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## Why “*Tolle Lege*”?

The title of this journal is a reference to an extraordinary moment of conversion in the life of St. Augustine, the great philosopher and theologian of the early medieval period. The story begins with St. Augustine sitting beneath a fig tree, weeping in distress over his inability to leave behind his life of sin and follow God faithfully. Amidst his tears he hears the distant voice of a child chanting the words “*Tolle, lege!*” or “Take up and read!” Aroused from his pitiable state and taking this as a sign from God, he goes to his house, picks up the first book he finds, and reads the first chapter. The book contained the letters of St. Paul, and the verse that Augustine read spoke to his heart with such force that he was convinced beyond any doubt of the truth of God; he was converted on the spot.

This journal of philosophy and theology is meant to embody a spirit of truth-seeking—on the part of both the contributors and you, the reader. Like St. Augustine, we are all faced with the choice between complacency and continual conversion toward truth. We hope that this journal will serve as an aid in the discovery of truth, and thus we exhort you in all earnestness to “Take up and read!”

## Editors' Note

*Tolle, lege*—these two words changed the world when St. Augustine converted to a new journey in faith toward truth. In our journal, now in its ninth year, these two words continue to inspire us in our mission, not only to highlight the best philosophy and theology essays written by Mount students, but also to bring them to you, the reader, in the hope that you, like the great thinkers before us, will be inspired in your journey to pursue and cultivate knowledge.

This issue includes eight fantastic essays on a variety of topics, from decision making in the context of infidelity to discovering Dante's hidden philosophical talent. The prizewinning essay, "Finding Room for Kant: A Deontological Critique of Joshua Greene's Moral Psychology," was selected for its clarity of argument and contemporary relevance. Addressing philosophical claims grounded in recent psychological research, it inspires the reader to appreciate the intersection between these two fields of study.

The publication of this volume would have been impossible without the support of many members of the Mount community. We would like to thank the provost, Dr. Jennie Hunter-Cevera, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and chair of the Theology Department, Fr. Jim Donohue, and the chair of the Philosophy Department, Dr. Richard Buck, for their financial support. And we would like to offer special thanks to our faculty advisers, Dr. David Cloutier and Dr. Thane Naberhaus, for their encouragement and guidance. We also want to recognize the unsung hero of the Philosophy Department, Ms. Katie Soter, whose assistance in this project has been invaluable. Finally, we want to thank the undergraduate editors who worked tirelessly to evaluate and choose the essays for this year's publication, as well as—of course—those students whose submissions made this volume possible. We encourage all Mount students to consider submitting their philosophy and theology essays for next year's issue, as we celebrate a decade of exploration, reflection, and collaboration.

So *tolle, lege*—take up and read! We hope that by doing so, you will be inspired to join the ongoing endeavor to discover truth in a community that fervently pursues this goal.

Alyse Spiehler and Katherine Wu  
Co-Editors-in-Chief

## Contributors

**Zachary Carls** is a graduate of the class of 2015 and earned his B.A. in political science. However, he has always regarded philosophy as his second love and considers a philosophically grounded view of human nature to be a necessary component of any political or social theory. He wishes to thank all of his teachers, without whom he would never have learned to think.

**Brendan Fitzgerald** is a seminarian from the Archdiocese of Baltimore in his second year of studies. A graduate of Loyola University, Maryland, in 2013, Brendan has a keen interest in ethics and moral psychology, which led him to compose the essay included here for Dr. Jessie Jordan’s “Aristotle after Kant” course in the spring of 2015.

**John-Paul Heil** is a Ph.D. student in history at the University of Chicago, specializing in Renaissance humanism and early modern Italy. He graduated from the Mount in 2015 with a triple-major in philosophy, history, and Italian studies and a minor in English.

**Andrew McCarthy** is a member of the class of 2016 and is a double major in philosophy and theology, with an emphasis in youth ministry and pastoral ministry. He will graduate in May and plans to be a high school youth minister.

**Paul Miller** is a member of the class of 2017 with a major in theology and a minor in philosophy. He hopes to go on to graduate study in theology. Paul resides locally with his wife Alesha and their two sons, Alexander and Gabriel.

**Jonathan Powell** attended Mount St. Mary’s Seminary from 2014 to 2015, after receiving his Ph.B. from The Catholic University of America. He is currently working on a master’s degree in moral theology at Christendom College. He teaches theology, Latin, and public speaking at Kennedy Catholic High School in Somers, New York.

Born in Germany and raised in Maryland, **Kayli Workman** is a biochemistry, French, and biology major at Mount St. Mary’s from the Class of 2016. After graduating, she plans to attend medical school with the aim of helping those in need.

# Finding Room for Kant: A Deontological Critique of Joshua Greene's Moral Psychology

*Brendan Fitzgerald*

Recent scholarship in moral psychology is increasingly structured on the conclusions of empirical science. Advances in brain mapping and neuroimaging enable psychologists and philosophers to use data derived from these kinds of experiments to assess the validity of moral and ethical systems. Ethical systems with claims supported by science are positively verified; those that lack empirical verification are reevaluated. Positive psychologist Joshua Greene presents one such reevaluation in his article "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul." Greene asserts that the tenets of deontological ethics cannot be confirmed by current research. A moral judgment—argues Greene—typically associated with the rightness or wrongness of an action is just the rationalization of an intuitive emotional response. According to this view, reason does not determine moral judgment so much as it provides an *ex post facto* justification for an affective reaction to an ethical dilemma.

My aim in this analysis is to offer a response to Greene's argument. In broad terms, this is also a Kantian response to Greene. I draw textual support from recent Kantian scholarship; still, this is not necessarily the rebuttal that Kant himself would have made. Much contemporary work on Kant incorporates the advancements made in other fields of moral philosophy (especially virtue ethics). My research makes use of this development. In more particular terms, I contend that Greene is wrong to conclude that certain moral judgments are rationalizations of intuitive emotional responses because Greene provides an insufficient account of emotion. With a proper definition of emotion, we are able to see that Greene also possesses an inadequate understanding of Kant's decision procedure, and that Greene fails to present Kant's full view on the ethical life. After briefly presenting Greene's argument, I will proceed to criticize it through an explanation of each of these claims.

Greene uses the data derived from brain mapping and neuroimaging to analyze deontological and utilitarian ethics. He finds that the types of moral judgments usually associated with deontological ethics develop within the areas of the brain regularly associated with emotion. The types of moral judgments common to a utilitarian ethic, however, develop within the areas of the brain regularly associated with reason. Greene appeals to two influential hypothetical dilemmas in the course of his research. Jesse Prinz describes Greene's project nicely:

Greene et al. (2001) have used functional magnetic resonance imaging to measure brain activity as subjects consider trolley cases. They showed significant activation in emotional areas of the brain when subjects were asked whether it is appropriate to push someone off a footbridge into the path of a trolley [to save five others]. Emotion activations were lower when subjects were asked whether it is appropriate to pull a lever that would divert a trolley away from five people toward one person.<sup>1</sup>

Subjects considering the footbridge case experience heightened neural activity in the emotional centers of the brain: the posterior cingulate cortex, the medial prefrontal cortex, and the amygdala.<sup>2</sup> Neural activity in persons evaluating the trolley case centers in the "classically" cognitive areas of the brain: the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and the inferior parietal lobe.<sup>3</sup> The moral judgments made concerning these dilemmas tend to divide along the emotional–cognitive line as well: subjects say that pulling the lever is acceptable but throwing a man off a footbridge is immoral.

The conclusion drawn from this study is that "moral reasoning is driven by two dissociable processes: a cool rational process and an emotional process."<sup>4</sup> These results are found in Greene's original research into cognition, emotion, and moral judgment. There, Greene limits himself to presenting the empirical data derived from fMRI experimentation. But in "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul," Greene engages in a philosophical analysis of his own and similar research. He distinguishes between personal and impersonal moral dilemmas. The

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<sup>1</sup> Jesse Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Joshua Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul," *Moral Psychology: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 43–44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>4</sup> *Emotional Construction*, 24.

trolley case he labels impersonal because the subject is removed from immediate contact with the potential victims. Greene says that the footbridge case, on the other hand, is personal: here a test subject must consider immediate and violent contact with a potential victim.

The next move that Greene makes is to categorize moral judgments made in response to the trolley and footbridge cases. It is commonplace for a utilitarian to claim that pulling the lever in the trolley case is licit; here the greatest good is accomplished for the greatest number. Likewise, it is commonplace for the deontological ethicist to state that throwing the man off the footbridge in order to save five lives is illicit; the action itself is wrong, regardless of the consequences.<sup>5</sup> Now, one way to object to Greene's philosophical project is to insist that these categories don't hold: surely a good utilitarian would be obliged to throw the person off the footbridge as well; and a deontologist might object to pulling the lever in the trolley case. Greene's ethical generalizations are troubling. But let's table this objection. If we grant that Greene's ethical categorization of moral judgments is correct, what picture does this paint for moral psychology?

Greene gives us the following image. Utilitarian ethics depends on a "cool rational process" to evaluate rights and wrongs; it is most applicable in scenarios where a person is removed from immediate interaction with others. Deontological ethics relies on an "emotional process" to identify an action as right or wrong; it is most applicable in scenarios where a person is directly involved with other people. The final factor that Greene introduces is time.<sup>6</sup> Deontological judgments are made quickly. Utilitarian judgments require a longer period of deliberation. Greene thinks that this correlates to the research: the emotional response to throwing a person off of a footbridge is immediate, but the trolley case demands time for moral assessment.

The conclusion that Greene draws is that the standard view that deontological ethics is the height of moral reasoning is wrongheaded. Deontological judgments are quick and involve the emotional rather than the cognitive centers of the brain. A person presented with an ethical dilemma that involves direct contact with another person experiences an intuitive moral response. The moral judgment that follows, says Greene, is the rationalization of that response. "Humans are," says Greene, "in general, irrepressible explainers and justifiers of

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<sup>5</sup> "Secret Joke," 42.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

their own behavior.”<sup>7</sup> According to Greene, the need to explain and justify moral actions develops into deontological ethics. People aren’t content with grounding action and judgment in the emotions, and so they generate rationalizations that satisfy the need for explanation and justification.

Before offering a response to Greene, it is worth pointing out two more notable features of his argument. First, Greene makes use of an enormous body of psychological research that tends to corroborate his own inductive investigations. So at a minimum, there do appear to be two distinct processes that occur in the brain during the evaluation of hypothetical moral dilemmas. Second, these results hold across a range of other hypothetical scenarios. The trolley and footbridge cases are just two of the more popular hypotheticals in psychology and philosophy, but the field is replete with alternatives. These alternative cases reveal similar results. In other words, if Greene is correct in his assessment of deontological ethics, his conclusions are well substantiated by the empirical evidence.

One problem with Greene’s assessment of deontological ethics is that he fails to provide a sufficient account of human emotions. When Greene attempts to define emotions, he does so through an appeal to physiological geography and temporal progression. He writes that “Emotion, in contrast [to cognition], tends to be associated with other parts of the brain, such as the amygdala and the medial surfaces of the frontal and parietal lobes” and that he is interested in “emotions subserved by processes that in addition to being valenced, are quick and automatic, though not necessarily conscious.”<sup>8</sup> But the assignment of emotions to a location in the brain and a statement as to the time lapsed in their development is not a sufficient account of human emotions.

Imagine the following. We ask a friend to explain the game of soccer. He tells us that soccer is played on a grass field 105 meters long by 68 meters wide and that a match takes 90 minutes plus stoppage time. It’s doubtful that such an account would satisfy. A sufficient explanation of the game of soccer requires more than a statement as to where it is played and how much time elapses during a match. Likewise, we ought not be satisfied by Greene’s account of emotion. If emotions are the source of our personal moral judgments, then a sound account of their nature is essential to good moral philosophy.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.

When Christine Korsgaard presents a theory of human emotion, she defines them as “perceptions of reasons.”<sup>9</sup> First, consider experiences as raw as pain and pleasure. Korsgaard makes an important distinction between a physiological sensation and mental awareness of that sensation. An animal in need of sustenance and yet unable to locate food might experience a particular sensation. We tend to believe that this sensation is pain, but Korsgaard recommends caution here. She writes, “The sensation in question is the sensation of hunger, not of pain. But an animal is designed to perceive and revolt against threats to the preservation of its identity, such as hunger. When it does that, it is in pain.”<sup>10</sup> The experience of pain and pleasure require the perception of a reason. Hunger is painful not because of its attendant physiological sensations but because hunger jeopardizes the well-being of the starving animal. There is something at stake beyond the physical when an animal is starving, and that recognition results in pain.

Korsgaard builds her analysis of pain and pleasure into a theory of emotions in general. She writes, “Fear is the perception of a reason to flee, pity is the perception of a reason to relieve another’s pain, and so on.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, there is an element to perception, Korsgaard believes, that philosophers often overlook. Perception is not just an “epistemic state,” she argues, but is “a way of being in the presence of an object . . . To have an emotion is to stand *in the presence* of a normative fact.”<sup>12</sup> When we fear, we stand in the presence of the “dangerousness of danger” and when we grieve we stand in the presence of the “infinite loss of death.” The emotions depend on these types of perceptions; we experience an affective reaction to the normative fact that is the reason for that reaction. Absent the perception of reasons, there is no cause for emotional responses.

Drawing on Korsgaard, let’s reconsider the trolley car and footbridge cases. In each case, a person stands in the presence of a similar normative fact: the death of one person will save five others. On Greene’s analysis, people tend to make a deontological judgment in the footbridge case and a utilitarian judgment in the trolley case. The footbridge case is more personal and therefore more emotional;

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<sup>9</sup> Christine Korsgaard *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 112.

<sup>10</sup> Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 150.

<sup>11</sup> *Self-Constitution*, 112.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

the trolley case is more impersonal and therefore a better example of genuine moral reasoning. If we incorporate Korsgaard's account of the emotions into Greene's analysis, we are able to make the following two claims: (1) the person confronted with the footbridge dilemma stands in closer proximity to the normative fact at hand, and so ought to experience a heightened level of emotion, and (2) it seems backwards to conclude that deontological judgments are rationalizations if emotions are perceptions of reasons.

I think that (1) needs little explanation. A person who lives 50 miles inland is likely to experience less fear of an impending hurricane than a person who lives on the coast (though he or she could be just as greatly affected by the storm); an animal that has gone two weeks without food experiences more pain than the animal that goes five days without nourishment. In each case the normative fact is the same, but the proximity of the person or animal to that fact varies. Likewise, the person on the footbridge stands in closer proximity to the normative fact at hand than the person in the trolley case. In both cases, the subject might immediately recognize that the hypothetical calls for an act of murder and that murder is wrong, and yet the person who stands nearer that normative fact will experience a greater emotional response. Moreover, if emotions are the perceptions of reasons, then someone can only experience an emotional response to the prospect of committing a murder because that person recognizes that *the act of murder is wrong*. A person who did not know that murder is wrong would experience no emotional response to the footbridge case at all. So, on the one hand, we ought to expect that subjects would experience a heightened emotional response in the footbridge case, and on the other, we know that this emotional response is experienced because of knowledge of a deontological fact. It is a mistake to conclude that an evaluation of comparative levels of emotion entails that deontological ethics is emotional in its origin.

Concerning (2), we should expect it to be easier to rationalize an act of murder from a distance. This is not because in the footbridge case the origin of judgment is emotion and in the trolley case the origin of judgment is reason. Rather, it is because in the trolley case the relative distance between agent and normative fact entails a lower level of emotional response. The emotional response that is consequent to the perception of the fact that the hypothetical calls for an act of murder together with the judgment that murder is wrong is weaker. We can draw a parallel to grieving. A parent who loses a child would likely be more difficult to console than that child's teacher. Both

parent and teacher perceive that there is a reason to grieve, and both might experience the pain of loss. But the teacher, being more removed from the child, would be able to come to grips with that loss more quickly. He or she might be more receptive to advice than the parent. The teacher is in a better position to push through the emotions consequent to the perception of the normative fact at hand, simply because there is a lesser emotional response to deal with in the first place. It would be a fundamental error to conclude that the parent grieves without reason, or that the teacher experiences no emotional response to the loss of the child. And here is the point: it is easier to rationalize when there is an absence of emotions, and not the other way around. Rather than conclude that a deontological judgment is an *ex post facto* rationalization of an intuitive emotional reaction, it is more reasonable to surmise that it is simply easier for the subject in the trolley case to rationalize or justify an immoral act. That process of rationalization might take time, as the empirical data suggests, but its possibility is contingent on a lack of proximity between agent and victim. Emotions often confirm ethical judgments, but they do not cause them. A proper account of the emotions reveals a major deficiency in Greene's moral psychology.

The absence of a sufficient account of emotion in Greene's analysis points to a second failure: the inability to properly understand the role of emotion in Kant's decision procedure. Consider the following statement by Greene:

Deontology is rule-based morality, usually focused on rights and duties. A deontological judgment, then, is a judgment made out of respect for certain types of moral rules. From this it follows that a moral judgment that is made on the basis of an emotional response simply cannot be a deontological judgment, although it may appear to be one from the outside.<sup>13</sup>

There is, in this assessment of Kantian deontology, a problem. Greene claims that a moral judgment derived from an emotional response cannot be a deontological judgment. But in this same passage, Greene acknowledges that a deontological judgment "is . . . made out of respect" for moral rules. Greene concludes that emotions have no part to play in Kant's decision procedure, while failing to recognize that respect is a feeling. It is a sentiment of our affective nature; in other words, respect in an emotion.

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<sup>13</sup> "Secret Joke," 37.

According to Korsgaard, Kant believes that humans are prone to acting from self-love.<sup>14</sup> But through reason, a moral agent is capable of detachment and reflection. From reflection, the agent might identify a maxim for action derived from the moral law. The adoption of a maxim derived from the moral law, Korsgaard says, “thwarts inclination” and “humiliates self-conceit.”<sup>15</sup> She describes this as painful. But subsequent to that process, the agent experiences a form of pleasure—something akin to a “divine bliss” and a “complex mix of affect”—that is a respect for the moral law.<sup>16</sup> The agent realizes his or her freedom and self-legislates as an autonomous person. The agent has given the action a “special moral worth.”

It is clear from this account of Kant’s moral psychology that emotions are instrumental in Kant’s decision procedure. These are not baseless or uncaused emotions but are rather sentiments and feelings that derive from reason. This account conforms to Korsgaard’s definition of emotions as perceptions of reasons. The acknowledgment that the moral law ought to be action-guiding gives to the agent pleasures and pains that develop into a more refined experience of disdain and respect. We should expect, then, that a person who recognizes the authority of the moral law in an ethical dilemma will experience heightened emotional activity.

When Greene points to increased activity in the emotional areas of the brain as the source of deontological judgments, he is unable to make two critical distinctions. First, he cannot provide a sequence to cognitive and emotional activity. He admits that some amount of cognitive function is a necessary precondition for emotional activity. But Greene is unable to state exactly what role that initial cognitive functioning plays in the formation of moral judgments. Second, Greene cannot distinguish which emotions are active through neuroimaging. A person considering the footbridge case might experience some form of the respect for the moral law that Kant describes; continued contemplation of the hypothetical might cause that respect to transition into repugnance or disgust at the mere thought of using human life as a means to an end. So while Greene is able to indicate heightened neural activity in the emotional centers of the brain during the contemplation of hypothetical dilemmas, he cannot tell us what kind of emotional activity is occurring. Nor can he

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<sup>14</sup> Christine Korsgaard, “From Duty and For the Sake of the Noble” in *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 213.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

tell us what role cognition plays in that process. A properly construed Kantian deontology might be able to accommodate the type of emotional activity that Greene believes indicates an intuitive response to a moral dilemma.

I'd like to close with a third objection to Greene's critique of deontological ethics. When Greene describes deontology, he says that it "is defined by its emphasis on moral rules, most often articulated in terms of rights and duties."<sup>17</sup> That is, at least for Kant, only one half of the ethical life. Kant distinguishes between self-legislation and self-command. A person self-legislates when he or she adopts a maxim in conformity with the moral law. This is the process described by Korsgaard above. But self-command is a part of the ethical life that is the necessary consequence of self-legislation. Eric Wilson says that "The person with self-command does something more [than self-legislate]. In addition to adopting the maxim, he resolves to stick to it, to put it into practice. The person not only decides to act as the law requires but also sets himself to resist any temptations that might lead him to reconsider or undo this decision."<sup>18</sup> Greene does not consider self-command in his analysis. He limits himself to a discussion of moral judgment, and in doing so he reduces Kantian ethics to self-legislation alone.

The problem with this narrow view of Kant's ethical program is that the trolley car hypothetical presents a scenario where self-command, and not self-legislation, is the central issue. Someone who has already adopted the maxim that a person cannot be used as a mere means to an end, or that murder is wrong in all circumstances, etc., might confront in the trolley car scenario a sincere challenge to that maxim. The trouble here is not deciding what to do, but rather finding the resolve or the strength to abide by ethical norms, even when these entail that five people will die. As Wilson says of a person who possesses Kantian self-command:

It means that he has become good at resisting the things that would tempt him to revise or reconsider the morally authoritative maxims that obligate him to act. He has developed an effective repertoire of techniques and strategies to help him stay committed to his own decisions. Proficiency in this domain enables him to do something the person without self-command cannot do: namely, extend the results

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<sup>17</sup> "Secret Joke," 37.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Wilson, "Self-Legislation and Self-Command in Kant's Ethics," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming), 15.

of self-legislation over time.<sup>19</sup>

The person confronted with pulling a lever to divert a trolley into the path of one person in order to save five others might encounter just this sort of temptation. The salient concern is not the morality of pulling the lever, but whether or not a person can find the resolve to do so. That moral agent faces the enticement of acting for the greater good, even though that result comes at the expense of human life. Finding the strength to act for the greater good engages the agent in a process of rationalization that takes time. Acting against personal moral norms requires mental effort, and a person who acts contrary to self-legislated maxims demonstrates an absence of self-command. To that extent, the moral agent can only be said to engage in one aspect of the ethical life.

My aim in this paper has been to respond to Joshua Greene's moral psychology. Greene describes deontological moral judgments as the rationalization of intuitive emotional reactions to ethical dilemmas. I don't think that's right. I offered three objections to that view. First, Greene's account of deontological judgment could be explained through a proper conception of human emotions. It might be the case that the emotional activity observed in empirical research is a reaction to the perception of a moral wrong. Second, Kant is clear that some type of emotional activity is essential to good moral judgment. And third, it might be the case that the person who deliberates over the trolley case knows right from wrong but cannot execute an action on the basis of a previously adopted maxim.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 21.

# The DREAM Act: A Compassionate Response

*Paul Miller*

One of the most current and relevant topics in American society is immigration. From cable news networks to social media to the dinner table, Americans continue to discuss and debate the topic of immigration. While for many this remains a political or academic discussion, increasing trends have caused many Americans to look at the moral responsibility we have toward undocumented immigrants. The number of unaccompanied children apprehended on the southern border increased a shocking 77% from fiscal 2013 to 2014.<sup>1</sup> The plight of these children seized the headlines during the peak of the crisis in 2014. But the number of family units apprehended (individuals apprehended with a family member) increased even more dramatically from fiscal 2013 to 2014. According to the U.S. Border Patrol, in 2013, 14,855 individuals traveling in family units were apprehended. In 2014, 68,445 individuals were apprehended, an increase of 361%. These numbers are staggering, causing many to respond with great concern about America's national security, legal integrity, and economic stability.

But beyond the legitimate concerns of security and economy, Americans must grapple with the moral responsibility we have toward undocumented immigrants. This moral responsibility should cause us to reevaluate our identity as a society, to remember that we are a nation of immigrants, and a nation that values compassion. One such piece of legislation that addresses these concerns is the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, also known as the DREAM Act. First introduced in 2001, the DREAM Act would provide undocumented young men and women who were brought to the U.S. as children a pathway toward citizenship.<sup>2</sup> This piece of legislation

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<sup>1</sup> United States Border Patrol, "Southwest Border Family Units and UAC Apprehensions (FY 2013–FY 2014)," *Department of Homeland Security*, last modified January 2015, <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/media-resources/stats?title=Border+Patrol>.

<sup>2</sup> "Basic Facts on the Dream Act," *American Immigration Council*, last modified May 18, 2011, <http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/dream-act>.

advocates for acceptance of these young people as members of our communities and takes a compassionate response to human situations. We will describe the DREAM Act and the underlying reasoning for its advocacy on behalf of young undocumented immigrants. We will also analyze the legal objections to legislation such as the DREAM Act. In response to objections, we will take a closer look at our American identity and what it means to have compassion for the “other.” Our understanding of compassion in America is deeply rooted in our predominately Western Christian ethics. In view of this, we will take a theologically grounded moral approach to the act, specifically from the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching.

The DREAM Act was first introduced to Congress in 2001 and has undergone many changes since then. In 2013, it was incorporated into the S.744 bill known as the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act.”<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this essay, we will focus on the most recent well-known version of the bill, from 2011.

