DIANOIA

ISSUE V

Spring 2018

Cover designs courtesy of Gregory Kacergis.
Featuring:
Rylov, Arkady *In The Blue Expanse*. 1918.
Enso design derived from a sketch by Kendrick Shaw; obtained via Wikimedia Commons.

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Spring 2018

Dear Reader,

In your hands is Issue V of *Dianoia: The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College*. This year, we were pleased to receive a record eighty submissions from North and South America, Europe, and Asia. After a lengthy review process, we selected for publication seven truly impressive philosophical works which present a diverse array of philosophical themes. Our journal begins with two papers—one on Spinoza and Hinduism; another on Heidegger and the Kyoto School—that consider the perennial dichotomy of East and West. Our next paper, the "Praxis of the Soviet Avant-Garde," employs the thought of such philosophers as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer to investigate the cultural and economic foundations of Soviet-era Avant-Garde art. From there, our authors bring us on an engaging journey, from a consideration of the representational fallacy and the philosophy of time, to a reflection on the work of Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas, to a reading of the Myth of Er, and, finally, an explication of Martin Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking?*.
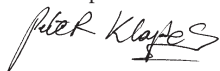
You will find, on our front and back covers, Arkady Rylov's *In the Blue Expanse*. Its Russian artist calls to mind our paper on the "Praxis of the Soviet Avant-Garde." On our journal's back cover, we overlay Rylov's contemplative, serene masterpiece with the image of the *Enso*, a sacred image of the Zen school of Buddhism and a common subject of Japanese calligraphy. The synergy of these two images, on the front and back—*alpha* and *omega*—of our journal articulates the bridging of culture and ideas that serves as a great impetus for, and cornerstone of, our publication.

Before we close, we want to express our most sincere gratitude to our journal's friends, supporters, and advocates. First and foremost, we would like to thank publicly our editorial board—of sixteen talented undergraduates—for their keen philosophical and editorial insights. We are also greatly indebted to our faculty advisor, Fr. Ronald Tacelli, S.J., for his words of encouragement and expert advice, and to our graduate advisor, Myles Casey, who constantly made sure that we would have a product to show for our late-night hours of editing and reviewing. We thank Paula Perry of the Philosophy department for her constant support, advocacy, and organizational assistance. And, ultimately, without the generosity of Boston College's Institute for the Liberal Arts, directed by Dr. Mary Crane, the Center for Centers, the Boston College Philosophy Department, and the Undergraduate Committee of the Philosophy Department, our vision for an international review of undergraduate philosophical work would never become the reality that it is today.
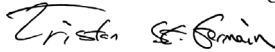
Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Peter Klapes, Editor-in-Chief

Tristan St. Germain, Managing Editor

Noah Valdez, Managing Editor

SPINOZA THE HINDU:
Advaita Interpretations of *The Ethics*

NOAH FORSLUND

Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza holds a distinctive, if enigmatic, place in the Western philosophical canon. Although usually considered as a Cartesian rationalist, Spinoza's metaphysical and epistemological views continue to be considered somewhat anomalous within the Occidental tradition.[1] Arguably, in fact, much of his influential *Ethics* espouses a substantively non-"Western" philosophical doctrine beneath orthodox rationalist terminology and organization. I contend that, although it employs decidedly Western-rationalist methods of inquiry, *The Ethics* actually proposes a system strikingly similar to the ontological-philosophical worldview found in Advaita Vedanta Hinduism. Core similarities between the schools include their (1) non-dualist, monistic metaphysical systems, (2) a strong relationship between humans and the divine, and (3) a potential for living liberation. This paper will consist of comparative analyses of metaphysical and epistemological facets of both the Advaita and Spinozistic philosophical traditions, including overviews of both schools, and concluding with a suggestion that these similarities might prompt a reexamination and critique of the oft-cited East-West dichotomy.

It may first be relevant to define briefly the binary system alluded to previously. The East-West dichotomy comprises a doctrine that divides socio-cultural, religious,

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1   Russell, Bertrand. A History of Western Philosophy. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1946), 458-461.

and philosophical, traditions into two distinct camps, which are understood to inhabit fundamentally different realms. Customarily specified hallmarks of Western philosophy include a propensity towards rational intellectualization, the promotion of individualism, a rejection of mysticism, and often metaphysically, some conception of a personal God. Common stereotypes of Eastern philosophies include a skepticism toward pure rationalism and the intellect, mystical doctrines, and non-personal deities. Spinoza has perennially been placed firmly within the former canon[2]; an examination of the substance of his works, however, might complicate this placement.

Although some antecedent scholarship has compared Spinozism to Eastern philosophical traditions, most analyses have been restricted to broad comparative surveys of Buddhism and Spinozism. In the past, researchers have provided several examinations that attempt to link the two philosophical schools. S.M. Melamed associates Spinoza's advocacy of a seemingly impersonal, or even non-existent, God to the Buddhist metaphysical picture of an "empty" universe.[3] Both B. Ziporyn and Soraj Hongladarom cite Spinoza's union of mind and corporeal body as correlative to the Buddhist doctrine of non-self.[4][5] Although some limited scholarship exists in this particular area of comparative analysis, few publications—if any—have considered comparisons between Spinozism and Advaita Vedanta Hinduism. The lack of literature regarding this similarity is surprising. In the next few paragraphs, I will broadly outline the two traditions individually, in order to procure, eventually, an examination of their similarities and differences.

We will begin with an overview of Advaita Vedanta philosophy. First espoused by Sankara in the 9th century CE, the tradition is rooted in interpretations of the Brahma Sutra, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Upanishads, three core Hindu religio-philosophical texts. Advaita is characterized by the fundamental belief that ultimate reality is solely *brahman*: that existence cannot be reduced to various distinct entities (like an individual soul, or an external world). Advaita Vedanta thus promotes a non-dualist, monist[6] model of reality, in which all the world is a manifestation of the singularity of *brahman* (the word *advaita* literally means "non-dual" [7]). Additionally, *brahman* is infinite, and transcends the existence of the world. Although the world is

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2   Russell, Western Philosophy, 459.
3   Melamed, S.M. Spinoza and Buddha: Visions of a Dead God. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 153-275.
4   Ziporyn, B. (2012). Spinoza and the Self-Overcoming of Solipsism. Comparative and Continental Philosophy, 4(1), 125.
5   Hongladarom, Soraj. "Spinoza & Buddhism on the Self." The Oxford Philosopher, July 29, 2015.
6   It must be acknowledged, however, that the characterization of Advaita as a strictly "monist" philosophy has been cited as problematic by many adherents, scholars, and philosophers; Anantanand Rambachan writes, "Numerical categories, such as the number one, gain meaning from the existence of other numbers. When reality is nondual, we are constrained to use such categories with caution." (Rambachan, *Advaita Worldview*, 67) Haphazardly ascribing a numerical category to brahman might be seen as an attempt to limit the illimitable. Although we must be careful with complications that arise from such terminology, semantics aside, the ontological picture proposed in Advaita remains a non-dual, unified reality in *brahman*.
7   Brannigan, Michael C. *The Pulse Of Wisdom: The Philosophies of India, China, and Japan*. (Stamford: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2000), 61.

"non-different (*ananya*) from *brahman* [...] *brahman* is not identical with the world."
[8] In other words, although the world derives its existence and reality from *brahman*, the inverse is not true, because "the reality of *brahman* is independent and original." [9]

Advaita scholars and philosophers consistently assert that *brahman*'s limitlessness (*ananta*) renders any attempt at descriptive language ineffective. For this reason, *brahman*'s true being is portrayed in Advaita as *nirguna*, or *without characteristics*. This contrasts with a portrayal of *brahman* as *saguna*, which signifies that explicit attributes are assigned. The concept of *nirguna brahman* requires that ultimate reality only be described negatively, as *neti, neti* ("Not this, not this").[10] Because *brahman* is infinite, linguistically assigning any qualities to it would only serve to limit its nature. Thus, *brahman* must remain ineffable.

Because all the world is essentially non-different from *brahman*, humans too are only manifestations of the divine. The cardinal assertion in the Advaita tradition is *tat tvam asi*: that the human self (*atman*) is non-different from *brahman*. This is further exemplative of non-dualism in Advaita. Individual selfhood is illusory, based upon a flawed understanding of ultimate reality. As long as the world (including the self) is perceived ordinarily (as distinct from *brahman*), a human remains in a state of ignorance (*avidya*). *Avidya* obstructs us from the highest quest for humanity: knowledge of our true selves and reality as identical to *brahman*.[11]

Ultimate liberation, called *moksha*, is achieved when a person realizes that *atman* is non-different from *brahman*. One prominent Advaita scholar neatly summarizes the concept of liberation, writing that "the unliberated person attributes a separate reality to the world, while the liberated sees the world as owing its existence and being to *brahman*." [12] *Moksha* affords humanity the valid means of knowledge of ultimate reality, superior to human perception or reason (Sankara rejects these alternate sources of knowledge, because they rely on an observed object's finity). *Nirguna brahman* is without attributes ("form, sound, taste, scent, and sensation"), so the senses cannot hope to provide any understanding of ultimate reality. Similarly, although Sankara does not discount the importance of human reason (guided by the holy texts, such as the Upanishads), he does assert that *brahman* surpasses any human rational capacities: "although reasoning may be noticed to have finality in some, still in the present context it cannot possibly get immunity from the charge of being inconclusive." [13] Because *brahman* is both the means of knowledge and knowledge itself (insofar as *brahman* is ultimate reality), *brahman* must be known intuitively: "intuitive knowing is immediate as distinct from the discursive and mediate knowledge [...] It is the

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8 Rambachan, Anantanand. *The Advaita Worldview: God, World, and Humanity.* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 75.
9 Rambachan, *Advaita Worldview*, 77.
10 Brannigan, *Pulse of Wisdom*, 63.
11 Brannigan, *Pulse of Wisdom*, 64-65.
12 Rambachan, *Advaita Worldview*, 113.
13 Rambachan, *Advaita Worldview*, 49.

perfect knowledge, while all other knowledge is indirect and imperfect insofar as it does not bring about an identification between subject and object." [14] When a person has achieved *moksha*, he is liberated from ignorance through knowledge of all reality as *brahman*, which results in freedom from "sorrow, hate, grief, greed, and fear [… and] the attainment of peace and abiding happiness."[15]

This, very broadly, summarizes the main tenets of the Advaita Vedanta tradition. Allow us now to compare this summary to the normative Eastern philosophical model outlined earlier in this paper. To recapitulate, oft-proposed hallmarks of Eastern philosophy include: (1) skepticism toward pure rationalism and the intellect, (2) the promotion of mysticism and the possibility of unity with the divine, and (3) a metaphysically non-personal God. Although the nuances of Advaita philosophy present some variance in practice and belief, we can generally understand the school to include these characteristics. Firstly, we have seen Sankara's rejection of human sensory experience and pure reason as sources of valid knowledge: that is, true knowledge of *brahman* can only be attained through intuitive understanding, guided by Hindu holy texts. Secondly, human union with *brahman* through the realization of *tat tvam asi* is the ultimate goal in Advaita philosophy. Thus, Advaita does promote a sort of mysticism, in which the self may be unified with, and liberated through, the divine. Thirdly, *brahman* is decidedly non-personal. The actions of *brahman* are unconcerned with human interests or desires. Instead, the world merely behaves according to *brahman*'s essential nature—its grounding of reality. As Sankara writes, "God [*brahman*] can have activities of the nature of mere pastime out of His spontaneity without any extraneous motive [….] Any motive imputed to God can have neither the support of reason nor of the Vedas."[16] Effectually, we see that the Advaita Vedanta school includes these three normative "hallmarks" of Eastern philosophy.

Now that we have summarized the Advaita philosophical tradition, we will continue with an overview of the Spinozistic philosophical system found in *The Ethics*. A foundational element of Spinoza's method lies in his argument that God must be the only substance that exists. The core of this Spinozistic concept lies in propositions that stem from Spinoza's definition of substance, which he defines as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed."[17] A substance is a thing that enjoys autonomous, self-contained existence, the understanding of which is not dependent upon the conception or existence of auxiliary things. Although an individual substance can have various affectations or modes within its being, these affectations are necessarily subsidiary to the substance

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14 S. Radhakrishnan, trans., *The Principal Upanishads*. (London: Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1953), 96.

15 Rambachan, *Advaita Worldview*, 55.

16 Rambachan, *Advaita Worldview*, 91.

17 Spinoza, Baruch. *The Ethics*, Treatise on The Emendation of the Intellect, and Selected Letters. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Edited by Seymour Feldman. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Hackett Pub. Co., 1992), 31.

itself. As Spinoza writes, "substance is by nature prior to its affectations." [18] Finally, extrapolating on the logic of these propositions, Spinoza argues that a substance, by nature, must be infinite (or hold infinite attributes), because the substance must exist independent of the existence of other bodies. Nothing can ever constrain a substance (and substances can never constrain each other).

It is from this foundational understanding of substance that Spinoza derives the claim that "there can be, or be conceived, no other substance but God," and, that, consequently, "whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God."[19] Because God is a perfect entity, he[20] is the only thing that must necessarily exist by definition. Therefore, all other things exist subordinately to the existence of God, because he is constrained by nothing. God is the only thing that can be independently self-contained and self-caused, and, thus, fulfills the two defining characteristics of a substance.[21] So, all of existence is God. Things we perceive to be individual entities actually comprise only finite modes within the substance of God, which is internally infinitely diverse and complex. It is here that Spinoza begins to use the terminology "God", or, "Nature", because God, as all of existence, is equated with the universe and Nature itself. Thus, Spinoza is generally understood to espouse a pantheistic, or a panentheistic-monistic philosophy, in which all existent things are unified in the oneness of God's eternal, infinite being.[22]

Due to God's perfection, morality in Spinozism is limited to the non-metaphysical, and God is decidedly non-personal. If the universe and God are one and the same, we cannot explain occurrences within Nature through human definitions of "good" or "bad." Ultimately, if God is the only substance, and therefore is the only causal power in existence, then all things in him "proceed from an eternal necessity and with supreme perfection." [23] If all things are divine, then all events are perfect and necessary, insofar as they emanate directly from God. Thus, Spinoza presents us with an amoral universe, void of any differentiation between metaphysical "good" or "bad." This ontological schema advances a conception of a non-personal God, unconcerned with human activity or interests. As Spinoza writes, "Nature has no fixed goal (and) all final causes are but figments of the human imagination [...] God has acted in all things for the sake of himself, and not for the sake of the things to be created." [24]

But where do humans fall in this metaphysical picture? If we are understood to be only finite modes of a non-personal divine entity, what becomes of our relationship

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18 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 32.
19 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 39-40.
20 The masculine pronoun is only used here to conform to Spinoza's own word choice.
21 Hartshorne, Charles and William L. Reese. *Philosophers Speak of God*. (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000), 194.
22 Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God*, 189-192.
23 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 59.
24 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 59.

to the God? It is clear that the human self must be conceived as a part of God. Spinoza writes that the self ("man") consists of the unification of human mind and body, arguing that the mind is the self comprehended under the attribute of Thought, while the body is the self comprehended under the attribute of Extension. Because God is all things, God must therefore have the attributes of Thought and Extension. The human mind and body are both expressions of God under these different attributes. [25] Yet, both objects, unified in the self, remain finite, individual parts of the singular substance that exists beyond them: "we are a part of Nature which cannot be conceived of independently of other parts."[26]

It is here that Spinoza begins his discussion of the three types of human knowledge. The first type is derived from sensory experience, which only offers falsities, due to the subjectivity of the senses. The second is derived from common understandings of the world and its properties, unencumbered by subjectivity: that is, reason. The third and final kind of knowledge, Spinoza calls "intuitive," of which he writes, "proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things."[27] That is, essentially, intuitive knowledge is derived from an understanding that God is all of existence, and, thus, that the essences of all things are defined by his being. When a person has an adequate conception of God through an understanding of the true nature of reality (that is, Spinoza's pantheistic monism), he simultaneously has a true understanding of all things in existence, because they are one and the same. Therefore, intuitive knowledge is "necessarily true", emanating directly from the necessity of God's being.[28]

Spinoza believes that humans can ultimately achieve freedom through this intuitive knowledge. Through this adequate understanding of God, we may be liberated from the bondage of uncontrollable emotions (or "agitations of the mind") produced in us by "thoughts of external [non-divine] causes."[29] Essentially, Spinoza argues, when we understand the ontological necessity of all things resulting directly from God's being, we can rationalize our way out of undesirable emotional responses. If the actions of an external body produce in us a sensation of fear—or anger, or sadness— intuitive knowledge allows us to realize the divine necessity of those actions, and to rationalize the emotion, negating it through thoughtful reflection. [30] We move from being passive participants in our emotional state to being active participants in that state, through this intellectual process, as we simultaneously achieve salvation from ignorance. Therefore, as Spinoza writes, the highest blessedness that a human can achieve is found in this intuitive knowledge, which leads to an "intellectual love of

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25 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 64-72.
26 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 156.
27 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 90.
28 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 91.
29 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 204
30 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 205-206.

God", and, consequently, of all existence.[31] Spinoza summarizes his liberative system, writing that "the wise man...suffers scarcely any disturbance of spirit, but being conscious, by virtue of a certain eternal necessity, of himself, of God and all things... always possesses true spiritual contentment." [32]

Allow us first to compare the Spinozistic system to the normative Western philosophical model elucidated earlier. *The Ethics* certainly utilizes a Western rationalist lexicon and basic conceptual framework. Spinozistic terms like *substance* and *attributes* had been employed by precursory Western philosophers like Descartes and Malebranche, even if their definitions were slightly different. Similarly, the geometrical-method proofs found in the *Ethics* were certainly evident of a penchant for ordered intellectual inquiry. Thus, Spinoza clearly fulfills that first indication of the Western philosophical canon: he proposes his system in Western terms, employing a decidedly Occidental model.

Yet, Spinoza fails such a litmus test on all other indications. Firstly, with his promotion of pantheistic monism, Spinoza rejects individualism. Because God encompasses all of existence, and because a particular human solely comprises a modal manifestation of the divine, the supposed "individual" must in fact be unified with all other beings in the ultimate ontological picture. In his comparison of Spinozistic and Buddhist philosophy, Soraj Hongladarom neatly summarizes this retreat from individualism, writing that "the task of the human being is to achieve what [Spinoza] calls 'the intellectual love of God' [….] Here the uniqueness of this situation does not play a role; instead the idea is to forgo these traits of individuality by merging with the One, so to speak, through losing one's unique individual traits." [33] Secondly, Spinoza espouses a version of philosophical mysticism wholly distinct from the Western canon. In *The Ethics*, human endeavors toward an intellectual love of God end with liberation through a realization of ultimate ontological union with God. This, in effect, sounds somewhat like Eastern mysticism, and further isolates Spinoza from traditional Western philosophy. Third, as explained earlier, Spinoza's God is decidedly non-personal, unconcerned with human interests; any attribution, of a human-serving "fixed goal," to Nature can only be "but a figment of the human imagination." [34]

While *The Ethics* finds Spinoza rejecting many of the hallmarks of Western canonical models, the text strikingly parallels Advaita philosophy. What will follow will be an analysis of these likenesses.

Firstly, both Spinozism and Advaita Vedanta Hinduism present non-dualist, essentially monistic metaphysical systems. In Spinozism, God is the only independent substance

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31 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 217-221.
32 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 223.
33 Hongladarom, "Spinoza & Buddhism", no page numbers.
34 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 59.

in existence—God alone is infinite, immutable, and eternal. All individual things comprise finite modes of God's substance, and are identical to God (insofar as they are themselves divine). Yet, God, with infinite attributes, transcends all possibilities of human perception; we only have access to God through the attributes of extension and thought, though God contains infinitely more attributes. Thus, God is infinitely greater than the observable universe, because God is constrained by nothing, including human faculties. This is strikingly similar to the unified ultimate reality proposed by Advaita Vedanta. *Brahman* alone comprises all existence as an infinite, eternal being. The world and individual humans are finite expressions of *brahman*'s nature, and are non-different from *brahman*. However, the infinite nature of *brahman* indicates that ultimate reality is not encompassed by the world alone, as *brahman* can neither be constrained nor defined by any external body. Both Spinozism and Advaita propose monistic, transcendent divine beings, which encompass all of reality and existence, and which exist independently of any subordinate entity.

A further metaphysical parallel between Spinoza's God and Advaita's *brahman* is that both provide the ontological grounding for ultimate reality, but both are non-personal. We have seen how Spinoza's God is unconcerned with human interest and desire, merely acting "in all things for the sake of himself," [35] according to the necessity of God's nature. Similarly, in Advaita philosophy, extraneous motives cannot be attributed to *brahman*; instead, actions like creation are "in the very nature of *brahman*."[36] Both God and *brahman* are the grounding forces of reality and existence, non-different from both, and defining reality and existence according to the necessities of their own beings.

A second similarity can be found in the relationship of humanity to God. In both traditions, humans are manifestations of the divine, non-different from their respective gods. Spinoza argues that humans, along with all things in existence, comprise modes of God's substance. The human self (as it is composed of mind and body) is one with God. Advaita philosophy promotes a similar human union with God, since *atman* is non-different from *brahman*. Thus, both systems present us with a vision of humanity as expressions of God, ultimately inseparable from the divine. The ontological non-dualism of each tradition thus extends to the human self, which is non-distinct from God or *brahman*.

A third and final similarity between the traditions can be found in their promotion of living liberation through knowledge of ultimate reality. In Spinozism, an intellectual love of God (intuitive, true knowledge of ultimate reality) is the highest blessedness a human can achieve. In doing so, a person is liberated from an incomplete knowledge of reality and possesses "spiritual contentment" through a recognition of the necessity of God's nature. A person who has achieved *moksha* in Advaita Vedanta is freed from

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35 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 59.
36 Rambachan, *Advaita Worldview*, 91.

ignorance (*avidya*), anxiety, and anger, and knows "peace and abiding happiness." The acknowledgement that *atman* is non-different from *brahman* is the only source of valid, necessarily true knowledge about existence. In both traditions, humans can be liberated through a realization of the ontological truth of a singularly unified ultimate reality.

Despite these striking connections between substantive facets of each tradition, some nuanced differences remain. Perhaps the principal divergence is seen in the fact that Advaita Vedanta comprises a religious tradition accepted by a community of believers throughout a significant portion of human history, while Spinozism (as presented in *The Ethics*) is decidedly philosophical, devoid of any explicit community of believers, and without any "religious" history.

