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“Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity.”

*Ludwig Wittgenstein*



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Many people worked long and hard as Editor-in-Chief for this edition of *Harvest Moon*. I cannot take credit for selecting the papers we chose, nor for overseeing the bulk of the editing process. While I cannot claim the distinction of having acted the longest or the hardest as Editor in Chief—this honor in my opinion, falls to Alex Kozak—I can say that I am glad to have been able to see Harvest Moon finally reach its ultimate publication. And while I cannot claim to have worked longest or hardest as Editor in Chief, I did do it last, and so the task of introducing the edition falls to me.

This edition has passed through many different hands, and in doing so surpassed its estimated publication date in triplicate. Some students graduated, some were unable to continue to commit due to personal tragedy. Some simply underestimated their workloads. Eventually Harvest Moon went into remission and lay dormant for several months before it was picked up again and carried through to the finish line.

In spite of all this, the edition has been published, Harvest Moon has been reestablished, and a strong new group of student editors has committed to seeing the journal through to another edition, if not more. As I write this, they are busily typesetting and proofreading the edition you see in your hands. They have heard firsthand woeful tales of the perils that can befall an editor, and by extension the edition, and have taken note of the wisdom Alex, Matteo, and I have tried to pass on. I have complete faith that they will be able to continue on the tradition of Harvest Moon in my stead, and I look forward to receiving the future editions in the mail (and online!).

I am therefore happy to announce that Harvest Moon is and remains Berkeley's undergraduate philosophy journal: it is written, edited, managed, and published *entirely* by UC Berkeley undergraduates, and has

been since 2001. As Nick Riggle before me remarked in the previous editions' Editor's Note, this publication is "more than just a medium for talented students to get their names out there." Harvest Moon represents the intellectual rigor and accomplishment that the Berkeley department is known to foster and the undergraduates are known to display. This journal is a reflection of the philosophical prowess and intellectual acumen that the students of this department are capable of, and recognized for.

In May 2007 Nick Riggle predicted that there would be another edition of Harvest Moon, and in May 2009, I am pleased to present one. With any luck, my successors will be able to outdo us both, and deliver one within a year. How about it, guys?

Chelsea Anne Harrington  
April 2009

# PREFACE

The new issue of *Harvest Moon* testifies marvelously to the vitality of philosophical life in the undergraduate community at Berkeley. The four essays that make up this volume certainly justify its Wittgensteinian motto that philosophy is an activity and not a body of doctrine. While most or all of these pieces have originated in classroom work, they all have taken their problems far beyond what they may have learnt there. Each of them reveals, indeed, an intense personal engagement in the philosophical matters it discusses. Having worked with some of the authors of these essays, I know of their great dedication to philosophy and the intensity of their intellectual commitments. But reading their work now I am full admiration about how much further they have gone in the development of their talents.

The second thing to note is that the essays that make up this volume address topics that lie outside the analytic tradition in philosophy. The philosophers under discussion here are Nietzsche and Carl Schmitt, Wittgenstein and Foucault, not Quine or Carnap, Paul Grice or Michael Dummett. At the same time these essays exhibit a determination to be clear and precise in argument and exposition that is generally considered a hallmark of the analytic approach to philosophy. I read these essays, thus, as promissory notes for a new kind of philosophizing that overcomes the wretched distinction between Anglo-American, analytic and so-called “Continental” philosophy. I have always been convinced that each side of this divide can learn from the other and the essays printed in this volume illustrate how this can be done.

I am sure that we will hear again from the contributors to this volume, that this will not be their last publication in philosophy. Perhaps, they themselves will, one day, look back on this work with some embarrassment, having traveled far beyond the point they have now

reached. That would be a pity. For the rest of us, their present work will undoubtedly remain a sign of pleasurable achievement.

Hans Sluga  
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LARRY S. MCGRATH

# Temporality and Agency as Eternal Recurrence

And Nietzsche, with his theory of eternal recurrence. He said that the life we lived we're gonna live over again the exact same way for eternity. Great. That means I'll have to sit through the Ice Capades again. It's not worth it.

*Woody Allen*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted from the film *Hannah and Her Sisters*, 1986

## Introduction: Learning to Live with Style<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche is a stylish philosopher. Even a cursory exposure to his works reveals a noticeable style of philosophical construction that overthrows the systematic sterility of his predecessors. It was Nietzsche who mistrusted all systematizers for their lack of integrity.<sup>2</sup> The honest philosopher, he contended, relies on his own style, employing the voice with which his ideas manifest in their immediacy. But Nietzsche was also a philosopher of style. It was the imperative to impart a creative style to one's actions that in many ways defined the *Übermensch*, the crystallization of Nietzsche's ultimate philosophical project. The overman who precipitates the evolution of modern humanity, much like the philosopher who eschews systematicity, is the one "who has organized the chaos of his passions, given style to his character, and become creative."<sup>3</sup> He does not rely upon pre-established values to ground the meaning he finds in the world. His active engagement in the world creates meaning through the style he imparts upon the life he lives.

This investigation probes how Nietzsche understood the task of imparting style to one's life. Its concern is not the textual style of Nietzsche's writing. The former understanding of style is one that Nietzsche sought to dislodge from its subservient relation to substance. His task aimed at reviving the creation of a style from its status as "mere style," as rigorous thought is often contrasted with rhetoric, or concepts with outward appearance. Throughout his works, style, specifically the task of self-stylization, corresponds to the creative mastery over one's life. One exists, but only by affirming existence as such can one impart style to one's life.

Nietzsche describes "the meaning of every style" as the communication of "an inward tension of pathos, by means of signs, including the tempo of these signs."<sup>4</sup> Whenever Nietzsche invokes style or references the noble souls who have stylized their existence, he describes a creation on par with his own philosophy. Style is not systematic, rigidified, nor schematized. It is created immanently out of chaos. This essay fittingly searches for an account of what it means to impart style to one's existence in what is arguably Nietzsche's most chaotic idea, the eternal recurrence. The eternal recurrence, this essay argues, posits the nature of style. Those who affirm "this highest formula of affirmation

<sup>2</sup>This article is the first chapter of a longer work by Larry S. McGrath.

<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*. Maxims and Arrows 26.

<sup>3</sup>Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. 316.

<sup>4</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*. 265.

that is at all attainable”<sup>5</sup> impart style to their agency. This essay is not concerned with describing the qualities of particular styles with which we can ask. Affirming the eternal recurrence furnishes the *basis* of self-stylization as the locus of one’s purpose amidst an otherwise purposeless world.

This essay takes as its task the modest aim of extracting an account of style from the eternal recurrence. It does not claim, in the face of a century’s worth of commentary, to advance the authoritative truth of Nietzsche’s enigmatic notion. Nietzsche took on many rolls in developing the eternal recurrence. He was certainly a philosopher, but also a cultural critic, a psychologist, a theologian, and undeniably a comic. In interpreting the eternal recurrence, this essay focuses on its metaphysical content. In order to complete this task, this essay will recruit the work of Gilles Deleuze. His groundbreaking *Nietzsche and Philosophy* focuses on the possibility of immanent creation out of the tension among force. While Deleuze’s work identifies such possibilities beneath the purview of human activity, they will help shed light on how one can affirm the eternal recurrence in order to seize hold of the forces that exceed oneself as the basis of creative stylization. Hence, secondary to the task of constructing an account of style, this essay will compare Deleuze’s reading of the eternal recurrence with Nietzsche’s original formulation.

These twin projects will unfold in three chapters. The first presents a theoretical account of the eternal recurrence, constructed out of its various formulations among Nietzsche’s aphorisms that reflect on the nature of creative agency and the structure of temporality. This account will reveal how self-stylization becomes possible through one’s incorporation of temporality as the basis of one’s agency. After foregrounding the inherently temporal nature of style, the second chapter advances a reading of the third part of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which he dramatizes his thought of eternal recurrence through his protagonist. The goal is to re-construct the philosophical content of Nietzsche’s ostensibly fictional work in order to further develop an understanding of self-stylization as a creative process. The final chapter will focus on Deleuze’s reading of the eternal recurrence. His is particularly helpful because it rounds out Nietzsche’s otherwise under-theorized understanding of style. The chapter will both argue how style emanates from the affirmation of chance, an affirmation that endows one with the power to embrace the eternal recurrence and labor to cre-

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 295.

ate one's own style. At each step in the process, style will be revealed to describe a way of acting liberated from its all too human conception as the creation of an actor. The deliverance of the stylized deed from its illusory doer is a project that Nietzsche would have surely approved.

## Chapter 1: Temporality and Agency as Eternal Recurrence

The notion of the eternal recurrence appears in Nietzsche's works across a patchwork of explicit formulations and implicit references. Given the enigmatic nature of the idea, Nietzsche fittingly presents the eternal recurrence as two disparate formulations: an ethical imperative and a cosmological thesis. Even after a century of commentary, the majority of critics treat them as incommensurable.<sup>6</sup> As Robin Small notes, most privilege the ethical formulation and dismiss the cosmological formulation, as theories of the nature of the world have died in a manner similar to that of speculative metaphysics.<sup>7</sup> This chapter will advance an account of the eternal recurrence that revives its cosmological formulation, reconstructing it as a thesis on the structure of temporality. Together with the ethical imperative, these two formulations explain what it means to act with style: to fashion one's agency to accord with the structure of temporality. An analysis of the relationship between agency and temporality will develop in four stages. The first section will construct an outline of the metaphysics of becoming that the eternal recurrence presupposes. The discussion will focus upon Nietzsche's idea of the will to power and its displacement of the metaphysics of being. This backdrop will help clarify the opposing formulations of the eternal recurrence. The second section will explicate the ethical formulation. This will explain Nietzsche's understanding of agency, specifically what it means to act creatively. The third section will analyze the cosmological formulation by revising the notion of "cosmology" in the context of Nietzsche's thought. This term designates the movement of temporality according to the eternally present "now," in opposition to the linear succession of instants. Fourth, the chapter

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<sup>6</sup>Paul S. Loeb, "Identity and Eternal Recurrence." 173. Loeb surveys the past 40 years of Nietzsche scholarship, concluding that most interpret the cosmological formulation as "insupportable, insignificant, and incoherent."

<sup>7</sup>Robin Small, "Nietzsche and Cosmology." 183. In the introductory section, Small likens the fate of the cosmological formulation to that of rational cosmology following its rejection by Kant's epistemology: "In Kant's critical philosophy, rational cosmology shared the fate of its two counterparts, theology and rational psychology: it was condemned for exceeding the bounds of possible knowledge."



will analyze how these formulations come together within Nietzsche's thought of eternal recurrence. Whereas the ethical formulation posits an account of creative agency that seems to contradict the fatalism implicit in the cosmological formulation, the conclusion will argue that this apparent tension does not make the eternal recurrence incoherent but instead drives the very thrust of its content as a thesis on the task of imparting style to one's agency.

### 1.1 The Metaphysics of Force

Nietzsche's metaphysics of becoming dismantles the metaphysics of being to which the philosophical tradition has adhered since its Platonic inception. Across its various accounts, the metaphysics of being posits a self-sufficient substance as the foundational structure of reality. This structure informs our linguistic relation to the world, which distinguishes a subject and its predicates according to the grammatical operation of "to be." This term designates an enduring subject abstracted from its temporal constitution. John Richardson explains that the metaphysics of being depends upon this expulsion of temporality: "what is, is complete in the moment it is so, so that an adequate account would only need to refer to its state at that moment."<sup>8</sup> The metaphysics of being fixates upon the *state* of a thing in *the* moment. Being, understood as substance, thereby assumes an a-temporal character. That is, across a given span of time, the subject designated by the term "to be" remains static.

In place of substances, Nietzsche's metaphysics of becoming argues that force is the fundamental constituent of reality. Unlike substances, force does not exist in isolation. It does not make sense to speak of *a* force, for forces exist in dynamic relations of tension. Nietzsche's notion of the will to power describes these relations of tension among strong and weak forces. A force expresses its strength against other forces with which it struggles. It is the perpetually differentiating outcome of this permanent struggle that Nietzsche calls "becoming." In opposition to identity, becoming describes an entity that is already and ceaselessly becoming other than itself. As Nietzsche instructs, becoming is inherent to the notion of force: "That 'force' and 'rest,' 'remaining the same,' contradict one another. The measure of force (as magnitude) as fixed, but its essence as in flux."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*. 104.

<sup>9</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Aphorism 1064.

In order to measure the fixed magnitude of force, the metaphysics of being orders thought to abstract entities from their temporal constitution and thereby represent them as static. Reason and its concomitant forms of knowledge separate “being” from “becoming” and cause from effect. Nietzsche viewed this abstraction to a static concept as absurd:

To demand of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength. A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language . . . which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a “subject,” can it appear otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

Nietzsche dramatizes the metaphysics of becoming through anthropocentric figures that demonstrate the primacy of force. Each force has an inherent valence that manifests as the expression of its strength. A strong force, or “master,” dominates the “enemies” that are weaker than it. The passage, however, also indicates that strong forces are not always bound to dominate the weak. This is because the metaphysics of being constitutes a form of force that arises in order to conceive “all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects.” The metaphysics of becoming establishes the potential for forces to redistribute their relationships and thereby convert strength into weakness. Weak forces undermine strong forces by representing forces as causal substances and thereby transforming becoming into being.

The valence of force’s strength is a qualitative measurement. Hence, stronger forces overpower weaker forces because of the degree of their respective strength. But it is by exploiting the qualitative character of their force that weak forces triumph over the strong. The transformation is not particular to Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality; it is intrinsic to the metaphysics of becoming. In every tension among forces there also inheres tension among competing perspectives, which Nietzsche describes as the “necessary perspectivism by virtue of which every center of force—and not only man—construes the rest of the world from its own view-point. i.e., measures, feels, forms, according to its own

<sup>10</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. 45.

force.”<sup>11</sup> Quantitatively weak forces ally themselves in order to impose upon stronger forces the qualitative perspective of the metaphysics of being. This alliance organizes itself in order to prevent strong forces from realizing their potential. Weak forces accomplish this by separating strong forces from their strength—from what they can do. Hence, the weak construct the ruse of substantiality. The illusion of substance severs activity from the *being* of an entity in order to represent strength and weakness as accidental attributes of the latter. The metaphysics of being deploys this strategy in order to “demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength.”

Nietzsche figures the qualitative relations among forces as the activity of quantitatively strong forces and the reactivity of weak forces. Active forces create new perspectives, which they strive to impose upon weaker forces. For Nietzsche, “What is ‘active’?—reaching out for power.”<sup>12</sup> Active forces mold reactive forces to their own perspective by consuming them and obliterating their distinction, whereas the latter “presses to the stronger from a need for nourishment; it wants to get under it, if possible to become one with it.”<sup>13</sup> While mastery characterizes the activity of strong forces, passivity characterizes the reactivity of weak forces: “To be hindered from moving forward: thus an act of resistance and reaction.”<sup>14</sup> Reactive forces, manifest as the metaphysics of being, stymie the creativity of active forces, their *moving forward* toward the different. This movement characterizes becoming as self-differentiation. Indeed, the notion is critical to the qualitative character of active forces, which relentlessly overcome any semblance of a static identity.

The opposition between active forces and reactive forces reflects that between the metaphysics of becoming and the metaphysics of being. Being, as a reactive force, drives toward unification, whereas becoming perpetually drives toward its self-differentiation. From the perspective of being, becoming appears outside the unity of substance; an entity’s different states are merely accidental. From the perspective of becoming, being constitutes a particular perspective that drives toward the unification of differentiation: “The greater the impulse toward unity, the more firmly may one conclude that weakness is present; the greater the impulse toward variety, differentiation, inner decay, the more force

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<sup>11</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Aphorism 636.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.* Aphorism 657.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.* Aphorism 655.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.* Aphorism 657.

is present.”<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche’s metaphysics does not negate the unification of being; it renders the metaphysics of being as a perspectival force in the ordinary struggle among opposing forces.

The metaphysics of becoming re-frames how we conceive of being: anything that *is* exists in and through the tension among struggling forces. Unity thereby gives way to multiplicity. Yet, this understanding of multiplicity remains incomplete if it conceptualizes the multiple as simply the inter-relations among struggling forces. There exists a third relation that partakes in this struggle, which is that between multiple competing forces and the whole multiplicity of forces—a totality of force. The latter composes the eternal recurrence. As Nietzsche writes, “That the world is not striving toward a stable condition is the only thing that has been proved. Consequently one must conceive its climactic condition in such a way that it is not a condition of equilibrium.”<sup>16</sup> This “climactic condition” is the totality that eternally recurs.

