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The Subject of Consciousness: Attention and Block's Theory of Mind

Joe Hedger, Arizona State University

Seneca's Cynical Side: Withdrawal and "The Social Embeddedness of Virtue"

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Totalitarianism, Consumerism, and Megachurches: Hannah Arendt's Indictment of an American Religious Phenomenon

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The Epistemic Nature of Beauty: Locke, Descartes, and the Architectural Theory of Claude Perrault

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Editors' Introduction

The *Logos* staff is proud to present the fourth volume of *Logos: The Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy*. Last year the staff decided to switch to an annual rather than a bi-annual publication, a change that allowed us to consider a greater number of submissions, ultimately increasing the quality of submissions chosen. This year we had many promising submissions spanning various disciplines, and the selection process was both more difficult and more exciting.

Although many of our former staff members have graduated and left Ithaca, the *Logos* staff experienced an increase in membership of freshman and sophomore students. This is very encouraging because it ensures that the journal will continue to play a role in forming a community at Cornell among students interested in philosophy. To help foster this community, we have continued to hold extra-curricular meetings, providing undergraduates with an opportunity for philosophical discussion. For example, this past spring we sponsored a viewing and discussion of the documentary *Derrida,* directed by Amy Ziering Kofman and Kirby Dick. We are also indebted to Associate Professor Karen Bennett for leading an enlightening discussion of Frank Jackson's influential 1982 article "Epiphenomenal Qualia." We hope to continue these meetings in an effort to supplement our philosophical investigations at Cornell.

Submissions for publication are evaluated on the basis of creativity, depth of philosophical inquiry, and clarity. As an expression of a growing interest in expanding philosophical discourse to include other disciplines, this journal also features articles that go beyond the more traditional topics of analytic philosophy. We have included articles that discuss the phenomenon of megachurches, the architecture of Claude Perrault, and the contributions of Continental and Asian philosophers. We have also included an article on the subject of consciousness that addresses previously unpublished material by Ned Block and an article that is an important contribution to contemporary discussions of Stoicism.

The editors would like to thank everyone who contributed to the production of *Logos* this year, and we gratefully acknowledge Professor Andrew Chignell for his dependable guidance, thoughtful suggestions, and encouraging support.

Gavin Michael Arnall
Derrick Ryan Ward
Logos Editors-in-Chief
Cornell University

The Subject of Consciousness:

Attention and Block's Theory of Mind

Joe Hedger

I. INTRODUCTION

In "Consciousness, Accessibility, and the Mesh between Psychology and Neuroscience,"[1] and his subsequent reply to commentators,[2] Ned Block seems undecided on an issue with important implications for empirical consciousness research. Beneath the surface of Block's main arguments, there is an unresolved tension between two opposing viewpoints in the philosophy of consciousness. This paper brings this tension to the surface, explains and evaluates the two contrary positions, and resolves the tension and points the way toward a proposal for empirical consciousness research. First, I offer an intuitive and plausible definition of consciousness based on Block's notion of phenomenology, Joseph Levine's notion of conscious access, and Thomas Nagel's notion of "what it is like" to be conscious. This definition logically leads to the view—here called "holism"—that a conscious subject is a prior necessary condition of conscious mental states, and I present a number of arguments in support of this view, based upon philosophical reasoning, neuroscientific research, evolutionary biology, and studies of cases such as the subject Zazetsky and persons with identity disorders. I argue that Block implicitly and explicitly assumes this view in "Consciousness, Accessibility, and the Mesh between Psychology and Neuroscience," before apparently waffling in his subsequent replies to commentators.[3] In closing, this paper will consider the implications of this thesis on the surest path to a scientific understanding of consciousness.

II. SKETCHING A DEFINITION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Before explicating the two positions and deciding which is correct, it would be useful to have at least a rough sketch of a definition of consciousness. I think that consciousness is basically what Block calls "phenomenal consciousness," or "P-consciousness." As Block acknowledges, this phenomenon is difficult to define, even though we are all familiar with it. Perhaps the best we can do is point to it. In Block's words, phenomenal consciousness

> is experience . . . P-conscious states are experiential states, that is, a state is P-conscious if it has experiential properties. The totality of the experiential properties of a state are 'what

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[1] Ned Block, "Consciousness, Accessibility, and the Mesh between Psychology and Neuroscience" (2007), forthcoming in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (hereafter cited as "Mesh").

[2] Ned Block, "Replies on Phenomenal Consciousness and Cognitive Access" (2007), unpublished draft.

[3] See notes 1 and 2, above.

> it is like' to have it . . . we have P-conscious states when we see, hear, smell, taste, and have pains. P-conscious properties include the experiential properties of sensations, feelings, and perceptions, but I would also include thoughts, wants, and emotions.[4]

These are the sensory qualities of conscious experience from the first person perspective (the way a painting by Monet looks to you, music sounds to you, or wine tastes to you); how your experiences feel to you. Phenomenal consciousness is closely tied to subjective experience, and therefore to a single subjective point of view. Consciousness is essentially first-person—as in *my* feelings, perceptions, thoughts, etc. Although difficult to precisely define, most of us intuitively understand what is meant by phenomenal consciousness: it is just all the events, feelings, images, thoughts, etc. which we are aware of taking place within our own minds.[5]

Block describes the conscious experience as "what it is like," alluding to the influential 1974 article "What is it Like to be a Bat?" where Thomas Nagel discusses another very intuitive notion of consciousness.[6] In that paper, Nagel says that ". . . fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something it is like to *be* that organism—something it is like *for* that organism. We may call this the subjective character of experience."[7] Nagel makes this clearer, explaining ". . . that every subjective phenomenon [such as consciousness] is essentially connected with a single point of view . . ."[8]

Following Nagel's definition of consciousness (which influenced Block's), we can say that a subject or creature *S* is conscious just in case *S* has a subjective point of view. This definition coheres with what we intuitively consider to

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[4] Ned Block, "On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness," in *Consciousness, Function, and Representation: Collected Papers Vol. 1* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 166 (hereafter cited as "Confusion"). [Originally from *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18:2 (1995)]

[5] Note that what we mean by consciousness in this paper is slightly different in some respects from Block's "P-consciousness" from "On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness," since in that paper he distinguishes two kinds of consciousness, while I deny that his "Access consciousness" is a real kind of consciousness. It may be important, in clarifying Block's current position, to note that in conversation with Professor Block in November 2007, he told me that he has come to agree that A-c (Access consciousness) is not a real distinct *kind* of consciousness, having been persuaded by the arguments of Levine, Burge, and Kobes. (A-c is, perhaps, more strictly speaking an *aspect* of consciousness).

[6] Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 165–80. [Originally from *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974)]

[7] Ibid., 166 (Nagel's emphasis).

[8] Ibid., 167.

be conscious in everyday life. Thus, rocks and toasters are not conscious, while cats presumably are. In more controversial cases it may be difficult to determine whether, for instance, simpler organisms are conscious or not. However, this has more to do with the epistemological problem—known traditionally as the Problem of Other Minds—of having adequate criteria for ascribing consciousness to another organism. What seems uncontroversial is the fact that *if* something has a subjective point of view of awareness, then it must be conscious.

Phenomenology is essentially tied to phenomenal conscious experience. As Levine rightly notes, "phenomenal character seems to be, in itself, a kind of presentation. Experience is essentially connected with a subject for whom it is an experience, and this immediately brings with it a relation of access."[9] Levine also notes that Block's adoption of Nagel's phrase "what it is like" to describe phenomenal experience already entails a subject who is doing the experiencing.[10] 'Access,' for Levine, is the relation between conscious states and the subject who is experiencing them. Thus, a subject has access to a particular mental state just in case that subject is aware of that mental state. In other words, a mental state is conscious just in case the subject is aware of it. Therefore, pain is by definition a conscious state, since it is a certain felt quality or feeling, although it may be more or less so depending upon the degree of attention the subject gives to it.[11] A Freudian unconscious state, assuming that this is a plausible concept, would be any mental state of which the subject is unaware—for example a desire to kill one's father and sleep with one's mother. This sketch of a definition of consciousness, which could perhaps be filled out with more detail at a later time, is a very intuitive and plausible understanding of consciousness. It coincides nicely with the everyday notion of consciousness, which is ultimately what we are trying to explain with a scientific understanding of consciousness.

Furthermore, it appears to follow from this definition that consciousness necessarily requires a conscious subject. Only subjects (and mental states of sub-

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[9] Joseph Levine, "Phenomenal Access: a Moving Target," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18:2 (1995): 261.

[10] Joseph Levine, "Two Kinds of Access" (2007), forthcoming in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.

[11] See Tyler Burge, "Two Kinds of Consciousness," in *Foundations of Mind (Philosophical Essays)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 389–90. When Burge speaks of "unconscious pains," he seems to be confusing *access* with *attention*. For example, if I have a pain in my ankle which I am not attending to, because I am concentrating on something else, then at times that pain is not felt as strongly as it might be otherwise. Here, degrees of attention correspond to degrees or intensity of consciousness. Still, in my view, pains in the conscious background are conscious because the subject is aware of them, even if to a minimal degree.The case of hypnosis is a little different (see Burge, 391). We aren't exactly sure why some patients don't feel pain during surgery, for instance, while under hypnosis. However, if there is no feeling of pain, then it makes more sense to say that there is no mental state of pain, rather than to say there is an unconscious pain.

jects) are conscious: you, me, my cat, your dog. Things and parts of organisms cannot sensibly be called conscious. Thus, chairs, computers, arms, pieces of neural tissue, and lampposts are not conscious, unless science one day demands a radical revision of our everyday notion of consciousness. The three aspects of consciousness we have been discussing are three necessary (but not sufficient) conditions for consciousness. Phenomenology is the central notion of consciousness, and Nagel's *"what it is like"* and Levine's *conscious access* are natural extensions of this core idea. Part of phenomenology is that phenomenal qualities of experience are always presented in a first person perspective.

Note that I speak here of *subjects*, and not of the self, because the concept of a self carries with it philosophical complications which I wish to avoid here. First, the idea of a self is somewhat vague. Second, some philosophers (such as David Hume and Daniel Dennett) deny that there is a self. Block calls himself a "deflationist" concerning the self.[12] Also, many philosophers think of a self as more complex than a subject, and I don't want to require something too strict or narrow, which would incorrectly restrict the range of creatures which we intuitively call conscious. Thus, a mouse might not have an idea of itself as a *self*, although it presumably experiences things from a particular point of view, and is therefore rightly called conscious.

On this model, consciousness is like a light switch: it is either on or off. *Awareness* goes hand in hand with consciousness. An organism is conscious just in case it is aware; a mental state is conscious just in case the organism in question is aware of it. Consciousness is a stream of phenomenal mental states tied to a single subjective point of view. An organism is able to *attend* to a small number of things,[13] but is still conscious to a lesser degree of things in the conscious background. For instance, as one attends to reading a philosophy paper, things like background noises and the feeling of one's shirt on the back of one's neck fall into the conscious background; yet we could attend to those things if we so chose. As we go further down the scale of attention we become less and less

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[12] Here, Block is influenced by Thomas Nagel, "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness," in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 147–64. [Originally from *Synthese* 20 (1971)]. In this paper Nagel suggests that the fragmentation observed in split brain patients exists to some degree in normal persons. Block says that we "are loose federations of centers of control and integration" (Block, "Biology Versus Computation in the Study of Consciousness," in *Consciousness, Function, and Representation: Collected Papers Vol. I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007) [originally from *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 20:1 (1997)], 257), or "a kind of constellation of states, an organized collection of states and their bases that interact with one another" (Block's interview by Susan Blackmore, in her book *Conversations on Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 31).

[13] The number of things to which an organism may attend depends on the capacity of the global workspace. See Block, "Mesh," 22–3, 29–31.

conscious of things, for example certain distant memories or stored facts and other available items.[14] Other unavailable, unconscious things can never be attended to, such as the process of digestion in our bodies, even though this is also controlled by our brains. In this way we can distinguish between things conscious and unconscious, and also account for degrees of consciousness among the former class of items with *attention*. Organisms are either conscious or not—there is either something it is like to be that organism or thing or there is not.

III. ATOMISM VERSUS HOLISM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND NEUROSCIENCE

The tension I am interested in expounding upon concerns what Bernard Kobes calls "a major fissure in the landscape of contemporary philosophy of consciousness."[15] This divide is between what Kobes calls the *atomistic* and the *holistic* views of consciousness. The atomistic view emphasizes the priority of individual phenomenal qualities, which this view supposes might be present in sub-systems of the human mind (like Block's "Fodorian modules")[16] or even in a piece of neural tissue in a Petri dish.[17] According to this view, the self is constructed out of these individual mental items. Contrastingly, the holistic view emphasizes the priority of a conscious subject who is experiencing the stream of phenomenal conscious states. It assumes that a point of view is necessary to organize and comprehend individual mental states.

This fissure is also evident amongst scientists doing empirical research on human consciousness. Philosopher John Searle, for instance, describes this opposition as the *building-block approach* versus the *unified field approach*.[18]

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[14] Some philosophers argue that stored facts ought to be considered *unconscious* rather than *less conscious* (cf. e.g. Block, "Confusion," 171; Ned Block, "How Many Concepts of Consciousness?" in *Consciousness, Function, and Representation: Collected Papers Vol. I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 224. [Originally from *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18:2 (1995)]; and Block, "Biology Versus Computation in the Study of Consciousness," 251–2). However, it is proper to say e.g. that I am conscious of the fact that Russell is the author of *The Problems of Philosophy*, even if I am not at this moment attending to that fact. For this reason, it seems more like a matter of degree, since it is a fairly simple matter for me to shift my attention to that fact, like moving a searchlight across the conscious field. On the other hand, shifting one's attention to a previously unnoticed noise seems different from recalling a noise from memory, so perhaps it is a difference of kind. As this issue is tangential to our present purpose, I leave it as an open question.

[15] Bernard Kobes, "Notes on a Generic Concept, and Specific Concepts, of Consciousness," 7 November 2007, (unpublished draft), 11 (hereafter cited as "Consciousness Notes").

[16] Block, "Mesh," 1–2.

[17] Kobes, "Consciousness Notes," 4–5.

[18] John Searle, "Consciousness: What We Still Don't Know," *The New York Review of Books* 52:1 (2005).

The building-block approach attempts to find physical neural instantiations of particular mental qualities or images, for example the neural correlate of seeing red or seeing a red rose. On the other hand, the unified field approach assumes that the neural correlate of any conscious state must include not only neural mechanisms for seeing a red rose, but also the neural mechanisms responsible for instantiating or constituting what Searle calls the *unified conscious field.*

Searle claims that for a person to be conscious, or in order for a person to experience the perception of, for example, a red rose, that person must "already have a unified field of qualitative, subjective intentionality."[19] By "subjective" Searle means that consciousness must have a certain point of view, that conscious states are always experienced by one single subject.[20] By "unified" Searle means that a multiplicity of conscious states—including various sensations, feelings and thoughts—always occur as part of a unified conscious experience, all occurring concurrently in the mind and in a continuous stream of time.[21] A further item that unifies this "field" is not only the coherence of the mental images and thoughts, but also what Block calls "meishness."[22] This is the "sense of ownership"[23] that we all have concerning our mental states: the thoughts in my mind are *my* thoughts and feelings, and my perceptions and mental states are presented *to me.*

IV. IS NED BLOCK AN ATOMIST OR A HOLIST?

There is a tension preventing an easy conclusion on where Block stands on this point. First, in "Consciousness, Accessibility, and the Mesh between Psychology and Neuroscience," he discusses empirical data in support of the holistic view. He cites six sources which provide

> . . . evidence that *(and I will be assuming that)* there is a single neural background of all experience involving connections between the cortex and the upper brain stem including the thalamus . . . This background can perhaps be identified with what Searle (2005) calls the "unified conscious field."[24]

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[19] Ibid., 4.

[20] John Searle, *Mind, Language and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 73–4.

[21] Ibid., 74.

[22]. Block, "How Many Concepts?" 232–3, 238; Block, "Mesh," 8.

[23] Block, "Mesh," 8.

[24] Ibid., 3, my emphasis.

In this passage Block appears to agree with certain neuroscientists who argue for the holistic view. For instance, Baars *et al* argue for the existence of "the 'observing self' that appears to be needed to maintain the conscious state."[25] Those neuroscientists hypothesize that a neural system involving the prefrontal parietal cortex functions to create this observing self, and furthermore that this system is necessary for a human to have normal veridical conscious experiences. This system "could constitute the point of view from which 'we' experience the world."[26] The parietal cortex, constituting the observing self, communicates with other parts of the brain which encode sensory information to create a complex system which is the "single neural background of all experience." Baars and his colleagues claim that when the parietal cortex fails to function, subjects become unconscious.[27]

As further evidence that Block takes this view, he claims that observational studies done by Merker prove that "children who are born pretty much without a cortex can have the conscious field with little or nothing in the way of conscious contents . . ."[28] Apparently, these children have a point of view, and at least some primitive notion of a self, and yet lack phenomenology altogether. He also claims that Dan Pollen (in "The Fundamental Requirement for Primary Visual Perception," forthcoming) and Antonio Damasio[29] "argue that all experience requires a sense of self . . ."[30] In this passage, Block seems to accept these three arguments for holism as well.

Block says that he will assume the holistic view in his paper and indeed he does. For instance, a major part of the support for his argument that phenomenology overruns cognitive access involves the Sperling experiments.[31]

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[25] Bernard Baars, Thomas Z. Ramsey, and Steven Laureys, "Brain, Conscious Experience and the Observing Self," *Trends in Neurosciences* 26:12 (2003): 671.

[26] Ibid., 673.

[27] Ibid., 673–4.

[28] Block, "Mesh," 3. Merker's interpretation of his study (that subjects lacking a cortex have a point of view but no particular contents) appears to conflict with Baars et al, "The Observing Self," and the other five sources Block cites on p.3 who identify the cortex as partly constituting the point of view. However, I am not here making any claims about the actual physical instantiation of the subjective point of view in humans, but merely arguing that such a point of view is a necessary condition of consciousness.

[29] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1999).

[30] Block, "Mesh," 4.

[31] Ibid., 14ff. In these experiments, subjects are shown a grid of e.g. 3 rows of 3–4 letters for a brief time (50ms), and asked to report what they saw. They are able to report seeing the entire grid, but are only able to accurately specifically report one of the three rows of characters. They cannot accurately report *all* of the characters. However, subjects can apparently choose which row to activate into working memory (or the global workspace), since if the flash is followed by a tone (high, medium or low), subjects are able to accurately report all of the letters in the appropriate row (the top row for the high tone, middle row for the medium tone, and so on). See Block, "Mesh," 14 ff., and Block, "Confusion," 198.

Crucially, however, even the phenomenology which overruns cognitive access, (and is therefore not available to the global workspace) is still accessible to the subject. The subject is able to report, for example, seeing a grid of 9 Roman letters, but is only able to specify one row, or 3 of those letters. Both the entire grid and the 3 letters which the subject is able to hold in the global workspace are present to the subject. As Kobes notes with some dissatisfaction,[32] this assumption means that Block never addresses the question he opens the paper with, viz. the question of whether phenomenology is present in Fodorian modules.

However, in Block's replies to commentators, he claims that Rafael Malach provides evidence from empirical studies which "presents a challenge to views . . . that emphasize the importance of the self in phenomenal experience . . ."[33] This claim, along with comments in an earlier paper where he argues for "deflationism about the self"[34]—following Nagel in the view that there is no single unified self, but rather a loose federation of "sub-selves"[35]—seems to show that Block is waffling a bit on his earlier assumption.[36] [37] However, I think we can demonstrate that, first, a disunified self does *not* preclude the holistic view of consciousness, and second, Malach's evidence does *not* refute the holistic view.

Let's turn first to the Malach paper which is the subject of Block's reply. Malach's studies involve his tentative theory of neurophysiology, which differentiates between the functions of the "sensory part of the cerebral cortex, in a system of areas we termed the Extrinsic system—i.e. the cortical regions oriented towards the external environment," contrasted with the function of "the front part of the brain . . . [and several islands in the back of the brain] which we termed the In-

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[32] Bernard Kobes, "A Harder Methodological Puzzle," (2007) unpublished commentary on Block, "Mesh."

[33] Block, "Replies," 19.

[34] Block, "Biology versus Computation," 257.

[35] Nagel, "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness."

[36] Importantly, Block assumes the holistic view throughout his paper. Therefore, his subsequent indecisiveness about atomism and holism has no effect on his main argument that phenomenology is broader than cognitive access (an argument which I accept).

[37] Another explicit endorsement of atomism can be found in Block's interview by Susan Blackmore, in her book *Conversations on Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). There he says: ". . . part of my view is that I think there could be phenomenal states in us that aren't part of ourselves, that aren't integrated enough with the others to be thought of as a state of the self." Blackmore, *Conversations on Consciousness,* 31. Block's evidence for this view is that a subject with visuo-spatial extinction displays neural activation of the fusiform face area of the brain although he reports not seeing a face. Blackmore, *Conversations on Consciousness,* 32. On the fusiform face area, see Block, "Mesh," 2–3. On the visuo-spatial extinction study, see Block, "Mesh," 4.

trinsic system because of its complementary nature to the sensory-driven, Extrinsic, system."[38] The "Intrinsic System" is equivalent to the system which Baars and his colleagues claim constitute the observing self or "the first person perspective."[39] This system "deals with internally-oriented functions."[40] In certain studies, subjects who are involved in some deeply engrossing mental activity, for instance "watching a highly engaging movie,"[41] where they become so engrossed as to lose their sense of self, show a decrease of activity in the Intrinsic System while the Extrinsic System still functions normally. Obviously, subjects watching a movie (even if completely engaged in their watching) are still conscious according to any normal criterion.

What does this evidence refute? Certainly not the holistic view we have thus far been discussing. The subjects in the experiments still have a certain point of view from which they are viewing the film. There is something that it is like for them to watch the movie, which is essentially at least partially different than what it is like for a person in a neighboring seat to watch the same movie. This perspective is not only a result of their relative positions in space and time, but also partially constituted by their own unique memories, thoughts and feelings—their own subjective points of view. Although it is clear that there is some disagreement between scientists as to which parts of the brain actually constitute the subjective point of view which organizes and binds our mental states together, most seem to agree that this point of view is nonetheless essential.

