The Oracle

York University's Undergraduate Philosophical Review

Issue 5 (Spring 2011)

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A Note of Thanks

The process of putting together an undergraduate journal is certainly not without
its stressful moments. I can't express gratitude enough to the people who helped me

compile this fifth issue.

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Lastly, thank you of course to the contributors who filled this journal with their creativity and hard work; I have a feeling this will not be the last time your works get published.

Thus passes another year, another Oracle, and another set of stories that time will surely charm.

With love,
Aaron Lauretani
                  2011 Editor-in-Chief

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One-Elephant-One

or
The Non-Existence of Nothingness and Comparative Totalities.

By David Schokking

When philosophers, scientists and writers argue the value of existence in comparison to non-existence, they are imagining a state of emptiness which does not, and cannot, exist. The notion of nothingness complicates matters because we don't seem to have the ability to describe, define or even imagine an accurate state of 'nothingness'.

This cognitive discord has resulted in terms such as nothingness, vacuum, infinite void, and non-existence, being used incorrectly by philosophers and quantum theorists alike, without much criticism.

I will argue that a state of nothingness is an impossible one. I will do this by analyzing the popular conceptions of nothingness, from physical realms to linguistic constructs, to potentialized existences and even numerical quantifications. I will then extend my attack on nothingness by critically analyzing a number of philosophers' conceptions, and finally focussing on Benatar's claim that non-existence has a distinct advantage over existence. From Parmenideans to Leibniz, I will show how philosophers have created a false construct of nothingness that does not accurately reflect a viable account of this daunting concept.

I will conclude by arguing that the value in existence qua existence cannot be determined without resorting to comparative value judgements, which are impossible to engage in when assessing existence as a totality because comparative value claims force an impossible comparison between existence and a non-existent realm of nothingness or non-existence. Existential claims regarding the state of the totality should be therefore be limited to existence qua existence, and not slip into illusory comparative value judgements with states of nothingness because these states do not and cannot exist.

Part I: On the Non-Existence of Non-Existence.

When we argue that something is better than nothing or, as with Benatar, that nothing is better than something, we are making distinct comparative claims. I would argue that this is an impossible comparison because there is no such thing as a non-existent state, let alone a state devoid of matter, thought, experience, depth or time. This

notion of 'nothing' is a creative device often meant to provide a neutral ground to compare qualitative value to a void, similar to a control group in pharmaceutical trials. I will argue that when we conceive of nothing, we are making a number of errors. Often, we are in fact conceiving of a very full and dynamic space, far removed from the factors needed for a truly empty void or state of nothingness.

A Vast and Full Onyx Scope.

First, let us consider the notion of nothingness within a conception of space and time. We occupy a set timeline. Our timeline is subjectively defined and is infinitely long along a linear temporal scale. What is meant by this is that our lives are experienced along an objective temporal path; however, we do not experience this objective passage of time. For each of us, our personal timeline exists within the timeline of the contexts we inhabit such as earth, this universe or this reality. We are set along a specific rail following a specific topography much like the rail of a tram car. We experience our own timeline, separate from the temporal reality of the full topography which the objective reality of time inhabits. Our subjective temporal topography exists within an objectively infinite timescale. Time is eternal in this sense; however, it is meaningless to us without space to graph the passage of time. Time, in the sense of any type of utility, is only meaningful in its ability to chart and graph distance and speed in an existing universe. If we imagine a state of nothingness, often we describe it as an infinite void of blackness. Barring the idea that this blackness may be composed of some specific atomic or elemental makeup, a conception of nothingness as a vast onyx scope must include time. Time must be present because depth, height, and length exist. Time in this sense, however, would be a non-utilizable form because of the lack of things contained within the nothingness' depths. The simple fact of times presence within an emptiness shows that the emptiness itself is not, in fact, empty. The popular conception of an infinite void

is easily shown to be false due, at the very least, to its temporal depths. This view of nothingness is only lacking in tangible 'things' but still 'exists'. It is still a something, albeit a very empty something, but a something nonetheless, a something that exists in time and space with depth and width and height as a realm, but not a realm of nothingness. Obviously 'nothing' cannot have any degree of 'something-ness' inherent to it or it fails to be 'nothing'. To conceive of a true state of nothingness we must therefore eliminate these immaterial factors such as depth or space-time.

The Infinitely Thin Shadow.

We can try, although it is incredibly difficult, to imagine the flat world of the first dimension posited via the work of Arthur Cayley, William Rowan Hamilton, Ludwig Schlafli and Bernard Riemann. These dimensional concepts are difficult to grasp, however, all one needs to understand for a notion of a first dimension is that it contains within its parameters no height, width or length. This first dimension exists, or we can imagine it to exist, within a sphere of existence as thin as a shadow and as wide and long as a shadow is deep. This would be an infinitesimal speck of existence, if anything at all. In this world, it is claimed, time as a force has no meaning, and hence it does not exist, because it has no space to cross. The measure of passing time would have no value because past, present and future become relativities unto themselves. Without a scope to cross or climb, and a temporal measurement to access it, we can see how time, Einsteinian space-time, and space, are not necessary factors in this dimension. This first dimension exists, but does not grow or shape itself, or create or destroy or contain or release. I would argue that this minuscule point is far closer to a concept of nothingness than an infinite void of darkness. However, this state may not be as empty as we hope, as the old Buddhist thought experiment shows by asking: "does the shadow know it is a shadow?" In this first dimension, something can still exist, albeit it is very difficult for us

to imagine how anything can 'exist' within these limited parameters. Life in the 1st dimension is dauntingly hard to imagine, it is easy to catch oneself adding depth here, or height there, however I would argue it can exist, and possibly does. For the creature that exists within the first dimension, it exists within a sphere of reality that is infinitely full, and dense and beautiful. A life form existing in the 8th dimension trying to imagine our existence within three dimensions would have the same difficulty imagining our sphere of reality in its limited finitude. However, we exist within our own subjectively full scope. The same can be said for these first dimensional inhabitants.   Although I have eliminated the false factors inherent in a concept of a vast state of nothingness, such as time and depth, it is still clear that even the most simplified state can exist with limitless complexity and complexity cannot presuppose nothingness. This shows us that a state of infinite space and a state of finite space both disrupt the possibility of a true nothingness as a physical state.

The Weight of Zero.

      If a physical plane of nothingness does not and cannot exist, then perhaps we can consider a numeric state of nothingness: a state defined by its quantitative as well as qualitative value. Zero is a fascinating number and an even more fascinating concept. It is, in my humble opinion, one of the most extraordinary examples of human thought ever imagined. Zero is often thought of as an example of nothingness. It holds a strange position in the numeric scale in that it has no quantitative weight inherent in it. If anything is added to zero, it becomes a 1, or some number greater than itself, seemingly gaining numeric value from a non-value. This, however, is a false understanding of the meaning and weight that zero possesses.

      It is easy to see how we confuse zero with 'nothing'. There is an assumption that if you were to add anything to nothing, you would magically transform it into a

'something'. Zero does not function in this cumulatively transformational way and, I would argue, neither does a state of nothingness. Zero does not exist as a non-quantitative numerical. Zero is as much a 'something' as 5, 10 or 300,000. Zero acts as a tangible fulcrum between the negative scale and the positive scale of numbers. It exists as the point of transition where a negative slides into a positive. This is an important distinction when discussing nothingness. For nothing to truly be nothing we cannot imagine it as a nexus of creation. Something cannot originate from nothing because there must be a point of transition wherein nothing has elements of something, eliminating the notion of nothingness altogether.

Zero is merely a point on a sliding scale of addition and subtraction. When one has taken 1 apple from a set containing only 1 apple we are not left with nothing, we are left with no apples, or zero apples. If we take away one more apple, we are left with -1 apples. The notion of a negative spectrum of numbers is another indicator that zero is far removed from nothing. Pascal said, of man: 'What is man in nature? Nothing in relation to the infinite, all in relation to nothing, a mean between nothing and everything' (Pensees, 1660). Like zero, this is a false definition of nothingness as a negative existence, existing counter to a state of 'something-ness.' We cannot take from nothing. I cannot reach into nothing and remove an apple creating a negative or anti-apple state within the nothingness. This is because a negative integer is merely a mirrored polarized image of a positive integer. To further explain, imagine a bowl of ice cream. Imagine that if you were to add a spoonful of ice cream you would have ice cream +1. Now imagine that you were to take two spoonfuls from this +1 ice cream, you would now be left with your original ice cream amount -1. We cannot do this with nothingness because it is not existence with finite elements removed. Zero functions in this way, as a state of neutrality, a fulcrum of numeric potentiality. Zero is far removed from a state of nothingness.

This is an important notion for both a state of nothingness and a conception of non-

existence. Non-existence can be said to be a potentiality or a derivative from something that does, will, or has existed. A potential human, in this model, can exist in the determined teleology, some would argue, of a sperm and its eventual meeting with an egg. This however is not non-existence. This is not existent, or not-yet existent. The distinction here is an important one. Much like zero, potentialities and post-existences are planes on a spectrum of existence. This spectrum, however, does not intersect with nothingness; it is not related in any way to nothingness. Nothingness and 'something-ness' cannot interact or intersect because it would reduce one to the other at the locus of interaction. Clearly, then, nothingness cannot exist as a fulcrum point between subtractions or additions of existent or potential articles. Thus, a numeric concept such as zero does not accurately reflect a notion of nothingness.

Part II: On Knowing Nothing.

It is rarely a good idea to begin an academic philosophic paragraph with the term 'Philosophers have questioned X since the dawn of human thought', however, the notion of nothingness may be decent fodder for this type of introduction. Indeed, philosophic inquiries into the existence of the existent and the possibility of a non-existent realm date back to the birth of philosophical thought. I have already provided my critique against the possibility of a true state of nothingness, I will now present a number of philosophical claims regarding nothingness, and show how each fails to truly convey an accurate depiction of the subject matter.

Aristotle argued that objects within a truly empty void will move at an unlimited speed because there is no resistance to their increasing velocity (Coggins, 2003). This, he claims, shows that nothingness cannot exist because things do not move at this infinite velocity. Barring the claims made by Einstein's special theory of relativity, which states that space limits speed according to a maximum velocity, Aristotle is still mistaken in

confusing a void with nothingness. Speed presupposes distance, which presupposes time, which presupposes depth, which, as I have already argued, is vast and full despite being materially empty. Therefore, Aristotle's argument for infinite velocity within a truly empty void falls flat.

There is a wide spectrum of philosophers who say that the inherent problem with nothingness is the linguistic difficulties associated with the term. C.J.F. Williams argued that 'nothing' can be made into a verb: "the flask has nothing in it", means that the flask 'noths' (2001). This claim presupposes an interrelation between the existent realm and a realm of nothingness. For something to 'noth', something must stem from nothing, or visa-versa, and, as I have already explained in my attack on the comparison of zero to nothing, we cannot have a nothing that interacts with any something; such a thing fails to be 'nothing' because of the axiomatic principle of cause and effect. Said principle states that something which is an existent article cannot stem from nothing. All matter, energy and thought are derived from some other such plane of existence.

Another example of a thinker using linguistic premises to attack nothingness is Melissus. Melissus agrees with my conclusion that nothingness cannot exist; however, he concludes that it is merely a linguistic impossibility. He claims that "if there is nothing but a vacuum in a flask, there is still something in the flask: the empty vacuum"(Guthrie, 1965). Therefore, he claims nothingness is something. This linguistic critique of nothingness avoids the inherent issues with the impossible reality of nothingness because it claims that there is 'something-ness' inherent in nothing. It also confuses empty space with nothingness, which we shall ignore out of charity. A linguistic error like this is also shown by Parmenideans who argued that it is self defeating to say that 'something does not exist' because it is referencing that very thing, which presupposed its existence. For example, the statement 'Atlantis does not exist' does not make sense, according to Parmenideans, because it presupposes a cognitive notion of Atlantis.

Firstly, I have already shown that our conceptions of an imagined state of

nothingness, are not, in fact, accurately portraying nothingness. Our conceptions of 'nothing' are not of 'nothing', they are, as I have shown, definitively of 'something.' This inability to accurately conceive of 'nothing' means that it's cognitively constructed truth value is impossible to determine because we have no true conception to base it on. In turn, we must have some kind of conception of Atlantis to accurately say that Atlantis 'exists,' if in even the most broad definition. If we picture New York City and say we are imagining Atlantis, can we truly say Atlantis still exists in any cogent form? Similarly, it is analogous for us to posit: 'If our cognitive depictions of a state of nothingness are in fact simply *empty* states of something, can we truly say that 'nothing' exists in even this imagined sense?'

