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Welcome from the Editorial Board

Welcome to the sixth edition of Zētētikon. Zētētikon is a Greek word denoting someone who is ‘disposed to search or inquire.’ The submissions chosen by the editorial board all reflect such a spirit.

As with past issues, multiple themes and types of scholarship are presented in this issue, from original philosophical argumentation to exegesis and comparative analysis. All of these pieces are the result of work submitted by members of the intellectual community at Northern Arizona University.

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If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, or if you would like to submit a piece for a future issue, please write to: zetetikon@nau.edu

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Cover Design

The design of the cover of this year’s journal as well as its physical layout is thanks to Philosophy alumnus Marcus Lobstein. He has our wholehearted gratitude.
Basic morality tells us that it is good to do the right thing and bad to do the wrong thing. Simple. Straightforward. Black and white. Yet experience tells us that life is rarely, if ever, so clearly defined. The choices we face often fall within the grey zone, an area where a deeper understanding of the nature of right and wrong is less discernable and more obscure. In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates, who understands this, stipulates that it is virtuous and justified to disobey unjust laws. Yet later in Plato’s *Crito*, Socrates argues that it is unjust and morally destructive to disobey the law. This is an apparent contradiction raising two fundamental questions: are we obligated to always obey the laws, and how are we to distinguish laws that are just from those that are not? Thankfully, Socrates, through careful reflection and contemplative discussion, establishes a means to differentiate just laws from unjust ones. Furthermore, his analysis in this regard permits a resolution to what would otherwise seem like a contradiction.

Plato’s *Apology* is an account of Socrates’ trial in 399 BCE. After the charges have been leveled against him, Socrates gives his defense to the Athenian court and his jurors. In his speech, Socrates recalls when, about seven years prior, he resisted an order given him by the democratic Athenian government on the grounds that the order was “illegal… contrary to the laws” (32b). Socrates states that he would “not yield to any man contrary to what is right, for fear of death, even if [he] should die at once for not yielding” (32a), clearly asserting his willingness to die for upholding the law and disregarding the orders of those who act against it. In his disobedience, Socrates demonstrates that while he has an obligation to obey those with authority, he has a greater obligation and a moral duty to obey the law itself.

Later in the *Apology*, Socrates addresses his jury with another recollection of a similar instance when he disobeyed orders. From 404-403 BCE, Sparta imposed an oligarchic regime on Athens. This regime, ruled by the Thirty Tyrants, had called upon Socrates to bring in a man named Leon for unjust execution. Socrates’ response to this, being that his life’s “whole concern [was] not to do anything unjust or impious” (32d), was to simply go home. Again, he states that “death is something [he] couldn’t care less about” (32d), for he could “have been put to death for this, had not the government fallen shortly afterwards” (32d-e). This act of disobedience to the Thirty Tyrants differs from that to the democratic Athenian government because, while both were involved in injustice, the tyrannical government of the Thirty was institutionally flawed. In the former case, Socrates’ qualm was with the order itself, not with the governing institution. He proves in the latter case that the ruling body of authority, in its tyranny, is itself offensive to the nature of justice. Therefore, any laws it issues are fundamentally unjust and therefore not binding.
Following the *Apology* is Plato’s *Crito*, in which Socrates, having been tried and found guilty by the Athenian court, awaits execution in prison. His friend, Crito, visits him in a last attempt to persuade Socrates to escape. The discussion that follows explains Socrates’ seemingly unfathomable reasoning for refusing Crito’s offer. Socrates’ belief is that “the most important thing is not life, but the good life” (48b). To help distinguish what is in keeping with the good life from what is not, Socrates argues that, as an Athenian citizen, he is bound to obey the laws and courts. He contends that the laws are instituted to maintain order and balance within the city; by disobeying them, he is, in effect, trying to destroy Athens because doing so undermines the laws’ authority and sanctity. He furthers this contention by saying it is in Athens that he was “born and nurtured and educated” (50e), given freedom to choose how he should conduct himself and given an obligation to respect the laws that are his foundation for life. He has never found fault in the just, democratic laws of Athens, thus he cannot find fault in the verdict issued by the court calling for his death. He expounds upon this point by reminding Crito that he chose to stay and live in Athens by his own free will, and that in doing so, he made “an agreement with [them] to obey [their] instructions” (51e).

Socrates compares his obedience to Athenian law to the relation between a child and parent. He stipulates that just as a child is inferior to a parent, so is Socrates inferior to the law of Athens. As such, it follows that obedience is both morally and legally obligatory. If they find fault with the rulings of their superiors, they may try to “persuade it to the nature of justice” (51c), yet to disobey would be wrong, for if it is “impious to bring violence to bear against your mother or father; it is much more so to use it against your country” (51c). Socrates also reminds Crito that his death is in part his choice, for at his trial the court offered him exile instead of execution. Yet Socrates prefers to die so as to maintain his allegiance to the city, upholding the laws with which he had entered into an agreement and display his submission to Athens. He views exile as an act of “the meanest type of slave… trying to run away, contrary to [his] commitments and [his] agreement to live as a citizen under [Athenian law]” (52d), demonstrating that he is rational and autonomous instead.

What is not explicitly stated in the *Crito* is the assumption that the laws to which Socrates binds himself are fundamentally just. An objection to Socrates’ argument in the *Crito* is the evidence he brings forth in the *Apology*; that Athens has not always conducted itself in a just manner, and that Socrates has found fault with its rulings. Yet he clearly explains that he felt justified in his disobedience, and indeed, he felt a certain obligation to disobey, because the ruling was morally and legally unjust. The underlying, implicit assumption he carries in the *Crito* is that all the laws he holds himself bound to obey are morally and legally just. This is essential for understanding the *Crito* in relation to the *Apology*. The *Apology* holds that when a law or ruling is unjust, or even if the government itself is corrupt, the right course of action may be to disobey. It follows then that any law or ruling or government that is just and in accordance with morality must be obeyed, as Socrates explicitly states in the *Crito*. 
Socrates’ core belief, his drive throughout the *Apology* and the *Crito*, is that virtue and the pursuit of justice are the highest and noblest aims in life and that “one must never do wrong” (*Crito* 49b). He states simply that “the good life, the beautiful life, and the just life are the same” (*Crito* 48b). He goes so far as to assert that any action he takes to disobey the court’s ruling would be injurious to the Athenian government, the Athenian citizens, and himself. He would wrong the government in rejecting their ruling, illustrating that he does not abide by his agreement with its laws. He would injure Athenian citizens by setting a poor example for the youth and hypocritically disregarding his own teachings. He would harm himself in that any of his actions which are not virtuous or just would harm his soul. When Crito interjects and says that while Socrates may harm his soul by escaping, it is wrong of the government to charge him in the first place. Socrates responds that, when wronged, one must not “inflict wrong in return” (*Crito* 49b). To do wrong in return is to corrupt the soul. Socrates addresses the jurors in the *Apology* by telling them that they “are wrong… if [they] think that a man who is any good at all should take into account the risk of life or death; he should look to this only in his actions, whether what he does is right or wrong, whether he is acting like a good or a bad man” (28b-c). Here is the foundation of Socrates’ most basic moral principles.

As Socrates addresses the jury in the *Apology*, he admits that he has always known he must die in his pursuit of the good life, a life of morality and justice. He says that a “man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive for even a short time” (32a). He rejects a public life for fear of corruption. He understands that in leading a private life in pursuit of justice, he is likely to be killed, leaving the people of Athens without his wisdom. In death he ceases to help them understand the nature of virtue and justice. Yet if he leads a public and corrupt life, he is sure to harm Athens. Thus, Socrates advocates for the lesser of the two evils, rejecting retribution to the city for the unjust charges brought against him and instead allowing the city to injure itself by finding him guilty.

The *Apology* and the *Crito* demonstrate that Socrates’ choice to preserve the virtue of his soul in exchange for his life is consistent with his most fundamental teaching: lead a virtuous life. He clearly demonstrates that he values justice and virtue above all else by pursuing them in the face of certain death. He holds just laws as a binding agreement between citizen and state, yet stipulates laws can and must be disobeyed if they are unjust or issued from a corrupt government. Though initially the *Crito* could strike us as an argument against civil disobedience, when held in context with the *Apology*, it becomes clear that Socrates establishes a means to maintain virtue and justice within society by setting precedence for virtuous civil disobedience. Laws or institutions that are themselves harmful to society are precisely those which are not to be obeyed. In the end, Socrates does not demand that we either obey or disobey laws; instead, he demonstrates how we should think about our relationship to society in light of virtue and the obligation such relationships have upon us.
In contemporary usage, the term skepticism tends to be viewed most often in a negative way. The skeptic is seen as a naysayer who rejects the feasibility of a project or idea without providing any good reason for such an appraisal. Due to this stereotype, society views the skeptic as a hindrance to progress and a deterrent to creativity. In terms of philosophical epistemology, the role of the skeptic has been very much the same. Many non-skeptics contend that the skeptical view of epistemology is an irrational construction that has ultimately slowed the process of determining an accurate picture of knowledge and how one attains it. The question to be asked then is this; what is the nature of skepticism in epistemology? Is skepticism a useful tool that can provide important insights not available from other theories? Or might skepticism truly be as irrational, and perhaps even dangerous, as the rest of the philosophical community seems to believe. In his article, “Scepticism, ‘Externalism,’ and the Goal of Epistemology,” Barry Stroud argues in favor of the former. He contends that, when considered properly, some aspects of skepticism can prove extremely useful to the epistemological project. It is the intent of this work however, to demonstrate the inadequacies of Stroud’s claims in particular, and the ultimate inadequacy of the skeptical theory in general.

To begin with, it is important to note that there is one aspect of skepticism about which there is very little disagreement within the philosophical community. This is in regards to what one might call strong or general skepticism. General skepticism implies that it is impossible to attain any knowledge, or at the very least that it is impossible to be justified in believing that one has any knowledge. This is the stereotypical form of skepticism, the form that has provided the negative connotation for the word when used generically. The main consensus among the philosophical community is that skepticism in this general form cannot contribute to any worthwhile epistemological discourse. Stroud fully agrees with this stance. He explains that to immediately doubt everything, as such a skeptic would advocate, doesn’t really involve any philosophical work. General skepticism does nothing to advance neither one’s knowledge of the world around him nor the way that he might attain such knowledge. In fact, by making up his mind to automatically doubt and refuse to question or examine any new input, it could be said that the general skeptic actually pushes himself further away from any type of knowledge. Thus, since the whole purpose of epistemology is to bring man closer to knowledge, general skepticism cannot be taken seriously as an epistemological project.

That being said, it is rather rare to find anyone who advocates the adoption of general skepticism as a working theoretical framework, let alone a lifestyle. Instead, proponents of skepticism, Stroud among them, argue in favor of a more focused theory. Their aim is not to show that knowledge in general is impossible, but perhaps that particular types of knowledge, as found in traditional epistemology, might be
impossible to achieve and that our understanding of the epistemological project should reflect that. The idea is that, whereas general skepticism was decided to be irrational and not a true epistemological process, these forms of specific skepticism can be taken seriously. These forms are said to gain a certain level of legitimacy as epistemological processes because they involve going through the work of examining, and where necessary refuting, the justification and reasoning behind knowledge claims in order to determine if they truly amount to knowledge.

In evaluating this type of skeptical methodology one must examine the ways in which the skeptic attempts to refute the knowledge claims made by traditional epistemology. To that end it is useful to break traditional epistemology into two main categories, internalist theories and externalist theories. These two categories encompass most of the basic traditional epistemological theories and are each dealt with in different ways by skepticism. Thus, examining skepticism from both angles should provide as full a picture as is necessary to fairly evaluate the theory.

On the one hand are internalist theories. Consisting of such theories as foundationalism and coherentism, the internalist theories contend that all knowledge and justification for said knowledge have their foundations in factors that are internal to the person making the knowledge claim. In the case of foundationalism, that basis consists of so-called basic beliefs that are innately justified and can therefore be used to justify other newer beliefs. In the case of coherentism the basis of knowledge is the justification provided by the coherence of the person’s entire system of knowledge. According to Stroud, the skeptical argument against the internalist theories is that all such theories will necessarily fall victim to either an infinite regress or circularity. The skeptic is claiming that the aspects of internalist theories such as basic beliefs and coherence theory cannot stop the regress or avoid the circularity. That is to say that the skeptic refuses to believe that there can be any inherently justified beliefs or that justification can be drawn from a system without reverting to a form of circularity. Thus, the position that the skeptic would ultimately take on internalist theories is that there can be no knowledge produced by such theories because there is no effective means of justification.

Although Stroud seems to believe the above explanation successfully demonstrates that skepticism can undo internalist theories, he is in fact mistaken. There are a number of problems with this particular skeptical method. The most troubling issue is that the skeptical argument against internalist theories seems to be taking the same form as the account of general skepticism. The skeptic is assuming that it is inherently impossible for justification to come from such sources as basic beliefs or coherence. A stance like that does not sound like the serious philosophical work that Stroud claimed specific skepticism would be doing. The epistemological process is one of examination and testing. It’s perfectly fine if one’s theory leads him to believe, for instance, that there can be no justification in an internalist theory so long as he came to that conclusion by doing the proper work and not because he must automatically doubt. Also, the claim that there can be no worthwhile justification from
an internalist theory may not even be true. According to a number of knowledge systems such faculties as memories and reason can be utilized as justificatory evidence for a belief being counted as knowledge. And while those faculties may not be enough to provide certain justification for any one belief, the more such beliefs a person holds the closer he will come to certainty to the point where he can rightfully claim to being fully justified in his knowledge claims. Thereby defeating the skeptical assumption.

Next there is also a skeptical argument against the externalist theories of traditional epistemology. As the difference in name implies, while internalist theories justify their beliefs through faculties internal to the believer, externalist theories allow the believer to obtain justification from sources outside him. Externalist theories tend to allow sensory perception and expert testimony in addition to reason and memories as viable sources of justificatory evidence. But it is that very characteristic that the skeptics use against externalist theories. The argument is that sensory perception and the word of others cannot necessarily be trusted. Whether one goes as far as to invoke Descartes’ evil genius, or simply states that one’s sensory perceptions aren’t reliable because one has a habit of being intoxicated most of the time, the idea is that there is no good reason to believe that what one observes in the outside world is actually the fact of the matter. Furthermore, Stroud argues that a belief obtained through an externalist system can only count as knowledge if it is actually true. This combines with the previous skeptical claim to imply that since one can never know for certain if one’s beliefs about the world and the things in it are true one will never know for sure if one has any knowledge. Thus, while the skeptic seems to be allowing that one can gain knowledge through an externalist system, the skeptic is likewise committed to the position that one could never know that a belief is in fact knowledge. And that situation is really no better than not being able to gain any knowledge at all.

Again though, the skeptic is not on the right track. There can be no doubt that truth conduciveness is extremely important to any epistemological system. One goal of epistemology after all is to hold true beliefs and avoid false beliefs. However, there is quite a difference between truth conduciveness and certainty, and the skeptic seems to be after the wrong one. No reasonable epistemological system demands certainty for knowledge claims. Rather it is more important that a belief have all the necessary characteristics that will make it very likely to be true, i.e. it must be truth conducive. Then, the belief’s truth conduciveness combined with empirical observations and the reasoning of the believer can be used to determine how justified one is in turning the belief into a knowledge claim. Thus, once again it seems irresponsible for the skeptic to insist that one cannot gain any knowledge, or at least can’t have any reason to believe he has knowledge, when operating under an externalist theory.

Based on the above examinations it seems quite clear that at best skepticism is no more justified than any other epistemological theory, and at worst is irresponsible and potentially damaging to the entire epistemological project. Undoubtedly one can see a certain appeal to skepticism. When so many other theories seem to be unable to explain the hard epistemological questions it could be tempting to assume that perhaps
the skeptics are right in believing there actually is no answer. But to follow through on that impulse is to betray the entire philosophical tradition. As was stated earlier, holding a skeptical view of knowledge, or even of the outside world for that matter, is not an epistemological crime by any means. The issue at stake is the way in which that view is developed. Although the likelihood of it happening seems incredibly small, if a skeptical view is arrived at after an honest and thorough philosophical examination, then it is reasonable. However, general skepticism and even the forms proposed by Stroud are a different story. General skepticism’s immediate doubting based on principle requires neither intelligence nor effort and can produce neither knowledge nor understanding. The specific skepticism is ultimately no better. In the end skepticism is a detriment to the philosophical project, which intends to continuously seek the truth, not assume that there is none.

Work Cited

Aristotle’s Conception of Eudaimonia
Jenna Fish

Eudaimonia, translated from Greek to English as happiness, or sometimes as flourishing, is Aristotle’s primary concern in Book I of the Nicomachean Ethics, in which he ultimately argues for the humanistic telos (end, goal) of eudaimonia. Aristotle seems to reach this conclusion by first analyzing what the good is and what the function of a human being is. Throughout the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle presents arguments as to why he believes a philosophical human life is superior to a political one. To understand why, one must first comprehend what a human life, specifically, consists of. This paper will first address the characteristics that are exclusively human for Aristotle. This will lead into an analysis of eudaimonia as a distinctively human aspect. The paper will conclude by finally examining the effects and consequences of the integration of eudaimonia into a philosophical life.

