sup>18</sup> Compared to Balme, John M. Cooper is more attentive to Aristotle’s numerous claims that, in addition to biological entities, the elements are also subject to final causality. Yet, in the end, he too empties final causes of any real efficacy, as he dismisses Aristotle’s claims concerning objective ends for the elements, saying, “this just refers e.g. to fire’s tendency to heat things up.”<sup>19</sup> On this reading, elemental teleology is reduced simply to a way of expressing the way the elements happen to behave without providing an explanation of why such behavior occurs regularly. Finally, the most powerful argument in favor of the view that Aristotle holds teleological explanations only to pertain to biological organisms is certainly Gotthelf’s observation that “in almost every passage in which Aristotle introduces, discusses, or argues for the existence of final causality, his attention is focused on the generation and development of a living organism.”<sup>20</sup> There is, therefore, a strong case to be made for a restrictive reading of teleology in Aristotle such that only living beings can be affected by final causes.

Despite the multiple lines of evidence pointing towards a restrictive interpretation of teleology, such an understanding is simply not comprehensive enough to capture all the uses of final causes

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VIII.1, 250b10-250b14, the relevant part of which asks, “Is it [i.e. motion] in fact an immortal never-failing property of things that are, a sort of life as it were to all naturally constituted things?” This one question out of the entire Aristotelian corpus hardly suffices to demonstrate that Aristotle maintained a sort of universal animism, especially when one considers the possibility that Aristotle here refers to “a sort of life” because he associates eternity with the divine, which is alive in some sense (This, and not anthropomorphism, is incidentally why Aristotle attributes life to the stars, which he believes are eternal). The point being conveyed, as the context clearly shows, is the eternity of motion, not the animacy of matter.

18 Balme, “Teleology and Necessity,” 277.

19 John M. Cooper, “Hypothetical Necessity and Natural Teleology,” essay, in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle’s Biology*, ed. Allan Gotthelf and James G. Lennox (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 268, n. 26.

20 Gotthelf, “Aristotle’s Conception of Final Causality,” 229, n. 7, which refers back to his citations in n. 2 and 5.

in the Aristotelian corpus. Though the various interpretations of the restrictive view of final causes each contain their own particular flaws, all sides of the debate agree that Aristotle attributes teleology to those things which possess a nature.<sup>21</sup> The contested issue, therefore, is specifically what types of entities possess a nature (*phusis*) according to Aristotle. The views presented above generally ascribe a nature only to biological beings,<sup>22</sup> but an analysis of Aristotle's explicit comments on the subject reveal that he certainly had a much broader understanding of the concept of nature. At the opening of *Metaphysics* VIII, for example, Aristotle lists "fire, earth, water, air" as the prime examples of "natural substances," which are "recognized by all thinkers."<sup>23</sup> Aristotle provides further corroborating evidence of this broad understanding of nature in *De Caelo* III where he introduces the following distinction: "Now things that we call natural are either substances or functions and attributes of substances. As substances I class the simple bodies—fire, earth, and the other terms of the series—and all things composed of them; for example, the heaven as a whole and its parts, animals, again, and plants and their parts."<sup>24</sup> Both of these passages make it clear that, on Aristotle's account, substances with natures are not limited to plants and animals but also includes the four elements and the heavenly bodies.

Though Aristotle's explicit statements as to what is included under the scope of nature suffice to undermine the restrictive interpretations presented above, these basic observations still leave open the question of precisely *why* these incomplete understandings fail. That is to say, what has been dealt with so far are merely conclusions, not premises and reasoning. To see why the reasoning behind the restrictive interpretations of nature fails, one must understand the criterion

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21 E.g. Balme, "Teleology and Necessity," 275; Cooper, "Hypothetical Necessity and Natural Teleology," 244; Zeller, *Aristotle and Earlier Peripatetics*, 459.

22 Zeller is an exception to this as he believes Aristotle attributes teleology to anything with intentions, and Zeller goes on to affirm that Aristotle teaches everything has at least some low-level of conscious intentionality. Zeller, *Aristotle and Earlier Peripatetics*, 459-461. For a refutation of this interpretation, see n. 17.