The DREAM Act would primarily do three things. First, undocumented high school graduates or GED recipients could receive conditional lawful permanent residence status if they were younger than sixteen when they entered the U.S. and have been here for at least five years. Second, the conditional LPR status would be granted for six years, during which time the students would work, go to school, or join the military. And third, the conditional status would be lifted and the students would be granted lawful permanent residence if they complete at least two years of college in a bachelor’s program or if they serve in a branch of the military for at least two years with an honorable discharge.<sup>4</sup>

The underlying reasoning for the DREAM Act is a combination of legal, economic, and humanitarian considerations. The legal considerations include what to do with approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants who call the United States their home. The United States was founded on the rule of law. It strikes deep into the American consciousness that established laws are to be followed and enforced. A problem with immigration law is that it fails to keep up with social change in the U.S. and it lags behind other social reforms. Immigration law is based on the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The INA has been amended numerous times to expand or

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<sup>3</sup> Immigration Policy Center.

<sup>4</sup> “Basic Facts on the Dream Act.”

restrict access to the United States.<sup>5</sup> And the debate continues about whether to address immigration law incrementally or to conduct comprehensive immigration reform. The DREAM Act was intended to address legal considerations related to the children of immigrants who have been living in the U.S. for an extended period of time. It was meant to address a portion of the overall legal concerns regarding the status of residents in the United States who are here illegally. The undocumented status of these children in the U.S. creates barriers for them in continuing their education after high school or finding legal employment. Discouraged, many drop out of high school and gravitate toward the margins of society. They may become involved in gangs or other illegal activities.<sup>6</sup> So the legal considerations include not only the legal status of these immigrant children but the broader legal effects in regard to crime and society as well.

The underlying reasoning behind the DREAM Act also includes economic considerations. Advocates for the law propose that the U.S. economy would benefit from the law in several ways. First, the children who would benefit from the law would have more access to further education and better jobs. This would increase the taxable income of these individuals. Second, because of the access to better jobs, these individuals would have more money to invest in their local and the broader economies. Third, the U.S. economy would benefit from the decreased high school dropout rate. Instead of working illegally in the cash economy, these individuals would more likely be legally employed in positions that are in high demand in the U.S. economy. Finally, the U.S. economy would benefit by retaining highly talented students in the United States. It would provide an incentive for talented and intelligent students to pursue a college education, and then apply their talents and skills in the U.S. economy.<sup>7</sup>

But for many advocates, the fundamental underlying reasoning for the DREAM Act are the humanitarian considerations. Every year, approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school.<sup>8</sup> These students oftentimes cannot pursue their dreams of college education, military service, or legal employment in the United States. Through no fault of their own, they were brought to the United

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Giovagnoli, "Overhauling Immigration Law: A Brief History and Basic Principles of Reformation," *American Immigration Council*, last modified February 14, 2013, <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/perspectives/overhauling-immigration-law-brief-history-and-basic-principles-reform>.

<sup>6</sup> "Basic Facts on the Dream Act."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

States as children and raised here, and advocates would say they are as American as any citizen. This is their home. While many opponents of the DREAM Act would argue that Americans have to take care of our children first, advocates would argue *that these are our children*.

The DREAM Act would result in the United States taking responsibility to care for the human needs of our nation's undocumented children. There is no better way to demonstrate this point than to put a human face on the human need. Senator Dick Durbin from Illinois did this in his opening remarks at the first U.S. Senate hearing on the DREAM Act in June 2011. He brought with him several undocumented students. One, by the name of Tereza Lee, was a student who attended the Merit School of Music in Chicago. She was a soloist in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and she had been accepted to many of the nation's most prestigious music schools. Unfortunately, she was brought to the United States when she was two years old and was here illegally. She was set to be deported. Sen. Durbin intervened, and Tereza went on to earn her master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music. She performed her debut at Carnegie Hall. Sen. Durbin concluded his opening remarks by saying, "These Dreamers would go back to the end of the line and wait their turn for citizenship, but there is no line for them to get into. I urge my colleagues to support the DREAM Act. It is one of the most compelling human rights issues of our time."<sup>9</sup>

For American Catholics, as well as for many people of different faith traditions, the underlying reasoning in support of the Dream Act goes beyond the basic humanitarian considerations. There is a pastoral and spiritual responsibility Christians have toward other people, especially children. The responsibility goes beyond the borders of a particular nation and beyond public policy. In a joint letter on immigration, the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States said that "Catholic concerns for immigration include pastoral as well as public policy issues. First pastors must work to convert the hearts of American Catholics to see Jesus as present in all persons."<sup>10</sup> There is an eternal and spiritual dimension that is extended through justice

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<sup>9</sup> United States Congressional Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and Border Security, "The Dream Act. Hearing," *112<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session*, last modified June 28, 2011, [http://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/durbin\\_statement\\_06\\_28\\_11.pdf](http://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/durbin_statement_06_28_11.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> United States Council of Catholic Bishops and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope," *United States Council of Catholic Bishops*, last modified January 22, 2003, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope.cfm>.

towards others. As Pope John XXIII said in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*:

Now the order which prevails in human society is wholly incorporeal in nature. Its foundation is truth, and it must be brought into effect by justice. It needs to be animated and perfected by men's love for one another, and, while preserving freedom intact, it must make for an equilibrium in society which is increasingly more human in character.<sup>11</sup>

The bishops direct this awareness and conversion first toward American Catholics; we need to see Jesus in the faces of immigrants and their children like Tereza Lee, and then a *metanoia*, a profound conversion, begins to take place in our hearts. We are then compelled to extend that compassion. As Catholics and other people of faith awaken to this dimension, the underlying reasoning based on humanitarian considerations for the DREAM Act takes on a spiritual quality.

Therefore, I believe that the pursuit of legislation such as the DREAM Act is of the highest moral regard; for it involves what is considered by many to be the greatest of the theological virtues: love. And it is love expressed in compassion that takes action. It is *misericordia* or compassionate mercy.<sup>12</sup> Compassionate mercy calls on all Americans, especially Christians, to step outside their provincial ideologies and comfort zones and extend love to neighbor. It is a call that reminds us of our past, of our identity as immigrants, and it is a call for progress as a society. In this call, not only do we have the opportunity to remember who we are and where we are going, but it is also an opportunity for spiritual renewal. It should press ever nearer to our hearts the words of Christ: "Taking a child he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them, whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."<sup>13</sup> As we demonstrate compassionate mercy to these children, who are indeed our children, we are in truth reaching out to God through Jesus Christ, opening our hearts for a spiritual renewal in America.

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<sup>11</sup> John XXIII, "Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*," *Vatican*, April 11, 1963, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html), para. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Ryan, "Aquinas on Compassion: Has He Something to Offer Today?" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2010): 159.

<sup>13</sup> Mk. 9:36–37 (NAB).

One may take issue with the degree of emphasis I have placed on Christian spirituality in regard to this issue. I will therefore demonstrate that compassionate mercy is not only a spiritual responsibility for people of faith, but a human responsibility for all people in our nation, based on natural law and moral duty.

Through natural law, humanity comes to understand with their reason the proper order of moral actions in community with each other. The primary precepts of natural law require us to respect and pursue certain goods and refrain from evil.<sup>14</sup> This idea is simply articulated in the first principle of natural law: good is to be done, and evil is to be avoided. John Finnis identifies seven basic human goods that are to be promoted and protected, one of which is practical reasonableness. This is the ability to apply practical wisdom and reason to one's own choices and actions.<sup>15</sup> Finnis goes on to explain that there are guidelines for applying practical reasonableness. His third guideline states that there should be no arbitrary preference among persons.<sup>16</sup> As we evaluate our own condition as citizens of the United States in terms of basic human goods and the common good of all, we need to engage in an honest self-appraisal. We are blessed with superabundance in our nation. We have good resources of land and climate, a strong education system, and an orderly government. We need to ask ourselves: at what point do we have enough, and at what point do we cross the line from genuine concern for our own well-being to a self-preference at the cost of what could be done for others? When does it become a selfish indifference to the good of others whom we could easily help?<sup>17</sup>

If we again take a look at the provisions in the DREAM Act, we can evaluate it in the light of Finnis's approach to practical reasonableness. One might argue that it is actually arbitrarily preferring undocumented children. In response, it could be said, first, that while the DREAM act prefers these undocumented children to other undocumented immigrants, it is not an *arbitrary* preference. Their undocumented status was not a result of their own freely chosen action. They entered and stayed in the United States throughout childhood because of the choices of their parents. The circumstances of these undocumented children are different from those of other

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<sup>14</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 89.

<sup>15</sup> John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 88.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

undocumented immigrants. Therefore, in response to their circumstances, special legislation such as the DREAM Act is not arbitrary treatment.

Second, I would argue that it *is* arbitrarily preferring our own self-interests *not* to act in compassionate mercy toward these children. We are holding all the power and the resources. They are the ones, through no fault of their own, who are suffering from lack of opportunity and resources; even more, they are threatened with being torn from their families. I would respond with Finnis that this is indeed a “pungent critique of selfishness.”<sup>18</sup>

Putting aside our selfishness, we can rationally say that the situation of these undocumented children meets the Aristotelian cognitive requirements of compassion.<sup>19</sup> First, their suffering is indeed serious and not trivial. No one can argue that the hardship these children have suffered and continue to suffer is trivial. Second, these children in no way deserve their suffering. As has been stated above, their suffering was not a result of their freely chosen action. Third, we can imagine the possibility of such suffering befalling ourselves or our children. And indeed, if we engage our moral imagination, it is likely that we can imagine our ancestors or their children suffering in similar circumstances when they immigrated to the United States.

And what of moral duty? In Kant’s deontological ethics, all rational beings have a duty to follow the moral law. In his first proposition of the categorical imperative, Kant articulates how one can arrive at a universal moral law: “Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time *will* that it should become a universal law.”<sup>20</sup> He goes on to provide illustrations of maxims that fail to meet this criterion, one of which directly relates to the topic of compassion: “I will take nothing from another, but will not contribute to their welfare or assist them in their distress.”<sup>21</sup> Kant goes on to follow the logical conclusion of what would happen if one were to will this to be a universal law. At some point the person willing this maxim would be in need, and following the maxim this person established, no one would come to his or her assistance. It would be a self-destructive maxim to the one willing it as a universal law. But if we applied the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 306.

<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant, “The Moral Law,” in *The Moral Life: An Introductory Reader in Ethics and Literature*, ed. Louis P. Pojman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 311.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 313.

maxim that we will contribute to the welfare of others and come to their assistance in distress, it would be a sustainable universal law, and one that would be a meritorious duty. Therefore, we have a moral duty, a universal obligation, to assist those who are in distress.

In Kant's second proposition of the categorical imperative, he says that we are to "treat humanity, in ourselves and others, as an *end* in themselves, and not *merely* as a means."<sup>22</sup> By this, we approach every human being as an end in themselves because of their very nature as rational and free beings. There is a moral duty not to view others as only instruments by which we achieve our own ends. A concern for the needs of other rational beings must be considered in every human encounter.

Immigration in general has been a political football used by both ends of the political spectrum. Whether conservative or liberal, politicians have used immigrants as a means to pursue their own political ends. No one can judge another's heart, and I'm sure many of these politicians have a genuine concern for all people. But all too often we see immigrants cast in a certain light by politicians to elicit a certain response by their constituencies. They make human beings a political issue. They paint a group of people in one broad stroke. It removes the human reality of each individual in that group of people. Even if the intentions of the politicians are good, the consequence of homogenizing a group of people in the minds of their constituencies can cause them to forget that we are talking about real human individuals, with real families and real needs. So the moral duty as articulated by Kant would require us to consider each human being, in every instance, because of their worth as rational human beings.

So both the natural law and Kant's deontological approach to ethics would require that we consider the human dignity and worth of every human person, whether that person lives on one side of the border or the other, and whether the person is documented or undocumented. If we take that as our rational starting point, especially in response to special cases, our legislation will be more balanced and can incorporate compassionate mercy, as in the DREAM Act. The positive law that we legislate in our country will then be elevated and conform to the moral law, the natural law, and to God's eternal law. If a compassionate approach to undocumented immigrants appeals to both our spiritual and rational capacities as Americans, is there any

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 314.

reason we should not implement compassionate policies now and in the future?

There is indeed at least one serious and credible objection to legislation like the DREAM Act. That objection is that it will erode the rule of law. To many, the DREAM Act would be legislation that disregards currently established laws in our society. And America prides itself on having a system of laws that, while imperfect, have brought about a social order that provides safety and security to its citizens. Laws as such cannot be so easily disregarded. Not only does it violate our sense of legal justice, but also the consequences should be thought through. In the case of any legislation that allows a path to citizenship for those who are in the U.S. illegally, we must consider that such legislation may cause future disregard for the rule of law. The concern is that once policies or legislation are enacted, other immigrants will be encouraged to come to the U.S. in violation of the legal process, and the severity of the situation of undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S. will then increase.

Some see a correlation between so-called “amnesty” policies and the increase in illegal immigration. For example, since 2012, when the Obama Administration enacted the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) policy, apprehensions of unaccompanied children from El Salvador increased 490%, from Guatemala 444%, and from Honduras 610%.<sup>23</sup> Whether causation can be attributed to these numbers is questionable, but a certain level of possible correlation needs to be conceded.

In his book *Immigration and the Next America*, Archbishop Gomez of Los Angeles articulates some of the complex elements of immigration and explains why it isn’t a black-and-white issue of “amnesty” and disregard for the rule of law. He addresses the question that we often fail to ask. Why do people come here illegally in the first place? As has been previously noted, immigration law is based on the INA from 1952. The Archbishop points out that our immigration laws are outdated. For example, due to immigration caps in our current law, every country in the world is allotted the same number of visas without consideration for the size of the country, proximity to the U.S., or economic needs. To go through the current legal process can take ten

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<sup>23</sup> Ian Smith, “Yes, Amnesty Encourages More Illegal Immigration,” *The National Review*, last modified February 26, 2015, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/414436/yes-amnesty-encourages-more-illegal-immigration-ian-smith>.

to twenty years.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the U.S. has not been consistent with its enforcement. So to suddenly punish people for laws that weren't enforced years ago seems inappropriate and inhumane. He proposes that there should be some kind of statute of limitations on those who have been in the U.S. for an extended period of time and have conducted themselves appropriately while here. He also says that while there do need to be consequences for breaking the immigration law, tearing individuals away from their families, or, in the case of many of these children, sending them back to countries they hardly know, seems an excessive form of punishment. Rather, requiring community service and civic education and formation seems a better response that will not only uphold the rule of law, but also will add value to the lives of these individuals and their communities in the U.S.<sup>25</sup>

I would argue that the opposition to laws such as the DREAM Act or comprehensive immigration reform is rooted in a more basic condition of fear. This fear is a fear of the other, a fear that the other may take what is ours, a fear that our own identities and beliefs will be challenged. Listen to or read any conversation opposing immigrant legislation reform, and you will likely hear very little about how *legal* immigration can be made easier. While our history as a nation has been one of ongoing immigration, it has also sadly been one of bigotry towards immigrants of different ethnicities and religions. Herein lies where the key *metanoia* needs to occur. A conversion of heart and mind is called for in how we view the immigrant, the *other*. Martha Nussbaum, in her articulation of Aristotle's cognitive requirements for compassion, emphasizes the need for an awareness of "similar possibilities," that is, an ability to see the suffering and misfortune of *another* as something that we ourselves or our loved ones could suffer.<sup>26</sup> It takes a capacity of moral imagination to achieve this insight. If we take a moment and place ourselves or a loved one in the plight of what immigrants face, we may begin to reevaluate our conduct and policies toward them.

Christ used parables in his time to encourage the imagination needed to convert hearts. When challenged to say who our neighbor is, Jesus illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan something shocking to his listeners. Jesus' audience expected an ordinary Jew, one of their own, to be the one to reach out in compassion to the

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<sup>24</sup> Jose H. Gomez, *Immigration and the Next America: Renewing the Soul of Our Nation* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2013), 106.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>26</sup> *Upheavals of Thought*, 315.

beaten man. But a Samaritan, an alien, despised by the people, was the one who reached out to the suffering man who was beaten down by robbers.<sup>27</sup> The parable had the power to turn the perspective of his audience, to cause them to ask themselves: “What if I were the one suffering? Who would come to my aid? Who would be a neighbor to me?” We could add our own cast of characters to the parable today. Put an undocumented immigrant in the place of the Good Samaritan, and ourselves or a loved one in the role of the man beaten down. We would be the one suffering, and the undocumented immigrant, demonstrating compassion to us, becomes our neighbor, our common humanity being recognized together. This again reminds us of Kant’s first proposition of the categorical imperative and the illustration of coming to the assistance of someone in distress. At some point in our lives *we* may be the one in need.

Genuine compassionate mercy then requires us to see the distress of undocumented immigrants and their children from *their* point of view. This requires the exercise of a moral need to be moved in our hearts and our imagination by what we see, and then we need to take steps to try to remedy their situation.<sup>28</sup> The DREAM Act has the potential to do just that in response to the plight of undocumented children. But Catholics and other people of faith need to lead that way, bringing the stories of real human suffering into public discourse. We need to put a human face on public policies. We need the conversion of compassionate mercy in our own hearts and houses of worship first. We can then by extension reach into and influence the society around us through individual action and advocacy of just policies. But it will take solidarity, solidarity with each other and with those who suffer. Religion is what binds us to ultimate things and connects us to one another, and as Catholics we will imitate our Savior in his capacious outreach toward the marginalized.<sup>29</sup> As citizens of the United States of America, we will again remember that we or our ancestors were once the marginalized in need of someone’s compassionate mercy toward us, that our identity as a nation is one of only a few in human history made up almost entirely of immigrants. Through our awareness of our core values and identity as an immigrant society and nation, we can renew our efforts to enact compassionate policy towards immigrants, especially children. We will then have renewed

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<sup>27</sup> Lk. 10:29–37.

<sup>28</sup> “Aquinas on Compassion,” 162–63.

<sup>29</sup> *Immigration and the Next America*, 109.

our spiritual identity as a nation and demonstrated to the world our moral capacity to do whatever is right and good.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Special thanks to Dr. Trudy Conway for her support on this project, and for her years of service to the Mount St. Mary's.

# From a Broken Heart to Fulfillment: Making a Prudent Decision about the Future Following Infidelity

*Kayli Workman*

Infidelity is the act of betraying a significant other with whom one has an intimate relationship. More specifically, infidelity is “considered the breaking of a contract [vow, or promise] . . . between two people who are dating, married, or otherwise in a committed relationship.”<sup>1</sup> There are three types of infidelity: physical, emotional and a combination of the two. Physical infidelity not only entails intercourse with a third party but also can include “cybersex, viewing pornography . . . kissing, petting, and/or sexual interactions other than intercourse.”<sup>2</sup> Emotional infidelity is “an emotional intimacy and connection shared by two people to the exclusion of one of their partners,” entailing the investment of precious resources such as “romantic love, time, and attention in another person other than the partner.”<sup>3</sup> Whether it is physical infidelity, emotional infidelity or an amalgamation, this active betrayal can be debilitating to both men and women alike, often leaving them with “a landslide of unpleasant emotions, including depression, anger, self-reproach, and jealousy.”<sup>4</sup> The poet Molly Hunter Giles compares infidelity to a “dear old house/ hit by hurricane, / humans left standing/ remembering wreckage.”<sup>5</sup> After the discovery of a significant other’s infidelity, the three main choices open to the betrayed partner are to retaliate, dissolve the relationship, or continue the relationship.

Before delving further into the intricacies of infidelity, we must consider the unfaithful partner’s possible underlying reasons for starting and maintaining an affair. Infidelity impacts “as many as 30%

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Hertlein, Joseph Wetchler, and Fred Piercy, “Infidelity: An Overview,” *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy* 4, no. 2–3 (2005): 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Todd Shackelford, David Buss, and Kevin Bennett, “Forgiveness or Breakup: Sex Differences in Responses to a Partner’s Infidelity,” *Cognition and Emotion* 16, no. 2 (2002): 299.

<sup>5</sup> Molly Hunter Giles, “Infidelity,” *Literary Review* 46, no. 1 (2002): 4–7.

of [both married and] dating couples.”<sup>6</sup> Over 70% of men and over 55% of women have partaken in some type of extradyadic relationship during the course of their lifetime.<sup>7</sup> Considering the high prevalence of infidelity in our society, there must be a pattern of reasons for being unfaithful. In particular, there seems to be a complex and deep-seated network of reasons for an affair to occur, often formed by a mélange of environmental influences and defects of the unfaithful partner.

An individual’s environmental influence may act as a frame of reference, thereby inclining him or her to partake in an affair. These environmental influences include his or her social context, opportunity and proximity, the examples of others, gender, and, most importantly, the deficit(s) in the primary relationship. The social context, opportunity, and proximity can greatly affect the susceptibility to infidelity.<sup>8</sup> Concerning social context, defined as “the aspects of the social system in which [an individual] is embedded,” culture and religion are important factors.<sup>9</sup> Individuals are greatly influenced by their surrounding norms, beliefs, and values. For example, infidelity is significantly more common in African countries than in Asian countries.<sup>10</sup>

Also, individuals’ own beliefs and surrounding religious community can impact their sexual inclinations and behavior. In one study, “religious attendance [was found to be] inversely related to [an individual’s] propensity for engaging in marital infidelity,” thereby suggesting that having a network of people who uphold certain standards and accountability decreases the likelihood of engaging in an affair.<sup>11</sup> People who have more opportunity for interacting with and having closer relationships with potential third-party partners are significantly more inclined to infidelity.<sup>12</sup> In fact, studies have shown that individuals who live in cities, are employed, and travel are more likely to be unfaithful.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Infidelity: An Overview,” 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Christin L. Munsch, “The Science of Two-Timing: The State of Infidelity Research,” *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 1 (2012): 48.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>12</sup> William Barta and Susan Kiene, “Motivations for Infidelity in Heterosexual Dating Couples: The Roles of Gender, Personality Differences, and Sociosexual Orientation,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 22, no. 3 (2005): 342.

<sup>13</sup> “The Science of Two-Timing,” 50.

Individuals, especially men, are often influenced by the examples of others who engage in adulterous relationships.<sup>14</sup> In particular, celebrities, friends, and family shape their attitude toward infidelity. In our present day and age, we greatly look up to celebrities and their lavish lifestyles. In so doing, when we hear about “the indiscretions of high profile celebrities, sports figures, and politicians regularly making front page news,” we begin to believe that infidelity is acceptable.<sup>15</sup>

Although public figures have an influence, our peers’ ideas and behaviors concerning infidelity are more important. One study found that individuals were more inclined to engage in infidelity if they knew peers who had done so or if they thought their peers would take advantage of an opportunity to have an affair.<sup>16</sup> The outlook, behavior, attitudes toward, and prevalence of infidelity in an individual’s family can have a strong impact on his or her own outlook, behavior, and attitudes toward infidelity, allowing the unfaithful partner to learn and develop certain “coping mechanisms, insecurities, [and] cognitive distortions [that may have] factored in to him or her engaging in such hurtful behaviors.”<sup>17</sup> For example, “some couples have patterns of infidelity existing within several generations of their family,” further encouraging them to believe that infidelity is normal and acceptable.<sup>18</sup> Studies have consistently shown that, in families that have had parental divorce, past divorce, or remarriage, members are much more likely to be unfaithful.<sup>19</sup>

Gender also plays a significant role in an individual’s inclination to engage in an affair. From an evolutionary standpoint, “men and women face different adaptive pressures stemming from reproductive differences.”<sup>20</sup> In particular, a male’s evolutionary goal is to inseminate as many females as possible to ensure the continuation of his genetic line. A female, on the other hand, must sustain a child for at least nine months and then take care of the child for several years, making it more advantageous for her to “mate long-term with someone who [is] able to provide the resources necessary for survival.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Levine, “A Clinical Perspective on Infidelity,” *Sexual & Relationship Therapy* 20, no. 2 (2005): 144.

<sup>15</sup> “The Science of Two-Timing,” 46.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Case, “Healing the Wounds of Infidelity Through the Healing Power of Apology and Forgiveness,” *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy* 2, no. 2–3 (2005): 48.

<sup>18</sup> “Infidelity: An Overview,” 13.

<sup>19</sup> “The Science of Two-Timing,” 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Consequently, studies have repeatedly shown that men are more likely to engage in affairs, engage in them earlier, and have more third-party partners than women. Women are “more likely to engage in [adulterous] emotional involvement without sexual intercourse and to be more emotionally involved than men in their secondary relationships.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, men are more likely to be driven to be unfaithful because of purely individualistic, sexual factors “such as liberal sexual permissiveness attitudes, desire for exciting sex, and social context variables such as opportunity,”<sup>23</sup> whereas women are more likely to be driven by emotional needs, such as a quest to find love due to dissatisfaction in the primary relationship.<sup>24</sup>

The key environmental influence, however, is the quality of the primary relationship. Individuals are often motivated to be unfaithful, because their “thinking may focus on sexual or interpersonal marital frustration and the hope about its relief with another person.”<sup>25</sup> Marital frustration can stem from a variety of factors, such as a perceived unattractive spouse; a cold partner; continuous and seemingly hopeless quarrels; a lack of intellectual stimulation, respect, recognition, or attention; hostility; a partner’s previous infidelity; unsatisfying marital sex; boredom, or an overall low marital satisfaction.<sup>26</sup>

Relational boredom is a significant motivator for infidelity. In a long-standing primary relationship, partners often become bored. Over the years, they may acquire a desire to “create a tantalizing, promising, and exciting uncertainty” in their life.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that an individual with the drive to have this kind of uncertainty in his or her life may not necessarily intend to have an affair. Nonetheless, an affair stemming from boredom usually begins with flirting, often “involving prolonged eye contact, apparent interest or enjoyment in the person’s conversation, standing or sitting close to the person, and a slight excess of innocuous touching,” which can escalate to full-fledged infidelity.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Shirley Glass and Thomas Wright, “Justification for Extramarital Relationships: The Association Between Attitudes, Behavior, and Gender,” *Journal of Sex Research* 29, no. 3 (1992): 366.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>24</sup> “Motivations for Infidelity,” 355.