To help understand the function of a human being, Aristotle presents a sort of hierarchy of the soul, in which he determines the difference between humans and all other forms of life. For Aristotle, plants would be at the bottom of the hierarchy, possessing a soul that is only concerned with living. All other non-human animals would be found in the middle of the hierarchy, for they possess a soul concerned with living as well as sense perception. The top of the hierarchy is where a human soul belongs, according to Aristotle, for a human soul is concerned with both living and sense perception, and is also equipped with reason. This type of soul hierarchy follows a similar pattern within an individual soul itself, such that each human being possesses a tri-partitive soul, composed of a nutritive part, an appetitive part, and a rational part. For Aristotle, what makes us distinctively human and sets us apart from all other life on the planet is our ability to reason, insofar that no other species possesses such an ability. Aristotle recognizes two aspects of the rational part of the soul, one that obeys reason and one that actually possesses reason or thinking. Here is where we find Aristotle’s definition of reason, that it is our ability to think. He concludes that, “[…] the human function is the soul’s activity that expresses reason.”

The function of a human being, the activity of the soul that expresses reason, is important to consider while interpreting Aristotle’s account of eudaimonia, or happiness. He claims that, “Happiness needs a complete life.” Reason, completeness, and happiness are all intimately connected for Aristotle. Happiness here may be defined as the activity of the soul that expresses reason, in accord with virtue (excellence), in a complete life, where a complete life entails having some external goods, such as friends, money, or health. Therefore, happiness too requires reason, and is thus considered an attribute privileged to humans only, insofar as reason is an attribute exclusive to humans. Eudaimonia, then, would be considered one of the many activities of the soul that expresses reason. This is why Aristotle does not find it surprising that, “we regard neither ox nor horse nor any other kind of animal as happy, since none of them can share in this sort of activity.” For this same reason, Aristotle
does not believe children can be happy either, since their youth prevents them from participating in such activities of the soul. Another aspect of a complete life that is especially interesting to consider while examining the integration of *eudaimonia* into a philosophical life is that of a certain kind of post-death perspective.

Aristotle seems to believe that only in the moment of death is one able to truly judge if he or she has lived a happy life, since bad and unhappy things can always spontaneously, randomly, and quickly happen to someone. He says that, “when a human being has died, we can safely pronounce that he was blessed before he died, on the assumption that he is now finally beyond evils and misfortunes.” There is an important distinction to be made here between self and other. For Aristotle, the soul is mortal, and it dies along with the body. So, one cannot possess a post-death perspective about his or her own life insofar as there would be no more soul to do the reflecting after death. We can only judge the happiness of others’ lives after they have died.

This is especially interesting when one considers a philosophical life, which is the kind of life Aristotle seems to prefer. A philosopher, by virtue of definition, is a lover of wisdom. His life pursuit is an activity of the soul that expresses reason; it is a search, a quest for wisdom and knowledge. While Aristotle recognizes that *eudaimonia* varies for different crafts or actions, it seems to best apply to a philosophical life, especially considering Aristotle’s post-death perspective. Just as we may judge a man to be truly happy at the moment of death, he is similarly [usually] considered wise at the moment of death as well, insofar as at that time, he will be free from misfortunes and spontaneous happenings so that we may finally interpret and judge the wisdom and knowledge he gained throughout his life and thus pronounce him wise. The connection present between Aristotle’s conviction regarding *eudaimonia* and his partiality towards philosophy and a philosophical life is likely no coincidence. He may even argue that it is quite natural to want what one prefers or believes in to be superior to anything else.

Aristotle makes several claims throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* about the superiority of a philosophical life. It is, however, within a philosophical life that concepts such as *eudaimonia* may be best applied and integrated. *Eudaimonia*, the Greek word that translates into English as a very general kind of happiness, for Aristotle, is an aspect exclusive to humans, since happiness requires reason, and reason is what ultimately characterizes us as human beings. The *Nicomachean Ethics* provides a very thorough account and process of *eudaimonia*, and gives ideas for how to live the happiest life. Through analysis, it appears that *eudaimonia* connects quite nicely to a philosophical life. The integration of *eudaimonia* into a philosophical life might have been the ultimate goal for Aristotle, and he himself seemed partial towards philosophy, and spent sufficient time documenting the notion of happiness.
On the Possibility of Metaphysics
Michael Cox

In “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language,” Carnap argues that “In the domain of metaphysics, including all philosophy of value and normative theory, logical analysis yields the negative result that the alleged statements in this domain are entirely meaningless” (61). Following a brief description of Carnap’s argument, I will dispute this thesis by taking a closer look at Carnap’s defining of meaning via empirical science.

For Carnap, metaphysics is the attempt “...to discover and formulate a kind of knowledge which is not accessible to empirical science” (76). In order to allow for a proper reading of Carnap’s arguments, I will tentatively accept this definition. Carnap asserts that all meaningful statements can fall into two categories: tautologies (and their negations), and empirical statements. Members of the latter category belong exclusively to empirical science. Because metaphysics is attempting to remain outside empirical science, and is not interested in making purely tautological claims, any statement of metaphysics necessarily falls outside the set of meaningful statements. Thus, all metaphysical statements are necessarily meaningless.

Leaving tautologies aside, the empirical claims possess meaning due to their relationship with their respective protocol sentences. While Carnap does not tell us exactly what protocol sentences are, they seems to be observational claims of the most basic kind, such as ‘I see that object moving.’ or ‘This object feels warm.’ The truth value of any empirical sentence is dependent upon the truth values of its respective protocol sentences, which serve to provide empirical definition for all words in the sentence. For Carnap, “...a sequence of words has a meaning only if its relations of deductibility to the protocol sentences are fixed” (63). For example, the truth of the claim ‘x is an arthropod’ can be determined by the protocol statements associated with the word ‘arthropod’: ‘x is an animal,’ ‘x has a segmented body,’ and ‘x has jointed legs.’ If all of these are true of x, then it is also true that x is an arthropod. Thus, insofar as empirical science is made up of empirical statements, all science stands in a fixed deductive relationship to basic observational claims. This view, while tempting, is quite problematic. An extremely cursory look at the history of science easily displays this. There are often heated debates over competing scientific theories, and even overwhelmingly successful theories, such as Newton’s theory of gravity or Einstein’s theory of relativity, have been met with opposition. If science was a purely empirical venture, then such debates would not occur, and if they did, they would be debates not over the theories themselves, but over the proofs for the theories.

In “From A Logical Point of View,” Quine provides a wonderful description of how scientific theories are actually adopted. “...we adopt, at least insofar as we are reasonable, the simplest conceptual scheme into which the disordered fragments of raw experience can be fitted and arranged” (16). Science is not simply a set of
deductively derived claims, but rather a set of schema under which we attempt to understand the world around us. Competing theories will often use the same empirical evidence, and in such cases a fixed relationship between observation and theory is simply not sufficient reason to endorse one theory over another. Instead, our decision between competing theories hinges on such things as simplicity, which is a non-quantitative normative value, a thing which Carnap dismisses as meaningless.

There are also claims in science which do not seem to lend themselves to reduction to protocol sentences. Consider the following claim: ‘There are gravitational forces.’ Forces are not objects of experience. One can perhaps see motion, or feel pressure, but these are the effects of forces, not forces themselves. The inference to the existence of gravitational forces was not a deductive one, but an abductive one. One cannot derive ‘There are forces’ from ‘Those things are moving’ or ‘I feel pressure.’ Because we can only observe the effects of forces, not the forces themselves, we can only claim ‘IF there are forces, THEN I will observe such and such.’ To claim that our observations deductively prove the existence of forces is to commit the fallacy of affirming the consequence.

Thus, it seems as though Carnap’s conception of meaning in relation to empirical science does not stand up to how science actually works. Science includes claims about things which are neither included in nor deduced from experience. Our scientific inferences hinge on non-deductive logic and the application of normative values such as simplicity. For Quine, we must recognize the value of science as it functions, for it functions quite well, and use science’s operations to guide our claims regarding metaphysics. Indeed, in “The Scope and Language of Science,” he argues that “...we do need to add abstract objects [to our ontology], if we are to accommodate science as currently constituted.” This is because mathematics is an integral part of science, and cannot be divorced from it. Because “the objects needed for mathematics...can be got down to a single category, that of classes,” and classes are certainly not objects of experience, we must allow for their existence in order for math, and therefore science, to function at all.

Carnap does account for mathematics in his discussion of meaning by claiming that mathematics falls into the class of meaningful statements known as tautologies. The truth and meaning of mathematical formulae are fixed because the formulae themselves are true by virtue of their form, not of their content. However, this view runs into a problem similar to the one confronting Carnap’s description of empirical science. If all of mathematics was composed of formally true tautological statements, then there would never be any reasonable cause for debate over mathematical theories. Either the tautological claims would be properly constructed, or they wouldn’t be; analysis of the tautologies would decide any mathematical dispute. However heated debates over mathematical theory, such as that between the logicists and the intuitionists, do occur. “This opposition is no mere quibble; it makes an essential difference in the amount of classical mathematics to which one is willing to subscribe” (Quine, 14). The two sides disagree over when variables can be applied
to abstract objects, and the result is that “intuitionists are compelled…to abandon even some of the classical laws of real numbers,” (Quine 14-15) while the logicists maintain access to these laws. The existence of such debates undermines the idea of mathematics as a purely analytic venture.

The upshot of Carnap’s argument is that only the objects of experience itself can be meaningfully discussed, let alone held to exist. But this is clearly not the case, as neither mathematics nor science function as described by Carnap. The former requires abstract objects in the form of classes, and is not a purely analytic venture. Science, insofar as it is dependant upon mathematics, requires abstract objects as well. Additionally, science makes use of non-empirical normative values, which Carnap would have us abandon. Some metaphysical claims, or claims about non-physical objects, must be allowed. Thus Carnap’s attempt to defenestrate metaphysics has failed on account of his insufficient analysis of both empirical science and mathematics.

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Pangaea’s Alleged Existence
Jenna Fish

Science, as factual and absolute as we may interpret it, is in fact, in essence, epistemological. By way of math, physical evidence, and facts, science seeks to answer the same types of questions as epistemology. Therefore, it is within the field of science that we may best apply some of the most pressing epistemological questions in order to more accurately determine their probability and likelihood within reality. In this paper, I will first introduce the scientific example of Pangaea, the most recent supercontinent to exist on Earth, and the subsequent and related theory of plate tectonics. This example will be used throughout the paper to help make better sense of the concepts presented. Next, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant will be introduced to help illustrate, through the explanation of various kinds of knowledge, the problems that arise from the theory of Pangaea, and to establish that Pangaea is in fact a form of impure knowledge. Finally, I will briefly introduce the British philosopher A.J. Ayer who will provide a counterpoint to Kant’s refutation of Pangaea, arguing for its existence by means of weak verifiability. Before these theories of knowledge may be applied to Pangaea, though, we need to first understand exactly what Pangaea is.

Earth’s most recent supercontinent, Pangaea, existed during the Paleozoic and Mesozoic eras, about 250 million years ago. The word “Pangaea,” comes from the Greek words *pan*, meaning all or entire, and *Gaea*, meaning Earth. Pangaea, as it is called, was first introduced in 1915 by German geophysicist Alfred Wegener. Between then and the late 1960s, three revolutionary theories emerged, each one providing stronger evidence for Pangaea than the previous. The final of these theories is that of plate tectonics, which explains the movement of the Earth’s outer shell by means of mechanisms such as seafloor spreading and subduction. These mechanisms, in turn, produce the Earth’s most prominent features, like mountain ranges, continents, and ocean basins. The emergence and integration of plate tectonics into geology and the other earth sciences has arguably provided the most irrefutable evidence for Pangaea. Other strong evidence includes the puzzle piece-like appearance of the western edge of the African continent and the eastern edge of the South American continent and how they seem to have once fit together, and fossil records of the exact same plants and creatures found of the same, now very distant, continents. While the evidence for Pangaea exists in things we possess today, like the fossil and rock records, and in processes still occurring to this day, like plate tectonics, the fact remains that Pangaea as it is was existed at a time in the past, long before the first humans were ever on Earth. A theory such as this, of an entity that existed prior to human presence on Earth, would be considered by 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant to be *a posteriori* knowledge, that is, knowledge after experience.

Kant, a German thinker of the Enlightenment period, contributed greatly to such fields of philosophy as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics.
The Critique of Pure Reason, first published in 1781, is Kant's primary contribution to epistemology. It presents arguments for the scope and limits of reason. The introduction to the First Critique begins with Kant claiming that all knowledge begins with experience. He is careful to distinguish, though, that this does not necessarily mean that all knowledge arises from experience. Here, Kant deciphers between two kinds of knowledge, a priori and a posteriori. A priori knowledge is independent of experience (this appears to be Kant's own belief of knowledge), while a posteriori, or empirical knowledge, has its very sources in experience. A priori is the pure form of knowledge; a posteriori is the impure form. Kant, however, seems to take this idea one step further, and introduces the idea of synthetic a priori, that is, a priori knowledge that requires the combination of at least two separately existing concepts. Remembering his distinction that all knowledge begins with experience but not necessarily arises from it, Kant might argue that Pangaea is an example of synthetic a priori knowledge, a hypothetical suggestion, such that its existence may be derived from our knowledge of the current continents and of the mechanism that propel the plates.

Kant’s position is one that supports a priori knowledge; his goal is to find knowledge that exists separately from experience. Although we claim, with such certainty by means of our current scientific advancements, that Pangaea really and truly did exist 250 million years ago, Kant’s view is one that suggests the hypothetical existence of Pangaea. He was, after all, the first to suggest in 1755 that the bright band of stars we observe in the night sky is really a side-on view of our galaxy, the Milky Way. To help understand where Kant might stand in regard to Pangaea’s existence, he claims that, “no determinations, whether absolute or relative, can be intuited prior to the existence of the things to which they belong [...].”

Pangaea belongs to the idea of continent, an idea that we are all explicitly familiar with today. Likewise, we are equally familiar with the mechanisms that propel the crust of the Earth, that have placed the continents in the locations that we observe them to be in today. With these bits of knowledge, combined with our awareness of how time appears to operate, we can synthesize them, and thus derive the idea of Pangaea, such that if we possess an idea of a continent, and are aware that plate tectonics is constantly driving the motion of the plates, we can derive that at a time in the past, the continents were joined together in one supercontinent.

Although perhaps counter-intuitive at first, a posteriori knowledge, that which arises from experience, would not seem to apply to the case of Pangaea. The theory of plate tectonics, which is the mechanism or force that drives continental drift, the theory that seemingly “proved” Pangaea’s late existence, is barely forty years old! Before this breakthrough, Pangaea was only a theory, despite the already existing fossil and visual evidence; although Africa and South America looked like they had once fit together, and although there were fossils of the exact same plants and creatures found on each continent, no present theory could explain how or why this was so. These two bits of evidence are arguably some of the most obvious examples of a posteriori knowledge. Observation by nature, because it requires the active participation of at least one of the human senses, requires experience; the observation of Africa and
South America, and how they appeared to fit together, required the involvement and experience of the human eyes. Consequently, while fossils may have actually existed on the South American continent before humans, the discovery of them required human experience and interaction. The fact that we possess these several different bits of evidence that support Pangaea’s existence might be, for someone like A.J. Ayer, the precise verification needed to conclude absolutely Pangaea’s past existence.

A.J. Ayer, a Twentieth century British philosopher, has made many fine contributions to the fields of ethics and epistemology, most notably the principle of verification. Ayer claims that we may call a sentence (or an idea) factually significant to any person if and only if that person knows how to properly verify, by means of various observations, the proposition(s) that the sentence (or idea) maintains to express. He makes another, more precise distinction between strong and weak verifiability; strong verifiability entails that a proposition can be conclusively established in experience, and weak verifiability holds if experience can render the proposition probable. The idea of Pangaea maintains to express a previously existing continent, and therefore the likewise movement of continents across the Earth’s surface. Ayer might argue that Pangaea’s existence can be verified using a weak verification criterion. Our actual human experience with the fossils found on Africa and South America, our experience with seeing on a map how the two seem to have once fit together, and our experience with technology and plate tectonics, could render the idea of Pangaea probable. Ayer would be arguing for Pangaea’s existence this way, countering Kant’s argument that Pangaea is a form of synthetic a priori knowledge.

Science, with its wide range of possibilities and potentialities, is arguably the field where various theories of knowledge can be best applied, examined, tested, and ultimately either verified or refuted. Kant’s theory of knowledge, the distinction between a priori and a posteriori, ultimately posited Pangaea as a form of hypothetical, synthetic a priori knowledge. The synthesis of the idea of continent, the mechanism of plate tectonics, and of our conception of time could allow for Pangaea’s late existence. Contrarily, for Ayer Pangaea’s existence satisfies the requirements of weak verifiability, which renders the idea probable through our experience. It is clear that the boundaries between philosophy and science start to blur when investigating epistemological questions, especially when the science in question, like geology, exists primarily during a time in the past.

Works Cited


Literature vs. Reality
Jakob Allmaras

Literature, and art more generally, is a crucial part of the human experience, and not merely because it makes up a large portion of our lives. I would like to focus this paper on the nature and importance of literature, and especially on how it is able to overcome certain pitfalls of the physical world. Essentially, it will be broken into two parts. Part one will compare the views of literature from Proust and Plato, respectively. Plato will essentially serve as Proust's antithesis so that I might draw out what I find especially useful and interesting in Proust. Part two will focus on drawing out the most interesting parts of Proust, how literature functions in conjunction with everyday life, its augmentation of “reality.”

