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Aletheia

Texas A&M Journal of Undergraduate Philosophy

A warm congratulations to Daniel Lightsey and Keilany Lightsey on their

new marriage

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I want to begin this edition by mentioning that the 2020-2021 academic year was one of the most transformative for *Aletheia*. In one year, our journal tripled the size of its editorial board, tripled the number of its annual publications, accepted submissions from across North America, became a university-recognized internship for editors, and took on the annual coordination of the IV-CUP. All of these things were a first for our journal and they will certainly not be the last.

These developments, and many more, are due in no small part to a number of supporters whose encouragements and guidance were vital to the success of *Aletheia*. I would take the first few pages of this journal to thank some of the most impactful among them: The editorial board, Dr. Linda Radzik, Dr. Dwayne Raymond, Jordan Dunlap, Daniel Lightsey, Jake Donohue, and Hadley McKnight. To them all, we are deeply grateful. Special thanks are also given to A&M's Department of Philosophy's faculty and staff for endorsing this publication.

This was a tumultuous year for many and, unfortunately, some of those who contributed to this edition of *Aletheia* were no exception. Within these pages, you will see the scholars' dedication to academia and their brilliance shining through their arguments. Lying beneath all the text though, are the efforts and countless hours our editors put into making this edition a reality. Each and every contributor brings value and an undeniable rarity to these pages.

Finally, I have been fortunate enough to witness four cycles of scholars be published in this journal — each wildly exceeding my expectations. It has been a privilege to endorse their works and I look forward to seeing how they all continue to change the world. It is with all the sincerity in my heart that I say it was an honor to serve as the Editor-in-Chief for this past year of *Aletheia*.

Now, dear reader, please enjoy *Aletheia's* Spring 2021 edition!

<div align="right">

Eric W. Nash
B.A. in Philosophy
Class of 2022

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NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

I would like to express my gratitude to all of the editors of this edition of the journal for their hard work and flexibility during the development of this edition of *Aletheia*. Especially for their resilience and dedication to continue working on the journal during the COVID-19 pandemic. This edition of the journal has a variety of topics, from existentialism to the question of sexism in Aristotle's works and other intriguing and thought-provoking topics. Thank you to the scholars who are part of this edition of *Aletheia* for submitting your superb writings which are wonderful contributions to their respective fields of philosophy. A special thank you is in order for Eris-Jake Donohue and Bec Morris for making the covers of this edition of the journal—they are a splendid addition. I would also like to acknowledge Professor Raymond for supervising the journal's progress and ensuring that the journal was completed. A final thanks to our Editor-In-Chief Eric Nash for making everything happen and his excellent leadership capabilities that kept all of us working efficiency. I think I can speak for all of us when I say that it was a pleasure to work with him. Finally, to all the readers of this journal, I hope you enjoy the following pages and find them illuminating as well as insightful.

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Eric Nash

Eric Nash is a junior philosophy major with minors in English and classics from New Braunfels, Texas. He is curious about all fields of philosophy but has a particular interested in philosophy of jurisprudence, environmental ethics, philosophy of religion, axiology, political philosophy, and ethics. In his undergraduate career, Eric has had the privilege of writing a thesis as Glasscock Summer Scholar, being a Fish Camp counselor, serving as a director for the sexual assault awareness committee of SLIDE, interning at the Hernandez Law Firm, and serving as the Editor-in-Chief for *Aletheia*. After graduating from Texas A&M, but before attending law school, Eric hopes to either work in the public sector or pursue a higher degree in philosophy.

Eris-Jake Donohue

Eris-Jake Donohue is a Texas A&M senior majoring in philosophy and minoring in gender studies. They serve as the co-executive editor of Aletheia and the president of private philosophy club Antithesis. Postructuralism, gender theory, trans theory, philosophy of art, and Nietzsche compose their areas of philosophical interest. Their current in-development project poses a critique against transitioning as a viable means of escaping gender dysphoria through the lens of E.M. Cioran's anti-salvific philosophy.

Deborah Tate

Deborah Tate is a Junior Society, Ethics, and Law major and minor of philosophy, business and classics from New Braunfels, Texas. Her areas of philosophical interest include the philosophy of law, the philosophy of the mind, and ethical theory with particular interest in their impact on societies throughout history. Deborah is a member of several university clubs and organizations including the TAMU Women's Rugby Team. In her free time, she enjoys being with friends, playing the guitar, and blacksmithing. After graduation she plans to attend law school and pursue a career in corporate law.

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Daisy Cisneros is a senior from Fort Worth, Texas pursuing a bachelor's degree in University Studies- Society, Ethics, & Law along with two minors in Philosophy and Human Resource Development. Her philosophical fields of interest include Ethics, Epistemology, and Science. Daisy describes making the Dean's List to be her favorite academic accomplishment throughout her time at A&M. She is currently finishing up her term as president of another organization on campus, Gamma Phi Omega International Sorority, Inc., and was also recently elected as VP for Communications of TAMU's Multicultural Greek Council starting in Fall 2021. For the near future, Daisy plans to attend graduate school and eventually pursue a career in the field of Human Resources.

Joshua Legg

Joshua Legg is majoring in Society, Ethics, and Law and minoring in philosophy and military studies. Joshua's area of philosophical interest includes epistemology, axiology, ethics, and human rights. In addition to working as an editor for *Aletheia*, Joshua has previously worked as an intern for U.S. Congressman John Carter of the Texas 31st district. Joshua has also spent multiple years interning for Cofty Law PC. He plans to attend law school upon completion of his undergrad degree and hopes to concentrate in constitutional and libel law.

Daniel Lightsey

Daniel Lightsey is a junior philosophy and physics double major from Leander, Texas. His philosophical interests include philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, free will, and philosophical questions on the meaning and purpose in and of life. He is a recipient of the Phillip and Doris Moses Ranch Fund and the Crawford and Hattie Jackson Foundation Scholarship in Science for his academic success in college. In his free time, he likes to play board games with his friends and fiancée, cook, and read. Once he has graduated from Texas A&M, Daniel plans on going to graduate school and getting a PhD in philosophy and hopes to teach and influence the lives of his students.

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Savannah Benson-China is a Society, Ethics, and Law major with a double minor in philosophy and military studies from Mannheim, Germany. She is interested in political philosophy, social philosophy, and medical ethics. Savannah is a sophomore in the Corps of Cadets and a member of the Corps Women's Basketball Team. She is also a member of Pre-Law Society and First Generation Aggies. Upon graduation, Savannah plans to commission as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force.

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Haley is a senior Society, Ethics, & Law major from Bastrop, Texas. She is primarily interested in environmental philosophy, ethical theory, and philosophy of religion. Haley is also Awareness Coordinator of Muster as well as a member of the women's organization Ryllies. After graduation, she plans to attend The Bush School of Government & Public Service for the ultimate goal of public service.

Kate Girvin

Kate Girvin is a sophomore philosophy major from El Paso, Texas. Kate's philosophical interests include Nietzsche, existentialism, philosophy of the mind, and ethics. In addition to serving as a first-year editor for *Aletheia*, she is a University Honors student and member of several social and professional organizations on campus. She currently serves as a director for SLIDE, a sophomore leadership organization on campus, in which she advocates for mental health and sexual assault awareness. Once she graduates from Texas A&M, Kate will attend law school to pursue a career in criminal law and advocate for United States prison reform.

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Simon Holmes is a senior communication and philosophy major from Houston, TX. He enjoys studying political philosophy and philosophy of mind, with a focus in consciousness and seeking to better understand how the immaterial mind meets the material world. He is also passionate about education and learning more about our education system and its history from a cultural and societal perspective, as a way to better improve it for generations to come. He has served in the Memorial Student Center Freshmen in Service and Hosting committee (MSC FISH) as an Assistant Director and Executive Director as well as a two-year counselor and later Co-Chair for Texas A&M's extended orientation program, Fish Camp, which helped transition over 3,000 new students to college each year. After completing his undergraduate degree, Simon will be continuing his education at Duke University where he will obtain his Master of Science in Management. One day he hopes to work in the Consulting or Marketing field, helping companies' visions come to life.

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Nicholas Rodda

Nicholas Richard Rodda is from Winder, Georgia and iw a 4th year philosophy and biology double major at the University of Georgia. His main philosophical interest is environmental ethics, social political theory, and the intersection of these two fields. He is a recipient of the Georgia HOPE scholarship. In the future, he wishes to pursue his masters in Entomology with a focus on plant-insect interactions as well as further research into environmental ethics and human attitudes towards nature.

Spencer Judd

Spencer Judd is an undergraduate student at New York University double majoring in both Philosophy and Finance. In 2019, a paper of his analyzing the problem of evil and contrasting insights between Fyodor Dostoevsky and Joseph Smith was published in the International Journal of Theology, Philosophy, and Science. He has since presented on that paper at the 2019 NYU Research Symposium, the 2019 NYU Comparative Literature Conference, and the 2021 NYU Dean's Conference. Spencer currently serves as the President of the NYU Private Equity club and as a producer for a feature film in development. He graduates in Spring 2021 and will then start as a M&A Investment Banker at Citibank. He also plans to continue to read and write philosophy, as well as work on writing projects related to temple mysticism and ascension literature.

Andrew Jensen

Andrew Jensen is a junior at the University of Utah, studying philosophy and minoring in mathematics and economics. Andrew was born in San Francisco, California and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah. Before he was a philosophy major, Andrew cultivated a desire to learn and argue by studying for and winning the scholastic Academic Decathlon in Utah. Andrew is interested in ethics, political philosophy, and what he considers to be their intersection: collective action problems. Andrew hopes to attend law school and one day practice in federal litigation.

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Anna Milukas is from Atlanta, Georgia, and is a fourth-year Political Science student at the University of Georgia. After graduating this May, she will return to UGA this fall to complete her master's degree in International Policy, and hopes to one day work for the US Department of State. Her philosophical areas of interest are classical philosophy, political philosophy, and gender studies.

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Hierarchy and Human Exploitation of the Environment: An Anarchist View

Nicholas Rodda, *University of Georgia*

Human attitudes towards the environment are largely shaped by their interactions with other humans. This is due to the subtle changes in the societal structure of original human societies, called organic societies, towards a hierarchical society. Organic human societies were largely egalitarian, which then they applied to their environment. But as organic societies began the shift to a hierarchical system, humans applied their human hierarchical beliefs onto animal and plant interactions, where it is not naturally/coherently applicable. This allowed human societies to justify their domination of the environment, something that did not exist in organic societies, which is leading to the current environmental crises we are facing. This 'anarchist' analysis of hierarchies and the environment, which existed in the earliest anarchists but was refined by Bookchin, goes against the idea that increased technological development leads to increased environmental exploitation.

Many of the earliest theorists who called themselves anarchist had distinctly ecological tendencies to their writings. This is no surprise considering that many of the earliest anarchists, before entering politics, were involved in some way with the study of life. Kropotkin participated in many geographical expeditions to Siberia, while also attempting to find proofs of Darwin's theory of evolution in the Siberian tundra (Marshall 309). Malatesta went to school to study medicine, and many of Reclus's earliest published works were those of geography, not political science (Marshall 339). This contrasts with many Marxist theorists, such as Marx, Engels, and Lenin, who practiced economics, philosophy, and political science as their fields of study. As such, many of their works have the mark of nature written plainly on them. I talk of this because the hierarchical structure that anarchists wish to fight against is the same hierarchical structure that causes the modern mass destruction of the environment. Humanity has existed in a vast array of different social, political, and economic institutions from preliterate, tribal, feudal, all the way to capitalistic societies. All of these have drastically shaped human outlook towards the environment. The formation of hierarchy that is necessary to the development of these complex institutions gives rise to the domination that humanity applies to nature. Humans dominate humans, leading to the domination of nature to satisfy the needs and wants of those of the higher social classes. From here on, I wish to describe how these hierarchical institutions came to be, and how human domination of humans was outsourced into human domination of nature.

Firstly, I wish to debunk the idea that observable hierarchies are present in animal societies and therefore are natural and should be present in human societies. To do this, we must first understand what a hierarchy is in order to reveal why it cannot be accurately applied to animals. Hierarchy, at its simplest, is the relationship of power between roles in a society. For example, a king would have more power than the peasant in a feudal society, or a brahmin more power than a member of the untouchables in Indian caste society. Power, in this case, is the ability to control those of lower social status and to influence their life. What is important to note here is that every individual is assigned to one of these roles, that they understand their role and that they are assigned to it, and that there is no meaningful biological difference between those of separate roles. A king is separated from the peasant simply by the role of their parents in society, not because of some biological imperative that forces them to become king or peasant.

What I have put above are examples of direct or formal hierarchy. They are institutionalized in the legal code and recognized rigidly in a society. But, we also have more hidden forms of hierarchies, where the power relationship is not as clear as a king and peasant, where one can strictly tell the other what to do. These are called 'indirect' hierarchies. One such example of this is the power difference between races in post-civil rights era America. While, legally, Black people have the same rights as white people in America, there are huge power imbalances between them. Black Americans make up a much larger section of the prison population than white Americans, they are more likely to be sentenced to prison for crimes they did not commit, they face discrimination in the job market and underrepresentation in STEM fields, and so on. While white people cannot directly go around commanding black people, like a king does to a peasant, they still have comparatively more power in society, from being able to find jobs easier, to generally having larger incomes, etc. This is the imbalance of power in society, where one group has much more power to do things, rather than power over others. Again, these roles are assigned by society, regardless of a biological imperative to fit into the roles. Black people do not have a biological imperative to put themselves into a lower status than whites, despite the hierarchy being based on skin color. These are also institutionalized, like the king and peasant, as they are cultural phenomena perpetuated by society itself. Racist attitudes would cease to exist if not enforced by society. Harari says, in his description of human hierarchies, "Yet… these hierarchies are all the product of human imagination. Brahmins and Shudras were not really created by the gods from different body parts of a primeval being. Instead, the distinction between the two castes was created by laws and norms invented by humans… Contrary to Aristotle, there is no biological difference between slaves and free people" (Harari 136). We can point out many of these in

society, the hierarchy of rich and poor, man and woman, etc. Now that hierarchy is defined, now we can discuss how the "hierarchies" in nature are not truly hierarchies at all.

The modern idea of hierarchies in nature stems from Darwin's theory of evolution and the survival of the fittest mantra that many narrowly apply to his theory. Proponents of survival of the fittest took Darwin's theories of natural selection to mean that nature is a constant and perpetual state of war between organisms; a constant fight for survival where only those with the strongest genetic material survive and the strongest rule. Those that are the strongest, survive and pass on their genetic material, which then becomes selected for over time. From this, they apply human concepts of domination, hierarchy, and subjugation to nature, concluding that the natural state of man should be that of hierarchies and domination. I will agree that a fight for survival is present in nature and in evolution, but in their examination of the fight for survival, they miss an equally important part of evolution: the idea of mutual aid. Kropotkin says, "There is an immense amount of warfare and extermination going on… there is, at the same time, as much, or perhaps even more, of mutual support, mutual aid, and mutual defence amidst animals belonging to the same species or, at least, to the same society" (Kropotkin 14). Kropotkin observed in the harsh tundra of Siberia, that species that worked together for the betterment of their community fared equally well, if not better than species that warred with each other continuously. He used the example of ants to indicate this clearly. An individual ant does not have the same defensive features that many other insects have; its venom is weak, it lacks camouflage, and it's exoskeleton is not extremely strong. Yet he notes that, "the ants, in their thousands are not much destroyed by the birds, not even by the ant-eaters… When Forel emptied a bagful of ants in a meadow he saw that 'the crickets ran away, abandoning their holes… the grasshoppers fled in all directions; the spiders and the beetles abandoned their prey…" (Kropotkin 19). When united, the ants are powerful in ways that, if they were disunited and fighting each other for survival, they could not even imagine. Recent studies have also noted that, among ant communities 40% of the ants are not actively doing any kind of labor for the colony, because there is simply no need for the labor of the ants at the time. Yet, there is no stigma applied to these 'lazy' ants by the 'productive' ants. They are treated the exact same within the community. As soon as the 'productive' ants are removed, the 'lazy' ants step up and replace the lost labor, as necessary (Charbonneau 22). If they had a community solely based on mutual struggle and competition, the 'lazy' ants would not exist, but instead they have a community based off mutual aid and protection. Kropotkin observed this in many insect communities, mammalian communities, and avian communities, as well as

interspecies mutual aid and symbiotic evolution. There are dozens of examples that could be rattled off on top of this, but instead I will ask one final question: Which community would be considered best, one that is based off constant competition and struggle, where most individuals are starved by the most fit, or one that is based off mutual aid and defense, where every member of society is cared for by the other members? I would say the latter is more suited to handle natural disasters, famines, and threats by other species, than the former. This proves that nature is more than mutual struggle and competition and that humans are not bound to this fate by any kind of natural compulsion.

There are yet more problems with the observations of 'hierarchies' in animal communities. Many of the hierarchies that people seemingly observe in nature are a result of crudely applying human political institutions to animal actions. Bookchin says, "A snarling animal is neither 'vicious' nor 'savage,' nor does it 'misbehave' or 'earn' punishment because it reacts appropriately to certain stimuli. By making such anthropomorphic judgements about natural phenomena, we deny the integrity of nature" (Bookchin 93). By this, he means that we apply human terms to nonhumans so that we can necessitate human order and meaning in the actions of animals, thereby justifying our own hierarchies. Many of the hierarchies that they point out in nature fail to meet the criteria established for considering something a hierarchy. A "queen" ant is not a queen through ant's social nature and establishment of hierarchies, it is a biological imperative that forces her, rigidly, into the position of "queen" -- a term that human beings have ascribed to her. The worker ants do not understand their roles as "worker" instead they just simply, through biological impulses, do the tasks required of them. They are too rigidly imposed by instinct to be considered hierarchy (Bookchin 94).

On the other hand, we have animals where the supposed "hierarchies" are too wishy-washy. Chimpanzee communities have "hierarchies" that are more similar to just individual interactions because of their temporary nature, "Chimpanzees… forms such fluid kinds of stratification and establish such unstable types of association that the word hierarchy becomes and obstacle to understanding their behavioral characteristics" (Bookchin 93). They lack the "roles" that a hierarchical society requires. The "beta" questioning the "alpha's" authority in chimpanzee society does not threaten to jeopardize the authority of the role of the alpha, instead it is just an affront to the individual. If the peasant questions the authority of the king, that is an affront to the role of the king. Considering all of this, calling these relationships between animals "hierarchies" is anthropocentric, dangerous to the studying of animal behavior, and simply scientifically incorrect.

Now, let us discuss the emergence of hierarchy in humans. The earliest humans existed in what is called an "organic society". This is a society that lacks

economics classes, a political state, and contains an egalitarian mindset both within the community and with regards to the world around them (Bookchin 110). Egalitarianism is implicit in the worldview of organic societies and needs not to be specified in societies where notions of inequality do not exist (Bookchin 111). Bookchin talks about the absence of any type of domineering or coercive language in the language of the Wintu Indians, "A Wintu mother, for example, does not take a baby into the shade; she goes with it. A chief does not "rule" his people, he stands with them. 'They never say, and in fact they cannot say, as we do, 'I have a sister', or a 'son', or 'husband,'…" (Bookchin 111). There is a unity of the individual and the community, a unity in the diversity and independence of each person in the society, "there is a point in the development in organic society where it visibly generates a sense of symbiosis, of communal interdependence and cooperation… The organic community is conceived to be part of the balance of nature" (Bookchin 112). Leadership in these societies do not have the same "power" that we see in leaders in our societies. It is not codified or political in any manner, instead it is just simply for the functional purpose of organizing hunts or war expeditions (Bookchin 122). It is not institutionalized, it does not establish the role of "leader", and it is not coercive in any way. In summary, their societies are completely equal in every way, with no domination of man over woman, parent over child, worker over non-worker, etc. No form of informal or formal hierarchies exist in organic societies and this shows that it is not inherent to human societies.

