

ISSN 2476 - 1818 (print)
ISSN 2476 - 1826 (online)

DIANOIA



διάνοια

The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College
April 2023 - Issue X

Featuring an Interview with Professor Gregory Fried, Author of *Towards a
Polemical Ethics: Between Heidegger and Plato* (page 6)

δίανοια DÍANOIA

THE UNDERGRADUATE PHILOSOPHY JOURNAL OF BOSTON COLLEGE



ISSUE X
Spring 2023

Editor-in-Chief: Tanner Loper

Managing Editors: Gregory Evans, Jacob Goodgame, Patrick Kelly

General Editors: Jacob Chapelear, Patrick Gaffey, Elliott Jones, Arushi Katyal, Yitian Lyu, George Renaudin, Tianmu Wei, Thomas Wilkins, Aniella Zaslavsky, Meriel Zhao

Graduate Advisors: Wenyu Huang, Sean Haefner

Faculty Advisor: Ronald Tacelli, S.J.

Cover and internal designs courtesy of Susanne Hahs.

Featuring:

Regnault, Jean-Baptiste. *L'Origine de la sculpture*. 1786; obtained via Wikimedia Commons.

The materials herein represent the personal opinions of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of *Dianoia* or Boston College.

If you have questions regarding the Journal, would like to submit your work for review, or if you'd be interested in joining next year's staff, please contact the Journal at dianoia@bc.edu.



Dianoia

The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College

Spring 2023 Issue X

Boston College

140 Commonwealth Avenue

Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

<https://www.dianoiaabc.org>

<https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/philosophy/undergraduate/dianoia.html>

© 2023 The Trustees of Boston College

Printed by Progressive Print Solutions.

- 4 **Acknowledgements**
- 5 **A Letter From the Editor**
Tanner Loper, Boston College
- 6 **Interview with Professor Gregory Fried**
Towards a Polemical Ethics: Between Heidegger and Plato
- 15 **Hermeneutics of Heraclitus: Allowing Concept Flux**
Gabriel Bickerstaff, Saint Mary's University Minnesota
- 27 **How Can We Reach the True Definition of Something?
Essence, Definition, and Teleology in Aristotle's
Metaphysics**
Minjun Lee, St. John's College
- 43 **A Superior Natural Law Theory in the Works of
Johannes Althusius**
Alison Vaughan, Vanderbilt University
- 57 **An Analysis of the Overlooked Value of Greatness**
Brandon Beesley, Capital University
- 70 **Kant's Racial and Moral Theories: The Importance of a
Teleological Perspective**
Lauren Toensing, University of Minnesota
- 85 **Contributors**

The Editorial Staff of *Dianoia: The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College* would like to extend our sincerest thanks to the following individuals for their assistance in making this issue of *Dianoia* possible:

Mary Crane, Institute for the Liberal Arts

Susan Dunn, Center for Centers

Peter Klapes, Philosophy Department

Paula Perry, Philosophy Department

Dermot Moran, Philosophy Department

Gabriel Feldstein, BC Libraries

We would also like to thank Dr. Ronald Tacelli, S.J., of the Boston College Philosophy Department, for his invaluable assistance as our advisor and editor of this issue's faculty interview.



Dear Reader,

April 26th, 2023

I am pleased to present Issue X of *Dianoia: the Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College*. We received around one hundred and fifty excellent submissions from six countries and three continents. The essays presented in this issue were selected by the editorial board after four rounds of reading, discussion, and selection. They represent not only the hard work of our authors, but also the effort we on the editorial board have taken to share with you, our reader, what we found to be the five most compelling and astute pieces.

In terms of content, we believe this issue has a little bit of something for everyone. The works published range from a rigorous close reading of Aristotle to an investigation into Joannes Althusius, an obscure, yet compelling natural law theorist. We hope you take the time to read through these exciting pieces and that they edify you in your personal philosophical pursuits.

Additionally, we are privileged to publish an interview with Gregory Fried, PhD., Professor of Philosophy at Boston College, on his most recent book *Towards a Polemical Ethics: Between Heidegger and Plato*. He offers some relevant and timely insights not only on the contemporary philosophical predicament but also on the process of philosophy in general. Thank you to Patrick Kelly, the incoming Editor in Chief, for reading Dr. Fried's book conducting this interview.

This year, the editorial board chose Jean-Baptiste Regnault's *The Origin of Sculpture* as the cover art for this issue. The painting depicts a scene from the myth of Pygmalion when Pygmalion prays to Venus to animate his statue with which he had fallen in love. We believe it evokes the philosophical discipline in that, just as Pygmalion sought the help of the gods to bring his creation to life, good philosophy is vivified by earnest engagement with philosophers past.

On the release of this tenth issue of *Dianoia*, I cannot help but to pause and express my sincere gratitude for all who made this possible. Most of all, I would like to thank Peter Klapes, one of the founders of this journal. His constant support and invaluable advice truly made the publication of this issue possible. I would also like to thank Patrick, Jake, and Greg, the managing editors, and the rest of the editorial board.

Sincerely,



Tanner D. Loper
Editor-In Chief
Dianoia

AN INTERVIEW WITH GREGORY FRIED, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY AT BOSTON COLLEGE

Towards a Polemical Ethics: Between Heidegger and Plato

"I think for Plato and for Socrates, the philosophical life is a constant striving to seek that enlightenment: to try our utmost to transcend our historical circumstances, even knowing that we will ultimately fail."

Patrick Kelly, Managing Editor Thank you, Professor Fried, for agreeing to have this interview with us.

Professor Gregory Fried Thank you so much. I look forward to our chat.

PK So can you give us a brief introduction on the relevance of your book *Toward a Polemical Ethic*, why you chose to write it, how you think it might prove useful for today's philosophy students as well as for non-philosophers, and why you chose to focus on this area?

GF Thank you for that question. It's always a difficult question to ask a philosopher, but I think it's the responsibility of a philosopher to try to answer the question, who is their audience, and what are they trying to achieve? Many academic philosophy books—in fact, I would imagine the vast majority of them—are written for a specialized academic audience. While I think philosophers are very happy when people outside academic life—or outside of philosophy as a specific discipline—read them, it's not common and it is not the audience most professional philosophers

write for. However, I tried to write this book for a more general audience than just Heidegger specialists or philosophy specialists. That is very difficult to do when working on a figure like Heidegger. But I believe there is something relevant to a wider audience here.

I think the fundamental issue that is at stake is Heidegger's claim that the challenges facing European civilization, which has effectively become a global civilization after colonialism, and the integration of the world into a single world economy—that those challenges are addressed by Heidegger as going all the way back to a tradition rooted in Greek thought and in Plato.

Heidegger is challenging Plato and challenging that tradition. Very unfortunately, Heidegger's own personal response to those challenges was to say that this tradition needs to come to an end; that it has exhausted itself; that what we think of as contemporary, enlightened liberal societies—those are manifestations, not of the strength of our civilization, but of its decline and its weakness.

Heidegger traces that weakness back to Greek thinking, starting with Plato, which sees the world as divided between historical reality—the shadows of the cave that we live in—and the realm of philosophical truth, the realm of the Ideas, which philosophy can bring us to as the true world beyond our historical experience in which there are everlasting truths that transcend us.

Heidegger thought that way of thinking about what it means to be human in the world was responsible for uprooting humanity from its connection to the reality of its historical world. I disagree with him about that. I think there's a way of reading Plato, which shows that Plato takes into account the concerns that Heidegger has and that he has an answer for Heidegger.

Obviously, Plato comes more than 2000 years before Heidegger, so he's not answering him personally. But I see it as my task in the book to think with Plato against Heidegger, but also to think with Heidegger, to take seriously what his challenges to us are. That brings me to the present because I do believe that, especially in the United States, we are facing a political, social, and cultural crisis over the meaning of our own national political identity, and that this has something to do not with Plato and Heidegger directly, but the issues these two philosophers bring up for us—issues that can be traced to the kinds of thinking that do exist in our own historical tradition and that are familiar to Americans.

My book's last chapter is about Frederick Douglass as an American thinker and political actor who embodies for me the response that I actually think is a platonic or Socratic one to the challenges of contemporary American democracy. I do hope that I have a wider audience that can understand the broad relevance of philosophy in the

Western tradition for the crises that we face in the United States and elsewhere in the world that revolve around the human beings that we want to be in the 21st century.

PK What is your own approach to writing? Socrates, as you mention in your book's address to the reader, never published a single word. So, what is your method in approaching writing and stepping into, as you just said, the space where conversation with Heidegger and Plato is possible?

GF I think I say at the very beginning of the book that I'm a Platonist and a Socratic. And for me, thinking is dialogical. I think in conversations. I think in conversations with philosophical thinkers, but also with colleagues and with friends. It's very hard for me to write from a standing start, as it were. So sometimes I feel that conversation very directly, and it allows me to write quickly and well. Sometimes I have to really examine myself to see what the conversation is that I want to take up in order to get my dialogical energies flowing. So, in fact, when I started this book, I began writing it as a letter to one of my close colleagues and friends, because that was the way for me to imagine my way into a philosophical dialogue about what matters in this project. I try to engage in that dialogue with Heidegger, against Heidegger, with Plato, and even against certain aspects of Plato. I think that's the best general explanation of how I go about writing. I do have an outline. I have a plan for what I want to do, but I don't write according to a fixed outline of what's definitely going to happen in my book. It's more of an outline around broad issues, even questions that I want to address, because my thinking happens *in* my writing. The writing is a dialogue for me, so I'm not entirely sure what's going to happen or where it will go. I'm telling a story about thinking when I'm writing.

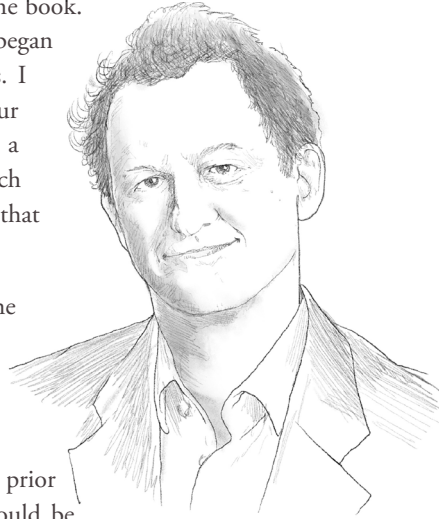
PK On that note: in your first chapter, you describe philosophy as a form of absolute freedom. Do you feel that way yourself when you're entering into these dialogues, when you're writing? Or put it this way: Would you care to elaborate on what it means for you, in the confines of the discussion between Heidegger and Plato, to experience philosophy as a form of absolute freedom?

GF First, abstractly, I think philosophy is absolute freedom because philosophy asks us to take seriously the challenge of separating ourselves from our most immediate convictions and attachments and prejudices in order to think through a question or a problem with fresh eyes. It's very hard to do that. I don't think human beings can ever fully do that. But I do think there is an ethical obligation on us if we're going to think of ourselves as engaging in philosophy to take seriously the challenge of being that free. I do think that the experience of that freedom can be terrifying sometimes because, as human beings, we are attached to our convictions, our opinions. They attach us not only to our sense of ourselves, but to other people as well. And so seriously questioning one's own deepest convictions can be very disorienting; it can even give a sense of danger that one may be risking relationships with people one

cares about if one ends up with a different view than one had before one started philosophizing, especially about ethical and political issues. But I also think that this sense of liberation from one's own context can be exhilarating. I don't think we can ever completely leave our own context, and that's part of my argument in the book.

We're always returning to where we began and trying to see it with fresh eyes. I think there is a way to reconcile our embeddedness in a context and in a world which matters to us, in which we have opinions and convictions that matter to us a great deal.

It's possible to look at those with the ideal of freedom and consider them and then return to them in ways that can rejuvenate them. If there are aspects that we really discern, we need to reject about our prior convictions and prejudices, that should be liberating and not depressing.



PK Regarding freedom: In your chapter titled “Freedom Under Fire,” you discuss Heidegger in terms of the cave-analogy. Leo Strauss has famously said that modernity is the second cave under the cave. In what way does Heidegger see our freedom as being under fire, is it similar to Strauss's point? How would Plato respond to this argument?

GF Strauss' point about modernity having dug a cave, even beneath the cave-floor of Plato's allegory is really very interesting. I do think that Strauss has in mind the predicament that Heidegger presents us with. I'll come back to that. But I think what Strauss meant by that was that for the Greeks, for Plato and Plato's allegory of the cave, they could really recognize the shadows of everyday experience as a normal aspect of political life, and that that was immediately tangible to them. Modernity, on the other hand, conceptualizes and theorizes and historicizes political life so radically that we've in fact lost touch with the phenomena of everyday political experience—what it means to be a social animal. For Strauss, we have to claw our way back just to the experience of what it means to be situated naively in one's own historical, political, cultural context because we have mediated that so much with theories that no longer allow us to experience it directly.

To come back to Heidegger: I titled that chapter “Freedom Under Fire” for two reasons. One is because in the allegory of the cave, we, the prisoners in the cave,

are literally by the topography of the cave that Socratic depicts, *under* a fire behind and above us, a fire we can't see as projecting the shadows on the wall of the cave. How can we be free under the fire of the cave, which is what gives us the minimal illumination that we have to see even the shadows by? Can there be freedom there? That's part of Heidegger's question. What is the freedom of the cave? Is there freedom in the cave? How do we become free in the cave? That's a question for Socrates and Plato as well.

But this is where Heidegger and Plato diverge. And because they diverge, that's the other meaning of freedom under fire. Being under fire means you're under attack. Attack by an enemy. I do think that there is an attack that Heidegger is making against freedom as it has been understood, at least in the last several hundred years of the liberal Enlightenment. That's a very broad statement. The Enlightenment was many things, and liberalism was and is many things. But I think that's still the issue on the table: the nature of freedom and modernity. So, for Socrates in telling the story of the cave, freedom only happens when we're released from the chains. But it's not just the release from the chains that really makes us free because we're enormously disoriented once we lose those chains. We can't make out the shadows in the dark anymore. We're blinded by the light of the fire. We need a new orientation, and we need to climb out of the cave to see what the ultimate reality truly is. I think for Heidegger, there is no ultimate climbing out of the cave. Why? Because Heidegger rejects the platonic distinction between the eternal world of the ideas that are accessible to us through philosophy and the historical world of our opinions, our embeddedness in a particular culture and society that for the most part dominates us, but a world that we can transcend philosophically. Heidegger rejects that. He does not believe that there is a realm beyond history that we can achieve. His interpretation of the cave is not to free ourselves from our historical boundedness to a particular time and place, but instead to free ourselves from the average everyday lazy interpretation that we have of our historical situatedness, where we don't confront it, where we don't assess it for ourselves, where we don't make it our own. His understanding of liberation from the cave is as a way of being more authentically *situated* in the cave itself.

I think for somebody like Strauss—and I would agree with him on this—Heidegger effectively walls off the exit to the cave and leaves us there in our historical time, our historical place, without the possibility of true transcendence to something, some objective standard, that's beyond time and beyond history that we can use to evaluate our historical situation. So for Heidegger, the freedom within the cave is just to know and to authentically live within it and situate oneself inside it without using an external standard—whether eternal or natural—to justify it with.

For Heidegger, *nature* means something very specific. So, he would agree that there can be a natural standard, but not in the sense that nature has been used in the liberal Enlightenment by natural rights theories, where nature becomes something universal

that we can philosophize about and can apply to all human beings, where we all have natural rights or what in contemporary times we call human rights that transcend history and time and place. For Enlightenment, liberal thinking, again, speaking with a broad brush, if we have a natural right, then that right applies irrespective of culture, time, and place, even if people don't recognize it as such. Heidegger is rejecting that.

What does that mean? It means, yes, that the freedom we have is freedom to own up to the finite specificity of our worldly existence. What's natural about that is not something that unites all of humanity across time. Nature, for Heidegger, is about genuinely experiencing what history means for you in your time and your place and the tasks that your history presents you with in your time and place, and voluntarily taking those upon your shoulders rather than just being borne along by the current of what everyone else is doing; but there's no eternal external standard by which to judge the choices you make in that freedom.

Now, I think that's a very powerful argument.

PK Yes, I'm simultaneously compelled and repulsed by it.

GF Yeah, people do find it very attractive, and yet there is some profound danger to it.

PK Well, I'm just thinking of Heidegger's own history. On the one hand, there seems to be a certain impossibility about what Plato is calling for. But on the other, without it, you can situate yourself in such a way that Naziism becomes not only appealing but acceptable.

GF That is, in my view, the danger of this position, because it makes one's own historical situatedness an ultimate barrier to identification with all of humanity. That ends up leading into nationalism—if not worse.

Because one's most important commitments are historically bound, and there's no way for a very different culture with a very different history to share that, one can respect that other cultures, other nations, other peoples have their own histories and their own historical tasks to take up authentically. And what you don't want to do for Heidegger is fuse them all together into some mishmash where everyone then loses the singularity of their own historical traditions. But Heidegger is not merely some traditionalist. He's not calling for a return to the past. He's calling for taking one's own past really seriously, though, in terms of what it means for dealing with one's own present and the *future*, and to make the past questionable. But it's questionable in *your* way as a member of that tradition. And that's your obligation—to think *that* through.

PK I have one more question. In your concluding chapter, you discuss how a reconstructive view of history can help us to embody “polemical” ethics and lead to a new understanding of freedom. So, in the context of the present-day United States, how can a reconstructive view of our history elucidate polemical ethics and help us move forward as a people? What might that look like?

GF By “polemical ethics,” I do not mean a combative attitude that’s looking for fights, that’s trying to win at all costs. Here, I’m trying to think with Heidegger and Plato against the historically limited way that Heidegger thinks about political belonging. I think that Heidegger is right in saying that what it means to be human is to be polemical in his larger sense, which means to be confronted with one’s own history and to confront one’s own history and have to interpret it. We are necessarily embedded in the world that we’re born into, and that has to have an impact on us. There’s no getting around that. And all of us are confronted by that task in little ways and in big ways in our everyday life and in momentous decisions that we have. We’re informed by the past, we’re carried forward by the past. But if we don’t take seriously for ourselves what that past really means for us going forward into the future, we’re not taking ourselves seriously, and we’re not taking other people seriously. The polemical ethic is to take oneself, one’s history, and other people in the world around you—what they have to say, what they have to do—with utmost seriousness, and to be challenged by it and to challenge it.

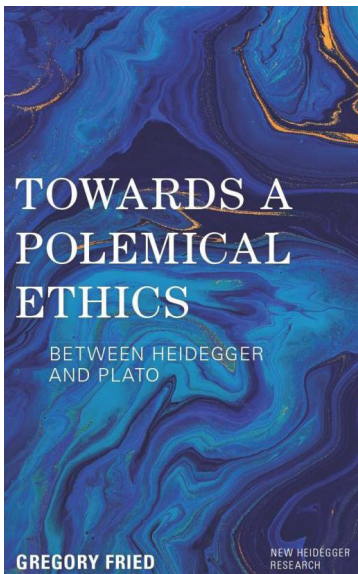
My difference with Heidegger is that I think he’s fundamentally wrong about denying need for transcendence beyond our own historical situatedness. I don’t think—and this is getting very complex, so I can only say a little bit about it, and the readers of this interview will have to read the book—I don’t think that Plato or Socrates believe that absolute transcendence from our finite situatedness is truly possible for human beings. I believe they both think we can get glimmers of what that might mean and have experiences of transcending our limited finite understanding of things and of coming to a new understanding of them. But I think for Plato and for Socrates, the philosophical life is a constant striving to seek that enlightenment: to try our utmost to transcend our historical circumstances, even knowing that we will ultimately fail. And that’s an ongoing struggle that makes life interesting but is also an ethical and political requirement on us. In our context, I think that we see this animated by the American experiment in liberal democracy, where the American experiment begins with these very high-flying words: We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

That’s an ideal standard for what you think of as human life—and also what society you think would be a good and decent one, and what government you think would be a legitimate one. Did America in 1776, at the time of the Declaration of Independence, or in 1789, when the constitution was adopted, embody those

ideals? Was reality in conformity with those ideals? Absolutely not. There was slavery, there was the subjugation of women. Even white men didn't have the vote because there were property requirements for having the vote. So, in what sense are all persons created equal if that's the world that we are inhabiting? An example of the "polemical" ethic is to confront the historical reality in which one lives and say: We have this ideal, we claim we're living by this ideal. What does that ideal truly mean? Have we misunderstood it? When it says *all men*, does it mean only *all white men*, or *all white men who own enough property*? Does it include the people of color who have been enslaved? We had a Civil War to try to resolve that question. Does *all men* mean *all males*, or does it include women?

The confrontation with our history tells us that women should have the vote and have equal rights under the constitution—that working itself out of what the ideal means requires that we transcend our time in order to understand the ideal more fully. If people couldn't do that, slavery would never have been challenged in the way it was by figures that I take as heroic and emblematic of this. And the one that I've chosen here to speak of is Frederick Douglass and others. But Douglas, in my view, is a paramount version of a modern American Platonist who confronts his lived situation and is faithful enough to the ideals of what that situation *ought* to be, what it *should* be, to try to rectify and change the lived world so it's a little bit closer to what that ideal, as best he understands it, requires. I think we're still fighting that fight. That's a summation in very broad strokes of what's going on in my book and why I think these issues are important.

PK Thank you for your time, Prof. Fried. It's been a pleasure.



Gregory Fried, *Towards a Polemical Ethics: Between Heidegger and Plato* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

Professor Fried's book can be purchased on Amazon or from the publisher at www.rowman.com.

HERMENEUTICS OF HERACLITUS

Allowing Concept Flux

GABRIEL BICKERSTAFF

*Conjoinings: wholes and not wholes, converging and diverging, harmonious
dissonant; and out of all things one, and out of one all things.*¹

–*Heraclitus*

A thought exercise by which to consider the meaning of the above fragment might leave one feeling that there is more unsaid than said, or wondering what Heraclitus is speaking *in reference to*. A reader might try to fill in the blanks, considering what Heraclitus's words would mean in the context of their own experience. But Heraclitus is best known for leaving the reader hanging. A forgotten poet said that Heraclitus "is called 'Obscure' because he wrote very obscurely on nature," and Aristotle complained that Heraclitus omitted punctuation so that the same fragment could be read as meaning two different things.² While his difficult style was a cause for criticism by his early readers, it remains a defining characteristic of Heraclitus's fragments. And whether it is despite or because of their ambiguity, the valuable philosophical potential of his words is evident in his profound influence on Philo of Alexandria and Plato and his presence in historical and contemporary philosophy.³ Heraclitus and his troublesome words continue to feature in philosophy

1 Laks, André, and Glen W. Most, *Early Greek Philosophy: Early Ionian Thinkers Part 2* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 161 (D47).

2 Laks and Most, 209.

3 A. V. Halapsis, "Man and Logos: Heraclitus's Secret," *Anthropological Measurements of Philosophical Research* 0, no. 17 (2020): 127.; Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 88.

published today.