Finally, another critique of the linguistic arguments regarding nothingness lies in the Parmenideans' claim that to say something 'does not exist' presupposes its existence. If we say that nothingness does not exist, we are presupposing its existence. If we presuppose its existence, it becomes something and fails to be nothing. If it fails to be nothing then we must say that nothing does not exist which, once again presupposes its existence. The Parmenideans' linguistic argument results in an inescapable paradox when attempting to determine the potentiality of a state of nothingness.

Benatar and the non-existent nothing.

I will now extend my argument beyond a debate on the validity of nothingness. I have sufficiently argued that a state of nothingness cannot exist. I will attempt to show that judgements about experiential existence and non-existence are analogous to claims

about something-ness and nothingness. Benatar argues in "Why is it Better Never to Come into Existence" (July, 1997) that not existing, or non-existence, is advantageous over existence because of a negative utilitarian duty towards non-existent beings. For Benatar, these non-existent beings have a moral validity even though they do not (yet) exist. It should be noted that Benatar, unlike the other thinkers, is not considering existence as opposed to non-existence in the sense of 'something-ness' versus' nothingness. He is dealing purely with existence as 'being alive.' He considers that bringing someone into this world is essentially negative because of the negative things that result from bringing someone into a life of pain. We have, he argues, a duty not to bring suffering people into existence, whereas we have no such duty to bring happy people into existence "because, while their pleasure would be good, its absence would not be bad." (pg. 157)

Although Benatar's argument is ripe for criticism, I am not so focussed on his negative utilitarian claims about our duties to our unborn children, as I am on his conception of non-existence. Benatar defines non-existence as being "applicable to those who never exist and do not currently exist. [Which] can be further divided into those who do not yet exist and those who are no longer existing. In the current context I am using non-existence to denote those who never exist." (pg. 168) Benatar argues that a state of non-existence is preferable to one of experiential existence. He uses the comparative analytic technique of game theory to position a state of experiential existence against one of non-existence. He justifies his entire argument by making claims towards this state of nonexistence, however, 'non-existence' cannot exist, just like nothingness cannot exist and for many of the same reasons.

Benatar makes many of the same errors in conception that philosophers and thinkers have often made before him: he posits an empty concept such as 'non-existence' as being merely a point along a spectrum towards existence. I have argued this point extensively and need only cite the axiomatic principle of cause and effect to show that we

cannot create something from nothing, lest we change our state of nothingness into something.

Another possible conception of non-existence that Benatar has given us is the idea that perhaps non-existence is the opposite of a state of existence. This seems like the most likely alternative considering Benatar's rigidly defined binary when considering existential value. If we presuppose that existence has a polar opposite in non-existence then we must also presuppose a state or realm of non-existence because existence must exist qua existing, or it fails to exist. Non-existence must perform in a similar manner for any logical comparison to be made. However, as I have argued extensively, there can be no possible conception, imaginary or realized, of a state of nothingness. Non-existence cannot be compared in any logical way without finding some sort of interaction or similarity from which to base this comparison. I have shown, however, that any such interaction cannot exist without eliminating the non-existent sphere. I have also shown that non-existence as a negatively charged doppelganger of sorts also fails because that would require some degree of existence within a non-existent realm, which, once again, undermines the definition of non-existence.

One possible objection Benatar might make here is that he is not attempting to compare existence to nothingness. Benatar might claim that a state of non-existence is a state of potentiality and not, in fact, an empty vacuum. In this case I would have to criticize the wording of non-existent. If it is the case that a state of non-existence is not in fact nothingness, then can we really ignore the oxymoronic aspects of an existent non-existence? Also, a state of potentiality, even if it is empty, requires a locus from which a potential something may, to reference C. J. F. Williams, 'someth.' This locus of creation must exist, and therefore we are once again left without the possibility to consider an existent non-existent state from which not yet existent potential somethings may be compared with existent somethings. To compare something to nothing is a false

dichotomy. There is no comparison there; it is an illogical, impossible and redundant claim. It is equivalent to comparing the value of 1 elephant against 1. We cannot logically compare nothingness to something without losing our comparison completely. But what does this mean for one of the paramount questions in metaphysics and existentialism: Is there value in existence?

PART III: The Value of Something.

I have argued so far that nothingness cannot exist in any form. It does not function as a location or realm because immaterial elements prevent it from ever being a truly empty void. It cannot be conceived mentally or linguistically because to presuppose the existence of nothing undermines the very definition of it. Furthermore, nothingness cannot act as a locus of creation because of the axiomatic principle of cause and effect. I have even argued against terms designating nothingness but hiding under alternate titles, such as Benatar's non-existent potentials. However, my critique of Benatar has also undermined his judgement of value in existence. I will now briefly attempt to explain the final thrust of my argument: that any value claim about existence as a totality is essentially nonsense.

We designate value by comparing a thing, mood, experience, thought, or action to something of equal, greater or lesser quality or value. Our entire system of values is based on comparative value claims. In the case of value claims about existence as a whole, we have nothing to compare existence to but non-existence, as Benatar has done. I have, however, disproved the logic of any state or notion of nothingness and have therefore removed this comparison. What are we left with? Existence, full and expansive. This existent realm has no comparative other than other possible existent realms which exist altogether within one vast topography that we can call 'Existence.' This overarching existence exists and has existed forever in some form or another. If it did not exist at any

point, then the only possible alternative would be nothingness, which cannot exist without existing and becoming something. This nothing also cannot create something without a locus of creation which, as I've argued, undermines nothingness prima facie. It is for these reasons that I argue we can make no claims about the value of existence qua existence without in some way comparing existence to an illogical and impossible construct of nothingness. In short, value claims about existence presuppose a comparison that cannot be made, and thus are rendered meaningless.

In Conclusion.

I have shown how value claims of existence fail because existence has no logical comparative besides nothingness. I have deconstructed and disproved the validity of nothingness in any form, and I have also rendered numerous thinkers and philosopher's metaphysical claims moot by citing their falsely conceived comparative premises of non-existence. I have argued that we cannot compare and contrast elements of something to nothingness, and we cannot compare the overarching state of existence qua existence to anything else because there are no comparatives to the totality. Hypothetical claims of nothingness are thereby reduced to emotivist nonsense. The discussions of a comparative value within existence have been focussed on the values inherent in the existent realm, as opposed to the lack-thereof within a non-existent realm. I have shown this to be a false dichotomy, rendering the comparison false. Nothingness cannot exist. Existence is all that does exist, and nothing more is needed.

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The Role of Inspiration in Presocratic Philosophy

By Mike Tkacz

In the Presocratic philosophers we find a major shift in their character and style of thinking, and in the accounts they give of the organization and structure of the cosmos, compared to that of the poets, the epic poets such as Homer and Hesiod, whom their thought was emerging out of. While we find the poets giving fantastical and mythological accounts of how the world operates and came to be in its present state, the Presocratic philosophers are found to prefer more naturalistic accounts while still retaining a place and important role for the notions of god and the divine. To describe this in a modern way of speaking, we might call this a paradigm shift. The Presocratic philosophers I will be focusing on are Xenophanes of Colophon, Heraclitus of Ephesus and Parmenides of Elea. The immediate question that comes to mind is what changed

with the Presocratic philosophers; what inspired them to break away from the poets and their accounts? In the discussion that is to follow I will focus on the what influenced the change in the mode of thinking of the Presocratics, and the notion of the divine as these philosophers understand it. This analysis will be aimed at examining the role of inspiration in Presocratic philosophy.

Before I begin my analysis I would like to draw on a quote from Aristotle to get an initial sense of what is inspiring the Presocratics. On the philosophical project Aristotle says, "People both now start and in the beginning started to do philosophy because of wonder. At first they wondered about the obvious difficulties and then they gradually progressed to puzzle about the greater ones... Whoever is puzzled and in a state of wonder believes he is ignorant (this is why the lover of myths is also in a way a philosopher, since myths are made up of wonders)" (from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, quoted in McKirahan, p. 69). This sense of wonder and curiosity about the natural world runs through the Presocratics, compelling them to investigate and attempt to describe the world they find themselves in. And it is this sense of wonder that links them with the poets; while the poets are perhaps trying to animate and stir the feeling of wonder in their listeners, the Presocratics are trying to explain and understand the wonders of the world. What is at the root of the poetic and Presocratic accounts is this sense of wonder.

When we compare the Presocratic philosophers with the poets what we see is a transition from a traditional mode of thinking, used by the poets, to a more argumentative / empirical mode of thinking. The implications of this shift concerned the manner in which the Ancient Greeks conveyed, sought out and identified knowledge. Classics scholar Charles Beye helps describe the cultural context that poetry was apart of, in which traditional thought established itself in. Beye first notes that "the poems themselves were created in a preliterate society, one that existed before the invention of writing", that is, epic poetry was part of an oral culture (Beye, p. 3). The significance of poetry to the Greeks was very important because through it they learned of their culture's

history, and more than that, poetry was a performative art, of poems that could be thousands of lines long; "without writing, knowledge of [their past] would have had to be carried in humankind's memory in some other fashion", and the means to do this was the "combination of memory and its creative application in performance" (ibid, p. 3-5). To accomplish the momentous task the poets employed what is called the dactylic hexameter, an "inherited formula" incorporating repetition of phrases and a specific meter and rhythm (ibid, p. 5-6). The traditional method is part of an oral culture where these poems represent the history and identity of a group of people, which would be performed vividly in front of an audience. Under the traditional method of the poets, knowledge was passed down from one generation to the next as the poems are taught to the younger generation by the older.

Where then is the knowledge of things happening before human existence coming from? How is the truth of what the poets speak of to be accounted for? The inspiration of the poets is said to come from the Muses. Hesiod himself, in his *Theogony*, claims that he is being divinely inspired by the Muses (lines 1-115), and Homer does the same in the *Odyssey* about the singer Demodokos (Bk. 8, ln. 63, 73). This phenomenon, and its importance to understanding Greek thought at this time, is also recognized by contemporary academics such as philosopher Gerard Naddaf (Naddaf, p. 330) and scholar Maarit Kivilo (Kivilo, p. 3, 7, 208-209, as well as numerous other places). Through the Muses, knowledge of events past were divinely revealed to the poets who would then perform and sing of what the Muses have imparted to them, to the members of their community. In this way the community was able to learn about its history and the origin of the world because authority was given to the poets account because it was believed to be the word of god. So what traditional thought relies on is faith, faith that the poets were actually being inspired by the Muses and recipients of divine revelation. But the main concerns of the poets and this traditional mode of thinking are with memory, memory of their culture's past, and performance, bringing their past to life for

their audience; as we will see, the concerns of the Presocratics were very different.

When we move to examine the Presocratics we are moving into a culture that has gained the written word, so we find an entirely different attitude towards the knowledge of the poets. With Xenophanes we see him not telling a story of the gods nor claiming to be inspired by the gods, but instead actually giving a *critique* of the poetic gods; "Homer and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods all deeds which among men are a reproach and a disgrace: thieving, adultery, and deceiving one another" (DK 21B111). We see him also comparing the accounts of the gods in different cultures; "Ethiopians believe that the gods are flat-nosed and dark, Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired" (DK 21B16). From this critique he rejects these descriptions as based on the people in those cultures or of human nature in general, and not to be based on truth or any notion of how divine nature would or should be in itself, hence his mocking remark that "if oxen and horses and lions had hands…horses would draw the shapes of gods to look like horses and oxen to look like oxen, and each would make the gods' bodies have the shape they themselves had" (DK 21B15). From this he proposes a more fitting description of god based on his understanding of what divine nature really entails, that being a nature which is all powerful and all knowing and without the wants or needs which people have (DK 21B23-26).

He also rejects the notion of divine revelation, perhaps because the conceptions of god found in the supposedly 'divinely inspired' poets is so clearly derived from those people they are most familiar with and so can not be imparted to them from the gods. He states that "by no means did the gods reveal all things to mortals from the beginning, but in time, by searching, they discover better" (DK 21B18) thus favouring that we seek for ourselves in order to give a natural account (DK 21B29-30, 32). However, he also recognizes that there are limits to human knowledge, claiming that "No man has seen nor will anyone know the truth about the gods and all the things I speak of. For even if a person should in fact say what is absolutely the case, nevertheless he himself does not

know, but belief is fashioned over all things" (DK 21B34). Just because we may never be able to attain perfect knowledge, this doesn't mean that we can not do better or worse in the accounts that we give. Even if we are creatures limited to belief only we can still improve upon our beliefs, such as describing a rainbow as a cloud instead of as a god (DK 21B32). Though our mental and sensory faculties are not nearly as powerful as those of god, they are still of the same kind so if we use what powers of perception and cognition we do have we can give an account that is closer to the truth than we originally had. This is what we see Xenophanes doing when he critiques the notions of god he finds around him.