  The first hierarchies stemmed from the division of labor between men and women, the experience and prestige that comes from age, and the lineages that people descended from. These were not organized hierarchically in early organic societies, such as those I stated above, but it slowly materialized into the hierarchy between men and women, old and young, and the great lineages that would later become rulers.

  The division of labor between men and women became one of necessity. Women in preliterate societies lacked the mobility that men had, because of nature of human development. Children are attached to their mothers for long periods of their development and one can scarcely hunt or effectively forage outside of the village with a screaming infant in their arms. Hence, women were relegated to home activities, ones of gathering, crafting, and generally managing the household, while men were tasked with hunting, foraging, and defense. Because males were trained from birth to be hunters and with more physically demanding tasks, they were natural fits for war and raiding, which would become gradually more and more common as human societies. This put them in key positions that would later become the leaders and rulers, those of tribal commanders, tribal chieftains, and councilmembers, due to their leadership experience. Women are also much more

valuable for the future prosperity of the village. War and hunting are deadly activities and villages cannot afford to lose their women at the same rate they lose men. Then, the old come into power through their situation as knowledge-keepers. They socialize and teach the youth, which gives them prestige in the village, while at the same time their experience nets them high positions in the aforementioned leadership positions (Bookchin 152).

These are not institutionalized hierarchies, but from these the institutionalized hierarchies form. It is not easy to delineate an exact point where this happens, it is a slow process that regressed at times, but the march was one towards hierarchical societies. This is the start of the "class society". Shamans became more and more important in society, many of whom were the respected elders of the society. Their positions were tenuous, based off of the success of his techniques and how the village is faring at the time. In order to secure their power, they played political games, established alliances, and created "power centers" (Bookchin 154). They would change the religious views of the society to offer them more stability and power, eventually cementing themselves into priestly elite, even projecting their domination into religious ceremonies, "By converting mundane nature spirits and demons into humanlike supernatural deities and devils, the priestly corporation had cunningly created a radically new social and ideological dispensation, indeed, a new way of mentalizing rule" (Bookchin 162). They took these lands as permanent spoils of war, or in the case of theocratic society, land was seen as being owned by the gods the shamans worshipped to, leading to the replacement of communal ownership of land to land being owned by deities, and by extension, the shamans. Advancements in technology provided the means to support the new rise of professional priests, warriors, professional bureaucrats, and later the massive states we see later in history. But, without the integration of classes and exploitation in the private life of the individual, the rise of the hierarchy would not have been possible (Bookchin 167). This is shown by American Indian societies, where they were capable of vast technological feats, yet there was no development of the hierarchical systems to the extent that we saw in Europe or the Middle East at similar points in technological development.

In this process, the rise of the city and more changes in religious attitudes towards nature began. Bookchin wrote "For it was the city that provided the territory for territorialism, the civic institutions for citizenship, the marketplace for elaborate forms of exchange, the exclusivity of quarters and neighborhoods for classes, and monumental structures for the state" (Bookchin 167). The economic necessity of the city for the advancement of the class system leads to further separation from the environment, less community kinship, and less unity with all those around. The individual no longer sees themselves as a member of the

community, one that includes nature around them, instead they see themselves as separate from it and isolated from it,

> In rendering the individual bear subject to manipulative forms of human predation, generalization in this form marks the first steps towards objectification of the external world… If the individual bear is merely an epiphenomenon of an animal spirit, it is now possible to objectify nature by completely subsuming the particular by the general and denying the uniqueness of the specific and concrete. (Bookchin 171)

Here, he is talking about the development of reason, generalization and classification that transformed the human mindset towards nature. No longer is the spirit embodied in the particular, but now it is abstracted into the absolute. The corn is no longer just corn, instead it is a blessing from the food deity. This abstraction is the application of the loss of communal ship in human relationships and the human dominance systems into the environment. Now, the bear is something to be conquered and taken, not something that exists in and of itself in nature. We can contrast the animism of organic societies with the later development of the Hebrew bible. The Hebrew bible marks the reverse of the transformation we saw early, where the particular becomes the absolute, in that now, the absolute creates the particular. In the Hebrew Bible, God gifted humanity their landed, presupposing humanity's existence on the existence of God, which is the abstract (Bookchin 175). The evolution of animism supposes that the universal comes from the particular, while the Judeo-Christian tradition supposes that the particular exists as a byproduct of the universal and depends on it for its existence. The domination we saw rising in pre-literate societies was outsourced into the religious tradition, where humanity's existence is predicated on God's existence, and by extension, God's control of humanity (Bookchin 177). From these changes in culture, the domination of nature was justified by the domination of human by human.

These systems evolved over time, especially in the West, where the Judeo-Christian spirit took over as the dominating mindset. Humans, with the domineering mindset grown from the changes above, have systematically destroyed nature around us to provide for those in the upper ranks of hierarchy and to fuel our own intense consumption. Capitalism has led to the depletion of Earth's natural resources at an unprecedented rate, leading to an accumulation of wealth at the top of the social hierarchy. Reclus remarked on the changes in air quality at the start of industrialization, "it is a well-known fact that in the cities the air is full of deadly substances… it is nonetheless certain that in all the countries of Europe and America, the average life-span among rural populations exceeds that of the city dwellers by several years" (Reclus 8). Capitalism is truly the ultimate form of the

objectification of humans, and by extent, nature, that we saw before. It turned the labor of humans into a commodity, an object to be sold and bartered for, and by extension, made humanity see nature as a commodity to be exploited, dominated, and sold for profit. Our society, not coincidentally, is now more stratified than ever. The divide between rich and poor is magnificently large and with that, the wants of the rich are ever increasing. The needs of the modern-day upper classes are far more than the needs of previous generations of upper classes, leading to a necessity for more domination of nature,

> Just as capitalism leads to production for the sake of production, so too it leads to consumption for the sake of consumption. The bourgeois maxim, 'grow or die,' has its counterpart in 'buy or die.' And just as the production of commodities is no longer related to their function as use-values, as objects of real utility, so wants are no longer related to humanity's sense of its real needs. (Bookchin 136)

Capitalism is the ultimate form of hierarchical domination, where Nature needs to be destroyed to keep the system afloat and functioning, completely absent of any relation to the needs of humans. How many gallons of milk are poured down the drain by farmers, because the sale of them would lower the price of milk, causing their profits to crash? Or how many products are thrown away at the back of grocery stores, because giving them to homeless shelters isn't profitable? The exploitation of nature is not causing capitalism, capitalism, and the hierarchy associated with it, is causing the exploitation of nature and mass waste that we have today.

In summary, the domination of humans, coming from the ancient pre-literate humans, leads to the domination of nature, because of the ever-expanding needs and wants of the upper classes, as well as shifts in mindset to keep hierarchical systems in power. The political system that currently exists, one based off of hierarchy is extremely flawed and leads to many of the environmental dangers and issues that we see today, such as pollution, life-threatening climate change, and ocean acidification, which threatens our marine life. All of these issues stem from the hierarchies that we see in modern society. Reformation of the economic system of capitalism, while not addressing the domineering mindset that humanity has towards nature does nothing to solve these issues. Our future would benefit extremely from the toppling of human hierarchies and the change in domineering type attitudes towards nature.

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Man Against Nothingness: Nietzsche and Dostoevsky

Spencer Judd, *New York University*

My paper is a comparative analysis of the ideas of Nietzsche, Dostoevsky's The Grand Inquisitor, and Schopenhauer. I review and compare each of their responses to the problem of meaningless suffering and the proposition that existence is essentially meaningless. Having summarized each of their views, I compare the differences of Nietzsche's and the Grand Inquisitor's philosophies. This includes an evaluation of the Grand Inquisitor's plan through the lens of Nietzsche's master/slave morality distinctions and an analysis of which response to nihilism offers genuine compassion and a meaningful existence to humanity.

Introduction

I've titled this paper *Man Against Nothingness* because in this essay I seek to compare the ways in which Nietzsche and his contemporaries were reacting to the problem of nothingness, namely nihilism, meaninglessness, and in particular, suffering that is devoid of meaning. I will begin by summarizing Nietzsche's master and slave morality distinctions as described in his book *On the Genealogy of Morals* and his response to nothingness. Following that, I will then outline the Grand Inquisitor's project and motives as mentioned in the book *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Having summarized each of their ideas, I will note the ways in which the Grand Inquisitor and Nietzsche significantly diverge. The crux of that analysis will focus on evaluating the Grand Inquisitor's argument from the lens of Nietzsche's slave/master morality distinctions. Through all of this, I will ultimately argue that Nietzsche's life-affirming pessimism of strength adequately responds to the problem of nothingness by revealing the shortcomings of the Grand Inquisitor's philosophy and uniquely providing a philosophy for genuine compassion and a meaningful existence to humanity.

Nietzsche

In his book *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche attempts to trace the origins of our terms "good" and "evil." Upon this project he arrives at two types of moralities: slave (or herd) morality and master morality. According to his story, historical communities gave rise to different class divisions of people such as the nobles (the aristocrats and the powerful) and the common people (the weaker and powerless). From the perspective of the nobles in these communities, the term "good" was associated with traits of their own noble, ruling class and the term "bad" with the undesirable traits they did not possess. This ruling class of masters thus created a value system among society of traits that were advantageous and

desirable. As Nietzsche describes them:

> The knightly-aristocratic judgments of value have as their basic assumption a powerful physicality, a blooming, rich, even overflowing health, together with those things which are required to maintain these qualities—war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and in general everything which involves strong, free, happy action (The Genealogy of Morals, section 7 essay 1).

Elsewhere in section 7, he notes that what is considered good for the masters is also equivalent to what is noble, powerful, beautiful, fortunate, and loved by the gods. This is what master morality is comprised of.

Slave morality, however, is an inversion or reversal of the masterly values by the weak and powerless, particularly as a way to accrue power. It is a morality that is born out of resentment and in reaction to the dominance of the ruling nobles and their valuation. In contrast to slave morality, master morality, "did not have to construct [its] happiness artificially first by looking at [its] enemies, or in some circumstance to talk [itself] into it, to lie to [itself]" (section 10 essay 1). Slave morality consists in justifying states of being weak by promoting traits such as humility, meekness, submissiveness, obedience, equality, compassion, abstinence, moderation, modesty, and pity. Overall, it values non-threatening traits that promote values that are good for the herd of the weak. As Nietzsche puts it,

> When the oppressed, the downtrodden, the conquered say to each other, with the vengeful cunning of the powerless, "Let us be different from evil people, namely, good! And that man is good who does not overpower, who hurts no one, who does not attack, who does not retaliate, who hands revenge over to God, who keeps himself hidden, as we do, who avoids all evil and demands little from life in general—like us, the patient, humble, and upright"—what that amounts to, coolly expressed and without bias, is essentially nothing more than "We weak people are merely weak. It's good if we do nothing, because we are not strong enough (section 13 essay 1).

Slave or Herd morality is thus a way for the weak, the sick, the unhealthy, the inadequate, the incompetent, and the overall powerless to gain moral superiority for their inferiority. All these values and virtues are exactly those that are largely found in Christianity.

> (the slave revolt) successfully and with a fearsome consistency dared to

reverse it and to hang on to that with the teeth of the most profound hatred (the hatred of the powerless), that is, to "only those who suffer are good; only the poor, the powerless, the low are good; only the suffering, those in need, the sick, the ugly are the pious; only they are blessed by God; for them alone there is salvation. By contrast, you privileged and powerful people, you are for all eternity the evil, the cruel, the lecherous, insatiable, the godless—you will also be the unblessed, the cursed, and the damned for all eternity!" We know who inherited this Judaic transformation of values (section 7 essay 1).

And who is one of the primary advocates and accommodators for the slaves and their slave morality? The priests and the leaders of religion. According to Nietzsche, slave morality came out of Judaism and into Christianity, and that evidence for the fact that slave morality has won over master morality in the modern world, you can look to Rome to see who currently rules there. It's the Catholic Church, one of the engines and sources of slave morality according to Nietzsche. "As is well known, priests are the most evil of enemies—but why? Because they are the most powerless. From their powerlessness, their hate grows into something immense and terrifying, to the most spiritual and most poisonous manifestations" (section 7 essay 1).

The manifestation of slave morality by the religions, particularly Christianity and its moral substructure, reveal its nature to be life-denying. As Nietzsche says near the end of the book,

> the ascetic ideal: this hate against what is human, and even more against animality, even more against material things—this abhorrence of the senses, even of reason, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing for the beyond away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, desire, even longing itself—all this means, let's have the courage to understand this, a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a revolt against the most fundamental preconditions of life (section 28 essay 3).

Nietzsche's resistance to slave morality is precisely against its parasitical tendencies to be life-denying and anti-human in nature. Slave morality not only normalizes, moralizes, and values suffering, but even seeks it.

> With him (the person who invented slave morality) was introduced the greatest and weirdest illness, from which human beings today have not recovered, the suffering of man from his humanness, from himself, a consequence of the forcible separation from his animal past, a leap and, so to

speak, a fall into new situations and living conditions, a declaration of war against the old instincts, on which, up to that point, his power, joy, and ability to inspire fear had been based (section 16 essay 1)….. all these ideals, which are anti-life, have vilified the world (section 19 essay 1).

Nietzsche sees this inclination to deny life, whether manifest in asceticism or in Christian ethics, as a sickness of the mind and as a temptation that is succumbed to as a way to give their suffering meaning.

> Suffering itself was not his problem, but rather the fact that he lacked an answer to the question he screamed out, 'Why this suffering?'…he desires [suffering], he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* of suffering. The meaningless of suffering, *not* suffering itself, was the curse that lay over mankind so far-*and the ascetic ideal offered man meaning!*….man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will (section 28 essay 3).

Nietzsche believes that there is nothing worse than living (and thus suffering) without a meaning to it and so we turn towards and cling onto slave moralities to give us this meaning, even if it leads to us counterintuitively embracing more suffering.

In this paper I will not give a thoroughly detailed examination of Nietzsche's response to this issue other than some brief descriptions of Nietzsche's Übermensch or Superman (this is to focus on Nietzsche's critique of other's responses to the problem of nothingness). Nietzsche briefly mentions in the *Genealogy of Morals* what he sees as a potential response to the problem of nothingness, in contrast to S and the Grand Inquisitor, in the idea of the Superman,

> But at some time or other, in a more powerful time than this moldy, self-doubting present, he (the Superman) must nonetheless come to us, the redeeming man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit, constantly pushed away from the sidelines or from the beyond by his own driving power, whose isolation is misunderstood by people as if it were a flight from reality, whereas it is his immersion, burial, and absorption into nothing but reality, so that once he comes out of it into the light again, he brings back the redemption of this reality, its redemption from the curse which the previous ideal (asceticism) had laid upon it. This man of the future, who will release us from that earlier ideal and, in so doing, from those things which had to grow from it, from the great loathing, from the will to nothingness, from nihilism—that stroke of noon and of the great decision which makes the will free once again,

who gives back to the earth its purpose and to human beings their hope, this anti Christ and Anti-nihilist, this conqueror of God and of nothingness—at some point he must come. (section 24 essay 2).

The idea of the Superman (which Nietzsche invites the strong to try and become) is a being who transcends slave morality (it seems also to partake in many of the master morality type traits, but that's not entirely clear to what extent it isn't also transcended). They do this by constructing their own meaning, creating and evolving their own life-affirming morality, by expression of developed strength and power. In this way Nietzsche recognizes the inherent suffering and meaninglessness of life, but suggests that instead of depending on a god to give you the tools to cope with this meaninglessness and suffering, you must become in a sense, the god. You must create those things which make life bearable and by which you maximize and expand your strength, health, and power. By this view he proposes a life-affirming pessimism of strength that does not seek suffering and that embraces the here and now, of this present life and this present world. With it, Nietzsche suggests that just because life in the cosmic overarching sense is meaningless in the *macrocosm,* it need not be the case that your life is void of meaning in your personal *microcosm,* if you create it for yourself.

The Grand Inquisitor

The Grand Inquisitor is a fictional creation of the character Ivan Karamazov, who was a fictional creation of Fyodor Dostoevsky in his book *The Brothers Karamazov.* I will be comparing Nietzsche's ideas with those of the Grand Inquisitor and at times with those of Ivan, which all symbolize differing reactions to these philosophical problems in their epoch, rather than views that Dostoevsky himself advocated or believed. As a prelude to the tale of the Grand Inquisitor, Ivan describes the atrocities that happen to innocent children and argues that no greater good, such as heaven or the Christian process for salvation, could be worth justifying such unnecessary suffering and abuse of the innocent and the precious. He has been told that traditional theodicies say such atrocities must be permitted in order for true freedom to exist and for the salvation God envisions to be realized. Ivan is skeptical of the existence of this God in the first place, but holds that even if God exists, he would reject such a God, as he considers such a being fundamentally unworthy of worship. He argues that freedom isn't as good as it's made out to be and that it's especially not worth it in light of the atrocities that are permitted because of it. Having also come to his own death of belief in God, Ivan seeks a way of life that can combat the overabundance of suffering that is a result of freedom. This reaction and possible way out is presented through the tale of the Grand

Inquisitor, who seeks to save humanity by correcting the shortcomings of the life of Jesus and the various ways it has led to the suffering of mankind.

The story begins in 15th century Spain. Jesus returns at this time and place, but is captured by the Grand Inquisitor. He is held captive and awaits a similar fate as other contemporary heretics as labeled by the Church: to be burnt at the stake. The Grand Inquisitor explains that Christ is arrested for interfering with the work of the Church, who is really trying to save people and give them a good life. The Grand Inquisitor then recalls the three temptations that Christ received from the devil as he was fasting in the wilderness for forty days. This included being tempted to use his godly powers to turn stones into bread to feed his own hunger, casting himself off the top of a temple building and being caught by angels before falling to the ground fatally, and finally choosing to rule the kingdoms of the world.

When reviewing Christ's rejection of the three temptations of the devil, The Grand Inquisitor explains to Christ the terrible mistakes he had made, the damage that this has had on humanity, and the ways the Grand Inquisitor is trying to fix it. By denying the temptation to turn stone into food, Christ holds mankind to the standard to prioritize spiritual security over material security, to live by heavenly bread instead of earthly food. Instead of using his godly powers to provide material security and then ask virtue of people, he asks for virtue in the absence of material security. Had he summoned angels to receive him off the temple, Christ could have proved to people that he was the son of God and people would hence automatically believe in him with evidence of his divinity. But by denying an opportunity to prove that he is the son of God, he places the burden of freedom on mankind to have to choose to believe in him or not. Had he chosen to rule the world and exert his power to coerce people to act the right way, he could've guaranteed their salvation and their material well-being, but by rejecting this temptation and leaving them to be free, he inevitably leaves people to fall short of salvation by their own error-prone, weak-willed decisions and efforts, as well as with the unbearable ability of self-determination in general. They are too weak to seek spiritual salvation without material security and well-being. So, by rejecting these temptations he allows people to be free and to freely choose him. But people, according to the Grand Inquisitor, are too weak for that freedom and so this freedom will inevitably lead to millions of miserable souls. His thesis is that people prefer actual bread over spiritual bread and security over freedom.

According to the Grand Inquisitor, Christ should have taken away their freedom and given them security instead. This would allow for people to at least have comfort in this life in the here and now. It'd be better to have comfort now and damnation eternally after rather than have to deal with the burden of freedom and still end up damned forever without happiness in this life. For the Grand Inquisitor,

freedom actually turns out to be the root of all evil. If you want happy people you don't give them freedom, you just give them something to eat, something to believe in, a project, a community, authority, and security, such as through the Holy Roman Empire, or the institutional church. Christ should have given people freedom from hunger rather than freedom of choice.

