

JOURNAL OF
PHILOSOPHICAL
IDEAS

A PRESENTATION OF STUDENT WRITING
IN PHILOSOPHY AT TOWSON UNIVERSITY

2009

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Daniel Michael Murphy

EDITORS: Patrick O'Neill, David Parks

REVIEWING COMMITTEE: Keith Ciborowski, Sara Fralinger, Paul Joseph Kelly, Daniel Michael Murphy, Patrick O'Neill, David Parks, Dr. Stephen Scales

EDITOR'S NOTES

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The Philosophy Forum is indebted to the professors of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies for the guidance and insight they offer to all of their students. Without the involvement of the professors, the Philosophy Forum would fail to thrive as an academic stimulus. It is with the department's help that the Philosophy Forum's events run so smoothly. Additional thanks go to Dr. Stephen Scales for his contribution to the reviewing process. The Philosophy Forum also expresses appreciation to the Student Government Association for providing our group with the funds to produce this journal, and to the Printing Services of Towson University for all their work in the journal's publication.

It is our wish that the philosophical community of students, professors and alumni will take as much enjoyment in these works as the students had in piecing this altogether.

Daniel Michael Murphy

Editor-in-Chief
Philosophy Forum Publishing Chair, 2007-2009

CONCEPTUAL REVISION AND THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT AGAINST PHYSICALISM

Paul Joseph Kelly

Introduction

Physicalism is the prevailing orthodoxy in contemporary philosophy of mind. Physicalists believe that everything that exists in the world is physical. Property dualists doubt this, claiming that physicalism cannot fully account for the raw feeling of phenomenal consciousness, or “qualia.” Property dualists argue that in addition to the physical there exist nonphysical properties that make up our phenomenal experiences. One of the most popular ways of attempting to demonstrate that these nonphysical properties exist is through the Knowledge Argument. The Knowledge Argument attempts to show that learning all of the physical information about human color vision still leaves out the phenomenal information of what it is like to have the qualitative experience of color. From this it is implied that there exists phenomenal information over and above the physical information. According to physicalism, this view is mistaken; phenomenal information does not exist, and any theoretical appeal to the existence of nonphysical properties is superfluous and unnecessary.

Understanding the Argument

The most widely known formulation of the Knowledge Argument is presented by Frank Jackson in his seminal 1982 essay “Epiphenomenal Qualia.”¹ Jackson imagines a brilliant neuroscientist named Mary who lives in the future when humanity has acquired a complete understanding of neuroscience. From birth, Mary is forced to stay in a single black and white room and study everything physical that can be learned about human color vision through a black and white television. Eventually, Mary learns everything there is to know about the neurophysiology of color. She knows everything about the structure of

¹ Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” in *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. David J. Chalmers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 273-280.

the eye, the functions of the occipital nerve, what wavelengths of electromagnetic radiation correspond to which specific color experiences, how the visual cortex interprets sensory information, etc. In short, through her studies, Mary comes to know *all* the physical facts about human color vision, while never having personally experienced color. Jackson then asks us:

What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a color television monitor? Will she *learn* anything or not? It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it.²

From the intuition that Mary would learn something new, Jackson infers that Mary's previous knowledge of color vision was incomplete and that knowing all of the physical information is not the same as having exhaustive knowledge. Jackson's argument can be summarized in the following way:

(P1) Before her release, Mary knows *all* the physical information about human color vision.

(P2) After her release, Mary comes to know *new* information about human color vision.

(C) Therefore, there exists nonphysical information about human color vision.

Jackson thinks that if Mary learns anything new upon her release, then we must conclude that her previous knowledge was incomplete and that physicalism is false. While there is widespread agreement among physicalists that the Knowledge Argument fails to refute physicalism, there is no majority consensus on where the argument actually goes wrong. The following are the four most common responses.

Objection #1: The Nonreductive Physicalist Response

Nonreductive physicalists often respond to the Knowledge Argument by claiming that the argument fails because it is unclear what the term "information" refers to. Terence Horgan argues that it is not entirely clear if Jackson is referring to *explicit physical information* (i.e. information found in theoretical physical theories) or *ontological physical information* (i.e. information that refers to entities, properties, and relations that are all physical).³ If Jackson is referring to the former,

² *Ibid.*, 275.

³ Terence Horgan, "Jackson on Physical Information and Qualia," in *There's Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank*

than his argument is an attempt to show that there exists an *epistemic gap* inherent to any scientific theory of the mind. On the other hand, if Jackson is referring to the latter, then the argument is an attempt to show that there exists an *ontological gap* in the world between physical and nonphysical things.

The epistemic formulation of the argument would argue that when Mary leaves the room, she learns a new *kind* of knowledge that no theory phrased solely in *explicit physical information* could ever adequately grasp. On this reading of the argument, an exhaustive theoretical description of Mary's new experience is beyond the reach of the physical sciences, but the ontological status of her new experience is left an open question. The epistemic formulation of the argument can be summarized as follows:

(P1) Before her release, Mary knows *all* the explicit physical information about human color vision.

(P2) After her release, Mary comes to know a *new kind* of knowledge about human color vision.

(C) Therefore, there is a certain *kind* of knowledge concerning facts about human color vision that is not contained within *all* the explicit physical information.

If this argument were to succeed, it would establish the existence of a certain kind of knowledge beyond the language utilized by physical theories. No matter how precise our scientific theories concerning the nervous system become, they will always leave out the phenomenology of subjective experience. In other words, knowing all the neuroscience in the world still won't help you know what it is like to experience the vivid redness of a ripe tomato. However, the ontological status of this new kind of knowledge is left unanswered.

Yet even though Jackson is vague with his use of the term "information," since he intended to demonstrate the existence of nonphysical properties, it can be assumed that he actually intended the argument as an ontological one. Jackson wanted not only to make an epistemic claim about the nature of subjective experiences, but also a stronger claim about what types of things exist in the world.⁴ He wanted

Jackson's Knowledge Argument, ed. Peter Ludlow, Yujin Nagasawa, and Daniel Stoljar (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 304.

⁴ Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know," in *Problems in Mind: Readings in Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Jack S. Crumley II (London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000), 577-78.

to show that there exist *nonphysical facts* over and above all *physical facts*. Jackson thinks that what Mary learns when she leaves the room is a new *nonphysical fact* about the world. Contrary to the epistemic formulation, this version of the argument argues directly for the ontological distinctness of Mary's new experience. The ontological formulation of the argument can be summarized as follows:

(P1) Before her release, Mary knows *all* the physical facts concerning human color vision.

(P2) After her release, Mary comes to know a *new* fact about human color vision.

(C) Therefore, there are nonphysical facts concerning human color vision that are not contained within *all* the physical facts.

If the ontological formulation of the argument succeeds, it would show that there exist *nonphysical facts* over and above the *physical facts*, and therefore physicalism as an exhaustive ontological description of the world would be false.

Horgan and other nonreductive physicalists disagree with the Knowledge Argument because they think that while Mary does learn something new when she leaves the room, this new knowledge is still *ontological physical information*.⁵ They claim that while Mary was in the room she knew all of the *explicit physical information* the physical sciences could tell her about how nervous systems interpret color vision, but she still knew nothing about the *ontological physical information* of what it would be like to have an experience of red. Horgan thinks that the epistemic formulation of the Knowledge Argument is compatible with a physicalist ontology, and that the ontological formulation is simply unjustified. Physicalism is not committed to the linguistic claim that everything can be exhaustively explained in the language of the physical sciences. Rather, physicalism is committed to the ontological claim that whenever a true fact about the world is expressed in *any* language (including descriptions of mental states) it refers to a physical entity, property, or relationship. Horgan believes that there exist *subjective facts* about the world that can only be known through direct experience, but he also believes these facts constitute ontologically physical information. Horgan concedes that Mary does indeed learn something new when she leaves the room, but thinks that Jackson's claim that this new knowledge

⁵ Daniel Stoljar, "Two Conceptions of the Physical," in *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. David J. Chalmers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 316.

is nonphysical is unjustified. Implicit in the Knowledge Argument is the assumption that all physical facts can be learned discursively. Horgan rejects this assumption, claiming that there exist ineffable subjective physical facts that are beyond the grasp of *any* physical theory. He thinks that since phenomenal experience consists of subjective physical facts it would be impossible for Mary to learn everything physical while in isolation. Simply put, Horgan thinks that the first premise of the argument is incoherent, and for that reason the Knowledge Argument fails.

Any physicalist response to the Knowledge Argument is going to have to account for Mary's new experience in some way or other, and while this nonreductive physicalist approach has an intuitive appeal it comes at the cost of accepting a bifurcation between *subjective facts* and *objective facts*. At first glance, this distinction seems plausible, but it forces us to come up with an explanation of how these two classes of facts relate to each other. If it is the case that there is a substantial overlap between the two classes of facts, then it would appear that one of the categories is superfluous and that there actually exists only one set of facts that are referred to through two different modes of presentation. A physicalist response to the Knowledge Argument that could adequately account for Mary's new experience without an appeal to a division between two different types of ontological physical facts would be preferable.

Objection #2: The Anti-Intuition Response

Through the Knowledge Argument, Jackson attempts to refute the ontological claims of physicalism through purely epistemic and *a priori* means. He attempts to evoke our prescientific intuition about what Mary could and could not know before her release through an imagined experiment, and from that he concludes that physicalism will never be able to fully account for phenomenal consciousness. Yet the history of science shows us countless instances in which things that were once thought inconceivable turned out to actually be the case. For this reason, some physicalists have responded to the Knowledge Argument by simply rejecting the intuition that Mary would learn something new when released from the room.⁶ They claim that Mary's utopian knowledge of neuroscience is so radically different from our current understanding of

⁶ Daniel Dennett, "What RoboMary Knows," in *Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Science of Consciousness*, ed. François Recanati (London: The MIT Press, 2005), 103-29.

the brain that to speculate about what she could and couldn't know would be presumptuous. They think that at the core of the Knowledge Argument is an unsupported folk-intuition concerning the ontological status of experiences, an intuition that, if wrong, causes the argument to fail.

The main advocate of this reply is Daniel Dennett, who thinks that we really have no idea what Mary would or would not know if she knows *all* the physical information concerning human color vision.⁷ He thinks that when people are told that Mary knows *all* of the physical information, they merely imagine her with *a lot* of information, and from that misconception draw the faulty conclusion that she learns something new when leaving the room. In fact, even the idea that Mary would be surprised when released from the room appears to rest on an unsupported intuition. Proponents of the Knowledge Argument assume that Mary would be surprised when released, claiming that to doubt this would be absurd, but upon reflection it appears there is not any fact or principle that would be violated in claiming just the opposite.⁸ It appears that the argument's only defense is our gut intuition that she would, in fact, be surprised and learn something new.

One of the reasons why Dennett thinks Mary might not be surprised when released is because she would know the exact physical brain-state that any normal sensory experience would put her in. For example, if on the day of her release Mary's captors were to try to play a cruel joke on her by showing her a blue banana and tell her it was yellow, she would immediately know that they were trying to fool her.⁹ Her omniscient understanding of her own nervous system would allow her to know exactly what brain-state a yellow experience would place her into, and when the sight of the banana brought about a brain-state correlated with a blue experience she would know immediately that they were trying to deceive her. This ability to identify colors correctly without having ever seen them before is not an ability the average person has, but we need to remember that Mary is not your average person. The depth of her understanding of human color vision is beyond anything we can even begin to imagine.

⁷ Daniel Dennett, "Qualia Disqualified," in *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 369-411.

⁸ Dennett, "What RoboMary Knows," 105.

⁹ Dennett, "Qualia Disqualified," 400.

What appears to be at the core of the Knowledge Argument is the intuition that no matter how developed the natural sciences become, they will never be able to fully explain the seemingly ineffable qualia of subjective experience. Dennett rejects this intuition believing it to merely be a folk-psychological hunch.¹⁰ He thinks that no consistent argument for the intrinsic ineffability of phenomenal consciousness has ever been given, and that, until one is offered, we ought to think just the opposite. The human brain is the most intricate object in the known universe, consisting of 100 *billion* neurons with 100 *trillion* synaptic connections.¹¹ The prescientific intuition that no piece of meat could ever accommodate the richness of our phenomenology is unjustified and presumptuous. Everyone agrees that constructing an exhaustive description of phenomenal experience would be an extremely complex and difficult task. However, the question is whether or not we are justified in believing that such a description is *in principle* impossible.

A look back at the history of science shows multiple instances when people thought that seemingly ontologically distinct phenomena could never be exhaustively explained through purely physical processes. For example, before the time of contemporary biology and genetics, there was a school of thought known as “vitalism.” Vitalism was an attempt to explain the seemingly unbridgeable gap between inorganic matter and organic matter. Proponents of vitalism thought that there was no conceivable way for mere physical material to give rise to the complex structure and behavior observed in the animal kingdom.¹² Consequently, they concluded that there exists an immaterial vital spark (or *élan vital*) that animates all living things. If we were to go back in time and talk to a proponent of vitalism and ask him to imagine an entity physically identical to himself but lacking this immaterial vital spark, he would tell us that when he does this he pictures himself as a corpse. Now, if we were to return to present day and ask anyone with a moderate understanding of contemporary biology to try to imagine the same thing,

¹⁰ Dennett, “What RoboMary Knows,” 129.