This essay leans into Heraclitus's enigmatic style while exploring the space between philosophy as critical interpretive scholarship and *doing* philosophy or engaging authentically with concepts about the nature of things. To read Heraclitus, in the sense of trying to understand what he means by what he says, presents difficulty. Most philosophical literature about Heraclitus tries to add some insight or perspective about what he means – to explicate more clearly what his original idea or intended meaning could be.⁴ Such literature is good philosophical scholarship, and authors concerned with Heraclitus give compelling reasons for their interpretations. However, no amount of incisive scholarship will ever allow us to fully determine Heraclitus's intended meaning.⁵ Reasons for this include first, Heraclitus's own riddlesome style of expression,⁶ and second, the space between Heraclitus and ourselves – the double barrier of having to read Heraclitus through all his past exegetes as well as our own historical, philosophical, cultural and linguistic conditioning, which inevitably and inadvertently color our interpretive efforts.⁷ On the worst end of this problem, interpretations are sometimes regarded as more or less authoritative based on philosophical attitudes that are preferred at a given time.⁸ Yet, Heraclitus's historical and philosophical significance makes the project of interpreting his riddles worthwhile despite these hermeneutical barriers.⁹ Moreover, I think the philosophical value of Heraclitus's expressions inspires new philosophical development. One case of this is an essay by William Desmond, in which he utilizes what he calls a "companioning approach" as a hermeneutical tool to explore Heraclitus's expressions of flux and whether flux is intelligible.¹⁰ Desmond's companioning seems to be a good tool both for interpreting Heraclitus, and for moving beyond interpretation to *doing* philosophy and developing Heraclitean concepts.

In this essay, I support and show the merit of Desmond's companioning approach both as a hermeneutical tool, and as a means for Desmond to go beyond interpretation and to philosophize with Heraclitus.

To support Desmond's companioning approach, I first depend on Charles Kahn, a prominent Heraclitus scholar, to define the hermeneutical problem. Second, I explain

-
- 4 Halapsis, 119-129.; C. D. C. Reeve, "Ekpurōsis and the Priority of Fire in Heraclitus," *Phronesis* 27, no. 3 (1982): 299-305.; Laura Rosella Schluderer, "Speaking and Acting the Truth: The Ethics of Heraclitus," *Méthexis* 29, no. 1 (2017): 1-19.; Magdalena Wdowiak, "Heraclitus's Sense of Logos in the Context of Greek Root 'Leg-' in Epic Poets," *Classica Cracoviensia* 18, (2015): 459-73.; Robin Reames, "The Logos Paradox: Heraclitus, Material Language, and Rhetoric," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 46, no. 3 (2013): 328-50.
- 5 Halapsis, "Man and Logos: Heraclitus's Secret," 120.
- 6 Halapsis, 119-20.; Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 205-15 (R5-R15).
- 7 Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 87.
- 8 Kahn, 88.; Ed. L. Miller, "The Logos of Heraclitus: Updating the Report," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 2 (1981): 167-68. Miller gives an instance of this problem where presocratic philosophers are characterized as modern positivists of scientism/empiricism.
- 9 Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 88.
- 10 Desmond, William, "Flux-Gibberish: For and Against Heraclitus," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 70, no. 3 (2017): 473-75.

what is useful about Desmond's companioning approach and position it relative to the hermeneutical problem. Third, I draw on Pierre Hadot's insights about perennial hermeneutical problems in the history of philosophy to argue that there is a need to go beyond interpretation to engage concepts themselves, as we best understand them. Fourth, I argue for the legitimacy of companioning with or thinking philosophically with Heraclitus, given that this could be the kind of activity he hoped to effect in others. To support this view, I engage Alex Halapsis' thesis that Heraclitus's obscure style was essential to his philosophical commitments and was intended to allow active philosophical thinking. The third and fourth sections which bring in Hadot and Halapsis suffice as context to show the merit of companioning as a viable approach to the problem of reading Heraclitus and as a worthy philosophical activity for itself.

THE PROBLEM WITH INTERPRETING HERACLITUS

Charles Kahn saw critical interpretation of Heraclitus as a worthy and limited endeavor. Through his book he sought to better consider what the "literary artistry" of Heraclitus's fragments could lend to our interpretation of them, specifically qualities of expression which he called "linguistic density" and "resonance." His resulting analysis remained open to plural meanings or "readings" existing together in Heraclitus's statements – an approach which differed from the precedent of limiting Heraclitus to one explicitly intended meaning.¹¹ However, Kahn was realistic about the limitations and potential pitfalls of any interpretive effort. He notes how Heraclitus's vague quality of expression makes his ideas especially susceptible to rash misappropriation or "the free play of interpretation," so that "every age and philosophical perspective... projected its own meaning and preoccupations onto the text of Heraclitus."¹² Kahn explained that any interpretation will inevitably be conditioned by the unique and unchosen perspective of the interpreter, but that there is no perfect way of engaging with Heraclitus. Kahn presents the problem as the difference between the "object-language" of the extant Greek text and commentary or explications of it as "hermeneutical metalanguage," which is our means of trying to access the object-language. There is no alternative way of receiving Heraclitus than to make or choose a metalanguage for ourselves – a metalanguage which will more or less closely approximate what Heraclitus really meant. Kahn calls this problem "the hermeneutical circle." The best referee that we have for the metalanguage we develop is the text itself. To read Heraclitus at all, we must risk some degree of misunderstanding, but we ought to be as responsible as we can.¹³ For Kahn this is to consider how the qualities of linguistic density and resonance bear on Heraclitus's meaning.

¹¹ Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 89, 91-92.

¹² Kahn, 87.

¹³ Kahn, 87-88.

COMPANIONING AS A HERMENEUTICAL TOOL

This problem of interpretation was also acknowledged by William Desmond in his paper about Heraclitus's idea of flux and implications for the intelligibility of nature that is in flux.¹⁴ Desmond's paper is an instance of creative philosophical thinking. He presented this interpretive problem in terms of a "ventriloquizing" vs. a "companioning approach." For Desmond, ventriloquizing is what happens when someone misappropriates Heraclitus so that one would "find in Heraclitus what one brings to him." Desmond explains that in ventriloquizing, "the words we have of Heraclitus function like... rorschach blobs or indeterminate pictures onto which we project ourselves." Much like a more sophisticated philosophical plagiarism, the problem with ventriloquizing isn't the way that concepts are used per se, but the lack of definition around the creative philosophical exchange that is happening in the hermeneutical circle. Desmond doesn't exempt Heidegger, Hegel, or Nietzsche from the charge of ventriloquizing to some extent with Heraclitus.¹⁵

Companioning, on the other hand, happens when "the thinker who occasions the reflection is less an object of scholarly research and more one who brings forth connatural thinking in us, as we try to understand him *and the matters that engage him*."¹⁶ Companioning as a hermeneutical approach would free one from making a claim regarding Heraclitus's intended philosophical meaning – allowing there to be a distance between what Heraclitus may have meant and what his fragments bring to mind for the contemporary reader. Desmond regards Heraclitus as an exemplary philosophical companion. "Heraclitus offers us striking thoughts that strike one into thought - thought that opens up philosophical porosity to the deepest perplexities."¹⁷ What Desmond seems to describe here is a more receptive, cooperative, and uninhibited disposition for engaging with a thinker. Desmond's companioning approach is his articulation of the practice of letting a piece of text *move us* into philosophizing. As a hermeneutical tool, companioning has the benefit of defining this activity and distinguishing it from critical interpretive scholarship.

HISTORY OF HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEMS

To communicate ideas or concepts across language, space, time, culture and between persons with incongruent life experience is an inhibited project. As Kahn put it, "there is the more fundamental problem that we, good classical scholars that we are, are also historical beings with a certain perspective, who can only see what is visible from where we happen to be standing."¹⁸ It seems impossible that an idea or concept could exist the same way for me, when I read a translation of Heraclitus,

¹⁴ William Desmond, "Flux-Gibberish: For and Against Heraclitus," *Review of Metaphysics* 70, no. 3 (2017): 474.

¹⁵ Desmond, 473-74.

¹⁶ Desmond, 473 (emphasis added).

¹⁷ See note 12 above.

¹⁸ Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 87.

as it did for him when he wrote it in his own language. I might think about the words I am reading and reference my experiences of things to lead me to a concept approximating what Heraclitus intended to communicate.

We may do our best, through reading critical interpretive studies, to understand Heraclitus's intended meaning, but what then? Ought one to preserve these concepts as perfectly Heraclitean as possible? This seems impractical when we consider that ideas, however Heraclitean they may be, relate to a very different collection of conceptual data for someone in the 21st century than they did for Heraclitus. For example, Desmond's work with Heraclitus's flux doctrine was a unique philosophical project because Desmond was also relating Heraclitus's flux (or Desmond's version of Heraclitus's flux) to Nietzsche, Hegel, and Heidegger who came long after Heraclitus. It would seem that concepts are not static, especially when they are shared between persons. We could use Play-Doh to think about this process of receiving, playing with and understanding concepts: My friend Rachel gave me a Play-Doh sculpture of a bird. To understand the shape of the bird, I had to squish the Play-Doh and make my own bird. My bird was a bit different because I have seen different birds than Rachel, but I had a more real concept of the shape of a bird after I made my own bird with the Play-Doh. This is like the give and take of ideas or concepts.

To show the merit of Desmond's companioning in this context I look to Pierre Hadot who understood this problem of the flux of ideas in ancient Greek philosophy and the history of philosophy. His nuanced writings are a great source for learning the subtleties of ancient thought. Hadot achieved depth and breadth through steeping himself in original texts.¹⁹ Hence he can provide insight into the way philosophy was done, as well as what philosophy was thought to be. In both of these ways, ancient Greek philosophy facilitated philosophical freedom or innovation much more than contemporary historical study. We will look at the method or mode of ancient Greek thought first, and then what philosophy was thought to be.

Hadot highlighted an incongruence between how we engage with philosophical ideas and how ancient Greek philosophers did. Hadot notes that the mode of philosophical activity in the "pre-Cartesian period"²⁰ was exegesis – a process which involved elaborating or explicating latent meaning in texts. This process resulted in a plethora of what, from our contemporary philosophical attitude, would be considered inexcusable conceptual errors – ventriloquizing, to use Desmond's word. Hadot was no more a fan of ventriloquizing than Desmond; however, he acknowledged how exegesis allowed ideas to develop:

19 Michael Chase, Translator's Note to *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), vi.; Arnold I. Davidson, *Introduction to Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 1-2.

20 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 73.

The fact that authentic texts raise questions is not due to any inherent defect. On the contrary: their obscurity, it was thought, was only the result of a technique used by a master, who wished to hint at a great many things at once, and therefore enclosed the “truth” in his formulations. Any potential meaning, as long as it was coherent with what was considered to be the master’s doctrine, was consequently held to be true.²¹

It isn’t difficult to see how this activity could result in a plethora of meanings and conceptual scaffolding not conceived of by the author of the text in question. Hadot explained that those engaged in exegetical analysis would formalize texts into new conceptual systems. Other times, conflicting or unrelated concepts would be awkwardly stuck together, resulting in a philosophical Frankenstein of sorts.²² However rash this might have been, Hadot acknowledged the opportunity for philosophical creativity that this practice afforded.

The modern historian may be somewhat disconcerted on coming across such modes of thought, so far removed from his usual manner of reasoning. He is, however, forced to admit one fact: very often, mistakes and misunderstandings have brought about important evolutions in the history of philosophy. In particular, they have caused new ideas to appear.²³

Less concern with interpretive accuracy and more interest in engaging with the concepts for themselves created the conditions of what was simultaneously philosophical innovation and philosophical distortion. Hadot seems to favor the conceptual freedom of exegesis, but not the ventriloquizing it involved. The philosophical creativity that was afforded by exegesis helped to blaze new conceptual territory, however it came at the expense of interpretive clarity.

Hadot makes a couple of odd notes about this problem that are important. One is that this exegetical phenomenon has happened especially with notions of being. The other is that he faults a strange philosophical fetish with systematizing ideas for causing exegetical distortion. Hadot explained that one exegetic offense against the philosopher being explicated was to impose a system onto their ideas. He stated: “systematization amalgamates the most disparate notions which had originated in different or even contradictory doctrines.” And “philosophical thought utilized a methodology which condemned it to accept incoherences and far-fetched association, precisely to the extent that it wanted to be systematic.”²⁴ However Hadot clarifies that this exegetical systematization is different from modern notions of system and that

²¹ See note 18 above.

²² Hadot, 74-75.

²³ Hadot, 75.

²⁴ Hadot, 75-76.

modern idealist efforts to replace exegesis with pure reason also failed and relapsed back into exegesis.²⁵

Hadot is correct when he says that now, “historians seem to consider all exegetical thought as the result of mistakes or misunderstandings.”²⁶ This complaint has been made by and about interpreters of Heraclitus. For scholars like Kahn, concerned only with discerning Heraclitus’s original intended meaning, “the various levels of exegesis and distortion,” has made this task more difficult.²⁷ Though Hadot values the free engagement with ideas afforded by exegesis, he does not see interpretive mistakes as a good thing. Rather, he faults contemporary exegesis for “the same violence used by ancient practitioners of allegory.”²⁸ This, shall we call it a curate’s egg phenomenon, I think speaks to the need for allowing old philosophical texts to catalyze new philosophical developments. However, there should perhaps be a way for this to be done without ascribing new variants of an idea to the author of its original form. Blame for conceptual innovation need not always be thrown back to whoever’s work inspired it – an exegete can take philosophical responsibility. I think this is what companionship allows.

Hadot also provides insight into what philosophy was thought to be in antiquity. He helps us understand that philosophy was not a project of defined concepts logically related in deductive argument. Rather, it was somewhat fluid since it was meant to be deeply transformative and relevant to life. Hadot’s presentation of this kind of thinking is philosophy as “spiritual exercises.”²⁹

Hadot unpacks spiritual exercises in a descriptive way, highlighting their presence as a point of unity in the thought of diverse groups and figures including Plato, Socrates, the Stoics, Epicureans and Neoplatonists.³⁰ Spiritual exercises were activities done intentionally to affect some inner improvement within the person. They were *spiritual* because of the “level” at which they worked in the person. Hadot explained that “these exercises are the result, not merely of thought, but of the individual’s entire psychism” and “the philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It... causes us to *be* more fully, and makes us better.”³¹ Hadot presents ancient thought as operating on more dimensions than merely the cognitive – one might say they cause ontological and moral augmentation within a person. Further, they are exercises because they are activities done intentionally, which in a manner analogous to “physical exercises,” have the power of causing this deep spiritual (ontological, moral, cognitive) improvement.³²

25 Hadot, 76.

26 Hadot, 74.

27 Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 87.

28 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 76.

29 Hadot, 83, 81.

30 Hadot, 101-02, 81-109.

31 Hadot, 82-83.

32 Hadot, 102.

Understanding philosophy as somewhat of a self-improvement project provides another account for why less emphasis had been placed on the integrity of concepts as communicated and received. Philosophy was not to be understood for its own sake, but for the sake of affecting human change to which the constancy of ideas took secondary importance. It is as though the concepts had to adopt the fluid quality of the ontological change they were meant to affect.

To read Heraclitus in light of Hadot's insights about the nature and methods of antique thought would require us to exchange the relative importance we give to getting Heraclitus right for the value of concepts we derive from his riddlesome expressions as catalysts for helping us think about the nature of things and of ourselves. This is Desmond's companioning approach, in which Heraclitus "brings forth connatural thinking in us, as we try to understand him and the matters that engage him."³³ Some have even gone as far as to claim that Heraclitus *intended* to make us think for ourselves.

HERACLITUS AS A COMPANION

Alex V. Halapsis claimed this as part of his thesis that the center of Heraclitus's program was a philosophical anthropology³⁴ – a theory that the soul's self-consciousness after death depended on its wisdom or how intellectually awake it had made itself during life. Halapsis accounted for what Heraclitean notions of being awake and of having a dry or fiery vs wet soul mean as expressions of the relative immortality of the soul. According to Halapsis, Heraclitus would have understood the soul as immortal by nature, but only immortal in the sense of achieving "self-awareness" if it made itself so during life. For Heraclitus, this meant to actualize its *Logos* which is what it meant to be awake, dry, fiery, wise etc. And this sort of ontological transformation could happen only through "active participation in the cognitive process."³⁵

Halapsis thought that Heraclitus remained obscure to force us to awaken. Our salvation, which is our enlightenment, depends on us to actively and effortfully inquire for ourselves into the nature of things – a process which stops as soon as someone saves us the trouble by telling us explicitly. Hence, Heraclitus refused to be explicit. Halapsis contrasts Heraclitus with Pythagoras for whom wisdom consisted of a dogmatist program of truths spoon-fed to naïve minds. "But the fact is that comprehending *other people's* doctrines is certainly the wrong way. Wisdom cannot be "borrowed" from others; it cannot be 'copied' into one's head. Knowing ten wise doctrines will not make anyone a 'tenfold' sage." In Halapsis's view, Heraclitus wanted rather to inspire the movement to wisdom. Hence, "I searched (for) myself,"³⁶

³³ Desmond, "Flux-Gibberish," 473.

³⁴ Halapsis, "Man and Logos: Heraclitus's Secret," 120.

³⁵ Halapsis, 125, 125-27.

³⁶ Halapsis, 124.; Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 155.

This is the part of Halapsis's thesis that supports the general disposition behind Desmond's companioning approach – of relaxing efforts to pin down what Heraclitus is saying about the way things are. This is because, in Halapsis's account, Heraclitus didn't make explicit statements about things lest someone too quickly assent, precluding their own searching and awakening. If Desmond's companioning approach means something like allowing a philosopher's expression to make us think for ourselves, then Halapsis's account would be that Heraclitus intended to be companioned with – accompanied shall we say in his obscurity.

Noteworthy is how closely Halapsis's thesis of Heraclitus's philosophical anthropology aligns with Hadot's presentation of spiritual exercises. Both are a deep (perhaps ontological) growth affected within the person through some intentional activity – active inquiry in the case of Heraclitus. I would argue that Halapsis' Heraclitus would fit comfortably among Hadot's examples of the spiritual exercises of antiquity, however Hadot had reasons for framing spiritual exercises “from Socrates to Foulcault,” and a defense for including Heraclitus would require a separate essay.

DESMOND'S COMPANIONING WITH HERACLITUS

It is worthwhile here to approach Desmond's thesis about “flux-gibberish” in as much as it helps us get a better sense of his companioning with Heraclitus. In his paper, Desmond proposes that Heraclitus's expressions, despite seeming ambiguous and illogical, have metaphysical significance because they indicate a form of being which more definite or lucid statements fail to capture. He thinks that Heraclitus, in his obsession with the constancy of the *Logos* and the flux of opposites and becoming, can be read as expressing the “overdeterminacy” of being, and that this overdeterminacy is spoken through expressions that have a “saturated equivocality.”³⁷

What does Desmond mean by saturated equivocality? He explains that with both Heraclitus's flux doctrine and the *Logos* that is a principle of constancy, he is working between “the constancy of form” and “the fluency of flux” so that expressions of the two are “synchronically superposed.”³⁸ They are expressed simultaneously and together to get at an overdeterminacy of being that doesn't come through in univocal language. “What I am calling the saturated equivocality of Heraclitus's discourse is his entry into the space of the over-determinate, and out of that space his effort to speak the superposition of seeming opposites that calls for utterance there. There is a oneness to it.”³⁹ Desmond explains that the equivocal opposites that are saturated and superposed are one in this overdeterminacy. He describes overdeterminacy as a “too-muchness,” found in art for example, in which “there is an abiding inexhaustibility, a source enabling of infinite astonishment, an origin out of

37 Desmond, “Flux-Gibberish,” 480, 496.

38 Desmond, 484, 486.

39 Desmond, 496.

which finite articulations emerge but which itself exceeds all finite articulations.”⁴⁰ Desmond thinks that Heraclitus’s expressions capture the overdeterminacy, rather than making it determinate, which is why they *seem* indeterminate and don’t make sense. “There is an overload of significance that can look idiotic; when (st)uttered the overdeterminacy looks idiotic.”⁴¹ To use Desmond’s descriptor, there is too much for Heraclitus to express, so his expressions are also too much for our univocal minds to process without Desmond helping us understand their doubleness or equivocity.

How do we understand this reading of Heraclitus by Desmond as companionship rather than the ventriloquizing of which he accuses Heraclitus’s modern readers? Believing that Heraclitus’s modern exegetes didn’t sound the full depth of Heraclitus’s sense of the overdeterminacy of being as expressed through saturated equivocal language, Desmond appears only to be offering an alternative interpretation. But perhaps Desmond receives this insight through companionship with Heraclitus. He explained that a reader who is committed to univocal intelligibility will mistake Heraclitus’s equivocity for logical contradictions, thus ventriloquizing with him. “We quickly construct more coherent theories, or perhaps ventriloquize a meaning through selected sayings of Heraclitus, a meaning less insolent to our more univocal measures of determinate argumentation.”⁴² This attempt to nail down Heraclitus, to massage away the incoherencies or to get rid of the parts that don’t fit as we think they should – this seems to be ventriloquizing. We could consider this in light of the violent exegetical tendency towards systematization highlighted by Hadot. Ventriloquizing seems to be an instance of this phenomenon – also remarkably happening with the notion of being. But is even Desmond ventriloquizing? He claims to be companionship but admits that “it may be impossible to avoid ventriloquizing entirely.”⁴³

Desmond is expressing Heraclitus in his metaphysical lexicon. Indeed, he is, with the rest of us, condemned to the “hermeneutical circle”.⁴⁴ But I think that companionship is real, and that Desmond is doing it. And I think companionship is slightly more helpful as a hermeneutical tool because it is more form-fitting. It requires a more receptive and relaxed disposition, allowing the text of the author to distinguish itself. We could think back to Desmond’s statement: “Heraclitus offers us striking thoughts that strike us into thought.” In this expression of companionship, Heraclitus’s fragments take the position of agency, affecting the reader. This arrangement allows the words of Heraclitus to cause us to think and reflect with Heraclitus, perhaps even allowing our thought to pattern Heraclitus’s more closely. At the same time, it relieves

40 Desmond, 498.

41 Desmond, 502.

42 Desmond, 488.

43 Desmond, 474.

44 Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 88.

us of having to make sense of Heraclitus or risk proffering a definitive account of what Heraclitus himself meant.

CONCLUSIONS

Some remarks can be made about Desmond's place among our three reference points, Kahn, Hadot and Halapsis: Kahn thought that attending to qualities of Heraclitus's expressions such as resonance and density could add to our understanding of what his words *mean*. While Kahn's work has its merits, Desmond's project also attends to the poetic quality of Heraclitus's fragments. And because Desmond *companions* with Heraclitus and is *doing* philosophy rather than mere interpretive scholarship, he can suggest that Heraclitus's words have a saturated equivocity which expresses an overdeterminacy, with the result that their meaning comes by means of apparent contradictions.

Hadot shows that not only has something like Desmond's ventriloquizing been happening for the entire history of philosophy through systematization and creative misinterpretation, but that there is an extent to which this is inevitable and necessary. Scholars' honesty about the hermeneutical problems and pitfalls is already a huge step forward, but companionship could be the next step by legitimizing the tendency for a philosophical companion to "strike one into thought," – into *doing* philosophy, and distinguishing this project from strict interpretive scholarship.

What Desmond is doing in trying to identify the metaphysics behind Heraclitus's saturated expressions is, I would argue, something like what Halapsis claims that Heraclitus hoped others would do to awaken their logos and "connect" with *the* logos to make themselves immortal.⁴⁵ If Halapsis is correct that Heraclitus intended to be obscure for this reason, then companionship, or the general attitude of letting ourselves be *struck into thought*, would be an appropriate way of engaging with Heraclitus's fragments.

Companionship is an important hermeneutical activity, distinct from the critical interpretive work of Charles Kahn, yet equally important, especially for those who are perhaps more concerned than Kahn with the rich philosophical potential in Heraclitus's expressions. Kahn stresses that our being trapped in the hermeneutical circle does not mean "that interpretation is a game with no rules, which anyone can play and in which no mistakes are possible."⁴⁶ Kahn is right. However, companionship allows us to step outside the game of interpretation and to do philosophy; we are free from "rules," free to make mistakes and engage Heraclitus on philosophical rather than interpretive grounds. Companionship is a part of "the formulation of the thoughts that are dearest to one's own intellectual and spiritual concerns. [...]"

