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Editors’ Introduction

For the second year in a row a number of students were busy publicizing, compiling essays, and reviewing for our undergraduate philosophy and theology journal. The idea to develop a journal to publish students’ work in the areas of philosophy and theology was introduced in 2006. Since then, faculty and students have worked hard to establish this annual publication.

The approach of the staff for the second volume was accompanied by feelings of enthusiasm and anticipation. Many new editors were excited to participate in what we hope will be a long-standing tradition of exhibiting students’ writing in an annual scholarly journal. The editorial board put many hours of work into the compilation of this volume in hopes that it might live up to the standard set by last year’s publication. Through a process of blind reviews, eight essays were chosen for the second volume, with an excellent combination of philosophical and theological backgrounds.

We are very proud of the quality of this year’s essays, with topics ranging from the Harry Potter series to modern cosmological arguments.

Of these eight, John Laracy’s essay, *Vegetarianism and the Obligation to Avoid Unnecessary Animal Suffering*, was chosen as the prize essay for its solid, thorough, and convincing arguments.

Our gratitude goes to all the students who submitted essays this year, as well as the editors and advisors who volunteered their time and energy to read and edit essays. We would also like to thank Su Lane, whose design again graces the cover of the journal. Also, special thanks to Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. David Rehm, Philosophy Department chair Dr. Richard Buck, and Theology Department chair Rev. James Donohue for their invaluable endorsement and financial support.

Finally, we invite each and every reader to take and read the theological and philosophical insights on the follow pages. May you be as inspired and impressed as we were by the quality of Mount students’ work.

*Anne Boisvert and Katherine Ressel*  
Co-Editors-in-Chief  
November 2008
Vegetarianism and the Obligation to Avoid Unnecessary Animal Suffering

John Laracy

The practice of vegetarianism consists of completely abstaining from eating meat or, more precisely, animal flesh. Positively stated, it consists of eating only plants, plant food derivatives, and animal products other than flesh. One major motivation for subscribing to vegetarianism is the notion of animal welfare.

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1 One should note, though, that there is a range of strictness among vegetarians in regard to the eating of animal products other than animal flesh, ranging from veganism—eating no animal products—to less stringent vegetarianism, which allows for the consumption of dairy and other non-flesh animal products. Some argue that veganism is morally obligatory because procuring any animal products for consumption, including eggs and milk, causes animal suffering. Factory farms do keep egg-laying hens and milking cows in cramped conditions, but in general veganism is more difficult to justify because conditions can exist in which eggs and milk can be procured without harming the animals. See Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Avon Books, 1977) for more on this issue.

2 The underlying motivations for vegetarianism might be separated into three main categories: health or nutritional concerns, animal welfare concerns, and environmental concerns. For the purposes of this paper, the last motivation—animal welfare—will be the focus. A thorough analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of vegetarianism would also include the former two motivations. Regarding nutrition, many vegetarians claim that abstaining from meat leads to healthier living. This position is not fully embraced by all nutritionists, though there seems to be a general consensus that reduced meat eating for the average American would be beneficial. See Dwyer’s “Nutritional Risks of Vegan Diets,” in *Food for Thought: The Debate over Eating Meat*, ed. James S. Saponzis (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 66 for more information. One might argue that there is an obligation for one to try to remain healthy in order to live a more productive life, thus vegetarianism is morally superior to meat-eating. For insightful essays on the debate over the nutritional benefits of vegetarianism see section two of *Food for Thought*.

Regarding environmental concerns, some more famous vegetarians like Francis

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Generally speaking, animal welfare focuses on issues concerning the mistreatment of non-human animals. Eating meat demands animal farming, and according to proponents of animal welfare, it is wrong to raise and slaughter animals for human consumption because it causes them tremendous suffering. Accordingly, vegetarianism is morally obligatory because it is the only way to fully diminish the unnecessary suffering inflicted on farm animals. This essay will explore the animal welfare motivation for vegetarianism and attempt to justify it as a moral obligation on both utilitarian and Kantian ethical principles.

**The Basic Animal Welfare Motivation and its Modern Context**

The animal welfare motivation for vegetarianism relates directly to the moral rejection of unnecessary pain and suffering for any living creature. James Rachels succinctly describes this principle: “causing pain is acceptable only when there is a good enough reason for it.” The consumption of animal flesh demands that animals be raised and slaughtered, resulting in suffering for the animal, but pleasure for...
the meat-eating human. The question, then, is whether our desire to eat animal flesh is a good enough reason for inflicting suffering upon animals. Many vegetarians, like Rachels and notorious animal welfare activist Peter Singer, think the answer is a resounding “no.” As they see it, non-animal products provide adequate nourishment and enjoyment, so consumption of animal flesh—as well as most animal products—is unnecessary and essentially cruel. Although meat may taste good and provide essential nutrients, vegetables, grains, beans, etc. offer these benefits as well. Accordingly, they claim, rearing animals for slaughter and consumption should be abolished, and all people should practice vegetarianism.

Whether or not meat-eating is morally justifiable in hunter-gatherer societies, where meat-consumption was essential for survival, remains more or less irrelevant for the modern issue of animal welfare. In most modern societies, there are more than adequate means to survive without killing animals, and modern farming methods are particularly cruel to animals. Therefore, many vegetarians claim that the only appropriate response is a complete boycott on meat. Due to the high demand for meat among wealthy Westerners, the meat industry’s output is astounding: “Over 100 million cows, pigs, and sheep are raised and slaughtered in the United States alone each year; and for poultry the figure is a staggering 5 billion.” To produce such immense quantities of animal flesh, the meat industry has abandoned the traditional sprawling farm for efficient centers of production.

The typical commercial farms that produce most of the meat we buy from the grocery store or fast food restaurants are often called “factory farms,” referring to both the efficient technology used and the treatment of animals as mere products. As a competitive business, the farming “industry” has adopted methods that produce the most meat, in the fastest time, at the cheapest price possible. Colin Spencer explains that factory farming utilizes modern medical and nutritional advances, including antibiotics and hormones that promote rapid growth in animals, as well advanced maintenance technology: “cheap housing units, concrete stalls and automatic feeders and timers.” For consumers, these methods result in more

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5 Ibid.
6 Singer, Animal Liberation, 95.
7 Ibid., 94.
tasty meat at reasonable prices, but for farm animals, they lead to a short, cramped, and painful existence. According to the principles of factory farming, Singer writes, “Animals are treated like machines that convert low-priced fodder into high-priced flesh, and any innovation that results in a cheaper ‘conversion-ration’ is liable to be adopted.”9 Modern factory farming, it seems, reduces animals to mere things, which humans can contain, engineer, maim, and mutilate in order to make a profit for the farmers and produce dishes for consumers.10 Quoting Hog Farm Management, one of the farming industry’s own publications, Bart Gruzalski points out that the industry openly encourages this factory farming mentality:

Forget the pig is an animal. Treat him like a machine in a machine in a factory. Schedule treatments like you would lubrication. Breeding season like the first step in an assembly line. And marketing life the delivery of finished goods.11

Treating their animals like senseless machines, commercial farmers cramp them into the smallest areas possible in order not to waste space or time in caring for them, overfeed and inject them with chemicals to make them so obese they can’t even move in some cases, and shorten their life to a fraction of its natural span.12

Beyond these nearly universal practices in commercial farming, other, more acutely cruel methods are uniquely applied to each species of animal. Chickens, for instance, are “de-beaked” in order to prevent them from pecking at, killing, and even eating each other.13 Quoting animal behaviorist Konrad Lorenz, Singer points out that chickens are competitive animals that maintain a social hierarchy—literally a “pecking order”—based on “physical strength” and “individual courage.”14 In the wild, chickens peck at one another to maintain order, not harm one another. However, when thousands of them are cramped together into one shed, their competitive instinct compounded by the harsh, irritating environment leads to killings and cannibalism.15 To prevent this, farmers cut off their

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9 Singer, Animal Liberation, 94.
10 Spencer, Vegetarianism, 300.
11 Bart Gruzalski, “Why It’s Wrong to Eat Animals Raised and Slaughtered for Food,” in Food for Thought, 127.
12 Spencer, Vegetarianism, 300.
13 Singer, Animal Liberation, 98.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
beaks by using a hot knife or “inserting the chick’s head in a guillotinelike device which cuts off part of the beak.” According to zoologist F. W. Rogers Brambell, this process is highly painful for the chicken, whose beak has “a thin layer of highly sensitive tissue, resembling the ‘quick’ of the human nail.” A particularly cruel farming technique, de-beaking epitomizes the harsh treatment of animals on factory farms, though it is only one instance of the many cruel methods used to rear not just chickens, but also pigs, cows, turkeys, and goats for our consumption.

After a short and oppressive life on the factory farm, these farm animals are shipped to the slaughter-house to face their final end, one which, not surprisingly, tends to be painful. Chickens are “hooked onto conveyor belts that carry them, alive but upside down, into the killing room where their throats are slashed so they can bleed to death.” The slaughter of larger animals like cows and pigs can be even more gruesome than that of chickens in some instances. Despite government regulations that require these animals to be stunned prior to slaughter, the overloaded factory workers do not always succeed, and “fully conscious animals are regularly stabbed, skinned (cows), or scalded (pigs) to death.” Prior to the actual slaughter, moreover, animals are beaten and prodded along on the assembly line to speed up the process. From birth to death, these farm animals are cruelly treated as if they were senseless machines.

The Utilitarian Justification
According to proponents of animal welfare, treating animals like this is highly problematic because, in fact, animals are not machines or mere things, but sentient beings who feel pain and pleasure. Some, like Peter Singer, explicitly adhere to the utilitarian program of

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 99.
18 These numerous techniques are too vast to discuss here. See chapter three of Singer’s Animal Liberation, 105–08 for a full discussion of the distinctly cruel aspects of chicken farming, pig farming, cow farming, and turkey farming. Some further examples include: the use of battery cages for chickens, whose feet develop sores and infected ulcers and even get permanently stuck from remaining perched on wires rather than solid ground; housing of pigs in structures with harsh concrete floors, leading to a staggering 65% rate of leg injury; the chaining of calves to stalls to ensure they cannot move and develop muscles, thus becoming too “tough” for human enjoyment; and the list goes on. See Singer’s Animal Liberation, 122–23.
19 Gruzalski, “Why It’s Wrong to Eat Animals,” 127.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Rachels, “Basic Argument,” 77.
maximizing overall pleasure and reducing overall pain among all sentient beings. Following the lead of Jeremy Bentham, the first philosopher to clearly formulate the utilitarian ethic, utilitarians base the moral judgment (goodness or badness) of an action on its ability to produce or eliminate pleasure, which is good, or pain, which is bad.23 Not only the state of humans, but also the state of non-human animals, is considered according to the principle of utility. With regard to the issue of moral treatment of beings in general, Bentham famously writes, “The question is not, Can they reason? Nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?”24 Embracing utilitarian principles, some vegetarians abstain from eating meat because factory farming causes tremendous amounts of animal suffering in return for a minimal amount of human pleasure.

Given the cruelty of factory farming, the utilitarian justification for obligatory vegetarianism seems sound. If modern farming causes so much animal suffering, one must avoid eating meat in order to reduce this suffering. This justification, however, is called into question when one considers that there are still some traditional farms that rear animals on spacious fields and refrain from artificially accelerating their growth. If animals on small traditional farms enjoy a pleasurable life, then why would it be wrong to eat these animals? Eating the so-called “free range” meat from small traditional farms might reduce animal suffering in the same way that abstaining from meat does. According to Roger Scruton, this type of farming is ideal for both the reared animals and the omnivorous humans. Humans can enjoy eating their meat, while the animals’ needs are fully cared for:

> Animals raised for meat are, for the most part, gregarious, gentle, and dependent. They are unhappy in isolation, and emotionally dependent on the proximity of their kind. In the winter they must be sheltered; in the summer . . . they are out to grass.25

If, as Scruton suggests, this type of farming is pleasurable for both humans and animals, the utilitarian principle calls for the buying and

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24 Ibid., 232.
eating of meat from these small farms, but not the supermarket or fast food restaurant, rather than subscribing to vegetarianism.

Generally speaking, however, utilitarian philosophers, including Singer and Bart Gruzalski, hold that vegetarianism is morally obligatory if adequate vegetarian foods are available, which is the case for all citizens of developed nations. In contrast to Scruton’s perhaps overly romantic depiction of small-scale animal farming, they hold that all sorts of animal farming cause suffering. “Even if intensive methods are not used,” Singer writes, “traditional farming involves castration, separation of mother and young, breaking up social groups, branding, and transportation to the slaughter house, and finally slaughter itself.” In light of the necessary suffering caused by animal farming, Gruzalski cites the following principle to justify vegetarianism:

In order that eating meat be justified, the pain caused to animals by this practice must not only be outweighed by the omnivore’s pleasure, but there can be no alternative act that would foreseeably result in a better balance of pleasure over pain.27

In other words, for meat-eating to be justified, it must lead to the best possible overall proportion of pleasure to pain, but, in fact, vegetarianism leads to the best possible proportion. He argues that eating just vegetarian crops is not only as healthy and pleasurable as eating meat, but it also eliminates cruel farming techniques entirely.28

If one reasonably assumes that all animal farming causes some level of animal suffering, the principle of utility calls for a vegetarian diet. As Singer points out, although traditional farming is better than factory farming, it still involves some violent practices. Moreover, even the ideal farm life leads to a violent death for a farm animal. The vegetarian obligation is made clearer in light of the horrendous factory farming industry that produces most meat in developed nations. Practically speaking, non-factory-farmed meat is pricey and often hard to find. Most meat available in local supermarkets and restaurants is likely to be from factory farms. Completely abstaining from meat, then, is the only sure way to live out the utilitarian principle of maximizing pleasure and diminishing pain for sentient beings.

26 Singer, Animal Liberation, 160.
27 Gruzalski, “Why It’s Wrong to Eat Animals,” 125.
28 Ibid.
A Kantian Challenge

While the utilitarian justification for vegetarianism may be convincing, its line of reasoning appears to turn on a faulty view of animals in comparison to humans. For Singer and some other utilitarians, animal pain and pleasure and human pain and pleasure are to be equally considered in determining the right choices based on utilitarian calculus. Singer, for instance, writes:

[T]he basic element—the taking into account of the interests of the being, whatever those interests may be—must, according to the principle of equality, be extended to all beings, black or white, masculine or feminine, human or nonhuman (my emphasis).29

Singer’s point that utilitarianism, according to the principle of equality, treats “nonhuman” beings the same as human beings is troubling, for humans are clearly distinct from and more valuable than all other animals. While other utilitarians recognize that human happiness is a higher, more valuable kind of pleasure than animal pleasure, they nevertheless maintain that pleasure and pain are the ultimate standards for moral choices, thus the outcome of animal pain must always be considered bad in and of itself. In contrast to the utilitarian standpoint, one might claim that pain and pleasure are not the ultimate standards for moral decision-making. Rather, as highly influential philosopher Immanuel Kant claims, human rationality and freedom, not consequences of pain and pleasure, determine moral choices. According to a Kantian view, the utilitarian justification for vegetarianism errs in treating humans and non-human animals equally. By focusing on pain and pleasure alone, instead of higher human duties and abilities, the utilitarian justification for vegetarianism seems to diminish the fundamental distinction between humans and animals.

