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"When the past speaks, it always speaks as an Oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it."

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Friedrich Nietzsche

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Ideas are the chaotic expression of the conscious will to make sense of the world around us, yet tied together they become the structures that psychologically ground us in this world. To take on the task of playing with and investigating thought is indeed to take on the world.

Philosophers sometimes create rules and constancies in their attempt to "do" philosophy or they can dismantle structures altogether in the hopes of finding value in the world beyond a stable, purported truth. The business of philosophy is never a dull one and the students at York University are endowed with a faculty that aids them greatly in their pursuits. Let us not talk about what philosophy is or what it means, rather, let us look at the lives of the students whose academic experience and sensibilities have been enriched through such a discipline. Philosophy opens up a world (even possible worlds) where students have the chance to liberate themselves from any given, to gain the tools to make sense of life on their own terms, and to communicate their understanding to others with sophistication. To the philosophy student, the true soldier of wisdom who values learning above all else, there is one motto:

Disce aut discede![1]

Sincerely,

Jessica Ellis
Editor-in-Chief, The Oracle
York University, 2014.

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[1] Learn or leave!

Rethinking the Body: the Relevance of Solitary Language and Spaces

MAOR LEVITIN

The purpose of this paper is to situate the development of "existential language" within the experimental capacity, and movement, of bodies. I contend that, despite its relevance to material surroundings, such language is not reducible to a notion of materialism that favours the value of collectivism. Language contains the desire of individuals to advance themselves as authentic beings, which arises in response to the pressure they face through participation in society's disunited space. In order to implicate the creative capacity of the body as meaningfully influential on individuals' psychological struggle for independent valuation, I will analyze/develop Nietzsche's conception of "art" and employ it as a model for independent valuation. I will emphasize the movement of this model away from attempts to theorize about language as a socially coherent phenomenon. Language reflects individuals' panicked desire for independent valuation and for this reason invariably carries "authoritative accents." In order to lead an interesting life, and break away from the temptation for comfortable universality that arises from the "competition" for meaning, one must learn to engage with the forces specific to her "becoming."

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra (TSZ)*, Nietzsche demonstrates that laughter is a powerful method for securing radically individualistic self-expression. Laughter is more than merely a tool for the parodying and "decrowning" of the gravity of authority and stands much closer to common experience than just as a reiteration of the commonality of time, to juxtapose my development of

the concept with the dimensions it receives from linguist Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the "carnivalesque" (McNally, *Bodies of Meaning* 141-145 [BM]). The kind of laughter in which Nietzsche takes interest presupposes the desire of individuals to preserve their unique life experiences. While affirming the impossibility of finalized authority and value, it also accentuates the need for retaining "internal" authority over the world. Although the extent to which Nietzsche promotes solitary existence is unclear, as is the exact relation of the "artist" (his philosophy of becoming and change, personified) to society, it is nonetheless important to note the relevance of laughter to Zarathustra's quest for authenticity: "This crown of him who laughs, this rose-wreath crown: I myself have put on this crown, I myself have pronounced my laughter holy" (Nietzsche, *TSZ* 406). I take Zarathustra to possess some of the major characteristics of Nietzsche's artist; that is, of the existential individual, who struggles to retain form within life's destructive fluidity. Through this character Nietzsche stresses laughter as a method of revolt against meaning(s) imposed by others and the accompanying drive of these for self-naturalization.

Nietzsche's artist relies not only on the sensuality and exuberance of Dionysus, but also his aptitude for frenzied transgression (Nietzsche, *TSZ* 518). For the purposes of this paper, I want to emphasize Zarathustra's transgressive laughter as a "break" not from official authority but any kind of externally insinuated meaning. While it may be the case that society consists of various speech "accents," as per Valentin Voloshinov's argument (McNally, *BM* 116), there is no denying that the individual must be able to construct and negotiate her speech-form from a position of self-knowledge. Zarathustra's artistic laughter permits him to stroll lightheartedly through his various encounters with other characters, as it ensures that "the whole affective system is excited and enhanced: so that it discharges all its means of expression at once. . . .The essential feature [of the artist] here remains the ease of metamorphosis, the inability *not* to react..." (Nietzsche,

TSZ 519). The artist's "value-shedding" interrupts claims to finalized meaning, and through such interruption, the multiplicity of social accents is integrated selectively into one's own condition. The responsive quality of Nietzsche's artist should not be underplayed, however, for the artist lends to the social beings she encounters some of her transformative strength; that of self-overcoming (*TSZ* 518).

The attribution of laughter to the impulse to subvert official utterances (McNally, *BM* 116) should not then take too much away from laughter as a means for both engaging and dis-engaging from the social, as creative (and thus changing) individuals. Laughter is the force that reproduces not only solidarity and oppositional consciousness, but also individual bodies as experimental phenomena. Readings of Nietzsche that represent him as one who advocates "discourse with self" (McNally, *BM* 45*)* especially capture his interest in asserting the importance of *self-expression*. Bakhtin's suggestion that consciousness faces the necessity of "choosing language" (McNally, *BM* 133) has everything to do with the desire of individuals to preserve and (re)generate their-selves. Such choice is not indicative of the need of consciousness to preserve itself as much as it is of individuals' struggle to retain a sense of authenticity. It is in fact only through this drive for authenticity that social birth and re-birth are made possible (McNally, *BM* 133), for otherwise society would conform to a permanently static form. McNally discusses at length the pertinence of language acquisition to the process of developmental self-assertion *via* the arguments of Voloshinov and Bakhtin (*BM* 130-141).What is lacking in their account of language and individuality, it seems, is an exposition of the "extra-linguistic" drive behind the individual's struggle for development. Such an exposition would make clear that the individual is inclined not only towards developmental freedom but freedom from the *accent of inhibition* generated by encounters with "the social," or in other words, existential freedom. What follows when an individual reaches the stage in which she

is able to distinguish herself from others, or begins to recognize her social specificity, is the continuous need to balance her speech-form with those of "others." Put differently, a mature sense of self is invariably followed by the fear of self-loss, and thus a panicked desire for the preservation of authenticity. Such panic consequently necessitates the constant reconstruction of identity, or "movement".

In defense of the idea that it is engagement with others that sets the stage for self-development, Bakhtin attempts to insinuate dialogue into the very structure of the novel: "By decrowning and ridiculing everything mythical and monumental, the novel creates a new sense of historical time. The past now becomes part of the present and future" (McNally, *BM* 131). He posits that the novel even parodies its own pretensions to finality; it is a hybrid-genre, and a mockery of the "truth" claimed by the epic (McNally, *BM* 131). But I argue that the novel nevertheless sets a new stage of seriousness, one upon which the individual finds herself struggling to contain the complexity and breadth of the meaning(s) embedded within the social, and thus deems it necessary to minimize her engagement with social norms. Its characters' ambivalent relation to truth is established concurrently to the emphasis placed by the polyphonic novel on other "consciousnesses" and their '"unfinalizability" (McNally, *BM* 128). While the novel clearly mocks uni-accentual versions of meaning and knowledge, it simultaneously stresses the significance of personal space. The individual must first learn to accept the impossibility of social clarity and consequently, in a cautious and meticulous fashion, construct a model of value that corresponds only to the creative "forces" governing her own body (Deleuze 39-40). The "will to truth" that Nietzsche is so critical of (*On the Genealogy of Morals* 160-161), one might argue, arises from society's characteristic instability, or more precisely, from individuals' susceptibility to *certainty* in the face of such instability. Out of fear of losing their authenticity to the social "contest," they are often tempted to mediate their

self-understanding through the illusion of timeless truth (equality, justice, and so on). This move helps individuals defer movement and ambiguity. The novel portrays not the attempt of individuals to escape fragmentation, but precisely their endorsement of such fragmentation as they struggle to dismantle illusions of universality and boundaries. The novel posits uncertainty and changes in self-perception as a "new" norm.

Adherence to the model of independent valuation is the only means for an individual to guarantee the triumph of her "will to power" (Nietzsche, *TSZ* 227) over the temptation for collective "knowledge," and for society to nourish its primary source of growth, which is the cycle of ambivalent contests for meaning embedded within it. This, in turn, requires sub-spaces through which individuals are to mold and remold their identity. Self-knowledge does not hinge on recognition from others but rather on self-determination. That being said, one can will the movement of one's forces into a discrete (immediate) reality, but never into stable identity: "Whatever I create and however much I love it- soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it" (Nietzsche, *TSZ* 227). The existential (panicked) individual requires the capacity to reconstruct oneself. The will to truth obstructs the meaning derived from panicked fluidity, which is essentially the only kind of meaning available to individuals on a stage of competition and fragmentation, and for this reason she must tear herself away from it. She must abide by her own "truth."

The tendency in Bakhtin's theory of language to juxtapose freedom with authority is problematic in itself: "Bakhtin sees the human individual as developing *via* a struggle between the 'authoritative discourse' of parents, adults, teachers, religious, and political leaders, on the one hand, and 'internally persuasive discourse,' a discourse which is one's own, which expresses one's values and aspirations, on the other" (McNally, *BM* 133).This suggests that the development towards freedom within society occurs within a background of various

discursively restrictive forces. But such a representation of the interaction between individuals and society disregards rather hastily "authoritative speech genres" as rigid mechanisms of oppression. There is a felt disinclination by Bakhtin to grant such genres legitimate "presence" in the struggle for development: "But to develop toward freedom, the individual must break away from the authoritative word" (McNally, *BM* 133). Authority is enthusiastically linked by him with the floating and indeterminate "word," so as to portray it as a kind of anti-human violence which needs to be challenged at all costs. Violence is taken to be an unnatural and thus changeable feature of the relationship between individuals and society. One must take seriously the suggestion, however, that the quest for development is imbued with struggle. The word "struggle" denotes that to a large extent an individual is not really in a position to freely construct her medium for self-expression. She must actually fight for it on a stage of conflicting voices and accents. The quest for meaning is saturated with authoritative self-assertion, and thus a kind of violence.

The prospect of individualistic vitality carries with it the need to deny the ambiguity of socially represented speeches, a denial accomplished through their insertion into distinctly personal spaces. In these, individuals force the social struggle for meaning to "speak" through them, and in a language that they can actually understand; that of familiar confusion. Although the struggle on this level is not more definitive or resolvable *per se*, it nonetheless renders confusion more personal, more amenable to the flow of one's forces. Dionysian frenzy is here contained within coherence/form (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* 519). The collective body, on the other hand, always appears as absurd disunity.

Let us further explore the notion of "official speech genres." It is clear that the official genre should not be attributed to a set of undeclared and/or indescribable power relations, for such a perspective would render the linguistic analyses of the Bakhtin

tradition similar in kind, at least in some respects, to Foucault's ungrounded vision of power (McNally, "Language, History, and Class Struggle" 18). The official genre is better conceived, I argue, as an "excess" of the desire of individuals to retain their-selves within the social, to exist as original creatures within a sphere of violently contested meaning. It seems clear that undue focus on official genres of speech, as such, reinforces conceptions of power as indeterminate occasion. This is constitutive of an undesirable superstructure whereby the development of individuals is understood only in counter distinction to hegemonic forces. Its undesirability stems from neglect of the specificity of shifts in the will to power that characterize individuals' negotiation for authenticity, and thus identity itself. In order to avoid this, authoritative figures must always be analytically situated within their specific life and speech genres. The so-called bosses of our capitalistic environment must themselves be interrogated as creatively responsive bodies, for even if their officialdom can be linked in some ways with the imperatives of oppression (McNally, *BM* 116), it always simultaneously reflects a unique kind of "self-authorship." The fact of society's multi-accentual constitution invariably refers us to the need to both experience and even forcefully assert our special niche of life. It is not clear that language's centripetal tendency is symptomatic of much more than this expressive and authoritative "I." And to the extent that certain speech genres are associated with hegemonic forces, these must be cautiously untangled (to the extent this is possible) from the call for self-affirmation that flows through linguistic forms.