As was seen above, Xenophanes takes very seriously the significance of giving the correct description or account of god. Xenophanes finds the accounts given by the poets to be very poor because they do not see the inconsistencies with their depictions of the gods. So in response to the poets' accounts he sets out to give one that he thinks is much more likely to be true. His account ends up being very different from those of the poets because it comes out of a very different methodology and mode of thinking, that is, he is conscious of his reasons why he thinks it to be a better account. The account he gives is much more like those of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes in that it is a naturalized account.

In Heraclitus we again find a preference for an empirical method when he says, "if all things were to become smoke, nostrils would distinguish them" (DK 22B7), "all that can be seen, heard, experienced – these are what I prefer" (DK 22B55), "men who are lovers of wisdom must be inquirers into many things indeed" (DK 22B35), and that "nature loves to hide" (DK 22B123). If we inquire into things with the perceptual powers we possess we will begin to see and understand how "all things are steered through all things" (DK 22B41) because they all occur in accordance with the Logos (DK 22B1). Like Xenophanes, Heraclitus sees humans as capable of insight if we actively inquire into the world. Understanding of the world does is not simply revealed to us, however, the

fact that nature hides implies the possibility that it can be found, otherwise nature would just be concealed, buried and unknown.

For Heraclitus, if, by searching, we have come to understand the Logos, then we will be able to interpret the Logos in all manner of phenomenon we encounter. We find him stressing the importance of how we interpret oracles, by paying attention to the signs they give (DK 22B93), the traditional gods (DK 22B32), and even nature (in the sense of giving the right account) (DK 22B123). But in order to give a proper interpretation we must have wisdom (DK 22B32, 41). Once again, the ability to accurately interpret or give a good account depends on our mode of thinking. By thinking more argumentatively than we will gain wisdom and insight because we will have to investigate into things sufficiently to understand the how Logos operates. If we can have an understanding of the Logos then we can properly interpret the oracles or the traditional gods, or give a good account of nature because these will all accord with the Logos and so be intelligible through it.

But this is not the way of the poets. The way of the poets is to receive from generations past and remember what has been taught. This is part of what Heraclitus is reacting to, and so we see his contempt for the poets when he says that "much learning does not teach insight. Otherwise it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras and moreover Xenophanes and Hecataeus" (DK 22B40), and in the fragment which states that "Heraclitus said that Homer deserved to be expelled from the contests and flogged, and Archilochus likewise" (DK 22B42). Since the poets do not go and investigate for themselves, they do not gain an understanding of the Logos. So when we go out and investigate for ourselves with our own powers what we do is we begin do understand the Logos that hidden in all things.

Parmenides as well exhibits a break away from traditional modes of thinking. Most importantly he is credited with the introduction of deductive logic into philosophy (McKirahan, p. 157-159). Describing this Parmenides says, "in no way may this prevail,

that things that are not, are. But you, bar your thought from this way of inquiry" (DK 28B7), and as well that, "there is still left a single story of a way, that it is…being ungenerated it is also imperishable, whole and of a single kind and unshaken and complete…I will not permit you to say or to think <that it grew> from what is not; for it is not to be said or thought that it is not.…it must either fully be or not" (DK 28B8). This represents a major step because, like the dactylic hexameter of the poets, Parmenides provides a specific formula for assessing one's own and others ideas and for pursuing knowledge.

In Parmenides (DK 28B1) there is the distinction between truth, which is held by the goddess for Parmenides, and the opinion or beliefs of humans, which perhaps are influenced by either tradition or by their individual fancies. It is decided by the goddess that "there is need for [Parmenides] to learn all things – both the unshaken heart of persuasive Truth and the opinions of mortals, in which there is not true reliance" (DK 28B1). By learning of both accounts Parmenides will be prepared to distinguish between truth and falsity no matter whose account or interpretation he is hearing. The distinction between truth and opinion is not simply between what the poets say and what the philosophers say; all who purport to have knowledge must be able to meet Parmenides' standards. By employing deductive logic, one can not only come to arrive at truth, but one can also show how and why the accounts of others can not be true by making their inconsistencies and contradictions apparent.

The character of thought exhibited by the Presocratics could be considered an argumentative mode of thinking. With it the idea of divine revelation has been rejected, so the question now becomes how are they going to justify their accounts? They rely on observation and evidence, and then extrapolate from this to reason for their account. The validity and strength of their lies in how convincing their evidence and reasoning is. The Presocratics seem to be aware of their own capacity to perceive and understand the world and the fragments we have reflect this. The challenge to the poets is, without the

authority of god, how do you account for your account?

The Presocratics show commitments to an underlying order in the universe and the ability of humans to comprehend that order through their own means. But just because we are capable of comprehension does not automatically mean that we will. If there is a systematic order to the universe then the quality of our account of it will in part depend on the quality of our thinking about the universe. If ones thinking process is constrained by cultural practices then it will produce an account that is true only insofar as those practices are concerned with truth preservation; but systematic and reasoned thinking will be much more likely to produce a coherent and true account. In adopting more argumentative thinking, that is, by not relying on faith or divine authority, people can begin to question the observations, reasoning and accounts of others if they think they have apprehended something more correctly. This is why we see that the accounts given by the Presocratics are always in response to those who came before them, either poet or philosopher.

What we see in the Presocratics is that they are becoming *conscious* of their own reasoning and justificatory process, and of why they are giving the accounts they are giving. This must have been greatly aided by having access to writing, through which thoughts and ideas are able to be preserved allowing one to return to them and see the reasoning process right before their very eye. So with the advent of writing, the problem of memory becomes less of a problem so that the Presocratic philosophers could focus their efforts elsewhere, namely on whether their account, and those of others, seemed plausible or truthful. To support the plausibility or truthfulness of their accounts they appealed to evidence from the world. So the transition from a traditional to a more argumentative mode of thinking, from poetry to early philosophy, being aided by the advent of writing, allowed the Presocratic philosophers to provide their own interpretations of the world, based on the evidence they saw. But this also left them open to criticisms of others, with their own evidence and interpretations, because they were no

longer operating within a traditional framework. As was stated above, the concerns of the poets were with memory and performance of their cultures history. Inspiration, as being gifted from the Muses, then dealt with these challenges that the poets faced. The Presocratics on the other hand, because of the introduction of writing, did not need to be as concerned with memory. Inspiration for them concerned reasoning and understanding the principles governing the universe. Before we can get an understanding of what inspiration means for the Presocratics we must first see how they saw the relationship between nature and the divine.

Despite taking a more natural approach to understanding the universe, we still find that in the Presocratics the notions of god and divinity are still prominent. It is important then to attempt to understand what the Presocratics understand by god and the divine.

As was seen above, Xenophanes has a particular understanding, of god and that this god is responsible for setting out the order of the universe "by the thought of his mind" (DK 21B25). Moreover, with Xenophanes' god, "all of him sees, all of him thinks, all of him hears" (DK 21B24), and "he always remains in the same place, moving not at all, nor is it fitting for him to go different places at different times" (DK 21B26). This could be taken to mean that this god is the universe in its entirety, or that god is a supreme being, existing motionless at the center of the universe (presumably). What seems certain is that Xenophanes' god set out the order found in the cosmos, and that this order is intelligible, at least to some degree for humans, provided that we search for the underlying principles.

With Heraclitus, I believe that he conceives of the Logos as divine. He says that, "this Logos holds always... all things come to be in accordance with this Logos" (DK 22B1), "listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise to agree that all things are one" (DK 22B50), and so presumably it is what steers all things through all things (DK 22B41). The Logos is thus an ever present, guiding and unifying principle or force which

makes all things intelligible.

Heraclitus also claims that "human nature has no insight, but divine nature has it" (DK 22B78) and that "a person's character is his divinity" (DK 22B119), so perhaps if we inquire and search (DK 22B35) long enough, and with the right way of thinking, we can come to acquire wisdom and true judgement (DK 22B41). Thus, by acquiring wisdom we can come to fully understand the Logos and how it operates in all things so that we might live according to its law. Perhaps in understanding it we can come to be divine ourselves.

Parmenides claims that it is a goddess who reveals to him the ways of truth and human opinion, and the method of deductive logic (DK 28B1). Given the significance of the deductive method he discovered he may have thought it must be divine since through it all things can be understood and judged. Or perhaps he thought that to see things through this method is to see things the way god does and so using this method is akin to stepping into the mind of god.

There is a sense among the Presocratic philosophers that whatever principle is governing or ordering the universe, be it the Logos, water or air for Thales or Anaximenes, the logic of Parmenides goddess, or simply god for Xenophanes, that because it gives order and unity to the universe, because all things spring from this infinite well, it must be divine. And when we look at the world around us we have a sense that we are apart of something much larger than ourselves, that we are a small part of a grand scheme. This I believe was intriguing to the Presocratics, and even more so because they could achieve some understanding of the cosmos. What seems to come together in their thought is that: god is the cause of the all pervasive order in the universe, and so understands that order; they are part of the universe and have a place in that order; and that they are able to understand it in some capacity. What they may have drawn from this is that humans must be of like kind, or at least our minds are, with the divine or god, even though not to the same degree.

How then are we to understand the role of inspiration in the Presocratics? First I think we should remind ourselves of the role inspiration played for the poets. Inspiration, divine inspiration, came to the poets from the Muses in order for them to perform the stories of their past. It concerned memory and performance of tales of old. Truly inspired poets thus would be able to perform their poems for their audience as if they had actually been there.

But the Presocratics, having access to the written word, were not so heavily concerned with memory. The concerns, again, of the Presocratics were those of understanding, of the principles governing the order of the cosmos, and reasoning, by evidence for the account of the cosmos they were putting forward. Inspiration for the Presocratics then would mean that nature was speaking to these philosophers, but subtly, giving them flashes of insight into the underlying order of the universe. But this does not come for free. The Presocratics were inquirers and observers, filled with a sense of wonder about the natural world no doubt, so after much searching perhaps something they saw would jump out at them and present itself as related or similar to other phenomena, or as indicative of some deeper implications and forces at work. That is, they would become inspired. Nature, which being divine, would speak to them, reveal to them something not seen by the others around them, a little piece of the great puzzle that is nature. Then from this inspired insight they could then continue their inquiry and observation and attempt to explain other phenomena. With each flash of insight they would gain a little more understanding of the world around them and a better sense of how they fit into that world and what their role was. Thus I believe that the Presocratic philosophers were being inspired by nature herself.

But how is that possible; how were the Presocratics being inspired by nature? Like that of the poets, inspiration had to come from without; it was a gift to account for the abilities of a select few. How was it that these philosophers could have access to the basic principles of nature while others didn't? The same way as the poets could perform

their poems better than anyone else was able to; they were inspired. But the Muses are not said to have been at work with the Presocratics. But the Presocratic understanding of nature is that it is divine, or that the divine is at least ever present in nature. Thus the divine can be inspiring the Presocratics directly through nature.

This may seem like a strange idea to our modern minds, but we must remember that even though the advent of philosophy has occurred it is still young, and we are still in Ancient Greece. This, however, can enrich our contemporary understanding of nature if we see it in a divine light. The divine can be seen then as wanting us to understand it, compelling us to inquire into our place in nature, and how best to fit that place, perhaps by enticing an innate passion for understanding in humans that has yet to be fully unlocked. To appreciate and foster this type of love of wisdom we must understand the relation between the mind and the world. There seems to be a relation between the mind and the world, that they are like two halves of a whole, one intelligent and the other intelligible; it is as if the mind and the world are given over, destined, for each other. Add to this a sense of wonder about the world and it seems quite possible that nature has the power to inspire. If the principles that govern the universe are understood as divine, then the divine is calling us, compelling us, inspiring us to inquire into nature and make known what is waiting to become known.