In *Remembrance of Things Past*, Proust appears to support the idea that literature, being a form of art, is essential to our humanity and supplements our lives. He believes literature connects us with characters in the novel and thereby helps better connect us with our fellow humans. We become more in touch emotionally with different experiences we may have. In this way, we also gain valuable life experience, which may be otherwise inaccessible. This sort of experience also helps bring us closer to fundamental truths than a life devoid of such things might yield. Such a view is much more attractive than Plato’s and contrasts greatly with what he argues in the *Republic*: that literature can be, and often is more of a detriment than an improvement. In fact, Plato seems to disagree on every point made in favor of literature by Proust: literature is further from the truth than our real life experiences; we ought not be so emotionally involved in literature, which gives far too much influence to the emotions over its characters, who, like mankind in general, ought to act rationally; this influx of emotion leads to a disruption of proper actions and ought to be avoided.

Proust very clearly explicates the idea that there is an insurmountable barrier between material objects in life, and it is through literature that this barrier can be overcome. There is always some sort of obstruction or gap that prevents us from coming into contact with something’s true nature. Proust mentions this explicitly when raising concerns about “a thin spiritual border that prevented [him] from ever touching a substance directly” (90). He worries that such a border causes him to have somewhat less understanding of the world than he would like; he can never truly experience the object around which there is a border in the same way an object cannot clearly be distinguished when seen through water. Now, this worry applies more to physical, material objects than with fellow human beings; Proust is “reaching out from [his] inner self to the outer world, towards the discovery of Truth” (91). It is in this sense of truth that he believes he will find happiness, a fuller life experience. That is the issue with the spiritual border: it prevents his inner self from touching the specific object. There is no physical barrier; it is spiritual. To use Plato’s language, the Forms are out of his reach; he can never really come into contact with them, and Proust finds this to be a major problem. He worries about a lack of truth and purity.
in the physical world to which he has access, and he seeks some way to get in touch with these truths.

However, it is literature that solves this problem. Instead of forever struggling to come into contact with reality, as in our physical existence, reading allows the spirit and consciousness to fully come into contact with the true essence of the world. While reading, there is a sense in which the deepest part of his soul is set free, allowing for both internal and external truths to be revealed. His “consciousness would simultaneously unfold while [he] was reading,” and all sorts of new truths would be revealed to him, “which ranged from the most deeply hidden aspirations of [his] heart to the wholly external view of the horizon spread out before [his] eyes” (Proust, 90). In this way, his spirit, which before was always being blocked from meeting the spirits of other objects, has a clear path through which the world becomes intelligible. Reading becomes a lens through which the imaginary world can be more clearly seen and replaces the barrier through which the physical world is seen.

In addition, literature also helps Proust connect more easily with other human beings. Much like material objects, Proust feels a gulf between himself and others, a gulf which swallows a large portion of the emotions arising when either curses or blessings befall them. If some misfortune may meet one of our neighbors or friends, “it is only in one small section of the complete idea…that [we are] capable of feeling any emotion” (91). The emotional connection we fail to make with those around us prevents us from living a full life; life is emptier without emotional connections, if only because of missed experiences. It is in passing through that spiritual border that the emotion is lost, and we feel only the smallest portion of what the other person feels. It is as though we are cells with membranes filtering out the emotions like dirt and bacteria; only the tiniest portion is able to slip through, and even then it is a changed, nearly unrecognizable and inexpressible form. There is a sense in which that inexpressibility widens the gulf and makes it harder to connect than if there were no shared emotions at all. Instead of misunderstandings, there would simply be nothing to understand. A misunderstanding that occurs when the wrong words are used takes away from connecting with other people; it pushes people further from the truth, and from each other.

Once again, literature comes to the rescue. Through his or her words, an author finds a way to extend some sort of lifeline through which emotions become directly transmitted. Instead of being filtered out, they are amplified and warmly welcomed. This is due to the fact that “none of the feelings which the joys or misfortunes of a ‘real’ person arouse in us can be awakened except through a mental picture of those joys or misfortunes” (91). Such is the particular skill of novelists: creating mental pictures of the events that befall their characters and the emotions by which they are accompanied; they are able “to think of substituting for those opaque sections, impenetrable to the human soul, their equivalent in immaterial sections, things, that is, which one’s soul can assimilate” (92). We are brought into a heightened state of being, what Proust refers to as a purely mental state, a state of perfect
imagination. It is in this state that “every emotion is multiplied ten-fold” and the book “comes to disturb us as might a dream” (92), as though it arises from within ourselves. These emotions are readily transmitted not necessarily through any sort of special description, but because we can fully and sincerely empathize with the characters; we become them, and we thereby experience their emotions as though first-hand: “the feelings…appear to us in the guise of truth, since we have made them our own, since it is in ourselves that they are happening” (92). With this vicarious ability, literature adds yet another dimension to an otherwise somewhat shallow existence. Through enriching our experiences, literature enriches our lives as a whole. We are able to experience more than would otherwise be possible.

The human life is rather ephemeral, and we spend our lives trying to extend it and get the most we possibly can out of it; literature is one tool used for just such a purpose, especially for Proust. In fact, that sort of vicarious living is one major reason Proust speaks so highly of literature. Literature is somehow able to squeeze an entire life into the space of an afternoon: within “the space of an hour [the author] sets free within us all the joys and sorrows in the world, a few of which only we should have to spend years of our actual life in getting to know, and the most intense of which would never be revealed to us because the slow course of their development prevents us from perceiving them” (92). Here again, there are bits and pieces of life being revealed to us that may otherwise be out of reach: truths too slowly developed to be noticeable over the course of a life and emotions lost to the gulf separating one person from another, into which the majority of our emotions flow. This is precisely the reason Marcel so often escaped into a book during the course of an afternoon. It was because “these afternoons were crammed with more dramatic events than occur, often, in a whole lifetime” (91). He was after a new sense of life, a new perspective to which he could fully open his heart and mind, which he could most fully appreciate and experience.

This sort of experience, however, is one against which Plato appears to argue as being more detrimental than beneficial. Instead, he finds literature to be much more harmful to our life experience than anything we may find in the “real” physical world. He disagrees with Proust on every point: literature is, in his eyes, exactly the sort of spiritual border that Proust is trying to bypass; literature’s clarity of emotion, of which Proust is so fond, ought to be cut so that potential readers may be better able to distance themselves and thereby encounter far less emotion; the experiences shown in all literature are types that no person should ever want or desire, for they cause moral degeneration and diminish happiness.

Instead of bringing the reader closer to the truth, Plato believes that it pushes him or her further from it. Instead of imitating the “idea” of our physical world, it is imitating the imitation. This is a whole extra layer through which a person must sift in order to find truth. An author “is by nature third from…the truth, as are all other imitators” (268). This further distancing is the sort of thing Proust argues literature overcomes. Instead of taking the spiritual border away, Plato believes it simply adds
another and thereby further distracts us and lessens the enjoyment and happiness to which we may be exposed; those objects which could potentially bring us happiness are dulled and falsified as they come to us through a medium such as literature.

Plato’s largest concern about literature seems to stem from his belief that it allows our emotional, irrational side to overrule our reason; our rational nature becomes disjointed and our morals will inevitably suffer because of it. Besides the fact that poets, artists, and novelists essentially make a living through the “deceit of children or simple persons” (268), there is also the worry that the deceit will “gratify the irrational nature which has no discernment of greater and less” (276). This worry about the “discernment of greater and less” is based on the idea of intemperance and what it might mean for the society if literature and other forms of art are allowed to run free and unchecked; there is a worry that emotionally-driven intemperance leads to immoral activity and a decline in happiness, which for Plato is to some degree dependent upon virtue. Literature must be carefully monitored, if not outlawed completely, because it “nurtures and waters [the passions] and establishes them as rulers when they ought to wither and be ruled, for that way we’ll become better and happier rather than worse and more wretched” (277). Through the usurpation of reason by emotion, the foundations for morality crumble and the larger society falls with it: a society cannot exist when its citizens are driven purely by passion.

Plato worries literature will incite these emotional and passionate actions. In fact, literature has no purpose he finds redeeming, though he freely admits it is enjoyable. There is a sense in which Plato views literature the same way he does alcohol: it is something to be used warily and sparingly. This is because Plato heartily dislikes what literature stands for: all things overly emotional and therefore disreputable. “The imitative poet implants an evil constitution” (276) which more easily allows the reader or listener to be subject to immoral actions. After all, of all the forms which art can take, “they have no healthy aim” (274). Plato also worries about the actual content of the literature for similar reasons. The heroes and gods, which form the protagonists of the stories, are often overly emotional and partake in immoral actions themselves, things which Plato fears the larger society may therefore grow accustomed to and emulate.

One of Plato’s questions from which the argument as a whole is drawn is “does not the rebellious principle furnish a great deal of material for imitation,” that is, art as a whole (276). In Plato’s mind, the only topics which art, especially literature, seems to cover are based on lower, baser feelings, and Plato worries that if a society partakes in literature, emotion—rebelling against reason—will begin to rule the lives of the its citizens; the society becomes overly emotional, which causes the overthrow not only of reason, but morality and the actual government as well. After all, if emotion can overthrow its ruler—reason—then there is nothing stopping those under the influence of emotion from forgetting themselves and overthrowing their rulers—the government. Plato, in his Socratic dialogues, shows himself to be a champion of reason and of dutiful obedience to the government. The overthrow
of both is something that would most likely deeply concern him and is something he would go to any lengths to avoid.

Now, looking at Proust’s argument for the augmentation of human life through literature, there appear to be a few consequences that might follow from such a stance. One in which I am particularly interested is whether it is possible for literature to actually replace the “real” physical world by which we are surrounded. Obviously, we cannot practically exist within a book, but is it possible that those books we read are just as real as the things we see and experience first-hand in our own lives? The same can be said of imagination in general. Is what goes on inside of our minds any less real than the physical world around us? I argue that it is not; it is perhaps even more real. The process of imagination more easily allows for the mental growth of those doing the reading or imagining than would a purely physical existence.

We generally think of the physical world as being right in front of us and ready for interpretation, but the imaginary, ideal world present in literature allows for a better understanding than we could ever hope to find in the “real” world. In reality, whenever we have an interaction with another person and attempt to share an idea, there is always some sense that it does not get shared exactly the way we would like; there is some sort of gap between what we are saying and what the other person is understanding that cannot be overcome merely by another explanation—the right words are often hard to find for particular situations. This sort of issue is solved by what Proust refers to as the art of the novelist. It is the novelist who is particularly well-suited to portraying things in just the right light so that they are universally understandable and not “those opaque sections, impenetrable to the human soul” (91). The very best novels are those in which everything that occurs appears to have happened to us, inside us; the emotions and experiences which the character goes through become our own, and we more purely understand them than we could ever hope to understand something which happened to one of our friends or family members. This is because through the art of the novelist, the emotions and reaction to the experiences of characters arise from within, and we are not forced to try and interpret the words and actions of someone else, forced to guess at what may have sparked a certain feeling. Because of literature’s purely mental existence, that fictional reality becomes more real to us than physical reality.

It is another perspective on life to which we are exposed in literature, and those different perspectives are much harder to come by in real life. These different perceptions are essentially teachers from which we learn how life ought to be lived. Despite the fact that not all literary characters are moral, we still get a lesson from them, just as we learn a lesson when we make a mistake in our own life. Crime and Punishment may show us how to commit a murder without leaving any evidence, but the lesson we take away from it is the dangers in such an act; a pride-driven quest for greatness may lead to mental collapse. As well as being far more revealing and instructive, these perceptions are also more numerous than in real life. In the same way literature reveals
more of a particular emotion to us, it also reveals more individual emotions and insights. There are things in life which move too slowly for us to notice, and we realize that only by looking back in a memory can we see a noticeable change. We notice a change in heart “only through reading, through our imagination” (92). In reality, its change “is so gradual that, even if we are able to distinguish, successively, each of its different states, we are still spared the actual sensation of change” (92). But, how does that relate to showing us different, instructive perspectives? In discovering the actual stages that occur in something like a change or heart and why it changes at all, we are able to apply those to our real lives and more fully understand the depths and complexities of our emotions, as well as those of others.

It is this sort of self-reflection that exists and operates within the appeal of all literature. All literature is capable of inspiring such reflection, but only great literature achieves it; prompting reflection is the mark of a great work of literature. All the exchange of ideas and conversations that exist in daily life also exist within the life of a novel. As far as mental occupations and interpersonal actions, there is far more going on within a literary work than in reality; a novel could not exist without such conflict to drive the plot forward. When we read about a group of characters, we read about their thoughts, beliefs, and values. We then compare them to our own and those of the people around us and see how they match up: how the characters are alike and/or different from us. By asking ourselves these questions, we discover more about our own beliefs, including why we hold them and how they may be mistaken or need adjustment. We get this through the exchange of ideas that occur within conversations; as the characters communicate with one another, it is as though we are involved in their conversations as well, as though we are experiencing them first hand. Without these experiences, there would be a sense that we do not really know ourselves as well. Interpersonal actions, even fictional ones, are essential in discovering traits about ourselves, about our passions; there is a sense in which we are too close to our passions, so from our perspective they appear different than the truth; they lie to and deceive us: “what we come to learn about our own [passions] can only be learned from [others]. Upon ourselves, [passions] react only indirectly, through our imagination, which substitutes for our primary motives other, auxiliary motives, less stark and therefore more seemly (140). Our pride gets the better of us, and it becomes impossible to fairly judge our own emotions and passions. What stirred them up, and about what are we passionate? This is what the different perspectives provided by literature are able to teach us.

The way in which we perceive literature is also an important aspect of literature’s ability to help us grow as individuals, from a first-hand point of view. In the course of reading a good book, we often find ourselves becoming completely captivated by its characters, its conflicts, and its setting; it takes over our life, and its reality is substituted in place of our own, as though we really are a character inside of the book itself. We have been transported out of our own world into the magical world in which the book takes place, as though we are transported into Fantastica alongside Bastian. That is not to say, however, that the book must be a fantastical
one: it is merely a byproduct of being a great book that it appears magical. Even a nonfictional biography can transport us into the world of the object about whom the biography is written: in reading a biography about George Washington, we experience the Revolutionary War first-hand. As we are drawn further and further into the story, we retreat more and more from our physical existence: such everyday tasks as eating, sleeping, or even going to the bathroom fade away and are forgotten in the course of reading. Time seems to speed up, and hours float by in a matter of seconds; in the intoxication that is “the fascination of [a] book, a magic as potent as the deepest slumber” (94), we lose track of time and suddenly find ourselves far into the night with no recollection of how the hours have passed. Not only that, but it becomes disruptive to be suddenly thrust back into reality. The settings and scenes in which we have been immersed for so long become “landscapes more vividly portrayed in [our] imagination than any which [real life] could spread before [our] eyes” (94); the physical world becomes dull and gray in comparison; no longer does it hold our attention. There is a sense in which reading becomes a door to a world that is more real: more vibrant, colorful, and educative. It is in this world that we find experiences otherwise closed to us, and we learn all the more because of it.

Throughout the process of reading a book, poem, or play, the reader becomes more and more involved as his or her imagination begins to work on new ideas and problems. The process of reading a book becomes the process of meditation. Without it, literature cannot move beyond the page; unless the reader becomes intimately involved with it, a book can never be more than a series of words on a series of pages. Through this sort of meditation, the reader becomes introduced to new ideas, new characters, and new beliefs. The spiritual barrier surrounding each and every object in the world evaporates: the opacity of the world is clarified, becoming transparent and readily understandable. We come into contact with the true nature of the world, and our souls have an impression made forever by the experiences one has within the realm of a book: the emotions and ideas drawn out by literature are more intense and varied than any that are able to shine through the cloudy existence of the physical. It is precisely this intensity that worries Plato; he fears a world in which this emotional existence overshadows the dry, dull, reasonable world of reality. It is precisely this aspect of literature that Proust expounds upon so much and for which I have been arguing. The overwhelming of reason stems from literature’s ability to draw us in; the crystal clear, effervescent settings of literature drive us to try and enliven our actual existences in a way that allows them to match the last book we read. For Plato, this leads to a world of heretical notions of divinity and cowardly warriors. However, the fact that Plato does not want literature to envelope us does not take away from the argument that it can: the same connections we make between the different everyday occurrences in reality are made between the occurrences in our favorite novels. We go through the same process of self-reflection after reading about a politically charged murder as we do when we see it on the news; we do the same reassessment of beliefs when we read a religious debate as we do when we are involved in one; we are just as awestruck reading about a majestic landscape as when we actually see one. Every
aspect of a book is automatically imbued with our own experiences and beliefs that fill them out in our imagination just as our imagination fills out and analyzes each new experience we have in real-life. What we have read and what we have seen begin to intertwine, what we have heard becomes what we have done. When reading a book, there is no distinction between fantasy and reality; the realm of the physical has been overrun by the imaginative and abstraction becomes concrete: art replaces science.

Works Cited


When reading the “Overture” and “Combray” from Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, memory surfaces as a central theme of the text. The major divisions within this paper are to be structured as follows: (A) first, orienting remarks and an explication of the function of, (I) habit, (II) voluntary memory, and (III) involuntary memory; (B) second, an investigation of the interrelated nature within daily life of the previously described phenomena (I,II,III).

One preliminary point must be made in order for the outcome of this paper to resonate with readers. *Remembrance of Things Past* could be read as a sort of autobiography, fiction, or brilliant philosophy (not to say that it isn’t brilliant fiction as well). The themes that will be charted are philosophical in nature, but reading Proust is not like reading Kant. The way that Proust presents his theory of memory lends a helping hand to the philosophical impact they have on the reader. With this consideration in mind, each of the thematic divisions (I,II,III) will be divided into two further subsections (1 and 2). 1 will utilize direct passages from the text that I see as philosophical in the form their presentation takes. 2 will focus on specific points in the plot. By using quotes and orientation in order for these plot-scenes to make sense, I will extract from these passages the same themes that were arrived at more directly through the philosophical passages from 1. I have chosen to organize the paper this way in direct view of the inventive approach to philosophy that Proust has taken with his work. The philosophical themes of Proust would lose their resonance if they were not placed in the context of *Remembrance of Things Past*, the story. Therefore, by showing first the philosophy, and then the story-context, we will arrive at a more robust exposition of the themes investigated.

