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GEIST is an ever evolving journal sponsored by San Jose State University’s Philosophy Club, The Symposium. This year is without exception, with a new editor-in-chief, new assistant editors, and a new printer, the journal has changed fundamentally in the corporeal sense.

However, GEIST fundamentally has not changed. It is still dedicated to giving a voice to graduate and undergraduate students, and encouraging philosophical investigation in the world. Philosophy is about questioning fundamental beliefs, questioning common sense and tempering ideas. Common sense is so often followed blindly, without questioning the integrity of these ideas that when the philosopher comes along and places it under scrutiny it can be disorientating to say the least. This is the spirit of philosophy, and the spirit behind this journal.

Aporia represents the essays that have been refereed, by myself and the assistant editors, and the SJSU Symposium includes an essay from assistant editor Scott Stroud. I also encourage people to respond to any of the essays included. They will be printed in next year’s journal, under Reflections.

I would like to thank the assistant editors and the former editor of GEIST for without their assistance, this journal would not be. It is not without a great deal of sacrifice of time, when time is so valuable in the semester, that their services are required the most. I would also like thank the SJSU Philosophy Department, for standing by GEIST and assuring the publication of this journal.

This journal is always a work in progress, and being so, suggestions on how to improve it are always warmly accepted.

Cheers,

-W.K.Y.
Butch, a Vietnam veteran I know, could articulate no answer to the question, "What was Vietnam like?" An expression of sorrow, he had. But even that was vague and insufficient. I reasoned that the horror of recalling to one's mind the experiences of war would at least be a partial reason for Butch's silence. Yet, if he had imparted some of his recollection in the form of words and syntax, would he have imparted anything at all equal to what he had experienced?

Much of what we experience is at a sub-linguistic level. Feelings toward others are seldom expressible in words alone—yet they are often mutually understood implicitly by each subject involved. Ethical and religious inclinations are also modes of existence difficult to communicate or justify with language. Indeed, there are numerous kinds of entities in our experience that do not lend themselves to formulation in sets of propositions. The experience as one's "experience of" is wholly different than the experience as viewed by an external observer. Love as viewed by the physician is a physiological condition of her patient. But for the patient, as he knows it, love is inexpressible.

This is not to say that words are in any way useless. Words, as direct communication, maintain the capacity to carry information from one individual to another for most practical purposes. Facial and other forms of expression carry still more. But how is it possible to communicate the subjective as the subjective? How does one communicate experience except in its subjective form as an experience of something? Certainly this cannot be achieved by cramming the subjective into judgments such as "$x = y$," and then
speaking or writing it to another individual.

Through both philosophy and method, Soren Kierkegaard and Socrates impart a valuable response to the issue of efficacious subject-to-subject communication. They recognize that certain knowledge or “essential truth,” as Kierkegaard calls it, cannot be passed from one individual to another by any direct means of communication. They suggest, however, that forms of indirect communication such as maieutic stimulation of the other individual allow one subject to influence or help another in such a way that the latter attains important knowledge or experience subjectively.

The Problem in Husserlian Terms

Greater explication of the problem of inter-subjective communication is necessary before proceeding to the responses of Kierkegaard and Socrates. Put in Husserlian terms, some aspects of the difficulty of communicating subjective experience become quite vivid. The fact that there are many things that can be effectively communicated objectively is undisputed. But that there are some things that cannot be communicated, in their entirety, through objective propositions is made clear by Husserl’s phenomenological study. For Husserl, the very most fundamental parts of consciousness are pre-predicative. They are the “objects-about-which” that give content to the simplest judgments we make. These parts of experience are intuited in immediacy—not even yet as objects. No syntax accompanies these intuitions, and therefore no real direct communication of them is possible.

The theory of pre-predicative experience, of precisely that which gives in advance the most original substrates in objective self-evidence, is the proper first element of the phenomenological theory of judgment. The investigation must begin with the pre-predicative consciousness of experience
and, going on from there, pursue development of self-evidences at higher levels (Husserl 27).

We begin at the "pre-predicative consciousness of experience," because such experience is the most fundamental level of consciousness that still contains meaning. Pre-predicative experiences give us meaning before syntax; they might even be said to be pre-predicative knowledge. Thus our problem (which does not seem to be where Husserl intended to lead us): How does one communicate the pre-predicative parts of experience? In a word, how does one communicate redness as experienced without making the recipient of communication the subject of experience?

We normally attempt to communicate the incommutable through signs. We scratch lines on a page, call them words, and expect the reader to know exactly what we mean. Or we make noises and call it speech—speech that is meant to signify intricate subjective feelings and experiences. But signs are empty. They are insufficient to convey the meaning of that which they mean, without the hearer or reader having some sort of subjective experience to fill the sign. Take love, for instance. Although we could define it as this or that, the word "love" is a filled intention only when experienced subjectively. Our reasons for acting ethically—conscience, for example—also evade objective expression. These intentions are empty without something more than a proposition like, "x = y Ü z."

Such emptiness in a sign for the observer who lacks experience is due to the fact that signs can function in the absence of that which they signify—a word functions without the substrate's presence. In making the distinction between signifier and signified, Husserl seems to have hoped to make possible a bridge between the two, or at least a founding of sign in one's experience of the signified. John Caputo explains this point:

[This] worried Edmund Husserl, who
wanted to return the intention to its fulfillment, to fill the sign with the intuitive presence of the signified, in order to avoid the “crisis” precipitated by the absence of intuition (197).

But just as intuition is an experience of the object had by an individual person, bringing intuition back into the picture makes a meaningful sign nothing less than a sign of one’s own subjective experiences.

In his references to the pre-predicative, Husserl seems only to be speaking of our perceptions of simple things like color (“redness,” for example). But unless his “substrates” include the more subjective categories, such as emotions, our problem of inter-subjective communication does not lie exclusively in Husserl’s phenomenology. Anything that is impossible to communicate linguistically adds to the problem. Now, one might reasonably object that the seeming impossibility of communicating certain subjective things to another person is not a problem at all because communication of such things is unwanted—secrets not kept are not secrets. Yet a look at the different types of the problem may lead such an objector to think twice. First, the practical matters of living with other subjects demand inter-subjective communication of some sort. Having common subjective experiences seems to be a precondition for understanding another individual. Contact with individuals that lack life experiences similar to ours makes intolerance an easy temptation.

On the other hand, philosophical matters are influenced by our inability to communicate subjective experience. Particularly in the ethical and religious areas of philosophy, the individual experiences feelings or inclinations as to what seems right. Often, another thing just feels less ethical. Sometimes it seems that one’s objective ethical reasoning is really only an ad hoc attempt to justify an ethics that is, in truth, based only on subjective inclina-
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tions. Yet how can we explain such inclinations to another in justification of our position without somehow helping her step into our shoes? Even the process of contemplating a math problem and then coming to a conclusion on one’s own leaves the student with a more “filled intention” of the meaning and significance of the conclusion than another student who just sees the answer at the back of the book. Right answers might work, but without tying the answer to some experience of inner reasoning, another false conclusion might just as easily replace it.

Introduction to Indirect Communication

If direct communication entails objective representation of what is meant, and the problem with direct communication between individuals through language or other means lies in the fact that it is objective, then the answer (if there is one) must be indirect communication. But such indirect communication is not necessarily to be found in non-linguistic communication like gestures or facial expressions. Even in these, some direct proposition such as, “I am sad,” is often communicated implicitly. In indirect communication, the medium of communication used (whether words or other forms) is not so important as what the recipient of communication is subjectively related to. For indirect communication to occur, the other person must be the subject having the experience or finding the knowledge—not the student simply hearing the authoritative “x = y” conclusions of the teacher.

With indirect communication, the direct relationship between initiator and recipient, author and reader, speaker and listener, is somehow severed. The two individuals are interposed. The recipient’s relationship rests with an intermediary, not with the initiator. When I want my wife to see the sunset, I point toward it and instigate a relationship of experience between her and the sunset. The sunset is the intermediary that is the source of both her and my experience. If I read Catcher In the Rye and receive a
more profound understanding of purity, I place the other person in a relationship with the book as reader to communicate what I had subjectively experienced. In some cases, through posing hypothetical possibilities, I might place the other person in a relationship with his own mind—he reasons and experiences the process of an internal dialectic to the end that his apprehension of the conclusion is often filled, as Husserl would say, in a way that is similar to mine. I have communicated subjectivity.

The obvious dilemma that always follows this sort of indirect communication is the lack of guarantee that the other's experience of the intermediary is exactly like one's own. Indeed, that it would be exactly the same is impossible because, as a subject, the other person is part of the equation of experience. She is a variable. But a picture is still worth a thousand words. In the end, allowing the other to personally experience what one experiences must be more effective than objective communication of the subjective knowledge. While the indirect process ideally entails a relationship only between the other person and the object of experience, a direct communication of the object would include the object, the communicator, the sign, and the other.

**Answers in Kierkegaard**

Kierkegaard attempts a form of indirect communication that, in many respects, is after the manner of maieutic stimulation. His own ideas on indirect communication seem particularly similar to what one of his pseudonyms, Johannes Climacus, sets forth in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Climacus believes that for the existing human, subjectivity is the truth, and cannot be communicated except through indirect means. Objective propositions and judgments yield no truth about the individual’s existence as a subject. Therefore, for Climacus, there is an inverse relationship between objective certainty and importance because existence and decisions
in existence are paramount.

Climacus asks, "Now, then, which of the ways is the way of truth for the existing spirit?" (193). And then he responds:

The way to be commended is naturally the one that especially emphasizes what it means to exist. [But the] way of objective reflection turns the subjective individual into something accidental and thereby turns existence into an indifferent, vanishing something (193). Objectivity throws existence out of the picture. For Climacus, when it comes to questions of ethics, religion and existence, there is no language that can serve to objectively mediate two individuals, as there is with mathematics or logic. Climacus further explains that existential truth or knowledge about how to exist is the only essential truth:

Therefore, only ethical and ethical-religious knowing is essential knowing. But all ethical and all ethical-religious knowing is essentially related to the existence of the knower (198, my emphasis).

How am I to live? What decisions should I make? Whom or what should I come into a relationship with? In a word, how should I exist? These are the "essential" questions that precede all others for Climacus, and the one thing common to each is the word, "I."

To describe one aspect of indirect communication, Climacus uses the term, "double-reflection." In one sense, double-reflection refers to the reflection made by each of the two subjects involved in any communication. In the first reflection, the communicator inwardly reflects and appropriates the existential knowledge—he makes it part of his existence. In the second reflection, the recipient of the communication experiences the same subjective process as he too appropriates the knowledge through his existence. As Climacus puts it, "The reflection of inwardness is the subjective thinker's double-reflection" (73). In another sense, however, double-reflection seems to refer to the
outward nature of the word or sign that is communicated, and the inward action of appropriation on the part of the recipient. The word is first communicated, and thus in the first reflection the recipient has, as Husserl would say, an intention of the sign alone. But in the second reflection, knowledge is experienced or appropriated such that the sign is filled.

When a thought has gained its proper expression in a word, which is attained through the first reflection, there comes the second reflection, which bears upon the intrinsic relation of the communication to the communicator and renders the existing communicator’s own relation to the idea (76).

Climacus says that to communicate in such a manner as to allow double-reflection and existential appropriation of essential knowledge in the recipient requires self-control and a minimum of “meddling busyness” on the part of the communicator. This sort of indirect communication is a “freeing” of the other:

Just as the subjective existing thinker has set himself free by the duplexity [of thought-existence], so the secret of communication specifically hinges on setting the other free, and for that very reason he must not communicate himself directly (74).

Indeed, if essential truth is truly essential, and the only way to help another obtain such truth is by indirect means, then the act of making the other person free by choosing to use indirect communication (and not direct communication) is truly a form of giving. Kierkegaard further speaks of this point in Works of Love:

And in love to help someone [...] to become himself, free, independent, his own master, to help him stand alone—that is the greatest beneficence [...] if, note well, the one who
loves also knows how to make himself unnoticed so that the person helped does not become dependent on him. [...] The greatest beneficence, [which is] to help the other stand alone, cannot be done directly (Works 274).

Indirect communication is this giving without being there. The communicator assists, and yet hides herself.

Now we would surely expect an advocate of indirect communication to communicate his point indirectly. At the end of the book, Climacus makes a surprising statement:

What I write contains the notice that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only an end but has a revocation to boot (619, my emphasis).

Why would Climacus go through the trouble to write more than six hundred pages of prose containing many very difficult and ingenious ideas only to revoke the whole book? Such contradiction of word and action leads one to believe there is something more to this than just a flippant change of mind. Climacus makes this apparent when, referring to “the most pleasant of all readers,” he says:

He can understand that the understanding is a revocation—the understanding with him as the sole reader is indeed the revocation of the book. He can understand that to write a book and to revoke it is not the same as refraining from writing it...(my emphasis, 621).

If he had no reason for his adding a revocation to his writing other than just to take back what he said, then he would have never published the book after the revocation. Furthermore, when Climacus says, “the understanding with him as the sole reader is indeed the revocation of the book,” it becomes clear that his revocation has something to do with the reader’s individuality—with the reader’s subjective
experience of the book.

Kierkegaard makes a similarly unexpected and ironic move when, at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he admits that all of his works that were published under pseudonymous names were actually written by him—that the pseudonymous authors (or "imaginary constructions," as he calls them) are in fact fictitious creations. However, he proceeds to say, "...in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me" (626). Indeed, this seems to be Kierkegaard’s own very blatant personal revocation of all his pseudonymous works—or at least of his relation to them. He confirms,

The imaginary construction is the conscious, teasing revocation of the communication, which is always of importance to an existing person who writes for existing persons, lest the relation be changed to that of a rote reciter who writes for rote reciters (263-264, my emphasis).

