Southwest Philosophical Studies

The Journal of
The New Mexico Texas
Philosophical Society

Volume 41
2019

SOUTHWEST PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES

http://www.nmwt.org/

Southwest Philosophical Studies, the journal of the New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society, is published annually. General correspondence may be addressed to Justin Bell, editor-in-chief *Southwest Philosophical Studies*; University of Houston – Victoria; School of Arts and Sciences; 3007 North Ben Wilson; Victoria, TX 77901. Justin Bell's email address is BellJ1@tamuv.edu.

Submissions: Only papers read at the Annual Meeting of the New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society are eligible for publication in Southwest Philosophical Studies. Manuscripts in any area of serious philosophical interest are blind-refereed for possible acceptance in two phases, the first for formal presentation during the Society's annual spring meeting and the second for publication in the following year's volume of Southwest Philosophical Studies. Contact the Secretary-Treasurer for technical details of manuscript preparation. The call for papers is published on the Society's website at <http://www.nmwt.org/> and sent out by the Secretary through the distribution list. Please contact the Secretary to be added to the list.

ISSN 0885-9310

Selected Proceedings of

The Sixty-Ninth Annual Meeting of The New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society

April 6-7, 2019

The meeting was held in Houston, Texas

At

The Whitehall Hotel
Hosted by Houston Community College

EDITOR'S NOTE

I would like to thank the following members of the New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society for their editorial assistance with this volume:

Dave Beisecker
Parish Conkling
Jackson Hoerth
Jacob Mills
Nathan Smith
Sarah Woolwine

I count myself lucky to be a member of a society as supportive as the New Mexico Texas Philosophical society and to have colleagues willing to volunteer their time toward making *Southwest Philosophical Studies* successful.

CONTENTS

Socratic Ignorance, Skeptical-dogmatism, and Self-Refutation

Mark Walker
New Mexico State University

Presidential Address

In a famous passage in the *Apology*, Socrates tells the jury:

> As a result, I became hateful to him and to many of those present; and so, as I went away, I thought to myself, "I am wiser than this man; for neither of us really knows anything fine and good, but this man thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas I, as I do not know anything, do not think I do either. I seem, then, in just this little thing to be wiser than this man at any rate, that what I do not know I do not think I know either." (21d)[1]

Nowhere in the entire Platonic corpus does Socrates say "I know that I do not know," still, it is hard not to feel a certain sympathy with commentators who worry that there is at least a tension lurking here.[2] The reason I mention Socrates is because my own thinking has backed me into a similar corner. I have argued for the thesis that philosophers are often wrong when they think they have justified belief about their preferred philosophical thesis. I call this position 'skeptical-dogmatism.' Unlike the ancient skeptics, skeptical-dogmatism does not recommend mere suspension of belief, it recommends that you disbelieve many philosophical theses. That is, for many philosophical disputes, you should believe your preferred position is probably wrong. The obvious problem—and parallel with Socrates—is that it seems I should think that skeptical-dogmatism is probably wrong. Extricating myself from this philosophical pickle is the goal of this paper.

Before we proceed in earnest, a couple of caveats. First, I won't offer an interpretation of Socrates' thinking—I leave the study of the ancients to those better qualified. I mention Socrates here merely to tip my hat. Second, I will not pretend to provide an adequate defense of skeptical-dogmatism here, although I

will briefly cover one argument for it. In doing so, my aim is merely to clarify the target, not to persuade you.

I. An Argument for Skeptical-dogmatism

One argument for skeptical-dogmatism stems from disagreement. To illustrate, imagine a bookie offers even odds on four horses with the initials: JF, SC, LB, and UT. Four punters place bets of $10,000 each on a different horse.[3] The punters meet daily to argue the virtues of their favorite nags. They also write books and hold conferences extolling the merits of their picks. One of the punters has a daughter anxious to follow in her father's footsteps. She pesters her father for years and eventually he relents. As a keen student, she attends their conferences and reads the voluminous literature produced by the punters in support of their favorites.

The apprentice is puzzled by their disagreement. One day she timidly asks whether it might be a much more rational strategy, given the odds, for the punters to pool their money and bet $10,000 *against* each horse winning. This would mean that the bookie would take in $40,000 and pay out $60,000. The group would realize a tidy profit of $20,000—$5,000 for each punter. The punters gently laugh at the apprentice's naive but well-meaning suggestion. One says, "Why would I bet against JF? Clearly JF is superior to the others. I have summarized JF's virtues in a 13 volume set in the Oxbridge press. To bet against JF is a sure way to lose money." The other three punters say similar things about their horses to the dim but well-meaning apprentice. In the politest fashion, they extol (yet again) the virtues of their favorite nags: SC, LB, and UT, and point the apprentice to the equally voluminous literature supporting their views in equally prestigious presses.

The apprentice asks the longtime stable hand, Pyrrho, what he thinks. Pyrrho says that with horses, like with everything else, he suspends judgement. He thinks each horse is no more likely to win than not. One must never go beyond appearances. In fact, this is why Pyrrho took the job as a stable hand, even though he was warned by so many that it is a smelly job. For although it appears to Pyrrho that it is a smelly job, he suspends judgement about whether it is in fact a smelly job. Pyrrho finds a certain tranquility in finding it equally credible as not that it is a smelly job.

The apprentice points out that the punters disagreement is a multi-proposition dispute: a dispute where there are three or more incompatible views. Any punter who claims at least some minimal positive probability greater than 0.5 for his preferred nag winning must represent himself as an über epistemic superior: one who is more likely to determine the truth about some matter in a multi-proposition dispute than the combined probability of the other views. So, for example, imagine one punter believes with *seeming* epistemic humility that JF is only slightly more likely than not to win the race. In terms of credence, let's suppose that he has a

credence of 0.52 that JF will win. In which case, the punter must represent himself as an über epistemic superior to his colleagues. For assuming that he distributes the credence equally that one of his three colleagues is correct (0.16 for each colleague), it follows that he must represent himself as more than three times as likely to be right than his peers. The apprentice points out that the punters have no dispute-independent evidence that they are über epistemic superiors to their colleagues. After all, the horses in question are slightly magical: they live tens of thousands of years and take thousands of years to run a single race. No punter has ever lived long enough to develop a superior track record (as it were).

The parallel with philosophical disputes is perhaps (painfully) obvious. We can unpack the analogy with reference to three different positions as to whether we are justified in our philosophical beliefs. Let us think of 'dogmatists' as those who believe that their preferred philosophical position is true, or who at least "lean" towards their position: they believe their preferred position is more probable than not. As we shall understand the term, 'skeptics' suspend judgement about which philosophical position is correct. In the words of Sextus Empiricus, "…we neither deny nor affirm anything."[4] Finally, as intimated above, skeptical-dogmatism about a multi-proposition dispute is the belief that each position is probably false.

Many contemporary philosophical disagreements are multi-proposition disputes. Take, for instance, the question of just distribution of goods in society. The question receives quite different answers by Rawls' justice as fairness (JF), Cohen's socialism (SC), Nozick's libertarianism (LB), and Goodin's utilitarianism as political philosophy (UT). The question of freedom of the will is answered in incompatible ways by the libertarian, the hard determinist, and the compatibilist. The question of the existence of divine entities has three well-known answers: atheism, theism, and polytheism. Realism, constructivism, and empiricism are three major positions in terms of the epistemic goal of science, etc. While we won't explore the question of numbers here, there is at least some evidence that some major philosophical positions are held by a minority of living professional academic philosophers. For example, a recent survey suggests that the "big three" in normative ethics, consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics, are minority positions. Deontology had the most support in the survey with about 26% of respondents either "accepting" or "leaning towards" deontology.[5]

With respect to disagreements in multi-proposition disputes, philosophers face a stark choice.[6] If we are dogmatists about our positions, that is, if we whole-heartedly believe or even just barely lean towards a particular view in a multi-proposition disagreement, then we must represent ourselves as über epistemic superiors to our disagreeing colleagues. If we accept that it is inappropriate to represent ourselves as über epistemic superiors, and we reject skepticism, then we should be skeptical-dogmatists about the views under dispute. That is, we should think that each of the views, including our preferred position, in multi-proposition

disputes is probably wrong. Consequently, if you find it implausible to think that you are an über epistemic superior to your philosophical colleagues about such disputes, then you should side with the skeptical-dogmatist when it comes to multi-proposition disputes.

Notice that the previous argument does not depend on the controversial assumption that our colleagues are our epistemic peers: approximately equal in terms of their ability to ascertain the truth about some subject of disagreement.[7] Indeed, the argument is consistent with the idea that we are epistemic superiors to our colleagues: X is an epistemic superior to Y if, and only if, X is more likely to determine the truth about some disputed matter Δ, but not as likely to determine the truth as an über epistemic superior. In other words, the idea of an epistemic superior is one that occupies the midrange between that of epistemic peer and über epistemic superior. Suppose Rawls has a 0.4 credence that his justice as fairness is correct, while the opinions of his three colleagues are assigned 0.2 each. Even though Rawls represents himself as twice as likely to have discovered the truth about distributive justice than Nozick, Cohen, and Goodin, still he should represent himself as an epistemic superior, not an über epistemic superior. Notice that in this instance, even though he represents himself as an epistemic superior to each of his colleagues, Rawls is still a skeptical-dogmatist, since he represents his preferred position as probably false (along with the competitor views). It is worth emphasizing that I am not suggesting it is permissible to represent oneself as an epistemic superior; rather, the point is that for the sake of the argument, I will remain neutral on this question. If one believes that it is not permissible to represent oneself as an epistemic superior to one's disagreeing philosophical colleagues, then one has even *stronger* reasons to reject dogmatism in multi-proposition disputes.

II. The Big Bet and Epistemic Hubris

In this section, we shall look briefly at the alethic desideratum: we should aim for true philosophical beliefs. It may well be that some, perhaps many, philosophers disagree with this in deed, if not in word. It might be the case, for example, that one's professional goals are better served with a bit of epistemic bravado: hubristically representing one's beliefs as likely true to one's philosophical audience, while secretly admitting that one's views are probably false. Let us suppose the god of epistemology has confirmed that it would be professional suicide, or at least detrimental to one's career, if one publicly avows that one's preferred philosophical theory is probably false. Imagine Rawls, in an early draft, ended his *A Theory of Justice* with the remark, "Of course, this is just one view in a multi-proposition dispute with philosophical colleagues whom I do not consider to be my über epistemic inferiors, hence, I am probably wrong about justice as fairness." The god of epistemology whispered to Rawls that, although no truer

words have ever been spoken, ending his massive tome this way would be a serious professional mistake: *A Theory of Justice* would thereby fail to garner the attention and praise that it would otherwise. Thus in the final version, Rawls edited out this conclusion. A similar point about the professional usefulness of epistemic hubris, let us suppose, applies to other contenders in the debate over distributive justice mentioned above, namely: Nozick, Cohen, and Goodin.

But of course the god of epistemology has a cruel streak. He confronts our four heroes—Rawls, Nozick, Cohen, and Goodin—with the Big Bet. Each philosopher must bet the lives of a quarter of the world's population either for or against his own theory. What should they do? The god of epistemology, not totally bereft of compassion, agrees to make things a little easier. He says that the four theories—(JF), (SC), (LB), and (UT)—are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. He points out that the way to save everyone on the planet is for the author of the correct view to bet on his view, and for the other three to vote against their own views. Of course, since all four believe they have the correct view on distributive justice, this doesn't help much. It is about as much help as the sage teacher's advice to students hoping to do well on the final exam: just answer every question correctly. If they all bet on their own theory, then a quarter of the world's population will survive. If they each bet against their own theory, three quarters of the world's population will survive. Suppose you are brought in as a high-paid consultant. How would you advise each of the four to bet? It seems there is only one epistemically rational (and moral option): each should bet against his own theory.

The Big Bet throws into relief the idea of epistemic hubris. When the accuracy of our beliefs is of paramount importance, we should believe that our preferred positions are probably false. Yet in our workaday lives, we tend to be epistemically hubristic; we believe that our preferred positions are more probable than not. We either lean towards or accept our preferred positions. The survey of philosophical belief mentioned above strongly supports the idea that philosophers either accept or lean towards a large number of particular views in multi-proposition disputes.[8]

Perhaps you think that belief in a philosophical position does not require thinking it is even likely true. Perhaps you think philosophical belief requires merely that philosophical beliefs are justified—or some analog of justification—that is not strongly connected with an alethic aim.[9] If you think that philosophical belief about some multi-proposition dispute Δ should aim merely for justification in this sense, then say it loud and say it proud, "I believe my preferred philosophical theory P, and I believe that P is justified, and P is probably false." For my part, I find this position offers little comfort, for it seems there is Moore to worry about in adopting this line.[10] In any event, this view is not an alternative to skeptical-dogmatism: it embraces it. And if philosophers generally embrace skeptical-dogmatism, then there is a lot less philosophical disagreement than one might expect, given the sound and fury that rages in philosophical journals. For in this scenario, philosophers generally agree that their preferred theories, as well as

that of their colleagues, are probably false. As a sociology of philosophical belief, this seems entirely implausible.

III. The Nature of the Paradox

As we noted above, skeptical-dogmatism is part of a multi-proposition dispute, since skeptical-dogmatism is one of at least three positions: dogmatism, skepticism, and skeptical-dogmatism. It seems then that skeptical-dogmatism is open to the objection that it is self-undermining. The following reductio version of the argument illustrates the point:

Reductio Ad Absurdum of Skeptical-dogmatism

1. Skeptical-dogmatism about philosophical theories is true. (Assumption for RAA.)
2. So, if X is a specific view in a multi-proposition philosophical dispute, then we should believe X is probably false. (From 1.)
3. Skeptical-dogmatism is a specific view in a multi-proposition philosophical dispute.
4. So, we should believe skeptical-dogmatism is probably false. (Modus ponens on 2 and 3.)

The choices for avoiding the paradox do not look particularly appealing. Proposition 2 follows from our understanding of skeptical-dogmatism. The reasoning for 3 also seems sound, since, as we noted above, skeptical-dogmatism has at least two competitors: skepticism and dogmatism. Finally, 4 follows from modus ponens on 2 and 3. So it looks like the paradox is devastating for skeptical-dogmatism.

IV. Exceptionalism as the Way Out

Exceptionalism offers a means to escape the paradox. Exceptionalism draws a distinction between first-order debates, like the question of the correct view of distributive justice, and the second-order question about philosophical views about our capacity (or lack thereof) to ascertain the truth of first-order debates. Exceptionalism says that skeptical-dogmatism is justified with respect to many first-order multi-proposition disputes, whereas dogmatism is justified with respect to skeptical-dogmatism itself. So in effect, we have four positions on the table, which we may summarize as follows:

> **D:** We are justified in believing, or at least leaning towards, particular theories about first-order multi-proposition disputes.

SD: We are justified in believing skeptical-dogmatism about first-order multi-proposition philosophical disputes (i.e., each first-order position is probably false).
SDD: We are justified in believing skeptical-dogmatism about first-order multi-proposition disputes (i.e., each first-order position is probably false), and we are justified in being dogmatists about SD.
SDSD: We are justified in believing skeptical-dogmatism about first-order disputes (i.e., each first-order position is probably false), and we are justified in being skeptical-dogmatists about SD.

So, both D and SD say something about the first-order level but are silent on the second-order question. SDD and SDSD take competing views about what is justified at the second-order, given SD at the first-order. So we can now more compactly restate the dialectic. The horse racing analogy suggests reasons to believe the philosophical position SD. But in thinking about SD itself, it seems we need to decide between SDSD, which our opponent alleges is self-refuting, and SDD (that is, Exceptionalism).

The main burden of much of the rest of the paper will be to defend the SDD view. The attractions of Exceptionalism (i.e., SDD) for proponents of skeptical-dogmatism are obvious. It permits one to maintain the view that we are probably wrong about the first-order debates while avoiding the seemingly embarrassing paradoxical consequences of SDSD. Assuming for the moment that SDD can be defended, its effectiveness for disarming the reductio are obvious, since it permits the following disambiguation:

1'. Skeptical-dogmatism about first-order philosophical theories is true.
2'. If X is a specific view in a first-order multi-proposition philosophical dispute, then we should believe X is probably false.
3'. Skeptical-dogmatism is a specific view in a second-order multi-proposition philosophical dispute.

And so disambiguated, the inconsistency suggested by the reductio is vanquished: 4 does not follow from 2' and 3'.

V. The Evidential Special Pleading

Let us concede, at least for the sake of the argument, that SDSD is self-undermining. Our opposition then needs to show that a commitment to SD requires a commitment to SDSD. The most obvious route would be if SD implied SDSD, but this does not look like a promising avenue. After all, even given SD, SDD looks to be at least a logically possible alternative, even if it is not plausible. The

fact that SDSD implies SD is of no help—at least so long as affirming the consequent is still an epistemological sin.

The most promising line seems to be for the opposition to claim that SDD is evidential special pleading. The thought is that if we are to treat like-cases consistently, then something like the following disagreement-as-evidence principle is at work in the disagreement argument for skeptical-dogmatism:

> **DEP*:** If epistemically reasonable philosophers disagree about some multi-proposition dispute Δ, then we should take the dispute as evidence that each view is probably false.

DEP* in conjunction with the fact that philosophers disagree about whether dogmatism, skepticism, or skeptical-dogmatism is the correct response to disagreement about first-order multi-proposition disputes provides us with reason to believe that skeptical-dogmatists ought to accept SDSD. Since SDSD is self-undermining, we have a powerful consistency case against skeptical-dogmatism. For opponents of skeptical-dogmatism, this opens up the tantalizing possibility of dismissing the sorts of worries canvassed in the punting and the Big Bet analogies.

IV. Defeaters and Defeater Defeaters

The problem with this line of reasoning is that DEP* is not plausible. Rather, the disagreement-as-evidence principle should be reformulated along these lines:

> **DEP:** If epistemically reasonable philosophers disagree about some multi-proposition dispute Δ, then, other things being equal, we should take the dispute as evidence that each view is probably false.

The reason is very general: We may think of DEP* as describing how disagreement defeats justified belief that P. But defeaters can sometimes be defeated themselves. DEP* does not allow this possibility, whereas DEP does.

Ironically, it seems that the objector's own reasoning can be turned back on itself. It seems that a good reason to reject the application of DEP to the disagreement about skeptical-dogmatism is that it would lead to thinking that skeptical-dogmatism is probably false. In other words, suppose we find the reasoning for SD to be plausible: it provides us good evidence as to what to believe at the first-order level, namely: SD. In trying to decide between SDSD and SDD, we find that there is a major epistemic difference between the two: the one is self-undermining while the other is not. It seems that we then have a strong reason to suppose that we should not endorse SDSD, which leaves SDD.

Now it may be thought that this line of reasoning begs the question against our opponent; however, an analogy might help us to see that this is not the case.

Suppose Pinocchio's nose grows a centimeter just before he lies. We have lots of evidence for this and so we have reason to believe the nose as evidence principle:

> **NEP:** If Pinocchio's nose grows a centimeter, then, other things being equal, we should take this as evidence that Pinocchio is about to lie.

We ask Pinocchio whether he always lies. His nose gets longer just before he answers, "Yes, even this sentence is false." But the liar paradox suggests that NEP must be misleading in this case, since NEP is defeated by the fact that if it is true that Pinocchio is lying, then what he says is true (but if it is true, then it must be false). Let me hasten to add that I'm not suggesting that the self-undermining objection against skeptical-dogmatism is a version of the liar paradox. Rather, the point I want to make with this analogy is that there are at least two different things we might think about NEP in this case. The first is that we must reject it *completely*, since NEP does not universalize: NEP is misleading when Pinocchio utters some version of the liar's paradox. Another possibility is to think that we should still *generally* rely on NEP, but understand that it is not reliable when we ask Pinocchio about second-order self-referential cases like the liar's paradox.

By parallel reasoning, if we land in trouble universalizing DEP, then there appears to be at least two options: either we abandon DEP altogether, or we acknowledge that DEP has limitations. The objector has provided no reason to suppose that the former is the only rational option. We may insist on this point even if we concede that other things being equal, it is good that our epistemic principles have universal application.

To summarize, the dialectical situation is this: Let us grant that if DEP is applied universally, then it will show that skeptical-dogmatism based on DEP is self-undermining. The question resolves to whether DEP should be applied universally. Even granting that there may be a general presumption that we should apply our epistemic principles universally, this is not rationally required in all cases (as NEP illustrates). What our opponent lacks is an argument that we ought to apply DEP universally, given that we allege that it will result in a significant epistemic cost, namely, what DEP reveals about the epistemic rationality of first-order debates. But admittedly, we have not shown that adopting a non-universal form of DEP is worth the epistemic cost of giving up the presumption to apply epistemic rules universally. We've reached a standoff.

VII. Planet Wasteoid: The Self-Undermining Objection is Insensitive to Truth

The standoff can be resolved when we take into account another desiderata: where possible, our epistemic principles should increase the likelihood that we will arrive at the truth. Accordingly, I shall argue that if we insist on rejecting DEP because

when universalized it leads to SDSD, then we may have to sacrifice truth along the way. In other words, when concentrating on the truth goal, we may have reason to accept that DEP in a non-universal form may be true.

Imagine we take the starship Philosophy to a nearby planet, Planet Wasteoid. Its denizens, the Drunkards, drink heavily every day but one, every year. (Even our undergraduates would have trouble keeping up.) In their drunken stupor they disagree incessantly about multi-proposition disputes. Their inebriated condition means that they labor under severe epistemic limitations. As we listen in on their philosophical disagreements, we are appalled at their reasoning; it is a festival of logical fallacies. It is apparent to the earth delegations that if the Drunkards do somehow light upon some philosophical truth, it is best explained by pure luck rather than the reliability of their skills. The consensus of the philosophical party from Earth is that skeptical-dogmatism applies to the denizens of Planet Wasteoid: each of their first-order philosophical positions is probably false.

On Sober Day, the one day a year everyone stops drinking for twenty-four hours, one of the Drunkard philosophers, Curly, turns to his philosophical colleagues, Larry and Moe, and says that he believes that skeptical-dogmatism is true of the philosophical theorizing of Drunkards: there is incessant disagreement amongst the Drunkards, and no Drunkard is in a position to represent himself as an über epistemic superior. Larry disagrees, claiming that they should suspend judgment about which is the correct philosophical position. Moe believes that he is correct about his first-order position and says that it would be wrong to reduce his confidence given that the others are clearly wrong. Larry and Moe argue that Curly's position is self-undermining for reasons which are familiar by now.

Question: What should the philosophers from Earth think about this? Suppose they grant, for the sake of the argument, that Curly's view is self-undermining. Still, it seems a rash conclusion that the Earthlings should reject skeptical-dogmatism about the Drunkard's philosophical abilities with respect to first-order disagreements. In fact, I submit that what this example shows is that, at least sometimes, the question of whether some position P is self-undermining, and whether P is true, are orthogonal. Take a parallel case: It might be self-undermining for a Cretan to claim that Cretans lie 95% of the time. Nevertheless, it still may be true that Cretans lie 95% of the time. And in fact, if we are investigating whether Cretans lie 95% of the time, the fact that a Cretan says that Cretans lie 95% of the time offers little evidence one way or another as to whether Cretans lie 95% of the time. By parallel reasoning, if we are to understand the charge that skeptical-dogmatism is self-undermining and this somehow reflects on the truth of skeptical-dogmatism at the first-order, then it must be the case that there is an assumption about some strong connection between the claim that skeptical-dogmatism is self-undermining and the truth of skeptical-dogmatism. But no argument is given for this assumption. In fact, the Drunkards show at least one instance where this assumption is false: we have good reason to suppose that skeptical-dogmatism is

true of the first-order disputes of the Drunkards, even if we concede that Curly's view is self-undermining. In other words, if our goal is to establish whether skeptical-dogmatism is true or not, and we take the self-undermining objection to show that skeptical-dogmatism is false, then clearly we would have been led astray. Such reasoning would falsely tell us that skeptical-dogmatism is false on planet Drunkard, when skeptical-dogmatism is in fact true.

The Drunkards example doesn't, of course, show that skeptical-dogmatism is true on Earth. What it shows is that it is a hasty conclusion to go from the claim that skeptical-dogmatism is self-undermining at the second-order level, to the claim that skeptical-dogmatism is not true at the first-order level.

It may be thought that there is a major disanalogy between the Drunkards and humans: namely: we have reasons independent of their disagreement to suppose that Drunkards have poor reasoning skills. While it is true that at least some Earth philosophers are not as drunk as the Drunkards, there is still an analogy with the reasoning impairment of Earth philosophers, namely, many Earth philosophers are drunk with epistemic hubris. Now one may disagree with the claim about epistemic hubris, but that is entirely a different issue from whether the analogy is faulty.

VIII. What Makes You So Wise and Virtuous?

Suppose my opponents (grudgingly) admit the possibility of Exceptionalism when it comes to *epistemic principles*. Still, they may regroup and argue that Exceptionalism is far less palatable when we think of how it plays out in terms of *epistemic virtues and vices*. Consider that part of the brief for SD about first-order debates using DEP is that it is implausible to assume that one is an über epistemic superior to one's colleagues in these debates. The imputation of this argument, so our opponents might maintain, is that it is an epistemic vice to represent oneself as an über epistemic superior. But then the same point seems to apply with equal force in the case of second-order debates. It seems equally epistemically vicious to represent oneself as an über epistemic superior at the second-order. This line of thought might be summarized as follows:

> **P1:** If it is correct to represent ourselves as dogmatists about SD, then we must represent ourselves as über epistemic superiors (to dogmatists and skeptics who reject SD).
> **P2:** It is always wrong to represent ourselves as über epistemic superiors to philosophical colleagues.
> **C:** It is wrong to represent ourselves as dogmatists about SD.

In terms of virtues and vices, the initial impetus for skeptical-dogmatism is a type of epistemic humility: the realization that we are not über epistemic superiors. Indeed, the horse racing and Big Bet examples are suggestive of the idea that

philosophers suffer from epistemic hubris: an excessive confidence in their abilities to determine the truth. But in endorsing SDD, we must represent ourselves as über epistemic superiors, and so it seems that by my own reasoning I should describe myself as suffering from epistemic hubris. So the objection is that whatever we might think of the idea of self-exempting epistemic *principles*, it is quite another to think that *persons* are self-exempt from the very same epistemic criticism they level at others. In other words, if it is an epistemic vice to represent oneself as an über epistemic superior at the first-order, then it seems as much of a character flaw at the second-order.

IX. 'ALWAYS' VS. 'AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE'

I hope to show that P2 is too strong for present purposes. To see why, consider these sentences:

CD1: Canadians always lie (when communicating).
CD2: Canadians lie as much as possible (when communicating).

Let us concede, at least for the sake of the argument, that CD1 implies CD2. However, CD2 does not imply CD1 (putting aside paradoxes of implication). As a Canadian, I am tangled in a paradox uttering CD1, but not in uttering CD2.

Suppose you have a pill that will force one truth (and no falsehood) out of anyone who ingests it. You have always suspected that Canadians are habitual liars, so, because you are an American, you force me at gun point to take the pill in order to investigate your hunch. Which of these two questions should you ask to investigate your suspicion?

Q1: Do Canadians always lie (when communicating)?
Q2: Do Canadians lie as much as possible (when communicating)?

Suppose the following is true. If you ask me Q1, then I will answer "no", for otherwise, I would utter a falsehood (and a truth). But this doesn't really help much. Since it may still be the case that Canadians are chronic liars, it is simply that it is not possible to lie (and not tell the truth also) in answering this question. It says little about the virtues of Canadians when they tell the truth (and no falsehood) when it is not possible to lie. On the other hand, either a "yes" or "no" answer to Q2 is much more revelatory. It will say something about the moral character of Canadians. Thus in general, when investigating moral character, we are better off avoiding questions that involve the logically impossible. Q2 is a much better question to ask than Q1.

Similarly, I want to argue that P2 is less instructive than P2*:

> **P2*:** One should, as much as possible when philosophizing, avoid representing oneself as an über epistemic superior to one's philosophical colleagues (while rejecting epistemic nihilism).

I'll explain P2* more in the following two sections, but the basic strategy will be to argue that skeptical-dogmatism better satisfies P2*, in comparison with dogmatism and skepticism.

X. Dogmatism and Epistemic Hubris

In terms of the first-order debates, it is clear that the skeptical-dogmatist does not need to represent herself as an über epistemic superior, while the dogmatist must represent herself as an über epistemic superior. The punter analogy illustrates this: the four punters are confident that they are correct in their picks, while the skeptical-dogmatist apprentice declines to say which horse will win. In terms of virtues and vices, the skeptical-dogmatist's claim is that punters suffer from epistemic hubris: they have excessive confidence about their abilities to ascertain the fastest horse.

When we move to the second-order, it seems that both the skeptical-dogmatist (who endorses SDD) is equally epistemically hubristic as the dogmatist who endorses dogmatism at both levels (let us refer to this position as 'DD'). That is, the SDD theorist holds that she is correct about SD, while the DD theorist holds that she is correct about D. So, when thinking about the difference between first and second-order debates, it is clear that dogmatists must represent themselves as über epistemic superiors far more often than skeptical-dogmatists.

In fact, when we consider the number of first-order debates that philosophers weigh in on, we can see that dogmatists represent themselves as über epistemic superiors across a wide number of disagreements. As noted above, if a recent survey is anywhere near the mark, it seems that most philosophers lean to or accept a wide number of positions across a wide number of multi-proposition disputes.[11] So whether we count how often one represents oneself as an über epistemic superior in terms of first and second-order disputes, or simply the sheer number of disputes, SDD requires one to represent oneself as an über epistemic superior far less often.

XI. Skepticism and Epistemic Nihilism

I have made the case that skeptical-dogmatism avoids epistemic hubris to a greater degree than dogmatism. Still, it seems that if the desideratum is to avoid epistemic hubris, then Pyrrhonian skepticism should strike us as a more appealing option. Given space limitations, I will need to be rather quick and heavy-handed with the Pyrrhonians—as much as I admire them.

Let's start with Sextus' general description about suspension of judgement about first-order disputes:

> The Skeptic Way is a disposition to oppose phenomena and noumena to one another in any way whatever, with the result that, owing to the equipollence among the things and statements thus opposed, we are brought first to epoché and then to ataraxia….By "opposed" statements we simply mean inconsistent ones, not necessarily affirmative and negative. By "equipollence" we mean equality as regards credibility and the lack of it, that is, that no one of the inconsistent statements takes precedence over any other as being more credible. Epoché is a state of the intellect on account of which we neither deny nor affirm anything. Ataraxia is an untroubled and tranquil condition of the soul.[12]

In practice, the Pyrrhonians might deploy the skeptic way by opposing one philosophical theory (or aspect thereof) with another. Against Stoic ethical arguments, Pyrrhonians might point out that the Peripatetic school makes an incompatible but equally compelling claim, so the Pyrrhonians might claim that we ought to suspend judgment about the dispute.

This way of describing the Skeptic Way, which, as we shall see in a moment, is not without controversy, seems to rely on something like the underdetermination principle:

> **UP:** If H1 and H2 are incompatible competitor hypotheses, and we do not have reasons or evidence that favor H1 over H2, then we are not justified in believing H1.

The problem for the Pyrrhonians is perhaps apparent: Epoché is the state of the intellect where one neither denies nor affirms anything, but this seems to include UP itself. But if one neither affirms nor denies UP, then it is hard to see how equipollence will lead to epoché, since the principle seems necessary for this process.

Two general approaches to this problem, with a number of variants of each, have developed.[13] The normative account accepts that skeptical arguments have normative force: if we are epistemically rational, then we must yield to their conclusion. To the problem of whether this entails that we are rationally required to suspend judgment over UP, some sort of self-exemption strategy is endorsed. The problem with this approach, in terms of avoiding epistemic hubris, is that it does not offer any advantage over skeptical-dogmatism. Whereas the skeptical-dogmatist says that we should believe that each first-order multi-proposition dispute is probably false, the skeptic says we ought to suspend judgment about

each position. So the Pyrrhonian skeptic must represent herself as an über epistemic superior to both the dogmatist and the skeptical-dogmatist on this score.

