Logos

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Editors' Introduction

Welcome to the fifth volume of *Logos*, Cornell's undergraduate philosophy journal. Over the past year, we have received dozens of submissions from students across the country and the globe, and the five paper papers selected for publication within represent some of the finest work being done by young philosophers today.

As always, the *Logos* staff strove for a diversity of subject matters and styles when reviewing the submissions, and the result is a refreshing mixture of philosophical methods and approaches. In "Surrealist Aesthetics and the Possibility of Eros," Qiuting Hang explores a variety of well-known and obscure surrealist works through the lens of Marcuse, Kant, and other thinkers. "Rethinking the Postcolonial: Dialectics of the Self and the Other," by Casey Ford, is a valuable addition to the literature on the concept of the 'Other' and its applicability to debates over globalization. Luke Herrine and Devin Gouré provide a rigorous analysis of the concept of truth in the work of Simon Blackburn and Harry Frankfurt in their paper, "Ethicstemology: A Defense of Pragmatic Postmodernism," while "Needle-pointed Grace: Ethics, Self-Forgiveness, and Trauma," by Kate Vredenburgh, is a wide-ranging examination of trauma, forgiveness, and gift-giving in Derrida, Levinas, and others. Finally, Benjamin Larson's paper, "Are Rich Farm Subsidies Fair?", applies a variety of ethical systems to the problem of wealthy nation farm aid in a nuanced and original manner.

In addition to reading, discussing, and editing papers over the past year, the members of the *Logos* staff have had the privilege of meeting with Cornell professors for extracurricular lectures and seminars. In the lead-up to the 2008 presidential election, we invited Government professor Diane Rubenstein to speak about "The Postmodern Presidency." In the spring, we enjoyed a series of seminars on Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* with philosophers Andrew Chignell, Matti Eklund, and Michelle Kosch. Such events have strengthened the intellectual community around *Logos* and increased our contribution to campus-wide discourse.

We would like to thank all writers who submitted papers to *Logos* this year, as well as the devoted staff of undergraduates who reviewed and discussed those submissions. Invaluable help was provided by Professors Hilary Kornblith of the University of Massachusetts and A. John Simmons of the University of Virginia, who assisted in reviewing papers for content. Most of all, we would

like to express our gratitude to our faculty advisor, Andrew Chignell, whose sage advise and helpful enthusiasm have contributed greatly to our success.

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Surrealist Aesthetics and the Possibility of Eros

Qiuting Huang
George Washington University

> The surrealist thesis, according to which the poet
> is the total nonconformist, finds in the poetic language
> the semantic elements of the revolution ... The surrealist
> thesis does not abandon the materialistic premises but it
> protests against the isolation of the material from the cultural
> development, which leads to a submission of the latter to
> the former and thus to a reduction (if not a denial) of the
> libertarian possibilities of the revolution.[1]
>
>   - André Bréton, Manifesto of Surrealism

THE MAGUS OF DREAM

For the surrealists, the early Sigmund Freud embodied a vital part of the potential for psychological transformation with his revelation of the secret of dreams. In his depiction of Freud as the "Magus of Dream," Oscar Domínguez created a Freud shrouded in effeminate sexuality (with his mustache, tie and torso replaced by naked female figurines) and surrounded by potent dream symbols developed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This image was plastered on a card that was part of a set of playing cards that the surrealists had reinvented during their wait in a French port for passage to America. André Breton, a prominent surrealist theorist, insisted the face cards be de-hierarchized to be Genius, Siren and Magus and for the suits to be based on surrealist themes of Love, Dream, Revolution and Knowledge.[2, 3]

By rejecting notions of hierarchy and class, these themes generate the groundwork for a change in the "reality principle" by abandoning its original form and introducing the circumstances for a new reality principle, one that merges and engages with the pleasure principle.* These themes defy rationality and pose a pathway for the ego to relate to the id, for rationality to mesh with emotionality. In the same vein, Marcuse poses a crucial question in the Political Preface to *Eros and Civilization*: "Can we speak of a juncture between the erotic

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[1] André Bréton, *The Manifesto of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).

[2] Celia Rabinovitch, *Surrealism and the Sacred: Power, Eros, and the Occult in Modern Art* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 118.

[3] Alice Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros: 1938–1968* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 72.

and political dimension?"[4] In response, I suggest that before these dimensions can be properly understood as connected, we must first locate a method to sculpt the erotic dimension in a way that can then be actualized in the political realm. By analyzing the modern consciousness through a surrealist lens, one may achieve a sort of aesthetic freedom that is a freedom not only from political repression but from restrictive notions of how the self may behave vis-à-vis so-called "objective" reality. This self-liberation is the grounding for any eventual will toward a collective social liberation from the rationalized oppression of alienated labor. The surrealist project is consistent with Marcuse's project, for they are both toward a world of liberated erotic imagination.

THE POET IS WORKING

Social oppression has decidedly evolved into self-repression, to become a repression that Michel Foucault calls "automatic docility."[5] This is oppression so thorough that neither political nor economic forces must continue to execute it, for it propels and perpetuates from the individual herself. We have become our own gatekeepers, sitting in our own mental cages, completely unaware that we hold the keys on a chain around our necks. All this occurs under an economic apparatus where freedom and happiness are constructed as opposing forces[6]; we are organized to overcome the law of economic scarcity and this requires self-restraint. The performance principle has become an accepted law of reason that the self has introjected in order to flawlessly project it. Consequently, the capitalist machine has consolidated its control over proletariat subjects by naturalizing such concepts as "efficiency" and "wage-labor," making its operation seem inevitable rather than ideological. Orders have become extraneous because the most important ones have already been encoded into the system.

Despite this self-embedded oppression, there is still a possibility for *eros*. Throughout the development of human history, the power of the reality principle has never been fully secured; it must re-assert itself incessantly over the pleasure principle.[7] The history of civilization is constantly reproducing domination and this domination is becoming systematized into institutions, but the influence of the reality principle is fleeting and the result of a *specific* history. To account for this prospect of societal change, Marcuse develops the performance principle, which is the preponderating form of the reality principle. For Marcuse, the

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* The reality principle for Freud is the principle upon which the ego operates after learning how to function in society. The pleasure principle is the id's drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain for instant gratification. See Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures 16.357.

[4] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), xxi.

[5] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 169.

[6] Marcuse, 18.

[7] Ibid., 15.

performance principle is not universal, nor is it permanent and unchangeable.

The disablement of the performance principle within our conscious minds necessitates knowledge from our unconscious to be excavated and put into use. The pleasure principle still retains its power in the faculties of our unconscious, which is the component of our minds that also exposes the weaknesses of the reality principle. The unconscious continues to prop up the pleasure principle and upholds the "equation of freedom and happiness tabooed by the conscious."[8]

But how accessible is the unconscious? Saint-Pol-Roux, a French symbolist poet, would hang a sign on his door every evening before going to sleep that read "THE POET IS WORKING."[9] Dreaming gives unfettered access to a poetic though unconscious life, which means that the unconscious is something that could be accessed daily. The surrealists grant dreams the authority that is usually granted to waking life; they feel that dream should not be denoted as inferior to reality, and this is why Bréton asks "Can't the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life?"[10] Freud attributed dreams with an empirical intelligence, an idea that the surrealists became enamored of and used to envision an alternate method of rationality, one that is not based in the creeping social oppression of instrumental reason. The psychic state of dreaming is a source of the marvelous removed from the tedious, dull and calculated nature of everyday life that individuals are immersed in for a considerable portion of their lifetimes. Hence, Breton questions the amount of importance we attach to dreams in comparison to conscious reality and ponders why the dream is "reduced to mere parenthesis"[11] when dreams are such a natural and reoccurring state of mind.

The banishment of the dream state to permanent exile and irrelevance to conscious life is psychically numbing. From the perspective of the proletariat, it reinforces the oppressive social reality of alienated labor. We should be highly skeptical of such epistemic categories, as their construction is in the interest of the ruling classes in preventing the dreams of revolution into material reality. Historically, the distinction between the reality principle and the pleasure principle is largely linked to arbitrary elevation of the conscous experience over the unconscious. According to Marcuse, "The individual exists, as it were, in two different dimensions, characterized by different mental processes and principles. The difference between these two dimensions is a genetic-historical as well as a structural one."[12] Human nature has been redefined to only function

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[8] Ibid., 18.
[9] Bréton, 14.
[10] Ibid., 12.
[11] Ibid., 11.
[12] Marcuse, 13.

within the reality principle, while the substance of the pleasure principle has been fossilized to remain in our primitive, animal-like state that has no role in civilization. The idyllic "state of nature" is labeled as complete calamity: our instinctual selves would only evolve into an unstable chaos.

PHANTASY AND IMAGINATION

The defamation of phantasy and imagination throughout philosophical tradition correlates with the rigid divide of the conscious and the unconscious.[13] Human life has been molded into a consistent, linear package, and imagination is the deviation that breaks the seal, spilling the contents to create a theoretical mess. Much of this academic tradition has ascribed phantasy and imagination to the temptations of the devil. According to this line of thinking, imagination can only be used seriously when one is under the "guidance of a superior power." Respect for the classical scientific method contributed to this degradation, especially when both the body and mind became targets of oppressive rationalization. This conception of imagination is problematic, because exiling the most expansive, freeform mode of thought would be to equate the performance principle to the reality principle. In order to keep the performance principle as an explanation of a certain socio-historical evolution, and not as a totalizing definition of human nature, imagination must be redeemed, for it is our last resort to "preserve…the tabooed images of freedom."[14]

For both Marcuse and Bréton, imagination bridges the two worlds of the unconscious and the conscious, of the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Breton defines the practice of surrealism more or less with a version of phantasy:

> SURREALISM, *n*. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express — verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner — the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.[15]

The idea of "automatism" is indebted to Freud's exercise of free association during analysis to obtain ideas from the unconscious.[16] Bréton redefines thought

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[13] Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Imagination and Modernity: Or the Taming of the Human Mind," *Cultural Critique*, no. 5 (Winter 1986-7): 33-35.

[14] Marcuse, 141.

[15] Bréton, 26.

[16] Rabinovitch, 120.

with this state of pure psychic automatism; true thought is untainted by the rules of the external world; it is mercifully free from the strictures of the reality principle. At the time, the surrealists were severely disenchanted with the political and social climate in France and particularly with the national crisis as a result of the Algerian War.[17] Bréton believed that through a surrealist method to aesthetics, our uncorrupted poetic natures could be unearthed. While Marcuse doubted the viability of automatic writing,[18] he agreed with Bréton's sentiments by calling for "the conscious effort of a free rationality"[19] to break away from the oppressive rationality imposed upon us by the capitalist system of surplus-repression. What Marcuse calls phantasy, Breton calls surreality, but both are aesthetic approaches to reality that deliberately and explicitly merge dream and conscious experience.[20, 21] According to Marcuse and Bréton, these states of mind make the conscious and the unconscious accessible to each other, engaging with each other, ultimately fusing together to become an "absolute reality."[22]

Giorgio de Chirico illustrates poignantly that this merging of the unconscious and conscious is feasible through an aesthetic method. De Chirico, who titled his self-portrait with "And what shall I worship save the enigma?" heavily influenced the surrealists, though he was always personally ambivalent and detached from the official movement. Many of De Chirico's paintings highlight the visual moment of epiphany, which is an experience of intuition that leads to a comprehension or perception of reality. This is a moment where the unconscious noticeably affects the conscious — the source of revelation cannot be explained, yet the manifestation of it can be seen and understood in conscious reality. He also emphasized childhood experiences, which are often shoved into the unconscious, but can have a profound effect on our overtly conscious lives in mature adulthood. De Chirico painted nostalgically of the piazzas of Northern Italy, his mother's oriental scarf and his father's engineering tools, all of which allowed him entrance into an unconscious and no longer existent world. The mysteries of these objects for the child are vividly captured in De Chirico's imagination and masterfully crafted in his paintings.[23]

While phantasy and surreality seem superior to the modern-day capitalist machine, Marcuse points out that "reason prevails: it becomes unpleasant but useful and correct; phantasy remains pleasant but becomes useless, untrue — a mere play, daydreaming."[24] The seemingly forbidden fruits of imagination are

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[17] Mahon, 143.
[18] Franklin Rosemont, "Herbert Marcuse and Surrealism," *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion*, no. 4 (1989): 45-46.
[19] Marcuse, 223.
[20] Ibid., 141.
[21] Bréton, 14.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Rabinovitch, 148.
[24] Marcuse, 142.

seen to be incompatible with life as we know it, for there is nothing fantastical or dreamlike about the conveyor belt or the assembly line. Can imagination be explained in a "useful" way? Many of the Early Romantics were optimistic of the power of imagination, with Friedrich Schlegel stating, "Once fantasy has gained victory over human thinking, then humanity will have arrived at perfection."[25] Kant on the other hand, equated uninhibited imagination with insanity, and sought a sort of institutionalized imagination that could be sustained in regular day-to-day life.[26] Marcuse's conception of phantasy is much more closely aligned with the imagination of the Early Romantics; he aligned reason with oppression and believed that any institutional logic would shatter the movement toward utopia. Marcuse uses the images of Orpheus and Narcissus to explain what a world of phantasy could be. The non-repressive world of Orpheus and Narcissus "is not alien to the reality; on the contrary, they are useful."[27] The images of Orpheus pacifying animals, singing and playing lyre, or of Narcissus, who is the epitome of love and beauty, are to replace the current cultural hero archetypes of Prometheus and Pandora.[28] The objective and meaning of Orpheus and Narcissus render a new reality where play, song, beauty and contemplation validate existence.[29]

This is somewhat of a resolution to the question of seeking a "juncture between the political and the erotic dimension."[30] Marcuse's idealization of these characters from Greek mythology corresponds to an idea of the imaginative poet as the hero of our times. It may be explanatory to consider such notions in relation to Shakespeare's elucidation of the qualities of the imaginative poet:

> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.
> The Lunatic, the Lover, and the Poet,
> Are of imagination all compact.
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
> That is the madman. The Lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
> The Poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.
> And, as imagination bodies forth

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[25] Schulte-Sasse, 44.
[26] Ibid., 42.
[27] Marcuse, 165.
[28] Ibid., 161-64.
[29] Ibid., 171.
[30] Ibid., xxi.

The forms of things unknown, the Poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing,
A local habitation, and a name.[31]

Marcuse's hope for a cultural utopia is, then, essentially an act of poetic imagination, á la surrealism. Marcuse himself admits to this "airy nothing" for the *forms* of Orpheus and Narcissus; he cedes that "they are essentially unreal and unrealistic," but he does give them name and form.[32] Marcuse does go "to the very sleep in which the myths of man are preserved,"[33] simultaneously allying himself with the surrealist movement and arousing the fantastical myth-heroes out of the poetic consciousness of the ancient Greeks. Marcuse and Bréton envisioned the same purpose for imagination: to discover a world outside the performance principle. Marcuse even quotes Bréton explaining that "imagination alone tells me what *can be,*" a concept that Marcuse rephrases in its negative dialectic as the "Great Refusal."[34]

The visual phantasy that Marcuse posits through the myths of Orpheus and Narcissus, De Chirico's visual moment of epiphany, and the childish wonderment that De Chirico preserves gives the fusion of the conscious and unconscious a tangibility to identify with phantasy and surreality. Since these are concepts that we have already planted and rationalized, to associate them with a world of phantasy endows them with an enhanced potency. These put us into contact with the possibility of a less repressive reality principle, one that encompasses the pleasure principle and supersedes the prevailing performance principle.

While re-claiming the unconscious and practicing phantasy and imagination are important to breaking down the repressive system that capitalism has imposed, there still exists another dualism to be unified. The performance principle has not only overtaken reason to become repression, it has also made the body into an instrument of labor, rather than an instrument of pleasure. This creates a duality between the mind and the body and fails to recognize their mutually affecting nature. The performance principle becomes a total control of the body by the practical, efficient mind. The individual is literally performing for society, her body is more physical than sexual; a rule-abiding puppet. The pleasure of the individual is made secondary to principles of competition, production, and preservation. The ironies of this dualism can be seen in the condemnation of sex workers, which is necessarily cloaked in Christian morality, Weber's "protestant

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[31] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, (Act V, Scene 1).

[32] Marcuse, 165.

[33] Wallace Fowlie, *Age of Surrealism* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1953), 140.

[34] Marcuse, 149.

ethic" angrily confounded by the emergence of sexuality in the form of labor, exactly what an ethic was designed to repress. The very idea of there being a sensual erotic element to work is unfathomable and abhorrent to the notions of capitalist production that originally defined the terms by which what we know as "labor" came to exist. Sensuality is relegated to the limited private sphere and the body is desexualized "in order to make the organism into a subject-object of socially useful performances."[35]

This phenomenon has become a modern version of the Cartesian mind-body dualism — the rational mind must keep the sensual body under control. Marcuse explains this dilemma as:

> The desublimation of reason is just as essential a process in the emergence of a free culture as is the self-sublimation of sensuousness. In the established system of domination, the repressive structure of reason and the repressive organization of the sense-faculties supplement and sustain each other.[36]

Sexuality is repressed to certain forms, particularly genital sexuality or procreative sexuality, the other erotogenic zones of the body become deactivated for the sake of the performance principle. Rationality has caused the already diminished libidinal sexuality to be also removed from cognition entirely, and if it hasn't then it isn't doing its job. The Western cultural view of emotions is a part of this repression; references to emotions are often based on our inability to control them and people that are overly emotional are seen as weak and unable to function in the public sphere. Rationality is largely replacing emotionality as the dominant cognitive function. Freud identifies this as "the conflict between civilization and sexuality," because sex-love relations are only between two people and any third person would only be extraneous. Freud insists that this sort of restricted sexual life is unavoidable due to society's need for order and stability. However, Marcuse suggests that a free Eros would not lead to a society of chaos and discord, that it would only transform the current framework of repressive social relationships. This shift from a repressed sexuality to Eros would cause human relations to become truly gratifying.[37]

The surrealists endorsed a similar strategy of anti-capitalist sexual liberation to Marcuse's Eros. Paul Eluard championed this conception of love as able to transcend the barriers of language and reason to liberate the individual.

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[35] Ibid., 199.
[36] Ibid., 196.
[37] Ibid., 211.

Bréton believed that love resolved the contradiction between flesh and spirit,[38] to become "our surest way of escaping from the world and our profoundest way of knowing the world."[39] Eros, then, is the resolution of the mind-body distinction. Love is both knowledge and sexuality; it converts the rationality of domination into a completely different form of rationality that is both emotional and sexual. Eluard expounds on the mystery of woman from the vantage point of man, revealing the nature of love as one that is mythical, spiritual, and passionate: love is an experience so destabilizing that it lightens the materiality of the world. For the surrealists, this expression of love has a radical potential to transform the way society is organized — were it enacted, our culture of consumption would shift to become a culture of passion, making emotional ties more important than material possessions.

To achieve this erotic emotionality, Marcuse directs society toward a "polymorphous sexuality," a sexuality that would better fulfill our unconscious, libidinal, instinctual needs. Phantasy remains a cognitive function toward this form of sexuality because it repels normal sexuality in the way that it is prescribed by the reality principle.[40] Marcuse's image of Orpheus furthers this liberated notion of sexuality. Orpheus is classically associated with introducing homosexuality as a remonstration to a sexuality that is solely for the sake of procreation.[41] In this way, Orpheus represents a doorway to polymorphous sexuality that is both realizable and real, a sexuality that moves beyond social confines and expectations. Orpheus' sexuality goes beyond self-preservation, and transcends traditional notions of erotic behavior.