<sup>25</sup> “A Clinical Perspective,” 144.

<sup>26</sup> “Motivations for Infidelity,” 355; “The Science of Two-Timing,” 51; “A Clinical Perspective,” 146; “Justifications for Extramarital Relationships,” 365.

<sup>27</sup> “A Clinical Perspective,” 146.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Low satisfaction or a lack of fulfillment in a primary relationship is the most significant environmental influence concerning infidelity. Barta and Kiene describe this dissatisfaction as a “disillusion with [an individual’s] primary, intimate partner as well as positive valuations of an alternative partner.”<sup>29</sup> According to Gary Lewandowski and Robert Ackerman, satisfaction and fulfillment in a primary relationship are mainly maintained by five needs: sex, intimacy, companionship, security, and emotional involvement.<sup>30</sup> In one study, it was found that if any of these five needs were depleting or causing dissatisfaction, “individuals were more likely to engage in extradyadic relationships.”<sup>31</sup>

If the sex in a primary relationship is not fulfilling, the partners may be susceptible to infidelity. For example, if a husband is handicapped and unable to have intercourse, the wife’s increasing sexual frustration may lead to her having an affair. If an individual cannot find “self-disclosure and [trust] in the partner regarding secrets and personal feelings, joint activities with the partner such as spending time together and having fun together that result in a greater sense of closeness, predictability, and contentment [in the relationship] or a sense of emotional connection with the partner, he or she may be experiencing a lack of fulfillment in his or her needs for intimacy, companionship, security, and emotional involvement respectively.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, an individual’s dissatisfaction in a primary relationship concerning sex, intimacy, companionship, security, or emotional involvement is a frequent and significant underlying reason for being unfaithful to a partner.

Although it is quite common for the faithful partner to completely blame himself or herself for the affair, according to Stephen Levine, “affairs convey, erroneously, personal failure.”<sup>33</sup> Admittedly, the faithful partner most certainly can play a role in influencing the unfaithful partner to start and maintain the affair. However, he or she cannot ultimately be the primary reason for the unfaithful partner’s extradyadic relationship. The unfaithful partner, a volitional being who wills and deliberates, bears ultimate responsibility for the affair, and it can be reasonably presumed that such a person has a moral failing.

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<sup>29</sup> “Motivations for Infidelity,” 355.

<sup>30</sup> Gary Lewandowski and Robert Ackerman, “Something’s Missing: Need Fulfillment and Self-Expansion as Predictors of Susceptibility to Infidelity,” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 146, no. 4 (2006): 391.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>33</sup> “A Clinical Perspective,” 147.

Further, the moral inadequacy or wickedness residing in the unfaithful partner that encourages him or her to start and to maintain an affair can be rooted in one of three character types: psychopathy, malignity, or incontinence. Psychopathy is the most chilling of the three types of wickedness leading to an affair. A psychopath is a “moral imbecile,” incapable of moral understanding.<sup>34</sup> He or she lacks empathy and sensitivity to moral suffering. In one study, “psychopathic individuals, characterized by callous, manipulative, and egocentric behavior, reported a greater number of affairs.”<sup>35</sup> Psychopaths are likely to be motivated to engage in adulterous affairs, operating “from self-love” with no regard for the moral implications of their actions.<sup>36</sup> Unlike psychopaths, those possessing malevolent wickedness have a moral awareness but do evil for the sake of itself. When these individuals commit adultery, they are promoting evil and “rejoicing in the suffering” it causes.<sup>37</sup>

However, it should be noted that psychopaths and notably malevolent individuals are only a small percentage of the overall number of unfaithful partners. The overwhelming majority of the unfaithful engage in adultery due to their incontinence. Aristotle believes that an incontinent individual has a moral awareness and is able to reason, but has an internal struggle between his or her reason and appetites: “The incontinent person knows that his [or her] actions are base, but does them because of his [or her] feelings.”<sup>38</sup> Concerning infidelity, unfaithful persons essentially think the infidelity is wrong, but they do not have a sufficient control over their appetites. According to Justin Matchulat, they “can neglect to direct [their] attention and consequently have it pulled towards considerations simply by what occurs to [them], or by [their] present desires, sources which may not lead to a human being’s true good.”<sup>39</sup> Further, they may consider committing adultery as forbidden “without adopting or using this evaluative aspect in . . . forming [their] practical verdict about what to do.”<sup>40</sup> As a result, they do whatever it is they want to do, namely, partaking in an affair. For example, in one study,

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<sup>34</sup> Stanley Benn, “Wickedness,” *The Moral Life*, ed. Louis P. Pojman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 114.

<sup>35</sup> “The Science of Two-Timing,” 54.

<sup>36</sup> “Wickedness,” 113.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Newbury: Focus Publisher, 2002), 1145b13–14.

<sup>39</sup> Justin Matchulat, *Practical Cognition and Moral Motivation in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (dissertation, Purdue University, 2014), 17.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

“although 75 to 90% of those surveyed reported disapproving attitudes toward [adulterous] relationships, the actual incidence of [infidelity] ranges from 30% to 60% of the men, and from 20% to 50% of the women.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, regardless of the fact that most people fundamentally understand that infidelity is morally wrong, many still partake in adulterous affairs.

From an Aristotelian point of view, the unfaithful partner pursues certain pleasures that are not necessarily bad in themselves, but he or she does so regarding the wrong person, in the wrong way, to the wrong extent, at the wrong time, and for the wrong reason.<sup>42</sup> The motivating pleasures for infidelity are sexual appetite, emotional intimacy, love, and extrinsic goods. Sexual appetite can lead to a desire for novelty and for variety, an unrelenting curiosity, a deep frustration or deprivation due to an unfulfilling primary relationship and perhaps unsatisfying sex, and a need for enjoyment or excitement.<sup>43</sup>

Infidelity may also be seen as “an emotional solution to an emotional problem.”<sup>44</sup> Those engaging in infidelity for emotional fulfillment are often searching for things Aristotle would also judge as good, but such persons fulfill these desires at the wrong time, in the wrong way, with the wrong person, and for the wrong reason.<sup>45</sup> Persons engaging in affairs may seek goods “such as intellectual sharing, companionship, understanding, respect, and enhancing self-esteem.”<sup>46</sup> Romantic love, as a motivating reason for an affair, includes “getting love and affection and falling in love.”<sup>47</sup> Lastly, perceived extrinsic goods are often an underlying reason for infidelity, including using adulterous sex to advance in a career or to exact just retribution on a primary partner or possibly someone else for perceived undeserved wrongs.

In addition to the excessive pursuit of certain pleasures, these incontinent individuals may have settled, dispositional vices or certain psychiatric conditions that incline them to commit adultery. Narcissism, diffidence, neuroticism, coldness, and careless indifference are among the many such deeply engrained conditions. A psychiatric condition may distort an individual’s judgment and make such a person liable to pursuing certain other problematic social

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<sup>41</sup> “Justifications for Extramarital Relationships,” 367.

<sup>42</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109a25–32.

<sup>43</sup> “Justifications for Extramarital Relationships,” 365.

<sup>44</sup> “Infidelity: An Overview,” 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109a25–30.

<sup>46</sup> “Justifications for Extramarital Relationships,” 376.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

situations. These include “addictions, hypomania-mania, major depressive disorder, paraphilia, hidden homosexuality, prolonged separation, personality disorders of sociopathic and narcissistic types, and traumatic childhood experiences.”<sup>48</sup> For example, in one study, it was found that “the proportion of married men who reported an affair in the previous year was significantly higher among alcoholic men than in the matched sample [of non-alcoholic men].”<sup>49</sup>

After contemplating the underlying reasons for the unfaithful partner’s infidelity, we must consider whether infidelity is morally wrong. Such persons may try to justify their actions, using many of the underlying reasons mentioned above as arguments: “I was curious,” “I thought I was in love,” “I did not think it had anything to do with my marriage,” “I was feeling so lonely,” “I needed it,” or “All my friends were doing it, and it seemed okay.”<sup>50</sup> However, regardless of any attempts at justification, infidelity is wrong in *every* circumstance, because the unfaithful partner could not rationally will that his or her “action [of infidelity] were to become . . . a universal law of nature.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, he or she could not possibly will that all rational beings would necessarily be unfaithful to their partners, because this would entail his or her own partner being unfaithful to him or her, an act which no rational being would will. Commonly, unfaithful partners would morally object to their partners being unfaithful. In a contradicting manner, they seek to be the exception to the moral law they affirm and expect others to uphold.

As Aristotle contends, there are some actions that are intrinsically wrong in themselves and do not have a mean.<sup>52</sup> One of these actions is adultery, for “doing . . . [such an action] can never be correct.”<sup>53</sup> It is impossible to commit adultery “with the right woman [or man], at the right time, and in the right way.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, an individual can never be justified in committing adultery, because, as Kantians would stress, he or she could not will infidelity to become a moral law, binding on all rational beings, revealing that it can never be morally correct to do this type of action. Along Aristotelian lines of reasoning,

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<sup>48</sup> “A Clinical Perspective,” 150.

<sup>49</sup> “The Science of Two-Timing,” 54.

<sup>50</sup> “Justifications for Extramarital Relationships,” 382.

<sup>51</sup> Immanuel Kant, “The Moral Law,” *The Moral Life*, ed. Louis P. Pojman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 311.

<sup>52</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a10–18.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 1107a15.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1107a17.

an individual could not will persons to do acts such as infidelity that are destructive of the goods central to a committed relationship.

One might counter the argument that infidelity is never justifiable by discussing consensual, open relationships or mentioning that persons develop different values over time. Some couples “may not find extradyadic sexual relationships to be problematic, and, in some cases, find them to be enhancing of their primary relationship.”<sup>55</sup> These couples would argue that if the partners in a primary relationship are completely honest about their extradyadic relationships and if they are both willing to engage in extradyadic sexual relationships, then their primary relationship can experience “fulfillment of their personal needs, increased sexual satisfaction within their marriage, increased communication with their spouse, and lessened jealousy and possessiveness.”<sup>56</sup>

Applying their reasoning, mutually consensual infidelity might seem permissible in their case. However, open relationships do not fit the definition of infidelity specific to this study—i.e. the breaking of a contract, vow, or promise between two partners in a committed relationship—because, in their specific contract, according to them, as long as the partners are open and honest, extradyadic relationships are acceptable and do not violate any mutually accepted agreements.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, they are not committing infidelity in their own specific case, for they are not breaking their agreement, which includes promises and marital vows. This is not to deny that there may be other morally problematic dimensions of such relationships.

Others may counter that infidelity may be justified, because over the course of a lifetime, an individual’s political views, religious beliefs, moral beliefs, and professional outlooks may evolve.<sup>58</sup> With that said, if an individual’s sexual inclinations change and develop in such a way that infidelity becomes a viable option, is it still unjustifiable? I would state that the person must reevaluate the original agreement made with his or her partner. If the particular case of infidelity seen as a viable option violates the agreement, then it is not justifiable. For example, if one has taken a vow to be faithful, this is either a false or violated vow. In addition, if the other partner is not open to extradyadic partners, then he or she is certainly still obligated to follow the agreement. Infidelity does not become permissible simply because an

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<sup>55</sup> “Infidelity: An Overview,” 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> “A Clinical Perspective,” 146.

individual's sexual ideas and views change. However, if both of the partners are open to extradyadic relationships, then they may create a new agreement, allowing extradyadic encounters. In this case, these partners now consider themselves to be in an open relationship, and therefore they no longer fit the stated definition of infidelity. Again, it is recognized that further ethical analysis is required in order to decide whether or not such consensual, open relationships are morally permissible. However, this question is beyond the scope of this particular study.

Now that we understand that infidelity is never morally permissible, we must consider the action we should take in response to it. There are three options: to retaliate, to end the relationship, or to continue the relationship. These options may overlap in certain situations. For example, the faithful partner might end the relationship but try to exact revenge, or he or she might end the relationship but restart the relationship at a later time. For the purposes of this paper, however, we are only discussing these choices of action as separate decisions.

Unfortunately, consistent with many things in life, there is no easy answer as to which action—to retaliate, to dissolve the relationship, or to continue the relationship—is the best option. However, prudence, the ability to “deliberate finely about things that are good and beneficial for [oneself],” is of the utmost importance in finding the most virtuous action for an individual's particular situation concerning infidelity.<sup>59</sup> To decide on the best action, it is essential to think clearly while paying close attention to the details of the relationship and of the affair and their effects, including “the turbulent emotional experiences of the [faithful partner] and [unfaithful partner].”<sup>60</sup> More specifically, before making a prudent decision on the future of the relationship, an individual must identify, understand, and rationally assess the underlying reasons regarding the infidelity and the feelings and states of both partners subsequent to the affair.

As stated earlier, there are countless reasons for an individual to engage in such an affair. In some circumstances, the person may enter an affair because of entirely individualistic reasons such as a desire for sex and excitement. However, it is likely that there were problems in the primary relationship prior to the affair (whether or not they are consciously known by the partner) which served as an impetus for the

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<sup>59</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a26-27.

<sup>60</sup> “A Clinical Perspective,” 143.

affair. These problems may often be rooted in the faithful partner's behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, or outlooks, although this is not always the case.

In cases in which interpersonal problems existed prior to the affair, it is essential to find the root of the pre-existing problem and to address it. This requires an open heart and an open mind, through which the faithful partner must be ready to deal with possible internal problems and behaviors that have encouraged his or her partner to be unfaithful. In so doing, the faithful partner is on his or her way to eventually reaching the peace of mind that will allow him or her to make a prudent decision.

Next, we must consider the impact that the infidelity has had and continues to have on the feelings of the faithful partner and the unfaithful partner. Once the faithful partner becomes aware of the infidelity, a storm of emotions usually hits him or her. He or she may be saying to himself or herself, "I cannot believe I did not see this [coming] . . . how did I let this happen?"<sup>61</sup> The faithful partner's feelings might include "waves of various combinations of sadness, anger, anxiety, shame and vengeance."<sup>62</sup> In addition, he or she may experience a sense of betrayal and abandonment, intense anxiety, feelings of loss and shame, a loss of purpose, specialness, identity, and trust toward the unfaithful partner, everything, and everyone.<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, the unfaithful partner may be at one extreme, experiencing no distressing emotions or guilt, in which case it may be prudent for the faithful partner to terminate or separate himself or herself from the relationship immediately. However, most likely, the unfaithful partner will be experiencing guilt, loss of self-esteem, and a need to protect his or her partner's feelings from the pain caused by the affair, in which case more consideration and careful study of the infidelity's intricate details are needed.<sup>64</sup> In addition, infidelity "can unleash a firestorm of judgment against the [unfaithful partner]. . . . [Friends] may express disappointment and disapproval, subtly ostracizing [him or her]."<sup>65</sup> Life for the unfaithful partner may seem hopeless, considering that he or she may not only be dealing "with the

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<sup>61</sup> "Healing the Wounds," 42.

<sup>62</sup> "A Clinical Perspective," 147.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*; see also "Infidelity: An Overview," 7; "Healing the Wounds," 43.

<sup>64</sup> "Infidelity: An Overview," 8.

<sup>65</sup> "A Clinical Perspective," 143.

damage to his [or] her primary relationship, but is also going through a grieving process as the affair has come, or is coming, to an end.”<sup>66</sup>

With that said, both parties may feel tense and physically drained due to the stress and frustration cause by the infidelity.<sup>67</sup> At this point, it might seem easier for both of them to give up, but it seems more reasonable for both parties, especially the faithful partner, to summon the courage to press on in order to make a prudent decision. Further, even though the trust in the relationship has been temporarily shattered, the two partners should communicate, both expressing and addressing their feelings, so as, over time, to allow “the healing of existing wounds, the prevention of future wounds, and, [if it is indeed a prudent decision,] the restoration of trust and vitality to the relationship.”<sup>68</sup> Note that this must always be done in non-hurtful ways. For example, the faithful partner should “express anger and other intense emotions to his [or] her partner assertively, rather than through verbal or physical aggression.”<sup>69</sup>

When evaluating whether it would be prudent to continue the relationship, an important factor is whether or not the unfaithful partner is receptive to the faithful partner’s feelings. The unfaithful partner must not only be able to communicate with the faithful partner but must also listen to what he or she has to say. It would not be prudent for the faithful partner to use this situation as a chance to gain power in the relationship by constantly expressing his or her negative feelings in a way that tears down the unfaithful partner, because this would only exacerbate existing problems and create additional problems in the relationship.<sup>70</sup>

If the faithful partner is even slightly considering continuing the relationship, he or she must allow the unfaithful partner to express what he or she is going through so as to bring forth a fuller understanding of the situation at hand. This may be especially painful to hear and may incite the faithful partner’s anger. However, the grief of the unfaithful partner “cannot and should not be denied.”<sup>71</sup>

After taking the time to contemplate, understand, and rationally consider the underlying reasons for the affair and the feelings of both parties, we must consider the state of the faithful partner. If the

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<sup>66</sup> “Healing the Wounds,” 42–43.

<sup>67</sup> “Infidelity: An Overview,” 8; A Clinical Perspective,” 143.

<sup>68</sup> “Healing the Wounds,” 43.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> “Infidelity: An Overview,” 7.

<sup>71</sup> “A Clinical Perspective,” 148.

faithful partner wishes to make a prudent decision, the necessary state is clarity, which requires a peace of mind. Note that this is no easy task and may take a long time to achieve. Regardless of the degree and the underlying reasons for the infidelity and the feelings of both partners, in order to achieve a peaceful state of mind allowing wise discernment, the faithful partner must be willing to address the possible problems in the relationship prior to the affair that may primarily or partially be due to his or her own failings to communicate, to listen to, and to address the feelings of the unfaithful partner, and, most importantly, to consider the possibility of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a complex and multi-faceted process that “has typically been regarded as a personal response to having been injured or wronged.”<sup>72</sup> In this paper, forgiveness is defined from a virtue-based perspective. Forgiveness is not merely forgetting wrong things that have been done to us, but is, instead, an active process in which we relinquish resentment or some other negative emotion because of a moral reason.

Jeffrie Murphy defines forgiveness as “the principled overcoming of feelings of resentment that are naturally, and perhaps properly, directed toward a person who has [inflicted] a moral injury [on oneself].”<sup>73</sup> In order to overcome any negative emotions, attitudes, or behaviors toward the unfaithful partner and therefore to forgive, the faithful partner must “be grounded in or expressive of relatively stable and durable dispositions or character traits.” In other words, the aggrieved partner must know what he or she is doing (i.e., relinquishing any negative emotions and forgiving); he or she must decide actively on doing it, and he or she must do these things from an unchanging state.<sup>74</sup>

According to Glen Pettigrove, the process of forgiveness includes three dimensions: forgiveness “disclose[s] an emotional condition, declare[s] a changed state (such as a debt being cancelled), and [entails a commitment] to a future course of action.”<sup>75</sup> The emotional condition might include an elimination of or decrease in anger and bitterness and the presence of some change of heart.<sup>76</sup> In this step, the faithful partner “works through the hurt, pain, anger and

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Hughes, “Forgiveness,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: The Metaphysics Research Lab, 2012), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/forgiveness/>.

<sup>73</sup> Jeffrie Murphy, “Forgiveness,” *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker (New York: Routledge, 2001): 561–62, quoted in “Forgiveness.”

<sup>74</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105a29–35.

<sup>75</sup> Glen Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

resentment to the point where these emotions have dissipated significantly.”<sup>77</sup>

Often the changed state entails something analogous to a debt being cancelled. The cancellation of the unfaithful partner’s debt is a pardon, referring to the absolving of his or her continued indebtedness for his or her wrongdoing. In this step, it should be noted that forgiveness is not condoning or excusing the infidelity. Instead, forgiveness includes recognizing and acknowledging the wrongdoing, requiring “a moral reassessment of the wrongdoer by the [faithful partner].”<sup>78</sup> The faithful partner is not denying “the seriousness of the wrong, the moral standing of the wrongdoer or his or her own moral standing . . . . To forgive, [the faithful partner] must affirm the seriousness of the wrong and the importance of both himself or herself and the wrongdoer.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, in order to make a prudent decision regarding whether to retaliate, end the relationship, or continue the relationship, the faithful partner must consider the underlying reasons for the affair, and the emotions and states of both himself or herself and the unfaithful partner.

In the last step, a commitment to future action is a promise not to retaliate or react contentiously.<sup>80</sup> Concerning infidelity, the faithful partner is choosing “not to actively hurt the other person back, to demand or suggest that somebody else hurt him [or] her, or to hope or perhaps even pray that the person suffers somehow.”<sup>81</sup> In fact, he or she might even be able to wish the other person well. This is the “forgiveness, for which we all hope,” a nurturing forgiveness that includes all three of these dimensions, a true gift to the unfaithful partner.<sup>82</sup>

In order to make a prudent decision concerning the future of the relationship, the faithful partner must achieve personal clarity or peace of mind. The most important ingredient to obtaining peace of mind is forgiveness. Therefore, for the benefit of himself or herself and of the relationship, the faithful partner should, if possible, eventually forgive the unfaithful partner in cases of infidelity. For as Jesus once said, after he was asked by Peter how often he should forgive his brother, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven,”

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<sup>77</sup> “Healing the Wounds,” 43.

<sup>78</sup> “Forgiveness.”

<sup>79</sup> Pamela Hieronymi, “Forgiveness,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Donald M. Borchert (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006), 3: 697.

<sup>80</sup> *Forgiveness and Love*, 13.

<sup>81</sup> “Healing the Wounds,” 43.

<sup>82</sup> *Forgiveness and Love*, 17.

meaning that we must always forgive, even in the heartbreaking case of an infidelity.<sup>83</sup>

Forgiveness is beneficial to *both* parties. Those who forgive are able to relinquish once festering negative emotions that could have damaged them psychologically or physically.<sup>84</sup> In addition, when the faithful partner graciously forgives the unfaithful partner, he or she has “released [the unfaithful partner] from the blame and hard feelings often directed toward [him or her] by those [he or she] wronged, and has helped [the unfaithful partner] transcend the guilt or remorse [he or she] suffers from having done wrong, thereby allowing [him or her] to move forward in [his or her] life.”<sup>85</sup> Regardless of the benefits, it is essential that the faithful partner be eventually able to forgive the unfaithful partner, so that he or she can begin to heal in response to the harms done.

Stating that the faithful partner must always forgive the unfaithful partner is a radical claim, because the unfaithful partner may have committed some terrible, deeply harming offenses. One might counter this claim by underscoring that the faithful partner should only forgive the unfaithful partner if he or she feels remorse and is in the process of rectifying the wrong done. More particularly, according to therapist Stephen Levine, the faithful partner should forgive only when the unfaithful partner has demonstrated that he or she has “personal clarity about wrongfulness of the behavior, accurate knowledge of the specific consequences for the partner, and persistent pervasive remorse.”<sup>86</sup> In other words, the faithful partner should only forgive the unfaithful partner if the unfaithful and apologetic (or remorseful) partner is working toward continuing the relationship and taking the right steps toward rebuilding the primary relationship.

Although these three factors of the unfaithful partner are promising signs for which the faithful partner should be looking when prudently deciding about whether to stay in the relationship, they in themselves do not constitute forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift that should be given from the goodness of the heart, regardless of how the unfaithful partner is responding to the affair. As Case contends, “choosing forgiveness initially is not necessarily a commitment to stay in the relationship no matter what, but is instead a decision to give

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<sup>83</sup> Mt. 18:22, *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*.

<sup>84</sup> Hughes, “Forgiveness.”

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> “A Clinical Perspective,” 149.

healing a chance.”<sup>87</sup> This healing is absolutely necessary in order to achieve the peace of mind that will allow the faithful partner to make a prudent judgment regarding his or her continuance in the relationship. Further, although one might argue that forgiveness is not necessary to discontinue the relationship, I would counter that, after the affair, forgiveness is necessary in order to further one’s human function, that is, to achieve human happiness by flourishing in a life in accordance with reason.<sup>88</sup> With or without the relationship, after the affair, the faithful partner cannot become truly happy again unless he or she forgives.

Because I am indirectly arguing that, in the case of infidelity, forgiveness is always a good, one might counter that forgiving the unfaithful partner in some cases may encourage him or her to create a vicious cycle in which he or she continues to have affairs with the expectation that he or she will always be forgiven. The unfaithful partner may “feign apology and repentance, thereby fraudulently securing forgiveness from the [faithful partner],” making forgiveness in this case detrimental and morally wrong.<sup>89</sup> However, I would counter that forgiveness is always justified, because as mentioned before, it is needed in order to achieve *eudaimonia* or human flourishing.