We may observe a product of this difference in Advaita philosophy's emphasis on the importance of Hindu religious texts as conduits for human knowledge. Spinoza, conversely, proposes no equivalent textual guide for intuitive knowledge of God. Instead, humans achieve an intellectual love of God that is guided by reason. Spinoza believes that the route to blessedness and true knowledge, although ultimately intuitive, must involve reason and the intellect. Thus, rationality serves as a preliminary guide to liberation. In Advaita philosophy, this role is filled by the Upanishads, which, likewise, guide humans to an intuitive knowledge of *brahman*. Though the end result (knowledge of ultimate reality and human freedom) is the same, the methods for achieving such knowledge differ.

Because Advaita Vedanta philosophy is an offshoot of a major religious tradition, it is not surprising that historically-important religious texts serve as the bedrock of ontological understanding and knowledge. Similarly, it is unsurprising that Spinoza, as an Enlightenment thinker, rejects any sort of scriptural authority in favor of human intellect and reason. It cannot be doubted that this fact plays a significant role in his characterization as a Western thinker (recall that an oft-cited hallmark of the Western tradition is rational, intellectual inquiry). Although this disparity between the traditions does exist, the actual substantive claims proposed by each remain strikingly comparable: that an understanding of reality is ultimately intuitive, and that it, alone, is the source of valid knowledge.

Another apparent difference is an ontological one. *Nirguna brahman*, the true being of *brahman*, must be ineffable and without attributes. Spinoza's God, on the other hand, is described as having infinite attributes, including Thought and Extension. Are these incompatible understandings of the divine, if one god is without attributes, and the other is with infinite attributes? I would argue, in fact, that these differing characterizations of god still provide the same substantive claim—that God and *brahman* both transcend human understanding, and both cannot be defined or constrained.

The Advaita adherent's concern with attributing characteristics to *nirguna brahman* stems from the belief that any linguistic claim placed upon *brahman* would serve to limit its unlimited nature. *Brahman* is ultimately inexpressible, because any attempt at expressing *brahman* is inadequate. Spinoza's God is, actually, quite similar to *brahman* in this way. Spinoza does believe that God must have the attributes of Thought and Extension, because these are definable human attributes, and because God (as an infinite being) must encompass all attributes. Yet, humans only have access to these two attributes: just as *nirguna brahman* encompasses and transcends both *atman* and the corporeal world, God encompasses and transcends the world and the human self as understood through Thought or Extension. Although we can speak of God as having these attributes (just as we can attribute certain characteristics to *saguna brahman* [*brahman* with attributes]), the totality of Spinoza's God remains, because of this transcendence, similarly ineffable to the totality of *nirguna brahman*.

Nonetheless, if the situation is as described, then we have a Western rationalist philosopher espousing an Eastern religio-philosophical doctrine. It is here that we must examine the broader implications of this comparative analysis.

In the postcolonial era, the East-West dichotomy has come under increasing attack from a variety of scholastic circles. Edward Said, an outspoken critic of such an "Orient-Occident" binary, has argued that the division is entirely mythical: that the imagined region of the Orient is, in fact, "an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that has given it reality and presence for the West."[37] Said argues that, in its purported difference from the West, the very notion of the East (as espoused and understood by Westerners) is imbued with "doctrines of European superiority, various kinds of racism, imperialism and the like", and necessarily creates a power-dynamic that produces and justifies Western domination.[38] Obviously, the dichotomy has proven itself tremendously controversial in recent years.

It is my hope that this comparison between Advaita Vedanta Hinduism and *The Ethics* might spur further critique of that problematic ideology. Through an examination of substantive similarities between Eastern and Western philosophical schools, a rigid East-West dichotomy might be unmasked as hopelessly reductionist. The argument that Spiozism so closely mirrors the ontological and epistemological claims of Advaita Vedanta Hinduism complicates the image of any fundamental ideological differences between Eastern and Western philosophy. The potential for a reexamination, and a critique of, that binary system is an intended consequence of my project.

Additionally, it is my firm belief that the type of comparative analysis exemplified in this paper provides us with a deeper understanding of seemingly disparate entities: an understanding that might have otherwise been unattainable, or entirely ignored.

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37 Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 5
38 Said, *Orientalism*, 8.

When we discuss Eastern and Western philosophies in a comparative lens, fascinating results ensue. When we separate them based upon a purported incommensurability, we lose the potential for broader understandings of humanity at large, with its varied traditions and beliefs, regardless of geographic zone. I hope that further scholarly examinations of the subject matter of Spinozistic-Advaita comparative analysis might follow, so that we might see commonalities in both systems, across any imagined delineations. ✦

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IT WAS NOTHING

A Conversation with Heidegger and the Kyoto School on Nothingness

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In his exploration of anxiety, Heidegger remarks that once our anxiety has subsided we are inclined to say, "it was really nothing." "This way of talking," he observes, "indeed, gets at *what* it was ontically."[1] Heidegger takes the state of anxiety to reveal the nature of *nothingness* to us, and in this insight lies a complex story. The mundane appearance of nothingness often serves to conceal our failure to be clear on the true nature of nothingness. Though we think we understand nothingness plainly, we often find ourselves tied up in knots when we are questioned about it. These questions are only further complicated by the differing notions of nothingness that have developed in the philosophical conversations in the East and West. However, recent developments in the philosophical conversation in Europe have opened up new avenues for engagement between the two traditions. Beginning in the early 20th century, a handful of Japanese philosophers, who later came to be called the Kyoto School, sought to engage with the philosophical conversation that was taking place in Germany and France. In particular, the thinkers of the Kyoto School found Martin Heidegger to be a fruitful conversation partner, even going so far as to study under his tutelage in Germany.[2] Though these Japanese thinkers

1   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 165. (All pages are marginal pages from the 2nd edition of Stambaugh's translation.)

2   As with any movement, speaking about the school as a 'movement' overlooks crucial nuances. However, one may broadly say the school is composed of Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945), his student Tanabe Hajime (1885- 1962),

were well trained in the texts of the Western conversation, their fundamental commitments remained with the Zen Buddhist tradition, which allowed them to arrive at a unique viewpoint on the West's philosophical questions and to facilitate new ways forward in the midst of those struggles. In this paper, I will seek to explore Nishitani Keiji's critique of Western nihilism—a critique that Nishitani extends to Heidegger's thought. I will attempt a conversion project in order to allow for smooth and productive dialogue between these two parties. Due to deep differences between their respective traditions, however, Nishitani and Heidegger appear to eventually reach an impasse. I will attempt to identify the source of this impasse, and to sketch potential ways to move forward. In short, though this paper can only serve as a catalyst for further conversations, I hope that it will nonetheless clarify the terms of the conversation so as to bear fruit at a later date.

Though anxiety provides us with an opportunity to engage in the conversation between the East and the West, the goal of this paper is not, ultimately, to comprehend anxiety. This paper's true aim is to understand the questions and concepts that gave shape to Heidegger and Nishitani's thought. With that in mind, let us start with §39 of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger proposes to determine the mode of attunement that presents Dasein to itself in the most naked manner possible.[3] For Heidegger, a mode of attunement (or 'mood') reveals our orientation towards our thrownness[4], which is our already having found ourselves having a world.[5] We experience our particular situatedness in our world as thrown because we find ourselves already being there, rather than having chosen to be there. Essentially, we discover that we have already arrived at the place of having a finite set of possibilities. Attunement reveals Dasein's structures of being-in-the-world through an examination of how Dasein orients itself to its thrownness. Heidegger proposes anxiety as that mode of attunement that can bring Dasein to presentation in the wholeness that it possesses primordially.[6] In an intriguing turn, Heidegger surmises that those attunements, which involve a *flight from* Dasein, actually disclose Dasein with the least amount of pretense.[7] Why would this be the case? Heidegger takes it that if Dasein flees from itself, then it flees precisely from *itself*, which is there disclosed. In fleeing from itself, Dasein recognizes itself as itself. In this case, anxiety serves as an orientation of Dasein that turns away from its thrownness with trembling, but does so precisely because it sees itself as thrown.

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and his other student Nishitani Keiji (1900-1990). There are others who trace themselves to this school, such as Abe Masao (who's philosophy I will be employing in this paper). The Kyoto School tradition still remains a crucial part of the identity of the philosophy department at Kyoto University to this day. For an excellent introductory text to the Kyoto School, see James W. Heisig, Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

3   Heidegger, 181-182

4   Ibid., 139.

5   Ibid., 135.

6   Ibid., 187.

7   Ibid., 184-186.

The illuminating nuance of Heidegger's concept of anxiety becomes clearer when anxiety is contrasted with fear. When an individual experiences fear, Heidegger says, that individual becomes oriented toward innerworldly beings.[8] For instance, I can be afraid of clowns or the dark. These phenomena are definite beings within our world, and are thus objects to Dasein. However, anxiety differs from fear in that anxiety does not have an object as such. Anxiety is anxious about nothing, for anxiety is Dasein's being anxious about being-in-the-world *itself*.[9] Anxiety confronts Dasein with the sheer possibility of possibilities that make up Dasein's world and thus make up Dasein itself, because Dasein is essentially that being that understands itself in terms of its own possibilities for being.[10] Because anxiety lacks an ontic referent, it transcends the realm of objective presence and alerts Dasein to its own fraught relationship with the world, which it has actively tried to anaesthetize by absorbing innerworldy beings into the forgetfulness of the horizon that determines those beings in their Being. Thus, when anxiety unmasks absorption in innerworldly beings as being essentially determined by nothing, Dasein finds itself unmoored at sea, in a world of pure possibility-for-being-in-the-world, which is to say, nothingness. All innerworldy beings have fallen away and have been revealed as ultimately meaningless by virtue of their lack of foundation. Dasein is awakened to the ipseity of its ownmost possibility for being-in-the-world. Dasein comes to realize that only it can choose the possibilities before it. Yet, Dasein also realizes that all those possibilities have been problematized by their essential lack of grounding. These possibilities hang over the abyss of nothing, and thus Dasein finds itself hanging over this same abyss. Naturally, Dasein finds itself terrified and seeks to flee from itself and back into the realm of innerworldly beings. This is precisely because Dasein has realized the depth of the nothingness that lies at the ground of the whole world, and even of itself.

Heidegger's account of anxiety allows us to bring the Kyoto School into the conversation, for the question of anxiety lies at the the heart of Buddhism. Nishitani says, "We become aware of religion as a need, as a must for life, only at the level of life at which everything loses its necessity and its utility…When we come to doubt the meaning of our existence in this way, when we have become a question to ourselves, the religious quest awakens within us."[11] Buddhism seeks to confront this problem of anxiety through an analysis of self-consciousness. When we find ourselves anxious, often we say that we are being 'self-conscious'; that is, we are hyper aware of our own selves as selves. Abe Masao argues that this problem of being self-conscious is actually peculiar to humans. Plants and animals do not suffer from this problem; they simply are themselves. They do not present themselves to themselves so as to compare

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8   Heidegger, §40.
9   Ibid., 186 - 187
10 Ibid., 187-188.
11 Nishitani Keiji, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Braght (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 3.

themselves to others, or as to cast judgments on themselves or others.[12] A bird birds. The world worlds. However, humans suffer from this unique phenomenon where we compare ourselves to other people and are thereby conscious of ourselves as selves. Zen takes this to mean that we have objectified ourselves (and thereby others).[13] I have become an object to myself, and I have made others an object to myself. I may only see myself from the "outside," so to speak. In this realm of self-consciousness, I find myself on the plane of the subject-object relation. This plane is where self-consciousness introduces a rupture in the primal unity of all things by relating to them as other, or as "outside" of self-consciousness. The world becomes a field where objects are given to subjects and viewed as objects because the subject takes itself to not be the object. Zen seeks precisely to transcend that plane in order to reside on the plane where all things are realized as absolute nothingness.

How does one break through this plane of the subject-object in order to realize the nature of all things as absolute nothingness? This process unfolds in three steps, each of which prepares the way for the next. In the first step, one must realize the nothingness that lies at the ground of the subject-object relation, and thus see this subject-object relation for the groundless relation that it is. One must discover its inadequacy before one can move forward. Abe proposes an exercise[14] in which one asks, "Who am I?" He then asks, "Who is the one asking, 'Who am I?'" He wants us to realize that there are now two 'I's. The I which is inquired after and the I which does the inquiring cannot be the same I, for one is the subject and the other is the object. One is offered to the other as object, yet it is precisely the 'subject I' after which one is seeking to inquire after. Thus, one is caught in an infinite regression of I's asking who they are and offering themselves to themselves as objects. He compares this act to a snake attempting to eat its own tail.[15] In this way, Zen becomes a practice that seeks to undermine and unsettle the individual's conviction in the self's knowledge of itself. However, this unsettling can never become an end in itself, because this unsettling serves the ultimate purpose of preparing one to pass into the next phase.

When the self finally reaches the second stage, it becomes completely despairing of ever knowing itself. The self discovers the nothingness that resides beneath its feet. It suddenly must confront its own groundlessness. The self and everything around it become nothingness and meaninglessness. This nihilism Nishitani describes as the state of the welling up of "The Great Doubt," where the entire self becomes doubt and, in fact, becomes the site where the world doubts itself.[16] We can visualize this as a person hanging over an infinite abyss of nothingness. You can't tell if you're falling or not, which way is up, down, right, or left, and you have no idea where you are or how you got there. There is truly *no place* to stand, as nothingness becomes present

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12 Abe, Masao *Zen and Western Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 223.
13 Ibid., 225-226.
14 Abe., 6.
15 Ibid., 226.
16 Nishitani, 18-19.

both within and without. In this stage, one sees nothingness as encroaching upon oneself; nothingness flings one into a state of vertigo. Crucial for the account of Zen, however, is that one cannot remain in this stage. One must surpass this stage in order to break into the third stage, where all things become absolute nothingness. This is enlightenment.

At this point, Westerners such as us may be asking, "Why does this second stage require surpassing?" Zen understands the second stage as problematic because, in this second stage, one still remains trapped within the subject-object relation. When the ego-self (the self in a state of attachment to itself as object) finally hits "rock-bottom", and must confront the abyssal nothingness that resides right at its feet, it has still only managed to make nothingness into an object, and still conceptualizes nothingness as that which opposes itself to being. Thus, one has only succeeded in constituting themselves as a self through confronting this nothingness as an object. However, the goal of Zen is to break through the plane of the subject-object relation altogether. In the second stage, one no longer objectifies things in general, but, rather, one objectifies nothingness itself. Thus, in order to pass to the third stage, emptiness must be emptied of itself. Even our representations of nothingness, as a some*thing* that is out *there* while I am in *here*, must be surpassed.

In *Religion and Nothingness*, Nishitani offers an extended critique of Western philosophy, where he presents the philosophies of Descartes and Sartre as embodying the first and second stage of Zen, respectively. In order to better understand why the second stage must too be broken through, we will trace Nishitani's progression from Descartes to Sartre. Nishitani takes it as given that Western humans understand themselves primarily as a Cartesian *ego*. In his critique, Nishitani reveals the problematic nature of Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* by following a line of questioning that is similar to the state of aporia that Abe's thought experiment seeks to create in the self. Nishitani does not question that the *cogito* seems to be the most self-evident truth. Instead, he calls into question whether or not the *cogito* is actually the proper standpoint from which to consider the *cogito*. He takes Descartes' unquestioned and seemingly harmless presupposition to be far from self-evident.[17] We can already see the cracks in the foundation of Descartes' presupposition when Descartes describes himself as a thinking 'thing,' and thus reveals that he has only succeeded in calling himself before himself as an object. Nishitani observes that the nature of the *cogito* itself covers over this problematic. He says, "But because this ego is seen as self-consciousness mirroring self-consciousness at every turn, and the *cogito* is seen from the standpoint of the *cogito* itself, ego becomes a mode of being of the self closed up within itself."[18] This means that the *cogito* can only secure itself through reference to itself.[19] Through constantly mirroring itself, the *cogito* deceives itself into believing

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17 Nishitani, 14.
18 Ibid., 15.
19 Ibid., 15.

that it has a pure and immediate understanding of itself. However, this sounds like nothing more than self-deception. Is it not rather the case that this endless cycle of securing the self through reference to the self is actually groundless? Much like in Abe's experiment, the Cartesian *cogito* collapses in an infinite regression of mirroring itself.

Thus, Nishitani believes that Western nihilism has arrived at the second stage of Zen, because the *cogito*—what Descartes describes as a thinking "thing", and which enshrines the cycle of self-objectification—has had the rug pulled out from under its feet. Starting in the 19th century, many Western philosophers hit rock bottom and realized the bankruptcy of the attempt to make sense of the world in terms of the subject-object relation. In essence, Western philosophy is still figuring out how to live in the wake of the failure of the Cartesian *ego*. Thus, Nishitani wants to affirm thinkers like Sartre and Nietzsche for realizing the nothingness that lies at the ground of all things. While Nishitani believes that Jean-Paul Sartre and Friedrich Nietzsche have successfully entered the second stage, he also critiques them for remaining stuck in this phase. Nishitani believes that the West is fundamentally lacking the resources to advance to the third stage because the Western tradition is too deeply attached to the subject-object relation. However, Nishitani also hopes that his work will supply those resources that the West requires to finally break into the third stage.

In examining the nature of the second stage, Nishitani presents Sartre as one who has failed to break into the third stage, and as one who is paradigmatically unable to fully let go of Descarte's *cogito*. Though Sartre rightly observes that nothingness resides at the ground of subjectivity, he takes this nothingness to be that which awakens us to our subjectivity and constitutes our freedom as subjects.[20] Sartre's atheistic project does not say that God is the ground and guarantor of our subjectivity (to which Descartes resorts), but instead asserts that nothingness should assume the function of God.[21] If nothing undergirds us, then we are free to endlessly project ourselves out over that nothingness.[22] This form of subjectivity, which Nishitani says is a type of *ekstasis*, casts itself forward endlessly and allows the self to affirm itself through its undertakings.[23] Essence is a groundless illusion; there is only the courageous adventure of choosing whom you will be in the next moment. However, Nishitani sees in this the same failures of Descartes, only disguised by the language of nothingness. Though Sartre has realized that the project of consciousness being its own self-ground has become untenable, he has made the more sophisticated mistake of making nothingness into the ground of the self.

When Nishitani himself says that nothingness is the ground of the self, he does not mean what Sartre means. Nishitani intends for us to realize that nothingness *is* the

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20 Nishitani, 31.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.

self and that this nothingness is literally *no place*. It is not a ground in the sense that Sartre uses it. Nishitani sees in Sartre's attempt to make nothingness the ground of the self a setting up of a floor that shuts the self up inside of itself. This rock hard nothingness becomes a wall at the bottom of the ego that traps the ego in its own private cave.[24] He says, "As long as this nothingness is still set up as something called nothingness-at-the-bottom-of-the-self, it remains what Buddhism repudiates as 'emptiness perversely clung to.'"[25] He sums up, "The self that sets up this nothingness is thereby bound by it and attached to it."[26] Whereas in Descartes, the Cartesian *cogito* was attached to self as self, Sartre's *ego* has attached itself to an objectified nothingness that it employs like a "springboard" to endlessly extend itself precisely as a self.

Where, then, do we find ourselves? Nishitani has accused Western nihilism of being stuck in the second stage of Zen. What does Nishitani propose as the way forward? What happens when we are emptied even of our representations of emptiness? What sort of an account of things does one give when one has broken through the plane of the subject-object relation to the plane of absolute nothingness? In order to begin to answer these questions, I will again begin with the more practically oriented answers of Abe before moving into Nishitani's more philosophical formulations. This will help us to understand the translation project that Nishitani is trying to perform.

In his essay, "Emptiness is Suchness," Abe worries that the language of Zen has often posed an obstacle to mutual understanding with the West. Abe explains that the phrase, "'everything is emptiness' may be more adequately rendered: 'Everything is just as it is.'"[27] The third phase, which one enters upon breaking the subject-object plane, is precisely where this realization that 'everything is just as it is' takes place. Why could this realization not take place in the other two phases? In the first phase, one is still attached to the self and thus unable to see things as they are simply in themselves. As subject, one takes things to be for one or given to one as objects, but this means that a thing is only a thing in so far as it is for the self. Abe calls this "self-centeredness," an obstacle to truly knowing other things. This concept of the various modes of 'centeredness' will play a vital role in Nishitani's own account.

In the second phase, the objectification of nothingness is the ground of the self, a state that either vindicates or threatens the self. In either case, one still clings to the self, either through standing on nothingness and using nothing to extend the self as self, or fleeing from nothingness in hopes of preserving the self as self. However, in the third phase, these projects fall apart and the realization of the self as nothingness

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24 Nishitani, 33.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Abe, 223.

becomes true freedom. No longer is nothingness viewed as the ground beneath the feet of the self, nor is nothingness seen as an alien invader impinging upon the self's being, but instead the self becomes the site of the realization of nothingness, or, "the unattainable."[28] While one may have legitimately said during the second phase that 'the self is nothingness,' the self, in this sentence, is still subject, and nothingness is still an object. In the third phase, by contrast, Abe believes it more proper to say that "Emptiness is the self."[29] The self becomes no-self because the unattainable is the true nature of the self. Only in this state of no-self (non-ego) can all things be precisely what they are. In a seemingly ironic move, this emptying of our representations of emptiness (the negation of a negation) becomes the positive and full affirmation of all things, but of all things in their suchness and with no competition between them.

This emptied emptiness of which Abe speaks, Nishitani calls 'absolute nothingness' (*sunyata*), and this absolute nothingness forms the basis of his ontology. At the point that one breaks through to the third phase of Zen, one comes to realize that all things are the presentation of absolute nothingness. By this, Nishitani does not mean to express an objectified nothingness like Sartre, as if the 'thing' we encountered were composed of the material of 'nothingness.' Rather, things spring up on their home-ground in union with nothingness, which is to say, things are nothing at all. Nishitani takes this to mean that the essential character of all things is 'illusory.' But he cautions us against taking this appearance as illusion to mean that there is some*thing* that dons an appearance, as if the things itself resided behind the appearance.[30] No, the thing is itself precisely in its being mere appearance. To help us understand the identity of non-identity, Nishitani employs the analogy of fire. What makes fire fire? That fire burns things seems essential to what fire is. Yet, fire does not burn itself. So, fire is itself precisely in not being itself? Non-fire is fire.[31] This means that we can only say that the fire we experience on the plane of sense or reason is an illusion—but an illusion with nothing behind it simply is itself. The shapes that these illusions present to us emerge when things are uprooted from their home-ground and transferred into our consciousness.[32] In other words, the emergence of each thing is an emergence in ekstasis from itself. [33]

Conversely, Nishitani maintains that a thing must be known from within its "Samadhi-being." The word *samadhi* means 'settling' and refers "to the mode of being of a thing in itself when it has settled into its own position."[34] This concept was hinted at earlier, in relation to Abe's critique of self-consciousness as 'self-centered.' In the first and second stages, the self is self-centered because it takes things to be

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28 Abe, 9.
29 Ibid., 13.
30 Nishitani, 129.
31 Ibid., 116.
32 Ibid., 130.
33 Ibid., 126.
34 Ibid., 128.

what they are for the self; it makes itself the center. But Nishitani says that all things are already centered in themselves. Why, then, does Abe consider a human's self-centeredness to be a problem? Because self-centeredness presumes that other things are not settled within themselves and not sufficient unto themselves. The one who is self-centered has only understood half the truth and thus has missed the whole thing entirely. Instead, Nishitani says, "on the field of sunyata, *the center is everywhere.*"[35] If the center is everywhere, each thing dwells upon its home-ground precisely in its suchness, with no competition between any beings. Everything is exactly what it is.

