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Honors College

Gratia Eruditionis

"for the sake of knowledge"

Volume Nine

Lament, Presence, and Re-Storying: The Limitations of Theodicy and a Communal Response to Suffering

Alexander Brouwer

To Address the Soul:
Dostoevsky's Active Love
Informs Bakhtin's Polyphony

Brianna Askew

Insufficient Self-Salvation:
The Limitations of David Hume's and Immanuel Kant's Anthropocentric Moralities

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Milton's Mythology and Augustine's Theology: Milton's use of the Proserpine Simile to Foreshadow His Incorporation of Augustinian Theology

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Songs, Shrouds and Stories:
Weaving Power on the Ancient Greek Loom

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Compilers, Qualia, and the Human Mind

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Acknowledgements

Gratia Eruditionis is the collection of six award-winning research papers written by undergraduate students in the Honors College at Azusa Pacific University. This publication was inspired by Jennifer Walsh, Ph.D. during her tenure as Faculty Director of the Common Day of Learning (2008-2012). Featured students submitted their papers for the annual Honors College Paper Competition. These papers were blindly reviewed by a Review Committee made up of honors faculty and staff. The selected students are not only published in this book but also received a small monetary award to further their personal libraries.

It is important to note that this publication could not have been created without the support of Vicky Bowden, Ph.D., Vice Provost of Undergraduate Programs, Diane Guido, Ph.D., Vice Provost for Graduate Programs and Research, and David Weeks, Ph.D., Dean of the Honors College. We thank Emily Griesinger, Ph.D., Department of English, Alan Oda, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, and Francis Clement, Director of Strategic Initiatives for the Honors College, who served on the Review Committee. We are especially grateful to the faculty members who serve in the Honors College for all their dedication to and support of our students' academic endeavors.

As we read the essay submissions, we were humbled and in awe of the incredible work of our students. We hope you find these essays to be as thought-provoking and insightful as we did. We congratulate Alexander Brouwer, Bri Askew, Logan Cain, Angela Pham, Caleb Agron, and Nicholas Chera for their hard work.

Rhonda Roberts
Executive Assistant
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Foreword

This ninth issue of *Gratia Eruditionis* highlights the winners of Azusa Pacific University's annual Honors Paper Competition. For nine consecutive years, this paper completion was an opportunity for Honors students to share their scholarship during the Common Day of Learning and through the publication of this monograph. This will be the final issue of this publication. Starting next year, the Honors College will turn its attention to publishing a new publication series that will feature the work of seniors completing the Oxbridge Tutorial.

This issue contains six scholarly papers by Alexander Brouwer, Bri Askew, Logan Cain, Angela Pham, Caleb Agron, and Nicholas Chera. These six undergraduate authors were chosen by a faculty review committee from a pool of outstanding papers. Their work continues a longstanding tradition of excellent undergraduate scholarship.

The Honors Program at APU was launched in 1992 by Carole Lambert, Ph.D. The initial group of twenty students participated in special courses designed to challenge them with a curriculum that provided greater depth, intensity, and intellectual rigor than standard university classes.

Under the subsequent directorship of Mel Shoemaker, D.Min. (1995-2004) the program grew and began to admit forty students a year. Annual cultural events and opportunities to study in England at Oxford University were added to the program. During the fall semester of 2000 Joseph Bentz, Ph.D., served as Interim Director while Mel Shoemaker was a visiting scholar at Oxford University. In 2004-2005 Mark Eaton, Ph.D., served as Interim Director for the program until Vicky Bowden, Ph.D., began her distinguished stint as Honors Program Director (2005-2013). In July of 2013, the Honors Program became the Honors College. I am very grateful to all who have led and supported Honors at APU since its inception. Their good work laid the foundation for the formation of the Honors College.

I hope you enjoy these student essays and join with me in applauding their good work.

David L. Weeks, Ph.D.
Dean, Honors College
March 2017

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Lament, Presence, and Re-Storying: The Limitations of Theodicy and a Communal Response to Suffering

Alexander Brouwer



Alex Brouwer is a senior Youth Ministry major who will be graduating in May and serving in the Peace Corps. Last spring he studied philosophy, theology, and literature at Oxford University. This paper is an outgrowth of his tutorial on evil and suffering and exhibits his passion for meaningful conversations about diverse human experiences, liberation theology, and ministry. He would like to extend his gratitude to Dr. Margaret Adam, tutor of theology, ethics, and philosophy at St. Stephen's House Oxford, England, for her patience, wisdom, and guidance.

Abstract

Theodicy, the attempt to explain and justify God's allowance of evil, has become central to contemporary discussions on suffering due to modernity and atheistic arguments against God. Modernity's emphasis on human intellect, progress, and autonomy served as an impetus for theodical discourse. The prominence and extent of suffering in today's world stands as an affront to modern presuppositions about humanity and the world. In response, theodicy upholds modern presuppositions and attempts to theoretically defend the nature and actions of God in light of suffering. As the veracity of modern thought has come under question, the limitations of theodicy have also become apparent. Theodicies wrongfully posit an abstract, ahistorical understanding of God, impose meaning on people in suffering, and neglect a communal response to alleviating suffering. Alternatively, a practical, communal approach to suffering recognizes the severity of suffering while providing space for lament, comforting presence, and hopeful re-storying.

I. Introduction

Over the last few centuries, the practice of theodicy has been at the forefront of the discussion of evil. According to the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, the term theodicy describes attempts to explain and justify God's permission of evil and suffering.¹ Although theodicies encompass many forms and types of evil and suffering, this paper will focus primarily on human suffering. Particular theodical questions shape this discussion. If God is all-powerful and all-good, why does evil exist? If God allows evil, how can God's actions be justified? More experientially—if God exists, why do bad things happen? Questions like these arise out of modernity. Within this paper, modernity will refer to patterns of thought beginning in the 17th-18th century which placed faith in human reason, progress, and independence while questioning tradition. The existence and inexplicableness of immense suffering and evil has contributed to the deterioration of these modern ideals. Confidence in human capabilities to prevent or resist evil has diminished along with the supposed autonomy of the individual. Because modernity is a foundation and impetus for theodicy, critiques of modern thought often apply to theodicies. Theodical questions posit an ahistorical, abstract understanding of God, diminish the severity of suffering and the experiences of others, and neglect a communal response to alleviate suffering.

Alongside theologians like Stanley Hauerwas and Mark Scott who see evil and suffering as a practical problem, the following question should become foundational for a Christian discussion of suffering—how does a community of believers attempt to understand and respond to suffering?² A practical response to suffering does not diminish its horrific nature or the centrality of Christian community. Within the context of the Christian community, one may find the courage to mourn and lament while creating a new story of God's presence and hope through which to understand one's life.

¹ Michael J. Murray, "Theodicy." *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (March 2011), 354. Along with this definition, Murray explains that a convincing theodicy must meet the following three conditions in order to give morally sufficient reasons for God's allowance of evil: (1) the good secured by the evil would not have been secured unless the evil occurred, (2) the greater good which results from the evil "sufficiently outweighs" the evil, and (3) the entity allowing the evil has the right to allow the evil to occur.

² Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 51; Mark S. Scott, "Theodicy at the Margins: New Trajectories for the Problem of Evil." *Theology Today* 68, no. 2 (2011): 150.

II. Modernism as an Impetus for Theodicy

When examining the fundamental questions which provide impetus for theodicy, it may be beneficial to recognize the origination, presuppositions, and importance of such questions. Universal attempts to explain evil have not always been central to discussions on evil and suffering. In fact, medieval theologians like Saint Anselm (11th c.) focused on creation and how the ontological nature of evil could be problematic.³ Moreover, the term theodicy was not coined until 1710 by Gottfried Leibniz.⁴ Modern thought laid the framework for theodical questions and the apparent need for such questions to be answered. Modernity stresses the prominence of human intellect and reason, the inevitable progress of humanity, and the independence of the individual to create one's own meaning. All three concepts lay the foundation for a person affected by modernism to view theodicy as a necessity and central to a discussion on suffering.

Modernity emphasizes human capabilities to explain the world through reason and intellect. Out of this context, modern atheism emerged as an alternative to traditional religion. Many atheistic arguments (like those proposed by J. L. Mackie and Paul Draper) attack theism theoretically and posit God as an abstract principle.⁵ In many arguments, God is detached from history, and God's attributes are absolute and clearly defined. If God is understood in this manner, the existence of evil and the characteristics of God appear incompatible.⁶ For example, philosopher William Rowe argues the existence of pointless evils like animal suffering are logically incompatible with the existence of God.⁷ Exhibiting similar trust in human reason, theodicies attempt to defend an abstract concept of God by explaining and justifying suffering.

³ Siobhan Nash-Marshall, "Saint Anselm and the Problem of Evil, or On Freeing Evil From the 'Problem of Evil'." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52.4, no. 108 (December 2008): 455-456.

⁴ Murray, "Theodicy," 354.

⁵ J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64, no. 254 (April 1955): 200-12 and Paul Draper, "The Problem of Evil," *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (March 2011).

⁶ Just as atheists and Christian theists may posit different understanding of God (e.g. solely theistic vs. Trinitarian perspective), so they often will argue from differing understandings of the nature and existence of evil. These preliminary differences make discussion or debate on the issue difficult and problematic. The scope of this paper does not permit this issue to be addressed further.

⁷ See William L. Rowe, "Friendly Atheism, Skeptical Theism, and the Problem of Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 59 (2006): 79-92. In this article, he reworks his original argument found in his 1979 article "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism."

The apparent need for theodicy and a theoretical explanation of suffering arose alongside modern atheism within the last three centuries.⁸ The centrality of theodical questions is not timeless but emerged because of an abstract understanding of God and a trust in human capacity to explain the world.

Modern presuppositions about human progress also contributed to the current understanding of evil and the framing of theodical questions. In line with its reliance on human intellect and reason, modernity proposes that humanity will inevitably progress and advance technologically, socially, and scientifically. Human flourishing in this life becomes the goal, and humans are portrayed as having the necessary strength and competence to accomplish this goal. Under these presuppositions, the modern mind sees horrific suffering as unexpected and shocking as they do not fit into this story of human progress. Some instances of evil and suffering seem beyond explanations and beyond human control. For Irving Greenberg, a Jewish-American scholar, the Holocaust shattered “modern Western culture” and its “promise of redemption of the world and the perfection of human living conditions.”⁹ For many modern people, events like the Holocaust are impossible to reconcile with the narrative of human progress.

Within this modern context, theodicy arises as an attempt to remedy this problem by providing explanations of suffering. Theodical questions aim to show how suffering is congruent with human progress and God’s providence. The questions take on particular urgency within modernity’s influence. Suffering is more offensive under the assurance of comfort and safety. The sickness of a loved one is more disturbing under the presupposition that modern medicine is capable of curing disease. Similarly, the promise of prosperity makes the presence of poverty more appalling. The destruction of a tsunami may be more disorienting if one holds to belief that humans are capable of controlling their destinies. This is not to say that experiences of evil and suffering should be minimized or discounted. Rather, the emphasis here is that theodical questions are only seen as indispensable under the affirmation of human progress.

Alongside the affirmation of human reason and progress, modernity upholds individualism and autonomy. Before modernity, the stories and identity of one’s community typically served as a foundation from which one’s life

and experiences could be understood and given meaning. Modernity feels restricted by such narratives. In modern thought, people are seen as capable of acting independently and creating their own sources of meaning.¹⁰ Within this perspective, one is capable of thinking, living, and acting apart from others and creating one’s own stories that give life meaning and purpose.

Under this modern perception of human independence, the inexplicability of some instances of evil raises serious questions. Some instances of suffering shatter a person’s worldview and are inexplicable within the stories he or she creates to make life meaningful.¹¹ Again theodicies attempt to solve these issues by providing universal explanations that people can adopt to give meaning to their suffering. Modernity and theodicy often claim such explanations are both beneficial and necessary. In reality, theodicy may be neither.

III. The Limitations of Modernity and Theodicy

Over the past few decades, many Christian theologians like Hauerwas, Tilley, and Hart have criticized modernism and the theodical approach to evil.¹² The modern beliefs discussed previously (reason, progress, and independence) have been challenged by postmodern thought and instances of horrific suffering. As modern thought is challenged, the resulting theodicies are as well. Theodicies often lead to four problems: (1) adopting abstract, ahistorical understandings of God, (2) imposing meaning on people who suffering, (3) approaching theological discourse outside the context of those in suffering, (4) failing to recognize human dependence and the severity of suffering.

Arising from atheistic critiques of theism and modern trust in reason, theodical questions presuppose an ability to understand God apart from both God’s historical, narrative revelation and a community of believers.¹³ This approach to God creates numerous theological problems. A strictly theoretical approach restricts God to a set of principles or beliefs that can be proven true or false. God becomes a concept detached from real life experiences and the

¹⁰ Mary E. Lowe, “‘Rabbi, Who Sinned?’ Disability Theologies and Sin,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 3 (September 2012): 191.