We are left to wonder what it is about Kierkegaard and Climacus’ works that makes the authors revoke them. After a hasty analysis, one might conclude that the authors disagree with what they have said; that in writing the books, they have come to understand that their ideas were false. But, as previously mentioned, this possibility is refuted by the fact that Kierkegaard published the works. Such a conclusion can be made only if we are talking about books as direct communication. But indirect communication is a whole different animal. Climacus writes:

Indirect communication makes communicating an art in a sense different from what one ordinarily assumes it to be in supposing that the communicator has to present the communication to a knower, so that he can judge it, or to a nonknower, so that he can acquire something to know (277).

Because a person cannot directly give subjective
knowledge or existential truth to another individual, that individual must find or experience these on her own. Indeed, if another person did want to help in the process, he would have to do it in some indirect way, so as to allow the individual the genuine responsibility of experiencing and finding the truth subjectively.

It also became clear to me that if I wanted to communicate anything about this [what it means to exist and what inwardness is], the main point must be that my presentation would be made in an indirect form. That is, if inwardness is truth, [objective] results are nothing but junk with which we should not bother one another, and wanting to communicate results is an unnatural association of one person with another [...] (242).

Essential truths cannot really be communicated—only obtained subjectively. However, indirect communication can be a means of helping the individual apprehend those essential truths for herself. But books traditionally are direct communication. They communicate a set of propositions directly from the author to the reader. Therefore, unless the author, the book, or the relation between the two is removed, any book can be said to contain direct communication.

As mentioned above, Climacus revokes his writings explicitly. Kierkegaard does so as well by abolishing any direct relation between himself and the words written by his pseudonymous authors. If they did not work in this way, they could not achieve indirect communication, and would thus be in the precarious position of having one's method contradict one's philosophy. Jacques Derrida refers to Kierkegaard as "Kierkegaard-de Silentio" (Derrida 58). He further explains this peculiar name: "[The] pseudonym keeps silent, it expresses the silence that is kept. Like all pseudonyms, it seems destined to keep secret the real name as patronym, that is, the name of the father of the work" (58). In their revocations, Climacus and Kierkegaard dissolve the relation between the author and
the book, and thereby force the reader \textit{alone} to establish his own subjective relationship with the book and its contents. The heterogeneity [of authorship] must definitely be maintained, that here is an author, that objectively it is not a cause but that it is a cause for which \textit{an individual has stood alone, suffered, etc.} (Entries 145, my emphasis).

Thus, by maintaining heterogeneity in authorship, the author is “not a cause” of certain propositions being accepted by the reader—rather, he is the cause of the reader standing alone and contemplating the contents of the book in such a way that he might find some essential truth subjectively. He \textit{betrays} the reader into a relationship with the truth such that it becomes the reader’s \textit{own} truth.

Therefore, through revocation and pseudonymous evasion, Climacus and Kierkegaard allow the reader space to come to her own conclusions and have her own experiences, which will make the apprehension of essential truth possible. Climacus says that the “imaginary construction” of existential possibilities or pseudonymous authors, “establishes a chasmic gap between the reader and the author and fixes the separation of inwardness between them, so that a direct understanding is made impossible” (263).

Furthermore:

\begin{quote}
With imaginary construction [...] If what is said is earnestness to the writer, he keeps the earnestness essentially to himself. If the recipient interprets it as earnestness, he does it essentially by himself... The \textit{being-in-between} of the imaginary construction encourages the inwardness of the two \textit{away from each other in inwardness} (264).
\end{quote}

Upon realizing that there is no author that takes credit for what is said in the book, the reader is forced away from making statements that begin with, “The author argues that \textit{x},” and forced into making statements (if she makes any at
all) that begin with, “I believe that X.”

This is also why Kierkegaard asks us to cite the respective pseudonymous authors instead of him as we refer back to his works. Instead of appealing to him, we are forced to appeal to an “imaginary construction,” or an existential possibility. It is fallacious enough to base one’s argument on an appeal to authority, but to appeal to an imaginary authority seals one’s coffin. Kierkegaard also says he must be called the “author’s author” (Entries 110). Instead of quoting a set of propositions made by Kierkegaard, we must relate ourselves subjectively to the nature and words of an imaginary author.

For Climacus, the supreme example of an effective indirect communicator is God. Objectively, God seems both as silent and absent as any being can be.

No anonymous author can more slyly hide himself, and no maieutic can more carefully recede from a direct relation than God can...and only when the single individual turns inward into himself (consequently only in the inwardness of self activity) does he become aware and capable of seeing God... And why is God illusive? Precisely because he is truth and in being illusive seeks to keep a person from untruth (243-244).

Derrida notes this idea in his discussion of Kierkegaard in The Gift of Death. He quotes Paul’s writings in Philippians 2:12, “...but more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (my emphasis). And as Derrida further explains:

The disciples are asked to work towards their salvation not in the presence (parousia) but in the absence (apousia) of the master: without either seeing or knowing, without hearing the law or the reasons for the law. Without knowing from whence the thing comes and what awaits us, we are given over to absolute solitude. No one can speak for us; we must take it upon ourselves, each of
us must take it upon himself...(56-57, my emphasis).

And as Kierkegaard affirms of indirect communication, only by hiding ourselves do we truly help the other take the acquisition of essential knowledge "upon himself."

By the time the reader is done with the book, Kierkegaard and Climacus have done the damage intended. The reader has read the book, experienced it, and found the essential truth that he will. Taking out the author strips the reader of what he may have objectively concluded (for there is no authority to whom he may now appeal) and leaves him only with those beliefs and existential relations that are supported in subjectivity alone. The act of revoking their words is essential to the method of Climacus's and Kierkegaard's works in their support of subjectivity—an essential component to forcing the reader back on himself in inwardness.

Credit to Socrates

No discussion on maieutic stimulation would be appropriate without giving some (or perhaps all) of the credit to Socrates. In admiration of Socrates, Kierkegaard writes:

This noble rogue had understood in the profound sense that the highest one human being can do for another is to make him free, help him stand by himself—and he had also understood himself in understanding this, that is, he had understood that if this is to be done the helper must be able to make himself anonymous, must magnanimously will to annihilate himself (Works 276, my emphasis).

While Kierkegaard presents the recipient with a pseudonymous work, Socrates presents the interlocutor with incessant questions; never making a positive statement or judgment. Socrates initiates subjective reflection in every
In the *Theaetetus*, we find the term “maieutic” particularly applicable as Socrates compares himself to a “midwife” who never gives birth to his own idea, but often helps someone else in the process. In the dialogue, Theaetetus is suffering from the mental pains of coming close to producing a new idea, but cannot quite “give birth” to it. Describing his art, Socrates tells Theaetetus:

Now my art of midwifery is just like theirs in most respects. The difference is that I attend men and not women, and that I watch over the labor of their souls, not of their bodies. And the most important thing about my art is the ability to apply all possible tests to the offspring, to determine whether the young mind is being delivered of a phantom, that is, an error, or a fertile truth (150 b-c).

Socrates allows for the communication of essential truth by standing aside, while the other comes to conclusions on her own. He keeps himself from being misunderstood as the source of knowledge by putting his interlocutor in a relationship with herself— with her own contemplation.

Now we are bound to ask how knowledge can come from within a person who originally lacked the knowledge obtained. Socrates addresses this question in another example of his maieutic method in the *Meno*. He posits that knowledge might come from the immortal soul’s recollection of previous lives.14

So it is in no way surprising that [the soul] can recollect things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of human nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—[from] discovering everything else for himself [...] (81 c-d).
In order to show that this is the case, he uses maieutic stimulation on an uneducated slave boy in order to teach him how to find the length of a side of a square twice the size of a square for which the side length is known. Without telling the boy anything about geometry, Socrates proceeds by means of questioning to help the boy produce right answers. Even though he is using spoken words (as Kierkegaard used the written word), Socrates communicates indirectly because he gives the boy no propositions as to the facts of the matter. He allows the boy room to come to an understanding of the geometry problem and its conclusion on his own, through subjective processes. To be sure, it is clear by this example that the medium of communication (whether speech, books, gestures or other methods) is not what makes communication direct or indirect. The difference lies in the relationships—that the recipient is put in an experiential relationship with something, rather than being handed propositions in some form.

Whether the source of knowledge produced subjectively is truly the immortal soul, as Socrates says, makes no difference to our discussion. Indeed, there may be some other source. The important point in Socrates' position is that he realizes that a method that allows subjective activity—as opposed to objective reception of signs from the teacher in the form of judgments—permits the acquisition of some forms of knowledge that one otherwise could not obtain. To be sure, if one did obtain ethical ideas (or other knowledge that is in some way based on subjective experience) from another in the form of a proposition, then the recipient would not have really obtained that knowledge. For Socrates, as with Kierkegaard, some inner activity or experience is necessary on the part of the subject for the knowledge to really mean anything to that subject. To again use Husserlian terminology, an intention of a sign or judgment cannot be filled except by the subject experiencing the contents in some way—whether through perception, inner contemplation, or another experience. Socrates'
Conclusion

The question of the possibility of inter-subjective communication is indeed more difficult than we have seen it here. And Kierkegaard and Socrates in no way eliminate the problem. Yet in presenting us with maieutic stimulation and the absence of an authoritative author, these philosophers do assist in our understanding of possible methods that allow for such communication. As life itself suggests, the lack of communication of subjective experience only leads to intolerance and lack of understanding between people. While we would not wish to actually experience Vietnam so as to understand Butch, we might find something within our own life experiences that "fills our intention" of what war is. In the philosophical world as well, certain aspects of our existence cause us to question deeply whether "world-historical" or positivistic views of human life are broad enough in their categories to include all of reality—subjective as well as objective. Perhaps our leaning toward such narrow accounts of human existence is due primarily to the fact that subjective experience is so difficult to communicate, while objective ideas lend themselves easily to syntactic formulation. Though the objective route leads to extensive knowledge in some form, Kierkegaard's critique reminds us that such knowledge may not be the most essential knowledge. By presenting possible forms of indirect communication, Kierkegaard and Socrates give us some answers as to methods that communicate subjective experience—methods that communicate the incommunicable.

Notes

1 This word has its origin in the Greek word for midwifery. It means to elicit new ideas from another person through a dialogue or other form of communication that allows the person to come to conclusions through subjective, or at
least personal, processes.

2 Exactly what Husserl says and the terms he uses sometimes vary from one of his books to the next. The Husserlian terminology and ideas here are primarily from the Churchill translation of *Experience and Judgment*, although they may be found elsewhere.

3 Husserl is used here for practical purposes of elucidating the difficulty of some dimensions of inter-subjective communication. The intent is not to correlate Husserl’s way of handling the problem (if he does) with that of either Kierkegaard or Socrates. To be sure, in many ways two philosophers could not be more dissimilar than are Husserl and Kierkegaard (or Husserl and Socrates).

4 When Husserl uses the term “intuition,” he seems to mean what we more commonly call “perception.” When he uses the term, “intention,” he seems to mean what we more commonly call “conception.” The complex and difficult ideas that Husserl packs in to these two words are by no means sufficiently embodied in the suggested synonyms. The synonyms are simply to assist those who have never read Husserl.

5 The concept of “filled” and “empty” intentions is a Husserlian manner of speech that refers to the depth of real experience one has with a certain intention. For example, one might intend or conceive the word, “red.” But if one has no prior personal experience or intuition of redness, then the word will have little meaning—it will be empty.

6 Kierkegaard’s own position is difficult to place with precision because not only does he write with pseudonymous names, he asks us not to cite the pseudonymous works as his. Therefore, I will try to refer to Kierkegaard when an idea or method seems particularly his, and the pseudonymous author when citing specific works.

7 See Evans. For this reason, this paper will focus on the Postscript.

8 This is different than saying truth is subjective. Although some have taken Kierkegaard to mean that truth is subjec-
Most citations of Kierkegaard or Climacus are from the first of the two volumes of the Hong translation of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. Citations with only a page number are from volume 1. Volume 2 is the source where cited as “Entries.”

This name is a reference to another of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, Johannes-de Silentio.

Climacus asks us not to appeal to his writings at all (see Postscript 618). I recognize the irony in citing a book that specifically states, “…let no one bother to appeal to [the book].” But this essay is, in some respects, in the form of direct communication, and therefore should be expected to appeal to the relevant sources—even if they plead for us not to.

The old problem of citing Socrates and his method remains—is it really Socrates, or just Plato’s words in Socrates’ mouth? For example, Myles Burnyeat argues persuasively that the maieutic method is Platonic and not Socratic. While I realize that Plato’s ideas are very much involved in what is used here (especially in the doctrine of recollection), I will leave the concern of distinguishing the two philosophers up to the Platonic scholars and refer to everything cited as Socrates for the sake of simplicity. Also, all works of Plato are cited with the traditional Stephanus page numbers.

Indeed we could say that Plato undergoes the same “anonymous” indirect communication as Kierkegaard in that he puts his words in another’s (Socrates’) mouth. But for this paper, I am content to focus on Socrates alone.

The *Meno* is particularly troublesome (with respect to the problem mentioned in note 12) because it seems to be a transition dialogue between the earlier and later Platonic dialogues that lean toward Socratic and Platonic thought, respectively. Whether this is what Socrates would have really said is put into question by the fact that Socrates,
until this point, had rarely put forth his ideas in the form of a direct proposition as is made here regarding the doctrine of recollection.