The word “forgiveness” is being misused in the context of the vicious cycle. In such a case, the faithful partner is not truly forgiving the unfaithful partner. Instead, he or she is condoning the constant, unjustified infidelity by deliberating poorly to stay in such a problematic relationship, which is morally wrong. He or she is not exercising reason well to deliberate prudently. Forgiveness, when the term is used properly, is a process that stands independent of the future of the relationship. Forgiveness itself may, but does not necessarily, require or entail reconciliation and the continuance in the relationship.

Now that we have talked about forgiveness, we can reevaluate our first option for responding to the affair—retaliation. When the unfaithful partner engages in an affair, the faithful partner may suffer unbearably. His or her gut reaction may be to exact revenge in order to “reassert [himself or herself], to attempt to get relief from the hurt and humiliation of being wronged.”<sup>90</sup> Revenge, or retaliation, is a

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<sup>87</sup> “Healing the Wounds,” 45.

<sup>88</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a8-10.

<sup>89</sup> Hughes, “Forgiveness.”

<sup>90</sup> Trudy Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.

method of exacting a similar or perhaps a greater suffering on the unfaithful partner so that the faithful partner can feel vindicated and satisfied. He or she might exact revenge by staying in the relationship only to have an affair, by using violence, by damaging the unfaithful partner's property, or even by murdering the unfaithful partner.

By following our requirement that forgiveness is necessary in order to make a prudent decision concerning the future of the relationship, retaliation does not set up the conditions for a prudent choice of action. Forgiveness includes that the faithful partner lessens or eliminates his or her resentment, pardons the unfaithful partner, and promises to not retaliate. Thus, forgiveness necessarily excludes vengeful retaliation. Consequently, because forgiveness is always morally justifiable to bring about personal clarity and to promote human flourishing, retaliation is never morally justifiable.

Revenge is not even worth its trouble or time. Retaliation does not end up "soothing the wounds of insult and bringing a sense of satisfaction and contentment."<sup>91</sup> If the revenge does bring the faithful partner some sort of satisfaction, it is often "short-lived, achieved at a high cost, [and] it does not bring the anticipated joy."<sup>92</sup> Revenge is ultimately harmful to the faithful partner and is also never morally justifiable, thereby making it an imprudent decision.

Now that we have eliminated the option of retaliation, the faithful partner should consider the state of the unfaithful partner in order to ultimately make a prudent decision regarding "whether [he or she should] move forward with the relationship or individually."<sup>93</sup> The state of the unfaithful partner is undoubtedly the most crucial element of this important decision. Even if the faithful partner desires to stay in the relationship, if the unfaithful partner has absolutely no desire to maintain the relationship, then the most prudent decision is to leave the relationship. Beyond this, if the unfaithful partner wishes to stay in the relationship, the most important factor in deciding on either ending or continuing the relationship is whether or not the unfaithful partner is committed to reconciling and actively implementing reconciliation.

Reconciliation is the state shaped by the underlying reasons and the feelings of both parties. It can be broken into two complex stages that may occur simultaneously or subsequently: the stage of being willing to reconcile and the stage of heartily reconciling. In the stage

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> "Infidelity: An Overview," 6.

of being willing to reconcile following an affair, we must examine the underlying reasons for the affair and the feelings and responses of both parties caused by the affair.

Was the affair purely for individualistic reasons and not influenced by problems in the primary relationship prior to it? If the answer is yes, the faithful partner must consider whether the unfaithful partner acknowledges what he or she did was wrong and whether the unfaithful partner is experiencing guilt or any negative emotions as a result of the affair, an initial step towards reconciliation.<sup>94</sup> If the unfaithful partner does not acknowledge what he or she did as wrong and therefore does not experience guilt or negative emotions whatsoever, then the most prudent decision is certainly to terminate the relationship. However, if the unfaithful partner recognizes and addresses what he or she did as morally wrong and shows signs of remorse and related emotions, then the faithful partner must consider additional factors as well in order to make a prudent decision.

If the affair was influenced by problems in the primary relationship prior to the affair, are both parties willing to acknowledge them? If the unfaithful partner is not willing to address these issues, then maintaining the relationship is ultimately a barrier to the faithful partner's achievement of well-being as well as to the unfaithful partner's well-being, and therefore, ending the relationship would be justifiable. On the other hand, if the faithful partner is not willing to address these issues, then he or she has reached an impasse. In order to make a prudent decision, he or she must have achieved peace of mind, and therefore must be willing to address these issues. In other words, the faithful partner must be willing to "make an honest acknowledgement of his [or] her own weaknesses and need for forgiveness" for any contributing role played.<sup>95</sup> For example, one aggrieved wife was able to acknowledge that "although she could never see herself cheating, she had created considerable damage over the course of the relationship through abusive name-calling, being active in her eating disorder, and being shut down sexually."<sup>96</sup>

Assuming that the faithful partner is willing to consider the broader context of the infidelity, if the unfaithful partner is willing to address these issues, this means that the unfaithful partner is "looking beyond the obvious and determining both the methods and motives

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<sup>94</sup> "Healing the Wounds," 50.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

within the affair.”<sup>97</sup> In addition, this means that he or she is willing to communicate with the faithful partner in order to learn and understand the impact of his or her actions. If the unfaithful partner is doing all of these things, both parties are gaining “insights [that] translate into greater degrees of remorse and expressions of understanding and empathy, [making] the healing much more likely to occur.”<sup>98</sup> These are good signs that the prudent decision may, in fact, be to continue the relationship, considering that the two parties are in “an environment of safety and hope, dealing with the anger and the hurt caused by the infidelity in a productive manner.”<sup>99</sup>

Next, in the second stage of reconciliation, the faithful partner must consider whether the unfaithful partner is actively and heartily seeking reconciliation. The faithful partner must consider if the unfaithful partner is trying to rebuild trust by “reestablishing a sense of fairness and balance within the relationship.”<sup>100</sup> Has the unfaithful partner created a plan so as not to relapse or further damage the already compromised relationship? The unfaithful partner may implement his or her plan by manipulating the environment in order to reduce the temptation to relapse. For example, if a husband was previously drawn to pornography, he might “move the computer to another room, use a program to restrict visits to specific sites, or limit time on the computer.”<sup>101</sup> Having a comprehensive and well-thought out plan translates into a greater probability and a “greater success he or she will have in not repeating hurtful behaviors and thus in restoring relational trust.”<sup>102</sup>

The most important question is, in addition to having a plan, is the unfaithful partner carrying it out? Everyone has heard the phrases, “I have to see it to believe it” and “Actions speak louder than words.” In a similar manner, the unfaithful partner may seem willing to reconcile by addressing the underlying reasons and the resulting feelings of both parties, but what is unquestionably crucial is whether the person continues to act on the intention to reconcile over time.

Further, if the unfaithful partner is full-heartedly reconciling as “the forgiveness work of the betrayed partner is unfolding,” then it becomes morally justifiable that staying in the relationship is a prudent

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 50–51.

<sup>99</sup> “Infidelity: An Overview,” 14.

<sup>100</sup> “Healing the Wounds,” 51.

<sup>101</sup> “Infidelity: An Overview,” 12.

<sup>102</sup> “Healing the Wounds,” 52.

decision.<sup>103</sup> Deciding to stay in the relationship based on the faithful partner's utilization of practical reason is a dynamic process that requires both parties to participate actively. If the faithful partner has achieved personal clarity and the unfaithful partner is willing to participate actively in the process of reconciliation, then it would be a prudent decision to stay in the relationship.

One might counter that even if all these traits and conditions are present, termination of the relationship is still a justifiable course of action after a case of infidelity. This is reasonable on the grounds that engaging in unfaithful relationships is the breaking of two partners' trust and commitment as evidenced in a contract, vow, or promise, so that the faithful partner is no longer bound to the unfaithful partner. Further, in several situations, if the unfaithful partner does not feel guilt, remorse, or a desire to continue the relationship or to work toward reconciliation, non-continuance of the relationship in some form (in cases of marriage, separation or divorce depending on related, central beliefs) would be the most prudent decision. For example, "if either partner has long been deeply unhappy with the unacceptable permanent limitations of the spouse as a life partner," then divorce or otherwise ending of or separating from the primary relationship would be justifiable.<sup>104</sup>

However, the main purpose of this paper is to reveal what factors might constitute a prudent decision to stay in the relationship after an affair. Both parties should be encouraged to consider the underlying reasons for the affair and the feelings and the states of both parties before prematurely assuming that termination of the relationship is the best option (for example, in the case of a marital relationship, whether divorce or permanent separation is an option). The faithful partner must realize that fleeing from his or her problems by divorcing or permanently separating from the unfaithful partner does not necessarily equate to completely distancing oneself from the infidelity. Both parties should consider that divorce or separation might completely reorient their lives, creating a "new developmental trajectory, filled with uncertainties that cause almost everyone, however inherently mentally well, considerable anxiety, guilt, and regret."<sup>105</sup> Instead of jumping prematurely to conclusions, it is more prudent for both parties to deliberate well in order to make a prudent

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–50.

<sup>104</sup> "A Clinical Perspective," 148.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

decision concerning the future of the relationship, which may indeed entail terminating the relationship.

In conclusion, after an individual in a committed relationship is unfaithful to his or her partner by breaking his or her contract, promise, or vow to remain loyal, the devastating infidelity can leave both parties with a storm of painful emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Despite the urge to immediately retaliate or dissolve the primary relationship as a response to the humiliation and suffering, the faithful partner must use reason well in order to make a prudent decision concerning the future of the relationship if he or she hopes to recover from the infidelity and respond in a way that promotes human flourishing.

More specifically, the faithful partner must first recognize the underlying reasons of the infidelity. He or she must also consider the feelings of both parties, especially noting whether the unfaithful partner feels guilty or is experiencing negative emotions as a result of the affair. Next, the faithful partner must ruminate on his or her state. In order to make a prudent decision about whether to continue the relationship, he or she must achieve a peace of mind by forgiving the unfaithful partner, thereby eliminating the strong, negative emotions and desire for retaliation, which can obstruct rational deliberation. Lastly, and most importantly, the faithful partner must rationally observe the state of the unfaithful partner, seeing whether the unfaithful partner is willing to reconcile and whether the unfaithful partner is actively seeking reconciliation. Once all these factors have been considered, the faithful partner enters a state that facilitates prudent decision-making.

Even though several of the factors that have been laid out suggest that staying in the relationship would be a prudent decision, dissolving or separating from the relationship in some form may still be a justifiable choice in some cases. Ultimately, the future of a relationship depends on the specific details of the relationship and the desires and goals of the partners. However, if the faithful partner rationally comes to the conclusion that staying in the relationship is the most prudent decision (i.e., if deciding to continue the relationship is done in the right way, at the right time, to the right extent, with the right person, and for the right reason), an awful situation such as infidelity can be transformed into a favorable state in which “couples survive and (in time) thrive in its wake.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> “Infidelity: An Overview,” 14.

# Jacob Wrestles with an Angel: A Conversion Story

*Jonathan Powell*

*And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. And he saw that he had not won out against him and he touched his hip-socket and Jacob's hip-socket was wrenched as he wrestled with him. And he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." And he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." And he said, "Not Jacob shall your name hence be said, but Israel, for you have striven with God and man, and won out.*

—Genesis 32:24–28

A passage from Genesis narrates and records the mysterious nocturnal incident preceding Jacob's momentous meeting with his long-lost brother Esau. Here Jacob wrestles with a divine being who blesses and renames him Israel. This passage may be interpreted as God working through an angel to draw out of Jacob a willingness to be close to God and humility in order to receive His blessing, which is a name that will enable him to see God.

## Context

### *i. Historical/Theological*

The Book of Genesis is the first of the Pentateuch and of the Bible as a whole. Up to the last three centuries Moses has been nearly undisputedly assumed to be the author of the Pentateuch; hence the traditional name, the Five Books of Moses.<sup>1</sup> However, from the eighteenth century to today, scholars have vigorously debated its authorship from a plethora of angles, reaching diverse conclusions.<sup>2</sup> As of yet, there is no discernable consensus among scholars regarding the authorship of Genesis.

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<sup>1</sup> T. Desmond Alexander and David Baker, eds. *The Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 622–30.

In the eighteenth century, Jean Astruc proposed that Moses used two sources to write the Pentateuch: one referring to God as Yahweh and the other referring to Him as Elohim.<sup>3</sup> From Astruc to the present, some of the popular approaches to the Scriptures have been form, redaction, source, documentary, fragmentary, and canonical criticism. In this exegesis, I take the perspective, alongside many scholars, that the Pentateuch has been edited to some degree.<sup>4</sup> However, I will treat the Pentateuch as a coherent whole, as Leon Kass does.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, I will assume that Moses was the primary author and compiler due to the internal evidence,<sup>6</sup> the longstanding tradition in Judaism,<sup>7</sup> and the unpersuasiveness of the arguments for the contrary view.

Many scholars estimate that Moses was born, educated, and lived in Egypt during the early thirteenth century B.C.<sup>8</sup> As recorded in Exodus, he led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the desert, where he eventually died. Presumably, it was toward the end of this time that he authored and compiled the Pentateuch, including Genesis.

Some scholars speculate that coming out of Egypt, the Israelite people cared to “sketch a few highlights about human origins that had particular religious significance for Israel’s view of life, and to record a few traditions about their own ancestors that would help them understand how they came to be a people and a nation.” Therefore, it would stand to reason that the figures and situations presented in Genesis would have an informative but also an educational purpose. Thus, we may conclude that Moses wrote Genesis, and especially the patriarchal narratives, to be educational and instructive for his people.

Leon Kass argues that Genesis serves as a guidebook to human living. More specifically, it serves as a “prelude to the laws . . . in Exodus and Leviticus, and repeated in Deuteronomy . . . by making clear through its stories why the laws might be needed and for what sorts of human weaknesses and difficulties.”<sup>9</sup> By proposing the figures in the stories as exemplars, Genesis comes to “convey a universal

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 622–23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 62–63.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Kass. *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 17:14, 24:4, 24:7, 24:27–28, Num. 33:2, Deut. 31:9, 19, 22, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Isaac Hershon and H. D. M. Spence. *Genesis: with a Talmudical Commentary* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1883), iii–viii. Also see Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 573.

<sup>9</sup> *Beginning of Wisdom*, 9.

teaching about ‘human nature.’”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, “the stories cast powerful light, for example, on the problematic character of human reason, speech, freedom, sexual desire, the love of the beautiful, shame, guilt, anger, and man’s response to mortality.”<sup>11</sup> These themes are proposed first in Genesis but further explained later in the Pentateuch. Additionally, the stories are demonstrably informative regarding the various human–human and human–divine relations, both of which can be observed quite strikingly in the story of Jacob.

*ii. Literary*

Scholars generally agree that Genesis is composed of two parts of unequal size. The first, the primeval history, begins with the creation account and ends, according to the majority of scholars, at the genealogy of Shem (11:26). However, some end the first part at the conclusion of the story of Babel (11:9), the genealogy of Terah (11:32), or Abraham’s departure (12:9).<sup>12</sup> The first part “deals with issues concerning the world and humanity in general, transcending national particularism and inhabiting a world beyond the experience of the reader.”<sup>13</sup> The second part, the ancestral history, comprises the rest of Genesis, including the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.<sup>14</sup> “Compared to the primeval history,” according to one scholar, “this section has greater geographical and historical definition, and while the storyline traverses the ancient Near East, it is concerned primarily with the ancestors of Israel.”<sup>15</sup>

The Book of Genesis is recognizably marked by *toledoth* (generations) introductions, which designate epochs of the covenantal structure.<sup>16</sup> These *toledoth* headings usually take the form “This is the (family) history of . . . .”<sup>17</sup> There are ten sections in total, in addition to the prologue:

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 350.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Class Notes, Steven Smith, Mount St. Mary’s Seminary. Feb. 3, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1–15* (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1987), xxii.

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|     | 1:1–2:3     | Prologue                               |
| 1.  | 2:4–4:26    | History of heaven and earth            |
| 2.  | 5:1–6:8     | Family History of Adam                 |
| 3.  | 6:9–9:29    | Family History of Noah                 |
| 4.  | 10:1–11:9   | Family History of Noah’s Sons          |
| 5.  | 11:10–26    | Family History of Shem                 |
| 6.  | 11:27–25:11 | Family History of Terah                |
| 7.  | 25:12–18    | Family History of Ishmael              |
| 8.  | 25:19–35:29 | Family History of Isaac                |
| 9.  | 36:1–37:1   | Family History of Esau                 |
| 10. | 37:2–50:26  | Family History of Jacob. <sup>18</sup> |

The story of Jacob is situated in the second of the two parts, the ancestral history. After the story of Abraham, who, along with his descendants, received “the call . . . to be a channel of blessing to all the nations”<sup>19</sup> and was promised progeny and land for future generations,<sup>20</sup> there is the short story of Isaac. Isaac prospers, stays faithful, and remains in the Promised Land unbothered.<sup>21</sup> His wife, Rebekah, gives birth to the twin brothers: Esau the first and Jacob the second born.

The rivalry between the Esau and Jacob originates as “Jacob comes out of the womb holding on to Esau’s foot, a sign of things to come since ‘to grasp the heel,’ from which Jacob receives his name, is a Hebrew idiom that can mean ‘to deceive’ or ‘supplant.’”<sup>22</sup> Later in life, Jacob dishonorably buys Esau’s birthright<sup>23</sup> and deceives his father to give him the blessing.<sup>24</sup> Infuriated over his usurpation, Esau vows to kill Jacob.<sup>25</sup> So, Jacob “[fled] for his life to Haran . . . in the direction of exile, east, away from God’s Promised Land; this too is a consequence of and punishment for his sin”—that is, against his brother and father.<sup>26</sup> In Haran, Jacob meets adversity in his dealings with the likewise deceptive Laban; however, God provides for Jacob and delivers him, such that he leaves Haran with two wives and much

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<sup>18</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary*, xxii.

<sup>19</sup> Tim Gray and Jeff Cavins, *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2010), 47.

<sup>20</sup> *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Walking with God*, 47–8.

<sup>22</sup> *Walking with God*, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Gen. 25:31–34.

<sup>24</sup> Gen. 27:1–29.

<sup>25</sup> Gen. 27:41.

<sup>26</sup> *Walking with God*, 49.

wealth. It is at this segment in Jacob's journey that he looks to restore right relations with God, Esau, and his father in the Promised Land.

Having recognized that he was beginning to lose favor with Laban and his sons, Jacob secretly flees toward Canaan with his wives and possessions.<sup>27</sup> Despite a three-day head start, Laban catches up with Jacob and accuses him of leaving secretly, cheating Laban by carrying off his “daughters like captives,” and stealing his goods.<sup>28</sup> In this suspenseful moment, Jacob is able to justify himself honestly because of his wife's deception, upbraid Laban, and make a covenant to secure his safety.

After a puzzling encounter with the angels at Mahanim, perhaps a warning of subsequent events, Jacob sends out “angels,” or, literally, messengers, of his own to Esau.<sup>29</sup> Despite his unusually courteous and deferential language indicating his attempt to reverse the current tone of their relationship—so that Esau would become Jacob's servant (25:23; 27:40)—the messengers return only to give the ominous reply that Esau is approaching with four hundred men. Without certainty regarding Esau's intentions, Jacob becomes “greatly afraid and distressed”<sup>30</sup> and prepares for the worst as night descends.

St. John Chrysostom interprets Jacob splitting his company into two as an act motivated purely by “fear and great terror.” Jacob intends “to placate Esau's anger . . . and [show] his brother his peaceful intentions and his desire for reconciliation.”<sup>31</sup> However, his attempts prove futile. It is only in the face of his own inadequacy that he turns to God in prayer.<sup>32</sup> Yet after having recourse to God, his disposition changes radically. St. Ambrose holds up Jacob as an exemplar of someone possessing tranquility and steadfastness from the bounty of God through prayer and virtue. He describes Jacob's God-given grace as being “not easily influenced by worldly things or [being] troubled with fear or tormented with suspicion or stunned with dread or distressed with pain.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Jacob experiences anxiety and his own

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<sup>27</sup> Gen. 31:1–21.

<sup>28</sup> Gen. 31:26–30.

<sup>29</sup> E. A. Spencer, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 256.

<sup>30</sup> Gen. 32:7.

<sup>31</sup> Members of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Navarre, *The Navarre Bible: Genesis* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 165.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Sheridan, ed., *Genesis 12–50, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 215.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

insufficiency; he humbles himself; he prays; and he receives peace and tranquility.

A number of character traits are on display in Jacob's encounter with the divine being at the ford of the Jabbok. Jacob is "hardly a pious or God-fearing man"; he is "self-absorbed and self-reliant" and "marked as a conniver, trying to make up for lack of natural strength or position."<sup>34</sup> However, at Peniel, Jacob does not come merely to a physical ford but also to a personal ford, where he leaves behind his self-reliant, impious, selfish, and conniving ways in exchange for a life-path of humility, piety, generosity, and integrity. In a word, Jacob makes the crossover from being Jacob to being Israel. As Israel, he is blessed to fair well with Esau the following day, later in his life, and through his progeny.

## Analysis

### *i. Formal*

Gordon Wenham outlines Jacob's initial contact with, preparation for, and meeting with Esau in the following seven scenes:

Scene 1: Jacob's embassy to Esau (32:4–7)

Scene 2: Jacob prepares to meet Esau (8–22)

Jacob's fears (8–9)

Jacob's prayer (10–13)

Jacob's gifts (14–22)

Scene 3: Jacob and wives cross Yabbok (23–24)

Scene 4: Jacob wrestles with a "man" (25–33)

Scene 5: Jacob and Esau reunited (33:1–15)

Jacob approaches (1–3)

Greetings exchanged (4–11)

Esau's invitation turned down (12–15)

Scene 6: Jacob and Esau part (16–17)

Scene 7: Conclusion and Preview: Jacob settles in Canaan (18–20)<sup>35</sup>

The primary criterion for this arrangement is the parallelism occurring between this and the preceding passage concerning Jacob's departure from Laban. The parallelism is as follows:

CHAPTER 31

CHAPTERS 32–33

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon Wenham. *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50* (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1994), 287.

Scene 1: Instructions to leave	Planning to meet Esau
Scene 2: Preparations to leave	Preparations to meet Esau
Scene 3: Crossing of the Euphrates	Crossing of Yabbok
Scene 4: Pursuit by Laban	Struggle with man
Scene 5: Confrontation	Confrontation
Scene 6: Parting of Laban and Jacob	Parting of Esau and Jacob
Scene 7: Conclusion/Preview	Conclusion/Preview

The juxtaposition of these two series of events not only continues Jacob's narrative in reasonable fashion but also underscores God's faithful guidance and providence throughout Jacob's life, as opposed to being some kind of sporadic assistance.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the juxtaposition highlights the reversals in both narratives.<sup>37</sup> For instance, Jacob deceives his father Isaac.<sup>38</sup> Yet later, it is his father-in-law Laban who deceives him.<sup>39</sup> And again, while in 27:29 "Jacob cheats Esau of his blessing, in 33:11 he offers it back to Esau."<sup>40</sup>

#### *ii. Detailed*

In v. 24a, the reader is told that "Jacob was left alone,"<sup>41</sup> and in many senses, he is indeed alone. In short, he is alone before man and empty-handed before God. He is separated from his homeland and alien to the land he previously occupied.<sup>42</sup> He is separated from his father and brother by his previous deception and usurpation. His prayer thus far unanswered, he is seemingly distant from God. In an attempt to placate Esau, he sends out a large portion of his possessions as gifts, thus separating Jacob from his wealth, perhaps, as modern commentators suggest, to acknowledge his guilty conscience.<sup>43</sup> Finally, he separates himself from his wives and children as a precaution in case Esau attacks.<sup>44</sup> For once, Jacob is before God "naked,"<sup>45</sup> without a meal to barter with, as he had to buy his brother's birthright, without

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>38</sup> Gen. 27:18.

<sup>39</sup> Gen. 29:22.

<sup>40</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50*, 289.

<sup>41</sup> Gen. 32:24.

<sup>42</sup> David Cotter, ed., *Berit Olam, Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry: Genesis* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 241.

<sup>43</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50*, 290.

<sup>44</sup> *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 454.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

disguise, as he had to deceive his father, and without a wife to protect him, as he had in his last encounter with Laban.

“Alone,” Leon Kass reminds us, “has two meanings, one weak and lowly, one high and mighty. Here they seem to be combined. Though Jacob is literally alone and seemingly frightened, he has voluntarily made himself alone.”<sup>46</sup> In this way, he is shown to purposefully detach himself from other pieces of security, relying on nothing besides God, before approaching God in prayer, a high-minded move indeed.

Being voluntarily alone is not only humbling; it is also an act of selfless love. In his prayer to God, “his final plea is, implicitly, Save the children!”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, he does not sit idly; he takes the initiative to separate himself from his family, presumably to keep them from danger, given that Esau would be more likely to kill only him if he was alone.<sup>48</sup> In selflessly separating himself from his family, Jacob is shown to have already begun to progress from being the conniving and double-crossing Jacob toward becoming the noble and selfless Israel God intends him to be.