Kant claims that humans, who are rational and free, have moral worth and dignity, while non-human animals are non-rational and have only “conditional” value:

Beings whose existence depends not on our will but on nature’s [non-human animals] have nevertheless, if they are nonrational beings, only a relative value as means, and are therefore called things; rational beings, on the contrary, are

29 Singer, Animal Liberation, 6.
called persons, because their very nature points them out as ends in themselves.\(^{30}\)

A rational being, as the independent and autonomous master of herself, is an “end in herself,” while non-rational beings are valuable only as means for human ends. Kant’s view poses a challenge to the utilitarian principle by suggesting that there is a hierarchy of beings, in which rational beings reign supreme over non-rational beings. If animals only have conditional value in relation to humans, the rearing and slaughtering of farm animals might be seen as a valuable use of these beings. Because they are not ends in themselves, they are only valuable, perhaps, for our use and enjoyment. In this view, vegetarianism might be considered unjustified because it attributes a false intrinsic value to animals.

Along the same lines, vegetarianism might not be considered obligatory because animals, unlike humans, have no rights. Following Kant’s lead, philosopher Carl Cohen explains that rights are an essentially human concept because only humans have a conscious sense of right or wrong.\(^{31}\) On the other hand, “The concepts of wrong, and of right, are totally foreign to animals, not conceivably within their ken or applicable to them.”\(^{32}\) Unconscious of right and wrong, good and bad, animals have no claim on others to respect their freedom or dignity because they don’t have freedom or dignity in the first place. By nature, they lack free will, so the human coercion of animals, in effect, does not violate their freedom or dignity. It follows that they have no right not to be reared and slaughtered. Based on a Kantian account of human versus animal nature, then, vegetarianism might appear not to be justified. As I will argue in the next section, however, even Kant’s own explicit remarks on animals would justify the obligation for vegetarianism in a modern context.

**A Proposed Synthesis**

Undoubtedly, this challenge raises an important issue (the hierarchy of beings), but does it, much like the factory farming industry, err in reducing animals to mere things? One can acknowledge the fundamental differences between humans, who are moral agents, and


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 157.
animals, which are not, but also recognize the difference between animals and plants, rocks, TVs, and dust particles. Because of their difference from mere things, animals are not to be caused unnecessary pain and suffering. To illustrate: “It is silly to think of rats as the holders of moral rights, but it is by no means silly to recognize that rats can feel pain and that it is our obligation to refrain from torturing them because they are beings having that capacity.”  

This obligation to refrain from torturing animals arises, in part, from their ability to feel pain. Reacting to physical injury and discomfort in similar ways to humans—with screams, panic, aggressiveness, irritability, etc.—animals clearly feel pain and have at least some basic awareness of it. Utilitarians are right to avoid inflicting unnecessary animal pain because by its very definition pain is unpleasant and should be avoided if possible.

Utilitarianism, however, is not alone in this respect. At this point, we can return to Rachels’s formulation of the basic principle underlying the animal welfare motivation for vegetarianism: “causing pain is acceptable only when there is a good enough reason for it. Justification is required.” Therefore, if adequate vegetarian sources of food are available, providing both nutrition and pleasure for humans, the slaughter of animals for human consumption is not justified. As Rachels points out, one need not embrace utilitarianism to accept this principle and its implications in regard to vegetarianism. While utilitarianism most explicitly upholds this line of reasoning, one could accept it for a variety of philosophical or religious reasons.

Based on his explicit comments on animals, even Kant would agree with the reasoning of this basic animal welfare motivation. For Kant, unnecessary cruelty toward animals is to be avoided because it might engender cruelty toward humans. Although Kant maintains that animals have only conditional value, he nevertheless argues that humans have an “indirect” duty to treat animals well. “Tender feelings toward dumb animals,” he writes, “develop humane feelings toward mankind.”

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34 For a thorough discussion of animal pain—including scientific evidence—see chapter two of Singer’s *Animal Liberation*.
36 Ibid.
cruel treatment of animals leads to cruel treatment of humans, and kind treatment of animals leads to kind treatment of humans. Therefore, “duties toward animals . . . are indirect duties towards mankind.” In other words, one develops her moral capabilities in regard to humans by treating animals well.

In this view, like a utilitarian view, unnecessary cruelty towards animals is wrong, unless there is an adequate justification for it. Kant says the sadness or guilt one experiences after killing any creature “for no reason” is “a natural feeling for a humane man.” Even for Kant, slaughtering of animals needs justification because the unjustified infliction of animal suffering leads to other severe human cruelties. Given the vast amount of vegetarian foods in developed countries, Kant would have to agree that there is not an adequate justification for the especially cruel animal slaughter in these modern nations. According to Kant’s reasoning, the excessive cruelty of factory farming would certainly be detrimental to the moral character of the factory farmers, but perhaps this pervasive practice even affects the moral character of the meat-eating consumers. In any case, Kant’s notion of duty toward animals as an indirect duty to mankind demands a reasonable justification for inflicted animal suffering; for most modern societies, eating meat is not reasonably justified, and vegetarianism is an apparent obligation.

Although Kant suggests that the unnecessary suffering of animals should be avoided, his insistence that animals only have conditional value nevertheless misses the mark. Kant’s hierarchy of beings places humans above all other objects, including animals, which have merely conditional value along with vegetables, trees, rocks, books, cars, etc. On the other hand, utilitarians like Peter Singer diminish the essential difference between humans and animals almost entirely. A proper hierarchy of beings, though, acknowledges a range of value or worth for a range of distinct beings, with human beings on top. Humans, who have deep moral sense, reasoning ability, capacity for love, aesthetic sense, etc. are clearly on top of the hierarchy of beings. As Carl Cohen suggests, humans have inalienable rights to life, freedom, pursuit of happiness, etc. because of their supreme, intrinsic worth as conscious and free beings. Animals, though, lack full self-awareness, free will, and an ability to

38 Ibid., 396.
39 Ibid., 395.
40 For an early example of an accurate hierarchy of beings see Aristotle’s De Anima.
love unconditionally as humans do and, therefore, do not possess the same inalienable right as humans have. Nonetheless, animals should not be included with all other objects as having merely conditional value. In many ways, some animals are similar to humans and should be treated accordingly. Some chimpanzees, for instance, have been taught a small amount of sign language. If some animals are so similar to humans that they can even communicate with us, surely they are more valuable than a moth, a blade of grass, or a rock. Kant fails to realize that the hierarchy of beings is not merely divided between humans and all other objects, while Singer fails to acknowledge any genuine distinction among creatures at all; for him, all sentient creatures deserve equal treatment.

My sense of animal nature falls between Singer, who emphasizes animal similarity with humans, and Kant, who emphasizes animal difference from humans. In my mind, farm animals, including cows, pigs, and chickens, should certainly not be considered equal to humans, yet their value is not merely conditional. Because of their sentience, sensitivity, associational awareness, and ability for a very limited sort of affection, their pain and suffering is an evil in and of itself—that is, it is evil if it is not a means to some higher end. Causing pain to animals for its own sake is clearly wrong because animals are, in a sense, intrinsically valuable creatures. Without self-awareness, free will, and an ability to love selflessly, however, their lives are not intrinsically valuable in the same way a human’s life is. Because each human life is so utterly valuable, the suffering and pain of animals can be justified to save human lives. Although causing animal suffering for its own sake is evil, it can be justified for some noble human aims. In hunter-gatherer societies or perhaps some third world countries, for instance, human survival depends on the slaughter of wild animals. Since any one human life is supremely valuable compared to animal life, painfully slaughtering animals is justifiable if it is the one and only means of human survival. Similarly, some medical testing on animals is justified because it could potentially save many human lives. If testing an AIDS vaccine on monkeys, for instance, might lead to the cure of

AIDS and the prevention of millions of human deaths, the suffering of the monkeys is justifiable.\footnote{The issue of medical testing on animals clearly demands its own thorough moral justification, one which this paper will not provide in any detail. I mention this issue to demonstrate what sorts of justifications for causing animal pain are possible.}

In short, sufficient justification is required to inflict pain on animals. Singer, Kant, and I might disagree on which particular practices are justified, but we would all agree on this basic principle. Accordingly, Kant, it seems, would agree with Singer and I that modern farming is unjustified in light of the availability of modern vegetarian options. Modern animal farming involves violent treatment of animals, and this practice is not necessary for human survival or any other genuinely worthy human end. To prevent the pervasive and gratuitous suffering of farm animals, modern consumers need to abstain from eating meat. All people living in developed nations should, at the very least, lessen their meat consumption and consider giving up meat entirely.
Birth Control in Catholic Marriage
Sarah Baumgarten

Approximately ninety percent of people in the United States marry at least once in their lifetime, and almost equally high is the number of people who use contraception to prevent unintended pregnancy, both within and outside of marriage. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states that “89% of sexually active women of reproductive age ‘at risk’ of becoming pregnant use contraception, and 98% have used it in their lifetime.”

However, the Catholic Church has always held fast to its position that contraception is morally unacceptable. Pope John Paul II’s work *Theology of the Body* fits right into this tradition by emphasizing the purposes of sex and marriage as God created them. Still, “more than 75% of U.S. Catholics believe the church should allow the use of contraception,” reports *Medical News Today.*

Why is this the case? The Catholic Church does allow for the regulation of family size using Natural Family Planning (NFP)—is it simply that people are unwilling to practice the self-control involved in NFP? It is indeed true that doing what is right involves walking the “straight and narrow” path. Artificial contraception contradicts the purposes of

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sex as designed by God and should not be used under any circumstance; since we are called to love as God loves, Natural Family Planning is the only morally acceptable method for a Catholic couple to regulate family size.

According to Beverly Winikoff and Suzanne Wymelenberg, “Contraception, in one form or another, has been practiced by humans for thousands of years.” Today, men and women are able to control their fertility with greater success than ever before, thanks to the development of modern contraceptive methods and advances in medical science. The many different contraceptive options now available fall under four categories: barrier, hormonal, intrauterine, and surgical. Some truly act as contraceptives, preventing the union of sperm and egg in fertilization, while others have effects that prevent an already fertilized egg from surviving when contraception fails, thus acting as an early abortion.

Barrier methods, which are aimed solely at preventing the union of egg and sperm, include male and female condoms, the diaphragm, the cervical cap, and spermicides. Hormonal methods, which include birth control pills, Norplant inserts, and the Depo-Provera injection, can work in several ways. According to the USCCB’s pamphlet Married Love and the Gift of Life, “if the contraceptive action fails and fertilization takes place, these hormonal methods may make it impossible for a newly conceived life to implant and survive,” such as through changes in the lining of the uterus. The intrauterine method involves Intrauterine Devices which are placed in the uterus through the cervix to prevent fertilized eggs from surviving, generally killing the fetus after a few days. Surgical methods include tubal occlusion (tube tying) for female sterilization and vasectomy for male sterilization.

All of these methods of artificial birth control are wrong according to Catholic Church doctrine, but the majority of Catholics, even those who consider themselves devout, choose not to follow Church teaching in this area. To understand how this came about, it is necessary to look at recent Church history. Advances in

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2 Ibid.
5 Winikoff and Wymelenberg, *The Whole Truth.*
contraception technology and fear of the “world population explosion” during the middle decades of the twentieth century led many Catholic laypeople to hope for a change in Church teaching.\(^8\) This hope was strengthened when a Papal Birth Control Commission was formed to examine the issue and the majority report in favor of change was released. Paul VI, however, chose to act in a way that no one at that point expected—in 1968 he released his encyclical Humanae Vitae, which stood behind the Church’s traditional position, and “when . . . [he] condemned all contraception and recommended only natural family planning, it provoked a storm of indignation.”\(^9\)

Following Humanae Vitae, lay Catholics began to question Church authority because it seemed that their feelings on this issue were being ignored. In addition, “Perhaps most troubling, increasing numbers of Catholics came to assume that forming one's conscience on sexual matters was an essentially private endeavor.”\(^10\) Even many bishops and priests around the world neglected to enforce the pope’s decision in their dioceses and parishes. Regardless of how they felt about the issue, it seemed that clergy were now remaining as silent as the confessinals in their churches had now become as a result of the encyclical:

Silence on contraception inevitably led to an even greater silence—this one around the subject of sexual morality generally. At a time of almost breathtaking change in sexual values and behavior, church leaders had little to offer beyond what theologian Gerard Sloyan has called ‘prohibitions without explanations.’ . . . Humanae vitae might best be understood as having terminated a necessary and, in fact, long-delayed conversation within the church. What is sex for? What is the nature of marriage?\(^11\)

It is true that, for the most part, the Church had provided only “prohibitions without explanations” regarding the contraception issue. Enter Karol Wojtyla, newly elected Pope John Paul II in 1978. Throughout his papacy, John Paul II would answer the questions about sex and marriage and provide the explanations behind the prohibition of contraception, among other things. He would do this

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\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^11\) Ibid.
most famously in his series of homilies which became *Theology of the Body*.

For centuries the Catholic Church viewed sexual relations as “dirty,” and encouraged good Catholics to avoid them whenever possible; sex was seen as a kind of “necessary evil” (although this was never claimed outright) for the purpose of reproduction. In recent years, however, the Church has finally recognized the beauty and profound meaning of human sexuality as it plays out in Christian marriage—a sacramental union between a man and a woman. Explanations of the purposes of sex according to God’s plan are now provided for those who seek out the reasoning behind the prohibitions of practices such as contraception, adultery, divorce, polygamy, fornication, masturbation, pornography, and homosexual activity. Although he was not the first to attempt an explanation of the great mystery of sex, John Paul II provides a very detailed and clear description and application of God’s plan for human sexuality, as do editions of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* following the Second Vatican Council.

The *Catechism* states that ideally, in sex within marriage as it should be according to “the way things really are,”

> [t]he spouses’ union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple’s spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family. The conjugal love of man and woman thus stands under the twofold obligation of fidelity and fecundity.  

So we see that a Christian marriage, as well as each and every individual sexual act, is naturally ordered toward two purposes which cannot be separated from each other without falsifying sex: sex should be both unitive and procreative. As the Pontifical Council for the Family says, “one cannot eliminate either of the two meanings… Otherwise, the conjugal act would be deprived of truth and true love, and would become falsified and deviate into selfishness.”

Sex needs to bring a married man and woman closer to each other in love while simultaneously remaining open to the creation of new life. So this explains, at least to a certain extent, what sex is meant to be, but can the Church go even further in its explanation? Can it provide deeper

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reasoning behind why good sex has these twofold purposes? *Theology of the Body* does just that.

Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* is comprised of 129 homilies delivered from 1979 through 1984 that were put together to form one theological work. It focuses, in a nutshell, on the idea of sexual love being sacramental of God’s love; John Paul II states that “The body, in fact, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world, the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus to be a sign of it.”14 This theology involves an interpretation of Genesis 1:27, “God created man in his own image… male and female he created them,” as meaning that the union of male and female through their bodily complementarity reflects the essence of their Creator.

According to *Theology of the Body*, the “mystery hidden since time immemorial,” the “ultimate mystery of God and the meaning of human existence,”15 can be found in the *Catechism’s* revelation that “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.”16 There is within God, among the three Persons of the Trinity, an “eternal exchange of love.”17 This exchange of love is a “communion of persons” in which “two persons mutually ‘give’ themselves to one another in love.”18 The Holy Spirit, in this case, is actually the personification of this incredible love between the Father and the Son. God is love, and since human beings were made in God’s image, this love is what human beings are supposed to be mirroring. Not only that, but God wants humanity to ultimately be caught up and become a part of this eternal exchange of love. This love should be mirrored in all human relationships, but most importantly and powerfully in the relationship between a man and a woman in marriage. In order to image God’s love most completely and perfectly, it makes sense that characteristics of God’s love must be understood.

