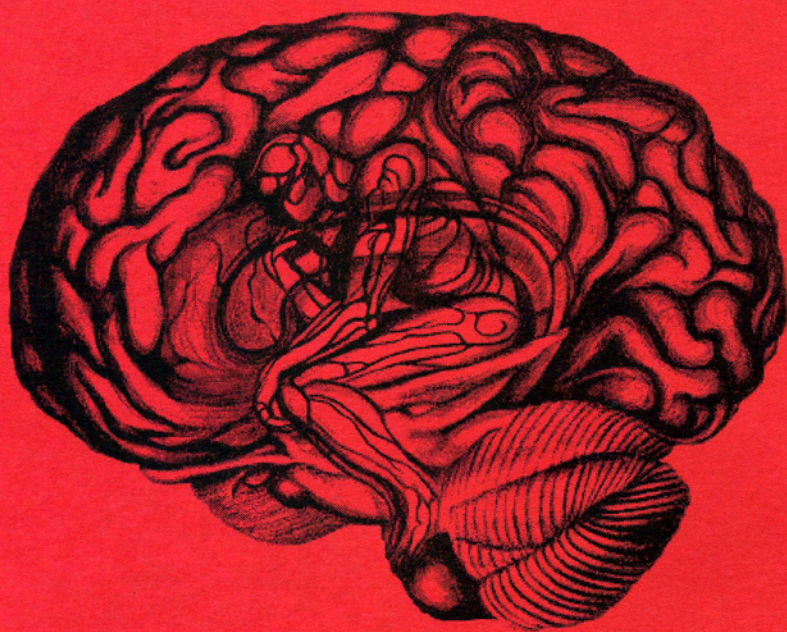


The Oracle

York University's
Undergraduate Philosophical Review



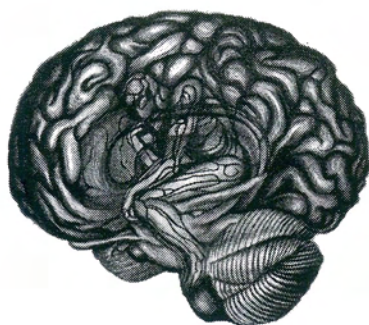
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The Oracle

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One who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of one's age or one's nation, and from convictions which have grown up in one's mind without the cooperation or consent of deliberate reason. To such a person the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects rouse no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected... Philosophy removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect... The free intellect will see as God might see, without a here and now, without hopes and fears, without the trammels of customary beliefs and traditional prejudices, calmly, dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire of knowledge – knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for one to attain.

—Bertrand Russell

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Editor's Introduction

It is an immense honor to introduce the first edition of *The Oracle*, York University's undergraduate philosophical review. Our journal is intended to encourage excellence in scholarship by providing undergraduates with an opportunity to publish philosophical work. After a long evaluation process involving forty submissions, we have included the five essays that best demonstrate clarity, insight, and critical scholarship — necessary virtues of any great philosopher.

In the first essay, "Meaning Use and Determination", Boris Babic explores Wittgenstein's attempt to elucidate the absurdity of Platonic determination, which suggests that an algebraic formula determines its infinite applications objectively for all time. Babic argues that although words can only be *naturalistically* determined they can nevertheless determine future application in virtue of use, learning, norms, and human nature.

In the second essay, "Who Needs Value-Free Science?", Michael Hannon offers both a defense and a critique of value-free science. He argues that although values sometimes misrepresent or even completely falsify scientific data, values also play a legitimate and vital role in the functioning of science. Hannon wants to show the reader that values are a necessary component of scientific inquiry, and that a lack of value-freedom in science does not compromise the pursuit of objectivity.

In the third essay, "What Would a BIV do Differently?", Abtin Dezfuli attempts to demonstrate how our ordinary knowledge claims can remain intact given the possibility of skepticism. He argues that although the contextualist response to the skeptic is valiant, it falls short of refuting the skeptical hypothesis. Dezfuli therefore argues that we must appeal to pragmatism in order to give contextualism the boost it needs to become a viable theory.

In the fourth essay, "Identity in Limbo", Martin Vezér tackles the question of personal identity. He begins by examining two possible criteria for personal identity: the criterion of continuity of memory and the criterion of continuity of body. After evaluating the arguments offered by both sides, Vezér concludes that personal identity requires something more than either criterion on its own.

Instead, both memory *and* body are crucial elements of personal identity.

In the final essay, “Plastic ‘Perfection’”, Angela L’Italien examines how covert power structures and hegemony impact individual autonomy. In particular, L’Italien takes a Foucauldian-type approach to assessing the role of autonomy in cosmetic surgery. She argues that the belief in individual autonomy belies the role that covert power structures, normalized beauty standards, and enshrined social norms play in shaping an individual’s “choice” to undergo cosmetic surgery. The illusion of complete autonomy thus serves to maintain race- and sex-based oppression.

As a final point, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to several people who deserve acknowledgement. Professor Michael Gilbert in the Philosophy department deserves many thanks for his continued help in advertising the ‘call for papers’. The York Philosophy Department also warrants gratitude for their financial support of the journal. *Philosophia* – York’s undergraduate philosophy association – is also appreciated for its continued support. And finally, all of the editors who volunteered their time to review each submission deserve many thanks, since without them this journal would not be possible.

Michael Hannon
Editor-in-Chief, *The Oracle*
York University ‘07

Meaning Use and Determination: The Underdetermination of Meaning by Use

BORIS BABIC

Abstract

In section 189 of Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein's interlocutor asks: "But are the steps then not determined by the algebraic formula?" And Wittgenstein replies, "the question contains a mistake." In the first part of this essay, I will argue that this question is a consequence of Wittgenstein's attempt to elucidate the absurdity of the default idea of determination — Platonic determination — which suggests that an algebraic formula determines its infinite applications objectively for all time. Here I shall expose the problems with the Platonic conception of determination. Now if a question asked contains a mistake, then it should follow that at least one illicit assumption is necessary to asking it. In the second part of this essay I will try to make explicit this assumption. I will argue that Wittgenstein's response to the question is a product of his attempt to articulate a conception of determination — naturalistic determination — independent of Platonic associations, and lying somewhere between the extremes of Platonism and conventionalism.¹ In the main, I hope to show that for Wittgenstein applications of a word might indeed be determined by its meaning. But I hope to illustrate that for Wittgenstein words can only be naturalistically determined. Though they may not be determined in virtue of their objective essence or inherent meaning, words can nonetheless determine future application in virtue of use, learning, norms and human nature. Wittgenstein's position therefore hangs in the middle — between Platonism and conventionalism.

In section 146 of *Philosophical Investigations* (hereafter referred to as PI), Wittgenstein inquires into what is involved for a student to understand any given cardinal number series. He asks: "What is one really thinking of here? Isn't one thinking of the derivation of a

1. The idea that the rule supplied by the algebraic formula is a product of near arbitrary choice.

series from its algebraic formula?" For example, when we count 998, 1000, 1002, are we not simply deriving applications from the formula $n+2$? In what sense, Wittgenstein wants to know, can a word or formula determine future applications? If it does determine them in some way, then do all future applications logically *follow* from it? This is the default idea of determination, held by Russell and Frege: "the straight line which connects any two points is already there before we draw it and it is the same when we say that the transitions, say in the series $+2$, have really been made before we make them orally or in writing."² This sort of determination emerges from the phrase "*deriving* an application from a formula." It seems intuitive that the formula n^2+2-2n has a settled application at any step of the cardinal number series. For example, at 5 it is 17; at 1000 it is 998002, and so forth.

In PI 147, Wittgenstein asks: "Your idea, then, is that you know the application of the rule of the series quite apart from remembering actual applications to particular numbers?"; and the interlocutor replies: "Of course! For the series is infinite and the bit of it that I can have developed finite." This idea — that we *intuit* or derive the application of a formula at each step from the original rule — is the *only* idea of determination we have to this point. So the finite formula that I grasp or understand, by predetermining infinite future applications, goes beyond what I have actually done. Before I have even reached this or that step, the step is already predetermined by the meaning of the algebraic formula; it is already there — like the invisible line between two points.

Wittgenstein wants to show that this situation is problematic. Given this determination, we may be compelled to say that the correct step to take at any particular stage is the one that accords with the order as it was *meant* (PI 186), and that what is required at any particular stage is to intuit the Platonic essence — *meaning* (PI 186) — of the algebraic formula. So your idea, Wittgenstein asks the interlocutor, is that that act of meaning the order had in its own way already traversed all those steps—"that when you meant it your mind as it were flew ahead and took all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one" (PI 188). This argument sounds puzzling.

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), I 6. (Hereafter referred to as RFM.)

When I give the order +2, I cannot possibly have an infinite number of steps in mind at this same instant. Wittgenstein further asks: "So when you gave the order +2 you meant that he was to write 1002 after a 1000 — and did you also mean that he should write 1868 after 1866, and 100036 after 100034, and so on — an infinite number of such propositions?" The interlocutor responds: "No: what I meant was, that he should write the next but one number after *every* number that he wrote; and from this all the propositions follow in turn." But, Wittgenstein responds, "that is just what is in question: what at any stage does follow from that sentence?" (PI 186). What is it for something to be entailed by or derivable from either a sentence or an algebraic formula?

