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Letter From the Editor

“πᾶν δὲ αὖ τὸ γιγνόμενον ὑπ’ αἰτίου τινὸς ἐξ ἀνάγκης γίνεσθαι: παντὶ γὰρ ἀδύνατον χωρὶς αἰτίου γενέσιν σχεῖν.”

“But again, everything that comes into being must necessarily come into being from some cause; since it is impossible for anything to have an origin separate from its cause.”

- Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a

At a graduate school advice panel in 2024, St. John’s College Tutor Khafiz Kerimov stated in response to a question I’ve now forgotten that “graduate humanities scholarship is just the big seminar that spans across language, space, and time.”

Later that year, at the Johns Hopkins Undergraduate Humanities Symposium, within the diverse presentations of quality scholarship, it was impossible not to notice the uniqueness of topic, methodology, approach, and final product of myself and my fellow Johnnies. Very few scholars were presenting on the topics of continental philosophy, and those that did remained heavily influenced in both topic and commentary by secondary thought. With no intention of disparaging contemporary humanities scholarship, I merely attempt to draw attention to the fact that there is a vacuum of scholarship that is Johnnie-like.

What does it mean for scholarship to be Johnnie-like? That is a question I’m in no way qualified to answer; but hopefully, this journal in motion will begin to answer that question. If humanities scholarship is the seminar that spans across the dividing dimensions of human communication, St. John’s Students ought to have a means through their own university to give their voice to that conversation. This, in summary, is the cause and origin of *Σχόλια περὶ Φιλοσοφίας* (Commentaries concerning Philosophy).

I would like to thank all of the contributors: authors, editors, and tutors, who took part in the creation of this journal, as well as the SJC Delegate Council for sponsoring printing costs.

Presented for your consideration: Scholia Volume 1

Lawson C. Fraser

Editor-in-Chief

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The Spiritual Life and Growth of Noble Duc Theseus

Mary Bednar

Abstract:

Much scholarly attention has been paid to the theology displayed in Theseus' final speech in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*. Theseus' shifting relationship to the gods throughout the rest of the tale, however, has not been sufficiently explored. In the background of the main action, Theseus undergoes subtle but significant changes, following Venus, Mars, Diana, and Jupiter in turn. Each of these affiliations reflects a stage of life, and through the course of the story Theseus goes from being a young devotee with a singular focus (love, then battle), to a family man desperate for balance and control, to an older, wiser man who accepts whatever comes to him as a part of a larger plan. A further stage that Theseus has not yet reached is hinted at by the distinct worldview of Aegeus, who believes the whole world to be chaotic and whose theology reflects the actual godly relationships portrayed in the story more closely. This reading makes it clear that Theseus is not a stagnant background character but one of the most dynamic and significant characters in the *Knight's tale*. The events of the main story can even be read as secondary to the effect that they have on Theseus' worldview.

In Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, Duke Theseus' exact relationship to the gods is less transparent than those of Arcita, Palamon, and Emily, whose private prayers are shared with us and whose allegiances seem fairly consistent. The attention that he pays to adorning the temples of Mars, Venus, and Diana indicates that he has strong ties to each of these gods. His relationship to each is muddled, however, by the fact that the images on the temple walls are so sinister; Diana's temple is adorned with the transformation of hunters into natural objects in revenge, Mars' with dishonorable killings, and Venus' the torment of the unrequited lover and jealousy and mourning of the successful one. After Arcita's death, Theseus gives a long speech about Jupiter, in which he indicates that he believes him all-powerful and supremely good.

These shifting relationships match his priorities and outlook at each stage of his life, and he aligns himself with Venus, Mars, Diana, and Jupiter in turn as he grows and changes over two decades. Theseus' changing relationship to the god traces a distinctive arc of human spiritual development, revealing a quiet coming-of-age narrative embedded behind the tale's more obvious romantic plot.

I. Love and War

Although Theseus is a devoted warrior when we first meet him, Mars was not the first god he seriously worshiped. When he finds Arcita and Palamon dueling in the woods, he forgives their foolishness because they are acting for love, which he can relate to. "In my tyme a servant [of Love] was I oon," says Theseus, "And therfore... as he that hath ben caught ofte in his [snare], I yow for[give] hoolly this trespaas" (1814-18). More than just having been in love at some point, Theseus fell under its spell so seriously and frequently that he can relate to the impulse to kill one's own cousin in the woods for the mere chance of obtaining one's beloved.

Instead of judging the folly of Arcita and Palamon's duel for Emily, Theseus indicates that to be driven mad by love at some point is inevitable, and that it is most fitting for a young man: "all [must be] assayed, hoot and coold; a man [must be] a fool, [either] yong or oold" (1811-12). To have a lovesick phase appears completely natural, and it is most appropriate to get it over with while young and resilient.

Although he does not specify at what age he was a devotee of love, it is likely before the story begins; while a servant of love might wage war for the sake of winning his love (we see Palamon, a follower of Venus, planning just that), once she was won, he would surely be preoccupied by her company for some time. Theseus does no such thing after taking Hippolyta for a bride. Before he even makes it home to Athens to enjoy his newly-won wife, he is distracted by another battle, riding forth as does "the rede statue of Mars" (975) to conquer Thebes. It seems that by the time the story begins, love has ceased to be a primary object for him; he is instead thoroughly focused on leading his army. At this time, he is "swich a conquerour that gretter was there noon under the sonne" (862-3), and this lust for battle occupies him completely. He is so singularly focused on war at this stage in his life that he could not be imagined to follow any god but Mars, and it is likely this devotion that motivates the later building of a temple to him.

Theseus' wholehearted devotions to Venus and Mars are mirrored by those of Palamon and Arcita, who both emphasize that love and victory in battle are their only focus. In his prayer to Venus, Palamon says: "I [hope] noight of armes for to [boast, nor do] I axe... tomorwe to have victorie... but I wolde have fully possessioun of Emelye, and dye in thy servyse" (2239-41). Arcita, on the other hand, asks Mars "[Give] me victorie, I aske thee namoore" (2420).

It is perhaps inevitable in a polytheistic world that those most devoted to any individual god would suffer, at the hands of that god or otherwise. A human life is complex and made up of many components, and to focus wholeheartedly on only one aspect of life does not often lead to contentment. It makes sense, then, that to be devoted completely to just one aim belongs foremost to the young.

For people in this stage of life, one god is everything. They are passionate and emotional, convinced that they know exactly how they ought to live, and act wholly in pursuit of love, ambition, social justice, the thrill of a party, or any of the myriad other fixations that call out to the young. This lifestyle is difficult to maintain; a passionate love cannot sustain itself at an all-consuming intensity for long. Although we were at first unsure whether our beloved "be womman or goddesse" (1101), as we get to know her better she begins to fall firmly in the human category. As for warriors, they must either die "in his excellence and flour" (3048) or cease to really be a warrior, when "his name [enfeebled] is for age, for al forgotten is his [prowess]" (3053-54). For most, thirst for battle, like extreme lust, will be outgrown over time.

It is not unusual that Theseus undergoes two such 'devotee' phases. War gives many a dose of reality, requiring courage and a sense of duty, and instilling a great deal of pride into those who make it safely home. It is easy to imagine a new soldier finding that the unrequited love he used to dwell on so intensely feels silly in comparison with his new, serious purpose. Still, to run bravely into battle requires a certain ability to ignore reality; one must be able to commit fully to the enterprise without dwelling on moral qualms or fears of dying. The more one witnesses the deaths of friends and the devastation caused to the enemy, the harder these worries become to ignore.

Theseus' relative immaturity at the beginning of the tale is evident in the way he speaks to the wailing women he meets coming home from Scythia, asking: "What folk been ye, that at myn homcomynge perturbed so my feste with [crying]?... have ye so greet envye of myn honour, that thus compleyne and crye?" (905-7). Even if meant purely in jest, this sarcastic manner of speaking to his ailing subjects belies his prideful, even cocky demeanor at this age, which contrasts greatly with his empathetic, measured speeches later in the story.

In fact, this very moment seems to have had a serious impact on Theseus' character; as soon as the widows explain their situation he seems to regret the way he initially approached them, quickly leaping down from his horse "with herte [pitiful]" and taking them up "in his armes... confort[ing them] in ful good entente" before setting off to avenge their dead husbands (952-8). A recognition of the rudeness of his opening remarks probably contributed to this

remorse, but there is perhaps another reason that speaking to the women affected him so deeply: they forced him to reckon with the impermanence of his fortune.

A young man, especially one coming off the heels of many successful battles, often feels invincible, as though all his assets are the result of his own excellent character. When Capaneus' widow addresses Theseus as "Lord, to whom Fortune hath [g]iven victorie" (915-6), and describes her own fall from nobility to wretchedness, it serves as a harsh reminder that luck, too, has played a large role in his prosperity. "Thanked be Fortune and [her] false wheel," that no estate is assured "to be weel" (924-6), she tells him, and strikes fear in his heart as he realizes that he and his city are not immune to misery. This is a crucial realization for Theseus, and reflecting on his potential for failure is likely what causes him to enter the next stage of his life, in which he takes extreme care to ensure everything goes right for the people he cares about.

II. Family and Control

During the time between the battle at Thebes and the time when he happens upon Arcita and Palamon dueling in the woods, Theseus undergoes significant change. On that morning, we see him engaged in a new passion: "in his huntyng hath he swich delit that it is al his joye and appetit... for after Mars he serveth now Dyane" (1679-82). It is less clear exactly what it means for Theseus to serve Diana than to serve Mars or Venus, as chastity is not something most people take up in middle age (although sexual desire does often wane with time). Hunting, though, makes more sense as an adult devotion; a hunter, historically at least, is a provider, seeking sustenance for his family and community.

When stalking in the woods, Theseus even brings his wife and sister-in-law along with him, suddenly a family man. Emily and Hippolyta may have been mere trophies at the beginning of the story, but they have since become true companions, whose advice on what to do with Arcita and Palamon he takes seriously (even if they still feel the need to wail and flatter him as they give it). It is even possible that it is a connection with these Amazonian women that sparks his worship of Diana in the first place—after all, Emily is her devoted follower, and the things Diana represents would certainly seem to align with the values of Hippolyta's society of female warriors.

As she is depicted by Theseus on the walls of her temple, the three-fold goddess Diana foremost represents transformation, the waxing moon about to wane. Callisto turned constellation, Dana become tree, a baby about to be born (potentially killing its mother); the sanctuary is adorned with pivotal changes. Perhaps it is also for this reason that Theseus worships Diana, because he is a man in a transition from young to old. He is now married and past his days of passionate loves or violent wars, and is ready to begin a process of careful maturation.

Before, when war supplanted love as his key desire, Theseus committed fully to Mars in a way that we do not see in his newfound respect for Diana. In the very same scene, he both opens and closes his threat to the fighting brothers with invocations to his old god, indicating lingering reverence: "By myghty Mars, he [who moves] shal anon be deed" (1708), he begins,

and ends, definitively, ‘ye shal be deed, by myghty Mars the rede!’ (1747). This indicates that the transition from Mars to Diana is of a distinct character to his prior shift from Venus to Mars. It seems he has escaped the stage when he let one devotion rule his entire life, and instead come to balance multiple desires at once. A man at this stage might go to war for a truly just cause, or feel love toward his wife and children, but would not consider either to be the only purpose of his actions. This balance is epitomized by his construction of three temples at once, to each of the gods he has worshipped up to this point.

The location of Diana’s temple, “northward, in a touret on the wal” (1908), is significant. Instead of being built in one of the gates the warriors rush through, like Venus’ and Mars’ temples, hers is not aligned with either side of the battle. Instead, like her followers Theseus and Emily, she is a mere spectator, observing the battle but not participating in it. Although clearly still invested in warfare, Theseus’ role at the age when he worships Diana most of all has become that of a planner and supervisor, no longer a direct combatant. This makes some sense; as we age, our physical prowess ceases to be a viable source of power, and we are forced to use our wits if we want to maintain a position of strength. It is fitting, then, that this is a period of personal evaluation for Theseus, in which he begins to think very carefully about all his decisions, knowing that he will soon have nothing but his mind to fall back on.

It is likely a consequence of this reflection that Theseus has come to recognize the dangers of worshipping a single god. As he grows, he sees the folly of being so single-minded and emotionally driven: “who may [be] a fool, [unless] he love?” (1799). Instead, multiple pursuits have a place in his life, and with them multiple gods deserve his honor. Beyond an increased understanding of the importance of being well-rounded, Theseus by this age has also grown to let his reason overtake his pride, offering mercy when he can. His emphasis on chivalry complements this rationality: in order to ensure his conduct remains noble, a knight must necessarily choose his actions with thoughtful precision, sometimes even acting against his interests for the sake of what is right.

Theseus’ focus on reason manifests as a desire for control and order. Understanding the volatility of his fortune, he undertakes to secure it through careful consideration. We see this in the construction and organization of the battle for Emily. Having chosen the decoration of every part of the arena, Theseus develops detailed rules to ensure fairness and safety, enforcing them from the sidelines as a “trewe juge, and no part[isan]” (2657). Even though he has seen the brutality of countless wars and knows the futility of trying to govern lovers with a law, he nonetheless sets out to hold a perfectly gentle battle, somehow imagining he can avoid anyone dying. He designs the rules to be just severe enough that nobody’s honor is hurt (“to be [led] by force unto the stake... was [counted them] no [disgrace]... no man [may call] it coward[ice]” (2723-30)), but just lenient enough “that they shal nat dye” (2541).

Even after Arcita is severely wounded, Theseus remains in denial of his impending death, coming home “with alle blisse and greet [pomp]” (2702), although it is hard to say to what extent this celebration is truly felt or whether it is mostly for the sake of general morale. This

celebration of a supposedly peaceful fight, despite many being “soore yhurt... [one] with a spere... [pierced through] his brest boon” (2709-10) and another on his deathbed, is almost ridiculous; for all Theseus’ attempts to control and frame the situation, it is an undeniable disaster.

Theseus at this age is sharp and intelligent, sure of what he wants and adept at calculating the best actions to take to achieve his ends and act as a fair leader. He is rational, but he is not yet truly wise; after all, his plan to avoid any casualties is a failure. Not only does someone die, but the corpse is the winner of the contest he has spent an entire year devising; in the end, the victor shall not have Emily, though he “by his fortune hath h[er] fair[ly] ywonne” (2659). When Arcita succumbs to his wounds in spite of all Theseus’ careful planning, it serves as a devastating lesson that no matter how good a leader he tries to be, he will never be able to save all his people or stop his city from eventually falling.

This realization shakes Theseus deeply enough to make him reevaluate his faith. When organizing Arcita’s funeral, he appears most angry at Diana, the goddess on whom he has most recently fixated. We learn from Emily’s prayer that Diana is the “chaste goddess of the [woods] grene” (2297), which makes sense given the woodland setting of the hunting party earlier. After Arcita dies, Theseus burns the entirety of those same woods in an immense funeral pyre.

Although the knight claims he will not speak of the funeral at length, he spends so long describing the types of trees felled and the destruction that the pyre’s construction wreaks on the land that the scene stands out as surely significant. “The goddes [ran] up and down, dis[in]herited of [their] habitacioun... the beestes and the [birds] alle fledden for fere, whan the [wood] was [felled]” (2925-30); this destructive act is a serious dishonoring of Diana’s wood. Acteon, on her temple wall, was turned to a stag and eaten by his hunting party “for vengeance that he s[aw] Diane al naked” (2066). Theseus forcing the nymphs to flee with no trees to cover themselves and exposing the floor of Diana’s forest so that “the ground aghast was of the light” (2931) can even be seen as an invasive undressing of a similar nature. These are the desperate actions of a man utterly overcome with woe.

Theseus, then, out of grief for his close friend and despair at the chaotic misery of existence, seeks revenge on the goddess he worshipped most dearly. He is perhaps even crying out to be punished; if Diana were to react immediately and turn him into a stag then he would at least have some proof of heavenly consistency. Instead, just as Venus took no action when Theseus turned his focus toward war, Diana remains silent. Neither she, Venus, nor Mars is ever mentioned again.

III. Acceptance

The Theseus we meet next is a calmer man. Endeavoring to make Thebes allegiant to Athens, he engineers a marriage between Emily and Palamon, winning them over with a carefully constructed speech on the relationship between gods and mortals. His conception of the gods has clearly changed greatly since the days of the battle, when he built temples to three of

them and sought foremost to evade death. Now, there is only one god for him, Jupiter, who is the ‘first mover’ and the cause of everything: “I seyn that al [things must] dye. What [causes] this but Juppiter, the kyng, that is prince and cause of all thyng...?” (3034-6). He claims that everything resides “in certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee” (2993), tied to Jupiter’s great chain of love. In contrast to the earlier sinister portrayals of the other gods on the walls of their temples, Jupiter is described as “parfait... and stable” (3009), and the death he causes, instead of being a tragedy, is merely “convert[ing] al unto his propre [source] from which it is dirryved” (3037-8).

Once wholly preoccupied with evading misfortune, Theseus seems to have made peace with the inevitability of decline. Just as he once realized that worshiping only one god was foolish, he now looks back on his attempts to avoid death in a similar light: “Whoso [complains at all], he dooth fo[ol], and rebel is to hym that al may [guide]” (3045-6). This new god is loving and all powerful, directing things as they ought to be directed. Instead of lamenting or being angry, as Theseus did when faced with hardship earlier in the story, he recommends gratitude: “After wo[e] I [advise] us to be merye, and thanken Juppiter of al his grace” (3068-9). Death, in this worldview, is perhaps even merciful; instead of being trapped in the “foule prisoun of this lyf” (3061), the departed soul is free to return whence it came.

This new worldview helps Theseus cope with not only death but pain in general, because he believes whatever happens to be a necessary part of the “faire cheyne of love” (2989) that Jupiter began so long ago. When creating this chain, “wel [knew Jupiter] why, and what [by it] he mente” (2990); nothing came about by accident. In contrast to the chaotic competing desires of his earlier polytheistic conception, this world is ordered and planned by one benevolent deity, and so does not necessitate such meticulous planning on his part. Any misfortune Theseus or his loved ones experience must somehow be in service of that plan, and is, therefore, a little easier to swallow. He no longer has to worry about appeasing a pantheon of fickle gods; in fact, he does not have to worry about anything at all. His destiny is laid before him, and all he has to do is meet it contentedly.

IV. Chaos

This view of the world is consoling to Theseus and seems to make him a happier man. It represents a significant departure, however, from the actual godly relationships we see during the prayer and battle scenes. It is difficult to imagine, however, that the “prince and cause of all thyng” (3036) would be unable to keep lesser gods from fighting one another without the aid of an older god, as happens to Jupiter after Palamon and Arcita make their prayers to Mars and Venus: “swich strif there is... in the hevene above... that Juppiter was [kept busy] to [stop it] til... Saturnus the colde... pleased every part” (2438-46). In fact, the very existence of an older god than Jupiter seems to cast doubt on his status as prince of this world; he certainly cannot be the creator of everything.

When speaking to placate Mars and Venus, Saturn directly contradicts Theseus’ claim that Jupiter is responsible for the eventual fall of men, cities, rivers and trees: “Myn is the ru[in]

of the h[igh] halles, the fallynge of the toures and of the walle. Myne be the maladyes colde... my looking is the fader of pestilence,” he says, taking credit for a large portion of the world’s cruelty (2463-9). At the very least, Saturn must be the one abridging the days of many of Jupiter’s creatures, and doing so in a remarkably cruel manner; these lives cut short do not enjoy an honorable death in battle that their relatives can take solace in, are not “departed... with duetee and honour” (3060) as Theseus claims Arcita was. Instead, they are dark, quiet deaths: “the [drowning] in the se[a] so wan... the stranglyng...by the throte... the pr[ivate] empo[isoning]” (2456-60).

Even Arcita’s death, although praised by Theseus as honorable, is not quite the typical death of a knight. He is trampled by his own horse after winning a contrived battle, and then spends days in agony trying every cure imaginable to no avail. At last, Arcita dies because “hym ga[ineth] neither... vomyt upward, n[or] dounwawrd laxatif... al is [shattered in that] regioun” (2755-7); this death is visceral and bodily, a far cry from a swift, noble death on the battlefield.

It is not especially surprising that Theseus does not recognize Saturn’s role in the world’s cruelty; after all, Saturn tells us explicitly that his “cours... hath moore power than [knows] any man” (2454-5). Although he acts quietly, Saturn is clearly a powerful force, perhaps even more powerful than Jupiter; where we see Saturn make peace between two other gods and kill a man with a fury from hell, in the course of the entire story we never see Jupiter do or say anything outright, save for that one moment in which he is unable to keep Mars and Venus from fighting one another. In his picture of the workings of the world, Theseus, like most men, is wrong in at least this respect, that he vastly underestimates the role of a power whose nature is not to make peace or order but to sow chaos and discontent.

When we are first introduced to Arcita and Palamon, we get a clue that in his final speech Theseus might be mistaken about something else: the very idea that Jupiter has assigned “certeyne dayes and duracioun to al that is engendred in this place, over the which day they may nat page” (2996-8). After Thebes’ defeat, the two cousins are found in a pile of corpses, and “nat fully [alive, nor] fully dede they were” (1015). If we are to assume that Arcita and Palamon actually died on that battlefield, and then came back to life somehow, the events of the rest of the story would then be an extension of the duration they ought to have lived.

It seems, then, that at least sometimes creatures’ actual lifespans do not correspond very closely to those allotted to them. Sure, sometimes the oak “hath so long a life... yet at the laste wasted is” (3019-20), but often that decay is not so natural, occurring well before the last. Sometimes that oak, along with its whole forest, is cut down in its prime and burned in the rage of a ruler, angry at his friend’s own premature death. On the other hand, the end of this supposed duration is not especially strict either. Sometimes, after a whole generation of Thebans has died, two knights are resurrected with the power to continue Thebes’ noble bloodline and bring an entire city back from its ashes. Given these possibilities, a view that the world is ordered according to the aims of just one god seems like it is missing something; if God

has a plan, it is not very specific and allows for a great deal of both positive and malicious interference.

If any character has an understanding of the possibility that the world might be more chaotic than ordered, it is Theseus' father, Aegeus. "This world [is] but a th[orough]fare ful of wo[e]," he tells Theseus, "and we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro." (2847-8) His speech emphasizes that "ther [lived] never a man... in al this world that som tyme he [did not] d[ie]" (2844-6), just as Theseus' does, but in Aegeus' message there is no mention of an ordered world or any kind of god. The comfort, for him, comes purely from the idea that the world is full of suffering, so to watch a loved one die is to watch them find relief.

When Saturn is first introduced, we learn that "elde hath greet advantage; in elde is bothe wysdom and [experience]; men may the old [outrun], and noght [outwit]" (2447-9). It makes sense, then, that Aegeus would be the one with the greatest understanding of Saturn's power; the most elderly of any character we see, he ought also to be the wisest and his observations the most astute. Perhaps, as he ages, Theseus too will come to 'worship Saturn', accepting death without the need for any religion to soften the blow.

The knight himself seems to take this approach. When Arcita is at last pronounced dead, the knight is deliberately ambiguous as to where his soul goes: "as I [have been there] nevere, I kan nat tellen wher. Therefore I [stay quiet], I am no divinistre; of soules fynde I [nothing] in this [book, nor do I want] opinions to telle of [t]hem" (2809-15). He is not a man desperate for spiritual knowledge, seeking the answers to his every question about the workings of the world. No, he is instead simply a man who tries to teach his son, a devotee of lust, a little about how to cope with the world, just as old Aegeus tries to help Theseus through all his grief.

It seems, then, that although Theseus has reached a contentment that might serve him well, he has not yet discovered the truth of the way the gods operate. He is right that all things must eventually fall, but this fact does not necessitate a loving power at the helm, or any kind of detailed plan for the world, only a general tendency toward ruin. He has come a long way since the days when he laughed at a group of wailing women and thought foremost of his own honor, but there is growing left for Theseus still.

Conclusion

We are presented through the course of the tale with three distinct ways in which Theseus interacts with the gods, each aligning with a different stage of life. The first, that of the devotee, belongs foremost to the young. Theseus goes through two such devotee stages with Love and War, before he comes to recognize the pitfalls of placing so much emphasis on only one facet of life. Theseus illustrates these dangers on the walls of the temples he builds, perhaps also as a warning to the young people who worship within.

As he lets go of youthful passions and becomes influenced by his new family, he becomes more analytic and attempts to think his way through every situation. He plans the battle meticulously in an attempt to ensure that his desired results are certain to come to pass, making

sure to honor multiple gods, Venus, Mars, and Diana, in order to have the best chance of success.

This, too, turns out to be a harmful approach; nobody, not even the gods, can get everything they want, no matter how well formed their plans. His battle ends in disaster. This realization is difficult to grapple with and causes profound sadness to Theseus and many others. He is at first furious at the gods, unable to accept his position of relative powerlessness, and lashes out by burning Diana's entire forest. While this might have felt cathartic, it is not any grand gesture that brings him real peace but rather a connection with his father.

As his emotions calm and his grief becomes more bearable, he comes to worship Jupiter, accepting that misfortune is inevitable and he, like everything, must die someday. Still, doubts must linger at times about whether that trust might be misplaced; once one has experienced enough terrible events, it becomes harder and harder to believe in a divine plan justifying everything that has happened. As Theseus ages and wisens, he has gotten closer to understanding the truth about the godly relationships that determine the world, but he is still a long way from facing the uncomfortable truth that the world is more chaotic than he would like to believe.

Theseus' growth and change show us that the *Knight's Tale* is about more than chivalry and romance. Behind the main arc of the story is a subtle but profound reflection on the way we learn from sudden loss and struggle to make sense of an often incomprehensible world.

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Our Life's Journey as Epic in Dante's *Divine Comedy*

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to examine epic poetry as a journey of self-transformation in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Beginning with the western epic tradition that Dante participates in, I examine the increasing presence of the poet within his poetry. I then explore how Dante has taken the final step in this process by epicizing his own life journey, placing himself within his art, framing the creation of epic poetry as a process of self-discovery. To examine how Dante rediscovers himself, I contend that guidance is a necessary first step in this process. I analyze Dante's portrayal of Ulysses and Virgil in *Inferno*, who both demonstrate the importance of guidance to escape hell and enter Purgatory, to escape confusion and enter self-correction. But to take the next step, one must learn to guide oneself. In my analysis of Statius, I contend that Dante frames epic poetry as a tool to guide others to where one could not guide themselves, but simultaneously, that this form of guidance cannot carry one all the way through Purgatory. Finally, I contend that Dante's portrayal of the siren exemplifies, contrary to Virgil's understanding, the limited power of the inborn will. Will is not enough; experience, faith, and grace are necessary to purge oneself of sin and right one's path. Dante views epic poetry as a necessary mediator to enlightenment on the journey out of hell; but to surpass one's guides and make one's way through purgatory, one must become their own guide; and finally, to arrive in heaven, one must discern how to defeat the Siren and let the primal urge direct the inborn will.

Introduction:

*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
ché la diritta via era smarrita.*

(Dante, *Inferno*, I.1-3)

Dante does not explore the divine realms by himself; instead, throughout his journey, he must be guided by mediators to help him interpret what he sees. To make sense of the world, it must often be explained to us. Somehow, the self is often unintelligible to itself, turning to family, friends, priests, therapists, etc., needing an external being to mediate its internal dialogue. Dante begins halfway through *our* life's journey, opening his hundred-hymn epic with a profound and peculiar choice of diction. He unifies two separate identities, speaker and audience, with the word '*nostra*' universalizing his experience and presenting his life as a shared journey. The subsequent line divides one identity into two, separating the subjective ego from his objective self when *I* finds *myself* lost in a dark forest. How does *I* find *myself*?

As Jonathan Tuck remarks in his lecture "Sons of Homer: The Genealogy of the Epic Poem," the epic tradition is one of imitation and competition – "each successive poem contains and then surpasses its predecessors."¹ As with the generations of men, poems hope to not only emulate, but advance the work accomplished by their ancestors. As the genre's name implies, epics are characteristically about *epic* events: wars, journeys, explorations of the divine realms, etc. but importantly, they not only depict these events but *personalize* them. This paper seeks to examine Dante's perspective on the epic canon, why it is necessary and when it fails, through his depiction of heroes and poets in *The Divine Comedy*. I hope to demonstrate that Dante's greatest contribution to the epic tradition is the insertion of the poet's self into their art – the complete personalization of epic and the key to self-actualization.

The Process of Personalizing Epic:

At the beginning of Dante's journey, he finds himself confused, afraid, unable to recall how he entered the wood, and retreating to lower ground in fear of beasts, when a faint figure appears. Once Dante realizes this figure is Virgil, he supplicates himself, pleading for help to defeat the she-wolf blocking his way; but Virgil tells Dante, "It is another path that you must take."² Why is Dante's chosen guide for the underworld Virgil? The obvious answers are commonly brought up in contemporary conversations: Virgil inspired Dante's style of poetry, writes about the underworld, and both present themselves as prophets (*vates*) who both prophesize a *novum*

All Dante quotations are from the Allen Mandelbaum translation.

All other quotations are translated by the author unless otherwise specified.

¹ Jonathan Tuck, "Sons of Homer: The Genealogy of an Epic Poem," St. John's College Digital Archives, accessed January 7, 2026, <https://digitalarchives.sjc.edu/items/show/6540>.

² Dante, *Inferno*, I.91-3.

progeniem (a new progeny).³ This paper seeks to add to that conversation Virgil's attempts to *personalize* epic poetry, giving agency and responsibility to the poet's perspective and their interpretation of the divine will.

The opening to the *Iliad*, the indisputable originator of the epic tradition that Dante partakes in, notably makes no explicit mention of its poet. Instead, it emphasizes that this story is about the rage of a particular, explicit, and named figure, Achilles.

μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος

Sing the rage, Goddess, of Achilleus, son of Pelius⁴

Achilles, a demigod, is the child of a god and a demigod, the sea goddess Thetis and the mortal son of Poseidon, Pelius. Therefore, the *Iliad*, being a story about a demi-god in an ancient war, emphasizes that it concerns the intersection between the divine and human. Contrast this opening with the opening to the *Odyssey*:

ἄνδρά μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον

Tell *me* about *a man*, Muse, of many ways⁵

Instead of the first word “μῆνιν” (rage), the *Odyssey* begins with “ἄνδρα” (a man). Odysseus, unlike Achilles, is born to two mortals. The second word of the *Odyssey*, μοι, makes the opening phrase “a man *for me*.” Homer has now introduced himself as the poet into the canon of the epic tradition via the word μοι, an ethical dative demonstrating the interest of the speaker.⁶ The *Iliad* appears to emphasize the divine, and therefore distant nature of the poem. It is a poem sung by a Goddess about a demi-god and an ancient war. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, is told, and told to a poet or for the poet's sake, emphasizing that the *Odyssey* is a story about a man, a man for me.

Virgil combines both openings to form the first line of the *Aeneid*:

arma virumque *cano*, Troiae qui primus ab oris

I sing of arms and a man, who first from the shores of Troy...⁷

Mimicking both epics, Virgil sings of war and an unnamed man whom we will come to know as the epic's eponymous hero. The *Aeneid* is both about an individual hero like the *Odyssey* and something far greater than that hero, the progeny of Rome, like the *Iliad*. It is both personal and universal. But more than emulating and synthesizing these epics, Virgil is *translating* and reviving them for a new civilization while adding his own interpretation. Although Virgil includes an invocation of the muse later on, in the opening line, Virgil himself sings the story,

³ Robert Hollander, "Dante's Virgil: A Light That Failed," *Lectura Dantis*, no. 4 (1989): 3, www.jstor.org/stable/44806718.

⁴ Homer, *Iliad* I.1.

⁵ Homer, *Odyssey* I.1.