⁴⁵ Halapsis, "Man and Logos: Heraclitus's Secret," 125-26.

⁴⁶ See note 46 above.

One may be finding one's own voice, but into that voice the heard voice of the companion may have entered intimately."⁴⁷ A worthy activity might be to read Heraclitus fragments slowly and reflectively while letting the ideas, however they are received, react with one's internal milieu of other philosophical voices and personal experiences, considering possible implications for how to perceive the world and oneself.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ William Desmond, "Despoiling the Egyptians - Gently: Merold Westphal and Hegel," *Gazing Through a Prism Darkly: Reflections on Merold Westphal's Hermeneutical Epistemology*, ed. B. Keith Putt (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 23.

⁴⁸ Grateful recognition goes to professors Christopher Bobier, Patricia Calton and Joseph Tadie, as well as to the editorial board at *Dianoia* for critical reviews and helpful feedback during the writing process.

REFERENCES

- Chase, Michael. Translator's Note to *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault, vi-viii*. Edited by Arnold I. Davidson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- Davidson, Arnold I. Introduction to *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Translated by Michael Chase. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- Desmond, William. "Flux-Gibberish: For and Against Heraclitus." *Review of Metaphysics* 70, no. 3 (2017): 473-505.
- Desmond, William. "Despoiling the Egyptians - Gently: Merold Westphal and Hegel," *Gazing Through a Prism Darkly: Reflections on Merold Westphal's Hermeneutical Epistemology*. Edited by B. Keith Putt. New York: Fordham University Press, 2009.
- Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Translated by Michael Chase. Edited by Arnold I. Davidson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- Halapsis, A. V. "Man and Logos: Heraclitus's Secret." *Anthropological Measurements of Philosophical Research* 0, no. 17 (2020): 119-29.
- Kahn, Charles H. *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Laks, André, and Glen W. Most. *Early Greek Philosophy: Early Ionian Thinkers Part 2*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Miller, Ed. L. "The Logos of Heraclitus: Updating the Report." *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 2 (1981): 161-76.
- Reames, Robin. "The Logos Paradox: Heraclitus, Material Language, and Rhetoric." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 46, no. 3 (2013): 328-50.
- Reeve, C. D. C. "Ekpurōsis and the Priority of Fire in Heraclitus." *Phronesis* 27, no. 3 (1982): 299-305.
- Schluderer, Laura Rosella. "Speaking and Acting the Truth: The Ethics of Heraclitus." *Méthexis* 29, no. 1 (2017): 1-19.
- Wdowiak, Magdalena. "Heraclitus's Sense of Logos in the Context of Greek Root 'Leg-' in Epic Poets." *Classica Cracoviensia* 18, (2015): 459-73.

HOW CAN WE REACH THE TRUE DEFINITION OF SOMETHING?

Essence, Definition, and Teleology in Aristotle's Metaphysics

MINJUN LEE

*“The ultimate value of life depends upon awareness and the power of
contemplation rather than upon mere survival.”*

-Aristotle

INTRODUCTION

What is wisdom (*sophia*)? In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says, “Clearly, wisdom is knowledge of certain principles and causes (ἡ σοφία περί τινος ἀρχᾶς καὶ αἰτίας ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη, ὄβριον)” (982a2).¹ For him, the task of *Metaphysics* is investigating being qua being, the principles and causes of being.² The inquiry into being qua being signifies the question of what a being is. What a being is and what a substance is are the same: “Namely, what is being? is just the question, What is substance?” (1028b3).³ Aristotle believes that a substance is equal to an essence: “the essence, the account of which is a definition, is said to be each thing’s substance” (1017b22). The essence and the definition (*horismos*) are one in some sense: “the definition is the account of the essence” (1031a11). If the essence of a thing X is p, then the definition of X is the statement “X is p.” Thus, reaching the true definition

¹ This citation from *Metaphysics* refers to the Loeb translation.

² *Metaphysics* 1003a20-27

³ All citations here and throughout this paper refer to the Reeve translation; see appended bibliography.

of something is identical to knowing what something is and can be an answer to the question of Metaphysics.

Nevertheless, there is a puzzle with Aristotle's method of reaching the true definition of something in Metaphysics. He approaches the definition of something by dividing genera and finding differentiae. However, if we follow Aristotle's system to reach the definition of something, we face the moment when it is questionable whether the definition by means of genera and differentia is the true definition. For instance, Aristotle gives a definition of a human: "A human is a featherless, two-footed animal."⁴ Since the definition of something is the account of its essence, if the account "a human is a featherless, two-footed animal" is the true definition of a human, the essence of a human is nothing but 'featherless and two-footed.' This is because the essence means "what something is" (1030a3). Does such a definition truly capture the essence of a human being what a human is? Although a human is the only featherless and two-footed living creature, this does not seem to be the true definition of a human. We know that what a human is goes beyond this definition by virtue of being a human. Living a human life is more valuable than just surviving as one of the animals. Therefore, this definition is the mere taxonomic definition. This definition does not express a vivid human life.

Hence, we should know how to find the true definition of something in order for us not to remain as a merely featherless, two-footed animal. Unfortunately, Aristotle does not give us any suggestion of how we can overcome this issue. Unless we know the solution to surmount this problem with Aristotle's method, we may not reach the true definition of something. If we cannot reach the true definition of something, then we cannot know its true essence. This is a significant problem for Aristotle, who seeks knowledge of what it is in Metaphysics.

However, there is a way of reconciling the method of reaching a taxonomic definition and a true definition. This is the aim of this paper. We will not dismiss Aristotle's method of dividing genera and finding differentia. Instead, we will interpret the true meaning of the ultimate differentia in this paper. This interpretation of the meaning of the ultimate differentia will guide us towards the true definition of something. Hence, the ultimate goal of this project is to find the true meaning of the ultimate differentia of something, supplement Aristotle's method of division, complete his unfinished project, and reach its true definition.

OVERVIEW

In order to achieve this aim, we will proceed in three parts. In Part 1, we will investigate what a definition is and how Aristotle approaches the definition by means of genera and differentiae. Using this method, Aristotle defines a human as 'a featherless, two-footed animal.' However, it is questionable whether this is the true definition of a human due to two reasons. Therefore, we will articulate why this is not the true definition of a human and begin to look for a solution. In Part 2, we will attempt

⁴ *Metaphysics* 1037b34

to rectify this issue by showing that the ultimate differentia (*teleutaia diaphora*) of something, is, in fact, the same as the end (*telos*), which lies at the heart Aristotle's theory. In Part 3, we will attempt to reach the true definition of something by reconciling Aristotle's method with its ultimate differentia (*telos*).

PART 1: DEFINITION OF GENERA AND DIFFERENTIA

What is a definition? The definition of something is the account of its essence. Aristotle says, "For the essence is just what something is (ὅπερ γὰρ τί ἐστι τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι)" (1030a3). Thus, if we ask the question "what is a human?" then the answer to this question would require the essence of a human. Nevertheless, what does he mean by "what something is?" Let us look at another explanation for the essence to have a better grasp of it. Aristotle describes the essence as what it is said to be intrinsically:

The essence of each thing is what it is said to be intrinsically. For the being for you is not the being for musical. For you are not intrinsically musical. [Your essence], therefore, is what you are [said to be] intrinsically. (1029b14-15)

You can be musical. However, you do not need to be musical. You can still be you without being musical. Being musical is not necessary for being you. Therefore, it is accidental. However, let us assume that there is some characteristic *p* essential to being *X*. Since to be *p* is necessary for *X*, *X* cannot be *X* without it. Hence, the essence of each thing is that which is necessary to being it. Thus, it appears that the definition of a thing is the account of what is necessary to being it.

Then, what is the account (*logos*)? The Greek word 'λόγος' (*logos*) means speech or thought. Thus, the definition of something is the speech or thought of its essence. However, what we want to know is the essence of something (or what something is), since the main task of Metaphysics is the investigation of what something is. In that case, why do we need speech? The reason may be that the essence of a thing does not belong to us; it belongs to the thing itself. Thus, if we want to relate to and understand a thing, we need some mediator between it and us. It is the speech (*logos*) that belongs to us and expresses our understanding of it.⁵ Thus, the definition belongs to us since a definition is a kind of an account. We come to the essence by means of a logical procedure of our language. And since an account consists of a subject and a predicate that states an attribute of the subject, the definition also has a linguistic structure composed of a subject and a predicate. Hence, since the definition of a

⁵ In *On the Soul*, Aristotle explains in detail how we cognize and understand a sensible object logico-linguistically. When we perceive (*aisthanesthai*) a sensible object, imagination (*phantasia*) works. Because of imagination, a mental image (*phantasma*), the sensible form of a sensible object, is presented to us (427b20). And then, our thinking capacity, the mind (*noûs*), thinks this mental image. Thinking (*noeô*) is the process in which the mind in the active sense makes the mind in the passive sense actually identical with the objects of thought (430a14-17). When we think a thing, we make the notion of it. When we try to understand an object, we combine notions and make an account such as "S is P." Therefore, our understanding of the world is intertwined with our account. The account of something expresses our understanding of it. (This footnote refers to the Loeb translation.)

thing is the account of its essence, the definition is the linguistic expression of that which is necessary to its being.

If the definition consists of a subject and a predicate, what kind of thing can be the subject of a definition? In other words, what can we define? In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle deals only with substance (*ousia*) for the definition of something: “It is clear, therefore, that only of substance is there a definition” (1031a1). Therefore, only substance can be situated in the subject of the definition. What, then, is a substance?⁶

In his early book *Categories*, Aristotle divides a substance into two groups: particular objects and species.⁷ Individual things (*tode ti*; a “this something”), such as an individual man, are substances. And species (a human) and the genera of these species (an animal) are also substances. This shows us that Aristotle thinks that both a particular substance (say, Socrates) and a species (say, a human) or the genus of a species (say, an animal) can be a substance in a broad sense.

Nevertheless, Aristotle thinks that not all substances are proper candidates for the subject of their definitions. Of substances, we can only define a species. The definition is the account of the essence. Only things that are species of a genus have an essence: “Hence the essence will belong to things that are species of a genus and to nothing else” (1030a11-12). Therefore, only the species of a genus have their definitions.⁸

How, then, does Aristotle express the essence of something in the predicate of its definition? The subject of the definition of something is a species, so the predicate of its definition must be its genus and its differentiae. This is made clear by the fact that he says a species is a genus plus differentiae: “the species are composed of the genus and the differentiae” (1057b7). Undoubtedly, he expresses the account of its essence with its genus and its differentia:

⁶ What is a substance? This is an extremely complicated question to answer since his explanations of a primary substance and a secondary substance in *Categories* and *Metaphysics* are different. First, concerning a primary substance, in *Categories*, Aristotle explains that primary substances are particular objects (*tode ti*; a this something). In contrast, Aristotle says that the what-it-is (*to ti esti*) is primary in Book Z1 of *Metaphysics* (1027a14). Why are they different? The simplest hypothesis I can make is that, in *Categories*, he thinks that *tode ti* is primary, but in *Metaphysics*, he divides *tode ti* into matter (*hylē*) and form (*eidos*). By dividing *tode ti* into matter (*hylē*) and form (*eidos*), he thinks the what-it-is (*to ti esti*) is primary. Second, pertaining to a secondary substance, in *Categories*, Aristotle says that a species or the genera of a species are secondary. But in *Metaphysics*, species are regarded as form (*eidos*). However, he thinks that form is primary in *Metaphysics*. There would be more complexities related to what a substance is. Nevertheless, this is not our main project in this paper. What we want to know here is what can have a definition. Therefore, with the question of what a substance is, we will merely think that a substance is that which exists (being) such as 1) movable and perishable things in the sub-lunar level (animals or cups), 2) movable and eternal things (planets), and 3) something immovable and eternal (the prime mover). (1069a29-33, *Metaphysics*)

⁷ *Categories* 2a13-18.

⁸ Why does Aristotle think that there is no definition of a particular and perceptible substance? There are two reasons. First, an account does not admit the generation or destruction of something. (1039b23-30, *Metaphysics*) Perceptible and particular substances have matter. Substances having matter can come to be and pass away. However, an account only outlines whether something is or is not. Therefore, there is no definition of perceptible and particular substances. For instance, Socrates is a particular perceptible substance because Socrates has his body, which is matter. Therefore, Socrates is coming to be and passing away. We cannot define Socrates qua Socrates. Although we can define Socrates qua man, this is not a particular definition but his species definition. Second, a subject itself should not be present in the predicate of its definition. (1029b18-20, *Metaphysics*) The predicate of a definition should explain its subject without using the subject in the predicate. For example, we should not say that the definition of a cup is “a cup is a cup that is . . .” However, if we attempt to define a particular object, we will violate this rule. For instance, let us try to reach the definition of this cup. Its definition would be something like “this cup is a cup which is here.” This disobeys the rule that a subject itself should not be present in the predicate of its definition. In addition, Aristotle also excludes the possibility of the definition of the genus of a species since the genus of a species does not have the essence. Nonetheless, we can see that we define an animal as a perceptual living thing, for instance. It seems that, for Aristotle, we can give a definition of genus, but when we do this, we do not truly work on the question of what it is.

We should first investigate definitions that are by division. For there is nothing else in the definition except the genus that is mentioned first and the differentiae; the other genera are in fact the first one along with the differentiae combined with it. (1037b28-30)

By dividing genera, Aristotle finds the definition of something. First, he discovers the genus of something and then finds the differentiae combined with the genus. For instance, Aristotle offers “a human is a featherless, two-footed animal” as a definition.⁹ In this definition, a species (a human) is the subject, and the genus (animal) and the differentiae ‘two-footed’ and ‘featherless’ are predicated of it.

Nonetheless, before we try to follow how Aristotle reaches this definition, we should understand what a genus and a differentia are. The genus of something is the common thing of what are distinct in species:

What is distinct in species is distinct from something, in something, and this latter thing must belong to both—for example, if an animal is distinct in species [from another], then, both are animals. Hence [two] things that are distinct in species must be in the same genus. For this is the sort of thing I call a genus, that by reference to which both things are said to be one and the same, and which is not coincidentally differentiated, whether as matter or otherwise. (1057b34-1058a1)

If we interpret the first sentence as “what is distinct in species (A) is distinct from something (B), in something (C),” we know that A and B are distinct in species, but both A and B belong to C. Then, C is the genus of A and B. For example, a human (A) and a horse (B) are distinct in species. However, the common thing they share is their genus (C). Both a human and a horse belong to the genus of animals (C). Therefore, animal (C) is the genus of a human (A) and a horse (B).

In addition, a differentia is what makes the difference between A and B:

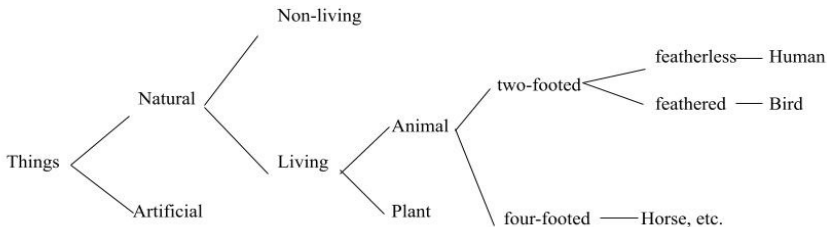
This differentia, therefore, will be a contrariety (as is also clear from induction). For all things are divided by opposites, and it has been shown that contraries are in the same genus. For contrariety was seen to be complete difference, and all difference in species is difference from something, in something, so that this latter thing is the same for both and is their genus . . . Hence the differentia is a contrariety. (1058a8-16)

If we consider the differentia ‘two-footed,’ then between a human and a horse, a human is two-footed, but a horse is not. Therefore, this differentia makes a distinction between them within the genus “animal.”

⁹ *Metaphysics* 1037b12

So far, we have investigated what a definition is and what we can define in Metaphysics. The definition of something is the account of its essence. The subject of a definition is a species, and the predicate expresses its essence. Aristotle thinks that he can logico-linguistically express the essence of a species with its genus and its differentia and reach its definition. He does this by the method of division and classification.¹⁰ He proceeds from genus to species by dividing genera and finding differentiae. Accordingly, let us attempt to find the definition of a human using his method in order to understand the problem with his method.

The initial task is to find its genus. Of things that exist in the universe, some are natural, and others are artificial. A human certainly belongs to the natural things category. Aristotle says that natural things are simple bodies, such as earth, fire, water, and air, and living bodies, such as plants and animals.¹¹ Among natural things, a human is an animal. Therefore, a human is placed under the genus of animals. Since the genus of animals is the proximate genus of a human, we know the genus of a human. However, under the genus of animals, there are innumerable species (say, a horse, a bird, a dog, a whale, etc.). Thus, to proceed from genus to species, we should find the differentiae of a human. Among animals, some are ‘footed,’ and others are not. A human belongs to footed animals. Of footed animals, some are ‘two-footed,’ and others are not (say, ‘four-footed’). A human has two feet. Therefore, a human is a two-footed animal. Nonetheless, there is still an abundance of two-footed animals: all types of birds, as well as humans, qualify as two-footed animals. We require more differentiae. How about ‘feathered? The contrariety of ‘feathered’ is ‘featherless.’ A human does not have feathers. Therefore, a human is a featherless, two-footed animal. Is there another featherless, two-footed animal? If so, we should find another differentia. However, a human is the only featherless, two-footed animal. Hence, this is the definition of a human by means of genera. The diagram below shows the journey of this division.



¹⁰ 1037b29
¹¹ Physics 192b9-10

We have followed the way in which Aristotle expresses the essence of a species by finding the most specific genus and differentiae. As a result, we have reached the definition of a human: A human is a featherless, two-footed animal. This definition sounds plausible. No one would deny it. The differentiae ‘featherless’¹² and ‘two-footed’ are unquestionably essential characteristics of a human. A human is intrinsically ‘two-footed’ and ‘featherless.’ A human is the only animal having the differentiae ‘featherless’ and ‘two-footed’ together. Therefore, this definition is exclusive to a human being.¹³ However, is this definition satisfactory? The definition of something is the account of its essence. Does this definition capture the essence of a human quite well? We can be satisfied with this definition if we regard ourselves nothing but featherless, two-footed animals! However, we are not satisfied with the definition “a human is a featherless, two-footed animal” for two reasons.

First, the combination of the differentiae ‘featherless’ and ‘two-footed’ are not what makes us humans in a positive sense even though these differentiae may set us apart from all other animals. In other words, these qualities express not what we ourselves are intrinsically but what other animals are not. Aristotle says that the essence (*to ti ên einai*; ‘the-what-it-was-to-be’) is the cause: “It is evident, accordingly, that we are inquiring into the cause. This is the essence, logico-linguistically (ΦΑΝΕΡὸν τοίνυν ὅτι ζητεῖ τὸ αἴτιον (τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, ὡς εἰπεῖν λογικῶς))” (1041a27). What is the cause of a thing X? This question is the same question as “what causes X to be X?” The answer is the essence of X. Since the essence of X belongs to X, X is X. If the account “a human is a featherless, two-footed animal” is the true definition of a human, then the essence of a human is the combination of the differentiae ‘featherless’ and ‘two-footed.’ It means that because of these differentiae ‘featherless’ and ‘two-footed,’ we are humans. Is it because “featherlessness” and “two-footedness” belong to me that I am a human being? Definitely not; we know that what a human is goes beyond this definition. What is it to be a human? To live a human life is not just to exist as a creature which has no feathers and has two legs. Although the differentiae ‘featherless’ and ‘two-footed’ seem to be essential components for a human because a human can move owing to two feet, these two essential qualities do not seem to make a human a human. How can we capture what it is to be a human in the definition of a human that Aristotle suggests?

Without capturing the essence of something, it is hard to say that we know what it is. Knowing what it is means that we know its essence and have reached its true definition. Therefore, if the differentiae of something do not capture its essence, it is unlikely that we know what it is and have reached its true definition.

¹² It is strange to say that ‘featherless’ is essential for a human being. How can we talk about some non-existent qualities? We should say what a human has instead of saying what a human does not have. We will look into this problem in a few paragraphs.

¹³ In fact, there are some other ‘two-footed, featherless animals,’ such as kangaroos and Tyrannosaurus Rex, although I assume that Aristotle is not aware of them in his life, unfortunately.

The second reason why the definition reached by genus and differentiae is insufficient is that the essence of something cannot be changeable, but the combination of essential differentiae seems subject to change. There are still copious differentiae that are essential characteristics of a human. A human is a 'vertebrate.' A human is 'warm-blooded.' A human is 'two-handed.' If we begin the task of defining a human with another differentia, we will reach another definition of a human being. For instance, let us try to find the definition of a human with the differentia 'vertebrate.' We know the genus of a human is an animal. We can divide animals into 'vertebrates' and 'invertebrates.' A human is a 'vertebrate.' There are innumerable vertebrate animals. We can break them down into 'warm-blooded' and 'cold-blooded.' Since a human is 'warm-blooded,' the tentative definition of a human is a warm-blooded, vertebrate animal. However, we know that there are a lot of warm-blooded, vertebrate animals. From this, we can add the previous example—"featherless" and "two-footed"—to the definition we have reached in this paragraph. Then, at the end of this process, the definition of a human is a featherless, two-footed, warm-blooded, vertebrate animal.

This shows that we will sometimes define a human as a featherless, two-footed animal, and at other times we will define a human as a featherless, two-footed, warm-blooded, vertebrate animal. Hence, the definition of something changes whenever we find another differentia. Indeed, Aristotle himself is aware of the problem with his dichotomous method in his book *Parts of Animals*:

Now if man was nothing more than a cleft-footed animal, this single differentia would duly represent his essence. But seeing that this is not the case, more differentiae than this one will necessarily be required to define him; and these cannot come under one division; for each single branch of a dichotomy ends in a single differentia, and cannot possibly include several differentiae belonging to one and the same animal. It is impossible then to reach any of the ultimate animal forms by dichotomous division. (644a7-13, *Parts of Animals*)

The differentiae can be changed because one and the same genus can be dichotomously divided in many different ways. He thinks that there is no single definition of an animal species. How can the essence of something change depending on the method of differentiation? How can sometimes 'featherless and two-footed' make a human be a human and other times 'featherless, two-footed, warm-blooded, vertebrate' make a human be a human?

If the essence is unchangeable, the essential differentia should also be unchangeable. However, the combination of essential differentiae seems to be changeable insofar as we can swap out one differentia for another. Why does this problem occur? We do not have a way to guide us among these decisions. We do not have a basis from which to decide because they both capture essential qualities. Therefore, even if we follow

the methodical dichotomous division of the genus, we might run into problems. For example, consider that we want to define a cup. The genus of a cup is ‘vessel.’ However, both a house and a cup can be considered to be vessels. Now, we need a differentia to distinguish them. A house is ‘doored.’ In contrast, a cup is ‘doorless.’ According to Aristotle’s method, we find ourselves in a position of saying that a cup is a doorless vessel. We know that a door never has anything to do with a cup. Similarly, though it is supposedly a “featherless, two-footed animal,” a feather does not have anything to do with a human at all. Why do we consider some feature that does not apply to us as essential? How can something that we do not have make us what we are? By following the method of differentiation, we find ourselves including in the definition essential qualities that are lacking in the species and that have no relevance to a human and a cup. Hence, even in the most careful application of Aristotle’s method, we still reach a definition that includes arbitrarily chosen differentiae.

So far, we have seen the reasons why the account “a human is a featherless, two-footed animal” is not the true definition of a human. The combination of the essential differentiae of X might not make X be X. It is true that the combination of the essential differentiae of X may tell us that X is different from any others due to the combination of the essential differentiae of X. However, it does not mean that these qualities signify what X itself is intrinsically. It only tells us what others are not. In addition, the arbitrariness of this method makes it vulnerable for us to reach the true definition.