If x is derivable from a proposition then that proposition contains, or entails, x . Consider an example: From the proposition ' $P \supset (Q \supset (R \supset Z))$,' I can derive $P \& Q \supset (R \supset Z)$, and I can further derive $(P \& (Q \& R)) \supset Z$. Call these propositions a , b and c , respectively. Now notice that c is contained in b and that b is contained in a . In this scenario we speak of c being entailed by a , that is a entails c . In *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* I, 6, Wittgenstein maintains that when we say one proposition follows from another, we mean that the first is derivable from the second within a derivation. We surely do not mean that an infinite number of values of x for each value y are all contained in n^2+2-2n in the same way as discussed above.³ Each successive step is not there for us to see or *intuit*.

Consider this situation from another angle: take our proposition c again. From c , we could return back to a : that is, ' $P \supset (Q \supset (R \supset Z))$ ' is derivable from $(P \& (Q \& R)) \supset Z$. But we cannot return to the formula n^2+2-2n from 998002. There would be no way to determine whether the formula applied here had been n^2+2-2n , or $n^2+(3-1)-2n$, or $n^2+2n+(5-3)$ *ad infinitum*. It seems that Wittgenstein is right to deny that an infinite set of propositions *follow* from or are contained within the algebraic formula. Consider the scenario this way. In PI

3. This is not to say Wittgenstein would agree with my distinction in this context, but the above example is the closest I can come to the concept 'entailment.' Wittgenstein would probably say that entailment, too, is a learned concept. The only way for a child to see the truth of $[(P \& (Q \& R)) \supset Z] = [P \supset (Q \supset (R \supset Z))]$ is through learning and practice.

193 Wittgenstein visualizes a machine as an analogue to the algebraic formula: “as if it were not enough for the [machine’s] movements to be empirically determined in advance, but they had to be really — in a mysterious sense — already *present*.” For Wittgenstein, this is the main problem with the Platonic conception of determination — each successive step of any given formula must not only be empirically determined but *already present*!

This is inconceivable because, for Wittgenstein, meaning is by and large determined through use: “For a *large* class of cases — though not for all — in which we employ the word ‘meaning’ it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (PI 43). But the idea that meaning must predetermine a future unforeseen application necessarily assumes that meaning is fixed before this or that use. But for Wittgenstein, it is through use that we come to know what words mean. If use determines meaning however, then it is not the case that an intuition is needed at every stage, but perhaps a decision is, “It would almost be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every stage, but that a new decision was needed at every stage” (PI 186).

I agree with Fogelin that this is an exaggeration in the opposite direction: “I’m not supposed to make things up as I go along.”⁴ So what, then, am I supposed to do? Is there any other way? This is what prompts the interlocutor’s question in PI 189: “But *are* the steps then *not* determined by the algebraic formula?” We can see that Platonic determination is problematic and that it is inconsistent with meaning as use; but we have no alternative conception of determination. And Wittgenstein replies: “The question contains a mistake.”

He answers the question in that manner because the interlocutor is referring to a specific *kind* of determination and Wittgenstein wants the interlocutor (the reader!) to shake this preconceived notion of determination. In 218 he asks, “Whence comes the idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity?”; and in 219 he tells us “all the steps are already taken means: I no longer have any choice. The rule, once stamped with a particular meaning, traces the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole of space.” Wittgenstein does not want us to think

4. Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 159.

of determination in *this* way; therefore he answers the interlocutor's question by saying, "The question contains a mistake." The mistake is that the interlocutor has this rigid Platonic idea of determination which, once its absurd implications are spelled out, becomes problematic.

But if it is absurd to think that an intuition is needed for each application of a formula, and if it is an exaggeration to say that a decision is needed for each application of a formula, then what exactly is it that we do for each application of a formula? In answering this question we should be able to see how, for Wittgenstein, future applications of a given word or formula might be determined by its meaning. In PI 189 Wittgenstein asks how do we use the expression "the steps are determined by a formula?" We may refer to the fact that people are brought up by their training or education to use a formula such that each person arrives at the same answer; that is, each takes the same step at the same point. In PI 190 he tells us: "The way the formula is meant determines which steps are to be taken." But we must ask: "What is the criterion for the way the formula is meant? It is, for example, the kind of way we always use it, the way we are taught to use it" (PI 190). When we grasp the whole use of a word or formula in a flash, Wittgenstein says, there is nothing astonishing about what happens; it becomes so only when we are led to think that the future development must in some way be already present in the act of grasping the use (PI 197).

Think of the formula as expressing a rule and think of the rule as a sign-post. The connection between my actions and the sign-post, Wittgenstein wants to say, will express the way in which formulae determine applications: What sort of connection exists here? Perhaps this one: "I have been trained to react to this sign in a particular way, and now I do so react to it" (PI 198). But I can react to the sign-post in a particular way only if there exists a custom of regularly using sign-posts. Thus, future applications of a formula can be determined by learning to use the formula in such and such a way. For this, norms, customs and institutions for learning rules and using them as sign-posts are necessary. I call this conception of determination 'naturalistic' because it makes no appeal to anything beyond the natural world. What is required for naturalistic determination is learning how to use the formula, the customs

regarding the use of the formula and a social community in which these customs are exercised.

For example, at present the formula $\Phi!x$ does not fix a meaning, because most of us do not learn how to use such a formula. But for Russell and his readers in 1908, it denoted a predicative function of an argument x .⁵ In PI 190, Wittgenstein says this of a strange formula $x!2$: “if by $x!2$ you mean x^2 , then you get *this* value for y , if you mean $2x$, *that* one.” In other words, since we did not learn how to use $x!2$ and since there exists no custom of using it in such and such a way, this formula does not predetermine future applications. But if we take x^2 , for example, we have learnt to use it in a specific way and we have norms regarding its use, so it *does* determine future applications.

One might now object and ask: But is *that* not a convention? This is a contingent custom, but it is not a product of convention. Convention is an arbitrary choice which could have been otherwise. Recall, for example, that at some colleges class ends ten minutes early to allow for travel time, while at others it begins ten minutes late. The rules we have for inference, calculation and so forth are contingent, but they are not arbitrary. They are a result of practices which have evolved in response to particular features of the human brain, which has in turn evolved through interaction with the natural environment.

Consider Fogelin’s example:⁶ It is a fact that we humans recognize the same shape through large-area variations — we easily recognize a triangle when we see one, regardless of its size. But we cannot easily recognize equal areas through large shape variations — we cannot immediately judge whether an octagon and a hexagon have the same area. Had this been the other way around, rules of geometry would have been much different than they are today.

We can agree with Wittgenstein that when someone says, “if you follow the rule it *must* be like this,” that person has no concept of what it would be like for it to be otherwise (RFM III 29).⁷ We cannot conceive of comparing immediately the area of two radically

5. Bertrand Russell, *Logic And Knowledge: Essays 1901-1950* ed. Robert Charles Marsh (New York: Routledge, 2001), 78.

6. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 162.

7. I am indebted to Barry Stroud for this quote.

different polygons. But this is because of the contingent world we live in. The determining factor is not mysterious — we find it in our natural world.

There is therefore no inherent essence in x^2 from which future applications follow, nor does x^2 mysteriously contain future applications. It determines them because of our rules or customs regarding the application of the formula x^2 . These rules do not exist out of logical necessity. They *could* change because they are ultimately a product of human evolution and our natural environment. It is because of the contingent world we live in that we cannot imagine people who measure length with elastic rulers or people who sell timber by cubic measure (RFM I 142, RFM I 5).

These rules do not impinge on us from outside, nor are they preordained by the divine across all space and time; nonetheless, they are quite stable within the community of rule users.⁸ This is how future applications of a word are naturalistically determined for Wittgenstein. They are based on a consensus which is grounded in certain very general facts of nature (PI 230). So future applications of either the word 'chair' or the formula ' x^2 ' are determined in the sense that we know how to use chair and x^2 ; however, chair or x^2 in and of itself does not *contain* future applications. If, all of a sudden, x^2 yields unintelligible values or a chair starts to disappear (PI 80), then, through use, we readjust our understanding of either term. Chairs however, tend not to disappear, and x^2 generally yields intelligible results so we have stable rules in a contingent environment.

As we have seen throughout this essay, Wittgenstein approaches this matter cautiously and from many angles because he wants us to grasp somehow, to try and see, the problematic consequences of understanding determination of words or formulae in the way Frege or Russell understood it. He does not want to say, however, that we make things up as we go along. Wittgenstein's conception lies in between these two poles of conventionalism and Platonism.

8. If, for example, the many-worlds idea of quantum mechanics — modal realism — proves correct, we should have to reassess our understanding of physical laws and alter rules of modern physics. In the meantime, we get by with the consensus understanding of modern physics, which precludes modal realism and things of this sort. In the meantime, these rules *do* determine future applications.

Who Needs Value-Free Science?