¹¹ Paul Churchland, “The Methodological Problem,” in *Matter and Consciousness: A Contemporary Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*, Revised Ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), 96-7.

¹² Patricia Churchland, “Are Mental States Irreducible to Neurobiological States?” in *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind/Brain*, ed. Jerome Feldman, Patrick Hayes, and David Rumelhart (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), 333-4.

this person would tell us something quite different. He would tell us that when he imagines his physical duplicate he imagines someone just as alive as he is. The reason for this change is that since the time of vitalism, the empirical sciences have progressed to the point where we now understand that life can be fully explained through the language of chemistry and physics alone. As our understanding of biology expanded, we had to deflate our previous common-sense conceptions of what it meant to be alive. Through science, we came to understand that to be alive is merely to fill a specific functional role (i.e. to metabolize, to reproduce, etc.), and that this functional role can be fully explained through the physical sciences. Just like the mistaken common-sense intuition that an exhaustive explanation of the complexities of biological life was in principle beyond the reach of the empirical sciences, we ought to be highly skeptical of the claims that the complexities of phenomenal consciousness are in principle beyond them as well.

What we ought to take from the example of vitalism is that what seems intuitively possible or impossible depends greatly on the scientific understanding of the time. Often what seems to be impossible in one time period becomes conceivable in the next because of conceptual revision due to advances in the empirical sciences. Robert Van Gulick points out that when encountering *any* conceivability or inconceivability argument:

One must always weigh the competing plausibility or implausibility of the argument's alleged radical conclusion against that of its assumptions. If there is a logical conflict of intuitions with established theories, the more empirically well-supported the theories or models, the more likely we are to assign blame to our intuitions and defer to evidence and theory.¹³

Obvious conceptual distinctions are often shown not to reflect any difference in the real world, but merely the limits of our present understanding. Seemingly impossible philosophical obstacles to empirical progress often times only reflect that we lack the necessary conceptual apparatus to understand the situation properly. Simply put, the reason why we assume that the mental could never be identical with the physical is because of our prescientific bias that they never could be.

¹³ Robert Van Gulick, "So Many Ways of Saying No to Mary," in *There's Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument*, ed. Peter Ludlow, Yujin Nagasawa, and Daniel Stoljar (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 365.

Arguments that rely heavily on the conceivability or inconceivability of imagined situations should always be read skeptically, since the common-sense intuitions and concepts that they attempt to evoke are constantly being revised by new empirical findings. For this reason, Dennett cautions us that we ought to avoid equating a “failure of imagination for an insight into necessity.”¹⁴ We should also take note that the farther a thought-experiment strays from our current conceptual framework, the less likely our intuitions are going to provide us with the proper interpretation of the situation.¹⁵ Our current understanding of the nervous system is quite limited, and consequently we have no idea what it would be like to have Mary’s complete conceptual framework. It seems that until we possess a more fully matured understanding of neuroscience, we ought not to speculate as to what Mary would or would not know about the phenomenology of human color vision. The question of whether or not phenomenal information is in principle beyond the reach of the materialistic neurosciences appears to be an empirical question not accessible by *a priori* arguments or intuitions alone.¹⁶

Objection #3: The Ability Hypothesis

Another popular response to the Knowledge Argument is known as the Ability Hypothesis. Advocates of the Ability Hypothesis claim that there are some forms of understanding that do not involve the acquisition of new *facts*, but instead involve the acquisition of new *abilities*. They claim that what Mary learns when she leaves her room is not knowledge of a new *fact* about the ontology of the world she did not know previously, but rather a new set of imaginative *abilities*.¹⁷ After her experience, Mary can remember what the experience was like, imagine it again, and recognize similar experiences in the future. Similar to the nonreductive physicalists, advocates of the Ability Hypothesis claim that the Knowledge Argument equivocates on the term “information.” They

¹⁴ Dennett, “Qualia Disqualified,” 401.

¹⁵ Van Gulick, “So Many Ways of Saying No to Mary,” 372.

¹⁶ Robert Van Gulick, “Understanding the Phenomenal Mind: Are We All Just Armadillos?” in *Mind and Cognition: An Anthology*, 2nd edition, ed. William G. Lycan (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 464.

¹⁷ David Lewis, “What Experience Teaches,” in *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. David J. Chalmers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 292.

think the first type of information is descriptive and theoretical, whereas the second type of information consists of a set of abilities that enable Mary to introspect and imagine. Proponents of the Ability Hypothesis argue that if the “new information” in premise two is understood as referring to these new introspective abilities, then *both* of the argument’s premises can be true without the conclusion necessarily following, and the argument would therefore be invalid.

The main proponents of this view are Laurence Nemirow and David Lewis. Both believe that while it may *seem* that when Mary is released she learns new *knowledge-that* the world is a specific way, this is actually an illusion. They think that what Mary actually learns is new *knowledge-how* to remember, imagine, and recognize. Nemirow writes that:

These imaginative abilities are of such importance cognitively that they may properly be characterized as constituting a deep understanding of experience. Thus it does justice to... equate knowledge of what an experience is like with the ability to imagine.¹⁸

In this way, Nemirow and Lewis are able to concede that Mary *does* learn something radically new when released from the room, but maintain that these new abilities do not conflict with a physicalist ontology. While inside the room, Mary knew all the facts there are to know about the structure of the world. Upon her release, she merely learned a new way of remembering, imagining, and recognizing these same physical facts.¹⁹

However, the obvious response from the property dualist is to claim that while it does appear to be the case that Mary gains these new abilities after her first phenomenal experience, that surely cannot be *everything* she learns. The property dualist would want to claim that in addition to these nonfactual abilities, Mary also gains new knowledge about the nonphysical properties of qualia. Lewis objects to this addition, claiming that it provides no increased explanatory power and is included by the property dualist merely as a “gratuitous metaphysical gloss” on the explanation.²⁰

¹⁸ Laurence Nemirow, “Physicalism and the Cognitive Role of Acquaintance,” in *Problems in Mind: Readings in Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Jack S. Crumley II (London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000), 586.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 584.

²⁰ Lewis, “What Experience Teaches,” 294.

However, even if the property dualists' claim of nonphysical properties is unjustified, perhaps they are right in their claim that there is more to Mary's new experience than just the acquisition of new abilities. One can fully grant that once Mary has this new experience, she gains new practical *know-how*, but the question is if that is truly *all* that she gains. Micheal Tye has pointed out that while the introspective abilities that Nemirow and Lewis argue for are definitely important, they do not appear to be *necessary* or *sufficient* for having knowledge of qualia.²¹ For example, let us imagine someone who, through a bizarre neurological disorder, has been robbed of their ability to form new memories, and, just like Mary, has never experienced the phenomenal qualities of human color vision. Now, if we were to show this individual a red object for the first time and while he was looking at it ask him if he now knew what it is like to experience the sensation of red, he would surely say yes. However, as soon as we remove the object from his field of vision, he would be unable to introspectively imagine or recollect the experience. Yet while he was staring at the red object, he knew what it was like to see red. Hence, it appears that it is possible to have knowledge of what it is like to experience phenomenal consciousness in the absence of these abilities, and such abilities are therefore not *necessary*. These introspective abilities also do not appear to be *sufficient* for knowing what it is like. Let us imagine someone who has never experienced red before, but who possesses the ability to imagine a red experience at any moment. Before utilizing his imagination to visualize a red experience, he would not have knowledge of what it is like, but he would still possess the abilities that Nemirow and Lewis think constitute having phenomenal knowledge. Consequently, it does not appear that merely having these abilities is *sufficient* for knowing what it is like. Earl Conee has pointed out that while the Ability Hypothesis may not adequately explain knowledge of what it is like, it may constitute what is required for *continued knowledge* of what it is like after an experience has occurred.²² However, Jackson's Knowledge Argument is not concerned

²¹ Michael Tye, "Knowing What It Is Like: The Ability Hypothesis and the Knowledge Argument," *There's Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument*, ed. Peter Ludlow, Yujin Nagasawa, and Daniel Stoljar (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 151-2.

²² Earl Conee, "Phenomenal Knowledge," in *There's Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge*

with *continued knowledge* of qualia; it is concerned with the knowledge gained during the initial phenomenal experience.

It appears that what Mary learns cannot be adequately explained solely through the acquisition of new abilities, while the property dualist's appeal to nonphysical facts is unjustified. Put another way, the property dualist claims far too much, whereas proponents of the Ability Hypothesis claim far too little. What is needed is an explanation of Mary's new experience that does not posit the existence of unnecessary entities, while also adequately accounting for our intuition that something is radically different about Mary's new experience.

Objection #4: The Acquaintance Hypothesis

The most convincing (and simplest) physicalist response to the Knowledge Argument is known as the Acquaintance Hypothesis. The Acquaintance Hypothesis is the idea that while inside the room, what Mary has is *knowledge by description*, whereas when she leaves the room she gains *knowledge by acquaintance*. This new form of knowledge is not factual knowledge about the world, but rather knowledge of the same physical facts she knew previously presented to her in a different way.²³ Prior to her release, she knew propositional knowledge about brain-states from the third-person perspective, whereas after her release, she acquires the non-propositional knowledge of what it is like to instantiate those same brain-states in herself. As Paul Churchland puts it, "the difference lies in the manner of the knowing, not in the nature of the things known."²⁴ While both the property dualist and the nonreductive physicalist think that Mary learns a new ontological fact, proponents of the Acquaintance Hypothesis merely think she gains a new epistemic perspective. They think that Mary learns more than just the set of abilities discussed in the Ability Hypothesis, but still not a genuinely new fact about the structure of the world that she did not know previously.

Argument, ed. Peter Ludlow, Yujin Nagasawa, and Daniel Stoljar (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 201.

²³ Paul Churchland, "Reduction, Qualia, and the Direct Introspection of Brain States," in *A Neurocomputational Perspective: The Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 573.

²⁴ Paul Churchland, "The Rediscovery of Light," in *On the Contrary: Critical Essays, 1987-1997* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 131.

Through this knowledge by acquaintance, Mary enters into a new cognitive relation to the same physical facts she knew before. While Mary was held in isolation, her nervous system was only able to construct neural patterns in her visual cortex that would enable her to have experiences of black, white, and shades of grey. Consequently, what was lacking in Mary was the appropriate neural structures required to provide her with other color experiences. In her isolation, Mary was denied the necessary sensory input to construct these prototypes, and as a result she did not know what it was like to experience them.²⁵ To put it simply, there is a difference between learning about a brain-state in a textbook and actually being in that brain-state; the former is known linguistically, whereas the latter is known pre-linguistically. Since Jackson's argument fails to distinguish between these different modes of knowledge, it equivocates on the term "knows" and consequently fails.

David Papineau agrees with this approach, and thinks that our intuition regarding a radical change in Mary can be best explained through a distinction between *material concepts* and *phenomenal concepts*.²⁶ Prior to her release, Mary knew all the facts through the third-person theoretical language of *material concepts*. After her release, however, Mary came to understand these same physical facts through her newly acquired *phenomenal concepts*. Papineau thinks that this conceptual difference poses no threat to physicalism. While material and phenomenal concepts may be different at the level of how we sense the world, they tell us nothing about the ontological status of what they refer to. It is quite likely that both Mary's material concepts and her newly learned phenomenal concepts both refer to ontologically physical facts. Papineau also states that:

If phenomenal and material concepts are quite distinct at the level of sense, there will be no *a priori* route to the identification of their referents. Examinations of the concepts themselves will not tell us that they refer to the same properties. Such knowledge can only be arrived at *a posteriori*, on the basis of empirical evidence about their actual referents.²⁷

²⁵ Paul Churchland, "Knowing Qualia: A Reply to Jackson," in *A Neurocomputational Perspective: The Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 68.

²⁶ David Papineau, "Conceptual Dualism," *Thinking About Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 47-72.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

In other words, since material and phenomenal concepts are cognitively independent, it would be impossible to determine *a priori* whether or not what they refer to are indeed the same physical facts. This is why it seems intuitively plausible that there could be someone like Mary, who knows all the facts under material concepts, but lacks that same knowledge under phenomenal concepts. This epistemic asymmetry inappropriately leads many to conclude that Mary must learn a new *fact* upon her release, when in actuality it could be that what Mary comes to know outside of the room is made possible by the same physical facts that she knew while still in isolation.

However, some disagree, claiming that this apparent epistemic asymmetry between mental states and brain-states provides a justification for belief in the nonphysical ontology of mental states. Thomas Nagel, for instance, argues that phenomenal consciousness is inherently tied to the subjective point of view, and that any attempt to explain this point of view in solely objective terms is impossible. Any attempt to do so would be forced to abandon the subjective viewpoint entirely, and would therefore lack that unique property in its description.²⁸ The argument would look like the following:

(P1) My phenomenal consciousness is known by me directly through introspection.