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Finding the Philosopher in Plato

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Much has been written on the questions of "being" and "non-being" found in Plato's *Sophist* and close analysis of the dialogue reveals an investigation into the deep structure of language. At the same time, a contextual surface reading of the *Sophist* reveals issues that are key to Plato's ethical theory and what remains of the Theory of Forms. In addition to the *Republic*, one may consider the *Sophist* as an indirect commentary on the true nature of the philosopher. In contrast with the "darkness of not-being," where sophists takes refuge, in the *Sophist* one finds the philosopher at home, in the light of reality.

A Stranger in our Midst

The Eleatic stranger that Theodorus introduces to Socrates as "devoted to philosophy" remains a stranger to readers of the dialogue and to history. He agrees to engage in dialogue with Theaetetus, whom readers recognize from the dialogue of that name. Because Theaetetus' role is that of foil, the stranger occupies the position of primary interlocutor in the *Sophist*. Just as the views of the Athenian in the *Laws* are Platonic, we may attribute the stranger's views in the *Sophist* to Plato. It is worthy to note why Plato would not choose to employ Socrates in his usual function.

First, it would be a clear conflict of interest to portray Socrates, the presumed philosopher, as taking part in a dialogue aimed at distinguishing his type from that of the sophists and statesmen. Rather than put Socrates on the soapbox, Plato introduces a stranger who is known as neither philosopher nor sophist. This choice can be seen as the Platonic literary equivalent to the principle of independent counsel. Though Plato's disapproval shows through in
the end, he chooses not to employ his philosopher as a sermonizer. Secondly, though it is presumed that Socrates would be quick to distinguish his motivations from those of the sophists, Plato here isolates his own unique understanding of the subject at hand. One finds surprisingly naïve, charitable banter from Socrates on this subject in earlier dialogues. In fact, at Cratylus 429d, Socrates claims not to welcome the challenge of a discourse on so subtle a topic as not-being.

High Honors

The Eleatic stranger proceeds, with Theaetetus, on a process of bifurcation in order to identify correctly the nature of the sophist. In the sophist’s sixth appearance in the dialogue, the Eleatic stranger agrees to describe him as a “purifier of the soul from conceits that block the way to understanding.” This appearance, according to the stranger, was “open to doubt” as discussed in the following passage:

STRANGER: For all these reasons, Theaetetus, we must admit that refutation is the greatest and chiefest of purifications, and he who has not been refuted, though he be the Great King himself, is in an awful state of impurity; he is uninstructed and deformed in those things in which he who would be truly blessed ought to be fairest and purest.

THEAETETUS: Very True.

STRANGER: Well, what name shall we give to the practitioners of this art? For my part I shrink from calling them Sophists.

THEAETETUS: Why so?
GEIST

STRANGER: For fear of ascribing to them too high a function. 8

There were those that practiced this art of purification, but they were not the sophists. To say that the sophists practiced this art would be to ascribe to the sophists too high an honor.

A.E. Taylor disagrees with this reading of 231a and instead prefers to see an expression of irony in a reversal of the pronoun’s referent where we read “for fear of ascribing to them too high a function.” 9 Instead, says Taylor, the stranger means not to ascribe to those who practice this art of purification the honorable name of sophist. I must agree with Lewis Campbell’s interpretation of this passage that “the sophist seems scarce worthy of so high a dignity.” 10 As Taylor notes, it is clear that the stranger’s tentative agreement to call the purifiers of the soul “sophists” is simply for the sake of argument. That this characterization is tentative remains clear at 231e where the stranger reminds Theaetetus of its doubtful status.

Again, the stranger hesitates to assign a high honor to the sophists where none is in fact warranted. What does warrant the honor, though, is that art of refutation as a path toward true knowledge. The art described at 230b-d is exactly that art practiced by Socrates, Plato’s true philosopher. “The best and wisest state of mind” is that which encourages purification through refutation. 11

Accidental Clarity

To “discern” or “discriminate” in the process of purification, it is necessary to recognize whether kinds may be divided or blended and in which way this may be accomplished. 12 Again in the Sophist, as in the Theaetetus, Plato introduces a metaphor of letters of the alphabet as constituent parts of a whole word or syllable. The metaphor in this case stands to illustrate that a certain art, or science, is necessary to discourse just as rules of grammar apply to the
division and blending of letters in the alphabet. Inquiry into the "science needed as a guide on the voyage of discourse" happens, as if by accident, upon the science of the philosopher. It is only the lover of wisdom and master of dialectic who:

"...discerns clearly one form everywhere extended throughout many, where each one lies apart, and many forms, different from one another, embraced from without by one form, and again one form connected in a unity through many wholes, and many forms, entirely marked off apart. That means knowing how to distinguish, kind by kind, in what ways the several kinds can or cannot combine."

Thus we have in a nutshell what the Eleatic stranger will subsequently prove; notably, that individual things stand in relation to one another in terms of difference, and in relation to a unity in terms of identity with one form. It is the skill of the philosopher to recognize such combinations of difference and identity. As I show below, the principle of difference is central to the refutation of the relativity that plagued the Sophist's vocation.

Relative Obscurity

A philosophy of relative values constituted the underpinnings of the sophists' role in Athens where, as the stranger asserts, "there is a demand" for their services. As Socrates asserts in the *Meno*, there must clearly be a person to whom a student might go to prepare for practical democratic matters such as governing, management, or entertaining properly. At this time in Athens, such a need was properly fulfilled by those Sophists offering instruction in various fields including but not limited to the arts of rhetoric and disputation. The philosophical inquiry of Plato's Academy questioned neither the demand for nor the
practicality of such instruction. Philosophy questions its legitimacy and its morality. In a time where, given the correct instruction, any man could rise to a position of power, Plato recognized the need to address not just skills, but specific values.\textsuperscript{17}

It is in this context that the question of not-being, a question central to Plato's \textit{Sophist}, arises. If not-being as relativity does not blend with thinking and discourse, then everything said must be true.\textsuperscript{18} This is the dark, absolute relativity in which the sophist takes refuge. If, on the other hand, not-being is shown to exist as an expression of relative difference with respect to the true nature of reality, then philosophical discourse is possible through the illumination of that nature.

From the substantial digression at 236d-264b we gather that the occurrence of non-being represents difference in mode of being. Instead of expressing a negative, the Eleatic stranger has shown that non-being expresses positive difference. As the stranger says at 257d, we may look at this in terms of the beautiful. "The existence of the not-beautiful is constituted by its being marked off from a single definite kind among existing things and again set in contrast with something that exists."\textsuperscript{19} For example, the most beautiful of pots can be said "not beautiful" in comparison with a beautiful maiden. Likewise, the most beautiful of earthly maidens, then, is said "not beautiful" in comparison with a god.\textsuperscript{20} This juxtaposition of that which has "definite kind among existing things" and those multiple existing things might go on \textit{ad infinitum}, where not-being in each case is shown to be relative to that which is fixed. In other words, the existence of non-being is relative. When speaking of beauty, it is imperative to recognize the clarification made in the \textit{Sophist}. Beauty is one and definite, whereas not-beauty is always relative in that it differs from beauty. But speaking this way does not imply that falsity does not exist, as a sophist might suggest.\textsuperscript{21} The \textit{Sophist} clarifies the relativity of the existence
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of not-being while affirming the existence of falsity in speech and thought.

As an early representation of work in the philosophy of language, the *Sophist* investigates the use of attributes (both adjectives and participles) and their negations. It shows how their accepted use in language confuses the truth-value of statements with the subjective relativity expressed by Protagoras' theory, *homo mensura*. If “man is the measure of all things,” then man’s relative judgements exclude the possibility of an outside standard. What *is* can only be spoken of in relation to another thing that also *is*; that is, subject to judgement. To speak of “not being” is to speak nonsense, for that which an individual chooses to predicate of a thing is no more or less valid than someone else’s predication. As the characteristic of difference combined with other absolute forms, though, this relativity is not the state of reality, but only a character of certain propositions. Whereas before, differences could only be spoken of from a subjective perspective in terms of those things that *are*, the *Sophist* affirms how we can speak of relativity without living in its darkness.

The sophist, in the end, is one concerned with “the art of contradiction making, descended from an insincere kind of conceited mimicry, of the semblance-making breed, derived from image making, distinguished as a portion, not divine, but human, of production, that presents a shadow play of words…” If one were to follow this bifurcation in an attempt to describe how the philosopher’s art is wholly different from that of the sophists, we might say the philosopher is concerned with the art of discernment, descended from a sincere kind of knowledge by acquaintance, derived from the making of originals, distinguished as a portion, not human, but divine, of production, that presents genuine discourse. This conclusion could have easily been inferred by discernment through bifurcation. What the *Sophist* clarifies is the nature of not-being and its relative
existence. Just as to speak of not-being was, for some, to speak nonsense, to speak of absolute relativity for Plato is likewise to speak nonsense. The philosopher, then, is also hard to find, but he hides not in the darkness of relative obscurity. He dwells instead in the clear light where difference is not confused with nonexistence.

1 *Sophist*, 254a-b. Unless otherwise indicated, citations from the *Sophist* are the F.M. Cornford translation in Hamilton and Cairns, ed.

2 *Sophist*, 216a4


4 Similarly, in the *Symposium*, there are practical reasons why it is best that Diotima, rather than Socrates, serves as a mouthpiece. See David Halperin, “Why Diotima is a Woman,” *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays of Greek Love*, NY: Routledge Press, 1990

5 Most notably *Meno* 91-94, *Apology* 20a, and *Cratylus* 429d

6 *Sophist*, 231e4

7 ibid.

8 Italics mine, *Sophist*, 230d5-231a2. Because Cornford omits the long passage from 218d-230e, the first lines of both the stranger and Theatetus are from the Jowett translation

9 Taylor, pg. 380-1, on Sophist 231a 3

10 Campbell’s interpretation mentioned as a footnote to Taylor’s argument on pgs. 380-1. According to Taylor, Campbell’s interpretation is grammatically impossible. I fail to see how this is so, given that the ἀντώνις of 231a 3 (Μῆ μεξόν ἀντώνις προσπιτωμεν γέρας) clearly refers to the σοφιστας of 231a1 (σοφιστας, though first declension, is masculine). (editors note: I had a tough time including the greek letters, and I know I do not have all the accents in the right place. If there is a misspelling, it is probably my
fault, and not the authors.)

11 Sophist, 230d. This art outlined by the sophist is clearly modeled after those of Socratic elenctics (see Meno 80a-d) and midwifery (see Theaetetus 150b-151d).

12 The skill of discernment is noted both as involved in purification at 226d and as being part of the mastery of dialectic at 253d

13 Sophist 253b

14 Sophist 253d

15 Sophist 233b

16 Meno 91a-b


18 Sophist 260c

19 Sophist 257e 3

20 see Greater Hippias 289a-e

21 Sophist 260d

22 Sophist, 268c
Necessary Truth and the Existence of Physical Objects

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I. Introduction
Since at least the time of Descartes, one of the most important issues facing Western philosophers has been the relationship between the internal world of individual human consciousness and the external world of physical objects. Some thinkers, most notably Berkeley and Hegel, sought to resolve the issue by altogether denying the existence of an objective world beyond sense perception. Others, such as WV Quine, have gone to the opposite extreme by denying the existence of consciousness, mental substances, or anything else which could be said to exist apart from the physical world. All of these views share in common the idea that some kind of polarity allegedly exists between the external and the internal, such that one is inexorably occasioned by, or derived from, the other.

I have argued elsewhere that an examination of the axioms of formal logic, rather than of the nature or structure of consciousness, may provide a clue as to the ontological status of physical objects. In what follows, I hope to draw upon and improve this idea in an effort to provide a deductive proof for the existence of physical objects apart from cognition. In so doing, my chief goal is to establish a prima facie distinction between the existence of physical objects and the cognitive realization of those objects as such. I shall not attempt to deal with broader issues pertaining to the ontological status of consciousness, cognition, and the like.

II. Strong Idealism Defined
Unlike their ancient and medieval forebears, the philosophers of the Enlightenment were especially fascinated by the vagaries of sense perception. By shifting the focus of philosophy from reason to perceived experience, Locke,
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Berkeley, Hume, and their ilk radically challenged the longstanding Aristotelian correspondence theory of knowledge and its accompanying metaphysical doctrines. More important, they called into question the very intelligibility of a "real world" which can be said to exist independently of knowing, experiencing subjects. In an orderly, piecemeal succession, the empiricists divested epistemology of its old tokens, starting with Locke's doubting of substantial qualities and ending with Hume's rejection of substance and mind.