The causal or psychological interpretation says that the skeptic does not dogmatically endorse anything like UP, but rather, the skeptic simply finds herself suspending judgment. Skepticism is a psychological disposition. The idea of equipollence is interpreted as a practice: skeptics follow the practice of equipollence and as a result, find themselves in the states of epoché and ataraxia. The psychological interpretation, for our purposes, is the more interesting interpretation, as it seems to avoid the problem of representing oneself as an über epistemic superior to one's colleagues. For now, the skeptic is not claiming that one *ought to* suspend judgment, rather, skeptics are merely reporting that they find themselves suspending judgement. By eliminating from their thinking any normative element about what one epistemically ought to do in the face of competing claims, the psychological account seems to have the advantage of purging the skeptics of any residual epistemic hubris.

Whether this psychological interpretation is the correct way to understand the ancient Pyrrhonians is something I leave to others more qualified. Unsurprisingly, I have no argument with any normative force that can break the committed Pyrrhonian who adopts the psychological interpretation, since the psychological interpretation does not accept any normative principles. Still, if I work in the spirit of the psychological interpretation, then I must report that I find that the doctrine of equipollence does not move me to epoché. For it seems to me that such a psychological movement resulting in epoché depends on a systematic equivocation. From the fact that two opposing statements are equal in terms of their credibility or lack thereof, it does not follow that each statement is as likely true as it is false. This would be to equivocate between the credibility of the two statements in comparison with each other, and the credibility of the two statements within the entire space of probability. A simple example: it is equally credible as not that a die will land either '1' or '2', but it does not follow that it is equally credible that a die will land '1' or it will not land '1.. With three or more contraries, where at least two are equal in credibility and the third has some non-zero credibility, it seems to me that each is probably false. Sextus happily says that epoché will result when we compare contraries, not just contradictories.[14] But unless he attributes zero probability to the remaining logical space not occupied by the two contraries, elementary probability theory suggests that we should lean against both contraries when we think they are equally likely. So I can't follow the skeptics down the path to epoché, since with multi-proposition disputes, I find myself thinking that each is probably false, rather than suspending judgment about all three.

Similarly, I find myself unable to endorse the normative nihilism of the psychological interpretation. I tend to think that normative epistemological questions are extremely difficult. I tend to think that we are hampered in our quest

for the truth about these principles by a tendency to embrace epistemic hubris too quickly. But for all that, I do not find myself tempted by normative nihilism. My plea for modesty is not to be confused with plea or practice of giving up on normativity.

I have put this in a first-person psychological description not as a means to construct an ad hominem attack on psychological Pyrrhonianism, but out of deference. Any attempt at dislodging the psychological Pyrrhonian using normative principles will be question-begging, or at least dialectically ineffective. Out of deference, I have described why I do not find myself following the same path.

To summarize, if we accept the normative account of Pyrrhonianism, then we have not found an epistemically more modest position than skeptical-dogmatism. The psychological interpretation is potentially more epistemically modest, but it comes with a high price: normative nihilism.

XII. Not Just Another Disagreement and the Super Big Bet

To summarize the dialectic thus far: to me, what recommends Exceptionalism as the most promising means to avoid the self-undermining argument, is simply that Exceptionalism is the least bad option. Yes, it requires us to employ non-universal forms of our epistemic principles, and yes, it requires us to represent ourselves as über epistemic superiors to our colleagues at the second-order. But as bad as these costs are, Exceptionalism is still better than dogmatism and skepticism. This is not exactly a ringing endorsement of Exceptionalism, but, as is so often the case, what recommends a philosophical position is simply that it is the least bad choice.

But I believe we can do better. Thus far I've been playing rope-a-dope: it is now time to be offensive. I hope to show that two systemic equivocations pervade the self-undermining objection, which, when noted, render it impotent.

The first equivocation has to do with the question of whether the second-order debate should be treated as just another disagreement, or whether there is something special about the second-order disagreement. The objection under consideration, that it is arbitrary to endorse skeptical-dogmatism at the first-order but not at the second-order, must elide between these two interpretations.

To illuminate the problem, consider the New Big Bet challenge to the skeptical-dogmatist: "Shouldn't you bet against skeptical-dogmatism?" The reasoning provided above in the Big Bet seems to dictate that the skeptical-dogmatist should bet against skeptical-dogmatism. The refusal to take the New Big Bet seems arbitrary.

To respond to the New Big Bet challenge, we need to disambiguate exactly what the second-order question is. Suppose we ask the second-order question in the same way as we might ask a first-order question. For example, we might phrase one first-order debate as: "Should we be consequentialists, deontologists, or virtue

ethicists?" If we phrase the second-order question in a manner that is completely independent of the *content* of our epistemic views about the first-order debate, we might ask:

> **Q1:** Should we be dogmatists, skeptics, or skeptical-dogmatists about our epistemic views about first-order disagreements?

This seems analogous to the first-order question. However, as we noted above, the dogmatists, normative skeptics, and skeptical-dogmatists agree that we should be dogmatists at the second level. (The psychological interpretation of skepticism, it seems, neither agrees nor disagrees about what *ought* to be done.) But then the New Big Bet does not work in this case, since the consensus of the wise is that we should be dogmatists at the second level. Where there is agreement, the disagreement argument for skeptical-dogmatism does not apply. Hence, it is perfectly consistent—not arbitrary at all—to endorse dogmatism when one of the conditions for the disagreement argument—that there is in fact disagreement—is missing.

It seems the only way to preserve the analogy with first-order disagreements is to build more content into the second-order question. The question needs to mention both the position at the second-order (dogmatism) and the disagreement about the correct epistemological position at the first-order (dogmatism, skepticism, or skeptical-dogmatism). (The view that we should be normative skeptics at the first-order, and dogmatists at the second-order, we may refer to as 'SKD.') Thus, the question is:

> **Q2:** Should we bet on DD, SDD, or SKD?

But once we build in this much of the first-order content, it quickly becomes evident that we have failed to arrive at a suitable analog of the first-order question. The trouble is that the second-order dispute is not logically independent of the first-order dispute. We can illustrate this with the Super Big Bet, which works like this: The god of epistemology provides each player a stake of 4 billion people. And as before, the god guarantees that the views are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. At most, one can bet 1 billion lives on any individual column. The best outcome is to save all (roughly) 8 billion people on the planet. The table below illustrates the Super Big Bet. The choices for each column are to abstain, bet for a particular view, or bet against each view.

The Super Big Bet

Column 1	*Column 2*	*Column 3*	*Column 4*
First-order Normative Ethics Dispute	*First-order Distributive Justice Dispute*	*First-order Religion Dispute*	*Second-order Dispute*
A1: Consequentialism	A2: Utilitarianism	A3: Monotheism	A4: DD
B1: Deontology	B2: Libertarianism	B3: Atheism	B4: SKD
C1: Virtue Ethics	C2: Justice as Fairness	C3: Polytheism	C4: SDD

We can now restate the challenge at the second-order to the skeptical-dogmatist: "Wouldn't it be arbitrary for the skeptical-dogmatist to not bet against SDD in the fourth column?" It might seem like the skeptical-dogmatist must agree, but in fact this is the wrong answer, for the second-order disagreement, in effect, encompasses the bets at the first-order. We can see this by assuming (for the purposes of reductio ad absurdum) that it is correct to bet against SDD. This means that logical consistency requires us to accept the recommendations of DD or SKD for the first three columns. Let us see what these payoffs are.

If we equate the skeptic's view with abstaining—believing there is no more reason to bet for or against—then the skeptic winds up with no more and no less than the original stake for these three columns, namely, three billion. Assume that dogmatists are evenly distributed over each of the rows of first-order debates, e.g., that there are as many dogmatists about consequentialism as there are about virtue ethics and deontology. Dogmatists, since they believe their preferred view is more likely than not, will bet on each of their preferred views. Thus, each will bet one billion persons over the three disputes. On average, they will lose twice and win once. So overall, dogmatists will do worse than skeptics: they will end up down one billion people with only two billion remaining of their original three billion stake.

To complete the reasoning here, we need to see how skeptical-dogmatists will fare over the first three columns. Skeptical-dogmatists should bet 1/3 of a billion against each of the nine cells in the first three columns. The skeptical-dogmatist will win twice and lose once in each column, resulting in gaining 1/3 of a billion people in each column. Thus, over the first three columns, the skeptical dogmatist will be up a billion, equal to four billion lives saved. If the goal is to save as many lives as possible (and by analogy, truth), then skeptical-dogmatism is the most rational option over the first three columns (for those who should not represent themselves as über epistemic superiors).

So we are now in a position to reject the assumption that it would be rational to bet against SDD in the fourth column. The reason is that consistency would require us to adopt either dogmatism or skepticism within first-order disputes in

the first three columns, and these are suboptimal strategies when it comes to the first three columns.

Thus the response to the challenge that skeptical-dogmatists should bet against skeptical-dogmatism might be summarized by way of dilemma. Either the question is formulated as independent of the first-order content (as Q1 above), in which case there is no disagreement, or the question is formulated in a manner that is not logically independent of the content of the first-order disagreements (as Q2 above). In which case, consistency with the rational decision at the first-order dictates betting on SDD in the fourth column. It is only by equivocating between an understanding of the second-order question as being both logically independent and not logically independent of the first-order disagreements that the objection appears to have any force. Thus it is not arbitrary to refuse to bet against SDD, because the disagreement about SDD is significantly different from the usual first-order disputes.

But then it may be objected: "You have simply shown your reasoning for being a dogmatist at the second-order. Why can't this same strategy be used at the first-order to defend dogmatism? All that dogmatists need to do is lay out their reasoning for the first-order disputes and the parallel is complete." I can't discuss this line of objection here in detail. Let me just note that this seems to assume that epistemic resources necessary to underwrite dogmatism in both cases are the same. However, this will have to be argued for—it is certainly not a plausible general rule. Consider our young apprentice. Her recipe for skeptical-dogmatism involves a couple of ingredients that the punters seem to lack: epistemic humility and a dash of very elementary probability theory. Presumably, to justify dogmatism about a particular horse winning the race would require different epistemic resources, e.g., detailed knowledge about the fitness of the horse, the type of track the race is to be run on, who will be the jockey and trainer, etc. In making her case, the apprentice does not appeal to have detailed knowledge about any of these matters. Similarly, dogmatists about first-order philosophical disputes must assume they have greater epistemic resources than dogmatism about skeptical-dogmatism at the second-order. To put it somewhat metaphorically, skeptical-dogmatism is destructive; dogmatism is constructive. And, in general, it is easier to destroy than create.

XIII. Disagreeing with the Unreasonable

The second equivocation turns on the question of the reasonableness of my colleagues. You won't be surprised that I use an analogy to set the stage. Suppose I go mountain climbing with three friends. On the descent, we return to an open meadow that we agree is about halfway down the mountain. There are four paths going in different directions from the meadow—a point we hadn't noticed on the way up in our enthusiasm to reach the summit. Each of us is initially confident that a different path is the one we took on our ascent, and therefore the way back to

basecamp. On hearing the disagreement, I suggest that we accept that each of us is probably wrong: we have overestimated our epistemic abilities when it comes to judging direction. No one in our group has a track record or other evidence that distinguishes him or her from the others as an über epistemic superior in terms of a sense of direction.

My reasoning, let us suppose, is based on a climber's analog of DEP:

> **DEP**:** If epistemically reasonable climbers disagree about some multi-proposition dispute Δ, then, other things being equal, we should take the dispute as evidence that each view is probably false.

Of course the analogy is much like our earlier ones, except that this time a diachronic element is at the forefront: our disagreement is recently revealed. We can imagine the revelation plays out in two different ways. In one ending to the story, my friends internalize the lesson that we were initially overly optimistic about our epistemic abilities to determine the correct path, and they agree that each path is probably the wrong way to go—and then devise a plan consistent with this epistemic humility. At this point, DEP** no longer applies since we all agree about the right doxastic attitude to the question of which is the correct path. I retain the idea that my comrades are reasonable, but now there is no dispute.

In the second version, two of my climbing companions ignore my plea for epistemic modesty and continue to insist that they are more likely than not right about the correct path. The third (hampered by elementary errors in probability theory brought on by the methane fumes from horse dung) suggests that it is as credible as not that each of the four paths is the correct path. All three argue that my own position dictates that I should accept that DEP** is probably false, since they disagree with DEP**. They charge me with endorsing a self-undermining position.

Notice, however, an absolutely critical point in their charge: the assumption that my position dictates that I am still required to accept that they are epistemically reasonable. However, if DEP** is true, then I have reason to think that they are not epistemically reasonable: they do not think that each of their views about the correct direction home is probably false. Since they do not accept this consequence, I have reason (assuming DEP** is true) to reject the idea that the antecedent of DEP** is satisfied in this instance. That is, to reject the idea that my climbing colleagues are epistemically reasonable. But if my colleagues are not reasonable, then the fact that they disagree with me about DEP** does not in itself show that I should think that DEP** is probably false. So in either ending to the story there is reason to reject the idea that DEP** is self-undermining, since in either case, the antecedent is not satisfied.

Of course, by analogy, the suggestion is that the fact that my epistemically unreasonable philosophical colleagues disagree with me about DEP does not show

that I should think that DEP is probably false. For again, the antecedent is not satisfied: if DEP is true, then philosophers who continue to insist they are probably correct about multi-proposition disputes are not epistemically reasonable. The dialectic is harder to see here because often the diachronic element is missing: it is not like we do philosophy for a long time and then all of a sudden discover as we hand in our doctoral dissertation that philosophy is rife with disagreement. Still, we can imagine individual cases. Suppose I meet a philosopher for the first time at the New Mexico Texas 2018 conference. If I find out he has strong beliefs in favor of certain views in multi-proposition disputes—e.g., he thumps his chest as he pronounces in favor of atheism, hard determinism, political libertarianism, deontology, etc., and he claims to be an über epistemic superior to all those with whom he disagrees—then I have reason (according to DEP) to reject the idea that my new acquaintance is epistemically reasonable (in some respects, at least).

So the dialectical terrain is something like the following: I find that systematic disagreement among dogmatists about first-order multi-proposition disputes reveals that dogmatists are epistemically hubristic about the extent of their epistemic prowess. As a result, I find them epistemically unreasonable—on this point, at least. So the fact that dogmatists (and normative skeptics) disagree with me about DEP is no indication that DEP is self-undermining.

Another way to see the point here is to suppose DEP is formulated without the qualifier of 'reasonable,' for example, something along these lines:

> **DEP***:** If philosophers disagree about some multi-proposition dispute Δ, then, other things being equal, we should take the dispute as evidence that each view is probably false.

Something like DEP*** would make the case that skeptical-dogmatism relies on a self-undermining principle much stronger, for then my disagreeing colleagues would provide considerable evidential weight against skeptical-dogmatism. But this is not my position.

It should be clear that any characterization of 'reasonable'—not just DEP— is going to have this potential effect of dividing actual (and possible) philosophers into the reasonable and the unreasonable. If you think some sort of consistency constraint is part of what constitutes the notion of reasonable, and Graham Priest offers you an inconsistent proof that inconsistency is reasonable, you will be forced to say that he is unreasonable. If you think a constraint on what counts as reasonable is that you should not argue in a circle, then you may have reason to denounce Hegel as unreasonable when he champions the "circle of circles."[15]

It may be remarked that this simply pushes the dialectic one step back, because now the issue will be whether my characterization of what is epistemically unreasonable may be questioned. I accept this: this is where the dialectical action should concentrate. If I am wrong about what is epistemically unreasonable, then

the argument as stated fails. In which case, the argument of my opponents that my argument is self-undermining becomes otiose. And if I am right about a condition for epistemic reasonableness, then I am right not to apply DEP to those colleagues who violate this norm.

XIV. Socratic Wisdom

The parallel with Socrates can now be drawn more fully. Where Socrates claims that we are ignorant of the 'fine and the good,' I claim that we are not justified in dogmatic beliefs about first-order multi-proposition disputes. Where Socrates professes wisdom about our epistemic situation, we are not wise about the fine and good, I claim that we are justified in believing that we are probably wrong about first-order debates. Where Socrates finds that he is wise in comparison to his contemporaries who are dogmatists about the fine and the good, I follow.

It may be asked, "Aren't you embarrassed to compare yourself with the immortal Socrates?" To which I reply that we must keep this in some perspective. Socrates, after all, was just a man. So yes, so long as we put aside his philosophical talent, charisma, and humor, then indeed I think the comparison is pretty apt. In other words, yes, I still feel much discomfort with where my philosophical path has led me: there is the obvious discomfort of saying that one is wiser, epistemically virtuous, or more reasonable than so many other contemporary philosophers. Socrates could get away with it because, well, he is Socrates. It is quite another matter for some puny philosopher from some or other state school to make such a boast. On the other hand, I feel out of step with so many of my colleagues who feel they are justified in believing that some philosophical position in a multi-proposition dispute is true, or at least who lean that way. Although I consider myself a recovering dogmatist, such casual indifference to representing oneself as an über epistemic superior about first-order debates now escapes me. So I stand with Socrates on the limits of human philosophical abilities.

Notes

1. Plato, *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus,* Translated by Harold Fowler (Harvard University Press, 1914).
2. For some review of the problem and literature on Socratic ignorance, see Richard Bett, "Socratic Ignorance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 215–36.
3. See Mark Walker, "Between Gods and Apes: On the Lack of Scientific and Philosophical Progress," in *Philosophy's Future* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 147–58.
4. Sextus Empiricus, "Outlines of Pyrrhonism," in *The Skeptic Way*, translated by Benson Mates (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
5. David Bourget and David J. Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?," *Philosophical Studies* 170, no. 3 (2014): 465–500.

6. For some discussion of the relationship between multi-proposition disputes and binary disputes see Mark Walker, "Na-Na, Na-Na, Boo-Boo, the Accuracy of Your Philosophical Beliefs Is Doo-Doo," *Manuscrito* 45 (2022): 1–49. A discussion of the historical and social dimensions of multi-proposition disputes can be found in Mark Walker, "Epistemic Permissiveness and the Problem of Philosophical Disagreement," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review/Revue Canadienne de Philosophie*, 2022, 1–25.

7. I'm using the "alethic" version of 'epistemic peer' here. For some discussion of competing conceptions see David Christensen, "Conciliation, Uniqueness and Rational Toxicity," *Nous* 50, no. 3 (2016): 584–603.

8. Bourget and Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?"

9. In these terms we should think of accounts of justification that eschew any strong alethic connection, e.g., sometimes the idea of reflective equilibrium is understood in this way. Others might follow Lewis in saying that a reasonable aim is to look for a certain amount of internal coherence of our philosophical views:

> Philosophical theories are never refuted conclusively. (Or hardly ever, Gödel and Gettier may have done it.) The theory survives its refutation—at a price….Our "intuitions" are simply opinions; our philosophical theories are the same… a reasonable task for the philosopher is to bring them into equilibrium. Our common task is to find out what equilibria there are that can withstand examination, but it remains for each of us to come to rest in one or another of them…Once the menu of well-worked out theories is before us, philosophy is a matter of opinion. David Kellogg Lewis, *Philosophical Papers: Volume I* (Oxford University Press, 1983). x-xi.

10. A. Hájek, "My Philosophical Position Says 'p'and I Don't Believe 'p,'" *Moore's Paradox: New Essays on Belief, Rationality, and the First Person*, 2007, 217.

11. Bourget and Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?"

12. Sextus Empiricus, "Outlines of Pyrrhonism."

13. Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* (University of California Press, 2009). Diego E. Machuca, "A Neo-Pyrrhonian Response to the Disagreeing about Disagreement Argument," *Synthese*, no. 194.5 (2017): 1663–80.

14. Sextus Empiricus, "Outlines of Pyrrhonism."

15. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Theodore F. Geraets, *The Encyclopaedia Logic* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1991).

WORKS CITED

Bett, Richard. "Socratic Ignorance." In *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates.* Cambridge University Press, 2010: 215–36.

Bourget, David, and David J. Chalmers. "What Do Philosophers Believe?" *Philosophical Studies* 170, no. 3 (2014): 465–500.

Christensen, David. "Conciliation, Uniqueness and Rational Toxicity." *Nous* 50, no. 3 (2016): 584–603.

Hájek, A. "My Philosophical Position Says 'p' and I Don't Believe 'p.'" *Moore's Paradox: New Essays on Belief, Rationality, and the First Person*, 2007, 217.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, and Theodore F. Geraets. *The Encyclopaedia Logic*.

Hackett Publishing Company, 1991.
Lewis, David Kellogg. *Philosophical Papers: Volume I*. Oxford University Press, 1983.
Machuca, Diego E. "A Neo-Pyrrhonian Response to the Disagreeing about Disagreement Argument." *Synthese*, no. 194.5 (2017): 1663–80.
Plato. *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus.* Translated by Harold Fowler. Harvard University Press, 1914.
Sextus Empiricus. "Outlines of Pyrrhonism." In *The Skeptic Way*, Translated by Benson Mates. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
Thorsrud, Harald. *Ancient Scepticism*. University of California Press, 2009.
Walker, Mark. "Between Gods and Apes: On the Lack of Scientific and Philosophical Progress." In *Philosophy's Future.* Wiley-Blackwell, 2017: 147–58.
———. "Epistemic Permissiveness and the Problem of Philosophical Disagreement." *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review/Revue Canadienne de Philosophie*, 2022, 1–25.
———. "Na-Na, Na-Na, Boo-Boo, the Accuracy of Your Philosophical Beliefs Is Doo-Doo." *Manuscrito* 45 (2022): 1–49.

Varieties of Explanation in Defense of Humean Laws of Nature

Jan Swiderski
Syracuse University

Winner of the Houghton Dalrymple Award

I. Dialectical Landscape

Views of laws of nature can be divided into two camps according to their answer to the question: are laws mere regularities? Humeans answer in the affirmative. They are motivated by Lewis' doctrine of Humean Supervenience: "all there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing and then another" (Lewis "New Work for a Theory of Universals," ix). There can be no variation of any kind of fact without variation of these local matters—henceforth, "the Mosaic." Thus, on the Humean view, laws are determined by the Mosaic. Prominent defenders of Humeanism about laws include Lewis and Loewer. The anti-Humean camp disagrees. They argue that laws are not reducible to the Mosaic. More than mere regularities, the laws play some role fitting the metaphor of "governing." Anti-Humean, governing laws can be described as relations between universals (Armstrong What Is a Law of Nature, Dretske "Laws of Nature"), the powers or dispositions of particular objects (Ellis and Lierse), or irreducible to anything further (Maudlin).

All parties agree that laws of nature, together with initial conditions, are meant to explain worldly goings-on. Humean laws have been objected to for their failure to explain. Armstrong's classic argument is that, if one attempts to explain phenomena with laws understood as mere regularities,

> we are then trying to explain the fact that all observed Fs are Gs by

> appealing to the hypothesis that all Fs are Gs. Could this hypothesis serve as an explanation? It does not seem that it could. That all Fs are Gs is a complex state of affairs which is in part constituted by the fact that all observed Fs are Gs. 'All Fs are Gs' can even be rewritten as 'All observed Fs are Gs and all unobserved Fs are Gs.' As a result, trying to explain why all observed Fs are Gs by postulating that Fs are Gs is a case of trying to explain something by appealing to a state of affairs part of which is the thing to be explained. (Armstrong 40)

Maudlin puts it as follows. If, for the Humean, "the laws are nothing but generic features of the Humean Mosaic, then there is a sense in which one cannot appeal to those very laws to *explain* the particular features of the Mosaic itself: the laws are what they are in virtue of the Mosaic rather than vice versa." Call this the "circularity objection" (172)

Loewer defends L-laws against the circularity objection. He argues that there are two distinct senses of explanation: scientific and metaphysical. So long as there are two kinds of explanation, Humean laws produce no circularity. Scientific and metaphysical explanation, Loewer argues,

> are different enterprises. The relevant kind of metaphysical explanation is one in which a type of fact—say mental facts—is shown to be grounded in or constituted by some other kind of fact—say neurological fact. Metaphysical explanation need not involve laws and the explanandum and the explanans must be co-temporal (if the explanans is a temporal fact or property). Scientific explanation of a particular event or fact need not show that it is grounded in a more fundamental event or fact but rather, typically, shows why the event occurred in terms of prior events and laws. ("Humean Supervenience," 131-132)

There is no circular explanation: the Humean laws explain the Mosaic scientifically, and the Mosaic explains them metaphysically. But, since these two kinds of explanation differ, nothing explains itself.

However, Lange argues that any explanation provided by L-laws will be circular ("Grounding" 256). Even if metaphysical explanation differs from scientific explanation, the relations between explanations will obey the transitivity principle (*T*). *T* states that if *E* (scientifically) explains *F*, and *G* grounds *E*, then *G* (scientifically) explains *F*. On the Humean view, the laws explain the Mosaic, and the Mosaic grounds the laws. Then, by *T*, the laws explain the laws. The circularity objection still applies. L-laws offer no non-circular explanation.

If "metaphysical explanation" is understood to mean the same thing as "grounding", *T* can be stated as follows: if the explanans in a scientific explanation has grounds, those grounds explain the explanandum.[1] The defense of L-laws rests

on the claim that, in that specific case, the grounds of an explanans don't themselves explain the explanandum of what they ground. That is, in that specific case, the Mosaic doesn't explain the Mosaic. I will argue that the Humean should reject *T*. Here's a rough sketch of what's to come. In Section 2, I argue that a new defense of Humean laws is necessary. I argue for a more general principle contradicting *T* in Section 3: the variety view of explanation. In slogan form, I suggest that the Humean should consider explanation as variegated and context-sensitive, rather than univocal and absolute. What it takes for one thing to explain another is different from context to context. This view offers a principled reason to reject *T*: if there is a variety of explanatory relations, scientific and metaphysical explanation can reasonably be taken to be different. I conclude that the variety view offers a novel response to the circularity objection.

II. MOTIVATIONS

In this section, I motivate the need for a new defense of Humean laws appealing to a more general principle, rather than appeal to examples or counter-examples.

A strategy employed by Miller, Hicks and van Elswyk in defense of Humean laws has been to identify cases in which *T* fails. In many instances, Miller claims, "particular grounding facts about the mosaic are incidental to what is being explained" ("Humean Laws" 1321). For example, an explanation of a tsunami will tend to refer to such facts as the movements of tectonic plates, the propagation of seismic waves through large bodies of water, and so forth. Also, most would agree that facts about tectonic plates are grounded in the distribution of the fundamental particles in space-time. However, it would be rather strange to explain a tsunami referring to fundamental particles. Hicks and van Elswyk note that counterexamples like this one are "easily replicated" (438). Indeed, they argue that the Humean account of laws is itself such a counterexample (439).

I fear this strategy will end up in stalemate. Anti-Humeans have argued that *T* applies to the explanations of instances by laws (and vice versa) on the basis of the apparent ubiquity of situations in which *T* holds. Humeans have argued that *T* does not apply to the explanations of instances by laws (and vice versa) on the basis of many other situations in which *T* does not hold. No strategy consisting of evaluating the relative strengths of the rival examples or their relevance to the case at hand looks promising, and invites only begging questions and digging in heels. Nor is it fruitful to call explanation by Humean laws a counterexample, like Hicks and van Elswyk do: whether *T* applies to L-laws is just the issue at hand. What's more, Lange's (1341-1344) response that *T* apply strictly to contrastive explanation (why did *F* rather than *F** happen) seems to rule out each of the suggested counterexamples, and preserve the troubling circularity.

A way out of the stalemate is through an analysis of the concept of explanation, which I undertake in Section 3. My argument is that we understand explanation so

as to rule out *T* not just in the specific case at hand, but, rather, in any standard case. I claim that explanation is variegated, and that it is a rare coincidence that one thing explains another in more than one context. The nature of explanation varies with context in general, and metaphysical and scientific contexts are radically different. Failure of explanation across contexts is the rule, rather than the exception. In denying *T*, we are just following this rule.

III. Against the Transitivity Principle: Data from Everyday and Technical Explanation

Now, I will argue from examples of explanatory practices that *T* is contrary to standard usage of the concept of explanation. I will argue that explanation is taken to be effective only insofar as it succeeds in integrating facts into a unified system of knowledge. Whether some fact or group of facts is or is not an explanation depends on context. Since there is no single, most general systematization of knowledge, but various systematizations relevant to various special sciences, situations, or individuals, there is no general sense of explanation, but a variety of equally well-founded senses thereof.

Suppose you have become embroiled in some hopelessly complicated social conflict involving your neighbors, which is rife with misunderstandings, tenuous implications, and old grievances coming to light. Consider how you would explain the situation to somebody familiar with the particularities of each of the participants, their mutual relations and interests, and so on—perhaps another longtime neighbor just returning from a few months abroad—compared to how you would explain it to a compassionate (and probably very patient) friend, unfamiliar with these facts. Surely, one would offer different explanations. But there is certainly just one situation to be explained. Or consider your favorite philosophical argument—maybe Anselm's Ontological Argument. How would you explain it to a philosopher? To a theologian? To an undergraduate? To a young child? Again, each explanation would be different, even though there is but one Anselmian Ontological Argument.

Consider, too, that scientific practice accepts a distinction of disciplines, each with its own proper methods of establishing and justifying claims. Things get explained in other terms depending on what sort of question is being asked. The methods employed by various special sciences, too, differ. Although there are certain general standards imposed by the scientific method, the more specific criteria for what makes an acceptable explanation in one context rather than another differ. This suggests that not all explanation is on a par. Also, it suggests that explanation doesn't move across domains of inquiry. A sociologist will not accept an explanation of a sociological fact which refers solely to biological facts, and so on. Note, finally, that restricting our interest to contrastive explanations, following Lange's suggestion, does not change the results: if a sociological event

is not explained by some biological facts, those facts will also not be sufficient to explain why the event happened *rather than not*.[2]

Here's an objection: these examples don't show that some explanations violate *T*, only that explanations which obey *T* tend not to be given. Of course, the challenge continues, we can account for this by the simple fact that explanations involving the fundamental grounds are terribly long-winded, and nobody would have the patience or time to hear them out. Thus, strict truth is sacrificed at the altar of efficient communication, as we presuppose some general knowledge and give the listener the salient facts required for her to put the information together. But the explanation of the explanandum by the grounds of the explanans, though usually unstated, is not undermined by this argument, and these are no counter-examples to *T*. Or so the challenge alleges.

My response is as follows. We have established that the explanations involving fundamental grounds tend not to be given. From that, we can infer that these explanations are unsuccessful. An unsuccessful explanation, I argue, is no explanation at all. So, in the cases above, *T* is violated.

The explanations above are not just practically unheplful, but categorically unsuccessful. It just so happens that unhelpful explanations are not offered. One might, in a maniacally pedantic mood, be moved to talk about elementary particles when asked to explain bird migration. Our behaviors tend to adhere to the norms for efficient discourse, but they might not. But it is no contingent fact that inefficient explanations are unsuccessful. They would not achieve their intended purpose of providing new knowledge or insights about tsunamis or migrations, even if they were given. That they would fail is no mere matter of practice, but a necessary truth about their nature.

Failed explanations are not false, *per se*, but they are not true either. They are neither, because they are not, strictly speaking, explanations at all. An explanation is characterized by its specific function: to explain. Something which does not serve that function cannot properly be called an explanation. Just like a bad argument is no argument at all, or a bad excuse is no excuse at all, a bad explanation is no explanation at all. Compare: "Jones has failed to explain his actions" and "Jones has given no explanation for his actions." I take these to mean the same thing. Imagine this plea from Jones: "I agree with the first charge: I have failed to explain my actions; but I've certainly given an explanation of them!" That doesn't make sense. We take giving an explanation to be the same as succeeding in explaining. Of course, we can still call failed attempts to explain "explanations" (as I will, at times, in this paper). But we say many things without really meaning them for convenience's sake: a "fake donut" is no donut, a "failed evacuation" no evacuation, "artificial cheese" not cheese, and so on.