(A.I.1) Habit is a necessary and hindering ability of the human species. Proust writes: “Perhaps the immobility of the things that surround us is forced upon them by our conviction that they are themselves and not something else, by the immobility of our conception of them” (Proust 6). When we look out at the world, we must begin to categorize. We *must* because this tendency to categorize makes living with other humans, and living in the world possible. Habit makes “any room seem habitable” (Proust 9). If we had to formulate new ideas about what things were every moment of our lives, we would not be able to get out of bed in the morning. We have an implicit understanding of what legs are for and how to use them. We know how our belt buckle works. This procedural knowledge is possible if first and foremost one has a conception of what something is. If we didn’t label the belt buckle as a belt buckle as such we may not even begin to use it as a belt buckle. In a mind devoid of habit the trumpet is the belt buckle and the belt buckle is the vacuum. Habit is present in most moments of our lives and we are quite unaware of its presence. We look upon a couch and know what it is and what it is used for. There is no effort exerted in this day-to-day process.
The way in which habit is discussed in Proust is rather different from our common conception of the word habit, but Proust’s habit and the popular notion have aspects in common. A helpful distinction will be to delineate between proactive habit and reactive habit. Proust talks more about proactive habit. However, this distinction is quite superficial because proactive and reactive habit are related and influence each other. Take this example: Perhaps I am in the proactive habit of considering dogs as a threat. Before I see any dog in the future I already have this preconceived notion about the nature of dogs. This proactive habit will then influence my reactive habits. If I have a preconceived notion that dogs are harmful, I will react to them in a habitual way. I will avoid them and run if they chase. Like many know though, the dog you run from is the dog that will chase you more. It is in this way that reactive habits also further reinforce proactive ones. When people speak of habit they often mean reactive habit. However, the seeds of many of these reactive habits are sown in the minds of men before reaction takes place. If I have the proactive habit of conceiving of the world as a hostile and dangerous place, it is no wonder that I am in the habit of reacting to life in a very timid and cautious way. We normally think of habit as habits of lifestyle. “He is in the habit of doing such and such.” Here there is reference to patterned activity. However, this patterned activity does not just grow out of nothing. Our patterned activity to the world (reactive) is ultimately shaped by the way that we shade the world (proactive).

Proust’s notion of habit involves even the simplest non-patterned activities such as gazing out at a sunrise. We are in the habit of predicking “sun” with many attributes. We also say that it is our sun. It is the sun that warms our home. Here we see a relationship between self and outside world with regards to habit. This is my chair. It is different than every other chair and I know this. Habit allows us to form relationships between ourselves and the outside world. We could not own anything without Proustian habit. Habit is also a factor that functions in time. We have certain notions about what something is, and this “is” is a function of our current position in life. The hockey stick that hangs on my grandpa’s wall is not that same hockey stick it used to be for him. He used to use it in the actual play of the sport and it was a playing-stick. Now, it is used as a decoration. It is now a looking-decorating-remembering stick. What is apparent in this example is that our habits, which designate what something is, are dependent on our current position in life. This idea will become increasingly important when we discuss voluntary and involuntary memory. All that is said could be taken as unimportant and already known. However, ignoring habit because it seems so obvious, so simple, so self-explanatory, is a mistake. It is precisely because it permeates our life to such a massive extent that it becomes invisible. We are in the (patterned activity, reactive) habit of ignoring the presence of (Proustian, proactive) habit.

(A.I.2) I will now look at a passage from the book that occurs within the plot and its relationship to the theme developed in (A.I.1). In this passage young Marcel has just returned home from a visit with his uncle. This visit meant much to Marcel and he desired to expound, to bring to light, the feelings he felt to his parents. He
first tries to hint at the meaning that the meeting had. This fails and he chooses to
tell as many details as possible in order to bring his parents into that room, to show
them where he was and how he felt. For an event so important, Marcel felt that his
parents must know the details in order to be able to feel the power that the encounter
had on him. He fails and the plan backfires. No amount of detail can break someone
out of their own world view. Marcel claims that “I had not the least doubt that when
I deposited in the minds of my parents the news of the acquaintance I had made at
my uncle’s I should at the same time transmit to them the kindly judgments I myself
had based on the introduction” (Proust 86). Marcel firmly believed that if he could
only bring his parents to his uncle’s office through the words of his description, then
they would understand him and what the meeting meant to him. He is very wrong.
They see the activity of his uncle as unacceptable and Marcel is not allowed to meet
with him again.

How does this interesting little story relate to our theme of habit? Young
Marcel does not yet understand that people see different things in the same situation.
Marcel’s parents have a habit formed, a preconception regarding the moral nature of
the uncle and the company he keeps. This can be thought of as a proactive habit. This
habit of judgment blinds them from being able to see what Marcel saw in the visit.
This is a fundamental insight that speaks directly to the habit we have been discussing.
We are in the habit of perceiving and conceiving of material objects in certain ways
as well as other people. Our habit is both a great tool and a great hindrance. We form
judgments about people with the aid of habits of perception. We know who is friend
and foe because of this tendency. We know who to avoid, who to be wary of, and
who to embrace. But this type of habit also hinders us. Marcel’s parents were unable
to understand an important event in their son’s life because they don’t have the same
perceptual habits. His parents reacted to the uncle based on a proactive appraisal of his
moral merit. Likewise, Marcel is unable to ever see his uncle again because he doesn’t
understand that habit in this form exists yet. He thought that his parents could look
upon his uncle through his own eyes, but this did not and could not happen because
of the all-pervading nature of habit.

(A.II.1) I will now investigate the nature of voluntary memory. Proust writes:
“the facts which I should have then recalled would have been prompted only by
voluntary memory, the memory of the intellect, and…the pictures which that kind of
memory shows us preserve nothing of the past itself” (Proust 47). This quote reveals
to us all of the necessary features of voluntary memory. Voluntary memory is the
mental movement that we make when we forcibly conjure up the past. We stand here
in the present light of day and are forced to look back to a time that is already dead,
and reconstruct that time. There are several important features of this type of mental
movement. First, when we voluntarily look back on our past, we are looking at that
dead moment from the place that we are now. “The place that we are now” means the
self that we are currently. But wait! Was I not also Chris in 1995? Yes and no. At that
time I had not had the experiences, both mentally and physically, that I have had since
then. I have changed. I am not who I was in the past. Therefore, this vantage point
that I look back from will always skew the past, just as Marcel’s parents’ perception could not grasp the uncle that was in Marcel’s head (A.I.2). This consideration is what prompts Proust to claim that voluntary memory does not show us that past as it was but only as it is now to us, from our current vantage point.

This is a bold claim with many implications. We will investigate one of these. Most of what people mean when they speak of memory is voluntary memory. Someone may ask me, “How did you choose this college?” My present self, who has already gone through three and a half years here, will tell a sort of story. I will tell them how I discovered this school, the first time I was in Flagstaff and the application process. All of these past experiences were forcibly conjured up by me to meet the demands of the questioning party. This story that I tell them, I also tell myself. This is because as I am formulating and telling the story I am re-charting the path that led me here. We need a metaphor: Suppose you are hiking and you get to a beautiful vista. You now forcibly conjure up the path that led you to such a beautiful place. When you made the turns right and left and the hikes up and down, you did not know of the beautiful place that these turns and climbs would bring you to. However, now that you know that all of those turns and climbs led you here, you praise them. Thank you path for bringing me to this beautiful vista! But, the struggle to get you here was not so pleasant. You had to hike, and hike hard. Therefore what once was a struggle in the process of getting here is now a point of praise and thankfulness. Voluntary memory in general works in a similar fashion. The position that you are at now will shade the past, leaving some things out and emphasizing others.

(A.II.2) We will discuss a passage that occurs in the “Overture.” In this snippet, Proust is discussing the relationship between Swann and Proust’s family. Swann is an interesting character that spends time with many different social circles. Proust describes how people are a corporeal envelope that we fill in with our own conceptions about them. Social circles other than Proust’s family will fill that envelope up in different ways. He then moves from the discussion of different ‘Swann’s with regard to social circles to different ‘Swann’s throughout Proust’s life: “so that even now I have the feeling of leaving someone I know for another quite different person when, going back in memory, I pass from the Swann whom I knew later and more intimately to this early Swann in whom I can distinguish the charming mistakes of my youth, and who is in fact less like his successor than he is like the other people I knew at that time” (Proust 21). This quote bears directly on our current discussion of voluntary memory. Notice first the discussion of different “Swann selves” through time. The Swann of Marcel’s youth is a different character from the one he knew better later in life. What is more is that when Marcel voluntarily goes back in memory the Swann he sees when he himself was a child is less like the actual Swann and more like people he knew at that time. His memory is tied up with the context in which he knew this early Swann. Therefore, forcibly conjuring up the memory of this Swann does not bring back the Swann of that past as he was. This memory brings back the Swann as he is to the Marcel looking back, where he labels the young Swann as part of his own youth, therefore similar to people that he knew at that time. He can never directly access this
young Swann again, for he can only forcibly bring him back with the mental baggage of time elapsed. What is this mental baggage? It is Marcel’s skewed memory which has been shaped by subsequent experience. He now sees his past as an era, with this time-context shaping the Swann of Marcel’s memory. Taken more largely, when we forcibly conjure up the nature of ancient Greece, are we really delving into the past as it was there in Athens, or simply delving more into ourselves?

(A.III.1) I will now investigate involuntary memory. There is a famous scene at the end of the Overture. Proust describes a moment in time when he eats madeleines with tea. This is the passage in which he describes the first bite of the small cookie-cake. “No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me” (Proust 48). The scene continues from this point and is a clear description of the nature of involuntary memory. What begins as a sudden and unexpected sensation of an extraordinary phenomenon becomes a strenuous pursuit of an explanation for Proust. Men always like to make the unfamiliar more familiar. He tries to find out what this experience means. He takes another bite of the cake and feels the same thing, but is no closer to an understanding of where the sensation is coming from. He then realizes that the sensation is not in the cake but in himself. He shuts out all transitory things around him in his pursuit. Through this struggle he suddenly realizes the origin of this strange sensation. He used to eat the same cakes dipped in tea with his aunt in Combray. Through the cake he is suddenly transported to this past era of his life.

The seed that has just bloomed in Proust’s mind brings with it the tree that composes the second section of the novel. With this involuntary memory, he was able to recapture a whole part of his life. But we still have not answered what involuntary memory is. It is normally cued by a physical sensation. Remember that voluntary memory is an intellectual effort. Involuntary memory is a bodily phenomenon. When we hear a certain song or eat a certain food, we sometimes have the uncanny feeling that we have been there before. We may not know when, but if we pursue this phenomenon strange jewels await us. Involuntary memory brings us back to a past time, but unlike voluntary memory, in which we look back at the past from our current vantage point, clustered with new experiences and habits, involuntary memory brings us back to that past and we see it from that vantage point. We see the memory from the self that we were instead of the self that we are now. Therefore, involuntary memory is a much more accurate way to access a past as it was for us then instead of as it is for us now.

(A.III.2) One of the most important, early scenes in the text involves Proust in discussing the time that he came out from his room to get a longed for kiss from his mother. He then reflects on this time in a way that speaks directly to our discussion of involuntary memory. “Many years have passed since that night. The wall of the staircase up which I had watched the light of his candle gradually climb was long ago demolished. And in myself, too, many things have perished which I imagined
would last forever, and new ones have arisen, giving birth to new sorrows and new joys which in those days I could not have foreseen, just as now the old are hard to understand” (Proust 39). Here we see the transitory nature of life, as well as the theme of a disintegrated past. When he looks back with voluntary memory, he cannot even understand his old joys and sorrows, which were a specific product of that past place-time. However, let us speculate that the candle that his father carried gave off a certain scent. Perhaps the older Proust comes upon a scent much like that one later in his life. With a jarring jolt he could possibly be transported back to that past which he can no longer understand. He would be able to understand his joys and sorrows to more acutely with the aid of this involuntary memory. He would actually be able to be the young Marcel again, unclouded by the mental baggage that he has collected along the path of time.

(B) Now that we have dealt with habit, voluntary memory, and involuntary memory separately, we can form a synthesis that speaks to our daily lives. We have shown that habit is a necessary but hindering aspect of human experience. It allows us to live, but it doesn’t allow us to grow. We get caught up in a certain way of looking at things. The glimmer that shown from the silver spoon has long since tarnished and things that were once extraordinary are now ordinary. Yes, we need habit in order to make use of the things around us, but habit soon leads to a smothering of the very faculty that gave birth to definitions that are engrained in us now as a form of habit. There were once not couches. They were brought into being long ago. How that first couch must have glimmered and shined! Now that we carry around with us the habit of couch, no couch will ever glimmer again like that habit-defining first couch. Therefore true invention breaks away from habit. We find new uses for things, new ideas about things.

Voluntary memory is also necessary and at the same time inadequate. It is tied up very intimately with habit. Our current selves carry with us habits about everything. Since habit clouds our perception of things, (but it must, so don’t take this as a negative statement about habit) we can never fully live in the present moment. We carry with us our current habits, and in consequence, our voluntary memory will cloud the past because we are looking upon a time when different habits reigned in our minds. However, I see voluntary memory serving as an acclimation. On page 5 Proust describes the experience of waking up in a place that one cannot pinpoint, cannot subject to the categorizing nature of habit. He calls upon his voluntary memory. How did I get here? He then remembers and with this remembrance, remembers who he is himself. “Oh yes, I got here last night and I am here because I have a business meeting. And yes, that is my hotel bed.” It is in this way that voluntary memory and habit function in order to make life livable. Now that he has remembered why he is here with reference to the past (voluntary memory), and also the meaning of the specific material objects around him (habit), he can get up and live his life with purpose and conviction.

We have seen the very tangible functions of habit and voluntary memory,
but what is there to say about involuntary memory? What function does it serve? Is it just a passing amusement, like watching family home videos? No, it is the one form of memory that can actually bring us to a higher truth about ourselves and life. Habit and voluntary memory have practical significance. Involuntary memory has philosophical significance, and because of this carries with it a practical insight into the nature of who we are. To be able to actually live the life of a former self, even for a moment, is an experience that brings with it many tangible insights. It shows us that the way we are looking at our life now is not the only way to look at it. In fact, it shows us another way we lived, with different dreams and fears. With this insight we are not retracing our steps to our current position in the mind’s eye so to speak. We are not merely seeing past events through our current vantage point. We are actually walking that past path again. We can actually see what was (this “was” is the “is” of the present that has passed).

We cannot live a life without Proustian or proactive habit. We cannot have a concept of self without voluntary memory. The insight that involuntary memory provides us with sheds light on the nature of habit and voluntary memory. We can see that the past we forcibly conjure up is a creation of our present self. We also see that the habits we have formed in our present self were not always that way; they are not set in stone. Life is transitory. Everything is constantly in flux. The only things that are immovable are our conceptions of things. Therefore, conception in general is not true to nature. Involuntary memory brings us to this realization by showing us another time and another self, as it was in itself at that time. Our conceptions may make the world manageable, but this does not mean that we are seeing the truth. You may ask me what the truth is. The only way that I could say what it is would be by using words, which bring with them habits of conception, therefore skewing its essential nature, which is not immovable but always in flux.

Do we drop our word-toolbox, our most precious device? No, to abandon words would be fatal. Involuntary memory shows us what words are. They are shared and immobile conceptions of the way the world is. Granted that we can interpret words differently, but interpretation always happens after words are already in place. Did anyone interpret Proust’s novels before Proust himself was born? I do not know the answer to this question. Words shape the world into manageable form. This is their truth. In understanding this fact, we can utilize the insights of involuntary memory in our daily life. To see that a conception is needed but not true to the ever changing flux of reality will allow us to use our language and our lives in a more fruitful way. Life is always new and changing, always interesting and challenging. The boredom that accompanies habit comes about only when we think of our conceptions as unchanging. We may never be able to look at the world through someone else’s eyes, but we can look at the world through the eyes of the past thanks to involuntary memory. This experience reveals the truth of our habits: they are not bad, for they serve many useful functions, but they are also not immobile, immune to life’s changing circumstances. To know this is to live a life of growth instead of a life of stagnation.
Postscript metaphor:

Just as with a shoe that is made of leather and is impermeable to letting the air go in or out, it is so with the self. Just as when I wear my leather shoes, that have been seeped in so much sweat, to such a point where the shoe smells bad, I also live my life. When I wear these shoes I have no fear of the stink escaping into the nostrils of others. I can rest assured that the stink will stay within the shoe and not embarrass me. However, this consolation comes with a price. When shoes are impermeable to exiting winds, they are also impermeable to entering winds. I can rest assured within the comfortable mental niche that is habit. I don’t have to worry about things exiting me, thus being judged, thus being scrutinized, thus being changed. This is so because if I act like a couch is a “couch”, (the way a couch is habitually or conventionally considered by my peers, which thus has been internalized by me, nothing will be judged, challenged or changed) my habit can run its course without a beaver dam getting in the way. But this river of my life will get stale, algae will form on the banks of my river in direct proportion to the habitual stagnation of my life river, and more algae will grow, the more stink will grow…for I am a fisherman who likes clear waters to fish in, unhindered by the buildup of some growth that is the product of habit. Therefore, my shoe will stink. However, in books I find another self, unhindered by the habitual nature of the human mind. These undo my beaver dams. They break my flow when algae have gathered at the banks of my life. It is also so with involuntary memory, where a former self, which also was completely my own, completely sweating within the shoe, can break the flow of habit, thus restoring the luster to day-to-day habitual existence.