Freedom, then, is really the exact thing to be avoided. What is best for people according to the Grand Inquisitor is enslavement. The Grand Inquisitor thinks that he is saving others from themselves by taking away their freedom, making them obey him, and creating a society of slaves.

> For the secret of man's being is not only to live but to have something to live for. Without a stable conception of the object of life, man would not consent to go on living, and would rather destroy himself than remain on earth, though he had bread in abundance…didst thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? (The Brothers Karamazov p. 220).

This reflects our earlier interaction with Nietzsche's ideas that humans need something to live for and this can unfortunately turn into believing in moral or religious systems that are life-denying and anti-human (slave morality). Restricting people from manifesting their power, or in other words, disallowing them to act on their abilities, is both slave morality and exactly what we find the Grand Inquisitor doing. By enslaving and controlling people, he is trading off freedom for guaranteeing security and peace, something that is not certain to be achieved in a world of unregulated freedom. The Grand Inquisitor taunts Christ for what he believes is the unrealistic expectations and ideals set forth by Jesus's gospel. The Grand Inquisitor explains that the church has been doing the work of Satan because they believe it's in the best interest of the people.

> And if for the sake of the bread of Heaven thousands shall follow Thee, what is to become of the millions and tens of thousands of millions of creatures who will not have the strength to forego the earthly bread for the sake of the heavenly? Or dost Thou care only for the tens of thousands of the great and strong, while the millions, numerous as the sands of the sea, who are weak but love Thee, must exist only for the sake of the great and strong? *No, we care for the weak too.* They are sinful and rebellious, but in the end they too will become obedient. They will marvel at us and look on us as gods, because we are ready to endure the freedom which they have found so dreadful and to rule over them- so awful it will seem to them to be free (p. 223).

By this excerpt, he reveals his extremely cynical and negative views on human nature. He also explains his understanding of compassion and societal progress as promoting the well-being and care of the *weakest*. As counterintuitive as his more extreme and totalitarian suggestions are for society, he argues that he cares for the weakest and is doing this all out of love.

> All will be happy, all the millions of creatures except the hundred thousand who rule over them. For only we, we who guard the mystery, shall be unhappy. There will be thousands of millions of happy babes, and a hundred thousand sufferers who have taken upon themselves the curse of the knowledge of good and evil. Peacefully they will die, peacefully they will expire in Thy name, and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death. But we shall keep the secret, and for their happiness we shall allure them with the reward of heaven and eternity (p.223).

In this paragraph, the Grand Inquisitor reveals that there are only certain few who can bear this grand secret for the good of others. It turns out that this secret, this great mystery that the rulers conceal and alone have to bear, is this: that God doesn't exist and there is no afterlife. Essentially, what the Grand Inquisitor is trying to do is protect the weak individuals of the population from the unbearable consequences and dilemmas that come as a result of the crisis of meaning and morality.

Divergences

It appears that the key areas that the Grand Inquisitor and Nietzsche diverge on are 1) human nature, 2) what of the human is to be prioritized in measuring progress, 3) what value/moral system is best for humanity, and 4) the definition of compassion. With regards to human nature, the Grand Inquisitor constantly emphasizes and focuses on humanity's weakness. Nietzsche doesn't seem to be too optimistic in regard to the collective human strength within a society either, but not to the extent to believe that such individuals' weakness is not something that can't be overcome or shouldn't be wrestled with. Another key difference (and this perhaps explains some of their fundamental divergences elsewhere) is that they measure human progress differently and thus prioritize different parts of humanity. Nietzsche sees progress as measured by the heights achieved by humanity's best and strongest, even if it comes with a process of striving that leads to much suffering and inequality. The Grand Inquisitor sees progress as judged by the well-being of the lowest and weakest of the masses. The Grand Inquisitor knows the

masses will not be able to handle Nietzsche's critique of their slave morality and their veils of ignorance. Nor will they be able to pursue either the alternative brute master morality or of the creation of new moral values in the path of the Superman. Nietzsche's pessimism of strength does not seem to pretend or to care that it may not be a tenable solution for the masses, much of which is not strong enough to rise to these standards.

Despite these noted differences, I want to primarily focus on the crux of my evaluation of the Grand Inquisitor, which is through the lens of Nietzsche's dual moralities and evaluate their hidden motivations. Embedded in the Grand Inquisitor's resistance to freedom in the world are certain assumptions on human nature, human morality, and human progress. It is on these foundational assumptions that Nietzsche is directly speaking against in his critiques of slave morality. The reason the Grand Inquisitor thinks people would be better off without freedom is that they are too weak, too inadequate, too powerless to handle the immense pressure that comes with it, and as a result are too powerless to have an authentically good life filled with meaning, comfort, and material security. Nietzsche would see ingrained within this resistance, the manifestation of the tendency within all of us towards slave morality. By doing so, we create a society where we are not threatened by others because we have all become non-threatening. In this way, the powerless accrue power against the powerful.

The Grand Inquisitor concocts his narrative and grand plan as a response to the theodicies of religion that believe freedom is such a great thing by which to have life and salvation founded upon. It's also crafted as a response to the harsh truth of atheism and its implications, as well as to address the severe weakness of the masses. In turning to his plan of security rather than freedom, he is committing and constructing, though not as explicitly, a type of slave morality for the masses. So while Nietzsche has very particular beliefs in the free will/determination discussion, I'm not comparing the Grand Inquisitor's views of free will to Nietzsche's. Nor do I want to get distracted and have this summary be seen as commentary towards a larger discussion on the value of freedom as a foundation for a theodicy, society, or way of life. All I'm trying to do by evaluating the way the Grand Inquisitor interacts with the subject of freedom is to point out how his philosophy is rooted in motives that are for slavish moral ends, whether he is aware of it or not.

That underlying manifestation of slavish elements is what I would like to focus on for the remaining analysis, particularly how it affects different definitions of compassion (or love) that both of these thinkers are basing their moralities in. It seems part of the Grand Inquisitor's hesitance to adventure and the other traits and activities related to master morality is that they result in suffering, oppression, and

inequality. Nietzsche, however, is not interested in the project of minimizing suffering, he's trying to maximize power, not for the masses, but for the species. His interest in the development and actualization of the potential of individuals, of their strengths, powers, and talents, are things he sees to be embraced and prioritized.

It is here that the two come at odds most starkly, not on discussions of determinism and free will, nor in regard to the existence of God, but in what type of compassion should rule and be made the ideal. For the Grand Inquisitor, compassion and loving others mean pitying and protecting them. It means prioritizing their security, including beliefs that do not threaten them, or expose their weakness, or make them feel bad for their weaknesses. In his pursuit to protect people from suffering, he ironically makes them suffer by maintaining them in their state of inadequacy, weakness, and inferiority, instead of encouraging them to rise above it and conquer it. This is because he realizes that such a process of overcoming is not possible or realistic for all, and perhaps only for very few. He realizes that it will mean that they are exposed to threats, and that people who are naturally stronger or powerful (e.g. intelligence, physical health, physical attractiveness, mental well-being, social skills and status, material wealth) will emerge. This will inevitably lead to a division of superiors and inferiors, with the inferior types suffering psychological pain for their inferiority. As a result, his whole system protects the masses from being afflicted by the harsh realities of life. That however is not love, that is just coddling. That is simply justifying and defending inferiority and weakness, born out of resentment due to feelings of powerlessness, to avoid the pangs of self-awareness of one's own deficiencies.

For Nietzsche, compassion is minimizing incompetence and inadequacy, a kind of eradication of self-inflicted suffering from one's own incompleteness. He argues that humanity's progress and the individual process of becoming have negative by-products, but that they are necessary and instrumental for what he considers to be progress. Nietzsche is not arguing about freedom or security, but whether either system the Grand Inquisitor is considering will lead to an illegitimate transformation of values that will promote slave values. In other words, he is questioning whether this system of freedom or security that the Grand Inquisitor is advocating for will lead people to believe that,

> [O]nly those who suffer are good; only the poor, the powerless, the low are good; only the suffering, those in need, the sick, the ugly are the pious; only they are blessed by God; for them alone there is salvation. By contrast, you privileged and powerful people, you are for all eternity the evil, the cruel, the lecherous, insatiable, the godless—you will also be the unblessed, the cursed, and the damned for all eternity (section 7 essay 1)!

It seems like it will do precisely that. Perhaps it shouldn't come as a surprise that the Grand Inquisitor's project is based on slave morality because his whole idea is to enslave people and take away their freedom, something he's very explicit and direct about. His coddling of them enslaves them in their weakness, and slaves *to* their weaknesses, rather than allowing them to overcome them by allowing tendencies toward master morality.

For Nietzsche, one of the problems of the Grand Inquisitor's plan is that he doesn't allow master morality to emerge, and by doing so restricts the values and attributes of the strong from emerging. The Grand Inquisitor does this because master morality threatens others and leads to their suffering. Where masterly, animalistic, and beastly like-character is permitted, slaves in distinction to the masters are produced. He believes the majority of people can't handle a society under the dominating influence of the master-like nobles and aristocrats because their competence, growth, and development threaten them by reminding them of their lack of those attributes. Here, the slavish element of the Grand Inquisitor's plan manifests. While distinct from the masses as a keeper of the grand secret, The Grand Inquisitor stays true to the classic role of the Priest described by Nietzsche by seeking to accommodate the weak, perhaps entirely because deep down he's one of the slaves as well.

In "caring" for the weak, the Grand Inquisitor ends up preserving the weakness *within* the masses that directly and relationally afflicts them. The problematic nature of their shortcomings is intensified when one compares themselves with people of greater abilities. Part of Nietzsche's point is that it is not just the inadequacies of the individuals, but the intense unavoidable awareness of their inadequacies, that is a source of pain. The nobles, just by their mere presence and embodied degrees of excellence, constantly remind the slaves how they fall short or are not seen as good enough. This is the additional insufferable psychological condition the slaves must bear. The Grand Inquisitor's form of "caring" unfortunately simply preserves the existence of these traits and in so doing preserve the *direct* and *relational* consequences their weaknesses and inadequacies bring.

The Grand Inquisitor fights to give the masses something of meaning to get them through life and be able to bear it. The Grand Inquisitor's plan, which establishes life-denying practices, preaches slave morality, and deceives the masses on the existence of God and the afterlife, seeks to coddle and distract them from meaningless suffering and the grand secret. In other words, the Grand Inquisitor's plot is based in a system that addresses suffering by accommodating and preserving it, and in some cases, potentially increasing suffering. All this is motivated by his

belief that it's better to give the masses suffering with meaning, even if that meaning is life-denying in nature, rather than no meaning at all.

By contrast, Nietzsche is seeking for humanity to overcome the slavish, the weak, the inadequate, the incompetent, and the ugly, *within* us. One of Nietzsche's fundamental messages is to not confuse compassion with pity or to mistake pity as authentic love, which flaw it appears the Grand Inquisitor has committed. Here they diverge on which philosophical positions are truly in the interest of others, or as the Grand Inquisitor sees it, something done out of love. To Nietzsche, the Grand Inquisitor is not truly caring for the masses because he does not try to help them change, correct, or transcend their conditions or weaknesses, but instead encourages them to accept it, find security and comfort in it, and ultimately to accommodate it. The Grand Inquisitor feels he is a hero because he views these acts as caring for the weak. In this way his pessimistic-based philosophy tolerates weakness, but it doesn't wholly save people from themselves or from their weaknesses, such as by addressing and overcoming them. Instead it seeks to have the masses become distracted and indifferent towards their weaknesses. Standing in for God, yet continuing the great lie (that God exists and that there is an afterlife), the Grand Inquisitor is able to provide meaning and material comfort to the masses despite having to take away their freedom and leave them to marinate in their own insufficiencies and incompetence.

Though a fictional tale by Dostoevsky, the Grand Inquisitor's underlying philosophy highlights Nietzsche's argument that people will be willing to go to startling extremes, such as give up their freedom in the Grand Inquisitor's totalitarian state and believe in its theological fantasies, if it is able to provide them with a meaning, or, more specifically, to give their suffering meaning and help them endure life. Despite their differing antidotes, they agree on the ultimate enemy to the human, both as individual and species. Suffering is not the greatest enemy, *not-willing* is, or in other words, nothingness is.

Conclusion

After comparing Nietzsche and the Grand Inquisitor, it is clear that there are multiple ways in which they differentiate: Life affirmation vs. life-denial, strength vs. weakness, master vs. slave, compassion vs. pity, one declaring the Death of God vs. the other seeking to hide it from the masses. Their fundamental divergence is revealed when we apply the lens of Nietzsche's genealogy of morality on the Grand Inquisitor's philosophy. Through this analysis, the underlying nature (as well as its motives) of the Grand Inquisitor's plan is revealed. It immediately becomes clear how his philosophy likewise falls into the trap of desiring meaning for suffering, even though it comes through an ideology rooted in the perpetuation of suffering

and inadequacy. To not let one develop and grow, but instead to trap them in a state of weakness and inadequacy (and the suffering that comes with it) is not compassion. Overemphasizing pity to such individuals in a way that perpetuates their state and their problems is not love. Helping others to transcend those weaknesses and inferiorities is. It is on this very fundamental point where slave morality (even in the Grand Inquisitor's sincere and well intentioned, yet provocative plan) falls short of contributing to human dignity. Much like the slave morality aspects of Christianity that Nietzsche pointed out, the Grand Inquisitor's decision is enslaving, not freeing, ennobling, or empowering. By coddling the masses in a bubble and championing this inversion of values in reaction to the overabundant and extreme suffering in the world, his decision is not aligned with authentic love or compassion, but with the opposite of love. The Grand Inquisitor's response to nothingness is a life-denying pessimism of weakness and slavery. Nietzsche, alternatively, offers a response to nothingness that is a life-affirming, self-transcending pessimism of strength that endows the world of the here-and-now with ultimate value, that calls us to overcome the inclinations towards slavish values within us, that invites us along the path to rise to the heights of the Superman and to take on the classical roles of God, and that provides a way for the creation of meaning in one's microcosm, even in the face of utter meaninglessness in the macrocosm.

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Who Bears Moral Responsibility for Collective Action Failures?

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There are many kinds of group actions where an individual can contribute a negligible amount, but it is important for the group to act. In these cases, the legislature is morally responsible for ensuring that the group action is undertaken. There is no way for any individual or individual corporation to meaningfully influence the progression of climate change, but it is important (on utilitarian and deontological grounds) that significant climate change mitigation is undertaken. Though there is no basis for individuals to impact the climate, legislative bodies can force compliance and, because there are morally important harms that can be avoided, it is legislatures that are ultimately responsible for harms that arise from a lack of collective action.

In one particularly memorable scene in Michael Schur's *The Good Place*, divine beings are discussing consequentialism. Michael (Ted Danson) argues that consequentialism is difficult because "Humans think they're making one choice, but they're actually making dozens of choices they don't even know they're making." In response, the Judge (Maya Rudolf) retorts, "Your big revelation is, 'life is complicated?' That's not a revelation, that's a divorced woman's throw pillow" (Weng, 4:37). This snappy interaction from *The Good Place* offers a surprisingly cogent summary of the current state of the debate around utilitarian ethics. There is a lot to be said here, but in this piece, I will argue that, though individual consumers bear little to no moral responsibility for the harms caused by moral failures related to collective action problems, policy makers do bear responsibility for these failures.

As a fun example, we cast philosophers Shelly Kagan in the role of the Judge, and Mark Budolfson in the role of Michael. In his paper "Do I Make a Difference?" (Kagan, 107) Kagan argues that the world works in such a way that we can make decisions that have a positive impact on the economic realities of the universe to which Budolfson, in "The Inefficacy Objection to Consequentialism and the Problem with the Expected Consequences Response" (Budolfson), responds that it simply isn't the case that the world is set up in such a way to allow this, because the world is too complicated for Kagan's theory to work. It simply isn't the case that our economic systems allow for Kagan's analysis to be true, because of the flexibility in these large-scale, complex economic systems.

Though this example is fun, both of these views deserve a more complete characterization. Because Budolfson's paper was written in response to Kagan, I'll start with the Kagan piece, then pick up Budolfson's critique. Kagan is motivated

by what he sees as a potential problem with the utilitarian thesis when the thesis is understood by its own rights (Kagan, 107). These are what might be called collective action problems. Collective action problems, as Kagan understands them, are situations where if a large number of people act there is a bad consequence, but if only one person acts there is no such consequence. So, though the consequentialist should condemn this collective action, it is unclear that it can condemn any particular individual for participating in this action, as each individual has no real impact on the negative outcome.

One common example is pollution (a version of this example is taken up by Kagan) (Kagan, 108). Here, I will take up an example close to my home: the air quality in the Salt Lake Valley. Every winter, the pollution from Salt Lake City is trapped by the mountains around the valley and usually only a strong storm can clear it. This can lead to problems breathing for those in the valley (to say nothing of the aesthetic harm). Now, if no one in the valley polluted at all (no cars, trains, factories, anything), then there would be no pollution problem in Salt Lake winters. And, if no one is polluting at all, and one person (call her Ann) decides to drive their car to work one time then there will still be no pollution problem. Ann reaps some benefit (she gets to keep her job), and there was no harm caused due to the pollution. So it seems that the utilitarian should endorse Ann's actions in this case. However, if everybody runs through this same calculus and decides to start driving to work all the time, then there will be a pollution problem again, which has huge disutility for all of the inhabitants of the valley. So, some utilitarians should condemn this action. But as the utilitarian can't condemn the individual actors, there seems to be a conflict between condemnation and sanctioning.

Kagan has seen this potential problem and has a solution. For Kagan, these kinds of problems might *look* concerning for the consequentialist, but they are not actually difficult to resolve. Here, Kagan has an extended example dealing with purchasing chicken in a supermarket (Kagan, 121–128). In essence, Kagan argues that every collective action problem is a "triggering case" problem. That is, once some threshold is passed, all of the negative utility is created. In his example, a grocery store will order more chickens every time they sell roughly 25 chickens. So, if you purchase the 25th chicken, then the store will buy 25 more, and you will be responsible for all 25 of those chicken deaths. Of course, you mostly don't know whether you did, in fact, buy the 25th chicken. However, you have a one in 25 chance of being that person, so, on average, one in 25 times, you will be responsible for 25 chicken deaths. So, in general, if you buy one chicken, you are responsible for, on average, one chicken death. So, as they are concerned with the expected outcome, a utilitarian concerned with the suffering of chickens should not purchase any chickens, because the expected outcome is always one chicken death.

Kagan then considers more cases that take in increasingly many complications to show that you are responsible for, on average, your portion of the collective action problem. This is the central thesis that Budolfson takes issue with. Budolfson argues, in essence, that the world is more complicated than Kagan assumes. There are a few reasons for this, but with an example, Budolfson shows that the real problem is that there are too many buffers in the real economic system for Kagan's thesis to work (Budolfson, 6). Budolfson considers a toy economic system of a basement shirt maker. The shirt producer has a way to sell all excess shirts at a breakeven price, so waste is not a factor. In essence, because the shirt maker is tolerant of waste, no individual will impact the number of shirts being produced (unless they purchase the magic number that would cause more shirts to be made with, again, a huge waste margin). Because any purchase will just eat into the huge waste in the system, most purchases don't matter. The extra waste built into the system acts as a buffer against any individual mattering. And, Budolfson argues, the probability that your purchase will actually matter is much smaller than Kagan needs for his thesis to work, at least in this toy case. Budolfson then generalizes by claiming that there are plenty of buffers and waste in any economic system, and this waste is analogous to his toy example (Budolfson, 7–8). So, it will always be the case (in these kinds of economic collective action problems) that the individual simply doesn't matter.