IV. Against the Transitivity Principle: Context-Sensitive Explanation

The following emerges from insights concerning the everyday and the specialized use of the notion of explanation: explanation succeeds only insofar as it integrates some fact or event into a more general system of facts or events. Neighbors have a different collection of background knowledge and beliefs than curious colleagues, philosophers know different things about medieval approaches to God than theologians. This, together with the fact that each case presents a different context, accounts for why each case demands a different explanation in order to be successful.[3]

This insight justifies and plausibly motivates certain arguments in favour of L-laws. Loewer has argued that L-laws "explain by unifying," while anti-Humean laws are simply declared to explain by postulation" ("Humean Supervenience" 189, 197). Miller, too, claims that at least one view of explanation takes it to be "a matter of uncovering mere patterns or regularities in reality, and then classifying particular facts as instances of these patterns" (1326). In this case, L-laws "have some explanatory force that outstrips the explanatory force attaching to even a conjunction of their instances [...] in virtue of their privileged standing in a systematization of the local Humean facts." Both of these passages mean to justify the explanatory power of L-laws. They do so by appeal to the fact that L-laws put their explananda into a well-ordered, complete system. I'm proposing that fitting a fact or event into a system is the criteria for a successful explanation. If these arguments about unification succeed, they suggest the variety view is correct.[4]

Precisely how fine-grained the contexts of explanation should be taken to be can fall out of whatever further data one wishes to draw on. For the purposes of a defender of Humean laws, only one distinction between contexts is enough: the context of metaphysics differs from the context of natural science. I think even the most maximally coarse-grained conceptions of context would likely recognize that distinction. So long as it holds, the context in which the Mosaic explains the laws (the metaphysical context) and the context in which laws explain instances (the scientific context) are different.

That distinction seems exceptionally well-motivated. Even if explanation is transitive across the contexts I discuss above—maybe particle physics does, after all, explain tsunamis, in some sense—there remains a substantial difference between that case and the case of natural laws. Explanation which is transitive across ontological categories is not shown to follow from explanation which is transitive across different kinds of entities of the same category. Paradigmatic instances of grounding which implies a further explanation—grounding obeying *T*—are within one ontological category. Neural states and electrical states, or centers of mass and relative distributions of weighted parts are all concrete things.

But I'm hard-pressed to find an instance of cross-category scientific explanation. That is, an explanation such that *C* explains *E*, where *C* is of one category, and *E* of another. Laws and instances are not of the same ontological category. Even without establishing their precise natures, it's clear that the Mosaic is spatiotemporal, whereas the laws are not, for instance. That's enough to establish that they don't belong to the same category. So a Humean might be content to reject *T* specifically in this case, without taking on the variety view I propose.

At this point, one might worry that the variety view is so permissive about what counts as an explanation (of some kind or another) that it engenders a new circularity for Humean laws. Namely, one might think that even if neither the metaphysical context, nor the scientific context features a problematic, circular explanation, there is a further context in which such an explanation *does* occur. Indeed, one might think that this further context—perhaps the context of "the metaphysics within physics"—is the context which philosophers of science are interested in.

The following seems to me to be a natural response on behalf of the variety view: not *everything* counts as a context, and furthermore not everything counts as an explanation. That is, not every gerrymandered "grab-bag" of disparate situations should count as a context, much like not every disjunction of properties counts as a property. The context which combines physics *and* metaphysics, and, with it, the variety of explanation which is appropriate for it, are far less plausible candidates for notions which are joint-carving or natural. I cannot offer a complete argument here; however, it is sufficient to say that it seems that what would count as explanatory for one thing would *not* for the other.

IV. Conclusion

I've argued that denying *T* can save L-laws from the circularity objection. I have argued that independent, theory-neutral considerations raise suspicion about *T*: it contradicts the apparently general principle that explanation is context-sensitive and variegated. With the variety view, the circularity objection is no threat, as it turns out to equivocate on two kinds of explanation. The explanation of instances by laws occurs in the context of natural science. The explanation of laws by instances occurs in the context of metaphysics. But no more general explanation follows.[5]

Notes

1. Loewer, Lange, and others use "metaphysical explanation" interchangeably with "grounding" to refer to a hyperintensional, non-causal, metaphysical relation. Although I think grounding can be explanatory, I don't think it's essentially so. To dispel the suspicion that grounding is inherently explanatory (I will go on to argue that no relation is inherently explanatory), I will use "grounding" and its cognates to refer to metaphysical explanation.

Calling the relation metaphysical explanation implies that it must, of course, explain just as much as it grounds. I don't think that's true: grounds don't always explain. I don't mean to suggest that grounding isn't explanatory *at all*. Rather, I am suggesting only that grounding, much like building, causation, or responsibility, is explanatory sometimes, but not others. If grounding is meant to be understood as essentially explanatory (i.e. explanatory in any context, as, it seems, some would like to understand it), my argument is that there is no such relation.

2. One might object as follows: there is, indeed, no privileged explanation in philosophical or social situations, but that does not license the inference that there is no privileged explanations in natural science. On the contrary, there does seem to be a privileged, more complete or appropriate explanation, a "whole story" which underpins and accounts for all of the other, less complete stories, in natural science. Specifically, the more complete or appropriate explanation is the one which invokes the fundamental grounds. Thus, in the natural sciences, the variety view is false, and if the explanans in an explanation has grounds, those grounds explain the explanandum. I see two natural responses to this objection. The first is to dispute such claims about scientific practice, and appeal to the different "incommensurate" levels of explanation in natural science. The second is to reject the specifically scientific sort of explanation as paradigmatic. To adopt scientific explanation as the sole or best kind of explanation that there is to fail to see the big picture of what we do when we explain things. Here is how I see the big picture: explaining is answering questions and integrating facts into a system of knowledge, but there is no one system of facts which is the system into which everything must be integrated. If this is correct, explanation in the natural sciences has no bearing on explanation in other areas, including the area concerned with the nature of laws, and the objection fails.

3. The view I recommend seems to follow from the picture of explanation endorsed by Hicks and van Elswyk: "explanations are sets of statements that answer questions about why something is such and so" ("Humean Laws" 438). Given the plausible assumption that what it takes to answer a question varies with the context in which it is asked, Hicks and van Elswyk are committed to the claim that the conditions on successful explanation vary with context.

4. Loewer (1996) adds the further allegation that non-Humean laws fail to explain. If "unification" is understood as I suggest, this further charge is dubious. It's not true that the non-Humean laws account resists systematization into a bigger framework. The charge is strong insofar as there is reason to doubt a thorough, systematic theory of grounding. If one were to ignore philosophical work on grounding, truth-making, determination, and the like, non-Humean views *would* be based on a relation between the laws and the way that the world is altogether unlike any other relation around. As such, they would fail to fit into any more general framework of knowledge. But many people think that there is a serious theory of grounding, truth-making, or the like. So non-Humean laws succeed in unifying: they integrate the laws of nature into a metaphysical theory. Another way to put this point is that the A-laws are explanatory in the context of metaphysics only.

5. I am grateful that this paper has benefitted from comments from Mark Heller, Jacob Mills, Kim Frost, as well as audiences at the New Mexico-Texas Philosophical Society's 2018 Conference, and the Central European University's "Laws of Nature"

summer class.

WORKS CITED

Armstrong, David. *What Is a Law of Nature?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Dretske, Fred. "Laws of Nature," *Philosophy of Science*, vol 45, 1977, pp. 173-181.

Fodor, Jerry. "Special Science, or, the Disunity of Science as a Working Hypothesis." *Synthese* vol 28, 1974, pp. 77-115.

Hicks, Michael Townsen and Peter van Elswyk. "Humean Laws and Circular Explanation," *Philosophical Studies* vol. 172, 2015, pp. 433-443.

Lange, Marc. "Grounding, Scientific Explanation, and Humean Laws," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 164, 2013, pp. 255-261.

———. "Transitivity, Self-Explanation, and the Circularity Argument against Humean Accounts of Natural Law." *Synthese* vol. 195, 2018, pp. 1337-1353.

Lewis, David. "New Work for a Theory of Universals," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* vol. 61, 1983, pp. 343-377.

———. *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. II. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Loewer, Barry. "Humean Supervenience," *Philosophical Topics* vol. 24, 1996, pp. 101-126.

———. "Two Accounts of Laws and Time," *Philosophical Studies* vol. 160, 2012, pp. 115-137.

Maudlin, Tim. *The Metaphysics within Physics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Miller, Elizabeth. "Humean Scientific Explanation," *Philosophical Studies* vol. 172, 2015, pp. 1311-1332.

Tooley, Michael. "The Nature of Laws," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7, 1977, pp. 667-698.

Arendt's Unbearable Loneliness: Adrian Piper's The Probable Trust Registry

Jeanette Joy Harris
University of Houston

Winner of the Hubert Griggs Alexander Award

In 2015, American artist Adrian Piper won the coveted Golden Lion (best in show) award at the Venice Biennale for her participatory artwork *The Probable Trust Registry* (Figures 1 & 2). This paper is an investigation of *The Probable Trust Registry* and how it overlaps with Hannah Arendt's ideas of political isolation and loneliness. The questions being asked are: Can *The Probable Trust Registry* act as a "politically coherent" way to gauge loneliness—the human condition that Arendt believed led to the destruction of democracy and the development of totalitarianism?[1] Does the creation, implementation, and reception of a participatory work of art tell us something about the state of our political climate and possibly indicate a moment of impending crisis?

Piper is an especially appropriate artist to evaluate because of the fluidity between her creative practice and her educational background. Piper was an integral player in the conceptual and performance art movements in New York City in the 1970s.[2] She embarked on a series of performances that tested the limits of what constitutes a work of art, where a work of art should be shown, and who should be involved with the work itself. She also received her PhD in philosophy from Harvard University, studying under John Rawls.

Piper simultaneously acts as artist and scholar moving within a political schema. This is demonstrated in her body of work that includes performances,

performance documentation (photographs, posters, and other visuals) and writings (manifestos and analyses). Because of the variety of her source material, Piper is the perfect example in which to study the relationship between performance art and political action.

This paper is divided into four parts. Part one clarifies Arendt's definitions of loneliness and isolation. Part two describes *The Probable Trust Registry* as a work of art. Part three discusses *The Probable Trust Registry* using Arendt's framework. Part four includes concluding remarks.

I

In the final section of *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Hannah Arendt says:

> what prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness … has become an everyday experience of the ever growing masses of our century.[3]

Loneliness is an important idea to Arendt because it indicates a failure in the basic way a person, as a "political animal," functions in the world, which she sees as plurality. Arendt, like Aristotle and others, believes that we are ultimately people in and of the world, not people who think within the barriers of their minds. The world, she asserts, must be preserved so that "Men, not man" can gather together.[4]

Plurality, then, is the basic condition of our political world, and it is comprised of diverse individuals who think and act. Thinking and acting are inter-related. A person considers her world in solitude (thinks), participates in the world through words and deeds (acts), and then retreats back into solitude (thinks) in order to reconsider and reconcile what she has experienced in the world. [5] The movement between the solitude of thinking and the publicity of acting is what protects and challenges the individual thoughts that are needed to support public life.

But the cycle of thinking and acting can deteriorate. Arendt believes that when we no longer find the thoughts of other people important we retreat into isolation, where our own company is the only place we find meaning. Further, and more despairing, when we no longer take interest in ourselves and our own thoughts, when we cease to think, we become lonely. She says,

"What makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one's own self which can be realized in solitude, but confirmed in its identity only by the trustworthy companion of my equals."[6]

Arendt uses the same adjective "unbearable" seven years later when describing loneliness in *The Human Condition*. She says, "loneliness is so contradictory to the human condition of plurality that it is simply unbearable

for any length of time."[7] Arendt reminds us that if we are "political animals," then we crave the companionship of others where we can assert ourselves as both similar and distinct.[8] When we are lonely, we engage with the world thoughtlessly, without regard to our self or other, and act without the need to reflect upon its consequences. When we are surrounded by other lonely people, the outcome can be irrational and unpredictable. Arendt concludes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that a contagion of isolation and loneliness directly impacted the growth of totalitarianism in Europe in the beginning of the 20th century.

In what ways can Arendt's analysis serve 21st century politics with its resurgence of nationalism? Arendt would want us to look for signs of isolation and loneliness before they lead us into political disaster. This can be accomplished through discussions around participatory art but Arendt might be wary. She had a very traditional point of view surrounding the work of art. She believed that art was an object—a product of *homo faber.* Though it could be meaningful, the work of art did not constitute political action.[9] What is interesting, however, is that as Arendt was teaching at the New School before her death in 1975, a new generation of artists was emerging in her very neighborhood. Performance art, formally constituted by artists in Downtown Manhattan in the 1970s, began to reevaluate the ways in which art manifested itself as a combination of object, process, action, and material. [10] It divorced itself from institutionalized art spaces and took to the streets. It spoke to individual experiences, communities, politics, and the body. This form of art as non-object might have intrigued Arendt as a political possibility. It is here that Adrian Piper's *The Probable Trust Registry* will serve as an example to consider.

II

The Probable Trust Registry was originally shown in Elizabeth Dee Gallery in 2014 and was later exhibited at the "All the World's Futures" pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale where it won the Golden Lion.

At first blush, *The Probable Trust Registry* appears to be an office space. When entering the exhibit, you encounter a reception area with three desks where volunteers wait to give you a sheet of paper with what Piper calls the "rules of the game." You are asked to consider these rules and, if agreed upon, sign a declaration of values promising to uphold them moving forward. These items are: I will always be too expensive to buy; I will always mean what I say; and I will always do what I say I am going to do.[11]

If you are willing, your declaration is collected and combined with other declarations into a book. This collection forms a public document that affirms a new consensus between other participants of the work who were, before then,

just a disparate group of people. The book is given to the APRA Foundation Berlin and will be confidentially held for 100 years. Each signatory is given a copy of the book to remind them of their commitment to themselves and others.[12]

III

In his introduction to *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, Robert Storr states that, "Piper casts the artist as an agent of social change" but can we consider the participation and reception of *The Probable Trust Registry* as indicative of political isolation and/or loneliness?[13]

Here we will use Arendt's framework. If loneliness is determined by the deterioration of plurality because of the absence of thinking and acting, and we want to know if the work of art can indicate political isolation and/or loneliness, then one way to evaluate the work of art is through these questions: First, does *The Probable Trust Registry* exist within plurality? Second, does the work cause the participant to engage in thinking? Third, doesthe work cause the participant to engage in action? If *The Probable Trust Registry* can positively answer these questions, then it seems reasonable to at least consider the work of art as a barometer of political mood.

The Venice Biennale is an example of plurality both in terms of its visitors and participants. The Biennale is comprised of three components: pavilions hosted by individual countries with native artists, a pavilion curated to include international artists, and events that support the overall exhibition theme. At the 2017 show, the Biennale saw some 615,000 visitors and included 86 host countries, a diverse cross-section ofour global community. [14] *The Probable Trust Registry* was included in "All the World's Future," the international exhibition, framing it as a project whose concept transcended the scope of a specific, national pavilion.[15]

Also, *The Probable Trust Registry* asked individual participants to engage in what Arendt would consider thinking. Through engaging in the rules of the game (I will always be too expensive to buy; I will always mean what I say; and I will always do what I say I am going to do), Piper asks us to reflect upon our own orientation in the world.

As Chloe Bass remarks in her review of *The Probable Trust Registry* in *Hyperallergic*,

> If we really choose to remember and live by them [declarations], we'll be questioning the relationship between our actions and their veracity at nearly all times. We can only learn more through participation, the kind that ultimately resides between us and ourselves.[16]

This moment of reflection is as important to Piper as it is with Arendt. Whether you can adhere to the rules must be questioned, and you must be honest with yourself about your ability to do so.

Finally, *The Probable Trust Registry* asks individual participants to act in the world with others by not only agreeing or disagreeing with the statements (through thinking) but acting upon those thoughts through our commitment or non-commitment to the final document.

In a critical view of *The Probable Trust Registry*, *Guardian* writer Adrian Searle says:

> At one of the sleek corporate desks I sign a contract. I could have made a personal declaration that "I will always be too expensive to buy," but that was clearly a no-no.[17]

Searle's comment may be sardonic, but he is an example of thinking in solitude and acting as a consequence of thinking. Through this work, Searle knows he cannot fully comply with the agreement so he does not.

IV

In Elizabeth Dee Gallery's press release on *The Probable Trust Registry* she writes, "engagement with Piper's interactive installation offers the possibility to assess one's own philosophical obligations and to reevaluate complicit relationships to others."[18]

The Probable Trust Registry, as a work of art, asks us to participate alongside global citizens, think about our commitment to the world, and then act upon those thoughts by signing or not signing the declaration, positively meeting our earlier criteria. But *The Probable Trust Registry* responds even more directly to Arendt's concerns about isolation and loneliness because, in considering Piper's agreement, it asks us: do you feel isolated? Do you, can you, should you be thoughtfully participating in the world around you? The overwhelmingly positive reception of *The Probable Trust Registry* at the Venice Biennale demonstrates that this work speaks to our political situation. It reveals that we want to participate in a shared work of art where our thoughts about personal responsibility, political action, and community are considered publically alongside others.

Political interaction has changed dramatically since *The Origins of Totalitarianism's* publication. Because of this, we must reconsider how to identify isolation and loneliness so its momentum does not lead to political crisis, but linking performance art to Arendt's work is complicated. First, there is little scholarship on Arendt and aesthetics because the "work of art" is not at the core of her political inquiry. She talks about the work of art in *The*

Human Condition and engages with literature and poetry in *Reflections on Literature and Culture* but topics like these are underrepresented when compared to others she wrote on revolution and violence.[19] Second, because performance art is a relatively new genre, critical studies on its relationship with traditional political theory are virtually non-existent. So, when looking at the intersection of Arendt, aesthetics, and performance art, there is quite a lot of work to be done from both a political and art historical perspective. Cecilia Sjoholm and Kimberly Curtis have both written texts on Arendt and aesthetics but neither specifically discuss performance.[20] It can be argued that the structure of performance and its engagement with others through words and deeds in public space requires a different type of analysis than the current one focused on the work of art as object. Performance seems to emerge more as political action than the work of art.

The Probable Trust Registry lends itself to an analysis of performance and Arendtian politics, specifically, because we are certain that Piper saw herself as a political agent and that the work, itself, explicitly tackles questions that Arendt found important. *The Probable Trust Registry* could serve as a case study for further, broader investigations in participatory art's ability to instruct us on political attitudes that might go unnoticed and, ultimately, might emerge to be an alternate form of political action altogether.

FIGURES

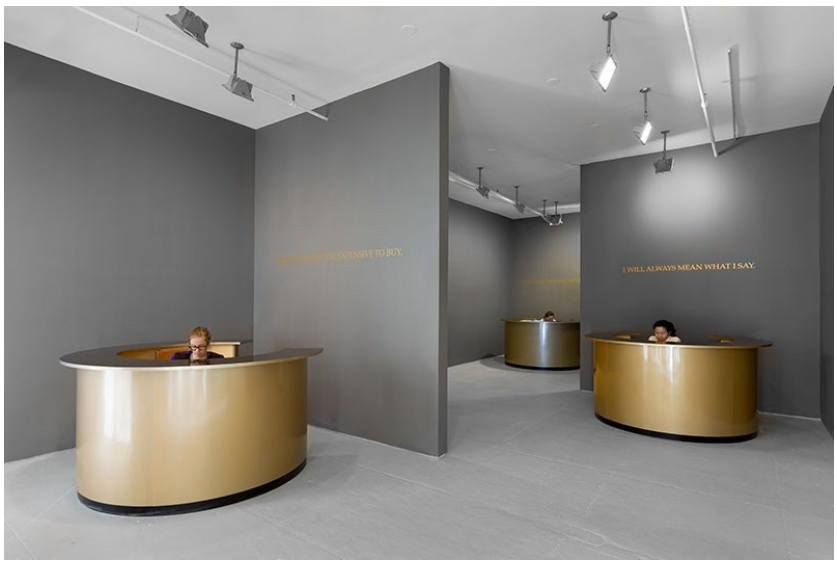

Fig. 1: Adrian Piper. *The Probable Trust Registry: The Rules of the Game #1-3,* 2013.

Photo credit: E. Frossard. Collection of the Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. © APRA Foundation Berlin.

Fig. 2: Adrian Piper. *The Probable Trust Registry: The Rules of the Game #1-3,* 2013. Photo credit: Emmtahn's Blog.

NOTES

1. Robert Storr, "Foreword," in *Out of Order, out of Sight. Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art, 1968 - 1992* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996). Page xxiii.
2. Piper's work is included in seminal performance art historical texts like: RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 3 ed. (New York, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011). Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997). Thomas McEvilley, *The Triumph of Anti-Art* (New York, New York: McPherson & Company, 2005).
3. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, New York: Harcourt, 1951). Page 478.
4. *The Human Condition* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Page 7.
5. This statement is a synthesis of Arendt's idea of solitude in *The Human Condition* (page, 76), Arendt's exposition of action in *The Human Condition* (Book Chapter: Action), and her discussion of the space of appearances in *The Life of the Mind* (page 21).
6. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Page 477.

7. *The Human Condition*. Page 76.
8. Ibid. Page 175.
9. Arendt discusses the work of art as a product of *homo faber* in Section 23 of *The Human Condition.*
10. 10 Performance art, its definition and the impact that New York City artists made on the movements can be found in Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*.
11. Elizabeth Dee Gallery, "Exhibitions Adrian Piper: The Probable Trust Registry," http://now.elizabethdee.com/exhibitions-adrian-piper-the-probable-trust-registry/.
12. Ibid.
13. Storr, "Foreword." Page xvii.
14. La Biennale Venezia, http://labiennale.or/la-biennale-di-venezia.
15. It is important to note that the Venice Biennale has a long history. It began in 1895 with the intention of highlighting Italian artists. It was conceived by the Italian monarchy, was overseen by Mussolini and his fascist government, and is currently governed by an independent foundation in the hopes of connecting global, contemporary artists and organizations. The plurality that I discuss here is in the context of the current governance. "Venice Biennale," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venice_Biennale.
16. Chloe Bass, ""Adrian Piper Binds Us with Impossible Trust," http://hyperallergic.com/127622/adrian-piper-binds-us-with- impossible-trust/.
17. Adrian Searle, "Venice Biennale: The World Is More Than Enough," http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/11/venice-biennale-all-the-worlds-futures-review.
18. Gallery, "Exhibitions Adrian Piper: The Probable Trust Registry."
19. Hannah Arendt, *Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007). *On Revolution* (New York, New York: The Viking Press, 1963); *On Violence* (New York, New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1969).
20. Cecilia Sjoholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt: How to See Things* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). Kimberly Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real: Aesthetic Experience and Arendtian Politics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

WORKS CITED

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
———. *On Revolution*. New York, New York: The Viking Press, 1963.
———. *On Violence*. New York, New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1969.
———. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York, New York: Harcourt, 1951.
———. *Reflections on Literature and Culture*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007.
Bass, Chloe. "Adrian Piper Binds Us with Impossible Trust." http://hyperallergic.com/

127622/adrian-piper-binds-us-with-impossible-trust/.
Curtis, Kimberly. *Our Sense of the Real: Aesthetic Experience and Arendtian Politics*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999.
Gallery, Elizabeth Dee. "Exhibitions Adrian Piper: The Probable Trust Registry." http://now.elizabethdee.com/exhibitions-adrian-piper-the-probable-trust-registry/.
Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. 3 ed. New York, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011.
Lippard, Lucy R. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997.
McEvilley, Thomas. *The Triumph of Anti-Art*. New York, New York: McPherson & Company, 2005.
Searle, Adrian. "Venice Biennale: The World Is More Than Enough." http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/11/venicebiennale-all-the-worlds-futures-review.
Sjoholm, Cecilia. *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt: How to See Things*. New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.
Storr, Robert. "Foreword." In *Out of Order, out of Sight. Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art, 1968 - 1992*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996.
Venezia, La Biennale. http://labiennale.or/la-biennale-di-venezia.
"Venice Biennale." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venice_Biennale.

The Ballistics of Inquiry in a Post-Truth Age

Dave Beisecker
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Winner of the Glenn Joy Award

I. A POST-TRUTH AGE?

Echoing an iconic cover from the '60s, an April 2017 issue of *Time Magazine* featured no image at all, but rather asks, "Is Truth Dead?" Many shudder at the specter that we have entered a new, so-called "Post-Truth" age, in which truth has been toppled from its perch as the *summum bonum* of thought and inquiry. Wouldn't such a world only give aid to those anti-intellectual troglodytes who wish to dismiss the value of science and other responsible inquiry as "fake news," inconveniences which can be brushed aside simply by advancing "alternative facts?" Absent truth, how can we value honesty in our political discourse? Indeed, what would become of philosophy itself, if truth no longer served as its norm or highest aim? In a recent advertising campaign, *The New York Times* reassures us that The Truth, though hard to find and hard to know, is nevertheless "more important now than ever."

At the same time, recent accounts in the popular press have sought to pin our current anti-intellectual climate upon forces from within the academy itself. In particular, it has been suggested that pernicious elements of the American pragmatist tradition have paved the way for truth's demise. For instance, Christopher Scalia (and son of the Supreme Court Justice) writes in *The Washington Post* that the pragmatist label "could very well lend Trump that always-coveted air of gravitas, gilding his unpredictable and inconsistent ideas with a semblance of respectability and intellectual seriousness."[1]

To which, defenders of the tradition respond that American pragmatism,

correctly understood, is just as committed to objective truth and reality as other perennial philosophies. If there are villains and co-opters within that tradition, they would have to be misguided followers of Richard Rorty (who after all was the eponymous subject of a 2003 BBC4 documentary entitled "The Man Who Killed Truth").

Such is the view of the prominent contemporary pragmatist Cheryl Misak. In *The American Pragmatists*, Misak draws an opposition between those pragmatists who follow Peirce and endorse a substantial, intersubjective norm of truth and those who follow either James by adopting more subjective or individualistic notions of the aims of inquiry, or Dewey by subscribing to a picture of truth as "mere" warranted assertibility. Misak staunchly advocates a pragmatism of a neo-Peircean variety. Her story is one in which self-styled pragmatists who have urged us to follow the insidious paths blazed by James and Dewey have wrought untold damage to the pragmatist label. In her eyes, the chief villain is indeed Richard Rorty, who famously aimed to do away with any account of truth as an accurate representation of an antecedent inquirer-independent reality. Rather, Rorty is notorious for suggesting that truth-talk is merely a salutary way of speaking about what we can get away with saying (perhaps in the long-term). So Rorty appears then to elevate eloquence as an intellectual virtue over any concern for actually getting things right. Misak is rightly appalled by any flat-footed understanding of that idea, and so she cautions us against being taken in by so-called "neo-pragmatists" who, in Rorty's wake, would try to convince us that we could get by with some insubstantial account of truth, or more accurately, some purely deflationary account of truth-talk.

All of which puts me in a rather awkward position. For I happen to share that Rortyan suspicion that truth is an idle notion that has perhaps outlived its usefulness as a concept fit for heavy philosophical lifting. At the same time, I don't wish to give any aid and comfort to the philistines with their cynical nihilism regarding intellectual norms. Stranger still, I am a serious and generally sympathetic reader of Peirce—though not so much enamored by the bits that captivate Misak. Elsewhere, I have argued that a proper and serious understanding of logic need not involve any great appeal to a substantive notion of truth. In this paper, I extend that claim to a proper and serious understanding of empirical and other responsible inquiry. My job, then, is to tell you how we may yet "Remain calm, and carry on" in a world in which the notion of truth no longer does any work.

II. Misak: Truth as The Regulative Ideal of Inquiry

Articulating what might be called the common conception of the aim of inquiry, Misak endorses Peirce's contention that it is a "fundamental hypothesis" of the method of science that:

> There are Real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; those realities affect our sense according to regular laws, and, though our sensations are as different as our relations to the objects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really are, and any man, if he have sufficient experience, and reason enough about it, will be led to the one true conclusion. (Peirce CP 5.384)

Accordingly, Misak tells us that since an appropriately "scientific" method of inquiry is one that "takes experience seriously," its results are not simply what this or that inquirer chooses them to be (Misak 80). In her eyes, the chief virtue of the scientific method is that its pursuit allows inquirers to overcome their specific biases or idiosyncrasies—contingent features about their history, personal inclinations, and so on. For this reason, the differences between individual inquirers pursuing inquiry in accordance with scientific methods would—ideally, and in the long run—wash out, and they would come to a consensus upon what we would understand to be reality or "the facts."[2]

Thus, while Misak generally (and, I think, wisely) shuns Peirce's talk of an "ideal end of inquiry" or beliefs that an inquiring community is "fated" to believe, she nevertheless thinks that there is content to the notion of a stable and lasting truth of the matter to which our beliefs, assertions, and inquiries ultimately answer. An acceptable resolution to inquiry would be one that is ultimately defensible across challenge coming from any potential quarter. In our very aspiration that doubts and disputes within inquiry admit of resolution, our notion of inquiry itself commits us to a realism about the way things are. Inquiry itself, to be worthy of the name, needs to understand itself as aiming at the truth—as animated by a faith that were it to be pursued long enough and well enough, we inquirers would arrive at "the" (a?) single best answer to any given question.[3] A substantial notion of truth is thus a regulative ideal for honest inquiry.

For Misak, pragmatism's fundamental insight is that philosophical conceptions need to be elucidated within the context of our best practices. At this point, Misak points to the work of Huw Price showing that the pragmatic role that truth plays in our discursive practices is that of making sense of disagreement. Price begins by noting that for several of the statements we make, we take on a commitment to dispute those who disagree with us. At least in inquiries into what we deem to be substantial matters of fact, we cannot rationally accept the judgements of others who adopt contrary points of view. Indeed, this intolerance of disagreement serves to distinguish what we take to be substantial matters of fact, from insubstantial matters, such as whether or not a certain restaurant or style of bar-be-que is to be preferred over another. The latter are matters of "merely opinionated assertion," which, though rationally criticizable on grounds of sincerity and internal

consistency, are nevertheless matters for which we may cheerfully "agree to disagree" and leave it at that.

So Price argues that our actual discursive practices—specifically our resolve to settle (or "get to the bottom of") disputes—indicate that we take bona-fide inquiry to require a "third norm" beyond mere sincerity and internal consistency. The notion of truth can be understood as playing the role of articulating and making explicit this third norm; it provides inquiry with a "friction" that prevents alternative points of view about objective matters from sliding past one another (Price 182).

For Misak, then, Price's defense of a third norm of assertion entails that inquiry itself presupposes truth as a regulative ideal. Our felt commitments to resolving intersubjective disagreement (when possible) between contrary points of view presuppose a corollary commitment to a truth of the matter at hand waiting (if conditions for inquiry are favorable) "out there" to be discovered. When we disagree with one another, we must hope that our disagreement would admit of some "determinate" resolution—if only inquiry were to be pursued long enough and well enough, and circumstances were such that determinate answers could be found.

III. Of Truth and Cannonballs

This story about the role of truth as a regulative assumption in inquiry is well-illustrated by an account the documentary filmmaker Errol Morris relates about his obsession with a couple of photographs taken by Robert Fenton during the Crimean War. One of these photographs, "In the Valley of the Shadow of Death," depicts a landscape blasted by war, with a roadway running through it covered in cannonballs. It is an iconic image of that conflict, which graced the pages of the *London Times*. Years after its publication, another photograph surfaced, depicting that exact same battle-scarred landscape, but without the spent artillery littering the road. A question naturally arises (which obviously concerns the ethics of using doctored or staged scenes in photographic journalism: which of these scenes is the one that Fenton first encountered? Did Fenton increase the poignancy of the published photograph by salting the roadway with cannonballs? Or did a detail pass through the road later on collecting those balls for reuse?