## 1.2 First Formulation of Eternal Recurrence as an Ethical Imperative

The preceding discussion analyzed Nietzsche’s conception of force, which provides the basis upon which he develops his account of agency via the eternal recurrence. Its first formulation takes the form of an ethical imperative, addressed to a subject who decides what course of action to take in the present moment. This address takes the form of a thought-experiment. For Nietzsche, this experiment is the “greatest weight” that can bear upon human action. In its explicit formulation, a demon utters the imperative of the eternal recurrence:

This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Aphorism 655.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Aphorism 639.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Aphorism 341.

The weight of the imperative depends upon its practical significance. The ethic that the eternal recurrence elicits does not posit an external standard to which one's actions ought conform. Nor does it compel a moral stance in response to actions. Rather, the thought of eternal recurrence re-envisioned ethics in order to inspire an affirmative comportment toward life that no longer views past actions as a burden that bear upon the decision made in the present. Nietzsche draws this inspiration from the challenge the demon poses: "The question in each and every thing, 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?' would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight."<sup>18</sup> Hence, the thought of eternal recurrence inspires one's subjective agency to seize the present moment, as if the cry of *carpe diem* reverberated through one's will. Nietzsche contends that this cry would spur the disposition "*to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal."<sup>19</sup>

As Keith Ansell-Pearson suggests, the eternal recurrence posits a "doctrine which will liberate the will from its fixation on the past."<sup>20</sup> Rather than fixate upon the past, we should acknowledge its continuation into the present. Thus, faithful adherence to eternal recurrence presupposes the metaphysics of becoming that figures the subject not as a substratum that motivates actions, but as a collection of past experiences. The eternal *seal* conferred upon our actions acknowledges their inseparability from our constitution through time. The present moment, therefore, is intimately interwoven with our life. As Ansell-Pearson continues, the eternal recurrence simultaneously teaches those who heed its call:

The meaning of life is to be found nowhere but within life itself as we live it and shall live it. But instead of such an insight crippling us, we should be inspired by it—to the extent that we are able to affirm unconditionally the eternal return of all the moments of our existence because we recognize that every one of those moments is necessarily who we are.<sup>21</sup>

The moment in which one expresses one's agency is eternally present. The present "now" is eternal because the action that fills it remains

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist*. 108.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 109.

a part of one's subjectivity. We are never able to fully remove past expressions of agency from the present. Each present moment unfolds along with the collection of experiences that inhere in each expression of agency. This process corresponds to the deployment of a subjective totality of such past expressions. As opposed to the metaphysics of being, which represents an action as the predicate of a subject at a determinate moment in time, becoming characterizes the perpetually differentiating character of the subjective totality with each expression of agency. This totality is never complete, however, but instead becomes slightly different with each new expression of agency that it conditions.

The present moment occupies the centerpiece of the eternal recurrence. Expressions of agency and the subjective totality of past experiences constitute a reflexive relationship within it. On the one hand, one acts into the present, as if the moment were an aesthetic medium taken up by one's creative agency. On the other hand, the present passes as a continuation of the past. Ansell-Pearson characterizes this figuration of the eternally present moment as the "existential constitution of time."<sup>22</sup> By this he means that time does not constitute a straightforward series of moments extending through the past, present and future, but that one experiences the interconnection of all three dimensions through the perpetual unfolding of the present moment. As the present moment passes, a subjective totality of past actions concretizes; their irrevocability ensures their continued existence in the present. Nietzsche describes this as, "[t]he most dangerous point of view.—What I do or do not do now is as important for everything that is yet to come as is the greatest event of the past: in the tremendous perspective of effectiveness all actions appear equally great and small."<sup>23</sup> The subjective totality of past experiences imparts the temperament or disposition with which one acts. It is instructive to think of these characterizations as the series of habits that condition the will. Each habit manifests a depository of past experiences that cements in a subject whose agency resides in the present. Past experiences coalesce in the present to orient the intensity and perspective with which one acts, constructing a background from which the present emerges. Hence, John Richardson emphasizes that the point of the eternal recurrence is to reframe how we situate agency in time. One assumes a posture of good will toward the past by acknowledging that actions

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 111.

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Aphorism 233.

are not merely the predicate of a subject who exists within an independent present. Instead, “the model [of eternal recurrence] stresses to us how times are knotted together: how the present never leaves behind the past, and how it is also tied to a fated future.”<sup>24</sup> The present moment is therefore eternal in the sense that it inextricably flows as the space within which a subjective totality of past experiences deploys itself through one’s agency.

The critical question then arises of whether it is possible to conceive the eternal recurrence solely as a thought-experiment? In order to will the present *as if* it were knotted together with the past and the future, must not the relation between the present and time *actually* be cyclical? For Richardson, this is not the case. He describes the eternal recurrence as an “epistemic virtue,” according to which “you pursue your projects *as* embedded in a world that eternally returns” in order to overcome the unhealthy aggravation expressed toward the past. He continues, “Nietzsche is convinced that this works a major transformation in your practical stance: it gives you a new way of going toward goals, and new ways of being in time.”<sup>25</sup> For Nietzsche, however, the eternal recurrence offers more than an antidote to illusions of time; it demonstrates the nature of temporality as such.

### 1.3 Second Formulation of Eternal Recurrence as Cosmological Thesis

The second formulation of the eternal recurrence accounts for the structure of temporality. In its preparatory formulation, the cosmology of time—the sum total of possible events that span the course of the world—repeats eternally. Nietzsche offers the most straightforward exposition of this account in the *Will to Power*:

If the world may be thought of as a certain definite quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centers of force . . . it follows that, in the great dice game of existence, it must pass through a calculable number of combinations. In infinite time, every possible combination would at some time or another be realized; more: it would be realized an infinite number of times. And since between every combination and its next occurrence all other possible combinations would have to take place, and each of these combina-

<sup>24</sup> John Richardson, “Time and Becoming.” 224.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 223.

tions conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a circular movement of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated: the world as a circular movement that has already repeated itself infinitely often and plays its game *in infinitum*.<sup>26</sup>

According to the cosmological formulation, “a certain definite number of centers of force” corresponding to a set of states-of-affairs recurs in a cyclical pattern that determines the fate of all world events. The tension between Nietzsche’s rival formulations of the eternal recurrence is patent. If the cosmology of time repeats “every possible combination” eternally, then the structure of temporality enforces a fatal determinism that strips agency of its creative power. This “fundamental antinomy,” Ansell-Pearson argues, informs the heart of eternal recurrence: “on the one hand, the recognition of the infinite importance of what we now do with respect to our knowing, erring, and modes of living, and, on the other hand, the knowledge that all has happened innumerable times before and all will happen innumerable times again and again in the future.”<sup>27</sup> It is on the basis of the latter reading, and its corollary rejection of the ethical formulation, that many commentators dismiss the cosmological formulation.<sup>28</sup> This dismissal derives from Georg Simmel’s original objection.<sup>29</sup> It holds that the fatalism implied by the eternal recurrence is incoherent because it is impossible for a human to experience qualitatively identical moments. This impossibility arises from the fact that a human’s *recognition* of a recurrent moment renders it qualitatively different than its initial occurrence, during which there was no such recognition.<sup>30</sup>

For Simmel, Nietzsche’s fatalism depends upon the recurrence of moments that are in every way identical. Hence, the possibility that there may arise a difference between a moment and its recurrence, however slight, is enough to refute Nietzsche’s idea. Simmel’s under-

<sup>26</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Aphorism 1066.

<sup>27</sup>Keith Ansell-Pearson, “The Eternal Return of the Overhuman: The Weightiest Knowledge and the Abyss of Light.” 10.

<sup>28</sup>John Richardson’s summary dismissal is emblematic of this view: “As is now familiar, [Nietzsche] mainly means this idea not as a “cosmological” thesis about the real structure of the world-process, but as a psychological challenge or test.” See “Nietzsche on Time and Becoming.” 223.

<sup>29</sup>Paul S. Loeb, “Identity and Eternal Recurrence.” 173.

<sup>30</sup>Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*. 174. “If the qualitative reality of the second instance referred to the first one and thereby acknowledged itself to be second, then it would not be an exact repetition of the first, just by the virtue of that acknowledgment.”



standing of the cosmological formulation, however, remains preparatory and under-theorized in that he represents it as an identical cycle that repeats a definite number of states of affairs. While the dice metaphor suggests this reading, Simmel privileges what results from the dice throw and neglects the uncertainty of the throw itself. When Nietzsche writes that “every possible combination” recurs eternally, “combination” should not be read as a particular state of affairs that recurs with the repetition of an identical cycle. As Robin Small clarifies, the purpose of the dice metaphor is to highlight the uncertainty of the roll, whereby there is no design or purpose to the combination that falls.<sup>31</sup> Simmel’s argument shrouds this uncertainty by reading the eternal recurrence as a historical thesis that predicts the repetition of *certain* states of affairs. He therefore advances a purely quantitative reading of the dice roll’s “combinations” because it arranges each state of affairs along a cycle, which, like the spokes of a wheel, rotates repeatedly in order to ensure the recurrence of identical states in their sequential order.<sup>32</sup> It is this interpretation that ensures “a circular movement of absolutely identical series” as the consequence of the cosmological formulation. Yet, it fails to consider that this quantitative reading is merely introductory, as it excludes forces’ potential to qualitatively re-distribute their relations.

How then should the cosmological totality be understood in light of both its quantitative *and* qualitative composition? Focusing on the present “now,” within which the cosmology deploys itself, might make this formulation intelligible. What the dice metaphor offers is an understanding of “deployment,” with each throw representing the deployment of a new present “now.” To recall the ethical formulation, the subjective totality of experiences deploys itself, each time slightly differently, through the conduit of agency. In much the same manner, the cosmological totality of force differentiates its constitutive relations with each recurrent deployment. Hence, Nietzsche writes of “the world,” that it is “a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself.”<sup>33</sup> Consequently, “cosmology” does not mean the sum of rela-

<sup>31</sup>Robin Small, “Nietzsche and Cosmology.” 199.

<sup>32</sup>In its most basic account, Alexander Nehamas characterizes this reading of the cosmological formulation: “everything that is happening at this very moment, and everything that will happen in the future, has already happened and will happen again, preceded and followed by exactly the same events in exactly the same order, an infinite number of times.” See: Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. 142.

<sup>33</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Aphorism 1067.

tions of force that exist beyond the present moment, for the present is the moment of self-transformation. In its recurrent passing away, the cosmological totality constitutes itself in its re-deployment. Unlike the combinations of dice throws whose quantity is determinate, however, the sum total of force poses the possibility of deploying its constitutive relations in a qualitatively different manner. For example, quantitative relations among hydrogen and oxygen molecules re-distribute their relations qualitatively through the forms of solid, liquid, and gas. This is why Nietzsche writes that, “[a]t any precise moment of a force, the absolute conditionality of a new distribution of all its forces is given: it cannot stand still.”<sup>34</sup>

It is this process of cosmological self-differentiation that constitutes the structure of temporality. This process synthesizes the total relations of force through each deployment, whereby the cosmological totality conjoins relations of forces in time. Its deployment performs this task by giving rise to a new deployment. Much like a roll of the dice that repeats as soon as the previous roll finishes, each event invites a new event. The previous deployment passes and makes way for the re-deployment of the totality of forces as a new present. Hence, deployment follows a movement of composition and decomposition. Forces compose their relations, the quantitative intensity with which they struggle, and the qualitative sense with which they manifest, only to decompose as the moment fades. This twofold movement explains the structure of temporality as the becoming of the cosmological totality. The totality distributes and redistributes its relations of forces. Redistribution, in turn, depends upon the decomposition of the prior distribution. Comparing the dynamic redistribution of the cosmological totality to teleological conceptions of time, Nietzsche describes this cosmological synthesis: “God *not* as the driving force, but God as a maximal state, as an epoch—a point in the evolution of the will to power by means of which further evolution just as much as previous evolution up to him could be explained.”<sup>35</sup> A causal first mover, such as God, does not initiate the progression of temporality. Rather, the perpetual re-deployment of the totality of force is the only “mover” that stimulates the possibility of an *epoch*—the present moment—that arises following the decomposition of a prior epoch. These interweaving movements characterize the sole driving force of temporality following the death of God: the immanent flow of self-differentiation that marks

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Aphorism 1064.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* Aphorism 639.

the rise and fall of the perpetually present “now.”

This account of the cosmological totality is akin to that which Robin Small advances. He argues that Nietzsche rejects the scientific idea of “cosmology” as a *kosmos*.<sup>36</sup> If “cosmology” references a universal order, the contents of which exhaust the world’s possible states of affairs, then the term assumes the character of a self-sufficient being. Each instant in time is, in turn, predicated of this cosmological being. Instead, the cosmology, like all reality for Nietzsche, transforms itself through a process of becoming. This process of transformation upends a linear account of temporality, according to which each moment aligns along a temporal line that signifies the progression from past through future. The relation between moments in linear time depends upon their causal order: the present contains within it a causal power that determines the course of the subsequent moment. This conception of temporality, however, presupposes a metaphysics of being that secures the notion of a cause. The effect is the predicate of its cause, which is conceived as a discreet temporal moment that is independent of others. However, this conception abstracts the causal moment from the temporal duration in which it is embedded. Nietzsche describes this process of abstraction: “An intellect which could see cause and effect as a continuum, which could see the flux of events not according to our mode of perception, as things arbitrarily separated and broken—would throw aside the conception of cause and effect, and would deny all conditionality.”<sup>37</sup>

Must not, however, every moment begin, and end, allowing one to isolate any as a particular moment that gives way to the succession of subsequent moments? There is a key distinction between the present moment constituted by the eternal recurrence and the instant within linear temporality. It is not “wrong” to isolate an instant from a temporal duration; rather, Nietzsche claims that any such instant is incomplete. What it omits is the synthesizing operation of temporality that unfolds through the deployment of the cosmological totality according to the movements of recomposition and decomposition. This is why Nietzsche writes that temporality “is a question, not of succession, but of interpenetration.”<sup>38</sup> In place of succession and causation, the eternal recurrence characterizes time as an originary duration of relations of force. As Small asserts, “[Nietzsche’s] idea of reality as consisting of processes rather than things . . . clearly involves including duration within the simplest processes and eliminating action at a dis-

<sup>36</sup>Robin Small, “Nietzsche and Cosmology.” 202.

<sup>37</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Aphorism 112.

<sup>38</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Aphorism 631.

tance in time between distinct events.”<sup>39</sup> Small’s commentary hints at the movements of re-composition and decomposition constitutive of temporal duration. Since the cosmological totality re-deploys itself *as* the present, there does not emerge a composition—the final manifestation of the moment—between the movements of re-composition and decomposition. The distinction between these movements only serves to demonstrate their indistinguishable relation in the present. Nietzsche tells us that the world “becomes, it passes away, but it has never begun to become and never ceased from passing away—it maintains itself in both—It lives on itself: its excrements are its food.”<sup>40</sup> These movements are originary and are therefore always already persistent throughout the perpetual duration of the present moment. It is this duration, constitutive of present “now,” that eternally recurs.

#### 1.4 The Possibility of Imparting Style to One’s Agency

Nietzsche’s cosmological formulation posits the structure of temporality, which flows according to the simultaneous movement of the re-composition and decomposition of forces within the ever-present “now.” The temporal movement of the “now” constitutes the innocence of becoming whereby the relations of tension among forces perpetually become different. The ethical imperative treats this temporal structure as its object of affirmation. Heeding the ethical imperative means embracing becoming, and not one’s subjective being, as the ground of one’s agency. For Nietzsche, this grounds the basis upon which one can stylize one’s agency.

Style describes the resemblance among unique instances that do not belong to a unified whole. One can say someone does things with a certain style, despite the fact *everything* she does is different. Nietzsche’s understanding of style affronts our typical conception of agency as the will’s expression of a subjective or cognitive intention; one expresses one’s agency by putting an intention into action. Affirming the eternal recurrence reconstitutes agency according to the innocence of becoming. Agency instead expresses the rhythm of time as its basis: re-composition and decomposition as the present moment. Doing so allows one to harness a creative style that characterizes different actions across time, none of which belong to a subject, but inhere in a *way* of acting.

<sup>39</sup>Robin Small, “Nietzsche and Cosmology.” 199.

<sup>40</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Aphorism 1066.