Nevertheless, the sense of "losing oneself" and the Intrinsic System constituting this self, which Malach discusses in this article, have more to do with a notion of *self-consciousness* of the sophisticated sort only humans are capable of, rather than the primitive point of view of mental subjects, which I am arguing is primary in this paper. Clearly, even someone who has lost herself in a movie is still experiencing sensations, thoughts and feelings all converging on a single point of view. Awareness from a single point of view does not entail awareness of or thinking about the self in a sophisticated way, for instance as Descartes does in the *Second Meditation*. It merely means a unification of mental states, in a single location in space, in a coherent stream through time, tied to a single subject by a sense of ownership.

Let us now briefly address the notion of a fragmented self and its relation to the holistic view of consciousness. Nagel argues that evidence gathered from experiments involving observations of split-brain patients suggests that the self

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[38] Rafael Malach, "The Measurement Problem in Consciousness Research," (2007) forthcoming in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 2.

[39] Ibid., 2.

[40] Ibid., 2.

[41] Ibid., 2.

is not a single unified entity, but rather a loosely organized federation of various sub-selves.[42] Block accepts these and similar arguments. Let's assume that Nagel and Block are correct. Does this theory refute the holistic view? I don't see why. Even a self lacking perfect unity can have a subjective point of view. There is still something it is like to be an organism with a fragmented self. These fragments are never severe enough to fracture a subjective point of view into several points of view at one and the same time.

Perhaps in persons with multiple personality disorder there are different points of view (at different times) for each distinct personality. Baars and his colleagues note that "patients with identity disorders such as fugue (a rapid change in personal identity lasting weeks or months) often show amnesia for the eclipsed self. When the patient returns to normal, he or she might report time loss—a period of weeks from which no conscious experiences can be recalled. It as is if each personality serves to organize and interpret conscious events during its time of dominance."[43] Thus, it appears that persons with selves so severely fragmented as to come apart have marked differences in their conscious experiences. It seems they have more than one point of view, but that different points of view are not accessible to each other. Each point of view has its own conscious experiences, so that the experience of for example eating breakfast is only available to one point of view, personality or subject. This seems to lend support to, rather than refute, the holistic view. If the atomistic view was correct, then subjects with identity disorders ought to have *all* of their various mental states available to them all of the time, since these would be primary. However, it seems that mental subjects (points of view) organize and understand mental states, rather than the mental states constructing the various selves.

Consider the following thought experiment: suppose that a single human body, with one brain, supports two distinct personalities.[44] The person is Bill on some days and Fred on others. Fred is quick-tempered, atheistic, and loves watching football, while Bill is quiet, peaceful, contemplative, and a devout Catholic. Yet they share the same brain, so that the same perceptual mechanisms are used when Bill watches football and despises it as when Fred watches football and enjoys it. The same pain-perceiving mechanisms are used when Fred stubs his toe and angrily curses the coffee table, as when Bill stubs his toe and quietly moves his bookcase so as to make a wider walkway. Now, the same bits of phenomenology, instantiated in the same neural matter, are present whether it is Bill or Fred

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[42] Nagel, "Brain Bisection."

[43] Baars et. al., "The Observing Self," 673.

[44] This thought experiment was inspired by an example related to me by Professor Kobes in conversation in January 2008.

who stubs his toe or watches television. Yet how could they result in such wildly different feelings and reactions? And why can't Bill access any of Fred's memories? There must be something more to the mind than atoms of phenomenology. Somehow, we need to account for the correlation between two points of view and two distinct consciousnesses.

V. A DETAILED CRITIQUE OF THE ATOMISTIC VIEW OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The atomistic view is what we might call the *film projector model of the mind*. On this model, mental subjects and the stream of consciousness are constructed out of individual frames just as a movie is. Phenomenology is present in each individual frame, and certain frames or pieces of them might not even be noticed by or accessible to the "viewer" (subject) of the stream. The entire apparatus has to be constructed out of pieces of phenomenology and running smoothly on some mechanism, and then the self arises naturally out of viewing a mind movie composed of consistent and coherent frames. Although attractive in some respects, there are a number of reasons to believe that this picture is incorrect, beyond the problems discussed in the previous section. The atomistic approach (of understanding a biological or physical process by analyzing its constituent parts) has had great success in other areas of science, but it is a flawed approach to the study of consciousness.

One reason some philosophers such as Kobes (and perhaps Block) are attracted by this view is that it allows for an explanation of certain cases of *covert knowledge,* such as blindsight. Subjects with blindsight have a piece of their normal visual field missing because of a specific kind of brain damage. If something is flashed in the blind area of the person's visual field, the subject will report that she saw nothing. However, in psychological studies such subjects have nonetheless been able to accurately make correct guesses about some features of the flashed stimulus.[45] How are we to explain this?

One intuitive interpretation is that the brain is somehow receiving information from outside stimuli which are not conscious to the subject. The subject is not aware of seeing anything but is somehow nonetheless able to grasp information about the stimulus. The subject has knowledge which is accessible in some way, but not in the normal fashion of mental images. Blindsight is a highly interesting and perplexing phenomenon, and I don't presume to have an explanation of it. However, explanations which lend credence to the atomistic view of

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[45] Block, "Confusion," 160.

consciousness are definitely incorrect, because the film projector model of consciousness leads to some wildly counter-intuitive implications.

The interpretation I want to argue against says that some part of the brain—perhaps some sub-system involved with visual perception—contains phenomenal consciousness which is not accessible to the subject. If this is true, then the phenomenology might be found in something even smaller, which then makes it accessible to this sub-system. Kobes, for instance, claims that a small piece of neural tissue might contain some phenomenal quality accessible only to itself.[46] He says, "Suppose neuroscientists create in a Petri dish the smallest possible neurological core supervenience base for pain. In that neural tissue there would then be a [brain system]-unconscious instance of phenomenal pain."[47] There are a couple of problems with taking this tack, however (assuming that your intuitions haven't already sent alarm bells ringing).

Firstly, there is the difficulty of understanding what this means, exactly. Kobes claims that there is something it is like to be a piece of neural tissue in a Petri dish: that this little piece of tissue somehow feels pain. Yet, it seems intuitively implausible to say that a piece of neural matter somehow has its own point of view. There wouldn't be something it's like to be a tiny piece of neural tissue, even if it could by itself feel pain, because a sensation by itself does not constitute a point of view. But if a pile of neurons can't have its own point of view, then how are we to understand Kobes's claim that this piece of tissue is somehow conscious? What could this possibly mean? Furthermore, once we start, what criteria can we use for knowing when to stop? Presumably the covert information contained in the brain of a person with blindsight was received through that person's eye. Can we then say that person's retina, for instance, has phenomenal qualities which are inaccessible to the subject? If not, then what separates the retina from the piece of neural tissue?

Maybe it's just the presence of neurons. But then it would seem to follow that the nerve endings in my foot are somehow conscious, that they feel the pain of stepping on a tack before I do. Yet this seems preposterous. Here's why: If the phenomenology of pain was to be found in the nerve endings of my foot, then it would be possible to surgically remove my foot, keep it "alive" in a warm nutrient bath, and the foot itself could feel pain. In fact, this atomistic view would seem to lead to some kind of panpsychism in order to be consistent and comprehensible. I, for one, am not willing to go that far before at least attempting to see if our everyday notion of consciousness is comprehensible first.

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[46] Kobes, "Consciousness Notes," 4.

[47] Ibid., 5.

A person need not have blindsight in order for her brain to contain inaccessible information. As is well known, an important function of our brains is *homeostasis*. Our brains are unconsciously continuously managing the proper operations of our bodies, not only of the circulatory and digestive systems etc, but also maintaining constant levels of temperature, pH, sugar, hormones, and so on.[48] According to the atomistic view, in order to be consistent with the interpretation of blindsight, there is a sub-system of the brain controlling digestion which is phenomenally conscious but not in communication with the subject proper. Nagel thought he was making our heads spin trying to comprehend the point of view of a bat; what is it like to be the sub-system of a human brain in control of maintaining proper pH levels in the bloodstream?

I suppose that Kobes would respond here that inference to the best explanation would rule out neurological activity of an implausible sort, such as that of a foot or spinal column, being sufficient to support a conscious state. However, it's difficult to see what empirical evidence could be brought to bear in this case. The systems which control homeostasis of the body are located in the human brain. We require an explanation involving specific evidence demonstrating why one piece of neural tissue in the brain contains phenomenology which is not accessed by a subject, while another contains no phenomenology. Psychological evidence clearly will not help, since nothing capable of reporting back to us can access the brain activity in question. Furthermore, in the end, neuroscientific evidence must be supported by psychological reports in at least some cases (see pp.16–17, below).

As another example, I claim that a computer is not conscious because there is nothing it is like to be a computer. A computer has neither a subject nor any point of view. Yet it can presumably process information in its sub-systems. Is some part of its computer program conscious according to the atomistic view? Why couldn't the pieces of a functioning computer be presumed to contain phenomenology which no one ever accesses? Inspired by an example of Searle's, suppose that neuroscientists are able to isolate the smallest possible neurological core supervenience base for the perception of red.[49] The atomistic view seems to suppose that we could then introduce that core into a comatose patient, along with some apparatus which "reports" this phenomenology to the rest of the patient's brain, who would then be aware of a brief flash of redness before lapsing back into unconsciousness. If this is not possible, then some further explanation is needed concerning the consciousness of parts of a brain. If consciousness were

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[48] See Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 139–42.

[49] Searle, "What We Still Don't Know," 4–5.

composed of bits of phenomenology, then these sorts of scenarios would be possible. However, such scenarios seem highly implausible, so therefore something more is required for consciousness than just bits of phenomenology. Instead, the holistic view is correct, and some conscious subject is necessary in order to have conscious mental events.

Even neuroscientists Christof Koch and Naotsugu Tsuchiya[50] seem to argue for the holistic view in their response to Block (even though Searle calls Koch's book *The Quest for Consciousness* (2004) "the most powerful statement of the building-block approach that [he has] seen").[51] In empirical scientific studies, they advocate using the reports of subjects as the criterion for phenomenology, and not mere neural activation on an fMRI scan or similar device, for compelling reasons:

> . . . [O]ne should trust the first person perspective. That is, in the absence of compelling, empirical evidence to the contrary (such as Anton's, also known as hysterical blindness . . .), if the subject denies any phenomenal experience, this should be accepted as a brute fact. If we take the existence of mere recurrent, strong neuronal activation as evidence for consciousness, why not argue that my spinal cord or my enteric nervous system is conscious but is not telling me . . . ?[52]

Again, the atomistic view seems to sink into some strange form of "pan-neuropsychism."[53]

A further argument for the holistic view is the following thought experiment from Searle:

> Imagine that you wake from a dreamless sleep in a completely dark, soundless room. Imagine that you are fully awake and fully alert. You can be fully conscious, with many fantasies and thoughts, and yet have absolutely minimal perceptual

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[50] Christof Koch and Naotsugu Tsuchiya, "Phenomenology without Conscious Access is a Form of Consciousness without Top-Down Attention," (2007) forthcoming in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.

[51] Searle, "What We Still Don't Know," 3.

[52] Koch and Tsuchiya, "Phenomenology without Conscious Access," 5.

[53] Specifically, Koch and Tsuchiya are here arguing for a negative answer to Block's question of whether patients with visuo-spatial extinction have phenomenal consciousness without access to it (Block, "Mesh," 4). If their argument is sound (as I believe it to be), then Block loses this reason for sympathizing with the atomistic view.

> inputs. You feel the pressure of your body against the bed and the weight of the covers but they do not constitute your entire conscious experience—the conscious field as I have called it. They are minor parts of it. Now suppose you get up, turn on the lights, and have a bath. Are you creating consciousness? Well in one sense you are, because you now have conscious experiences you did not have before. But it is best to think of these as modifications of the preexisting conscious field, because the field was there before you had the perceptions. You had to be already conscious before you had the perceptual experience and we still need to know how you got to be conscious in the first place.[54]

We are aware of a subject without being aware of sense perceptions. The self or subject is the constant, able to make sense of different mental states. Consciousness is more than just a continuous series of mental events. Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to make sense of those mental events. As Block notes (inspired by Nancy Kanwisher and Dan Pollen), mental events wouldn't even make sense without some kind of temporal and spatial perspective.[55] That perspective is supplied by the subject of consciousness. Searle seems right that the fundamental part of consciousness is not bits of phenomenology integrated together, but rather a "unified conscious field."

I suppose one idea which leads to the atomistic view goes something like this: most of our information about functions of parts of the brain comes from studies of persons with localized brain damage. As more evidence is gathered that people with a certain part of their brain damaged lack a certain ability, such as the ability to recognize faces, then scientists hypothesize that the section of the brain damaged must perform the function lacking. Hence, we could slowly subtract parts of the brain until we are left with the piece which, for instance, *feels pain.* The problem with this thought experiment is that we have never, nor could we ever, find a part of the brain which contains inaccessible phenomenology in this way. No kind of brain damage has ever been found which makes a person lack a subjective point of view yet still be able to feel, think or sense anything. It hasn't been found because it isn't possible.

A further problem with atomism is that the mere *coherence* of mental states (while probably necessary) is not sufficient for a conscious subject. To be a con-

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[54] Searle, "What We Still Don't Know," 5.

[55] Block, "Mesh," 4.

scious experience which is intelligible, it must have that quality of what Block calls "meishness." Coherence is not sufficient for a self, and a subject (self) is necessary for consciousness. With his idea of "meishness," Block is pointing out that some notion of *possession* is also necessary. It is not enough that there are impressions of the sight of a computer screen, the sound of a tapping keyboard, the smell of perfume coming from the direction of a female student working next to me, the taste of my water, etc., which all cohere with each other in space and themselves cohere in a stream of time, to make me conscious that I am working on a philosophy paper in Coor hall at Arizona State University. It is also necessary that *I* see, smell, and hear these things—that these are *my* mental states; that *I* believe that *I* am writing a philosophy paper. Note that I am not demanding self-consciousness here. To be conscious of my environment means that all these mental states not only form a coherent picture, but that they all converge on a single point of view which I associate, however roughly, with myself.

Maybe a brief thought experiment will help to illustrate what I mean. Suppose you become completely engrossed in watching some person from across the room. All of your attention is placed upon her movements, her facial expressions, her mannerisms, the way in which she is holding her coffee, and the way she smiles from the corner of her mouth. If she eventually turns her gaze back upon you and notices you watching her, you become suddenly conscious of yourself, where before you were only conscious of your environment. This is properly called self-consciousness. Yet, even before your face flushed and became hot with embarrassment, all of your impressions were still converging upon a single point of view, and you still felt in some way that *you* were seeing a person. Failure to associate mental states with *yourself* would cause some kind of defect. For instance, perhaps when schizophrenics experience intrusive thoughts which they feel are coming from someone else, this is because they are unable to associate those thoughts with themselves.[56] In order to be comprehensible, we must have the notion that feelings we experience are "my feelings."

Further evidence of this might be found in the strange case of the soldier Zazetsky who lost memories of his middle past. Historical information from Zazetsky's middle past are unable to be recalled normally, yet can be reported via "automatic writing." After a time, in fact, Zazetsky had written more than a thousand pages detailing his own past experiences.[57] Block notes this as another case of phenomenal consciousness without cognitive access, but I think something

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[56] On theses kinds of schizophrenic mental states, see for example G Lynn Stephens and George Graham, *When Self-Consciousness Breaks: Alien Voices and Inserted Thoughts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

[57] Block, "Confusion," 192.

else may be happening here. It seems plausible that what Zazetsky is missing is indeed this very sense of ownership which we are now discussing. The thousands of pages of past history are all perfectly coherent (necessarily so, if they are accurate), yet the soldier is unable to associate these memories with himself. He has the memories in some form, but is unable to know or feel that they are in fact *his* memories.

There is also one last argument to be made, based on evolutionary biology. Damasio notes that the (broad) function of the brain is to preserve the individual organism, if evolution is correct. He theorizes that while early brains maintained homeostasis adequately, consciousness developed as a means of adapting to the environment. This not only means that the organism, or self, is the functional center of the mind and brain, but also that some sense of self was necessary for consciousness to serve its function. If the purpose of consciousness is to allow the organism to adapt to its environment, then consciousness had to be able to represent the outside object, the organism, and the relation between the two.[58]

In order to represent this relationship, some idea of a self is necessary to consciousness. Damasio notes that "mental scenes . . . do not exist in a vacuum [but] are integrated and unified *because* of the singularity of the organism and *for* the benefit of that single organism."[59] The mind has to adapt to a changing environment, but sees the organism itself as relatively stable, uniform, and unchanging. The representation of the body needed for homeostasis (in order to "maintain the body state within the narrow range and relative stability required for survival")[60] eventually evolved into the *self* as a representation of the organism in relation to its environment. "If this idea is correct, life and consciousness, specifically the self aspect of consciousness, are indelibly woven."[61]

VI. CONCLUSION

To resolve a tension found in Block's theory of mind concerning what Kobes has coined the *atomistic* and the *holistic* views of consciousness, I have shown that Block assumes the holistic view for his argument that phenomenology overflows cognitive access. With the help of a rough sketch of a definition of consciousness (influenced by Block, Nagel, Levine and Kobes), and arguments

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[58] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 19–23.

[59] Ibid., 19 (Damasio's emphasis).

[60] Ibid., 22.

[61] Ibid., 23.

from philosophy, psychology, neuroscience and evolutionary biology, I argue that the atomistic view is false and that the holistic view seems to be correct. That conclusion leaves scientists with a definite direction to follow while studying consciousness empirically. Specifically, as Koch and Tsuchiya, Searle, and others note, neuroscientists should proceed on the assumption that the *subject*, and not mere neurological evidence, provides the criterion for phenomenal consciousness. In addition, they should search for a neural correlate of consciousness including awareness by the subject, and not merely correlates of individual mental states. I have demonstrated why neurological activity by itself is insufficient evidence for consciousness, and why a conscious subject with a point of view seems necessary for consciousness.[62]

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[62] Many thanks to Professors Ned Block and Bernard Kobes for allowing me access to unpublished writings, and also to Professor Kobes for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Seneca's Cynical Side:

Withdrawal and "The Social Embeddedness of Virtue"

Ivan Heyman

I. INTRODUCTION

Julia Annas has argued that the Stoics recognized two aspects of ethical life: the social and the ideal.[1] On the one hand, living well is based upon filling particular roles in a particular society, i.e. that the virtues are "socially embedded," that I am a good person insofar as I show myself to be a good husband, student, son, apartment tenant, dog owner, etc. The facts of my social existence are largely the result of chance, but they make up the determinative starting point of my own ethical reflection and indeed limit any assessments as to whether I am living well or badly. On the other hand, the Stoics realized that ethical life relies on an ideal, abstract standard which transcends particular cultures and is applicable to all humans as rational beings. It is this ideal which the good person strives for in the midst of everyday responsibilities, and it informs the particular decisions made within the various social roles the person happens to occupy.

The Stoics, Annas notes, expressed these two aspects of ethical life by the idea that there are two commonwealths. She quotes from Seneca's *De Otio* (variously rendered as "On Leisure" or "On the Private Life"), as well as a passage from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. Her main thesis is that, while the Stoics distinguished between these two different aspects of ethical life—aspects which can easily be imagined to conflict with one another (e.g. the social role of slave master conflicts with a certain ideal of human dignity)—they managed to hold them together in a way superior to and fundamentally different from the way in which modern ethical theories have sought to do so. While modern theories, she says, typically privilege the ideal aspect and seek to justify or "permit" the social aspect in terms of the ideal, the Stoics did not do this. They never regarded the social aspect as "disposable," and thus would never (while a consequentialist might) encourage you to "abandon your family responsibilities in favor of doing good to more people".[2]

I will argue that Annas's thesis, while it may roughly reflect a majority Stoic opinion, does not easily accord with Seneca's own opinions in *De Otio (Ot.)*. By considering the two commonwealths quote with which Annas begins her paper in its original context, we will see that Seneca's own use of these "two aspects of ethical life" has more in common with the view she characterizes as "modern" than she admits. In particular, Seneca's radical conclusion at the end of *Ot.*, suggesting that no civic community is good enough for the *sapiens* (Stoic wise man) to embed himself in, certainly privileges the ideal over the social aspect of ethical

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[1] Julia Annas, "My Station and Its Duties: Ideals and the Social Embeddedness of Virtue," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 102, no. 1 (2002): 109–123.

[2] Annas, 120.

life. This means that either (1) Seneca's conclusion is not a Stoic conclusion, or that (2) Annas's outline of the Stoic interpretation of the "two aspects" is selective and lacking. As I will show below, Seneca's radical critique is in line with a vibrant strand of Stoic thought stretching from Zeno to Epictetus. In other words, Seneca's conclusion is indeed Stoic and this leads me to reject (1) and conclude (2). Thus, while I find the viewpoint of "socially embedded ideals" that Annas recommends as basically on target, I do think it is—if we allow Seneca's *Ot.* a full hearing—more problematic than she leads us to believe.

II. A SUMMARY OF SENECA'S *DE OTIO*

Annas opens her paper with the following quote from *Ot.* 4.1:

> We must grasp that there are two public realms, two commonwealths. One is great and truly common to all . . . The other is that in which we are enrolled by an accident of birth—I mean Athens or Carthage or some other city that belongs not to all men but only to a limited number.[3]

Annas explains the passage as follows: "Morally, we have dual citizenship, in the embedded circumstances of our life and in the community of reason".[4] We will return to the idea of "dual citizenship" later. For now, let us briefly survey Seneca's essay, to see what part the passage plays in it.

The beginning of the dialogue is missing, and the first section opens in the middle of a sentence bemoaning the vices that other people urge upon us. Seneca goes on to say that retirement from public life is good because it will enable us to pursue virtue free from the distractions of the crowd, to pick a moral *exemplum* to imitate, and to live a unitary course of life—one not divided up by various projects and purposes. Seneca then broaches his first major objection: "Even if withdrawal has all sorts of moral benefits, how is it Stoic? The Epicureans teach retreat; the Stoics public service. Surely you should cease calling yourself a Stoic if you go around endorsing withdrawal!"

In the second section, Seneca states his thesis: he will prove that *otium* (leisure, time away from one's business and social obligations) is indeed consistent

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[3] Seneca, *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays,* trans. John M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 175, quoted in Annas, 109.

[4] Annas, 109.

with Stoicism. He will show that it can be pursued in two ways: (1) a young person may choose to lead a private life of philosophic contemplation and may devote all his years to this pursuit of truth, putting what he has learned into practice in private (*excercere secreto,* 2.2); and (2) an older person, having completed a career of public service, may then retire and devote the rest of his days to philosophic study, not only learning but also teaching others.