(P2) My brain-states are *not* known by me directly through introspection.

(C) Therefore, my phenomenal consciousness *cannot* be identical to my brain-states.

In other words, since my phenomenal consciousness has the property of being known directly from the first-person perspective, and since my physical brain-states appear to not have this property, it seems they cannot be equivalent to one another. However, Paul Churchland has objected to such arguments, claiming that being “recognized, perceived, or known as something, under some specific description or other” is not a genuine property.²⁹ For example:

(P1) Lois Lane knows that Superman can fly.

(P2) Lois Lane does *not* know that Clark Kent can fly.

²⁸ Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like To Be a Bat?” in *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. David J. Chalmers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 219.

²⁹ Churchland, “Reduction, Qualia, and the Direct Introspection of Brain States,” 59.

(C) Therefore, Superman *cannot* be identical to Clark Kent. Since we know that Clark Kent is, in fact, identical to Superman, it appears that being known by someone under a certain concept and not under another does not provide justification for belief in their ontological independence.³⁰ Often when we believe in the distinctness between two concepts, it is merely because we lack the necessary understanding to see that they actually refer to the same thing.

Arguments that rely on this mistake claim that psychoneural identities are impossible, and that any physicalist account of the mind is futile. However, the seemingly obvious conceptual distinction between mental states and brain-states has no bearing on the ontological status of subjective experience. Much like the example of vitalism mentioned previously, seemingly apparent conceptual distinctions have often been used as justification for belief in ontological distinctions that empirical research eventually shows to be mistaken. For example, if we were to travel back in time prior to the development of the kinetic theory of gases and ask someone if heat and molecular kinetic energy were conceptually distinct, he would tell us that they were. However, in contemporary times, we have come to understand that heat is, in fact, *identical* to molecular kinetic energy. Prior to the empirical research which provided justification for this identity, it was possible for people to view these two concepts as independent and distinct.³¹ However, now that we have come to realize that both concepts refer to the same thing, it seems impossible for us to imagine one in the absence of the other. Ned Block and Robert Stalnaker write that, much like in the case of mental to physical correlations:

If we believe that heat is correlated with but not identical to molecular kinetic energy, we should regard as legitimate the question of why the correlation exists and what its mechanism is. But once we realize that heat *is* molecular kinetic energy, questions like this will be seen as wrongheaded. . . The role of identities is to disallow some questions and allow others.³²

³⁰ Van Gulick, "So Many Ways of Saying No to Mary," 380.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 367.

³² Ned Block and Robert Stalnaker, "Conceptual Analysis, Dualism, and the Explanatory Gap," in *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. David J. Chalmers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 382.

Even though we may currently think or conceptualize two things as distinct from one another, that has no bearing on whether or not they are actually distinct. Conceptual entailments are always subject to change as science progresses, and consequently we should not take our own epistemic limitations as grounds for asserting the ontological distinctness between two types of phenomena.

Yet many property dualists are still unconvinced that the Acquaintance Hypothesis adequately answers the Knowledge Argument and the intuition upon which it rests. For example, David Chalmers claims that even if Mary's new experience is identical to an old fact she knew while still in the room under a new mode of presentation, there is still a genuinely new fact that Mary learns. Namely, the fact of what it is like to experience that old fact *through* that new mode of presentation. From this, Chalmers infers that there are some genuine facts that Mary does not know prior to her release, and consequently that physicalism is false.³³ In other words, Chalmers believes that even if the Acquaintance Hypothesis is correct, the Knowledge Argument still shows that physicalism is false.

However this objection seems to miss the point of the Acquaintance Hypothesis. The Acquaintance Hypothesis is claiming that while it may *seem* that Mary comes to know a new fact about the world, this is an illusion. Mary's new experience gives her no new insight into the ontology of the world; it merely gives her perspectival knowledge and knowledge by acquaintance. The Acquaintance Hypothesis concedes that Mary does learn something radically new, just not new *factual* knowledge. Through her new experience, Mary does *not* discover new objects or properties; rather, she merely sees things she knew previously in a fundamentally different way. In short, Mary becoming acquainted with a physical fact she knew about previously provides no grounds for Chalmers' assertion that there exists another ontological fact in addition to the physical fact.

Another common objection to the Acquaintance Hypothesis comes from proponents of the Ability Hypothesis. They claim that it fails to account for the bundle of abilities mentioned in the Ability Hypothesis.³⁴ However, this objection seems mistaken as well. While inside the room, Mary knows all the physical facts about the brain,

³³ David Chalmers, "Naturalistic Dualism," in *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 142.

³⁴ Lewis, "What Experience Teaches," 292.

including a complete descriptive understanding of how learning and memory function in the nervous system. She would know the exact physical processes that enable the storing of information for later retrieval, the imagining of past and future events, as well as how the brain comes to recognize familiar sensations. In short, Mary would have a complete *knowledge by description* of how one remembers, imagines, and recognizes. However, once Mary leaves her room, it seems that she would gain the *knowledge by acquaintance* of what it would be like to instantiate those abilities herself. In other words, the abilities required for continued knowledge mentioned in the Ability Hypothesis can be adequately accounted for within the Acquaintance Hypothesis, and consequently the Ability Hypothesis appears to be redundant and unnecessary.

Frank Jackson Changes His Mind

Frank Jackson first published his formulation of the Knowledge Argument in 1982. Since then there have been various physicalist responses, claiming that the Knowledge Argument is mistaken and that Mary's transformation can be best understood within a physicalist framework. Jackson rejected all of these responses until 1998 when he changed his mind and concluded that the best account of mental phenomena will more likely than not be some form of physicalism.³⁵ Jackson states that our prescientific intuitions lead us to believe that color experience provides us with knowledge of nonphysical qualia; however, as empirical science has progressed, it appears that belief in such nonphysical properties is unjustified and unnecessary. Jackson states that:

Physicalists can allow that people are sometimes in states that *represent* that things have a nonphysical property. Examples are people who believe in fairies. What physicalists must deny is that such properties are *instantiated*... Although our experience of color contains a substantial degree of misrepresentation – the misrepresentation that leads dualists astray – there are complex physical properties ‘out there’ that stand in relations near enough

³⁵ Frank Jackson, “Postscript on Qualia,” in *There’s Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson’s Knowledge Argument*, ed. Peter Ludlow, Yujin Nagasawa, and Daniel Stoljar (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 417.

to those captured by the color... for us to be able to identify them with the various colors.³⁶

In other words, even though our intuitions lead us to believe in the nonphysical ontology of our phenomenal states, empirical science has forced us to deflate this concept and rearticulate our experiences within the context of a physical universe. The committed property dualist would object to this idea, claiming that what is needed is not a reevaluation of our intuitions, but the outright rejection of physicalism. However, Jackson thinks that such a response would mistakenly give *a priori* conceptual analysis a more important role than it deserves.³⁷ The role of philosophy should be to interpret the findings of the natural sciences and propose promising avenues of future inquiry, while the role of the natural sciences should be to discover anomalous results that force us to modify our long standing conceptions about ourselves and the world in which we live.

Conclusion

It appears that the Acquaintance Hypothesis shows the Knowledge Argument, and the intuition upon which it rests, to be misguided. The new experience and abilities Mary gains after her release from isolation seem to be identical to the same physical facts she knew previously, and consequently an appeal to nonphysical facts, in addition to these physical facts, is unnecessary. This response may not sit well with some property dualists, but that is perhaps because they feel that advances in the sciences ought to confirm their intuitions rather than challenge them. What we ought to learn from the Knowledge Argument is not that a physicalist description of color vision leaves out the phenomenology of color, but rather that our prescientific conception of the ontology of color experience may be over-inflated. In realizing this, we can either humbly accept the problems inherent in our folk-

³⁶ Frank Jackson, "Mind and Illusion," in *There's Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument*, ed. Peter Ludlow, Yujin Nagasawa, and Daniel Stoljar (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 431-2.

³⁷ Daniel Stoljar and Yujin Nagasawa, Introduction, in *There's Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument*, ed. Peter Ludlow, Yujin Nagasawa, and Daniel Stoljar (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 24.

psychological understanding of color vision, or we can advocate a halt to conceptual revision and embrace epistemic stagnation.

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NIETZSCHE'S DEMON

Daniel Murphy

A play in one act¹

Characters:

William

Mrs. Powers

Demon

The curtain opens to the living room of a small apartment. There is a mess of clutter amidst books and old bottles of alcohol. The dim light from a single lamp that rests upon a small desk joins the light escaping through the closed curtains of a large window. In the heart of the room lies a long oak coffee table topped with empty glasses, scattered books and numerous sympathy cards. A young man enters the room with profound confusion and angst.

William, *with great worry*: I don't understand! It is simply beyond me! *William paces the room with a look of concern. He sits down on the edge of the coffee table before getting up again and pacing around once more.*

William: How could it have been possible? There is no room in the world for this much human suffering! *William picks up and tosses books about the room in search of a particular text. He finally comes across a thick hard covered book, looks for a specific page and reads for half a minute.*

William: We are all beings towards death! This is what I try to comfort myself with? It is simple, yes; I am aware. All of us are to die! But she

¹ This play concerns some of the philosophical doctrines put forth by Friedrich Nietzsche, specifically from *The Gay Science's* Section 341. However, the play as a whole is a reflection of the author's culminating views and interpretations of various philosophers and not intended to specifically reflect Nietzsche's own thoughts and doctrines.

went too soon! My only love, my only friend, all I had. *William paces around the room again and looks solemnly at a bottle of whisky on the table.* I see her in my thoughts, everywhere, inescapable. Lying in a pool of blood in the street. And where am I left, still living. And I could feel it before; I knew that there was something wrong. I had seen her in my thoughts, fleeting and uncertain. I could feel it was going to happen.

William, *picking up the whisky bottle:* Is there no comfort apart from the intoxication of a drink or even the intoxicating effects of hope? The former is so temporary. *William pauses for a few moments and then places the bottle back on the table.* And the latter is impossible. I cannot turn back to God. The thought of it is so laughable! Me? Am I simply to go back to God now just to cope? I cannot. Science was the deadliest thing for man... And how am I to cope with death now? *William pauses, then picks up another book, opens it to a bookmarked page, reads a sentence and slams it closed.*

William: God is dead. God is dead. God is dead and where am I left?

William again picks up the bottle of whisky and pours it into an old glass resting on the coffee table. He swishes the liquid around in the cup and then smells the liquor before downing it with a long swig. Grabbing one of the cards from the table, William gives it a quick glance before tossing it across the room.

William: Science gives us no meanings. But I crave one! Don't we all? *With desperation:* How am I to go on? I have nothing now. I've lost all that meant anything and I have no meanings to fall back on. But there must be something more, how else could I have had that feeling of connectivity? How could I have had that premonition unless there was something outside of my comprehension?

A knock is heard at the door. William seems both startled and disturbed at the thought of someone so near. He freezes in place for a moment and then the knocking continues. William takes his time making his way over to the door and looks through the peep hole.

Mrs. Powers, *an elderly woman speaks from off stage*: William? Are you in there? *William turns his head away from the door as if looking for a means of escape. He remains motionless.*

Mrs. Powers: William? I saw you come into the building. How are you doing? Do you want some company? I could... I could bring you some tea. *William hesitates and looks away from the door again before turning back to it preparing to speak.*

William, *loudly*: I am fine, Mrs. Powers. Please do not worry yourself over me. *She starts, but is interrupted by William*: I am afraid I am much too busy to talk and will have to apologize for not opening the door... I am not decent.

Mrs. Powers, *stuttering with hesitation*: O alright. *A pause.* I have your new key to the roof that the locksmith left. *She pauses again.* Although I don't know who would want to go back up there after what happened to... *She stops.* I wouldn't even want to be near the roof. I'm so sorry William. Accidents happen, but that doesn't make them any easier to deal with.

William: Please just slide the key under the door, Mrs. Powers. I thank you kindly, and my apologies for not being able to chat. Just slide it under, thank you.

There is a few moments' pause and William again looks through the peep hole. The key is slid under the door after a few more seconds pass. Sounds of footsteps retreating are heard before an abrupt stop can be made out.

Mrs Powers, *loudly*: Take care William, I'll check in on you later.

William bends down and picks up the key. He holds it up to stare at it and then tosses it carelessly on a nearby desk table.

William: Interruptions! Disturbances, of course! I cannot think; I cannot get anything done! What was I even thinking about? *William stops in his tracks and a look of great confusion comes over him.*

William, *solemnly*: Death... *He pauses, and begins pacing again before stopping and turning towards the audience.* We are all going to die!
William turns away from the audience: Yes... yes, yes, yes. This much is certain. In the age of uncertainty of truth there is one thing I know of the human being. It is going to die; therefore, it must already be alive. We exist; we live, and we die. *He begins to laugh slightly.* Perhaps there is some relief in establishing this one truth. Man is. But what is he? What is his point?

William begins pacing again and then proceeds to sit on the edge of the coffee table once more. He looks across the room at a large bookshelf standing in the corner. Captivated, he walks towards it and picks up a tarnished bronze frame protecting the photograph of a young woman. He stares at it for a few moments and then places it back on the bookshelf.