In v. 24b, Scripture reads: “and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.” Who is this mystery man? According to literary criticism, this passage is written from Jacob’s perspective; and from his perspective, this figure is a man, but not much else is certain at this point for him.<sup>49</sup> Assuming that the ambiguity of the figure is intentional, Leon Kass suggests that “if what [Jacob] is supposed to discover is that his relations to man and God are mutually implicated, the ambiguity and mystery of the antagonist’s identity is perfectly appropriate.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, in struggling with this “man,” Jacob is able to come into a right relationship with God, and thus is able to come into a right relationship with Esau the following day. Taking note of this same ambiguity, Caesarius of Arles interprets the angelic man or manly angel as Christ, the divine man or manly divine, the subject of the hypostatic union.<sup>51</sup> In this analogy, Jacob represents the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 453.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>49</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50*, 295. Some modern scholars suggest that Jacob’s encounter may hark back to Near Eastern myths in which the protagonist encounters a river demon; see *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 34; see also *Beginning of Wisdom*, 454: “If so, it represents yet another instance in which the Bible, for its own pedagogical purposes, transforms tales of nature and nature gods, giving them ‘antinatural’ or ‘transnatural’ moral and spiritual significance.”

<sup>50</sup> *Beginning of Wisdom*, 456.

<sup>51</sup> *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 220.

Jews who crucified Jesus by overcoming Him, yet he also represents those who believe in Christ insofar as he asked for a blessing.<sup>52</sup>

While Jacob does not know the identity of his opponent, many Jewish scholars hold that the man was, in fact, an angel. For instance, Hosea writes: “In the womb he [Jacob] seized his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he struggled with God. He struggled with an angel and overcame.”<sup>53</sup> That being said, on a literal and practical level, how is it that a purely immaterial being can interact with a human being in the form of a man?<sup>54</sup> Supported by St. Thomas Aquinas,<sup>55</sup> Peter Kreeft offers one suggestion: “Angels sometimes ‘assume’ bodies, as we would put on a costume or hire a tuxedo or a limo.”<sup>56</sup> With these assumed bodies, they are able to interact with other bodies without having their nature changed. With this understanding of angelic abilities, we may conclude that Jacob could have wrestled and did in fact physically wrestle with an angel.

Assuming the man was actually an angel, some questions arise. “If Jacob’s opponent was an angel, then why should the text say ‘you have struggled *with God*? . . . [If] it was an angel, Jacob’s new name should really have been ‘struggled-with-angel,’ not ‘struggled-with-God’ (that is, Isra-el).”<sup>57</sup> How is one to resolve this apparent inconsistency? James Kugel writes, “One solution was obvious: ‘God’ here might be just a short way of saying ‘*angel of God*.’”<sup>58</sup> Supporting his point, he cites a Jewish writing: “He said, ‘Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have made yourself great with angels of God and with men and you have overcome them.’”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, in reference to this passage, Josephus writes that Israel “signifies the adversary of an angel of God.”<sup>60</sup> Finally, one may interpret “God” “more generally as ‘heavenly being’ or ‘heavenly power’ (both of which would certainly include angels as well),”<sup>61</sup> as in the following passages:

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 385.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Angels (and Demons): What Do We Really Know About Them?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 50.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 51, 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Angels (and Demons)*, 52.

<sup>57</sup> *Traditions of the Bible*, 385.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> *Traditions of the Bible*, 386

I should like, I said, to learn from you gentlemen what is the force of the name Israel. And as they were silent, I continued: I will say what I know . . . The name Israel means this: a man overcoming power. For *Isra* is “a man overcoming,” and *el* is “power.”<sup>62</sup>

You have grappled with beings from above and overcome them, with beings from below and overcome them. “Beings from above” refers to the angel . . . “Beings from below” refers to Esau and his princes.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, with reverence for sound and traditional interpretation, it is reasonable to conclude that this mystery man who wrestles with Jacob is in fact an angel of God.

Whether or not Jacob wrestles with Christ or an angel, the idea of “wrestling” (קרבן) or “struggling” with this heavenly being is pregnant with spiritual fruits.<sup>64</sup> After summing up how Jacob has left all to rely only on God in this moment, St. Ambrose writes: “Whoever forsakes worldly things comes nearer to the image and likeness of God. What is it to wrestle with God other than to enter upon the struggle for virtue, to contend with one who is stronger and to become a better imitator of God . . . ?”<sup>65</sup> In other words, to struggle with God is to struggle for virtue. Implicit in the pursuit of virtue is the pursuit of knowledge of the ways of God or, as it is indicated in the name Israel, the capacity to “see” God. This symbolic interpretation would seem especially reasonable if Jacob’s coming new name, Israel, does in fact mean “to see God,” as some Jewish scholars have contended.<sup>66</sup>

Supporting the aforesaid spiritual interpretation, Kugel notes that many interpreters have used the translation “wrestle with” not in the sense of struggling over and against the angel; rather for them “[i]t meant that Jacob had been strong *with the help of* God or had been *exalted with* (that is, into the company of) God.”<sup>67</sup> Due to this plausible translation of “wrestle with,” there have been a number of interpretations of this mysterious encounter. For instance, in the Septuagint, this passage reads: “And he said to him, ‘Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. For you have

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<sup>62</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 125:1–3.

<sup>63</sup> *Genesis Rabba* 78:3.

<sup>64</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (electronic ed., 2000). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

<sup>65</sup> *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 219.

<sup>66</sup> *Beginning of Wisdom*, 396.

<sup>67</sup> *Traditions of the Bible*, 386.

been strong with God, and you shall be powerful with men.”<sup>68</sup> As attested in Jacob’s prayer, God has had His providential hand in all his actions and situations. Moreover, it is due to God’s initiative that Jacob is wrestled with and thus made stronger, more virtuous, better able to see God, etc. As St. Therese of Lisieux wrote: “All is grace.”<sup>69</sup> It is God who takes the initiative by blessing Jacob, providing for him with Laban, directing him to the Promised Land, and now strengthening him by sending an angel to toughen him up the night before his encounter with Esau. Thus, we see that it is God aiding Jacob and Jacob cooperating with God’s grace. In this way, he struggles *with* God, not against Him.

In v. 25, we read that while wrestling, the angel touched the hallow of Jacob’s thigh, putting it out of joint. This seemingly insignificant detail has puzzled many scholars—Jewish and Christian alike.<sup>70</sup> While it has been the occasion for much spiritual speculation, taken literally, this detail confirms the reality of Jacob physically wrestling with an angel.<sup>71</sup> It was, accordingly, certainly not a dream but a real match.

The detail that the “man” merely “touched” Jacob’s thigh to maim is quite telling. Wenham writes: “this clause gives an insight into Jacob’s situation. A touch that dislocates indicates an opponent with superhuman power (cf. Isa. 6:7).”<sup>72</sup> This also underscores the incredibility that Jacob was truly in control of the fight. If the angel could simply touch to maim, could he not do more damage to win?<sup>73</sup> It seems that this angel is holding back much like a boxing trainer holds back when sparring with his student in order to strengthen him for the real match to come. More to the point, perhaps this is how the angel “wrestles with” Jacob, as opposed to wrestling *against* him.

Assuming, then, that the angel was in control of the bout the entire time, one can make more sense of the clause, “when the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob.” As Jacob’s trainer, this angel assesses Jacob’s determination and fortitude. So once he determines that Jacob’s faith and devotion are satisfactory, he calls for a close to

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> John F. Russel, “Concept of Spiritual Childhood,” *Society of the Little Flower*, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.littleflower.org/therese/reflections/st-therese-and-spiritual-childhood/>.

<sup>70</sup> *Traditions of the Bible*, 400.

<sup>71</sup> *Beginning of Wisdom*, 456.

<sup>72</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50*, 296.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

the training session by landing a show-stopping blow to the thigh<sup>74</sup> and by saying, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.”

In v. 26, the angel mentions the breaking of the dawn as, to some degree, reason to end the bout. Why would the breaking dawn cause the angel to want to leave? “Perhaps fearing that he will lose his powers in the daylight, perhaps concerned that Jacob in the light will discover his assailant,” perhaps to provide time for Jacob to learn from the bout;<sup>75</sup> whatever the reason, on a literal level, the breaking dawn is a measurement of time and at this indication, the angel decides that the bout was finished.

Cyril of Alexandria makes a spiritual connection between the dawn and the light of Christ. He writes: “When the light of justice, that is, Christ, rises in our mind and introduces his brilliance into our hearts, then we also will be waited on as noble souls and will be made worthy of divine attention. ‘The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous.’ At daybreak the fight ceases.”<sup>76</sup> So, combining the insights of St. Ambrose that to wrestle with God is to grow in virtue and thus see God and St. Cyril’s connection of the dawn as symbolic of Christ’s light dawning on the mind of Jacob, we may conclude that the angel calls for an end because his work is done. Jacob has been successful in his training session. He has been conditioned well through this bout to receive a blessing from God.

Indubitably recognizing the heavenly character of his adversary<sup>77</sup> and his own apparent success in persevering with the angel, Jacob seeks a blessing.<sup>78</sup> There are many possibilities regarding Jacob’s specific hopes;<sup>79</sup> however, it seems clear that his primary concern generally consists in the following day’s encounter with Esau.

In v. 27, the angel asks Jacob’s name. “To bestow a blessing, the blesser must know who he is blessing. But for an angel to ask Jacob’s name is superfluous,”<sup>80</sup> presumably due to the nature of angelic knowledge, which is apparently great.<sup>81</sup> So why would the angel ask for his name? Scholars suggest that he asks in order to know Jacob’s nature. “The stranger needs to know how Jacob thinks of himself,

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<sup>74</sup> *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 219.

<sup>75</sup> *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 458.

<sup>76</sup> *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 220.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>78</sup> *Beginning of Wisdom*, 458.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50*, 296.

<sup>81</sup> *Angels (and Demons)*, 65.

what name he bears, for the name evokes the person's nature."<sup>82</sup> If it were superfluous for the angel to ask Jacob's name, however, by the same reasoning, it seems superfluous to inquire of his nature. Instead, it seems more likely that the angel is drawing a confession out of Jacob, helping him own up to his past and acknowledge his lowliness following his apparent success in the wrestling bout.<sup>83</sup>

In answering truthfully, Jacob reverses his prior lie to his father to attain the blessing.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, by giving his name, he confesses his guilt. In uttering the word "Jacob," he confesses: "I am *Ya'aqov*, the heel catcher, the supplanter, the deceiver, the one who prevails over his opponents by means of guile and trickery."<sup>85</sup> If indeed, "the beginning of wisdom is fear of the LORD"<sup>86</sup> and fear of the Lord is seeing ourselves rightly in relation to God,<sup>87</sup> then Jacob is making that first and essential step toward wisdom by acknowledging his guilt. Besides being a step toward sanctity, "this truthful confession of his dubious character is part of what makes Jacob eligible for renaming and for receiving the blessing legitimately, that is, for earning it himself and without deceit."<sup>88</sup> Thus, the angel inquires as to Jacob's name in order to illicit a confession, draw out humility, and enable him to receive his coming blessing.

In v. 28, the angel demonstrates his approval of Jacob's answer by declaring, "Not Jacob shall your name hence be said, but Israel, for you have striven with God and men, and won out."<sup>89</sup> The meaning of "Israel" has proven to be elusive for many scholars. In Jewish and early Christian interpretation, it has been interpreted as "[each] man saw God," "a man seeing God," "a man who will see God," "see God," "seeing God," "one who sees God," "one seeing God," and "the man that sees God."<sup>90</sup> Alone, "Israel" is clearly difficult to translate. The good news is that the angel supplies an explanation of the name. The bad news is that it, too, is perplexing.

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<sup>82</sup> *Berit Olam*, 246.

<sup>83</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary*, 296.

<sup>84</sup> *Beginning of Wisdom*, 459.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Prov. 9:10.

<sup>87</sup> Jonathan Powell, *Early Church Fathers on the Gift of Counsel*, unpublished paper, Mount St. Mary's University (2014), 1.

<sup>88</sup> *Beginning of Wisdom*, 459.

<sup>89</sup> *Five Books of Moses*, 180–81.

<sup>90</sup> *Traditions of the Bible*, 388.

Jacob is called Israel because he has “striven with God and men, and won out.” How is striving with God meritorious? As argued in the section above pertaining to v. 24b, we know that “his willingness to grapple and to close with the assailant can be said to be a sign of his desire to be close to God, even as he struggles with and against Him.”<sup>91</sup> However, Kass argues that

Given the human condition, man will necessarily struggle with man, including those closest to him. And given the human condition, men will—at best—necessarily grapple with God. But struggle or striving is vastly preferable to ignorance or indifference. In all intimate struggles—especially within the family—one does not really seek a decisive victory, but rather respect.<sup>92</sup>

In wrestling with God, Jacob learns to respect God, and God, in turn, graciously respects him. At no point in his struggle with God, in his struggle toward virtue and sanctity, does Jacob despair. “He hangs on, he endures. . . . In short, he *prevails*.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, his persevering cooperation is meritorious.

While he has striven with God on this momentous occasion, he has also striven throughout his life with men. Kass writes: “Through his struggles during his travels he has largely learned the limits of his own shrewdness . . . . He now feels powerfully his own mortality and vulnerability, but also his propensity to kill.”<sup>94</sup> With this self-knowledge, with his acknowledgment of his guilt, Jacob is now fully open to the work of God.<sup>95</sup> For these reasons, Jacob receives his new name.

The implications of receiving this new name, Israel, are far reaching. Israel receives forgiveness,<sup>96</sup> a “new character and destiny,”<sup>97</sup> a rebirth, “a guarantee of a successful meeting with his brother Esau,”<sup>98</sup> and a name that his descendants can learn from and hope in for their own triumphs.<sup>99</sup> Yet, most significantly, Israel is declared to, in some sense, “see God.” Putting aside the possibility that this refers to the angelic episode or theophany, to “see God” conveys “a spiritual

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<sup>91</sup> *Beginning of Wisdom*, 461.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Beginning of Wisdom*, 462.

<sup>96</sup> *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 223.

<sup>97</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50*, 296.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

state.”<sup>100</sup> This spiritual state points forward not only to the Incarnation, in which men will indeed see God, but also to the beatific vision, Heaven. Indubitably, in receiving this name, Jacob is given the opportunity to see God when Jesus descends to the Limbo of the Fathers. In brief, Jacob the sinner receives a conversion to become Israel, the one who sees God.

### **Synthesis**

In his canonically first book, Moses portrays Jacob, the swindler and liar who becomes Israel, the just man who sees God. In this episode of wrestling with the angel, Jacob demonstrates his need for God, his acknowledgment of his guilt, his willingness to be close to God, and his receptivity to God’s blessing in his life. All this is known through his selfless and pious actions preceding the wrestling match and through the angel’s blessing and explanation of it after the match. In portraying Jacob in this way, Moses teaches his people about their origins in Israel, giving them hope that they too can prevail with God and men and eventually see God.

### **Homiletic Reflection**

In Genesis, we learn that Jacob lived a difficult early life. It seems he drew the short straw from birth as he is said to have been holding his older brother Esau’s foot. This anecdote labels him as a conniver, liar, and backstabber. After conning and lying to his brother and father to get his Esau’s birthright and blessing, Esau vows to kill Jacob. Yet, ever wily, Jacob flees out of the Promised Land and meets Laban, his soon-to-be father-in-law. It turns out that Laban gives Jacob a taste of his own poison by tricking him into marrying both of his daughters and serving him for about fourteen years. Nevertheless, God makes good on His promises and enables Jacob to become wealthy and escape from Laban.

At this point, Jacob is told to return to the Promised Land. However, he thinks Esau is probably still bent on killing him. So he sends out some messengers to test the waters and hopefully placate him with gifts. To Jacob’s fright and frenzy, they return only to report ominously that Esau is approaching . . . with four hundred men. Jacob is freaking out. He makes some preliminary moves to minimize the

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<sup>100</sup> *Traditions of the Bible*, 388.

potential damage to his family, but quickly realizing his helplessness, he turns to God in prayer.

I'd like to take a moment to point out how we've all been in similar situations. Either something has happened to us or we've messed up royally, and only after all our resources have been depleted, only then, do we fall on our knees begging for help. For starters, let's not beat ourselves up. This is what God does to draw us close to Himself. He allows tragedies to enter into our lives so that we realize our inadequacy and rely on Him for complete help. However, He does this to teach us to *always* rely on Him and not ourselves. If we do this, we will prevail in our struggles with God.

That said, let's return back to Jacob. Responding to God's grace of the crisis, Jacob turns to prayer and already begins to show signs of piety and selflessness. He says: "God you can do everything, without you, I can do nothing. Help! And even if I don't deserve your help, save my family!"

Now God is not a vending machine; for His own purposes, He often does not answer our prayers right away. So, this happens to Jacob. And what does he do? Does he sit around? No! He gets to work sending off lavish presents to his brother—without regard for how much it's costing him—and he separates himself from his family to protect them in case Esau attacks him that night. Here we see Jacob exemplifying the saying: "pray like everything depends on God; work like everything depends on you."

So there he is: aware of his faults, his inadequacy, but also of the hope he has in God to save him. It is in this state that God sends Jacob an angel. But don't get romantic now. This angel has come to fight. In fact, they wrestle all the way until the dawn. The takeaway from this scene is this: God is drawing out of Jacob the desire to be close to him, but it is difficult—just as in wrestling we are close but struggle. Once the angel is satisfied that Jacob does in fact desire God, he tries to stop the bout by dealing a show-stopping blow to his hip and by telling Jacob to call it quits. Yet, seeing that he had passed the angel's test, he says: "not until you give me a blessing!" In other words, he says: "I'm not going to let you go until I am assured that everything is going to be all right with Esau tomorrow."

While the angel now knows that Jacob desires God, he still needs him to ask humbly. So he calls for Jacob to confess his sins. He asks: "What is your name?" In other words, he is asking: "Where do you come from? What have you done?" And Jacob replies in truth, without excuses, and without any saving face; he replies: "My name is Jacob"

and this is all the angel needs to hear to verify everything he had done due to the meaning of his name.

It is at this point that God, working through the angel, blesses Jacob—much like the way in which God works through the priest in the sacrament of Reconciliation to forgive our sins. He declares his name to be Israel, one who sees God. Jacob here experiences a conversion. He is no longer chained down by his past sins or what has happened to him; he is reborn, renewed, and given the assurance he had hoped for—and more. God will end up keeping Israel safe the next day with Esau and, above Jacob's wildest dreams, come back for him when Jesus, God, goes down to the Limbo of the Fathers during his three-day descent into Hell to bring Israel to Heaven with Him.

In short, Jacob strips himself of everything he had relied on besides God, prayed for help, proved his desire for God through his perseverance in wrestling with God, and finally confessed his sins in humility and was thus able to receive his conversion, which is marked by his new name Israel, a name that foreshadows his entrance into Heaven, where he will truly see God.

Let Jacob be a reminder for us when we are faced with a crisis: rely on God for help, yet make prudent decisions, persevere in staying close to God, confess your sins to a priest, and trust in God's care for you on Earth and trust in His ultimate promise of seeing Him in Heaven.

## The Moral Failing of the Happy Philanthropist in Both the Aristotelian and Kantian Traditions

*Andrew McCarthy*

In the history of philosophy it has often been argued that the ethical views of Aristotle, as developed in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, and those of Immanuel Kant, as presented in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, are incompatible. This view has garnered significant agreement among scholars, almost to the point of becoming dogma. However, there is an emerging trend in contemporary philosophy which argues that the supposed radical contrast between these two thinkers is merely apparent. This view does not ignore the substantial differences between these two great thinkers but is a modern movement that recognizes useful similarities between them. Once the task of searching for resemblances between the Aristotelian and Kantian philosophies is embraced, many new insights into the true interpretation of these authors and the two iconic texts mentioned above emerge. One insight that emerges from this modern method pertains to Kant's "happy philanthropist" and the moral value of this agent's actions.

A traditional reading of Aristotle regards the happy philanthropist as a virtuous person worthy of moral praise. However, reading Aristotle through a Kantian lens results in the conclusion that both the Aristotelian and Kantian traditions agree that the happy philanthropist is not worthy of genuine moral praise. This conclusion can be reached through three points. First, the happy philanthropist is acting from inclination. Second, because inclination is the motivation for the happy philanthropist's actions, this agent's natural virtue can be misleading and he or she cannot be relied on to act well. Finally, the actions of the happy philanthropist are not rooted in reason, and consequently, from both an Aristotelian and a Kantian standpoint, are not worthy of moral praise.

In order to flesh out these arguments, it is first essential to describe the happy philanthropist as Kant portrays him. Kant describes this type of person as follows, "There are many persons who are so sympathetically constituted that, without any further motive of vanity or self-interest, they find an inner pleasure in spreading joy

around them and can rejoice in the satisfaction of others as their own work.”<sup>1</sup> The happy philanthropist described as such is naturally sympathetic to others and seems to possess a characteristic desire to act with charity and benevolence.<sup>2</sup> This person is motivated by a natural inclination to do good works and receives an inner pleasure from acting in this way.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that Kant rejects the possibility of this character’s worthiness of moral praise, but to make the same claim for Aristotle will require a detailed reading of Aristotle with a Kantian frame of mind.

Traditionally, as suggested above, it has been thought that Aristotle would disagree with Kant on the question, “Should the happy philanthropist be attributed moral praise for their actions?” This opinion stems from the Aristotelian notion that “[v]irtuous conduct gives pleasure to the lover of virtue.”<sup>4</sup> The person who is naturally sympathetic in charity would seem to have developed the virtue of charity or benevolence. Through habitual practice of this virtue, the happy philanthropist has grown from merely practicing virtuous acts of charity to developing the character virtue of charity.<sup>5</sup> Further, it would seem natural for a person possessing the character virtue of charity to be happy when acting on this virtue because this person has stopped merely acting charitably and has become a charitable person.

Given that this is the traditional interpretation of Aristotle, it can be difficult to picture an interpretation which comes to a completely opposite conclusion. However, a close examination of Aristotle’s motive for action alongside Kant’s philosophy can highlight the agreement between these two philosophers about the lack of moral worth in the happy philanthropist’s actions. Rosalind Hursthouse states, “If Kant’s happy philanthropists, who act from inclination, not from duty, are as described, they cannot be regarded as having an Aristotelian version of the non-Aristotelian virtue of charity or

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1981), 398.

<sup>2</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 99.

<sup>3</sup> Maria de Lourdes Borges, “Kant on Sympathy and Moral Motives,” in *ethic@* 1, no. 2 (December 2002), 184, <https://periodicos.ufsc.br/index.php/ethic/article/viewFile/14595/13347>.

<sup>4</sup> *On Virtue Ethics*, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999), 1103a.

benevolence.”<sup>6</sup> This claim by Hursthouse brings up the first notion which unites Kant and Aristotle on this subject. Kant makes it clear in the *Grounding* that the happy philanthropist’s actions contain no moral worth because they are carried out from inclination.<sup>7</sup> Though benevolent acts are done in accordance with duty, or virtue, when executed from natural sympathy, they are not done from duty or virtue. The happy philanthropist is driven to act in a virtuous way because of inner pleasure and natural sympathy.<sup>8</sup> This character’s actions can be driven by inclination in two ways. A man may have a natural attraction to acting in a sympathetic manner and because of this act in accordance with virtue. On the other hand, a man may act in accordance with virtue because he likes the feeling of pleasure that he receives as a result.<sup>9</sup> Both versions of the happy philanthropist would not be considered to be worthy of moral praise by either Kant or Aristotle.

In response to Kant’s description of the happy philanthropist, Aristotelians are required to reevaluate their claim that acting virtuously gives pleasure to the virtuous person. Because of Kant’s example, this foundational claim of the traditional interpretation of Aristotle must be reexamined.<sup>10</sup> The naturally sympathetic person acts from emotional incentives. These incentives could be various: sympathy, compassion, or love. A person acting from such emotions is naturally attractive. Who wouldn’t want a friend who instinctually comes to your aid because he or she naturally feels sympathetic?<sup>11</sup> No matter what emotion is driving his or her actions nor how attractive the happy philanthropist appears, these actions are driven by inclination and not virtue or duty. Here it is important to distinguish between emotional motivation and emotional reaction.<sup>12</sup> Both Kant and Aristotle would agree that there is nothing problematic with emotional pleasure resulting from moral actions. Yet as described by Kant, the happy philanthropist does not have an emotional response resulting from action but is driven to act from sympathetic motivation. It is for the immediate gratification of helping others or natural compassion that the happy philanthropist is inclined to act

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<sup>6</sup> *On Virtue Ethics*, 103.

<sup>7</sup> *Grounding*, 398.

<sup>8</sup> “Kant on Sympathy,” 189.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Clark, “How Can Reason Be Practical: A Reply to Hume,” in *Moral Psychology*, ed. Sergio Tenenbaum (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2007), 123.