⁶ Thomas Van Nortwick and Rob Hardy, *Homer: Odyssey 5–12*. Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Dickinson College Commentaries, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-947822-17-7 <https://dcc.dickinson.edu/homer-odyssey/i-1-43>; Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, § 1486.

⁷ Virgil, *Aeneid* I.1.

placing responsibility and emphasis on the poet instead of attributing the story to the divine alone.⁸ He also tells a new story about the Romans, particularizing the universal principles of the epic tradition and reviving its legacy for a new audience. Virgil has both imitated and surpassed the epics that came before him by continuing a process that started with the *Odyssey* – humanizing the epic poem.

Returning to Dante's opening, Dante seeks to do the same thing as Virgil: continue the process of personalizing epic while remodeling the tradition for a new audience. Dante's first line clarifies that this story and this journey is for all of us:

*Nel mezzo del cammin di **nostra** vita*

In the middle of **our** life's journey⁹

Like Virgil, Dante frames his epic to be both personal and universal. Even more explicitly than Virgil, in Dante's second line, he writes "*mi ritrova*" (I re-found myself). Dante explicitly casts himself as the hero and pilgrim of his own epic, merging artist, art, and audience. In addition to mimicking preceding epics by starting the story *in media res*, Dante has furthered the purpose of epic poetry by portraying its creation as an act of self-discovery. Poetry is no longer the investigation of an object, but the investigation of a subject. Through the process of integrating the poet and the hero, i.e. *epicizing* one's own life journey, the feedback loop between one's idea or image of themselves and their true self facilitates the means to truly know oneself. If the act of reading epic poetry is the investigation of externals to reflect inwardly, and the act of creating epic poetry is a process of inward reflection with the end of depicting these truths externally, then the synthesis of these two processes is the synthesis of the internal and external, subject and object, themselves, thus giving one direct rather than indirect knowledge of self. Dante has taken the final step begun by Homer of placing the poet within epic poetry, both literally in his art and metaphorically in his worldview. Dante has completed the meta-poetic journey of epic spanning across two millennia of poets and poems; for he has fully unveiled the epic poem as a metaphor for the poet's own life journey.

The Self & The Guide:

Dante's art does not have to speak for itself, but rather his unique position as poet-pilgrim enables him to speak for it within it. With this new ability, Dante can comment on preceding epics in a way none of the other epic poets can. For instance, in the eighth circle of Hell, Ulysses is found being punished in one shared flame with Diomedes. Dante asks Virgil to wait to speak to them because "out of my desire, I bend towards it [their flame]" and Virgil praises Dante's request and permits their delay.¹⁰ While Virgil could have and did comment on Ulysses by changing how his character is portrayed, only the integrated poet-pilgrim can express their own desire and tendency towards a hero's behavior and fate so explicitly. In Dante's encounter with him, Ulysses recounts that, after venturing beyond where Hercules had set up boundary stones (a

⁸ Ibid., I.8.

⁹ Dante, *Inferno*, I.1.

¹⁰ Dante, XXVI.69.

divine warning), he encouraged his companion to continue onwards to a land that is unpeopled. As they approached a dark mountain, a whirlwind rose from the land and sank them.¹¹ Through Dante's expression of his desire and tendency towards Ulysses' flame, he is able to not only portray his interpretation of preceding epics, but portray how such an interpretation is significant to him personally.

Although it is generally agreed that Dante did not read the *Odyssey*, it is undoubtedly true that Virgil, the poet from whom Dante adopts the character of Ulysses, did. This is poetically represented by Dante's silence in Virgil's conversation with Ulysses. Since Dante did not know Greek, he only knew of Odysseus from other poets, which is why it is particularly his language abilities that prevent them from conversing.¹² Throughout the *Odyssey*, although Odysseus is portrayed as crafty and sharp-witted, he is also portrayed as a questionable leader and a sinful trickster. He pillages towns, can't control his crew, can't control himself, and he loses much of his crew even before they incur the wrath of Poseidon. He incurs said wrath due to his own ego and hubris, revealing his name to the blinded Polyphemus who then prayed to delay his return and bring trouble to his household. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil portrays Ulysses as the "... *scelerumque inventor*" or "the inventor of crimes/impieties."¹³ From Odysseus to Ulysses, the flaws of the same hero go from implicit to explicit.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus receives a prophecy from Teiresias in the underworld that tells him once he arrives home, he must "journey / until you come where there are men living who know nothing / of the sea."¹⁴ And once there, he must plant an oar as a shrine and make a sacrifice to Poseidon. However, in Dante's account, Ulysses does not perform this task but gives in to his desire to keep exploring until he finds a land that is wholly unpeopled. Ulysses directly claims that:

Neither my fondness for my son nor pity
for my old father nor the love I owed
Penelope which would have gladdened her,
was able to defeat in me the longing
I had to experience the world
and of the vices and the worth of men.¹⁵

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' mistakes are often attributed to an innocent curiosity to know the minds and towns of many men. This apparently innocent desire to explore is revealed by Dante through Ulysses' mouth to be a wanton and reckless disregard for the obligations and relationships one holds at home. In the *Odyssey*, Teiresias tells Odysseus that he must carry an

¹¹ Ibid., 90-142.

¹² Ibid., 73-75.

¹³ Virgil, *Aeneid* II.164.

¹⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, XI.121-23.

¹⁵ Dante, *Inferno* XXVI.94-99.

oar to where men know nothing of the sea and give recognition to Poseidon.¹⁶ The duty that Odysseus carries from surviving his journey is that he must be a teacher, a rectifier, and a guide in such a way that the punishment fits the crime: he must help those who would not know Poseidon *see* him in exchange for blinding his son. Although the *Odyssey* suggests that Odysseus follows through with this obligation, the *Aeneid* certainly does not suggest it, and Dante explicitly tells us that Ulysses' love for his family and the obligations that come with it were not enough to curb his desire for experience.

In Dante's account, Ulysses does not listen to Hercules, who in this case serves as his divine guide, building pillars to mark the limits of the known world that one ought not pass.¹⁷ When Ulysses transgresses this boundary, he says he sees the other pole and approaches a dark mountain. Dante also depicts Purgatory as a mountain with sight of the opposite pole, one that is lit by two suns: the world's path and god's path.¹⁸ Since Ulysses does not have the light of Rome's laws, nor the laws of Israel, nor Christ's teaching, nor any request for divine guidance, and is in fact acting contrary to the divine guidance he has received, this mountain appears to be Purgatory, but it is dark because the suns are either absent or eclipsing one another. Ulysses is an unenlightened man who acts without the direction of church nor state. Dante's alteration to Odysseus' ending demonstrates that his sin is to venture to a place where no man has gone before not just without a guide, but against a guide's instruction. Even if Ulysses found Purgatory on his own merits, he did it against Hercules' warning and beyond the scope of Teiresias' prophecy. Instead of paying his penance by evangelizing and then returning home to lead, to cultivate, and to teach, he never stopped exploring and gave in to his ardor for discovery. By relying solely on himself, he eclipses the two suns that light purgatory, placing them in one central position, himself, darkening the pathway forward.

Ulysses' punishment – being trapped in a flame with Diomedes, who not only shares his divine patron, Athena, but also fought against gods with her protection and saw the gods' true forms undisguised, two things Ulysses did not ever get to do – serves as a reminder that he is not special for being favored by the gods. While Ulysses is eternally reminded that others were just as, if not more, pious and beloved by the gods than he, Diomedes is constantly reminded that he is less famous than his flamemate. Diomedes' silence in Dante's interaction with the pair seems similar to a scene from the *Iliad*, in which Agamemnon reviews the troops and scolds them both. Odysseus talks back to Agamemnon, but Diomedes is silent with reverence for the king until another soldier speaks on his behalf, whom Diomedes then rebukes.¹⁹ Odysseus appears to talk back when being corrected, while Diomedes is silent, just as Dante portrays them in Hell. Despite Diomedes' apparent respect for authority, both he and Odysseus are punished as false counselors for their shared effort to persuade the Achaeans to ignore divine warnings and persist in their siege of Troy. In the *Iliad*, when Agamemnon encourages the Achaeans to retreat because

¹⁶ Homer, *Odyssey*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, XI.121-23.

¹⁷ Dante, *Inferno* XXVI.107-09.

¹⁸ Ibid., *Purgatorio*, XVI.106-08.

¹⁹ Homer, *Iliad* IV.338-418.

Zeus “glorifies our enemies, treating them as gods!” Ulysses and Diomedes both use the Achaeans’ wounded state and the sunk cost fallacy, as well as national pride, as arguments to persist despite the divine warnings.²⁰ As a punishment for their self-insistence, they are punished as a collective. Just as Virgil says to Dante, “they, who went as one to rage, now share one punishment.”²¹

Dante’s account of Ulysses reveals his ἀμαρτία and its cause: he fails to listen to a divine guide’s warning because his love for his family did not conquer his love of experience.²² Dante’s confession that he is drawn towards Ulysses’ flame demonstrates a similarity between them in this desire and tendency. However, unlike Ulysses, Dante appears to be listening to his divine guide. When Virgil tells him to be quiet and curb his desire to speak to the flame himself, but instead to let Virgil speak for him, Dante obeys without argument.²³ Although victim to the same temptations, Dante overcomes Odysseus’ second and greater sin of self-insistence. When Dante first encounters Virgil, he asks him to help defeat the she-wolf, and only then does Virgil properly guide him to take another path instead.²⁴ In contrast, Ulysses, when faced with the pillars of Hercules, relies on himself as the only necessary leader and pressures his men into transgressing a divine boundary for the sake of his own curiosity.²⁵ He does not try to seek help or guidance, but persists in his stubbornness. Even if Dante’s request for help was mistaken in direction (asking to defeat an undefeatable beast instead of asking to find the pathway out of the dark forest), since he was asking for advice, he was willing and able to heed Virgil’s correction. With Virgil’s guidance, Dante can make it to Purgatory without being smitten by a whirlwind as Ulysses was.

Ulysses’ story proves that external guidance and one’s openness to accepting it are necessary for one’s entry into Purgatory. This is further evidenced by Cato’s questions when they arrive, “who are you?” immediately followed by “who was your guide?” After being asked who his guide was, Virgil replies “I do not come through my/ own self. There was a lady sent from Heaven;/ her pleas led me to help and guide this man.”²⁶ Virgil also later confirms that “men need guidance in this place [Purgatory].”²⁷ By framing himself unconcealed at the center of his epic, Dante can meta-poetically encapsulate the importance of poetry, how the audience sees themselves reflected in it, and how our beloved heroes are victim to human passions; while simultaneously conveying the importance of poets, how they sing the hero’s story and serve as guides, helping the reader find clarity in confusion, and guiding one through metaphorical hell by helping them interpret what they see. But if human poets are guides, this raises a difficult

²⁰ Ibid., XIV.81-82, 93-104, 138-51.

²¹ Dante, *Inferno* XXVI.56-57.

²² Ibid., 94-99.

²³ Ibid., 73-75.

²⁴ Ibid., I.88-114.

²⁵ Dante, *Inferno* XXVI.112-20.

²⁶ Ibid., *Purgatorio* I.52-53.

²⁷ Ibid., XIII.18.

question: how is Virgil able to guide Dante through Purgatory, a realm with which he is unfamiliar? Must we only go where our guides have been before?

Self-Direction:

In Hell, Dante follows Virgil extremely closely. He rarely strays, and when he does, he is quickly recalled.²⁸ This is partly due to Dante's fear, but also due to Virgil's aptitude as a guide throughout *Inferno*.²⁹ One rare instance in which Dante does doubt Virgil in Hell is when they are denied entry into Dis and he asks if Virgil has ever been this low before. Virgil replies that he has been to the bottom once to retrieve a lost soul.³⁰ On this journey with Dante, Virgil only made one navigational error because he was tricked by a devil; and even though he was tricked, he was still able to reassure Dante and guide him back to safety.³¹ Virgil is an extremely competent guide for having only ever taken this journey once.

However, on their journey into Purgatory, a place where Virgil has never been, his flaws begin to show. While still in Ante-Purgatory, Dante asks his old friend, Casella, to sing "the songs/ of love that used to quiet all my longings," and Casella obliges.³² Dante states that "My master, I, and all that company/ around the singer seemed so satisfied,/ as if no other thing might touch our minds."³³ From their trance they are woken by Cato's chastising, and like doves leaving their food when they're startled, they scurried "like those who go and yet do not know where."³⁴ Dante, Virgil, and the crowd's succumbence to the pleasure of the song appears to be a foreshadowing of Dante's dream of the siren, an immersive and distracting pleasure that disenables the primal urge. The crowd's confused scattering appears symbolic of the disoriented and frantic state that accompanies realizing one is doing wrong, and could do better, but does not know how. Virgil's involvement in the crowd, instead of correcting Dante, demonstrates his failure to guide either of them anywhere without Cato's encouragement.

Virgil seems to exhibit a profound ability to examine the perdition of others in Hell, but a complete inability to recognize his own faults in Purgatory. After they scatter, Dante describes Virgil as "one who's been stung by self-reproof."³⁵ Virgil insists that Dante should trust his guidance, and stung, suggests "Foolish is he who hopes our intellect/ can reach the end of that unending road/ only one Substance in three Persons follows."³⁶ Virgil appears to be correct in stating that intellect is not what brings us to the end of that road, but he calls the road unending, as if nothing else (faith nor grace) could carry one to the finish line. Virgil continues:

²⁸ Ibid., *Inferno*, XXI.88-99.

²⁹ Ibid., XIX.37-39.

³⁰ Ibid., IX.1-27.

³¹ Ibid., XXI.127-35.

³² Ibid., *Purgatorio*, II.106-13.

³³ Ibid., 115-17.

³⁴ Ibid., 120-33.

³⁵ Ibid., III.7, 23-24.

³⁶ Ibid., 34-36.

‘You saw the fruitless longing of those men
who would – if reason could – have been content,
those whose desire eternally laments:
I speak of Aristotle and of Plato –
and many others.’ Here he bent his head
and said no more, remaining with his sorrow.³⁷

Virgil can clearly recognize the failure of the intellect in others with whom he shares a ring of Hell; however, he noticeably does not admit to counting himself among them. Virgil continues to consult his own mind as his eyes become focused on the ground.³⁸ He does not even understand the truth of what he said – that intellect alone cannot carry one to the end of the road – since he is still relying on his own mind to guide them. Dante must then step in as Virgil’s guide to get him to lift his eyes and seek external guidance.³⁹ Dante’s role in his journey transitions in Purgatory from the guided to the guide, an important step on the path to enlightenment.

Virgil’s initial behavior in Purgatory demonstrates his inability to recognize and face his own faults despite his ability to notice them in others. His refusal to forfeit his reliance on his intellect, despite recognizing it as a malady, is demonstrative of this trait; but it is best exemplified by his flawed understanding of Limbo and his place within it. Virgil can recognize that he is unworthy of entry into heaven, yet he claims he and the others in Limbo are sinless.⁴⁰ Virgil can recognize that he is in Limbo because he lacked “the portal of faith that you [Dante] embrace,” but he does not interpret lacking this faith to be a sin, for how else could he call those in Limbo sinless?⁴¹ Virgil both sees and does not see. He recognizes the weakness of intellect and the heaven-granting property of faith but is incapable of living up to this virtue of faith, nor does he see it as necessary for a sinless nature. Both sinless and faithless, at the boundary of Hell (Limbo coming from the Latin word “*limbus*”), Virgil lies both within and outside it.

At times, Virgil appears to blame his position in time and culture for his lack of faith.⁴² Virgil directly claims that before Christ’s death, “there were no human souls that had been saved.”⁴³ However, this is later proven untrue, since Ripheus found faith before Christ.⁴⁴ It also cannot be true that Virgil’s role in promoting Roman Paganism disabled his ability to find faith, given that Trajan supposedly found faith, who himself was deified.⁴⁵ Virgil claims to be sinless

³⁷ Ibid., 40-45.

³⁸ Ibid., 55-57.

³⁹ Ibid., 61-63.

⁴⁰ Ibid., *Inferno*, I.122; IV.34-39.

⁴¹ Ibid., Canto IV, 34-36.

⁴² Ibid., *Inferno*, Canto IV, 31-39.

⁴³ Ibid., 62-63.

⁴⁴ Ibid., *Paradiso*, XX.127-29.

⁴⁵ Ibid; Boer, W. den. “TRAJAN’S DEIFICATION AND HADRIAN’S SUCCESSION.” *Ancient Society* 6 (1975): 203-12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44080086>.

and calls those in Purgatory “chosen souls,” yet still understands that the ἀμαρτία of those in Limbo is their insistence on their intellect, a flaw he recognizes as such and is unaware, or at least unable to admit, that he shares with them.⁴⁶

Returning to the journey, Virgil seems to have learned from Dante’s correction, since he stops relying on himself and begins to seek “expert company” to guide them.⁴⁷ But Virgil now begins to rush Dante through Purgatory, repeatedly emphasizing time and asking him not to concern himself with the lost souls.⁴⁸ It is as if Virgil has interpreted Cato’s correction as ‘make haste,’ and not what he actually said, “Quick, to the mountain to cast of the slough/ that will not let you see God show himself.”⁴⁹ Cato commanded them to rush to, not through the terraces of purgatory. This is the first sign of Virgil’s inability to interpret. Virgil cannot navigate the uncharted territory of Purgatory because he cannot properly interpret the guidance he’s been given.

Virgil’s role transitions from Hell to Purgatory, from a knowledgeable guide to an encouraging friend. While not knowing exactly where to go, Virgil successfully comforts Dante and encourages him to keep ascending.⁵⁰ However, Virgil cannot *guide* Dante and must regularly appeal to others to guide them to the next spur or terrace.⁵¹ This is also how Dante guides Virgil when he is stung by self-reproof. Neither character knows where to go, but they remind one another of their purpose and encourage each other to seek more knowing guides. It appears that in Purgatory, human guides serve less as knowledgeable mediators and more as encouraging partners in our mutual ascension. Although guidance is necessary to escape Hell, both literal and metaphorical, it appears human wisdom cannot guide one through, but only encourage the process of purging oneself of sins.

Virgil’s failure as a guide goes beyond his navigational skills when he begins to become a hazard to Dante on the ascension to the second spur. Once more, Virgil successfully encourages Dante to keep moving, but when two shades ask Virgil to “tell us something more of what you are,” Virgil does not reply by turning their attention towards their divine mission, which may have given them clear passage, but instead he turns their attention towards Dante’s bodily flesh, causing Dante and Virgil to be swarmed by beseeching spirits, making their journey more arduous.⁵² Virgil, while still being an important motivating presence for Dante, is also beginning to pose a danger due to his focus on the body.

On the difficult ascent to the first terrace, Virgil again demonstrates his flawed reliance on his intellect – “‘Here we shall need some ingenuity,’ my guide warned me, ‘as both of us draw near/ this side or that side where the rock wall veers.’/ This made our steps so slow and

⁴⁶ Dante, *Purgatorio*, III.73.

⁴⁷ Ibid., IV.39.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 137-39; XII.85-87; XIII.10-12.

⁴⁹ Ibid., II.122-23.

⁵⁰ Ibid., IV.43-51.

⁵¹ Ibid., 37-39; VII.61-63.

⁵² Ibid., V.31-36, 43-63.

hesitant.”⁵³ Is Dante’s ‘this’ the difficulty of the journey itself, or could it be Virgil’s reliance on his ingenuity? Virgil, like Odysseus, wants to rely on himself while undertaking what he knows to be a divine mission – “*arma virumque cano*.” When they finally arrive at the first terrace, Dante is quick to acknowledge the arrogance of Christians, but he does not recognize the arrogance of his guide.⁵⁴ It is worth noting that Virgil is still guiding Dante’s attention (poetically, his sight), telling him when to look down at the images below his feet for solace and when to turn his attention towards the angel of humility to ascend.⁵⁵

When the weight of pride is lifted off of Dante, Virgil emphasizes that soon, “your feet will be so mastered by good will/ that they not only will not feel travail/ but will delight when they are urged uphill.”⁵⁶ Virgil seems to imply that good-will can conquer pleasure, so that one delights in difficult goodness. His emphasis on human will, however, is shown later to be insufficient. Still, by guiding Dante’s attention from a reality that was depressing him to art, and then from art to the angel of humility, Virgil has helped Dante move beyond the terrace of pride, even if he was simultaneously delaying and exhausting him.

Although Virgil is still able to guide Dante’s sight through pride, on the second terrace, envy, Dante begins to stray. Virgil warns from the very outset that he should not delay to “inquire of those who pass,”⁵⁷ yet Dante stops repeatedly to do just that. Although Dante only stops with Virgil’s permission, Virgil’s efficacy as a guide has clearly begun to decrease, even if Dante is still just as loyal to his guide as he was in *Inferno*. At the end of the second terrace, when Aglauros appears, Dante notably steps to the right rather than forward so that he is closer to his guide.⁵⁸ Dante is now failing to progress as he attaches himself to an ineffective counselor. Instead of moving forward with his own understanding and courage, Dante waits for his guide, just as Ulysses’ example should compel him. However, the improper object of his trust has now become a hinderance. Aglauros again foreshadows the dream of the siren, but this time with a fishing metaphor, stating that “you would take the bait, so that the hook/ of the old adversary draws you to him; thus neither spur nor curb can serve to save you.”⁵⁹ Dante and Virgil, because they lack anything sturdy to hold them, are predisposed to take the bait and cannot save themselves or each other by curbing their temptations by will alone, for will can be deceived by bait.

In the next terrace, a previously mentioned fault of Virgil’s becomes more apparent, his inability to interpret. After receiving a vision of a boy being stoned to death who prays for the pardon of his persecutors, Dante is scolded by Virgil for not walking properly.⁶⁰ The fact that the scolding takes place in the terrace of wrath once more demonstrates Virgil’s inability to be aware

⁵³ Ibid., X.10-13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 121-35.

⁵⁵ Ibid., XII.1-15, 77-81.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 124-126.

⁵⁷ Ibid., XIII.10-11.

⁵⁸ Ibid., XIV.139-140.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 143-151.

⁶⁰ Ibid., XV.106-120. This is the same thing Virgil scolded Dante for in the second spur.

of his own sins. Virgil, knowing the exact vision Dante saw, suggests that the image “was shown lest you refuse/ to open up your heart unto the waters/ of peace that pour from the eternal fountain.”⁶¹ This appears to be a complete misinterpretation of the meaning of the vision. A person praying for the pardon of their persecutors while suffering at their hands is *exactly* the pinnacle of Christian morality. Therefore, it is actually the fate of the person who does open their heart to the waters of the eternal fountain, not the other way around. Virgil also believes that in this instance, he speaks not “as one who sees with earthly eyes,” even though he is unable to see under the veil.⁶²

Contrasting Virgil’s character as a guide in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, Dante (poet) sends a clear message about the changing purpose of guides (and in turn, epic poetry) throughout one’s journey. When lost in a dark forest, a guide serving a higher purpose can often be the light needed to journey one’s way through and then out of the depths of hell. But when one is out of hell and beginning to turn their attention towards purging their own sins, one cannot rely only on human guides, since man is inherently imperfect.

The Siren:

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus avoids succumbing to the tempting song of the sirens by stuffing his ears with wax and having his men hold him back with rope. In the *Aeneid*, Palinurus, Aeneas’s helmsman, is killed by the god of sleep causing his boat to drift towards the island of the sirens. Unlike Homer, Virgil notably does not portray the sirens with a tempting song, but portrays them as a natural obstacle, emphasizing the cliffs, rocks, and waves.⁶³ Aeneas successfully steers them out of danger before saying:

“*O nimium caelo et pelago confise sereno,
Nudus in ignota, Palinure, iacebis harena.*”

“Oh, too trusting of calm sea and sky,

Naked, Palinurus, you will lie on unknown sand.”⁶⁴

The sirens of the *Aeneid*, although still deceptive, are no longer temptresses. Their danger is no longer drawn from their seductive nature, but rather inattention and a lack of skepticism. The siren’s nature is still a deceptive one, since Palinurus is described as “too trusting,” yet he does not trust them on account of a Siren’s persuasion, but on account of inattention, since Somnus, the god of sleep, threw him overboard. When Aeneas, the attentive and awake captain, takes the helm, he is able to guide them back towards safety, without being temptingly drawn towards danger. Virgil seems to imply that the sirens only tempt the inattentive (Palinurus) or impious (Ulysses).

⁶¹ Ibid., 130-132.

⁶² Ibid., 133-135.

⁶³ Virgil, *Aeneid*, V.866.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 870-71.

On the fourth terrace of Purgatory, Sloth, Virgil finally gives his account of will and desire. He begins his account by stating “let the error of the blind/ who’d serve as guides be evident to you.”⁶⁵ This line appears to foreshadow Statius’ analogy of the lantern, with Virgil unknowingly serving as one of these blind guides. Virgil explains that love is a primary instinct for beauty, but when it seizes the soul, it leaves one with longing for the beloved thing to make him joyous. He then says, and Dante agrees, that the flaw of praising every love has been made clear, because “it may seem – always good;/ but not each seal is fine, although the wax is.”⁶⁶ Virgil seems to be saying that unconditioned love, the wax that is common to all letters regardless of seal, is always good; but the different seals or stamps, the different forms of love, change the quality and significance of the seal.

Dante becomes concerned with how merit and free will play into this system of love. Virgil says he can only impart what reason can see, but he will have to wait for Beatrice “for truth of faith.”⁶⁷ Virgil continues:

And thus man does not know the source of his
intelligence and primal objects:
both are in you just as in bees there is
the honey-making urge; such primal will
deserves no praise, and it deserves no blame.
Now, that all other longings may conform
to this first will, there is in you, inborn,
the power that counsels, keeper of the threshold
of your assent: this is the principle
on which your merit may be judged, for it
garners and winnows good and evil longings.⁶⁸

Virgil establishes two important ideas – the primal urge and the inborn will. The inborn will is the power that controls our pleasure-seeking desires. The words “primal urge” *can* imply something base and violent, but based on Virgil’s example with the bees, it is not inherently so. The primal urge is a purpose-driven desire that has been instilled in us by nature that sustains us and our community. This appears to be in line with Virgil’s earlier statement about love, that “The natural is always without error/ but mental love may choose an evil object/ or err through too much or too little vigor.”⁶⁹ Virgil’s perspective seems to place the inborn will as the arbiter between pleasure and purpose. However, Virgil’s perspective, while correct, is incomplete. While the will is the keeper of the threshold of our assent by which we are judged, it alone cannot be

⁶⁵ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XVIII.17-18.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 34-41.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 46-48.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 55-66.

⁶⁹ Ibid., XVII.94-96.

responsible for one's ascension. The inborn-will, therefore, cannot be the sole arbiter between good and evil longings, for will can be deceived.

Despite Dante's attempts to try and stick by his guide in Purgatory, Dante falls into a deep sleep while on the fourth terrace, sloth. In his dream, Dante sees a siren, and his first glance portrays her as askew, crippled, and unhealthy.⁷⁰ However, as he looks at her:

Just as the sun revives
cold limbs that night made numb, so did my gaze
loosen her tongue and then, in little time,
set her contorted limbs in perfect order;
and, with the coloring that love prefers,
my eyes transformed the wanness of her features.⁷¹

While Dante's gaze is captured by the sirens song, a woman appears at his side. Virgil, with his eyes solely focused on the woman, slays the siren, and Dante is woken by the stench of the siren's intestines.⁷² When Dante wakes, it is revealed that Virgil had called his name three times (three being a spiritually significant number to the Christian faith), but it was not Virgil's call, but the stench that woke him.

In Dante's dream, Virgil is no longer successfully guiding Dante's sight, but Dante casts his eyes where Virgil doesn't. Virgil, a pious pagan, can avoid falling victim to the siren only by refusing to examine her. By keeping his attention on an external example, the woman, his will can conquer his desires. But Dante, having been tempted by curiosity, looks and is so entranced that he cannot be woken by Virgil's cries. The sound of the siren and her visual beauty drown out Virgil's attempts. Interestingly, it is Virgil who is able to slay the siren in Dante's dream, but Dante is still not awoken by observing Virgil's triumph over temptation, but only by taking the siren into himself and *smelling* the disgust of the siren's insides.

When examining the first three terraces of Purgatory, pride, envy, and wrath are all experientially unpleasant. If we interact with others who are guilty of these sins, it is often an unpleasant experience filled with annoyance, pity, or terror. These sins are also unpleasant to experience within oneself. Pride brings unfulfilled expectations, envy brings feelings of insufficiency, and wrath brings loneliness at best and more wrath at worst. For these malicious sins, the internal and external perception of the experience reflect one another. Therefore, it is easier to portray moral lessons concerning these sins in art: those afflicted with these sins will more easily recognize their suffering in a hero, making it easier to effectuate a change of heart by directing their attention. Virgil says that these sins are caused by improper objects of love.⁷³ Pride would be the improper love of ego; envy, the improper love of other's abilities, property, or

⁷⁰ Ibid., XIX.8-9.

⁷¹ Ibid., 10-15.

⁷² Ibid., 21-32.

⁷³ Ibid., Canto XVII, 124-39.

status; and wrath, an improper love of vengeance. Here, Virgil seems correct that these sins can be conquered through reason by analyzing the nature of what one loves.

In contrast, Dante's dream occurs on the fourth terrace. Sloth, and the remaining sins of avarice/prodigality, gluttony, and lust are all intrinsically pleasurable and deceptively fulfilling. It is intrinsically known that these sins are sins, but if one's attention strays from perfection or curiosity strikes one's soul, and one finds themselves entranced in the siren's dance, such that they become overindulgent in idleness, stinginess/frivolity, or appetite, whether of stomach or of loins, then reason becomes blind to the Adversary's sophistry. These intrinsically pleasurable sins all appear to arise not from improper objects, but improper measures of love. These sins can also be portrayed in art, but they won't effectuate change in the sinner in the same way, since it takes life experience to recognize that one's pleasure is the cause of their suffering, or that one loves the right things, just the wrong amount or in the wrong way. Only by reflecting upon one's own experience, and not the art alone, can one learn to recognize and rectify these sins themselves.

Sloth, which Virgil describes as a deficiency of love, is difficult to cure, since it is almost impossible to strike inspiration into another's soul. Avarice/Prodigality are both improper measures of love for material goods. If material goods are a part of creation, they are a gift from God, and to be greedy or careless with that gift appears to be an improper measure of love for that gift. Gluttony and lust are also improper measures of love, since food and sex are natural urges which are necessary to sustain life, but here are perverted by excess. This raises an interesting question, why are fasting and abstinence not punished together with prodigality? It is because conscious abstinence is not the same as carelessness. Prodigality is not asceticism nor careful charity. Prodigality is not abstinence from a worldly gift, but a careless misuse of it.

Returning to Dante's dream, the siren is immediately recognized for her ugliness at first glance; just as one intrinsically knows that the four sins caused by improper measures of love are vices. But as Dante looks, his attention beatifies her until she becomes irresistible; just as when one gives into these temptations, one becomes blind to the negative side effects and eventual destruction they bring. The pleasure blinds the sinner to the act's ugliness. Dream-Virgil can only avoid Dante's fate by refusing to look at her; just as Aglauros says, he would take the bait. It is not Dream-Virgil's example (sight) nor Virgil's cries (sound) that wake Dante, since the illusory beauty of the siren and her song drown it out. The external theatre of sight and sound are incapable of inducing proper sense in those afflicted with these sins. Even when Dream-Virgil slays the siren, his external example still does not wake Dante. Instead, Dante is only awoken when Dream-Virgil enables him to take these sins into himself through the sense of smell. Virgil guided Dante out of hell, but since he could not guide himself, he is forever somewhat asleep in limbo, trapped in hell at the furthest point from heaven, blind to the siren, slaying her without ever knowing her.