¹¹ Kathleen M. Sands, “Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism in the Time after Time,” *New Literary History* 35, no. 1 (2004): 42; Hauerwas, 3.

¹² See Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences*; Scott, “Theodicy at the Margins,” Terrence Tilley, “Theodicies in Context,” *CTSA Proceedings* 50 (1995): 205-11; and David B. Hart, “Tsunami and Theodicy,” *First Things* 151, (March 2005): 6-9.

¹³ Hauerwas, 53.

⁸ Hauerwas, 41.

⁹ Irving Greenberg, “Theology After the Shoah: The Transformation of the Core Paradigm,” *Modern Judaism* 26, no. 3 (October 2006), 215.

goal of Christianity, like modernity, becomes explaining the way things are.¹⁴ From a biblical perspective, God reveals God's character and relationship to the world in the sphere of history.¹⁵ God is known through the narratives of God's covenant with Israel, God's revelation in Jesus Christ, and God's continued presence in the Church through the Holy Spirit. Additionally, within theodical discussions, theologians generally defend a generic, monotheistic God and neglect Trinitarian perspectives and the importance of Christology. Generally theodicies do not include Trinitarian considerations because their main aim is to defend the abstract God atheists presuppose. In whole, the centrality of God's historical revelation through narrative is largely overlooked by theodicies that posit an abstract concept of God.

In line with modernity's trust in human reason and capabilities, theodicies presuppose universal questions and answers. Coming from a theoretical angle, theologians and philosophers grant themselves the freedom to speculate regarding all instances of suffering and attempt to arrive at far-reaching conclusions. In its attempt to provide all-encompassing explanations, theodicy diminishes the severity of people's suffering and does little to relieve their suffering.¹⁶ When theodicies attempt to give ultimate meaning to all instances of suffering as part of God's providential plan, the pain and suffering of people is glorified as either a means to a greater good now or in the afterlife. Such efforts discredit people's horrifying experiences of suffering by attributing them to God's will. In response, those in suffering might begin to view God as a tyrant who brings about evil for God's own purposes.¹⁷

Moreover, a universal approach lacks history and context, neglecting people's actual experiences of suffering.¹⁸ Each person's experience of suffering is unique.¹⁹ Because of one's context, one will inevitably ask different questions in search of particular answers.²⁰ For example, one person in the midst of suffering may desire to embrace it and search for the greater good while an-

¹⁴ Hauerwas, 55.

¹⁵ Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity After the Holocaust," in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust* (2007): 507.

¹⁶ Tilley, 206.

¹⁷ Hauerwas, 89.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Hauerwas, 3; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 25.

²⁰ Hauerwas, 44-45.

other person may reject the idea that his or her suffering will be beneficial. To assume universal questions and answers disregards each person's experience of suffering and also the larger context of suffering.

When disregarding people's unique contexts and experiences, theodicy may also be excluding the voices of suffering people from the theological discussion. Theodical questions assume that theological discourse on suffering can occur apart from the input and experiences of those who are suffering. The following questions arise: Who has the right to ask questions concerning suffering and determine its meaning? Are theologians just in providing answers to other people's suffering apart from their input? Liberation theologians like James Cone and Miguel De La Torre have adamantly critiqued biblical interpretations and theological discourse from centers of power and privilege that oppress suffering, marginalized people.²¹ Granting meaning to other people's suffering without their consent or opinion is unjust and can perpetuate suffering. Before this point is defended, a possible objection will be addressed regarding the theoretical nature of theodicy.

In response to the previous critique on theoretical discourse, advocates of theodicy like philosopher Eleonore Stump argue that a theoretical and mainly acontextual approach actually avoids imposing meaning on people's unique situations. She argues that theodical discourse can be detached from specific historical experiences of suffering because of its theoretical nature.²² While it is true that most theodicies do not address specific instances of suffering, they attempt to provide universal answers and must draw from human experiences. Theodical discussions must incorporate real human experiences of suffering if the goal is to explain such suffering. Reflection on God and suffering cannot happen in a vacuum like theodicy presupposes.²³ Although not directed at specific contexts, theodicy's claim of universal answers applies to everyone.

Contrasting modernity's hope in human independence, many academics have shown how true autonomy is impossible. The idea that humans have the

²¹ Miguel A. De La Torre, *The Politics of Jesús: A Hispanic Political Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 11-16 and James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 119 & 147-150.

²² Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

²³ Hauerwas, 45.

capacity to independently give meaning to their lives is inherently flawed.²⁴ As philosopher Michel Foucault recognized, human identities are formed through the stories society tells about them.²⁵ Humans are defined by their position in relationship to others.²⁶ What it means to be human is not the ability for autonomy but the necessity for dependence on others.²⁷ In fact, for any semblance of autonomy to be possible, humans must grant and sustain such autonomy.²⁸ The words of the South African concept of *ubuntu* ring true, “A person is a person through other people.”²⁹

The individualistic approach of many theodicies is also problematic because it neglects the role of Christian community. God’s historical revelation is meant to be interpreted within the context of a worshiping community. Christianity is more conversion and participation in a body of believers than it is mental assent to a set of beliefs.³⁰ One participates in the life of the community to collectively interpret the differing ways God has revealed Godself throughout history. The importance of historical, communal interpretation is repeatedly neglected by theodicies.

The reality of human dependence and the dangers of theodical questions are especially apparent in light of horrific suffering. Some instances of evil cannot be given sufficient meaning or fit into the story of one’s life.³¹ Christians and non-Christians alike recognize the way some experiences of suffering and evil damage or destroy one’s vitality and capacity for creating meaning.³² As Hauerwas puts it, “we cannot situate [some suffering] in any ongoing story carried by a community that can make this suffering person’s

²⁴ John Swinton, “Whose Story Am I? Redescribing Profound Intellectual Disability in the Kingdom of God,” *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 15, no. 5-19 (2011): 11.

²⁵ Lowe, 189-190.

²⁶ Ibid., 190.

²⁷ John Swinton, “Who is the God We Worship? Theologies of Disability; Challenges and New Possibilities,” *IJPT* 14 (2011): 292.

²⁸ Swinton, “Whose Story Am I,” 11-12.

²⁹ Michael O. Eze, *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa* (N.p.: AIAA, 2010), 190.

³⁰ Hauerwas, 55.

³¹ Kenneth Surin, “Impassibility of God and the Problem of Evil,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35, no. 2 (April 1982): 103.

³² Marilyn M. Adams, “God Because of Evil: A Pragmatic Argument from Evil for Belief in God.” *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil* (2013): 162; Rowe, 79-80; and Sands, 42.

life its own.”³³ Theodicy attempts to create such a story and situate people’s experiences of suffering within a framework of meaning. Although the aim is to provide answers, such answers may not exist.

In the presence of severe suffering, theoretical explanations may be more harmful than beneficial. In the face of dying children, all speculation about meaning is shallow.³⁴ In the wake of a Tsunami and the death of thousands of individuals, an explanation to victims regarding the possible “greater good” is abhorrent.³⁵ These instances are not times for acceptance of fate but times of sorrow and grief. A more effective response to suffering will not be found in an individual quest for intellectual answers, but in the participation within a community where suffering is voiced, absorbed, and “re-storyed.”

IV. Communal Christian Response to Suffering

Recognizing the limitations and problems of theodicy and modernity, theologians and philosophers should begin asking different questions within theological discourse on suffering. Shifting from theodical questions to practical questions like “how should a community of believers respond to suffering?” avoids many of the problems raised by theodicies and a modern understanding of God. Within the scope of this paper, extensive plans for interpreting, resisting, and alleviating suffering cannot be given. Instead, three ways a community of believers can respond to those who have experienced or are experiencing immense suffering will be considered—lament, presence, and the process of “re-storying.” Through these communal practices, suffering can be grieved but not glorified, comforted but not forgotten, and given hope but not diminished.

Rather than be encouraged to accept and embrace suffering, a person can find space within a Christian community to grieve and lament. While theodicies often affirm ultimate meaning in suffering, a practical response may avoid imposing meaning by instead allowing the people themselves to honestly reflect and lament. In the midst of suffering, people often struggle to live with the dialectic of belief and disbelief, hope and despair. James Cone’s description of the African American struggle for faith during the lynching era illustrates this dialectic: “Faith and doubt were bound together, with each a check against the other—doubt preventing faith from being too sure of itself

³³ Hauerwas, 2.

³⁴ Hauerwas, 1; Wolterstorff, 34-35, 66-67.

³⁵ Hart, 1-2.

and faith keeping doubt from going down into the pit of despair.”³⁶ Within a community of believers these emotions and struggles should not be disregarded or ridiculed. The Psalms reveal these struggles for faith to be examples of faithful, authentic response in relationship to God.³⁷ Praising God is not limited to joy and thankfulness, but includes acknowledging pain, sorrow, and disbelief. Allowing the space to express struggles, a community gives power and voice back to the sufferers. People in the midst of suffering are now given the ability to shape the communal search for understanding and restoration.

Lament not only provides space for honest grief and reflection, but also shapes a community’s understanding and response to suffering.³⁸ Lament helps a community acknowledge the severity of evil and suffering in the world. Although most Psalms shift from despair to hope, some end in grief and frustration. Psalm 88 ends in despair—“the darkness is my closest friend.” To lament is to express the depth of one’s pain which makes clear the severity of suffering in the world. Lament does not discount suffering by explaining how it fits in to an understanding of progress or providence, a community is enabled to see it as wrong and opposed to God’s kingdom.³⁹ When the reality of evil and suffering is admitted, a community is shaped to respond with liberating protest and restoration rather than passive acceptance. The first step to relieve and transform people’s situations is recognizing suffering does not reflect God’s desires or kingdom. In the words of theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff, author of *Lament for a Son*, “The mourners are those who have caught a glimpse of God’s new day, who ache with all their being for that day’s coming, and who break out into tears when confronted with its absence [...] mourners are aching visionaries.”⁴⁰ The impetus for a community to fight evil and alleviate suffering is acknowledging the horrific nature of both through communal lament.

The communal practice of lament might lead to despair without a commu-

³⁶ Cone, 131.

³⁷ Hauerwas, 30.

³⁸ Ibid., 82-83.

³⁹ Derek Nelson, “David Bentley Hart. The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 48, no. 4 (December 2009): 396 and Wolterstorff, 66-67. Wolterstorff wisely recognizes the mysterious balance that must be held between God’s providence and God’s character. He cannot bring himself to say God *caused* his son to die, but he also cannot say God could not have done anything about it. He says he can only endure. This is a powerful example of the need for a communal, practical response to suffering.

⁴⁰ Wolterstorff, 85-86.

nity’s presence, comfort, and “absorption” of the suffering. When words and theories do not suffice, the strongest act of consolation may be one’s loving presence.⁴¹ Suffering reminds a community of the fallacy of complete autonomy. By mourning alongside sufferers in comforting embrace, a community can share the burden of suffering, absorbing some of the pain.⁴² One prevalent burden of suffering is the feeling of God’s abandonment. Many people in suffering cry out as Christ did, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:45 NIV) As a response to the isolating nature of suffering, a community of believers functions as the tangible representation of the presence and care of God. Even if the pain cannot be removed, one may be comforted by the recognition that one has not been abandoned or forgotten.⁴³ From this place of solidarity, a person can then be encouraged to rediscover meaning, faith, and hope.

The process of “re-storying” one’s life involves exploring new interpretations of past experiences, faithfully moving forward, and never losing sight of the eschatological hope found in Christ. In contrast to the individuality of modernity, a community’s stories about God and suffering shape an understanding of one’s experiences.⁴⁴ In order to better understand one’s experiences, one can benefit from re-storying one’s life in the light of God’s character and God’s revelation in Christ. Questions regarding suffering must take place in the context of God’s goodness and Christ’s suffering and death.⁴⁵ Above all, a community of believers must uphold the faithful, covenantal love of God towards humans.⁴⁶ Within this context, one may be able to re-story one’s suffering to include an understanding of God’s constant presence and care. Held in tension by practices of lament, this affirmation of God’s nature does not lead to the glorification of suffering but rather to the comfort of God’s character and presence.

People in suffering may also choose to re-story their suffering in light of Christ’s suffering. The scope of this paper does not include a comprehensive analysis of the Trinity’s relationship to suffering, but some people may experience comfort by recognizing Christ’s solidarity with human suffering. Christ,

⁴¹ Ibid., 34.

⁴² Hauerwas, 49.

⁴³ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁴ Swinton, “Whose Story am I,” 6.

⁴⁵ Hauerwas, 79.