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15 Ibid., 7.
16 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 221.
17 West, *Theology*, 7.
18 Ibid.
Theology of the Body provides four characteristic traits of God’s love: His love is free, total, faithful, and fruitful. We see this most clearly in the sacrificial love of Christ:

First, he gives his body freely (‘No one takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord,’ Jn 10:18). Second, he gives his body totally—without reservation, condition, or selfish calculation (‘He loved them to the last,’ Jn 13:1). Third, he gives his body faithfully (‘I am with you always,’ Mt 28:20). And fourth, he gives his body fruitfully (‘I came that they may have life,’ Jn 10:10).¹⁹

In order to truly love one’s spouse, he or she must image this perfect love of God; this means loving freely, totally, faithfully, and fruitfully. This kind of love is what Christian marriage is meant to be, and it is the kind of love that is vowed at the altar during every Christian wedding. Further, the completion of the Sacrament of Marriage actually takes place with the consummation of the wedding vows on the wedding night, when husband and wife really give themselves to one another. In the sexual act, the man and woman repeat bodily the wedding vows they had declared verbally earlier that day (and words are made flesh); these same vows of free, total, fruitful, and faithful love are then meant to be renewed every time the couple has sex, “until death do they part.”

If sex is meant to be a renewal of the wedding vows which promise free, total, faithful, and fruitful love, then all four of these elements must be present in order for it to be good and true. Obviously, a couple who uses contraception is leaving out the “fruitful” aspect—they are not being true, at least not in those individual sexual acts which they close off to fertility, to the vow they made at the altar to “receive children lovingly from God.” Although not as clear at first glance, a contracepting couple is also going against the other elements of Christ-like love.

Freedom, properly understood, is negatively affected by contraception How? Since abstinence was already a fool-proof method of preventing pregnancy long before contraception became popular, contraception was invented so that people could indulge their sexual desires without consequence. As Christopher West explains, “Contraception . . . actually fosters self-imposed slavery. It

¹⁹ Ibid., 91.
creates a culture of people unable to say no to their hormones.”20 Totality is impeded upon in the sense that spouses cannot give themselves totally to each other if they are holding anything back; with contraception, fertility is held back and not included in the self-gift. Finally, even fidelity is hindered through the use of contraception, although this may not be as clear. Being faithful is about “living what you promised at the altar… Couples who succumb to sterilizing their acts of intercourse have consciously or unconsciously decided that fidelity to their vows is too demanding.”21

Within all of this reasoning lies the Church’s decision to remain steadfast in her anti-contraception position. Some may argue that, since intention is the most important consideration in questions of morality, Natural Family Planning (which the Church promotes) is really no better than contraception; both NFP and contraception have the same intention: to prevent or regulate pregnancy. However, while this intention is indeed the same for both, other intentions are also involved. Every action has an intention, but certain moral actions also have inescapable intentions built into the very action itself, regardless of other intentions. In this case, as Christopher West says, “The NFP couple intends to abstain from fertile intercourse. The contraceptive couple intends to sterilize fertile intercourse. These are different intentions altogether.”22 It is the intention to sterilize fertile intercourse that is wrong, not the intention to regulate pregnancy. In fact, the Church sees planning one’s family as an important responsibility for couples; “Natural family planning is not something which is permitted in exceptional circumstances but an attitude and behavior which are necessary and morally obligatory.”23

To hold Natural Family Planning up to the same standards of love that contraception was compared against is necessary to prove the goodness of NFP in contrast to the moral evils of contraception. Again, the obvious comes first: sexual love within the context of NFP is fruitful, even if a couple is not trying to get pregnant. Rather than refusing openness to new life, a NFP couple works with the natural cycle of fertility implanted in the woman’s body by God. In addition, the couple should always be open to the

20 Christopher West, Good News about Sex and Marriage: Answers to Your Honest Questions about Catholic Teaching (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004), 110.
21 Ibid., 111.
22 Ibid., 117.
possibility of conception during every single act of intercourse. Sex within NFP is also free, total, and faithful in that the husband and wife are truly giving themselves to one another freely and completely, holding nothing back and remaining true to the promises made in their wedding vows. In this context, sex is good in every situation—it is not falsified through a refusal to image God's love. Rather, the couple is working within God’s purpose for this primordial sacrament where “the two become one flesh.”

While John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* has been incredibly profound, enlightening, and freeing to so many listeners and readers, it is important to recognize that those who read but do not fully understand it as John Paul II intended will have a hard time swallowing everything that the late pope says. This is because not only is the work dense and academic in style, it is also revolutionary. Christopher West, author of *Theology of the Body Explained* and *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, claims, “Indeed, if we take John Paul II’s ‘sexual revolution’ to heart, we will never see ourselves and the universe quite the same way again.”

Susan A. Ross, a theology professor at Loyola University Chicago, writes of the difficulty in accepting everything the pope says at face value. “As a lifelong Catholic, a feminist, a wife, and a theologian,” Ross says, “I find myself in agreement with some dimensions of it but with concerns about and even strong disagreements with others.”

These concerns and disagreements include issues of gender and sexual complementarity and contraception. For example, in response to John Paul II’s explanation of the purposeful differences between men and women, both physically and personally, Ross says, “I am not so sure that my ‘essential femininity’ means that I am intrinsically more nurturing than my husband or that I have a deeper receptivity than he does.” She is skeptical of the pope’s conservative and seemingly biased views on gender and of the idea that all females are by nature more nurturing and therefore suited to be mothers. Ross also criticizes the idea that contraception contradicts true marital love, feeling instead that disallowing the use of contraception is oppressive to women. She also believes that the decision of such a great majority of Catholic couples to disregard

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27 Ibid.
Church teaching on contraception must have some wisdom in it: “This is not to say that celibates cannot understand sexuality, but rather that the lived experience of sexual activity also has a wisdom greatly worth hearing.” Ross encourages couples to follow their individual consciences on this issue rather than follow rules about abstinence in marriage set down by celibate Church leaders. She seems to believe, in essence, that asking couples to abstain from sex for any length of time is too much to ask; NFP is too hard—harder than celibate men can understand.

Despite this lack of understanding on the part of many who choose to take Ross’s advice, which is the same they are being offered by many different sources, a clear understanding of the true purpose of sex stands behind the Church’s anti-contraceptive stance.

Contraception, both within and outside of marriage, is morally inexcusable because it goes against God’s plan for sex and the inherent dignity of all human persons. Choosing not to follow the Church’s teaching on contraception simply because it is “too much trouble” or “unrealistic” is an unacceptable excuse; these reasons do not fit with what it means to live a Christian life, because following Christ is not supposed to be easy. It is supposed to be difficult, according to the Gospels, at least at first. Acting virtuously becomes easier over time, and refusing to follow one’s immediate desires is the first step. Sexual love between a man and a woman is meant to point us to Heaven as an image of the communal love of the Trinity, as well as the love of Christ for the Church. It is meant, every time, to be a renewal of the couple’s wedding vows to love as God loves: freely, totally, faithfully, and fruitfully. Natural Family Planning is justifiable because it works within God’s plan, accepting God as the “Lord and giver of life.” Jesus said, “What God has joined together, let no man separate.” Although this refers to marriage in context, it applies also to sexual love itself as well. The creation of human beings is inherently joined to sexual love; no man or woman may separate the two.

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28 Ibid.
29 Matthew 19:6
Conditions of Perception: An Answer to the Skeptical Doubt of Perception-Based Knowledge

Matt Balaban

In his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus Empiricus outlines the skeptical frame of mind by stating:

Skepticism is an ability, or mental attitude, which opposes appearances to judgments in any way whatsoever, with the result that, owing to the equipollence of the objects and reasons thus opposed, we are brought firstly to a state of mental suspense and next to a state of “unperturbedness” or quietude.¹

To parse this long-winded definition into something more manageable: skepticism is a philosophical position, as well as a method of doing philosophy, which holds that any statement has an opposing statement which is equally probable, so it is rational to not make judgments about which statements are correct and incorrect, thus bringing ourselves to a state of mental rest. This paper will focus on how Sextus’ skeptical view applies to knowledge derived from perception—“appearances,” to use his term—and how the problems which it poses can be overcome.


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The skeptical view holds dire consequences for most theories of knowledge, although skepticism seeks to apply itself to all areas of epistemology and philosophy in general. Many theories include knowledge based on, or stemming from, perception in some way. If someone were to hold this type of skeptical view there would be no such thing as knowledge based on perception because any claim made based on that perception would be open to opposition. There is, however, a solution to this problem.

Sextus uses a few examples of differing sense perceptions to prove his point. One such example is a man who has jaundice; he will see everything with a yellow tint whereas other people without jaundice will not. Following the same idea, a man who has bloodshot eyes will see things tinted red. Sextus also points out that noises sound different depending on the density and quality of the air and the physical surroundings, specifically in narrow and wide places.²

Sextus concludes that it is impossible to identify which of these opposing perceptions is the correct one because an argument could be made for each opposing perception. To quote Sextus:

Since, then, all apparent objects are viewed in a certain place, and from a certain distance, or in a certain position, and each of these conditions produces a great divergency in the sense-impressions, as we mentioned above, we shall be compelled by this Mode also to end up in suspension of judgement.³

As this quote shows, Sextus believes that the only way to settle a dispute in terms of what different people perceive is to say that there is no way to settle it.

Sextus, however, falls short of giving a complete consideration to the cause of these differences in perception. Locke’s concept of primary and secondary qualities can help in explaining this discrepancy of perceptions, which Sextus correctly points out.

Locke defines secondary qualities as “such qualities which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities”⁴ This is a strange concept, upon first consideration; Locke is claiming that the qualities of an object can be divided into two categories: those which create ideas of properties that are in the object itself and those which create

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² Ibid., 86.
³ Ibid., 85.
⁴ Ibid., 133.
impressions of qualities which are solely in the mind of the person
perceiving the object.

Locke calls qualities within the object “primary qualities.” They include solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number. These are fairly straightforward and require little explanation. By contrast, secondary qualities create impressions solely in the mind of the perceiver. This category of qualities includes, simply put, anything which can be said about an object which is not a primary quality.

To establish why these so-called “secondary qualities” do not exist in the object being perceived, Locke offers an argument which sounds similar to one Sextus might make. Locke says, “Take away the sensation of them; let not the eyes see the light of colors, nor the ears hear sounds; let the palate not taste, nor the nose smell, and all colors, tastes, odours, and sounds . . . vanish and cease.” In short, without the perception of a secondary quality, that quality does not exist. Locke contrasts this to primary qualities, which he asserts exist regardless of whether they are being perceived or not.

That is not to say, however, that there is no connection between secondary quality ideas and physical objects. Although the ideas of the qualities are within the mind of the perceiver, the objects which are being perceived are constructed in such as way as to have the power to produce those ideas within the mind of the perceiver. To quote Locke, “They are…only a power to produce those sensations in us: and what is sweet, blue, warm in idea, is but the certain bulk, figure, and motion of the insensible parts, in the bodies themselves, which we call so.”

The ideas caused by secondary qualities are given to us through the five senses native to humans: taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing. Furthermore, each sense has a specific type of secondary quality idea which is generates: sight generates images, hearing generates sounds, and so on. However, each of these senses is dependent on several factors in order for them to function properly.

One such factor is the external environment that the perceiver is in when he perceives the object in question. As Sextus himself points out, “the light of a lamp appears dim in the sun but

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
bright in the dark.”⁹ This is a very clear case that illustrates how the perception of sight can be affected by the environment in which the perception is made. Sextus’ example includes two scenarios, the first being a person perceiving a lamp in bright sun light and the second being a person perceiving the same lamp in darkness. Both perceivers in this example are looking at the same object, the lamp, but they perceive its brightness differently. How can this be? The answer is given in the question: the environmental conditions under which the lamp was perceived were changed between the two scenarios; the conditions under which the second perception of the lamp was made were more conducive to perceive the true brightness of the lamp. At this point, Sextus would most likely state that these two opposing perceptions can not be analyzed and a true brightness found, but he would be wrong.

In this example, both the lamp and the perceiver are the same in both situations, so it can be inferred that the actual brightness of the lamp did not change between the first and second perceptions. However, the sun is brighter than any lamp, and anything that is more than another thing will make the second thing appear to be less in comparison. This holds true for all perceptions; a hot object will make a warm object feel cooler then it really is when it is perceived before the warm object. With this in mind, it is only a matter of logic to say that the sun, which is many times brighter than the lamp, makes the lamp appear to be dimmer by comparison when the lamp is viewed in conjunction with the sun. Therefore, if a person is to perceive the true brightness of the lamp, he should perceive it in conditions that are free of any elements which would bias their vision against seeing the true brightness of the lamp. What these conditions entail exactly will be discussed later.

The conditions of the perceiver’s own body and sense organs are another set of factors which may bias the perception of an object, and so must also be addressed. Sextus uses the example of a man with jaundice to show how the state of a person’s body and sense organs can affect what he perceives. He says, “the sufferers from jaundice see everything yellow.”¹⁰ This example utilizes two different people observing the same object and trying to determine its color. The man with jaundice will, no matter what the true color of the object, always see a yellow tint to whatever he perceives with

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⁹ Ibid., 85.  
¹⁰ Ibid., 86.
his sight. The second man in this example, the one without jaundice, will not have the same yellow tint to his sight because he does not suffer from jaundice. Consequently, when these two men attempt to find the color of an object, their perceptions will differ. Again, how can this happen and still allow for knowledge from the senses?

Again, the answer is contained within the problem: the man with jaundice is in an unnatural condition which biases his eyes to perceive things to be yellow in color. Being afflicted with jaundice is not the natural state of the human eye, so it can be said that an eye which is afflicted with jaundice is not in its optimal condition to perceive color.

These two categories of factors both rely on the same underlying principle: the differences which can be observed with regard to secondary quality ideas can be explained by differences in the condition of the environment or the sense organs themselves. Therefore, it can be seen that the conditions surrounding an act of perception are able to influence the way that the secondary quality ideas are perceived by the mind. If the conditions surrounding a perception are not ideal, then the idea that is generated by the perception will be flawed.

Locke, however, asserts that any secondary quality idea will always be flawed simply because there is no direct correlation between the idea and the object.\(^{11}\) I believe that Locke is wrong in this regard. A secondary quality idea is based on the primary qualities of the object in question; therefore it can be seen that there is a connection between the physical object and the secondary quality idea.

The question now becomes: what qualifies as ideal conditions of perception? I answer this question by saying that ideal conditions of perception are the conditions under which the sense that is being used is best able to perceive the object correctly. Ideal conditions of perception include being free of any disorders, diseases, or malformations of the sense organ. A person who is color blind would be an example of someone who is perceiving under non-ideal conditions of perception in this sense; the person suffers from a disorder that prevents them from properly perceiving the color of an object and, thus, their perceptions of color are incorrect.

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\(^{11}\) See Locke’s discussion in paragraphs 15–21 (in \textit{Human Knowledge}, pp. 133–34) for his explanation.
Ideal conditions of perception also include being free of environmental factors which detract from a person’s ability to perceive the object. An example of this would be if a person attempting to perceive things in the world was wearing glasses with red lenses. While the glasses were being worn, everything would acquire a red tint, but this red color is not actually caused by the objects being perceived; rather, it is a product of the glasses, the medium through which the objects are distorted.

An analysis of the examples used by Sextus in light of the conditions of perception will point out where Sextus falls short of a complete consideration of the differences which arise in perceptions of objects and the impact that those differences have on our ability to have knowledge. Sextus uses two specific examples in constructing his point: a man with jaundice, and sound in wide vs. narrow areas. Both of these examples involve differing perceptions which can be explained using the idea of conditions of perception.