How can the center be everywhere? The concept of *ekstasis* helps elucidate how this might be. If the center is everywhere, then each thing is completely and utterly unique. This means that each thing remains the absolute center of all things. It is as though each thing is the master of all things. This is the half-truth that the self-centered consciousness grasps. But the self-centered self-consciousness has missed the other half entirely, for Nishitani also says that each thing is simultaneously in the position of being the servant of all things.[36] Thus, each thing is both master and servant to all things. How can this be? "To say that a certain thing is situated in a position of servant to every other thing means that it lies at the ground of all other things…making it to be what it is and thus to be situated in a position of autonomy as master of itself."[37] Here, on the field of absolute nothingness, every thing empties itself into every other thing, and is thereby fully itself in being fully not itself. "To say that a t*hing is not itself* means that, while continuing to be itself, it is in the home-ground of everything else."[38] The corollary of this is that, when a thing is on its own home-ground, every other thing is there with it.[39] Every other thing becomes the constitutive element of everything else; all things are interconnected, and fully in harmony. We may think again of the example of fire being non-fire. Because fire burns everything except itself, we can see that the essence of fire arises only in its interaction with other things. This means that fires finds its identity through its illusory appearance as not-itself, for this is precisely to be itself. Everything is nothingness. Nothingness is everything. Every appearance is the appearance of nothing. Every appearance of nothing is an illusion. Every illusion is the true self. Nothingness is the true self.

We now have a clearer notion of what Nishitani wants to do when he engages in dialogue with Heidegger. Though Nishitani studied under Heidegger, and even had discussions with Heidegger about Buddhism,[40] he still believes that Heidegger

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35 Nishitani, 146.
36 Ibid., 147.
37 Ibid., 148.
38 Nishitani, 149.
39 Ibid.
40 When Nishitani was studying at Freiburg in 1938, he gave Heidegger a copy of D. T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism* and Heidegger invited Nishitani over to his house in order to discuss the book because h*e had already read it!* Not only had he read it already, he was also eager to discuss it with Nishitani, see Graham Parkes,

remained stuck within this second phase along with the rest of Western Nihilism. Nishitani believes that, though Heidegger's philosophy is superior to Sartre's, Heidegger had not escaped the representation of nothingness as an object. In the following paragraph, Nishitani explicitly accuses Heidegger of failing in this respect:

> Nevertheless, nihility is still being viewed here from the bias of self-existence as the groundlessness of existence lying at the ground of self-existence. This means that it is seen lying outside of the 'existence' of the self, and therefore also as something more than the 'existence' or distinct from it. We find this, for example, in Heidegger's talk of self-existence as 'held suspended in nothingness,' despite the fundamental difference of this standpoint from other brands of contemporary existentialism or nihilism. The very fact that he speaks of the 'abyss' of nihility already tells us as much. In Heidegger's case, traces of the representation of nothingness as some 'thing' that is nothingness still remain.[41]

Let us return to Heidegger's explication of anxiety in order to consider Nishitani's critique: that Heidegger still represents nothingness as something that remains other than the self. As was said before, Heidegger takes anxiety to be a mode of attunement that most clearly reveals Dasein as that being that orients itself towards the world in terms of its possibilities. However, he notes that anxiety does this precisely by trembling and fleeing from manifest reality. In this way, the act of turning away would actually seem to be an act of objectifying nothingness, because any turning away always assume an object from which to turn away. However, doesn't Heidegger say that this nothingness from which Dasein flees is ontically nothing and thus is not an object? This hearkens back to Heidegger's earlier assumption that those modes of attunement that flee from Dasein reveal Dasein in its primordial wholeness. However, we now have reason to question this claim, for is it not rather the case that to flee *from* some*thing*, one must precisely see it as a thing from which one can distance oneself? When Dasein is awakened to its own nothingness in anxiety, it is awakened immediately to a nothingness from which Dasein believes it can flee. Anxiety labels the nothingness of pure possibility-of-being-in-the-world as a threat to its existence precisely because anxiety formulates this nothingness as that which it is not. This would seem to betray the fact that the nothingness called before the self in anxiety actually is an ontic representation of nothingness and not nothingness itself. This objectification serves only to enclose oneself in one's self further, because anxious Dasein reacts by fleeing back into absorption in innerworldy objects. Anxiety as a mode of attunement reveals that nothingness is the ground of being, but objectifies this nothingness by turning away; thus, anxiety is unable to reveal absolute nothingness as Nishitani defines it. So, is Heidegger correct in stating that anxiety does reveal "nothing"? Yes, and no. Though Heidegger takes anxiety to

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"Introduction," in *Heidegger and Eastern Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 10.

41 Nishitani, 96.

reveal *ontically* nothing, this nothingness, which is given ontically (and therefore as an object), remains wholly inadequate for the task of revealing nothingness to us. Anxiety cannot reveal the true nature of this nothingness because Dasein makes this nothingness an object in its turning away from it. Because Dasein has objectified nothingness, it will find itself endlessly anxious about itself—generating precisely the state that Zen seeks to transcend.

With these considerations in mind, we can see that Nishitani's criticism of Heidegger may have some teeth. However, a good Heideggerian might reply that while Heidegger does take anxiety to be the mode of attunement that brings Dasein before itself in its primordial wholeness, he does *not* take it to be the most authentic orientation towards that wholeness. What if it were the case that anxiety, by being an inauthentic mode of attunement, constitutes the second phase of Zen, but that an authentic orientation towards nothingness provides the path towards the enlightenment of the third stage? This reply would have us look at Heidegger's concept of being-towards-death, which he takes to be the authentic mode of being towards our thrownness and the way that one overcomes anxiety about being-in-the-world.

However, before we even have a chance to consider being-towards-death as a possible solution, we must immediately confront a preliminary consideration that seems to be an insurmountable obstacle. We must tackle a singular and fundamental difference between the thought of Heidegger and the thought of Nishitani before we can make an adequate reply by using being-towards-death as the path towards the third stage. This difference hinges on the unique status that Heidegger accords to human beings. If we were to phrase this problem as a question, we might ask, does the fact that Dasein's mode of being differs from that of other beings fundamentally prevent Dasein from ever settling into its Samadhi-being and from finding its home-ground in absolute nothingness? Can Dasein, as long as it remains Dasein, ever be truly emptied of self and comprehend its unity with all things in nothingness? This question arises due to the unique nature of Dasein as that being that is concerned in its being about its being.[42] Heidegger takes Dasein to be that way and chairs to not be that way, thus introducing a fundamental difference between conscious beings and inanimate beings. Even though Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, does not conclusively say whether Dasein is simply *a* human mode of being or whether Dasein is how all humans *already are*,[43] we can at least say that Heidegger intends to convey that the structures of Dasein are specifically and peculiarly human. Understanding (or "un-concealment") only happens for Dasein, and not for rocks. Dasein understands itself and other things in terms of a horizon, and can intend relations between itself and others. However, this account of the structural features of a human's mode of being-

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42 Heidegger, 191.
43 Edith Stein raises this insightful question in her masterful critique of Heidegger's thought, Edith Stein, "Heidegger's Existential Philosophy, translated by Mette Lebech," *Maynooth Philosophical Papers*, no. 4 (2007): 70.

in-the-world displays a fundamental divergence between Heidegger and the Kyoto School—a divergence that threatens to halt the discussion altogether.

Returning to Abe's diagnosis of why humans experience anxiety, we remember that Abe sees the problem of anxiety fundamentally in terms of self-consciousness. If the Zen practitioner takes self-consciousness to be the problem, what models of existence do we look to instead? Zen leans heavily on examples from the natural world, employing earthy images like fire, water, trees, and stones. For Zen, the problem is that anxious humans are *not* like these natural things. Abe makes this clear when he contrasts human beings, who grow anxious through judging, with plants and rivers, which have no such problem. Nishitani's account of things as always already being settled in their Samadhi-being explains why things like plants and rivers are without anxiety. In this way, we see that Zen is interested not in explicating that humans are unique, but in explicating that humans cannot quite seem to fit in, and that they live in continual denial of how things actually are. They are anomalous, not special.

If this is the case, Heidegger seems to have found himself in a tight spot. As long as he is convinced that Dasein is this being with this particular mode of being that is concerned in its being with its being, how can Dasein possibly abandon that self-centered way of being-in-the-world, and become totally emptied so as to be constituted on the plane of absolute nothingness? Is not Dasein's problem that it is Dasein? For now, I have no answer to this question. I take this to be a fundamental rupture between these two thinkers and between their traditions. With that said, there are paths along which we may proceed to further our analysis and to inspire future dialogue.

The path forward will lead us to explore how *ekstasis* functions in Heidegger's thought. In particular, Heidegger's account of the structure of Dasein's understanding as ecstatic warrants further investigation. The discovery that *ekstasis* is the primordial unity between Dasein and the world may bear more fruitful dialogue with the Kyoto School. That all things are absolute nothingness does not preclude the possibility that this nothingness is a dynamic nothingness. Indeed, Nishitani speaks of this absolute nothingness as a 'force,'[44] and a force bespeaks movement and process. A process can be nothing and everything at the same time, and Dasein's ecsatic movement may paint for us a useful picture of nothingness' perpetual perichoretic motion.

Heidegger's account of understanding finds its underlying motivation in the desire to articulate understanding, not as the correlation of beings understood in terms of object as mere presence, but as the un-concealment of Dasein's prior unity with other things.[45] These relations are uncovered through care, which is another way of saying that what we care about commands our attention and thereby gives shape to our

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44 Nishitani, 163.
45 Heidegger, 144-145, 200-201.

understanding.[46] This orienting ourselves towards objects in terms of what concerns us reveals those underlying relations that were always already there. Conversely, those relations that are brought to presentation through care must be grounded in a unity which is prior to the subject and the object in this relation.[47] If one begins from the standpoint of either subject or object, one will find that neither subject or object can reach far enough to meet the other in the middle. Both must possess a primordial oneness that founds the subject-object relation. This is essentially to say that the experience of knowing cannot be built up from the totality of the experience's parts— as if the experience were a mere aggregate of information bits—but that knowledge arises only from the foundational plane of the oneness of all things.[48]

For Heidegger, then, knowing is not merely an intellectual act but actually a coming to expression of our fundamental interconnectedness with the world. "[W]e must remember that knowing itself is grounded beforehand in already-being-alongside-the-world."[49] Knowledge can only arise from being-in-the-world, and thus being-in-the-world is prior to the plane of subject-object where knowledge gives an account of things. What role does *ekstasis* play in this account? Heidegger describes the paradoxical nature of knowing in terms that strongly evoke notions of *ekstasis*:

> In directing itself toward… and in grasping something, Dasein does not first go outside of its inner sphere in which it is initially encapsulated, but, rather, in its primary kind of being, it is always already "outside" together with some being encountered in the world already discovered…even in this "being outside" together with its object, Dasein is "inside," correctly understood; that is, in itself is as the being-in-the-world which knows.[50]

Thus, he says, "Dasein that knows *remains outside as Dasein*."[51] So, Dasein understands by being outside itself but is itself precisely in this being outside of itself? Dasein's inside is its outside and its outside is its inside. Here I see a clearing toward which the thoughts of Heidegger and Nishitani may converge. Heidegger's statement that Dasein knows its inside by being outside of itself calls to mind Nishitani's articulation that all things are related as both master and slave. If Dasein knows by being outside of itself, then Dasein can be said to be itself through residing in the home-ground of every other thing. Yet by residing on the home-ground of everything (and thus being outside of itself), Dasein finds itself right at home on its inside. Only because the center is everywhere can Dasein simultaneously be its own center and also be in the center of everything else.

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46 Ibid., 145.
47 Nishitani, 149 – 150.
48 Heidegger, §44.
49 Ibid., 61.
50 Heidegger, 62.
51 Ibid.

We may take another step further by connecting the master and slave paradox to the dynamic perichoretic movement of hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur's statement that, in hermeneutics, "I exchange the *me, master* of itself, for the *self, disciple* of the text,"[52] conveys the ecstatic structure of hermeneutical understanding. I exchange the me, the ego-self, for the no-self, the servant of all things. When this exchange is made, one discovers how the hermeneutical circle traces the flow of nothingness. One is master of the text by being a servant of the text, and in becoming the servant of the text, one becomes its master. I lie at the home-ground of the text and the text lies at my home-ground. Through our continually being constituted ecstatically, the unity we already had with each other and with all things can come to proper presentation.

In the end, the conversation between Heidegger and Nishitani seems to run aground on the question of what sort of problem self-consciousness actually poses to us. Is self-consciousness ultimately the problem, or is the problem a certain sort of self-consciousness? Nishitani seems to want to say that self-consciousness itself cannot be the plane on which the truth of things can be faithfully articulated, because self-consciousness is the plane of discursive thought that traffics in the subject-object relation. Heidegger seems to want to say that we have been dominated by one mode of self-consciousness (the metaphysics of presence), but that we, therefore, must seek the more primordial mode of self-consciousness that allows Being to be un-concealed in understanding—that is, in care. However, the difference between Heidegger and Nishitani seems to originate in their respective religious traditions, rather than in mere philosophical disagreements. Nishitani's commitments reside in an ancient Buddhist debate about whether plants can attain Buddha-nature. In re-phrasing this question so as to reveal its underlying import, one might ask, "is enlightenment *attained* through practice or is enlightenment simply realizing what all things *already are*?" Though initially there was debate between the Tendai and Shingon schools in Japan, Japanese Buddhism eventually reached a consensus that all things already are Buddha-nature (emptied of self) and that enlightenment is simply realizing that one already is Buddha-nature (a view referred to as *hangaku*[53]). Standing in this tradition of Japanese Buddhism, Nishitani sees the natural world as the exemplar from which we ought to learn, and to which we ought to conform.

Heidegger, on the other hand, displays the traditionally Christian intuition that there is something fundamentally unique and special about human beings; that is, their being made in "the Image of God." The centrality of the *imago Dei* in the Jewish and Christian faiths helps explain the Western reflex to posit humans as somehow distinct in the community of beings. This idea that humans occupy some unique

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52 Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 73.

53 William LaFleur, "Saigyo and the Buddhist Value of Nature, Part 1." History of Religions 13, no. 2 (1973): 93-128. My account of this question and historical debate comes from LaFleur's article, which does a masterful job at locating these questions in the historical tradition of Buddhist reflection and then tracing them through the debates in Japanese Buddhist schools, which ultimately culminate in the Buddhist poetry of the monk Saigyo.

role amongst beings is evident even in the thought of the atheist Sartre, who writes that humans are condemned to freedom—a phenomenon which seems to constitute the exciting risk and glorious terror of being human. Heidegger's account of Dasein fundamentally presupposes that the way humans are in the world differs from the way that other objects are in the world, and that those different structures that we humans possess are actually to be celebrated.

Ultimately, this disagreement indicates that we can only answer these questions by thoroughly analyzing and re-envisioning the nature of the role of humans in the world of things. Are they unique? How are they unique? Is that a problem? Is the difference perhaps not fundamental, but merely situated on a continuum that loops back on itself like a Mobius strip? Is the concept of "humans" itself a problematic concept? Are we more like a process than a substance? We will need to confront such penetrating questions such as these if we desire to have any success dialoguing across the historical lines of East and West, and to secure a more just and beautiful way of being in the world. ✦

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PRAXIS OF THE SOVIET AVANT-GARDE

LEAH HASDAN

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno discuss how the culture industry is backed by a noncommittal vagueness of ideology, which, in turn, influences the production of art. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that, like the culture industry[1], art is bound to its struggle with tradition and is unable to transcend a new reality—or give way to a new cultural identity. The authors look towards autonomous art, recognized in the presentation of the avant-garde, to transcend the milieu of the culture industry. Yet, as they argue, "the claims of art are always also ideology"[2]—this holds especially true for avant-garde art. Even in the midst of society's attempting to sever itself from tradition (in hopes of striving for a new identity), avant-garde art does not transcend reality, for it is nonetheless backed by the instrumentalization of ideology and places the artist's identity into crisis.

Art is understood as the presentation of truth claims that reveal the current condition of the social order. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that art is able to transcend reality when it breaks from its tradition or its style; however, style is shaped by tradition,

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1   "The culture industry has abolished the rubbish of former times by imposing its own perfection, by prohibiting and domesticating dilettantism, while itself incessantly commiting the blunders without which the elevated style cannot be conceived" Adorno, Theodor W, Max Horkheimer, and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. 2009. *Dialectic Of Enlightenment*. 1st ed. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press. 108.

2   Adorno, Theodor W, Max Horkheimer, and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. 2009. *Dialectic Of Enlightenment*. 1st ed. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press. 103.

and a work of art can only break from its tradition when it has developed a new style. In order for a work of art to develop a new style—to break from tradition and transcend reality—it must expose itself to the failures of culture. Yet, if a work of art does not expose itself to the "necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity" that marks the discrepancy between tradition and style, then the work of art reverts to immanence, relying on its similarity to others, which marks, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the "surrogate of identity." If art fails to diverge[3] from its style, then it submits to the "obedience of the social hierarchy."[4]

If art is the presentation of truth claims that expose the condition of the social order, then it is always ideology if it does not contest the social hierarchy. Therefore, good art, determined by "what the Expressionists and Dadaists attacked in their polemics, the untruth of style as such,"[5] is that which contests its own cultural identity. In order for art to challenge its identity, or break from its tradition, it calls for artists to develop their own style. The greatest artists, then, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, are "those who adopted style as a rigor to set against the chaotic expression of suffering, as a negative truth."[6] A good artist is one who indirectly communicates suffering by means of inducing a pleasurable, moving experience. An artist with good style indirectly develops his style by means of contesting the guise, absence, or lack of presentation, of suffering. Therefore, in the realization of his style, developed out of the artwork itself, the artist does not obey the social hierarchy, but always challenges its claim to truth.

In this notion, we recognize revolution. The Soviet Avant-Garde movement is one of the best examples of artists' demanding a change in the social hierarchy and producing work that embodies the experience of suffering. The newly revolutionized Soviet state, however, invariantly politicized the artistic Avant-Garde movement of its time: it enforced the ideology of the revolution—through a scientific method of organization at its forefront—where the venerated reality of the revolution remained trapped by the instrumentalization of its own ideology. For the Constructivist movement in particular, this meant abandoning all *a priori* conceptions and iconographical elements to investigate the metaphysical contradiction between building materials.

The Constructivists sought harmony in the least amount of excess necessary for construction. Perhaps this is best recognized in Aleksandr Rodchenko's *Oval Hanging Construction No. 12 (1920)*, which was constructed out of a single sheet of plywood. This deductive structure was then coated with aluminum, cut into various

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3   Although the authors use "divulge" in the initial text to argue that the culture industry exposes style as conformity, "[the culture industry] being nothing other than style, it divulges style's secret: obedience to the social hierarchy," they are really stressing that style must break from culture if art is to transcend reality (Adorno, Horkheimer and Schmid Noerr 2009).

4   Adorno, Theodor W, Max Horkheimer, and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. 2009. *Dialectic Of Enlightenment*. 1st ed. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press.103-104.

5   Adorno, Horkheimer and Schmid Noerr 2009

6   Adorno, Horkheimer and Schmid Noerr 2009

concentric geometric shapes, and positioned in such a manner to form a geometric three-dimensional volume that would plicate into its original planar condition. The *Oval Hanging Construction* demonstrated a pedagogical directness by showcasing its bare process of production. This method of construction implements a dialectical approach to the integrity of the materials by posing a contradiction to the identity of the transient art object: the construction, or the art object, therefore operates as a *motivated* sign, whereby its composition is arbitrarily limited by its relationship to its materials. Whereas a composition is merely arbitrary, the Constructivist's art objects are motivated by its integrity of material, and by the least amount of excess necessary for its construction.[7]

Operating as a motivated sign, the constructions ultimately stress the discontinuities in temporal and spatial elements of experience, also introducing the artist's work as an intervention towards the social practice of mass cultural representation.[8] Yet, this intervention of mass cultural representation is precisely what is at stake here. The Constructivist's pedagogical directness did not contest mass cultural representation; rather, they used it as a means to re-constitute a collective identity. Mediating the transcendence of a new identity by embodying the power of mass cultural representation, the Constructivists dismissed the authentic experience of the viewer, which establishes the validity of the art object. The Constructivist's logical method of production induces an absence or loss of experience for the viewer, such that the artist imposes a manufactured reality onto the art object—leaving no room for the viewer to authentically reflect and establish a connection to the art object.

The loss of experience, according to Adorno, occurs when ideology or preconceived, *a priori* concepts mediate the essential moment of objectivity. The essential moment of objectivity occurs when the object or thing-in-itself is not falsified by mediated concepts; the object must be experienced for what it is as *intention recta*[9], and must "prove itself in that it qualitatively alters the opinions of reified consciousness."[10] The viewer's loss of experience is recognized in the Oval Hanging Construction's discontinuities in temporal and spatial elements of experience. The Oval Hanging Construction denies the possibility of an essential moment of objectivity because it cannot disentangle its temporal and spatial elements of experience from the ideological framework in which its very form and materiality are constituted. Therefore, the Oval Hanging Construction cannot be considered a thing-in-itself outside of its ideological framework. As such, the Oval Hanging Construction is arbitrarily limited as a motivated sign. In its demonstration of the least amount of

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7   Foster, Hal. *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. 2nd ed. Vol. 184.
8   Foster, Hal. *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004. Print. 183.
9   The state of consciousness which focuses upon the true object, rather than on an image of the object within the intellect.
10 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 252.

excess of materials, the Oval Hanging Construction holds captive the experiential reality of production by staying true to its representation of efficiency. The viewer's experience of the deductive materiality in the Oval Hanging Construction is entirely mediated by the motivation—the interjection of ideology on behalf of the artist. Presenting its ability to be reverted into its original planar condition, the thing-in-itself is robbed of its essential moment of objectivity, for it is only suggestive of a fixed manufactured experience and cannot be recognized as such—as its true object. Yet what guides the residual notion of objectivity it not necessarily the thing-in-itself, but rather something man-made entirely:

> [I]t is the model of the profit that remains on the balance sheet after all production costs have been deducted. Profit, however, is subjective interest limited and reduced to the form of calculation. What counts for the sober matter-of-factness of profit thinking is anything but the matter: it disappears into the return it yields.[11]

The subjective viewer's interest towards the art object reflects what is common to the community and its forms of visibility, thereby marking the residual notion of objectivity within the capitalist framework. The basic level of production suggests that subjective interest does not recite quantifiable value, whereas in a heightened sense of production (induced by the capitalism system), subjective interest obtains a relationship to the quantifiable value of the profit-gain return model.