⁴⁶ Swinton, “Who is the God We Worship,” 302.

as both God and man, experienced the pain of human life and suffered horrific pain and shame on the cross. Wolterstorff reflects, “To redeem our brokenness and lovelessness the God who suffers with us did not strike some mighty blow of power but sent his son to suffer *like us* [...] Instead of explaining our suffering God shares it.”⁴⁷ He goes further and states love’s nature (and therefore God’s nature) is to suffer—“To love our suffering sinful world is to suffer [...] God is suffering love.”⁴⁸ Although this lacks a deeper Trinitarian distinction between God the Father and God the Son, his statements are honest reflections on his experience of suffering. Many people like Wolterstorff have found comfort in solidarity with Christ’s suffering.

One may also decide to view patience and endurance in suffering as imitating the life Christ.⁴⁹ The difference exists here between affirming the suffering itself and affirming the patience and endurance of the sufferer. The suffering itself is not glorified, but the virtues necessary to remain faithful in suffering can be. Such a viewpoint should not be imposed on others as theodicies might, but one may choose to re-story their experiences in this way.

As a community of believers offers possibilities to re-story and understand suffering, it can also provide ways to respond to suffering. How should one live now? What can be gained from these experiences? Having lamented the severity of suffering, one might recognize the ways suffering enables one to serve God and others. For example, one may come to realize that suffering can lead to growth in empathy and the ability to empathize with other people’s suffering.⁵⁰ Suffering can also produce character, perseverance, or greater appreciation for the good that remains in life.⁵¹ While not needing to accept these as reasons for suffering, a community can encourage people to search for possible benefits of suffering as ways to move forward.

A Christian response to suffering is not complete without the affirmation of ultimate hope of God’s redemption. Often within theodical discussions the hope of resurrected life is used to diminish suffering. Yet hope in God’s escha-

tological redemption often does not change the actuality of suffering.⁵² One finds in Revelation 21 that pain, suffering, and evil will not prevail in the end. Hope comes in the longing for the consummation of God’s kingdom and the restoration of all creation. God’s eternal kingdom is not the *meaning* behind suffering but the *end* of suffering. Alongside attempts to be honest about suffering, a community must not lose hope in God’s ultimate triumph.

This hope and trust can provide not only comfort, but also the impetus for Christian practice and service. When a community recognizes the disparity between the extent of suffering in the world and the reality of God’s kingdom, it is challenged to transform the world through God’s enablement to reflect that reality. Despite inevitable human limitations, Christian communities must resist the pain, suffering, and evil in the world and participate in God’s work of redemption and restoration.

V. Conclusion

In regard to suffering, humanity’s hope does not lie in modern affirmations of reason, progress, and independence or universal, theodical answers. These responses neglect the unique experiences of those who suffer and legitimize, diminish, and perpetuate suffering. Alternatively, a practical response to suffering from a community of believers can provide space for grief, comfort, and newfound meaning.

⁴⁷ Wolterstorff, 81.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁹ Hauerwas, 87-89.

⁵⁰ Wolterstorff, 72-73.

⁵¹ Ibid., 96-97.

⁵² Ibid., 31. Wolterstorff shares how the hope of heaven was real to him, but that did not change the reality of his son’s death. In the present, his son was still gone and that is his sorrow.

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To Address the Soul: Dostoevsky's Active Love Informs Bakhtin's Polyphony

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Brianna is double majoring in Psychological Science and Humanities at Azusa Pacific University and hopes to attend graduate school in the field of neurolinguistics. This paper grew from her interest in literary critical theory and her love of Dostoevsky, both of which were sparked by her mentor Dr. Christopher Noble at the High Sierra study abroad program. She pursues a deeper understanding of the convergence of critical theory, the humanities, and neuroscience, and ultimately hopes to utilize her education by becoming a professor.

Abstract

Literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin describes the structure of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* as a polyphonic dialogue: an earnest, open discourse between many equal voices, in which the author does not speak through the characters but with them. The characters who best engage in the polyphonic dialogue open themselves up to the ideas of others with vulnerable reverence. One idea that pervades the dialogue is Zosima's active love, which encourages its disciples to humbly hold themselves responsible for the trespasses of all. This paper will argue that, of all the ideas in the text, active love is the most fitting and suitable for a person to hold because it acknowledges the fundamental interconnectedness of humanity. One can observe the revitalization that active love effects by examining the transfer of active love from Zosima's pupil, Alyosha Karamazov, to the schoolboy Kolya Krasotkin. Initially, young Kolya is isolated and fearful of vulnerability. When he meets Alyosha, he perceives a superior, more fitting way of living, and relinquishes his pride so as to engage more deeply in the human experience. While the polyphonic structure is similar to active love in that it references humanity's interconnectedness, active love takes the message further by calling individuals to live an absurdly rapturous life of responsibility to one another.

"Health and Strength, radical pessimism and an ardent faith in redemption, a thirst for life and a longing for death—here all these things wage a struggle that is never to be resolved. Violence and goodness, proud arrogance and sacrificial humility—all the immense fullness of life is embodied in the most vivid form in every particle of his work."

The most fundamental truths of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* are oriented around the change that occurs in the characters as they engage the world, and one another, more deeply. Dostoevsky translator Richard Pevear explains in his introduction to the novel that "what unfolds before Dostoevsky is... a world of consciousnesses mutually illuminating one another" through the platform of dialogue.² According to literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, whose interpretation of Dostoevsky is well-regarded, *The Brothers Karamazov* implements a new literary structure which Bakhtin calls *polyphony*: a dialogue of many "whole, profoundly individualized voices," in which the author does not speak through the characters but with them.³ The characters are pulled into the dialogue even more deeply by their yearning to solidify their own *idea*, their own framework by which they can discern their own nature, and their responsibility to others. This earnest desire fosters a collective openness to one another that functions as the subtext of the novel. The polyphonic conversation is dominated by two contrary theories regarding one's responsibility to others: Ivan's negation of interpersonal obligation and Father Zosima's active love. As a modern materialist, Ivan claims that the individual is naturally isolated and responsible for no one else. Active love, on the other hand, holds that the individual is fundamentally bound to those in her world, and cannot be fully understood without her context. Therefore, he who "separates his unit

1 Otto Kaus, *Dostojewski und sein Schicksal [Dostoevsky and his Fate]* (Berlin, GE: E. Laub'sche, 1923), 36.

2 Pevear, Richard, and Volokhonsky, Larissa. Introduction to *Demons: A Novel in Three Parts* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Translated and annotated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, NY: Vintage books, 1995); Richard Pevear, introduction to *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Trans. Richard Pevear, Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), xvii. Vladimir Seduro also describes the characters as "polemical and always open to the consciousness of another." *Dostoyevski in Russian Literary Criticism: 1846-1956* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1957), 214.

3 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Ed., trans. Caryl Emerson, introd. Wayne C. Booth, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 8 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 93; Ned Goertzen, "The Three Metamorphoses of the Four Karamazovs," *Kinesis: Graduate Journal in Philosophy* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 45-76.

from the whole" will never feel complete contentment because he is antagonistic to the very reality of the human collective.⁴ Followers of Zosima live to counteract the unnatural isolation by showing brotherly love to all.⁵ Selfless acts serve as evidence for human benevolence: the more they are performed, the more humanity will believe in its own connectedness.

This paper will consider the transformation that the idea of active love inspires in its recipient and will ultimately reflect on its relation to the polyphony itself. Zosima's ethic of active love is transferred to his novice Alyosha Karamazov, who then passes it on to the schoolboy Kolya Krasotkin, whose resulting character arc will be the subject of the paper's examination. The revitalisation of Kolya illustrates that *the idea of active love is the most fitting and suitable one for a person to hold because it acknowledges the fundamental interconnectedness of humanity*.

Kolya Krasotkin, who begrudgingly mutters to those who ask that "he'll be fourteen quite soon," is the fiery, clever alpha of the local troupe of schoolboys who spend their days arguing, laughing, and exasperating their neighbors.⁶ In his first description, Dostoevsky suggests that Kolya is "extremely vain" but not conceited; his self-absorption comes from a distinct fear of inadequacy.⁷ Restricted by insecurity, he is capable only of perpetuating the materialist ideology he finds himself in. He therefore grabs hold of the idea that a man is someone who relies on his own strength, shuns intimacy, and mocks "sentimental slop."⁸ His haughty distance wins him the esteem of his peers, but loneliness pervades his spirit. In this initial state, Kolya's mantra of isolation keeps him from learning important lessons from his peers and warps his existence with fear.

Kolya's first conversation in the text is dominated by his self-importance. He is walking with his friend Smurov to the house of Ilyusha Snegiryov, a younger boy who was devoted to Kolya "like a slave" until Kolya felt they were becoming too intimate and cruelly repels him.⁹ Kolya's endless harassment

4 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Trans. Richard Pevear, Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 303.

5 Ibid., 304.

6 Ibid., 537.

7 Ibid., 515.

8 Ibid., 534.

9 Ibid..

finally causes Ilyusha to lash out in anger, which results in his banishment from the group. When Ilyusha falls ill, Kolya refuses to visit him, protecting his own superiority through his effect of apathy. His self-centeredness distances him from the actual human experience. It causes him to detach himself from the peers who would still his fears and show him the beauty of honest connection. Further, he criticizes all involved, calling their visits “silly sentimentalizing.”¹⁰ From this, Smurov senses that Kolya understands neither the magnitude of Ilyusha’s illness nor the profound emotional complexity of the visits; he mutters, “It’s nothing silly.”¹¹ Had he engaged Smurov with any humility at all, he would have gained a better understanding of the significance of the moments shared around the bedside of a dying child.

While the fiction he presents to his companions is cool, sharp, and aloof, the origin of that facade is, quite apparently, a stifling fear of being found inadequate. Kolya is smart enough to perceive the complexity of the world and honest enough to feel inadequate in its evaluation. Rather than responding in reverent humility, he embraces whatever idea will offer him instant security.¹² He feigns a cynical detachment not because he feels it himself or understands it, but because he wishes to appear academically weathered. This facade offers him nothing but esteem that he himself knows to be misplaced. He is afraid to play games with children for fear others would realize he enjoys it.¹³ He volunteers to lie between the tracks as a train rolls over him for the sake of his “reputation as a desperado,” only to fall sick with anxiety the next day; and he “always [goes] away from the mirror with indignation” at his small stature.¹⁴ He sees all signs of emotion as undignified, and criticizes Ilyusha’s father for crying because of the boy’s imminent death.¹⁵ Kolya’s cold individualism causes him to negate his natural need for companionship, ultimately confining him into a miserable creature that a human, especially a child, is never meant to be. However, Kolya is not a true cynic; he is just one of the many that has yet to be shown a better alternative.

¹⁰ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 534.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Alyosha later describes him as “terribly afraid of being ridiculous, and miserable because of it.” Dostoevsky, *Brothers*, 557.

¹³ Ibid., 537.

¹⁴ Ibid., 518.

¹⁵ Ibid., 772.

This changes when Kolya meets Alyosha, whom he encounters at Ilyusha’s home. Alyosha draws Kolya in by offering him the thing he craves most: affirmation. Even from their first interaction, Alyosha makes it clear that he will assume of Kolya the same responsibility as he would an adult. Alyosha meets Kolya outside in Russian winter weather, at the youth’s impolite request. Kolya asks after Ilyusha, and Alyosha tells the truth candidly, as one would to an adult: “Ilyusha is very bad, he will certainly die.”¹⁶ When Kolya makes claims, Alyosha assumes that they are the well-considered product of a competent mind and amiably asks him about them.¹⁷ He never tells Kolya what to believe or how to act but rather “[leaves] it precisely up to him, little Kolya, to resolve the question.”¹⁸ In doing so, he treats him as a worthy member of the polyphonic dialogue. The responsibility that Alyosha assumes of Kolya helps him to realize that the formation of his worldview is a solemn, private responsibility, and its articulation is more than just a tool one can use to impress others. Once Kolya understands the impact of his decisions, he realizes that the flippant rationalist system he has embraced has no place in settings of extreme suffering, where interpersonal reliance is so tangible.

Alyosha also offers Kolya a refuge from criticism, even as Kolya airily explains his falling-out with Ilyusha in the tone of one who is convinced of his own justification. He tells Alyosha that after he expels the child from the group, Ilyusha begins sitting with Smerdyakov, the Karamazov’s lackey. Eventually he learns a cruel prank from him—hiding a pin in a piece of bread—and uses it to inflict pain on a street dog. When Ilyusha runs to Kolya in tears of shame and regret, Kolya calls him a scoundrel and cuts off all communication with him. He admits that he does so not out of moral principle, but to impress upon the boy the reality that people are meant to be impassive, composed, and profoundly inaccessible.¹⁹ Kolya does not realize that his cruelty considerably exacerbates Ilyusha’s suffering, and maybe even causes his death. In his fevers, Alyosha has often heard him repeat: “I’m sick because I killed Zhuchka, papa, God is punishing me for it!”²⁰ What makes Kolya’s actions even worse is that, as Ilyusha wastes away with guilt thinking he has killed Zhuchka, in reality

¹⁶ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 533.

