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Dear Reader, April 7, 2025

It is my great pleasure to present to you Issue XII of *Dianoia: the Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College*. This year we received over 80 submissions from colleges and universities across North America. Dianoia returned from the summer interim with a passionate editorial board of undergraduate philosophers. Prioritizing marketing and outreach, we launched a LinkedIn page, hoping to connect with past and future accepted authors for years to come. In addition, we gratefully accepted the expertise of our graphic designer who launched a new logo for the journal.

This year, we were able to publish four papers that we felt were representative of the best undergraduate philosophical scholarship. We are grateful to welcome our accepted authors at our Annual Symposium allowing them to present their research to Boston College's students and faculty.

For a short preview of the contents of this journal, we offer an introduction to the philosophy and relevance of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, a historical comparative study of Daoist influences on Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and two pieces on political philosophy. One tests the compatibility of John Locke's and Jacques Maritain's vision for church-state relations. The second offers a Thomistic critique of classical liberalism from Hobbes and John Locke to the modern liberalism of John Rawls. The two former papers contribute to the history of philosophy while the latter two raise pertinent questions for contemporary church-state relations in a period of skepticism over the liberal tradition. We hope that these papers inspire thoughtful reflection, form new understandings, and most of all spark questions.

The editorial board chose Jan Toorop's *The Woodworker* (Il Taglialena) and Frank Millet's *A Cosey Corner* for the cover art of this year's issue. The former is an impressionist painting of an axe-wielding woodworker, the latter is of a woman reading by the window light next to a burning hearth. We understand this depiction of work and leisure to be emblematic of the birth of philosophy. It is only a culture founded on leisure that the liberal arts can thrive as Aristotle hints at in the opening paragraphs of his *Metaphysics*.

Lastly, I offer thanks to our faculty advisor, Fr. Ronald Tacelli, S.J., and our graduate advisor, Sean Haefner. In addition, I want to thank our Senior Managing Editor, Aniella Zaslavsky for her lasting commitment to the journal for the past three years. Aniella's diligence, patience,

and prudence have greatly contributed to the publication and lasting influence of this journal. For our graduating editors: Aniella, Amelia, and George, I wish you wonder-filled questions in your philosophical pursuits. Finally, I am grateful to those consistent members of the editorial board who devoted their time and knowledge to this institutional endeavor. Next fall Dianoia will publish an online transcript of our interview with Political Science Professor and Kant scholar Susan Meld Shell. We hope you enjoy this issue and continue to offer your support for Issue XIII next spring.

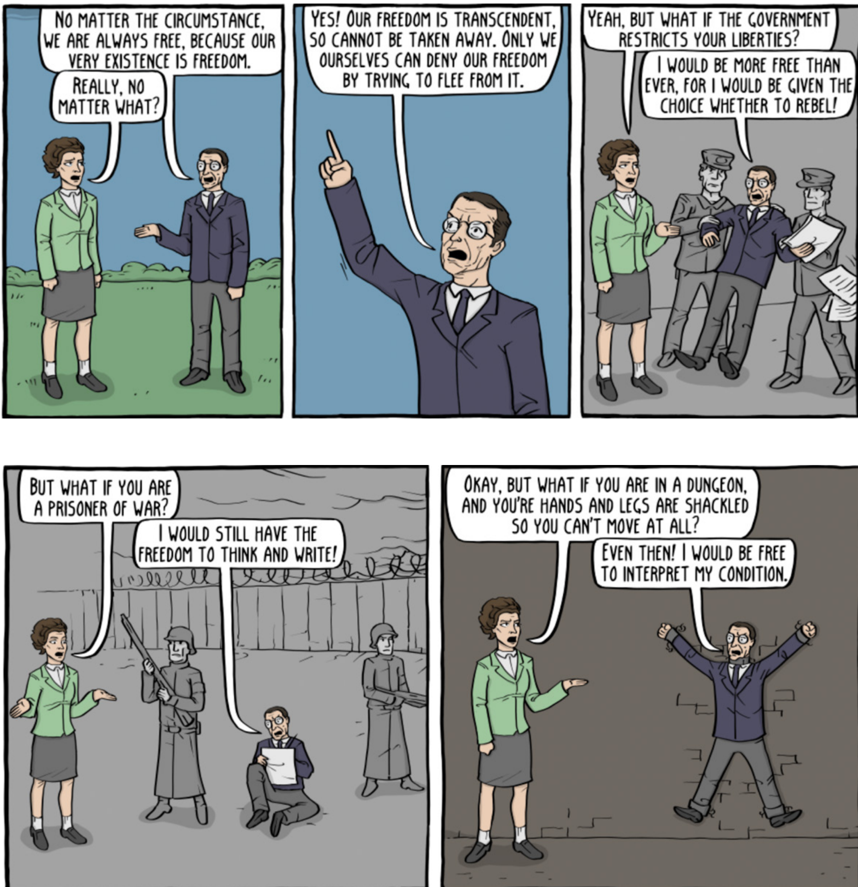
Sincerely,

Elliott Jones
Editor-in-Chief
Dianoia

TO LIVE FREE OR TO MAKE EXCUSES

IN DEFENSE OF SARTRE'S (REVISED) CONCEPT OF RADICAL FREEDOM

PALOMA FIGUEROA



Is the slave as free as his master? The prisoner as free as his captor? Before even attempting to answer these questions, one cannot help but imagine how easy it would be to challenge anybody who dared affirm such propositions: not only given the semantic absurdity of trying to equate the freedom of the slave with that of his master when the master-slave relationship is defined by the negation of one individual's freedom by another, but more importantly given the undeniable reality of the physical constraints imposed upon slaves by their masters by virtue of the latter's dominant status and power. Still, Jean-Paul Sartre was one who affirmed that "the slave in chains is as free as his master,"[1] a claim which, along with his overarching concept of freedom, has earned him quite a few objections and caricatures – including the comic above.[2] Here, the same Sartre who unshakably states to Simone de Beauvoir that freedom cannot be taken from us except by ourselves ends up in shackles against the wall of a dungeon, as Beauvoir guides him through a thought experiment to test through how many restrictions of freedom Sartre still considers himself *"totalement libre*."[3]

[1] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

[2] Existential Comics: a philosophy comic about the inevitable anguish of living a brief life in an absurd world. Also jokes. "Sartrean Freedom." (n.d.)

[3] Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 741. Quoted in FØLLESDAL, Dagfinn, and Henri SARLET. "LA LIBERTÉ CHEZ SARTRE." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 35, no. 135 (1981): 41–59.

Though this comic is caricatural, there is always some truth behind caricature—and indeed it is true that Sartre's initial concept of freedom elaborated in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) was, even from an existentialist perspective, radical. Existentialism is a philosophy centered around human freedom and responsibility within a universe considered devoid of inherent meaning. According to existentialists like Sartre, we are 'thrown' into this universe at birth, left alone to construct our own *existence* through our choices and actions, without any higher being or predetermined *essence* to turn to—hence the fundamental existentialist idea that "existence precedes essence."[4] Beyond this shared idea, what makes Sartre stand out from other existentialists is his conception of freedom as limitless and unconditional. To him, every human agent, regardless of their personal circumstances, is *always* free to choose their course of life in accordance with their freely set projects. Obstacles to one's freedom only arise in light of those projects, not as material constraints. It follows that, by reorienting one's project, one can eliminate those obstacles. Therefore, there is no such thing, from Sartre's perspective, as an *in-itself* limit to my freedom; in fact, to consider myself limited in that regard would be to act inauthentically, in "bad faith", wherein I self-deceptively interpret my given circumstances as being outside of my control, and thus consider myself unable to freely choose otherwise. Hence why the caricatured Sartre in the comic above holds on for dear life to his interpretation of himself as free despite his circumstances—even as a prisoner in shackles. To consider his freedom lost would be to surrender to bad faith, thus becoming more of an object than a conscious human being.

As the comic suggests, Sartre's radical freedom has been subject to many objections—some of which convinced Sartre to revise his thesis. Perhaps most notably, his fellow existentialist thinker and lifelong partner, Beauvoir, insisted against Sartre that people are not all equally free, due to social inequalities and *sedimentation*—a concept that we will explore in detail in section II for its centrality to Beauvoir's existentialist theory and to her philosophical disagreement with Sartre. Though the latter revised his theory in light of Beauvoir's insights, even this less hyperbolic concept of freedom has been directly and indirectly challenged since, namely by contemporary cognitive science. Indeed, countless recent findings reveal that the human brain appears to be determined by various internal processes and external influences,

[4] Gallagher, S., Fuchs, T., Zahavi, D., & Aho, K. *Existentialism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

upending not just Sartrean freedom, but the very existentialist foundation of free will and lack of pre-given essence. These findings leave Sartreans with a rather *angoissant* existential problem: faced with such serious objections to human freedom, let alone to "radical" freedom, can the latter concept still hold any value, or should we discard it along with our very conception of ourselves as free agents? Further, what contributions, if any, can the canonical version of existentialism[5] make to current thinking and how can it evolve going forward, faced with the scientific advances since these foundational existentialist works were published?

In this paper, I argue that there *is* a way to hold on to our felt freedom as human agents while acknowledging the neurological and social factors that may limit us psychologically and sometimes physically. I argue that, in fact, we *should* hold onto our belief in the possibility we have to transcend those limits imposed on us, rather than considering ourselves determined and powerless, lest we fall into the "bad faith" Sartre warned of. This, as we will see, is one of the valuable contributions that existentialism can still make today. With this in mind, I will start by explaining Sartre's initial form of existentialism–the concept of "radical" freedom—based on passages from *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism is a Humanism*. I will then consider a variety of objections to Sartre's thesis, first at the sociological level with excerpts from Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, then at the neurological level with excerpts from Robert Sapolsky's *Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will* and a recent paper by Neil Levy. To the sociological objections I will respond with Sartre's revised theory of freedom inspired by Beauvoir's philosophy and described by Jonathan Webber in *Rethinking Existentialism*. As for the objections from neuroscience, I will respond by arguing that it is of pragmatic importance that we see ourselves as free agents even if the cognitive sciences do not regard us as such. Finally, I will end with Webber's argument in favor of conserving existentialist philosophy for the significant contributions that it can bring to various fields beyond individual existence in today's world.

[5] As Jonathan Webber calls it in *Rethinking Existentialism*; more on this idea in section III.

§ I: "NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCE, WE ARE ALWAYS FREE": SARTRE'S INITIAL CONCEPT OF FREEDOM[6]

Though Sartre did revise his version of existentialism later in his philosophical career, the main ideas for which he is remembered—and caricatured—stem from his initial concept of human freedom. In this section, I will attempt to summarize the key elements of this foundational radical theory which I aim to defend later in this paper.

In his essay *Existentialism is a Humanism* published in 1946, based on a lecture he gave the previous year during a conference, Sartre states that there is one idea that unites all existentialists, whether Christian or atheist[7]— namely, that "existence precedes essence."[8] From the perspective of atheist existentialism, which Sartre adheres to, this is the idea that there is no such thing as a shared human nature because "there is no God to conceive it." As such, human beings exist "before they can be defined by any concept." Objects, in contrast, are defined by the concept for which they were produced. The paper cutter, for example, is crafted in a specific way for a predetermined use: the "essence" of the paper cutter, or "the recipes and qualities which allow for its production and definition", precedes its existence insofar as the role of the paper cutter is determined, and the paper cutter cannot be defined beyond that role.[9] Contrary to the paper cutter, Sartre argues, human beings are *essentially* nothing: "man exists first, meets himself, arises in the world,"[10] and defines himself only thereafter, during the course of his *existence*. In other words, man is a blank slate at birth, undefinable because there was no God to define and craft him, and through the years

[6] I will be quoting parts of the comic above in the heading of each of the three sections of this paper, but to be clear, these are not Sartre's own words; the same precision applies to the following headings.

[7] It must be noted that Sartre's strict duality between Christians on the one hand and atheists on the other excludes religious atheists of other faiths than Christianity. Among 20th century existentialists of Jewish faith, for example, we can think of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, namely. In this passage, Sartre only mentions Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel – both Christian – as figures of the non-atheist existentialist school of thought that he opposes. Yet while considering the opposition between religious existentialism and atheist existentialism, Sartre omits the fact that Christians have not been the only ones to make contributions to the former.

[8] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Gallimard, 1996), 26.

[9] Sartre, 27.

[10] Sartre, 29.

he defines himself through his actions. "Man is nothing more than what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism."[11]

How does man "make" himself? This is where Sartre's concept of the *project* comes in. To him, man is first and foremost "a project which lives itself subjectively", given that nothing precedes this project, and that the latter arises out of one's subjectivity, the foundation of human existence. As such, we will firstly be what we will have projected ourselves to be through our freely chosen fundamental project.[12] To have this freedom of choice is not just to have the ability to choose between the different possibilities that appear to me; it's the ability to choose our basic *orientation* in the world, which itself creates the possibilities and obstacles to which we are confronted.

Therefore, for Sartre, obstacles are to a certain extent determined by ourselves. As he explains in *Being and Nothingness*, the mountain only appears as "not climbable" to the climber standing at its foot, in light of his projected climbing—a secondary project which finds its meaning in terms of his fundamental project, which might be to become a world-renowned alpinist. In contrast, the mountain appears simply as beautiful or impressive to the traveler passing by, "whose free project is a pure esthetic ordering of the landscape;"[13] it does not appear to him as climbable or unclimbable, since he doesn't have the project of climbing it. In this sense, our obstacles only appear as obstacles in light of our project, not as a material reality. We have the freedom to remove obstacles from our way by choosing to change our project: if the climber decided to change his fundamental project of becoming an alpinist to pursue another career, then the mountain would not appear to him as an obstacle anymore.

We may live our entire lives with a single fundamental project, but it is always subject to change. Indeed, to Sartre, we are always freely choosing our project or orientation, therefore we cannot use it as an excuse for any wrongdoing; in short, "we are alone, without excuses." To be human is to be "condemned to be free"— condemned to choose our own course of life without a guiding essence, God, or a set of objective values that could legitimize our conduct,[14] and condemned to bear the

[11] Sartre, 30.
[12] Sartre, 30.
[13] Excerpt from *Being and Nothingness* in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Edited by Robert Denoon Cumming. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 269.
[14] Sartre, 39.

responsibility for each of our decisions and actions. There is no form of determinism that could alleviate the weight of total responsibility constantly resting on our shoulders; "man is freedom," whether we like it or not.

Any attempt to flee our total freedom and consequent responsibility, to treat perceived obstacles as material constraints that limit my freedom, is what Sartre calls "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*)—a central element of his existentialism. To choose inaction rather than confronting the field of possibilities opened by my freedom, out of the anguish provoked by the thought that I am free to do *anything* at any moment, is a form of bad faith. To use events of my past as an excuse for my present wrongdoings[15] is a form of bad faith insofar as those past events *in themselves* did not determine me to act in any certain way in the present. In other words, fleeing into psychological determinism to escape taking responsibility for my actions when the reality is that nothing is determined and that only I am responsible for my own actions is a form of bad faith.

The opposite of bad faith is *authenticity*, which Sartre presents as our moral imperative.[16] As Neil Levy writes, to act authentically is to face the lack of external meaning and value in the world by embracing our "free choice of values," knowing that "nothing justifies this choice except that we have made it."[17] When we face this choice, we live authentically. Conversely, when we flee this choice by accepting a seemingly constraining situation as our only option, or by adhering to an "overarching metaphysical system that we take to confer justification on our lives,"[18] then we are living *inauthentically*, in bad faith.

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[15] Like saying "I cheated on you because my parents cheated on each other when I was younger, so I see infidelity as a normal part of romantic relationships." More on this in section III.

[16] Sartre's concept of authenticity was heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger, particularly his ideas about *Dasein*'s "being-in-the-world" and the importance of confronting one's own existence and choices 'authentically' within an inauthentic world. For more on Heidegger's understanding of 'authenticity,' see Heidegger, Martin. (1927). Being and time. Translated by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962.

[17] Levy, Neil. "Choices Without Choosers: Toward a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism." Essay. In *Neuroexistentialism: Meaning, Morals, and Purpose in the Age of Neuroscience*, 111–25. (Oxford University Press, 2018), 113.

[18] Levy, 112-113.

No internal or external constraint can justify my denial of my freedom of choice—even the slave or prisoner is free to choose his own *interpretation* of his condition. As such, from a Sartrean perspective, even in situations of oppression our human capacity of meaning-making remains, so that such oppressive processes that aim to turn individuals into freedomless things cannot do so as long as that person has a consciousness. This is why, even tied up against the wall of his dungeon, the comic's Sartre insists that he remains "free to interpret" his condition.[19]

In short, Sartre's initial concept of human freedom can be described as "radical" insofar as it leaves absolutely no room for any form of determinism, or "excuse" in Sartrean terms. No matter our socio-economic background, our psychological baggage, our physical constraints, or any circumstance that we may take to determine or limit us, Sartre urges us to take back control over those perceived constraints which we may take to structure our existence. It is in that sense that Sartre calls his doctrine one of "optimism", one that motivates *action*[20] by placing the human agent as the source and foundation of all values and meaning[21]—hence the idea that existentialism is a "humanism."

§ II: "REALLY, NO MATTER WHAT?": OBJECTIONS TO SARTRE'S RADICAL FREEDOM

The problem is that in practice, Sartre's concept of freedom does not hold as strongly as it may appear convincing on paper. In fact, many would say that it does not hold at all. From the publication of *Being and Nothingness* up until today, Sartre's initial existentialism has been subject to a number of objections so strong that some of them led him to revise his own theory a few years later, while other more recent objections have put into question whether existentialism as a philosophy, even away from an ideal of "radical" freedom, can still hold. In this second section we will explore those different objections, starting with those made to Sartre's radical freedom, then moving on to those made to the broader concept of freedom.

[19] Though Camus reaches this conclusion in a different way, we could draw a parallel with his Sisyphus, who can and must *choose* to be happy rather than live in despair, as the only possible rebellion against his condition.
[20] Sartre, 77.
[21] Levy, 113.

§ 1: OBJECTIONS FROM A LESS "RADICAL" EXISTENTIALISM

Though Sartre is often regarded as a symbolic figure of existentialist philosophy, it is important to note that his version of existentialism was only one among several. Indeed, the enduring influence that Sartre has had on existentialism by virtue of his particularly radical ideas on freedom sometimes overshadows the fact that there were other existentialists at his time who contributed to the movement's evolution, namely by putting forward objections to Sartre's radicality, specifically to his overreliance on the concept of bad faith.[22] One of them is Beauvoir, who had a significant influence both on Sartre's philosophical career and personal life.

As Sonia Kruks explains in "Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom," Beauvoir never challenged Sartre's conception of freedom head-on. In fact, she based her own works on the central premises of *Being and Nothingness*—that it is wrong to abdicate one's freedom to a higher principle or power, and that all values emerge from our fundamental project— yet they led her to some "most un-Sartrean conclusions,"[23] namely concerning the question of oppression. Indeed, the fundamental disagreement between the philosophies of Sartre and Beauvoir is summarized in a passage from the latter's autobiography, *La force de l'âge* (1960), where she recalls the following discussion with Sartre back in 1940: while Beauvoir argued that "not every situation is equal: what transcendence is possible for a woman locked up in a harem?",

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[22] When I say other existentialists, I am mainly referring to Simone de Beauvoir and Franz Fanon, two other frontrunners of mid-20th century existentialism. In a more comprehensive paper, I would have included a discussion of both of their rich philosophies but given that the focus of this paper is on Sartre's concept of freedom, I will only discuss Beauvoir's ideas given that they directly influenced Sartre to revise his own. As for Fanon, he also interacted with Sartre in response to the latter's essay about the Négritude movement, "Black Orpheus" (1948). Beyond that, Fanon made significant contributions to existentialism—namely by bringing in the perspective of a racialized person's struggle with limitations imposed on their freedom— and should not be placed in the shadow of Sartre and Beauvoir. By not including him in this paper, I do not wish to contribute to giving Fanon that secondary status, but for our present purposes, a discussion of his ideas would make this paper unnecessarily longer than it already is.