Although Hume is not an idealist in the strict sense, he nonetheless provides a very good example of the kind of thinking I wish to criticize in this paper. Hume begins his Treatise of Human Nature with a detailed consideration of the origin of ideas. All perceptions, he says, can be divided into ideas and impressions. The latter are those perceptions which "enter with most force and violence," including physical sensations, desires, emotions, et cetera.4 The former, in contrast, are "faint images" of impressions which emerge in the course of thinking and discourse. According to Hume, all thoughts and ideas ultimately come from impressions. We could not have ideas for things for which we have no impressions whatsoever.5

All ideas of the mind seem to be interconnected by some universal set of principles.6 The first of these, which Hume terms resemblance, refers to the way in which particular ideas or impressions are said to be similar to other ideas or impressions. The second, contiguity, refers to the way in which particular ideas or impressions are ordered in time and space. The third, cause and effect, refers to the way in which certain ideas or impressions cause or bring about other ideas or impressions. The first two principles pertain to relations between ideas and can be divided into qualities such as identity, quality, et cetera.7 Cause and effect, in contrast, pertains to all contingent matters of fact about the world.8

Cause and effect, again, refers to relationships in which
particular ideas or impressions seem to cause or occasion other ideas or impressions. Hume argues that empirical observation, rather than a priori reasoning, leads us to posit cause and effect: "Tho' the mind in its reasonings from causes or effects carries its view beyond those objects, which it sees or remembers, it must never lose sight of them entirely, nor reason merely upon its own ideas..." The observation of causal relationships between impressions forms the basis of human experience as well as all reasoning about matters of fact.

Given that resemblance, contiguity, and causation are the only ties that unite our ideas together in consciousness, how are we to discern between true beliefs about matters of fact and fictitious beliefs? In the first place, Hume says, a belief is not the same thing as a simple idea. Rather, belief is "a particular manner of forming an idea" which convinces the mind of some one thing's existence. The idea, moreover, is always formed according to relational and/or causal relationships between present impressions or impressions given to us in the past. To put it another way, the mind forms beliefs according to the resemblance, contiguity, or causal connections which subsist among particular impressions and ideas. In cases of demonstration, truth is established precisely because falsity is unintelligible. But in cases of matters of fact, true belief is established to the extent that such a belief corresponds to present impressions, impressions given in the past, or an agglomeration of both. Thus for Hume, all human knowledge reduces to ideas; we can have no knowledge of substance.

This account of knowledge differs from that of Locke and Berkeley in a number of important ways, a few of which are certainly worth noting. For Locke, the mind can only form simple ideas from the primary substantial qualities of objects of experience (e.g., extension, numbers, the power to produce secondary qualities in minds, etc). Locke takes for granted that minds exist and that these minds form ideas from the primary qualities of objects of
experience. It follows, then, that we can know something of the substance - that is, the world outside our minds - but only through its power to produce ideas within us. For Berkeley, in contrast, we cannot even know the primary qualities of substances. All we know are the ideas given to the mind. It is impossible to know whether these ideas correspond to some substance separate from our own minds. Hume goes one step further than both Locke and Berkeley by suggesting that all knowledge reduces to ideas formed from impressions. We cannot even assume a “mind” to which ideas are given, for the idea of mind is not formed from present or past impressions.

For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to the aforementioned notion that all knowledge of existing things reduces to ideas as strong idealism. Some philosophers, including Kant, have attempted to refute strong idealism by suggesting that an external world must exist in order for our ideas to exist, even if the exact nature of this world remains eternally beyond our grasp. More recently, certain analytic philosophers have gone in the opposite direction by suggesting that ideas, and all attendant notions of mind, consciousness, and the like, are somehow reducible to physical or materialistic processes, thereby inverting the nature of the problem entirely. For such philosophers, the question is how to account for the existence of the “internal world,” and not vice versa. I make no attempt here to deal with either of these solutions. Rather, I want to suggest an alternate way to account for the existence of an external world beyond cognition or sense experience by examining the idea of logically necessary truth.

III. Necessary Truth and the Existence of Physical Objects

All relevant epistemological issues aside, it is generally accepted that certain truths of formal logic or mathematics, such as “2+2=4,” are necessary, such that their denial implies a kind of unintelligible contradiction. To put it another way, we cannot intelligibly imagine a state of
affairs in which a necessary statement such as “2+2=4” could be false, provided that the terms in question are adequately defined. At the same time, however, we can intelligibly imagine a universe which is like ours in all respects except that it does not contain any human (or, for that matter, rational) beings. The question then becomes: do logically necessary truths obtain in such a universe?

In one sense, this seems impossible, inasmuch as it is impossible to imagine any possible world in which the denial of “2+2=4” is true. But it is also clear that the very concepts (quantitative and otherwise) that are presupposed by this statement are unintelligible in the absence of rational minds to conceive them. This latter point has led some philosophers to conclude that the whole notion of necessary truth is in some sense absurd. J.S. Mill, for instance, argues that the “character of necessity ascribed to truths of mathematics, and even... the peculiar certainty attributed to them, is an illusion [because] those truths relate to, and express the properties of, purely imaginary objects.”

Similarly, A.J. Ayer points out that the reason necessary truths are necessary is that “we cannot abandon them without sinning against the rules which govern the use of language, and so make our utterances self-stultifying.” But language is, of course, something which is inconceivable without the existence of beings who use language. In this sense, logically necessary truths are only necessary within a decidedly contingent context - namely, a context in which rational beings exist.

Assuming that the latter point is true, i.e., that the existence of rational beings is contingent, it follows that the existence of any rational being X at time T is purely potential - that is, it may or may not be the case that X exists at time T. Assuming further that the aforementioned truths of logic are ontologically dependent on the existence of some rational being X, it follows that these truths may or may not obtain at time T, depending on whether X happens to exist at T. From these assumptions, it would seem follow
that in a universe such that X does not exist at time T, none of the logically necessary truths obtain at time T.

Even if we grant that the instantiation of logically necessary truths is ontologically dependent on the existence of some rational being X, it does not necessarily follow that there is a possible rational being X such that the existence of X could instantiate a different or even contradictory set of logically necessary truths. In fact, it seems impossible to imagine a rational being X such that the existence of X instantiates a "truth" of the form "2+2=5." Even in a state of pure potentiality, logically necessary truths seem binding on all possible rational beings. To this extent, logically necessary truths remain necessary for all possible beings, whether or not such beings ever happen to actually exist at all.

This idea implies, among other things, that the truth value of certain logical axioms or propositions remains independent of the actual cognition of some rational being X. In other words, certain axioms or propositions remain necessarily true even if the instantiation of these axioms or propositions by some rational being X is contingent. If this is the case, it follows that the truth value of logically necessary axioms or propositions is in some sense independent of the ontological status of rational beings, possible or actual. They remain constant even in a universe in which rational beings happen not to exist.

Taken at face value, this view carries a number of difficulties. It seems absurd, for example, to suggest that "2+2=4" is a true proposition in a universe with no rational beings to instantiate notions of quantity. Notice, however, that the very construction of these arguments necessarily implies that our universe is such that at least one rational being exists (namely, the author). And while it is certainly true that the rational being in question just happens to exist (that is, exists contingently), the fact remains that he does actually exist, which means that the aforementioned logically necessary truths obtain.
Let us assume for a moment that the external world, and all physical objects that are part of the external world, do not exist apart from the cognition of some rational being X (a position which is roughly synonymous with ‘strong idealism’). Most of the aforementioned logically necessary truths, especially those pertaining to mathematics, implicitly rely upon a principle of quantification, which in turn relies upon principles of identity through which physical objects are differentiated. If physical objects do not exist, then it makes no sense to speak of “identities” and, by extension, “quantities.” Thus the very idea of a statement such as “2+2=4” becomes, in some sense, unintelligible.

As we have already seen, however, it is impossible for any possible rational being to come into existence and not to instantiate the aforementioned logically necessary truths. If this is the case, it follows that whenever some rational being X comes into existence at time T, it not only instantiates certain logically necessary truths, but also all the necessary preconditions involved with the instantiation of these truths. Inasmuch as the actual existence of physical objects is a precondition to the instantiation of at least some of these truths (viz., the laws of mathematics), it follows that the actual existence of some rational being X at time T necessitates the existence of physical objects. And inasmuch as at least one rational being actually exists (viz., the author), it follows that physical objects also exist.

It may be objected that the actual existence of physical objects beyond the cognition of some rational being X is not necessary for the instantiation of relevant logically necessary truths. Quantity, for instance, may be derived from ‘ideas’ of physical objects alone, whether or not these ideas correspond to some reality outside of the cognition of some rational being X. My reply is twofold. First, on what basis can quantity be derived if ideas alone exist? On a partially materialist view, quantity can be derived from physical differences - that is, we can decide that there are two things rather than one if the things in question meet
certain physical criteria (e.g., the atoms of which they are constructed are at a certain spatio-temporal distance from each other, the atoms have differing chemical make-ups, etc). On what grounds can we possibly say of two ideas that they are distinct without positing the existence of some kind of super-ideal substance?

Second, the existence of ideas must come either from some reality outside the cognition of some rational being X, or else from other ideas already present to that same being. If the latter is true, then the ideas in question must themselves come from other ideas, or else they must come from at least one innate idea. The former is not plausible because it leads to an endless causal chain of ideas. The latter, in contrast, needs to be accounted for according to a principle of sufficient reason. Such an idea, even if innate, must come from somewhere apart from itself. Clearly it cannot come from another idea, since it is the first idea, which means either it comes from an external world apart from cognition or else was ‘implanted’ by some other force.

The question then becomes what this ‘other force’ might be. If it is not part of an external world outside of cognition, then it must be some kind of ‘superphysical’ or supernatural force. We then must decide whether the alleged existence of such a ‘supernatural force’ carries more evidentiary weight than the alleged existence of an external, physical world. The principle of parsimony (or Ockham’s razor, if you prefer) allows us to eliminate this hypothesis. There is no need to posit the existence of a supernatural force when we can just as easily account for the existence of ideas with reference to an external world which exists apart from the cognition of some rational being X.

The point is that quantity, among other things, logically entails the existence of physical objects, such that quantity cannot obtain apart from the existence of physical objects. Even in a world in which some rational being X happens not to exist, there is no state of affairs such that X could
come into existence without the concomitant existence of physical objects, for these are necessitated by the concomitant instantiation of logically necessary truths.

The preceding proof can be expressed in the following syllogistic form:
P1: If some rational being X exists at time T, then all logically necessary truths are instantiated.
P2: The instantiation of some logically necessary truths is ontologically dependent on the existence of physical objects apart from the cognition of some rational being X.
P3: No physical objects exist apart from the cognition of some rational being X.
P4: Some rational being X exists at time T.
C1: Therefore, only logically necessary truths that are not ontologically dependent on the existence of physical objects apart from the cognition of some rational being X are instantiated at time T.
C2: But this is absurd (from P1 and P2).
C3: Therefore, P3 is false.
C4: Therefore, some physical objects exist apart from the cognition of some rational being X at time T.

In the foregoing proof, only a few of the premises are truly controversial. P1 seems irreproachable because its negation would entail the denial of at least some logically necessary truths, which is impossible. P2, however, depends on the aforementioned idea that certain logically necessary truths, such as the laws of mathematics, require the existence of physical objects to be intelligible. I have already addressed one possible objection to this premise; are there any others? It seems that one could deny that concepts such as quantity are ontologically dependent upon the existence of physical objects, but it is unclear exactly how this would be. Quantity presupposes the existence of two Xs, where X is a physical object of some kind or else an idea derived from a physical object.

The only other option is to deny the existence of cogni-
tion, in which case all physical objects exist apart from the cognition of some agent X. This option takes us beyond the purview of metaphysics and into the philosophy of mind; as such I make no attempt to deal with it here. The proof is not intended to demonstrate that all existence is reducible to physical phenomena, but rather to refute the strong idealist position by demonstrating that at least some things exist apart from the cognition of some rational being X. The question of whether cognition exists at all as a separate, non-physical phenomena is left open. I should point out, however, that the general foundation of this proof, as well as its conclusions, seem perfectly compatible with a strong materialist view of mind and substance.

IV. Conclusion

In sum, although the instantiation of logically necessary truths is ontologically dependent upon the existence of some rational being X, their necessity is such that they could not be otherwise for any possible rational being X. This implies that the actual existence of any rational being X at time T brings with it the instantiation of logically necessary truths, as well as any and all preconditions which this instantiation requires. I have argued that the actual existence of physical objects is a precondition to the instantiation of at least some of these truths. Whether or not cognition stands in any real relationship to physical objects remains an open question. But in the meantime, the existence of logically necessary laws provides sufficient grounds for concluding that at least some physical objects exist apart from the cognition of rational beings.

NOTES
2. cf., e.g., WV. Quine, The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays, (New York: Random House, 1966); Ontological Relativity and
Other Essays (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). Quine is obviously only one of many modern philosophers who endorse this sort of thesis. Others worth mentioning include Gilbert Ryle, John Searle, Paul and Patricia Churchland, etc.


5. Ibid.


7. Ibid., I:1:5.

8. Ibid., I:3:2.


10. Ibid., I:3:4, 5.

11. Ibid., I:3:7.

12. Ibid., I:3:8.


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Online Psychotherapy: A Case Study in Technology and Values

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For centuries, human beings have looked to other members of the community for guidance and advice in personal matters. Psychotherapy as a profession, however, has existed for a relatively short period in history, approximately seventy years. Over time, problems such as depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, and sexual dysfunction, among others, have been addressed by a number of accepted methods of treatment, including psychoanalysis, behavior therapy, person-centered therapy, and the newer cognitive-behavioral treatments. What binds these various forms of treatment together? According to Rosenhan and Seligman:

Psychological therapy consists of a systematic series of interactions between a trained therapist who has been authorized by society to minister to psychological problems, and one or more clients who are troubled, or troubling others, because of such problems. The goal of psychological therapy is to produce cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes that will alleviate those problems. (p.734)

Traditionally, psychotherapy by qualified professionals has been carried out face-to-face in the privacy of the therapy room, or alternatively, in the context of a support group that brings clients with closely related problems together for joint therapy. Occasionally, a therapy session might be conducted over the telephone under extenuating circumstances. With the development of the Internet, a new modality for therapy has emerged: the online psychotherapy session.