When Virgil offers his interpretation of the dream, he says "you saw how man can free himself from [the siren]." ⁷⁴ However, it is unclear exactly *how* Virgil thinks the dream shows

⁷⁴ Ibid., 61.

that. Dante must guide himself to the answer to that question. If it is by slaying the siren, i.e. removing her from existence, as Virgil the character does in Dante's dream and Virgil the poet does in the *Aeneid*, then this answer does not account for why Virgil did not achieve salvation. Besides, Virgil himself is susceptible to the Siren-like imagery foreshadowing the dream (Casella and Aglauros), and therefore Virgil the character does not live up to this perfect image. Symbolically, Virgil can slay the siren by showing it is in our will to avoid it through Aeneas, but he cannot explain *how* to attain that level of piety. Aeneas, a pious follower of divine commands, shows no hesitation in choosing his divine mission over love, the primal, purpose-driven urge over the inborn will. (Consider Dido). Dream-Virgil, similarly, never glances at the siren. Aeneas and Dream-Virgil appear to be unattainable images of piety, however Dante seems to be making an important distinction between our understanding of heroes and humans, of art and its artist.

The Poet and the Journey:

When Statius, a Christian poet who acts as a foil to Virgil's paganism, is introduced, before he is even aware that Virgil is Dante's guide, he states that "the sparks that warmed me, the seeds of my ardor,/ were from the holy fire – the same that gave/ more than a thousand poets light and flame./ I speak of the *Aeneid*;"⁷⁵ When Statius reveals this, Virgil tells Dante to be still and Dante writes that "yet the power of will cannot do all."⁷⁶ Dante smiles and Statius inquires why, so Virgil permits Dante to explain. This implicit recognition on Dante's part that the power of will is not omnipotent re-emphasizes the problem with Virgil's account of love; if it is not entirely in the power of one's will to avoid looking at the siren, how can one emulate Dream-Virgil and simply avoid ever glancing at sin?

When Statius finally discovers that Virgil is Dante's guide, he bends to kiss his feet, but Virgil dismisses the significance of his gesture on the basis that they are shades. Just as Virgil did in the second spur, he turns his attention towards truths about the body, and thinks he is revealing truth to Statius by pointing out his mistake. But Statius replies that Virgil now understands "how much love burns in me for you, when I/ forget our insubstantiality,/ treating the shades as one treats solid things."⁷⁷ Statius' ability to find meaning in a symbol and Virgil's failure to see through the factual reality for the metaphorical meaning reveal the crux of why Virgil is insufficient as a guide. It is Virgil's lack of faith that keeps him from heaven, and he lacks faith because he lacks the ability to unveil the truth behind his musings. But how can Virgil, a poet, be bad at interpreting images? How does one create images without the ability to interpret them?

It seems that Virgil can veil but cannot unveil. While in need of a guide in Ante-Purgatory, we see Virgil hug another shade, Sordello, a fellow countryman. But in this moment, Virgil does not stop Sordello to tell him that they are shades and such contact would be meaningless, instead Virgil embraces Sordello back.⁷⁸ While Virgil could be distracted by his love for his countrymen just as Statius was distracted by his love for Virgil, he could also be

⁷⁵ Ibid., XXI.94-97.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 134-136.

⁷⁸ Ibid., VI.75.

using their shared nationality as a tactic to convince Sordello to guide them. When Virgil is using a symbol as a means towards a tangible end, he clearly has no objection to treating shades as solid things. However, when another tries to communicate with Virgil through images, whether Statius by kissing his feet or God through visions in Purgatory, Virgil seems completely incapable of unveiling the meaning behind it. Instead, Virgil's reason tends towards unveiling factual rather than symbolic truth. Virgil seems to be able to veil what he can see, but he cannot properly unveil what he cannot.

When Virgil asks Statius how he became guilty of avarice, Statius replies that he is not guilty of avarice, but of prodigality. Statius emphasizes that reason is deceptive and provokes perplexity, and he found his way to repentance by interpreting the true meaning of certain verses of the Aeneid.⁷⁹ He elaborates that:

You were the first to send me
To drink within Parnassus' caves and you,
The first who, after god, enlightened me.
You did as he who goes by night and carries
The lamp behind him – he is of no help
To his own self, but teaches those who follow.

It appears that Virgil was also Statius' guide. But Statius is closer to God in the afterlife than Virgil. This returns the present inquiry to where it began, how does one guide another to a place they have never been?

As Statius' story reveals, it appears that Virgil, being unable to see how his own muse veiled divine truth, was unable to shine this light to direct himself. However, by letting the light shine anyway, Virgil was still able to use his access to the muse to give others faith. This access to the muse is what gave him his fame, and therefore his position in Limbo. It seems that Dante believes that through the art of poetry, we can guide others to places we do not yet know ourselves. Virgil guides not as one who knows, but as one who inspires.

Virgil's inability to grasp the truth directly connects to his inability to enter heaven. Virgil can give Dante encouragement to enter the earthly paradise through fire, but he does not enter it himself.⁸⁰ Although he can tell Dante what to do, he refuses to be burned by the cleansing fire of God in the form of self-reproof. It is this refusal to be burned that prevents him from understanding and portraying how one becomes an Aeneas. Virgil can exemplify piety for others through Aeneas since he sees the destination, but he believes the road is unending, so he cannot describe the journey by which one arrives there. There's no proper account of the journey along the road of self-reproof if one never reaches an enlightened destination.

⁷⁹ Ibid., XXII.36-45.

⁸⁰ Ibid., XXVII.117-23; XXX.49-51.

By placing himself in his poetry, placing the lantern in front of himself, and allowing himself to be burned by self-criticism to see what light it brings, Dante can pass through the ring of fire to earthly paradise. It could be argued that this is the sign that Dante has overcome the ἀμαρτία of Virgil, the reliance on the intellect that prevents proper interpretation of images and self-examination. Yet the opposite could also be argued: that Dante has not fully overcome this ἀμαρτία either due to his own inability to see properly in Paradise. The first thing Dante does in earthly paradise is weep that Virgil has left him. Later, a woman asks Dante directly “why are you only/ so eager to behold the living lights/ and not in seeing what comes after them?”⁸¹ Dante, too, seems to have been contaminated by Virgil’s lack of interest in shadows. Beatrice calls Dante’s sight “still-crude,” and when Dante notices Virgil is gone, he says “Virgil, the gentlest father, Virgil, he/ to whom I gave my self for my salvation.”⁸² Dante does not seem to fully realize yet that it is God and Beatrice who have called him on this journey and offer him salvation, not Virgil.

It seems that Virgil’s account of love is flawed because it completely fails to account for how God’s grace plays into human willpower. Virgil’s account is not incorrect, but incomplete. Virgil certainly wishes to understand the good, but the power of the will cannot do all. However, Dante is not a victim of lack of grace, but of his own will. Dante claims not to remember “making myself a stranger to you,” but Beatrice points out that “If you can’t remember that... then call to mind how you – today –/ have drunk of Lethe.”⁸³ Instead of using his will to keep his attention on the right path, a path he has been graced with by getting to love Beatrice before she died, Dante forgets. Dante *chose* to be thrown off the ship by Somnus. It is much easier to forget something painful than to try to appreciate the joys that come out of it. Dante chose to forget instead of work through the pain, which is how he truly lost his way. After Dante forgot Beatrice, he had nothing sturdy to hold him, so he took the bait and lost the true path.

Conclusion:

Dante’s pilgrimage demonstrates the pathway back to piety for one who’s lost their way: by *epicizing* one’s own experience. Virgil, by creating Aeneas, was able to shine the light for many towards a pious end. But Virgil does not demonstrate in any way how one attains the kind of character Aeneas has, one that forfeits love for divine orders without hesitation and stays alert and steers clear of Sirens. Dante, like the apostles and Augustine, insert themselves into their stories, describing not just the destination, but the journey one must take to arrive at a pious life. Dante, by completing the insertion of the poet into epic, has become a poetic mirror to the apostles’ prose, allowing him to shine the light to direct not only others, but also himself.

Ulysses and Cato make it explicit that this journey back from Hell cannot be taken without a guide. The journey to Purgatory, let alone Paradise, necessarily comes through external guidance. Heroes, real or fictional, offer necessary models that inspire one to begin the journey

⁸¹ Ibid., XXIX.61-63.

⁸² Ibid., XXX.48-49.

⁸³ Ibid., XXXIII.92, 94-96.

along the path of self-correction. These heroes are our first guides when we are truly lost because they are trusted, and rightfully so since they have withstood the test of time. However, it also appears that there is a fundamental distinction between the artist and the art. This distinction means that art can carry wisdom not possessed by its creator; but it also means that the examples can never truly teach us certain things we must know by experience if we hope to get farther than Limbo. By eliminating the distinction between art and artist, placing oneself within one's art, treating oneself as a hero, one can begin the journey of self-reproof and do more than merely encourage others with transcendental images of piety disconnected from the empirical journey towards it. However, inserting oneself into one's art is painful. Virgil's reliance on his intellect makes him refuse to be burned by God's cleansing flame, unable to interpret images properly, and unable to enter paradise. With no fall, there can be no ascension. With no dissonance, consonance means little to nothing. Not reason, but only faith in resolution, can justify dissonance.

Externals necessarily guide one to, but cannot guide one through, the intrinsically pleasurable sins of Purgatory, which is why in this realm, Dante must become his own interpreter with God's images, or experience, as his guide. It appears one cannot correct their pleasure-seeking urge with merely their inborn will, but only the grace experience brings and God bestows can train the inborn will to submit to the primal and purpose-driven urge. By going through the experience of truly analyzing and purging oneself, the only remaining guide necessary is one's other half. Finally, to truly arrive in Paradise, one must be guided by a beautifier who provides proof of faith. The way one's soulmate perfectly fits into one's life is the strongest evidence of God's plan. Faith, hope, and charity do not come from only the will, but from proper use of will after grace. Once one has been graced with that proof of faith, we must do everything we can not to drink from Lethe. In this sense, the destination is the journey, and to forget the journey is to forfeit the destination.

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Crusaders of Love: The Question of Christian Politics in the Knight-Errantry of *Don Quixote*

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Abstract:

Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* takes the life of the ordinary man and injects it with the fantasy and wonder of the story books, making a comical chaos out of the eponymous character's overactive imagination. While it can be interpreted as a tirade on how poor literature corrupts the mind, it appears that Cervantes intends to communicate a much more complex philosophy on fiction, one of layered storytelling and veils upon veils of meaning. It is these veils that, I contend, communicate a critique on the archetype of the Christian soldier, and consequentially the political Christian. Through an exploration of the multifaceted narrative method, I intend to demonstrate how this criticism is born out of a compounding of absurdities that jut up against both reality and our conceptions of ourselves.

Miguel de Cervantes is not the first author to write about Christians on the political stage. Shakespeare's histories of the kings and princes of England detail Christian men at the helm of government. Yet unlike Shakespeare and other authors, Cervantes chooses to take the majestic realm of Christian politics and install it into the daily life of common men. In a small village, somewhere one is more likely to find Chaucerian pilgrims than knights and ladies, Cervantes sets the scene of his novel, featuring his hero, Don Quixote de la Mancha, an old hidalgo with the burning desire to become a knight errant. Quixote's passions lead to his delusion, mixing the world of fantasy and reality in a way that reflects the insertion of grand *conquistas* and quotidian life. Quixote's yen for a life of chivalry juts up against the small world he resides in, and forces readers to question the nature of knight errantry and the place of Christianity in political action. Is it possible that, throughout the fabric of the novel, Cervantes' depiction of inconsistencies and absurdities is intended to lead readers towards these questions? Is Quixote's ridiculous character the tool by which he achieves this?

In Chapter 4 of Part 1 of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the eponymous character encounters a group of merchants on the road to Murcia. "Wishing to imitate in every way... he could the passages of arms he'd read about in his books," Quixote stops them in their path and demands their confession of the unrivalled beauty of Dulcinea del Toboso (pp. 44-5). The men, curious and playing along, tell him that they have never seen her, and will confess as soon as they know what she looks like. Quixote replies, "'what merit would there be in confessing so manifest a truth? The whole point is that, without seeing her, you must believe, confess, affirm, swear, and uphold it; if not...you shall face me in battle'" (pp. 46). This interaction becomes increasingly inquisitory in nature, as the "enlightened" and empowered knight demands the ignorant to have faith in an invisible entity, establish it as the truth, amend their ways towards it, bind themselves to it by oath, and carry on their lives with this as the centerpiece.

This is a clear imitation of the kind of crusading that his beloved knights errant engage in, conquering cities and converting infidels to the Good God. However, Quixote is more interested in conversions towards the admiration of Dulcinea del Toboso. His fanaticism renders her a god in her own right, while the Christian God, now more distant, is no longer the object of faith but the justifying force for Quixote's authority and power as a knight errant. Throughout Part 1 of the text, Quixote's relationship to God seems twisted, as he attempts to bring justice to Christendom, not really in the name of Christ but in the name of Dulcinea. The endeavors he undertakes are also, in themselves, ridiculous spectacles of foolhardiness and an excessive appetite for pulp fiction. This man is clearly not the shining knight of yore, but the question arises whether we are to do more than laugh at Quixote's foibles. Quixote's attempts to mimic chivalrous love and bravery are in many ways contrary to the kind of Christian behavior one would anticipate from the Gospels: revering a woman as an idol, causing scandal and chaos in society, enacting violence on other human beings, and yet to him they appear the just and true actions of a god-fearing knight. To what extent may Don Quixote's bumbling attempts at knighthood be a criticism of the archetype of the Christian soldier? How do the text's reflections of real issues in Christendom (holy violence, for example) indicate such a possibility?

Don Quixote is a clear example of how without careful reading of fiction one can run away into the world of unreality. The greatest condemners of these books of chivalry, however, are the clerics, who are depicted as fools themselves. The priest stages a book-burning in Quixote's library, an amusing and disproportionate answer to a madman's poor behavior that does not even seem spiritually motivated; he declines sprinkling the room with holy water when requested (pp. 52). The canon acts more like a literary critic than a scholastic when discussing tales of knight errantry, more concerned with the poor writing than any lack of virtue in the works. These are silly men, and the reader is left unable to truly take their criticism seriously without wondering what else Cervantes could be trying to communicate, for surely censorship of pleasurable novels is not the answer. It appears that there are layers of commentary surrounding clerics, chivalry, and fiction itself compounded across Part 1 of *Don Quixote*, not leaving readers with a clear solution while amplifying the absurdities of any stringent worldview.

Section I: The Use of Layered Storytelling as a Mechanism for Commentary

Cervantes' commentary does not appear to solely serve the purpose of touching upon social and political realities, but also fiction itself, generating a kind of commentary-on-commentary. It is that meta-commentary that he seems to use in order to temper the mind of the reader towards a more nuanced understanding of how fiction can be written and understood. One such example of meta-commentary within the text is when the barber and the priest are censoring Don Quixote's library and come across *Galatea*, a prior publication by Cervantes. The priest says, "he's [Cervantes is] more conversant with adversity than with verse. His book's ingenious enough; it sets out to achieve something but doesn't bring anything to a conclusion; we'll have to wait for the promised second part; maybe with correction it'll gain the full pardon denied it for the time being" (pp. 58). The manner in which the priest talks about Cervantes reveals significant details about how his work is received and, perhaps, how it ought to be understood. By setting the notions of "adversity" and "verse" in opposition, Cervantes is revealed to be more interested in placing concepts in conflict than he is with the poeticism of his style. The non-lyric nature of the prose in *Don Quixote* demonstrates a priority for the events of the text in themselves, not in an artful mode of presentation.

By noting that his work "sets out to achieve something but doesn't bring anything to its conclusion," it may be possible that the ridiculous nature of many scenes are intended to remain so, for the sake of demonstrating this adversity, such as the conflict between the real and imaginary worlds that Quixote finds himself a dual citizen of. Is there, perhaps, an expectation that the adversity addressed in Cervantes' work is intended to remain as an existential issue? There is a possibility that there is no fitting way to resolve the adversity Cervantes points out, and thus no way to truly "complete" his works to the satisfaction of the priest. It must be acknowledged that Cervantes is writing about himself from the perspective of an interpreter, and thus doubt ought to be cast on the reliability of this commentary. However, it does not seem that the priest is wrong to understand Cervantes this way, as the literary habits of the author are quite apparent even in this work, but rather that perhaps the priest is wrong to suggest that Cervantes ought to be censored because of it. What would it even mean for a work to be censored by merit

of its style? Is it possible that to bring things to a conclusion would be an imposition of a kind of conventional order that Cervantes does not believe is possible?

The canon, in Chapter 47, also holds a strong stance with regards to works of fiction, asserting that he has ““never seen a book of chivalry that could be regarded as a whole body complete with all its members...their intention seems more to produce a chimera or a monster than a well-proportioned figure...there’s no ingenious artifice about them, so they deserve to be thrown out of a Christian society”” (pp. 440-1). This is yet again a stylistic quibble with chivalry books, one that calls upon the need for a kind of orderly completeness about them lest they be so unbelievable they lose all meaning. A very tenuous claim is made that this lack of artifice is cause for ejection from Christian society, but other than a brief mention of ““licentious loves”” in these books, none of the canon’s complaints are due to a lack of Christian virtue, but rather a general roughness and absurdity of style. He believes that fiction ought to produce a work in which ““wonder and pleasure go hand in hand; and none of this can be achieved by the writer who forsakes verisimilitude and imitation, because the perfection of all writing consists in these two qualities”” (pp. 440). Believable imitation, some kind of reflection of reality, seems necessary to present readers with otherwise impossible marvels, ensuring they suspend their disbelief for the core of the story. The canon does, however, admit that many authors demonstrate the arts and virtues within their works, portraying ““...all that faculties that contribute to the perfection of an illustrious man”” (pp. 441), indicating that some intellectual and moral value *can* be found in these works.

The canon also laments the opinion of the masses, whom he blames for the poor quality of fiction and plays. He himself wished to be a writer of chivalry books, but became ““aware that there are more fools than wise men in the world and, although the praise of the wise few is more important than the mockery of the foolish many, I’m not willing to subject myself to the indiscriminate judgement of the fickle mob, the principal readers of such books”” (pp. 442). He believes that this is not the necessary consequence of the art of writing, that the subtleties appreciated by the ““half-a-dozen intelligent people who can understand them”” can be married with the entertainment desired by the common people (pp. 443). It is by shrouding the text in many layers of meaning—an initial narrative, a hidden commentary, and perhaps deeper commentaries below the first—that authors can produce a work as entertaining as it is intellectually stimulating and valuable. Perhaps the best way that an author can do this is by the verisimilitude and imitation that the canon holds to be so necessary; the depth of the texts can only be realized when the reflections of reality point towards something beyond the face of the story, giving readers fictional frameworks through which they can gain real intellectual and moral insight from the great heroes.

The issue, then, appears to be in ensuring both that the text is authored completely and that the reader truly does *learn*. It appears certain that the “wise few” can see political or philosophical commentary beyond the letters of a knight’s tale. Quixote himself is quite well-

versed in the arts of astronomy and geography.¹ Yet these books are still too real to him, he cannot pull himself out of the chimera's grasp, flailing about in inconsistencies of reason and virtue. It seems that here, Cervantes is demonstrating his conversance with adversity, setting the image of a foolish, asocial man obsessed with story books against that of a man deeply concerned with justice and knowledgeable about the arts. By watching Quixote humiliate himself time and again, failing to see any deeper truths than the words on a page, one begins to wonder whether he has missed the point of these texts to begin with. It may be possible to interpret Cervantes' character as intentionally crafted to demonstrate the need for multi-layered storytelling for the sake of intellectual growth, coming out of a text that is, itself, demonstrating a similar pattern of veils of commentaries and questions. These veils of fiction—and the exposure that they are present in Cervantes' work—serve perhaps not only to show room for maturity in Quixote's character, but a method of thinking for the reader's approach to the character himself. Why does he fall short of becoming a knight errant? What does his imitation teach us about knight errantry as a practice? Given this interpretive framework of shrouding the text in imitations, what can we glean from Quixote's odd behavior as a knight errant led astray by the zealotry of love?

Section II: The Subordination of God for the Lady

In Chapter 13, Don Quixote has an exchange with some travelers he meets on the road, in which he more clearly details the “duty” of a knight errant as a lover. One of the travelers, Vivaldo, criticizes the tales of knight errantry for their treatment of ladies, saying that when in battle, these knights fail to “commend themselves to God, as every Christian's meant to do in such moments of danger,” instead doing so to their ladies, “as if their ladies were God himself” (pp. 98). Such a comment indicates that while perhaps Quixote's tendency to convert others to the beauty of Dulcinea may be absurd even for a knight, the elevation of one's lady, as a knight, to the place of God appears to be more of a pervasive problem with knight-errantry than merely Quixote's interpretation of it. In response to this, Quixote insists that such an elevation is necessary, as it is “an established custom” and thus knights are “obliged to whisper a few words in which his commends himself” to his lady prior to battle, adding the caveat that “one cannot assume that...they do not commend themselves to God as well, for they still have the time and the opportunity to do so in the course of the subsequent actions” (pp. 98). A Christian is expected, not only in battle, but always, to have God at the forefront of his mind; the First Commandment tells us to have no false gods before Him, never mind a human being.² Are knights errant granted permission to behave differently due to their vocation?

¹ In Chapter 29 of Part II, Quixote uses his skills in astronomy to help direct himself and Sancho on a short boating adventure, showing the strength of his intellect despite the veracity of his fantasies. It appears that his commitment to knight-errantry does not obstruct his capacity of scientific reasoning (though he remains caught in his fictions), reflecting how the books of chivalry can be shown to “teach” the reader such disciplines.

² One may wonder whether the veneration of Mary and the saints is not idolatry, yet Cervantes does not seem to discuss this much. Notably, in Chapter 52, Quixote attacks a group of penitents for carrying a statue of Mary he believes to be a kidnapped woman; there is little indication that Mary is being treated idolatrously, but rather that Quixote mistaking her for an abductee shows his bungled religious priorities. Perhaps this can be understood by the

Protecting a land from injustice, paganism, and heresy does not seem to be simply for the sake of a righteous display of power, but with the intention of turning the eyes of the people to God. While the use of violence to achieve these means is a separate issue, how can a knight adequately defend his countrymen when even he is not commending himself to God first? By turning his lady's approval into the standard by which his actions are just and honorable, the knight errant fails to be a Christian soldier, but merely a soldier in love, using God to justify his use of force without the consideration of whether God approves of holy violence (or, better yet, whether God could ever consider violence holy). Instead, Dulcinea's presumed perfection, her total unknowability, her position as a moral standard for Quixote, render her a god to him, and the guiding path for his pursuits. How infrequent is this phenomenon that Vivaldo condemns, of knights errant supposedly fighting for Christendom but truly worshipping their ladies, using chivalry, instead of God, to guide their valiant actions while claiming to follow Him? And yet their feats are considered brave, honorable, and worthy of imitation, not only by Don Quixote but surely by a myriad of younger men.

It is not merely the exaltation of one's lady that becomes an issue for the Christian soldier; it is also the position that God is forced to take in his life. Quixote exemplifies this issue to the extreme, making a mockery of passionate, albeit idolatrous, knightly love by morphing it into unmistakable deification. God is left to the wayside, and yet the knight insists his allegiance to him in his testimony of the Christian faith, an inconsistency that roots itself deeply in knight-errantry itself, according to Vivaldo. How can God still be the claim on which a knight stakes his battle when He is not even the central focus of the knight's desires? One begins to question the motivations of the knight errant, and whether or not his actions can be pure when his heart is not directed towards Him alone.

Section III: The Subordination of the Laws of God for the Laws of Chivalry

In many ways, God becomes the source of legitimacy for the soldier's actions, without needing to have any bearing on justice or truth, which are derived from the laws of chivalry. A prime example of this takes place in Chapter 4, when Don Quixote encounters a farmer beating his servant boy for carelessness. Quixote believes that the farmer is being unjust to the boy because the boy cannot defend himself, a discourteous way of approaching battle (pp. 42) and demands he free him and pay him what the boy claims he is owed (nine months' pay). He swears, "...by God who rules us, I shall exterminate and annihilate you this very instant" (pp. 43). The farmer heeds, and Quixote now demands an oath of him: "My command will be sufficient to ensure his obedience; and provided that he gives me his oath by the laws of the order of chivalry into which he has been admitted, I shall allow him to go free" (pp. 43). Interestingly, both the farmer and the servant boy swear oaths prior to Quixote's liberation of the boy, both to God, and both for the sake of the truth that they purport to carry about the situation.

fact that, for Catholic Christians, the veneration of saints is distinct from and lower than the worship of God, saving the practice from the same kind of condemnation that the veneration of human ladies is subject to.

On the other hand, Don Quixote's oath to God is for the sake of power; it is *by God* that he swears to obliterate the farmer for his injustice. It is *by the laws of chivalry*, instead, that he urges the farmer to vow his honesty to not beat the boy after Quixote departs. This is just another example of how God becomes subordinated by the knight errant for the sake of his knight-errantry. The oath Quixote demands of the farmer implies that the code of honor, justice, and truth does not reside in the Bible, nor any other religious text, but in the chivalric code designed for the knight; he is the ““righter of wrongs and injustices”” (pp. 44) by merit of his title, “Don,” not the laws of God. In fact, at the end of the encounter, Quixote cries out to Dulcinea del Toboso, wherever she may be, that to her he is ““subjected and enslaved”” to her ““every wish and desire,”” failing to commend himself to God at any point in his knightly engagements (pp. 45). Here it seems that Quixote is directly contradicting the words of Vivaldo; the elevation of his lady *has* reached a near-pagan extent; he is not the subject and servant of his God, but of Dulcinea. And yet he is simply fulfilling the duties of his “honorable profession” seeking to imitate the knights in his story books and gain the honor they have in spades.

Perhaps part of the humor in Don Quixote's clumsy chivalry is in his *age*; it is not uncommon for young boys, upon hearing stories of war and conquest, to enlist in armies and fight the good fight for a taste of glory—this is a tale as old as war itself. Don Quixote, an old hidalgo, is attempting to do the same thing independent of any legitimate political entity with the bad back and bleary eyes of an aged man. He is not this charming young knight, in the summer of his life, pursuing his passions with the fervor expected of youth; he is middle-aged and klutzy, going after the same prizes with immature exuberance. Perhaps it is this, the juxtaposition of his age with his follies, that demonstrates part of the absurdity of knight errantry to begin with—how can a Christian soldier not direct himself towards God? Well, if he is twenty-odd years old and raging with hormones, the answer becomes quite clear. If he is fifty and wild-eyed, the magic of these tales of chivalry begins to wear off. One is forced to question if these pursuits are just at all.

This question of justice becomes amplified with an encounter with the faithful in Chapter 19. After having attacked a procession of priests in mourning, Quixote is told that he has been excommunicated ““for laying violent hands on what is sacred,”” to which he insists, ““I did not think I was attacking priests or anything to do with the church, which I respect and adore as the good Catholic and faithful Christian that I am, but ghosts and phantoms from another world”” (pp. 152). In the midst of his delusion, he turns on men of God, perceiving them as nearly diametrically opposite to what they are. Instead of admitting to his mistake, despite the fact that he has been ousted from the church to which he claims his faith, he chooses to justify it with a tale about Cid Ray Diaz, who was excommunicated for smashing a chair in front of the Pope, saying, ““the good Cid's behavior on that day had been that of a very honourable and valiant knight”” (pp. 152). The laws of chivalry have so subordinated the laws of God that even in the face of direct contradiction, Quixote believes the former to be more just. The zeal he has for knight errantry as this “correct” form of virtue for the Christian soldier has caused him to

become a public nuisance, yet how can a Christian fight for his faith while sowing discord? Christ claims that he will set father against son, but did he call for war?³

With the incorporation of holy violence into the practice of knight errantry, it seems necessary that a knight be sure that he is acting according to God's will and not his own. Quixote's emphasis on the primacy of the laws of chivalry further subordinate God, failing to make him the standard of ethical political behavior in favor of a human law. By citing the tales of other knights errant, Quixote's erratic behavior is a high-resolution reflection of a hole in the moral armor of chivalric men as a whole, demonstrating a contradiction that cuts to the quick of the motivations of a holy soldier.

Section IV: The Conflict Between Arms and Letters

Tales of knight errantry appear to feed into this desire to vanquish in the name of something legitimate, something holy, yet the heroes fall short of actually directing themselves toward God. Quixote's encounter with the priests demonstrates that this is more than a lack of priority for God's law, but also a conflict between the soldier and the priest, the man of the sword and the man of the book. When Quixote attempts to impose his justice upon them, they laugh. When he charges, they strike him down. What happens when the crusader does not agree with the scholastic? Are we to permit holy violence in the face of biblical contradiction? Or, on the other hand, are we to unilaterally agree with the class of clerics, whom Cervantes also chooses to depict as foolish and, at times, deceitful?⁴ Perhaps, more generally, the question becomes whether or not the battle or the principles behind the battle are the most important.

Don Quixote articulates the conflict between arms and letters in Chapter 37, distinguishing between the goals of the two and creating a distinction between "sacred letters" and "letters of human learning." Sacred letters have the goal "to conduct souls to heaven," while those of human learning intend to "organize distributive justice and give to every man according to his deserts: to interpret and enforce the law" (pp. 354). The goal of arms (and thus that of war, as well) is "peace, the greatest good to which man can aspire in his life" (pp. 354). Quixote argues that when the Good News was heard, the teaching most paramount was to bring "peace to men of good will."⁵ Interestingly, he is not interested in considering sacred letters, but rather letters of human learning, in comparison with arms, something quite odd considering his clear preference for chivalrous acts over ecclesiastical decrees. This could be due to the fact that Quixote does not even consider sacred letters to be concerned with justice at all, hence his

³ Jesus says he has "come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household" (Matthew 10:35-6). Christ acknowledges that his Way will set followers on a path contrary to the convention, but he does not seem to be advocating for violent discord. This passage is with reference to the lonely path of discipleship, calling men to be like him, someone distinctly pacifist and loving in nature.

⁴ Chapter 26 ends with the priest scheming to convince Don Quixote to come home by dressing as a "maiden errant" while "the barber would try his best to make himself look like a squire" (pp. 227). While for the intention of finding a "remedy for his strange madness", the priest's willingness to deceive Quixote to impose order upon his behavior seems inconsistent with the cleric's faith, which one would presume forbade him from acting upon ulterior motives and deceiving another.

⁵ This quote comes from Luke 2:14, when Jesus is born and heaven sings his praises.

depiction of them as simply salvation-oriented. This clarifies his stance on the standard that these letters impose on man, creating a distinction between the divine and the material worlds.

It is the letters of human learning, instead, that “organize distributive justice,” establishing law and standards of behavior. This would suggest that all men, including knights, are subject to this law, a profoundly human one. Yet Don Quixote’s description of the supposed interdependency of arms and letters points to something strange: “‘letters say that arms could not exist without them, because war too has its laws and is subject to them, and laws are the province of men of letters. To which arms reply that laws could not even exist without them, because arms are responsible for defending nations’” (pp. 357). This explanation suggests that war is in some ways primary, that without it there can be no law. Consequentially, this indicates a degree to which men of arms are extrajudicial—by merit of being that which defends (or in some cases establishes) political order, they cannot be subject to that order in their capacity as fighters of war. This means, however, that in order for a state to protect its right to justice or faith, it must permit harm through war. As a philosophy of self-defense this can be argued as permissible, but what about when knights crusade to “defend” Christendom and engage in offensive action? How can one love God and cause offensive harm?