Unless we know the essence of something, it is unlikely that we reach the true definition of something. We might have to be satisfied with a mere taxonomic definition: “what definitions are like” (1038a35) while we pretend to think we know the essence of something. Therefore, in Part 2, we will find a solution to overcome this problem.

PART 2: THE ULTIMATE DIFFERENTIA (TELEUTAIA DIAPHORA) IS THE END (TELOS)

In Part 1, we attempted to understand what a definition is, what we can define, and how Aristotle reaches the definition of something by the method of division. However, this method is not enough to capture the essence of something. To overcome this problem and reach the true definition of something, we need to consider the ultimate differentia (*teleutaia diaphora*). As Aristotle presents it, the ultimate differentia is the one that cannot be further divided. For instance, when we define a human as a featherless, two-footed animal, we divide animals with the first differentia ‘two-footed’ and the second one ‘featherless.’ Then, we reach a point in the procedure at which it becomes impossible. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the more significant feature of the ultimate differentia is its aptitude for capturing the essence of a thing.

Therefore, the goal of Part 2 is to investigate how to arrive at an ultimate differentia that is not arbitrary but that reliably captures the essence of the thing.

If we know the ultimate differentia of something, we will reach its satisfactory definition. Aristotle thinks this is the correct procedure to follow: “Thus it is evident that the definition is the account composed of the differentiae, or, if it is in accord with the correct procedure, the ultimate one” (1038a28-30). Without knowing the ultimate differentia of something, we might get lost in the labyrinth of the differentiae and not be able to find its true definition.

Aristotle suggests that the ultimate differentia will be the form and the substance: “If, then, we take a differentia of a differentia, one differentia—the ultimate one (*teleutaia diaphora*)—will be the form (*eidōs*) and the substance (*ousia*)” (1038a24-25). This is the only clue we can use in order for us to reach the true definition of something. Hence, the aim of Part 2 is to understand that the ultimate differentia of something is its end (*telos*) by utilizing this hint. Because Aristotle says that the ultimate differentia is the form and the substance, the exploration of the form (*eidōs*) and substance (*ousia*) is our primary task.¹⁴

Then, what are the form and the substance?¹⁵ Aristotle thinks that form and the substance are the same: “And by form I mean the essence of each thing and the primary substance” (1032b1). And we have seen that the primary substance is the what-it-is.¹⁶ The essence of each thing is what it is. Therefore, the form is the same as the substance. In addition, he says that the form and the substance are the activity: “So it is evident that the substance and the form are activity (ὥστε φανερόν ὅτι ἡ οὐσία καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐνέργειά ἐστιν)” (1050b1). Therefore, since the ultimate differentia is the same as the form and the substance, and the form and the substance are the same as the activity, the ultimate differentia will express the activity of the thing defined.

Then, what is the activity (*energeia*) of something? Aristotle says, “the activity is the end (τέλος ὃ ἢ ἐνέργεια)” (1050a9). And the end is the characteristic activity of a thing. It is that activity for-the-sake-of-which something is, without which it would not be what it is. Then what is the end (*telos*), or that for-the-sake-of-which?

¹⁴ Indeed, this direction is reasonable. The definition is the account of the essence. In fact, Aristotle says that the essence belongs to the form and the activation: “Since the essence belongs to the form and the activation (τὸ γὰρ τί ἦν εἶναι τῷ εἶδει καὶ τῇ ἐνέργειᾳ ὑπάρχει)” (1043b1). Thus, if we know the form and the activation of something, we immediately come to know its essence. Since the ultimate differentia of something is its form and its substance, and since our project aims to know what the ultimate differentia of something is, this is the correct path toward its true definition to investigate the form, the activation, and the substance.

¹⁵ We do not undertake a deep investigation of the meanings of the form (*eidōs*) and the substance (*ousia*). Remember that Part 2 of this paper aims to understand that the ultimate differentia (*teleutaia diaphora*) and the end (*telos*) are the same. The deep exploration of these terms will distract the big picture.

¹⁶ 1028a14.

The end, and this is the for-the-sake-of-which—for example, of taking walks health is the end. For why does [he] take walks? “In order that he may be healthy,” we say. And in speaking that way we think we have presented the cause. Also, anything, then, that comes to be as an intermediate means to the end, when something else has started the movement: for example, in the case of health, making thin, purging, drugs, or instruments, since all these are for the sake of the end, although they differ from each other in that some are instruments and others works. (1013a33-1013b3)

The end of something or some action is that for-the-sake-of-which. Why does he take a walk? Or what is the function of him taking a walk? The end of taking a walk is health. Why does he make himself thin? Or what is the purpose of making himself thin? To be healthy. Why does he take drugs? To be healthy. All the instruments and actions here have an end, which is health. This is because when we ask a question about instruments or works with the interrogative ‘why,’ one type of answers uses “for.”¹⁷ Why do you eat? For health. Why do you work? For making money or for serving the society. Hence, since the ultimate differentia is the activity, and since the activity and the end are the same, the ultimate differentia is the end. For instance, let us consider a cup. The end of a cup is to contain liquid. Then, the ultimate differentia of a cup is ‘containing liquid’ and ‘containing non-liquid (say, solids).’ We know that a cup is for containing liquid. Therefore, the ultimate differentia of a cup is its end.

So far, we have demonstrated that the ultimate differentia (*teleutaia diaphora*) of something expresses its end (*telos*). In order to grasp the entire demonstration in the simplest way, let us look at its summary in a Euclidean way:

“The ultimate differentia (*teleutaia diaphora*) is the form (*eidōs*) and the substance (*ousia*)” (1038a25).

“The substance and the form are activity (*energeia*)” (1050b1).

“The activity (*energeia*) is the end (*telos*)” (1050a9).

The ultimate differentia (*teleutaia diaphora*) is the end (*telos*).

This shows us that Aristotle’s terms ‘the ultimate differentia (*teleutaia diaphora*)’, ‘the form (*eidōs*)’, ‘the substance (*ousia*)’, ‘the activity (*energeia*)’, ‘the end (*telos*)’ are the same. Therefore, the ultimate differentia of something is the same as its end.

At the end of Part 1 of this paper, we have seen the necessity of overcoming the problem with Aristotle’s method. Hence, we have looked for the possibility to surmount this issue in Part 2. Finding a solution begins with the fact that the ultimate differentia of something is the same as its form and its substance (or essence).¹⁸ We

¹⁷ Physics 198a15-2

¹⁸ It is safe to say that the essence and the substance are the same in that both signify “what something is.”

have figured out that the ultimate differentia of something is eventually the same as its end (*telos*). Indeed, Aristotle claims that the essence of something and its end are the same: “What a thing is and its purpose are the same (τὸ μὲν γὰρ τί ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα ἔν ἐστι; the literal translation is “the essence and for-the-sake-of-which are the same”)” (198a25, Physics).

Now, the procedure by genus and differentia that leads to the definition “a human is a featherless, two-footed animal” is like the process that we would use. However, this is not the complete version of this process. Indeed, Aristotle seems to acknowledge that this is not the perfect procedure for the true definition of something at the end of Z 12: “Where definitions by division are concerned, then, let this much suffice as a first statement as to what they are like” (1038a35). Here, Aristotle seems to be suggesting that though this definition serves as an example as to how one might proceed by division, he is not necessarily asserting the given definition to be complete.

Nevertheless, we will not dismiss this procedure entirely. Instead, since we now know that the ultimate differentia of something is its end, we will rely on a method like genus and differentiae, but we will involve a teleological ultimate differentia.¹⁹ Therefore, let us continue on to see whether we can fully capture the essence by finding the ultimate differentia: that is, *telos*.

PART 3: THE DEFINITION OF MEANS OF GENERA AND THE END (TELOS)

In Part 1, we figured out the reason why we cannot reach the true definition of something. The cause of the problem is that we bifurcate the genera and species without knowing the ultimate differentia of something. Therefore, in Part 2, we have made an effort to know what the ultimate differentia of something is. The answer is that the ultimate differentia of something is its end. Therefore, finding out the ultimate differentia involves not just finding a feature that obeys contraries, but finding a purposive division under the genus. Now, we should assess whether we can reach the true definition of something when we know its end. This is the aim of Part 3.

Let us imagine an example. Your friend asks, “What is the purpose of a house?” We may say that the purpose of a house is to shelter property and bodies. This is the activity of a house:

That is why of [1] those who give definitions, . . . [2] Those, on the other hand, who propose that it is a receptacle to shelter property and bodies, or something else of that sort, are speaking of the activation (*energeia*). . . For

¹⁹ See Page 18 or 1038a28-30.

it seems that [2] the account that it is given in terms of the differentiae is of the form (*eidōs*) and the activation (*energeia*). (1043a13-19)

The activity of a house is the same as its purpose. Since we know the purpose of a house, we know what a house is, and we can reach its true definition: “A house is a receptacle (or vessel) to shelter property and bodies.”

Therefore, if we know a thing’s end, we can reach its true definition. However, as stated above, this does not reject Aristotle’s method of division and classification. The only difference is that we do not divide the genus with arbitrary bifurcations. We add the ultimate teleological differentia to his method. For example, let us define a doctor with Aristotle’s method and the ultimate differentia. The end of a doctor is to cure patients. With the method of genus and differentia, the genus of a doctor is a profession. The ultimate differentia of a doctor is to cure or not to cure since this is the end of a doctor. Therefore, the true definition of a doctor is that a doctor is a professional who cures patients. Likewise, let us define a cup. The genus of a cup is a vessel. This is because there are many types of vessels, so that vessel is not a species but the genus of a cup. Since we know the genus of a cup, if we know its ultimate differentia, we can reach its true definition. The ultimate differentia (the end) of a cup is to contain liquid. Thus, its true definition is a vessel that contains liquid.

So far, all the examples we have examined are artefacts. Since we create them with our craft, we certainly know the end of them. We are the efficient cause of artificial things. We are builders who build a house or a cup. If we do not know the purpose of a house or a cup, it is impossible to make them. Hence, we can reach the true definition of artificial things since we know their purposes.

Nevertheless, let us finally attempt to reach the definition of a human. If we know the end of a human, then we can reach its true definition. What is the end of a human? Let us attempt to find it in a two-fold manner if we can.

On the one hand, Aristotle suggests that knowledge is our end: “All humans by nature desire to know” (980a21). This is possible because a human has reason (*logos*). This is the most fundamental difference between humans and other living creatures: “Man alone among the animals has speech (λόγον δὲ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τῶν ζώων)” (1253a10, Politics). A human can think (*noeō*), understand (*phroneō*), and judge (*krinō*). Thanks to this faculty, we naturally pursue knowledge. What do we want to know? We experience the world and understand it. However, a human’s desire to know does not merely signify knowledge of phenomena—that is, knowledge that “the ball I grab falls down to the ground when I unfold my hand” or “the sky is blue.” We want to know “why?” What causes these things? What is the cause of phenomena? The primary starting-points and causes are what we want to know. This is wisdom, as stated above. Hence, all human beings think—*noēsis*—to know. This is our activity (*energeia*). This is our goal (*telos*). Therefore, a human being is for thinking.

On the other hand, in Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle suggests that happiness is the final end of a human: “So happiness appears to be something complete and self-sufficient, it being an end of our actions” (1097b20). In Book 1 of Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle thinks that happiness is an activity of soul in accord with virtue:

...if this is so, then the human good becomes an activity of soul in accord with virtue, and if there are several virtues, then in accord with the best and most complete one (εἰ δὴ οὕτως, ἀνθρώπου δὲ τίθεμεν ἔργον ζώην τινα, ταύτην δὲ ψυχῆς ἐνέργειαν καὶ πράξεις μετὰ λόγου, σπουδαίου δ' ἀνδρὸς εὖ ταῦτα καὶ καλῶς, ἕκαστον δ' εὖ κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν ἀποτελεῖται). (1098a16-18, Nicomachean Ethics)

Happiness is an activity of soul in accord with virtue. To achieve happiness, we utilize our *logos* (*praxeis meta logou*). By using our *logos*, the end of human beings is happiness. This shows us that the end (*telos*) of a human and the activity (*energeia*) work together. It seems that our happiness does not have to do with the divine being. However, Aristotle thinks that this happiness ultimately occurs with the divine being:

If happiness is an activity in accord with virtue, it is reasonable that it would accord with the most excellent virtue, and this would be the virtue belonging to what is best. So whether this is the intellect or something else that seems naturally to rule, to command, and to possess intelligence concerning what is noble and divine, whether it itself is in fact divine or the most divine of the things in us—the activity of this, in accord with the virtue proper to it, would be complete happiness. And that this activity is contemplative has been said. (1177a13-18, Nicomachean Ethics)

Our happiness ultimately belongs to the divine being. This is complete happiness. This is contemplation. We think and contemplate. This is our activity (*energeia*). We want happiness. This is our goal (*telos*). This happiness is contemplation. Therefore, a human being is for contemplating.

Both thinking and contemplating—our activity (*energeia*)—are possible because of our *logos*. Both thought and contemplation—(*telos*)—occur with the divine being.²⁰ Since the genus of a human is animal, if we accept Aristotelian teleological view, we can accurately define a human as a thinking—or rational— animal.²¹

Aristotle at various times refers to human as a rational animal, at other times as a featherless two-footed animal. We have seen two distinct definitions of a human that appear throughout Aristotle's corpus. They are not just two interchangeable definitions with equal utility. One is taxonomic, an example of what definition is

²⁰ Metaphysics 1026a15-18, 1026a28-31

²¹ One might point out that if we define a human as a political animal, it is also arbitrary. Sometimes, we define a human as a political animal. At other times, we define a human as a rational animal. It is a reasonable argument. However, it seems that for Aristotle, political activity is subordinate to rational activity. A human being takes pleasure in society and lives an ethical life because of reason. Then, one might ask again how a political life and a contemplative life can be described under the realm of the definition of a human: "A human is a rational animal." A politician is a practitioner who pursues practical wisdom. A philosopher, by contrast, pursues speculative wisdom. Insofar as both a politician and a philosopher seek wisdom with reason, both of them are rational.

like. The other one represents the achievement that can be made when we know the true end of a thing—that is, true definition. Now it gives us a model to follow in other cases and an appreciation for the difficulty of reaching definition in cases where the telos is hidden from us.

CONCLUSION

For Aristotle, the question “What is being?” is significant. This question is the same as the question “What is a substance?” This question leads us to what the essence is. Since the definition and the essence are one in some sense, if we know the essence of something, we can reach its definition. However, without knowing the ultimate differentia of something, it is unlikely for us to reach its true definition. For artifacts, we have access to the true purpose of anything that we make as humans. In addition, we are for thinking.²² So, we can reach the true definitions of artifacts and ourselves. However, for natural things other than humans, it is unclear whether we can know their purposes or not. We do not know whether our interpretation of phenomena is the same as the true end of a thing. While we experience the world, we observe the phenomena of things. We see an acorn growing up and becoming an oak tree. We think the final cause of an acorn is to become an oak tree. Even if Aristotle says that our perception of proper objects is always true,²³ does Aristotle think that we can know the ends of all the natural things? For instance, what is the unique end of the mature oak tree? It is difficult to answer. All things are ordered and related to each other, contributing to the good of the world. They contribute to the order, the beauty, and the good of the world in their own ways.²⁴ Therefore, unless we know the order of the world, it is unlikely that we know the true end of things.

Hence, for natural things, taxonomic definitions might have to be enough. If we know their true ends, we will be happy. However, we may or may not know their purposes. So, we may know only what the definition is like. A horse, for instance, is approximately a four-legged hoofed animal, but this definition misses its essence. However, this does not mean that Aristotle’s investigation of being and pursuit of wisdom in *Metaphysics* has failed. The mere taxonomic definition can be useful for scientists as Aristotle was a scientist who tried to understand the physical world scientifically. Furthermore, if the goal of humans is thinking and contemplating using our logos, then his task cannot be considered a failure. Thinking and knowing are not the same. We are not sure whether we can know, but we can continue to seek wisdom about, for each thing that exists, *the end*.

²² There is a possibility that Aristotle might think that not every human being is for thinking. For example, while natural slaves are humans, are they indeed for thinking? In addition, poets compose not by using reason but by inspiration. This problem led us to the question of whether we can even define a human. However, this is a wholly different matter. Although significant, we will follow Aristotle’s account of the goal of a human in *Metaphysics* and *Ethics* in this essay.

²³ *De Anima* 427b13

²⁴ *Metaphysics* 1075a15-25

REFERENCES

- Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. Loeb Classic Library edition. Trans. Hugh Tredennick. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1933.
- Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. Trans. C.D.C. Reeve. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2016.
- Aristotle, *On the Soul*. Loeb Classic Library edition. Trans. W.S. Hett. Harvard University Press, 1936.
- Aristotle, *Categories*. Trans. J. L. Ackrill. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.
- Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*. Trans. William Ogle. New York: Garland Publishing, 1987
- Aristotle, *Physics*. Trans. Robin Waterfield. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Aristotle, *Politics*. Trans. Carnes Lord. The University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

A SUPERIOR NATURAL LAW THEORY IN THE WORKS OF JOHANNES ALTHUSIUS

Alison Vaughan

Johannes Althusius's third edition of his *Politica*,¹ published in 1614, presents a systematization of communal associations in his structuring of a political society. Befitting a thinker living in the complicated politics of the Holy Roman Empire, his ideas—borrowing heavily from Aristotle's *Politics*,² and reflecting his Calvinist background—sought universal applicability both in Catholic and Protestant countries. Behavioral guidelines and the tenets of associational happiness cement both public and private life in his polity, and Althusius underpins these discussions with a theory of natural law. Readers encounter two versions of such a theory within Althusius's body of work containing slight yet significant variations. One is found in his *Politica* and the other in his *Theory of Justice*,³ published three years prior in 1607 as a juridical systemization seeking the same universal applicability.⁴ Though *Theory of Justice* seems to set forth a confusing mix of secular and religious sources of behavioral morals, this model presents a more philosophically sound system and compelling fit than the *Politica* version within Althusius's entire schema of thought.

Johannes Althusius (1557-1638) was a Calvinist political theorist trained in both civil and ecclesiastical law, born in Westphalia in modern northwestern Germany.

¹ *Politica methodical digesta atque exemplis sacris et profanis ilustra*, translated as "Politics Methodologically Set Forth With Sacred and Profane Examples," commonly referred to as *Politica*. This paper refers to the only completed English translation available, Frederick Carney's 1964 abridgement.

² Aristotle, *Politics: A New Translation*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2017), 2-5.

Althusius adopts the Aristotelian idea of community arising by necessity in nature as the only mechanism by which an individual can satisfy his needs. The smallest division of such associations, namely, the conjugal relationship within the household, also forms the base of Althusius's schema. The bestial nature of man without community also appears within this text, as does the idea that subjugation and hierarchy within political orders of men is not only necessary, but natural, as it mirrors similar structures in the animal and natural world.

³ *Dicaeologicae Libri Tres...*, translated as "Three volumes of a Theory of Justice...", hereby referred to as *Theory of Justice*. Any information from this text referred to by this paper comes from the portion translated in *On Law and Power*.

⁴ See *On Law and Power's* "Althusius in Context: A Biographical and Historical Introduction" p. xxii-xxvi.

The widespread attention generated by the first edition of *Politica* facilitated his transition to serve as Syndic of Emden in East Friesland, a position he held until his death.⁵ His works fell out of academic interest until the 1800s with Otto Gierke's rediscovery of the material and placing of the works as seminal in the development of modern Western political thought,⁶ a position perhaps unjustly overshadowed by his contemporary, Hugo Grotius. However, a growing number of scholars has devoted considerable attention to Althusius's work in recent years,⁷ exploring its features of constitutionalism, jurisprudence, popular sovereignty,⁸ covenants, and integration of philosophy and political theory situated squarely in the transition from Medieval to Modern. Emerging from relative obscurity, he has been deemed the "father of modern federalism"⁹ for *Politica's* striking fit within the canon of modern thought.^{10,11} Discovery of the impact and fundamentality of this author's scholarship only grows with time, and there is much to be gained from an investigation into the theory of natural law he employs in his body of work. His particular conception is made all the more curious for its strange philosophical inconsistencies, pitfalls, and unique use of the Decalogue.

The philosophical purpose, or even intentionality, of the core differences in Althusius's two models that this paper will discuss is not made explicitly clear by the author. Given his profound connection to modern political ideas, scholars will undoubtedly also examine, reference, and synthesize his philosophical material with an eye towards the development of the contemporary natural law canon. Recognizing that his principle works in fact contain two different theories must be stressed in such endeavors. As such, there is no single "Althusian Natural Law." While both *Politica* and *Theory of Justice* rely heavily on the Christian canon, the latter finds a core legal basis in Roman Law. Readers will find this more logically sound in its deriving personal duties than the technique of deriving double-sided duties employed in *Politica*, but this also represents an internal inconsistency: the use of positive law as the foundation in a natural law system.

This paper will guide the reader through a comprehensive understanding of Althusian terminology, the key philosophical components of his natural law theories,

⁵ For more information on his education and public service, see *Politica's* "Translator's Introduction" p. xi-xii.

⁶ *Politica*, "Translator's Introduction" ix.

⁷ On Law and Power, "Series Introduction" xvi.

⁸ In discussing modern natural law, Sabine describes this element of Althusius's works as, comparative to contemporary texts, "The clearest statement of popular sovereignty that had so far appeared" (p. 418).

⁹ Brian Duignan, "Johannes Althusius: German Political Theorist," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified August 8, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Johannes-Althusius>.

¹⁰ Althusius's political theory is described as the "first modern theory of federalism." His vanguard conception is based on a subsidiary notion of the power to rule where sovereignty originates in the smallest societal associations and expands outwards and upwards. The lowest layers can properly exist as independent units, but the larger are not valid in their own right. Each tier has its own purpose, integrity, and jurisprudence. This contrasts heavily with the conception of the absolute sovereignty of individual territories of the time and with the statism of later centuries.

¹¹ Malan, "Johannes Althusius's Grand Federalism, the Role of the Ephors and Post-Statist Constitutionalism," pp. 2-8, 24.

and finally, a discussion of the merits of each model weighed against one another. Before moving beyond the context of his life to these following steps, it is notable to mention his thorough use of Ramist logic in *Politica*, a method in which extensive proper categorization and subdivision of the topics under consideration are said to illuminate both study and clarification.¹² This method permeates the entirety of *Politica* with, as translator Frederick Carney states, “tiresome regularity throughout the whole volume.”¹³ The reader ought to keep in mind the implicit framework of subdivision and tiered classification in both of Althusius’s natural law theories.

Politica is primarily a political work, and the majority of prior attention paid to this text has been to its components under this umbrella, but this paper approaches its philosophical elements. Therefore, a summary of a few of *Politica*’s key methodological components will equip the reader with sufficient context to approach the complexities of the natural law theory that appears alongside discussions of associational order. First, the base unit of political society in *Politica* is not the individual of many contemporary accounts, but instead, the conjugal and kinship associations. Examples of these include the nuclear family and clans made up of the paterfamilias of each family, respectively. These marital and familial groupings come together to constitute “collegia”¹⁴ and then larger associations such as the city, province, and commonwealth. Regarding Althusius’s use of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) of the Christian tradition, following Protestant convention, he designates the first table, or tablet, as commandments 1-4¹⁵ and the second table as 5-10 (see Appendix A, Figure 1).

