

DIANOIA

The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College

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THE UNDERGRADUATE PHILOSOPHY JOURNAL OF BOSTON COLLEGE

SPRING 2012 ISSUE I



FOUCAULT AND *MAD MEN*
PASCAL AND THE REASONABLE HEART
KANT ON JUDGMENTS OF TASTE

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MISSION STATEMENT

Dianoia fosters open philosophical discussion and writing among undergraduate students at Boston College. The journal provides a necessary venue for sharing creative, philosophy-based papers that bridge academic disciplines.

WHAT DOES 'DIANOIA' MEAN?

The ancient Greek word '*diánoia*' translates as 'thought' but connotes a discursive direction or search for a higher form of knowledge.

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COVER

Friedrich, Caspar David. *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*.
Oil-on-canvas. 1818. (Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg,
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QUESTIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

If you have any questions or would like to submit your work for review, please contact the journal at bcdianoia@gmail.com.

The materials presented represent the personal opinions of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of *Dianoia* or the Boston College community.

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EDITORS' NOTE

A man in a dark green overcoat stands perched on a towering rock precipice, gazing into a sea of fog. As we too fix our gazes onto this vast landscape, we begin to make out immense mountains in the background. Since *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* was painted at the height of Romanticism and flourishing Kantian philosophy in Europe, we may see the white, formless haze as a metaphor for the landscape of knowledge. We ask: Is the fog becoming murkier or clearer? What does the fog hide? What does the road ahead look like?

Boston College is a community of thinkers seeking to discern what lies behind the fog. As a liberal arts institution that has one of the largest philosophy departments nationwide, we certainly have a strong drive toward the examined life. In such a life, the sharing of ideas plays a crucial role. No student here is an isolated student, but relies on constant discourse with a flourishing community of great authors, professors, and fellow students.

The final component, learning from our classmates, is what we want to emphasize. It provides a fundamental basis for our education, and one that extends beyond the classroom into dining halls, libraries, and dorm rooms. It is in this spirit of the Boston College philosophy community that this journal has come together. Our goal is to provide students with a venue to exchange ideas, a way to publish original and scholarly work in philosophy. Whether it means engaging Heidegger with Eastern philosophies or connecting Foucault's thinking with *Mad Men*, the popular TV series, we hope to foster thought-provoking writing and discussion among BC undergraduates.

We were surprised and humbled to receive over 70 submissions for our first issue. This made the selection process extremely difficult, as we realized in the countless hours of reading, discussion, and editing. We would like to thank all undergraduates who submitted their work, without which this journal would not have been possible. We also want to thank the Philosophy Department and the Institute for the Liberal Arts for their generous support, especially Fr. Ronald Tacelli, S.J., Fr. Arthur Madigan, S.J., and Prof. Mary Crane. Last but certainly not least, we thank our editors for their hard work and commitment in bringing this journal to completion.

We hope that you all enjoy this inaugural issue of *Dianoia*. We look forward to your continued support for the start of what we hope will be a staple on campus for years to come.

Sincerely,

Lucia Kim, *Editor-in-Chief*
Kyle Kavanaugh, *Managing Editor*
Nathaniel Sanders, *Managing Editor*

The telescope through which we see the universe cannot be made to see itself.

Love causes people to do irrational things – to open themselves up to the chance of pain.

When we make a particular judgment of taste that something is beautiful, our claim is not merely subjective.

The shock of Draper's character reveals the hypocrisy our society still contains today.

If we attempt to shine no such light, we see no chrysanthemums.

Any action for the sake of bettering loses significance.

We are moved to reach out and grab those aspects of our experience that are most unstable and wildly erratic.

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“*Draper’s inner duality, the careful balance between family man and hedonist, implies that the notion of repressive sexuality and sexual freedom are two sides of the same coin in the vision of Mad Men.*”

Foucault and *Mad Men*: The Self, Sexuality, and Pleasure

Neil Patch

Set in New York City's high-powered advertising world of the early 1960s, the television program *Mad Men* has captivated viewers and critics since its inception in 2007. The series' protagonist, Don Draper, is the creative director at the fictional Sterling Cooper Advertising Agency, and his life exudes the ideals of the American dream: he is handsome, successful, and owns a suburban home with two children and a beautiful blonde wife. However, it is the secret half of Draper that contains his countless sexual affairs and hidden past that fascinates viewers, and a considerable portion of *Mad Men*'s appeal is the tightrope Draper constantly walks between clean-cut family man and unabashed hedonist. He attempts to create within and rebel against a system of societal conformity, while at the same time working to propagate this cultural passivity and acceptance of the structures of power. The subject's striving for freedom, a central theme of Foucault's life work, is at the dramatic heart of *Mad Men*'s plot, and the program explores the difficulty of creating new value systems of the self and pleasure while retaining a sense of balance.

The study of Draper's character becomes one that incorporates the Foucaultian areas of the self, sexuality, and pleasure. In *Mad Men*'s first season, Draper is portrayed as being caught between the myriad of extremes that weave the ethical snare of modern life: the restricting powers of society and personal desire, want and need, asceticism and pleasure, reason and madness. Draper struggles with his position between the aforementioned poles, and in doing so represents the greater hypocrisy of a Western society that seems to readily believe that life cannot be a work of art, sexual desire is repressed, and pleasure must be restricted. Thus, *Mad Men* serves to establish a history of the present by engaging the Foucaultian topics of creating the self as a work of art, critiquing

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the repressive hypothesis, and exploring the ethics of pleasure. These three areas of Foucaultian inquiry reflect how Draper's struggle embodies Foucault's own goal of establishing a means to the subject's freedom, and the resulting difficulty of such an attempt while still being subject to the realities of one's existence in modern society. By focusing on the personal and professional struggles of Don Draper, *Mad Men* effectively deconstructs the modern capitalistic society and analyses the contradictions and tensions that lie underneath the surface of such a system. Foucault and Draper promote different paths of life, but Draper's issues arise from taking Foucaultian concepts too far.

Creating an Aesthetic Identity

The penultimate episode of *Mad Men's* first season explains who Don Draper really is—the short answer being not really “Don Draper”. Born Dick Whitman, Draper assumed the identity of fallen comrade Donald Draper at the age of nineteen following an attack on their position during the Korean War. Reinforcements subsequently believed Whitman to have died, thus allowing him to live as Don Draper and escape a past filled with poverty and abuse. Under this new alias, Draper moves to New York City as a salesman and crafts his new alias into a stereotypical image of post-war success: upper middle-class white male. Draper imbues himself with a *mélange* of previously unattainable ideals, and he becomes handsome, confident, professional, debonair, and respected: a symbol of masculine power.

Such a drastic transformation invokes the Foucaultian concept of creating the self into a work of art and evolving one's aesthetic identity. Foucault describes how much of nineteenth century history may be viewed as a “series of difficult attempts, to reconstitute an ethics and an aesthetics of the self”.¹ Draper may thus be viewed as a follower of this tradition, and the struggle between the effort to reconstitute his ethical and aesthetic self is dramatized by *Mad Men* via the literal split between who he was (Dick Whitman) and who he has become. Foucault supported the idea of creating the self into a work of art, and his elucidation of the concept may be applied to Draper's own attempt to create himself in an artistic manner: “We have hardly any remnant of the idea in our society that the principle work of art which one must take care of, the main area

1 Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 251.

to which one must apply aesthetic values, is oneself, one's life, one's existence".² In following Foucault's analysis, Draper acts "so as to give to [his] life certain values," and so Draper creates his persona of power in order to attribute various characteristics to his existence and turn himself into an "object for a sort of knowledge".³

However, Draper does not appear to engage in practices of caring for the self, and thus his own sense of creating the self into a work of art differs from Foucault's. One crucial difference between the philosophies of Foucault and Draper is Foucault's view of living as if death is constantly present in life and every individual day is the individual's last.⁴ Draper proclaims that he is "living like there's no tomorrow, because there isn't one," but this perspective is seemingly used as an excuse for his affairs.⁵ Instead, Foucault's goal is to lead the individual toward a sense of fullness in one's life, and he quotes Marcus Aurelius' judgment that living each day as if it is the last leads to "moral perfection".⁶

In accordance with this Foucaultian interpretation, Draper's job plays particular importance. Draper is the head creative director at Sterling Cooper, and his main responsibility is to manipulate consumers for the benefit of his clients: "Advertising is based on happiness. We make the lie, we invent want".⁷ This notion of inventing want, and by association desire, reflects upon Draper's own self creation. Draper finds himself able to rely upon this form of invention because he sees no overarching system of morality: "I hate to break it to you, but there is no big lie, there is no system, the universe is indifferent".⁸ While Draper believes in the mantra of "art for art's sake" and does not bring morality into the art of his persona, Foucault stresses the importance of defeating one's vices, gaining self control, and "resisting the temptations of pleasures and the flesh".⁹ This struggle is the major point of contention within Draper, and his relation to sex and pleasure take on dominating importance.

2 Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 271.

3 Ibid.

4 Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 478.

5 Weiner, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," *Mad Men*.

6 Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 271.

7 Weiner, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," *Mad Men*.

8 Provenzano, "The Hobo Code," *Mad Men*.

9 Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 265.

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Questioning Sexual Repression

Throughout *Mad Men*'s evolving drama, one component remains constant: the empowering and dominating powers of desire. While the common advertising trope is that "sex sells," Draper instead focuses on the commercialization of desire. Draper thus views sexuality as merely a manifestation of the greater power of desire. Upon being told by Peggy Olson, the agency's only female copywriter, that her advertising proposal intends to use the apparently universal truth that "sex sells," Draper responds with his explanation of using the power of desire:

Says who? Just so you know, the people who talk that way think that monkeys can do this. They take all this monkey crap and just stick it in a briefcase completely unaware that their success depends on something more than their shoeshine. You are the product. You—feeling something. That's what sells. Not them. Not sex. They can't do what we do, and they hate us for it.¹⁰

Draper thus sees the true power of advertising as the ability to tap into the underlying forces *against* the Christian doctrine of renunciation that has permeated the West, particularly America.

Foucault sees the paradox of such a societal position as one of the key components to his analysis in *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1*: "Briefly, my aim is to examine the case of a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its hypocrisy for more than a century, which [...] promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function".¹¹ *Mad Men* as a whole also seeks to reestablish a view of the "sexual liberation" of the late 60s, as Draper exists in a corporate culture that thinks nothing of transgressing the moral tenets of sexuality.

Regarding Foucault's challenges to the repressive hypothesis, *Mad Men* provides a portrait of a society that goes against the accepted norm. Firstly, sexual repression is not portrayed as an historical fact given Draper's place outside of the moral bounds of sexuality; his seductions are frequent and deliberate.¹² It is important to note that *Mad Men* thus shows that the apparent "sexual liberation" never occurred as people (most notably men, as they are

10 Weiner, "For Those Who Think Young," *Mad Men*.

11 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1.*, 8.

12 *Ibid.*, 10.

portrayed in the series) have always acted upon sexual desire, but Foucault's notion of "silence" on this matter has made this fact seem more like a shadow or mist.¹³ The common notion is that the eruption of sexual freedom came in the latter half of the decade, but the first season of *Mad Men* occurs throughout 1960 in a culture very much attached to the 50s. Thus, men such as Don Draper have always existed and will continue to exist. The issue arises when the prevailing ethical position of modern society on sexuality deems that Draper is "bad" and transgresses society.

Mad Men addresses the historico-theoretical question of whether the "workings of power [...] belong primarily to the category of repression" through the aspect of advertising. Draper is essentially a captain of industry, and as an advertising executive he appeals to what the public desires; advertising is an open admission that such powers are not repressed. In the first episode of the series, Draper explains how happiness affects the consumer:

Advertising is based on one thing, happiness. And you know what happiness is? Happiness is the smell of a new car. It's freedom from fear. It's a billboard on the side of the road that screams reassurance that whatever you are doing is okay.¹⁴

Happiness is the goal of desire, and so happiness takes on any sort of meaning for the individual. Draper's job entails revealing and playing upon what people commonly consider to be repressed, and then putting it up on a billboard for all of the world to see. Thus, Draper is simply communicating with what is natural within the individual, and not playing into the myth of sexual repression.

The third and final prong of Foucault's attack against sexual repression is the historico-political question which entails discerning if the critical discourse against repression is part of the "same historical network as the thing it denounces".¹⁵ To approach this question through *Mad Men*, one must return to the scenario in which Draper's copywriter Peggy seems to not only accept the repressive hypothesis of sexuality, but also assume that its mythology should be played upon in their advertising. While Draper does not share this view, the immediate connection Peggy makes reveals that an industry such as advertising may be interpreted as paradoxical according to Foucault's question. While

13 Ibid., 5.

14 Weiner, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," *Mad Men*.

15 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1*, 10.