There are more reasons to think that the individual isn't as responsible as Kagan thinks they are. Budolfson considers something that is more generally applicable. In one piece, Budolfson is concerned with how the utilitarian, those with a similar kind of outlook as Kagan, should choose to eat. The important part here is his discussion of moral "budgets." Budolfson thinks that we should, in general, keep ethical harms in these kinds of cases "under budget" (Chignell et al., 167). He thinks this because the time that we spend on something like looking for ethical food might have been better spent on some other project. If this is the case, we could have come out ahead, ethically speaking, by giving up the most ethical food and reallocating the time and money that would be spent to attain something with yet more ethical importance.

Let's consider an example. Suppose that the only place for me to get the most ethical food (vegan, low environmental footprint, whatever), is a two-hour drive, and this food is very expensive. So expensive in fact, that were I to buy a hamburger at a fast-food place nearby, all of the money I would save could be donated to a charity that supplies mosquito nets to people in sub-Saharan Africa and would save five lives. And with the two hours I save, I could volunteer for a local cause that I am passionate about. So, even though the hamburger might be immoral, it isn't clear that the best option is to avoid it. It seems at least plausible, on the

balance, eating the hamburger is actually the most ethical option available to me in this case, as long as I spend that excess time and money on something ethically good.

I have spent the bulk of this paper strictly arguing to utilitarians, but deontologists should get on board with this way of thinking as well. In economics, there is a concept called "opportunity cost." The idea that opportunity cost captures is that there is no way to just make one decision. Every decision has, embedded within it, the decision that could have been made instead. So, from the above example, if I were to decide to make the drive to get the vegan, low environmental impact food, I would simultaneously be deciding to not spend that time and money on charity. This is a facet of decision-making that deontology so often neglects.

Let's consider an example to see how this might play out. The universalizability test of deontology should hold that individuals polluting, at all, is morally wrong. After all, if everyone were to pollute a little that would be disastrous. So, Jen, a Kantian, is trying to decide what to eat for dinner. She doesn't want to eat meat, because the meat industry pollutes a great deal. She then decides that she will go to the nearest vegan store and get food there. Upon deciding this, Jen realizes that there is a problem. The nearest store with vegan food is a two-hour drive away. Making this drive would also pollute which is forbidden by deontology. The good news is that there is a restaurant within walking distance of Jen's house, so she can get there without polluting. The bad news is that they only serve burgers. If Jen is to simply follow naïve deontological maxims, then Jen would have no choice but to not eat. However, this is unsustainable and causes harm to herself, which is also impermissible under deontological ethics. Jen finds herself in a dilemma where any action is impermissible and taking no action is also impermissible.

The standard deontological maxims struggle here to endorse any particular action. Luckily, there is an easy solution. All that needs to be done is slightly relax the maxims. Instead of outright forbidding everything that goes against a universalizable maxim, formulate the maxims to minimize the universalizable harms. So, instead of having a dilemma, Jen would just determine which action (if universalized) would have the least damage. In her case, not eating isn't an option (everyone starving for fear of pollution is worse for humanity than some pollution that could be mitigated), so she then needs to do her best to figure out which of her two options (driving for vegan food or the fast-food hamburger) will cause the least amount of pollution. Whichever it is, is the one that the new deontological maxim should endorse.

Given this framework for thinking about deontology, it turns out that no individual is to blame for collective action failures. In Jen's case she was morally

required to contribute to pollution, either through meat consumption or through driving, so she cannot be morally condemned. This framework implies that in difficult edge cases where there is no classic deontological answer, the view will reduce to utilitarianism. The deontologist can hold that there are maxims that must be followed if there is a way to do it (don't pollute if there is a way to not pollute), but in the case where there is no way to not cause harm, and the deontologist thinks that harm to people should be avoided, so they pick the action that creates the least amount of harm, and this just is a consequentialist model.

　　If individual consumers can't be morally responsible for collective action failures like the meat industry or pollution, perhaps corporations and those who lead them can be. This feels promising. The corporations are the ones actually slaughtering animals and using factories to pollute and any number of other unsavory things that cause morally relevant harm to those in society. Unfortunately, as promising as this tact seems, it is flawed. Corporations cannot be held any more responsible than consumers can, for all of the same reasons.

　　On the utilitarian front, no individual company actually has the ability to influence any of the important factors in these collective action failures. On the one hand, there might be too many companies. If any one of the corporations that raises beef decided to stop raising beef, it would not in any way impact the demand or supply of beef in the United States. There are too many other considerations at play. Any one farm is small enough that it would get eaten up by the buffers that exist throughout the supply chain (just like if an individual stopped eating meat). On the other hand, if there were a large distributor of animal products which decided to shut down, the demand for meat that exists in American would create a strong incentive for another company to simply take the place of the now defunct distributor. So, there is no utilitarian reason for corporations to be morally responsible for collective action problems.

　　As we just discussed, when considering deontological maxims, proper context needs to be considered. With this in mind, the case with corporations becomes surprisingly simple. Because we now only need to compare the morality of an action with the next best alternative, the deontological view, again, collapses to the utilitarian view in difficult cases. However, in the case of corporations, deontology collapses into utilitarianism in all cases. To see why, imagine that there is some product (a widget) that is the most ethically good product that could possibly be made. Its very creation is inherently ethical, and it does good ethical things in the world once produced. If there is a deontological corporation, it cannot participate in creating this thing. The law cannot be universalized. People will still need food, and if every corporation is focused on making widgets, then no one will have food, and society will collapse. So, the deontologist corporation cannot morally produce

widgets. This example will hold in general. There is no universalizable industry that a corporation can engage in, so they need some other factor to determine what they should do.

Because deontology is focused on societal preservation in general (that's what the universalizability test does), a corporation does have a deontological duty to do its best to fill whatever niche society would most benefit from being filled. But of course, looking to this outcome to determine what actions to take is just utilitarianism. So, whether utilitarianism or deontology is your preferred moral theory, a corporation is bound by utilitarian rules, and so does not bear responsibility for collective action concerns.

At this point, it is important to note that all of these claims are based on empirical facts, and not any inherent truth about morality. It isn't necessarily the case that there is waste in the system so your contribution matters less than you think. And it won't necessarily be the case that deontological ethics will have conflicts. However, it seems that in the world we live in, these things are often true, especially when dealing with economic systems and markets. Given all of this, we finally can find someone to blame. We cannot blame consumers or corporations for moral harms caused by collective action problems because their influence is less than it seems like it should be. However, there is only one group of people who have any ability to fix any collective action problem, so the responsibility to fix it falls completely on them. They can solve collective action problem by forcing the collective to act in a particular way. This group, of course, is legislators. Lawmakers have the power to force people to pollute less or treat animals better or solve any number of collective action problems. So, all the concerns about individual contributions not mattering doesn't apply to lawmakers. Here, it might seem like a legislature has the ability to solve collective action problems that occur outside of itself, but there is still a question of collective action in producing such solutions. Put another way, if no individual is responsible for collective actions, it would seem like the individuals that make up a legislature can't be responsible for the decisions of that legislature.

This is a genuine concern, but it has an easy response. In the case of a legislature, the empirical facts are different. In particular, Budolfson's concern about waste is no longer relevant. In a legislative body with 100 people, there is no waste or overproduction ready to be used up in some other area. A bill doesn't get to be a super-law just because it gets 70 of the 100 available votes. So, in that case, every legislator would, unlike the consumer, be responsible for one one-hundredth of the vote on that bill. So, in the case of legislatures, Kagan finds the correct theory. The difference is that the legislative process is responsive in a way that economic systems simply aren't.

Here we find a solution. Legislative bodies have the power to fix collective action problems and a moral responsibility for their actions. They are the only group that has both, and so moral responsibility rests on them. This also points to a solution to another potential problem. Voting is a collective action in an important way; furthermore, as I've shown throughout this paper, in many collective action areas, individuals aren't morally responsible for the outcomes in these cases. If that applies to voting, then it would seem that we have a problem. In that case, elected officials would have moral responsibility, but the process that elected them wouldn't, and so it would seem that the legislature as an institution wouldn't have moral authority. Luckily, this all works out because the argument that grants moral responsibility to individual legislators can also be applied to voters.

Voting in elections for representatives, like voting in a legislature, is responsive. There is no overproduction, no waste in the system, and so each voter is genuinely responsible for her small fraction of the final vote. This is why it is important to flag the empirical dimensions of this discussion. It turns out that the empirical aspects of the world make it the case that moral responsibility can fall to the same groups of people differently based on the exact circumstances they find themselves in.

Though this piece is focused on the ethics of collective action, it has important implications for political philosophy as well, specifically the nature and role of government. It turns out to be the case that policy makers have certain moral responsibilities for the harms caused by collective action problems, and so it is the case that governments should undertake actions to mitigate the relevant moral harm caused by these problems. Legislators are responsible for allowing them to happen, and so they have a duty to fix them. This will mean, in rough agreement with a Hobbesian position, that governments should act to force everyone to act in the common good because it will benefit each individual.

Here there is an important potential objection. David Gauthier wants to apply this Hobbesian view to morality instead of politics. Gauthier argues (in "Why Contractarianism?") that when there are these kinds of collective action problems, it is morally required that every individual act in a way that is consistent with achieving the common good if everyone were to undertake such actions (Vallentyne). As an example, we could consider the nature of contracts. Gauthier would argue that everyone should fulfill their contracts, even if it wouldn't benefit them to do so. The basis of this obligation is that we are all better off in a society where people generally honor their promises. So, each of us is responsible for making sure that all of our own contracts are fulfilled. This is essentially Hobbes' political theory applied to morality. Gauthier attempts to build this morality out of the legitimate self-interest of each individual. Gauthier reasons that, if we are all

better off when contracts are honored, then we all have an incentive to honor contracts.

The problem is that, as has been discussed though this paper, it isn't the case that the individual has enough influence over these kinds of issues to matter. One person one time skipping out of a contract doesn't actually harm society in a meaningful way, so the incentive doesn't exist. Same with the examples already considered with pollution or eating chicken. Then, the individual has an incentive to break a contract whenever it would be advantageous to them, so Gauthier's appeal to personal interest fails. Though it is, in fact, in everyone's self-interest that contracts are fulfilled, individuals can't be morally responsible for this on Gauthier's appeal to self-interest, utilitarianism, or deontology. Thus, it again falls to governments to force these important actions to be taken.

Here, we land, again, on a Hobbesian view of how governments should operate and what kinds of power they should exert. It is important to note at this point that Hobbes' conclusion that absolute monarchy is the best form of government does not necessarily follow from taking up his position on the nature of the role of government. Hobbes came to this conclusion by finding efficiency to be the ultimate virtue of government and human civilization (Hobbes, 132). This view is no longer acceptable, and the values of human prosperity, dignity, and freedom are higher ideals that governmental structure should aim for.

Ultimately, holding legislators as the responsible party for a range of collective action problems will be correct and useful for future discourse on ethics and the role of government. Though collective action problems have always existed, we live in a world where the failure to meet these problems is potentially catastrophic, so it is paramount that we determine who is responsible for fixing these problems.

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Misogynist or Merely Outdated? Why Aristotle Cannot be Acquitted of Sexism

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Aristotle makes several claims about female nature that have been interpreted as sexist. This paper examines two defenses in which Aristotle's sexism is seen as inaccurate.The first argues that the descriptions of women in Aristotle's writings are not sexist because it is incorrect to try and judge Aristotle by modern standards. The second argues that while Aristotle made statements in his work that seemingly treated women as lesser in regards to the generation of children, this too has been misconstrued and is also not actually sexist. However, both of these defenses can be rejected. The first attempts to dismiss the charges of sexism first by employing too narrow a definition of ideological bias and too broad an allowance of other explanations. The second attempts to excuse gender from the issue of generation yet still fails to explain why women are assigned the lesser generative role.

In his judgments of women, did Aristotle demonstrate a deliberate sexist bias? There are two schools of thought on the answer to this question: First, Aristotle, for various reasons, was indeed a misogynist by the standards of his day or any other. The second general position is that the treatment of women in his philosophical writings is not actually sexist and it is incorrect to try and judge Aristotle by modern standards of gender relations. In this second school of thought, two specific defenses have been proposed that are of interest. First, that Aristotle is not sexist at least in the sense that Aristotle was not consciously ideologically biased against women. Statements made in various biological texts such as *History of Animals, Parts of Animals* and *Generation of Animals* are not the result of deliberate misogyny, but rather the lack of scientific knowledge and philosophical conventions of the times. The second defense is that while Aristotle made statements in his work that seemingly treated women as lesser than men especially in regards to womens' roles in generation of children, some of these statements such as the ones made in *Generation of Animals* have been misconstrued by posterity and are not actually sexist. It is my intent in this paper to examine two analyses of Aristotle representative of these approaches as presented by Robert Mayhew and M.D. Tress, and determine if the charges of deliberate and conscious sexism laid against Aristotle are indeed false based on these defenses.

Generally, the first defense brought against the charge of sexism in Aristotle's writings is that in the many cases where Aristotle has been accused of ideological bias, he may be acquitted being found only guilty of drawing conclusions from

contemporary misinformation. Several instances in Aristotle's writings can be used as pieces of evidence to support this argument, instances which feminist writers have previously pointed out as egregiously misogynistic. These are the issues of generation, of Aristotle's description of women as mutilated men, of fallacious assumptions about women's anatomy, and of women's inferior psychology.[1] Drawing from these examples, the argument stands that based on a set definition of ideological bias, Aristotle does not, in fact, demonstrate a ideologically sexist bias against women.

Before commencing an examination of the instances in question from Aristotle's biological writings, it is first necessary to establish what constitutes the 'ideological bias' from which Aristotle is defended. Mayhew presents the following definition: in order for an offending conclusion to be considered ideologically biased, it must be *deliberately* biased. In other words, the thinker must have been capable of drawing different conclusions, but through evasion, dishonesty, and rationalization, has instead chosen otherwise (Mayhew, 5). There is furthermore a test to determine if this variety of bias has taken place, adapted from Khan, 1990:

> An ideological interpretation of some claim is appropriate when the following conditions hold: 1. the claim does in fact tend to promote a specific ideological agenda or justify social interests (i.e., interests of class, social position, gender, etc.); 2. The claim exhibits one of the following two features: a. it rests upon arbitrary or implausible assumptions and/or is supported by unusually bad arguments; b. it conflicts with other fundamental principles held by the same thinker (Mayhew, 7).

There are problems with this definition of ideological bias. First, while it may be a useful exercise for the purposes of this line of defense to limit the definition of ideological bias only to the overtly conscious variety, this is an irresponsible perspective at best. The attempt is to draw a distinction between being influenced by one's culture against certain groups and the potential of being ideologically biased, when in reality these two things are almost synonymous. The only arguments offered for this distinction are some loose metaphors about aristocrats and philosophers undergoing mental gymnastics to serve their own

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[1] There is also the issue of bees, specifically that Aristotle has been accused of sexism for refusing to call bee-leaders "queens", instead of "kings". Mayhew's response to this argument is that while it is true that other thinkers of the time, such as Xenophon, were willing to call the bee-leaders queens, given that Aristotle believed bee-leaders were both male and female and was willing to call wasp-leaders "mothers" and treat male insects as generally sexually passive, it is fair to say that this is not an example of Aristotle being especially misogynistic. (Mayhew, 20). For further discussion, see Lloyd 1993 and Lennox 1995.

intellectual ends (Mayhew, 3). While this no doubt often occurs, a person does not have to explicitly decide to demean others in order to make assumptions that reflect the status quo from which that person benefits, and to excuse this human tendency from the charge of bias runs the risk of giving egregiously harmful perspectives credence because 'he didn't mean it like that.' Furthermore, beyond the issues with the narrowness of this definition of ideological bias, it should also be noted that the instances of sexism in Aristotle that are addressed cannot even be excused from even this specific concept of bias- as will be seen shortly.

Having discussed the definition of ideological bias, it is now possible to move forward into an examination of the offending passages in Aristotle. First, there is the contentious issue of the different roles between the male and female in generation. The argument here defends Aristotle from sexism by rejecting the idea that Aristotle subscribed to the sexist 'Container' theory of generation in which the female only serves as essentially a feed-bag to sustain the
offspring, and contributes nothing to its generation.[2] The argument furthermore states that the unquestionably sexist 'Inert Matter' theory that the female only passively contributes the matter to the offspring while the male provides the form is also not an accurate assessment of Aristotle's position (Mayhew, 30). This second idea is rejected on the grounds that it does not take into account that the female also donates 'seed' to generation in the form of her menses,[3] which is albeit a less purified variety of seed than the male. Also, the matter found in the female is 'active' inasmuch as it contains a preordained set of potential movements to create a person (Mayhew, 41). And finally, the female does contribute part of the soul to the offspring-although admittedly the most base part. She furthermore affects gender and appearance of the offspring (Mayhew, 45, 50). These justifications are used to reject the Inert Matter theory, and somehow absolve Aristotle of sexist ideological bias along the way, a conclusion drawn because while Aristotle referred to the female contribution as 'inferior', at least he didn't treat women as harshly as he could have. However, a difference in degree of an offense does not, *ipso facto*, remove the offense. This is also missing the main question, which is not if the female contributes the offspring in some significant way, but whether her contributions are equally valuable as those from the male. Aristotle clearly does not

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[2] For more discussion, see Dean-Jones, 1994. However, this part is true. There is no question that in *Generation of Animals* Aristotle believes that the female contributes to generation-but what she contributes is the question.

[3] 'In GA 1.18, Aristotle raises the question, What is seed? He answers that 'to be seed means to be by nature the sort of thing out of which naturally constituted things are produced in the first place' (724a17– 18)' (Mayhew, 33). In *Generation of Animals* Aristotle uses 'seed' and 'semen' interchangeably for the male, and 'seed' and 'menses' interchangeably for the female.

treat the female contribution as equally valuable, and the defense therefore fails.

The next offending passage in Aristotle to come under scrutiny is the place in *Generation of Animals* where he writes that 'The female is, as it were, a mutilated male' (2.3.737a27–28). This passage has come under fire from feminist critics as a particulary egregious example of Aristotle's demeaning views of women, and at first glance this appears to be an obvious conclusion. The argument exists, however, that looking beyond this first glance reveals that this passage is not actually condemning of the female sex. The first point in this argument is that the passage in question is qualified; it does not refer to women being mutilated men, but women being '*as it were*' mutilated men. In other words, women are not literally deformed men, but they are comparable to deformed men, because they do not perform certain functions (such as generation) in the same way as men. As Aristotle considers the male of the species the default form, any deviation from the default can naturally be referred to as mutilation without necessarily using the term pejoratively (Mayhew, 55). The second point in this argument is that while to the modern eye the description of women 'as it were, mutilated males' may jar, when considering historical context it may seem more natural and less derogatory. In Aristotle's time, the people who were commonly understood as, literally, mutilated men who could not perform the same generative functions as normal men were eunuchs. Eunuchs were people similar to men who are softer, have less body hair and no beard, have higher voices, and who do not go bald. In other words, people very similar to women. Eunuchs demonstrate these qualities because they have no testicles, so, therefore, it follows that women, also possessing no testicles, would demonstrate these same qualities. The existence of the female must result from a 'defect' in generation that results, like a eunuch, in no testicles. In summary, keeping these thoughts in mind as well as the knowledge that it was not uncommon at the time to use eunuchs as metaphors for other natural phenomena such as plants,[4] the argument is that Aristotle demonstrated no sexist ideological bias when using mutilated men as an analogy for women, at least per the narrow definition of ideological bias which requires intent, implausible assumptions, and conflicting claims.