When a man has jaundice, he is affected by a condition which causes his eye to perceive things as yellow when they are not. It is clear that jaundice is a non-ideal condition of perception, specifically one relating to disorders, diseases and malformations of the sense organ. Jaundice is an unnatural condition which creates incorrect perceptions of color within a person when they attempt to perceive an object. Therefore, a dispute over the color of an object between a man with jaundice and a man without it will be settled by asking the man without jaundice what color he sees. Provided that the only non-ideal condition of perception at work in this example is the first man’s jaundice, the second man will be able to accurately perceive the color of the object.

The differences in a sound which is heard in a narrow area when compared to the same sound heard in a wide open area is an example of non-ideal conditions of perception relating to the external environment that the person is in while they perceive the sound. Establishing an ideal condition of perception in this case is tricky, though; it would be a middle road between a very narrow area that echoed too much for a person to hear the true qualities of the sound and an open area that allowed the sound to disperse too much before the qualities could be heard. Without knowing how wide and narrow of an area Sextus had in mind it is nearly impossible to say which of the two is the more ideal condition of perception.

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However, that does not detract from the fact that there are differences in the qualities of the sound in each of those conditions which can be explained by the fact of the condition. Simply put, the sound will be perceived as different if it is in a narrow or wide space and the side of the space that the sound is perceived in will have something to do with the difference in perception.

The concept of ideal conditions of perception is mainly a theoretical one, however. It is nearly impossible for a person to place themselves in a state where nothing is biasing their perceptions. Sextus’ lantern example can be used again to illustrate the point. If a person observes a lantern during the day, the lantern will appear dimmer then it truly is because of the sun. However, if the same lantern is viewed at night there is no guarantee that the true brightness will be seen. The amount of light during the night differs based on the status of the moon—a full moon provides more light than a new moon and the lamp will appear to be brighter during a new moon than during a full moon. Furthermore, there are disorders and conditions of the sense organs which prevent a person from experiencing ideal conditions of perception. A colorblind person will not be able to ideally see colors, for example, and a deaf person will not be able to ideally hear sounds; both are conditions which are (mostly) stable and unchanging.

Even if ideal conditions of perception are not possible to achieve in the physical world, they can be used as a thought experiment to mediate between differing perceptions. Even if a person is not able to strip all biasing conditions from their environment and body, he is still able to take those conditions into account when comparing his perceptions with another person’s. To use the colorblind example again, a colorblind man and a color-seeing man could look at the same object and think that they were different colors but the colorblind man could, knowing that he is colorblind, defer to the other man who has no obvious biasing conditions to his sight.

Sextus brings up a very interesting point about a potentially major problem with knowledge based on perception. However, he stops short of a full consideration of the problem and asserts that knowledge through sense perception is impossible because of differences in perception. Drawing on Locke’s concept of secondary quality ideas, an analysis of the examples that Sextus uses to prove his point shows that what changes in differing perceptions can be explained by looking at the conditions of perception relating to the...
sense organ itself or the environment in which the perception takes place. Thus, a distinction between ideal and non-ideal conditions of perception can be made which not only accounts for the differing perceptions experienced by people in differing situations, but also establishes what conditions a person should be in to correctly perceive an object.
Privation and Perversion: The Nature of Evil in J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* Series  
*Rena Black*

J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series offers rich ground for a philosophical discussion of the nature of evil. Rowling’s universe introduces several original “evil” beings—beings that do not have, or that no longer possess, a free will. This lack of liberty allows Rowling to present these creatures in an unequivocal way and to describe a simplicity and clarity of evil impossible in realistically rendered human characters. Dementors, inferi, and boggarts are of particular interest. The evils they manifest are visible, multifaceted, and substantial, while those produced by other evil magical creatures are often relatively harmless.¹ More significant to our current purpose, however, is the fact that these three creatures engender distinctly personal evils, evils known by their effects on the whole human person. These effects also illuminate several other evils, including the Imperius curse and the phenomenon called “Quirrelmort,” which are inflicted directly upon living human beings.

Rowling’s dementor is a creature that presents a convincingly privative conception of evil. For theologians and philosophers like Augustine of Hippo² and Boethius,³ evil derives its existence from privation.

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¹ For example, Grindylows present a feeble, and purely physical, threat: they grab swimmers tightly, but their grip is easy enough to escape. (Their fingers are “easy to break,” according to *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* [New York: Scholastic, 2001], 20.)  
² Cf. *Confessions*, VII, 7; VII, 18; *City of God*, XI, 9.  

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the deprivation of good. One way to think about this concept is to imagine a sock that has a hole in it. The hole is real, but it only exists because there is a bit of sock missing—it is a privation.4

The first time we encounter a dementor is early in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, during the initial trip on the Hogwarts Express. It is described as “a cloaked figure that tower[s] to the ceiling.”5 Harry presumes that its face is “completely hidden beneath its hood.” 6 All that he can actually see of the dementor is a nauseatingly disgusting hand that is “glistening, grayish, slimy-looking, and scabbed, like something dead that had decayed in water.” 7 This creature is characterized by its hiddenness and by its decay; in other words, it is a towering emblem of privative evils, of the unknown and the incomplete.

As the dementor enters the train car, it takes “a long, slow, rattling breath,”8 confirming it as the unhealthy9 creature its decayed hand suggested. The dementor’s effect on Harry is “an intense cold” that goes “deeper than his skin . . . inside his chest . . . inside his very heart . . . a thick white fog swirling . . . inside him.”10 Not only is this effect largely described in internal terms, but the use of cold is particularly telling. Cold is not an independent force, but instead an absence of heat, a void that “cools” only because it sucks energy away from anything with a higher temperature. In fact, the image of “white fog” suggests a lack of vital color and an inability to see clearly, both of which are essentially absences. Harry’s breathlessness and helplessness, too, are symptomatic of the dementor’s consuming evil.

Remus Lupin’s exegesis of Harry’s first dementor experience further underscores a privative presentation of evil. Dwelling in darkness (i.e., the absence of light), dementors, as Lupin describes them, “glory in decay and despair . . . [and] drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them.”11 It is not necessary to see or be aware of the dementor for this vacuum effect to occur; Lupin says

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4 Dr. William Collinge, class lectures, Mount St. Mary’s University, spring 2006.
6 Ibid., emphasis added.
7 Ibid., emphasis added.
8 Ibid.
9 *That is, lacking* in wellness and wholeness.
10 *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 83–84.
11 Ibid., 187.
that “even Muggles [non-magical people] feel their presence, though they can’t see them.”

Dementors, in short, exist for the purpose of sucking away “every good feeling [and] every happy memory” of their victims. To be a dementor is to attempt to “feed on [a victim] long enough to reduce [him or her] to something like itself . . . soul-less and evil,” leaving the victim with “nothing but the worst experiences.” A hallmark of such privative evil is that the final product is always a sort of nothing, at best a poor parody of goodness and at worst a gaping void.

It befits such evil to mimic good, so not only do dementors have eerie, humanlike hands, but they also have something like a human mouth, though it is “a gaping, shapeless hole.” Just as the primary purpose of a human mouth is to enable nourishment, so, too, is this the purpose of a dementor mouth. The conversation with Lupin climaxes in this description of “nourishment” for dementors:

‘They call it the Dementor’s Kiss,’ said Lupin, with a slightly twisted smile. ‘It’s what the dementors do to those they wish to destroy utterly. I suppose there must be some kind of mouth under there, because they clamp their jaws upon the mouth of the victim and—and suck out his soul.’

Harry accidentally spat out a bit of butterbeer. ‘What—they kill—?’

‘Oh no,’ said Lupin. ‘Much worse than that. You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you’ll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no . . . anything. There’s no chance at all of recovery. You’ll just—exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever . . . lost.’

The Dementor’s Kiss, then, is profoundly evil not because it steals life, but rather because it violates the wholeness of life; it fragments the person and irreversibly destroys a crucial part of him or her. This destruction of human wholeness is an important theme for Rowling, especially in relation to Lord Voldemort’s perverted pursuit of the genuine good of human life.

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., emphasis added.
15 Prisoner of Azkaban, 384.
16 Ibid., 247.
Dementors also embody a paradox of evil—how evil is simultaneously an invasive, inner deficiency and an oppressive, outside force.\(^\text{17}\) A dementor actively drains good from its victims, but the evil it creates is the ensuing lack of good, a deficiency rather than an entity in itself. This sort of active evil is akin to the destructive force that causes a hole in a sock—perhaps analogous to gradual friction or to a sudden ripping pull. The feeling of cold that Harry experiences is likened to “a bad bout of the flu,” almost as if the dementor introduces a virus that actively attacks Harry.\(^\text{18}\) The dementor draws a breath, creating a pull that seems to physically drag positive memories and bits of humanity from its victims. This dynamic thieving by near-humans is force-evil at its most sinister.

Lupin also describes the “anti-dementor,” a so-called Patronus, as “a kind of positive force,” a “shield,” which projects “the very things that the dementor feeds upon—hope, happiness, the desire to survive.”\(^\text{19}\) But like the dementor, a Patronus merely mimics or perhaps magnifies humanity: “it cannot feel despair, as real humans can” and is therefore impervious to a dementor’s power.\(^\text{20}\)

Another frightening creature in Rowling’s Potterverse is one called an Inferius, a zombie-like, reanimated human corpse. Unlike the popular conception of a zombie, an Inferius does not lumber aimlessly. It acts only by the “magical programming” of its creator, like a macabre puppet, inert until its particular task presents itself. In The Half-Blood Prince, we learn that Mundungus Fletcher impersonates an Inferius in an attempted burglary, and that this is an offense worthy of imprisonment in Azkaban, the wizarding world’s most severe prison.\(^\text{21}\) Voldemort creates a group of Inferi to guard his cursed locket of Slytherin, and it is these that we first encounter.

In their search for the locket, Dumbledore takes Harry to a cave, which is filled with a “somehow denser than normal

\(^{17}\) In chapter 3 of his J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), Tom Shippey characterizes the internal, privative conception as Boethian or Augustinian and the external, forceful conception as Manichean. Indeed, both types are presented, but it is not proper to say that the Harry Potter worldview resembles in any way a Gnostic or binary cosmology. Instead, the evils are dependent; in other words, the Dark Arts are dark because they ignore fundamental elements of proper magic, the “old magic” of love. That the “good magic” has no corresponding title (such as “Light Arts”) indicates it as the default sort of magic; the Dark Arts are only a deviation from this norm.

\(^{18}\) Prisoner of Azkaban, 86

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 237; emphasis added.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

darkness.”22 “Something very large and pale erupt[s] out of the dark water” of the cave lake,23 something that sends Harry’s mind whirling in the direction of “water monsters, of giant serpents, of demons, kelpies, and sprites.”24 Harry soon identifies a “marble white . . . human hand” floating just below their boat.25 Like dementors, the dead bodies are decayed and eerily incomplete, with useless “eyes misted as though with cobwebs.”26 Later, as he stoops to fill a goblet with water for Dumbledore, Harry’s wrist is grasped by “a slimy white hand,” and an “army of dead” rise to the surface.27 The Inferi emerge onto land and begin to drag the helpless Harry into the water with “thin, fleshless arms cold as death.”28

Since the Inferi are already dead, it is very difficult to combat and conquer them; Harry’s attacks do little except create bloodless “gashes . . . in their sodden rags and their icy skin.”29 The weapon Dumbledore uses to defeat the Inferi is as warm, bright, and dry as a dementor’s effect is cold, dark, and wet: a “crimson and gold” ring of fire.30 Dumbledore himself is emblematic of flame here; though he is “pale as any of the surrounding Inferi,” fire is “dancing in his eyes” and his wand is “raised like a torch.”31 The “distracted” and “bewildered” Inferi are then seen “slipp[ing] gratefully back into their dark waters,” happy to return to their interrupted rest.32

The Imperius curse, one of the three Unforgivable Curses in the Wizarding World, produces something like a living Inferi. The mind of the victim is magically conquered, giving the appearance of a fully-functional and free individual while reducing that person to the status of a tool with no power to resist. In The Goblet of Fire, Mad-Eye Moody’s classroom example of an Imperiused spider illustrates the curse’s limitless power:

The spider leapt from Moody’s hand on a fine thread of silk and began to swing backward and forward as though on a

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22 Ibid., 560.
23 Ibid., 561.
24 Ibid., 562.
25 Ibid., 565.
26 Ibid., 566.
27 Ibid., 575.
28 Ibid., 575–76.
29 Ibid., 575.
30 Ibid., 576.
31 Ibid., emphasis added.
32 Ibid.
trapeze. It stretched out its legs rigidly, then did a back flip, breaking the thread and landing on the desk, where it began to cartwheel in circles. Moody jerked his wand, and the spider rose onto two of its hind legs and went into what was unmistakably a tap dance.

Everyone was laughing—everyone except Moody.

‘Think it’s funny, do you?’ he growled. ‘You’d like it, would you, if I did that to you?’

The laughter died away almost instantly.

‘Total control,’ said Moody quietly, as the spider balled itself up and began to roll over and over. ‘I could make it jump out of the window, drown itself, throw itself down one of your throats...’

Instances of this powerful curse abound as practice of the Dark Arts increases; ironically, many wizards implicated in the first wave of Voldemort’s reign claim to have been under its influence. This is perhaps what makes the Imperius curse even more frightening and unforgivable than that which animates an Inferius: there is no sure method of discerning who is and who is not under the influence of an Imperius curse.

The creation of Inferi and the use of the Imperius curse are evil because of the good that is missing—the victim’s freedom to agree or decline to participate. Such evil is best described as parasitic, in that it is entirely dependent upon the genuine good of human agency. Human bodies, alive or dead, are powerful agents, not to be controlled by anyone but their rightful selves, and to hijack this liberty for an evil purpose is treated as especially heinous. Evils like these are presented in stark contrast to the “theme of reverence for the body” apparent throughout the series, affirming a Christian understanding of the human being as a unity of mind, body and soul. A true Platonist, Manichean, or gnostic of any type would not be especially offended by the creation of Inferi, but a Christian must regard bodily violation as personal violation, equal to violation of the mind or soul.

34 Ibid.
35 So too, the soul-stealing Dementor’s Kiss shockingly violates the personal unity of mind, body, and soul. Again, this shattering effect is what makes the Kiss “worse than death.”
One of the series’ most disturbing defilements of bodily or personal unity appears in the first volume, *The Sorcerer’s Stone*. In searching for the stone, Harry discovers that Hogwarts’ Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, the physically weak, cowardly, and perpetually nervous Professor Quirrell, is also looking for the stone—on Voldemort’s behalf. Quirrell admits, “I find it hard to follow my master’s instructions—he is a great wizard and I am weak,” but he also says that Voldemort is with him wherever he goes, monitoring him and punishing him for his failures. As Quirrell struggles to find the stone, it becomes clear just how weak he is, and just how closely his master watches. Voldemort’s voice, seemingly coming from Quirrell himself, demands that he be allowed to see Harry “face-to-face.” In a grotesque peak of irony, Quirrell “turns slowly,” revealing “a face, the most terrible face Harry had ever seen. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake.”

Voldemort, the most powerful Dark Wizard of the modern age, has “become . . . mere shadow and vapor,” formless unless he “can share another’s body,” though he longs to “create a body of [his] own.” He strengthens himself by drinking the innocent blood of unicorns, a monstrous crime that leaves the drinker with “a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches [his] lips.” And he shamelessly exploits the body and influence of a feeble man, noting that “there have always been those willing [like Quirrell] to let [him] into their hearts and minds.”