**Work Cited**

Tradition, Innovation, and The Essential Tension
Christopher Murtaugh

The state of electrical theory in the 1740’s was very underdeveloped. Some postulated that it was a fluid. Others referred to the electrical “fire” which was arrived at because of sparks that resemble fire. There seemed to be no overarching theory which could tie together all of the observable phenomena. What is more is that the invention of the Leyden jar in mid 1740’s made a theory that much more needed. In this paper, three theories, that of Nollet, Watson, and Franklin will be described in relation to experiments done with the Leyden jar. Following this will be a philosophical analysis of the goings on in the debates between these three theorists with special emphasis being placed on the “essential tension” (Kuhn) that must be in place for science to progress. This essay will chart the necessity of each of the above mentioned theories with regards to the current state of electrical theory. The earlier theories are not accepted any more but that doesn’t make them any less important. After this historical analysis, a distillation from it with regards to scientific change or progress in general will be explored.

We will first discuss what the Leyden jar actually is. Before the Leyden jar could be realized there had to be a device that could produce an ample amount of electricity. This came in the form of the electrostatic generator. These machines would create friction which would then produce electricity. In their later development, an operator would turn a crank which would rotate glass spheres. The spheres would be contacted and friction would create an electrical build up. Back to the Leyden jar. Musschenbroek is traditionally credited with the invention of the machine: “Musschenbroek… had suspended from the gun barrel a wire which was inserted into a glass flask, partly filled with water, held in his right hand. After the globe of the electrical machine had been whirled (so that the gun barrel and the water had become charged), Musschenbroek attempted to draw sparks from the gun barrel and received a great shock” (Cohen 385). This effect (the enormous shock) would only occur if it was the same experimenter holding the flask and touching the gun barrel. The Leyden jar is what we today would call a capacitor. It is able to store large amounts of electricity and also able to discharge it.

The Leyden jar was important in terms of the development of the science of electricity for two major reasons. The first is that, being able to store larger amounts of electricity meant that new phenomena could be observed. People had been aware of electricity since ancient times. Rubbing amber as a way to create static electricity had been known about since before Christ. It was only with the advent of electric machines, which could create large amounts of electricity, and the Leyden jar, which could store it, that large electrical shocks could be created and controlled (to an extent!) The other reason, related to the first, is that the Leyden jar was used in public demonstrations to show the amazing power of electricity. Huge sparks and electricity forming a current through many people, brought electricity to the public’s attention.
The power that electricity was shown to have inspired awe in the public. What all of this necessitated was a need for a theory that would be able to explain all of the phenomena observed concerning the Leyden jar.

As was already said, the electrical machines and the Leyden jars of the 1740’s made a satisfactory theory demanded by the public at large. We will first look at Abbe Nollet’s theory of electricity. According to him, electricity is akin to fire, which caused him to often refer to the “electrical fire.” What drew him to this conclusion was the simple observation of sparks, which resemble fire. He believed that this fire was a subtle matter that penetrated “all solid bodies, liquids, and air, but with differing degrees of ease” (Cohen 389). On the surface of bodies are pores, some of which let electricity in and some that let it out. The electricity leaves the pores in a divergent fashion and comes back in convergent paths. These pores are dispersed on the electric body, say a metal bar. He came to this conclusion by observing that if dust were scattered over an electrical bar some of the dust would be moved away from the bar by the electrical stream pores that move outwards, and some would stay on the bar, presumable because they were located on pores that were the ones that brought electrical streams into the bar. Being that the fire leaves the bars in a divergent fashion; the concentration of this fire will lessen as you move away from the electrical source. The pores on the electrical bar are also of different sizes according to Nollet. He came to this conclusion from the following observation: Let us say that you scatter a fine dust on the electric bar. Some will be propelled off of it, while other particles of dust will stay adhered to the bar. If you then use a larger medium, say, golden flakes, all will be projected off of the bar. He postulated that these larger gold flakes were of a sufficient size to be in contact with the pores that emit electrical fire, thus causing all of them to be propelled away (Home 131). A final part of his theory has to do with a sulphureous matter encasing the converging and diverging electrical streams. When there was a sufficient concentration of the inward and outward going streams they would “crash” into each other, causing the sulphureous encasing to explode, thus causing the spark that we see in electrical experiments. When an electric body is excited by rubbing, he believed that this caused the “leaving stream” to become active.

It is worthy to note that Nollet conceived of electric particles like many small springs. When these leave, inward moving particles come in to fill this void. We already see discrepancies bubbling up, and Home points out one of these quite nicely: Since Nollet claims that the particles are springs, the void that would be created by the excited leaving currents would be filled by the expansion of electric particles left in the metal rod. This is contrary to Nollet, for he claims that inward moving particles would have to fill the void. Secondly, we see that this electrical fire would have to be omnipresent because if it were not, particles far away would have to “sense” that there was a need for them in the voids created by rubbing, which would bring in the doctrine of acting at a distance. For our purposes this rough outline of his electrical theory will suffice.
We now come to Watson’s theory. He divided substances into “electrics” and “non-electrics”. Electrics are those substances that can be excited by rubbing, like glass or amber. Non-electrics are those things which conduct electricity. However, he did not use the term “conduct,” but merely referred to things that cannot be excited by friction as non-electrics (Cohen 392). Watson refined the Leyden jar, and concluded that the moisture in the air had a lot to do with the power that the jar would be able to hold and emit. This arose from the previous distinction (electrics and non-electrics). If the outside of the glass was wet with water (non-electric water coating the electric glass) there would be an alteration in the power output. He also noted that the strength of the shock would be altered by “the number of points of non-electric contact” (Home 158). This led him to wrap the outside of the Leyden jar in (non-electric) foil. Like he expected, the shock was far greater with the foil in place. When the experimenter was shocked, he noted that the electricity felt to have moved through the arm across the breast, to the other arm. He hypothesized that electricity forms a circuit. Based on this hypothesis, he conducted experiments in which electricity was conducted through four or five experimenters holding hands. His observations confirmed his circuit theory. What electricity actually was to Watson is less clear. He sometimes refers to it as the fire, sometime as an “effluvia.” For the sake of this paper, Watson is more valued for his contributions to experimental set up, rather than electric theory.

When Franklin wrote his initial letters concerning electricity, they sparked Watson’s interest. What is most important to his theory will be covered. He held that there had to be a conservation of charge. What this explained was the need for the one conducting a Leyden jar experiment to be grounded. The electric fluid cannot be given to one part unless it can leave from another. This conservation seemed pretty obvious because the conservation of matter was already accepted. Another contribution Franklin made to electric theory is his idea of positive and negative charge. This departed from Dufay’s concept of two electric fluids, which he deemed resinous and vitreous. According to Franklin, something that is positively charged will attract a negatively charged entity, while it will repel fellow positively charged entities. With regards to the Leyden jar—According to Franklin the charge is not held in the wire which extends from the electric generator or the water in the glass. The electricity is held in the foil that lines the inside and outside of the glass jar. With this theory there is no need for the pores of Nollet. It also is much more exact than Watson’s vague notions of electric fire, or effluvia, or aether as he sometimes refers to it. He then showed that the electricity is not held in the water or the wire by conducting experiments in which the wire is removed, with the electrical charge still being able to be observed. He also used a large glass plate with foil on both sides, removing the water. Electricity was still able to be observed without the water or the wire. It had to be stored in the foil lining.

What has been outlined thus far are three theories of electricity in the 1740’s. What do these sketchy accounts tell us about science in general? The first thing that will be discussed is the role of theory in both apparatus creation and experimental procedures. If we remember, the Leyden jar was created in hopes of “bottling” the
electrical fluid. Since electricity was conceived of as a fluid it surely must be able to be bottled. We have here a realist position. The original creators of the Leyden jar believed that this unobservable fluid actually does exist. If they had not believed in its existence, they would have never been led to create the Leyden jar. No one can say for sure if the original creators of the Leyden jar saw their theory as merely having instrumental value, or if they were full on semantic realists, but this is not the important question. What is important is the action it led them to, namely building the Leyden jar.

All of these theories were proposed in a time of crisis. There was not one electric theory which could account for all observable phenomena. For example, Nollet could not account for why the electricity would not leave the glass through its “pores”. Observation revealed that the jar could hold electricity without discharging it immediately. This crisis was heightened by the invention of the Leyden jar. The huge public displays in which large sparks were emitted made a theory of such powerful phenomena (electricity) that much more needed. The Leyden jar brought forth anomalies that would previously not have been conceived of because electricity could now be observed on a greater scale because of the massive sparks that the machine created.

The theories in the experimenter’s head and the experiments he works on form a symbiotic relationship. For example, Watson was the first to line the outside of the jar with foil because of his theory. This in turn made the Leyden jar more powerful, and culminated in Franklin lining both sides of the jar, which lead to his theory of positive and negative charge. If there are no theories then there will be no change in the way experiments are done, and if there is no change in the way experiments are done, then there will be no questioning of the theory. In other words, a theory may induce a certain experimental set up, and the results from these experimental set ups will further change the theory.

What is most apparent in the Leyden jar case is what Thomas Kuhn deems the “essential tension.” This concept has to do with tradition and innovation. In each of these electrical theories as well as with the development of the Leyden jar in general, there was a certain adherence to a past conceptual framework, as well as innovation. These innovations were not embodied in any one of the theorists, but there was a gradual conceptual change. For example, Nollet was aware that his theory could not account for why the jar was able to hold electricity, since his theory of pores would have let it out, but he did not abandon his theory. Home claims that he simply ignored this fact. Whether or not he recognized this anomaly is beside the point. The anomaly was eventually accounted for in the culmination of Franklin. This essential tension must be in place for science to progress. Without a belief in a certain conceptual framework, there can be no directed action. But as this directed action gets more precise, the conceptual framework will be brought into the light and its deficiencies will be seen. This will then lead to further refinement.
The story of electric theory and the Leyden jar would not have even existed if the essential tension that Kuhn describes would not have been present in its proceedings. If the older theories didn’t believe in a fluid electricity, they would not have invented the Leyden jar. The invention of the Leyden jar opened up a can of worms so to speak which allowed for further theory refinement. This ties in with the contemporary psychological concept of convergent and divergent thinking. Divergent thinking is normally thought of as the creative aspect of human thinking. It is when you are able to literally “diverge” from the tradition in order to come up with new, creative solutions. What this analysis neglects is what the essential tension brings to light. In order to diverge from something, you must have already converged on something. If Franklin had not converged on the traditional experiments and literature concerning electricity at the time, he would have had nothing to correct or work from. He would be stranded in an ocean and he may have not been understood. What is apparent is that divergent thinking is not the only ingredient when in comes to creative solutions. Its counter part, convergent thinking must also be factored in to get a clear account of not only scientific innovation, but innovation in general.

The next logical question to ask is: When is it appropriate to diverge from the tradition? It is one thing to say that the essential tension is necessary, another thing to answer the question about when its two counter parts: convergent and divergent thinking, should take place. To answer this question, context will be needed. In this case there was no one set conceptual framework which could be called upon to test what experiments were done well. Electricity in 1740’s was a very new science. Each theorist had his own idea about what electricity was. Was it a fluid with positive and negative charge (Franklin), two fluids (Dufay), a fire (Nollet), aether (Watson)? With such differing conceptions about what electricity was, it is apparent that the field was A) young, and B) in crisis. When a field is young there has also not been as much written about it. Compare electricity in the 1740’s to evolutionary theory today. There is a major difference in both the amount of time the two have been in place, and how much has been written on the topic. This may seem like it leads to the conclusion that it is only a matter of how long and how much. The bigger the better. But this is not true. It is also the quality of the experiments and the quality of the results. There were anomalies that Nollet’s theory could not explain, urging for a new divergent theory.

Perhaps a reference to hypothetico-deductive testing will help us here. We will utilize an everyday example in order to cut the fat off of this jargon laden concept of hypothetico-deductive testing. Perhaps I am building a house. I believe that wood is the best material to use as a foundation for the house. This is my hypothesis. I now will go to the observable phenomena. Maybe I look and see all the twigs in my back yard that are rotting. I know that my foundation will be under the ground. I also see this wood on the ground and it doesn’t seem to be standing up to the elements. I bury a board under the moist soil for three months. Upon digging it up I note that it has become very weak. I conclude that my initial hypothesis, namely that wood is good material for a foundation, is not correct. I test a theory against what I can observe, however indirectly.
Nollet was either too stubborn or too absent minded to notice that his theory could not explain what was going on with the Leyden jar. If he would have asked “if my theory is true, will this happen?” he may have recognized the insufficiency of his theory. But this also does not get us to our answer. Let us restate it, When is it time to diverge from a convergent tradition? Hypothetico-deductive testing is a more complex affair than it appears to be. There are many auxiliary theories that are also utilized to get to the observed prediction. These auxiliary theories can be understood as helping and sometimes unstated conceptions. In our wood foundation example, my auxiliary theory was that when I bury a board under the ground, it will simulate how the foundation will react. In order to do my wood-burying experiment I had to have some prior knowledge. This knowledge was is my auxiliary. In a science as young as electricity in the 1740’s there are not many auxiliary theories to use. However, HD testing can be a good indicator none the less, even if it is not wholly satisfactory. Nollet, if he would have used it, would have possibly made innovations that he did not recognize were needed.

Although we have not answered our question yet, we have made some progress. In a science as young as electricity in the 1740’s there were no well entrenched theories concerning electricity. This calls for more divergent thinking. When a device such as the Leyden jar brings new and unexpected phenomena into the picture divergent thinking is needed more. Also, HD testing can show us when we need to diverge. These three things are signposts to change, but they still don’t give us a satisfactory answer.

According to Cohen, Nollet’s theory was initially accepted simply because there were no other theories available at the time (Cohen 386). This hints at another signpost for change. People want explanations. When something cannot be explained people become uneasy, causing them to prematurely accept a possibly faulty explanation, as in the case with Nollet. When there are two theories we can at least compare the relative merits of the two (which we are able to do looking back at history). On what grounds are we to compare two different theories. The HD model is a guide, as well as simplicity. Relating back to our question: Divergent thinking is needed more when there is only one theory proposed, because people like things explained, and this leads to premature acceptance. This is not to say that one should not learn the proposed theory, but one should be weary of it. But wait, look at the state of evolution today. There is one theory, should we be weary of it because of this fact. There will be a winning theory, which will then be widely accepted, as is the case with evolution. But, there were other theories before it. This indicates the importance of historical study. Look at the theories that the current one defeated. With a science as new as electricity in the 1740’s there were not many theories in the beginning, when Nollet’s was initially accepted. Another signpost: Look at the “battles” that the current theory faced in the past. Study what made it the victor. In the process you will discover the merits of the current theory and ways that it itself diverged from the tradition-- which allowed it to win.
We have not answered our question but we have come closer to a criteria for when to diverge from the tradition. 1) HD: When our theory does not predict observable phenomena we should be more alert. 2) When there is not a well entrenched theory or only one or two, study the history of these theories, its battle, its victories, its failures to decide if you should diverge.

What else does this “essential tension” between adherence to a tradition and innovation tells us about science? I argue that it is this very concept that separates it from other disciplines. Science is willing to admit it is wrong. Religion does not have this same willingness. This is where divergence comes into play in science and allows it to progress. On the other hand, it is not overly willing to admit it is wrong. If the scientists were so willing to not believe that electricity was a fluid they would not have created the Leyden jar in the first place. Adherence to a tradition or paradigm, allows science to go into much greater detail. If every scientist had to start anew, with no traditional footing they would not have the time to get into as much detail as scientists do. People today criticize that science is too dogmatic. Students of science are fed laws which they are told are true and are not to be questioned. What this criticism fails to recognize is that this factor of science is what makes it scientific. It is what allows science to be so successful. On the other hand, this ability to get into such great detail is what allows divergence to happen. Detail reveals anomalies, which spur on change in theory. The essential in “essential tension” means exactly that: without it, science would not be science. Belief in tradition to get into such great detail that anomalies will bubble up, which spurs on divergent thinking, is what sets science apart from other human endeavors.

Works Cited


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In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin is interested in medieval carnival and comedy for the unofficial truths they bring to the surface in Renaissance culture. The kinds of unofficial truths Bakhtin found in medieval carnival were in opposition to official truths such as hierarchical and religious social structure, kings as gods on earth, notions of providence, and asceticism because of the emphasis on revelry and feasting. These unofficial truths obliterated hierarchy, placing the king at the same level as the fool. Unofficial truths abandoned notions of providence and asceticism. The extent of hierarchy, providence, and asceticism which Bakhtin was working with in his reading of *Rabelais*, is not present in contemporary western society. However, I believe it can still be argued that one of the finer functions of comedy is its giving rise to unofficial truths. Official and unofficial truths exist simultaneously in our culture and though comedy is not unwelcome in official culture, it is often the case that something is found to be funny because it reveals certain unofficial truths which can be laughed at by all.

In a section of *Rabelais and His World* called “Carnival Ambivalence,” Bakhtin introduces celebrations of the Middle age and the Renaissance called feast days. He explains that “The famous fairs of Lyon were held four times a year, and each lasted fifteen days” (213). He was most interested in these types of cultural events because he believed it unveiled a new culture of its own. “Thus, the unofficial folk culture of the Middle Ages and even of the Renaissance had its own territory and its own particular time, the time of fairs and feasts” (213). Bakhtin viewed the unofficial folk culture as an entirely different entity from official folk culture. Feast days were a time devoted to the rise of unofficial folk culture and suspension of official folk culture.