There are several issues with this argument. First, the analogy of women as deformed men rests on the assumption that men are the default form of humans, which is not addressed in the defense of this passage. This is the core of it: that

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[4] 'Athenaeus tells us that the Pythagoreans referred to one kind of lettuce as 'eunuch' lettuce - probably because it was thought to check sexual desire. He also tells us that Plato Comicus, in his *Laios*, calls melons without seeds 'eunuch-like' He reports that Aristotle, in the (lost) work *On Plants*, writes that 'some call [seedless dates] 'eunuchs' and others 'stoneless' Finally, Aristotle's successor in the Lyceum, Theophrastus, discussing reeds, says that those without a plume or flower tufts are called 'eunuchs'.' (Mayhew, 58-59).

women are compared to men that are defective, instead of simply being considered the natural other half of the species, or even being considered as the default for humans themselves. The eunuch defense does not address this, and, while eunuchs themselves may have feminine characteristics and be commonly used as literary analogies, this does not change the fact that for a woman to be compared to a eunuch, she is being held equivalent to a mutilated man. This argument states that as the characteristics of a eunuch result from his mutilation, so too do the characteristics of a woman result from a similar mutilation: the lack of testicles. This obviously does not treat women as being natural and having equal value as men.[5]

 This stance is indefensible, even from the narrow definition of ideological bias previously discussed. First, considering women as analogous to mutilated men benefits the male as it enshrines him as the natural blueprint for the human race. Furthermore, this passage offers no clear defense for why women have to be a defect from the blueprint as opposed to being merely the other half of it. Finally, the part of the text in question is admittedly not inconsistent with the rest of Aristotle's body of work, but since this is only because the rest of Aristotle's body of work uniformly treats women as lesser than men, this is no defense either.

 On the topic of the rest of Aristotle's body of work, it offers several other notable instances of Aristotle analyzing womens' bodies in potentially sexist ways. For example, he makes the claim that women have fewer teeth than men (HA 2.3 501b19–21). He also claims that women have smaller brains than men, (PA 2.7 653a28–29) going on to say that consequently women and men have differently shaped skulls.[6] He also states that women are naturally more pale (GA 1.19 727a22–24), and claims that women have softer bones (PA 2.9 655a10–14) (Mayhew, 70-86). These examples seem more obscurely misogynistic than previous ones such as referring to women as mutilated men. What does it matter if Aristotle believes women have fewer teeth, or smaller brains,[7] or paler skin and softer bones? It matters because while one example taken alone may be an oddity, taken together they paint a picture of a woman as weaker, smaller, and altogether lesser than her

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[5] For further discussion of the consequences of the description of women as mutilated men, see Horowitz 1976.

[6] The question of whether believing that men and women have different skulls is sexist is the followup to questioning whether believing that men and women have different sized brains is sexist, so in the interests of space this paper will address the latter and not the former.

[7] The issue of whether women have smaller brains is also related to the issue of women's role in generation, due to the brain's role of heating and refining blood in Aristotelian biology and the importance of hotter blood in generation.This ties back to the argument over whether women are in reality less in their generative role, which will be addressed further, but can be assumed for now.

male counterpart, a picture exacerbated by Aristotle's account of the female character, which will be examined shortly.

There are, of course, defenses proposed to this assessment, first concerning the issue of womens' brains (Mayhew, 70-72). The argument is that Aristotle makes no explicit connection between having a smaller brain and having diminished cognitive capabilities. The answer to this argument is that while Aristotle may not have stated this in so many words, the connection is still clear given the rest of his biology. First, Aristotle thought that the main role of the brain was to heat and regulate blood for the heart, (PA 2.7 652b17–28) which was the seat of some human cognitive capabilities (PA 2.10 656a15–35), and as men have bigger brains their hearts are better heated (PA 2.7.653a29–30). Second, Aristotle thought that hotter blood leads to better and purer results for bodily functions, as seen in *Generation of Animals*, where he theorized that the superiority of the male's seed in generation was a result of the greater heat of his blood (GA 1.19.726b30–727a4; 727a27– 30).[8] And so, if it is better for bodily functions to have hotter blood, and the brain heats blood for the heart, and the heart governs cognition, then it follows that having a better-heated heart as a result of a larger brain results in better cognition than the alternative state of affairs. So therefore, men have better cognitive abilities than women, which is a clearly sexist position under any definition of ideological bias.

The issues of womens' teeth, skin, and bones may all be addressed together. The general defense for all three is that, taking a historical perspective, women in the ancient world tended to be more susceptible to health issues that would result in fewer teeth, paler skin, and softer bones than men were, and so Aristotle may very well have been merely observing the deficiencies of ancient Greek healthcare (Mayhew, 75-86). This position is speculative to the extent that it can hardly be evaluated. Perhaps Aristotle did notice that women seemed generally frailer without truly knowing the deeper scientific reasons why, but it cannot be proven that he did any more than it can be proven he did not, and so this is no good defense at all. It is far less of a stretch to assume that Aristotle in his life had the ability to observe all kinds of women, and surely not every single woman he ever met had all her teeth falling out or was dying from anemia and osteoporosis, even given the deficiencies of ancient healthcare. It is far less of a stretch to reason that Aristotle's assessment of the female body in these instances was the result of his preconception of what women were like: softer and weaker. Obviously, these assessments betray ideological bias by any definition as they benefit men in society by treating them as

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[8] It is also notable that 'Aristotle explains that a deficiency in heat may affect the working of semen (GA 4.1 766a18– 22) and result in a female or deficient offspring (4.3 767b23)' (Fortenbaugh 1977, 246).

the stronger and furthermore could be easily disproved with greater scientific diligence. These assessments are not incompatible with the rest of Aristotle's body of work, but again only because his body of work is heavily biased against women.

Aristotle's biases expressed in his conclusions about female physicality appear further in his account of the female character.

> For the character of the females is softer, quicker to be tamed, more receptive to handling, and readier to learn. . . . All females are less spirited than males, except the bear and leopard: in these the female is thought to be braver. But in the other kinds, the females are softer, more vicious, less simple, more impetuous....a woman is more compassionate than a man and more given to tears, but also more jealous, more complaining, more scolding, and more apt to fight. The female is also more dispirited and more despondent than the male, more shameless and more lying, readier to deceive and possessing a better memory; and further, she is more wakeful, more timid, and in general, the female is less inclined to move than the male, and requires less nourishment. But as we have said, the male is more able to help and braver than the female... (HA 8 (9).1.608a21– b18).

These claims are largely indefensible against the charge of sexism and consequently little attempt is made to defend them. The only real half-defense that can be made is that while Aristotle is accusing the female gender of being naturally flawed, at least he is not accusing them of being morally flawed (Mayhew, 99-102).[9] However, a flaw is a flaw. It is unquestionable that Aristotle's views on female psychology are biased, or at least, as Mayhew himself admits, 'strongly tainted by ideological presuppositions' (Mayhew, 113).

The first general defense of Aristotle's sexism now having been discharged, the second debate of interest in this paper can now be fully addressed: the role of women in generation. It is generally understood that in *Generation of Animals* Aristotle uses the idea of hylomorphism to explain generation: everything, including human beings, consists of both matter and form. In this case, matter can be generally understood as that which makes up the body, and form as the soul and faculties that give the body its identity. (Tress, 309-313). According to Aristotle, in generation the male donates the form, and the female donates the matter. The issue

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[9] As set out in Fortenbaugh 1969, in Aristotle's mind true moral virtue requires an element of choice, and therefore true moral deficiency is also at least partially the result of choice. Natural deficiencies are innate, not chosen, and are therefore not equivalent to moral deficiencies (Mayhew, 99). [10] It should also be noted here that, as discussed in Fortenbaugh 1977, Aristotle does not claim that the female is completely devoid of reason, but that her emotions will almost always win out over reason (Fortenbaugh 1977, 246).

here is that this position has been historically considered sexist, as Aristotle in the rest of his work on hylomorphism values form above matter. The proposed defense to this accusation is that Aristotle's theory of generation is not concerned with gender, but instead with mechanics. The argument of the defense is as follows: Feminist thinkers have correlated the issues of generation with the issues of gender when in reality they are unrelated. Aristotle believed that both the male and the female play a necessary role in reproduction, because both the male and the female are actualized beings, and hold equal potential for offspring in their *sperma*, which are semen and menses, respectively (Tress, 330-31). The idea here is that as Aristotle rejected the idea that the male held the total potential offspring already within his semen, he therefore by necessity embraced the theory that the female had to contribute something vital to generation as well. And so, faced with the mechanical problem of how to explain generation while including both the male and the female and also accounting for the necessary presence of matter and form, he assigned the form to the male and the matter to the female. In conclusion, the argument is that in doing so, Aristotle had no thought to the merits of the respective genders, and therefore was not sexist in this instance.

However, this argument is remarkably thin. Aristotle states in *Generation of Animals* that the one who donates the form is better and more divine than the one who donates the matter (GA 732a5). Aristotle also grants preeminence to form above matter in the rest of his work on hylomorphism and metaphysics (Tress, 330). Aristotle further states that while the male and the female both contribute *sperma* to generation, the female's *sperma* is less pure and refined (GA 737a22-30).[10] However, he speaks of the male *sperma* in terms of the divine and the cosmic, heated and refined by a star-like heat that the female does not possess (Tress, 335). These qualities allow the male to contribute the soul and higher faculties to generation: the form. The female is left with nothing to claim but the low and common earth: the matter. There is no question that the female is given the lesser role in generation. It is a stretch to argue that this stance has nothing to do with sexist biases, especially given the rest of Aristotle's body of work already discussed. Why, if one contribution to generation has to be lesser, must it be that of the female? Why speak of her as deformed and impure, if not out of a sense of sexism?

Both defenses, concerning Aristotle's statements on female physiology and psychology as presented by Mayhew and concerning Aristotle's position on

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[10] It is here that Aristotle refers to the female as a deformed male, which has already been addressed. The additional defense of this comment here is that in this case Aristotle only meant "deformed" as "lacking", since in her generative ability the female contains within herself the potential of male organs that she does not possess (Tress, 337). This can be answered with the same argument already presented- why should the female be the one considered lacking?

generation as presented by Tress, can be rejected. The first attempts a defense with too narrow a definition of ideological bias, and allows too charitable a range of potential alternative explanations. The second attempts a defense by considering too little context for the issue at hand. When considering the issues of Aristotle's description of women as mutilated men, of fallacious assumptions about women's anatomy, of women's inferior psychology, and of women's role in generation, Aristotle clearly takes sexist positions based on his assumptions about the nature of women. In regards to Aristotle's position on the role of women in generation, it is also clear that he defaults to assigning women the lesser role. Neither defense, concerning physiology and psychology or generation, ultimately succeed in absolving Aristotle of sexism in his works.

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Death Before Dying: Developing a Multi-Layered Account of Dasein

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This paper investigates the kind of death mentioned throughout Heidegger's account of being-towards-death: is it a biological death, or a more existential form of death? Through an examination of Heidegger's remarks on death as well as William Blattner's defense of the existential account of death, I argue that the death of Dasein is marked by its utmost condition for its sheer existence: the absolute non-revivability of Dasein. This condition marks the death of Dasein as being inevitably tied to a biological bodily totality. As long as this core condition is fulfilled, the existential deaths of Dasein won't shatter Dasein's structure as having possibilities of being.

In *Being and Time,* Heidegger builds a detailed philosophy of death by developing an account of being-towards-death.[1] This framework, however, surprisingly lacks a thorough discussion of death in either a purely biological or purely existential interpretation, thereby creating doubt as to what *kind* of death his framework refers to.[2] Pieces from Heidegger's existential analytic necessitate that being-in-the-world (and thus, being-towards-death) must avoid talk of the body as an entity, while Heidegger's descriptions of death picture it as primarily grounded upon one's biology.[3] This paper attempts to solve this ambivalence by arguing that Dasein's death is characterised by its *non-revivability*: the only condition in which Dasein can maintain all of its properties is that Dasein must not contain, but still be

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[1] Heidegger understands time in terms of possibilities, and accordingly, death is for humans a possibility. According to Heidegger, confrontation with death is the most profound factor in the question of the meaning of being. Being-towards-death is a term delineating Dasein's approach to the possibility of its death: Dasein comports itself to the possibility of death. Because possibilities are integral to our lived experience (and our thrownness), being-towards-death is not just expecting an event in the future to happen, but it is a way of being.

[2] Possibly due to Heidegger's aversion to the involvement of the body in the death of Dasein, there has been an ongoing debate in Heidegger scholarship about how death in the context of Dasein's no-longer-being-able-to-be-there should be interpreted. An "existential" reading of the death of Dasein can be understood as a non-traditional interpretation of death: it is fundamentally grounded on a death that marks the end of Dasein's possibilities of being-in-the-world, rather than the ordinary meaning of death as the end of bodily operations.

[3] Heidegger uses the term "being-in-the-world" to describe Dasein's activities in the world. Heidegger also uses this terminology to avoid talk of spatial-relatedness, such as an object or subject: Dasein is not in the world as an object is in space. Rather, the term attempts to emphasize that Dasein concernedly comports itself to the world. As being-towards-death is a possibility of Dasein, a view that inauthentically views bodies as entities spatially related to each other cannot be a part of Heidegger's existential analytic.

made possible by, the fulfillment of the condition of having a bodily totality.[4] While Dasein must necessarily be in a vital dependency relationship with the body, this framework still allows room to conceive of existential forms of death as laying secondary to Dasein.

Throughout *Being and Time*, Heidegger pays little attention to the body as it relates to Dasein. However, Heidegger's initial laying-out of the tradition of metaphysics seems to at least hint at the possible roles the body can play in his existential analytic. One of the strongest evidence of such hints is his discussion of, and involvement in, Descartes' philosophy. Heidegger was essentially bothered by Descartes' project, because it deemed humans as self-contained subjects that have no roots in a shared worldly context. Heidegger writes, "a discussion of the Cartesian ontology of the 'world' will provide us likewise with a negative support for a positive explication of the spatiality of the environment and of Dasein itself" (Heidegger, 122-123, §18). Heidegger builds an argument for Dasein as fundamentally opposed to the substance philosophy. This involvement can hint towards a possible decision that Heidegger's neglect of the body is a deliberate attempt to overturn the traditional metaphysical conclusion that embodiment must always be in terms of a substance like a body or mind.

In light of an intentional neglect of the body, one might try to extract from Heidegger's forms of entities to determine the position of the body in relation to Dasein's being-towards-death. Heidegger mentions briefly that "Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein's being; it is an existentiale. So one cannot think of it as the being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) 'in' an entity which is present-at-hand" (79, §12). The body can be conceived, according to Heidegger, as a mass of quantifiable properties and as an object of knowledge for the sciences. A purely biological view of an individual's body does not have a place in the discussion of being-towards-death, however.[5] An every-day register of the phrase "being-in" is misleading; Dasein doesn't exist contained inside a substance. This directs attention to the hypothesis that Heidegger's presentation of being-towards-death does not depict death that occurs inside a body. Therefore, Dasein must be structurally distanced from entities that are present-at-

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[4] Heidegger distinguishes Dasein as a type of being that specifically seeks the meaning of its own being. This does not depict a theoretical or introspective relationship to one's own being, but it defines the distinct type of beings that humans are.

[5] This is not to say that Heidegger wants to eliminate the ontic aspect of a being. According to Heidegger, the ontic and the ontological are necessarily intertwined.

hand, because Dasein as a being that questions the meaning of its being cannot interact with present-at-hand objects.[6]

An approach that stays loyal to Heideggerian terminology may also approximate a view of the body as ready-to-hand.[7] The body is something useful for purposes of efficiency and productivity, something that has functionalities that allow human beings to move around and accomplish tasks. In this consideration the body is still closely familiar to Dasein as an external tool for day-to-day tasks.

However, no matter what form of entity we attempt as a potential place to which the body can belong to, each interpretation falls into the Cartesian ontology that separates the self from the body, a view that is wholly rejected by Heidegger, and therefore, can find no place in his thesis. Such discussions of where the body lies overlook Dasein as primordially questioning the meaning of its own being. Indeed, Heidegger reveals a structure in which nothing other than being-in-the-world can precede Dasein:

> Being-in is not a "property" which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, and without which it could be just as well as it could with it. It is not the case that man 'is' and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-being towards the 'world' – a world which he provides himself occasionally (84, §12).

According to Heidegger, then, discussions of the body attempt to mistakenly root human beings into a material space. The only *a priori* structure of Dasein is its being-in-the-world. Heidegger effectively argues that any bodily experience of the world is made possible by the primordial factor that is being-in-the-world. This suggests that a discussion of the body doesn't have relevance to Heidegger's advancement of his existential analytic, and therefore, his neglect of the body actually functions to keep his discussion consistent with the inherent character of Dasein.

The evidence in his general discussion of being-towards-death creates the impression that the talk of the body must not play a role in Dasein's being-towards-

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[6] "Present-at-hand" refers to an approach to comprehending an object in the world. Specifically, something viewed as present-at-hand will be understood conceptually and theoretically, rather than practically. This is best understood in relation to ready-to-hand objects. A tool, such as a hammer, can first be understood as ready-to-hand through its practical functions. However, if the tool breaks, it reveals itself not as a tool to be used practically, but a material or an object to be theoretically observed (whereby it becomes present-at-hand). In this framework, Dasein cannot view a body as present-at-hand, because it would contradict an authentic view on human beings as essentially being-in-the-world.

[7] "Ready-to-hand" refers to the view of objects in terms of the goal that can be achieved by using them in a practical setting.

death, but Heidegger surprisingly sprinkles indirect references to deaths that are specifically grounded in physiological death. In his discussion of the Dasein of Others, Heidegger asserts that "the end of the entity *qua* Dasein is the *beginning* of the same entity *qua* something present-at-hand" (281; §47), such as a "corpse", which is useful for a "student of pathological anatomy" (282; §47). Here, there is a strikingly definitive understanding of death in its very *normal* form: death that is evidenced by the stopping of biological functions. Similarly, in his discussion of the "they" talk, Heidegger's criticism addresses the way in which an authentic being-towards-death is concealed and evaded, and replaced by an inauthentic view of death. However, Heidegger never mentions that everyday approach to death refers to the wrong *kind* of death[8]. For instance, when Heidegger addresses that everyday talk replaces the indefinite character of death by "conferring definiteness upon it" (302; §52), the view of death as definite aligns with social trends only when seen as referring to the normal definition of death. Moreover, Heidegger's criticism of the overemphasis on the "'empirical' certainty of death" isn't directed at what kind of death "they" refer to, but it is directed at the failure of everydayness to understand death as something specified in detail. While Heidegger doesn't elaborate on what semantic meaning death may have, there exists a number of "hints" through which it becomes evident that Heidegger most likely referred to death in its first, most literal meaning.

According to Heidegger, talk of the body as being part of or interacting with Dasein misunderstands his project of building a method in which the only primordial content to Dasein is being-in-the-world. If references of death were kept consistently "existential" in his later discussions of death, Heidegger's being-towards-death could be understood not in terms of a death that must necessarily involve a body, but must instead only fulfill the conditions of authenticity. However, his discussion of being-towards-death seems to view the term "death" in its literal meaning that grounds death to the ceasing of bodily operations. Due to a lack of elaboration on or a direct analysis of the body, however, there is no certainty as to what *semantic meaning* of death Heidegger wants to address in his thesis. If it is true that Heidegger uses death in its literal meaning, this must unavoidably challenge Heidegger's initial direction that the existential analytic is devoid of a content of the body. Is Heidegger's view of death, then, ground upon the body, or does Heidegger offer a purely existential understanding of death?

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[8] Everyday talk about death conceals qualities that are revealed in Dasein's own relationship to its death, therefore being inauthentic. For instance, it assumes that death is an event that ends a life, therefore being an endpoint. This view would mistakenly assume that humans are present-at-hand or ready-to-hand entities, because it would ignore the "authentic" approach to death: for Dasein, death is not an event that merely ends lives, but Dasein constantly comports itself to the possibility of death.