This amalgamation of Marcuse's and the surrealists' concepts of imagination and Eros should be looked at with a philosophical approach of immanence, in which phantasy and surreality are contained within reality itself. While Bréton and Marcuse are both optimistic, they reject overly idealistic visions of a purely surreal or phantastical world. Though dreams are an important part of surrealist philosophy, they are looked to as fantastic alterations and combinations of notions already existent in reality. Marcuse's images of Orpheus and Narcissus are alternatives to the archetypes propelling the performance principle, Prometheus and Pandora. Marcuse is essentially propopsing that reality should have a basis in ideals, but the ideals should not reflect or magnify the repressive parts of reality. Imagination should be conducive to changing reality, not as a venue for escape. With an erotic imagination, the individual has the means to liberate himself from self-repression. Surplus-repression still prevails due to alienated labor, but the individual is now *aware* and *conscious* of the play of life, of

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[38] Fowlie, 147.
[39] Ibid., 145.
[40] Marcuse, 146.
[41] Ibid., 171.

exciting potentialities for civilization, of the fruits of revolution.

AN AESTHETIC LIBERATION

Within this new consciousness of the unconscious, imagination and eroticism that has cast out the reality principle, for a *surreality principle*, the subject is no longer in opposition to the object, but engaged and stimulated by the object's potentialities. We see now "a subjective and at the same time objective universe"[42] that can be materialized through art. The internal mental realm has been reconstructed to determine new meanings in the world — the meaning of the object is no longer pre-determined by the rational capitalist principles of efficiency and production and the subject becomes truly in control of his reality. In Bréton's words,

> "the container would also be its contents. What I envisage is almost a communicating vessel between the container and the contained....I reject categorically all initiatives that would inevitably lead to the narrow isolation of thought from life, or alternatively, the strict dominion of life from thought."[43]

The surrealist aesthetic creation becomes the dissipation of a pure subjectivity into the material world. Aesthetic creation, then, is not limited to authoring a novel or composing a symphony, but can be found in the subtle methods of existence, what Foucault would later refer to as the "technologies of the self."[44] By extension, imagination would not be restricted to solely the mental realm; it would be integrated with life. Revolution is no longer an event, but a type of aesthetic practice, rebelling against the conditioning of capitalist production that teaches us that "nothing useless can be truly beautiful."[45] The imaginative erotic internal self is not contained, but thoroughly externalized and practiced in everyday life.

By examining the etymology of the term "aesthetic," Marcuse demonstrates that there has been a fundamental change in its meaning. Originally (and as Kant uses the term), aesthetic was the human function pertaining to the senses, where now it is limited to the decors of a museum. This historical change in meaning is partially due to social privilege, when art became commodified as a thing to be bought and aesthetic judgment was one of refinement, not one of "beauty."

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[42] Ibid., 144.

[43] Rabinovitch, 176.

[44] Michel Foucault, Luther H. Martin, and Huck Gutman, *Technologies of the self*, (University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

[45] William Morris, 19th century British designer.

Kant speaks of natural beauty as the most beautiful because it "arouses" the individual and that interest in it indicates moral character.[46] Kant's philosophical conception of the aesthetic dimension is that of a place where the senses and the intellect converge, and are then mediated by the imagination. The later transition in meaning of aesthetic shows the violent splitting of sensuousness and reason, but looking back at Kant's theory, the aesthetic dimension has the possibility of "the liberation of sensuousness from the repressive domination of reason."[47] Marcuse revamps the aesthetic dimension from one that evolved from the historical manifestation of the reality principle to one that is etymologically deconstructed to remove the basis of the reality principle. Kant specifies that the activity of art, when it is "*aesthetical,*" is intended for immediate pleasure.[48] The authentic aesthetic dimension validates and re-establishes the substance of the pleasure principle.

The oppressive nature of the performance principle is ultimately vindicated by sociopolitical circumstances that have progressed in a long history of individual repression. The underlying obstacle to achieving the surreality principle is thus a political one. Marcuse turns to Schiller to exhume the emancipatory strength of the aesthetic function:

> The ideal Beauty, although indivisible and single, manifests in a different relation both a reductive and energetical quality; in experience it gives a reductive and energetical Beauty. So it is, and so it will be, in all the cases with the absolute is transferred to the limits of time, and the ideas of the reason are to become realized in humanity. Thus the reflecting man imagines virtue, truth, felicity; but the acting man will practice only virtues, comprehend only truths, enjoy only happy days. To lead the latter back into the former — to substitute morality for morals, felicity for prosperity, knowledge for information, is the business of physical and moral culture; out of beauties to educe Beauty, is the problem of aesthetic culture.[49]

Aesthetic culture is inclined toward resolving the flawed forms of physical and moral culture. These forms do not drive toward Beauty in its ideal; they confuse the particular with the universal to the point of replacing the universal

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[46] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J.H. Bernard (London: McMillan and Co., 1914), 179.

[47] Marcuse, 180.

[48] Kant, 186.

[49] Friedrich Schiller, *The Aesthetic Letters, Essays and Philosophical Essays of Schiller*, trans. J. Weiss (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845), 76.

with the particular. Schiller sees the reductive quality of beauty as leading to "harmony and peace," while the energetical quality of beauty salvages the individual from a caustic nature to one of sensuality.[50] The aesthetic function is the only one founded on the inner nature of the individual since it is based on a sensuousness that all individuals instinctually understand, and therefore the only function that can build a harmonious society.[51] The truly aesthetic social order would not impose principles from above, it would cultivate the "social character" that is already inherent in all individuals.[52] This notion of aesthetic culture, according to Kant, would also reduce the commodification and valuation of art:

> Hence, all that is studied and anxious, for beautiful art must be free art in a double sense. It is not a work like that of a tradesman, the magnitude of which can be judged, exacted, or paid for, according to a definite standard; and again, though the mind is occupied, still it feels itself contented and stimulated, without looking to any other purpose (independently of reward).[53]

The actualization of beautiful art cannot be for a tangible reward. Beautiful art is created with the pretense of intrinsic satisfaction — it is the practice of freedom. The restoration of the artist as an individual with a drive for beauty and not for profit places aesthetics above economics as the molding force in civilization. The surrealists rejected this enterprise model for art as well, for "art is not so much the production of an object — a poem or a painting — as it is the expression of an attitude or a revolution of metaphysics."[54]

The social character of human activity is then imaginative *play and display*. With these as the new guidelines of society, "the system of societal labor would be organized rather with a view to saving time and space for the development of individuality outside the inevitably repressive work-world."[55] The individual would be content with life in itself, for she would not need to direct herself at the task of "playing 'with'"[56] something; the very fact of existence allows for the exercise of creative imagination.

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[50] Ibid., 77-78.
[51] Ibid., 145-46.
[52] Ibid., 146.
[53] Kant, 208.
[54] Fowlie, 161.
[55] Marcuse, 195.
[56] Ibid., 187.

CRITICAL IMAGINATION IN THE SURREALIST'S WORLD

The aesthetics of capitalism are not in their original context beautiful. Dark clouds of foggy smoke polluting the blue sky, the workers gaze moving mechanically down the assembly line, and imperialists fighting over black liquids and rocks — these are the images of capitalism. What would this new world adorned with the values of the aesthetic dimension look like? The art of the surrealists may give us some hint as to what a world of consumption and production would be transformed into a world of imagination and creation, a world that is not designed to further any metaphysical goals but exists as an end in itself, a world in flux.

The surrealist isolation of the object from the consumerist context opened up space for aesthetic interpretation in spite of the productive purpose designated for the object. Duchamp's idea of readymades can be seen as an attempt to trigger the subjectivity of these objects that are fixed in reality. A snow shovel is a snow shovel is a snow shovel — it is difficult to attach a special meaning to it until it is used in a unique sphere of operation. "Massively produced, humanly reduced," these objects chorus in unison as we are all assumed to want the same dulling visuals; our individuality washed out with a monogram of items. There is passive repetition in the material desires of one person to the next; quality becomes a monetarily measured condition prioritized over aesthetic judgment. For Duchamp, to see a mass produced item in a context of imagination is to redefine its nature. The significance of the readymades "lies in displacing the commodity into a new context in order to comment on the status of both that commodity and the realm of art into which it is allowed to irrupt."[57] The readymade takes the function out of the object and labels it with a new ambiguous, mysterious name. What Marcuse calls "Duchamp's urinal in the museum" and what Duchamp entitled "Fountain," evoked mass criticism and public outrage. Its display of intimate body functions in the public realm made the urinal an object of intrinsic reversal; it confounded contemporary notions of what art should be.[58] If anything, "Fountain" provoked "the break with the monopoly of the established experience," especially considering its widespread rejection in post-Victorian society as immoral and plagiarized. Duchamp's "Fountain" offers us a new interpretation of so-called reality, one that is both personal and radical.

Marcuse's criticisms seem to reflect a misunderstanding of the surrealist object. In Adorno's words, "The appearance of art being reconciled with a

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[57] Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 113.
[58] Rabinovitch, 173.

heterogeneous reality because it portrays it, is to disintegrate as the work admits actual fragments of empirical reality, thus acknowledging the break and transforming it into aesthetic effect."[59] Duchamp's method was not merely "geographical displacement,"[60] but to expose the lack of a heterogeneous reality that modernist art fails to admit to. By transforming an everyday object, and especially a vulgar object, into an art piece, Duchamp dissolved the relation between the representation and the represented, the signifier and the signified. All that made it art was its context, but in a way it exposed that context is really all that makes anything art.

For Marcuse, "the transformed reality is the reality of art"[61] and the readymade is the transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary by placing it in an imaginable space and redefining its function, showing that functionality is an arbitrary construction of production. Marcuse also compared Duchamp's surrealist object with Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup can,[62] which is also the displacement of an object, but a branded object under the guise of what Warhol indecisively called Business Art. Duchamp's readymades were intended as a criticism of the rigid and monotonous reality assigned to the everyday object in bourgeois society — a criticsm that intrinsically redeemed those objects through aesthetic imagination.

The role of fetishism in the surrealist aesthetic will also enhance our understanding of Duchamp's readymades. For Freud, the fetish is "a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it."[63] The fetish simultaneously denies the absence of the female phallus and stands for that absence through its acknowledgement.[64] While the surrealists' use of the fetish does seem to contain a collective aesthetic based on sexual deviance, their use of the fetish object goes beyond the basic premises of the fetish. The surrealists prided themselves on the liberation of a libidinal sexual energy, and also believed in art as a therapy for expressing private desires. However, the most significant explanation of the fetish object is the erotic allure of the commodified object, especially when juxtaposed with erotic images of the body.[65] The sexual fetish and the commodity fetish character of the object mediate through the body, though the object both exudes an erotic nature of its own and absorbs the subjective impulse of the creator. The Marxist notion of the commodity fetish is the exchange value that it is assigned that masks the social relationship of

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[59] Malt, 113.
[60] Rosemont, 46.
[61] Ibid., 46.
[62] Rosemont, 46.
[63] Malt, 102.
[64] Ibid., 102.
[65] Ibid., 104.

labor used to produce the object. Human labor then has a determined market value which appears as a characteristic of the object. Social relations are then determined through the exchange of *things* while material relations are based on the labor of *individuals*.[66] According to Walter Benjamin, a commodified object removed from function can be redeemed by applying the function of a fetish. The intent of these objects in the process of production is to lead to a happier, more fulfilled society, but this is a false claim and the "satisfaction" from the object is illusionary.[67] If we combine Freud's conceptions of displacement and disavowal with this Marxist view of the fetish, the displaced surrealist fetish object can stand for both an eroticization of the everyday object or the renouncement of it as a commodity.

If we look at Meret Oppenheim's object "Fur-covered teacup," the contradictory attraction-repulsion impulses in Freudian fetishism are playfully on display. The cup and saucer are representative of the female sex, and fur is used to both attract the observer as a sexualized commodity, and to disgust because of its placement on a cup and saucer. The banal object has been eroticized while simultaneously repelling the observer from seeing it for its exchange value through its commodified function. In *The Hat Makes the Man* (1919), Max Ernst questions the authority that everyday objects impose on us. Ernst acknowledges that the culture industry has given a heightened importance to these objects, but through the collage also exhibits the object as an empty signifier, showing that the authority is fallaciously granted. This reformulation of our material aesthetic to one of sexual liberation and commodity rejection makes the surrealist aesthetic conducive to the political change that Marcuse speaks to. The everyday commodified object constitutes a major portion of our daily aesthetic experience; to transform this pre-determined capitalist aesthetic to one of a libidinal imaginal space is to render irrelevant the economic function of these objects, or to expose them for the flawed consciousness that they impose on us.

The practice of performance art for the surrealists plaintively advanced Marcuse's ideal of "play and display." The installation of Meret Oppenheim's "Cannibal Feast" took place during the opening night of the EROS (Exposition InteRnatiOnale de Surrealisme). The performance consisted of three men and two women luxuriously dining off a nude women's body that was painted in gold. The consumption of food off the centerpiece of the woman suggested the themes of the commodification of the female body in the culture industry and the magic of life that the female body produces.[68] The erotic nature of the naked

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[66] Ibid., 105.
[67] Ibid., 111.
[68] Mahon, 166-67.

female body propagates a freer notion of sexual relations, accentuated with the succulence of fine food and a "polymorphous sexuality" by covering the entirety of the body with food. The playful nature of this performance combined with the erotic sensual presentation of the female body creates an aesthetic immersed in phantasy and "critical imagination."

Rrose Sélavy was the name of Duchamp's alter-female-ego. The name is a pun on "Eros, *c'est la vie*" (Eros, that's life), which encapsulates a fundamental belief for the surrealists. Duchamp recreated his effeminate identity in a mannequin, which was naked from the waist down. With effeminate facial qualities but dressed in male clothing, the mannequin was also sexless — socially and physically. The Rrose Sélavy mannequin shows the surrealists' rejection of socially constructed gender roles and their affirmation of the feminine. The surrealists had a profound attachment with the creation of eroticism, which for them signaled the repudiation of a patriarchal, rational and violent society.

The image of Orpheus for Marcuse as "the archetype of the poet as *liberator and creator*"[69] is very much in harmony with the ideal poetry of the surrealists. According to Fowlie,

> True poetry for the surrealists was seen to be a part of every force which was working for the liberation of man. The poet was no longer the inspired man; he was the one who inspires. And because he is involved in the life of every man, in the common life, his art seeks to reduce the differences which exist between men.

Poetry for the surrealists served the same function that song did for Orpheus: both were expressions to pacify the world and reconcile Eros and Thanatos. The surrealist aesthetic function sees the poetic as "the opposite of the formalized"[70] because form is a petrifaction of imagination and a barrier to obtaining knowledge, the true function of poetry. Apollinaire, a revered surrealist poet, believed the activity of poetry to be "a secret means of knowledge, self-knowledge, and world-knowledge."[71] The surrealists and Marcuse both associated the aesthetic nature of poetry with authentic knowledge, while equating the knowledge that is deduced from reason with repression and sublimation. The aesthetics that Apollinaire's poetry constructs are ones where contradictions are harmonized. In *La Chanson du Mal-Aimé*, the unconscious and the conscious are

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[69] Marcuse, 170.

[70] Fowlie, 89.

[71] Ibid., 89.

reconciled through myth as reflections of each other.[72] This assuaging aesthetic of unification breaks down the oppressive dualisms and dichotomies of modern civilization. In the process, unification is the harmonization of boundaries and a change in the subject-object relationship. The current of the subject now flows in sync with the current of the object world, not trying to surpass it or antagonize it. In Fowlie's words, "the inner world of the ego and the exterior world form only one world, the poet truly becomes the child or the angel who is able to pass from one world to the other without perceiving any difference between them."[73]

POLITICIZING EROS

In an essay included in the 1959 international surrealist exhibition catalogue, Guy Doumayrou designs an utopian city. The city was internally structured on collectives and communes and skeletally depicted an erect phallus penetrating a vagina. The city also contained endless enigmatic spaces for exploration and prohibited moral taboos. The city was one that stimulated the senses, with blossoming flowers, endless music, and aromatic perfume. This was a city in which one could be sensuous, sexual and truly part of a social collective. The surrealist aesthetic is one that proves equal to the demands of Marcuse's erotic imagination. Such an aesthetic "possesses the genius of flight and lightness and airiness"; it frees the subject from the grasping rationality of an overly rationalized order, because "reality loses its seriousness."[74]

This surrealist city is a potential real-world installation that fulfills the surrealist ideal of society, while also fulfilling the surrealist aesthetic as a determinate negation of the capitalist aesthetic. By taking the beliefs, objects and morals that embody capitalism and re-displaying it with "critical imagination," the surrealists succeed at exposing the false consciousness in current material reality while simultaneously flaunting a heightened poetic consciousness that is realizable without being reducible to any determinate idea of itself. Benjamin and Adorno applaud this idea of looking at the world:

> With (Benjamin's) collaboration, Adorno hatched the idea of a 'constellation' — a method of examining artworks or societies which dismantle their elements into particulars, then reassemble them in fresh configurations, rather like a montage. A surrealist sociology had been brought to birth; a

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[72] Ibid., 98.
[73] Ibid., 98-99.
[74] Marcuse, 187.

sense of the whole, but one which refused to reduce it, á la Hegel, to a single determining principle.[75]

Through this method, the tension between the particular and the universal is bared and illuminated and universal man of the failed enlightenment is rejected. The project of liberation that Marcuse suggests can be completed with the surrealist aesthetic. Surrealism releases the libidinal Eros and pushes it to be used for subversive political goals.[76] Breton suggested that a free Eros was a mutual ground on which the material revolution and the surrealist revolution could meet.[77] Surrealism is imagination that is erotic and critical, it is "play and display" and finally, it is exposition of the very problems of modern civilization that Marcuse identifies as oppressive labor relations — sexual repression and a dominant rationality. Essentially, a revolutionary aesthetic can be actualized through the implementation of the surreality principle. The erotic imagination is the combination of love and poetry, which are "not opposed to collective action, but lead quite naturally to it."[78] As a result, this exposition can lead to the realization and potential activation of a political will which can transform social relations.

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[75] Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent* (London: Verso, 2005), 73-74.

[76] Mahon, 15.

[77] Malt, 21.

[78] Sylvia Kantaritzis, "Surrealism, Communism, and Love," *Essays in French Literature*, no. 7 (1970): 15.

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Rethinking the Postcolonial:

Dialectics of the Self and the Other

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The political condition of the present, with its seemingly unending vicissitudes and obscurities, may leave us frequently at a loss. Previous geopolitical classification systems — West and East, First World and Third World — are now virtually obsolete for understanding present conditions. With the rapid globalization of finance, production, and labor, and the decentralization of the nation-state as the primary governing agent, the world around us becomes more labyrinthine and increasingly less understood. Colonialism seems to be of the last definite geopolitical structures, and its demise a descent into a cavernous valley where systems of power have decentralized, veined out, and engraved themselves in new forms within the new global landscape. The advent of postcolonialism as a theoretical project represents one attempt to map this new terrain after the dissolution and fragmentation of colonial borders, one attempt to re-illuminate the grayed present.

One of the most widely used ontological and theoretical categorizations in postcolonial theory is that of the Self and the Other. The Self-Other relation is employed often to denote an oppressive relationship in which the Self exercises varying degrees of power over the Other, subjugating the Other to modes of being which are oppressive and constraining. The aim of the present paper, however, is not to provide a comprehensive evaluation of this relation, nor of the inexhaustible number of contexts in which it manifests itself. While the theoretical function of the Self and the Other as experiential categories can be found throughout the history of philosophy, they are most elaborately present within phenomenology. The first task at hand is to ground the Self-Other binary in this phenomenological framework, i.e. in the fundamental experience that produces it, and thereby to move beyond a strictly negative conception of the relation. Secondly, I will demonstrate the ways in which a system of social organization such as colonialism is structurally iniquitous, and thus delineate the issues at stake in beginning a postcolonial discourse. The problem of oppression between the Self and the Other, first in colonial and then postcolonial contexts, is not the systemic or theoretical failure of phenomenology, but rather the incomplete and structurally exclusionary aspect of its applications. By reconsidering the epistemological foundations of phenomenological intersubjectivity, the fundamental truths of phenomenology can be utilized to mediate social justice between the Self and the Other. My interest here is not to defend any particular philosophical system, but to articulate certain lines of philosophical dialogue and their interpenetrations within contemporary political concerns. In the context of postcolonialism, phenomenology can be addressed not as a theoretical system to be refuted and overcome, but to be placed at the center of postcolonial discourse.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Phenomenology, understood simply as the study of consciousness' experience of the world, leads ultimately to the concern of how multiple consciousnesses experience each other, and to the precise way that an intersubjective community is constituted. The most fundamental and unitary relation of intersubjectivity is that between the Self and the Other.* Understanding the dynamic interrelation between the two, and thus briefly explicating the phenomenological approach, is necessary before addressing the problems it poses in social contexts.