William, *dragging out the final word*: But I want more! *He pauses again and then turns back towards the middle of the room*: I want comfort, and order; I want someone to oversee everything! How can everything work out otherwise? The world cannot be so chaotic and absurd! I am a sensible man; I believe my sciences. But isn't there something missing? How is it we are all still living, breathing, being? It amazes me that we have not yet exterminated ourselves somehow! We are particles bouncing around wreaking havoc upon the universe!

William walks once more over to the coffee table and picks up another card which he opens briefly before crushing it within his hands.

William, *shouting loudly and with desperation*: What do they care? What did they lose? *A tear slowly descends William's face while he speaks with a softened voice*: How could there have been such a strange connection... I saw her death before; I could feel it. What could I have done? It was icy; she loved to spend her time up there waiting for my return, and all this I knew. But there was something else. I could feel her dying before I even made my way back home; I could see it as clear as anything. This is impossible. This isn't possible. *With anger*: Where is my scientific explanation for this? *William sweeps his arm across half the table sending empty glasses, books and cards flying about the room. He pauses for a few moments, breathing heavily.*

William, *gazing around the room*: It all feels so correct the way things turn out; it has always been like this, everything is so fitting. And I feel it ahead of time, as if I am never truly surprised. How? Why? Which is the more important question?

William walks back to the coffee table picks up the bottle and pours another drink. He downs it hastily yet again. Then he pours another and holds the glass in his hand. He looks to the couch that has a blanket and a pillow atop it.

William: I haven't slept in... days, it seems. I am so weary, so tired. *He approaches the couch slowly and picks up the blanket.* It has lost her sent. How can one sleep? *William stumbles over to the coffee table and sits upon it again.*

Everything in the room goes very quiet. William slowly sips his whisky now. He sits still for half a minute. He bows his head towards the ground and covers his face with one hand while still holding the glass in the other. The quiet lull ends when a loud crash is heard from the far adjoining room, followed by an unidentified screech. Then another loud crash is heard. William jumps up at the noises and spills his drink on the floor. He seems alarmed and slowly makes his way towards the room, stage right, from which he heard the noises. A door opens on this far side of the room and a great look of awe and horror takes over William.

William lets out a horrific scream and drops the glass to the floor.

A wretched ugly beast steps forth into the room. Its appearance is unimaginable. But its monstrous look gives rise to feelings of nausea and disgust.

William, *screaming loudly*: What are you?

Demon, *speaking with a monotonous, raspy voice*: Please, do not be alarmed. I mean not to frighten you. Do not scream. I mean you no harm, intentionally.

William: You... you are a monster! You... you are impossible! It is unfathomable. You... you cannot exist! *The demon approaches William*

but leaves a few yards length in between. William emphasizes each word:
Who are you? Or what?

Demon: I am what you are looking for, but not expecting. And certainly not what you had hoped to find.

William, *with confusion*: What I am looking for? *With a touch of anger*:
What... what can you possibly mean?

Demon: You are in your greatest loneliness and uncertainty, are you not?

William, *awe struck and speaking with a stutter*: You... are you not possibly... *A pause*. Are you... God?

Demon, *with annoyance*: No.

William, *fearfully*: Then... the devil?

Demon, *with even greater annoyance*: No. Your understandings of God and devil are misguided. You could call me God, but your term is not truly applicable, for I do not fit the traits of what you know as God.

William: What do you mean?

Demon: God is perfect. God is all knowing and all powerful. And God would surely be the most beautiful of sights. I am no God. I am not perfect. And certainly I am no beautiful sight. But I do know all, for I have seen it pass by eternally. And you will find that I am quite powerful, but I am certainly not capable of anything I wish. No... no, God is not a term fitting for me.

William, *with impatience*: But, is there a god?

Demon: Not in the way you wish there was. Things will become clearer to you in due time.

William: Where did you come from? How long have you existed?
William pauses. What are you really?

Demon: I do not normally make myself present in your world because my presence is so nauseating to man. And I have been in existence as long as I understand existence to be. I am eternal, as you will soon understand.

William: So you are almost like a god, or an angel... or perhaps the opposite. *William takes a step back with a look of fear across his face.*

Demon: There are no angels or devils as you may have mistakenly been taught. Only the universe and myself, or at least what I represent.

William: And what may that entail?

Demon, *taking a step towards William*: Impossibility and contradiction.

William, *with an incredulous stare*: Indeed.

The demon takes a careful, slow step towards William. With a look of astonishment and slight fear, William proceeds to walk around the demon while still keeping some distance. After making a full circle around the demon, William slowly reaches a shaking arm out to it but stops himself half way.

William, *speaking more calmly*: Why are you here?

Demon: In some sense I am here to help you.

William, *anxiously*: You can bring her back to me?

Demon: No. I cannot bring her back.

William, *disheartened*: Then what use are you to me? *William slopes down to the coffee table once more and covers his face within his hands.*

Demon: Have you not sensed something outside of yourself and your understandings of the universe, connections you cannot explain, a feeling that you already know just how life unfolds itself?

William, *uncovering his face, William looks back towards the demon and speaks hesitantly*: Yes. I am in angst over just that feeling, the unexplainable.

Demon: I will teach you.

William, *with a hint of curiosity*: Teach me what exactly?

Demon: How to give rise to that which you can already feel within you. Let us first begin with my unclouding your clouded mind. I do not wish to unveil my message before you too quickly. I am certain you have many questions. Let me warn you, however, that you may not find me to be of much help. *With careful movements, William stands up and gazes into the Demon's eyes.*

William, *with a look and tone of despair*: Is there meaning, anywhere?

Demon: I had faced this question for an eternity with the same angst that you ask me now. But there is no meaning in the sense you are looking for it. There is no purposeful meaning; there is only meaning in what you choose to give meaning to.

William, *pauses then speaks with a bit of anger*: This cannot be true! Maybe before, before you, but now that I can see there are things outside my understanding of the universe, surely there must be meaning too!
William with increasing rage: What is your meaning, what brought you into being?

Demon: There is nothing that brought me into being.

William: And before yourself?

Demon: There is no before myself.

William, *confused*: But before the universe, what was there?

Demon: The universe.

William, *speaking rapidly*: What do you mean? Surely if you can come out of the blue to me, perhaps a God can come to you, maybe even a perfect one! I could not have been certain that anything brought me into existence before you came to me. Maybe the same could happen for you, maybe there is meaning!

Demon: There is no perfect God that will descend upon you and guide you to a purpose of fulfillment. There is no ultimate meaning to the life you live. But there may still exist what you create of meaning for yourself.

William, *with a stubborn air*: And what would that matter?

Demon: There is not a meaning to life in the way you are asking, but may I ask why it plagues you?

William: What would be the point if there is no ultimate meaning? Why should I or anyone go on living and putting up with suffering!

Demon: I am sorry this is how you view life at the moment, but soon you will see things differently.

William, *with increasing anger*: Sorry? You are sorry? You... you are a monster! You are not worried about the world before you, with mortal human beings acting out as your jesters, suffering through life still believing there was something more! You are sorry? There are millions of men, women, and children dying because they misunderstand religion, and values, and meaning! You are letting them die without a worry! And you say you are sorry? Where is your pity for man? *William stops himself and turns away from the creature before him. He shakes his head in disbelief and then promptly turns back to the demon*: You seem so unconcerned with human suffering... I have just lost all that I had. What is the reason for it? I am abandoned in the world, and you come to me and say sorry?

Demon: You do not yet have the view that you will need.

William, *promptly*: One in which I am heartless and uncompassionate?
With an air of sarcasm: Is this to be my apology?

Demon: You are worried far too much about meaning and suffering. You wish for there to be life without suffering. But suffering is not a consequence of life; it is a necessary and integral part of the human being. *The demon pauses a moment*: Suffering is life. And meaning is not the goal; one may spend eternities wondering over meaning. But one must understand that there is no meaning outside of one's self, which is why one has the beautiful power to create his own meaning.

William, *outraged*: How can you say such things? Do you not know what it is like to feel pain? To question your own existence to the point of tears? You think that you know everything and yet you cannot even comprehend what I am feeling! Well what if a God, a true, perfect God and not some hideous monster, arose to give meaning to human beings?

Demon, *the demon pauses and takes another step towards William*: And what would it be like if there were a perfect God? Could there be life without suffering? Would you truly want there to be? Would working towards this perfect God's meaning change everything? *A small spider descends from the ceiling in between them*. Have you asked yourself, if there were a perfect God would he not wonder over his own being just as you do? You will say it would be contradictory for him to ask, because he is perfect. But you worry too much about contradiction. You do not yet understand that man really lives in a contradiction with life. Man wishes for a meaning that will remain eternal, but man does not understand his own eternal nature. Man is impossible.

William, *angrily*: How can you say man is impossible? You are wrong. *With a gust of confidence*: Man is not a contradiction. I am not a contradiction; I am possible because I exist!

Demon: But existence of any life is a contradiction, yours, mine, anything. There should not be anything at all. There is no reason, no meaning as you wish, for there to be anything rather than nothing. It is impossible for there to have always been something, and yet there is, always was and always will be something. Therefore, life itself is a contradiction.

William, *disheartened and speaking with a stutter*: But life, but a God. William turns to look out the window of the room. The closed curtains reveal a dim moonlight seeping through.

Demon: Man can only create his own meaning but it will never rule over man the way man wishes it to. And if Gods arise too in some way out of man, these Gods cannot suddenly create an eternal and universal meaning that you seem to be looking for. However, they will understand the true nature of life and the eternal.

William, *with great stress*: And what is this true nature of life and the eternal?

Demon: 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 immeasurably small or great in your life must 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 over and over, and you with it, a dust grain of dust.²

William, *stumbling and covering his face with his hands*: No! No you are wrong. You monster, you horrific demon!

Demon: Do you want this once more and innumerable times more?

William, *falling to the ground in a fit of tears, he gazes up at the demon and speaks softly*: No... it cannot be true.

Demon: But you already know it to be true. You have felt it, that connection. Life seems to unfold before you because it already has, *the demon pauses and places a hand on William's shoulder*: I have come to you because you are different than the others. Soon this is what you shall will, that it be once more. And there will be nothing you more fervently crave than for an eternal recurrence of the same.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kauffman. (New York: Vintage, 1974), 273-274.

William, with a look of great despair and sickness while feeling a faint approaching, tries to take refuge by sitting on the coffee table only to slip off and collapse. He dazes about himself in wonder and worryment.

William, slamming his fist upon the hard oak coffee table and shouting with rage: This cannot be. It is worse than before!

William looks about the room, alone. The demon has left, mysteriously.

William, stuttering in his confusion: Where... where have you gone? You abandon me in the world! Have I disappointed you? You have done a far greater evil to me! You are a monster! A demon of impossibility! How can I have lived this all before, how can it continue to happen over and over? The suffering will never end? Shouting with misery as tears fall from his face: The suffering will never end!

William stops, bewildered. He breathes heavily for a few moments and then quickly paces about the room. William, unaware, walks over to the small desk table. He stops and looks at the roof key shining on top of the wooden table before picking it up. William holds the key out above his head and stares at it.

William, lowering the key with a look of defeat: I cannot even end it, without it coming back once more to crush me... again. William walks once more about the room, head down: All again. The suffering will come all again. William pauses and suddenly stands upright: All again? Everything, again? Her life again? Speaking rapidly with growing joy: I will see her again, her smile, hear her laugh! I will be with her again, taste her lips, and stroke back her hair. We will be together again! I am to live again and again... with sudden confusion: But how am I to live? What do I do now? How am I to go about living if I have already done it all before? How can I now feel so... changed, if it has all already happened? William looks back at the key: When will I see her again? And what of the rest of my life? What I do now is eternal, endless...

William opens his front door and pauses for a moment. He steps out off stage.

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IS ELIMINATIVE MATERIALISM AN ELIMINATIVISM?

Patrick O'Neill

Under the influence of Willard Sellars's "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," the potential theory-ladenness of introspection and self-ascription of mental states became a problem. Although philosophers had long attempted analyses of the concepts of "belief," "desire," "intention," and the like, the supposition that there existed at all such things as those was largely granted without argument. It was furthermore allowed that direct, immediated access to these concepts could be had through introspection; philosophers could generate infallible reports about what the mind was like and how it must work just by reflecting carefully upon the structure of their consciousness. If introspection, however, were included among the varieties of perception subject to theory-ladenness, it might turn out that our introspective judgments were focused by a poor theoretical lens all along. It became useful to be able to refer to the sum of our pre-reflective beliefs about the nature and contents of the mind *as a theory* and to compare its virtues to other theories of physical phenomena. This collection of beliefs was christened "folk psychology" (FP). If FP really were a theory in the sense usual to Newtonian mechanics or Ptolemaic astronomy, then it might also eventually give way to a competing theory of that domain of phenomena. In particular, we might someday discover FP to be radically false, postulating entities and relations that nowise resemble the ontology of its theoretic successor. If this should happen to folk psychology, we say that it will be eliminated by its succeeding theory. The view that we have good reason to believe that FP will be eliminated is termed "eliminative materialism," a coinage due to Feyerabend.¹

Paul Churchland, a primary exponent of this view, came to regret Feyerabend's term for the position and conceded:

we do not confront two simply and mutually exclusive possibilities here: pure reduction versus pure elimination. Rather, these are the endpoints of a smooth spectrum of possible outcomes, between which there are mixed cases of partial

¹ Paul Feyerabend, "How to Be a Good Empiricist," *Delaware Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (New York: 1963).

reduction and partial elimination. Only empirical research can tell us where along that spectrum our own case will fall. Perhaps we should speak here, more liberally, of “revisionary materialism.”²

In order to determine the point that future historians of science will assign to FP, we must first have some idea of the function that maps the fates of scientific theories onto a one-dimensional interval according to (something like) their degree of resemblance to the theories that replace them.