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Draper rejects the notion of the repressive hypothesis, his line of business plays upon sexuality even today; ads and commercials are filled with sexual images. Thus, *Mad Men* portrays the questioning and the proliferation of the repressive hypothesis to be encompassed by the greater forces of industry present in the advertising business. Draper's inner duality, the careful balance between family man and hedonist, further implies that the notion of repressive sexuality and sexual freedom are two sides of the same coin in at least the vision of *Mad Men*.

Throughout the first season of *Mad Men*, Draper's secret affairs are only discovered by two female secretaries who determine that they must keep his infidelity hidden out of the sense of some kind of duty to Draper as their superior. The concealment of sexual affairs and the concurrent proliferation of the knowledge of their existence are sentiments reminiscent of Foucault's take on modern society's attitude toward sex: "What is peculiar to modern societies [...] is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum while exploiting it as the secret".¹⁶ Peggy, the woman who initially stumbled upon a phone conversation between Draper and a lover, felt the compulsion to share it with her colleague Joan. Instead of keeping the knowledge to herself, she exploits this information, while still treating it as the secret; the power of such knowledge comes from its very existence as a "secret" within modern society. This level of secrecy regarding Draper's affairs reveals the greater power Draper possesses upon comparing it to what Foucault writes about power and secrecy: "[Power's] success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms [...] For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation".¹⁷ Draper thus defines his notion of power in terms of its relationship to secrecy, given the nature of his own "secret" identity and the secrecy of his affairs.

The Struggle of Redefining Pleasure

By representing a structure of power within himself, the adulterous side of Draper embodies an almost weaponization of sex and strays away from Foucault's vision of moderating pleasures. Like Foucault, part of Draper sees sexuality as an instrument that has been conceived as an instrument of power,

16 Ibid., 35.

17 Ibid., 86.

and his main conflict emerges out of his simultaneous support of capitalism and rebellion against the greater structure of bio-power that controls him:

The adjustment and accumulation of men to that of capital, the joining of the growth of human groups to the expansion of productive forces and the differential allocation of profit, were made possible in part by the exercise of bio-power in its many forms and modes of application.¹⁸

Draper's rejection of sexuality as a moral containment of sexual desire leads him to the other extreme of seeking pleasure and away from Foucault, a thirst for power via pleasure reminiscent of Foucault's analysis of Greek sexual ethics. This further classifies Draper as a man struggling with a split within his self: one foot in Greek sexual ethics, while the other remains in the widespread moral system of marriage.

It would seem that Draper finds himself in the realm of Greek *aphrodesia*, "the acts, gestures, and contacts that produce a certain form of pleasure".¹⁹ Foucault describes *aphrodesia* as not "an ontology of deficiency or desire" or a "nature setting the standard for acts," but rather an "ontology of a force that linked together acts, pleasures, and desires"; Draper also seems to make no distinction between these three categories.²⁰ The Greeks viewed this doctrine of desire and pleasure to be freeing rather than restricting, and Foucault makes the distinction between it and the later Christian system:

[The Greeks] might take great pains to fix the optimal age to marry and have children, and the best season for having sexual relations, but they would never say, like a Christian spiritual director, which gestures to make or avoid making, which preliminary caresses were allowed, which position to take, or in which conditions one could interrupt the act.²¹

Draper the family man lives in a Christian society concerned with hiding sex away in the parent's bedroom, while Draper the transgressor of sexual morality engages in seduction out in the open: music clubs, expensive restaurants, bars. The hidden aspect of sexuality is thus revealed in the public forum, and it is in

18 Ibid., 141.

19 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, 40.

20 Ibid., 43.

21 Ibid., 39.

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this setting that his power emerges; Draper's confidence in his power ignores any concern over which gestures to make or the allowance of caresses.

Within the realm of Draper's affairs, two female characters represent the struggle Draper faces between excess and a moderate approach to extramarital pleasure. The character of Midge Daniels, a proto-hippie painter with whom Draper engages in an affair, serves as the embodiment of Draper's extreme pursuit of pleasure. Their encounters are sudden and passionate, even occurring in the middle of the workday—two creative beings indulging in pleasure. However, Draper becomes offended upon learning of her other lovers, and he ceases their relationship.²² Even in the throes of a wild affair based upon pleasure, Draper's association of pleasure to ethical commitment shows through the Don Juan persona. On the opposing side of this spectrum is Rachel Menken, the owner of a department store and one of Draper's customers. The two engage in an affair, during which Draper muses on the reality of love:

The reason you haven't felt it is because it doesn't exist. What you call love was invented by guys like me to sell nylons. You're born alone and you die alone and this world just drops a bunch of rules on top of you to make you forget those facts.²³

Menken believes in the reality of love, even if Draper claims not to, and thus her participation in their affair is not due to bestial pleasure seeking, but rather an attempt to find love.

Draper's sexual "immorality" perhaps even challenges the limits of *aphrodesia* and moves into the realm of the Don Juan character Foucault analyzes in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*:

Underneath the great violator of the rules of marriage—stealer of wives, seducer of virgins, the shame of families, and an insult to husbands and fathers—another personage can be glimpsed: the individual driven, in spite of himself, by the somber madness of sex.²⁴

Foucault continues to write that the character of Don Juan overturned both "the law of marriage and the order of desires," and in doing so he rebels against the "two great systems conceived by the West for governing sex".²⁵ The connection

22 Albert, Jacquemetton, and Jacquemetton. "Nixon vs. Kennedy," *Mad Men*.

23 Weiner, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," *Mad Men*.

24 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1*, 39.

25 *Ibid.*, 39-40.

between Don Draper and Don Juan, in both name and ethical ambivalence, appears to be quite clear. Foucault's analysis of the favored role within Greek sexual ethics serves to effectively describe the role Draper creates within his society:

[I]n sexual behavior there was one role that was intrinsically honorable and valorized without question: the one that consisted in being active, in dominating, in penetrating, in asserting one's superiority.²⁶

Foucault repeats this sentiment in "On the Genealogy of Ethics" in which he describes how "the Greek ethics of pleasure is linked to a virile society, to dissymmetry, exclusion of the other, an obsession with penetration, and a kind of threat of being dispossessed of your own energy".²⁷ Foucault finds all of this "quite disgusting," and it would seem that he would think the same of Draper's insatiable desire for pleasure.²⁸

Conclusion

As *Mad Men* has sparked a revival of interest in 1960s culture among its viewership and beyond, spawning everything from a clothing line at retailer Banana Republic to character-specific "Barbie" dolls, its self-reflective intention has come full circle. Much in the same way that *The History of Madness* intends to comment on Foucault's own society through the analysis of the history preceding it, *Mad Men* seeks to comment on the state of current America. Some viewers naturally find Draper's actions disgusting, and yet countless other shows, films, and books portray the drama surrounding infidelity as a major interest point. The shock of Draper's character reveals the hypocrisy our society still contains today, and the taboo association with anyone who goes against the "norm" of society's ethical structure. One who commits adultery is thus forever an "adulterer," and the viewer permanently sees Draper as he relates to this label. While future seasons of *Mad Men* deal with the repercussions of Draper's actions and his journey to return to a more balanced life, the first season displays him to the viewer as a man in the throes of the "somber madness of sex".²⁹ Foucault and the audience may find Draper disgusting, it would seem that

26 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 2, 214.

27 Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. 258.

28 Ibid.

29 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*: Vol. 1, 39.

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Foucault would appreciate or support the character's ongoing search for personal truth.

While the opening moments of *Mad Men* explains its title became short hand for the advertising men of Madison Avenue, its implicit meaning begs the question: Is a man like Don Draper “mad”? Foucault's answer is deceptively simple: “where there is a work of art, there is no madness”.³⁰ If this is madness, if Don Draper is a “mad man”, then our society is based upon madness in at least the personal and professional realms that we hide from others. *Mad Men* ultimately becomes a piece of art conveying the difficulties and complexities the individual encounters upon applying areas of Foucaultian thought to their own lives. Draper's portrayal as a 1960s American analogue to the Superman conveys the false sense of self-unity society imagines the individual to have; we live in extremes, not the more balanced view Foucault intends. Even so, the shock and secretive pleasure viewers find in watching Draper's exploits in *Mad Men* unearths our capacity to be just like him, and alerts us, the audience, to the likelihood that we are.

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30 Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, 298.

The Reasonable Heart

Bart Celie

Ever since Rousseau, we seem to be incorrigibly insistent on being sentimental. Our age values feeling more than any age that has preceded it. Though it did not survive the disillusionment of the 20th century entirely, Romanticism has managed to retain some hold on the modern mind; the Stoic attitude that dismissed emotion, in any case, seems to be gone. Opinion carries phenomenal weight, and the word “reason” is subliminally associated with the “cold,” the “drab,” and the “mathematical.” It is therefore not very surprising that Blaise Pascal is frequently quoted when he writes: “The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing...”¹ The sentence comes straight from Pascal’s *Pensées* (or “thoughts”) and is the 423rd of almost 1000 ponderings. Frequently paraphrased as “the heart has reasons which reason does not know,” it is used to emphasize the modern notion that there is some deeper meaning to feeling that trumps reason: that intuitive feeling leads the individual to truth by dark, winding paths that are foreign and alien to reason. We have misunderstood Pascal, however, if we take this contemporary hermeneutic to be his. This misunderstanding, in turn, is based largely on our Cartesian definition of reason.

The first obstacle to such an interpretation of Pascal is that he writes that the heart has *reasons* - not some vague, ambiguous, subjective intuition of the sort that we often ascribe to feeling. Pascal intends to say that the heart is rationally grounded in the same manner that the intellect is rationally grounded when it knows that $2+2$ is equal to 4. He points out that reason cannot always know the rational grounds of the heart, but Pascal’s observation does not change the nature of rational grounds themselves: it is based upon it. An additional problem is that the heart and reason (or the intellect) find themselves juxtaposed, and they must therefore be related in some way. The word *reasons* must relate

1 Pascal, *Pensées*, 127.

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the heart and “reason,” otherwise it would be a pointless statement. To say that, “a chicken has feathers which a monkey cannot have” would be to say nothing, because having feathers is a property specific to only one of the two juxtaposed creatures. On the other hand, to say that, “a chicken makes sounds that a monkey cannot make” would be to relate the two by the word *sounds*. In like manner, both the heart and reason must be capable of having *reasons*; the word must, therefore, retain the same meaning whether it is applied to the intellect or to the heart.

It may seem odd then, that Pascal attributed something so distinctly rational to the heart. Yet, he was not the first philosopher to recognize that there was an element of reason that could not be grasped by the intellect as clearly as, say, geometry could be. In Book VI of *The Republic*, Plato categorizes different levels of understanding in his famous Divided Line analogy. Of the four categories, the highest is an intuitive understanding of the Forms; what Plato calls the “exercise of reason.”² What the contemporary person commonly calls reason—the mathematical, analytical type of thinking—was classified by Plato as “understanding” that was “something between opinion and reason.”³ It was therefore only third in the Divided Line, with the wisdom that grasped ideals such as Goodness, Beauty, and Justice being directly superior to it. Thus, dialectic consisted of an intuitive understanding, and the reasoning of the scientific method was a step below it.

Likewise, Aristotle draws a distinction between intuitive reason and scientific knowledge in the sixth book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The argument is that scientific knowledge is demonstrable; inductive in nature, scientific knowledge is derived from that which can be clearly demonstrated. Aristotle points out, however, that the first principle from which we begin our investigation of scientific knowledge cannot itself be demonstrated. He writes: “the first principle from which what is scientifically known follows cannot be an object of scientific knowledge... for that which can be scientifically known can be demonstrated.”⁴ It often escapes us that even the sciences, which are (rightly) taken for indisputable truth once they have withstood the rigorous test of the

2 Plato, *The Republic*, cited in *Great Dialogues of Plato*, 311.

3 Ibid.

4 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 107.

scientific method, depend upon assumed principles. These principles cannot be proved themselves by the scientific method, for they are the constituent parts of that very method. We are thus unable to prove with mathematical certainty the principles upon which mathematics as a whole is based; the telescope through which we see the universe cannot be made to see itself.

The three laws of logic are good examples of assumed first principles that play a role in any argument, be it scientific or not. First, there is the Principle of Non-contradiction, which summarizes the idea that “ x does not equal non- x .” To say that a “black bird is white” is quite clearly meaningless. Second, there is the Principle of Excluded Middle, which states that something must be either “ x or non- x .” The answer must be either-or (think back to taking your SATs, and how difficult multiple-choice answers would have been without this principle). Last, there is the Principle of Identity, which makes the simple but crucial assumption that “ x equals x .” Together, these three laws provide a basic scaffold upon which we build with certainty; something as simple as solving a basic algebra equation points to the necessity of all three implicit assumptions. Without them, argument would be unstructured chaos. Yet these principles cannot themselves be proved: the principles that allow you to use the variable “ x ” in a mathematical equation to prove that its identity equals a certain number cannot themselves be proved by that same mathematical equation (or any, for that matter). They are simply assumed.