In section 3, Seneca points out that the Epicureans and Stoics both direct us to *otium,* but in different ways. The Epicureans withdraw on principle (*ex proposito,* 3.3); the Stoics only from a particular inducement (*ex causa,* 3.3). However, this "particular inducement" is quite broad in scope (*causa autem illa late patet,* 3.3) for the wise man (*sapiens,* 3.3): (1) if the republic is too corrupt to be helped or is ruled by wicked men, and (2) if the wise man is barred from service, of ill health, or lacking in authority. All of these cases count as legitimate *causae* to withdraw. So, even a young person can permanently withdraw before ever having engaged in public service, for even the quietest people (*quietissimis,* 3.5) can be virtuous. Of course, in such a case he must continue to benefit others, for that is the heart of Stoic ethics. However, even if he is only able (due to a legitimate *causa,* we might presume) to benefit himself, this counts. By helping himself (studying philosophy, becoming virtuous) he indirectly benefits others by "preparing what will benefit them" (*quod illis profuturm parat,* 3.5)—perhaps some philosophical texts, perhaps his virtuous life as an *exemplum.*

The fourth section opens with the two commonwealths quote used by Annas. Seneca introduces this idea to give further justification to what he was just arguing: that improving oneself in private is in fact an other-regarding activity. Thus, we can serve the greater commonwealth of gods and men "even in retirement—indeed better, I suspect, in retirement" (4.2)[5] by studying philosophy. Seneca also notes that some people serve both commonwealths, while others only serve one or the other, and (he seems to imply) this is legitimate and no cause for alarm.

In section 5, he states the Stoic *summum bonum:* "to live according to nature" (*secundum naturam vivere,* 5.1). We are naturally equipped not only for action but also for contemplation. Thus, we live according to nature when we contemplate her mysteries and wonders. The rest of the section is a defense of philosophic contemplation as natural and therefore Stoic.

In the sixth section, Seneca concedes that contemplation should normally be accompanied by action because virtue is weak and incomplete in retire-

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[5] Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays,* 175. The Latin reads: *"et in otio . . . immo vero nescio an in otio melius."*

ment (*imperfectum ac languidum bonum est in otium sine actu proiecta virtus,* 6.2). However, sometimes there is a legitimate *causa* that prohibits the wise man (*sapientem,* 6.3) from engaging in this public activity. In such a case, the *sapiens* retains an other-regarding attitude while he is withdrawn: he works at philosophy for the sake of posterity. This is what Zeno and Chrysippus did, so it is surely good enough for a good Roman citizen (*viro bono,* 6.4).

He then discusses the three classic types of life: one devoted to pleasure (*voluptati,* 7.1), one devoted to contemplation (*contemplationi,* 7.1) and one devoted to action (*actioni,* 7.1). Seneca shows that all three of these are actually interdependent—that action requires contemplation, that pleasure depends on action, etc. He concludes that "all schools approve of contemplation" (7.4),[6] while admitting that for the Stoic contemplation is more of an anchorage (*statio,* 7.4) than the harbor itself (*portus,* 7.4).

Section 8 is the final section of the dialogue, at least in the form we possess it. Some commentators think it is in fact Seneca's intended conclusion, while others think a substantial portion of his essay is missing.[7] This textual question bears on the historical-philosophical problem at hand (whether Seneca's use of the two commonwealths is put to a purpose adverse to Annas's own) especially when it features in a further argument, such as the following:

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[6] Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays,* 179. The Latin reads: *"ut appareat contemplationem placere omnibus."*

[7] For the "lost end" view, see M. Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 328–334; as well as Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays,* 170. For the "end intact" view, see Seneca, *Seneca: De Otio, De Brevitate Vitae,* Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, ed. G. D. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16–18 and 116–118.

The view that we are missing the ending is based upon an analysis of the structure of Seneca's argument. Having declared in section 2 that he will argue two things (that complete withdrawal over an entire life is justified and that post-career retirement is justified), we would expect him to argue separately for each point. While Seneca fleshes out his case for complete retirement in the extant text, he does not do so for post-career retirement. Thus, it is concluded that we are missing the end, in which Seneca argues for post-career retirement. For this view, see: Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays,* 171 and Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics,* 328. As further proof for this view, one could point out the lack of a *subscriptio* to mark the end of the text in our manuscripts. But on this, see Seneca, *De Otio, De Brevitate Vitae,* 117–118.

Against this view, an argument could be made that we do possess the end: first, the abrupt and puzzling conclusion is characteristically Senecan and is seen at the ending of many of his letters (This has been suggested to me by S. C. Stroup); second, Seneca has already in the extant text of *Ot.* offered an argument for post-career retirement (see Seneca, *De Otio, De Brevitate Vitae,* 17–18 and 18n80), a brief argument, to be sure, but he has also argued for this perspective in other dialogues (see Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays,* 173n7); and most importantly, Seneca's opening remarks in section 1 are critical of social life, because it divides up our purposes and because the people we encounter in society lead us astray. This introduction can easily be seen to prepare us for his critical conclusion in section 8.

> (P1) We do not possess the end of the dialogue.
> (P2) The radical viewpoint of section 8 conflicts with Seneca's views elsewhere (especially in *De Tranquillitate Animi (Tr.)* where withdrawal is advised against).
> (C) Therefore the radical viewpoint—far from offering us Seneca's conclusion—merely gives us a view he is voicing for the sake of argument and which he will have subsequently repudiated in the missing portion of the text.[8]

While (P2) is certainly true, (P1) is debated (see my note 7). If (P1) is not true, we need not accept the conclusion. If (P1) is true, the conclusion only follows if it is also assumed that either (P3) Seneca cannot have changed his mind or that (P4) he would not have applied Stoic doctrine in two contrary ways. However, we need not assume either (P3) or (P4). It is a truism that no one is entirely consistent, and it is an open question whether Stoic theory offers a unified statement on the issue of withdrawal versus engagement. Thus, we need not accept the conclusion.[9]

However, (P2) is certainly true and still poses a problem for the interpretation of section 8. How do we deal with the conflict between Seneca's views here in *Ot.* and earlier in *Tr.*? Two approaches have been suggested. The first is biographical: Seneca has merely changed his opinion between the time he wrote *Tr.* and the time he wrote *Ot.* (a span of probably less than 15 years).[10] The other approach might be called "experimental".[11] Seneca is putting Stoic theory to two different uses: in *Tr.* practical advice for a Stoic friend and in *Ot.* a theoretical

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[8] See Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*, 170 and Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics*, 333. Both suggest the conclusion without exactly affirming it.

[9] Two other premises could be offered in support of the conclusion. The first is (P5): What Seneca says in section 8 contradicts what he says elsewhere in *Ot.* itself. On this view, see Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics*, 332–333. This proposal has been countered by Seneca (2003), 18n80 with the suggestion that Seneca has two classes of people in mind: the *sapientes*, for whom complete withdrawal is necessary, and the virtuous-but-not-yet-*sapientes*, for whom a public career is appropriate prior to their withdrawal. Such an interpretation would remove the contradiction that Griffin perceives within *Ot.*

Another possible premise is (P6): The language of section 8 (i.e. the word *fastidiose*, 8.2.) suggests that Seneca is out of favor with the view he is outlining. On this, see Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics*, 332 and Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*, 179n20. But cf. Seneca, *De Otio, De Brevitate Vitae*, 113. I would argue that such a reading does not pay due regard to Seneca's critical comments in section 1 which mirror his critical comments (e.g. about Carthage) in section 8. Nor does it seem wise to base an entire interpretation on one word *(fastidiose)*.

[10] See Seneca, *De Otio, De Brevitate Vitae*, 1–3, 12–16.

[11] See Seneca, *De Otio, De Brevitate Vitae*, 2, 16.

defense of the Stoic-ness of withdrawal properly understood.[12] In this paper, I will adopt the "experimental" perspective because it does not depend on the assumption that Seneca's texts somehow justify or mirror his state of affairs (i.e., that when he is engaged in politics he tends to read Stoicism as teaching engagement, while when he is withdrawn or considering withdrawal he tends to read Stoicism as teaching withdrawal). The "experimental" perspective is certainly compatible with the biographical, but it assumes less and is sufficient for the problem at hand.

Now we may return to section 8 confident that Seneca's own opinions are being expressed. Having conceded that contemplation is a *statio* for Stoics, but not the *portus*, he immediately follows this up by pointing out that Stoic theory allows one not just to suffer or put up with retirement, but to actually choose it (*non dico ut otium patiatur, sed ut eligat,* 8.1). The point then is that while contemplative-*otium* may be merely a *statio* it is a good one[13] worth choosing. This echoes Seneca's remarks in section 1 where he highlights unencumbered rational choice (*eligere,* 1.1) of an *exemplum* which is made possible only in *otium,* versus the unreflective dependence (*pendemus,* 1.3) on the opinions of others that characterizes society. Thus, withdrawal is a good choice, and it allows us to make other good choices. Further, the Stoics teach that "the *sapiens* will not attach himself to just any republic" (*sapientem ad quamlibet rem publicam accessurum,* 8.1). And what does it matter, Seneca submits, whether it is because the republic is lacking in the eyes of the *sapiens* (first class of *causae*) or because the *sapiens* is lacking in the eyes of the republic (second class of *causae*)? Either way, the *sapiens* and the city will not get along—remember how Socrates was condemned by the Athenians? Every state, with its value system at odds with that of the *sapiens,* will be inhospitable to him. Seneca concludes (8.3–4):

> Were I to go through each commonwealth, I would not find one that could endure the wise man or be endured by him. But if no commonwealth is to be found of the kind that we imagine, retirement becomes a necessity for all wise men, because the one thing which could be preferred to retirement nowhere exists. If someone says that sailing is best and then says that you should not sail on a sea where shipwrecks

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[12] Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics,* 333–334.

[13] Of course, I do not mean good in the Stoic sense in which only virtue is good. The *choice* of the *statio* could be virtuous, but the *statio* itself cannot be good in this sense; it can only be a "preferred indifferent" in Stoicism. Equally, however, the state is also only a "preferred indifferent." On this, see: Annas, 113–114.

> regularly occur and there are often sudden storms to sweep the helmsman off course, he would be telling me, I think, not to weigh anchor, though speaking in praise of sailing.[14]

A radical conclusion, to be sure. The *causae* do indeed "extend broadly": once one reckons with the Stoic teaching on what makes a city a city (i.e. exclusively virtuous people who obey a common law; therefore no true cities exist on earth)[15] and the fact that the *sapiens* is very critical (*fastidiose,* 8.2) of existing communities, we have quite possibly the strongest argument a Stoic could make for withdrawing from public life.

III. SENECA'S CYNICISM

While Annas notes that the "cosmopolitan" and the "communitarian" perspectives are often taken to be two irreconcilable approaches to moral life, she does not (in her paper under discussion) talk about the Cynic origins of Stoic cosmopolitanism. It is typically thought that Diogenes the Cynic coined the term *kosmopolites* (citizen of the universe).[16] As a Cynic, he rejected the norms of society, preferring to live "according to nature" rather than according to the arbitrary laws and customs of human communities.[17] Thus, he did not consider himself to be a citizen of any local polity, but rather of the universe itself. The founder of Stoicism, Zeno of Citium, studied under the Cynic Crates. While Zeno went on to develop his own philosophical perspective, the Stoic school that he founded retained many Cynic ideas, including the idea of cosmopolitanism.[18]

But how did this concept end up working in Stoic ethics? As Annas has suggested, it continued to function as an ideal which one ought to strive for. But what does this striving look like? We have already seen one application of it in Seneca's *Ot.*: the *kosmopolis* (Seneca's "greater republic," 4.2) is served, perhaps better served, in *otium,* and the *sapiens* will truly be a *kosmopolites* (a cosmopolitan) because no existing "city" will suffer him. Thus, he will not possess "dual citizenship," but will rather be characterized by something perhaps not unlike the

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[14] Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays,* 180.

[15] John Sellars, *Stoicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 132.

[16] John Sellars, "Stoic Cosmopolitanism and Zeno's Republic," *History of Political Thought* 28, no. 1 (2007): 3.

[17] Sellars, *Stoicism,* 4–5.

[18] Indeed, it has recently been argued that ". . . Cynic cosmopolitanism is . . . not merely an antecedent to Stoic cosmopolitanism but also a constitutive component." Sellars, "Stoic Cosmopolitanism and Zeno's Republic," 3.

Cynic virtue of independence *(autarkeia)*.[19] This does not seem to be a stretch when we recall Seneca's claim in section 1 that withdrawal is intrinsically beneficial (*proderit . . . per se ipsum secedere,* 1.1) because we will be better off by ourselves (*meliores erimus singuli,* 1.1). This is one way to press Stoic theory. The other, of course, is in the direction of Annas's "social embeddedness."

Of particular importance to our interpretation of *Ot.* is a passage in Griffin's insightful essay on the relationship between Cynicism and Roman Stoicism. Discussing Cicero, she notes:

> The view we find in *De Officiis* may have been inspired by Panaetius. His contemporary the Stoic philosopher Apollodorus of Seleucia is credited with the definition of Cynicism as a "shortcut to virtue" [D.L. 7.121]. The famous passage in Cicero's *De Finibus* (3.68) shows that the Stoa in his day was discussing the question of whether there were circumstances in which the Cynic way of life was appropriate to the Stoic *sapiens,* a question to which Arius Didymus in the same period attempted to give an answer: if the *sapiens* had achieved his virtue by the shortcut, he could stick to that way of life—neglect of social duties of marriage and political life are in question—but he should not start behaving like that when already a *sapiens* (Stob. 2.7.118, p. 114.24 W.).[20]

Was this same sort of question at the back of Seneca's mind as he wrote *Ot.*? If cosmopolitanism was the ideal the Stoics were aiming for, it is not surprising that they debated whether adopting a cosmopolitan way of life outright—even though this meant dispensing with traditional social roles—was a legitimate course for a would-be *sapiens*. Seneca elsewhere praises Cynics like Diogenes and Demetrius for being living models of the ideal Stoics are striving for, even while Stoics need not adopt their lifestyle,[21] and Cynicism continued to fascinate Roman Stoics after Seneca. For instance, in book III section 23 of his *Discourses,* Epictetus praises the Cynic lifestyle (when properly practiced) and defends the Cynics' rejection of conventional politics (III 23.83–85) and family duties (III 23.67–76).

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[19] On this concept, see Sellars, "Stoic Cosmopolitanism and Zeno's Republic," 7–8.

[20] Miriam Griffin, "Cynicism and the Romans: Attraction and Repulsion," in The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy, ed. R. Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 203.21. Ibid., 203–204.

[21] Ibid., 203–204.

Annas mentions Diogenes the Cynic in her paper when she claims that ". . . people like Socrates or Diogenes may give us a glimpse of the possibility of virtue, but they do not indicate for us a way of life that all virtuous people would have to lead".[22] It seems to me that her disjunction is misleading: for between (A) "a glimpse of the possibility" and (B) "a way of life that all virtuous people would have to lead" lies something like (C) "a legitimate way of life that some virtuous people may lead (either by choice or by necessity)." Indeed our reading of *Ot.* has suggested that Seneca did not shy away from pressing Stoicism toward (C), where these "some virtuous people" are *sapientes* or would-be *sapientes*. In *Ot.* Seneca was concerned to legitimate a lifestyle along the lines of that lived by Socrates, Diogenes, Zeno and Chrysippus, concluding that every true *sapiens* will, given the nature of things, end up leading a one-citizenship life.[23]

Annas is concerned to rebut a reformist consequentialism that is willing to dispense with family and other social duties for the sake of bringing a greater good to a greater number. Such a theory privileges the ideal (greatest amount of happiness) over the social, with the result that the performance of everyday social duties is only morally right when the consequences of such performance outweigh the consequences of a more high-minded program. Annas rejects this model, and I think she is right to do so. However, she endorses Stoicism because it combines the social and ideal perspectives in a way that allows deliberation to proceed, at least in theory, "unproblematically." (Problematic with regard to deliberation are those theories in which the social and ideal perspectives are bifurcated—in which one perspective justifies the other).[24] On the contrary, I think the Roman Stoics' continued interest in the Cynic ideal (an ideal which by definition rejects the conventional value system latent in the embedded perspective) indicates that they did at times regard the embedded perspective as "disposable"—not for the sake of bringing a greater good to a greater number—but out of devotion to virtue, the only good.

IV. CONCLUSION

Annas is right to insist that there is a stark difference between the detachment of a Stoic and the detachment of a consequentialist:

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[22] Annas, 121.

[23] For a striking forerunner of Seneca's defense of the philosophical way of life (over against one devoted to political or family duties), see Plato's *Apology*, 23a5–23d8, where Socrates defends his lack of participation in political life and family duties—a defense which he frames, interestingly enough, in terms of the contrast between leisure *(schole)* and occupation *(ascholia)*, the Greek counterparts of the Latin *otium* and *negotium*.

[24] Annas, 111–112.

> Consequentialism requires that you first regard your commitments as disposable and then restore them in the name of practicality; there is nothing in this to get you to be more critical of them and your relation to them. Stoicism requires that you scrutinize your life from within, that you aspire to an ideal in a way which is critical but realistic about what your life actually is. To abandon your family responsibilities in favour of doing good to more people, for example, is romantic self-importance.[25]

I would add merely that Cynicism, as carefully yet approvingly interpreted by a Stoic like Epictetus, did require that you "first regard your commitments as disposable" for the sake of pursuing virtue. Insofar as Cynicism rejected the embedded perspective for the sake of the cosmopolitan, it is an ancient analogue to modern ethical theories which regard social commitments as disposable. Furthermore, while the Stoics generally tried to retain both the embedded and the cosmopolitan perspectives, this was not always a tidy affair. Seneca's *Ot.* has shown us that the radical path of the cynical *sapiens* is just as authentically Stoic as the ethic Annas commends (an "internal aspiration" from within traditional social roles).[26] She is right that the Stoics were no radical reformists; they were at times, however, radical critics who endorsed withdrawal.

Perhaps the philosophical point of all this has to do with the way one understands the relationship between the Stoic doctrine of "preferred indifferents"—a doctrine which tells us to choose apparently good things like family, social community, etc. on the basis that it is natural for us to do so—and the notion of the one true good, virtue. If the wide gulf that separates these two classes of things is highlighted, a perspective like that in Seneca's *De Otio* is achieved, a perspective in which virtue is pitted against social life. On the other hand, if the naturalness of the preferred indifferents is stressed, a perspective like that of Annas (or Seneca elsewhere or other Middle or Late Stoics) is achieved, one in which it is very unlikely that our social roles will conflict with virtue. It will be noted instead that, as nature has it, these very roles enable us to begin to find out what our moral obligations are. Maybe this leeway within Stoicism is a benefit, maybe it is a clue that a further problem awaits us.

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[25] Ibid., 120.

[26] Annas, 121.

Totalitarianism, Consumerism, and Megachurches:

Hannah Arendt's Indictment of an American Religious Phenomenon

Grant J. Rozeboom

> "Here, where the deed itself dispossesses us of all power, we can indeed only repeat with Jesus: 'It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea.'"—Hannah Arendt[1]

The relatively recent phenomenon of megachurches has elicited a wide range of responses from the religious community, ranging from thoughtful support to cautionary criticism.[2] However, very little has been done to discuss the philosophical, and specifically the ethical and political, implications of the megachurch movement and its effects on persons inside and outside the church. While many possibilities exist for such scholarly research, I will limit myself in this essay to discussing the potential and oftentimes actualized dangers of megachurches within the framework of the 20th century political theorist Hannah Arendt. Born and raised in Germany, Hannah Arendt grew to become a successful scholar in her native country, receiving her philosophical training from Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. However, after the Nazis rose to power in the 1930s, Arendt, a Jew by birth, was forced to flee Germany and eventually settled in the United States. It was there she penned her first postwar work, the controversial *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* which was devoted to analyzing the rise of totalitarian regimes such as the one she fled. Some have criticized *The Origins* for leaving "theoretical threads" hanging, especially in its first edition,[3] and consequently in her next major work *The Human Condition,* which was the first piece of her scholarship which she termed "political theory," many of the themes that had been discussed sparsely in *The Origins* were given more complete attention. I would suggest that, while a variety of concepts and principles emerge in Arendt's political writings, her notion of human freedom should be seen as the primary theoretical foundation and unifying theme of works such as *The Origins, The Human Condition,* and *On Revolution*. Through her understanding of freedom, Arendt was able to look at the totalitarian movements in Germany and Russia and discern their most destructive capabilities (the corresponding deeds of which are implicated in the opening quote of this paper), and then turn her gaze upon

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[1] Arendt, Hannah. The Human Condition. 2nd Ed. (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1958), 241.

[2] Thumma, Scott and Travis, Dave, *Beyond Megachurch Myths* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2007) is a good example of recent Christian literature that has argued for supposed advantages offered by the megachurch movement, while Os Guinness' *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1993) offers a thoughtful, contrasting viewpoint which cautions against megachurch "flirtation" with secularism and consumerism.

[3] Hanna Pitkin's *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1997) is a thorough and sometimes scathing critique of Arendt's political theory.

the emerging consumerist conditions in America and find frightening similarities. In the following essay, I would first like to outline briefly Arendt's definition of human freedom, and then, with those fundamental principles in mind, go from there to discuss some of the most significant and pertinent connections between *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*. Finally, I will apply these concepts to the megachurch movement (which followed Arendt's death by at least a decade[4]) in order to better understand its dangers, especially as they are transcendent of religious institutions, as well as propose possible avenues of resolution which could recover and protect the humanity of megachurch attendees. Neither the "modern man" who was the subject of Arendt's concern, nor the church member who is threatened by "the presence of the mall in the church,[5]" "has lost his capacities (for freedom) or is on the point of losing them,"[6] and so I hope to maintain a hopeful tone throughout the following paragraphs that centers on the always-underdeveloped potential of humans to join together to further their freedom.

I. EXPLORING ARENDTIAN FREEDOM

I previously made the claim that Arendt's notion of human freedom played a unique role in unifying her political writings. Before that statement can be further clarified, Arendt's own thoughts on freedom will have to be delineated, beginning with her explicit use of ancient Greek thought and culture in formulating her theoretical categories. According to Arendt, the fundamental opposition between the private, household realm of *zoe* affairs *(oikos)* and the public, political realm of *bios* affairs (the *polis* and its *agora*) correspond to the contrasting and mutually exclusive notions of necessity and freedom. Arendt claimed that since the Greeks viewed the household as essentially structured around biological necessity i.e. all relationships and activities that took place within the *oikos* were "driven by . . . wants and needs,"[7] no deeds could take place in this private realm that could be considered acts of freedom. As long as humans remained subject to their physical,

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[4] Scott Thumma, Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their characteristics and cultural content, http://www.hirr.hartsem.edu and Guinness, Dining with the Devil. The term "church growth movement" is used by Guinness to describe the origins of the megachurch movement as a preceding phenomenon, and so he traces the roots of Americana megachurches into the 1970s, which was contemporaneous to Arendt's death in 1975.