This metaphor encourages two sets of questions: (1) is the idea of a spectrum of reduction/elimination internally coherent? What, if anything, is represented by a continuum ranging from seamless theoretic integration to complete conceptual overhaul? Could independent observers receive identical lists of theories and arrange them identically along this axis? If so, how are the theories judged? In short, what makes one theory reducible and another eliminable? (2) Where should we expect FP to come to rest in the shuffle? Is there already relevant evidence for its placement? Should aspects like the history of the theory, its rate of development, best-, mean- or worst-case performance, or the character of the reducing theory affect its status?

I hazard two answers. First, our current understanding of intertheoretic reduction is not yet robust enough to support the reduction/elimination spectrum metaphor, because there are many properties of one-dimensional continua that should, but do not appear to, have functional analogues in “reduction space.” Second, FP might, under the purview of a mature neuroscience, prove as reducible as a number of other “successful approximations” (e.g. Newtonian mechanics, classical thermodynamics) whose ontologies we now roundly reject. To be clear, FP suffers several grave defects which together suggest that its explanations of human behavior will resemble little of what a matured and integrated neuroscience will uncover. It is rather the belief that there is a single criterion which divides phlogiston, heavenly spheres and propositional attitudes from temperature, force and atoms which is up for review.

² Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 48.

Elimination and Reduction

Any encompassing philosophy of science must eventually take account of the conflict between theories which describe and explain the same class of phenomena. When both rival theories in question are both somewhat mature, it is typical that at least one should originally develop in a separate domain of inquiry. (For example, both classical optics and electromagnetic theory had a claim to model the diffraction of light rays through various media, though only the former was organized as a body of knowledge for that purpose. The latter gave a general characterization of electromagnetic radiation from which it was possible to recover the laws of optics as a derivation.) If only one of the theories has reached a mature stage, the reduction is more usually a case of replacement than unification between separate scientific domains. In either case, the classical account of intertheoretic reduction, owing to Nagel, has it that the more particular theory reduces to the more general just in case the laws of the reducing theory may, under the appropriate limiting conditions and boundary stipulations, derive the laws of the reduced.³

Newtonian mechanics, for example, is regarded as a fairly successful “approximation” of its reducing theory, special relativity, for systems involving medium masses at low relative velocities. By Nagel's recommendation, this relationship is to be read out of theoretical similarities like the following: the co-ordinate transforms used in special relativity make use of the Lorentz factor $\gamma = 1/\sqrt{1-(v^2/c^2)}$ used to translate vectors between inertial reference frames. Where the classical Galilean transform has $x' = x-vxt$ the Lorentz transform amends to $x' = \gamma(x-vxt)$ As inspection shows, γ differs negligibly from one when v is low in comparison to c , and diverges to infinity as v approaches c . Clearly the old Galilean transforms, which “set” the Lorentz factor equal to 1, are an impressive approximation of the relativistic model.⁴ This goodness of fit between the two theories at low velocities led scientists to characterize their relationship by the expression $\lim_{v \rightarrow 0} STR = NM$, meaning that Newtonian mechanics just is the special theory of relativity under the appropriate limiting condition, as velocities approach zero. It becomes appealing, then, to imagine classical mechanics as a function of

³ Ernst Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Explanation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).

⁴ The value of γ does not differ from unity by even 1% until v exceeds roughly .14c. By comparison, the mean orbital velocity of our solar system with respect to the Milky Way is less than .001c.

a single variable which is obtained by sectioning a function of two variables with respect to the plane $v=0$. Realistically, of course, almost any theory rich enough to be considered in functional notation actually maps m -dimensional input to n -dimensional output. In thinking of the Galilean transforms as “the Lorenz transforms with v held to 0,” the one- to two-place function must be, for the sake of visualization, a small corner of the $(n-1)$ - to n -place reality. This formulation was quickly challenged with Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which advanced the argument that theoretical terms take their meaning from their relationships to other concepts given by the theory. To illustrate, consider the use of a concept like “power” in Newtonian physics. If asked to explain its meaning, a physicist might reply that power is the quotient of work and time. How do we measure work? As a force multiplied by a distance. And how do we measure force? As a mass times an acceleration. But what is a mass? We measure it by its acceleration when acted upon by a force... Though this imagined dialogue is slightly caricaturized, Kuhn recognized that at the center of any physical theory resides a cluster of interdefined terms which scientists must learn as a whole. On this view, terms which fail to enter into the same network of conceptual relations are not synonymous.⁵ It is incorrect in light of this argument to assert that Newtonian mechanics is a special case of special relativity, since the two theories refer to two different sets of entities entirely. To take the most familiar example, Newtonian and Einsteinian mass are not interchangeable, nor is the latter strictly a refinement of the former; the conceptual roles they fulfill in relation to other predicates of the theory like distance, time, acceleration and energy are radically different. All one can say is that STR, provided the appropriate limiting conditions, yields an isomorphic image NM' which we accept as a duplicate of NM for its syntactic and predictive correspondences with NM', even if there is no semantic agreement *sensu stricto*. That is to say, STR still asserts that vector addition in an inertial reference frame cannot result in a vector whose norm is greater than c ; we just acknowledge that the correction at low velocities is negligible. Velocities in STR and NM (as well as masses, accelerations and all the rest) are different kinds of things altogether.

⁵ Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 57-61.

The received view of elimination is in need of similar refinement. Conventionally, a theory is ripe for elimination if it fails to withstand pressure from a number of evidential or theoretic sources. When a theory lacks empirical adequacy and resists repeated attempts to regain it via revision of its marginal assumptions, there is reason to suspect that the theory has gone wrong at some ontological juncture. When such a theory is outperformed by a rival which carves up conceptual space in a fundamentally different way, the initial prejudice toward elimination is confirmed. Even when no rival paradigm exists to challenge a relatively successful theory, it is still a mark of disfavor if the incumbent theory should call upon a set of entities that do not appear in, and cannot be associated with or explained by, the shared ontology of the other physical sciences. Even if, for example, experimental subjects were able to guess the contents of playing cards held by volunteers in the next room or on the other side of the planet at rates far above chance, it would remain a damaging criticism of “telepathy theory” that telepathic force, unlike most other macroscopic physical forces, did not degrade smoothly with distance.⁶

The principal difficulty with this view of elimination is that it seems to overlook the range of possible empirical results and the cleanliness of theoretical mapping that obtains between contemporary paradigms and several theoretical frameworks now derided as tantamount to witchcraft. One of the observations motivated by phlogiston theory, for example, was Cavendish’s calculation that a certain percentage of the Earth’s atmosphere was “dephlogistonated.” Consulting a table of atmospheric composition, one finds that Cavendish’s estimate of dephlogistonated air differs from the modern estimate of oxygen by little over one half of one part in one hundred. The strength of this result and others bolsters the very rough bridge principle that “oxygen is dephlogistonated air.”

Although phlogiston eventually ran afoul of the principle of conservation of mass, it is easily conceivable that it might have instead accommodated these theoretical barriers and evolved until the whole of chemistry had been sketched out with phlogiston as its anchor point. With some historical luck, statements within phlogiston chemistry would have turned out to be clean inversions of corresponding statements in

⁶ This remark is often attributed to Einstein, although it is difficult to separate this from his criticisms of quantum mechanics, whose non-locality principle he also derided as a form of telepathy.

actual chemistry: “materials lose phlogiston when burned” would continue to mean “materials combine with oxygen when oxidized,” and (presumably) “one part oxygen combines with two parts hydrogen to create water” might have an isomorphism in phlogistic chemistry as “the combustion of two parts hydrogen in one part completely dephlogisticated air yields one part water.” With inspiration from Quine's indeterminacy thesis and his use of the “cosmic complement” argument,⁷ it seems possible that two theories could display an isomorphism and equal each other in predictive accuracy despite differing in the meaning of the terms of each. (Indeed, the meaning of each term in its respective conceptual network is the direct complement of the other!)

So, do actual chemistry and the hypothetical matured phlogistic chemistry respectively reduce or eliminate naïve phlogiston? In the actual world with actual chemistry, actual textbooks cite phlogiston as a case study in elimination. But if matured phlogistic chemistry were possible (and if cosmic complement theories are internally coherent, then it should be), then why should phlogistic chemists not regard 18th century phlogiston as we do 18th century physics, i.e. as a kernel of concepts whose meanings were revised rather than rejected? Further, actual chemistry and matured phlogistic chemistry are isomorphic according to the structure of their conceptual roles, just strictly complementary in content. By hypothesis, then, it is possible for naïve phlogiston to be eliminable by one and reducible by another of two conceptually equivalent theories.

The first answer given to the question “how should we regard past theories?” was a binary categorization scheme of reduction and elimination. When faced with FP, a stagnant and metaphysically flagrant theory which nonetheless offers extraordinary success in predicting the behavior of incredibly complex physical systems, Churchland's solution was to dissolve the reduction-elimination dichotomy into a spectrum. But even this expansion may not be sufficient.

Consequences for Folk Psychology

Against the possibility of a reduction of FP to the natural sciences in general and neuroscience in particular, Churchland illustrates three problems such a reduction would face. Firstly, FP is something of a

⁷ Alex Orenstein, *W.V. Quine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 30-2.

degenerate research program. Throughout recorded history and literature, here does not appear (pace Jaynes⁸) to be any evidence of major theoretical advancement in the explanation of propositional attitudes since their first mention in the records of the earliest literate peoples. Secondly, FP's success at modeling normal, neurologically healthy brains does not extend to pathology or trauma, which produce cognitive deficits that cross-cut workaday intuitions about the nature of perception, language, memory, attention and the like. Thirdly, there remain basic questions about the behavior of unexceptional brains which FP is unable to clarify. Sleep is no less a mystery to the folk theory of mind than to prescientific peoples, despite an intimate and daily acquaintance with the phenomenon. A fortiori, the answer FP provides for the question "why do people sleep?" ("because they're tired") is simply empirically incorrect.⁹

FP faces other problems. For one, there is the well-documented confabulation in patients whose corpora callosa have been severed as a radical treatment for otherwise debilitating cases of epilepsy. When a motor imperative (e.g. "laugh!" "stand up!") is presented visually or aurally to the eye or ear whose sensory input is handled by the right hemisphere, the left hemisphere (which has no knowledge of the command given to its neighbor) spontaneously invents a plausible narrative when asked about the motive of the action.¹⁰ Confabulation is also observed in patients with certain anosognosias. Such patients might fail to recognize that their hospital room is not their house, but would go on to offer an apparently sincere narrative about the cost of installing an elevator in their living room and populating it with medical staff. The ease with which explanations trading in currency like intentions, hopes, beliefs and desires can be given, even when it is impossible for such

⁸ Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁹ Experimental subjects, when allowed to *rest* but not to sleep, fare no better than subjects who exercise at forestalling the effects of sleep deprivation. If "tired" does not mean "in need of respite from exertion" but rather "sleepy," then the reply becomes a form of question-begging. "Why do people sleep? Because they are sleepy!" Vd. Moliere's *Le Malade imaginaire* for the canonical dismissal of explanations of this type.

¹⁰ R. Sperry, "Lateral specialization in the surgically separated hemispheres," in *Third Neurosciences Study Program*, ed. F. Schmitt and F. Worden (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 3: 5-19.

states to have caused the observed behavior, should temper the claim that propositional attitudes are self-evidently the only tractable explanations of willful human action.

FP also needs to give some indication that its inner workings, however inaccessible to self-conscious manipulation, consist in the kinds of things that can be reduced to the physical sciences if it holds hope for survival. In no other science do explanations like “the weight fell because it wanted to reach the ground,” or “the system reached equilibrium because it feels more comfortable there” count for anything more than attempts at humor. The ontological standing of propositional attitudes, in contrast to other reductive physical terms like “temperature” or “wave crest,” is almost totally opaque. It is at this point that the eliminative materialist details the possible ways that neural matter could be arranged in order to produce operationally indistinguishable human beings and compares this field to the vanishingly small number of ways it could be arranged in order to produce human behavior and harbor anything like real and irreducible propositional attitudes at the ground level of neural excitation and inhibition. It would be miraculous, the eliminativist concludes, if FP happened to get it right.¹¹

And yet, FP is still a marvel of prediction. It has a predictive accuracy that far exceeds anything else in the social sciences to interpret and foresee certain salient features of the behavior of highly complex physical systems even months or years in the future. It is elegant: propositional attitudes are capable of being understood, reasoned about and being made the basis of action by three year olds. It provides tremendous social utility, and so on. The only other real problem facing it is its lack of consilience: no other science makes use of propositional attitudes, nor could explain what they are in the sense that physics can explain what a chemical bond is. Nevertheless, FP is almost unnervingly accurate if one believes it will go the way of phrenology or phlogiston.