Though laughter serves to counteract the repression of the multiplicity of society's speech genres, as per Bakhtin's claim, it nevertheless always serves as an authoritative gesture. The social stage entails the struggle of individuals to be heard within a condition of competing meanings. The attribution of authority to a capitalist superclass, in our times, serves to mask the constant clash

of genres that reverberates through the very idea "social," and the impossibility of a unified stratum of meaning. I do not intend to imply that there is no problem with the current distribution of society's means of production, but rather that this problem does not properly account for the existence, and value, of authoritative speech (and thus life) genres. The intellectual act of deferring the inherently ambivalent nature of society's meaning to a point beyond fragmentation detracts from the creativity with which bodies assert themselves and negotiate their "presence" in the face of such fragmentation. McNally provides an excellent example of what such creativity looks like in his discussion of rebellious factory workers: "They find time, while meeting their quotas, to produce items for themselves, things which will be smuggled out of the plant and taken home. They have invented a word for these works of free activity-'homers'. . . " ("Language, History, and Class Struggle" 22). But it is a mistake to associate such activity only with a break from the work "machine" and collective mockery of authority. For each of these "homers," no doubt, speaks to the positioning within the work place of the respective employees that produce them, the tools these have in their possession, as well as their imagination; in other words, to the specific forces of their bodies and those of the environment within which they are situated. Forms of collective protest, when take place, are fueled by the desire of each individual to assert her condition in opposition to those of both managers and employees. The enemy is everyone, then, to the extent that all bear a claim to specific meaning, and no one, insofar as the struggle for independence subsists on the level of self-overcoming and avoidance of the inhibiting echoes generated by others' valuation. Though collective protests express the dissatisfaction of groups with types of social oppression, the vitality and force that sustain these are conceived *via* individuals' existential need to break out of their comfortable will to truth.

One conspicuously recurring theme within the social, which it can be said is responsible for its

inclusiveness and growth, is that of "spatio-discursive" dismemberment. It is a recurring one because society consists of meanings that seek to constantly interrupt each other, of voices intruding on the spaces of "other" articulations. These do not just intersect, to be sure, but are violently asserted. I do not think that the dialectic between society and individuals excludes the description of their relation as also a fetishistic one. While the individual contributes to the social organism, she must at the same time violently deny the existence of this organism. She is inclined to accept her accent not just as another accent, but rather as a separate world of meaning. The constitution of accents is such that it wills to abstract from the meaning of others. It is unjust to emphasize the dynamism that characterizes Feodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, without giving serious consideration to the psychological unrest and impulse for retreat such dynamism gives rise to, as is implied by various aspects of this very same novel.

While the psychological insecurity that plagues Raskolnikov both before and after he commits "the crime" reflects the diversity of social forms of valuation, as well as the lack of finality associated with these, it is important to note that they all carry with them a trace of his own personality and almost invariably are described by the author in conjunction with some sort of solitary space/movement. In fearing that the police might catch up with him, after committing the crime, the panicked Raskolnikov suspects that an attempt is being made to entice him to, and then trap him, in the police station (Dostoevsky 79). Through extensive focus on Raskolnikov's uncertainty about the crime, Dostoevsky is enabled to articulate the shifts in his attitude towards the crime in conjunction with descriptions of his movement through the apartment, the objects that he interacts with, as well as his various bodily states (trembling, perspiration) and positions (sitting, running). Such descriptions permit Dostoevsky to convey the relevance of personal space to the process of "capturing" and re-

framing external meanings/ forces. He thus integrates Nietzsche's "art" into the very essence of individuals' psychological imperative to balance society's multiple accents with the need for experimental identity; it is no coincidence that Dostoevsky often links the shifts occurring in Raskolnikov's psychology with frenzy and laughter (79). Nietzsche's ambiguous desire for discourse with oneself is implicitly grounded by Dostoevsky in the desire for engagement with the "playfulness" of (distinctly) personal material space.

It has been so far argued here that a distinction must be made between authoritative breaks and breaks from the language of authority. This distinction, in turn, necessitates caution when articulating the potentialities of laughter, for vulgar retreats from the language of gravity and fragmentation, such as the ones described in McNally's *Bodies of Meaning* with reference to Bakhtin's conception of the carnival, are too readily associated with breaks from officialdom: "In the image of the grotesque body, popular culture drew all aspects of human life back onto 'one plane of material sensual experience'" (142). Such cultural retreat is, in other words, attributed only the dimensions of a *defiant* materialism of the body. Insofar as the imagery of the carnival is "expansive, unfinished, transgressive, and overflowing" (McNally, *BM* 142), however, it appears to erase all individual features. Much finesse is due in conceiving a social act of subversion without dismantling the relevance of unique bodies. The association of individuals, when examining acts of the carnivalesque nature, with a collective form made up of "grotesque realism," to a large extent deprives their bodies of the creative maneuvering they are capable of. The theme of degradation that persists throughout this vision of the carnival appeals to a body that is not one's private property, argues McNally in defense of the sense of unity generated by such symbolism (*BM* 142). But does not the fact that individuals are only able to communicate with one another on the level of crude bodily materialism throughout carnivalesque subversion speak to the

incompleteness of this ritual as a model of knowledge? It is not clear that the carnivalesque setting facilitates genuine awareness, despite the symbolic (re)generation that can be linked with a display of the bottom parts of the body and the sense of collectivism sustainable through such display (McNally, *BM* 142). To the extent that the carnival is a collective act of transgression, then, it at the same time appears as a "forgetting" of individuality and its value to social diversity/vitality.

In defense of Bakhtin against his critiques, McNally suggests that the carnivalesque turn in *Rabelais and His World* is not a nihilistic one. In Bakhtin's view, he writes, the carnival is regenerative insofar as it invokes both nature's life giving and taking tendencies (McNally, *BM* 145). He later clarifies: "he [Bakhtin] advocates debasing the spiritualized idealism of official culture and decrowning the figures of authority by bringing them into collision with 'the lower bodily stratum,' the site of birth" (McNally, *BM* 145). But why must we think of birth in such generic terms? What is needed is not merely the (re)generation of the social, as such, but a social that is "pregnant" with opportunity and competition. Since the social is only conceivable as the struggle between individuals for self-affirmation, the valorization of contest (and the exchange of energy it entails) promises forms of authenticity that are better grounded in the specificity of individuals' forces. The more persistently one abides by the demands of existential panic, the more energy is forced out of those she interacts with to preserve their own authenticity. What I am attempting to convey here that the psychology of frenzied fragmentation enforces others' attentiveness to, and greater experimentation within, their specific life conditions. The revitalization of the body, which follows acceptance of isolated and unstable meaning, promises escape from the existential constraints generated by the comfortable illusion of universality.

It is clear from his text that Nietzsche is interested in the productive capacities of the body, and

thus a "return" to it (*TSZ* 146-147); he deems the body the primary source of the energy needed to overcome the dimensions of a constructed identity. Nietzsche attributes all of the vibrant materiality to the body that Bakhtin insists upon. Nevertheless, he also conceives of the body as a site for contesting socially imposed values. It is a medium for engaging with the experimental line without caving in to the dangers of dogma. And it is not clear that Nietzsche's will to power is best formulated as either the energy one asserts to win the social competition, or alternatively, the kind she asserts to ensure her survival (as a specific form). The will to power is better understood, I think, as the energy one musters to preserve a unique experience of society's conflicting accents, to re-live the self within the herd-like inclination plaguing every collective body. Society's herd-like inclination, to be clear, takes nothing away from conceptions of it as fertile organism; under the auspices of the artist, who lives in the present, albeit it is her own present, the social organism is enabled to display the historicity of its material experiences.

      The issue with Bakhtin's carnival is that it fails to account for the developments that take place for individuals precisely during the slow and regular cycles of daily life. McNally argues that the carnival "displaces the language and experience of daily life in favour of the episodic inversions of the carnival [and] . . . devalues memory by valorizing laughter and forgetting" (*BM* 144). What about the personal laughter of individuals in the face of existential contradiction? What about Raskolnikov's small but fertile flat, in which he is enabled to dis-assemble the social dialogue, reconstruct its implications on his terms, and subsequently to return to the social with a more "competitive" sense of meaning? It is in fact necessary for Raskolnikov to experience frenzy within the confines of his own spatio-discursivity, for such frenzy is precisely the means through which society replenishes a creative "stock" within the ambivalence natural to it. Nietzsche writes: "if there is to be art, if there

is to be any aesthetic doing and seeing, one physiological condition is indispensable: frenzy. Frenzy must first have enhanced the excitability of the whole machine; else there is not art. . . .In this state [of art] one enriches everything out of one's own fullness: whatever one sees, whatever one wills is seen swelled, taut, strong, overloaded with strength" (*Twilight of the Idols* 518). Frenzy guarantees the revitalization of creative individuality as well as refinement of the social assemblage.

Each body possesses a unique language, and this language must be valorized for the sake of creativity and the avoidance of social *stasis*. Such *stasis* is in truth but an illusion, since the social is made up of fragmented claims to self-knowledge: "Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the abundance of a lavish play and change of forms" (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* 491). Though it may be possible to curtail social fragmentation in the future through a more refined experience of individuality, this is not certain. The only thing that can be asserted with confidence here pertains to the development of language. "Language," as a concept descriptive of the relation between the development of individuality and society, must be comprehensive enough to recognize the specificity of different bodies as well as the perpetual contest for meaning generated by their interaction.

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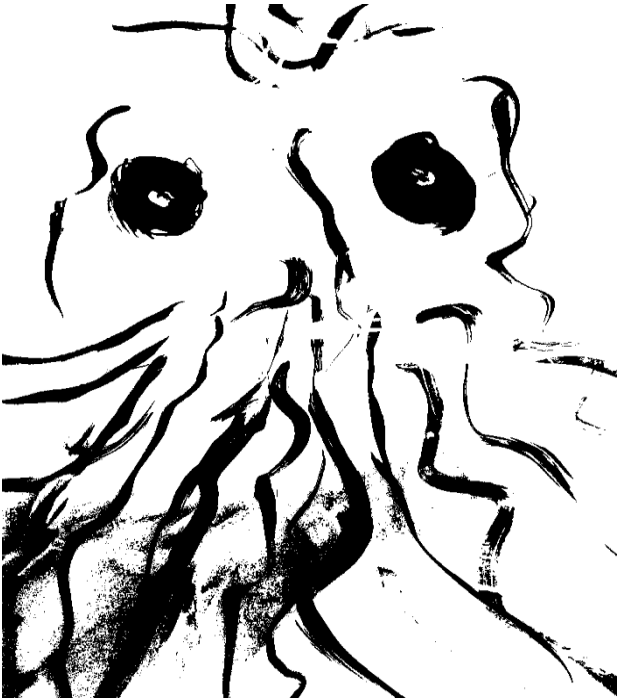
Commentary

JESSICA ELLIS

We encounter speech every day, but discussions of speech "accents" are rarely discussed. The thinkers Maor Levitin addresses in this paper, in conjunction with his own thought, aid in the construction of a holistic understanding of language- in its constitution of both society and individuals. Language as an activity possesses transformative potential: it helps individuals assert their-selves within the collective, of which the structure seems to be the ultimate source of the generation of meaning (imposition). Personal spaces are crucial to understanding the formation of speech, its movement, and the encounters of the individual with the Other. Speech is indicative, then, of a constant, productive internal struggle to over-write authoritative speech (the speech of others).