Relationships within the unofficial folk culture were different from those in the official folk culture. “This territory… was ruled by a special type of relationship, a free, familiar, marketplace relationship” (213). The official folk culture, according to Bakhtin, was not free or familiar. Official relationships were directed by hierarchy. Peasants’ speech to those of a higher rank was a regulated and rare occasion. Only on feast days could social circles of the ruling classes be broken by conversation and fraternization with the common crowd. The ordering of classes became chaotic and unseen, revealing the arbitrariness of such an ordering as an important truth.

The language of these feast days was further evidence for Bakhtin’s acknowledgement of two separate cultures. Feasts had a language different from that of official folk culture. “Officially the palaces, churches, institutions, and private homes were dominated by hierarchy and etiquette, but in the marketplace a special kind of speech was heard, almost a language of its own, quite unlike the language of Church, palace, courts, and institutions” (213). Through a language outside of the language spoken in churches, palaces, and institutions aristocratic circles were broken.
down even further. The language barrier which separated the nobles and high-ranking clergy from others disappeared. Bakhtin observed an unofficial spirit flood the festive marketplace as the tongue of official language escaped the ruling classes. This breaking down of the hierarchy was an important part of carnival in that it was to be enjoyed by all.

The unofficial spirit deeply opposed the official truths. “On the other hand, the official feasts of the Middle Ages, whether ecclesiastic, feudal, or sponsored by the state, did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life” (199). Bakhtin didn’t simply examine the differences between unofficial and official folk culture. He examined the difference between the unofficial feasts and the official feasts. The product of an unofficial spirit was not produced within the official feasts. Official feasts remained in the official language with the official cultural divisions. “As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (199). It was only through an unofficial feast that the unofficial spirit, a spirit free of suppression and discipline, was evoked. An unofficial celebration replaced the divine monarchy with the uncrowning of the king. It replaced asceticism with festive laughter and carnival spirit. It celebrated change as opposed to a static, rigid, culture. It was essentially a positive reduction of humanity which celebrated the body by not only feeding its hunger and quenching its thirst, but by consuming food and drink that is delectable and plentiful.

This unofficial spirit relates to a function of comedy because it was through laughter which the unofficial folk culture flourished.

“They (feast days) offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year. If we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither medieval cultural consciousness nor the culture of the Renaissance can be understood. To ignore or to underestimate the laughing people of the Middle Ages also distorts the picture of European culture’s historic development” (196).

Bakhtin distinguishes the unofficial folk culture as the laughing people of the Middle Ages. Ignoring the laughing people means ignoring an entire culture. Laughter is important here because laughter is a part of the rise of unofficial culture. Through comedy, the fool becomes the king and the king becomes the fool. The fool rules through comedy. The festival is a celebration through humor and spirit. When Bakhtin perceives a world outside of officialdom, he is catching sight of a world of celebration through joy and laughter. Laughter and unofficial truths, the kinds of truths shared among friends rather than the state, go hand and hand.
Bakhtin clarified this by noticing that the ritual of feast days revolved around comedy. “Thus carnival is the people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life. Festivity is a peculiar quality of all comic rituals and spectacles of the Middle Ages” (198). The peculiar quality Bakhtin spotted is basically that comedy leads to merriment. If carnival is organized on the basis of laughter, then the function of laughter is the same as that of carnival. Laughter is the basis for the unofficial spirit of carnival. So, laughter must be related to that unofficial spirit. Laughter is what replaced official truths with the unofficial by laughing at the king and praising the fool for causing laughter. The kind of laughter Bakhtin noticed in carnival was laughter available to everyone. “It is first of all, festive laughter…Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival’s participants” (200). The laughter which replaced unofficial truths was not focused on an individual. Unofficial culture introduced laughter for all and by all.

In contemporary society, there isn’t as large of a separation between official and unofficial truths as was featured in medieval culture. There are no kings or gods on earth. Churches and institutions do not have their own official language which is unavailable to the majority of the population. Notions of providence are clearly less prominent. It’s not unheard of for our presidents to present themselves enigmatically as opposed to ascetically, such as Bill Clinton’s playing the saxophone on NBC during his presidential term in 1992. Laughter is generally embraced in society. John Stewart and Steven Colbert are generally welcomed to mock politicians, authors, and almost anyone else of their choosing.

Though official and unofficial truths don’t seem to be two entirely separate cultures in today’s society, there do seem to be truths which are more official and those which are more unofficial within our culture. Official truths are no longer those of hierarchy or language, but official celebrations do still adhere to a certain form of etiquette, such as place setting at dinner tables and the ordering of silverware. There is something more official about the holiday silver in contrast to the paper cups at college parties which makes the latter more festive and informal than the former. Noise levels vary from the more casual to the more formal restaurants. The more official restaurants tend to be those which give their guests more privacy at a lower volume level. The more unofficial restaurants tend toward more openness among their guests and higher volume levels. Generally, more laughing can be heard within the noisy unofficial restaurants.

A more explicit example which comes to mind is a recent experience in which an unofficial truth was most surprisingly broken in a quite official setting. I recently attended a Philosophy Outreach Conference at Columbia University and was lucky enough to listen to a brilliantly moving opening speech by Robert Paul Wolff, a contemporary political philosopher. Wolff was telling a story and amidst the story he mentioned that he hadn’t been paying attention to something important occurring because he was having a sexual fantasy. The entire crowd burst into laughter. It wasn’t
a fleeting chuckle. The crowd could hardly settle down. As soon as the laughter began to soften Wolff added, “What? Like you all haven’t done it at least once since I’ve been speaking?” The laughter from the second comment roared even louder.

The point of this story is simply that Robert Paul Wolff, an official speaker in an official setting, brought an unofficial truth to the surface and the entire audience found thought it was uproarious. He even acknowledged that he was surfacing an unofficial truth by asserting that every audience member was likely guilty of the very confession he had made. What caused the laughter in this situation wasn’t entirely different from the carnival laughter Bakhtin was interested in. Not only did Wolff reveal an unofficial truth, he produced laughter for all and by all. He selected an unofficial truth he knew to be human nature and put it on display just as Bakhtin conveys carnival laughter did. The official nature of a conference is high-level intellectual exchange and often powerful dispute. Wolff used a communal unofficial humor to welcome us to the conference lightheartedly.

For Bakhtin, Rabelais described a world of two separate cultures: the official folk culture and the unofficial folk culture. Carnival, or feast days, meant time devoted to the unleashing of the unofficial folk culture. Bringing about the unofficial culture meant the unity of the people through the breakdown of hierarchy and aristocratic circles through festive laughter. Official culture isn’t as separate from unofficial culture in today’s society, but official and unofficial truths remain within our reticence. When an unofficial truth which is generally reserved is brought into the open, it is a normal reaction to laugh. Laughter is still a part of celebration just as it was in the Renaissance. Laughter is not a part of a second life or culture, but it is a part of our culture in such a way that things are humorous when they are about those unofficial truths which everyone can relate to.
A Second Look at Cancer Screening
Tom Atkins

Not being medical practitioners, most of us must rely on the medical community to provide us with the best advice when it comes to our all-important health decisions. In the special cases of breast and prostate cancer screening, we must each decide at what age to begin screening and how regularly to screen. But when it comes to making these decisions, patients seeking expert advice are receiving conflicting testimony from the medical community and society at large. Recent interpretations of statistical data advises women not to begin mammography screening for breast cancer until age fifty, and advises biennial (instead of annual) screening thereafter. There is also growing consensus among professionals that men shouldn’t partake in prostate cancer screening at all. Many have argued against these interpretations of the evidence. In the case of breast cancer screening, Cokie and Steven Roberts argue emphatically in support of annual screening beginning at age forty (Roberts, 5). And in the case of prostate screening, there is the lawyer who prosecuted Dr. Merenstein over his discussion with a patient regarding the costs and benefits of undergoing the prostate-specific-antigen (PSA) test (Merenstein, 15-16). These individuals believe the decision to undergo screening to be straightforward that it would make for a seriously negligent doctor not to advice regular screening to all patients. Here I will argue against their view by briefly reviewing the available evidence and allowing it to inform various decisions relating to cancer screening.

First we should recall the arguments of the Roberts and the prosecuting attorney. Cokie and Steven Roberts argue that the “statistically minded scientists were at best naïve, at worst unethical” for advising women not begin screening until age fifty, and thereafter undergo mammography screening every two years. They acknowledge the statistical data which indicates that “1,904 women in their 40s have to be screened to prevent one breast-cancer death,” but beg the reader to “tell that to the 45-year-old whose life was saved by mammography.” Their argument asks us to consider the good outcomes of mammography, which, although rare, are in their view worth the insignificant troubles suffered by most women who have screening done, but are not found to have breast cancer. The plaintiff’s attorney who prosecuted Merenstein successfully argued his case mainly by invoking the “standard of care in the commonwealth of Virginia.” Standards of care are used in legal circumstances to determine how the actions of a medical practitioner in a given circumstance measure against how other practitioners in similar circumstances would have acted. Since apparently it is commonplace in Virginia for doctors to advise a PSA test, and the prosecutor was able to produce testimony in favor of this, Merenstein was accused of not practicing in accordance with the standards. In effect, it doesn’t matter that the best statistical data and official recommendations of national medical groups supported Merenstein, because the patient “believed that if something had been done differently he would have survived longer.”
As Merenstein points out in the article, this patient’s belief is false, and without scientific evidence “standards” become mere conventions. In this case, Merenstein and his patient were faced with a decision to order a PSA test or not. Of course, prior to testing, they were ignorant of whether or not the patient actually had prostate cancer. Below is a decision table that shows the states and ranked outcomes (1 to 6, where the best outcome is 1) designated for them. Although the rankings are subject to change according to who is assigning them, I believe most readers will identify with those provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(S1) Patient has life-threatening prostate cancer</th>
<th>(S2) Patient has non-invasive prostate cancer</th>
<th>(S3) Patient does not have prostate cancer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A1) Do the PSA test</td>
<td>(O1)</td>
<td>(O3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(O1) 6</td>
<td>(O2) 4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A2) Don’t do the PSA test</td>
<td>(O4) 5</td>
<td>(O6) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(O4) 5</td>
<td>(O5) 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before the reader objects to the assignment of “6” –the worst outcome on the table—to outcome one (O1) instead of outcome four (O4), consider first some statistical information. Reasons will be provided momentarily to defend the assignment of “6” to outcome one. Following are the probabilities of the states according to the best available statistical evidence for men at age 54, the age of Merenstein’s patient, where \( P(x) \) reads “the probability that \( x \):”

\[
\begin{align*}
P (\text{Patient has life-threatening prostate cancer}) &= .01 \\
P (\text{Patient has non-invasive prostate cancer}) &= .15 \\
P (\text{Patient does not have prostate cancer}) &= .84
\end{align*}
\]

These figures show that Merenstein’s patient had a very low prior probability of having a life-threatening cancer, in fact at the time he could have rightly been said to have a 99% chance of not dying from prostate cancer. Merenstein consulted his patient, explaining that even if he happened to be one of those unlucky few (as he indeed was), because there’s no effective treatment for deadly prostate cancer, early detection could not lower his mortality risk or lengthened his life expectancy. But while early detection doesn’t lower his risk of mortality, it would heighten other risks, among which are included a temptation to undergo surgical and radiological treatments which can result in incontinence and impotence. This makes a compelling
case for why (O4) ought to be assigned a lower (better) number than (O1) on the table above. The same risks are also heightened if his patient were to have been a member of the more likely group (those with a non-invasive prostate cancer), though he would stand only to lose were this true of him. Everything considered, Merenstein’s sound advice to the patient basically amounts to “ignorance is bliss.” While his accuser did suffer from an unfortunate outcome, that outcome could never have been known in advance by either of them; at the time the only available option was to follow Merenstein’s sound advice, well supported by cost-benefit analysis.

Now we will move on to the case of mammography screening for early detection of breast cancer. There is much current evidence supporting the advice of the U.S. Preventative Task Force, the group condemned by Roberts for not advising annual screening for women beginning in their forties. But after ten randomized trials, there remains to be any evidence found that screening for women between the ages of forty and forty-nine reduces mortality risks for breast cancer. There are possible benefits for women age fifty and over, namely, four out of a thousand women who undergo a mammography every other year will be saved by early detection. But why not go every year instead of biennially? Will the annual screenings promoted by the Roberts save more lives? Because tumors are not detectable by a mammogram before they have been present in a woman for around 3.5 years, annual screening offers no gained benefits over biennial screening. Since this was a major point of contention in the Roberts’s article, I have chosen to illustrate this decision with the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A tumor develops</th>
<th>No tumors develop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mammogram every 2 years</td>
<td>Early detection is as likely as if (A2); lower risks than (A2)</td>
<td>Patient takes on considerable risks, but probabilities of the costs are lower than if (A2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mammogram every year</td>
<td>Tumor detected no earlier than if (A1); greater risks than (A1)</td>
<td>Patient takes on considerable risks that are more likely to ensue than if (A1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table suggests, there are considerable costs associated with having a mammogram done, risks that are increased the more a woman screens. We will now consider in some detail what these costs and risks turn out to be.
Tests show that for 1,000 women between ages forty and fifty, 70 will receive false positives while 7 will receive true (or accurate) positive results. Therefore most positive results from a mammography screening (around 90%) are false positives. For women this means an exposure of up to a 50% chance of receiving a false positive, if they partake in ten regular screenings either every year or every other year. Of those 7 with breast cancer out of 1,000 screened, many of them are more likely to have some form of non-progressive breast cancer, which may either remain harmless or become progressive in 20 to 30 years. This alone casts considerable doubts on the benefits offered by screening at ages younger than fifty, since many young women will only stand to lose if they discover they have cancer young. The same kind of losses are suffered by those who receive false positives, in fact it is estimated that every year “more than 300,000 American women who don’t have breast cancer undergo a biopsy”, which may result in scarring, tissue loss, and risk of infection. Also younger women are more susceptible to risks resulting from the radiation they are exposed to by a mammogram. Indirect evidence suggests that between 2 and 4 women out of 10,000 who have a mammography done regularly beginning in their forties will actually develop breast cancer as a result of the screening. Taken together, all these risks make it an unwise decision for any woman to undergo mammography screening before age fifty.

Cokie and Steven Roberts either overlooked or ignored the information provided above. Because of the nature of statistics, the numbers do not of course correspond to the actual physiological states inside a given individual. But medical practitioners can’t peer into the specific physiological states hidden under our skin, or at least not without surgery. For this reason practitioners are forced to become statisticians if they want to allow the best available evidence to inform their practice. In the case of prostate and breast cancer screening, I have shown how the relevant statistics and cost-benefit analysis of them may not lead to the best result for a given individual, but nonetheless represent the most appropriate handling of a situation in which a patient is faced with a decision, ignorant of the actual physiological states hidden in them.

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By nature, or perhaps more clearly by conditioning, humans seem to have an insatiable thirst for knowledge. We seek to understand more than our forebears. What’s more, we like to write these sorts of things down and claim them as ours, uniquely ours. We have, then, a connection to our projects that is not readily apparent to others; we have secrets. Religion is certainly no different. In many ways, the words we read in religious texts represent the secrets of others and their relations to their own projects and to the divine. This is, for Jacques Derrida, problematic, or it is perhaps safer to say that this is made problematic after Derrida. In his discussion of secrets, Derrida picks away at the foundation of religious thinking and life, and begins to redefine what it means to live the religious life that is also a genuine life. Thus, this essay will seek to draw out what Derrida would consider to be the life that could be simultaneously religious and authentic.

For Derrida, there is a particular way in which we can understand the term “secret” within the context of religion. In referring to a secret, Derrida refers to the notion that one cannot “reveal…or divulge it in any familial or public, ethical, or political…[, nor] expose it to any part of what Kierkegaard calls the generality” (Derrida, 128). A secret, then, represents that which must remain with the individual to whom it was given. It cannot be transmitted to another nor written for posterity. Neither could a secret be used as a justification for something; that is, we cannot base our actions upon or seek merit for them in a secret. In doing so, we reveal that there is a secret to which we are privy and even such a referential revelation of a secret shatters the necessary veil of secrecy for a secret to remain as such. To be a secret in the truest, most Derridean sense of the word is to remain entirely veiled from any notion of the public, even a public no larger than one other. For the true secret-keeper, there can be no confidant, no companion in secrecy—such a person is inextricably alone in their knowledge.

Derrida makes explicit reference to two particular types of secrets as being invisible in a certain sense of the word: those which are invisible entirely (absconditus), and those which are less visible in a gradient of visibility (krypto). The former of these, absconditus, refers to an “absolute sense of invisibility [that] resides rather in the idea of that which has no structure of visibility” (Derrida, 89). This sort of invisibility refers to everything which cannot be beheld in sight. Such an invisibility, such a secret, supersedes the realm of vision and the eye; it is held, rather, in the auditory or the olfactory or the tactile. It can never, in its real form, be observed by the eye. Speech, for example, though it can be written, that which was spoken can never be seen. We do not see words when another engages in the act of speaking; we hear them. Though I can reproduce the spoken in written form, I cannot fully capture what it was for it to be spoken and, in turn, what it was to hear—the emotion, the sensation—beyond the mere words spoken. A secret which is spoken, then, remains ever beyond the realm of sight.
On the other hand, a secret which falls into the sort of invisibility embodied in *krypto* does, in some fashion, participate in the world of sight. This sort of secret is “an invisible of the order of the visible that one can keep secret by keeping it out of sight. This invisible can be artificially kept from sight while remaining within what one calls exteriority” (Derrida, 90). This sort of secret is veiled by a surmountable barrier to sensory exploration; it could also be thought of as a secret which is not readily intelligible. It is a secret which is merely awaiting the proper stimulus to make itself known. This form of invisibility is the less difficult of the two to overcome if only because it can be overcome. A secret which has been written in a language I do not understand is a secret which is invisible to me in the sense that I cannot comprehend it when placed before me. The visual meaning of such a secret is lost on me. However, it is not forever so. I could entrust it to another to translate the secret into intelligibility, or I could even take such a task up myself. The process of translation, then, is a kind of unveiling, of making visible, the secret. The secret that is invisible *krypto* can become, through effort and work, less secret and less invisible. It can be rendered sensible to the eye.