What is to be made of ontological monstrosities like FP that outperform their more metaphysically sound competitors? Consider Ptolemaic and Copernican astronomies (post-Kepler), which with some tailoring can be made to generate predictions about the apparent positions of the heavenly bodies which vary from one another by less than the margin of observational error. What must be true of the first theory in order for this relationship to the second to hold? An appeal to

¹¹ Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, 75.

theory-ladenness is fair sport but uninteresting here; it is hardly helpful to remind that the two theories predict different sorts of things appearing in the night sky (viz., luminous bodies affixed to a celestial mobile of orbits, epicycles, deferents and equants on one hand, and chunks of rock and ice falling through the sun's gravity well on the other). It is more pressing to ask instead, how do the two theories predict different types of entities appearing in the same locations at the same times?

Now does the Copernican system reduce or eliminate Ptolemy? Suppose there are "eliminativists about geocentrism" and "reductionists about geocentrism." Here is a case for elimination: there are no crystalline spheres in Kepler's equations, nor any of the finer clockwork used to shoehorn the retrograde motion of the planets into circular orbits. There is a definite coordinate origin suggested by the system, and it is not the earth. Most presentations of the geocentric system allow for collinear conjunctions of the Sun, Earth and Venus in that order, an obvious impossibility. With this in mind, the laws of the geocentric configuration are strictly not derivable from the heliocentric.

Here the eliminativist about geocentrism will do well to argue for a very central claim about the relationship between elimination and reduction: a theory T_n reduces another T_m not merely when the T_n has all the accurate predictions of T_m and more besides, but when an image of the laws of T_m themselves are consequences of T_n under some limiting condition. The following argument for this principle should be amenable to the eliminativist camp: infinitely many theories are compatible with a given body of evidence. But if the idea of theoretic reduction is to have any use, it must be determinable for a reduction-pair T_a and T_b which is reduced by which. If a theory reduces any other theory which shares its predictions over a certain range of evidence, then it reduces an infinite number of theories, and those theories reduce the original as well. Since mutually reducing theories are not properly reductive at all, reduction pairs must therefore be restricted by some criterion other than predictive agreement.

Can FP hope for a partial reduction if predictive agreement is not enough? If the reductionist must press for a relatively small set of definitions and bridge principles from which at least some of the "laws of thumb" can be derived, she must do so in a way that would not simultaneously allow humor theorists to identify the over-production of red blood cells with superfluities of black bile, or witch theorists to define bridge laws connecting poisonous mushrooms to demonic

enchantment. Churchland argues ultimately that the decision to treat the relations between successive theories as reductive or eliminative is a purely pragmatic one.¹² Classical mechanics was reduced because there is little effort required to identify their homologous features and locate the relevant points of divergence. Witch theory, on the other hand, fails both tests. There are no known methods of reduction from witches to biology without doing violence to either theory. Nor is there a plainly available fork at which witch theory begins to lose contact with its explananda, at which we might reason: "if part of thy theory offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee..."

Perhaps the one-dimensional spectrum can be located along the diagonal of a plane whose axes describe two related but distinct aspects of theoretic fate. Along one, we may rank theories according to their conservation of the syntactic structures of the old. Classical mechanics fares well, humor theory fares less so, and sundry cases in between, according to the cleanliness or entanglement of the bridging principles between them. Along the other, we may sort theories by their predictive accuracy. Again, classical mechanics does well in its target domain, FP possibly less so but in a far more complex environment, and humor theory practically nil. Should FP fall somewhere in the upper left corner (low consilience, high predictive value), it would be unsatisfactory to split the difference and appraise it as a system marked for partial reduction, as if all points outside the original spectrum, situated within the plane as the diagonal from (low, low) to (high, high), were to be mapped onto their nearest points on the line. The hand-wavy talk of a single dimension of intertheoretic reduction is an analogy that may grossly distort the variety of deaths that await our systems of understanding. Indeed, it is almost fitting that investigation into the use of the concepts reduction and elimination should result in a new comfort and fluency with theoretic morbidity that revises the understood meaning of elimination itself.

¹² Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, 87.

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SOLITUDE

David Parks

When the traditional concept of solitude enters our thoughts, it immediately elicits the idea or feelings of aloneness and seclusion from others. But Solitude may have various sources; one may choose solitude, abandoning the community around them in favor of seclusion. One may be forced into solitude, cast out from society or secluded in prison. Solitude can also come from circumstance, when machinery breaks down in the middle of the desert or out at sea. It is isolation of the Self, and from the Other.

At first, a victim of circumstance becomes angry and upset at the machine that failed to deliver its typical and expected function. The futility of cursing the machine is not yet realized as a vocabulary of swear words spew forth in its general direction, perhaps accompanied by some violent attack on the object. With a sore fist and ineffectiveness achieved, the anger diminishes and turns into pleasantries and pleas. Curses turn into praise and admiration for what a reliable vehicle it has been up until now. The stranded one begs the vehicle to return to its normal functionality, concocting deals with it: "If you work, I promise to take better care of you." In desperation, the role of mechanic is taken on, with hopeful and perhaps confident ability to repair the broken thing. Hopelessness comes when all valiant efforts are met with failure. Solitude has overcome him; he is fearful, impassioned,¹ and alone.

The lawbreaker finds himself imprisoned as a punishment for his crime. He has been removed from the vastness of the world and the freedom to explore it. Horizons have been interrupted by chain-links and barbed wire; landscapes replaced by walls, drywall by block and bar. He has been taken out of society and away from others, but not from the Other. Scouting the new area, he finds empty shells of abandoned joy, which are just like him and yet completely different. He devalues them as the dregs of society. With a look of disdain he sets forth angrily, embarrassed by his company, his surroundings, his choices. He is

¹ Alphonso Lingis, *The First Person Singular* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 15-7.

impatient and arrogant towards everyone, including himself, in an attempt to show solidarity and strength. Like a painter following the final stroke, the inmate completes his mask.² Behind this façade, the inmate conceals his greatest secret, his truly impassioned state—fear. He sees his fear as the weakness he must never reveal, the weakness the others are circling over like vultures waiting for a wounded animal to die. A frustrated and desperate act finds the inmate now being led away from the others and placed into a small abandoned room, a haven of seclusion where his ruse is now worthless. Solitude has overcome him; he is exhausted, relieved, and free.

The one who chooses the life of a recluse does so for varying reasons. The surrounding social and political climates may differ so dramatically with one's own values that an individual would choose abandonment from others as the preferred or necessary decision. A person may choose seclusion based on a desire to test the ability to survive on one's own. The choice of isolation may be taken up to embark upon a religious quest to test or strengthen faith or to find release from the mundane or monotonous life lived thus far. One may also be in solitude without having relocated, as in that of Gregor Samsa.³

The stranded, the prisoner, and the recluse all share in providing an interpretation of what is commonly meant by solitude. Whether by choice, force, or circumstance, solitude is seen as being an outcome or state due to a series of causal events leading up to the isolation or seclusion of an individual from the Other. This would seem to limit the concept of solitude to a sociological or anthropological state. What is neglected is that solitude is also ontological.

To approach solitude in terms of its ontological dimension is to begin with the Heideggerian notion of *Geworfenheit* ("thrownness").⁴

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 40

³ Although Gregor was forced by his family to remain in his room, thus seeming like an imprisonment, it is worth noting Gregor's acceptance to his isolation as well as the accommodations he made to spare those entering his room from looking upon him. In that regard, his acceptance, and the choice people make to isolate themselves, parallel.

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. Stanley Corngold (New York: Bantam, 2004).

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper-Row, 1962), 135.

One does not choose the family one is born into, or one's race, or any such characteristic or attribute; one is "thrown" into these circumstances as a condition of existence. The underlying ontological importance of this is found in the being-thrown-into-the-world as a singularity and not a plurality. To be thrown-in is to be thrown-in-alone. From the moment existence takes its hold upon us, we are singular, solitary existents, as Levinas gave us: "solitude lies in the very fact that there are existents."⁵ This infancy of *Dasein* is thus not only Being-in-the-world, but also Being-in-solitude. Being-in-solitude is not as simplistic as to describe a mood or state one comes into and goes out of. Although this description is adequate in a sociological or anthropological analysis, it does not describe solitude ontologically. While solitude ontologically is in the dialectic of *being*, it does not appear as a certain moment of this dialectic, as Levinas proposed,⁶ but as a continual underscore of *being*. The duality of being presents itself in this notion. The 'I' is the singular with-self and the plural with-others. Heidegger separated himself from this notion by positing the world of *Dasein* as a *with-world* [Mitwelt] and that Being-in is *Being-with Others*.⁷ This would lead us to posit that as an existent, I am a contingent existent, predicated by the others (e.g. my parents) who came before me. Their decision to conceive a child and carry to term brings forth my existence into the world with-others. I am thrown into the world as an entity in solitude but abandon my solitarian self, as a contingency of my existing for a collectivity. Although the duality is still apparent, it fails to consider that solitude may continue beyond the brief instance of inception. Although collectivity and solitude are generally considered to be in opposition⁸, it is not given that only one or the other can be present at a given time, or that one replaces the other indefinitely. This relationship of solitude and collectivity would seem analogous to Heidegger's "authenticity" and "inauthenticity."

"Authenticity" and "inauthenticity" are two modes Heidegger chose very precisely and upheld to a very strict terminological usage, authenticity as in *something of its own*, and inauthenticity as *Dasein being caught up in the world*. He pointed out that inauthenticity is not a sub-class or subordinate of authenticity and is of no less importance to

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time & the Other*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 118-9.

⁸ Levinas, *Time & the Other*, 41.

Dasein.⁹ In the inauthentic self, Dasein is captivated by the world. Dasein concerns itself with its relationship with *das Man* (the “they”) as “Being-with-one-another”, in “distantiality” and “average everydayness.”¹⁰ From the moment one comes into existence they are with others. The one wallows in the collective of the others. Every action, every emotion, every new thought stands in the foreground of the Other. Most of our lives are spent in the “they-self” mode. The way we primp our appearance, the jokes we tell, the jobs we take, the places we patronize, are all in accord with our (i.e. Dasein’s) average everydayness, and for the Other. This notion is a background thought to us, realizable most easily when we are alone. One embraces the collectivity of the Other. When one moves away from the collectivity of the others, something is said to be wrong or amiss. Nietzsche wrote that “It seems nothing offends more deeply than suddenly letting others feel a distance.”¹¹ When our vehicle suddenly fails to start, we notice its functionality. Something is wrong; something has changed; something is amiss. When the vehicle started all those previous mornings with no hesitation, it was never thought of. When the one is consumed in the collectivity of the Other, the same can be said. It is when the vehicle fails, when the One defects, that it is noticed. The Other is offended by the distancing. If one were engaged in conversation with another and were to step back from it, or turned and walked away before the conversation finished, it would be offensive. The one who is *distanced from* immediately becomes self aware. If during an argument between lovers, one lover walks away before a resolution is achieved, then this one has created a distance from the other. This distancing is seen in clichés: “put some space between us,” “turning a cold shoulder,” etc. This distancing is a spatial move away from the Other. But is there a mode of distancing that is neither offensive nor spatial?

To distance oneself in the ontological sense is to move towards what Heidegger refers to as the authentic self; one is no longer caught up in the inauthentic or they-self. The embrace and intrigue of average everydayness has been paused. Heidegger noted that Dasein’s absorption into the ‘they’ and concern for the world is a *fleeing* of Dasein: flight

⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 42-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-130.

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,”* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 303; sec. 5. Also see “the pathos of distance,” in Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 257.

from its authentic potentiality.¹² The move towards the world, towards collectivity, towards the Other, is being in the “they.” When one moves away from the they-self, and instead towards authentic self, one moves away from the collectivity of the Other, towards the singularity of the Self. Although our lives are lived in average everydayness, one does, indeed needs to¹³, return to the solitude of the Self. In the “they-self,” one functions as demands arise. It is in the distancing of the Self that one begins to see one’s own functionality in the “they-self”. A farmer sees himself planting the crops; a CEO sees herself making critical decisions; a police officer sees himself in action. One does not see the eyeglasses on one’s nose until they are taken off to be cleaned. It is only when one creates a distance from the “they-self” that one sees oneself *in* the “they-self.” With this distancing beyond the analysis of one’s own inauthentic-self, the quietude of the Self is embraced. It is here that one finds oneself in solitude, absent from the world, with self, as an individual. In solitude one takes a disinterested approach towards average everydayness. Only in solitude is one able to contemplate one’s own existence as an existent. Solitude is the “indissoluble unity between the existent and the existing ... the subject is alone because it is one.”¹⁴ In solitude, the Other is absent; everydayness is paused. One exists as the singular, enthralled with being, an existent in existence.