While it may be true that the letters of justice are *not* the sacred ones, it seems absurd to suggest that the political Christian abides by laws that are human and not divine. It appears that one of the fundamental issues with Christian society is that to engage in political action is to obstruct the laws of God; we are not permitted to kill or steal, yet Christian knights massacre and pillage in the name of Christ. One begins to wonder whether one fights in the name of God because one loves God so deeply, or if one loves fighting so deeply that he seeks a heavenly cause. Is it possible Cervantes utilizes the self-contradictory knight to lead the reader exactly down this line of questioning, suggesting that the integration of politics with Christianity is the cause of this problem? In order to enforce, protect, and establish Christian virtues on a political scale, war is in some way required, meaning that one must have a stock of men willing to fight for the religion of love. It appears that, necessarily, the most zealous warrior will be the most zealous Christian, as he can utilize Christianity as a cause for his violent passions. Yet this begets issues of contradiction, the Christian soldier now occupying two worlds, one of God and one of man, which are in many ways inherently at odds.⁶

⁶ At this point, the reader may begin to note the similarities between the holy violence of the Christian and the jihad of a follower of Islam. Interestingly, Cervantes’ narrator notes that he found the histories of Don Quixote in a market, in a book written by a man named “Cide Hamete Benengeli”, an Arab historian” (pp. 75). This layer to the novel causes one to question what Cervantes wishes to communicate to us by “revealing” the original author of Quixotes’ tales—is it perhaps to show that the Christian soldier is not as much unlike the infidel he seeks to blot out? They both look to defend their faith through warfare, yet with a key difference; the Quran permits a holy violence and the Bible does not. Muslims are told to “Fight in the cause of God those who fight you but do not transgress limits...fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression and there prevail justice and faith in God” (Surah al Baqarah, 190-3), while Jesus instructs Christians, ““Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also”” (Matthew 5:39). This indicates a key issue for the Christian seeking to fight for God—He never asked them to.

Knowing this and wishing to be a good Christian in service to God, one is forced to stow away the exhilarating tales of chivalry for rainy-day entertainment, no longer a life to aspire to. Is the answer, then, to submit oneself to the life of letters, off the battlefield, where one does not need to reckon with the fundamental contradiction of holy war? Cervantes seems to argue no, given his depiction of the priest and the canon, who are just as much fools as Quixote, without causing as much explicit social harm. While they do not harm their polity by attempting duels in the woods, they do occupy a political role with a similar degree of misguidance. Don Quixote does not wish to consider the sacred letters as much more than heaven-sending mechanisms, but one cannot deny that the men of sacred letters have a degree of political power, one that may perhaps overlap with the letters of human learning. The clerical authority to censor books and provide instructions of behavior must be politically relevant due to the scope of its impact and perhaps is a form of “distributive justice” with a holy bent. And yet the priest neglects to bless Quixote’s library, suggesting he has no concern of spiritual warfare when he clears out his friend’s collection of books. Certainly, this cannot indicate that the priest’s actions are directed towards God, but rather towards his own opinion, which prompts him to act politically in the capacity of a censor. The canon also demonstrates a kind of love of his own opinion, criticizing the style of books of chivalry more than any assault on Christian virtue (that he even admits is absent from many).

Insofar as the clerics are not working to save souls but rather distribute justice and establish political order in society, their holy titles seem to serve as justification for non-Godly actions in a similar way that “Don” or “Cid” does for a knight. While nobody is physically harmed by the clerics, their influence does not bring a polity closer to God as it is not directed towards Him, instead bringing them closer to their own opinion of how the world ought to be; they risk leading men astray from the holy path in a way that may be as spiritually harmful as the knight’s violence is physical. It seems that the issues of the integration of politics in Christianity does not exist merely on the battlefield, but in society at large through the imposition of policies and methods of justice that do not find their basis in Christ’s teachings. It appears, then, that the question must expand: is it possible to be a Christian in a political capacity, either through arms or letters?

Section V: The Issue of the Political Christian

Cervantes does not appear to be providing us with a solution to this problem. In fact, he has demonstrated through his depiction of Don Quixote the extent to which knight errantry is fundamentally flawed, yet also how the answer is not to retreat to the books of distributive justice. Neither the imposition of order through practical arms nor through justice appear to be answers to the political problem. Perhaps this is another example of Cervantes’ inclination towards incompleteness and adversity; in setting arms and letters in opposition, one begins to understand that one is not an adequate answer to the other but rather possesses just as many problems. The intention appears to be to demonstrate a root cause—the inherent issue with being a political Christian—that is the generative source of the absurdity one observes in the case of either arms or letters. The reader is forced to observe this as an innate contradiction that cannot

be solved through either worldview but must be acknowledged nonetheless. One is left asking what in the world to do; how can one live a political life and follow Christ? Perhaps it is best to first look at why the character of Don Quixote is the door that one must walk through to see these issues, in order to try to understand what can be done about them.

Don Quixote's follies amplify the issues of knight-errantry to the point that they cannot be ignored, prompting one to seek an alternative solution. Quixote is the prime example of the follies of chivalric action in two ways: his failures and his extreme nature. In his inability to achieve the heights of knightly glory, Quixote can in some way demonstrate its nature as a self-contradictory fantasy. The passions of knighthood, particularly in being distracted by beautiful ladies and vainglory, can be nearly interpreted as a charm of the vigorous young man. He is still able to fight and conquer, facing vice in his pursuit of virtue in a way that we nearly wish to excuse because of his feats. But when Don Quixote, a skinny old man, experiences the same vices in pursuit of virtue without ever actually achieving them, one begins to wonder why his means are so distant from his purported ends. A glaring light is cast on the suggestion that un-Christian behavior is made excusable by accomplishment, which cannot be done when one fails to accomplish at all and we are forced to reckon with the fact that our men of glory are misguided.

Quixote's delusions further indicate a clash of worlds that one can otherwise disregard when the world of chivalry is isolated to the books. By superimposing fiction upon reality, Quixote beckons the knight into daily life, reminding us that these chivalrous men are not restricted to stories, but a real political presence. Imposing inquisitions upon travelling merchants and demanding chivalrous justice of a disgruntled farmer, wreaking havoc in society, points towards the suggestion that the ideal does not function as well as initially thought. Don Quixote's mode of chivalrous thinking and his application of it to the world is demonstrative of the notion that the Christian soldier may very well be an ideal that causes more harm and contradiction than good and order in a real political landscape.

Quixote's extravagant dedication to the image of the Christian soldier takes the archetype to its extreme, putting a magnifying glass to a preexisting chain and finally allowing one to see the kink in it. His deification of Dulcinea goes to the point of attempting to "convert" men towards her beauty, exaggerating the idolatrous treatment of ladies to the nth degree. His commitment to the laws of chivalry even in the face of excommunication and violence against the faithful is yet another demonstration of the subordination of God by these men, again by blowing the archetype out of proportion. These events are all incredibly entertaining, something that one could read to a child and laugh about on the surface level. But the subtleties of his reflection of Christian soldierhood are exactly what allow Cervantes to open his novel to the audience of the "half-a-dozen intelligent people who can understand them" (pp. 443).⁷

⁷ Please note that the author of this paper does not claim to be among such a small minority of intelligent readers but merely suggests that a curious mind will catch on to these subtleties and find meaning in them.

In ushering in this curious audience, Cervantes is able to use Quixote as the tool of introduction to the question of Christian politics. Once the reader has faced the analogous, God-subordinating issues of the life of letters, it seems that they are at an impasse. The question is reiterated: how can one live a political life and follow Christ?

Each individual has a private and public life. The former being how one goes about the world based on internal moral drive and the latter being based on a political ethic. This ought to be the case for the Christian as well; there exists the body of the church as an institution and as a social relation bred by moral teaching. As a Christian in the sense of social relationships, it seems possible to live in a polity guided by one's faith; one treats his neighbor with love, living a life to emulate Christ within one's soul and through the treatment of others. In this arena, the Christian is not a political actor, seeking the Good Life through Christ instead of glory and renown through great feats of power. While this private sphere may appear to be a solution to the Christian political problem, perhaps it is not so clear that this is the case.

It appears almost inevitable that Christians will find themselves in seats of political power. Whether that be because a small Christian village needs a mayor or a priest uses his role to make policy decisions for a diocese or an emperor wishes to defend the rights of his citizens of faith, there will be political actions made in the name of God. The guarantee that the faithful maintains his right to worship depends on Christians defending that right, directly or indirectly on the political stage. And through this need the political Christian enters into the same realm of risk that Cervantes warned us about in the first place, the subordination of God for other loves like power, war, and opinion. By looking at the public and private life in opposition, one recognizes once again the inherent adversity that arises, the one that Cervantes begs us to recognize as it is without suggesting that there exists a solution. This is an uncomfortable conclusion to be faced with; why can't we find satisfaction in the seemingly complete and resolved life of the knight, or, alternatively, life of the man of the book?

Well, nobody is stopping us. Unlike the cleric or the knight, Cervantes does not presume to use his authority to restrict us from one path or the other but simply points out the contradiction within which one would exist by choosing either. Without acknowledging the risk involved in the political life, one is nearly guaranteed to be led astray—perhaps even with this warning one cannot escape it. And yet it seems to matter immensely to Cervantes that the reader recognizes it, that they keep their eye on adversity in the stead of his verse, to acknowledge that the completeness that either arms or letters provides is false and internally inconsistent. Don Quixote's character is a mechanism for bringing these inconsistencies to light, and Cervantes' philosophy around adverse, incomplete fiction is the reminder that these inconsistencies are not reconcilable. Perhaps the awareness that he demands of us can provide some regulative effect, keeping us from straying too far from God's path. But perhaps, more importantly, this awareness is necessary so as to not become Quixote, lost in the world of fiction and unconscious of his absurdities. It is by not merely laughing at Don Quixote's follies, but trying to learn from them, that can open our eyes to contradiction and face the uncomfortable, irreconcilable truths of political life as a follower of Christ.

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The Kantian Idea of Systematicity and the Transcendental Perspective on Scientific Cognition

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Abstract:

What presupposes scientific cognition? And why do the facts of nature relate to each other? These two essential meta-scientific questions are typically answered in either a reductive-naturalistic way or a normative manner. However, both answers are problematic and insufficient to address the epistemic question of the ultimate presupposition of science, while also failing to address the metaphysical question of the interconnectedness of empirical facts.

This essay aims to offer a third alternative to answer these questions, through the transcendental perspective of Kantian philosophy of science. It will focus on the “sense of connection” between empirical facts presupposed by Reason’s transcendental inference: “If the conditioned is given, then precisely thereby a regression in the series of all conditions for this conditioned is **assigned** to us” (Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B526).

Consequently, the essay will rely heavily on the Transcendental Dialectic section of Kant’s First Critique, as well as a “historical episode” from the early history of electromagnetic research (namely, the exploratory experiments of Charles François deCisternay Du Fay and Michael Faraday). These episodes will illustrate the reliance of Reason’s transcendental inference in the construction of an empirical science in the absence of any general theory.

Ultimately, this History and Philosophy of Science (HPS) essay will conclude that the interconnectedness of facts in nature and the emergence of scientific cognition stem from the “problem of Reason” that demands and guides our cognition

Introduction

There seems to be a gap between ordinary and scientific cognition. From one perspective, the content of ordinary cognition (or common experience) might be characterized as a Humean “collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (Hume, 2007, p. 300-301). If this is a proper characterization of the content of our common experience, it may seem impossible to connect perceptions in the manner that scientific knowledge requires. Our ability to know *a priori*—for example, that a house with undermined foundation will fall—is evidence that we do have a reliable “sense of connection” between separate instances of common experience. Hence, common experience itself has a basis for a reliable connection between separate perceptions that goes beyond the Humean “conjunction” and “association” that are merely based on uncertain habits or dispositions.

¹ This ability to know *a priori* implies a basic lawlikeness of our common experience, i.e., it implies that we generally have a *sense* that a specific set of perceptions *connect* with each other, and that they can be correctly anticipated. This “sense of connection” proves that the content of common experience is not merely a “heap of perceptions”, but rather “manifolds of cognition” (Kant, 1996, B102)—i.e., the content of our experience is a case or instance of certain general rules (e.g., the rule of temporal succession) (e.g., the rule of temporal succession) that enables us to anticipate anything connected to it. Therefore, if science is a special kind of cognition where one can see the systematic connection of manifolds of cognition in terms of facts and law, then this “sense of connection” is the point of origin for all scientific cognition. The most appropriate way to explain this cognitive origin is through the lens of Kantian philosophy of science. The “sense of connection” presupposed by scientific cognition cannot simply be found in the subject matter of science itself—i.e., this “sense of connection” cannot be reduced to a phenomenon of specific sciences (e.g., physico-mechanical process of neurons in biology). Hence, it is pertinent to investigate this “sense of connection” in a meta-scientific manner and to reflect exclusively on the epistemic relationship between a cognizing subject and its object of cognition.

Accordingly, our meta-scientific investigation will be directed toward explicating this “sense of connection” as the transcendental basis of scientific cognition and of the construction of positive laws in general. In the first section of the essay, we shall see that reason’s demand for *systematic unity* is the “sense of connection” presupposed by scientific cognition as a whole. This demand consists in the regulative use of the idea of *systematic unity* and its imposition upon the manifolds of cognition. In other words, it consists of reason’s systematic *demand* upon the range of cognitions available to it. The characteristic of this *demand* will not be understood reductively

¹ (Hume, 2007, p. 179) If the connection between separate perceptions can be considered a ‘habit,’ then it must be a ‘transcendental habit’ that characterizes the interconnectedness of our common experience. However, it is still incorrect to think of this connection in terms of a habit, because common experience does not arise from the habitual appearance of an object for us. Rather, it is a presentation—a synthesis according to rules—that gives us any mundane and regular characteristics of our experience (e.g., temporal succession).

as merely a “heuristic of reason” or simply as an “economic principle of unity,” but rather as based on reason’s transcendental inference that precedes empirical cognition in general. Hence, this discussion of Kantian systematicity is aligned with the broader transcendental interpretation, especially with Kraus’s (2023) perspectivalist approach, which claims that “objects of our experience only become intelligible to us if we can make sense of them as parts of a systematizable whole, viz. nature.” In the second part of the essay, we shall examine a historical episode² in which a system of facts is constructed. Charles François de Cisternay du Fay’s (1733) experimental success in the construction of a positive system out of loosely organized facts called “electricity” will illustrate the actualization of the transcendental principle of *systematic unity*. The investigator’s reliance on this transcendental principle reveals that systematic knowledge, incapable of being built upon an all-embracing immutable foundation, is guided by the continual iteration of systems of principles that preserve the systematic character of a science but also remain open to revision. This iterative pattern, which arises from thinking about facts in terms of the *idea of systematic unity*, is best captured by the epistemic framework of *progressive-coherentism*; a framework that “recognizes the possibility of making progress by first accepting a certain system of knowledge without ultimate justification, and then using that system to launch lines of inquiry which can in the end refine and correct the initially affirmed system” (Chang, 2007).

Ultimately, it shall be concluded that the “sense of connection” between empirical facts is the true origin of scientific cognition in general and of the construction of any positive system. To illustrate this, let us imagine the existence of a piece of art (e.g., an epic poem) in which any information regarding the author is lost. A trained historian who sees this piece of art will wonder, “who could have written such a beautiful piece of writing?” From this point on, the historian will tirelessly peruse the great historical archive to find who might have been the poet capable of writing such a beautiful piece of literature. The historian may find him through the coherence of historical facts written, or he may not. Nonetheless, one should notice that the very possibility of the historian’s search is dependent upon the idea of a craftsman (or an author in this case) in relation to art that he sees empirically. Without this idea of a craftsman, he would never have been able to think about such an inquiry at all. The situation is the same with the idea of *systematic unity*. The scientist, like the historian, is not required to possess positive knowledge of whether there will always be a craftsman for every work of art, or, in the case of the scientist, of the systematic unity of Nature as a whole. However, without the idea of systematic unity, science would lose its preconditions because the very subject-matter of science—i.e., thinkable objects—would disappear. Hence, the idea of systematic unity guarantees that common experience itself has a certain lawlikeness that can be clearly conceptualized as facts that cohere in a systematic unity as a system of positive laws.

² “The episode is a concrete instantiation of the general concepts (the characters, the setting, the type of events to be expected, etc.), and each episode also contributes to the articulation of the general concepts. To be sure, this analogy is very imperfect, but it does express something relevant about the relation between concrete historical episodes and abstract philosophical conceptions.” (Chang, 2011, pp. 110-111)

Possibility of Scientific Cognition & the Cognitive Basis for Empirical Interconnectedness

To begin, let us discuss the possibility of scientific cognition and its transcendental origin. Scientific cognition is possible because of a “sense of connection” presupposed by any investigation of instances of common experience. Crudely speaking, this “sense of connection” is the *feeling* that an observation is certainly related to another observation. A *feeling*, however, is inadequate and too subjective to serve as a meta-principle of scientific cognition. For if science were guided by mere *feeling*, then scientific cognition itself would be arbitrary and “*anything goes*”. An appropriate way to explain this “sense of connection”, without arbitrariness or normative “habits”, is through the Kantian (1996, B671-B731) transcendental perspective. Rather than relying on *feeling*, Kant lays down an *inference* (i.e., a *sylllogism*) of reason at the basis of our scientific cognition. This inference is as follows, “*If the conditioned is given, then the entire series of all its conditions is also given; now the objects of the senses are given to us as conditioned; consequently, etc*” (Kant, 1996, B525-526). What Kant means by “conditioned” and the “condition” here is only meaningful if we understand him in the context of the relationship between objects and nature—i.e., the former as “facts” and the latter as “the sum of all facts”. For Kant, a fact (*Tatsache*), henceforth, is the “conditioned” that is given to us in common experience. This encompasses a broad range of observations (e.g., the downward tendency of physical things) that we are aware of, either in an uncontrolled setting (viz, day-to-day observations) or in a controlled experimental environment. Therefore, in accordance with the inference, we lay down at the basis of scientific cognition that the “condition” of these facts is also given to us—i.e., they are subsumed into a greater (and more abstract) rule.

However, this inference contains a dialectical³ deception—viz, what Kant calls “sophism of figure of speech”.⁴ It is a sophistical inference because “the major premise [...] takes the conditioned in the transcendental meaning of a pure category, but the minor premise takes it in the empirical meaning of a concept of understanding applied to mere appearances” (Kant, 1996, B528). In other words, the syllogism does not hold because the major premise (viz, the logical statement that every conditioned given has a condition) is applied equivocally to the minor premise. This application is a form of equivocation because it overlooks the difference between how a mere logical inference and object of the senses are given to us. The synthesis of the condition and conditioned, regarded formally as a logical inference, is given to us both *totally* and *simultaneously*.⁵ Contrarily, the synthesis of the condition and the conditioned for the object

³ Dialectical deception, for Kant (1995, B354), is “natural and unavoidable illusion that itself rests on subjective principles and foists them on us as objective ones”, and *dialectic* is a “sophistical art of giving an air of truth to one’s ignorance, and indeed even to one’s deliberate deceptions [...] by imitating the method of thoroughness prescribed by logic as such, and by employing the topic of logic to paint over any empty pretense” (Kant, 1995, B86). Thus, the basic inference of reason contains an ignorance that needs to be “corrected” by Kant’s transcendental critique.

⁴ *Sophisma figurae dictionis* (Kant, 1996, B528). The modern term for this fallacy is the fallacy of equivocation or the fallacy of ambiguous middle. Another, simpler, example of this fallacy is, 1) Nothing is better than God, 2) Something is better than nothing, and consequently Something is better than God. Here we can see that “Nothing” is being taken in a two different sense.

⁵ Any logical synthesis is always complete in its totality—i.e., the conclusion of a logical proposition is given in its premises.

of the senses is given as a *problem*—i.e., it is a problem that is assigned by reason for all the concepts (viz, facts) of the Understanding by treating them as a “conditioned” for a certain unknown “condition”. Also, it is important to keep in mind that for Kant (1996, B535) an object of the senses is “given” to us, not as a “thing-in-itself”, but merely through the *synthesis* of empirical cognition. Therefore, although the condition for all possible experience is given to us *formally* through the Kantian categories, the actual “condition” of a fact of nature (i.e., the rule that actually governs a specific fact) must be sought within the boundaries of experience.⁶

If we revise the initial inference of reason, alongside Kant (1996, B526), with a new expression, viz, “*If the conditioned is given, then precisely thereby a regression in the series of all conditions for this conditioned is **assigned** to us*”, then we have in front of us the ground for the possibility for scientific cognition in general. Consequently, science is cognition guided by the problem that reason gives itself and *demand*s out of the array of facts presented to it. Science, therefore, is a problem-solving activity where we actually do the regression from the conditioned to the condition through experimentation (*Versuch*).

So, what exactly is the characteristic of this assignment (viz, problem) that reason had assigned? We may start by considering this assignment as reason’s *economic* consideration of the multiplicity of facts at hand. In other words, it is a normative interest to express the myriads of primitive facts as succinctly and compactly as possible, but at the same time, not to reduce the content that these primitive facts contain. On account of this economic interest, a “system” (viz, a cognition of the manifolds of concepts under a principle⁷) becomes necessary to satisfy the needs for simplicity and compactness.

The manifestation of this interest lies in the formulation of a “systematic question”—i.e., a question that demands a systematic answer—which can always be found when one’s question begins with a *why*. For example, when one is faced with many occasions of moving bodies, one begins to ask the question, “Why do all bodies tend towards the ground when they fall? Why is it that some of them ascend in the opposite direction?”. A question such as this one always demands a systematic answer—i.e., the questioner has an interest in finding a principle that accounts for the various primitive facts concerning motion. Therefore, a systematic question marks the transition from ordinary cognition to proper scientific cognition—i.e., a systematic question (and the power or capacity it presupposes) is the point of emergence of any higher cognition⁸ (viz, both scientific cognition and the “systematic art”).

To see whether economic interest alone might account for—i.e., give rise to—scientific cognition, one must ask, “Where do the economic considerations of the multiplicity of primitive

⁶ Any object of common experience is possible through what Kant (1996, B160) calls the *synthesis of apprehension*. This synthesis is both spontaneous and rule governed. The rule for this synthesis is none other than the famous Kantian categories and how they are applied according to the manifolds of intuitions. An illustration of this lawlikeness of experience can be found in Kant’s (1996, B232-B257) discussion of how the succession of perceptions in common experiences is governed by the necessary law of causality. Therefore, the possibility of an object of common experience depends on a synthesis governed by a priori laws.

⁷ (Kant, 1996, B673)

⁸ (Kant, 1985, 468)

facts originate from? Do these economic considerations have a higher basis than a mere normative interest?”. It is important to notice here that the basis for the subsumption of facts into higher laws and then uniting all these laws under a single principle (i.e., finding the condition of these “conditioned”) cannot be found in experience, nor in the principles themselves. There is *nothing* in the facts themselves that compels the investigator to develop a principle that may unite them in a kinship under the unity of a principle. Even the notion of “principle” itself, regarded analytically, is merely another rule that can be applied to facts—i.e., the notion of a rule does not contain the necessity that compels us to subsume all possible empirical facts into the unity of a principle. Therefore, there must be a higher cognitive act that presupposed this unyielding “interest,” and this act is none other than reason’s *demand* for systematicity to satisfy the problem of the “condition for all conditioned” we talk about earlier.

This *demand* for systematicity is unique. One can interpret this simply as a heuristic—i.e., as a dubious assumption to enable the construction of positive system—or as a genuine *transcendental condition* of common experience (Kraus, 2023). Before delving deeper to interpret reason’s *demand*, we should ask the question: how exactly does reason *demand* the systematic arrangement of facts in scientific cognition? The answer to this question can be found in Kant’s (1996) discussion of the idea (*Idee*) of *systematicity* and the quasi-schematic application of this idea by reason.⁹ Kant calls it the *idea of systematic unity*¹⁰ simply because the unity of all facts under a principle is merely a relative supposition—i.e., we cannot know positively that all facts cohere under a single principle. However, since we are capable of subsuming a definite set of facts under a principle, it is plausible to suppose—relatively to that capability—that reason possesses the schema of subsumption of any facts (and even particular principles themselves) under increasingly general principles up to the point that the totality of all facts is subsumed into a single all-embracing principle. In other words, any positive proof of whether there is systematic unity is irrelevant, but at the same time, the idea of systematic unity is responsible for the very possibility of a systematic presentation of the manifolds of facts. Therefore, the *demand* for systematicity lies with the application of the idea of *systematicity*—presenting them *as if* the facts themselves are organized through some yet-to-be-discovered positive principle.

Consequently, by “charting” (i.e., pointing) the way, the demand for systematicity becomes the true guide for an investigator in his approach to Nature.¹¹ The application of the

⁹ At B673, Kant maintains what he meant by system, but in respect to the capacity by which this system originates, Kant designates reason as the capacity responsible for *inference* (Kant, 1996, B363) and the highest unity of thought. Kant (1996, B355) says, “All our cognition starts from the senses, proceeds from there to understanding, and ends with reason, beyond which there is found in us nothing higher to work on the material of intuition and bring it under the highest unity of thought.”

¹⁰ (Kant, 1996, B699 and B673)

¹¹ This Idea of systematicity is linked closely with the Kantian conception Nature as the sum of all appearances and its relevance as a concept of a weak lawlikeness (Kraus, 2023) of empirical cognition. This Idea naturally arises from Kantian cognition, especially out of the synthesis of apprehension and its capacity to gives us facts out of the manifolds of sensibility. In other words, if our basic empirical cognition itself contains lawlikeness (viz, the earlier example of

Idea of *systematicity* by the *demand* of Reason brings about a “blueprint” for what investigators can and ought to do in their approach to nature. The Idea of *systematic unity*, therefore, is like a variable exponent¹²; it indicates the method, subject matter, and range of the inquiry that is to be carried out (Kraus, 2018). In other words, this Idea is an “indeterminate principle”¹³ which regulates the activities of Reason in subsuming *facts* into the superstructure (arrangement) of principles. It gives us guidance or a sense of what to look for (viz, coherence of *facts* under a single expression) when we are confronted with a multitude of facts.

In the application of the Ideal of *systematicity* to appearances, Kant (1996) conceives of two kinds of auxiliary ideas utilized by reason. The first kind is the Kantian *Transcendental Ideas*—viz., the psychological, cosmological, and theological ideas.¹³ These ideas are essential to bring about the *unity-in-kinds* in the project of the Understanding—i.e., they are the ultimate guide by which the manifolds of the concepts of the Understanding (viz, facts) can be collated under a *collective unity*. For example, under the cosmological idea of *Matter in Motion*, the various concepts regarding the physical aspects of Nature can be subsumed into a systematic cognition under a principle—viz., as a science of physics. The second kind of ideas is the quasi-schematic application of reason’s maxim of systematic unity— viz., the ideas of *manifoldness*, *kinship*, and *unity*.¹⁴ The importance of this set of ideas lies in the conduct of inquiry—i.e., the application of these ideas always guides the inquiry to find the fewest principles that would account for different concepts, while at the same time ensuring that they maintain continuity within themselves. The application of these ideas is quasi-schematic because, unlike the schemas of the Understanding, they do not really give us an object—or a thing—in experience. These ideas, nonetheless, are merely useful *heuristics*.

Kant’s example of the application of both the *Transcendental Ideas* and *heuristic* of reason can be found in his discussion of the calculation of a comet’s path in the context of Newtonian *rational mechanics*.¹⁵ His explanation deserves to be quoted in full,

“If through an experience (that is not yet fully corrected) the course of the planets is given to us as circular and we then find differences, we presume them to lie in what can change a circle according to a constant law, through all the infinite intermediate degrees, to one of these divergent orbits [...] Thus under the guidance of those principles, we

causality, succession, and the perception of a boat going downstream), then the Idea of a systematicity itself is already contained formally as a necessity for all possible empirical cognition. Hence, when one speaks about nature, one considers the sum of all appearances all at once and presupposes a system.

¹² What an Idea is can be expressed succinctly with the algebraic expression a^x . It is clear what rule is ought to apply to a , but at the same time it is not clear what the exact answer is. Such is the case with the Idea—the quasi-schematic application of the Idea is clear, but it is not intended for the purpose of seeking an exact answer (e.g., a positive expression of how the world *is* systematic) ¹³ (Kant, 1996, B697)

¹³ (Kant, 1996, B700)

¹⁴ (Kant, 1996, B690)

¹⁵ “*Rational mechanics* will be the science, expressed in exact propositions and demonstrations, of the motions that result from any forces whatever and of the forces that are required for any motions whatever.” (Newton, 2016, pp.28) In other words, a science that demands clear systematicity in the presentation of any motion through a geometrical expression that are exact and can be demonstrated.

arrive at unity of the genera of these paths' shape. But thereby we arrive in addition at unity of the cause of all the laws of these bodies' motion (viz., gravitation). From this cause we thereafter extend our conquests, and try to explain on the same principle also all variations and seeming departures from those rules. Finally we even add more than can ever be confirmed by experience: viz., we conceive, according to the rules of kinship, even hyperbolic comet paths; on such paths these bodies leave our solar world altogether and, by going from sun to sun, they unite in their course the more distant parts of a—for us unbounded—world system that coheres through one and the same motive force.” (Kant, 1996, B691)

One can see that without making an absolute claim that Nature is united in a continuous whole, or that Nature is well-ordered, the physicist can rely on the ideas of reason to find connections between concepts and therefore unite the various experimental conclusions into a system of concepts which coheres under a principle (viz, in Kant's example, gravitation). Hence, the application of these ideas in *regulating* this specific inquiry in physics—viz., finding the orbits of extraterrestrial bodies—is what makes Newtonian celestial mechanics possible in the first place.

What Kant (1996) means by *regulative* is the “asymptotic” application of the ideas by which facts can be brought about under a system. It is asymptotic because the ideas are here followed approximately—i.e., the investigator is not claiming that the world *is* constituted absolutely by such ideas. As we can see from Kant's example, the investigator does not begin by saying that the world *is* systematically unified. Instead, the investigator *demand*s an explanation of Nature (viz., the orbital courses of the planets) such that the circularity of the planet's movement he is observing obeys some yet-to-be-determined constant law. By demanding that the *facts* be given to him systematically, the investigator avoids question-begging which arises out of prematurely asserting that he knows all the facts are in kinship with each other through the unity of a principle. This kinship under a principle is, it should be emphasized, merely an idea—for if it's not, then either we face the paradox of not knowing what the principles are but at the same time saying that we know positively that appearances of Nature are united under a principle, or we actually know what the principle is and inquiry is unnecessary.¹⁶ Neither of these accurately illustrates the condition at hand. The idea of a systematic unity—i.e., kinship under a principle—and its asymptotic application to facts, therefore, is the cognitive basis from which a system of nature can be constructed systematically, although not perfectly.

To conclude, the “sense of connection” that makes scientific cognition possible can be understood as the demand for a solution to the problem that reason postulates to the multitude of facts.

This problem—viz., that there must be a “condition” for a conditioned—is assigned by reason in the form of a *systematic demand*. This demand, applied to the whole range of facts of common experience, reveals the essential presupposition of the unity of nature which becomes the cornerstone of all scientific cognition. Or as Kraus (2023) points out, “the unity of nature is not a fact that can be discovered from

¹⁶ If *systematic unity* is not an idea then we are met with Meno's paradox of learning.

empirical observations or derived from the laws of logic. Rather, it is a necessary and regulative principle that scientists must assume in order to be able to make sense of the diversity of empirical reality in a lawful way [...] but this very concept must already be presupposed in the acquisition of any specific scientific terms and theories.” Therefore, the demand for systematicity—as a regulative idea of reason—is the transcendental basis of science proper because it makes the construction of positive systems possible. Through *demanding* the unity of these facts in terms of the ideas, we can determine further the possibility of a systematic presentation of these facts. Ultimately, the idea of systematic unity merely guarantees that the systematic arrangement (i.e., the formal arrangement of facts) is possible, but the content of this system must, in the end, be discovered in experience itself (viz, through the facts). Hence, the ideas are merely the cognitive basis (also *cognitive restraint*) for the construction of a system of positive laws.