Pascal himself points to this phenomenon elsewhere in the *Pensées*. When discussing the skeptics (who deny the dogmatists’ claim to any absolute knowledge) he writes, “The strongest of the skeptics’ arguments, to say nothing of minor points, is that we cannot be sure that these principles are truth (faith and revelation apart) except through some natural intuition.”⁵ We cannot *prove* with certainty that any of the universally assumed first principles are true. Even the famous Cartesian starting point, “*cogito ergo sum*” (“I think therefore I am”), falls apart when the laws of logic are questioned, to say nothing of the argument even if the laws of logic are left intact. These first principles and laws cannot be subjected to reason, if all we mean by reason is mathematical analysis. That is why Pascal writes that they can only be known as truth by some natural intuition—in doing so he hints at the very same idea that Plato and Aristotle

5 Pascal, *Pensées*, 33.

The Reasonable Heart

tried to get across by the notion of “intuitive reason.” It follows, however, that, if man is capable of this intuitive understanding, then the skeptic’s argument cannot be entirely correct either. Pascal writes, “I pause at the dogmatists’ only strong point, which is that we cannot doubt natural principles if we speak sincerely and in all good faith.”⁶ These natural principles are subjectively and psychologically certain; they may not have a mathematical proof, but it would be dishonest to say that we doubted them. The laws of logic are universally accepted and hardly ever doubted. So we are presented, then, with a seeming paradox: we cannot deny nature and dismiss these first principles in favor of the skeptics, and yet we cannot deny scientific reason and admit to the dogmatist’s claim of absolute certainty. As Pascal phrases it, “Nature confounds the skeptics and the Platonists, and reason confounds the dogmatists.”⁷

The answer to this riddle is the *synthesis* of faith and reason. The medieval period was quite good at this; statues of St. Augustine, for example, depict the saint holding a flaming heart in the one hand and a book in the other. Pascal was simply reminding us of this synthesis: the kind that neither claimed absolute intellectual certainty, yet did not deny the veracity of reason. But why did he have to remind anyone of this? To answer this question, one can look at a contemporary (and friend) of Pascal: Descartes. In the midst of Enlightenment success, Descartes sought to prove the skeptic wrong by applying the seemingly infallible scientific method to philosophy. In *Discourse on Method*, Descartes marvels over the certainty of mathematical reasoning and wonders at its rather meager application to philosophy (up to that point). He writes, “I delighted most of all in mathematics because of the certainty and the evidence of its reasonings... I was astonished by the fact that no one had built anything more noble upon its foundations, given that they were so solid and firm.”⁸ What Descartes proceeded to do, then, was precisely that — attempt to build a philosophy based upon the foundations of mathematical and scientific reasoning. Indeed, the second of Descartes’ four steps of the “method” required him to “divide each of the difficulties I would examine into as many parts as possible and as was required in order better to resolve them.”⁹ This type of

6 Ibid., 34.

7 Ibid., 35.

8 Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 4.

9 Ibid., 11.

division is *analysis*, as opposed to *synthesis*, and it effectively redefined reason to mean “a mathematical sum of its parts.” Yet to reduce *reason* as a whole to “scientific reason” is to ignore Aristotle’s warning that scientific knowledge is by definition demonstrable, whereas the principles upon which this knowledge is obtained cannot themselves be demonstrable. Somewhere, somehow, a leap of faith is required. Descartes himself seemed to be aware of this, when he wrote, “I judged that I could take as a general rule that the things we conceive very clearly and very distinctly are all true...”¹⁰ To make “clear and distinct ideas” the criterion for truth is to appeal, implicitly, to the “natural intuition” mentioned by Pascal, for there is no other reasonable ground to assume that what we see as clear and distinct is necessarily true.

Thus, the post-Descartes man began to equate reason with scientific analysis and soon forgot the ancient picture, which held that *reason*, as a whole, was *more* than the mathematical sum of its parts. Reason meant the synthesis of that which was assumed by faith and that which could be deduced with certainty. Modern conceptions of reason emphasize the latter but neglect the former almost entirely. The third section of Plato’s Divided Line — namely, understanding such as that used in mathematics and geometry — has become the highest and truest definition of reason. No longer do we validate “natural intuition” (though we by no means cease to use it) and no longer does the “exercise of reason” mean the intuitive understanding of ideals. It was in the midst of this changing understanding of reason that Pascal lived, and it was with the old synthesis in mind that he wrote that the “heart has reasons of which reason knows nothing.” For Pascal, man was a puzzle — being at once kept from certainty, yet intuitively rational — and the answer lay in the synthesis of reasons which only the heart could perceive (and could therefore only be accepted by faith) with the knowledge of the intellect. In turn, Pascal painted a picture of reason that presents it as a whole that is greater than a mathematical sum of its parts.

10 Ibid., 19.

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Experiencing Art for Heidegger and the Eastern Philosophies

Clay Venetis

*Lighting the lantern—
The yellow chrysanthemums
Lose their color.¹*

Yosa Buson in his haiku translated above approaches the fundamental problem both Martin Heidegger and the philosophies of Taoism and Buddhism attempt to expose between man and art. How does one use the light of his lantern to see the work of art before him without having the very same light obstruct the truth of that work? Heidegger, in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, and various teachings of these eastern philosophies, arrive at quite similar resolutions to this question. Both systems of thought seek to approach the truth hidden in art by standing away from the work in order to truly be with it. We must attempt a radical suspension in experiencing the work by first stripping ourselves of the preconceptions inherent in that very experience we are so accustomed to.

I begin my analysis of this transformation in aesthetics by outlining Heidegger's use of the Sceptic suspension, or epokhé, as adopted by German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, and its application in experiencing the work of art. This leads to a reevaluation of what gives art its 'thingness', or concrete being. Each step will be viewed as a necessary means to moving closer to an original truth within the work that could not disclose itself otherwise. I find that this epokhé in approaching truth is quite analogous to the intention of avoiding delusion in Buddhism and Taoism. Given these similar motives, I will show that Heidegger's thought and method emerges in east Asian examples of 1) the artistic event of the Japanese Wabi Tea ceremony, 2) Buddhist artist and scholar

1 Hass, *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa*, 112.

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Hisamatsu Hoseki Shin'ichi's own comparisons presented at his conference with Heidegger in Freiburg, and 3) the Zen question and answer paradoxes, or instructional *koan*.

To remain in the philosophical light, I must first address a presupposition taken in the title with *Eastern philosophies* and with *Buddhism and Taoism* mentioned above. Here I mean various interpretations of Taoism from the *Tao Te Ching* and primarily Japanese Zen Buddhist practices and parables, many of which were made available by the influential translator and writer D.T. Suzuki. Though rooted in theological rites, aspects of such traditions are profoundly applicable to western progressions in phenomenology, metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics, to name a few. But stripping Taoist and Buddhist teachings of their origins in search of 'western philosophy' would render them baseless and unfounded. I rather wish to find pieces of their essential nature that can be illuminated by Heidegger's own philosophical thought. This traversing is meant to parallel the practice of *skillful means* by which Buddhist scholars of China sought to transcend cultural limits and boundaries in their teachings. Monks employing this principle revealed the same eternal truths through foreign languages and conflicting religious systems, ultimately facilitating Buddhism's spread to Japan alongside Confucianism and Taoism alike. Admittedly, one finds stark divergences in disclosing hidden Buddhist and Taoist truths in a single figure of 20th century German phenomenology and existentialism. We thus keep our focus on the similarities in their attempts to move beyond a traditional aesthetic experience of art, and raise it to an ontological level of unconcealing a hidden truth of the being.

Heidegger's Epokhé

Heidegger often borrowed the concept of epokhé that Husserl adapted from the Skeptics (though Heidegger does not use the actual term) to express the necessity of stepping back from things we wish to experience in order to be truly near them.² Taking from the ancient Skeptic tradition, epokhé typically describes an equanimity and passivity in the philosopher's arguments that renders them solely defensive, keeping him clear of any positive truth assertions. This stemmed from the general Skeptic belief that there is, in fact, no certain, immutable truth to be known, as all things change ceaselessly. Husserl, however,

² Heidegger, "The Thing" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 175-179.

did not reassert aspects of the Skeptic viewpoint to stay away from truth claims. He wished only to embrace the spirit of the preliminary position one achieves in *epokhé*, from which the philosopher can then let the phenomenon of the thing itself come forth. In regard to this experiential position, Heidegger himself notes in *The Thing* that “we ought to turn toward the being, think about it in regard to its being, but by means of this thinking at the same time let it rest upon itself in its very own being.”³

The difficulties in this are obvious. *Epokhé* describes a turning away to only then truly see, letting the work in front of us be in a way that disengages our limiting structures and evaluations. Because Heidegger’s *epokhé* is not clearly designated as a passive or active state, we are consistently faced with Buson’s initial problem. If we wish to see the color of the chrysanthemums, we must shine our light of forming experience. But if we attempt to shine no such light, we see no chrysanthemums. Heidegger elucidates this predicament in his essay *The Thing* by noting that humans have not gained a universal nearness by the forward-moving powers of technology, but instead have only lost an essential farness.⁴ Surely video-conferencing helps with connecting humanity, but we forget that a video projection cannot stand in for the real person. Remembering the essential farness between others and ourselves actually brings us closer to the truth of that rapport. In regard to art, then, we still must understand that a distance in our attitude is required to see the work as it is. Art cannot be degraded to a stimulation of our senses and does not depend on our interpretive attempts to become closer to it. The work is neither appreciated for the state of mind it produces within us, nor the pleasure that its beauty might provide.⁵ The goal of *epokhé* is to let art, and everything involved therein, continue without our experience aiming at it, thereby obstructing what we aim for. The way towards enacting *epokhé*, however, is much less clear.

Yet a lack of clarity is expected if we are to reform the western aesthetic conception that has long been buried in the sediment of self-reflective thought. For Heidegger, art is not a representation of ideas in the Platonic sense nor even of nature and the external world in the Aristotelian sense. The shortcomings of

3 Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 31.

4 Heidegger, “The Thing,” 175-179.

5 Heidegger, “The Origin,” 66, 79.

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traditional aesthetics stem from looking at the work with what Heidegger calls ‘inadequate thing-structures’, such as a substance with attributes, the unity of the manifold of sensations, or formed matter.⁶ Using these in our conversation on art, we forget that the work is far more than a thing in traditional terms, as we will see in the next section. It is not necessary for art to copy the existing world, nor is it to be valued as a piece of equipment.⁷ Heidegger will thus use a Greek temple to exemplify a work of art not merely representative and not defined by its usefulness.⁸ The description of the temple sets the reader’s focus on art in and for itself.

Truth in Art

The work of art, being more than a mere thing, is the site of the happening and revealing of original truth. Leaving behind the common definition of truth as a correct connection of thought to the external world, Heidegger reinterprets the Greek word for truth, *alethia*, as an *unconcealment*. (He draws from the word’s negativity (a-lethia) and direct meaning, which can be translated as un-forgetting). There is something at work in the art that is brought out, unconcealed, from its refusing nature. The work embodies truth in its own work-being, where the conflict of what Heidegger calls ‘earth’ and ‘world’ happens. Earth is not to be seen in its literal or physical definition; rather, it is the ontological ground from which all things arise and to which they all return. It is the yet unformed building blocks of art: the words, notes, and sculpture shapes before they are created as beings and evaluated by man. World, as an opposite, is the setting up of the historical/cultural aspect of the work that can be known by humans. It pulls earth into what Heidegger calls the Open of our understanding for the first time. Paint strokes, for example, are first seen as they truly are when the world sets them into place in the work. That is, the specific lines and hues of a painting are first revealed for what they are when they become indispensable pieces to reproducing the essence of an otherwise indescribable moment.

The essential conflict between world and earth makes the two inseparable. Both define the other in that “the world grounds itself on the earth and the

6 Ibid., 37-8.

7 Ibid., 37.

8 Ibid., 40.

earth juts through the world.”⁹ This conflict is not meant to eventually establish a victor or lead to mutual destruction, though. The striving of one over and through the other lets each rise to their self-asserting natures.¹⁰ A word comes into the Open for the first time in the poem because the world of this work gives it a value, thrusts it into culture. It also conceals itself in that very same moment (earth pulling world down) because to bring an indescribable thing (an unformed word) into value-laden history is to limit it to man’s value-laden experience. We have lost the formless earth just as it seemed to protrude, but this is its nature, and only its difference to world reveals it as such.

Outlining this dichotomy gives us a picture of what is necessary for truth to establish itself in a being (or a work) in such a way that this being occupies the aforementioned Open of truth.¹¹ If this is the case, one cannot understand truth as some core or jewel at the center of the work to be dug out. When we view a work of art, we experience both the truth of that work and the event of truth itself. Aligning ourselves with this Open is an unconcealment of Heidegger’s ontological notion of Being in general, not just the particular work in front of us. This condition or clearing that art must occupy in revealing Being and in setting truth to work is also the site of the founding of an original history. It defines humans as those who have the *techne*, or artistic knowledge and crafting competence, to create it.