[5] Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, 12.

[6] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 323.

[7] Ibid., 30.

life-centered desires, their time and energy were devoted to activities that were fundamentally determined and necessitated by natural forces and (according to the Greeks) entirely unfit for persons who wished to be considered as a member of humankind: "(Aristotle) denied not the slave's capacity to be human, but only the use of the word 'men' for members of the species man-kind as long as they are totally subject to necessity."[8] Additionally, the "animal life *(zoe)*" that was represented by natural, biological forces maintained an unending cyclical motion which continually moved between birth and death, production and consumption, growth and reproduction, etc. and was impossible to escape through individual effort. Consequently, these cyclical needs of biological life acted as a ruler over the *idiotes* who remained confined solely to the private activities of the household, for they shared only in a "natural community (which) . . . was born of necessity, and necessity ruled over all activities performed in (the household)."[9]

Therefore, for both Arendt and the Greeks, freedom existed outside of the household realm of isolated privacy and biological need, thereby implying that freedom has both an external and communal character.[10] That is to say, the existence of freedom is qualified by two conditions: 1) it must be experienced from without and not within the privacy of oneself and one's household, for it is an essentially "worldly and tangible reality,"[11] and 2) it is only realized in the presence of other persons, in "the company of other men."[12] This stands in stark contrast to many of our more familiar formulations of freedom, especially those which include a "free will" or "freedom" of movement and private action, and so these should be briefly considered.

Arendt traces the use of free will or willing as a mode of freedom to Paul and the early Christians, who in turn influenced the writings of Augustine.[13] For Augustine, freedom was inherently private, since it could only emerge in the struggle that took place within the individual will; it occurs only "in the intercourse between me and myself."[14] This definition of freedom is found lacking by Arendt because it leads to an unavoidable contradiction: the good intentions of the "will" which are supposed to force our actions into compliance are confronted

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[8] Ibid., 83.

[9] Ibid., 30.

[10] In his recent article, "Public Space" (*Continental Philosophy Review,* 40[2007]:31–47), James Mensch discusses the phenomenological implications of the extrinsic and communal aspects of Arendtian freedom.

[11] Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (Penguin Book: New York. 1977) 147 and *On Revolution* (Penguin Books: New York. 1977), 124.

[12] Arendt, *Between Past and Furture,* 147.

[13] Ibid., 156–161.

[14] Ibid., 156.

by the seeming impotence of the same "will" to carry them through on the many occasions in which there is a disparity between the "willed" intent and the actual execution. "It is as though the I-will immediately paralyzed the I-can, as though the moment men *willed* freedom, they lost their capacity to *be* free."[15]

Equally unacceptable are the arguments of early modern political thinkers, such as Hobbes and Locke, whose theories remain largely (and often subconsciously) influential today. The former suggested that unhindered "motion within the body of man"[16] for the sake of self-preservation was freedom, and the latter maintained this notion of freedom as unhindered movement for self-preservation while altering it slightly to include property acquisition; accordingly, for Locke, "liberty" became inseparable from his concept of private property.[17] Both of these definitions, while claiming a "freedom" of movement and activity, confine humans within the stifling boundaries set by individual, physical needs, and, in turn, perpetuate the private isolation which was seen as both destructive and deterministic by Arendt and the ancient Athenians. Unsurprisingly, both Hobbes and Locke thought that any action taken by humans to form a political community resulted in at least some loss of freedom, as both of their Social Contracts included a surrender of "natural liberty."[18] So, neither the introverted "free will" of Augustine, nor the isolating and unhindered self-preservation of Hobbes and Locke allow for a freedom that is beyond oneself and shared with others, and so they remain locked in their respective contradictions: the free will forever struggling to overcome insufficient actualizations of its intentions, and the "free" pursuit of self-interest remaining strangely *determined* by uncontrollable needs and wants that rule as the harshest of dictators.

The suggestion, then, that freedom exists as something extrinsic and shared becomes of the utmost importance if we are to move beyond these troubling contradictions. But what would this kind of freedom actually look like? How could it be possible for freedom to be experienced outside of oneself and with others at the same time? Arendt answered these questions (again, in theoretical agreement

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[15] Ibid., 160.

[16] Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. (Penguin Books: London. 1968), 119.

[17] John Locke, in Chapter VII of his *Second Treatise of Government* (Digireads.com: Stillwell. 2005), 97 famously defines property as "life, liberty, and estate," thereby implying that freedom is subsidiary to his more important and encompassing notion of private property.

[18] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* Chapter VIII, finds that the formation of a Commonwealth will sacrifice some of the liberty naturally held by persons in the fictional State of Nature, but, in the end, will better preserve their property, which is an ideal outcome for Locke. For Hobbes, all liberty is essentially exchanged when the Social Contract is formed in order to obtain the security offered by the Sovereign, and any "free movement" that occurs thereafter must be within the bounds set by the Sovereign's laws.

with the Greeks) by suggesting that there must be "a common public space"[19] associated with freedom's appearance. To the Greeks, this was the essence of the *polis*—a space in which citizens could gather as equals in order to engage in the common affairs of politics, and so establish their freedom.[20] Unfortunately, for women, children, and slaves in ancient Athens, this spatial realm of equality and freedom was unreachable, a problem of which Arendt was cognizant.[21] Accordingly, she universalized the Greek connection between human freedom and the *polis* by translating the activities of the *polis* into the exercise of two faculties shared by all humans—action and speech. In other words, Arendt proposed that freedom, which requires that extrinsic relations occur between humans outside of "household" conditions, could be realized when people join together for the purpose of speaking with one another and acting on behalf of their community. Freedom "springs from the possibilities that we present to each other through our publicly appearing behavior,"[22] and is present in those moments during which persons reveal themselves to each other as truly unique and fully human. Using the coinciding Greek concepts of *archein* (to begin, to lead) and *prattein* (to carry through, to follow), Arendt specified her notion of action by suggesting that when persons present themselves in the public realm on behalf of their community, they will also present ideas for the future of that community that are spontaneous and unique (insofar as they break the cycle of necessity and are unanticipated)[23]. Debate will ensue, and eventually the "beginner" will be chosen for having the best idea and the citizenry will join together to "carry it through." Thus, it is not difficult to understand why Arendt associated speech so closely with political action, for without shared ways of revealing themselves, persons will never be able to build "the web of human affairs and relationships"[24] needed to facilitate the new beginnings of their freedom.

I feel compelled to insert one final clarification regarding Arendt's concept of freedom, lest I mischaracterize her nuanced work. While Arendtian freedom sets itself in contrast to private, biological necessity, it does not seek to abolish this necessity or the private activities associated with it. "For the elimination of necessity, far from resulting automatically in the establishment of freedom, only blurs the distinguishing line between freedom and necessity."[25] In other words,

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[19] Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 147.

[20] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 32.

[21] Roy Tsao, "Arendt Against Athens," *Political Theory* 30 (2002): 97–123

[22] Mensch, "Public Space," 37.

[23] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 177–178.

[24] Ibid., 204.

[25] Ibid., 71.

the needs inherent with biological life will never completely disappear from humanity, and if we pretend otherwise, we lose the very foundation on which we can build freedom. Freedom is not an ascetic escape from life and its pressing desires; rather, "freedom is always won in (man's) never wholly successful attempts to liberate himself from necessity."[26] That is to say, freedom is not the end reached at the end of some great struggle against necessity, but exists and is actualized in this struggle itself. And while this at first seems to be an overwhelming and daunting task, it should serve as immense encouragement to remember that this difficult effort of freedom cannot be undertaken individually, for, as previously mentioned, we cannot begin to discover the potentialities of human freedom until we step outside our private domains of "household" activity and form public relationships with one other as equal citizens.

II. CONNECTING *The Origins of Totalitarianism* AND *The Human Condition*

The writing of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* provided Arendt with a chance to grapple with the shocking realities she had witnessed under the Nazi's rise to power, as well as an opportunity to deduce underlying principles associated with this terrifying new form of governance termed "totalitarianism." In doing so, she included an analysis of the Stalin-era Soviet Union, for while the specific agendas of the Nazi and Soviet regimes differed in appearance, they shared much in common both in their development and in their capacity to destroy the possibility of freedom's appearance for persons within their mechanistic grip.[27] Additionally, as she became acquainted with American society, Arendt discerned the emergence of totalitarian tendencies in the growing culture of affluence and consumerism, and wrote *The Human Condition* as an indictment of this phenomenon, which consisted of an economically-oriented, consumer-driven, and anti-political "social realm." Both the continental totalitarian regimes and American consumerist society became enemies of freedom to Arendt; therefore, they also became interconnected phenomena and issues of the highest significance in her political thought. So, with her aforementioned notion of freedom in mind, it will serve our purposes well to discuss the central theoretical themes shared by *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*.

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[26] Ibid., 121.

[27] Arendt states that the Nazi and Stalinist totalitarian regimes produced a system which "negates human freedom more efficiently than any tyranny ever could," and even removes the speck of freedom which is offered by the option of suicide (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, [Harcourt Inc.: New York. 1976] 432); consider also her statement that "totalitarian domination . . . aims at abolishing freedom." (*Origins.*, 405)

Prior to discussing the emergence of totalitarianism in Germany and Russia, Arendt devotes the first two sections of *The Origins* to the historical developments of anti-semitism and imperialism, both of which she viewed as precursors to the totalitarian phenomenon. Of particular importance for her theoretical claims in *The Origins,* and eventually those made in *The Human Condition,* is the originally imperialistic notion of expansion for expansion's sake (which, for the sake of coherence, I will term the "expansion principle"). This concept takes a variety of forms in Arendt's writings, but retains its unity in its uniquely destructive role. It first emerges in the second section ("Imperialism") of *The Origins* as part of her critical discussion of the beginnings of the colonial age: "The concept of unlimited expansion that alone can fulfill the hope for unlimited accumulation of capital, and brings about the aimless accumulation of power, makes the foundation of new political bodies . . . well-nigh impossible. In fact, its logical consequence is the destruction of all living communities."[28] This idea is further developed in later chapters under the term "process", eventually becoming eerily symbolic of the cyclical rhythms of biological nature and its resulting necessity: "Expansion . . . conceived as an endless process" will result in a "maelstrom" which will subsume individual persons until they "identify (themselves) with anonymous forces that (they are) supposed to serve in order to keep the whole process in motion."[29] Additionally, during her description of the rise and apex of totalitarian rule, this cyclical expansion principle is also called a "movement" by Arendt, and it is expanded to include characteristics such as constant growth and an ever-changing system of organization which forces all its members to become mere functions. Even the totalitarian Leader is not exempt from this functional degradation, as he or she simply acts as "the motor which swings (the totalitarian movement) in motion."[30] It should come as no surprise that the pressing needs and wants of the Greek *oikos* are metaphorically invoked in this part of Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism, and that the agenda she attributes to the Nazi's regime emphasizes the primacy they gave to "the laws of nature and life."[31] For, if the primary crime of totalitarian regimes was their consistent annihilation of freedom, than the "process" by which that destruction was

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[28] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* 137.

[29] Ibid., 215.

[30] Ibid., 373.

[31] Ibid., 346.[32] In *The Origins,* Arendt, in a bit of foreshadowing, concludes the chapter preceding the section on totalitarianism with a discussion of Greek distaste for the private realm and privacy's opposition to the formation of "a common world." (301) This is *not* to suggest that totalitarianism represented a magnified household realm; rather, my point is simply that totalitarianism exhibited anti-freedom tendencies that had the same quality and effect of *oikia* activities and functions.

achieved should certainly be expected to resemble the household realm's "natural given-ness," along with its cyclical necessities.[32]

While totalitarianism eventually subsided in both Germany and Russia, the danger posed by the expansion principle certainly did not. In fact, Arendt worried that its new manifestation in the American "consumers' society"[33] would be just as destructive as its preceding trans-Atlantic forms, and maybe even more so because of its seeming imperceptibility. In *The Human Condition,* Arendt finds that the cycle of consumerism, which she defined as the ebb and flow between production and consumption that comes to characterize the lives of entire groups of persons, is "an enormously intensified life process" which reduces all human activity to deeds done "for the sake of 'making a living.'"[34] In other words, consumerism exhibits an inherent need to enlarge its production and consumption capabilities simply for the purpose of increasing the amount of production and consumption. By spending the entirety of their lives serving the basic needs of life itself, and so chaining themselves to necessity, members of a consumers' society remain caught in this cycle of growth, for there are always more commodities to be consumed than time and production constraints allow.[35] Therefore, partakers in consumerism find themselves caught in an unending process, which, like the imperialists' "unending accumulation of capital" and the ever-increasing domain of the totalitarian movement, turns persons into mere functions. And perhaps most disturbing of all is the suggestion that, as a consumerist society produces more and more commodities and turns more and more objects into consumable items,[36] persons will likely become "dazzled by the abundance of (consumerism's) growing fertility" and unable to detect their "own futility."[37]

Interrelated to the emergence of the expansion principle in imperialism, totalitarianism, and consumerism, is the use of ideology as a way to reconstruct what persons consider "reality." Ideologies are, according to Arendt's concise definition, "isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything

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[32] In *The Origins,* Arendt, in a bit of foreshadowing, concludes the chapter preceding the section on totalitarianism with a discussion of Greek distaste for the private realm and privacy's opposition to the formation of "a common world." (301) This is *not* to suggest that totalitarianism represented a magnified household realm; rather, my point is simply that totalitarianism exhibited anti-freedom tendencies that had the same quality and effect of *oikia* activities and functions.

[33] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 126.

[34] Ibid., 132.

[35] Ibid, 133.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 135..

and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise."[38] They "combine the scientific approach with results of philosophical relevance and pretend to be scientific philosophy,"[39] so that abstract explanations for non-empirical phenomena are perverted and extrapolated to become concrete, scientific laws which explain the entirety of history and all that is important about the present. While ideologies had played a "negligible role in political life" prior to the rise of totalitarianism, the social atomization and loneliness exhibited by persons in modern mass society made them particularly vulnerable to the all-encompassing explanations and membership that ideologies offer, thereby allowing ideologies to come to the political foreground.[40] Since ideologies operate from the conclusions drawn within their inherent system of logic, they become detached from the sensible world and "independent of all experience" and so achieve "a consistency that exists nowhere in the realm of reality."[41]

Furthermore, in their attempt to explain the whole of history and reality, ideologies become cyclical in their claims, for they always end with the same assumed premise that they begin with. For instance, in the case of totalitarian ideology, the "movement," which is used to justify the existence of the regime as well as the regime's actions (i.e. the genocide of the Jews will serve the purpose of a fictional "Aryan" movement which Nazi policy is designed to further), is in turn justified by explaining the movement's origins as the essence of history. However, when questions of a historical nature are raised (i.e. what past events have led to society's ills today?), the answer returns to the movement by using *it* as *the* ultimate justification of historical developments (i.e. the causes of society's current problems can be traced to the existence of the Jews as a parasitical people in Europe, because the Jews are an inferior race which cannot coexist with the growing *Aryan movement*). This sort of circular reasoning destroys the "freedom inherent in man's capacity to think," and reinforces the cyclical necessity central to the expansion principle by providing "reasons" for its ever-recurring, insatiable hunger—which, as previously discussed, is the defining characteristic of accumulation for its own sake.[42] For Germany and Russia, this meant that persons who accepted totalitarian ideologies felt a deceptive sense of purpose[43] by becoming

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[38] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 468.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 225, 470–471

[41] Ibid., 470–471

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 356. This sad state of affairs can be summarized with Arendt's observation: "(Nazi propaganda) gave the masses of atomized, undefinable, unstable, and futile individuals a means of self-definition and identification which not only restored some of the self-respect they had formerly derived from their function in society, but also created a kind of spurious stability."

a function of the regimes' growth movements and their corresponding "manufactured unrealit(ies)."[44] It is also important to note that these ideological "unrealities" rested on two interdependent claims: 1) everything outside the ideological "unreality" is perishing, since all that is worthwhile is contained within it, and 2) anything that challenges and/or contradicts the "unreality" should be promptly destroyed,[45] so that the illusion of reality can be maintained. The acceptance of these claims in turn increased the ability of totalitarian expansion movements to further the scope of their domain.

Just as Arendt recognized a new form of the expansion principle in American consumerism, she accordingly claimed that the presence of ideological unrealities had moved across the Atlantic after the end of totalitarian regimes and established itself in America's consumers' society, this time under the guise of "world alienation."[46] In *The Human Condition,* Arendt finds that the presence of consumerism leads to the formation of a "waste economy" which thrives not on the abundance of goods produced, but rather on the expansion of the consumption-production process itself.[47] This provides the basis for the creation of consumer*ism*'s ideology—the premise that increased consumption is an unqualified good, and the resulting principle that considers all of life's activities only in terms of their relation to consumption. This ideology could only begin to spread when "expropriation, the deprivation for certain groups of their place in the world . . . , created both the original accumulation of wealth and the possibility of transforming this wealth into capital through labor."[48] Consequently, as expropriated persons became laboring functions of the consumption-production process and adopted the consumerist ideology, the whole of external reality became potential commodities to them. In other words, after losing their former place in the world (and thereby becoming vulnerable to ideological claims), and by adopting the ideology which states, "All that matters is consumption," persons became anonymous parts of the movement to increase consumption (as previously discussed), and in doing so, excluded from their minds the possibility of things that could be lasting and worldly. As a result, we face the possibility that "all worldly things . . . (will be) fed back into (the production process) at an ever-increasing speed."[49] This in turn has set the stage for consumerism's cycle to move at a dizzying pace

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[44] Ibid., 445

[45] Ibid., 380 ". . . everything outside the movement is dying," and 385, ". . . when they are told that only Moscow has a subway, the real meaning of the statement is that all (other) subways should be destroyed."

[46] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 248–257.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 254.

[49] Ibid., 256.

and begin transforming all of the world and its objects into consumable items. This is why Arendt terms the consumerist brand of ideological unreality "world alienation": "the process of wealth accumulation, . . . stimulated by the life process . . . , is possible only if *the world and the very worldliness of man are sacrificed*"[50] (emphasis added). And, if we were to apply the logic of the paired claims attributed by Arendt to totalitarian ideologies, we could also conclude that the existence of a permanent, external world violates the ideology of consumerism, and so leads consumerists to demand that this world either be completely destroyed or transformed into commodities so that it can take its proper place in the consumption process. These consequences of consumerist ideology strike at the heart of Arendtian freedom, for there can be no consideration of a freedom that is extrinsic and shared if there is no durable human world within which "a common public space" for this freedom can be founded. Genuine political communities (that is, those which promote freedom) demand the existence of a lasting, objective realm within which they can be built, and so the ideology of consumerist "world alienation" will forever be at odds with genuine freedom; the "durability and stability" of freedom's polities can do nothing more than "interfere"[51] with the consumption-production process.

While we have barely scratched the surface of the numerous and complex connections that lie between *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition,* hopefully our purposes have been adequately served. It will be enough for now to recognize the important role that freedom, defined as acts of new beginnings in political communities, played for Arendt and her political thought. Additionally, we will do well to remember the monstrosity of the crime totalitarianism committed against this freedom, both through its adoption of the expansion principle as a systemic tool, and by its use of ideological unrealities to lure vulnerable persons into becoming functions of its own growth. American consumerism exhibits a reemergence of these two phenomena, and its relative subtlety in comparison to the continental totalitarian movements presented (and still presents) a danger of its own. The loneliness of modern humans certainly made fertile ground for this destruction,[52] and while historical context has changed drastically since the writing of *The Origins* and *The Human Condition,* the vulnerability of lonely persons to ideological movements has not, and we need not look any further than American religious organizations to see it realized today.

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* 476–478.

III. CONSUMERISM AND MEGACHURCHES

The popular definition of a megachurch simply describes a congregation which consists of at least two thousand persons per week. However, if the number of congregants was all that was at stake in describing this dangerous phenomenon, the original premise of this essay would be defeated. While size is certainly a startling characteristic of all megachuches, their essential identity lies with "organizational and leadership dynamics[53]" that embody the core values of American consumerism.[54] Hidden beneath a façade of religious good will and appealing slogans, commercial techniques and marketplace strategies have been adopted by megachurch organizations, bringing with them a tendency towards endless growth and expansion. Furthermore, megachurch leaders have expertly synthesized these secular market strategies with isolated theological ideas, resulting in the formation of ideologies which reinforce constant growth while offering participants a carefully constructed realm of spiritual identity and consumption.[55] Attempts have been made to defend megachuches against the widespread criticism they have received in recent years, and such defenses have been successful in their own right.[56] However, they have usually centered on particular aspects of megachurch worship, such as theological preference and congregant demographics, and have avoided dealing with broader questions concerning the presence of consumerist mechanisms. By examining current research of the megachurch phenomenon and then applying Arendt's conclusions within these findings, I hope to deal with these pressing problems that have largely escaped the notice of religious authors. Furthermore, it is my intention to do this from a philosophical perspective, and so while statistical data will be referenced occasionally, the focus of my analysis will remain theoretical in order to remain consistent with Arendt's writings.

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[53] Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their characteristics and cultural context."

[54] This is certainly a contentious claim, but I find it telling that even literature written in defense of the megachurch phenomenon, such as Thumma and Davis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths,* openly admits to consumerist tendencies in megachurch organizations (14–17). Of course, Christian books and articles critical of the megachurch movement have much to say about American consumerism in the church; particularly notable is, as previously mentioned, Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* (12, 25–27).

[55] Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their characteristics and cultural context." Consider this quote from a megachurch pamphlet: "Big is Beautiful . . . Any church in a large, growing community that is practicing the 'Great Commission' cannot keep from growing." Thumma comments later in this article: "Megachurches offer . . . persons a history, a narrative tradition, and programs to which they can commit."