Levitin demonstrates that a fetishistic element exists within the connection of each individual with the collective body, whereby she is compelled to deny her dependence on the social if she is to have a coherent sense of self; this denial of the social surfaces as the most meaningful existential experience. Levitin also theorizes the materialistic element that grounds the individual and helps shape her growth. Bodies, he argues, must be thought of as more than mere vessels for transferring culture over time, but rather as the difference between culture and the cultivation of individuals' sense of identity. The body is a primary source of energy in individual movement and, through such movement, serves the contestation of socially imposed value.

What often seem as ordinary or meaningless expressions, like laughter, in fact carry authentic existential meaning for the individual. Moreover, it is through the frenzy, which includes the excitation of all

bodily capacities, that the body provides the individual with the capacity to re-insert meaning back into the competition of the social; this means that the social also is subject to movement and "refinement of meaning".

Moral Subjectivism and Nietzsche's Active Nihlism: Affirming the Supremacy of the Subject

JONAS MONTE

J. L. Mackie has proposed a case for Moral Subjectivism (MS) which asserts that there are neither transcendental standards nor objective moral values, but that all moral standards are man-made. He emphasizes the uniqueness of MS and highlights its difference from Moral Relativism. Still, MS tends to cause intellectual conflict in the subject due to the fact that it is a radical theory. It often provokes strong reactions, and subjects who encounter it, engage in imaginative exercises; many who accept this theory even suffer psychological conflicts. This paper argues that MS theory is the path to free the subject from standardized moral norms that limit human beings and prevent them from exercising their capacity for evolution. It also argues, to counter the negative connotations of MS, that Friedrich W. Nietzsche's concepts of passive and active nihilism are necessary successive stages of passage for subjects who accept MS as they seek to affirm their autonomy.

Moral Subjectivism (MS) asserts that there are neither transcendental standards nor objective moral values, but that all moral standards are human-made, and therefore one should not classify *the nature of action* as either good or bad. This theory provokes a strong reaction in some subjects, who misguidedly, when they encounter it, engage in imaginative exercises such as thinking how their pre-established world would be without their moral values. While others accept the theory, they go on to suffer psychological conflicts which may lead them to a first stage, passive nihilism, and from there to second

stage, active nihilism. I shall argue, considering J. L. Mackie's account of Moral Subjectivism and dealing with those who accept MS, first, that it frees the subject from standardized moral theories which limit human beings and thus prevent them from affirming their supremacy as beings endowed with an infinite capacity for evolution. Further, to counter the negative connotations of Moral Subjectivism, I shall also consider Nietzsche's particular concepts of passive and active nihilism: the first one of its nature arising from the acceptance of MS; but the second concept I propose as Friedrich Nietzsche's solution for overcoming the first.

Moral Subjectivism

"There are no objective values" (Mackie, 1977, p. 15).

In his work, *From Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong (1977),* simply by demonstrating their variability in terms of time, space, cognition, social relations, culture, and so forth, J. L. Mackie deconstructs the claim that there are objective values. Furthermore, Mackie explains that "Moral scepticism, the denial of objective moral values, is not to be confused with any one of several first order normative views or with any linguistic or conceptual analysis" (Mackie 1977, p. 48). Hence, Moral Subjectivism, as distinct from Moral Relativism or Normative Moral Subjectivism, both of which base morality on the subjectivity of the agent, asserts that there is neither a transcendental standard nor an objective moral entity, but that all moral standards are human-made. Therefore one cannot classify an action as either good or bad with regard to the nature of the agent-subject (the subject's being either virtuous or vicious – "good or "bad") nor can one so classify the action in itself according to the laws of nature. In fact, this concept of MS considers human beings as part of the physical world and subject to those same physical laws as are other mammals. Mackie's account of MS also

takes into consideration human beings' perceptions of the world, without accepting, however, the idea that the agent-subject's capacity to cognize precedes matter. Significantly, in such an analytical characterization there is clearly no room for classification of human beings themselves as either good or bad since any such classification would require a "beyond-humankind" standard.

On the other hand, such a theory of Moral Subjectivism does not negate the subject's perception of the world. Here, while the word *judge* can be applicable to an action itself considering its results, it is not applicable to the nature of such action because what is at stake here is the subject's perception of the physical world. For example, considering a situation in which "A" kills "B", one can judge the action's results as either productive of good or bad but one cannot judge the nature of such action, due to the fact that in the natural laws of the physical world, there is no such absolute standard. Furthermore, according to Mackie's presentation of MS theory, such an explanation of human perceptions of the world in terms of physical laws differs radically from that of Moral Relativism, although it is the case that neither can classify things as either right or wrong. Mackie is clear on this point: "The denial that there are objective moral values does not commit one to any particular view as to what moral statements mean, and certainly not to the view that they are equivalent to subjective reports." (Mackie 1977, p. 18). Finally, the illustration about killing previously cited in this paragraph serves to highlight the fact that the subject's capacity for creating meaning, which one will certainly have done in this instance, while it may be a feature inherent in human beings, rests beyond the laws of nature. Moreover, MS theory still allows such capacity for perception to be isolated as an important individual characteristic of every subject.

Accepting Moral Subjectivism: Psychological Conflicts

After accepting the theory of Moral Subjectivism, the subject can, and in fact often does, experience psychological conflicts. These psychological conflicts arise from the metaphysical dissolution of previous bases for the subject's moral values, and frequently begin with a self-analysis of such established moral values in the light of MS. Indeed, there often will be an internal struggle between the idea of the universe as only a human representation – totally discarding the laws of nature – and the idea of human awareness of their particularity as cognitive beings who accept the physical laws of the world and a naturalist position. Nietzsche depicts this emotional clash as:

> A path that climbed defiantly through boulders, a malicious, lonely path consoled neither by weed nor shrub – a mountain path crunched under the defiance of my foot. (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [TSZ] 2006, p.124).

As one can see, the situation described above will uncover for one who takes this path, the horizons for an evolution of the human species, which were once obscured by the illusion of absolute objective moral values. Consequently, the resulting intellectual clash will prepare the ground for a watershed stage within such a subject. As Nietzsche suggests metaphorically, "Then the dwarf became silent, and that lasted a long time. But his silence oppressed me, and being at two in such a way truly makes one lonelier than being at one!" (*TSZ* 2006, p.124). The clash within cries out to be resolved.

Nietzsche's Concept of Passive Nihilism

Nihilism (from the Latin *nihil, nothing)* is a much varied concept that in general terms denies objective values and suggests that existentially, life does not make sense. Among the various forms of nihilism, Nietzsche describes a passive nihilism which is concerned with the existential dimension in which the agent, having accepted Moral Subjectivism, denies imperative moral values, affirms a naturalist position, and considers life without value or the potential for improvement. Such passive nihilism obviously leads the agent to agonized internal crises. Furthermore, it instills the notion that human beings are a finished product for whom further evolution is impossible. Nietzsche recognized this, and in the following passage he depicted the effect of passive nihilism on an individual agent:

> And truly, I saw something the like of which I had never seen before. A young shepherd I saw; writhing, choking, twitching, his face distorted, with a thick black snake hanging from his mouth. Had I ever seen so much nausea and pale dread in one face? Surely he must have fallen asleep? Then the snake crawled into his throat – where it bit down firmly. (*TSZ* 2006, p. 127)

In this passage, Nietzsche is obviously implying that passive nihilism ("the snake") has taken possession of the subject in an unguarded moment ("Surely he must have fallen asleep?"), that is, during the existential crisis caused when Moral Subjectivism broke down the idea of objective moral standards. Moreover, Nietzsche is suggesting that the passive nihilist has adopted a submissive attitude towards life, entering a state of inertia where nothing matters and passivity reigns supreme. Nevertheless, both these stages may be overcome if the subject understands instead, as Nietzsche contends as he progresses further, that MS can offer the confirmation of a

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human being's greatness in the acceptance and affirmation of life as it is: "My hand tore at the snake and tore – in vain! It could not tear the snake from his throat. Then it cried out of me: "Bite down! Bite down!" (*TSZ* 2006, p.127). Actually, here, of course, Nietzsche is signifying symbolically the transition from passive nihilism to active nihilism ("Bite down!").

Nietzsche's Concept of Active Nihilism

Nietzsche considers that passive nihilism is effectively a pathological process. Still, he represents that one can triumph over passive nihilism and attain the next stage: active nihilism. For Nietzsche, this is not only the acceptance of life as it is, recognizing completely its limitations and its finitude, but also the affirmation and intense appreciation of life. He characterizes the transitional point with this passage:

> Bite Down! Bite Down! Bite off the head! Bite down! – Thus it cried out of me, my dread, my hatred, my nausea, my pity, all my good and bad cried out of me with one shout. (*TSZ* 2006, p. 127).

According to Nietzsche, it is by "biting down" – facing squarely passive nihilism (the snake) – that all nausea, pity, and dread will be overcome, and thus the subject will reach a state of active nihilism. Clearly, to avoid passive nihilism calls for an agent's radical change of attitude, an action that only the agent can take. In particular, following Nietzsche's understanding, the active nihilist must affirm the plenitude of life as it is, prevail over morality and imperative truths, accept the laws of nature, declare his/her supremacy (Nietzsche's concept of *Übermensch*), and seek to rethink all human values. In Nietzsche's words, "No longer shepherd, no longer human – a transformed, illuminated, laughing being!" (*TSZ* 2006,

p. 127). As a result, the active nihilist values the mundane life and accepts its finitude, aiming to live it intensely so as to further evolve.

Conclusion

Moral Subjectivism often triggers within the subject a series of events such as an existential crisis, entrance into a stage of passive nihilism, and finally, attainment of an active nihilist stage whereby the subject's supremacy is resuscitated. All three steps of this progression are essential. Each individual stage of the process is crucial to build the intellectual faculty necessary for human beings to overcome conventional ideas of morality – which inhibit their potentiality as subjects – and to launch new initiatives turned instead from attempting to conform to the achievement of individual autonomy. The subject's movement from Mackie ("there are no objective values") to Nietzsche ("become who you are") paves the way for their victory over subjection to whatever may be the current predominant moral codes, and the birth of supremacy of the subject. In this way, each person can become god to himself/herself and begin to create right and wrong.