¹⁷ Miriam T. Sajkovic, *F. M. Dostoevsky: His Image of Man* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962) 167.

¹⁸ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 534.

¹⁹ Ibid., 557.

²⁰ Ibid., 536.

Kolya found him long ago. He hides the dog for weeks teaching him tricks to make the big reveal all the more flattering to himself. At this point, he sees little fault in his actions.

Rather than resenting Kolya for the agony he inflicts on Ilyusha, Alyosha finds a way to simultaneously express acceptance to Kolya and sorrow for Ilyusha. He details Ilyusha's misery, but never places blame on Kolya. The subtext of his speech conveys only the assumption that Kolya, as a rational and empathetic human being, would want to know the extent to which his actions affected Ilyusha. Kolya is comforted by Alyosha's kindness. At the same time, he is made to understand that he has been neglecting a major responsibility to his peers and might even have harmed his community by failing to seek truth in the proper way. Alyosha's message simultaneously offers Kolya a place in the interconnectedness and shows him its requirements of thoughtfulness and self-sacrifice.

Kolya has been suffering the repercussions of his profound isolation for some time, so Alyosha's gentle offer of inclusion overjoys him and takes immediate effect. He allows some excitement to show itself in his demeanor; he speaks "in an emotional and effusive voice" for the first time in the novel.²¹ He even begins to consider the needs of the other, and realizes that he is being incredibly rude in that very moment: "Ah, my God, but I'm keeping you out here!" Kolya suddenly cried. 'You're just wearing a jacket in such cold, and I'm keeping you—see, see what an egoist I am!'²² As they walk towards the cottage, Kolya looks at Alyosha intently and says, "I admit, I did suspect it would be possible to learn something from you. I've come to learn from you, Karamazov." Alyosha responds with a smile: "And I from you."²³ This first meeting marks a turning point for Kolya. He is showered in acceptance and invited into an open, caring friendship. Further, for just a moment, the kind of understanding that arises between the vulnerable becomes tangible to him, and realizes that he needs more of it. These lessons bring Kolya closer to believing in the interconnectedness of humanity.

Kolya enters the Snegiryov household with plans to impress the other boys with Zhuchka and come off as casually accomplished, but when he is faced with that which his friends have been experiencing—when he sees "such a thin and yellow little face, such eyes, which burned with fever and seemed

²¹ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 538.

²² Ibid., 537.

²³ Ibid., 538.

to have become terribly big, such thin arms—" he is almost completely at a loss.²⁴ His scripted entrance escapes him, and he "[cannot] muster enough nonchalance."²⁵ In this moment of sorrow, Kolya's composure is assaulted by the sensational chaos of the human experience. All of a sudden, he does not want to be above the boys, but with them. When he is praised he waves the compliment away instead of exulting in it, and when Ilyusha's father, a military captain, inadvertently challenges Kolya's homemade gunpowder, the youth responds very differently from his usual fiery self-defense: "What do you mean, not real?" Kolya blushed. 'It burns all right. However, I don't know..."²⁶ Even Kolya must admit that his aloof coolness is tangibly unsuited to this context. It is as Smurov told him: sorrow at the bedside of a child is not mere "sentimental slop." Kolya realizes that there are some moments in life that warrant the surrender of pride and that criticizing another for lamenting the slow death of a child indicates not manliness but misunderstanding.

Eventually Kolya regains some of his composure, but his cruelty toward Ilyusha, now shadowed with deeper understanding, harasses his thoughts. In the following conversation with Alyosha, Kolya's formality endures only long enough to embarrass him as he makes hectic rhetorical flourishes and spouts poorly concealed lies about his academic experience. Finally he gives in to the waves of convicting emotion: "Tell me, Karamazov, do you despise me terribly?"²⁷ Alyosha denies it, but Kolya scolds himself with bitter feeling for not coming earlier, and ardently names *himself* the scoundrel all along. His nonchalance exhausted, he wearily admits to Alyosha that his isolation makes him "profoundly unhappy" and causes him to torment his loved ones.²⁸ In a single outburst, Kolya releases the prideful lie he was clinging to.

The two engage in honest and ardent discourse, so vulnerable Kolya fears it is "almost like a declaration of love."²⁹ Kolya passionately expresses his admiration for Alyosha's values and decisions, and Alyosha speaks truth into his life and accepts Kolya unconditionally. Their ecstatic, transcendent dialogue further expands Kolya's interpersonal awareness. Once he opens up to Alyosha, Kolya is encouraged by the fact that Alyosha shares his intensity: both are

²⁴ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 548, 542.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 547.

²⁷ Ibid., 555.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 558.

so fervently engaged that they are almost self-conscious of it. They both sense the raw, immeasurable potency of the sensations they share with each other. For the first time, Kolya feels the bond that can form between two sincere, earnest people, and it shows him that people are not so different from each other as he supposed.

After Kolya experiences the vulnerability that Alyosha lives in, he is ready to release his pride and let his spirit encounter others, only to discover again and again that all people are fundamentally relatable. The next time he sees Ilyusha, when the boy is certainly dying, Kolya embraces the significance permeating the room and connects with others more fully, holding Ilyusha close. Afterward, Alyosha finds him “crying and no longer embarrassed to be crying.”³⁰ He plunges more deeply into the human experience, no longer afraid of raw emotion shown among those who understand it.

The entity of active love and the literary structure of polyphony both reference the human obligation to engage one another on a more profound level; they demand that the soul be given reverence. However, active love surpasses mere ideological respect by transforming the members of the polyphony. It pulls them even closer together and calls them to recognize not only their influence upon, but also their responsibility to, one another. It is clear that active love transforms its recipient—it extricates Kolya from the grasp of fear, shows him the impact of his actions, and gives him a chance to respond more fittingly to the reality of his close involvement with others. By the end of the novel, Kolya is on his way to being as “absurdly rapturous” as Father Zosima, stirring up passion in the group of boys.³¹

Perhaps more profoundly, in his speech at Ilyusha’s funeral—the closing message of the novel—Alyosha proposes that the transfer of active love vitalizes not only its recipient but its contributor as well. Alyosha calls the boys to treasure the feeling of being “united by such good and kind feelings” toward Ilyusha, and to remember “how [they] loved him in his last days, and how [they’ve been] been talking just now, so much as friends, so together.”³² He suggests that the experience of performing such a perfect action together made the group, “perhaps, better than [they] actually are.”³³ When one per-

son makes the effort to delve into the experience of another, the result can never be anything but a more profound realization of humanity’s unison. According to his intimate friend Nikolay Strakhov, Dostoevsky had “discovered flashes of beauty under the disfigured and repulsive exterior of man, and for this he forgave people and loved them.”³⁴ Hidden deep inside each person is a similarity that convicts and cleanses the observer of all condemnation. At this level of intimacy, denunciation of another is impossible; once the other is seen to be the same as oneself, one realizes that sin is not a personal shortcoming but a collective one. Each time one addresses the soul, one comes to realize more and more the truth of the statement made by the narrator in the very beginning of the story: “In most cases, people, even wicked people, are far more naive and simple-hearted than one generally assumes. And so are we.”³⁵

³⁰ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 562.

³¹ Dostoevsky implements this term to capture Zosima’s character in a letter to a friend. James L. Rice, “Dostoevsky’s Endgame,” *Russian History*: 33 (1), 47; for Kolya’s animation: Dostoevsky, *Brothers*, 775-778.

³² Ibid., 775.

³³ Ibid., 775.

³⁴ Robert L. Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: the Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 104.

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

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**Insufficient Self-Salvation:
The Limitations of David Hume's and Immanuel
Kant's Anthropocentric Moralities**
Logan James Cain



Logan is a junior biblical studies major who is passionate about social ethics. He believes that reason and good-will alone are not sufficient to salvage the human condition; instead, God's grace and guidance are paramount in instilling the peace, presence, and power to live justly. In this paper, he critiques the anthropocentric moralities of two of philosophy's greatest thinkers, indicating the value of surrender over self-sufficiency. He thanks Dr. Gary Black, Jr., who helped him with this paper, along with his other Honors colloquy leaders—Dr. Christopher Flannery, Dr. Bradley Hale, and Dr. Adam Green—for their wisdom and support.

Abstract

I seek to prove that the limitations of Hume's and Kant's anthropocentric moralities indicate the insufficiency of human-reliant attempts to achieve moral satisfaction. Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* will be examined first, wherein it will be demonstrated that while seeking to prove morality is a purely natural function, Hume cannot help but to conceptualize larger, universal obligations and possibilities for humanity. Kant's *Ground-work for the Metaphysics of Morals* will be explored second, wherein it will be posited that Kant's understanding of the human condition—that humans are creatures of limited reason—is incompatible with the notion that it is possible to derive moral certainty from pure intellect. Finally, the essay will conclude with an anecdote and an examination of potential ramifications of the limit-edness of anthropocentric morality.

As the age of modern rationalism transforms philosophical thinking, anthropocentric belief-systems are becoming increasingly popular. The issue of morality has been no exception to this phenomenon. David Hume's treatise *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* both represent human-reliant attempts at morality. It is demonstrable that *the limitations to Kant's and Hume's anthropocentric moralities indicate the insufficiency of human-reliant attempts to achieve moral satisfaction*. Since the approaches of pure humanism (Hume's *Enquiry*) and reasoned principles (Kant's *Groundwork*) are common attempts to anthropomorphize morality, these two philosophical works are particularly helpful for exploring this aspect of modernity.

I: Limitations in Hume (rooting ethics in naturalist humanism)

David Hume's attempt at codifying morality in his *Enquiry* could essentially be described as a removal of imaginative conjecture and speculation from the subject of ethics. He wants to replace supernatural morality with natural morality. Hume states that any morality stemming from the infinite would long ago have been universally accepted.¹ He argues that in order to achieve a state of satisfactory morality, society must "reject every system of ethics, however subtle or ingenious, which is not founded on fact and observation."²

Hume believes that morality is naturally intuitive to all human beings. He argues that whatever is useful to society directly appeals to human sentiment and good-will.³ Furthermore, Hume states that this appeal of utility has the most influence on human sentiment and that this innate appeal is universal.⁴ Put simply, Hume asserts that all humans find pleasure in that which benefits society and pain in that which harms it.⁵

Hume argues that the natural intercourse of these sentiments forms an unalterable moral standard which promotes societal utility.⁶ Bestowing benevolence and happiness based on his standard, he puts forth, is the most merit

¹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1983), 79.

² Ibid., 16.

³ Ibid., 43.

⁴ Ibid., 34, 16.

⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁶ Ibid., 43.

anyone can receive.⁷ Hume metaphorizes this concept in the form of a stream which adapts to the curvature and structure of its environment; such is moral sentiment, he argues, which adapts to its social context.⁸

Despite himself, however, Hume also imagines greater, all-encompassing moral imperatives which he believes humanity should heed—the kind of moral truth-claims which he also claims should be eradicated. He argues that, while inherently selfish, humanity is capable of a learned selflessness, the resulting equality of which forms the obligation of justice.⁹ While concern for others is much weaker than natural self-interest, Hume states that "it is necessary for us" to promote more public sentimentality that overlooks differences between one another.¹⁰ Although he otherwise disavows abstract conception, Hume imagines the possibility of purely empathetic relations between friends, starting his sentence with, "where is the difficulty of conceiving..."¹¹ Furthermore, he proposes that one may learn to fit her or his temperament to any circumstances.¹²

Hume's critique of law also creates difficulty for him, as he states that law should promote the best interest of society, and critiques the legal practice of shared possessions; this inadvertently indicates that the law does not always naturally promote society's best interests.¹³ These claims of necessary alterations in human conduct inherently contradict Hume's more central premise that the general good is arrived at naturally when unimpeded.

James Brian Coleman's essay "Hume and the Enthusiasm Puzzle" uses the example of a political enthusiast (a radical revolutionary) to demonstrate the inherent contradiction between what he categorizes as Hume's utilitarian concerns versus his sympathetic concerns. While the consequences of a radical's actions are praiseworthy from a utilitarian perspective, Coleman argues, a sentimentalist perspective urges one to criticize such hypothetically destructive behavior.¹⁴ This inconsistency is indicative of the larger problem of Hume's ethics: his belief in the natural morality of the individual is funda-

⁷ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 20.

⁸ Ibid., 113.

⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹¹ Ibid., 92-93.

¹² Ibid., 53.

¹³ Ibid., 28.

¹⁴ James Brian Coleman, "Hume and the Enthusiasm Puzzle," *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 10, no. 2: 221-235.

mentally incompatible with what he perceives as the need for correction in society. In fact, one might reverse his own assumptions and inquire why, if superstitious morality is inherently harmful to society, there is any purpose in disavowing it. By Hume's own reasoning such a pernicious ideology should, in the course of time, be weeded out by itself.