[56] Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths.*

Before a deeper discussion concerning the dangers of the megachurches can begin, a workable definition of the term "megachurch" must be established. As previously mentioned, the common standard of 2,000 congregants per week is unhelpful in that it does little to indicate the structural and programmatic characteristics that are theoretically significant. Recent scholarship has attributed a variety of attributes to megachurches, such as their predominantly suburban and "ex-urban" location and their tendency to avoid official affiliation with a denomination, but for the sake of brevity, we will focus only on those aspects which are *most* pertinent to the issue of consumerism.[57] Therefore, I suggest that we consider megachurches to be those religious organizations which claim Christianity as their faith-identity, but display the following two distinct characteristics: 1) the belief in "church-growth" as an unqualified good, and 2) the utilization of a vast programmatic and ideological structure to maintain continuous growth.[58] Both of these will be further explicated below so that they can be critically discussed in terms of Arendt's theoretical categories and assessment of American society.

The notion of church growth, by itself, seems relatively innocent. After all, what could possibly be wrong with the ability of religious groups, specifically those dedicated to ideals such as love and community outreach, to expand and increase their institutional capabilities? Certainly the mere occurrence of such growth is largely uncontroversial, and is potentially beneficial for both church members and communities within which churches reside. Within megachurches, however, growth is not simply a mere side-effect or even goal among other goals. It serves as a fundamental assumption from which other beliefs and organizational decisions are made; as a megachurch pastor recently stated, "I'm just trying to get people in the door."[59] Furthermore, as megachurches (or pre-megachurches) begin to adopt growth as a governing principle, they "evolve their buildings, leadership, and programmatic structures along with their growth."[60] In other words, once these church organizations start functioning for the purpose of expanding their organizational capacities, their internal structure and programming initiatives are changed in order to facilitate a high rate of growth. In the end, the initially innocent objective of church growth becomes a unifying theme and foundational belief in the form of Church Growth, determining the ways in which persons, programs, and ideas are organized and utilized. By believing that increased numbers of persons and greater institutional capacity are inher-

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[57] Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their characteristics and cultural content."

[58] Ibid.

[59] Jonathan Mahler, "The Soul of the New Exurb," *New York Times*, March 27, 2005.

[60] Thumma and Davis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, 12.

ently valuable and beneficial, megachurches move beyond facilitating Christian worship and outreach and begin serving the purpose of getting bigger—an end which, when fully adopted, overshadows all other aims.

Seemingly little needs to be said to describe the ways in which the dominating role of Church Growth in megachuches is analogous to the expansion principle in Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism and consumerism. As previously discussed, the systematic belief in continual expansion as an inherently and absolutely valuable principle carries with it the consequences of reducing persons to mere functions of continual growth and cyclical processes. For megachurches, this means that church members will be relied upon to play a variety of roles that help facilitate organizational expansion: "There are always groups (within megachurches) which organize and train church volunteers both to assist in the functioning of the church and in the performance of its ministries."[61] Furthermore, as churches and their members learn to serve Church Growth, they structure themselves around its two-phase cycle: accommodating new attendees (analogous to the reproduction phase of biological life cycles) and finding functional roles for established members (analogous to the maturation phase of biological life cycles); accordingly, functioning members can help bring in more persons once they are fully integrated into the expansion-complex.[62] As is the case in Arendt's "consumer's society," which exhibits "life-like" growth through a continual cycle of production and consumption, megachurches envision their own expansion as endless, and in doing so, transform their members into functionary "jobholders" whose greatest aspiration (within their respective church) is to add as many new members as possible. Even more striking is the connection between the ever-changing leadership and bureacratic apparatuses of totalitarian regimes and the tendency of megachurches to be "continuously altering their ministry choices.[63]" Arendt claimed that Hitler's and Stalin's state machinery needed to be continually in flux so that responsibility would never be attributed to any particular actions taken by individuals, and therefore, the focus could remain on continual power-expansion at a world-wide level.[64] Similarly, as megachurches seek high levels of growth, they must appeal to greater and greater numbers of persons, and therefore must constantly change their internal organization and programmatic offerings, so that new attendees can

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[61] Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their characteristics and cultural context." He also states elsewhere in the article that "megachurches . . . require massive numbers of volunteer workers."

[62] Gustav Neibuhr, "The Minister as Marketer: Learning From Business," *The New York Times*, April 18, 1995.

[63] Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena."

[64] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 374–375.

successfully be incorporated as full-fledged members without feeling the need to take full responsibility for their own spiritual maturation. That is to say, by attempting to offer programs that fit the various needs, interests, and preferences of potential members, megachurches remove a large degree of autonomy from persons who would otherwise be encouraged to discover ways to enrich their spiritual lives, either by themselves or with their immediate community members. The notion that persons should take full responsibility for nurturing spiritual growth in themselves and others is entirely incompatible with the maxims of megachurch membership, for in order to maintain continual expansion and large numbers of congregants, megachurches must control and centralize the ways in which their members participate and experience spirituality.[65]

Some have described the megachurch tendency to expand and centralize religious programming in terms of a shopping mall metaphor, suggesting that megachurches package spirituality into consumable forms, and allow religious "consumers" to come and select the various spiritual commodities that suit their tastes.[66] Such a metaphor is suggestive of the consequences of megachurch programming and ideology, and while megachurches certainly differ both in purpose and function from America's shopping centers, the ways in which they have adopted consumerist structures allows for the maintenance of their vast and unending growth mechanism. By reducing evangelical faith to participation in internal ministry activities, megachurches essentially negate the need (or even possibility) of participating in other community activities. By offering "everything (a member) need(s) in one package,"[67] megachurches monopolize spiritual, communal, and charitable activity, and thus construct a self-sufficient reality which can function apart from the geographical community within which it is placed. In order for this to take place, megachurches expand their functionary roles so as to meet more than just purely spiritual needs—soon, exercise classes, businessman meetings, financial help sessions, and much more find a place within their programmatic structure.[68] The end result is a dualistic and sharply divided world for megachurch

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[65] Thumma and Davis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths,* 36.

[66] Guinness, *Dining with the Devil,* pp. 11–13 and Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomenon." One megachurch pastor was even bold enough to publicly welcome this association: "We want the church to look like a mall. We want you to come in here and say, 'Dude, where's the cinema?" (Mahler, "The Soul of the New Exurb").

[67] Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomenon."

[68] Thumma and Davis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths,* 36. This is also evidenced by one New Jersey megachurch pastor's statement that "[the church leadership wants] to serve the community in a much more complete way, from athletics to a community center to our Community Development Corporation to having fewer worship services, having more people sitting at one time together." (George James, "Exurbia and God: Megachurches in New Jersey," *New York Times,* June 29, 2003.

members, for they must function in their everyday community as they go to work, school, and interact with non-megachurch member friends in various social activities, but then, in spiritual programs and larger services, they find themselves within a different realm that functions on its own terms.

Ideology is an unmistakable factor in the prevalence and growth of megachurches, and, despite its seemingly theological roots, consists more accurately of the enforcement of moral and religious-sounding maxims that reinforce the alternate reality which megachurches offer their congregants. Studies have shown that most megachurch attendees are "mobile, transient, and without roots."[69] These individuals "long for a place, a heritage, and commitments,"[70] and so, as was the case for the expropriated individuals which fell victim to the origins of consumerism in Arendt's analysis, many contemporary Americans are vulnerable to the historical and growth-oriented institutions offered by megachurches. By using familiar commercial techniques and structures and their accompanying expansion mechanism, and combining these with a comprehensive programmatic and religious structure, megachurches place themselves in a position to make ideological claims that will soothe minds and ensure a continual influx of committed members. These claims parallel Arendt's two-part description of ideology. First, teaching and preaching in megachurches makes use of premises which, when logically carried out, can explain anything and everything in a circular fashion. God is invoked as a Sovereign Being who, when appealed to, can be guaranteed to bring comfort, salvation, prosperity, and eternal happiness, both at an individual and corporate level. Yet, when tragedy and difficulty are encountered by megachurch members, their own moral failings or enemy spirits are blamed, and God is seen as a divine Rescuer who relieves emotional burdens and, should these difficult circumstances change for the better, is given credit for such "blessings." By avoiding the uncomfortable and confrontational dictums of traditional theology[71] and reassuring congregants that their belief in God (insofar as it is evidenced by participation in church activities) will invoke God's benevolence, megachurches effectively explain the problems of the world away.

However, this ideological construct has a second, more sinister, component. Since claims about God are made carefully within the metaphysical walls of megachurches in order to heighten and strengthen them, they must also say something about the world which surrounds them. Ideological movements believe that "everything outside (them) is dying,"[72] and consequently, megachurch

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[69] Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomenon."

[70] Ibid.

[71] Mahler, "The Soul of the New Exurb."

[72] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 380.

ideology operates under the assumption that the world around it is spiritually perishing, and therefore must be either subsumed under its auspices or left to die. This premise justifies the belief that megachurches can and should grow infinitely, and is essential for the construction and maintenance of their ideological unreality.[73] Unfortunately, this development becomes troublesome when megachurches confront aspects of the world which cannot become a part of their structures, as has been the case with the homosexual community. Megachurch ideology, as previously mentioned, contains moral maxims that help support the separateness and perceived sacredness of megachurch unrealities, and among these maxims is the prohibition of homosexuality, or at least the exclusive affirmation of heterosexuality as part of God's created order.[74] Consequently, the existence of homosexuality cannot be accepted as a real and genuine phenomenon if megachurch ideologies are to be effective for their members. According to Arendt, when ideological movements are confronted in this way—when they are faced with a reality that seems to contradict their own claims—they can respond in one of two ways: 1) they figure out a way in which the contradictory reality can be transformed into a functioning component of the movement, as seen in consumerist attempts to transform the entire world into commodities, or 2) they deny and/or destroy the existence of the contradiction.[75] Both responses have been exhibited by megachurches in recent years in order to deal with the tension created by their declamation of homosexuality. When possible, they have tried to make homosexuals a functioning part of their membership, attempting to convince them that their homosexuality is essentially a mistake, and offering "recovery" classes which are designed to help them discover their "inherent" heterosexuality. If such a transformation is deemed impossible, megachurch members are left in an uncomfortable position, for they cannot simply accept homosexual persons as homosexuals, since this would deny the integrity of the unrealities in which they find meaning. Yet, they still cannot escape the visibility and popular vindication of the homosexual community, which in turn begins to feel like a threatening force. Thus, megachurch members must somehow maintain their belief that homosexuality is an unnatural perversion, *not* just because the Bible condemns homosexual behavior in a select few passages but primarily because

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[73] Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena": "As this growth occurred these (megachurch) leaders drew upon the forms and structures of everyday life to fashion a reality which would meet the needs of their institutions and the requirements of their membership."

[74] Evangelical Christianity, which characterizes the vast majority of megachurches, has been "especially prone to stigmatize homosexuality." (John C. Green, *Antigay: Varieties of Opposition to Gay Rights*, www.georgetown.edu)

[75] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 385.

of the threat it poses to the ideological explanations which form the foundation of their membership.

The damage done by megachurch ideology extends far beyond social conflict into the fragile possibility of public freedom which is presented to each human. Freedom demands that persons discover their unique identity in relation to others, for with such an identity comes innumerable "possibilities" for joint action on behalf of common interests.[76] By using ideology to "offer a clear, well defined identity" that is uniform and effectively anonymous,[77] megachurches destroy the ability of persons to discover their plurality with one another. Instead of the spontaneous speech and action which emerges through genuine public relationships, megachurch ideologies enforce smoothly functional roles which lull persons into unconsciousness towards their own unique potential and each other. Furthermore, by employing assumptions which logically and coherently explain away the whole of reality, megachurch ideologies prevent megachurch members from being able to fully engage with the world around them, creating an uncomfortable division which casts favorable light on the welcoming, readily-accessible, and comprehensive nature of megachurch programs. Again, without forming strong and vibrant public relationships with others, freedom becomes a distant *im*possibility, for persons cannot present novel possibilities by themselves. And these relationships cannot be easily developed within megachurch structures, for the "words and deeds" upon which public relationships rely must be sourced from ideas that are essentially *individual*.[78] Mere participation in a megachurch's programs does not encourage this sort of creative and independent thought, and its ideology certainly cannot allow it, lest human uniqueness be allowed to stand against its leveling claims.

Arendt believed in the power of forgiveness to release persons from "what they have done unknowingly" and therefore continue to find their public identity with others, and attributed this discovery of forgiveness' pubic importance to Jesus of Nazareth.[79] When we reveal ourselves in a public manner, we knowingly take a risk, for it is possible (even likely) that we could inadvertently compromise this identity by acting in ways contrary to the selves we reveal through action and speech. Forgiveness protects persons from being bound to these compromises, and allows them to maintain their role in their community. Yet, Arendt cryptically maintained that there were acts which, when considered honestly in terms of

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[76] James Mensch, "Public Space," *Continental Philosophy Review* 40 (2007): 31–47.

[77] Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena."

[78] Ibid.

[79] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 238–240.

their monstrosity, could not be forgiven; they "transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power," and thus escape the bounds of human forgiveness.[80] I would suggest that, in light of Arendt's first-hand experiences of totalitarianism and consumerism, the unforgivable sin she indicted is the deliberate and forceful deprivation of freedom from humans. When persons are prevented from forming strong, public ties with each other, and are discouraged from revealing their unique identities, they cannot establish their freedom, and in turn, forgiveness is rendered useless. It can only be applied by persons who actually know one another and are invested in each other's fates through the common fate of their community. Thus, it is painfully ironic that megachurches, who verbally ascribe to the teachings and way of life demonstrated by Jesus of Nazareth, would subscribe to organizational principles that inhibit the adoption of (arguably) his most foundational ethic. By prizing continual growth and expansion while refusing to include plurality and spontaneous action within their institutions, megachurches are indeed guilty of Arendt's unforgivable sin. The invisible walls which enclose megachurch unrealities are effective barriers to the formation of genuine community, and extend around each person that enters by enforcing economic functionality and ideological coherency. Yet, hope still exists so long as the ability of persons to reveal themselves to each other, to speak and act for the creation of common interests, never completely disappears. Megachurch members, should they wish to escape the troublesome consequences of their ideological membership, need only reach for the "miracle" of public action by trusting the ways in which they can reveal themselves to each other[81] and then forgiving the occasional inconsistencies that are bound to occur, all the while refusing to explain away the world which cries out for such genuine human renewal.

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[80] This is the crime implicated in the opening quote of this paper.

[81] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247.

The Epistemic Nature of Beauty:

Locke, Descartes, and the Architectural Theory of Claude Perrault

Bryan E. Norwood

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Age of Reason, two supposedly distinct forms of modern thought took root and became the basis for philosophical procedure: rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism is said to have begun with René Descartes (1596–1650) and proceeds based on the belief that the correct method of uncovering truth is to begin from an undeniable truth and build in a deductive manner to more complex ideas. Universal truths are intuitive and undeniable and are attained by pure reason, which begins not from observation, but from immanent first principles. The empiricist school, on the other hand, roughly began with the work of Francis Bacon (1561–1626). Empiricism starts not with universal truths, but with the facts of observation and attempts to establish general laws. Empiricism, in opposition to deductive rationalism, attempts to establish truth in an inductive way.

So how do these seemingly opposed ways of philosophical thinking play out in the architecture of the day? If we were to expect architectural theory to connect to these two schools of thought, it would seem that we would find some architects arguing from inductive *a posteriori* truths while others would be arguing from deductive *a priori* certainty. How is it then that, in his major work *A History of Architectural Theory,* Hanno-Walter Kruft claims that the French architect Claude Perrault (1613–1688) is "a representative of epistemological empiricism, as taught mainly by John Locke,"[1] while in *Architectural Theory,* Harry Francis Mallgrave calls Perrault "a Cartesian skeptic and rationalist"?[2]

Claude Perrault, born on November 25, 1613 in Paris, was a medical man by trade, but his most famous contributions were made in the world of architecture.[3] In 1651, Perrault became a professor of physiology and pathology at the University of Paris, where he lectured until 1666 when he became a member of the *Académie des Sciences.* At the *Académie* Perrault joined a list of scientific minds that included the geometer Pierre Carcavy, a friend of Blaise Pascal and Descartes.[4] His

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[1] Hanno-Walter Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory: From Vitruvius to the Present,* trans. Ronald Taylor, Elsie Callander, and Antony Wood (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), 133.

[2] Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Architectural Theory: Volume I, An Anthology from Vitruvius to 1870* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 77.

[3] Wolfgang Hermann, *The Theory of Claude Perrault* (London: Zwemmer, 1973), 1.

[4] Hermann, 6. I have not been able to establish a direct link between Descartes and Perrault, but for the purpose of this study in the philosophical similarity of their ideas, it is not necessary. The use of the Descartes will mainly be as a representative example of the multiple attempts taking place in 17th century to reestablish the foundations of knowledge. The situation is similar with Locke in that no direct contact can be established between the two, but Locke was a resident of France between 1675 and 1679 and could have come in contact with Perrault (Kruft, 133).

first entry into the world of architecture, which has also become his most famous, was the east facade of the Louvre where he startled his contemporaries by using coupled columns. In *A History of French Architecture* Blomfield remarks on the east facade:

> the most remarkable thing about Perrault's design is its originality, and in a way its individuality. We are so used to this manner that we are apt to take it for granted, but at the date in question nothing like it had been done, and a comparison of Perrault's design with the designs of [others] . . . proves that Perrault turned his back on precedent, and went right away on his own.[5]

Perrault's design for the Louvre, which he and his brother, Charles Perrault, both claim to have been submitted in 1664, undoubtedly helped to bring Perrault to the attention of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the minister of finance for the court of Louis XIV. Colbert, seeing Perrault's wide range of abilities, such as his skill with Greek, his medical training, his knowledge of natural sciences, and his architectural talent, commissioned him to complete a critical translation of the roman architect Vitruvius's *Ten Books on Architecture* into French, which was finished sometime during 1667.[6] The quality of Perrault's translation was recognized by members of the architectural academy, who devoted many meetings to the reading of Perrault's edition and his commentaries.[7]

In 1683, Perrault published his famous treatise on the design of columns, *Ordonnance des cinq espéces de colonnes selon la méthode des Anciens,*[8] in which he questions the epistemic and metaphysical foundations of architectural proportions. Ancient architecture is based on various "orders," or systems of proportioning and ornamenting that determines the size and relationship of architectural elements such as columns, entablatures, cornices. The five classical orders of architecture are Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite.

While not rejecting the ancient orders themselves, he attempts to move the basis of their proportionality to a rational one and to revise and clarify the orders to have simpler ratios to make their implementation easier. This rejection

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[5] Reginald Blomfield, *A History of French Architecture, Vol. 3* (New York: Hacker Art, 1921), 81.

[6] Hermann, 18.

[7] Hermann, 21.

[8] For a brief history, See G. P. Brooks, "Claude Perrault's Aesthetic Theory and the Association of Ideas," *Dalhousie Review* 61, no. 4 (1981): 644.

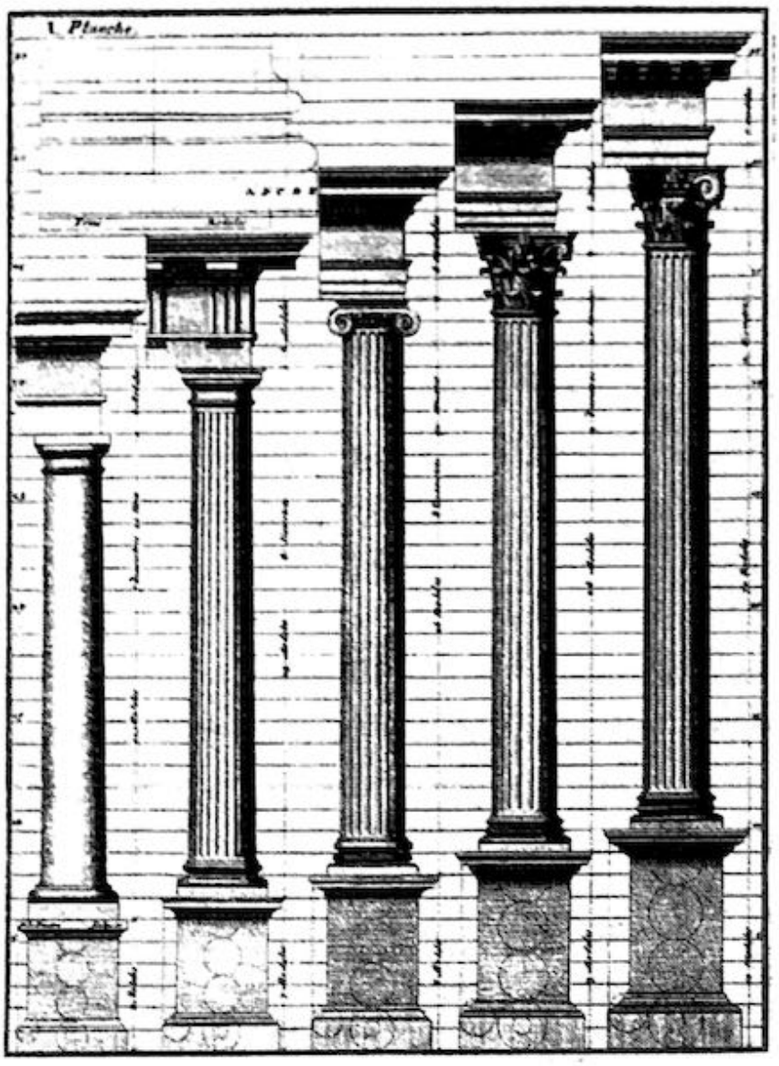

Figure 1: The Five Orders, Plate 1 from Perrault's *Ordonnance*[9]

of ancient authority puts Perrault squarely in line with purpose of the project of modern thought that can be found in both empiricism and rationalism, but does Perrault belong specifically to either philosophy? If we accept a strong distinction between Locke and Descartes, it must also be accepted that Perrault was either trying to return to innate first principles or that he was attempting to build up to more general truths by establishing empirical data.