While most commentators blithely conclude that Fenton must have altered the scene to amplify its emotional impact, Morris notes that they do so primarily based upon what they have heard from others or upon armchair assumptions about Fenton's motivations. That is, they rely upon what Peirce would have called the methods of authority or a priority. They are not appropriately grounded upon specific evidence provided by historical details or the photographs themselves. Nagged by an irritation of doubt, Morris proceeds to engage in an exemplary instance of Peircean inquiry taken to a wonderful and thoroughly entertaining

extreme (Morris, Abumrad and Krulwich). By his own admission, Morris tells us that "the pursuit of truth shouldn't stop short of insanity."[4] As he recounts in *The New York Times* and an episode of *Radiolab*, his obsession with settling the question leads him to the Crimea, where, among other things, he is able to identify the exact location from which the photographs were taken, with the hope of using shadows in the photographs to estimate the times at which they were taken. Eventually his efforts to locate the scene of the crime(a) are successful, as are his efforts to determine which photograph came first.

Here we have a nifty, live example of what Peirce called a "buried secret." At least judging from his own remarks, Morris' investigations is animated by the faith that there is a determinate, stable answer to our question, along with an overarching hope that his inquiries will be able to latch upon the correct hypothesis—the one we would understand to be true. Morris is proceeding on the common assumption, which most find compelling—even platitudinous—that there must be an "objective" fact of the matter as to which photograph was taken earlier. One of the possible answers is determinately correct from an appropriately detached perspective, the other is incorrect; it fails to correspond or agree with an appropriately impartial point of view. This is so, even when we recognize all our intellectual fallibilities and limitations. There is a truth that is out there, and hard as we may try to attain it, it just might come apart from our most warranted beliefs or assertions. The aim of inquiry clearly goes beyond merely warranted belief or solidarity with our fellow inquirers. All of this seems hard to deny; to do so, it might seem, would be to commit that gravest of Peircean sins: blocking the path of inquiry (Misak, *Cambridge Pragmatism* 50).

IV. An Alternate Ballistics of Inquiry

And yet I do wish to deny this common conception of inquiry as aiming at objective or impartial truth. That is not to deny Price's contention that there is a third norm of inquiry beyond sincerity and internal consistency. While the prevailing attitude is that this further norm must be understood in terms of truth, there might be other—indeed, better—ways of thinking about that very norm. Indeed, that seems to be what Rorty is gesturing towards when he calls for solidarity in the resolution of our inquiries rather than objectivity. Similarly, I would like to reconceive this third norm around something other than a notion of impartial truth, though I would like to do so around something more objective or disposition-transcendent than mere intersubjective agreement.

My contention is that most folk altogether misconceive the norm of assertion and inquiry; they get it backwards. Consider a case of genuine disagreement, such as that faced by Morris, in which one is confronted with contrary conjectures. Acceptance of one precludes acceptance of the other. Inquirers are thus placed in a position where they must rationally reject (at least) one hypothesis or the other.

Resolving disagreement, then, is really a matter of showing how some hypothesis or other is ultimately *indefensible*; after all, successful hypotheses are those that robustly resist any and all challenge. While evidence that directly favors one hypothesis is evidence against the tenability of any of its contraries, one can also always show that a hypothesis should be rejected on independent or internal grounds. However, though the rejection or elimination of a competitor may be enough to remove genuine doubt in a hypothesis on some occasions, there is always the possibility of inquiry producing grounds for rejecting them *both*, in favor of embracing an as yet unconsidered, but more encompassing, alternative. Thus, though sufficient grounds for rejecting one hypothesis may be sufficient to resolving a disagreement between it and one of its contraries, that need not by itself be sufficient grounds for embracing the contrary. For there may yet be other grounds for rejecting the contrary as well.

The point—made famous by Popper and his followers—is that the goal of resolving actual disagreement is that of showing how one hypothesis or another (perhaps a "null" hypothesis) should be *rejected* as unworkable. The hypothesis that remains standing is accepted, at least provisionally, for the chief source of its doubt—namely the acceptance of its competitor (or competitors)—has been shown to be implausible. That is actually the course of action that Morris pursues. Essentially he builds a case for why it would be *implausible* to think that one photograph comes before the other—on grounds that actually come from the photographs themselves. Now if we accept this as an account of how such disputes are generally and ideally resolved, then the regulative ideal of inquiry—the hope that animates it—is that in the face of any genuine disagreement, one can find grounds for *rejecting* one or another hypothesis as unworkable. An acceptable resolution of a disagreement is not so much that of finding which is *correct*, as that of finding out at least one that is *untenable* and thus best rejected. This is not so much a commitment to there being a "truth" of things, so much as it is of ensuring that one doesn't embrace an hypothesis that is demonstrably *un*acceptable. This suggests in turn then then that the "true" goal of inquiry (or norm of assertion) is not positive, but negative: inquiry (and assertion) does not aim at the truth, but rather avoids error and falsity. One should not believe hypotheses that are indefensible.

Such a norm certainly accords well with the Peircean idea that we should adopt beliefs that are defensible in the long run. But how is this norm any different? Isn't the goal of avoiding claims that are demonstrably unworkable equivalent to that of aiming for the truth? Surely, in the contest between hypotheses and their contraries, we can find at least a few in which the considered alternatives are not just mutually exclusive, but exhaustive as well. For in showing that some hypothesis is unacceptable, doesn't one thereby show that another—namely its negation—is thereby true? Indeed, isn't that the case with Morris' investigations of the Fenton photographs? By showing the implausibility of one's photograph

being taken earlier than the other, doesn't one thereby show that the rival hypothesis is "the true one?" Here is where Misak tells us that pragmatists of an appropriately Peircean stripe will also adopt the law of bivalence as a further regulative assumption in inquiry.

> It is a regulative assumption of inquiry that, for any matter into which we are inquiring, we would (or it is probable that we would) find an answer to the question we are inquiring. Otherwise, it would be pointless to inquire into the issue: 'the only assumption upon which [we] can act rationally is the hope of success.'… Thus the principle of bivalence—for any proposition *p*, *p* is either true or false—rather than being a law of logic, is a regulative assumption of inquiry. It is something that we have to assume if we are to inquire into a matter. (Misak, *Cambridge Pragmatism* 49)

However, I can't help but see this justification for bivalence as a non-sequitur. This insistence that a hope for success in our inquiries commits us to a semantical theory centered upon truth values strikes me as an egregious attempt—on par with Aristotle's discussion of future sea battles—to get logic to perform metaphysical work for which it is particularly unsuited. Logic is simply in the business of explaining how certain *sentences of ours* follow from others; it isn't in the business of investigating grander claims about the nature of reality or the end of inquiry (though that is not to say that logic does not figure into inquiry). Moreover, I think this appeal to bivalence—or more accurately, the law of excluded middle—is one place where philosophical practice and thinking has itself ossified around traditional representationalist semantic theories, which accord pride-of-place to truth-values and a truth-functional understanding of logical vocabulary.[5] That is, Misak is attempting to enshrine a questionable semantic hypothesis as a metaphysical article of faith. It takes a little philosophical imagination of the sort that Rorty applauded to dislodge us out of these semantic doldrums. As Peirce recognized, the law of excluded middle (and assumptions of bivalence) need to be relaxed when the concepts or vocabularies that compose claims come into question. For instance, they may be unacceptably vague or introduce undesirable inference licenses.[6]

While Misak eschews conceiving truth as correspondence to some antecedent reality, she nevertheless believes in determinate and stable answers to our questions, that are not held hostage to contingent features of inquiry. But such stable and ultimately defensible answers still need to be couched in some vocabulary or other—and though she doesn't understand those answers as mirroring or corresponding to reality, her appeal to the law of bivalence rests in turn upon some notion or regulative assumption of an ideal or final vocabulary in which those answers are pitched. In this sense, Misak's Peircean position still holds

on to some vestige of hope for a "God's eye perspective" or "Book of Nature" in which the truths of the world—the answers to our inquiries—are couched.[7] It is this commitment that rails against properly Rortyan sympathies.

Rorty's abiding concern was that of developing ever improving vocabularies for coping with a physical and social world that is in constant flux. Specifically, he was concerned with expanding our imagination and expressive power to deal with our ever-changing environs. For Rorty, the attitude of fallibility and intellectual humility that pragmatists have traditionally emphasized as required for healthy inquiry, amounts to the sense that there is *always* room for improving the ways in which we talk to one another and think about our worldly challenges. This is the part of Rorty that I find so inspirational. Far from being a vision that denies intellectual and moral progress altogether, progress is instead seen and measured in retrospect. The lesson to be learned from Rorty is that assertion and inquiry is not to be understood in terms of a norm of aiming at the truth, but rather the norm of putting distance between us and our relatively ignorant and error-fraught forebears.[8]

So rather than viewing inquiry as getting us ever-closer to a stable realm of truth, Rorty urges that we view ourselves as moving away from states of relative ignorance, expressive powerlessness, and barbarity. Thus the proper ballistic metaphor for inquiry is not that of the archer aiming an arrow, but rather that of the distance thrower hurling a javelin or shotput. That is, intellectual and moral progress is measured not by how close one approaches a target, but rather by how far one has managed to travel from an origin. Instead of conceiving our inquiries on a hyperbolic course approaching an asymptotic, and ideal, limit of absolute truth, one in the grip of this Rortyan vision is free to view the march of science on an unbounded parabolic trajectory. There are no worldly or logical limits, except those provided by our own collective imagination. In particular, there is no ideal vocabulary with which a Creator wrote the book of the world, and to which our own way of speaking should ultimately correspond.

Since we shouldn't regard any vocabulary as ever truly final, we should not accept the law of excluded middle even as a regulative assumption. And since we shouldn't accept the law of excluded middle, we shouldn't accept that the meanings of our claims must be governed by the law of bivalence. Hypotheses may be rejected on substantial grounds independently of us; the refutation of competitors is perfectly objective. Still, the settled, objective rejection of the workability of a hypothesis need not mean that we have come any closer to "The Truth." So this picture of inquiry—salted as it is with a healthy dash of Popper—would have us view exemplary inquiry as moving progressively outward with no fixed destination, even in the ideal. Without a substantial notion of truth, or ideal limit or aim of inquiry, the Rortyan is free to view the particular path of successful inquiry as open-ended.[9] As long as one is progressing in the sense of dispelling relative ignorance, precariousness, and barbarity, then there may be multiple

divergent paths for successful inquiry to proceed, some of which may be incommensurable with one another due to their vastly different vocabularies, histories, and background commitments.

V. Conclusion

As Misak points out, there are two distinct strands in the pragmatist tradition—one that takes truth to be "the" aim of inquiry, and one that does not. While she is in the former camp, my aim has been to sketch a picture of responsible inquiry—one with an alternate ballistics—that does justice to the latter. The aim of inquiry, is not to produce beliefs that are true so much as to produce those that are the most defensible or resistant to serious challenge. If this is a form of relativism, it certainly isn't one in which objectivity has entirely gone out the window. Vocabularies—ways of speaking or "forms of life," if you will—still need to be tested against a tribunal of experience (understood here as a history of application) to see if they are workable.[10] Understanding inquiry as governed by a norm of avoiding error is well within the pragmatist spirit of a Peircean sense of ideal belief being that which would resist all challenges. The mistake is to think that that in turn commits one to a substantive norm of truth for belief.[11]

I have a particular friend of mine, who—when told that she is right or correct, likes to quip, "Well, I'm not wrong." Her response points to how we might substitute the idea of truth being the aim or end of inquiry, with the idea that inquiry should instead be oriented around a substantial negative norm of avoiding or superseding error or ignorance. I recommend that you try it yourself, as part of an effort to take truth out of your lexicon (except in overtly deflationary uses, such as registering your approval or agreement). Doing so helps us to focus upon what really matters in our discourse: sincerity and the ability to stand up for our assertions. That—more than any allegiance to truth—is where the troglodytes who defecate upon our intellectual heritage fall short. It's not so much that what they spew is not true, so much as it is indefensible. What is most alarming—what makes their spewing such bullshit—is their galling lack of concern about responsibly defending claims at all. In a recent tweet, "Psycho" Joe Scarborough asked, "Why do you keep lying about things that are so easily disproven? What is wrong with you?". Sadly, I doubt that the target of his tweet will ever bother to mount a responsible defense.

Notes

1. In addition to *The Washington Post*, other similar charges appear in *Die Suddeutsche Zeitung* and *Le Monde*.

> Characteristically prescient, Rorty predicted this reaction: "This is why philosophers like myself find ourselves denounced in magazines and newspapers

> which one might have thought oblivious of our existence. These denunciations claim that unless the youth is raised to believe in moral absolutes, and in objective truth, civilization is doomed. Unless the younger generation has the same attachment to firm moral principles as we have, these magazine and newspaper articles say, the struggle for human freedom and human decency will be over." (Rorty xxviii)

2. Of course, that is to say nothing about just what particular inquirers actually go about choosing to be the subject-matter of their inquiries. That could well be determined by idiosyncratic inclination. It's just that the products of those inquiries - the answers that they would come to if inquiry were pushed seriously and successfully enough— are not held hostage to such contingent factors.

3. For instance, consider three contrary positions held by three distinct groups of inquirers: A, B, and C. Misak's picture of inquiry as aiming toward the truth is one in which there is a proper resolution of this dispute, and it does not matter upon such contingencies as which groups come together first to resolve their differences. If A and B get together to resolve their disagreement first, and then resolve their dispute with C, then the answer should be the same as if B and C resolve their dispute first, and then settle their joint differences with A. Proper disagreement resolution in inquiry would thus obey a certain principle of association: {[A r B] r C}={A r [B r C]}.

4. c.f. 9:15 - 10:00 in the *Radio Lab* interview (Abumrad and Krulwich). It is worth remarking in passing that Morris happens to be a former student of philosophy, whose encounters with his erstwhile graduate-advisor Thomas Kuhn eventually drove him away from a career in the field.

5. There are non-representationalist semantic theories available, which give a much more "human" picture of logic centered upon our practices of accepting and rejecting claims, including those not usually thought of as assertoric or truth-apt (see Beisecker, which serves in part as an elaboration of Brandom's "incompatibility semantics"). Instead of conceiving entailment in terms of the (metaphysical) possibility of some sentences being true while others are false, such semantics conceive of entailment in terms of the permissiveness of accepting some claims while denying others. I think a pragmatist especially ought to find such alternatives attractive. See also Misak's extended discussion in *Cambridge Pragmatism* of how Ramsey and Peirce both plumped for an understanding of logic that is much more "human" than that articulated by Russell and the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*.

6. Consider Dummett's well-worn example of the concept of BOCHE. As Dummett tells us (perhaps apocryphally), the concept issues an unacceptable inference license from someone's being of German extraction to their being excessively cruel by nature. Now consider whether or not your kindest German friend is or is not BOCHE. To affirm the claim is to affirm their barbarity. But to deny it is to deny their heritage. The appropriate attitude to take is to reject the vocabulary in question altogether, and to neither affirm nor to deny of anyone that they are BOCHE. One takes the same attitude that Oscar Wilde is said to have taken toward "blasphemy": "That word is not part of my vocabulary." Essentially the same point applies with discarded scientific concepts, such as phlogiston or *elan vital*, which also issue unworkable inference licenses. Surely, we do not want to say that the air in this room is phlogistinated, but to insist that it is not phlogistinated would

require us to conclude that we couldn't breathe it. Once again, the law of excluded middle fails to hold, because the vocabulary in question is found to be unworkable to our situation.

7. "The aim of inquiry is to settle on propositions that remain stable under further progress— and that aim is only achieved if the language remains unmodified…If you continue to think of progress in teleological terms then the aptness of the language will consist in the fact that it is, in some sense, "Nature's Own" (Kitcher 478).

8. Kitcher (478) calls this an *originary* notion of progress, as opposed to a *teleological* form of progress. Though Kitcher doesn't go so far as to talk about the aims of inquiry, he too identifies this other form of progress as being more pragmatist in spirit.

9. Consider, once more, our three communities of inquirers: A, B, and C. On the alternative conception of inquiry, the most reasonable resolutions to their joint dispute might well hinge upon the order in which these groups come together. The associative equivalence - {[A r B] r C}={A r [B r C]}— need not obtain: reasonable courses of inquiry may well be path independent.

10. "This is why we pragmatists see the charge of relativism as simply the charge that we see luck where our critics insist on seeing destiny." (Rorty xxxii)

11. See Kitcher (479):

> The progressivist narratives of Hegel and Marx have waned in their appeal, leading many scholars to be wary of utopian "final states" and, on that basis, to repudiate social progress. The inference, however is unwarranted. If there can be progress of a non-teleological stripe, the rejection of teleology doesn't warrant the dismissal of progress."

WORKS CITED

Abumrad, Jad and Krulwich, Robert, hosts. "In the Valley of the Shadow of Doubt." *Radiolab*. 24 September 2012, http://www.radiolab.org/story/239499-in-the-valley-of-the-shadow-of-doubt/.

Beisecker, Dave. "Logic Beyond the Looking Glass," *Richard Rorty and Beyond (American and European Values IX)*. Edited by Randall Auxier, Eli Kramer, and Krzysztof Skowronsky, Lexington Books, 2020, pp. 237-52.

Dummett, Michael. "Frege: Philosophy of Language." *Philosophy* 49.190 (1973):438-442.

"Is God Dead?" *Time* 8 April 1966: Cover.

"Is Truth Dead?" *Time* 23 March 2017: Cover.

Kitcher, Philip. "Pragmatism and Progress." *Transactions of the CS Peirce Society* 51.4 (2015): 475-494.

Misak, Cheryl. *The American Pragmatists*. Oxford, 2013.

Misak, Cheryl. *Cambridge Pragmatism: From Peirce and James to Ramsey and Wittgenstein*. Oxford, 2016.

Morris, Errol. "Which Came First, the Chicken or the Egg?" *New York Times Opinionator* 25 September 2007.

Peirce, C.S. "The Fixation of Belief," in 1931–1966. *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, 8 vols. Edited by C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, and A. W. Burns. Harvard University Press, 1931-1966. References are to "CP" and are in decimal notation by volume and paragraph number.

Price, Huw. "Truth as Convenient Friction." *The Journal of Philosophy* 100.4 (Apr. 2003): 167-190.

Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. Penguin, 1999.

Scalia, Christopher. "Trump is a pragmatist, too. That's the problem." *The Washington Post* 27 May 2016.

Scarborough, Joe [@JoeNBC]. "Why do you keep lying about things that are so easily disproven? What is wrong with you?" *Twitter*, 30 Jun 2017. https://twitter.com/joenbc/status/880773832663085056

"Warum Trump jedes Mittel recht ist." *Die Suddeutsche Zeitung* 19 Nov. 2016.

Relational Virtues: Disability and the Pursuit of the Good

Elyse Purcell
State University of New York, Oneonta

Winner of the Glenn Joy Award

> [Friends] direct young men toward correctness and to the elderly, they give care and help to supplement their failing sensory powers, and to those in their prime they direct toward noble actions (Aristotle 1155a).[1]

I. Disability and Virtue

The pursuit of living a good and moral life has been a longstanding ideal of philosophy, an ideal that dates back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle. This ideal establishes that a good life as a happy and flourishing life is pursued by developing the right motives and the right character. And in order to live this life, it is held that one must strive to become a virtuous person, who desires the good.[2] Finally, one must not pursue the good alone; rather, one should pursue the virtuous life with others, i.e., friends, because they enhance our ability to think and to act (Aristotle 1155a).[3] That is, our sociability enriches our rational nature.

Tragedy and vulnerability within our human condition, however, can play a distinctive role in our pursuit of virtuous living.[4] At the end of Book I in the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle discusses tragic circumstances affecting the virtuous person and considers whether virtue is still possible. Aristotle recalls the case of king Priam who has lost everything, and yet, in his actions, remains a figure of nobility. Aristotle suggests, at numerous times in the *Nicomachean Ethics,* that virtue remains whether one's circumstances are fortunate or unfortunate.

Later in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, however, Aristotle describes the fate of a person who has met tragedy not due to the loss of those whom he loves, but due to his disability—it is the character Philoctetes, in the play by Theodectes.[5] In the myth, Philoctetes was bitten by a snake and as a result, was in inexorable physical pain, but his reasoning resisted being overcome by this pain. Aristotle praises Philoctetes for his continence, that is, his mental mastery over his physical pain (1150b). But, unlike Priam, Philoctetes' strength is not nobility. Thus, for Aristotle, while Philoctetes' bravery and mastery over his struggling emotions are praiseworthy, Philoctetes in this regard does not represent the virtuous person.

Like Aristotle, it has been assumed that only rational persons with able-bodies could be truly virtuous agents. Yet, this assumption has increasingly come under scrutiny: this scrutiny is known as the critique of elitism. The purpose of this essay is to respond to this critique and the complexities involved with disability and to conceive of a new kind of virtue one might call a *relational virtue.*

In order to respond to this critique, I propose that one needs to follow the insights of care ethicists on the importance of relationships and to consider what virtues are necessary for caring for the other's good. This living for the sake of another and caring for another's good require at times a different set of skills and habits than the classical virtues. Moreover, to care for another's good may at times involve a shared agency and collective action, i.e., a relational action, that cannot be performed by the agent herself. This need for shared agency in collective action indicates a need for an account of a relational virtue.

My hope is that the concept of relational virtue strikes one, at least intuitively, as valuable and deserving of more reflection. I elaborate on this kind of virtue below. In the argument that follows, I demonstrate two points: first, that a relational virtue is distinct from the classical sense of virtue as a disposition that is central to the agent's character, and second, that the addition of relational virtues to the classical tradition of virtue ethics is an adequate reply to the critique of elitism. First, I begin with a careful review of the critique of elitism. Afterward, I turn to a more detailed account of what a relational virtue is in order to show that it is in fact a distinct kind of virtue and a defense against the elitist critique. It is my hope that in elaborating what a relational virtue is, this new kind of virtue may be included in other forms of virtue ethics that diverge from the classical tradition.

II. The Critique of Elitism and Some Responses

While the tradition of virtue ethics has several forms, it is best to begin by considering the classical tradition to describe the central features of a virtue before turning to various forms of the critique of elitism. In the classical sense, a virtue is a state or disposition of an individual's character. More specifically, it is not a mindless disposition, but rather it is a disposition to act for reasons guided by the agent's practical reasoning (*phronēsis*). For example, an agent may know he needs

the virtue of courage (*andreia*) if he should stand up for his friend who is being slandered by peers and does so with an undivided affective attitude and the right reasons.

The critique of elitism against classical virtue ethics is motivated by an egalitarian concern: although virtue ethics focuses on what it means to be good rather than what it means to do right, if the classical conception of the virtuous person is an unachievable ideal for most, it serves as a poor moral guide for ethical action. Julia Driver has argued that attaining full virtue that requires a kind of "intellectual development and moral sophistication" is not achievable for the majority of ethical agents (51). A second version of this critique is that since many people lack the central theoretical component necessary for practical reasoning, this apparent lack results in a kind of epistemological privilege. While some agents may be equipped with the reflective abilities to act virtuously, there are many who will "need, more or less blindly, to rely on the judgment of the more wise" (Svensson 149-50). The critique of elitism has led many modern theories of virtue to depart from practical reasoning as an essential part of deliberate decision-making for virtuous action.[6]

Often these theories follow a kind of "Humean" conception of virtue as a disposition that is useful and good for myself and others. Departing from practical reasoning as a moral guide, Michael Slote has argued that care is a primary virtue and can give a better general account for right and wrong action than the classical tradition of virtue ethics. Slote defines care as a "motivational attitude" that is based on our benevolent consideration of humanity (*Morals From Motives* ix, 30). Some philosophers such as DesAutels and Wargh have followed a similar line of reasoning and have argued that care as a virtue can serve as a guide for right action.

The most radical departure from practical reasoning allows for virtue even though no reflection occurs at all. In a way, one may be virtuous by mere ignorance or accident. It is in this way that the *ideal* of classical virtue ethics is beyond one's grasp. The majority of individuals will probably never attain the necessary emotional, intellectual and psychological development required of the virtuous person (Annas). According to Driver, "[v]irtue must be accessible—to those who are not wise but kind; to those who had the misfortune to grow up in repressive environments that warped their understanding, yet who are capable of showing the appropriate compassionate responses to human suffering" (54). Similarly, Svensson clarifies the core issue of this concern: "[a]ssuming that ought implies can, it seems as if the ideal of full virtue must be normatively irrelevant, except possibly in relation to a few intellectually well developed and morally sophisticated persons" (134). For all of these departures, the role of practical reasoning has been significantly diminished or has been deemed unnecessary for a virtuous life.

III. Relational Virtues

It is necessary to draw a distinction first between the virtues of traditional virtue ethics and what I deem the relational virtues. The ethical and intellectual virtues would be considered agential virtues in so far as one becomes courageous by habitually practicing courageous acts or one perfects one's art (*techne*) by instruction and repetition. The relational virtues, by contrast, are of a different kind or sort than the traditional agential virtues: that is, they are virtues of relation that require a shared agency between two agents. Similar to an agential virtue, a relational virtue is a state or disposition of a person that is a disposition to act with another in certain ways and not others, and to act for reasons that aim at a higher value. By drawing insights from care ethics,[7] I elaborate the three central components of relational virtues, which make them distinct from agential virtues.

First, relational virtues do not aim at the good life for oneself. Instead, they aim at caring for the good of the other. A relational virtue guides the agent in living for the sake of another and at times may require sacrificing one's own lesser goods for the other's higher good. The enactment of relational virtues is most present in our personal relationships with others. According to Lawrence Blum, a personal relationship may involve deep concern, involvement, commitment, care, love, intimacy and other virtues, sentiments and qualities (512). Blum argues that these traits point to the quality of a relationship: a loving relationship in which the lovers are intimate and committed to each other differs from a relationship in which the lovers do very little more than "go through the motions" (Ibid). In the first case, what Blum calls the quality sense of relationships, one directs care, intimacy, commitment and involvement to the other person. One cares for the other's sake and for the other's good. This is different from just being lonely and wanting a companion to share the night with. Moreover, building these kinds of quality relationships require time.

The best personal relationships and friendships involve caring for the other's sake. Yet, more is involved in this friendship than two people loving one another for their morally excellent traits of character (Blum 514-515). This definition seems to miss the target at which a friendship aims. Blum argues that this definition of friendship is too narrow for two reasons: (i) "when I love someone for her own sake, I love a totality that typically involves a good deal more than her morally good traits of character," and (ii) excellent qualities of character are only one of the sources for why I find my friend appealing (515).[8] The basis for sustaining a long-lasting friendship is caring for the other's sake without either friend necessarily being morally excellent.

Second, while agential virtues guide one to conceive of one's life as a whole, relational virtues guide one to conceive of another's life as a whole. A personal relationship sustained by obligation rather than love or care is a deficient

relationship. While obligation is a part of a personal relationship, it does not encompass all of the qualities of a personal relationship. A parent who only takes care of his child out of obligation is a poor father. Likewise, a daughter who only dutifully cares for her mother in an assisted living facility rather than lovingly cares is missing an important aspect of personal relationships. According to Blum, "moral requirements are integral to personal relationships, but it is best if they are infrequently adverted to directly" (Ibid). One also has the obligation of beneficence in relationships and friendships, prompted by care and love, toward one's friends and families. The moral requirement in relationships does not function solely as a direct source of action but as a reminder of legitimate expectations that might elicit an attentiveness to the friend and the friendship that evoke caring motives (Ibid).

Finally, to care for another's good and to conceive of another's life as a whole, often involve shared agency and collective actions, that cannot be performed by the agent on their own. While all virtues are developed in communities, the relational virtues are cultivated from the initiation of another individual. Moreover, the relational virtues are cultivated in reciprocal practices and are often enacted with another as a shared practice. For example, in a virtuous friendship, each party must trust one another and be loyal to one another. The virtues of trust and loyalty must be enacted together; if only one friend is loyal and trusting, the friendship is imbalanced or one-sided. To return to the earlier example of a friend calling upon the agential virtue of courage to stand up for his friend, he is also morally bound to defend his friend because of loyalty. The virtue of loyalty is a relational virtue because it requires another; one cannot be loyal to an object. A friend is morally bound because of loyalty to stand up for his friend when he is unjustly attacked. The trust that obtains between good friends rests in part on a recognition that the friend accepts the moral requirements to come through for his friend should he lack the direct inclination to do so (Ibid). Finally, if a friend should have a moment of weakness, one must forgive one's friend. The virtue of forgiveness requires a relationship and is enacted when one party has been wronged. Relational virtues, such as trust, loyalty, beneficence and forgiveness, require another to be practiced. It is in this sense that they are virtues of relation, dependent upon our relationships in our moral communities.

IV. A Response to the Critique of Elitism

The critique of elitism, which is animated by egalitarianism, has attacked the classical conception of virtue ethics as an unachievable ideal and serves as an impractical guide for moral action. The critique argues first, that this elitism is grounded in the necessity of practical reasoning for virtuous action, and second, that people with cognitive disabilities may never be able to achieve the virtuous ideal due to their bodily impairments.

The critique of elitism, however, misses its mark because relational virtues are

not guided by practical reason. Relational virtues can supplement the classical agential virtues of courage, temperance and generosity that are guided by practical reason because they aim at a different ethical value. Instead, relational virtues such as trust, loyalty and beneficence aim at the ethical value of care. Since caring for another's sake is accessible to most individuals, even those with cognitive disabilities, relational virtues are not susceptible to anti-egalitarianism.[9]

Furthermore, relational virtues are concerned with another's life as a whole and exercise shared agency through collective action and practice. To conceive of another's life is not as an extension of my own, but as a life lived by another, which one hopes is noble and good. One's caregivers, whether parents, relatives, teachers, neighbors, coaches, or others, preserve one's life when one is vulnerable, foster one's growth to maturity and prepare one to be a virtuous citizen in one's community.[10] To care for another's moral development and good life is accessible to most and a regular part of our human communities. To refigure Aristotle, then, it is our caregivers who help us to think and to act.

V. Relational Virtues and the Community

This essay began with two classical tragic figures: king Priam of Troy and Philoctetes abandoned on the isle of Lemnos, which I believe express the two opposing conceptions of vulnerability within the human condition. In the case of Priam, he was made destitute by war and lost his son Hektor in battle. He could no longer flourish due to his pitiable circumstances, but his enactment of virtue was still possible. As Aristotle argues, Priam let nobility shine through in such difficult times. For Philoctetes, by contrast, we are given a different conception of vulnerability. A vulnerability that does not allow for nobility. For Aristotle, it is Philoctetes' strength of mind (of reason) which equips him with the ability to endure his bodily suffering.

The story of Philoctetes, however, captures a forgotten facet of human living: its very fragility. In his abandonment and pain, Philoctetes remained humble and candid, even when Odysseus morally failed as a friend and deceived him. Our humility and honesty enable us to recognize our interdependent relations with others. Thus, it is our interdependent relations that make virtue and happiness in our pursuit of the good for ourselves and with others possible.

Notes

1. All translations in this essay are my own. *kai neois de pros to anamartēton kai presbyterois pros therapeian kai to elleipon tēs praxeōs di astheneian boētheia, tois t' en akmē pros tas kalas praxeis.*

2. Many philosophers such as Julia Annas, Rosalind Hursthouse, Alasdair MacIntyre, Susan Meyer, and Daniel Russell retain the idea of the moral exemplar for the virtuous agent.

3. *Kai gar noēsai kai praxai dunatōteroi.*

4. Though perhaps his ultimate position might not be as clear as one might hope, see chapter 2 of Russell. Further, to be clear, for the Stoics, virtue could be affected by neither of these circumstances (Nussbaum).

5. Theodectes was a tragic poet (380 B.C.E.—34-B.C. E.) from Phaselis. He was a close friend of Aristotle, and only fragments of his *Philoctetes* remain today.

6. Another position that departs from practical reasoning as a guide for right action holds that one may be virtuous, not by reflection, but as a result of being positively influenced by others. This position has been taken up by certain philosophers calling themselves "Situationists," who draw their support from behavioral studies in social psychology. From those studies, these philosophers have concluded that there are no such things as *global traits* in people's personalities. Because there are no such things as global traits, they conclude, then that there is no such thing as *character.* As a result, one becomes virtuous by placing oneself in situations that prompt virtuous action. Philosophers who hold to various versions of this position include John Doris, Gilbert Harman, and Maria Merritt.