The analogy of a song, particularly one to which people dance, helps to explicate what it means to act with style in accord with the rhythm of temporality. The song's rhythm distributes a beat that permeates the dance floor. The rhythm recurs and with each recurrence it poses the possibility of a similar beat or a radically different one. The present beat, like the present moment in time, manifests the movement from one beat to another: a duration of rhythm's self-differentiation. It recomposes different musical layers, sounds with harmonious or discordant accents, while at the same time decomposing these acoustic elements. Like the structure of temporality, one cannot divide the rhythm into identical intervals without distorting its nature. For a rhythm is more than a mere humdrum repetition of identical past, present, and future beats. The former poses the possibility of re-distributing itself at any point.

The dancer negotiates the song's rhythm through her style. The movement of her body illustrates the affirmation of eternal recurrence; it responds to the rhythm over which she lacks control by perpetually becoming different. Her moves do not proceed from any particular intention on her part. Rather, if one were to freeze an instant of the dance, it would display a body that is at once stepping from the previous beat, in conformity with the present beat, and preparing for the next. But the dancer is not recreating her movement with each recurrent "now" of the beat. To recall the ethical formulation, the movement of her step takes off from her subjective totality of past movements. The entirety of past movements impels her to move in a certain way. And the deployment of the rhythm, in a manner analogous to the cosmological formulation, recomposes and decomposes a totality of musical forces. Within the present "now" there is a fit between the two: the dancer's expression of her stylized agency accords with song's rhythm.

The question arises, what is the difference between someone who affirms the eternal recurrence and stylizes her agency and someone who does not? The ethical imperative corrects the dancer who thinks too much about her movement. One can represent oneself as a being who acts freely in order to dictate the present moment. Doing so beguiles an *intention* to stylize oneself by means of the will, attempting to sever it from the subjective totality of past experiences. Yet, this misrepresentation throws the dance out of the rhythm. The dancer who fails to embrace becoming attempts to dictate the rhythm and stumbles. The distinction is reminiscent of that between active and reactive forces. The reactive dancer demands a pattern of movement, an ordered 1-2

step. She desires a regimented dance. As a result, her move is either too late or too early. Alternatively, the active dancer binds her agency to the song's differentiating movement and, perhaps, dance more rhythmically than the rhythm itself. Those who respond affirmatively to the ethical imperative, and deploy their past stylistically, achieve the latter. Their agency "fits" with temporality. Ansell-Pearson alludes to this fit between agency and temporality when he describes the eternal recurrence:

[I]t is the thought that provides us with both an insight into the importance of our singularity (it holds and gathers within itself that which is "to-come" and we feel the weight or burden of this), and yet we are to recognize that we can have no influence on the eternal repetition of this singularity (we are not to be crushed by this insight). The task, then, is to become equal to the event that now befalls us, that of outweighing and being superior to all that has preceded us with regard to the fundamental questions of existence that are now our concern.<sup>41</sup>

What Ansell-Pearson incisively characterizes is the *task* of eternal recurrence: *to become equal to the event*. This reframes how we think the relationship between its ethical and cosmological formulations. The question Nietzsche poses of agency is not one of free creation versus fatalism, but concordance versus discordance. Whereas Ansell-Pearson only figures the task of eternal recurrence as a thought; it is in truth a thought that affirms the structure of temporality it simultaneously posits. Nietzsche describes the subject who heeds the ethical imperative and binds its stylized agency to the rhythm of temporality: "It will be the strong and domineering natures that enjoy their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection under a law of their own; the passion of their tremendous will relents in the face of all stylized nature, of all conquered and serving nature."<sup>42</sup> Agency expresses its *gaiety* through its synchronicity with temporal rhythm. In this synchronism of rhythm and style, it is active forces that respond to the ethical imperative. They overcome weak forces that represent subjectivity as being and agency as the predication of a unified agent who endures through time. Instead, the subject affirms its multiplicity; and multiplicity, which characterizes relentless self-differentiation, depends

<sup>41</sup>Keith Ansell-Pearson, "The Eternal Return of the Overhuman: The Weightiest Knowledge and the Abyss of Light." 3.

<sup>42</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Aphorism 290.

upon the re-composition and decomposition of oneself in time. This is self-stylization: responsiveness to the temporal structure over which one lacks control.

Nietzsche reserves a title for this co-extensive relationship between temporality and agency, rhythm and style: *amor fati*: love of fate. Against the cosmological totality over which we have no control, and the burden of the past that threatens to impose its weight upon the present moment, agency accepts the fate of the world and reacts accordingly. Nietzsche writes:

I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.<sup>43</sup>

The passage follows the movement of fitting totalities, the first as necessity (cosmology) and the second as beauty (subjectivity). *What is necessary in things* is their temporal constitution: that forces are bound together in a present that unfolds outside one's control. It is the present to which our subjectivity is perpetually drafted, but we have the power to make the present our own. Only by seeing its necessity as *beautiful* can one incorporate time as the ground of agency. The passage thereby equates fate with liberty and release with affirmation. Opening oneself to the play of forces aligns one's agency with strength. Nietzsche characterizes this affirmative spirit as he does active forces that multiply themselves. They do not oppose weak forces, but differentiate according the rhythm of temporality. Hence, stylized agency wishes "to be only a Yes-sayer." That is, a will that becomes with the course of time and that creates the beautiful within the moment using the tools it presents as possibilities. The "Yes-sayer" does not wish to impose the illusions of being to secure ground in a groundless world. *Amor fati* invites one to play in the groundlessness of becoming, to incorporate temporality as the lifeblood of agency.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* Aphorism 276.

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JAMES MARVEL

# Secularized Sovereignty

The Idolatry of a Theologically Derived Political Concept

The mythology of the sovereign was no longer possible once a certain kind of power was being exercised within the social body. The sovereign then became a fantastic personage, at once archaic and monstrous.

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<sup>1</sup>Foucault, Michel. "Prison Talk: Interview with J.-J. Brocier." *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings*. Ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon, (1980): 37-54.

This essay will address Carl Schmitt's definition of sovereignty and his thesis that all significant modern concepts of the State—including, but not limited to sovereignty—are secularized theological concepts. Schmitt's definition of sovereignty seems to capture part of the operation through which sovereign power is motivated, but his argument that sovereign power can be secularized and employed by the State is flawed. This critique will attempt to show the inconsistencies in Schmitt's argument, especially in regard to the process of secularization. I propose that the invocation of theological concepts as the basis of State power leads to an inconsistent philosophical concept of sovereignty: one that undermines the possibility of a secularized sovereign power employed by the State.

## I. Sovereignty

Schmitt begins his text, *Political Theology*, with a definition: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (5). This stands in contrast to what Schmitt calls the "old definition" of sovereignty as "the highest, legally independent, underived power" (*Political Theology* 17). Schmitt offers a new definition because he thinks that the "old definition" is not defining sovereignty at all. Schmitt's definition is observational; he has looked for sovereign power in action and has seen it in the Bible. Thus, Schmitt asserts a definition that he thinks describes God's sovereignty. Schmitt's definition relies first on the argument that sovereign power is derived from God, and secondly on the argument that if we witness sovereign power being employed in politics, then it is activated through the decision of an individual on the exception. That is to say that not every person is a sovereign but that secularized sovereignty requires the human action of decision, which every person is capable of. However, the capability must be paired with the proper office of government to perform the right kind of decision that expresses sovereign power: a decision on the exception.

Despite the differences that are seen in different definitions of sovereignty, the different definitions are all aiming for the same generality: to have some form of ultimate power that does not have to operate within the confines of the legal order. Schmitt's definition fulfills this generality, but it does more than that: Schmitt's sovereignty does not just operate outside the legal order; it traverses the legal order and a sphere where law does not apply. Giorgio Agamben states in *Homo Sacer*, "The paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact the sovereign

is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order” (15). The sphere of existence outside the juridical order is one that is occupied by the sovereign. Law is a universal system that is meant to apply to every person, but Schmitt’s sovereign is able to suspend the universal claims of the law, thus imposing a “state of exception” in the legal order. What is the essence of, or what sphere is the sovereign operating in if not the legal sphere? I will propose later in this essay that sovereignty operates in the religious sphere; and here we are confronted with the wellspring of sovereignty: what Schmitt would call the being of God.

## II. The Exception

What is the exception? Schmitt describes the exception as “[that] which is not codified in the existing legal order, [and] can at best be characterized as a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state, or the like. But it cannot be circumscribed factually and made to conform to a preformed law” (*Political Theology* 6). Schmitt’s definition of the exception and the importance of the decision is an argument where the sovereign must be able to suspend laws. The practical argument for Schmitt is when something happens that threatens the continuation of the state, the sovereign should be able to suspend laws in order to deal with the emergency. Schmitt writes, “The precise details of an emergency cannot be anticipated, nor can one spell out what may take place in such a case, especially when it is truly a matter of an extreme emergency and of how it is to be eliminated” (*Political Theology* 6-7). That is, it is impossible to write laws that deal with unforeseen events and if there are no laws to deal with those unforeseen events, then there is a need for an office that can deal with them, i.e. the sovereign power. However, the sovereign power does not just deal with exceptions; the sovereign power decides what the exceptions are.

Schmitt’s definition of sovereignty does more than assign the sovereign power the authority to deal with situations that fall outside of the law. Sovereignty, for Schmitt, allows the sovereign to decide whether or not to apply the law or to suspend the law in regards to any circumstance. This creates a system of laws governed by a sovereign power that has the authority to indiscriminately choose which laws will be used and which laws will be suspended. The sovereign has the power to suspend laws and conversely has the power to create law. Schmitt articulates this point in *Political Theology*: “The decision parts here

from the legal norm, and authority proves that to produce law it need not be based on law" (13). That is, even though the exception is a decision on whether or not to suspend law, the exception itself works as a type of law that originates from outside the governance of law. Agamben describes it as follows: "In truth, the state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other" (*State of Exception* 23). Essentially, Schmitt's sovereign can do whatever it wants, when it wants, and it has the legal standing to maintain its position as outside of the law.

The exception cannot be defined. It alludes to something out of the ordinary, or an event that does not often take place. Schmitt suggests a guideline for the exception as "an extreme emergency" (*Political Theology* 7). A thought that Schmitt never investigates is what constitutes an extreme emergency. Perhaps Schmitt never articulates what an extreme emergency is for two reasons: Schmitt thinks that an emergency for a political state is obvious when it occurs and needs no articulation, or since Schmitt is not a sovereign power he cannot make authentic claims as to what an emergency could be. The first option might characterize Schmitt's best, but the second option is a consequence of Schmitt's formulation of sovereignty. This is because an extreme emergency is a term that is inherently ambiguous, save to one person: the sovereign power. An extreme emergency is what the sovereign power decides it to be. This means that any issue could potentially be an extreme emergency, or depending on the sovereign's decision nothing could qualify as an extreme emergency, not even bombs falling from the sky. The vastness of possibilities seems incredibly daunting given that only the sovereign is capable of deciding which issues are emergencies. For example, a massive earthquake strikes a country whose government is headed by an office that ostensibly has secularized sovereign power. The populous and the entire governing body agree that the devastation is so great that the ordinary disaster procedures cannot be followed if the country is to maintain itself. Despite the overwhelming consensus about the earthquake, the sovereign power decides that the earthquake is not an exception and everyone will follow the normal laws, regulations, and procedures. Due to the sovereign power's decision in this case to *not* declare an exception, the country ends up fraught with infrastructure problems, disease, starvation, and economic depression. This is the kind of power Schmitt's sovereign has: regardless of the outcome

of the decision made by the sovereign, the sovereign's decision is always correct. The decisions are always correct because to decide on the exception is a process that assumes the correctness of the decision-maker in order to allow the decision to make exceptions to the rule.

To understand Schmitt's definition it is helpful to examine Thomas Hobbes' definition of sovereignty. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes writes:

[...] one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defence. And he that carrieth this person is called SOVEREIGN, and said to have Sovereign Power. (109)

For Hobbes, sovereign is he who decides which means to use to keep the peace and defend the commonwealth. The similarity between Schmitt and Hobbes is the derivation of authority from the deciding aspect of the sovereign power. Schmitt acknowledges this similarity, "The classical representative of the decisionist type (if I may be permitted to coin this word) is Thomas Hobbes" (*Political Theology* 33). The similarity that Schmitt and Hobbes have is a structural one: the sovereign power as a deciding political office. While Schmitt's and Hobbes' concepts of sovereignty share other similarities, due to the exception, Schmitt's definition provides for a more absolute form of sovereignty. What about the exception makes Schmitt's sovereignty more absolute?

For Schmitt, the sovereign's power does not come from being a decider in regards to the plethora of political problems, in contrast to Hobbes' sovereignty, which makes decisions about expediency in regards to protecting the commonwealth. Hobbes' sovereign acquires its legitimacy and power through the social contract. Schmitt's sovereignty justifies its decision on the exception *by making the decision*. For Schmitt, there is a self-legitimizing quality inherent in the sovereign's act of deciding (how Schmitt's sovereign gains political office is not determined here). This absolute form of sovereignty does not need approval or authority from any other governing body for any of its decisions. This is in contrast to Hobbes, where the sovereign is a deciding power, but the sovereign is not legitimated by its own decisions. For Hobbes, the authority granted to it by the commonwealth legitimizes the sovereign decision. Schmitt thinks that an absolute form of sovereignty is necessary so "it is not hampered in some way by checks

and balances, as is the case in a liberal constitution” (*Political Theology* 7). This allows the sovereign to deal freely with the circumstances that it judges as exceptional.

### III. Secularization

Schmitt’s definition of sovereignty can be seen in another light on the basis of a second thesis that he proposes in *Political Theology*, “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts” (36). Here it is easy to see the connection between Schmitt’s political sovereign and the concept of God. Schmitt explains that the exception is “analogous to the miracle in theology” (*Political Theology* 36). Just as God can suspend the laws of nature through direct intervention with a miracle, so can the political sovereign suspend civil laws through direct intervention with the exception. It is hard to determine exactly what “secularized” means, and what it is doing to theological concepts, but Schmitt seems to be saying that political concepts are derived from theological concepts. That is to say, human beings do not create political concepts; human beings model political concepts on the nature of God.

If Schmitt’s concept of sovereignty is a secularized theological concept, then it is important to discuss how secularization can be a process by which secular concepts are derived from theological concepts. To get a better grasp on what secularization might mean, we will briefly examine two works: Karl Löwith’s *Meaning in History* and Søren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*.

In *Meaning in History*, Löwith explores secularization in regard to the philosophy of history. Löwith claims that the philosophy of history is “a systematic interpretation of universal history in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward an ultimate meaning” (1). The secularization of the philosophy of history happens, according to Löwith, because the basis for understanding history in terms of an ultimate meaning is derived from the Christian belief in salvation: the philosophy of history is “entirely dependent on theology of history, in particular on the theological concept of history as a history of fulfillment and salvation” (1).

Löwith identifies this derivative relationship as problematic in the sense that a theologically derived philosophy of history undermines its theological foundation: the progress of the philosophy of history is one that aims to do away with the idea that Christ is coming back to save



humanity. Löwith writes, “modern history... is Christian by derivation and anti-Christian by consequence” (202). The philosophy of history, as Löwith has proposed, is a secularized theology of history. One consequence of this derivation is a necessary but inherently unstable relationship between the theological and philosophical views of history: “The whole moral and intellectual, social and political, history of the West is to some extent Christian, and yet it dissolves Christianity by the very application of Christian principles to secular matters” (202). The issue that Löwith illuminates is that when a theological principle is the basis for a secular principle, then there is an unstable relationship between the two. I want to investigate this last claim by Löwith and examine whether or not it is true of secularization in Schmitt’s case.

As noted earlier, Schmitt’s sovereignty is a paradox. The paradoxical nature of the sovereign consists in its unstable footing. Is the sovereign inside the law, outside the law, or is it neither and both? The movement of the sovereign between spheres of existence (legal and the non-legal) is analogous to Søren Kierkegaard’s formulation in *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard discusses the teleological suspension of the ethical, which is a movement between the ethical and religious spheres of existence. God instructs Abraham to kill his son Isaac, a command that violates the intuitive ethical sphere. Yet Abraham follows the instructions and chooses to not only violate the ethical sphere, but ignores the demand of the ethical to love his son, and chooses to obey the command of the religious to kill him. Kierkegaard explains that Abraham is able to do this because of faith. Abraham is a “knight of faith”<sup>1</sup>, which allows Abraham to traverse spheres, never violating either one (84-85). For when the ethical is suspended by the religious, then the ethical no longer applies to the situation. Hence, Abraham is not an attempted murderer in regards to the ethical, but is the father of faith due to the religious suspension of the ethical. For Kierkegaard, faith is the paradoxical element that justifies the movement between the ethical and religious spheres.