William Blattner's article named *The Concept of Death in Being and Time* presents a purely existential reading of Heidegger's philosophy of death. Here, Blattner poses a seemingly troublesome contradiction between the two notions: (1) death is a way of being for Dasein and (2) Dasein is no-longer-able-to-be-there at the same instant. Blattner claims that the only way to solve the apparent contradiction is through an analytic of Dasein's being-towards-death purely existentially (Blattner 68): if death had its normal meaning, Dasein would no longer be, allowing for the contradiction. His solution of an existential view of death includes understanding Dasein in terms of two parts: the "thin" part is the part of Dasein that questions the meaning of being, and the "thick" part is the part of Dasein that is able-to-be. In this framework, death can be a possibility of Dasein if Dasein becomes "thin" while letting go of its "thick" side. In other words, Dasein 'is' death when it can keep questioning the meaning of its being, but does not have the ability to seek an answer to this question to understand who it is and what possibilities it has.

By ignoring the body, Blattner's solution lets some possibilities of Dasein to remain untouched. By splitting Dasein into "thick" and "thin", Blattner essentially attempts to have all of Dasein's ability-to-be separated and collected into one category of "thick", and leave an inactive state of being in the category of "thin".[9] This understanding mistakenly assigns to the "thin" Dasein a constant state of maintaining itself. If the "thin" Dasein, now as death, conceptually possesses no ability-to-be, then Dasein's possibility of death cannot be against the "thin" Dasein, and therefore, it stays essentially unaffected, maintaining its way of being as death. But is it even possible to conceive of death, in the Heideggerian framework, as a continuing state? Heidegger states that Dasein doesn't possess a way in which it can experience death as a process let alone "understanding it as something experienced" (Heidegger 281; §47). Heidegger's characterisation of death involves two parts: (1) the instant wholeness of Dasein as an entity, and (2) Dasein's "loss of being-in-the-world" (280; §46). Death as a constant way of being cannot endure precisely because it lacks the instant transition that Dasein must go through in order to be no-longer-Dasein.

The concept of a "thin" Dasein somehow maintaining its *being* inevitably leads to a contradiction that the "thin" Dasein has at least a limited number of possibilities. But how can an ability-to-be exist in an inactivated Dasein? In this

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[9] Blattner's thesis is mainly concerned with allowing Dasein to have death as a way of being. He "fulfills" such a condition by this structural split of Dasein. He depicts a type of death in which Dasein *is*, but possessing a particular blindness that doesn't give it the ability to produce or seek possibilities. By considering death a limit of ability, and leaving a kind of 'deactivated' piece of Dasein to be death, Blattner imagines a death that is not spontaneous, but essentially stagnant and ongoing.

specific framework, Dasein is still able-to-be, precisely because of the requirement that it maintains a state of "thinness" after the instant of splitting. Without any ability-to-be, the "thin" Dasein cannot keep any state at all. It requires a certain level of self-guidance as well as hold in itself possibilities to be in order to *be* after its split. Blattner's thesis undoubtedly contradicts Heidegger by misunderstanding Dasein as splittable, and believing that death can be a possible way of being for an insufficient Dasein, and most importantly, claiming that there can ever be a kind of Dasein that is devoid of all possibilities.

Despite such misunderstandings in his thesis, Blattner's question stays relevant: how can death stand against every single possibility of Dasein, while also being a possibility of Dasein? There appears a way in which all possibilities can be eliminated, without death having to be a purely existential phenomena. Blattner's mistake was to treat Dasein only through the ways in which it is able-to-be. However, if one keeps seeking to make-impossible all possibilities of Dasein while ignoring the most primordial factor that essentially makes Dasein possible, there will still exist a Dasein, which necessarily possesses the ability-to-be, leaving new contradictions to occur. For death to stand against every single possibility of Dasein, one must not try to eliminate the possibilities that branch out of Dasein, but seek the answer to the question: *What makes Dasein itself possible?*

How can one securely eliminate any possibilities of Dasein's being-in-the-world? Establishing such an understanding of Dasein as being *made possible* enables one to fully conceptualize a detailed framework of Dasein's no-longer-being-able-to-be-there by understanding this phenomenon in terms of guaranteeing the *impossibility* of a revival of Dasein after. Here, the only fundamental force that awakens the possibility and sets the absolute impossibility of Dasein is the *body*: Once somebody's vital organs completely shut down, there cannot be any way in which Dasein can continue being-in-the-world. A lifeless body ultimately guarantees that the conditions are simply not sufficient to give rise to a Dasein. In this way, death in a purely physiological understanding erases Dasein by not only depriving it of the ways in which it can be (its possibilities), but it also deprives it the origin out of which it came to be (the possibility of the origin of Dasein). In this way, continuation of bodily operations makes up the fundamental conditions for the possibility of Dasein and its being-in-the-world.

In this manner, the solution to the initial contradiction that Blattner raises must be through a multi-dimensional understanding of "splitting". On the level of the operations of Dasein, it comports itself to death and it's inherently a not-yet. Death as a possibility of Dasein refers not to the feasibility of Dasein being able to "achieve" that possibility. The moment Dasein becomes a whole, Dasein becomes no-longer-Dasein, not because of Dasein deciding to existentially go out of

existence, but because the body ceases its biological operations, which results in the failure of fulfilling the condition of the possibility of Dasein itself. The "split" in this framework finds itself in its multidimensional structure: Dasein has its own relationship and character towards its death, which is on a separate plane of operation from that of the body. The end of operations on the plane of the body hasn't changed Dasein's character, but instead, it forcefully shut it down.

That the body gains such a vital position in relation to Dasein must not be discussed without addressing problems regarding the talk of the body. Isn't there the danger that involving a mainly ontic view of the body pollutes Heidegger's analysis by introducing the body as a contained substance similar to that of Descartes'? Here, the dynamic isn't to understand Dasein in terms of a substance, nor is it to involve the body as being attached to Dasein. The particular relationship that the body has to Dasein does not pollute the character of Dasein as essentially being-in-the-world. The role the body plays in Dasein's being-in-the-world and being-towards-death is a non-invasive dependency: *if* the body dies, it is inherently always going to entail that Dasein will no-longer-be-able-to-be-there. Here, his inherent cause isn't grounded upon the body assimilating the existential structure of Dasein. It is instead that the body constantly powers Dasein: the body fulfills its necessary conditions to be, so that Dasein *can* be-able-to-be-in-the-world.

Such a revelation requires a detailed drawing of what one means here by "body" and its "biological operations ceasing". Here, the body as it appears before Dasein assumes a particular *totality*: to maintain being alive, for instance, a person must keep its vital organs functioning without disrupting one's bodily integrity. These vital organs together create a totality in which each of them is required for a person to have total biological possibility. However, the condition of totality doesn't mean that one must have perfect health, it instead refers to a totality in being biologically human. One cannot question the meaning of being without the presence of a totality of our body. Animals, for instance, don't possess a "totality", precisely because their vital body parts still do not allow for the emergence of the question of the meaning of being.[10] Such a totality allows a biological life to the human, fulfilling the condition of the possibility of Dasein. The specialty of the human body is key in allowing for the pure possibility of Dasein itself.

Dasein is involved in a relationship of non-invasive vital dependency with the totality of the body. If Dasein is no-longer-there, then the body's totality can no longer be there. However, rather than eliminating it, this understanding that the body in its totality as the condition for the origin of Dasein can be applied to

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[10] That Dasein only applies to human beings as opposed to animals is a concept assumed by Heidegger throughout *Being and Time*.

existential forms of death. For instance, one may imagine such a death to be the death of their identity, which refers to the possibility of one's identity of not being-able-to-be-there. Similarly to Dasein, the being of an identity doesn't exist by itself but is made possible. For identity to be possible and for its being to be maintainable, there must be (1) the totality of the body, and (2) Dasein, to be present in order to allow for its possibility. Mainly, for somebody's self-identity to maintain its being-there, there must first be a total body in order to account for the production of identity. Secondly, for there to be a production of identity, there must be a primordial being that is able to be that way, resulting in the necessary presence of Dasein. Any form of death that emerges from human capability has to be made possible by both the body and Dasein.

The similar dynamic that occurs among kinds of deaths may give rise to the supposition that Dasein stands next to such deaths as their equivalent; however, a further development of this dynamic reveals the structure in which Dasein is a *primary* form of death, while the existential forms of death locate themselves *secondary to Dasein*. The primary character of Dasein emerges from its power to maintain the body: while the death of the body entails the death of Dasein, the death of Dasein also entails the death of the body. For Dasein, death is the impossibility of all possibilities of Dasein. Making impossible all possibilities of Dasein requires that the body does not allow any possibility for Dasein to emerge. Definitionally, the totality of the body inherently depends on Dasein's essential questioning of being. According to this structure, Dasein is *non-revivable*: once all of its possibilities end, there cannot emerge a new Dasein to replace it.

The same dynamic cannot be applied to existential forms of death: both the body and Dasein endure after an existential death. When a person's sense of self is no-longer-able-to-be-there, this implies that there are no more ways of being for that sense of self. While this includes the possibility of that self-image, which is a possibility produced by Dasein, eliminating such possibility only means that Dasein loses *one* instance of possibility. This is because Dasein's being isn't inherently dependent on achieving a certain instance of possibility. Similarly, the totality of the body isn't dependent on one possibility of Dasein, but it is only dependent on the possibility of Dasein to question the meaning of its being and a knowledge of its relationship to its possibilities. In this way, the death of a certain existential death is *secondary* to the death of Dasein: while existential Being *can* be replaced by the other ways in which Dasein can be, the Dasein is irreplaceable.

This has certain implications for Heidegger's existential analytic. First, all existential beings and deaths emerge as possibilities of Dasein; therefore, the characteristic of the existential forms of being-there differs fundamentally from Dasein's. Heidegger's philosophy of death offers vital qualities to death as it relates

to Dasein: (1) death is Dasein's ownmost possibility, (2) it is not to be outstripped, (3) it is non-relational, (4) it is certain, and finally, (5) it is indefinite (295-304; §50-52). This framework correctly describes Dasein's death as it is understood within a vital codependency with the totality of the body. However, these qualities don't apply to an existential death. For instance, (1) and (3) cannot literally apply mainly because an existential death doesn't have a sense of mineness to produce such characters: Dasein as the "parent" of these Beings must inherently witness and embody the ways in which a secondary being relates to its death.

However, these characteristics can still apply to the secondary Beings' being-towards-death, through facilitating the perception that they apply. For one is threatened in a way that reminds her of an impending existential death, she enters into that possibility to conceive of her Being only inside this form of existence, giving herself the illusion that her fundamental Dasein *is* this existential Being. This perceptual shift allows all of the characteristics above to apply: an existential death *becomes* one's ownmost possibility, because the existential Being has been given the title of Dasein.

That existential forms of death reveal characteristics laid out in Heidegger's philosophy of death in a non-real way results in the understanding that such a secondary form of being might itself be also perceptual: an understanding of being-in-the-world, according to Heidegger, should not be based upon an idea of a sense of space, in that it shouldn't be contained inside something else. An existential form of death reveals to have a necessarily spatial and contained structure: any existential form of being is definitionally a possibility of Dasein. In this way, Dasein *is* always its possibility. However, this existence is only one of the many different ways in which Dasein can-be-in-the-world. An actual consideration of a single form of existential being as an exclusive being-in-the-world that is detached from the greater structure from which Dasein's other possibilities emerge, therefore, turns this being into a substance that lays inauthentically detached. Therefore, while it is possible to recognize the characteristics of being-towards-death when one perceptually is deceived to see Dasein as inherently existential being-in-the-world, this perceptual illusion doesn't belong to Heidegger's philosophy of death and is only indirectly affiliated with it through perception.[11]

Understanding Dasein in the context of a multi-dimensional structure in which there exists a non-invasive bodily force that makes it possible to be, enables the

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[11] This analysis doesn't necessarily align with the idea that existential forms of death aren't as important as death that is grounded upon the body. The way in which other existential deaths are secondary to Dasein is due to the varieties of existential deaths that branch out of Dasein, which results in its replaceability. This does not entail, however, that existential forms of death are replaceable perceptually. It seems like in the dimension of human subjective experience and perception, existential death can be viewed as an equivalent to Dasein.

particular reading that Heidegger's philosophy of death as explained in *Being and Time* applies primarily on an understanding of Dasein that is irrevocably tied in a relationship of dependency with the totality of the body. This multi-dimensional structure, when applied to the existential forms of death, reveals that existential death is necessarily secondary to Dasein's being-towards-death, and perhaps only fulfilling the Heideggerian characteristics of being-towards-death in perceptually valid, but illusionary ways. These explorations do not absolutely fit into Heidegger's general existential analytic: Heidegger not only avoids the talk of the body, but he seems to also deny the presence of anything other than being-in-the-world as a condition that makes Dasein possible. This new framework necessitates that Heidegger's introduction to Dasein be rewritten to reflect that, while Dasein's being-in-the-world can never be categorized as a substance that is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, nor be reduced to physiological death, Dasein still has a necessary relationship with the body inside a conceptually multidimensional structure, in the sense that, the existence and total state of the body is the fundamental condition for the mere possibility of Dasein's existence.

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Demiurgical Technics: Existentialist Thought as Coercive Control in Richard Kelly's *The Box*

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Richard Kelly's 2009 sci-fi film The Box draws heavily upon the philosophy of existentialism, particularly the thought of Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartrean concepts like anguish, authenticity, and freedom are featured prevalently throughout its narrative. However, instead of agreeing with existentialism, The Box presents a critique against it. Kelly illustrates how existentialist values, contrary to the perspective of their adherents, work in service to demiurgical technologies that malevolently control the human subject. Through an analysis of The Box's narrative, this project pits Sartre against a host of opposing philosophies of technology in order to expound upon this coercive aspect of existentialism.

Introduction

Within the art of cinematic science fiction, existentialist philosophy prevelantly receives thematic acclaim. The former's tales about aliens, advanced technologies, and other such humanity-questioning topics mesh excellently with the latter's championing of human freedom, authenticity, and subjectivity.[1] Less commonly, however, does a sci-fi film portray a critique against this school of thought, accordingly undercutting the humanist values exalted therein. Precisely such a rarity finds expression in director Richard Kelly's 2009 film *The Box*. As a work of adaptation, *The Box* draws inspiration from Richard Matheson's original 1970 short story "Button, Button" as well as the story's televisual reimagining as a late-80s episode of *The Twilight Zone*.[2] All three works center on a morality scenario involving a family, a device, a stranger, and a dilemmatic offer. As a feature-length picture, however, *The Box* stretches well beyond the precedent of its source material. Into the film Kelly weaves, as typical of the director's dense approach to narrative crafting, a tangled knot of philosophical and intertextual threads.[3] Existentialism stands out as the most prevalent of these. Preeminent

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[1] See Steven M. Sanders, "An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science Fiction Film."

[2] Roger Ebert, "Working outside The Box."

[3] Geoff King, *Donnie Darko*, 53.

existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre in particular frequently sees both explicit and subtextual citation. Numerous Sartrean concepts critically inform the film's themes, and the thinker's renowned 1944 play *No Exit* even intertextually appears as a major plot point.[4] By a surface viewing, Sartre's inclusion suggestively positions *The Box* among the many other works of sci-fi that champion existentialist principles. But upon a deeper reading—a reading that pays attention to the fine details scattered throughout narrative—we discover Kelly launches a *critique* against Sartrean thought, one demonstrative of how existentialist values like humanism, subject centricity, and freedom operate in service to technologies of coercive control. After outlining *The Box*'s plot, existential pretense, and nuances revealing said pretense as hypocritical, this project will explore how this critique from Kelly destructively unfolds.

I. *The Box*'s Dilemmatic Opening

We begin with a summary of *The Box*'s first act, wherein Kelly cinematically renders the aforementioned hypotextual morality scenario. Kelly's rendition goes as follows: in the wee hours of a 1976 mid-December morning, Virginia couple Norma Lewis, a private school English teacher, and Arthur Lewis, a scientist working at NASA's Langley Research Center, receive an unmarked package in the mail. Inside, they find a device composed of a sturdy wooden box and a crowning dome-clad red button [Fig. 1]. Later that day, Norma is visited by Arlington Steward, a mysterious stranger missing half a face, who explains the device (formally referred to as the 'button unit') and its accompanying offer [Fig. 2]. Steward explains that if the button is pushed the couple will receive a payment of one million dollars. But there is a catch. Upon

Figure 1: The Lewis family's first encounter with the button unit after its unpacking.

Figure 2: Arlington Steward arriving to meet Norma.

performing action, someone in the world, someone who the couple don't know, will die. Steward goes on to outline three additional restrictions that void the offer if broken: 1) the identity of Steward's employers cannot be disclosed; 2) the couple cannot discuss the offer except amongst themselves; 3) they have 24 hours to make a decision. Having delivered all the necessary information, the stranger then departs. Throughout the following day, the couple meditate on their course of action, struggling with the pros and cons of ending another human life for the sake of monetary gain. Eventually, however, pressured by the back-to-back unexpectancies of Arthur's failing to land an astronaut promotion and Norma's school discontinuing the faculty tuition discount for their son, Walter, the couple cave and the button is pushed, Norma specifically being the one who enacts the deed. Come the expiration of the 24-hour period, Steward returns to the Lewises to deliver the promised payment and collect the button unit so it can be, in Steward's words, "reprogrammed." Perplexed, Norma inquires as to whether this means someone else will receive the offer, to which Steward responds, "Well, yes, Mrs. Lewis. That's how it works. And I can promise you the offer will be made to someone you don't know." With the pronouncement of this deathly omen, the stranger exits, leaving a now paranoid Arthur and Norma wondering just how damned they've become in light of their self-centered decision.

We find within *The Box*'s opening morality scenario a highly existential predicament. The thought of Jean-Paul Sartre, in particular the philosopher's conception of 'anguish', here proves informative. Anguish for Sartre manifests as a feeling of "total and deep responsibility" that arises when one "realizes that he is not only the person he chooses to be, but also a lawmaker who is, at the same time, choosing [for] all mankind as well as himself" with every decision.[5] This realization

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[5] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 18.

evokes such feelings because any action instigated at the personal level inscribes a precedent of action for humanity in general. Hence, as properly in anguish one lives in an attuned state of reflectivity; one knows one's own actions—those actions towards others especially—recirculate, in some cases even back around toward oneself. The crux of *The Box's* dilemmatic offer consists of an assessment of its participating subjects' sense of anguish. The decision to either push or not push the button ultimately establishes a greater law for humanity, be that one where life is revered as priceless or one approving of life's extinguishment for the sake of monetary gain. Additionally, each of the offer's three restrictions further accentuate this Sartrean condition. First, the lack of disclosure of Steward's employers puts the emphasis squarely on the action itself. It suspends any questions as to how, if at all, the button push actually kills someone. This concealing echos Sartre's exemplifying account of anguish through the impossible verifiability of angelic visitation, wherein Sartre proposes that the multiple possibilities behind any encounter with a supposed angel (e.g. as possibly demonic, possibly pathological, etc.) similarly places the delivered message and its evaluation by the visitee over the true forces behind the encounter.[6] Second, as restricted to discussing the offer only amongst themselves, the participants stand as the sole responsible agents behind whatever action they choose to take. This incapacitates them from shifting the blame upon another actor. "In anguish," Sartre states, "I apprehend myself at once as totally free and as not being able to derive the meaning of the world except as coming from myself," and this reflects the exclusivity of the subjects' responsibility in their assessment and subsequent actions.[7] Third, the 24-hour window bars the participants from postponing their choice. This quality itself—that of spurring instead of stalling decision—is native to anguish as a condition.[8]

Relating this sum of existential interconnections back to the specific action of Lewises, the couples' pushing of the button violates anguish's principle ethic: "And every man ought to say to himself, 'Am I really the kind of man who has the right to act in such a way that humanity might guide itself by my actions?' And if he does not say this to himself he is masking his anguish."[9] Those who refrain from pushing the button ultimately lack such a mask. Facing anguish in their decision, they understand what they do sets a wider precedent, that an act of inhumane avarice might recircle. But those who push the button, like Arthur and Norma,

[6] Ibid., 19-20.