The quantifiable abstract value inherent to capitalism demands the subject to regard the world with an interest that is fundamentally quantitative. Something may be valued, such as the Oval Hanging Construction, the viewer's experience is in fact mediated by the capitalist profit-thinking: fundamentally quantitative mentality. It is not so much that the viewer looks towards the art object as a literal form of quantifiable value; rather, it is that the viewer enters an organized method of social programming—that of the capitalist regime—where he forfeits the spontaneity of his or her own contemplation for the sake of a quantifiable, tangible operation of contemplation where "ideology […] makes life initially easier for the spectators."[12]

In the same sense that the art object is trapped by the predetermined framework of its own ideology, the experience of the art object as such is set up in advance to determine the viewer's experiences as nothing but the culture industry's object, which is to view the art object as a cyclical invariant of the production.[13] In this sense, the loss of experience is predicated on the notion of "the ideal of depersonalizing knowledge

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11 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 253.
12 Adorno, Theodor W, Max Horkheimer, and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. 2009. *Dialectic Of Enlightenment*. 1st ed. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press. 117.
13 Adorno, Theodor W, Max Horkheimer, and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. 2009. *Dialectic Of Enlightenment*. 1st ed. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press. 113.

for the sake of objectivity."[14] The loss of experience occurs when ideology determines thinking for us. When the essential moment of objectivity for the construction falls prey to mediated a priori concepts, the separation between theory and praxis emerges in the loss of experience and knowledge.

Perhaps the Constructivists developed a new style at best. If reinforcing ideology by giving it aesthetic form can been regarded as style, then their art objects alluded to the idealized transparency of the political state. It is clear that Rodchenko's *Oval Hanging Construction* presents theory in operation: his construction lays bare the process of production and calls the experience of efficiency into question for the viewer. However, if thinking is a form of doing; and theory is a form of praxis,[15] then is the articulation of theory successful here?

Both the art object and the viewer exist within a revolutionary moment of passionate striving for a new cultural identity. If the construction is a motivated sign, does the *Oval Hanging Construction* confront challenges of production? The failure to do so strikes the revolutionary moment as incomplete, for the viewer enters the artistic space in search for a direction, anticipating an answer to the revolutionary call. Yet the viewer operates under the profit-thinking model that renders them docile, forfeiting the spontaneity of their own contemplation for the ideology presented before them. The articulation of theory is quite relevant here, for if the viewer is confronted with a ready-made cliché defined by the cultural schema within which it operates, then to what extent does cliché answer the revolutionary call by suspending a sense of reflection within the viewer? Does theory carry out its goal in the *Oval Hanging Construction* if the construction reinforces the hierarchical representation of production rather than posit a form of alterity?

The Constructivists' pedagogical directness demonstrates a loss of experience that is necessary to prologue the revolutionary fervor for both artist and viewer. The revolutionary experience sparks the guiding ideology of the revolution is extinguished when every phase of artistic production and choice of material is planned. This loss of revolutionary experience isolates theory from its praxis by collapsing the distinction between the artwork and its message:

> What since then has been called the problem of praxis and today culminates in the question of the relation between theory and praxis coincides with the loss of experience caused by the rationality of the eternally same. Where experience is blocked or altogether absent, praxis is damaged and therefore longed for, distorted, and desperately overvalued. Thus what is called the

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14 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 253.

15 "A consciousness of theory and praxis must be produced that neither divides the two such that theory becomes powerless and praxis becomes arbitrary [...] thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis." Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 261.

problem of praxis is interwoven with the problem of knowledge. Abstract subjectivity, in which the process of rationalization terminates, strictly speaking can do just as little as the transcendental subject can conceivably have precisely what it is attested to have: spontaneity.[16]

What induces the artist's disconnect from the spontaneity of the revolutionary experience is his preconceived commitment to the artistic material, precisely because the construction is a motivated sign, where the form of the art object communicates a truth limited in its interpretation. The art objects obey the social hierarchy by presenting truth claims that have been manufactured by the politicization of the state.

The separation of theory from praxis is most evident in Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International (1920)*. Originally crafted in wood within a scale of 18 to 22 feet, the finished monument was intended to be a 1300-foot metal-and-glass sculpture (which, at the time, would have surpassed the world's tallest building [the Eiffel Tower] by one third) that aimed to embody the new ethos of the Revolution. Tatlin's celebrated design consisted in two dovetailing conical spirals contained within a web of oblique and vertical slats, which framed four geometric glass volumes stacked on top of each other within the structure's slanted core.

The four glass volumes were intended to rotate at specific paces—each representing a branch of the *Comintern*, or the Soviet organization in charge of spreading the revolution abroad. The revolution regarded with the slowest pace was the largest volume, symbolizing the International's "legislative assemblies," intended to rotate for the length of a year. The second volume would house the executive branch and rotate for a month; the next volume, the propaganda services, would take a day; the uppermost volume was added as a late edition to the project and would have presumably lasted an hour.[17]

A construction built off of the cyclical rigid invariants developed out of the social disorder of the revolution, Tatlin's art object presents a harmony that was guaranteed in advance. Intended to rebel against the cultural complacency left over from the monarchical tradition, the material form of Tatlin's construction quite literally obeys its own hierarchy in the new Soviet order. Although there were several arguments made in favor of the production, Tatlin's design was never realized. He failed to justify his formal use of a spiral, and its appeal to an age-old iconography, reducing his construction to a cultural, traditional invariant of the same. The Working Group of Objective Analysis, established by Rodchenko, regarded Tatlin's monument as a fetishization of artistic production—a romantic affair: "by a lone artist in the secrecy of his studio and with the traditional tools of his craft; its formal organization

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16 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 260.
17 Foster et. al 2004 p.183

remained an indecipherable secret that reeked of 'bourgeois individualism': it was not a construction but an authorial composition." [18]

Through his logical method of production, Tatlin isolated himself, as well as his work, from the Constructivist community precisely because he was detached from the theory of the revolutionary fervor. The unembroidered material representation of the Soviet social hierarchy in the *Monument to the Third International* destroys any opportunity for the essential moment of objectivity because the construct cannot be viewed as anything other than its literal representation. The absence of spontaneity in Tatlin's artistic processes, the concrete memorialization of a suffering void of actually inducing a moving, reflective experience for the viewer, demonstrates his inability to articulate theory and therefore isolates praxis altogether.

The absence—or loss—of an experience that may stimulate reflection and generate knowledge, rooted in the complacency of profit-thinking, constitutes the artist's failure to incite an authentic connection with his work: "the lack of self-reflection […] is the mark of a praxis that, having become its own fetish, becomes a barricade to its own goal."[19] In the attempt to respond to the call of the revolutionary fervor— to strive for a new cultural identity—the Constructivist movement organized its revolutionary theory within the efficiency of production. Initially emerging out of the platform of autonomous art, the Constructivist movement should have challenged itself, contested the social order, and promoted a social alterity. Since it failed to stay true to its roots, it did not produce works of art that challenged themselves or instigated spontaneous reflection necessary to carry out its own goal. The art object should not answer a call to what *should* be done, but present an aesthetic experience that gives space for critique.

Though the Constructivist movement did not succeed in its autonomous intent, such failure does not exist because of theory's failure to prescribe praxis. The distinction between theory and praxis does not suggest a temporal continuity: "the relationship between theory and practice after both have once distanced themselves from each other is that of qualitative reversal, not transition, and surely not subordination." [20]The disenchantment of the Constructivist movement is due to the loss of identity on behalf of the artist. Trapped by the constraints of ideology, the Soviet Avant-Garde artist did not successfully critique his tradition, and therefore lacked a presentation of style such that it ultimately failed to induce an aesthetic experience that would promote the passionate striving for an alterity, or a new cultural identity.

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18 Foster, Hal. *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism.* 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004. Print. 182.

19 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models.* 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 262.

20 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models.* 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 277.

Theodor Adorno specifies that successful action arises out of engaging in the art of critique. Addressing the oscillation between theory and praxis yields the spontaneity of imagination, which presents the possibility for change. In this respect, Adorno believes that art should be autonomous. Insofar as art compels change through the dialectical approach of critique, "art is the critique of praxis as unfreedom; this is where the truth begins."[21] Moreover, Adorno mentions that praxis embodies a sincere and intense conviction, which is broken when praxis liberates itself out from the interplay between the sensuous and the rational movements of the intellect, which are expressed in Friedrich Schiller's play drive. [22]

It is true, nonetheless, that Schiller proposes if man were to achieve change successfully, then "he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom." [23] In order for theory and praxis to succeed—for the interplay between the sensuous and rational to remain in balance—the artist must induce an aesthetic experience, which would stimulate the inherent reflection—the spontaneity of imagination necessary for change. Because the free play of the imagination mimics the intellect's capacity to conceive of a political alterity, Schiller calls for a historically situated intellectual reflection.

This is what makes Schiller's system attractive to Adorno: the fact that Schiller diagnoses his historical moment, and attributes its corrective task to an aesthetic experience, incites freedom's capacity to keep itself in check through the active interplay of the imagination. The dialectical procedure of the aesthetic experience, developed out of the sensual, instigates the imagination to posit an alterity that may then be grounded and articulated in a reasonable local manner that tailors the current condition of the social order. Schiller's system offers a similar operation of theory and praxis in the sense that freedom induced by reflection is not removed from its actual practice: rather, it opens up a space to critique, to preserve intention, and to give way to a proper form of practical freedom.

What remains of interest here is that Schiller emphasizes a critique of the historical moment, where his response to the revolutionary call stands in accordance with an aesthetic self-reflection, and where the viewer is able to generate knowledge and earnestly partake in a form of praxis. In respect to Soviet Avant-Garde art, praxis was isolated from theory when the artist produced constructions that preserved the Soviet identity by trapping representation in material form, as opposed to producing works of art aimed at inciting spontaneous reflection—which would develop a space for critique and the production of knowledge.

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21 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 262.
22 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 262.
23 Schiller, Friedrich von, Walter Hinderer, and Daniel O Dahlstrom. 2005. *Essays*. New York: Continuum. 90.

It is as if the Soviet artist conceived of himself as a mere agent of ideology, solving the historical moment through its preservation, executed via efficient assembly. What is there to be said about the lack of self-reflection, perhaps on the part of the artist, in the ever-changing contextual moment? We may come to recognize that the transparency of the artist's pedagogical directness reveals a silencing on the artist's part—sacrificing the identity of his own narrative to present the logic of collective assembly. Yet, in the historical moment of striving for a new identity, the logical method of organization lays bare the complacency of profit-thinking where the artist is only valued based on the efficiency of his assembly. The Soviet artist cannot but help face isolation as he anticipates losing true value in his commitment to rigid ideology:

> …in the eyes of those who nourished the all too abstract and illusory hope for a total transformation might have appeared justified—that is, violence—after the experience of the National Socialist and Stalinist atrocities and in the face of the longevity of totalitarian repression is inextricably imbricated in what needs to be transformed […] Whoever does not make the transition to irrational and brutal violence sees himself forced into the vicinity of the reformism that for its part shares the guilt for perpetuation the deplorable totality […] Dialectic is perverted into sophistry as soon as it focuses pragmatically on the next step, beyond which the knowledge of the totality has long since moved.[24]

Although the Constructivist movement may be read as a call for order in the lingering moment of revolutionary fervor, the crisp delineation of geometric lines erects borders around empty space, which operate as mere frames that hug an unknown, undefined territory. If the art objects of the Constructivist movement were to bear meaning outside of their initial ideology, they would be seen as memorials to the insecure struggle, and collective loss of identity. In his logical presentation of material, the Soviet artist bears witness to the violent nihilism of constructing value out of mechanical assembly.

Insofar as theory is a form of praxis ("if thinking bears on anything of importance, then it initiates a practical impulse, no matter how hidden that impulse may remain to thinking"[25]), then the artistic vision and its aesthetic experience are also productive. Schiller believes that the practical impulse in the artistic process depends on the artist's handling of the subject matter—specifically that the artist obtains the power to manipulate form so that it may destroy and consume material. The more seductive the material appears in itself, "the more it seeks to impose itself upon us, the more high-handedly it thrusts itself forward with effects of its *own*."[26] Artistic production, according to Schiller, carries with it the capacity to transform, destroy,

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24 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 268.

25 Adorno, Theodor Wiesengrund, Henry W Pickford, and Lydia Goehr. 1998. *Critical Models*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 264.

26 Schiller, Friedrich von, Walter Hinderer, and Daniel O Dahlstrom. 2005. *Essays*. New York: Continuum.151.

and give shape to materials based on our susceptibility to its sensuousness. This process of production is precisely how The Working Group of Objective Analysis constituted Tatlin's romantic affair in the secrecy of his own studio: "in contrast with the bourgeois artist's studio secrets, the sculpture's 'logical' mode of production and deductive structure where heralded as a means of opposing the fetishization of artistic production."[27]

However, the logical mode of production lacks the susceptibility to sensuous materiality present in Schiller's system, and the aesthetic experience altogether. The material appears sensuous through artistic production: the artist realizes his artistic vision through the process of destroying material—of giving it form. Through this process of creation, the art object appears sensual because it serves as a vestige of this artistic consciousness. The viewer seduced by the sensuousness of material because artistic production has rendered it as a presentation of the artists' consciousness: the material now embodies an inductive experience that validates the existential existence of the viewer.

It is the viewer's experience of recognizing the power of the gaze that reflects the violence of artistic production back to itself. The viewer is receptive to the art object's raw material. With the power of the art object's gaze, the viewer must destroy its aesthetic organization, for reflection causes the viewer to examine and dissect forms of detail, dismantling the visual. However, Adorno mentions that the Soviet artist, through his violence—in enforcing the pragmatic direction of reformism and in moments where Constructivist art merely reverts to industry of pedagogical directness—creates an impositional alterity that severs their art from its autonomous roots. A manufactured experience that links alterity with a dependency on ideology, "a work of art, which expresses intelligence more than anything else, can never strike us as noble, any more than it is beautiful, since it emphasizes a relation of dependence (which is inseparable from purposefulness) instead of concealing it."[28] ✦

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27 Foster, Hal. *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism.* 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004. Print. 184.
28 Schiller, Friedrich von, Walter Hinderer, and Daniel O Dahlstrom. 2005. *Essays.* New York: Continuum. 155.

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THE REPRESENTATIONAL FALLACY AND THE ONTOLOGY OF TIME

JAZLYN CARTAYA

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, Heather Dyke, notices that while most work in contemporary Metaphysics takes itself to be an enquiry into the fundamental nature and structure of reality, a flawed methodology has been used in pursuit of this aim. Philosophers have been examining language in order to try to uncover ontological truths about reality. As a result, their arguments move from facts about language to facts about reality. The debate concerning the ontological status of tense[1] in the philosophy of time brings this flawed methodology to light. In order to argue for their respective ontological positions, the A-theorist and the B-theorist[2] place an unusual amount of emphasis on our temporal language. In this paper, I will call this methodology into question. I will argue that it is fallacious to argue from claims about language to conclusions about reality; it is committing a fallacy called the *representational fallacy*.[3] I will use the argument from tense in the philosophy of

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1 Tense in language is when a speaker talks about or refers to a moment in time, relative to the moment in time from which he or she is speaking. Most languages include phrases that suggest past, present and future with respect to the moment of time from which the utterer is speaking. i.e. If I say "It is raining now," this is a (present) tensed phrase because "is" and "now" indicate the moment of time that I am uttering it (which is the present, it is raining now). Thus, these phrases depend on context. This will be addressed further in sections 4 and 5.

2 A-theory and B-theory are two different ways of thinking about time and how it works.

3 A term coined by Heather Dyke (2007). In *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, 1. London: Routledge.

time to betray this fallacy, and to argue that both A-theorists, who think that tensed language demonstrates the existence of tensed facts, and B-theorists, who think that they can demonstrate the existence of tenseless facts by translating tensed sentences, commit the representational fallacy. In each of their respective arguments, they move from facts about language to facts about reality. Next, I will argue that both A-theorists and B-theorists end up committing this fallacy due to a flawed assumption about the relationship between language and reality. I will argue that this assumption is false, and I will write about how the possibility of moving past the debate from language depends on rejecting this flawed assumption. Lastly, I will present two new responses the B-theorist can give to the original A-theory argument from tense, thus proposing a new way of doing Metaphysics.[4]

II. WHAT IS THE REPRESENTATIONAL FALLACY?

Before I demonstrate the representational fallacy in the ontology of time, I will first introduce it and talk about why it is fallacious to move from premises about language to conclusions about reality. "The term '*representational fallacy*' refers to a general philosophical tendency to place too much emphasis on the significance of language when doing ontology" (Dyke 2007:14). This fallacy does not refer to one invalid argument, or form of argument; instead, it indicates a fallacious strategy of reading Metaphysics off of language (Dyke 2007:7). Reading Metaphysics off of language makes *language*, rather than *reality*, the starting point in our investigations.

What does it mean to read Metaphysics off of language? Take the sentence "Asking two girls to the prom left Bill in a quandary." Let us suppose it is a true sentence. If a philosopher argues that reality includes the existence of entities called *quandaries*, based on the fact that a quandary occurs in this true sentence, then the philosopher is reading ontological facts off of language. In this case, he is reading a true sentence and deciding that, based on the fact that this sentence is true, there must exist entities called quandaries. But this is absurd. There is nothing about this sentence that tells us the sentence is *made true* because there are entities called quandaries that exist (or that we must posit entities such as quandaries). The truth of this sentence does not entail the existence of entities called quandaries. Thus, the philosopher who makes this move is reasoning fallaciously. In this case, the philosopher is committing the representational fallacy.

Dyke believes that philosophers who commit this fallacy are either implicitly or explicitly assuming that there is only one way in which our world can be based on our true sentences about it, and that examining these sentences will reveal the nature of reality to us. (Dyke 2007: 63) However, this is a mistake. A single language is compatible with *many opposing ontologies*, so it cannot be the case that a close

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4   This paper and its arguments are largely inspired by Heather Dyke.

examination of that language would reveal to us the true nature of reality. Let us consider, for example, a simple language that consists of just proper names and predicates, and suppose that some of the sentences in this language are true. One interpretation of such a language might be immanent realism, where proper names refer only to particulars and predicates refer only to the universals of immanent realism.[5] Another interpretation of such a language might be Platonism, where proper names refer only to objects in the world of appearances and predicates refer only to the Forms.[6] Additionally, trope theory, resemblance, nominalism, class nominalism, and any other variant of nominalism all can be plausible modes of interpreting such a language. (Dyke 2007: 64) Moreover, nothing about this language decides which of these interpretations is the *right* interpretation. All we can say, if backed with metaphysical and/or scientific arguments, is that one of these interpretations is right, and that we can use our simple language to help describe our true ontology.

To illustrate this point further, I will consider an example adapted from John Heil. If we take a billiard ball, there are many true ways of describing it. You may say that "the billiard ball is spherical," or that "the billiard ball is red." Many predicates hold true of it. But "to imagine that to every significant predicate there corresponds a property, [for instance,] is to let language call the shots ontologically."[7] For instance, to imagine that there must exist a property that corresponds to the significant predicate "is spherical," because it occurs in a true sentence, is to let language dictate ontology. It *could* be the case that there is a property corresponding to the predicate "is spherical," but *language cannot tell us this*. Language cannot tell us what makes the statement the billiard ball is spherical" true. And inferring that there must be a property "is spherical" or "is red" simply because we know that these properties are true of the billiard ball (that it is spherical and red) is committing the representational fallacy. The truth of the sentence does not entail the existence of these properties—this is reading ontology off of language. Instead, what makes these truths true could be because they "participate in the form of redness, belongs to a resemblance class of red things, has a red trope." But "knowing that [the sentence] is true, even knowing what its truth-condition is, does not tell us what it is about the world that makes it true." (Dyke 2007: 65) For this reason, Dyke suggests that instead of looking at sentences we take to be true and deducing metaphysical conclusions from them, we should to the world to explain how our true sentences become true.

I have just introduced the representational fallacy, explained how it is committed, and suggested a new form of metaphysical enquiry. I will now address immediate, and potential objections to this new methodology.

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5   Dyke suggests "universals are tied to particulars by the relation of inheritance, whereby a universal inheres in a particular" in this case. (Dyke 2007: 64)
6   Dyke suggests "The relation that ties objects to the Forms is that of participation" for this example. (Dyke 2007: 64)
7   John Heil. *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction*, 204. New York: Routledge. 2013.