We now begin examining the theory of natural law found in *Politica* with a definition of its central philosophical terms. Althusius’s distinction between what he calls common law (*lex communis*) and proper law (*lex propria*) illuminate his starting point. In contrast to the three categories most commonly used in this era—natural law, law of nations (*jus gentium*), and civil/positive law¹⁶—Althusius boxes law into only these two above categories. According to common law, natural law behavioral guidelines arise at a basic level from knowledge, notitia, and from inclination, inclinatio.¹⁷ Citing Romans 1:19,¹⁸ Althusius otherwise calls this law “conscience,” and says it is “naturally implanted by God in all men.”¹⁹ His citation of Romans 2:14²⁰ gives

¹² *Politica*, “Translator’s Introduction” xiii.

¹³ *Id.*, xv.

¹⁴ The paterfamilias of a family enters society to form these, e.g. guilds, corporations, voluntary associations

¹⁵ *Politica*, 141.

¹⁶ For more information on these three categories, see Witte, “A Demonstrative Theory of Natural Law.”

¹⁷ *Politica*, 139.

¹⁸ All biblical citations in this paper use the New International Version unless otherwise specified.

(19) “... since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. (20) For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

¹⁹ *Politica*, 139.

²⁰ (14) “Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. (15) They show that the requirements of the law are written

further depth to the concept he has in mind. By conscience, we are compelled to do what we understand to be just and to avoid the unjust. He does, however, limit the reach of this law, which is said to encompass “nothing more than the general theory and practice of love, both for God and for one’s neighbor.”²¹

Most importantly, when it becomes necessary to translate this natural law inclination into a legal system, common law is said to be unequally written on the hearts of everyone according to the design of God. Althusius continues to cite biblical sources as evidence, and from this we understand he has in mind the blindness and clouded hearts of the wicked and the influence of man’s sinful nature as deterrents for recognizing and adhering to conscience’s demands. Also, limits in individual capacity make the exercise of applying these general principles to particular situations difficult for some. Furthermore, even if this innate knowledge of just and unjust behavior is recognized, it is insufficient in compelling some to actually act on it.²² Here, we arrive at the need for Althusius’s second category of law: proper law.

Proper law is common law adapted to particularities: the place, time, circumstances, and people of a given polity.²³ This law serves to teach and compel the “symbiotes”²⁴ to follow the common law; the insufficient compulsion and specificity of common law is addressed here through the threat of punishment provided by a proper law system. To highlight the difference between the two, by common law, we understand that evil is to be punished, and by proper law, we determine what the punishment will be.²⁵ To be sufficiently distinct from common law as to constitute something new, proper law adds or subtracts from it, though it cannot ever be completely contrary to common law. It gains its legitimacy from its base in the common law inclinations.²⁶ Both of these types of law share a purpose of “justice and piety, or sanctity, and the same equity and common good in human society.”²⁷ Their common starting point is “the right and certain reason upon which both laws rely.”²⁸ Proper law is changeable, common law is not.²⁹ Proper laws are “fences,” as Althusius

on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.”

²¹ *Politica*, 140.

²² *On Law and Power*, 11. *Politica*, 144.

²³ *Politica*, 144.

²⁴ This is Althusius’s term for the individual members of an associated body.

²⁵ For more information on the purpose and exercise of public punishment provided by law, see *Politica*, Ch. X-XVII “Secular Communication” p. 83.

²⁶ *Id.*, 144. One of Althusius’s tools for demonstrating this inclination-in-common is to cite in the original Latin *Politica* hundreds of sources of legal and historical texts with shared ideas and conclusions during each discussion, presumably to give credit to the idea that thinkers were all working with more or less the same conscience. In “A Demonstrative Theory of Natural Law,” Witte aptly terms this characteristic “intense eclecticism.”

²⁷ *Id.*, 145.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

The curious reader might wonder as to whether these terms will play a significant future role in *Politica*. They will not, right/proper reason make few and far between appearances in the *Politica* and are without definition or expansion, leading to the conclusion these function primarily as nods to the intellectual language of natural law discussions of the time more than as key components of his theory itself. Indeed, *Politica* deals with politics first and foremost.

²⁹ *Id.*, 145.

describes them, guiding us along the “appointed” way when we cannot divine the path completely for ourselves.³⁰ Therefore, the differences he saw between the legal systems of England, Germany, and France, for example, were to him differences in manifestations of proper law rather than in the basic human common law. Notably, Roman law is listed as proper law, though when interpreted and applied equitably in line with common law, it can be said to exude natural law.³¹

To understand the Decalogue’s central role in *Politica* and subsequent use in Althusius’s theories, we must establish why he deems it an appropriate source of natural law precepts. At a cursory glance, one might mistake it as the source of moral guidelines. However, Althusius importantly clarifies that the Decalogue is not natural law/common law in and of itself, but rather “agrees with and explains” the urges and inclinations experienced by every person.³² The “general theory and practice of love of God and one’s neighbor,” the natural law already written on our hearts, is merely expressed as a more concrete set of guidelines through these commandments. Though some deem this natural law purely theological, Althusius insists upon the importance of its inclusion within politics.³³ He concludes that piety and justice are necessary components of a well-ordered political society, and thus are essential to preserve when building a healthy life in common. In his eyes, the Decalogue is an instrument to help foster these qualities since it communicates how people ought to live and behave, infusing a “guiding light” into politics.³⁴ It only becomes theological when its commands are carried out with a heart toward pleasing God but can be secular and useful in its provisions for a just life.³⁵

With knowledge of these foundational pieces, we now approach the intriguing feature of Althusius’s body of works— the aforementioned natural law theory in *Politica* and the conflicting one in *Theory of Justice*. Both deal with duties owed by each person to various recipients. In *Politica*, which will be examined first, Althusius provides a “flat” interpretation of the Decalogue where duties to self and duties to others (subdivided into duties to one’s neighbor and duties to God) both arise from its ten precepts. The perfection, encapsulation, and furthest extension of these duties is the Golden Rule, or treating others as one would like to be treated (see Appendix A, Figure 2).

Politica’s introduction of duties to others appears in the discussion of duties that ought to be imparted to one’s neighbor. “The precepts of the Decalogue,” Althusius states, “are both affirmative and negative,”³⁶ so from each can be derived specific actions and inactions. He begins by determining what duties we owe to our neighbor, and from

³⁰ Id., 139.

³¹ Id., 148. Witte, “A Demonstrative Theory of Natural Law.”

³² *Politica*, 144.

³³ Such a categorical justification is all the more necessary given his adoption of the methods of Ramist logic.

³⁴ *Politica*, 11.

³⁵ Id., 147.

³⁶ Id., 80.

there we can also know what ought not to be done to our neighbor. These things owed, which are “his so that he rightly possesses them,”³⁷ are his life, the liberty and safety of his body, his dignity, reputation, good name, and honor, chastity of body, the right of family and citizenship,³⁸ and external goods. Althusius then explains how the second table of the Decalogue prescribes duties relating to safeguarding these very features.³⁹ Again, since not all men can divine and act on inclinations to owe such duties to others, “through the law comes knowledge of things to be done and to be omitted.”⁴⁰ Here, Althusius quotes from Romans 3:20.⁴¹ The second table thus teaches us of justice, of “the use of the body and of this life, and the rendering to each his due.”⁴²

Duties to others are broken down in *Politica* into “special” and “general” duties.⁴³ Special duties come from the fifth commandment and deal with what is owed by inferiors to superiors, namely, respect and obedience. Extrapolating from obedience to parental figures to obedience to all authority figures everywhere might seem too far a leap, but this aligns with Althusius’s treatment of the conjugal association as part of the “seedbed of all private and public associational life.”⁴⁴ Parental authority serves as a foundational model for larger scale political authority.

The rest of the commandments house general duties owed by each symbiote to everyone. This is the theory’s key feature. Althusius breaks each commandment down into both duties owed to others and corresponding duties owed to oneself. For example, regarding the sixth commandment, he interprets its instructions as “defending and preserving from all injury the lives of one’s neighbor and oneself,” and for the seventh, “guarding by thought, word, and deed one’s own chastity and that of the fellow symbiote, without any lewdness or fornication.”⁴⁵ When addressing this topic again in a later chapter, Althusius declares that within the sixth commandment, protection of one’s own life comes first and consists of “the defense, conservation, and propagation of oneself.”⁴⁶ In a political system, these duties serve to promote the utility and welfare of the associated body.⁴⁷

³⁷ Id., 80.

³⁸ Althusius distinguishes between citizens and “foreigners, outsiders, aliens, and strangers whose duty it is to mind their own business.” Id., 40.

³⁹ Nowhere else in *Politica* does Althusius argue that the specific duties owed to others come from ideas of objective possession of goods or qualities, so here, it can be interpreted he starts off going down this route most likely to highlight the Decalogue’s role as a device that coincides with the natural law inclinations of man.

⁴⁰ Id., 82.

⁴¹ “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.”

⁴² *Politica*, 75.

⁴³ Id., 52.

⁴⁴ Id., 31.

⁴⁵ *Politica*, 52. For full discussions of the positive and negative duties of each commandment of the second table, see Ch. VII-VIII “The Province” p. 52, Ch. X-XVII “Secular Communication” p. 81, and Ch. XXI-XXVII “Political Prudence in the Administration of the Commonwealth” p. 142-143.

⁴⁶ *Politica*, 142.

⁴⁷ Id., 75.

Fostering piety and justice is a consistent theme in the body of *Politica* with the former always tied to the first table of the Decalogue and the latter to the second table.⁴⁸ While duties to neighbors and the corresponding duties to self constitute justice, duties to God in commandments one through four are devices to promote piety and the glory of God.⁴⁹ These break down into private internal worship, private external worship, and public worship.⁵⁰ Notably, the second table is said to yield to the first as a higher law.⁵¹ Again, while some might deem the supposed virtue of these behaviors to be solely theological, Althusius claims they are necessary for any natural law, since, “if symbiosis is deprived of these qualities, it should not be called so much a political and human society as a beastly congregation of vice-ridden men.”⁵² He even goes as far as to say that religion is the fountain of all symbiotic happiness, since true piety is linked to belief in eternal salvation.⁵³

The final step in this system of ought and ought-not behaviors is the Golden Rule. Though less emphasis is given to this topic than to justice and piety, Althusius describes it as the summation of the principles of justice. While the Decalogue embodies common law inclinations, the Golden Rule must be of supernatural origin, for such a standard cannot be reasoned to or deduced from the natural world. Instead, its existence and binding moral authority arises from divine revelation through scripture. For this reason, Althusius places it in the third and final tier. To explain this concept, he cites Matthew 22:39,⁵⁴ 7:12,⁵⁵ Shabbat 31a,⁵⁶ and, interestingly, the Digest.⁵⁷ The Golden Rule seems to be the ultimate culmination and perfection of justice, and to that effect Althusius states, “Above all, we vouchsafe and do to our neighbor what we wish to be done to ourselves.”⁵⁸

When moving from *Politica*, a theory of a political system, to *Theory of Justice*, a comprehensive work on law and justice, one might expect a more in-depth discussion of this same natural law theory. Instead, one finds intriguing differences at the core

⁴⁸ Id., 12, 74.

⁴⁹ Id., 75

⁵⁰ Id., 52. For further discussion of affirmative and negative commands of each commandment of the first table, see Ch. XXI-XXVII “Political Prudence in the Administration of the Commonwealth” p. 141-142.

⁵¹ Id., 141.

⁵² Id., 147.

⁵³ Id., 161.

⁵⁴ (37) “Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ (38) This is the first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

⁵⁵ “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

⁵⁶ (6) “That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah and the rest is interpretation.”

⁵⁷ “Justice is a steady and enduring will to render unto everyone his right. (1) The basic principles of right are: to live honorably, not to harm any other person, to render to each his own. (2) Practical wisdom in matters of right is an awareness of God’s and men’s affairs, knowledge of justice and injustice.” D 1.2.

Althusius’s inclusion of Roman law on seemingly the same level of moral authority as general scriptural verses appears puzzling at first, but the reader might refer back to his strategy of citing ideas in common in legal systems and also the idea that proper law, when interpreted in line with common law, can be treated as a legitimate extension as such. This is not such a problematic use of Roman law as that in *Theory of Justice* since here, this citation is supplementary to biblical texts and does not function as the sole source of the most primal common law urges.

⁵⁸ *Politica*, 81. Althusius sums his entire system on id., 74 stating, “We should live temperately towards ourselves, justly towards others, and piously towards God.”

level meriting further exploration. Althusius breaks down natural law obligations in Book 1, Chapter 13 “On Common Law,” which can be understood as a system of three tiers (see Appendix A, Figure 3). First, there exists duties to oneself in the form of three impulses: self-defense, self-preservation, and self-promulgation. This initial tier can be understood as the most basic, and Althusius derives authority for his claims about the personal duty of self-defense from Roman law, citing the Institutes,⁵⁹ Codex,⁶⁰ and Digest.⁶¹ For legitimizing self-preservation, Althusius cites biblical sources. Though, when he pulls from the Christian canon in Ephesians and Colossians, the verses he cites either have little to do with self-preservation⁶² or merely speak of men nourishing their bodies, so what exactly he is referring to there is unclear.⁶³ While this implies, at the very least, the benefits of self-preservation, the only direct instructions for doing good to oneself come from citations of the apocryphal book of Sirach.⁶⁴ With respect to self-propagation, Althusius again refers to the Institutes, referencing a chapter on the Law of Nature being those urges that are shared between animals and humans, such as the desire to procreate.⁶⁵ These laws of nature are said here to be those “... which all nations observe alike, being established by a divine providence, and remain ever fixed and immutable.”⁶⁶ The basis of Althusius’s *Theory of Justice* natural law system, or that which constitutes this first tier, is partly these animalistic traits, the inclinations common to everyone by virtue of being a human. This mix of biblical and Roman behavioral guidelines also presents a less rationalist origin than the *notio* and *inclinatio* of common law.

The theory then expands outward to the second tier of duties to others, which breaks into duties to God and duties to our neighbor. The knowledge and worship of God (piety) is said to come from the first table of the Decalogue while protecting one’s

⁵⁹ “To kill wrongfully is to kill without any right; consequently, a person who kills a robber is not liable to this action, that is, if he could not otherwise avoid the danger with which he was threatened.” (3) “Nor is a person made liable by this law, who has killed by accident, provided there is not fault on his part, for this law punishes fault as well as wilful wrongdoing” For more examples, see the rest of Title III De Lege Aquilia. I 4.3.2-3.

⁶⁰ Althusius refers to part of a collection of imperial decrees expanding basic self defense to the integrity not just of one’s body, but also of one’s property, specifically through recompense for private property damages. C 3.35.

⁶¹ “You see, it emerges from this law (*jus gentium*) that whatever a person does for his bodily security he can be held to have done rightfully; and since nature has established among us a relationship of sorts, it follows that it is a grave wrong for one human being to encompass the life of another.” D 1.2.

⁶² See Colossians Ch. 2.

⁶³ Ephesians 5:29- “After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—”

⁶⁴ Sirach 4:5-6 (Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition)- “To whom will they be generous that are stingy with themselves and do not enjoy what is their own? (6) No one is meaner than the person who is mean to himself, this is how his wickedness repays him.”

This section also claims the associated citations will direct the reader to sources pertaining to protection of one’s property, but the only subjects in them remotely approaching such protection are warnings against coveting and adultery. (see Sirach 23:21, Sirach 30:26) One wonders why Roman law, if deferred to regarding other duties to self, is not also cited here given its abundance of instruction as regards property law.

⁶⁵ “The law of nature is that law which nature teaches to all animals. For this law does not belong exclusively to the human race, but belongs to all animals, whether of the air, the earth, or the sea. Hence comes that yoking together of male and female, which we term matrimony; hence the procreation and bringing up of children. We see, indeed, that all the other animals besides man are considered as having knowledge of this law.” I 1.2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

neighbor (justice) comes from the second just as in *Politica*.⁶⁷ Finally, duties to others are said to ultimately teach us “whatever you wish to be done to you, you should also do to another,” or the Golden Rule. These outward tiers reflect an identical structure to that of *Politica*. It is in the first tier that the differences emerge.

Now able to weigh these two theories against one another, it becomes clear that the *Theory of Justice* model, though not without certain muddled elements, presents the more philosophically grounded theory. This is a result of the weakness of the argument of duties to self in *Politica*. For example, as regards the duty of “defense, protection, and conservation of one’s own life and that of the neighbor” within the sixth commandment, Althusius argues protection of one’s own life is primary,⁶⁸ but fails to provide solid ground for this claim. He even changes course in Ch. I, discussing the benefits of prioritizing others over oneself with references to 1 Corinthians 10:24⁶⁹ and Philippians 2:4.⁷⁰ In searching for some semblance of an explicitly stated right to self-defense in *Politica* like that provided by *Theory of Justice*, Althusius determines, “No one can renounce the right of defense against violence and injury.”⁷¹ He also names “defense of liberty and of one’s rights, and the repulsion of a launched attack” as a possible cause for a just war.⁷² However, in the same section he delineates “defense” as “either of your own nation or another,” so it is unclear whether this discussion is applicable to the personal level. Indeed, the defense of life, honor, reputation, and goods is entrusted to the Supreme Magistrate.⁷³ Following Althusius’s schema,⁷⁴ this implies that these rights of defense, in order to have been conceded to the magistrate, did at one time belong to the conceding unit, but as we have discussed above, the smallest unit of this system is the family and the collegia, not the individual. These statements offer no illustration of any individual right to protection, leaving the *Politica* theory without legs.

The only other mention of self-defense in *Politica* appears in Chapter XXXVIII “Tyranny and Its Remedies,” but readers will see this also is not an indication of this personal right in Althusius’s schema. He begins by asserting that the proper course of

⁶⁷ On Law and Power, 10.

⁶⁸ *Politica*, 142.

⁶⁹ “No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.”

⁷⁰ “... not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Behavioral commands Althusius provides from scriptural passages in the New Testament would have likely been regarded by him as compulsory and legitimate given his Calvinist background. However, readers ought to keep in mind that within his system, only the Decalogue represents common law. The rest of Scripture can be understood as an expansion on these general principles.

⁷¹ *Politica*, 125.

⁷² *Politica*, 187.

⁷³ The administrator and steward of the rights of sovereignty in the association; the highest political figure. Id., 168, 178, 190.

⁷⁴ Power, authority, and sovereignty of leaders is theirs only by a concession on the part of the people, with whom the right to sovereignty ultimately and originally lies. In order for a leader to have possessed a certain right to an action, it must have at one time belonged to and been conceded by the people. Id., 72-73.

action when faced with a “tyrant by practice”⁷⁵ is to flee since individuals do not have the “right of the sword,”⁷⁶ e.g. David hiding from Saul in the mountains.⁷⁷ Notably, he follows that when “manifest force” is applied by the tyrant to individual symbiotes, “then in the case of the need to defend their lives resistance is permitted to them.”⁷⁸ However, this resistance is limited; these private people must await the commands of the ephors⁷⁹ before acting. Though natural law is said to be the giver of this right,⁸⁰ Althusius offers little grounding. In essence, self-defense is a highly qualified right, far from an automatic remedy, and included as more of an afterthought in a later chapter rather than as a core component of the natural law theory in *Politica*.⁸¹ Though both models argue the primacy of self-defense, it is only *Theory of Justice* that offers a clear source of the right from Roman law.

Another shortcoming of *Politica* is its difficulty grounding any duty to oneself at all. In this work, Althusius places corresponding duties to self alongside the duties a symbiote owes to others via each of the Ten Commandments. As efficient as it is to pull all of these prescriptions from a single source, readers must nevertheless ask themselves, can duties to self be said to clearly follow from a list of prescribed treatment of others? Perhaps it might be said that the fact these duties are owed by others to us implies we ourselves are worthy of the same treatment, and thus owe it to ourselves. However, the Decalogue ultimately says absolutely nothing in and of itself regarding what we self-reflexively owe. Therefore, as Althusius has elected to utilize the Decalogue as the clarification of natural law and his only source of behavioral guidelines in *Politica*, the choice of this particular device limits him and does not properly allow for the duties to self he prescribes to it. Though raising the ever-present question of whether Roman law is actually a legitimate source to back up claims of duties to self in *Theory of Justice*, the model manages to offer evidence for them.

For a final complication, the order of the first tier of duties is afforded no clear hierarchy in *Politica*. The first table (duties to God) is said to be primary to the second table (duties to others), but if duties to others are at the bottom, which is the utmost priority, self-defense or piety? If duties to self are slightly superior correlatives

⁷⁵ Tyranny performed by an accepted member of office in the associated body in which one “neglected the just rule of administration, acts contrary to the fundamentals and essence of human association, and destroys civil and social life.” For a discussion of special and general tyranny, see *Id.*, 192-193.

⁷⁶ *Lit.*, “usus et jus gladii.” Althusius appears to use this term to refer to violent force exercised by public authority.

⁷⁷ *Id.*, 196.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Public ministers of the associated body at the same level as the Supreme Magistrate, elected by the people, and designed to serve as a power check.

⁸⁰ *Politica*, 196.

⁸¹ George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, Third Edition. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1962), p. 382.

Additional evidence that Althusius is not arguing for an individual right of self-defense and, instead, is arguing for the right to collective resistance through the ephors can be found by examining contemporary texts based on the same Calvinist principles. In *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, published forty years prior to Althusius’s *Politica* by Huguenots (French Calvinists in the 1500-1600s), a right to resistance is given to inferior magistrates as a counteraction against royal power. Notably, “Its rights were the rights of corporate bodies and not of individuals.”

of duties to others in the second table, duties to God could be interpreted to be above them. The careful reader again asks why. This also marks a stark contrast to the *Theory of Justice* model where duties to self exist in the first tier, followed by duties to others and to God, with no explicit priority given to one over the other. This second model makes more sense given duties to others— to neighbors and to God— come from the same source, so are indeed equal in priority. In essence, in *Theory of Justice*, we find a far more satisfying and cohesive breakdown of duties owed, beginning with the individual to himself and extending to others, both to God and to men, and finally reaching fully outward with the Golden Rule.

As another advantage of the *Theory of Justice* model, this theory situates itself cohesively within Althusius's Calvinist perspective. It begins with base urges and extends outward with each layer requiring more intervention on the part of the supernatural. For example, in tier 1, one does not need to be taught a duty of self-propagation common even to animals. Duties to self via a connection to the same urges experienced by animals lines up well as the most base form of what is innate to every person, or the *notio* and *inclinatio*. Specific treatments of others and acts of worship to God are based on inclinations but are given more specificity in tier 2. A final tier 3 standard of treating others as one might like to be treated is not found in the state of nature, and thus requires supernatural intervention and guidance. This natural law system justifies and upholds the necessity of Althusius's own religious beliefs. This model also fits well within the schema of other sections of *Politica* with the family as the natural unit and the need for authority. In such discussions, Althusius states that, since hierarchies of inferiors submitting to superiors exist in the animal world, subjugation is also natural in the political order. "Common law," he states, "indicates that in every association and type of symbiosis some persons are rulers (heads, overseers, prefects) or superiors, others are subjects or inferiors."⁸² If the legitimacy of authority mirrors those models found in nature, the same can also be said of law.

Though more cogent in its tiers and evidence, *Theory of Justice* is not without its own limitations as a natural law theory. There remains the problem of Roman law, a proper law system, appearing at the center of a theory whose second and third tiers are common law and the perfection/supernatural extension of common law. During the High Middle Ages, Roman law was seen by Althusius and his contemporaries as a sound and excellent legal system,⁸³ but an appeal to the Roman canon is lacking in explicitly evidenced legitimacy within the entire schema of Althusius's thought. Perhaps he would claim the Roman law he cites for duties to self is sufficiently in alignment with common law to be considered natural law. Even if this interpretation was indeed his intention, one questions its arbitrary nature and propensity for self-

⁸² *Politica*, 20.