Construction of Positive Laws & *Progressive-Coherentism*

Now, let us proceed to see how the system of positive laws can be constructed via the cognitive basis that we possess. Since the possibility of a positive system has been secured upon a firm cognitive basis (viz, *demand* of systematic unity by reason), what remains is the question, “how does one justify that one’s system is the appropriate systematic presentation of *facts*?” Justification is crucial for the construction of any positive system. However, justification functions here not as a method for achieving a “principle of everything”, but as an epistemic tool (or means) for presenting the coherence of a set of facts derived from the ideas. The impossibility of finding the “principle of everything” (i.e., the ultimate foundation) is implied in the cognitive basis of the regulation of ideas. If there is ever an ultimate foundation, it must be the idea conceived in the positive sense—i.e., the idea must *exist* as an empirical object.¹⁷ Nevertheless, this is impossible. Thus, justification of a system of positive laws lies not in systematicity, but rather in how *approximate* the system is to nature itself. This approximation can be tested, and the clarity of a theory can be developed over time. Hence, the “capacity of a system” given by the idea of *systematic unity* is needed only to bring about the *possibility* of systematic knowledge, but the process of justification is the actualization of this possibility through a continual march of progressive clarification and re-evaluation that guarantees the positive systematicity of nature in a scientific cognition throughout the various phases of scientific cognition.

To see how this possibility is turned into actuality, however, we should now see how the Understanding—guided by the ideas of reason—justifies the appropriate facts capable of being subsumed under a particular system. To do this, we shall examine a historical episode that illustrates a concrete instantiation of a general epistemic framework that operates without any ultimate ground (i.e., without any absolute principle) but at the same time permits the facts to cohere in a system. Chang's (2007) proposal of a novel epistemic framework, progressive-coherentism, would effectively capture this. Although Chang’s example of the episode of early temperature measurement manages to capture the instantiation of such a brilliant epistemic framework in great detail, we shall use another example, for the sake of increasing the generality

¹⁷ I.e., if foundationalism is to be true, then the ultimate principle of all knowing has to be a positive rule of a possible experience.

of Chang’s epistemic framework and to prove an additional case for the regulating idea of *Systematicity* of reason. Thus, let us focus on examining the history of early research in electromagnetism and how the positive content of systematic thinking (viz, coherence of facts under a principle) is developed and clarified over time without compromising its systematic character.

Under the guiding idea of *Matter in Motion*, what is it then, in the early science of electromagnetism, that is *in motion*? This question regarding substance is the primary concern of early studies of electricity and magnetism. One of the earliest accounts of electricity, conducted and documented by Du Fay (1733), identified that it is an empirical *fact* that a particular “electric” sensation emerges out of the agitation of bodies (e.g., rubbing resin with silk). He then formulated a principle that expresses this “electric” sensation—i.e., “that electric bodies attract all those that are not so, and repel them as soon as they become electric, by the vicinity or contact of the electric body.” The expression of a “principle” which Du Fay uses here clearly expresses the cognitive act by which it is *possible* to organize observational facts under a common rule (or principle). Hence, the attempted systematic presentation of facts concerning the “electric” sensation and other observations surrounding it enables Du Fay to see a rule by which these facts can be expressed succinctly. However, the goal here is not merely to find the most succinct expressions possible, for otherwise the goal of systematicity would merely be out of an economic interest.¹⁸ Instead the goal here is to *expand* from the facts at hand (via the systematic arrangement) to find the possibility of other facts—i.e. to find more empirical facts that elude us and lie hidden in a mere observation of common experience.

Based on this systematic presentation of facts, one then begins to “experiment” and approaches the world with the discovered principles in hand. Du Fay (1733) shows exactly this; by applying the aforementioned principle, he manages to “[clear up] numbers of obscure and puzzling facts.” What he means by “puzzling facts” here is any observations devoid of explanations. An example of this would be the Glass Globe’s experiment of Mr. Hauksbee¹⁹, in which the silk threads inside the globe fly away when we put our fingers outside the globe. Without Du Fay’s principle of electricity, it is impossible to make sense of this *fact* other than

¹⁸ In section I, we clarified that the economic interest of subsuming facts under a principle has to be more than a normative interest that one might form out of the habit of observing objects of experience. Hence, in *thinking about facts*, the goal for the formation of any positive principle is not to find the most succinct expression as possible, but rather to facilitate an expansion of the domain by which the *a priori* conceived principle has over the multitude of facts. Thus, in approaching nature with a principle in mind, one becomes an informed observer by which it is possible to discover facts that lie hidden in common observation. In short, one is capable of examining what one is looking for. Hence, any principle is an indeterminate expression by which more particular facts of nature can be discovered via a “second-round” approach towards nature (i.e., through informed observations). Henceforth, what we are addressing here is simply the Newtonian (2016) basic problem of philosophy—viz, “to discover the forces of nature from the phenomena of motions then to demonstrate the other phenomena from these forces.”

¹⁹ Du Fay (1738) Mr. Hauksbee’s experiment involves the electrification of a specially made glass globe that surrounds various silk threads, and the globe is electrified through friction. When the globe is electrified, the threads ‘fly out’ toward it. As soon as we bring a finger near the globe, our finger becomes electrified with the same polarity as the silk, causing it to repel the silk away from our finger. Today, this phenomenon is known as static electricity, specifically a subset of it in which bodies with different charges repel each other.

that it is simply “*a fact of common experience*”. However, with Du Fay’s principle, we can observe that this is merely an instance of the principle—i.e., the threads are “flying out” toward the direction of our hand because our fingers “becomes electric” and thus repels the threads away from it. Hence, here we can observe that putting a fact under a principle seems to be the beginning of any knowledge of Nature whatsoever.

The formulation of such a positive principle, however, does not mean that the ultimate foundation of the science of electricity has been discovered. It is merely an instance by which a set of facts actually coheres under a single principle or expression. Nonetheless, the interconnectedness of these facts is not merely formal. One can say that by the mediation of a principle—in this case, Du Fay’s principle—various observational instances can be referred to or unified effectively. The clarity of such *effective mediation*, however, is developed over time. For if it is not, then one might say that Du Fay’s principle—taken as the ultimate foundation for all science of electricity—is enough to express the whole range of facts it subsumes and that there could be no more facts regarding it that can be discovered in experience. This kind of epistemic framework is antithetical to progress and, at the same time, incorrectly illustrates how scientific principles are developed. To see the importance of *effective mediation* that is developed over time, we shall subsequently see that the principal aim of Du Fay’s principle is to facilitate a more rigorous approach to Nature via experimentation.

Before that, it is important to understand what *effective mediation* is. It is the capacity of a principle to express the whole range of facts as clearly and determinately as possible. Hence, in developing (i.e., clarifying) the initial principle, Du Fay (1733)—keeping the recently-discovered principle at hand—began experimenting with different materials (viz, glass, resin, etc) and deduced a clarifying principle according to which electricity can be understood in terms of two separate categories—viz, *vitreous* and *resinous* electricity. Not only does Du Fay differentiate between two kinds of electricity, but he also develops a reliable method by which the different kinds of electricity can be detected in bodies. He says,

“In order to know immediately, to which of the two classes of electricity belongs any body whatsoever, one need only render electrical a silk thread, which is known to be resinous electricity, and see whether that body, rendered electrical, attracts or repels it. If the body attracts, it is certainly of that kind of electricity which I call vitreous, if on the contrary it repels, it is of the same kind of electricity with the silk, that is, of the resinous.” (Du Fay, 1733)

From the experiments he conducted based on the initial principle—viz., an electrical body attracts a non-electrical body and then repels another electrical body—Du Fay managed to discover a more distilled version of the principle as he approached Nature a second time. Therefore, the purposive use of subsuming facts under a principle is not to find an all-embracing positive principle, but rather to facilitate a continual approach towards Nature that is progressively more informed than before. Hence, the *effective mediation* by a principle is a schema which we repeatedly apply to nature *ad infinitum*. Chang (2007) is correct in pointing out

that “inquiry must proceed on the basis of an affirmation of some existing system of knowledge.” Therefore, the coherence of Du Fay’s (1733) research is not dependent on the initial “foundation” he laid out, but rather on the historical progress by which the principle of his system is developed over the course of “approaches” (i.e., informed observation or “experimentation”) towards Nature. Hence, Du Fay’s successful practice—manifested in the form of epistemic iteration (Chang, 2007)—presupposes the regulative use of the *idea of systematicity*. As the necessity of a system (viz, coherence of facts under a principle) is already established in Du Fay’s mind via the regulation of ideas, the progressive coherence of a positive system that he discovered in Nature can be repeatedly iterated and clarified—but without losing the systematic presentation of these facts at the same time.

The epistemic framework of progressive-coherentism, then, is the accurate framework that captures the development of knowledge in the absence of any ultimate foundation and of any positive knowledge of how the world *is* truly a systematic whole. The recognition of “the possibility of making progress by first accepting a certain system of knowledge without ultimate justification and then using that system to launch lines of inquiry which can in the end refine and correct the initially affirmed system” (Chang, 2007) is precisely the spirit that Kant (1996, B718-B720) believes an inquirer must possess in formulating any system of positive laws under the guiding idea of reason.

Ultimately, any construction of a positive system is made possible by the necessary regulation of the idea of reason and is actualized through a progressive-coherentist justification—i.e., a repeated process of refinement and clarification as the investigator approaches Nature. This continual approach to Nature is necessary since we do not have a positive principle to account for the totality of experience—but merely the *idea* of it, i.e., we merely possess the schema for the subsumption of all concepts. At the same time, the reason’s cognitive act of *demanding* systematicity out of facts, and the regulative use of the idea of systematicity as if Nature has a definite system, implies that a progression of positive knowledge is required to bring about a more precise and general positive principle, as shown by the Du Fay example above.

Conclusion

To conclude our discussion in this essay, it must be stated that the origin of all science lies in reason’s postulated problem and its solution through *demanding* systematicity. The interconnectedness of Nature, which is implicitly put forward by anyone who asks the question *why*, has its origin not in a weak normative confidence that the world is organized under a principle or that Nature *is* a system, but rather it is implied by the very cognitive act of *reasoning* (i.e., making rational inferences). Scientific cognition, the most sublime product of such activity, only arises when reason “in order to be instructed by it [viz., nature] [...] does so not in the capacity of a pupil who lets the teacher tell him whatever the teacher wants, but in the capacity of an appointed judge who compels the witnesses to answer the questions that he puts to them.”²⁰

²⁰ (Kant, 1996, Bxiii)

Hence, as long as we have in us the *idea of a systematic unity* which we hold onto while we are investigating Nature, then we are ready to determine the specific principles by which our experience of Nature can be organized. One can even say, the relative supposition of this *idea of systematic unity*—i.e., thinking of experience *as if* it is a systematic whole that coheres under a principle—is science. The gradual iteration to determine the positive determinate principle by which this systematic unity can be realized has, at its basis, this negative idea of systematic unity. The origin for all systematic unity of our science turns out to be immanently placed within the power of reason itself. If one is to go against this and attempt to show that systematicity is not an idea but a positive concept, or maybe to go further by saying that scientific cognition does not require any ideas, then the appropriate answer to that would be, “as I said just now, O Meno, you are a rascal. You now ask me if I can teach you, when I say there is no teaching but recollection, in order to show me up at once as contradicting myself.” (Plato, 2002, 82a).²¹

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²¹ “καὶ ἄρτι εἶπον, ὃ Μένων, ὅτι πανούργος εἶ, καὶ νῦν ἐρωτᾷς εἰ ἔχω σε διδάξαι, ὃς οὐ φημι διδασχὴν εἶναι ἀλλ’ ἀνάμνησιν, ἵνα δὴ εὐθὺς φαίνωμαι αὐτὸς ἐμαυτῷ τάναντία λέγων.” It is just as what Kierkegaard (1985, pp. 11) says, “In the socratic view, every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses only on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge.”—scientific cognition is learned by oneself and continuously refined by the immanent application of one’s Ideas to oneself. Therefore, the knowledge of oneself, that one never is capable of a total and ultimate principle, is “god-knowledge”—the most important knowledge that one can have.

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An Outstretching of the Soul: The Possibility of Contemplative Prayer in the *Enneads*

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Abstract:

Plotinus' *Enneads* are often viewed as an esoteric text of metaphysics and the origins of the universe, centered around the core concept of contemplation. In a battle between the material and the spiritual, man must find his way via contemplation; yet it is difficult to grasp and parse out exactly how one does so, and how it brings one into union with the divine. Prayer is an instinctive way that humans have found to feel said union, but is it properly aligned with the contemplative life? Is it even possible to pray contemplatively? Plotinus addresses a kind of spiritual connection that humans can possess in alignment with the hypostases, yet its applications and feasibility are not entirely clear. This essay attempts to address the nature of Plotinus' metaphysical framework in order to tease out how the contemplative nature of the universe informs the mechanics and ends of the contemplative life for man. The intention is to find space for the spiritual life of embodied beings that are both materially inclined and integrally connected to the hypostatic divinity of the heavens.

Section I: Oneness, Otherness, and Bridging the Gap Between Hypostasis and the Material

Prayer to God or, the One, is only explicitly mentioned once in the *Enneads*: when discussing the Three Primal Hypostases. Plotinus says, “Let us speak of it in this way, first invoking God himself, not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves out with our soul into prayer to him, able in this way to pray alone to him alone” (V.1, 6.9-12). This is a very particular *kind* of prayer; silent, soulful, and solitary. It is also, importantly, an act directed towards the One, the greatest of the primal hypostases, which has no thing predicated of it and eternally engages in pure, self-directed contemplation. How is man to pray to the One if it is simple and eternal, while man exists in the material world of becoming?

The existence and function of Intellect and Soul appear to bridge that gap. It is essential when embarking on any question using the Plotinian framework to understand the One, Intellect (along with Being), and Soul. The three primal hypostases are not merely the foundation of Plotinus’ philosophical system; they are what eternally underly all order in the universe. The function and relationships of the primal hypostases are essential to facilitating contemplation, as man must come to an understanding of the higher things and learn to engage with them properly. The relationship between oneness and multiplicity, or, more simply, sameness and otherness, in the hypostases is exemplified by the distinction Plotinus credits to Parmenides: “But Parmenides in Plato speaks more accurately, and distinguishes from each other the first one, which is more properly called One, and the second which he calls ‘One-Many’ and the third, ‘One and Many’” (V1, 8.24-26). The varying degrees of separation between oneness and many-ness is not only useful in understanding the hypostases relative to the One, but also in terms of material reality, in which all things possess distinct physical Being.

The One is perfect, the “productive power of all things” (V.1, 8.9-10). Contemplating itself and want of nothing, the One produces the Intellect by way of emanation, as “a radiation from it while it remains unchanged, like the bright light of the sun which, so to speak, runs round it, springing from it continually” (V.1, 6.28-30). This principle of emanation from the One distinguishes it from the other hypostases; while the Intellect and Soul are in a state of active, intentional creation, the One is akin to the Prime Mover as a self-directed, contemplative source of motion that remains unmoved itself. The One is thus “none of the things in Intellect, but all things come from him” (V.1, 7.23-24), which poses a difficulty in terms of how we are to understand the One in itself, and, more importantly, how to engage with it. The subsequent hypostases seem to provide a potential solution to this problem through their respective powers.

Intellect, the product of the One, is “next to it in greatness and second to it: for Intellect sees it and needs it alone; but [the One] has no need of Intellect;” (V.1, 6.42-44). Being the next greatest thing after the One, the Intellect comes to understand itself relative to the One in its possession of Being (otherness). And while the One has this universal productive power, the Intellect possesses a different power, one “to produce substantial reality” (V.1, 7.14)¹. This word for substantial reality, *ουσίαν*, is also translatable as “being” or “substance,” further strengthening

¹ Greek: *δύναται ουσίαν*.

the notion that Intellect is separate from the One in its possession of Being. Unlike the One, in which there is only unity and simplicity, Intellect, or the All, encompasses everything. However, each thing that resides within it is distinct in Being, making the collective All only partially unified (thus Parmenides' categorization of it as the "One-Many"). Notably, the Intellect is the entire reason for the Soul's "establishment in reality" (V.1, 3.16-17), suggesting that the ensouled nature of an individual living creature is due to the initial distinction made between the One and the Intellect through Being.

Soul, consequently, "is an expression and a kind of activity of Intellect, just as Intellect is of the One" (V.1, 6.46-47). The activity of the One that is demonstrated by the Intellect is this "productive power," which the Intellect brings into reality by recognizing Being in itself, dividing into the All and creating Soul. The Soul, as "One and Many," is thus an activity of the Intellect in its uniting of the All through ensoulment, imparting distinct souls and natures into each thing within the All, while maintaining unity through the universal possession of Soul. This is even more clearly demonstrated in the Soul's product, Nature, which by way of contemplation makes "the lines which bound bodies" manifest in reality (III.8, 4.9-11). Nature is an expression of the Soul's activity in the material world, effectively linking the hypostases to physical reality through its own contemplation.²

While it is important to understand the function and nature of the three hypostases, it must be acknowledged that there is nothing between each of the hypostases and their products; "Everything longs for its parent and loves it, especially when parent and offspring are alone; but when the parent is the highest good, the offspring is necessary with him and separate from him only in otherness" (V.1, 6.52-54). The metaphor of the parent and the child not only clarifies how one is to understand the relationships of the hypostases to each other but also provides a useful lens through which one can understand man's relationship to the One.

If this parent-child relationship applies to man and his children, as well as the One and the Intellect, for example, does the metaphor necessarily render itself null and void when the parent is immaterial (Nature), and its child is of a physical body (man)? It certainly does not seem so, as the "otherness" the child possesses seems to be *material* (not simply substantial)³. In man possessing Soul and Nature being a type of Soul, (along with the fact that in both man and Nature existing, they must be within the All) there is some level at which he and his parent are unified. Thus, it can be concluded that while the human experience is tied to the material world, unification with the nonmaterial is not impossible within the Plotinian framework; it simply possesses a greater degree of "otherness." This "otherness" is not insurmountable, as the primal hypostases are still accessible to the human mind through the Soul and Intellect, connecting the hypostatic, divine world with the material, human one.

² It is important to note, however, that Nature is a soul and has no physical body. It is an immaterial thing that, through its contemplation, begets material form.

³ In the purest sense of "*οὐσία*;" the way in which a body has a distinct "otherness" from other things, regardless of the accidental characteristics it has due to its physical body. For example, the substance of "leaf-ness" separate from the accidental physical features of a leaf such as chlorophyll or veins.

This understanding of the relationships between the hypostases and what they provide to man is essential in understanding how one is to bridge the gap between the Self and the One through prayer. For an imperfect, albeit ensouled, being, the notion of prayer to a perfect and self-directed One would be thought unattainable, but Plotinus certainly posits that it is possible; otherwise, the exhortation to “pray alone to him [the One] alone” would serve no purpose. It has also now been shown that the lower hypostases of Soul and Intellect provide the means for lower beings to be unified with the higher things, therefore there must be some way in which man can engage in prayer to the highest thing: the One. But how? What does it mean to pray, to Plotinus? Does the object and intention of our prayer change its nature?

Section II: Disentangling the Ends and Means of Prayer from Externals

It seems necessary to start this inquiry with an understanding of how prayer works, and thus its distinction from enchantment. Plotinus suggests that there are two different kinds of “prayer”: prayer to the One and prayer to the heavenly bodies, which he describes as a type of magic. While Plotinus does not explicitly discuss these two models of prayer in relation to one another in any part of *The Enneads*, it seems that there exists a clear difference between them in terms of the purpose, object, and means of prayer. A distinction must be drawn between the two forms in order to understand what the ideal kind of prayer ought to be, and whether or not it is contemplative in nature. Where ought prayer be directed? And, most importantly, what is its end? By investigating the functional and teleological differences between prayer to the One and enchantment, the possibility of contemplative prayer can be illuminated.

The idea of enchantment is one in which the forces at play affect other objects, in this case the heavenly bodies. However, Plotinus proposes an issue with the notion of prayers being answered, as in, our human wishes being fulfilled by the motions of the heavens. The possibility that the moon and stars move to tend to our material ends suggests that there must be memory, “For it is obvious that if when we pray they act, and do not do it at once, but afterwards, and very often after a long delay, they have memory of the prayers which mortals offer to them....But there would also be some such need of memory for the conferring of benefits on mortal[s]” (IV.4, 30.18-21). If these beings must act in accordance with our prayers, instead of their natural rhythms, to fulfill our wishes, there must be a capacity to remember involved in the “answering” of human prayers.

But if we are to consider the heavenly bodies, these “lower deities”, as parts of the whole that is the All, then memory seems pointless. Being part of the greater All, which has nothing contrary to its nature within it, there would be no need to recall a human petition in order to fulfill it. A different understanding must be taken of deities answering prayer, in that “...their powers of choice, as well [as that of the All], cannot be affected and their bodies and natures remain unharmed, and if they give something by means of their soul, their soul is not diminished and their bodies remain the same, and if anything flows from them, it goes imperceptibly, and if anything is added to them, it is unnoticed” (IV.4, 42.24-30). The harmonic rotation of the heavenly spheres suggests a “way of things” that humans can perceive, engage with, or tap into,

but perhaps not change or influence in the way that we understand it (through direct manipulation). And yet our prayers *do* seem to be answered when we pray to the sun or the moon. For example, if, in a period of draught, a man prays to the moon to nourish his crops, and he is blessed with a surplus of grain that year, one's inclination would be that the moon *did* hear his prayer and fulfill it. How can this be if these entities are not being actively moved by our desires?

Plotinus seems to say that these bodies can still beget causes, "answering our prayers," though not in a way that deviates from their natural state of being and motion. He asserts that "...we must admit that some influence comes from them both with and without prayer...and that there are many powers which work even without deliberate choice...and one thing is benefited and harmed by another because it is naturally so disposed, and by the arts of physicians and magicians one thing is compelled to give something of its power to another" (IV.4, 42.5-7). While the heavenly bodies have their particular rhythms, the notion that they can be compelled by magicians and physicians—while still maintaining their natural order—seems odd. What exactly is man's active role in this kind of prayer? How does this enchantment even come about?

A very strange idea is then proposed: that by some act of "sympathetic connection," our desires are linked to the higher realms "...just as in one tense string; for if the string is plucked at the lower end, it has a vibration in the upper...But if the vibration can even pass from one lyre to another in so far as sympathy exists, then there is also one single harmony in the All" (IV.4, 41.1-11). The suggestion seems to be that man's will, his prayers, his desires, can compel the heavenly bodies the way an overtone is compelled by the striking of a particular key on the piano. What we desire must be a reflection of the motions above, producing a sympathetic harmony that man can engage with. Instead of our prayers moving the heavens, they must move *with* it to be fulfilled. It is not, in fact, that the heavenly bodies are truly hearing our prayers, but that the order and music of the universe brings our prayers into being when they are in accordance with the nature of the bodies above.

In a similar way, the things that harm us are not done with any intention to disregard our prayers, and are rather incidental, taking place as they ought according to the motions of the heavens, "... just as if someone, taking a light from a fire, hurts someone else—either the person who has made arrangements to go or that one who took it does the damage by having given some fire to someone who, in a way, moves it about from one place to another; and the fire which has come hurts if the person to whom it was transferred was unable to take hold of it" (IV.4, 41.12-16). The suggestion here would be that, when our prayers go unanswered, or events take place directly contrary to our wishes, they are part of this aforementioned "way of things," and it is better to accept these heavenly rhythms, whether we like it or not, than attempt to resist or influence them. The human notion of manipulating things against their nature appears to be useless here—one must be reminded of one's integral connection to the bodies above. With Plotinus noting the fact that this sympathetic connection can take place with or without prayer, it seems that to work with the way of things, whether through enchantment or in implicit action, is the means by which one can "influence" the motions above.

This human engagement with the heavenly bodies through enchantment seems to be *some* kind of “turning the mind” upwards to the higher things, as it is essential to understand one’s place in the All in order to move along with these rhythms. But is this what Plotinus means by contemplation? Is contemplation even the *end* of the enchanting act? While an understanding of the unity and harmony of heavens is an important aspect of enchantment, it seems to be more of a tool than an end. The clearer purpose seems to be to beget material outcomes that benefit man on a baser level. To raise one’s eyes and ears to the higher things (though notably not the highest, the One), the enchanter seeks fulfillment of a desire, rooted in an object. This cannot be contemplative, as the end is not to utilize the object for contemplation, instead it is to utilize a misunderstanding of contemplation for the sake of the object itself. Ultimately, one is still distracted by the noise of the external world, not opening the soul as much as using one’s spiritual understanding to affect the externals through the divine.

In the same way that the heavenly bodies can be enchanted, so can man. The practical man is “moved to that which charms him” (IV.4, 43.19-21), making himself and every practical action he takes subject to enchantment, as “everything which is directed to something else is enchanted by something else” (IV.4, 43.17-19). Yet, if these higher entities are moved by magicians, is this true of the practical man? What exactly is enchanting them? Plotinus claims that men are, in fact, drawn by *nature*, “which brings illusion and links one thing to another not spatially but by the magical draughts which it gives” (IV.4, 43.23-26). While the error man makes when enchanting the heavenly bodies is a misunderstanding of contemplation, the error he makes when he is not self-directed is his failure to see the illusions of nature for what they are: illusions. For example, man in his pursuit of nobility can confuse himself with mere reflections of it and therefore become enchanted by a false pursuit; “for to pursue what is not good as if it was good, drawn by the appearance of good by irrational impulse, belongs to one being ignorantly led where he does not want to go. And what would anyone call this other than magical enchantment?” (IV.4, 44.30-33).

Section III: How Man May Find Himself Capable of Prayer to the One

The contemplative man, however, is immune to the influences of enchantment, “for he is one, and that which he contemplates is himself, and his reason is not deluded, but he makes what he ought and makes his own life and work” (IV.4, 44.1-5). Just as a contemplative man is self-directed, the One itself is self-directed. There can be no enchantment in an individual’s prayer to the One, because the One cannot be moved towards or under the influence of anything other than itself. It also seems to be true that if the man enchanting the heavenly bodies is doing so with a preoccupation towards practical action and material things, this must also be the man who is enchanted *himself*. Man’s focus on the lower or higher things seems not only to influence the way in which he prays, but the kind of man he is. If the One is immune to enchantment, he who prays to the One must also be so, for, if otherwise, he would be incapable of praying to the One at all. Therefore, it seems not only essential for man to approach the One in prayer without enchantment, but also to be in a particular state of understanding when he does so, lest he be misguided and fall towards illusion.

How can this prayer to the One be categorized? There seems to be a different process that takes place when praying to the One than when praying to the heavenly bodies, though the nature and function of said process is still unclear. To begin to answer this question, it seems essential to determine what it means to engage with the One at all, to understand our relationship with it and therefore what this particular form of prayer entails. In order to make ourselves receptive to a higher level of understanding than what is typically reached through human investigation, we are exhorted to “turn our power of apprehension inwards, and make it attend to what is there...we must let perceptible sounds go (except in so far as we must listen to them) and keep the soul’s power of apprehension pure and ready to hear the voices from on high” (V.1, 12.13-21).

But how exactly does one maintain an inward power of apprehension? This issue seems to be addressed, at least in part, by this freedom from enchantment. By resisting manipulation or influence, by being self-directed, man can begin to tune out the external noises and tune *in* to the higher tones. Perhaps this is the better approach to sympathetic connection—it is not that one is tuned into the higher things for the sake of the lower things. Instead, man is engaging with the All for the sake of the engagement—contemplation—itself. The absence of any “delusion” or “pursuing” of knowledge, but rather a *possession* of knowledge in himself, enables man to remain unmoved by magical forces (IV.4, 44.34-37). Plotinus suggests that a self-possessed knowledge comes from understanding the One, by removing the notion of Being from the One and resting within it, so as to be “filled with wonder” (III.8, 10.31). Yet, from our understanding of the primal hypostases, the Intellect finds Being within itself through its contemplation of the One in order to understand the One as separate from itself. This concept of *οὐσία* is the foundation for Reason, which man utilizes daily, for intellectual thought *and* survival. How are we, as human beings, to understand the One, or anything, by doing away with Being?

Plotinus makes clear that this understanding of the One is an intuitive act, not something that can be elucidated from rational human investigation: “shall we lose faith [in the One] and think of it as nothing?...it is of such a kind, though nothing can be predicated of it, not being, not substance, not life, as to be above all of these things...coming to rest within it, [you will] understand it more and more intimately, knowing it by intuition and seeing its greatness by the things which exist after it and through it.” (III.8, 10.28-35). It makes sense that the One, possessing this Prime-Mover-esque productive power while also being “none of the things in Intellect [the All],” would therefore not have Being predicated of it. This does not, however, answer the question of how man, with a hardwired conception of the world *attached* to Being, is to conceive of the One otherwise. This is why the question of faith in the One appears to be so important. Perhaps the intuition he suggests, the means by which “wonder” of the One is gained, is done *through* faith, and is what it means to preserve our soul’s power of apprehension. By removing Being from the equation, man intuits the One as *within* himself. The life-force that set the particularities of an individual’s soul, mind, and body into motion is a productive power that transcends multiplicity—it is neither the soul, mind, or body, nor these things combined, but is their source. This is at the very least a reflection of the One inside the individual, and at the very most the One itself. Man must therefore have faith in the soul’s perceptive power separate from

the intellect (and, additionally, faith in the existence of the One) in order to understand such a phenomenon.

But what facilitates this intuition? The soul seems particularly necessary. Plotinus goes as far as to say that “Man would not have been moved to such great achievements if the powers in himself from which he started had been without soul, nor would the All live as it does if each particular thing in it did not live its own life” (IV.4, 36.22-26). The Soul is not only the source for our individual lives but is an essential linking force that can allow lower beings to turn their eyes to the One, as it separates the notions of Being (form) and Intellect (mind) into two separate entities. Accordingly, the separation between our minds and our bodies, our capacity to distinguish thought from action, is a consequence of Soul.

Acting upon or alongside other physical bodies allows us to understand our differences, our otherness, from other things. But our ensouled nature allows for unifying contemplation of the higher things. For example, there are no particular physical similarities between a man and a toad; there are only the common faculties of motion, sense perception, and the organs that facilitate that. Yet through contemplation, one can come to an understanding that as living beings, man and toad are one, both products of the highest Soul. It is possible, then, for higher levels of contemplation (of the Intellect, or even of the One), this ensouled ability to separate form from mind is the power of inward apprehension and the preservation of the sense-perception of the soul, that facilitates the intuitive, self-possessed knowledge of the One detailed by Plotinus.

Section IV: The Mechanism of Contemplative Prayer

Man, through this inward apprehension of the soul, can come to an intuitive understanding (or perhaps, wonder) of the One. While this understanding seems an essential first step to engaging with the One, it does still not clarify the way in which man is to *pray* to it. Plotinus exhorts us to invoke God,

...not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves with our soul into prayer to him, able in this way to prayer alone to him alone. The contemplator, then, since God exists by himself as if inside the temple, remaining quiet beyond all things, must contemplate what correspond to the images already standing outside the temple, or rather that one image which appeared first; and this is the way in which it appeared: everything which is moved must have some end to which it moves. (V.1, 6. 9-17)

While it is not explicitly stated that the “God” mentioned is the One, the descriptions of the temple and its surrounding images demonstrate that this is, in fact, the case. This God is solitary, existing “by himself as if inside the temple,” a fitting metaphor for the solitary and simple nature of the One. But what is to be said of the images standing outside of the temple? Perhaps they are analogues for the multiplicity that exists within the All, necessarily separate from the One and each other due to their individual Being yet a result of the One’s productive power. This would then make the Intellect “that one image that appeared first,” as the first thing set in motion, pointing the contemplator towards its source: the God inside the temple, the One.

It is important to note that the contemplator (which in this context appears to be synonymous with the prayerful individual) is expected to remain “quiet above all things.” The crutch of language seems to be unhelpful in this form of prayer, which is consistent with the nature of the One. Being self-directed, only and always contemplating itself, the One is without need or want of anything. Necessarily, this would include language and any other means of communication. Therefore, our human attempts to reach the One through outward, spoken prayer would be fruitless, and any “connection” man typically attempts to gain through language must be reached through other means. Language effectively shows itself to be a shadow of true understanding, requiring him to stretch out his soul in prayer and engage in deep contemplation.