Potential Objections

While I have argued that Hume's *Enquiry* is an example of modernist attempts at self-reliant ethics, some, such as Maria L. Homyak, propose that Hume's ethics are better classified as a reworking of ancient ethics. She argues that Hume's subordination of reason to sentiment may be derivative of ancient morality systems like Aristotle's.¹⁵ I will concede that Aristotle argues, "not everything seems to be loved but only that which is good, pleasant, or useful."¹⁶ However, Aristotle's ethics, while rooted in happiness, are based on an enforced principle—one which is not natural—such that "it belongs to good people neither to err themselves or to permit their friends to do so."¹⁷ Furthermore, Aristotle states that practical wisdom is not only concerned with universals (such as happiness or utility) but is also bound in practice, which concerns particulars.¹⁸ Therefore, I would respond to Homyak by proposing that Hume's morality differs from ancient philosophies—such as Aristotle's—in that it assumes that morality arises from naturally occurring sentiment. Aristotle's philosophy, on the other hand, and those like it, are concerned with such sentiment manifesting through intentionally reinforced habit and correct action.

Another objection to the limitations of Hume's moral system may be the issue of vanity, which Philip Reed outlines in "The Alliance of Virtue and Vanity in Hume's Moral Theory." In this essay, Reed claims that "the virtue lover cannot help being vain... [and the] esteem lover cannot help being virtuous."¹⁹ In other words, the desire for a good reputation will naturally propel one to exhibit qualities that will appeal to the social good. The problem with this assertion, however, is that it assumes whatever society deems laudable

¹⁵ Marcia L. Homiak, "Hume's Ethics: Ancient or Modern?" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 81 no. 3 (September 2000): 215.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 165.

¹⁷ Ibid., 176.

¹⁸ Ibid., 124.

¹⁹ Philip Reed, "The Alliance of Virtue and Vanity in Hume's Moral Theory," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93 (no. 4): 595-614.

is naturally virtuous. Not only does this concept contradict many historical examples of socially propelled moral atrocities, but it also fails to resolve the issue of whether or not morality truly arises naturally through society. Therefore, the limitedness of Hume's morality as presented in his *Enquiry* should be maintained.

II: Limitations in Kant (rooting ethics in human understanding of universal principles)

Kantian ethics, as described in his *Groundwork*, are comprised of imperatives which can only be derived from pure reason. However, Kant also concedes that human beings have limited reasonable faculties. These two assertions, when considered together, pose problems for the application of his morals.

Kant asserts that humans can only cognate appearances of things, but are unable to grasp things in themselves (essence).²⁰ He differentiates the "world of sense" from the "world of understanding," and confines human cognition to the former.²¹ Kant's understanding of the limits of human capacity also impacts the practice of his morals. His famous categorical imperative is, "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become universal law."²² Yet, Kant must—and does—admit the categorical imperative should be allowed exceptions (although he calls such exceptions insignificant).²³ Kant also states that reasoning must be deferred to the constant use of questioning.²⁴ One cannot help but wonder what the use of such questioning would be if exceptions to the categorical imperative are, as he argues, insignificant.

Kant also seems to neglect the same transcendental realm from which he asserts his morals are gleaned. One of his imperatives is that people should be treated as ends rather than as means, yet he simultaneously calls the realm of ends "only an ideal."²⁵ Kant also believes that the assumption of moral free will is necessary to discuss ethics, but only believes in free will from this

²⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), 67.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 37.

²³ Ibid., 67.

²⁴ Ibid., 79.

²⁵ Ibid., 51.

pragmatic perspective.²⁶ It should be contended, however, that Kant should not make such a half-assertion. As Iuliana Corina Vaida posits in “The Problem of Agency and the Problem of Accountability in Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” for Kant’s morality to be sensible “transcendental freedom has to be not just conceivable, but metaphysically real.”²⁷

While Kant acknowledges human limitations and neglects asserting the reality of a transcendental realm, he still maintains that moral imperatives must be derived solely from pure reason. He states that categorical imperatives—which are derived from undiluted reason—relate objectively correct will to the “subjective imperfection” of humanity.²⁸ Kant argues that morality can only stem from this practical reason.²⁹ He states that one must “act as though your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.”³⁰ Universal law thereby supersedes moral inclination.³¹ Kant believes human beings, whom he has admitted are limited in faculty, are meant to conceive universal law and apply it such that it never be misapplied.

As John E. Hare identifies in “Ethics and Religion: Two Kantian Arguments,” Kant’s ethics are flawed insofar as they make demands of humanity that humans are unable to satisfy. “Perhaps I ought to sing in tune,” he quips, “but that is in fact beyond me since I do not have perfect pitch.”³² Hare points out that Kant is not only demanding that humans try to be moral but is, in fact, requiring the achievement of morality itself.³³ Furthermore, even if it is possible for humans to conceive perfect duty, Marcel Ackeren and Martin Sticker in “Kant and Moral Demandingness” demonstrate that “Kant cannot admit that it may sometimes be rational not to obey perfect duties, even very demanding ones.”³⁴ All in all, the limitedness of Kant’s morality becomes clear in that he requires morals be derived from perfect reason, yet simultaneously

²⁶ Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 65.

²⁷ Iuliana Corina Vaida, “The Problem of Agency and the Problem of Accountability in Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (March 2014): 110-137.

²⁸ Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 30-31.

²⁹ Ibid., 28.

³⁰ Ibid., 38.

³¹ Ibid., 19.

³² John E. Hare, “Ethics and Religion, Two Kantian Arguments,” *Philosophical Investigations* 34, no. 2 (April 2011): 110-137.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Marcel Ackeren and Martin Sticker, “Kant and Moral Demandingness,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 18, no. 1 (February 2015): 75-89.

ously allows that humans cannot achieve such perfect reasoning—a problem that becomes even more significant due to his inattention to transcendental reality.

Potential Objections

An available objection to the errors in Kant’s morality in his *Groundwork* is outlined in Alix Cohen’s “Kant on the Ethics of Belief.” Cohen’s essay argues that it is possible to conflate the universality of moral knowledge and the universality of moral action, thereby solidifying certainty within Kantian ethics.³⁵ In this case, Kant’s morality informs our epistemic morality, such that “reflection is only required in cases where we are considering complex or uncertain beliefs.”³⁶ I would contend, on the other hand, that postmodernity has made it more evident than ever that almost every moral consideration—abortion, material inequality, homosexuality—is not subject to any apparent, universally certain maxim that warrants no reflection. For example, in dealing with abortion, the claim “no human life should be unnecessarily taken” becomes complicated (and thereby requires reflection) the moment a mother’s life is threatened by a future childbirth.

Another point of contention may be represented in Michael Cholbi’s “fine print” understanding of Kant’s ethics presented in “The Constitutive Approach to Kantian Rigorism.” Cholbi’s criticism of current understanding of Kantian morality is helpful insofar as he challenges the assumption that perfect duties can only partially solve moral dilemmas.³⁷ His solution, however, is equally problematic. Reducing universal maxims to several “fine print” qualifications makes Kantian morality impractical and the successful implementation of it improbable. It seems the issue does not lie in the precision of the legal document, per se, but the hand that has written it. The Kantian problem, simply, is this: without perfect transcendental aid humanity cannot rely on its own imperfect reason to acquire perfect knowledge.

III: Doing Alright by Ourselves

In Flannery O’Connor’s short story, “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” a violent outlaw called “The Misfit” positions himself across from a grandmother,

³⁵ Alix Cohen, “Kant on the Ethics of Belief,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 114, no. 3: 317-334.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Michael Cholbi, “The Constitutive Approach to Kantian Rigorism,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16, no. 3: 439-448.

planning to murder her. As he describes his irredeemable past, the grandmother says to him, “if you would pray, Jesus would help you.” The misfit replies that he is “doing alright by himself.” As the misfit continues to speak, however, his voice cracks—presumably in anguish—as he explains that he would not be so evil if he knew with complete certainty that Jesus Christ had raised the dead. The grandmother immediately responds in a moment of clarity, “you’re one of my own children!” before the misfit recoils in disgust and shoots her to death.

Due to modern rationalism, the belief is becoming increasingly popular that, like the misfit, we are “doing alright” by ourselves. The grandmother, on the other hand, perceives a criminal’s human brokenness in his moment of anguish and identifies his full limitedness and lack of self-sufficiency. The grandmother is a prophet of human weakness and dependence on the transcendental; the misfit, in his faithlessness, is consigned to despair, uncertainty, and, ultimately, violence. A good man is *indeed* hard to find, but humanity is doomed to failure if we believe we will solve our moral insufficiencies by propagating self-reliance. We are bound only to disappoint ourselves.

Hume’s *Enquiry* and Kant’s *Groundwork* can provide insight into the limitations of solely anthropological ethics. Perhaps such revelation ought to be a wake-up call to the necessity of surrender to a higher divine power. Though such a claim is beyond the scope of this essay, the limitations of human-reliant moral systems have undoubtedly been indicated. Surrender or no, a journey to discover non-anthropocentric morality beckons urgently for departure.

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**Songs, Shrouds and Stories:
Weaving Power on the Ancient Greek Loom**

Angela Pham



Angela Pham loves reflecting on and challenging the way humans have formed society, the way God meant society to be, and how struggles with different minority groups throughout time show us more about human nature and our eternal heavenly society. This paper allowed her to explore how women in ancient Greece asserted their personhood by utilizing simple, everyday labor: spinning and weaving. Angela is a sophomore studying Economics and would like to thank Dr. Bradley Hale for listening, critiquing, and always giving generously of his time as she wrote and rewrote in his classes.

Abstract

Do women in oppressive societies have any power? Scattered throughout ancient Greek myth are hints about how women subtly influence and powerfully manipulate the stories written by their patriarchal societies. The key is in the archetypal female craft: weaving. Despite the submissive role of women, the cloth they wove signified great value and could be used to express generosity, memorialize heroism, and determine social standing. Furthermore, the loom itself could be a tool for protection, aggression, or subterfuge. Queen Penelope of Homer's *The Odyssey* emerges as a central figure in the study of women, weaving, and power, because of how Homer depicted her struggle and victory, and how Odysseus' glory is embedded in Queen Penelope's loom. The stories of women in ancient Greek mythology show this possibility: that the power of will and language is written not in history, but in the fabric of the loom.

Introduction

Queen Penelope, while beautiful, rich, and wise, could not boast of much authority when faced by more than one hundred impassioned men, demanding her hand in marriage. However, what power she did hold, she used cunningly well, by promising to marry once she finished weaving a shroud for her aging father-in-law. This fitting and womanly task could hardly be refused, even by the proud and eager suitors. So, with wifely weaving as a subterfuge, Penelope deceived the men into believing she was willing to marry. For three years, her uncertain status depended on the shroud upon her loom, worked all day and secretly unworked all night. Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*, tells one of the greatest and most well-known textile stories to date in the story of Penelope and the shroud. However, this weaving episode is not just the anecdote of a witty wife. Penelope's trick is an example of how many ancient Greek female weavers made the loom and its craft not just indicative of their gender, but a way to shape their society, history, and identity. Although the loom subdued women in ancient Greek society, women were able to use their craft as a tool to create culture, manipulate circumstances, and make their voices heard.

Creating for Culture: What Fabric Reveals about Ancient Greek Society

The nature of textile work in Greek society suggests submission and oppression of the weaver; most probably, to keep women out of men's business. The loom was set up in a private, interior room of the house, and men unrelated to the weaver would probably never see her at work. Textile-related tasks, such as spinning and carding wool, could consume most of a woman's time,¹ no matter who she was—slave, queen, or even, in the case of *The Odyssey*, goddess.² Ancient Greek society explicitly designated women to be textile workers—the art of the loom was tied to female identity. Greek women and their place at the loom was ingrained into the structure of society, so that deviation from this stereotype signaled societal threat, if not disaster.

This attitude is exemplified in *The Bacchae*: Euripides depicts chaos when women break away from the loom and join men outside the home. In *The Bacchae*, insane Agave pinpoints her rebellion on giving up weaving and turning

¹ Maria Pantelia, "Spinning and Weaving: Ideas of Domestic Order in Homer." *The American Journal of Philology* 114 no. 4 (Winter 1993), 493.

² Homer, *The Odyssey*, Translated by Robert Fagles. Introduced with notes by Bernard Knox. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 154, 178, and 357.

to "more important work"—hunting, which leads her into accidental murder.³ Given the demanding task of hand-making all household textiles, Greek society could ensure that women kept themselves occupied and removed from positions of power. Another example of tying the woman to the loom for the purpose of maintaining societal order is in *The Odyssey* when Telemachus rebuffs his mother, who, apparently exceeding her authority, gave an order for the bard to change his song. "Go back to your quarters," Telemachus says to Queen Penelope. "Tend to your own tasks, the distaff and the loom . . . as for giving orders, men will see to that."⁴ Thus segregated and disempowered, women of ancient Greek society could only contribute to the culture around them through woven material.