III. OBJECTIONS TO THE NEW METHODOLOGY

A philosopher might object to the new methodology by claiming that we cannot say that our true sentences, such as "the billiard ball is spherical," tell us something about reality if we claim that facts about language can tell us nothing about reality. After all, "the billiard ball is spherical" is a linguistic claim (insofar as it is a linguistic entity; a sentence), and it is one we take to be true. The philosopher might add, "your recommendation is that we attend to reality itself, rather than to language, when doing Metaphysics. But how do we do this? We come up with theories that we express in sets of sentences that we take to be true." Based on this, the philosopher might conclude, with respect to these sentences, that we are either being inconsistent (and must deny these sentences can tell us anything about reality), or that we are committing the representational fallacy ourselves when attending to these sentences.[8]

This objection misunderstands the nature of the representational fallacy. Simply using language to say what the world is like is not committing the fallacy. We must, of course, use language to articulate our theories. That is not a problem. The problem appears when we use language to defend our ontological claims (i.e., when we claim that there must exist a property corresponding to "is spherical" because it is a significant predicate and because "the billiard ball is spherical" is a true sentence). As long as the reasons we use to support our claims are metaphysical and/or scientific, for instance, and do not have to do with language, the fallacy has not been committed. Thus, I do not commit the fallacy by merely stating that "the billiard ball is spherical" is true, as I am not using the truth of the sentence to argue for the existence of a property that corresponds with its significant predicate. "The representational fallacy occurs when claims about descriptions of reality are taken to generate a Metaphysics, not when claims about reality itself (which, of course, are couched in language) are taken to do so." (Dyke 2007: 5)

The philosopher may concede that it is fallacious to draw ontological conclusions from descriptions about reality[9], but he may insist that it cannot be fallacious to draw ontological facts from true descriptions of reality. The philosopher might add that the fact that ontological conclusions do follow from true descriptions is a consequence of the truth schema. For example, "the billiard ball is spherical" is true if and only if the billiard ball is spherical.[10]

This objection cannot mean that the truth schema itself entails *the billiard ball is*

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8   This objection and its response can be found in Dyke (2007). *In Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, 4.
9   Descriptions about reality are descriptions created using language, sentences or linguistic entities to illustrate reality (they may try to show or capture how reality is).
10   This objection and its response can be found in Dyke (2007). *In Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, 5.

spherical. Otherwise, "Phoenixes exist" is true if and only if phoenixes exist would entail the existence of phoenixes. The objection must instead mean that (1) the truth schema, (2) together with the claim that the sentence in question is true, (3) entails the ontological conclusion in question.[11]

> But then, what ontological conclusions are we to derive from the following instances of the truth schema, together with the claim that the sentence on the left-hand side is true? 'Eating people is wrong' is true if and only if eating people is wrong; 'there are prime numbers greater than a million' is true if and only if there are prime numbers greater than a million, and even 'The teacher's resignation left the students in a lurch' is true if and only if the teacher's resignation left the students in a lurch. Are we to take the truth of these sentences, together with these instances of the truth schema, to entail to existence of, respectively, moral properties, numbers and lurches? Surely not (Musgrave 1993: 266-7).[12]

Additionally, it is plausible that someone admit to the truth of these sentences without also admitting to the existence of moral properties, numbers and lurches, so it cannot be the case that semantics alone gives us Metaphysics. Again, knowing that a sentence is true does not tell you *what makes the sentence true*; what makes a sentence true we may call its *truth-maker*. [13]

When I talk about the argument from tense in philosophy of time, I will argue that it is possible for two or more non-synonymous sentences to be made true by the same truth-maker. Sentences such as "it is raining now" and "it is raining at 5:44pm," supposing now is 5:44pm, are both made true in virtue of the same truth-maker, even though they are non-synonymous.[14] And if it is possible for two or more non-synonymous sentences to have the same truth-maker (i.e., the same thing that makes them true), then it does not suffice to focus on a true sentence in order to find what makes it true. In order to find the thing that makes both non-synonymous sentences true, we must appeal to metaphysical and/or scientific considerations, not linguistic ones. The truth-maker that makes both "It is raining now" and "It is raining at 5:44pm" true is a fact about the world, not a fact about either of the two sentences. One implication of admitting that it is possible for two or more non-synonymous

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11 e.g. (1) "Phoenixes exist" is true if and only if phoenixes exist, (2) together with the sentence "Phoenixes exist" being true, (3) entails the ontological existence of phoenixes. (This example is not meant to suggest phoenixes exist, it is only meant to clarify the objection.)

12 Dyke (2007). In *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, 5.

13 Truth-makers are supposed to be the facts in the world that make certain sentences true. Truth-maker and fact are used interchangeably in this paper. I will not be providing an account of truth-makers in this paper, as it is a separate dispute. Mentioning truth-makers is meant to suggest an alternative approach to certain metaphysical questions that have been using the fallacious strategy of reading Metaphysics off of language as arguments or in response to arguments. (Dyke 2007: 81)

14 And I as explained in an introductory footnote above, "It is raining now" is a sentence with tense, or a tensed sentence, since it refers to the moment of time that it is uttered (the present). "It is raining at 5:44pm" is not a tensed sentence, since it does not take the moment of time that it is uttered (the present) into consideration. When I talk about different ways of thinking about time in section 5, I will argue that these two sentences are non-synonymous sentences.

sentences to have the same truth-maker is that it is not the case that there is exactly one, but, rather, many ways to truly describe the world.[15] Hence, "it is raining now" and "it is raining at 5:44pm" are both true ways to describe the world.

I will now talk about the argument from tense in the ontology of time and show how the representational fallacy has been committed in this metaphysical dispute.

IV. A-THEORY VERSUS B-THEORY

For the remainder of my paper, I would like to draw upon a case-study that shows the representational fallacy in practice. It is the argument from tense in the A-theory versus B-theory debate in the ontology of time. First, I will define the A-series and B-series, and give key terms associated with them. Then, I will write about the argument from tense.

John McTaggart distinguished two ways of thinking about time.[16] One way is the *A-series*, which is the series that takes our common-sense distinction between past, present and future to be true, and says that there is a real ontological distinction between them. The other way is the *B-series*, which is the series that accepts that all time is real, and posits that there is no ontological distinction between the past, present and future. B-theorists believe the fact that we draw a distinction between past, present and future in ordinary life is reflective of our perspective on temporal reality.[17] Time is seen as dynamic for the A-series, since what was future is now present, what was present is now past, and not for the B-series, since time does not flow in the way just described. Along with their respective ontological views of time, key terms are associated with each of them. The A-series is typically associated with the terms *pastness*, *presentness*, and *futureness*. Phrases such as, "today", "yesterday", "five weeks ago" and "three hundred years from now" are part of the A-series conception of time and are called *tensed phrases*. The B-series is associated with the terms *simultaneous with*, *earlier than* and *later than*. That is, event 1 is simultaneous with event 2 in time, for instance, or event 1 is earlier than event 2. Phrases such as, "two months after September 11th, 2001" or "on April 5th, 1688" are consistent with the B-theory of time, and are called *tenseless phrases*.[18]

In the debate from tense, the A-theorist takes phrases with tense such as "Tomorrow I will get my hair cut" or "Today was a good day" to represent facts about reality. The A-theorist believes that the fact that we say things like *today* and *tomorrow*, which correspond with our true sentences, means that there must exist some ontological

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15 This claim does not need to commit a philosopher to antirealism, Dyke (2007). In *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, 89-90. For the purposes of my paper, it is not important that I show why.

16 McTaggart. The Nature of Existence, Vol. II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1927.

17 B-theorists are also generally eternalists, or accept the block view of time. Imagine time as a big block, and if you move along the block you will see different moments of time. In this way, time is viewed similarly to space.

18 Distinction between A-series and B-series is also found in Dyke (2007). In *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, 37-8.

properties such as *today* and *tomorrow*. Hence, the philosopher who accepts A-theory would argue that since the B-series cannot account for these phrases in their ontology of time, it must be false. The old B-theorist response to this argument would be to say that it is incorrect, because they could provide the A-theorist with synonymous paraphrases that capture those A-series phrases. Without moving any further, it is obvious this "debate takes as its starting point our ordinary temporal language and asks what this tells us about the nature of time itself." (Dyke 2007: 9) The debate moves from facts about language to facts about reality. In the next part of my essay, I will argue that both A-theorists, who believe tensed language demonstrates the existence of tensed facts, and B-theorists, who think they can demonstrate the existence of tenseless facts by translating tensed sentences, commit the representational fallacy. They both assume that we can read ontological conclusions off of our temporal language.

V. THE REPRESENTATIONAL FALLACY IN THE ONTOLOGY OF TIME

Much of early A-theory work argued that tense could not be eliminated from natural language without loss of meaning. From this, the A-theorists concluded that temporal reality itself must be tensed. This argument moves from premises about temporal language to conclusions about reality. They argued that tense was not eliminable because no tenseless sentence conveys as much information as a tensed sentence. In his "Tensed Statements," Richard Gale gives an example to highlight this. Suppose Joe's job is to inform his military company when the enemy are within 100 yards of their post. If Joe yells (the tensed sentence) "The enemy are now within 100 yards," his company will be warned of the enemy's position and can take appropriate action. If Joe, instead, yells (the tenseless sentence) "The enemy are within 100 yards at 2:15pm," his company will not be warned unless they know that now is 2:15pm.[19] For this reason, A-theorists have concluded that "since tensed expressions convey more information than tenseless sentences, there must exist something in reality that corresponds to this additional information conveyed." (Dyke 2007: 40) There must exist properties in reality that correspond to the tense in our sentences, they say. This example successfully shows that we cannot translate tensed sentences into tenseless sentences without loss of meaning. However, the example does not warrant drawing the conclusion that reality must thereby be tensed, as that commits the representational fallacy. After all, someone could accept that tensed sentences cannot be translated without loss of meaning, while also believing that reality is actually tenseless. William Lane Craig (2000) is an A-theorist who has recently made this fallacious move. His argument is as follows:

P1: Tensed sentences ostensibly ascribe ontological tenses.

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19 Gale: 1962; Dyke 2007: 40

P2: Unless tensed sentences are shown to be reducible without loss of meaning to tenseless sentences or ontological tense is shown to be superfluous to human thought and action, the ostensible ascription of ontological tenses by tensed sentences ought to be accepted as veridical.

P3: Tensed sentences have not been shown to be reducible without loss of meaning to tenseless sentences.

P4: Ontological tense has not been shown to be superfluous to human thought and action.

C: Therefore, the ostensible ascription of ontological tenses by tensed sentences ought to be accepted as veridical.

(Craig 2000: 22; numbering of premises changed)[20]

He moves from the claim that tensed sentences are not reducible, without loss of meaning, to tenseless sentences to the conclusion that we ought to accept that the tense given by our tensed sentences is true of reality. Craig believes that in order to refute his argument, the B-theorist must either refute P3 and show that tensed sentences can be translated into tenseless sentences, or refute P4, and show that tensed facts are not required for human thought or action. This, nonetheless, is a false dilemma. The B-theorist could maintain both P3 and P4 and, instead, reject P2. He thinks P2 "has offered the B-theorist her only escape route from the conclusion of his argument." (Dyke 2007: 43) Yet, this is not true. The B-theorist could agree with both P3 and P4—that tense cannot be eliminated and is needed for human thought and action—and believe that these true tensed sentences are *made true* by tenseless facts. I have just shown how the A-theorist moves from premises about temporal language to facts about reality in the debate from tense and suggested an alternative response for the B-theorist. I will now discuss an old B-theorist response to this debate.

B-theorists believe that there are no tensed facts and no tensed properties—the fact that we say things like *today* and *tomorrow*, for instance, is reflective of how we perceive time, not of time itself. The old B-theorists tried to prove this by rejecting P3, or by showing that tensed expressions can be eliminated from natural language. (Russell 1915; Goodman 1951: 287-301; Quine 1960: 36; Smart 1963: 132-42).[21] B-theorists tried to appeal to parsimony or Ockham's razor to support their claim that tenseless sentences displayed the true nature of reality, since tenseless sentences on their own imply the existence of fewer entities than tensed sentences (and are thus preferred) (Dyke 2007: 43). B-theorists concluded from this that tensed sentences are eliminable, since there is no feature of reality they actually describe, and tried to translate tensed sentences into tenseless sentences. These B-theorists believed

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20 (Dyke 2007: 42)
21 (Dyke 2007: 43)

that their translation project was successful, having demonstrated the existence of only tenseless facts, and that there was no ontological distinction between past, present and future. Their translation project was unsuccessful, however. As we saw in Gale's example above, it is not possible to translate tensed sentences into tenseless sentences without some loss in meaning (see Joe's informing the military company example). Tense in language is a context-dependent phenomenon, since whether or not a sentence is true depends on the time it was uttered.[22] Not only was his translation project unsuccessful, but the B-theorist who argues that translating tensed sentences into tenseless sentences shows there are only tenseless facts, commits the representational fallacy. Their argument is no different from the A-theorist's, as both move from facts about language to facts about reality.

Why do both the A-theorist and B-theorist make this move? Dyke suggests that there must be a hidden assumption that they both accept, which is informing the move from making purely linguistic claims to concluding ontological ones. It is my, and Heather Dyke's, view that these philosophers are assenting to the assumption that there must be "a privileged, true description of reality, which can inform us about the ontological nature of reality." (Dyke 2007: 44) This makes up part of a thesis called the Strong Linguistic Thesis (SLT). In the next section of my paper, I will show why the A-theorist and the B-theorist must assume SLT for their debate to make sense, and then, I will subsequently refute SLT.

VI. STRONG LINGUISTIC THESIS (SLT)

The Strong Linguistic Thesis (SLT) says that "there is one privileged, true description of reality, the sentences of which (a) stand in a one-to-one correspondence with facts in the world, and (b) are structurally isomorphic to the facts with which they correspond." (Dyke 2007: 46) There are a couple of ways of understanding "one true description of reality." I believe the A-theorists and B-theorists are understanding it to mean that "there is one true description of reality which contains a subset of all the truths that there are. This subset of truths is ontologically perspicuous, in that each truth in it reveals the nature of the fact that it describes, and that makes it true." (Dyke 2007: 45-46) In other words, they must accept (1) with each true proposition there corresponds a single truth, and (2) each true proposition tells of the nature of its truth. For this reason, there can only be one fact per linguistic utterance, one truth-maker per sentence. If there were more than one, a choice would have to be made between them. SLT thus involves a commitment to the claim that there is a one-to-one correspondence between truths in the one true description of reality and truths in the facts about the world. (Dyke 2007: 46)

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22 "This conclusion was originally arrived at by philosophers working in the philosophy of language, on the linguistic phenomena of indexicals and demonstratives. These philosophers established that no sentence containing a context-dependent expression, like an indexical or a demonstrative, could be translated by any sentence that was wholly context dependent (Castañeda 1967; Perry 1979)." (Dyke 2007, 44)

I will now argue that philosophers must either knowingly or unknowingly accept SLT in order for certain metaphysical debates, like the debate from tense in the ontology of time, to make sense. In order for A-theorists to reach the conclusion that reality must be tensed because language is tensed, they must think (1) there is a fact corresponding to every truth in that description, and, (2) that the truths are structurally isomorphic to facts. (Dyke 2007: 46) Without (1) A-theorists could not infer there are any facts in reality that correspond to their true tensed phrases, and without (2) A-theorists could not infer that these corresponding facts must be tensed.[23] The same applies for old B-theorists of time. Without (1) B-theorists could not infer there are any facts in reality that correspond to their true tenseless phrases, and without (2) B-theorists could not infer that those corresponding facts must be tenseless.[24]

Now, it may be that if presented with SLT, most philosophers would reject it. Regardless of whether or not philosophers think it is false on its own merits, it needs to be assumed in order for certain arguments, such as the argument from tense, to make sense. "Once we make it explicit, and then reject it we can see that those disputes are by and large, fruitless." (Dyke 2007: 47) I will now argue against SLT.

The component of SLT that I am arguing against is that there is one privileged, true description of reality, "where that description is taken to be a subset of all the truths that there are, and where the sense in which it is 'privileged' is that it contains ineliminable kinds of term." (Dyke 2007: 72) SLT is false because the fact that true sentences contain property terms does not entail the existence of these properties. (Dyke 2007: 72) As I argued in section 2, nothing about our language tells us what makes our sentences true, and the truth of certain sentences does not entail the existence of certain properties. Since I am denying that there is one privileged, true description of reality, in this sense, I am also denying that there is a one-to-one correspondence between truths and facts. The ratio of truths to facts is many-to-one, as I showed in section 3. There are many ways to truly state a fact, since two or more non-synonymous sentences can be made true by the same truth-maker. Both "it is raining now" and "it is raining at 5:44pm" are made true by the same truth-maker, the same fact in the world, and, thus, they are both accurate ways of describing that fact. The fact that there is a many-to-one ratio allows for there to be better or worse descriptions of any fact. For instance, "it is raining at 5:44pm" would be a better way to most accurately describe its truth-maker if you are a B-theorist, and "it is raining now" would be a worse way. But what it does not allow is the inference that since a sentence cannot be paraphrased, there must exist a fact that can only be described by that truth. Thus, I reject that there need be any isomorphism between truths

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23 "Without (1), the A-theorist would not be able to infer that there are any ontological counterparts to her tensed truths. Without (2) she would not be able to infer that those ontological counterparts are tensed." (Dyke 2007: 46)

24 "Without (1), she would not be able to infer that there are any ontological counterparts to her tenseless truths. Without (2) she would not be able to infer that those ontological counterparts are tenseless." (Dyke 2007: 46)

and the facts that they describe. There *may* be isomorphism between truths and the facts that they describe, but we cannot rely on this possibility in all cases. Hence, we cannot draw conclusions about the ontological nature and structure of our reality from claims about the nature and structure of reality of our true sentences. (Dyke 2007: 72-3)

I have just shown how the A-theorist and old B-theorist must accept SLT in order for the argument from tense to make sense, delineated SLT, and argued against it. I will now give a couple of new B-theorist responses to the argument from tense—one is the truth-condition variant of the new B-theory, and the other is the truth-maker variant of the new B-theory. Then, I will argue against the truth-condition variant, since it also places too much emphasis on language, and support the truth-maker variant of the B-theory of time on the grounds that it is in line with our new metaphysical enquiry.

VII. TRUTH-CONDITION VS. TRUTH-MAKER VARIANT

New B-theorist responses emerged because of the failure of the old translation project. These B-theorists realized that they needed new ways to respond to the A-theorist's argument from tense. The first way in which the new B-theorist responded was by the truth-condition variant of the B-theory. The second was by the truth-maker variant of the B-theory. I will first show how the truth-condition variant is also prone to committing the representational fallacy, and then I will advocate for the truth-maker variant of the B-theory of time as an alternative approach.

Proponents of the new B-theory of time agree that tense cannot be eliminated from language, but disagree whether this means that reality is itself tensed. "Proponents of the truth-condition variant argue that, while it is not possible to translate any tensed sentence into a tenseless sentence, it is possible to state the truth-condition of any tensed sentence in entirely tenseless terms." (Dyke 2007: 47-48) In other words, they believe that it is possible to state the conditions in which the world must be for the sentence to be true. For instance, if we take the utterance "the enemy is now approaching," then the truth-condition B-theorist would say "the enemy is now approaching" is true, if and only if the enemy's approach is tenselessly simultaneous with the sentence "the enemy is now approaching." That is to say, the condition in the world it takes for "the enemy is now approaching" to be true, is that the enemy approaches at 2:15pm, when "now" is uttered it is 2:15pm. There are a couple of ways to construct this approach. One is to say that they argue that since tensed sentences can be given tenseless truth-conditionals, reality is tenseless. Another way is to say that the new B-theorist has separate arguments for the B-theory account of time, and that he offers the tenseless conditional alternative, not as an argument for B-theory, but as a way to show how the semantics of tensed sentences are compatible

with B-theory. (Dyke 2007: 48) The latter approach is fine; the former is fallacious.

Some philosophers believe that if we know the conditions it takes for a sentence to be true, then we know what the world must be like in order to make that sentence true: "so, if a sentence *is* true, we know what the world, as described by that sentence, *is* like." (Dyke 2007: 73) However, it is a mistake to think that knowing the conditions it takes for a sentence to be true can generate ontology, since that is just another way of trying to read ontological facts off of language. Arguing from the claim that tensed sentences can be given tenseless truth-conditionals, to the claim that reality is tenseless, commits the representational fallacy. "This suggests that we are able to determine whether a sentence is true or false just by examining its truth-condition, but this is not true. Examining its truth-condition will tell us *what must be the case* for the sentence to be true." (Dyke 2007: 50) Stating the truth-condition of a sentence is specifying what the world must be like in order for that sentence to be true—it does not tell us whether the truth-condition is actually upheld by reality. In order to know this, we must appeal to metaphysical and/or scientific considerations. If truth-condition B-theorists argue from the claim that we give our tensed sentences tenseless truth-conditionals, to the conclusion that reality is thereby tenseless, then they seem to use the same fallacious strategy that the A-theorist and the old B-theorist of time used. This strategy accepts SLT, which I argued is false in section 6. I have just argued against using tenseless truth-conditionals as an argument for the B-theory of time. I will now introduce the truth-maker variant of the B-theory of time.

The significance of the truth-condition project was to state what the world must be like in order to make our sentences true. However, "by focusing on this notion of *how the world makes a true sentence true* instead of on how to state the truth-condition of a tensed sentence, one arrives at the truth-maker variant of the new B-theory." (Dyke 2007: 54) What distinguishes the truth-condition variant from the truth-maker variant of the B-theory is that the truth-maker variant is a purely ontological thesis. The truth-maker variant of the B-theory makes the world, instead of language, our starting point. It takes ontological facts about time, and uses them to explain the semantics of our temporal language. The truth-maker variant of the B-theory also holds that tense cannot be eliminated from language, but denies this means temporal reality is tensed. Thus, it rejects SLT—that sentences of that description stand in a one-to-one correspondence with the facts in the world, or that those sentences need be structurally isomorphic to the facts that make them true. (Dyke 2007: 55) Though they believe that tensed sentences cannot be eliminated or reduced to tenseless sentences, this belief does not entail that there exist some extra-linguistic[25] tensed fact that corresponds to the tensed sentence. What makes these tensed sentences true are truth-makers—scientific and/or metaphysical reasons, and not linguistic ones.

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25 Extra-linguistic simply means beyond linguistics, or something that is not language.