<sup>10</sup> *On Virtue Ethics*, 98.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

charitably.<sup>13</sup> It is also important to point out that Kant does not disregard emotions or feelings as part of an action. He only claims that emotions cannot be an incentive to act. Moral motivation can stir up moral feeling, which may surface in action. However, moral feeling differs from the emotional inclination of the happy philanthropist. This is so because moral feelings are rooted in duty or virtue while natural emotions are not.<sup>14</sup>

For example, Sally has a choice whether or not to give charitably to a homeless man. If Sally decides to be charitable because she knows it is the right thing to do and afterwards feels happiness because she helped another, neither Kant nor Aristotle would deny the moral worth of her actions. If Sally naturally feels compassion for the homeless man and because of this gives charitably, or if Sally acts charitably because she knows it will bring her pleasure, she would not be worthy of moral praise, for Kant. While this is clear for the Kantian, it has not yet been proven why an Aristotelian would agree. In order to prove convincingly that Aristotle would agree with Kant on this point, it is crucial to understand why natural virtue, as embodied in the happy philanthropist, is misleading.

Emotion is an unreliable motivation for Kant and is liable to go wrong. Though a person may have the best intentions for action, their actions can be extremely harmful if performed from emotional inclination alone.<sup>15</sup> Acts from sympathy or compassion are done for the good of others. Yet if done by inclination alone these types of acts “attach one to ‘the apparent good’ of others.”<sup>16</sup> Simply acting charitably because of natural inclination can lead the happy philanthropist to commit wrong in an attempt to do “good.” It is something like the adage, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” As Aristotle states, “For these natural states belong to children and to beasts as well [as to adults], but without understanding, they are evidently harmful. . . . A naturally well-endowed person without understanding will harm himself.”<sup>17</sup> The unreliability of natural inclination is pivotal in proving that Aristotle would agree with Kant about the happy philanthropist’s lack of moral worth.

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<sup>13</sup> “How Can Reason Be Practical,” 123.

<sup>14</sup> “Kant on Sympathy,” 190.

<sup>15</sup> *Grounding*, 393

<sup>16</sup> *On Virtue Ethics*, 101.

<sup>17</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144b.

To clarify this point, think back to the example of Sally and the homeless man. Sally, being compassionately inclined to give charitably, gives this man a twenty dollar bill, and as a lover of the virtue of charity she feels happy because of her benevolence. Has Sally accomplished “good” in this situation? Suppose this man was sitting a few yards down from a liquor store. Also suppose this man has a problem with alcohol addiction. Has Sally really performed a “good” act? No. Her act of charity was not properly motivated, and as a result, Sally has just contributed to the homeless man’s addiction and consequently caused a worse situation for him. This is because emotional inclination is only a response to the apparent “good.” In Aristotelian terms, Sally has not acted virtuously because she was not charitable “to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way.”<sup>18</sup> Sally acted from inclination alone, without reason. (The role of reason will be discussed below.) Because of this, the “good” of Sally’s action is only apparent, since she acted solely from natural inclination.

As shown above, actions performed from emotional motivation, especially in the case of the happy philanthropist, are unreliable even if they are actions done in accordance with duty or virtue. As Hursthouse claims, “Kantians and Aristotelians agree on the fact that this sort of agent cannot be relied on to act well.”<sup>19</sup> To further emphasize this, it is helpful to look at Kant’s description of the sorrowful philanthropist:

Suppose then the mind of this friend of mankind to be clouded over with his own sorrow so that all sympathy with the lot of others is extinguished, and suppose him still to have the power to benefit others in distress, even though he is not touched by their trouble because he is sufficiently absorbed with his own; and now suppose that, even though not inclination moves him any longer, he nevertheless tears himself from this deadly insensibility and preforms the actions without any inclination at all, but solely from duty—then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth.<sup>20</sup>

In this case the moral motivation, which is from duty, prevails over the sorrowful philanthropist’s natural inclinations. This character stops being driven to act by natural sympathy and must act from duty alone. This type of person is no longer inclined to act charitably from

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<sup>18</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109a.

<sup>19</sup> *On Virtue Ethics*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> *Grounding*, 398

emotion but rather acts from duty or virtue. The sorrowful philanthropist exemplifies action which is deserving of genuine moral worth. Simultaneously, this example highlights the point that emotional motivation for action is unreliable. It is completely plausible that the philanthropist in this situation would cease to act charitably after losing his natural sympathetic characteristics. The natural virtue of the happy philanthropist, consequently, does not guarantee virtuous action. There must be something else for moral motivation. This “something else” is practical reason. It is through the role of practical reason in moral action that the agreement proposed between Kant and Aristotle can be best understood.

The happy philanthropist, as described by Kant, acts from inclination and, as shown above, the natural virtue which motivates this type of action is not reliable. Hursthouse notes that Aristotle himself claims that our natural dispositions “without ‘intelligence’ (*nous*) . . . are apt to be harmful,” and that he tells us that “if the subject with the natural disposition(s) acquires intelligence, his disposition, while still resembling the natural one, will be virtue in the full sense.”<sup>21</sup> Here we find an Aristotelian critique of the happy philanthropist. The character described by Hursthouse is much like Kant’s sorrowful philanthropist. It is not the natural disposition of the subject that holds moral worth but the natural disposition under the control of *nous*. This point highlights the harmony between Aristotle and Kant.

Both of these philosophers believe that moral action needs to be governed by reason. For reason to govern moral action, it needs to be practical.<sup>22</sup> To say that reason is practical is to give validity to reason as having an instrumental role in human decision making. Even if the happy philanthropist acts in a way that is in accordance with duty or virtue while performing a beneficial act, this act will not be worthy of moral praise. To be worthy of moral praise, this act must still be regulated by practical wisdom.<sup>23</sup>

The role of reason in moral decision-making is a reoccurring theme in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. At the earliest point in Aristotle’s discussion of virtue he says, “First, then, actions should accord with

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<sup>21</sup> *On Virtue Ethics*, 105.

<sup>22</sup> Christine M. Korsgaard, “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action,” in *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty*, ed. Stephan Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 203.

<sup>23</sup> *On Virtue Ethics*, 102.

correct reason.”<sup>24</sup> Later, in book VI, Aristotle more clearly distinguishes this point by saying, “For it is not merely the state in accord with correct reason, but the state involving correct reason, that is virtue.”<sup>25</sup> These notions provide proof that an Aristotelian would not simply give moral worth to the happy philanthropist’s action because, to use Kantian language, though they may be in accordance with reason, these actions are not realized from reason. The supreme condition, then, by which man must regulate action, is reason.<sup>26</sup> Therefore it is reason which is the “something else” that gives an action moral worth.

So far it has been shown that both Aristotelians and Kantians would agree that the actions of the happy philanthropist are not worthy of moral praise because this agent’s actions are not governed by reason. There is more to this point than has been stated so far, and this concerns the significant role practical reason plays in human action. For both of these philosophers, there are two principles of action in human beings: desire, or inclination, which man shares with the lower animals, and a principle that is distinctly human, the principle of reason.<sup>27</sup> Practical reason is a substantial notion because it provides an understanding about what makes human action unique and different from the actions of other animals. Practical reason is necessary if one is to show that human action goes beyond mere reaction, as is the nature of other animals.<sup>28</sup> The fact that practical reason is lost, in the actions of the happy philanthropist, is this agent’s greatest fault. An agent acting in such a way is living by inclination, and the actions exhibit no differences from the actions of other animals. Because of this, Hursthouse says that this is “the sense an Aristotelian may attach to the Kantian claim that their ‘actions’ (in a broad sense) lack genuine moral worth because they act from inclination not from duty.”<sup>29</sup>

Without practical reason, the actions of the happy philanthropist hold no moral worth because they are no different from the actions of animals. A female lion may have the natural virtue of caring for her offspring. This lioness may nurture, care for, and protect her young. Acting in this way would be a “good” action for the lioness, and this

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<sup>24</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1144b.

<sup>26</sup> *Grounding*, 396.

<sup>27</sup> *On Virtue Ethics*, 102–103.

<sup>28</sup> “From Duty,” 204.

<sup>29</sup> *On Virtue Ethics*, 103.

lioness would be acting as a good lion *qua* lion. However, no one would claim that because of her actions the lioness, in this example, is worthy of genuine moral praise because she is simply acting on natural maternal instincts. Using this analogy in relation to human action can highlight two important points about practical reason's role in human decision making. First, this analogy relates to the happy philanthropist's actions. Because the actions of such a person are guided by inclination alone, like the lioness's, these actions are not worthy of moral praise because they lack reason as the principle of action. Reason alone is the requirement for an action to be worthy of moral praise. In addition to this point, the happy philanthropist is acting in a way which is no different than the actions of the lioness. This agent, then, is not acting from reason and consequently is not fulfilling what it means for a human action to be good *qua* human. The happy philanthropist is acting as an instinctive animal would and not as a rational, moral human being. In order for action to be a "good" human action and fulfill the function of the human person, the action—to again use Kantian language—must not merely be in accordance with reason but from it.

Many of Aristotle's and Kant's ideas are quite similar. In particular, the two thinkers would agree that the actions of the happy philanthropist, as Kant depicts him, should "not be regarded as having full virtue."<sup>30</sup> Further, this character's actions deserve no moral praise. This sort of agent acts from natural inclination. The natural virtue contained in this character is an emotional incentive which causes this sort of person to be naturally inclined to act sympathetically. An agent acting in such a way cannot be relied on to act well. Acting from inclination is only a reaction to the "apparent good." Because of these points, it is clear that the happy philanthropist acts without reason, thus acting in the same way as other animals. It is only when action is governed by reason that it can be regarded as a truly human action and one worthy of genuine moral praise. This is not the case for the happy philanthropist, and both Aristotle and Kant are in agreement on this claim.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

# Asking Pointless Questions: A Semantic Dispute between Materialists and Idealists

*Zachary Carls*

Among the more desperate searches in philosophy have been those by epistemologists and metaphysicians who have sought to justify belief in the existence of the external world. They cannot seem to agree on what kind of thing the external world is and have been battling each other for centuries, disputing its exact composition. They are obsessed over the question, “what knowledge can we have of things as they truly are,” and have thus endeavored to determine the exact composition of the external world, and not merely determine by what means we have access to it. However, the basic composition of the world, whether it be physical, non-physical, or some hybrid, seems to be of little importance, as the consequence of holding any of these views is largely the same. The “external world,” however one may conceive of it, is always considered to exist independently of one’s own mind, to exist whether one observes it or not and to be bound by definitive laws of nature, which force it to conform to certain patterns—all the objects in the external world behave in a regular, consistent fashion that is sufficiently interpretable by observers that it does not seem entirely chaotic. The external world is also considered to be entirely indifferent to its observers; observers have no say in receiving sensory images, as the images are simply forced on them, and the world itself operates independently of its observers, without care for them. These qualities of the external world, but especially the quality of indifference, are what allow us to call it objective, and are what make knowledge possible. Insofar as anyone claims that an external world exists, the fact that it is defined by these qualities is all that matters—the exact composition of the external world is generally irrelevant.

Further, I hold that the debate regarding the physicality or non-physicality of the external world is pointless for a second reason: however the world is composed, its composition is uniform, and can consist only of physical or non-physical things, but not both. Or, if the world is in fact composed of both physical and non-physical

things, we shall only ever have access to one of them, and never both—making the one we have no access to a useless construct, unworthy of our attention.<sup>1</sup> This is because things of a physical nature, like atoms, and things of a non-physical nature, like ideas, are fundamentally different from each other. As such, they have no hope of interacting, because two things must share at least some common properties in order to interact. Even assuming that both physical and non-physical things exist, because we would only ever have access to one of them, we would never have any evidence of the other's existence; therefore, the belief that both physical and non-physical things exist is unfounded. Insofar as we can have contact with physical or non-physical things, or insofar as they can have contact with each other, they must be of fundamentally the same nature. Since the external world must be either physical or non-physical in its nature, or because we only have access to either a physical or a non-physical world, the question of the details of the world's composition is moot—in terms of what we can know, we only need to establish that the world is objective and not merely a figment of our imagination.

The debate between philosophers on this issue is as old as the discipline itself, and men such as Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas have lent their support to one side or the other—most of them chose a middle ground. However, there are two thinkers so critical to the debate that they simply must be discussed. These are of course John Locke and George Berkeley, whose exchange neatly outlines the two basic camps of believers in the external world, materialists and idealists. Locke believes that the external world is composed of objects, which cause us to have sense impressions, and that through our experiences we gain concepts that can be rendered into knowledge through reflection—though this knowledge is merely of ideas within our own mind, and not of the world as it actually is. Berkeley believes that objects are entirely composed of their sensations, and that therefore matter cannot be said to exist; instead, he thinks, the world is merely a tissue of images that we experience, which emanate from the mind of God. While his idea

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense, I am just like Berkeley; what differentiates us is that I do not dismiss the existence of matter out of hand, whereas he rejects it completely. The middle-ground position, that both physical and non-physical things exist, is also beyond that which I wish to discuss, as I am only interested in arguing that there is no practical difference between materialism and idealism.

may seem almost absurd, God serves roughly the same purpose as the material universe does for Locke: as an objective and impartial source of sensation, available to all.

What we can learn from the debate between Locke and Berkeley is this: We interact with what we interact with, and all that really matters is that the external world has those qualities which make knowledge possible. As St. Augustine once said,

I call this entire thing, whatever it is, which surrounds us and nourishes us, this object, I say, which appears before my eyes and which I perceive is made up of earth and sky, or what appears to be earth and sky, the world ... If, however, you deny that this object which appears to me is the world, you are making it a controversy in regards to a name since I said that I called it the world.<sup>2</sup>

Augustine highlights my core point, namely, that that which we experience is the world. And despite the quibbles and quarrels of materialists and idealists, what we experience is real, regardless of whether the world consists of ideas or hard matter, because that is how we have defined “reality.” Semantics is all that truly distinguishes materialists and idealists, insofar as both acknowledge that an external world exists.

## Materialism

John Locke believes that all of our ideas about the world come to us through sense perception, accessed through the relevant organs, which are then aggregated and generalized by means of reflection.<sup>3</sup> All complex ideas and thoughts are simply deeper levels of reflection. He also outlines several types of knowledge, ordering them in terms of their perfection and certainty. At the top of Locke’s hierarchy is intuitive knowledge, or the knowledge of what we experience; if I see red, I know that I see red. At the bottom of his hierarchy is knowledge of the world as it actually is; Locke believes in a physical, objective world that exists outside the senses, but he does not claim to have any access to it, holding that we can only gain ideas through the medium of sense perception.<sup>4</sup> True knowledge is nothing more than the

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<sup>2</sup> *Contra Academicos*, in *Human Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 93.

<sup>3</sup> *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Human Knowledge*, 130–31. See also William Uzgalis, “John Locke,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (plato.stanford.edu), 2001.

<sup>4</sup> *Essay*, 142–44.

“perception of the connexion of and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas.”<sup>5</sup>

Locke rejects the notion of innate ideas, saying instead that minds are born as blank slates to be written upon.<sup>6</sup> As evidence for his claim that minds are blank slates, he asks us to consider the fact that a man blind from birth cannot comprehend color; he would require a sense of sight to do so. Because of this, Locke also draws a distinction between what he calls primary and secondary qualities—the former being actual properties of a physical object, usually things that are measurable, and the latter being qualities assigned to an object by the mind, such as color.<sup>7</sup> However, since organs of sense perception are only a medium for gaining impressions and cannot manufacture the latter on their own, these impressions must have a cause. For Locke, the mind is a mostly passive thing, which does little more than observe, and sensory input could therefore only originate from a source outside of us. He thinks that it would be foolish to doubt the existence of the outside world. The fact that our sense organs require stimuli to generate impressions, and the fact that they are themselves physical, would suggest that the world itself is physical.

Locke’s claims, while they seem sensible on the surface, seem rather odd when one applies closer scrutiny. For instance, he claims that there is a material world beyond us, but that we have no access to it, since we must always experience it by way of sense perception. At most, Locke can rightly establish that there must be an external world that is capable of providing us with sense perceptions, since our passive minds cannot generate their own original impressions. However, assuming that this external world is physical because our sense organs are physical is circular reasoning. It also presumes, without grounding, that our organs are indeed physical, yet we only are aware of them insofar as our sense experience will inform us of their existence.

## **Idealism**

George Berkeley, responding directly to Locke, claims that there is no distinction to be made between primary and secondary qualities, and that there is nothing that we as human beings experience other

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

than ideas.<sup>8</sup> He writes, “Again, I ask whether those supposed *originals*, or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, be themselves perceivable or no? If they are, then *they* are ideas, and we have gained our point.”<sup>9</sup> If all of our ideas were to originate as sense impressions, as Locke would suggest, then there would be no cause whatsoever to suggest that we were actually seeing things as they were; the primary–secondary quality distinction has been shown, by Berkeley, to be no distinction at all, leaving no ties between the impression of objects that we receive and the objects themselves. Because he finds no way to justify through sense perception the “inert senseless substances” that would constitute “matter,” he dismisses it as a concept.

In the place of matter and a universe, Berkeley would substitute ideas and God. Like Locke, he holds that our ideas must have a cause, because we witness them flowing from one to another. However, he requires a substitute for matter as the cause of our impressions, since ideas must originate from somewhere. Unlike matter, which operates in a mechanical way, ideas cannot be said to cause each other to happen; they are not like billiards smashing into one another, causing the rest to move. Further, ideas can only exist in a mind, and only ideas are like other ideas.<sup>10</sup> In order for a thing to exist, it needs to be perceived by a mind—if not by us, then at least by God.<sup>11</sup> Our sense impressions, which are themselves ideas, must also be provided to us from some greater mind, since our minds are not capable of generating ideas on their own, or with the same degree of vividness that we experience in impressions.<sup>12</sup> Berkeley would call this greater mind God.

## Synthesis

In a rather counterintuitive way, Berkeley intended to preserve reality as we typically would conceive of it without sacrificing its more qualitative, secondary bits. In his attempt to do so he threw out the concept of matter, but he allowed us to keep our sense of an objective, tangible, and generally accurate picture of reality. Unlike Locke, Berkeley claims that what we see is what we get. He is a defender of

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<sup>8</sup> Lisa Downing, “George Berkeley,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (plato.stanford.edu), 2004.

<sup>9</sup> *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *Human Knowledge*, 160.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 156–66; see also “George Berkeley.”

<sup>12</sup> *Principles*, 165.

common sense, and of realism.<sup>13</sup> It is ironic, then, that when a man picks up a rock; he assumes that he is in fact picking up something real and independent of his own existence, and his common sense tells him so. Is not “matter” in common parlance simply that which we hold to be objective and to exist apart from our own consciousness? Perhaps “matter” might, in Locke’s definition, consist of physical bodies which are engaged in motion and have extension, and Berkeley might call this definition ridiculous, but “matter” must at least be defined in terms of its separateness from our perception and its objectivity. Further, if only ideas and minds exist, and motion and extension are ideas central to our understanding of the world, then surely they are things that exist.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, though Berkeley would call that which makes up the external world “ideas” and a common man, and perhaps even Locke, would call it matter, we may say that these two things—physical and non-physical things—are the same insofar as they carry the same practical meaning for us as observers of the world. An all-or-nothing philosophy of materialism or idealism is the same philosophy—though one should note that Locke believes in both physical and non-physical things, and is therefore not a pure materialist.

To Berkeley’s credit, his criticisms of Locke are effective, and I am forced to accept his argument, insofar as it may be said that all that we experience is “ideological” in nature. However, it is not clear that in order to provide us with sensations there must be some sort of God to do so. As he says at the very end of his text, “whatever we see, feel, hear, or in any wise conceive or understand remains as secure as ever, as real as ever. There is a *rerum natura* ... .”<sup>15</sup> Those powerful sense impressions, which we do not generate but which are imposed on us, he says are “according with certain rules or laws of nature” which “speak themselves the effects of a mind more powerful and wise than

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<sup>13</sup> Harry McFarland Bracken, *The Early Reception of Berkeley’s Immaterialism: 1710–1733* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Some ideas are complex, and others are simple. Simple ideas or concepts form the basis of more complex ideas, which are really combinations of many different simple ideas. This concept of idea layering must be as Berkeley himself conceives of it, as he defines “abstraction” as the subtraction of detail from more particular examples to create more general ideas—see *Principles*, 158. If “motion” and “extension” are merely simple ideas that form the foundation of all more complex sensational ideas, then it is useless for even idealists to dispute their existence, as they can simply be said to be a part of the definition of anything we describe as experiential, whatever that may be.

<sup>15</sup> *Principles*, 166.

human spirits.”<sup>16</sup> If by “real as ever” and “according to the laws of nature” Berkeley means that these impressions are derived from a source that is consistent and indifferent to us, then there is little need to call it God, even if it *is* a mind; there is nothing here that indicates that this universal medium of ideological transference, “God,” has any sense of agency or intention, because complete indifference to its subjects and strict adherence to fixed laws suggests nothing but a mechanistic process.<sup>17</sup> If, as Locke says, minds are passive, they needn’t reflect or think in order to exist; they need only be that which records or contains ideas—thus a mechanistic and thoughtless mind is no contradiction. Positing the existence of some great eternal overmind is simply a way of halting the infinite regress that would occur if one were to ask where ideas are originally generated, if not by matter.

It is true that as mere information, ideas need a mind to house them, and Berkeley is quite right about that. But since “God” in Berkeley’s sense is simply that which contains and provides all of the ideas which we experience, and which maintains them even in our absence, it may suit some simply to call this “God” the universe—particularly if “God” has no observable agency or will to speak of. If we are content to call ideas and matter the same thing, and we can say that ideas follow each other in a logical fashion, then we can also say that ideas *can* cause change in other ideas, just as interactions in matter are said to cause motion and chemical reactions.<sup>18</sup> Just as Berkeley noted that ideas cannot be their own cause, though he would dismiss the concept, the same can be said of matter as it is typically construed; matter can be combined, separated, or transformed, but nothing else. If that is the case, then we can say that ideas function in exactly the same way that materialists suppose that inert matter functions—that is to say, independently of any *conscious* mind, operating only within the context of certain overarching laws of nature which govern them. Humans, too, can be said to exist within this governing framework of laws. Ideas and matter, in the most basic sense, can be construed as bits of information, or collections of qualities, existing within some grander medium which governs them—materialists call this the universe, idealists like Berkeley call it God, and the difference is

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> As a curious bit of trivia, it may be worth noting that despite his status as a bishop, many of his contemporaries thought Berkeley to be an atheist, so it may be that my reasoning isn’t that unorthodox. See *The Early Reception of Berkeley’s Immaterialism*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> For example, if *idea A* and *idea B* are simple ideas, but in combination form the more complex *idea C*, then it can be said that the interaction between *idea A* and *idea B* caused *idea C*.

semantic. This grander medium can be considered a mind insofar as it is a thing that contains ideas, but if one considers “ideas” to be synonymous with “matter,” then there is no real difference between “mind” and “universe.”

One possible objection to this assessment of Berkeley’s idealism is that his account of reality depends on the experience of subjective observers’ minds, which house all the ideas, notions, and concepts that make up reality. Both God and human beings are minds that observe and house ideas; God observes everything, including those ideas which are not currently in any of our minds.<sup>19</sup> As such, Berkeley’s Idealism only supposes that reality is objective insofar as it assumes that at no time is any idea’s existence dependent on a human mind to house it. However, the mind of God could still potentially be called a subjective observer, leaving no guarantee that the ideas that he supplies us with will be consistent or orderly in the way that one would hope. This would mean that the external world that we experience could very well be chaotic, and able to alter itself drastically at a moment’s notice, with no degree of permanence—this is something that would be possible only if there was an idealist God, but not something that would be possible in a material universe. However, the thought of God as an agent of potential chaos would probably run contrary to Berkeley’s own understanding of the universe, as he claims that it conforms to laws.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

As I hope to have demonstrated, the distinction between materialism and idealism is actually no distinction at all; both are ways of describing a world which is made available to us through sense experience, which is itself the result of some external force, be it God or matter. Idealism holds that we are minds which are only capable of experiencing ideas, or collections and amalgamations of qualities, which are supplied to us by God, and that there is nothing other than minds and ideas. Materialism holds that instead of a god, there exists some sort of physical, mindless substance that serves as the cause of our sense impressions. But both philosophies posit the existence of something outside of ourselves that guarantees a consistent reality that

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<sup>19</sup> *Principles*, 159, 165–66; “George Berkeley.”

<sup>20</sup> *Principles*, 166.

conforms to certain laws, and allows us to trust our senses. Curiously, both John Locke and George Berkeley were theists. And while I see no contradiction in Locke's God, which has very little to do with his materialist philosophy, if anything whatsoever, the God of Berkeley needlessly complicates a philosophy which would otherwise be identical in its practical consequences to materialism. In order to serve its purpose, Berkeley's God would need to be so indifferent to the lives of mortal men, and so mechanistic in its delivery of ideas, that the word "God" could not be sufficiently differentiated from the word "universe"—Berkeley's "God" wouldn't be worthy of the name.

All that is needed for an external reality is a governing system which binds its subordinate constructs, whether they be composed of matter or simple ideas, to laws that make them discernible to observers and allow them to exist objectively without the specific attention of any particular observer. Out of habit and custom, our language has deemed these external constructs to be "matter," the house of all these constructs to be "the universe," and the laws that govern them to be "physics"—Berkeley would substitute "ideas" for "matter" and "God" for "universe." To dispute the terms our language has assigned to external objects is to do nothing more than play a semantic game. In the end, that which we experience is the same.

