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Editors' Note

"Thinking reed - It is not from space that I must seek my dignity, but it is from the ordering of my thought. The possession of lands would give me nothing more. By space, the universe envelops me and swallows me up like a point. By thought, I envelop it."

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

The Reed is – and has been for the past nine years – an undergraduate, peer-reviewed philosophy journal dedicated to Existentialism. To a greater degree than most other philosophical “-isms,” the constitutional ambiguity of Existentialism allows for a wide-ranging inclusivity that we try to reflect in this publication.

“Existentialism” may bring to mind a certain roster of philosophers, but within this list an incredibly vast array of beliefs, methods, and attitudes will be represented. A philosopher of existence may be ardently religious, as is the case with Søren Kierkegaard, but the term can just as easily be applied to committed atheists such as Friedrich Nietzsche. Furthermore, Existentialism is not just a philosophical tradition, as it often may claim many theologians (Paul Tillich, Martin Buber...), novelists (Albert Camus, Fyodor Dostoevsky...), filmmakers (Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Godard...) and playwrights (Henrik Ibsen, Samuel Beckett...).

What all of these people have in common, besides the “existentialist” label, is their passion to create meaning in a disordered, chaotic, and absurd cosmos. This is never a passive metaphysical appeal to abstract or transcendent universals; it is a dynamic act, a personal experience, it is a choice. *The Reed* provides a space for similarly impassioned undergraduates to exhibit the fruits of their own reflections on existence, whatever form they may take—philosophical, theological, literary, or artistic.

We hope you enjoy the 2006 issue. Many thanks to professors across the country and world who helped advertise *The Reed* and to all who sent in contributions. We would also like to express our gratitude to the St. Olaf Student Government Association, whose generous funding makes this project possible, as well as Professor Gordon Marino, Cynthia Lund, and everyone at the Hong Kierkegaard Library for their constant support.

Editors

Nathaniel T. Hopkins '07

Andrea J. Horbinski '07

Anne Torkelson '07

The tremors of those battles fill the air with salt and ghosts, with stars and wine.

In that night I go out, between clouds and ports, and read the sea to sleep.

– James McBride

NERUDA'S SON

And in this season, why have I not eyes,
nor voice?

Why do I not touch anyone, why am I not born
another time and another,
between the burning earth and the visions of my brothers?

Why do my questions suffer so much yellow,
so many mute birds of chocolate and smoke?
Why do my goodbyes suffer from so many mornings and cities,
while those wild-haired women shut me
and leave me, smiling?

The smell of the movie houses makes me sob out loud.
When I return to my seat it has become
bodies and voices, living memories.
The sea's profile is yours,
and it burns.

I am a solitary child, protected by my solitude and its vices,
valiant under the somnolent cadavers of my dreams.
I am the serpent, speaking in tongues. I am the forest,
I am a tangled net of forests in the mouth of a river
reciting car bombs over the tombs of Zapata and Sarmiento,
praying to a Christ of blood and earth.

My world has inherited the insanity of the centuries.

I am the brother of silence and the son of bullets.

I am born amongst everyone and I go out alone
into the war where children die.

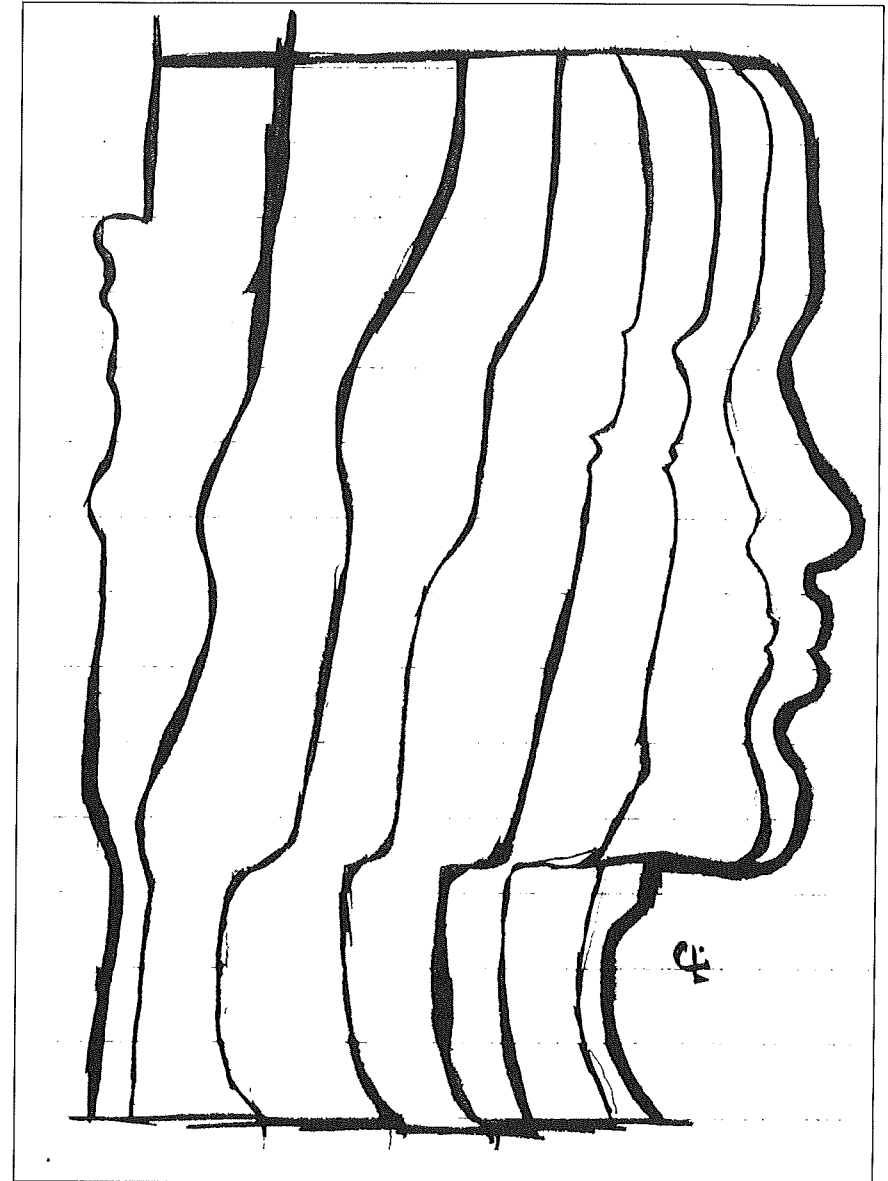
To Submit a Work

The Reed is an annual, undergraduate, interdisciplinary, student-published and peer-reviewed journal of existential philosophy published out of St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. We are constantly accepting work (essays, poetry, creative writing, and visual art) from current undergraduate students anywhere in the world. If you would like to submit a piece, please send it as an email attachment to thereed@stolaf.edu. To find out more, please visit our website: <http://www.stolaf.edu/depts/philosophy/reed/reed.html>.

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- Colin Halverson

Platonic/Cartesian science about which Dewey philosophizes. And its end, as seen in the philosophy of Einstein, is evident. In fact, Einstein's theory exemplifies eloquently the argument upon which Heidegger contemplates this idea. The line of reason purported by Descartes and developed throughout modernity is a line of reason that fails to take into adequate consideration the essential elements of ancient Greek philosophy. As such, modern science fails to take into account the primordial thrownness of humanity, the essence of Being, of *Dasein* – thus, it fails to take into account the actual relationship between human and world.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, John Dewey and Martin Heidegger offer contrasting takes on the nature of ancient Greek philosophy. These theories underlie the distinction between each respective analysis of the nature of science and technology, both ancient and modern. While Dewey likely consolidated a rich theory of ancient Greek philosophy of science and nature for his audience, he presents the idea that all of the ancients can be classified together. On the contrary, Heidegger draws his rich and complex theory of technology from a highly diverse appreciation of the ancients. Based on the notion that each theory is predicated upon ancient philosophy then, Heidegger's deep interpretation is more appealing. Moreover, Heidegger's account of teleology clearly illustrates where each philosophy differs the most, as well as where modern science has failed to recognize the limits of Being and nature. Finally, Heidegger offers a compelling argument that modern science has reached its "scientific" end, and yet has failed at seeking "truth."

– Brian Rochel

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PROTESTANT VOCATION AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL¹

Jessie sat on my couch and cried, dark hair quivering – back and forth, back and forth – covering her face like the blinders used on draft horses to keep them from spooking at sudden movements in their peripheral vision. I could not get her to tell me what the matter was; she claimed not to know. But *the matter* entirely consumed and engulfed her, reducing her motion to a quiver.

We were both seniors in college, Jessie and I. *The matter* was growing up. Eaten alive and brain-first by the monster of choice, we agonized over our post-college plans. In college there are relatively few choices – whether to take Intro to Poetry or Creative Nonfiction as an elective; whether to take Postmodernism seriously; whether to spend the extra money for Summit Extra Pale Ale or just settle for Pabst Blue Ribbon. In college the choices are pretty limited, and there is a certain comfort in that limitation. Jenny Norenberg, a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota Law School, described life in academia very well when she said, "There is a kind of perverted contentedness in certainty born of a lack of alternatives."² When choices are limited to course selection or beer variety the banal nature of the decisions limits the anxiety they can impose.

With graduation the choices become more various and profound. Norenberg writes that "the years between college and marriage are in many ways far more self-defining than any others. They're filled with the simplest, yet most complex, decisions in life ... The more choices you have, the more decisions you must make – and the more you have yourself to blame if you wind up unhappy."³ It was these choices, and the necessity of hard decisions, that brought Jessie to my couch. It was the necessity of choice and the foreswearing of other choices that brought both of us profound anxiety.

This essay is about growing up, and growing into, philosophy and adulthood from the perspective of Protestant vocation.⁴ Particularly,

¹ The author would like to thank Professor Charles Taliaferro for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

² Jenny Norenberg, "I Can Do Anything, So How Do I Choose?" *Newsweek*, December 6, 2004.

³ Norenberg.

⁴ I take up vocation from a first-person perspective because it is the narrative

this paper is about the history of freedom vis-à-vis the problem of evil. Most of all, this essay works toward a definition of freedom that can coexist with a Protestant conception of vocation. Pursuant of these ends, I write in four parts. The first part, Negative Freedom and the Problem of Evil, argues that Luther's idea of vocation is a prima fascia evil when freedom is defined negatively. The second section, In the Mind, surveys the history of locating freedom in cognition. I work with Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel in showing the inadequacies of cognitive freedom, finally rejecting it. The third part, Freedom To..., follows T.H. Green and Isaiah Berlin in arguing that maximal freedom is positive as well as negative. The fourth piece, Positive Freedom, Vocation, and the Good, examines the limitations of the first three parts.