23 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VIII.1, 1042a6-12.

24 Aristotle, *De Caelo*, trans. J. Stocks (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1922), III.1, 598a29-32. See also *De Caelo* I.1, 268a1-6 where Aristotle defines the scope of the study of nature so broadly that it can include the whole material world, except man-made artifacts. For an analysis of this passage, see Monte Ransome Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2008), 133.

that Aristotle uses to include something under the category of nature. He holds that natural and non-natural substances “plainly differ” since every case of the former “has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness (in respect of place, or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration).”<sup>25</sup> For Aristotle, nature *is* this principle of motion and rest. His standard of what constitutes a natural substance therefore clearly presents a disjunction where any one of various conditions is satisfactory, but it seems that the restrictive theories of nature take the “growth and decrease” characteristic of organisms to be a necessary condition for naturalness. If Aristotle’s own standard is applied, however, then the elements are manifestly teleological for Aristotle, since he believes they have a natural tendency to move “in respect of place.” Earth has a tendency to move down, followed by water, and air tends to move up, only surpassed by fire.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Aristotle holds that the motion of elements to the place they usually rest is the result of a natural teleological movement, and this means both nature and teleology extend to all substances that possess a tendency to change in some consistent manner.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* II.1, 192b12-15.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Byrne argues that the movement of the elements to their respective usual places is not driven by a teleology grounded in nature. His reasoning is that Aristotle claims the elements will not move teleologically if placed in a void, which implies that the teleological motion of the elements is not grounded in the substances themselves but in their mutual relations. Byrne concludes from this that natural motion refers to physically necessary motion (as opposed to teleological motion), and in this he seems to stand alone among scholars. I believe this is for good reason, since in addition to claiming that teleological motion is not possible in the void, Aristotle also says that physically necessary motion is impossible, which means one could wage the same critique concerning the non-intrinsic character of the type of motion in question against Byrne’s claim that physically necessary motion is natural motion. Aristotle’s express point is that no motion is possible in a void because *all* motion requires the ability to go, say, up or down, but these categories make no sense in the context of a void which lacks a point of reference. Additionally, in the very passage to which Byrne refers, Aristotle says that natural motion is prior to all other types of motion and makes them possible. Aristotle then says that natural motion is not possible in the void because there is neither up nor down. The language of up, down, and natural motion is reflective of Aristotle’s broader discussions of elemental teleological motion (as opposed to physically necessary motion, which by definition is not directed towards any direction in particular). This implies that teleological motion is in fact natural motion, and physically necessary motion is (as Aristotle says elsewhere) defined as the deviation from this natural motion. Christopher Byrne, “Aristotle on Physical Necessity and the Limits of Teleological Explanation,” *Apeiron* 35, no. 1 (March 2002): 19–46, <https://doi.org/10.1515/apeiron.2002.35.1.19>. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* IV.8, 215a1-13.

Though the specification of what exactly Aristotle means by nature implicitly shows that most arguments for a restrictive interpretation of teleology fail to adequately account for elemental motion, the question still remains why Aristotle puts so much emphasis on biological examples when discussing final causes. Exploring this issue also helps clarify why so many scholars mistakenly restrict the purview of final causes to plants and animals in Aristotle, despite the “irresistible” conclusion (to use Robert Wardy’s description) that Aristotle believes elemental motion is teleologically driven.<sup>27</sup> Though certain scholars, such as Rich Cameron, have claimed that the constriction of final causality in Aristotle to the purely biological sphere is “motivated by modern doubts concerning the coherence of final causality,”<sup>28</sup> the ubiquity of biological examples in Aristotle’s presentations of teleology provides a more generous interpretation of the restrictive teleology reading. To see how, one must turn to *Physics* II.8 where Aristotle explains that “the form must be the cause in the sense of that for the sake of which.”<sup>29</sup> That is to say, wherever a formal cause is present, so too will a final cause.<sup>30</sup> For current purposes, the relevance of this is that final causes are as easily identifiable as formal causes, since a final cause is present wherever a formal one is. If form is more apparent in plants and animals, then it follows that teleology is similarly more obvious in these cases. As Joseph Owens explains, the variegated character of the cosmos in Aristotle’s thought allows “form to play a proportionately greater role in the inanimate, plant, and animal kingdoms respectively, with corresponding increase in the obviousness of the teleology.”<sup>31</sup> The prevalence of biological examples in Aristotle’s discussion of final causality can, therefore, be explained in terms of pedagogical purposes. Aristotle uses the examples that are most obvious and easiest to discuss to demonstrate his points so as to avoid confusion. The restrictive