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<sup>1</sup>The ‘knight of faith’ is somewhat of a technical term for Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard calls Abraham a ‘knight of faith’ not only because of his obedience to God’s command, but also because of the character Abraham displays in his obedience. See “Problema II: Is there an absolute duty to God?” in *Fear and Trembling* for a full account of this term.

## IV. Idolatry

The ambiguity of the exception is a result of the paradoxical nature of the sovereign power. There is not anyone who can even guess at what might or might not be an exception. Only the sovereign can know what is an exception, and that knowledge is known *a posteriori* to the decision. It is only after the sovereign decides on the exception that the sovereign power is informed about the exception that was decided upon. The paradoxical sovereign is wrought with an exception, which prior to the decision, is at all times ambiguous. In *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, Schmitt addresses the importance of an ambiguous concept and its role in the political structure of the Catholic Church: “Ultimately, most important is that this limitless ambiguity combines with the most precise dogmatism and a will to decision as it culminates in the doctrine of papal infallibility” (8). Within the confines of the Catholic Church, papal infallibility is a capacity available to the Pope. It is not here meant to suggest that Schmitt thinks one must hold the office of the Pope in order to be a sovereign or that Schmitt is suggesting that the Catholic Church is the only political organization that can wield sovereign power. However, it does suggest that in order for a person to grasp the limitless ambiguity of the exception, it is required that a person has the ability to inhabit a role of infallibility. Sovereignty does not just culminate in the doctrine of infallibility; it presupposes the doctrine of infallibility. In order for someone to make decisions about what is or is not an exception, the doctrine of infallibility must first be at work in order for the decision on the exception to have any legitimate standing. Otherwise the assumed sovereign could make incorrect judgments about the exception. Thus, the doctrine of infallibility of the individual is a necessary characteristic of Schmitt’s sovereign power. Schmitt has constructed a system of sovereignty that presupposes an individual’s ability to be infallible in order to instantiate the correct decisions that will be made in regards to the exception. This presupposition stands as a problem for Schmitt’s sovereignty, for who on earth is capable of making infallible decisions?

The theological explanation of infallibility as a requirement on secularized sovereignty is provocative, and it seems that Schmitt’s definition of sovereignty needs to be understood through a theological lens given its theological basis. Take another reading of Schmitt’s definition: Sovereign is *he* who decides on the exception. Is there any human that can fulfill the role of *he*? Perhaps a more internally coherent formula-

tion of Schmitt's definition is: God is sovereign because God decides on the exception. Schmitt's definition abstracts from God, yet it can only be based on God. Who can decide on the exception? Schmitt is proposing that based on the theological model of God's sovereignty, humans can and ought to inhabit a role of power as modeled by the sovereign power of God. If a human being could inhabit that role, what are the conditions that would make that inhabitation possible, and are those conditions at least minimally theologically consistent? If we follow the argument of sovereign power then it leads to a necessary conclusion: Whoever wields secularized sovereign power is culpable of idolatry. This conclusion is the only way that secularized sovereignty could possibly exist in the political landscape. From a theological perspective, the idolatry that is required in order for sovereignty to become secularized subverts Schmitt's sovereignty, which is based on a theological vision where sovereignty is understood through the classic structure of God as sovereign.

The sovereign would require at least a divine presence to guide the decision on the exception. This conjures an image of a sovereign power that is devoted to the political ends of the state, but is at the same time a quasi-prophet of God. In order for a sovereign to make decisions on the exception the ability to make infallible decisions must be instantiated; the only conceivable source of infallibility is the divine. The process of secularization is a complicated array of paradoxical maxims at work. Sovereignty becomes secularized when a political office is made available to a person who, under Christian terms, is indwelt with the Holy Spirit during their decision on the exception thereby justifying the decision through the principle of infallibility. The decision is considered on the basis of political benefit, not for religious betterment, yet it is legitimated by religious experience. The ambiguous exception is a suspension of earthly governance, by an appeal to religious providence, which is meant to maintain earthly governance of a civil government. This is a restaging of the problem mentioned earlier by Löwith where the theological basis of the sovereign power is undermined by the pursuit of secular advancement. Religious means are used to reach secular ends, and those secular ends are constantly seeking self-governance without the aid of religious means. This process is not an intention of Schmitt's sovereignty: it is simply the result of the paradoxical nature of sovereignty.

Given the requirements that are placed upon an individual that acts as a sovereign power, how does an individual merit the correct qualifi-

cations to hold a sovereign office? This is not meant to allude to the political process that might be undertaken to fill such an office, but rather to address the problem of bestowing individuals with sovereign power. What kind of an individual does it take to bear the responsibility and capability of making infallible decisions, and wielding the type of power that is normally reserved for God?

In order to meet the criteria of infallibility that secularized sovereignty demands, the individual would have to be a Christian.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that a non-Christian cannot gain access to a contemporary sovereign political office, it is to clarify that the non-Christian would not be employing sovereignty. The non-Christian would appear to have sovereign power, deciding on exceptions and suspending laws, but due to the lack of a divine presence guiding the non-Christian, the decisive actions are not governed through the doctrine of infallibility and they are void of any religious suspension of the law. Without the religious suspension the exception is no longer ambiguous, and it should be crystal clear: someone is doing away with law for no good reason. This is a restaging of the story of Abraham, where if the ethical sphere is not suspended by the religious command of God to kill Isaac, Abraham's desire to kill Isaac seems obviously homicidal and unjustifiable. Take the case of Adolf Hitler (assuming that Hitler is not a Christian); do the political actions of the Nazi regime seem like the justified actions of a sovereign power? Agamben makes the following observation in *State of Exception*:

Let us take the case of the Nazi State. No sooner did Hitler take power (or, as we should perhaps more accurately say, no sooner was power given to him) than, on February 28, he proclaimed the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State, which suspended the articles of the Weimar Constitution concerning personal liberties. The decree was never repealed, so that from a juridical standpoint the entire Third Reich can be considered a state of exception that lasted twelve years. (2)

Here it is noted that the activity of suspending the Weimar Constitution, at least from an outsider's perspective, seems to be a quintessential

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<sup>2</sup>Part of my argument is the assumption that if a secularized sovereign power can exist, the person with sovereign power must be a Christian. I think this assumption best represents Schmitt's own views, and at minimum follows from Schmitt's own theological views (which are of the Catholic variety). However, to my knowledge, Schmitt never explicitly makes this claim.

example of a legal suspension that is not justifiable. But note that the reason why it is not justifiable has nothing to do with our intuitions of what is just, morally right, or any other such subjective judgment. It is not justifiable according to Schmitt's definition of sovereignty, because an infallible decision-maker is required in order for any decisions on the exception to be justified. With the case of Hitler as a non-Christian the exception may even be disguised as religiously ambiguous to maintain the political office of sovereignty, though maintaining the office reserved for sovereign power is not a qualifier that sovereignty is being employed.

On my account of Schmitt's view we are left with the notion that a Christian is the only viable option that could fulfill a sovereign office and actually employ sovereignty. However, what kind of Christian would seek out or be persuaded to possess the same type of power that Schmitt identifies as a power of God? While there is no doubt that people are capable of desiring to do good with the sovereign power that Schmitt proposes can be secularized, there is a point where the problem is not only practical; the practical problem is simply the abuse of the sovereign office. There is a theological problem, where even if a person could employ sovereignty with positive results in civil government, the trouble begins when a human being strives to execute a divine power in the first place. This gives rise to the theological problem of idolatry. Why is idolatry a problem for Schmitt's secularized sovereignty? Because given that Schmitt's philosophical formulation is based on theological concepts, if there is an obvious theological problem within Schmitt's account, it leads to his philosophical project being inconsistent.

Within the confines of Catholic theology, only the Pope and the body of bishops as a whole can claim infallibility, but only in certain circumstances regarding judgments on issues of doctrine. Then how could any person in good standing with the Catholic Church hold a political office that entails making infallible decisions in regard to the suspension of civil law when the theology of the Catholic Church, which one is to be obedient to, only allows for infallibility to be claimed within a strict set of parameters? The individual, in order to avoid excommunication from the religious community would have to renounce the political office of the sovereign as blasphemous. The blasphemy is understood as a person aspiring to not just be like God, but to raise themselves to a place of sovereign power that only God can employ; the same would hold for Protestant Christians as well. The idolatry of

a secularized sovereign lies in the desire to seize a sovereign power that is restricted to use by God. Not only to seize sovereign power, but to reverse it as a means of achieving secular ends.

The consequence of idolatry is a theological disclaimer that would warn Christians away from pursuing an office of sovereignty. Yet in order for Schmitt's secularized sovereignty to be utilized politically, it requires a Christian to hold the office of the sovereign. So, if sovereignty was to be secularized it would require a Christian to perform an idolatrous act, an act that would drive a wedge into the theological underpinnings of that Christian's beliefs, and result in a Christian removed from the presence of God (removed from the presence of God due to the idolatrous act, which falls into the traditional category of sin in Christian theology: sin as separation from God). Without God's presence, there is no divine guidance resulting in the ability to be infallible, and without infallibility there is no secularized sovereign power. Back to the earlier example of Hitler, let's assume that Hitler was a Christian. Even if Hitler were a Christian in a political office, any attempt to make a decision on an exception would itself be an idolatrous act. The idolatrous act would render Hitler without the sovereign power that was being sought.

## V. Conclusion

I actually agree with Schmitt's definition of sovereignty. That is, if there is a God and that God is all-powerful, and we call that power sovereignty, then I think Schmitt's definition of sovereignty aptly describes the type of power that we would take God to have. However, Schmitt's further claim that sovereignty can be secularized and thus utilized as a political power does not hold. If Schmitt's definition of what it means to be sovereign is correct and sovereign power cannot be secularized, then what kind of power does the State have? Certainly, States have political power and offices that represent that power, but it is obvious that claims to sovereign power by any person, office, or State are absurd. It turns out that Schmitt's insightful definition of sovereignty, which he sought to use to bring real sovereign power to the State, actually serves as a proof that the State can never be sovereign.

Schmitt tries to give an account of his observations about modern theories of the State when he writes, "in which they [political concepts] were transferred from theology to the theory of the state" (*Political Theology* 36). Schmitt's attempt at describing political concepts as

“transferred” is a rhetorical strategy with two ways of going: First, “transferred” here stands in for secularized, making the process sound as easy as wiring money from one bank account to another. Second, by using the past tense “transferred” Schmitt is leading the reader into believing that secularization of political concepts has already taken place. At least in regard to sovereignty, I hope it has been shown here that secularization is a meticulously crafted process, *unlike* a transfer from one realm to another, but a process of rupture that somehow substantially changes sovereignty along the way. Furthermore, this process of secularization has not yet taken place, and there are serious reservations as to whether it ever could take place.

There have been states that have created offices, which resemble sovereignty, but they do not meet the criteria that Schmitt’s definition of sovereignty requires for a political office to employ sovereignty. This does not prevent arguments from arising in favor of the type of sovereign power that Schmitt advocates. In contemporary society there may not be a secularized sovereignty, but there is certainly political power that calls itself sovereign and strives to utilize Schmitt’s definition as a justification. In *State of Exception*, Agamben explains how the development of the concept of the “state of exception” through different books written between 1934 and 1948 gives rise to the contemporary problem of this so-called sovereignty and its employment of the exception:

While these books are quite varied and as a whole more dependent on Schmitt’s theory than a first reading might suggest, they are nevertheless equally important because they record for the first time how the democratic regimes were transformed by the gradual expansion of the executive’s powers during the two world wars and, more generally, by the state of exception that had accompanied and followed those wars. They are in some ways the heralds who announced what we today have clearly before our eyes—namely, that since “the state of exception has become the rule” (Benjamin 1942, 697/257), it not only appears increasingly as a technique of government rather than an exceptional measure, but it also lets its own nature as the constitutive paradigm of the juridical order come to light. (6-7)

Whether contemporary political offices actually are sovereign according to Schmitt’s definition does not matter in light of the fact that political offices, which only appear sovereign, are able to utilize Schmitt’s

definition to determine how the contemporary political office ought to conduct itself.

In regard to modern theories of the state, Schmitt's writings on sovereignty and secularized theological concepts have created a strand of political thought where the sovereign is no longer just a border concept. While the sovereign may often govern from outside the legal order, this is due to the exception becoming the predominant functioning rule, where the law is displaced to serve the purpose of the sovereign. This results in political operatives engaged in ways to make decisions on the exception appear ambiguous, or religiously fueled. The ambiguity actually solidifies the claims to sovereignty that the political offices make, and creates enthusiasm for policies that are enacted under the veil of the exception and hidden from the light of the law. Hidden in the sense that the idolatrous act of a human being pursuing sovereign power is itself a deception, a concealed deed, and one that maintains its strength by the peril of its subjects.

“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”

Apostle Paul



DEVIN FITZPATRICK

# Purity Unto Death

An Analysis of Wittgenstein's Ethical Motivations  
for Logical Atomism in the *Tractatus*

## Introduction

Amongst the host of claims and conclusions to be found in Ludwig Wittgenstein's notoriously obscure magnum opus the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the most fundamental is his assertion of the structural theory of "logical atomism." Atomism, the belief that the complexes of the world may be broken down into a finite set of simples that constitute all the "building blocks" of reality, serves as a basis for the majority of the claims in the *Tractatus*, despite its many seemingly disparate themes. These themes, which focus on everything from language, to logic, to ethics, and "the mystical," are united by Wittgenstein's thesis: there exists the possibility of a *logically perfect language*, where only one name exists for each object, and complex propositions may always be reduced to their relevant parts. The result is a reality organized from top to bottom, in our world and in his text; just as every aspect of the world of the *Tractatus* is built up from simple atoms, so do all of the work's conclusions find their initial basis in this concept of a logically perfect language. Even so, the diversity of the conclusions the author derives from his basic premises, and the complexity involved in their derivation, render it impossible for a paper focused on logical atomism, his most basic assertion, to deal with all its consequents.

Yet the *Tractatus'* focus on logical atomism is particularly interesting because, despite its primacy in this earlier work, it is one of the first concepts that Wittgenstein rejects wholesale in his later work, the *Philosophical Investigations*. The concepts that "transcend" his framework of logical atomism in the *Tractatus*, such as ethics and the metaphysical subject, are constructed in relation to that framework. Those items in his work that end up excluded by the limits of the world as defined by the logically atomistic language still themselves depend on the existence of those limits, which are abolished with the loss of logical atomism. The theme of transcendence dominates the later part of the *Tractatus*. After the boundaries of what may and may not be said within the logically perfect language are set, Wittgenstein seizes upon certain facets of philosophy and relegates them to that higher realm of the "unsayable," beyond the reach of what we may meaningfully talk about and therefore is no longer problematic, at least insofar as 'answers' become impossible. Given that this transcendental realm depends on the limits of the world as posited by logical atomism to distinguish between the worldly and that which transcends it, one would assume that upon abandoning logical atomism, so too

would one abandon the idea of the transcendental that depends upon it. But though Wittgenstein's basic premises about language in the early part of the *Tractatus* will drop out to be replaced by his later theories of "language-games," history reveals that he never seemed to change his attitudes about the 'transcendent' themes that were supposed to be the concepts derived from said premises: his ideas about ethics and the self. With the loss of one's premises so too are lost one's conclusions; yet Wittgenstein's conclusions on ethics and the self remain in his attitude towards the world though he reverses entirely the structure of his thought on language. The sharply delineated boundary between the "sayable" and the "unsayable," between the natural and the supernatural, that is to be found in the *Tractatus*, persists in his *Lecture on Ethics* and even in his architectural style. The question to be asked in this paper is *why* this might be, so that we may consider what motivated a genius to cast aside his work and rebuild it all anew.