# “Practice Rather than Theory”: The Role of Self-Knowledge in *Paradiso*’s Sphere of the Fixed Stars

John-Paul Heil

Despite his many contributions to Italian language, culture, and history, Dante Alighieri is often overlooked as a philosophical writer. Although all of his works reveal his philosophical formation, Dante is, for the most part, considered to be a master poet and author of the world’s most famous lyrical poem, *The Divine Comedy*. Dante “the philosopher” is rarely found in textbooks of historical philosophy. In the rare cases in which Dante’s philosophical acumen is recognized, the early works (*Convivio* and *De Monarchia*) overshadow the *Comedy*, due to their more typically philosophical rhetoric.<sup>1</sup>

Christian Moevs attempts to rectify this neglect in his book *The Metaphysics of Dante’s Comedy*.<sup>2</sup> His argument is multi-layered. Moevs argues that the *Comedy* is a work of philosophy because it is a work of ethics: the goal of philosophy, to grow in love of wisdom, is the attainment of ethical perfection. Moevs argues that the anagogical and ethical purpose of the *Comedy* is to encourage contemplation and self-knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Moevs supports this point in part by focusing on Dante

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of this, see the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’s account of Dante as philosopher ([plato.stanford.edu/entries/dante](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dante)). Even a cursory examination shows how little philosophical study has been given to the *Comedy*. The article’s bibliography demonstrates the amount of research done on the *Convivio* and on the philosophical influences on Dante’s thought rather than on Dante as a genuinely philosophical thinker or on his philosophy in the *Comedy*.

<sup>2</sup> Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante’s Comedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> The *Comedy*, like the Bible, has four traditional ways of being interpreted, acknowledged by Dante himself in the “Letter to Cangrande.” In the “Letter,” Dante states that, for the *Comedy*, “the first sense is that which comes from the letter, the second is that which is signified by the letter. . . the first is called the literal, the second allegorical or moral or anagogical” (Dante Alighieri, “Letter to Cangrande,” trans. James Marchand, [faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/cangrande.english.html](http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/cangrande.english.html)). While this distinction is correct, modern Biblical studies breaks down each of these four fields into distinct areas. According to the biblical interpreter J. I. Packer, “each [of these three senses other than literal] was in a broad sense allegorical: the ‘moral’ or ‘tropological’ (from which one learned rules of conduct), the ‘allegorical’ proper (from which one learned articles of faith), and the ‘anagogical’ (from which

the Pilgrim's time in the Primum Mobile and the Empyrean.<sup>4</sup> Thus, by focusing on contemplation of the self as a specific ethical goal of the *Comedy*, Moevs supports his broader point of arguing for the *Comedy* as a work of ethical philosophy.

This project supports and aims to clarify Moevs's central argument, namely, that the *Comedy* needs to be taken seriously as a work of philosophy. However, although Moevs's book deserves praise as "surely the best book ever written on the philosophical aspect of the *Commedia*,"<sup>5</sup> it raises confusion at key points rather than clarity. Although Moevs argues that the ethical purpose of the *Comedy* is self-reflection, Moevs does not give an account of self-reflection. Moevs, despite attempting to frame the moral journey of the *Comedy* under the rubric of self-reflection, does not define how this process of self-reflecting works, nor does he attempt to reconcile the views of Dante the pilgrim with Dante the poet. Furthermore, Moevs does not provide extensive investigation of the role of self-contemplation in other parts of the *Comedy* other than the Primum Mobile and the Empyrean, leaving other areas in the poem fecund for further investigation into both the meaning and role of self-knowledge in the *Comedy*. By examining two metaphysically significant moments in the Pilgrim's journey within the Sphere of the Fixed Stars, the role of self-reflection within both the Sphere and the poem at large becomes clearer. The purpose of self-knowledge within the Sphere of the Fixed Stars is to recognize that the material world is unfulfilling but that a properly ordered life can lead to a detachment from the things of this

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one learned of the invisible realities of heaven)" (J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958], 101). The objection could be raised that self-knowledge, as Moevs understands it, is the analogical rather than the moral purpose of the *Comedy*. This is a very limited view of what constitutes ethical perfection. As Dante himself says, the modes of interpretation are all related, particularly the moral and analogical, since one can only achieve eternal life if one lives a properly ordered temporal life. Accordingly, perfect self-knowledge is a proper action of souls in heaven, and even imperfect self-knowledge is required in order to reach heaven.

<sup>4</sup> The terms self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-contemplation, consideration of self, etc. will be used interchangeably throughout this argument, as Moevs similarly does not draw a sharp distinction between any of these terms. Since the definition of self-contemplation within the *Comedy* is under examination here, it does not make sense to pay much attention to the potential distinctions that might arise between these terms. The only consideration that should be mentioned here is that "self-contemplation" does not necessarily always mean contemplation of oneself alone. While the self is important to Dante, it is generally a recognition of self as situated in the world, as a child of God, as a sinful creature, and so on. Contemplation of self seems to be intrinsically tied to the things related to one's self as well as one's own soul. This will be examined further later.

<sup>5</sup> Winthrop Wetherbee, "Dante Alighieri," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, plato.stanford.edu/entries/dante/#ComDivCom/.

world, which leads to the world to come.<sup>6</sup> The detachment that comes through self-knowledge results in a proper understanding of creation.

Identified by Roger Lafferty, a key Dantist debate on this topic is over the genre of the *Comedy*: literature or philosophy? Although Lafferty's work will be discussed in more detail later, most scholarship on the philosophical content of the *Comedy*, in particular Nardi's work, places the poem in the former category rather than the latter. Moevs's work, although he never explicitly makes this claim, puts it in the latter category. Nardi's and Moevs's respective reasons for placing the *Comedy* in one category or the other seem to be tied to their views of the originality of Dante's philosophical thought in the *Comedy*. Nardi argues that "far more than Thomas [Aquinas], Dante is indebted to Albert Magnus."<sup>7</sup> While Nardi does not deny that Dante was influenced in some ways by the Aristotelian tradition, Nardi emphasizes the formative roles that Albert the Great and Neo-Platonism play in the development of the *Comedy*. Moevs, on the other hand, denies that Dante should be classified by connection to any single thinker or school and argues that he should instead be read as an independent philosophical thinker with his own distinct methods, or rather "neither one nor the other, but both."<sup>8</sup>

According to this account, what would make the *Comedy* a work of philosophy is the presence in the poem of a distinct philosophical argument that can be explained by reference to a particular thinker or school of philosophy. But this approach to the genre question still seems to be inadequate and negative in its form. In his review of the history of philosophy, Roger Scruton holds that there are "questions that have some *prima facie* right to be considered philosophical," which in turn delineate the major areas of philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Scruton identifies "studies of metaphysics, logic and epistemology" as well as "ethics, aesthetics and political philosophy" as the major categories of

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that this project only argues in favor of Moevs's major claim: that self-reflection is the ethical point of the *Comedy*, which in turn makes the *Comedy* a work of philosophy. This project does not necessarily support the other aspects of Moevs's book, including its discussion of dualism, Moevs's concerns with the form-matter distinction within the poem, and similar arguments within the book (most of which, in some way or another, seem to relate to Moevs's commitments to a non-dualist mysticism).

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Nardi, *Dal 'Convivio' alla 'Commedia'* (Roma: Nella sede dell'Istituto, 1960); "Il vero è che, assai più che a Tommaso, Dante è debitore ad Alberto Magno," 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Wittgenstein*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 5.

philosophical thought.<sup>10</sup> Scruton illustrates the breadth and limits of the use of the term “philosophical,” and he agrees with Moevs that an ethical argument is a philosophical argument. This will be the criterion for defining the *Comedy* as philosophical: if the *Comedy* turns out to have a central ethical point, it would, according to this working definition, be a work of philosophy. This may seem reductionist, but it is clear that Scruton sees philosophy in a classical sense, as a way of life rather than as a collection of subjects to be studied. This differentiates Scruton (and this project) from Moevs’s account of the philosophical point of the *Comedy*.

This inquiry raises some questions. The first is if examining the *Comedy* as philosophy is really very substantial. The second is whether or not this topic is relevant to Dante studies. The first can be answered by examining the underlying reason for Moevs’s argument. Moevs’s book is a response to a trend in Dantist literature (a trend foreseen by Lafferty) that reduces Dante to Thomistic or Neoplatonic or some other set of influences. However, scholars of Dante clearly underestimate the philosophical creativity and genius of the Florentine poet. This, in turn, answers the second question: Moevs’s book and this project have a similar goal, to draw attention to and contribute to a neglected way of interpreting Dante.<sup>11</sup>

## Historical and Literature Review

Scholarship on the *Comedy* is extensive; however, work on the *Comedy* as a philosophical text, as has been observed already, is more limited. Although there were philosophical examinations of the *Comedy* before the end of the Renaissance, by the close of Cosimo de’ Medici’s reign as the Duke of Florence, interest in the *Comedy* in general dissipated in favor of Boccaccio and Petrarch. A group of English artists and poets revived interest in the *Comedy* in the nineteenth century, and since then scholarship on the poem has expanded.

The *Comedy*’s philosophical aspects began to be examined in earnest by scholars in the early twentieth century. In particular, Roger Lafferty’s 1911 essay “The Philosophy of Dante,” was definitive in its

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>11</sup> Important differences from Moevs should be clarified. By comparison with Scruton, Moevs’s position that ethical reflection is *de facto* philosophical is vague. If the religious, ethical, and doctrinal dimensions of the *Comedy* are subsumed under a general sense of “philosophy” because “philosophy” describes a total narrative and religious experience, the resulting understanding of philosophical wisdom may seem completely inaccessible to readers. A danger lies in this way of thinking: in attempting to correct the philosophical reductionism of *Comedy* interpretations, Moevs may be slipping into over-intellectualization of the poem.

account of Dante's writings as an evolution of Dante's own philosophical thinking.<sup>12</sup> Lafferty stated that to be "rightly understood and appreciated, therefore, Dante should be approached from the point of view of philosophical studies, rather than of literary scholarship."<sup>13</sup> This view, while too dismissive of the literary merit of Dante's works, was groundbreaking for Dante studies. Lafferty declared that "The *Divine Comedy* is the most perfect expression ever given to any system of philosophy; especially is it the finest expression ever given to a moral philosophy."<sup>14</sup> The emphasis on the *Comedy* as a work of ethics was the key, according to Lafferty, to understanding the purpose of the *Comedy* as well as the metaphysics of the world through which the pilgrim and protagonist Dante traveled. Lafferty explains that "Dante's philosophy would be expressed by saying that he begins with ethics principally, and secondarily with politics and aesthetics, and from these develops a metaphysics."<sup>15</sup>

The major thrust of Lafferty's argument is that Dante humanizes the Scholastic tradition, creating a metaphysics within his writings that is based on how people are supposed to live. This metaphysics develops throughout Dante's writings, but is nevertheless consistent; Lafferty does not see a divide between the Dante of the *Convivio* and the Dante of the *Comedy*. Although Lafferty never states his position on the *Comedy*'s ethical argument, he seems to have believed that it was related to the pursuit of the contemplative life, going so far as the call Dante and his *Paradiso* "the link between pure Scholasticism and . . . Mysticism."<sup>16</sup> Dante's aim in the *Comedy* was to make the dense philosophy of the Middle Ages accessible and relevant to his readers so that any reader could have a way to achieve a mystical–ethical understanding of the world to come.<sup>17</sup>

Although Lafferty's praise of Dante is effusive, the essay's major contribution to the consideration of Dante and philosophy is also its greatest flaw. Lafferty states early in the essay that "As a philosopher,

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Lafferty, "The Philosophy of Dante," in *Annual Reports of the Dante Society* 30 (1911), 1–34.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> This suggests a further criticism, which will not be explored here for reasons of length, concerning Lafferty's suggestion that Dante is developing a new eschatology. Overlooking the problem of anachronism, this move neglects the fact that Dante is clearly writing for those here on earth rather than devoting his time to a study of the world to come.

however, Dante was not himself an original creative thinker, but the poet of the philosophy which had been making for centuries.”<sup>18</sup> In the essay’s first section, Lafferty lays out the major influences on Dante’s thinking: Aristotle, Aquinas, Plato, and Augustine. Although he did not intend it, Lafferty undermines his own thesis, that Dante’s works should be considered works of philosophy. By arguing both that Dante’s works are philosophical and that Dante is not an original philosopher, the *Comedy* and the poet’s other writings become less philosophically significant. What separates Dante’s philosophy from that of Aquinas, for example, becomes the humanized, often poetic presentation of the works rather than the works themselves. The *Comedy* is therefore an epic poem with philosophical elements rather than, as Lafferty intended, “poetic philosophy.”<sup>19</sup> According to this view, what makes the *Comedy* unique are its poetic form and story, not its philosophical content.

The view of the *Comedy* as philosophical poetry rather than poetic philosophy persisted throughout most of the twentieth century. Lafferty’s article began a trend of defining Dante’s philosophy by his influences rather than as something uniquely philosophical in its own right. Shortly after the publication of Lafferty’s article, Miguel Asin Palacios published his famous *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*, arguing that the *Comedy* is heavily influenced by Islamic philosophy.<sup>20</sup> Since the publication of Palacios’s book, scholars of Dante have continued to define the philosophical character of the *Comedy* according to a particular school of influence. Work engaging with the *Comedy* as Averroist, Avicennian, Aristotelian, Neo-Platonic, or Thomistic have been written, all the while losing sight of the key point Lafferty meant to defend: that in order to be properly studied, the works of Dante (the *Comedy* in particular) should be considered properly speaking philosophical. At the same time, interest in the ethics of the *Comedy* basically vanished.

An important exception to this trend is the scholarly work of Bruno Nardi. Nardi, whose interest in the relationship between Dante and philosophy came about concurrently with the publication of Lafferty’s article, devoted his life to the study of Dante. However, he too tends to restrict the philosophical genre to the question of influences upon Dante, rather than seeing Dante as a philosophical

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>20</sup> Miguel Asin Palacios, *La escatología musulmana en la Divina comedia* (Berkeley: The University of California, 2008).

thinker in his own right. Nardi follows in the tradition of interpreting Dante's *Comedy* as a work of philosophical poetry. By the time Nardi was writing the majority of his work, in the mid-twentieth century, scholarship had focused on the Aristotelian and Thomistic aspects of Dante's thought. Nardi challenged this view, reemphasizing the influence of the work of Albert the Great and the Islamic philosophers Avicenna and Averroes.<sup>21</sup>

Although interested in the *literary* value of Dante's works, Nardi also examines how Dante's writings, in particular the *Convivio* and the *Comedy*, represent shifts in Dante's life. Nardi details how "[t]he *Convivio* signaled the return of Dante to the philosophical studies to which he had dedicated himself after the death of Beatrice and which he had never entirely left . . ." <sup>22</sup> Thus, while Nardi does not always identify Dante with a particular school of philosophy, his focus on influence relegates philosophical issues to the question of their significance within Dante's life and poetic development—more a matter of *why* Dante wrote something rather than *what* that something actually meant or what its purpose was.<sup>23</sup>

Nardi's influence is seen in the best of Dante scholarship, above all that which situates Dante's works within the context of his life, including his philosophical and theological influences and his linguistic work in crafting a poem in the Italian vernacular.<sup>24</sup> This includes an entire subset of literature on the role of Beatrice within the *Comedy* as

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<sup>21</sup> Bruno Nardi, *Saggi e Note di Critica Dantesca*, (Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore: 1966), 24: "Ma parlando di Alberto Magno, che tanta influenza ebbe su Dante." For more information on the connection between Albert, Averroes, Avicenna, and Dante, see Nardi's chapter on "Philosophy and Theology in the Time of Dante," which treats the subject with much more depth than can be afforded here.

<sup>22</sup> *Dal 'Convivio'*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Although, if forced to do so, Nardi would most likely have categorized Dante as a follower of Albert.

<sup>24</sup> On situating Dante's works within his life: Charles Davis Till, *Dante and the Idea of Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); *Dante's Italy and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Ruedi Imbach, *Philosophes médiévaux: anthologie de textes philosophiques, XIIIe-XIVe*, (Paris: Union Generale, 1997). On Dante's philosophical and theological influences: Kenelm Foster, O.P., "Religion and Philosophy in Dante," in *The Mind of Dante*, ed. Uberto Limentani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); Cesare Vasoli, "Dante, Alberto Magno e la scienza dei 'peripatetici,'" in *Dante e la Scienza*, ed. Patrick Boyde (Ravenna: Longo), pp. 55–70; "Rimaggamenti danteschi di Aristotele: 'gravitas' e 'levitas' nella *Commedia*," in *La culture di Dante: studi in onore di Robert Hollander*, ed. Michelangelo Picone, (Florence: Cesati, 2004), pp. 151–77. On Dante and the vernacular: Alison Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Reuven Tsur, "Translation Studies, Cultural Context, and Dante," in *Comparative Literature and Culture* 3, no. 1 (Purdue: Indiana University Press, 2001).

a proto-feminist figure.<sup>25</sup> While many of these essays explore important areas of Dante's work, they exemplify the interpretation that Lafferty warned against over a century ago, allowing literary or authorial interest in Dante's works to overshadow their philosophical interest. Many of these Dantist sub-fields reduce philosophical analysis to mere historical analysis.

Christian Moevs consciously attempts to break from this tradition of interpreting the *Comedy*. He argues that Dante's philosophical influences are not clear-cut, but also, more significantly, that this scholarly preoccupation threatens the possibility of understanding Dante's real intellectual purposes. He does not occupy any one philosophical school: he "is neither one nor the other, but both."<sup>26</sup> Moevs observes that Dante

drew particular ideas with great freedom from different (often irreconcilable) sources, precisely because his purposes transcended differences of doctrine, differences that he considered a consequence of the inevitable ignorance and falsely motivated philosophizing of individual egos.<sup>27</sup>

Moevs argues that it does textual violence to reduce Dante's philosophical thought to the influence any one particular school of thought.

In light of this, Moevs sets out to outline Dante's unique philosophical project in the *Comedy*. Salvation, according to Dante, does not come through understanding in a usual sense. Salvation does not require a commitment to a particular philosophical approach, but rather a "self-awakening of the Real to itself in us, the surrender or sacrifice of what we take ourselves and the world to be, a changed experience that is one with a moral transformation."<sup>28</sup> Moevs characterizes Dante's understanding of philosophy as the reflexive love of intellect, concluding that "a philosopher whose contribution can be reduced to doctrine, to a new set of ideas, has either been misunderstood or is not very good."<sup>29</sup> The *Comedy* cannot be read as

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<sup>25</sup> On Dante and proto-feminism Diana Glenn, *Dante's Reforming Mission and Women in 'The Comedy'* (Leicester: Troubador, 2008); Jeffrey Schnapp, "Dante's Sexual Solecisms: Gender and Genre in the *Commedia*," in *The New Medievalism*, ed. Marina Brownlee (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1991); Deborah Anna Logan, "Female Spirituality: Can Women Aspire to Dante's Paradise?" in *Alabama Literary Review* 3, no 1 (1989), 73–83.

<sup>26</sup> *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. According to Moevs, Dante believes that true understanding is meant to catalyze "inner change" and that argumentation that leads only to more argumentation is meaningless sophistry.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

merely a synthesis of influences, but rather lays out Dante's mature sense of how philosophy should be done. As a result, by contrast with his earlier work (particularly the *Convivio*), in the *Comedy* Dante moves away from a standard model of disputation to an epic-poetic exhortation to the ethical life.

This deepens the question of the genre of the *Comedy*. Moevs argues throughout his book that Dante's primary moral argument is an exhortation to self-reflection.<sup>30</sup> Human beings are the only creatures with rational capabilities, and this marks them as made in the image and likeness of God. Since God cannot be separated from creation (or else creation itself would cease to exist) and God is perfect self-knowledge of the divine nature (love), human reason and all of creation are completely contingent on God's perfect love.<sup>31</sup> Through contemplation of the contingent relationship between God and creation, particularly as seen in the rational creature, moral perfection is attained.<sup>32</sup> This highlights the radically dependent nature of creation, as well as its gratuitous character, since only love can explain the being of things.

Moevs argues that "the *Comedy* ultimately falls under moral or ethical philosophy, because its ultimate aim, even when it treats speculative matters, is not speculation, but action (namely to lead humans to happiness). Salvation, after all, is a practical affair: *something* has to change."<sup>33</sup> Moevs does not outline his reasons for the necessity of internal change in salvation, but it is not difficult to see that Dante himself was arguing for this point in the *Comedy*.

The need for internal change can be seen even as early as the first tercet of the *Inferno*. Dante, recounting his time in the *selva oscura*, says that he had lost "the unstraying path"; his entire journey through the rest of the *Comedy* is a search to rediscover this unfailing way.<sup>34</sup> Examining Dante's simile of Achilles in the ninth canto of the *Paradiso*, Thomas Mussio explores this theme of the need for internal change within the Pilgrim. Dante's comparison of himself with Ganymede in *Purgatorio* IX.22–24 is interpreted by Mussio as a representation of the

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<sup>30</sup> *Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> As Moevs points out throughout his book, these ideas are heavily shaped by Dante's study of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and the Neoplatonists. Nevertheless, this need not entail reducing Dante's reflection to any particular influence, as argued above.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> *Inferno*, I.I.3, "la diretta via era smarrita."

Pilgrim's "stubborn resistance to progress and internal change."<sup>35</sup> Mussio connects this hesitation with both the Medusa encounter in *Inferno* IX and, more pertinently, Dante's gaze back toward Earth in *Paradiso* XXVII.<sup>36</sup> These three incidents are occasions for self-reflection by Dante the pilgrim and Dante the poet. Dante reflects on his fear of peril with Medusa, his fear of internal change in Purgatory, and his fear of leaving Earth behind in Paradise. The Pilgrim's second gaze back toward Earth and readiness to move onward after his time in the Fixed Stars demonstrates that the Pilgrim has achieved internal change of various kinds at different moments in the poem. Taken together, these examples suggest that knowledge of self is essential to the formation of spiritual fortitude in response to recurring fear of internal change.

Philosophy is a discipline through which one can begin to move toward God; however, because of the weakness of human reason, philosophy is an effective but imperfect tool.<sup>37</sup> Philosophy cannot do its work if it takes the form of sophistic argument with no clear conclusion; readers of the *Comedy* must come away from the poem spurred to change their lives, after the practical example of Dante the pilgrim. As Dante himself says in his "Letter to Cangrande," the "genus of philosophy under which we proceed here in the whole and in the part is the business of morals or ethics, since both the part and the whole are composed for *practice rather than theory*."<sup>38</sup> The *Comedy* is not (or not solely) a work for contemplation, but for action.<sup>39</sup>

Moevs's interpretation is often figurative in its use of the text, making it difficult to discern what it looks like to attain self-knowledge. Even when Moevs makes this claim most strongly, there is no consistent content or form to this self-knowledge in the *Comedy*.<sup>40</sup> When Moevs finds Dante the poet arguing for a "self-awakening of the Real to itself in us," he leaves it up to the reader to understand how each instance of self-reflection within the *Comedy* supports the larger picture of the poem as a poetics of ethical perfection.

Moevs's arguments can be improved by invoking Lafferty's approach to philosophical genre. If we can differentiate parts or ways that the *Comedy* serves a genuinely philosophical end, these should be

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<sup>35</sup> T. E. Mussio, "The Achilles Simile in Purgatorio 9," in *Romance Notes* 52.1 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 85.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> "Letter to Cangrande," emphasis mine.

<sup>39</sup> *Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy*, 86.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 83–86.

considered genuinely philosophical. The text itself can be analyzed in light of its ethical purpose, and this text should help to illustrate the way in which the poem is a work of moral philosophy—as identified in the “Letter to Cangrande.”

### Textual Analysis

The Sphere of the Fixed Stars is the most metaphysical of Dante’s heavens, as it is a part of nature while also transcending nature. In book 2, chapter 14 of the *Convivio*, Dante begins to lay out the differences between what he calls the three heavens: the Fixed Stars, the Primum Mobile, and the Empyrean. The Fixed Stars, which he calls the “Starry Heaven,” are associated with both physics and metaphysics, given its dual nature.<sup>41</sup> Dante associates this Starry Heaven with both because of the two poles of the sphere.

For thus: the pole of this Heaven that we see that signifies the sensible things, which makes up Physics; and the pole that we do not see signifies that things without matter that we cannot sense, which make up Metaphysics. And thus for these reasons the heaven under discussion has a close similarity to one of these sciences and the other.<sup>42</sup>

In this way, the Sphere of the Fixed Stars has two important characteristics: it is both the last sphere of the perceivable, physical universe and the first of the non-sensible heavens.<sup>43</sup> Dante further justifies this claim by explaining that

Thus, because [our galaxy] is an effect of those stars which we cannot see, if not for the effect these stars have, and Metaphysics is the science of first [primary] substances, which similarly we cannot know except through their effects, it is clear that the Starry Heaven has great similarity with Metaphysics.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Convivio* (Firenze: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1995), II.xiv.1. “... Lo Cielo stellato ...”

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., II.xiv.9. “Ancora: per lo polo che vedemo significa le cose sensibili, delle quali, universalmente pigliandole, tratta la Fisica; e per lo polo che non vedemo significa le cose che sono senza materia, che non sono sensibili, delle quali tratta la Metafisica: e però ha lo detto cielo grande similitudine coll’una scienza e coll’altra.”