I. *Negative Freedom and the Problem of Evil*

Freedom to choose makes us uncomfortable because, viewed through a classically liberal lens, making choices makes us less free. Thomas Hobbes wrote that freedom is the absence of external impediments, and the exercise of ability without interference. "A Free-man is *he that in those things which by his wit and strength is able to do is not hindered in what he has a will to do.*"⁵ We are most fully free when no state, person, or society is acting to curtail the pursuit of our desires. This Hobbesian idea of freedom I will call *negative freedom*.⁶

Hobbes writes further that whatever is desired is the good for the desirer.⁷ Achieving that good desire requires freedom, or the ability to exercise our will. Consequently, a reduction of freedom is a threat to the pursuit of the good life. Freedom, in the liberal tradition, is not an element of the good life, but a necessary beginning for the good life to be pursued. Hobbes is still very much with us as equations of negative freedom and

in which I, along with many people, play a part. It is a topic of perennial gutless self-help books which address only superficial issues in an attempt to assuage deep anxieties. As this paper engages the subject from both narrative and systematic viewpoints, it aims to provide direction without using disposable wallpaper on the real cracks of the problem.

⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994): 136. Italics in the original.

⁶ This term is borrowed from Isaiah Berlin. He famously distinguishes between positive and negative freedom in his lectures published as *Two Concepts of Liberty*.

⁷ Hobbes, 28.

it is worth asking what those "limits" represent. For Heidegger and the ancient Greeks, these limits are an understanding of Being. That is, of the natural world which begets truth.

Platonic theory,⁵³ however, may support Dewey's conception of science and of nature, which very well could have led to Dewey's apparent failure to adequately address ancient Greek philosophy with any comprehensive amount of diversity. In fact, one of the primary rudiments of the difference between Heidegger's and Dewey's conception of ancient Greek philosophy is Heidegger's commitment to not reducing the theories of many ancients into one "ancient Greek philosophy." Heidegger even draws on many differences amongst the ancient theorists in order to better explicate his own arguments. To illustrate, Heidegger differentiates between Heraclitus, Parmenides, Aristotle and Plato (among others) many times throughout *The Origin of the Work of Art*, *Letter on Humanism* and *The Question Concerning Technology*.

It is Platonic theory, however, that has dominated much of the Western interpretation of ancient Greek thought, primarily by virtue of its indoctrination into Cartesian philosophy and Christianity. In fact Descartes may have even been the segue between ancient idealism and Dewey's modern progressive science. Cartesian philosophy promised two things to the scientific world: 1) "A promised goal of becoming 'masters and possessors of nature';" and 2) an "Archimedean point"⁵⁴ upon which all knowledge can be built (Lloyd 48). These are the foundations which Platonism had sought, and to which modern science lays claim.

In terms of Dewey's philosophy, then, it is possible to consider the working out of the internal logic of Platonic/Cartesian dualism as an exact separation and subsequent subordination of nature to human. But while this may account for Dewey's logic of progress and his foundation for the prominence of modern science and technology, it appears that it has, as a paradigm of scientific theory, run its course. In being a scientific project, modern science has failed at what it set out to do. "When and insofar as a science passes beyond correctness and goes on to a truth, which means that it arrives at the essential disclosure of beings as such, it is philosophy" (Heidegger 187).

This is what is happening in modern science, in the

⁵³ Not necessarily an ancient reading of Plato, but the Christian/Cartesian dualistic read that has been popularized and underlies modern science.

⁵⁴ Descartes's term; see Meditation One.

it: "That which gives bounds, that which completes, [is] *telos*, which is all too often translated as "aim" and "purpose," and so misinterpreted. The *telos* is responsible for what as matter and what as aspect are together..." (Heidegger 315). These bounds represent not the limits that force the thing to stop, rather the essence of the thing: what it will *be* upon production and what it *is* once produced. An object is thus not limited because it could not *be* anything more than it *is*. This is hardly an act of limitation on the natural world, but is rather a matter of understanding the world as already limited, already essential, already an *end*.

This *telos* can be represented in terms of formal or material limitation. As I alluded to above, an omission of *telos*, or of these limits, can lead to nature or man becoming a standing-reserve. The formal limits of the river are disregarded when the dam interrupts the *telos* of the river, reducing it to standing-reserve. A coalmine serves as an example of the disregard modern science evinces with respect to material limitation. A coalmine is reduced to a standing-reserve by virtue of its existence. Humans extract as much high-yield carbon substances as possible without regard for limitation. Yet, modern technology abuses the limits of coal everyday. Mass combustion of coal has resulted in a potentially dangerous situation for the natural world.⁵² Not to mention the infinity that modern science demands of the very finite amount of coalmines. But nobody has "imposed" material limits on how much coal can be extracted from a given mine and combusted. In fact, those limits are in the nature, the *telos*, of the coal itself. Coal is *essentially* prehistoric fossils which support geographically elevated land masses – not some infinite source for consumption.

Therefore limits were never *imposed* by the Greeks, but rather *recognized*. This is exactly what Heidegger means when he speaks of the essence of Being and of truth. Coming to be (in any manifestation) is the coming to be of truth, of Being. And Being necessitates that something come to be within its *telos*, within the very limits which define its *essence*. Allowing technology to be limitless, formless and essential-less disregards the primordial relationship between human and nature akin to the Greek notion of *telos* – it *conceals the truth of Being*.

On the contrary, Dewey explicitly attacks this endorsement of a natural *telos*. "[Ends] paralyze constructive human inventions by a theory which condemns them in advance to failure" (Dewey 70). But this statement creates the question, what is "failure?" If natural ends limit human behavior,

the good life pervade our culture. The Constitution enshrines personal liberty, enumerating rights upon rights, only to finally state that rights are unlimited unless stated otherwise.⁸ Mel Gibson, a cultural icon, was unforgettable in *Braveheart* when he asked the question, "What good is your life if you don't have freedom?". We westerners believe in freedom so strongly that Gibson's question is assumed to be rhetorical, as it is presented in the movie. Jesus Christ declared that a purpose of the incarnation was freedom, saying "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."⁹ Freedom in our culture is equated with a good and meaningful existence, and, perhaps, redemption itself. Moving from a state of freedom (potentiality) to a state of limited choices (actuality), we endanger the pursuit of the good life by threatening the foundational principle of freedom.

Choices are the first movement of freedom. We can only will to the extent that there are different choices to be willed. Every choice we make narrows our scope of potential choices, and, consequently, our freedom to choose different options. For example, Sally, a senior philosophy student, can either go to law school at Harvard or serve in the Peace Corps in East Angola next year. By choosing one she necessarily cannot do the other; Sally cannot be in both Massachusetts and Africa. Regardless of which option she chooses, it appears that Sally becomes less free, sacrificing unactualized possibles for a single apparent good.

The process of actualizing potentials is commonly accepted as a fact of growing up and aging. We age by becoming graduates, spouses, parents, retirees, and – finally – dead. And we must age. Like the seasons and lunar cycles, aging is a law of nature. Aerobics videos, health club memberships, and medical technology are merely attempts to beat at the basic mortal bounds of human existence, always falling short of the elixir

⁸ The 9th Amendment states "The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people." At the forefront of the Founders' minds was a fear of limiting freedom rather than maximizing it. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a key figure in both the American and French Revolutions, wrote that the only legitimate government is "a form of association which defends and protects with all common forces the person and goods of each associate, and by means of which one, while uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before" (Rousseau, 148). The very legitimacy of all government is tied up in its ability to expand our freedom, and a government which makes us less free is necessarily illegitimate.

⁹ Gospel of John, Chapter 8, Verse 32, New International Version.

⁵² As a greenhouse gas, for example.

of life or fountain of youth: We are not magicians. As we necessarily age and make choices, we necessarily become less free. With every day that goes by, every choice made, the scope of our liberty is reduced. Every movement we make apparently makes the world less good.

The concept of vocation in orthodox Protestantism is precisely that serving God by living out the Christian life demands the actualization of potentials. Martin Luther wrote that "a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."¹⁰ Images of servanthood and subjection are hardly images of freedom, and these paintings of service depict the life of vocation. Imagine a person called to be a brick mason. The knowledge of how to make a sturdy wall, safe fireplace, or an arch that will not drop bricks on passersby is not an innate skill. The skills of masonry are the actualization of potential skills; a potential mason is not yet a mason, he must first take his potential and actualize it. This decision to really learn masonry makes the potential mason less free. Perhaps the potential mason was also a potential mathematician and a potential ballerina. By becoming an actual mason the choice is necessarily made not to pursue linear algebra or pirouettes. Living out the vocation of masonry prohibits many other options and limits freedom of choice.

As discussed earlier, freedom is a basic foundation necessary for the good life, and, consequently, a reduction of freedom is necessarily evil. The living out of a vocation is basic to Protestantism, required of all adherents. It would seem that living the Protestant life of vocation causes a reduction of freedom, and a reduction of freedom is a necessary evil. It appears that the life of vocation creates evil, and the very process of redeeming creation (a goal of vocation) is counterproductive.

The problem of evil is presented extremely strongly here: *The very nature of Protestant vocation necessitates evil*. The evil occurring in the world is not a matter of chance, probability, or justified by a greater good – the evil is necessary, and even commanded. If such a situation were to exist, I can see no way that a perfectly powerful, good, and knowledgeable God can exist.

The essence of modern technology, then, is seeing the world as a means to an end. Modern technology requires that humans see the world as a means, as a standing-reserve (Heidegger 326-8). Therefore, modern technology has concealed the truth of *Dasein*, the truth that humans are in fact defined by their primordial relationship with the earth.

III. Discussion of Ancient Greek Theory

It is now clear that John Dewey and Martin Heidegger offer contrasting views on the philosophy and nature of science and technology, and their relationship to the natural world. Dewey establishes the view that nature is a means to the end of human progress, while Heidegger asserts that Being demands a relationship between human and nature such that nature is essential, and that the end of nature is to be nature. Anything more conceals the essence of nature and reduces it to a standing-reserve. We shall now carefully consider each philosopher's interpretation of ancient Greek philosophy in order to provide a basis for understanding why Heidegger provides a more sound argument than does Dewey.