Yet even with such implications, one begins to see the person gradually stripped away in favor of what is happening in the work. *The Origin of the Work of Art* is distinct in this shift of emphasis, which is indicative of the movement of epokhé itself. Allusions to the creator or the creative process often serve as detours to the original question of “ask[ing] the work what and how it is.”¹² Heidegger does not completely disregard those involved in making and experiencing art. He understands their necessity, but defines their roles in such a way that leaves them subservient to letting the truth happen on its own. This radical point is brought to the foreground in Heidegger’s description of the work of art’s preservers. Creators and witnesses of art are not curators keeping art in

9 Ibid., 47.

10 Ibid.

11 Heidegger, “The Origin,” 61.

12 Ibid., 18.

proper condition for viewing or trade, but those who successfully *stand within* the Open of the being before them. As Heidegger appeals to art's audience, he states that "the more solitary the work, fixed in the figure, stands on its own and the more cleanly it seems to cut all ties to human beings, the more simply does the thrust come into the Open that such a work is..."¹³ Following this, we find that the preserver, or person experiencing art in the correct way, is he who can best restrain his judgment and let its truth be. At this point, we have not lost the artist and his audience; each is necessary to give the very cultural definition of art that Heidegger outlines. But we have, in fact, broken from traditional aesthetics by putting the independent truth setting-itself-to-work in art on a more equal and essential footing.

Buddhist and Taoist Delusion

I believe Heidegger's need to completely restructure our basic modes of approaching the work of art stems from a comparable impetus seen in Buddhism and Taoism in terms of avoiding delusion in our experience of the world. Being one of the three fires or passions to resist, along with hating and wanting, delusion is the most prominent and difficult to break. We find ourselves submitting to delusion when we do not see reality as it is, imposing our own judgments on it even before sensation. Each thing or phenomenon before us is inherently empty of a separate, autonomous existence it seems to have in the external world. It is a staple of Buddhist living to recognize the emptiness of the various representations we use to communicate the world to others and to ourselves. Our constructions and names we give to reality cannot be taken for the things themselves; such representations are full of nothing substantial. Our experience of art, then, falls into the same confusion. Too often do secondary aspects of a piece, (its price, the époque it belongs to), draw our attention away from the work's independent nature. Knowing the truth of the work of art coincides with knowing the limits of such contextual qualities, though they are unavoidable in our existential condition. While we have a specific name for this suspended attitude in western philosophy, the avoidance of delusion in Buddhism and Taoism is less easily reduced. The continual transcendence of our varying modes of experience and world-views describes a lifetime of disciplined study, action, and reformation.

13 Ibid., 64.

Learned Buddhist monks dissatisfied with scholastic conservatives in the early centuries C.E. put this theoretical goal to practice when adopting *skillful means*, exposing the universal applicability of their thought as well as falsehoods of other doctrines in the process. They brought to new cultures and theological sects the Holy Truths through languages that most suited each new geographical and ideological region.¹⁴ Believing that a Nepalese dialect dissembles the Buddhist realization that all life is suffering is to delude oneself with the strangeness of the dialect and miss the truth that always remains. Adopting a distance from the particular form of expression is required to be near the formless form that rests below, or prior to, all representations. In the reticent haiku poem, for example, we are challenged not to deceive ourselves by the face value of the sparse poetry. Reading haikus lets us practice finding truths with very few words and representations at the surface to guide us. We condition ourselves to see all aspects of life in the same distant but penetrating way. Lao Tzu, the father of Taoism, found this experiential trade-off necessary as well. In the *Tao Te Ching*, the true sage is one who "... steps back but remains in front, the outsider always within."¹⁵ Only in this stepping back can we avoid delusion and let truths emerge in all artistic mediums.

Wabi Tea Ceremony

D.T. Suzuki, a critical figure in introducing eastern philosophy to the west, reveals in *Zen and Japanese Culture* the problems of delusion and truth in art in the pouring, drinking, and cleaning up of tea. Not merely intended for sensational enjoyment by an audience, the art of Wabi tea consists of seemingly simple but precise acts. Cleansing oneself of delusion or contamination is essential to correctly practice the ceremony.¹⁶ Similar to our focus on epokhé, the associations we pin to the daily experiences in drinking tea must be cleansed in order to know the truth that is going on. Each motion allows the tea drinker and pourer to actively participate in Zen, thereby founding them in their own original artistic and religious culture. The most renowned tea-master, Sen No Rikyu of the 16th century, declared that to become a master of this art form one must first perfect oneself in the practice of Buddha law, though the ceremony is

14 Makransky, "Buddhist Perspectives on Truth in Other Religions: Past and Present" in *Theological Studies*, 3-4.

15 Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 10.

16 Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 281.

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not solely a representation of the doctrine.¹⁷ We find here an example of skillful means operating through art. One can write a parable in Sanskrit or one can prepare tea with simplicity and perfection in Japanese society; each can reveal the way, or Tao, towards the cessation of suffering. But there is no secondary telos here. Like the Greek temple, the truth that is happening in the ceremony is not used as a token towards finding salvation or nirvana. The truth of the work of art is its own end, though our alignment with the formless form or Being when experiencing it is certainly a positive consequence.

For Heidegger, one way in which art is distinguished from other created things, such as equipment, is the importance we put on the fact that it is made, i.e. on its createdness. The more useful a piece of equipment is to our purposes, the less attention we give to the fact that someone made it. The fact of art's creation, however, is brought to the foreground.¹⁸ I believe tea that is poured to quench our thirst is a piece of equipment if seen in this light. Its createdness is subsumed by its usefulness. But Wabi tea pouring places all of its focus and attention on the fact *that it is made* because it must be *made* or *done* in a specifically rigorous way to retain its artistic value. Heidegger also explains that in the work of art both the creator and the preserver are equally necessary, even if their roles have been limited in favor of the work. I find that the ceremony can exemplify this trade off in necessity, equality, and subservience if we view the participants of Wabi tea as both its creators and preservers, each attempting to be subsumed by the event itself. Heidegger's use of the concept of *standing-within* the work when describing the preserver's role implies a positioning of one's self and one's ability to know into the presence of original truth laid out by its creator. What better way of positioning ourselves into the presence of original truth, and hopefully losing that very self to the action as a whole, than by physically and mentally enacting the art of the tea ceremony? The participant is simultaneously creating art, (by pouring, drinking, and cleaning in the correct fashion), and preserving it, (by standing within and experiencing the art happening in and around him). Heidegger often describes the truth of the work of art being *thrown* at the coming preservers in the way that humans are thrust

17 Graham, "Art, Language, and Truth in Heidegger's Radical Zen" in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 27, 507.

18 Heidegger, "The Origin," 62.

into history as explained in his text *Being and Time*. It is in this interaction of creator and preserver, pourer and drinker, that man's uniquely artistic history can be re-experienced again and again.

Freiburg Conference

A direct discourse between Heidegger and the eastern philosophies of art occurred in May 1958, through a colloquium chaired by Heidegger at the University in Freiburg with Professor Hisamatsu Hoseki Shin'ichi as the main interlocutor. Hisamatsu, exalted as a Zen scholar and Tea Master himself, contributed two philosophical poems as well as calligraphy to the occasion. When asked by Heidegger how East Asian art understands itself, he explained that the modern Japanese term for art, *gei-jiz*, best translates the western metaphysical/aesthetic notion of art and the skillful mastery involved therein; whereas the *way of art*, or *geido*, "understands art as an itinerary toward the empty origin of manifestation, and back again from the originary emptiness to the richness of phenomenal presencing."¹⁹ Hisamatsu then alludes to *The Origin of the Work of Art* by explaining that this double movement is the very "working, the setting-itself-into a work, of Zen truth itself."²⁰ Understanding *geido* may allow us to penetrate beneath our representations towards the empty origin or formless form. We may then return and experience the phenomenon of the piece in a more enlightened way. The empty origin and formless form are therefore akin to Heidegger's earth. They remain concealed in all beings, yet may spontaneously spring forth in the work of art if the creator and preserver let them. And the phenomenal presencing relates to the setting up of a world as understandable by the audience. The movement to and from each, in which the empty origin is reached and pulled away from by way of art, is the happening and condition of truth within the conflict.

It is important to note, however, that Hisamatsu understands *geido* as having no historical dimensions, while the difference of world and earth marks a unique cultural beginning and founding of a people. We see this distinction in Hisamatsu's poem (one of the two submitted for this occasion) *A Sheltering Empty Sea*. The sea, understood here as the empty origin, is formless and tranquil, unable to be touched by the dimensions of time and cultural

19 Fóti, "Heidegger and "The Way of Art" in *The Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 31, 339.

20 Fóti, "Heidegger and "The Way of Art," 339.

formation.²¹ For Heidegger, art creates a founding of a people as it leaps to the truth of what is. It is a beginning that already contains its historical track to a final end.²²

Even with this divergence, both Heidegger and Hisamatsu agree that art is not an aesthetic screen behind which signification exists and on which evaluations are made. If this were the case, Buson's lantern would seem to cast light upon some meaning in the work and leave its truth, or Zen truth, concealed and deluded. The work of art, the poem, the play is rather that which can express truthfully the formless form and earth without describing it into dissolution.

Japanese Koan

What, then, of the style and method used by Heidegger and the East Asian masters to show us how to align ourselves with the concealed truth in the work? How do they teach us to avoid a description into dissolution? We have seen in Heidegger's texts and in scattered teachings of Buddhism and Taoism a use of paradox moving beyond conventional logic or linguistic sense to do just this. It is their answer to the question of how one teaches others to reach a truth behind representations and language when such modes are all one has available. Instead of resorting to unending silence, Heidegger and the Zen Buddhist masters used language to deconstruct its own rules and necessities. The *koans*, or brief question-and-answer constructions between Zen master and student, exemplify this lesson by entangling our conventional modes of thought and expression in such a way that renders them arbitrary. It is this arbitrariness that allowed the Buddhist scholars to traverse nations and states with the same foundational truths. *Skillful means* thus reveals that there is no rigid and necessary medium, only rigid and necessary truth. A popular *koan* between a questioning student (Q) and an answering master (A) that exemplifies this deliberate dialectical entanglement goes as follows:

Q: What is the truth of Buddhism?

A: Ask the post standing there.

Q: I fail to understand.

A: My ignorance exceeds yours.²³

21 Ibid., 340.

22 Heidegger, "The Origin," 73-74.

23 Cited in D.T. Suzuki, "Studies in Zen", 58, 113.

At this point, the student realizes how limited language is in allowing his master to teach him an essential truth. Heidegger too recognizes a willing or seeing of truth that comes only from similar paradoxes in established customs of language. The opposition of world and earth, for example, breeds a language that allows us to equate clearing with concealing, truth with untruth. The work of art is seen as something that rests in itself, yet is the sight of a happening. As with the Wabi tea ceremony, breaking from what is customary and comfortable is necessary for letting truth in art happen freely before us: “the setting-into-work of truth thrusts up the unfamiliar and extraordinary and at the same time thrusts down the ordinary and what we believe to be such.”²⁴ As we observed, Heidegger comes closest to describing earth to the reader only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained. These near-poetic enigmas provide us only glimpses into the indescribable. Entering the circle of thought, the paradox of language, is ultimately an exposition of our limitations. It helps us prepare for the wholly unsayable experience with truth in the work.

Seeing the Riddle

Heidegger and the lessons of Buddhism and Taoism understand that a work embodies an essential truth, one that we may be transported to and experience for ourselves without the ability to describe it in traditional terms. I have shown that their radical systems of thought see a suspended experience of art as more primal than any sensible amusement. We find that truth in the work naturally refuses itself to us yet can come into the Open for the first time by our epokhé and avoidance of delusion. In my direct comparison, Heidegger’s conception of experiencing art can be applied to the Wabi Tea ceremony to reveal how participants are able to engage in truth by their own immersive yet disengaging activity. Hisamatsu Hoseki Shin’ichi’s thesis of *geido* at the Freiburg conference equated the movement from the formless form to phenomenal presence with Heidegger’s own experience of the ontological conflict of earth and world. And the anti-dialectical methods of *koan*, mirroring the deconstructive language of Heidegger’s texts, were shown to be the chosen forms for guiding us from a paradoxical experience to its equally paradoxical target.

Neither Heidegger nor the Buddhist or Taoist teachings provide a clear, inclusive solution to these open systems, then, but only draw our attention to

24 Heidegger, “The Origin,” 72.

the dilemma. Heidegger notes in his Epilogue that the task is not to solve the riddle, only to see it as it is.²⁵ Even Aristotle ended his *Nicomachean Ethics* with an *aporia*, or a no-way, to show that only now, after the entire work is read, do we face a puzzle ripe for investigation. Notice that Buson too does not have a solution for experiencing the chrysanthemums while holding the lantern. He simply chooses art to point out this problem of being near yet far, simply points out that this problem exists at all.