Quirrelmort, the Inferi, and the unforgivable Imperius curse illustrate a central, postmodern tenet of the series: appearances are almost always deceiving. As the professor himself puts it, “who would suspect p-p-poor, st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell?” This

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38 Ibid., 292–93.
39 Much might be said about the ironic tone of this scene: the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher as servant of Voldemort; weakling Quirrell’s warning to Voldemort that the latter is “not strong enough” for the encounter; the literally two-faced villain, unable to speak louder than a whisper or to touch his victim without intense pain; the “evil face smiling” (ibid., 294).
40 Ibid., 293.
41 Ibid., 293–94.
42 Ibid., 293.
43 Ibid., 258.
44 Ibid., 293.
46 *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 288.
deceptive quality of evil is related to privation in that such evil
perverts or hijacks a true good, as a wolf dons sheep’s clothing to
infiltrate the flock.

Examples abound: In Prisoner, Ron’s powerless pet rat, Scabbers, is revealed as the animal form of the cowardly and
dangerous Peter Pettigrew, a man doubly deceptive because his flight
sent the innocent Sirius Black to Azkaban.47 In The Goblet of Fire, the
Triwizard Cup, which should be the culmination of the tournament
of the same name, has been charmed into a Portkey, or magical
portal, to the graveyard where Cedric Diggory meets his death and
Harry witnesses Voldemort’s corporeal return.48 (Goblet also includes
the exposure of Harry’s supposed guardian Mad-Eye Moody as a
polyjuiced49 and hostile Barty Crouch, Jr.50) In The Order of the
Phoenix, despite her small stature and “fluttery, girlish, high-pitched
voice,”51 Dolores Umbridge is shown to be one of Rowling’s most
sadistic characters. All these deceptions prime the reader to look for
evil in the most unexpected places, echoing the corresponding call to
seek justice and salvation through the weak, young, and otherwise
unremarkable “Boy Who Lived.” Again, the evils here are privative
or parasitic because they are deceptive; they use the appearance of a
good thing to facilitate evil acts.

At last we come to the creature called the boggart, which is
deceptive in an inverse way. Instead of being an innocuous-looking
hazard, a boggart is a harmless creature that assumes the shape of the
viewer’s worst fear. It is a sort of shadow of the Patronus: instead of
being supported by powerfully good memories, the boggart is
vanquished by positive thoughts. The key to defeating a boggart is to
fashion the boggart into something laughable; the action of the
counter-spell, in fact, makes the boggart riddikulus.52

Hermione defines a boggart as “a shape-shifter,” a being
without a consistent identity.53 Lupin clarifies that “the boggart sitting
in the darkness within has not yet assumed a form.”54 Though Lupin is

47 Prisoner of Azkaban, 366. Azkaban is the Wizarding World’s high-security prison,
complete with roaming dementors—what John Granger calls “a psychic concentration
camp” (Looking for God in Harry Potter, 58).
48 Goblet of Fire, 636.
49 Disguised as another person, by way of a potion called Polyjuice.
50 Goblet of Fire, 682.
51 J. K. Rowling, Order of the Phoenix (New York: Scholastic, 2003), 146.
52 Prisoner of Azkaban, 134.
53 Ibid., 133.
54 Ibid., emphasis added.
referring to a particular boggart held captive in a wardrobe for the purposes of the class, the image of an unknown, shapeless “thing” sitting “within” is helpful. The terrifying power of this thing is not intrinsic but illusory and dependent upon human fear. It takes on the form of an apparent threat or frightening possibility, but the thing itself is rather harmless; it has no existence “without.” This is why repelling a boggart “requires force of mind,” because a boggart can only influence the mind. This is perhaps why Lupin can respond to the manifestation the boggart presents him—a moon meant to remind him of his shameful werewolfhood—“almost lazily.” He has dissociated the implication of his fearful condition and of its harbinger from the reality of his well-controlled werewolfhood. He has, in a word, integrated his condition with his humanity in such a way that a mere mention of it no longer holds sway.

In *Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort himself uses the boggart’s “multiplication of possibilities” technique heavily. We are told that “You-Know-Who’s strategy of remaining in the shadows is creating a nice little climate of panic” and that “the air of mystery is creating more terror than actually showing himself.” The radio correspondents who are discussing the issue respond with the same mocking humor that the *riddikulus* charm employs, debunking quite a few fearful “possibilities” and undermining the Dark Lord’s influence in the process. Thomas More once wrote that “the devil . . . the prowde sprite . . . cannot endure to be mocked.” As this quote suggests, the major factors in conquering false claimants to evil power are laughter, ridicule, and joy. This positive, nonviolent reaction to evil—for example, a joy-overflowing Patronus versus a joy-swallowing dementor, or *riddikulus* laughter against boggart-triggered fear—is Rowling’s preferred method for the “good guys.” The refusal to submit to fear and the commitment to respond with resolved confidence are central to Harry’s final confrontation with Voldemort.

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55 Ibid., 134.
56 Ibid., 138.
58 Ibid.
Nigger: a versatile word with a deep and confusing history that is generally viewed as offensive (though for some, circumstantially), and a word that may contain a great deal of power. To better understand the word, and for the sake of any discussion about it, its operational definition should be, “A typically pejorative word used to describe people of darker skin and African features, particularly those called black.” It is commonly used in social situations between black people, often with the variation “nigga.”\(^1\) The word’s history is long, contested, and somewhat confusing; its meaning is somewhat less contested, though it has been debated. Currently, the word is used in many social situations, particularly between young black people, as well as through various sources of media, including but not limited to movies and music.\(^2\) There is also little doubt that the word is still generally understood as offensive; Montgomery County in Maryland recently (July, 2007) banned a class discussion called “Questionable Words” about racial epithets, a discussion used as a precursor to talking about race in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.\(^3\) Furthermore, in March 2007, New York City

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\(^2\) Ibid., 220.


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voted 49–0 to symbolically “ban” the word from use in the city; the purpose is to discourage New Yorkers from using the word and encourage them to understand the word’s history.\(^4\)

The word “nigger” and its uses have become hot topics of conversation in many intellectual circles, with the discussion often focused on whether or not the word should be used under any circumstances. Some believe that the controversial and offensive nature of the word can be ameliorated by frequent use, much like the word ‘queer’ has lost its sting;\(^5\) others, however, believe that the word’s dark and painful history make it impossible for the word ever to lose its unique ability to offend almost anyone’s sensibilities. To understand this discussion in the least bit, and whether or not the word “nigger” can or cannot have its offensive power diminished, one must first begin to understand the history of the word, its meaning, how it is currently used and portrayed (in ‘real life’ and the media), and, finally, its power.

**Words: Their Power to Control and Elicit Reactions**

Before discussing a specific word and its function as a powerful agent, one must understand that words *themselves* can be powerful. Michel Foucault, a well-known French philosopher of the latter half of the 20\(^{th}\) century, frequently discussed power, and in discussing power relationships, he determined that no power relationship can exist without “the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of discourse.”\(^6\) This suggests that all power relationships must inherently stem from some form of discourse or language; words are inherently necessary for discourse, and thus Foucault’s claim is that words are crucial for developing power relationships, and further must have some controlling power in their use. Words, however, are not powerful in and of themselves, but rather through the context in which they are used.

It has also been suggested that words are commonly used to demean entire groups in a way that is intended to desensitize those groups in recognizing the dominating and suffocating nature of

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power structures. An example of language being used to demean others is the use of animal language to describe a group of people. For example, for several centuries before World War II, Jews were commonly described as pigs, vultures, and insects; after a lengthy period of time, this had a dehumanizing effect on perceptions of Jews in Europe, even to the extent that many had little to no issue with the mass slaughter of Jewish people (since they were defined as “inhuman”). This division of language also extended to some philosophy: Nietzsche, who is well-known for his theory of the superman, referred to Jews as subhuman, or “undermen.” His characterization of Jews as “undermen” suggests that he considers them almost less than human, or at least considers them humans who do not live up to their potential which is often the aim of animalistic imagery.

Words can often be used to demean a group, or perhaps even limit a group’s power. The word “nigger” is a word that has been used with the intent of separating and demeaning an entire group of people. Its use, though not necessarily in conjunction with animalistic imagery (as in the example of European Jews), has created a divide between two differing power structures in society: blacks and non-blacks (more specifically, whites, although the word’s demeaning power has not been limited to use by just whites). Because the word has been used to create a divide in power between two groups and was used to reassert the power of one group (whites) over the other (blacks) during a long period of time (slavery and even today), the use of “nigger” can be and is used as a controlling element and can also elicit a powerful reaction in anyone who unavoidably senses the word’s power.

The History and Meaning of the Term “Nigger”
There are wide and varied reports as to how “nigger” came to be part of the common English vernacular. The most common belief is that it is derived from the Latin word niger, meaning “black.” Another viewpoint is that the word holds its origins in a letter written by John Rolfe in which he wrote about “twenty negars” who

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8 Ibid., 165.
had arrived on a Dutch ship. Some believe he meant to write negroes, niggers, or nigers, although there can be no certain answer on the matter. Most writers also believe that the word “niger,” in its initial use, and subsequently the word “nigger,” was intended as a neutral term, not a racial epithet. Randall Kennedy writes that there were many lexical versions of the word niger, including nigger, niggar, nigur, niggah, and nigguh. For later conversation, it may be worth noting the similarities between the current ‘friendly’ version ‘nigga’ and the words “nigguh” and “niggah.” It is also worth noting that Kennedy has also reported in another essay that “nigger” may have been derived from the English word neger, which was in turn derived from the Spanish word negro.

For a time, the word niger, and likely its derivatives, was simply used as a descriptive term, perhaps no less offensive than descriptions like “black” or “white” to describe skin color; however, by the early 1800s, the word had become “nigger,” and had taken on an undeniably derogatory connotation, and had become a common insult. In 1837, one writer called the word “an opprobrious term [used] to impose contempt upon [blacks] as an inferior race,” and that “it flows from the fountain of purpose to injure.” After the word became recognized as an insult, its use varied across venues, including politics and music. It has been used in contemporary music since long before the modern rap movement, and even was commonly used in nursery rhymes; for example, the common children’s rhyme that goes “Eeeny-meeny-miney-mo, Catch a tiger by its toe,” has its origins in the rhyme “Eeeny-meeny-miney-mo, Catch a nigger by the toe!” Though this rhyme is no longer in practice and many of the songs containing “nigger” are no longer sung, the hip hop movement has embraced the word, often with the variation “nigga,” claiming that it is a brotherly word among the members of the black community. Though this also suggests that it is only acceptable for black people to use it.

11 Ibid.
12 Kennedy, Nigger, 4.
14 Kennedy, Nigger, 5.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 6.
17 Ibid., 6; Asim, The N Word, 224; Pilkington, “New York City Council.”
Current Usage: Who Says It Most, Who Can Say It, and Its Use by the Media

Today, the word “nigger” is still generally viewed as negative by all people, including young blacks; the word “nigga,” however, is now generally viewed as a friendly salutation, particularly when combined with a handshake.\(^\text{18}\) To better understand how some young blacks view the word “nigga,” it is often used in the greeting, “Whassup nigga?” in place of the black power greetings, “What’s happenin’, brother?” and “What it is?”\(^\text{19}\) The use of the word “nigga” has been propagated chiefly by gangsta rap, beginning with the band, N.W.A., which stands for Niggas Wit Attitude.\(^\text{20}\) Prior to their big album “Straight Outta Compton,” the word “nigga” was regarded as equally as offensive as “nigger,” and a word that was regularly used since the early 1900s; however, N.W.A. made the word out to be much less than offensive, and even perhaps tried to project it as a positive word for young blacks.\(^\text{21}\) Of course, the way in which Ice T, the lyricist for N.W.A., portrays “niggas” is certainly less than positive, as he often suggests that a “real nigga” sells drugs and generally causes mayhem in society.\(^\text{22}\) An interesting sidenote about N.W.A. – in their second album, they use the words “nigger” or “nigga” 185 times; Mark Twain’s novel *Huckleberry Finn*, which has been hotly debated in many educational circles, uses the word 215 times, only thirty more times in the span of thousands more words.\(^\text{23}\) Many other influential rap artists, such as Jay-Z, 2pac, The Notorious B.I.G., and Mobb Deep sing songs with the word “nigga” in the title, often using the word at length.\(^\text{24}\) Some artists use the word more tastefully than others (particularly more tastefully than N.W.A.), such as the Geto Boys in their big hit, “Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta,” which satirizes the gangsta rap view of power, illustrating the point that real power comes through the government, not the street corners.\(^\text{25}\) They offer this satire by mockingly portraying “niggas” as powerful, and then counter this viewpoint with a stanza about the real men in

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., 220.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 220–21.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 221.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 222.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 222.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 221.
government who have more power than any street corner “nigga” can imagine.

Context is also an important component of modern usage. Inmates in a detention center were asked to describe and define the words “nigger” and “nigga,” particularly with attention to how they may be different. Nearly every inmate suggested that “nigga” is less offensive, and a word used to blunt the sharp edge of the word “nigger.” Furthermore, they also suggest that only black people can say it to other black people, with one inmate saying, “if you are a different color and you use these words, you will get yo ass beat.”26 This attitude is also influential in a recent debate about the pop culture movie *Jackie Brown*, directed by famed white director Quentin Tarantino, which has several usages of the words “nigga” and “nigger,” almost always said by a black man, but often in the presence of a white man.27 According to director Spike Lee, the word is said thirty-eight times in the movie, and a subsequent debate and discussion resulted with Tarantino responding that the word needs to be “depowered,” meaning that its ability to offend and cause a reaction needs to be diminished by overuse.28 This debate still rages in pop culture, and it is not likely to be resolved any time soon.

The Debate on the Amelioration of the Use of the Word “Nigger” and Its Offshoots

Many people believe that the frequent use of a word will blunt its edge, and thus eventually take away its social power – its ability to offend almost any and all listeners/readers. That the word has a raw, offensive power is clear, even in recent history. First, the debate that rages about Quentin Tarantino’s use of the word in his films is an example of some reactions to its use, particularly by a white man. If one goes back in time just a bit further, Langston Hughes, a famous black poet, once said:

> The word nigger to colored people is like a red rag to a bull. Used rightly or wrongly, ironically or seriously, of necessity for the sake of realism, or impishly for the sake of comedy, it doesn’t matter. Negroes do not like it in any book or play

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27 Ibid.

whatsoever, be the book or play ever so sympathetic in its treatment of the basic problems of the race. Even though the book or play is written by a Negro, they still do not like it. The word nigger, you see, sums up for us who are colored all the bitter years of insult and struggle in America.29

Hughes aptly illustrates the point that the word, no matter the context, can be especially enraging for a black person; he suggests that the history of the word’s usage is why the word still offends so easily. Another recent, and useful, example is the use of the word “nigger” by the Central Michigan basketball coach during a halftime speech. The white coach used the word to refer to his players, after having asked for permission by his mostly black team, in an attempt to inspire them. He said that the players who were playing well were “niggers,” while those playing okay were “half-niggers,” and those playing poorly were “non-niggers.”30 There were eleven black players and three white players on the team; he called one of the white players a nigger, and said, “We need to be tougher, harder-nosed, and play harder . . . we need more niggers on the team.”31 When word of this halftime speech reached the public, the coach was fired within months and legal battles followed; what is significant, however, is that the coach used the word in a way that was not intended to be offensive, but still was offensive enough on its own account to warrant the coach’s firing and national awareness of the situation. Clearly, the word “nigger” still has the power to offend, even in a potentially non-offensive circumstance.