The difference between the two sorts of invisibilities and secrets, for religious life, has only the meaning of temporality—at what point we measure when the secret begins to occur. The secret that is invisible *absconditus* makes reference to the secret begat when God spoke, or speaks, to an individual. Derrida speaks of Abraham when he writes in regard to this ever-invisible secret: “Kept to secrecy, kept in secret, kept by the secret that he keeps throughout this whole experience of asking forgiveness for the unforgivable, Abraham takes responsibility for a decision” (Derrida, 128). Even though the experience of the binding of Isaac has been written and recorded, and even though we can read Abraham’s words, we cannot fully grasp what it means to have heard God speak directly. Nor can we then understand why Abraham would commit himself to an action our sentiments find abhorrent. Words written of such a moment, of the experience of hearing such a voice directly, cannot capture what it meant to be in that moment. The secret of it remains invisible.

The secret that is invisible *krypto* is felt when one encounters a religious text that is indecipherable, such as a text written in its original form. Such invisibility can be overcome by translation, as has previously been discussed; however, we must consider how thorough such a solution is. We still, in the process of such a translation, lose something of what was originally intended; no language has in another its whole and perfect counterpart such that the process of transference does not, in some way, miss the mark. While we are able to gather, at least we hope, the bulk of the secret in such an unveiling, we lose bits of the polish, and even some of the roughness, in the process. As such, we can no longer claim to be as fully privy to the secret as we could had we not read the work in translation. The degree to which we can claim a full understanding of the secret depends upon the degree to which such a translation is indeed faithful.
What we encounter, however, which is not explicitly addressed in Derrida’s work, for both sorts of secrets and invisibilities, is the very notion of interpretation. In both instances of secrecy in a religious context, we encounter the lenses of those who came before us. In the first instance, we encounter the lens of the direct experiencer, the Abraham or the mystic, taking what they perceive and feel to be most important and imparting it in the written word or spoken to another. In the latter, we encounter the lens of the translator who seeks to make the insensible sensible. In so doing, however, the translator must sacrifice that which cannot be transformed—the tone, the connotation—to make sense of the whole. What religious life, as interpreted through a religious text, demands then is that we take certain notions simply as they appear in such a text. We might consider this idea in the context of Nietzsche’s ideas on perspective and bias, particularly as they relate to claims of objectivity. “[These] always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking” (Nietzsche, 119). Nietzsche illustrates, here, the impossibility of such a request; we are always viewing the world from a particular perspective and that will inevitably affect how we view a text and how the text itself if written. What we view when we view a religious text is an eye turned in a particular direction and its desire to turn our as well. We encounter what another, or several others, thought to be important and necessary to include. We only see part of the secret, and we cannot begin to guess at the other parts because they exist outside our ability to make them visible.

We must then take certain notions merely on faith—for example, that God does not want us to engage in adultery—when we have not been the immediate receiver of the secret. However, there is a danger in such belief if “we take belief as meaning the adherence of being to its object when the object is not given or is given indistinctly” because we take these beliefs as they are given; we do not investigate them and cannot therefore take responsibility for them (Sartre, 112). The secret then has the consequence of making the notion of living religiously, if by such a thing we mean living by a dogmatic understanding of the world based upon religious text and the words of human others, living irresponsibly in some sense of the word. When we live purely by religious text, we live by the secrets which are not ours to have—they were given to another. Written or not, the secret is not what it once was: it cannot be divine word, directly to man, once man has written it. It then becomes the interpreted and mitigated secret given to one and spread to many. The many do not necessarily feel the weight of the secret upon them, and cannot then take responsibility for their actions as Abraham did with Isaac—there is no need to keep what is not one’s own secret.

Living a religious life, for Derrida, almost seems to be after the fashion of seeking a connection to God that is not based on the secrets of others. It seems, instead, to be the seeking to create one’s own secrets with God. In so doing, we allow for the dissymmetrical gaze, which “sees [us] without [our] seeing it sees [us],” to find
us (Derrida, 91). When we live by the secrets of others, by religious dogma, we at the very least glimpse the gaze peripherally because we see how it sees. We can map around that gaze with our own, even if we cannot glimpse it directly, simply by the virtue that we have been given a lens with which to view it. It may very well be that what we come to understand in seeking such secrets is quite similar to what dogma has already stated; however, it is the act of critical understanding and the allowance for variation that would seem to allow for the religious life to also be genuine. We arrive then at a kind of Hegelian Spirit, “what in religion was content or a form for presenting an other, is here the Self’s own act; the Notion [Spirit] requires the content to be the Self’s own act” (Hegel, 485). When we undergo the process of seeking to develop our own secrets with God, we can then fully account for our actions as Abraham did and claim to lead the genuine and religious life.

The religious life that is also genuine, then, cannot rest upon the secrets of others. In order to participate in both, under a Derridean conception of secret, we must seek out the secrets within our own lives as they relate to, or perhaps are given by, the divine. In so doing, we allow for ourselves to take a full account of the meaning of faith and belief such that we can claim to be responsible for our actions and their effects. Neither, then, can we seek to convince others to live by our version of the religious life if we are to avoid demystifying the secret and presenting it as a formula, free of the burden of secrecy, for the good life.

**Works Cited**


In a game of billiards, when we watch the cue ball hit the object ball we expect the object ball to start moving. We have seen this happen before, and in fact, in our experience, this is what always happens when the cue ball strikes the object ball. Although we may not typically stop to consider the contact forces that come into play as we continue the game, they are nonetheless in effect every time the billiard balls collide. The idea of contact forces does not seem too difficult to us at first glance; we simply accept them as they appear to be in the real world. But what of other forces at work in the world? Would a distance force, such as gravity, be any less meaningful than the contact forces that make the object ball move? Despite the fact that Hume seems to suggest that both of these types of forces are equally intelligible, a closer look at the nature of gravity and distance forces shows that distance forces are indeed not as simple as contact forces, and are ultimately less intelligible.

When considering whether distance forces are less meaningful than contact forces, we must first understand what is meant by “meaningful” or what the criteria for being “meaningful” are. Hume is gracious enough to provide us with a test of meaningfulness, and advises that,

When we entertain, therefore, any suspicious, that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, from what impression is that supposed idea derived? And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion (Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding [hereafter Enquiry], p. 13).

Thus, by asking from what impression we derive a particular idea, we can discover whether we are using a term meaningfully and intelligibly. In order to understand this even more clearly, we must discover what sorts of things count as impressions. Hume instructs us in this subject matter when he writes, “By the term impression, then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will” (Enquiry, p.10). Accordingly, if we are to ascertain whether the concept of distance forces are less intelligible than contact forces we must first try to identify what “lively perceptions” give rise to the idea of these forces.

This task of discovering what impressions distance forces are derived from may at first seem difficult, considering that forces such as gravity are, in and of themselves, insensible. No one can say what gravity smells, tastes, or looks like. Nevertheless, Hume argues that gravity does arise from impressions. He classifies gravity as a “secret power” which can indeed serve as a cause for events such a rock falling to the ground when it is suddenly left unsupported. It is still unclear, however, what impression it is that gives rise to the concept of gravity. In the scenario of the rock falling to the ground, we do not see gravity. We may see the effects of gravity, as
the rock falls, but at no time can we pinpoint an exact moment or location to point to as an impression of gravity. If gravity is to explain the rock’s movement toward the earth, then it must fit into Hume’s account of causality. Hume proposes that our ideas of causation arise “entirely from experience, when we find, that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other” (Enquiry, p. 17). This means that every time we experience a certain object, event, or “secret power”, another particular object, event, or “secret power” is sure to follow it. Through the constant conjunction of these causes and effects, we come to assume there is some necessary connection between the two. In the case of gravity, we do see a constant conjunction of events. Every time I let go of a rock I have been holding in my hand, I can watch it fall to the ground. Hume explains that it is “this connexion, therefore, which we feel in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, [that] is the sentiment or impression, from which we form the idea of power or necessary connexion” (Enquiry, p. 50). In the instant that I let go of the rock, I feel in my mind an anticipation of it falling. I expect it to move toward the earth. According to Hume, this expectancy is the impression which gives us the idea of gravity. Our anticipation is the necessary connection which binds cause and effect together, and gives us our concept of distance forces.

Unfortunately, the relation of cause and effect in regards to distance forces is not as simple as two billiard balls in play. When we watch the cue ball strike the object ball, we may say with quite a bit of certainty that the cue ball (or motion thereof) was the cause of the motion of the object ball. What, then, would be the specific cause and effect in the case of the unsupported rock? Gravity is not simply a function of one object moving toward another. In fact, gravity takes into account the masses of both objects as well as the distance between them, regardless of which one I held in my hand or which I assume to be the “cause”. Both objects will exact a gravitational force on the other. This being the case, what impression must we receive in order to have a meaningful idea of the concept of gravity? If our impression must be an anticipation of the effect, must we not anticipate both the gravitational pull of the earth on the rock as well as the gravitational pull of the rock on the earth? Both objects must be simultaneously named as both cause and effect. This, however, seems puzzling, especially in light of Hume’s definition of a cause as “An object, followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second. Or in other words, where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed” (Enquiry, p. 51). Hume also describes a “cause” as “an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other” (Enquiry, p. 51). Both of these descriptions seem to imply that there is some temporal element to causation, wherein the cause must precede the effect. This concept is difficult to apply to gravity, since there is apparently no temporal element to gravity, and both objects affected are simultaneously cause and effect. Although it may be argued that we receive an impression of the earth’s gravity working on the rock when we anticipate the rock’s descent to the earth, it is not clear that through experience alone we would ever receive a simultaneous impression of the rock’s gravity working on the earth.
While Hume’s account of causation may be sufficient for providing an intelligible explanation of contact forces, it is unable to adequately account for the concept of distance forces. When we ask ourselves, ‘From what impression is the supposed idea derived?’, we are left with an incomplete answer that only describes half of the relationship that produces gravitational effects. Distance forces, then, must be considered less intelligible than contact forces, and we are left to anticipate further investigations of its meaning.
In *The Gift of Death*, Jacques Derrida makes several claims about the nature of absolute responsibility and the way in which sacrifice must necessarily play a role in the execution of moral actions. That is to say that only by acting through a strict sense of duty to one’s responsibility, can an action truly be considered moral. One must therefore perform his moral duty regardless of his own desires to the extent of potentially abandoning, or even destroying, that which he loves most. Only such an extreme offering can truly constitute a sacrifice, and such is necessary in order to truly adhere to one’s responsibility. In developing this assertion, Derrida draws upon Immanuel Kant’s concept of the categorical imperative as an example that demonstrates the necessity of sacrifice in morality. However, this construction proves problematic. Thus, this investigation will show that Derrida’s conception of moral responsibility is, at least partially, flawed due to a misunderstanding of the notion of sacrifice within Kant’s categorical imperative.

It is important, at first, to obtain an understanding of what Derrida is getting at in his use of the terms responsibility and sacrifice. Fortunately, he speaks about both with a greater level of clarity than he does concerning some of the other topics within *The Gift of Death*. Regarding absolute responsibility Derrida explains that in order to fulfill one’s duty to the absolute other (call it God if you like) one must forsake his conceptions of relation to and duty towards everything that is not that absolute other. He says, “As soon as I enter into a relation with the [absolute] other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command, or call of the [absolute] other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is to say by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all others” (69). Derrida illustrates this renunciation of all responsibility except that which is toward the absolute other with the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. By being willing to kill his own son at God’s command, Abraham forsakes all connection to his earthly community. He betrays his responsibility to serve and protect his family as well as his responsibility to obey the laws of man that prohibit murder. Furthermore, this fulfillment of responsibility must be undertaken “in terms of duty alone” as opposed to “out of duty” such that one is not entering into a sort of debt/repayment relation with the absolute other (64). For example, if one performs a good deed because he believes that a history of good deeds makes him more likely to enter heaven in the afterlife he is not acting in terms of duty alone because he is expecting to be repaid for his actions. Thus, the absolute duty requires a sacrifice of any potential remuneration or ulterior motives other than responsibility.

For Derrida however, the idea of sacrifice means more than simply to forego something that one enjoys or desires. Sacrifice in Derrida’s sense is intimately related to his explanation of responsibility. In the way that one must forego his responsibility to others in order to maintain his responsibility to the absolute other a sacrifice can
only be legitimate if that which is sacrificed is something that is truly loved. “I must sacrifice what I love. I must come to hate what I love…I must hate and betray my own, that is to say offer them the gift of death by means of sacrifice, not insofar as I hate them—that would be too easy—but insofar as I love them” (65). Thus, sacrifice becomes an essential component of moral action. By sacrificing that which is so loved, one demonstrates that he is acting strictly according to duty without any ulterior motivation or expectation of repayment. It is here where Derrida draws the parallel to Kant’s categorical imperative. He claims, “Access to pure duty is, in Kant’s terms, also ‘sacrifice,’ the sacrifice of the passions, of the affections, of so-called ‘pathological’ interests…” This demonstrates, according to Derrida, that Kant’s categorical imperative is in line with Derrida’s own notion of moral responsibility.

In the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant explains that a categorical imperative is an absolute requirement that must be obeyed in all circumstances. He proclaims that there is only one categorical imperative and that it takes the form “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (*Groundwork*, p.31). Lying, therefore, is an immoral act because if everyone lied all the time society would cease to function. It is significant to note as well that although the categorical imperative determines which actions are moral, Kant argues that only when a moral action is carried out through a commitment of duty to that moral law does one in fact act morally. Thus it is the case that, according to Kant, an action is not truly moral unless it is devoid of the selfish interests described by Derrida. On that point Derrida and Kant seem to be well in agreement.

The place where Derrida goes wrong however, is in assuming that Kant’s disallowing of ulterior motives in moral actions is necessarily a sacrifice. There is no doubt that Kant acknowledges that following the categorical imperative and acting morally can result in outcomes that are wholly opposed to one’s emotional and material desires. Nevertheless, this is not ultimately manifested as a sacrifice in the sense that Derrida sets forth. For Derrida a sacrifice in the name of duty is necessarily an emotionally violent action that forces one to turn on himself and his fellow man. This is not what occurs in the Kantian account of duty. Kant argues that the knowledge of moral laws and the duty to them that follows are products of the rational nature of man. Once one comes to understand the moral laws through reason he will dutifully follow them regardless of conflicts with his material or emotional desires. He understands that acting in accordance with the moral laws already produces the highest possible good within him and therefore no longer recognizes as important his material and emotional desires. This means that whatever sacrifice one may have made in order to fulfill his moral responsibility is outweighed by the sense of fulfillment gained by the knowledge that he acted morally. Thus, the sacrifice does not produce the emotional violence that Derrida argues is necessary to represent a sacrifice made in the name of moral responsibility.
As Derrida’s discussion of Kant only represents one supporting example, this flaw does not necessarily bring down Derrida’s argument about the correlation between moral responsibility and sacrifice. In fact, it could be said that even Kant’s categorical imperative requires that one make sacrifices in order to act morally. The difference is in the definition of sacrifice. According to Kant, one is able to utilize reason to gain an understanding of the universal good that will follow from his moral action. In that way Kant’s actor consciously chooses to deny his desires in favor of the ultimately greater reward of assured moral righteousness. While on the other hand, Derrida’s “absolute other” operates beyond the grasp of man’s rationality thereby forcing one to blindly perform his duty while taking it on faith that he is acting morally. Thus, by misreading Kant, Derrida attempts to support his argument with a concept that is in fact foundationally incommensurable with his own argument.
At the very core of human identity is human interaction; our claims to be something or possess a certain quality matter little if there are no others to receive and interpret that information. The very notion of possessing an identity assumes that it is that which represents how we interact with social norms and mores, how we both challenge and embrace them. Through our interactions with one another, then, we encounter separate worldviews which may radically differ from our own. An ethical concern arises then: how are we to encounter these separate others? Thinking through this concern clearly rests at the core of ethics. Before laying out my argument, I wish to claim an assumption: we wish to have ethical interactions with one another in the first place. It may seem a superfluity, but it is an assumption that is vital to this project. Ethics, and living the life which we ought, must be a matter of work and introspection.

In order to reach an understanding of what it means to have an ethical interaction, I draw on the work of contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor in conjunction with Hegel. Taylor proposes what he calls the “ethics of authenticity” as a solution to the question of ethical interaction. While this is a thorough and compelling account of an ethics (indeed, I will rely on many of the same ideas), it is lacking one significant aspect: it does not demand that we care for one another. In order to reach an understanding of exactly why this distinction is important, I will lay out Taylor’s argument of the ethics of authenticity, supplementing it as necessary by drawing directly on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, after which I shall present my own account which I term the “ethics of regard.”