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25 Heidegger, "The Origin," 77.

Plato's Condemnation of Imagination in *A Clockwork Orange*

Michael Wangen

According to Plato, a philosopher enters the realm of universal knowledge when his understanding is purely an abstract science. At this stage, the philosopher is in touch with the ultimate "Form of the Good," and knows what is best for man. Imagination plays an integral role in reaching the Form of Good, because it serves as a means to which students can understand abstract ideas and eventually reach universal thought. In his pre-modern narrative the *Republic*, however, Plato finds that society can be easily consumed by the mimetic imagination, in which people are tricked into believing that the imaginary is reality. Plato's condemnation of the mimetic imagination alludes to Stanley Kubrick's postmodern film, *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), which features a youth gang driven by images of sex, violence, and drugs, set in a dystopian future Britain. Furthermore, Kubrick's film resembles Plato's Allegory of the Cave, as the prisoners of the imaginary are introduced to new realities.

In Book VI of the *Republic*, Plato prefaces his Allegory of the Cave with his concept of the "theory of the forms." This view asserts that each thing existing on earth has a corresponding "form," or perfect idea in the Form of the Good, the highest form of all. Those things existing on earth are part of the lower material realms, known as the Form of Intelligible and the Form of the Visible. Socrates, the main character in the dialogues of the *Republic*, cannot find a succinct definition of the highest good, so he provides an analogy which stretches into the Allegory of the Cave found in Book VII. The metaphor begins with the sun, which illuminates the Visible Realm, just as the Good illuminates the intelligible realm. The sun is the source of visibility, sight, and is responsible all life, and thus the existence of the intelligible realm. Likewise, the Good is the source of intelligibility, capacity for knowledge, and is responsible

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for the Forms, or the existence of the intelligible realm itself. Just as the sun is beyond our physical being, Socrates says that the Form of the Good is beyond our intelligible being, and is the cause of all knowledge and truth. Because it is the cause in the intelligible realm, it must too then be the source of all that is beauty in the visible realm. We can then imagine the structure of the three realms, in which the Form of the Good is overarching provider, with the Form of the Intelligible positioned beneath it, and the Form of the Visible at the bottom. Through an interpretation of Socrates' analogy, we find that the "Good" is identical with unity, harmony, order, and balance in both the soul and society. Socrates concludes that philosophers embark on the journey through the Visible and Intelligible forms in order to reach the Good, and they are the most fit to rule society as Philosopher-Kings.

The question that arises then is how we can best accumulate knowledge through the lower realms. Socrates addresses his problem through the analogy of the Divided Line, which separates the correct vision of knowledge (*epistēmē*) from the false vision of opinion (*doxa*).¹ Plato places reason (*nous*) and thought (*dianoia*) in the higher section. Thought is the use of sensible particulars to aid in reasoning. Reason has the ability to contemplate truth as an abstract science using purely forms. Universal propositions can be formed and unproven hypothesis are unnecessary – universals are referents of general terms such as "manhood," instead of particular referents such as the name, "John." Ultimately, reason allows one to access transcendental ideas. Belief (*pistis*) and imagination (*eikasia*) are relegated to the inferior form of opinion. Belief is a state where one correlates perceptions, but only looks for explanations in particular terms, as opposed to universal ones. Imagination lies below belief. It is a state of mind in which our perceptions of the world are completely uncritical and we fail to differentiate reflections of objects from the objects themselves. Given that the objects are copies of transcendental ideas themselves, the imagination is no more than a copy of a copy. Plato finds this as a sufficient reason to denounce it as "an agency of falsehood."²

1 Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 90.

2 Ibid., 91.

Plato Condemns Imagination

In Book X of the *Republic*, Plato condemns imagination because it prevents the soul from ascending to the reality of *nous* (spiritual being). He claims that poets should be banished from the city because their works create a fundamental problem between reality and images. Plato accuses poets of being ignorant, non-didactic, immoral, irrational, and idolatrous. These allegations are derived from the five fundamental dualisms that characterize Platonic philosophy; truth vs. falsehood, political praxis vs. artistic uselessness, good vs. evil, rational soul vs. material body, and diving being vs. human becoming. With the abolition of the artist, Plato fears that the fundamental dualisms will collapse due to rampant contradiction, and society will dispel the divine as the ultimate Form of the Good.

Plato uses the example of a bed to illustrate ignorance; the first degree of existence comes out of the divine Form of the Good, the second by a carpenter, and the third by a painter.³ The painter's creation is three degrees removed from reality because it imitates the other two. The maker of images is ignorant because they pretend to know all sorts of tricks of the trade, but they know nothing at all, as Socrates states, "the painter, we say, will paint for us a shoemaker, a carpenter, and the other craftsmen, although he doesn't understand the arts of any one of them."⁴ Plato finds this to be dangerous because if the painter is skillful enough, his portrait can deceive children and other people into thinking he is a real carpenter. This muddles the difference between knowledge and opinion, and thus the ability to discern between truth and falsehood.

Plato accuses the artist of being non-didactic because they teach us nothing about reality. Plato cites the trial against Homer and the poets, as they can name no city or state which owes it legal system, successes in war, inventions of practical devices, or schools where children came to live the "Homeric way of life."⁵ Homer has created images that are three degrees removed from reality, and Plato believes they are in all purposes, useless. By saying "useless," Plato is denouncing the experience of aesthetic beauty, reflecting the priority of the

3 Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 279.

4 Ibid., 281.

5 Ibid., 283.

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public over the private in Greek society. Plato believes that art should remain in the private realm, so that it does not reduce the political praxis of his ideal *polis*.

Plato's third critique of imagination accuses the artist of being irrational. Plato finds the greatest power of images, "by virtue of their appeal to our erotic and animal desires."⁶ These desires are found in places in the soul that are opposite of reason. As the opposite of reason, which serves to create unity in the soul, the imagination creates contradiction. We are moved to reach out and grab those aspects of our experience that are most unstable and wildly erratic. We are so far removed from reality that we find it difficult to use the reason of our soul to calm the desires of our material bodies. Confusion overwhelms us, and we are left plunging back into the *eikasia* through more irrational behavior.

In line with irrational behavior, Plato believes that art is immoral and has "terrible power to corrupt even the best characters."⁷ To this point, Plato has limited the discussion of art as three degrees removed from reality; however, he finds that immoral behavior has a tendency to propagate already false imitations. Plato introduces the irrational *pathos*, claiming that we become emotionally attached to the immoral characters displayed in art.⁸ Such immoral characters fuel desires for things such as drugs, sex, and violence, which in turn control us. We are no longer to discern between good and evil, and we allow instinct eventually to rule over reason.

The final reason Plato condemns imagination is because it leads us into idolatry. The artist mimics the surrounding world, thus imitating the divine demiurge, or creator. This creates a man-made order of non-being, because art is taken to be the original form of the divine being. Thus, the imagination is both a crime against truth and being, because the imaginer worships what he believes is divine being in the form of artistic imitations. Plato describes the mimetic image as a "poor child of foster parents," such that the child, or image, is illegitimate. Idolatry is the ultimate fault that transgresses between divine being and imaginary becoming. The artist represents the invisible Form of Good with visible images. Art displaces the "paternal logos" and assumes a life of its own. People then are no longer pursuing the ultimate truth, which impedes

6 Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 93.

7 Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 289.

8 Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 94.

any possibility of entering the realm of transcendental being. All of the five fundamental dualisms collapse and society is left bewildered by contradiction.⁹ Thus, Plato finds it necessary to reject the mimetic imagination, because this is the only way to protect his ultimate principle of identity.

Societal Problems of Imagination in *A Clockwork Orange*

The society in *A Clockwork Orange* features a wretched society in futuristic Britain that is consumed by violence, rape, and political corruption. The main character, Alex, is a psychopathic delinquent, who fancies rape, and what he deems “ultra-violence.” Alex especially enjoys idolizing classical compositions by Beethoven, even to the point that he incorporates some sort of music or art in every one of his crimes. Alex is not the only culprit, however, as we see that much of society has been consumed by immoral artwork, such as sexual paintings and sculptures. Paralleling Plato’s condemnation of the imagination in book X of the *Republic*, these pieces of art prove to blur the fundamental dualisms of good vs. evil, the rational soul vs. the material body, and the divine being vs. human becoming. This has led society, along with Alex, to be stuck in the stage of the imaginary, with seemingly no ability to ascend upwards to a state of reason.

As the film begins, Alex and his small gang of thugs, whom he calls *droogs*, are sitting in the Korova Milk Bar intoxicating themselves with what they call “milk plus.” This is essentially milk laced with drugs, which come in the flavors of Drencrom, Vellocet, and Synthemesc. These hallucinogens allow the user to experience “thingness,” or the ability to withdraw from the reality around them. When the opportunity arises, milk is served nowhere else in the film, giving reason for us to believe that “milk plus” is now taking to the real form of “milk.” Plato would deem this to be an artistic act of ignorance, because the distinction of milk as a substance to nourish the young is confounded by “milk plus,” which is now the choice drink of many teenagers. “Milk plus” glorifies the *droogs* immoral imaginations, as Alex states, “[Milk plus] would sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of the old Ultra-Violence.”¹⁰

In the Milk Bar, the tables and chairs are not those normally found in a

9 Ibid., 95.

10 *A Clockwork Orange*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

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bar; they are made of sculptures of naked women, which feature bright colored wigs, and the same bright colored hair in their pubic regions. These images harshly objectify women as sex symbols, and as the *droogs* calmly sit in the bar, it is clear that these types of images have influenced them heavily. Such immoral characters have fueled the *droogs* to desire their fantasies of sex and violence. References to sex are found in many other parts of the film, including the Cat Woman's (Alex's murder victim) large sculptures of penises – which she calls “works of art,” pornographic content possessed by Alex's parents, and later when Alex awakes from a coma in the hospital to a doctor and nurse having sex. Society has allowed sexual images to redirect its moral compass away from the good in which instincts rule over reason.

Alex's crime spree begins when he and his fellow *droogs* see a homeless man singing beneath a bridge. At first the homeless man believes the *droogs* are approaching to help him, however, he soon realizes that they are only there to beat him to a pulp. As the *droogs* wreak havoc on the helpless man, he shouts, “There is no law anymore!”¹¹ The cry of the homeless man alludes to Plato's effect of the imagination as non-didactic. Blinded by infusion of art into the public realm, the political system can no longer define justice or administer it to its citizens.

Next, the *droogs* find themselves interrupting the rape of a rival gang led by Billyboy. This is our first real view of the desolate wasteland that is the society in futuristic Britain; wreckage of street signs, benches, and garbage is littered about in every direction. The state of society is, of course, a result of immoral values that are construed through images. Billyboy's gang lets the rape victim free as if she was merely an afterthought. They are wearing army outfits and challenge the *droogs* to a duel. Given the lack of truth in society, who is to say that Billyboy's gang couldn't be the army of Britain? The fight is an exotic, near artistic, choreography of playful battle. In this case, Plato's critique of the artistic imagination concerns its irrational character. The fighting represents disunity and the “unstable and irritable” elements of human behavior.¹² Thus, the mimetic imagination has lured the human psyche of the gangs so far away from

11 Ibid.

12 Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 93.

reality that conflict and contradiction consume the realm of vision.¹³

Alex's next crime occurs when he and his *droogs* drive out to the countryside. They see a house with a sign that says "home" out front, and decide to break in. The image of this sign is very peculiar, because we no longer know what "home" actually means. Surely it may be a reference to a place where one's family is always welcome; however, how can we know this in a society filled with ignorance? The *droogs* break in and proceed to rape a woman while her husband watches. Soon after, Alex and the *droogs* are back at the Milk Bar, where Alex tells everyone to "shut up" as a woman in the bar sings Beethoven's 9th Symphony, *Ode to Joy*, in its original German. At this juncture, we are made aware of Alex's obsession of music, specifically the works of Ludwig Van Beethoven, of whom Alex refers to simply as "Ludwig Van." As the *droogs* return home and Alex goes to bed, there is a large image of Beethoven's face printed on a window shade in Alex's room. The camera then pans downward to reveal four statues of Jesus. Each statue of Jesus is bloodied in a way that resembles his crucifixion, but the statues are positioned in a line so that they appear to be doing a routine as a part of a dance team. Later, when Alex is imprisoned, he imagines himself as a Roman officer whipping Jesus' back as he carries the cross. As Alex stares intently at Beethoven, a rapid series of violent images floods his brain. These images include a woman being hanged, a train blowing up, men being crushed by boulders, multiple fiery explosions, and Alex imagining himself as Dracula with fangs and bleeding running down his cheeks. Plato would show his greatest hostility towards Alex's fascination with Beethoven, because the imagination has led him towards idolatry and the complete rejection of the Form of the Good. This ultimately transgresses the Platonic dualisms of Western metaphysics, which leaves the futuristic society of Britain in a completely contradictory state.