[23] Kruks, Sonia. "Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom." *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987), 111.

Sartre maintained that "even such a cloistered existence could be lived in several different ways."[24] In a way, this fundamental disagreement is summarized in the comic above: what united them philosophically was their commitment to human freedom, but what distinguished them was the added "no matter what."

Beauvoir argued that there are situations of oppression in which the radical freedom that Sartre describes is denied and ceases to be possible. This is because freedoms are "not autonomous but interdependent."[25] In other words, my freedom depends on the Other's will: if the Other chooses to deny my freedom and objectify me, then I become the Other's object if I submit. "It is this interdependence [of freedoms] which explains why oppression is possible" and additionally "why it is hateful,"[26] as any attack on the value of human freedom is hateful from an existentialist perspective. In fact, as an existentialist, Beauvoir's conclusion is not that oppression entirely negates the freedom of the oppressed. As she explains in *The Second Sex*, dominant social groups try to make the one they subjugate into the Other, denying them their transcendence as they reduce them to the status of object, yet to fully become an object one has to *submit* to this objectification: "if the Other is not to regain the status of being the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view."[27] Thus, as long as the individual does not submit to this "othering," they do not lose their fundamental freedom entirely.

Still, to acknowledge that freedom can be limited, Beauvoir draws a distinction between *formal* freedom and *genuine* freedom. On the one hand, human beings have an ontological freedom that allows us to set our projects and modify them. Yet a freedom that does not actually allow us to fulfill our goals is merely "formal". As such, while a victim of oppression has the formal freedom to revolt against their condition, they have "genuine" or "moral" freedom only insofar as their project of revolt succeeds in emancipation, which, if achieved, would allow them to freely pursue their projects in the world. With this distinction, Beauvoir responds to the criticism made against existentialism that "the precept 'to will freedom' is only a hollow formula and offers no concrete

[24] Kruks, 111. Quoting from Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge,* Volume II, Gallimard (1947), p. 498.
[25] Kruks, 112. Paraphrasing Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas.*
[26] Kruks,112. Paraphrasing Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity.*
[27] Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated and Edited by H. M. Parshley. (London: Vintage Books, 1989), 9-10.

content for action."[28] Beyond this "hollow" freedom—the one implied in Sartre's claim that "the slave in chains is as free as his master"—the reality is that the power to make meaning in the world and freely choose between a range of options is not given to everyone equally: in some extreme cases of oppression, there may be only two options to choose from, one of them involving a high risk of death, which would be the ultimate negation of one's freedom. Beauvoir may agree with Sartre that the slave is as free as his master on the *formal* level, but the slave's *genuine* freedom is limited by a situation in which only submission or revolt is possible.

In this way, Beauvoir adds nuance to Sartre's theory of freedom with her concrete discussion of oppression, largely based on her analysis of the historical oppression of women by men. As Kruks explains, Beauvoir's thesis is that woman is locked into "immanence"[29]—the negation of Sartre's "transcendence"—by the situation that man imposes upon her, a situation which she is not necessarily responsible for. Indeed, although we could say that some women are acting in "bad faith" when they submit to their objectification, bad faith is not always the explanation: in Sartrean terms, women are always responsible for themselves no matter what, while in Beauvoirian terms, "for many there is no 'moral fault' because there is simply no possibility of choice."[30] This disagreement over personal responsibility highlights another aspect of Sartre's initial theory that Beauvoir disagreed with: emphasis on bad faith as the *only* valid explanation for people feeling constrained by circumstances which they experience.

In chapter 7 of *Rethinking Existentialism*, Sartre scholar Jonathan Webber argues that it is in their respective interpretations of the inferiority complex, a phenomenon identified in Freud's psychoanalysis,

[28] Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 2015), 84.

[29] Defined by Beauvoir as the falling back of the for-itself's consciousness into the in-itself (Kruks, 121).

[30] Kruks, "Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom," 114. Quoting from *The Second Sex*.

that we can clearly see how this disagreement plays out.[31] As Webber explains, the idea of an inferiority complex is central to Beauvoir's theory on the construction of gender through socialization: the idea that men are superior to women is instilled in young boys and girls by both male and female adults offering them different opportunities, encouraging them to do different activities, praising them for different actions, which results in so many women feeling a sense of inferiority to men. On the other hand, Sartre interprets the inferiority complex as a "project that some individuals freely choose," an *inferiority project.*[32] In his view, social values can structure one's existence "only through being internalized into the projects one has freely chosen and can abandon". In other words, as a woman I don't *need* to accept being categorized as part of an "inferior group", for I have "absolute freedom" to adopt projects that "attempt to disprove or [...] ignore" this categorization. However, to Sartre, most people are "committed to the project of bad faith", identifying themselves with a fixed set of characteristics as if these formed part of an essence that determined their behavior.[33] It follows, to him, that the only reason why we might feel inferior and limited is due to bad faith.

Beauvoir, on the other hand, finds an alternative explanation for people feeling constrained by their life circumstances: *sedimentation*,

[31] In chapter 5, Webber gives a more extensive account of both Sartre's and Beauvoir's articulations and interpretations of the inferiority complex, among other concepts taken from psychoanalysis. In fact, Webber argues that "existentialism is not fundamentally antagonistic to Freudian psychoanalysis, as is often claimed, but rather aims to provide better articulations and explanations of the phenomena that Freud identified than Freud himself achieved" (76). Webber's analysis reveals how, despite his hostility to Freud, Sartre actually preserved some Freudian insights, such as the inferiority complex, in his own existentialism, with the intention of better explaining them according to his own theory of mind. For more on the relationship between existentialism and psychoanalysis, see chapter 5 of *Rethinking Existentialism*.

[32] Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 86.

[33] Webber, 114-115.

a concept derived from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.[34] As Webber argues, Beauvoir's reliance on sedimentation rather than bad faith makes her theory of existentialism "preferable" to Sartre's "for a reason that seems to explain why Sartre went on to adopt Beauvoir's conception of sedimentation and revise his existentialism accordingly."[35] Indeed, Sartre's initial reliance on bad faith makes him unable to go beyond the individual to explain why members of certain social groups often have certain characteristics in common, such as an inferiority complex relative to another group. If he tried to use bad faith to explain the origins of those characteristics, he would have to explain why this bad faith is a common feature of people's outlook within one social group—but how?[36] It cannot be the result of a fixed essence, since existence precedes essence; nor can it be the result of some prior project of bad faith, because again we would need to ask why it was freely adopted by each individual within the group. Thus not only is this centrality of bad faith unfounded, it also suggests a sociologically inaccurate account of the origins of shared cultural values.[37]

A more accurate account, as Webber argues, could be built upon Beauvoir's idea of sedimentation. The argument for sedimentation goes as follows: in childhood, each individual experiences specific "opportunities, encouragements and discouragements" based on the values of their surrounding culture, experiences that will direct the individual towards projects that incorporate those values.[38] Those

[34] Merleau-Ponty coined the term 'sedimentation' in his book *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), where he writes that "the sedimentation of our mental operations [...] allows us to count on our acquired concepts and judgments, just as we count upon the things that are there and that are given as a whole, without our having to repeat their synthesis at each moment." According to him, "building up the layers of meaning through which subjects engage with the world and each other, rests on a 'double moment of sedimentation and spontaneity.'" (Pepper, Ken. "The Phenomenology of Sensorimotor Understanding." In Bishop, J., Martin, A. (eds) Contemporary Sensorimotor Theory. Studies in Applied Philosophy, Epistemology and Rational Ethics, vol 15. Springer, 2014. Quoting from Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. London: Routledge, 2012, 131-132.)

[35] Webber, 116.

[36] Webber, 116.

[37] The insufficiency of bad faith when it comes to explaining the origins of shared values is explored in more detail by Webber in chapter 7 of *Rethinking Existentialism*, with a critical analysis of Sartre's attempt to ground cultural characteristics common to Jewish people in his essay *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948).

[38] Meanwhile, "childhood plays no special role in the formation of the individual" in Sartre's initial existentialism, according to Webber.

projects and the values within them then become "sedimented," or internalized within the individual's psyche at an age where they adopt projects based on influence. Once they become mature enough to adopt projects on the basis of critical reflection, they will be influenced by those sedimented values. Thereafter, new projects that contradict these values can be adopted in theory, but only after considerable time and "pursuit of these projects" can they become sufficiently sedimented to counteract the older ones. Thus, it is with sedimentation that Beauvoir can explain how "woman" has been constructed as the Other—"the second sex"—through a long history of male domination, conditioning female individuals to be passive and dependent, and rigid gender roles that reinforce those values.[39] Meanwhile, Sartre's initial existentialism cannot account for the empirical social fact of women's secondary status. To avoid this problem without abandoning existentialism altogether, Webber argues, Sartre needed to replace his overreliance on bad faith with Beauvoir's idea of sedimentation—which, as we will see, he eventually did.

As explained above, Beauvoir's idea of sedimentation has the potential to save existentialism from objections made to Sartre's radical freedom. Indeed, "social forces are extremely powerful"[40] and cannot be overlooked by a strictly individualistic account of responsibility. At this point, it is important to insist that Beauvoir's analysis does not conclude that sedimentation and oppression negate freedom: she offers a more nuanced, realistic account of freedom than Sartre, but with no less emphasis on the moral value of embracing one's freedom—for example, through participation in collective revolt against a shared condition.[41]

§ 2: OBJECTIONS FROM NEUROSCIENCE

So far, we have posited human freedom as a central inescapable necessity: without freedom, there can be no existentialism and both Beauvoir's and Sartre's entire philosophies would be rendered obsolete. Yet what if we had reason to posit determinism, specifically incompatibilist determinism, as a central, inescapable necessity? Then

[39] Prinz, Jesse. "Moral Sedimentation." Essay. In *Neuroexistentialism: Meaning, Morals, and Purpose in the Age of Neuroscience* , 87–108 (Oxford University Press, 2018), 91-92.

[40] Prinz, "Moral Sedimentation," 92.

[41] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* 93.

we would have to accept that all events, including human decisions and actions, are predetermined and causally inevitable, which is incompatible with the idea of free will, and that therefore free will is nothing but an illusion— human beings do not *really* have the capacity to choose freely and independently. We would have to rule out existentialism premise by premise: asserting that *essence* precedes (even determines) existence, that there can be no such thing as "authenticity" since there is no genuine freedom of choice. We would have to rule out, paradoxically, that the only possible form of authenticity is living in what Sartre would call bad faith, which in this case would come down to recognizing the different forms of determinism that make me unfree rather than self-deceptively asserting the illusion that I am free. For Sartreans, this reversal of ideas seems inconceivable and yet, contemporary cognitive science forces us to seriously consider it. In this subsection, we will explore several such objections to human freedom based on findings in neuroscience.

When it comes to "radical" freedom, scientific objections are overwhelmingly obvious: as Levy writes, "Sartre's optimism about agency conflicts with contemporary science."[42] For Sartre, the mind and consciousness are one and the same, and consciousness is "essentially free"[43] from anything that could constrain or even guide it. Yet contemporary findings in cognitive science have revealed that the mind is *not* "essentially free" or "essentially independent" from external influences. Furthermore, unconscious processes—which Sartre rejected[44]—suggest that a large part of our mind is "opaque to introspection": we consider ourselves to be affirming values "that have no foundation beyond our choice," when these values may actually reflect "deep-seated unconscious impulses"[45]—echoing Beauvoir's idea of sedimented values, though with more scientific backing and different conclusions. Indeed, Beauvoir used sedimentation to explain why historically marginalized groups have limited freedom; here, the presence of unconscious processes in the mind suggest that human beings are not free *at all* by showing how little control we really have over our thoughts and actions.

Levy illustrates this with the idea of modularity of mind. Though a popular conception of the mind treats the conscious mind,

42 Levy, "Choices Without Choosers: Toward a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism," 114.
43 Levy, 114.
44 Levy, 114.
45 Levy, 114.

or self, as a kind of "control center"[46]— a "CEO" that delegates tasks to other parts of the brain—while the unconscious is like a rogue force that doesn't report to the "CEO" but doesn't offset the latter's control over the mind either, contemporary cognitive science tells us that there is no such control center: rather, "the mind consists of nothing but such unintelligent mechanisms" as those supposedly directed by a "CEO" that does not exist. In other words, there is no unified self in control, just a collection of automated mechanisms or modules. There is "extensive" evidence in favor of this modularity of mind,[47] an idea that conflicts with our conception of ourselves as a unified self, or "chooser" from an existentialist perspective.

Do the ideas of authenticity and genuine choice still hold in the face of this dissolution of the self into a multiplicity of modules? As Levy explains, if our moment-to-moment decision making is indeed shaped by the multiplicity of modules which constitute us and that are "obscured from consciousness", then under many conditions those modules will shape our choice while causing us to have false views about the reasons behind our choice—a form of unconscious self-deception or "confabulation."[48] Sartre maintained that man is radically free as long as he has a consciousness, but what if the very notion of consciousness becomes hardly accessible or controllable? The existentialist conception of human beings as "unified agents making choices for reasons" that we can justify is thus challenged by empirical findings which we can hardly deny.

If you, naive Sartrean, feel anguished when confronted with this kind of antithesis, wait until you hear what hard determinist Robert Sapolsky has to say about human freedom. The title of his recent book says it all: "*Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will*." As one of the leading researchers in neuroendocrinology today, his thesis against free will is worryingly strong in that, contrary to Sartre's phenomenological method, it relies on extensive empirical research on the human brain. As such, when he asserts that "there is no free will" or at least that "there is much *less* free will than generally assumed," we are compelled to listen.[49]

[46] Levy, 114.
[47] Levy, 116.
[48] Levy, 119.
[49] Sapolsky, Robert M.. *Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will.* Penguin Press, 2023, 15.

Sapolsky's thesis rests on the idea that "nothing comes from nothing": when I behave in a particular way, it is due to "the determinism that came before, which was caused by the determinism just before that", and so on. There is no causeless, undetermined behavior that I may want to attribute to my free will, because free will is an illusion: I am as I am as a result of "the biology over which [I] had no control, interacting with the environment over which [I] had no control."[50] Explaining why a certain behavior occurred requires looking at what factors the agent was influenced by during their adolescence, when a key region in their brain was still being shaped by "socialization and acculturation"; it may require looking further back to how childhood experiences shaped the construction of their brain, and even further back to the genes they inherited.[51] Once again, this somewhat echoes Beauvoir's emphasis on the role of early life experiences and circumstances outside of our control—such as an abusive parent—in shaping our adult self, but with more scientific backing and drastically different conclusions, as well as different premises, considering Sapolsky's belief in an "inherited" essence.

As for Sartre, his main ideas can be reformulated in polar opposite form by Sapolsky: man is not "what he makes of himself"[52] rather "nothing more or less than the cumulative biological and environmental luck over which [he] has no control."[53] Existence does not precede essence, rather the other way around, given that we are not born as a blank slate but with a particular genome that, together with environmental influences, "determines" our behavior. The only point on which Sartre would agree with Sapolsky is that "there is nothing but an empty, indifferent universe" which we will eventually fade into, yet their conclusions from that premise are expectedly incompatible: Sartre would say that, for as long as it exists, the self is much more than a collection of atoms, rather the independent source of all meaning in the universe—"uncaused causes who are the foundation of all values" in Levy's terms[54]—while Sapolsky considers the so-called self to be nothing but a temporary arrangement of atoms that we each call "Me".[55] Sartre and Saposky may also agree that people's brains and behaviors

[50] Sapolsky, 11.
[51] Sapolsky, 12.
[52] Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme,* 30.
[53] Sapolsky, 13.
[54] Levy, "Choices Without Choosers: Toward a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism," 113.
[55] Sapolsky, 360.

can change through life, but while the former would articulate that in terms of freely chosen projects subject to change, the latter maintains that the science of change "doesn't counter this being a deterministic world without free will."[56] In short, the two may have a couple premises in common, but not a single conclusion.

This essentially comes down to a debate between free will and determinism. For Sapolsky, to be human is not to be "condemned to be free" but to be condemned to be determined despite *believing* that we are free. As he observes, belief in free will is extremely prevalent: it is at the root of all social practices and institutions—including the justice system which punishes criminals based on the assumption that they are responsible for their crimes. For Sapolsky, this widespread assumption shows that, faced with harsh truths about existence, humans have developed "a robust capacity for self-deception", which "includes a belief in free will."[57] From this perspective, adhering to existentialism is a ironically a form of self-deception since in Sartrean terms, to adhere not to existentialism but to a form of determinism that does not posit man as a free and responsible agent is a form of bad faith, or self-deception. Conversely, to be "authentic" from Sapolsky's perspective would be to "face our lack of free will,"[58] or to at least begin to question our certitude of ourselves and others as free by attempting to make the "radical changes" in our thinking and feeling that a lack of freedom would imply.

At this point, the case for human freedom, let alone radical freedom, seems like a mere delusion. How can we genuinely see ourselves as free agents considering the empirical facts of social, biological, and neuronal determinism? Faced with sedimentation, modularity of mind and the debunked idea of causeless behavior, should we follow Sapolsky's recommendation to face our lack of free will by reorienting ourselves towards determinism, giving up our conception of ourselves as "choosers" and accepting ourselves as temporary arrangements of atoms determined by various forces over which we have no control?

§ III: "EVEN THEN! I WOULD BE FREE TO INTERPRET MY CONDITION": SARTRE'S REVISED CONCEPT

56 Sapolsky, 23-24
57 Sapolsky, 362.
58 Sapolsky, 365.

OF FREEDOM BASED ON BEAUVOIR'S THEORY OF SEDIMENTATION, AND WHY THIS EXISTENTIALISM CAN AND *SHOULD* BE RETAINED TODAY

Direct confrontation with texts like Sapolsky's might trigger such a felt necessity of reorientation towards "a life without free will", but it doesn't *need* to trigger a fundamental reorientation of our self-perception and behavior—nor do I think it should. In this final section, I will argue that without blindly rejecting what is widely accepted today about the human brain and the extent to which genes and past experiences shape it, it is possible and even morally desirable to hold on to a nuanced version of radical freedom, conserving the moral imperative against bad faith, only without the now outdated conception of ourselves as "*totalement libres*."

§ 1: ON SARTRE'S DERADICALIZED FREEDOM

Before we elaborate on this nuanced version of radical freedom, it is important to insist that Sartre himself came to recognize the limits of his initial concept of freedom. Thereafter, he revised and "deradicalized" it to include the sedimentation of values, which he took from Beauvoir, as a more coherent basis for projects than bad faith. According to Webber, this more "mature" Sartrean existentialism made its first notable appearance in Sartre's biography of vagabond and thief turned writer and political activist Jean Genet, published in 1952.