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Commentary

ANDREW KNOTT

With the rejection of moral objectivism, the short, swift descent into nihilism threatens on the horizon. Nietzsche was initially inspired by Shopenhauer's atheism and pessimism, but broke rank from Shopenhauer's passive nihilism with the doctrine of the Eternal Return. One of many ways the Eternal Return can be regarded is as an ethical injunction because it compels the maximization of every moment of life, lest your mediocrity return to you. The doctrine of the Eternal Return suggests that your best and your worst moments, along with all the mediocrity in between, will return to you an infinite amount of times in this very same life. Nietzsche does not just spit-ball; he gives an argument for the Eternal Return in *On The Vision and the Riddle* found in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. There is an infinite amount of time, but a finite amount of things in the universe. The gateway through which an infinite amount of time flows is the Moment. If there are a finite amount of constituents in the universe, existing within an infinite amount of time, *everything that has already been, can and will be again.*

To Nietzsche, the Eternal Return is a necessary part of being, but our approach to the inevitability of this doctrine is open. The spirit of gravity, a subordinate theme in TSZ, can be thought of as the unconscious burden of values that are anchoring us in mediocrity, obstructing the subject from self-overcoming. Man is a burden to himself, argues Nietzsche, because he loads

himself with alien values that he did not create, and is weighed down by the parochial mindset of good and evil. To Nietzsche, "*the"* way or "*the"* truth do not exist. There is only my way and your way, which each of us must find alone, while we consciously create our own values for the first time. This is *self-overcoming*. Further, Nietzsche invites the reader to let go of the spirit of revenge because man cannot will in to, or effect, the past. Instead, Nietzsche ultimately invites us to embrace and love our destiny. The Superman (*Übermensch)* is consciously created whereby a subject of great fortitude embraces their destiny and wills their future. The Superman consciously wills what has been and what will again be. To Nietzsche, the *last will* is to will the Moment to return in the Eternal Return, and to love your fate.

Simone de Beauvoir's Existential Account of Oppression

PARISA SAMET

Among several famous French existentialists of her time Simone de Beauvoir offers an account of the existential nature of oppression within society. By examining her Ethics of Ambiguity we find a framework, which aids in understanding relationships between the oppressor and oppressed within different groups of society. The groups in discussion that Beauvoir advocates for are those who are oppressed as a result of race, sexuality and age. In reviewing the relationships between oppressor and oppressed in each of these groups we gain an analogous reading of Beauvoir's ethics and her existential position on oppression.

Throughout her various fields of study, Simone de Beauvoir maintained a consistent perspective on her existential views of freedom and oppression. In her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir clearly outlines what it means to be a free person, and claims that in order to will oneself free one must will others free as well (73). In addition, she creates a framework for establishing the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressors. This system of ethics becomes useful in analyzing Beauvoir's work on different forms of oppression, including racial, sexual and ageist oppression. By using her ethics, we are able to see analogous themes and similarities within the relationships between the oppressed and oppressors. It will be shown how a common occurrence among oppressors is to naturalize the oppression inflicted on their victims. Additionally, Beauvoir emphasizes the notion that violence may be justifiable in the attainment of existential freedom within

certain limitations. Further, in providing this framework we will be able to witness certain analogies between racial, sexual and ageist oppression.

In order to effectively frame Beauvoir's perspective on various forms of oppression, it may be helpful to refer to her views on freedom and oppression in the *Ethics of Ambiguity.* In the *Ethics,* Beauvoir provides an account of the dual nature of the human condition. She explains the view one holds of oneself and how one views others. This may often result in neglecting another's freedom. She explores the detriments of oppression and explains that the oppressor often treats the oppressed as things rather than individuals with their own individual freedom (Beauvoir 83). In order to keep the oppressed as immanent existents, the oppressors naturalize and institutionalize their oppressed situation (Beauvoir 83). It is through this power dynamic that the oppressor transcends and keeps the oppressed in an immanent state of being. She effectively shows the existential role in the relationship when she states:

> "Oppression divides the world into two clans: those who enlighten mankind by thrusting it ahead of itself and those who are condemned to mark time hopelessly in order merely to support the collectivity; their life is a pure repetition of mechanical gestures; their leisure is just about sufficient for them to regain their strength; the oppressor feeds himself on their transcendence and refuses to extend it by free recognition," (83).

Beauvoir does in fact provide an account of what must occur in order to eradicate this immanence within the ethics when she states: "...We are obliged to destroy not only the oppressor but also those who serve him, whether they do so out of ignorance or constraint," (98). She continues on this subject when describing the need for violence and the effect it has on morality. Beauvoir examines the circumstances in which violence against the

oppressor is justified. Ultimately this section outlines that we must attain our freedom without impending on the freedom of others, however Beauvoir would support a revolt on the side of the oppressed to attain their freedom as individual existents. She makes this explicitly clear when she states:

> "In any case, morality requires that the combatant be not blinded by the goal which he sets up for himself to the point of falling into the fanaticism of seriousness or passion. The cause which he serves must not lock itself up and thus create a new element of separation: through his own struggle he must seek to serve the universal cause of freedom," (90).

With an understanding of Beauvoir's perspective on the dynamics of freedom and oppression, an in-depth look on specific forms of oppression may be examined. Beauvoir's perspective on racial oppression outlines similar perspectives to those examined in the *Ethics*.

In *Beauvoir and the Algerian War: Toward a Postcolonial Ethics*, Julien Murphy explicates Beauvoir's perspective and role in addressing the racial oppression, which took place in Algeria during the postcolonial war. Murphy discusses actions that Beauvoir undertook, including highlighting the torture that the Algerian minorities faced during the war as a result of French colonialists. Beauvoir did so in part by co-authoring a book about Djamila Boupacha, a young Algerian girl who was violently tortured during the war, alongside Gisèle Halimi (Boupacha's defense attorney). Beauvoir and Halimi would educate the French people on the extent of torture that was taking place in Algeria at the time as a result of French colonialist powers and spoke on topics such as rape torture as a weapon against women during the war (273).

The injustices, which came of the Algerian war highly resembled the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed as Beauvoir described in the *Ethics*. The

French colonialists were using their power against the Algerians at the time and othering them through grave wartime atrocities. Beauvoir's involvement in the case of Boupacha was extremely significant as Halimi explained: "...the book was to be a weapon in the immediate struggle, and instrument for disseminating the truth as widely as possible, and also constitute a pledge for the future," (273). It is in this way that we see how Beauvoir acted as a weapon for the oppressed, rather than conforming to her role in society as an oppressor. She did so by aiding them in their revolts and drawing attention to the atrocities that were taking place throughout the French government, her home nation. Through the use of her tactics on justified revolt, Beauvoir directly engaged in attaining existential individual freedoms for victims like Boupacha and many others suffering racial oppression in this war.

Beauvoir drew attention to the racial oppression occurring in Algeria at the time by comparing Algerian atrocities to the Nazi attacks and to slavery in America (274). Beauvoir had hoped that by involving herself in the case she would provoke additional violence against the colonialists in attaining freedom for Algerians- again directly acting as a moral agent fighting the oppressors. Moreover, her perspective on French colonialists seemed similar to the views provided earlier in the *Ethics*. Her attempts for racial inequality mirrored her views of the oppressor versus oppressed freedom dynamic she describes in the *Ethics*. Murphy states that Beauvoir "...wanted a moral awakening for France. She used Boupacha's case to enlighten the citizens of France about the war crimes committed in their name with hopes that public outcry would stop the war," (275). In *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege*, Sonia Kruks addresses Beauvoir's assessment of the racial oppression faced by Algerians at the time. Kruks writes "Her strategy [regarding involvement] was very different. Becoming increasingly aware of her privileged status, she [Beauvoir] learned to deploy it as a basis for effective political intervention...she is very conscious about who she is and

what she values," (82). Beauvoir used her privilege as a scholar from the oppressor country to aid and fight against the atrocities occurring as a result of racial oppression during the Algerian war. Alongside her views on racial oppression Beauvoir spends a significant amount of her work discussing the oppression faced by women in *The Second Sex:*

> "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is the civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. Only the mediation of another can constitute an individual as an *Other*," (283).

This quote reinforces Beauvoir's non-essentialist perspective and emphasizes the social process that takes place in othering women as inferior, immanent or significantly oppressed. Femininity as Beauvoir describes it is in no way objective, rather societal markers and institutions naturalize oppressive roles for women in society. In each of the chapters of *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir discusses the various stages, which take place during the span of a female's life. In each chapter Beauvoir provides in-depth accounts of how women are socially placed into the role of immanence and passivity with no room for transcendence.

In the *Formative Years* section Beauvoir shows how the development of a girl places her in a role of immanence within society as she grows into a woman. The significance of the chapter for the girl is that a young woman is forced to abandon her childhood instincts. By doing so she accepts passivity, dependence and inwardness as attributed to her naturalized femininity. Beauvoir uses terms such as weak, futile, passive and docile to describe what it means to be a woman and shows also that self-assertion is a primarily male attributed trait

and is not condoned by femininity whatsoever (348). However it is important to notice here that these attributions are enforced by the naturalization of othering. It must be addressed that none of these characteristics are inherently objective in the nature of a woman, rather they are tools used against women (by the oppressor) to keep them in a state of immanence and otherness.

Another interesting oppressive feature of femininity is passivity as a desirable trait in seeking to please men. This resembles her view in the *Ethics* in regards to reinforcing the transcendent versus immanent relationship between oppressed and oppressor. In regards to oppressive existential features outlined in Beauvoir's work, we see a pattern of oppressor and oppressed again within sexual oppression. Beauvoir describes passivity accepted as a woman's destiny which becomes one of waiting for a man. Beauvoir states that "...men do not approve of thinking women; too much audacity, culture, intelligence or character frightens them," (347). We can see a parallel here between the oppressor and the oppressed, as men maintain their transcendence over women by naturalizing women's roles within marginalized feminine confines. Beauvoir describes the roles of women and men as synonymous with the oppressor and the oppressed. Through the use of naturalization women are oppressed and this dynamic is made explicitly clear throughout the stages Beauvoir outlines in *The Second Sex.* Beauvoir would describe the naturalization as a connection made between female and feminine. However based on her existential views, as we have previously seen Beauvoir maintains that there is no necessary connection between a woman's sex and her femininity. This quote is explicated when she infamously states:

> "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates

this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine," (283).

A woman is not feminine by nature or essence; rather by destiny (Beauvoir 283). This existential view on the state of women would be used as a stepping-stone in further investigations on feminist philosophy. Further, the relationship of reciprocity resembles the Hegelian master slave dialectic Beauvoir refers to in the *Ethics.*

In *Conditions of Servitude* Shannon Mussett discusses the similarities of the role women are confined to in the *Second Sex* and the slave in Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Mussett first highlights the master-slave dialectic and points out that woman: "serves as an instrument of mediation for man; and even though she evades the life-and-death struggle, she nevertheless learns the same lesson of absolute negativity and can thus be emancipated through labour," (276). Mussett critically discusses how the woman attains the role of mediation within the process of her oppression. She maintains that woman is bound by the master-slave dialectic, specifically as a mediator between man and nature (Mussett 282). This directly reinforces the notion Beauvoir stated earlier when referring to woman as an intermediary object between "man and eunuch" (Beauvoir 283). A woman's existential freedom as an individual is taken from her when she is objectified and oppressed in a role such as femininity. Mussett also describes, as Beauvoir does, that the oppressive nature of a woman's role within society is her lack of freedom. She effectively reinforces Beauvoir's perspective in that women are socially coerced into this role of the inessential in contrast to the male essential. She further discusses the oppressive nature of a woman when she explains that the master (oppressor, transcendent, male) uses the slave (oppressed, immanent, female) to mediate his recognition of himself, similar to Beauvoir's perspective on how the oppressor uses the oppressed to transcend. Mussett effectively draws parallels between Beauvoir's account of woman and Hegel's account of the

slave, particularly when she describes a woman's objectification. Finally Mussett states: "...woman undergoes the same education as the slave-namely, that the essence of self-consciousness is pure negativity-without having to enter into a life-and-death conflict," (284). Mussett and Beauvoir both draw attention to the depth of oppression women experience as a result of the naturalization of the attributes of femininity assigned to their sex. Moreover, Beauvoir follows this pattern of oppression in her discussion of *Old Age*.