For Edmund Husserl, the Self that is at once self-certain of its own subjectivity and of its experience of the world moves beyond solipsism to intersubjectivity.[1] Unlike René Descartes, Husserl steps beyond the immediate certainty of the Self's existence to verify the existence of other subjects in the world. The phenomenological reduction, which determined the Self to be the only apodictically verified thing, subsequently denotes the existence of the Other in the objective world, a new being which is both subject to itself and other to self-consciousness.

The Self that reduces itself to a transcendental ego finds that its own ego is constituted as such only by having contrasted itself with otherness, by designating that which is essential to itself (the transcendental ego) and that which is other than it. In determining this "sphere of ownness," the Self is able to apperceive the possibility of alterity, and thus able to intuit the existence of an Other which is still an internalized component of the Ego but which is subsequently apprehended within the objective world as another subject.

The Self identifies this other subject-object which appears to be constituted by subjective processes corresponding to that of the Self. The Other is thus made co-present in relation to consciousness insofar as the Ego identifies an analogous Ego operating within the body of the Other. As Husserl notes, the "experienced animate organism of another continues to prove itself as actually an animate organism, solely in its changing by incessantly harmonious 'behavior.'"[2] The other Ego continues to validate its subjectivity by presenting itself continuously as a psychophysical organism similar to that of the perceiving Ego. By speaking in a similar language, by touching, and by expressing emotion, the Ego articulates its subjectivity corporeally, thereby establishing the possibility of being experienced as a subject. Maurice Merleau-Ponty elaborates on Husserl's phenomenology,

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* The terminology used in the present paper will be based on something like the Lacanian model. Capitalized 'Other' will designate the other that is also a Self—while lowercased 'other' will designate the Self's object of consciousness that is characterized by alterity.

[1] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999).

[2] Ibid., 114.

emphasizing the essentiality of the body as the verification of the Other's subjectivity insofar as the body is the site where that subjectivity operates and through which the Self identifies her likeness.[3][*] The Self, in confrontation with another being, immediately ascertains the life force dwelling within it. Through language, somatically expressed emotion, and kinesthetic motion, she sees this not as something totally unknown, but as a psychophysical state identical to her own.

Although the Self will never be able to directly experience the subjectivity of the Other, which is to say, to experience the transcendental Ego of the Other in the same way it experiences its own transcendental certainty, the Self is able to legitimate the Other's subjectivity through apperceptive recognition. Just as the subject *indirectly* perceives the absence of an object that has moved out of view, so too can the subject indirectly perceive the internal and non-sensible subjectivity operating in other Egos.

It is thus the case, from the perspective of Husserlian phenomenology, that the Self and the Other are necessarily co-constituted by each other. David Ross Fryer, speaking of the work of Jacques Lacan and Emmanuel Levinas, notes:

> Prior to the intervention of the other, the self is incomplete. There is neither unity nor self-sufficiency; neither a subject resting in reason, nor one secure in its capacity to know. Prior to the other the self is not yet actualized, and not yet a subject.[4]

Without the understanding of alterity, the Self would be unable to designate a sphere of ownness, i.e. to have any legitimate form of self-knowledge, and would be unable to develop its subjectivity beyond simple self-certainty. To know itself, and the body as the vessel of its consciousness, the Self must also know the Other. Furthermore, to know itself as transcendental it must know a life-world that is constituted by a multiplicity of transcendental Egos, a world that is marked by a nexus of intersubjectivity. In many ways, phenomenology

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[3] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Other Selves and the Human World," in *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London, UK: Routledge, 1962), 403-25.

[*] It could be argued that the body is not merely the site of subjectivity and the possibility of intersubjectivity, so too is it the site of oppression of the Other. For Hegel, it is the fear of death that immediately subordinates the slave to the master. Furthermore, according to Foucault, it is the control over life through the physical discipline of the body that constitutes disciplinary power, and the investment and security over life that constitutes biopolitical and governmental systems. See Foucault's analyses of power mechanisms set forth initially in Part V, "Right of Death and Power Over Life," in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage, 1978): 133-59.

[*] For Husserl, this difference in the processes of verifying the transcendental Ego and the existence of other subjectivities in the world does not pose any epistemological problems, for apperception, or the perception of that which is not experienced directly, is a legitimate form of experiential knowledge.

[4] David Ross Fryer, *The Intervention of the Other: Ethical Subjectivity in Levinas and Lacan* (New York, NY: Other Press, 2004), 31-32.

implies a state of equal intersubjectivity between the Self and the Other, at least at the level of abstraction: the Self is an Other and the Other is a Self. Levinas asserts that the Self-Other relation is immediately a question of ethicality.[5] The Self confronted with the face of the Other feels an unavoidable responsibility for her livelihood. For Levinas, the relation between the Self and the Other is at all points an ethical relation, even if the relation is ethically iniquitous, or if there appears to be suspension of the ethical.

HEGEL AND SUBJUGATED ALTERITY

Although it is clear that there may be a fundamental and abstract equality in the philosophical conception of the Self-Other relation, there is an important way in which the relation is conceptualized in its negativity. G.W.F. Hegel's master-slave relation, the confrontation between two Others in the world, marks one point of conceptualized inequity within his philosophical system.[6] Hegel writes of the two modes of consciousness:

> Since to begin with they are unequal and opposed, and their
> reflection into a unity has not yet been achieved, they exist as
> two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent
> consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the
> other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature
> is simply to live or to be for another.[7]

The slave consciousness is subordinated to the master consciousness through the former's fear of death; her subordination allows for the slave to retain her livelihood, but only by giving up her freedom. In its most simple form, the relationality between the master and the slave is one of unequal recognition: the slave recognizes the subjectivity of the master, but the master does not, in turn, recognize the subjectivity of the slave. The slave is confined to laboring for the master who regards her as a mere object. In a word, the slave exists simply to be for another being. The will of the master is accepted as absolute, while the slave does not yet fully know herself as a legitimate subject in its own right.

For Hegel in the master-slave dialectic, the enslaved Other can never be

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[5] Emmanuel Levinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?" in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. A.T. Peperzak, S. Citchley, and R. Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 2-10.

[6] G.W.F. Hegel, "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage," in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111-19.

* Hegel's 'phenomenology' should not be conceived in the contemporary understanding of the term as systematized by Husserl in the twentieth century. However, a more in-depth analysis would be required to differentiate the two and to address the problematic coupling of the two systems.

[7] Ibid., 115.

fully objectified; the Other always retains some basic level of agency, unless she is naturally negated (destroyed) by the Self.* The slave first intuits her agency as a subject through her labor, the active servitude by which she comes to terms with her alienation. Ethicality does not intervene on the relation between the master and the slave because the master consciousness refuses to recognize the subjectivity of the slave. The belief that the master has obtained a permanent mode of recognition is therefore an act of bad conscience, for the slave can never be made completely inhuman. Corresponding to Hegel's intuitions in this regard, James C. Scott observes, in his analysis of historical slave practices, that the slave preserves her agency by operating in two independent social spaces: the public and the private.[8] In the public sphere, the slave feigns to accept the absolute authority of the master, thus constructing for the master a false consciousness whereby the master is unaware of the incompleteness of his power over the slave. The existence of a private stage for the slave allows her subjectivity to operate semi-freely, and for her agency as a subject to be preserved, albeit in highly repressed terms.

The relation set forth here by Hegel is a Self-Other dichotomy characterized by negativity: the Self negates the Other's freedom for a transient recognition that is consumed without satiety. Both the master and the slave have apprehended otherness through their experience of each other, although this alterity remains in its initial stages as the experience of mastery and slavery. Therefore the type of self-affirmation accomplished by the master at the expense of the slave is unsatisfactory, much in the same way that the preceding self-conscious being negated objects in the world in an attempt to fortify its centrality and essentiality without ever achieving a sufficient recognition of its subjectivity from the objects it negates: neither moments of the dialectic produce a full subjectivity.

The contradiction inherent to the master-slave relation, namely its relationality between subjects without reciprocity and without a genuine form of recognition from and of the Other, cannot be maintained and must dialectically move to a more equal state of interrelation, toward the intersubjectivity of mutual recognition. Through the necessity of this dialectical logic, out of the relation's negativity comes positivity, and out of slavery comes freedom. The retention of the slave's humanity, of her basic subjectivity as an oppressed being, is the impetus of her resistance and the seedbed of her freedom. This latent subjectivity of the slave and her ability to resist give the oppressed subject a unique position in the dialectic as a driving force toward independence, for it is only the enslaved subject that is able to progress in the dialectic. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of*

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* The slave is never reduced down to pure objectivity. This is merely the intention of the master; the subjugation of the slave to the master's will is not genuine objectification.

[8] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

Spirit, the paramount moment resounds when the slave lets the master go as a failed mode of consciousness and springs forth to actualize its freedom.

COLONIALISM AND SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION

Colonialism, as a historical phenomenon, represents an ontological differentiation between the Self and its other. Both the discursive structures and the political apparatuses at work in colonial formations hinge on a type of inequality whereby the colonized subject is denied a certain mobility in regards to its own being, its place within a process of conquest, and its access to a history that despotically sweeps over it and its own legitimate cultural ties. In the development of a European historical self-consciousness, the colonizing Self's subjugation of the indigenous Other was legitimated partially by designating the Other as exterior to the system, or as Hegel claims, outside history. Jane Anna Gordon notes in this regard:

> Removing the African as a subject of history, or, as with Hegel, from world consciousness, designated African consciousness as false or pathological and the African as 'lacking human identity.' It also had the effect of placing blacks beneath the self-other dialectic of the master slave narrative, below the possibility of a future of reciprocal recognition.[9]

Lewis R. Gordon articulates further in his analysis of W.E.B. Du Bois that the systemic Self, associated with a political or cultural entity such as Europe, thus conceived the 'problematic' other as extrasystemic, as existing outside of the system, and as a hurdle to be overcome within the process of European expansion.[10] The Self constituted its identity as civilized by articulating the Other as an uncivilized subject, by reducing the Other to the level of barbarism. Such a "system that denies its incompleteness faces the constant denial of its contradictions," thereby "avowing freedom while maintaining slavery; humanism while maintaining racism; free trade through colonialism."[11] The phenomenologically produced structure of systemic and extrasystemic being suspends the ethical insofar as it denies the Other as possessing a legitimate

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[9] Jane Anna Gordon, "The Gift of Double Consciousness: Some Obstacles to Grasping the Contributions of the Colonized," in *Postcolonialism and Political Theory*, ed. Nalini Persram (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2007), 146.

[10] Lewis Gordon, "Problematic People and Epistemic Decolonization: Toward the Postcolonial in Africana Political Thought," in *Postcolonialism and Political Theory*, ed. Nalini Persram (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2007), 121-42.

[11] Ibid., 125.

subjectivity on the level of the Self.*

The colonization of the Other leads inevitably to the modifications of the consciousnesses of both the colonizer and the colonized. One of these effects has been the splitting of the consciousness of the colonized Other, originally described by Du Bois as the production of "double consciousness" — the production of a subject self-divided between multiple and conflicting identities.[12] The identification of the white, European Self in terms of its opposition to its non-white other imposes blackness onto the African, essentially 'niggerizing' the African Other. In this way, colonialism imposed the identity of the indigenous Other as colonized, an imposed identity reinforced and made concrete by the administrative apparatuses and the discursive structures of the colonial order.

The conditions of unequal, oppressive relations between subjects, however, cannot be delimited to the mere modification of certain consciousnesses. As the work of Michel Foucault demonstrates, subjectivities and modes of being are historically constructed and constituted by systems of power. According to Foucault:

> This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday
> life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own
> individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law
> of truth on him which he must recognize and which others
> have to recognize in him. It is form of power that makes
> individuals subjects.[13]

Power takes consciousness as its very object, encompassing itself around the subject. It does not restrict itself to controlling the conditions within which the subject lives and operates, or by simply determining what is possible and what is not. Rather, power constitutes the very being of the subject. It penetrates the subject's body and organizes the unity that is her subjectivity, fixed as this or that type of subject, whether it is a racial, sexual, or ethnic identity. Colonialism represents one such power structure that constituted and formatted the subjectivity and the ontology of its subjects. Most notably, European discursive and literary trends, such as stereotypical conceptions of the African in European literature, are responsible for imposing a series of valuations around the being of the African Other.[14] In this way, the colonial self-consciousness projected

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* Such an inequality between the Self and the Other is the result of a number of conditions: on the one hand there is a cultural subordination of the Other, and on the other a material domination. Material conditions of domination will be ignored here because of spatial limitations. The discussion will focus largely on cultural differentiations. Further work must necessarily explicate a Marxist account of global political economy.

12 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 1996).

13 Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (1982): 781.

14 Cf. Chielozana Eze, "The Pitfalls of Cultural Consciousness," *Philosophia Africana* 10:1 (2007): 37-47.

the signification that is the colonized Other, the representation of the Other as uncivilized, dependent, and so forth. Through material and cultural domination — via military occupation, the foreign facilitation of the colonial economy, and the imposition of Western values — the colonialist forced this foreign ontology upon the conquered and colonized Other. Colonialism positioned the native in such a way that its existence was contingent upon the will of colonial officials and the citizenry composing European civilization.

For Frantz Fanon, it is the colonized who bring the process of decolonization into effect, who confront the colonialist with a most elemental violence and demand the end to a "world divided into compartments, a motionless, Manicheistic World, [...] a world which is sure of itself, which crushes with its stones and backs flayed by whips."[15] Fanon argues further that decolonization means nothing less than the total ontological reformation of the colonial subjects: "Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from their situation in the colonies."[16] Each of the subjects in confrontation — the colonizer and his guns on the one hand, and the colonized and his rage on the other — has its being rooted in the system itself, in the long history of colonialism that shadows them as they stand face to face at the breaking point, the point of impossibility for the colonial order, the point where enough is enough. Such a reformation can only mean the destruction of one mode of being and the reification of another.

The Self and the Other are therefore not ontologically fixed modalities. Like subjectivity, it is their contingency on historical constitution that guarantees their malleability. The power structures that confine the Self and the Other to a differentiation between subjects, by the oppression of the latter by the former, is simultaneously the potentiality for them to be otherwise, for their identities and beings were never grounded in some natural order. The solution is not the overcoming or the transcendence of the Self-Other relation, but rather the re-constitution of the two modalities in a state of ethical intersubjectivity, or as Hegel claims, a state of mutual recognition. Primarily, the task of postcolonialism is to account for the desire of decolonized individuals and communities to redefine their identities in new global, hybridized, and ontologically restructured contexts. Algerians attacking French police stations, Palestinian children throwing rocks at IOF tanks, landless peasants protesting neoliberal economic reforms — each moment of vocalization is a demonstration of demanded recognition, whether it is interpersonal, redistributive, or cultural.

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[15] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963), 52.
[16] Ibid., 36.

POSTCOLONIAL COMPLICATIONS

If the dichotomous world order of colonialism has dissolved into a seemingly unitary global community, insofar as the blocs of the colonies and the metropoles have perished, how then do we describe the Self-Other relation in the new globalized context? Certain frameworks, such as the developmental model, suggest that the fundamental binary of the colonial world is preserved in the new articulation of developed Selves and undeveloped Others. The dichotomous relationship between the 'barbaric other' and the 'civilized self' is thus exemplified in a divide produced by the global stratification of wealth and resources. The once dichotomous world of colonialism is now polarized into developed countries and underdeveloped countries. It is the case that although colonialism has been structurally terminated, at least formally, as a hegemonic mode of organizing global societies, the domination of formerly colonized populations persists in the form of global capitalism. It is therefore necessary to be attuned to the new formations of power and their effects upon local subjectivities within the course of history.

One of the complications of postcolonialism is the manifestation of a third actor in global political economy, the subaltern subject, which possibly operates outside of the Self-Other relation. Gayatri Spivak observes that the subaltern subject is designated to a state of disparity outside the gaze of the Self, whose fixation is always on the Other.[17] Subalternity thus denotes a mode of existence below alterity, below otherness. The subaltern exists in a mode of inaudibility, a shadowed corner of the global community where there is no dialogical structure, no speaker-listener relation that would allow for her voice to be heard.

In many ways, subalternity problematizes the efficacy of phenomenology, as well as the totalizing power of the Self-Other categorization of intersubjective experience. However, as I have contended, the solution to the problem of subalternity should not necessarily be found in the transcending of the Self-Other relation. There is no need to erase the categories of the Self and the Other, for this is one of the most fundamental ways we experience the world. Any rudimentary development of subjectivity need not totally escape the first-person perspective as long as this type of relationality is able to transcend a type of egocentricity, for the Self to see not only itself in the Other but to in turn recognize the Other. This possibility remains always on the horizon even if there is no immediate relational experience between the subaltern and Western self-consciousness. Any attempt at reformulating epistemic and discursive structures to remove the Self and the Other as operational categories will merely be a reconstitution of the binary. The

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[17] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C Nelson and L. Grossberg (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

despair of the subaltern is systemic oppression in its extremity. What is required is the ontological reification of the subaltern as an Other. By raising the subaltern to the level of alterity, the subaltern can be oriented into the already hybridizing world, into a political context that is in ceaseless transformation.

PHENOMENOLOGY AS THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

There is a tendency to look to phenomenology as being responsible for the epistemic inequality between the Self and the Other, insofar as the structure of experience reduces the latter to the level of inessentiality, to mere objectivity for the essential consciousness.* Édouard Glissant and Merleau-Ponty both critique Hegel, noting that Hegel's Eurocentric conception of the totality of history, in its refusal to totalize history beyond European historicality, merely produces an alienation between the world of the European Self and the non-European Other.[18] Hegel's system of intersubjectivity produced a limited, local sphere of intersubjectivity, encompassing the European world as the geocultural manifestation of Spirit. In this way, his system was not totalizing, but particularizing.** The only outcome of such an exclusionary application of phenomenology is the production of multiple spheres of intersubjectivity, e.g. European and African, which in turn reproduce the same alienation that Hegel sought to resolve. These differentiated spheres become individuated, confronting one another as individuals. At the point of Hegel's articulation of the totality of world history as actualized European self-consciousness, the master-slave relationship has been simply reproduced. Colonialism represents the actualized structure of differentiated and compartmentalized spheres of intersubjectivity: it divided the world up into European consciousness and the world of the colonized Others. It is not the case that the world of the colonized Others, diffused over the globe in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, lived in a state of absolute alterity, in complete subjugation. They were permitted to operate as subjects within their own spheres: in the colony, the ghetto, or the nation-state. But in terms of the relation between them and the colonizing self-consciousness, they were projected as something other than what they are: as the inessential being of the relation, as the lesser subject whose sole purpose was to be facilitated in the grandiose colonial scheme in

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* For a good discussion of this in relation to the work of Hegel, see Michael J. Shapira, "The Now Time(s) of the Global City: Displacing Hegel's Geopolitical Narrative" (lecture prepared for and delivered at the 49th meeting of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, March 26-29 2008).