In *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, Sartre analyzes Genet's character, lifestyle and writings as "expressions of a single complex project rooted in childhood"—an explanation he would never have given a few years earlier when his theory implied that childhood plays no fundamental role in the formation of the individual. According to this analysis, Genet's project was born from the social environment and moral values he was exposed to as a child: raised by a family of poor peasants after his mother abandoned him, with the value of property (among others) instilled into him, he finds a way to acquire some property by committing petty thefts early on, for which he is labeled a "thief."[59] Over the years, "he comes to accept that this judgment correctly identities his

[59] Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 17. Quoted in Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 126.

essential nature"[60] (note here Sartre's mention of essence and nature); by internalizing society's moral judgment of him based on actions that his childhood led him towards, society had "penetrated to the very bottom of his heart."[61]

This instance of sedimentation, Sartre argues, partly explains why Genet continued to violate society's moral code throughout his life, accepting this socially attributed "essence" rather than resisting it—a form of submission which former Sartre might have qualified as bad faith. Yet here he treats it as a "conversion" based on a *conscious* decision to embrace society's judgment of him, which becomes sedimented as Genet's outlook is "gradually transformed by his repeatedly deciding to embrace his supposed evil nature"[62] as a thief in the eyes of society. This is the "project" that Genet becomes committed to, and the sedimentation underlying that project makes Sartre qualify it as a "prison without bars": Genet's commitment to being a thief does not make him unable of adopting "new points of view entailing new commitments," but those would not displace "the original attitude" towards himself, so deeply internalized that it "continues to influence thought and action."[63] As such, Sartre's revised concept of freedom recognizes the power of social forces, as Beauvoir did before him, while remaining attached to the imperative of embracing our capacity to "make" ourselves, to a certain extent: "we are not lumps of clay," he writes, "and what is important is not what people make of us but what we ourselves make of what they have made of us."[64]

With sedimentation, Sartre no longer relies on bad faith to explain why we are sometimes unaware of our motivations or why we sometimes feel constrained. He now agrees with Beauvoir that we experience this when our deeply sedimented values conflict with our more recently endorsed values. He also corrects the incoherence of grounding a theory of shared cultural values on bad faith by showing how the values of one's social environment, such as Genet's peasant origins, can become sedimented in one's outlook early on, creating the "prison without bars." For these ideas he credits Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. He does not, however, entirely abandon his own version of existentialism in favor of Beauvoir's: his theory of bad faith and his

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[60] Webber, 126.
[61] Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 21. Quoted in Webber, 126.
[62] Webber, 127.
[63] Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 69. Quoted in Webber, 127.
[64] Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 49. Quoted in Webber, 127.

claim that it is widespread remain, only now he is able to explain that widespread adoption of bad faith "in terms of its sedimentation" as a value.[65]

§ 2: ON THE MORAL VALUE OF HOLDING ON TO OUR BELIEF IN FREE WILL AND APPLYING EXISTENTIALIST INSIGHTS TO TODAY'S WORLD

Despite this "deradicalization", Sartre is still not immune to caricaturesque comics: first, because he remains popularly associated with his earlier "radical" freedom; and second, because other objections can be brought even against his more socially conscious concept of freedom insofar as the very notion of human freedom has become seriously problematic considering contemporary cognitive science, as discussed above.

These objections and the evidence behind them push us towards a most un-existentialist conclusion: that us human beings, supposedly capable of transcendence, are actually nothing more than our *facticity*. As defined by Sartre and explained by Webber, facticity is "the set of one's own physical features and the physical and social features of one's situation" or "the facts that one has to deal with."[66] Hence to say that we are nothing more than our facticity is to say, joining Sapolsky's thesis, that we are nothing more than the biological and environmental *facts* that shaped us and over which we have no control. While the influence of biological and environmental factors, as well as of sedimentation, on our brain cannot be reasonably denied, I would like to further the existentialist idea that we are *more* than our facticity: that no, we are not "determined" to remain stuck with the facts of our current situation unless we convince ourselves that we are, which is where I think Sartre's concept of bad faith can still be of value.

From a Sartrean perspective, human existence is structured by projects, which we choose in the context of our multi-layered facticity. Additionally, as Webber writes, the projects we choose to pursue "can either transform that facticity or simply maintain it."[67] As such, I *can* be

65 Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 33-36. Paraphrased in Webber, 128.
66 Webber, 191.
67 Webber, 191

more than my facticity if I pursue a project that aims to transcend it.[68] My choice of that project may still be influenced by sedimented values,[69] but then again, all projects are, to a certain degree, sedimented. We may become conscious of the effects of that sedimentation—for example, I may become aware of an inferiority complex— and thereafter it is *possible* to pursue a project that aims to overcome those sedimented values woven into my facticity.

Indeed, the "chooser" may be just a collection of automated modules as Levy argues, or determined by a range of factors according to Sapolsky, but the fact is that in practice, I am still the one who does the action of choosing a project based on what I perceive as my reasons, and then acting accordingly. From a consequentialist perspective, it doesn't really matter whether my choice was determined by this or that underlying factor: as long as I *believe* that I have the power to construct my own existence, rather than perceiving myself as determined and powerless due to some negative childhood experience or membership to some social group, I am less likely to turn biological and social factors into obstacles *in themselves* and then partly impose those limits on myself. This is similar to how Beauvoir argued that one can only become fully objectified if one submits to that objectification.

As such, insofar as it is *possible* to choose a project that transcends my facticity, we must recognize that facticity *can* be transformed, and that I am the only one who can make that effort for myself. To a certain extent, I *can* transcend the different forces that some might say "determine" me. This is neither naive nor idealistic when you consider different examples of real individuals who have achieved emancipation from constraining situations. Take Malala Yousafzai: when the Taliban took over and prohibited girls like her from going to school, did she submit? On the contrary, she resisted by speaking out publicly in favor of girls' right to learn – which made her a target. At the age of 15,

[68] Except in certain situations of oppression where one's options are significantly reduced due to physical constraints. I won't go on here about the possibility of emancipation from situations of oppression as my present purpose is to make a more general argument supporting the possibility to transcend one's facticity. For more on the possibility of liberation from oppression, I recommend Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity.*

[69] For example, in *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir argues that only through paid employment can women regain the transcendence that male domination has historically denied them, but in her time and still in some places today most of the options available for paid employment became known as pink collar jobs for requiring more "female" skills.

when the ban on girls' education had just been lifted, she was shot by a masked gunman on her way back from a school exam. Yet despite this near-death experience which she survived, she still chose to continue her activism, eventually becoming the world-renowned advocate she is today. Young Malala could have accepted her facticity by submitting to the ban without pushback – with reason, given the danger of resisting – but instead she *chose* to pursue a project that transformed her facticity. In other words, Malala's ontological transcendence remained within her, despite being "degraded into immanence"[70] by those who tried to take away her fundamental freedom to choose her own course of life.[71]

With this example in support of my argument against Sapolsky's determinism and in favor of defending a nuanced form of radical freedom, my intention is not to reject the empirical fact of social inequalities, or the years of neurological research conducted by neuroscientists like Sapolsky. Rather, it is to warn against the concrete danger of confusing unlikelihood with impossibility. It was *unlikely* for Malala to rise against the Taliban considering the risks involved, yet she did. Therefore, transcending one's facticity is not *impossible*. Similarly, it is not *impossible* to transcend sedimented values, but what is certain is that taking it to be impossible will remove that possibility altogether. Merleau-Ponty once argued that, although we can free ourselves from sediments, their deep "embodiment" in our practices and cultures renders such self-emancipation "unlikely." Going back to the inferiority complex, he argued that after having built his life upon the latter, "continuously reinforced for twenty years, it is not *likely* that I would change," given this "commitment" to inferiority.[72] Of course, if I tell myself that I am "committed" to inferiority, then I will remain as such and act accordingly. Having never considered the *possibility* of working through that sedimented belief, I might live my whole life as a victim of my inferiority complex, with all the missed opportunities that entails: for example, not applying to top universities because I don't believe I could ever be accepted, or never feeling secure in relationships because I don't believe I deserve love. Following this thought pattern further

70 Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 191. Citing ideas from Beauvoir, *The Second Sex.*

71 Her father being an education activist and encouraging her to not limit herself certainly influenced her, but in no way did it *determine* her to become an activist herself. In a way, her father's influence gave her (positive) sedimented values that contributed to her project of resistance, but that project was certainly not her only option.

72 Mearleau-Ponty, Maurice. (1945) *The Phenomenology of Perception,* Routledge, 2012, 466-467. bQuoted in Prinz, "Moral Sedimentation," 89.

sediments those beliefs and convinces me that I am forever stuck with my facticity, when in fact it is *possible* to overcome a deeply ingrained inferiority complex; it would certainly be a psychological challenge and it may require years of therapy , but it is not *impossible*.

My fundamental issue with arguments like Sapolsky's and even Merleau-Ponty's is that, by pushing us to reduce ourselves to our facticity and deny ourselves our own *possibility* of transcendence, they encourage us to invoke past experiences as excuses for acting a certain way and refusing to change, as if we were incapable of change. For example, although it has been shown that children who grow up with unfaithful parents are statistically more likely to cheat on their own partners,[73] there is no direct causal link between having unfaithful parents and committing infidelity ourselves. Yet it's an easy form of excuse that allows a cheater to paint themselves as the victim of circumstances outside of their control, thus avoiding responsibility and justifying any future infidelity on the same basis. In Sartrean terms, this is a form of 'bad faith' – convincing oneself that one had no choice but to act in a certain way, that there is a necessary *causal* link between past and present at play, when really, past events *in themselves* do not determine me to commit a wrongdoing in the present. Suppose you learn that your partner had an affair (within an otherwise healthy relationship), and they justify themselves by saying they had no other choice, that they were 'determined' to cheat for whatever reason. I doubt anyone (except for hard determinists like Sapolsky, and even then) would accept this as a valid excuse from their own partner. Yet it is not uncommon for us to use these kinds of excuses for actions that could have been avoided, including but not limited to cheating. In that sense, I join Sartre in arguing that the denial of one's own freedom in 'bad faith' is an unfortunately widespread social phenomenon.

Now there is a way to transcend this phenomenon of which we have all been guilty at times, and this is where I join Webber in arguing that existentialism can still have an important value today, despite scientific and sociological objections made to it. Webber's argument is that the "canonical" version of existentialism, based on *The Second Sex*, *Saint Genet,* as well as Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, has "the potential to make significant contributions to moral thought, philosophy

[73] Weiser, D. A., Weigel, D. J., Lalasz, C. B., & Evans, W. P. (2015). Family Background and Propensity to Engage in Infidelity. *Journal of Family Issues*, *38*(15), 2083-2101.

of mind, social psychology and psychotherapy."[74] This "canonical" existentialism does not treat the individual as *"totalement libre",* nor as the "mere product of social forces," but "combines the freedom to revise the values that shape one's outlook with the sedimentation of one's projects over time."[75] According to Webber, empirical psychology supports this core claim, and indeed existentialist perspectives have the potential to contribute to both the philosophy of mind and procedures of psychotherapy.[76] On a more individual level, I would add that such existentialist perspectives as Beauvoir's argument for the moral imperative of acting authentically can help us confront the values and experiences that make up our facticity and work to transcend those that keep us down (or at least know that it is possible). In this way, we may enlarge our horizon of possibilities, allowing ourselves to dream big and aim high in our projects, and catching ourselves whenever we are tempted to fall into bad faith. As Levy eloquently writes, while "we are all tempted to confuse convention with nature" and "social facts for fixed regularities", the existentialist call to "face up to our freedom" and "recognize that we have options" is "salutary" in that it "can lead us to live more reflectively and more responsibly."[77]

So, is the slave as free as his master? The prisoner as free as his captor? Early Sartre would have argued that, although the slave may not have the same freedom to *obtain* due to physical constraints, he would have the same freedom to *choose* at the very least his interpretation of his situation. In less extreme situations, however, there is no "excuse" for considering oneself unfree: we always have the moral imperative to act authentically. While Beauvoir also believed in this moral imperative, she objected that not every individual is equally capable of turning their *formal* freedom into *genuine* freedom, namely due to sedimentation. We saw how Sartre then revised his radicality considering this objection. Yet he continued to face objections given his existentialist commitment to human freedom, a concept which contemporary cognitive science seriously challenges. Faced with this challenge, this paper has argued in favor of holding on to our conception of ourselves as free agents to

[74] Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 188.
[75] Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 192.
[76] For more on this argument that I find quite original and interesting but won't explore in too much detail here, I recommend Chapter 11 of Webber's *Rethinking Existentialism.*
[77] Levy, "Choices Without Choosers: Toward a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism," 119.

give ourselves the *possibility* of transcending the facticity which the objections above reduce us to. This paper has also made the case for conserving Sartre's "bad faith" within a more nuanced version of radical freedom.

At this point, one might find it contradictory for me to still speak of "radical" freedom after so many have objected to it, and Sartre himself later "deradicalized" his concept of human freedom. My response would be that, in an era where more and more scientific findings on the human brain give strong support for the thesis of determinism, any degree of belief in free will may be considered "radical." Yet if being a radical in this context means believing in our individual power to rise above our circumstances like Malala did and give ourselves a chance at living a better life, rather than constantly making excuses that limit our own potential, then we should all be radical existentialists.

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OF EXPERIENCE AND BEING: APOPOS OF THIS AND THAT

AN ANALYSIS FROM DAOISM TO HEIDEGGER

SHEA DIVOLL

§ 1: TO BE

"God is absolute nothingness. God is not, however, mere nothingness. An immovable unifying activity clearly functions at the base of the establishment of reality, and it is by means of this activity that reality is established."

—*Nishida Kitarō* 西田 幾多郎 *in An Inquiry Into the Good*

善の研究

§ 1.1: *YELLOW-RED-BLUE*

I AM. Just two words. Two words so important, though, that they have come to mean God in one of the largest religions in the world.[1] The idea of Being[2], of the I-am-ness, the you-are-ness, and the it-is-ness underlies the premises of philosophy in a few different ways. On one-hand, much of language is structured implicitly around Being, the type of Being that lets humans describe things and people; it is the Being that says a certain cat *is* brown, or she *is* intelligent. Inasmuch as philosophy rests on the shoulders of language, it is thus subject to Being.Alternatively, there are also more subtle questions that define a more tacit manifestation of Being. What makes a being a being? How does a being be? Or, is the Being of different beings the same fundamental Being? Questions like these are, in part, the foundation of religion and philosophy. Consequently, it is reasonable to desire firm answers to the questions of Being, or at the very least, to inquire for a deeper understanding of Being. The man who perhaps spent the longest time addressing these que tions of Being was Martin Heidegger, a twentieth-century philosopher who laid the groundwork for most of modern philosophical discourse. By first explicating the context Heidegger arose in, then the philosophy he constructed, in addition to important ideas in classical Daoism, I will soon show how classical Daoist ideas like wuwei and equipmentality[3] seeped deeply into the works of Heidegger. Contrary to popular belief on the subject, I intend to demonstrate that Daoist sources had a clear influence on Heidegger's *early* work, including *Being and Time*.

[1] This refers to the use of "'Εγώ εἰμί" in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. The phrase builds off of Exodus 3:14 in the Torah where God claims "I Am that I Am", or in Hebrew, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh". Hence, at a very early point in the development of Western culture, inasmuch as that term is applicable, the idea of Being was at the forefront of religious and philosophical thought. See "Christianity" by Hogg et al or "'I Am Who I Am'? The meaning of God's Name in Exodus" by LeFebvre for a more in depth discussion of this topic.

[2] From here on, I am going to use Heidegger's convention of capitalizing Being, primarily because of its centrality to ontology and existence. The convention of capitalizing Being is remarkably similar to the convention for writing "God"; and to this end, Dr. Michael Sugrue's lecture "Heidegger: Being and Time" on YouTube raises a fascinating point on how Heidegger's treatment of the word "Being" mirrors a Christian's treatment of the word God. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MaobMHescwg.

[3] Equipmentality is not in itself a classical Daoist idea. However, the paradigm of equipmentality that is later shown to be present in classical Daoism is the same paradigm Heidegger uses.

§ 1.2: WANDERER ABOVE THE SEA OF FOG

Born in the late nineteenth century, Martin Heidegger grew up in a Roman Catholic family in Meßkirch, Germany, whereupon he began training to be a priest in 1903. After leaving the program due to health issues, he shortly thereafter began to study the questions of Being. Heidegger found himself reflecting on the ontology of Aristotle, traditional Catholic theology, modern Protestant thinkers including Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Luther, as well as many other Western philosophical thinkers. By 1927, he published *Being and Time* (Sein und Zeit), and established himself as an important name in philosophy.

A cursory glance through *Being and Time*, however, will raise some issues. Despite his elaborate education, we immediately see a stark contrast between his education and his philosophy. Consider the following quote:

> This undifferentiated character of Dasein's everydayness is *not nothing*, but a positive phenomenal characteristic of this entity.[4]

Where did this diction and syntax come from? For Heidegger to have such a learned vocabulary in ontology, one would certainly assume he had an education which made him proficient in such terms. And in part, he *did* have some education in ontology, especially as he was a pupil of Edmund Husserl. Yet, if we follow the narrative of Martin Heidegger as a Catholic-turned-philosopher, it comes off as a non-sequitur for him to have such an emphasis strictly on Being. Although figures like Saint Augustine come from a Catholic tradition and discuss ontology, Heidegger approaches ontology from a paradigm completely opposed to Christian education, rejecting and changing many premises Augustine would consider fundamental. To emphasize my point:

[4] Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, ed. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1962), 69, http://pdf-objects.com/files/Heidegger-Martin-Being-and-Time-trans.-Macquarrie-Robinson-Blackwell-1962.pdf. The excerpt essentially means that Dasein, which translates roughly as Being-there, is not less relevant because of how worldly it is, rather it is more defined. However, the quote was only provided to demonstrate the vocabulary of Martin Heidegger.

> The Interpretation in which the "not-yet—and with it even the uttermost "not-yet", the end of Dasein—was taken in the sense of something still outstanding, has been rejected as inappropriate in that it included the ontological perversion of making Dasein something present-at-hand. Being-at-an-end implies existentially Being-towards-the-end.[5]

Again, there is room for a reasonable amount of creativity and ingenuity on Heidegger's part; nevertheless, his turn toward the ideas and concepts of Being and Time appears out of left field. However, this is only surprising under the paradigm highlighted thus far of Heidegger as a Christian-turned-philosopher—and yet this is precisely the wrong paradigm. Although Heidegger commonly wrote on traditionally "Western" dialogues,[6] he did have significant Eastern influences, especially Daoism. For instance, "Heidegger's 'A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer' (1959) confirms that this engagement [with Daoism] goes back to as early as 1921,"[7] which is far before the publishing of Being and Time. Furthermore, at a dinner party in the 1930s,Heidegger asked his host for *Parables of Zhuangzi* (*Reden und gleichnisse des Tschuang-Tse*), which he then gave a garrulous speech on.[8] In some of Heidegger's later works, he created the word *Weg* to mean a path or way, and it has striking similarities to the Chinese *Dao* (note that Heidegger himself compared *Weg* to the Greek *hodós*).[9] Additionally, he cited the *Laozi* 老子 many times throughout his papers. Not only this, but he was so well acquainted with Daoist texts that he intentionally utilized parallelism between his writing and early Daoist texts. In one text, "Heidegger's 'Geheimnis aller Geheimnisse' is a reference to *xuan zhi you xuan*

[5] Heidegger, Being and Time, 293. Here, Heidegger is discussing how Dasein relates with Being-towards-death and Being-towards-the-end, which is a bit out of the scope of this paper. Like the above excerpt, this is included strictly to emphasize the writing style of Martin Heidegger.

[6] In terms of published works, Heidegger directly addressed Western philosophers in *Kant and The Problem of Metaphysics* in 1929, *Nietzsche* in 1961, *Hegel's Concept of Experience* in 1970, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1988, *Parmenides* in 1992, *Plato's Sophist* in 1992, *Heraclitus Seminar* in 1993, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* in 1997, and *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* in 2001.

[7] Eric S. Nelson, "Heidegger's Daoist Turn," Research in Phenomenology 49, no. 3 (2019): 363, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26843235?seq=5.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Tobias Keiling, "Way (Weg)," in The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 813-814; Nelson, "Heidegger's Daoist Turn," 363.

玄之又玄"[10] from the *Laozi*. All in all, there is significant evidence developing the connection between Martin Heidegger and Daoism, especially classical Daoism (to the extent that the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* 莊子[11] are pillars of classical Daoism).[12]

§ 1.3: THE SCREAM OF NATURE

With an understanding of Martin Heidegger's academic background, I will now give a selection of passages from Being and Time that are useful in later understanding how he may have had "hidden" sources.[13]

Heidegger believed that the question of Being was central to philosophy. Thus, the primary concern for his philosophy was the primordial question of Being and the lack of an authentic approach to this question. To understand this exigence:

> The question of Being aims therefore at ascertaining the *a priori* conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such a type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of Being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations. *Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its*

[10] Nelson, "Heidegger's Daoist Turn," 365. "Geheimnis aller Geheimnisse" means the "mystery within the mystery", however the meaning changes significantly depending on the base language.