As with many other services, the number of websites related to mental health has expanded rapidly over the past several years. In 1997, Metanoia, a website sponsored by
Martha Ainsworth, who describes herself as a consumer advocate for mental health, listed 50 providers of mental health services on the web (Grohol, 1997). Three years later, these number more than 160 (Ainsworth, 1999). Services are provided through video-conferencing, on specially designed web pages, in the context of a chat room, or most commonly, via email (Ainsworth, 1999). The appeal of the Internet in psychotherapy seems obvious—the convenience, the perception of privacy, the possibility of anonymity. However, a careful examination is required to determine whether or not online psychotherapy is a legitimate and ethical method of delivering mental health care.

As with traditional psychotherapy, the qualifications of the therapist, issues of confidentiality, and the effectiveness of the treatment remain paramount. Specifically, is the therapist qualified and licensed to provide mental health services? Is private information shielded from undesired scrutiny? Does the client have a reasonable expectation that therapy will result in amelioration of psychological problems? In the case of online mental health services, it can be shown that these criteria are not adequately met.

Qualifications of the Therapist

How does a consumer of mental health services know whether they have hired a qualified therapist who adheres to ethical standards? Development of the profession of psychotherapy has entailed the establishment of standards of training and competence, as well as a formal code of ethics. Currently in the United States, licensing of psychotherapists and adherence to professional and ethical codes is regulated at the state level. For example, in California, the Board of Behavioral Sciences (a division of the California Department of Consumer Affairs) is responsible for overseeing the professional conduct of Marriage and Family Therapists and Licensed Clinical Social Workers. The activities of psychiatrists and licensed clinical psychologists are controlled by similar agencies. A therapist
who does not comply with professional and ethical standards is subject to disciplinary action by the licensing board, which has the power to revoke the therapist's license. The incompetent or unethical therapist may also face proceedings in the criminal and civil courts.

Online delivery of mental health services raises new concerns. Regulation of the Internet, which is closely related to telecommunications and potentially involves interstate commerce, falls under the auspices of the Federal Communications Commission. However, this agency has no jurisdiction over the conduct of psychotherapists. Moreover, laws that address the licensing and conduct of psychotherapists vary from state to state. A resident of one state who seeks online treatment from a therapist in another state may not be adequately protected under the laws of either state.

Presently, consumers who seek psychological advice online are largely at the mercy of the provider, who may or may not conform to the ethical and professional standards of the state in which the client resides. John Grohol (1997), an early provider of online mental health services, raises the question, if online clients encounter an incompetent or unethical therapist, to whom will they turn for redress? It is entirely possible that a person may retain the services of an online therapist who does not reside in the same country, let alone the same state, as that person. Local laws may not apply to the therapist who resides elsewhere, and even if they do, how will the therapist be held accountable from a distance? Some states are in the process of developing legislation that addresses issues of long distance supervision of care and eligibility for reimbursement for medical services provided electronically via “telemedicine” (Telemedicine Information Exchange, 2000). Still, it remains unclear how compliance to such laws will be enforced, even if they are interpreted to include mental health services. Given the lack of regulation in contracting for online mental health services, it is the
case of "buyer beware."

Privacy on the Internet

Some argue that online therapy offers a degree of privacy and anonymity that traditional psychotherapy cannot offer. It is important here to make a distinction between privacy and anonymity. Privacy involves restricting access to one's personal information. Anonymity, on the other hand, involves keeping one's identity secret. A person may remain anonymous and disclose very personal or private information, but any privacy achieved in this way hinges on protection of that person's identity. When advantages of online psychotherapy are presented, "privacy" is often mentioned, but advocates of web-based treatment may be confusing anonymity with privacy. Although it may be possible to achieve a degree of anonymity online, the privacy of communications transmitted over the Internet is inherently at risk. This presents a dilemma for those who provide mental health services online.

Confidentiality, a strict code of protecting anonymity and privacy for clients, is a fundamental ethical principle for psychotherapists. Confidential information can be revealed only in very specified circumstances, for example, if a client poses a real danger to self or others, or if a client discloses knowledge of child abuse. In either case the therapist is obliged ethically and legally to report this knowledge to the authorities. In the case of online therapy, confidentiality is removed from the control of the therapist who is responsible for it. There is a distinct possibility that electronic communications may be intercepted either intentionally or inadvertently. A person might send an email to a therapist using a computer at work, not realizing that electronic communications in the workplace are monitored and not currently protected by privacy laws. In another case, a client may send an email to the therapist, realizing after the "send" button is clicked that the email has been accidentally sent to the wrong person and cannot
be retrieved. If communications are sent via satellite, the signal may be detected and de-scrambled by equipment that is easily obtained via the Internet. In the wrong hands, private emails and “chats” could be quickly and widely distributed via the Worldwide Web. Even in the privacy of one’s own home, there is always the chance that another person can walk into the room and become party to very private thoughts and feelings that are not intended to be shared. Clearly, though there is a perception of privacy on the Internet, there are considerable risks when one trusts deeply personal information to electronic transmission, and the online therapist cannot guarantee confidentiality.

Could privacy be protected by adopting a pseudonym in order to achieve anonymity? As pointed out above, privacy attained through anonymity depends predominantly on protection of the person’s identity. If the alternate identity can be linked in any way to a real person, any privacy gained through anonymity is lost. Payment to online psychotherapists or their agents may be tracked through credit card records, and with some effort, screen names can often be associated with a particular computer or a specific account with an Internet service provider. The success of government agents in identifying hackers and ferreting out the sources of malicious viruses clearly demonstrates the impossibility of remaining entirely anonymous on the Web.

Even if complete privacy and anonymity were feasible on the Internet, does provision of psychotherapy to anonymous clients serve their best interests and protect individuals at risk of harm? When the oath of confidentiality must be ethically and legally violated, how is the therapist to identify and help authorities locate the person in harm’s way, if that person’s identity and location is unknown? Although it is possible for the traditional psychotherapy client to remain anonymous by giving a fictitious name and paying in cash, in practice this rarely happens, and therapists usually have the information to take swift and
diate action when necessary (Grohol, 1998). Moreover, if a client is carefully maintaining anonymity by concealing personal information, it seems likely that there will also be a failure to disclose details that might be pertinent to therapy, such as the person's place of residence, age, marital status, and occupation. These factors may be critical in establishing the nature of a person's problems and identifying possible solutions. Perhaps more important, the psychotherapeutic relationship is founded on a high degree of trust between therapist and client. Attempting to build trust while keeping one's identity a secret seems contradictory, and in the context of psychotherapy, it is even more illogical. In summary, then, provision of mental health services online removes control over privacy from the therapist, may restrict the ability of the therapist to intercede in those cases which require an ethical breach of confidentiality, and may in fact interfere with effective treatment by inadvertently encouraging the tendency to avoid disclosure.

Effectiveness of Treatment

Assuming the qualifications of the therapist are established, and that privacy can be controlled and maintained within acceptable bounds, can the online psychotherapist achieve the effectiveness of face-to-face psychotherapy? Many studies have established the importance of the therapist expressing empathy, warmth, and genuineness. With this approach, the therapist fosters an atmosphere in which a strong therapeutic alliance can be established with the client. This collaborative relationship provides for joint decisions about goals and treatment and has been found to be a significant factor in the improvement of mental health through psychotherapy (Rosenhan & Seligman, 1995). How might the characteristics of online communication affect the therapeutic alliance? In their study of online support groups, Miller and Gergen (1998) state, "The [online] community is virtual because it does not exist in a single geographic locale, does not involve face-to-face
immeinterchange, and is often constituted by communication that does not take place in real time (but rather through messages posted at one time and answered at another)” (p. 190). These features of Internet communication may negatively affect the therapeutic alliance and interfere with the attainment of behavioral change. King and Moreggi (1998) note that a therapist who is geographically remote from a client is likely to remain unaware of local customs, potentially resulting in a misunderstanding between the therapist and client. They also point out that social and environmental conditions (for example, the prevailing work ethic, economic instability, a recent rise in crime, or a prolonged heat wave) are factors that might affect the emotional state of the client, unbeknownst to the therapist.

Additionally, it seems reasonable that a relationship initially established online is less likely to be maintained over time. Ordinary long distance relationships, even those developed more traditionally and maintained through electronic and written correspondence, wane to some degree in the absence of physical proximity. Despite the best of intentions, not having met face-to-face, the online client and therapist who are geographically distant seem predisposed to fewer interactions, predicting a weaker therapeutic alliance.

Currently, most psychological advice provided online is dispensed via email. The lack of face-to-face interaction requires the therapist and client to communicate in a way that is strictly text-based, such that warmth and empathy must be expressed by the therapist to the client in written form. As any writer of fiction can attest, it is difficult to convey the depth and complexity of emotion in textual form without sounding either trite or overdramatic. However, when engaged in face-to-face psychotherapy, the therapist can communicate genuine concern and interest through an effective melding of words, vocal tone, and facial expression. Likewise, the therapist can assess
whether discrepancies exist between the client’s words and facial expressions, and explore the nature of such inconsistencies in the course of therapy.

The lack of real-time communication poses an additional drawback to offering psychological advice by email. Hours or days may pass between the client’s written communication and the therapist’s response to a particular statement or concern. In contrast, the face-to-face therapist can respond immediately to a client during the session, focusing on problem behaviors in a more timely manner.

In summary, geographic distance, text-based communications, and delayed responses present significant challenges to mental health professionals on the Internet. Overall, when online provision of mental health services is compared to traditional psychotherapy, it appears to be less conducive to establishing an effective therapeutic relationship. In the absence of a strong alliance between the client and therapist, behavioral change is less likely to occur.

Addressing the Problems

National certification of online therapists has been proposed as a possible solution to the lack of regulation of online psychotherapy. Still, it will take an alliance between national professional associations, state licensing agencies, and the Federal Communications Commission to come up with a workable system that can provide some assurance to those who seek mental health care online. Given the slow rate at which bureaucratic changes are made, it seems likely that the provision of mental health services online will continue to grow unchecked.

Advocates of online psychotherapy will argue that increased security on the Internet through sophisticated encryption will solve the problem of diminished privacy on the Internet. However, the information is still vulnerable to those persons who have access to the encryption decoding programs, such as administrators of chat rooms, email services, and web pages. And although some clients may be more comfortable disclosing relevant personal informa-
tion when anonymous, others who seek therapy online may continue to conceal pertinent information in an ongoing attempt to maximize privacy and minimize embarrassment. In the latter case, online psychotherapy is of no advantage in facilitating disclosure and achieving understanding of the client’s problems.

Online video-conferencing may provide a solution to the limitations of textual communications in establishing the therapeutic alliance. Facial expression and vocal tone are added to the verbal communication, provided the electronic transmission is of sufficient quality. Still, the issues of geographic distance, including cultural differences and the difficulty in establishing a personal relationship with someone never met, remain unsolved. Perhaps most important, in evaluating a client face-to-face, a more complete mental health and physical examination can be carried out (King & Moreggi, 1998). This comprehensive assessment is necessary to make an accurate diagnosis and develop an effective treatment plan. For example, through direct observation the therapist can evaluate whether the client is appropriately groomed, and whether there are any signs of substance abuse, such as alcohol on the breath or track marks on veins. Internet communication, even with high quality video conferencing, does not always achieve the necessary degree of visual resolution, let alone transmit olfactory information. Even if the psychotherapist can establish a positive alliance with a client over the Internet, the limitations of online psychotherapy can compromise diagnosis and treatment.

Conclusions

Online provision of general information regarding mental health may be helpful, but the lack of coordinated regulation, the potential for violation of confidentiality, and the difficulty in arriving at a diagnosis and attaining an effective therapeutic alliance, support the argument that personalized online mental health services are incompatible with the ethical practice of psychotherapy. The goal of
psychotherapy is to alleviate psychological problems, and many of these problems involve interpersonal relationships. Interestingly, Miller and Gergen (1998) note, “As the number of dependable and available partners for intimate conversation has diminished, troubled persons turn increasingly to therapists. ‘Talking cures’ operate, then, as important surrogates for significant others in daily life” (p. 190). Easy access to online psychological services may drive even more people toward psychotherapy in the absence of conventional supports such as friends, relatives, and intimate partners. Researchers, clinicians, and even some savvy consumers of mental health care, already wonder to what extent improvement achieved in traditional therapy generalizes to other relationships. Online psychotherapy is carried out in an environment that bears even less resemblance to everyday life than established modes of therapy. Therefore, in analyzing aspects of online psychotherapy, another very important question must be asked. Given its differences from ordinary life, will online psychotherapy induce positive changes in interpersonal skills that transfer to relationships outside of therapy? Or alternatively, will the client simply become more adept at online communication with a paid supporter? If the latter is the case, then web-based psychotherapy, despite its potential advantages and good intentions, will ultimately fail to bring about a better life for its subscribers.

References


Religion of Humanity as Public Religion: An Alternate Reading of J.S. Mill’s *Utility of Religion*

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Published posthumously, Mill’s *Three Essays on Religion* includes an often overlooked essay of great import, *The Utility of Religion*. In this brief piece, Mill examines whether there are reasons to maintain traditional religious beliefs (supernaturalism) in the context of the implausibility of its doctrines. He does not side with Clifford in that “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence”, granting that if traditional religion has positive utility, it should be retained in the face of its intellectual problems (Quoted in James 721). Mill’s thesis, however, is that contemporary society should abandon traditional religious beliefs in favor of the naturalized ‘religion of humanity’ (a term borrowed from Comte). While I agree that the religion of humanity would have far more positive utility than vulgar Christianity, comments made by Mill in other works suggest that the religion of humanity should not be understood as an exclusive religious system, but rather as a framework within which examined religious beliefs may be maintained.