Defending Objectivity in Not-So-Value-Free Science

MICHAEL HANNON

Value-free science¹ is both overrated and underrated. It is overrated by those who believe it can provide a complete view of the world on its own, replacing the values from which it has developed. It is underrated by those who do not regard it as capable of providing a more objective picture of the world. This controversy has polarized philosophers of science into two distinct camps: at one end of the spectrum are the idealists, and at the other, the relativists. The former characterize science as the progression toward more “real” and “objective” knowledge, which requires the constant filtering-out of cultural values that allegedly tincture the “purity” of the subject. The latter completely eliminate assertions of objectivity, arguing instead that the history of science reveals it as inherently value-laden, and that notions of objectivity are fantasy. Much ink has been spilt over this controversy, and although I sympathize with both sides, I accept neither.

This essay is both a defense and a critique of value-free science. It is a defense in that I shall endeavor to demonstrate how science is often influenced by values that distort, misrepresent, or even completely falsify scientific data. I argue that there are many circumstances where values do not play a legitimate role in scientific inquiry, and thus are rightly barred. However, I shall also critique the notion of value-free science by demonstrating that values can (and do) play a legitimate and indeed vital role in the functioning of science. The worry, it seems, is that if science is not value-free, then it cannot be objective. Contrary to this assertion, I will argue that the conflation of value-freedom with objectivity is mistaken. First, I will begin by examining the arguments both for and against value-free science. Second, I will disentangle the notion of value-freedom from objectivity in order to reveal that the two are by no means the same. This will help to set up my defense of objectivity, where I shall reconcile value-motivated science with the possibility of objective

1. The term “science” is taken to denote some kind of systematic empirical inquiry.

knowledge. My thesis is that values are a necessary component of scientific inquiry, and that the lack of value-freedom in science does not compromise the pursuit of objectivity.

The traditional view of science conjures up imagery of the disinterested researcher who is free from prejudice and concerned solely with the discovery of objective, verifiable truths. Under this view, the scientific inquirer resembles those characteristics epitomic of Cartesian inquiry: the solitary, pure, individual pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake. Such a person is free from religious, political, economic, and personal values, interests, and powers. Indeed, under this view there is no proper role for moral and social values in judgments regarding scientific theory, nor is there a purpose for dogma, ideology, and pre-existing commitments. The distinct feature of science is that it deals with facts, not values — science is allegedly objective, while values are personal. Objectivity, as the regulative ideal in science, seems to imply that values do not have a legitimate function.

We are all familiar with the situations in which values have compromised scientific objectivity; for instance, there is the case of the researcher who will twist the results in order to satisfy his or her own agenda, or there is research informed by corporations that aim to deepen their pockets by producing favorable outcomes. It is for these and similar reasons that isolation from social and moral values in science is alluring. Philosophers of science advocate objectivity and value-neutrality due to the fear of slipping into subjectivism, fallibilism, and relativism. The benchmarks of value-freedom, objectivity, and neutrality offer much comfort to scientists and laypersons alike, who view science as operating within the privileged domain of stable knowledge. Recently, however, this image has been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny. The notion of value-free science is becoming old-fashioned in the face of critiques emerging from studies in the sociology of knowledge. I shall now turn to an examination of some of these critiques.

Critics who target claims of alleged value-freedom have set out to expose the various ways in which values are invariably connected to scientific inquiry. This position has been supported in many ways, however I maintain that the core premise of each of these critiques hinges on the notion that science, as a human endeavor, is not value-free because people are not value-free. Scientists do not spring, fully

formed, out of a social or cultural vacuum. Instead, they are inextricably linked to both cultural and individual standpoints, and this significantly threatens assertions of value-neutrality.

The scientific enterprise is itself embedded within particular cultures, and values will inevitably enter it through the conduct of its individual practitioners. Values, however, intersect with science in other complex ways. They often guide scientific research, for instance, as in the case of corporate interests shaping the sort of research that is conducted. Values can also emerge from science, which are then exported into mainstream culture. The discovery of harmful germs and bacteria, for example, has shaped the value we place on practicing good hygiene, which has further emphasized the value placed on researching sanitation. Equally, scientific breakthroughs often pose challenges to preexisting social values. Consider how the scientific discoveries of Galileo challenged dominant religious conceptions of the cosmos. Another intersection between values and science relates to how the values of a particular society can influence its scientific standards. On the one hand, the standards of scientific and epistemic justification seem to rise when the values it challenges are well entrenched. On the other hand, the standards of scientific and epistemic justification seem to drop when a theory compliments values that are well-entrenched. For instance, late nineteenth-century Europeans developed theories of human evolution according to which European races were more advanced than Africans. These claims were easily “proven” given the prominent contemporary cultural values regarding race. Further, it is no coincidence that science once “proved” the intellectual inferiority of women at a time when patriarchy was more overt and oppressive than it is today. Such examples illustrate that the standards of knowledge are contextual, since “facts” often fit the prevailing value judgements of a particular time and place. For this reason, many argue that science should not refer to a process of inquiry that takes place in a value-free context, but rather a process informed by cultural values.

Setting aside these criticisms, many philosophers of science have also attempted to demonstrate that individual and cultural values can play a positive, and even necessary, role in scientific inquiry. For instance, the traditional argument that science is objective and value-free itself reflects the value for ascertaining unprejudiced truth.

Although the traditional view of science seems to purport a clear “fact/value” distinction, recent arguments against value-freedom in science have maintained that concern for the facts is itself a value, thus blurring this division. Furthermore, the principle that facts serve as a check on our conceptualizations is not itself implied by the facts.² Instead, our concern with establishing concrete evidence often reifies the value we place on truth for its own sake. Also, consider how research concerned with ameliorating or curing diseases is also guided by values, such as the importance of prolonging human life. Finally, the values that often emerge from scientific discoveries can be very positive, such as practicing good hygiene, eating healthy, and so on. Thus, one can dismiss the need for value-free science by pointing to the legitimate functions of values. Such values do not merely operate at the periphery of science, but rather at its core.

The argument that value-free science makes objectivity possible, and that a science tintured by values would hinder objectivity, is alluring, albeit mistaken. One should be careful not to equate objectivity with value-neutrality, since the two concepts are surely distinct. This conclusion seems to flow quite naturally from the fact that objectivity is itself a value. Indeed, maxims such as “truth is superior to falsity,” and “objectivity is preferred over subjectivity,” are not empirical descriptions but normative judgments. Verily, if science were conceived as value-free, then the preference of truth over falsity, or objectivity over subjectivity becomes, at the very least, something to question. That moral and social values play various roles in science is, I think, consistent with the pursuit of objectivity. Even religion, which is often characterized as the antithesis of science, can be a value-laden resource that contributes positively to the growth of objective knowledge. For example, William Buckland’s landmark work on fossil assemblages in caves — which received the Royal Society’s prestigious Copley Medal — was influenced by assumptions about the Noachian flood.³ Although science may be inescapably normative, this does not, in principle, debase the pursuit of more objective knowledge. Values have many

2. Don Bowen, “Objectivity as a Normative Standard,” *Journal of Politics* 39, no. 1 (1997): 202.

3. “William Buckland.” Oxford University Museum of Natural History. <http://www.oum.ox.ac.uk/learning/pdfs/buckland.pdf>.

legitimate roles to play in scientific research; for example, in motivating research interests, in determining the direction of applied research, and so on. To this end, one can dismiss arguments to the effect that personal values influence our approaches to the data, our categories of thought, and our choice of topics, not because they are incorrect, but rather because they are irrelevant to the pursuit of objectivity. Accordingly, the critique should not be that harbouring personal values thwarts objectivity, but rather that science is not objective when it fails to meet the requisite norms of objectivity (e.g., if objections are being suppressed, if conclusions exclude relevant data, and so on). Thus, objectivity does not require that science be value-free, but rather that science be value-free in the right ways.

That values play a necessary role in science has thus far been established. However, the amount of emphasis one places on a particular value can nevertheless result in controversy. For example, it is often conceded that “good” scientific research must also be ethical. But our ethical commitments may conflict with the aims of epistemological inquiry. This conflict has been beautifully captured in Robert Hood’s article, *AIDS, Crisis, and Activist Science*. In this piece, Hood examines “crisis science” in order to illustrate that scientific standards are sometimes contingent on social circumstance. Recently, HIV/AIDS activists have criticized the existing norms of research as unresponsive to the demands of the HIV/AIDS crisis.⁴ These activists contend that, in light of this calamity, “normal” scientific standards should be replaced with those of crisis science. However, this new approach has been criticized for its methodology, which seeks to achieve results quickly and allows patients to take greater risks than normally tolerated. Advocates of crisis science have responded by arguing that although prudence is ordinarily valued in science, it is not the only important value to consider. Thus, on the one hand, critics of crisis science maintain that the accepted level of scientific standards should be held universally, and that any failure to do so amounts to an ethical and epistemic

4. Robert Hood, “AIDS, Crisis, and Activist Science,” in *Science and Other Cultures*, ed. Sandra Harding and Robert Figueroa, 15 (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2003).

violation. On the other hand, advocates maintain that the failure to shift scientific standards in the face of a global crisis is itself a significant ethical failing. Although both sides are concerned with establishing a scientific standard that is ethical, their differing sense of values has led them down opposing paths.