***A Clockwork Orange* – Ludovico Treatment**

Alex is caught by the police after murdering the Cat Woman, and is sentenced to fourteen years in prison. When he arrives at the prison, Alex is stripped of all of his belongings from the outside world, including his name, which becomes "inmate 655321." This serves to dehumanize him to the mere subject of a prisoner, as those who existed from birth in Plato's allegory

13 Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 286.

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of the cave. After two years of serving his prison sentence, The Minister of the Interior arrives and presents Alex with the opportunity to undergo the Ludovico Treatment. The new experimental form of aversion therapy is famed to cure criminals of their evil tendencies in only two weeks time. From Plato's perspective, this would mean elevating Alex's soul into the realm of the intelligible, where reason commands his decision making process. Alex discusses whether or not he should undergo treatment with the prison chaplain. The chaplain explains to Alex that the Ludovico treatment will impose behavioral modification on his psychological processes, rendering him incapable of performing evil deeds. The chaplain finds the treatment to be quite dangerous, but Alex responds, "I don't care about the dangers Father; I just want to be good." The chaplain responds, "The question is whether or not this technique really makes a man good...goodness comes from within, goodness is chosen, when a man cannot choose, he ceases to be a man." Alex fails to understand the Chaplain's definition, which illustrates the sizable discrepancy between the two character's ways of thinking. Alex, who is submersed in the realm of the visible, cannot define what good is because his immoral acts prevent him from distinguishing good from evil. *Eikasia*, or imagination, which is the lowest level of opinion, would lead Alex to make cultural references to define "good," such as Beethoven's 9th Symphony. The priest, on the other hand, recognizes moral oppositions of good and evil, and that without the option of evil, good is an empty, meaningless gesture. The chaplain is able to make such a distinction because he thinks in the realm of the intelligible, likely moving between the divisions of thought and reason. The chaplain, perhaps, is the only one who can bring Alex out of his illusionary world.

Alex decides to undergo the Ludovico Treatment. Alex is first drugged with a serum, and then bound up in a straitjacket, with his head strapped to a headrest and eyes clamped open. He is forced to watch violent movies. Alex's inability to turn his head or even close his eyes strongly resembles Plato's prisoners in the Allegory of the Cave. Alex feels deep pains when seeing the violent images, especially when he hears Beethoven's music playing in the background. After two weeks of treatment, Alex is "cured," in that he is physically incapable of committing violent or sexual acts. After a private demonstration of Alex's inability to do evil, the Minister of the Interior

concludes that “there will be law and order, the streets will be safe, this is about to be a reality.”¹⁴ Alex’s transformation from a gangster to a “good” man seems to represent the ascension of the soul in the Allegory of the Cave, however, the process is extremely different. In the allegory, the prisoner’s soul ascends through the realms of the visible and intelligible to reach the Form of the Good. In *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex merely shifts to an equally detached world; rather than being free and ignorant, he becomes unwillingly socially acceptable. Thus he becomes a clockwork orange; organic as an orange on the outside, but mechanical as a clock on the inside. This horizontal shift prevents Alex from ascending into the intellectual world and illustrates that the Minister of the Interior is only concerned with the realm of the visible, as he hopes to fill society with clockwork oranges so that reality appears to be “good.”

After the Ludovico treatment, Alex is released from society and returns to his past reality. He finds himself at the places where he committed his previous crimes, and he is brutally beaten up and tortured because he is unable to defend himself. Alex wants to change back into his old violent self, but he is unable to because of the treatment. Similar to Plato’s Allegory, the spiritually elevated soul wants to descend back into his world of illusions when entering the cave. They are able to do this, however, because their free will is intact.

A Clockwork Orange illustrates Plato’s critique of imagination, as it showcases a youth gang driven consumed by images of sex, violence, and drugs. While Plato admits that imagination plays an important role in reaching his ultimate Form of the Good, the film demonstrates the tendency of humanity to become confused between the imaginary and reality. One can imitate the Form of the Good for a short time by making something like a clockwork orange; however, according to Plato, the highest good is the providing source for everything, and a dystopian society becomes inevitable when the true source of good is compromised.

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14 *A Clockwork Orange*

“ *The value of life cannot be assessed because it must be lived.* ”

“I Have Lived”: Nietzsche and the *Symposium*

Dan Friedman

“We need to see ourselves more clearly before we can say whether we would like to become this other sort of being, excellent and deaf.”¹

Let us begin with a thought experiment. An attractive young man in fourth century Athens has been harboring a love he feels for another man. Whenever he listens to this older man, his “heart pounds and tears flood out when he speaks.... [no one else] produced this kind of effect.”² The young lover attempts to seduce this man, only to be rebuffed. Does he choose to accept his misfortune, and attempt to find the true form of beauty in all things, or does he instead open himself up to his emotions? In other words, does he become a philosopher, or does he try to cope with simultaneous feelings of shame and lust, failure and longing? It seems far more natural that this young man would choose the latter. To side with the former would be to commit the cardinal sin that in the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s opinion, all philosophers prior to himself had committed. As scholars Charles Guignon and Derk Pereboom point out, for Nietzsche, “It is philosophers’ hatred of any form of becoming and process...that leads to their contempt for the constantly changing material world in which we actually live.”³ Nietzsche, ever for the affirmation of the present, for the vitality of the will and instinct, felt that “whatever has to get itself proved in advance is not worth much.”⁴ But is Nietzsche’s essential overturning of Plato’s and Socrates’ philosophy – one that would become the foundations of Western thought – fair? With regards to his criticism of Plato’s *Symposium*, the evidence suggests so.

1 Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, 184.

2 Plato, *Symposium*, 215e.

3 Guignon and Pereboom, *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, 115.

4 Ibid., 174.

“I Have Lived”: Nietzsche and the Symposium

What is the in-between nature of love? As Socrates explains, love is the child of Resource and Poverty. Socrates recounts a tale told by Diotima, in which love is “a formidable hunter, always weaving tricks; he desires knowledge and is resourceful in getting it; a lifelong lover of wisdom; clever at using magic, drugs and sophistry.”⁵ Pierre Hadot elaborates on this in-between nature: “In Socratic Eros, we find the same basic structure as in Socratic irony: a divided consciousness, passionately aware that it is not what it ought to be. It is from this feeling of separation and lack that love is born.”⁶ It is true that Love is indeed an in-between. One finds oneself infatuated with a person or thing, only to be revolted by the feeling of infatuation. But love is also a desire to fill a void. Socrates is mistaken, then, when he confines love to the desire only for the beautiful. Diotima claims “Love is love of beauty,” but I wonder what she would say to the Marquis de Sade.⁷ He had a compulsive need for the ugly underbelly of society but his love of Sodomy emerged from a void he needed to fill in the absence of an outlet. That his pursuits were not beautiful should not diminish his experience of love. Nevertheless, the observation that love is the desire for something that one lacks is remarkably profound.

Socrates then recounts Diotima’s description of the staircase of love though it is fairer to say that this discussion is truly Plato’s discussion. As Hadot points out, “Socrates became the prosopon, or mask, of personalities who felt the need to take shelter behind him. It was from him that they got the idea both to mask themselves, and to use Socratic irony as a mask.”⁸ Diotima describes her staircase of love: one must start with love of one other body, followed by love of all bodies, and finally move on to realize the beauty “in practices and laws.”⁹ Then, Diotima claims, one will realize two things. First, beauty cannot be created or destroyed but simply is. Second, “it’s not beautiful in one respect but ugly in another, or beautiful at one time but not at another, or beautiful in relation to this but ugly in relation to that; nor beautiful here and ugly there because it is beautiful for some people but ugly for others.”¹⁰ She says in four separate ways

5 Plato, *Symposium*, 203d.

6 Hadot, “The Figure of Socrates,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, 163.

7 Plato, *Symposium*, 204b.

8 Hadot, “The Figure of Socrates,” 149.

9 Plato, *Symposium*, 210c.

10 Ibid., 211a.

the same thing – beauty is not relativistic, but rather is an ideal, something that has a true form. Because Love’s function is to give birth to beauty both in body and in mind, it becomes crucial to master the identity of beauty in order for love to function properly.

Martha Nussbaum provides a useful discussion of this complex idea in her essay “The speech of Alcibiades: a reading of the *Symposium*.” As Nussbaum points out, “Just try to think it seriously: this body of this wonderful beloved person is exactly the same in quality as that person’s mind and inner life. Both in turn, the same in quality as the value of Athenian democracy; of Pythagorean geometry.”¹¹ But what does any of this have to do with living the good life? According to Diotima, once one is able to see the ideal of beauty, one can in turn give birth to true virtue as opposed to a mere image of virtue, and only through true virtue can one hope to be loved by the gods and to be immortal.

Although it is hard to deny the appeal of a so-called stairway of love, this explanation is rife with problems. Nussbaum inadvertently discovers one when trying to explain this concept. She writes, “The lover, seeing a flat uniform landscape of value...will have few motivations for moving here rather than there on that landscape. A contemplative life is a natural choice.”¹² But the idea of a contemplative life is chilling. Aside from the sheer inability for one to even comprehend what a flat world of virtue would look like, Plato, through Socrates, “in order to avoid dealing with the ever-changing material world... [focuses] not on the concrete objects we discover through sensory perception, but on [his] own abstract concept of things.”¹³ Socrates’ speech asks us not to react. It favors the passive idealism of a utopian existence in place of the wondrous if frightening realities of the physical world.

This line of thinking emerges in Nietzsche’s harsh criticism of Socrates’ view on love. For Nietzsche, there once was a society that represented purity and swift action. Oscar Wilde was able to articulate this view of the pre-Socratic Greeks in *De Profundis*. He writes:

I discern great sanity in the Greek attitude. They never chattered about sunsets, or discussed whether the shadows on the grass were really mauve or not. But they saw

11 Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 180.

12 Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 181.

13 Guignon and Pereboom, *Existentialism*, 115.

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that the sea was for the swimmer, and the sand for the feet of the runner... We call ourselves a utilitarian age, and we do not know the uses of any single thing. We have forgotten that Water can cleanse, and Fire purify, and that the Earth is mother to us all. As a consequence our Art is of the Moon and plays with shadows, while Greek art is of the sun and deals directly with things.¹⁴

Wilde’s views on Art seem equally applicable to Nietzsche’s criticism of the ideal. Humans, in religion, in pretension, in centuries of thoughtless thought, have been caught in a web of elaborate impotency. This idea seems to be the basis of Nietzsche’s combination of shock and disgust in his tone when assigning the blame in this shift to Socrates. He describes how he “recognized Socrates and Plato as symptoms of decay, as instruments of the Greek dissolution, as pseudo-Greek, as anti-Greek.”¹⁵ He goes on to make an amusing observation regarding Socrates philosophy: “I am trying to grasp from what idiosyncrasy that Socratic equation – reason = virtue = happiness – stems, the most bizarre equation that there is, and one which in particular has all the instincts of the older Hellenes against it.”¹⁶ By older Hellenes, Nietzsche means either the Homeric Greeks or the Dionysian man. Guignon and Pereboom explain, “The mystical sense of life as a unified flux of energy, experienced in the rapture and intoxication of the ancient celebration of Dionysus, is called the “Dionysian.”¹⁷ Reason is bright light; it dulls the instincts. In frustration Nietzsche warns, “One absolutely must reach out and try to grasp this astounding finesse, that the value of life cannot be assessed.”¹⁸ Achilles chose death for a cause rather than immortality for the sake of breathing – there is something deeply attractive in that. The value of life cannot be assessed because it must be lived.

Nietzsche excoriates Socrates and Plato, writing in *Twilight of the Idols*, “The dialectician lays on his opponent the burden of proving that he is not an idiot. He infuriates, and at the same time paralyzes.”¹⁹ The teleology of this technique leads only to fear and hatred of man. And yet, Nietzsche could not help an undeniable fascination with these founders of Western philosophy, so much so that Pierre Hadot convincingly argues:

14 Wilde, *De Profundis*, 114.

15 Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 172.

16 Ibid., 173-174

17 Guignon and Pereboom, *Existentialism*, 95.

18 Nietzsche, *Basic Writings*, 173.

19 Ibid., 174.

Might not Socrates' illness be the same as that of Nietzsche himself? This myth-dissolving lucidity, this pitiless consciousness; are they not those of Nietzsche himself? Nietzsche's amorous hatred for Socrates was, in the last analysis, identical with the amorous hatred Nietzsche felt for himself.²⁰

This view, while thought provoking, should not detract from the very real criticism Nietzsche leveled at the two thinkers.