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<u>Reconsidering Transgendered Embodiment</u>

<u>as Monstrous</u>

By Laura Curridor

In Western societies the dominant gender paradigm constructs two genders as

naturally and fundamentally rooted in two biologically based sexes with correlating physical, psychological, and behavioral differences (Davis 2). Subsequently, it is within this gender paradigm that sex, as male and female, and gender, as masculine and feminine, have been set in opposition to one another, ultimately comprising a dichotomous archetype that strictly outlines acceptable gender ideals as they correspond to either sex. It is within the confines of the gender regime that individuals are expected to construct their identity, gendering themselves in a way that is culturally intelligible and performed in accordance with the hegemonic rules of gender. It is within these gender boundaries, however, that the only acceptable forms of embodiment are permitted. Individuals who do not identify with heteronormative conceptions of gender are cast aside, hidden, or punished, their form of embodiment is rendered culturally unintelligible and outside what is considered socially acceptable under normative gender conceptions. For instance, in deviating from normative gender rules/roles, transgendered individuals are thought to be violating and disrupting the natural state of the gender system. Within the gender regime there is no place for gender diversity and as such. This not only limits the possibilities of sexual and gender identification, but also denies the transgendered subject agency and the opportunity for authentic self-formation. Transgendered embodiment is thought to be reprehensible and repulsive, culturally and socially unintelligible and therefore invalid and unworthy of recognition or acceptance. However, when both transgendered and non-transgendered forms of embodiment are considered in relation to the diversity of modes and structures of embodiment, multiple similarities become evident between these various manifestations of embodiment. This recognition not only opens a space to consider gender diversity, but also acknowledges the validity of the transgendered experience. Thus, in various accounts it is argued that transgendered individuals are akin to monsters, embodying that which is unnatural and perverse. However, in the quest for gender identity and self-actualization, all individuals, both transgendered and non-transgendered, undergo processes of self-formation and re-

formation in a way that illuminates the sameness and overlap in processes of embodiment experienced by both transgendered and non-transgendered individuals which allows for the reconsideration of transgendered embodiment as monstrous.

In the West, dominant gender ideology is founded on a binary system conceptualized by heteronormative claims surrounding the relationship between sex and gender. For instance, "...the dominant gender paradigm constructs two genders [man and woman] as naturally rooted in two biologically based sexes [male and female]" (Davis 2). The biologically born female for example, is expected to understand her sex as the basis of her fundamental human nature with distinctive psychological and behavioural propensities that will be predicted naturally from her reproductive functions (Goffman 301, West & Zimmerman 128). "Garfinkel notes that in everyday life we live in a world of two - and only two - sexes. This arrangement has a moral status, in that we include ourselves and others in it as essentially, originally, in the first place, always have been, always will be, once and for all, in the final analysis, either 'male' or 'female'" (West & Zimmerman 133, Garfinkel 59). The separation and inclusion of ourselves and others into two fundamentally distinct states of being allows for the proliferation of hierarchal, dualistic, and naturalized categories of identification as man and woman. These two categories, rooted in a biologically deterministic gender paradigm, reflect hegemonic expectations in relation to gender, carrying with them a compulsory and regulatory force in such a way that female and male embodiment seems to be given, organic, and necessary (Davis 2, Haraway 115).

Thus, how one identifies as a man or woman is directly influenced by heteronormative conceptions of what it means to be a gendered being in the West. "Identification occurs within a social regime of normative expectations and guidelines that shape everyone's possibilities for self-representation. Social expectations about the physical, psychological, and behavioural difference among people shape both individuals' gender identifications and the gender attributions of others" (Davis 2). According to the

rules of gender, not only is one accountable to gender expectations and expected to present themselves accordingly, but seeing that the gender binary maintains that there are only two genders which correspond with two sexes which are fundamentally distinct, individuals who deviate from their birth-designated sex are thought to exceed the limits of cultural intelligibility (Gilbert2, 93,95 & Davis 3). Under the regime of gender, those who do not identify with their birth-designated sex or choose to cross the gender boundaries are rendered unintelligible: persons who transgress the natural and acceptable limits of self-presentation and embodiment.

Under the prevailing gender binary paradigm if one's physiological sex is perceived to be consistent with their gender identity, their embodiment is recognized and affirmed. However, if the opposite is true, and one chooses a sex to which they are not assigned, or associates with a gender that does not correlate with their given biological sex, one is typically hidden or punished. "Gender and genitals comprise a stronghold of control binding all people to a social order that has serious difficulty tolerating diversity or change. The freedom to self-categorize flies directly in the face of bigenderism" (Green 504, Gilbert2 100). In contemporary Western societies individuals who choose to transgress gender boundaries have been labeled as transgendered. For the purpose of this paper, the term transgendered will be used to recognize any subject who does not live in the gender they were assigned to as correlating to their birth-designated sex. Seeing that only two sexes are thought to exist alongside two genders, transgendered individuals are thought to embody that which is fundamentally unnatural, and in a sense, morally wrong. The transgendered experience is ignored and distorted, their embodiment denied and excluded. "Under the binary phallocentric founding myth by which Western bodies and subjects are authorized, only one body per gendered subject is 'right'. All other bodies are wrong" (Stone 231). As mentioned in a previous paper, in such discourses, there are no subjects, only homogenized, totalized objects, bound together and united under dominance and exclusionary politics (Riddell 149, Stone 232). All other

bodies and experiences are rendered meaningless, unnatural, and unworthy of recognition. The transgendered sense of self is constructed in reference to a particular form of embodiment; however, it is these various forms of embodiment that diverge from hegemonic gender expectations that has prompted defenders of the heterosexist gender regime to label transgendered individuals as monstrous and perverse. Identity labels, conceptualized through a binary understanding of sexuality and gender, label the transgendered experience as unintelligible, a kind of false consciousness (Valentine 417). "Transgendered individuals have become ideal representatives of gender disruption and fluidity because they have histories and bodies that do not reflect hegemonic expectations" (Davis 3). It is the feelings of discomfort, repulsion, and fear, which stem from threats against the binary posed by the body and embodiment of the transgendered individual, which are used to justify the label of monster. Within the realm of the gender regime, it is argued that transgendered individuals make problematic the statuses of man and woman and, as a result, their humanity becomes unintelligible, their status as human problematic, and hence, elicit the label monster.

Dominated by fundamental dualisms such as, male and female, nature and culture, etc, stories of gender in the West are told from a "phallogocentric" standpoint founded on organic wholeness, a position which subsequently demonizes any gendered position that transgresses heteronormative expectations (Haraway 112). When gender is defined by biology, to be a transgendered woman, for instance, is to move outside of the gender boundaries, to defy nature. It is commonly accepted that to be a transgendered woman does not equate with being a real woman, the same being said for transgendered men. Instead, transgendered individuals are denied humanness, a sense of personal identity, and, in virtue of their supposed subversion of the structure and modes of identity, they become threats, their embodiment labeled as monstrous (Haraway 112, Riddell 150).

Susan Stryker comments on her own experience as a transsexual woman,
> The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is a product of medical
> science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and
> sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born.

> In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a
> transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.
> Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human
> due to the means of my embodiment... (Stryker 245).

Like the monster, the transgendered individual becomes the alien, 'other', ridiculed and isolated because of the threat the individual is argued to pose against nature itself. Many theorists have commented on the sheer horror of transgendered embodiment, an intense fear produced by the diversity of identification and self-construction that threatens to shake the very foundation of the heterosexist gender regime. The following examples illustrate this line of thought:

> "I consider transsexualism to be a fraud, and the participants in
> it...perverted. The transsexual [claims] he/she needs to change his/
> her body in order to be his/her "true self". Because this "true self"
> requires another physical form in which to manifest itself, it must
> therefore war with nature" (Stryker 245).

> "People will regard any phenomenon that produces this
> disorientation as "disgusting" or "dirty". To be so regarded, however,
> the phenomenon must threaten to destroy not only one of their
> fundamental cognitive categories, but their whole cognitive
> structure" (Bornstein 237).

> "All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female
> form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves...Rape
> although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by
> deception [a characteristic given to the transsexual subject by Janice
> Raymond]" (Bornstein 238).

In this sense, not only is the experience of the transgendered individual denied, but their sense of self and form of embodiment rejected. Within the confines of Western heterosexist ideology, to bear the label monster, or creature, is also to be targeted and at risk of assault, whether it be verbal, physical, or emotional, justified by dominant gender ideology and the "othering" that has occurred as a result. However, although the above may in fact be the current state of the gender regime, it does not necessarily preclude thinking about whether or not transgendered individuals can be not monstrous.

When compared how one, transgendered and non-transgendered, constructs a sense of self and other, and how one manages the accomplishment of gender in their everyday interactions, there is room for the reconsideration of transgendered embodiment as monstrous. It has been noted that gender is part of a story we tell ourselves, in part, to naturalize particular social organizations, ideologies, etc. This being the case, it can also be argued that there is nothing about being male or female that naturally binds men or women, and that the category of man or woman is highly complex and constructed, used to justify various gendered social arrangements (Haraway 107). As something likely unnatural and socially constructed then, gender is not so much inherent as learned, achieved and practiced throughout one's daily interactions. "This means that the essential axiom is that our understanding of what it is to be a man or a woman, male or female, is not something innate and unchangeable, but rather something that is created by social and historical forces" (Gilbert1 46). It is here that it is necessary to recognize gender as something public, not private, something learned, something inevitably practiced. "From the standpoint of persons who regard themselves as normally sexed, their environment has perceivably normal sex composition" (Garfinkel 59); however, whether or not this is the case, it can be argued that both transgendered individuals and non-transgendered individuals must manage their gender and work to achieve self-presentations, doing so in a variety of ways (to be discussed). Whether one is a biologically born female or a transgendered woman, both, under current hegemonic expectations, tend to base their perceptions of themselves on the social truths that are read on their bodies. For example, both transgendered and non-transgendered individuals will share experiences relating to dress, behaviour, etc, for the purposes of guidance and self-actualization. "Again, this is much like any teenager would do" (Wilchins 548). In a study done surrounding the gendered nature of identity development in men, it was acknowledged that the traditional definition of masculinity refers to the dominant culture's normative definition of masculinity (Edwards & Jones 221). The study considered men of different ages, race-

ethnicity, classes, and educational backgrounds. As was noted,

> One of the participants described the way he performed to meet
> these expectations [dominant heteronormative expectations
> surrounding masculinity] as "putting my man face on". The men's
> gender identity development is described as a process of interacting
> with society's expectations, by learning these expectations, putting
> on a mask to conform with these expectations, wearing the mask,
> and struggling to begin to take off the mask (Edwards & Jones 214).

It should be noted that the men in this study were all biologically born men; however, when their responses to the pressures of hegemonic masculine expectations are compared to those given by transgendered individuals, their responses are strikingly similar. Both groups expressed feelings of needing to put on a "mask" to cover aspects of their true selves that do not meet society's expectations (Edwards & Jones 216, Garfinkel 70). Most individuals fear not being seen as they want to be seen as a woman or man, and most will argue that they feel the need to conceal or justify parts of themselves that do not fit with dominant thinking. In this way, it can be argued that both transgendered and non-transgendered subjects must not only learn, achieve, and practice their gendered form of embodiment, but at times do so in a way that conforms to dominant societal expectations. It is not to say that all individuals experience the same forms of embodiment, but to raise the point that both transgendered and non-transgendered forms of embodiment can develop similarly which allows for the reassessment of transgendered embodiment as monstrous.

As mentioned above, it has been suggested that the transgendered body is unnatural, a product of medical science in many cases, created by various surgical procedures, and through the use of various hormone treatments. However critical theorists of body modification practices have argued that practices such as piercing, branding, tattooing, cosmetic surgery, and self-demand amputation, can all be considered "trans" practices, and that, conversely, transsexual body modification can be considered simply one particular type of a wider class of body modification phenomena (Sullivan

552). Whether an individual receives breast implants, tattoos, a mastectomy/penectomy, hormone treatments, etc, each function in varying ways and to varying degrees, explicitly transforms one's bodily being and hence, in some way, they are all "trans" practices (Sullivan 552).

Under the heternormative gender regime, transgendered individuals are not acknowledged because they do not have bodies and histories that reflect hegemonic expectations, their attempts at body modification seen as grotesque exaggerations of unnatural combinations; however, diversity not only challenges the taken-for-granted binary divisions of gender, but recognizes the bodily and living conditions of transgendered and non-transgendered individuals. It has been argued that body modification not only subverts the categories of identity, but also acts as a symbolic marker, used by all modifiers to establish their sense of self (Pitts 446,447). There is a multitudinous diversity of bodies and experiences and body modification practices provide insight into the ways various individuals transform their physical bodies in ways that open up new possibilities and subjectivities for the individual. "Body modifiers, both "trans" and not, describe his/her gender and sexuality as affirmed and even transformed though the process of visibly transforming the physical body" (Pitts 458). It is necessary to note that, as of now, there are different implications for those who transform their bodies within the limits of heteronormative perceptions; however, when the body is transformed it is done as a way of organizing the body to suit one's self image (Sullivan 503). If body modification practices of both transgendered individuals and non-transgendered individuals are recognized as overall attempts to develop/transform one's subjectivity, and if all individuals claim their right to modify their bodies and shape their identities, then a conceptual shift is possible here. Rather than seeing body modification practices as a negative process that produces disavowed and abjected monstrous others, the process should be seen as expressions of a fundamental human condition, a claim for humanity, rather than a moral condemnation of the monstrous and strange (Green 503,

Sullivan 552).