[18] Hwa Yol Jung, "Edourad Glissant's Aesthetics of Relation as Diversality and Creolization," in *Postcolonialism and Political Theory*, ed. Nalini Persram (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2007), 193-225.

** I would contend further that this problem is most explicitly manifested in Hegel's concept of the state form in *The Philosophy of Right*. Hegel's positing of the state as the most actualized form of political organization reproduces a civil society of nationalized and individuated entities on the global political stage. What is required is the dialectical movement from the state form to a form of international authority, or more likely, in consideration of the development of global capitalism, a transnational global community.

all its dimensions: the harvesting of crops, the mining of resources, the filling of the factory, and the exporting of resource capital to the hub of the European economy.

Why does it matter that the Self and the Other are oppressively dichotomized? How is it possible to make valid claims for social justice? As I've demonstrated, phenomenology produces an epistemological system grounded in the apodicticity of self-experience, in the indubitable existence of the Ego.* However, the existence of the Self as a legitimated subjectivity is only verified when the Ego ascertains the existence of the Other. In this way, the Self and the Other arise simultaneously in consciousness as necessarily co-constituting wholes. The Self and the Other are therefore fundamentally equal subjects. Social justice claims can be, and in most cases are already, mediated by this experiential truth. The dialectic moves from a state of inequality to a state of equality because iniquitous relations between subjects are fundamentally untruthful. Hegel's master-slave relation demonstrates precisely this dialectical logic: in refusing to recognize the legitimate subjectivity of the slave, the master fails as a mode of consciousness. Any mode of oppression between the Self and the Other is rooted in a misrecognition of the legitimate subjectivity of the Other, and thus a contradiction of the fundamental truth of phenomenology.

In this way, there is much consensus on the need for non-geo- and non-ethnocentric phenomenology within the context of postcolonialism. Any phenomenology must adopt a 'life-world view' in order to transcend the iniquitous Self-Other binary that characterized the master-slave and colonizer-colonized modalities. Paget Henry asserts the need for an Africana phenomenology — a phenomenology of non-European Other consciousness — to articulate the Africana self-consciousness as the site of legitimate meanings and experiences.[19] Despite the systemic failure of Hegel, and arguably of Husserl as well, to posit a genuinely universal phenomenology that would account for the legitimate subjectivity of the non-European Other, there is a way in which such a realization is implicit in their work. At the foundation of the conflict between the Self and the Other is the struggle for recognition. Such a struggle implies, as Hegel articulated, a deficiency or total absence of recognition, and the movement from the recognition of basic subjectivity to the recognition of fully legitimated subjectivity.

The solution to the problem of inequality between the Self and the Other

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* Many critical theorists object to phenomenology as an epistemologically foundationalist system, noting that experience cannot be foundational insofar as experience is always ideological. What is required is a constant ideological critique of experience, i.e. a constant critique of the foundation of the system of knowledge. Cf. Theodore Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*.

19 Paget Henry, "Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications," Purdue University, 2006, http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~mmichau/henry-2006.doc.

therefore lies partially in phenomenology. It is the infinite task of moving toward a state of hypostatized and just intersubjectivity where the Self and the Other can relate on a plane of ethicality. As has been demonstrated, postcolonialism designates a temporal context in which colonialism, one roadblock toward this goal, is overcome. The absolute cultural differentiations between the Self and its other no longer dichotomize global society. Developmental inequality in postcolonial contexts, however, has produced a new binary division between the Self and the Other. Unlike the effects of colonialism in constituting the subjectivities of its subjects, developmental differentiations are not characterized by cultural or ontological absolutes. Rather, the Self and the Other are now differentiated and constituted by material conditions: the international division of labor, economic disparity, the geopolitical framework of markets, and the pervasive mobility of capital. Hybridity is one of the ways in which this new dichotomy is combated in the postcolonial context. By systemically externalizing the Other, colonialism delayed the Self having to address the Other's legitimate subjectivity; colonialism produced distance. The hybridization of the global community — the arrival of Third World intellectuals in Western academia, the immigration of populations, the urbanization of communities — brings the Other in closer proximity to her oppressive counterpart. Levinas articulates this correlation between ethicality and proximity, arguing that ethicality is unsuspended when the oppressive Self confronts the embodied humanity of the Other.[20] Once the distance between the two beings is diminished, the Self sees the eyes, lips, the moving limbs, the familiar voice, and the emotionality that expresses itself through the Other's flesh. In the Other the Self sees both its own humanity and the humanity of the other person. This fundamental and abstract equality rises up from the very being of both subjects, if only as a point of potential reconciliation.

In perpetuating the distance between European self-consciousness and the colonized Others, colonialism muted the voices of those subjugated beings whose existence was confined to the cages of the colonies. The colonial administrators, as intermediaries, absorbed the desperate pleas for recognition. Although the formal dissolution of the colonial barriers did not immediately reconcile the Self and the Other as equal beings, it did allow for more mobility between the two. What is required then is a phenomenology of the Other, not merely through the turning toward the voice of the Other with open ears, but the creation of the conditions of possibility for this voice to speak and to be heard. In many ways such a phenomenology already exists, and has always existed: the Other has always spoken. In its own sphere of confinement, in the colony, the ghetto, the prison, or the shanty, the Other has always recognized the alterity of the colonizing

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[20] Emmanuel Levinas, "Peace and Proximity," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. A. T. Peperzak, S. Critchley, and R. Bernasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).

Self. The Other immediately understands the essentiality of her own life, and her oppression by this other being who brandishes the rifle of differentiation. The African Other is never nothing; the African is everything. Only in the mind of the European is she nothing, merely an abstract notion. European self-consciousness projected the being of the Other in its own mind, and in the minds of its public consciousness, as nothingness, as the being whose sole purpose was to exist for another, to exist in order to differentiate the European from something, to give the European its self-identity as the essential being. By vocalizing the experience of the Other, one can empower the speakers of the former colonies, presenting the voice of the Other to the consciousnesses of its former masters. In this way, the dialogical avenue is opened for the former master to see the embodiment of its delusion, to see the legitimate subjectivity of the Other not as nothing, but as everything, as life itself.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is a reason why it is necessary to speak so abstractly and theoretically as has often been done here, and to forestall articulating a theory of the phenomenology of the Other in terms of material reality. Approaches to social justice that submerge themselves completely in the minute and mundane details of material conditions tend to produce intellectually vacant conclusions about the theoretical and discursive conditions that foster social and material disparities. This is not to suggest that conditions 'on the ground' are irrelevant concerns. On the contrary, they remain of the utmost importance. The task of the present paper has been to position postcolonial imperatives for social justice within the necessary theoretical framework, thereby allowing social justice claims to move beyond mere moral speculation.

The Self and the Other are not destined to be opposed. In this way, the phenomenological structure of experience does not attest to the fixed and ahistorical equality of the Self and the Other as much as it intuits the potentiality for them to come to terms with their own necessary co-constitution, to be other than oppressive and oppressed. The fact that each subject is fundamentally both a Self and an Other, as phenomenology demonstrates, is a truth that once realized will reorient oppressive and oppressed subjects onto a political field without the structural differentiations that confine the Other to oppressive ontologies. It should not be supposed that the infinite task of reconciling all Selves and Others as equals is possible, nor should such impossibility be a daunting or paralyzing fact. However, a theoretical system like phenomenology should not be taken as a totalizing explanatory system. Rather, phenomenology should be understood to provide essential ethical tools for addressing a number of political problems. The

theorists of phenomenology should be seen as providing the implicit capacities for truly universalizing its methods and for endowing subjects with the necessary conceptual tools for combating social injustice.

As the title of this paper suggests, a rethinking of the postcolonial must begin with its historical beginning, with its fountainhead in the transformative ending of formal colonialism. Postcolonialism is always looking for a road forward, always grappling with an indefinite roadmap of the terrain in which it is forced to transverse or perish within. In many ways, the ethical imperative of postcolonialism is for the Self to recognize its own alterity — for the ex-colonial to allow himself to be seen as other by the formerly colonized subject. In other ways, the question is of the potentiated consciousness of the Other to create an alternative space for existence. For Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the dialectical move in the new global structure is the confrontation of the sovereign Self with the multitude of social Others, and the key is that it will require confrontation.[21] Understanding the structural and theoretical underpinnings should be taken here as the initial task before resistance, as a first step toward new forms of intersubjectivity.

These dialectics manifest themselves in contexts all over the world, from the Western familial unit, to *maquiladora* factories in Mexico, to shantytowns in Brazil. They are dialectics which demand the development of the ex-colonized Other's subjectivity through its discursive and material domination, always against external forces of ontological fixation and determination. The imperative for the present is to fully understand the experiential structures that foster the conditions for oppression, misrecognition, and reconciliation. Only when the Other recognizes the illegitimacy of her own subjugation can she position herself on the necessary path toward liberations from local and diffuse forms of oppression and forced identifications, a liberation which amounts to nothing more than the opening of the horizon for the subject's continual self-formation*

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[21] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Press, 2000).

* I understand fully that what I am implying here is a dialectics that utilizes the philosophies of both Hegel and Foucault, for this possibility is certainly something that interests me. Such a conception of the subject as dislodged from a position of fixity (such as a fixed phenomenological subjectivity) and understood as a continually developing and socially constituted subject, is not unthinkable in relation to the work of Hegel. Such a thinking-together of these two philosophies must be more fully explicated, and the present paper should be seen as a sketch for a more developed articulation of the subject and its possibilities. It is my contention that the subject should be continually critical of any forms of fixed identity, whether externally or internally assigned. Furthermore, we must always be critical of systems of power, and we must never underestimate the capacities of power to constitute and constrain the subject in increasingly dynamic ways.

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Ethicstemology:

A Defense of
Pragmatic Postmodernism

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INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, two well-known and well-respected philosophers have published books on truth for the general public. Harry Frankfurt's aptly titled *On Truth*, a follow-up to his polemical *On Bullshit*, claims to defend the role of truth in society. Simon Blackburn's *Truth: A Guide* more modestly explains for the educated layman the philosophical problems surrounding truth. Though their positions and purposes are hardly identical, underlying both their works is a pattern of thought pervasive in contemporary analytic philosophy, a pattern that we call "arch-realism." We will argue that arch-realism provides oversimplified and inadequate solutions to complicated problems of justification in philosophy, ethics, and politics. Because of the potentially harmful consequences of this way of thinking, it could be especially problematic when published in books for non-philosophers.

Arch-realism holds that for a proposition to be true it must represent, or correspond with, reality. As long as a proposition is true in just this way, it is inarguably the case that it should be believed by everybody. Furthermore, the first sentence is thought to justify the second; arch-realism has it that everybody should believe a true statement just because it represents the world accurately. At first glance, this view seems attractively intuitive, but when examined closely it has at least two problems.

First, traditional representationalism relies on an illegitimate synthesis of epistemology and metaphysics. Several philosophers, who are mentioned below, have pointed out that any argument for this marriage is circular. We endorse this assessment and further contend that any argument for representationalism that does not rely on this marriage actually rests on normative considerations, which would make the imperative structure of belief *prior to* representation.

This underlying normative layer of arch-realism is its second problem. Arch-realism's main claim is that certain propositions — called true beliefs — should always be believed, no matter what. We will argue that propositions should not be seen as unqualifiedly true, but rather that all notions of truth arise out of a given set of relative standards, and thus that truth should be seen as relative. This position does not imply blind multiculturalism, for there remain normative reasons for belief that can be critically applied. Arch-realism's normative structure, on the other hand, suffers from the uncritical application of a contextually-bound set of standards. It is here where, in the wrong hands, arch-realism can have dangerous ramifications.

Various parts of the reexamination we suggest have precedent in a range of philosophical traditions. In different times and places this project has been known as pragmatism, postmodernism, anti-representationalism, post-

structuralism, and other supposedly dirty words. We take these terms to be indistinguishable for present purposes, and propose that our position be labeled pragmatic postmodernism, to distinguish it from the uncritical forms of the latter. Some of our influences for this stance are Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Paul Feyerabend, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

We understand the implications of using such an embattled label and endorsing such controversial authors. Like "liberal" in 21ˢᵗ-century political discourse, "postmodern" has been distorted into a derogatory term in contemporary analytic philosophy. The concepts that fall under that label are seen as suitable for literary criticism and other less rigorous humanities but unfit for *serious* philosophy. It is associated with a set of dubious and even dangerous epistemological attitudes ("bullshit" according to Frankfurt) on the same plane with solipsism, subjectivism, or nihilism. While there are those who fall under the aegis of postmodernism who *are* guilty of overzealous rhetoric and even academic irresponsibility, all those with postmodern sympathies should not be held guilty by association. Measured criticism is certainly appropriate, though we hope that the following arguments will show that postmodernism's tendency to think of knowledge normatively is highly relevant to doing careful epistemology.

PART 1: REPRESENTATIONALISM

The first step we must take to understanding epistemology normatively is to show that the traditional way of understanding it—namely, representationalism—implicitly relies on a normative foundation. By "representationalism" we do not mean any specific theory of knowledge, but rather a pattern of thought present across a wide range of theoretical orientations and philosophers. Representationalism has it that understanding is a mirroring relation by which one builds a mental map or picture of the world. This way of thinking is often part and parcel with a correspondence theory of truth, strict materialism/physicalism, and/or a strong notion of objectivism.

Simon Blackburn furnishes us with an explicit example of this pattern of thought in *Truth: A Guide*. When responding to Richard Rorty's attacks on representationalism, Blackburn invokes the metaphor of a map to describe the way knowledge functions. His basic operation is to dissolve the coping/copying distinction in Rorty by demonstrating that maps work only because they accurately represent the external world.˙ While allowing that different sorts of maps are possible and that there is no final map or vocabulary that could accurately represent all aspects of the world, he argues that representation is

causally prior to language's ability to help us act successfully in the world.

Bracketing the concern that it is precisely this idea that knowledge "maps onto" the world that is being contested, Blackburn's picture still leaves something to be desired. Running through his account is the idea that the litmus test for the validity of representation is how well the map *works*. For instance: "[the map] enables us to cope precisely because it represents the landscape correctly; it enables us to anticipate what we shall find."[1] Here it is as if anticipation is synonymous with representation. Certainly representing and anticipating go hand-in-hand in a representational activity like map-making, but they correspond so reliably that it is easy to confuse the direction of causation. Blackburn has it that if a map represents accurately, then it anticipates effectively. We think that if a map anticipates well, it causes us to say that it represented the landscape accurately. But if Blackburn and we agree that we judge the value of a map based on its anticipatory power, are we not just quibbling over meaningless details? Where does the disagreement lie?

The problem seems to pivot on the question of how the world constrains our knowledge. Blackburn writes, "[t]he landscape...dictates how it is to be mapped, given a set of conventions determining the meanings of the signs and the shapes on the map, and meanings of their presence or absence...*In other words, it can represent the landscape as it is or represent the landscape as it is not.*"[2] For Blackburn, what the landscape immediately dictates is the accuracy of a representation given certain conventions. But how do we establish the accuracy of this representation? What is the role of these tacit conventions? The map does not begin by depicting an undifferentiated world; it literally maps *our interests in* the world. If the map corresponded to the landscape point-for-point, atom-for-atom, quark-for-quark, it would become useless, as in Borges' allegory.[3] The representation, in other words, is not a representation of the landscape *per se* — it is a representation of the landscape with concern for our future action therein. As Blackburn would agree, a tourist map of Paris is different than a plumbing map. The anticipation of action therefore *determines how* we map (or represent) a landscape, not vice versa. The accuracy of a map's representation can only be judged, as even Blackburn says, *given certain conventions*.

It is worth mentioning that Blackburn elsewhere asserts that representationalism should be embraced just because in cases like map-making

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* For Rorty, copying means representation and coping means effective practice. He argues that copying is a philosopher's fiction and that all we really care about when we think we care about copying is coping.

[1] Simon Blackburn, *Truth: A Guide*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 158.

[2] Ibid., 157.

[3] Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 325.

there is no better way of explaining what is going on than representation.[4,5] Fair enough; but this does not make representationalism prior to pragmatic or normative concerns. In fact, it explicitly relies on a normative judgment of how we *should* explain our epistemic actions under a given set of situations. That is, one of the conventions for judging whether or not the map is accurate is that it should be evaluated by a representational framework. We think this ultimately applies to all representationalists — they must appeal to value structures to justify representationalism, which makes the ethical* prior to the representational.

One imagines a representationalist responding: if accurate representation depends on our interests, then how can we have any sort of non-relative standards? Our position may seem to exclude notions of accuracy, facts, and perhaps even truth. However, all we are implying is that in a philosophical context these notions need to be examined more rigorously. It is not that they should be jettisoned, only that, when one thinks carefully about them, a representationalist interpretation of them falls short.

Frankfurt is one example of a philosopher who thinks that the lack of strong concepts of accuracy, facts, and truth is precisely the problem with non-representationalist accounts of knowledge. In *On Truth*, he writes: "Truths have practical utility because they consist of, and because they therefore can provide us with, accurate accounts of the properties...of the real objects and events with which we must deal when we act."[6] Frankfurt argues, appealing to normativity, that truths are important to us because they "have practical utility." However, he wants an absolute standard for accuracy that goes beyond mere praxis and depends upon an object in the world of which we can form good or bad representations. He fleshes out this point by arguing that facts are "the true nature of reality...the final and incontrovertible recourse of inquiry. They dictate and support an ultimately decisive resolution and rebuttal of all uncertainties and doubts."[7] But what exactly is it about facts that makes them "final," "ultimately decisive," and the rest? No serious philosopher will argue that reality (what we have been more cautiously calling "the world") does not constrain our knowledge, but what Frankfurt argues for is much more dogmatic and metaphysical than this. He wants a transcendental framework that can reliably and with absolute certainty dictate which statements and theories are even worth considering. This hypothetical framework determines what counts as knowledge, what is relevant, and even what should and should not be said.

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[4] Simon Blackburn, "Pragmatism: All or Some?" (paper presented to the 2007 Expressivism, Pragmatism, and Representationalism Conference, Sydney, August 29, 2007).

[5] Simon Blackburn, "Success Semantics," http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/~swb24/PAPERS/list.html.

* When we use "ethical" we mean it in the old-fashioned sense, not as a synonym for moral, as it is often used today. "The ethical" is just anything concerned with practical reasoning.

[6] Harry Frankfurt, *On Truth* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 52.

[7] Ibid., 55

Such an account leads to several questions. What does the rebuttal of all doubts consist of? What permits us to establish something as incontrovertible? Even if there is some underlying, pervasive, and absolute essence to everything, where does this come into play in our discourse? These questions are clearly relevant to fleshing out a picture of truth and its function. But it seems that Frankfurt has no way of answering them. For the transcendent component of his theory to make sense, he cannot just resort to a vague notion of "the true nature of reality." Indeed, Kant pointed out long ago that it is impossible to theorize directly about noumena. We have knowledge of the world only through our all-too-human interactions with it, and these interactions have rarely, if ever, rebutted all uncertainties and doubts. Frankfurt seems to think that facts have relevance or practical utility as a part of their essence, but it is impossible to define either relevance or practical utility outside of the contingent contexts of human interaction. A thing has practical utility only insofar as we actually use it, not as a thing in itself. The essence of truths is always entangled with the way they are deployed.

Unless Frankfurt wants to drop the notion of truth, then he, too, must appeal to normative concerns. We think (with precedent in Rorty, Putnam, et al.) that any time a representationalist picture of truth is presented it relies on just these concerns. We cannot justify a statement about the world by appealing to some ineffable and inexplicable metaphysical relationship between us and the world; we must justify it in terms that we can understand. Otherwise, who would or could count it as justified? The point is that we *always actually do* justify statements in this way—even statements about the ineffable metaphysical relationship between the world and us, as we have just seen. In short, a representationalist picture justifies itself ethically.