Plotinus makes it clear that man ought to contemplate “that one image which appeared first,” the first thing set into motion by the One: Intellect. How exactly does this facilitate prayer to the One? This appears to be due to the One’s lack of Being—how can someone pray *to* an entity that has no Being towards which prayer can be directed? While this demonstrates why praying with spoken words to the One is ineffective, it also appears to explain the need to contemplate the Intellect in this prayerful state. Since the One is “none of the things in the All,” but is necessarily the cause and source of everything (due to its productive power), contemplating the Intellect, the source of our substantial reality, must be a path towards comprehending the power and beauty of the One in a way that is accessible to the human mind. Perhaps this contemplation of Intellect provides the inward focus required to be unified with the One in total self-directed contemplation. Man, therefore, prays “to” the One by directing himself inwards, in this receptive state “ready to hear the voices from on high” (V.1, 12.20-21). As man contemplates the Intellect, he is pointed towards its source, the One, which he can then, through the inward apprehension of the soul, intuit as within him, allowing for a deeper level of connection with the One than could ever be provided by language.

Interestingly enough, humans *do* pray with words, both spoken and internal. If the One has no use for language, who (and what) is this spoken prayer for? How does it shed light on the purpose of contemplative prayer for man compared to the purpose of contemplative prayer for the universe as a whole? First, it must be addressed that while humans do pray with language through prayer cards, recitations of mantras, etc., they ought not to, at least for the sake of contemplation. When Plotinus begins discussing Nature, he wonders how it would reply upon being questioned on why it creates. Nature responds, “‘You ought not to ask, but to understand in silence, you, too, just as I am silent and not in the habit of talking...what comes into being is what I see in my silence, an object of contemplation’” (III.8, 4.3-5). It is asserted here that the silence of contemplation and prayer is the exact means by which one “sees” their object of contemplation; this need for quiet is therefore not only useless for communication with the One, but it is more importantly a hindrance to the contemplative state one is attempting to enter through prayer.

This verbal prayer thus appears to be solely for the praying individual, an attempt to keep focus on the One through expression. However, it does not seem possible to pray with language and not tend towards the lower, material things—it becomes prayer *for* something, or prayer

towards an entity with Being⁴, not prayer to the One. This tendency towards the lower things is not only characteristic of the pulls of enchantment, but also symptomatic of man's weaker capacity for contemplation. Mankind, as a product of Nature, possess weak souls, as "a weak contemplation [that of Nature] produces a weak object" (III.8, 4.28-30). Consequently, this leaves man predisposed to weak contemplation, causing him to turn his eyes towards action and the lower things. This weakened capacity for contemplation is exactly why contemplative prayer is so important for the human; Plotinus makes clear that "men...when their power of contemplation weakens, make action a shadow of contemplation and reasoning...[because] they are not able to grasp the vision sufficiently and therefore are not filled with it, but still long to see it, they are carried into action, so as to see what they cannot see with their intellect" (III.8, 4.30-35). This tendency towards spoken word, material things, and action makes man especially susceptible to the enchanting power of practical action.

Not every action is wholly non-contemplative, however. The end of the action is what marks the distinction between an act concomitant with contemplation and an act in opposition to it, as "making and action are either...a weakening [of contemplation], if the doer or maker has nothing in view beyond the thing done, [or] a consequence [of contemplation] if he had another prior object of contemplation better than what he made" (III.8, 4. 40-43). Yet while certain acts such as procreation or art may be concomitant with contemplation in that they have a higher end in mind, it does not appear preferable to turn prayer into such an act. Even if spoken prayer is concomitant with contemplation as it is still for the sake of contemplating the One, venturing to a lower form of contemplation for its ease or comfort does not seem ideal; "for who, if he is able to contemplate what is truly real will deliberately go after its image?" (III.8, 4.43-45). The human soul has granted us with the capacity to pray to the One without language, in a pure state of contemplation—why succumb to our predilections for the lower, material things when we can "let perceptible sounds go...and keep the soul's power of apprehension pure and ready to hear the voices from on high", without word, without action, without *shadow*?

Section V: The Role of Prayer in the Context of the Greater Plotinian Framework

Prayer acts as an antidote of sorts to the tempting sense-perceptions of the body, redirecting man towards the contemplative track of the universe. This is the purpose of prayer when considering the greater order of the world; the One, the productive power of everything, exists in total contemplation of itself, leading to the emanation of the Intellect from it. Intellect, in contemplating the One, divides itself into the All through its recognition of Being, producing substantial reality and creating the Soul. The progression of the hypostases in their generation demonstrates a divine order that is for the sake of contemplation, emulating of the contemplative and productive nature of the One. As the hypostases descend in generation from Intellect to Soul, the contemplative power of the entity weakens along with the objects and products of its

⁴ The limitations of language require a subject and predicate. The One, without Being, can have no thing predicated of it. Therefore, even prayer that is not a petition, but rather a recognition of God's power, glory, mercy, etc., imposes Being onto the One. This effectively renders the prayer to no longer be contemplation, as it is now directed towards something lower than the One itself.

contemplation. This is especially true when the Soul produces Nature, the first non-hypostatic being as well as the first to engage directly with the material world.

Consequently, Nature produces weaker creatures of more varied will, capable of engaging in practical action that are for the sake of lower, non-contemplative things. Man is included in these weak creatures; his unique ability to pray, however, gives him access to a higher mode of contemplation. Man is capable of engaging in contemplation of the One through prayer, without need of a concomitant action. Effectively, contemplative prayer keeps man aligned with the contemplative nature of the universe, allowing him to emulate the hypostases in contemplation and generation. This is all the more important upon the consideration that man has more choice than it appears the hypostases do; the eternal nature of the One, Intellect, and Soul suggest an engagement in the “way of things” that they cannot deviate from.

Man is *voluntary* in his prayer, making his mode of contemplation more valuable in its rarity, and more essential in its contribution to the All as a physical body engaging in pure contemplation. It is important to recall that “Man would not have been moved to such great achievements if the powers in himself from which he started had been without soul, nor would the All live as it does if each particular thing in it did not live its own life”. Mankind and the All, the material and hypostatic realities, are united in a reciprocal relationship through contemplative prayer to the One. This is a demonstration of the continuance of contemplation throughout substantial reality, from the eternal realm of the hypostases down to the material products of Nature. The divine order begotten by and for contemplation sees no end, so long as man maintains a focus on contemplative prayer in his life.

Plotinus introduces a new look on faithful practice; by condensing disparate human notions of Prime Movers, Creator Gods, and Souls into primal hypostatic entities, he provides a pure framework through which prayer can be understood. The function of contemplative prayer is an essential aspect of man’s place in the divinely ordered cosmos, one that contributes to the contemplative tendency of the universe and unites the nature of the eternal realm with the temporal, material world through a maintained connection with the One. This receptive state gives man the opportunity to engage with the “way of things” as he ought, accessing the unity of the All and finding his place with it, and contemplating the simplicity of the One, subsequently finding the One within himself. Such a rarified view of prayer and faithful action is not as apparent through any other lens than Plotinus; removing cultural context provides one with a perspective removed from the influence of dogma and tradition for the sake of tradition. Instead, prayer can be considered for the sake of contemplation, and for the sake of that alone. As contemplation, prayer ought to be understood in and of itself, isolated from the material and practical particularities that often give rise to the misleading force of enchantment.

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Αγαποκρατία: Love in the Cosmos in Paul's Epistles

Elio Shiffman

Abstract:

St. Paul sets out in his letters that the present cosmos will pass away with all of its material objects and the concepts and importance ascribed to these material things will vanish as well. In I Corinthians 13 he lays out the idea of love, or *αγάπη*. He characterizes it as many things, but most importantly he characterizes it as a thing that is complete and present now, before the cosmos passes away, and will remain after. He also characterizes it as the most important of the things that are present in completeness now, greater than faith or hope. In this paper I seek to prove that love is given this importance because it provides the sole system that organizes Christian society and dictates what is good for people to do while still in the cosmos, as St. Paul has completely negated the necessity of following any law. This paper will span multiple letters of St. Paul and attempt to unify them into a consistent message.

⁴*Love is magnanimous, love is kind, is not envious, love does not boast, does not bluster,*
⁵*does not act in an unseemly fashion, does not seek for things of its own, is not irascible,*
does not take account of the evil deed, ⁶does not rejoice in injustice, but rejoices with the
truth; ⁷it tolerates all things, has faith in all things, hopes in all things, endures all things.
⁸*Love never fails; but if there are prophecies, they will be made ineffectual; if tongues,*
they will cease; if knowledge, it will be made ineffectual. ⁹For we know partially and
prophecy partially; ¹⁰but when that which is complete comes, what is partial will be
rendered futile... ¹³But now abide faith, hope, love – these three – and the greatest of
these is love. (I Corinthians 13:4-13 [David Bentley Hart])

In Paul's view of the cosmos, it is clear here and in other places that many things that exist contemporaneously to him will pass away when "that which is complete comes." In this particular passage, knowledge, prophecy, and speaking in tongues – all things that the Corinthians can take pride in achieving in this world – will be reduced to nothing and in fact, are partial and imperfect spiritual tools that seem only to exist because of the imperfection of human understanding in the cosmos. Love or *αγάπη*, on the other hand, never fails, unlike the things of the cosmos; therefore, it must both exist now and after those things pass away, and it also must be complete where those things are partial. In verse 13, he offers three things that abide in the world now completely in this way: faith, hope, and love. Faith is evidently important, and hope is necessary if there is a perfection to hope for beyond the cosmos, but Paul says that love is the greater of the three, distinguished even over faith, which Paul says is most important to being saved. Why is it given this importance, and why is it necessary that it be complete in the cosmos in the same manner as faith and hope?

A first clue to its greatness over the other two may be that Paul includes them in his definition of love, "...has faith in all things, hopes in all things." This makes it seem that love is some kind of basis for faith and hope. Perhaps in Paul's formation, faith and hope are good and necessary evidently, but one cannot have them in any true way without love. This would make sense from how he begins this chapter, saying in verse 2, "And if I have prophecy and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I have all faith, such as can remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." Therefore, faith without love is nothing, and although hope is not mentioned here explicitly, it does not seem to take a great leap of reasoning to conclude likewise for hope. So, the fact that it is more important than these is clear and the fact that it is so by being the underlying principle by which faith at least can be legitimized is certain. But the reason for it being necessary to legitimize faith and the reason why it is so important have not been satisfactorily accounted for.

The central problem is that though Paul gives a whole laundry list of things that love is and is not, it is still not clear what the definition of the word *αγάπη* is in Paul's letters. The Greek meaning for the word hardly gives any clues either. "Affection" cannot be literally what Paul means here. It is clear that it is not a romantic or sexual love. The common Christian interpolation of "charity" does not seem to fit perfectly either, though the definition of *caritas*

has perhaps been bent towards *αγάπη* in its use over time. It is therefore necessary to try and understand how *αγάπη* is being used by Paul.

Paul offers this extensive definition of love in his first letter to the Corinthians to provide, as he mentions in the preceding chapter 12:31, “a yet more excellent path.” The word translated here by Hart as “path” is *ὁδὸν* the accusative singular of *ὁδός*, which can mean way, manner, or system. The Corinthians have a problem that Paul is seeking to address. They have built certain divisive hierarchical systems into their community of believers. This can be seen in some men claiming to be followers of Apollo’s versus some men claiming Paul, but a more pressing issue Paul is seeking to solve is the fact that the Corinthians seem to be seeking to be impressive through prophesying and speaking in tongues.

In chapter 12 he is acknowledging that there are different spiritual gifts that come to people through grace. He even lists the gifts of grace in order of place, showing that some are in fact better than others. He does not want to deny or ignore the differences. However, he presents a *ὁδός*, or system, that is above all differences. *Αγάπη* is a system that avoids differences, a way to nullify differences between people to allow them to live peaceably and orient themselves away from the things of the cosmos and truly toward the things of the spirit. Paul does not deny that all of the occasions of prophecy and speaking in tongues are real. He views spiritual gifts as important and encourages people to seek them, but at the same time it seems that he is implicitly acknowledging that someone could be faking speaking in tongues for some sort of spiritual prestige within the community and he wants to head this off, which can be seen in his guidance on that issue, telling people to only speak in tongues in public if there is an interpreter.

The benefit of this system of love can also be seen clearly elsewhere in the First Letter to the Corinthians. Perhaps the biggest plague of their community that he must attend to is their “whorishness.” Beginning in chapter 5, Paul begins chastising the Corinthians for their *πορνεία*. This begins a whole section in which he talks about how to avoid sexual fornication or whoring. Whoring is obviously a thing of the flesh as it is included in the list Paul makes in Galatians 5:19-21, “Now what the works of the flesh are is obvious: adultery, whoring, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, witchcraft, enmities, strife, jealousy, rages, rivalries, dissensions, heresies, envies, murders, inebriations, carousals, and things of that sort, regarding which I tell you in advance – just as I have said in the past – that those doing them will not inherit God’s Kingdom.” Now whoring here is the same *πορνεία*, and it is obvious that the Corinthians should be warned against this if they wish to inherit God’s Kingdom. However, while this may seem to be a ridiculous line of inquiry and it may be obvious that all of these actions could be seen as inherently wrong, it is interesting that they are all characterized under the umbrella of the flesh because it is not immediately clear what they all have in common. To say they are all just bad is not enough. But if examined closely, it seems that they are all causes and effects of divisions between people. A few of them are just different words for divisions between people, and there are others that are less obviously so, but adultery is an obvious act of fornication that results in division. If fornication can be taken as a blanket term for all sexual deviancy, as it clearly covers having sex with your father’s wife, then it could be discarded as just something that is wrong, but

it is still worthwhile to consider it as wrong because it causes division. Paul considers sex as an action that makes two people's flesh into one. Whatever Paul means by that, having multiple sexual partners then is an action that naturally divides one's body between multiple people. And in a society that leaves people free to do this sort of thing the question becomes how to stop people from creating these divisions between each other.

"All things are lawful to me – but not all are beneficial. All things are lawful to me – but I will not be overpowered by any of them," this passage at I Corinthians 6:12 appears to give an answer to this question. Paul has made it clear that Christianity frees you from the necessary observance of any earthly or religious law, but people should still be able to consider what is best for themselves or what is expedient or edifying as mentioned in the repeated structure in 10:23. The question remains as to whether each person can evaluate for themselves what is beneficial, expedient, or edifying. Paul answers this in 10:24, "Let one seek not what is his own, but rather what is for the other." Doing things for oneself may not be the answer at all. Doing things for others may.

"Bear one another's burdens and thus you will fulfill the law of the Anointed," (Galatians 6:2). What Paul means as the law of the Anointed, or Christ, is not always clear, but if the system of *αγάπη* can be accurately called the law of love as suggested by Galatians 5:14, "For the whole Law is summed up in a single utterance; to wit; 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Galatians is where Paul most prominently stresses that love is a system that is set up for the purpose of caring for others. In the preceding verse in fact, he says, "For you were called to freedom, brothers; only let this freedom not serve as an occasion for the flesh; rather slave for one another by love," (Galatians 5:13). Here again is the idea of absolute freedom granted to you by being a member of the body of Christ, but it is beneficial, according to Paul, to subjugate oneself to every other person, by or through (*διὰ* used as causality) love. Treating love as a system suggests that this state of slavery to others is brought about by the system of love rather than an action or indeed every action of love being for the purpose of enslaving oneself to others, making every act done in slaving for another an act of love.

Everything about what Paul does in his organization of these communities that he writes to, and presumably every group of people he aims to convert, fits into this system, "For being free from all, I enslaved myself to all, that I might gain yet more," (I Corinthians 9:19). Paul lives his own suggestion to the Galatians; he becomes a slave to any community he visits, acting in the system of love. He treats all those who he visits with love, and the way this takes form as he writes in the following verses is that he seeks to become one with the people he is trying to save, "to the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak; I became all things to all persons, that in every case I might save some of them," (I Corinthians 9:22). Here Paul stresses the importance of becoming like others in order to slave for them. This follows the system of love; it removes any difference Paul might have from these people. In order to gain the trust of these people and convince them that they should follow Paul's example he must show them that he can follow his own teachings while being one of their own people. He comes into these communities and does the best he can not to be a burden on them, to carry his own burdens as he seeks to help

them through his teaching and through living his teaching to serve as an example. This itself is an action of love; he does not want to create division by being a stranger coming in and changing people's ways entirely. There are some things that are unavoidable as witnessed by the number of times he was imprisoned, attacked, and beaten. But he does not seek to disrupt people's daily lives. He wants them to see that they can live within the governmental, social, even religious systems that they lived in before while still acknowledging that these are simply things of the flesh or the cosmos and can be followed if a believer chooses to follow them, as long as they know that these things hold no true significance, unlike the system of love.

It is not necessary to follow conventions of any specific political or idol worshipping religious group, but it is necessary for Paul at least to share the good tidings, "For, if I proclaim the good tidings, no boast belongs to me. Because a necessity is laid upon me; for it is a woe to me if I do not proclaim the good tidings," (I Corinthians 9:16). Paul feels that it is necessary for him to proclaim the good tidings because it would be bad for him if he did not. If Paul proclaiming the good news is part of his action of enslaving himself to others and therefore an act of love, this suggests that there is a certain element of compulsion to the system of love. The compulsion for Paul comes from the "necessity" or *ἀνάγκη* to do what is good for him. This follows his practice of recommending what is good for people. He does not order people to do anything he speaks of laws of the spirit or laws of Christ, but these are not laws in the sense of governance in the cosmos. The principle that Paul believes people should follow is love, in using their freedom of choice to enslave themselves to others, because this will benefit themselves.

Paul has clearly stated this as seen in I Corinthians 10:24 as quoted above. The avoidance of seeking after things for yourself on earth is beneficial for oneself because avoiding the things of the flesh and the cosmos reaps rewards in spiritual life. But a person's actions still must be ordered towards some *τέλος*. Therefore, it is more beneficial to order your actions towards the worldly good of others. This formation makes sense, orienting worldly actions to the good of others leads to spiritual goods for the self, however Paul spreading the good tidings is a spiritual good for others and he seeks to save them through love. So doing spiritual goods for others is just as much an act of love which is necessary for the good of the self because do to otherwise would be to misuse the freedom which God gives.

Even Paul's consideration of contemporary master-slave dynamics shows his view of love, both to avoid division and violence and to do good work for others. In I Timothy 6:1-2 he says, "As many as are under yoke as slaves, let them esteem their own masters worthy of every honor, so that God's name and teaching should not be blasphemed. And those who have masters who have faith, let them not think slightly of them because they are brothers, but let them slave yet better for them, because the recipients of that good work are persons faithful and beloved. Teach and exhort these things." Slavery is naturally divisive because it creates an imbalance of power between to people, but Paul seeks again to stress that the master slave distinction does not truly matter, especially if both are brothers in Christ. The loving action is not to create more division between slave and master. Paul does not want to cause a slave rebellion so that all slaves can be free; he has accepted slavery as a condition of the cosmos like the governing powers and

differences in peoples. These differences cannot be entirely removed without great violence and division, so it is better to accept them as temporary things of the cosmos. Even so, as seen in Paul's letter to Philemon, if there are unique opportunities to create equality without inciting violence or bad feeling they should be taken.

Another institution that Paul views in a somewhat comparable way is marriage. Marriage creates inequality because it causes people to prioritize their spouses, or their children above others. This is further proof that the system of love is, in Paul's formulation, a love that creates equality. Love is a thing that should be shared between people as equals and marriage causes a more intense and exclusionary familial love than the familial love between the brothers and sisters of the Church. However, he does value marriage as a safeguard against fornication, by which metric it is an institution that is useful in the cosmos, but as seen in Matthew 22:30 it will pass away with the cosmos.

Likewise, the love that comes with marriage will pass away, but *αγάπη* will not. Which gets back to the fundamental problem. Love in its completeness in the resurrection is an absolute dissolution of all differences between people. According to Philippians 3:20-21, "...our true citizenship is in the heavens, from which we also eagerly await a savior, Lord Jesus the Anointed, who will transform the body of our abjectness, conformed to the body of his glory by the operation of his power for setting all things in order under himself." This is one of the few examples from Paul that talks about what life will be like after the resurrection, and this conformity that he describes aligns with the idea of all becoming unified after the resurrection. But according to Paul this is already our state after baptism as he says in Galatians 3:28, "There can be neither Judaeon nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there cannot be male and female, for you are all one in the Anointed One Jesus." This is how love is complete already. The perceived divisions between people are regarded as nothing because unity through love is already in the cosmos. It is a system that is ready to be used and worked within; the only thing that is incomplete is humanity's ability to adhere to this system of love.

Paul has made it manifest then, that for the good of humanity in the cosmos, it is necessary for themselves and others that people have love. Simply speaking in terms of humanity as a whole and viewing it as such already leans towards the homogeneity that Paul is trying to get to through love. As mentioned before in the long passage quoted above, love applies to all things and people. Love gives people the freedom to ignore the divisiveness that the flesh causes so they can be more mindful of the things of the spirit.

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Relational Knowledge and the Origins of Violence in Genesis: The Trajectory from Eden to Lamech

Utsuk Upreti

Abstract:

This paper traces the transformation of humanity's relational knowledge in Genesis from pre-Fall clarity to post-Fall distortion. In Eden, human knowledge and understanding are inherently relational; Adam perceives his identity through interaction with creation and intuitive recognition of Eve (Gen. 2:18–23). The Fall disrupts this framework, causing Adam and Eve to interpret reality apart from divine boundaries (Gen. 3:1–6). Their resulting shame and blame signal a shift from relational insight to epistemic distortion, a shift underscored by God's act of clothing them with garments of animal skins, the first instance of divinely sanctioned killing, which preserves life while marking humanity's new relational awareness of life and mortality (Gen. 3:7, 3:10–12, 3:21). This trajectory intensifies with Cain, whose fratricide reflects a reactionary, emotional misunderstanding of his inherited condition (Gen. 4:3–8). Lamech amplifies this pattern by transforming partial knowledge into a confident, self-justifying theology of violence. By appropriating God's mercy toward Cain to celebrate revenge, Lamech embodies the cultural normalization of violence that precipitates the Flood (Gen. 4:23–24; 6:5, 6:11). Genesis thus presents violence not only as an ethical failure but as the consequence of knowledge severed from its divine context, with the skin garments functioning as the inaugural symbolic marker of this transformation.

Relational Understanding as a Core Feature of Human Life in Eden

From its earliest scenes, Genesis anchors human existence in relationships. The first problem identified within creation concerning humanity is Adam's aloneness, expressed in God's declaration: "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). This statement establishes companionship as a foundational dimension of human existence. The narrative never implies that Adam's solitude limits his ability to work the garden or that a partner is needed to make the ground more effectively tilled. Instead, relational presence appears as an existential need that precedes human productivity. Human flourishing, in this portrayal, begins with the presence of another who can stand alongside the human as an equal counterpart—a "partner."

This relational emphasis becomes more pronounced when God brings the living creatures to Adam "to see what he would call them" (Gen. 2:19). Rather than an exercise in classification, the narrative presents this moment as an encounter through which Adam perceives the kinds of beings around him and situates himself among them. Naming functions as discernment: as Adam confronts each creature, he explores the boundaries of similarity and difference in relation to himself, and discovers, through this process, that none corresponds to him. The text marks this realization by stating, "but for the man no helper was found" (Gen. 2:20) indicating that the absence of a suitable partner is recognized first at the level of Adam's own relational perception rather than through divine explanation.

Eve's creation completes this sequence of recognition. When Adam sees her, he immediately declares, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). This is the first instance of a human articulating judgment not directly prompted by divine speech. Adam understands himself well enough to recognize another self; This moment reveals an inherent human capacity for intuitive relational knowledge: the ability to perceive identity, likeness, and difference. Genesis thus establishes relational perception as part of the created order, not as a moral or psychological development acquired later.

This foundational clarity sets the stage for the narrative developments that follow. Once human beings begin interpreting creation apart from the relational awareness grounded in divine presence, misperception, fear, and violence emerge. Eden's early scenes therefore function as both a baseline and a contrast for the distorted forms of relational knowledge that unfold after the Fall.

The Fall as the Distortion of Relational Knowledge

Genesis 3 introduces the first rupture in relational clarity. Notably, the text does not portray Eve as misperceiving the physical world. Her judgments about the tree correspond with the narrator's earlier descriptions. She sees that the tree is "good for food" and "pleasant to the eyes" (Gen. 3:6; cf. 2:9), echoing the language used to describe all the trees in Eden (Gen 2:9). Her sensory and evaluative faculties remain intact.

The distortion arises specifically from relational interpretation. God's command had established a boundary regarding this particular tree. The prohibition was relational, grounded in divine authority rather than the tree's physical properties. When Eve evaluates the tree

independently of that boundary, her correct observations become misaligned judgments. The critical shift occurs when she concludes that the tree is “desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). This belief is rooted in the serpent’s half-truth that the humans’ eyes would be opened. Their eyes do open, but what they gain is not divine wisdom; it is shame, fear and alienation.

Eve’s error is therefore relational, she interprets creation outside the framework of God’s command. This represents the first moment in which human judgment operates autonomously, detached from the divine relational structure that prohibited eating from the tree. Once humans begin interpreting creation, and themselves and God, apart from the relational structure that gave those things their meaning, the clarity of Eden dissolves. What begins as a subtle shift in interpretive framework becomes the seed of disorder that will expand exponentially. The Fall is thus best understood not as a cognitive failure but as a relational one: the breakdown of interpreting the world in reference to God.

Further Transformation in Relational Knowledge after the Fall

Genesis states that “the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.” (Gen 3:7). Yet God’s question, “Who told you that you were naked?” (Gen 3:11), reframes this moment in a striking way. Rather than asking *how* they realized their nakedness, God asks *who* communicated it, implying that their new awareness may have emerged through relational interaction rather than isolated introspection. The narrative itself supports this: Adam and Eve stand together, seeing and responding to one another, and jointly sewing fig leaves. Their knowledge of nakedness appears first as mutual perception. Nakedness becomes meaningful only when exposed in the presence of another, and shame becomes possible only because one is seen by another. The fig leaves are not merely coverings; they are a shared attempt to manage a newly felt relational vulnerability.

God’s question, therefore, highlights a central feature of post-Fall human knowledge: it remains fundamentally relational, but its relationality is now distorted. Before the Fall, Adam’s self-understanding developed through encounters with others, recognizing the animals as different, discerning Eve as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” and gaining identity through relational comparison under divine guidance. This was relational knowledge functioning properly, producing recognition and unity with a fellow human.

After the Fall, the same relational structure persists, but its meaning changes. Adam and Eve still come to know themselves through one another, yet what they now perceive is exposure and insecurity. Their awareness of nakedness arises through the gaze of the other; their shame is born in the presence of the other. As Adam once discovered his likeness through Eve’s presence, he now discovers his vulnerability through her gaze. The mode of knowing is the same; the emotional and moral context is ruptured. What once unfolded gradually and harmoniously under God’s presence now erupts suddenly in God’s absence, shaped by fear, shame, and relational tension.

Thus, relationality continues to clarify self-knowledge, but with drastically different consequences. Pre-Fall, relational perception reveals identity within God's order; post-Fall, it produces shame.

Transformation of Self-Knowledge from Sameness to Separation

The Fall alters not only Adam and Eve's moral standing but the very structure of how they understand themselves. The first sign of this shift appears in their perception of nakedness. After eating the fruit, they sew fig leaves together to cover themselves (Gen. 3:7), and these coverings are sufficient within the human-to-human frame of reference. The text never suggests that Adam and Eve hide from each other; their shame is mutual and manageable.

This changes the moment God enters the scene. When they "heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden" (Gen. 3:8), they hide, not because of any new physical exposure but because the relational context has shifted from human to divine. The fig leaves that worked before one another no longer work before God. Nakedness becomes charged not only with shame but with fear.

This fear exposes a deeper fracture introduced by the Fall. God later declares that the human has "become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). Adam now carries a category of knowledge that belongs to God, but he remains a creature. This mismatch, possessing the knowledge of good and evil without divine capacity, reshapes how he sees himself and his nakedness. His confession reveals this altered self-perception: "I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Gen. 3:10). The fear arises not from bodily exposure alone, already addressed by their coverings, but from realizing that his nakedness now symbolizes his disobedience before the One whose command he violated (Gen. 2:17). His knowledge about self is now that of inadequacy of covering his nakedness in front of God and of humanity itself.

The change in self-knowledge becomes even more explicit when God questions the couple. Adam responds, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit...and I ate" (Gen. 3:12). The one he had celebrated as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23) is now described primarily as the source of his failure. The relational knowledge that once disclosed sameness becomes a means of separation. Eve follows the same pattern: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:13). Each shifts responsibility outward, redefining the relational network not through unity but through blame.

Thus, the narrative reveals a complete transformation of relational knowing. Before the Fall, self-knowledge leads to correspondence and harmony. After the Fall, self-knowledge leads to separation, fear before God, blame toward one another, and distance even from the created world.

Genesis 3 therefore depicts the collapse of the relational framework through which selfhood had previously been disclosed. Relationality, once the ground of unity, becomes the arena of fear, hiding, and the displacement of responsibility.

Introduction of Violence as an Embodiment of a New Relational Knowledge

After pronouncing judgment on the serpent, the woman, and the man, God's next act becomes a pivotal moment in the narrative, one that reframes questions of knowledge, purpose, and violence. The text states simply, almost with a kind of sympathy, that God made "garments of skins for the man and for his wife and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). It involves the first death in Scripture, the killing of an animal, and most importantly, the first act that lends itself to the interpretation of violence, and it is performed not by the humans, who introduced disobedience, but by God, who responds to their fear and shame with an act of protection. The moment holds a tension between divine sympathy and the gravity of what has been lost.

Yet this understated gesture carries a more symbolic weight. A striking detail becomes relevant here: earlier in the narrative, every animal, including the birds, had been formed as a possible helper for Adam. Their original purpose was relational; they were created with the hope that one among them might correspond to the human. When none were found suitable, the animals remained in the world, continuing to live despite having, in a sense, failed their intended role. Their failure was not moral; it arose from their essence, from what they were made to be. Yet their inability to fulfill their initial purpose did not result in their destruction. They retained a kind of intrinsic value simply by virtue of being God's creatures.

Read in this light, the clothing of Adam and Eve in the skins of such animals takes on new significance. If the animals' failure of purpose did not warrant death, then the humans' departure from their divine purpose, caring for Eden, presents a different kind of failure, one rooted not in essence but action. Adam's disobedience, unlike the animals' unsuitability, introduces a moral rupture that does call for death. Yet even here, the narrative portrays God as delaying the full consequence. Death becomes an eventual destiny rather than an immediate execution.

The skins therefore mark a profound symbolic exchange. The humans are now clothed in the coverings of creatures who failed their initial role yet were allowed to live based on their inherent worth, like the fate of the animals. By wearing these skins, Adam and Eve are placed, metaphorically, in the same category: beings who have lost their original vocation but are sustained for reasons deeper than their usefulness. The garments become a physical expression of a new kind of knowledge; the knowledge of themselves as morally compromised yet still valued, condemned to mortality yet preserved for a time.

In this sense, the clothing is not merely provision for nakedness but an embodied reminder of this knowledge and their transformed condition. It signals that humanity now lives suspended between failure and worth, judgment and mercy. What was once an identity rooted in purpose and presence is now carried as a burden: the awareness that they are beings who have forfeited their divine role, yet whose intrinsic value still sustains their life. The skins thus become the first tangible symbol of that knowledge, something humanity must wear, and bear, from this point forward.

This inaugural act of violence, done not by human hands but for human preservation, becomes a life-sustaining sign of what humanity now is: creatures marked by both intrinsic worth and the consequences of their failure. ‘Inaugural’ because all subsequent events containing human violence grew out of this act, a scene rendered with such disarming simplicity that the violence beneath it remains almost out of sight.