Beauvoir briefly discusses the oppression that older women face in *The Second Sex*, when she describes the older woman as chained and considerably imprisoned by her immanence. Beauvoir describes how the older woman develops into a different person oppressed in different ways, becoming more dependent and immanent as a result of her changing situation and circumstance (626-627). Unfortunately Beauvoir describes that a significant part of being older is that the role one attains is daunting. She states: "Here we touch upon the older woman's tragedy: she realizes she is useless," (633). Although this statement is directly geared toward the female elderly, it seems that this role can be applied to both men and women. Beauvoir describes how the elderly, and even particularly women are further oppressed not only into their othered roles as women, but additionally as elderly women (627).

In *The Being-In-The-World: The Discovery and Assumption of Old Age*, Beauvoir describes the decline and further passivity the elderly face when she states: "...it was the other within her that she was addressing, the Other that existed for the rest but of whom she herself had no immediate knowledge," (39). The significance of this statement is that an "identification crisis" may occur among the elderly, which may be a result of such oppression. The aged person may feel old due to the perceptions other people have of them, as they have yet to

experience old age in *en soi* [2] (in itself) mode (39-40). Moreover, even though the elderly may not immediately experience the effects of growing older, consequently certain roles are attributed to them as a result of their age. These traits may include a lack of employment or projects as a result of their age, feeling less useful in society, and lacking attention other than that of pity (40-41). This type of oppression is attributed to what happens as one ages and it is naturalized again by the privileged within society. The pressures that the elderly face including aesthetic transformations or seeking projects may be viewed as examples of ways of revolting against the immanence that comes of old age. However, as Beauvoir mentions in both these pieces, (particularly in regard to the ageing woman) ageing does not save women from the othering and oppression they have faced in their lives thus far, rather ageing and growing old into a new role of immanence adds another layer to a different kind of othering and oppression.

Throughout the explanations provided for the various forms of oppression Beauvoir addresses, many similarities have been drawn. In all three forms of oppression, there is always an oppressor and oppressed role established. In racial oppression, the French colonialists acted as the oppressors whereas the Algerians were treated as the oppressed. We see the same pattern when discussing Beauvoir's perspective on sexual oppression. The man is the transcendent essential oppressor and the female is the immanent inessential and most importantly, oppressed. Finally, we see the same form of oppression when observing the roles attributed to the elderly and how as they age their existential freedom is further stripped as they enter a new form of othering. In all three cases, the oppressed are marginalized and naturalized into a role and robbed of their individual

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[2] *En soi* is described in the Ethics as the in itself category of material things which contain pre-determined essences, (Beauvoir 10).

freedom as a result of oppression. By outlining Beauvoir's views on oppression and othering, the commonalities between the forms of oppression can be fairly assessed as analogous. They each maintain similar underlying existential assumptions that involve a manipulation of the interdependence of people and use this feature of dualistic nature in order to naturalize oppression.

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Commentary

BROOKER BUCKINGHAM

In February 2014, tens of thousands of French citizens marched in the boulevards of Paris to protest the legalization of same-sex marriage and news that the government had recently launched an experimental program titled the "ABC of Equality" in select grade school curriculum. The course teaches children that although there are some biological differences between the sexes, a vast number of differences are constructed by society. Critics were quick to point out the course concepts were inspired by American gender theorist Judith Butler.

That Judith Butler is largely the focus of this controversy begs the question: What about Simone de Beauvoir? One of the giants of 20th century intellectual thought, de Beauvoir's 1949 work *The Second Sex* acts as the *ratio essendi* for Butler's gender theory. In fact, the theory's very concept is encoded in the book's famous line, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

Parisa Samet's paper, "Simone de Beauvoir's Existential Account of Oppression," is a reminder of the fundamental importance de Beauvoir's work plays in not only contemporary gender studies, but the field of identity politics, humanities and the social sciences in general. Samet argues de Beauvoir maintained a consistent existential view on the relation between freedom and oppression throughout her body of thought, and she uses de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* as a framework to discern various ways in which contemporary society naturalizes racial, sexist and ageist oppression.

Implicit in this paper is the idea that de Beauvoir developed a form of existentialist applied ethics, through which the oppressed, bound in their immanence, can learn to will their own freedom in order to negate the transcendent role of the oppressor. It would have been illustrative to outline de Beauvoir's debt to Kantian

deontological ethics, as well as to stress how she parts from Kant by invoking violence as a means to achieve moral ends.

It is this notion of viewing de Beauvoir as an applied ethicist that makes this paper truly valuable in light of our current conjuncture. As the cracks deepen in the edifice of late capitalism, we can turn to the likes of de Beauvoir to help us articulate a new political and social morality – one that refuses to perpetuate the myriad forms of oppression identified by de Beauvoir over half a century ago – forms of oppression which still conquer and divide us. Perhaps Alain Badiou addresses a facet of de Beauvoir's thought when he conceptualizes difference as immanent and the Same as what becomes through the discipline of universal truth. Throughout Samet's paper, we can surmise de Beauvoir's ongoing desire to eliminate othering is ultimately a desire to recognize our sameness.

David Lewis and the (Im)Possibility of Backwards Time Travel

MARILENA DANELON

Is it possible to time travel into the past? David Lewis famously argued that no logical contradiction is entailed in the Grandfather's Paradox. In Part I of this paper, I outline Lewis's defense of the non-contradiction of time travel in the Grandfather's Paradox. In Part II, I argue that Lewis's argument leaves open a problematic possibility: that one could possibly go into the past and perform acts other than the Grandfather's Paradox. I argue that under no circumstances could a person perform an action in the past. In Part III, I argue that not only is there no possibility to act in the past, but there's no ability to, either. In Part IV, I address potential criticisms, and in Part V, I conclude that backwards time travel is logically impossible.

Tim really hates his grandfather. Tim has a fool-proof plan to murder his grandfather and never get caught: Tim decides that he's going to hop in his time machine, travel back in time, and kill his grandfather. He grabs his gun, packs it in the machine, and travels to 1921: the time when his grandfather was a childless bachelor. He is determined to kill his grandfather. He stalks him. He knows where his grandfather lives, what route his daily walk follows, and where he shops. After his grandfather goes home for the night, Tim does target practice with his gun. So far, he's hit the mark every single time. The day comes where he decides to kill his grandfather. He follows him on his daily walk and until his grandfather is perfectly alone. He stealth's the wall,

aims the gun, breathes quietly, finger on the trigger... and then it happens!

What happens, exactly? David Lewis in his paper "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" (1976) argues that perhaps Tim tripped. Perhaps his grandfather knew he was being followed all along and escaped. Tim had the *ability* to kill his grandfather: he had a time machine, a gun, perfect aim and thorough knowledge of his grandfather's activities. But for whatever reason, he didn't succeed. Tim's being alive is the proof that he didn't kill his grandfather.

While some have argued that time travel is impossible because it contains an inherent contradiction - that a time traveller both *can* and *can't* go into the past and kill his grandfather - others, particularly Lewis, have argued otherwise. Lewis argues that "The Grandfather's Paradox" does not have an inherent contradiction, and therefore that backwards time travel is logically possible. In this paper, I will argue that backwards time travel is not logically possible. I will argue that time travellers do not have the possibility to act in the past. They cannot act in the past for the same reason that Tim cannot possibly kill his grandfather. Further I will argue that Tim doesn't have the ability to act in the past, either. I will conclude that Tim doesn't have the ability *or* possibility to backwards time travel, and, as such, backwards time travel is logically impossible.

I

The grandfather paradox can be presented as follows:

(P1) If backwards time travel is possible, then Tim can go into the past and act such that he could kill his grandfather.

(P2) Tim can go into the past and kill his grandfather.

(P3) Tim can't go into the past and kill his grandfather (because then he wouldn't exist to kill his grandfather in the first place).

(P4) A logical contradiction follows if backwards time travel is possible (P2).

(C1) Backwards time travel is impossible.

David Lewis argues that "can" is equivocal in (P2) (Lewis 1976, 150). If "can" is equivocal, then it follows there is no logical contradiction and therefore time travel is not logically impossible. Lewis argues that the first "can" in (P2) is true relative to a narrow set of facts (151). Relative to the narrow set of facts, Tim has the *ability* to kill his grandfather. I will call this narrow set of facts "*can-ability*". Tim has a gun, a time machine; he knows his grandfather's daily routine, etc. But, he "cannot" kill his grandfather in P3 relative to a wider set of facts (151). For example, Tim could not have *possibly* killed his grandfather because he exists in the present as the evidence that he, in fact, did not do so. I will call this wider set of facts "*can-possibility*".

Lewis explains. Relative to one set of narrow facts, Tim can-ability kill his grandfather. He has what it takes. Lewis draws an analogy. Lewis can speak Finnish, but an ape can't. But Lewis still can't speak Finnish (150). This is a similar equivocation of "can". On the one hand, Lewis *can-ability* speak Finnish. He has a larynx and the cognitive capacity to learn and speak a human language. But, on the other hand, he *can't-possibly* speak Finnish because he has never learned the language and doesn't know the vocabulary. Thus, relative to a narrow set of facts, Lewis can-ability speak Finnish, and relative to a wider set of facts, he cannot-possibility (150).

Lewis also gives an analogy to further argue that the grandfather paradox does not prove the impossibility of backwards time travel. He introduces another character: Tom (149-50). Tom is identical to Tim, except

that Tom is not a time traveller. Tom even believes he is a time traveler – though he is not, and he lives in the year 1921. Tom also wants to kill his grandfather; but Tom believes that Tim's grandfather is his grandfather. (Poor Tim's grandfather might be murdered by two different people now.) So it's 1921, and Tim and Tom are both trying to murder Tim's grandfather. They both have the can-*ability* to kill his grandfather. But, we also know that neither Tim nor Tom succeeded at killing Tim's grandfather, because Tim is the living, empirical evidence of this truth. Lewis's conclusion is that, in the same way that Tom's can-ability to kill Tim's grandfather is independent of time traveling, Tim's can-ability to kill his own grandfather is time-travel independent (151-52).

So why is Tim's grandfather alive? Maybe Tim tripped. Maybe Tim had a change of heart, or Tim's grandfather knew he was being followed and escaped quickly. One way or another, it is *not* the case that Tim both *could* and *couldn't* kill his grandfather (151-52). He had the ability to kill his grandfather, and for whatever reason failed. But it doesn't follow that Tim's failing to kill his grandfather is the result of a logical contradiction. As such, backward time travel has not been shown to be logically impossible.

II

Lewis's emendation to the argument would be as follows:

(P5) If backwards time travel is possible, then Tim can go into the past and act such that he could kill his grandfather.

(P6) Tim can-*ability* go into the past and kill his grandfather.

(P7) Tim can't-*possibility* go into the past and kill his grandfather.

(P8) A logical contradiction does *not* follow if backwards time travel is possible (P2).