Although they domesticated and feminized textile production, Greeks did not dismiss its central role in society. *The Odyssey* depicts fabric as important, even influential, for both individuals and society. Cloth, and by extension its maker, was a curiously powerful thing in that society: it functioned prominently in hospitality, distinguished social status, served in religion, and could be traded for great value.

For example, consider the role of woven material in Odysseus's shipwreck on Phaeacia. Athena uses clothing-related duties to send Nausicaa to the beach—it is her responsibility of washing the family laundry that compels her there. Then, Odysseus requests two things when he meets Nausicaa: directions to town and "a rag for cover, just some cloth, some wrapper." The clothing Odysseus requests and receives specifically signifies a hospitable interaction. Queen Arete later sharply recognizes Odysseus' borrowed clothing as fabric she made herself with her women. Finally, when directing Odysseus how to petition at the palace, Nausicaa identifies her mother by her wife's occupation of "spinning yarn on a spindle, sea-blue wool." In this story, woven material almost drives the action, in addition to painting a vibrant picture of Phaeacian culture and hospitality.⁵ Clothing exchange also features in Telemachus' visit to Sparta; Queen Helen, with royal import and drama, presents Telemachus with "the largest, loveliest robe... richly worked and like a star it glistened." These parallel stories dramatize Homer and the ancient

³ Euripides, *Bacchae*, translated by Paul Woodruff. Notes and introduction by Paul Woodruff. (Cambridge, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 50.

⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 89.

⁵ Ibid., 174, 178, 187.

Greeks' fascination with cloth and honor for the art of the loom.⁶

Weavers as Storytellers: An Uncertain Power

Females, as the power behind the loom, not only influenced their contemporary society by weaving its clothing, but by recording its history. Male poets, or bards, may come to mind as the memory keepers, or historians, in *The Odyssey*. Maria Pantelia argues that bards, even though they were mortal, had the ability to confer a kind of immortality.⁷ Their song memorialized and granted *kleos* (renown or glory) for heroes, since without the bard's memory, no one in the Greek world or the modern world would know or honor the feats of men like Achilles and Odysseus. Notably, all bards in ancient Greece were men. However, memory keeping was not achieved solely through male poetic song.

In fact, verbal song and manual weaving may have been one in the same, according to the oldest Greek Theogony. Ann Bergren argues that Zeus broke the single art of communicating into two separate crafts. Bergren, while exploring the relationship between woven story and spoken story, postulates that at the divine level (and therefore trickling into human reality) was the idea that females are the source of communicating truth and falsehood; females are the original communicators of story and meaning. This idea is based on an explication of Greek Theogony. Using Zeus's relationship with his first wife, Metis, as an example, Bergren states that the power of knowledge and language can only be appropriated by males, not truly owned. Weaving and *metis* (meaning, tricky wisdom or cunning plan) both have distinctly female origins—Athena, goddess of weaving, and her mother Metis, the etymological root of *metis*. Both fabric and plans (*metis*) and are the object of the verb "to weave"—and, significantly, so is poetry-song. Song, fabric, and plans can all be woven, and, Bergren suggests, were *originally* woven by women. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that song is derived from an originally female craft, just like *metis* and fabric.⁸

Metis' legacy remained in Greek culture—despite the male occupation of bard, story and song was not a purely male craft. In fact, textile, in the form of the tapestry, also recorded stories. So there were weavers of tapestry (women) and weavers of story (bards, or *rhapsodos*, literally "weaver or sewer of story

⁶ Homer, 316–317 and 322.

⁷ Pantelia, 498.

⁸ Bergren, 17–19.

strands").⁹ The etymology of *rhapsodos* gives rise to an interesting semiotic question. We naturally assume that textile-related language in communication (spinning a yarn, weaving a tale, etc.) is a metaphor for physical weaving, but Bergren asks, "Which is the original and which the metaphorical process? Is weaving a figurative speech or is poetry a figurative web?"¹⁰ In other words, did weavers imitate bards or did bards imitate weavers by spinning tales as a means of recording history? After complex anthropological and semiotic research and discussion, it cannot be decided.

Recognizing how closely related poetry-weaving, or song, was to fabric-weaving helps illuminate the role female tapestry makers played as historians. The authoritative role of historian extends from bards to weavers as well.¹¹ How they tell the story determines how its actors achieve or fail to achieve *kleos*—if the heroic feat was not recorded, the actor does not become a hero. This dependence heroes have on their society's memory-keeping highlights the relationship between fate, weaving, and the woven material. Kathryn Kruger, referencing the spinning of the Greek Fates, ties fate to woven material by suggesting that once material is woven, its meaning enters permanence and eternity.¹²

Interestingly, Homer shows the goddesses Circe and Calypso melding with bards because in his story they are the only ones who sing. This similarity connects their shared ability to confer immortality on Odysseus. However, despite their ability to grant immortality, the goddesses could not give Odysseus what he truly desired: *kleos*. However, a tapestry could give Odysseus *kleos*, by communicating his story to future generations. The close-knit bond between spoken and woven story reveals that female weavers had authority similar to or exceeding their male poet counterparts. Woven material, just like an old family story, communicated truth to the following generations, shaping future society's worldview, value system, and character.

Helen of Troy played that part of powerful historian in *The Iliad* by weaving the story of the battle—her own story, since the battle is over her body—on a "great web, a red folding robe, and working into it the numerous struggles

⁹ Bradley Hale, "Poetry, Performance, and Purpose," (HON 240 lecture, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA. Jan. 25, 2016).

¹⁰ Ann Bergren, *Weaving Truth: Essays on Language and the Female in Greek Thought* (Washington, D.C.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 16.

¹¹ Pantelia, 498.

¹² Kathryn S. Kruger, *Weaving the Word* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2001), 55.

of the Trojans.”¹³ Helen effectively memorialized and thus honored the actions of the warriors, predating Homer’s epic narrative. Some scholars, ancient and modern, even suggest that Homer was inspired to write *The Iliad* when he saw the actual historical artifact, the tapestry Helen wove.¹⁴ This theory heightens the importance of Helen’s work, as it enabled Homer to glorify the heroes of that tale, and create a lasting literary, cultural, and philosophical cornerstone of the Western world.

Helen is not the only woman to insert her voice into a story dominated by male power using the loom. Philomela, a character in a Greek metamorphosis myth, weaves to extricate herself from the worst situation a woman could find herself in. Tereus, a Thracian king, rapes Philomela, the sister of his wife Procne. He then cuts out her tongue, rendering her unable to accuse him, and imprisons her on a distant island. However, Philomela weaves the story of what happened as well as her hidden location into a robe and sends the robe to her sister Procne, who interprets the symbols, rescues Philomela, and takes revenge on Tereus.¹⁵ Philomela, brutally taken advantage of by a member of the patriarchy, manages to use the loom—an emblem of female domestication—to claim authority over what happened to her by recording it in cloth, as well as to empower herself as a member of the submissive class to defeat a man who would otherwise escape punishment. Bergren fancifully calls Philomela’s art a kind of magic, because she enabled a silent, inanimate object to speak.¹⁶

While the loom had creative, history-shaping, and vengeful capability in the hands of women, it did not necessarily afford them true or permanent power. Philomela’s story ends with being pursued and transformed into a bird. The myth of Arachne also depicts a woman weaving her own view of history, and being punished for it. In this story, Athena and Arachne compete in a weaving contest. Arachne produces the better tapestry, but it depicts eighteen scenes of gods abusing mortals, mainly women, thereby signifying “artistic resistance.”¹⁷ Athena responds violently, first destroying the treasonous tapestry, then causing Arachne’s death and transformation into a spi-

¹³ John Scheid and Jesper Svenbro *The Craft of Zeus: Myths of Weaving and Fabric*, translated by Carol Volk. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 116.

¹⁴ Dolores Bausum, *Threading Time: A Cultural History of Threadwork* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 2001) 24.

¹⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by Frank Justus Miller. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 329.

¹⁶ Bergren, 16.

¹⁷ Kruger, 69.

der, capable of weaving only meaningless webs. If Athena was merely jealous of Ariadne’s skill, Kruger argues, would she have gone to such lengths—or was Arachne’s message rebellious, on the level of heresy? Ariadne is another ancient Greek woman unhappy with her powerless role. Ariadne, cherishing forbidden love for Theseus, subverts her father’s power by using yarn. She risks her life in giving Theseus the magic ball of yarn so he can find his way out of the Minotaur’s labyrinth. Theseus then ventures into the deadly maze, the Ariadne’s craft as his only means of escape. Within this episode, Ariadne’s yarn succeeds in accomplishing her own will, but by the end of the story, despite her faithfulness to Theseus, she is abandoned by him.¹⁸

Penelope: A Case Study in Weaving Power

These stories give rise to the question, can the loom set women free, or can it only give them limited power in desperate situations? Does weaving do more to keep women subdued, or does it give valuable disguise to subversive action against the dominant powers? More stories throughout Greek myth color the many uses of the loom and how women used it to speak, fight, and create, yet these stories tend to end in tragedy for the woman. This pattern makes Homer’s portrayal of Penelope all the more interesting. Penelope’s story deserves more intense scrutiny because it may present a middle ground in the tension between the subduing yet empowering role of the loom.

Homer first presents Penelope’s loom as a power that keeps her subdued. Telemachus denies her request to stop Phemius from singing by relegating her to the loom, and she refers to her work on the loom as a necessary act of service for her father-in-law, Laertes.¹⁹ The shroud is expected, required, by societal standards: “I dread the shame my countrywomen would heap on me, yes, if such a man of wealth should lie in state without a shroud for cover,” Penelope says, defending the project to the suitors.²⁰ The queen of Ithaca thus uses the loom to demonstrate submission to the patriarchy. The suitors, eager as they are, allow her to pay her dues by fulfilling what the system requires of married women. Kruger argues that even though Penelope’s shroud frustrated the suitors, the weaving is “condoned by the patriarchy...[and] creates and sustains it as well.”²¹ Penelope intentionally chose a project that highlights her

¹⁸ Bausum, 37.

¹⁹ Homer, 89.

²⁰ Homer, 96.

²¹ Kruger, 83.

goodness as a wife and daughter-in-law, a woman any man would want for himself and family, and in this way supports the patriarchy that has forced her into such an undesirable situation.

At the same time, however, Penelope undermines the power of the men around her using the same loom that they approve of, and the same project that they are inspired by. The eerie image of Penelope unraveling all her work by torchlight, night after night for more than three years, is conjured up three times throughout the story. In a symbolic way, Penelope's loom only works for the suitors, while she must work against the loom, by unraveling, to fight the suitors. The argument of Penelope's submission to or rebellion against patriarchy comes full circle, however, when we remember that the tireless unravelling serves not just Penelope's purpose, but her husband's. Penelope's trick gives her glory, but more so, it gives her husband glory because it enables a happy homecoming story. Her loyalty to Odysseus may be interpreted as an act of love, or, according to some scholars, it may be subconscious and self-defeating act, by supporting the patriarchy as a whole even while fooling the suitors.

This leads us to Penelope's loom as an agent in Odysseus's destiny. From Book 1 of *The Odyssey*, the warning of Agamemnon's fate hangs over Odysseus's head: even if he does come home, will he come in glory, or will he face infidelity, familial strife, betrayal, and death?

Penelope's actions "determine or at least profoundly affect his [Odysseus's] destiny."²² Although Odysseus' tactics, twists, and turns may make him a hero, and much of the book recounts his adventures, he has no *kleos* if his *nostos* does not include a faithful wife. With a dead Penelope, Odysseus' homecoming is mediocre; with an unfaithful Penelope, his homecoming is ignominious. Penelope's situation as a tantalizing queen, courted by more than one hundred aggressive men, does not bode well for Odysseus' fate—a fate which hangs in peril, at the least. *The Odyssey* begins at a crucial turning point in Odysseus's homecoming partly because he is able to begin his journey again after eight years, but also because Penelope, having finished the shroud, may be about to capitulate to the pressure of the suitors.

The figurative threads of Penelope's loom are thus tied to the patriarchy (loyalty to husband), to subverting the patriarchy (fighting against the suitors), and to Odysseus' *kleos*. These threads come together to create the time-

less story of *The Odyssey* because they are all held in the hand of Penelope. Penelope's story demonstrates not just the multiple facets of the loom and its ability to aid or anchor women, but the female agency that causes the loom to have that ability. Penelope weaves multiple plots that allow for different endings for herself: adultery, lawful remarriage following Odysseus' purported death, or reunion with Odysseus. She is a uniquely self-determined character, despite the hand of fate and mankind attempting to force her destiny. Homer places the loom in her hands to illustrate her ability and agency.