[11] It may be worth noting here that although the Zhuangzi is historically said to be written by a figure named Zhuangzi, historians actually consider it an anthology with many sections by different authors. I will herein refer to the authors of the Zhuangzi as the single person named Zhuangzi, because this is useful in discussing the book and is valid insofar as the authors can all be approximated by a single name.

[12] It is worth noting that my use of Daoism, and even classical Daoism, in reference to Heidegger could be too broad. Explicitly, Heidegger interacted with the Laozi and Zhuangzi exclusively, leading Graham Park on page 13 of "Thoughts on the Way" to refer to Heidegger's Daoist influences as the works of Lao-Zhuang. So, although I may reference Daoism and classical Daoism, when referring to Heidegger, I am more so talking about the Lao-Zhuang authors.

[13] This is an allusion to an interesting book about Heidegger's relationship with East-Asian philosophy called *Heidegger's Hidden Sources, East-Asian Influences on his Work* by Reinhard May.

> *ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task.*[14]

Essentially, the *Being of beings* is a concern for Heidegger, and the attempt to understand this is a nearly impossible task; as each approximation of true Being is coming from a being and a web of presuppositions surrounding Being. Thus, an authentic mode or system of ontology is concerned with the Being of beings, while an inauthentic one would pervert the meaning or purpose of ontology, often resulting in onticology.[15]

The lack of a sufficient answer to the questions of Being has, in Heidegger's account, been due to the lack of bias-free approaches to the question. The pre-Socratic philosophers such as Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides had discourses in ontology which (at least in Heidegger's opinion) were free from negative linguistic and cultural assumptions.[16] Thus, in ontology, this meant that the pre-Socratics started from the point of view that we exist and built out what that means from there. However, following Socrates, and especially following Plato with his Theory of Forms, the assumptions philosophers made in ontology began to shift. Instead of considering what it means to exist *right now,* many philosophers started from the assumption that there is an afterlife, and found the meaning of existence to be a combination of the afterlife with the current life, the divine with the sublime, or something of that sort. This was only magnified by the growth of religions such as Christianity

[14] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31. The emphasis in this quote is directly from the source, it is not mine.

[15] The term "onticology" is a play on Heidegger's distinction between the ontological and the ontic. Contrary to its popular use, Heidegger used ontic to relate something to a being, while ontology regarded the Being of a being. Thus, I am presenting onticology as the study of being, rather than Being.

[16] See Glenn W. Most, "Heidegger's Greeks," (n.d.), 85, https://www.bu.edu/arion/files/2010/03/Greeks-Most.pdf. Most highlights Heidegger's pre-Socratic influence by describing the nature in which Heidegger adopted specifically non-Platonic and non-Aristotelian ideas from the ancient Greeks, going as far as calling the Greeks as Heidegger's "Pagan Gospel".

and Islam, which both further propagated this mode of ontology.[17] For Heidegger, Being-towards-divinity or Being-towards- transcendence was *necessarily* skewing ontology; as he believed that ontology should start from the most fundamental aspects of Being, then build up. Due to the historical prevalence of the aforementioned religions (and their proselytizing nature), Western philosophers often interpreted divine and out-of-this-world notions as being fundamental aspects of Being - even when a more fundamental aspect would stem from simply Being-in-the-world, thus “polluting” Western ontology.

Hence, the starting place of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy is his rejection of most of Western ontology and the need for a completely new foundation of ontology. First, Heidegger’s philosophy requires a new word—*Dasein*.[18] Dasein roughly translates as “Being-there,” which represents the fact that a human’s understanding of Being only exists insofar as they understand Being through the lens of a human being’s Being. As a construct, Being itself is inaccessible.[19] Thus, Dasein represents this underlying sense of Being-as-experienced, in contrast to Being proper:

> Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein's

[17] *The Six Enneads* by Plotinus began the thought-system of Neoplatonism, which led to the Western focus on forms of ontology which do not prioritize Being itself. *Neoplatonism in Relation to Christianity: An Essay* by C. Elsee is a good resource for understanding how Neoplatonism affected Christian theology during Christianity’s formative years. For Islam, see *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought* edited by Parviz Morewedge to understand this dynamic. More precisely, John 3:16 of The Bible is a good example of Being-towards-divinity in Christianity; and for Islam, The Qur’an 29:64 likewise endorses Being-towards-divinity. In both cases, the holy texts advocate for the afterlife being the purpose of this life, and thus ontology from these frameworks starts with framing humanity’s existence in terms of pursuing the afterlife, when in fact there is a current life we could frame ontology in.

[18] Though Dasein can be translated as “Being-there”, and it is translated as such once in the above text, I will leave it untranslated for the majority of the essay because a translation only serves to misrepresent the context for which Heidegger invented the word.

[19] The inaccessibility of Being is still a topic in contemporary literature, as the incredible work of Thomas Nagel in *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?* emphasizes the limitations of ontology. No amount of scholarship could uncover the similarities in the Being of a human and the Being of a bat. As a fact, there is no basis for understanding what it is like to have wings, what echolocation as a sensory perception feels like, etc.

> Being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being— a relationship which itself is one of Being.[20]

Referring back to his critique of historical Western ontology, Heidegger would argue (and to an extent did argue this in other places)[21] that the object of Being, whose subject is Being (Dasein), was omitted from most of Western tradition in exchange for studying ontic entities, simple modes of Being, and Being-towards-divinity.[22]

Being and Time, in addition to creating the framework for understanding Dasein, also highlights complementary concepts in ontology, including Thrownness (*Gerworfenheit*), ready-to-hand (*zuhandenheit*), as well as present-at-hand (*vorhanden*). Thrownness[23] refers to the human condition in which a human being is "thrown" into existence without proper consent on entering this life and with no choice in where they are born, when they are born, their personality, etc. Given the magnitude of this condition and its universality, it is a key aspect of Dasein and is alluded to in context here:

> Dasein has forgotten itself in its ownmost thrown potentiality-for-Being. This forgetting is not nothing, nor is it just a failure to remember; it is rather a 'positive' ecstatical mode of one's having been—a mode with a character of its own.[24]

Thus, one consequence of the intensity of Thrownness is that Dasein integrates the Thrownness to such an extent that it forgets to remember its more authentic Being, or as Heidegger says, potentiality-for-Being takes precedence. The concept of Thrownness also corresponds well with the classical Daoist text entitled the *Zhuangzi*, and that correlative will assist in deepening our

understanding of Thrownness later.

[20] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32.

[21] See Heidegger's *Philosophy of Religion: From God to Gods* by Ben Vedder for more details.

[22] For the sake of brevity, I will have to skip over much of the characterization of Dasein given by Heidegger, and will assume this background is sufficient.

[23] *Geworfenheit* is referred to as Thrownness because this is the academic consensus for the best translation of it. Some other translations include dereliction and dejection.

[24] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 339.

Next, the idea of ready-to-handness is also similar to ideas in the *Zhuangzi*, and thus a discussion of it is warranted. First, consider a person about to locomote to their nine to five job. They step into their car, presumably listen to music or a podcast, or perhaps just enjoy the present moment while driving, and they soon arrive at work. The car's Being, though on one level is simply an ontical expression of car-ness, manifests to the person as an instrument of the immanence of soon being at work. The *phaínesthai* (φαίνεσθαι) of the car's Being to the person is hence not as a car-in-itself ontically but rather as the ready-to-be-usedness of a tool. This ready-to-be-usedness is what Heidegger calls ready-to-handness:

> The ready-to-hand is not grasped theoretically at all, nor is it itself the sort of thing that circumspection takes proximally as a circumspective theme. The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw (*zurückzuziehen*) in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically. That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves (*die Werkzeuge selbst*). On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work—that which is to be produced at the time; and this is accordingly ready-to-hand too.[25]

By this, he means that the most authentic ready-to-handness (thus the best definition for the term) is an object which is fully withdrawn from one aspect of itself (namely the aforementioned ontic being) to be used as the essence of a tool.

Meanwhile, present-at-hand also coincides with ready-to-handness. While something ready-at-hand is currently available as a tool, an object present-at-hand exists in the world simply as a being but is able to become ready-to-hand if an instrumental paradigm sees it. This is because once someone with an instrumental view sees this present-at-hand object, it is no longer just ready to be or exist; *instead, it is now ready to be used*. Regarding objects present-at-hand:

[25] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 99.

> To entities such as these, their Being is 'a matter of indifference' or more precisely, they 'are' such that their Being can be neither a matter of indifference to them, nor the opposite.[26]

Hence, the principal focus of an object present-at-hand is the isness of itself. More precisely, it is the pure isness, to such an extent that neither Being nor non-Being is a concern.

With an understanding of a few Heideggerian concepts from *Being and Time*, I will now give a similar background of classical Daoism.

§ 2: OR NOT TO BE?

"Those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know."
— Laozi 老子 in Laozi 老子

§ 2.1: THE GOD OF SPINOZA

Classical Daoism[27] (4th century B.C.E to 9 C.E.)[28] refers to the very beginning of the Daoist belief system in China. In this period, classical Daoism was subject to two separate segments of Chinese history, existing during the Warring States Period 戰國時代 (from the birth of Daoism until 221 B.C.E.) then the Former Han dynasty 漢朝 (from 206 B.C.E. until the end of classical Daoism in 9 C.E.)[29] During these two eras, classical Daoism is well- characterized by the wealth of literature coming from this epoch, where essential texts included the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Guanzi* 管子, *Huainanzi* 淮南子, *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, and the *Huangdi sijing* 黃帝四經.[30]

Hereupon, I will take any practice or thought system focused on the cosmological idea of the *Dao* 道 to be relevant to our discussion

[26] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 68.
[27] In the discussion of Daoism, the topic of translation is at the forefront of the conversation. For consistency, I will use the Hanyu Pinyin translation style over the Wade-Giles translation style for this essay. However, for the sake of clarity, I will also include any important terms from Daoism in Chinese the first time I use them.
[28] Adrien Stoloff, "HU 3900 Mysticism Nei-yeh (Inward Training)," Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA, 2024.
[29] Stoloff, "HU 3900 Mysticism Nei-yeh (Inward Training)," 2024.
[30] Ibid.

and moreover to be a reasonable approximation for Daoism.[31] The Dao is often translated as "the Way" or "the Path"; however, to best avoid projecting preconceived notions for interpreting the Dao, I will simply leave it as "the Dao." Hence, emphasis will be placed on how the early Daoist texts characterized the Dao and not on a linguistic translation. To this end, we can now characterize the Dao:

> The One is the most valued of all things. No one knows its source. No one knows its manifestations. No one knows where it starts or where it ends. Yet the myriad things take it to be their progenitor. The sage-king imitates it to keep his nature intact, to fix his life span, and to issue orders.[32]

Thus, as the Dao is one, any following characteristics will importantly be one aspect of a whole part, which when analyzing Heidegger, will be relevant. There is also a normative claim made here implying that a "good" person has a nature imitating the Dao, inasmuch as a sage-king is a good person. Additionally, the Dao is ineffable[33] as seen in the *Laozi* here:

> The way that can be spoken of
> Is not the constant way;
> The name that can be named
> Is not the constant name.[34]

In this context, the Dao is not only ineffable, but its ineffability implies its divine essence, which connects well with the conception of the Dao as both transcendent and immanent. Next, the Dao has intimate connections with the concepts of nothingness and creation. To begin to see this, consider the passage from the *Laozi*:

> Its upper part is not dazzling;
> Its lower part is not obscure.
> Dimly visible, it cannot be named

[31] The idea of trying to separate Chinese concepts of religion and philosophy is yet another controversial issue; because there may be a tendency of Western academia to superimpose Western concepts (like religion and philosophy) onto Eastern belief systems, I will avoid characterizing Daoism and related concepts where it is unnecessary, and will choose more broad terms such as "belief systems". This is all to say that the categorization of Daoism is not as important as the ideas present in Daoism, so Daoism is going to be conceived of as a belief system in pursuit of authenticity.

[32] Lüshi Chunqiu, 111 as quoted in Adrien Stoloff, "Laozi 1," Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA, 2024.

[33] Stoloff, "Laozi 1," 2024.

[34] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, tr. by D.C. Lau (London: Penguin, 2003), chap. 1.

> And returns to that which is without substance.
> This is called the shape that has no shape,
> The image that is without substance.
> This is called indistinct and shadowy.
> Go up to it and you will not see its head;
> Follow behind it and you will not see its rear.[35]

First, notice how the shape is characterized as the shape that has *no shape*. Ontologically the Dao is the ontological entity that is comprised of the negation of ontological value; as in Being.[36] The Dao is the manifestation of the Being of non-Being. It is a real thing; it does have a head and tail, but the head and tail are not visible. If the Dao's meaning is unclear, the idea of a shadow is illuminating. In many ways, a shadow is not a tangible thing, it is simply an absence of a tangible thing, that is light. Thus, in the same way that a shadow is a being distinguished by and composed of non-Being, so too is the Dao the Being of non-Being. Although a philosophy or religion of nothingness, or the Nothing,[37] could seem to be in vain, the *Laozi* also addressed this:

> Thus what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use.[38]

In Daoism, the concern is not the uselessness of Nothing because of the existence of Something; rather, the concern is that Something is useless without Nothing. Insofar as an essence for the Dao is uselessness, uselessness is affirmed as being a positive thing in the paradigm of the useless tree in the *Zhuangzi*:

> After Carpenter Shi had returned home, the oak tree appeared to him in a dream and said, 'What are you comparing me with? Are you comparing me with those useful trees? The cherry apple, the pear, the orange, the citron, the rest of those fructiferous trees and shrubs - as soon as their fruit is ripe, they are torn apart and subjected to abuse.

[35] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, chap. 14.
[36] Even when outside the Heideggerian framework, I am still going to capitalize Being to denote the context that the idea of Being requires as an ontological entity, and emphasize the difference between Being and the everyday use of being.
[37] Similar to the convention for Being, I will capitalize terms like Nothing and Nothingness to emphasize their different meaning from everyday use, even when not discussing them directly in relation to Daoism or phenomenology. Furthermore, Nothingness as a concept can be likened to a religious ideal of God in the same way Being can, which is in part why the concept meontology exists.
[38] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, chap. 11.

> Their big limbs are broken off, their little limbs are yanked around. Their utility makes life miserable for them, and so they don't get to finish out the years Heaven gave them, but are cut off in mid-journey. They bring it on themselves - the pulling and tearing of the common mob. And it's the same way with all other things.'
>
> 'As for me, I've been trying a long time to be of no use, and though I almost died, I've finally got it. This is of great use to me. If I had been of some use, would I ever have grown this large? Moreover you and I are both of us things. What's the point of this - things condemning things? You, a worthless man about to die - how do you know I'm a worthless tree?'[39]

Here, the text carefully establishes the merit of uselessness while also taking care not to conflate worthiness with usefulness—*part of the value of the Dao is in uselessness*. Meanwhile, as the Dao is transcendent and immanent, it is paradoxically useful and useless. Thus, the usefulness of Nothingness is made manifest in Daoist cosmogony, which is explained by:

> The way begets one;
> One begets two;
> Two begets three;
> Three begets the myriad creatures.[40]

The Dao ("the way" in this passage) has already been shown as a cosmological force that relates to Nothingness, so the fact that the Dao is the center of Daoist cosmology means that Nothingness is a pivotal part of Something; that non-Creation is a center of Creation; and later, that non-Being is a pivotal aspect of Being. We furthermore see it characterized as *xu* 虛 (empty), *yuan* 淵 (deep), *zhan* 湛 (dark), *jing* 靜 (still), *yao* 窈 (dim), *ji* 寂 (silent) and *liao* 廖 (void); leading to the realization of the Dao's essential action being *wuwei* 無為 (non-action).[41]

§ 2.2: THE CREATURES OF PROMETHEUS

Now engaged in the Daoist paradigm, we are prepared to begin tackling the core concept of *wuwei*. As mentioned earlier, wuwei is the

[39] Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi Basic Writings*, tr. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), chap. 4.
[40] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, chap. 42.
[41] Stoloff, "Laozi 1," 2024.

essential action of the Dao, which leads to many implications for the meaning of *wuwei*. First, *wuwei* is traditionally translated as "effortless action" or as "non-action," both of which may necessitate some explanation. Although it more closely translates in English to "non-action" from a linguistic perspective, the phrase non-action has the wrong connotation for the meaning of *wuwei* (which is why I will leave *wuwei* untranslated). Instead, "effortless action" better depicts the idea that *wuwei* is still an action, but it is an action that is not forced and is in harmony with the Dao. Although *wuwei* will be left untranslated, it can be thought of as connotationally meaning effortless action and denotationally meaning non-action.

In most of the aforenamed classical Daoist texts, *wuwei* is a staple for understanding the Daoist worldview and the relation of the Dao to humanity and existence. Similar to the Dao, *wuwei* is better understood by seeing all the ways it is characterized rather than trying to fit it into a one-sentence definition. For instance, Xunzi 荀子 discusses wuwei as "an ideal way to 'walk the path.'"[42] From this definition alone, there is the interesting conclusion that the essential action of the Dao is the manifestation of the ideal way of experiencing the Dao (calling back to the definition of the Dao). Hence, using *wuwei* as an intermediary step, we learn that the Dao as a cosmological and mystical idea has an essential action of interacting with itself, further compounding its mystical nature. The *Laozi* also describes *wuwei* by describing the never-acting of the Dao:

> "The way never acts, yet nothing is left undone."[43]

At face value, this is a characterization of the Dao (the Way). However, as the way never acts, the text is characterizing the Dao as having *wuwei*, and by virtue of having *wuwei*, nothing is left undone. Thus, returning to the discussion of effortless action versus no action, *wuwei* must be associated with some action as nothing is left undone; however, it is also not excessive action - again lending credibility to the translation of *wuwei* as effortless action. Furthermore, *wuwei* is a virtue present in the sage:

> Hence the sage says, I take no action and the people are transformed of themselves; I prefer stillness and the people are rectified of themselves; I am

[42] Adrien Stoloff, "Mind Like a Mirror: Toward a Modern Understanding of Classical Daoist Wuwei," PhD diss., (Brown University, 2019), 115, https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:918791/.

[43] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, chap. 37.

> not meddlesome and the people prosper of themselves; I am free from desire and the people of themselves become simple like the uncarved block.[44]

Here, there is an emphasis placed on the lack-of-action aspect of *wuwei*, or more appropriately, the lack of improper action, insofar as adjectives like meddlesome are included to develop the nuance of *wuwei* advocating for a lack of improper action and not a lack of any action. This aspect of *wuwei* is present in sages, and thus the *Laozi* is making a normative argument for the value of acting in harmony with the Dao via *wuwei*. This harkens back to the passage on the Dao, which asserts that sage-kings are in tune with the Dao; thus, having a nature imitating the Dao is both good and *wuwei*.

To leave the realm of abstractions, contemplate a more palpable illustration of *wuwei*. Suppose you are a Daoist, and there is a loud argument on the train you are riding.[45] The fight is actively escalating, and it appears increasingly likely that the man in the fight is going to physically hit the woman he is fighting. Only a few options come to your mind. For one, there are plenty of other people on the train, and this argument is not your problem, so let the fight happen and move on with your day. Conversely, be a hero! Imagine the news clips showing a valiant paragon saving a woman from domestic abuse by gallantly fighting the abuser! But, what is the most Daoist way to react? How could you react with *wuwei*? In this exact scenario, a New York man responded by eating potato chips to de-escalate the scenario.[46] Rather than reacting in a forced way (as in by picking a fight), which could put more people in danger, the bystander decided to step between the two people fighting; confusing the potential abuser enough to fully quell the situation. Furthermore, the bystander did not choose to do nothing, mirroring the fact that *wuwei* is *not* "doing nothing". Instead, the man took action, but not excessively, and in turn, this man exemplified acting with wuwei.