(C2) So it does *not* follow from (P5) through (P8) that time travel is impossible.

While Lewis's solution is helpful in getting out of the original contradiction, I would like to argue that he leaves open another problematic possibility: that Tim *can*-possibly go into the past and do something else; just not kill his grandfather. He argues that Tim has the ability to kill his grandfather, but didn't, given the fact that Tim is alive. What are the repercussions of this resolution?

I argue that cannot-possibility extends to *all* actions - not merely the inability to kill one's own grandfather. As such, Tim cannot-possibility kill his grandfather *or do anything else for that matter*. Lewis argues that we know Tim didn't kill his grandfather because he is alive to try and do so. Tim's being alive is the truthmaker for the claim that Tim *didn't* kill his grandfather before his grandfather had children. If Tim successfully killed his grandfather, then Tim wouldn't exist.

Does this extend to all present truthmakers? I think it does. It seems that for any present-x, there was a past-x that made it such. If past-x were altered, present-x would be altered. If past-x were deleted from existence, present-x would be deleted from existence. If we accept that every present-x exists because some past-x exists, then we should accept that some present-x is the truthmaker for the claim that the relevant past-x was never altered.

I will explain using an example. Let's say Tim's daughter really likes stickers and decides to put a sticker on Tim's car's back window. Every time he checks his rear-view mirror, all he sees is the large sticker in the

middle of his window. This sticker has a heavy-duty adhesive, so Tim fails to scratch off the sticker whenever he tries to. He's used water, sponges, hardware tools, you name it. This sticker refuses to be scratched off the window. Tim is really upset about this sticker, because it depletes the value of his 1998 Honda Civic and it annoys him whenever he looks through his rearview mirror and window. Luckily, Tim has his trusty time machine. Tim wants to go into the past, to the day when his daughter is playing with the stickers, and wants to stop her from putting the sticker on in the first place. That'll get rid of that pesky sticker!

Lewis's (Sticker)Father's Paradox:

(P9) If backwards time travel is possible, then Tim can-possibility travel into the past and prevent the sticker from being affixed to the window.

(P10) Tim can-ability go into the past and remove the sticker. He knows the date, time, and location when his daughter was playing with them, and he knows he can pull over and take away the stickers from her. He has the ability to take away the stickers no problem.

      Here is the important part: Tim failed to kill his grandfather. Why? Because Tim is alive in the present as empirical evidence of this truth. So, we can conclude that Tim fails to remove the sticker. Why? Because the sticker is on the windshield in the present as empirical evidence of this truth. I can tell whatever story I want about why Tim failed - his daughter was hyper-determined to put the sticker on, an officer pulled him over inconveniently, he decided he liked the sticker after all and let his daughter play - but the *fact* of the story remains. We know Tim failed because the sticker wouldn't be on the window *if* Tim stopped his daughter from doing it in the past.

III

(P11) Tim cannot-possibility go into the past and prevent the sticker from being affixed to the window. (see previous paragraph.)

(C3) (P9, P11 Modus Tollens) Backwards time travel is impossible.

The impossibility of action derived from can-possibility extends to can-ability. We know that Tim can't do something mundane like take a sticker off a windshield: what makes us think he can do anything else? Again, it doesn't really matter what example I provide. Tim goes into the past to find the TV remote, Tim goes into the past to buy PS4 instead of Wii, Tim goes into the past to stop a child from drawing a single line in chalk on the sidewalk... All the reasons *in the present* why Tim would have to go into the past in the first place are the reasons why *Tim didn't succeed in the past*. So long as that single line in chalk is on the sidewalk, we know that Tim doesn't succeed in stopping the child from drawing the line.

To simplify: if Tim succeeded in preventing the line of chalk in the past, then why would the line of chalk be there at all in the present (thus requiring him to go back in time to alter the situation)?

Can-ability is impossible if it is can-impossible for Tim to be able to do *anything*. Assuming it were calculable: If the air particles exist in the present such that they allow for exactly 2.5 billion people to breathe in 1950, then we know that Tim couldn't have breathed in 1950 and been the 2.5 billionth-and-one. Tim can't even breathe or shift the particles of the past! What makes us think he has the can-possibility *or even* can-ability to do anything, then? By virtue of the present-x state of things, we know that past-x couldn't have been such-that it doesn't allow for present-x.

As such, here is D's Revised (Sticker)Father's Paradox:

(P12) If backwards time travel is possible, then Tim can go into the past and prevent the sticker from being affixed to the window.

(P13) Tim canNOT-ability go into the past and prevent the sticker from being affixed to the window. (see previous paragraph)

(P14) Tim canNOT-possibility go into the past and prevent the sticker from being affixed to the window. (see P9)

(C4) (P12, P13; P12, P14; Modus Tollens) Backwards time travel is impossible.

Recall Lewis's example of his inability to speak Finnish. An ape can't-ability speak Finnish, but I can-ability. But don't ask me to translate; I can't-possibility speak Finnish. We know two things about the ape and the human. They both canNOT-possibility speak Finnish because neither have been taught Finnish. But the ape, unlike the human, does not have the can-ability to speak Finnish, either. He does not have a larynx or the cognitive capacity. The human does.

I believe that time travellers are analogous to the ape. They do not have the can-possibility *or* can-ability to time travel. When it comes to backward time travel, thorough can-impossibility rules out can-ability. Therefore, no matter how you look at it, in terms of can-possibility *or* can-ability, it seems that Tim canNOT go into the past and act. Since his time travel is not *at all* can-possible his can-ability to time travel is nonexistent. (He doesn't have the ability to do anything in the past)[3].

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[3] I recognize that throughout this paper, I have not addressed causal loops. David Lewis argues that closed causal loops, while strange, are *not* impossible and therefore again allow for the possibility of backwards time travel (149). For the purposes of this paper, I do not address causal loops. Instead, if you'd like to read more, here are two of many published responses to the criticism that causal loops allow for the possibility of backwards time travel:

IV

Lewis might counter-argue that "can" is ambiguous in P11 and P14. He might argue that the "can" referred to in those premises is 'can-ability'. If the 'can' in P11 and P14 is 'can-ability', then it still remains logically not impossible to backwards time travel. I would object to this by arguing it doesn't matter which 'can' is assumed, whether it be 'can-possibility' or 'can-ability'.

The reason it doesn't matter is because if can-possibility isn't had, then can-ability is impossible too. If Tim can't *possibly* do anything in the past, then it seems he doesn't have the *ability* to do anything, either. It would be analogous to saying: perfectly circular squares are impossible, but I have the ability to build one. I think this is false. One has the ability to build any other possible shape, but not the ability to build an *im*possible shape (like a perfectly circular square). In this light, a time traveller has *no* possibility to act in the past, and this entails that he does not have an *ability* to act in the past, either.

Another critic might argue that this analogy doesn't hold; that one *can* have the can-ability to do impossible things. For example, an expert carpenter *could*-ability build circular squares should there have possibly been circular squares. I disagree. This is an impossible claim; for example, the claim that there could have possibly been circular squares. I don't think a carpenter *could*-ability build a circular square because it is not can-possible to do so. No amount of carpentry expertise could allow him to build the impossible. He has the ability to build many other things - but not circular

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squares. Similarly, Tim has the can-ability to do lots of things in the present - but not time travel. Because backwards time travel is can-impossible, there can be no can-ability to do any backward time travelling.

Another possible objection is that Tom is evidence of can-ability. Tim and Tom both have the travelling-independent can-ability to kill Tim's grandfather. Similarly, Tim's can-ability is independent of his time travelling. I disagree. Tim and Tom are not exactly the same for one critical reason: Tim is a traveller, and Tom is not. I have argued that only in virtue of time travelling being can-impossible are one's can-abilities revoked. Tom is not a time traveller - Tom has the ability to act *in his present time*. Tim has the ability to act in *his* present time. But neither of them can act in *past time*.

V

Lewis's Revised Grandfather's Paradox hinges on Tim possibly doing something else besides killing his own grandfather. Lewis believes that he could not kill his grandfather - but leaves open the can-possibility that he could do something else (perhaps remove the sticker off a car). In this paper, I have argued that Tim, in fact, does *not* have the can-ability to do anything else at all. Regardless of how the 'can' in the proposition 'Tim can go into the past' is interpreted, it is impossible for Tim to go into the past. So, backwards time travel is impossible.

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Commentary

NICOLE D'SOUZA

The nature of cause and effect poses many problems for the possibility of backwards time travel, and this is clearly illustrated in Marilena Danelon's critique of David Lewis' equivocation argument. In her elucidation of the familiar 'Grandfather Paradox', we note that the past is *singular* and that having two different perceptions of the past (the original version and the time-travelling edition) creates inconsistencies in the present. If Tim did indeed possess the *can-ability* to do away with his Grandfather (or that pesky sticker for that matter) and yet *failed to follow-through* when absolutely nothing was standing in his way, then it follows that Tim *cannot-possibly* perform acts which alter the current course of time.

A particular argument presented in this paper that I wish to highlight for the reader is contra the contention that the inability to *change* the past does not *necessarily* entail inability to *travel* into the past. The assertion being that, in principle, one could still partake in the act of time travelling *itself* for mere observational purposes without falling prey to the problem posed by the Grandfather Paradox. For proponents of this claim, so long as Tim does not perform any act that alters what has already happened, then it is still possible for him to travel back - even if only to witness the past occur. In response to this potential criticism Danelon points out that because we have established that Tim *cannot-possibly* perform event-altering acts, *it is necessary* that we object to Tim being able to travel back in time *altogether*. We simply cannot allow Tim to backwards time travel at all because it would mean indulging him in the possibility of the impossible.

While some might be quick to denounce Danelon on the grounds that her arguments present too grandiose a form of fatalism, I believe she has hit the nail right on

the head by subscribing to a deterministic picture when *dealing with the past*. The notion of a necessity contained in the nature of the past and present appeals to both laws in logic and laws in metaphysics. What is true of the past *is* a matter of inevitability, and to conceive of it in any other way then it already has been simply *isn't* possible! The subject of backwards time travel has had a significant impact on both logical and metaphysical areas of inquiry, and Danelon has done well in hitting Lewis' weak spot on the mark with her extension of impossible acts into the realm of the mundane.
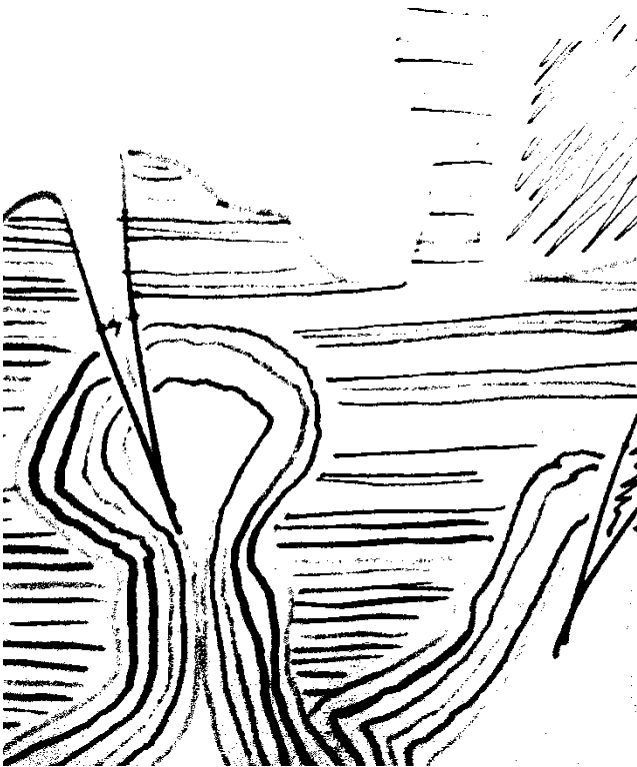
Argumentation and Morality

JOSHUA KOMAROVSKY

This paper will present critiques of both objectivist and relativist moral attitudes. I will begin by arguing, in connection with Allison Jaggar's adversarial views on "career self" ethics, that objectivist Sinnott-Armstrong's account of the role motives play in moral judgements are grounded in attitudes that perpetuate social inequality. I will provide further reasons for anti-objectivism through an appeal to John Mackie's claim that objectivism is self-refuting. The focus of the paper will then shift to a critical analysis of relativism, which maintains that arguments over foundational beliefs cannot occur. It will be suggested that, given Quine's rejection of the analytic-synthetic dichotomy, the idea that interlocutors have undebatable views is implausible. Subsequently, I will advance the hypothesis that attempts to maintain the relevance of the objectivism-relativism dichotomy through the association of morality with the nature of propositions cannot be successful. I will conclude by proposing that for the most part, two faulty assumptions impede moral argumentation. The first is that consensus is the primary goal of arguments. The second is that propositions can be delineated and studied separately from contexts of argumentation.