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27 Robert Wardy, “Aristotelian Rainfall or the Lore of Averages,” *Phronesis* 38, no. 1 (1993): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852893321052433>.

28 Cameron, “The Ontology of Aristotle’s Final Cause,” 153. Cf. Margaret Scharle, “Elemental Teleology in Aristotle’s *Physics* 2.8,” essay, in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. David Sedley, vol. 34 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 149.

29 Aristotle, *Physics* II.8, 199a30-32.

30 The reason Aristotle does not directly identify formal and final cause appears to be that artifacts have ends and therefore final causes, but since they are not natural substances, they do not have a form. Final causes, therefore, are a broader category than formal causes.

31 Joseph Owens, “Teleology of Nature in Aristotle,” *Monist* 52, no. 2 (April 1968): 173, n. 51, <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist196852215>. Owens rightly cites Aristotle’s *Meteorology*, IV.12, 390a2-b2 to confirm his point.

interpretation of teleology in Aristotle's works is thus reflective of the Stagirite's predilection for biological examples, which is grounded in his hierarchical ontology of form and matter. This being said, Aristotle's preference for explaining teleology in terms of biological processes should not be taken at the exclusion of other objects of final causes, as is done by those who support the restrictive interpretation of teleology.

## §5: THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC INTERPRETATION OF TELEOLOGY

Bar none, the most influential presentation of the anthropocentric reading of teleology in Aristotle is that of David Sedley. Unlike those guilty of anthropomorphism who claim that the world possesses some low level of intentionality, Sedley argues that everything (even elements devoid of consciousness) in the universe is for the sake of mankind. That is, humans are the final cause and end of all things. This basic presentation, however, requires an important qualifier. Sedley correctly notes that Aristotle draws a distinction between two ways one thing can be for the sake of something else. This distinction is that "between the *beneficiary* of a process or state of affairs, and its *aim* or *object of aspiration*."<sup>32</sup> The essence of this distinction is that something can be an end either in the sense of being benefited or by making others imitate itself. With this dichotomy firmly established, Sedley is able to clarify that "Nature is anthropocentric to the extent that man is the ultimate *beneficiary*."<sup>33</sup> If this is true, then Aristotelian teleology would not be grounded in the nature of each substance, as I have claimed, but in human nature in particular. Sedley's interpretation, therefore, must be dealt with in detail prior to constructing a positive interpretation of Aristotle's teleology grounded in the natures of each substance.

Sedley presents two main arguments in support of his anthropocentric reading of Aristotelian teleology. The first among these is simply conveying what Aristotle, himself, explicitly states concerning the issue. At one point, Aristotle claims: "For the arts too make their material: some of it they make simpliciter, some of it they make workable. And we use it *on the ground that everything exists for our sake*. For we ourselves too are, in one sense, an end."<sup>34</sup> Sedley would,

32 David Sedley, "Is Aristotle's Teleology Anthropocentric?," *Phronesis* 36, no. 2 (1991): 180, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852891321052778>.