Let us, then, take a step back from absolutist accounts of accuracy, facts, and truth — a step back into the human realm. This realm consists of the everyday deployment of truths within practice and discourse, in just the way that Frankfurt speaks of truth prior to taking a step toward transcendence. If the move to the transcendent seems fruitless, then it is perhaps by taking this step back that we can better understand concepts of accuracy, facts, and truth. For the arch-realist, "the relevant facts are what they are regardless of what we may happen to believe about them."[8] But what makes the facts relevant other than what we believe about them? Relevance is an inherently relative term: the idea that something could be transcendentally relevant outside of a particular usage is difficult to make sense of. If, as Frankfurt makes clear, relevance and usefulness are crucial aspects of truth, and a transcendent framework of relevance or truth

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[8] Ibid., 53.

is incoherent, then all that remains to explain truth is its usage in the different domains of human activity.

Frankfurt furnishes us with some examples of the way facts are employed in human activity and tries to show that they justify his absolutist account of truth. For instance, he takes it as a refutation of postmodernism that an architect or engineer looks for accuracy in "carefully executed measurements." But these measurements are only accurate insofar as they are useful in constructing the building.[9] This does not mean that the conventions of measurement are completely arbitrary or based on purely subjective standards; it does mean that they are *conventions* used to guide activity. If the architect and the engineer did not take these conventions seriously, then they would lose their jobs (and rightfully so); however, it does not follow that these conventions are absolute or useful in all circumstances. Obviously we do not bestow upon the wood a new quality when we call it five feet long, but our picking out a certain aspect of the appearance of the wood (its dimensions, in this case) is a matter of a convention or set of conventions that allows us to act successfully in the world. We only call the wood five feet long due to systems of measurement that we have invented to help us act in the world. Again, the world *does* constrain which statements we consider to be true *but only* in light of our interests in it. It is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle the two.

Still, perhaps it is possible that there are certain conventions endowed with a special capacity to represent the world. Daniel Dennett, for instance, acknowledges that human activity is influenced by a multitude of conventions, but still maintains that "these communicative and recording innovations come with a built-in ideal: truth."[10] While this statement does not take into account contexts such as storytelling, intimidating, and art-making that clearly do not have the ideal of truth, let us bracket them for the sake of argument. There remains the question of what exactly a cross-contextual notion of truth consists in. What Dennett himself seems to have in mind is "getting it right" or "not making mistakes," which just diverts the question to what exactly getting it right entails. Dennett himself uses several evolutionary examples, such as distinguishing between friend and foe and recognizing one's children, which are clearly matters of practical utility, as they are only useful within the context of survival. The concepts of "friend" and "foe" only exist within a set of conventions that give them meaning — it is hard to see how they could be conceived of as interest-independent. If acting successfully in the world is all that is meant by "getting it right," then indeed getting it right is important for contexts concerned

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[9] Ibid., 22.

[10] Daniel Dennett, "Postmodernism and Truth," (paper presented at the World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, August 13, 1998).

with practical utility (unlike, e.g., singing). Again, an idealized metaphysical version of truth gives way to a context-dependent normative version.

PART 2: ETHICSTEMOLOGICAL REALISM

The preceding gives us reason to believe that the sort of absolutist picture that representationalism endorses does not hold up to close scrutiny. At all points, the nexus between the world and our conversations about it is better explained as pragmatic than as transcendently representational. However, even when these quasi-metaphysical structures begin to crumble, there remains what we suggest is the implicit foundation of arch-realism. This foundation might be called "ethicstemological," as it is concerned with what we *should* believe—it is a matter of guiding epistemological behavior rather than engaging in speculation about its nature.

In his essay "Why is a Philosopher?", Hilary Putnam engages in a metaphysical fantasy that suggests a sort of ethicstemology:

> If I dared to be a metaphysician, I think I would create a system in which there were nothing but obligations. What would be metaphysically ultimate, in the picture I would create, would be what we ought to do (ought to say, ought to think). In my fantasy of myself as a metaphysical superhero, all 'facts' would dissolve into 'values.' That there is a chair in this room would be analyzed (metaphysically, not conceptually — there is no 'language analysis' in this fantasy) into a set of obligations: the obligation to think that there is a chair in this room if epistemic conditions are (were) 'good' enough, for example ... Instead of saying with Mill that the chair is a 'permanent possibility of sensations,' I would say that it is a permanent possibility of obligations. I would even go so far as to say that my 'sense-data,' so beloved of generations of empiricists, are nothing but permanent possibilities of obligations, in the same sense.
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> I am not, alas! so daring as this. But the reverse tendency — the tendency to eliminate or reduce everything to description — seems to me simply perverse. What I do think, even outside of my fantasies, is that facts and obligations are thoroughly interdependent; there are no facts without obligations, just as there are no obligations without facts.
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> This, in a way, is built into the picture of truth as (idealized)

justification. To say that a belief is justified is to say that it is what we ought to believe; justification is a normative notion on the face of it.[11]

A fantasy perhaps, but the point is clear. Once we drop the question-begging excesses of representationalism, we are left only with each other and our practical interactions with the world. Why do we say that there is a chair in this room? Because we live in an epistemic community that has us do so under certain "epistemic conditions." If you want to be accepted in polite society, you must say "please" and "thank you" when appropriate — or "good" and "evil" in an ethical society — and if you want to be accepted in this epistemic society, you must say that there is a chair when appropriate. They are obligations in exactly the same way.

Putnam has unearthed what we think of as the ethicstemological foundation implicit in arch-realism. Ethicstemological realism understands truth as an unconditional imperative. To say that a statement S is true is to say that whenever a person is confronted with S, they are obligated to believe it. It does not matter when or where this person is from, what this person's other beliefs are, or whether or not this person is mentally ill: she is obligated to believe S. To take a paradigmatic case, if an ethicstemological realist believes that "God exists" is true, she believes that God exists *and* that everybody else — in every culture, in every historical place and time, with any other beliefs, etc. — should believe that God exists.

Of course, this ethical intuition is normally bolstered by the rationale that the state of the world impresses this belief on us (through the mysterious relation of correspondence and/or representation) and thus we are compelled to believe, for example, that God exists just because reality forces us to. But as we have argued, this rationale does not hold up to scrutiny. Ethicstemological realism, then, leads quickly to the question of *why* exactly somebody should believe S. To say "because S is true" is circular, for now that we've dropped representationalism we are analyzing truth as an imperative: that rationale would translate into "somebody should believe S because they should believe S." Neither can we resort to saying, with the old-fashioned empiricist, that S concords with our experience, because, as Quine, Feyerabend, and others have shown, experience is colored by concepts.[12,13]

Once arch-realism is seen as antiquated, there is no absolute answer to why somebody should believe something. This should not be surprising if we

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[11] Hilary Putnam, *Realism With a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1990), 115.

[12] Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1993), 149.

[13] WVO Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia U Press, 1977).

are thinking of truth as an obligation to believe, for obligation is always relative. One is obligated to be polite at a dinner party *if* she does not want to get thrown out; one is obligated to be violent *if* she is in a battle; (more awkwardly) presented with what seems to be a chair, one is obligated to believe that it is a chair *if* she comes from a linguistic community that calls it a chair and is in an epistemic situation that allows her to trust her judgment. An ethical realist may chime in, "but some obligations are absolute!" So that we do not need to get into the very hairy problems of meta-ethics, we will argue only that ethicstemological obligations are relative. Even an ethical realist should be able to agree with our ethicstemological relativism without too much cognitive dissonance, since much of what we say about the relationship between knowledge and convention does not bear directly on common ethical problems.

The notion that ethicstemological obligations are relative is reinforced by the idea of convention discussed in the first section. We have already observed that it is difficult if not impossible to separate truth claims from the ways in which they are deployed and the conventions within which they function. Michel Foucault suggests that we can think of our methods of deployment as "games," "games through which one sees certain forms of subjectivity, certain object domains, certain types of knowledge come into being."[14] That is, the discursive context determines how statements are to be used and thus how truth is to be thought of. Foucault's point is that one can hardly find an instance in history in which truth claims can be separated from a procedure or set of conventions by which they are deployed. In this way, speaking the truth is always connected with a set of obligations, expectations, and relationships that constrain the way in which truth statements are produced.

Foucault's idea suggests a more productive way of doing ethicstemology. When we think practically about how truth is justified, we always run up against a set of cultural (or discursive or methodological or...) constraints that give us obligations for which truth statements to produce, how to produce them, and whether or not to believe them. In the process, we start to form certain well-defined "games" or discourses for producing these statements, each with varying rules for how these statements should come about. For the arch-realist, whether or not a statement "works" is independent of the discourse in which it grew up, as it were. But Foucault's picture suggests that the constraints of these discursive games have an equal if not primary role in determining whether such statements are justified. These obligations for producing truth are fully social and historical, and they change across cultures and over time. For instance, one can justify the

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* The terminological echo of Wittgenstein is no accident. Both Foucault and Lyotard have expanded the concept of language games into wider epistemological contexts.

[14] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms," in *Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 4

statement "the underlying substratum of the world is atomic" by appealing to contemporary scientific research and theory or by appealing to Dharmakirti's arguments.* Each of these structures of justification has its own standards for what can be counted as an argument or as evidence: a contemporary scientist would not be persuaded by a Buddhist atomist and Dharmakirti would not be persuaded by a contemporary scientist.* A skeptic about atomism would be presented with wholly different arguments by each party and could easily accept one without accepting the other depending on what the skeptic already believes. If this is the case, there is no room for the ethical structure of truth as an unconditional imperative. We cannot establish any consistent obligation for belief across all of these disparate discourses; we may not even be able to establish that they all have the same concept of obligation or belief. If we are required to treat justification ethically, which we have argued that we are, then we must refer to the conventions by which truth is produced rather than a transcendent ground on which truth supposedly relies.

Not so fast, the ethicstemological realist might interject: clearly the difference between Buddhist atomism and the contemporary scientist is that the contemporary scientist has a more accurate picture. The skeptic would be more likely to be convinced by the scientist than by Dharmakirti. Aside from the fact that whether or not the skeptic is convinced depends on the skeptic's other beliefs (if the skeptic is a strict Buddhist, for instance), we would agree with the realist. Yes, the contemporary scientist has a more accurate picture, but scientific discourse values predictive accuracy and has certain ways of establishing this, while Buddhist metaphysical discourse values working out and justifying buddhavacana and has certains ways of establishing that. So if the scientist has a more accurate picture, she has acted according to the rules of her game, as it were. It is a separate (and important) question whether or not we value the scientific discourse over the Buddhist. Still, we argue that this question should be framed in terms of "relevance, necessity, and the point of something" rather than in terms of an arcane metaphysical picture of truth.

If the obligation to believe depends on the conventions by which we produce truth, how can we say that one convention is better than another? Does this not commit us to a total relativism? Yes, it does, but not of a subjectivist form. Just because the type of discourse useful for a given situation is relative to that situation does not mean that any discourse is useful for any situation. If Sarah wants to make her way around Bangkok, she would do better to buy a

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* Dharmakirti was a 7th century Buddhist logician. His atomism posited that everything is made up of indivisible points of dharma.

* Either *might* be persuaded by the other. The crucial point is that in order for Dharmakirti to be persuaded by a contemporary scientist, the scientist would have to convince Dharmakirti to accept the scientific way of looking at the world *before* arguing for the scientific concept of atoms and vice versa.

map with representational rather than aesthetic standards, but if she wants to hang a map of Bangkok on her wall, the reverse may be true. Similarly, different discursive situations require different standards for justification and/or use. Since each discourse comes with its own set of ethicstemological obligations, which situation the subject is in determines which ethicstemological obligations are binding.

Our position does not, however, invalidate the forms of inquiry conducted by these different "games." Rather, it forces us to see their activities in a different light. The example of the debate between evolution and intelligent design is instructive in this regard. An arch-realist might object that our ethicstemological position, with its notions of relativism, commits us to declaring that intelligent design is an equally valid theory as evolution. Indeed, some intelligent design defenders use this tactic. This might be the case if this debate confronted us with two different discourses, a scientific and religious one, trying to establish their usefulness for different ends, like the explanation of human origins on the one hand and personal salvation on the other. But this debate does not take place between two different discourses with different rules for evaluation. It takes place within a single, scientific discourse, between two theories claiming to better exemplify scientific rigor. Intelligent design claims to be a better scientific theory that should be judged by all the standards by which scientific theories are judged. That is, both theories exist within the same domain of relevance and are subject to the same rules for verification. While we happen to think that contemporary synthesis evolutionary theory better explains macrobiology *qua* macrobiology, if an intelligent design theorist could present good *scientific* reasons for the advantage of her theory, intelligent design might be worth accepting *purely on scientific terms*. The point is that intelligent design challenges evolutionary explanations on their own terms, and who wins out depends on the current standards of what is acceptable in macrobiological theory.

We have been using terms like utility or relevance since they have a more obvious relation to epistemology than ethical concerns, but in some situations where different epistemological domains clash, "usefulness" will not be adequate to decide the issue. This problem comes up, for example, in debates about multiculturalism. Should we build a hospital of Western medicine to stop an outbreak of malaria amongst a tribal community? We can say with some certainty that Western medicine will be more useful in combating malaria than folk remedies, but there are further ethical issues raised by this situation as well. Would we disrupt tribal harmony? Would we be imposing our medical values in a way that creates a colonial-subaltern situation? Does possessing a more useful form of knowledge for a certain situation give us a right to intervene in another culture's affairs? There is no clear answer to this last question — it depends

on careful thought about the specific answers to questions like the first two. It may be that concern for the community's health ethically outweighs the other concerns, or it may be that the other concerns influence the implementation of the health initiative. No matter what, the situation is more complicated than just which medical practice is more effective. Ethicstemology forces us to recognize the ethical aporias raised by the confrontation between different "games" for producing knowledge. It also forces us to recognize that these ethical problems bear directly on the question of epistemological justification.

CONCLUSION

Pragmatic postmodernism therefore does not seek to remove all notions of accuracy, facts, or truth. Instead, it recognizes that the standard by which we judge these notions is relative to the set of conventions typical of a domain of knowledge that can establish their coherence. If this is the case, there can be no "final and incontrovertible recourse of inquiry" as Frankfurt would have it. What this paper has endeavored to show is that arch-realism, which would try to set up an transcendent basis for judging truth claims, appears to be a philosophical dead end. We have not tried to elaborate a complete picture of what an alternative would look like; instead, we have synthesized the progress made by a number of other philosophers to produce a sketch of another way to proceed in epistemology. The purpose of our ethicstemological picture is thus not to give a final, definitive theory but to show the inadequacies of arch-realism and call for the reexamination of a number of thinkers whose work has often been overlooked in this context.

As we have noted, the philosophers who are labeled "pragmatists" or "postmodernists" are often deemed more suitable for literary theory than serious philosophy. In this way, thinkers like Rorty, Foucault, and Lyotard are sometimes construed as irresponsible relativists, or, at worst, nihilists. Their theories of the social construction of knowledge are generally answered by a simple performative contradiction argument. It is asserted that the statement, "there is no objective truth" only makes sense if we understand it as referring to what is true objectively, and this results in the contradictory claim that "it is objectively true that there is no objective truth." It seems to us that this supposed performative contradiction only results from a misunderstanding due to strict adherence to arch-realist principles. The thinkers who are designated as pragmatists and postmodernists are most often pointing out that knowledge is domain-relative, a concept that we have stressed throughout this paper. As we have tried to show, negating any transcendent basis for truth does not obligate us to jettison any notion of truth whatsoever. On the contrary: every

discourse sets down rules and procedures for producing the truth according to certain cultural conventions. The question of objective truth, to which the postmodernists respond, is a question produced within the tradition of Western metaphysics, a discourse with its own peculiar habits and conventions.* Seen in this light, the postmodernist's claim that there is no objective truth boils down to showing the question-begging nature of any philosophical position that claims a transcendent basis for truth — that is, demonstrating that such arguments fail to meet common epistemic standards for producing truth. Since pragmatic postmodernism does not claim such a basis, it is innocent of such a contradiction. We can then affirm that to the specifically philosophical question of whether or not there is objective truth, the answer is no.

That is not to say that there have been no irresponsible postmodernists. Indeed, the reception deconstruction received, especially from the American literary criticism community, produced a number of overenthusiastic adherents who generalized postmodern ideas to support a concept of total relativism. But, as aforementioned, arch-realism can also be wielded irresponsibly and has been. Myriad historical examples, from the Spanish Inquisition to neo-conservatism, illustrate the dangers of claiming universally true pictures of the world. Obviously, the academics who endorse such views are engaged in a largely benign, contemplative activity. Nonetheless, irresponsible academics should be avoided — regardless of whether they are of the postmodern or the arch-realist persuasion (or any other, for that matter). In our view, a responsible, rigorous examination of the grounds of epistemology shows that the ideas of some postmodernists deserve a second, more sympathetic, look. When, for example, Western science confronts Indian cosmology about the origin of the universe, we cannot follow the cop-out of the arch-realists and appeal to a universal, incontrovertible ground of truth. Nor, when evolution confronts intelligent design, can we follow the extreme relativists to say that their claims are equally valid. Rather, pragmatic postmodernism forces us to acknowledge the delicate practical and ethical quandaries underlying these ethicstemological battles. Only when we have realized that these problems do not have easy solutions will we be able to make progress in solving them.

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* A similar sentiment in Putnam: "What does it mean, apart from a philosophical tradition, to speak of 'objects,' let alone a 'fixed totality' of *all* objects? What does it mean, apart from a certain philosophical controversy, to speak of 'mind independence'"? (*Realism with a Human Face*, 30). The implicit answer is, of course, nothing.

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Needle-Pointed Grace:

Ethics, Self-Forgiveness, and Trauma

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I. INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS SELF-FORGIVENESS?

Self-forgiveness, with its overtones of pop psychology and self-help books, may seem over-indulgent and distasteful. In a culture of easy fixes, self-forgiveness can be the height of self-appeasement, allowing individuals to abdicate responsibility for their actions in favor of restoring self-esteem. As Trudy Govier says, "in some of its contemporary forms, self-forgiveness seems a form of moral self-indulgence"[1]. The term is also thrown around in so many different contexts that it is difficult to pinpoint what it might mean. For example, is the statement "I can never forgive myself for not going on that vacation to the Carribean" equivalent to an individual saying "I forgive myself" for committing murder?

To understand how such situations might or might not be related, we must first ask the question "what is self-forgiveness?" On a basic level, it is what it sounds like: self-forgiveness is when an individual forgives himself for a wrongdoing perpetrated against the self or another. It is clear, however, that this definition is insufficient because we have no more clarity on what "the self" and "forgiveness" are. Therefore, by breaking self-forgiveness into its two atomic components, we ought to be able to make better sense of "self-forgiveness" and determine if it is meaningful or not.

Unsurprisingly, we will come to see that such a term is extremely problematic. In most situations of ordinary life, self-forgiveness does not relate all that strongly to forgiveness, and it is closer to acceptance or condoning than forgiving. An examination of the term "I forgive myself" in ordinary language reveals that, in most cases, we may substitute instead "I'm over it" or "I just need to stop feeling guilty and get on with my life." Self-forgiveness in these situations has a strong ethical dimension, pulling it away from what Derrida defines as pure forgiveness.

Perhaps it is naïveté or hopeless idealism, but there is something that resists this reduction of self-forgiveness to this perverted or misnamed process. Instants of grace, or self-forgiveness, do seem to be possible, especially in cases where the self is broken in some way. Doing away with self-forgiveness would mean that fragmentation cannot be healed, that there are some burdens that people have to suffer until they break. In taking away self-forgiveness completely, we impoverish ourselves of human potential.

Due to the nature of the self and forgiveness, pure self-forgiveness only seems possible in extraordinary situations, if even then. Since self-forgiveness is possible, however, it remains a meaningful concept towards which we can strive.

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[1] Trudy Govier, *Exploring Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2002), 133.