To begin, Dewey states that "just because [the Greek] theory of knowing was dominated by esthetic considerations, the finite was the perfect" (Dewey 66). While Heidegger may or may not endorse aesthetic consideration in an essential picture of nature, he would question the claim that ancient Greek philosophy can be easily reduced to "obsession" with the "finite." And the German theorist would be justified in any such critique. To explicate, I shall provide several fragments from ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus which, when read in a traditional pre-Socratic context, support this idea: "what is opposed brings together," "fire is want and satiety," "This kosmos [the same for all] no god nor man has made, but it always was and is and will be: an everliving fire, kindling in measures and in measures going out," and the ultimate Heideggerian endorsement, "nature loves to hide" – not to mention his explicit conviction that the world is in constant "change" and "strife" (Cohen 25-34). But the critique extends beyond the pre-Socratic notion to, for example, the Aristotelian. If Dewey is in fact supposing all ancient thought as necessarily endorsing a fixed, limited universe always seeking rest, that endorsement would be dubious when applied to Aristotelian science as well.

Of central importance, however, is each theorist's respective account of teleology, of which Heidegger's seems much more akin to the world of ancient Greece. Dewey's account of the term, I argue, falls within Heidegger's account of the failure of Western philosophy to make sense of

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*. In *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Volume 2*, ed. William C. Placher, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988): 13.

What's more, there exists a massive danger in allowing technology to be the concept that modern science has thus far forced upon it. Heidegger introduces the notion of a "standing-reserve" in order to illustrate this danger. As he defines, "Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object" (Heidegger 322). He means that whatever is ordered about merely to be ordered about some more; whatever lacks an essence, and is merely a means to an end, is a standing-reserve. In this way modern science views nature as a standing-reserve; or, as Dewey puts it, a means to the end of human progress. Take, for example, a man-made dam on a river. The dam exists simply to control nature; it turns the river from an end in itself – to be a river – into a standing-reserve which now exists to allow humans to have more or less water in a given designated area. The dam interrupts the essence of the river by, for example, changing the entire flow of the river, greatly altering its natural process of soil erosion, and essentially engaging in its metaphysical alteration. The technology – the dam – fails to take into account that nature, like man, *exists* (see Heidegger 172-73, 320-22).⁵¹

As if this subordination of nature to the role of standing-reserve is not perilous enough, Heidegger claims that allowing technology to run the course upon which it has been set will inevitably lead to humans themselves becoming standing-reserves (Heidegger 332). This peril has already become reality, as evidenced by the primary role of slavery in the American industrial revolution. Modern technology knows no bounds in its ability to subordinate ends to means. "As a destining, it banishes man into the kind of revealing that is an ordering" (Heidegger 320).

Finally, it is apparent that Heidegger seems to adopt a sort teleology, not foundational, and not quite the working out of internal logic; rather, one that concerns Being, truth and *essence*. It is a concept of final casualty that plays a significant role in Heidegger's natural theory. The essence this theory adopts, though, is really an empty essence, an essence that is purely formal. For Heidegger, existence precedes essence, but the essence of truth is unconcealment of Being. Being presents itself – unconceals itself – through the only worldly thing capable of consciousness and negativity – through *human* (the human condition). Heidegger's teleology demands that the essence of a given thing be taken into serious consideration. Thus, we must consider the essence of technology as it is both concealed and unconcealed.

⁵¹ "ek-sists...rooted in truth as freedom, is exposure to the disclosedness of beings as such" (see Heidegger 126)

II. In the Mind

A. The Promise of Cognitive Freedom

The second section of this paper aims to resolve the apparent problem of evil in Christian vocation. It will begin by examining the history of cognitive freedom and its potential for resolving our problem. I conclude that, in its simple form, cognitive freedom is inadequate to solve the problem of evil explicated in Part I. But, following T.H. Green and Isaiah Berlin, I defend a positive, duty-based conception of freedom that can coexist with the demands of a Protestant vocation.

There is a long-standing tradition in Western thought which places human freedom in individual mental reflection on material reality rather than in the matter itself. The Stoics advocated such a view. Epictetus, a Roman stoic, understood mental freedom in a restrictive environment very well. He spent most of his life as a slave, and even after gaining his freedom was exiled from Rome by the Emperor Domitian. After these experiences of trying to find peace and a good life in the midst of tumultuous circumstances beyond his control, he wrote a manual on finding freedom in hard circumstances. He writes that something as simple as going to the bathhouse might be an upsetting affair for a mind which is not free. Instead, philosophers ought to align their will with nature and

if anything happens to hinder you in your bathing, you will be ready to say, "Oh, well, this was not the only thing that I wanted, but I also wanted to keep my moral purpose in harmony with nature; and I shall not so keep it if I am vexed at what is going on. It is not the things themselves that disturb men, but their judgments about these things."¹¹

The material state of reality, what we now might call "facts of the matter", are not what make us more or less free, it is how we react to these facts. If we find freedom in our minds, that cognitive freedom is final - we are indeed free.

The idea of cognitive freedom receded (along with freedom generally) during the Middle Ages, but as the Renaissance approached it emerged again. Shakespeare writes in *Hamlet* of a young prince struggling to live well in the circumstances of a quintessentially dysfunctional family. Lamenting his situation, Hamlet turns to his trusted friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

¹¹ Epictetus, *Encheiridion*. In *Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003): 511.

HAMLET: What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?
 GUILDENSTERN: Prison, my Lord?
 HAMLET: Denmark's a prison.
 ROSENCRANTZ: Then the world is one.
 HAMLET: A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o'th' worst.
 ROSENCRANTZ: We think not so, my lord.
 HAMLET: Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.
 ROSENCRANTZ: Why, then, your ambition makes it one; 'tis too narrow for your mind.
 HAMLET: O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.¹²

Here Shakespeare revives the Stoic notion of cognitive freedom. To Hamlet, Denmark is a prison if it is chosen as one, while the human mind is an infinite kingdom if only it is peaceful. The mind can be a place of imprisonment or complete freedom, and that freedom is up to the individual.

The political and epistemological philosopher John Locke follows in this same tradition. He locates freedom primarily in the desire for an object. In the Stoic sense, when a person desires an object that their circumstances allow them to obtain, they are necessarily free. Locke gives the following example:

Again, suppose a man be carried, whilst fast asleep, into a room, where is a person he longs to see and speak with; and be there locked fast in, beyond his power to get out: he awakes, and is glad to find himself in desirable company, which he stays willingly in, i.e. prefers his stay to going away. I ask, is not this stay voluntary? I think, nobody would doubt it: and yet being locked fast in, 'tis evident he is not at liberty not to stay, he has not freedom to be gone.¹³

It appears self-evident that when an individual has what she desires and does not have any choice in the matter, the individual remains free in spite of the lack of choice. If I desire brownies and have them, it does not impinge upon my freedom to not be able to have chocolate cake as well – I want brownies, not chocolate cake. In the same way that I possess the one thing I desire to eat, I am at perfect liberty, in practice, to eat anything. Because I desire only brownies, the inability to consume chocolate cake is

¹² Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 238-254.

¹³ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Kenneth Winkler, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1996): 96.

conception of science as an object for “rational man” to conquer. Indeed, “All of the scientific reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries strikingly agree in regarding the doctrine of final causes as *the* cause of the failure of science” (68). This very revolution brought about the ability of humans to control nature for their own “scientific and practical purposes.” Nature is to be used for “this end *or* that.” There is no end to nature, no essence; rather, nature is a means to the end of human progress – whatever form that may take at a given time (67-70). “Nature is subdued to human purpose because it is no longer the slave of metaphysical and theological purpose” (71).

II. Heidegger and Science

In Martin Heidegger's work we see a theory of science and technology much different from that of John Dewey. His philosophy, while non-foundational, is built heavily on notions of existentialism, ontology and *essence*. What's more, the very basis for the differentiation in scientific theory between Heidegger and Dewey is likely the significantly different interpretation of ancient Greek philosophy between the two. In order to demonstrate this incongruity, I will provide Heidegger's theory of technology in sum, focusing primarily on its relation to his account of ancient scientific theory.

One of the primary arguments Heidegger employs is that modern science is a concealment of the truth,⁵⁰ insofar as it completely disregards *Dasein*, that is, the relationship of human to the natural world. Modern science treats nature as a means to an end by rejecting the truth that nature is not “ours” with which to do whatever “we” please. In fact, Heidegger argues that our concept of nature should be quite the opposite. For, he explains, humans do not – cannot – exist without the world in which they are projected. Moreover, Heidegger challenges his readers to think of technology in terms of its ancient etymological roots, that is, in terms of *techne*. “*Techne* is the name...for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Techne* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poetic” (Heidegger 318). Technology is that which is created and used by human hands. It is indicative of the primordial relationship between human and nature. Technology is essentially a mode of revealing. In discussing Aristotle's use of the term he writes that “[*Techne*] reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another” (Heidegger 319).

⁵⁰ *Aletheia* (see Heidegger 125, 161, *et al*)

essence and reality throughout his account of science and technology. As Dewey eloquently states, "I see no way in which the truly philosophic import of the picture of the world painted by modern science can be appreciated except to exhibit it in contrast with that earlier picture which gave classic metaphysics its intellectual foundation and confirmation" (54). He offers a fairly complete account of ancient Greek science, which I will provide in pertinent part here. It is worth noting, however, that *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (the only Dewey text which I am citing) was derived from lectures Dewey gave to a non-Western audience, so his account of ancient philosophy in this case may very well be less than comprehensive – though certainly representative of his complex interpretation.

As Dewey construes the ancient world, not only was the universe fixed and ordered, but it was *ordered as such*. Not only did natural phenomena have a fixed place, they had a place that was fixed in relation to everything else. In fact, "the universe is constituted on an aristocratic, one can truly say feudal, plan" (59). He asserts that the natural world was conceived in – and is a product of – the direct relation to the then-existing social construction (63). "Classic thought accepted a feudally arranged order of classes or kinds, each "holding" from a superior and in turn giving the rule of conduct and service to an inferior" (61).

Furthermore, John Dewey depicts a great deal of deviation from ancient Greek thought in his account of modern science. First is the movement from a world of rest to a world of constant change. He characterizes an advance from the ancient belief that potentiality implies following through a fixed course, to the modern idea of potentiality implying novel change or radical deviation (58). Also, Dewey asserts the movement from a scientific "hierarchy of Being" has advanced science in some way (59). Next, a more appropriate definition of "change" has also been instituted: rather than "change" as a form of independent being, "change" is now a "formula of description and calculation of interdependent changes" (61).

However, the most significant change from ancient to modern natural science, and the one that allows for "infinite human progress," is the annihilation of final causes. There can be no final cause – no "end" – asserts Dewey, for that would necessarily be foundational. Indeed there is no "end" to nature, as there is no "end" to any natural phenomenon. Dewey proclaims that this deconstruction of ends in nature "is the reason why the intellectual modification of the last few centuries may truly be called a revolution" (Dewey 60). He is, of course, talking about the Cartesian/Baconian

not a reduction in my liberty; as chocolate cake is not something I want its inaccessibility is inconsequential.¹⁴ Freedom, again, is about the choices we make and the desires we feel.