Of course, there are examples of words that have the ability to offend easily but may be losing some of their power; one such word is “fuck,” which is arguably starting to become accepted in the common vernacular in a variety of ways. Several such examples include the use of the word “fucking” as an adjective to provide emphasis, or the word “fuck”, meaning either “to have sex,” or in its noun form, simply “sex.” The word “queer,” which used to be a highly pejorative word referring to homosexuals but is now used with pride by many in the gay community, has almost completely lost its raw offensiveness already; in fact, collegiate studies of the gay community are put under the heading of “queer studies.”32

30 Ibid., 92.
31 Ibid.
ameliorating of “queer”’s offensive power is a particularly apt example, as it was used as a polarizing word intended to alienate and diminish a specific group of people (much like “nigger”). A common argument is that since the word “queer” has become accepted, so is “nigger” becoming an accepted word, and some even suggest that it may already be accepted. It may be accepted in that it is not an inappropriate word for common conversation, and that it does not have the raw power to offend. However, Jabari Asim, author of The N Word: Who Can Say It, Who Shouldn’t, and Why, provides an example that puts the issue into perspective; on television, we have the show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, but how would general society react to a show titled *Nigger Eye for the White Guy*? The instant emotional response to this title further suggests that the word still holds some offensive power, though many argue that the word’s ability to offend is diminishing.

At the other end of the spectrum, some would suggest that the history of the word, and how much power it used to hold, will never be successfully diminished to the point of acceptability, and thus should generally be avoided as a curse word. Furthermore, Kennedy suggests that “nigger” is the worst of all insults in the English language, particularly due to its history. Kennedy believes that the word’s history, coupled with its use to trample upon (even enslave) an entire group of people for centuries, has earned it the right to be the most offensive word. One of the word’s most powerful traits is that because it is so pervasive as to have entered into black communities, it has actually caused black people to believe the slur. As an example, he tells the story of his own childhood, when his grandparents and parents used the word “nigger” to talk about black people who were lazy or unsuccessful. Further, in my own experience, I have heard many people (both black and white) say something along the lines of, “I have no problem with black people – only niggers.” It is also fair to suggest that the word has begun to cross racial boundaries and is no longer even limited to just black people; the words wigger (white), jigger (Japanese/Asian), and chigger (Chicano) are simply a few examples of the reuse of nigger to refer to a different race. However, Kennedy also acknowledges that total disuse of the word could lead to a failure to remember the past and the history of the word; though the word may be highly

33 Ibid., 214.
offensive, it can serve a good use, particularly in recognizing history and the racial clash inherent in modern society.  

The debate on the offensive power (or lack thereof) of the word “nigger” is central to one’s understanding of the issue; does the word, through its offensiveness, have any control or power over people, and should it be recognized as a powerful, deeply offensive word to be avoided? Or should it be a word that becomes generally accepted in the English lexicon? Or perhaps the word should be used sparingly, but not necessarily avoided completely. Whether or not the word has such an offensive power that it should be banned, limited, censored, or bowdlerized, is of much concern and has been the source of debate for many years now.

The N-Word: Is It Ever “Right” or “Okay” to Use?
As a word, “nigger” has a deep and dark history. Its meaning and purpose as a derogatory term toward any person of “black” skin is inherently offensive, but its use in modern culture is not forbidden or even wholly unacceptable. The question, then, is should it be an acceptable term under any circumstances? As with any practice, particularly questionable practices, one must have details to determine best whether or not said practice should or should not be acceptable. The claim I intend to make is not that the word should be avoided at all costs; rather, “nigger” is a powerful word that needs to be avoided socially, but can be used for a powerful and positive purpose—the word itself, its history, and its meaning all need to be treated with respect, and only used in certain circumstances.

There are several circumstances that have become generally acceptable for the use of the word in modern society. The word is found in abundance in modern hip hop music (particularly rap), and this medium has helped reassert the notion that black individuals can and even should refer to each other as “niggers” or “niggas.” Further, the word is frequently considered acceptable in historical literature (particularly autobiographies and memoirs) and fictional literature, although there are clearly many individuals who object to its use in writing (i.e. the attempts to ban *Huckleberry Finn* on the grounds that it is racist for its use of “nigger” 200-odd times). It is my contention that the word can be used in both mediums, but should be used sparingly and in the appropriate context. If the word is to be used in hip hop music, it should not be used to talk about

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what and who the singer and his “niggas” are doing every night; rather, it should be used in an educational or intelligent way, perhaps to illuminate listeners to the issue of racism and the ongoing social segregation inherent in today’s culture (segregation on the grounds of race, sex, and economic status). Some rappers already employ this technique; for example, the rapper known as Common, who rarely uses the word, often employs it to point out and illustrate prejudice and pain. Literature also can and perhaps even should use the word; certainly, the word should not be deleted from the American lexicon, since the word has such a deep history and has appeared in countless novels. If the word were to be “erased,” much censorship and bowdlerization could and would ensue, which would then diminish the useful message of novels that often employ the word “nigger” usefully (such as Twain’s Huckleberry Finn and Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, among many others). However, literature should not use the word without discretion; rather, the word should be used only in a situation that illustrates a necessary point. For example, if an author wanted to show the frequent usage of “nigger” or “nigga” in everyday language among the black community, it would be more than fair to use the word with great frequency; the word, however, should not be portrayed as if it is a common word that should be used by blacks. Essentially, the word “nigger” should be used with great discretion; it should be assumed that all people who encounter the word, in either a song or some text, not only could be offended, but actually will be offended. Artists should be especially judicious in their use of the word, and should thus limit it to situations in which the word could have a positive effect on the listener or reader. This notion further extends to movies and plays; all creative disciplines should be selective in their use of “nigger.”

There are some circumstances in which the word should not be used. Because of the word’s offensive power, it should not ever be used in an especially public venue, such as a speech, basic television, talk shows, or on the radio. Any other similar mediums that cannot justly claim a proper use of the term also should not use it; its raw offensive power is too controversial to be used in a public venue of any kind. The word should also not be used in any casual everyday conversation; one should never refer to another person as a nigger, even if it is intended as an endearing term (i.e. from one black person to another). The word’s history and its meaning make it impossible for the word to be used positively in describing another individual; that the word has become a term of endearment reflects
the deeply entrenched self-disrespect and self-racism of all who use the word as such. Using the term between blacks reflects self-disrespect and self-regarding racism because the word itself has become inherently racist; due to its long history as a controlling word, as a word that was used to exert power on an entire group, it cannot be converted from its original context into a new one as a cordial term of greeting or as one of endearment. Rather, it should be used merely as a means to become more educated about and more aware of the existence of class and racial struggle, and also as a means of studying and understanding the history surrounding the word. Using the word in everyday language promotes a modern-day remnant of slavery, one that is imposed both by the users of the word and those that permit the word to be used in a regular context; “nigger” needs to be recognized for its intense power, and used appropriately.

**Kantian Analysis of Racial Denigration through the Use of the Word “Nigger”**

Kant wrote at great length about man’s duty to other men, writing both about the inherent duty implied in a proper action, as well as about something he calls the categorical imperative, a moral law that should govern all moral actions and assumptions. First, before discussing one’s proper duty, Kant writes on the importance of having a “good will.” A good will, according to Kant, is the only unqualified good, and it is an integral component of a moral behavior for an act is to be of moral worth. The question one must ask, then, is can one who uses the word “nigger,” which has been shown to be inherently offensive and cruel, have a good will? The answer must be “no,” because the notion of a “good will” must suggest that the individual’s will is inherently positive and good; any language that is intentionally divisive must not, by its very nature, have any positive qualities, and thus cannot be associated with a “good will.”

Kant also wrote about an action needing to be done from a sense of duty if it is to have moral worth. He especially emphasizes that an action must not be done from one’s inclination, but from one’s sense of duty. Diminishing a group of people based on their race comes from an inclination, and thus cannot be linked to any sense of moral duty or good will; the proof that it comes from an inclination is the human tendency to dislike those people and things that are different from oneself. Further, Kant writes briefly about the
“command to love our neighbour, even our enemy.”  

He suggests that this command is actually reflecting a duty to be beneficent to others, even those for whom one is “repelled by a natural and unquerable aversion.” He calls this a practical love “seated in the will [and] in principles of action.” Ultimately, Kant is suggesting that all individuals have a duty toward behaving beneficently to all other humans, regardless of any aversion. If one applies this to the use of “nigger” in language, one realizes that its use in no way reflects any tendency to behave beneficently, and thus comes from some deep-seated inclination that cannot reflect good will or a proper sense of duty.

The irony built into Kant’s discussion on beneficence and a proper sense of duty is that Kant himself failed to behave beneficently toward all humans. He wrote a short essay called, “The Difference Between the Races,” in which he detailed a claim that “Negroes . . . have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling.” Here, he even suggests that there is a fundamental difference between white and black men, and that this difference is as great in regard to mental capacity as it is to color of skin. Kant, who wrote so much about proper morality with an emphasis on the absoluteness of moral behaviors surrounding men, failed himself to treat black people with the proper respect, and thus failed to follow his own proposition of morality.

The last and arguably most important of Kant’s influences on moral discussions is the categorical imperative, which states, “I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.” This means that a behavior is not morally correct unless it can be universalized so as to generate a binding moral law. Thus, from this, one can develop a categorical imperative for the use of demeaning language: “All people ought to be demeaned based on the color of their skin or their representation in a group.” Then, one must determine if this is a plausible imperative. It has already been established that the use of demeaning language reflects a lack of good will and is the result of a negative

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
inclination, not moral duty; from this, it is thus logical to assume that one cannot will this imperative to become a universal law.

Counter-Claims

Claim 1
One could suggest I have no place talking about this issue, since I am white and am thus incapable of understanding the use of the word “nigger” in everyday conversation; further, because I have not been racially oppressed and in fact experience racial privilege, I am thus further incapable of understanding what it is like to experience and fight against such oppression.

In response to this, I have little I can say. I am not black, so I cannot understand exactly what it is to be black; I have not experienced the same sort of racial oppression, and thus I cannot fully identify with the unique condition of having had recently enslaved ancestors (as we are only a few generations removed from slavery in America). However, to suggest that I have not experienced some form of oppression, perhaps occasionally even as severe as those who experience racism, would be faulty; as a hearing-impaired individual, I have experienced prejudice since the first day I began my education. I was, and still am by some, considered inadequate on the grounds of my impairment. This, of course, is not to say that I can empathize fully with those who are subjected to racism, but I can certainly sympathize with the notion of being singled out for one trait that has little bearing on one’s intelligence or character.

Claim 2
Many could and would claim that the frequent use of the word “nigger,” as has happened with “dyke” and “queer,” will and could actually make its use acceptable.

As mentioned before, “nigger” has a longstanding history of use and abuse that not only makes it improbable for people to become desensitized, but rather impossible. Further, using the example of “queer” or “dyke” is a historically inadequate comparison. The term “queer” came into use in the 20th century, and within half a century, its sting had become lessened. Indeed, the word “homosexual,” which is the more commonly used term to refer to “queers,” was not even recognized as a legitimate word until 1892 when it first appeared in the Old English Dictionary. The word

“nigger” has been used since the 16th century, and though some may claim it did not begin as a derogatory term, it became one within the next century and a half. 43 Comparing words that have such a vast difference in the duration of the time they were used as derogatory terms belies a level of ignorance and foolishness; it would be as comparing the number 100 to the number 10 as mathematically identical—though the numbers may be connected (i.e. one can evenly go with the other), they are in no way the same. A comparison of the words “queer” and “nigger” is similar in nature to this mathematical comparison—they are not fairly comparable.

The histories of the two respective words are inherently incomparable. “Queer” and “dyke” existed as slurs for mere decades, whereas “nigger” has been a slur for several centuries. This extends to all other racial or polarizing slurs; no other such slurs has existed as long as “nigger” in the United States, with perhaps the exception of terms intended to separate groups based on religion. Regardless, the word “nigger” has become so entrenched as a slur word intended to denigrate a group of people that it cannot and will not ever become a universally accepted term.

Claim 3

A third claim could be that the word can lose its offensive power with time and use. The argument goes, since the word was not originally intended as a slur and it had to become a slur, then it is possible for the word to no longer be intended as a slur, to lose its raw offensiveness.

This is a valid claim, as one cannot suggest that word cannot lose its raw offensive power, but rather that it will not likely lose it. My suggestion, however, is that “nigger” has always had an inherent slur built into it. As stated before, it is likely derived from the word niger, which means black. Africans were referred to as nigers, not as niger men; by initially reducing Africans to a mere color, the basis for “nigger” is essentially demeaning. Further, the word was borne out of a situation of enslavement, which is by its very nature a demeaning institution. Thus, the word never existed as a non-slur, and thus has been inherently demeaning since its inception, and will continue to be so.

Hence, the word “nigger” is an inherently cruel and demeaning word that should be avoided in almost all circumstances;

43 Asim, The N Word, 10.
its only real value is for the purpose of education, particularly when discussing history and race consciousness. Outside of those circumstances, there are no true justifiable circumstances for the use of the word “nigger” or any of its variant spellings.
From the time of the writings of the Old Testament, it was prophesied that a woman would give birth to the Messiah. When Mary became the Mother of Jesus, she took on a role that earned her respect and reverence from every person. For the early Church (and the modern Church today), Mary’s significance and power were derived entirely from her Son. Examining the ecclesiastical and historical changes of the Church shows that devotion to Mary in the first fifteen centuries was shaped by many different factors and was also reflected in art, yet was constantly connected with Jesus.

Throughout Church history, all we know and ascribe to Mary comes only because of her relation to her Son. A development of the understanding of Mary and her role was necessary before any devotion could begin. The primary source for the Church’s knowledge of Mary in the first few centuries came from the Scriptures. Both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain references to Mary’s pregnancy as part of their infancy narratives. Luke’s Gospel, possibly the more well-known of the two, emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, using “Christological titles and language developed by the Church after the

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resurrection.”¹ In the second century, questions arose as to the genealogy of Jesus, as his conception was very mysterious. Tradition taught that Mary conceived him virginally, which, to many people, seemed “peculiar.”² A few theories arose to explain Jesus’ conception before Mary and Joseph were married. One taught that Joseph was Jesus’ biological father, another that Mary had committed adultery with an anonymous man, another that she was raped by the Roman soldier Panthera, and another that Jesus was conceived virginally through the power of God. The Church accepted the last theory, and Mary gained the title of Virgin Mother.³

Art has survived from the first and second centuries in which Mary is depicted as one of the central figures. In the catacombs of Rome, there are frescoes that were used by the early Christians for both catechesis and devotion. There are three depictions in which her presence is most prominent: the announcement of the birth of Jesus by prophets, the Annunciation, and the Adoration of the Magi. In the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome, there is a depiction of Mary with a prophet that has lasted from the second century. Mary is depicted seated, holding the infant Jesus. The prophet is holding a scroll and is pointing at Mary. Some believe that the prophet is supposed to be Isaiah, who foretold the virgin birth of Jesus.⁴ This fresco is significant in showing the typology of the birth of Jesus, drawing connections between the Old and New Testaments. In depictions of the Adoration of the Magi, Mary is usually shown seated and holding Jesus, presenting him to the Magi. Jesus is always the focus of the piece, although Mary is also present, and both are seated as a sign of respect and honor.⁵ These pieces of art reflect the developing Mariology at the time, as the only stories and information they had of Mary was Scripture-based and Christ-centered.