After their expulsion from Eden, Adam and Eve bear Cain and, afterward, Abel. Eve’s declaration, “I have produced a man with the help of the Lord”, is striking. She does not say “child.” The text also states that Abel *was* a keeper of sheep and Cain *was* a tiller of the ground. The verbs here, “man” rather than “child,” “was” rather than “became”, signal an absence of development, growth, or learning. The brothers appear almost already fixed in their identities, as though their roles emerge from the world they have inherited rather than from any gradual maturation.

This impression intensifies when the text continues: “In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering... and Abel... brought of the firstlings of his flock” (Gen. 4:1). The phrase “in the course of time” (Gen. 4:3–4) suggests more than chronology; it implies inevitability. Their offerings seem not to arise from gratitude but from a kind of mechanical unfolding of consequences set in motion by Adam and Eve’s earlier actions. The narrative frames their behavior as something that had to happen once humanity entered this new condition of post-Fall existence.

Their professions also function as identity-markers that separate them. Abel’s work, keeping and domesticating sheep, is unprecedented. No one tended animals before him. This new task appears directly born from the events in Eden, especially God’s act of clothing Adam and Eve with animal skins, the first action performed on an animal. Cain’s labor, by contrast, continues Adam’s work of tilling the ground. What Adam once did in the Garden without sweat, thorns, or thistles, Cain now must do on cursed soil, for God says to Adam while pronouncing his judgment “cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen. 3:17). Abel, therefore, represents humanity moving forward into a new condition shaped by violence and sacrifice, while Cain represents continuity with the past, a lingering attachment to what Eden had been.

The distinction between their offerings deepens the symbolic landscape. Animals and humans were originally formed from the ground, but neither reproduces from the ground. Vegetation does. And since the ground is now cursed, Cain’s offering is implicated in this curse at the deepest level, both in its origin and in its reproduction – one which he cannot escape. Abel’s offering, by contrast, comes from creatures not formed from this cursed reproductive cycle. This helps explain why God regards Abel’s offering but not Cain’s (Gen. 4:4–5). It also makes clear that violence becomes structurally embedded in any offering to God: an offering that pleases God requires killing. Nonviolent offerings, of fruit or produce, cannot escape the curse on the ground.

The first act of killing, performed by God, produced garments that embodied humanity’s post-Fall identity: simultaneously bearers of divine failure and beings of intrinsic worth. That act

placed humans symbolically alongside the animals whose skins they wore. The second act of killing, Abel's sacrifice, expresses humanity's acceptance of this new relational knowledge while still asserting human superiority over animals. God's regard for Abel's offering is thus a divine affirmation of this relational order.

Into this world enters the first recorded human emotion after the Fall: anger. Cain's anger arises when God disregards his offering, a response that emerges within a world already shaped by a curse Cain did not cause. The ground was cursed 'because of' Adam (Gen. 3:17), yet its consequences extend beyond Adam himself, shaping the conditions of Cain's labor and the frustration embedded in his offering. Cain now bears the knowledge that God's acceptance depends not on the offeror but on the offering, and that the offering itself is already compromised before he is even born. He discovers that the father's sin is inherited, that divine judgment in the present remains inextricably linked to a single past event. This knowledge generates anger: the sense that history is an unjust determinant of the present.

Abel's acceptance by God does not imply that Abel understood this knowledge; rather, his work and offering simply aligned with God's evaluative framework. Cain, however, receives the darker revelation: humanity's failure is inescapable, but so is its intrinsic worth. He is unable to recognize both. He refuses the balance of this relationality between failure and worth that is embedded in human existence. Instead, he focuses solely on failure. By killing Abel (Gen. 4:8), the first human-to-human violence, Cain rejects humanity's intrinsic worth and thus the very structure of relationality God had affirmed. He attempts to sever the link between past and present, treating history not as a determinant but merely as a temporal background. In doing so, he distorts the relational truth that past and present remain bound together in God's view.

This distortion inaugurates a trajectory that will intensify in the generations ahead. The relational knowledge between past and present, failure and worth, curse and identity, will become the very engine of escalating violence in humanity, culminating in figures like Lamech, where distortion becomes boastful aggression.

Lamech and the Theological Rationalization of Violence through Distorted Knowledge

Lamech's brief speech in Genesis 4:23–24 marks a decisive turning point. Where Cain's violence arises from anger and confusion, Lamech's violence emerges from confidence and justification. He addresses his wives:

"I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

Unlike Cain, Lamech does not speak to God. He speaks to other humans. His words are not confessional but triumphant. The shift from divine dialogue to human-centered proclamation signals a profound transformation in how violence is perceived.

Lamech interprets his killing as retaliatory and therefore justified. More significantly, he appropriates God's protection of Cain (Gen 4:15) as precedent for divine support of his own violence. God's mark on Cain originally functioned as a limit, a containment of vengeance. Lamech treats it as authorization. He inflates the divine measure from sevenfold to seventy-sevenfold, transforming divine mercy into a theological endorsement of unrestrained harm.

This reveals a deep distortion of inherited knowledge. Lamech remembers only part of the Cain story. Whether through generational retelling or selective emphasis, the narrative of Cain's murder and divine protection becomes detached from its moral context. Cain may have become a heroic ancestor, a city-builder (Gen 4:17) and progenitor of cultural accomplishments (Gen 4:20–22). In such a retold memory, the mark of Cain could easily appear as divine approval rather than divine restraint. Whatever the mechanism, the effect is unmistakable: Lamech possesses only a fragment of the truth. And in Genesis, fragmented knowledge, knowledge cut loose from its original relational and moral context, becomes the seedbed of violence. This pattern is already visible earlier in the narrative. Eve's perception of the tree as 'good for food' and 'a delight to the eyes' (Gen. 3:6) is not false, but she treats this knowledge detached from its relation to God's command. What she grasps is the tree's appeal, but not its place within the divine relational boundary. Cain likewise receives only part of the necessary relational knowledge: he perceives the reality of inherited failure, the cursed ground and the limits placed on human offering, but he refuses the corresponding truth of humanity's intrinsic worth that God affirms. Instead of holding these in tension, he collapses his self-understanding into a single dimension of failure, and this truncated knowledge fuels anger and enables fratricide (Gen. 4:5–8). Now Lamech inherits an even more warped form of knowledge: the belief that divine intervention after a killing proves divine approval of the killer.

This shift anticipates the moral disintegration of the pre-Flood world, where "every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5) and "the earth was filled with violence" (Gen 6:11). Lamech thus functions as a symbolic hinge in Genesis: a figure who embodies how distorted knowledge, transmitted across generations, becomes the cultural engine of escalating violence.

Conclusion

The early chapters of Genesis present the escalation of human violence not as an innate biological failing but as the final consequence of a progressively corrupted interpretive framework. By tracing the development of relational knowledge from Eden to the Flood, this paper has demonstrated how the human capacity for self-understanding, originally rooted in divine presence and mutual recognition, became fundamentally warped.

The trajectory is clear: the Fall inaugurated a relational rupture where self-knowledge was filtered through shame and fear rather than unity. God's act of clothing Adam and Eve with garments of skins (Gen 3:21) as a response to this shame and fear also became the inaugural symbolic marker of this transformation, a paradoxical use of death that preserved life while confirming humanity's new identity as morally compromised yet intrinsically valued. This

necessary tension was rejected by Cain, whose fratricide reflected an emotional inability to reconcile inherited failure with intrinsic worth.

The story culminates in Lamech, who serves as the narrative hinge, marking the decisive shift from emotional failure to theological rationalization. Lamech weaponized inherited knowledge, transforming the divine restraint shown to Cain into a confident license for seventy-sevenfold vengeance. His boast demonstrated that violence had moved beyond individual sin; it had become an integrated, self-justifying cultural ideology.

Therefore, the declaration that “the earth was filled with violence” (Gen 6:11) describes a world structurally formed by epistemological decay. The Flood is thus God’s response not to random moral chaos, but to the confident, comprehensive collapse of the moral order, a collapse rooted in humanity’s persistent misreading of divine command and mercy. This analysis suggests how partial knowledge, once severed from its relational and moral context, became the engine of humanity’s self-destruction.

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Innovation and Symbolism in Leibniz's New Method

Thomas Vollum

Abstract:

I examine what most critically distinguishes Leibniz's differential calculus from Fermat's previously published method for maxima and minima, and argue that it is not a difference in algebraic procedure, or the introduction of dx as an infinitesimal quantity. I argue that the essential innovation lies in Leibniz's robust concept of the differential quantity considered as a mathematical object in itself, and in the development of symbols relating the differential quantity to its corresponding variable quantity. Fermat's procedure yields equivalent results for maxima and minima and, when translated into Leibnizian notation, contains the algebraic expansion underlying Leibniz's product rule, which is the basis of his algorithm for finding differences. However, Fermat does not isolate the differential of the dependent quantity as its own magnitude nor grant it symbolic status. Leibniz, in contrast, recognizes differential quantities with their own symbols which relate them to the finite quantities they correspond to. It is this symbolic recognition which allows him to formulate general rules for a difference-finding algorithm, to apply them uniformly across problems of tangents, maxima, minima, and inflections, and to operate directly on complicated expressions using substitution without first eliminating fractions and irrationals.

Leibniz names the paper in which he introduces his differential calculus *A New Method for Greatest and Least, as well as for Tangents, which is not Hindered by Fractional or Irrational Quantities, and a Singular Calculus for these*.¹ But what is it about his method which sets it apart, and enables it to find tangents, greatest, and least which the previously published methods failed to? What are the fractional and irrational quantities which foiled the previous methods, and which Leibniz's is not hindered by? In his *New Method* paper, Leibniz addresses this question, comparing his method to previously published ones.² Here he reaffirms the claim of the title, writing that with his method it is possible to “find maxima and minima as well as tangents without the necessity of removing fractions, irrationals, and other restrictions, as had to be done according to the methods that have been published hitherto.” While he does not name the author of the method he is comparing his to, his description of it closely matches that of Fermat's *On a Method for the Evaluation of Maxima and Minima*.³

The critical component which Leibniz stresses in contrasting his method with ones like Fermat's is “that dx , dy , dv , dw , dz can be taken proportional to the momentary differences, that

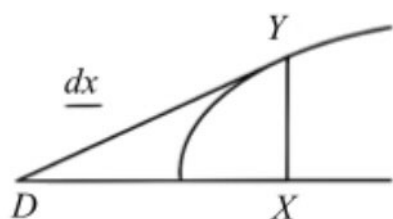


Figure 1

is, increments or decrements, of the corresponding x , y , v , w , z .”⁴ Further down he elaborates, writing that “the methods published previously... mostly use a line such as DX or something similar, but not the line dy , which is the fourth proportional to DX , DY , dx —something quite confusing”⁵ To understand what he means, let us examine how Fermat and Leibniz solve two similar problems, using Leibniz's explanation as our guide.

In Fermat's first example of his method,⁶ the problem is to divide a given line segment AC (Figure 2) at E so that the product of AE and EC is as great as possible. As he states in his



Figure 2

general rule for the evaluation of maxima and minima, the first step is to “indicate the maximum or minimum by a in terms which could be of any degree.”⁷ He accomplishes this by naming AC b , and the first segment a . Then, the second segment is $b - a$, and therefore the product

which is to be maximised is $a(b - a) = ab - a^2$. If we cross-reference with the example Leibniz

¹ Published in 1684.

² Struik – *A Source Book in Mathematics*, page 276.

³ Published in 1633.

⁴ Struik – *A Source Book in Mathematics*, page 276.

⁵ Struik – *A Source Book in Mathematics*, page 276.

⁶ Struik – *A Source Book in Mathematics*, page 223.

⁷ From the paragraph describing the rules of the method at the top of Struik's page 223.

gives of his method as applied to the refraction of light in dioptrics,⁸ we can see that he would likely have proceeded almost identically to Fermat as far as the translation of the construction into algebraic notation, although Leibniz would probably use x rather than a to symbolize the unknown quantity, so that the quantity to be maximized would be written as $bx - x^2$. However, the two methods will soon appear to diverge.

As we can see in his dioptrics example, once Leibniz has an algebraic expression for the quantity he is interested in, he then associates that quantity with its own symbol, and uses his algorithm to find the differential quantity which belongs to it. For example, he might give the quantity $bx - x^2$ the name y , and then use the symbol dy for $d(bx - x^2) = d(bx) - d(x^2) = (b - 2x)dx$. Then, since the problem is to find a maximum for y , Leibniz would look for a value of x such that $dy = 0$. This would give the answer $x = \frac{b}{2}$.

However, if we return now to Fermat's method, we find something which looks on the surface to be quite different. After we have our first expression of the quantity to be maximised in terms of a , namely $ab - a^2$, the next step is to "replace the original unknown by $a + e$ and [express] the maximum or minimum quantity in terms of a and e involving any degree."⁹ This is done in Fermat's first example by taking a new division of AC in which the first segment is $(a + e)$ instead of simply a . Then the second segment is $b - (a + e)$ or $(b - a - e)$, and thus the new product is $ab - a^2 + be - 2ae - e^2$. Then we "adequate, to use Diophantus' term"¹⁰, the two expressions of the maximum or minimum quantity and... take out their common terms."¹¹ The adequation gives $ab - a^2 \sim ab - a^2 + be - 2ae - e^2$. To remove the common terms and rearrange, Fermat adds $a^2 + 2ae + e^2 - ab$ to both sides. The result is the simplified $be \sim 2ae + e^2$. Just as Fermat says in his description of the method, we have arrived at an adequality both sides of which "contain terms in e or its powers."¹²

The next step prescribed by the rules of the method is to "divide all terms by e , or by a higher power of e , so that e [is] completely removed from at least one of the terms."¹³ In this case, the highest power of e which all the terms of our expression are divisible by is the first power, so we simply divide $be \sim 2ae + e^2$ by e to obtain $b \sim 2a + e$. Finally we "suppress all the terms in which e or one of its powers will still appear," which gives us our final equality: $b = 2a$, or $a = \frac{b}{2}$. Sure enough, Fermat's method has gotten us to the same answer as Leibniz's rules for finding differences did before. But how? Why do these two methods which appear to have such different steps arrive in the same place? When we follow the steps laid out by Fermat in the description of his method, why should we expect the result to be a maximum? In Leibniz's method we have a geometric understanding of the differential quantity which tells us that the

⁸ Struik – *A Source Book in Mathematics*, page 278.

⁹ Fermat, *Maxima and Minima*, first paragraph on page 223 of Struik's *A Source Book in Mathematics*.

¹⁰ Diophantus' term is $\pi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\eta\varsigma$, also translated as 'approximate equality.' See *Arithmetic* Book VG Problem 11.

¹¹ From the paragraph describing the rules of the method at the top of Struik's page 223.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

point where it is equal to zero is the point where the curve goes from increasing to decreasing, and is therefore at a maximum, or goes from decreasing to increasing, and is therefore at a minimum. However, as Leibniz pointed out to us, Fermat's method includes only e , which corresponds to dx , and not any fourth proportional representing the difference of the quantity we are trying to find the maximum for. So why does it work?

To understand, let us go back to the beginning and consider the original quantity of which we are trying to find the maximum: the product of the quantities a and $(b - a)$. Since this is a problem concerning a multiplication of two quantities, I would like to note a parallel between Fermat's procedure and the explanation which Leibniz gives of his multiplication rule.¹⁴ As we saw, Fermat adequates his product with a new one which is obtained when the first quantity is increased by e and the second quantity is decreased by e . This is the adequality $a(b - a) \sim (a + e)(b - a - e)$ or $ab - a^2 \sim ab - a^2 + be - 2ae - e^2$. First let us rewrite Fermat's expression in the terms Leibniz uses. We will replace a with x , and $(b - a)$ with $(b - x)$, to which we will give the symbol v . Then e will be replaced by dx , and since when a is increased by e , $(b - a)$ or v is decreased by e , we will replace $-e$ with dv . This also follows from the fact that $dv = d(b - x) = -dx = -e$. With these new names, let us see what happens when we translate Fermat's adequality into Leibniz's terms.

First, I want to consider the right side of Fermat's adequality; $(a + e)(b - a - e)$, which expands to $ab - a^2 + be - 2ae - e^2$. Using our new symbols, the first of these expressions can be straightforwardly rewritten as $(x + dx)(v + dv)$. For the second expression, let us separate the $-2ae$ into $-ae - ae$. Then we have $ab - a^2 + be - ae - ae - e^2$. Now, I note that $ab - a^2 = a(b - a) = xv$, while $be - ae = (b - a)e = v dx$, and $-ae = a(-e) = x dv$. Finally $-e^2 = e(-e) = dx dv$. Therefore we see that the whole left side of Fermat's adequality can be rewritten with one to one correspondence as either $(x + dx)(v + dv)$ or $xv + v dx + x dv + dx dv$, simply by substituting Leibniz's symbols in for Fermat's.

Now, if we look back to Leibniz's explanation of his product rule on page 62, we see that $(x + dx)(v + dv) = xv + v dx + x dv + dx dv$ is the first equation which appears. However, in order to find $d(xv)$, Leibniz is not simply interested in finding the product $(x + dx)(v + dv)$, but rather the difference between this product and xv itself. This being the case, his next step is to subtract xv from $xv + v dx + x dv + dx dv$ in order to find $v dx + x dv + dx dv$, which, after removing the incomparably small $dx dv$, becomes his final expression for $d(xv)$, the quantity we need to make equal to zero in order to find our maximum. Can some steps equivalent to these be found in Fermat's procedure?

Let us return now to Fermat's adequality, and consider the left side. The translation here is much simpler, as we have just seen that $a(b - a) = xv$. Now we have everything we need to put together the whole adequality $ab - a^2 \sim ab - a^2 + be - 2ae - e^2$ in Leibniz's notation: $xv \sim xv + v$

¹⁴ From *A Remarkable Symbolism of the Algebraic and Infinitesimal Calculus in the Comparison of Powers and Differences, and on the Transcendental Law of Homogeneity*, 1710. Translated on page 62 of *Readings and Notes for Junior Mathematics*.

$dx + x dv + dx dv$. Let us consider what this adequality is saying in natural language. The left side, $ab - a^2$ or xv , is the product of the two segments of AC with our original division point E . The right side, $ab - a^2 + be - 2ae - e^2$ or $xv + v dx + x dv + dx dv$, is the product of the new segments of AC obtained after we shift E over by the distance e or dx . Therefore the whole expression states that the product of our original segments adequates to the product of our new segments, or in other words, that the difference between the product of our original segments and the product of our new segments adequates to zero. Therefore, by setting up this adequality, Fermat has set up to find the value of a or x such that the change in $a(b - a)$ or xv is nothing when a or x is changed by e or dx .

This can also be shown by algebra if we consider Fermat's adequality in Leibniz's notation: $xv \sim xv + v dx + x dv + dx dv$. If we subtract xv from both sides we get: $v dx + x dv + dx dv \sim 0$. And in Leibniz's multiplication rule $v dx + x dv + dx dv$ is the expression for $d(xv)$ right before $dx dv$ is thrown away. Further, to get his final result, Fermat does also suppress the term $-e^2$ which corresponds to $dx dv$, although not directly. As we saw before, Fermat first divides his whole expression by e , leaving $-e$ or dv in place of $-e^2$, or Leibniz's $dx dv$. It is actually this quotient $-e$ which Fermat discards. This division by e is analogous to the one which Leibniz performs to find the ratio of $dy : dx$ after he has obtained dy in terms x and dx . However, the fact that this division takes place before the suppression of e in Fermat's procedure does not make a significant difference to the correspondence between his method and Leibniz's.

What is important about this step in both methods is that the corresponding term is discarded, or suppressed, *against* the rules of the algebraic calculus, in order to obtain what is presented by both Fermat and Leibniz as an exact result.

This move furnishes an important view into the way Fermat thinks about e . Fermat gives no explicit indication that e is to be considered as infinitesimal, indivisible, infinitely small, or anything else of the kind. However his willingness to "suppress [terms] in which e or one of its powers [appear]"¹⁵ demonstrates that Fermat's e , like Leibniz's dx , is a mathematical tool which operates, to some extent, outside of ordinary algebra, allowing the method to achieve a result which unaided algebra is unable to. Further, this breaking of, or stepping beyond, the laws of algebra happens in essentially the same place for both mathematicians. Whether or not Fermat is willing to discard e because he sees it as quantitatively negligible, it remains true that the mechanical¹⁶ role e plays in Fermat's method corresponds almost exactly to the one dx plays in Leibniz's.

With all these correspondences in mind, it appears that the steps of Fermat's method are nearly identical to those of Leibniz's, with the only differences being that he gives different symbols to the quantities, and that he writes out all the steps of the multiplication rule, as

¹⁵ From the paragraph describing the rules of the method at the top of Struik's page 223.

¹⁶ By 'mechanical' I simply mean the role it plays in the symbolic manipulation of expressions and relationships, without regard to the geometrical interpretation thereof.

opposed to Leibniz who does the same steps once in order to derive the rule, and then skips directly to the result when using the rule in subsequent problems.

This would certainly answer the question of how Fermat's process is able to find maxima and minima, and why it arrives at the same answer as Leibniz's. However, it brings us back to our original question: 'what is it that sets Leibniz's new method apart from the old ones and allows him to solve so many problems they could not?' If the only differences between the two methods are what letter symbols they use and whether they always write the rules out long-form, why is Leibniz's method so superior, and what does it mean that, in contrast to the previously published methods, his is able to find maxima, minima, and tangents "without the necessity of removing fractions, irrationals, and other restrictions?"¹⁷

As we have seen, Fermat's method requires us to algebraically manipulate our expression until we have an adequality in terms of a and e which we can then divide by e in order to be left with at least one term in which e no longer appears. This process, whereby denominators and roots containing indeterminate quantities are eliminated by means of multiplication, is the one Leibniz is referring to when he speaks of the previous methods needing to eliminate 'fractions and irrationals.'

For example, in order to find the maximum of the quantity $\frac{1}{\sqrt{a^2+2}}$ Fermat would have to form the adequality $\frac{1}{\sqrt{a^2+2}} \sim \frac{1}{\sqrt{(a+e)^2+2}}$ but it is impossible to free any terms of this adequality from their powers of e without first freeing the terms in a and e from radicals and denominators. This can be seen clearly if, without first eliminating fractions and irrationals, we attempt to "divide all terms by e , or by a higher power of e "¹⁸ as Fermat's method prescribes. The result is $\frac{1}{e^n \sqrt{a^2+2}} \sim \frac{1}{e^n \sqrt{(a+e)^2+2}}$ where e^n is whatever power of e we choose. Far from eliminating e from any of the terms, we have only managed to complicate both terms, and introduce e into a term which it was absent from before. Instead, we must square and multiply out both sides of the expression until e appears as the coefficient of free terms, and can therefore be canceled out by a division. Such a process is possible in most cases, but it is often cumbersome, and it must be tackled with different steps depending on the form of the original expression of the problem. Leibniz, on the other hand, could find the difference of the quantity $\frac{1}{\sqrt{x^2+2}}$ by simply letting w equal $x^2 + 2$ and using his power rule to find $d(w^{\frac{-1}{2}})$ directly. This is only possible because Leibniz grants the quantity dw its own *symbol* with its own quantitative relation to dx .

Leibniz himself emphasizes the importance of the symbols he uses in contrast to the

¹⁷ Struik – *A Source Book in Mathematics*, page 276.

¹⁸ From the paragraph describing the rules of the method at the top of Struik's page 223.

previous methods. In his *New Method* paper, he calls the failure to recognize “the line dy , which is the fourth proportional to DX , DY , [and] dx ” something “quite confusing”¹⁹ As a product of this confusion, he says, “they proceed to remove fractions and irrationals (in which undetermined quantities occur).”²⁰

Returning to Fermat’s first example of his method, it is important to note that we had to introduce new symbols, v and dv , which do not have a direct counterpart in Fermat’s notation, in order to translate his expression into Leibniz’s multiplication rule. The recognition of $(b - a)$ as its own quantity warranting its own symbol and its own differential goes beyond the arbitrary choice of one letter symbol over another. It gives name and importance to the relationship between the increments or decrements of the two segments of the line AC , which was overlooked, or not made explicit, in Fermat’s method. Further, the quantity $d(xv)$, which corresponds to the fourth proportional dy in Leibniz’s explanation, is also only implicitly expressed and made equal to zero in Fermat’s Method. It is never recognized as a quantity in its own right by Fermat, nor is it given its own symbolic status the way it is by Leibniz.

It is his comprehensive use of symbols which sets Leibniz’s method above Fermat’s, and allows for simpler and more complete solutions to all problems involving the maxima, minima, and tangents of curved lines. The recognition of dy as its own quantity allows Leibniz to express his rules for finding differences *as such*. That is, it allows him to write the rules of his algorithm in the form of equations between the symbol for a differential quantity and an expression in terms of the quantities and differentials which it depends on. An example of such a rule is ‘if $y = xv$, then $dy = v dx + x dv$.’ In contrast, Fermat’s method is written out in something much closer to natural language— as a series of steps or stages at which different actions are prescribed, and must be carried out appropriately by the mathematician according to the particulars of the problem at hand. Consequently, Fermat’s method manages at the same time to be neither as general nor as specific as Leibniz’s. As we have seen in the example problem containing fractions and irrationals, to “[express] the maximum or minimum quantity in terms of a and e involving any degree”²¹ is not simply a step in an algorithm, it is a problem of its own which must be solved in the course of applying Fermat’s method.

Another important consequence of the fact that Leibniz gives symbolic status to the differential of the dependent quantity (dy in our example) is that the differential of the independent quantity (dx) remains present even in the final result of his algorithm. In contrast, Fermat does not have a symbol for the difference of the dependent quantity at all. This being the case, the final result of his method is not a differential quantity, but a quantity which directly represents the position of a maximum or minimum, or the length of a tangent intercept. Consequently, the result does not contain e , the independent differential, at all. To see why this is

¹⁹ Struik – *A Source Book in Mathematics*, page 276.

²⁰ From the paragraph describing the rules of the method at the top of Struik’s page 223.

²¹ Ibid.

such a critical distinction, let us go back and consider the Leibnizian solution to the example problem involving fractions and irrationals more fully.

We started with $\frac{1}{\sqrt{x^2+2}}$, and we made w equal $x^2 + 2$. Then, the original expression can be written simply as $w^{-\frac{1}{2}}$, and the power rule can be used to find $d(w^{-\frac{1}{2}})$, which is the sought difference. Applying the power rule to $w^{-\frac{1}{2}}$ just as we would if w were an independent quantity like x , we get $d(w^{-\frac{1}{2}}) = -\frac{1}{2}w^{-\frac{3}{2}}dw$. Note that dw remains in the resulting expression. This allows us to find the sought quantity in terms of x and dx by simply noting that $dw = d(x^2 + 2) = 2x dx$, and substituting. If dw had been eliminated from the expression entirely, as e is in Fermat's method, such substitution would be impossible. Here we see that Leibniz always maintains a symbolic reference within the expression of each differential quantity relating it to the differential of the quantity on which it depends. This is the basis of Leibniz's robust method of substitution which allows him to break down highly complex problems, and apply his rules to every part of them universally.

Fermat, therefore, has a method which can be adapted and applied to various problems, but there is no one symbol for the object which his method is attempting to find, and so the rules for carrying out his method cannot be expressed in equations. In contrast, by recognizing dy and its relation to the tangent intercept, Leibniz can write universal and exact rules for how to find dy for any quantity y , and from there he can use dy in various ways depending on the problem he is trying to solve. For example, if he wants to find the tangent intercept for any point on the curve Y , he can resolve the proportion $dy : dx :: y : \text{the sought distance}$, or if he wants to find maxima and minima he can find all the values of x for which $dy = 0$, etc. For this reason it is Leibniz's use of the symbols themselves which make his method more general than those of his predecessors, and it is this symbolic recognition of dy as a fourth proportional which allows Leibniz to achieve '*a Singular Calculus*' for answering all problems regarding the tangents, differences, maxima, and minima of curved lines.

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Music as Metaphor: The Auditory Image of Philosophy

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Abstract:

Music is undoubtedly the one-not-like-the-others when compared to the rest of the quadrivium. How often do we get to perceive the beauty of Leibniz and Lobachevsky in motion as we do with Bach? In Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, it is said that music and astronomy are images of the revolutions of our souls and help bring us into harmony with ourselves. In doing so, *Timaeus* presents music as a discipline that teaches us about something more than music – but teaches us about the order and harmony of souls. This paper seeks to examine the image of that order as pictured through tones and rhythm. From this examination, four major principles arise that concern the ordering of both tones and souls: freedom under law, equality through imperfection, diversity through plurality, and departure and return. I conclude by arguing that *Timaeus*' philosophical notion is correct, and that this harmonic order, created from circular motion, is necessary to the study of philosophy and the freeing of the mind.

Introduction:

To the uninitiated eye, music seems out of place among the other disciplines of the quadrivium. *Μουσική* – the art of the Muses, or the inspired art, which includes poetry, dance, drama, and of course, music – is categorized with geometry, arithmetic, and astronomy rather than grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Why aren't the creative arts given their own category? And if they must be categorized with the others, why are they among the mathematical (*μαθηματικά*), rather than the linguistic (*λογικά*) arts? Plato's *Timaeus*, a creation myth with these arts as central themes, claims that musical harmony was given to us by the muses as a means of restoring order to our souls.¹ But what kind of order does musical phenomena bestow upon us? How does the musical scale, an innate *ἀμαρτία* of nature, help one discover order? And finally, how does this uncovered order clarify what makes a discipline quadrivial?

Timaeus' claim is as follows:

ἀλλὰ τούτου λεγέσθω παρ' ἡμῶν αὕτη ἐπὶ ταῦτα αἰτία, θεὸν ἡμῖν ἀνευρεῖν δωρήσασθαι τε ὄψιν, ἵνα τὰς ἐν οὐρανῷ τοῦ νοῦ κατιδόντες περιόδους χρησαίμεθα ἐπὶ τὰς περιφορὰς τὰς τῆς παρ' ἡμῖν διανοήσεως, συγγενεῖς ἐκείναις οὐσας, ἀταράκτοις τεταργμένας, ἐκμαθόντες δὲ καὶ λογισμῶν κατὰ φύσιν ὀρθότητος μετασχόντες, μιμούμενοι τὰς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντως ἀπλανεῖς οὐσας, τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν πεπλανημένας καταστησαίμεθα.

*But let it be said by us that the cause of this ability is this: that god gave us sight to discover; in order that, seeing the cycles of the mind in heaven, we would proclaim that they resemble the revolutions of our own thoughts, and are related to them, the alterable to the inalterable; and, by learning and partaking in calculations that are by nature correct, and by imitating the completely wandering-less being of god, we might stabilize the wanderings within us.*²

But this act of ordering the internal state from external models is not limited to sight; Timaeus continues:

φωνῆς τε δὴ καὶ ἀκοῆς περὶ πάλιν ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος, ἐπὶ ταῦτα τῶν αὐτῶν ἕνεκα παρὰ θεῶν δεδωρῆσθαι. λόγος τε γὰρ ἐπ' αὐτὰ ταῦτα τέτακται, τὴν μεγίστην συμβαλλόμενος εἰς αὐτὰ μοῖραν, ὅσον τ' αὖ μουσικῆς φωνῇ χρήσιμον πρὸς ἀκοὴν ἕνεκα ἀρμονίας ἐστὶ δοθέν. ἡ δὲ ἀρμονία, συγγενεῖς ἔχουσα φορὰς ταῖς ἐν ἡμῖν τῆς ψυχῆς περιόδοις, τῷ μετὰ νοῦ προχρομένῳ Μούσαις οὐκ ἐφ' ἡδονὴν ἄλογον καθάπερ νῦν εἶναι δοκεῖ χρήσιμος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν γεγυνοῖον ἐν ἡμῖν ἀνάρμοστον ψυχῆς περίοδον εἰς κατακόσμησιν καὶ συμφωνίαν ἑαυτῇ σύμμαχος ὑμὸ Μουσῶν δέδοται: καὶ ρυθμός αὖ ...