The psychology of Nietzsche himself aside, the question of love remains, likely as it always will. In the end, Nietzsche's problems with Socrates and Plato are too profound to ignore. Socrates turned an event whose function was to get prosperous Greek citizens drunk into a discussion group about love. Not only does Alcibiades interrupt the symposium because he is handsome and drunk and noisy, but because he barges in on the discussion. It seems that Plato the observer could not help but include a climactic human event, at the very least as juxtaposition to a philosophy that likely bored or frustrated him most of the time. Love causes people to do irrational things – to open themselves up to the chance of pain. But love and pain are emotions; they are felt and experienced. The danger to humanity is above all idealism. The contemplative nature of Plato's philosophy, in addition to its influence on western culture, led Nietzsche to lament in *Ecce Homo* "The consequences of this 'idealism' provide my explanation of all blunders, all great instinctual aberrations and 'modesties' that led me away from the *task* of my life."²¹ In this vein, Harold Bloom identifies the problem with idealism regarding the task of interpreting Shakespeare's plays. In his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, he writes, "Allegorizing or ironizing Shakespeare by privileging cultural anthropology or theatrical history or religion or psychoanalysis or politics or Foucault or Marx or feminism works only in limited ways."²² The danger of idealism is that it detaches one from the willfulness and vitality inherent in humanity – to the fundamental truths of living that all humans share, regardless of their supposed brainpower. Reminding us of this truth was one of Nietzsche's greatest gifts, but was also his greatest challenge.

20 Hadot, "Figure of Socrates," 169.

21 Nietzsche, *Basic Writings*, 697.

22 Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 718-719.

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How We Decide What is Beautiful: Kant on Judgments of Taste

William Adamowicz

We travel miles to stand before Victoria Falls, we practice relentlessly to play Chopin's Études, we examine with scrutiny the swirling clouds of Van Gogh; and we find ourselves aroused. When we are confronted by these objects of our existence, whether in nature or in art, we exalt their beauty. We claim that such a thing is beautiful and we expect others to recognize the validity of our claim, and furthermore, we expect them to recognize its beauty on the basis that they will be affected in the same way. While there is no doubt that such a claim to beauty is *subjective*, upon further reflection, we cannot help but to acknowledge the underlying suspicion that the claim demands more than just subjectivity. In fact, we realize this claim also corresponds to a seemingly *objective* benchmark, namely, the notion of taste—the ability to distinguish things of a high aesthetic standard. When we recognize that there is something called taste and that some people have this faculty while others lack it, it follows that we must be adhering to an objective standard of some sort. For objectivity, by definition, must be structured in some way or other. These 'opinions' of ours, then, are more than just that—they are *judgments of taste*, and they define our individual and collective principles of aesthetics.

If I say that a particular sunset is beautiful, and you disagree, am I allowed to say that you are wrong because you lack taste? Am I allowed to claim that anyone who sees this sunset will also be inclined to say that it is beautiful? Immanuel Kant—and most of us—would say that yes, you are entitled to demand other peoples' agreement. But when I say that my chicken sandwich is beautiful, am I still allowed to demand your agreement? Can I be right or wrong about what I deem beautiful? This brings us to our central question: Why are we entitled to demand agreement with a particular judgment of taste? In order

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to answer this question, we turn to Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful" from his *Critique of Judgment*.

By coming up with a way to define these judgments of taste, Kant became known as the father of modern aesthetics. He strayed away from rational or empirical models for a system of aesthetics; he believed that it was impossible to create a science of taste. He came to this conclusion in realizing that there is no discernible link between the qualities that make an object beautiful and beauty itself. As renowned Kant scholar, Paul Guyer, notes, for Kant "no determinate relation holds between being beautiful and any specific properties of empirical objects analogous to that which holds between being gold and such properties as being yellow, ductile, malleable, and soluble,"¹ yet we find that gold is beautiful. It follows that beauty is not intrinsic to the beautiful object, but rather depends on our perception of it. In that sense, a judgment of taste is *subjective*. But Kant maintains that, although subjective, the notion of judgment of taste has a "peculiar claim to validity" and this particular characteristic is what "differentiates it from mere avowals."² In other words, when we make a particular judgment of taste that something is beautiful, our claim is not merely subjective; we presume that other people would also recognize the validity of our claim. However, this still does not tell us when we are entitled to claim that we are *correct* in a particular judgment.

Kant defines two types of judgments: determinant and reflective. For determinant judgments, the universal is given and the particular is "subsumed." For reflective judgments, "only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it."³ While judgments from the faculty of reason are determinant, judgments of taste, Kant claims, are reflective. Such a judgment "is not a matter of reflecting on a determinate concept but [of reflecting] in general only on a rule of perception."⁴ While it is easy to get lost in Kant's complex lexicon, he is essentially saying that judgments of taste correspond to a certain objective reality. In other words, a determinant judgment would be something like Einstein's mass-energy equivalence, or $E=mc^2$. Such a judgment would *determine*

1 Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 121

2 Schaper, "Taste, Sublimity, and Genius," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, 371.

3 Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, §IV.

4 Ibid., §VII.

something about the external world. Kant says that judgments of taste, on the other hand, are not “a matter of reflecting on a determinate concept,” like the fact that energy equals mass times the speed of light squared, but rather of reflecting “in general only on a rule of perception.”⁵ In the case of judgments of taste, we can interpret this ‘rule’ as that which defines what is beautiful and what is not. It is merely our correlation with this rule of perception that leads to taste. Claiming that an object is beautiful does not make the object beautiful—it is not determinant—it simply reflects on the fact that the object can already be perceived as beautiful. How does this fit in with our discussion thus far? It provides us with an explanation for why judgments of taste have this “peculiar claim to validity.” If we can imagine that there is an objective standard for everything that is beautiful in the world, it seems that a judgment of taste is purely *objective*. But we know from our own experience that this is not the case, since it is our own faculty of judgment that leads to decide whether something like a piece of gold is beautiful. It is this seemingly paradoxical combination of objective and subjective qualities that makes judgments of taste unique, and we will see how it constantly reappears in Kant’s discussion of aesthetics.

Essentially, the core of Kant’s theory of taste is as follows: a beautiful object creates a balance between the imagination and the understanding, which leads to a state known as the harmony of the faculties. This harmony, in turn, evokes a feeling of pleasure, and the consciousness of that pleasure allows us to form a judgment of taste. Again, it is easy to get lost in Kant’s technical language. But what is important to retain for our purposes is Kant’s fundamental claim that the feeling of pleasure is behind what determines judgments of taste.

There are four central components to Kant’s formulation of judgments of taste. He refers to these as the “Four Moments,” namely: quality, quantity, relation, and modality. While many scholars dismiss these ‘moments’ on the grounds that they are overly confusing, Guyer reformulates them in a way that clearly describes four characteristics:

1st moment: quality → disinterestedness

2nd moment: quantity → universality

3rd moment: relation → form of finality

4th moment: modality → necessity

5 Ibid.

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The first moment describes the quality of a judgment of taste as lacking personal interest. This *disinterestedness* to which Kant refers is explained by his differentiation of the ‘Pleasant’ from the ‘Good.’ He claims, “that which pleases the senses in sensation is pleasant” while that which “by means of reason pleases through the mere concept is good.”⁶ Judgments of taste stand between the subjective nature of the pleasant and the objective nature of the good. The pleasant would be something like a cool breeze. When we decide that the breeze is pleasant, that particular judgment has interest, since the reason we enjoy it is because it *feels* good. The good is more like an ethical judgment; it would be something like the feeling of helping an old lady cross the street. It makes us feel good because, “by means of reason,” we arrive at the *concept* that helping people in need is good. Kant claims that both the pleasant and the good are bound up with interest, since they are objects of satisfaction, but things that are beautiful can “have no meaning” and “depend on no definite concept, and yet they please.”⁷ For example, a beautiful sunset gives us visual pleasure, but it does not please in sensation like the pleasant. While one could make the argument that visual pleasure is a form of sensation, it still would not explain why seeing a beautiful sunset is arousing. We can explain how a breeze feels nice through the reactions of the nervous system, but there is no way to explain why the combinations of certain colors in a particular setting make the difference between a plain sunset and a beautiful one.

Since the second and fourth moments go hand in hand, for now, we skip the second moment, and move on to the third. With regards to the third moment, the form of finality, Kant believes that the goal of the understanding is rooted in the purposiveness of nature. In other words, Kant maintained that nature has an agenda; it is not accidental. The faculty of human understanding coincides with nature’s design. While the first moment leads us to think that it is the individual who is responsible for making a judgment that a sunset is beautiful, Kant believed that nature predetermines how much the faculty of human understanding will judge. It is important to keep in mind that this shared ability to recognize the beautiful is not an invariably accurate scientific tool, but rather “the ability to ‘estimate’ what is beautiful, and the exercise of this

6 Ibid., §3-4.

7 Ibid., §4.

ability is the judgment of taste.”⁸ If one does not find that a beautiful sunset is, in fact, beautiful, it does not change the fact that nature allowed for the *possibility* to make the judgment that the sunset is beautiful. One could also make a judgment that the sunset is nice, but this would simply be a poor estimation—one that does not measure up to the potential of one’s faculty of understanding in that particular case. To return to our central question, at this point, we can say that we are entitled to demand agreement with a judgment, and this is precisely because nature has allowed for the possibility to judge a particular object as beautiful.

Thus far, the first and third moments provide us with observations that judgments of taste have both a certain disinterestedness and a way of coinciding with the form of finality in nature. But it is the second and fourth moments that are required for a judgment to be a judgment of taste, namely, universality and necessity. With regards to universality, Kant claims that a judgment of taste is not just the ability to individually gain pleasure from beauty in nature and art, but also the ability to share it with others who have a similar insight. With regards to necessity, in order for a judgment to be a judgment of taste, one must make the judgment in a deliberate manner. That is, it does not suffice to merely think about how something is beautiful. Instead, there must be an action for the judgment to come into existence in order for it to be presented to others. We are entitled to make a judgment of taste only if we are able to make this subjective conviction universally valid, through “intersubjectivity.” In other words, “Kant’s view is that in making an aesthetic judgment—not just responding to an object with pleasure, but calling that object beautiful—one is not merely reporting an experience of pleasure; one is claiming that the pleasure one has felt is intersubjectively valid, or reasonably imputed to other persons.”⁹ As Guyer notes, it is not merely enough that the beauty of the object necessarily gives the individual a sensation of pleasure; one must also be convinced that other persons will feel the same way and actually express his or her conviction that something is beautiful.

8 Schaper, “Taste, Sublimity, and Genius,” 372.

9 Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 120.

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Yet what happens when we make judgments of taste on a medium as polemical as art? Since people tend to fundamentally disagree on what makes art beautiful, subjectivity becomes more problematic. For this, we turn to Kant's "Deduction of Aesthetic Judgments," in which he defines "Genius" as "the talent (or natural gift) which gives the rule to Art."¹⁰ While nature provides its own rule, according to Kant, the rule for Art, is manifested through the individuals' talent in so far as "beautiful art is only possible as a product of Genius." This definition allows Kant to bridge the gap between beauty in nature and beauty in art, for it is clear that beauty in art is often less recognizable to the untrained eye. When we think of the surrealist movement, of Rodin's drawings of prostitutes, of interpretive dance, or of certain works of modern art, many of us find nothing beautiful on the surface, and we even feel discomfort rather than pleasure upon viewing it. But once we come to relish the fact that it can disorient us and shed light on the human condition, we value it all the more. With regards to the difference between art and nature, Kant claims that "a beauty of nature is a beautiful thing; beauty of art is a beautiful representation of a thing."¹¹ As Eva Schaper astutely notes in her essay, *Taste, Sublimity, and Genius*, "This is one of Kant's memorable formulations of the contrast between nature and art, and it allows him, in a brief but important aside, to comment on the power of the art of genius to present as beautiful what is actually ugly in nature."¹² Upon further reflection on this point, we find that for Kant, we ought to concern ourselves not only with outer appearances, but also—for lack of a less cliché-prone term—a sort of inner beauty.

As a final anecdote, in coming to recognize the value of Kant's differentiation between mere opinions and judgments of taste, I think back to my demonic childhood complaints, and I am reminded of my father's persistence that I say "I think" before I exclaimed something like "My food is terrible!" The difference is subtle but notable; when I say, "My food is terrible," I am making a claim about the food itself; I am assuming that anyone who tastes the food will also inevitably deem that it is terrible. If I am sitting in front of someone who finds the same dish delightful, they would surely take offense

10 Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, §46.

11 Ibid., §48.

12 Schaper, "Taste, Sublimity, and Genius," 392.

since I am inherently assuming that they lack taste. But if I say “I think...etc.,” I am merely sharing my opinion about the food. While I doubt that my father had Kant’s Aesthetics in mind, his incentive came from a desire to have me recognize the consequences and the responsibility that is inherently assumed from making a subjectively ontological claim rather than a purely subjective claim. Interestingly enough, at the simplest level, his incentive was merely to teach me manners, which leads us to conclude that there is a connection between limiting one’s claim to universality by approaching such manners in a discretionary fashion, and what people generally regard as being raised well. This makes obvious sense considering that the notion of good manners is already a product of intersubjectivity; it is a product of universal validity and necessity in the same way that judgments of taste are.