Conclusion

Telemachus and other Greek men may have denied women speech, but for their own sake, they could not deny them weaving. Thus Bergren poignantly says, "Greek women do not speak, they weave." Each picture of the woman and the loom illustrates a metaphor for song, a rebellion against silence, a manipulation of circumstance, a creation of history, or, in Penelope's case, a determined woman. Whether weaving a song or a shroud, females in *The Odyssey* give the careful reader many opportunities to ponder not just the power of weaving, but the power of woman, who could do any or all of these things, given whatever tool she is allowed.

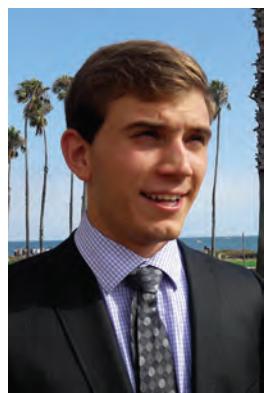
²² Nancy Felson, *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 16.

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**Milton's Mythology and Augustine's Theology:
Milton's use of the Proserpine Simile to Foreshadow
His Incorporation of Augustinian Theology**

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Caleb is a junior double-majoring in Spanish and Honors Humanities, and minoring in Classics. During his time at APU, Caleb has studied away both at the High Sierra campus and in Costa Rica. This paper reflects his interest in ancient literature and the way it shapes later conversations. Caleb extends his gratitude to the Honors College faculty, especially Dr. Matthew Smith for his guidance in writing this paper, and to his friends who continually walk with him through the paper-writing process.

Abstract

Although some view Milton's use of the Proserpine simile in book four of *Paradise Lost* to only be a comment on Eve's innocence, a wider reading of Proserpine mythology reveals that the simile actually serves to foreshadow Milton's use of Augustinian theology, calling attention to Eve's less than innocent characteristics. The simile underscores 1) her vanity and pride, both of which lead to her turn away from God and end in her sin, and 2) the moral and ontological consequences of that sin, as she is separated from God, experiences an ontological decline, and becomes associated with evil. All of these aspects of Eve's fall are foreshadowed by the Proserpine simile and are rooted in Augustine.

Jonathan H. Collet points out that the vast majority of the mythological similes that Milton employs go beyond mere visual description and actually serve to underscore the story's prominent themes.¹ For example, Milton compares the garden of Eden with the field of Enne in book four, saying, "Not that fair field / of Enne where Proserpine gath'ring flow'r's, / Herself a fairer flow'r, by gloomy Dis / Was gathered...with this paradise / Of Eden could not strive."² In this excerpt, Milton is both showing Eden's superlative physical beauty *and* making a statement about his characters, Eve and Satan, by mentioning two mythological characters that parallel them (i.e., Proserpine and Dis). Many view this simile as Milton's way of pointing to Eve's innocence. This belief is not unfounded. Proserpine is, after all, kidnapped against her will by Dis. In one version of the story, Proserpine is tricked into eating the fruit of the underworld, while in another she eats the fruit unaware of the rule that she must not return to earth.³ However, Chris Bond points out that a characterization of Proserpine as a purely "innocent victim...has restricted scholarly readings of the simile and failed to take into account the full resonance of the story for Milton."⁴ This paper seeks to elaborate one aspect of this "full resonance," namely, that Milton uses the Proserpine simile to foreshadow the Augustinian theology that he later incorporates into the story of Eve. More specifically, Milton's development of two points, Eve's prelapsarian pride and her postlapsarian depravity, directly reflect Augustine's teachings on the same topics, and are foreshadowed by the Proserpine myth.

However, this can only be appreciated by looking at the greater corpus of mythological texts that tell the story of Proserpine, moving away from portraying both Eve and Proserpine as purely innocent and moving toward a portrait that underscores their pre-fall vanity and pride and their post-sin depravity. In this paper, I will explain how a wider reading of the Proserpine simile foreshadows Milton's Augustinian theology on these two points. Con-

¹ Collett, Jonathan H. "Milton's Use of Classical Mythology in 'Paradise Lost,'" PMLA 85 (1970) 88.

² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), 268-275.

³ Homeric Hymn, *Rape of Persephone*, accessed 16 April, 2016. <http://www.theoi.com/Khthonios/HaidesPersephone1.html>. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 5.533-571, trans. A.S. Kline, 5.332-571, accessed 25 March, 2016. <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph5.htm#479128843>.

⁴ Christopher Bond, "Prosépin Gathering Flowers: A Miltonic Simile in Its Mythic Context," *Milton Studies* 50, 106-124. 2009. MLA International Bibliography, EBSCOhost (accessed April 13, 2016), 2.

sidering them one at a time, I will explain each point by looking first at the myth as a foreshadowing element, then at Augustine's corresponding teaching, and ultimately at how that teaching plays out in *Paradise Lost*.

The Proserpine myth's subtle emphasis on the danger of vanity paves the way for Milton to include Augustine's teachings on the role of pride in the Fall of Eve. As the vanity of Proserpine will lead to her capture by Dis, so the vanity of Eve will lead to her entanglement in pride, leading to her failure to resist temptation.

Proserpine's vanity is evident throughout the canon of Proserpine myths. In Ovid's version of the story, Proserpine is said to be out gathering flowers with other maidens when Dis snatches her away. Although Ovid is the most popular of the mythologists who tell the story of Proserpine, he also leaves out an important detail that several other versions include.⁵ Claudio includes in the list of flowers she picked that day the *narcissus* flower, which symbolizes the over-zealous self-love of the boy who pined away at his own reflection until the gods changed him into a flower. Claudio refers to the flower as "thy flower inscribed with woe."⁶ One of the Homeric hymns even describes the flower as being specifically crafted "to be a snare for the bloom-like girl."⁷ At the moment that she picks the flower, the earth opens wide, and Hades springs out in his chariot to snatch her away.⁸ Chris Bond says that the narcissus flower's purpose "is to entice the carefree and credulous Persephone into picking it and thus somehow to enable the entry of the infernal king."⁹ The myth therefore makes a strong connection between the idea of vanity, as symbolized by the narcissus flower, and capture by the king of the underworld.

St. Augustine discusses these same ideas in a Christian context, pointing to pride, which is closely connected to vanity, as the root of the Fall. Pride, for Augustine, is a "perverse kind of self exaltation" that comes when a person is "too pleased with himself."¹⁰ In other words, pride comes from vanity. Pride

⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.S. Kline, accessed, 3.402-510, 25 March, 2016. <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph3.htm#476975712>.

⁶ Claudio, *De Raptu Proserpinae*, 2.128-129, accessed 16 April, 2016. <http://www.theoi.com/Text/ClaudianProserpine.h>

⁷ Homeric Hymn, *Rape of Persephone*.

⁸ Ibid.

Note that I will vary the use of Proserpine and Persephone depending on how the respective mythologists choose to refer to the bride of Dis.

⁹ Bond, 3.

¹⁰ St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 14.13.

then, for Augustine, is the “start of every kind of sin” because in its self-exaltation it seeks to “abandon the basis on which the mind should be firmly fixed [i.e., God], and to become...based on oneself.”¹¹ In turning to the self and abandoning God, pride is the “start of the evil will.”

The evil will, already existing in a person, then leads to the evil act.¹² Augustine explains that this was the case with the parents of man, saying, “It was in secret that the first human beings began to be evil,” turn away from God toward the self. He further explains that if Eve had not turned from God to the self, “the will would not have been so darkened and chilled in consequence as to let the woman believe that the serpent had spoken the truth,” and she would not have eaten the fruit. It was an evil will, based on a pride that existed in Eve before her temptation, that led her to eat of the tree.¹³

In this way, the myth foreshadows Augustine’s theology by showing that Proserpine would not have been taken by Dis if she had not picked the flower which represents vanity, just as Augustine’s Eve would not have been deceived by Satan had she not become full of vanity to the point of pride and inwardly turned toward herself and away from God. Milton then incorporates this foreshadowed idea of Eve’s pre-existent pride into his story, presenting two instances of her vanity. The first is her high opinion of her own beauty, and the second is her desire to exalt herself within the divinely established cosmic hierarchy. Milton then brings both of these aspects back to the foreground when Satan tempts Eve, fanning her vanity into full-blown pride.

The first aspect of Eve’s vanity is displayed when she sees her own reflection for the first time, and finds herself extremely beautiful.¹⁴ Awaking from her creation, Eve is startled to see a beautiful face staring back at her from out of a lake. Unaware that it is her own, feelings of “sympathy and love” start to arise in her.¹⁵ Eve tells later that “there I had fixed mine eyes till now and pined with vain desire” had not the voice of God directed her away from her reflection to Adam, although she admits that she found him less fair than her “smooth watery image.”¹⁶ Eve therefore has a certain tendency toward vanity, that is, to high regard for her own beauty.

¹¹ St. Augustine, *City of God*, 14.13.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Milton, 4.440-480.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.465.

¹⁶ Ibid., 4.465-480.

The second aspect of Eve’s vanity is that she wants to ascend her position within the natural hierarchy in Milton’s world, which is displayed when she leaves Adam--against his judgement--to work by herself.¹⁷ Despite the fact that Adam, the rational one of the pair, understands that there is potential danger in Eve’s departure from him while Satan is lurking about, Eve convinces herself that there is no danger and separates from Adam. By refusing to adhere to Adam’s counsel, Eve is not merely rejecting his authority over her but also the hierarchy that, as C.S. Lewis explains, is present in all of Milton’s world.¹⁸ Though she is not acting directly against God, she is acting directly against the system He established. She is exalting herself as the authority over herself which, according to Augustine, is characteristic of pride.

These two aspects of Eve’s vanity, which exist before she ever comes to the tree, become Satan’s topics of flattery when he tempts her.¹⁹ The serpent begins by flattering her beauty. He kisses the ground around her, stares at her, and comments on her “celestial beauty.”²⁰ Then he does something subtle. Satan says to her, “But here / in this enclosure wild these beasts among /... one man except / who sees thee? (and what is one?), who shouldst be seen / a goddess among gods adored and served / by angels.”²¹ The serpent is telling her that because she is so beautiful, she deserves a higher place within the hierarchy, going on to press this point by calling her “universal dame” and professing his desire to “worship thee.”²² In one stroke he has flattered both areas of her own self-exaltation, which he quickly follows by commanding the tree’s power to elevate her as high “as gods.”²³

Eve’s vanity turns into pride as she tries to justify how she can eat the fruit. Satan’s words have “into her heart too easy entrance won.”²⁴ Now Eve, recognizing the “virtues” of that “best of fruits” to give her the knowledge of good and evil and help her ascend the hierarchy, questions God’s prohibition of her doing so. Reasoning to herself, she says “In plain then what forbids He but to

¹⁷ Milton, 9.205-396.

¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 79-80.

¹⁹ Milton, 9.524-781.

²⁰ Ibid., 9.540.

²¹ Ibid., 9.542-548.

²² Ibid., 9.610-611.

²³ Ibid., 8.708.

²⁴ Ibid., 9.734.

know, / forbids us good, forbids us to be wise? / Such prohibitions bind not!”²⁵ By deciding for herself that God’s command does not apply, she not only acts as the authority over herself, but she acts as if she is a *higher* authority than God. Eve’s vanity has been fanned by Satan into self-exaltation, and it is in this vein of pride that Eve directly asserts herself as being more authoritative than God. And all this happens before she even touches the apple.

Milton therefore follows suit with Augustine by depicting that Eve’s pride precedes her outward sin. Just as the foreshadowing Proserpine myth alluded to a girl who was captured because she picked the flower of vanity, so was Eve tempted into sinning by Satan, whose flattery fanned her vanity into pride. Her self-exaltation above God is the very pride that Augustine explains prompted Eve to eat the fruit, and which the Proserpine myth warned the reader to expect.

As the story goes, Eve eats the fruit, takes it to Adam, and their perfection and innocence give way as they experience the consequences of disobeying God. Milton’s portrayal of Eve’s fall into postlapsarian depravity, as with his portrayal of Eve’s pride, is heavily Augustinian. Once again, the Proserpine myth foreshadows the Augustinian theology that Milton employs in his depiction of Eve’s depravity. The sufferings that Proserpine experiences as a result of her kidnapping correlate to Augustine’s teaching that separation from God, diminishment of ontological reality, and becoming associated with evil are all interconnected.

