

# PHARMAKON

Volume I ° Spring 2024



# Pharmakon:φάρμακον

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Spring 2024

Dear Readers,

We are proud to announce the revival issue of *Pharmakon*. The editorial board began this process of journal building in the spring of 2024 and are exceedingly proud to put forth the first volume of hopefully many to come.

This issue of *Pharmakon*, the first inaugural volume, reflects the breadth and depth of American University's (AU) philosophical inquiry. The articles range from discussions of classic Aristotelian philosophy to the influence of dance in postcolonialism. The authors work within traditions ranging from ancient Greek to postmodern ethics. Their subjects of interest range from the roles of liberalism and communism to love and classic literature. What these pieces share is a devotion to rigorous philosophical and theological analysis, and a commitment to grappling deeply with questions that are foundational to the way we view the world.

Members of the AU Philosophy and Religion department revived *Pharmakon* to address that task, to provide the DC consortium of schools with a forum for open dialogue on the philosophical issues which plague our students today. *Pharmakon* was originally launched in 2007 as a journal for the American University student body to delve deeply into the complex philosophical questions which arose from being positioned within the nation's capital. This revival hopes to expand the scope, encompassing not just our small community here at AU, but a number of schools with diverse philosophical voices across DC. As a student run journal, we will continue to publish an annual general issue. In the future we hope to expand our repertoire to publish special issues focused on a single topic, as well as hosting conferences allowing a gathering place for students to present their manifold lines of inquiry.

This issue has been long in the making and would not have been possible without the generous support and encouragement from numerous members of the AU community. We would like to give special thanks to Dr. Lauren Weis, Director of Undergraduate Studies in Philosophy at American University; Dr. Nicholas Buck, Director of Undergraduate Studies in Religion; Dr. Ian Rhoad, Director of Graduate Studies in Philosophy & Religion; and those in the Philosophy and Religion provost department who have been incredibly helpful in securing funding and organizing community events for *Pharmakon*. We are indebted to the members of the *Pharmakon* Review Board for their enthusiasm, assistance, and expertise throughout this last semester. As well as, our authors who have courageously stayed with us during this process. *Pharmakon* would not exist without this community.

The Indian philosopher Rabinadrath Tagore once said that "the one who plants trees, knowing that he will never sit in their shade, has at least started to understand the meaning of life." We often lamented to one another in our staff meetings and working periods that the revival of *Pharmakon* did not come sooner, in time for us to contribute to it and enjoy the wonderful community that has grown around it. We find this thought less troubling when we think ahead to the new editions of *Pharmakon* that will be published, the fresh ideas and riveting discussions it will generate, and, most of all, the people it will bring together in the future. We sincerely thank you for taking the time to read this journal.

Best,

*Pharmakon* Editorial Board

Ayantu Gelan, Alexandra Kallaher, Henry Mondschein, Andrew Wagner

# KANT AND HOOKS: A DUTY TO LOVE

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Gwyneth Hill

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of love as articulated by bell hooks in “All About Love: New Visions” and its intersection with Immanuel Kant's idea of duty and the categorical imperative in the “Groundings for the Metaphysics of Morals”. Although widely different authors, both converge in promoting a moral landscape that values human dignity, mutual respect, and universal principles. It explores Kant's categorical imperative and its relevance to hooks' concept of love as a guiding principle for ethical behavior. By embracing a love ethic willed into Kantian universal law a more compassionate and equitable society is possible.

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Love is commonly perceived as an elusive emotion, challenging to define as it remains shrouded in mystery. The intricacies of love are seldom taught, leaving us without a clear understanding of how to articulate, recognize, or cultivate it. But bell hooks provides a definition in her novel, “*All About Love: New Visions*,” in which she characterizes love as “a will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.”<sup>1</sup> While the conventional narrative predominantly associates love with romantic relationships, hooks explains its scope extends far beyond such confines. She argues that love transcends the boundaries of mere romantic sentiment and instead manifests as an ongoing choice that should be applied to our interactions with one another and all living beings. Her usage of the word “will” is key, as it suggests the driver for our actions would be love. Similarly, Immanuel Kant, a philosopher 200 years prior, defined the will as a motivator of action. However, this will is only a good will, or pure, if it acts in accordance with duty. To act from duty is to follow the moral law, also known as the categorical imperative. We are required by the categorical imperative to only take actions that could logically be codified into universal rules. Therefore, the combination of Kant's categorical imperative and a love ethic creates a robust framework for ethical behavior, where individuals are bound by duty for the well-being and respect of others. Both philosophies converge in promoting a moral guidance for interactions that value human life, prioritize mutual respect, and recognize the intrinsic worth of every individual.