Such a question may seem more psychological than philosophical, and thereby cast doubt onto whether or not this paper is truly one of philosophy. The proper philosophical approach to this issue would likely perceive the contradiction between Wittgenstein allowing his linguistic formulations to collapse and maintaining the resultant ethical conclusions, and thus dismiss his claims. Yet I believe to end there would be a failure in two important ways: first, it would obscure the true nature of the *Tractatus*, and second, it would reveal a superficial understanding of philosophy itself. Although it may seem obvious from the structure of the work that Wittgenstein begins with an enigmatic philosophy of language only to end startlingly with a discussion of ethics and mysticism, a study of the shifts in his thinking reveals that it may well be his ethical ideas that inspired his linguistic formulations, and not the other way around. More profoundly, however, in stepping outside the body of Wittgenstein's own work in an effort to justify the paradoxical progression of his own beliefs, much of the *heart* of philosophical endeavor is revealed, and with it the human behind the philosopher. As Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "every great philosophy" consists in "the confession of its originator" (§6). Logical atomism is not relevant; namely, Wittgenstein has disproved it himself in his later work. But it is precisely because Wittgenstein is an exceptional philosopher that his efforts and frustrations reveal the passion and the desperation behind every attempt to organize or justify existence. Too often in an effort to distill the worth of a philosophy, it is taken out of context and judged purely on its rational

merits, without any emphasis on what motivated its creation. If the *relevance* of such philosophical projects is to be understood—including those we ourselves undertake—such shocking contradictions should not be dismissed but rather closely analyzed. We too, student of philosophy or not, must make sense of our world, and much can be learned from the “confessions” that result. So that we do not dehumanize ourselves through study, we must resolve to humanize the studied. With this in mind, let us consider Wittgenstein.

There is some debate as to whether the main importance of the *Tractatus* is intended to be in its initial linguistic formulations or in its later ethical conclusions. As the answer to this is crucial to understanding Wittgenstein’s overarching motives, I take my cue from a letter that Wittgenstein wrote to his publisher, Ludwig von Ficker, in 1919, in which he discussed the *Tractatus*. As translated by Ray Monk:

... the point of the book is ethical. I once wanted to give a few words in the foreword which now actually are not in it, which, however, I’ll write to you now because they might be a key for you: I wanted to write that my work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything I have not written. And precisely this second part is the important one.

Considering that “the point of the book is ethical,” there is a clear indication here that Wittgenstein, though he only writes of ethics briefly and in the later section of the text, is *using* his philosophy of language to make a greater ethical point. Though his ideas about ethics may appear to be conclusions that should drop out once his premises are lost, they may in fact have been his premises all along, continuing to motivate him once he sets the *Tractatus* aside. Once this connection is made, not only do many other parallels present themselves, but Wittgenstein’s personality begins to emerge within his work. In his discussions of an ethics that transcends the seemingly more practical concerns of morality; in his insights on the metaphysical subject, a concept that transcends entirely the more mundane ideas of a subject as an “I” useful in everyday language and life; in his equation of ethics with aesthetics, represented in the methods he made use of when building his sister’s house; and in his basic attempt to create a logically perfect language, capable of such clarity that it seems we ourselves are hardly worthy of speaking it, Wittgenstein becomes a philosophical engineer, constructing a system of the world that gleams like steel and moves like clockwork in its precision and immutability.

Making a philosopher's personal motivations apparent is difficult, especially given a limited supply of translated resources, but in this paper I will make a compelling case that it can be done. I will first trace Wittgenstein's arguments for logical atomism within the *Tractatus*, using the concept of objects as simples to explain and critique this basic theory and thereby aid in elucidating why Wittgenstein might have come to his various conclusions. Next, I will focus on the metaphysical subject in the *Tractatus* as an initial example of transcendence and attempt to explain it in the context of and as a contrast to logical atomism. Finally, using the concept of transcendence gleaned from a discussion of the metaphysical subject, I will attempt to expand on the ethical conclusions of the *Tractatus* as further evidenced in his *Lecture on Ethics* and in his architectural style. In doing so, I will seek to demonstrate that underlying all of the author's concerns was a drive towards *purity*, towards peace, toward a carefully contained world, and a self that could safely rise above it.

Our goals are thus twofold: to understand logical atomism, key to the project of the *Tractatus*, and its influence on the self or metaphysical subject and ethics; and to understand what motivations would drive such a project, and see if they are intelligible to us.

With regard to the latter, I am reminded of a small excerpt from the preface of the *Philosophical Investigations* that moved me considerably:

I make [my ideas] public with doubtful feelings. It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another—but, of course, it is not likely. I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own. I should have liked to produce a good book. This has not come about, but the time is past in which I could improve it. (*Philosophical Investigations*, x)

More compelling than any piece of philosophical evidence I could gather from his work, I am convinced, is the sense I get from these few lines that only a man compelled inexorably toward a purity in his thinking so absolute as to defy the realm of human possibility could be so utterly unsatisfied with the depth of the work he has produced.

## The Object and Atomism

Although the premises of logical atomism create the foundation for much of the theory in the *Tractatus*, the clearest and most direct representation of logical atomism itself can be found in Wittgenstein's theory of objects. For Wittgenstein, the world is defined as the "totality of facts, not of things" (1.1), or in other words, as "existing states of affairs" (2.04); our reality—that which our language refers to—is not one we interact with at its most basic level. This phenomenal world is built out of indivisible atoms, and we experience these atoms in their molecular form; that is, simple substances are at the heart of reality, but we encounter them only as complexes, as "facts" rather than "things." Thus the propositions of our language, the medium through which we engage with this composite reality, do not refer to things themselves; Wittgenstein asserts that they are instead built up out of thoughts that are "logical pictures of facts" (3). The specifics of what would become Wittgenstein's famous picture theory of representation would distract from our analysis of his philosophical motivations. The general thrust of what underlies picture theory, however, is that because at heart each fact is formed of simple things, we may trace our way back from the complex molecular propositions of our language to their atomic predecessors and from there to the states of affairs that are pictured. As "the configuration of objects produces states of affairs" (2.0272), in objects may be found the building blocks of our reality, the atoms with which the living world is constructed. In sum, "objects are simple" (2.02), and because all complex states are built from simples, "objects contain the possibility of all situations" (2.014).

The result of these assertions is that, theoretically, one might devise a logically perfect language wherein each complex proposition may be broken down to its component parts such that there is *never* any confusion in language. There would be one name for every simple object, and from various configurations of these objects would arise the myriad complex situations—or "states of affairs"—we interact with in our daily life. For example, we would have one word for "sphere"—being able to call it an "orb" as well would only cause trouble—and we would have a series of words to describe location, such that if we were asked to say where in a room a sphere was located, we would be able to link our simple terms together in a composite proposition and make a perfectly clear statement. This is why Wittgenstein may say that "objects contain the possibility of all situations"; so long as we can

break down every conceivable state of affairs into the simple “objects” it is composed of, there is no confusion in reference.

Only in a realm with such clear links between phenomena, where objects combine to become facts that are then represented through thought in the form of propositions, could Wittgenstein hope to create the logically perfect language; thus, this theoretical language depends entirely on the truth of logical atomism. “Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly,” he writes. “Everything that can be put into words can be put clearly” (4.116). If thoughts and propositions arise directly from simple objects which, in their simplicity, contain all of their own possibilities in states of affairs, there is no reason why such perfect clarity in reference should not be the case, however much picturing is required to make it so. With one name for every simple and every proposition constructed so that it splits easily into its component parts, it would be only the limits of the human intellect that would prevent the perfect logical language from being made a reality. Indeed, logic, and language itself, often appear to be more clever than we are. “Logic must look after itself,” he notes, as though logic were its own being, and, “[i]n a certain sense, we cannot make mistakes in logic” (5.473). This “certain sense” is the sense that defies our own mortal limitations, limitations that have occasioned us to use logical definitions that Wittgenstein finds to be wholly unnecessary. “In a suitable notation, we can in fact recognize the formal properties of propositions by mere inspection of the propositions themselves” (6.122); if our language were ideal, we would need say nothing to demonstrate the logical properties that are otherwise obscure to us. The laws of logic would be inherent in every statement, as it would be impossible to make nonsensical claims so long as every proposition is built of its respective simples.

Thus, given the clarity of this pure logical language, the stepping-stones we may have used in developing formulations of logic—our various axioms, for example—are no longer necessary and indeed only inhibit us, thereby motivating Wittgenstein’s claims regarding the “unsayable” and transcendence. We are distracted by the tools we use to say what is already self-evident, he argues in the preface, for the problems of philosophy are posed because “the logic of our language is misunderstood.” In claiming that “[a] picture is a model of reality” (2.12), and that thoughts are pictures of facts, Wittgenstein posits that language is a representation of logic, and that logic is the framework of our fact-based reality:

The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they represent it. [...] Logic is not a field in which we express what we wish with the help of signs, but rather one in which the nature of the absolutely necessary signs speaks for itself. If we know the logical syntax of any sign-language, then we have already been given all the propositions of logic (6.124). Hence there can *never* be surprises in logic (6.1251).

How precisely Wittgenstein develops his final conclusions regarding what is “unsayable” from these logical critiques will be reserved for the subsequent discussion of transcendence. What ought to be noted here is that just as language is a representation of logic, so too is logic a representation of the world, and as such language and logic have clear connections to reality. Through contrasting these claims with the comments in the preface, the vast scope of Wittgenstein’s project begins to reveal itself: in creating a logically perfect language wherein meaningless claims are impossible, and “the logic of our language” is *always* understood, our philosophical problems will cease to exist. Wittgenstein is convinced that our philosophical qualms are in fact the result of our failure to understand what constitutes a meaningful statement; all of our discussion of formal logic, for example, has been pure nonsense, insofar as all of our laws of logic are already implied in the very language we use to talk about them, thereby making any statement about the laws of logic automatically circular.

But we must not forget that for this to be true, Wittgenstein’s logically perfect language, wherein logic is perpetually invoked, must be possible, and the immediate link of language to reality is sustained. If Wittgenstein is to successfully deconstruct philosophy, the “scaffolding” formed by the network of objects that creates facts and states of affairs—and thus the world—must be composed of simples, so that all complexes remain, at least theoretically, clear in their composition. Only if objects are simples is logical atomism, and all conclusions developed from it, feasible.

Objects, however, as I would argue, and as Wittgenstein himself argues in his later work the *Philosophical Investigations*, are not simples. To illustrate, imagine the example of a river, the banks of which are ever shifting. The name that the river has been given by humans never changes, so that it might be consistently referred to for practical purposes, and thus it is considered to be “the same river.” Yet no one can say where precisely the river begins or ends, and neither can they say



with any certainty how wide those shifting banks would have to become to make it a lake and how narrow for it to be a stream. When exactly the river ceases to be a trickle in the mountains, and when exactly it ceases to be a river and becomes the bay as it leads toward the sea, cannot be answered, because the very question defies the actual nature of the so-called object. The river cannot be considered a self-contained entity; it is anything but “simple,” for its existence as a river appears to depend, even more so than on its physical state, on whether or not people choose to call it a river, and what function it thus serves in the language. The river cannot be reduced to component parts when its properties are subordinate to the social context in which it exists, and as such, it resists the demands that would be made of it by logical atomism.

Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, presents his own counter-example to what he stated in the *Tractatus*, and uses the example of a chair. He first repeats his earlier thoughts from the *Tractatus*: “a name ought really to signify a simple” (§39). An object, he continues, such as the sword Excalibur, may still be referred to when it has been broken into its component parts—such as its sharp blade—and therefore the names of these component parts will be the key to a clear sense of what Excalibur is. Yet he soon retorts to his own suggestion:

But what are the simple constituent parts of which reality is composed? What are the simple constituent parts of a chair? The legs of wood of which it is made? Or the molecules, or the atoms? “Simple” means: not composite. And here the point is: in what sense “composite?” It makes no sense at all to speak absolutely of the ‘simple parts of a chair’. [...] To the *philosophical* question: “Is the visual image of this tree composite, and what are its component parts?” the correct answer is “That depends on what you mean by ‘composite’.” (And that, of course, is not an answer but a rejection of the question.) (§47)

There is no absolute sense of composite or simple, only senses contained in what Wittgenstein will refer to as the specific “language-games” of various social contexts. Thus, the question itself must be rejected, for it is predicated on a false understanding of objects.

By rejecting the existence of absolutely simple objects, Wittgenstein refutes logical atomism in its entirety. In so doing, he should thereby discard the entirety of the *Tractatus*, given that logical atomism is its fundamental assertion. Yet an exploration of the later themes of the

*Tractatus*, that of the subject and transcendence, will reveal that his conclusions on ethics and personal identity persist even as he revolutionizes his thinking on language in his later work.

## The Subject and Transcendence

The failure of logical atomism to describe that which exists in the limit of the world complicates the reality of that which exists without: the transcendental. As explained above in the discussion of logical atomism, Wittgenstein draws a sharp distinction between statements that are informative and those that are the mere recitation of truths that are inherent in the fabric of language itself—such as, he asserts, our logical axioms—and thus, in being tautological, are nonsensical. This theme is carried further in his discussion of the transcendental, in which Wittgenstein devotes himself to a careful separation between what can be said and what can be shown. In order to understand his ethical perspective, we must first analyze how that which is meant to exist outside the world of logical reality, the transcendental—the metaphysical subject, ethics, and aesthetics—depends on this distinction between that which can be clearly said and that which must be passed over in silence.

Language cannot describe its own truths: “Propositions *show* the logical form of reality” (4.121), and “What can be shown, *cannot* be said” (4.1212). Again, language cannot describe rules when those very rules are necessitated by the act of describing; this would be circular and thus nonsensical, and the only alternative is to create a hierarchy of rules by which lesser levels of language are described. But rather than craft an elaborate framework wherein formal concepts can be discussed, Wittgenstein simply dispenses with them altogether: “To ask whether a formal concept exists is nonsensical. For no proposition can be the answer to such a question” (4.1274). Formal concepts are necessitated by the structure of language; hence, there is no need to speak of them in any case. Even if we were in our ignorance to try, however, we would only be speaking nonsense. “*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world” (5.6), and that which exists outside the limits of the world exists outside the limits of language as well. These truths can only be *shown* through the fact that the world functions, not *spoken of* meaningfully.

This does not explain why Wittgenstein decides to place the “self” alongside logic and language as something transcendental, but an abrupt

and convoluted argument tucked into the *Tractatus* makes his reasoning more clear. Wittgenstein asserts with characteristic obscurity that “[i]n the general propositional form, propositions occur in other propositions only as bases of truth-operations” (5.54), and promptly concludes from this that “there is no such thing as the soul—the subject, etc.—as it is conceived in the superficial psychology of the present day” (5.5421). What precisely Wittgenstein is saying in his first statement, and the linguistic reasoning he goes through in bafflingly brief form to make his specific argument, would require another paper to itself. For the purposes of understanding the conclusions that develop from his ethical views, however, we may sidestep a discussion of abstract logic and focus on only the latter statement, and what he states after his conclusion that there is no soul: “Indeed a composite soul would no longer be a soul.”

One might well ask why a composite soul would no longer be a soul—why the self could not be a unity just as the body is composed of cells—and I have a suggestion: a composite soul would not serve the *function* that the term “soul” does for us, namely, distinguishing a specific and indivisible “I”. The purpose of the soul or the subject is not merely that it allows us to refer to others and ourselves. It allows us to presume we may do so consistently; that however our physical or mental states change there is something about us that a name sticks to permanently. In doing so, we may be confident that we, like the objects of the *Tractatus*, are simples. Wittgenstein is arguing that the subject is not a simple, and that because of this there is no subject; the “I” is a mystery we cannot so easily solve, and our desire for the safety of this linguistic—and psychological—convenience only blinds us to this.

In place of the conventional subject Wittgenstein creates a “meta-physical subject,” the properties of which are mysterious. “I am my world. (The microcosm)” (5.63), he writes, invoking the first person, and then both “[t]here is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas,” (5.631) and “[t]he subject does not belong to the world; rather, it is a limit of the world” (5.632). Clearly, the subject is transcendental: like the eye implied by the existence of the visual field, it must be there yet it necessarily cannot be seen; the eye, and the “I”, are invisible. Yet that the “I” would be abolished in favor of identifying the self with the microcosm—the world itself—seems to make it impossible to use this new subject in any manner that the old version was relied upon for; we cannot use it to distinguish between different people, for example, lest we claim that we belong to different worlds.

As he ventures into the realm of the mystical, however, Wittgenstein seems comfortable in claiming exactly that. “The world of the happy man is different from the unhappy man” (6.43), he writes, in what might be a relatively innocent statement by another philosopher but which, in the context of his earlier claim that “[t]he world is all that is the case” (1), here seems to potentially have breathtakingly broad implications. Hans Sluga describes this by noting in his “Wittgenstein on the *Self*”:

While we can give an exhaustive objective, scientific description of the world, according to Wittgenstein, that description cannot touch on the (transcendental) fact that the world is after all my world. This fundamental feature of subjectivity cannot be accounted for by postulating an objectively available subject (or objectively available subjects) within the world. The mental is not a sphere within the world nor is it an object outside the world; “the metaphysical subject” is, rather, the nonobjective condition of the possibility of the objective world. (*The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, 329)

Wittgenstein struggles with the consequences of an unindividuated psychological self, a “world soul” as described in his *Notebooks*, and the transcendental solipsism that is the result, even until his death, a few weeks before which he writes, “But [that] it is still false to say: I is a different person from L.W.”