Think of the soldier, stationed at the battlefield. The soldier performs the functions of her role; she scouts an area for potential threats, tends to the wounded, and meets the enemy in battle. While on a reconnaissance mission, the soldier’s squad encounters the enemy and a fierce exchange of gunfire ensues. During the exchange, one of her squad members is wounded by enemy fire when he moves to adjacent cover. His body lies just in front of her, exposed to the enemy’s gun. With disregard for her own welfare, she leaps forth from her cover, showering the area with gunfire as she makes her way towards her fallen friend. With one hand, she holds the gun with the depressed trigger; with the other, she latches on to her comrade’s fatigues, dragging him back to the cover from whence she came. It would be difficult to argue that this act was not courageous. So too can be said of the firefighter who runs into the burning apartment building to rescue the trapped tenant. Courage is

¹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 184.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: “Why I Am So Wise,”* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 233; sec. 8.

¹⁴ Levinas, *Time & the Other*, 54.

virtuous, not because it is valorous or receptive of praise, but precisely because it presents itself as a transcendent of average everydayness. The same can be said of sympathy, insight, and solitude.¹⁵ To say that solitude is transcendent is not to imply that it is above the world of average everydayness, but that it lies outside average everydayness, sporadically and in scarcity: sporadic and scarce for the same reasons attributed by Heidegger to authenticity. Proximally, Dasein remains in the “they.” It is through what Heidegger refers to as *anxiety* that we are brought back towards our authentic self, from which Dasein *falls* back into the “they-self.”¹⁶ The soldier performs her normal duties, but is interrupted by a fleeting moment of courage. The sympathy we express to those grieving over their loss fades as quick as it came. The insight we come to when the solution presents itself vanishes as soon as our admiration is gone or the next problem is presented. Solitude represents a fleeting moment of awareness of our existence as existents, only to revert to inauthenticity when everydayness demands.

Solitude is thus the retrieval of Self from its inauthenticity. To be in solitude is to perceive the self not in relation to others, but as an existent: alone. To revive the self is to perceive the self in “mineness.”¹⁷ My existence is such that when I contemplate myself as an existent, my *being* is mine. *To be* is to postulate an ‘I’. Lingis wrote that “to say ‘I am a man’ is to commit myself to manly behavior.”¹⁸ Likewise, to simply say “I am” is to commit myself to existence. *It is because I exist that I can claim existence as my own.* This is not to say that I have some preconceived knowledge of existence, as if existence were some separate entity to be understood, but that being an existent brings about existence. Without existents, existence would be an empty concept.¹⁹ This is made clear by understanding that existence is not a “thing” to be understood (clearly not a ‘thing’ at all) but is the verb of the existent. The most important feature or element (that which of all things is inseparable) of an existent, indeed that which identifies its very nature, is existence. Existence is the essence of the Existent. This is not to contradict Jean-Paul Sartre’s “existence precedes essence,” for there is a distinction between the two. Sartre held that unlike the paper knife, man first comes

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 284.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 175-6, 189.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 42-3, 53.

¹⁸ Lingis, *The First Person Singular*, 37.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Time & the Other*, 46.

to exist and only later acquires his essence.²⁰ In positing that existence is the essence of the existent, I am not referring to the essence of man, but to that which is essential to being an existent. For Sartre, man's essence is defined in the past-tense, or as the future to-be. Here, existence as essence is not in a past or futuristic tense, but always in the present. The existent, as "something that is," always contains existing as an attribute, and is always in the process of existing.²¹ To say "I am" is to speak in the present tense, as opposed to the "I was" or "I will be." To be in the present as an existent is to embrace the "mineness" of existing. As an existent, existing, I perceive the "mineness" of self, which is possible through solitude. If an existent is in the moment of existence through solitude, what is the relationship between solitude and time?

Solitude has already been described as sporadic and scarce in comparison with the collectivity that is experienced in our average everydayness. In addition, solitude has been described as a fleeting moment of awareness of our existence as existents, when everydayness has been paused. To say that everydayness pauses is not to say that the world or time stops, but represents a disconnection one experiences through solitude. The world is so captivating that these moments of disconnect are scarce at best. We consume ourselves with average everydayness.

We are prematurely awoken by the buzzing of the alarm from our bedside clock. We arise from bed and begin thinking of our routine morning schedule. We move to the kitchen for a quick breakfast before hopping into the shower to wash away the sleep from our eyes. From there, we dress ourselves in the attire appropriate for the day's events. We notice the clock every time we walk past it, watching the minutes of the morning tick away. We let the dog out, fearing a mess if we forget. Our movements are hurried as if this moment of our lives were the most important time to date. We rush out the door; contemplating the traffic we expect to encounter on our way to work. We begin formulating excuses to give to our boss in the event we arrive a few minutes late. We rehearse the speech we have to give, drink our coffee, smoke our cigarette, all while trying to keep a hand on the steering wheel. We arrive to work and immediately assume our role. When the workday is finished, we embrace the rush hour traffic with disdain. We arrive home, fix

²⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. C. Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 21-2.

²¹ Levinas, *Time & the Other*, 52.

dinner for ourselves or our family, and plant ourselves in front of the computer to work or play, or in front of the TV or a good book, anticipating our relaxation. As our day unwinds we find that the clock on the wall shows us that it is time for bed. We reset our alarm, fix our pillow, kiss our significant other, and fall asleep. The day-in, day-out, hustle and bustle of our lives consumes our time. At sporadic times during the day we find ourselves distancing ourselves in analysis. In distancing we attain a strange feeling: *unheimlich* (uncanniness). Our concern for the world pauses. We are in, what Heidegger calls, *anxiety*.²² It is in the mood of anxiety that Heidegger says Dasein moves towards its authentic self. This moment of solitude is disrupted as everydayness pushes its way back into our thoughts. Solitude, like Heidegger's anxiety, is always in the present. We are constantly moving away from our past and moving towards our future. Within this insulated time pocket, the present departs from itself and comes back together again,²³ in solitude, as an existent in existence.

Solitude discloses to the self its finitude. It is in solitude that one comes face to face with one's finitude. There in resides the paradox. The present has no concept of time. I am a finite entity who comes to the realization of my finitude in the eternal, for the present has no beginning and no end, but simply is. There will come a time where the present is no longer accessible to me, when I cease to exist, but its experience will forever allude me. I cannot experience existence without the present for the very reason that existence begets the present. In solitude, I know that I am an existent; I know that I am a finite entity; I know there will come a time when I cease to exist; I call this death.

Heidegger notes that death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein.²⁴ What this means is that death comes to that who's very nature is *to be*. Death is not only a possibility, but an inevitability of a finite existent. Solitude brings with it the revelation of this inevitability. I am an existent that is *towards* that which will contradict my very nature. What solitude cannot bring is the revelation or apprehension of the "moment of death."²⁵ Existence as present always

²² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 188-9. Translated in the text as "uncanny" but is more literally "unhomelike," which is closer to the author's intent.

²³ Levinas, *Time & the Other*, 52.

²⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 251.

²⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 234.

sees death in the future, never to overtake or surpass it. At the instant just prior to death, the existent is oblivious to the moment of death. The existent is like the track star, running towards the finish line, completely unaware of its position. Even if one saw the finish line, as in the contemplator of suicide or the terminal patient moments before euthanasia, existence would only carry them up to the line, their chest touching the ribbon. Death marks the extinction of the existent, their existence, and their solitude.

From this analysis, solitude has shown to be much more than the traditional sociological or anthropological concept. While this mode of solitude makes itself known to the Other, it is the solitude in the ontological sense that makes itself known, and known only, to the self. It is through my interactions with others that my “they-self” is shown. When I distance myself spatially, the other is offended by my abandonment. When I distance myself existentially, the other is oblivious to my seclusion. One may choose, be forced into, or circumstanced by solitude in the world. Ontological solitude is elusive, sporadic, and scarce. When I choose to abandon others, as Zarathustra did for ten years,²⁶ I choose so until I am forced or force myself back into the community. Existential solitude comes randomly and lasts only for a brief moment. When one abandons others, they are always still there. Though my location has changed, there still remain others in this world. Transcending into the solitude of the self, one finds the Other absent. It is no wonder that solitude was traditionally viewed negatively, as a descent into despair or melancholy. To isolate oneself is seen as a degradation or devaluation of others, or of the self. In this light, solitude ontologically is none of these things. It is separate from the others, and enlightening of the self. Through solitude, I am able to grasp my existence as an existent. In isolation, I remove myself from the others of the past, and defend myself from the others in the future. In existential solitude, everydayness is paused; I detach from my otherness, and embrace my self in the present. In death I find permanent isolation from the Other. In death I find solitude extinct.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Commons (New York: Dover, 1999), Zarathustra’s prologue, 1.

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**THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OTHER:
LOVE AND EROTICISM IN AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS'
*RUNNING WITH SCISSORS***

Carly M. Whitlock

In love, we find ourselves vulnerable and out of control. We want to put the needs of another first, but we long to have our needs fulfilled as well. We use sex as a means to reach love, but sex is not love. Through love and sex, one can discover the difficulty of the human existence: to know oneself, to know the Other, and to love and be loved. Emmanuel Levinas claims that it is eroticism that brings us the closest to the Other and that our desire is a reaching towards infinity. Jean-Paul Sartre believes that desire is a guaranteed failure because our connection with the Other will also dissolve. Hegel sees desire as the notion of going outside oneself to find oneself through the relation of consciousness.¹ These philosophers, among many others, attempt to explain the phenomenology of the Other using theories that discuss love, desire, and eroticism. Their theories are exemplified in a memoir by Augusten Burroughs titled *Running with Scissors* in the relationship of young Augusten and an older man, Neil Bookman.

Running with Scissors chronicles Augusten Burroughs' life from age nine to seventeen. Augusten lives with his mother, Deidre, who is always on the verge of a mental breakdown, and his father, an alcoholic who is violent towards Augusten's mother. Deidre begins seeing Dr. Finch, an unconventional psychiatrist, and her sessions grow more frequent and lengthier. Augusten's mother and father divorce and Deidre decides she can not handle taking care of Augusten, eventually giving Dr. Finch custody of her son. From then on, Augusten lives with the Finches in an unruly household, which is filthy, unkempt, and dysfunctional.

Augusten, who is thirteen by this time, claims that he is gay and has known it his entire life. He confides in Hope, Dr. Finch's daughter,

¹ Walt Fuchs, "Phenomenology of the Other," Towson University. Linthicum Hall, Towson (19 Feb. 2007).

about his sexuality, and Hope tells Augusten that one of the doctor's adopted sons is also gay and that she will arrange for Augusten to meet him. Neil, 33, comes to talk to Augusten one afternoon, and they discuss their similar situations. Augusten is smitten with Neil, who is twenty years his senior and seems so mature and sure of himself. After their afternoon walk, Augusten says he feels "mildly intoxicated, like [he'd] just taken a big swallow of Vicks 44."² Their relationship progresses emotionally and sexually, with Neil giving Augusten his first sexual experience, in which he forces Augusten to perform oral sex on him. Lasting for three years, the relationship eventually changes its tone, with Neil becoming obsessed with Augusten, and Augusten verbally abusing Neil in attempts to push him away. Their relationship comes to an end when Neil disappears in the middle of the night, taking a train to Manhattan, never to be seen or heard from again.

This relationship represents many arguments of Hegel, Levinas, and Sartre concerning the relationship with the Other in general and focusing on love and eroticism. Hegel's master-slave dialectic theory is present throughout the entire memoir, centering on an erotic relationship, with Levinas' and Sartre's theories on desire salt-and-peppering Hegel's theory along the way.

The relationship between Neil and Augusten is very similar to Hegel's Lords-Bondsman dialectic. Hegel was the first philosopher who began to seriously think about the relationship with the Other. He argues that we all have a self-consciousness for ourselves, but that our self-consciousness also helps others find theirs, and in turn, others' self-consciousnesses help one know oneself. In the beginning of the Lords-Bondsman relationship, there is a self-consciousness which is "independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself" and another consciousness that is "dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another."³ The first consciousness is the Lord and the second is the Bondsman. The master exists for himself and is essentially independent from the bondsman. However, the bondsman is dependent on the master, for his identity of slave exists only because of the lord. Because of the master's existence, the bondsman remains a slave, with the only reason for his containment being the existence of the master. Therefore, the

² Augusten Burroughs, *Running with Scissors* (New York: St. Martins Press, 2002), 76.

³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), sec. 189.

bondsman exists *for* the master, completing whatever tasks deemed necessary by him. Because of this, the master gains self-consciousness: the slave is acting for him, reaffirming his existence and self-consciousness. Through this process the slave loses his self-consciousness: the master has turned the slave into a non-person, unable to provide recognition of his master. The master ends up where he began: needing recognition from another being to uphold his existence.