<sup>43</sup> Not only in a sensible way, but in terms of being bound by the laws of physics and nature as well.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., II.xiv.8. “Onde, con ciò sia cosa che la Galassia sia uno effetto di quelle stelle le quali non potemo vedere, se non per lo effetto loro intendiamo quelle cose, e la Metafisica tratti

In Dante's universe, things that have characteristics of non-necessity are moved or caused by things that are more necessary and permanent. This could be compared to the expanding limit or causal forces of an expanding universe. The metaphysical dimension of Dante's observations here is present to explain the non-perceptible "beyond" of the physical limits of the universe; from an Aristotelian perspective, a causal dimension (the work of the Unmoved Mover diffused through the fixed stars) is vested in this, because the spiritual is more permanent and necessary than the physical.

Upon entering the Sphere of Fixed Stars proper, Beatrice and Dante encounter Jesus and Mary. It is interesting to consider that Dante has Christ and Mary appear here, the only place they are individually present in the entire *Comedy*.<sup>45</sup> The Sphere of Fixed Stars has evident Christological aspects; like Jesus, it has both a physical nature and a divine nature while still maintaining its oneness.<sup>46</sup> Dante, in having Jesus appear in this sphere, incorporates an Aristotelian view of the physical universe together with a Christian metaphysical worldview. Aristotle and the medieval cosmology he influenced held that the Sphere of Fixed Stars was the last sphere of the universe, the sphere closest to the Unmoved Mover; outside of the Unmoved Mover was nothing.<sup>47</sup> The Sphere of the Fixed Stars and the sphere that was moved first by the Unmoved Mover were later separated into two, the latter of which became the Primum Mobile. The Heaven of Christianity necessitated the creation of a tenth sphere, the Empyrean, a "heaven of divine peace" existing outside of space and time and home to God.<sup>48</sup> Through the unity of the metaphysical act of existence and the nature of the Sphere itself, the Fixed Stars serve as a mediator between the divine and the physical, just like Christ. Christ's appearance in this sphere references not only his twofold nature, but also the Christian Unmoved Mover as personified rather than as a

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delle prime sostanze, le quali noi non potemo simigliantemente intendere se non per li loro effetti, manifesto è che lo Cielo stellato ha grande similitudine colla Metafisica."

<sup>45</sup> The two do, of course, appear again in the final cantos of the poem within the Empyrean, but this is the only place in the *Comedy* where they are *present*; that is, the only place where the two individually appear and are engaged with by Dante. Dante does encounter them both later, but only as part of the crowds of the Empyrean. Much more focus is devoted to them here than elsewhere.

<sup>46</sup> As Moevs points out, the Sphere of Fixed Stars "distributes" the act of existence through diverse essences (the stars), essences that are distinct from, but nothing apart from or 'outside' of, the act of existence they qualify" (116).

<sup>47</sup> Al Van Helden, "Ptolemaic System," *The Galileo Project*, [galileo.rice.edu/sci/theories/ptolemaic\\_system.html](http://galileo.rice.edu/sci/theories/ptolemaic_system.html).

<sup>48</sup> *Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy*, 116.

causally necessitated entity. Jesus is both a metaphysical deity and the humanized God of the Christians. The key point here is Jesus' role in creation: Christ appears in the Fixed Stars both because of his twofold nature and because of his role in creation, as a necessary unmoved first principle of natural causality.

Likewise, while Jesus represents the divine united to humanity, Mary represents the human conformed to the divine. Dante the poet devotes fewer lines to his account of Jesus than he does to his description of Mary. This is because Dante the pilgrim is overwhelmed when he attempts to look upon Christ; rather than being blinded, he looks upon Beatrice looking upon Christ, and receives his perception of Christ through her.<sup>49</sup> Dante is able to see Mary and witnesses her heavenly train of souls singing hymns praising her, although it is still difficult because of the brightness that reflects her unique holiness.<sup>50</sup> The pilgrim is unable to look upon the divine made human, but he is able to see the human made divine.

Two very similar and important experiences bookend the Pilgrim's time in this very metaphysical region. At the beginning of their visit to the Fixed Stars, in canto XXII, Beatrice tells Dante that "you are so near the final source of well-being . . . that you need to have clear and acute vision, and so before you proceed farther, look down and see how much of the world is already beneath your feet."<sup>51</sup> Beatrice's reasons for this, as usual, are mysterious, as she tells Dante that if he looks upon the Earth, his "heart will have the joy necessary to join the triumphant throng that comes through this ethereal round."<sup>52</sup> Dante complies, and his first look back is one of enraptured awe.

Before proceeding farther, the distinction between Dante's different levels of discourse should be considered briefly. The *Convivio's* identification of the Sphere of the Fixed Stars as relating both to physics and metaphysics is key to understanding these levels, but it is difficult to identify where Dante ceases to be cosmological

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<sup>49</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso, a Verse Translation*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), XXIII: 85–87; translation mine.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 88–108.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, XXII.124–28: "Tu se' sì presso a l'ultima salute', cominciò Beatrice, 'che tu dei aver le luci tue chiare e acute; e però, prima che tu più t'inlei, rimira in giù, e vedi quanto mondo sotto li piedi già esser ti fei.'"

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, XXII.129–32: "sì che 'l tuo cor, quantunque può, giocondo s'appresenti a la turba triunfante che lieta vien per questo etera tondo.'"

and astronomical and speaks rather in allegorical or moral terms. However, Dante himself would most certainly not have drawn a sharp line between these different levels of narrative meaning. The transitional nature of the Sphere of the Fixed Stars (separating the physical world from the world beyond) is allegorical, metaphysical, astronomical, and properly cosmic, all at the same time.

Upon looking back toward Earth, the pilgrim contemplates how far he has come physically, intellectually, and spiritually. He recognizes his foolishness in believing that the moon was both “rare and dense” and sees for the first time the smallness of the Earth.<sup>53</sup> Dante, now on the farthest edge of the physical universe, looks back on the seven heavenly bodies he has traversed and contemplates his travels through Paradise. He also observes Earth and, seeing its smallness and humble glory compared to the rest of the heavens, considers the irony of how a “little piece of land . . . makes us so ferocious.”<sup>54</sup> Beatrice’s cryptic language seems already to point to greater forces at play here than a mere poetic flourish on Dante the Poet’s part.<sup>55</sup> The next step, then, is to examine the passage as making an ethical point.

Dante admits that he “smiled at [the Earth’s] ignoble semblance,” amused by the contrast between his home and the Heavenly Spheres, between a small patch of dirt and a majestic solar system.<sup>56</sup> But, if Beatrice is to be believed, this amusement seems to be crucial to further progress in his journey, as it will prove that he has the “clear and acute vision” needed to see the things of the higher spheres.<sup>57</sup> This vision thus seems to come from Dante’s contemplation of himself as a human being and native of Earth. Dante has gained new sight, both externally (at the level of physics and cosmology) and internally (at the level of metaphysics and ethics). Externally, Dante can see the smallness of Earth compared to the rest of the spheres. Earth is seen in its proper context, as relatively insignificant within the scope of Providence. Internally, the Pilgrim can now also see how foolish it is to be so preoccupied with earthly affairs. His newly

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., XXII.141: “rara e densa.”

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., XXII.151: “L’aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci.” Mandelbaum and Singleton translate *aiuola* as “threshing floor”; I do not disagree, but I also believe that the point that Dante was trying to stress here was the smallness and unimportance of the Earth and the foolishness in fighting over such an insignificant piece of the universe.

<sup>55</sup> It is also interesting to note that Dante is looking back through the Heavenly Spheres immediately after visiting the planet Saturn, which is identified by Dante with the study of astronomy; see Massimo Verdicchio, *The Poetics of Dante’s Paradiso* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 123.

<sup>56</sup> *Paradiso*, XXII.135: “ch’io sorrisi del suo vil sembiante.”

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., XXII.126.

contextualized self-reflection generates spiritual insight into the relative insignificance of worldly politics and other temporal matters. Dante thus experiences both cosmic and moral insights.

Dante's earthly gaze is thus an act of self-contemplation, but it also illustrates an ethical point for the poem's audience. This look back toward Earth is a way for the Pilgrim to start freeing himself from temporal and spatial concerns.<sup>58</sup> Now that he has seen the Earth and all human concerns for what they really are—insignificant in the grand scheme of things—he can better put his own worries behind him and move ever closer to the Empyrean, where neither time nor space exist. Likewise, Dante the poet is illustrating here that contemplation brings with it a freedom from earthly concerns, which is a necessity for entering the Empyrean.

While for Dante the pilgrim this entrance is literal, for Dante the poet this point is anagogical, demonstrating a truth about a requirement for achieving life in heaven. In contemplating the Earth as a human being, Dante the pilgrim stands for humanity as a whole, specifically humanity's ability to see itself in a right manner. Indeed, it seems that seeing things in the proper way is a requirement for entering the Empyrean, both literally, in the pilgrim's case, and to achieve salvation for human beings in general. Human beings can recognize both their greatness and weakness. Boethius (with whom Dante was very well acquainted) illustrates this clearly in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, explaining how "human souls are more free when they persevere in the contemplation of the mind of God, less free when they descend to the corporeal, and even less free when they are entirely imprisoned in earthly flesh and blood."<sup>59</sup> The capacity of human beings to be able to realize the weakness of the physical world and the freedom in their contemplation of the mind of God (through the order of the universe) is key to their achieving eternal life in the Empyrean.

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<sup>58</sup> Singleton concurs with this point, saying that in turning away from the spheres towards Beatrice's eyes at the end of his gaze towards Earth, the Pilgrim "implies an upward gaze now that rejects and negates all the rest. [Beatrice's] eyes reflect a spiritual universe that is immeasurably more important" (*Dante Alighieri, Paradiso 2: Commentary*, trans. Charles Singleton [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991], 370).

<sup>59</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans., David R. Slavitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 150. One point for further consideration is how much Dante's gaze back toward Earth here is meant to invoke Lady Philosophy's view of God's eternal knowledge as like a spectator at a chariot race.

This gaze back to Earth certainly has a personal and moral aspect for Dante the pilgrim. Beatrice's comment that Dante "has need" for the vision that his look back toward Earth will provide suggests that the Sphere of the Fixed Stars is a moral gateway to Heaven, parallel to Dante's experience in Purgatory shortly before entering into the Earthly Paradise.<sup>60</sup> Admission to the Earthly Paradise requires Dante to "wash away [his] sores," the seven *peccati* (sins) represented on Dante's head by seven *Ps*, by ascending the mountain of Purgatory.<sup>61</sup> Dante has been purified of his sins and earthly worries throughout his time in the three realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, but before he goes farther he must accomplish more work. The first task he must complete is looking back to the Earth and recognizing that it is not worth the concern that Dante has been giving it for so long.<sup>62</sup> Dante is orienting himself more and more toward heavenly wisdom, toward the divine, which can be seen particularly in his second gaze back toward the Earth.

This second look back upon the Earth at the end of his time in the Fixed Stars emphasizes how far Dante has come. Dante, when first looking back on his home planet and the rest of the heavens in canto XXII, spends twenty lines describing the wonders he is looking down upon. However, in canto XXVII, when Beatrice tells Dante to look back again before they continue on to the Primum Mobile, the poet only devotes nine lines to this second reflection. Dante once again calls the Earth a "little piece of land" and sees part of the Mediterranean, but he cannot see any more of the Earth due to the position of the sun.<sup>63</sup>

While this could be Dante the poet showing off his skills at cosmology and determining the location of the heavenly bodies, it is worth noting that the sun was a sphere which the poet had previously associated with the wise.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Dante calls the sun "a sign and more departed."<sup>65</sup> Thus, Dante's view of the Earth, of the

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<sup>60</sup> *Paradiso*, XXII.125–26.

<sup>61</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio, a Verse Translation*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1984), XXII.113; translation mine.

<sup>62</sup> There are two further tasks that Dante either completes or is given during his time in the Fixed Stars. The second task is to successfully pass the tests of the Apostles. The third task is for Dante to bring what he has seen in the heavens back to Earth, to bring Peter's condemnation of the Church as well as the glory of Heaven to the people of Earth (*Paradiso*, XXVII.64–66).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVII.86: "di questa aiuola." For Singleton, this "marks a definite recall to the previous time when Dante looked down" (*Commentary*, 437).

<sup>64</sup> See *The Poetics of Dante's Paradiso*, 59–77 and *Convivio* xiii, 15–19.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

unimportant things below, has been eclipsed by the brightness of wisdom during his time in the Fixed Stars. Dante the pilgrim quickly abandons this look back and turns his gaze back to Beatrice, finally freed from temporal worries and ready to move onward to his ultimate goal in the Empyrean.<sup>66</sup>

Because the Fixed Stars are the first of the three heavens, according to the *Convivio*, the Sphere is in some ways the gateway to the Empyrean and, as with the last gateway that Dante passed through in Purgatory, Dante must complete some challenges in order to proceed farther.<sup>67</sup> The questions asked by the three apostles all clearly deal with Dante's self-knowledge. The three rounds of questioning follow a similar format. First, the apostles ask Dante to explain the definition of a particular virtue. After the definition (or clarification of a definition), Dante is then asked if he has the virtue and to prove that this is the case. Each time, Dante is able to demonstrate that he has the virtue and is praised by the apostle, Beatrice, and the angelic choirs. Dante answers these questions through a self-examination of each virtue within him and by calling upon examples from Scripture and tradition to back up his points.

In Purgatory, the Pilgrim had to "wash"<sup>68</sup> seven Ps from his forehead and pass through a purifying fire in order to be given "crown and miter over [himself]"<sup>69</sup> and to be granted admission to the Earthly Paradise. Achieving the Earthly Paradise has similar requirements for entry as the Empyrean itself. In heaven, Dante has been crowned and mitered over his passions, but he is still drawn back to Earth by his temporal worries.<sup>70</sup> By contemplating his temporal existence *qua*

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<sup>66</sup> *Commentary*, 435.

<sup>67</sup> *Purgatorio*, XXVII.49–53.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 113. "Sette P ne la fronte mi descrisse/ col punton de la spada, e 'Fa che lavi,/ quando se' dentro, queste piaghe,' disse." This has already been briefly discussed earlier, but there are a few further notes to be made about the Ps. The first is that there is consensus among scholars that the Ps signify *peccati*, sins, and this account will not be challenged. The second point, however, is that there is still debate over the Ps themselves, namely their general allegorical significance or if, within the story itself, Dante is the only one on the mountain with the seven Ps (as he is the person on Purgatory with a body). For more on this, see Robert Hollander, "The Letters on Dante's Brow," *Princeton University*, 31 January 2002, [www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/bob013102.html](http://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/bob013102.html).

<sup>69</sup> *Purgatorio*, XXVII, 142: "per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio."

<sup>70</sup> Readers should remember Mussio's comment about how the Poet uses his Achilles similes in each canticle, including the one here before the movement into the Fixed Stars, to demonstrate the Pilgrim's "stubborn resistance" to moving forward with his journey ("The Achilles Simile," 85).

existence directly rather than concentrating only on his moral shortcomings in the physical world, Dante orients himself more and more toward heavenly wisdom, towards the divine. This reiterates the point that the Poet made in the *Convivio* about the Sphere's correspondence with metaphysics and physics. Thanks to his looks back toward Earth and testing in the Fixed Stars, the Pilgrim has become cognizant of the importance of divine wisdom in achieving heaven and the futility of remaining concerned with temporal affairs if one is aiming for heaven.

However, this does not mean that there is no moral component to Dante's metaphysical and physical considerations in the Fixed Stars. In fact, although this is a somewhat paradoxical point and therefore difficult to grasp, Dante's metaphysical reorientation away from temporal concerns and toward the divine is itself a moral entreaty for others to do the same. This ties Dante's first task to his third. For example, St. Peter himself begs Dante to return to Earth to reveal what the latter has learned in Heaven, as the Church itself has become more concerned with earthly matters than what lies beyond. As Peter says shortly before Dante leaves the Sphere, "Never was the bride of Christ brought up/ by my blood . . . to be used to acquire more gold,/ *but to acquire this life of joyousness . . .*"<sup>71</sup> Peter's entire condemnation of the current state of the Church and the papacy proves this point, but these lines in particular demonstrate that there is a widespread moral need for this metaphysical change of focus from the temporal to the divine. Furthermore, unlike the sophistry of other philosophers, Dante is showing here how philosophy and metaphysical concerns cannot be divorced from internal change. The overvaluation of worldly matters by comparison with the perspective of wisdom must be addressed.

Dante the poet does not leave his readers in the lurch to solve this problem for themselves, but provides some suggestions for how this can be done through the character of Beatrice shortly after she and the pilgrim leave the Sphere of the Fixed Stars and enter the Primum Mobile. Although they are no longer in the Fixed Stars, Beatrice's discourse on the sorry state of the world reveals much about this problem and how to solve it. Beatrice entreats both Dante and the readers to return to a child-like faith that most abandon "before the cheeks are covered with a beard."<sup>72</sup> She argues that "on Earth, there

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<sup>71</sup> *Purgatorio*, XXVII.40–43, emphasis mine. "Non fu la sposa di Cristo allevata/ del sangue mio, di Lin, di quel di Cleto,/ per essere ad acquisto d'oro usata;/ ma per acquisto d'esto viver lieto."

<sup>72</sup> *Paradiso*, XXVII.129: "pria fugga che le guance sian coperte."

is no one who governs/and so strays the human family.”<sup>73</sup> It is not too great of a leap to make, especially given Peter’s scathing criticisms of the papacy just lines before in the canto, that what is being said here is that, without a church that focuses on the world beyond rather than the material world, humanity strays from salvation. The church, if properly ordered, can mediate between the visible and the divine as popes like Peter were able to do. Without good rule rooted in a child-like faith, however, the church and its members are unable to correctly see themselves, unable to properly self-reflect within the cosmos, which in turn leads to an overemphasis on the material and an underemphasis on giving up the physical to move to spiritual goods.

To return to the comparison of the Fixed Stars with the moral quest of Purgatory. This severs Dante’s connection with the things of Earth and prepares him to enter into a space outside of space, an eternity outside of time, the Empyrean. Dante’s gazes back towards the Earth and his subsequent trials in the Fixed Stars thus serve similar purposes as those of the seven Ps and the purifying fire in the *Purgatorio*. Dante could not enter the Earthly Paradise without freeing himself from his sins and could not enter Paradise itself without liberating himself from his temporal concerns through self-knowledge.

The apostles’ tests of Dante the pilgrim serve two purposes. First, they demonstrate the importance of Dante the pilgrim’s self-knowledge. In spite of the demanding nature of these questions and even temporary blindness, Dante’s self-knowledge and right understanding of his own virtue enables him to complete these challenges. Second, these definitions are Dante the poet’s way of entreating his readers to reconsider whether or not they have the proper understanding of the virtues that are supposed to be the cornerstones of their lives; without a proper knowledge and use of these virtues, as Dante the pilgrim demonstrates, access to Heaven would be impossible.

Readers must thus consider whether they are forming their faith as “the substance of the things we hope for and the argument for things unseen.”<sup>74</sup> Faith naturally necessitates hope through this definition, as it is “a certain expectation of future glory, which is the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 139–40: “pensa che ’n terra non è chi governi;/ onde si svia l’umana famiglia.”

<sup>74</sup> *Paradiso*, XXIV.62–63: “fede è sustanza di cose spate e argomento de le non parventi.”

production of God's divine grace and the merits we have earned."<sup>75</sup> In fact, the only time that Dante almost falters is when he dwells too much on his earthly hopes: rather than keeping his mind on the matter at hand, Dante's mind wanders to the glory of how "at my baptismal font, I will put on the laurel crown" as poet of Florence.<sup>76</sup> However, both faith and hope are blindly applied without love to guide them, just as Dante is blinded by the light of St. John. Love is acquired through "philosophical arguments and from the authority that from hence descends," and "such love must in me be imprinted."<sup>77</sup> This love, which imprints itself on us from heaven, is the most important of the three virtues and the key to living out life on Earth and to achieving eternal life with God.

There is a broader structure within the Sphere of the Fixed Stars that presents itself, a hierarchy of properly ordered human goods, throughout Dante's time in the Sphere.<sup>78</sup> Dante's journey through the sphere begins by realizing the meaninglessness of earthly affairs, departing from material concerns and ordering himself toward Heaven. After this, Dante encounters Christ and Mary, two figures who complement each other; Christ is the divine made human, while Mary is the human made divine. Before all else, Jesus and Mary must be at the forefront of a properly ordered life. Dante's ability to see Christ exclusively through Mary and Beatrice demonstrates how frail human nature is. For all the power and reasoning capabilities they have, human beings of the physical world are not divine and can only become divine through imitation of other humans who have achieved divinity.<sup>79</sup> Through Mary, the saints, and other holy people, Christ becomes visible and accessible.

The questions the apostles ask of Dante reflect the importance of virtue in human life. Faith, hope, and charity are the foundation of a well-ordered life; it should come as little surprise that the champions for the virtues, the three apostles, appear in the wake of the departure

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., XXV.67–69: "Spene, 'diss' io, 'è uno attender certo de la gloria futura, il qual produce grazia divina e precedente merito."

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., XXV.8–9: "in sul fonte del mio battesimo prenderò 'l cappello."

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., XXVI.25–27: "Per filosofici argomenti e per autorità che quinci scende cotale amor convien che in me si 'mprenti."

<sup>78</sup> Although the hierarchy within the Sphere of the Fixed Stars has never been considered before now, Dante's use of hierarchy has been documented in other work. For an example see Jacob E. Weinrib, "Dante's Philosophical Hierarchy," in *Aporia* 15, vol. 1 (2005).

<sup>79</sup> This calls to mind the Aristotelian method of learning which habits to cultivate, namely by following the example of someone excellent. See *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a15–1104b4.

of Christ and Mary, as the virtues flow naturally from those two.<sup>80</sup> Once again, proper self-knowledge is necessary in order to live out a life according to the virtues, as it is only through self-knowledge that human beings can come to know whether or not they are living lives in accordance with virtue and that they are proceeding under the right definitions of these virtues. Eventually, in living virtuous lives, questions that may arise about the nature of the universe or revelation will be answered, at least in part, as demonstrated through Adam's appearance.

Finally, a well-ordered and properly understood life will have a purpose which will become apparent to the person living that life. St. Peter entreats Dante to tell the people of Earth about how the Church has become "a sewer of blood and of stench; so that the perverse one who fell from heaven will be contented there below."<sup>81</sup> Peter tells Dante not to be afraid to "open the mouth" and reveal the truth of what he has seen to the world.<sup>82</sup> This process prepares those who undertake it for what Dante experiences in his final gaze back to Earth: a complete detachment from all physical and temporal concerns, allowing for an ascent into Heaven.

Although this journey is not an easy one, as Dante the pilgrim demonstrates, it begins and ends with proper knowledge of self and with self-contemplation. At every step of the way, Dante the pilgrim needs corrected self-knowledge in order to proceed farther, beginning and ending with his recognition of the unimportance of the things of the material world. Thus, for Dante the poet, at least in this area of the *Comedy*, the role of self-knowledge is to provide a comprehension of self as unfulfilled by the physical world and to guide oneself through a life properly ordered to the hierarchy that Dante has laid out here.

## Conclusion

This project is located at the juncture of many questions, some large and some small. The largest one at play here is Lafferty's: is the *Comedy* a work of philosophical poetry or poetic philosophy? Christian Moevs argues for the latter, claiming, along with Dante's own "Letter

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<sup>80</sup> Not much explanation has been given about how this is possible, as I do not think much is needed: Mary is a moral exemplar and Jesus needs no introduction.

<sup>81</sup> *Paradiso*, XXVII.25-27: "fatt'ha del cimitero mio cloaca del sangue e de la puzza; onde 'l perverso che cadde di qua su', la' giu' si placa."

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

to Cangrande,” that the *Comedy* is a work of ethical philosophy. According to Moevs, the ethical point of the *Comedy* is to promote self-knowledge, but this attempt is weakened by Moevs’s lack of clarity in defining what the role of self-knowledge is in the *Comedy* and how to identify when Dante was making an ethical point, a point therefore in support of self-contemplation. By combining Lafferty’s question with Moevs’s methodology, a fix for the latter weakness has been found: Dante is making a philosophical point when he is arguing for something that clearly appears to be more than a poetic turn of phrase and that could potentially relate to the traditional areas of philosophy detailed by Scruton. This definition was applied to a place in the *Comedy* that Moevs had not examined, the Sphere of the Fixed Stars, in an attempt to find determine what role, if any, self-reflection plays in the *Comedy*. Self-contemplation does indeed play a key part in Dante’s time in the Sphere of Fixed Stars, enabling him to sever himself from material concerns and to pass through the challenges of the Sphere unscathed. This contemplation of self, combined with the hierarchy for a well-ordered life laid out by Dante throughout the sphere’s poetic structure, allows one to depart from the concerns of this world and prepare for heaven.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Many thanks to my project mentor, Dr. Paige Hochschild, for her help, comments, and tireless revisions of this paper. Her saintly virtue of patience has truly helped me begin to leave the material things of this world (adverbs, run-ons) behind and reorient myself to the goods of heaven (clear language, concise sentences).