What is relevant here for the purposes of our discussion of Wittgenstein’s ethical motivations, then, is that even though Wittgenstein dismisses his earlier claims toward logical atomism, the limits of which establish the limits of our world, he maintains his interest in the metaphysical subject, which as transcendental should still depend on the existence of those limits. Wittgenstein’s beliefs regarding the ethical retained some consistency even after his beliefs on the logical and linguistic changed, and the points of reference thus formed give us some insight into why ethics, and the subjects governed by it, is for Wittgenstein transcendental. The question remains: why would Wittgenstein want to think of the subject as transcendental in the first place, and go to such trouble as to envision an elaborate logical structure of language in order to make his point?

## Purity: Ethics and Aesthetics

In his resistance to those who were his mentors and the academic environment that so craved his presence, in his efforts to exclude many concepts that are apparently worldly—such as language and ethics—from the world, in his aesthetic tastes as evidenced by his architectural design, and even in aspects of his personal life, it may be said that Wittgenstein's whole life was a series of rejections. If any theme unites the disparate elements of Wittgenstein's life, it is that of a man obsessed with precision in a world of chaos. Only a true biography would have the right to assert which features were most defining: his family and the suicides therein, and his own depressive tendencies; his guilt about his homosexuality and general aversion to society; his brilliance and impatience with the less astute; or fighting and living through two World Wars and the loss of his own home country. What is worth understanding is that Wittgenstein lived in a world subject to constant upheaval. He would express himself by creating worlds where such upheaval could not exist, where the questions one could ask could be answered, and the questions that could not be answered simply could not be asked; a world of perfect clarity. The density and rigor of the *Tractatus* and its formulation of a logically perfect language will, I believe, be best understood in this context, and furthermore, it will become intelligible—even if not justifiable—as to why, in spite of changing his views on language over the course of his life, Wittgenstein's sentiments toward ethics and the self would remain.

Wittgenstein's efforts to formulate a logically perfect language are rooted in more than philosophical reasoning; a theme of overriding concern with clarity and disdain for wasted words on that which must be unclear persists through numerous aspects of Wittgenstein's work, and what he concludes in ethics from his logical formulations in the *Tractatus* does not seem to fade from Wittgenstein's life when its premises are rejected. As to why personally Wittgenstein might have been so fundamentally concerned with clarity to the degree that the desire for it so suffused his existence, many possibilities present themselves: Wittgenstein originally wanted to be an engineer, from which perspective the *Tractatus* might have been a kind of philosophical blueprint; the multiple suicides in his immediate family might be perceived by one interested in ethics as a failure of philosophy, in its confusion, to protect people from their despair; he might have searched for an impermeable stability in a world wracked by warfare. Whatever his reasons were,

just as they eventually would motivate him to seclude himself, they drew him to a transcendental view of ethics that distanced itself from questions of morality and practicality, and had less to do with dealing with the world than with reaching beyond it.

Ethics govern the subject, and like the subject, “[e]thics is transcendental” (6.421). Yet ethics for Wittgenstein is distanced from traditional concepts of morality: “ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the usual sense of the terms” (6.422). Normally, ethics defines a stance by which one views the world, a description of that which is valuable, while morality regards action and practice; morality generally follows from ethics, then, and is a practical application of the ethical views. Yet Wittgenstein’s concept of ethics is entirely distinct from the moral, and indeed it seems as though to even talk about “practicality” in ethical terms would be, for Wittgenstein, the result of confusion as to what ethics is about.

The *Lecture on Ethics*, appropriately enough, begins with Wittgenstein apologizing in advance for the imprecision of his English and the lack of clarity that he fears will result: “my expression therefore often lacks that precision and subtlety which would be desirable if one talks about a difficult subject” (37). Yet he speaks with clarity enough to demonstrate that at the time of the lecture his views had not changed on ethics since the writing of the *Tractatus*. “Ethics, if it is anything,” he says, “is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water [even] if I were to pour out a gallon over it” (40). Ethics, for Wittgenstein, may only be about meaningless statements: for example, one might take an ethical stance wherein one wonders at the existence of the world, which is nonsensical, as all thought takes place within the limits of the world and that which is outside the world must then be inconceivable. Ethics, then, is rooted in “the misusing of language” (41); ethical claims are just as meaningless as the axioms of logic, not because they are implied by the language we use, but because our language is limited by our world, and to speak of that which is outside our world is to refer to nothing. Wittgenstein provides other examples of potential ethical stances, such as the experience of being absolutely safe—of transcending all danger and therefore of, I assume, the complete dissolution of the “I”—or of feeling absolutely guilty, as in beholden entirely to a higher power. But the main thrust of his point is not to be found in the specific ethical stances made possible by his unique formulation of transcendental ethics but rather his thoughts on why human beings might want to

make these meaningless statements at all:

I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute value, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it. (44)

Georges Bataille, in his *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, has similar insights regarding a basic tendency within human beings to want to transgress their boundaries, that for humans this is a kind of end in itself and so to be able to say or do anything that reaches beyond “the world,” at least the world as it is understood, holds a certain appeal. Yet Wittgenstein resists explaining his respect for this apparently hopeless urge, and given his utter division of ethics from practical concerns of morality it seems unlikely he would appreciate Bataille’s own perspective, rooted as it is in certain assumptions about human nature. For Bataille, when we seek to transgress the limits of the world, what we are doing is infinitely meaningful; for Wittgenstein, what we do is, in fact, utterly meaningless, yet we do it all the same.

But in what might be perceived in this light as a hypocritical move, Wittgenstein does appear to accept certain practicable consequences of ethical stances: namely, aesthetic choices. Wittgenstein’s architectural efforts, as demonstrated in the images above, illustrate how his transcendental ethical perspective, despite in theory having no meaning communicable within the world, found expression. In a sense anything but bohemian or hedonistic, aesthetics becomes the new morality for Wittgenstein. In his rigorous attention to balance in structure—his insistence that an entire ceiling be replaced for being a few inches too low, which no one without a measuring stick would have ever noticed—and clarity in design—an elevator with mechanisms exposed—and his rejection of adornments or superfluous decoration, Wittgenstein made

logic into art, and attempted, I believe, to drive chaos from his world.



Theoretically, by his own rules in the *Tractatus*, what he attempted to do cannot actually be done; I cannot imagine he would have ever built the house he did without being motivated by the same desire that compelled him to craft a logically perfect language, and yet ethics and aesthetics by their very nature are supposed to transcend the limits of the world, made meaningless as soon as they are articulated. As I myself find moral concerns highly relevant, I resist a transcendental form of ethics such as his own, one which seems to compel one to be only either ascetic or apathetic, silent on morality. Had Wittgenstein never built that house, I would here be compelled to argue against him. Yet I feel it is enough to point to the house he built as a sign that he, too, struggled with his ethics of purity, and that just as he wrote the *Tractatus* using propositions that he would declare within the text itself were meaningless, so was he compelled to design the undesignable. Only a man for whom purity and clarity were of the utmost concern, I think, would believe so strongly and then contradict himself so utterly, seeking to be true to himself.

## Conclusion

Wittgenstein lived in perpetual defiance of his own final conclusion: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (7). Every one of his notable acts, whether writing a philosophical work necessarily utilizing meaningless propositions or being architect to a building that embodied precepts supposedly indescribable within the limits of the world, defied his own ideal. To have lived that way must have been a prolonged torment, and the ultimate source, I suspect, of the disillusionment that plagued his preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*. Even after the rejection of logical atomism, it appears that Wittgenstein never lost his will to escape the confused morass of the limited



world, and so in spite of the order of propositions within the *Tractatus*, I believe it was Wittgenstein's ethical motivations toward purity that inspired his pursuit of a logically perfect language, and not the other way around. The world, as he admits in the *Investigations*, defies a logically perfect language; were we to have a logically perfect language, it would not be able to refer to anything, for there would be no simples for which to have single names. Not merely human incompetence but material transience obstructs the precision that Wittgenstein strove for in the *Tractatus*.

With the rejection of logical atomism and thus the possibility of the logically perfect language, it is impossible to live without saying what cannot be said, for nothing can truly "be said" at all. Language does not merely distort the purity of our thoughts; our thoughts themselves are not pure, for however they refer to the world, whether by picture representation or whatever method, they refer to a world that itself is indistinct. A man that demands purity of an indistinct world will go mad searching for truths that do not exist, scouring his world and himself until nothing remains. He would build not buildings but pile up rubble, write not the *Tractatus* but instead scribble on a page, for these, in the face of the transcendental, would, I believe, be equivalent. He would stay perfectly silent, speaking no words and taking no action, seeking purity unto death; for when the world of life is by nature a mess, only when life ceases would clarity be conceivable.

Yet Wittgenstein, though he may have struggled with the metaphysical subject and other consequents of his search for purity within and without the limits of the world until the day of his death, did not do quite that.

I searched for his cause of death upon reading the despairing section of the preface of the *Investigations* mentioned above, fearing that he, in his demands upon his own genius, had taken his own life just as one close to me, who I have admired for similar reasons, once had—and I found not only that he had not committed suicide, but a transcript of his last words:

"Tell them I had a wonderful life."

I suggest that in a world where the purity of the transcendental is impossible, where the limits between what is 'sayable' and what is not are not so easily drawn, we need not abandon purity; rather, we must redefine it. Wittgenstein, in his decision to abandon his crystal-clear logical language for the custom-based systems to be found in his *Investigations*, gave up a search for an all-encompassing grounding

for existence, a grounding with which supposed—if only we scraped off the assorted refuse of life that clung to it—we would be able to find the eternal truths of our world. The alternative search for truth must be to immerse ourselves in existence, seeking not a totalizing structure that would freeze our world in place and order it perfectly but instead to master as best as possible the rough and amorphous systems that comprise the human experience. I will not make a case for such a philosophy here. But I will say that if there is any such thing as “purity” at all, I suspect it is to be found in the sincerity of the individual who grasps the world and thereby forges an integrity for themselves with which they react with some consistency to the world’s surprises, not in an ascetic fleeing from those surprises and a shedding of one’s surface identity in the hope that something truer is to be found beneath. The latter is purity unto death, but the former is purity unto life.

Many who are at all philosophically-minded will be able to sympathize with Wittgenstein’s isolationist tendencies and his desire to distill the world down to its basic structure, to see the chaos as contingent and rest certain that order lies beneath. Yet though these tendencies were perhaps integral to his character, I believe that had he succumbed to them entirely and sought purity to its logical end, he would not have survived as long as he did. Wittgenstein may never have come to any final conclusion about the nature of his self, but in struggling with his world to the best of his ability, the fruits of which we may now cherish to our own elucidation, he lived.

I respect him more for this than for his genius.

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SCOTT LUCAS

# Overcoming Man

Towards an Epistemological Reconstitution of the Care of the Self in Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* and *Hermeneutics of the Subject*

Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous crossing, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous trembling and halting. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal: what is lovable in man is that he is an over-going and a down-going.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

## Introduction

Unwind and stretch out the surface of the globe. Subtract its geography, the particular terrain and forms both organic and inorganic that differentiate one place from the next. Allow the mind's eye to glance at the individual members of humanity in their irreducible multiplicity. As the gaze travels from one to the next, one notices the nearly limitless divisions upon which they insist to separate themselves from each other. Let drop away these multiple and overlapping cleavages. To grasp the totality, one must make an abstract representation, focusing only on the essential and necessary elements of the multiplicity of the mass. Call one such abstraction "Man."<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy writes the outlines of this golem, practice breathes life into it. During the period of European history roughly bracketed by Descartes and Kant, a particular picture of Man was painted by a range of actors, from leading philosophers to now-anonymous practitioners toiling at the capillary points.

My task in this paper is twofold. First, working within the structure of two works by the philosopher Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*<sup>2</sup> and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*,<sup>3</sup> it is to explicate Foucault's understanding of the concept of Man and highlight what he and others see as its inherent contradictions. Second, it is to show how Foucault's later work begins to recover an alternative concept of the subject—known as "care of the self"—that has lain dormant since the Hellenistic era and the Roman Empire.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, I present Foucault's analysis of Man. Second, I show his recovery of the Hellenistic concept of the care of the self, which has been effaced by the concept of Man. Then, I attempt to show how the care of the self might be reestablished and what would follow from that development.

The first text under consideration poses a question that the second begins to answer. This reading goes against some of the grain of Foucault's thought. For one, it leaps over the middle period Foucault's

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<sup>1</sup>It is unfortunate but unavoidable that the language will be gendered in this paper. I do so in order to stay true to Foucault's terminology. I recognize that "Man" falls on different and more critical ears since we have internalized the (largely correct) feminist criticisms of gender and language. To this point, I can only request the latitude afforded to one who must engage with historical texts. In the interest of distinguishing the historical nature of the term, I capitalize "Man" throughout.

<sup>2</sup>Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. Vintage.

<sup>3</sup>Foucault, Michel. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*. Picador.

concern with power/knowledge and biopolitics, amongst other fruitful topics. Second, it reads the late period Foucault as actively proposing the locus point of a new episteme. In *The Order of Things*, epistemes were analytic concepts. They could not be known by thinkers within them, nor could they be consciously replaced through agency. In order to avoid this problem, this paper treats *The Order of Things* as a significantly more Hegelian text than Foucault intended it to be. The bulk of this discussion will be postponed until the appropriate point in the paper. However, it is critical to note that this work does not postulate a figure lurking behind the texts and then attempt to divine his thoughts. Rather, all it attempts to accomplish is to fruitfully read two texts in tandem. If the reading is in accord with the intent of the author, so much the better. But nothing hangs on whether this fortuitous concordance obtains. Offering a hermeneutics of the author is not the goal of this paper. Genealogy is the task at hand, not biography.

## The Contemporary Figure of Man

At the heart of *The Order of Things* lies the claim that, “[M]an—the study of whom is supposed by the naïve to be the oldest investigation since Socrates—is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things [...] Man is a recent invention, a figure not two centuries old, a new wrinkle in the order of knowledge [and] he will disappear.”<sup>4</sup>

What does “Man” mean? The answer is hard to give. It is simpler by far to show what is not meant. The term is *not* meant to designate the flesh-and-blood physical animal. Nor does it pick out the designation of the species as a whole unit. After all, the concept “humanity” is ancient, a fact of which the text is undoubtedly aware. The meaning of the term has to be understood in the context in which it is deployed. The question under consideration is not, “what is ‘Man’?” but rather, “to what meaning is ‘Man’ assigned in virtue of its place in the totality of the argument?” And to do that, one must turn to the idea of the *episteme*.

## Epistemes

An episteme is the “positive unconsciousness of knowledge”<sup>5</sup> that makes up the set of rules of formation of possible statements within a

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<sup>4</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. xxiii

<sup>5</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. xi

field of knowledge. Foucault's analysis reveals that statements, arguments, and concepts within a given domain at a certain period of time display regularities in their construction and deployment both internally within a given field and synchronistically across fields. They do so because the production of knowledge is a regulated activity; there are rules to the game.<sup>6</sup> For example, in the Renaissance, knowledge was constituted on the basis of resemblance; to know a thing was to show how it resembled other things. An epistemic analysis enables one to examine a science "not from the point of view of individual [scientists] who are speaking, nor from the point of view of the formal structures of what they are saying, but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse."<sup>7</sup>

An episteme can be thought of as somewhat analogous to the structures of music. Classical Western music is usually divided into several eras, what is meant to be designated is that at certain times only a certain few of the potential configurations of melody, harmony, instrumentation, and modality were utilized. These eras do not draw their existence from individual composers who consciously create them, but rather from the multiplicity of actions, sometimes contradictory, which nevertheless rest upon a common substratum.

Unlike Thomas Kuhn, who focuses on the physical sciences,<sup>8</sup> Foucault analyzes the human sciences. However, though the fields of analysis differ, an episteme can also be thought of as not unlike Kuhn's notion of a paradigm. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn argued that research in physical science is normally conducted under the auspices of what he terms a paradigm, like Ptolemaic cosmology or Newtonian physics. Paradigms, as they guide the experimentation and theorization of scientists, accumulate a set of outstanding and irresolvable problems, known as anomalies. Eventually, these anomalies lead to a breakdown of the paradigm and its revolutionary replacement by a new paradigm capable of resolving them. The new paradigm in turn generates its own anomalies and the process continues, perhaps

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<sup>6</sup>One pauses to note that it seems plausible to replace "game" with "language-game," thereby fruitfully suggesting a degree of concordance between Foucault's work and the Later Wittgenstein's. The development of this passing suggestion into a full treatment lies outside the scope of the task at hand, but the critical point of agreement is that both move philosophic analysis from rational argumentation to a consideration of the practices that underlie those arguments. Foucault does so on the basis of giving histories, whereas Later Wittgenstein does so on the basis of question present assumptions.