The idea of Mary as Mother of God was also involved in Christological heresies in later centuries. In the fourth century, heresies such as Arianism, which taught that Jesus was a created being who was neither fully divine nor fully human and therefore not

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² Ibid., 227–28.
³ Ibid., 228.
⁴ Luigi Gambero, Mary and the Fathers of the Church (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 83–84.
⁵ Ibid., 85.
of the same substance as the Father, fueled the need to examine Jesus’ life. Arianism became very popular and spread rapidly as a way of accounting for Jesus’ dual nature as both human and divine. The Council of Nicaea was called in 325 and affirmed that Jesus was “begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father” and that “by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man.” By verifying what the Church had always believed, the Council was stating that Jesus was both truly divine and truly human, the latter part of his nature deriving from the Virgin Mary. The Council of Ephesus in 431 was called against another heresy, Nestorianism, which rejected Jesus’ true divinity and, consequently, rejected ascribing the title theotokos to Mary. Nestorius believed that the person of Christ was separate from God, so it was acceptable to call Mary “Christ-bearer” but not “God-bearer.” The Council affirmed that Jesus was God and took his flesh from a woman, so Mary was rightly acknowledged as theotokos.

After Mary was affirmed, through the confirmation of Jesus’ humanity and divinity, as truly the Mother of God, devotion to her began to grow. In the fourth century, St. Epiphanius staunchly upheld the perpetual virginity of Mary, saying that “only the Only-Begotten opened the virginal womb.” He reasoned that, as the Church already established Mary as the Mother of God, it would be unreasonable for her to have had intercourse with a man. From this he concluded, “He who honors the Lord honors also the holy [vessel]; he who dishonors the holy vessel, also dishonors the Lord. Let Mary be by herself the holy virgin, the holy vessel.” The Church continued to uphold this idea: that in honoring Mary, you consequently honor Christ as well. St. Epiphanius, however, also warned against worshipping Mary. In his most famous work, Panarion, he took a stance on a heresy from the Collyridians, a group of mostly women who would offer a piece of bread on a throne in the name of Mary and then eat the bread. To this, Epiphanius responded,

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7 Rodica Stoicoiu, class lecture, Mount St. Mary’s University, October 3, 2007.
9 Fr. Fred Miller, lecture, Mount St. Mary’s University, November 7, 2007.
11 Fr. Fred Miller, lecture, November 7, 2007.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 70.
“Honor Mary, but let no one worship Mary . . . [E]ven though Mary is the most beautiful and holy and venerable, yet she is not to be worshipped.”\(^{15}\) This statement was upheld, and continued to be upheld, as Marian devotion developed in later centuries.

Around the same time, St. Ambrose was making his own contributions to the formation of Marian devotion, which to him was still Christ-centered. This is reflected in a Christmas hymn he wrote. A translation of the hymn says, “Come, Redeemer of the nations, show forth the birth of the Virgin; let all the world marvel, such a birth befitted God.”\(^{16}\) Ambrose also furthered Mariology by teaching that by giving birth to Jesus, Mary brought the world salvation. He rejected, however, the notion that Mary took part in the redemption of Jesus from the cross. Ambrose says that Jesus accepted her motherhood, but did not need any help from her in his work of redemption.\(^{17}\) Ambrose was also the first to compare Mary and the Church. He said that she is a “type,” or model, of the Church because of her motherhood through the Holy Spirit and because of her union with Christ.\(^{18}\) Ambrose’s teachings are a prime example of reverence for Mary being rooted in her relationship with Christ.

From the fourth century, a fresco is retained that depicts Mary in the orans, or praying, posture.\(^{19}\) The orans icon draws on exactly what Ambrose taught. It implied that Christ is present in the work even if he is not pictured because he is the only one to whom Mary would be praying. Also, Mary represents the intercessor for the Church as well as the Church itself, because it had been established by Ambrose that she was the model of the Church.\(^{20}\)

The role of women in the Church became a topic of debate in this period of the fourth and fifth centuries. After Christianity was legalized by the Emperor Constantine in 313, the authority of the bishops increased.\(^{21}\) As the bishops were all men, more women than before began to live lives of virginity as their own personal vocations. Many believed this to be “above women’s nature” and “very close to trying to be ‘female men of God.’”\(^{22}\) Virginity was a

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 73.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 79.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 83–84.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 84–85.


\(^{21}\) Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 122.

lifestyle present in previous centuries, although it increased in the fourth century, and many women began to organize themselves into orders. Virgins were believed to have risen above the nature of women and to have taken on the virtues of men.\textsuperscript{23} It was not until after the teaching of St. Ambrose that Mary came to be a model of virginity for women. As Mary’s body had remained intact through her perpetual virginity and never experienced feelings of lust, so others were called to live the same lifestyle, as a practice of purity and devotion. It was also through these teachings that the idea of clerical celibacy was developed. Ambrose argued that only men who were pure in body should be able to consecrate the Holy Eucharist.\textsuperscript{24}

As the teachings about Mary came to be refined, the iconography and depiction of the Annunciation began to solidify. Beginning in the sixth century, the Annunciation was generally always depicted with Gabriel’s knee bent and his feet never touching the floor, as a sign of his “coming from another part of reality.”\textsuperscript{25} Mary is shown wearing a purple veil, a blue garment, and red shoes, all of which were symbolic of Byzantine royalty. She either has one hand raised in greeting or both hands folded. The Holy Spirit is usually depicted as coming upon her in the form of a dove or ray of light.\textsuperscript{26}

Around the sixth century, as a result of the circulation of apocryphal stories describing her death and entrance into heaven, more Christian communities began to celebrate the memorial of Mary’s death. The date for the feast, to be held in the area around Jerusalem, was set for August 15, a date which was also adopted in the East by Emperor Maurice in 600.\textsuperscript{27} St. Gregory of Tours, at the end of the sixth century, provided the first Western teaching about the Assumption. He drew on the apocryphal story, but developed the theology further. He said that the Assumption further showed the connection between Mary and her Son. Gregory also explained how the Assumption was a testimony to the belief in eternal life and the eventual glorification of man.\textsuperscript{28} After this teaching developed,

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 148–50.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 157–58.
\textsuperscript{25} Martin, \textit{Sacred Doorways}, 184.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Graef, \textit{Mary: A History}, 133–34.
\textsuperscript{28} Gambero, \textit{Mary and the Fathers of the Church}, 354.
prayer to Mary increased, as her intercession was thought to be very powerful.\textsuperscript{29}

Because of this increased belief in Mary’s power, more prayers to Mary were developed. The earliest of these prayers was found among the Coptic Ostraca from 600. One of the fragments contains the words, “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed are thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, because thou didst conceive Christ, the Son of God, the Redeemer of Souls.”\textsuperscript{30} This prayer was assumed to be used for liturgical purposes in the East and became part of the offertory for the Latin Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. However, there is no record of the Hail Mary being used as a separate devotion in the West until the eleventh century.\textsuperscript{31} It was also during the eleventh century that Mariology and devotion to Mary flourished, practices that continued in subsequent centuries.

In the seventh century, a hymn was developed in the East that praised Mary; it is known as the Akathist hymn. It was formally accepted in 626 and is still used today in Orthodox churches on Fridays in Lent and during Holy Week. It was first written in response to a miracle attributed to Mary’s intercession when the city of Constantinople, under the Emperor Heracleios, was surrounded by barbarian troops. The fighting lasted for months, until Byzantine clergy and officials began to march around the walls of the city, holding an icon of Mary. Shortly thereafter, a tidal wave destroyed most of the barbarian troops. The Akathist hymn was developed from the people singing Mary’s praises throughout the night after the defeat.\textsuperscript{32}

Between the fifth and ninth centuries, a type of icon of Mary, the \textit{Virgin Hodegitria}, was painted frequently and was finally given a name in the 800s. The icon shows Mary holding Jesus in the crook of her left arm. The significance of this icon lies in the positioning of the figures. Mary is facing the viewer, pointing at the infant, who is also facing the viewer. This positioning implies that Mary is connected to people on earth and is showing them the way to her Son, where we can meet him directly. \textit{Hodegitria} literally means

\textsuperscript{29} Graef, \textit{Mary: A History}, 136.


\textsuperscript{31} Graef, \textit{Mary: A History}, 230.

“one who shows the way.”  

In the late eighth and early ninth centuries, Alcuin, a theologian from England, further contributed to devotion to Mary as a result of his own personal devotion to her. He often addressed Mary as “Queen of heaven” and believed that she would always hear those who, in faithfulness, ask for her prayers. He contributed the idea of Mary as Mediatrix, furthering belief in her power of intercession. This idea was adopted from the story of the Wedding Feast of Cana in the Gospel of John, when Jesus responded to Mary’s request on behalf of the newly married couple. 

The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary began to incorporate all these Scripture readings and prayers to Mary in one devotional rite. This was a shortened form of the Divine Office which began as a private monastic devotion in the tenth century but which was quickly disseminated for public use when Pope Urban II, at the end of the eleventh century, mandated that it be recited on Saturdays for clergy who desired help in the First Crusade; laity also began to recite it shortly after this. It was because of the increased recitation of the Little Office that the Hail Mary became more well known. The Little Office also began to take on further significance with the publication of legends about grace and the miracles attributed to its recitation.

Around this time, the iconography of the Nativity became established. Mary is generally the largest figure of these icons, reclining next to Jesus, who is in a manger. Sometimes Mary is pictured sitting rather than reclining, to indicate that her childbirth was painless and therefore different than any other woman’s. Joseph is pictured separate from these two, generally looking distressed and confused about the virgin birth. Jesus is also shown in a lower corner of the icon with a nurse, a motif that developed from an apocryphal story in which Joseph went to find a midwife for Mary. Shepherds are shown approaching Jesus and Mary with their animals, and sometimes the Magi are present as well. Advancements in the study of iconography such as this show that depictions of Mary are no longer being drawn only from one Scriptural source; other circulating

33 Martin, Sacred Doorways, 169.
34 Luigi Gambero, Mary in the Middle Ages (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 62–63.
36 Martin, Sacred Doorways, 185–86.
texts and traditions are influencing belief about her as well. This is similar to the way the Little Office was developed from many different sources.

The twelfth century brought the “Golden Age of Mariology,” during which many advances in Mariology and devotion were made. Among those contributing to this was St. Bernard of Clairvaux. According to Bernard, Christians are united with Christ through his Incarnation, in which Mary played a very active role, as well as through her intercession. In his most famous homily, De aquaductu, Bernard cites the analogy of Mary as an aqueduct, through whom the faithful can receive divine grace. Therefore, Bernard concludes, faith in and devotion to Mary can only bring one closer to Christ, since it is she who is closest to Jesus. He also taught, however, that one is able to contact Christ directly without Mary’s aid, although having her help, he says, can encourage communication with Jesus. As a sign of his faith in Mary’s intercession, Bernard is believed to have written the Memorare, a prayer that calls on Mary’s aid, remembering that she has always been steadfast in help before. Showing her direct connection to her Son, St. Bernard reiterated the importance of prayer and devotion to Mary for a more fruitful relationship with Christ.

St. Anselm was another man in the twelfth century whose teachings influenced Mariology. Anselm was the archbishop of Canterbury and contributed many prayers to Mary to the tradition of the Church. His prayers generally invoke both Mary and Christ, showing the connection between the two. For example, one prayer he wrote calls upon the love of Mary and her Son. (Using both Mary and Jesus together became very popular at this time in devotional spirituality.) The prayer is as follows: “O good Son, I pray you for the love with which you love your Mother, that you might grant me to love her truly . . . . O good Mother, I pray you for the love with which you love your Son, that you might grant me to love him truly as you truly love him.” Anselm’s prayers were a form of devotion that was “theologically solid and genuinely emotional, capable of satisfying the demands of the mind and the impulses of the heart.”

37 Gambero, Mary in the Middle Ages, 105.
38 Ibid., 135–36.
39 Graef, Mary: A History, 240.
40 Gambero, Mary in the Middle Ages, 112–13.
41 Ibid., 114.
combined faith and reason to discover truths, obtaining a balance between head and heart.42

Marian art took on very distinctive styles in the twelfth century. In Eastern iconography, there are several ways of picturing Mary, many of which became prominent during this time. One of these is the Virgin Eleousa, which is a Tenderness icon, meaning that it shows Mary’s compassion and concern. This type of icon generally depicts Mary holding Jesus, their cheeks pressing against one another and his hand reaching around her neck. This kind of icon evokes more emotion than other kinds, showing a typical mother-son relationship between Mary and Jesus.43 The Virgin of the Passion icon evolved from the Tenderness icons. It shows Mary holding Jesus, surrounded by two angels that are holding the cross, whip, and nails. Mary appears to be leaning into Jesus, as if to protect him from the harm that is to come. This is sometimes connected with the prophet Simeon’s words at the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple: “a sword will pierce your own soul too.”44

The twelfth century also saw the very beginnings of the Rosary. The devotion of the psalter, during which psalms were recited many times, came about around 1130. Eventually the psalms were replaced by one hundred and fifty Hail Maries, which were counted on beads.45 It was not until later centuries that the recitation of Hail Maries would be connected with reflection on the life of Christ. In the late Middle Ages, spiritual practices generally included reenactments of Jesus’ life as a way on conforming one’s life to that of Christ. The combination of the two is dated to the fifteenth century.46 Also in the fifteenth century, printed Rosary books began to be circulated. However, these books varied in the number of meditations that were specified; there could be anywhere from five to two hundred meditations. Of these books, the ones that focused on the life of Christ were the most popular. St. Dominic was the first to list fifty points on which to meditate during prayer because he had difficulty paying attention during the repetitive devotion.47 Events from the Incarnation to the Resurrection were used as the objects of

42 Rodica Stoicoiu, class lecture, Mount St. Mary’s University, November 14, 2007.
43 Martin, Sacred Doorways, 170.
44 Ibid., 171–72.
the meditations, turning the focus more to Jesus than to Mary. The Creed and the Gloria were also added in order to complete the summary of the teachings of the faith.48

Aalanus de Rupe, a Dominican friar, wrote of his belief in the power of the Rosary in his treatise *Compendium psalterii beatissimae Trinitatis*.49 Here he explained how the Rosary can help people give praise to the Father, Son, and Spirit through Mary, together with all the saints. Alanus believed that it was Mary who revealed to St. Dominic the number fifty as a proper number for meditations. He also believed that the founding of the Confraternity of the Rosary was inspired by the Virgin. This was a group of people, founded by St. Dominic, who were committed to daily recitation of the Rosary and who frequently participated in confession and the reception of Communion. Any person was allowed to join, showing that the Rosary was a universal prayer. Alanus’ main contribution to the tradition of the Rosary lay in showing the connections between Mary and the events of Jesus’ life in the meditations.50

Many of the more well-known icons the Church has today came from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. One of the more interesting icons from this time is of St. Anne with Mary as an infant. It is from the fourteenth century and shows a rare depiction of Mary and her mother. Christ is present in the upper right-hand corner, blessing the two, showing that God’s will for Mary’s life was always planned.51 Another icon from the fifteenth century shows the Ascension of Christ, in which Mary is shown at the center of the apostles. Jesus is shown ascending into heaven, and, in the lower half of the icon, Mary is shown in contrast to the apostles, who are all looking at the sky. Mary is looking at the viewer; her background is entirely white, formed from the garments of the angels, symbolizing Mary’s share in heaven through her risen Son.52

Tracing the art of and devotion to Mary through the first fifteen centuries of the Church illuminates how they were shaped by changes in theology and historical events. From the very beginning of the Church onward, devotion to Mary was rooted in her relationship to Jesus. In later centuries, especially the twelfth century,

48 Ibid., 27.
50 Ibid., 318–19.
52 Ibid., 104–05.
prayers and teachings came to be focused on Mary specifically, although she is always associated with her Son. These devotions have been shaped by multiple factors over many centuries, and most remain as part of the Church’s tradition today.
The Progression of Modern Cosmological Arguments for God’s Existence: From the Big Bang to the Anthropic Principle
James Plantania

Albert Einstein saw a harmony at work in the laws of the universe. As the leading scientist of the twentieth century, he held that within the cosmos an obvious ordering can be found. Until the late 1920s, he, along with practically all of the respected scientists working in the field of cosmology, believed in an essentially static universe. This belief originated in the philosophy of Aristotle and was supported by modern scientists such as Newton and Einstein himself. Yet in 1927, the Belgian scientist and Catholic priest Georges Lemaître hypothesized the existence of a time when the matter of the entire universe was contained in a single primordial atom. Although this hypothesis was initially met with skepticism, the massive explosion of that primordial atom, coined the “Big Bang,” has since gained near universal acclaim as the most common explanation of cosmic development. When Lemaître presented his then novel theory in January of 1933 to scientists in California, Einstein, upon hearing the presentation, exclaimed, “This is the most beautiful and satisfactory explanation of creation to which I have ever listened.”