Taylor begins his argument by identifying what he calls the “three malaises of modernity”: individualism, instrumental reason, and the political consequences of the first two. It is the first two of these on which I intend to focus. Of individualism, Taylor writes that while “many people consider [individualism] the finest achievement of modern civilization[,]” the previous social orders which might have been restrictive to the individual “gave meaning to the world and to the activities of social life” (pp. 2-3). In the quest to claim the primacy of the individual, we have forsaken the very notions that created and sustained communities. Rather than seeing ourselves as an individual part of a collective whole, we tend to view the world through the lens of solipsism; we pretend that we are islands unto ourselves. That is, we view the world as a collective of mere things existing to fulfill some need or desire in our own lives. Without a sense of connectivity, everyday interactions are simply reduced to that which fulfills the individual. Of course, we cannot all be equally fulfilled, and so we struggle with one another.

This notion of struggle is addressed in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraphs 187-189. As Hegel writes, “This trial by death, however, does away with
the truth which was supposed to issue from it, and so, too, with the certainty of
self generally” (p. 114). In seeking to wholly consume another, and assert our own
Subjectness, we reduce the sum of the other to merely Object and destroy the ability
of the other to receive and interpret our identity. In doing so, we disallow the other
to assist in forming our identity and instead insist on trying to form it entirely on
our own. We attempt to exist as the sole Subject through which everything else is
given meaning and purpose. In such a world, satisfying our own desires is the only
worthwhile pursuit, and we pursue it endlessly. The entire notion of community
must be set aside so that the individual may be satisfied. This is a destructive end; it
cannot be an ethical way to interact with our counterparts. By transforming others
into objects we remove the sense of self unique to them that is vital to having an
ethical interaction.

This leads directly into what Taylor terms “instrumental reason,” by which
he means “the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical
application of means to a given end” (p. 5). It is a key part of our nature to look
toward maximizing outcomes. In our every interaction, we look toward our own
concerns above those, and even to the detriment, of others. To this end, Taylor
writes, “the solid, lasting, often expressive objects that served us in the past are being
set aside for the quick, shoddy, replaceable commodities with which we now surround
ourselves” (p. 7). Instead of valuing permanence, we value the ephemeral. This
seems to reflect a self-awareness of the fleetingness of desire: “Desire has reserved to
itself the pure negating of the object…that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself
only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence” (Hegel 118).
In seeking to fulfill our desires, we do not seek to do the work to achieve it; constantly
working toward fulfilling desire would be an effort comparable to the eternal tasks
of Tantalus and Sisyphus. By focusing only on desire, we can only contemplate the
desire itself—we view things and others as means to an end.

These sorts of problems lead Taylor to identify the notion of the ethics
of authenticity. He argues that this system of ethics both “builds on earlier forms
of individualism” while also remaining “critical of disengaged rationality and of an
atomism that didn't recognize these ties of community” (p. 25). Thus, the ethics of
authenticity simultaneously recognizes the importance of the individual and the place
of the individual within a larger whole. In this regard, Taylor notes that “[there] is a
certain way of being human that is [our own] way” and that this particular “way” is
unique to the individual (p. 29). We have, then, an obligation to live up to this notion
of being in our own way. In order to lead an ethical life, we must be willing to seek
to claim that way which is peculiar to the individual. In so doing, we free ourselves
to begin to understand what it means to interact with others. It is important to note,
then, that this must be a reciprocal freedom; we cannot demand it for ourselves
while denying it to others. We must each be free to develop this notion of the self.
Without that caveat, Taylor’s ideas seem to reproduce the very individualism against
which he seeks to work. The notion of being human, of course, demands that the

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realization that while we may each interact as such uniquely, we are all acting as such. This implicitly argues toward a notion of community and connectedness that was not addressed within the purely individualist model of modernity.

This then leads Taylor to discuss the notion of recognition. It is recognition that is central to the notions of authenticity as an ethics for interactions. The recognition to which Taylor refers has two components: (1) it is a sense of self-awareness; and (2) it is an obligation to one another. In regard to the former, he writes, “My discovering my identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internalized, with others” (p. 47). That is, identities are not formed in a vacuum—we do not have the ability to create and sustain an identity without the input and output generated in social interaction. Identity, rather, relies on both our own projection of who we may be and the reaction of others to these notions of ourselves. Implicit in Taylor’s account is the idea that we must constantly be willing to revise our own considerations of ourselves as our interactions demand. If I claim to be a baker and no one recognizes me as such, then I must either amend my identity (perhaps I am an amateur baker) or I must attempt (foolishly) to try to operate as a baker without the recognition of those surrounding me.

Further, the notion of a social identity is far more external to us than we typically like to think. Taylor writes, “Social recognition [is] built in to the socially derived identity from the very fact that it [is] based on social categories everyone [takes] for granted” (p.47). The notion of the category, and claiming to operate within a certain category, is inherently dependent on the recognition of others because we rely upon conversations that are both past and present at once. That is, our claims to belong to a certain category depend upon that category both having been defined before our claim and being concurrently defined as we claim it. Unlike the individualist model, wherein we must struggle with one another to achieve our identity and its recognition, Taylor’s model of authenticity accounts for recognition as both a priori and under constant revision.

It is at this point that my ethics of regard diverges from Taylor’s ethics of authenticity. As a way of introducing this difference, I will briefly explicate Hegel’s master/slave dialectic. Hegel develops the model of the master and the slave, or the lord and the bondsman, as a way of addressing the shortcoming of the struggle model discussed earlier. Of these two, Hegel writes that “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 be for another” (p. 115). The lord/master is clearly the being-for-itself while the slave/bondsman exists to serve the pleasure of the lord. The master reflects Taylor’s critique of modernity in many ways. The master seeks to assert himself as the sole determining being and he also seeks to fulfill desire through the most efficient means possible: the slave.
However, the slave’s compliance is implicit to his servitude through his fear of the master. Hegel writes that “this consciousness [the slave] has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing, but its whole being has been seized with dread” (p. 117). This fear of the master, however, forces the slave to interact with the world, on the master’s behalf at first through the sort of work which “forms and shapes” (p. 118). On page 118, Hegel also makes the argument that through the formative labor of the slave, the slave “becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to him” and that he exists as separate from the master in his own right. Thus, it is the slave, according to Hegel, who truly gains a sense of stable self, of recognition, while the master is ever dependent on the slave to grant that. The slave, then, is able to interact and react with the world around him/her in a way that the master, as a being of desire, cannot. The slave at this point reflects Taylor’s notion that identity is socially derived, and that identity can only come about through our interactions with one another.

It is the slave upon whom I model the ethics of regard with two important differences. The first is in reference to the notion of the fear the slave experiences. While the slave’s fear is what allows for the realization of self to occur (by requiring work to appease the master), that fear is also intensely restrictive until the slave should ever reach that realization—it is not a given that the slave will—and it forces the slave to do as another being wills for a time. This seems very shaky grounds upon which to build an ethics for the individual; however, it has elements of necessity. Given that modernity encourages us to live entirely for the individual and utilize instrumental reasoning, we must often feel obligated to do the kind of work necessary to achieve ethical interactions. To that end, I argue that ethical interaction demands a level of caution from the individuals interacting.

The notion of caution refers to a restrained Hegelian fear. While we need not fear death as Hegel demands, we do need to worry over and interrogate both our intentions and our assumptions. What we intend in given interactions may not be aligned with what actually occurs. It is easy, and a natural inclination, to try to steer the interaction favorably on our behalf or more in line with our expectations. This, however, blinds us to the concerns of the other party or parties involved in the interaction. When we allow intentionality unrestricted to guide our actions, we attempt to view the world as being merely at our disposal. We act as though we are the master, and that is a dead end. Interaction with the world around us must come from more than our intentions. Instead, we must use prudent caution when we interact so that we can see both our own intended course and the actual reality.

Our assumptions can be equally detrimental to ethical interaction in several ways. One way in which assumption can be harmful is when we assume our experience as universal. It seems normal to assume that our lived reality is somehow common; it is only natural since that is the only sort of experience with which we are familiar. However, caution demands that we step back from that and instead seek to learn more about other lived experiences. It is important that we actively seek to
learn about these other experiences because another way in which our assumptions
can deter ethical interaction is by assuming the experiences of others for them. In
contemporary parlance, we might refer to this as “stereotyping.” When we stereotype,
we pigeon-hole; we assume from some sort of *a priori* “knowledge” that we can reach
certain conclusions about a person based upon the social categories into which we
see them fitting. In a similar manner to projecting our own experiences, we remove
the element of subjectivity from the person or persons in question. In so doing, we
reduce them to Objects which may or may not live up to our expectations. Caution is
then necessary to ethical interaction so that we remember to approach each situation
anew. We cannot allow pre-conceived intentions and assumptions to funnel the focus
of the interaction; instead, we must let it follow a natural course.

This brings me to the second difference from the example of the slave, and
also the key difference from Taylor’s ethics: regard. Both Hegel and Taylor depend for
their interaction ethics upon the notion of recognition. While recognition certainly
plays a part in my ethics, it is ultimately too shallow to fully account for the type of
ethics I seek to address. Recognition demands that we see another for what they wish
to claim to be and what they indicate in their interactions with us. It assumes that all
individuals have the ability to form their own unique identities. This, however, does
not seem to be equally the case for all individuals. For some, the notion of the socially
derived category exists merely as a negation of another category: “I am *x* because I
am not *y*.” Simone de Beauvoir discusses this in terms of gender when she discusses
masculinity as the positive and the neutral, and femininity as the negative. A number
of scholars discuss the notion race, especially in the context of the United States, in
these terms; in many ways, what it means to be Black or Latino is what it means to
not be white. An identity based in a negation of another hardly seems to be a proper
way of deriving identity.

Regard, then, demands that we look beyond these types of pre-generated
notions of identity. Even if we do revise them continually, we depend on assumptions
that limit the mobility of individuals among and between identities. To hold regard
for another is to look at the other as a being with the ability to both fit into these social
derivations and transcend them as needed. When we hold others in regard, we care
for them, after a fashion, as they themselves are unfettered by these identities. We
view these derivations as components and facets of the individual identity before us,
but not the complete whole. In so doing, we recognize and allow for the fluidity and
dynamism of identity. Only when we achieve that, can we claim to be interacting with
another individual rather than an amalgamation of thoughts and precedence. This,
then, is the very type of interaction the ethics of regard seeks to foster.

**Works Cited**


Skeptical of Academic Skepticism
Jonathan Carver

As told by Cicero, ‘Academic Skepticism’ (from now on just ‘Skepticism’) seems to be the idea that since the senses may be deceived, nothing can be perceived, and thus the truth and falsity of something (a presentation) cannot be known. In what follows I will examine the Skeptic’s main argument as presented in Cicero’s writings and discuss where I believe the Skeptics go wrong. To begin, in this passage Cicero recounts the Skeptic’s two basic propositions:

[The Skeptics] elaborate two propositions which, as it were, constitute this entire investigation. [1] When there are things that can be so presented that other things can be presented in the same way, and there is no difference between the two presentations, it is not possible that one group should be perceived and the other not. [2] However, [they say that] there is no difference, not just if they are of the same quality in all respects, but even if they cannot, in fact, be distinguished by the perceiver.\textsuperscript{15}

A common illustration of this idea is the “wax egg.” Even the keenest observer cannot distinguish between a real egg and a wax egg set side by side. The wax egg is presented to the eyes in the same way as the real egg. Obviously, we perceive both eggs, but we cannot be sure which is which. We cannot tell which the true presentation (the real egg) is and which is the false. We may think we perceive or apprehend something when in fact we have perceived something different, in which case our judgment would be false. The Skeptic asserts that this is true not just of wax eggs but of everything we can perceive. It may seem to me that I am sitting on a couch, when in reality I may be sitting on something else which only appears be a couch, but is actually something other than the couch I take it to be. Further, I may take myself to be understanding propositions about Skepticism, when in reality some other proposition is before my mind, and only appearing to me in this way. Because it is possible in every case that our perceptions may be mistaken, the Skeptic advises that we ought to “withhold assent” in order to avoid affirming something false.

This idea might seem somewhat silly at first. How would it be possible for there to be a false presentation of literally everything? Isn’t it true that there is a perceptible difference between the wax egg and the real egg? The wax egg would feel different from the real one, it wouldn’t crack as expected, and it wouldn’t taste very good either. And if it’s the same in every respect to the real egg, well, then how is it different from the real one? There’s something to these questions, I think, but the following example should help us to see that the Skeptical position shouldn’t be brushed off so lightly.

Imagine a world populated only with people afflicted with red/blue color blindness. In this world, the words “red” and “blue” are meaningless distinctions.
Shown a red wall and a blue wall, the people of this world judge them to be the same color. Life goes on without a single inkling that something is missing from the color wheel. Yet, they are deceived by the appearances. It remains true that there are red and blue walls, but this is completely unknown to the residents of our imaginary world. They are unable to even conceive of how, in terms of color, there might be a dichotomy in their perception.16 There would be no way to explain to them the error, or at least incompleteness, of their perception. Here, then, we can see how our perceptions (sensory perceptions at least) might be deceived while we are none the wiser, and indeed have no way to discover that our perception is mistaken. The Skeptic is definitely on to something. The Skeptical idea again, in the form of an argument:

(1) Some presentations are true, others false, (2) what is false cannot be perceived; but (3) every true presentation is such that there can be a false presentation of the same quality; and (4) with presentations which are such that there is no difference between them it cannot happen that some can be perceived while others cannot; therefore (Conclusion), there is no presentation which can be perceived.17

Premises (1) and (4) seem plausible enough, taken as the ideas that we may be mistaken about at least some of our perceptions, and that alike presentations are perceived as being alike. These ideas are illustrated by the wax egg and the argument from color blindness. Premise (2) is more ambiguous. It seems to me that the most plausible interpretation is that a false perception can't be recognized as such, though we can understand that there is the possibility of our perception being mistaken. The whole argument, as I see it, seems to turn on (3), and this is the most debatable premise.

Is it possible for there to be a false presentation of every quality? As Descartes informs us, it doesn't seem that thought itself could possibly be a mere illusion. I might be factually mistaken when I believe there is an orange in the next room, or that I am in fact deep within the bowels of Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory, but there isn't any way for me to be wrong about the fact that I at least believe it. I can be wrong about the contents of my beliefs, but not the fact that I believe them. Does the Skeptic apply this argument to his very beliefs as well? Antipater and Carneades disagreed:

But Antipater [the Stoic] demanded the very same thing, and said that it was consistent for him that affirmed that nothing could be perceived to say [at least] this one thing could be perceived, even if other things could not. Carneades argued against him with greater acuity: for, he said that, far from being consistent, it was in fact totally self-contradictory. For he who denies that there is anything that can be grasped makes no exceptions; therefore, it is necessary that not even [the claim that nothing can be grasped] can in any way be grasped and perceived, since it has not been excepted [from the
It seems clear from this exchange that the Skeptics include propositions (beliefs) as presentations. It seems also that Antipater and Carneades had each grasped a different half of the problem with the Skeptical position as formulated. Antipater saw that the Skeptic would have to affirm Skepticism in order to apply it, and Carneades understood that the Skeptic cannot exclude anything from his Skepticism. They each grasped one horn of a dilemma: if the Skeptic affirms his Skepticism, then there is at least one presentation that can be perceived, and this contradicts his claim that nothing can be perceived. And if the Skeptic does not assent to his Skepticism, as consistency requires, then whence his Skepticism? He does not assent to it, after all. The situation seems to get even worse when we realize that there are many things that the Skeptic must affirm in order to present an argument (which he is in fact doing). He must affirm the legitimacy of logical connections, non-contradiction, the presentations of soundness and plausibility, and probably a host of other concepts like ‘greater than’ and ‘less than.’ Does the Skeptic apply his hypothesis to these concepts as well? If the Skeptic withholds assent from these, he necessarily has no argument, or at best he has an argument to which no one has reason to assent. If he does assent to these basic principles, then he obviously affirms something and thus refutes himself. Essentially, then, if (3) is true, then the Skeptic cannot know it to be true (he may be mistaken about it), and he cannot argue for its truth (if he similarly withholds judgment about the validity of argument, as it seems he must). He may assert the principle all he wants, but we are free to reject it.

All this said, the there are important, positive lessons we can learn from the Skeptic. First, it is certainly possible for us to be mistaken, even in ways that may never be apparent to us. We ought to avoid dogmatism and constantly examine our own doctrines with care and diligence. A little humility never hurt anyone. Second, we need to be willing to see issues from multiple perspectives. The Skeptics were known for ‘arguing both sides of the question,’ and arguing both plausibly. As well as being valuable mental exercise, seeing both sides of the question puts us in a position where we are less apt to miss ideas that might contribute to our own understanding. Numenius seems to indicate, however, that unlike these principles, the value of Academic Skepticism seems to fade with time:

As time went by and their doctrine of suspension of judgment lost the impact of its novelty, Philo could not maintain his previous way of thinking, but rather the clarity and consistency of his experiences began to turn him around. Having so much clarity in his insights, he was extremely eager, you may be sure, to find someone who would refute him so that he would not appear to have turned his back and fled of his own accord.
Footnotes

2. Ibid, 6.
3. Ibid, 5.
5. Ibid, 337.

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid, 211.
13. See Ayer’s *The Elimination of Metaphysics* in *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*.
14. Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a Russian philosopher and scholar who worked heavily with literary theory and philosophy of language throughout the 1920s, but whose work was fairly unknown until rediscovered in the 1960s by Russian scholars.
16. Try, for example, to imagine a new color. Some philosophers think that colors exist only in the mind, as “color” is not part of the language of physics and chemistry. There are no colors “out there” on the surface of objects and appearing to us; the physical world is actually colorless.