Proserpine’s sufferings can be divided into three parts: separation from Zeus, relocation to a less real world, and association with evil. Her separation from her father is particularly evident in one version of the myth, where Proserpine cries out to Zeus as she is being captured by Dis, saying, “Was this thy will to deliver thy daughter to the cruel shades and drive her forever from this world? Does love move thee not at all? Hast thou nothing of a father’s feeling?”²⁶ As she is whisked away, she doubts whether Zeus has any paternal love for her, showing that there is not only a physical separation, but a relational separation between the father and daughter as well. Another of her sufferings is that she comes to live in the land of the dead, where the inhabitants are all ethereal ghosts.²⁷ The underworld is less solid, that is, less real than the earth upon which she once lived. She experiences an ontological decline. Lastly, she

becomes associated with evil. The once beautiful maiden becomes the terrible and threatening queen of that underworld. In the *Dionysiaca*, she becomes the mother of a terrible monster.²⁸ In the *Odyssey*, she is suspected by Odysseus of maliciously sending the shade of his mother to him “to make me ache with sorrow all the more.”²⁹ Ovid describes her as the “queen of Erebus,” that is, the queen of darkness.³⁰ Although she was once an innocent girl, she becomes a fittingly dreadful queen for the underworld, the evil consort of Hades.

The three themes of separation from the father, lesser existence, and becoming associated with evil are all elements present in Augustine’s doctrine of the Fall of Adam and Eve. As C.S. Lewis points out, Augustinian theology teaches that “God created all things without exception good.”³¹ However, creation is only good because it derives both its existence and its goodness from God, the ultimate source of both. Evil is therefore an absence or diminishment of existence, a perversion of good rather than its own entity.³² Augustine applies this directly to the parents of man, saying that after Adam sinned, “his being was less real than when he adhered to him who exists in a supreme degree.”³³ Since goodness and ontology are interconnected, when Adam and Eve sinned, according to Augustine, they not only separated themselves from God, but they became lesser in existence, and to some extent became morally evil.

These three Augustinian aspects of sin are present in Milton. The first two--separation from the Father and diminished existence--are easy to observe. First, Milton shows that there is a separation between God and man when Adam and Eve hide from the Son. When the Son calls out for them to show themselves, they are said to look “discount’nanced and discomposed.” Eve is especially embarrassed, “loath...’ offend” the Son.³⁴ The former closeness between God and man has been severed. Second, Milton also shows that Adam and Eve have become less real, having Adam complain that he can no

.....
28 Nomos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*, 5.562-569. Accessed 16 April, 2016.
<http://www.theoi.com/Text/NonnusDionysiaca5.html>.

29 Homer, 11.244-245.

30 Ovid, 5.535-536.

31 Lewis, 66.

32 St. Augustine, *City of God*, 11.22, 14.11.
St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 124,,225, 244.

33 St. Augustine, *City of God*, 14.13.

34 Milton, 10.99-110.

25 Milton, 9.758-760.

26 Claudio, 2.249-252.

27 Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 11.33.

longer look upon “those heav’ly shapes / [who] will dazzle now this earthly with their blaze / insufferably bright.”³⁵ They have become separated from God, and therefore they have diminished in existence, becoming unable to look upon the bright heavenly figures.

The third consequence of their Fall, becoming evil, which is closely tied to the Proserpine simile, requires more explanation. Milton shows that Eve has taken on a degree of evil by drawing a subtle comparison between her and Satan’s daughter, Sin, by implying that Eve, like Sin and like Proserpine, has become allied with the king of the underworld. In one version of the myth, Persephone’s father rapes her, she conceives the monster Zagreus, and she later (as in all versions) becomes the queen of the underworld and partner of Dis.³⁶ This parallels Milton’s character, Sin, who is impregnated by her father, Satan, gives birth to a monster, and later becomes the portress of Hell and accomplice of its king. There is, therefore, a strong connection between Sin and Proserpine. Milton brings the comparison full circle, connecting Eve to Sin when Adam says to Eve, “Out of my sight, thou serpent! That name best / befits thee with him leagued, thyself as false / and Hateful! Nothing wants but that thy shape / like his and color serpentine may show / thy inward fraud.”³⁷ Just as Sin is part serpent and part woman, Adam calls Eve an inward serpent and an outward woman, and explicitly says that she is allied with Satan. She is not just sinful, she is like Sin herself. The reader must wonder if Eve has become the inadvertent ally of Satan. She did, after all, give Adam the fruit, advancing Satan’s plot. Regardless of whether or not Eve is actually an ally of Satan, the fact that a strong case can be built against her shows that she has fallen a long way from her innocence, becoming less good and necessarily more evil.

Milton therefore incorporates Augustine’s teaching on the consequences of depravity, using the Proserpine simile to foreshadow. Through the Proserpine myth, he reminds the reader of another maiden who experienced a separation from a high divinity, a diminishment of existence, and a transformation from something good into something evil. He then affirms Augustine’s interconnection of separation from God, diminishment of existence, and association with evil by making Eve experience all three. In affirming Eve’s becoming

evil, Milton draws a layered comparison between Eve and Sin, using Proserpine as the middle link to connect the two. In summary, Milton’s use of the Proserpine simile underscores his incorporation of Augustine’s teachings on depravity.

In summary, Milton’s Proserpine simile does *not*, as some would argue, function merely to comment on Eve’s innocence. It does more than that. By looking at the wider body of Proserpine myths, one sees that Proserpine’s capture by Dis is directly connected to vanity. This idea within the simile foreshadows that vanity will also play a central role in Eve’s Fall, which is the very doctrine that Augustine teaches and Milton borrows. One also sees through a wider reading of the myth that Proserpine undergoes separation from a high divinity, relocation to a diminished reality, and a transformation into something evil. These themes directly correlate to Augustine’s teaching, which Milton then incorporates into his portrayal of Eve, having her experience all three of these themes that the Proserpine simile foreshadowed. The Proserpine simile is therefore not merely an instance of Milton alluding to Eve’s innocence. Rather, by a wider, closer reading of the myth, one sees that Proserpine’s experience parallels that of Milton’s Augustinian Eve and therefore foreshadows Milton’s Augustinian theology of the Fall.

³⁵ Milton, 9.1082-1084.

³⁶ Nomos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*, 5.562-569. Accessed 16 April, 2016.
<http://www.theoi.com/Text/NonnusDionysiaca5.html>.

³⁷ Milton, 10.867-870.

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Compilers, Qualia, and the Human Mind

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Nicholas is a junior Computer Science major who lives at the intersection of technology and humanities. His areas of proficiency include asking good questions, programming, and select console games for the Nintendo 64. This paper delves into the fascinating differences between mind and machine with relation to experience and language processing. He is incredibly grateful for the support of Professor George Isaac and for his friends Brandon Bartlett and Jonathan Ming, who introduced him to really important thought experiments early on. Finally, he would not be here without the Honors College faculty, staff, and students, whose relentless pursuit of virtue inspire him to keep going when the going gets tough.

Abstract

This paper was written in response to a faith integration prompt from CS 400: Compiler Construction. Compiler Construction is the process of making computer languages understandable to computers, which only understand binary. This paper examines the differences between the ways humans and computers think about language in order to show how raw experiences (qualia) are unique to human experience. I argue that since qualia do not appear to boil down to physical explanations of the mind, their existence supports an understanding of the human mind that contains at least some non-physical content. The Christian worldview is proposed as one such understanding.

When talking about computers, we often use human metaphors to help us out. Object-oriented programming, for example, is usually described as a computer “thinking about the world the way we do.” Compilers “teach” computers how to “understand” computer languages. Computers, we say, are “thoughtful,” “rational,” and my favorite, “smart.” But when learning computer programming, it doesn’t take long to realize that computers are not all they’re cracked up to be—at least, not on their own. Computers are not “taught,” they are programmed. They are not “intelligent,” they are procedural. Certainly, computers can perform computations much more efficiently than a human can, but behind almost every operating system and major program is a team of hundreds, if not thousands, of programmers responsible for making the code work. If anything, the sheer power of computers is more a testament to the dedication and intelligence of software engineers than it is to the computers themselves. In this regard, using human metaphors to describe computer behavior can be misleading.

Many people talk about the human mind as if it boils down to a computer-like logic machine. At first glance, the metaphor seems apt—nature “programs” the human computer, an enormously complicated mechanism that, like an actual computer, has an operating system, processes input, and returns output. In this explanation of the mind, humans have evolved a set of fundamental programs within their operating system to help them learn and process. Humans compute and execute based on a deterministic model, using their programming to attain the goal of species survival.

While popular, this system of thought is not without its flaws. Though many have raised moral objections to the materialist model of humanity, this paper will focus on the merits of the model itself by examining the difference between the way that computers and humans understand language. I would like to propose that human beings have a means of understanding not possessed by computers: experience. Since experience does not in itself boil down to a mechanistic process, its existence strongly supports an understanding of the mind that cannot be reduced to the body.

To begin, let’s look at the way computers (programmed deterministic machines) process language. When defining grammar for a compiler, words and symbols are arbitrary and meaningless unless defined by their relationship to other words and symbols.¹ The whole thing means nothing at all

¹ George Isaac, “CS400 Lecture 2: Lexical Analysis, Syntax Analyzers, Parse Trees, and Resolving Ambiguity,” (lecture, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA, September 7, 2016).

by itself; it is only defined in the abstract, having no logical ties to an outside reality. If I tell a computer that a ‘cat’ is made of ‘fluff,’ all the computer has is an abstract relationship between the two tokens ‘cat’ and ‘fluff.’ The computer doesn’t understand what I mean when I say ‘cat’; it just uses predefined rules to relate the token words ‘cat’ and ‘fluff’ in order to do something. To use a more direct example, when I say ‘+’ to a computer, it has been instructed to execute a series of commands that, if all goes well, leads up to two numbers getting added together. The computer has no understanding of the *meaning* of what it is doing, it simply executes tasks.

Humans seem to have a very different understanding of language, even though the situations appear similar at first. After all, what is called input in the computer world, we call experience. What we call thinking is called processing in the computer world, and what we call speaking, writing, or creating art, computers call output. Yet there is also a hugely important difference: humans seem to have a unique understanding of experience not possessed by computers. For example, what is the essence of the color green? If you were to describe green to a computer, you could program it to understand wavelengths or output pixels with certain RGB values, but the experience of green itself couldn’t be captured or made sensible to the computer. Think about trying to describe sight to a blind person. You could give a blind person all the information in the world about what it is like to see, but they will never be able to fully understand the essence of what it means unless they experience it for themselves.² In philosophy of mind, raw experiences like green or love are called “qualia.” When we use words like beauty, love, wonder, or even green, we are talking about experiences that transcend relationships between words and seem to have a life of their own. Maybe that is why these words are nearly impossible to define.

Additionally, these experiences do not seem to boil down to a physical explanation. After all, if a blind person decided to study neuroscience and learned everything possible about sight from a scientific, empirical perspective, they might have a complete understanding of all the mechanisms involved, but it would not be the same as understanding what it is like to see. The difference becomes obvious when contrasted with the realm of computers, where understanding the underlying mechanism *is* understanding the es-

² See also Frank Jackson’s “Mary’s Room” thought experiment: Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 127-136; Frank Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know,” *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1996): 291-295.

sence of what is going on. To a human, the idea of beauty is inherently tied to the experience of beautiful things, but to a computer, beauty is, at its absolute best, a word that humans use when referring to certain objects which sometimes fit certain criteria. Computers (or perhaps more accurately, computer programs) do not have the same understanding of meaning because they do not have access to qualia.

Why is this significant for our understanding of the human person? If humans have experiences that cannot be fully understood by mechanistic physical processes, then the deterministic model of the human mind must fall short of describing reality. Furthermore, since qualia themselves seem to be completely separate from scientific processes, some philosophers have concluded that the human mind can never be fully explained using a materialistic model. If that is true, then the only conclusion we can reasonably draw is that at least part of the human mind must be non-physical.

For most Christian thinkers, the spiritual side to human nature is a basic implication of the idea that humans are made in the image of God, who is immaterial. It is this understanding of the human person that has enabled Christians and Jews to affirm human dignity in ways that are often strongly opposed to the cultures that they have been a part of. Take, for example, the Jewish opposition to human sacrifice in the Old Testament, or the early Christian church's pacifying influence on Roman culture.³ Today, however, this non-physical understanding of human beings has fallen out of favor, in large part because the foundational assumptions of the scientific method leave very little room for meaningful spirituality.

This, then, is how making sense of compilers can improve our understanding of human nature. When we know how to program computers to work with language, we can see very clearly how different a computer's way of understanding words is from a human's. Once we understand that and think more about our experiences of things like light, beauty, and wonder, it should cause us to have doubts about the mechanistic model of the mind. If the materialist explanation falls short, we must find a different way to understand human nature. The Christian perspective, which sees both body and soul as important pieces of the human puzzle, is one such explanation. Not only does

it appear to fit the facts better than an exclusively material framework as far as mind is concerned, it also gives us answers to many of our biggest questions along the way.

³ Deuteronomy 12:31; Leviticus 20:2; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Jeremiah 7:31; 2 Kings 16:3 (NRSV); Michael Novak, "Where Would Civilization Be Without Christianity? The Gift of Dignity," *Christianity Today*, December 6, 1999: 50-59; John D. Woodbridge, "Objection #7: Church History is Littered with Oppression and Violence" in *The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 215-216, 233.

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