In fact, the same argument applies to tone and hearing, and they were given to us by the gods for the same reason. For speech has been put together for the same reasons, and it puts forth the greatest contribution to them. The musical arts with tone were bestowed to us for the sake of harmony. And allied harmony, having a motion akin to the periodic

¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 47d-e.

² Ibid., 47b-c. Author's translation.

*revolutions in our souls, was given by the Muses to he who uses it with intelligence, not as it now seems, for the sake of senseless pleasure, but for the sake of bringing the out-of-tuned revolutions within our souls into an arrangement and symphony with themselves. And rhythm too ...*³

Under Timaeus' philosophical framework, music is not a mere means of provoking feelings nor one of many modes of conveying knowledge or experience persuasively. Instead, similarly to astronomy, it reflects some external order that our souls ought to mimic. Since the development of the liberal arts in the middle ages was closely tied to Platonic philosophy, I contend that the true difference between the quadrivium and the trivium is encapsulated by the following distinction, a distinction implied by their Greek names – the *μαθηματικά τέχναι*, the arts associated with the learning and acquisition of knowledge, and the *λογικά τέχναι*, the arts associated with communicating knowledge. I claim that music is not just a communication method, a means of reflecting the internal outwards, nor a persuasive technique, a *λογικά τέχναι*, rather it is a philosophical investigation of harmony as an image of order itself, a reflection of the external inwards, a *μαθηματικά τέχναι*. For this claim to be true, it is necessary to demonstrate that music is more than a form of self-expression, but an investigation that teaches one the nature and order of tones, a nature and order that reflects that of souls.

In this paper, I identify four principles of musical harmony that analogously apply to the proper order of human societies and selves: freedom under law, that free agents attain *more* creative freedom, not less, by placing themselves under certain voluntary constraints; equality through imperfection, that minor irrelevant impurities are more beautiful than major concentrated ones; diversity through plurality, that souls should strive for beauty through diversity, and should find diversity in a cohesive plurality rather than an incohesive one; and finally, Departure and Return, that the beauty of a destination can only be manifested through a journey.

Freedom Under Law:

For the purposes of this examination, let music be broadly defined as the intentional combination of rhythm and tone by an agent, in this case called a musician, to produce an auditory sensation. The continuum of pitch allows musicians to manipulate a binary aspect of sound that we have metaphorically designated as low and high, played in a certain regular sequence of time to produce rhythm. With the discovery of the octave, there becomes not just a continuum, but a sense of familiarity or repetition in the progression of pitch. This repetition is not a precise return to the starting position, like motion in a circle, but a progressive motion with a repeating pattern, like motion in a spiral. The musical return being described is not exact because two notes an octave apart are obviously different to our ear. However, they do contain within them some sense of sameness; the same way points on a spiral simultaneously repeat while progressing. This added sense of sameness allows there to be two dimensions of musical tone: one caused by its pitch, how high or low the tone is, represented by its progression along

³ Ibid., 47d-e.

the spiral; and another caused by its note, its relationship to the subsequent, simultaneous, and progressive tones with reference to the octave, represented by its orientation along the spiral.

In order to comprehend tone, the combination of pitch and note, some kind of auditory context must be established within which the octave and its corresponding intervals can be perceived. For this reason, *truly atonal* music is impossible.⁴ Since all noise has pitch, the primary distinction between sound and tone must be the intentional inclusion of *note*. Since *truly atonal* music lacks any intentional tone, it fails to meet this paper's definition of music—the intentionally created auditory sensation of *tone* and rhythm. Therefore, in the framework of this paper, the phrase “atonal music” is meaningless, much like the phrase “incorporeal body.”⁵ Body cannot meaningfully be incorporeal in the same way music cannot meaningfully be atonal, since corporeality or tonality appear mandatory to create any comprehensible sense of body or music respectively. Since all sounds have pitch, truly atonal music is indistinguishable from noise; however, most music that is referred to as atonal is not *truly* atonal. So-called atonal music, which utilizes a tonal scale (e.g. the chromatic or whole tone scales), but lacks a tonal center, still has a comprehensible order in its tone selection within which intervals can be distinguished. The easiest way to establish a tonal context is through a tonal center, but it can also be established through repeated similar movements of rhythm and pitch, i.e. habit.⁶ To truly be music, and not noise, a sound must establish some context for the tonal aspect of note to be perceptible. Therefore, atonal music does not exist, but tonal-centerless music certainly does and possesses its own unique kind of beauty.

Tonal centers manifest a third dimension of tone in addition to pitch and note – a centripetal force called dynamic quality. Tonal-centerless music is still music because it has some tonal sense of scale; but because it lacks a tonal center, it has no dynamic quality. Nevertheless, since both tonal and tonal-centerless music are in fact music, in Timaeus' framework, they must both be ways of ordering the soul, but perhaps different interpretations of said order or παραδείγμα (model). Timaeus describes two kinds of models, the self-similar and uniform model (τὸ κατὰ ταῦτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως) and a model of becoming (τὸ γεγινός). Both forms of music are forms of sense-perception, and therefore both are objects of becoming; but when any object comes into being, Timaeus says that its artificer looks at one of the two models, and the beautiful things come from the uniform model, and the ugly from the changing model.⁷ Since tonal music, at least without changes of key, keeps its attention on the unmoving 1 with all its wanderings, and tonal-centerless music has no analogous constant focus and framing, it is clear that the

⁴ Atonal music should not be confused with rhythmic music, which is not music under this paper's definition, since it is rhythm exclusively. Rhythmic music, however, is irrelevant to this analysis of music as tones and rhythm, the gifts from the gods as presented in Plato's *Timaeus*.

⁵ See Thomas Hobbes' critique of the term in the *Leviathan*.

⁶ See Anton Webern, *Fünf Sätze für Streichquartett*, Op. 5 (1909); Phish, "You Enjoy Myself," Track 1 on *Junta*, Elektra, 1989; "Atonal music is still music.," video, YouTube, posted by Benjamin Morren Music, January 11, 2021, accessed January 15, 2026,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qD6XmKnLs8M&list=RDqD6XmKnLs8M&start_radio=1;

⁷ Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a.

former is an image of the uniform model, the latter an image of the changing. For this reason, Timaeus frames the musicality within our allegedly beautiful universe as tonal, dividing the soul into portions according to the Pythagorean scale.⁸

Tonal-centerless music resembles the aimless state of man, the wanderer who has no homeland, no garden to tend, only an ordinal sense of direction, no vocation, no obligations, what one *might* call truly free. Tonal music, alternatively, resembles the *τέλος* seeking city-builder, the one who strives to cultivate a home and a context to build expectations that are then met or subverted. Tonal-centerless music, therefore, appears not to be based upon an unchanging model, but an amorphous model in constant change. There is no focus on anything unchanging as the music wanders through the tonal scale, no tonal center with which to ground one's position throughout the musical movement. In such a state, one can only expect repetition or the unexpected, since there is no dynamic quality hinting at possible resolutions. Tonal-centerless music is free to wander throughout its chromatic scale without any constraints, and while it can create a tonal context through repetition, it cannot harness the kind of euphoria that comes about from *striving to then achieve*, for it has no dynamic quality, no force, to which it may submit or against which it may struggle, and therefore, it points nowhere.

Regardless of whether any given individual finds tonal-centerless or tonal-centered music more pleasant, both systems require some contextualizing force, a tonal center or repetitive motions, a home or habit, without which one cannot make music, which has order, but can only make noise, which has no order. Ancient civilizations adopted musical scales, such as the diatonic or pentatonic scales, which do have tonal centers, in order to give music some direction, just as those societies established customs, laws, cultures, and religions to give their cities direction. Dynamic quality is not only the position of where a note is, but where a note is pointing to, or where it aims. Without this quality, without a tonal center providing a continuous context, every moment of the music feels equally new.⁹ If every moment feels new, the musical direction is illusory, since it can be changed at any time without any consequence in abandoning what's been previously constructed; and if the musical schema can be altered at any time, the music has no continuous identity, and it cannot build anything that necessarily exists beyond the present moment.

The tonality of music and the phenomenon of dynamic quality demonstrate that although our potential is limitless, to actualize the greatest part of our potential, we must limit ourselves to a certain selection of possibilities. Additionally, it teaches us that if we want our lives to have direction, we should select those possibilities in such a manner that they do not merely exist in a beautiful harmonious state but point to some future state that one then achieves the satisfaction of actualizing, before departing again. Without creating for ourselves some kind of structure, we are lost, and cannot have meaningful lives, just as without structure, we cannot make music, but only noise. To actualize the full potential of our capabilities, we must not merely create a

⁸ Ibid., 36b.

⁹ See any of the examples in footnote 6.

structure, but one that aims at some good. Tonal-centerless music, as a metaphorical image of the soul, resembles an aimless state, and while this condition can be pleasurable, it is doubtlessly less capable of the heights of beauty that come from comedy and tragedy. Therefore, in order to attain more freedom, and be truly free, one must not indulge in every possible potential just as we do not select every tone, but we should strategically select a scale of activities that maximize our potential and point to an attainable aim; and when that aim is attained, one should depart to return again, or start another song.

Equality Through Imperfection:

The creation of musical scales itself poses a unique challenge to the musician-philosopher. In Ancient Greek philosophy, Pythagoras emphasized the problem of tuning as a mathematical one on account of his observation that two notes an octave apart have a 2:1 ratio to one other with respect to string length. The string that represents the harmonic mean between them is also auditorily distinct, and forms a 3:2 ratio with the smaller string and a 3:4 ratio with the bigger string, and these two relationships are called a fifth and a fourth respectively.¹⁰ If this process is repeated with the new string, the equivalent note raised an octave forms a 9:8 ratio with the original note and is called a whole tone.¹¹ However, when trying to put the whole tones in sequence to form a scale, six whole tones will barely miss the octave.¹² If instead of adding whole tones, one continues this progression of fifths, the error lessens, yet the scale still does not return precisely to the octave.¹³ This small imperfection in the cohesion of the musical scale is what is known as the Pythagorean comma.

The Pythagorean comma demonstrates something about the inherent imperfection of our universe. While musical intervals appear to be comprised of precise whole number ratios, this beautiful order carries with it a fatal flaw, the inability to preserve the precision of every interval within a scale. As demonstrated above, it is impossible to form a scale where every whole tone, fifth, and octave is preserved due to this comma. To compensate for it, the Pythagorean tuning system uses the progression of fifths to create a twelve-note scale, but to complete the cycle evenly, the last fifth is noticeably dissonant. This last fifth is dissonant because it is made of seven semitones instead of three whole tones and one semitone. The value of the semitone is the difference between three whole tones and a perfect fifth, or a major third (two whole tones) and a perfect fourth. Since three whole tones do not equal six semitones, the intervallic note value of this dissonant fifth is different than all the others. Despite this dissonant fifth, the Pythagorean scale can be said to be complete, since its cycle always coincides with the octave. By preserving eleven perfect fifths as consonant but sacrificing one fifth for the cohesion of the scale as a whole, the Pythagorean scale is both complete and as perfect as possible, preserving the maximum number of whole number intervals in any given key.¹⁴

¹⁰ See Demonstration 1.

¹¹ See Demonstration 2.

¹² See Demonstration 3.

¹³ See Demonstration 4.

¹⁴ See Demonstration 5.

The Pythagorean scale demonstrates that one solution to the problem of preserving all intervals with a single scale is to concentrate, as much as possible, the imperfection of that scale into a single element (called a *wolf fifth*). However, this tuning system poses a problem. If a musician were to seek to play in multiple keys, they would find themselves incapable without retuning the whole instrument. For example, if one attempted to play a piece in F# on an instrument tuned to C, the piece would sound extremely dissonant, since it would place emphasis on the wolf fifth between F# and C#. ¹⁵ This makes a change of keys, a movement of tonal center within a piece, impossible without multiple instruments tuned to multiple keys.

With the invention of equal temperament, musicians gained the freedom to change their tonal center within a performance or a piece. Equal temperament does not maintain any of the whole-number intervals except for the octave, simply dividing the octave into twelve equal parts on a logarithmic scale. In the Pythagorean scale, a semitone is not exactly between two whole tones, but in equal temperament, all semitones are equal and exactly half a whole tone. This system equally distributes the error of the wolf fifth across the whole octave, making the error so small that it is irrelevant to the human ear's sense of music. Only by abandoning perfectionism and equally spreading the burden of unavoidable imperfection can one create a fully flexible scale.

The human mind, on account of its finitude, will forever have the flaw that it cannot know everything clearly and distinctly. One mind can never complete the scale of knowledge. But perhaps the burden of this deficiency is better spread across many fields of study. It is certainly not a settled question whether it is more beautiful to play with perfect intervals but only in one key, constrained by the concentrated flaw in the scale's outcast interval, or, to play with only one perfect interval, but with the freedom of every key, with no constraints, but constant imperceptible imperfections. Perhaps the correct answer is just temperament, a golden mean. Regardless, the various opinions reflect a variety of understandings of what it means to be *ordered* with respect to both tone and soul. Musically, equal temperament is almost the universal standard, but metaphorically with respect to the order of the soul, in the modern age, the exact opposite, hyper-specialization, is the standard.

For the one seeking a liberated mind through the liberal arts, equal temperament must be the preferable way to order the soul. Pythagorean tuning limits a musician just as expertise without general knowledge limits the expert. Both limit their multifaceted potential for the sake of unachievable perfectionism. With the ordering of equal temperament, the freedom to change keys allows one to harness the beauty not just within but between the keys, just as the flexible intellect discovers and utilizes the beauty not just within but between the disciplines. With the adoption of equal temperament, the imperfection of the universe transforms from an imperfection of experience to an imperfection of the mind. In Pythagorean tuning, the comma is an imperfection in the order of nature, but in equal temperament, it is an internal error manifested by the limited way our brains conceive of number – that we are more prone to arithmetic rather

¹⁵ If one follows the series of fifths from C, the last wolf fifth turns out to be between F# and Db.

than logarithmic thinking. This flexibility found in equal temperament is a necessary trait among successful philosophers, statesmen, businessmen, etc. Without it, one cannot organize a system, since it can only examine the nodes themselves, which are illusory, and not the connections that ground them. Jack of all trades, master of none, but conductor of the orchestra, making many one.

Diversity Through Plurality:

When ordering multiple movements into a greater whole, the first requirement is that all movers be able to act in synchronicity with one another. For many actors to unify into one group, they must have some ability to act separately, but in unison. Additionally, a plurality of actors in a group must coordinate their exertions of effort to create an effect greater than each could cause individually (musically, that is their strong and weak beats). They also must share a mission, otherwise, the actors would merely cancel one another out in unorganized chaos (chance dissonances). This applies to musicians, social leaders, and any organizer of many separate motions into one larger movement. This organization requires each actor to share more than a common mission (or musical piece), but the ability to coordinate in a shared time. This is not to say that the actors must move at the same time in the same way, but that they must move in a coordinated time and in corresponding ways.

The act of composing for, coordinating, and conducting a band or symphony is another way music teaches mankind about order. In addition to coordinated time, there must be a methodology behind coordinating their varied motions into correspondence with one another. Two primary solutions have arisen to this tonal coordination problem – polyphony and homophony, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. In homophonic music, the musical fabric, according to Viktor Zuckerkandl, “consists of one leading melody or voice combined with a supporting body of sound. This body of sound is essentially *harmony*.”¹⁶ One way of leading a many-voiced movement is with a leading voice, within which the essential movement of the piece is concentrated, surrounded by a supporting body. However, in homophonic music, the true melody of the piece is only identifiable from the leading voice and cannot be reconstructed with perfect accuracy from the harmony alone. Like a shadow, or a calculus integration problem, the casting object cannot be deduced from its shadow alone.

In polyphonic music, any voice can identify the piece, but no one voice can capture the complete movement, or the essence of the piece. In polyphonic music, all the voices are designed from the beginning of composition to conform to some greater melody that no one voice possesses, and each voice still stands as a melodic segment on its own. Although homophonic music has more structure to its identity by virtue of its clear distinction between leader and follower, polyphonic music is capable of more complex essences than can be distilled into a single voice. In homophonic music, the essence of the piece’s melodic movement exists in its leader alone, and therefore, the movement itself is not capable of an essence that expands beyond its leader. This limits the essence of homophonic music to that of monophonic music, with the

¹⁶ Zuckerkandl, *The Sense of Music*, 157.

simple addition of supporting sound. But polyphonic music is something fundamentally different. Since every voice identifies the piece, but no single voice captures its essence, polyphonic music is truly a *gestalt*, a greater whole not intelligible by the mere summation of its parts. While both homophonic and polyphonic music are summations of voices into a greater whole, only polyphonic music represents a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, since only it designs itself around a model that no single voice can carry.

Similarly, other non-musical movements with multiple agents appear to be sortable into these two categories, polyphonic or homophonic, a *gestalt* or a herd and their shepherd. And once more, both contain certain advantages and disadvantages. A homomotive social or political movement that bases itself around a leading voice has the advantage of a clear identity, defined by its leader. Yet, this feature is also the system's greatest bug, since the presence of such a strong leader gives the movement vulnerability to a variety of dangers: assassination, follower sycophancy, gradual decay as its leader naturally ages, vulnerability to corruption, etc. A polymotive social or political movement doesn't have these weaknesses, since the movement itself is greater than any single leader or voice; but it faces a different kind of danger: lack of clear identity, lack of direction, and infighting (musically, dissonance). In this case it does not seem that the metaphorical lesson is that one approach is better than another, but rather a good musician or activist should know how and when to use each as appropriate. Here, music reflects a way in which permitting a diversity of potential is preferable to a limited heterodox approach.

If one considers how this metaphor relates to only the individual soul, it is clear that the religious fundamentalist, the rational empiricist, and the hedonist all have homophonic souls. They elect one part of their soul to be the leading voice and demand that the other voices submit to and support that part. This approach is tempting, since it leaves the soul without the dissonance and discomfort uncontrolled polyphony can bring. But if one can achieve the proper polyphony of soul, where each part plays its proper role, only then does one become a complete whole.

Departure and Return:

In The Odyssey, the epic event being portrayed is Odysseus' νόστος (homecoming). The opening lines, contrasted with the Iliad, are a gold mine of both already actual and potential scholarship, but I want to bring forward how they contrast one another with respect to music:

μῆνιν ᾄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος (Iliad I.1)

Sing the rage, Goddess, of Achilleus, son of Pelius

ἄνδρά μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον (Odyssey I.1)

Tell me about a man, Muse, of many ways

Instead of ordering the muse to *sing*, the narrator orders the muse to *tell him* of the events that unfolded. In the final line of the *Odyssey*, it is said that Athena makes her oath with Odysseus “Μέντορι εἰδομένη ἥμην δέμας ἡδὲ καὶ αὐδὴν.” – “Resembling Mentor in both form and voice.” The final word of the *Odyssey*, αὐδὴν, specifically means human voice, but can also mean the

sound of a trumpet or a song. Only via departure and return, a journey, do sounds become musical, stories songs, and men heroes.

The note that represents the tonal center is fundamental to defining the musical context, and metaphorically, a musical home, as was discussed in the first section. But it is also important to note that the tonal center *cannot* be the only note in a piece. The centripetal force of dynamic quality draws the music towards the tonal center, but the ear only finds the sound satisfying because of the way the context of the music has pointed the ear's expectation towards such a resolution. This resolution of a musical piece rarely feels like an arrival, but rather, a return. It is not truly the destination that makes the musical piece satisfying, but rather the journey, the motion, or the space between the notes, that makes sound music.

I argued previously that the advantage tonal-centered music has over tonal-centerless music is the presence of a home, a place the piece is drawn towards that gives each note its dynamic quality. This dynamic quality does not only exist within the tonal center, but rather the tonal center creates a dynamic field that spreads itself across the octave. The character of the dimension that tonality adds to music is that of a centripetal force drawing the piece to a tonal home. The musical piece can then submit to or resist this force, giving it character by fulfilling or subverting expectations as it wanders around this field. Articulated more simply, dynamic quality creates a *tension* that the piece either tightens or releases. This tension and how to properly harness its power is the true theme of the historical progression of western music.

In the spirit of departure and return, I now depart to the philosophical problem of evil. Leibniz's answer to the problem argues that the best of all possible worlds necessitates the inclusion of greater goods (courage, forgiveness, etc.), which in turn require evil to *exist* before it can then be conquered by the good.¹⁷ Spinoza's answer to the problem of evil argues that "good" and "evil" are merely subjective labels born from the contrast between what we desire and what we desire to avoid, and therefore one cannot exist without the other.¹⁸ Regardless of whether "good" is a foundational principle of the universe or a subjective label of mankind, evil exists so that we can distinguish, honor, and utilize the good. Heraclitus argues that evil is a necessary part of the unity of opposites that manifests the harmony of our universe: "οὐ ξυνιᾶσιν ὅκως διαφερόμενον ἐωυτῷ ὁμολογέει· παλίντονος ἁρμονίη ὅκως περ τόξου καὶ λύρης" – "They do not understand how that which is divided agrees with itself; a back-stretched harmony, like the bow or the lyre."¹⁹ Without the two opposite ends that maintain the strings of a bow or an instrument, the string would not perform the task for which it is designed.²⁰ It is only through the tension of the string that the correct note is played or the arrow is shot. It is only through the tension between dissonance and consonance that we feel the full effect of music. It is only through the tension between good and evil that the purpose of the good may be actualized.

¹⁷ Leibniz, *Theodicy*.

¹⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part III, Proposition 9, Scholium.

¹⁹ Heraclitus, 51. Original Greek text edited by Diels. My translation.

²⁰ For clarity, the bow as in the weapon, not the thing one plays a stringed instrument with.

Inherent in harmony is the presence of both consonance and dissonance, and without these aspects in tension with one another, music would sound incredibly boring. Zuckerkandl, in *The Sense of Music*, writes, “to consider a sound dissonant means to acknowledge its state of inner tension and to be responsive to its *will not to be*.”²¹ Metaphorically, dissonance reflects those states of being where a psychological inner tension manifests. The tension itself comes with a *will not to be*, an unsettling feeling that the mind seeks to resolve. But this tension caused by dissonance is not to be avoided but is where “the most pleasant sounds of music dwell.”²² Dissonance should be considered as a *tension* and not universally as *unpleasantness*. Consonance and dissonance in polyphony and homophony are the reflections of the build-up and release of tension that is necessary to finding life meaningful. Dissonance without consonance, tension without resolution, is the musical reflection of miserable struggle, chaos, and the disoriented soul. Consonance without dissonance, resolution with no build-up of tension, would be a boring, uninspired musical piece that reflects the mundanity and lack of meaning associated with Robert Nozick’s thought experiment, ‘the experience machine.’²³ But by balancing consonance and dissonance, one can capture the height of divine beauty and bring a song to a satisfying conclusion. The musical journey reflects the same metaphorical lesson as the *Odyssey*, *Job*, the sabbath day of rest after creation, Exodus, Adam’s fall, Christ’s death and resurrection, and the hero’s journey – that the beauty is in the journey not the destination; yet destinations are necessary to remind the traveler that the adventure is not aimless wandering, but a journey within the context of a home.

Conclusion:

Some might reasonably raise the objection that this paper is extrapolating basic music principles into tangentially related philosophical abstractions of order, in other words, molding the shoe to the foot. However, I believe such an argument would lack a certain amount of faith proper to human souls. This paper set out to demonstrate that music is not a *λογικαὶ τέχναι*, but a *μαθηματικαὶ τέχναι*; to explain why music is not just a form of communication but a study for its own sake. *Timaeus* assists this inquiry into music as a liberal art by mythologically encapsulating how the harmony of tones and the heavens are both examples of external motions which mimic our internal ones. This paper merely takes that suggestion seriously and derives from the principles of music the abstract principles of internal and social order contained within.

In Plato’s *Timaeus*, the world soul is constructed by dividing the mixture of the same, the other, and being, into their arithmetic and harmonic means. They are then split in two and wrapped in the form of crossed circles.²⁴ Therefore, according to *Timaeus*, the circular nature of the world comes from its harmonic construction. In Leibniz’s essay “On the True Proportion of the Circle to the Circumscribed Square, Expressed in Rational Numbers,” he demonstrates that

²¹ Zuckerkandl, *The Sense of Music*, pg. 154.

²² Ibid.

²³ Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pg. 42-45.

²⁴ Plato, *Timaeus*, 35a-36c.

the infinite summation of the harmonic series is equal to pi.²⁵ Music is not recursive due to the octave, instead circularity expresses its essence in harmony. When the answer to mathematical questions is to be found in the nature of the musical scale, how could one still doubt whether music is a *μαθηματικαὶ τέχναι*?

Music has been shown to encapsulate a harmonic law of order that can be studied for its own sake, and not merely for the sake of *conveying* truth to others. By examining music more closely, one finds a changing field governed by a universal order; and by harnessing the laws of this order one may manipulate this field to their will. Additionally, in learning how to manipulate this field, by reflecting those discoveries inward, one can find many similarities between the ordering of tones and souls. Music reveals an ever-changing field of tone governed by an unchanging order that we can bend to our will by harnessing its laws properly, just as we experientially find ourselves in the physical world. It is not through the act of listening to music that we can understand precisely how *music* itself is made in the image of man, for listening to music can only at best show us how *this* music is an image of *this* artist. But by creating music, it becomes apparent that the musical space is an auditory canvas on which it is our responsibility to discern and utilize the laws of color. Music and the inspired arts are auditory reflections of experience itself. The laws that underly music reflect an internal order within us, just as Timaeus suggested.

Even if music appears to be a peculiar inclusion in the category of “necessary arts to free one’s mind,” it is the hermaphroditic discipline, being both a mode of expression and a study in itself. It does what the liberal arts do best, requiring one to complete the cycle of external, to internal, back to external. Although it is a mode of expression like the trivium, for emphasis’ sake alone, it still ought to be identified as a quadrivial art, because it is so easy to forget that the art is not just a discipline of expression, but an inquiry into the nature of sound and harmony. Music teaches creativity and discipline, but also, as I hope to have demonstrated, contains principles about harmony and order separate from sound – how to live one’s life, the benefits of equality, just social orders, and the metaphor that underlies the purpose of motion and change, departure and return. In *Timaeus*, a dialogue I’ve previously argued is fundamentally about metaphor, music is correctly classified as an image of the proper ordering of the human soul.²⁶ And unlike astronomy, music and poetry also contain a seed of the trivium, making the musical arts not just the black sheep, but the unrivaled monarch of the liberal arts.

²⁵ Leibniz, “True Proportion of the Circle,” 3.

²⁶ Fraser, Lawson (2025). “The Purpose of Storytelling: Logical Mythologizing in Plato’s *Timaeus*” *The Macksey Journal*: Volume 6, Article 7.

Appendix

Demonstration 1:

Let there be two tones an octave apart A_{low} and A_{high} . Let there be another tone, D, which lies equably between A_{low} and A_{high} (that is to say, the difference between A_{low} and D is equal to the difference between D and A_{high}). I say that A_{low} and D form a fourth and D and A_{high} form a fifth.

Let the string length of $A_{low} = 2$ units.

Since an octave is defined as a 2 : 1 ratio, $A_{low} : A_{high} :: 2 : 1$.

Therefore, $A_{high} = 1$ unit.

Since D lies equably between A_{low} and A_{high} ,

$$D - A_{high} = A_{low} - D$$

$$2D = A_{low} + A_{high}$$

$$D = \frac{A_{low} + A_{high}}{2}$$

$$\therefore D = \frac{2+1}{2} = \frac{3}{2}$$

And $\frac{3}{2} : 1 :: 3 : 2$. Therefore $D : A_{high} :: 3 : 2$, making A_{high} a fifth higher than D.

And subsequently, $D : A_{low} :: \frac{3}{2} : 2 :: 3 : 4$. Therefore $A_{low} : D :: 4 : 3$, making A_{low} a fourth lower than D.

Q.E.D.

Demonstration 2:

Let the same elements of demonstration 1 be given.

Let D_{low} be an octave below D.

And since $D_{low} : D :: 2 : 1$, and $D = \frac{3}{2}$, therefore $D_{low} = 3$.

Let G_{low} lie equably between D_{low} and D.

And Let G_{low} be an octave below G_{high} .

I say that $G_{high} : A_{high} :: 9 : 8$ and is called a whole tone.

Since G_{low} lies equably between D_{low} and D,

$$G_{low} - D_{low} = D - G_{low}$$

$$G_{low} = \frac{D + D_{low}}{2} = \frac{\frac{3}{2} + 3}{2} = \frac{9}{4}$$

And Since G_{low} is an octave below G_{high} , $G_{low} : G_{high} :: 2 : 1$.

$$\text{Therefore, } G_{high} = \frac{G_{low}}{2} = \frac{9}{4} * \frac{1}{2} = \frac{9}{8}$$

And $A_{\text{high}} = 1$.

So, $G_{\text{high}} : A_{\text{high}} :: \frac{9}{8} : 1 :: 9 : 8$.

Therefore, G_{high} is a whole tone below A_{high}

Q.E.D.

Demonstration 3:

I say that whole tones cannot be put in sequence to coincide with the octave.

Let there be a sequence where the next tone is a whole tone away from the previous tone.

That is $x_{n+1} = x_n * \frac{9}{8}$;

And let x_1 be the first string in this sequence and let its string length equal 1.

Therefore, $x_n = \left(\frac{9}{8}\right)^{n-1}$

So, $x_2 = \frac{9}{8}, x_3 = \frac{81}{64}, \text{etc ...}$

Thus, the sixth tone in that sequence has a string length $x_6 = \left(\frac{9}{8}\right)^5 = \frac{531,441}{262,144} \approx 2.027 \neq 2$

Therefore, the sequence of whole tones produces a string length just slightly greater than the octave below it and will become more out of sync as the pitch progresses farther away from the original note. From this it follows that a musical scale constructed from a subsequently lower progression of whole tones will not coincide with the original note's octave. Therefore, what has been set out to demonstrated has been proven.

Demonstration 4:

I say if one continues to find the fifths of fifths, and adjusts when necessary back to the original octave between A_{low} and A_{high} , the progression will not find its way back to the octave within a reasonable number of repetitions.

For if one does progress 12 perfect fifths, the length of the string 12 fifths lower than A_{high} is

$$\left(\frac{3}{2}\right)^{12} = \frac{531,441}{4,096} \text{ units}$$

And 7 octaves in terms of the original string is

$$2^7 = 128 = \frac{524,288}{4,096} \text{ units}$$

Therefore, after 12 repetitions, the fifth will barely miss the octave.

If this progression were continued, as Jing Fang discovered in 122 BC, the difference between the octave and fifth at the 53rd pitch would be much smaller, but will still miss the octave.²⁷

Therefore, what has been set out to be demonstrated has been proven.

²⁷ McClain, Ernest G., and Ming Shui Hung. "Chinese Cyclic Tunings in Late Antiquity." *Ethnomusicology* 23, no. 2 (1979): 205–24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/851462>.

Demonstration 5:

If the whole tone and semitone are assumed to be 9 : 8 and 256 : 243 respectively, then all intervals can be expressed as some compounding of those ratios.

The fourth:

$$\left(\frac{9}{8}\right)^2 * \frac{256}{243} = \frac{20,736}{15,552} = \frac{4}{3}$$

The fifth:

$$\left(\frac{9}{8}\right)^3 * \frac{256}{243} = \frac{186,624}{124,416} = \frac{3}{2}$$

The octave:

$$\left(\frac{9}{8}\right)^5 * \left(\frac{256}{243}\right)^2 = \frac{2}{1}$$

Etc.

Q.E.D

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