II. THE SELF: COMMUNITY, ETHICS, AND FRAGMENTATION

The concept of 'the self' is an immensely complicated notion, one that thousands of years of philosophy, religion, psychology, and literature have failed to crystalize into a completely accurate and unassailable theory. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a complete or essential description of the self. Instead, the aim will be to present pertinent remarks on the self directed at elucidating self-forgiveness.

1. The self as belonging to a community of beings

The basic metaphysical state of the self is in relation to others. Instead of thinking of the self as a completely autonomous individual whose freedom is threatened by others, it seems more true to experience to recognize that there are fundamental metaphysical bonds that tie members of a community together. The Archbishop Desmond Tutu discusses an African word, *ubuntu*, that beautifully captures this notion. *Ubuntu*

> speaks about the essence of being human: that my humanity
> is caught up in your humanity because we say a person is
> a person through other persons. I am a person because I
> belong. The same is true for you. The solitary human being
> is a contradiction in terms.[2]

It is a mistake, then, to locate the basis of the self in rationality, or character, or freedom. In order for there to be any of these things, there must first be the self, which comes about through other persons. These metaphysical bonds are the basis of human life. Emanuel Levinas uses the example of suicide to illustrate this point, saying that:

Suicide appears as a possibility to a being already in relation with the Other, already elevated to life *for the Other*. It is the possibility of an existence already metaphysical; only a being already capable of sacrifice is capable of suicide. Before defining man as the animal that can commit suicide it is necessary to define him as capable of living for the Other and of *being* on the basis of the Other who is exterior to him.[3]

Suicide can be thought of as the ultimate act of freedom, the ability to take complete control over one's life to cause one's death. For Levinas, however, such radical freedom indicates that we fundamentally exist as beings

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[2] Robert D. Enright and Joanna North, eds., *Exploring Forgiveness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), iii.

[3] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 149.

in response to one another. Suicide is the fundamental severing of our ties and responsibilities to the Other; if we did not have such ties, we could not sever them. The being who can commit suicide is a being already wrapped up in a community of beings, and furthermore she is first capable of living in response to the Other and respecting these ties. One of the fundamental assumptions of this paper is that "the social relation is experience preeminently, for it takes place before the existent that expresses himself, that is, remains in himself."[4]

This metaphysical relation is an ethical relation, so we are inextricably ethically bound together. Levinas argues that "our relation with the Metaphysical is an ethical behavior"; by the metaphysical, Levinas means the social relationship or *ubuntu* discussed previously.[5] Levinas' definition of ethics is also unique. To risk oversimplification, ethics can be thought of as the fundamental fact that we find ourselves in response to the Other before all else. Since my being is so wrapped up in the Other, I have a pre-eminent responsibility for her that I can choose to accept or ignore. It is the basic fact of our existence; "this primacy of the ethical, that is, of the relationship of man to man...[is] a primacy of an irreducible structure upon which all other structures rest."[6]

For Levinas, this ethics comes from a face to face relationship with the Other. Ethics "involves a calling into question of oneself, a critical attitude which is itself produced in the face of the other and under his authority." Ethics cannot happen without the face to face, for there is no Other to interrupt my egoism, or my enjoyment of life. The self without the Other exists with the whole world at his disposal, seeing everything as a totality, or complete whole, that can be used by him. However, "the face [of the Other] resists possession, resists my powers"; the face is Infinite and cannot be grasped or controlled by the totality of the self.[8] The face calls to us, welcomes us, in "a positive structure: ethical."[9]

2. Naming and the unified self

If the self gains its metaphysical foundation from relations with the Other, how does the individual establish a unique identity? In the midst of so much fragmentation and change, how can one have any notion of a fixed and whole self? What can we really say about such a nebulous concept?

The search for the fixed self is often equated with the search for essences.

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[4] Ibid., 109.
[5] Ibid., 78.
[6] Ibid., 79.
[7] Ibid., 81.
[8] Ibid., 197.
[9] Ibid.

In order to understand how an individual is a self, and how the individual can remain the same self throughout constant change, philosophers often search for the essence of the self, a definitive totalization of what it means to be the self. Such an essentializing definition, however, ignores the self as constantly in flux, removing it from the stream of life.

The self, then, occurs not through some essential property but instead through identification, particularly the name. In *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy,* Franz Rosenzweig corrects the philosopher's search for essences by saying that while "all else has changed; the name remains."[10] The name provides a continuity as man moves throughout time, giving him a sense of permanence. It ties man to the past and indicates the future, for "through it comes the compelling word of memory and the liberating word of hope."[11] Levinas also points to the central role identification plays in being the self, saying that:

To be I is, over and beyond and individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as one's content. The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is the primal identity, the primordial work of identification.[12]

Elsewhere, Levinas uses the lovely metaphor of existing at home with oneself. An individual cannot go out in the world unless she first identifies herself as having a permanent home, the self. This primordial identification or being at home comes through the name. The name both refers man back to himself and beyond himself, linking the self forever to the world through the name. Hearing someone call your name, you recall yourself, but you are also taken out of your isolation and moved to respond to the Other.

This fixed self that we identify through the name exists as a unified totality. Rosenzweig uses the example of a man going to buy butter to show that we do not doubt the basic facts of existence. He explains that it would be ludicrous if a man were prevented from buying butter through some metaphysical doubt of whether the butter today is the same as the butter was yesterday. Why, then, would we doubt something as basic as the self? It seems impossible for an individual to see the self as permanently fragmented or foreign to herself somehow. Levinas also argues that "the I, as other, is not an 'other.'"[13] An individual always identifies with the I, even when actions he commits are shocking or disturbing. To say "I can't believe I just did that"

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[10] Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: Understanding Man, World, and God* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1999), 48.

[11] Ibid., 82.

[12] Levinas, 36.

[13] Ibid., 37.

means that there is still a unified self that the action still falls within (it may, of course, take time for the I to incorporate whatever actions within her narrative of the self).

3. The disruption of the self

The vast majority of us will experience the self as this unified totality, even despite injuries to our security, self-esteem, or idea of our own character. Life propels the self forward; Rosenzweig points out that "have you not always had the courage to live when you simply proceeded on your way, with the past at your heels, and the light of a dawning tomorrow already touching your brow?"[14] However, it is possible for this narrative of self to be disrupted and, perhaps, even to see ourselves as Other. Trauma can cause a dissociation of self that has severe psychological and metaphysical consequences.

Trauma can be defined as "an experience that immersed the victim in the traumatic scene so profoundly that it precluded the kind of specular distance necessary for cognitive knowledge of what had happened."[15] In other words, trauma destroys the subject's ability to separate himself from the traumatic scene, leading to complete identification with what happened. Traumatic experiences are those that are so overwhelming that they breach the ego's protective shield and unbind the self.

It is already obvious that trauma causes a rupturing of the self, which comes to be seen as other. In trauma, "the subject was fundamentally 'altered'... because it was 'other.'"[16] The subject-object distinction has been erased, and the subject identifies with the other (in this case the experience) before there is a subject (the subject does not participate in the experience but instead *is* the experience). The unified self is fragmented and split into multiple selves or voices. T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, for example, is very much a poem dealing with post-WWI trauma and the dissociation of the self in modern life. Part V of the poem, where voices dissolve into madness ("Hieronymo's mad againe") is a striking example of the dissolution of the self.[17]

One's agency can be taken away by trauma. Trauma is a "threat to an ideal of individual autonomy and responsibility," for the self that is fragmented no longer has a home from which to go out into the world.[18] Without such a home, it is difficult to see how the self could have any agency. To go back to Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" portrays this problem: Prufrock, stuck

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[14] Rosenzweig, 83.
[15] Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 9.
[16] Leys, 9.
[17] T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Signet Classic, 1998), l. 432.
[18] Leys, 9.

between his intellect and desire, cannot even decide whether to eat a peach, much less ask his overwhelming question to a woman. Traumatic memories also force one to repeat the past, making it difficult to act in the present. We thus encounter the problem of how to assign responsibility to the self that is now many selves: which part is responsible for what? Can the fragmented self go beyond its repetitive trauma to claim a responsibility towards others in the world? Trauma threatens the unified self and its agency in the world.

III. FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness, unfortunately, is just as intricate and puzzling a concept as the self. This paper will not attempt a review of the many, varied arguments that analyze forgiveness. Instead, it will set out the most convincing views on the subject, so that the coherence of these two terms can be analyzed.

Jacques Derrida distinguishes between conditional and unconditional forgiveness, and the following discussion of forgiveness will be built around this distinction. "Conditional" forgiveness is when forgiveness is offered on the basis of certain conditions being met. Derrida argues, however, that such human processes resemble reconciliation more than forgiveness, in that they aim to "re-establish a normality."[19] "Unconditional" or "pure" forgiveness, by contrast, does not take the situation into account; it is the impossible gift to one who does not deserve it and has not asked for it. For Derrida, "these two poles, *the unconditional and the conditional,* are absolutely heterogenous, and must remain irreducible to one another."[20] The tension between these two can never be reconciled, and so common forgiveness must occur in the mushy area between these two opposites. Forgiveness is not an essence; it is a process that occurs between the two poles.

1. Pure forgiveness and gift giving

Derrida argues that for forgiveness to be meaningful, it must be a concept that exceeds all conditional, moral expectations and processes. He says that "forgiveness is not, it *should not be,* normal, normative, normalizing. It *should* remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality."[21] Forgiveness, as stated before, is not reconciliation; it goes beyond all rational considerations of outcome to offer itself to the wrongdoer. Pure forgiveness stands outside the

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[19] Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001), 32.
[20] Ibid., 44.
[21] Ibid., 32.

normal temporal and moral order, and, as such, it is not a common occurrence, and it is doubtful if forgiveness ever really occurs. Derrida says that "one cannot, or should not, forgive; there is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable."[22] By saying that we should not forgive, Derrida is not insulting reconciliation or the alleviating of suffering but is instead, alerting us to the paradox that only crimes that are irreconciliable, so heinous that they break any sense of moral order, are worthy and needing of forgiveness. However, since such actions are unforgivable (and should not be forgiven), we cannot ever forgive. For Derrida, only the concept of forgiveness remains, as he doubts that it can be practiced in its pure form. Vladimir Jankélévitch also says that "pure forgiveness is an event that has perhaps never occurred in the history of man; pure forgiveness is a limit that is barely psychological, a peak state that is hardly lived."[23] This impossibility leads Derrida to say that in "ethics beyond ethics, there perhaps is the undiscoverable place of forgiveness."[24] Forgiveness must be beyond our normative moral order, since it deals with what the moral order condemns (the unforgivable).

Since forgiveness is beyond the ethical, it can be thought of as an impossible gift. Pure forgiveness, since it is unconditioned, must be a gift, since its recipient cannot be deserving. Derrida argues that

> in order for there to be forgiveness, must one not on the contrary forgive both the fault and the guilty *as such*, where the one and the other remain as irreversible as the evil, as evil itself, and being capable of repeating itself, unforgivably, without transformation, without amelioration, without repentance or promise?"[25]

If we forgive someone who has taken responsibility for her crime and atoned, argues Derrida, we are not forgiving the person who committed the crime, since she has already changed and is a different person. Forgiveness, in that case, is unnecessary and inappropriate, as "it is no longer the *guilty as such* who is forgiven."[26] Forgiveness is a gift to the Other who is absolutely Other, who is infinite in his alterity. Such a gift, however, seems impossible. How can we forgive someone that we do not understand? Without understanding, forgiveness does not seem to have any meaning. Thus, forgiveness seems to be stuck in the realm of the impossible.

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[22] Ibid., 32-33.
[23] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Forgiveness*, trans. Andrew Kelley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 114.
[24] Derrida, 36.
[25] Ibid., 39.
[26] Ibid., 35.

2. Forgiveness as conditional

The other pole of forgiveness is the conditional, where forgiveness is only granted if certain conditions are fulfilled. Charles Griswold makes the strongest argument for the conditionality of forgiveness. For Griswold and others, the existence and fulfillment of conditions make it psychologically possible to forgive, as we have re-framed and can understand why the wrongdoer committed the harmful action. The conditions also uphold the moral order by enforcing a repentance for breaking this order and allowing a return to the fold. He sets out six necessary, but not sufficient, conditions to be completed by the wrongdoer and victim in order to create possibility of forgiveness.

Along with positing forgiveness as conditional, Griswold does not think that unconditional forgiveness is possible or desirable. Griswold takes offense at the language of gift giving, saying that "gift exchange is subject to norms, as is forgiveness."[27] This reading ignores Derrida's acknowledgment that gift giving is an aporia, an impossible-possible act. Griswold's most serious claim is that "forgiveness comes with certain conditions or norms, else it would collapse into forgetting, or excusing, or condoning, or rationalization."[28] This claim, however, only functions as a serious deterrence if one assumes that ethics and forgiveness are inextricably bound. If, as Jankélévitch and Derrida argue, morality is instead separate from forgiveness, which is a good beyond morality, then such moral problems do not arise.

Griswold assumes that forgiveness is only meaningful if it is equivalent to the human processes he observes, which are reducible to a set of necessary conditions. I would, however, contest this assumption. While perhaps events, whether intentional or not, have brought the individual to the point of forgiveness, the moment of forgiveness does not seem to be conditional. Even if certain conditions have been fulfilled, there is still that mysterious instant where one's suffering and moral sense are overcome, and it is that instant that allows one to forgive. Griswold, I think, recognizes this in part by making his set of conditions necessary but not sufficient; something more needs to happen other than these conditions. Additionally, while certain conditions could make it more likely for us to forgive, it is an oversimplification to claim that any one set of conditions can fully capture the dynamic human process of forgiveness.

Unlike Griswold, Derrida argues that conditional forgiveness is not properly forgiveness. He says that "even where it could be justified, this 'ecological' imperative of social and political health has nothing to do with

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[27] Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 63.
[28] Ibid., 47.

'forgiveness,' which when spoken of in these terms is taken far too lightly.[29] Conditional forgiveness impoverishes the notion of forgiveness by making it contingent on certain requirements being fulfilled; forgiveness becomes an economic transaction, where seven dollars of repentance can be exchanged for one bottle of forgiveness. Griswold argues that, when these conditions have been fulfilled, we ought to forgive because "it is what the offender is due."[30] At the same time, he argues that forgiveness, while a virtue, is not mandatory. There seems to be a tension between the duty to forgive when conditions have been met and the superogetory nature of forgiveness. Additionally, as has been previously mentioned, when all these conditions are fulfilled, there is no longer any need for forgiveness, as the wrongdoer has already changed and balance has been restored.

3. Forgiveness as process

Conditions play an important role in practical forgiveness, and yet, as Derrida points out, forgiveness is impoverished and perverted if we reduce it to only the conditional. Therefore, we should take seriously the idea that forgiveness is a process that takes place between these two poles. Any practical examination must recognize that there is a wide variation in what we recognize as forgiveness; as Margaret Walker says, "forgiveness is a variable human process and a practice with culturally distinctive versions.[31]" As such, it is a process that reaches towards Derrida's pure forgiveness yet is moulded by the context and conditions that it finds itself in. In examining this process, we cannot set out *a priori*, necessary and sufficient conditions to define forgiveness because its shape will be different depending on whether it tends towards one pole or another. There must, however, be some way of distinguishing forgiveness from non-forgiveness in terms of this spectrum.

While we cannot find an essential definition for the process, we can perhaps find a common thread. These different processes of practical forgiveness seem to have two common, basic outcomes: the moral repair of relations and a psychological change in the victim. Walker characterizes moral repair as "the task of restoring or stabilizing...the basic elements that sustain human beings in a recognizably moral relationship."[32] There are a few important elements in this definition. Unlike Derrida, the human process of forgiveness has a basic moral component, for without an ethical dimension, forgiveness becomes therapy

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[29] Derrida, 41.
[30] Griswold, 69.
[31] Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 152.
[32] Ibid., 23.

(which, while valuable, is not forgiveness). Not only is forgiveness moral, but it restores some moral state that had been lost in wrongdoing. This moral state could be the relationship between the wrongdoer and the victim, the moral health of the community, or the connection of the victim or wrongdoer to the rest of humanity (the restoring of *ubuntu* ties, if you will). Moral repair can also be thought of in terms of Bishop Butler's definition of forgiveness as "the command to prevent its having this effect, i.e. to forgive injuries" so that resentment does not "destroy our natural benevolence towards him [our enemy], and become malice or revenge."[33] This moral repair can be thought of as more of a negative than a positive act, as it is passive, yet it has a positive outcome. By foreswearing revenge (not acting), an individual has affirmed her moral tie with her enemy that requires her to look after the moral health of her community and her relationships.

Forgiveness also has a psychological component. Jeffrie Murphy says that

> forgiveness is a moral virtue...that is essentially a matter of the heart, the inner self, and involves a change in inner feeling more than a change in external action...the overcoming, on moral grounds, of the intense negative reactive attitudes that are quite naturally occasioned when one has been wronged by another.[34]

The process of self-forgiveness involves a psychological change as well, one that commits to overcoming negative emotions that might lead to harmful actions. It is important to remember that emotions such as guilt and resentment are not always negative, nor does their presence preclude forgiveness, and it is not psychologically realistic to expect an individual to completely overcome negative emotions before forgiveness can happen. It is the commitment to move past these emotions that is the most valuable for forgiveness.

IV. WHAT IS SELF-FORGIVENESS?

Now that we have better explored both the self and forgiveness, we are prepared to see if forgiveness can be applied to the self. Govier asserts that "self-forgiveness involves the same central elements" as forgiveness.[35] This paper will make the same assumption that forgiveness and self-forgiveness

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[33] Bishop Butler, "Upon Forgiveness of Injuries," in *Sermons* (Cambridge: Hillard and Brown, 1827), 128.
[34] Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 13.
[35] Govier, 133.

have the same basic structure, for if they did not, self-forgiveness would not be a sub-set of forgiveness. Thus, as with forgiveness, it seems highly undesirable to reduce self-forgiveness to only a conditional forgiveness. Even if the individual sets the conditions for himself, self-forgiveness is even more reduced to an economic transaction; if you fulfill all these conditions, then you are worthy of forgiveness and so it is granted. Forgiveness has become a duty or a right, whereas even those who think that forgiveness is granted on the basis of conditions say that "forgiveness is commendable [or virtuous] because it is what the offender is due," but it is not a right held by the wrongdoer.[36] Therefore, self-forgiveness has the same tri-partite structure as forgiveness, existing most often as a process somewhere in between pure self-forgiveness and conditional self-forgiveness.

1. The spectrum of forgiveness

The two main contexts of self-forgiveness are bi-lateral and uni-lateral relationships. Griswold points out that "one might forgive oneself for injuries one has done to others; or for injuries one has done to oneself."[37] This distinction is extremely relevant for the process of self-forgiveness, but it may not matter greatly to pure self-forgiveness. As a process that takes place between the two poles of the unconditional and conditional, self-forgiveness has an ethical dimension (we must remember that, for Derrida, conditional forgiveness is a moral matter). This moral component is especially relevant in bi-lateral relationships where both parties are present. First, if an individual has already been forgiven, self-forgiveness does not seem relevant; it is, as Griswold points out, instead a matter of "the need to *accept* the forgiveness one has rightly been offered."[38] What about when the wrongdoer is waiting for forgiveness from the victim?

Let us take the example of the cheating husband. His wife refuses to forgive him for his actions, and he remains tormented by what he has done. He has taken responsibility for his actions, committed to overcoming his guilty feelings, and resolved to never cheat again. Is self-forgiveness an issue?