⁸³ Witte, "A Demonstrative Theory of Natural Law."

selection bias. Especially with a system designed to be universally applicable like *Politica*'s, readers might consider that not every thinker mixing religion, philosophy, and politics has so agreed on the validity of a right to self-defense that its existence can be presumed a settled matter.⁸⁴

Worthy of mention is a problem pertaining to both theories– the practicality of the inclusion of the Golden Rule within a schema of natural law reasoning. Along with the *Politica* cited verses previously mentioned, In *Theory of Justice*, we can understand this rule to be Matthew 7:2-12,⁸⁵ 1 John 2:11,⁸⁶ and Romans 2:13⁸⁷ among others.⁸⁸ This rule is included more as an afterthought in discussions of duties to others, but jurisprudentially, such a component being ascribed to a natural law behavioral system has significant ramifications for a legal system. Are punishments to be meted out for people who do not love their neighbors as themselves? While vices such as selfishness are not strictly forbidden in the Decalogue, with the inclusion of the Golden Rule, this act and others like it fall into a prohibited category. Since Althusius is attempting in *Politica* to build a system of associations that would be compatible across time and place in the fragmented medieval Germany he occupied, no concrete fleshing-out is done to his proposed behavioral system, and the general is favored over particular application. The reader is left wondering whether it would be possible, or in any sense practical, to include the Golden Rule as anything more than a lofty ideal.

Althusius's cogent systematization of a polity theoretically applicable to all in *Politica* is made more effective by the underpinned idea of natural law arising from inclinations possessed by every human being. Though the two models of this theory in his works share the majority of their features, the *Theory of Justice* use of Roman law in justifying duties to self is far more coherent than attempting to derive both these and duties to others via only the Decalogue in *Politica*. The commandments of this artifact itself limit how far Althusius can take it, perhaps unsatisfactorily so that he simply had no choice but to rely on an overextension in *Politica*. Rising in attention and importance, Althusius's philosophical thought will likely be afforded much upcoming analysis. The existence of two distinct theories within his body of works and their philosophical merits and downfalls must be recognized, especially with an eye towards comparing his schema to his contemporaries and placing him within the development of the modern canon.

⁸⁴ Augustine, notably, denies such a right.

⁸⁵ "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you... (12) So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

⁸⁶ "But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness..."

⁸⁷ "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous."

⁸⁸ For a comprehensive list, see *On Law and Power* p. 16, n 59.

APPENDIX A - FIGURES

Figure 1. The Ten Commandments, Exodus Ch. 20 (NIV)

Table 1.

1. "You shall have no other gods before me."
2. "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to worship them..."
3. "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God."
4. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns."

Table 2.

5. "Honor your father and mother..."
6. "You shall not murder."
7. "You shall not commit adultery."
8. "You shall not steal."
9. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."
10. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Figure 2. The *Politica* Model

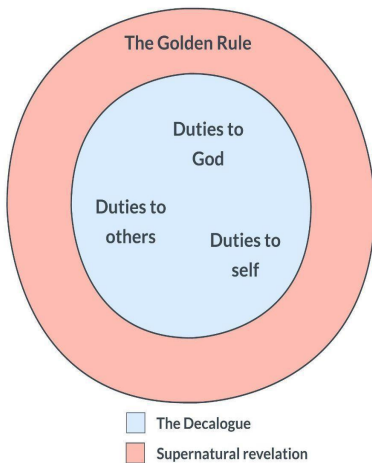
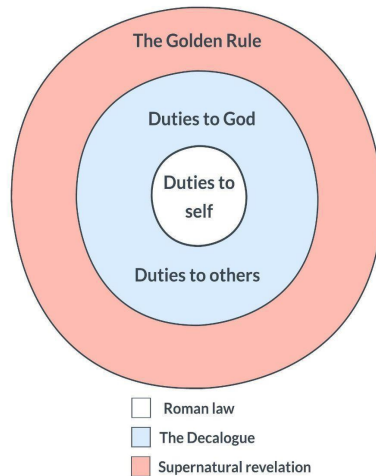


Figure 3. The *Theory of Justice* model



REFERENCES

- Althusius, Johannes. *On Law and Power*. Translated by Jeffery J. Veenstra. Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2013.
- Althusius, Johannes. *Politica*. Edited and translated by Frederick S. Carney. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995.
- “Annotated Justinian Code.” George W. Hopper Law Library. University of Wyoming. Accessed on December 23, 2023. <https://www.uwyo.edu/lawlib/blume-justinian/ajc-edition-2/books/book3/index.html>.
- Aristotle. *Politics: A New Translation*. Translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2017.
- Bible Gateway. HarperCollins Christian Publishing. Accessed on December 23, 2022. <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.
- Duignan, Brian. “Johannes Althusius: German Political Theorist.” In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Last modified August 8, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Johannes-Althusius>.
- The Digest of Justinian: Volume 1. Translated and edited by Alan Watson. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- Malan, Koos. “Johannes Althusius’s Grand Federalism, the Role of the Ephors and Post-Statist Constitutionalism.” *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 20, no. 1 (2017): 1–34. Accessed March 30, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.17159/1727-3781/2017/v20i0a1350>.
- Sabine, George H. *A History of Political Theory*, Third Edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1962.
- The Institutes of Justinian. Translated by Thomas Collett Sanders. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970.
- “Shabbat: Talmud: The William Davidson Edition.” Sefaria. Sefaria, 2021. <https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat?tab=contents>.
- Witte, John Jr. “A Demonstrative Theory of Natural Law: Johannes Althusius and the Rise of Calvinist Jurisprudence.” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 11, no. 3 (September, 2009): 248–256. Accessed December 10, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956618X09990044>.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE OVERLOOKED VALUE OF GREATNESS

BRANDON BEESLEY

INTRODUCTION

Greatness is a concept ubiquitous throughout human history; amorphous, undefined, yet tauntingly and irresistibly alluring.¹ Humanity's interest in achievement is demonstrated by philosophy's many attempts at distilling the concept, with concessions ranging from Aristotle's virtue-oriented *megalopsychos* to Nietzsche's power-hungry *Übermensch*. These two dichotomously opposed figures (the *megalopsychos* and *Übermensch*) both, in the minds of the philosophers who created them, embody human greatness. Contextualized by the obsessive, overwhelming, and often anxiety-inducing human aspiration to greatness, the dissimilarities between them become somewhat disconcerting, and we must ask: what exactly is greatness? This essay aims to shed additional light on this question from the space between prevalent philosophical interpretations of greatness.

Generally, it seems that attempts to define greatness fit within one of two categories. The first of these prioritizes a link to virtue and morality, while the second understands power to be the measure of greatness. Aristotle, Plato, and Saint Thomas Aquinas understand greatness in terms of virtue, while Nietzsche and certain feminist philosophers understand it to emerge out of an exercise of power.

Essentially, the virtue-oriented thinkers purport that greatness is achieved by a life of virtuous acts conducive to happiness and honor. *Megalopsychia* is "a sort of crown of

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Nate Whelan-Jackson and Dr. E. Wray Bryant for their support and suggestions on the many versions of this work.

the virtues; for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them.”² Adversely, with a conspicuous disdain for the “whole virtuous dirtiness” of the first category, Nietzsche’s Will to Power purports that the concept of greatness is intrinsically linked to personal power.³ Valuing only the conquering of obstacles and expansion of strength, status, wealth, and influence, the *Übermensch* is an eagle amongst lambs, yielding only to its own will to power.

IS GREATNESS IN 'POWER-TO' OR 'POWER-OVER'?

Nietzsche’s definition of power that prioritizes strength and force, however, is challenged by certain feminist perspectives on power. Amy Allen, for instance, notes the predominantly masculine and oppressive form of power, described by Robert Dahl, as a scenario in which “[person] A has power over [person] B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do,” has come to be known as the ‘power-over’ understanding of power.⁴ This understanding of power is similar to Nietzsche’s philosophy: it values physical strength, influence, and social status. Historically, the mistreatment of women has led to the interpretation of this notion of power as a tool of the patriarchy. The feminist perspective, in an attempt to remediate this oppressive and misogynistic concept, has instead promoted conceptions of power that empowerment of action – ‘power-to’ rather than ‘power-over.’

A ‘power-to’ perspective focuses on a more positive relationship with others, noting facets of power as the ability to empower and inspire transformation in oneself and others; put simply, it is the ability to enact change. This perspective places few, if any, restrictions who can potentially be counted among the powerful. As Johanna Oksala notes, women have impacted immeasurable change, even when consigned to the roles of mothers and caretakers, through the upbringing and nurturing of others.⁵ She further summarizes the feminist response to power, “In other words, the fact that women are often reluctant to take or exercise power over others does not indicate that women have a problem; it indicates that there is a problem with our understanding of power, as well as in our relationships with each other in patriarchal societies,” a problem the ‘power-to’ concept attempts to remediate.⁶

² Understood as ‘greatness of soul’; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 7.3.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Translated by H. L. Mencken. Binghamton (NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1924): 21.

⁴ Amy Allen, “Feminist Perspectives on Power,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition): 1.

⁵ Johanna Oksala, “Feminism and Power,” *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, (2017): 680.

⁶ Oksala, “Feminism and Power,” 681.

GREATNESS AND ITS VALUE AS POWER: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

The feminist perspective, with a definition of power vastly different than Nietzsche's, still supports the idea that greatness is reliant upon the expression of power. An excellent example of specific feminine greatness is discussed in Alison Booth's *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf*, in which Booth discusses the influence the two authors held over their patriarchal Victorian-era society, exemplifying 'power-to' through literature. Booth suggests their greatness results from their persuasiveness; their ability to describe through their writing a society of inclusion and progress elicited reactions from readers that broke the strongly enforced gender roles of the late 19th century. Persuasion, of course, is an expression of 'power-to,' specifically power to influence others and incite change.

Woolf and Eliot displayed a visceral expression of power through their persuasive literature, an achievement magnified by the oppressive, damaging gender norms to which they were constrained. T. S. Eliot even "affirms that Woolf became 'the centre . . . of the literary life of London,' 'the symbol' of the 'Victorian upper middle-class' cultural tradition," despite her womanhood being a social disadvantage.⁷ Their ability to influence their readership with notions of "a shared, progressive life beyond individuality" is certainly reason to deem these two authors great wordsmiths, and while the ability to persuade and influence is an important component of the feminist assessment of greatness, it is not the only one.⁸ Equally as important to the concept is the predominantly feminist ethic of care.

Care and Power

This ethic of care is not exactly the naive, benevolent depiction the connotation of 'care' may evoke. Virginia Held addresses the presence of violence, particularly against women, and how the ethics of care has been designed to handle such stark possibilities. Rather than negatively attempting to suppress or harm those who may be violent, the ethic of care searches for a more positive, peaceful resolution. "Within practices of care, as we have seen, rights should be recognized, including rights to peace and security of the [violent] person. Force may sometimes be needed to assure respect for such rights. This does not mean that the background of care can be forgotten."⁹ This 'background of care' and, in fact, the general term 'care,' has been given various definitions by numerous thinkers; Joan Tronto focuses on the work of caring for someone, and Nel Noddings on the attitude with which one is willing to care.

⁷ Alison Booth, *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Booth* (NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 1.

⁸ Booth, *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Booth*, 6.

⁹ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 139.

After sifting through the many offered definitions, Held provides and seems to prioritize the definition offered by Diemut Bubeck, who believes “Caring for is the meeting of the needs of one person by another person, where face-to-face interaction between carer and cared-for is a crucial element of the overall activity and where the need is of such a nature that it cannot possibly be met by the person in need herself.”¹⁰ Bubeck’s definition simultaneously separates care from being a service for one capable to complete an act themselves, and allows care to be universally offered without a prerequisite of emotional attachment. However, there are, at risk of dramatization, fatal flaws in Bubeck’s contender that desecrate its validity in Held’s eyes. She notes that Bubeck does not pay mind to the intent of the caregiver; a nurse may utterly hate a patient, wishing them death, but still offer them services. Is this truly care? Bubeck says yes; Held is less certain. She adjusts the original definition to form her own:

Care is both a practice and a value...it shows us how to respond to needs and why we should. It builds trust and mutual concern and connectedness between persons....along with its appropriate attitudes...Practices of care should express the caring relations that bring persons together, and they should do so in ways that are progressively more morally satisfactory. Caring practices should gradually transform children and others into human beings who are increasingly morally admirable...In addition to being a practice, care is also a value. Caring persons and caring attitudes should be valued... We can ask if persons are attentive and responsive to each other’s needs or indifferent and self-absorbed. Care is...more the characterization of a social relation than the description of an individual disposition, and social relations are not reducible to individual states.¹¹

Held’s description of care rectifies the flaws found in Bubeck’s definition while maintaining the universality and distinctiveness of acts of service originally proposed.

Care plays an important role in the feminist assessment of greatness, as it is through care that empowerment and influence must be affected. While moral value seems to permeate this understanding of care and empowerment, it is important to recognize that the feminist analysis of greatness credits the power, the ability to influence positive change as the variable pertinent to greatness, rather than the morality intrinsically present in care and empowerment. The ethics of care certainly fit into the feminist perspective of ‘power-to’ as a necessary condition for empowerment, which in turn leads to the final value of greatness— per this assessment, that is the power to incite change. Interestingly, these characteristics—care, empowerment, and social progressiveness— seem to be the antithesis of the Nietzschean power characteristics of wealth, status, and strength. However, despite their differences in understanding

¹⁰ Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, 139.

¹¹ Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, 42.

of the term, both the feminist perspective and Nietzsche contend that expression of power is the ultimate value of greatness.

POWER? OR VIRTUE?

Now that the proponents for each set have been introduced, and their arguments described, who do we believe? Is the reason humanity strives for greatness tied to morality and virtue? Or is greatness simply an expression of human power, with no tie to morality? It seems evident that the much more likely and correct answer is a third option; morality and power are both required to achieve greatness. More specifically, expressions of power that are consistent with morality and exhibit virtue are the only actions that mirror the characteristic of greatness. Analyses of the reasoning provided by both the virtue-centric and power-centric proponents will now be conducted in order to determine the validity of each—are they self-sufficient and satisfactory? Or do they support this essay's contention?

An Analysis of 'Power-Over' Greatness

Nietzsche's argument against the idea of virtue as having any role in the value of greatness, and thus his argument against this paper's contention, are quite unconvincing. He asserts that the achievement of great acts, through all the pain and suffering they bring, grows personal power in accordance with the innate will to power living beings experience; this growth of power is the ultimate good along with the expression of personal power over opposition. In this view, either power-over is a sufficient condition for greatness, meaning those with power have a correlated claim to greatness, or that power is a necessary condition for greatness, meaning that if one is great one must possess power.

Both of these logical avenues struggle in defending Nietzsche's contentions. Firstly, let's assess power-over as a sufficient condition for greatness. The existence of tyrants and oppressive power, the likes of Hitler and Stalin, discredit this avenue for (what should be) an overwhelming majority. The power and influence these two men specifically possessed was immense, yet without morality to guide them, such power lent itself to atrocities rather than greatness. Their growth in power did not ultimately lead them to happiness, rather, their thirst for power and conquest was insatiable and unsatisfying. These two tyrants exemplify the *Übermensch*, possessing power, influence, strength, and wealth. Yet they are lacking the result expected from this Nietzschean equation: greatness of character is certainly not associated with these dictators. Thus, Nietzschean power is not a sufficient condition for greatness.

The conclusion that strength, influence, and, in general, 'power-over' is not necessary for greatness rests upon the assumption mentioned in the introduction—humanity is able to intuitively identify greatness of character. Without this assumption, a

ridiculous conclusion and counter may conceivably be offered by the fiercest and most adamant subscribers of Nietzschean philosophy: that such horrific tyrants are great. In this context, the assumption that those engaging with this discussion are reasonable enough to denounce vehemently this conclusion is necessary, and benign to the analysis. However, Nietzsche's philosophy does play a supportive role in the concept of greatness and its value this discussion proposes.

Although certainly not sufficient, it seems to be the case that power is instead a necessary condition for greatness. If this is indeed the case, no examples of greatness without power exist. In this aspect, Nietzsche appears to be somewhat correct. Harriet Tubman's incredible life provides an equally inspiring and fascinating example to explore through a Nietzschean lens. Tubman embodies the opposite of the aforementioned *Übermensch* and tyrants: a woman widely (and rightly) regarded as great (again, relying on the precursory assumption), who had little, if any, social power. As an escaped slave, she possessed no influence, no wealth, and no particular physical strength. As the victim of a head injury that left her susceptible to seizures, blurred vision, and headaches, it seems quite the opposite was true.¹² Despite having no resemblance to the typically described *Übermensch*, Tubman does, in fact, demonstrate a will to power.

Tubman's will was not expressed in grandiose displays of power or influence, rather, it was expressed both in her daring escape from slavery and through the thirteen acts that earned her a place amongst the great; the thirteen selfless and daunting journeys that delivered emancipation to over seventy people. Simply, Tubman willed to free herself and others, and enacted that will through her power. Defying the racial oppression—perhaps more appropriately, the racially motivated abuse—she and countless others were subjected to, Tubman's story exemplifies the human desire to “overcome the world” against them that Nietzsche describes.¹³ Tubman's story, although certainly incredible, is just one example of power's intricate relationship with greatness. Syntactically,

Each choice demonstrates an expression of power (the power to choose one outcome or another).

Agential actions require the choice to act.

Great acts that elucidate greatness of character must be agential.¹⁴

¹² Harriet Tubman Byway, “About Harriet Tubman.” Accessed July 23, 2022, harriettubmanbyway.org/harriet-tubman/#about.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Edited by Walter A. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, Translated by Walter A. Kaufmann. (NY: Random House, 1968), 182.

¹⁴ (c) serves as a defense against technicality. If one is theoretically forced to do a great action against their will, the action does not elucidate greatness of its actor's character, and is thus out of this discussion's intended scope.

Therefore, great actions (actions denoting greatness of character) must be a result of power.

In this notation, power is necessary for greatness. However, since power is not sufficient for greatness, as we deduced earlier, then a second characteristic in cooperation with power must also be responsible for greatness. This second characteristic reveals itself to be morality, as Tubman's life exemplifies.

Along with expressing her will to power against an oppressive society, the morality Tubman's actions displayed was perhaps equally, if not more, responsible in warranting her the recognition of greatness. The actions through which she expressed virtue were plentiful, as her thirteen journeys liberating slaves through the Underground Railroad were simply precursors to her serv[ing] as a spy and scout; provid[ing] extensive assistance to soldiers including nursing, cooking, and laundering, and even help[ing] lead a major attack on Confederate property called the Combahee River raid...yield[ing] new union enlistments and over 700 "contrabands" (freed slaves).¹⁵

These heroic and selfless expressions of will exemplified courage, ambition, selflessness, and certainly several other virtues— all of which elucidated the greatness of her character. While Nietzsche's argument of the will to power is unsatisfactory as a sufficient condition of greatness, Harriet Tubman's life demonstrates its conceivable role as a necessary condition illuminates the first evidence of this essay's contention—greatness' value lies in the crossroads of expressing power and morality.

An Analysis of 'Power-To' Greatness

To further support the argument that both power and virtue play a role in greatness and its value, we will once again use the sufficient and necessary logical avenues to analyze the validity of the 'power-to' argument offered by the feminist perspective, which states that displays of greatness—defined as acts that empower and influence change through ethics of care—are valuable in the social change they effect. Again, either 'power-to' is a sufficient condition, suggesting that no 'power-to' is expressed without greatness, or it is a necessary condition, meaning no greatness is evident without the expression of 'power-to.' The ultimate value prescribed by the feminist perspective of 'power-to,' and thus greatness, is the instigation of social change.

This expression of power as it is understood by the feminist perspective, upon logical analysis, appears to contain variables necessary for greatness but offers none sufficient for greatness. While many examples of vicious leaders lacking the distinction of

¹⁵ Lasch-Quinn, Elisabeth. "Harriet Tubman: An American Idol," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 43, (Spring 2004):124, [jstor.org/stable/4133571](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4133571).

greatness certainly possessed and demonstrated characteristics of the feminist assessment, specifically influence, the morality required for care and empowerment seems to be the filter such tyrants and dictators cannot percolate. Hitler, for example, achieved immense influence over Germany through his oration. Daniel Binchy recalls listening to him speak at a meeting that took place in 1921, at the University of Munich. “Here was a born natural orator,” he describes, “He began slowly, almost hesitatingly, stumbling over the construction of his sentences, correcting his dialect pronunciation. Then all at once he seemed to take fire. His voice rose victorious over falterings, his eyes blazed with conviction, his whole body became an instrument of rude eloquence.”¹⁶ The speech ends with a response from the audience, “a scene of hysterical enthusiasm which baffles description,” Binchy recalls.¹⁷ The captivation Hitler commanded over a listening audience demonstrates a similar degree of persuasiveness that Woolf and Eliot possessed through their literature. Unlike these two great authors, however, Hitler used this persuasion to persecute, oppress, and breed hatred, rather than empower positive social change.

He did, however, empower himself. Allen’s understanding of Held’s concept of ‘power-to’ clarifies that the “capacity to transform and empower oneself” is compliant with the sickening expression of power Hitler demonstrated.¹⁸ Through propaganda, manipulation, and fear, Hitler empowered himself and his political party, posing as a moral crusader while victimizing millions throughout his cynical rampage.¹⁹ While he was undeniably lacking care as described by Held, the evidence that such a terrible man displayed both empowerment and influence characterizes where this assessment of power is subject to dispute and provides evidence against ‘power-to’ as a sufficient condition for greatness.

It appears that without morality, the abilities of empowerment, influence, and ultimately, the means to produce societal change, do not warrant the distinction of greatness. The unique aspect of care, though, and the virtue intrinsically woven within care undoubtedly fit into our concept of power with virtue. Care certainly demonstrates characteristics representative of the expression of will; an enactment of personal power. Held notes that “An important aspect of care is how it expresses our attitudes and relationships,” meaning that the intentions of a caregiver must match their actions to be genuine care.²⁰ This acting upon one’s desire is compatible with the Nietzschean concept of Will to Power; the caregiver expresses their personal power, (i.e. ability to care) in response to their will (i.e. their desire to care). While they may not necessarily be facing the social opposition Nietzsche posits, they are certainly

¹⁶ Daniel A. Binchy, “Adolf Hitler,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 22, no. 85 (March 1933): 1, [jstor.org/stable/30094970](https://www.jstor.org/stable/30094970).

¹⁷ Binchy, *Adolf Hitler*, 2.

¹⁸ Allen, *Feminist Perspectives on Power*, 4.

¹⁹ Richard Weikart, *Hitler’s Ethics: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress*, (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 17.

²⁰ Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, 33.

attempting to overcome an obstacle; they are attempting to alleviate whatever the cared-for may be facing, an obstacle that, through relationship, becomes personal. While the feminist perspective is unsatisfactory alone in its assessment of greatness, the understanding of care as the expression of one's will and power, partnered with the intrinsic morality present in care, appears to further support the conclusion that both power and virtue are essential in greatness and its value.

THE VIRTUE-CENTRIC CONTENTION

Plato, Aristotle, and Saint Aquinas each believe that greatness and its value are closely related and dependent upon moral standards and displays of virtue. Aristotle particularly argues that greatness of soul, *megalopsychia*, is a crown that indicates the metaphorical wearer as one who possesses and appropriately practices each virtue. Greatness, as argued by these essentially eudaemonistic philosophers, holds value as the practice of virtue required for greatness is also the path to happiness. Similarly, great acts are valuable in that they reveal greatness of character.