Within the contemporary situation it is evident that there is a diverse range of bodily experiences and living conditions that do, and do not, reflect hegemonic expectations; however, when considering the entire spectra of embodiment, identity, and desire outside of heteronormative constructions, it should be apparent that what is considered monstrous is merely a different position on the same spectra of existence. To consider this further, Magnus Hirschfeld's interpretation of the "Theory of Intermediaries" becomes useful. On the topic of intermediary stages, Hirschfled reviews a possible range of sexual intermediary stages by considering the admixture of masculine and feminine characteristics experienced and expressed by persons both male and female (34,35). Hirschfeld develops a hypothetical spectrum in which one extreme represents one hundred percent womanly women and the other, one hundred percent manly men. What is important here is that, along the entire spectrum, a complete diversity of sexual and gendered characteristics is plausible and entirely valid. For example, Hirschfeld recognizes the potential for women who possess full beards, men with milk-producing teats or simply men with feminine characteristics (of any degree) and vice versa. It is this kind of theoretical work that becomes useful when considering the possibility of transgendered embodiment as "natural" expressions of gender diversity. By acknowledging a diversity of embodiment, identity, and desire, pleasure can be found in the confusion of boundaries, in permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints, in resistance and re-coupling, in an oppositional consciousness, in a space free from gender categories rooted in biologically deterministic gender paradigms that categorize difference as monstrous (Haraway 104-108, David 2).

The overall deconstruction of the binary gender system cannot happen instantaneously. However, various considerations can be made to eliminate stigma surrounding transgendered embodiment. First, there is a need for the abandonment of sex

categories all together, as well as the need for categories of self-classification that are respected and accepted (Gilbert2 99). The binary gender system states the specific and acceptable ways to be a man or woman, othering and creating outsiders of those who do not comply with hegemonic expectations.

Additionally, although it is not necessarily the ideal model, concepts surrounding a third, forth, fifth, etc, "gender space" may prove beneficial. There are indigenous frameworks for understanding the embodiment of gender that do not correlate with Eurocentric transgender theorizing and that resist making sweeping theoretical claims that marginalize non-western experience (Roen 656). For example, the Hijra of India is an institutionalized third gender role that is neither male nor female and instead, contains elements of both (Nanda 35). The Hijra community is not only welcome but also expected, like other groups, to participate in various community events and take on various roles in the community (Nanda 37). Katrina Roen notes that while this type of anthropological research on transgenderism and transsexuality is complex, it does have images of hope and holds the possibility of conceptual shifts concerning transgendered embodiment and oppression (657). As was mentioned, all of the above are merely starting points to begin reconsidering the transgendered subject as monstrous through the deconstruction of the binary gender regime. In this way however, it will become possible to reclaim the transgendered body while inspiring more critical thinking about the gender liminal ways of being (Roen 664).

To conclude, it is through the examination of various modes and structures of identity, and embodiment, as they apply to both heteronormative constructions of gender and "non-normative" constructions, that one can begin to reconsider transgendered embodiment as monstrous. To define the experience of any one being is to deny that individual their agency and humanity. It is fundamental to move beyond and deconstruct heterosexist bi-gender ideology in order to transcend essentialist expectations that inhibit

one's search for self-hood. When comparing various forms and experiences of embodiment, it is crucial to note various similarities in the construction and transformation of both transgendered and non-transgendered individuals as they define their embodiment, identities, and desires. Although this is only a starting point, it opens a space for a conceptual shift and allows for the reconsideration of transgendered embodiment as monstrous.

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<u>On Ignorance</u>

By

Mark Zolotar

       Is ignorance an active or passive process? If we tackle this question without defining inaction as a particular kind of action, then we must conclude that there are both active and passive types of ignorance. In this paper I will define the many forms which ignorance can take. I differentiate the kinds of ignorance by whether they are passive or active. Additionally I distinguish between proliferations of ignorance generally – i.e. those that make and keep others ignorant – versus personal passive ignorance and self-deception (active ignorance). Then, having established the different kinds, I will discuss harmful practices of ignorance and self-deception, commenting on their variable degrees of culpability. I will conclude that the elimination of them is of utmost importance, not due to their culpability but rather because of their detrimental effects. Lastly, I will attempt to formulate a handful of possible solutions that will potentially address all forms

of harmful ignorance. Feeling that the taxonomy of ignorance can at times be rather misleading, I turn first to define the different types of ignorance.

Four Types of Ignorance

1. *Passive Personal Ignorance:*

Appropriately defined as a lack of knowledge, passive ignorance is a negligence to attain a certain knowledge or understanding. This type of ignorance takes the form: "I am ignorant of x because I do not know what x is and am not motivated to investigate." The culpability of such an ignorance is a variable of what the implications of that ignorance are. It is further dependent on the context with which it is concerned. For example: "I am ignorant of how to properly disassemble a rifle." In an ordinary civilian context, one is not culpable for not having extensive knowledge of combat weapons. But if one were placed in a military context, such as in the midst of a battlefield, and one's weapon jams, then it is arguable that this person is culpable for not knowing how to disassemble their rifle and fix the problem.

1. *Passive Proliferated Ignorance:*

As with the previous type of ignorance, a passive proliferated ignorance is a general lack of knowledge about a specific topic. However, the difference from the previous kind is that this type of ignorance is apt to spread, through a multitude of possible methods. One method of proliferation with this kind of ignorance is instruction, such as through written work. Suppose we were to discover a new land or planet and I was commissioned to investigate whether that land was inhabited. If I could not find any inhabitants, and yet there actually were life forms there, this could potentially become a passive proliferated ignorance. I would return to whomever I was commissioned by, suppose it were my government, and tell them that there are no inhabitants on that land.

Thereby I would be spreading that ignorance and my findings would likely be released to a wider audience. Note that if I were to discover inhabitants and yet tell everyone that I did not, then I am *actively* perpetuating or proliferating ignorance. Both the passive and active proliferated ignorances fit under Shannon Sullivan's characterization of ignorance "as an active production of particular kinds of knowledges" (Tuana and Sullivan, p. 154). In my example, my passive ignorance of the existence of inhabitants will actively produce the widespread knowledge that "there are no inhabitants on that newly discovered land". If my ignorance were an active ignorance (so that I am telling others that *x* is false, when I am well aware that *x* is true), I may still be perpetuating the same false knowledge in a nearly identical way. However, the key difference is that in the passive case I am accidentally proliferating ignorance, and in the active case I am intentionally spreading false knowledge. This may amount to a difference in culpability, but I will save this discussion for later as it can get convoluted.

1. *Active Personal Ignorance, aka Self-Deception:*

In contrast to a passive personal ignorance, an active ignorance is to convince oneself of something while actually knowing that the opposite is true. This amounts to a self-deception, where one comes to know that *x* is true, but for some reason convinces oneself that *x* is actually false. Elizabeth Spelman explains that a person can be so motivated in wanting to believe that *x* is false, that in the face of *x*'s truth they continue to deny it and assert that it is false (Tuana and Sullivan, 123). As with the passive case of personal ignorance, culpability may be context-specific. Setting aside the concern of whether and how self-deception is possible (which I will address later), we can suppose that if I know that there is a surprise party planned for me, yet I banish this knowledge or convince myself that there is no surprise party, then I have not done anything evil, and may in fact help to ensure the success of the surprise. With recognition of isolated examples such as this, we can only characterize self-deception as *always* being culpable

if we adhere to a strict doctrine of authenticity or truth.

Culpability under authenticity may be akin to Immanuel Kant's claim that if one performs a moral action while believing it to be an immoral action, then it in fact becomes an immoral action (because of the heinous motivation). Self-deception does not map onto this particular qualification, but with some similarity we can argue that if one performs a moral action while only self-deceiving oneself to think that it is moral (so that one implicitly believes it immoral), then the action is culpable. With culpability under a doctrine of truthfulness, we can model self-deception as lying to oneself, and if we believe that lying is always wrong then self-deception will always be culpable. However, putting absolute doctrines aside, we should be able to clearly see that active personal ignorance of the kind that is potentially harmful (in a tangible way) to oneself and others will be particularly culpable – more so than convincing oneself that there is no surprise party. An evident example of such a harmful self-deception is what Spelman addresses: that "whites are unwilling to believe, namely, that black America's grievances are real" (ibid., 120). In this instance, the whites' unwillingness to accept that x is true (where x is that "black America's grievances are real") is an impediment to overcoming issues of racism, and should whites come to know that x is true and yet self-deceive themselves by claiming that it is not, then they will only further cause harm and render issues of black oppression irreconcilable.

1. *Active Proliferated Ignorance (aka Deception):*

The kind of ignorance that concerns some epistemologists of ignorance most is the active production of false knowledge. Spun from a different perspective, an active production of false knowledge can be described as actively *ignoring* true knowledge and proliferating; spreading; promoting, false knowledge. When an authority figure, such as the government, engages in active proliferated ignorance, this topic quickly brings to bear social and political concerns. This is the kind of ignorance that concerns Sullivan and her

discussion of colonial oppression (ibid., 153-172). Furthermore, this is the kind of deception and disillusionment that most epistemologists refer to when they speak of "White Ignorance" (e.g. Charles Mills, Linda Alcoff, Shannon Sullivan, and others in Tuana and Sullivan 2007). Though it is hard to say that there might be a case of actively proliferating ignorance that is not culpable, one could potentially make the case that if a particular ignorance is spread for the sake of the people (to protect them) then perhaps it is well intentioned and not necessarily culpable.

On the Similarities of Ignorance

Undoubtedly, issues of active proliferated ignorance will transform into passive personal ignorance when accepted by listeners and inheritors of false knowledge, and if faced with the reality of the matter and still in ignorance, these inheritors will transform into active ignorers. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the different kinds of ignorance are often inseparable from one another, because they work off of each other. Actively proliferating and perpetuating ignorance is performed with an intention, often the intention is of a political, and manipulative, nature. If no passive ignorance is created, then the goal of active perpetuation is not ascertained. Thus, where active proliferation exists, passive ignorance is bound to result. This is important to recognize because in order to reduce and eliminate ignorance, we do not necessarily need to target the sources of active proliferation of ignorance (e.g. the government) because if we resolve and reduce the amount, as well as the potential, of personal ignorance, then the active perpetuators will be thwarted.

On the one hand, this is a sigh of relief, because combatting a government and its active proliferation of ignorance is an intractable task. A small group cannot take up arms and march against a government (because *we* will be easily repelled by the government's overwhelming military force). The only other way of overthrowing a democratic

government or republic, one that is spreading ignorance, is to rally an enormous support behind us, which would first require eliminating passive ignorance anyway. But on the other hand, just how do we go about reducing and eliminating harmful passive and active ignorance?

Harmful Ignorance and Culpability

Before I go on to discuss how to eliminate harmful ignorance, we first have to look at what constitutes *harmful* ignorance. A harmful ignorance is describable as the sort of false knowledge, or altogether lack of knowledge, that may potentially lead to epistemic, psychological, and physical harm. One may be suspicious that including epistemic harm then qualifies all ignorance as harmful since it undermines truth and knowledge. However, this claim tacitly places an inherent value in truth and knowledge, over and above their uses. I concede that according to certain theories, such as strict Kantianism, all ignorance will be harmful and culpable. But otherwise, what I mean by epistemic harm is the sort that prohibits the acquisition of new and accurate knowledge. I take it that psychological and physical harms are rather straightforward (e.g. oppression of Blacks through denial of rights such as voting, and oppression of Blacks through violence such as lynching).