B. Why Cognitive Freedom Is Inadequate

Although the idea that an individual who is free in his mind is entirely free may be tempting, it is inadequate. Recall that our discussion of freedom is framed in the context of living a good life, and is elevated to the status of a primary good in its necessity to that life. Thomas Nagel and Bernard Williams, in a pair of essays entitled *Moral Luck*, draw out the possibility that the mind does not exist in a context of freedom prior to experiences and conditions.¹⁵ People are mentally limited by both their constitution and their circumstances.¹⁶ Minds are biologically different, and few would deny that their physical constitution plays some role in the cognitive processes that an individual experiences. In the Lockean example of desiring to be in a locked room, there may be a biological disposition toward this desire. The action is not, then, purely free. Simply because an action is motivated by the mind does not make it voluntary; the mind is not an irreducible black box. Further, our minds function in a set of circumstances. Every day we function in a world of locked doors we wish to open; a world of brilliant articles we can never seem to write; a world of beautiful people we can never seem to be. Freedom is not only about subjects, but objects as well.

Although cognitive freedom may be a necessary part of solving the problem of evil posed by Protestant vocation, it is inadequate. The idea of vocation is about both subjects and objects, it is about freedom to

¹⁴ This is a general glossing-over of Locke's concept of volition, as well as the distinction between freedom, will, and volition. See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* on pages 95-104 for an in-depth explication of these concepts. Joseph Raz uses a similar example in *The Morality of Freedom*, pg. 292.

¹⁵ Nagel and Williams write in response to the Kantian idea that morality exists in a circumstantial vacuum. See Kant's section *The Good Will and Its Results in the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* at line 394, section 4.

¹⁶ Nagel explicitly states four things that may confound our pursuit of the good life which are beyond our control. In addition to constitution and circumstances, he acknowledges that antecedent circumstances and final results of an action are relevant in the action's moral worth. See Nagel's *Moral Luck*, pages 28-38, for some interesting examples.

act in the world, not only the mind. If we are to hold that vocation does not act as a force which decreases freedom (and therefore goodness), vocation must increase objective freedom – freedom to act, freedom over objects.

III. *Freedom to...*

This section will argue that the initial thesis relies on a false definition of freedom, and that this definition has made Protestant vocation an apparent freedom-reducer rather than a freedom-increaser. In making this argument I follow T.H. Green and Isaiah Berlin. This case allows freedom to continue as a foundational good, but redefines that freedom to mitigate the conflict between it and vocation.

Hobbes misunderstood freedom when he wrote, “A Free-man is he that in those things which by his wit and strength is able to do is not hindered in what he has a will to do.”¹⁷ Freedom, he admits, involves at least two entities, the subject and the object. We have seen that the idea of cognitive freedom ignores the object, and, particularly, the subject's ability to carry out his will in obtaining a desired object or reaching a sought after objective. Addressing the will of the subject does not adequately address the issue of obtaining desired, but elusive, ends.

Instead of an idea of freedom which only recognizes the individual's freedom from being acted upon, we must incorporate the ability to act. The Oxford philosopher T.H. Green articulates the ability to act as a unique and real freedom.¹⁸ He also was well aware of cognitive freedom and naturalist schools that came before him when he wrote that

freedom does not mean that the man or will is undetermined, nor yet does it mean mere self-determination, which (unless denied altogether, as by those who take the strictly naturalistic view of human action) must be ascribed equally to the man whose will is heteronomous or vicious, and to him whose will is autonomous...¹⁹

¹⁷ Hobbes, 136. Italics in the original.

¹⁸ Green follows Ralph Cudworth and Thomas Reid in this view of freedom. See Cudworth's *Intellectual System* and Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* for earlier treatments of the topic. Reid arrives at the conclusion that freedom must be active through a degree of skepticism. He writes that freedom and power are not the sorts of things to be defined. Rather, we know them through common sense and observations of the results they produce. If freedom is to be recognized it must be active since results are the only thing which we conceive (pgs. 9-10).

¹⁹ T.H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1967): 9.

This essay will explore the respective theories of the nature of science and technology between John Dewey and Martin Heidegger. Both Dewey and Heidegger draw heavily on the pre-Socratic notion of science while purporting their respective theoretical foundations. Each theorist provides an account of ancient Greek philosophy in order to contrast it with contemporary scientific theory, and to describe whence modern theory had borne. While both philosophers offer compelling historical accounts of Greek thought, I will demonstrate how Heidegger offers a more compelling interpretation of Greek natural and scientific philosophy. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how Martin Heidegger's interpretation of ancient teleology accounts for the shortcomings of modern science. Finally, it will be clear that Heidegger offers a compelling argument against the foundation upon which modern science has set, and which Dewey philosophically endorses.

I. *Dewey and Science*

First, like Heidegger, Dewey is a non-foundationalist. There can be no true foundations, claims Dewey, because they will be either entirely abstract, or they will change as human experience changes and are therefore not “foundational.” So for Dewey true knowledge is not separate from experience but is instead involved in the process (87). His empiricism is in contrast to that of Locke or Hume in that Dewey rejects any realm of ideas or universal truth. What's more, Dewey is a pragmatic theorist. As such, his concern is with theories that are readily useful or applicable rather than foundational or metaphysical. Moreover, his account of the nature of science begins by focusing on a static/dynamic dichotomy which he purports. Dewey believes that change is absolute and necessary, that any conception of a static universe is absolutely without justification. He characterizes the natural universe as “so multiplex and far-reaching that it cannot be summed up and grasped in any one formula. And [that] change [is] a measure of “reality” or energy of being; change is omnipresent” (61). This notion of nature as ever changing and “omnipresent,” argues Dewey, is quite the contrary of scientific philosophy until the coming of modern science. The world of ancient Greece was one of a fixed and changeless nature, defined by limited forms and where rest was regarded as the epitome of perfection (Dewey 54-59).

In order to reproduce that concept most clearly, Dewey maintains a comparison between the ancient Greek and contemporary notions of

in his cries as he hears nearby twigs break
under a deer running by with a stiff cotton
tail. The boy whimpers as the footsteps fall
and too begin to die slowly in the wind.
He struggles in frustration and tries to tear
at the damp sullen wood trapping his foot,

but soon grows silent and shivers in the wind,
and does not shed a single other tear
for his leg pinned beneath a great tree's foot.

– *Graham Book*

The free person is not one who is simply without constraint. If it were, we would be forced to acknowledge the survivor of a sunken ship living on a life raft as free. The shipwreck survivor may be free from interference, but he is not free to flip through the *Wall Street Journal*, go for a jog, or volunteer at a soup kitchen. Although no human is interfering with the man on a boat, he is profoundly not free.

Each of us is, to a greater or lesser extent, the man on the life raft. Isaiah Berlin, a survivor of two Russian revolutions, the child of refugees who fled to England, and an Oxford philosopher, was well acquainted with the ways freedom can exist. He also experienced the ways freedom can cease to exist first hand. Berlin writes that our freedom depends on at least five things:

(1) the number of possibilities that are open to me ...; (2) how easy or difficult each of these possibilities is to actualize; (3) how important in my plan of life, given my character and circumstances, these possibilities are when compared with one another; (4) how far they are closed and opened by deliberate human acts; (5) what value not merely the agent, but the general sentiment of society in which he lives, puts on the various possibilities.²⁰

Every one of these five determiners of freedom exists on a continuum; none are answered with a simple “yes” or “no”. Each is a matter of degree. Although negative and cognitive freedoms leave us perfectly free but on a life raft of isolation, positive freedom costs some of that negative freedom in exchange for a tow to shore.

We experience optimal freedom by defining the good life for ourselves and actualizing our potentials in the pursuit of those ends. Every pursuit is a tradeoff between stability and adventure, preconceptions and conceptions, potentials and actualities. The adventure of vocation is no different. We sacrifice potentials in the pursuit of a good of surpassing worth - the good life. The potential to live well is, in and of itself, value neutral. It is only when we actualize that potential and really *do* live well that we can, in hindsight, call those potentials good. T.H. Green writes that freedom is not to exist in a void, but to know the good and have the latitude to pursue it.

²⁰ Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1958): footnote on page 15.

[Freedom] means a particular kind of self-determination; the state of the man who lives indeed for himself, but for the fulfillment of himself as a 'giver of the universal' (Kant); who lives indeed for himself, but only according to the true idea of himself, according to the law of his being 'according to nature' (the Stoics); who is so taken up into his God, to whom God so gives the spirit, that there is no constraint in his obedience to the divine will (St. Paul); whose interests, as a loyal citizen, are those of a well-ordered state in which practical reason expresses itself (Hegel). Now none of these modes of self-determination is at all implied in 'freedom' according to the primary meaning of the term, as expressing that relation between one man and others in which he is secured from compulsion. All that is so implied is that a man should have power to do what he wills or prefers. No reference is made to the nature of the will or preference, of the object willed or preferred; whereas according to the usage of 'freedom' in the doctrines we have just been considering, it is not constituted by the mere fact of acting upon preference, but depends wholly on the nature of the preference, upon the kind of object willed or preferred.²¹

Whether or not actualizing our potentials increases our freedom in pursuit of the good life is precisely a matter of what we will, what we say is the good. To recall Locke's example of being locked in a room with a dear friend you wish to speak with, the very fact that you are locked in the room, rather than out of it, increases your freedom. If you were to be locked out you would no longer have the freedom to enjoy your friend's company.

The same holds with the idea of a Protestant vocation. In this case, though, the good is not one among many (speaking with a friend, brushing your dog, hugging your mother). It is the good of human existence, and it is true freedom. Only by recollecting the good, trading off pure potentiality for concrete potency, and putting that potency into action do we optimize freedom in the world.

IV. *Positive Freedom, Vocation, and the Good*

All that has been shown in the preceding sections is that if vocation is not necessarily evil, freedom must be positive, a freedom to act. But defining freedom in this way does not make vocation a necessary good, it only allows it to be a potential good. Vocation prior to human choice is value neutral; it is the actions we take as moral agents that allow us to use

A BOY

pads through the forest, tough dirt under-foot,
in the dusk where daylight comes to break.
And light glints through the black treetops, a tear
of pallid skin peeking through sheer cotton.
He'll never notice where his path would wind;
the life of spring far from the death of fall.