The fact that Lemaître was both priest and scientist should

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not be seen as a contradiction. Lemaître showed that religion and science need not conflict, using his scientific expertise to provide knowledge and his theological expertise to provide meaning. Natural science and theology are each able to learn from one another within the context of an honest search for truth. Science explains the rational plan that has emerged from the mind of God, and theology gives scientific discoveries their meaning. This combination results in what Stephen Jay Gould describes as the “non-overlapping magisteria” of science and religion, which allows room for dialogue in a period of perceived tension.2

A leader in this dialogue, especially in the ongoing discussion of biological evolution, has been the Catholic Church. The 1950 encyclical of Pope Pius XII titled Humani Generis has allowed Catholics to accept proven scientific conclusions as long as metaphysical determinations are left to the Magisterium of the Church. In a 1996 message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, once headed by Lemaître, Pope John Paul II asserted that remarkable cross-disciplinary discoveries had led to the acceptance of evolution as fact. It is this acceptance of scientific realities that allows Catholic philosophers and scientists to effectively engage the scientific community in fruitful dialogue. Yet within the theological community at large, such dialogue cannot always be found. On the one hand, champions of strict “Intelligent Design” theory, such as Alvin Plantinga, have placed Intelligent Design in direct opposition to Darwinism, while on the other hand, Catholic philosophers such as Michael Heller and Ernan McMullin have been able to accept the significance of contingency in Darwinism while not mitigating the role of a Creator.3 This embrace of modern science found in Catholic thought, coupled with the emergence of Lemaître’s Big Bang theory, has led to the development of modern cosmological arguments for God’s existence.

These arguments make reference to verifiable scientific features of the universe in order to establish a cosmic purpose. An early instance of this came in 1951, when Pius XII quickly endorsed the Big Bang as scientific support for the creation of the world as understood from the book of Genesis.4 Although the theory certainly adds scientific credibility to the possibility of Divine

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creation *ex nihilo*, it does not do so deductively. Thus it must be noted that modern cosmological arguments for the existence of God are inductive, showing how certain aspects of nature often support a theistic viewpoint.

Any argument for cosmic purpose asserts a teleological nature of the universe. The Greek word *telos*, which means “end,” “purpose,” or “goal,” takes on philosophical significance starting with Aristotle and Plato. Yet each philosopher employs the term differently. Aristotle, and later Einstein, asserts that an ordered universe is self-evident. All existing things, both living and non-living, work together for a purpose.\(^5\) Aristotle takes this ordering at face value, and in a universe existing in a perceived “steady state,” he does not concern himself with cosmic origin. But Aristotle’s predecessor Plato takes a different approach to teleology. In the *Timaeus*, Plato is concerned with “agent causality” as opposed to final causality. His aim is to show that within the universe there exists a shaping Reason that has ordered everything; he calls this Shaper the Demiurge.\(^6\) Modern interpretations of Darwinism, while leaving the teleology of Aristotle untouched, attempt to reject Platonic teleology, the appeal to an Intelligent Shaper of the cosmos. By appealing to the randomness operating in natural selection, these interpretations take God to be impotent in guiding the creation of the human race. McMullin responds to this idea by placing God outside time, adopting an orthodox position held by Augustine and Boethius and enabling him to approach Darwinism on its own terms. Boethius defines eternity as the “whole, perfect, and simultaneous possession of endless life.”\(^7\) When God exists apart from time as we know it, all things simply are; there is no temporal progression from the Divine standpoint. Those advocating strict Intelligent Design limit God’s power by placing Him in a timeline that is dependent on evolutionary processes. But for God all things simply are, and random contingency in the evolutionary process can easily be reconciled with a Divine plan. Instead of putting Darwinism in conflict with God, McMullin accepts the theory in its entirety and shows how it is in keeping with God’s intention for the universe.

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\(^6\) Ibid., 15.
In contrast to the discussion of Darwinism, there is a powerful argument for cosmic purpose that is separate from the evolutionary timeline. This argument has come to be known as the “anthropic principle,” and it effectively puts the teleology of Plato, along with that of the three great monotheistic religions, back into play. The anthropic principle, derived from the Greek *anthropos*, meaning “man,” says that if the initial conditions at the time of Lemaître’s Big Bang had varied in any way, life as we understand it would not have evolved. These initial conditions, such as temperature and chemical environment, existed when the primordial atom exploded and were so finely tuned for the development of human life that any variation at all would have eliminated the possibility. Don Page from the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton quantified the odds against the formation of our universe as one in $10,000,000,000^{124}$.\(^8\)

Given the choice as to whether the existence of human life was due to random chance or to an intelligent force acting in the interest of life, the selection of an intelligent force is most probable. With a universe so “finely tuned” for the conditions of life, the general intuition is that there exists a cosmic “Fine Tuner.” This conclusion is known as the strong anthropic principle. Some deny the influence of a cosmic Fine Tuner but still acknowledge that the conditions of the cosmos were favorable to human existence. Generally referred to as the weak anthropic principle, this second version was developed merely to confirm that the cosmic conditions necessary for human existence were present in the earliest stages of the Big Bang. While the weak anthropic principle is definitional, the strong anthropic principle adds a purpose to that definition, namely, that an Intelligence wanted rational, self-conscious life to come about as it has.

Astronomer Owen Gingerich singles out the emergence of the element carbon as a unique process involving a perfect environmental “resonance.”\(^9\) Without the resonance existing in the exact conditions it did, very few carbon atoms would have come into being. The same is true for oxygen. Thus for Gingerich, the fact that these elements emerged at all can be considered a “miracle” in itself.

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The list goes on: the necessity and rarity of the greenhouse effect, the specificity of Planck’s constant, etc. These scientific results have been accepted by most professionals, and we see even those who do not wish to attribute causality to an Intelligence acknowledging the conditions in the weak form of the anthropic principle. The strong anthropic principle and modern inductive arguments from science have swayed some of the most professed atheists towards theistic belief.

In an interview with Gary Habermas, renowned atheist turned deist Anthony Flew attributed his conversion to arguments for God’s existence that are supported by recent scientific discoveries, such as those that proceed from the Big Bang, cosmology and fine tuning arguments. Fred Hoyle, an astronomer at Cambridge who was an adamant supporter of the “steady state” universe, and who sarcastically first labeled Lemaître’s theory the “Big Bang,” has also become convinced by the anthropic principle. For Hoyle, it was the nuclear resonance structure of carbon and oxygen that shook his atheism. He writes:

Would you not say to yourself, “Some supercalculating intellect must have designed the properties of the carbon atom, otherwise the chance of my finding such an atom through the blind forces of nature would be utterly minuscule.” Of course you would . . . A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect has monkeyed with physics . . . The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question.

In spite of such evidence, two important objections have arisen to the anthropic principle. The first argues for the existence of a large number of co-existing, independent universes. This argument for “multiuniverses” assumes that if a vast number of universes existed, it would not be improbable that at least one of them would be “fine tuned” for human life. Intuitively, this theory seems unrealistic and is a weak speculative counterargument. If faced with the choice between trillions of co-existing universes and an Intelligence who intended the creation of humanity, it is most

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reasonable to choose the latter. It remains even more astounding that
the argument for multiverse, while proposed by scientists, is
neither empirically verifiable nor falsifiable by the principles of the
scientific method. The second objection accuses the anthropic
principle of anthropomorphism, suggesting that self-conscious life
may have arisen out of an entirely different kind of universe, one
with different laws of physics. While not being an absurdity, the
argument is still highly unlikely and requires a significant stretch of
the imagination. For if life could have evolved under different
conditions, we as humans would have no way of knowing what they
would be. And even if it were determined that life could evolve
under different laws of physics, the probability would remain
infinitesimally small and would still leave one begging the question as
to why self-conscious life exists.

Thus the paradox. In the context of biological evolution,
contingency is cited as a challenge to the notion of a teleological
purpose to the cosmos. Yet in the context of cosmology,
contingency is instead seen as an indication of cosmic purpose. With
the development of the strong anthropic principle, the atheistic
argument from contingency has been turned on its head. We see
contingency at its most powerful in the initial physical conditions at
the time of the explosion of Lemaître’s primordial atom. The idea
that these conditions were set by an Intelligence—a divine Fine
Tuner—is the most likely conclusion.

Upon receiving the Templeton Prize in March, 2008,
Michael Heller, a scientist and philosopher who, like Lemaître, is a
Catholic priest, quoted Leibniz: “Why is there something rather than
nothing?” Science is unable to answer this question. Theology can,
however, and modern cosmological arguments such as those based
on the anthropic principle provide convincing support for the
existence of a God who willed humanity into existence.
The “Problem” of Compassion: A False Assumption Made by Wolsterstorff, Cobb, and Griffen

Rena Black

“God is love,” says John. But Thomas raises a complicating objection: “For in God there are no passions. Now love is a passion. Therefore love is not in God.”

Surely Thomas did not mean this conclusion to be contrary to the passage from John; still, a defense of God’s sovereignty, his immovability, seems necessary. We want to square an analogical interpretation of John’s dictum with the valuable and favored medieval picture of God’s omnipotence, but this seems impossible.

Process theology, and Nicholas Wolsterstorff’s complementary scriptural exegesis and his conclusion of an “everlasting” (rather than an eternal) God, strike the majority of theologians as unorthodox, and they probably cause more difficulties, especially with regard to the problem of evil, than they solve. But perhaps the everlasting and responsive God they suggest is precisely the sort of God John’s passage reveals. Perhaps the answer to Thomas’s objection is that his first premise—that there are no passions in God—is false, because God develops in time and is therefore entirely capable of passion.

John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffen, two prominent process theologians, believe that the problem lies not in our

1 John 4:8 (NAB).
2 Summa Theologica I, q. 20, art. 1.
3 The formulation of analogical God-talk is particularly strong in the thought of Thomas himself. See, for example, the “Doctrine of Analogy,” in Summa Theologica I, q. 13, art. 5 and Disputed Questions: On Truth 2.11 (both excerpted in Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings, 2nd ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2001], 371–73). In this case, it means that we read “God is love” not univocally with human experience (saying, for example, “God = a biochemical process of attraction” or “God = the feeling a good married couple have for one another”), nor equivocally (saying that the sort of love John is speaking about is so vastly different from that which we know that we cannot rightly speak of it), but analogically. God may not love the way we do, but his love must at least resemble ours (or vice-versa) for us to be able to say anything at all about John’s assertion.
4 See his “God is Everlasting,” reprinted in Philosophy of Religion, 139–47.
conception of compassion, but in the classical conception of God as eternal.⁵ There is no contradiction, they say, in holding that a God who develops—learning alongside creation, responding to events in time—is compassionate. This is precisely the sort of being who could experience a passion, a change in time, as Thomas describes it.

Cobb and Griffen, like Thomas, assert that love and compassion are, by nature, responsive—that is, affected by external events. Linguistically, their case is very strong. The word compassion means “suffering with” and hence connotes a response to and alongside of a suffering human being. As opposed to the more distant word “pity,” compassion implies engagement, relationship, and sympathy—in other words, a likeness between the object of compassion and the being that is acting compassionately.

An even stronger reason to think that Cobb and Griffen may be on to something is that the word “emotion” denotes a motion or change from one state to another. Feeling is a movement, and motion, as a reception of and reaction to external stimuli, occurs in time.

But surely thought and knowledge, as we know them, are, like compassion and love, also responsive. Human thought invariably originates in experience; it is never objectless, and external stimuli undeniably influence its path. Yet few question the doctrine of God’s immovable, unchanging omnipotence and omniscience, despite the fact that these notions are extrapolated from this very different sort of thought and knowledge. In practice, the portrait of God as eternal knower is well established among non-process theologians and seemingly causes no difficulty. Theologians and philosophers are entirely comfortable conceiving of God in this way, yet all thought as we know it is time-bound, nearly always discursive, and never omniscient.

If the majority of theologians find no difficulty conceiving of God’s thought as effective rather than affected, eternal rather than discursive, and omniscient rather than partial, the “problem” of compassion, as laid out by Cobb and Griffen, should in fact be equally innocuous. The reasoning process that underlies the relatively easy acceptance of the notion of an eternal thinker and knower is based on our experience of our own non-discursive, intuitive, or “eureka”-type thought—a sort of thought that is qualitatively

different from discursive, linear, proof-style thinking. It is interesting to note, then, that we in fact probably have far more experience of the mixture or co-existence of emotions (Thomas’s “passions”), especially under the guise of true compassion/love/caritas, than we do of non-discursive, “eureka”-style knowledge. If we are familiar with and sure of the fact that a human being can simultaneously experience distinct emotions like joy and sorrow, excitement and apprehension, or affection and frustration, why should the God in whose image we are made not be capable of experiencing a similar mingling (or better, complexity) of emotions?

In short, if God’s thought and knowing are different from our own, why should we not equally concede that, just perhaps, God’s love and compassion are also different? Why must we continue to privilege thought, and to rank as inferior compassionate love, a divine action far more immediate to the Christian ethos than omniscience? Do we imitate Jesus’ insightful teaching or his loving sacrifice? The answer must, of course, be “both,” but not as Cobb and Griffen would have it. The union of divine thought and action should not be accomplished by demoting God’s thought and knowledge to a human level, but by elevating human compassion to the level of God’s perfect love.

None of this invalidates the claims of process theology. It only means that God’s compassionate love need not be any more time-bound than divine thought or knowledge. Our experience of God’s action does not, by itself, inform us as to the ultimate ontological nature of that action. For example, we know that Jesus Christ’s Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection happened in a particular time and place. How, then, is it so often said that “even Socrates knew Christ?” A humble response might venture that it is perhaps because the love poured out in the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery, if eternal, is part of one complex divine (e)motion, along with Creation, the Fall, and the covenants with Abraham and Moses. All may be summed up in God’s intense longing for free human response, at once love and pang, ecstasy and agony—the true lover’s discordia concors.

Surely it is not blaspheming to say that God suffers, because although we as agents “cause” such suffering, it is God who chooses

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6 I would assert that the truth of this experience almost never questioned, unlike the “gut” or intuitive experience, to which hindsight provides 20-20 vision.
to suffer, and it is God who chooses to offer us such agency. Omnipotence would not be omnipotence if God did not have the power to create creatures with free agency, and to choose to behave responsively to their actions.

To put it another way, God’s vulnerability does not mean that God could not have chosen to remain invulnerable, but simply that he in fact did not. To say the opposite, that God’s omnipotence excludes such loving surrender, is to exclude an orthodox understanding of the Paschal Mystery. We do not change God but rather participate in his self-offering, his free choice to make himself vulnerable through the act of Creation and its visible extension in the historical Incarnation. In light of this, there is simply no good empirical or theoretical reason for privileging thought and knowledge over compassion and love in the question of God’s eternity or temporality. The “problem” of compassion offers no support for the idea of God proposed by Wolsterstorff, Cobb and Griffen.