Although Kant gives us an outline of how judgments of taste follow specific laws, when we see a good-looking BC student on the Comm. Ave. bus, we do not (most of us, anyway) actively think about whether such a judgment will be “reasonably imputed” to the person next to us, or whether the pleasure it provides is interested or disinterested. We simply make our judgment, as it comes to us naturally. In the same way that our human nature guides us without any deliberate effort on our part, the intersubjectivity and universality that are inherent to our manners are inherent to the judgments that we make from day to day. In that sense, Kant’s Critique is itself reflective rather than determinant; he does not change the way we go about making judgments; he merely shows us how we make them. While Kant did not show signs of artistic genius in his lifetime, it is clear that he certainly had a type of genius that he himself did not identify.

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Beckett successfully sidesteps taking a stand on the existence of God, and, in avoiding assumptions about the unknown, he provides the audience with what is known: God is not necessarily an active player in humans' daily life.

Entertainment Ethics of *Waiting for Godot*

Kara Bradley

“Interviewer: How can you be so preoccupied with salvation when you don’t believe in it? Beckett: I am interested in the shape of ideas, even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine... ‘Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.’ That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.”¹

Disillusioned by the harsh realities of the Great War, thinkers of the modern era wage a war on authority, questioning not only the political systems that gave way to such suffering, but also traditional systems of belief as a source of meaning. The main trends of modern thought thus break into two branches, one that completely rejects any external source of meaning and one that merely shifts the responsible party in the traditional system from God to the individual. Epitomizing the first trend, Sartre takes on the assumption that there is no God, claiming that “existence precedes essence,” and that humans must find meaning through action in the face of abandonment, despair, and anguish.² Frankl, on the other hand, clings to the notion of God, as demonstrated by his efforts to keep people alive by helping them pinpoint meaning in their lives.³ This indicates that, though he gives man the responsibility for maintaining his own well-being, he presumes an inherent value in life, one that springs from an external source. In either case, the initial assumption of whether or not God exists lies central to the thinker’s vector of thought as it determines the origin of meaning and subsequent course of action. Samuel Beckett, however, chooses to ignore this central God question and still

1 Gordon, *Reading Godot*, 112.

2 Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 20-35.

3 Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 98-111.

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manages to substantiate his prescription for action. In fact, Beckett avoids the inherent flaw in both Sartre and Frankl's arguments by doing so—his thought is not dependent on an assumption that can never be proven. In evading the God question, Beckett manages to delineate an ethical framework void of meaning but grounded in the knowable and full of entertainment.

As *Waiting for Godot's* title implies, Vladimir and Estragon await the arrival of "Godot," allegorically representing God, for the entirety of the play, but Beckett does not take a firm stand on whether or not that figure actually exists. On the one hand, a messenger boy claims that Godot "won't come this evening but surely to-morrow,"⁴ reaffirming Didi and Gogo's belief in Godot's existence and in his promise to meet them. However, the fact that the boy delivers the same message two days in a row,⁵ in combination with Godot's persistent absence from the stage, leads the audience to question Godot's existence. Plus, though the audience only witnesses two days of waiting for Godot, Vladimir's "so there you are again"⁶ illustrates that the waiting game has possibly been going on for a while. As the audience questions the certainty of Godot's being, Vladimir and Estragon are seen as fools wasting their days awaiting the unknown. Beckett successfully sidesteps taking a stand on the existence of God, and, in avoiding assumptions about the unknown, he provides the audience with what is known: God is not necessarily an active player in humans' daily life.

By steering away from a stance in regards to whether or not God exists, Beckett not only provides a stronger foundation for his ethics, but he also avoids the determinism that flows from both Christian (God-based) and Existential thought. As an individual's course of action depends on the situation in which he finds himself, a set of ethics founded on the presence or lack of God gives way to a range of actions tethered to either assumption. Thus, Beckett's 'Who knows?' response maximizes human freedom by allowing humans to act as they see fit, regardless of whether or not God exists. The notion of detachment from sources of meaning arises when Estragon asks Vladimir if they are "tied" to Godot, and Vladimir responds: "To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea!

4 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 55.

5 Ibid., 105.

6 Ibid., 2.

No question of it. (Pause.) For the moment.”⁷ Beckett’s claim that man is free from the constraints of both God and no God holds true despite Vladimir and Estragon’s failure to act in the face of freedom.

Though maximizing human freedom, Beckett’s ethics in *Waiting for Godot* by no means give meaning to human life. As described for the cases of Sartre and Frankl, in the modern era, the existence of God provides an external standard of importance, whereas a lack of God prompts humans to derive an existential value from choices and action. However, Godot does not exist in the realm of the stage, but Beckett also does not allow for self-validation. In Godot’s absence, Vladimir and Estragon do not yet know what role they play under his instruction and are rendered inert as they await his assumed arrival.

Estragon: Don’t let’s do anything. It’s safer.

Vladimir: Let’s wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea.

Vladimir: Let’s wait till we know exactly how we stand.⁸

As Vladimir and Estragon passively wait for an external Godot, they ignore the possibility of creating their lives’ own meaning. “Godot is also virtually a contraction of their nicknames, Gogo and Didi, the inner self that might alternatively give cohesion to their lives,”⁹ transforming Godot from a external set of ethics into one in which Gogo and Didi take responsibility for rooting their lives in something substantial. Godot represents the potential meaning that could arise from either God or self-determination, but he appears in neither form. In fact, the mere notion of an external source of meaning prompts them to relinquish control of their actions: as Beckett claims that the existence or nonexistence of God cannot be certain, he finds humans caught in a bind, not wanting to reject a potentially existing God for the sake of humanly derived meaning but also not receiving any external subsistence. The absence of a validating source, either in the form of God or an individual source of affirmation, makes human action seem futile and purposeless. Vladimir and

7 Ibid., 17.

8 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 13.

9 Gordon, *Reading Godot*, 61.

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Estragon serve as examples that man tends to avoid action for the sake of waiting.

Beckett also eliminates any notion of progress as a source of meaning by introducing the fluidity of time. For one, Vladimir and Estragon cannot remember what they did the day before, nor do they have a grasp on what comes in the future.¹⁰ Prior actions have no consequences for the current situation, and one cannot prepare for an unknowable or unpredictable future, which lays “bare the nature of life without real hope of improvement or change.”¹¹ Any action for the sake of bettering loses significance. In addition to memory’s effect on the nature of time, the silences that Beckett adds within his dialogue alter the apparent speed of time: “If we are active, we tend to forget the passage of time, we pass the time, but if we are merely passively waiting, we are confronted with the action of time itself.”¹² As the apparent speed and passage of time alters with mans’ focus on it, the structured, linear nature of time vanishes. Rather, individual units of time can stretch and contract in response to human conditions, undermining the steady beat of time, thereby eliminating any concept of forward progression.

Beckett even undermines the ‘other’ as a source of value, demonstrating that human interaction cannot provide meaning. Primarily, the characters’ faulty memories hinder dealings with the ‘other,’ for human relationships are not instantaneous but formed over periods of time. Exemplified by Estragon’s interactions with Pozzo, valuable human relationships cannot form when Estragon does not even recognize Pozzo from the day before.¹³ Even when characters remember each other, as in the case with Estragon and Vladimir, they find no value in human interaction.

Vladimir: You’re a hard man to get on with, Gogo.

Estragon: It’d be better if we parted.

Vladimir: You always say that and you always come crawling back.

Estragon: The best thing would be to kill me, like the other.

10 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 9-10.

11 Fletcher, “Bailing Out the Silence,” in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot*, 1987), 13.

12 Esslin, “The Search for the Self,” in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot*, 1987), 31.

13 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 88.

Vladimir: What other? (Pause.) What other?

Estragon: Like billions of others.

Vladimir: (*sententious*). To every man his little cross. (*He sighs*.) Till he dies. (*Afterthought*.) And is forgotten.¹⁴

Most clearly, Gogo and Didi directly claim that they gain nothing from interacting with each other. Beckett even alludes to the ‘other,’ claiming that the ‘other’ is dead and that human interaction is futile because relationships are as transitory as life. The constant miscommunications between Gogo and Didi also illustrate that the ‘other’ cannot act as a source of intellectual stimulus because dialogue serves as a moment in which two characters are both speaking about similar subjects, but “the different participants tend to pursue a line of thought independently of each other”¹⁵ (see Gogo and Didi’s ‘discussion’ of thinking).¹⁶ Beckett thus eliminates the three traditional sources of man’s value as externally prescribed or self-determined meaning, improvement through time, and human interactions are void of meaning in *Waiting for Godot*.

Despite the clear lack of meaning in Gogo and Didi’s present situation, Beckett critiques their inaction. One critic describes the apparent reality of *Waiting for Godot* as “nothing happens, twice.”¹⁷ The hyperbole of human inaction pins Vladimir and Estragon as foils to humanity, a species deeply rooted in action, and challenges those who only act for the sake of fulfilling meaning or upholding a value. However, Beckett illustrates that action has value in itself, since “*En attendant Godot* is not so much ‘waiting for Godot’ as ‘while waiting for Godot’...The primary dramatic action is thus the waiting itself...But what the characters actually do, even when they talk about waiting, is not waiting but something else.”¹⁸

Leaving humanity with a meaningless existence and shunning passivity, Beckett commands mankind to entertain itself. In one sense, the value of entertainment first naturally flows from the fluidity of time in *Waiting for Godot*, in which the beginning and end lose their significance and the focus shifts

14 Ibid., 68.

15 Fletcher, “Bailing Out the Silence,” 16.

16 Ibid., 71-2.

17 Fletcher, “Bailing Out the Silence,” 12.

18 Gans, “Beckett and the Problem of Modern Culture,” in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot*, 96-7.

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to individual moments: what carries the weight is what lies in the middle. Beckett, however, takes the significance of the moment one step further by denoting two potential courses of action: boldness and comedy.

The first branch of potential views every action as a noble and bold response to meaningless existence. Beckett best portrays this mentality through Gogo and Didi's contemplations of suicide. In both of the play's acts, Gogo and Didi emotionlessly discuss if and how they will kill themselves, not dwelling on whether or not suicide is good or bad, but merely noting the practicalities of the act.

Estragon: (*with effort*). Gogo light—bough not break—Gogo dead. Didi heavy—bough break—Didi alone. Whereas—
Vladimir: I hadn't thought of that.

Estragon: If it'll hang you it'll hang anything.¹⁹

In light of a meaningless existence, the decision to kill oneself has just as much significance, or lack thereof, as any other course of action. Suicide is simply one of the various choices that man can make, and taking action despite its futility echoes the persistent marching forward in Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, wherein "Sisyphus's perseverance, in literal spite or contempt of the meaninglessness of his task, defined his superiority...he could exult in his defiance of fate."²⁰ In fact, "Beckett's people also lack Sisyphus's most minimal assurances...that the rock or the mountain will be present the next day or that time and space are as they appear...They lack the most basic certainties upon which defiance depends,"²¹ giving greater nobility to any action they take. Especially in the case of suicide, action avoids the ultimate determinism of death, leaving Gogo and Didi the opportunity to seize and courageously determine the condition of their lives or deaths.

The other course of action stems from the belief that "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness...It's the most comical thing in the world,' since to laugh at our misery is the only way we have found of coming to terms with it."²² On the stage, Gogo and Didi spend their time "blathering about nothing in particular,"²³

19 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 13.

20 Gordon, *Reading Godot*, 57.

21 *Ibid.*, 58.

22 Fletcher, "Bailing Out the Silence," 13.

23 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 73.

entertaining themselves, while Beckett constructs a play which acts as a comedic diversion for the audience: “whatever the nature of the action on stage, its ultimate effect is to take up the time.”²⁴ In fact, Beckett employs traditional comedic structures, such as vaudeville, cross-talk routines, mirrored repetition, music hall monologues, circus clowning, and round songs as “the most popular and unpretentious forms of entertainment”²⁵ and as a means of entertaining the audience in light of its meaningless existence.

With no foundation of meaning and the impossibility of true passivity, man falls onto a path of action centered on nobility or comedy. Though the two types of action seem very different, Beckett melds the two by putting out a serious publication with intentional comedic effects, writing despite the futility of human action and for the sake of entertaining the audience, actors on a meaningless, earthly stage. As a source of action and a subsequent source of purpose, despite life’s inherent lack of value, Beckett’s ethics in *Waiting for Godot*, by eliminating any assumptions about God, at least give man solid ground on which he can either march boldly forward or stand and laugh.

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