[7] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 78.

[8] Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 21.

[9] Ibid., 20.

remain oblivious to this understanding. Anguish masked, they act without consideration for the greater law they set for humanity. They fail to see how putting a monetary price on the death of the other puts a monetary price on *their own* death as well. It takes Steward's explicit pronouncement that the couple reside in the position of that unknown other vis-à-vis that other themselves for the mask of the Lewises to shatter. Only then do they come into anguish, realizing the severity of their violation.

II. Existential Pretense

However, the dilemma of whether or not to push the button only makes up *The Box*'s first act. Onward from Steward's second departure, the film's straightforward, premise-driven narrative morphs into a labyrinth of conspiratorial sci-fi. Norma and Arthur come to realize pushing the button triggers far more than Steward disclosed. Their action ensnares them in the depths of a strange, elaborate test, one where they, among other NASA families, are the test subjects, Steward, the NSA, and a shadowy cabal of otherworldly entities are the conductors, and the button unit dilemma is but the first step in a much longer assessment. Kelly delivers all of this through a trademark directorial style infamous for convoluting everything while decrypting next to nothing for the viewer.[10] Cinema audiences, expecting a simple plot with clear ethical commentary, absolutely hated this narrative switch.[11] But while the excess of intricacies that populate the film's latter acts might have done little more than confuse and irritate the moviegoing rabble, from a philosophical standpoint these sections prove even more existentially intriguing than the opening. Instead of reinforcing the ethics of anguish outlined in the first act, Kelly puts forth here a counter-Sartrean critique, undermining the film's initially expressed philosophical alliances along with existentialism in general. In order to unlock this critique, we first must examine the way *The Box*'s narrative gives initial pretense of a pro-existentialist agenda.

Our analysis begins at the film's finale. It goes as follows: Steward, revealed as the conspiratorial head of a secret organization in the NSA, orders spec-ops to abduct the couple and take them back to the Lewises' own house. Upon their forced return, the couple find the half-faced test master there waiting. Steward tells them that Walter, who was also recently abducted, has by unrevealed means been

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[10] King, 63-64.

[11] It cannot be overstated how much audiences hated this movie. *The Box* stands as one of the few movies to get the rare grade of an 'F' from Cinemascore, the leading surveyor of initial public reception to commercial films. Out of the thousands of films polled since the company began in the mid-70s, less than 25 have received this same lowest score. See Adam White, "'My ideas get bigger and bigger'".

stripped of the ability to hear and see.[12] A new ultimatum is proposed [Fig. 3]. By the first option, the family can keep the million dollars obtained from pushing the button at the expense of their child's sensory impairments remaining permanent. Or, by option two, Arthur can fatally shoot Norma in heart with a revolver. Doing this will cause Walter's impairments to be lifted and the money to enter a trust account. The test master then departs, leaving the couple to make their final decision. When Norma and Arthur discover a terrified, confused Walter crying in an upstairs room that's been padlocked from the inside, they know option one is out of the question. Option two is the only way. After the couple give each other their final farewells, Norma sacrificially allows Arthur to take the shot. As promised, the child's deprivation vanishes at the moment of death. Elsewhere at this same moment, however, another, unidentified couple is shown pushing the button of the device, confirming that indeed someone the Lewises didn't know would receive the same offer. Back at the Lewis house, the police arrive to arrest Arthur for murder. But just as they plan to take the now killer into custody, one of the spec-ops intervenes and escorts Arthur to an unmarked black car. With the vehicle driving off, transporting its captive to a mystery destination, the film comes to a close.

By initial impressions, *The Box*'s finale blatantly follows through with the consequences outlined for violating the ethics of anguish. In another couple pushing the button, the greater law the Lewises set for humanity poetically recircles; Norma's killing of the unknown other ultimately leads to a killing of the self. This unknown other, however, consists not only of the unnamed couple vis-à-vis Norma at the finale, but just as much Norma at finale vis-à-vis the Norma whose anguish remains masked during the Lewises' button push. Before Steward leaves after explaining the final ultimatum, Norma asks the following question: "Mr. Steward, can I be forgiven?" After a pause Steward responds: "I understand you admire the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre. Perhaps these words will comfort you: 'There are two ways to enter the final chamber. Free or not free'. The choice is ours." The reason such words offer comfort under the given circumstances relates to the way existentialist freedom entangles with both anguish and what Sartre calls

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[12] This seemingly non-sequitur removal of Walter's senses is actually an intertextual inversion of Sartre's *No Exit*. The central tension of *No Exit* also lies in a three character scenario, except their conundrum stems from the unavoidability of each others' vision rather than its cessation. The play heavily exemplifies what Sartre calls 'the look', a penetrating gaze from without that apprehends a subject contrarily to its own idealized self-conception. While Kelly's initial script of *The Box* makes this intertextual inversion explicit, detailing the Lewises and Steward playing the role of play's four characters in a dream sequence, the released cut only contains subtle hints at the two works' parallels. For the cut scene in question, see Richard Kelly, "The Box," 74. For more on the look in *No Exit*, see Robert Bernasconi, "'Hell is Other People'"; and Søren Overgaard, "The look."

Figure 3: Steward delivers the final ultimatum. Note the parallel in framing to the shot in Figure 1.

'authenticity'. "This self-recovery we shall call authenticity," Sartre proposes, "a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted."[13] For Norma, the corruption of being stemmed from a masking of anguish. This masking eventually unravels upon Steward's pronouncement of the device's reprogramming, causing said corruption to dissipate and anguish to onset in turn. However, in order to achieve full self-recovery, Norma must sustain a condition of anguish all the way unto the point of death. Doing otherwise would mean lapsing back into corruption. Upholding Sartre's aforementioned characterizing of anguish as the apprehension of oneself as "totally free," following through with this commitment accordingly guarantees entrance into the final chamber. Norma's choice of self-sacrifice recasts a new law for humanity, one that values family and life over greed and human expendability. The choice of freedom overrides the prior law, bestowing upon the character redemption for prior violations. The catch to this forgiveness, though, lies in the authentic Norma relating to the corrupted Norma who pushed the button as utterly *unknowable*. Knowledge of this future self relies upon an understanding of anguish, but were this knowledge initially present, the button would never have been pushed in the first place. That pushing the button kills oneself, therefore, plays out here literally.

With both anguish and authenticity playing critical roles in the test, the question arises as to whether the button unit assessment ultimately aims at promoting existentialist ethics. Steward's explanations seem to hint toward the affirmative. A private conversation between the test master and the director of the NSA implies the entire broader test evaluates not just the Lewises' sense of anguish, but humanity's as a whole. "How do we pass the test?" asks the director, speaking collectively. Steward, gazing at a map of the world, replies, "Isn't it obvious?

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[13] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 116n9

Simply don't press the button. If enough of you don't, the test will conclude." A foreboding warning then follows: "If human beings are unable or unwilling to sacrifice individual desires for the greater good of your species, you will have no chance for survival, and my employers will be compelled to expedite your extinction." The criterion for passing the test individually, living in anguish, proves then the same criterion for passing it collectively. And with extinction looming as the consequence of failure, the Sartrean notion that choosing death over life personally chooses death for humanity at large as well also plays out here literally. The species' survival thus depends on its embodying existentialism. Moreover, even those that individually fail the test, those initially lacking an ethical responsibility toward the whole of humanity, obtain an opportunity for redemption by aligning with existentialist thought. The button unit's final ultimatum presents a way for its subjects to die authentically, to depart from the world as one free. Although in still choosing death they nonetheless continue to choose the greater death of humanity, making redemption itself insufficient to prevent human extinction, they also choose for it the same personally gleaned authenticity and freedom. Sacrifice and human connection come to supercede selfish desires on a mass scale. By the sum of these factors, then, all signs point to the test forwarding an existentialist intervention . . . . except this conclusion is *entirely false*.

III. Existential Hypocrisy

Against all initial impressions, the test neither aims to manifest a more existentially ethical humanity nor itself even abides by existentialist principles. Existentialism here serves only as a facade. Four pieces of textual evidence support such deceptive overtones. Their review will be the subject of this section. The first pertains to Steward's direct quoting of Sartre. To restate the line again, Steward asserts, "'There are two ways to enter the final chamber. Free or not free'." This line, however, is a *misquote*. The actual quotation from Sartre goes as follows: "There are two ways to enter the *gas* chamber. Free or not free."[14] This one changed word, 'gas', brings some disquieting implications to the fore. To start, Steward's purposeful manipulation of the quotation renders all other information stated from the character as suspect. That Kelly never makes explicit the shiftiness of this exchange only exacerbates this untrustworthiness, as now even the most benign

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[14] Jean-Paul Sartre, quoted in Alma Villanueva, *Soft Chaos*, 95. (My emphasis); I cannot find the original source for the actual quotation. This might mean the quotation is in fact a misattribution and that Sartre never even said these words. However, even if this is the case, this does nothing to dismiss the issue of Steward's misquote. To the contrary, for Steward to falsely wield Sartre in the given situation only bolsters the claim that the test master purposely is using existentialism toward deceptive, manipulative ends.

exchanges involving the test master take on an air of possible deception. Furthermore, the particular word omitted proves immensely consequential. 'Gas chamber' holds inseparable connotations with genocidal and holocaustal regimes. 'Final chamber', on the other hand, merely connotes the last location occupied before death. Neither word proves appropriately exchangeable respective to the context of the quotation, especially given the character misquoting it. The threat of expedited extinction humanity faces in collectively failing the test positions Steward as a facilitator of xenocide. The relation between the test master and Norma, therefore, proves anything but neutral. The decontextualization of holocuastal implications, helping to mask the broader scheme unfolding, plays to the former's advantage. In fact, that Norma's individual failure of the test results in the character's death ultimately situates the Lewises themselves as holocaustal victims. Thus, for Steward to tell Norma Sartre's quip here is equivalent to a Nazi telling it to an Auschwitz prisoner while leading them to the showers.

  The second piece of evidence derives from a far more overt element of *The Box*'s narrative. In the time following the couple's button push, Arthur and Norma begin to experience perpetual stalking by mobs of oddly-behaving but otherwise completely normal-looking people. These stalkers are Steward's so-called 'employees'. Now, this kind of employment does not involve working a for-hire job. Employees are humans mind-wiped and *possessed* by Steward, everyday people controlled remotely through an unidentifiable technic. Made into extensions of the senses, limbs, and voice, their manipulator hears what they hear, sees what they see, steers their bodies against their will, and speaks through them as mouth pieces. The employees serve Steward by providing surveillance, physically engaging the couple, and at times verbally delivering information. Particularly with Arthur, they continually flash the gesture of the peace sign—a detail which, to be explained shortly, is a highly important aspect of the test [Fig. 4]. Now, that Steward unabashedly makes use of human puppets spits in the face of existentialist thought. Existentialism distinguishes the human as the only being self-conscious of its own subjectivity and capacity to enact choices qua said subjectivity.[15] To mind-wipe a person and reduce them to an agentless tool ultimately eradicates their humanity and, in turn, their freedom.

  This anti-human element of Steward's operation recalls another, lesser known Sartrean figure: 'the Thing'. The Thing operates, to use Adam Kroker's phrasing, as the "viral bureaucracy" that since the late 20th century has dominated

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[15] Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 15-16.

institutional and political sectors.[16] Sartre provides the virus with the following description: "The 'Thing' thought Man, through the intermediary of its servants, and … conceived him as a thing. Not as a subject of history, but, necessarily, as its object. Blind and deaf to all properly human dimensions, it reduced him to a mechanical system: not merely in theory, but in its everyday practice."[17] Possessing humans en masse, the Thing confines and conforms its constituents into its own objectifying system.

Figure 4: One of the many dead-eyed employees who sends Arthur the same signal.

The employees, who in their very name epitomize bureaucracy, undergo a like stripping of their own humanity. They transform into automata who systematically execute various functions of the test. They come to embody the "Other-than-man": the alienated fate in store for all whom the Thing controls.[18]

However, one must not mistakenly attribute the center of the Thing to the character of Steward. If anything, the test master stands as that intermediary servant of the bureaucratic virus, as that through which the Thing thinks in order to objectify humanity. This brings us to the third piece of evidence: Steward's 'employers'. Alluded to in the three restrictions that voided the test's monetary offer, the employers of Steward seem initially to relate to the NSA. However, the narrative later reveals not the government, but otherworldly, nonhuman forces in

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[16] Adam Kroker, *The Possessed Individual*, 67; Sartre first coined the concept of the Thing in response to the destructive consequences of socialist takeover in Czechoslovakia. The same bureaucratic structures that ravaged this nation, however, now are widespread under contemporary global neoliberalism. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism,* 89-91.

[17] Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism,* 93.

[18] Ibid., 98

control of the character. In other words, *extraterrestrials*. While these alien employers receive neither explicit portrayal nor elucidating exposition, the backstory behind how Staward assumed the role of test master gives a glimpse of their identity. Prior to the beginning of the button unit assessments, Steward worked as public relations manager for NASA at Langley, the same center that employs Arthur. In July 1976, tragedy befalls the facility when a bolt of lighting strikes Steward on a platform, killing the manager instantly and causing severe facial deformities in the process. Several days later, however, Steward resurrects from the dead, albeit neither as fully human nor with the same personal identity. The former manager returns as self-described "vessel," "a mere employee" under the possession of a higher power. "Now I am in communication with those that control the lightning," Steward enigmatically proclaims. Guided by said communication, the now fittingly-named test master subserviently facilitates the button unit assessment. The hierarchical vernacular of Steward's self-characterizations here reveals the employers behind the identity of the Thing. "The 'Thing', of course," Sartre writes, "could not function without men: it recruited men who were things…. These became creatures possessed by power, hierarchized bureaucrats, each of whom commanded in the name of another - his superior, this other in the name of yet another, and the highest of all in the name of the 'Thing' itself."[19] Just as the power of Steward controls the humans-turned-employees, the power of the employers controls and reduces Steward, a dead thing recruited back from the grave as the virus' patient zero, to the same manipulated status.

The mystery remains, though, as to the significance of these employers acting as those who "control the lightning." The only direct information *The Box* provides on the nature of these otherworldly beings comes from this one line. However, a piece of intertextual minutia Kelly weaves into the narrative sheds some light upon Steward's characterization. Arthur, following a serendipitously found clue that might uncover the test master's identity (a photograph of the latter with a calling number), goes to the city library. There, the character finds a book with a newspaper clipping placed inside that details the fatal lightning strike. This book, which Kelly takes special care to show the title of, is Peter E. Viemeister's *The Lightning Book*, a survey of the eponymous natural phenomena. The text, however, imparts more than just lightning's meteorological behavior, but also focuses on a more controversial area of scientificity: its role in the origin of life. "Long before man came onto the scene, lightning was bombarding the earth. It is even possible that lightning played a vital role in the evolution of life," Viemeister writes,

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[19] Ibid., 91.

Lightning discharges split and converted … gases into molecular components that then combined into more complex molecules. As time passed these more complex molecules reacted with each other in the waters of the oceans, combining and recombining again and again into even more complex molecules. Later, proteins, which are vital constituents of all living cells, were evolved, leading to subsequent reactions and life itself.[20]

As implicated through the intertext, that the employers "control the lightning" relates them to humanity not merely as interplanetary outsiders, but as its *creators* —as *gods*.[21] Gnostic Christianity's deity of the demiurge proves especially analogous here. Gnosticism designates the demiurge as responsible for the creation of both humanity and the physical world.[22] Scriptural accounts of its appearance describe it as a snake with the head of a lion and, relevantly, "eyes … like lightning fires which flash."[23] However, in contrast to Catholicism and Protestantism, the creator receives characterization as a deceptive, malevolent god, one who demands unwarranted worship and subservience from all humankind.[24] Likewise, the employers hold the role of creator gods but ones who are also malevolent, creatively confined to a reliance on physical phenomena (i.e. lightning, molecular processes, etc.), and making demands that humankind abide by the code of conduct they impose. This demiurgical position of the employers proves especially troublesome from an existentialist standpoint. According to Sartre "the fact is that we are on a plane where there are only men."[25] God in particular for the philosopher holds a definitive status of non-existence.[26] The disturbing aspect of these preconceptions stems not from their inherent contradiction with the identity of the employers—the aforementioned explained impossible verifiability of angelic visitation applies just as readily to aliens and Sartre asserts that "even if God did exist, that [it] would change nothing" respective to the legitimacy of the existentialist project.[27] Rather, the disturbing factor here arises, in a similar vein to

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[20] Peter E. Viemeister, *The Lightning Book*, 21.

[21] Kelly's original script verifies this creator god connection explicitly. See Kelly, "The Box," 68-69.

[22] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 37.

[23] "The Apocryphon of John," 110.

[24] Pagels, 37

[25] Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 22.

[26] Ibid., 21

[27] Ibid., 51.

Steward's misquote, from the employers purposefully wielding a philosophy that conceives of them as non-existent. Existentialism works for them here as a cloaking device.

As for the last piece of evidence, this relates to the impetus behind Norma's choice of self-sacrifice. The primary reason the Lewis couple make their selection of death stems from their unquestioned belief in an afterlife, wherethrough they anticipate an eventual reunion beyond the grave. They derive this expectancy, however, not from an innocent pre-conviction, but from the very procedure of the button unit assessment itself. In-between the initial button push and the final ultimatum, Arthur individually undergoes an intermediary part of the test. Immediately after reading the story in *The Lightning Book*, the scientist gets accosted by a mob of Steward's employees and is led to a secret chamber in the library. There, the test subject encounters Clymene, Stweard's former widow who now, clearly under possession, serves as a sort of secondary test master. What follows arguably makes up the most bizarre sequence of the film. Clymene spontaneously summons three pillars of water out of the library floor and presents Arthur with a trilemmatic wager: "There are three gateways, but you may choose only one. Be careful which gateway you choose, for there is only one path to salvation." As for choosing the wrong path or refusing to choose at all, these both result in "eternal damnation." After thinking things over, Arthur, following the hint given by the other employees prior, flashes Clymene a peace sign of his own and selects gateway number two [Fig. 5 & 6]. The test subject has chosen wisely. Upon a touching of the water's surface, the second pillar sucks Arthur into a tunnel of blinding, angelic light. The scene, switching to the character's point of view, cascades forth a surge of abstract geometries, a clear hommage on Kelly's part to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* [Fig. 7].

Figure 5: Signal received, Arthur repeats the employees' gesture.
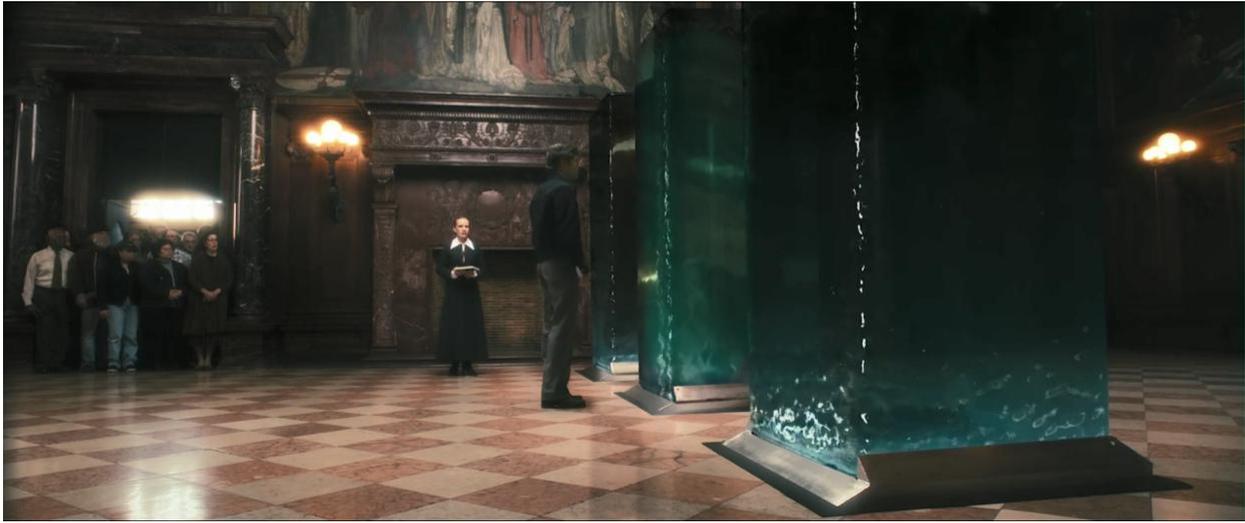
Figure 6: Watched by Clymene and a hoard of employees, the test subject approaches the second pillar.