I. LOCKEAN EMPIRICISM

Locke, in Book I of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, denies innate principles (although this denial is not a denial of intuitive truths) and suggests a procedure towards knowledge that does not necessitate "original no-

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[9] Image from Claude Perrault, *Ordonnance for the Five Kinds of Columns after the Method of the Ancients*, Trans. Indra Kagis McEwen (Santa Monica: Getty Center, 1993), 95.

tions or principles."[10] However, the impression that Locke is an epistemological, or justificatory, empiricist is a misguided one at best.[11] If Locke were an epistemological empiricist he would state that true knowledge can be reached through an empirical process, namely that of building from facts to general truths, but Locke simply does not believe that epistemic certainty can be reached on most subjects.[12] In developing an understanding of Lockean empiricism, the focus here will be on the distinction between epistemological (justificatory) empiricism and explanatory empiricism. Epistemological empiricism requires that all our knowledge be derived from sensation and experience. Explanatory empiricism, which Locke is actually doing, is merely a method by which reason and induction are used to explain undeniable truths or to regulate assent to beliefs. In fact, according to Locke, we should not worry if some things escape our knowledge.[13] In Book IV of *Human Understanding,* Locke discusses our assent to ideas:

> . . . most of the propositions we think, reason, discourse- nay act upon, are such as we cannot have undoubted knowledge of their truth: yet some of them border so near upon certainty, that we make no doubt at all about them . . .[14]

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[10] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Alexander Campbell Fraiser (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 3. Book 1, Chp. 1, Par. 1. "It is an established opinion amongst some men, that there are in the understanding certain *innate principles;* some primary notions . . . characters, as it were stamped upon the mind of man; which the soul receives in its very first being, and brings into the world with it. It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced readers of the falseness of this supposition, if I should only show . . . how men, barely by the use of their natural faculties, may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of innate impressions; and may arrive at certainty, without any such original notions or principles."

[11] I am greatly indebted to Dr. Lynn Holt at Mississippi State University for pointing out the key distinction in Lockean empiricism and the various problems within the standard line of the history of philosophy. This conclusion is drawn if one only reads the first part of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* where very early on Locke does claim that the mind is a *tabula rasa,* a blank tablet, and that all ideas are gained from experience.

[12] Alvin Plantinga says it well: "The aim is not to achieve Cartesian certainty. Rather . . . What we need to find out is how we *may* and *ought to* govern and regulate our opinion or assent. And his [Locke's] answer, in prototypical Enlightenment fashion, is that we ought to govern our opinion by *following reason*" (*Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75).

[13] Locke, xxxviii. Introduction, Par. 6. "If we can find out those measures, whereby a rational creature, put in that state in which man is in this world, may and ought to govern his opinions, and actions depending thereon, we need not to be troubled that some other things escape our knowledge."

[14] Locke, 560. Book 4, Chp. 15, Par. 2.

Absolute, empirical knowledge is simply not attainable regarding most subjects. Locke is only an explanatory empiricist in that he believes we should operate rationally when giving our assent to opinions, but he does not believe in the same deductive certainty, at least for most objects of knowledge, that Descartes thinks can be reached. Locke uses probability and assent in a way that shows quite clearly that he is not engaged in establishing truth by induction alone but rather is simply supporting the modern notion that man should act on reason and reason alone.[15] Epistemic certainty, in fact, is not even reached by the empirical process, for although he denies *innate ideas*, as shown earlier, Locke does not deny *intuitive ideas*. The few things that can be epistemically certain are, for Locke, established in a way that is much more akin to the rationalist school than the empiricist school. This can be illustrated in a passage from Book IV that is worth quoting at length, in which he states (with much similarity to Descartes):

> For if we will reflect on our own ways of thinking, we shall find that sometimes the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of two ideas *immediately by themselves,* without the intervention of any other and this, I think, we may call *intuitive knowledge*. . . . Thus the mind perceives that *white* is not *black,* that a *circle* is not a *triangle,* that *three* are more than *two,* and equal to *one and two*. Such kinds of truths the mind perceives at the first sight of the ideas together, by bare intuition, without the intervention of any other idea; and this kind of knowledge is the clearest and most certain that human frailty is capable of. This part of knowledge is irresistible, and like bright sunshine, forces itself immediately to be perceived as soon as ever the mind turns its view that way; and leaves no room for hesitation, doubt, or examination, but the mind is presently filled with the clear light of it. *It is on this intuition that depends all the certainty and evidence of all our knowledge.*[16]

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[15] Locke, 561. Book 4, Chp. 15, Par. 5. "Probability wanting that intuitive evidence which infallibly determines the understanding and produces certain knowledge, the mind, if it will proceed rationally, ought to examine all the grounds of probability, and see how they make more or less for or against any proposition, before it assents to or dissents from it . . ."

[16] Locke, 447. Book 4, Chp. 2, Par. 1. This analogy to the "clear light" of intuition is very similar to the *lumen natura,* the light of reason, that Descartes mentions in Meditation 3 (Par. 11). "I have no other faculty or power to distinguish the true from the false which could teach me that what this light of nature shows me as true is not so, and in which I could trust as much as in the light of nature itself."

True knowledge is intuitive, irresistible, and undeniable, while an opinion's truthfulness can be judged by probability and, as discussed later, can be assented to at different levels of probability. Since epistemic foundations are intuitive, empiricism is not needed to establish first principle truths. Locke is not establishing a system of empirical epistemology but rather attempting to find a way that one might regulate her assent to opinions and a way to explain empirically. Locke establishes first principle truths as being self-evident, undeniable, and reached by intuition. Descartes chooses to reach these first principles in a way that sets up Perrault to do the same thing in architecture: Cartesian skepticism.

II. FIRST PRINCIPLES

Descartes pursues an innate foundation for all knowledge, and his pursuit towards finding these basic truths begins with skepticism that is teleologically oriented.[17] The difference one will quickly find in Cartesian innate truths and Lockean intuitive truths is that the former are used as building blocks to establish all knowledge, while the latter, although Locke considers them the foundation of all knowledge, cannot be used to proceed to every truth by deduction. Descartes begins his establishment of a rationalist epistemology by rejecting precedent and the authority of the ancients.[18]

"I think; therefore I am."[19] In his philosophy, Descartes believes that from this single principle, this Archimedean point, he can make progress in knowledge

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[17] This stands in direct opposition to the ancient Phyrrhonism which defines skepticism as "an ability, or mental attitude, which opposes appearances to judgments in any way whatsoever, with the result that, owing to the equipollence of the objects and reasons thus opposed, we are brought firstly to a state of mental suspense and next to a state of 'unperturbedness' or quietude" (Sextus Empiricus, "Outlines of Phyrrhonism," in *Ancient Philosophy,* 4th ed, vol. 1 of *Philosophic Classics,* eds. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1994), 534).

[18] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* [book online], Trans. John Veitch, 1901, *The Classic Library;* available from http://www.classicallibrary.org/descartes/meditations/index.htm. Meditation 1: Paragraph 1. All subsequent references to *Meditations on First Philosophy* will be given as Medition:Paragraph, ex. 1:1. " I first became aware that I had accepted, even from my youth, many false opinions for true, and that consequently what I afterward based on such principles was highly doubtful; and from that time I was convinced of the necessity of undertaking once in my life to rid myself of all the opinions I had adopted, and of commencing anew the work of building from the foundation . ."

[19] This famous phrase is only partly Descartes' first principle, for his method of first principles truly begins not just with thinking, but more specifically with doubting. In *Meditations on First Philosophy,* Descartes writes, "I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind." (Meditations 2:3) This first principle for Descartes is intuitive and indisputable.

by building up with pure reason. Intuitive truths are indubitable, clear, and distinct for Descartes. He never doubts these certain beliefs because they are clearly perceived and established on what might be called pure reason. The intuitive truth that he doubts is an incorrigible truth that is not reached by sense perception or imagination. Descartes never doubts the criteria of clarity and distinctness which are provided by these truths. He writes:

> I could not doubt in any way what the light of nature made me see to be true, just as it made me see, a little while ago, that from the fact that I doubted I could conclude that I existed. And there is no way in which this could be doubted, because I have no other faculty or power to distinguish the true from the false which could teach me that what this light of nature shows me as true is not so, and in which I could trust as much as in the light of nature itself.[20]

From this skepticism, Descartes attempts to proceed by the use of deductive logic from his first principle of "I am thinking" to show that rationality and reason are able to be trusted. The rational order of the world is no longer derived from external conditions but is now derived from within human beings as rational beings created by God. The ancient assumption of rational beings in a rational world created by a rational God is reestablished firmly based on Descartes' first principles.[21] Thus deduction has supposedly allowed Descartes to proceed to certainty about rational beings in a rational world from a single principle and to reestablish old truths on a new and firm foundation. It is necessary to point out that although Descartes says he is proceeding from only one undoubtable truth, there are underlying presuppositions to Descartes argument that he simply does not recognize or acknowledge. Among these presuppositions are: 1) that his argument is without presuppositions, 2) that knowledge is indubitable, rationally undeniable, 3) that his conceptual structure is goal oriented, and 4) that the expression of these concepts through language is coherent. Also, Descartes does not acknowledge that he is using an architectural analogy when he discusses the "foundation" of knowledge. This analogy seems to be transparent to Descartes,

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[20] Descartes, *Meditations*, 3:11.

[21] Peter A. Schouls, *Descartes and the Possibility of Science* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2000), 18.22. Also see Laurence BonJour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 11–26.

but stands in opposition to the Platonic and Aristotelian thought that says first principles, or axioms, are understood last, not first. Moreover, knowledge may be a construct that is not built on a foundation.[22]

If Perrault's architectural theory is related to the Cartesian experiment of rebuilding a foundation for knowledge, then does it follow that Perrault should proceed through the same experiment of Cartesian skepticism to find his first principles of architecture? In the *Meditations,* Descartes asks everyone to participate in the process of Cartesian skepticism: "I would advise none to read this work, unless such as are able and willing to meditate with me in earnest, to detach their minds from commerce with the senses, and likewise to deliver themselves from all prejudice."[23] Descartes' belief in individual epistemic autonomy necessitates that each individual make this effort,[24] but Descartes also believes that the conclusions he has reached will be reached by everyone because they are objective, clear, and distinct:

> . . . although I consider the demonstrations of which I here make use, to be equal or even superior to the geometrical in certitude and evidence, I am afraid, nevertheless, that they will not be adequately understood by many, as well because they also are somewhat long and involved, as chiefly because they require the mind to be entirely free from prejudice, and able with ease to detach itself from the commerce of the senses.[25]

So there seems to be a sense that the process of Cartesian doubting is necessary for autonomy, but also in another sense not necessary because the same conclusions will be reached by all as long as they are free of prejudice. Perrault's application of the Cartesian method to the field of architecture warrants systematic doubt of the subject, and if this is done properly an indubitable conclusion should result.

If Perrault is to be related to Descartes, the process of Cartesian skepticism and the rebuilding of classical truths on first principles seems to be a logical

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[22] Also see Laurence BonJour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 11–26. 23. Descartes, *Meditations,* Preface.

[24] Schouls, 11.

[25] Descartes, *Meditations,* Dedication. One can easily see the large contrast between Descartes and Locke on the use of the senses to proceed from first principles.

place to start.[26] It is important to keep in mind that although Perrault sought to move the foundations of architecture to a Cartesian Archimedean point, he nevertheless respects the ancient orders of architecture and thought of them as basically rational. His goal was never to uproot the world of architecture and start over, but rather, with the scientific revolution taking place, Perrault, like Descartes, sought to take his profession back to its fundamentals. Beginning with skepticism very similar to the Cartesian model, Perrault states:

> [I]n the opinion of those who are knowledgeable, a number of architects have approached an equal degree of perfection in different ways . . . It is for this very reason that all those who have written about architecture contradict one another, with the result that in the ruins of ancient buildings and among the great number of architects who have dealt with the proportions of the order, one can find agreement neither between any two buildings nor between any two authors, since none has followed the same rules.[27]

Perrault, although denying that absolute proportions exist, nevertheless accepts the need for proportional standards: "although no single proportion is indispensable to the beauty of a face, there still remains a standard from which its proportion cannot stray too far without destroying its perfection."[28]

Perrault begins his process of Cartesian skepticism by doubting the authority of the ancients. As Pérez-Gómez writes, Perrault and Descartes clearly "criticized the spirit of submissiveness and blind respect for antiquity that was still prevalent in the arts and sciences."[29] They both saw the idealization of ancient philosophy and architecture as "blind adoration" that inhibited scientific prog-

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[26] Alberto Pérez-Gómez, in his introductory essay to Perrault's *Ordonnance,* explains that, "Perrault's concern was to place architecture, already well established within the European tradition of *disegno* (design as a liberal art), into the framework of the new scientific mentality inaugurated by Galileo and René Descartes." (Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Introduction" in *Ordonnance for the Five Kinds of Columns after the Method of the Ancients,* Claude Perrault, Trans. Indra Kagis McEwen, (Santa Monica: Getty Center, 1993), 3.) In his essay, "The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture," John Summerson agrees that this turn to rationalism and modernism in architecture hinges in the age of Descartes and can be related to Perrault's critique of Vitruvius (*Architecture Culture 1943–1968,* ed. John Ockman (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture, 1993), 229–230).

[27] Perrault, *Ordonnance,* 47–48.

[28] Perrault, *Ordonnance,* 47.

[29] Pérez-Gómez, 23.

ress. The rejection of the authority of the ancients shows an interesting dialectic in Perrault's theory. On the one hand, Perrault realizes that beauty has been influenced by cultures and that this is not necessarily wrong, but he also realizes that if progress is to be made, architecture must move past customs and habits. In the second edition of his translation of Vitruvius, Perrault critiques an opinion of François Blondel, a leading architecture theorist of Perrault's day:

> The principal objection upon which he leans the most is founded on prejudice and on the false assumption that it is not permitted to depart from the practices of the Ancients, that everything which does not imitate their manners must be bizarre and capricious, and that if this rule is not inviolably protected the door is open to license, which leads the arts into disorder. . . . If this rule were in effect, architecture would never have appeared at the time at which we take the inventions of the Ancients, which were new in their time.[30]

In addition to his critique of the argument from ancient authority, Perrault also critiques the analogy of architectural proportions to musical harmony and the imitation of various natural objects by architecture. The ancient mystical assumptions of musical harmonies, dating back to Pythagoras, seem to Perrault to be very weak in light of new scientific understanding. Perrault states:

> For if, through our ears, our minds can be touched by something that is the result of the proportional relation of two strings without our minds being aware of this relationship, it is because the ear is incapable of giving the mind such intellectual knowledge. But the eye, which can convey knowledge of the proportion it makes us appreciate, makes the mind experience its effect through the knowledge it conveys of this proportion and only through this knowledge. From this it follows that what pleases the eye cannot be due to the proportion of which the eye is unaware, as is usually the case.[31]

The musical analogy, according to Perrault, is flawed because the ways we perceive the visual and the audible are fundamentally different. Perrault believes

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[30] Mallgrave, 77.

[31] Perrault, *Ordonnance*, 49.

that audible beauty is received through the ear, not the brain, because the ear recognizes a harmony as proportional and beautiful and transmits a harmonious sound to the brain. In music we do not need to have direct knowledge of the proportions of consonances to know that the sound produced is beautiful. The same should be true for architecture in that we do not need to have knowledge of the proportions to know that they are beautiful, yet if only certain proportions are beautiful then the brain must have knowledge of those proportions, since visual perception must be interpreted by the brain, to understand beauty. Musical harmony is self-evident and can be recognized immediately, and thus never needs support from an association made in the brain.[32] Musicians never differ on the correctness of a consonance, but the ancients did seem to differ on the correctness of proportions.[33] The difference between the audible and visible and how the brain interprets them therefore makes the analogy of proportions of music to proportions in architecture invalid.

Perrault does not dispute that imitation is important in architecture, but he does dispute the argument that imitation and precedent proves that the order of proportions is based in nature, the human body, or primitive forms. The assumption of this argument is that when architecture was first being created, certain natural forms were imitated, such as the proportions of the human body or the shape of trees. Perrault took this concept in its most literal sense saying, "the grace and beauty of these things do not depend on such imitations and resemblances, for if they did, the more exact the imitation, the greater would be their beauty."[34] This is simply not so, as Perrault illustrates in multiple examples:

> It is obvious that the capital, which is the head of the body represented by the entire column, has nothing like the proportion a human head should have with respect to its body, since the squatter a body is, the fewer heads make up its length, whereas, on the other hand, the squattest columns have the smallest capitals and the slenderest ones, proportionally, the largest.[35]

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[32] Joseph Rykwert, *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980), 36. The nature of musical proportions is much more akin to Perrault's concept of positive (absolute) beauty which is perceived immediately, as we will see later on, than to the Arbitrary Beauty of proportions it is often used to justify.

[33] Hermann, 40.

[34] Perrault, *Ordonnance*, 52.

[35] Ibid.

Perrault also critiques the practice of relating column proportions to trees: "By the same token, columns do not meet with greater general approval the more they resemble tree trunks that served as posts in the first huts that men built, because we generally like to see columns that are thicker in the middle, which tree trunks never are, as they always diminish toward the top."[36]

In his *Ordonnance,* Perrault states that "there are not only general rules of proportion . . . but also detailed rules from which one cannot deviate without robbing an edifice of much of its grace and elegance."[37] Perrault never seems to establish an Archimedean point, a single supposition from which all architectural ordering can be rebuilt.[38] If the foundation for specific proportions cannot be based on the authority of the ancients, musical ratios, or analogies with nature, Perrault must explain why it is that the proportions that were supposedly based on these various authorities are so often desired. To do this Perrault divides beauty into two classes: arbitrary and positive. Beauty that can be comprehended by common sense and that is recognized by all people is Positive Beauty, while Arbitrary Beauty is based solely on custom. Positive Beauty includes such things as "the richness of materials, the grandeur and magnificence of the structure, the exactness and neatness of the performance, and the symmetry, which denotes proportion."[39] Arbitrary Beauty, on the other hand is based only on custom and habit as Perrault states:

> Now, even though we often like proportions that follow the rules of architecture without knowing why, it is nevertheless true that there must be some reason for this liking. The only difficulty is to know if this reason is always something positive, as in the case of musical harmonies, or if, more usually, it is simply founded on custom and whether that which makes the proportions of a building pleasing is not the same as that which makes the proportions of a fashionable costume pleasing. For the latter has nothing positively beautiful or inherently likeable . . .[40]

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 47–48.

[38] Although Perrault seems to come short of starting solely from what Descartes describes as an Archimedean point (a point on which everything rests, the image is an upside down triangle balancing on its tip), we have seen that Descartes himself also makes some fundamental assumptions in the meditations (specifically in meditation 3) related to causality as well as some unacknowledged presuppositions, and thus falls short of a true Cartesian experiment as well.

[39] Claude Perrault, *A Treatise of the Five Orders of Columns in Architecture* (London: Benjamin Motte, 1708), vi. This is the first English edition of his work.

[40] Ibid., 50.

This dualism of Positive and Arbitrary Beauty allows Perrault to establish a new foundation for beauty and at the same time continue to follow architectural customs of his day.

III. DUALISM AND BEAUTY

In *The Vitruvian Fallacy,* David Capon comments on the philosophical link of dualism in philosophy and in architectural theory:

> Following the introduction by Descartes of the idea that there is an essential distinction in the universe between the elements of Mind and Matter, the principle of dualism soon began to influence the course of architectural theory. Claude Perrault notably divided the categories into those which were "positive" and those which were "arbitrary."[41]

Is Capon justified in linking the dualism of Perrault to Descartes? There is no doubt a similarity in historical timing of the rise of dualism in architecture and in philosophy, but is it correct to link Perrault's dualism in beauty to Cartesian dualism in mind and matter?

Perrault's theory of dualism in beauty manifests itself in the dichotomy between intuitive self-evident beauty and beauty based on habit. Three other dichotomies play a role in this beauty. First, the dichotomy of the conscious and the subconscious divides how we approach these two beauties. The conscious does things in "which we apply ourselves with care" while the subconscious does things out of habit.[42] Second, Positive Beauty is founded upon rationality and convincing reason:

> In order to judge rightly in this case, one must suppose two kinds of beauty in architecture and know which beauties are based on convincing reasons and which depend only on prejudice. I call beauties based on convincing reasons those whose presence in works is bound to please everyone, so easily apprehended are their value and quality.[43]

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[41] Capon, 12.

[42] Perrault, *Ordonnance,* 54.

[43] Ibid., 50.

For example, some order has a rational foundation, such as the idea that the stronger part has to carry the weaker.[44] Arbitrary Beauty in contrast is not rational; it is based on custom.

Further, the term proportion must be understood in the dualistic sense as well, for there are actually two kinds of proportion according to Perrault. "One difficult to discern, consists in the proportional relationship between parts, such as the size of various elements, either with respect to one another or to the whole" while "the other kind of proportion, called symmetry, is very apparent and consists in the relationship the parts have collectively as a result of the balanced correspondence of their size, number, disposition and order."[45] The first kind of proportion is connected with Arbitrary Beauty and is the object of the skepticism of Perrault. These arbitrary proportions get their sense of beauty from nothing other than custom. The second kind of proportion is a facet of Positive Beauty and is intuitively recognized. "We never fail to perceive flaws in this proportion," according to Perrault, "such as on the interior of the Pantheon where the coffering of the vault, in failing to line up with the windows below, causes a disproportion and lack of symmetry that anyone may readily discern."[46] In fact, "common sense is all that is needed to apprehend most kinds of Positive Beauty," which puts this in direct opposition to Arbitrary Beauty. The knowledge of proportions linked to Arbitrary Beauty is not intuitive, but learned by custom and habit. For example, Perrault says, "good sense will never convey the knowledge that the height of a column base should be neither more nor less than half the diameter of the column."[47]

It is apparent that there is a strong use of dichotomies in Perrault's work, just as in Descartes, but what warrants connecting this dualism with Descartes? First, Cartesian dualism is a dichotomy between two distinctly separate substances. Perraultian dualism is simply a dualism between two kinds of beauties, not a fundamental distinction between the physical and metaphysical. For Descartes, both parts of his dualistic conception have ontological existence, while for Perrault only Positive Beauty does.

The second and more important point is that the use of dualism by Perrault cannot be singularly attributed to Descartes. The rise of the use of the dualistic method happened in the generations proceeding Descartes and Perrault.

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[44] Ibid., 54.

[45] Ibid., 50. For more on Perrault's definition of symmetry, in contrast to the *symmetria* of Vitruvius that he translates as *proportion*, see Giora Hon and Bernard R. Goldstein, "From Proportion to Balance: The Background to Symmetry in Science," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 36 (2005): 1–21.

[46] Perrault, *Ordonnance*, 50–51.

[47] Ibid., 54.

Cartesian dualism arose as a result of medieval philosophy and the "cult of dichotomies" which reached its peak with Peter Ramus (1515–1572) and his followers.[48] Ramus, in similar fashion to Descartes and Locke, believed in the specific use of logic and method to reach truth. Working one hundred years before both Descartes and Perrault, Ramus very specifically used dichotomies to reform arts curriculum.[49] The use of dichotomies enabled Ramus, according to Walter J. Ong, "to define each art or curriculum subject with supreme assurance, to divide it into two 'parts,' redefine each part, subdivide the parts each into two more 'parts,' and so on until he reached the atomic particles which admitted no further halving."[50] Ramus also used dichotomies for other such things as a biography of Cicero and the methodization of mathematics. Since there is such a strong use of dichotomies proceeding up to Descartes and Perrault, it seems to be nothing other than a mere anachronism to try to fit Perraultian dualism into Cartesian dualism.