Like ash, blue-green leaves begin to fall
causing him to stop at a great tree's foot.
What makes them tumble down without the wind?
he wonders as he stops to take a break
from his muggy walk under sweat-damp cotton.
He moves off the path where raspberries tear

at his legs and stinging drops of blood tear
up, but are not heavy enough to fall.
Ambient sounds, soft like tufts of cotton,
are interrupted by the tread of each foot
and a sound, like a wave about to break,
from the massive oak hewn in the sudden wind.

The boy did not have time to catch wind
or see the wood splinter and the bark tear
like paper. He would not hear his bones break
under tremendous weight as he would fall
back. He cries out and tries to pull his foot
free, as though it were a seed in cotton.

He tries not to look at the blood-soaked cotton
made pink with sweat that chills him with the wind,
but can't block the pain of his mangled foot.
The boy screams and cries, then sheds his first tear
as he realizes his voice will fall
only on indifferent leaves. There's a break

²¹ Green, 9.

thus that he hoped to find it awake and struggling and he would lift it gently and notice the feel of its feathers on his hands and take it out on the balcony to free it, or absent, or dead.

Sometime in the early morning he again broke his avian reverie to go and observe the raven, but this time it was gone and to his surprise the bird's departure made him very anxious.⁴⁹ He allowed himself to go outside and search around the dumpster and in the mounded roots beneath the trees on the south side of the building and between and even underneath the cars in the parking lot, but to no avail. It was not until many decades later, lying decrepit and demented in a foul-smelling room in a run-down nursing home that he found the raven. There in the sulfurous and decaying stench of the dementia ward, resting unconscious in his bed in the position he had been placed in by the African immigrants whose job was to check on him from time to time, it was there, wandering aimlessly through the untold folds of his ancient, convoluted brain that he again encountered the bird, perched on a large tree stump and smiling quite pleasantly and at that time he asked the bird, chuckling, "Have you been here all along? Were you here from the very start?" To which the bird replied, lovingly,

"Mine the only holy moment,
sheltered in this odd repose,
smiling at the edge of lonely,
never knew I wore these clothes,"

and then hopped off the stump and headed away and he thought he heard it whisper, very lightly, "And ain't I a woman?"

- Matt Zepelin

⁴⁹ Very anxious indeed, a nervous tickle crawling up his breastplate as he blinked and scanned the room and attempted to orient himself to this sudden sense of wrongness, tinged with despair.

terms like "good" and "bad".

Before freedom is put into practice value judgments about it cannot be made. Joseph Raz, Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford's Balliol College and Columbia University Law School, uses the following thought experiment to illustrate the relationship between freedom, agency, and value.

[T]hink of a person who is entirely passive, and is continuously fed, cleaned, and pumped full with hash, so that he is perpetually content, and wants nothing but to stay in the same condition. It's a familiar imaginary horror. How do we rank the success of such a life? It is not the worst life one can have. It is simply not a life at all. It lacks activity, it lacks goals. To the extent that one is tempted to judge it more harshly than that and to regard it as a 'negative' life this is because of the wasted potentiality. It is a life which could have been and was not.²²

Until a moral agent acts in a context of freedom, that freedom is value-neutral and any ethical judgment has little meaning.

When we make choices freedom takes on ethical qualities. Take, for example, the freedom to drive an automobile. Perhaps, due to impending student loan payments and a desire for a new yacht, I decide to drive the getaway car for a group of bank robbers. In the process of careening through traffic barriers and bystanders I run over six police officers and two young children. Certainly, the way in which I chose to exercise my freedom to drive a car could be called "bad" or even "evil". But the opposite might be true as well. A license to drive could be used to pilot an ambulance, a fire truck, or a school bus, combating sickness, fires, and ignorance. This same freedom to drive, which for the getaway car driver is called "evil", might be "good" for the ambulance, fire truck, or school bus driver. Freedom only takes on a positive ethical value when I choose to exercise it in a positive way. Raz writes that, "Autonomy is valuable only if exercised in pursuit of the good."²³ Further,

Our notion of a successful life is of a life well spent, of a life of achievement, of handicaps overcome, talents wisely used, of good judgment in the conduct of one's affairs, of warm and trusting relationships with family and friends, stormy and enthusiastic involvement with other people, many hours spent having fun in good company, and so on.²⁴

²² Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 306-307.

²³ *Ibid*, 381.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 306.

For vocation to be good it must be employed in overcoming, achieving, and building. It becomes a good when it is used to pursue good ends.

Some take this conclusion to mean that life has been figured out and little remains but to plod along the "good" path. Minnesota poet and 1964 winner of the Pulitzer Prize John Berryman writes in *Dream Song 14* that, "Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so." Berryman saw little in life but a predetermined trail upon which he walked, while he tried desperately to swerve off the packed dirt into the chaotic underbrush. In 1974, overtaken by the boredom of his life, he took a leap of indifference off the Washington Avenue Bridge on the University of Minnesota campus, clutching modernity as he tumbled to his baptism and death in the Mississippi River below. Meaning was too late, too far. Rather than exist like the hashed-up character of Raz's thought experiment, Berryman made the ultimate reach for self-definition, identity, and freedom. He walked away.

When Berryman concluded that life is boring and determined, he erred in deducing from general principles to particular individuals. The life of vocation is characterized as overcoming adversity, achieving goals, and building relationships. These characteristics are what legal scholars call *underdetermined*. There are multiple concrete actions and results which can fulfill these terms. Recall Sally who has the options of going to East Angola with the Peace Corps or Harvard Law School. Which of these actions leads her to overcome adversity, achieve goals, and build friendships? More than likely they both would. Given different talents, circumstances, or acts of nature, the degree to which each choice leads her to a fulfillment of living out her positive freedom may vary. But I don't fully know Sally's talents or the situations she will be faced with. And neither does Sally.

Even though none of us has perfect information about the future, we all have to pursue ends and take responsibility for those pursuits. Action, freedom, and responsibility are all bound up together. Joel Feinberg writes that freedom from restraint only has meaning when it is put into action in pursuit of a goal. There is no real distinction between positive and negative freedom except perspective. Feinberg proposes the following model for the way in which freedom is instantiated:

_____ is free from _____
to do (or omit, or be, or have) _____.

he did not open the door any wider than he judged necessary.

All through the night he returned to the raven and sat cross-legged about a yard from its box and watched it, a mild but sincere concern intermittently surfacing within the deep fascination that held sway over his visage.⁴⁸ The bird had no visible wounds, but its strange movements and overall sickly appearance suggested to him that it had an internal injury or was perhaps in the late stages of some avian disease. After fifteen or twenty minutes he would unfold his legs and look around, glancing quickly back at the raven as he stood up and turned to walk back to his room. He would climb in bed and pull his sheet and blanket up to the bottom of his ribcage and straighten the back of his neck against the pillow by pretending that someone was pulling on a string attached to the very crown of his skull and then check the symmetry of his supine body, close his eyelids halfway, and slowly begin to move his arms up and down. In his mind as he performed this mimetic action he attempted to feel just as he imagined the injured bird felt, to so completely inhabit the bird's experience that they would be parallel in their being, it in the tangerine box and he in the bed. His shoulders would begin to burn after a few minutes of arm-as-autonomically-controlled-wing mimetic movements, but this was to him no more than an easily dispatched distraction and, indeed, lying there in his vicarious birdness, totally immobile save for the rhythmic motion of his arms, he felt an unknown and tremulous beauty rush up through his trunk and engulf his mind like the tide over a seaside shell and it was then, at the peak of this unprecedented feeling that he would rise from the bed and head hurriedly toward the bird. He wanted to thank it. He felt, however, that a proper expression of gratitude could only be achieved if the bird's status had come to some sort of conclusion, as if his almost ritualistic embodiment of the bird could then come to a definitively meaningful close although he had no idea what this would be or feel like. And maybe in truth he was afraid. Maybe he feared that if the bird kept on in its torporous condition his experience of mimesis-induced beauty would begin to dilute and thereby lose value and maybe he would have to analyze the validity of the whole experience, which even thinking of this possibility was anathema to him, and it was

⁴⁸ A really absorbed fascination. Like after a few minutes he even began to rock lightly back and forth as people do when the object of their focus has somehow seeped into the tone of their experience, his head tipped slightly to the side and eyes wider than normal, the overall effect being not short of trance-like.

THE ONLY HOLY MOMENT

All through the night he returned to the injured bird, hoping each time to find a decisive change in its condition, hoping each time to find it awake and struggling or absent or dead. A raven, ebony and muscular. He remembered seeing birds just like this one, perhaps this very one perched high up on the grand, denuded trees that lined the street where he lived or pecking forcefully at the scattered trash near the apartment dumpster and how they evoked in him a feeling of excitement, a quick flush thrill in response to their regal, ontological foreignness, a beauty deeply entwined with power.

Awake or dead - but always he was disappointed, the bird remaining in some ambiguous torpor, its eyes half-open and teary but unmoving, its thick wings unfolding at a rate even enough to indicate autonomic control of their movement and opening to only a fraction of their total span and then closing with the same unnerving steadiness and staying at rest for long enough to make him wonder if they would open again, and they always did. He suspected but could not confirm that the bird sensed his approach when he would periodically climb out of bed and weave his way out the bedroom door and past the bicycle and various other apartmental detritus scattered in the hallway and common room where the raven rested in its makeshift convalescent bed near the glass door that opened onto the small balcony where he sat with his roommates some afternoons and watched them smoke. He had cracked the sliding glass door to a width he thought sufficient for the bird to fit through should it recover and somehow flutter out of the cardboard tangerine box in which it lay on an old, sweat-stained pillow. He figured it was unlikely that the raven would be able to find its way to the liberating crack in the door⁴⁷ but speculated that maybe it would sense the fresh air and move toward it. Easy exit for the theoretically recovered bird had to be balanced with the problem of the currently injured and essentially immobile bird, whose body was moist and fragile and he thought but had no way of being certain tense at his approach, becoming too cold, and so

⁴⁷ This from actual, if amateur and impromptu, ornithological observation conducted when a medium-sized bird of unidentified species got stuck in his friend's neighbor's dining room some years back and flew frenziedly back and forth between the room's two windows, smacking beak-first into one and dropping to the hardwood floor where it would putter around in a manic daze until it mustered the necessary balance to take flight and crash into the opposite window.

One fills in the first blank by naming the person (or persons) who is the subject of the ascribed freedom, the second blank by specifying some compulsion or constraint, and the third blank by the specification of some action, omission, state of being, or possession actually or hypothetically desired either by the subject or the speaker.²⁵

We experience freedom all at once. The movement away from being acted upon to moving as an actor are not two distinct motions. We become free and know that freedom through action. But our action is often without guidance because we do not always know which part we ought to play in our live narrative.