Contrary to the Aristotelian theory of unity, which unconvincingly describes that one cannot possess a single virtue if they do not possess all of them, –a theory that has been discredited by numerous scholars– it appears that greatness does not require the display of each virtue. Referring again to the moon landing, the undeniable act of greatness certainly lacked some of the twelve virtues Aristotle notes–humorous wit was likely not a large factor in the endeavor–but appropriate temperance, courage, ambition, and liberality undeniably were.²¹ The appropriate practice of these four virtues required to complete the mission still demonstrated the greatness of character the astronauts on board possessed, and further, seem to entail a correlation with honor.

As virtuous actions are valued by and rewarded with honor, the more virtues represented in an action, the more honor and greatness they seem to elicit. While greatness may not require every virtue, it is important to note that great acts must always be compatible with morality and all twelve virtues. For example, one may harbor ambition for an act of evil that directly opposes friendliness or justice. Ambition, one of the twelve virtues, does not make this potential act great; the lack of morality necessary for compatibility with virtue transforms ambition from a virtue into a vice. Acts of greatness, then, must show compatibility with the twelve virtues while demonstrating an appropriate practice of at least one virtue worth honoring.²² An analysis of this argument, as stated, will reveal whether virtue and morality are necessary, sufficient, or both in regard to achieving greatness.

²¹ The twelve virtues being Courage, Temperance, Liberality, Magnanimity, Ambition, Patience, Truthfulness, Wittiness, Friendliness, Modesty, and Righteous Indignation (Justice), via W. F. DeMoss.

²² W.F. DeMoss, "Spenser's Twelve Moral Virtues: According to Aristotle," *Modern Philology* 16, no. 1 (May 1918): 25, [jstor.org/stable/433028](https://www.jstor.org/stable/433028); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.7.

It appears that a display of virtue that is morally compatible with each virtue is necessary for acts of greatness. An action incompatible with virtue—an action incompatible with justice, friendliness, or truthfulness—simply fails to be great. For example, winning an Olympic gold medal for one’s country certainly seems like a great action. By Saint Aquinas’ definition that explains “one mak[ing] a very good use of [an item or action]” is proportional greatness, it certainly is.²³As such, any athlete capable of this feat inarguably demonstrates ambition, courage, temperance, and many other virtues both in their training and performance. Such an achievement is great unless of course, the athlete was cheating. Using banned performance enhancers, for instance, is incompatible with the virtues of justice and truthfulness—the action is both unfair to the other competitors and is untruthful of the athlete, and thus, fails to be great. The incompatibility of the twelve virtues perverts what would be an honorable and great action into a dishonorable act. It is the only aspect of this athlete’s conduct that excludes them from the designation of greatness.

This particular distinction between moral compatibility and incompatibility demonstrates quite well the necessity of morality: an action that would, by all other accounts, be great, marred by an act incompatible with virtue, fails to be great. Logically, then, virtue compatibility is necessary for great achievement. Additionally, excellent displays of virtue seem to be a requirement for greatness; an act is not great simply because they are compatible with virtue, it must display something worthy of honor. Which, as previously discussed, excellent demonstrations of virtue are worthy of honor. With a simple example, we have demonstrated the necessary roles of both virtue compatibility and displaying virtue in the achievement of great acts, through which greatness of character is represented.

POWER LED BY VIRTUE

When determining whether demonstrations of honorable virtue and virtue compatibility are sufficient for greatness, a dilemma requiring further attention appears. Our conclusion, upon logical analyses of both Nietzsche’s and the feminist perspective’s arguments, revealed the false dichotomy between the virtue and power assessments of greatness; both power and virtue seem necessary for greatness. When taken as two separate variables, virtue could not, then, be a sufficient condition, as the presence of an expression of power is required to achieve greatness. However, a different perspective reveals that they are not distinct variables, rather, expressions of power and morality are so closely intertwined that the two variables act as one—through one’s will and expression of personal power, virtues signifying greatness may be performed.

²³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.2.129.

An important aspect of virtue ethics as Aristotle describes them is the intention behind an action. He explains that we, as humans, deliberate amongst ourselves over choices we can control, including both virtue and vice. Whether one expresses virtuous acts depends, for the most part, upon their own choice and internal deliberation. Aristotle describes this ability by explaining, “For where it is in our power to act it is also in our power not to act, and vice versa; so that, if to act, where this is noble, is in our power, not to act, which will be base, will also be in our power, and if not to act, where this is noble, is in our power, to act, which will be base, will also be in our power;” our personal will, most often decided upon by our reasoning, determine whether we express virtues or ‘base’ actions in any given scenario.²⁴

This description of internal conflict and expressions of power seems quite reminiscent of the Nietzschean description of a being’s expression of their will to power, as well as the ‘power-to’ contention; indulging one’s will in an expression of power based solely on their whims and the ability to act upon one’s choice and influence change. “How does one become stronger?” Nietzsche asks before answering, “By coming to decisions slowly; and by clinging tenaciously to what one has decided.”²⁵ The permeating undertones of intention and choice are not unique to Aristotle and Nietzsche, as evidenced by the feminist contention.

The opposite distinction of power also understands choice as a crucial element, a power even described by Sarah Lucia Hoagland as “power of ability, of choice and engagement.”²⁶ The presence of deliberation and decision followed by the expression of power required to enact that decision in Will to Power, a ‘power-to’ approach, and Nicomachean Ethics supports the conclusion that both power and virtue are required for greatness. Saint Aquinas strengthens this notion, stating “The word ‘choice’ implies something belonging to the reason or intellect, and something belonging to the will...choice is substantially not an act of the reason but of the will... of the appetitive power” within us.²⁷ One must possess the will and power required to choose and act upon their decision to display virtue, thus displays of virtue are intrinsically woven with an expression of power.²⁸ Rather than interpreting these as separate variables, it seems that, due to their inseparable nature, the more appropriate route would be to conclude that power is an essential part of the practice

²⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.5; Base meaning ‘lowly, inefficient.’ via Rose Cherubin. “Ancient Greek Vocabulary: Aristotle.” Accessed July 4, 2022, mason.gmu.edu/~rcherubi/arovoc.htm.

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 486.

²⁶ Sarah Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Value* (CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988), 118.

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.1.13.

²⁸ We have discovered here that choice is an integral part of greatness. As an expression of one’s will or power, it is the link between power and virtue. Without choice, a distinction of ‘greatness’ is neither important nor honorable for the one receiving it: they did not accomplish anything worthy of the distinction! Only because there is a possibility not to be virtuous or moral is such an act honorable and great. Of course, this relies upon the belief that human free will is a reality. Without such a belief, human greatness (as is human evil, or any other human characteristic) is a falsity. Discussions on this topic (free will) can be found in Aquinas, Augustine, Bonaventure, Slote 1980.

of virtues. Therefore, the expression of virtues, through acts compatible with every virtue, is sufficient for the acts of greatness required in the demonstration of greatness of character.

CONCLUSION

In our attempt to construct a clearer understanding of greatness, the concepts once held to be diametrically opposed have become amalgam, enmeshed by the shared aspect of choice. It does not appear, through our analysis, that power alone is sufficient for a claim to greatness: as stand-alone contentions, both the Nietzschean and feminist perspectives of power encounter rather problematic implications that are incompatible with the notion of human excellence.²⁹ Nietzsche's perspective, termed 'power-over,' accommodates tyranny, oppression, and systemic violence in a concept of human excellence—a conclusion we must vehemently refute. While the progressive notion of 'power-to' as offered by the feminist perspective is an alternative account that resists the historically marginalizing patriarchal tones of 'power-over,' it too falls victim to similar unacceptable implications. Recounts of Hitler's influence, persuasion, and vicious self-empowerment reflect rather eerily the pillars upon which a 'power-to' perspective lies.

The apparent 'saving grace' of these power-centric concepts of greatness seems to be the necessary infusion of virtue, whether purely Aristotelian or mediated by Held's ethic of care. This formulation immediately excludes the preposterous notion of tyrants qualifying as great and adds to greatness a value as conducive to happiness and honor (in proportion to the virtue displayed). The example of the dishonest Olympian demonstrates the necessity of virtue for greatness; actions normally worthy of honor, marred by an act incompatible with morality, simply fail to demonstrate greatness. Additionally, Harriet Tubman's incredible life exemplifies the integral role of personal power (specifically, the personal power to choose) in expressing virtue, a notion which is supported by both the virtue-centric and power-centric perspectives. Thus, it appears that what began as two seemingly dichotomous understandings of greatness have emerged from our analysis as one, with virtue acting as a link between power (choice) and human greatness.

²⁹ People seem to be capable of identifying greatness of character, albeit without necessarily articulating what characteristic is being recognized. Simply, people can discern a figure as great without understanding why that figure is great. This notion can be more familiarly described by (imperfectly but effectively) analogizing the assumption that people are able to identify pieces of art as art, without having a distinct or articulable notion of what makes such a piece art—asking someone to describe the distinct characteristics that denote both Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate and Andy Warhol's Brillo Box as art may prove this point.

REFERENCES

- Allen, Amy. "Feminist Perspectives on Power," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Fall 2022 Edition): 1, plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/feminist-power/.
- Binchy, Daniel A. "Adolf Hitler," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 22, no. 85 (March 1933): 29-47, [jstor.org/stable/30094970](https://www.jstor.org/stable/30094970).
- Booth, Alison. *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Booth*. NY: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- DeMoss, W. F. "Spenser's Twelve Moral Virtues: According to Aristotle," *Modern Philology* 16, no. 1 (May 1918): 23-38, [jstor.org/stable/433028](https://www.jstor.org/stable/433028).
- Harriet Tubman Byway. "About Harriet Tubman." Accessed July 23, 2022, harriettubmanbyway.org/harriet-tubman/#about.
- Held, Virginia. *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Hoagland, Sarah. *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Value*. CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988.
- Lasch-Quinn, Elisabeth. "Harriet Tubman: An American Idol," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 43, (Spring 2004):124-129, [jstor.org/stable/4133571](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4133571).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Antichrist*. Translated by H. L. Mencken. Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1924, books.googleusercontent.com/books/content.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Edited by Walter A. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, Translated by Walter A. Kaufmann. NY: Random House, 1968.
- Oksala, Johanna. "Feminism and Power," *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, no. 1 (September 2019): 678-688, doi.org/10.4324/9781315758152.
- Shapiro, Gary. "Nietzsche's Graffito: A Reading of The Antichrist." *Boundary 2*, vol. 9 (1981): 119-40. doi.org/10.2307/303116.
- Weikart, Richard. *Hitler's Ethics: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

KANT'S RACIAL AND MORAL THEORIES

The Importance of a Teleological Perspective

LAUREN TOENSING

INTRODUCTION

It is often observed that the works of Immanuel Kant contain many propagations of racist and prejudiced beliefs, which seem to have been sincerely held by Kant himself. There is currently a large and growing body of scholarly work engaging with this fact: some authors have demonstrated his role in the development of scientific race theory in the 18th and 19th centuries; others are investigating the connections between these racist beliefs and other aspects of Kant's thought; and still others are investigating what a serious engagement with Kant's apparently racist positions might reveal about the rest of his work. As an example of the latter, read John Harfouch's recent book, *Another Mind-Body Problem*. At its core, this essay is also attempting to understand Kant's prejudiced beliefs in the context of his whole system of thought, both as it is situated in history and in its contemporary philosophical applications.

In particular, one short excerpt from Kant's 1795 essay "Towards a Perpetual Peace" has been at the center of a debate about how Kant's racism interacts with his political and moral theories. This quotation, given in the "Third definitive article", reads:

If one compares with [the right of hospitality] the inhospitable behavior of the civilized states in our part of the world, especially the commercial ones, the injustice that the latter show when visiting foreign lands and peoples (which to them is one and the same as conquering those lands and peoples) takes on terrifying proportions... they brought in foreign troops under the pretext of merely intending to establish trading posts... they introduced

the oppression of the native inhabitants, the incitement of the different states involved to expansive wars, famine, unrest, faithlessness, and the whole litany of evils that weigh upon the human species.¹

A piece that has been highly controversial in this debate is a 2014 essay published by Pauline Kleingeld, in which she argues that Kant “radically changed his mind” on race.² She bases most of her argument on an interpretation of “Perpetual Peace”, including the above quotation, that has Kant declaring people of color to be legitimate citizens of independent nations that demand the same respect as “civilized” or European nations. This argument failed to convince many Kant scholars of what would have been a late-life change of heart. In response, many have tried to find other explanations for the apparent contradiction that Kleingeld points out in “Perpetual Peace.” One notable objection to Kleingeld’s piece is Lucy Allais’s “Kant’s Racism,” which argues that Kleingeld overemphasizes the notability of Kant’s critique of colonialism. Allais maintains instead that Kant was, in the end, consistently racist and that the contradictions in his universalist moral and political theories can be attributed to “cognitive deficiencies” common to racists interested in creating a manufactured congruence between their racist and moral beliefs.³

Despite reaching opposite conclusions, both of these essays seem to view Kant’s racism as a basically psychological phenomenon that preexists and is separable from the development of his larger philosophical system. However, their insistence that racist attitudes necessarily generate contradictions ignores the possibility that Kant’s racial thought might be, in fact, entirely valid—even if also personally comfortable—within his system of thought. I think it is clear that the Anthropology is not a peripheral text, as these arguments imply, and that the arguments and observations Kant puts forth in his non-critical works should not be dismissed as less important than or tangential to his a priori works. In this essay, I argue that Kleingeld and Allais’s arguments are unsatisfactory because they fail to adequately prioritize the teleology ubiquitous in Kant’s thinking when comparing his ethical and empirical work relating to race. Ultimately, I demonstrate that, while there may be apparent contradictions in Kant’s moral system regarding human difference, these contradictions are more easily accommodated for when viewed through the lens of his teleology, which unites his entire philosophy.

¹ Immanuel Kant, “Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” Essay, in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, edited by Pauline Kleingeld, translated by Jeremy Waldron, Michael W. Doyle, Allen W. Wood, and David L. Colclasure, 67–109, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 82.

² Pauline Kleingeld, “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Colonialism,” essay, in *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives*, edited by Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi, 43–67, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 573.

³ Lucy Allais, “Kant’s Racism,” *Philosophical Papers* 45, no. 1–2 (2016): 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/05568641.2016.1199170>, 30.

"IDEA FOR A UNIVERSAL HISTORY WITH A COSMOPOLITAN AIM" AND KANT'S TELEOLOGY

Some of Kant's most explicitly teleological thinking can be found in his philosophy of history. In his essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim", Kant's view of history and his moral theory are engaged in a dialogue, and this complicated dialogue produces an interpretative difficulty for readers seeking to reconcile it with the rest of his work. In this section, I will discuss the relationship between reason, ethics, and teleological history, and demonstrate (A) the primacy of the history to Kant's work and (B) the importance of viewing Kant's moral theory through that teleological lens. I begin by discussing the role of teleology in "Idea for a Universal History", and demonstrating that Kant's belief in a purposed humanity underlies each of his major claims about the progression of history. Then, I investigate how this teleological sense of progress interacts with Kant's definitions of rational human nature and perfection. These investigations lead to the conclusion that, for Kant, a state of human moral perfection is not yet realized, and can only be realized through cultural progress. Such a state of humanity, it will be observed, is necessarily hierarchical. This hierarchical structure, it will be argued, offers an internal buttress and place for Kant's racism.

The opening line to "Universal History" reads: "Whatever concept of the freedom of the will one may develop in the context of metaphysics, the appearances of the will, human actions, are determined, like every other natural event, in accordance with universal natural laws".⁴ Although "individual human beings and even whole nations" act according to their own free wills, the set of possibilities upon which they exercise their will is not determined by them. Observable human actions are no more than appearances of individual human wills, the freedom of which is realized only within certain bounds—namely, those set by the will of nature.⁵ Thus, each free human action is merely participating in some larger history bounded by nature's will, and all human actions over time direct themselves toward "the ultimate destiny of the human race".⁶ With this, Kant immediately provides a limit through which human behavior—and its potential moral value—can and should be understood, which is the destiny coded into his predispositions.

Another aspect of Kant's teleology exemplified in "Universal History" is its relationship to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which informs many of Kant's most basic philosophical claims. The first proposition is as follows:

All natural predispositions of a creature are determined sometime to develop themselves completely and purposively. With all animals, external as well

⁴ Wood and Kant, "Universal History", 108.

⁵ Nature's will is functionally the same for Kant as the will of God, and thus can also be understood as perfectly good.

⁶ Kant, Lectures on Ethics, 252.

as internal or analytical observation confirms this. An organ that is not to be used, an arrangement that does not attain to its end, is a contradiction in the teleological doctrine of nature. For if we depart from that principle, then we no longer have a lawful nature but a purposelessly playing nature; and desolate chance takes the place of the guideline of reason.⁷

The Principle of Sufficient Reason asserts that every true phenomenon must have a sufficient reason or cause to justify its truth.⁸ This proposition implies that all observable biological phenomena must contribute to or result from some greater intentional goal of nature, or else they are absurd. It can be seen, then, that in a world according to reason, a thing cannot exist without a *telos*, or some final purpose. History, of course, is not exempt from this. Although the actual purpose of human history seems impossible to discover, Kant is confident that some guideline running through history should exist, and that philosophers should search for it.^{9,10} Most importantly, Kant believes that the best way to find this path is through the analysis of human predispositions, and their pointing toward some ultimate destiny of humanity. That is to say, Kant believes that insofar as nature and *telos* intimately inform one another, adequate analysis of the predispositions given to us by our nature will elucidate our *telos*.

One of these predispositions, which receives the most mention in “Universal History”, is the capacity for reason. For Kant, reason is the foundation of all moral laws, and the human capacity for reason is what allows us to function as moral agents.¹¹ Kant defines human beings as simultaneously causal and sensible creatures, meaning that, though they possess the ability to act autonomously—according to their free will and reason—they are also always bound by the laws of nature.¹² This duality of nature is what drives the tension between human actions as they tend to be versus how they ought to be. While human beings cannot behave as purely rational beings, they also “do not behave merely instinctively”;¹³ thus, it is possible for an individual to act according to pure reason, even if it would be unreasonable to expect them to do so at all times and for all actions. This concept helps clarify how Kant views the development of reason in the human being: it is not that reason itself increases across

⁷ Wood and Kant, “Universal History”, 109.

⁸ This is the Leibnizian formulation of the Principle, which was put forth in *Monadology*.

⁹ Wood and Kant, “Universal History”, 118.

¹⁰ Importantly, Kant does end this paper with a deference to historians and empirical evidence, indicating that he considers his propositions to be “up for debate”, in some sense. However, I think it is also reasonable to assume that this sort of evidence would have to be pretty massive for him to accept its criticism, especially because so many of the fundamental implications of these propositions are based on knowledge that Kant uses as a basis for other a priori thought. I would think, perhaps, that the argument put forward in proposition 4 about the antagonism willed by nature in human beings is one that is “more” up-for-debate than that presented in proposition 1, which is more of an analytic statement based on Kant’s undisputed belief in biological predispositions. Thus, I interpret this statement to mean that Kant is less sure of the application of nature’s will and its specific processes than the idea that nature has a will, and that it exercises that will on human society.

¹¹ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

¹² Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

¹³ Wood and Kant, “Universal History”, 108.

generations, or that its capacity necessarily differs between individuals, but that the laws of nature simply hold people back from exercising their capacity for reason in its fullest and most pure form.

The fourth proposition continues this line of thought in its analysis of how human beings actually exercise their capacity for reason. Kant admits that the use of reason is not instinctual for human beings, and that it needs “attempts, practice, and instruction” in order to progress from stage to stage, and from a mere predisposition embedded in human nature to a fully realized capacity.¹⁴ Furthermore, Kant argues that full realization of this capacity in the individual is impossible; perfect reason will only be exercised in a perfect human society, which still contains imperfect human wills and inclinations, only now with a structure of knowledge and instruction that can help individuals learn how to best exercise their reason.^{15,16} Even more so, an individual’s ability to act morally is inseparable from their cultural context and its own moral-rational development. Since reason is the tool for moral action, they cannot develop into a perfect moral agent, and should not be expected to do so. Due to this, it is important to consider the sociopolitical state of the world when looking at ethics from a pragmatic perspective: although the moral actions of individuals shouldn’t be expected to always benefit the present state of development, it seems there is good reason, from Kant’s perspective, to think that prescriptive ethical suggestions should take this into account to be most effective.¹⁷

Kant’s work regarding humanity does not admit the possibility of things being as they are simply because they are, demonstrated by his unquestioned acceptance of both a teleological perspective and the Principle of Sufficient Reason. The Principle of Sufficient Reason establishes that human difference cannot be arbitrary, and the existence of a highest state of humanity, which mirrors the highest state of man as an individual, establishes that these differences exist on a spectrum of moral value. In propositions 5, 6 and 7, Kant describes the concept that the only path towards moralization of the species is the development of a “civil society”, which follows certain internal and external political rules that are best suited towards the development of man’s free will and his capacity for reason.¹⁸ One major consequence of this idea, that a complete development of reason can occur only on a societal scale, is that reason is directly tied to culture. Just as the individual can fail in instances of reason, and is even expected to, so can a society.

¹⁴ Wood and Kant, “Universal History,” 109.

¹⁵ Wood and Kant, “Universal History.”

¹⁶ Kant, Lectures on Ethics.

¹⁷ I base this interpretation in part off Kant’s Lectures on Ethics, in which he asserts that there is some value to pragmatic judgements and that actions according to pragmatism can be good (even if they are not morally pure), and also on Kant’s argument for the role of warfare and “disagreeability” in “Universal History”: although he would presumably consider many aspects of warfare to be morally wrong, the development of culture cannot happen without it, which gives it an overall teleological goodness.

¹⁸ Wood and Kant, “Universal History,” 112.

Here, the link between teleology and anthropology becomes vital to understanding the meaning of Kant's history: culture has the distinct power to lock its people into certain states of existence if they do not appropriately exercise their capacities. This happens through an undescribed metaphysical process that entirely stops the development of specific capacities, or "seeds".¹⁹ Furthermore, the development of this capacity can be completely stopped: when this happens regarding reason, a manifestation of human culture is completely locked out of participation in humanity's final destiny.²⁰ A society that stops men from using reason stops men from being men. So, for Kant, it is of vital importance that human beings live in a culture that appropriately develops and instructs them toward the moral ideal, even if it does not instruct them perfectly, in order to move the whole of humanity forward. The seed must not be locked away.

Inherent in a call for forward movement is the claim that it is better to be closer to an ideal than farther from it. By establishing the development of reason as the one good path for humanity, Kant demonstrates that a hierarchy is fundamental to his vision of human development. An object simply must evolve toward something, since that something is already determined by another thing outside of the object itself. Furthermore, that something contains a moral worth, also determined externally. Thus, there have to be developments of human predispositions—which are now inextricably linked to manifestations of human culture—that are simply closer to the goal than others. This is the perfect breeding ground for hierarchical prejudices to flourish, exactly how we see in Kant's thought.²¹ Fundamentally, Kant's form of racism—although searching for some biological justification—is a cultural racism, and he ultimately sees race as a physical manifestation of a people's culturally conditioned capacities.

It is not necessary that this hierarchy be expressed as racism and sexism, the way Kant does; nevertheless, such an expression makes sense in the context of the predominant beliefs in Kant's time. He was racist before he conceived of this teleological world, and he made no effort to escape this racism at any point; rather, he simply developed a system that worked in accordance with the beliefs he already held. This can also be seen in Kant's ethical system in the context of what exactly he defines as moral goodness. It is not necessarily the case that a teleological perspective will lead to the conclusion of a reason-based moral goodness, like Kant's, but it again makes sense in the context of Kant's other beliefs and those who influenced him that it would develop in this way. Overall, although none of these concepts rely on each other,

¹⁹ Wood and Kant, "Universal History."