<sup>7</sup>*Op. Cit* pg. xiii-xiv

<sup>8</sup>See Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.



indefinitely, though Kuhn hedges this point.

An episteme varies across time. Different periods structure their knowledge in different fashions.<sup>9</sup> Foucault traces four such epistemic periods in his book: the Renaissance, characterized by resemblance; the Classical Age, characterized by representation through identity and difference; the Age of Man, characterized by an analytic of Man's finitude; and a vague and as of yet undefined period beyond these. Man, as it is used, comes to be in the eponymous aforementioned age.

In its episteme, the concept of Man presents a set of paradoxes. He is a "strange empirico-transcendental doublet, [...] a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible."<sup>10</sup> The paradox is drawn from Immanuel Kant. For him, Man was both an empirical object amongst objects, and, simultaneously, the transcendental subject who allowed for the possibility of the intelligibility of objects. Foucault does not take Kant to have authored the idea; rather, Kant's argument is the most visible manifestation of the underlying episteme. That is, the organization of the episteme allowed the argument to be articulated, the argument did not articulate the episteme.<sup>11</sup>

In a further paradox, for the Age of Man, Man is "the individual who lives, speaks, and works in accordance with the laws of an economics, a philology, and a biology, but who also, by a sort of internal torsion and overlapping, has acquired the right, through the interplay of those very laws, to know them and to subject them to total clarification."<sup>12</sup> Man is an object amongst objects: Like a rock or a tree he can be studied and his actions can be predicted. But, unlike any other object in the world, man is at the same time a subject: it is like something

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<sup>9</sup>An episteme, by the argument, is blind to its own existence; its structure cannot be investigated from within itself. That is for the simple reason that any analysis that aims to explicate the unstated rules of thought can do so only with recourse to other unstated rules. I cannot investigate the spot of ground upon which I am standing unless I take a step away from it; and once I do that, then I am no longer standing on that particular patch, but another. The patch upon which I stand is, as such, never the subject of my investigation. This argument may be what Foucault is after when he argues that asking the question "Does man really exist?" is "considered to be merely engaging in paradox. This is because we are so blinded by the recent manifestation of man that we can no longer remember a time [...] when the world, its order, and human beings existed, but man did not." 322.

<sup>10</sup>*Op. Cit* pg. 318.

<sup>11</sup>As Foucault puts it with regard to the Classical episteme: "There exists a single, necessary arrangement running through the whole of the Classical episteme [...] And it was this network that made possible the individuals we term Hobbes, Berkeley, Hume, or Condillac."

<sup>12</sup>*Op. Cit* pg. 310.

to be him. Furthermore, he can come to know the laws that govern his behavior; furthermore, in some sense he is the author of those very laws. "Labor, life, language appear as so many 'transcendentals' which make possible the objective knowledge of living beings, of the laws of production, and of the forms of language."<sup>13</sup>

As Foucault puts it, "Man is governed by labor, life, and language: his concrete existence finds its determinations in them; it is possible to have access to him only through his words, his organism, and the objects he makes."<sup>14</sup> Man is represented to himself as a finite being.<sup>15</sup> He can only live in accordance with a biology, only speak in accordance with a philology, and only labor in accordance with an economics; and in all of these cases the laws of the human sciences are anterior to him, they "traverse him as though he were merely an object of nature."<sup>16</sup> But it is precisely this finitude, "which rests on nothing but its own existence as fact [that] opens up the possibility of all concrete limitation."<sup>17</sup> The paradox of Man, then, is that he is an object amongst objects and thus ought to be understood completely in objective terms; yet he remains the lone subject and demands to be understood through this singularity. He is essentially limited, yet it is this limitation that opens up the possibility of all experience. He is clad in shackles that he himself forged.

These paradoxes will be extended and a solution to them proffered later in the paper. For now, let it suffice to say that each of these cannot help but fail to resolve the puzzle because each mistakenly takes its contingent bases as necessary. Or to put it in slightly different language, they assume as given what is in actuality constructed.

Man, the argument predicts, is destined to disappear precisely because of these paradoxes. It is a concept imbued with a temporality, a protology and an eschatology. And in that "void" left by man's disappearance, one finds "nothing more and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think."<sup>18</sup> In the following sections, I turn to the proposals the late-period Foucault advances for unfolding exactly that space in which one may think.

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<sup>13</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 244.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 313.

<sup>15</sup> Though Descartes has a similar notion of man's finitude viz. God, the exercise of man's reason is unlimited. The unlimited or circumscribed nature of reason is a key difference between the Classical and the Modern epistemes.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 313.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 315.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 342.

## Towards the Care of the Self from Kant to Heidegger

Of course, Foucault does not philosophize from a *tabula rasa*. This space has been explored before. His revitalization of the concept of care of the self finds resonances in several previous philosophical projects. If one is so inclined, a tale of incremental evolution to the care of the self can be told. Three thinkers in whose wake he follows are Kant, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Martin Heidegger. Though Kant recognized the fundamental finitude of human existence, he nevertheless based his ethics on a universal figure—Man—and a universal logic—the Categorical Imperative. Sartre moved to the peripheries insofar as he abandoned the universal logic as a given, but nevertheless posited that Man in acting became a universal legislator. Martin Heidegger's arguments are similar to Sartre's (or Sartre's are similar to Heidegger's), but his work on freedom and authenticity allows for greater room for individual experimentation and underdetermination.

With regard to Kant's ethics, it suffices here to repeat the well-worn steps of standard criticism. Kant starts with freedom and ends with the categorical imperative. Man here is a universalized and already given entity. What Man is or can become is not up to him. No matter where or when he lives, he is the same. From this universal figure, Kant postulates a universal ethics. The categorical imperative binds all men to a single ethical logic.

Sartre reverses an important aspect of Kant's formula. Instead of a logic underpinning human existence, he argues that human existence is prior to its logic. Although the figure of Man is universal, it is not given. As his slogan has it, "existence predates essence."<sup>19</sup> Man is the being such that he "first exists; he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterwards defines himself."<sup>20</sup> Sartre therefore rejects any the concept of human nature, to which Kant tenaciously clings. Though Sartre claims to reject an account of Man based on universals and givens, he nevertheless maintains that Man, in acting in the world, implicates universality. Sartre speaks of anguish here. This condition is the recognition of the Man who, "commits himself, and who realizes that he is not only the individual he chooses to be, but also a legislator choosing at the same time what humanity as a whole should be."<sup>21</sup> Anguish is the state of man failing to answer, and realizing that there

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<sup>19</sup>Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Existentialism is a Humanism." Yale University Press. pg. 22.

<sup>20</sup>*Op. Cit* pg. 22.

<sup>21</sup>*Op. Cit* pg. 25.

can be no answer to the question, “What proof is there that I am the proper person to impose my conception of man on humanity?”<sup>22</sup> It is as if Sartre confronted beginnings of the loss of the universalized man and forced himself to merely hypothesize what Kant had thought he had known. It seems as if Sartre had nothing else in mind when he stated that, “everything happens to every man as if the entire human race were staring at him and measuring itself by what he does.”<sup>23</sup> Sartre was right insofar as he demanded of man that he act for himself. He was misguided insofar as he thought that the basis of ethical action had to be this hypothesized universality.

In the work of Martin Heidegger, one finds a still less universalized and less given account of Man and of ethics:

Heidegger believes Dasein’s [Man’s] everyday behavior in the world is usually inauthentic. That is to say, Dasein usually comports according to these implicit rules that other individuals in the community follow as well. So, we exist as *das Man*, “the One,” just like anyone, so to speak. [...] It is more tricky to be authentic than one probably assumes, according to Heidegger. One cannot simply reject the “normal” way of dressing and dress completely opposite of what is common in order to be authentic. Even those “nonconformists” are limited to certain conditions of possibility [...] Heidegger believes that authenticity is possible, but one needs to work within his own culture or community as part of *das Man* and eventually create his “own way” of being to figure out who one is in his own culture.<sup>24</sup>

Though authenticity is a universal concept, there are multitudes of ways in which it can be achieved. There is no notion of acting in accord with a universal law, or of imposing one’s project upon the remainder of Man. Far to the contrary. The entire point, so to speak, of authenticity is to exist at a critical distance from one’s culture and the members of it. Revitalization of the care of the self ought to draw from this line of argument.

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<sup>22</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 26.

<sup>24</sup> Kalashian, Sarkis. Unpublished paper. pg. 4.

## The Care of the Self

Having presented the problem, the paper now pivots to the beginnings of a solution.

The *Hermeneutics of the Subject* reconsiders the relationship between the subject and truth. Foucault argues that for a period of time ranging from circa 500 BC to circa 500 AD, the injunction to know oneself was subordinated to the broader concept of the care of the self. Care of the self is the term used to mark out a set of inter-related techniques, practices, and ideas about how one constructs oneself. Since the Cartesian moment, philosophy and everyday culture has shifted from this spiritual mode of being toward a theoretical mode of self-understanding. Foucault implicitly argues that contemporary society ought to reconstitute this lost spiritual mode of existence.

The roots of the care of the self lie near the beginnings of Western philosophy. Foucault claims that Socrates subordinated the injunction to know oneself to the larger concern of the care of the self.<sup>25</sup> For him, knowing oneself was a “sort of concrete, precise, and particular application of the general rule: You must attend to yourself.”<sup>26</sup> Foucault quotes the *Apology* at several points and the *Alcibiades* in passing in order to support this reading.<sup>27</sup> In this work, the care of the self is presented as a set of techniques to prepare the wellborn for a life of political leadership. But in the hands of later philosophers, the domain of those who were expected to engage in the care of the self broadened considerably.

This care of the self “remained a fundamental principle for describing the philosophical attitude throughout Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture.”<sup>28</sup> The Epicureans, Cynics, and the Stoics all similarly subordinated the call to know oneself to the care of the self. “Throughout the long summer of Hellenistic and Roman thought,” Foucault states, “the exhortation to care for oneself became so widespread that it became, I think, a truly general cultural phenomenon [...] and at the same time an event in thought.”<sup>29</sup>

He decomposes this body of thought and practice into three constituent elements: First: “a certain way of considering things, of behaving in the world, undertaking actions, and having relations with other

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<sup>25</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 7-8.

<sup>28</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 9.

people.” Second: “a certain form of attention [...] We must convert out looking from the outside [...] towards ‘oneself.’” Third, and most importantly: “a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself.”<sup>30</sup>

## The Cartesian Moment and the Repudiation of Spirituality

Despite the high value attributed to the care of the self by the Hellenistic thought, the contemporary subject no longer engages in the practices of the care of the self. Our theory and practice has lost touch with these arts. Rather, the “Delphic prescription”<sup>31</sup> seems to be “the founding expression of the question of the relation between the subject and truth,” whereas the care of the self appears as no more than “a rather marginal notion.”<sup>32</sup> Foucault sets out to answer the question, “Why did Western thought and philosophy neglect the notion of the care of the self in its reconstruction of its own history?”<sup>33</sup> To put it another way, why has it valued the knowledge of oneself at the detriment of the care of the self?

The most important factors are the rippled repercussions of the Cartesian moment. Though in *The Order of Things*, Foucault had traced the figure of Man to Kant, here the nascence is pushed back to Descartes.<sup>34</sup> In Cartesian thought—and its contemporary and derived philosophies—Foucault finds two linked factors. First, the injunction to know oneself becomes the point of origin for truth; it becomes the fundamental means of access to truth.<sup>35</sup> Second, “the Cartesian approach [...] played a major part in discrediting the principle of the care of the self and in excluding it from the field of modern philosophical thought.”<sup>36</sup>

Both of these shifts occur as philosophy and spirituality disassociate. Philosophy here is defined as that the process that determines the grounds of truth and the possibility of the separation of truth from falsity. It questions what enables the subject to access truth and the

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<sup>30</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Perhaps he was aware of Heidegger’s argument that Descartes was the originator and Kant the articulator of this mode of thought.

<sup>35</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 14.

limits and conditions of that access.<sup>37</sup> Spirituality, of which the care of the self is a form, is defined in the text as the process that problematizes the relationship between the subject and truth. It has three characteristics. First, it postulates that truth is never given to the subject as a right. Spirituality understands knowledge as only contingently accessible. Second, no truth can come to be known without a conversion or transformation of the subject. This point derives from the first. Because one cannot attain the truth in one's original form, one can only come to knowledge through a transformation of oneself. Third, truth, once attained, transforms the subject beyond the transformation needed to attain truth.<sup>38</sup> For the ancients, philosophy and spirituality were indissociable. Knowledge of the self nested itself within the broader care of the self. One sought to understand the self in order to create, reorder, or build the self.

Since the Cartesian moment, when Descartes postulated as axiomatic both a self as the grounds for truth and a direct, unproblematic access to truth by the self, thought has abandoned spirituality for philosophy.<sup>39</sup> In the modern episteme, knowledge alone gives access to truth. In the Cartesian system, there is postulated a direct unproblematic relationship between the subject and truth. All the subject must do to access the truth is to think correctly.<sup>40</sup> There is nothing demanded of the subject for truth and nothing is changed in the subject once truth is attained.<sup>41</sup> None of the extrinsic or intrinsic conditions of knowledge concerns the subject in his or her very being.<sup>42</sup> Subsequently, the reward of truth is only found in the further development of knowledge. Knowledge no longer has a "rebound effect on to the knowing subject."<sup>43</sup>

## Practices of the Self

The subject is, according to the care of the self, not an unproblematic rational knower; it is the very object of a set of practices by which the self is constituted and altered. Foucault provides a number of examples from the Hellenistic period. This section focuses on three

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<sup>37</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 15.

<sup>38</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 17

<sup>40</sup> And perhaps be fortunate enough to have a comfortable chair and a warm fireplace nearby.

<sup>41</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 17.

<sup>42</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 18.

<sup>43</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 19.

of these: proper reading and writing, the death meditation, and examinations of conscience. The central goal of all is to provide tools or exercises by which one can take control and craft one's own soul.

Carefully reading and writing about a "few books [and] few authors"<sup>44</sup> provided "an opportunity for meditation."<sup>45</sup> This activity was understood as "a sort of mental exercise"<sup>46</sup> involving both "appropriation of a thought" and making "an experiment of identification" with that thing.<sup>47</sup> The ultimate aim was not hermeneutical exegesis, but rather "the creation of a equipment of true propositions for yourself, which really is your own."<sup>48</sup> Here one found an open field of texts and possible truths to be gathered and incorporated into the self. In contrast, Christian spiritual practices altered this activity in two fundamental ways: the imposition of "a fundamental speech: Revelation" and "a fundamental writing: Text"<sup>49</sup> and obliging as a condition for salvation that the subject speak "the truth about himself."<sup>50</sup> Notice that for Christian practices, it is a matter of the subject discovering and disclosing a truth buried within.

A second example is the famous death meditation. In Stoic practices, this exercise consisted of thinking of one's own death as present and actual. The specific form taken was both as an example of the general meditations on future evils, but also the unique "possibility of a certain form of self-awareness, or a certain form of gaze focused on oneself from this point of view of death, or of the actualization of death in our life."<sup>51</sup> The result of this practice was to allow one to say, as did Marcus Aurelius that, "I have lived. Moral perfection involves living each day as if it were the last."<sup>52</sup> The death meditation allowed the practitioner to freeze his present action by imagined death and thereby to evaluate it: "if you happen to think that there is a finer and morally more worthy activity which you could be engaged in when you die, then this is the activity you should choose."<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, it allowed one to evaluate the totality of one's life with a "retrospective view" that allows the "value of this life" to appear.<sup>54</sup> The death meditation

<sup>44</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 355.

<sup>45</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 356.

<sup>46</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 356.

<sup>47</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 357.

<sup>48</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 358.

<sup>49</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 363.

<sup>50</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 364.

<sup>51</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 478.

<sup>52</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 478.

<sup>53</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 479.

<sup>54</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 479.



provided a standpoint from which to judge one's own present actions and the totality of one's life.