One often encounters two radically differing attitudes towards morality. On one side, we have the objectivist camp, which represents ethical facts as either transcendental or inter-subjective. Relativists, contrarily, maintain that nothing interesting can be said about morals because they are entirely subjective and therefore undebatable. The most relativism would grant with regards to argumentation about morals is that it can occur when interlocutors share the same foundational beliefs, and those who subscribe to relativism naturally believe

that moral frameworks can be incommensurable. Those who oppose relativism generally defend objective accounts of morality. Theorists have recently contended that focus on the dichotomy between objectivism and relativism is constitutive of a "straw-man" dilemma, on the basis that one can still argue rationally even if there are no objective moral facts (Kock, "Norms" 182). This essay will commence by critiquing both objectivist and relativists positions, and then proceed to dismantle the relevance of the objectivist-relativist dichotomy. I will then suggest that a major impediment to moral argumentation is the assumption of finality and discreteness. By doing away with these assumptions, the relevance of the dichotomy becomes even more unstable. Finality and discreteness will be explicated in connection with the relativist and objectivist positions that utilize them.

In the article "Moral Realism and Moral Dilemmas," Walter Sinnott-Armstrong argues against extreme moral realism (263). He claims that in certain situations judgments depend upon subjective attitudes, and these situations cannot be classified as anything but moral (263-264). While Sinnott-Armstrong asserts that he has disproved moral realism, his position in the paper does not seem to abandon an objectivist account. Though his arguments appear relativistic, since moral decisions can in fact depend upon subjective attitudes, he nevertheless assumes that an external observer is capable of accurately determining the actions a person ought to take if she is given knowledge of that individual's "way of life" (267-268). Since external judgements are always made with regards to concrete frameworks of value, a specific set of values considered with regards to what an individual should do in a given situation must be grounded in her "way of life." Knowledge of one's distinct situation enables a judge to prescribe the proper course of action for the individual in question (270-272). This attitude can be detected in his thought experiments, where "correct" imperatives are determined by balancing pre-existing values (266-268). One can critique my

interpretation by suggesting that Sinnott-Armstrong does not intend concrete ideals but rather loosely guiding principles. Yet, even the acceptance of guiding principles presupposes some objective norms, and it can thus be conclusively asserted that Sinnott-Armstrong is an objectivist.

One of the problems with Sinnott-Armstrong's position is that he proclaims that a moral person is someone who remains consistent with her "way of life" (271). As Alison Jaggar points out, an introspective "career self" attitude towards morality results in the idealization of "individualistic planning ethics," which glorifies white upper- and middle-class values and thus reinforces systematic social inequality (461).The view of morality presented in his paper is grounded in the unjustified premise of coherent individuality. One might attempt to salvage objectivity by rejecting Sinnott-Armstrong's arguments against moral realism, thus returning to an objectivist system that considers people's attitudes to be irrelevant to moral decision-making. However, John Mackie poses a serious challenge to objectivism's general axioms. He accomplishes this by demonstrating that objective morality requires free will and simultaneously implies determinism, thus becoming a self-refuting imperative (151-152). In order to prescribe specific action, one must assume that people have the freedom to make alternative decisions (Mackie 151-152). If an individual lacks the capacity to choose from a range of actions, she cannot be held responsible by the actions taken by her. Mackie argues that the consistent subject presupposed by objectivism in fact implies the lack of such capacity (151-152). As such, objective morality appears to be self-refuting.

Robert Fogelin, contrarily to Sinnott-Amstrong, presents a standard relativist attitude regarding morality in "Logic of Deep Disagreement." For Fogelin, knowledge is reducible to an axiomatic system, similarly to mathematics' version of it (8). Fogelin's description of these axioms is quite vague; he fails to elaborate on any properties of axioms, which is to say that he gives no

means of distinguishing fundamental assumptions from non-fundamental assumptions. One may disagree and contend that whenever one has an impasse during an argument, the cause of this is a conflict of foundational beliefs. But such a claim would involve circular reasoning, because one is presupposing that there are axiomatic differences on the sole basis of irresolvable disagreements. Simultaneously, however, the explanation for irresolvable disagreements is based on the notion of axiomatic differences. If one chooses to ignore this problem, for the purpose of "begging" implications of his theory, one will notice that his reasoning seemingly implies ethical debate is possible only when foundational values concur between participants. When one discovers an axiomatic divergence during an argument, nothing constructive or meaningful can be said; the only reasonable response is to walk away (9). But Richard Feldman suggests that this account appears implausible when one considers the historical shift in attitudes with respect to fundamental issues such as God, sexuality and morality (21). Is it plausible to maintain that social changes are arbitrary and wholly irrational? Surely, the success of social movements, such as the ones advocating suffrage for women, proves the possibility of inciting people to revaluate their convictions. One may potentially rebut by claiming that core social beliefs only transform slowly, in conjunction with various changes in environmental circumstances. Nevertheless, if society only undergoes normative paradigm shifts over extensive historical periods, how can one account for the violent suppression of texts that are considered socially deviant? Controversial opinions such as those of Spinoza on theology would not have been deemed threatening unless society's leaders had reasons to suspect that these are persuasive. If it were the case that these are not persuasive, the *Ethics* would have been completely ignored rather than publicly contested (Francks 60). Defensiveness against critiques of accepted norms lends credence to the idea that arguments are capable of altering people's views, contrarily to Fogelin's relativism. Moreover, people who cling to certain beliefs,

such as God, will justify them when questioned. For example, many people claim they believe in God because it gives them a sense of comfort and meaning in an irrational world. A clever arguer may potentially seize upon this insight and attempt to demonstrate a conceptual gap between their convictions and justifications. For instance, she can posit that belief in God is unnecessary for leading a meaningful life, since people are free to actively construct meaning. Hence, what at first glance may appear like an axiomatic proposition is in fact not immune to argumentation.

In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", W.V.O. Quine problematizes the view of human knowledge as axiomatic, suggesting further difficulties with Fogelin's position. In particular, he argues against the analytic-synthetic distinction, which is the belief that there is a clear delineation between the foundation of knowledge (analytic statements) and the structure built upon this foundation (synthetic statements) (213-216). In postulating the rich interconnectedness of various ideas, Quine asserts that no axiomatic concepts exist within one's "web of beliefs" (216-219). This makes Fogelin's epistemic account, with its morally relativistic implications, untenable. In fact, this implies that a genuine impasse during argumentation is impossible because the strength of any premise may be undermined by revealing inconsistencies in its relative position to other premises in the network. As Quine points out, the perception that certain ideas are immutable is merely an illusion originating in their conditional relation to many aspects of the web (216-219).

Now one may counter-argue that I am failing to consider circumstances where despite the weight of reasoning brought to bear against an interlocutor, she may refuse to entertain the notion of changing her mind. Many arguments of this type end up repeating the same propositions, without contributing new perspectives to the discussion. When this occurs, the participants may feel there is no hope for the argument to progress any further, and experience an urge to abandon the debate.

Hence the commonplace phrase, "agree to disagree." And it is these circumstances which provide evidence for the "deep disagreement" that ground Fogelin's account. However, it is presumptive to assume from there that these disagreements result from differences in foundational beliefs. As Gilbert points out, impasses can result from eristic attitudes of interlocutors (*Coalescent* 118-119). Many people have strong emotional attachments to certain opinions and may react negatively when questioned on these issues, especially if they are highly intolerant of disagreement (Gilbert, "Argumentation Theory"). And, what seems like an impasse may also be perpetuated by the arguers lacking awareness of how eristic attitudes hinder argument. This prevents them from adapting properly to the situation, which fosters a deeper feeling of frustration and a greater sense of hopelessness

Kock also makes an interesting observation in the article "Is Practical Reasoning Presumptive." He raises the point that one cannot refer to proposals as true or false; in other words, one cannot think of them in binary terms (94). He seems to be claiming that this way of discussing proposals involves a category error. One may disagree on the justifications leading up to an act, but the act itself cannot be described in terms of truth values (Kock, "Practical" 94). One can extend this line of reasoning, and say that morals themselves cannot be described in terms of truth values, despite the deceptive language of morality. Upon initial inspection, the language of values is understood in terms of "it is wrong to do X," which seems like a fairly ordinary proposition that can be either confirmed or denied. Unfortunately, however, speaking in this manner obscures the meaning of this statement, for the statement "it is wrong to do X" contains an imperative within it, and hence is a proposal to perform a particular act. To say that it is wrong to kill somebody means nothing other than to say that one should not kill somebody. Moral statements conceived in this way, lead to the realization that they are merely a type of proposal statement. Therefore, if one accepts Kock's argument, one

would have to agree that it is improper to speak of truth values of moral statements. But embracing this view also entails rejecting the relevance of the objectivist-relativist dichotomy, since the question "are morals subjectively or objectively true?" arise as merely a linguistic misinterpretations.

Discarding the finality assumption further detracts from the relevance of this dichotomy. I define finality as the belief that the fundamental purpose of arguing is to eliminate differences in viewpoints. For example, Fogelin's imperative to walk away when one encounters "deep disagreements" is indicative of finality because the underlying assumption appears to be arguments are uninteresting if they are irresolvable (9). The relativist threat to moral argumentation arises from the fear that rational discussion over moral issue cannot lead to conclusive answers. But without presuming finality, this possibility would not be seen as threatening, making the conflict between objectivity and relativism irrelevant.

In fact, there is evidence to suggest finality is false. For as Gilbert points out, it grossly oversimplifies the plethora of multifaceted reasons people choose to engage in argument (*Coalescent* 67-74). Gilbert notes that each person participates in any given argument for a variety of reasons and to achieve various goals (*Coalescent* 67-74). For instance, people may argue as a means of expressing anger or stress, or out of boredom or mischievousness. Also, as Christian Kock points out, in issues pertaining to value judgments there rarely is a single "correct" course of action; rather, there are a multiplicity of legitimate approaches ("Norms" 183-185). Therefore, assuming finality misrepresents the complexity of moral situations.