The current HIV/AIDS epidemic captures the notion that science is not ethically idle or value-neutral. In truth, the very claim that science ought to be ethical is to maintain that values have a legitimate role in science. The HIV/AIDS crisis is a clear example of how epistemological issues are complicated by ethical concerns. And although both sides of the debate desire epistemological objectivity, the worry is that we might sacrifice our ethical values in the process. Thus, the value placed on objectivity may be superseded by ethical values, and rightly so. In many instances our values must be negotiated. Hood thus demonstrates that the best science epistemologically may not be the best science morally. Crisis science serves as a constructive example of the legitimate role of values in shaping the workings of science.

Science is not a romanticized examination of nature by devoted servitors of truth; it is a human enterprise, and as such, values will inevitably come into play. I maintain that values can affect virtually every level of the scientific process. The unfortunate consequence has been that of "bad science," where values have wrongly influenced inquiry in ways that hinder objectivity. It would be absurd to deny that at various points of history the conclusions of science have been strongly prejudiced. It is for this and similar reasons that value-motivated science is often considered a contradiction in terms. But the popular conception of value-free science is both overstated and misleading. Values are not only necessary in order for science to function; they also play an important role in the advancement of objectivity. I take this to be the alternative role of values: they work positively to expose error and deepen objective understanding. Although values are often considered to be the stepping-stone into relativism, I maintain that values in science often operate to prevent relativism. Again, this conclusion follows naturally given that objectivity itself is pursued because it is valued.

There are many methods by which one can pursue the goal of objectivity in value-motivated science. For instance, values such as reliability, testability, accuracy, and precision, all work towards the

advancement of objectivity. Better knowledge can be had if one relies on controlled observation, interventive experiments, redundancy checks, error reduction, and so on. Furthermore, various processes within the scientific community aim to increase the reservoir of reliable knowledge, such as peer reviews, dialogue at scientific conferences, and efforts to replicate results. The purpose of each of these processes is to strengthen objective knowledge. Even the very contestation of value-free science is itself an attempt to move closer to a position we regard as epistemically objective.

To this end, Michael Welbourne has developed a useful idea in his text, *Knowledge*. Welbourne argues that constant individual and collective monitoring will help to keep knowledge as objective as we can have it — on this point, I agree entirely. An epistemically healthy and functional society will monitor knowledge claims in order to keep distortion and falsity under control. This also serves as a constant check on relativism. Even the incorporation of cultural values can actually lessen the potentially biasing effects of other values in the production of reliable knowledge. The “feminist perspective,” for instance, may be no less motivated by values, but its existence has served a complimentary role by monitoring and critiquing many of the defects in men’s studies. This is just one example of how critically monitoring knowledge claims can help to advance the goal of objectivity.

I am trying to illustrate that there is an important distinction between science and what I call “dogma.” The distinction is this: science purports claims that allow the chance for objection, while dogma does not. Notice, however, that this distinction does not rest on the supposition that science must be value-free. My point is that scientific views must be justified by those same standards we employ to reach objectivity, as outlined above. Scientific knowledge must maintain propositions that are verifiable, falsifiable, and carry warranted assertability. If claims are not open to contestation, if viewpoints have been blocked, if relevant alternative hypotheses have been dismissed, then such claims hinder objectivity. It is here that the notion of an epistemic community becomes particularly relevant. In this sense, science (and the epistemological project in general) is indeed a collaborative effort.

It is no secret that science is underpinned by the goal of objectivity. Throughout this paper, I have maintained that objectivity

is a worthwhile aim in epistemological inquiry. In truth, I think that the loss of objectivity as a governing ideal in science would be devastating. Nevertheless, that science is not (and cannot be) value-free does not preclude the pursuit of objective knowledge, nor does it imply that we should do away with objectivity all together. Objectivity and values are not mutually exclusive; the former, in fact, is actually dependent on the latter. It is for this reason that I have maintained a commitment to being as objective as possible, while granting the recent critiques emerging from the sociology of knowledge.

On the one hand, to argue that science is completely value-free is archaic and untenable. However, this does not oblige us to abandon science or objectivity completely. On the other hand, to argue that science is not reliable or objective, and that present scientific theories are merely another paradigm, is to advocate an unsustainable relativism. Our only recourse is to rest somewhere between these two extremes. It has been my aim to argue that objectivity is a value worth defending, and that it ought to be sought and re-sought by methods that will expectantly lead to that end.

*What Would a BIV Do Differently?
A Pragmatist Defense of Contextualist Fallibilism*

ABTIN AMINZADEH DEZFULI

In "Solving the Skeptical Problem", Keith DeRose offers a contextualist response to a possible formulation of the skeptical hypothesis about knowledge. I will here outline his position in order to demonstrate the potential in the contextualist approach to effectively solve the skeptical puzzle. I will, however, go on to argue that the contextualist response as formulated by DeRose falls short of achieving its persistently elusive goal. In this, I will follow David Lewis, in "Elusive Knowledge", in order to explain how the type of contextualist solution offered by DeRose is inherently self-defeating. I will then suggest the introduction of a pragmatist understanding of knowledge into the contextualist picture. Shifting towards fallibilism, I will argue that in light of pragmatist considerations, the skeptical puzzle loses much, if not all, of its threatening significance.

DeRose is justified in his initial observation that any satisfactory solution to the skeptical argument should provide an account of the undeniable plausibility of its premises and the entailed conclusion. But why should an admittedly plausible argument be so troubling in the first place? The skeptic is, after all, merely inviting us to concede that we could possibly be deceived by the senses. On the face of it, we should be able to concede this point without facing a foundational crisis about knowledge. The problem, ironically enough, arises with Descartes' convincing argument to the effect that entertaining the notion of deception leads to the possibility of overall 'systematic' deception. Descartes' evil demon, or its contemporary counterpart, the brain-in-a-vat (BIV), are scenarios about precisely this type of situation: the case where all our beliefs about the world are, in one way or the other, potentially false. It is in this sense that the skeptical hypothesis, hereafter SH, remains a lark in the side of modern epistemology.

Consider DeRose's formulation¹ of SH (where O is an ordinary knowledge claim such as "I have a hand", and H is a skeptical proposition like "I am a BIV"):

P₁: I don't know that not-H.

P₂: If I don't know that not-H, then I don't know that O.

C: Therefore, I don't know that O.

DeRose correctly observes that SH, formulated as such, is at least at first glance a sound argument with intuitively plausible premises. However, it stands in direct conflict with an equally plausible knowledge claim that P₀: I know that O (e.g. I know that I have a hand). The problem, therefore, is that we are dealing with a *very* good argument with a *very* unacceptable conclusion. Setting aside the Moorean reaction of disputing the greater or equal plausibility of SH compared to P₀, the difficulty of the task at hand lies in the fact that the usual method of attacking the validity of premises or the soundness of the argument — namely, by denying any of P₁, P₂ or C — is an inherently implausible move in itself. The attractiveness of DeRose's contextualist solution, as I will sketch out below, is located in the way in which it manages to avoid taking such an unappealing stance.

DeRose's contextualist solution involves two major steps. The first is to investigate the reasons for the intuitive plausibility of both P₁ and P₂, and the second to demonstrate how we can accommodate that plausibility while keeping intact our belief in P₀. To this end, DeRose relies heavily on two central concepts: the Subjunctive Conditional Account (SCA) and the Strength of Epistemic Position. The SCA, taken from Nozick's "Philosophical Explanations", effectively argues that in order for a belief to count as knowledge, it should be 'sensitive' to the condition of being false.² In other words, my true belief that P is not my knowledge that P if it were the case that I would maintain that P even if not-P. Knowledge should track the truth in a specific way: it should be sensitive to its possible loss.

1. Keith DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," in *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Keith DeRose and Ted A. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 183.

2. Robert Nozick, "Philosophical Explanations," in *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Keith DeRose and Ted A. Warfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 156-182.

SCA thus explains the plausibility of P_1 : our belief that not-H does not track the truth. The SCA by itself, however, would lead us to accepting logical absurdities. If we apply SCA to P_2 , we could argue that the conditional is broken because, despite the truth of the antecedent, the consequence is insensitive and as such false. We are therefore left with an abominable conjunction: the antecedent of the conditional and P_0 . Furthermore, we would have violated our initial promise to allow for the plausibility (and not the truth) of both P_1 and P_2 .

To avoid all this, DeRose introduces a contextualist condition to his argument for the plausibility of P_1 . It is only in a context with a heightened standard of knowledge that P_1 is actually true. In an ordinary context, that is, almost anywhere outside a seminar on epistemology, the context-determined strength of the conversers' epistemic position doesn't require P_1 to be true. This is the trick the skeptic has been playing on us all along: a change in the relative strength of the epistemic position caused by introducing the SH to the conversation. The same line of thought can be extended to P_2 . Given the newly raised epistemic standards, the conditional is indeed true. The contextualist explanation, therefore, is that the skeptic's introduction of H to the conversation has raised the epistemic standards to an extraordinary position where our belief that not-H is now insensitive. However, DeRose is quick to point out that the skeptic has by the same token raised the epistemic standard of knowing P_0 so high that we no longer can claim to know it.