Mill does not dispute the special role religion has typically played in the context of the social good. Most people are quick to cite traditional religious reasons for their moral beliefs, and turn their hopes upward when in crisis. He points out, however, that “[e]arly religious teaching has owed to its power over mankind rather to its being early than its being religious” (210). Through authority, early education, and public opinion, religion is able to achieve its special status as an instrument of the social good. A special significance is placed on religious authority from childhood, and is strongly reinforced by
public opinion for the rest of one's life (Matz 3). These attributes are not exclusively religious, and thus may be used in the service of other systems of belief (i.e. religion of humanity).

Mill also agrees that traditional religion has historically played an important role in the context of personal perfection. Religion has traditionally been a supplement to political laws, "a more cunning sort of police", a personal corrective instrument which makes individuals examine their motives in a manner that political laws could never achieve (415). This role has been historical and accidental, and traditional religion does not have an exclusive claim to the power of this 'cunning police' force. With the weight of the three 'natural' conditions laid out above, it becomes apparent that other systems can be inculcated such that their doctrines have the same force. The question then becomes which type of belief system has more public and personal utility? Mill clearly thinks that a religion of humanity is the better choice.

Mill points out that "[t]he essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires towards an ideal object, recognized as the highest excellence, and as rightfully paramount over all selfish objects of desire" (422). The religion of humanity replaces a perfect metaphysical being with the community of humanity (understood broadly to include the past, present, and future). The 'highest excellence' which should be the focus of our public religious observances is "[t]he idealization of our earthly life, the cultivation of a high conception of what it may be made" (420). Instead of focusing on a personal, atomistic, effort to become what one can never be (a perfect metaphysical being), we should focus on making the community of humanity the best that it can be. In doing so, we should look to people of great importance in the past for inspiration, and they should be the focus of public honors. Much in the line of Bentham, who points out the value of 'pleasures of piety', seeing oneself as
being in the favor of one of these past persons of import will bring one a great deal of comfort, in much the same way that the traditional religious person is comforted by the idea that they are in God's favor. Understanding the world in this way will result in systems of ethics which take into account our fundamental connectedness and foster personal virtues (or a more 'cunning police' force) that will also recognize the importance of our obligations to each other.

Traditional Christian ethics stand in stark contrast to this novel system. In On Liberty, Mill points out that what is termed Christian ethics is actually a theological construct of the Middle Ages (Augustine and Aquinas). He argues that the "Gospel always refers to a pre-existing morality and confines its precepts to the particulars in which that morality was to be corrected." The moral teachings in the Bible have the poetic quality of generality, not the precision of legislation. As an ethical system intended to respond to the prevalence of paganism, Christian moral teachings are largely negative. Mill points out that, "in its precepts...'thou shall not' predominates unduly over 'thou shalt'". The stoic asceticism of early Christianity has been slowly turned into a form of legalism, leading its adherents to a selfish conception of moral obligation, obscuring the intimate connections to each other expressed in other moral systems. The ideas of positive obligation to humanity which are present, have their basis in classical, rather than Christian, sources. Mill continues by arguing that the moral teachings of Christ are not intended to stand alone, but should rather be incorporated into a substantive and positive moral system (utilitarianism in Mill's case) (On Liberty 47-48).

Mill then points out that the hope of an afterlife is apparently the one advantage enjoyed by traditional, over naturalized, religion. Citing the contemporary example of Buddhism, and the historical case of the Ancient Greeks, he shows that well developed moral persons can function without the belief in an afterlife. He also says that this
hope is not necessarily desirable, as a future set of circumstances can be imagined in which immortality would seem to be a burdensome idea, rather than a gift. Taking this idea in the light of Feuerbach’s doctrine of projection, Mill’s point becomes far more clear. If the function of religion is to project what we see as important about humanity onto some metaphysical ‘other’, then modern science may one day lead us to value mortality and finitude over immortality. Perhaps when medical science advances to the point at which our lives can be extended to lengths currently unimaginable, the willingness of Jesus to end His life will be seen as a doctrine more ‘divine’ than His resurrection. As we make ourselves increasingly ‘immortal’, resources will become limited, and the sacrifice of death will become a necessary moral obligation. In that context, one can see the value in Mill’s position. Death itself could then be seen as having positive utility and be considered a moral good, while life beyond death would seem to be a strange remnant from some past age (as science had practically achieved the feat).

In Theism, however, Mill admits the positive utility of the hope of an afterlife. This essay was written a decade after The Utility of Religion and must be seen as a correction of his previous position. Understood as other regarding, a hope in an afterlife, to allow individuals to reap what they deserved in this life (following Kant’s postulate of the immortal soul), can achieve its practical ends, while avoiding the problem of selfishness created by traditional Christianity. While our ability to be altruistic is harmed when hoping that God will deliver us from our troubles in some future state of affairs, it is enhanced when hoping that the work towards perfection made by some other person killed prematurely had not gone to waste. Understood as such, the hope for an afterlife allowed by traditional religion can be more advantageous (in terms of utility) than the exclusive hope for species improvement allowed for in the religion of humanity (Matz).
This correction is not problematic if Mill is understood to be creating a ‘public religion’, or general system of shared beliefs in which persons of diverse faiths retain non-conflicting doctrines. The central tenet of the religion of humanity, the “idealization of our earthly life, the cultivation of a high conception of what it may be made”, is compatible with some form of most, if not all, traditional religious beliefs (420). Within the shared system of beliefs, therefore, there is ample room for freedom of religion. Expressed in this way, Mill’s position is modified in a manner which makes the religion of humanity quite similar to the ‘public religion’ concept expressed by Robert Bellah and others in *Habits of the Heart*. While the authors of *Habits of the Heart* express the need for such a general framework, they are hesitant to lay out its content. With his doctrine of the religion of humanity, Mill has provided content while not explicitly expressing the project.

While the general or public religion (religion of humanity) can be seen as having the most positive utility, it can still be objected that each belief system within its boundaries is open to the same objections Mill raises against traditional religion. However, in order to remain consistent with the central tenets of the public religion, certain dogmas of the many faiths need modification. Immortality needs to be understood in the manner laid out above (as other regarding). While Mill’s system leaves open the possibility of the existence of God (as he is in the empiricist tradition, and there is no empirical evidence strong enough to disprove the possibility of God’s existence), it does seem to preclude the understanding of God as perfect, and Mill explicitly abandons omnipotence in *Theism*. The notion of the perfect God leads to the problem of evil, and therefore needs to be replaced with a God who is in some respects involved in a current co-creation of the world with the community of humanity. This is the position of Whitehead and other process philosophers. While God can be seen as the greatest of all possible
entities, it would be inconsistent with the public religion to hold God to be perfect in the metaphysical sense. Modifications of a similar sort would need to be made to non-Christian belief systems in order to incorporate them within the general framework. Modified as such, these systems of belief would escape the criticisms Mill levied at traditional religion.

Nobody would be forced to adopt a belief system which fits within the wider public religion, of course, as this would be a clear violation of Mill's 'liberty principle'. The power of the three natural conditions can be used to reinforce the public religion, however, and people brought up within that framework will be more likely to adopt systems of belief compatible with the public standard. The public religion will always be open for reinterpretation as our understanding of what is best in humanity evolves. To borrow an idea from Feuerbach, we will 'project' what we see as important into a new form of the public religion. That shared belief system will then help determine how we see ourselves. By focusing solely on what is best in and for us, this public religion is able to escape the devaluation of humanity Feuerbach points out as present in traditional theism. As science and philosophy work together to advance our understanding of what it means to be humane, the public religion will be open to modification.

If Mill is read as promoting the religion of humanity to the exclusion of other systems of belief, there is ample room for objection. As Mill himself points out, there is some positive utility gained in an other regarding hope for an afterlife. This is not present in the religion of humanity seen as an exclusive system. In addition, understood in this narrow sense the religion of humanity would fail to meet one of the needs met by religion, it would not help to explain why the world is as it is. Religion reaches beyond science and posits answers to the metaphysical questions we are driven to ask. Science answers the what, and sometimes the how, but it is religion that supplies us
with the answer to why. While the religion of humanity understood exclusively would be a great moral system, it would not be a complete ‘religion’.

Mill’s discussion of religion as a principle of social unity in *On Liberty* points out another problem caused by this narrow reading of the religion of humanity. He explains that Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman emperor and stoic philosopher, expresses in his *Meditations* a great sense of moral duty which is actually quite similar to that of traditional Christianity. Uncomfortable with removing the sense of unity brought to the Roman people by the Pantheon, Aurelius retained the traditional religious beliefs, even persecuting Christianity, though the Emperor was “a better Christian in all but the dogmatic sense of the word...”. Aurelius is used as an example of fallibility, and Mill warns the Christian conservative, who “flatters himself that he is a wiser and better man than Marcus Aurelius”, not to make the same mistake in persecuting novel religious theories (i.e. the religion of humanity). Conversely, the same argument could be used to warn the dogmatic proponent of the religion of humanity against exclusionary persecution. It seems unlikely, therefore, that Mill intended the religion of humanity to be taken as an exclusive religious system.

It appears that he would be far more comfortable understanding it as a public religion, or framework within which other traditional beliefs are retained. If adopted as such, Mill’s system would do what Aurelius did not apparently consider a possibility; the public religion would retain the Pantheon and improve morality using stoicism (understood as corresponding to utilitarianism in Mill’s system). Religious freedom would be maintained and positive personal and social utility would be enhanced. Therefore, the best reading of Mill’s religion of humanity is to understand it as a general framework (public religion) within which people of faith retain non-conflicting religious dogma, thus gaining the benefits of naturalized religion,
while retaining traditional religion's promise of an afterlife and answers to universal metaphysical questions.

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Duty of the Sovereign

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Tonight from the Punishment Dome in Washington, D.C., it’s Gorebot versus Dubya in Moral Combat. At stake: the Presidency of the United States, and maybe even the fate of democracy as we know it.

Anyone living and cogent during the 2000 presidential race can understand where that opening comes from. To say anything, the race for the highest office in the land was reduced to a farce played out on national television, starring tweedle-dumb and tweedle-dumber while the Walrus and the Carpenter snacked on their oysters. Unfortunately, elections in wonderland were the least of what this race represented. More insidious than the media bias toward Shrub, more powerful than a Moses-led gun lobby, able to leap small countries in a single bound, this election saw the rise of partial societies and their threat to the sovereign. The United States of America has lost sight of its wish to form a more perfect union and placed in its stead the power plays of special interests and an uninterested population.

Of the Social Contract theoreticians, Rousseau seems to be the most egalitarian and the most applicable to today’s political woes. Hobbes, when not leaping out from the bushes, would see us subjugated to his leviathan, controlled by a large authoritarian government. Also, while we are definitely a Lockean society, property is not the issue here – property is the least of our concerns. No, it seems that Rousseau is the best angle because while property creates the need for society, the rights to life and liberty outweigh the right to property two-to-one; right now the country needs a dose of liberty to resuscitate life.

According to Rousseau, the sovereign is the People as opposed to the lower-case people. This People is the
same one mentioned in the preamble to the United States constitution when it begins "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union," and so on. It is this people, the sovereign, to whom states and princes (or in our system, politicians) are answerable. It is the people who are the power behind the state and it is the general will that must be upheld.

This isn't to say that the general will is omnipotent. The will is only as strong as the sovereign and when the sovereign allows the passage of what Rousseau calls "general ills," does not oppose them, or even encourages them, then I contend that the sovereign is degenerate. Rousseau contends that such a degeneration is not of the general will but of particular wills bolstered by partial societies within the state. His solution is that these partial societies should either be eradicated altogether, or made numerous and equal so that no one group has dominance to affect the will.

The United States has seen the rise of two such partial societies, neither of which is capable of being killed with anything less than a political nuclear device. These behemoth societies, whom I'll refer to as Elephants and Donkeys, prove Rousseau's assertion that

"when there are factions, lesser associations detrimental to the greater one, the will of each of them becomes general in relation to its members and particular in relation to the state. It can then be said that there are no longer as many voters as there are men but only as many as there are associations."²

According to the U.S. Census bureau, there were a projected 205 million age-eligible voters on November 7, 2000.³ Of those, slightly more than 100 million participated in the voting process. Of those 100 million there was an almost unprecedented fifty-fifty split (actually 49-49, but that would be splitting hairs at this point) between the Donkeys and the Elephants in the presidential popular vote. Taking into account various disqualifying factors such as felony convictions and citizenship, approximately one
quarter of age-eligible voters stood on one side or the other of the political playground.

What then happens to the three-quarters of the voting population who are not represented by the duly elected official? It seems that when the general will degenerates due to the proliferation of partial societies, there can no longer be said to be a viable general will. Then what? Slavery I say. "A man who renounces his freedom renounces his humanity, along with the rights of humanity, and even its duties." But what about a man or woman who renounces his/her duties? Voting, which many call a right, is really a duty commensurate with other duties like jury and income tax. These are the membership responsibilities for one of the most popular clubs in the world.