Many argumentation theorists presuppose finality, an accusation that may appear peculiar at first. For instance, it does not seem Feldman assumes finality when he introduces a tertiary option, the choice of opting out and claiming indeterminacy (16-18). Neither does Jaggar, when she advocates for continuous engagement in

fruitful debate (463-466). Also, it appears Kock avoids presuming finality in his discussion of "legitimate dissensus" ("Norms" 187). In some sense these theorists recognize difference should not be suppressed, but I believe they have all missed the point. First, Feldman's option of indeterminacy, the choice to withhold judgement, is far from an abandonment of the finality principle. Feldman challenges Fogelin's claim that disputes over "deep disagreements" are entirely irrational, instead suggesting a person has the rational choice to retract her opinion regarding a deep disagreement and wait until new information emerges (Feldman 16-18). I think these positions are not as different as Feldman intends. He assumes nothing constructive or meaningful can be achieved when encountering an apparent "deep disagreement," and the only rational response is to suspend judgement (18-21). Yet in my opinion, this amounts to ignoring the difference, since discussion is abandoned. Now one may claim Feldman is merely advocating the withholding of judgement until novel evidence grounds one's position on the issue, implying respect for differences in opinion, since it urges people to interpret the impossibility of resolution as a serious theoretical threat. In contrast, Feldman's defenders would say, Fogelin's view entails indifference to difference because as soon as a person perceives another's position as axiomatic, the dissimilarity appears to reduce into a mere preference, which results in the discussion ending. Nevertheless, argumentation between reasonable people is unnecessary when only one of the parties holds a plausible position because an interlocutor may simply demonstrate the evidence necessary for convincing her discussion partner. Ergo, Feldman's theory entails the elimination of perspectival differences because the only situation where discussants will have genuine dissensus leads to neutrality. As such, one might even say Feldman takes the finality principle further than Fogelin because the latter allows people to have their differing axioms, whilst Feldman suggests they must abstain from having even this.

Even if I addressed Feldman, some might contend that at the very least, Jaggar does not assume finality. Particularly, one might point to her Quinean epistemology, which indicates a worldview that denies a concrete and standard truth, as all knowledge is relative to one's "web of beliefs" (Jaggar 465). But, in spirit she still supports the finality principle. For, although she promotes fruitful engagement in debate, the underlying purpose for these debates is to tend towards a consensual view. Her attitude is to begin with differences in beliefs and through argumentation develop each other's views in such a manner as to one day lead to a position that is amicable to all groups (463-466). And even if this is not possible in practice, it is this ideal which seems to motivate her project, the ideal of persuasion via fruitful interaction that grows into a converging perspective, in juxtaposition to fruitful interaction which leads to the development of indefinite and undetermined new perspectives. Therefore, her idealization of consensus means she has accepted finality. Also, one can see her presumption of finality in her methodological assumptions. I am referring to her commitment to sex equality, which is the basis of her philosophical work (454). Now I am not claiming that equity between sexes is not a positive and worthwhile ideal, especially when one interprets equity as the providing of space and opportunity for actualizing or developing capacities. Instead, I am arguing that her position involves, on some level, a denial of difference between the sexes, despite what she believes (Jaggar 454). To build an equitable framework or discourse, one must begin with difference as opposed to the presupposition of equality. Beginning with equality necessarily involves measuring oneself against already established patriarchal standards, and then merely reaffirming established values through imitation. Because to assert that women are disenfranchised prior to fully apprehending the ways they are different and what this difference entails in terms of undiscovered potential capacities, involves the acceptance of a pre-existing masculine systems of valuation that determine what is worthy of inclusion. For, as Luce

Irigaray argues, currently it is the masculine which is "everything," the only one with the right to define values (80). Hence, the problem of social inequality transcends the question of exclusion/inclusion, since to be included is to merely mimic masculine norms and become a potential man (Irigaray 84). Conversely, I am suggesting that feminists should ground the issue first by apprehending what it means to be a woman and what female potential is outside imposed masculine measuring systems, and on this foundation direct feminism's objectives. The alternative is a new form of discrimination, which involves persuading women to integrate themselves into the very structures responsible for their oppression. As such, many opportunities for inclusion, in fact help proliferate systematic oppression by masquerading as victories for women's rights. This is due to there being no strong conception of women's interests outside of male imposed values, and there would not be such conception as long as feminist discourse begins in equality rather than difference.

Instead of Jaggar, it is Kock that holds the closest position to what I am advocating. Although he discusses the possible fruitfulness of dissensus, underlying his account, there appears to be negative connotation regarding difference. For implicitly, it seems to me, there is the suggestion that we must accept difference as a consequence of the complexity of the world, due to its irreducible "multidimensionality"("Practical" 186). In other words, it seems to me that his position towards irreducibility is one of regretful acceptance. We cannot provide simple imperatives, so we will do the next best thing, which is discuss the situation in order to deliberate in an informed manner. In contrast, I recommend the valorization of difference and the experimental playing with concepts, not for the sake of being informed or finding the "correct" answer, but for the simple joy of expressing one's subjectivity via human interaction. This is akin to Nietzsche's idea of enjoying the enchanting wealth of forms and ideas which life perpetually provides, rather than attempting to deny this richness via

solidifying or desiring to solidify one's attitudes into one consistent framework (Kaufmann 491). However some people, such as Perelman, are motivated to create mechanisms for consensus because of fear born from witnessing the devastations during the Twentieth Century (Crosswhite 135-137). It appears Crosswhite is claiming that Perelman believed violence results from the unavailability of reasonable methods for resolving arguments (135-137). While the horrors of the Twentieth Century are clear, I do not think the solution is to discover an objective methodology for argumentation. Perelman's "Universal Audience" is an interesting, versatile and powerful tool, but its application must proceed after one rejects the standard of finality, rather than using it as just another means of affirming the finality ideal (Crosswhite 135-137). The source of the problem is not a lack of tools for reasoning about moral issues, but an intolerance towards differences that is expressed by attempting to suppress these differences.

Kock furthermore argues that often one cannot determine objectively the strength of any particular proposition ("Practical" 99-101). A statement's persuasive power is entirely relative, especially when it has to do with values (Kock, "Practical" 99-101). For instance, the premise "one should not kill" has different weight for various people. Some people are unequivocally against murder, while others concede it may be necessary in particular circumstances like during self-defence. An argument grounded in this value will vary in persuasive strength, depending on the person being addressed. This intuitively follows from the acceptance of Quine's epistemological model, which would maintain that knowledge is a web of interconnected ideas, where tenets central to one's web of ideas have stronger persuasive power than peripheral ones (216-219). Since no two people have an identical "web of beliefs," this model provides a plausible explanation for discrepancies in perceptions of argument strength. I would like to take this argument even further and point out that not only is the persuasiveness of an argument relative to individuals, it is relative to arguments and

time-positions in arguments. This means that a proposition's affect depends on when it occurs during an argument and its relation to the rest of the argument. The erroneous assumption that one can evaluate a proposition's persuasiveness independently, even if one qualifies by giving an individual's background information, such as her tendencies (if it is even possible to isolate tendencies outside of particular contexts), stems from the false assumption of discreteness. I define discreteness to mean the idea that it is possible to isolate an arguer's position during an argument. Presuming discreteness may cause a participant to feel that engagement in the discourse is meaningless if she can have no apparent impact on the other's views, thus impeding moral argumentation. On the other hand, if a person rejects discreteness she would realize that the interaction affects the other interlocutor, even if it is not as intended, and therefore she would not feel interaction is completely fruitless. The objectivist conflict with the relativists arises over the problem that conceding to relativism means rational persuasion is impossible. However, this is only a problem because of the fear it entails that moral argumentation is pointless, a fear which stems from presuming discreteness. As such, abandoning the discreteness assumption leads to the objectivist-relativist dichotomy becoming irrelevant.

Properly speaking, separating positions from context is impossible because as arguments progress, an interlocutor's position is constantly evolving, mutating and adapting. Very rarely do people leave an argument with the same view on a disputed topic as they had prior to the argument, regardless of whether consensus was reached. This follows from the fact that people's attitudes, understanding and perceptions are never invariant, being constantly affected by mood, environment, actions, words and behaviour. Ergo, people's attitudes, understanding and perceptions towards their beliefs are never static either. Even if the arguers were being eristic, the very act of thinking about their attitudes and then forcing

themselves to explicate these attitudes necessarily changes their views towards the position they hold.

Some of the theorists studied in this article seemed to have assumed discreteness. Sinnott-Armstrong indicates his belief in discreteness when he suggests moral dilemmas can be resolved by reflecting upon one's "way of life" (271-273). For had he not assumed discreteness, he would have realized that a person's desire to maintain consistency with her "way of life" changes in strength as she deliberates, argues and counter-argues with herself. In addition, her justification for desiring consistency will change during this process as she begins accounting for different factors in the situation. Since no two situations are alike, one cannot produce a simple formula for determining the correct course of action because even the relevance of these situations' differences is never static. Hence, without discreteness, one cannot judge a course of action by calling upon pre-established commitments such as one's "way of life". Likewise, one can see how Fogelin and Feldman presume discreteness, when they claim people have foundational beliefs. Because foundational beliefs by definition presuppose people can have context-free positions or attitudes, which they bring readymade into arguments. In general, the discreteness principle is equivalent to the belief fixed principles exist prior to their application in argument situations. Yet what reason do we have to believe in abstract beliefs, as opposed to beliefs that are situation-informed?

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Commentary

SARAH TAURIELLO

In his paper, Argumentation and Morality, Joshua Komarovsky begins by critiquing the objectivist/relativist distinction, and goes on to argue against the relevance of these dichotomous stances in moral debates. In the latter part of the essay, he proceeds to analyze how the two faulty and related assumptions of discreteness and finality impede moral argumentation, further destabilizing the centrality which the objectivist/relativist distinction typically maintains in moral debates.

Though Komarovsky outlines and criticizes various philosophers' respective positions, one particularly compelling criticism and counter-argument is against the philosopher Robert Fogelin, who argues for a relativist understanding of morality in his article "Logic of Deep Disagreements." Fogelin posits an axiomatic system which serves to ground all knowledge, including morality. These fundamental beliefs are to blame for impasses during arguments about morality. However, Komarovsky points out that positing this claim involves circular reasoning, because it would mean that an impasse during an argument is both the cause of and the proof for an axiomatic divergence between interlocutors. Also, Komarovsky makes a nice use of Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" to argue against the idea that there is such a thing as axiomatic beliefs that found knowledge, since all ideas are interconnected within what one can imagine as a web of beliefs. As such, it is not possible to come to a genuine impasse during an argument about morals since one can undermine what seems to be a foundational belief of their interlocutor by undermining the strength of its relation to other beliefs in the web.

While reading this essay, one may have the feeling that Komarovsky's paper would be more coherent if his main argument focused more on debunking what he

refers to as the faulty assumptions of finality and discreteness, using the arguments against the relevance of the objectivist/relativist distinction in support of this main line of argument. As the essay stands now, the bulk of it argues against the relevance of the aforementioned distinction, and as the assumptions Komarovsky wishes to prove faulty are used to support the irrelevance of this distinction, these potentially interesting ideas remain underdeveloped. At times it feels like one is reading an essay that was in fact supposed to be two essays.

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