Hence, DeRose manages to avoid endorsing the abominable conjunction. But has he solved the skeptical puzzle? So far it might have seemed that all he has done is to argue for P_1 and P_2 . Yet it should be noticed that the conclusion of the SH is now only to be followed under heightened epistemic standards. As such, the sense of the word 'know' in C is such that it poses no direct threat to our simultaneously maintaining that P_0 . DeRose thus argues that the combination of SCA and the notion of epistemic standards has successfully solved the skeptical problem. It has only to be realized that the skeptical worries are only warranted in an extraordinary truth insensitive context and not that of meaningful everyday conversation. In other words, the SH can be raised in any given context because it is context-insensitive in an important sense: it is

only plausible in a context that precludes our ordinary notion of knowledge.

As David Lewis points out, however, this solution places epistemology itself in a rather awkward position. The entire strength of the contextualist view rests on the basic observation that some possible alternatives — specifically those related to insensitive, systematic deception — are properly ignored in ordinary conversations. If I see what appear to be zebras in a zoo, I am justified in ignoring as irrelevant the alternative possibility that I am actually seeing cleverly painted mules, placed there by inexplicably deceptive zoo authorities. This seems to be a reasonable position insofar as the skeptical alternative has not been raised. As such, Lewis claims that ordinary knowledge of this type is infallible by virtue of having ruled out properly ignorable alternatives. It is crucially different from fallibilism, since in order to falsify the claim that S knows that P we must change the context of knowledge by heightening the epistemic standards. Indeed, I do not know that those animals are zebras if you mention the possibility of a paint job, since this alternative is no longer properly ignored. However, when I said they were zebras two minutes ago, I did know, and know infallibly, that they were zebras as opposed to antelopes.

But how do we know which alternatives are properly ignored in the first place? Here, DeRose is of no help. Lewis, however, makes a valiant effort to give us a rough idea of what some rules of proper elimination of possibilities will look like. The rules include criteria for actuality, belief, resemblance, reliability, method, conservatism, and attention. I believe none of the rules described by Lewis will give him the result that he needs for his infallibilism, that is, the possibility of properly ignoring the skeptical alternatives in all ordinary conversations. For the purposes of the objection I raise below, however, it will suffice here to consider the ‘rule of attention’. As Lewis states it, the rule specifies that “when we say a possibility is properly ignored, we mean exactly that; we do not mean that it *could have been* properly ignored.”³ This entails, of course, that the so-called far-fetched possibilities are relevant to the

3. Keith DeRose, “Solving the Skeptical Problem,” in *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Keith DeRose and Ted A. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 230.

context if they are for whatever reason not ignored by the conversers. To preserve his infallibilist view, Lewis suggests that *we* can nevertheless properly ignore the skeptical possibilities when discussing the knowledge claims in a conversation, *even if they are not ignored by the interlocutors themselves*. We are, after all, conducting a different conversation, in a different context, focusing attention on different alternatives of our own choosing.

I will allow Lewis himself to ask the immediately obvious question: “Don’t you smell a rat? Haven’t I, by my own lights, been saying what cannot be said?”⁴ The answer is yes on both counts. When discussing epistemology, we are discussing exactly the kinds of alternatives that we claim are being ignored in ordinary conversations. Lewis admits this self-destructing quality of the epistemological inquiry, yet maintains that despite this, his arguments remain correct. How so? Lewis believes that he has only momentarily “bent the rules” in talking about the contextualist position and ignoring the alternatives when in fact they were lurking in the background of the discussion. When we return to ordinary conversation, we can easily switch back to ‘properly’ ignoring the skeptical alternatives and, lo and behold, the skeptic withers away.

But is this a satisfactory response to the self-deconstruction charge? I think not. The crucial presupposition fueling the contextualist’s confidence in dismissing this charge is the global irrelevance of the skeptical alternatives. The possibility that I am seriously deceived will *never* be relevant in the context of an ordinary conversation and as such, our P_os are placed firmly out of the skeptic’s reach. This is what Lewis has in mind when arguing that knowledge is by definition infallible. As such, the burden remains on the contextualist to demonstrate the *absolute* context-independence of the skeptical alternatives. The contextualist, however, insofar as her position has any merit, is unable to move in this direction. Such an argument would commit her to the absurdity that she has all the while been talking outside any given context. For if the skeptical alternatives do make sense in some context — as they

4. David Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge,” in *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Keith DeRose and Ted A. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 237.

do, since the contextualist is discussing them — then it is indeed a peculiar move on the part of the contextualist to denounce them as absolutely context-independent. The *sotto voce* proviso would not suffice, since however soft the voice, something is being said, thus creating a context that cannot be essentially severed from ordinary life. In doing this, the epistemologist would be ascribing other-worldly qualities to philosophical discourse, which would imply that no one outside the seminar would ever understand the SH. But, then, how do philosophers get into this isolated island in the first place?

So, where does this last move leave us? We cannot simply capitulate by accepting C, since we will thus have made no progress in dealing with the puzzle that we started with, viz., the conflict between P₀ and C. Besides, we have already seen much promise in the contextualist solution. We have come too close to give up so easily. Often when a philosophical argument has fallen short, all it needs is a pragmatist boost. I will here try to give that boost to the contextualist solution.

C.S. Peirce, in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”, argues that the content of our beliefs are a momentary appeasement of doubt and a resultant disposition to act. To say that I believe that P means that I am prepared to act in a manner compatible with the fact that P. Our consideration about the justification of a belief, therefore, includes the rule, “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have.”⁵ Peirce then goes on to suggest a scientific method of investigating these practical bearings, one that would ultimately lead to truth:

Different minds may set out with the most antagonistic views, but the progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to one and the same conclusion. This activity of thought by which we are carried, not where we wish, but to a fore-ordained goal, is like the operation of destiny. No modification of the point of view taken, no selection of other facts for study, no natural bent of mind even, can enable a man to escape the predestinate opinion. This great hope is embodied in the conception of truth and reality. The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean

5. C.S. Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (January 1878): 290.

by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality.⁶

How would this conception of belief and truth help us in epistemology? It helps by posing a possible contextualist explanation for our holding on to P_o , while accepting the relevance of SH to ordinary conversations (which was so devastating to the contextualist solution as offered by DeRose et al). Consider the case of driving in a facsimile barn land. DeRose maintains that despite the possibility of facsimiles my knowledge that I am driving through real barns attains the status of infallible knowledge since the facsimile alternative is properly ignored. Oh, unless of course, it is not ignored. The pragmatist, however, can readily accept the fallibility of the knowledge that she is looking at real barns, but add that *in the context of driving through a barn-land, the practical consequences of the barns being real or fake are effectively the same*. Now, if I were to settle down in this area, I would need to make further inquiries, which may or may not ultimately show that the barns were fake. As I was driving through, however, perhaps with an epistemologist friend of mine who was discussing the very same scenario with me, the possibility of deception had no practical bearing. In other words, for pragmatic purposes — and is that not all that matters anyways? — I knew that I was driving through barns. Having already incorporated the contextualist rules, my belief that P is a piece of fallible knowledge that P if and only if in the present context the possibility that not-P bears no immediate practical consequences for me.

Notice that the pragmatic solution stays within the defined limits of not attacking the plausibility of either of the two premises. Endorsing the fallibilistic characteristic of knowledge allows for this consistency. The pragmatic turn simply introduces a different way in which context defines the sense of the word 'know', even if the epistemic standards are raised to include far-fetched possibilities of deception. The pragmatist is asking the skeptic a legitimate question: "So what do you suggest we do differently, considering the possibility you just raised?"

6. C.S. Peirce, "Make Our Ideas Clear," 292.

As such, the pragmatist can happily embrace fallibilism while dismissing the immediate skeptical “Aha, I got you now” claim that she knows nothing because she does not know which of her beliefs actually constitute knowledge. Whether a belief constitutes knowledge is determined by the practical dynamics of the context, which makes justification an essentially futuristic project. The question of whether I am a BIV is *usually* quite detached from possible practical implications, and as such, properly dismissed. Yet, if the context was such that it would actually bear practical consequences, then the BIV hypothesis should be put to scientific investigation. At the ideal end of inquiry it may be proved or disproved that we are BIVs, maybe because Neo would manage to explode the Matrix, or the demon would get bored and decide to let us know of its existence for the sake of variety. As already conceded, our knowledge in this sense is infallibly fallible.

At the present time however, it seems that the BIV hypothesis is — as all claims about overall and systematic deception — designed specifically to elude empirical investigation. As such, the skeptic is being too clever for her own good. DeRose’s bold skeptic is thus defeated, not because she is making a statement about systematic falsehood that is unappealing to the anti-realists, but simply because her scheme bears no practical consequences for the knower. Since what we believe has relevant content only insofar as it determines the way we act, the skeptic is left with the burden of demonstrating the practical bearing of her particular hypothesis. If she manages to manipulate the context enough to do so, then we would remind her of our fallibilism in the first place and ask her to join us in the scientific inquiry she has shown to be pragmatically viable.