Another way one might attempt to connect Perrault's dualistic nature of beauty to Descartes is to compare it with Descartes' understanding of passive versus active knowledge, but this comparison fails as well. According to Descartes, knowledge requires activity at some levels and passivity at other levels. For example, one must realize that he or she is able to actively guide the imagination and at the same able to keep senses passive. An active control of our imagination allows one to act rationally, and a passiveness in our senses allows objectivity, so as not to read into the environment something that is not there. Passivity can dominate our mind through habit if we are uncritical when judging the environment to which we are exposed.[51] The question then must be asked, is human nature capable of being fully rational and always remaining active and passive where needed? Descartes tries to escape the "habitual opinions" that, as he says, "despite my wishes . . . capture my belief, which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and the law of custom."[52] According to Descartes, we can escape the patterns of "habitual opinions" through volitional belief:

> I think it will be a good thing to turn my will in completely the opposite direction and deceive myself, by pretending for a time that these former opinions are utterly false and

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[48] Walter J. Ong, *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 202.

[49] Ong, 32.

[50] Ong, 32.

[51] Schouls, 155.

[52] Descartes. *Meditations.* 1:11

> imaginary. I shall do this until the weight of preconceived opinion is counter-balanced and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents my judgment from perceiving things correctly.[53]

According to Peter Schouls, Descartes would say that "the actuality of human progress depends on the possibility of science."[54] More specifically, "the kind of progress Descartes has in mind is to come about as the results of applications of mechanics, medicine, and morals."[55] It is essential that we keep active in intellect and passive in senses if we are to have progress. Is this kind of activity and passivity achievable in our understanding of architectural theory? Can we, or should we, suppress our subconscious habits and customs so that beauty is based on reason? If Perrault followed Descartes' line of thinking he might say that the actuality of progress in architecture depends on the possibility of human rationality in relation to beauty, but as we will see, Perrault had no intention of fully escaping the association or connection of ideas in architecture. He only desired that ideas be recognized to be what they are: fashion and custom. Thus, the connection of Perraultian dualism with Cartesian dualism fails once again. There is no reason to assume that the link between Cartesian and Perraultian dualism is specific to these two types of dualism. The historical context of both Descartes' and Perrault's ideas is one where dichotomist methodologies were abounding. Although Perrault's dualism doesn't seem to be directly related to Cartesian dualism, it may possibly fit into the Lockean categories of intuitive, epistemological facts and empirically explained probabilities.

IV. LOCKEAN ASSENT

17th century classical proportionability, according to Perrault, falls into the category of Arbitrary Beauty because it is based solely on custom and habit. So how is it that Perrault chooses to uphold the classical orders in face of their arbitrariness? Perrault's answer to why ancient proportions are desired may be tied to an important concept from Locke, namely the *association* and *connection* of ideas. Since Locke is not an epistemological empiricist, what Perrault attempts to establish empirically does not have to be absolute truth, or in terms of

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[53] Descartes, p. 155 in Schouls.

[54] Schouls, 146.

[55] Ibid.

proportions, positive. Perrault allows Positive Beauty to function just as Locke's intuitive truths; a few forms of beauty are undeniably true, but this kind of beauty is limited to what is immediately known.[56] The explanatory empiricism of Locke attempts to regulate assent to ideas and thus, for Perrault, empiricism can be used to establish rules for proportions and explain Arbitrary Beauty. In describing Arbitrary Beauty, Perrault discusses the concept of connection in a similar fashion to Locke:

> through custom, and a connection which the mind makes of two things of a different nature, it comes to pass, that the esteem, wherewith the mind is prepossessed, for some things whose value it knows, insinuates an esteem, also, for others, whose worth it knows not, and insensibly engages it to respect them alike. This principle is the natural foundation of belief . . .[57]

Perrault is not trying to destroy the *association* (or possibly *connection*) of ideas, but rather is comfortable with this association of beauty with arbitrary standards as long as we recognize that this association is based on custom and habit. Perrault suggests that it is not wrong to continue to associate classical proportions with beauty, as long as we realize there is no metaphysical connection between what is seen as beauty in arbitrary proportions and true, "positive" beauty. Locke views the process of *associating* ideas that are not logically related, but only related on the basis of custom, as dangerous and the cause of much ignorance. Perrault, on the other hand, does not view these false associations as problematic in architectural beauty. How might he respond to Locke?

Perrault might explain that even though proportions are not an absolute positive truth, a certain level of assent can be given to the "truthfulness" of their relation to beauty and their explanatory power: 1) because it is a tradition with no positively right answer so there actually is some level of truthfulness in the association, and, 2) because there is a need for some sort of order in architecture. Perrault can make this first objection by appealing to Arbitrary Beauty and instead of framing the question as "what is beauty?" he could set it up as "what does society define beauty as?" Whatever society defines as beauty is truthfully what Arbitrary

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[56] Positive beauties are the only truths established by the process of Cartesian skepticism that Perrault used. If Positive Beauty is treated as Descartes first principles the recognition there of would be due to an innate faculty, but as we will see later on, this distinction is of little importance.

[57] Perrault *Treatise,* vi-vii.

Beauty is. Through an empirical process of examining existing buildings and existing theory books the orders can be simplified, according to Perrault, by changing a few small measurements. This is possible because there is no metaphysical foundation for beautiful proportions. Under this interpretation, what Perrault really does with these responses is to take the architect's acumen out of the realm of reason and placed it into the world of taste and fancy.[58]

Locke gives a ready response to the first of these two replies when he states that:

> The ideas of goblins and sprites have really none more to do with darkness than light: yet let but a foolish maid inculcate these often on the mind of a child, and raise them there together, possibly he shall never be able to separate them again so long as he lives, but darkness shall ever afterwards bring with it those frightful ideas, and they shall be so joined, that he can no more bear the one than the other.[59]

There is no positively right answer as to whether a goblin should be associated with darkness or light, but it is nevertheless a wrongful association of ideas that is damaging. Locke, however, does not seem to have a response to the second supposition. Goblins don't necessarily have to exist, but according to Perrault architectural ordering does and therefore Arbitrary Beauty necessarily exists.[60]

Another way to do away with Locke's rejection of the association of ideas is to simply not identify arbitrary proportions with the *association* of ideas.[61] Locke attempts to distinguish between the *association* of ideas and the *connection* of ideas.[62] As previously discussed, Locke was seeking to establish a proper method

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[58] Reykwert, 117. Rykwert is careful to point out that this move by Perrault does not give the architect free license to do whatever he wishes: "The man of taste, as Perrault had taught and here shows in practice, elevates his building above the merely commonsensical positive beauties by endowing it with its clothing or Arbitrary Beauty. But these must not fall to the dictates of fancy, of unbridled imagination. They must be regulated by authority and freed from the overtones of metaphor and analogy" (93).

[59] Locke, 322. Book 2, Chp. 3, Par. 10.

[60] The danger of what Perrault did was that instead of putting the role of the architect in Arbitrary Beauty, one could sweep away Arbitrary Beauty all together. If it is wrong to make associations within architecture, then this sort of beauty should be eliminated. The rationalization and mechanization of architecture can be seen clearly playing itself out in his successors.

[61] The chapter on the association of ideas was actually not added to the *Essay* until its 4th edition published in 1700 (The first edition was published in 1689).

[62] Hans Aarsleff, "Locke's Influence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 269.

of assenting to certain *connection* of ideas that have some probability of truthfulness. Perrault actually describes the assent to Arbitrary Beauty as truthful as "belief" and "good opinion" which is in fact the same way Locke describes the assent to any matter of fact that is not intuitively known.[63] *Belief* and *opinion* are to be regulated by probability of a facts likeliness to be true. So with the same terminology as Perrault describing *connection,* Locke lays out various degrees of assent in two classes of probabilities: 1) Matters of fact that are capable of human testimony, and, 2) propositions concerning things which are beyond our senses and not capable of human testimony (This includes things such as the existence of finite immaterial beings such as spirits, angels, and devils, and the manner of operation of most parts of nature).[64] Probability in the first case is determined by our own knowledge, experience and observation and by the testimony of a number of witnesses. In the second case, probability is determined by analogy. If beauty is considered a matter of fact then the weight of the evidence for some probability of its truthfulness is strong since our experience and the witness of many people both tell us that arbitrary proportions are experientially beautiful. This seems to be the most likely category for beauty since it is based on observation. If one were to consider beauty a metaphysical idea and thus part of the second proposition, then one would have to use analogy. Perrault, as already discussed, eliminated analogy to music, nature, and the human body as foundations for architectural proportions, but this says nothing to beauty. What is considered Arbitrary Beauty could only be compared to other things considered to have Arbitrary Beauty to determine whether they actually had Arbitrary Beauty. This would lead to an infinite regress. Perrault's concept of Arbitrary Beauty does then seem to have some probability of truthfulness according to Locke's standards for assent and thus can be considered an actual *connection* of ideas.

V. CONCLUSION

Whether initial truths are considered to be innate or intuitive is of little consequence, for if truth is considered to have a foundation, one will always have to posit first principles that are not provable, and Descartes, Locke, and Perrault all have their first principles of innate ideas, intuitive truths, and Positive Beauty respectively. Positive Beauty as the first principle of architecture could either be considered Cartesian in the sense that it is innate or Lockean in the sense that it

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[63] Perrault, *Treatise,* vi-vii. Compare with Locke, 560. Book 4, Chp. 15, Par. 3.

[64] Locke, 566 ff. Book 4, Chapter 16, Par. 5 ff.

is intuitive and realized by common sense. Perrault often does seem to describe Positive Beauty as intuitive because it is immediately recognized when it is perceived. Also, the fact that Positive Beauty does not become the grounds from which to proceed to Arbitrary Beauty puts Perrault's first principles more in line with Locke than Descartes, because, as we have seen, the deductive rationality of Descartes necessitates that one proceed from these first principles.

As it turns out, the strong difference in Locke and Descartes is not in relationship to Perrault's Positive Beauty but is actually in the assent to Arbitrary Beauty. The epistemic issue centers then on how strongly an idea must be assented to for it to be an acceptable belief condition. The explanatory empiricism of Locke allows one to assent to a belief in degrees based on the probability of truthfulness, while Descartes, on the other hand, demands that a person have no possible doubt for a belief to be warranted.[65] This seems to once again put Perrault more in line with Locke's epistemology. Perrault uses empiricism to determine arbitrary proportions and allows the association and connection of ideas to explain why they are beautiful. Cartesian skepticism is methodically used by Perrault, particularly in relationship to establishing Positive Beauty.

Descartes' philosophy says that humanity is able to take up the active process of doubting and build only upon reason. If one takes Descartes at his word, then it would seem that he was able to fully achieve his first principle and build from it. In actuality, Descartes brought presuppositions into his experiment and assumed certain principles of causality that allowed him to make progress from his Archimedean point. Perrault's theory also falls short of the Cartesian attempt to return to first principles in philosophy, but he never seems to have had this to be an intent. Perrault never truly questioned the classical orders themselves or the authority of the iconic Roman architect Vitruvius, whose definition of the classical orders was admired and studied intently by many architects of Perrault's day. Perrault may have, as Wolfgang Hermann speculates, had doubts about "Vitruvius's eligibility for the role of supreme arbiter,"[66] but Perrault never puts those doubts in writing. Perrault agreed with Descartes that human knowledge should be subjected to methodical doubt,[67] but perhaps he realized the practical limitations on methodical doubt in the ordering systems of architectural theory as opposed to an individual's philosophy. Perrault did not fail to realize that Vitruvius's system was only one of many systems of order in architecture, but he also realized that if nature does not provide us with a set of rules for proportions, it is up to men and women to come up with them.

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[65] BonJour, 30–31.

[66] Wolfgang Hermann, *The Theory of Claude Perrault* (London: Zwemmer, 1973), 31.

[67] Pérez-Gómez, 24.

Perrault believed that having a single authority within architecture was beneficial. He recognized that systems of architectural ordering were not based on the truth or falsity of arbitrary proportions, but on a few self-evident aspects of Positive Beauty and what custom and the association of ideas have established as beautiful. Perrault did not attempt to escape the influence of custom on our ideas of beauty, nor did he try to deny the association of ideas its power. Just as Descartes reestablished the ancient assumption of rational beings in a rational world created by a rational God on his new scientific basis, Perrault reestablished the ancient orders on not a divine but a reasonable basis.[68]

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[68] Earlier segments of this paper were presented at The 11th Annual Pacific University Undergraduate Philosophy Conference and The Mississippi Philosophical Association's 2007 Annual Meeting. I want to thank my commentator at Pacific University, Ivan Heyman, for his helpful comments as well Dr. David Lewis, Dr. Rachel McCann, and Dr. Lynn Holt from Mississippi State University for the assistance they provided in editing.

Resignation and Singlemindedness:

The Fine Line Between Commitment and Obsession in Xunzi and Kierkegaard

Nick Russell

I. INTRODUCTION

Separated as they are by two thousand years and a host of differing cultural assumptions, one would do well to question a comparison of the ancient Chinese Confucian philosopher Xunzi (circa 200s BCE) with the modern Danish Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). Indeed, at first glance, their philosophies bear hardly any similarities at all that can't be explained away by chance; hardly any differences that can't be seen as the product of their cultural isolation from each other. And yet, for both Kierkegaard and Xunzi, full life entails a strong, all-encompassing commitment to a particular manner of living, one that exists primarily within the self but is a way of interacting with the outside world. The intensity of this commitment is hard to find elsewhere in either eastern or western philosophy, and both philosophers recognize that such commitments are dangerous if they aren't correctly applied, or made towards the wrong thing. The similarities and differences in their methods of analyzing whether one has made the proper commitment or is suffering from mere obsession are therefore worthy of comparison.

The first portion of this paper is dedicated to a quick overview of the relevant portions of Kierkegaard and Xunzi's philosophical views, which for simplicity in Kierkegaard's case I have limited to *Fear and Trembling* and smaller works not published under a pseudonym. I then compare their ideas about commitment more directly, with the aim of elucidating their positions through comparison and drawing more universal conclusions about the question of obsession. I end with a discussion of three areas of contemporary life that are particularly prone to obsession, in order to see whether Kierkegaard and Xunzi's ideas are helpful in avoiding the pitfalls that they predict or that we might imagine.

II. KIERKEGAARD

In *Fear and Trembling,* Kierkegaard draws distinctions between three levels of human experience, which he calls the esthetic, the ethical and the religious. The ethical, as the most universal of the three, includes those aspects of life that apply to everyone, whether of divine or human manufacture. By contrast, the esthetic and religious are both personal, but of different orders; where the esthetic level is the lowest of the three, the "first immediacy," a true religious experience transcends even ethical considerations.[1] Both the progression from the esthetic

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[1] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling / Repetition,* Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong, trans., (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1983), 82.

to the ethical and from the ethical to the religious are feats in Kierkegaard's eyes; indeed, the leap to faith is rare enough that it may never have been accomplished in the course of human history.

To illustrate these points, Kierkegaard uses two characters, the Knight of Resignation and the Knight of Faith, and contrasts them both with those who are beholden to their immediate, first-order desires. He discusses the choices and reactions of each class, should one of them fall completely in love with a "princess" of their society, someone he could never openly court within the bounds of their world. It is important to note, however, that although the example Kierkegaard uses is romantic love, the applicability of his arguments are meant to extend to any "interest in which an individual has concentrated the whole reality of his actuality," so long as it is temporal, finite and possibly unrealizable.[2] The object in question may be a person, a specific cause, a project, a country—but almost certainly not a theoretical idea, or anything else that is already beyond the boundaries of the physical world.

Upon realizing that his love is beyond his reach, the "slave of the finite," avatar of the esthetic level, declares "that kind of love [to be] foolishness" and moves on to find someone else. Kierkegaard is clearly somewhat disgusted by those who have this reaction: "frogs in the swamp of life," he calls them. "Let them go on croaking in the swamp."[3] Given that these people consist of, by far, the majority of humanity, this is rather a strong position to take. Indeed, the weight of his denunciation begins to illustrate just how much power Kierkegaard grants strong commitments: it is only through commitment to something outside of ourselves that we can advance as individuals, and, rather paradoxically, the only thing that allows us to attain anything like human free will. It is clear that Kierkegaard views the significant aspects of life as a process of personal growth and transformation, with a decidedly low starting point.

In contrast to the "slave," the Knight of Resignation recognizes his love to be the "substance of his life."[4] After confirming for himself that it is no mere infatuation, he gathers all his focus and passion for an extraordinary movement towards what Kierkegaard calls infinite resignation—for, as the embodiment of the ethical level, he knows that he can never have his love in this life. The only way he can reconcile his love with the state of the world is by renouncing her physically, thereby committing himself as though she were a spiritual being, divorcing the love he feels from the woman as she actually exists. This commitment has tremendous power, according to Kierkegaard, as it grants him the ability "to concentrate the whole substance of his life and the meaning of

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[2] Ibid., 41.

[3] Ibid., 42.

[4] Ibid.

actuality into one single desire," without the dangers that would otherwise accompany such a strong commitment.[5] If successful, it means the worldly actions of the princess no longer matter, that the Knight of Resignation is now well armored, capable of coming to terms with his own existence and of experiencing a constant, if solemn, state of love. The world, and the actions he should take in it, become that much clearer:

> In infinite resignation there is peace and rest; every person who wills it, who has not debased himself by self-disdain—which is still more dreadful than being too proud—can discipline himself to make this movement, which in its pain reconciles one to existence. Infinite resignation is that shirt mentioned in an old legend. The thread is spun with tears, bleached with tears; the shirt is sewn in tears—but then it also gives protection better than iron or steel. The defect in the legend is that a third person can work up this linen. The secret in life is that each person must sew it himself . . . In infinite resignation there is peace and rest and comfort in the pain, that is, when the movement is made normatively.[6]

It is worth bearing in mind that one cannot make this sort of commitment, according to Kierkegaard, without a great deal of pain—but to shy away because of this is to be a coward, one who will never experience life to its fullest extent. Still, this philosophy is not about avoiding pain but merely about avoiding the sort of pain that has the power to destroy a person. Pain, for Kierkegaard, is a necessary and powerful tool for coming to terms with life itself, and is simultaneously increased and made bearable by the decision to fully commit oneself by making the movement towards resignation.

The Knight of Faith is a Knight of Resignation, but one who, after and in addition to resigning himself to his lover's purely spiritual influence on him, decides that he will nevertheless have her—not in any mere spiritual sense, but *in this life,* and in this world. He does this with the full knowledge that it is impossible, and so is placing his faith in the possibility that some absurd quirk of fate, or God's grace, will grant his desire.

It is important to understand just how radical, how dangerous, this leap to faith can be. As an archetypal and particularly paradoxical example, Kierkegaard

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[5] Ibid., 43

[6] Ibid., 45.

discusses the biblical story in which Abraham is ordered by God to kill his son Isaac. Given that Abraham's life-defining commitment is to God's will, his greatest desire to become the father of the faith, God's command to destroy the person that makes him the father of the faith is the perfect test of his faith from a Kierkegaardian viewpoint: Abraham must destroy the object of his faith in order to maintain it. As the story turns out, God stays Abraham's hand once it is clear that Abraham has decided to commit the act, proving that Abraham's faith was both well placed and successful. Kierkegaard stresses, though, that Abraham's faith in God's will changes his decision to kill his son from murder to sacrifice—but it does not erase the fact that Abraham meant to kill his son. He is still a murderer; his faith just makes him *more* than a murderer, as well. Thus, while the religious level of experience might not apply to the ethical level, the ethical still applies to the religious.

We might wonder, given the extremity of the actions that may be undertaken by a Knight of Faith, and even the pain experienced by a Knight of Resignation: just what distinguishes these movements from mere harmful obsession? For one thing, it is an odd obsession that discards the object of its desire and forces one to remain detached. More helpfully, though, Kierkegaard argues that firm belief in one's actions can interfere with a true commitment—indeed, anxiety is a far better indicator of true faith than the feeling of self-confidence that is usually associated with it, since faith cannot usually *change* the world, but merely help one to come to terms with it. This comment on anxiety at least gives us an experiential tool for differentiating successful faith from obsession; nevertheless, it should be noted that there are *two* dangers where Kierkegaardian commitment is concerned. Not only must we worry about the consequences of successful faith and the power it grants, we must worry about unsuccessful faith—about making a commitment but failing to resign oneself to its consequences. Though the benefits of commitment are clear and potent for Kierkegaard, so are costs of failure. Indeed, he remarks that he could write an entire book on botched movements of resignation, and though he never did, the problems are still clear: "if his love comes to grief, he will never be able to wrench himself out of it"; "if he lacks this focus, his soul is dissipated in multiplicity from the beginning, and . . . he will continually be running errands in life and will never enter into eternity"; he will suffer the pain of resignation and frustrated infatuation both, and achieve none of the peace he should be entitled to.[7] We may think of obsession, in a Kierkegaardian context, and all the dangers that are associated with it, as nothing more than a failed commitment, a failed attempt at resignation and faith. For without the distance granted by infinite resignation, how can one help but

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[7] Ibid., 42; 43

become embroiled and lost in a commitment that permeates one's entire being? And without the leap to faith, how can one excuse the actions taken on behalf of that commitment?

III. XUNZI

For Xunzi, there is only Confucius' one true Way for humans to live: "There are not two Ways for the world, and the sage is not of two minds."[8] Even in the face of impossibly complex and difficult situations, the sage, human exemplar of benevolence, propriety and righteousness, is always capable of finding the solution that best balances the important considerations. According to Confucianism, every good person strives to become a sage; and yet, due to the difficulty of the task and, for Xunzi, the ill-suited nature of humanity, precious few ever come close to attaining it. All the Confucian philosophers make reference to sages of the distant past, most notably the mythical sage-kings Yao, Shun and Yu, as a way of communicating truths about ethics that can't be simplified to absolute rules; but for Xunzi, more than the others, sagehood is a particular way of being, and following the Way is a describable sensation.