What should be taken away from all of this? Philosophers should stop looking at our language in order to discover facts about reality. As I have shown in my paper, our language cannot reveal ontological facts to us, for there is nothing about a sentence that tells us *what makes it true* (see section 2). There are also additional reasons to believe that sentences do not reveal their truth-makers to us. Competent language speakers may understand the sentence "the ball is red," and see that it is a true sentence under the right conditions, without understanding *what makes this sentence true*. What makes the sentence true could be that the ball exemplifies universal redness, or has a red trope. But nothing about this sentence could tell a competent language-speaker that.[26] In order to know this fact—*how the sentence comes to be true*—we need to attend to metaphysical and/or scientific considerations. For this reason, we should attend to reality itself while doing Metaphysics, the parts of reality that are the truth-makers of our sentences, and, from there, see how our sentences get to be true.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I criticized a fallacious methodology by introducing the representational fallacy. I explained that this fallacy is committed when philosophers place too much emphasis on language while doing Metaphysics. I gave immediate objections to the new methodology, and then displayed, and betrayed, the fallacy in the argument from tense in the philosophy of time. I argued that philosophers must either implicitly or explicitly accept the Strong Linguistic Thesis (SLT) in order to warrant the move from language to reality and for certain metaphysical disputes to make sense. My paper argued that A-theorists and B-theorists assent to SLT in their argument from tense, and then proceeded to refute SLT. I concluded by providing some new B-theorist responses to the argument and suggested a new way of doing Metaphysics. "A fallacy is just an invalid argument and recognizing that an argument is invalid does not permit the inference that its conclusion is false." (Dyke 2007: 60) This paper is not meant to disprove the A-theory of time and does not entitle us to conclude the A-theory of time is false. It is meant to show that it is erroneous to argue from language to reality. Hence, A-theorists are not entitled to use this argument when arguing for their position. If the A-theory is correct, then they must use other arguments to justify their ontological stance on time. This paper also did not argue that the B-theory changed their stance on time. Both the old and new B-theorists maintain the same metaphysical views, this has not changed. What has changed is their methodology. The old B-theorists thought when presented with the argument from tense their job was to offer translations to show how facts about the world were actually tenseless. But as I have argued for in my paper, this move commits the representational fallacy. The new B-theorists agreed with the A-theorists that tense was not eliminable from natural language; however, they rejected the translation project and maintained reality was still tenseless. Two responses emerged from this, the truth-condition and

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26 Example inspired by Dyke (2007). *In Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, 73-4.

truth-maker variant of the B-theory of time. Ultimately, the truth-condition variant, if used as an argument for the B-theory of time, also committed the representational fallacy. For this reason, I advocated for the truth-maker variant of the B-theory of time in order to avoid reasoning fallaciously. The truth-maker variant of the B-theory relies on metaphysical and/or scientific considerations in order to reach metaphysical conclusions. It starts from reality and uses it to explain language. At the end of the day, I believe, we should reject the view that there is a certain privileged language or description of reality that we can read off of, which will tell us the way the world is. ✦

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REVOLUTION, REVELATION, RESPONSIBILITY:

Emancipatory Futures in Benjamin and Habermas

MAX FINEMAN

In order to clarify the functions of violence within the legal order of the modern state, Walter Benjamin does not claim that the state's application of violence is unjust. Rather, he interprets and critiques the very existence of a criterion of just violence whereby only some violence is legitimized. Benjamin concludes that this criterion is in place to justify only those uses of violence that serve as a means to the establishment and preservation of the current rule of law. Based on a critique of the instrumental use of legal violence, Benjamin argues that this violence inevitably will serve the interests of state power, and he concludes that the only remedy to this situation is the total annihilation of the legal order. In the final pages of the essay, the "Critique of Violence," Benjamin thus sets out to find a new conception of violence, which is opposed to the legal violence he critiques (296-300). This violence, which he bases on the divine violence of the Judeo-Christian God, is meant to found a new emancipatory order. In his text, Benjamin implicitly alludes to a robust vision for a revolutionary future in which individuals and communities operate according to self-regulated normative principles. Such a view towards an emancipated society is founded initially on a revolutionary destruction of the present state-governed order, and on the generation of communities oriented towards responsible collective action based on shared commitments to autonomy.

Benjamin conceives of divine violence as, first and foremost, an absolute destruction of the legal situation. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a brief review of law as Benjamin understands it, and of the role that violence plays within any legal framework. For Benjamin, the primary characteristic of legal violence is its use, as a means, within the legal system. The law is based on a promise that establishing a stable legal framework and solidifying the rule of law over society will produce a peaceful, nonviolent social order. All legal justifications of violence presuppose that the rule of law will establish, in the end, a community of citizens who are able to relate to each other without recourse to violence. They are supposedly able to do so specifically because the legal order carves out a social sphere in which such nonviolent interaction is possible.[1] Such an order is instrumental in the law's establishment of a nonviolent sphere, which it accordingly views as just and worth pursuing, by whatever means necessary. Violence is such a means. Legal discourse always makes recourse to these two poles—means and ends—in order to justify the application of violence in specific cases. Either the justness of the end towards which violence is applied as a means is used as a justification for the means, or the justness of the means itself is used as a justification for the end which that means brings about.[2] In either case, the law provides justification for the application of violence as a means to the ends that the law—or the state—has set for itself. Benjamin's first critical move is to point out that such justification (for the application of violence as a means) must be made according to some criterion that would distinguish between just and unjust forms of instrumental violence. Instead of evaluating the criterion itself, which would simply critique the application of specific instances of violence, Benjamin wants to critique the very existence of a criterion of instrumental violence itself.[3] Such a criterion, Benjamin argues, will always provide a justification for violence as a means to so-called 'legal' ends (namely, those ends that the law, or the state, acknowledges as legitimate).

The existence of a criterion by which to justify certain forms of violence is a problem for Benjamin because of his belief that any legal system (or at least any contemporary European legal system)[4] will justify violence, which serves the ends that are established and maintained in the legal order. Therefore, within any legal system that justifies violence as a means whatsoever, the law will suppress the 'natural', extralegal ends of individuals insofar as these natural ends might be pursued by violence.[5] In other words, the law—or the legal state—will always seek to maintain a monopoly on violence. The state seeks to maintain complete control over the application of violence—an effort partially effected by the mechanisms of legal justification discussed above—because it views any kind of extralegal violence as a direct threat

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1   Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 278.
2   Ibid., 278.
3   Ibid., 279.
4   Cf. Ibid., 280.
5   Ibid.

to the existence of the law itself.[6] This threat that extralegal violence poses to the legal order prefigures the place that Benjamin reserves for his conception of utterly destructive divine violence.

Benjamin seeks to provide a critique of violence that does away with the means-ends framework of the legal order all together and thereby rejects the usage of violence as a means under any circumstance. The philosopher argues that a critique of all legal violence (i.e., all violence which is given approval and facilitated by the law) is necessary in order to address adequately the application of violence within any particular sphere.[7] Benjamin therefore understands that all legal violence is either law-making or law-preserving.[8] In other words, all violence, which is enacted from within the means-ends legal scheme, and which is employed therein as a means, is always used either to establish or to maintain some legal situation. Benjamin's thesis here implies that even those forms of violence that are aimed at challenging the law's power and at threatening the enforcement of the law cannot succeed as long as they still employ violence as a means.[9] However just its ends may be, a revolutionary class that separates the violent means it uses from the ends it pursues will necessarily reestablish the same structure of legal ends that it seeks to dismantle. The instrumental use of even insurgent violence will necessarily fall back on this structure of legality because whenever a rebellious means is used to achieve some political end, it necessarily seeks to achieve that end *within* the realm of legal ends. In other words, insurgent use of violence as a means aims to establish its ends within the fundamentally problematic system of the law. Such violence is thus revealed by Benjamin as law-making violence, and, as such, participates in the same legal discourse that justifies violence as a means.[10]

Benjamin substitutes the means-ends scheme that characterizes the social order under the rule of law with his conception of a violence that will liberate society altogether from the oppressive condition of a law-governed society. Because the fundamental feature of the violence employed by the legal order was as a means to some end external to the act itself, Benjamin founds his liberatory violence on a conception of non-instrumental action that binds the goals of the action, and the action itself, more tightly together.[11] This form of action, which is not mediated by the external relations between means and ends, is the direct expression of will.[12] Benjamin wants to suggest a type of violence wherein the violent act emerges organically from the will, and which manifests the will itself. In the legal schema, instrumental violence was viewed as external to the ends that it sought to achieve in the sense that it could

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6   Ibid., 281.
7   Ibid., 284.
8   Ibid., 283-4.
9   Ibid., 285; cf. 282.
10 Cf. Ibid., 287.
11 Ibid., 293.
12 Ibid., 294.

be distinguished clearly from those ends. When a union strikes, for instance, it is clear that its goal for better working conditions is distinct from the strike that it uses as a *way* of achieving its goal.[13] In this schema, means and ends only relate to each other in their separateness—one is used to bring the other about. The immediately willed action to which Benjamin now looks is different from the mediated action of a means because it cannot be separated from the will of which it is an expression. Immediate violence is the realization of a will that seeks, for some reason, to exert its force upon the world. It is not meant to bring something *else* about, but to manifest a will which has no agenda but to see itself enacted in the world through violence.

Before Benjamin explains how revolutionary violence transforms into divine violence, the philosopher offers an account of the mythical violence of the Greek gods. Mythical violence is indeed an immediate action in the sense described above: it does not seek some end further than the simple employment of violence itself.[14] When the gods wreak havoc on the human world, provoking warfare, killing children, and spilling blood in the most extravagant acts of violence, their actions are not a direct a punishment *of* anyone, but rather are direct assertions of their existence in the face of a challenge to their authority or power. Mythical violence cannot be anticipated in the same way that many forms of legal violence, and especially punitive law-preserving violence, can be expected, as part of a highly structured, calculative social system that regulates actions with predetermined responses. It is thus in a more immediate proximity to the gods' existence that instrumental violence is first used purely as a means to the establishment and stability of the gods' authority.

Despite the immediacy of this form of violence, mythical violence has a lawmaking character, which, is crucial to the originary establishment of the rule of law. Although the gods' enactment of violence serves no further purpose other than to direct the expression of their existence, this violence does establish a law-constituting control over the world.[15] Indeed, this violence is not a response to the violation of an already existing law. Rather, it is a response to a direct threat to the gods. Insofar as this response reinforces the authority of the gods over the world, it constitutes some kind of law that restricts action for those who experience the violence. This violence does not annihilate its victim completely. It stops short of complete destruction; instead it produces guilt in its victim for the challenge that he made to the established mythical order. It is not that the gods necessarily sought to manipulate their victim, but that the enactment of guilt expands their control and authority.

Benjamin finds that mythical violence is paradigmatically opposed to the kind of violence which he wants to found revolutionary action. Mythical violence, rather than contradicting the law and the means-ends schema it establishes, mythical violence is

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13 Ibid., 291.
14 Ibid., 294.
15 Ibid., 295.

foundational to the rule of law.[16] Benjamin's several nods to mythical violence suggest that guilt, as a regulatory force on individuals' actions, is an originary source for the structure of law itself. One should identify mythical violence as a non-instrumental precursor to the violence of the legal order. Moreover, this parallel between mythical and legal violence also reveals that even when the legal order of the state employs violence as a means to the establishment of the rule of law, it does not actually exclude violence from its sphere of legal ends.[17] Mythical violence's connection to lawmaking reveals that violence is related to legal ends not only as a means, but also as an immediate property of the law that does not do away with violence in its realm of ends. In some cases, the law has violence simply as its own end, as an expression of the existence of the law itself in a way that resembles mythical violence. When the law enacts violence simply for its own sake, it manifests violence as an immediate expression of its power.

Benjamin thus ultimately renders his conception of divine violence as both a destruction of mythical violence and as a parallel revolutionary destruction of the law.[18] Divine violence must be an act that, in addition to having the form of an immediate expression of will, brings utter annihilation to the normative world through the mythical-legal violence. Divine violence, employing no psychological mechanism, is interested only in complete annihilation of whatever it finds wrong in the world and is destructive without limit19. This pure immediate violence sets up no law and, similarly, introduces no guilt into its victim for the simple reason that it does not spare its victim in any respect. Instead of manifesting divine *existence* through violence, the divine *will* is expressed in violence. It seeks to annihilate transgression not because transgression threatens divine power, but, rather, because the divine despises transgression.[19]

Benjamin contrasts divine violence's purely "expiatory" character with the "guilt and retribution" associated with mythical violence. Mythical violence engenders guilt in its victims by acting in response, as it were, to the transgression. In its enactment of violence, it holds the arrogance of the transgressive act up to the transgressor and clearly communicates that it is *because* of the transgressor's actions against the mythical gods that this violence is inflicted upon them. This utilization of the transgression instills in the transgressor a guilty attitude towards his own act, and, in some sense, is itself perpetuated in this guilt. Mythical violence thus utilizes the transgressive act as a method of control that sets boundaries for future action in the form of law. On the other hand, divine violence seeks to do nothing but annihilate this transgressiveness altogether.[20] It despises the wrong that is committed, and it therefore acts directly

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 296; 300.
19 I intend here transgression not in the legal sense of the breaking of a law but rather in the sense it has in the Jewish tradition, namely the failure to act in accordance with the commandment.
20 Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 297.

to purge its sphere of all transgression. It does not employ mechanisms of guilt, punishment, and control because its violence is not meant to regulate future action or solidify its control over the world. Divine violence has nothing to gain in manifesting itself; it purges the world of transgressive wrong precisely so that the world will not be stained by the abhorrence of this transgression. This attitude implies that, in purging the transgressor from the world, divine violence rids the world of wrong not for its own sake, but, rather, for the sake of a better world. Divine violence, then, is the manifestation of a will for a world free of wrong (and control)—a world it realizes by utterly annihilating and atoning for the remnants of wrong.

If divine violence atones for wrong done in the world through boundless destruction, in what sense does Benjamin intend for divine violence to be destructive of law? Is the legal order simply a state of injustice that must be destroyed in order for a more just social life to be established? Perhaps the most tempting interpretation would read divine violence as offering a solution to the problematic social situation created by the rule of law. After all, Benjamin has given a robust critique of the rule of law by exposing the way in which law deploys violence in order to bolster its power and stability. This operation of violence and the consequent harm it causes to its society might be reason enough to label law as an injustice deserving of divine violence. If so, then divine violence would "expiate" simply by directly attacking the unjust, violent operation of law. Such a condemnation of law presumes a far more robust ethical framework than Benjamin is willing to grant. Benjamin needs to conduct a critique of the criterion by which violence is justified and enacted because this criterion lacks general insight into the nature of law. The criterion of justified violence presupposes the means-end structure of law and only then proceeds to derive theories of what constitutes justice and injustice. It makes no sense, therefore, to speak of the injustice *of* the law because the law is a precondition for the establishment of a framework that determines justice. In other words, divine violence enacts justice or destroys injustice. Its destruction does not have a 'just' character because it does not presume any general criterion for justice or for the just application of violence.

Rather than viewing the law as an injustice, I suggest that Benjamin views divine violence as "law-destroying" insofar as it frees the living from the selfish controlling mechanisms of the legal order, which it does in two ways. Divine violence takes an immediate form that rejects the law's instrumental use of violence. It does not make use of violence in order to incur guilt or to exact punishment, and it, therefore, does not threaten, or make demands upon, the living. As will be shown later, even within the scheme of divine violence and the world that it establishes, individuals have responsibility (though that responsibility is not accountable for divine violence itself). Thus, divine violence destroys law, firstly, in the sense that it replaces the methods of control used by legal violence with direct annihilation wherever it finds something it regards as a transgression. Secondly, through this annihilation, divine

violence atones for the transgressor who has been made guilty by the punitive violence of the law. Legal violence establishes guilt in its victim, which generates the subjective means for the law to assert itself over its subjects. Divine violence gets rid of such guilt because it completely destroys. It leaves no trace of the transgression at all, and guilt is thus atoned for in the process. This utter annihilation is non-instrumental. It has no further goals, and guilt and punishment have no place in a will that does not seek control. Since law made use of guilt as the basis for its control, divine violence undermines the law in this second way by expiating the guilt on which the law relies.

One of Benjamin's larger goals in the essay is to provide, through an exposition of his understanding of divine violence, an argument for the possibility of revolutionary violence and a suggestion for what proper revolutionary violence might look like.[21] As discussed earlier, any violence that is still instrumentalized as a means cannot be truly revolutionary because it leaves the legal order of instrumental action intact. No matter how just the goals of a revolutionary class might be, the same oppressive and coercive legal power will be reproduced as long as the violence it employs is only a means to those goals. Instead, true revolutionary violence must seek to destroy the rule of law itself and the order through which the rule of law is perpetuated, (i.e., the state). Revolutionary violence, in taking after, or even *realizing* divine violence, must not set itself the goal of establishing a new order. Such a new order cannot be known to the agents of the revolution. Revolutionary violence is the expression of a will to rid the world of legal state power and of the coercive violence it deploys. This will cannot conceive of a future that will lie beyond the revolution, for such a conception would necessarily instrumentalize the violence it enacts. Instead, like divine violence, proper revolutionary violence will seek to annihilate what it despises, namely the legal state apparatus. Benjamin thus takes a firm position against utopian revolution, because it sets ends beyond the revolution itself. For Benjamin, the revolutionary future lies beyond the horizon of all political imagination, and can only emerge immanently out of the ruins of an already dismantled law-governed state.

Benjamin's view on violence certainly raises concerns. If revolutionary violence is to have no mechanism to justify its use, and no systematic way of regulating, or limiting, its application, then can there be any limit to this violence? Providing an ideal concept of immediate violence seems to be dangerous if the violence is enacted by a will that takes up the wrong kinds of ends. When violence no longer is a means for the establishment of a peaceful society, but, rather, is an expression of the will to destroy, the effect of that violence becomes totally contingent on the will, which enacts this violence. If the revolution cannot conceive of higher social goals beyond the revolution itself, how can there be any guarantee of emancipation? Furthermore, Benjamin recognizes that we do not have historical examples of this kind of violence on which to base our inquiry. Because divine violence leaves no trace of guilt in the

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21 Ibid., 300.

victim it annihilates, its "expiatory power [...] is not visible to men".[22] For Benjamin's vision of revolutionary violence to be at all feasible, then, we need to specify some sphere outside of the cycle of legal forces that will be able to provide some guiding norms for revolutionary action.

Benjamin provides a brief suggestion of such a sphere in his notion of commandment. The commandment, for Benjamin, is the articulation of a principle for guiding action delivered through the medium of language.[23] It is an imperative for action directed at individuals, which they are meant to adopt as their own when they encounter other people as agentive persons. The commandment is thus always known *before* the opportunity for action. Unlike legal norms, which regulate people's actions whether or not these persons are individually aware of specific laws,[24] the commandment operates through its communication *to* persons who must consider their own action. Individuals are bound in obligation only at the moment in which the commandment has been communicated to them. As an internalized guiding principle for individuals and communities, the commandment does not operate through a punitive threat, as the law does. The commandment always precedes the deed, and it remains for the persons who have received the commandment to consider the conditions and exceptions of its application. The commandment cannot be used as a criterion for the judgement of an action after it has been executed and it certainly cannot stand as an *ex post facto* judgement. This notion of commandment accords with Benjamin's rejection of the instrumental logic of legal discourse. In legal frameworks, adherence to legal norms is guaranteed by the threat of punishment. Legal violence, and law-preserving violence in particular, is used as a means to ensure the rule of the legal order by externally subjecting individuals to the law through punishment. Mechanisms of punishment and the fear of punishment ensure adherence to the law through the instrumentalization of violence. The commandment does not ensure adherence to the law, because it is not at all concerned with punishment or judgement, and, therefore, does not instrumentalize violence in pursuit of obedience. Rather, individuals act in accordance with the commandment based on a shared affirmation that it is a principle worthy of adherence. I will argue now that such a collective commitment to commandment-like norms can be grounded in the responsibility that is generated from the commandment's linguistic character.

This notion of non-punitive commandment provides a possible source for a revolutionary normativity that does not rely on the logic of legal discourse. If the central concern regarding Benjamin's vision for revolutionary violence is that it has no principle to guide revolutionary action, then the commandment is a potential source for action-orienting principles, because it does not impose itself externally and instrumentally upon normative actors. If its end is for individuals and communities

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 298.
24 Cf. Ibid., 296.

to act in ways that it regards as normatively valuable, then it does not force them to do so; it *tells* them to do so. The commandment mobilizes shared language to give the norm, from the one who commands, to those who are commanded. This notion of normative action, based on a communicated principle, is advantageous because it cultivates autonomy, which the law could not establish, in the acting individual. Because the law generates obedience only externally in the individual through punishment, the individual is always *subject to* the law. The law always acts upon him. The commandment, on the other hand, is a principle of action that is not enforced, but, rather, is given to the individual. Individuals must grapple on their own with its application in the real circumstances of their lives.[25] Unlike the law, the commandment does not make decisions for the individual. This autonomy is advantageous because it allows individuals to make crucial pragmatic judgements about the norm's applicability and its inevitable exceptions. It is additionally advantageous because it does not require the external force of a regulative system through which normative action must be guaranteed. Rather, individuals (and communities) who follow the commandment determine their own adherence to the project of collective normative action.

This commandment model for revolutionary normative action raises another difficulty: we have not yet explained how individuals are guaranteed to commit to norms without coercion, or by the threat of punishment. If normative action is not centralized by a legal-punitive system of action regulation, we are going to need to specify some ground for believing that individuals and communities would adhere to these norms. Additionally, while the *model* of the non-punitive commandment might be attractive to a Benjaminian sensibility, Benjamin fails to provide any explanation of the source of these norms. We therefore must specify how the *content* of such commandment-style norms are generated. As we will see, Habermas's notions of responsibility and language, and the emancipatory potential that lies in their relation, provide a possible grounding for our Benjaminian vision of normative action.

In his essay, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective," Habermas sets out a critique of all knowledge-producing sciences by revealing the "knowledge-constitutive interests" that determine the methodological framework in which scientists pursue each form of knowledge. Habermas's core argument is that all epistemic practices are oriented by interests that humans have in gaining particular kinds of knowledge. Therefore, the methodological tools that we use for inquiring about, and for investigating the world, are not determined by a disinterested strategic concern with the best manner of getting at an objective truth. Rather, the fundamental practical human interests that we seek to satisfy by pursuing knowledge determine these tools. These interests therefore provide the frame for our inquiries. According to Habermas, despite science's aspiration to disinterested theoretical inquiry, we cannot

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25 Ibid., 298.

rid our epistemic practices of these human interests.[26] Instead, the task of critical theory is to make these interests visible so that the sciences can proceed with a 'critical eye' towards the influence that particular interests have on knowledge-production. This 'critical eye' is meant to give the theorist a certain autonomy within the interest-constraints placed on our attainable knowledge.

One of these knowledge-constitutive interests is an "emancipatory" interest in autonomy and responsibility. Habermas argues that this fundamental human drive towards emancipation leads us to engage in reflection about our own social conditions, which will ultimately identify the ways in which we have been subjected to "hypostatized powers", and consequently, the ways in which we can free ourselves from the oppressive social conditions in which we are stuck.[27] The project that Habermas suggests for critical theory is to develop sciences, which are aware of the social and cultural conditions of their knowledge-production, through engaging in this kind of self-reflection.[28] They will therefore be able to identify more "emancipatory" ways of satisfying their respective human interests.

This suggested project of self-reflection of the sciences leads Habermas to consider what grounds the human interest in autonomy and responsibility (i.e., language). Habermas's idea is that implicit in the intersubjective communication, whereby language links people together, is a will towards "universal and unconstrained consensus."[29] In using language, humans recognize, at some level, the will to be understood by, and to be in agreement with, others. Language is thus premised on an assumption of mutual understanding; language must be *shared* language. This mutuality of language evinces a certain will towards universal dialogue: anyone who has access to the language can *understand* and *be understood*. No matter how simple its use of language is, every utterance aspires to an intersubjective communication, which is based wholly on shared, agreed-upon linguistic rules. In the ideal structure of language, no external constraints are imposed on linguistic usage, and any attempt to do so only inhibits language users' ability to communicate clearly and to create consensus-based dialogue.