33 Sedley, "Is Aristotle's Teleology Anthropocentric?," 180.

34 Aristotle, *Physics* II.2, 194a33-36. Quoted in Sedley, "Is Aristotle's Teleology Anthropocentric?," 189.

of course, interpret the “in one sense” to mean in the sense of a beneficiary.<sup>35</sup> On this reading, it is hard to ignore the presence of a universal anthropocentrism in Aristotle’s thought. Furthermore, in a passage in the *Politics*, Aristotle expresses a similarly broad understanding of the scope of entities that are for the sake of mankind:

Hence it is equally clear that we should also suppose that, after birth, plants exist for the sake of animals, and the other animals for the sake of men — domesticated animals for both usefulness and food, and most if not all wild animals for food and other assistance, as a source of clothing and other utilities. If, then, nature makes nothing incomplete or pointless, it is necessary that nature has made them all for the sake of men.<sup>36</sup>

According to this passage, in virtue of their ability to provide food, clothing, and assistance, animals are for the sake of humans. Additionally, plants are for the sake of animals since the former can be eaten by the latter, and plants, in turn, are the beneficiaries of the elements (e.g. water used by a flower for hydration). Thus, it would seem, all of the natural world is indirectly implicated in the anthropocentrism of final causality.

In addition to direct textual evidence, Sedley also presents an argument for his anthropocentric reading on the basis of an oft-discussed passage concerning the teleology of winter rain. In his refutation to Empedoclean natural philosophy, which denies the reality of final causes, Aristotle proposes an objection to his own view followed by his response:

A difficulty presents itself: why should not nature work, not for the sake of something, nor because it is better so, but just as the sky rains, not in order to make the corn grow, but of necessity?... Yet it is impossible that this should be the true view.... We do not ascribe to chance or mere coincidence

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35 Sedley, “Is Aristotle’s Teleology Anthropocentric?,” 189.

36 Aristotle, *Politics* I.8, 1256b10-22. Quoted in David Sedley, “Is Aristotle’s Teleology Anthropocentric?,” 180. Aristotle’s caveat that it is “most if not all” wild animals that are beneficial should make one suspicious of how precise Aristotle’s statements of the universality of anthropocentric teleology are intended to be.

the frequency of rain in winter, but frequent rain in summer we do; nor heat in summer but only if we have it in winter. If then, it is agreed that things are either the result of coincidence or for the sake of something, and these cannot be the result of coincidence or spontaneity, it follows that they must be for the sake of something.<sup>37</sup>

The relevance of this passage is that Aristotle claims winter rain is not solely the result of blind mechanical forces; rather, it is for the sake of something. Additionally, Aristotle claims that summer rain is attributed to chance, since it usually does not rain in the summer in Athens. Sedley nicely summarizes his thoughts on this topic: “Clearly, then, he [i.e. Aristotle] thinks that winter rainfall is for a purpose, and natural, and that it is only summer rainfall that is accidental, and, strictly speaking, unnatural.”<sup>38</sup> In virtue of this distinction, Sedley is able to claim that the specific case of teleological winter rainfall, at least, is not the result of water’s movement towards its own natural place (down to the earth).<sup>39</sup> If it were, then rainfall in both the winter and the summer would be considered teleological. But, so Sedley claims, Aristotle’s distinction between winter and summer rain implies that only the former is teleological. Given this assumption that the final cause of winter rainfall cannot be its proclivity to return to its natural place, Sedley concludes: “It rains [in the winter] in order to make the crops grow.”<sup>40</sup> The growth of crops, of course, is beneficial for the people producing them, so this reading of Aristotle’s winter rain argument further confirms Sedley’s anthropocentric interpretation of teleology.

When addressing Sedley’s arguments, some problems immediately arise. For starters, there is a grammatical ambiguity in the Greek of the passage Sedley translates as “everything exists for our sake.”<sup>41</sup>