Briefly returning to *wuwei* as classical Daoists described it, *wuwei* is the action of *Tiān* 天 (Heaven) and *Di* 地 (Earth), and therefore, it is the optimal life path, which is vital to lifelong health and happiness. [47] With such a broad definition, there are countless valid explanations and

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[44] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, chap. 57.

[45] Stoloff, "Laozi 1," 2024. The idea of the ensuing narrative warrants full credit to Professor Stoloff.

[46] See the video "Man breaks up subway fight while eating potato chips" by WPTV News - FL Palm Beaches and Treasure Coast at https://youtu.be/hR5cfTVkf-0?si=rHAreMgFQVEebTea.

[47] Adrien Stoloff, "Wuwei in the Zhuangzi 2" Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA, 2024.

understandings of *wuwei*, not limited to the definitions provided herein.

§ 3.1: HOW MUCH LAND DOES A MAN NEED?

The confluence of *Being and Time* with classical Daoism is a topic that has largely been both understudied and unacknowledged. Given the breadth of ideas I would like to incorporate in this section, I will first make explicit the general formatting of this chapter. By and large, I aspire to unveil places where *Being and Time* exhibits direct proof of Daoist influence *and* to begin an open discussion on the similarity of certain concepts in *Being and Time* and classical Daoism. This will be accomplished by directly presenting the praxes of my argument in the implied order, where the beginning arguments are direct proofs of Heidegger's Daoist influences, and later arguments become nuanced discussions showing how classical Daoist ideals arise in *Being and Time*, regardless of the intentionality on Heidegger's part. To that end, the preponderance of evidence suggesting direct Daoist sources in Being and Time ought to establish the plausibility of the similarities between the Heideggerian and Daoist worldviews as stemming from Heidegger's direct inspiration from Daoist manuscripts.

§ 3.2: TWICE TWO MAKES FOUR

To set the stage for the magnitude of Daoist ideas in *Being and Time*, I will first present an excerpt which, even if hyperbolic, should help understand the view some of Heidegger's colleagues had on his work:

> Ito Kichinosuke [伊藤吉之助], one of my teachers at university, studied in Germany in 1918 immediately after the First World War and hired Heidegger as a private tutor. Before moving 20 back to Japan at the end of his studies, Professor Ito handed Heidegger a copy of Das Buch vom Tee, the German translation of Okakura Kakuzō's *The Book of Tea*, as a token of his appreciation. That was in 1919. *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) was published in 1927 and made Heidegger famous. Mr. Ito was surprised and indignant that Heidegger used Zhuangzi's concept without giving him credit. Years later in 1945, Professor Ito reminisced with me and, speaking in his Shonai dialect, said, 'Heidegger did a lot for me, but I should've laid into him for stealing'. There are other indications that

> Heidegger was inspired by Eastern writings, but let's leave this topic here. I have heard many stories of this kind from Professor Ito and checked their veracity. I recounted this story at a reception held after a series of lectures I gave in 1968 at the University of Heidelberg at the invitation of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Japanese exchange students attended these lectures, and I explained that there were many other elements of classical Eastern thought in Heidegger's philosophy and gave some examples. I must have said too much and may even have said that Heidegger was a plagiarist…[48]

For context, the quotation above is from the point of view of a Japanese university student whose professor had hired Martin Heidegger as a private tutor. The student recounts that his professor gave Heidegger a copy of *The Book of Tea*. When *Being and Time* was published, the professor was certain that Heidegger had used Kakuzō's analysis of Daoism as the foundation of his philosophy, with the student later giving a lecture on this issue at an academic conference in Japan. In *The Book of Tea*, we directly read: "Taoism [is] the 'art of being in the world.'"[49] The implication here regarding Heidegger is clear as day, as there is no proof of Heidegger using the term "Being-in-the-world" before he had read the German version of *The Book of Tea*. With the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, Heidegger had already had access to this translation as well as a copy of the *Zhuangzi* for many years. This fact has held up in contemporary philosophy, as the few modern scholars discussing this issue all say something along the lines of "he has been suspected of borrowing the expression 'being-in-the-world' (*in-der-welt-sein*) from the 1919 German translation of Okakura Kakuzō 岡倉覚三, *The Book of Tea* (*Cha no Hon* 茶の本)."[50]

Calling back to chapter one, recall that the majority of Being and Time is a characterization of Dasein in one way or another. Yet, the very term Dasein (Being-there) is derivative of Being-in-the-world, which itself is from the characterization of Daoism by Kakuzō. What then? Is not the entire web of Heideggerian concepts built outwards from the point of stolen intellectual property? As the evidence is presented, Heidegger *did* find a niche concept, wrote it off as his own, and

[48] Tomonobu Imamichi, *In Search of Wisdom; One Philosopher's Journey*, (Tokyo, Japan: International House of Japan, 2004), 123-124.

[49] Kakuzō Okakura, *The Book of Tea* (Global Grey, 2014), 16, http://pdf-objects.com/files/Book-Of-Tea.pdf.

[50] Eric S. Nelson, "Martin Heidegger and Kitayama Junyū: Nothingness, Emptiness, and the Thing" *Asian Studies* 11, no. 1 (2023): 30, https://journals.uni-lj.si/as/article/view/10594.

then wrote a book on the concept. Thus, the most logical position maintains the existence of Heidegger's Daoist influences; any objection must first develop proof of Heidegger's conception of this concept before he interacted with East Asian culture. Moreover, Being-in-the-world from *The Book of Tea* attempts to describe the state of humanity as presented in early Daoist literature. Insofar as Dasein is the Being-there of consciousness, then Dasein in the setting of the world is best described as Being-in-the-world.

Now, from an understanding that Heidegger assuredly took influence from Daoism, it is reasonable to look at specific instances of Daoist ideas shining forth in *Being and Time*. In particular, the Dexterous Butcher of the *Zhuangzi* bears remarkable similarities to Heideggerian ideas:

> Cook Ting laid down his knife and replied, "What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now — now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes…'
>
> "A good cook changes his knife once a year — because he cuts. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month — because he hacks. I've had this knife of mine for nineteen years and I've cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints, and the blade of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there's plenty of room — more than enough for the blade to play about it. That's why after nineteen years the blade of my knife is still as good as when it first came from the grindstone…"[51]

On a more fundamental level, Zhuangzi uses this parable to characterize *wuwei* by referencing scenarios any layperson could understand. However, in doing so, he presents a novel view of tooling. The tool is not simply used and separate from the user; it ebbs and flows to and from the user in this passage. The tool's Being as part of the user is made manifest through its inability to break, as the durability of the equipment mirrors the continued Beingness of the being using it, signifying a lack of distinction between the two. This characterization is nearly

unparalleled, not only due to the uniqueness of the idea but also the

[51] Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu: The Basic Writings* (Columbia University Press, 1964), Section 8, quoted in *Bureau of Public Secrets, Chuang Tzu: "The Dexterous Butcher,"* (n.d.), Section 8, https://www.bopsecrets.org/gateway/passages/chuang-tzu.htm.

specificity. Furthermore, up until modernity, there was really no impetus to prompt philosophers to think extensively about the relationship between a tool and its user. And yet, we see for Heidegger that:

> Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure (hammering with a hammer, for example); but in such dealings an entity of this kind is not *grasped* thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using. The hammering does not simply have knowledge about the hammer's character as equipment, but it has appropriated this equipment in a way which could not possibly be more suitable. In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the "in-order-to" which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is - as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific 'manipulability' ("Handlichkeit") of the hammer.[52]

He takes special care to characterize the nature of the equipment precisely. His characterization likewise strays away from the convention of conceiving of equipment, tooling, or technology as external to humans. Rather, it is by the use of a hammer that the hammer's Being is revealed. Although Heidegger elaborates his theories concerning instrumentality and technology later in his career, especially in *The Question Concerning Technology*, he has already laid the groundwork for the discussion at this point in *Being and Time*, presumably taken from classical Daoism. The emphasis on equipment as not existing outside of humans continues for much of the book:

> The ready-to-hand is not grasped theoretically at all, nor is it itself the sort of thing that circumspection takes proximally as a circumspective theme … That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves (die Werkzeuge selbst). On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work - that which is to be produced at the time; and this is accordingly ready-to-hand too. The work bears with it that referential totality within which the equipment is encountered.[53]

The tool becomes such a part of the person that only its ready-to-handness is present, again painting an artistic flow between the user and the equipment. The equipment's Being in conjunction with the user has no

[52] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 98.
[53] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 99.

medium, similar again to the *Zhuangzi*: "Confucius said, 'A good swimmer will get the knack of it in no time —that means he's forgotten the water … he sees the water as so much dry land.'"[54] What could we infer about a good tradesman? Perhaps, he has forgotten the tool, and sees the tool as much as his hand.

Moving forward, the paradigm Heidegger and classical Daoist authors share regarding equipment is most clear if we only take Heidegger's excerpts in a vacuum. In reality, much of Heidegger's writing in *Being and Time* is in the context of Dasein, which turns out to be intricately related to *wuwei*. As already displayed, Dasein is an object of Being whose subject is Being. Likewise, considering *wuwei* under an ontological lens, we can make a few observations. First, *wuwei* is *not* an ontic entity because even if it is not necessarily an object of Being, it is undoubtedly closer related to Being than being. Whereas an ontic entity would be a statement of isness; an ontological entity is a statement of the isness of isness (deriving from the definition of ontology versus onticology). Furthermore, towards which direction does the ontological entity of *wuwei* turn? Given that it is the ideal path of following the *Dao*, *wuwei* orients itself towards the Dao. And, inasmuch as the Dao has been characterized as both transcendent and immanent, as well as Nothing and Something, then *wuwei* is left with no *physical* direction to turn. This fact is only magnified as the Dao and *wuwei* get better and more precisely defined, because better definitions increase the mystical and ineffable perception of them. Hence, *wuwei*, in its possible ontological Beingness, must turn to itself as an essential action of the Dao, leading to its potential ontological Beingness shining forth in its subject of Being. Physically, this statement manifests in the idea that *wuwei* is generally accepted as being capable of occurring in nearly every hobby or work. Because *wuwei* has a subject of Being, or alternatively is a concept outside of the paradigm of means and ends (or even within that paradigm, *wuwei* would have *wuwei* as its own ends), it can be as attainable in sports as it is in a trade as it is in an art.[55] The only limitation on *wuwei* as an ontological Being exists in the classical Daoist emphasis of *wuwei* manifesting in action. Then, whereas Dasein is simply Being-there, *wuwei* is a way of confronting Being-there authentically. Further, the relationship of *wuwei* to the Dao is that of Dasein to Being, where the former acts as a collapse of the potential ontological essence of the latter.

Not only does Dasein exist as a relative of *wuwei*, but Heidegger

[54] Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings*, section 19.
[55] Stoloff, "Wuwei in the Zhuangzi 2," 2024.

also more implicitly incorporates *wuwei*:

> Circumspection operates in the involvement-relationships of the context of equipment which is ready-to-hand. Moreover, it is subordinate to the guidance of a more or less explicit survey of the equipmental totality of the current equipment-world and of the public environment which belongs to it. This survey is not just one in which things that are present-at-hand are subsequently scraped together. What is essential to it is that one should have a primary understanding of the totality of involvements within which factical concern always takes its start.[56]

Here, the transformation of both the person and the equipment created because of the inherent goal of a ready-to-hand tool is similar to *wuwei*. Compared with the aforecited "The Dexterous Butcher" section of the *Zhuangzi*, in both cases, the user of a tool becomes more intertwined with their tool as they become better at using it. From this, a psychological flow state is produced, and given that a psychological flow state is similar to *wuwei*, Heidegger is at least demonstrating the production of an idea approximating *wuwei*.

Next, there are strong parallels between Heidegger's characterization of Dasein using Thrownness and the motif of fate in Daoist works. In the *Zhuangzi*, we read:

> "I was born on the dry land and felt safe on the dry land - that was what I was used to. I grew up with the water and felt safe in the water - that was my nature. I don't know why I do what I do - that's fate."[57]

Here, the Being of the narrator is not justified as reasonable. There is no metaphysics presented to justify *why* they were born on the dry land, why they grew up with water, or why this is their nature. Instead, the narrator chalks this up to fate. Similarly, Heidegger's ontology avoids normative ethics and metaphysical judgments. In the provided excerpts from *Being and Time*, none advocate for the reader to do anything (although one could argue his presentation of Dasein implies a method of living authentically). Hence, Heidegger too, does not care if there is an answer to the questions of Thrownness. Instead, he presents his argument as a truism about the world, saying, "this is just how it is." Thus, both Heidegger and Zhuangzi address the origins of certain deterministic mechanisms in life by illuminating the existence of said mechanisms

[56] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 410.
[57] Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi Basic Writings*, tr. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), Section 19.

but ignoring why the mechanisms exist.

Having considered both Dasein and Thrownness in the context of Daoism, it is

imperative to realize that the majority of *Being and Time* is focused on Dasein, let alone the even larger spotlight given to both concepts together. So, to rephrase, a majority of *Being and Time* is derivative of classical Daoist texts. Not only this, but the derivative aspects of Daoism in Heidegger's work are not simply details, rather, they are entire metaphysical, epistemological, and ontological structures underlying the thought upon which the book is built. The shining forth of Thrownness from classical Daoism, for example, is not a trivial detail; it is an entire ontological structure, a web of presuppositions, which Heidegger and Zhuangzi both take for being true. As such, to say Daoism underlies *Being and Time* is not saying that Heidegger directly discusses Daoist ideals. On the contrary, he is extracting a more fundamental influence from Daoism in the form of the structures through which he views philosophy—these are: fate/Thrownness as a condition of Being, Dasein as a complex relationship with *wuwei*, and the relation of humans with the world as fundamentally integrated into the world lacking emphasis on instrumentality and equipmentality.

However, there are limits to my arguments presented. First, the idea of Dasein being similar to *wuwei* is new, and thus, although its validity should be seen in this paper, there certainly are important differences between Dasein and wuwei. For instance, *wuwei* is first and foremost part of the Daoist belief system and is best understood in reference to the Dao. By taking *wuwei* away from the Dao, so too does it lose meaning. Furthermore, Dasein is fundamentally a description of the world, whereas *wuwei* entails much more in a normative sense; it tells you how to act. So, although I was careful to avoid conflating the two ideas directly, this is still worth considering. Another limitation of my arguments lies in the possibility that Heidegger took Being-in-the-world from classical Daoism and then came up with all other ideas independently. But this is highly unlikely for a few reasons. First, Heidegger took the idea of being in the world and passed it off as his own; there is no denying this. His willingness to do so implies he had no qualms about taking ideas from Daoism and repurposing them as his own, and he may not have realized people would find his source. Second, the similarities I presented between Heidegger and classical Daoist texts were not minor details that could be recreated; they were entire philosophical structures of viewing the world. The best chance for Heidegger *not* stealing from

Daoism lies in the slight chance that he simply had the same epistemological, metaphysical, and ontological presumptions as classical Daoists had.

In the case a reader could still write off the connections between Martin Heidegger and Daoism as coincidental, then it is important to note that there are *many more* philosophical assumptions shared by Heidegger and Daoists. First, a significant connection between Heidegger and classical Daoist authors has already been developed regarding a few points. The discussion of utility's relationship to usefulness, the interdependence of things on relationships, and the revelation of Nothingness in the world have all been discussed in David Chai's *Daoist Resonances in Heidegger*, especially in the first chapter by Graham Parker.

Furthermore, more connections still need to be discovered. For instance, Heidegger stems from the Husserlian tradition of phenomenology.[58] In this tradition, there is a focus on studying consciousness by understanding the first-person point of view of experience.[59] For Heidegger specifically, "The interconnectedness of Experience serves as the point of departure for methodical study."[60] Clearly, then, there is a primacy of experience central to Heidegger's philosophy. In comparison, the Daoist cosmology emphasizes the primacy of experience by claiming:

> The Way begets one;
> One begets two…"[61]

From the Dao comes oneness, and from oneness comes Yin and Yang, and everything else comes to Yin and Yang. Or, assuming that *wuwei* as the essential action of the Dao implies experience is present in this cosmology, then this short passage from the *Laozi* is an expression of the primacy of experience in the world. This is yet another structure underlying the worldview of Daoists and Heidegger alike. After this short digression, it should be easy to see the reasoning that can be utilized elsewhere in *Being and Time* to identify even more Daoist influences.

§ 3.3: WHERE DO WE COME FROM? WHAT ARE WE?

[58] David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology," Stanford.edu, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, November 16, 2013, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 75.
[61] Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, chap. 42.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

In conclusion, the blatant plagiarism shown in Martin Heidegger's use of the phrase Being-in-the-world (derived from Daoism) opens the door for *Being and Time* being inspired by

classical Daoism. From this position, a nuanced analysis of *Being and Time* reveals that Heidegger approaches philosophy from a similar worldview as Daoists approach the world, not limited to epistemological, metaphysical, and ontological presuppositions. The more analysis of *Being and Time* that is conducted, the more evident the similarities are. Some ideas I showed as derivative of Daoism include Dasein, Thrownness, and Equipmentality. Thus, in the context of Heidegger's confirmed reading and use of Daoist terms, I conclude it is more likely than not that Heidegger's presentation of Daoist ideas is due to his adoption of them, not mere coincidence. The recognition of Daoist sources in Heidegger's work is imperative not only for historicity but also because it allows for future scholarship surrounding syncretism. Given the connections between *wuwei* and Dasein, could *wuwei* represent the most authentic Clearing in Heideggerian philosophy? Or is wuwei truly the most authentic experience for Dasein? In either case, discussions like these are essential for future scholarship in the history of philosophy and religious studies.

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PERFECT SOCIETY OR VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION?

LOCKE, MARITAIN, AND THE AUTONOMY OF CHURCH AND STATE

SEAN SCULLY, CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

§ 1: INTRODUCTION

The liberal project began in Europe amidst fierce religious divisions. In the two centuries that followed the Protestant Reformation, competing claims of spiritual authority had driven the continent into a number of armed conflicts and suppressive campaigns. Given this context, it is not difficult to see why some desired a political arrangement that promoted a peaceful coexistence between different denominations. It was during this time period that John Locke published his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, which famously argued that the way to achieve

this coexistence was by making the state autonomous from the Church.[62] According to this vision, the jurisdiction of each entity would be entirely separated from the other, denying governments the right to coerce on behalf of any religious creed. This novel approach to political theory helped lay the groundwork for liberal philosophy and challenged the prevailing notion of the time that the state had a responsibility to promote both the temporal *and* the spiritual welfare of its citizens.

While this view was met with resistance from several Christian denominations, it faced particularly strong opposition from Catholic intellectuals. From the Middle Ages through the Counter-Reformation, the Church had always maintained that it was superior in dignity to the state and, as such, had the right to instruct and guide the state on spiritual matters.[63] For this reason, the liberal idea that the state had no right to coerce on behalf of spiritual authority was seen by several popes as a direct threat to the rights the Church had traditionally claimed for itself.[64] Since democracy and pluralism are now considered to be essential attributes of liberalism, this tension raised the question of whether a democratic and pluralistic society could ever realize the Catholic Church's idealistic vision for Church-State relations.

Some Catholic thinkers have since been more optimistic about Catholicism's compatibility with democracy. Jacques Maritain, a political theorist and committed Thomist, was one such thinker. In his book *Man and the State,* Maritain offers an alternative theoretical justification for secular democracy that does not rely on liberal presuppositions. In the process, he provides an extensive account of how a separation between Church and state could actually work for the *benefit* of the Church.