We are all forced to act and pursue particular concrete manifestations of the good without a clear guide in which exact action to pursue. The life of vocation demands that we seek some concrete implementation of our positive freedom, but it does not tell us which particular goals to pursue, or what methods to use. This tension between necessary action, imperfect knowledge, and complete responsibility brought Jessie crying to my couch in search of some confidence that her post-college plans were a good idea pursued in a good way. Neither I, nor anyone else, is able to tell her. But I will continue to cry and rock with her, and we will not be bored.

- Caleb Goltz

²⁵ *Social Philosophy*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pg. 11.

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Antonioni never actually gives us a moment where an I-You relationship occurs, but that does not mean that he denies their existence entirely. Instead, I would argue that these films are simply about the search for the truly impossible: lasting I-You relationships. In fact, judging from his use of objects in these two films, Antonioni affirms along with Buber that the It-world encroaches on true relation through means and causality. The difference is that Antonioni is not writing philosophy; he is directing films. Buber is giving a system; Antonioni is creating a lament for connection lost or never found. The modes of expression are simply different.

Of course, as was mentioned earlier, there is no evidence, nor is there even a good possibility, that Antonioni ever intended this interpretation. However, Buber's vocabulary is a fitting framework for interpreting Antonioni's films. These two, the philosopher and religious thinker and the agnostic film artist, are different on the surface, yet their affinities run deep. One is simply the artistic expression of the other's abstract thought, yet both are bound together by a criticism of a world that is forsaking its most vital need: connection.

– Stephen Strother

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an object, something inextricably tied to means and to a man-made chain of cause and effect.

The final sequence of *L'eclisse* is Antonioni's most chilling evocation of the alienation and oppression found in the objectified world of objects and experience. Vittoria and Piero are planning to meet at the corner of a street where they had met earlier in the film, but, when the time arrives for them to meet, neither appear, and Antonioni simply films the intersection for ten minutes. The camera tracks on the path they walked, closes in on the objects they observed, and tricks the audience by filming people who look very similar to Vittoria and Piero. Finally, in the film's final shot, the camera closes in on a street light, which finally brightens out the frame, creating the "eclipse" of the title: the eclipse of human beings by the It-world of objects. The possibility of an I-You relationship between Vittoria and Piero has been eliminated. This is Antonioni's pessimism – modern life is so transient, so determined by the outside world, that inner life and meaningful human connection are hopelessly difficult to achieve.

V

Antonioni's themes are far more pessimistic than Buber's. Buber certainly does not deny the possibility of I-You relationships. In fact, he affirms that every person has them throughout their lives. However, for Buber, they are fleeting, lasting only a short time. Buber writes:

This, however, is the sublime melancholy of our lot that every You must become an It in our world. However exclusively present it may have been in the direct relationship – as soon as the relationship has run its course or is permeated by means, the You becomes an object among objects, possibly the noblest and yet one of them, assigned its measure and boundary. The actualization of the work involves a loss of actuality. Genuine contemplation never lasts long; the natural being that only now revealed itself to me in the mystery of reciprocity has again become describable, analyzable, classifiable – the point at which manifold systems and laws intersect (68).

For Buber, as soon as means are applied or as soon as the world of experience is asserted, the I-You relationship dissolves. Buber does not even entertain the idea of a lifetime I-You relationship. The It-world is unfortunately necessary. Antonioni does not believe in a constant I-You relation either, but his way of expressing this is more pessimistic. He seems to deny their possibility altogether; however, I wouldn't say this is true.

Don't ask me what language I speak, don't ask me your name,
I don't remember anymore. My eyes are clouded with
reflections off the sea and digital kisses.
All things carnal have come to me and left me,
all things that I can touch refuse to touch me back,
and I am empty, without syllables or pleasure.

Don't ask me what streets I walk,
shamefully, without your companion shadow,
they all look the same to me. Don't ask me
the names of the prostitutes
down on Errazuriz, don't ask me
the color of the dawn.

I hold a rose in my stained hand
and a basket of fish in my heart.
I sleep and your memory touches me
through the sea's indifferent rhetoric
through the dark forests' murmuring.

I open wine and I find it turned to water,
my bread bleeds.
I awake and your memory touches me,
but I can't speak your name,
I can't stop pronouncing the names of God
over and over, destroying and creating the world
in your image.

– James McBride

THE (BAD?) FAITH OF MARTIN BUBER:
A "PARTICULAR" INVESTIGATION IN EXISTENTIAL SOLIPSISM

"Love is the extremely difficult realization
that something other than oneself is real."

- Iris Murdoch²⁶

In her meditations on existentialism, Murdoch observes that the awareness and fear of solipsism has fueled much of the philosophizing of Modern man. As a response to this solipsism, many great thinkers have dedicated their studies to the anxiety-ridden issues of otherness, solitude, and difference - and while the perspectives on these questions posed by Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Buber are unique, they both seem to discover a pathway into authentic being, or the full and holistic integration of the individual with the Other. Yet it is important for those of us living after the time of these phenomenological pioneers to approach their thought with both respect and scrutinizing criticism in order to determine whether or not the perspectives they have left behind provide us with meaningful results, or only serve to perpetuate the problems surrounding the Self and its Other.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre criticized a few giants of Western thought (including Edmund Husserl, G.W.F. Hegel and Martin Heidegger) for attempting and suspiciously failing to solve the problem of solipsism, even going so far as to say that some of their surest solutions were faulty products of bad faith. If we believe that Sartre's criticisms here are accurate, we are left with a frightening conclusion: that even those of us who strive to overcome solipsism, especially out of what seems to be a respect for the Other, can end up accidentally and frighteningly concealing the Other's very existence: perhaps to an even greater extent than was actual, before we first philosophized.

Some have argued that Martin Buber's philosophy in *I and Thou* establishes a way that the Other can be respected in its otherness without a gruesome confrontation of what Levinas calls "barbaric alterity,"²⁷ and in so doing Buber "saves us from Sartre."²⁸ By conjoining the *I* and *Thou* in a distinctively reciprocal but originally unified existence, Buber falls back on a divine and primal wholeness in our consciousness that, when

trapped in the system of time, space, and causality, and they cannot extricate themselves. The force of the mountains, the desire for more respect (in the case of Sandro, who compromises himself in his business for more money), and the weight of past actions and present consequences all work to keep Claudia and Sandro closed off. They are available physically, but not (to use a term Buber would use) spiritually.

IV

L'eclisse only furthers Antonioni's exploration of connection and its possibility in the modern world. As spare as the plot of *L'avventura* is, the narrative of *L'eclisse* is only more so. The film focuses on the fragile relationship of Piero and Vittoria, both good people who seem to want their relationships to have real meaning. They meet several times, make love, and have a moment of tenuous connection in which they hold each other. However, even in this scene, both characters look away from one another with looks of fear and longing on their faces. This is their most intimate moment, and still they do not truly connect.

There are scenes in *L'eclisse* that suggest the same problems as those analyzed in *L'avventura*. Piero is a trader on the stock market in Milan. Of course, a stock market floor is the perfect symbol for the frenzy of modern existence. The room is chaotic; people are screaming their bids; civilians are crying over lost money. Each person is focusing solely on a means to an end. In this setting, there is no time to stop and give one's being. The entire system is set up so that an I-You relationship is impossible. Vittoria meets Piero here, which seems to give their relationship no basis from which to start. It could even be suggested that Piero is conditioned to ignore the opportunity for I-You relation because he works in a business that demands I-It relationships with every object. These stock exchange sequences, utilizing very little important dialogue, argue for the accumulated alienation of the It-world.

The scene immediately following the first stock exchange sequence deepens this point. Vittoria's mother, addicted to playing the market, has just lost an enormous sum of money. The night before, Vittoria ended her relationship with her boyfriend. She feels alienated and alone, especially after her experience at the stock market, which, by her facial expressions and body posture, she makes obvious that she found disconcerting. She wants to talk about the breakup with her mother, but her mother is so distressed about the money that she coldly brushes Vittoria away. She denies the opportunity to say You because of money,

²⁶ *Existentialists and Mystics*, 215.

²⁷ *The Trace of the Other*, 345.

²⁸ Smith, *A Winter's Tale*, 2.

possibility, its necessity, its meaning – is one of the prime concerns of *L'avventura*. Claudia is a deeper person than Sandro. She is looking for meaning, and due to her friendship with Anna, she is much more uncomfortable with the relationship than Sandro. Throughout the film, they have many moments where true connection could happen, but it never does. Instead, they play at romance, sleeping together, but never truly communicating. Analyzing their relationship, and all the other relationships in the film, Gregory Solman writes, "It's as if these encounters, these "adventures", are so fleeting and meaningless that they have to be verified by a third party to exist" (par. 6). This sounds much like a relationship in the I-It mode. Each moment of Sandro and Claudia's relationship is transitory. They never actually give their whole being to one another. They never mutually say You, even though both characters, specifically Claudia, seem to be searching for the kind of connection that can only come through the encounter that Buber describes.

What weighs down these characters? What makes them unable to say You? Antonioni's compositions suggest answers. Throughout the search for Anna on the Sicilian island, each character is framed against the towering mountains in the distance. They are dwarfed, as if the weight of the natural world makes it impossible for each character to be authentic, or even to care. This is an expression of the alienation created by the I-It world. The objects of the It-world, the accumulated wealth of the idle rich on the island: these are all hindrances to the kind of relation that comes through saying You. Not only does Antonioni frame each character against the landscape to suggest how small they feel, but he also places the mountains between the characters as a shield against relation. This only strengthens the feeling that the natural world, the objectified world of It, is far too much of a burden to sustain the kind of selfless giving that these people need in order to be connected.

This concept, expressed in a different way outside of Buber's framework, is discussed by Hamish Ford: "The heavy emphasis on violent temporal and spatial materiality throughout Antonioni's films enforces an awareness of such immanent primordial forms' enforcement of death... This facing up to primordial facts about ourselves, as we exist within brutal time and space, necessarily wreaks difficult and devastating affectivity" (par. 33). To the categories time and space, we could also add causality, the element of the It-world that Buber considers the most harmful to I-You relationships. In Antonioni's film, the characters are always

experienced, provides us with a sense of union and peace with others. In opposition to Buber's concept, the task of this essay is to use Sartre's various commentaries in *Being and Nothingness* (specifically on Heidegger) first to throw the philosophy of Buber into question, and finally, to allege that the consoling faith of Buber is ultimately a detrimental idealism that, like the philosophies of those Sartre had criticized before him, ends with the ironic eradication of the existence of any Other. This is to say that the *I and Thou* of Martin Buber would be, in the eyes of Sartre, a suspicious and stealthy type of solipsism.