37 Aristotle, *Physics* II.8, 198b17-199a8.

38 Sedley, “Is Aristotle’s Teleology Anthropocentric?,” 183.

39 *Ibid.*, 184. Sedley does admit that Aristotle affirms the reality of teleology grounded in the movement of elements to their natural places, but he limits the scope of this type of causality such that it is not applicable to winter rainfall. It is unclear why Sedley could not affirm that it rains in the winter *both* for the sake of crop growth and for water to reach its natural place or that winter rain is solely for the sake of crop growth but winter rain can still be for the sake of water attaining its natural place. By ignoring these options, Sedley is forced to maintain that summer rain cannot be teleological at all, which seems to run up against his concession that the elements can be teleologically driven to their natural place.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Aristotle, *Physics* II.2, 194a33-36. Quoted in Sedley, “Is Aristotle’s Teleology Anthropocentric?,” 189. The ambiguity, in specific, is that



Sedley acknowledges that the passage is usually rendered in a counterfactual manner such that Aristotle's meaning would be "It is as if everything exists for our sake," but Sedley rather flippantly dismisses this alternate translation, saying it "must merely reflect an interpretative prejudice."<sup>42</sup> Robert Wardy concedes that Sedley's "grammatical observation is correct—so long as one appends the *caveat* that the construction does not preclude the counterfactual reading either," since the expression used "is the ideal Greek construction for *not* making a commitment."<sup>43</sup> The issue, therefore, cannot be solved solely at the grammatical level. One must interpret the expression in context to determine its meaning. Sedley does so, but he fails to appreciate the variety of interpretations the passage welcomes. Interpreting Aristotle's claim in light of the broader context concerning the arts, Sedley states that "Aristotle's clear meaning is that the *assumption* underlying our practices of cooking, pottery, sculpture, and all such arts is that the raw materials of those arts—the meat, clay, bronze, stone, and wood—exist for our benefit."<sup>44</sup> But this interpretation is by no means "clear," or at least this reading does not exclude equally clear alternative ones. Indeed, it seems quite likely that Aristotle has in mind here that everything exists for our sake in the sense that it is capable of being altered for our benefit by various arts. If, as Sedley suggests, Aristotle believes all things do exist for our sake in a direct sense, then the purpose of art becomes unintelligible. If everything is naturally oriented towards the benefit of mankind, then why do people need to use art to "make workable"<sup>45</sup> natural materials? Indeed, as shall be further elaborated below, Sedley's singular failure seems to be this underestimation of the importance of art in the Aristotelian system for making natural entities beneficial for humans.

Aristotle's claim that animals exist for the sake of men, plants for the sake of animals, and so on does not suffice to prove Sedley's conclusion concerning a universally anthropocentric teleology. Aristotle ends the passage where he affirms this seemingly anthropocentric theory of final causality as follows: "If, then, nature makes nothing

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the construction  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$  plus participle can connote uncertainty. Cf. Wardy, "Aristotelian Rainfall or the Lore of Averages," 27.

42 Sedley, "Is Aristotle's Teleology Anthropocentric?," 189.

43 Wardy, "Aristotelian Rainfall or the Lore of Averages," 27. Emphasis in original.

44 Sedley, "Is Aristotle's Teleology Anthropocentric?," 189. Emphasis in original.

45 Aristotle, *Physics* II.2, 194a33-36.

incomplete or pointless, it is necessary that nature has made them all for the sake of men.”<sup>46</sup> Sedley obviously takes this to mean Aristotle is affirming that all things are in fact for the sake of man, and the immediate context does admittedly lend itself to such an interpretation. However, Aristotle’s general comments on nature actually require the rejection of the conditional’s antecedent, thereby leaving the conclusion dubious. That is to say, Aristotle elsewhere claims that nature does make some things incomplete, which means nature does not necessarily act for the sake of mankind. That some things in nature are incomplete according to Aristotle is manifest in his discussion of the need for art, of which he says “generally art in some cases completes what nature cannot bring to a finish.”<sup>47</sup> If nature needs to be finished by art, it follows that nature is in the relevant sense not complete. The relevant sense of nature’s deficiency is, in fact, precisely what Sedley mistakenly claims constitutes the perfection of nature, namely its being beneficial for mankind. In fact, Aristotle was well aware of the obvious empirical fact that art is often necessary to make natural substances useful to mankind, as in the case of the arts of hunting, farming, etc. Aristotle’s claim that “[i]f, then, nature makes nothing incomplete or pointless, it is necessary that nature has made them all for the sake of men”<sup>48</sup> must therefore be read in the sense of *insofar as* nature is complete, it is for the sake of mankind, but this does not exclude the fact that the intervention of art is frequently necessary to bring nature to its completion.