7. Care ethics provides a supplemental framework for those with cognitive and affective impairments to be virtuous. The significance of the ethics of care, according to Virginia Held, is that it "recognizes the *moral* value and importance of relations of family and friendship and the need for *moral* guidance in these domains to understand how existing relations should often be changed and new ones developed" (12). Similarly, Alison Jagger argues that care ethics valorizes traits such as "interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace, and life."

8. Blum draws a distinction that when one loves someone, that does not mean "one loves everything about this person."

9. See Eva Kittay's accounts of her daughter Sesha, Hilde Lindeman's account of caring for those with dementia, and Hannah Young et al.'s account of adolescents with profound cognitive impairments for examples of this accessibility.

10. See Sarah Ruddick's account of mothering and Nel Nodding's accounts of caregiving for examples of moral actions and character initiated by a caregiver.

WORKS CITED

Annas, Julia. "Virtue Ethics." Edited by David Copp, *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. *Intelligent Virtue*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Loeb Classical Library, 1999.

Blum, Lawrence. "On Personal Relationships," *A Companion to Applied Ethics.* Edited by R.G. Frey and Christopher Heath Wellman, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 512-524.

DesAutels, Peggy and Joanne Waugh. eds. *Feminists Doing Ethics*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.

Doris, John M. "Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics." *Nous* 32 (1998): 504-530.

———. *Lack of Character*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Driver, Julia. *Uneasy Virtue*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Harman, Gilbert. "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the

Fundamental Attribution Error." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 119 (1999): 315-331.

Held, Virginia. *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. *On Virtue Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Jaggar, Alison M. "Feminist ethics." *Encyclopedia of Ethics*. Edited by L. Becker and C. Becker, Garland Press, 1992, 363-364.

Kittay, Eva F. "At Home with My Daughter." *Americans with Disabilities: Exploring Implications of the Law for Individuals and Institutions*. Edited by Leslie P. Francis and Anita Silvers, Routledge, 2000, 64-80.

———. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*. Routledge, 1999.

Lindemann, Hilde. "Holding One Another (Well, Wrongly, Clumsily) in a time of Dementia." *Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy*. Edited by E.F. Kittay and L. Carlson, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 161-169.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. Open Court, 1999.

Merritt, Maria. "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personalist Psychology." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3 (2000): 365-383.

Meyer, Susan. *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Noddings, Nel. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. University of California Press, 1984.

———. *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy*. University of California Press, 2002.

———. *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. Columbia University Press, 1992.

Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy.* Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Ruddick, S. *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*. The Women's Press, 1989.

Russell, Daniel. *Happiness for Humans*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

Slote, Michael. "Utilitarian Virtue." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13 (1988): 384-397.

———. *Morals from Motives*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

Svensson, Frans. "Virtue Ethics and Elitism." *Philosophical Papers* 37.1 (2008): 131-155.

Young, Hannah, and Maggi Fenwick, Loretto Lambe, & James Hogg. "Multi-sensory Storytelling as an aid to Assisting People with Profound Intellectual Disabilities to cope with Sensitive Issues: a Multiple Research Methods analysis of Engagement and Outcomes," *European Journal of Special Needs Education,* 26.2 (2011): 127-42.

The Equivalence Thesis and the (In)significance of Violating Negative Rights

Travis Rodgers
Valencia College

Winner of the Glenn Joy Award

Death is often placed among the worse things to befall a human. What responsibility one might bear for bringing about death is, as a result, an important ethical question. Indeed the right to life is often regarded as the bedrock upon which all other rights of persons are supported.[1] This right to life is often thought to be a negative right—a right of non-interference—a right, more or less, not to be killed.[2] Additionally, many philosophers defend the Equivalence Thesis, according to which the bare difference between doing and allowing makes no moral difference. In the case of death, the Equivalence Thesis implies that a killing is not *by that very fact* at all morally worse (or better) than an allowing to die. Both the Equivalence Thesis and the view that the right to life is a negative right are plausible enough individually. In this paper, I argue that their conjunction implies an implausible (and generally unrecognized) third claim. Some doings (killings) will be morally equivalent to some allowings (lettings die) despite the facts that the killing will violate the right to life, the letting die will not, and these facts will be the only differences between the cases. In other words, defenders of these claims seem committed to the claim that violating one's right to life is morally irrelevant to the wrongness of the actions in question. That is simply implausible.

CASES

James Rachels's *Active and Passive Euthanasia* (1975) began a conversation with far-reaching implications for end-of-life decisions. If there is no moral difference between killing and letting die, our general preoccupation with the killings rather

the allowings seems wrong-headed. While his main concern there was to argue that there was no basis for increased prohibitions upon the doings, Rachels highlighted the plausibility of the Equivalence Thesis in the process. This thesis holds that the bare difference between a doing and an allowing makes no moral difference. If the Equivalence Thesis is true, some common moral judgments and popular laws are without rational basis. I turn now to consider the case in favor of the Equivalence Thesis to elucidate the principle.

Recall Rachels's parallel cases (1975, 2-3) [my labels]:

> *Bathtub 1:* Smith stands to gain a large inheritance if anything should happen to his six-year-old cousin. One evening while the child is taking his bath, Smith sneaks into the bathroom and drowns the child, and then arranges things so that it will look like an accident.
>
> *Bathtub 2:* Jones also stands to gain if anything should happen to his six-year-old cousin. Like Smith, Jones sneaks in planning to drown the child in his bath. However, just as he enters the bathroom Jones sees the child slip and hit his head, and fall face down in the water. Jones is delighted; he stands by, ready to push the child's head back under if it is necessary, but it is not necessary. With only a little thrashing about, the child drowns all by himself, 'accidentally,' as Jones watches and does nothing.

After briefly considering resistance to the conclusion that Jones has done something just as immoral as Smith because Jones merely let his cousin die, Rachels concludes 'Again, if letting die were in itself less bad than killing, this defense should have at least some weight. But it does not. Such a 'defense' can only be regarded as a grotesque perversion of moral reasoning. Morally speaking, it is no defense at all' (Ibid, 4).

Challenges to the Equivalence Thesis have met with little success, but they have helped to clarify its force. Winston Nesbitt (1995) exploited the difference between act-evaluation (how bad is the killing vs. the allowing) and agent-evaluation (how bad is the killer vs. the allower) to gain traction. This failure instructively clarified that the Equivalence Thesis is a claim about events (specifically act-type events) rather than agents. When judging difference arguments, fix attention firmly on the events in question, not on the agents.[3]

Roy Perrett's criticism of Nesbitt's work showed that to disprove the Equivalence Thesis, one must rely on features *intrinsic to the case* (Perrett 139). Extrinsic factors may convince us that some killings are worse than some allowings to die, Perrett argues, but those facts do not damage the Equivalence Thesis. For instance, agential features like the killer's intentions cannot differ in the two cases because that difference is not an intrinsic feature of killing vs. letting die.[4]

Perrett's insight adds an additional hurdle to be cleared if one is to falsify the Equivalence Thesis. Suppose, then, that we take Rachels's and Perrett's work at face value, focus on act-evaluation of factors intrinsic to the cases. Doing this will still reveal cases in which a commitment to the Equivalence Thesis and a commitment to negative rights will suggest that violating rights is morally irrelevant.

KILLING, STEALING, AND ENSLAVING

Accepting both that rights are negative and that there is no moral difference between doing and allowing is tantamount to accepting that violating rights makes no moral difference in itself. For instance, if the rights in question in the Bathtub cases are negative, this means, roughly, that the victim has a right not to be killed.[5] This view denies that the victim has a corresponding positive right—an enforceable claim to someone's efforts to save him. The Equivalence Thesis implies, with Rachels, that there is no moral difference between the killing and the letting die versions of Bathtub. Someone who accepts both the Equivalence Thesis and the view that rights are negative is committed to this third claim, then: violating the cousin's right to life makes no moral difference to the wrongness of Smith's actions. Smith kills his cousin; Jones allows his to die. Smith violates his cousin's right to life, but Jones doesn't.[6] Thus, Smith violates the right (by killing his cousin), Jones does not (by letting his cousin die), and despite this fact, Smith and Jones have done something equally wrong. The rights violation is irrelevant morally.

The case of killing is the most straightforward considered in this paper: involving the most plausible candidate for a negative right, including Rachels's own example. Yet the conclusion that therights violation fails to make one worse than the other simply seems implausible. The case of killing is not, however, the only one that will demonstrate this strange commitment.[7] Consider, for instance, the case of Mail 1 and Mail 2.

> *Mail 1:* Andrews and her colleague, whom Andrews perceives as a rival, stand to gain $200 each in professional development money by submitting their signed forms certifying that they have completed the work. On the evening before the deadline, in order to make her rival's life more trying, just before the colleague's form would be being picked up by campus mail, Andrews sneaks into the office, takes her colleague's form, and throws it behind a cabinet so it looks like an accident. Andrews gains her $200, but her colleague does not.

> *Mail 2:* Brown and her colleague, whom Brown perceives as a rival, also stand to gain $200 each in professional development money. On the evening before the deadline, in order to make herrival's life more trying, just before the colleague's paperwork would be picked up by campus mail, Brown sneaks into the office, prepared to throw the form behind a cabinet and 'lose' it. However, just as she enters the office, her colleague's form is blown off the pile by a gust of wind from an open window. With a final flutter, the form slips behind the cabinet, escaping the notice of the mail carrier and becoming 'accidentally' lost. Brown gains her $200, but her colleague does not.

Hold all appropriate features consistent: Brown and Andrews share intentions, motivations, and the like. In fixing all the agential features, the cases should elicit (if we accept the Equivalence Thesis) judgments analogous to the Bathtub cases: Andrews's concealing is no worse than Brown's allowing the paperwork to disappear. If we accept also that a right to property is a negative right, then we must admit that Andrews violates the right to property but Brown does not. Here the strange commitment reveals itself: the fact that Andrews violated her colleague's right to property and Brown did not makes no moral difference to their action. Violating the right to property is itself irrelevant to the wrongness of Andrews's action.

The right to liberty is a third candidate to demonstrate this strange commitment.[8] Consider the following Cave cases then:

> *Cave 1:* Young has always wanted to detain a particularly annoying acquaintance. One day while on a hike, Young sees his acquaintance enter a cave with a gate whose controls are on the exterior of the cave. Knowing that the gate will open automatically in 24 hours, Young sneaks up to the cave entrance, pulls the lever, and then slinks off before his acquaintance can see that Young pulled the lever.

> *Cave 2:* Zamora has also always wanted to detain an annoying acquaintance. Zamora sees his acquaintance enter a cave similar to that in Young's case. Zamora sneaks down, intent upon springing the control and imprisoning his acquaintance. However, just as he reaches for the control, Zamora sees the gate fall without his interfering. To his delight, he did not have to get involved. Knowing that the gate will open automatically in 24 hours, Zamora slinks off before his acquaintance can see him.

SOME ATTEMPTS TO RESIST THE IMPLICATION

The conjunction of the Equivalence Thesis and the view that rights are negative

implies the moral irrelevance of rights violations. If it makes no moral difference whether rights are violated, then consider how certain pleas for help would now be similarly irrelevant: 'I have a right to be here!' 'It's my body!' Such rights talk is at the foundation of much work in social justice. If violating those rights is morally irrelevant, work in social justice currently relies upon an undermined foundation. Avoiding committing oneself to the claim that rights violations are morally irrelevant is, thus, desirable. There are some straightforward ways to achieve the task. One can reject the Equivalence Thesis, or argue that the cases introduce facts extrinsic to the argument and so violate the Bare Difference approach, or reject the view that rights are natural as well as negative. Alternatively, one could simply accept the thesis and prepare for the work of revising the liberal worldview. I shall consider each of these possibilities.

Might we reject the Equivalence Thesis? Not all who hear it accept it, and Rachels offers cases to convince those people that they are mistaken in resisting.[9] There are some apparent, important differences between the doing and the allowing cases. It would be just to offer restitution for the doings, but perhaps not in the cases of allowing. The Bathtub cases obscure this fact, because the person to whom restitution would most obviously be due is now dead. The Mail cases should make clearer the role of restitution: Andrews would surely owe her colleague restitution for depriving her of $200. She stole that money by taking the paperwork that guaranteed the money to which her colleague had title as property.[10] Brown would not obviously owe restitution to her colleague. It would be very kind of her render the money, but it would not be unjust to withhold it. If this point is right, then Smith owes restitution as a matter of justice, but Jones would be under no such moral obligation.[11] Similarly, Young would owe restitution for losses suffered. Though Zamora may be legally responsible for violating Duty to Assist laws, he would not owe restitution as a matter of justice. These points—the violation of the right itself, the judgment of many who deem the cases different, and the unequal demands of justice—suggest that the Equivalence Thesis is on unsecure footing.

A second tactic to avoid the implication is by arguing that these examples have violated the Bare Difference approach, so they are not legitimate for consideration of the doing vs. allowing distinction.

The introduction of rights talk is an addition to the original cases. If we are to test the Bare Difference between killing and letting die, then introducing the fact that some subset of these cases (at least those discussed here) will be rights violations, while the allowings will not, introduces a potential confound, the Equivalence Thesis supporter might argue. No longer are we comparing mere doings to allowings, killings to lettings die. We are instead comparing doings-with-rights-violations to allowings-without-rights-violations. This, the Equivalence

Thesis supporter can argue, is simply to mistake the terms of the debate.

This line of thought is not unproblematic. In the first place, one must tread carefully here, as the first example comes directly from the champion of the Equivalence Thesis. Moreover, if rights in question are not only negative but also *natural rights*, they would seem to be features that are necessary to describing the cases fully. Notice that moving from Bathtub 1 to the claim that Smith violates his cousin's right to life required no additional premises. Few would deny that the rights violation is a real characteristic of the case. The central claim in this paper is that the commitment to the problematic thesis arises not from accepting the Equivalence Thesis but from accepting the Equivalence Thesis in conjunction with the negative rights view. If the negative rights are natural rights, it is difficult to argue that anything new has been added to the cases: reminding the readers that the cousin has a right to life is not a new factor (as was the existence of a DNR on page 3). There is promise to arguing that the rights-violations are no further facts, which would forestall the challenge that rights are new additions, in violation of the Bare Difference approach.

This previous paragraph makes it clear that one might avoid the implication by denying that the rights in question are natural or negative rights. If one denies that the right to life is natural, one can coopt Perrett's response to Nesbitt mentioned previously: introducing non-natural rights is an extrinsic feature of the situation. If rights are natural, then the fact that someone has rights will be an intrinsic feature of theirs. We will not be able to fully explain what a person, like the cousin is, without reference to his personhood—and natural rights. Likewise, the fact that a particular killing is targeted against a person—with rights—and not against a thing lacking rights will be an intrinsic feature of the situation.[12] To exclude this fact, we omit a property of the situation that cannot be eliminated and still exhaustively spell out the moral import of the situation.

Perhaps rights are not merely negative. Because negative rights are rights of non-interference, doings often violate those rights in cases where otherwise analogous allowings do not. So someone who accepts Rachels's Bathtub judgments can accept also that the right to life is a positive right—a right to receive something from someone. In this case, because Jones was on hand and could easily have saved his cousin with little effort or risk to himself, Jones had an enforceable moral claim on Jones's life-saving effort.[13] But, so the case goes, Jones denied his cousin that effort, so Jones's inaction violates his cousin's right to life, just as Smith did to his cousin.

A final method is to embrace the implication and explain away its strangeness. Perhaps the rights violation does not make the doing worse than the allowing. This fact does not mean that the rights violation is morally irrelevant. Someone could accept the Equivalence Thesis and the negative rights view, could accept Rachels's judgments in the Bathtub cases, could even accept the view that the doing but not the allowing generates an enforceable claim to restitution, and still deny that the

difference is a difference that makes the one action worse than the other. The defender of such a move could argue that the killing and the letting die are complete when the cousin dies (and when the paper flutters behind the cabinet, and when the gate shuts). The rights violation matters, as the debt will be outstanding in the case of the killing/stealing/imprisoning (but not the allowings) until it is fulfilled. This fact is not, however, a fact that makes the doing worse than the allowing. The debt is a separate entry in the agent's ledger; so, Smith, Andrews, and Young acquire an additional obligation, but Jones, Brown, and Zamora do not. None of this reflects on the wrongness of the actions that led to the obligations.

This paper has not argued that the Equivalence Thesis is false or that the negative rights view is false. This paper has, however, demonstrated that commitment to the conjunction of these views commits one to a puzzling and implausible third claim. The fact that an action violates a negative right does not, in itself, make any moral difference to the wrongness of an action. Concretely, in accepting these theses, one is committed to the claim that the fact that someone violated a right to life (or liberty or property) makes no moral difference to the wrongness of their action.

NOTES

1. It is worth noting that Nozick, a defender of negative rights, argues that property rights come before the right to life (1974, 179n).

2. Alan Gewirth (2001) explains the difference between negative and positive rights in this way: 'negative rights entail negative duties, i.e., duties to forbear or refrain from interfering with persons' having the objects of their rights' while positive rights 'entail positive duties, i.e., duties to help persons to have the objects of their rights' (322). He lists a right to life as a plausible negative right and a right to education and health care as plausible candidates for positive rights (Ibid.). The fundamental distinction, as I use the term, is between rights of forbearance (non-interference) and rights of performance (recipience). Nozick (as in footnote 1) employs 'right' in the negative sense throughout *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

3. I take it for granted that readers are familiar with the logic of Bare Difference Arguments. Readers unfamiliar with the term should see Oddie's excellent treatment (1997) for a fuller discussion of Bare Difference Arguments.

4. Similarly, perhaps, the existence (or lack thereof) of a Do Not Resuscitate order would be extrinsic to the question of killing and letting die, because one case—the knowing killing—would fall outside the bounds of the agreements, while knowingly letting die in accordance with the DNR order would be following the patient's wishes. This is not an intrinsic difference between the cases.

5. As Judith Jarvis Thomson (1971) has shown, this is probably an inaccurate way of expressing the right. It is perhaps right not to be killed unjustly, or at least a right not to be killed under certain (extensive) conditions.

6. For if the cousin has an enforceable claim to Jones's life-saving assistance, that simply means that Jones's cousin's right to life is a right of recipience—a positive right. But this is precisely what the view that the right to life is negative denies.

7. The rights to property and liberty (and any other plausible negative right) will similarly demonstrate a looming commitment to the irrelevance of rights violations.

8. I assume that this right has centrally to do with restricting people's actions and behavior, in particularly their ability to 'move,' broadly construed to include physical and social movement.

9. Rachels pointed out the ruling by the House of Delegates of the AMA's 1973 policy on active vs. passive euthanasia as an example of the commitments in action (1975, 78). Plausibly, the delegates' ruling demonstrated a commitment to denying the Equivalence Thesis.

10. It seems that one can steal without anyone benefiting from the theft.

11. Of course, the fact that no one but Smith would know how the death came about would be irrelevant to Smith's moral responsibility and moral obligations for the death.

12. As in Langdon and Lewis's account (1998).

13. Thomas Mappes seems to defend this sort of view (2002, 215). He writes that someone who needs a rope to save himself from quicksand is 'entitled to [the] assistance' of a bystander who could easily hand the rope to the sinking person.

WORKS CITED

Gewirth, Alan. "Are All Rights Positive?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs.* Vol. 30, No. 3. Summer, 2001: 321-333.

Langdon, Rae and David Lewis. "Defining 'Intrinsic.'" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58.2 (June 1998): 333-345.

Mappes. Thomas. "Sexual Morality and the Concept of Using Another Person," in *The Philosophy of Sex*, Alan Soble, ed., Rowman & Littlefield, 2002: 207-224.

Nesbitt, Winston. "Is Killing No Worse Than Letting Die?" *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 12 (1995): 101- 106.

Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Limited, 1974.

Oddie, Graham. "Killing and Letting-Die: Bare Differences and Clear Differences." *Philosophical Studies* 88 (1997): 267-287.

Perrett, Roy. W. "Killing, Letting Die and the Bare Difference Argument." *Bioethics* 10.2 (1996): 131-139.

Rachels, James. "Active and Passive Euthanasia." *The New England Journal of Medicine* 292, (January 9, 1975): 78-80. Rpt. in *Bioethics: An Introduction to the History, Methods, and Practice*, Nancy S. Jecker, Albert R. Jonsen, and Robert A. Pearlman, eds, Sudburry, Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Publisher, 1997: 77-82.

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "A Defense of Abortion." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1.1 (1971): 47-66.

I Feel Like You're Wrong: Why Affect Matters to Disagreement, and How a Jamesean Approach Helps

Kyle Bromhall
Sheridan College

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will argue that recent work on the affective dimension of information-processing poses a serious challenge to mainstream accounts of disagreement found in contemporary social epistemology. In short, the challenge is this: Negatively-valenced information results in asymmetric updating of beliefs such that we are both strongly predisposed to maintain our confidence in our own belief-forming capabilities on one hand, and equally strongly predisposed to overemphasize the fact of disagreement in our consideration of the belief under dispute on the other. These predispositions strongly motivate our belief-forming processes, but which predisposition is the strongest motivator in any given situation is highly contextual—and beyond our control. Traditional accounts of disagreement thus assume a degree of control over our response to disagreements that we simply do not have, rendering their normative claims inappropriate. In their place I will sketch an account of disagreement, inspired by the work of William James, that holds that the most rational response to disagreement is neither conciliationist nor steadfastness, but rather receptivity to contrary evidence.

This paper shall proceed in the following manner. In the next section, I will give a brief sketch of the two main strands of thought in the scholarship on disagreement. In section three, I will consider how contemporary cognitive science on the asymmetrical updating of beliefs problematizes these accounts. In section four, I provide a sketch of a James-inspired account of disagreement that eschews

a global, normative account of disagreement, instead calling for agents to cultivate an awareness of how they typically respond to disagreement and the mental fortitude to resist this impulse under certain conditions.

II. Disagreements

The standard example of a disagreement is Christensen's 'Restaurant Case' (193). Suppose you and some friends go out to dinner and decide to split the bill equally. You and a friend typically calculate the totals, and always agree. However, on this instance, that is not the case. You are highly confident that each person's share is $43; however, a friend is equally confident that each person's share is $45. How should you react? Answers have generally taken one of two tacks, which I shall take in turn.

The first tack is to say that both you and your friend should revise the confidence in your beliefs downward significantly. After all, you know that your friend is generally good at calculating shares and has done so successfully in the past. Out of respect for your friend's reasoning abilities ('epistemic modesty'), and their respect for yours ('epistemic symmetry'), both of you must become less confident in your beliefs.

The second tack denies that you or your peer are in any sense *required* to revise your beliefs in light of the disagreement. 'Steadfastness' accounts emphasize the special access that you have to your own thought processes. You know how well you typically do such operations and have no *prima facie* reason to believe that you were incorrect in this instance (apart from the very fact of disagreement); indeed, granting epistemic symmetry, it is equally likely that your peer is incorrect. As such, it would be irrational to modify your belief until it is shown to be in error.

Although exceedingly brief, this sketch of the two positions is sufficient for the present purpose. I should note that many accounts fall somewhere between the two positions, advocating steadfastness in some cases and conciliation in others.

III. The Affective Dimension of Disagreement

Although they disagree about how to disagree, both accounts agree about what it means to disagree: two people look at the same evidence, draw conflicting conclusions, and are aware that they have drawn conflicting conclusions. Yet a growing body of literature suggests that this is inaccurate or at least incomplete, as there is a significant *affective* dimension to how beliefs are formed, maintained, and revised that this definition overlooks.

Tali Sharot and Neil Garrett recently observed widespread 'asymmetrical updating' with respect to "self-relevant beliefs"—beliefs that involve a person's

self-image or their future—based on the valence of new information relevant to those beliefs (25). If the new information reinforces or improves someone's self-image, then people are quick to revise their beliefs to incorporate the new evidence. At the same time, negatively-valenced information is systematically underweighted and usually results in little-to-no revision of prior beliefs (Sharot and Garrett 26). This pattern holds for a wide variety of self-relevant beliefs and across the vast majority of the population, even when controlled for country of origin, gender, and other variables (Sharot and Garrett "Forming Beliefs" 26).

Discovering that you disagree with your peer could threaten many self-relevant beliefs, as the possibility of being wrong calls into question your ability (at least at that time) to draw the appropriate conclusion from the given premises. Consider the Restaurant Case. Many different self-relevant beliefs could be in play: you could believe yourself to be an excellent mental-mathematician; you could believe that your social standing in some small way depends on your impeccable record of calculating shares; or, you could believe that being wrong would wreck your romantic chances with another member of the group. Each of these are negatively-valenced and will lead to a general, *prima facie* unwillingness to revise your beliefs about yourself, which in turn will lead to an unwillingness to revise the beliefs that would entail a revision of your self-relevant beliefs. While perhaps trivial for the Restaurant Case, consider how this effect might be amplified when learning that your peer disagrees with you about the existence of God, the permissibility of capital punishment, or that she likes Hegel.

The issue gets muddier when we consider the long and distinguished body of literature that demonstrates that, self-relevant beliefs aside, people tend to weigh negatively-valenced information disproportionately high, and consequently afford that information greater motivational force in their belief-forming processes. (Kahneman and Tversky 280-284) Despite this being a widespread phenomenon, psychologists have observed that the extent to which people demonstrate this tendency can vary depending on factors including (but not limited to): their core personality traits (Norris, et al. 107-110); the functioning of their behaviour-activation and behaviour-inhibition systems (Grey*The Psychology of Fear and Stress* 256-263); and, their temperaments vis-à-vis risk-seeking or loss-preventing behaviour (Elliot & Thrash "Approach-Avoidance Motivation in Personality 804-818). Further, Pietri, Fazio, and Shook argue that individuals "vary in the extent to which they weigh positives and negatives when making evaluative judgments of *novel* situations…" ("Weighting Positive Versus Negative" 196) Thus, not only does the response to negatively-valenced information vary from person to person, but putting someone into a novel situation makes it harder to predict how much of a response to expect from someone, proportionate to the degree of novelty in the situation.

This is problematic for traditional accounts of disagreement if one considers the fact of disagreement to be evidence for revising one's beliefs or confidence in one's beliefs, as the fact of disagreement is itself negatively-valenced information. Disagreements can be unpleasant and disruptive. Discovering that someone for whom you have tremendous respect disagrees with you on some fundamental topic can be upsetting; indeed, this shock lies at the heart of many accounts of disagreement. If we consider the fact of disagreement about p as evidence for the truth of p, then the fact of disagreement's negative valence would cause it to be overemphasized in our consideration of whether p, leading to asymmetrical updating in favour of conciliation with one's peer. How much someone overemphasizes the fact of disagreement, and the magnitude of the subsequent asymmetrical updating, is influenced by a host of factors outside of their immediate control. For example, someone who has more of a loss-averse temperament will be more inclined to overemphasise the fact of disagreement than someone who has a more gain-seeking temperament. This will lead to a greater asymmetry in belief-updating than the gain-seeker, even if both consciously favour conciliation. That is, even if both types of personalities favour conciliation, the loss-averse person will have a lower floor and higher ceiling for belief revision than the gain-seeking person.

The novelty of the situation is the most important variable of the situation, as the difficulty of predicting how someone will respond to a disagreement is directly in proportion to how novel the disagreement is. It is true that in some sense disagreement is to be expected; a cursory look at the state of society is enough to show that. But a key feature of the Restaurant Case and similar examples in the literature is that the disagreement with your peer is somehow novel. Disagreeing with someone with whom you *always* disagree is nothing new. It is only when you disagree with someone with whom you typically agree that the problem of disagreement emerges. As such, even if we manage to fully account for how the factors outside of one's control relate to one's response to disagreement, we will never be able to fully predict how much the fact of disagreement will be overemphasized in one's consideration of the belief under dispute, and thus how much one will be motivated towards conciliation by the non-rational features of our belief-formation processes that are beyond our control.

The situation is thus as follows: Faced with disagreement, our affective responses to negatively-valenced information pulls us in two competing directions. Disagreeing with your peer will threaten some self-relevant beliefs, which generally causes people to resist updating their beliefs (pulling towards steadfastness), but, being bad news in and of itself, will generally cause people to overemphasize the fact of disagreement as a motivation for changing their beliefs (pulling towards conciliation). The wild card in all of this is the novelty of the

disagreement, as it means that we cannot confidently say how much someone's response is motivated by these psychological traits, as someone's history of responses becomes of little value for determining how they will respond. Both mainstream accounts of disagreement thus presume that we have some choice in the manner of how we respond, but it really is a matter of for our pre-reflective processes. Thus, our response is largely motivated by factors outside our control, and largely *before* we get to the slow, deliberative stage of information processing.[1]

This point reinforces an issue flagged by Catherine Elgin. Elgin notes that both approaches to disagreement assume that we possess the ability to revise (or not revise) our beliefs in various ways (Elgin "Persistent Disagreement" 59-63). For example, Christensen assumes that we have the ability to modify our levels of confidence in a belief ("Epistemology of Disagreement" 194-199), while Feldman assumes that we can suspend judgement on a belief at will ("Reasonable Religious Disagreements" 155-156). Elgin argues that this smacks of epistemic voluntarism; and, if true, would sever the connection between truth and belief, as the salient feature of whether we believe that p would no longer be the force of evidence for p, but whether we assent to our belief that p—which can exist in the absence of evidence (60-61).

Taken together, both traditional accounts of disagreement assume a level of control over aspects of our belief-forming processes that we quite simply do not have.[2] As an alternative, I submit that we understand disagreement through the lens of someone who understood the deep connection between affect and cognition: William James.

IV. A Jamesean Account of Disagreement

James always afforded affect a significant place in his broader account of cognition. This is no more evident than in his paper "The Sentiment of Rationality." In that essay, James argues that much of our philosophical outlook is governed by the balance of two cravings: a craving for 'simplicity,' which is roughly the desire to unify seemingly disparate phenomena into a common term; and second, a craving for 'clearness,' which is roughly the desire to understand a phenomenon in fine-grained and minute detail (*Will to Believe* 59). Satisfying these cravings generate the 'sentiment of rationality'; any conception that generates this sentiment will be deemed rational (*Will to Believe* 62-63).

Affect plays a crucial role in this system. The reason for this is evolutionary: We need a system to quickly assess novel elements of our experience and sort between potential threats and potential boons, and our affective processes serve that function. We experience our continued need for further investigation into a phenomenon by the existence of these cravings and feel tangible relief when we

satisfy them (*Will to Believe* 63).[3] The balance of these cravings, which is a relative and inscrutable feature of someone's psychology, will exert substantial motivational force towards which philosophical positions someone will ultimately come to accept (*Will to Believe* 66). James observed in his day that those with a deeper craving for simplicity tend towards rationalistic explanations of the world that show a deeper unity behind all things, while those with a deeper craving for clearness tend towards empiricist explanations with ultimate division between all things (*Will to Believe* 66-67). While each camp will give an impassioned defence of their disposition on rational grounds, their approach was decided long before they opened a philosophical text.

The first feature of a Jamesian account of disagreement is to recognize that one's response to disagreement is more dependent on one's psychological traits than it is a conclusion that is arrived at through dialectic. As we have seen in this paper, the same balance of forces is present in cases of disagreement. On one hand, our affective response to negatively-valenced information that threaten self-relevant beliefs will compel us towards steadfastness; on the other, our affective response to the negatively-valenced fact of disagreement will compel us towards conciliation. As we have also seen, responses vary between people, and different people will treat these affective responses differently. There are some people whose instinctive response to disagreement will be steadfastness rather than conciliation. Such people find such a response more reasonable because they find the threat of self-relevant beliefs more intolerable than the shock of discovering that they disagree with their peer. Conversely, there are those for whom conciliation will be the natural reaction to disagreement; such people find the shock of the fact of disagreement more intolerable than the implications of disagreement on their self-relevant beliefs. By missing this connection, traditional accounts demand more of some people than others, as a person who is naturally inclined towards steadfastness must put exert more cognitive effort to act in a conciliationist manner, and vice versa. A Jamesean approach to disagreement thus rejects the possibility of a global, normative account of disagreement that places equal cognitive demands on all parties.