I would argue that in most cases like these, when self is whole and has accepted its actions, what we normally refer to as self-forgiveness tends more towards the ethical than self-forgiveness. Cases like the cheating husband show an acceptance of one's actions and a moving forward with one's life, which is perhaps the best an individual can hope for in most cases. With

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[36] Griswold, 69.
[37] Ibid., 122.
[38] Ibid., 124.

the exception of cases of extreme wrong-doing or trauma, individuals do not reduce themselves to the sum total of their wrongdoing, so re-framing is not needed. Additionally, moral repair is not a consideration here, since the man has not repaired his relationship with his wife, nor has he broken any other relationships (again, assuming his psyche is whole and he is functioning). In such cases, self-forgiveness remains tied up with the ethical, and the wrong-doer does not seem to have the right or need to forgive herself. The same might be said of cases of self-harm; an individual must accept that her past actions were harmful and resolve to change.

While this mixture of ethics and self-forgiveness may impede us from reaching a pure self-forgiveness, it saves us from the more dangerous extremes of self-love and easy grace. Excessive self-love often complicates our self-perception, and in self-forgiveness we do not have the Other to mediate those perceptions. Bishop Butler, in his sermon "Upon Forgiveness of Injuries," points out this danger, saying that "from the numberless partialities which we all have for ourselves, every one would often think himself injured when he was not, and in most cases would represent an injury as much greater than it really is."[39] The fickleness of memory and self-love we all hold can be a dangerous combination, allowing us to slide into condoning and easy self-forgiveness. With self-forgiveness, where the self is both the subject and object, there are no outside perspectives to temper these tendencies. Perhaps fortunately, self-forgiveness does not seem to be easy or common, as, in most cases, ethical considerations outweigh self-forgiveness. Self-forgiveness is thus far more limited in its scope than forgiveness because the Other, or ethics, comes before self-forgiveness when there is a mixture or conflict of the two.

Self-forgiveness, then, does not seem to be an extremely meaningful or well-defined concept in ordinary life, especially in bi-lateral relationships. We might look instead to instances of pure self-forgiveness or self-forgiveness separated as much as possible from the ethical. However, does it make sense to speak of forgiveness outside of a relationship with the Other? Can pure self-forgiveness in the absence of the Other exist?

IV. PROBLEMS WITH PURE SELF-FORGIVENESS

1. Pure self-forgiveness in practice

As with forgiveness, there are perhaps insurmountable difficulties with the practice of pure self-forgiveness. The first problem comes if self-forgiveness

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[39] Butler, 125.

is thought of as a gift. To truly give a gift, it must be unasked for, unexpected, and undeserved. It is extremely doubtful that we forgive ourselves without either first contemplating forgiveness or believing that we are deserving. A gift can only be given to that which is Other, and, since the self exists as a unified whole, it is impossible to see the self as Other. There is no impartial standpoint from which to view my actions; I will understand why I cheated on a test, or sped through the neighborhood and accidently killed my neighbor's puppy, even if this understanding enfolds only partially throughout time. The self does not have "that alterity, non-identification, even incomprehension" that is required for pure forgiveness, for we exist at home with ourselves, as Levinas would say.[40] Furthermore, the self will have been altered by the act of wrongdoing; since we are always changing, from a temporal and existential point of view, there is no one to forgive, since the present self is different from the self who committed the action. The effects of the action can be addressed, certainly, and the self moved in a new direction through new action, but pure forgiveness can have no part in the present self.

2. The Other and self-forgiveness

An essential element of pure forgiveness is a face to face, interpersonal relationship, which is lacking in self-forgiveness. Levinas' thoughts on the role of the face in ethics in many ways parallels the role of the face in forgiveness. He says that "the facing position, opposition par excellence, can be only as a moral summons."[41] When the face of the Other confronts us, it makes an ethical demand, one that we have no choice but to respond to. It is when we engage in conversation, or face the Other, that we recognize "in the Other a *right* over this egoism, and hence in justifying oneself."[42] I would argue that both ethics and forgiveness are born in this apology, this conceding of the right to our own enjoyment to the Other. In forgiveness, we move past our own negative feelings and moral sense of being wronged in order to forgive, and this movement does not seem possible without the face of the Other. We cannot forgive a chair, for example, precisely because it has no face. The face is an immediacy that is also an absence because "the idea of infinity is produced in the *opposite* of conversation, in sociality."[43] Forgiveness can occur precisely because of this combination of immediate presence and absence; we can forgive an individual for her specific action, but we can do so without completely understanding or

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[40] Derrida, 49.
[41] Levinas, 196.
[42] Ibid., 40.
[43] Ibid., 197.

totalizing her, thus preserving Derrida's dichotomy between comprehension and alterity.

In self-forgiveness, of course, there cannot be the face to face, since there is only one face. Since there is no dialogic relationship, the process of self-forgiveness seems to become about the care of the self, not doing good to the Other. There is no face to bring us away from the ego and our own suffering. Jankélévitch argues that it is "the changing of one's mind, in flowing back toward the ego, [that] turns us away from this Other at whom we were aiming"; this turning away is the point at which forgiveness begins to slip away.[44] However, how can we break from the self if it is that towards which we must turn? At a basic level, "forgiveness is a dialogue, a relation between two partners in which one waits for something from the other," and the question of forgiveness becomes enormously complicated without this dialogue.[45]

V. THE POSSIBILITY AND VALUE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS (WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?)

Despite all the problems with self-forgiveness, only some of which were enumerated above, there remains something within us that reaches towards it. Is it mere stubbornness? Are we afraid to be abandoned in a world without self-forgiveness? Is self-forgiveness one of Carnap's psuedo-concepts, disguising itself as sense but really devoid of meaning?

Perhaps if we can, despite all these objections, find an example of pure self-forgiveness, its coherence will be established. I would suggest, however, that even if such an example is not credible, there is a great value to self-forgiveness, for it allows us to affirm that we are moral beings and are capable of change.

1. Raskolnikov: the extraordinary case

The preceding discussion dealt with cases fairly routine to everyday life. In them, it is important to notice, there is no severe psychological and moral trauma; self-forgiveness is mainly a matter of incorporating harmful actions into one's narrative of the self and moving on. What about extreme cases, however? In order to look at the possibility of self-forgiveness in cases of severe psychological or moral fragmentation, it will be helpful to look at another example, this time from *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. In the novel, the main character, Raskolnikov, is tortured by his murder of an old lady.

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[44] Jankélévitch, 114.
[45] Ibid., 121.

At the end, while his love is visiting him in prison, he has a bizarre and nearly indescribable experience:

How it happened he did not know. But all at once something seemed to seize him and fling him at her feet. He wept and threw his arms round her knees....But at the same moment she understood, and a light of infinite happiness came into her eyes. She knew and had no doubt that he loved her beyond everything and that at last the moment had come...

They wanted to speak, but could not; tears stood in their eyes. They were both pale and thin; but those sick pale faces were bright with the dawn of a new future, of a full resurrection into a new life. They were renewed by love; the heart of each held infinite sources of life for the heart of the other.[46]

Many readers are upset by this ending, seeing Raskolnikov's salvation as a *deux ex machina* of the worst kind. Upon closer examination, however, Raskolnikov's experience seems to be an instant of pure self-forgiveness. Firstly, it is both self-initiated and self-directed, since the one whom Raskolnikov harmed is dead and thus no longer able to forgive. Self-forgiveness also seems a more appropriate term than redemption, although perhaps the two are synonymous in some cases. Derrida and Jankélévitch both claim that "pure and unconditional forgiveness, in order to have its own meaning, must have no 'meaning,' no finality, even no intelligibility. It is a madness of the impossible."[47] Raskolnikov's experience is not a rational choice; instead, it is a spontaneous instant of Jankélévitch's *acumen veniae*, a moment of inexplicable grace. Furthermore, since forgiveness is irrational, it is inexpressible; "the word of grace is often pronounced in silence."[48] Dostoevsky so beautifully captures this moment of grace, where both Raskolnikov and Sonia are unable to speak.

Now that we have an example of pure self-forgiveness, what implications can we draw out about the possibility and value of self-forgiveness in real life? Three main conclusions will be drawn from this example: that pure self-forgiveness only seems possible in cases of severe trauma, that self-forgiveness leads to psychological and moral renewal, and that self-forgiveness remains an important ideal. It is important to note that this paper is not trying to conflate the experience with its effects, which are secondary and do not necessarily follow. However, it is important to look at these effects to address the notion that self-forgiveness has no value in real life.

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[46] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (New York: PF Collier & Sons Co., 1917), 557.

[47] Derrida, 45.

[48] Jankélévitch, 118.

2. Self-forgiveness and trauma

When comparing the case of Raskolnikov with the cheating husband, it seems clear that pure self-forgiveness becomes far more possible in cases of psychological and moral trauma. The cheating husband was not traumatized by his actions; it is more appropriate to speak of him as accepting his actions than forgiving them. Raskolnikov, on the other hand, experiences severe psychological and moral trauma. He becomes psychologically paralyzed by his actions due to guilt, forced to relive the experience over and over again. His moral agency is diminished by his wrongdoing; he is isolated from the moral community and unable to accept any responsibility for the Other. In other words, his action severs the *ubuntu* ties that held between him and the rest of humanity.

It is this trauma, however, that allows Raskolnikov to forgive himself. The one who can forgive himself is the one who has "become capable of renouncing only this margin of vital hope that ceaselessly reconstitutes a futurition in front of us, but also the very hope of salvation, a love that is free from every ulterior motive is collected in a point and is concentrated in the present instant."[49] Raskolnikov had moved beyond the hope of forgiveness and any future, living in "inattention and indifference."[50] It is at the point of extreme fragmentation, guilt, and isolation that he experiences an instant of self-forgiveness.

Self-forgiveness, however, is still Derrida's impossible-possible; even though it seems that Raskolnikov has experienced self-forgiveness, we can only speculate upon why or how. I would suggest that repetition and fragmentation are important elements in creating the possibility of self-forgiveness. In fragmentation, as discussed earlier, the self comes to see itself as other. Perhaps this dissolution of the self creates a strange sort of relation or dialogic, where the necessary distance can be gained for gift giving. It is strange to think of part of the self as disinterested in the whole, but not impossible. Another possibility is that, in reliving the past, we may find an instant of self-forgiveness and wholeness. Along with trauma, confession is an example of this reliving. In confession, an individual narrates an instance of wrongdoing, and his re-telling allows him to both repeat the experience and gain the necessary distance for self-forgiveness. Trauma is a more extreme example of repetition, where victims do not feel any space between their present selves and the past event. Ultimately, of course, it is impossible to break down the instant of grace into analyze portions, so these remarks are only meant as interesting considerations that remain consistent with the notion of forgiveness and trauma.

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[49] Ibid., 120.
[50] Dostoevsky, 550.

3. Self-forgiveness as creative renewal

Like forgiveness, self-forgiveness creates a creative renewal of the self, one that can overcome the fragmentation experienced in trauma. After his instant of self-forgiveness, Raskolnikov asks whether "wasn't everything now bound to be changed?"[51] Through self-forgiveness, he has transformed his past being into a new self, one that now is in the act of becoming and living out this change. Raskolnikov is able to move forward with his life because "forgiveness breaks the enclosure of remorse. For it is in itself a liberating act, and it posits the foundations of a new era."[52] Self-forgiveness has freed him from the guilt and psychological damage from his act of murder, effects so crippling that he had lost all interest in life.

4. Self-forgiveness as metaphysical moral repair

Self-forgiveness can also lead an individual back to the moral community, restoring her to the *ubuntu* state from which trauma had separated her. In prison, Raskolnikov notices that "what surprised him most was the terrible impossible gulf that lay between him and all the rest. They seemed to be a different species, and he looked at them and they looked at him with distrust and hostility."[53] As discussed before, his act had severed the moral bonds between him and the rest of humanity. The denial of self-forgiveness has led "to the destruction of one's own capacity for agency, and even to self-annihilation."[54] Thanks to self-forgiveness, however, Raskolnikov can rejoin the human community, as evinced by his experience of love after being emotionally dead. After his existential change, Sonia realizes that Raskolnikov can finally love "her beyond anything and that at last the moment had come."[55] Both Raskolnikov's ties to humanity, shown by his realization of his love for Sonia, and his moral agency have been restored. He will have to morally struggle to rediscover his place in the world, for "his new life would not be given him for nothing...he would have to pay dearly for it, that it would cost him great striving, great suffering."[56] While the question of pure self-forgiveness is, as we have seen, beyond ethics, the act of self-forgiveness, in a curious way, brings us back to ethics. By going beyond ethics and affirming himself as a moral being, Raskolnikov has restored his agency and thus allowed himself to be responsible for the Other.

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[51] Ibid., 558.
[52] Jankélévitch, 122.
[53] Dostoevsky, 553.
[54] Griswold, 122.
[55] Dostoevsky, 557.
[56] Ibid., 559.

Self-forgiveness, then, is not an escape from the Other, but an embrace of the self that leads us back to welcome the Other once again. It therefore should not always be thought of as self-indulgent, since we have a responsibility to others, perhaps even to the human community, that goes beyond individual actions. Perhaps in extreme cases we need a good beyond ethics to return us to ethics, which is our proper home and fundamental metaphysical state of being.

5. Our lives are nourished by the possibility of self-forgiveness

It may be objected that, after this long and complicated treatment of self-forgiveness, it still remains only a possibility. With such problems, is it really a worthwhile concept to cling to, especially since it only seems to function in extreme and extraordinary cases? Jankélévitch gives such a beautiful answer to such doubts that it is worth quoting in full:

Even if no one since the world has been the world has ever forgiven without reservations, without afterthoughts, without mental restrictions, or without an infinitesimal amount of *ressentiment*, it suffices that the possibility of pure forgiveness is conceivable; even if it has never been attained in fact, the limit of pure forgiveness would still designate our duty for us, would determine and orient our efforts, would furnish a criterion for permitting us to distinguish the pure and the impure, and would give a standard of measure to evaluation and a direction to charity.[57]

As it is such an intensely personal experience, the question of whether pure self-forgiveness is ever really possible is an unanswerable one. Personally, I am more inclined to agree with Jankélévitch that "forgiveness is not a tangible thing, but it is not an unreachable ideal either. Man brushes against the limits of pure love and this lasts for the instant of a fugitive spark."[58] However, even if one never experiences this spark within her lifetime, self-forgiveness still gives all of us hope in the possibility of creative renewal and moral regeneration. It offers us the possibility that we will not have to drag the weight of our wrongdoings behind us for the rest of our lives, or forever remain broken creatures. Furthermore, even if self-forgiveness remains more a beautiful dream than an actualizable reality, it orients our life towards the good and, furthermore, clarifies our ethical responsibilities. Self-forgiveness is always an impoverished form of forgiveness, but human life would be even more impoverished without it.

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[57] Jankélévitch, 115-16.
[58] Ibid., 116.

VI. CONCLUSION

So, where does all this debate leave us? It seems that we had set ourselves up for failure, since, says Jankélévitch, "it is impossible to have a discourse on the ineffable, inexplicable, and indescribable instant that is wholly contained in the pure quoddity of the word *grace*."[59] Despite our descent into the depths of self-forgiveness, we have emerged on the other side, like Dante, to see the stars, with a deeper appreciation for the complexities and value of self-forgiveness.

If nothing else, we have come to a better understanding of what "the self" and "forgiveness" are, so that we are better prepared to approach the question of whether self-forgiveness is a meaningful term. The problems, it must be admitted, are serious, so serious as to preclude much of a role for meaningful self-forgiveness in everyday life, amongst people who, despite committing harms, are able to move past them. They have also given us a necessary caution when it comes to self-forgiveness, warning against the abandonment of ethics in favor of unwarranted cheap grace.

Self-forgiveness, however, should not be written off as nonsensical or impractical. There remains something so valuable in the hope of "inaugurating a future, of founding a new life, of instituting new relations among men; the miracle is that an era of peace could outlive the joyous instant."[60] Self-forgiveness as the "impossible possible" that is central to our idea of being human, as we grapple with what it means to commit harm and carry the burden with us through our lives. For those who have experienced great trauma, self-forgiveness might remain the only possibility to rediscover psychological wholeness and moral agency.

In the *Phaedo*, Plato says that "no sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it fitting for a man to risk the belief — for the risk is a noble one — that this, or something like this, is true."[61] Despite moral and psychological complications, claims of self-indulgence, and perhaps deserved skepticism, self-forgiveness is a meaningful concept to hold on to, one that is ever revealing itself in the messy contexts of our lives. Perhaps, if you are fortunate enough, you might experience that sharp, unsought instant of self-forgiveness and spend the rest of your life unfolding its inexpressible meaning.

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[59] Ibid., 117.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Plato, *The Republic*, in *Introductory Readings in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. C.D.C. Reeve and Patrick Lee Miller (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), 114d.

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Are Rich Country Farm Subsidies Fair?

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I

It is now common to criticize rich country farm subsidies on grounds of morality or fairness. Such criticisms usually assert something like the following: by lavishing subsidies upon their farmers, rich countries cause poor country farmers to lose a competitive market advantage. Subsidies allow rich country farmers to operate at a net gain while selling crops at below production costs. This drives global food prices down and gives rich country farmers an unfair advantage over poor country farmers. *The New York Times* writes:

> "Small-scale farmers across the Philippine archipelago have discovered that their competitors in places like the United States or Europe do not simply have better seeds, fertilizers and equipment. Their products are also often protected by high tariffs, or underwritten by massive farm subsidies that make them artificially cheap. No matter how small a wage Filipino workers are willing to accept, they cannot compete with agribusinesses afloat on billions of dollars in government welfare."[1]

Here, the author criticizes farm subsidies in the United States and Europe by pointing out the harm that they cause Filipino farmers. I will call this type of criticism *the standard argument*. The standard argument is an argument for the abolition of rich country farm subsidies. It proceeds by comparing the welfare of two specific societal groups, poor country farmers and rich country farmers. In a world with rich country farm subsidies, so the standard argument goes, 'rich country producers' (RCPs) benefit moderately while 'poor country producers' (PCPs) are substantially harmed. By contrast, in a world *without* subsidies, RCPs would suffer moderate loss while PCPs would be helped significantly. I will refer to this framing of the issue as "the standard frame." In the standard frame, the case against rich country subsidies has considerable moral force: a world in which poor farmers are denied help for modest gains to very rich people seems morally objectionable.

The first half of this essay will be dedicated to offering a philosophical analysis of the standard argument. To do so, I will discuss four principles governing distribution which might be applied in the context assumed: utilitarianism, the sufficiency view, priority for the worse off, and egalitarianism. Though the principles under consideration are sometimes treated as principles of justice, my concern in this paper will be with an evaluation of their effect on guiding social

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[1] "Harvesting Poverty; The Rigged Trade Game," *The New York Times*, July 20, 2003, Section 4, Page 10, New York Edition.

policy with regard to fairness in distribution. Accordingly, I will treat them as principles governing distributive fairness. Insofar as these are said to be principles of justice, I take a position similar to that of John Rawls, considering justice "only as a virtue of social institutions" and rating the justness of such institutions by the extent to which they are based upon principles of fairness.[2] By exploring the ways that these principles can be applied to the case of rich country farm subsidies, as framed by the standard argument, I hope to give the reader a clearer view of the reasons why this argument has moral force.

Before all this, though, it might be helpful to ask whether the argument ought to be framed in such a way. The consequences of a country's agribusiness policy reach well beyond its producers alone, yet the standard argument largely ignores the effects of agribusiness policy on consumers. By neglecting this group, the standard framing of the argument seems to be missing an essential element. The question to be asked is this: In what ways does the fairness appeal of the standard argument change when we factor in the moral claims of poor country consumers?

The second half of this essay will attempt to answer this question. The answer will require an account of the different ways that the various groups now under consideration are affected by rich country farm subsidies. I will therefore consider the welfare effects on 'poor country consumers' (PCCs) and 'rich country consumers' (RCCs), in addition to PCPs and RCPs, and reapply the four distributive principles mentioned above to see what fairness would seem to require in making a policy decision.