²⁰ Immanuel Kant, "On the Different Races of Human Beings," essay, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, translated by Zöllner Günter and Robert B. Loudon, 82–97, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 86–87.

²¹ This is also evidenced in his proposition that all men must have a master, even though that master is a man who also needs a master. This is related to his political beliefs, and is also seen in the relationship between government and citizen that he puts forward in "What is Enlightenment?"

it is better supported in the text to understand Kant's racism and Kant's ethics as developed through a teleological lens, rather than through some other preventent and incompatible bias, because the teleology can be found to entail in itself the basic assumptions that Kant's work operates upon, whether those be religious inclinations, prejudices, or even value judgements. It is not that any of these beliefs precede each other in time, but rather that Kant's idea that a purpose to humanity not only goes unquestioned but is necessary to explain why these other previous beliefs are correct, that proves the higher importance of teleology to Kant's system than his concepts that are explained through it.²²

THE IMPORTANCE OF TELEOLOGY TO THE REALATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHICS AND ANTHROPOLOGY

The given assertion that Kant's system of thought is a teleological one is hardly controversial—after all, he makes frequent explicit references to teleology and purpose across many of his critical and non-critical works. However, I argue that the importance of these teleological views should take precedence as the underlying ideology to Kant's system of thought. I have established the importance of these teleological principles to Kant's moral theory and its relationship to his theory of history; in this section, I explain how these principles also underlie the relationships between the different parts within Kant's ethical system. In Kant's ethics, teleological principles determine not only the methodology by which ethical thought should occur, but also serves as the actual source of moral value.

A central characteristic of Kant's ethics is its division into two distinct parts. In the *Groundwork*, Kant defines ethics as a study of freedom and the laws "to which [freedom] is subject"; from this, ethics is divided into an empirical part, called anthropology, and a rational part, called moral theory.²³²⁴ More specifically, anthropology is defined as a "science of the subjective laws of the free will", and moral theory as a science of the objective.²⁵ For Kant, moral theory and anthropology must also be preceded by a pure metaphysics derived from a priori principles—specifically, the pure principles of a good will—in order to contain any real epistemological value.²⁶ This metaphysics of morals is determined by the nature of human beings as being both rational and causal beings, and thus Kant posits that it would be equally valid for any other non-human being that also has rational cognition.²⁷ Because

²² The necessity in this claim comes from Kant's adherence to the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

²³ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3.

²⁴ For the purposes of this paper, I will only use these particular terms to describe this division, in order to accommodate for translation inconsistencies across Kant's works.

²⁵ Kant et. al., *Lectures on Ethics*, 3.

²⁶ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

²⁷ For Kant, a rational creature possesses reason and acts accordingly, not just to instinct; a causal creature recognizes themselves as being actors in the world.

these qualities are pure and non-empirical, a moral theory built upon them can be considered a priori and universal. Using this a priori moral theory, philosophers should then be able to derive prescriptive, universal moral laws for all rational creatures including human beings.

The basis on which Kant's metaphysics of morals is built is the concept of the free will and its predicates, which all rational-causal beings possess. Kant understands free will in Man to be inseparable from his nature as a rational being, who ascribes his judgment to his reason rather than to an "impulse".²⁸ So, in doing a metaphysics of morals, one must engage with the idea of reason in its purest form; this is what Kant does in the *Groundwork*, as well as in the later *Metaphysics of Morals*. However, as was shown in the previous section, human behavior only rarely seems to be guided by pure reason. The possession of the faculty of reason by human beings is not subject to improvement, but the ability to exercise it appropriately is. If one took human society as existing in some kind of "state" of reason, the highest of which would have all individuals ruled purely by their reason and acting only according to duty, then it would be clear that humanity does not currently exist in this state. Furthermore, the world of behavior that Kant describes through his analysis of pure reason must be understood as an ideal, and not easily accessible to human beings who must also contend with the sensible half of their nature.

In Kant's philosophy of a universal history, it is clearly established that human nature will hold back individual agents from moral perfection. In *Universal History*, he writes:

In the human being ... those predispositions whose goal is the use of his reason were to develop completely only in the species, but not in the individual. Reason in a creature is a faculty of extending the rules and aims of the use of all its powers far beyond natural instinct, and it knows no boundaries to its projects.²⁹

This is due first to the fact that human beings are animals, and thus have inclinations, and second to the fact that they have a free will with which to follow whichever inclinations they desire.³⁰ Man's capacity for reason makes him capable of acting according to duty, but at the same time it is unrealistic to expect him always to do so. Despite the powers of reason beyond nature, man's actual understanding and actions will always be limited by his sensible nature and inclinations.

Despite this, Kant does maintain that it is possible for human beings as a society to learn to exercise their reason in such a way that they can achieve a state of

²⁸ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 58.

²⁹ Wood and Kant, "Universal History," 109.

³⁰ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

moral perfection.³¹ Although the Groundwork focuses mostly on individual actions (maxims), the principles that a morally worthy maxim must ascribe to are fundamentally social: the Categorical Imperative demands consistency across individuals and situations, and thus it makes sense that Kant would see moral actions as easier in a moral society than an immoral one. So, Kant's metaphysics of morals describes what moral value looks like for both individual actions and on a societal scale: all individuals must be seen as ends in themselves, and only societies and actions that adhere to this principle have real moral value. This becomes possible when both are governed by pure reason. The case of the individual is different: he is a participant in society, and his actions can either be moral or immoral, but he cannot ever be ruled exclusively by his reason; he cannot himself have perfect moral worth, even if he tends to act according to duty. However, the more perfect his society is, the more easily he can exercise his reason without interference, and act according to consistent and duty-based maxims.

Finally, the process of human moralization culminates in Kant's emphasis on the necessity of moral instruction. Kant's discussion of moral instruction provides the clearest understanding of his view of a perfect moral state of humanity in his work and demonstrates the manner by which the capacity for reason and good moral action operates. For Kant, virtue is not inherent, and also cannot be learned through examples; knowledge of virtue must be taught to individuals through the moral rule of duty, and only then will the individual have the necessary knowledge to live in best accordance with it.³² In this way, it is easy to see the progression of moral development in a society: the instructor has knowledge of moral truths, and passes on this knowledge to his students. In turn, his students have the time and knowledge to use their own reason to build upon and refine this knowledge, gradually increasing the moral capabilities of each generation.³³ Each individual will have to "actively struggle" against his instincts to "make himself worthy of humanity", but the state of moral knowledge has no inclinations and will continue to develop in the memory of a society until it finally reaches truth.^{34,35} At this point, the instructed members of said society are still wrestling against their human nature, but they have the real a priori knowledge that they need in order to act as perfectly and virtuously as their nature allows them.

This is the point at which it is crucial to classify Kant's racism as a cultural racism rather than phenotypic (i.e., inherently tied to skin color). The development of the races is inseparable from cultural development, as demonstrated, and the fundamentally cultural nature of the realization of human beings' predispositions

³¹ Kant, "Lectures on Ethics."

³² Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

³³ Wood and Kant, "Universal History."

³⁴ Kant et. al., *Lectures on Ethics*, 252.

³⁵ Immanuel Kant, "Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View," essay, in *Anthropology, History and Education*, translated by Zöllner Gunter and Robert B. Loudon, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 420.

marks culture as the basic determiner of racial differentiation. Kant, as many of his Enlightenment contemporaries, is particularly interested in reason, and thus the cultural development of reason exists at the forefront of his analysis of the development of the species as a whole. Outlined in “Universal History”, there are two paths of development that are available to mankind: first, there is one ordained by nature and evident in his predispositions, which strive towards the ideal application of reason; and there is another which happens if man fails to develop this reason in the species— if we “allow nature unfettered sway, the result is savagery.”³⁶ Kant holds that there are “savage” people existing in the world, and he defines them by their failure to exercise their capacity for reason.³⁷ At the same time, he has faith in the Enlightenment and the possibility of an ideal humanity, which he sees existing in the culture of Europeans.³⁸ If this group continues to exercise their reason, and in a sufficiently good way, then they will bring about a world in which it is possible for them to live according to pure moral laws. In his more pragmatic writings on what people or political groups ought to do in the real world, Kant’s apparent deviations from the categorical imperative make sense if one assumes that, even though the Enlightenment is the correct path towards perfection, it may not yet be possible to live in true accordance with the ideal principles of moral theory.

Ultimately, all of these factors come together to demonstrate the teleological basis of Kant’s ethics. Just as Kant argues in the *Groundwork* that the actions of some agent who acts morally according to some impulse or natural inclination contain less moral value than one who does so purely out of duty, the moral state of all of humanity holds value because it must be achieved through rational moral cognition. If human inclinations and desires were compulsively moral, like the divine will seems to be, then they would be devoid of any real moral worth.³⁹ It is not only that man is destined to achieve moral perfection, but that he “is destined to achieve his fullest perfection through his own freedom”, making that perfection infinitely more worthy.⁴⁰ So, man’s destiny cannot be untangled from the very qualities that allow him to pursue moral worth; functionally, the possibility of perfect moral worthiness is the same as the predisposition to achieve it. This concept creates a slightly different framework by which to understand the relationship between anthropology and moral theory for Kant: while universal moral theory describes the ideal, that which ought to be, this ought is only meaningful because of the limits placed upon it by what is, i.e., anthropology.

In describing the possibility of universal practical philosophy, Kant writes that “[ethics and anthropology] are closely connected, and the former cannot subsist

³⁶ Kant et. al., *Lectures on Ethics*, 249.

³⁷ Kant, “Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,” 60.

³⁸ Kant, “Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View.”

³⁹ Kant et. al., *Lectures on Ethics*.

⁴⁰ Kant et. al., *Lectures on Ethics*, 252, emphasis mine.

without the latter”— no study of what man is capable of can be correctly done without an idea of what man is.⁴¹ While the universal moral imperatives of practical philosophy should not change, as they are contained in complete predispositions, the findings of anthropology can change as man develops and refines his nature towards something closer to the ideal. Finding meaning in a struggle towards something against what is is a distinctly teleological way to define meaning, and thus Kant's system of ethics is teleological—not necessarily because it is founded on explicitly teleological claims, but because its definition of value is one that constantly posits an eventual ideal against what is real. It is precisely this value that matters in the cultural hierarchy that Kant's racism is built upon: since culture is moralized, it holds relative value; since people are constrained by what their culture instructs, that relative value is passed on to them.

THE NECESSITY OF A TELEOLOGY-FIRST FRAMEWORK IN INTERPRETATION OF KANT'S MORAL WRITINGS

From the above discussion, it should be evident that Kant's teleological approach to understanding human history and human nature underlies his assumptions in both his ethical thought and his work in anthropology. With this established, should also be clear that interpretation of Kant's moral and anthropological thought should always be done with respect to the centrality of his teleological impulse. Within this discussion, the particular debate surrounding Pauline Kleingeld's claim in her essay "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race" that Kant abandoned—or at least lessened—his racist views somewhere in the 1780s or 1790s stands out as particularly interesting, and also particularly fruitless.⁴² Kleingeld interprets Kant's anti-colonial statement in "Perpetual Peace" as an explicit rejection of racism. But shouldn't a racist person, especially one who had previously supported colonial actions on other continents, have an interest in defending the national rights of those he deems inferior? Leaning heavily on this interpretation of "Perpetual Peace", Kleingeld attempts—but ultimately fails—to produce a temporal account of Kant's personal prejudices in order to account for the presumed contradiction.

In my reading, Kleingeld fails to produce a satisfactory account of Kant's contradictions due to her interpretation of "Perpetual Peace" as a fundamentally moral document and her confidence that Kant's racial and moral theories are ultimately incompatible. While she fully accepts that Kant "did defend a racial hierarchy until at least the end of the 1780s," she views his later assertion in "Perpetual Peace" that nations of color are deserving of equal "hospitality" as a complete reversal of that hierarchy.^{43,44}

⁴¹ Kant et. al., *Lectures on Ethics*, 2.

⁴² Pauline Kleingeld, "Kant's Second Thoughts on Colonialism," essay, in *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives*, edited by Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi, 43–67, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁴³ Kleingeld, "Second Thoughts," 575.

⁴⁴ Kant, "Perpetual Peace," 82.

Fundamentally, this interpretation asserts that Kant's Anthropology and other racist claims are essential, and incompatible with his universalist moral theory in that they restrict moral humanity from non-white peoples. Thus, if nations of color can be recognized as sovereign nations, they must no longer be restricted from humanity, meaning Kant must have changed his mind.⁴⁵ However, in the very same paper that Kleingeld heralds as evidence of Kant's changed views, he writes that Europeans "view with great disdain the way in which savages cling to their lawless freedom."⁴⁶ This indicates that the place of race theory in "Perpetual Peace" may be more complex than Kleingeld's interpretation, which can be understood through the teleological principles that I have discussed.

Firstly, "Perpetual Peace" is certainly a pragmatic document—its maxims work towards the end of having peace, which does exclude it from being a work of pure moral principles.⁴⁷ It also can be seen as potential evidence of a step forward for humanity's moral development; whereas the "Universal History" suggests a purpose to war in the process of civilizing man, "Perpetual Peace" calls for a new era in history that prioritizes rational and Enlightened interaction between peoples. It maintains the exact teleological principles that I described in Section 1—one could even say that it functions as part of the pragmatic moral and political instruction that Kant believes will lead to the full moral development of humanity. This also explains the somewhat vague relationship the essay has with non-white societies: they are less developed than European society, even worthy of disdain, mirroring the exact cultural development of predispositions in "Universal History"; simultaneously, non-white nations are still equally equatable to an end as more-civilized European nations, which maintains the moral rule.⁴⁸ When the teleological principles are applied, the presence or absence of racial hierarchy in "Perpetual Peace" becomes irrelevant, which significantly weakens Kleingeld's argument.

On the other side of the debate, Allais argues against Kleingeld's interpretation of the meaning of "Perpetual Peace" in regards to his racism, viewing her evidence as too weak and citing the fact that Kant still published his deeply racist Anthropology into the 1790s as proof that he could not have changed his opinion so much as to disagree with those claims. Allais argues instead that Kant's inconsistencies simply are inconsistencies, and that this makes sense in the context of the psychological effects of racism. Allais proposes a distinction between empirical racism, which would be based in mistaken thought, and disrespectful racism, which aims to humiliate or dehumanize the object of its disrespect, and is rooted in "normative-emotional attitudes" tied up with willing.⁴⁹ She believes that Kant himself demonstrates this

⁴⁵ Kleingeld, "Second Thoughts," 55.

⁴⁶ Kant, "Perpetual Peace," 79.

⁴⁷ Kant, "Lectures on Ethics."

⁴⁸ Kant, "Perpetual Peace," 68.

⁴⁹ Allais, "Kant's Racism", 22.

Kantian disrespect in his racism. On this point, I must disagree— Kant’s racism, although frequently disrespectful, doesn’t aim to disrespect or dehumanize; instead, it exists as the result of choosing to understand humanity through cultural comparison, especially one that aims to understand the teleological goal of human life.

So, Allais’s paper is also ultimately unsatisfying in its attempt at generating an understanding of how Kant’s seemingly contradictory thoughts relate to each other. First, Allais’s implication that Kant’s pragmatic moral theory exists as a justification for his racism ignores the actual distinctions within his ethics, as I described in section 2. It takes Kant’s racism to be something born purely of prejudice, and not teleological in itself. This leads to a reading that feels almost dismissive of a valid insight withing scientific racisms like Kant’s, and the role that they play in a worldview that aims towards a teleological purpose. Overall, Allais’s paper is not a satisfying response to either Kant’s own racism or Kleingeld’s interpretation of it because it ignores the very conscious and intentional role that cultural comparison plays in Kant’s construction of the teleological purpose of humanity itself.

Ultimately, Kleingeld and Allais’s papers both fail because they place too much emphasis on Kant’s ethical theory without enough regard for his underlying teleological views. This shared interpretive lens, despite the vastly different conclusions that it can lead to, perpetuates this debate unnecessarily and leads scholarship in circles. By refocusing the question on the placement of “Perpetual Peace” in a progressive and purposed history, it is much easier to see how Kant’s racial, moral, and political theories actually interact with each other towards his philosophical goals. Thus, when writing about the relationship between parts of Kant’s thought or the possibility for change across time, it is important to place all of his thought inside the teleological framework that he himself operated in.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that Kant’s first priority in his work is his teleology; it is evident in the end goal of humanity being something that individuals have a duty to work towards, as well as the more subtle ways that it grants value to morality in human beings and human culture. If this is not sufficiently recognized in interpretation of Kant’s work, especially that which is empirical or pragmatic, then many of the threads between ideas are lost, and it is difficult to find satisfying answers to his inconsistencies. Furthermore, I think that it is actually reasonable to consider that Kant was willing to have inconsistencies between his empirical anthropological work and his a priori moral theory— since we know that the pure principles of the latter cannot be based on the former, and the former is intended to be an observational empirical study of what is currently, not necessarily what must be, we can accept their contradictions as a manifestation of the complicated path towards realization of pure moral goodness in human society. After all, one individual— or even an entire culture— failing to embody these pure

principles does not have any effect on what makes them pure in the first place, or on whether they can or will be embodied in the future. It is not the job of a moral theorist in the Kantian tradition— especially one outlining pragmatic rules, as Kant aims to do in “Perpetual Peace” — to consider who is or is not worthy of receiving moral treatment, but how to construct rules that best sustain the moral rule while still being useful in the current reality of life.⁵⁰ The point, for Kant, is to make the world better;⁵¹ at the same time, it is undeniable that his idea for how this is to be done is deeply embedded with racial and cultural hierarchy.

While both Kleingeld and Allais make compelling interpretations on the controversial nature of Kant’s “Perpetual Peace”, both ultimately fail to provide a satisfactory answer to the ambiguity of Kant’s ethical stance on colonization. It is reasonable, especially from the more contemporary view of colonization as an inherently racialized form of violence, for their interpretation to be entirely entwined with Kant’s writings on race; however, their focus on Kant’s ethical and anthropological works leaves out a wealth of textual evidence that provides much needed context to “Perpetual Peace.” The cultural hierarchy and unequivocal teleology demonstrated in Kant’s “Idea for a Universal History” provide this context to the texts that Kleingeld and Allais engage with, and particularly reveal a more nuanced interpretation of Kant’s moral theory that can close the ideological gap that they see between Kant’s racism and “Perpetual Peace.” Their papers serve as examples of the importance of recognizing this teleology in Kant’s system, taking the time to evaluate its influence on all of his system of thought, and reminding ourselves as scholars to be careful to be as accurate as possible when speculating what, precisely, Kant is focused on when making value judgements. The inconsistencies in Kant’s thought between the “Anthropology”, “Perpetual Peace”, and his ethical writings are much better understood in the context of his teleology, which demonstrates a much more consistent value basis across his entire body of work.

⁵⁰ In this case, “worthiness” of moral treatment would be universally the end-status of an individual or nation, which is universal. Even a person or culture that themselves do not exhibit sophisticated moral thought— or even, potentially, recognize themselves according to the same moral rule— should not be excluded, as that would violate the universalizability of the principle.

⁵¹ Kant engages with this optimistic goal in a 1793 essay called “On the Common Saying: This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Hold in Practice,” writing: “I rely here on my innate duty to affect posterity such that it will become better (something the possibility of which must thus be assumed) and such that this duty will rightfully be passed down from one generation to another—I am a member of a series of generations, and within this series (as a human being in general) I do not have the required moral constitution to be as good as I ought, and therefore to be as good as I could be... however uncertain I am and may remain about whether improvement is to be hoped for the human race, this uncertainty cannot detract from my maxim and thus from the necessary supposition for practical purposes, that it is practicable.”

REFERENCES

- Allais, Lucy. "Kant's Racism." *Philosophical Papers* 45, no. 1-2 (2016): 1-36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/05568641.2016.1199170>.
- Kant, Immanuel. "Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View." Essay. In *Anthropology, History, and Education*, translated by Zöllner Günter and Robert B. Loudon, 406-29. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: Revised Edition*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor and Jens Timmermann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Kant, Immanuel. *The Metaphysics of Morals: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* by Mary Gregor. Translated by Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Kant, Immanuel. "On the Common Saying: This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Hold in Practice, Part III: Against Moses Mendelssohn." Essay. In *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*. Edited by Pauline Kleingeld, translated by Jeremy Waldron, Michael W. Doyle, Allen W. Wood, and David L. Colclasure. 60-66. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Kant, Immanuel. "On the Different Races of Human Beings." Essay. In *Anthropology, History, and Education*, translated by Zöllner Günter and Robert B. Loudon, 82-97. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Kant, Immanuel. "Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch." Essay. In *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, edited by Pauline Kleingeld, translated by Jeremy Waldron, Michael W. Doyle, Allen W. Wood, and David L. Colclasure, 67-109. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Kant, Immanuel, and Andrews Reath. "Introduction." Introduction. In *Critique of Practical Reason*, vii-xxxi. Translated by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997.
- Kant, Immanuel, Christoph Mrongovius, Theodor Friedrich Brauer, and Gottlieb Kutzner. *Lectures on Ethics*. Translated by Louis Infield. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1963.
- Kleingeld, Pauline. "Kant's Second Thoughts on Colonialism." Essay. In *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives*, edited by Katrin Flikschuh and Lea Ypi, 43-67. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Wood, Allen W., and Immanuel Kant. "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim (1784)." Chapter. In *Anthropology, History, and Education*, edited by Robert B. Loudon and Günter Zöllner, 107-20. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

GABRIEL BICKERSTAFF

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

Gabriel Bickerstaff is a senior undergraduate at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota majoring in Philosophy and minoring in Spanish. He grew up in various places around the United States, and hopes to travel to England in the near future to pursue studies in ancient Greek Philosophy. Gabriel loves to run and competes as a distance athlete for his university.

MINJUN LEE

Saint John's College Santa Fe

Minjun Lee is a senior at St. John's College in Santa Fe, NM. He is from South Korea. He is interested in false judgments, metaphysics, and economic inequality.

ALISON VAUGHAN

Vanderbilt University

Alison Vaughan is a current junior at Vanderbilt University double-majoring in Human and Organizational Development and Spanish with a Business Minor. While she originally hails from Marietta, Georgia, she is currently studying abroad in Sevilla, Spain. She will be applying to law schools in the fall and hopes to there integrate her passions for philosophy, writing, research, language, argumentation, and understanding human behavior and business functioning. Yash Agarwal

BRANDON BEESLEY

Capital University

Brandon Beesley is a graduating philosophy student at Capital University. He is particularly interested in Aristotelian and Aquinian moral thought, and hopes to eventually utilize his philosophy background in law school (somewhere on the East Coast). Although raised in Ohio, he now lives in Rhode Island, and would love to one day travel abroad to experience new cultures and languages.

LAUREN TOENSING

University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Lauren Toensing is a senior studying philosophy and art history at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, where she also serves as the president of Epistemai. She is a native to the Twin Cities metro area, and intends to pursue a graduate degree in philosophy with hopes of teaching at a University in the future. Lauren's current academic interests include the history of philosophy, aesthetics, philosophy of mind, and epistemology; she is particularly interested in Ernst Cassirer and the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism.

D*ianoia* fosters open philosophical discussion and writing among undergraduate students. The journal is committed to providing the opportunity for intellectual reflection that bridges the academic disciplines in pursuit of holistic understanding.

The ancient Greek word ‘διάνοια’ translates as ‘thought’ but connotes a discursive direction or search for a higher form of knowledge. We thus hope to direct philosophical discourse toward an intellectually rigorous level of thinking.



Dianoia is sponsored by

The Institute for the Liberal Arts and the
Philosophy Department of Boston College