Although Locke and Maritain both argue for a kind of political secularization, they disagree starkly on the type of society that political secularization should bring about. Their disagreement strikes at the core of the Church-State question: what kind of status should organized religions enjoy in a democracy with no established religion? Furthermore, how should members of religious congregations, bound by specific moral dictates, participate in a political body composed of individuals

[62] For the purposes of this paper, whenever I speak of "the Church," I am referring to the Roman Catholic Church.

[63] See St. Thomas Aquinas' *De Regno*, Giles of Rome's *On Ecclesiastical Power*, Robert Bellarmine's *On the Roman Pontiff*, and Francisco Suarez's *Defensio Fidei.*

[64] See *Libertas* and *Immortale Dei* by Pope Leo XIII and *Quanta Cura* and the *Syllabus of Errors* by Pope Pius IX.

of all faiths? This paper aims to clearly explain the ways in which Locke and Maritain address these questions in their political theories. After drawing out their theoretical differences, I will assess which arrangement is more practically realizable. In doing so, I hope to show that only Locke's theory is structured to fulfill its stated ambitions, while Maritain's envisioned society fails to achieve its desired relationship between Church and State.

§ 2: LOCKE'S CONCEPTION OF THE COMMONWEALTH

Following more than a century of religious upheaval, Locke wrote his *Letter Concerning Toleration* in an attempt to provide civil leaders with a roadmap for governing a commonwealth with competing religious factions. Although the treatise employs a number of theological arguments regarding the nature of Christian Faith, of interest to us here are the various claims Locke makes about the proper jurisdiction of both political and ecclesiastical authority.

Beginning with civil power, Locke defined the state as nothing more than "a Society of Men constituted only for the procuring, preserving and advancing of their own *civil interests*."[65] These "civil interests" are restricted to temporal goods, such as "Life, Liberty, Health, and Indolency of Body" as well as the "Possession of outward things" like "Money, Lands, Houses, Furniture, and the like."[66] Furthermore, the *Letter* draws a distinction between temporal and spiritual goods, claiming that the state's authority "neither can nor ought in any manner… be extended to the Salvation of Souls." According to this view of political rule, the state exists to provide for the bare necessities of life (such as health, money, and property) and to give men the freedom to determine how they ought to be used.

These claims about civil society rely on several assumptions that are treated more extensively in Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*.[67] To better understand what Locke views as the state's purpose, I will highlight just a few of its main ideas. Firstly, the *Second Treatise* describes the pre-political condition of man as being a "state of

[65] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. James H. Tully (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 26.
[66] Ibid 26.
[67] For the purposes of this paper, I am assuming that both the *Letter* and the *Second Treatise* present a singular, consistent theory of the state.

perfect freedom" where all people can "order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit."[68] Without a governing entity to hold licentious men accountable, however, the natural equality and liberty that each man should enjoy is left insecure. For this reason, men freely (and conditionally) enter into political communities to preserve and protect their "lives, liberties, and estates."[69] This agreement, commonly referred to as the "social contract," defines the purpose of the state as well as its jurisdictional limits. Locke reiterates this conception of the "social contract" in his *Letter,* where he argues that the state only has the authority to regulate matters that "advantage or prejudice the Life, Liberty, or Estate of any man."[70]

Most relevant to the topic of this paper, however, is the state's obligation to preserve a man's "liberty." As David J. Lorenzo noted, the right to liberty remains after men enter into the "social contract," and as such, the "government cannot rationally justify a policy forbidding us from acting on our remaining natural liberty."[71] From elsewhere in the *Second Treatise*, we can see that Locke's conception of liberty within the commonwealth is similar to the kind of freedom from *restraint* that he believed we enjoyed in the state of nature. Elaborating on this point, Locke argued that the "end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and **enlarge** freedom" as well as to allow men "to dispose, and order **as he lists**, his person, actions, possessions, and his whole property within the allowance of [the] law."[72] Because Locke believes we enter into a political community to secure this kind of freedom, he is by extension arguing that the state has an obligation to secure and "enlarge" the liberty of men to conduct their lives as they see fit.

Noting this, let us return to the *Letter.* As we discussed, Locke believes that the state is responsible for protecting and preserving man's "civil" goods. Why, then, are religious beliefs and customs not considered to be one of these "civil" goods? According to Locke, one reason is that they are acquired through entirely different means. Remember, in Locke's theory, coercive authority is invested in the state only for the purposes of securing "lives, liberties, and estates." In these

[68] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), Chapter II, §4.
[69] Ibid. Chapter IX, §123.
[70] John Locke*, A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 39.
[71] David J. Lorenzo "Tradition and Prudence in Locke's Exceptions to Toleration." *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 2 (2003): 254. https://doi.org/10.2307/3186136.
[72] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter VI, §57.

instances, coercion can effectively encourage upright behavior, such as when thieves are punished with fines or imprisonment. Religion, on the other hand, depends upon the "inward and full perswasion of the mind," which cannot be brought about through force.[73] For example, although incarceration can dissuade a man from vandalizing property, Locke would argue that it could not be used to convince someone of the truth of a particular religion. If it were, the individual's confession of "faith" would only be given to avoid punishment, rendering it both inauthentic and meaningless.

Locke even goes as far as to argue that forcing a man to betray his conscience is counterproductive to achieving his salvation. In his words, "to impose such things… [that are] contrary to their own Judgement, is in effect to command them to offend God."[74] Because the state is not given the kind of power that could effectively achieve the end of individual salvation, the state likewise cannot promote any particular path to salvation. For a state to do so would be an overreach of its proper authority. Instead, "the business of Laws is not to provide for the Truth of Opinions, but for the Safety and Security of the Commonwealth, and of every particular mans Goods and Person."[75]

The imposition of a religion, however, does not only fall outside of the state's authority. It also actively undermines its obligation to "enlarge" liberty. Recall Locke's theory that our original condition in the state of nature is one of "perfect freedom" to order our actions as we see fit. If this is the case, then this "perfect freedom" would likely extend to the ability to conduct our lives according to whichever creed we deem most correct. Indeed, Locke confirms this toward the end of his *Letter*, where he declares that the "Liberty of Conscience is every man's natural Right."[76] For this reason, Locke argues that the "care of each Mans Salvation belongs only to himself."[77] Thus, while the state can provide for the basic conditions necessary for a good life (health, wealth, property, etc.), the state cannot, in the most fundamental sense, dictate how private citizens ought to *pursue* it.

So what authority does the Lockean commonwealth have over the Church? To determine where the Church falls within the state's

[73] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 26.
[74] Ibid 39.
[75] Ibid 46.
[76] Ibid 51.
[77] Ibid 47.

jurisdiction, we must first identify the kind of organization Locke deems the Church to be. Toward the beginning of his *Letter*, Locke defines a church as a mere "voluntary Society of Men."[78] Like all other voluntary associations, churches do not have "any Jurisdiction in Worldly matters" and therefore have no right to advance their cause by any means of coercion.[79]

This model of Church-State relations is not unfamiliar to us today. Still, it is not extraordinary to find a liberal-democratic legal system that elevates religious congregations above other forms of "voluntary associations." For example, think of how the United States exempts religious entities from certain kinds of taxation. Locke, on the other hand, makes no such distinction. As Eric R. Claeys correctly noted, "Locke treats church denominations as the equivalent of secular societies."[80] As evidence, Claeys points to the fact that Locke, when speaking of voluntary societies, refers interchangeably to churches and groups of "philosophers for learning, of Merchants for Commerce [and]… of men of leisure for mutual Conversation and Discourse."[81] According to this model, there is no legal distinction between the Catholic Church and your local gardening club.

The status of "voluntary association" does afford the Church some basic liberties. Firstly, Locke maintains that all voluntary societies have the right to determine their own internal rules. In his words, "no Church or Company, I say, can in the least subsist and hold together, but will presently dissolve and break to pieces, unless it be regulated by some Laws, and the Members all consent to observe some Order."[82] Since private societies have a right to exist within the Lockean commonwealth, and since these societies require rules and regulations to maintain themselves, it follows that they also have the right to regulate their internal affairs. To enforce their rules, such societies also have a right to admit and exclude members at their discretion. This allowance, however, does have one condition; the exclusion of a person from a religious society cannot deprive that person of any of their "Civil

[78] Ibid 28.
[79] Ibid 32.
[80] Eric Claeys, "The Private Society and the Liberal Public Good in John Locke's Thought," *George Mason Law & Economics Research Paper* no. 07-43, 5, accessed November 26, 2024, https://www.law.gmu.edu/assets/files/publications/working_papers/07-43.pdf.
[81] John Locke*, A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 10; 51.
[82] Ibid 28.

Goods."[83] Since these goods fall under the protection of the magistrate, the religious organization in question would be liable to civil punishment if it infringed upon them. In this way, the congregation is prevented from possessing coercive power over citizens.

Beyond mere logistical regulations, Locke also grants churches the right to establish their own doctrines. As he wrote in the *Letter*, "the Magistrate ought not to forbid the Preaching or Professing of any Speculative Opinions in any Church, because they have no manner of relation to the Civil Rights of the Subjects."[84] Each denomination is free to have its members assent to whatever articles of faith they deem to be true. Whether a denomination affirms the veracity of the New Testament or believes in the Real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is of no concern to the state. If a ruler is to uphold Locke's conception of the "liberty of conscience," he must tolerate any number of "speculative opinions," recognizing that such opinions fall entirely outside the realm of civil authority.

This does not mean that churches are allowed to profess any belief whatsoever. On the contrary, Locke argues that the state has an obligation to quell opinions that subvert the fulfillment of its own ends. To explain the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable doctrine, Locke makes a distinction between speculative opinions, which require mere intellectual assent, and practical opinions, which bear directly on someone's ethical choices or political decisions.[85] Confessing belief in the triune God, for example, would be a speculative opinion, while the adhering to the laws laid down by the ten commandments would be a practical one. Speculative opinions, as we have mentioned, have no relation to a man's civil goods and therefore fall outside the regulatory authority of the commonwealth.

In contrast, Locke defends the state's right to regulate practical opinions that fail to promote the virtues necessitated by liberalism. In his words, "A Good Life, in which consists not the least part of Religion and true Piety, concerns also the Civil Government…Moral Actions belong therefore to the Jurisdiction both of the… Magistrate and Conscience."[86] For this reason, the state has the authority to restrict those opinions

[83] Ibid 31.
[84] Ibid 46.
[85] Ibid 46.
[86] Ibid 46.

which are contrary to the "moral Rules which are necessary for the preservation of Civil Society."[87]

Determining which opinions to suppress requires, as Claeys puts it, "a tough-minded calculation [of] how to tolerate the widest freedom of thought consistent with the community's responsibility to perpetuate the conditions in which such freedom is possible."[88] Remember that Locke believes that the freedom we enjoy in the commonwealth ought to imitate the freedom from restraint that he believes we enjoy in the state of nature. As part of the "social contract," the state is obligated to "enlarge" this freedom. If, therefore, the Lockean state chooses to suppress a particular opinion, it does so to preserve what Locke identifies as as man's natural right to pursue his own conception of a good life.

While Locke enumerates a number of unacceptable opinions, there is one that is particularly relevant to this paper, namely the ban he places on churches whose condition of membership requires that "all those who enter into it, do thereby, *ipso facto*, deliver themselves up to the Protection and Service of another Prince."[89] This, in Locke's view, allows for the possibility of having citizens who feel obligated to undermine the activities of their magistrate because of commands they received from their religious leader. Even though he only cites Muslims beholden to the Ottoman Empire as an example, this restriction is also clearly applicable to Catholics, who recognize the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff. In this instance, the Church and the unity of its doctrine would be subordinated to the end of the state. Locke, then, affords the Church no special designation or exemption for the sake of maintaining the entirety of its faith. Rather, if the Church's teachings are deemed counterproductive to the security of each man's "liberty of conscience," then the expectation is that the Church must discard those teachings.

Throughout the course of his *Letter*, Locke presents a view of Church-State relations that is very familiar to contemporary readers: "the Church it self is a thing absolutely separate and distinct from the Commonwealth."[90] Since its publication, the *Letter*'s position of "separation of Church and State" has become standard among Western

[87] Ibid 49.
[88] Claeys, "The Private Society and the Liberal Public Good in John Locke's Thought," 28.
[89] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 50.
[90] Ibid 33.

nations. In this dynamic, the state is the only entity which possesses coercive authority, and churches are partially shielded from government overreach through each man's right to form "voluntary associations." If the Church is regarded as a voluntary association like any other, however, then it is difficult to claim any special right for it. As we shall see in the next section, this very limitation created a dilemma that Catholic philosophers are still grappling with.

§ 3: MARITAIN'S ATTEMPT TO RECONCILE CHRISTIANITY AND PLURALISM

A cursory glance at the history of Catholic political thought reveals the challenge Locke's view (and, by extension, the classical liberal tradition) poses to the Church's traditional stance. As late as the nineteenth century, there were papal encyclicals published condemning the process of rapid liberalization that most Western nations were undergoing. In these encyclicals, there are a number of clear and succinct rejections of the arguments that were discussed in the previous section.

For example, in 1864, Pope Pius IX published the *Syllabus of Errors*, a document that contains a list of 80 propositions that were condemned by the pope as heretical and erroneous. Among the claims it rejects is the idea that a civil ruler "may interfere in matters relating to religion, morality and spiritual government, " directly rebuking the state's authority to regulate the Church's opinions.[91] The *Syllabus* also condemns a statement which sounds like it could have been written by Locke himself: "the Church ought to be separated from the State, and the State from the Church."[92]

These ideas are elaborated upon in Pope Leo XIII's 1885 encyclical *Immortale Dei*. In it, Leo XIII seems to reject the Lockean conception of religious liberty, denying "that everyone is to be free to follow whatever religion he prefers."[93] He likewise rejects the idea that the state ought to refrain from attending to spiritual affairs, arguing instead that "it [is] a sin for the State not to have care for religion as a something beyond its scope, or as of no practical benefit; or out of many forms of religion to adopt that one which chimes in with fancy."[94]

[91] Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors,* §44.
[92] Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors,* §55.
[93] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, §26.
[94] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, §6.

Later on, he makes it clear that the ideal political arrangement is not one where the state merely facilitates religious liberty, but one where the "religion instituted by Jesus Christ, established firmly in befitting dignity, [flourishes] everywhere, by the favour of princes and the legitimate protection of magistrates; and Church and state [are] happily united in concord."[95] By the turn of the twentieth century, it seemed clear that magisterial authority had not yet placed its faith in secular democracy.

This put Maritain in a tough position. As we mentioned briefly in the introduction, Maritain was pleased by many of the developments that had taken place in civil society throughout his lifetime. He spoke favorably of democracy, describing it as "the only way of bringing about a moral rationalization of politics" and the "only way through which the progressive energies of human life [come to] pass."[96] At the same time, however, Maritain recognized that some of these improvements in human flourishing were advanced on the basis of principles at odds with his Thomistic philosophical commitments.[97] Thus, one of Maritain's objectives in *Man and the State* was to formulate a new political theory that defended pluralistic democracy on non-liberal grounds. Although the book is comprehensive in its treatment of political authority, what is of particular interest to us here is his sixth chapter, where he directly addresses the Church-State issue.

In order to grasp Maritain's general argument, it is important to understand his distinctive philosophy of history. Maritain was aware that his predecessors within the Catholic intellectual tradition (Bellarmine, Pius IX, Leo XIII, etc.) held a very different view of Church-State relations than he did. In Maritain's view, however, it was a mistake to assume that a political arrangement deemed ideal in its time would necessarily remain ideal for all times. Instead, Maritain believed that each epoch possessed its own unique "historical climate" that had to be considered when determining the ideal form of Church-State relations.[98] Only in the context of a society's current "social, political, and juridical" circumstances could a political ideal be fashioned.[99]

[95] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, paragraph 21.
[96] Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State,* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1951), Chapter III, 59-60.
[97] Ibid Chapter VI, 159.
[98] Ibid Chapter VI, 156.
[99] Ibid Chapter VI, 156.

Maritain did not take this to mean that new political theories could be formulated without reference to the past. Rather, Maritain believed that a set of conditions, or "immutable principles," had to be met for any theory of Church-State relations to be adequate.[100] In this way, he could propose a new ideal relationship between Church and State while maintaining continuity with previous teaching. The immutable principles laid out by Maritain are threefold. First, the state must acknowledge that its end of temporal welfare is inferior to each individual person's spiritual end and, consequently, is subordinate to the spiritual in dignity.[101] Secondly, the Church, as the "Kingdom of God" on Earth, must be given the liberty to carry out its mission of teaching, preaching, and worshipping.[102] Finally, as creatures that are both corporeal and spiritual, those who profess faith in the Church are simultaneously members of the Church as well as the body politic. Because of this, the "Church and the body politic cannot live and develop in sheer isolation…from one another."[103] Consequently, there must be some kind of cooperation between Church and State.[104]

Now, as Maritain suggests, let us contextualize our own time period with what Maritain considers to be our particular "historical climate." For him, our age is a "secular" one, defined by the gradual rise of the state as completely differentiated and autonomous from the Church.[105] Maritain sees this as a positive development that fully realizes the "Gospel's very distinction between God's and Caesar's domains."[106] This does not mean that the state must be irreligious or indifferent toward religion. Instead, it merely means that the state is "only concerned with the temporal life of men and their temporal common good."[107] As a faithful Thomist, however, Maritain believed man to be a unity of body and soul, and as such, he saw the good of each man as transcending his mere material conditions. For this reason, the state must provide for the fulfillment of the "higher ends of the human person" by "supervising the development of sound conditions and means in the body politic for good human life, both material and rational."[108] Unlike Locke, Maritain does not believe the state exists exclusively to secure a man's "life, liberty, and estate." Rather, the "common good" envisioned by Maritain is much

[100] Ibid Chapter VI, 157.
[101] Ibid Chapter VI, 149-150.
[102] Ibid Chapter VI, 151-152.
[103] Ibid Chapter VI, 153.
[104] Ibid Chapter VI, 154.
[105] Ibid Chapter VI, 159.
[106] Ibid Chapter VI, 159.
[107] Ibid Chapter VI, 153.
[108] Ibid Chapter VI, 173b.

more comprehensive, encompassing both material interests as well as the spiritual good of each person.

But alas, as a secular institution, Maritain's state does not confess faith in the Catholic religion in quite the way Leo XIII would have hoped. This is because such a state would respect what is acknowledged as man's natural right to "free association" and to "believe the truth recognized by one's conscience."[109] As such, the state would be prohibited from imposing a singular belief system or way of life on its citizenry. Instead, Maritain argues that the state must respect the open discussion of ideas and opinions, for "[f]reedom of inquiry, even at risk of error, is the normal condition for men to get access to the truth."[110] In this way, Maritain's society bears a resemblance to the Lockean commonwealth, which is entirely unconcerned with the "truth of opinions." Furthermore, both thinkers would agree that the state is "not equipped to deal with matters of intelligence"—or speculative opinions as Locke would call them.[111] Thus, neither Locke nor Maritain believe that opinions can be restricted purely for their moral quality.

Maritain does, however, elevate the Church (and other churches) above the status of a mere voluntary association. Maritain's state, rooted in the natural law, acknowledges the importance of collectively acknowledging faith in a lawgiver.[112] Although this does not have to be done according to the Catholic Faith, such a state would have the right to grant institutional recognition and support to those "religious communities historically rooted in the life of the people."[113] Thus, full autonomy for Maritain is not synonymous with a complete lack of cooperation.