The bondsman, however, continues to work and creates something permanent through his work, affirming his own self-consciousness. He is a person working for another person, but he is also working for himself, proving himself to exist and be of worth. The slave objectifies his own essence through his labor. In the end, the master becomes dependent on the slave for recognition, to reaffirm his existence, because he now feels as though he has lost his self-consciousness.

In Augusten and Neil's relationship, Neil operates as the master and Augusten as the slave. Neil is in the position of power in the beginning of the relationship because he is the older one and acts as a mentor to Augusten. Augusten is in awe of Neil, claiming that he had "never seen a real, live gay man in person before; only on the *Donahue* show."⁴ Neil is obviously in control and aware of his self-consciousness, currently existing for himself, as the master does. When Neil meets Augusten, he says he is "flattered" that Augusten wanted to meet him, claiming that he "feel[s] famous."⁵ At this point, Augusten exists for Neil, dependent on Neil's reactions to his every word and action. Augusten is filled with anxiety and tries to find the right moment to tell Neil that he too is gay and is worried about how Neil will react. When Augusten finally reveals his secret, Neil is surprised, but understanding. When the two part ways that afternoon, Neil says to Augusten, "And don't ever worry. I will never take advantage of you."⁶ This seems to suggest that Neil has the power to take advantage of Augusten, further representing his position as master in their rapport. Neil is asserting his authority, insinuating that if any sexual relations were to occur that he would be the beneficiary and that Augusten would not have any say. By saying this, Neil gives the impression that the idea of taking advantage of

⁴ Burroughs, 70. Augusten wonders what it would be like to see a gay man without the title "Admitted Homosexual" floating beneath him on a TV screen.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

Augusten has already crossed his mind. Neil is viewing Augusten as existing for him in this moment and Augusten is content being slave-like for him, evident by his Vicks 44-like intoxicating feelings for Neil. Their relationship reaches its next level when Neil gives Augusten his first gay sexual experience. It seems, through Augusten's viewpoint, that Neil *does* take advantage of him. Neil forces Augusten into giving oral sex and pins Augusten's arms down to his side. During this act Augusten thinks "I didn't come here for this."⁷ Augusten says that Neil smells funny, his head is hurting, and his eyes are watering, summing up the experience as "embarrassing."⁸ When the experience comes to an end, Augusten says it brings him "more relief than [he] has ever known."⁹ This does not sound like an experience to which Augusten agreed and enjoyed. Rather, Neil is using Augusten's existence to help him recognize his own self-consciousness, his own sexuality. Neil's selfish attitude towards this sexual experience disregards Emmanuel Levinas' claim that we have an ethical obligation towards the Other. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas says we are in a nonreciprocal ethical relationship with the Other, in which we are obligated to them, but the Other is not obligated to us.¹⁰ In this case, Neil should act ethically towards Augusten, but Augusten has no ethical obligation to Neil. Neil is using Augusten for his own personal pleasure, therefore, Neil is ethically obliged to Augusten. Augusten, who receives no pleasure or gain from this interaction, operates solely as the Other and never as a subject, therefore he has no ethical obligations to Neil. However, Neil shows no ethical obligation to Augusten. He clearly did not ask Augusten if he was comfortable with the situation and certainly did not ask permission. Neil claims he forced Augusten to perform oral sex on him to show Augusten that "that's what gay men do"¹¹ and to help Augusten decide if he really wanted to be gay. Neil was not genuinely concerned with Augusten's feelings; Neil selfishly focuses on his own needs. This illustrates that erotic relationships are not of an ethical kind. We want to focus on our own desire, but because we are using the Other to satisfy these desires, we have obligations to the Other that are not always fulfilled. We

⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰ Walt Fuchs, "Phenomenology of the Other," Towson University. Linthicum Hall, Towson (28 Feb. 2007).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

sometimes ignore these obligations because our desires have been met. Erotic relationships concern the I and not the Other, especially when desires are involved. Levinas argues that there are two types of desire. The first is a mundane desire, one that can be satisfied. The second is a desire toward infinity: one that arouses, but does not satisfy.¹² At this point in the relationship, Neil has a mundane desire for Augusten sexually. His desires are able to be satisfied through this sexual encounter. However, this will change drastically later on.

After Neil finishes sexually with Augusten that first night, he begins talking about photographs he has taken and trips he has been on. It is almost as if nothing has happened. Neil was so charged, emotionally and sexually, and seemed to be “biting the word[s he spoke] out of the air.”¹³ But afterwards, the emotions and the apparent connection to Augusten appear to have vanished. According to Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness*, desire is a guaranteed failure. Desire will lead to satisfaction, but satisfaction always leads to dissatisfaction. In their sexual act, Neil and Augusten are able to obtain a subject/object relationship, but when the act ends, the connection is dissolved. Sex provided the connection and, therefore, the satisfaction. But the sex cannot last forever, resulting in the connection dissolving and the satisfaction turning into dissatisfaction. Sartre also claims that the sexual encounter of two individuals (i.e., the “caress”) inevitably leads to dissatisfaction because in the act of intimacy the Other is no longer hidden.¹⁴ The Other is known and therefore, less desirable.

A few days after the encounter, Neil comes to Augusten crying and apologizing. Even though Augusten wants revenge because he is angry, he tells Neil that the situation was okay. Augusten says he wanted Neil’s companionship more than revenge, illustrating his slave-role in Hegel’s theory. Augusten does not have a formed self-consciousness. Instead, he exists dependently on Neil, being for Neil’s pleasure and recognition. Neil tells Augusten that Augusten is “becoming [his] whole world.”¹⁵ This represents the turning point of the master-slave dialectic in which the master becomes the slave’s slave and the slave becomes the

¹² Walt Fuchs, “Phenomenology of the Other,” Towson University. Linthicum Hall, Towson (12 Mar. 2007).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes and Mary Warnock (New York: Routledge, 1969).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

master's master. No longer does Neil have the upper hand in the relationship. At this point, the two appear to act equally, with Augusten slowly gaining power.

Augusten asserts that Neil “was the only person who [gives him] attention”¹⁶ because his parents pay him none: his mother is only concerned with her (bad) poetry and his father does not accept his collect calls. Augusten craves for someone to pay attention to him, to love him. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre argues that we want to be desired more than we want to desire: we want to be loved more than to love. Sartre claims one's desire is the consciousness of the Other and the realization of the freedom of the Other. Augusten wants Neil to desire him, to love him, on his own freedom. This eventually happens and Neil tells Augusten that he is falling in love with Augusten. Neil says that Augusten is “godlike...and becoming everything to him, his *reason*.”¹⁷ Augusten admits that he has never mattered so much to anyone before in his life. This proclamation certainly excites Augusten, showing that he is desired, loved. And to Sartre, the feeling of being loved was much more substantial than loving someone. Augusten mentions Natalie, his friend, and her relationship with a man who was physically and emotionally abusive to her. He says that despite how horribly the man treated Natalie that she still loved him. Augusten says he could understand the situation completely: loving someone who doesn't deserve it. He claims he loves Neil and Neil does not deserve it, only because Neil is all he had: “Because *any* attention is better than no attention.”¹⁸ This statement only affirms Sartre's theory of one desiring to be desired.

Augusten and Neil spend many months in the stage of their relationship where they both love and need each other equally. But in due course, Neil becomes obsessed with Augusten, telling Augusten he has this “power over [him]...like there's nothing else in [his] life. Like it's a stage, all blackened out with only one light in the center. You, [Augusten].”¹⁹ The master, Neil, has now lost his self-consciousness. He becomes so dependent on Augusten to make him feel alive, recognized, through Augusten's admiration that he has lost his being. Neil is unaware

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 133. Neil expresses this after he had not seen Augusten in weeks. Augusten, with the doctor's help, faked suicide to get out of going to school. Augusten partly does this to spend more time with Neil.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

of himself without Augusten's willingness and love. The roles are now reversed and Neil needs Augusten more than Augusten depends on Neil. Augusten develops his own self-consciousness through Neil's constant recognition and attention. Neil recognizes his dependence on Augusten and now Master Neil is truly the Slave. Augusten, now the Master, emotionally abuses Neil, telling him "You deserve to need me, not to have me," and "You're a pathetic failure of a man. I know I certainly don't love you anymore."²⁰ Neil begs Augusten for sex after these comments, to which Augusten agrees. Neil claims he *needs* sex from Augusten.

Levinas asserts in *Totality and Infinity* that there is a distinction between things that fill a need and simple enjoyment. When we have a need (e.g., food, sex) and that need is fulfilled, a certain level of enjoyment is obtained. A need seeks to fill a negation or lack of something, but pure enjoyment does not reveal a lack in its subject. Neil's need for sex with Augusten brings him some enjoyment, but is really fulfilling (to a certain extent) a negation in Neil. Augusten does not need the sex, but enjoys it for the most part, even though his feelings for Neil are not as strong as they used to be. The negation or lack Neil feels in his sexual life and in his life in general ties in with his lost self-consciousness. Neil once only *desired* Augusten sexually when he was playing the master role. But now that he is playing the role of the slave, he *needs* sex from Augusten. Neil does not need sex in general, but specifically *Augusten's* sexual attention. Neil depends wholly on Augusten's self-consciousness to recognize his being.

While Augusten was once satisfied with sex with Neil, he now becomes extremely disgusted after the act. Augusten's feelings exemplify Sartre's theory of satisfaction eventually leading to dissatisfaction. The theory can be applied in two instances: long-term and short-term occurrence. The long-term example is Augusten's initial interest in Neil and his desire to be loved by him. Augusten yearned so intensely for Neil's love and attention. He eventually receives this love and is elated with the attention. His desire is satisfied. However, later Augusten is "sickened" by Neil for an unapparent reason and believes Neil to be "completely pathetic."²¹ He is incredibly dissatisfied with the relationship and with Neil. The love connection that once was has

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

dissolved, with the only path leading towards failure of Augusten's desires. The short-term example deals with the sexual encounter Neil has begged for. When Neil offers to perform oral sex on Augusten, the latter desires to feel good in the way only Neil could provide him. Augusten says he understood why people on TV said "He made me melt"²² because that is how Neil makes him feel in the moment. But after the act, Augusten feels repulsed by Neil and wants him to leave. He says to Neil: "Go away, dog,"²³ and threatens to go to the police for statutory rape if Neil ever refuses to listen to him. Augusten's desire for the pleasure that comes with oral sex was satisfied, but ultimately led to dissatisfaction, coinciding with Sartre's theory on desire ultimately leading to failure. While Sartre claims that the desires of both Augusten and Neil eventually lead to their dissatisfaction, Levinas would disagree, arguing that at least Augusten's desires can be met satisfactorily. Levinas' theory on the two types of desire (one that can be satisfied and one towards infinity) is evident at this point in the relationship between Augusten and Neil. Augusten has desires and needs, sexually and emotionally, towards Neil that can be satisfied. Depending on how Augusten is feeling, his desires range from wanting oral sex from Neil, wanting Neil's attention, or wanting Neil to leave his room: all of these desires can be satisfied almost immediately. Neil's desires, on the other hand, are desires that move towards infinity and cannot be satisfied. He desires too intensely; Augusten can never satisfy the needs of Neil. Even when Augusten gives in to the pleading for sex, Neil is shot down immediately afterwards, only causing him to desire more. Even if Augusten would not treat Neil badly after sex, the desires would not be met. Neil yearns for something that cannot be obtained. Does this relate to the fact that Neil is lacking a self-consciousness, according to Hegel's master-slave dialectic? Because Neil is not a complete being, will his desires be forever unfilled? This seems to be the case, as Neil leaves town in the middle of the night after revealing to Augusten that his "feelings for [Augusten] are so huge, [and he] doesn't think [he] can contain them. Sometimes [he] wants to hold [Augusten] so tight it scares [him]... [He wants to hold Augusten] until the life is gone, so [Augusten] can't ever vanish."²⁴ Neil's desire to hold Augusten so tight so he does not vanish is an unobtainable and unrealistic desire, one that reaches towards infinity. When Augusten

²² *Ibid.*, 161.

²³ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

brushes Neil's desires aside, Neil leaves Augusten without notice, forever. Neil needed to remove Augusten from his life in order to reclaim his self-consciousness that he lost from depending on Augusten. Along with removing Augusten, he removed the desires that reached towards infinity, the desires that would never be satisfied. Perhaps when one has a self-consciousness one only has desires that can be satisfied.

Hegel's theory concerning the master and slave's relation to self-consciousness is illustrated perfectly in *Running with Scissors*. Master Neil begins as a self-assured being, independently existing alongside Slave Augusten who dependently exists for Neil. Augusten's actions are centered on what Neil wants, affirming Neil's self-consciousness along the way. The relationship takes the turn of Master Neil becoming Slave Augusten's slave, and Slave Augusten becoming Master Neil's master. Neil has lost his identity because of his growing dependence on Augusten's recognition. Augusten, on the other hand, finds meaning through his devotion to Neil, asserting his own self-consciousness. The only way Neil can stand to reclaim his being is to leave Augusten and the slave-master relationship behind. Hegel's theory helped shaped Augusten's first true relationship with the Other, Neil, teaching Augusten life lessons on love and erotic relationships along the way.

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