The structure of language as unconstrained universal communication among language users is generative of responsibility because it allows for individuals to gain mutual understanding of the importance of their autonomy and of the autonomy of others. We can use language with each other to come to agreements about what kinds of action are worthy of our collective pursuit. Language allows for individuals to assent freely to consensus-based actions, and their responsibility towards each other, and towards the agreed-upon norms, is based upon their unconstrained practice

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26 Jürgen Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective," in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 311.
27 Ibid., 310.
28 Ibid., 311.
29 Ibid., 314.

of consensus-building in language. When individuals and communities engage in "non-authoritarian and universally practiced dialogue," they can come to normative agreements based on communication unencumbered by the interests of power, selfishness, and greed.[30] Rather, because every individual knows that his personal interests can be understood in this kind of communication, strategic and selfish linguistic maneuvers are replaced by collective commitment to agreed-upon norms.

Habermas' notion of collective responsibility and commitment to such norms, which are grounded in language, provides the necessary basis that was lacking for Benjamin's notion of the commandment. Using this understanding of unconstrained communication about norms, we can give a complete account of a possible non-legal, non-punitive vision of normative action. The structure of the commandment can be seen as an ideal example of consensus-based normative principles. As aforementioned, the commandment only binds those who have understood the content of the commandment and who have agreed to follow it. It is not an expression of a force, power, or threat according to whose will individuals must act. The commandment is delivered through language, and its binding nature is dependent on the understanding and assent of all parties. The commandment is thus an example of a universally agreed-upon norm grounded in language. This requirement of universal understanding of the norm before it becomes binding provides a level of assurance that norms will be followed based on a collective responsibility for the norms' realization. Those who "wrestle in solitude"[31] with the commandment have the responsibility to faithfully apply the agreed-upon normative principles, and it is up to them—and only them— to ensure that these forms of action are realized.

One final indication that Habermas' notion of communication-based responsibility is deeply compatible with Benjamin's revolutionary vision is found in Habermas' suggestion that the kind of unconstrained communication upon which all understanding is built is only possible in a fully emancipated society.[32] In an unfree society, external conditions impose constraints upon language-use. The law mobilizes language instrumentally to control legal subjects, and the state deploys language in the construction of ideologies that deceive people into thinking that their social conditions are natural. Such uses of language are not based on mutual understanding or a will towards universal consensus. Rather, they are based in the instrumentalization of language as a quasi-violent means towards the ends of state power and the perpetuation of the rule of law. These uses thus play into the means-end schema of the legal order repeatedly mentioned by Benjamin in his critique. Therefore, only in a society that is free of the power-accumulating forces of the instrumental legal order, is an unconstrained normative consensus actually possible. These legal forces, which instrumentalize violence and mobilize guilt as a means of

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30 Ibid.
31 Benjamin, 298.
32 Habermas, 314.

control, must be destroyed by Benjaminian divine-like revolutionary violence. Only then, in an emancipated, revolutionary society, can the kind of language-use and communication required for the generation of responsibility be truly enacted. With the destruction of the legal forces that place fetters on the progressive realization of the fundamental human interest in autonomy and responsibility, the historical horizon opens up towards an ethical future in which normative action is based on autonomous collective commitments and responsibilities, rather than on coercion and the suppression of cooperative initiative. ✦

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A DEFENSE OF THE GODS:
Interpreting Plato's Myth of Er

CHRISTOPHER FAHEY

The Myth of Er begins with a soldier named Er, who dies in battle but comes back to life twelve days later to tell of what he saw in the afterlife.[1] Er says that those who lived just lives were rewarded by the gods, and that those who lived unjust lives were punished, each for a thousand years.[2] After undergoing these rewards or punishments, the souls select the next lives that they will live, and are thus reborn.[3] Some scholars, such as Julia Annas and Ronald R. Johnson, believe that the primary purpose of the myth is to summarize the main argument of the *Republic*. It seems, however, that the Myth does not serve exclusively as summary; in fact, Socrates' main purpose in relating the myth is to restore the reputation of the gods as totally good after assuming the opposite throughout most of the *Republic*.

At the beginning of her article, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," Annas asserts that most philosophers have failed to demonstrate how the myths in Plato's dialogues are relevant to the primary philosophical arguments of those dialogues.[4] In addition to discussing the eschatological myths in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedo*, Annas describes how the Myth of Er relates to the primary argument made by Socrates in the *Republic*.

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1   Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, ed. C. D. C. Reeve, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 614b.
2   Ibid., 614c-616b.
3   Ibid., 617d-621b.
4   Julia Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," *Phronesis* 27, no. 2 (1982): 119.

[5]Although, in Book II, Socrates identifies justice as "one of the greatest goods, the ones that are worth getting for the sake of what comes from them, but much more so for their own sake," Glaucon wants Socrates to explain how justice is a good only in "its very self", leaving out any consideration of "wages and reputations" accorded to those who are just.[6] To explain that justice is a good "in its very self" becomes the aim of the main argument of the *Republic*.[7] But, according to Annas, if the Myth of Er is understood as suggesting that one should be just because of the rewards that he will receive in the afterlife, then its message directly conflicts with this main argument. [8]To resolve this apparent conflict, Annas advances a radically different interpretation of the myth. She asserts that since, according to Plato, our souls select our next lives (after undergoing their temporal rewards or punishments), our actions have been determined by our past selves.[9] But we do not remember our past selves after drinking from the waters of the River of Unheeding[10] and therefore, we are, in a sense, not the same people as our past selves.[11] This, she says, "must tend to paralyze any sense of being truly responsible for being the kind of person one is."[12] Under this conviction, one will realize that any punishments and rewards accorded to them in the afterlife become meaningless.[13] Annas, therefore, inverts the message that the Myth conveys. But this, she says, shows that the myth in fact supports what she identifies as the main argument of the *Republic*: that justice is to be sought for itself, rather than for its consequences.[14]

There are a number of problems with Annas' analysis. Some objections are posed by Ronald R. Johnson in his article "Does Plato's Myth of Er Contribute to the Argument of the *Republic*?" Johnson disagrees with Annas' view that if the myth demonstrates that meaningful rewards and punishments await the just and unjust in the afterlife, then it must subvert the *Republic*'s main argument.[15] Rather, Johnson asserts that, by the time Socrates relates the myth, the philosopher has already sufficiently demonstrated that justice is a good worth pursuing in itself regardless of its consequences.[16] Johnson believes that by including the myth, Plato "now wants to say that [...] the just life is not actually subject to such gross misunderstanding on the part of humans and gods."[17] In doing so, Johnson says, Plato does not intend to show that the rewards awaiting the just person in the afterlife are the real reason to be just—

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5 Ibid., 129-39.
6 Plato, *Republic*, 367d.
7 Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," 130.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 132.
10 Plato, *Republic*, 621a.
11 Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," 132.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 137.
15 Ronald R. Johnson, "Does Plato's 'Myth of Er' Contribute to the Argument of the 'Republic'?" *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 32, no. 1 (1999): 4.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.

"he is merely saying that these extra benefits are part of the just life as well."[18] Johnson also points out that Annas' interpretation "flatly contradicts what Plato has Socrates give as his reason for relating the myth," which can be found in the introductory passage prior to the myth, from 612b to 614b. Indeed, an examination of this passage serves to support Johnson's view of the myth, which stands in opposition to Annas'.

First, it is clear from this passage that Socrates believes that he has successfully completed the main argument of the *Republic* and wants now to point out that the gods and men do reward justice and punish injustice. At 612b, for example, Socrates inquires of Glaucon: "And haven't we found that justice itself is the best thing for the soul itself, and that the soul—whether it has the ring of Gyges or even it together with the cap of Hades—should do just things?"[19] Glaucon agrees, and so Socrates proposes to return to a discussion of the additional rewards accorded to the just:

> Then can there now be any objection, Glaucon, if in addition we return to justice and the rest of virtue both the kind and quantity of wages that they obtain for the soul from human beings and gods, whether in this life or the next?[20]

To this, Glaucon replies, "none whatever."[21] It is clear from this part of the introduction that Socrates seeks to discuss the consequences of being just versus unjust "in addition" to the main argument of the text, and not as a conclusion meant to supplant the main argument and totally nullify his progress thus far. Further, Socrates makes clear that "the prizes, wages and gifts that a just person receives from gods and humans while he is alive [...] are *added* to the good things that justice itself provides,"[22] but are not to be viewed as the primary goods of justice (those that come from possessing justice itself), for they are simply "added" to those goods. Thus, Socrates himself does not seem to believe a discussion of these goods would undercut his previous argument.

This introductory passage reveals that Socrates believes that not only the gods reward justice and punish injustice, but that these rewards and punishments are significant. At 612c, Socrates says that he wants to "return to justice and the rest of virtue both the kind and quantity of wages that they obtain for the soul."[23] The word "return" in this statement is key—Socrates clearly believes that men and gods will reward those who are just. On top of this, Socrates believes that, although the argument borrows these rewards from justice "for the sake of the argument" (as per Glaucon's request at 367d), these rewards must now be rightfully "returned" to justice.[24] Here we see that Socrates is so certain of the idea (that the just are ultimately rewarded

18 Ibid.
19 Plato, *Republic*, 612b.
20 Ibid. [Emphasis added]
21 Ibid., 612c.
22 Ibid., 613e. [Emphasis added]
23 Ibid., 612c.
24 Ibid., 612c.

and that the unjust are punished) that even as he makes his argument throughout the *Republic*, there is never any question in his mind that this is the case. Throughout the introduction, Socrates continues to reinforce this idea. Of the rewards accorded by men, Socrates says that "toward the end of each course of action, association, or life," the just "enjoy a good reputation and collect the prizes from other human beings,"[25] while the unjust, "even if they escape detection when they're young, are caught by the end of the race and are ridiculed."[26] Of rewards from the gods, Socrates says that, because the gods are good,[27] they "never neglect anyone who eagerly wishes to become just and who makes himself as much like a god as a human can by adopting a virtuous way of life."[28] Furthermore, Socrates not only clearly asserts that ultimately the just man will be rewarded and the unjust man punished by gods and men, but, in opposition to Annas' claim, he also believes that these rewards and punishments are actually meaningful and significant to human beings. At 614a, Glaucon remarks that the rewards for the just man that Socrates has just described are "very fine and secure ones too."[29] Socrates implicitly agrees with this when he further states, "yet they're nothing in either number or size compared to those that await just and unjust people after death."[30] It is this statement that leads into the elaboration of these rewards in the Myth of Er. So, throughout his introduction to the Myth of Er, Socrates is clearly trying to demonstrate that being just or unjust comes with due rewards or punishments both here and in the next life, and that these rewards and punishments matter. Annas' view that Socrates should then attempt to demonstrate that these rewards or punishments are "arbitrary" and "pointless" in the Myth of Er[31] is thus inconsistent with the philosopher's introduction. Supporters of Annas' view might counter that Socrates' remarks could be somehow ironic; perhaps Socrates is making these remarks even though, according to Annas' interpretation, he must know that he is about to demonstrate that they are wrong through the myth that follows. However, this seems far-fetched. Barring this interpretation, Johnson points out that Annas' interpretation of the myth remains in conflict with Socrates' introduction to it.[32] Annas does, in fact, acknowledge this problem herself in her article, but responds with the statement that the construction of book 10 is "scrappy and unsatisfactory as a whole."[33] Johnson finds this claim to be unfounded.[34] Indeed, it seems that Annas wants to ignore this issue, while Johnson remarks that perhaps the myth should be interpreted differently. [35]

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25 Ibid., 613c.
26 Ibid., 613d.
27 Ibid., 379b.
28 Ibid., 613b.
29 Ibid., 614a.
30 Ibid.
31 Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," 132.
32 Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 4.
33 Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," quoted in Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 4.
34 Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 4.
35 Ibid.

Johnson also argues that Annas misinterprets Plato's view of reincarnation.[36] As mentioned above, Annas believes that if humans' lives are determined by their past selves in the afterlife, then they cannot really feel responsible for their present actions since it was not really they who chose their lives. If humans are not really responsible for their actions, then any punishments and rewards that they face in the afterlife mean nothing.[37] To this, Johnson responds that "it is not clear why Annas separates the soul and the 'I,' and it is not at all evident that Plato separates them."[38] Indeed, Plato probably would not have thought about this issue in such a logically rigorous way, which seems characteristic of modern philosophy, in his relating of the myth. It is likely that Plato did not include the depiction of the souls drinking from the River of Unheeding at 621a to demonstrate that humans should feel no responsibility for their actions, but, rather, as Michael Inwood notes, to provide an explanation for why—if reincarnation does exist—humans cannot remember their past lives. [39]However, Inwood writes:

> The absence of memory might still be invoked either to argue that reincarnation does not occur or to suggest that, even if it does occur, no one has good reason to care about their past and future reincarnations.[40]

Though Annas would agree, Inwood states that it is possible, upon returning to the afterlife, that souls might be capable of remembering all of their previous lives (at least, presumably, before drinking of the waters of the River of Unheeding once again).[41] This is speculation, but Plato does not explicitly preclude this possibility of remembrance. For example, at 619b, Socrates states, regarding the process of choosing one's next life, that "we must always know how to choose the mean in such lives and how to avoid either of the extremes, as far as possible, both in this life and in all those beyond it. This is the way that a human being becomes happiest."[42] Here, Socrates seems to believe that the human being who becomes happy is the one who must "avoid [...] extremes," while choosing "all those" lives "beyond" this one. This would imply that Socrates thinks that in each successive life, our souls still remain "us," and "we" will have some kind of memory in the afterlife in order to recognize this. Thus, Annas' position that Socrates means to show that we retain no sense of the "I" in lives after our current one[43] may not be correct. If this is the case, the rewards and punishments for leading a just, versus an unjust life, might not be pointless, after all—as Annas claims[44]—because in the afterlife we might remember that we, in fact, were the ones who chose the lives we lived.

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36 Ibid.
37 Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," 131-32.
38 Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 4.
39 Michael Inwood, "Plato's Eschatological Myths," in *Plato's Myths*, ed. Catalin Partenie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Plato, *Republic*, 619b.
43 Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," 131.
44 Ibid., 132.

Johnson also criticizes Annas for "claim[ing] against Plato's repeated assertion that reincarnation leaves individuals no significant choice over the lives they will live." [45]Annas notes that, at 620a, Plato wants to show that souls in the afterlife choose the next lives they will live on the basis of how they lived their most recent lives and the temporal rewards or punishments that they have just undergone.[46] But these former lives, Annas says, were themselves determined by the soul's prior life choices in the afterlife, such that no soul has free choice when it comes to selecting its next life. [47]However, it seems that Socrates clearly supports the idea that souls do have freedom to choose their next lives: "the responsibility lies with the one who makes the choice; the god has none."[48] In fact, Annas acknowledges this very evidence, but says that "Plato [...] gives no reason for" this assertion.[49] Johnson, however, remarks that Plato does not need to: "Whether he is able to persuade anyone may be another matter, but there is no confusion over what he is saying."[50] But Annas says that even if this is so, what a soul in the afterlife is selecting is "a fully worked-out blueprint" of the next life that it will live, so during this next life, it cannot possibly feel responsible for its actions because those actions were predetermined.[51] As Inwood points out, though, one problem with this determinist interpretation is that it contradicts "those passages in which Socrates exhorts us to take precautionary steps in this life, to study for example the effects of a life on the soul."[52] Socrates makes such a recommendation to Glaucon at 618c, saying that in this life, "each of us must [...] be most concerned to seek out and learn those [subjects] that will enable him to distinguish the good life from the bad" to prepare for choosing our next lives.[53] If Socrates is saying that free choice is an illusion, then there is no purpose in heeding his advice in such passages as these.[54] Furthermore, if individuals have no free choice, then Socrates reiterates the main argument of the *Republic* (that individuals should choose to be just regardless of consequences) in vain. In light of these conflicts, perhaps Socrates does not include the account of souls choosing their next lives (617d-618b) in order to demonstrate that we wholly determine our future lives while in the afterlife. Rather, perhaps his message is that it is we—and not the gods—who control our fate. Therefore, we should not blame the gods for misfortune that we have brought upon ourselves through our actions. If this is true, then this would undermine Annas' claim that we should feel no responsibility for our actions.

It is clear, then, from Johnson's critique, that there are some problems with Annas' interpretation of the Myth of Er. Having posed these objections, Johnson goes on

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45 Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 5.
46 Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," 132.
47 Ibid.
48 Plato, *Republic*, 617e.
49 Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," 133.
50 Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 5.
51 Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," 134.
52 Inwood, "Plato's Eschatological Myths," 45.
53 Plato, *Republic*, 618c.
54 Inwood, "Plato's Eschatological Myths," 46.

to attempt to show "how the myth does the philosophical work required of it as the conclusion of the overall argument of the *Republic*."[55] In accordance with his first objection to Annas' argument, Johnson acknowledges that one purpose of the Myth of Er is, in fact, to support what he calls the "Addendum"[56]—the idea that the just will be ultimately rewarded and that the unjust will be punished for their actions.[57] However, Johnson asserts that providing support for the 'Addendum' is not the primary goal of the myth; rather, like Annas, he claims that the myth's chief purpose must be to support the work's main argument in order to serve as a proper conclusion to the *Republic*.[58] Johnson says that the main argument of the *Republic* can be divided into two parts: Part A and Part B. In Part A, Socrates shows that one "necessary condition" in order to live the just (and therefore happiest) life is "psychological well-being" (i.e., when the reasoning part of the soul rules the appetitive and spirited parts). In Part B, Socrates shows that another such condition is to be "living in harmony with the Good" and to be understanding reality for what it really is.[59] The primary evidence that Johnson cites from the Myth to support Part B is Socrates' description of the Spindle of Necessity (616c-617d), which Johnson says is a representation of the "order and rationality behind all that is": 'the Good' with which Socrates says the soul must live harmoniously in order to be just and happy.[60] The primary evidence that Johnson cites in support of Part A of the argument is 620d-621b, where it is stated that the souls preparing for their next earthly lives are told to drink from the River of Forgetfulness, and that they must not drink too much of the river's water.[61] The "reason" in their souls must not give in to the "appetitive beast within them that is goading them to drink freely."[62] Johnson also notes that Odysseus, who has subjugated the spirited part of his soul to the rational, and who chooses a life that will allow him to seek 'the Good,' is therefore representative of both parts A and B of the argument. [63]

It is certainly plausible that the evidence that Johnson selects was included by Socrates in order to point to what Johnson identifies as the two parts of the *Republic*'s main argument. Some might disagree with Johnson's claim that the myth's purpose is to communicate the idea that "the work's main argument [...] should be taken more seriously than the Addendum."[64] Viewing the myth as a whole, Socrates' descriptions of the Spindle of Necessity, the River of Forgetfulness, and the soul of Odysseus appear to stand as tangential asides to the bulk of the myth, which is the overarching story of the soul's journey through reward or punishment and

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55 Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 5.
56 Ibid., 6.
57 Ibid., 7.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 6.
60 Ibid., 8.
61 Ibid., 10.
62 Ibid., 11.
63 Ibid., 10.
64 Ibid., 12.

then rebirth in the afterlife. Additionally, Johnson's interpretation poses one of the same problems as Annas': it is contradicted by Socrates' own introduction to the myth in 612b-614b.[65] Though Johnson acknowledges that one purpose of the myth is to support the 'Addendum,'[66] Socrates' lengthy discussion—of the rewards and punishments accorded to the just and unjust by gods and men—in this passage clearly, as aforementioned, serves to introduce the chief purpose of the myth as a description of the rewards and punishments that will be accorded in the afterlife.

In addition to this introductory passage, the passage with which Socrates concludes the Myth (621c-d) also serves to illuminate the Myth's chief purpose. Johnson calls attention to this passage in support of his argument.[67] However, Socrates seems to acknowledge in this passage that the myth is basically unrelated to the main argument. He says that if we are "persuaded" only by the myth, then "we would then make a good crossing of the River of Forgetfulness, and our souls wouldn't be defiled."[68] Implicit in the statement that we will make a "good crossing" of the river is the idea that we will collect our rewards (for being just) from the gods as part of the entire reincarnation process. Therefore, Socrates suggests that being persuaded by the myth will lead one to live a just life because of the after-life rewards promised to the just man.[69] However, Socrates then moves beyond this discussion of the myth:

> But if we are persuaded by me, [...] we'll always hold to the upward path, practicing justice with reason in every way. [...] Hence, both in this life and on the thousand-year journey we've described, we'll do well and be happy.[70]

In this passage, when Socrates says "if we are persuaded by me," he means to say that, as Johnson understands it, "if we believe the whole of the *Republic*."[71] In other words, Socrates means that his argument is capable of persuading us that justice is a good in itself, and so it will bring us happiness in this life. Thus, Socrates seems here to draw a distinction between the persuasive power of the Myth of Er and that of the argument he makes throughout the entirety of the rest of the *Republic*. Indeed, Johnson says that "this last-minute comparison seems to suggest that the Myth of Er, in itself, is an insufficient guide to the happiest life."[72] In the same paragraph, though, Johnson states that "the Myth of Er is a powerful conclusion to the *Republic*, so long as we recognize the story as an illustration of the whole argument."[73] This seems contradictory: one wonders why Socrates would draw such a comparison, and thus, why he would demonstrate the inadequacy of the Myth (if, in fact, it did serve

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65 Ibid., 4.
66 Ibid., 11.
67 Ibid.
68 Plato, *Republic*, 621c.
69 Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 11.
70 Plato, *Republic*, 621c-d.
71 Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 11.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.

as a summary of the work's main argument). For these reasons, Johnson's view that the myth is meant to summarize the main argument of the *Republic*, like Annas' view, may be flawed.