Figure 7: Angelic visuals experienced beyond the gateway.

The gateway eventually spits the test subject out over the Lewis couple's bed, waking Norma, sleeping there at the time, to great alarm. Later, Arthur recounts to Norma what was experienced: "Words can't describe it. It's a place neither here nor there but somewhere in-between. It's a warm embrace, a place where the sidewalk ends, and despair is no longer the governor of the heart." In a word, Arthur experienced heaven. The submergence into the water of the gateway was a baptism, a literal dipping from life into death and back out again as one reborn. This conviction of having already previewed, and therefore knowing, where one goes upon passing ultimately informs the couples' choice of the second option in the final assessment. However, as guided by such knowledge, Norma's sacrifice fails as an act of redemptive authenticity. Sartrean thought qualifies authentic self-recovery upon an embrace of the ambiguous and the unknown. As Linda A.

Bell clarifies, "An authentic individual recognizes the ambiguity of the human situation…. Authenticity, therefore, is the recovery—the awareness and acceptance of—this basic ambiguity."[28] Under typical circumstances, this ambiguity would confront Norma in the option of self-sacrifice, as what lies beyond death's door imposes itself as the greatest of human unknowns. In order to obtain authenticity's self-recovery, the choice of self-sacrifice must depend on dying in full recognition of this unknowability. But the drive behind Norma's choice comes from the exact opposite impetus. The certainty, not uncertainty, of an afterlife compels the firing of the bullet. Broadly, then, the test does not offer a final redemption for its corrupted subjects though authenticity's self-recovery. It promotes the antithesis of the unknown, guiding its participants to pin salvation on a revealed knowledge of what transpires after one's earthly demise.

IV. Demiurgical Technics

By consideration of all this evidence, the assessment clearly does not serve in favor of a pro-existentialist agenda. Two questions arise accordingly: What is the actual purpose of the employer's test and why does it incorporate existentialism as a false front? Ultimately, the conductors' aim of the assessment boils down to one objective: *control*. Not control in manner of brainwashing—they already proficiently accomplish this though however they possess the employees—but a control of a far more potent, subtle variety; namely, coercion wherein those manipulated believe themselves to be agents acting solely on their own accord while, at the same time, remaining oblivious to the fact of their manipulation. In other words, the test facilitates a type of control *indistinguishable from being free*. A reevaluation of the test with this new agenda in mind uncovers an entirely different reading of the film, one that contests existentialist thought and at last brings Kelly's critique into clarity. While by the Sartrean interpretation the most important assessment stages were the opening dilemma and the final ultimatum, the most important stage here is Clymene trilemma, hence this is where our reevaluation will begin. Additionally, to assist in illustrating *The Box*'s critique, a host of counter-existentialist thinkers will see citation herein.

Besides Sartre, the most frequently intertextually referenced author in *The Box* is Arthur C. Clarke, particularly through the sci-fi writer's famous 'third law': "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."[29] The adage holds strong association with Arthur Lewis, whose home workspace features

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[28] Linda A. Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*, 45-46.

[29] Arthur C. Clarke, *Profiles of the Future*, 21n1.

a decorative poster inscribed with Clarke's quotation. Its most significant moment of the citation, however, occurs during the library assessment, wherein Arthur speaks the law out loud after Clymene manifests the three gateways. This utterance signifies a resonance from Arthur's own perspective between the occupational enterprise of working as a scientist and the inexplicable technology incorporated throughout the test. As employed by NASA during its golden years with the goal of becoming an astronaut, Arthur strives to develop technological innovations that

Figure 8: Arthur struck by overwhelming awe as the water columns spontaneously materialize.

broach upon the contemporaneously magical.[30] Many of the technics used by Steward and the employers throughout the button unit assessment demonstrate this exact type of magic the character pursues. They can control humans remotely, defy the laws of physics, and resurrect bodies from the dead. All of this fascinates the test subject

[Fig. 8]. Arthur's sentiment grounds itself in the existentialist perspective of technology. The very means whereby Sartre establishes the primacy of the human occurs by contrasting and opposing it to the technical. While for the human "existence precedes essence," meaning one only defines oneself and one's subjectivity as already positioned as a subject, for a technical object

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[30] Kelly reinforces this motivation of Arthur's to obtain magical technology through another intertextual subtlety. The poster with Clarke's third law also features an image of artist Edwin Austin Abbey's painting *The Arthurian Round Table and the Fable of the Seat Perilous* (1893-1895). The work depicts King Arthur, of the eponymous medieval legend, being visited by the wizard Merlin, the figure fabled to discover the legendary holy grail. The original painting appears in the secret chamber in the library, causing Arthur Lewis to reiterate Clarke's third law [See Figure 6]. Arthur Lewis, therefore, is an Arthurian figure. Magic technology substitutes in as the character's own pursued grail.

"production precedes existence," meaning it comes into being only as first devised and crafted by a human maker.[31] Thus, humans create technology and technology abides by an ontology distinct from the human's own.

However, when factoring in that the employers relate to humanity as its demiurgical creators, the hard border set between the human and technical spheres proves vastly more unstable than Sartre asserts. In E.M. Cioran's own rather caustic metaphorization of the deity, the demiurge endows humankind with its faculty of creativity. Cioran writes, "[The] inability to stay put within oneself, which the creator demonstrated in a sorry spectacle, is something we have all inherited; by *engendering*, we continue, in another way and on another scale, the enterprise that bears his name. Deplorable mimics that we are, we add to his 'creation'."[32] By the demiurgic endowment described, the human and the non-human inseparably intertwine. The origin of the human tracks back to a non-human creativity. Yet, simultaneously, the human itself possesses its own capacity to create, a capacity inherited from this non-human source. Considering these factors in tandem, every enacted instance of human engendering recapitulates just as much an additional, non-human creativity, but a non-human creativity *itself responsible for humanity's very origination*. Put differently, the demiurge did not make humankind for the latter to create as cut off from the former; humankind was made as an *extension* of the demiurgical project. So how does any of this relate to technology? If one exchanges 'demiurge' for 'technics', one has André Leroi-Gourhan's *exact* anthropological account for the origin of humanity. As outlined by Bernard Stiegler, "Leroi-Gourhan in fact says that it is the tool, that is, *tekhnê*, that invents the human, not the human who invents the technical. Or again: the human invents himself in the technical by inventing the tool—by becoming exteriorized techno-logically."[33] The criteria for the human evolutionarily coming into its own depends upon an ability of effective tool implementation and invention.[34] Moreover, the use of tools stimulated the development of the early human intelligence, engendering technics to in turn further constructively advance.[35] In the human and its creativity acting as extensive recapitulations of their non-human origin, just like with Cioran's demiurge, Leroi-Gourhan's technics inverts the privileged term of existentialism's human/*tekhnê* dichotomy. "Production precedes existence" transposes to the subject

[31] Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 13-14.

[32] E.M. Cioran, "The Evil Demiurge," 195. (Cioran's emphasis)

[33] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1*, 141.

[34] André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, 19.

[35] Jon Seltin, "Production of the Post-Human," 49.

itself and, as a consequence, collapses the hard divide partitioning the two spheres. Hence, the employers themselves, in addition to their metaphorizations as the demiurge and the Thing, come to exemplify this technological origin and recapitulation that manifested humanity.

When one flips the existentialist formula, taking technology as the inventor of humanity, Arthur's resonance holds entirely different implications. The figure of the scientist by this new scheme works not in service to humanity but instead works for technology as its primary catalyst for extension. Under typical circumstances, the human designation of technology as 'magical' functions as a device that spurs the engendering of further technical advancement. The presence of this drive does not arise coincidentally; the techno-demiurgical project implanted within the human an inability for it to stay put within itself at its genesis. But in the event of the scientist encountering the magical relative to themselves as already actualized, as what happens with Arthur, said technology functions akin a lure or a captivating spell [Fig. 9]. The human innovator, having now come into contact with the mythical entity of their pursuits, will seek with

Figure 9: Feelings of awe to turn those of enrapturement before technology indistinguishable from magic.

it a communion. They will want this technology's secrets. Ultimately, this very dynamic stands behind why Arthur selected the second gateway. Lured by the employer's demiurgical spell, Arthur chooses the option blatantly hinted toward prior by the employees and thus, by extension, that of the source of the captivating technics. What Clymene's trilemma assesses, therefore, is whether when confronted by technology indistinguishable from magic, the test subject will, adhering by their inherited scientific drive, place *faith* in the employers for the sake of said technology's understanding. With this positing of faith, however, comes a profound consequence. In the stakes of selection consisting of either salvation or eternal

damnation, for the subject to conform with employers for reasons of technological communion entails inadvertently a conformation with the employers' own standards for salvation. This catch effectively leads the subject into *absolute subservience*, for it elevates the test conductors to the highest seat of cosmological authority. The blissful transportation through the light tunnel—which, given its demiurgical source, is in all likelihood not even a preview of heaven but merely a convincing deception of it—that follows the gateway selection seals this apotheosis as finalized. Arthur reemerges from the baptismal experience with the false belief the employers hold domain over the afterlife. If Clymene's part of assessment checks the subject for the presence of technological faith, the final part puts this faith and the belief of death's mastery to the ultimate test. For Arthur to commit uxoricide under the assumption of both eventually reuniting with Norma and curing Walter's sensory deprivation demonstrates from the scientist a complete trust in the employers' directions. Hailing their magic and powers without questioning, the test subject follows compliantly with their agenda. For Arthur, therefore, the overall button unit assessment is not, in fact, a test; it's an *indoctrination*. Hence why the NSA take Arthur into their custody at the end of the film. Having snuffed the warmth of familial connection, obtained criminal status, and granted highest value to intrigue and illusory warmth of advanced technology, the scientist, blocked off from all other viable options, rises to the position of a new initiate in the employers' hierarchical system.

      None of this diabolic operation of the employers, however, falls into place unless the Lewises abide with existentialist thought. The internalizing of existentialism's human/*tekhnê* dichotomy leads the couple, Arthur especially, to distance themselves as subjects from the employer's magic technology. The Lewises, assuming "existence precedes essence" instead of "production precedes existence," not only deny the technical as constituting humanity's origin but also, assuming themselves as "totally free," deny they are in any way directly manipulated by it. The film, however, heavily insinuates the contrary to this latter distancing. The employers targeted the family *months* before the button unit was even delivered. The earliest verifiable instance of an employee engaging with the Lewises (a frequent babysitter for the couple revealed to have been using a fake throughout the entirety of the time they were acquainted) takes place in August, one month after Steward's resurrection and three months prior to the opening offer. This is not an isolated occurrence either; a multitude of characters who first appear prior to the button push later turn out to have been Steward's puppets. One such character in particular raises especially troubling implications. Among this early group of employees, is the school administrator who informs Norma of the tuition discount discontinuation. The significance of possession here stems from the fact that this

cancelation majorly influenced Norma's decision to push the button. That this influence derives from the employers' own manipulation means it functions as an intentionally imposed pressure. The other main influence, Arthur failing to land the astronaut promotion, presumably also holds this same status, as the employers at the time had already infiltrated the governmental bureaucracy. Now, by the naive existentialist reading of the film, these pressures only serve the purpose of complicating the quandary of anguish. They merely put the subjects in a situation where choosing money over human life becomes more tempting. However, by a more nuanced perspective, one that accounts for the employers' nature of duplicity, technological centrality, and desire for control, these pressures do not tempt a certain selection; they calculatively *force* it. In other words, *the Lewises never had a choice to not to push the button*. Its selection in the dilemma, along with every other part of the test that followed except for maybe Arthur's gateway choice, was pre-planned from the start. The power to manipulate decision making without brainwashing, therefore, resides within the employers' arsenal as one of their technics for coercive control. And they use this power more than once. It is not by coincidence that the random clue that brings Arthur to the library informs the test subject of Steward's magical resurrection immediately prior, at the exact same location, to Clymene administering an assessment of technological faith. It is obvious this is by the design of calculated pressures.

Yet, if the employers possess the technical ability to mind-wipe humans completely, why do they utilize this newly unveiled technology that enacts its manipulation covertly? If control is the ultimate aim, why not resort exclusively to the more direct method? Two reasons provide us our answers. On one hand, mind-wiping only works to a certain degree. Verbal communication hits up against the limit of the employers' manipulatory power. Prolonged conversations for living employees eventually induce brain hemorrhaging, causing Steward's control over them to monentaily falter. On the other hand, and far more importantly, the more covert technic in actuality works more effectively than its readily apparent counterpart. The difference between the control tactic used for the employees and the one used on the test subjects mirrors the conceptual difference of coercive technology between Thing-era Sartre and rival philosopher Michel Foucault. Associated with French postmodernism, Foucault picks up the gauntlet of the Thing and pushes its logic of manipulation beyond existentialism's humanist limits.[36] Contrary to Sartre, the postmodernist neither conceives the technical as of a fundamentally different ontology to the human nor deems its impositions of control

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as external to the human dimension. Rather, aligning with the dichotomy collapse articulated previously, Foucault posits these two spheres as, in fact, intertwined:

> The effort currently being made by people of our [postmodern] generation is not done in order to claim man is *contrary* to knowledge and technology, but is precisely to show that our thought, our life, our manner of being, even our most everyday manner of being, are part of the same systematic organisation and therefore depend on the *same* categories as the scientific and technical world.[37]

That the same systematic organization of the technical world constitutes the world of the human entails a break from the Thing by its original understanding. In accord with said understanding, the Thing, relying on a possessive form of power, infects subjects from without and depletes them of their humanity. By complete contrast, Foucauldian technology, relying on a *productive* form of power, neither corrupts the subject nor destroys its status as human, but instead *creates* the very conceptual parameters of subjectivity and humanity themselves.[38] The analogy of the human as the mere extension of the techno-demiurgical project thus comes to a perfect completion. As humanity's originators, the employers' methods of control involve areas existentialism fundamentally assumes as innocent and incorruptible. This makes them far more sinister than as strictly understood through Sartre's virus. The violative mechanization that renders one "other-than-man" at least implies a possibility of control's escape. But with humanity itself technologically determined, any appeal to an aspect of the "human dimension" (e.g. any of existentialist concepts relayed thus far) serves now to some minimum degree as a control mechanism, *especially* if claimed otherwise—this would merely be a tactic for stealthier coercion.

    And precisely such a stealth tactic lies at the core of how the employers covertly manipulate Arthur and Norma; namely, through the couple understanding themselves as existentially free subjects. This self-conception prevents the Lewises from interrogating the background forces at work in the test's conduction, barring the subjects from blaming its murderous unfolding on anything except their own actions. These actions, however, only occur as first compelled by productive technologies. And the most critical of these consists of freedom itself. According to Nikolas Rose, a devout Foucauldian, postmodern technics encapsulate the realm of human freedom in its totality:

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[37] Michel Foucault, "Interview with Madeleine Chapsal," 35. (Foucault's emphasis)

[38] Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato, and Jen Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, xiv-xv.

> All the essential, natural and defining conditions that tend to be ascribed to the human world – modern forms of subjectivity, contemporary conceptions of agency and will, the present-day ethics of freedom itself – are not antithetical to power and technique but actually the resultants of specific configurations of power, certain technological inventions…. One cannot counterpose subjectivity to power, because subjectification
> occurs in the element of power; one cannot counterpose freedom to technology, because *what we have come to understand as our freedom is the mobile outcome of a multitude of human technologies*.[39]

Comprehending freedom purely existentially instead of also technologically, Norma and Arthur remain blind to the role freedom itself plays in their coercion. The state of anguish the couple assume following the completion of opening dilemma, for instance, indeed thrusts them into the consciousness of existentialism's free subject —exemplifying the subjectification of productive technologies—but it also traps them in the belief that they alone as hold full responsibility for pushing the button. This assumption primes them for the remainder of the test to attribute whatever consequences that befall from this selection as ultimately self-imposed, despite the fact the employers in actuality control not only all of these but also the damning selection of the button push that sets them into motion as planned. The misplacing of fault accordingly manipulates Norma and Arthur in ways unique to each character. With regard to the former, freedom presents itself at the final ultimatum as the key to redemption, as the means to undo the enacted violation of the ethics of anguish. However, given 1) the test's absence of ambiguity precluding the authenticity needed for self-recovering and 2) the demiurgical technics behind human creativity rendering null the law-giving nature of human action that causes anguish in the first place, freedom in no sense provides for Norma the forgiveness it postulates. What it accomplishes, rather, consists of leading the test subject into actively desiring death. Inspiring this motivation abides suitingly with the employers' position of the demiurge. As prophesied by Cioran, "We are at liberty to imagine that one day the demiurge, when struck with the inadequacy or the perniciousness of his work, may wish to bring about its doom."[40] Thus, with the holocaustal aspect of the assessment now contextualized, freedom as a productive technology compels the extermination of life, particularly by a method where the

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[39] Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 54-55 (My emphasis); Note "human technologies" here does not signify technologies invented by the human but those technologies that *make* the human.

[40] Cioran, 197.

human feels deserving and at fault for its execution. This use, however, only partially accounts for how the employers deploy freedom as a technic. After all, as expressions of the Thing, any destruction they wreak on humanity ultimately serves toward persevering in the extension of their system.[41] Xenocide, culling the less technologically subservient, helps in this endeavor but does not stand as its main objective. The special manipulation of Arthur exemplifies the direct use of freedom in obtaining this goal. The success of Arthur's indoctrination hinges upon the subject completing the test and embodying the employers' values without suspecting coercion's use. With the upholding of this ignorance, the employers control the scientist while facing neither detection nor resistance to their efforts. This very reason establishes the superiority of productive technics over those that control the employees. While the latter, its limitations notwithstanding, also eliminates the capacity to evade control, only the former accomplishes this while leaving the subject and its sense of human agency intact. Arthur proves no less manipulated than a mind-wiped employee. Yet, because the impression of existential freedom here keeps its continual hold, this status of exploitation never registers. This allows the employers to extend their viral system *asymptomatically*; their regime spreads throughout humankind by a manner of clandestinity. Freedom, therefore, turns out to be the most powerful technology for coercive control.

Conclusion

While *The Box* might only be a piece of enigmatic science fiction, the critique it raises against existentialism exceeds beyond the context of the film. Demiurgical technics pervade throughout the everyday world, conditioning the existence of the human, the subject, and even freedom itself. These don't originate from literal extraterrestrials or some wicked god, however, but from real institutions wielding their own coercive power of production. If an ethical message is to be found in Kelly's sprawling work, it is conceivably that we not engage with these facets of the world in the naive manner of existentialism. Accordingly, recalling Arthur's description of the apocryphal afterlife, we must abstain in light of these technologies from interpreting that their control works like a "governor of the human heart." For as Foucault protests against such existential platitudes, "It is the 'human heart' which is abstract."[42] Heeding the technics that engender the human and its freedom thus requires that we put aside such abstractions, their humanist

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[41] Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, 91.

[42] Foucault, 35.

charm be damned. Only then will we gain a sense of their detection and, subsequently, a means toward their resistance.

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