Finally, Sedley’s use of the winter rainfall example fails because it relies on the premise that only winter rain, which is beneficial to humans, is teleological whereas useless summer rain is not teleological.<sup>49</sup> The distinction Aristotle draws between the two types of rain, however, is between what is regular and irregular, not teleological and non-teleological, and the reason Aristotle employs this distinction is because of the dialectical character of the passage. He is trying to prove to his Empedoclean objectors that teleology is a real phenomenon, so he naturally chooses the easiest examples to prove this, and the teleology of winter rain is more obvious than summer rain, not because it happens for the sake of mankind but because it happens consistently.

46 Aristotle, *Politics* I.8, 1256b10-22. Quoted in Sedley, “Is Aristotle’s Teleology Anthropocentric?,” 180.

47 Aristotle, *Physics* II.8, 199a9-19.

48 Aristotle, *Politics* I.8, 1256b10-22. Quoted in Sedley, “Is Aristotle’s Teleology Anthropocentric?,” 180.

49 Sedley, “Is Aristotle’s Teleology Anthropocentric?,” 183.

But, as Aristotle clearly believes, water in general consistently returns to the ground in virtue of its nature. Though, as a broader metaphysical claim, this is harder to prove and would therefore detract from his main point. Hence, Aristotle chooses to focus his argument on winter rain in specific.

Even if this dialectical reading of Aristotle's intentions is mistaken, Sedley's interpretation is not only unsupported by Aristotle's writings; it is directly refuted. Sedley affirms Aristotle's conclusion to his discussion of winter and summer rainfall: "Therefore action for an end is present in things which come to be and are by nature."<sup>50</sup> Aristotle thus establishes being a natural substance as a sufficient condition for being teleological. Since Sedley wishes to say that summer rainfall, which does not aid in crop growth and is therefore not helpful to mankind, is not teleological, Sedley is therefore forced to maintain that summer rainfall is "unnatural." However, as Monte Ransome Johnson has observed, "rainfall is not a substance,"<sup>51</sup> which means it does not possess a nature at all. On the other hand, "[w]ater is a substance, and so it can be teleologically explained."<sup>52</sup> This means that, given that teleology applies to all natural substances, if winter rainfall qua water is subject to final causality, so too summer rainfall qua water must be teleological. Aristotle's metaphysics does not allow for the division Sedley attempts to introduce when he claims that winter rain is natural and therefore teleological, but summer rain is unnatural and therefore not susceptible to final causes. Water is the nature of all rain, regardless of when it falls, so all rainfall insofar as it is water must be teleological. Since water must be treated as an irreducible category when discussing its relation to final causes, Sedley cannot claim that water as a whole is for the sake of mankind, since his whole argument presupposes that a certain type of water, namely summer rainfall, is not beneficial for people. One is thus left wondering what is the true end of water, and this raises the more general question of to what are all natural substances teleologically oriented. Answering this question will require a full elaboration of an interpretation of teleology in Aristotle's works as grounded in the natures of substances.

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50 Aristotle, *Physics* II.8, 199a1-8.

51 Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, 156.