The second feature of a Jamesean account of disagreement is to reconceptualize the epistemic work along lines consistent with the nature of the problem. Even if a global, normative account of disagreement is impossible, it is still possible to approach disagreement in a particularist or contextualist manner. The impulses behind both steadfastness and conciliationism serve useful functions. The impulse towards steadfastness is the consequence of trusting your cognitive abilities; such trust is crucial for navigating future experiences. The impulse towards conciliationism acknowledges the limitations of your own point of view and incorporates other sources of information into your considerations, potentially

leading to more accurate beliefs. In similar circumstances, James advocates "*mak[ing] our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy*" by acknowledging our tendencies and bringing that into our considerations of how to respond to a particular disagreement at hand. (*Principles of Psychology* 126). You may not be able to control whether you respond to disagreement in a manner that favours steadfastness, but your awareness of this tendency could help you resist it should resistance be appropriate. The same goes for conciliation: If you are aware that you typically overweigh the fact of disagreement, you can resist your impulse towards self-doubt. In sum, this approach calls for a certain receptivity towards evidence and awareness of one's dispositions rather than prescribing a particular response at any given point. Aware of her own predispositions, the rational epistemic agent takes care to not let those predispositions dominate her responses to disagreement.[4]

A Jamesean account of disagreement thus calls for the development of a certain type of intellectual character rather than insisting that one response is appropriate in all circumstances. We may not be able to change our response at the time of disagreement, but we can cultivate, over time, the mental agility required to respond appropriately to environmental cues. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to press this point much further, such an account ought to be of interest to virtue epistemologists.

V. Conclusion

A central assumption of the literature on disagreement is that we have the requisite level of control over our belief-formation processes to provide a general, normative account of disagreement prior to, or independent of, any actual case of disagreement. The central goal of this paper has been to demonstrate, by appealing to contemporary cognitive science, that such an assumption is unwarranted. Mainstream accounts of disagreement ignore the significant influence that negatively-valenced information has on our decision-making and belief-formation processes. Our response to negatively-valenced information takes one of two tacks. If negatively-valenced information threatens self-relevant beliefs, we asymmetrically update our beliefs in a manner that preserves those beliefs. In a disagreement, this means acting in a manner that favours steadfastness. Other negatively-valenced information—in this case, the very fact of disagreement—tends to be overemphasized in our decision-making processes, leading to asymmetrical belief updating that favours conciliationism. Our actual response to disagreement depends greatly on features beyond our control; as such, both steadfastness and conciliationism are unfit for purpose. My James-inspired alternative is to limit the solution to the problem of disagreement to the level of meta-habits of thought: the most we can do is develop the mental agility necessary

to respond appropriately, be it conciliation or steadfastness, in the manner most likely to generate effective beliefs in particular instances.

NOTES

1. The saving grace of the restaurant case is that there actually is an identifiable answer to the question of each person's share that is easily discernible through further work: the restaurant staff will not tolerate indefinite suspension of belief while the group of philosophers ponders the nature of disagreement. As such, whoever is wrong *will* have to change their belief when they are shown to be wrong. But this is not the kind of disagreement that really matters. Discovering that a colleague is a Hegelian is not as easily overcome as discovering that they miscalculated everyone's share of the cheque.

2. I foresee two responses to these challenges. First, traditional theorists might deny that how we revise beliefs in the face of disagreement has any bearing on how we ought to revise beliefs. In this line of thought, articulating the affective element of information-processing and its role in belief-formation, at best, gives us a clearer picture of what we are trying to overcome through dispassionate philosophical enterprise. The issue with this sort of response is that insisting that people ought to overcome our natural propensity to act in one way over another requires, or at least implies, that it is possible to overcome those propensities. As demonstrated by the examples given above, this is an inextricable part of our information-making, decision-making, and belief-formation processes. The central problem with respect to disagreement is how little time there often is between the discovery of the disagreement and the need to respond to the disagreement. We do not have the ability to avoid having an affective response to new information, and as such it is unreasonable to demand that we avoid such a response.

Second, mainstream theorists might bracket the affective dimension of disagreement and positioning their accounts as holding *ceteris paribus*, as most people experience asymmetrical updating, and that the extent to which it occurs varies so heavily. However, it is not at all obvious that the extent or amount of affective content experienced by either peer in a disagreement will be equal, or even roughly equal. For example, if you put stock into how you are perceived by your social group vis-à-vis your mental calculation ability, and your friend does not, then there will be a difference in the amount and valence of the self-relevant information present in the restaurant case. We cannot make a *ceteris paribus* claim when we are unsure that the elements involved will ever be at or near equal.

3. While it is beyond the scope of the present paper, I should note that my case is aided by the work of Daniel Brunson, who argues that James's work in "The Sentiment of Rationality" is best understood as an early articulation of what is now called 'processing fluency' (Brunson 33-36). In short, the more familiar we are with a particular stimulus, the quicker we process the information, leading us to consider it rational.

4. This point puts a Jamesean account clearly in line with that of Elgin, who advocated a similar receptivity by rejecting the voluntarism on which traditional accounts are based. See Elgin, 64-8. I do not wish to claim or imply that Elgin has this sort of connection in mind, or that Elgin was inspired by James on this point.

WORKS CITED

Brunson, Daniel. "Fluency, Satisfaction, Truth: Reassessing James in Light of Some Contemporary Psychology." *Contemporary Pragmatism* 13 (2016): 29-47.

Christensen, David. "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News." *The Philosophical Review* 116.2 (2007): 187-217.

Costa, P. T. and R. R. McCrae. *Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) and Five Factory Inventory (NEO-FFI) Professional Manual*, 1992.

Elgin, Catharine. "Persistent Disagreement." *Disagreement*, edited by Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield, Oxford University Press, 2010: 53-68.

Elliot, Andrew and Todd Thrash. "Approach-Avoidance Motivation in Personality: Approach and Avoidance Temperaments and Goals." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82.5 (2002): 804-818.

Feldman, Richard. "Reasonable Religious Disagreements." *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular*, edited by Louise Anthony, Oxford University Press, 2007: 194-214.

Grey, J. A. *The Psychology of Fear and Stress*, 2nd. Ed, 1987, Cambridge University Press.

James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. Harvard University Press, 1981.

———. *The Will to Believe*. Harvard University Press, 1979.,

Kahneman, D. and Amos Tversky. "Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk." *Econometrica* 47.2 (1979): 263-291.

Norris, Catherine, Jeff Larsen, L. Elizabeth Crawford, and John Cacioppo. "Better (or worse) for some than others: Individual differences in the positivity offset and negativity bias." *Journal of Research in Personality* 45.1 (2011): 100-111.

Pietri, Evava, Russel Fazio, and Natalie Shook. "Weighting Positive Versus Negative: The Fundamental Nature of Valence Asymmetry." *Journal of Personality* 81.2 (2013): 196-208.

Sharot, Tali and Neil Garrett. "Forming Beliefs: Why Valence Matters." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20.1 (2016): 25-33.

Toward a Virtuous Resistance: Radical Solidarity and the Problem of Adjudication

Samuel Garcia

In *The Epistemology of Resistance*, José Medina sets out to analyze and counteract the inability of oppressors to acknowledge their own prejudice. This "meta-ignorance," or ignorance of one's ignorance, puts a stopper on societal discourse in that it makes it all but impossible for participants to agree on the fundamental problems that need to be addressed. Medina's analysis brings to the fore the need for a theoretical model in which agents and communities are able to surmount such meta-ignorance with virtuous dispositions that are compatible with respecting and affirming manifold voices.

Nevertheless, this sort of model is insufficient in that it calls on discursive partners to respect and internalize diverse perspectives without itself offering a way to adjudicate between them. Virtues cannot be extracted from the lived traditions that give them meaning and direction; traditions that typically disagree with one another regarding their catalog and conceptualization of the virtues. Thus, the primary desideratum is a method of adjudication that can arbitrate between competing narratives without itself producing hegemony. I submit that a MacIntyrean analysis of such tradition-constituted inquiry, combined with Medinean insights, yields the most promising proposal for overcoming meta-ignorance and producing fruitful polyphonic discourse.

I. Veils and Resistances

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois describes "a world which yields [the African-American] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (Du Bois 8). The "other world" is that white supremacist milieu of early 20th century United States, whose systematic oppression of the African-American produced in him[1] a fractured self with a distorted ability both to understand himself in a society that reviles him and to see himself as whites see him. Du Bois calls this ability "double consciousness." In other words, the black man is conscious not only of his own perspective but of the way in which he appears to the eyes of the oppressive other—and *both* perceptions are skewed. An epistemic crisis arises because the internalized, oppressive white gaze becomes the standard of value and dignity for black subjects who also desire to rebuff it. Du Bois hopes to release the tension of black double consciousness by striking a balance without eliminating either component: neither African only nor American only, but African-American. This new identity would then serve as a fulcrum around which the black man[2] could reassert his worth and fight for his civil rights.

There is much to commend in Du Bois' analysis; however, Du Bois fails to clarify why the white gaze, given its oppressive nature, should coexist with the black perspective at all. José Medina, by contrast, aims to provide just such an answer.

He begins by positing an additional type of ignorance typical of oppressors in addition to the interpersonal one Du Bois had identified; that is, Medina theorizes that there is yet another veiled object of perception for whites: the self. For one noetic consequence of the veil is that "the white gaze that Du Bois describes does not see the limited nature of its own perspective; it is blind to its own blindness, insensitive to its own insensitivity" (Medina 154). Medina labels this "meta-ignorance." Ignorance here is not understood as a simple lack of knowledge but as a social production that maintains power relations which are fueled by distorted knowledge and confident cluelessness. As it turns out, white supremacy would be unable to survive without an interpersonal and reflexive epistemology of ignorance.

For Medina, the white gaze is valuable in that it gives rise to a special kind of lucidity in underprivileged subjects concerning the circumstances in which they find themselves. In effect, white ignorance produces epistemic gaps, which the oppressed can perceive and exploit for their own ends. Thus, argues Medina, oppressed subjects can develop "a *resistant perception* alongside the dominant perception [they have] internalized" (emphasis in original, Medina 193), and it is this vantage point that allows them to ensconce themselves within the interstices

of interlocking social ignorances to dismantle them. In short, white ignorance produces black lucidity; it sows the seeds of its own destruction.

This does not mean that such resistance will always be effective. For instance, a former Latino coworker of mine once told a client, a man with cerebral palsy and moderate intellectual disabilities, that the reason the latter did not understand a certain policy was because he was "retarded." The client replied, angrily and with a heavy speech impediment, that my coworker should not use that word and that it hurt his feelings. My coworker, instead of listening to and empathizing with his client, responded: "Well, aren't you retarded? Why would I use another word? That's what you are!" This was an ethical crossroads for my coworker, an opportunity for his privileged, "able-bodied" gaze to be challenged.[3] Yet this interaction, and others like it, failed to pull back the ableist veil he had internalized.

A more lucid, virtuous person might have reacted differently. Medina lists the virtues of humility, intellectual curiosity/diligence, and open-mindedness as characteristic of the lucid and the mirror-image vices of arrogance, laziness, and closed-mindedness as characteristic of the meta-ignorant (Medina 42-44). In exemplifying precisely these vices, my coworker was unable to experience the confrontation as a learning and humbling experience. Yet he exhibited the previously mentioned virtues when it came to his family, immigration, and poverty in general. This tension illustrates what I will call *the problem of constrained virtues*, a fault at the level of practical reason by which our social ignorances narrow the scope of the application of the virtues so that they cannot apply to the periphery where we have relegated the other (cf. Medina 202). Perhaps my coworker had experienced racism in his life and had developed a kind of double consciousness that eventually found equilibrium in a Latino identity.[4] But the virtues required for that process were apparently inadequate when it came to confronting his ableism *even though he had worked with clients with disabilities for decades*. What was missing was not the virtue of humility or open-mindedness *simpliciter* but a practical wisdom capable of applying such virtues to new and strange social situations. And more generally, whenever we ascribe virtue to someone, we are describing that individual as virtuous *qua* race, *qua* poverty, *qua* religion—as virtuous in a constrained social domain.[5]

That the problem of constrained virtues plagues traditional accounts can be seen in that "the standard list" of virtues[6] does little to address the various meta-ignorances that plague our society, as contemporary scholarship has sometimes acknowledged (cf. Blum 2007, Fricker, 2007, and Hursthouse 2007). I locate Medina's project in this vein when he supplants the concept of double consciousness with a "kaleidoscopic consciousness" that simultaneously acknowledges the limitations of one's perspective and the possible strengths of other, as-yet-unencountered viewpoints as valuable correctives worth seeking out for critical interaction. A *kaleidoscopically virtuous agent*, as I will call her, is one

for whom the problem of constrained virtues is no longer relevant, for she is "always open to acknowledge and engage new perspectives, and always open to strive toward a better balance among possible perspectives" (Medina 200). In effect, she desires "epistemic friction" among competing discursive participants. Still, this does not in itself bring about societal melioration; for that one needs a deep cognitive and affective understanding of the other, what Medina calls "radical solidarity." In sum: the goal of resistance is societal melioration via the radical solidarity that kaleidoscopic consciousness produces.

In what follows, I will argue that Medina's project faces a peculiar problem of adjudication in that it fails to arbitrate between competing traditions' claims to truth and action guidance. We cannot achieve societal melioration without deciding between lived traditions that provide us with the resources to practice epistemic friction virtuously. Thus, what we need is a coherent framework for a particular kind of resistance to oppression and privilege, namely, a *virtuous* resistance.

II. Emotivism and The Problem of Adjudication

One of the central claims in Alasdair MacIntyre's seminal text *After Virtue* is that "we live in a specifically emotivist culture" (MacIntyre 22). There is a deep suspicion, MacIntyre suggests, that behind the apparent rationality in our public ethical discourse lies a surreptitious emotional component. This ambivalence arises for two reasons. On the one hand, the Enlightenment tradition, from which modern liberalism stems, calls for objective reasons that are free from bias and capable of being assented to by any reasonable person; it promotes the idea of a single, unified conception of rationality. On the other hand, since Nietzsche, there has been a sense among moderns that this Enlightenment project has failed and that what remains is simply the relativity of preferences. Hence emerges a Janus-faced quandary: because of our Enlightenment inheritance, we disguise the emotional undertones of our convictions with "rational reasons"; but due to our rejection of Enlightenment conceptions of reason, it is in fact our emotions that form the substratum of our convictions. In other words, the "reasons" for our beliefs, and the "reasons" we employ to persuade (and control) others, are emotional to the core. So our moral debates have become interminable due to their assertion/counter-assertion mode; "hence perhaps the slightly shrill tone of so much moral debate" (MacIntyre 8).

An emotivist culture of this sort would be ignorant of its own ignorance on this score; it would be meta-ignorant, in Medinean terms. It would not only continue its emotivist practices, while convinced of its objectivity, but it would do so while flatly denying accusations that it is emotivist. Direct confrontation by another

large-scale tradition would be largely ineffective insofar as this emotivist culture refuses to interact with and internalize another vantage point. The parallels to the racial case are myriad, and now a MacIntyrean veil separating large-scale traditions looms.

I take it as uncontroversial that a theory which is compatible with such an emotivist culture will be unsuccessful.[7] By compatible, I mean not only logically compatible but practically so: a theory that is practically compatible with emotivism will envision a society in which its democratic participants continue to navigate interminable sociopolitical discourse with subjective preferences that arise out of disillusionment with the idea of universal rationality. I submit that Medina's thesis is just such an account.

For Medina the telos of polyphonic social discourse is "a community of shared concerns" (Medina 280) in which dialogue partners are fellow-travelers with "common access to plural ways of imagining their past, present, and future" (Medina 276. Though each may understand social maladies and their antidotes differently, there remains a shared basis upon which they can commiserate in order to improve upon their common situation: acknowledgment of and respect for the other's perspective and the experiences from which it stems (cf. 280). Medina's melioration view is decidedly pragmatist in that it requires we exercise certain virtuous capacities in unbridled dialogue because doing so is most useful for achieving societal melioration.

Yet it is precisely this same pragmatic condition that renders Medina's account problematic: it is compatible with kaleidoscopically conscious subjects conducting polyphonic discourse in an emotivist fashion. A society that followed Medina's proposal could be just as emotivist as the one MacIntyre depicts, albeit more virtuous. Herein lies the dual problem of adjudication for Medina: besides the pragmatic consideration, he supplies no mechanism to help determine which virtues to cultivate, nor are there criteria for deciding between the large-scale traditions that provide those virtues with their living context. Thus, Medina's vision of polyphonic discourse falls prey to the MacIntyrean critique of emotivist culture more broadly.

Consider first the claim that Medina's notion of kaleidoscopic consciousness is compatible with a deep commitment to emotivism. For the sake of argument imagine a kaleidoscopically virtuous emotivist named Ted. By hypothesis, Ted meets the standard list of virtues and also the additional ones expounded by Medina. Yet it just so happens that Ted is also an emotivist who believes that all moral judgments echo Stevenson's dictum: "I approve [or disapprove] of this; do so as well." So whenever Ted approves of radical openness to diversity, for example, he is expressing his feelings and calling for others to feel the same way. He may be deeply committed to that virtue, feeling passionately about it and even inspiring others to adopt it, but for emotivist Ted there is no underlying *cognitive*

or *rational* commitment to this value.

Now compare Ted to a kaleidoscopically virtuous moral objectivist; call her Diem. On the outside, Diem and Ted appear to be identical when it comes to their passion and advocacy for openness to diversity, for they are both kaleidoscopically conscious. They show up to the same rallies and protests, post similar things on social media, sign the same petitions, press for the same legislation, and even perform similar random acts of kindness in private. Still, Diem is doing something fundamentally different from Ted for, as a moral objectivist, she is cognitively committed to virtues she believes are objective features of the world. She believes she is obligated to honor those virtues even when her desires are at odds with them. But this is precisely what emotivist Ted rejects: he believes he is psychologically compelled, not morally obligated in the objectivist sense, to act on his deepest feelings for as long as he has them.

In Medina's pluralist account, Ted and Diem's actions are pragmatically equivalent insofar as they contribute equally to societal melioration. But can this really be the whole story? It cannot, if only because emotivist Ted fundamentally views all living traditions as arbitrary communal expressions of feeling or sentiment propagated by indoctrination into those same sentiments. Thus, Ted affirms *some* thesis concerning MacIntyrean large-scale traditions; however, that alone does not make him lucid with respect to the MacIntyrean veil. For one does not become lucid simply by crafting one's views with other perspectives in mind; lucidity requires the acknowledgment and empathy of radical solidarity, as Medina emphasizes. Perhaps Ted is lucid in a preliminary sense, but he remains meta-ignorant in the deeper sense of failing to accord sufficient respect towards his interlocutors and the traditions they embody, thus circumventing radical solidarity on a deeper level. Yet he remains kaleidoscopically conscious insofar as he exercises the relevant virtues, and his actions remain pragmatically equivalent to Diem's for as long as he continues to do so, whether that be temporarily or for life. Either way, his deeper meta-ignorance concerning large-scale traditions *produces* an undermining of radical solidarity that is difficult to detect.

This point is even clearer if we move away from the abstract Ted case and consider situations in which privileged individuals question minority perspectives because they suspect the latter are guided by self-interest or emotion. I take this to be symptomatic of a lack of social recognition in Honneth's sense: a denial of "a form of social esteem that allows [people] to relate positively to their concrete traits and abilities." (1995, 121) I take it that the respect for other perspectives engendered by radical solidarity is a form of social recognition that appreciates sociocultural factors beyond intellectual propositions that can be judged as true or false. Emotivist Ted is, in a sense, a stand-in for anyone who attains limited sensitivity toward such factors but acts in ways that appear to fully honor them. In

the end, though all perspectives that tend toward kaleidoscopic consciousness and radical solidarity may be prima facie justified, there will inevitably be some perspectives whose internal structure provides a defeater for producing those virtues robustly. It is my contention that only those traditions without such defeaters can maintain some claim to truth and be valuable contributions to a pluralistic society.[8]

Though it would be tempting to pick out virtues à la carte, doing so would rip them out of their live context. Virtues are embedded in traditions that give them meaning and purpose, traditions that offer overlapping and oftentimes incompatible catalogs of virtues. Furthermore, even when traditions overlap in their catalog of virtues, they often conceive of them differently. So in order to determine which virtues to cultivate, and for what ends they are practiced, one must first explain why some types of tradition should be preferred over others. Diem's ability to praise or condemn dialogue partners only makes sense from within a tradition that provides her with a catalog of virtues and vices that she holds as a standard; she would not be able to practice substantive polyphonic discourse otherwise. So virtues divorced from tradition can only bring about a *thin* pluralism of epistemic friction without truth adjudication or substantive action guidance. My claim is that Medina's account is thin in this way. By contrast, MacIntyre roots virtues within large-scale traditions and proposes two markers by which successful traditions can be identified: superior coherence and explanatory power when compared to their previous iterations and rivals.[9]

Still, one reason for supposing that MacIntyre's account of adjudication needs emendation is the way in which MacIntyre elucidates the notion of a tradition: the stigma or privilege associated with one's race, gender, class, and sexual orientation within a particular social ambit is hardly, if at all, acknowledged.[10] So a third, pragmatic criterion will be necessary to address this shortcoming:

> A successful tradition will tend to reliably produce individuals and communities that approximate the virtue-consensus which results from polyphonic epistemic friction.

According to this criterion, those traditions which better instill the virtues of kaleidoscopic consciousness and radical solidarity in their adherents will have partial justification for claiming that they are more true than their rivals and predecessors. But here, the condition is not standalone as in Medina; it is constitutive of a broader evaluative standard. Contra Medina, the purpose of epistemic correction must involve evaluating claims to truth beyond pragmatic concerns because societal melioration is compatible with profound meta-ignorance.

How, then, can meta-ignorance be combatted? There is a wide spectrum of

resistance-traditions from revolutionary to pacifist versions: which traditions should individuals follow and why? The argument thus far suggests that traditions with better claims to truth will be those which overcome the triple veil while meeting both MacIntyre's criteria as well as the pragmatic one proposed. I have argued for a theory of adjudication according to which affirming the truth of a tradition means it has surmounted conceptual hurdles in a non-ad hoc manner, promises to continue to do so as it maintains dialogue with its predecessors and rivals, *and* is useful for virtuous action-guidance in the sense outlined above. Such a MacIntyrean-Medinean synthesis, I hope, can shed light on the direction we must take as we seek to overcome meta-ignorance through virtuous resistance.[11]

NOTES

1. I will use masculine pronouns for the moment to stay consistent with Du Bois' language.

2. Or, more specifically, the "talented tenth" of black leaders. Du Bois famously took a dim view of "the masses" and also of black leadership. Gooding-Williams (2009) has argued that the concept of double consciousness was itself meant to analyze and critique the perceived failure of leaders such as Booker T. Washington so that a new generation of leaders could take the helm of black political thought.

3. I place "able-bodied" in scare quotes to register my discomfort with the term. To illustrate this, consider a display I encountered at the Rosie the Riveter Museum in Richmond, CA while in the course of writing this paper. It described how some workers with disabilities were able to flourish in WWII factories: deaf people, for example, would use sign language to communicate more efficiently than other workers who could not hear each other over the noise. Given the conext, should it not strike us as odd to find that the display applied the label "able-bodied" exclusively to the latter?

4. I agree with Alcoff (2006, 244-246) that "ethnicity" does not adequately capture the Latino identity and that even though there are difficulties with grouping Latinos into a "race," it remains true that they have been racialized in the United States.

5. Fortunately, we are often virtuous in multiple, intersecting domains. It's worth mentioning that the problem of constrained virtues is, of course, exemplified by Aristotle himself, who taught at length concerning the virtues but, like most everyone else in his time, was himself sexist, racist, and ableist (cf. *Politics* 1254b13-14, 1255a1-3, and 1335b20-21 respectively; on applying a social notion of "race" to Aristotle's thought, see Ward 2002). They are all blameworthy to varying degrees because they could have done better. Surprisingly, however, this calls for empathy and not merely judgment since, as Fricker (2007) puts it, "'could do better' will be our own ethical epitaph too" (107).

6. Obviously this is an ideal list, but it is still useful as a heuristic. I will continue to use this phrase without quotes with the understanding that there is, in fact, no such list.

7. My claim may strike some as hasty, but here is not the place to discuss the merits of emotivism or skepticism in general. My reasoning here is simple: emotivism is false; therefore, theories which are compatible with emotivism are also false.

8. It may be argued that Medina's focus is on epistemic, not moral, virtue. Nevertheless, I would question such a hard and fast distinction in the spirit of Zagzebski (1996) who argues that intellectual virtues are forms of moral virtues. In any case, it seems to me that Medina's account relies heavily on "radical solidarity" which itself demonstrates moral and intellectual hybridity. But even if Medina's thesis were purely epistemic, the present arguments could be easily reformulated to address such an account. I would like to thank Cameron Wright at the University of South Florida for raising this objection at the 2018 New Mexico-Texas Philosophical Society Conference in Houston, TX.

9. Of course, these criteria are not themselves tradition-neutral since that would undermine MacIntyre's entire project. They are criteria proposed from within his own neo-Aristotelian tradition set forth for others to evaluate with the resources provided by their own tradition.

10. To his credit, MacIntyre later perceived a significant lacuna in his own work and in broader moral philosophy, namely insufficient moral reflection on disabilities and nonhuman animals. His *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999) is an admirable attempt to rectify this neglect. My proposal, then, can be understood as taking up the trajectory of MacIntyre's own concerns from vulnerability and dependence to invisibility and erasure.

11. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to professors Oliver D. Crisp, Thomas M. Crisp, David A. Horner, and Timothy H. Pickavance for their penetrating critiques of earlier drafts of this paper.

WORKS CITED

Alcoff, Linda Martín. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

Blum, Lawrence. "Racial Virtues." *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, edited by Rebecca L. Walker and Philip J. Ivanhoe. Clarendon, 2007, 225-40.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Gooding-Williams, Robert. *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

Honneth, Axel. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Translated by Joel Anderson. The MIT Press, 1995.

Hursthouse, Rosalind. "Environmental Virtue Ethics." *Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, edited by Rebecca L. Walker and Philip J. Ivanhoe. Clarendon, 2007, 155-71.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed., University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

———. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. Open Court Publishing, 1999.

———. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

Medina, José. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Ward, Julie K. "*Ethnos* in the *Politics*: Aristotle and Race." *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, edited by Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott. Blackwell Publishing, 2002, 14-37.

Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Three Poverty of Stimulus Arguments

Cinnamon Jenson
Houston City College

I. INTRODUCTION

The Poverty of Stimulus (hereafter, "POS") argument is used in a number of fields of cognitive science, nature/nurture debates, moral psychology, developmental psychology and biology. In particular, cognitive linguists (Berwick et al.; Chomsky; Clark and Lappin; Cowie; Crain; Lightfoot; Pullum and Scholtz) use the POS argument to support "linguistic nativism," the view that humans have innate knowledge of certain linguistic features such as rules of syntax that are universal across every natural language.

The POS argument starts with an observation that children have "knowledge of language"—a host of implicit "knowledge" and automatic cognitive abilities—and an ability to understand, interpret, and produce language. If children acquired knowledge of language via a general learning mechanism (i.e., pattern recognition faculties that are not specific to language) then the environment must contain a rich source of primary linguistic data (e.g., spoken, written, or signed tokens of languages) from which to extract information about the rules of grammar. However, there is a poverty of linguistic data and children's knowledge of language far exceeds the set of stimuli the environment provides. Thus, children must be innately endowed with some linguistic knowledge that allows them to compensate for missing linguistic data from the environment (see Cowie for discussion).

The POS argument has been the strongest and most-cited argument in support of nativism for the last five decades. The aim of this paper is not to critique the controversial claims about nativism. Rather, I argue that the POS argument can be broken into three non-equivalent arguments and I compare and contrast these

arguments.

To see how the arguments can be distinguished, consider Seidenberg's summary of the POS argument:

> The input to the child is degenerate, consisting of both grammatical and ungrammatical sentences that are not labeled as such. It is also variable; children are exposed to different samples of utterances but converge on the same grammar . . . That essential aspects of grammar are innate—represented in the brain of the neonate—is said to be the only viable explanation for how languages could be learned so rapidly yet under such impoverished conditions. This hypothesis simultaneously accounts for universal properties of languages. (1601)

The overall conclusion to any POS argument is that children are supplementing their knowledge of language with innate linguistic content. However, it is one thing to conclude that essential grammar is innate because there are not enough linguistic stimuli in the environment. It is another thing to conclude that grammar is innate because children would not be able to interpret whether sentences are grammatical or not from a set of degenerate noise. These two arguments are not equivalent.

I distinguish three separate arguments that have traditionally been called the Poverty of Stimulus Argument:

> (1) The *Deficiency of Stimulus* (DOS) argument indicates the absence of linguistic stimuli in the child's environment, or absence of crucial features from which children could infer linguistic principles.
>
> (2) The *Corruption of Stimulus* (COS) argument indicates that linguistic stimuli are too degraded or poor to be used to acquire consistent linguistic principles.
>
> (3) The *Variety of Stimulus* (VOS) argument highlights the fact that children converge on the same knowledge of universal linguistic principles despite variations in individual's exposure to linguistic stimuli.

There are several reasons why these arguments are not equivalent and cannot be reduced to one single argument. First, the arguments point to diverging aspects of the environment in which they are raised. Some linguists focus on cases where there is too little linguistic information in the environment; others point to cases where the environment contains too much (of the wrong kind) of noisy stimuli. Second, each argument uses a different set of empirical observations about how language is acquired: e.g., acquisition follows universal developmental stages and

it must be acquired during a critical period of development. Finally, each argument draws a unique conclusion about *what* is innate. Some arguments conclude that *linguistic content* (e.g., rules of syntax) is innate, others conclude that a *cognitive structure* is innate (a Language Acquisition Device), and some conclude that a *process or procedure* is innate.

The following sections explain each kind of argument. I then motivate why I think these distinctions are important. Separating the various POS arguments will strengthen the overall nativist strategy and help clarify ways to break the stalemate between linguistic nativists and empiricists that has continued for decades.

2. The Deficiency of Stimulus Argument

The Deficiency of Stimulus (DOS) argument focuses on the *impoverished quantity* of the linguistic stimuli in the environment. In summarizing the Poverty of Stimulus argument, Jenkins offers an argument that is more appropriately categorized as an example of the DOS argument:

> The point of the argument from poverty of the stimulus is that if it is the case that during their lifetimes neither the child nor its parents have ever been exposed to or ever uttered the crucial sentences needed to deduce some grammatical property (e.g., properties of structure-dependence, subjacency, distribution of empty categories, and the like), then no amount of intelligence or ingenuity on the child's part, nor corrections and tutoring on the parents' will yield these properties. (80)

Accordingly, if linguistic stimuli from the environment are missing, limited, not relevant, or not the right kind then knowledge of language cannot be acquired via a general learning mechanism. Thus, children possess a source of innate linguistic content in which to substitute this missing information. This line of reasoning is analogous to inferring that birdsong is innate in birds that are raised in isolation (or with very limited exposure to bird song) and yet are able to acquire their species-specific birdsong (Gould and Marler).

Empirical observations that support DOS include the following list:

> (1) *Paucity of stimuli*. Linguistic stimuli in the environment are impoverished and missing crucial elements of language from which the child could infer knowledge of language.
>
> (2) *No explicit training*: Children are not explicitly taught language, unlike other knowledge like math or penmanship that must be selectively, explicitly, and painstakingly taught.

(3) *Abundant knowledge*: Children's knowledge of language is richer than the linguistic stimuli to which they are exposed.

(4) *Productivity*: Children acquire an ability to produce or understand any of an essentially unbounded number of sentences. Language is creative and compositional.
(5) *Ease of acquisition*: Children acquire language relatively quickly and easily without explicit instruction.