The Problem of Others...

Before jumping into the text of *I and Thou*, it is important for us to understand a few aspects of Sartre's position on Otherness, and most specifically why he feels that his perspective overcomes the solipsism he criticized in other philosophies. In the introduction, we noted that many attempts to formulate a philosophy respectful of the Other incidentally end up glossing over the Other's very existence. In an attempt to overcome this dreadful inclination, Sartre formulates a neo-Cartesian *cogito* that demands the harsh and barbaric alterity of a particular other be inescapably implied and present within the existence of any particular ego. However, even though the philosopher believed the presence of the Other could lead the individual to freedom, the "multiplicity of Others"²⁹ also establishes a convoluted lot of beings that insist on imprisoning every other self in mere object form, or taking away the self's transcendence. Furthermore, Sartre saw this multiplicity as being incapable of any Hegelian synthesis, which can be better understood in this regard as a sterilization of difference, opposition and Otherness. In this sense Sartre's philosophy maintains a respect for difference but at the same time perpetuates the self from ever achieving oneness or solidarity. This is, essentially, the tormenting realization that hits Garcin in the final moments of *No Exit* when he exclaims "Hell is – Other people!" Thus for Sartre, while the recognition of Others may eventually lead an individual to freedom, it must also leave one in a sort of terror, although Sartre also demanded that this terror be confronted. Thus in this light it becomes clear why some might feel the need to "save us" from Sartre: his philosophy maintains an intrusive and irreconcilable type of difference that has long been bastardized to the Western tradition in favor of unity. So in other words,

²⁹ *Being and Nothingness*, 299.

many selves may perceive this difference as absolutely terrifying.

In order to find a way out of this seemingly endless and fruitless struggle, Buber attempts to redefine the self and the Other in a primary relation that is original in nature, establishing a realm of experience where "there is *one* world, which is *twofold*."³⁰ Furthermore, Buber discusses at least two types of relations, an *I-Thou* relation and an *I-It* relation, that every individual maintains inescapably with existence on some level. What makes Buber's thought idiosyncratic is that neither an *I* nor an Other actually exists before their encounter together: that is, the "I-consciousness" only *gradually* comes into being and distinguishes itself from primal unity. Another way of saying this is that the *I*-self does not exist as an entity, but only as a sort of consciousness in relation.³¹ In this sense, separation – that is, the distinction of oneself from another self or thing – is merely one level of conscious awareness: and according to Buber, if we desire wholeness in our being our consciousness must be focused primarily in the *I-Thou* relation.

Perhaps some would criticize this type of ontology for being an undefended assertion: an overly romantic and idealistic belief in a unity lost long ago, created solely to oppose the disjunction one may currently experience in the present. While this criticism may in fact be valid, there is a much more relevant criticism in the creation of the I-consciousness that reveals Buber's faith to be both solipsistic and problematic. The issue becomes apparent in the analysis of the following metaphor that Buber uses to show the conscious formation of the *I* and the *Thou*:

It is simply not the case that the child first perceives an object, then, as it were, puts himself in relation with it. But the effort to establish relation comes first—the hand of the child arched out so that what is over and against him may nestle under it; second is the actual relation, a saying of Thou without words... the thing, like the I, is produced late, arising after the original experiences have been split asunder and the connected partners separated.³²

Certainly, when Buber says something was "produced late" in this context, he is referring to an idea, or a consciousness of an experience, for the original existence of both *something* called child and *something* called object are inferred from the start. In other words, while there is some orig-

³⁰ Smith, Translator's Preface to *I and Thou*, ix.

³¹ Boni, *The Self and the Other in the Ontologies of Sartre and Buber*, 116.

³² Buber, *I and Thou* (Smith), 27.

whole being. Buber scholar John Barich describes the ramifications of saying You: "When you say Thou to another person, you are sharing the mystery of your being, you are responding with the totality of self to the Thou who is addressing you, you are meeting one another on the level of spirit" (par. 4). When an individual says You, they are beyond experience; they are in a realm of relation where the only thing that possesses meaning is the relationship. In fact, Buber writes that the I-You relationship does not "make life any easier for us—it makes life heavier but heavy with meaning. And this is second: the inexpressible confirmation of meaning. It is guaranteed" (158).

In the I-It world of modern life, humans have objectified things to the point that they have accumulated an innumerable amount of objects with which to experience, test, and gain knowledge. However, it is this development that has created the sense of alienation in human life. We have a constant ability to learn about objects, but this inhibits our ability to stand in relation to those objects. Simon Smith states the problem of the I-It relationship clearly: "In *I and Thou* Buber asserts that this [the I-It] relation, although an integral part of the human condition, cannot be spoken with the whole being. It is not a complete relation and so the primary word I-It can only be taken as an attitude expressing limited engagement with the world" (par. 17). For Buber, the essence of life, and the possibility and guarantee of the highest meaning, are only found within the I-You relationship. Everything else is weighed down by the burden of causality and means. At some point in our lives, we feel this, and subsequently feel alienated and unable to connect with the world and each other in any meaningful way.

III

L'avventura, released in 1960, benefits when looked at through the lens of Buber's thought. Antonioni's film is difficult, opaque, and ambiguous, but certain thematic elements can be gleaned. The film concerns the disappearance of a young woman named Anna on a yachting trip in Sicily. She is in a relationship with Sandro, an architect for whom she has mixed feelings. When she disappears, Sandro and her best friend, Claudia, meet in Italy to search for her but instead find themselves romantically involved with one another. From this point, the film never concerns itself with Anna's disappearance again – the focus is solely on Claudia and Sandro's atrophied relationship.

Certainly this short summary shows that human connection – its

I

The films of Michelangelo Antonioni are primarily films about connection. While this is a debatable statement, his films do seem to be about the possibility of two human beings finding real meaning through a relationship with one another. There are exceptions: *Blowup* and *Zabriskie Point* are the first that come to mind. However, the films of interest here are most certainly concerned with this topic. Interestingly, these films have certain correlations with the thought of Hasidic Jew and author of *I and Thou* Martin Buber. This is not to say that Antonioni was influenced by Buber; in fact, there is no reason to think that he ever read Buber or knew of his philosophy. What I will be contending instead is that Buber's philosophy provides an interesting interpretive framework for a reading of these two films.

II

I and Thou is a book about relation – relation between humans and nature, humans and humans, and humans and God. For Buber there are two different types of relations: I-You and I-It. The I-It relationship is necessary, but much the lesser of the two. I-It involves objectification, experience, observation, and categorization. In the I-It relationship, everything is permeated by *means*. All things (nature, people, God) are used for some purpose outside of the immediacy of the relationship. Nothing is encountered, only utilized. In Buber's words:

Man goes over the surface of things and experiences them. He brings back from them some knowledge of their condition--an experience. He experiences what there is to things. But it is not experiences alone that bring the world to man.

For what they bring to him is only the world that consists of It and It and It, of He and He and She and She and It (55).

Formulated this way, I-It relationships are something that only scratch the surface, but can never actually fulfill any deep desire. They can satisfy only a small portion of our yearning.

In contrast to this, Buber offers the I-You (or I-Thou, as it is rendered in other translations) relationship. The I-You relationship is exactly that – a relationship. It is an encounter between two things (we can have an I-You relationship with anything) in which each participant gives their

inal pre-self-conscious unity, the development of a child's consciousness leads to the formulation of a distinct *I* and a *Thou*. In establishing this experiential unfolding of consciousness, Buber abandons the idea of an “ontologically prior ego”³³ – something he sees as responsible for the alienation of an individual with the whole of existence – and attempts to establish a new unity within a conscious relation that is twofold in nature. However, in doing so Buber leaves us only with a *self and that which a self experiences* in which the existence of any “Other” entity is nowhere to be found. Though this point certainly requires explication, it is undoubtedly a form of solipsism, and is an unforeseen consequence of Buberian philosophy.

Some might object: If our existence is twofold, how can there possibly be solipsism? First of all, it is because the *I-Thou* and the *I-It* are merely methods of relation: in a solipsistic sense, this is merely the relation of the self to that which the self experiences. As such, they do not refer to the existence of any objective entities, that is, any particular beings called *Thou* or *It*. As Sartre once wrote to Heidegger:

The Other in the relation “with,” taken on the ontological level, cannot in fact be concretely determined any more than the directly confronted human-reality of which it is the alter ego; it is an abstract term... and it does not contain the power of becoming that Other – Pierre or Annie.³⁴

Instead, these relations serve only as a way for a consciousness to relate to its own experience, mere abstractions that a consciousness develops in order to understand that which a self encounters. In short, they do not contain any elements of any particular being that is truly Other.

In light of this, consider once more Buber's story of the child and the object. Certainly, Buber tries to negate the existence of an ontologically prior ego in showing that the child's *I* develops only in relation, and in doing so prevents an ontological ego from originating in isolation. What is misleading, however, is that Buber's *I* is really not a *self* at all. Instead, it is merely a conscious abstraction of the actual “self” that we call the child, or a conscious device used to distinguish that self from something that the self experiences. Here, again, we have solipsism.

Thus, while an individual's experiences may develop into an *I-Thou* type of relation, this is *not* a relation to an actual, Other entity. Or, as

³³ Boni, 116.

³⁴ *Being and Nothingness*, 294.

stated clearly in Sartre's response to Heidegger:

More precisely, this ontological relation between me and an abstract Other, due to the very fact that it defines in general my relation to others, is far from facilitating a particular ontic relation between me and Pierre; in fact it renders impossible any concrete connection between my being and a particular Other given in my experience.³⁵

As we shall soon see, this realization carried to its fullest extent reveals – enigmatically, and seemingly paradoxically – that even within an *I-Thou* relation, there can be no real *Thou*, or real Other at all. Let us now examine in further detail how this result unfolds.

The Extraction of Others...

When criticizing Heidegger's philosophy, Sartre noted that if a self can be shown to be a “being by whom there are in general Others,” then we fall back into solipsism.³⁶ In saying this, Sartre is demanding that philosophy account for the existence of *particular* Others, that is, other beings with a particular nature and particular effects on the individual. Within Sartre's philosophy, this qualification is met by equating the truth of the Other with “Being-seen-by-the-Other”, the objectifying condition of a self's “being-unrevealed.”³⁷ But Buber's philosophy, due to its concealed solipsism, posits no such Other existence. For Buber's *self and that which the self experiences* that we have discussed can be seen in this light as an I-consciousness and its own creations, its own fantastical extractions from experience.