52 Ibid.

## §6: THE NATURAL INTERPRETATION OF TELEOLOGY

Several lines of evidence converge on the conclusion that, for Aristotle, teleology is grounded in the nature of each particular type of substance. The notion that nature is the driving force behind Aristotle's teleology is apparent in the opening line of *Physics* 2.8, where he states that "Nature belongs to the class of causes which act for the sake of something."<sup>53</sup> Nature, as has already been established, refers to the totality of the nature of substances, ranging from the dirt below to the stars above, and all the organisms in between. Though Aristotle seems to identify nature as a subclass within the broader category of causes for the sake of something, his additional indirect statements concerning the relation between final causes and nature reveal that the latter constitute the majority of the former. The only other type of final causes, which are often mistakenly taken as the paradigm of final causality in Aristotle, are the arts. Artistic creativity is not central to Aristotle's understanding of teleology. This notion has already been implicitly demonstrated in the refutation of the biological interpretation of teleology, which posits that intentionality is the essence of final causation for Aristotle. Since the totality of biological organisms does not exhaust the scope of entities subject to final causes, it follows a fortiori that artistic creativity, a very narrow type of animal intentionality, does not provide a sufficiently comprehensive model to understand Aristotle's theory of final causes. To demonstrate that it is nature, as opposed to the arts, which holds the central place among Aristotle's final causes, it will be necessary to observe precisely why he believes they are final causes at all.

Aristotle's identification of nature and form implies that natures are the ends in the fullest sense of the term. This comes out most clearly in *Physics* II.8: "And since nature is twofold, the matter and the form, of which the latter is the end, and since all the rest is for the sake of the end, the form must be the cause in the sense of that for the sake of which."<sup>54</sup> Here, as he says elsewhere, Aristotle affirms that nature can be spoken of as either the matter of something or as its form. Nature, however, is more properly spoken of as form because "a thing is more properly said to be what it is when it exists in actuality than when

<sup>53</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* II.8, 198b10-16. Cf. Scharle, "Elemental Teleology in Aristotle's *Physics* 2.8," 152-154.

<sup>54</sup> Id., 199a25-33.

it exists potentially.”<sup>55</sup> Whereas matter has the potential to take on all sorts of different shapes, form is what gives definition to matter and makes it what it is. Hence, the nature of a substance is in the strictest sense identical to its form. Given the identification of form and nature, it becomes clear that nature is for the sake of which things exist, since Aristotle clearly states that form is the end towards which substances strive. Furthermore, he directly identifies nature qua form as a final cause. Since the form is the actualization and therefore perfection of matter, all matter in a natural substance is for the sake of its nature qua form. Contrary to the restrictive interpretations of Aristotelian teleology, which require a diachronic development towards a final end such that the end is only achieved at the very end of a process (e.g. a baby moose is for the sake of the adult moose that will not emerge in time until years later), Aristotle affirms that in each and every moment matter is wholly striving for its form in all substances.

If Aristotle really does believe that teleology refers to the actualization of a substance’s nature, then it is unclear why he insists on using the seemingly anthropomorphic language of actions performed “for the sake of” some “end.” This problem is resolved, however, when one realizes that for Aristotle, in order for something to qualify as an end, it must be good. More precisely, Aristotle argues that each substance has its own particular good. For example, in the chapter immediately preceding the winter rainfall example, he explains something can count as an end “because it is better thus (not without qualification, but with reference to the substance in each case).”<sup>56</sup> Monte Ransome Johnson sums up the implications of this and several similar remarks made throughout the Aristotelian corpus: “The good which teleological explanations make reference to is specific to the natural kind being explained. The good is not the same for all kinds of things, for fishes, birds, and plants (not to mention stars, elements, households, cities, etc.).”<sup>57</sup>

Finally, a clearer image of Aristotle’s conception of teleology emerges. All substances possess a nature, which is an internal principle of motion and rest. These natures are what allow substances to move to their respective ends, which vary according to the substance in question. In moving towards these ends, substances are moving

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<sup>55</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* II.1, 193b7-12.

<sup>56</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* II.7, 198b8-9.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, 278.

towards their nature qua form, which is their actuality. When this full actuality is obtained, a nature qua principle of rest is in a state of full actualization, and the being has reached its perfection, both in the sense of completion and goodness. Because of the intrinsic moral character of these natural ends, Aristotle speaks appropriately when he says that non-conscious entities act for the sake of ends, just as human beings always seek out their own good and perfection.