Indeed, this model of governance intends to preserve the Church as a "perfect and perfectly independent society" fully capable of achieving its own ends.[114] In Maritain's view, when the Church is made independent from the state, it will be able to exercise its function more "purely."[115] In this way, Maritain's "christianly inspired" democracy grants the Church the liberty it requires according to the three immutable principles mentioned earlier. The freedom to fulfill its mission will, in

[109] Ibid Chapter VI, 150.
[110] Ibid Chapter VI, 162.
[111] Ibid Chapter V, 118.
[112] Ibid Chapter VI, 172-173.
[113] Ibid Chapter VI, 174.
[114] Ibid Chapter VI, 175.
[115] Ibid Chapter VI, 169.

turn, inspire and rejuvenate the faithful, who will then influence all the states of the world through their universal and pervasive influence (which, in Maritain's view, provides for the spiritual superiority of the Church).[116] Finally, Maritain's state will achieve the immutable principle of cooperation by simply fulfilling its own proper end effectively.[117] As we have shown before, Maritain believes that the "common good" that the state strives for aims to secure our "higher ends" as well as our material interests. Therefore, just as grace builds on nature, Maritain is proposing that what the state owes to the Church is a well-formed and cultivated citizenry. Thus, in showing us how this arrangement satisfied all three of his immutable principles, Maritain is optimistic about the Church's ability to carry out its mission within a pluralistic society.

§ 4: AUTONOMY IN PRACTICE:

By now, we have discussed two theories of secular democracy. While both posit a kind of autonomy between Church and State, their intentions are radically different. Locke's theory aims to reduce the Church to the status of a voluntary association, subject to the state's coercive correction if they are deemed subversive to the values of a liberal society. Maritain's theory, on the other hand, seeks to liberate the Church from cumbersome political concerns, allowing it to conduct its mission in the freest sense possible. As this paper draws to a close, we will be testing the strength of these theories by investigating which end secular society is more capable of achieving.

To begin, let us return to a point in Maritain's argument which may give pause to contemporary readers: the idea that the Church and State must "cooperate" with one another. As was made clear, Maritain does not take this to mean that the state must conspire on behalf of a singular religious institution. If, however, the Church is regarded as a "supreme and sovereign" authority over matters of faith and morals (as Maritain would have it), it becomes hard to see how civil governments could act independently of the Church's directives.[118] Conversely, if the Church is not viewed as "supreme and sovereign," it becomes challenging to distinguish it from any other kind of voluntary association.

This very criticism was made cogently by a philosopher named Gregory Vlastos. A contemporary of Maritain's, he too greatly admired

[116] Ibid Chapter VI, 164.
[117] Ibid Chapter VI, 178.
[118] Ibid. Chapter VI, 185.

the secularization and democratization of civil society. Although he believed that there was much to be commended within Maritain's book, he was utterly dismayed by Maritain's conception of Church and state. He questioned whether the Church could exercise her full authority without "infringing on the 'full autonomy' of civil society."[119] Whereas Maritain was optimistic about society's ability to separate "God and Caesar," Vlastos noted that if the Church were to maintain its claim of absolute authority over matters of morality, its jurisdiction would have to *include* the temporal welfare of society. After all, peace, justice, and human flourishing are all *moral* goods.[120] This very idea is explicitly maintained within the encyclicals of Catholic social teaching, such as when Pope Pius XI proclaimed that "social" and "economic activities" belong underneath the Church's "supreme jurisdiction."[121] Such claims about the nature of papal authority make a neat division between "secular" and "spiritual" matters impossible.

Vlastos went on to argue that if the pope can authoritatively interpret and apply the natural law, he would then also possess the power to render the laws of sovereign nations illegitimate.[122] In making this claim, he employs Maritain's own Thomistic belief that an "unjust law, even if it expresses the will of the people, is not law."[123] Thus, if members of the Church "were so instructed by the [pope] as to understand that a given law of their state…goes 'against the laws and dictates of nature,' they would be conscience-bound to hold that it is not a law."[124] His argument can be restated more simply in the following syllogism: if an unjust law is no law at all, and the pope has the authority to determine whether a law is unjust, he therefore also has the authority to render democratically-instituted laws illicit. If the pope reserves the right to nullify the legitimacy of state law, then, theoretically, the legitimacy of political activity hinges upon the tacit or explicit approval of ecclesiastical authority. Consequently, democratic governments possess moral authority over Catholics only to the extent permitted by the Church. Thus, the state would only *appear* autonomous when,

[119] Gregory Vlastos, "Of Sovereignty in Church and State." *The Philosophical Review* 62, no. 4 (1953): 575-576. https://doi.org/10.2307/2182462.
[120] Ibid 569.
[121] Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, encyclical letter, May 15, 1931, para. 41, accessed November 27, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html.
[122] Vlastos, "Of Sovereignty in Church and State," 570.
[123] Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State,* Chapter II, 48.
[124] Vlastos, "Of Sovereignty in Church and State," 570.

in actuality, the validity of its activities would depend on the moral directives of the Church.

This is why Locke cautioned against permitting religions that "deliver" their members "up to the Protection and Service of another Prince." In such cases, citizens could not only face spiritual penalties for obeying secular laws, but might also feel morally obligated to enforce their denomination's moral teaching through legislation. If this were to occur, Vlastos argued, then the Church would threaten the autonomy of the state and "cease to be a voluntary association."[125] In Lockean fashion, Vlastos prioritizes the conditions that enable religious pluralism over any particular church's right to adhere to the fullness of their faith.

One point I hope is clear by now is the challenge of maintaining that the Church and state can operate in entirely separate spheres of jurisdictional authority without ever infringing on one another. To return to the dilemma that we presented at the beginning of this section, if the authority of the Church is to be regarded as "supreme and sovereign" over matters of faith and morals, then the otherwise legitimate functions of a democratic and pluralistic state cannot be truly autonomous from the moral judgements of the Church. What is considered to be the Church's proper sphere of influence (faith and morals) too frequently intersects with political and social matters for this to be possible.

Within Maritain's framework of mutual autonomy, one can certainly imagine functions which would be more appropriate for one entity or the other. No pope, as far as I am aware, has ever made a ruckus over the decisions a political body has made regarding their own traffic laws. It is those matters where faith, morals, and politics intersect that present more complex challenges. The debates surrounding the legality of abortion, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia, for example, have all been highly-politicized issues on which the Church has taken strong stances. In these instances where the teaching of the Church might conflict with the enactments of a sovereign nation, the question shifts from determining which entity has authority over the issue to deciding whose authority takes precedence.

Up to this point, we have been considering a hypothetical in which the members of the body politic recognize the moral authority of the Church. In our own day, however, the general public is far more likely to acknowledge and comply with the coercive power of the state

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[125] Vlastos, "Of Sovereignty in Church and State," 574.

than the directives of any one church or religious congregation. There are certainly many whose political opinions are influenced by their religious convictions, but governments in Western nations generally do not allow objections from clergy to prevent them from implementing duly-enacted laws. Thus, in practice, it certainly seems as if most Western nations recognize the state's authority over the Church whenever they encounter these "mixed" matters.

Maritain himself knew full well that the state was no longer beholden to the Church's bidding—in fact, he celebrated this development. He never seemed to anticipate, however, that the secularization of society would correspond with the waning influence of religion. Instead, as we have covered, he believed that the separation of Church and state would lead to the Church being able to conduct itself more "purely" and "in a completely free and autonomous manner."[126] In doing so, the Church would exercise a "vivifying" influence on the body politic, influencing the affairs of state through the activity of its laypeople rather than the demands of the clergy.[127]

It is abundantly clear to us today that this arrangement has not come to pass. The different Christian churches certainly still have a right to congregate and worship according to their particular doctrines, but beyond that, their ability to influence and change public opinion has only decreased. This is because, as Thomas Pink noted, when a society no longer feels obligated to acknowledge the truth of a particular religion, it simultaneously ceases to promote religion in general as a distinctive and transcendent good. In his words, "[i]t seems that unless the truth of supernatural revelation is accepted, there is simply no reason for denying the state the same authority over religion as over other natural goods."[128] As a result, the state then "seeks to direct religion, but without recognizing religion as a distinctive natural good, assimilating it instead…as one among many forms of subjectively fulfilling personal commitments, like a sport or a hobby."[129]

In other words, when the Church is not publicly recognized by the state as having a supernatural character that distinguishes it from all the other denominations claiming the same status, the Church is reduced

[126] Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State,* Chapter VI, 163.
[127] Ibid 162.
[128] Thomas Pink, "Jacques Maritain and the Problem of Church and State," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 79, no. 1 (January 2015): pg. 29.
[129] Ibid 29.

to a mere voluntary association of the Lockean variety. As such, the state has the same sort of jurisdiction that it would over other voluntary associations. To name just one example, were churches considered "essential services" during the 2020 lockdowns? Or were their activities restricted in the same way restaurants and gyms were? The answer to this question indicates that contemporary society has joined Locke in seeing no substantive distinction between religious congregations and secular associations. Far from what Maritain had hoped for, the process of secularization has not promoted the idea that religion is "essential" to fulfilling the ends of a human person. Instead, it has only lent itself to the Lockean view of Church-State relations.

§ 5: CONCLUSION

Allow me to now make explicit what I have merely been suggesting; Locke, in his theory of Church and State, presents a much more realistic vision of the kind of relationship these two entities can maintain in a secular society. The conflict between Church and state arises in their competing claims of ultimate authority— with the Church asserting authority over faith and morals and the state asserting authority over the political common good. Maritain argues that, in our secular era, the Church and state can remain simultaneously autonomous and sovereign within their respective spheres, and that this arrangement is ordered toward the benefit of both. This argument, however, presupposes that the jurisdictions of Church and state never overlap; otherwise, one authority would inevitably be subordinated to the other. As we have shown, however, there are plenty of "mixed matters" in which both entities can legitimately claim stake.

Furthermore, Maritain attributes to the Church no special power or privilege that would indicate that the Church would take priority over these "mixed matters." Because of Maritain's sincere belief in intellectual pluralism, his theory offers the Church no means for enforcing its vision of the common good. Although he personally believes in the truth of the Catholic religion, his ideal state would allow each man to pursue the "truth recognized by one's [own] conscience."[130] Locke's theory, on the other hand, provides the theoretical justification for censoring those who subvert the purpose of the liberal state. In the Lockean commonwealth, the magistrate is given full authority to censor those "practical opinions" which endanger men's liberty. Maritain has no such provision to regulate

[130] Ibid Chapter VI, 150.

those who would subvert his "christianly inspired" state. For a believer such as Maritain, the Church may be the kingdom of Heaven on Earth. As Locke would say, however, "every Church is Orthodox to itself."[131]

As both Vlastos and Pink show, I am not the first one to point out some of the vulnerabilities in Maritain's theory. Both authors correctly point out that the Church cannot exercise the rights it has traditionally claimed for itself within the context of a liberal, pluralistic state. My intention in this paper, however, was not merely to identify these areas of tension. Rather, I wanted to contextualize this ongoing discussion by digging deeper into the theoretical framework which gave rise to the secular state. In doing so, I hoped to show how Locke's theory of a liberal society (as well as secular society as it has unfolded) is *designed* to be insulated from the influence of any one, particular denomination. Although Maritain offers an alternative theory of secular democracy, the fruits of history have shown that the intended consequences of Locke's theory were far more plausible.

[131] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 33.

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THERE IS NO SUCH *FINIS ULTIMUS*

LIBERAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS CONSIDERED

MICHAEL ELLISON

In this paper, I will describe the philosophical anthropology presupposed by the liberal tradition and demonstrate how that anthropology influences liberal conceptions of the relationship between Church and state. My analysis will draw from the works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and John Rawls. I will also offer a critique of liberal anthropology and an alternative view of the relationship between Church and state based on the Thomistic tradition of Aquinas and Pope Leo XIII.

Despite the diversity and variety of the liberal tradition, the three liberal thinkers mentioned above are united by common threads. One such thread is that all three of them are social contract theorists. Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* are explicitly social contract works. Rawls' system, outlined in *A Theory of Justice* and *Justice as Fairness*, is slightly different, involving not a contract that charters a government but an agreement on certain principles adopted by citizens in a hypothetical "original position" characterized by being

under a "veil of ignorance."[1] Rawls states that his theory "generalizes the familiar idea of the social contract," but modifies it by "making the object of agreement the first principles of justice… rather than a particular form of government."[2] Thus, despite his modifications, Rawls identifies himself with the social contract tradition of Hobbes and Locke and clarifies that his system shares its basic structure.

However, the most significant commonality between the liberal thinkers is the philosophical anthropology they share and presuppose in their political theories. Here, there is distinct congruence between all three authors: despite the various conclusions they draw about the ideal system of government and how to structure it, they all hold a common understanding of human nature and the human person. This liberal anthropology views man as having no determinate good toward which he is naturally inclined but instead as defining his own conception of the good and being primarily governed by the passions.

This view of man results from the liberal rejection or bracketing of teleology. In Hobbes' *Leviathan* for example, he explicitly rejects the teleological notion of man having a highest end or good to which he is compelled by nature. He states:

> [W]e are to consider that the felicity of this life consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus* (utmost aim) nor *Summum Bonum* (greatest good) as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers.[3]

Here, Hobbes asserts that man has no end or good to which he is inclined. Instead, Hobbes argues that man's happiness is driven by "a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another, the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter."[4] It is continual because "the object of man's desire is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of his future desire."[5] Importantly, Hobbes leaves the object of man's desires undefined because he believes that man's desires are simply whatever he is inclined to at any particular moment. Thus, man has no ultimate good that he desires, which leaves

1 See John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement,* ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), Pt. I, §6.2-3, p. 15-16.
2 Ibid., §6.3, p. 16.
3 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan,* ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1994), Pt. I, ch. xi, par. 1, p. 57.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.

him free to define the good for himself. Hobbes substitutes for the teleological conception of the human good a private notion of the good based on each person's appetites and desires.

Locke also rejects a teleological notion of man's ultimate good and adopts the notion that each person can define the good for themselves. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* he writes,

> The Mind has a different relish, as well as the Palate; and you will as fruitlesly endeavor to delight all Men with Riches or Glory… as you would to satisfy all Men's Hunger with Cheese or Lobsters…. Hence it was, I think, that the Philosophers of old did in vain enquire, whether *Summum bonum* consisted in Riches, or bodily Delights, or Virtue, or Contemplation: And they might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best Relish were to be found in Apple, Plumbs, or Nuts…[6]

Once again, we see the rejection of an objective human good in favor of the good being reduced to personal preference. Locke's comparison of debates regarding the good to arguments about preferred foods and his use of "relish" and "palate" vividly illustrate that man's good comes down to personal taste. He says, "What has an aptness to produce Pleasure in us, is that we call *Good*…"[7] Locke clarifies that people define their conception of the good based on what they find pleasurable. Haig Patapan and Jeffery Sikkenga connect this to Locke's concept of the "pursuit of happiness," writing, "Locke argues that…. [w]e define what is good by what gives us 'Happiness,' which Locke defines as 'the utmost Pleasure we are capable of.'"[8] This, in turn, results in "[t]he person's pursuit of a 'greatest good' for him as a human being transform[ing] into the person's 'pursuit of happiness' for him as an individual."[9] Thus, for Locke as well as Hobbes, human happiness depends on the private conception of the good a person has.

John Rawls takes a slightly different approach to the question of the human good. Like Hobbes and Locke, he affirms that human beings can define their own conception of the good. He states, "Citizens are free

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6 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Bk. II, ch. xxi, §55, p. 269, ln. 11-14, 18-22.

7 Ibid., §42, p. 259, ln. 2-3.

8 Haig Patapan and Jeffery Sikkenga, "John Locke's 'Unease': The Theoretical Foundation of the Modern Separation of Church and State," *Political Theory* 52, no. 5 (2024): 822.

9 Ibid., 824 (citations removed).

in that they conceive of themselves… as having the moral power to have a conception of the good…. [T]hey are seen as capable of revising and changing this conception on reasonable and rational grounds…"[10] Rawls even says the ability to do this is a fundamental liberty.[11] However, unlike Hobbes and Locke, Rawls does not say that this ability to define a conception of the good for oneself is because there is no objective human good to begin with. Rawls does not even provide an argument against this teleological conception of the human good. Instead, Rawls simply brackets the issue entirely and states that "reasonable pluralism," the presence of many competing conceptions of the good in the public sphere, is a fact of life. Objective conceptions of the human good are

> not… excluded by deductive argument…. Instead, they are ruled out by the historical conditions and the public culture of democracy that set out the requirements for… a modern constitutional regime. Among those historical conditions is the fact of reasonable pluralism…[12]

In response to those who would say that "the religiously true, or the philosophically true, overrides the politically reasonable," Rawls asserts that there is no place in public reason to investigate such claims: "We simply say that such a doctrine is politically unreasonable. Within political liberalism nothing more need be said."[13] Rawls states that the "fact" of reasonable pluralism requires society to structure itself to incorporate many different conceptions of the good, despite religious and philosophical arguments that there is an objective good that human nature inclines people toward. In a sense, he assumes what needs to be proved—that human nature does not incline man toward an objective good, or that this fact is unknowable to reason.[14]

Whatever the deficiencies in Rawls' refusal to provide an argument against an objective human good, one can see that rejecting a teleological conception of the human good, which humans are directed to by nature, is a common thread in liberal anthropology. It also leads to the second common feature of liberal anthropology, the characterization of human beings as driven primarily by their passions. Since the

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10 Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* Pt. I, §7.4, p. 21.

11 See ibid., Pt. III, §32.4, p. 113.

12 Ibid., Pt. I, §8.2, p. 25.

13 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), Pt. 4, p. 488.

14 This is Allan Bloom's primary criticism of Rawls' system. See Allan Bloom, "Justice: John Rawls Vs. The Tradition of Political Philosophy," *The American Political Science Review* 69, no. 2 (1975): 648-662.

liberal tradition holds that there is no objective conception of the good determined by human nature, liberal thinkers must explain what the primary determining factor is in a person's private conception of the good. As seen above, Hobbes, Locke, and Rawls all say that a person seeks whatever they find brings them enjoyment or pleasure. Hobbes clarifies this by adding that enjoyment "ariseth… from the diversity of passions."[15]

Locke echoes this sentiment in the comments cited above about taste and palate, but he also argues that one particular passion is behind our actions: unease. Patapan and Sikkenga outline Locke's definition of unease as "'[a]ll pain of the body whatsoever and disquiet of the mind.' Purely bodily pains are those such as hunger and thirst, and other natural desires…. Disquiet of the mind is caused by ideas…"[16] Locke argues that unease compels humans to seek what they believe to be the good. After all, no one wants the pain, disquiet, and discontentedness that comes from feeling unease, so one seeks what they think will quell their unease and views whatever that is as good for doing so.[17] Lest anyone construe Locke's idea of unease like Augustine's restlessness, Patapan and Sikkenga explain how Locke's unease is not tied to any notion of an objective good:

> [Locke's unease] allows him to abandon finally the last vestiges of the "old Philosophers" and scholastics who argued… that we are by nature drawn toward a *summum bonum*. Consequently, Locke's unease is not like Augustine's *inquietum* and Pascal's *inquiètude*, a feeling of lacking some profound good in our lives, which makes us unhappy and thereby gives rise to a longing for that greater good. Rather, unease is based on physical and mental pain and need not necessarily point to or disclose our neediness for the divine.[18]

Since Locke's unease is based on physical and mental pain, it is clear that his account of human action is based on seeking what one believes to be the good in response to the pleasures and pains one is confronted with. Of course, it is the passions that govern pleasures and pains, which means that human action is motivated at the root by the passions, according to Locke. As seen above, this is Hobbes' position as well, but Patapan and Sikkenga argue that Locke's concept of unease represents

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15 Hobbes, *Leviathan,* Pt. I, ch. xi, par. 1, p. 57.