With Johnson and Annas' shared view (that the Myth of Er must conclude the *Republic* by not only summarizing, but also by asserting the primacy of its main argument) challenged, then what could be Plato's reason for including the myth in the work? On this point, the view of the myth that Paul Friedlander provides in his book Plato: An Introduction is instructive. Friedlander calls attention to a myth about the afterlife related by Cephalus in Book I of the *Republic*.[74] Here, Friedlander is referring to 330d-331c, in which Cephalus briefly describes after-life punishments and rewards:

> When someone thinks his end is near, he becomes frightened and concerned about things he didn't fear before. It's then that the stories we're told about Hades [...] twist his soul this way and that for fear that they're true. [...] But someone who knows that he hasn't been unjust has sweet good hope as his constant companion.[75]

Friedlander sees this myth as belonging to his "first level" of classification of myths in Plato, which are those related by Socrates' interlocutors prematurely, prior to the completion of philosophical discourse.[76] But Friedlander sees the Myth of Er, conveyed by Socrates himself, as belonging to the "second level"[77] of those myths that are related by Socrates once the discourse is complete.[78] Indeed, Friedlander makes the following important point:

> Since [the *Republic*] has also absorbed the older 'Thrasymachus' [Book I], with its myth at the beginning, beginning and end are seen in reciprocal correlation. The perfect construction at the end answers the unsatisfactory attempt at the beginning.[79]

In support of the idea that the myth stands in "reciprocal correlation" to Book I is John Sallis' view that the structure of the *Republic* as a whole is symmetrical.[80] It is not only Book I that stands in symmetry to Book X, but also Books II through IV, which represent the construction of the "City in Word," and which stand in symmetric opposition to the "destruction" of the City in Books VIII and IX.[81] The allegory of the cave, in Book VII, is then the "center," across which the other books are

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74 Paul Friedlander, *Plato: An Introduction*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 177.
75 Plato, *Republic*, 330d-331a.
76 Friedlander, *Plato: An Introduction*, 178-79.
77 Ibid., 184.
78 Ibid., 208.
79 Ibid., 184.
80 John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 455.
81 Ibid.

symmetric.[82] According to this understanding of the work, perhaps the Myth of Er no longer needs to function as summary, but instead as a response to the myth in the opening book, and as a return to the discussion, begun and temporarily abandoned in Book I (330d-331b), of whether justice truly is rewarded and injustice punished by the gods. Indeed, this understanding of the myth is equivalent to Johnson's initial remark that one purpose of the myth is to show that the just life is not "subject to such gross misunderstanding" by the gods.[83] But where Johnson ultimately identified this purpose as nothing more than an "addendum," a tangential aim subordinate to what he believes is the myth's greater aim to summarize the main argument of the *Republic*, it seems that if, as Friedlander says, the Myth of Er lies in structural opposition to Book I, then perhaps the myth need not serve as a conclusion for the entire work. Then, vindication of the gods and affirmation that they do punish the unjust and reward the just can be understood as the myth's primary aim.

But why does Socrates feel such a need to return to Cephalus' myth in Book I and vindicate the gods? The answer lies in Book II, in which Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus begin to discuss what kind of poetry should be admitted into the city. At 379c, Socrates maintains that "since a god is good, he is not—as most people claim—the cause of everything that happens to human beings but of only a few things, for good things are fewer than bad ones in our lives."[84] Socrates goes on to state that "poets must look for the kind of account of [the gods] that we are now seeking, and say that the actions of the gods are good and just, and that those they punish are benefited thereby."[85] Here, Socrates' two main points about the gods are 1) that they are truly good and therefore reward justice and punish injustice, and 2), that, since they are good, they should not be held accountable for the bad that befalls humans. Naturally, Socrates must uphold these principles in his own dialogue, especially since he maintains that the poets should uphold them, since in a way his dialogue is poetic. This is why, after playing "devil's advocate," and assuming that the gods will not reward justice and punish injustice, Socrates corrects this view through the Myth of Er. Indeed, in the Myth of Er itself, Socrates demonstrates his adherence to the two main points about the gods that he makes in this discussion of poetry in Book II. To the first point—that the gods reward justice and punish injustice—evidence abounds. The overall sentiment of the myth is that, with Annas' objections countered, the punishments and rewards doled out by the gods do, in fact, have meaning for the dead:

> For each in turn of the unjust things they had done and for each in turn of the people they had wronged, they paid the penalty ten times over, once in every century of their journey. [...] But if they had done good deeds

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82 Ibid.
83 Johnson, "Plato's 'Myth of Er'," 4.
84 Plato, *Republic*, 379c.
85 Ibid., 380b-c.

and had become just and pious, they were rewarded according to the same scale.[86]

The totally incorrigible receive their just punishment as well, and are "thrown into Tartarus" for eternity.[87] Socrates also upholds the second point—that the gods should not be blamed for the bad that befalls humans. This is demonstrated by the souls who select their next lives. "A Speaker," Socrates says, relates the clear message that "the responsibility lies with the one who makes the choice; the god has none."[88] Again, with Annas' objection (that we retain no control over which lives we choose to live) refuted, Socrates' message seems clear: the gods must not be blamed for the bad that befalls one (at least not as a result of his or her own choices). It is clear, then, that as the Myth of Er stands in symmetrical opposition to Book I,[89] its primary aim is not to conclude the dialogue, but is, rather, to restore to it the truth, introduced in Book I, that the gods really are good and just, thus vindicating the gods from what they were accused of for the sake of the dialogue's argument. This is done in accordance with Socrates' principles that articulate how poets should represent the gods.

Giving further support to the idea that Socrates really wants to convey this fundamental truth about the gods through the myth is Josef Pieper's analysis in The Platonic Myths. Pieper first defines truly mythical stories as having three characteristics: 1) they must deal with action taking place between humans and the gods, 2) they must be not totally expressible through speech, and, 3) they must be authored by someone other than their narrator.[90] Pieper quotes a passage from the Timaeus: "we have to believe" the tellers of myths, those who "have certain knowledge handed down to them from their ancestors."[91] Pieper notes that though myth sometimes uses "symbolic speech"[92] to convey the truth of things that humans cannot grasp in their entirety, such myths can still be "accepted by man as valid beyond all doubt—as truth which, while not the absolute truth, is the ultimate attainable truth."[93] In other words, myths are always, in a sense, false. They, however, reveal underlying truths about reality. At the same time, a "critique of myth" is to be found in Plato because Socrates never subscribes to "undiscriminating, uncritically naive acceptance of what is handed down" through myth.[94] Indeed, Pieper says that "defend[ing] the truth about the gods as it is revealed in legitimate sacred tradition [...] defines Plato's most genuine aim. This becomes completely clear in the second book of the *Republic*,"[95] as was discussed above. Pieper thus analyzes the Myth of Er:

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86 Ibid., 615a-b.
87 Ibid., 616a.
88 Ibid., 617d-e.
89 Friedlander, *Plato: An Introduction*, 184.
90 Josef Pieper, *The Platonic Myths*, trans. Dan Farrelly (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2011), 9-11.
91 Plato, *Timaeus*, 40d, quoted in Pieper, *The Platonic Myths*, 44.
92 Pieper, *The Platonic Myths*, 47.
93 Ibid., 48.
94 Ibid., 50.
95 Ibid., 51-52.

> When faced, for example, with the hopelessness of Homeric expectations
> for the afterlife which we sense in the despairing cry of Achilles, Plato
> does not counter with a philosophical argument but expressly with the
> inviolable truth of the eschatological myth.[96]

In other words, Socrates' aim in the Myth of Er is to demonstrate that the gods are good. According to Pieper, the myths have not been authored by their narrators (they have been handed down). Thus, the final question is of where the myths and the universal truths they convey ultimately originated. Ultimately, Pieper, a Christian, points to God's own revelation.[97]

It is clear, then, that the purpose of the Myth of Er in Plato's *Republic* is not chiefly to summarize the main argument of the *Republic*, but is, rather, to convey the ultimate truth that, contrary to the poets, and to the assumption made at the beginning of the dialogue, the gods do reward justice and punish injustice because they are fundamentally good. ✦

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96 Ibid., 54.
97 Ibid., 60-61.

LANGUAGE AND SIGNS
In Heidegger's *What Is Called Thinking*

JON STUART VICTOR

"We are a sign that is not read." —Hölderlin

To analyze the ways in which humans relate to Being is to examine the extent to which they are alone in the world. The death of God, announced by Friedrich Nietzsche in Aphorism 125 of "The Gay Science," threatened the loss of Being forever, a loss that Martin Heidegger acutely felt as he strove to reframe humanity's relation to the metaphysical.[1] The task, at times, feels gloomy. For if a human being is a sign—as Heidegger states—he exists only in relation to something else, something that, Friedrich Hölderlin says, does not even read the sign. For as we turn to meet Being in all its glory and completeness, we find that Being has withdrawn from us. We are left alone. "We are a sign that is not read."

Heidegger introduces this line from Hölderlin early in his text, *What is Called Thinking?* He lets it stand before the reader, moving on to discuss the nature of the poetic word, rather than explaining its philosophical utility. One is, indeed, left with questions. Why are we not read? What could read us in the first place? I believe that Heidegger says that we are a sign that is not read in order to highlight precisely the extent to which Being has withdrawn from us, forming an analogy between the linguistic sign and our pointing toward Being. Whereas the linguistic sign's referent meets it where it lies, Being has turned away from humanity, leaving it to point

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1   Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Gay Science, translated by Walter Kaufmann." New York: Vintage 374 (1974): 181.

aimlessly into oblivion, as a sign without significance—a sign that is not read. In the same sense that we cannot think until we know what it is that calls us to thought (or so Heidegger says), we cannot be a sign that is read until we can access the sign's signifier—the thing it points to. In this case, what we are pointing to has turned away from us long ago.

While Heidegger explores several modalities of Being, such as thinking, memory and traveling, as part of his discussion on human being, perhaps no modality is as illuminative of what a human being *is* as his comparisons of humans to language. The philosopher's conception of the human being as a sign establishes a relationship between humans and Being that he says must always be present, even if the withdrawal of one side threatens how each interacts with the other. Heidegger writes, "man is the being who is in that he points toward 'Being,' and who can be himself only as he always and everywhere refers himself to what is."[2] The relationship between humanity and Being is one of essence, but the essence is signification, which, in turn, implies separation. Humans, as beings, are necessarily separate from Being insofar as they must constantly be referring themselves to it in order to partake in its essence. As a linguistic sign has no meaning (except that which it receives from the real-world object to which it points), humans must constantly refer themselves to Being, and, in this way, they must reinforce their essential separation from it. In other words, like any sign, humans receive their meaning only by virtue of their separation from their signifier—Being. We are a sign that is not read.

Of Hölderlin's statement, however, what is even less clear is what might read this "human sign", and how it is be done. Heidegger, in discussing the movement of Being as either drawing toward, or away from, human beings, appears to suggest that to 'read' a sign is to engage with it on a fundamental level. Heidegger invites this broad interpretation of the word "read," as he refers to a sign beyond an image or a written word, such as items of thought or beings who "point" in their relation to Being. For one to read a sign like a road sign—that is one thing. To read a sign that is a human being pointing toward Being in its essential nature—that is another. Heidegger recognizes the complexity of the task at hand and offers some clarifying words, in which he provides the withdrawal of Being and its existence beyond the scope of our language as justifications for why we are not read. He writes: "When man is drawing into what withdraws, he points into what withdraws. As we are drawing that way we are a sign, a pointer. But we are pointing then at something which has not, not yet, been transposed into the language of our speech. We are a sign that is not read".[3] Here it seems that Heidegger believes that for a sign to be read, it must point to a thing that, in turn, meets it and coexists with it on some level of existence. The semantic correspondence between the word or idea of a tree and the actual tree itself creates meaning for the sign. Yet, if the tree were to reject definition,

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2   Heidegger, Martin. "What Is Called Thinking?, trans." J. Glenn Gray (New York: Perennial Library, 2004), 149.
3   Ibid., 18.

or otherwise escape human understanding, the sign would not be read. We draw into what withdraws, and escape the language of our speech. As such, we are a sign that is not read.

This withdrawal, however, is by no means permanent—the idea that we are a sign presupposes the possibility of our pointing's eventually reaching the thing to which we aspire. Heidegger acknowledges this in his inclusion of the words "not yet" when describing how Being has eluded our faculty of language. Set off by commas, the phrase is, rhetorically, something of a side note to the idea that what we draw toward withdraws from us. The phrase is hopeful. Heidegger believes in humanity's ability to reach Being, and to receive meaning from the thing that gives us our essence, insofar as we point toward it. Indeed, he reinforces this hope through his constant assurances that we are *still* not thinking, rather than just *not* thinking. Heidegger also does not think that our inability to reach Being is entirely our fault either, stating, "that we are still not thinking is by no means only because man does not yet turn sufficiently toward that which, by origin and innately, wants to be thought about since in its essence it remains what must be thought about. Rather, that we are still not thinking stems from the fact that the thing itself that must be thought about turns away from man, has turned away long ago."[4] This idea reinforces the dual aspect of our search to find Being, as it requires a bidirectional relationship: as humans point toward Being, so too must Being point toward us. Heidegger could build on Hölderlin's verse, in saying that we are a sign that is *still* not read, even though, perhaps, we once were.

The temporariness of this uniquely human condition—that we still have not met Being in such a way that allows us to be read—is in no small part due to language's having prevented humans from engaging, on an essential level, with Being. For although the human being as a pointer makes him similar to the linguistic sign, a relation to Being requires a more fundamental engagement, which cannot be hindered by the constrictions set in place by language. Heidegger is deeply troubled by the completeness and finality of meaning that language purports to provide, and throughout *What Is Called Thinking?*, strives to redefine ordinary words and lines from other writers. Nonetheless, this unusual process of translation, for Heidegger, is only getting to the true meanings of words (or moving closer to their relationship with Being), as language is, itself, a collection of bungled signs. Heidegger writes: "It is not we who play with words, but the nature of language plays with us, not only in this case, not only now, but long since and always. It is as though man had to make an effort to live properly with language. It is as though such a dwelling were especially prone to succumb to the danger of commonness".[5] This commonness, and this dwelling, are what prevent humanity and Being from fully aligning. We live inside language, and therefore, cannot interact with aspects of the world that go beyond its scope. In the spirit of Heidegger, Hölderlin's line may become: *We point*

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4   Ibid., 6-7.
5   Ibid., 118-119.

but are waiting for that metaphysical principle to which we point to point back to us. We are waiting for Being to meet us where we are. For it do so, we must allow it to. By redefining our relationship to Being, we are freeing ourselves to more directly seek Being, and vice versa.

Up until now, we have discussed pointing as a form of striving, which implies that signs are in some way not partaking in Being, but are, rather, outside of it. According to Heidegger, signs, being permitted to partake in a relationship with their signifier, can become conjoined with the essence of their signifier, and, in that way, they become as necessary a part of its existence as anything. Heidegger's description of the characteristics of language can be applied to humans, as they relate to Being: "Language admits of two things: One, that it be reduced to a mere system of signs, uniformly available to everybody, and in this form be enforced as binding; and two, that language at one great moment says one unique thing, for one time only, which remains inexhaustible because it is always originary, and thus beyond the reach of any kind of leveling".[6] By signs' being "uniformly available to everybody," Heidegger seems to say that they contain no original reality, which, in its specificity, could render the sign inaccessible or unreadable to anyone. As such, the sign is binding—in other words, it receives its essence from its signifier. For humans, this would mean that our pointing toward being binds us with it in an essential way. The crux of the second characteristic is perhaps even more obscure, but an understanding of it may be found in the word "originary," which can mean "primitive" or "productive." In the sense of "primitive," language may be originary in that it originated long ago in humans — at the same time that Heidegger says Being turned away from us. Heidegger may also be saying that language is productive, yielding new meaning with each utterance. Yet, while any combination of signs can yield new meaning, there can be only one relationship of sign to signifier. Language as a combination of signs is constantly productive, but the relation of sign to signifier, or of human to Being, is transcendent, in that it is fixed in its singular meaning.

Given this discussion of language, we may be in some position to examine the two lines that directly succeed our aforementioned line from Hölderlin's poem: "We feel no pain, we almost have/ Lost our tongue in foreign lands".[7] In Hölderlin's words, we seem to be in the realm of language. The verse mentions losing one's tongue—a reference to shedding the constraints of language, and, as a result, feeling no pain (i.e., being transcendent). In that way, the passage describes our search for Being. The word "almost" weighs heavily on the pair of lines, as it refers to humanity's asymptotic approach towards Being—a necessary characteristic of which being humans' withdrawnness from Being. Heidegger does not explicate these lines for us, which raises questions about why he chose to include them. But while they could be read as describing transcendence, they are more likely to be referring to

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6   Ibid, 191-192.
7   Ibid., 10.

humanity's conundrum of not being able to relate properly to Being. Indeed, the lines are indicative of a sense of alienation that accompanies the sign that "stays without interpretation".[8] That we are in "foreign lands" reflects the unreciprocated relationship between humanity and Being. One might read the phrase "our tongue" not literally as "language," but rather as some essential characteristic of our being that is lost, having been corrupted by the "dwelling" in which we have had to make an effort to live. Language is likely to be the "foreign lands" to which Heidegger refers, as it is clear that he does not think of language as something that comes naturally to humans. The "tongue" that Hölderlin speaks of, at least for Heidegger, is something much more essential and closely tied to Being than language is. Heidegger warns against succumbing to the commonness of language, making this more broad interpretation of the word "tongue" a more consistent way of thinking about how he might view these lines. As we remain without interpretation, we remain separated from that in which we may be at home—Being.

In subsequent lines of his discussion of the poem, Heidegger derives great meaning from one of its various titles, "Mnemosyne," which is the name of a Titaness in an ancient Greek myth. Heidegger's view of the poem's character as myth-like is a form of reflecting on the nature of myth-telling. "Myth means the telling word," he writes. "For the Greeks, to tell is to lay bare and make appear—both the appearance and that which has its essence in the appearance, its epiphany."[9] It would seem initially that telling as "laying bare" contradicts what we have said before about language as obfuscating. *Laying bare* means to expose, reveal, uncover. But *telling* is not only laying bare—it is also making appear, which is distinct from exposure in that the latter refers to what has always been there, or at least once was and now is again. Given that Being turned away from us long ago, it remains that thing which, for Heidegger, is most important to expose, or to acquire anew. By turning toward Being, we call it to appear to us—to reveal itself to us. We want it to point back to us. Being has its essence in this epiphany, which occurs through pointing. For the Greeks, *telling* is the thing that exposes Being: "The *mythos* is that appeal of foremost and radical concern to all human beings which makes man think of what appears, what is in being".[10] The act of telling implies a listener—a relationship. The exposure comes in the act of telling: *telling* is the mark of a sign that reaches for a signifier.

To describe more accurately the relationship between language and telling, Heidegger employs the terminology of lying and letting lie, which, in turn, gives us new latitude to think about the ways in which we point to Being. We have thus drawn a distinction between language, which confuses our search for Being, and *telling*, which is an act that uses language to connect otherwise discrete elements. *Telling*, or stating, is parallel to the pointing-towards done by the sign, which Heidegger

8   Ibid.
9   Ibid.
10 Ibid.

says we are. For Heidegger, language is something that we bring into the world by uncovering it and letting it lie: "The essential nature of stating is not determined by the phonetic character of words as signs. The essential nature of language is illumined by the relatedness of what lies there before us to this letting-lie-before-us".[11] When we use language—when we employ it through stating or telling—we allow it to lie before us. It is in front of us, and we point towards it. It is with Being. The essential nature of humanity's relation to Being may be summarized in the exact same terms that Heidegger uses to characterize the essential nature of language. When we point toward Being, we attempt to let it lie before us. But as it has turned away from us, it cannot *lie before us*, and rather *lies outside* of our grasp.

A key question raised by the notion of lying and letting lie is how it applies to signs, and the interpretation of the sign by its signifier, such that it may be read. Heidegger says that the *letting lie* of Being is that essential trait that characterizes our experience:

> When man finds himself among what so lies before him, should he not respond to it in all purity by letting it lie before him just as it lies? And this letting-lie, would it not be that laying which is the stage for all the other laying that man performs? Thus laying would now suddenly emerge as a relatedness that pervades man's stay on this earth from the ground up—though we have never asked where this relatedness originates.[12]

The notion of origin emerges once more: similarly to Heidegger's description of language as originary, here the philosopher says that *laying* is something also originary, in that it must always be a characteristic of existence. Humanity has always responded to the *laying* by *letting-lie*, which has constituted our attempts at relating to Being. These have been successful attempts, as Being, which withdraws, allows for something concrete that humanity can let lie. This is the act of withdrawal. But as we let Being's withdrawal lie before us, Being does not turn to meet us, as would be necessary for a meaningful encounter. The relationship carries on one-sidedly, as it has since the beginning.

In a way, by reproducing Hölderlin's words and by letting them *lie* on the page before the reader, Heidegger is placing us on the path toward Being by uncovering the truth of Hölderlin's words. We should have no confusion about what the poem is. The poem is language! Its truth, therefore, should be muddled by that dwelling in which we live, which is essentially separate from our more fundamental relation to Being. Its words, however, point toward truth in the way that we point toward truth, and, as a result, show us along the path toward Being: "Its statement rests on its own truth. This truth is called Beauty. Beauty is a fateful gift of the essence of truth, and here truth means the disclosure of what keeps itself concealed".[13] Heidegger believes

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11 Ibid., 202.
12 Ibid., 206.
13 Ibid., 19.

that the disclosure of what keeps itself concealed—that is, Being—is what provides its actuality and gives meaning and interpretation to that which seeks it. The sign is vindicated by the *laying-bare* of its signifier. Similarly, the line, "We are a sign that is not read," is itself a sign, which rests on its truth, in that it makes apparent the thing to which it points. We follow these pointers toward truth and Being, Heidegger says, and the alienation from Being experienced by humanity comes as a result of being separated from this truth—the truth that Being has taken with it in its withdrawal from us. Being is, most fundamentally, the thing that does not make itself apparent to us. Our greatest concern with it is that it is hidden—that it has turned away. Somehow, Heidegger says, this poem has used language to *demonstrate* its truth. But demonstrate is not exactly the correct word. He says that the poem "rests" on its truth, which does not imply laying-bare, but rather being hidden below the surface, as a house rests on a foundation that is underground. The language is a sign that points toward the truth.

Heidegger urges us to take this leap from language to truth—sign to signifier—in our search for Being, as we point toward it and struggle to access it: "Why this reference to language? In order to stress once again that we are moving within language, which means moving on shifting ground or, still better, on the billowing waters of an ocean".[14] The entire project of a sign is to transcend its order, to point toward something more actual than itself, and to have that thing meet it to create meaning. When we look for Being, Heidegger says, we are leaping out of something—in this case, language—and are landing on something that gives us our essential nature. We leap out of everything pertaining to our foreign linguistic dwelling, and we meet Being so that it may meet us: "For that is what we *are* now, men who have leapt out of the familiar realm of science and even, as we shall see, out of the realm of philosophy. And where have we leapt? Perhaps into an abyss? No! Rather, onto some firm soil".[15] In understanding the nature and limits of language, we can hope to escape it. Only then can we find Being, resting upon its "firm soil," and only then can Being find us. ✦

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14 Ibid., 192.
15 Ibid., 41.

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Jon Stuart Victor is a senior philosophy major at Yale University. His primary academic interest is continental philosophy, specifically Critical Theory and existentialism. He wrote his senior thesis on the aesthetics of Theodor W. Adorno. In addition to philosophy, Jon has done significant coursework in literature and creative writing. He was managing editor of the Yale Daily News during his junior year, and has won several awards and fellowships for his work in journalism. He is originally from Montreal, Canada.