II

One might reasonably think that an important factor to consider in choosing any policy is the amount of benefit such a policy would provide to all those whom it affects. For the utilitarian however, the amount of benefit is *all* that matters.[*] The only morally relevant factor is the aggregate good. To reach a morally superior policy decision, one need only sum all of the benefits that would stem from the implementation of each potential policy, subtract any resulting harms, and then choose the policy that results in the greatest amount of benefit. But this principle has morally troublesome implications. If all that matters is the end sum, then great harms can always be justified by sufficiently great benefits.

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[2] John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol 67, No. 2 (1958), http://www.jstor.org/stable/2182612
[*] Various modifications have been suggested to the principle of utilitarianism. Here, I am considering utilitarianism in its simplest form, or "classic utilitarianism" as defined by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy under "Consequentialism," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/#ClaUti.

This holds even if the benefit is only slightly larger; as long as there is a net utility gain, the specifics of how that gain is achieved do not matter. Because the utilitarian denies "that moral rightness depends directly on anything other than consequences,"[3] he could justify egregious harms to a small group of people with moderate gains to a sufficiently large group. He could also justify substantial harms to a large group of people with very large gains to just a few. For example, utilitarianism would justify a policy which caused substantial harm to a vast number of poor farmers, but resulted in a few rich farmers receiving massive gains. If the benefit to rich farmers is greater than the collective harm done to the poor farmers, then we have a net utility gain.

What the above example illustrates is that utilitarianism lacks an inherent distribution principle. The lack of such a principle allows for utilitarianism's justification of situations like the one described above. The utilitarian defends against this criticism by putting weight on the principle that is not inherent to it, i.e. diminishing marginal utility. According to this principle, the more a person has of a particular good, the less benefit they will receive from a further increase in that good. As a person's level of well-being decreases, the same amount of a good becomes a greater benefit to them. Thus, a unit of a good will provide more benefit when given to a PCP than when that same good is given to a RCP. So, in taking a good from a RCP and giving it to a PCP, utility is increased. The abolition of rich country farm subsidies would redistribute goods in this manner. Considering only the effect on producers, then, abolishing rich country farm subsidies would appear to increase utility. Thus, utilitarianism seems to support the abolition of farm subsidies in the standard frame.

III

Another principle with distributive implications is the principle of priority for the worse off.[*] This principle says that the worse off someone is, the more benefiting them matters. At first, this principle might seem very similar to the principle of diminishing marginal utility, since both principles tell us that we ought to help someone at a lower level of well-being. But the reason why we should help them is different under each principle. For the utilitarian, the reason we ought to help the worse off is that, according to the principle of marginal utility, it would result in a net utility gain. Compared to someone who is better off, goods given to the worse off person will provide more benefit. For the prioritarian, however, the reason that these people should be given priority is

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[3] Ibid.

[*] My treatment of this principle is in accordance with *The Priority View*, in Derek Parfit, "Equality and Priority," *Ratio (new series)* X 3 (1997): 202-221.

just that *they are worse off*. This has nothing to do with their relation to other people. As Parfit writes:

> "On this view, if I am worse off than you, benefits to me matter more. Is this *because* I am worse off than you? In one sense, yes. But this has nothing to do with my relation to you."[4]

He gives the analogy of people at higher altitudes having greater difficulty breathing. In one sense, these people have greater difficulty breathing because they are higher up than other people. But these people would have just as much difficulty breathing even if there were no other people below them. It is their *absolute* level that matters, not their being higher up *than* someone else. In the standard frame, the prioritarian's concern is then with poor country producers' absolute level of well-being. Benefits to PCPs matter, not because they are at a lower level *than* RCPs, but because they are at a lower *absolute* level. Benefits to PCPs would matter just as much even if there were no RCPs. That is not to say that these benefits could not be outweighed by large enough benefits to the RCPs. But it does say that the PCP's absolute level of well-being is a morally relevant factor that should be given moral weight. The standard argument will gain moral force from this principle by claiming that the PCP's low level of well-being warrants their being given priority. Abolishing rich country farm subsidies would amount to priority for PCPs, and so the prioritarian might conclude that they should be abolished.

IV

While utilitarians hold that what matters is the size of benefits, egalitarians think we should sacrifice benefits for the sake of equality. Egalitarianism is the idea that equality is intrinsically good, and inequality is intrinsically bad. For pure egalitarians, equality is *all* that matters.[5] They believe that, from a moral standpoint, the best possible state of affairs is one in which everyone is equally well off.

If equality were all that mattered, though, any reduction in inequality would be good, despite the way in which that change occurred. For example, consider a city that has a sizeable homeless population. Now suppose that an intense wildfire rages through the city, completely destroying its residential district. This event would normally strike us as catastrophic. The destruction of homes makes

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[4] Ibid., 214.
[5] Ibid., 205.

no one better off, and makes many people worse off. Yet, the pure egalitarian tells us that this is, in at least one sense, a change for the better. Equality is increased, though it has been accomplished by reducing the homeowners to the level of the homeless. This is what Derek Parfit calls "the Levelling Down Objection."[6] Many egalitarians avoid this objection by taking a pluralist view. This means that they give weight to both equality *and* utility. They can then argue that, in cases like the one above, although the increase in equality brought about by leveling down is a good thing, it is outweighed by the major decrease in utility. In the standard argument, one utilizes egalitarianism by claiming that rich country farm subsidies promote the inequality between PCP and RCP, that this inequality is bad in itself, and it morally outweighs any utility gains it brings about.

V

Harry Frankfurt offers an alternative to egalitarianism, which he calls "the doctrine of sufficiency."[7] On this view, our moral goal should be to make sure that everyone lives above a certain threshold of well-being. Compare this with egalitarianism, where our concern was with making sure people have equal amounts. Frankfurt writes:

> "With respect to the distribution of economic assets, what *is* important from the point of view of morality is not that everyone should have *the same* but that each should have *enough*."[8]

Once people are above a certain sufficiency threshold, inequalities between them no longer matter. Our chief concern then is to make sure that as many people as possible live above some sufficiency threshold of well-being. This view is sometimes called "negative utilitarianism" because it aims to minimize the number of people below a sufficiency threshold. In the case where someone has more than enough, we would be required to reduce their level of well-being in order to bring others above the threshold, so long as they themselves are not moved below the level of sufficiency.

One could employ this principle in the standard argument by asserting that RCPs sit well above the threshold of sufficiency while PCPs sit below. RCPs would still have enough, even without subsidies, and therefore rich country farm subsidies should be abolished in an effort to bring RCCs above the sufficiency threshold.

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[6] Ibid., 211.

[7] Harry Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal," *Ethics*, Vol 98, No. 1, (1987), http://www.jstor.org/stable/2381290.

[8] Ibid., 21.

VI

So far we have been focusing on how four principles of fairness might be applied to the standard argument for the abolition of subsidies. But the standard frame of the argument focuses only on the effects that rich country subsidies have on producers. In reality, we know that these policies have serious consequences for other groups of people. While it is true that lower food prices harm PCPs, they do help a different class of people – consumers. Given that any change in a country's agribusiness policy would have consequences for its consumers, it would seem necessary to expand the scope of the standard argument to include these consumers in deciding what is fair. Let us therefore modify the standard frame to include two new groups: rich country consumers (RCCs), and poor country consumers (PCCs).

To start, let's look at the effects that rich country farm subsidies have on RCC. While RCC are generally in a better position than PCC in terms of welfare, there are still many poor people living within rich countries. These people spend a large portion of their incomes to feed themselves and their families. For these people, an increase in food prices resulting from the abolition of subsidies would cause considerable harm.

Within a rich country, consider how we might apply each of our four principles to the case of the poor RCC. The increase in food prices may be enough to move them below the threshold of sufficiency. According to the principle of marginal utility, inequality increases and utility decreases since the rise in food price would cause more harm to poorer citizens than wealthier ones. The move away from equality conflicts with the egalitarian view. We violate priority for the worse off because the worse off, i.e. poor consumers, are harmed. So it would appear that, according to the principles of fairness that have been introduced, the effects that the abolition of rich country subsidies would have on RCCs makes a moral case for keeping them.

However, it seems that these arguments can be overcome. The reason being that in rich countries, the poor can be compensated for the loss caused by increases in food prices. One possibility is that rich country governments simply use money that is currently spent on subsidies to aid its poor consumers. If this were the case, the removal of subsidies would be desirable according to the above principles. Priority is being given to the worse off, utility is maximized by directing goods to those at the lowest absolute level of well-being, fiscal compensation safeguards poor people against further declines from the threshold, and inequality is reduced between the nation's people. Consequently, within rich countries, it appears that it would be better to drop subsidies for farmers and adopt a compensation scheme for poor consumers.

It is unclear, though, whether or not such a distributive scheme would be possible in poor countries. In many of the world's poorest countries, even if a distribution plan were politically conceivable, the complex of bureaucracies needed to establish and govern it may be unfeasible. Extremely poor countries are likely to lack the institutional infrastructure, know-how, or capital required to sustain an effective compensation scheme. In the absence of a system to offset price fluctuations, any increase in the cost of food would have direct consequences for PCCs. These are some of the world's poorest people, and many of them are struggling just to survive. For them, an increase in food price is more than an inconvenience – it might, for example, mean making a choice between feeding one's children and sending them to school. Today in fact, increases in food costs are already threatening to reverse substantial improvements in global poverty levels. The numbers are significant. According to *The Economist*:

> "Roughly a billion people live on $1 a day. If, on a con-
> servative estimate, the cost of their food rises 20% (and in
> some places, it has risen a lot more), 100 million people
> could be forced back to this level, the common measure of
> absolute poverty. In some countries, that would undo all
> the gains in poverty reduction they have made during the
> past decade of growth."[9]

If rich country subsidies are responsible for low food prices – as is often argued in advocating their abolition – then it seems clear that the corresponding increase in food costs associated with subsidy removal would cause considerable harm to a substantial number of poor people. On the other hand, in keeping the subsidies we harm another group of people, i.e. poor country farmers. The question now becomes: Given that, within poor countries, the continuance of rich country subsidies will harm one group, and discontinuance of these subsidies will harm another, how are we to make a decision regarding agricultural policy that is moral and fair to both parties? The issue is complex. There are many factors to be taken into account, of which differing viewpoints will offer contrasting analyses. For the purposes of this paper, I will consider the ways in which several specific factors might shape an argument according to the four distributive principles discussed above: utilitarianism, the sufficiency view, priority for the worse off, and egalitarianism.

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9 "A Silent Tsunami." *The Economist*, April 17, 2008.

VII

First, let us look at the question from a utilitarian standpoint. In the standard case, where RCPs are compared to PCPs, we have seen that the utilitarian might argue that aggregate utility is increased when rich country subsidies are abolished. Here it is important to emphasize why the benefits outweigh the burdens. The reason it seems clear that helping the poor farmer carries more moral weight is because there is a shocking disparity between his level of well-being and the well-being of the rich country farmer. Due to diminishing marginal utility, the size of this gap is enough to ensure that benefits to poor farmers will outweigh benefits to rich farmers no matter how large their numbers become. But as the difference in the level of well-being between two groups diminishes, goods given to each group become of increasingly equal benefit, and numbers become more and more significant. Unlike the gap that exists between PCPs and RCPs, the gap between PCPs and PCCs does not appear large enough to subjugate the moral consequence of the number of people in each group. If the gap in well-being is large, goods given to a small group of PCPs might morally outweigh goods given to a large group of PCCs, but if these groups are roughly equal in their level of well-being, then a slightly larger number of PCCs could tip the scales in the other direction. The point is that in addition to their level of well-being, the number of people in each group seems to play an important role in the calculation of utility.

The summing of individual moral claims presents serious problems for this principle. Consider the feasible case in which a very poor country has a burgeoning middle class of moderately wealthy people. The population of the middle class grows rapidly while the population of farmers remains relatively stable. At first, the principle of marginal utility would tell us that the moral claims of the farmers take precedence. However, as the middle class population continues to grow, it will at some point reach a "critical mass," where benefits to the moderately wealthy outweigh benefits to the poor farmer. In this situation, utilitarianism seems to give an answer that goes against our commonsense notion of what is morally required.

Someone may object that the difference in well-being mentioned above amounts to a gap large enough as to not be bridged by aggregation, and that by the principle of marginal utility we are still required to aid the farmer. I do not think, however, that this objection succeeds. The objection does not show that utilitarianism is correct, but rather that it lacks a criterion for determining at what level the principle of marginal utility should override aggregated moral claims.

VIII

If the problem is finding a criterion by which we can determine how large of a gap may be morally bridged by aggregation, one might think that the sufficiency view is a solution. On this view, once a person has *enough*, they would be cut off from utility calculations. In other words, once a person moves above the threshold of well-being, they become irrelevant to moral considerations regarding distribution. This would fix the problem in our previous example. The moderately wealthy, being above the sufficiency threshold, would be cut off from making claims that weigh against the poor farmers. Our only concern is then with maximizing benefits to those below the sufficiency threshold. We are still left with the problem of how this threshold should be defined, but this problem does not discount the usefulness of the principle. The definition of a sufficiency threshold is topic for debate, but for our purposes it is enough to note that in so defining we could avoid the problem of having a large number of the moderately well off counting for more than a small number of the poor.

This view seems to help us in answering the question, but it does not by itself provide a solution. In narrowing the scope of the issue to those who do not have enough, the sufficiency view eliminates certain cases of moral concern. Yet when we look below the sufficiency threshold, the problem remains structurally the same as before. Even among those who do not have enough, significant differences in well-being can exist. Compare those living only slightly beneath the sufficiency threshold to those living in absolute destitution. As the population of those just below the sufficiency threshold grows, it will reach a critical mass at which withholding aid to the absolutely worst off becomes justified. Furthermore, since the aim of this view is to move as many people above the threshold as possible, it actually seems to *promote* withholding aid to the absolutely worst off by pushing more and more people closer to the threshold.

IX

Egalitarianism might seem to correct this problem below the sufficiency threshold. If our goal is to increase equality between groups, then we are barred from benefiting those at a higher level of well-being at the expense of those at a lower level. However, we are still faced with the leveling down objection. Increasing equality means providing benefits to the lower level group regardless of numbers, but it also means making the higher level group worse off. Below the sufficiency threshold, this means that the world would be in one way made better by making those who already do not have enough even worse off.

X

The principle of priority for the worse off has the advantage of requiring us to aid those at the lower level, regardless of numbers, while avoiding the leveling down objection. We are required to help the worse off because benefits to them matter more. Though the utilitarian also wants to aid the worse off, this is only because there will be a greater utility return on goods given. The prioritarian wants to aid the worse off, not because it will increase utility, but because they believe that being worse off in and of itself requires priority. Thus benefits to the PCP will matter no matter how large the number of PCC gets. We avoid the leveling down objection because this view does not regard inequality as a bad thing in itself. A person's well-being is considered at an absolute level rather than in relation to someone else's. No comparisons are being made between groups and therefore the leveling down objection does not apply.

I have said that we should rule out aggregation because of the problematic result that withholding benefits to a few worse off can be justified by small benefits to a large number of better off. But in ruling out aggregation altogether, it seems that we have gone too far in the opposite direction. We have been discussing cases where differences in the level of well-being are clear, but we can imagine situations in which people seem close enough in prospects that numbers *should* be taken into account. How then do we allow for aggregation in cases like this without opening ourselves up to the kinds of aggregative arguments described above?

XI

T.M. Scanlon encounters this type of difficulty in defending his version of contractualism as an alternative to utilitarianism.[10] He gives the example of a rescue situation in which we have the option of saving either one person or two other people from drowning. In this situation, it seems clear that, absent any outside constraints, we should save the two. But in other cases, it is clear that numbers should *not* count. He says, for example, that it seems clear that we should prevent one person from drowning rather than stopping a crowd of people from entering polluted water, which will cause them only a few days of illness.[11]

The reason the choice seems clear in each of these situations is the varying degree of the harms – in the first case the harms are of the same magnitude,

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[10] T.M. Scanlon, "The Structure of Contractualism," in *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 189-247.
[11] Ibid., 239.

and in the second case they are very different. The trouble comes when we consider intermediate cases where harms suffered are not so distinct. Regarding the beach example above, he writes that the number of people on the beach may not matter, but that "this becomes less clear as we modify the example, increasing the seriousness of the harm that the many will suffer to, say, loss of a limb, or blindness, or paralysis."[12] For example, it may be clear that we should save one person from death rather than saving one person from being blinded, but it is less clear that we should save one person from death over saving an entire country from being blinded. Scanlon explains that this moral intuition can be understood as accounting for "relevance" between harms.[13] Even if two harms are not of the same magnitude, if they are "relevant" to each other then aggregation should be allowed.

XII

What I propose is something like a multi-layered sufficiency view that takes Scanlon's idea of moral relevance and applies it to cases of distribution. Rather than one divisive level based on sufficiency, I suggest that we impose social strata which set multiple thresholds that are based on moral relevance. People are then divided into groups such that the level of well-being of everyone in the group is morally relevant to everyone else in the group. Numbers then only become a factor when comparing people whose positions are morally relevant to each other, i.e. people of the same stratum. The level of well-being enjoyed by a moderately rich middle class is not morally relevant to the level of the poor farmer, therefore these groups would be in different strata. Thus a burgeoning middle class of the moderately rich persons could never prevent aid to the poor farmer, no matter how great their numbers became.

Consider such a system composed of strata 1 though n. One objection might have to do with the cutoff between the n and $n+1$ strata. The system as I have described it prohibits aggregation across strata, but what about those at the upper limit of the nth stratum and those at the lower limit of stratum $n+1$? Couldn't these people, though in different levels, still be close enough in well-being that numbers should count? To answer this objection, I think we need to allow that aggregation should matter across strata which are directly abutting. Thus for stratum n, aggregation would count across strata $n-1$ and $n+1$.

Here someone might object that, if we allow aggregation across abutting strata, aren't we in effect saying that abutting strata are morally relevant? And since strata are defined according to relevance, shouldn't $n-1$, n, and $n+1$

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[12] Ibid., 239.
[13] Ibid.

compose one large group? The answer to this objection is that although n is in one way relevant to these abutting strata, the distinctions between them are necessary for the preservation of the system. We allow for aggregation across abutting levels, however we cannot allow a complete jump over a stratum. For example, we allow aggregation across $n-1$ and n, but do not allow aggregation across $n-1$ and $n+1$. If we were to group abutting strata into one group, then this group would expand and abut two further strata, and so on until the entire system collapsed. We do have a problem in defining what it means for a level of well-being to be morally "relevant" to another. This type of definition would be required in order to establish the divisions of the social strata. While I do not know what such a definition would look like, this difficulty lies in the characterization of well-being, and does not in itself rule out the possibility of the structure that I have proposed.

XIII

I have considered the standard argument against rich country farm subsidies and how four different principles of distribution support it. I have shown that there are difficulties for each of these principles when we expand the standard framing of the issue to include rich and poor country consumers. My view is that none of these principles seem to offer the correct answer when trying to decide what is fair. As a solution, I have proposed a version of the sufficiency view that gives priority to the worse off while allowing for aggregation across certain groups. In deciding what is fair regarding rich country farm subsidies, on my view, we are required to first help poor country farmers. This is because they are at the lowest absolute level of well-being among all those involved. Even though benefits could matter more to a large enough group that is just slightly better off than the PCP, I think that in most cases the gap between PCPs and PCCs is large enough to render aggregations across these groups morally "irrelevant." Thus, although I have changed the structure of the standard argument, the outcome remains the same. This outcome does, however, depend on PCCs being sufficiently better off than the PCPs as to put them in a strata of moral relevance that is not immediately next to the PCPs. I allow that if there were a system of compensation in place to compensate PCPs, we could justify keeping rich country subsidies, as we would still be aiding the worst off. But until such a system is in place, it seems like the fair thing to do is to abolish rich country farm subsidies.

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