A third example is the examination of conscience. This practice involves detailing one's actions in the course of a day to an older friend or "affective master."<sup>55</sup> The extant correspondence between the philosophically-minded Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his mentor, Fronto, falls into this category. Herein, one finds details of health, family and religious duties, and erotics.<sup>56</sup> These categories constituted a "reflecting surface, as the occasion, so to speak, for the self to test itself, train itself, and develop the practice of itself which is its rule of life and its objective."<sup>57</sup> "With regard to the self," Foucault notes, "you have the attitude, the stance, of someone who will have to give an account of it to someone else, and you live your day as a day that may be and anyway should be presented, offered, deciphered to someone else."<sup>58</sup>

The dual core of these exercises is both diagnostic and manipulative. They enable the subject both to examine himself as well as providing the means to alter what he finds there. Recalling the schema discussed above, one cannot access these truth-practices as one is. One must train, as an athlete does, to engage in them. One must alter oneself to engage in these truth-practices. And, once these practices are attained, these exercises internalized, the subject changes himself on the basis of the results.

## The Case Against Modern Philosophy

What Foucault presents, in the broadest sense, is an indictment against contemporary philosophy. Over a long period of years, the discipline has lost contact with the vital questions that it once attempted to answer and the concerns it once addressed. Of course, this charge is by no means novel. Marx, for one, registers a similar complaint.<sup>59</sup> The novelty comes in the solution, not the problem. One cannot read the text as merely advocating a move *ad fontes*. As a historical matter, it is impossible to recover the thought of a bygone era. But, by studying forgotten modes of thought, one can open up ways of understanding that move past the contemporary moment. The reintegration of spiri-

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<sup>55</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 159.

<sup>56</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 159-161.

<sup>57</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 162.

<sup>58</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 163.

<sup>59</sup> Marx, Karl. "Theses on Feuerbach."

tuality into the philosophic discourse is one such possible amelioration. As Dreyfus and Rabinow write with respect to Volumes Two and Three of *The History of Sexuality*, “He does not seek to deconstruct the subject but to historicize thoroughly the deep self in order to open the possibility of the emergence of a new ethical self.”<sup>60</sup> This paper spends its remainder considering the ramifications of this provocative claim.

## The Emergence of a New Ethical Self

*The Hermeneutics of the Subject* makes progress precisely on the problem of “the emergence of a new ethical self.” This figure can be read fruitfully as the replacement for Man. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that Man is of recent vintage. He poses the question, “Does man really exist? To imagine, for an instant, what the world and thought and truth might be if [M]an did not exist, is considered to be merely indulging in paradox.”<sup>61</sup> At the very end of the book, Foucault suggested that the Man might in time “be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”<sup>62</sup> The form of the replacement was left undefined in that work.

However, reading the two works together, it appears that Man and the theoretically-constituted Cartesian self are one and the same being. Therefore, insofar as Foucault proposes a new understanding of the subject based on spirituality, he thereby proposes an alternative to Man. When thought considers the subject from a theoretical standpoint, Man is born. When thought considers the subject from a spiritual standpoint, the cared-for subject appears.

By the practices of spirituality, the subject is made into a problem. It is not the departure point for a philosophy, but a topic for argumentation and consideration in practice. By abjuring theory in favor of spirituality, Foucault substitutes in the place of a self that *is* a self that *does*. Under the new mode of thinking, I am not myself. Through procedures of knowledge, I become myself over and over again. Instead of man as pre-extant knowing substance, the self is something constituted by the preparation for, attainment of, and rebound effects of knowledge and truth. Under the rubric of the care of the self, one confronts thoughts and practices designed to bring about a present awareness of the self—not as a bearer of internal truth, but

<sup>60</sup>Dreyfus, Hubert and Paul Rabinow. “Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics.” University of Chicago Press. pg. 254.

<sup>61</sup>*Op. Cit* pg. 322.

<sup>62</sup>*Op. Cit* pg. 387.

as the subject of any number of potential transformations. No longer is the subject an empty vessel waiting for truth to be poured into it by practices of theory. Rather, the self is the clay on the potter's wheel waiting to be molded by knowledge.

More precisely, the care of the self provides a critical point from which one works on oneself. It allows the self to set itself apart from the surrounding history and culture into which one is disciplined, as one finds also in Heidegger's work on authenticity. But, instead of so doing from a totalizing viewpoint, care of the self remains at the level of unreconciled partialities. When one engages in practices of the care of the self, one establishes one's ethics not from the point of view of a prevailing ideology or totalized discourse, but from the vantage point of the subject. Care of the self might be understood as an ethics of monadology. It is a means of building walls, however tenuous and transitory, between oneself and the surrounding space of discourse in which one creates and recreates oneself.

## Overcoming the Doublets of Man

Perhaps one might object: At no point in his work does Foucault give explicit trans-epistemic or trans-discursive reasons to favor one episteme or discourse over another. Therefore, there are no grounds upon which one ought to prefer the spiritual subject to Man. Foucault is on a fool's errand. As part of the response, consider again Dreyfus and Rabinow: "It might seem that if Foucault wants to give up one set of dangers for another, he owes us a criterion of what makes one kind of danger more dangerous than another. Foucault is clear that he cannot justify his preference for some dangers over others by an appeal to human nature, our tradition, our universal reason. His silence on this matter, while consistent, is nonetheless a source of confusion. His practice suggests, however, that he realizes that his diagnosis [...] is ultimately an interpretation to be judged in terms of its resonance with other thinkers and actors and its results."<sup>63</sup>

By their logic, one can derive at least two principles upon which to judge. First, it appears that one episteme ought to be favored over another if it solves the problems necessarily engendered by its predecessor. This criterion is in consonance with the approach of two major influences upon Foucault: Thomas Kuhn and G.W.F Hegel.<sup>64</sup> It ap-

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<sup>63</sup>*Op. Cit* pg. 264.

<sup>64</sup>One cannot help but detect a residue of Foucault's very early encounter with Hegel through Jean Hyppolite in *The Order of Things*, for example. A plausible

pears that the early Foucault largely adopted the theoretical model of Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In addition, traces of the Hegelian dialectic seem to be present in *The Order of Things* insofar as each successive episteme can be read as correcting the fatal flaw in its predecessor. For example, in the Classical episteme one finds, “the necessary disappearance of that which is the foundation [of representation. . .] The very subject [...] has been elided.”<sup>65</sup> Subsequently, the Modern episteme focuses precisely on that lacuna by establishing Man. One ought to consider how the subject of the care of the self transcends the problematics of Man.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault outlines three pairs of “analytics” that open up as a result of this understanding: the transcendental/empirical, the cogito/unthought, and the return/retreat of origin.<sup>66</sup> That is, there are three pairs of ways of resolving the tension inherent in the concept of Man. There are six ways out. But, none of these offer a satisfactory exit.

The empirical analysis of man focuses on the “space of his body” and studies “perception, sensorial mechanisms, neuro-motor diagrams, and the articulation common to things and to the organism.”<sup>67</sup> Its truth is grounded in “an analysis of the positivist type.”<sup>68</sup> This analysis stands at the head of the broad academic tradition of the social sciences, which treat man as a set of facts to be gathered and understood just as one might understand the physics of solid bodies. On the other hand, there is the transcendental analysis, which aims to show “that knowledge had historical, social, or economic conditions [...] and that was not independent of the particular form they might take here or

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reading of the epistemic development seems to be that the internal contradictions inherent in the age necessarily lead its successor. For example, take the passage regarding *Las Meninas* from chapter nine: “All the interior lines of the painting, and above all those that come from the central reflection, point towards the very thing that is represented, but absent [...] Even so, that absence is not a lacuna, expect for the discourse laboriously decomposing the painting, for it never ceases to be inhabited” (308). One could read the passage as claiming that the Classical episteme contained an internal contradiction—that though it was predicated on representation, it could not represent the representor—and that the dialectic ironing out of that contradiction necessarily led to the figure of man—whose internal contradictions, namely, the three doublets—will lead to a further epistemological development. This approach is to read Foucault against himself, as he explicitly claims to be ignoring the problem of causality in historical development.

<sup>65</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 16.

<sup>66</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 316.

<sup>67</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 319.

<sup>68</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 320.

there.”<sup>69</sup> The truth of the second is grounded in an “eschatological” anticipation of the “truth whose nature and history it defines.”<sup>70</sup> This mode of thinking finds its personification in Comte or Marx. This form of thought seems to stand for the analysis of man as a being outside this physical world, not subject in the same way to its laws.

The cogito/unthought dilemma is treated in a likewise fashion: “If man is indeed, in the world, the locus of an empirico-transcendental doublet [...] then man cannot posit himself in the immediate and sovereign transparency of a *cogito*; nor, on the other hand, can he inhabit the objective inertia of something that, by rights, does not and can never lead to self-consciousness.”<sup>71</sup> What Foucault means is that we can no longer understand Man either with the pacific Cartesian maxim, *cogito ergo sum*<sup>72</sup>, because the Age of Man understands the cogito as the product of historical forces and laws of life, labor, and language. However neither can we understand him purely in terms of unconscious behavior as an object. Rather the two are inseparable: “The unthought [...] is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality.”<sup>73</sup>

Finally, the retreat/return of the origin: Modern thought seeks the “foundation [...] that origin without origin or beginning, on the basis of which everything comes into question.”<sup>74</sup> Yet because it understands man as the empirico-transcendental doublet, it cannot do so. It can neither find a origin for man or his laws amongst other subjects—for all that does it give rise to the question of that subject’s origin—nor can it find the origin amongst objects—for that is to leave out the very question of subjectivity to which it wishes to answer.<sup>75</sup> Modern thought can also hypothesize the origin as a future event to which current history is leading up, as do Hegel and Marx. But, “time [...] cuts him off [...] that other dawn promised as still to come. Its “imminence” is “perhaps [...] forever snatched from him.”<sup>76</sup> Man cannot find the grounds of his existence in protological or eschatological terms.

<sup>69</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 319.

<sup>70</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 320.

<sup>71</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 322.

<sup>72</sup> Sartre is tacitly accused of committing essentially this crime, though in a “different” form. pg. 320.

<sup>73</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 326.

<sup>74</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 322.

<sup>75</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 321-322.

<sup>76</sup> *Op. Cit* pg. 334-335.

With respect to all three doublets, the spiritual analysis of the cared for subject dissolves these apparent dichotomies. In re-adopting the perspective of the care of the self, one may eliminate the need to worry about these problems.

With respect to the return/retreat of the origin, it eliminates any culmination of the existence of the subject in either the past or the future. The subject no longer stands in need of validation through from the future or the past. One ought not to understand the present in terms of either the future or the past; rather, the future and the past are to be understood only insofar as they bear upon the present.<sup>77</sup> The tools of construction are neither forthcoming nor waiting rediscovery; they are immanent. One faces the play of immediate present choices by which one creates and cares for himself in each and every instance.<sup>78</sup> No single event—whether long past or yet to come—provides the key to unlocking our understanding of ourselves.

With respect to the cogito/unthought, the care of the self eliminates the search for underpinning meanings with regard to either conscious choice or unconscious drives. There is nothing that stands in need of deep explanation or interpretation. It is not that those things do not exist. Rather, we are free not to define ourselves in their terms. As Dreyfus and Rabinow write, “Foucault seems to be saying that until we free ourselves from our obsession with deciphering the truth of our desires, we will continue to be entangled in our selves and in the power/knowledge complex which claims to help us uncover this truth.”<sup>79</sup>

Finally, with respect to the empirico/transcendental doublet, Foucault refuses the terms of the debate. The subject is neither given above the world nor as a part of it: Nothing is given. Instead, the subject proceeds from the self. An individual can choose to act as if he were made subject to either of these poles. To wit, he may create himself as Apollonian, Dionysian, or trending towards one pole or neither.<sup>80</sup> In other words, no longer ought one to seek to understand what man

<sup>77</sup>Foucault seems to follow Nietzsche’s argument in *Use and Abuses of History*.

<sup>78</sup>Here one is reminded of Arendt’s division of labor, work, and action. It is not infelicitous to read care of the self as a variant of the third category.

<sup>79</sup>*Op. Cit* pg. 254.

<sup>80</sup>And here, one pauses to note the vacancies in the pantheon. We can, but have yet to create the Zeusian, Hermetic, or Aphroditian (wo)man, amongst countless others to come). As Nietzsche himself came to realize at the end of his career: “—And how many new gods are still possible! As for myself, in whom the religious, that is to say god-forming, instinct occasionally becomes active at impossible times—how differently, how variously the divine has revealed itself to me each time!” (*Will to Power*, Book IV, Remark 1038).

is; rather, one ought to seek to understand how the subject constructs himself. The question becomes that of possibilities, not concretes.

Deleuze and Guattari pose the problematic elegantly:

We live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers. We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity. We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some future date. We no longer believe in the dull grey outlines of a dreary, colorless dialectic of evolution aimed at forming a harmonious whole out of heterogeneous bits by rounding off their rough edges. We believe only in totalities that are peripheral.<sup>81</sup>

Foucault answers this charge: all of this is true. Nevertheless, one can believe in—and one can actualize—the creation of oneself. From the peripheries one can create oneself—not on the basis of new totalities, but upon the unreduced and irreducible peripheries. One need not subsume all partialities to a general law in order to fashion oneself as a subject. One may not rest upon these irresolvables, but rather the constant interplay of one and then another is sufficient basis for a permanent revolution in the ethics, or perhaps the aesthetics, of the self.

## Conclusion

One can fruitfully read the early and late works of Michel Foucault together in order to form a picture both of the epistemological configuration of contemporary society, and the outlines of a possible replacement.

Sigmund Freud, writing near the end of the episteme, provides a diagnosis of Man one may regard as emblematic: “Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times.”<sup>82</sup> Writing from the

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<sup>81</sup>Deleuze, Giles and Felix Guattari. “Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.” University of Minnesota Press. pg. 42.

<sup>82</sup>Freud, Sigmund. “Civilization and its Discontents.” W.W. Norton and Company. pg. 33-34.

other side of the temporal and theoretical gap, Deleuze and Guattari give a glimpse of the figure to come: “the body without organs presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier. In order to resist linked, connected, and interrupted flows, it sets up a counterforce of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid. In order to resist using words composed of articulated phonetic units, it utters only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound.”<sup>83</sup> It is within this debate that Foucault offers the care of the self as a roadmap, or perhaps a set of maps, to articulating a new understanding of Man. There are two stories to tell. One is the historical matter, of how, when one faces backwards, one sees how the understanding of the abstracted figure of Man has changed over the course of time and how the care of the self is gradually effaced so completely that the philosophic canon no longer affords a place for it. The second story to tell is speculative and forward looking. It is the hypothesized results of a re-adoption or re-constitution of the care of the self as a new episteme.

As one adopts the approach of the care of the self, several key divergences appear in the manner in which one understands and practices the self. Two are highlighted here.

First, one does not accept the self as given, either by God or nature; but regards the subject as the result of ongoing process, conflicts, power relations, knowledges, and practices. New modes of thought and new solutions to old dilemmas may open. Contemporary Western practices and thought are based on a notion of a person as a given being hiding underneath a shell of repression and alienation. Called the inner child by some, the soul by others, it nevertheless undergrids a number of otherwise heterogeneous systems of thought. On this point, the Freudians, the Marxists, the churches, and the self-help gurus all agree. All operate as if Hume’s criticism of the soul had never occurred. Casting off the internal truth of the subject for the created truth of the self stands as the most important task for theory today. Instead of liberation, we must seek creation.

Second, one perhaps may use the care of the self as a vehicle for resistance to discipline and currently operative power relations. This is a point that has laid beyond the scope of the topic at hand, but inasmuch as disciplinary power is predicated upon the individual, it will provide a mode of resistance to the prevalent structures of power operating in our society. New practices of the self and modes of subjectivity can provide the point of resistance upon which the edifice of power rela-

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<sup>83</sup> *Op. Cit*



tions can subject to alteration. The disciplinary society is built upon inducing the subject to confess the truth about himself. Elimination of that concept eliminates the point of articulation for this particular operation of power, though one should never expect to free oneself from the operation of power in its most general form. However, the care of the self represents a potential point of reversal against certain power relations in their specific form. This reversal is a matter for both theory and practice.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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**JAMES MARVEL** was a community college transfer student and graduated from UC Berkeley with a double major in Philosophy and Rhetoric with an emphasis in Public Discourse. His main interests include Ethics, Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Law and Philosophy of Religion. His interests also include the thoughts of Socrates, Jesus, Spinoza, and Nietzsche. Before enrolling in college James enlisted and served in the United States Army as an Infantryman. In the fall of 2008 he began graduate studies at Boston University as an M.A. student in the Philosophy Department. He would especially like to thank Matthew Scherer for the professorial direction in the writing of his essay.

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