The issue of harmful ignorance brings the question of culpability to bear, but I want to make it clear now that the kinds of ignorance we want to change include culpable *and* non-culpable kinds. In a direct sense, we can equate any harmful ignorance as being culpable. However, a brief counter-example rightly debunks this equation. Suppose that I am, at the time of competing scientific conclusions about the matter, ignorant of the fact that cigarettes cause physical harm to my body and to those around me (while I am smoking). Contradictory scientific conclusions exist, and I have no authority or evidence to which I can attest to in order to gain true knowledge about the matter (or confidently

ascertain it to be true). Thus, I in this instance am causing harm to myself and to others around me, and am passively ignorant of the matter. However, I am not to blame because I cannot confidently judge the validity of the true and false conclusions, both of which exist. In response, one can say: "if you didn't know whether they were harmful or not, then you should have quit smoking until you knew the effects." Even though I think we need not go to these measures to argue for non-culpability, just suppose then that I had only heard of the studies that deemed it safe to smoke cigarettes, and upon acknowledging these studies I placed trust in the integrity of those scientists and did not investigate the matter further.

It is also arguable that ignorance which leads to harm of oneself, but not of others, is *not* blameworthy, and additionally that we do not need to strive to eliminate it. If my carelessness leads me to harm myself, then (though this should disqualify me from being a "virtuous knower") I am not necessarily immoral and culpable. Even more so with willful, active personal ignorance: if I want to deny that cigarettes are harmful to myself, then (hypothetically) supposing I do not smoke around others, I should not be particularly culpable. But talk of culpability can become convoluted and controversial, which is why I am inclined to argue that we should get rid of harmful ignorance regardless of culpability, where by harmful I exclude intentional or willfully negligent harm to oneself (is it truly "harmful" for a masochist to inflict pain upon oneself, if they thereby derive pleasure from doing so?).

A Tradition to Reducing and Eradicating Harmful Ignorance

There are platitudes of respectable approaches by which we can strive to reduce harmful ignorance. A considerable portion of these approaches advocate for a higher standard of what counts as accurate knowledge. They often seek to destabilize what people commonly accept as adequate grounds for accepting a knowledge claim. Indeed,

in one sense, this is what epistemology in general is purposed to do. Virtue epistemology is specifically tailored for this task. In simple terms, creating responsible knowers is a sure way to reduce ignorance (viz. reduce irresponsible knowledge). However, it would take no less than a thick novel, perhaps even an encyclopedia, to accurately portray all of the approaches and convey the literature associated with them. So, instead of rephrasing much of what has been said, I leave the reader with this simplistic overview of what advocates generally argue for and am now going to take my own, what I hope is a rather unfamiliar, approach.

After recognizing that reducing the capacity for passive ignorance in individuals leads to a decrease in, or at least a decrease in the effectiveness of, active proliferations of ignorance, we must then turn to decide whether active and passive personal ignorance must be dealt with separately. Surely, what may eliminate a passive ignorance, i.e. showing a person the truth, will not always get rid of active ignorance – because the active ignorer may already know what the truth is, and deny it regardless. But whatever can dissolve active ignorance will involve some utterance or reaffirmation of the truth, which is also sufficient to eliminate passive ignorance. Much of the epistemological work on standards and responsible knowing has been geared toward alleviating passive ignorance, so I leave it an open option as a viable course of action. However, I want to *add* to those approaches and that literature, and tackle solutions for *active* personal ignorance – which by way will also address passive ignorance.

Theorizing Active Personal Ignorance
(Self-Deception)

The issue of addressing active personal ignorance, aka self-deception, first requires some sort of understanding, however vague, of what self-deception might be. I do not claim to know what self-deception really is and how it works, but I have theorized

a handful of possibilities and believe that they all share at least one theoretical solution. In other words, whichever of these descriptions true self-deception might take, the solution should (hypothetically speaking) be able to address any of these possibilities. Some interpretations of self-deception are as follows:

[1] Self-deception as simultaneously knowing x is true and x is false. Or, similarly, simultaneously knowing x and not knowing x (knowing x is true and not knowing x is true). Either characterization amounts to A (knowing x is true) and not A (not knowing x is true, or even knowing x is not true [the former is a prerequisite or co-requisite for the latter]). A and not A [A $\land$ ~A] is not a logically valid statement, and in fact any computer that arrives at such a contradictory conclusion will be stumped. But in the face of logical invalidity this approach can still hold, because though A and not A cannot hold syntactically (in logic), they may hold semantically (in conversation and meaning). And, we already know, humans can process contradictions and paradoxes such as this.

[2] Probabilistic/statistical reconciliation: the bearer of the contradictory beliefs tacitly or subconsciously processes something akin to a probability of the truth of each belief. For instance: "I am 40% sure, as I have witnessed with this mistreatment, that black America's grievances are real, and 60% sure, as I have been taught over many years to believe, that black American's grievances are unfounded" (using Spelman's topic of discussion). Or, even better: "I am 80% sure that x is true, and 20% sure that it is not true, but I really want to believe that x is not true, therefore the 20% is sufficient to warrant accepting that x is not true." [The quotations are meant to loosely illustrate a person's possible subconscious or non-occurrent process.]

[3] Convincing oneself that insufficient evidence has been presented. This version is akin to [2] in that it recognizes that evidence contrary to one's belief that 'x is not true' has been presented, yet it rejects that evidence, deeming it insubstantial or invalid. This self-deception is slightly different than accepting x is true and x is not true; it instead is accepting that evidence or method y (of acquiring knowledge) leads to accurate

knowledge in some cases or generally, while evidence or method y is insubstantial or invalid in the instance of x. Thus if I say "the Jews' grievances are real because mom and dad say so, but black America's grievances are not real *even though* mom and dad say so", I must either explain why my parents' testimony leads to accurate knowledge in the first instance and not in the second, or I am in effect deceiving myself (y is an accurate source of knowledge and y is not an accurate source of knowledge).

[4] Partial truth: (again working with Spelman's example) "I know that certain groups of blacks have it rough, but there are others who are not oppressed or even prosper from being black." The agent rejects that "all of black America's grievances are real" and instead accepts that "some of black America's grievances are real." If x contains the general statement that "black America's grievances are real", then this interpretation of self-deception can account for believing x is true *and x is not true*, because x is qualified in a slightly difference sense for each belief. Thus, the scenario might be: x is true, because some of black America's grievances are real, and x is not true, because not all of black America's grievances are real.

[5] Tacit assumption or Alief2: this functions as a subconscious or subdoxastic motivator of action and, often, belief. Put simply, it involves a non-occurrent assumption or claim that x is false, which competes with the occurrent or acknowledged belief that x is true. If the tacit assumption or alief wins over (somehow presides over) the occurrent belief, then a person may act as though x is false, even if they explicitly state that x is true. Additionally, the effect of the tacit assumption or alief may be a motivational one, which leads someone to a form of self-deception such as the previous versions (think of [1]). With this version of self-deception, a person can be motivated to reject that x is true while faced with its reality and not even be able to cite that motivation. A tacit assumption or alief may be inherited (due to evolutionary purposes or otherwise because of genetics), however I really do not think that we inherit a belief such as "black America's grievances are false" (though the case can be made if our genetic ancestors

were really entrenched with this belief). This leads me to assume that a tacit assumption or alief such as "black America's grievances are unfounded" is manufactured through a constant repetition; an acculturation (in a Wittgensteinian sense).

Theoretical Solutions

Prominent with forms [1] (beliefs X and ~X) and [3] (knowledge production Y and ~Y), and to a degree associable with the other forms, there exists a cognitive dissonance. A cognitive dissonance is roughly definable as a sort of discomfort or anxiety associated with holding contradictory beliefs. The implication in talking about cognitive dissonance is that human beings are motivated to alleviate cognitive dissonance by changing beliefs or taking other measures. With form [1], cognitive dissonance is directly had by simultaneously holding x to be true and not true. With [3], if one is undermining the substantiality or validity of the evidence for discovering "x is true", and that method is self-admittedly an accurate one (e.g. empirical observation), then a great deal of cognitive dissonance will be had for allowing an exception to that method of acquiring knowledge.

Further delving into the psychological aspect of ignorance, we can use the model of a web of belief. W.V. Quine and J.S. Ullian introduced the term and entity, "web of belief" (1970; edition referred: 1978). Their view is that our belief set is intertwined, with firmly held beliefs at the centre of the web, and loosely held beliefs on the periphery. The beliefs in the center of the web are much harder to debunk, requiring a reconfiguration of a large number of other beliefs. Juggling beliefs freely is not something people like to do, in fact, they experience something much like (if not precisely) a cognitive dissonance when their beliefs are challenged. The more central the belief is, the greater the cognitive dissonance associated with changing it. This theory nicely explains why some people have a passive ignorance and others an active ignorance, for the same issue. The passive

ignorers are quick to get rid of their false belief or to add a new belief, while the active ignorers are much more hesitant.

So what does this all have to do with a solution to ignorance? Well, if one strongly believes (more central to their web of belief) that "black America's grievances are unfounded", then challenging that claim will be difficult and will produce a cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, if one believes in the law of non-contradiction, that A and ~A cannot exist simultaneously, then challenging that law by continuing to hold contradictory beliefs will produce its own cognitive dissonance. So, the self-deceiver must choose, first between form [1] and [3] – i.e. the cognitive dissonance of the 'law of non-contradiction' OR (the cognitive dissonance of) 'allowing *y* to be a reliable source of knowledge and yet denying it' – and secondly he or she must choose which cognitive dissonance to suffer: that of A and ~A (of making exception to the law of non-contradiction), or a reconfiguration of their beliefs. Again, adding depth to our familiar example: one accepts either a) the cognitive dissonance in challenging one's view of black America's grievances, or b) the cognitive dissonance from being inconsistent with 'A or ~A'.3 The self-deceiver will undoubtedly be inclined to choose the lesser cognitive dissonance. Thus one solution is as follows: reduce the cognitive dissonance associated with accepting that black America's grievances are real, and/or increase the cognitive dissonance had in the inconsistency of denying a fact when clearly faced with it.

To reduce the cognitive dissonance associated with accepting that black America's grievances are real, one must be familiarized with the literature and begin to understand the concerns and the perspective of oppressed blacks (and others). With forms [2] (statistical approach) and [4] (partial truth), the self-deceiver must be supplied with more examples, either to increase the probability that black America's grievances are real, or to show the partial truth self-deceiver that there are enough examples to warrant a generalization. With form [5] (tacit assumption or alief) we need to do something similar: provide the self-deceiver with more evidence and examples in order to counter-condition,

or counter-acculturate, against the incorrect assumption or alief. A person who is afraid of snakes, because they alieve that they are dangerous, can very often be conditioned into not being afraid (there are certain proven procedures that one can undergo).

Thus with all forms of self-deception we find a constant theme in resolving the ignorance: namely, to educate; familiarize; provide examples; and counter-condition.

Practical ("Hands On") Solutions

We know that we need to expose people to a chorus of literature, examples, testimonies, instruction, etc. on particular issues that they are, passively or actively, ignorant of. As I've mentioned before, the approach to destabilize the grounds of ignorance itself is to promote virtuous and responsible knowing, and to motivate people to have strong standards for accepting knowledge claims. But to convince people who deny these standards and who deceive themselves about pertinent issues, we need to iterate and reiterate that, for example, black America's grievances are real.

However, and I think this to be very important, I am not saying that we need to write more and more academic literature on the topic, though that helps to some extent, but rather I think the practical solution here is to expose more people to the already available resources on the subject (of which there are a gargantuan amount already). But, since most people are not adept in the vocabulary and style that philosophers and other academics use, we need to expose them to (and produce more) resources that they can understand and hopefully be interested in. A simple way of doing this is by talking to people, because conversation and personal instruction is harder to walk away from than a reference to a book. As well, accessible resources can include music and recreational literature. Richard Rorty wisely points out that artists and novelists have a wider audience and a generally much stronger social and political impact than philosophers (of course this depends on which philosophers and eras we look at, but we should grant his claim in

respect to our contemporary culture of literature and media). By spreading accurate information and a variety of perspectives we can slowly eliminate passive personal ignorance, chip away at active personal ignorance, and set higher standards for knowledge so as to minimize the chance of passive proliferated ignorance and reduce the effectiveness of active proliferated ignorance.

So far I have proposed methods by which to combat existing ignorance and diminish its proliferation. But we should also keep in mind that there are many methods by which we can help ensure that ignorance does not develop. This includes properly educating children and teenagers, and familiarizing them with social and political concerns. This can be done by putting more pressure on educational institutions and boards of education to include more pertinent discussions and perspectives on social and political matters, including (but not limited to) struggles with gender, race, and sexuality. Similarly, it may involve encouraging [non-ignorant] parents to educate and talk to their children about social and political matters, about ignorance, and about potentially heinous government agendas (or in general any person's immoral intentions to deceive and manipulate). In practical terms, one can become involved in their child's education, or get involved in other parent-school relationships. Furthermore, one can produce letters addressed to their board of education and to their MP. These are just a few of the commonplace ways people can get involved in promoting social and political awareness and encouraging responsible knowing. Nearly anything that contributes to knowledge and awareness of social and political issues will be instrumental to reducing ignorance related to those subjects.