Is voting a duty, or a right? Certainly there are no legal consequences to not voting. Voting is not mandatory for citizenship, nor is it compulsory under any law. There are no cartoon thugs in polyester suits brandishing .45 automatics saying "vote or die." Part of the social contract is the relinquishing of certain rights and freedoms that it is "important for the community to control". This is different from the abrogation of rights above because all rights under the social contract are contingent upon the meeting of certain obligations. While voting seems like a right, smells like a right, tastes like a right, it really is a duty. Unfortunately this is not a value shared by most people – in fact, half the voting population. Yet, consider that it should be a shared value, one that American citizens point to and say "this makes me an American; I can grab a hold of my and my country’s destiny and try to shape it. I am part of a larger whole that is the sovereign."

Rule by the majority is a consequence of the social contract. By Rousseau’s account the majority accounts for the general will while the minority is in some way mistaken. While this simplification makes democracy and voting seem somewhat suspect, it also lays foundation for the argument that voting is a duty. "The unequivocal will
of all the members of the state is the general will”; that will is expressed by what the majority have declared their will to be. However, when the majority of the state remains silent, refuses to offer an opinion, or let known their will, then the minority becomes the majority – the counted majority – and when the general will ceases to be known through the majority “no matter what decision is made, there is no longer any freedom.”

A slight anecdote, if I may: I once had a discussion about voting with a peer. He was a conservative young man, self-identified as a devout Christian, and very conscientious about the world around him. Only, he did not vote. When I asked him about it, he told me that after he registered to vote he started receiving jury summonses, (I informed him that just having a driver’s license puts you on the jury lists; he didn’t believe me) so he called the registrar of voters and had them de-register him.

That young man refused to be a part of the sovereign because of the inconvenience of jury duty. In that way he subjugated his freedom to those who would make the decisions for him. In essence, he became a slave. No one owned him, could sell him, or lay claim to him personally, but slavery, in its very nature is the abrogation of freedom and with freedom comes both rights as well as responsibilities. Abrogate responsibility and you abrogate rights. Abrogate rights and you abrogate freedom.

This young man, though he may or may not have subscribed to either of the major partial societies, subjugated himself to both of them since he refused his duty to influence issues that would affect both him and society at large. There are many reasons for not participating in the vote: apathy, ignorance, or some wildly ineffectual form of protest. These reasons, however, are simply excuses for not participating, for throwing away the chance to make one’s voice heard, and for failing to reaffirm the freedom guaranteed by the written manifestation of the United States’s social contract known as the Constitution.
The trend toward political slavery is in part due to the pervading sense that an individual's vote does not count, that in someway a vote is a waste of time, paper, and energy. The political parties put up candidates that the people feel don't represent them, who are going to be elected anyway by the power that the party possesses. This is what Rousseau meant when partial societies supported less voters than men. Those whose convictions do not lie with any partial society find themselves placed in a position where political slavery seems to be the only option. This political slavery is not always a conscious choice, though, as it can be made through, as I said, apathy, ignorance, and that strange form of protest that I'll now get into.

There is a belief that there is a way to protest the choices in an election by simply not voting. This belief seems to be linked to the existentialist notion of the choice to not choose. While in theory this sounds like it should be pretty standard practice (the equivalent to an abstention) there is a problem. In a small board or council an abstention is as much an opinion as a vote either way. An abstention tells the people that the voter did not agree either way and chose not to choose. Not voting in a general or presidential election in America, however, is not the same as abstaining because it is not put on record. If the purpose of not voting is protest then it fails. The purpose of protest is to communicate a message. By not voting, the protestors are lumped together with the ignorant and the apathetic, thus losing their message. Besides, there is a reason for write-in votes, isn't there?

There is also the proliferation of special interests that turn people away from the system and the sovereign. "Nothing is more dangerous than the influence of private interests on public affairs," and nothing is more influential than a special interest lobby. Gun lobbies and Tobacco lobbies are only two of the guilty parties. Their special interest is a private interest which in the end is profits. Yes there are constitutional issues with guns, but there is still a
deep, financial, personal interest in keeping governmental regulation of guns at a minimum. The same goes for the Tobacco lobby which has a vested interest in keeping its product unregulated and available.

Now that I have spent much time complaining about the state of the state, what are the solutions? Unfortunately there are no magical solutions for reinvigorating life into the people and repairing the sovereign. Healing will be slow and is only attainable though the strength of will. The people will have to want to change. Without the will to change there can be no healing of the general will.

People will have to understand that voting is a duty, not a right, and that voting for what one believes in is the only way to ensure that the general will is upheld, otherwise the minor-majority has it within their power to subvert the general will and subjugate the sovereign. Even the not-voting-as-protest issue has some kind of place if done properly. Things like “none of the above” initiatives, or even submitting an unfilled ballot act as some kind of abstention since there does appear to be a record of those. Not showing up is just a product of apathy, ignorance, and I have decided that laziness can be put on that list as well.

The partial societies of Elephants and Donkeys need to have their wings clipped. Their powers are such that their influence is far too great and sometimes even far to polarized for them to represent the sovereign. They represent their own sovereigns, separate from the People, yet existing under the guise of being political voices for the People so they don’t have to think. However, “if the general will is to be clearly expressed, it is important that there be no partial societies within the state, and that each citizen form his opinion independently.” The purpose of these partial societies runs at variance with the concept of the general will. Therefore they must be vetted, and the people must be allowed to think.

In a society where it seems commonplace for the average citizen to be alienated from politics by the power
structures involved, who have vested interests in seeing the survival of the status-quo, and think that low voter turnout is a blessing, it is no wonder that the sovereign and the general will suffer as they do. The people have very little to inspire them into participation. Duty to some is as dirty a word as its homophone that means waste. So there must be something new and inspiring, or something so heinous that even the apathetic can no longer afford to loaf around, before anything can start to pull the country out of its funk. We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, must dedicate ourselves to our democracy, even when we disagree with it, because our disagreements and actions stabilize the general will into a state where it represents the people. This is a country for the people, by the people, and of the people, and the people must fight to keep it so. Otherwise it will continue sinking into a country for the Elephants, by the Donkeys, and of the lobbyists, then all freedom will be lost.

Still, what is the write-in vote for anyway?

NOTES
Facts and figures from U.S. Census Bureau
http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/tabs00.html
Annotated Copy of the U.S. Constitution may be found at http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/constitution/toc.html
Rousseau, Jean Jacques; The Social Contract Or Principles of Political Right
Translated by Lowell Bair in The Essential Rousseau, 1975
1The Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right; Book II Chapter I
2Ibid: Book II, Chapter III
4Rousseau, Social Contract; Book I Chapter IV
5Ibid.
6Ibid: Book IV Chapter II
7Ibid.
8Ibid: Book II Chapter III
The issue of meaning is an extremely important aspect of hermeneutic inquiry and critical endeavors. Understanding a text and all of its overt and covert baggage hinges upon some grasp of its meaning. The singularity of this last statement, however, has been called into question by literary, rhetorical, and critical theorists in the later parts of the 20th century. Is meaning truly objective such that one can say he or she has the meaning of a certain text (art included)? According to Hirsch’s (1967) classic position and those that follow his line of thought, the singular meaning of a text can be located and surveyed by the critic in the intent of the author. This school defends the author from many segments of the critical community (hereafter used to collectively refer to literary, rhetorical, cultural studies, etc.) who wish to delineate the meaning of a text in the various interpretations that can be drawn out of it using various critical apparatuses. Thus, the battle over where the intellectual property lines should be drawn in regard to what the scholarly community means by the word “meaning” is initiated.

This paper wishes to join this debate by arguing that Hirsch’s conception of meaning is not only incorrect, but also harmful. After explicating Hirsch’s key concepts of “meaning,” “significance,” and “validity,” this paper will argue that meaning cannot be confined to aural intent for a variety of reasons, paramount of which involves the dialogic nature of meaning in relation to word use. Hirsch’s notions of communication/language use will be shown to be rather simplistic and blind to issues of systemic influence. After this section, the risks of adopting Hirsch’s conceptualization of meaning in regard to the critical project and its relation to the repressed “Others” of our
society—minorities and under-represented groups—will be detailed. In all, this paper espouses the idea that it is more heuristically valuable to leave criticism as an open enterprise, rather than closing it up to the interests of non-dominant groups in the pursuit of a positivistic notion of "True" meaning.

Hirsch's (1967) take on "meaning" seems to be quite simple—"a text means what it author meant" (p. 1). The worry that motivates such a simplistic delineation of the meaning of a text comes from Hirsch's concern over the escalating disagreements throughout the critical word as to what a certain text means. Thus, he advances the distinction between "meaning" and "significance" in an arbitrary action designed to guide interpretive behavior and critical thought. Putatively, Hirsch finds himself warranted in positing this distinction because of the fruits it will bring to the study of texts. At any rate, meaning is said to be "that which is represented by a text; it is what the signs represent" (p. 8). On the other hand, a text's significance is that which "names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable" (p. 8). Meaning is portrayed as that which the author intends the piece to represent. This representation appears to be mental, since Hirsch latter indicates that "meaning is an affair of consciousness not of words... There is no magic land of meanings outside human consciousness" (p. 4). The human mind is shown to have its own intentionality, which it then connects to words and transmits to a listener, etc.

Later on in this piece, however, Hirsh falls back to words to standardize meaning. He acknowledges that "no text can convey all the meanings an author had in mind as he [sic] wrote" and that "the meanings I can convey through discourse are more limited than the meanings I can entertain [in my mind]" (p. 17). While he does not find these admissions too damaging for his thesis of author intention as equivalent to textual meaning, it does cause
him to recast his definition of meaning as "the verbal meaning which an author intends is accessible to the interpreter of his [or her] text" (p. 18). The emerging picture of meaning appears to be those authorial intentions that can be adequately conveyed through language to any receiver of his or her text. Any other reading of a text would be consigned to its significance, not to its meaning in Hirsch's system.

This division of significance and meaning, according to Hirsch, allows for "objectively valid interpretation" (p. 3). This notion of validity is a standard or process, apparently, to which critics can appeal to resolve disagreements and to discern the "true meaning" of a certain text. It is along these lines that Hirsch laments, "once the author has been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his [or her] text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation" (p. 3). Thus, "one interpretation is as valid as another" (p. 3). The validity of an interpretation seems to describe its reference to the actual semantic content of a certain text; Hirsch states "validity implies the correspondence of an interpretation to a meaning which is represented by the text" (p. 10). The nature of this validity is universal, as Hirsch looks for a type of interpretation that ends all disputes concerning meaning. This proposed method of ascertaining such an objective fit between interpretation and text is offered in the form of authorial intent qua verbalized authorial meaning. It is this method and standard that the next sections will call into question on argumentative and normative grounds.

This will raise objections to Hirsch's position on a variety of grounds, the first being the internal incoherence of his definition of meaning. As detailed above, Hirsch finds (1) meaning is an issue of thoughts/cognitive states (consciousness) and not mere symbols. Following this intentionalist premise, comes (2) words cannot transmit all meanings or cognitive activities within an author's mind.
Hirsch admits this at a later point in his article, leading him to formulate claim (3) one can only have access to verbalized (or verbalizable) meanings/cognitive activities. Hirsch ends his argument here, believing that universally valid meanings of a text can be garnered from what the author verbalizes about it. This, however, is not the true conclusion of the argument. Instead, it should be stated that (4) not all cognitive states/thoughts/meanings are verbalizable, such as those involving emotional states, mystical feelings, etc. Hirsch admits this point, but doesn’t realize what he is admitting—he seems to take it that this simply leads one to conclude with (3), sticking to purely verbalizable meanings. However, the real conclusion of this line of thought, if one wants a “logical” implication and not an arbitrary decision rendered by Hirsch’s rule, is (5) therefore, not all authorial meanings can be conveyed or discovered. The reason behind (5) ultimately appears to be Hirsch’s own reasoning, “meaning is an affair of consciousness not of words . . . There is no magic land of meanings outside human consciousness” (p. 4). Adhering to this process and line of thought defended by Hirsch would seem to leave the “meaning” of a text forever in doubt as to its completeness and comprehensiveness, as the author may have meant something that is not conveyable in words. Perhaps it is this “startling” insight that prompts individual to paint a picture instead of writing what he or she wants to convey to us. Much of what inspires art and what it means cannot be simply verbalized or translated into non-problematic symbols.

Another major problem with Hirsch’s formulation of authorial intent as constitutive of meaning deals with authorial intent not being conscious or accessible to the author. Hirsch mentions the theories of Jungian psychology, but his theory will be hard-pressed to refute such concerns. This is because Hirsch, adhering to a very simplistic notion of communication and transfer of ideas, is committed to a linear process of cause and effect between
author and audience. This model, generally ignored in modern communication studies and psychology, posits an idea “occurring” in the head of an author; this thought is then put into a “linguistic vehicle” which speeds off into the head of an audience member. If all of its passengers disembark correctly into this new mind, the meaning has been effectively transferred. One must notice the simple lines of cause and effect; it is this aspect of the theory that will allow Jungian, Freudian, and other psychological concerns into the picture of criticism. Why, one may ask, should Hirsch limit the causal sequence to starting at the thought and ending with the receiver? Shouldn’t causal antecedents of the thought (or even contemporaneous with the thought) be allowed into the picture? Indeed, Jung (1958; 1976; 1980) and the school of thought that has followed him posit archetypal and unconscious elements that are important parts of the individual and that influence what is said and how it is said. In short, the meaning of a statement, like a dream, might not be only surface level—instead, further reflection may be needed to allow the author a comprehensive account of what he or she actually meant through the creation and transmission of a certain message. The artificial nature of Hirsch’s account of authorial intent is betrayed yet again; he wants a causal account of meaning, but only certain causes portrayed as the entire causal stimulus. Freud’s (1965) psychology would argue a similar line against Hirsch’s position, claiming that myriad other unconscious or repressed causes may be operating in a sufficient fashion to bring about the production and valuation of an owned text. These issues could be explored in greater depth, but the important point is clear; Hirsch’s criterion of meaning is not comprehensive enough to exhaust the causal and cognitive reasons for producing a text. It seems other, more critical methods that Hirsch deplores, are necessitated by the impotence of searching for verbalized authorial intent.