The skeptic has therefore rendered us a great service. By introducing the possibility of systematic deception, she has made us realize a serious flaw in the platonic picture of knowledge and truth. The demand for infallible knowledge should be given up, but given up in such a way that would capture the practical and evolutionary significance of the term ‘knowledge’. Pragmatic fallibilism provides this option.

Identity in Limbo

MARTIN VEZÉR

How can I explain the continued existence of myself as a being that exists continuously, from one moment to the next, when everything about my being is perpetually changing? How can I be sure that I am the same being today as I was ten years ago? For that matter, how can I be sure that I am the same being now as I was ten seconds ago? Exactly what are the criteria that account for the continuity of my personal identity? Often I take for granted the idea that my identity is fixed, even though the characteristics of my personality and properties of my body are constantly changing. Indubitably, everything about me as an individual is constantly changing. My mind changes with age: old memories fade and new memories are made. My body also changes with age: old cells decay, new cells develop, and the cycle continues as my entire physical being replenishes itself over and over again to such an extent that every cell in my body today is different from the cells that were in my body as a newborn. Why is it, then, that I feel as though I am one continuous being that exists through such extensive change? Is this feeling that I am one perpetual person correct, or am I a different person at different moments?

To answer the question of personal identity, philosophers generally examine two possible criteria: the *criterion of continuity of memory* and the *criterion of continuity of body*. Some argue that personal identity is independent of the body and that all that is needed to account for personal identity is the continuity of memory. Others, however, argue that continuity of memory alone is an insufficient criterion for personal identity; they maintain that humans intuitively value their physical make-up to such an extent that a criterion of continuity of body must also be taken into account. In this essay, I will examine and weigh important arguments from both camps and show how personal identity requires something much more than either criterion on its own. I will argue, then, that both memory and body are crucial elements of personal identity. Further, I will illustrate how, in some cases, human intuition gives emphasis to memory over body and, in other cases, body over memory.

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke argues that the persistence of personal identity is determined by memory alone. He maintains that person *A* is the same as person *B* if and only if *A* can remember enough of what happened to *B*.¹ According to Locke, then, I am the same person today as I was ten years ago if and only if I can currently remember enough about what my life was like ten years ago. Even though my body has grown and my personality has changed, I am still the same person as I was ten years ago insofar as I have significant memory of my past. Locke accounts for the persistence of personal identity by drawing a connection between a conscious being at one moment and consciousness at another moment. He says, "it being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself, personal identity depends on that only, whether it be annexed solely to one individual substance, or can be continued in a succession of several substances."² This statement implies that personal identity is not determined solely by the physical substance that makes up the human body. Furthermore, it implies that personality can theoretically be transferred from one thinking substance to another. According to Locke, a transfer of identity is possible if one memory is passed from one body to another.

Roderick Chisholm, however, rejects the Lockean account of personal identity. He argues that it is logically incoherent to propose a dichotomy between 'I' (that is, my psyche) and the 'thinking substance' in which 'I' am purportedly contained. Chisholm points out that this dichotomy allows for only four possible relationships between 'I' and the thinking substance, and all four of these relationships lead to absurd conclusions. He outlines the problem as follows. First, he asks: If there are two things involved in the persistence of the self — that is, both 'I' and a thinking substance — which thing is it that actually does the thinking? There are four options but each of them is impossible. (1) *Neither 'I' nor the thinking substance thinks*. If this were the case, however, then it

1. Julie Anna Allen, "Personal Identity" Lecture. York University, Toronto. 29 November 2005.

2. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding: In Two Volumes*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (New York: Dover, 1959), 1: 451.

would simply be impossible for a person to have consciousness. If nothing is thinking, then there is no thought, but there is thought so it is not the case that neither 'I' nor a thinking substance thinks. (2) *'I' think but the thinking substance does not.* This is also illogical because if it were the case that 'I' think but the thinking substance does not, then there would be no reason to call the latter a 'thinking' substance. One might respond to this point by saying that 'I' am contained in a non-thinking substance, a sort of shell that carries 'I', but this response would be inadequate since it fails to explain how a being that thinks could be contained in a being that does not think. For if 'I' were attached to, or a part of, a non-thinking substance, 'I' would have to be some sort of part or substance of that substance which holds 'I'. But if 'I' think, then it is impossible for the 'I' to be a part or a substance because parts and substances are non-thinking beings. Therefore, it is not the case that 'I' think but the thinking substance does not. (3) *The thinking substance thinks but 'I' do not think.* If the thinking substance thinks but 'I' do not think, then somehow the thinking substance tricks itself into thinking that 'I' am thinking and it is not when really 'I' am not and it is. Such circularity is nonsensical and should therefore be abandoned. (4) *Both 'I' and the thinking substance think.* If 'I' and the thinking substance think, then it seems that entities have been multiplied unnecessarily; if the self has a thought, there is no reason to suppose that it belongs to both 'I' and a thinking substance. Chisholm concludes, therefore, that the dichotomy between 'I' and a thinking substance is absurd. Further, he claims that since 'I' and a thinking substance are inextricably conjoined, "there is no significant sense in which we may speak of the transfer of a self from one substance or individual thing to another."³

As an alternative to the Lockean account, Chisholm offers his own explanation of how individuals are able to retain a sense of identity in the midst of perpetual change. Chisholm proposes that the Leibnizian definition of identicalness be set aside when dealing with accounts of personal identity. Leibniz's law states that one thing is identical to another if and only if the former has all of the same properties as the latter. That is, *X* and *Y* are identical if and

3. Roderick Chisholm, "The Persistence of Persons," *Person and Object* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1976), 3.

only if X has every property of Y . This definition is a problem for most accounts of personal identity because, as noted above, persons are constantly undergoing change. According to Leibniz's law, the only thing identical to me at this moment is me at this moment; in the next moment I will acquire and lose some properties and therefore be non-identical to who I was in the last moment. Chisholm claims that this definition is too "strict and philosophical"⁴ for an ordinary understanding of the persistence of individuals through time. He urges that, along with the Lockean notion of transitive identity, the notion of strict identity be abandoned. Instead of these rigid and deeply philosophical notions, Chisholm argues that a 'loose' definition of identicalness may sufficiently account for the contiguity of identity. He does not, however, venture to elaborate on exactly what criteria should be taken into account for a loose yet sufficient definition of identity.

Another objection to the Lockean account comes from Bishop Joseph Butler in his work, *Of Personal Identity*. Butler outlines the apparent circularity in Locke's position. The objection of circularity is as follows: To say that A equals B if and only if A remembers B is a flawed proposition because it *presupposes* a relationship between A and B . To say that I am the same person I was ten years ago if I remember the life of that person from ten years ago presupposes that I am somehow connected to that person, when really I might not be. According to Butler, there is nothing definitive about a relationship based entirely on memory, for if person A remembers enough about person B 's life, it does not necessarily follow that A is B . He says, "one should really think it self-evident that consciousness of personal identity presupposes, and therefore cannot constitute, personal identity, any more than knowledge, in any other case, can constitute truth, which it presupposes."⁵ Personal identity based on a presupposed connection between two conscious beings (e.g., a current self and a past self) is arbitrary and unqualified in the same way that knowledge based on a presupposed truth is arbitrary and unqualified. Presupposing the truth of a matter and then claiming that knowledge can be based on that truth in no way qualifies that

4. Roderick Chisholm, "Persistence of Persons," 4.

5. Sydney Shoemaker, "Persons and their Pasts," *Identity, Cause and Mind*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 29-30.

knowledge as actually true or justified. Locke presupposes that *A*'s memory of *B* is enough to equate *A* with *B*, but *A*'s memory could be a fabrication or someone else's memory. For example, I could have a memory of the experiences of another person, say from a movie or a book, and I could mistake those memories for my own. I could also invent a memory by telling myself a story and eventually convince my subconscious that the fabricated story was a real experience. In such cases, there is no real connection between what I remember and what I experienced in the real world.

Nevertheless, Sydney Shoemaker defends this attack of the Lockean account by elucidating the conditions that must be met in order for the memory equation (*A* is *B* only if *A* remembers *B*) to suffice as a criterion for personal identity. He claims that *A* is *B* if and only if *A* remembers enough about *B* and *A*'s epistemic access to *B* is due to *A*'s firsthand experience of *B* in the real world. There are two essential parts to this new equation: (1) The 'previous awareness condition' and (2) the 'immunity to error condition'. The previous awareness condition entails that it is necessary for *A* to remember *B* in order to equate *A* with *B*. This condition entails that for me to be the same person I was ten years ago, I must first of all remember a life from ten years ago. The immunity to error condition entails that *A*'s memory of *B* is sufficient for *A*'s identity with *B* only if *A*'s relationship to *B* accords with a historically existential state of affairs; that is, *A*'s memory of *B* is immune to error if *A* actually experienced *B* in the real world. This second condition entails that not only must I have memory of a life from ten years ago, but that memory must also originate from an experience I had in the real world. Shoemaker goes a step further than Locke does by distinguishing actual memories from 'quasi-memories.' While actual memories are caused by actual experiences, quasi-memories are factious and independent first person experience. *A* is *B*, then, if *A* remembers *B* and *A*'s memory is based on the experiences of *B* from a first person perspective. Under these conditions, I am only now the same person as I was ten years ago if I remember the person I was ten years ago and my memory is the result of my first person experiences of the actual world ten years ago. This account breaks the trail of circularity that Butler assigns to Locke's theory because, rather than presupposing a relationship between *A* and *B*, Shoemaker

insists that personal identity is verifiable if *A*'s memory is a direct effect of *B*'s cognitive sensory experience.⁶

To illustrate the importance of memory as a criterion for personal identity, Shoemaker proposes a thought experiment similar to what follows. Imagine that I undergo an operation and have my brain transplanted into the body of Queen Elizabeth. If this were to happen, would my personal identity be in the Queen's body or my body? Shoemaker argues that most people intuitively think that wherever memory goes, identity goes. Since modern science explains that my memory is contained within my brain, if my brain is in the Queen's body, then my memory is in the Queen's body. The Queen's body would hold my brain which holds my memory which is directly connected to my experience of the world. According to Shoemaker, the Queen's body would also therefore hold my personal identity. I would have the body of the Queen. At any rate, this account, like Locke's, holds that memory is the key to personal identity, while the body is relatively insignificant. But is this right? Is my body so irrelevant and detached from my identity? In what follows, I will explain how it is not the cases that body is irrelevant and detached from identity, but that intuitively, the body is an essential part of personal identity.