Conclusion

What I have aimed to achieve in this essay is to categorize difference kinds of ignorance and their effects, briefly discussing culpability (for those who are interested in

it). I also hope that I have contributed an interesting take (or variety of takes) on self-deception, and theorized as to how it works in the mind and how it can be resolved. Finally, I want to have made clear that, more than we need to write philosophical-jargon-ridden essays, we need to make the extant literature more accessible to ordinary people. This may include rewording philosophy-jargon into layman language and publishing, and it may include promoting existing work of a widely readable style and vocabulary. In a similar strain, we could take up alternative methods of expressing our concerns on the matter; if one is, for example, a song writer, one could (and perhaps should) write songs about political and social issues. Lastly, we can put more pressure on educational institutions and parents alike to properly educate and entrench children in literature of a social and political nature, as well as to begin setting high standards for accepting knowledge claims. In one sense, the solutions are simple. But, of course, they are easier said than done. Dispelling ignorance will be slow and tedious, but all contributions accumulate.

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A Defense
of Philosophers' Intuitions

By Natashia Botelho

Experimental philosophers, such as Weinberg, Gonnerman, Buckner, and Alexander (WGBA)4 have challenged the legitimacy of the philosophical method on the grounds that it unduly assumes to be a privileged way of producing accurate outcomes in response to philosophical questions. Although "philosophical questions" do not exist under a precisely determinate category, such questions are generally understood as pertaining to subject matter that, by nature, do not seem verifiable. Thus we cannot be certain of, or empirically validate, which phenomena are relevant to our specific epistemic investigations and how. Nevertheless, these are live and pressing questions that permeate the way in which we reason and interact with the world on a daily basis.

The pressing questions of philosophical inquiry have shifted from "*how do we know x?*", to "*what does 'knowing' consist in*?". In other words, current philosophical inquiries are questioning the standards of our standards! Recently, a new avenue of philosophical inquiry has been taken up by contemporary philosophers who utilize empirical experiments to further inform philosophical projects5. One of the most interesting findings that have come out of this line of philosophical inquiry is the role of intuitions in grounding our epistemic beliefs6. The literature consistently points to intuitions as unjustifiable motives that bias the way in which people reason about situations and make epistemic decisions. This puts the reliability of philosophers'

arguments under suspicion. It is now crucial to ask: are the methods of philosophical inquiry tainted by the general intuitions of philosophers? Moreover: can the reasoning of philosophers be credited as being informed by standards (intuitions) that are more reliable than those of non-philosophers? In order for the philosophical method to be deemed the most well-informed strategy to deal with these philosophical problems, we need justification that philosophers encompass expertise that allows them to have privileged intuitions over non-philosophers. The remainder of this essay will be focused on my argument wherein I attempt to justify that they do, although the more general problem of intuitions remains in the background as a hindrance to the sought out notion of reason-informed choice. This is especially problematic within philosophical disagreements.

Scientific problems, which were once the business of philosophers, now have fixed, empirically validated, standards which outline the correct way in which to carry out scientific endeavors that yield no disagreement. However, what are now called the 'philosophical questions' (about freewill, for example) have, by nature, established to be outside the scope of empirical validation. Thus, we must rely on our intuitions from which to reason about these philosophical problems. Furthermore, such philosophical questions affect all human beings, and not just an idiosyncratic group of thinkers with specific determinate goals. Since the scope of philosophical inquiry is so foundational we need a reason to trust that the philosophers have a particularly proficient way of accessing these questions. At the very least, philosophers should fare better than the average individual if they are the ones informing epistemic, ethical and metaphysical claims.

Let us consider what is being communicated by proposing that philosophers have *privileged intuitions* over the folk. Here, the word intuition will be specifically used to denote what we use as a standard to accept or reject philosophical theories. In the strictest sense as axioms and in the loosest sense as that which we take to be reasons why we are *stuck with* the substratum of our reasons that are not subject to further investigation or

justification. In other words, our intuitions inform our judgments and are what we use as the input in our processes of seeking out epistemic truths. If the body of literature on epistemic intuitions is accurate (e.g. Machery, Mallon, Nichols & Stich, 2004; Swain Alexander, & Weinberg, 2008), there are in fact disparities across the intuitions (of different groups) that are used to substantiate epistemic reasoning and judgments. In such cases, the reasoning of trained philosophers, although perhaps initially informed by intuitions, should still justifiably veto folk reasoning that varies across different groups of people. There are a number of reasons why this is the case.

First, philosophical training insulates philosophers from falling prey to many cognitive fallacies apparent within common reasoning. Said fallacies generally obstruct people from making accurate judgments. Such training includes proficiency in logic, and the ability to bracket irrelevant information in order to engage in consistent, rational, deliberation of issues7. When empirical assessment is possible, the results demonstrate that people are generally terrible at making accurate predictions, attending to the relevant features of a case, and being cognitively sound in general (Bishop & Trout, 37)8. In an investigation as to whether or not to privilege philosophers' intuitions, certain fallacies are particularly pertinent. Among the more interesting fallacies related to this discussion are those which stem from an inability to attend to the relevant features of a situation when making a specific epistemic judgment.9

Being mistaken about which features of a philosophical problem to attend to will no doubt thwart the correctness of the outcome since those features are used as the starting points which are referenced when trying to answer the problem. Working with the wrong inputs is especially obstructive considering the fact that these features are all we have to go by. It is these kinds of fallacies which must be avoided in order to get anywhere in our epistemic investigations. The more accurately we attend to the target attributes of the problem, the more reliable our judgments will be in dealing with them. If we are asking the wrong questions, or focusing on the wrong features of a scenario or

thought-experiment for example, then the answers that we end up with will be at best misleading.

For the purpose of this investigation, a pilot study was conducted to approximately measure how susceptible different groups of people are to commonly occurring cognitive fallacies, as set out and scientifically validated (agreed upon) by cognitive psychologists10. In order to distinguish the level of immunity to common cognitive fallacies (or biases) across these different groups of individuals, particularly with respect to how much philosophical training they have received, the independent groups of the study consisted of both philosophers and non-philosophers with different levels of education.11 It was assumed that the philosophers would perform significantly better than the non-philosophers, in order to demonstrate that *within agreed upon parameters* the intuitions of philosophers are more cognitively astute, particularly in respect to attending to the relevant features in given cases. This means grounding a case in respect to the perspicacity of philosophers' intuitions in general.

Results showed that among the PhD participants, those with PhDs in philosophy answered 100% of the original Wason's Card Selection Task12 correctly, compared to 33.3% of those with a PhD in other areas of study. This task was designed by cognitive psychologists in order to specifically test aptitude for valid abstract logical reasoning. The participants with a PhD in philosophy also answered the modified (less abstract version) of Wason's Card Selection Task with 100% accuracy, indicating that the philosophical emersion in reasoning strategies did not hinder their ability to keep to the relevant facts of the matter (they did not "over think" for example), while the PhD participants from other disciplines answered with 66.7% accuracy13.

Another interesting finding was that there were considerable increases in the "correct vs. incorrect" response ratios, especially pertaining to Wason's Card Selection Tasks14, from undergraduate to graduate philosophy students, and even more so between graduate students and those with PhDs in philosophy. This suggests that philosophers do

develop an expertise, quite possibly a fine tuning of their cognitive abilities, since they illustrate conspicuously better cognitive skills at the PhD level than the levels previous. An objector could offer a much more plausible criticism against philosophers having a specialized expertise, distinct from those in other disciplines, if there were little progressive difference across the different levels of education in philosophy, but there is not. This also indicates that philosophical intuitions are not merely the results of indoctrination15. If they were merely the result of indoctrination, the undergraduate and graduate students should have fared much better in comparison to the participants with PhDs, since set philosophical theories are taught to the philosophy students very early on in their academic career.

Finally, the study indicates that participants with a PhD in philosophy clearly yielded the *best* results. The next closest group was the participants with PhDs in other fields of study, whose results were most significantly inferior to the philosopher's in respect to the original Card Selection Task. This indicates the possibility that the successful scores of the non-philosophy PhDs are based on common (often fallible) heuristics16, as opposed to finely-tuned cognitive skills. The use of heuristics is not a problem in itself, experts tend to use them all the time (see WGBA), however, different heuristics are more susceptible to cognitive biases than others across different situations. Getting better results on a test (like the modified version of Wason's Card Selection Task17) is a suspicious way of obtaining epistemic truths about the general philosophical problems in our world for the potential reason of it being morally-charged. A higher success rate in the modified (morally-charged) Card Selection case compared to the original suggests that there are external and irrelevant factors such as moral implications18 being attended to19.

Although the students at the undergraduate-graduate level did not fare as well as expected, they still demonstrated a general edge over the other students. These results are quite inconclusive though. Additional studies should be properly conducted in order to

gain adequate evidence that could empirically justify that philosophers are more immune to these cognitive fallacies than non-philosophers. Such a study would need to take a much more representative sample of both PhD's in and outside philosophy, and it would be helpful to track the progression of cognitive aptitude across the different levels of philosophical training, controlling for things like level of education.

If a study could adequately demonstrate significant results in favor of philosophers' immunity to irrelevant stimuli on questions or cases that have agreed upon outcomes, it makes sense to assume that the philosophers have more astute intuitions on a more general level. Such intuitions would, of course, better equip the philosophers to face problems and puzzles that commonly produce errors in reasoning and false conclusions. If this is the case, then it follows that the intuitions of philosophers are more reliable than those of non-philosophers. A positive result would indicate that philosophers are less likely to make mistakes in reasoning about cases where there are no grounds for empirical validation, via the philosophers' success in answering similar questions to which there *are* objective standards of error.

In reasoning about social matters, we often attend to a number of different evidential cues and because we have certain cognitive limits, and biases that become apparent when we look at the empirical data that illustrates, this generally leads most people's social judgments to be very unreliable. (39)20. If a study can demonstrate that expert philosophers best attend to the correct features in agreed upon scenarios, we can say with some confidence that their cognitive process are being allocated more efficiently within the epistemic parameters of the issue than that of other folk who are more easily seduced by irrelevant features. At the very least this points to a much more plausible account of why philosophers will intuit better than those who have shown to be inferior at performing objectively measurable reasoning tasks.

We can certainly draw a parallel between being able to solve puzzles that have an agreed upon solution (without an empirically validated one) correctly, and being more apt in solving puzzles that do not seem to have an agreed upon solution (or are subject to empirical validation). Since both cases are illustrative of the use of intuitions in similar ways (if someone is less susceptible to errors in reasoning about these cases), that speaks of their intuitions being more astute than someone who is more likely to intuitively attend to irrelevant attributes of a scenario and thus make significantly more mistakes in judging relations between the *relevant* features of the case.

It has already been established that the philosophers have an expertise in logic (WGBA) which grants them superiority in the processing of truth, and there is also a distinct parallel to be drawn between these two phenomena. It makes sense that those who have a privileged set of skills by way of logic, are also better equipped to deal with abstractions of relevant details. As the pilot study suggests, trained philosophers can make these abstractions in a way that retains the positive effects of being able to attend to the relevant features of a case without obstructing an empathetic perspective of the real world subject matter21.

Although the philosophers could be seen as having more logical arguments, this is not enough on its own to endorse the expertise, defense, or significance of their particular expertise-endorsed intuitions. For example, we now have things like Statistical Prediction Rules (SPRs) to work out, with mathematic accuracy, what is likely and unlikely the case, given a certain data set (25). In their book *Epistemology and the Psychology of Human Judgment*, Bishop and Trout address this as a very interesting tool particularly because tools like these often prove to be even more successful than experts in their field of study at predicting the outcomes of field-related scenarios. Most experts, though, do not have cause to feel undermined in their expertise because they can still verify their methods and success empirically. But what does this mean for the philosopher? To explore this let us note that there are general reasons why certain kinds of SPRs are successful (26), and

understand why they cannot solve philosophical problems.