What Hirsch is missing in his analysis of language
appears to be the dialogic turn that most modern descriptions of meaning have taken. His notion of meaning follows a monologic model of communication that has been critiqued by individuals such as Habermas (1984; 1987). The intentionalist semantics he presupposes ignores the communal nature of language and its effects on thought. Habermas sees linguistic understanding as a communal, shared endeavor. Language exists within existing structures and systems, which in turn shape the thoughts and possibilities accessible to individuals. Additionally, meaning for Habermas is consensual; terms and claims are agreed or disagreed with before a given individual accepts them; thus, a simple "magic bullet" model of communicative meaning such as Hirsh's ignores the back and forth that occurs between a "sender" and a "receiver." Both parties to communicative interaction are open to changing their views and to defending/elaborating them if necessary.

Extending this notion to issues of historicity, Gadamer (1997) argues that understanding is not mere transmission of a set idea. He states,

Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interest the age and in which it seeks to understand itself . . . Not occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well. (p. 296)

Gadamer is arguing, in a similar vein to Habermas, that the communicative situation is less of a transaction and more of a productive interaction. The receiver of a text produces the meaning of it. While Hirsch emphasizes the importance of shared linguistic codes, other concerns are even more vital, such as the ideological schemes of the respective cultures. This explains how the Bhagavad Gita can be given so many divergent (yet defensible) meanings in contemporary society, ranging from non-dual interpreta-
tions to extremely theistic readings. As an aside, one should also note that there is no identifiable author for this text, and no verbalized intentions for a person's writing it have been put down in linguistic code.

The audience to a certain text does not simply partake in that which the author wanted to get into their heads; instead, they are the producers of that meaning in a very real sense. McGee (1990), commenting on critical rhetoric practice in the postmodern age, notes that in the 20th century's burgeoning information revolution, it is the audience that is the producer of texts in that the presented speech, book, etc. is placed in relation to a transparent "finished" discourse that is always already present. For instance, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech, "I Have a Dream," is a complete text but is more importantly a fragment that the receptive audience must be accounted for in relation to past discourse and future discourse/action. What one makes of this speech is absolutely conditioned by social conventions of language use (including such systemic influences of sexist, racist, and classist norms) and what context one can draw from to give meaning to a man speaking on racial issues in Washington. McGee describes this polysemy of the text, which is necessitated by the postmodern condition; he claims,

The communication revolution, however, was accompanied by a knowledge explosion... The only way to 'say it all' in our fractured culture is to provide readers/audiences with dense truncated fragments which cue them to produce a finished discourse in their minds. In short, text construction is now something done more by the consumers than by the producers of discourse. (p. 288)

The system of society and language use itself form a matrix of meaning that far outstrips Hirsch's simple notion of idea, translated in word, that is received by a listener and translated into idea, again. The very life world that the individuals live within structures their world, and accordingly should be analyzed by critics.
It is at this point that a follower of Hirsch’s ideas could say, “but that is the significance of a text, not the meaning.” This retort highlights the extremely arbitrary nature of this division; if masses of people read a text differently, the Hirschian waves his or her hand and this ceases to be meaning and instead becomes significance. The preceding arguments attempted to decry this conception of meaning as logically suspect; the following section will ask, “why should we define meaning in such a way?”

Normative Reasons against equating Meaning with Authorial Intent

Hirsch’s admittedly normative distinction between meaning and significance is an attempt to scientize interpretation; indeed, he worries about the state of the academy that produces so many conflicting interpretations. It seems that he believes that “good” and “valid” interpretations can be had if the criterion of verbalized authorial intent is agreed upon as the standard of a correct interpretation. In this author’s opinion, this seems to relegate critical studies to the role of an intellectual sharecropper; sure, they can “farm” all of “their” land of textual significance, but when it comes down to the heart of the matter, the intention of the author is what really controls the beliefs and actions of the people. What critical scholars are pointing out is the significance, not the meaning of a text. Hopefully, the reader will notice the condescending and hierarchical tone of that last statement. Judgments and power relationships are enshrined by Hirsch’s criterion, and this section will argue why this structure of power is normatively harmful.

The first concern over the criterion of authorial intent is epistemological; how does one go about finding out what the author intended? Hirsch anticipates this issue as a purely logically attack, and falls back to “verbalized” authorial meaning. Is the method so simple as to ask the author to write or tell us what he or she meant by a text? How many words are allowed in such a methodology? Surely, many “meanings” will be simple to describe and
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many will be beyond worlds. Even with this characterization, the worry brought up by Tyson (1999) is important; texts with authors who are long since deceased may lack all “meaning” simply due to our inability to 1) talk to the author and 2) read (i.e., interpret) any textual evidence from the author about what the author intended text X to mean. It is foolish to say such texts lack a meaning, but do have significance; such a criterion of meaning would discourage systematic textual analysis of ideology, etc. and instead focus efforts on historical research, craning for a fragment of an author’s intention so that critics can finally reveal to the world what a text “means.” Another problematic concern for Hirsch is texts that lack an author (such as the Bhagavad Gita); does the scholarly community give up on such texts since there is no way to discern what they mean?

A more serious and unanticipated objection to Hirsch also stems from this epistemological concern. If the discovery of the “meaning” of a text is to come from authorial verbalization, then the majority of authors (long since dead) will necessitate historical research. Even authors of repressed classes are affected, as they lack an adequate voice in society to air their intention behind their texts. One must ask, who has the power and privilege in such a scheme? The answer should be fairly obvious. For much of recorded “history” in the European world, those that have recorded history have been privileged white males. Thus, the historical record excludes the experience and thoughts of people of color and the female gender.

Tyson (1999) writes “Even when traditional historians believe that they are sticking to the facts, the way they contextualized those facts (including which facts are deemed important enough to report and which are left out) determines what stories those facts will tell” (p. 279). The historian, the individual whom the critic must rely upon to discern the authorial intention behind a text, is making an interpretation when he or she “reports” what happened in
the past. In most cases (since most authors of texts are dead or will be dead), the meaning of a text is simply another interpretation at the hands of those who record what an individual meant and what documents are preserved/translated. What we know of the past is related to what our society values and what it wants to erase, either intentionally or through neglect.

The relationship between “history” (as recorded) and the “Other” of minority races and cultures is captured poignantly by Hall (1991). He points out, “History changes your conception of yourself. Thus, another critical thing about identity is that it is partly the relationship between you and the Other . . . Racism is a structure of discourse and representation that tried to expel the Other symbolically—blot it out, put it over there in the Third World, at the margin” (p. 16). Our culture has historically defined itself based upon the telos of white European experience; the records of the other have either been neglected in toto or symbolically altered to suit specific agendas of power. For instance, how our history books portray the Native Americans, African tribes, and colonized peoples in general can serve an important function in legitimating programs of violence or, at the other extreme, providing the illusion that they did not occur. Indeed, the experience of oppressed individuals, when included in the historical canon, is often compromised by an “outsider” perspective; Said (1978) writes,

Since the Orientals cannot represent themselves, they must therefore be represented by others who know more about Islam than Islam knows about itself . . . Note that there is no question of an exchange between Islam’s views and an outsiders: no dialogue, no discussion, no mutual recognition. There is a flat assertion of quality, which the Western policy maker, or his faithful servant, possesses by virtue of his being Western, Shiite, non-Muslim. (p. 97)

The researcher, if he or she assumes that his or her research can adequately capture and report the experience
of an Other is often mistaken; it is this attitude that Wood and Cox (1993) warn about in relation to such issues as relational violence. Who reports the battered female’s experience? Who produces the “evidence” from which policy decisions can be made as “true” or “false?” In relation to the “universal” meaning of any given text, who gives the text to the public and who hides other texts? Which authors get to verbalize their intentions? Who does the translating? Who records, preserves, and refers to these material traces of the historical record? Questions such as this have lead literary studies away from positing certain “universal meaning” in canonical texts, as it becomes apparent that “a text’s ‘universality’ was determined by, and thus too often limited to, white male American experience” (Tyson, 1999, p. 151). These concerns of power and oppression are not petty concerns; contra Hirsch’s simplistic notion of meaning, I argue that a more complex and open conception of meaning would allow for such concerns of power and powerlessness to enter into the critical agenda. When the scholarly community begins to privilege certain people with access to “valid” meaning, efforts to expose such ideology and power should be redoubled. What Hirsch perceives as a paralyzing diversity of critical interpretations, I, along with Wilson, Flores, and Hasian (1993), find this plenum of readings to be a beneficial expose of the various levels of meaning and ideology within a specific text.

Another aspect to this dangerous installation of universally valid meaning in the normative standard of verbalized authorial intent comes from the audiences and viewpoints it privileges. When a text has a “universally valid” meaning that precludes other “meanings” and instead assigns them to mere “significance,” power is flexed over oppositional readings. The theories of Bakhtin emphasize this point. Emerson (1994) describes Bakhtin’s rejection of formalism, the notion that one “true” meaning exists for a given text. She states,
During those rigidly Stalinist years, so saturated with approved prototypes, Bakhtin seems to have feared the potential tyranny of perfect form, the immutability and uninterruptability of any icon that was too fixed in place” (p. 212)

This quotation provides the background for Bakhtin’s thought and the concern it had with issues of power; while the contemporary society we inhabit does not overtly abuse power as Stalin’s regime did, one must remain vigilant against stifling discourse and audiences with the possession of “universally valid meaning.” Hirsch’s conception of language as an ideal transmitter of the comprehensible currency of thoughts/intentions is labeled by Bakhtin as a “unitary language.” In discussing the dangers of this conception of language, Bakhtin (1981) talks of

Language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather . . . as ideologically saturated, language as worldview, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization. (p. 271)

Language is not the mere means to understand an author’s intention; this very orientation toward one answer to end all debate over meaning is the danger itself. Opposed to Hirsch’s fears over too much discussion and too many interpretations of texts, one should truly be concerned with his centralizing rhetoric—the search for “universally valid” and “objective” meanings that stifle others’ opinions of textual meaning. To assume that the words are transparent only to the author’s intended meaning misses the point of Bakhtin’s critic; instead, “these words [the author’s] are embedded in a history that transcends the speaker’s intentions, the words necessarily represent more than the author intends. In this larger context, the author is
a kind of ‘character,’ who is contained within and defined by the communicative structure over which he or she has only limited control” (Garvey, 2000, p. 379). The author and the language he or she uses are always already imbedded in a social fabric that limits their choices of thought and action; any transparency that the words of the author possess (either in the text or in other texts such as interviews) is forced upon it from a position of power. Garvey continues, “Transparency must be forced on the sign by arbitrary social power. This is partly so because the consensus that validates transparency . . . is more likely to mark the ascendance of the centripetal over centrifugal forces of language than it is to signify the victory of reason over power” (p. 380).

The consensus Hirsch wants through the arbitrary criterion of verbalized author intent comes at too high of a price—the shunning of alternate voices that may challenge the elite structures inherent in society, its texts, and its linguistic artifacts. The search for such a “science” of interpretation risks crushing the oppositional readings of texts that allow them to be empowering for oppressed individuals and groups; if one privileged author is allowed to describe the meaning of a certain work for all time’s sake, all other uses of it become lecherous and draining instead of new invigorated instantiations of different meanings for different groups. The centralizing urge to quell discourse for the sake of consensus begs the questions, who has the power and who can decide what criterion should be used?

Hirsch brings up some interesting reasons why the author should not be ignored in criticism; instead of stopping at such an inclusive point, he goes too far in restricting meaning solely to verbalized authorial intent. The sad fact of the matter is that Hirsch sees critical studies in light of the prevailing scientific views of his time; his rhetoric and use of metaphors betray his search for an end to dialogue through the force of “universally valid” meanings. This
paper has argued that such a search is doomed to failure and should not even be attempted because of the abusive results it empowers. Hirsch's approach employs a naïve model of communication that ignores the complexity of the textual/contextual situation; indeed, in one of his counter-arguments for authorial intent, he focuses on the argument for psychological change in the author, and admittedly ignores "the radical historicist view" (p. 1) of changing meanings for changing periods. What Hirsch ignores is what modern inquiry has studied in depth—the role of the society and socializing institutions in affecting meaning and the very use of language. Unfortunately, these postmodern sensibilities are absent from Hirsch's stand, which takes positivistic strains from science and yearns for such "certainty" in textual studies. It would be interesting to speculate on who is empowered by such an approach; beside the dominant classes who control the historical record, what traditions would approve of such a criterion (or indeed the very search for such a criterion)? Perhaps those in search of never changing, revealed dogma in sacred texts would applaud such an attempt to "get it right and then move on." So I end this rebuttal to Hirsch with this plea—let all the voices be heard and never assume there is an end to the dialogue. That end would imply power and the cessation of discourse, and that is an actuality that must never be realized. For in discourse comes novelty and new perspectives, and all texts continually possess new perspectives to reveal about what they say and about who we are. Questing for the meaning of a text is not only futile, but also dangerous to our knowledge of our society and what it could be in the future.

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