The cases used to show *paucity of stimulus* and *abundant knowledge* are among the strongest evidence for linguistic nativism. For example, in the case of Nicaraguan Sign Language (Goldin-Meadow; Senghas and Coppola), deaf children are raised by caregivers who do not know sign language. When children have an opportunity to socialize with other deaf children, they spontaneously develop language with consistent structure, fully-formed syntactic rules, and rules of grammar universal to all languages. Kegl describes the case of Nicaraguan Sign Language as a language that emerges *de novo*. The environment is not only missing crucial aspects of language from which to infer principles of language, it is missing *any* linguistic input since children cannot hear spoken language. This is a striking case of "acquisition of a first language by children in the absence of even fragments of a full language or languages in their input" (Kegl 199).

Other sets of empirical observations in DOS arguments are the *Ease of Acquisition* and *No Explicit Training*. Clark and Lappin point out that children "learn their first languages without explicit instruction, and with no apparent effort" and only "hears a random subset of short sentences" (33). Babies start babbling almost immediately after birth, and by 2 years old and by the age of 5 or 6, children have expert knowledge of linguistic principles, competent in forming sentences with complex principles such as c-command, the binding conditions, subjacency, negative polarity items, that-trace deletion, etc. (MacWhinney 888). These general principles of languages are barely understood by linguists, and largely unknown by people who have never studied linguistics; from this, it follows that these complex rules could not be explicitly taught (Laurence and Margolis).

3. The Corruption of Stimulus Argument

I coin the term Corruption of Stimulus (COS) for the second form of argument. This argument focuses on the *quality* of the data, not the *quantity*. Whereas the DOS is a puzzle about how people know so *much* despite the environment that provides so *little*, COS is a puzzle about how people know so *little* despite the environment that provides so *much* data of the wrong sort. The environment does

not indicate what kind of stimuli are relevant; instead, the available stimuli are degraded and corrupt. So, children have innate means of distinguishing relevant stimuli.

The following lists several observations used to support Corruption of Stimulus arguments:

> (6) *Degeneracy*: Linguistic stimuli include ungrammatical sentences, stops, pauses, "ums" and a number of nonlinguistic noises.
>
> (7) *Selectivity*: Children are able to select from among an enormous number of seductive but incorrect alternatives to acquire just the right grammar. E.g., babies only a few days old can distinguish the phonemes of any language and are primed to attend and process linguistic sounds.
>
> (8) *Filtering*: Children are able to filter out degenerate linguistic stimuli that would lead to faulty grammar formation.

These observations focus on the degraded nature of linguistic stimuli and the ability of children to reliably acquire correct knowledge of linguistic principles from such stimuli. *Degenerate* stimuli include nonlinguistic noises such as dog barks, traffic noise, or coughs. Some linguistic expressions are irrelevant, such as interrupted fragments, false starts, lapses, slurring, slips of the tongue, pauses, run on sentences, foreign words and phrases, or incomplete sentences. These data cannot be used as inputs for grammar formation. Even variables such as speaking fast, slow, or loud pose problems for language acquisition as "none of these variations matters to language per se" (Laurence and Margolis 227).

The corruption of stimuli shows that children must *select* what features of noises in the environment are relevant for language formation. As Laurence and Margolis put it, "speech doesn't come pre-sorted into the categories of reliable data and noise" (230). Lightfoot (60) notes that if only 5% of the expressions in the environment are ungrammatical, the child would have problems developing grammar if using a general learning theory. Nativists argue, then, that the mind must at least contain innate concepts such as *phonemes*, *sentences*, *nouns*, *verbs*, or questions. It is the mind that carves indistinguishable noise at its linguistic joints.

The strongest cases of COS are those of Creolization (see Bickerton, Pinker). In early colonial America, children of slave communities were exposed to linguistic data from their parents, who spoke pidgin, a make-shift combination of words used to communicate with others who spoke different languages. Pidgins have "no consistent word order, no prefixes or suffixes, no tense or other temporal and logical markers, no structure more complex than a simple clause, and no consistent way to indicate who did what to whom" (Pinker 34). Yet children

exposed to pidgin create their own language (i.e., Creole) that contain linguistic universals, systematic structure, and syntactic properties such as auxiliaries, prepositions, case markers, and relative pronouns. Pinker infers that children cannot help but add these innate rules, thus "re-invent the language" (35).

Although scholars use the case of Creoles to support POS arguments, it is more appropriate as an example of COS. It is not that there is a *poverty* of information in the environment; children are exposed to pidgin. The problem is that pidgin is degraded and does not provide stimuli from which children can extract consistent rules of syntax.

The DOS and COS arguments draw upon a different set of empirical observations. In cases relevant to DOS such as Nicaraguan Sign Language, there is no information in the environment from which children can infer any rules of grammar. A theory that would explain these empirical observations may propose some set of innate linguistic *content* such as knowledge of syntactic rules that may be triggered by minimal cues. This would explain how children could compensate for the absence of input of that content. The COS argument, in contrast, assumes a rich set of stimuli in the environment, but which is degraded or unusable for the purpose of inferring principles of grammar. A more appropriate explanation for COS is that children implicitly *sort* through information in the linguistic stimuli, *ignore* faulty or ungrammatical data, or are *primed* to focus on only relevant linguistic stimuli. These solutions suggest innate *processes* or cognitive *mechanisms*, not innate *linguistic content*. So, the kinds of theories required to explain evidence used in COS arguments are of a very different sort than those to explain DOS arguments.

4. The Variety of Stimulus Argument

I coin the term Variety of Stimulus (VOS) arguments to refer to acquisition of the same set of linguistic knowledge across individuals despite variable linguistic stimuli between each individual's environment. Few scholars mention this particular argument, though there are a number of instances where the argument is alluded to and treated as a basic POS argument.

The VOS argument presents a puzzle about how individuals who are exposed to a wide variety of linguistic stimuli converge on the same knowledge of language. As an analogy, birds raised with exposure to other species of birdsong still acquire their own species-specific birdsong (Gould and Marler). Consider that any child may be exposed to tokens of any possible natural language such as English, Mandarin, pidgin, ASL, or a multi-linguistic environment. If children acquire language via general learning mechanisms then each individual would learn a different set of knowledge contingent on the environment. Yet, children acquire the same set of knowledge such as rules of syntax universal to all

languages. As Crain puts it, the problem is "to explain how different learners converge on similar mental representations on the basis of dissimilar environments" (365). The following several empirical observations used to support VOS arguments:

> (9) *Ubiquity*: All normally developed children acquire language. Every society develops language, even in isolation from other societies.
>
> (10) *Linguistic Universals*: Certain linguistic principles are universal to every natural language.
>
> (11) *Convergence*: Children acquire the same set of knowledge of language of linguistic universals.
>
> (12) *Fixed Ontogeny*: Language acquisition develops in ordered stages, and in relatively the same pace and order regardless of chronological age, with predictable errors.
>
> (13) *Insensitivity to Variation:* Children acquire knowledge of language despite wide variation in linguistic stimuli, and regardless of their education or upbringing.

In VOS arguments, it is noted that each individual only has access to a small and unique subset of linguistic stimuli, and yet acquire the same set of knowledge. The puzzle applies to children raised in similar environments as well. Ariew calls this an *insensitivity to variation* and explains:

> Despite exposure to significantly different samples of data, different children in the same linguistic community end up adopting essentially the same linguistic intuitions, and thus, it is plausible to suppose along with Chomsky that they innately possess essentially the same grammar. (8)

At the very least, people acquire the same linguistic knowledge in order to converse with others in their own language.

More strikingly, children acquire the same set of knowledge of *linguistic universals,* aspects of language that are universal to every fully developed language, such as the Verb-Object constraint, principles of c-command, and morphological and phonological rules (Baker; Chomsky; Pullum and Schultz; see, Evans and Levinson for discussion).

The VOS argument also draws on observations that children's internal constitution varies, such as differences in "IQ, responsiveness to environmental

cues, eagerness to learn, attention span, and memory" (Laurence and Margolis 231). Nevertheless, children undergo predictable stages of language acquisition (Brown and Hanlon; Radford), thus demonstrating a *fixed ontogeny of development*. These developmental stages are found in deaf children who learn sign language (Goldin-Meadow; Kegl, et al.; Klima and Bellugi), and blind children (Gleitman and Newport). Children also make predictable errors during those stages, and these errors are universal even among cases of Creoles (Bickerton). Given the variety of linguistic stimuli in each child's environment, an empiricist would predict more haphazard development.

Whereas the DOS and COS arguments emphasize the quality or quantity of environmental stimuli, the VOS arguments appeal to similar end-states over a wide range of different environments. Appropriate theories that may explain cases of VOS may propose processes of canalization, where the end-state is determined despite variable early stages of development.

5. Cutting the Gordian Knot

Scholars have traditionally conflated the DOS, COS, and VOS arguments into one heading. This has led to a divide between linguistic nativists and empiricists for decades. It has, so to speak, created a Gordian Knot, a predicament that is seemingly impossible to entangle.

One problem with conflating POS arguments is that scholars lump together a host of empirical observations about children's abilities and the environment. However, we can now see that theories that explain acquisition in one kind of environment (e.g., an *impoverished* environment noted in DOS cases) may be inadequate to explain acquisition in another (e.g., a *corrupt and degraded* environment noted in COS cases). And, it is not clear how either kind of theory would explain a convergence of the same universal knowledge despite a *variety* of environmental stimuli among individuals (VOS cases). By separating these arguments, scholars can avoid lumping together empirical observations and will aid in creating more effective theories of language acquisition.

Another problem is that when linguistic empiricists criticize some POS arguments, they conclude that nativism fails altogether, when in fact their arguments only target some aspect of the argument. For example, Prinz argues that humans need only be equipped with a domain general mechanism used to "notice patterns, recognize familiar objects and make decisions based on prior decisions" (Prinz, 168). He points to a rich source of indirect linguistic data from which children can infer rules of grammar. Given that the environment is not as impoverished as nativists claim, the POS arguments fail to support nativism.

However, once we separate the three arguments, we can see that empiricist arguments are better suited to target some POS arguments than others. Empiricist

theories may be better suited to explain acquisition in the face of corrupt or degraded stimuli. In other words, they address COS cases: Despite noisy and corrupt inputs, a general learning mechanism can pick up on relevant patterns when they are present. However, empiricist theories are less suited to explain DOS cases. After all, a general learning mechanism must receive some input (and input of the right kind) for pattern-recognition to work. Thus, separating the POS arguments can help nativists and empiricists target theories to explain various empirical data. Given that language acquisition involves innate cognitive mechanisms as well as features of learning, nativists and empiricists must work together. It is my hope that by clarifying the explanatory scope, empiricists and nativists can move forward in a debate that has stalled for decades.

WORKS CITED

Ariew, A. "Innateness is canalization: A defense of a developmental account of innateness." *Where Biology Meets Psychology: Philosophical Essays*, edited by V. Hardcastle, MIT Press, 1999. 117–139.

Baker, C. L. *The Logical Problem of Language Acquisition.* MIT Press, 1981.

Berwick, R. C., Chomsky, N., and M. Piattelli-Palmarini. "Poverty of the stimulus stands: Why recent challenges fail." *Rich Languages from Poor Inputs*, edited by M. Piattelli-Palmarini and R. C. Berwick, Oxford University Press, 2012. 19-42

Bickerton, D. *Roots of Language*. Karoma, 1981.

Chomsky, Noam. *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use*. Praeger, 1986.

Clark, A., and S. Lappin. *Linguistic Nativism and the Poverty of the stimulus.* Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Crain, S. "Language acquisition in the absence of experience." *Language acquisition: Core Readings,* edited by P. Bloom, MIT Press, 1994. 364–409.

Cowie, Fiona. *What's Within: Nativism Reconsidered.* Oxford U. Press, 1996.

Crago, M. "Communicative interaction and second language acquisition: An Inuit example." *Tesol Quarterly* 26.3 (1992): 487–505.

Elman, J., Bates, E. A., Johnson, M., Karmiloff-Smith, A., Parisi, D., and Plunkett, K. *Rethinking Innateness*. 4th ed., MIT Press, 1999.

Evans, N. and S. Levinson. "The myth of language universals: Language diversity and its importance for cognitive science." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 32 (2009): 429-448.

Gleitman, L. R. and E. L. Newport. "The invention of language by children: Environmental and biological influences on the acquisition of language." *An Invitation to Cognitive Science,* edited by Gleitman and Liberman, MIT Press,

1995. 1–24.
Goldin-Meadow, S. *The Resilience of Language: What Gesture Creation in Deaf Children Can Tell Us About How All Children Learn Language.* Psychology Press, 2003.
Gould, J. L. and P. Marler. "Learning by instinct." *Behavior and Evolution of Birds,* edited by W. Mock, 1999, W. H. Freeman and Co. 4–19.
Jenkins, L. *Biolinguistics: Exploring the Biology of Language.* Elsevier Science and Technology, 2000.
Karmiloff-Smith, A. "Nativism versus neuroconstructivism: Rethinking the study of developmental disorders." *Developmental Psychology* 45.1 (2009). 56–63.
Kegl, J. "Language emergence in a language-ready brain: Acquisition." *Variation and Universals in Biolinguistics*, edited by L. Jenkins, Elsevier, 2004. 195–236.
Klima, E., Bellugi, U. *The Signs of Language*. Harvard U. Press, 1979.
Laurence, S. and E. Margolis. "The poverty of the stimulus argument." *British Journal of Philosophy of Science* 52 (2001): 217-276.
Lightfoot, D. *The Language Lottery: Toward a Biology of Grammars*. MIT Press, 1982.
MacWhinney, B. "A multiple process solution to the logical problem of language acquisition." *Journal of Child Language* 31.4 (2004): 883–914.
Pinker, S. *The Language Instinct*. Morrow and Co., 1994.
Prinz, J. *Beyond Human Nature: How Culture and Experience Shape the Human Mind.* W. W. Norton and Co., 2012.
Pullum, G. K. and B. Scholz. "Empirical assessment of stimulus poverty arguments." *The Linguistic Review* 18 (2002): 9–50.
Radford, A. *Syntactic Theory and the Acquisition of English Syntax: The Nature of Early Child Grammars of English.* Basil Blackwell, 1990.
Seidenberg, M. S. Language acquisition and use: Learning and applying probabilistic constraints. *Science* 275.5306 (1997): 1599–1603.
Senghas, A. and M. Coppola. "Children creating language: How Nicaraguan Sign Language acquired a spatial grammar." *Psychological Science* 12.4 (2001): 323–328.

Modal Insurance: Probabilities, Risk, and Degrees of Luck

Emmie Malone
San Jose State University

I. INTRODUCTION

In his article, "Anti-Luck Epistemology and the Gettier-Problem," Duncan Pritchard sets out to defend his modal account of luck (Pritchard 93-111). In this view, lucky events are those which obtain in this world, but which fail to obtain in a wide-class of nearby possible worlds in which the initial conditions are set. Pritchard provides several reasons for why we should accept the modal view over its competitors, the control view and the probability view. Chiefly, he argues, the modal theory of luck 1) allows for degrees of luck, and 2) associates luck with risk. I will attempt to argue against this claim by suggesting that the probability theory of luck is better able than the modal theory to meet these challenges, and that it better handles exemplary cases of luck like those brought up by Pritchard.

Pritchard begins by outlining what is meant in advocating for the modal theory of luck. The brief sketch he provides, which is consistent with his account elsewhere, tells us that lucky events are those events which obtain in this world, but do not obtain in a wide-class of nearby possible worlds in which the same initial conditions are set (Pritchard 96). For instance, he says, our winning the lottery is a lucky event because in almost all nearby possible worlds we would fail to do so. In the same way, if we imagine a person who is almost struck by the bullet of a sniper bent on assassinating them (say it came within an inch of them), this person is surely lucky, as the bullet would probably have struck them in a wide-class of nearby possible worlds. In this way, Pritchard argues, the modal account

seems to capture our intuitions about luck in what we would take to be exemplary cases of it. Yet, what other theories are on offer to compete against the modal account?

Other than the modal theory of luck put forward by Pritchard, the two major competitors to this view are the control theory of luck and the probability theory of luck. In the first view, which Pritchard spends little time on in his discussion, an event is lucky if it is significant for an individual and outside of their control. In this way, winning the lottery can be said to be lucky as the winner had no control over the outcome, and it would certainly be significant for most. To further aid the control theory, it seems intuitive enough to suggest that, were the winner to have control over the outcome of the lottery, it would diminish our willingness to attribute luck to their winning it. This so far seems reasonable. On the other hand, in its simple form, the control theory of luck may lead us to accept more than a few somewhat absurd conclusions. For instance, as Steven Hales has pointed out, it is surely significant for us that the gravitational constant is what it is, and the setting of the gravitational constant was outside of our control if anything was, but does this lead us to believe that we are lucky that the gravitational constant is what it is (Hales 494)? Hales provides a wide range of other equally strange conclusions we might be forced to accept under the control view, but they will not be mentioned here.

The final theory of luck we will, and Pritchard does, discuss is the probability theory. In this account, an event is lucky if it is significant, and improbable. Thus, if an event has a less than fifty percent chance of obtaining, and is significant for someone, it is lucky for that person. It is clear how this account is able to accommodate the lottery example, as winning the lottery is an exemplary case of an unlikely, or improbable, event. Better still, if the winner of the lottery were to have controlled the outcome, this would be visible in the probability of their winning it, and thus the probability theory is also able to track our failure to call their winning the lottery in that case a lucky event. What, then, is the problem with the probability theory in Pritchard's view?

II. Significance & Degrees of Luck

The first reason Pritchard gives us to discount the probability theory of luck is that while it seems to capture the luck operative in the lottery case, it produces the wrong results when we fail to win the lottery. He writes: "notice… that for most lotteries it's *both* the case that one's winning is a matter of luck *and* that one's losing is also a matter of luck (good luck in the first case, bad luck in the second). And yet in the latter case the event in question is a high probability event" (Pritchard, "Anti-Luck Epistemology" 97). What can be said in defense of the probability theory? While it may be likely for a person to lose the lottery, it is

ultimately a matter of chance. In this way, probability theorists tend to distinguish luck (as a type of chancy event) from mere chance (Coffman 385-398). If these events, which have a greater than fifty percent chance of obtaining and are significant to us, are merely chancy, what accounts for Pritchard's intuition that losing the lottery is a case of bad luck?

In the probability account, the significance of an event obtaining plays an important role in addition to its probability. This interaction, between significance and probability, is an interesting one, and it is one that may be responsible for throwing off our intuitions. For instance, if we were to imagine that the aforementioned lottery presented participants with a one in a million chance of winning $500,000,000 and we grant, as Pritchard asks us to, that losing is a case of bad luck, would we be willing to further grant that losing a lottery offering the same amount of money with a one in one thousand chance of winning is worse luck? It seems like the answer would have to be "yes." Of course, in this example we have increased the probability of the lucky event occurring, which should in turn be reflected in the breadth of the class of nearby possible worlds in which we won. In this way, changes in probability alone can't arbitrate competing intuitions. On the other hand, imagine that we lost a lottery with a one in one million chance at winning, but the prize was only one dollar. Surely, if we are granting that losing a lottery is a case of luck, this case is towards the better end of bad luck. At the same time, neither the modality nor the probability of the event obtaining has been altered.

While it may be enough to say that the significance condition in the probability theory of luck is able to explain this shift, whereas the modal theory is not, there may be something deeper at play. Our attributions of probability are notoriously prone to bias. In one study, similar to our discussion of lotteries, participants were asked at what dollar amount they would forgo a chance at winning a large monetary prize (Rottenstreich and Hsee 185-190). Researchers found that when the prize was affect-rich ($500 towards a summertime European vacation as opposed to towards their tuition), participants overestimated the odds of an unlikely win and underestimated the odds of a likely loss. While the probability theory of luck allows for significance to alter the relative luck attributable to an event, significance can also sneak in the backdoor of our estimates of probability. In this way, we might have further reason to think that attributions of luck in the case of likely events are tracking poor estimates of probability that go along with high significance rather than modal fragility. Put more plainly, the lottery loser who attributes their loss to bad luck is likely overestimating the likelihood of their odds of winning it in the first place.

In line with this defense of the modal account is a problem brought up by Steven Hales. In order to tease out where modality and probability come apart, he offers us the example of near miss in Russian roulette (Hales 492). Given that only

one chamber of a six-shot revolver has a round in it, the odds of winning are five in six (a likely outcome), but if we imagine that the chambered round is the one adjacent to the one we land on, then we might reasonably feel lucky for having missed it. In this way, while probability theory should not declare this victory lucky, because it is modally fragile, the modal theory should. To make the import of this case more clear, Hales asks us to consider a maximally large revolver, with a googolplex of chambers and still only one bullet (Hales 492). In this case, the odds of landing on the chambered round are incredibly low, yet, if we landed on the chamber next to the bullet, our victory was still modally fragile.

The first thing that we ought to mention when discussing this case is that it seems to be declaring our winning lucky on the basis of our intuitions about a subclass of ways in which that event might obtain (a near miss). For instance, the probability of our winning in a game involving a six-shot revolver and only one round is 5:6 (likely) and, for that reason, our winning would not be considered a case of luck according to the probability theory. However, while we might reasonably think ourselves lucky if the bullet was contained in the chamber adjacent to the one chosen, we seem to have altered the probabilities. The probability of a near miss in this case is 2:6 (it could appear on either side of the chosen chamber). Thus, in the case of a near-miss, the probability theory accommodates the intuition that the event is lucky. This distinction is amplified, not worsened, in the case of the maximally large revolver. A win in a game involving a revolver with a googolplex of chambers and only one round can be assigned the odds of (10^100)-1:10^100 (an incredibly likely event), but a near miss might be a paradigmatic case of luck according to the probability view because the odds of that event obtaining are a staggering 2:10^100. It seems that it would be a mistake to employ our intuitions about near-misses in a discussion about whether we ought to consider wins lucky.

A further response to this problem, should we still feel that a win is a lucky event, is to say that our willingness to attribute luck in this case is another instance of simply misattributing what is actually a combination of immense significance and mere chance. However, given that the odds are so dramatically in favor of winning, it seems unlikely that the intuition motivating a luck attribution is reducible to extremely poor, and motivated, estimations of probability. Rather, it might be that in the folk use of the term "luck," we often utilize the word in instances of mere significance. For example, would we still be inclined to attribute luck in this case if the googol chambered revolver merely poked the loser rather than fatally wounding them? While the situation is still modally fragile, without the significance condition that is built into the probability theory, modal attributions of luck seem to not be able to get off of the ground. It may be that a revised theory of modal luck, which includes a similar significance condition, could better explain the difference at play here, but modifying Pritchard's theory

of luck could come at great consequence to his larger project in epistemology. Rather, as Hales points out, it may be more likely that our attributions of luck do not conform to a singular and clear concept. Nevertheless, given that only the probability theory is capable, in its current form, of explaining the difference between a poke and a mortal accident in Russian roulette, we have reason to think that, insofar as there might be some clear and singular concept of luck, probability theory stands the better chance of illuminating it.

It is also important to note that, as we have seen in tinkering with the cases in question, luck seems to be capable of coming in degrees. Pritchard takes this to be an argument in favor of the modal theory, as it is quite good at explaining why a near miss is less lucky than an even nearer one, but is it alone in doing so? As we have seen already, probability offers us an exceptionally good way of quantifying degrees of luck, as a one-in-a-million lottery win is much luckier than a one-in-a-thousand. Further, because probability and significance can both come in degrees, probability theory is better able to explain a wider range of variation in degrees of luck. Even the troubled control theory could, in principle, offer us degrees of control which would in turn influence degrees of luck (should a proper theory of control be worked out). In this way, an account of luck should be able to accommodate degrees of luck, but the modal theory's ability to do this is not unique.

III. Luck & Risk

The final argument offered in support of the modal theory of luck is that it excels as a theory insofar as it attests to the deep relationship between luck and risk. To say that the target of an assassination is luckier having missed the bullet by an inch than having missed it by a yard is to say that, in the first case, they were at greater risk than in the second. Risky events, just like lucky events, are those that are modally fragile. Pritchard takes this connection to be relatively deep, and he argues that "our judgements about risk are thus tracking the degree of luck in play" (Pritchard, "Anti-Luck Epistemology" 98). Yet, is this deep connection between luck and risk really evidence in favor of the modal theory?

Estimations of risk in the world are, perhaps, most commonly associated with insurance. People take out insurance to protect themselves in proportion to their perceived level of risk, and insurers set insurance rates according to their perceived level of exposure. If our judgements about risk are tracking the degree of luck involved in an event's obtaining, and luck is a measurement of modal fragility, we ought to expect insurance to be calculated in terms of modality. Rather than this, we tend to find that insurance is, itself, deeply connected to calculations and estimations of probability. On the other hand, it could be argued that these probability estimates are an attempt to quantify an event's modal fragility. How,

then, do we arbitrate the case of insurance?

Imagine that we reached out to an insurance company to protect us in the event that a few unlikely instances obtained. Luckily for us (or for the company), this insurance firm employs infallible actuaries who always perfectly calculate the probability of given outcomes in order to determine payment rates. Suppose that we ask the company to insure us against a more modally close event and a more modally distal event; in the first case we seek protection from the damages associated with being struck by lightning, and in the latter, we want to be insured in the event that we are bitten by two giraffes simultaneously while snow-skiing. Assume, also, that we expect to be paid out the same amount of money if either event should obtain. The company's actuaries return, having sufficiently reviewed all relevant background information, and tell us that upon examining your lifestyle the probability of both events obtaining is exactly the same (one in seven hundred thousand). Yet, because the lightning strike was ruled to be more modally close, as our intuitions might suggest, the premiums for that plan will be one hundred dollars a month more than those associated with the giraffe attack. In Pritchard's account this discrepancy is reasonable, but what does it mean for determinations of risk if an event is more modally close than another, but being so does not render it any more likely to occur?

This example seems to map on to another brought up by Pritchard. In an effort to tease apart modality and probability Pritchard provides a case of luck involving risk. In this case, he argues that even if the odds of winning the lottery are calculated as the same as his winning gold in the next Olympic 100-meter sprint, one would be foolish to place a bet on the latter event obtaining over the former. This is because, in his account, much more about the world would have to change for the latter event to obtain than the former. Yet, if these probabilities are accurate, I would argue that it seems that one would be more foolish to think that one one-in-a-million bet is any riskier than another.

To better understand how this example might be misleading, consider how the odds of these events might be calculated. If we start from the assumption that the odds are, indeed, correct, and the Olympic win is justifiably set at a given probability, what accounts for the disproportionately low odds of winning the lottery? Pritchard tells us that all that would need to change about our world in order for him to win the lottery is that "a few coloured balls need to fall in a slightly different configuration" (Pritchard, "Anti-Luck Epistemology" 97). Yet, if the odds are truly equivalent between this and the Olympic win, perhaps this is not the end of the story. Given that the world, and the lottery machine, is sufficiently deterministic, we might find that the only way to arrive at a lottery-winning configuration of colored balls is to have the machine draw 14.98 watts at the precise moment rather than the 15 it consistently draws, but what is necessary for this to occur? Perhaps a mouse could chew ever-so-slightly at the cord running to

the machine so as to ensure only and exactly .02 watts are lost at just the right time, but to bring the closest nearby mouse into our world we would need to have the janitor not set a trap the night before. Unfortunately for us, the nearest world in which the janitor fails to set the trap is one in which he is forced in a witness-protection program after witnessing the attempted assassination from our earlier thought experiment. In this way, it seems that if the probability being calculated is, indeed, accurate, our willingness to attribute more modal fragility in the case of the lottery is a result of our insufficiently fleshing out exactly what changes to our world would be necessary in order to truly produce one-in-a-million odds.

On the other hand, it might be the case that Pritchard is right, and we are apt to take the Olympic bet over the lottery win, but surely in this case we have simply incorrectly calculated the odds. Probability simply seems to be an attempt at quantifying the breadth and nature of the class of nearby possible worlds. It is for this reason that we expect changes in lottery odds to go hand-in-hand with the amount of nearby possible worlds in which a win is obtained, and it is for this reason that Pritchard seems right that an amateur gold medal win in the Olympic 100-meter sprint is less likely than a mere lottery win. This likelihood would, in a truly infallible account of the relevant probabilities, result in two different calculations. Thus, we should grant, as Pritchard does, that in gambling we are right to be inclined to accept the more modally close event over the modally distal one. At the same time, truly divergent modalities should be reflected in the relevant probabilities, which in turn should allow the probability theory to explain the difference. Without the assurance of infallible actuaries, Pritchard is right to point out that the lottery bet seems like a better one than the Olympic bet, but this is simply to say that we have good reason to suspect that the equivalent probabilities are inaccurate. In this way, our actual (and fallible) insurance actuaries are performing a kind of modal calculation, by looking at the rate of events occurring in other cases where the initial conditions are sufficiently similar, but this should not motivate us to think that probability is a worse guide in estimating risk. Rather, calculations of probability present us with a useful way of quantifying how modally fragile an event actually is, rather than relying merely on our intuitions about modal closeness.

Here we have an error-theory which explains how we might be misled into thinking one genuine one-in-a-million bet is better than another, and an explanation which allows probability theory to capture what Pritchard thinks only the modal theory can. Further, if we imagine the case of the modal insurance company, or imagine asking the same company to insure us against our betting on the Olympic win or lottery win respectively, we can see that the probability theory of luck is sufficient to capture the deep association between luck and risk (even when this comes down to a matter of degree).

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, Duncan Pritchard is right in arguing that the modal theory of luck is strong to the extent that it associates luck with risk and allows for degrees of luck, but it is not alone in doing so. Both the control theory and the probability theory are able to accommodate degrees of luck (with probability theory being better able to quantify them), and probability theory is, perhaps, better equipped to calculate risk in the real world than any competing theory. Finally, in the instances where modality and probability seem to come apart, and instances where merely chancy events seem to result in luck, we have found error theories which explain how and why our intuitions can be led astray. In the case of supposed likely lucky events, we may, in fact, be tracking poor estimates of probability motivated by our hopes of significant and affect-rich events obtaining. In the case of equally likely modally divergent events obtaining, we may simply be wrong about the probabilities of events, or under-describing the changes to our own world necessary in order for those events to occur. On this basis, the probability theory of luck seems to be quite capable of achieving any of the successes attributed to the modal theory, and in many instances, seems to better capture our judgments about exemplary cases.

Works Cited

Coffman, E.J. "Thinking about Luck." *Synthese* 158.3 (2007): 385–398.

Hales, Steven D. "Why Every Theory of Luck is Wrong." *Nous* 50.3 (2016): 490–508.

Pritchard, Duncan. "Anti-Luck Epistemology and the Gettier-Problem." *Philosophical Studies* vol. 172 no. 1 (2015): 93–111.

———. "The Modal Account of Luck." *Metaphilosophy* 45 4–5 (2014): 594–619.

Rottenstreich, Yuval, and Christopher K. Hsee. "Money, Kisses, and Electric Shocks: On the Affective Psychology of Risk." *Psychological Science* 12.3 (2001): 185–190.

Compossibility and the Metaphysics of Expression

Jacob Mills
Houston City College

COMPOSSIBILITY HOW?

For Leibniz, two or more CIC (Complete Individual Concepts) are composssible if it is possible for them to be instantiated in the same possible world. The issue of how to determine if two CIC are compossible or incompossible is a debated topic. If the only predicates contained in a CIC are monadic ones and this means that they have the form Fx, then it becomes unclear how any two CIC could ever be inconsistent or incompossible.[1] Mates thinks that the solution to the compossibility problem is somehow connected with the doctrine of universal expression, what he calls the mirroring principle. He says,

> the "mirroring" principle clearly implies that concepts belonging to different possible worlds must be incompossible. It may be illustrated with Adam and Eve. Adam would not have been the same person if he had not been the husband of Eve, nor would Eve have been the same person if she had not been the wife of Adam; thus neither Adam nor Eve could have existed without the other. (76-7)

I agree with Mates that universal expression is essential to this problem, but Mates does not make clear exactly how CIC are incompossible. We know that concepts belonging to different worlds are incompossible. What we want to know is how we know whether or not they are incompossible without appeal to their being in

different possible worlds!