The success of the SPRs appears to be grounded in the fact that SPRs *do not get obstructed* by supplementary knowledge that does not have an actual impact on 1) the outcome that is being predicted, or 2) the best way of obtaining some form of truth22. In Bishop and Trout's explanation, the SPRs are running against experts in the fields of psychiatry, health and law. It is unfitting to use such rules when dealing with problems of a philosophical nature for two reasons. First: philosophers have already been granted as having an expert (logical) method of *processing* input in a satisfactory manner, or preserving the truth. Second: the important thing here is that we are looking for *agreed upon starting points (inputs)* and there is no SRP that could possibly pick out or generate those.

Perhaps the existence of things like SPRs is another reason why the importance of philosophy as a discipline is in jeopardy of being seen as obsolete. However, we cannot dismiss the *differences* between these two methods and what they demonstrate: the philosophers are dealing with issues that are problematic for an increasingly difficult reason than what the SPRs are being used for. There is no way to *verify* the philosophical outcomes, judgments, or intuitions. The relevant data *is* often that which the algorithms so readily (and rightfully, for their purposes) ignore. These matters, in which one has to distinguish not only between valenced variables (such as conceptions and scenarios about morality, freewill, and meaningfulness), but also among the real-world phenomena that *do* have a significant role in a particular line of inquiry, demand more than standard formulas and scientific verification. Moral cases, for example, such as whether it is permissible to have an abortion, euthanize someone, or take a child away from her family call for special per-case analysis and judgement that does not dismiss the *relevant* moral factors (as a mechanistic algorithm would), but will also not bring in personal biases that would contaminate the judgers perspective of the particular situation.

This is where the philosopher's specialized consistency, coherency and ability to abstract are once again important. As Bishop and Trout advocate, "it doesn't matter how reliable a reasoning rule might be if a reason-er applies it poorly…She must execute the strategy correctly, and she must apply the strategy to the right sorts of problems" (45). It is paramount that philosophical expertise encompass both the above traits (consistency, etc.) in synchronicity with the ability to actually attend to the primary features of unique cases as input in the first place; to understand the 'the sorts of problems' being dealt with. Without this, a critic would surely attest to a remaining problematic gap that exists between these findings favoring philosopher's intuitions, and the relevance they have on gaining epistemic insight when dealing with actual cases, questions and epistemic problems. Especially the critics who emphasize the philosopher's lack of verification, or systematic modification via improvement from feedback since "philosophers do not get accurate feedback23".

To start with the granted philosophical expertise of a specialization in logic, one might even argue that philosophers *do* get feedback. I cannot argue, without assuming I am correct in saying that philosophers have access to the correct input, that philosophers get feedback when they make a decision and it seems to go right or wrong. However, there *are* premises that remain agreed upon. The ability to note when agreement is granted, and the constant debates among philosophers, can be seen as feedback to at least a minimal degree. Perhaps a philosopher's intuitions, like the problems themselves, are not subject for further justification. However, a number of experimental findings purport to demonstrate deep and *systematic* failures of human reasoning (119), that the philosopher makes it his business to surmount, or, at the very least, avoid.

The critic might also raise issue with the traditional philosopher's appeals to the phenomena of the every day. Philosophical intuitions are about the same phenomena surrounding non-philosophers. So, why are the philosopher's ideas of what the

verification for these phenomena are more important than those of the average person who is exposed to them every day? A crucial point of this essay is addressing the fact that philosophers do not possess a "textbook case" of expertise. They *can* be seen as having a specialized expertise, but philosophers cannot be categorized as experts of the same esoteric sort. They are dealing with indistinct subject matter. On the other hand, if a traditional philosopher were to justify his expertise by way of exposure, it would obviously not be to the same kind of lay exposure to the phenomena in question as the folk have, since the philosopher would view such phenomena from a reflective, sophisticated perspective. Non-philosophers often do not even consider such questions and thus would not even be open to viewing the world as imbued with philosophically relevant features at all.

Philosophers do not just handle these questions at surface level. Rather, they seriously consider and reason about them *as* philosophical problems and not just phenomena in the background of whatever it is they are focusing on in their daily routines. Furthermore, they are trained to detect the relation between the problem and the scenario in a way that non-philosophers cannot (at least not nearly as well), both by way of their being able to attend to the information that is relevant to the scenario, and also by not falling victim to the seductions of other psychological pulls that draw in the majority of other people. Not only do philosophers have more finely-tuned cognitive skills, but these skills are such that they specifically shield philosophers from making the kind of cognitive mistakes that are detrimental specifically to 'philosophical problems,' where it has been empirically illustrated that people in general have a very difficult time distinguishing between relevant features and making appropriate connections. At the same time, the philosopher is not stuck within a mechanistic perspective that obstructs his ability to weigh out case-by-case considerations that are impregnated with momentous value. The philosophical problems demand an expertise somewhere between a strict scientific method and the flexible empathetic method of human beings. Philosophers have

shown to be the best intermediate of both and thus in cases of dispute, their intuitions should be given privileged attention.

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Appendix A

Please answer the following questions <u>as accurately</u> as possible:

<u>Important</u>: You are not allowed to go back and change answers once you have moved on from a question. Also, please note that the results of these questions are going to be part of *an anonymous* study. Your participation is appreciated.

[A]

1) You are shown a set of four cards, each of which has a number on one side and a colored patch on the other side. The visible faces of the cards show 3, 8, red and blue.

Which card(s) do you <u>have to</u> turn over in order to test the truth of the statement that *if a card shows an even number on one face, then its opposite face is red?*

2) There is a 1 in 500 chance that a person has disease X. A new apparatus was designed in order to test whether or not a patient has this disease (disease X), but it has a 5% false-positive rate – which means that it will incorrectly indicate that a person has the disease when he really does not 5% of the time. What is the rough probability that a patient receiving a positive test result does, in fact, have the disease?

3) If a plane full of Canadian citizens takes off from Brazil, and starts to malfunction in the USA but crashes right on the border between the USA and Canada, given that the medical team that came to the rescue first were Canadian citizens, where should the survivors of the plane wreck be buried?

4) You are shown a set of four cards, each of which has a number representing age on one side and a beverage on the other side. The visible faces of the cards show 19+ [19 years old or older], 12- [12 years old or younger], beer and 7up (indicating what beverage the individuals of either age group are drinking).

Which card(s) do you <u>have to</u> turn over in order to test the truth of the statement that *if a person is legally drinking beer in Ontario (law is that only 19+ can legally drink alcohol), he or she is 19 years old or older?*

[B]

Please answer, as accurately as you can, whether the following statements are true or false:

5) 27 minutes before 7 o'clock is 33 minutes past 5 o'clock
<div align="center">True ( ) False ( )</div>

6) This sentence has thirty-five letters (true or false)
<div align="center">True ( ) False ( )</div>

7) Frank is taller than John. Ralph is taller than Frank. Therefore, John is the shortest boy
<div align="center">True ( ) False ( )</div>

[C]

Please answer the following questions, about yourself, as honestly and accurately as possible:

8) My level of education is:

_____

9) I have taken ___ philosophy courses at a post-secondary level, the highest level being ___

10) I am a professor in philosophy, or have a PhD in philosophy: Yes ( ) No ( )

11) I knew the answer to questions _____before reading them for this study.

Appendix B

1) Study Results: sorted by level of education

CORRECT	ANSWERS	8 and blue	12- and beer	approx. 3.7%	dont	F	F	F
Level of Education	# of phil classes taken	Original Wason	Modified Wason	Base-line+f-p	bury survivers	Time	Words	Height
highschool	0	8 and red	12- and 7up	5%	Canada	F	F	T
highschool	0	8 and red	19 and beer	1/500	dont	F	F	T
highschool	0	any	any	5%	Canada	F	F	T
highschool	0	red and blue	beer	?	Canada	F	F	T
highschool	0	red	beer	15&	before USA	F	F	T
highschool	0	all	19+ and beer	45%	USA	T	F	T
highschool	0	8 and red	12- and 7up	25%	dont	F	F	T
highschool	0	8	12-	95%	Canada	F	F	T
highschool	0	8 and blue	12- and 7up	50%	dont	F	F	T
highschool	0	3	12-	?	dont	F	F	T
highschool	0	8	none	?	dont	F	F	T
highschool	0	all	beer	1/500	dont	F	F	T
highschool	0	both	19+	1%	Canada	T	F	T
highschool	1	8 and blue	12- and beer	95%	dont	F	F	T
highschool	1	8	12- and beer	1/500	dont	F	F	T
highschool	1	8	12-	95%	Canada	F	F	T
BA	1	8 and blue	12- and 7up	1/500	Canada	F	F	F

BA	0	one card	12- and 7up	95%	dont	F	F	T
BA	1	8 and red	12- and beer	95%	dont	F	F	T
BA	2	3 and blue	12- and 7up	(1/500)*0.95	Canada	F	F	T
BA	20	red	12-	5%	Canada	F	F	T
BA	18	8	12- and beer	95%	Canada	F	F	T
BA	0	red	19+	95%	dont	F	F	T
BA	18	8, red and blue	19+, 12-, beer	95%	dont	F	F	T
BA	8	8	19+ or beer	3.70%	dont	F	F	T
BA	1	8	19+ or beer	3.66%	dont	F	F	T
BA	1	8	19+ or beer	1/500	will	F	F	T
BA	0	red	7up	5%	dont	F	F	T
BA	0	blue or red	no cards	95%	dont	F	F	T
BA	0	8 or red	19+	?	will	F	F	T
BA	0	8	beer	95%	Can. or will	F	F	T
BA	11	8 and red	beer	95%	Brazil	F	F	T
MA	0	8 and red	12 -and 7up	95%	dont	F	F	F
MA	25	8 and blue	12- and beer	?	dont	F	F	T
MA	25	8 and blue	12- and beer	1/500	dont	F	F	T
MA	0	8 and red	19 and beer	95%	dont	F	F	T
MA	0	red	19+ and beer	5%	will	F	F	T
MA	30	8 and blue	12- and beer	1/500	dont	F	F	T
MA	2	8 and red	12- and beer	95%	dont	F	F	T
PhD	over 31	8 and blue	12- and beer	(1/500) * 0.95	dont	F	F	T
PhD	over 31	8 and blue	12- and beer	below 4%	dont	F	F	T
PhD	2	8	beer	3.70%	dont	F	F	T
PhD	0	8 and red	beer and 12-	95%	will	F	F	T

PhD	over 31	8 and blue	beer and 12-	95%	dont	F	F	T
PhD	0	8 and blue	beer and 12-	below 5%	dont	F	F	T

** Data Key **			
A: Level of education		**B: # Phil. Courses Taken**	
1: highschool or under		0: 0 philosophy courses	
2: post secondary at BA level	1: 1-7 philosophy courses		
3: post secocdary at MA level	2: 8-17 philosophy courses		
4: PhD		3: 18-30 philosophy courses	
		4: 31+ philosophy courses	
C: Original Wason's Card Selection Task		**D: Modified version**	
0: incorrect response		Card Selection Task	
1: correst response		0: incorrect response	
		1: correct response	
E: basline + false positive question		**F: Burying Survivors Question**	
1: only took one, or less factors into consideration		0: bury them somewhere	
2: took both the basline rate and false positive	1: don't bury survivors		
probability into consideration			

Notes on Contributors

(Alphabetical)

NATASHIA BOTELHO is currently finishing her Hons. Dbl. Major in Philosophy &

Psychology at York University. She is especially interested in 20th Century Continental

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LAURA CURRIDOR is in her final year of an Honours Double Major in Philosophy

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working in the area of family law stemming from an interest in justice for children and

youth. Her academic interests include gender and transgender

studies, and she intends to translate these interests into the area of violence and abuse

prevention.

DAVID SCHOKKING is in his final year of a Specialized Honours program in

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philosophy of time in the upcoming years, and continue engaging in issues of

Manipulation, Quantum Mechanics, Advertising and Ethics.

MIKE TKACZ became interested in philosophy in high school, as it was one of the few

classes he actually looked forward to. He enjoys studying philosophy and how it illuminates all the other areas of his life.

MARK ZOLOTAR is currently a fourth year philosophy major, graduating in the 2010-2011 school year. He hopes to enroll and complete graduate studies in the area of ethics and moral philosophy. His particular interests are in metaethics and metaphilosophy. He believes that one's upbringing and acculturation are crucial in forming what one comes to believe.

Submitting to the Oracle

The Oracle, York University's Undergraduate Philosophical Review, is always accepting submissions for its upcoming issue. Anyone interested in submitting a paper for consideration is encouraged to do so. All manuscripts must be the original, unpublished work of an undergraduate student and should pertain to a topic of philosophical interest.

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