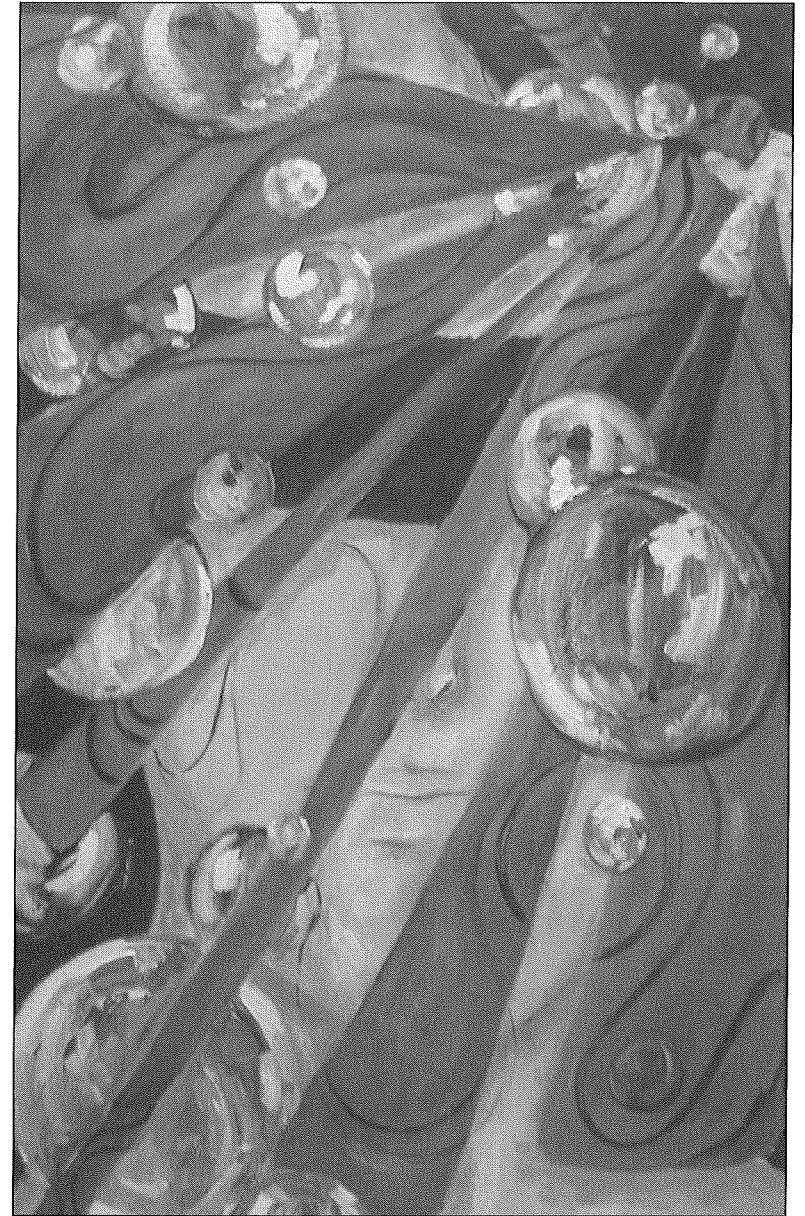
This happens because for Buber “man travels over [only] the *surface* of things” and “extracts knowledge about their constitution from them.”³⁸ Now, Buber's apparent purpose in noting this was to retain an unknowable mystique in the Other that cannot actually be *experienced*. Thus, Buber can be seen as trying to protect the Other from ultimately becoming an object for us and vice versa (this is, once more, a way Buber is seen by some as “saving us from Sartre”). However, in not allowing the Other to be capable of any sort of *ultimate* objectification on behalf of the *I*, the very existence of the Other begins to fade away, becoming a mere

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 301, 305.

³⁸ *I and Thou* (Smith), 27.



solipsism because he believed that exclusive moments of the *I-Thou* relation could break through the individual barrier. Secondly, Sartre seems to have created a philosophy in *Being and Nothingness* in which the existence of the Other is both certain and irreconcilable, and on the whole it seems to be a much more philosophically sound perspective on the problem. Yet if we fear that Sartre was somehow mistaken, we might be forced to accept that solipsism is all that an *I* can experience. Might this make the bad faith of Martin Buber more appealing?

I doubt many readers would be willing to establish solipsism as a basic starting point for philosophy, and accordingly, would see no necessity in maintaining the questionably bad faith of Buber at all. Regardless, the very pondering of this idea and of all of the contents of this exposition should lead any self into more carefully and critically examining his or her own relationships with experience – actual or fabricated, beneficial or bad – and evaluating just how close we are to our Other, and to our Other's experiences.

– Joshua Wolak

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whimsy that is forever left at our imaginative disposal. In this sense, stating that "man travels over the surface of things" is merely saying that an individual has experiences from which he can extract, fabricate and postulate another existence for himself.

As an example of this phenomenon, let us critically examine Buber's passage in *I and Thou* regarding the *I* and a tree, and what the *I* can make of it:

"I can perceive it as a movement... classify it in a species.... recognize it only as an expression of law... dissipate it and perpetuate it in number... in all this the tree remains my object, occupies space and time, and has its nature and constitution. It can, however, also come about that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer *It*. I have been seized by the power of exclusiveness."³⁹

Buber's point in describing the *I*'s experience with a tree is to show that 1) the tree can be imaginatively objectified and categorized in an infinite number of ways in the *It* form, and 2) that something of a tree exists in *Thou* form entirely beyond my ability to do these things. When seen in the *It* form, the *I*-consciousness is separated from the tree and the self has "erected a barrier between a subject and an object".⁴⁰ However, in the "moment of exclusiveness," all of the categorizations of the tree become "inseparably fused"⁴¹ and the tree is no longer an impression or a play of the imagination. It is *Thou* – and it is precisely this distinction of the *Thou* relation with the *It* relation that traps the self in solipsism and suggests that no Other actually exists. According to Buber, even within the (suspiciously) mystical moment of exclusiveness one does not actually *experience* the *Thou*.⁴² Thus all one really knows of the *Thou* at all are one's own personal feelings of being "bound up" with it in a few exclusive moments – fleeting moments which, after they have run their course, are bound once more to return to the realm of *It*. It is this fleetingness that results in that "exalted melancholy of our fate"⁴³ that Buber discusses.

His account is disconcerting here mainly for two reasons. First of all, the mystic experience that seems to mark the meeting (which is, as

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁰ Kohanski, *An Analytical Interpretation of Martin Buber's I and Thou*, 61.

⁴¹ *I and Thou* (Kaufmann), 58.

⁴² *I and Thou* (Smith), 11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16.

noted by Buber, *not* a knowing or experiencing) of the *Thou* seems entirely nonsensical, and Sartre and many other critical readers would be unsatisfied with such mystical fiction. Yet this sort of skeptic attack on the mysticism of Buber will surely be considered invalid by anyone who claims to have experienced such a mystic relation, or has truly experienced a *Thou*. Perhaps it is not our place as critics to dispute these few people here. Yet thankfully, the attack on Buber does not have to end in a battle over religious skepticism. This is because, secondly, Buber's formulation of the *I-Thou* relation can be shown – however “spiritually” overwhelming it may be – to be a mere *It* experience.

The following interpretations of the act of being “bound up” should clarify this point. If we should interpret this act as the feeling of a basic oneness or unity of the *I* with something not normally considered to be the *I* – or something normally considered Other – we can most certainly be left with solipsism: for this is simply another way of saying that *everything* is really just *I*, and that at the base of one's experience one can only find oneself. Alternatively, if we say that being “bound up” means becoming aware of *something* else existing, we can still assert that this is just a fancier mystic way of saying that an *I* has become aware of an *It* that was previously unknown to him. This perspective, of course, would substantiate Buber's claim that every *Thou* is bound to become an *It* in that the *Thou* was really just a newly discovered formulation of the *It* in the first place. And in this light, all that remains of the *Thou* is that which can be infinitely imagined and categorized by an *I*, which – in this philosophy – does little more than extract fantastical objects for itself within the realm of solipsistic experience.

In his opposition to solipsism, Sartre once stated: “I cannot constitute a human-reality as a concrete being which is its own possibilities.”⁴⁴ Here, Sartre was implying that in order to escape solipsism, it was necessary to comprehend an Other that *looks* at us, and has an equal hand as the self in the actualization of a self's possibilities. While this definition of the Other does lead to a certain amount of anxiety – specifically, the terror that may result from an encounter with barbaric alterity – Sartre also believed it was the only way to establish an Other in relation to a self that was “outside of the reference to a religious or mystic unknowable,” escaping the criticisms we have just discussed.⁴⁵ In what we have seen of

Buber's philosophy, there appears to be no actual Other capable of such terrifying feats, but only an *I* in a relation with its own experience. As such, the mere positing of the inexperienced *Thou* was an act of desperate idealism on the part of Buber that, in an attempt to reconcile *I* with the Other, wound up regrettably forgetting the Other entirely.

Bad Faith...?

The tragic freedom implied by love is this: that we all have an indefinitely extended capacity to imagine the being of others. Tragic, because there is no prefabricated harmony, and others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves.⁴⁶

At the end of our investigation, it would seem that Buber is acting in a Sartrean bad faith: Buber's philosophy accidentally rejects the existence of Others, thereby rejecting the freedom of Others and eternally escaping the consequences of his own free actions. According to Sartre, solipsism is simply not true, and a philosophy that would end up in a solipsistic idealism such as Buber's would be evidence that the self's fear of Others has allowed the self to be content with a lie – that is, with merely an *I*.

Yet perhaps there is a sense in which Buber's philosophy, even if it is a bad faith, may somehow be beneficial. Throughout the course of this essay, it has been primarily assumed (as Sartre assumed) that solipsism is a negative or frightening phenomenon; but in some ways, this might not necessarily be the case. The philosophy of Buber *does* gloss over the existence of Others in any threatening (or knowable) sense, and *does* posit only fabrications of entities that exist outside itself. This much is certain. But what if we were to concede that the life of an individual *was* inherently solipsistic? If this were indeed the case, would not the most ethical course of action – necessarily acted out in faith – be to posit the existence of something outside oneself, especially a something that *I* must respectably know absolutely nothing about? In short: Might one's decision to live in relation with a mysterious Other be the best course of action, if and only if nothing certain of the Other could ever actually be established?

While the above paragraph may be intriguing, it may also be moot for a variety of reasons. For one, Martin Buber probably would not have conceded the basic point that the life of the individual was a life of

⁴⁴ *Being and Nothingness*, 295.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁴⁶ Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, 215.