Monadic Perceptual Predicates

In order to try to solve the compossibility problem, I need to clarify the kinds of properties that are had by Leibnizian substances. The only true things that exist, the only true substances which correspond to CIC, for Leibniz are monads—mind-like entities that we conceive of on the basis of our own mental experience.[2] Dependent on the existence of monads are their modifications or properties, what Leibniz calls perceptions and appetites. Perceptions are to be understood broadly as any type of mental state, ranging from the cognitive to the sensory and affective.[3] Appetitions are tendencies or strivings of a substance that move mental life along from one perceptual state to another. The way appetites move from perception to perception is a manifestation of, and governed by, what Leibniz calls the individual law of the series. This individual law of the series constitutes the substancehood of a monad, and is sometimes referred to as the substantial form or the substance's primitive force (Adams 1994, 77-81).

So the modifications or properties of substances are not items like "being red" or "being six feet tall," but things like "perceiving that there is an apple on the table" or "thinking about birds." In general, we may schematize the form of monadic properties as follows:

> Substance s perceives p-wise that ϕ.

Perceiving p-wise that ϕ is the general form of a property of Leibnizian substances. Examples might include: substance s perceives sensation-wise that there is an apple on the table, or substance s perceives cognitive-wise that 1+1=2. I will refer to these as "monadic *perceptual* predicates" to avoid confusion with one-place predicates in general.

The Law of the General Order and Expression

The notion of expression is nicely summarized in a work from 1676:

> For it is sufficient to the expression of one thing in another, when there is a certain constant law of relations, by which each thing in the one can be assigned to each answering thing in the other. (Grua 15)

According to a version of Kulstad's formalism, the expression relation is analyzed as:

> x expresses y, in virtue of sets w and z, and according to relation R if and only if w and z are sets associated with x and y respectively, and R(x) is a function mapping w into z. (75)

Adopting Kulstad's formalism, the doctrine of universal expression is that every perceptual state of a substance expresses every other perceptual state of every other substance, in virtue of sets that consist of the perceptual contents of those respective states and according to a certain mapping described by the law of the general order γ.

The doctrine of universal expression is the key to solving the problem of compossibility. The question is: can we map truths about monadic perceptual predicates to truths of the form, "Substance s is part of a world with law of the general order γ," via expression?[4] I shall try to show that we can use universal expression to recover this content from perceptions.

The first thing to note is that this content should be recoverable. In *On Freedom*, Leibniz flatly asserts that the complete notions of substances "contain the whole series of things in which they will be contained" (AG 97). Thus there is a kind of mutual containment between substance and world. Each CIC contains information about the law of the general order of its world, and that law of the general order contains information about each law of the individual series of each substance existing in that world.[5]

Force and Perfection

In order to answer the metaphysical question of how CIC expresses the law of the general order, I need to take a detour through Leibniz's physics. It is commonly held that Leibniz was a relativist about motion; that he believed motion was not an absolute quantity, but could be assigned to any body one pleased. What Leibniz actually held was that *if* there were no forces acting in the world, then motion would be purely relative. Since there are forces acting in the world, these forces determine a unique reference frame by which to assign absolute values to the motion of bodies. Another way of putting this is that Leibniz believed a purely kinematic understanding of motion, in terms of the mere position of bodies, is relative, while a dynamic understanding of motion, in terms of forces or powers in bodies to move, is absolute. This position is stated in DM 18:

> For if we consider only what motion contains precisely and formally, that is, change of place, motion is not something entirely real, and when several bodies change position among themselves, it is not possible to determine, merely from a consideration of these changes, to which body we should attribute motion or rest…

> But the force or proximate cause of these changes is something more real, and there is sufficient basis to attribute it to one body more than to another. Also, it is only in this way that we can know to which body the motion belongs. (AG 51)[6]

There is a hiccup here. If motion, as measured by velocity, is relative, then surely force, as measured by mv^2, will be as well.[7] We need to figure out what is the "sufficient basis" that allows us to determine the true reference frame.[8] Luckily, Leibniz tells us how to do that.

In discussing the two rival hypotheses of planetary motion, the Copernican and the Ptolemaic, Leibniz says in *On Copernicanism and the Relativity of Motion* (1689):

> But since, in explaining the theory of the planets, the Copernican hypothesis wonderfully illuminates the soul, and beautifully displays the harmony of things at the same time as it shows the wisdom of the creator, and since other hypothesis are burdened with innumerable perplexities and confuse everything in astonishing ways, we must say that, just as the Ptolemaic account is the truest one in spherical astronomy, on the other hand the Copernican account is the truest theory, that is, the most intelligible theory and the only one capable of an explanation sufficient for a person of sound reason. (AG 92)

Here Leibniz says that one should use the Ptolemaic system when attempting to calculate the positions of objects in the sky relative to our position on earth, while one should use the Copernican system when one is attempting to give an account of actual planetary motion. The reason for using the Copernican rather than the Ptolemaic system is that the former is more intelligible and simpler than the latter; it is "the only one capable of an explanation sufficient for a person of sound reason." Previously, in the same work, Leibniz had declared that, "…one should choose the more intelligible hypothesis, and that the truth of a hypothesis is nothing but its intelligibility" (AG 91).

So out of the competing hypotheses for reference frames that distribute forces among bodies, and hence the absolute motions of those bodies, we ought to choose the simplest and most intelligible hypothesis, that is, we ought to choose the reference frame that distributes forces in the most intelligent and simple way.[9] There is one more important element to add to the story in order for us to understand how CIC express the law of the general order.

In DM 15, Leibniz is at pains to rescue our folk-causal talk from oblivion, given the causal isolation and independence of substances; in his own words he attempts to "reconcile the language of metaphysics with practice" (AG 48).[10]

Leibniz proposes the following:

> when a change takes place by which several substances are affected (in fact every change affects them all), I believe one may say that the substance which immediately passes to a greater degree of perfection or to a more perfect expression exercises its power and acts, and the substance which passes to a lesser degree shows its weakness and is acted upon. (AG 48)

Leibniz believes that we can retain our ordinary folk-causal talk. When we ordinarily say that one substance is the cause of an effect in another, metaphysically speaking, the substance designated as the cause is passing from a less perfect to a more perfect state, while the substance affected is passing from a more perfect to a less perfect state.[11]

EXPRESSING THE LAW OF THE GENERAL ORDER

Let us put these threads together. All monads will unconsciously perceive the motions of its universe from a particular reference frame. This configuration of motions from a particular reference frame will express the true configuration of motions associated with the real reference frame. The real reference frame will be the simplest hypothesis that accounts for the motions in the world, rendering them the most intelligible. The real reference frame will determine the correct distribution of phenomenal force, whose total quantity, mv^2, will be conserved across changes in motion. Not only will it determine the real motions of phenomenal bodies by determining the correct distribution of force, it will also determine a correct quasi-causal framework for phenomena. For example, if in the real reference frame, one body collides with another, changing the latter's motion in the process, we can say that the first body is the quasi-cause and the second body's motion the quasi-effect. Of course, no two monads ever truly causally interact. Therefore, what this quasi-causal structure reveals is that the monads in the first body, as quasi-causes, are, in their changing perceptions, moving to more perfect representations of the world, while those in the second, as quasi-effects, are moving to less perfect representations. Thus given the correct quasi-causal distribution among phenomenal bodies, we can also determine the distribution of changes in the degree of perfection of monads' perceptions. It is this expression of the way in which monads are changing their perceptions, from less to more and more to less perfect ones, that allows us to say that monads express the law of the general order.

We have:

1) Substance s perceives unconsciously the distribution of phenomenal motions δ
2) Distribution of phenomenal motions δ expresses the real distribution of phenomenal forces ρ according to simplicity mapping σ[12]
3) Real distribution of phenomenal forces ρ expresses distribution of perfection changes in monads π according to quasi-causal mapping χ

so,

4) Substance s expresses the distribution of perfection changes in monads π by perceiving unconsciously the distribution of phenomenal motions δ.[13]

A description of these perfection changes allows us to recover the law of the general order. Recall that the law of the general order contains information about every law of the individual series that exists at its world, that is, it contains information about all of the perceptual states that a monad at its world ever has had and ever will have. In addition to this, it also contains information about the harmony of that world, that is, about what perceptions express what other perceptions. A description of the distribution of perfection changes in substances' perceptions would contain information about those substances' perceptions themselves in much the same way that the equation for the differential of a curve contains information about the curve itself. Thus in the same way that one can recover information from the equation $y=2x$ about the equation $y=x^2$, one can retrieve information about the perceptions of other monads at a world from a description of their changing degrees of perfection. In this way, we have shown how one very important part of the law of the general order is expressed in a substance's perceptions.

We can now answer the question of compossibility. Two monads will be compossible iff their unconscious perception of the distribution of relative motion expresses the same distribution of perfection changes in substances. In this way, truths about compossibility and incompossibility will be grounded in the monadic perceptual predicates of CIC.[14] We can generate a unique space, each point of which is associated with a perfection value and evolves dynamically—a kind of world signature. Any other monad that expresses this same evolution belongs to one and the same world, that is, they express the same law of the general order.

ABBREVIATIONS

AG *Philosophical Essays*. Trans. and ed. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.

Grua *Textes Inédits*. Ed. by Gaston Grua. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948.

NOTES

1. Formally speaking it becomes impossible to generate a contradiction between two different atomic propositions of the form Fx and not-Fy for two different x and y. The general point is that we appear to need relations in order to get incompossibility results. Thus if Rxy is contained in x and not-Rxy is contained in y for some x and y, then x and y are incompossible. It should be noted that Ishiguro holds that CIC contain predicates of the form Rxa. She considers these to be monadic predicates that ascribe relational properties to their corresponding subjects (99-100).
2. I bracket concerns here about the status of corporeal substances in Leibniz and the rich debate it has produced. In the following I assume a monadological picture where monads phenomenal expressions or correlates are corporeal substances.
3. It is not clear how the concept of a mental state, much less a perception, is applicable to the modifications of what Leibniz calls, bare monads. However, even these bare monads will be embodied, and the resulting phenomenal "protozoa" will be involved in a phenomenal world that they will need to minimally represent in some way in order to interact with. This falls directly out of Leibniz's pan-organicism—that there are animals "all the way down."
4. Much of the following comes out of numerous fruitful discussions with Gregory Brown, to whom I owe much thanks. Any missteps are my own.
5. Besides the passage quoted above from *On Freedom* about the containment of the law of the general order in CIC, there is the following from DM 16:

> And to the extent that every person or substance is like a small world expressing the large world, we can say equally that the extraordinary action of God on this substance does not fail to be miraculous, despite the fact that it is included in the general order of the universe insofar as it is *expressed* by the essence of the individual notion of this substance. (AG 49, my emphasis)

6. DM refers to "Discourse on Metaphysics." All quotes are from AG.
7. Roberts takes this to be a real problem and claims that force cannot be empirically determined (see 562-63, 567-68). I also note here that Leibniz's measure of force is not our Newtonian F=ma but rather what we would call kinetic energy.
8. The solution to this problem that I endorse here was first brought to my attention by Puryear. For a much better treatment of the complex terrain here, see Roberts and Puryear. For a much better defense of this solution, see Puryear.
9. Again, this solution was first put forward by Puryear.
10. I say folk-causal talk, but I want to emphasize that Leibniz's "reconciliation" is

Corporate Action and Indexical Incoherence

Robert B. Tierney
University of Houston

COMPOSSIBILITY HOW?

For Leibniz, two or more CIC (Complete Individual Concepts) are composssible if it is possible for them to be instantiated in the same possible world. The issue of how to determine if two CIC are compossible or incompossible is a debated topic. If the only predicates contained in a CIC are monadic ones and this means that they have the form Fx, then it becomes unclear how any two CIC could ever be inconsistent or incompossible.[1] Mates thinks that the solution to the compossibility problem is somehow connected with the doctrine of universal expression, what he calls the mirroring principle. He says,

> the "mirroring" principle clearly implies that concepts belonging to different possible worlds must be incompossible. It may be illustrated with Adam and Eve. Adam would not have been the same person if he had not been the husband of Eve, nor would Eve have been the same person if she had not been the wife of Adam; thus neither Adam nor Eve could have existed without the other. (76-7)

I agree with Mates that universal expression is essential to this problem, but Mates does not make clear exactly how CIC are incompossible. We know that concepts belonging to different worlds are incompossible. What we want to know is how we know whether or not they are incompossible without appeal to their being in

different possible worlds!

Monadic Perceptual Predicates

In order to try to solve the compossibility problem, I need to clarify the kinds of properties that are had by Leibnizian substances. The only true things that exist, the only true substances which correspond to CIC, for Leibniz are monads—mind-like entities that we conceive of on the basis of our own mental experience.[2] Dependent on the existence of monads are their modifications or properties, what Leibniz calls perceptions and appetites. Perceptions are to be understood broadly as any type of mental state, ranging from the cognitive to the sensory and affective.[3] Appetitions are tendencies or strivings of a substance that move mental life along from one perceptual state to another. The way appetites move from perception to perception is a manifestation of, and governed by, what Leibniz calls the individual law of the series. This individual law of the series constitutes the substancehood of a monad, and is sometimes referred to as the substantial form or the substance's primitive force (Adams 1994, 77-81).

So the modifications or properties of substances are not items like "being red" or "being six feet tall," but things like "perceiving that there is an apple on the table" or "thinking about birds." In general, we may schematize the form of monadic properties as follows:

> Substance s perceives p-wise that ϕ.

Perceiving p-wise that ϕ is the general form of a property of Leibnizian substances. Examples might include: substance s perceives sensation-wise that there is an apple on the table, or substance s perceives cognitive-wise that 1+1=2. I will refer to these as "monadic *perceptual* predicates" to avoid confusion with one-place predicates in general.

The Law of the General Order and Expression

The notion of expression is nicely summarized in a work from 1676:

> For it is sufficient to the expression of one thing in another, when there is a certain constant law of relations, by which each thing in the one can be assigned to each answering thing in the other. (Grua 15)

According to a version of Kulstad's formalism, the expression relation is analyzed as:

> x expresses y, in virtue of sets w and z, and according to relation R if and only if w and z are sets associated with x and y respectively, and R(x) is a function mapping w into z. (75)

Adopting Kulstad's formalism, the doctrine of universal expression is that every perceptual state of a substance expresses every other perceptual state of every other substance, in virtue of sets that consist of the perceptual contents of those respective states and according to a certain mapping described by the law of the general order γ.

The doctrine of universal expression is the key to solving the problem of compossibility. The question is: can we map truths about monadic perceptual predicates to truths of the form, "Substance s is part of a world with law of the general order γ," via expression?[4] I shall try to show that we can use universal expression to recover this content from perceptions.

The first thing to note is that this content should be recoverable. In *On Freedom*, Leibniz flatly asserts that the complete notions of substances "contain the whole series of things in which they will be contained" (AG 97). Thus there is a kind of mutual containment between substance and world. Each CIC contains information about the law of the general order of its world, and that law of the general order contains information about each law of the individual series of each substance existing in that world.[5]

Force and Perfection

In order to answer the metaphysical question of how CIC expresses the law of the general order, I need to take a detour through Leibniz's physics. It is commonly held that Leibniz was a relativist about motion; that he believed motion was not an absolute quantity, but could be assigned to any body one pleased. What Leibniz actually held was that *if* there were no forces acting in the world, then motion would be purely relative. Since there are forces acting in the world, these forces determine a unique reference frame by which to assign absolute values to the motion of bodies. Another way of putting this is that Leibniz believed a purely kinematic understanding of motion, in terms of the mere position of bodies, is relative, while a dynamic understanding of motion, in terms of forces or powers in bodies to move, is absolute. This position is stated in DM 18:

> For if we consider only what motion contains precisely and formally, that is, change of place, motion is not something entirely real, and when several bodies change position among themselves, it is not possible to determine, merely from a consideration of these changes, to which body we should attribute motion or rest…

> But the force or proximate cause of these changes is something more real, and there is sufficient basis to attribute it to one body more than to another. Also, it is only in this way that we can know to which body the motion belongs. (AG 51)[6]

There is a hiccup here. If motion, as measured by velocity, is relative, then surely force, as measured by mv^2, will be as well.[7] We need to figure out what is the "sufficient basis" that allows us to determine the true reference frame.[8] Luckily, Leibniz tells us how to do that.

In discussing the two rival hypotheses of planetary motion, the Copernican and the Ptolemaic, Leibniz says in *On Copernicanism and the Relativity of Motion* (1689):

> But since, in explaining the theory of the planets, the Copernican hypothesis wonderfully illuminates the soul, and beautifully displays the harmony of things at the same time as it shows the wisdom of the creator, and since other hypothesis are burdened with innumerable perplexities and confuse everything in astonishing ways, we must say that, just as the Ptolemaic account is the truest one in spherical astronomy, on the other hand the Copernican account is the truest theory, that is, the most intelligible theory and the only one capable of an explanation sufficient for a person of sound reason. (AG 92)

Here Leibniz says that one should use the Ptolemaic system when attempting to calculate the positions of objects in the sky relative to our position on earth, while one should use the Copernican system when one is attempting to give an account of actual planetary motion. The reason for using the Copernican rather than the Ptolemaic system is that the former is more intelligible and simpler than the latter; it is "the only one capable of an explanation sufficient for a person of sound reason." Previously, in the same work, Leibniz had declared that, "…one should choose the more intelligible hypothesis, and that the truth of a hypothesis is nothing but its intelligibility" (AG 91).

So out of the competing hypotheses for reference frames that distribute forces among bodies, and hence the absolute motions of those bodies, we ought to choose the simplest and most intelligible hypothesis, that is, we ought to choose the reference frame that distributes forces in the most intelligent and simple way.[9] There is one more important element to add to the story in order for us to understand how CIC express the law of the general order.

In DM 15, Leibniz is at pains to rescue our folk-causal talk from oblivion, given the causal isolation and independence of substances; in his own words he attempts to "reconcile the language of metaphysics with practice" (AG 48).[10]

Leibniz proposes the following:

> when a change takes place by which several substances are affected (in fact every change affects them all), I believe one may say that the substance which immediately passes to a greater degree of perfection or to a more perfect expression exercises its power and acts, and the substance which passes to a lesser degree shows its weakness and is acted upon. (AG 48)

Leibniz believes that we can retain our ordinary folk-causal talk. When we ordinarily say that one substance is the cause of an effect in another, metaphysically speaking, the substance designated as the cause is passing from a less perfect to a more perfect state, while the substance affected is passing from a more perfect to a less perfect state.[11]

EXPRESSING THE LAW OF THE GENERAL ORDER

Let us put these threads together. All monads will unconsciously perceive the motions of its universe from a particular reference frame. This configuration of motions from a particular reference frame will express the true configuration of motions associated with the real reference frame. The real reference frame will be the simplest hypothesis that accounts for the motions in the world, rendering them the most intelligible. The real reference frame will determine the correct distribution of phenomenal force, whose total quantity, mv^2, will be conserved across changes in motion. Not only will it determine the real motions of phenomenal bodies by determining the correct distribution of force, it will also determine a correct quasi-causal framework for phenomena. For example, if in the real reference frame, one body collides with another, changing the latter's motion in the process, we can say that the first body is the quasi-cause and the second body's motion the quasi-effect. Of course, no two monads ever truly causally interact. Therefore, what this quasi-causal structure reveals is that the monads in the first body, as quasi-causes, are, in their changing perceptions, moving to more perfect representations of the world, while those in the second, as quasi-effects, are moving to less perfect representations. Thus given the correct quasi-causal distribution among phenomenal bodies, we can also determine the distribution of changes in the degree of perfection of monads' perceptions. It is this expression of the way in which monads are changing their perceptions, from less to more and more to less perfect ones, that allows us to say that monads express the law of the general order.

We have:

1) Substance s perceives unconsciously the distribution of phenomenal motions δ
2) Distribution of phenomenal motions δ expresses the real distribution of phenomenal forces ρ according to simplicity mapping σ[12]
3) Real distribution of phenomenal forces ρ expresses distribution of perfection changes in monads π according to quasi-causal mapping χ

so,

4) Substance s expresses the distribution of perfection changes in monads π by perceiving unconsciously the distribution of phenomenal motions δ.[13]

A description of these perfection changes allows us to recover the law of the general order. Recall that the law of the general order contains information about every law of the individual series that exists at its world, that is, it contains information about all of the perceptual states that a monad at its world ever has had and ever will have. In addition to this, it also contains information about the harmony of that world, that is, about what perceptions express what other perceptions. A description of the distribution of perfection changes in substances' perceptions would contain information about those substances' perceptions themselves in much the same way that the equation for the differential of a curve contains information about the curve itself. Thus in the same way that one can recover information from the equation $y=2x$ about the equation $y=x^2$, one can retrieve information about the perceptions of other monads at a world from a description of their changing degrees of perfection. In this way, we have shown how one very important part of the law of the general order is expressed in a substance's perceptions.

We can now answer the question of compossibility. Two monads will be compossible iff their unconscious perception of the distribution of relative motion expresses the same distribution of perfection changes in substances. In this way, truths about compossibility and incompossibility will be grounded in the monadic perceptual predicates of CIC.[14] We can generate a unique space, each point of which is associated with a perfection value and evolves dynamically—a kind of world signature. Any other monad that expresses this same evolution belongs to one and the same world, that is, they express the same law of the general order.

ABBREVIATIONS

AG *Philosophical Essays*. Trans. and ed. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.

Grua *Textes Inédits*. Ed. by Gaston Grua. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948.

NOTES

1. Formally speaking it becomes impossible to generate a contradiction between two different atomic propositions of the form Fx and not-Fy for two different x and y. The general point is that we appear to need relations in order to get incompossibility results. Thus if Rxy is contained in x and not-Rxy is contained in y for some x and y, then x and y are incompossible. It should be noted that Ishiguro holds that CIC contain predicates of the form Rxa. She considers these to be monadic predicates that ascribe relational properties to their corresponding subjects (99-100).
2. I bracket concerns here about the status of corporeal substances in Leibniz and the rich debate it has produced. In the following I assume a monadological picture where monads phenomenal expressions or correlates are corporeal substances.
3. It is not clear how the concept of a mental state, much less a perception, is applicable to the modifications of what Leibniz calls, bare monads. However, even these bare monads will be embodied, and the resulting phenomenal "protozoa" will be involved in a phenomenal world that they will need to minimally represent in some way in order to interact with. This falls directly out of Leibniz's pan-organicism—that there are animals "all the way down."
4. Much of the following comes out of numerous fruitful discussions with Gregory Brown, to whom I owe much thanks. Any missteps are my own.
5. Besides the passage quoted above from *On Freedom* about the containment of the law of the general order in CIC, there is the following from DM 16:

> And to the extent that every person or substance is like a small world expressing the large world, we can say equally that the extraordinary action of God on this substance does not fail to be miraculous, despite the fact that it is included in the general order of the universe insofar as it is *expressed* by the essence of the individual notion of this substance. (AG 49, my emphasis)

6. DM refers to "Discourse on Metaphysics." All quotes are from AG.
7. Roberts takes this to be a real problem and claims that force cannot be empirically determined (see 562-63, 567-68). I also note here that Leibniz's measure of force is not our Newtonian F=ma but rather what we would call kinetic energy.
8. The solution to this problem that I endorse here was first brought to my attention by Puryear. For a much better treatment of the complex terrain here, see Roberts and Puryear. For a much better defense of this solution, see Puryear.
9. Again, this solution was first put forward by Puryear.
10. I say folk-causal talk, but I want to emphasize that Leibniz's "reconciliation" is

meant to apply to ordinary causal talk as well as whatever causal relata enter into current physical theory.

11. We have not discussed a metric whereby one substance can be said to express the universe better than another. One *prima facia* possibility is that one substance expresses the universe better than another insofar as more correct inferences can be made about the universe from the contents of its perceptions and the expressive mapping between the two than can be in the case of the other.

12. The formalism for the expression relation that I use here is, again, due to Kulstad.

13. Of course, this argument assumes that Leibnizian expression is transitive, but given the above formalism for expression I see no reason why it is not. Thus the unconscious perception of the distribution of phenomenal motions δ expresses the distribution of perfection changes in monads π according to mapping $\chi(\sigma)$.

14. Of course, for this solution to compossibility to be viable, I must take these results to be modally robust. That is, for it to be a general solution to the compossibility problem, it has to be the case that simplicity and intelligibility determine the correct distribution of force in *all possible* worlds. One might think this move suspect, as part of why the actual world is the best possible is that its laws are the simplest and most intelligible. However, I see no reason not to think that the laws of a world are the simplest *relative to that world* and that the laws of the actual world are the simplest of the simplest (given the maximization of phenomena). According to the present account, Leibniz's optimism may know no bounds!

WORKS CITED

Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1994. *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. NY: Oxford UP. Ishiguro, Hidé. 1972. *Leibniz's Philosophy of Logic and Language*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.

Kulstad, Mark. 1977. "Leibniz's Conception of Expression." *Studia Leibnitiana* 9(1): 55-76.

Mates, Benson. 1986. *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language*. NY: Oxford UP.

Puryear, Stephen. "Force, Absolute Motion, and the Threat of Circularity in Leibniz." Unpublished Manuscript.

Roberts, John. 2003. "Leibniz on Force and Absolute Motion." *Philosophy of Science* 70(3): 553-573.

Program of the 69th Annual Meeting of the New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society

April 6-7, 2018

Friday Morning Session 1

Steven Haug, University of California – Santa Cruz,
"Community in Heidegger's Philosophy of Art"
Comments: **Stijn Talloen**, Rice University

Cameron Wright, University of South Florida,
"Soteriology and Time in the Sarvastivada Buddhist Theory of dharma"
Comments: **Paul Wilson**, Texas State University

Stijn Talloen, Rice University, "Heidegger's Idealist Misreading of Husserl"
Comments: **Peter Hutcheson**, Texas State University

Friday Morning Session 2

Jan Swiderski, Syracuse University
"Varieties of Explanation in Defense of Humean Laws of Nature"
Comments: **Jacob Mills**, Houston Community College

Emil Badici, Texas A&M University – Kingsville,
"Deflationary Truth and the Sparse vs. Abundant Properties"
Comments: **Jan Swiderski**, Syracuse University

J. Christopher Jenson, Houston Community College
"Limits of Intentional Stance"
Comments: **Isaac Wiegman**, Texas State University

Friday Morning Session 3

Travis Rodgers, Valencia College
"The Equivalence Thesis and the (In)Significance of Violating Negative Rights"
Comments: **Brandon Williams**, Houston Community College

Lamont Rodgers, Houston Community College

"Enough, and As Good; Not As Much and As Good"
Comments: **Jacob Mills**, Houston Community College

David Rodriguez, Biola University
"Moral Obligations and Exemplarism: How Moral Exemplarism Can Work with Divine Command Theory"
Comments: **Elyse Purcell**, SUNY Oneonta

Friday Afternoon Session 1

Elyse Purcell, SUNY Oneonta
"Relational Virtues: Disability and the Pursuit of the Good"
Comments: **Andrew Brei**, St. Mary's University

Samuel Garcia, Biola University
"Toward a Virtuous Resistance: Radical Solidarity and the Problem of Adjudication"
Comments: **Cameron Wright**, University of South Florida

Carissa Phillips-Garrett, University of Houston
"The Good of Moral Shaping in Friendship"
Comments: **Christopher Edelman**, University of the Incarnate Word

Christopher Edelman, University of the Incarnate Word
"Living with Monsters: Montaigne on Friendship and Tolerance"
Comments: **Vanessa Voss**, Lone Star College

Friday Afternoon Session 2

Brandon Williams, Houston Community College
"Toward a Functional Account of Normative Reasons"
Comments: **Lamont Rodgers**, Houston Community College

Isaac Wiegman, Texas State University
"Control Theory and the Concept of a Goal"
Comments: **David Beisecker**, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Andrew Brei, St. Mary's University
"Persons vs. Members: Motivating Moral Action"
Comments: **Robert Tierney**, University of Houston

Friday Afternoon Session 3

Tad Bratkowski, McKendree University
"Why Not Start a Real Band Already: Aesthetic Value in the Guitar Hero and Rock Band Series"
Comments: **Charles LaMendola**, Houston Community College

Vanessa Voss, Lone Star College
"What's So Funny about Nihilist Memes?"

Comments: **Jamie Bronstein**, New Mexico State University

Jeanette Joy Harris, Independent scholar,
"Arendt's Unbearable Loneliness: Adrian Piper's 'The Probable Trust Registry'"
Comments: **Parish Conkling**, Houston Community College

Robert Boyd Skipper, St. Mary's University
"Against Poetic Opacity"
Comments: **Tad Bratkowski**, McKendree University

Saturday Morning Session 1

Marcus Hunt, Tulane University
"Divorcing Occupation from Just War Theory"
Comments: **Jennifer Ward**, Texas A&M University

Jennifer Ward, Texas A&M University
"Moral Injury and Jus ad Bellum"
Comments: **Kyle Fruh**, Stanford University

Kyle Fruh, Stanford University
"Against Climate Refugees"
Comments: **Marcus Hunt**, Tulane University

Saturday Morning Session 2

Dave Beisecker, University of Nevada Las Vegas
"The Ballistics of Inquiry in a Post-Truth Age"
Comments: **Samuel Garcia**, Biola University

Kyle Bromhall, Independent scholar
"I Feel Like You're Wrong: Why Affect Matters to Disagreement, and How a Jamesean Approach Helps"
Comments: **Danny Marrero**, Dept. of Advanced Studies at the Colombian Office of the Attorney General

Timothy Cleveland, New Mexico State University
"Philosophy, Fiction, and the Unsayable"
Comments: **Kristina Grob**, University of South Carolina Sumter

Saturday Morning Session 3

Danny Marrero, Dept. of Advanced Studies at the Colombian Office of the Attorney General
"Confirmation Bias and the Epistemic View of Legal Factual Argumentation"
Comments: **J. Christopher Jenson**, Houston Community College

Robert Tierney, University of Houston
"Corporate Action and Indexical Incoherence"

Comments: **Jeanette Joy Harris**, Independent scholar

Emmie Malone, University of Houston – Downtown
"Modal Insurance: Probabilities, Risk, and Degrees of Luck"
Comments: **Jean-Paul Vessel**, New Mexico State University

Saturday Afternoon Session 1

Jerry Green, University of Central Oklahoma
"Phronesis in the Undisputed Books of the Nicomachean and Eudemian Ethics"
Comments: **Carissa Phillips-Garrett**, University of Houston

Jacob Mills, Houston Community College
"Compossibility and the Metaphysics of Expression"
Comments: **Emil Badici**, Texas A&M University – Kingsville

Jean-Paul Vessel, New Mexico State University
"Did Moore Swipe His Open Question Arguments from Plato's Dialogues?"
Comments: **Jerry Green**, University of Central Oklahoma

Saturday Afternoon Session 2

Cinnamon Jenson, Houston Community College
"Three Poverty of Stimulus Arguments"
Comments: **Tim Cleveland**, New Mexico State University

Jonathon Vanden Hombergh, University of Wisconsin – Madison
"Conceptual Sieves"
Comments: **Susana Badiola**, Angelo State University

Susana Badiola, Angelo State University
"Battling the Real Self"
Comments: **Kyle Bromhall**, Independent scholar

Saturday Afternoon Session 3

Kristina Grob, University of South Carolina Sumter
"More than one true story: The Limits of Narrative Form for Stories of Moral Change"
Comments: **Jeanette Joy Harris**, Independent scholar

Jamie Bronstein, New Mexico State
University, "Epistemic Questions about Working Class Autobiography"
Comments: **Peter Hutcheson**, Texas State University

Charles LaMendola, Houston Community College
"Agency and Intention in Feagin's Response to Carroll on Narrative Closure"
Comments: **Emmie Malone**, University of Houston – Downtown

Presidential Address

Mark Walker, New Mexico State University

"Socratic Ignorance, Skeptical Dogmatism, and Self-Refutation"

Institutional affiliations reflect the institutions of the participants at the time of the conference.