## §7: CONCLUSION

It is certainly easier to see the problems with alternative interpretations of Aristotle's conception of teleology in retrospect. For example, Aristotle's claim that final causes are a broader category that encompasses all formal causes shows that the former is not reducible to the latter. None of those who promote a reductionistic interpretation of final causes in Aristotle claim that formal causes are reducible to any other type of cause. Hence, insofar as final causes are formal causes (and even exceed them), final causality similarly cannot be reduced to any other mode of causation. With respect to the claim that natural substances capable of teleological explanation are merely coextensive with biological organisms, this is patently untenable in light of the metaphysical foundation of final causes in the actuality of forms. Since teleology is the movement of a substance's nature to its form, any entity with an internal principle of motion-oriented towards a consistent good end is subject to final causes. For Aristotle, this includes not only plants and animals but also the elements, which reach their fullest actuality when in their natural places. Revisiting Sedley's anthropocentric interpretation, one can see that making mankind the end of all substances ignores Aristotle's claim that the good towards which each substance strives is specific to that kind of substance. The best refutation of these rival theories is therefore the establishment of Aristotle's actual view that teleology is grounded in substance's natural movement towards pre-defined ends.

It is understandable why so many scholars wish to propose alternative solutions to the problem of teleology in Aristotle. His understanding of causality can seem foreign and even paradoxical. After all, in Aristotle's account, nature is both the principle of motion and the form towards which this principle strives. But this paradox ought not to be avoided, as Aristotle openly affirms it: "Nature in the sense

of a coming-to-be proceeds towards nature.”<sup>58</sup> For Aristotle, nature is in some sense self-transcending, such that it is both what strives and what is striven after. This is part of his answer to the question, which plagued earlier Greek philosophers: How is change possible at all? Any non-paradoxical answer to this question runs the risk of creating either a static universe of eternal forms or an unintelligible world of matter moving about randomly. If we are to take Aristotle’s metaphysics and the philosophical tradition he inherited seriously at all, therefore, we must make a central place for his account of teleology grounded in the natures of substances.

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<sup>58</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* II.1, 193b13.

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## DANIEL ANDREWS

### Boston College

Daniel (Danny) Andrews is a rising senior at Boston College, where he is majoring in philosophy and writing an honors thesis in the upcoming year. In addition to existentialism and ontology, he is interested in how phenomenology intersects with environmental ethics. Danny also has interests in comparative philosophy between eastern and western traditions, philosophy of technology and artificial intelligence, and embodied cognition. Outside of philosophy, he loves being active in the outdoors by skiing and hiking. In his free time he likes to practice yoga, read, and listen to music - Pink Floyd, The Strokes, Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Grateful Dead are some of his favorites. After graduating, he hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in philosophy.

## ARTHUR DECARLE

### University of Central Florida

Arthur deCarle is from Sarasota, Florida, and is currently attending the University of Central Florida as an incoming Senior. He is majoring in both Political Science and Philosophy and intends on applying to law school in the upcoming Spring. Arthur is a both a member of the Dean's and President's list for three consecutive years and is attending UCF on an academic scholarship. Arthur is active in UCF debate, both political and philosophical, with a special interest in Constitutional law and applied ethics.

## ROBERTO UREÑA

### SUNY New Paltz

Roberto Ureña is a recent graduate of SUNY New Paltz, having studied Philosophy, Political Science, and Economics. His philosophical interests include studies on ethics—in particular, the grounding of ethical theories—and metaphysics. He is also interested in Ancient Near Eastern speculative thought and mythology, and on the potential for the integration of ancient ways of thinking into modern society. In the hopes of becoming a lifelong academic, he plans to pursue a PhD in Philosophy.

## JORDAN SMITH

### Colby College

Jordan Smith is a junior at Colby College in Waterville, Maine where he is double majoring in philosophy and computer science. He is primarily interested in the history of Western philosophy, ranging from the ancient to early modern periods. In particular, he enjoys studying the interactions between theology, philosophy, and science as well as the practical implications these ideas have on the structure of society. Outside of his academic interests, Jordan also enjoys going on runs and whittling. After college, he intends to pursue a Ph.D. in philosophy.

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