Bernard Williams, in *The Self and the Future*, argues that human beings have conflicting intuitions about the importance of memory and body with regard to personal identity. He postulates two thought experiments that show these conflicting intuitions quite clearly. While the first shows the *importance of memory* and the *unimportance of body*, the second shows the *importance of body* and the *unimportance of memory*.⁷ For the first thought experiment, imagine two persons, say George Bush and I. We are about to undergo an operation in exactly one hour. The operation will be an exchange of memories; my memory will be put into the body of Bush and Bush's memory will be put into my body. Also, something else will occur sometime within two hours: one of the two bodies will be tortured, while the other body will be given a foot massage. Intuitively, I would hope that whenever the torture and foot massage

6. Sydney Shoemaker, "Persons and their Pasts."

7. The following scenarios are inspired by Bernard Williams's "The Self and the Future."

are given out, my memory is in whichever body is given a foot massage and not the one that is tortured. In such a situation I intuitively identify my self with my memory and not my body. In this situation memory is considered the only criterion for determining identity.

Now, consider a second scenario where there are two persons, say, Saddam Hussein and I. Hussein has me captive in a bunker and tells me that in ten seconds I will be tortured in the most horrendous fashion. He also assures me I will have no memory of the torture or of the announcement of the torture and it will leave me without any scars or other reminders of torture. He says that all that will happen is my body will be tortured but I will have no memory of it. How do I intuitively feel about this situation? Even though my memory will not be tortured, something makes me feel uneasy and worried to know my body will be. Regardless of what happens to my memory, I hope that those ten seconds pass and my body is not tortured. Intuitively, I would care only about my body and not my memory. In this scenario, human intuition places great importance on body and insignificance on memory. Williams notes that looking at these types of scenarios "each of which carries conviction", together "lead to contrary conclusions."⁸ Sometimes humans intuitively disregard body as a criterion for determining personal identity and only consider the memory important. Other times, humans intuitively disregard memory as a criterion and only consider the body as important.

As I sit here wondering what makes me who I am, and what makes me the same person now as I was ten years ago, I realize that neither the criterion of memory nor the criterion of body alone suffices to explain the intuitive feeling I have that I am one person continuously. It seems that a combination of both memory and body, or perhaps something even more profound, gives me a feeling of continuous personal identity. What is clear to me, though, is that intuitively my memory and body are both crucial elements of my self.

8. Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future," *The Philosophical Review* 79, no. 2 (April 1970): 161-180.

*Plastic "Perfection":
Examining the Role of Autonomy in Cosmetic Surgery*

ANGELA L'ITALIEN

Abstract:

The concepts of individual autonomy and freedom of choice are prevailing trademarks of Western postmodernity. Using Michel Foucault's concept of the manifestations of power in conjunction with Susan Bordo's critique of postmodernity, I will argue that the postmodern concept of "choice" is not the product of pure individual autonomy. Rather, societal norms, history, and hegemonic power structures play an insidious part in forming the choices people make. In applying these concepts to cultural standards of beauty and the increasingly normalized practice of cosmetic surgery, I shall provide an examination of how power structures coercively maintain women's subordination and oppression through a veil of absolute self-determination and choice.

Cosmetic surgery is often portrayed as an individual's choice and a result of autonomy; however, I argue that the issue is not so simple. The reasons people (typically women) undergo cosmetic surgery are usually because they feel that their features inadequately fit the standards of beauty in Western society. The degree of autonomy in which one claims to base such decisions is questionable, as those who purport the practice to be purely based on individual volition largely ignore the broader social and historical implications of beauty ideals, norms, and practices. In accordance with Susan Bordo, I argue that the postmodern society and its "anything goes" attitude ignores historicity and its implications. In placing the autonomy of cosmetic surgery in the patient's hands, one overlooks the fact that standards of beauty are not only set by social norms but that these norms are not "objective"; rather they are perpetuated and maintained by various hegemonic structures and institutions. Ignoring the long-standing historicity of the relationship between beauty and female subordination allows for hegemonic structures to be reinforced, reworked, and insidiously dispersed throughout society.

Working with the Foucauldian model of power, Bordo shows how culture influences the ways in which we comport ourselves, enact gender roles, style our hair, and so forth. Although careful not to accredit too much to Foucault's idea that the "definition and shaping of the body is the focal point for struggles over the shape of power," Bordo notes that such a concept was "discovered by feminism, and long before it entered into its marriage with poststructuralist thought."¹ Furthermore, Bordo is careful not to portray bodies as "*tabula rasa*, awaiting inscription by culture," and she recognizes that biology may well play a significant role in shaping our lives. Biology, culture, and historicity are inextricably linked; "We are creatures swaddled in culture from the moment we are designated on sex or the other, one race or another."²

Foucault focuses on the idea of the body and its interaction with culture as he discusses the "direct grip" that society and culture holds on the body. He works with the concept of the "docile" body, which prevailed during the eighteenth century:

To begin with, there was the *scale of control*: it was not of treating the body *en masse* ...but...individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself — movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body Then there was the *object of the control*: it was no longer the signifying elements of behaviour or the language of the body, but the economy, the efficiency of movements, their internal organization; constraint bears upon the forces rather than the signs...Lastly, there the *modality*: it implies an interrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement.³

Foucault shows how power coercively and insidiously manifests within postmodern society. Covertly operating through various institutions, power is scattered and perpetually and coercively

1. Susan Bordo, "Introduction: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body," in *The Body in Feminist Thought Course Kit V.1* (Toronto: York University, 2006) 53.

2. Bordo, "Introduction," 63. (In saying this, I further point out that even the concepts of race and gender are neither purely understood in terms of biology, nor culture, but based on the similar model of biology, culture and historicity.)

3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1977), 136–137.

enforced throughout society. The covert and scattered formation of power facilitates the pervasion of normalizing and regulatory practices, as it seems to emanate from nowhere and yet everywhere. Although the way we present ourselves, conceive of beauty, gender, and the like appears to be of our own volition, our behaviour is performed through these coercive and invisible manifestations of power.

In relating this power of appearance to male dominance and female subordination, Bordo notes that through the "voluntary" reproduction of masculinity and femininity, "one can acknowledge women may indeed contribute to the perpetuation of female subordination...without this entailing that they have 'power' in the production and reproduction of sexist culture."⁴ For example, when women "choose" to undergo cosmetic surgery, they are often condemned by others as "voluntarily" enforcing the stereotype that women are irrationally concerned with their looks. For in enforcing stereotypes within sexist culture, women do not have the power to change or undo these structures.

Bordo points out that these women are not "cultural dupes" who are "passively taken in by media norms of the ["beautiful"]"; in fact, in most cases these women have "correctly discerned that these norms shape the perceptions and desires of potential lovers and employers."⁵ Looking at the testimony of Dianne Powell, a forty-seven-year-old woman who has undergone a facelift, it is noteworthy how acutely aware she is of cultural pressures to conform to beauty norms in the workplace:

I am an investment banker and *my appearance is of utmost importance especially when dealing with clients*. In this world, *first impressions can make or break a deal* — and for the last few years, I didn't feel that attractive. I felt I was aging too fast, which my stress-filled work environment didn't help. My skin was losing its elasticity no matter how many different special creams I would apply on my face. I looked much older than what I actually was and after I said, "Enough is

4. Susan Bordo, "Material Girl: The Effacements of Postmodern Culture," in *The Body* (see note 3), 68.

5. Bordo, "Introduction," 55.

enough, I'm going to do something about it!" That is when I seriously started thinking about a facelift.⁶

In another example, Esta Santiago, a twenty-one-year-old woman, is aware of how "stupid" her insecurities are and yet she cannot help feeling ashamed of her own body for not "fitting in" to society's normalization of the "jiggle-free" body:

I felt that my stomach was the only thing that was not right about my body. I am a fairly slim gal but my stomach would protrude out noticeably. *It was embarrassing and it made me feel self-conscious and sad all the time. I know it's stupid but it did.* I would always make sure I was wearing baggy clothes so nobody could notice. I was thinking about getting liposuction for a long time and decided to make the move on your website. I was lucky enough to have the support of my parents to go through with it.⁷

In "choosing" to undergo cosmetic surgery, both these women carefully and rationally executed their plans. Moreover, these statements highlight the intense pressure felt by most women to conform to Western beauty ideals. These women are aware and accept that their insecurities are produced by their culture. For example, in the second testimonial, the woman admits that her intense self-consciousness and feelings of depression are "stupid", but the pressure to conform overpowers this so-called stupidity.