16 Patapan and Sikkenga, "John Locke's 'Unease'," 824 (citations and footnotes removed).

17 Cf. Locke, *Essay,* Bk. II, ch. xxi, §31.

18 Patapan and Sikkenga, "John Locke's 'Unease'" 827.

a break with Hobbes' passions. However, they fail to demonstrate any fundamental disagreement between Hobbes' passions and Locke's unease; instead, they only show how Locke's concept of unease leads him to a different model of government than Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Thus, I argue that while Hobbes and Locke may differ on the implications that their theories have on governmental structure, the role of the passions in human action that they presuppose is essentially the same.[19]

Regarding the role of the passions, Rawls is more nuanced. He does not say that the passions are the primary driving force behind a person's actions. Instead, he says that a person defines their private conception of the good based on any number of "comprehensive doctrines" or worldviews. Whichever one a person deems as resulting in "a fully worthwhile life" is what defines their conception of the good.[20] Rawls names both "the fulfillment of… (rational) preferences" and the fulfillment of "desires (as in a utilitarian view)" as among what people consider to be a happy and worthwhile life,[21] so he clearly makes a place in his system of models of human action that place desire as the primary motivator, even if he differs from other liberal thinkers by not explicitly affirming such a model himself.

Thus, one can see that the liberal tradition presupposes a common anthropology that denies an objective conception of the good determined by human nature. Instead, it posits no teleological good or end for human beings and argues that without this, people are free to define their own private conception of the good. This conception is, in turn, heavily influenced by the pleasures and pains that people encounter in their lives, which elevates the passions to a place of prominence in the realm of human action, since it is the passions that govern pleasure or pain and, therefore, incline one to seek or not seek certain things inasmuch as one perceives them as good or bad. Having explored the liberal anthropology, its effects on liberal conceptions of church-state relations can now be analyzed.

As mentioned above, Hobbes, Locke, and Rawls all adopt a form of social contract in constructing their political systems. A closer look reveals that the government set up under the social contract secures the conditions necessary for people to pursue their private conception of the good for each of these thinkers. These thinkers only differ as to

[19] See Patapan and Sikkenga, "John Locke's 'Unease'," 827-829.
[20] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* Pt. I, §7.1, p. 19.
[21] Ibid., Pt. II, §17.3, p. 60.

what those necessary conditions are. For Hobbes, human beings have "a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in death" because they want the means to attain and secure the objects they desire.[22] However, because all people desire the same scarce goods and nature has made people relatively equal in their physical and mental faculties for securing these, this results in a state of constant competition where no one is secure in achieving their private conception of the good. This is what Hobbes calls the "war… of every man against every man."[23] From this, Hobbes argues that all people desire peace and security because it alone guarantees them the ability to pursue their private conceptions of the good without the threat of others.[24] Since the state is constituted so as to ensure peace and security, the direct purpose of the state is to secure the conditions under which people can pursue their conceptions of the good.[25]

Similarly, Locke says that the state is instituted to preserve people's civil interests, which he says are "Life, Liberty, Health, and Indolency of Body; and the Possession of outward things."[26] However, Locke makes clear that liberty is simply the means "whereby [men] may acquire what they… want" and that the reason for securing it, along with the other civil interests, is that they "contribute to the Comfort and Happiness of this Life."[27] As demonstrated above, the pursuit of "happiness of this life" for Locke is nothing other than the pursuit of one's private conception of the good. Thus, the civil interests that the state is instituted to protect are simply the conditions under which one can pursue their private conception of the good. Therefore, for Hobbes and Locke, securing the conditions necessary to pursue one's private conception of the good is the purpose and mission of the state.

Rawls' system is not much different. Having assumed the "fact" of reasonable pluralism, Rawls argues that despite their differing conceptions of the good, no person can achieve their conception of the good without human society and the resources and security it gives them. Thus, people must cooperate in society despite their different ideas of the good so that all can achieve their conceptions of the good. This is what Rawls means by his definition of society as a "fair system

[22] Hobbes, *Leviathan,* Pt. I, ch. xi, par. 2, p. 58.
[23] Ibid., ch. xiii, par. 8, p. 76; see also par. 1-4.
[24] Cf. ibid., ch. xiv, par. 4, p. 80.
[25] See ibid. Pt. II, ch. xvii, par. 13, p. 109.
[26] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. James H. Tully (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), p. 26.
[27] Ibid., 47.

of social cooperation."[28] But, as in any system of cooperation, there must be "publicly recognized rules and procedures" that govern conduct and cooperation.[29] Only with these in place can the conditions under which people can secure their conceptions of the good be realized. For Rawls, these conditions end up being none other than his two principles of justice, which serve to guarantee people the rights and goods requisite to pursuing any conception of the good and to mitigating social inequalities that may arise in society.[30] Once again, Rawls clarifies the point that the liberal state exists to protect and secure the conditions under which people can pursue their conceptions of the good.

The fact that the liberal state exists to secure people's ability to define and pursue the good as they see it has direct consequences on the relationship between the Church and the state in liberal thought. In each case, there is either an explicit or implicit subordination of the Church to the state and severe limitations placed on it, inasmuch as it threatens the liberal state's ability to secure the conditions under which people can pursue their private conceptions of the good. In Hobbes, this is explicit: Hobbes views the Church and its ecclesial hierarchy as embodying a rival sovereign to the state.[31] The presence of a rival sovereign that can command its subjects undermines the monopoly of power that the state sovereign is given in the social contract to preserve peace, which is the condition under which people can define and pursue the good for themselves.[32] Thus, the Church must be completely subordinate to the state to preserve this condition. Hobbes says the rights of judging what doctrines are true, preaching, and even administering sacraments are "annexed to the sovereignty" for "the preserving of peace and security," which is to say for preserving the ability to define and pursue one's private conception of the good.[33] As Hobbes summarizes, "[The civil sovereign] hath the supreme power in all causes, as well ecclesiastical as civil…"[34]

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[28] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* Pt. I, §2.1, p. 5.
[29] Ibid., §2.2, p. 6.
[30] See ibid. §2.3; Pt. II, §13.1, 3; §17.1-2.
[31] Since Hobbes indiscriminately defines the church as any group gathered together to profess the Christian religion, his comments on the relationship between the Church and the state extend indiscriminately to the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church (against which much of the later parts of *Leviathan* is directed) or any church denomination.. See Hobbes, *Leviathan,* Pt. III, ch. xxix.
[32] Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* Pt. II, ch. xix, par. 3, p. 119.
[33] Ibid., ch. xviii, par. 8-9, p. 113; see also Pt. III, ch. xlii, par. 71-72, p. 368-369.
[34] Ibid. Pt. III, ch. xlii, par. 80, p. 373; see also ch. xxxix, par. 5, p. 316.

Rawls and Locke are less explicit in their subordination of the Church to the state. Each supports the separation of Church and state[35] or claims to have a system that is neutral or indifferent to all "comprehensive doctrines of the good."[36] However, in their discussions of tolerance in a pluralistic society, they make several statements which imply a non-neutral position. Locke, for example, states in his *Letter Concerning Toleration* that the state is not to extend religious toleration to sects that promote doctrines that would "arrogate to themselves… some peculiar Prerogative… in effect opposite to the Civil Right of the Community."[37] Because such a practice is "contrary to… the preservation of Civil Society," these groups are not to be tolerated.[38] However, recall that the preservation of civil society for Locke is essentially the preservation of the ability to pursue one's private conception of the good since this is the purpose for which society is instituted. Thus, by not extending toleration to such groups, Locke says that any group that promotes opinions that give them authority over the state should not be tolerated because they will impose that authority on others and jeopardize people's ability to pursue the good as they see it. Significantly, he names several Roman Catholic teachings, such as the right of the Church to depose apostate kings, as among these adverse opinions, thus explicitly denying toleration in this case.[39]

Similarly, Rawls states that a group that sees its conception of the good as the true one and seeks to structure society accordingly is not to be tolerated if it has a realistic chance of overturning the Rawlsian system. This is because he views the group's acceptance of the Rawlsian system, structured around the two principles of justice, as only conditional, based on the fact that they are a minority who cannot restructure society according to the conception of the good they hold to be objectively true. Thus, he says, such doctrines are "a threat to democratic institutions, since it is impossible for them to abide by a constitutional regime except as a *modus vivendi.*"[40] The "democratic institutions" and "constitutional regime" Rawls refers to are nothing less than the Rawlsian system and its two principles of justice. Since these, as outlined above, are instituted to preserve people's right to define the good for themselves, Rawls is making the same point as Locke, that groups who infringe upon others' ability to define the good for themselves by promoting an objective good are not to be tolerated. He says

35 See Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration,* 26.
36 Cf. ibid, 26-27; Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* Pt. 2, Lect. V, §1.1, p. 175.
37 Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration,* 49.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 49-50.
40 Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* Pt. 4, p. 489.

such groups ought to be "curbed," which, though sounding mundane, leaves the door open for any variety of state actions against such groups in a Rawlsian polity.[41]

Thus, the liberal anthropology, with its view that there is no objective good for man and that he is free to define and pursue the good as he sees fit, directly affects the relationship between the Church and state that each of the liberal thinkers envisions. In each case, it results in explicit subordination of the Church to the state or severe limitations being placed on the freedom and toleration granted to the Church by the state since the Church's promotion of an objective human good directly confronts the purpose of the liberal state, which is to protect people's right to pursue whatever they imagine the good to be. With all of this in mind, I will now give a Thomistic critique of the liberal anthropology and explore how the Thomistic tradition has understood the relationship between the Church and the state.

To begin, Aquinas explicitly denies the fundamental premise of liberal anthropology, that there is no objective, final good for man. Aquinas argues that human nature inclines humans to an objective good that is in accordance with their nature.[42] Since man is by nature a rational being, the objective good that nature inclines him toward is living according to reason, or virtuous living.[43] Now, it is important to note that Aquinas does not believe these principles are believed solely by faith. Rather, Aquinas believes that this is philosophically demonstrable because it follows from God's governance of the universe through divine providence, in which God "direct[s] nature towards good as an end."[44] Since Aquinas believes that divine providence is rationally demonstrable,[45] then it follows that man's objective end is also demonstrable and knowable to human reason. This is a direct rebuttal to the liberal anthropological claim that man either has no objective good to which he is directed, or such a good is not knowable to human reason. In particular, it undermines Rawls' reliance on the "fact" of reasonable pluralism, for if man has the determinate end of virtuous living, which is knowable to human reason, then one cannot simply assume reasonable

[41] Cf. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), Pt. 2, ch. IV, §35, p. 220.

[42] Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae [ST],* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, online edition, accessed November 11, 2024, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/, I-II.1.1.

[43] Cf. ibid. I-II.1.3, 93.5.

[44] Ibid. I.103.1 co.

[45] See ibid. I.22.1 for Aquinas's demonstration of divine providence.

pluralism as Rawls does since it is equally reasonable that all people could come to know this end through the exercise of their rationality. In addition, Aquinas's argument that man is inclined to live according to reason and not according to passion further undermines the aspects of liberal anthropology that follow from its denial of an objective end for man, that man is primarily driven by the passions.[46]

Regarding the origins and purpose of the state, Aquinas states that "man is by nature a social and political animal,"[47] and people form political communities to "live *well* in a way that would not be possible for each of them living singly."[48] Thus, Aquinas believes that the state should promote the good of man by promoting virtuous living. However, Aquinas notes that man's final end does not consist solely in living a virtuous life in society: it has a further spiritual dimension to it since "through virtuous living" man "attain[s] to the enjoyment of the Divine"—the Beatific Vision, which is his ultimate and final end.[49] The state, being concerned merely with temporal living, cannot safely direct man to the transcendent, spiritual aspect of his end which is the Beatific Vision.[50] Thus, Aquinas says man "has need of another, spiritual, care by which he is guided towards the harbour of eternal salvation. And this is… the Church of Christ."[51] From this, Aquinas concludes that both the Church and the state are necessary for man to achieve his good and live well. The Church is needed to govern and provide "those things which pertain to the salvation of the soul," while the state is necessary to govern and provide "those things which pertain to the civil good."[52]

These two entities must work together and cooperate to fulfill Aquinas's vision of both of them governing and directing man to his good. However, the practicalities of how the Church and the state work together to make this happen are not entirely clear in Aquinas's thought.

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46 See also ibid. I-II.2.6, where Aquinas demonstrates that bodily pleasures toward which the passions incline people cannot constitute true happiness and the fulfillment of man's nature.

47 Thomas Aquinas, *De regime principum,* Bk. I, ch. I, in Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings [APW]*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 5-6.

48 Ibid., ch. xv, 40 (emphasis mine).

49 Ibid., 41. See also Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith [Summa Contra Gentiles]*, trans. Anton C. Pegis et al., online edition, accessed April 6, 2025, https://isidore.co/aquinas/ContraGentiles.htm, bk. 3, ch. 25.

50 Cf. ibid. 39-40.

51 Ibid. 40.

52 Thomas Aquinas, *Scripta super libros sententiarum* II, Dist. 44, quaest. 3, in *APW,* 278.

He certainly makes clear that both are needed to direct man to his good and that the spiritual power is ultimately superior since it guides man to his higher, transcendent end.[53] Still, he does not specify the constitutions or governmental structures most conducive to Church-state relations. However, Pope Leo XIII, a disciple of Aquinas, provides one way it could take shape: the confessional state. In his encyclical *Immortale Dei,* Leo states that the close cooperation of Church and state produces "benefits… manifold and great" in civil society.[54] Drawing on Thomistic anthropology and divine providence, Leo says that the state arises naturally from man's desire to live well, both morally and intellectually, and argues that since the state "has its source in nature," it has, "consequently, God for its Author."[55] In light of these demonstrable facts, Leo says the state has a natural obligation to publicly recognize its origin in God and give thanks to Him by professing true religion.[56]

With this principle in mind, Leo outlines his vision for the confessional state. Roman Catholicism is recognized as the true religion and privileged by the state, giving the Church ample freedom to fulfill her divine mission. Leo says such an arrangement will bring about the benefits he speaks of in the opening section. By giving the Church the freedom to promote the gospel and teach virtue, Leo says the result will be a strong foundation for human rights, unifying beliefs in society, laws that are informed by truth and justice, reverence toward the authority of the state, and citizens who treat each other with charity and virtue.[57] All this, Leo says, is a result of the confessional state actively promoting true religion instead of relegating religious truth to a matter of personal opinion, like in a liberal society. In fact, Leo says that the privatization of religion and ignorance of the common good for the sake of the private good, characteristic of the liberal tradition, leads to societal degradation. This is because exiling religion to the private sphere casts aside the innumerable, valuable benefits that healthy Church-state cooperation can bring. Leo warns that such individualism is "not in itself an advantage over which society can wisely rejoice."[58]

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[53] See Aquinas, *De regime principum,* Bk. I, ch. xv, 41.
[54] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei [ID],* §1, Vatican trans., https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01111885_immortale-dei.html.
[55] Ibid., §3.
[56] Cf. ibid., §6.
[57] See ibid., §17-19.
[58] Ibid., §32.

Despite the strong opposition of the Thomistic tradition to core aspects of liberal political theory, Aquinas and Leo both note that, in Leo's words,

> [N]o one of the several forms of government is in itself condemned, inasmuch as none of them contains anything contrary to Catholic doctrine, and all of them are capable, if wisely and justly managed, to insure the welfare of the State.[59]

This is to say that the confessional state model is not the only way in which flourishing Church-state relations can be achieved, and society can be governed for the good of man. Instead, the Thomistic tradition allows that even a government structured according to a social contract model, such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rawls' systems, could, in theory, accomplish this. However, the obstacles would be significant. Firstly, as seen above, the liberal anthropology that is directly opposed by the Thomistic tradition plays an indispensable role in setting up the political systems envisioned by the liberal thinkers, as the goal of their state is to protect people's ability to define the good for themselves. Rawls and the other liberal thinkers see this as a way people are equal in society, that all are equally capable of defining the good for themselves. However, as Paul Weithman points out, Aquinas's defense of an objective good that is common to all men makes him understand equality differently than the liberal tradition:

> [I]n Aquinas's view, members of society are coparticipants in its common good…. He argues that realizing the common good depends upon harmonizing… differences so that each compensates for what others lack, and differences work for the good of all. He thinks that in a well-functioning political society, members complete or complement one another. Aquinas therefore endorses what might be called the complementarity view of political membership.[60]

Because of this fundamental understanding of human beings as having an objective good shared by all of them, a common good that they must work together in society to achieve, Weithman concludes that a complete synthesis between Thomistic political principles and democratic liberal political theory would be nearly impossible. As Weithman concludes,

> Since Aquinas held the complementarity view rather than the egalitarian view about political membership, he *did not* hold a democratic conception

[59] Ibid. §36.
[60] Paul J. Weithman, "Complementarity and Equality in the Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas," *Theological Studies* 59, no. 2 (1998): 280-281.

> of political equality. And since complementarity is central to his social as well as his political thought, framing a democratic Thomism would require significant revisions in Aquinas's position.[61]

I have now shown how the liberal tradition shares a common anthropology that denies an objective good that man is by nature guided toward and argues that all people are equally capable of defining their own private conception of the good. I have also demonstrated how this anthropology not only dictates how the liberal state is constituted, as it exists to ensure people's ability to define the good for themselves but also how this anthropology directly influences the liberal conception of Church-state relations, creating a society in which the Church must be "curbed" since it promotes an objective good. Lastly, I have also shown how Aquinas would attack the central premises of the liberal anthropology, arguing that an objective human good is rationally demonstrable through divine providence, and outlined how the Thomistic tradition has envisioned societies such as the confessional state where the Church and state work together to promote the common good of man.

[61] Ibid., 281-282, emphasis mine.

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PALOMA FIGUEROA
McGuill University

Paloma Figueroa is a junior at McGill University studying Philosophy, International Development, and Arabic. She recently joined the Honours Philosophy program to spend more time doing what she finds most intellectually fulfilling – exploring topics like the one she wrote about for this journal, and applying philosophical insights to practical settings. She believes that 'philosophizing' is a way of life from which everyone – not just Philosophy students – can benefit, and has made it her goal to demonstrate this through both writing and conversation. Aside from meta-philosophical questions, she is particularly interested in 20th century existentialism, as well as in the relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis. Beyond academics, Paloma enjoys engaging with 1970s pop culture through her Instagram account @70smania, dancing (especially salsa & bachata!), and engaging with different languages and cultures through music, movies, food, and strolls around Montréal or her native NYC.

SHEA DIVOLL
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Shea Divoll is a junior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, where he is completing a double major in Physics and Mechanical Engineering. He completed his Humanities and Arts Requirement in the Philosophy and Religious Studies Program - taking classes on Wuwei in Classical Daoism, Buddhism in America, epistemology, and ancient Chinese religion. More specifically, he enjoys writing and learning about the more mystical and esoteric side of religion, as well as the often underlooked cross-cultural exchanges of ideas by various thought systems. Outside of class, he enjoys hiking in the White Mountains, travelling to see architecture, reading, watching movies, and listening to music. After graduation, he is open to working in the engineering industry or getting a higher education (including an openness to studying physics, philosophy, math, or economics) - and he also has a long-term goal of starting an architecture and design practice on the side.

SEAN SCULLY
The Catholic University of America

Sean Scully is a senior at the Catholic University of America studying Philosophy. He has a strong interest in the areas where philosophical disciplines (most especially metaphysics and political philosophy) can borrow from theological insights. Foremost among his concerns is the question of how a regime can properly prepare its citizenry to exercise their rights and liberties well. Outside of

the classroom, he is currently interning on Capitol Hill, where he plans to pursue full-time opportunities upon his graduation in May.

MICHAEL ELLISON
The Catholic University of America

Michael Ellison is a senior studying philosophy at the Catholic University of America. His interests are mainly in metaphysics, political philosophy, and the philosophies of Plato and Aquinas. He enjoys exploring how the philosophical theories of the past have influenced modern culture and the ways that they can speak to the issues and questions society faces today. In his free time, he enjoys hiking and being outdoors, travelling, and playing violin. After college, he plans to do a year with the Fellows Initiative in North Carolina.

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