Xunzi's belief in a single Way is particularly potent in conjunction with his famous declaration that "Human nature is bad," and that "their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort."[9] While living a life in accordance with the Way is important for each of the early Confucian philosophers, Confucius and Mencius—Mencius quite explicitly—placed higher stake in the basic goodness of humankind than Xunzi. Because of this, Xunzi's ethics requires us to dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of the Way in a more dramatic sense than either of his predecessors if we want to become worthwhile human beings: there is no element of chance, no possibility that a particularly lucky person might manage to grow up uncorrupted within society.

Naturally, working with these assumptions, Xunzi's philosophy of life focuses on self cultivation and looks at first to external sources to improve the individual. Properly choosing and attending to a good teacher is a crucial early step, for we have almost no chance at all of improving ourselves on our own. Much of this early time should be dedicated to the study of the ancient texts, which were presumably written by masters who understood the Way. Only by steeping

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[8] Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001), 286.

[9] Ibid., 298.

ourselves in the past, and learning to truly appreciate the rituals that have been handed down for generations, can we hope to elevate ourselves to a level where we might begin to see the Way for ourselves.

If and when she reaches this point, a ready pupil must begin to turn to the world, and a study of herself, in order to continue her studies. This does not mean renouncing or necessarily changing the ancient rituals and teachings, or even that they should cease to teach her about the Way. It merely means that, when one is finally ready to see it, the world itself becomes a kind of teacher, for it is the embodiment of the Way. A sage, for Xunzi and the other Confucian philosophers, would be a person whose inner workings are in complete harmony with nature; as such, any action she took would accord with the natural order, and even her desires would reflect a proper respect and understanding of all things (see *Analects* 2.4).

Xunzi is deeply worried about the consequences of trying and failing to reach the level of true understanding, however, for the consequences of being wrongly convinced of one's own righteousness can be dire. In *Avoiding Fixation,* Xunzi argues that it is easy to be deceived into thinking that one has found the Way, even if one is sincerely committed to good:

> The rulers of chaotic states and the followers of pernicious schools all sincerely seek what they consider correct and put themselves into achieving it. They hate what they consider erroneous views of the Way, and others are seduced into following the same path . . . They rely on it when regarding other approaches and only fear to hear those other praised. Therefore, they depart further and further from getting under control and think they are right not to stop. Is this not because they have become fixated on one angle and missed the true object of their search?[10]

An insight into one aspect of the Way may well get at the truth; the problem is, only a complete understanding of the Way is enough, not only because the Way is exceedingly large, but because its parts are subject to change: "As for the way itself, its substance is constant yet it covers all changes."[11] Thus, no individual aspect of the way is truly helpful, except insofar as it helps one reach an understanding of the whole. To fixate on one—even if it is helpful in the short

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[10] Ibid., 286.

[11] Ibid., 287.

term—will inevitably lead you astray. Indeed, Xunzi feels that these misunderstandings are responsible for a great deal of suffering in the world, for nations and individuals alike.

It is easy to see, then, why Xunzi devotes an entire chapter to the question of avoiding fixation. His method is to, first, clarify that the Way must be open to all aspects of a situation, rather than closing some off; and second, to describe the experience one would have if one were to follow the Way. His primary concern is the development of a sense of "emptiness, single-mindedness and stillness"—a state that allows one to be open to any possibilities.[12] Such a state, properly applied, is capable of dealing with all aspects of the world without granting one artificial priority over the others, allowing action to flow effortlessly from one's being. For one who learns the Way, and puts it into practice, knowledge and power for good within the world are all but limitless:

> To be empty, single-minded and still—this is called clarity and brilliance. For such a one, none of the ten thousand things takes form and is not seen. None is seen and not judged. None is judged and loses its proper position. He sits in his chamber yet sees all within the four seas. He dwells in today yet judges what is long ago and far away in time. He comprehensively observes the ten thousand things and knows their true dispositions. He inspects and examines order and disorder and discerns their measures. He sets straight Heaven and earth, and arranges and makes useful the ten thousand things. He institutes great order and the whole world is encompassed therein.[13]

IV. COMPARATIVE NOTES

The most important and obvious similarity between Kierkegaard and Xunzi, for our purposes, is their belief that, in order to understand and best live in the world, we must commit ourselves fully to an aspect of it that lies outside of ourselves, in such a way that it has the power to transform our inner selves; and yet, there are important differences in the form that this commitment takes. For Kierkegaard, the most significant part of the commitment takes place at a single

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[12] Ibid., 289.

[13] Ibid.

point in time, the moment when the Knight of Resignation realizes the thing to which he will dedicate his life, and resigns himself to its finitude and temporality. Though he must work at this commitment for the rest of his life, and "keep his love young, [so that] it grows along with him in years and in beauty" the key part of his task is done (or not done) at this moment.[14] Xunzi, by contrast, holds that the important part of one's commitment is precisely the continual, lifelong pursuit of the Way. The decision to pursue it is not unimportant—it must be made in order for one to begin to learn, of course—but it is barely even the beginning. The word Xunzi uses to describe his version of commitment, "zhi," reflects this: zhi can be translated as "will" or "intent" in addition to "commitment," either which implies a slower move more than a single decision.[15] Nevertheless, the end result, the personal dedication involved, is no less strong or binding than Kierkegaard's idea.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the object of Kierkegaardian commitment is incidental (until it is committed to, at least), while there is only one proper target of Xunzian commitment. Viewed in a certain light, this is quite an argument for Kierkegaardian commitment being nothing more than Xunzian fixation, since it concentrates all of its energy on a single aspect of the world. That said, this difference may be smaller than it first appears: the important point for Kierkegaard is that we *relinquish* the object of our desires in the moment of resignation, that the infinite nature of one's commitment removes the object of commitment from the world and thereby grants us insight into all aspects of life. Once this is done, even the leap to faith, the decision to attain one's heart's desire, cannot erase the understanding of its impossibility. In this sense, both of Kierkegaard's knights seek to maintain a certain self-aware distance from the world even as they intertwine themselves with it, a goal that Xunzi would wholly endorse. Thus, while there is a clear (and perhaps, revealing) difference in their methods, the ideal state of being for both philosophers is much the same.

There would appear to be a conflict in the two philosophers' predicted experiences of a correctly pursued commitment: Kierkegaard stresses anxiousness, even pain at the uncertainty of his situation on the part of the Knight of Faith, while Xunzi describes a feeling of calm stillness. This difference is more significant than those previously noted, but, again, not so large as it might seem. The purpose of Kierkegaard's description of anxiousness, after all, is to differentiate

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[14] Kierkegaard, 44.

[15] Stephen Angle, *Sagehood*, "Chapter 7: Sagely Ease and Moral Perception," (Unpublished manuscript 2007); Stephen Angle, review of *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercise in Xunzi and Augustine*, by Aaron Stalnaker. *Dao*, VI, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 318.

his brand of faith from the usual sort of blind self-assuredness that one usually associates with faith, a worry that is paralleled closely by Xunzi in his exhortation to avoid a misunderstanding overconfidence in a single aspect of the Way. Further, the purpose of Xunzi's descriptions of stillness is to demonstrate precisely the sort of entwined distance from the world that Kierkegaard would like us to attain. It is also worth noting that Xunzi probably does not mean for "emptiness" to imply a lack of emotion, so much as a "receptiveness."[16] Nevertheless, given the epistemological weight of this sort of calm for Xunzi, there can be no doubt that Kierkegaard's anxiousness is a point of contention.

The largest fundamental difference between Xunzi and Kierkegaard, though, is that Kierkegaard is an extraordinarily personal philosopher, while Xunzi is a fairly social one. This permeates every aspect of their teachings, and while much of Xunzi's social philosophy can be traced to the nature of Confucianism, the extensive biographical information we have about Kierkegaard supports the hypothesis that his extreme shyness would be a difference between them even if they had been raised in the same philosophical environment. As such, it is the root cause of a number of fundamental disagreements between the two, as we shall see in the practical examples later in the paper. Nevertheless, there are some surprising concessions to social and traditional teaching in *Fear and Trembling* that are well worth mentioning. Most notably, in the paragraph just before he introduces the Knight of Faith, we find this passage:

> . . . in our age people are less concerned about making pure movements. If someone who wanted to learn to dance were to say: For centuries, one generation after the other has learned the positions and is high time that I take advantage of this and promptly begin with the quadrille—people would presumably laugh a little at him, but in the world of spirit this is very plausible. What, then, is education? I believe it is the course the individual goes through in order to catch up with himself, and the person who will not go through this course is not much helped by being born in the most enlightened age.[17]

Interestingly enough, although Kierkegaard is famous for dismissing Christian rituals in a way that almost certainly conflicts with Xunzi's Confucian doctrine, he fully respects the spiritual benefit of learning from those who have come before.

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[16] Ivanhoe and Van Nordern, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 289 footnote 59.

[17] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repitition*, 46.

V. THE PROBLEM OF ART

There are few areas of contemporary human life where one could convincingly argue that obsession is either necessary or beneficial, and all of them involve large projects where those involved actively choose to set aside a portion of their own well-being for the sake of completion. With art, in particular, we might find as much benefit as cost in obsession. This is due to the fact that the production of art often entails (and sometimes requires) the sacrifice of other aspects of one's life, and so some of the harms associated with obsession could simply turn out to be part of the expected toll of the artistic lifestyle. Such sacrifice is not to be glorified—the cliché of the suffering artist is absurd, and has almost certainly done more harm than good—but it is true that any artist must be capable of putting her art before a great deal of herself. And the fact is, artistic obsession can be extraordinarily useful, since it pushes one further than usual and inspires an enormous capacity for detail. For a true artist, as well, to reject an absolute commitment to her art would be to remain in Kierkegaard's swamp with others who fail to pursue their authentic self; once discovered, the . Thus, the trick in this case might not be *avoiding* obsession so much as knowing where to draw the line.

Artistic obsession comes at the costs and dangers described by both Kierkegaard and Xunzi: it can destroy you and those around you, and it can even lead you astray within your practice—in other words, cause you to make bad art. Thankfully, Kierkegaard and Xunzi's "solutions" are both generally applicable. Resignation to the possible failure of one's art is quite a tool for the alleviation of some of the dangers of obsession, since to accept failure at the outset of a projects one from destruction if it should fail. Further, any artist would recognize the feeling of single-mindedness emptiness and understanding that Xunzi describes, when they are working productively. But there is still a small part of artistic experience that isn't adequately accounted for by their views, a problem that arises from the truism that the best art is derived from the direct experience of the artist.

Take the case of Werner Herzog: an obsessive artist if there ever was one, his life (personal and professional) is as often as not consumed by the next in a series of an unbelievably intense projects. The making of *Fitzcarraldo* required his production crew to pull a boat over a mountain, which was as much of a challenge in real life as it was in the film; Herzog sincerely threatened to kill Klaus Kinski (and himself), the lead actor in *Aguirre The Wrath of God,* when Kinski announced his intention to leave the shoot; and he says in *Grizzly Man,* "I believe the common character of the universe is not harmony, but hostility, chaos

and murder."[18] His art is about obsession, and thin struggles against a seemingly unavoidable nihilism. For him, to live and create work on this topic in a calmer manner would be disingenuous.

Because of this, Herzog is a particularly difficult, nearly paradoxical, case for Kierkegaard. He is genuinely pursuing his life's commitment, but often does so in a highly destructive and costly manner, quite possibly without allowing for even the tiniest amount of resignation; in essence, Herzog's answer to Kierkegaard's warning about the consequences of obsession is to simply deal with the consequences, even when those consequences include murder and suicide. And yet, this is almost okay, from a artistic Kierkegaardian perspective, because the energy and knowledge goes back into his films—the object of his commitment—which makes them all the better. Nevertheless, Herzog's demonstrated lack of ability to accept the possibility of failure is a clear sign of Kierkegaardian obsession, and so we must either condemn his style of work or expand Kierkegaard's theory.

Further, Herzog's *intensely* emotional, even borderline insane style of work is hard to square with Xunzi's descriptions of the calm that one experiences while following the Way. Though the Xunzian sage may not be an entirely low-emotion person, it is, again, doubtful that she would seriously threaten to kill a person for possibly causing a project's failure. Ironically, though, Herzog appears to be in perfect harmony with his own view of the natural world, which is an extraordinarily chaotic one. If we were to grant that there is more than one Way, that it varied based on one's personal makeup and calling, it would not be so hard to argue that Herzog is but following a particularly acrid variant. Xunzi is certainly not willing to do this, however. Worse, Xunzi's Discourse on Music doesn't seem to allow for music that isn't joyful, that doesn't directly bring order and harmony.[19] If we extend this sentiment to other forms of art, it is doubtful that Xunzi would consider Herzog's work to be art at all. Again, we must either radically expand Xunzi's theory, or scale back our idea of acceptable methods of producing art.

VI. THE PROBLEM OF POWER

Like all of the Confucian philosophers, Xunzi was centrally concerned with giving good advice to those in power. Indeed, some of his recommendations and criticisms concerning fixation are addressed directly to the ruling class. Xunzi

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[18] *Aguirre: The Wrath of God: DVD Commentary,* DVD, directed by Werner Herzog (1977; USA, Hessischer Rundfunk.); *Grizzly Man,* Motion Picture, directed by Werner Herzog, (2005; France: Discovery Docs).

[19] Ivanoe and Van Nordern, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy,* 285.

clearly charges the state's ruler with maintaining order and harmony, and blames him with the failure to do so: "There are chaotic lords; there are no states chaotic of themselves . . . with the gentleman present, even if the rules are sketchy, they are enough to be comprehensive. Without the gentleman, even if the rules are complete, one will fail to apply them in the right order and will be unable to respond to changes in affairs, and thus they can serve to create chaos."[20] Clearly, the gentleman's personal cultivation and ability to follow the Way properly is of prime importance for Xunzi's system—in fact, hardly anything else matters.

Because the Confucian tradition is *so* concerned with instructing the ruling class about their trade, judging the efficacy of Xunzi's advice is tantamount to judging the efficacy of Confucianism itself—a project quite beyond the scope of this paper. However, it might be worth mentioning a counterexample to the idea that the ruler is solely responsible for the order of the state: the system of emperorship that Augustus laid down for ancient Rome. While what Xunzi says about chaotic rulers inspiring chaotic subjects is certainly true in this instance, the fact that Rome survived a number of dangerously bad emperors is testament to the rules that Augustus laid down before his death. In light of this, we might soften Xunzi's stance to allow for the benefit of an excellently designed set of rules, particularly for enormous states.

As noted, Xunzi is far more socially conscious than Kierkegaard, and so naturally more concerned with the workings of a state. However, Kierkegaard's silence in and of itself can be taken as an argument for placing individual cultivation before that of society, particularly in light of the occasional things he has to say about governance. For example, in a book review of *Two Ages,* one of the few works published under his own name, he writes: "Not until the single individual has established an ethical stance despite the whole world, not until then can there be any question of genuinely uniting; otherwise it gets to be a union of people who separately are weak, a union as unbeautiful and depraved as a child-marriage."[21] Clearly, in his mind, the individual comes first: only when we've taken care of ourselves can we worry about the community as a whole. This is intriguingly close to Xunzi's stance, except that Xunzi has a clearer picture of just how to educate the rulers—while Kierkegaard is apparently content to wait for the leaders to arise, Xunzi concerns himself with the disorder caused by the current ones.

It should also be noted that Kierkegaard's method for transcending one's current level of understanding—the complete commitment to something in the world, and the resignation of oneself to the consequences of its finitude and

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[20] Ibid., 269.

[21] Howard V. Hong, and Edna H.Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1978), 267.

temporality—is almost completely useless advice for someone trying to run a state. The high stakes and the risks of the failure of that sort of method, or even the consequences of too large a success, make it astronomically dangerous. There are many instances when a state has completely committed itself utterly to a goal; and even those few that ended positively, such as the space race in the 1960s, were usually part of a larger context that would disqualify them from Kierkegaard's recommendation.

VII. THE PROBLEM OF LOVE

It is said that romantic love always ends in tragedy; at the least, it's certainly easy for one, or both, people in a relationship to get carried away in a manner quite relevant for Xunzi and Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard phrases the problem directly, in the language of *Fear and Trembling:*

> If one makes love into a fleeting mood, a sensual feeling in a person, then one only lays snares for the weak by talking about the achievements of love. Everyone, to be sure, has momentary feeling, but if everyone therefore would do the dreadful thing that love has sanctified as an immortal achievement, then everything is lost, both the achievement and the one led astray.[22]

Love, the emotion, is nowhere near the justification required to make the sort of commitment that Kierkegaard recommends—to think that it is is to invite a great deal of pain, and is a mistake made by many a young lover.

Romantic love is particularly relevant for *Fear and Trembling,* since the book was written in part as a response to, and explanation for, Kierkegaard's decision to terminate an engagement with the love of his life, Regine Olsen.[23] An attentive reading of the text brings his struggle with himself to light: he could not come to terms with the sort of life-defining commitment that he discusses, something he apparently experienced with her, and she with him. The book, then, can be read as an attempt to find a solution that allows them to be together but without all the torturous risk that comes with being so utterly in love with someone. When viewed this way, while Kierkegaard's solution certainly cuts to the heart of the

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[22] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repitition,* 31.

[23] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition,* ix-xxxix; Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard.*

issue, it is awfully extreme: for although a movement towards resignation would eliminate the risk, if successful in the manner he describes, it does entail utterly foregoing physical love—which, in a sense, one must sacrifice in favor of the psychological and spiritual benefits. It is worth noting that in Kierkegaard's own case, the movement towards *faith* was unsuccessful: he and Regine never did get back together. Depending on one's priorities, then, in all but the deepest of love affairs, the cost of infinite resignation may not be worth the reward—though it must be kept in mind that such a full commitment and resignation would almost certainly grant one some extraordinary insight into the workings of human life.

From what reference to love exists in the text, it is clear that Xunzi approaches love from a different angle, but with what could be read as a similar trepidation: in essence, he views romantic love as a distraction. Quoting from the *Odes,* he writes, "'I pick and pick then *juan-er* leaves, / but cannot fill my sloping basket. / Oh for my cherished one! / He is stationed on the Zhou campaign.' A sloping basket is easy to fill, and the *juan-er* leaves easy to get, but one must not be divided with thoughts of the Zhou campaign."[24] Xunzi believes that we will fail at the tasks in front of us if we are divided in our mind—and love certainly has the power to divide us. Whether this means that emotional love should be completely avoided, or merely that it should only be felt in the presence of the loved one, Xunzi is clear about the possibility of its negative effects. If romantic love is to be felt at all, then clearly it must be kept well in hand.

Nevertheless, Xunzi's broader points about fixation could be well applied to relationships: the most obvious problems in love stem from an inability to see one's partner(s) for who he or she is as a whole, to fixate on one portion of their personality (good or bad), to the exclusion of other essential parts. The ability to be open to anything one's partner is capable of, as anyone who has experienced a healthy long-term relationship knows, is both a constant struggle and a constant joy. Should the Knight of Faith be granted his wish, of course, it may be that his preparations would be ideal for maintaining exactly this frame of mind: "He has grasped the deep secret that even in loving another person one should be sufficient unto oneself."[25]

VIII. CONCLUSION

For most of the purposes of this paper, the Knight of Resignation and a well-versed Xunzian *junzi* are adequate for a meaningful comparison: the Knight

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[24] Ivanhoe and Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy,* 290.

[25] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition,* 44.

of Faith and the Confucian sage are so exceedingly rare—which is to say, it may be that neither of them have ever truly existed—and at such an extreme of virtue, that most of the questions relevant to this paper have been answered by the time one attains that level. However, I would like to end with a quick comparison between a full-blown Knight of Faith and a Xunzian sage, in the hopes of teasing out a last, more personal point of comparison. Given that both are the highest expression of the philosophy concerned, the abilities ascribed to these fantastic characters say a great deal about the priorities and ultimate concerns of the culture, and individual philosopher, that created them.

Belief in sagehood requires an epistemology in which humans are capable of a direct connection with the world: the sage fully understands the ways of Heaven, and can apply this knowledge on earth. It is even implied, at least by Confucius, that this connection is two-way, and that the sage can have a direct influence on the physical world merely through the proper expression of ritual. Although Xunzi's view of sagehood is slightly less lofty than Confucius's, the abilities granted to the sage are far, far beyond the capabilities of any normal human; and more than anything else, these abilities are perfectly suited to bringing order to the world.

For Kierkegaard, the Knight of Faith is the only creature on earth capable of true belief in God. Self-assuredness is worthless for Kierkegaard, remember—if one has never doubted, then how is it possible to even know what one believes? And since God is an infinite being, nothing but an infinite, absolute renunciation could allow one to understand what belief in God means. Only a true Knight of Faith, after renouncing God utterly and deciding that belief in God is impossible, might then make the greatest leap to faith, in the face of its impossibility, and thereby, somehow, attain a belief in something that would otherwise be completely beyond the ability of mortals to understand.

These two thinkers differ in their cultural assumptions, personality and interests. Since each such difference adds a layer of complication to a direct comparison, we might most constructively leave the issue with this final, loaded comment: above all else, Xunzi longs for peace and order in the land and wishes humanity to produce a person who can bring about this peace, and above all else, Kierkegaard wants humanity to be capable of belief in God.[26]

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[26] Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, 252.

Author's note:

About Kierkegaard: It is impossible to write about Kierkegaard without mentioning the fact that he published the vast majority of his work under carefully constructed pseudonyms, both for practical reasons—some of it was rather radical at the time—and because it allowed him to play with different conflicting ideas and to hold multiple positions at the same time. By the later parts of his career, one can't help but feel that his phobias about authorship began to border on the insane, however: "I would put down what I had to say in reviews, developing my ideas from some book or other and in such a way that they would be included in the work itself. In this way I would still avoid becoming an author." This obsessive pseudonymity can make it difficult to determine what Kierkegaard truly thought about an issue, since different identities will very likely say different things about similar issues. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to know that Fear and Trembling was "written" by Johannes de Silentio ("of silence"), not Kierkegaard, and everything he says must be understood through that lens. Much of Fear and Trebmling, however, makes a great deal of sense in light of what was happening in Kierkegaard's life at the time: having recently broken an engagement with the love of his life, Regine Olsen, the book is in part an attempt to explain why he felt compelled to do so—both to himself, and to her. It begins with the following epigraph: ". . . What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not." It doesn't require much imagination, given that context and the book's discussion of Abraham's sacrifice of his son, to see Fear and Trembling as a secret message to Regine—and this can be a powerful tool for better understanding its underlying meaning. It should be noted, however, that it is quite valid to read Kierkegaard as an infinitely cynical and ironic thinker, but that this is not the interpretation I have chosen for this paper.