Esta Santiago's feelings of stupidity towards her "trivial" insecurities are instilled by the very culture that produces the homogenization and normalization of beauty. Such a paradoxical double standard further maintains the structures of female subordination and male domination. As Naomi Wolf maintains: "The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men's institutions and institutional power."⁸ By keeping women subservient to beauty, women "remain vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ self-esteem exposed to the air."⁹ I am, however, weary of Wolf's characterization of women's vulnerability, as such portrayal

6. Dianne Powell, "Testimonials," *My Body Part* 30 Nov. 2006, <http://www.mybodypart.com/testimonials.html>.

7. Esta Santiago, "Testimonials," *Body Part* (see note 6).

8. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1992), 13.

9. Wolf, *Beauty Myth*, 14.

emphasizes victimization and posits women as cultural dupes. On the other hand, her argument adequately reemphasizes the paradoxical argument put forward earlier by Bordo. Those women may perpetuate female subordination through their conformity to beauty and cosmetic surgery, however, such a perpetuation does not entail that they are in positions of power to enforce/redirect sexist ideology.¹⁰

Women's subordination is duplicitously maintained through the portrayal of cosmetic surgery as an objective practice in which the individual "chooses" to undergo the surgery. If a woman does not conform to standardized ideals of beauty, she is ostracized and is at a disadvantage to women who do conform to beauty ideals (and white men who need not conform to these ideals). For example, in the first testimonial, Dianne Powell acknowledges that her appearance "is of utmost importance" not only to her clients but to her employers as well. If she cannot keep or acquire clients based on her appearance, her employers will likely replace her with a younger, more "beautiful" woman (or a man of any age) whom clients will prefer. On the other front, if a woman does "choose" to undergo cosmetic surgery, she is criticized for being narcissistic and culpable of willingly perpetuating female subordination. In Foucault's model of power, the institutions that create and maintain these paradoxes become even more covert and insidious, since through these paradoxes they are able to escape blame. Thus, women are further subordinated through their "self-determination" because it allows blame to be projected onto them, which further allows culture and its coercive institutes of power to remain free of any locatable culpability.

Prior to postmodern society, the constraints of beauty over women were more visible; for example, one can see these literal constraints over the female body in the beauty practices of foot bondage or the coveted slender waistline obtained through the constrictions of the corset. Through fashion, women were literally caged and imprisoned by constraints of their own bodies. Bordo notes that one of the first mass feminist rallies "poignantly listed, among the various social and political rights demanded, 'The right to ignore fashion.'"¹¹ However, once this right was "given", the power constraints placed on women's bodies to maintain subordination became covert as women are now

10. Bordo, "Material Girl," 68.

11. Bordo, "Introduction," 54.

able to “choose” whether or not to conform to beauty norms and ideals.

As women can now express their individuality and determine what they chose to wear, fashion is seen in postmodernity as a trivialized and arbitrary concept of “anything goes”; thus, we can reinvent ourselves, our looks, and our bodies at will, without politicization. However, such a notion masks the pervasive power of normalizing practices of beauty in a given culture. Through “uninterrupted and [constantly] coercive” modalities of power,¹² “popular culture does not apply any breaks to these fantasies of rearrangement and self-transformation. Rather, we are constantly told that we can ‘choose’ our own bodies.”¹³ The homogenization and normalization of beauty practices and imagery are powerfully “suffused with the dominance of gendered, racial, class and other cultural iconography.”¹⁴ So much are these images ingrained that even on the “level of [cultural] discourse and interpretation” they reiterate “the same conditions which postmodern bodies enact on the level of cultural practice: a construction of life as plastic possibility and weightless choice, undetermined by history, or even individual biography.”¹⁵

Using Foucault’s concept of “docile bodies,” Kathryn Morgan emphasizes that although Foucault applies his model to military and carceral institutions, such a model is salient to the homogenization and coercive manifestations of cosmetic surgery over women’s bodies. “What is most important about this relation to cosmetic surgery”, says Morgan, “is the extent to which it makes it possible to speak of the diffusion of power throughout Western industrialized cultures that are increasingly committed to a technological beauty imperative.”¹⁶ Moreover, “it also makes it possible to refer to a set of experts – cosmetic surgeons – whose explicit power mandate is to

12. Foucault, *Discipline*, 137.

13. Bordo, “Material Girl,” 63.

14. Bordo, “Material Girl,” 63.

15. Bordo, “Material Girl,” 63.

16. Kathryn Pauly Morgan, “Women and the Knife Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women’s Bodies,” in *Sex/Machine: Readings in Culture, Gender, and Technology*, ed. Patrick D. Hopkins (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 269.

explore, break down, and rearrange women's bodies."¹⁷ By allowing women to "choose" their appearances, the power structures that continue to constrain women's bodies have shifted and rearranged themselves in order to become more insidious and covert. Thus, "what looks like an optimal situation of self-reflection, deliberation, and self-creating choice often signals conformity at a deeper level."¹⁸

In light of the testimonials above, we can see that while these women are explicitly aware of the societal pressure of conformity to beauty ideals, they nevertheless stress the careful consideration and choice involved in their actions. Yet, their insecurities are created through the internalization of external sources, "for the eye, the hand, and the approval of the Other — the lover, the taunting students, the customers, the employers, and the social peers."¹⁹ And more importantly, "*the Other is almost always affected by the dominant culture, which is male-supremacists, racist, ageist, heterosexist, anti-Semitic, ableist, and class-biased.*"²⁰ For example, Bordo notes that "a black woman's 'choice' to straighten her hair" represents a "cultural history of racist body-discriminations such as the nineteenth century comb test."²¹ The comb test, she explains, was a practice which allowed only blacks who could pass a fine-tooth comb through their hair to be admitted into certain clubs and churches.²² Without a proper examination of cultural history in relation to beauty practices, the underlying biases embodied by the Other escape notice.

Internalizations of the dominant culture and its biases are often embodied within the "objective" expert; for example, the plastic surgeon. In her aptly titled essay, "Conformity Through Cosmetic Surgery", Sara Goering attends to Western society's racial biases by referring to its long-standing historicity; "individuals who partake in cosmetic surgery to erase phenotypic signs of race [such as Asian eyelid surgery to remove the creases] often claim simply to be attempting

17. Morgan, "Women," 269.

18. Morgan, "Women," 270.

19. Morgan, "Women," 271.

20. Morgan, "Women," 271. (Emphasis mine.)

21. Bordo, "Material Girl," 64.

22. Bordo, "Material Girl," 64.

to become normal or beautiful.”²³ However, such a claim of triviality and arbitrariness of beauty ignores the fact that “our societal images of beauty are deeply ingrained in our discriminatory history” that has valorized whiteness in both science and religion.²⁴ By claiming expertise and objectivity, cosmetic surgeons (explicitly and implicitly) “use the authority of their positions within the medical establishment to encourage such racialized transformations.”²⁵ Even though women who undergo these surgeries claim that their decisions were the result of individual autonomy and deliberation, “the field of cosmetic surgery’s promise to help individuals achieve good mental health through such transformations ignores the background racist conditions, and indeed reinforces those conditions through its practice.”²⁶

The notion that individuals who undergo cosmetic surgery do so based on purely autonomous choice and self-determination is thus problematic. Such a notion presents beauty as arbitrary and trivial, and subsequently ignores the fact that culture and history influence beauty ideals and practices. Through insidious and scattered distributions of power, dominating structures maintain their race- and sex-based subordination. In attributing full autonomy to the individual “choosing” to undergo cosmetic surgery, these powerfully coercive structures become more covert. As such, these power structures cast an even more powerful grip over society, since through covertness they are able to maintain their power by infinitely reworking/shifting themselves in order to accommodate cultural historical changes and demands (for example, women’s rights). Furthermore, in becoming more covert, the power structures are able to escape culpability, since it is allegedly through individual “choice” and not through the coercive forces of power that stereotypes and subordinations are perpetuated and maintained. Thus, in order to begin to escape the pernicious grip of these dominating power structures, it is important that an individual’s exercise of “choice” is not one of pure autonomy, but includes cultural and historical influences shaped by hegemony.

23. Sara Goering, “Conformity Through Cosmetic Surgery: The Medical Erasure of Race and Disability,” in *Science and Other Cultures*, ed. Sandra Harding and Robert Figueroa (New York: Routledge, 2003), 175.

24. Goering, “Conformity,” 175.

25. Goering, “Conformity,” 177.

26. Goering, “Conformity,” 177.

By ceasing to ignore these implications we recognize that anything *does not* go.

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