Kant's “*Metaphysics of Morals*” introduces a multi-component categorical imperative tied to actions and their intentions that essentially must be passed before an act can be considered moral. The first formulation states, “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”<sup>2</sup> The idea is to assess the moral worth of an action by considering whether the principle or maxim guiding that action could be universally applied without contradiction. The maxim of love, as articulated by bell hooks, could

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<sup>1</sup> Hooks, Bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. New York: William Morrow, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 1999. 10

<sup>2</sup> Kant, Immanuel. “Groundings for the metaphysics of morals: With ‘on a supposed right to lie because of philanthropic concerns.’” Translated by James W. Ellington. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992. 30

be willed as a universal law without contradiction. When applying a maxim of a love ethic, it aligns with the notion that the principles of love, “encompassing care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust,”<sup>3</sup> should be foundational and applicable universally. If everyone were to embrace these attributes, it would contribute to a harmonious and just society. In essence, Kant's quote supports the idea that a love ethic, grounded in universal principles, is not only a personal choice but also a moral imperative that, if embraced by all, could lead to a world where love guides our actions and interactions on a global scale.

The second formulation of the categorical imperative is the "formula of the end in itself" and states: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means."<sup>4</sup> Kant's directive to treat humanity as an end resonates with the love ethic's core principles, particularly the notions of care and respect. By recognizing and respecting the inherent value of everyone as an end, rather than a means to an end, both Kant's philosophy and a love ethic converge in prioritizing the preservation of dignity of human beings. In both philosophies we ought not see each other as ways to gain in our own self-interest. In the context of the love ethic, treating others as ends aligns with the commitment to nurturing spiritual growth and acknowledging the unique worth of each person. bell hooks expresses that every individual possesses an inherent right to lead a self-determined and meaningful life just because of their humanity, “A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well.”<sup>5</sup> Whereas Kant argues to not treat humans as means to an end because of their reason therefore supplying them autonomy and humanity. But nevertheless, love ethics argues that to not treat others with love would deny their humanity and bodily autonomy, therefore failing the categorical imperative. The emphasis on personal moral responsibility and the avoidance of using or abusing others echoes the love ethic's call for genuine care and benevolence in human interactions. Unlike objects, humans possess no equivalent, because dignity cannot be replaced, further underscores the interconnectedness of Kant's philosophy and the love ethic. This shared perspective emphasizes the irreplaceable nature of each individual, reinforcing the imperative to treat one another with love – sustaining and maintaining the essence of our being, while avoiding reducing each other to mere objects.

Embracing a love ethic becomes a vital aspect of upholding our shared humanity and preserving the dignity of every individual. hooks asserts that our personal well-being is intricately connected to the well-being of the collective. This interconnectedness finds resonance in Kant's moral law, which envisions a world where individuals act in a manner that treats everyone uniformly because a cohesive and sensible world wouldn't be conceivable without such universal principles. In Kant's final formulation of the categorical imperative, he describes the will of every rational being as "a will that legislates universal law."<sup>6</sup> While not explicitly stated as an imperative, the idea can be framed as follows: Act in a way that your maxims could be legislative for universal laws. This concept echoes the first formulation but places emphasis on our role as universal law makers rather than mere followers. This shift is foundational to the dignity of humanity, according to Kant, as it requires setting aside contingent motives and adhering to principles that express the autonomy of the rational will.

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<sup>3</sup> Hooks, 54

<sup>4</sup> Kant, 36

<sup>5</sup> Hooks, 87

<sup>6</sup> Kant, 38

He connects the notion of every rational will as a legislator of universal laws to the concept of a "kingdom of ends," referring to a systematic union of different rational beings under the common moral law. The formulation of the categorical imperative emphasizes the need to act in accordance with the maxims of a member contributing universal laws for a possible kingdom of ends. "A rational being belongs to the kingdom of ends as a member when he legislates in it universal laws while also being himself subject to these laws."<sup>7</sup> People may reach the kingdom when they become subject of the universal laws. All people have individually come to the kingdom through their own reason. Morality, therefore, entails acting with profound respect for the universal laws that enable the realization of the Kingdom of Ends. This combines elements, requiring conformity to the laws of an ideal moral legislature, the universal application of these laws, and the recognition that every member of this possible kingdom must be treated as an end in themselves. In the context of love ethics, this philosophical framework implies that, for a society where all are seen as equally capable of giving, receiving, and deserving love, individuals are obligated to act in accordance with the principles that recognize the autonomy and intrinsic worth of every rational being. If such a kingdom were to exist, it would be critical as it would allow people to practice the duty of love. hooks defines a community as a collective of individuals who have mastered the art of honest communication, establishing a profound commitment to supporting and empathizing with one another, both in moments of joy and adversity.<sup>8</sup> In this space, people are empowered to cultivate relationships that surpass mere superficial connections, fostering a deep sense of interconnectedness and understanding. Thus, the kingdom becomes a fertile ground for the practice of love, where the ethos of genuine communication and unwavering support creates a nurturing atmosphere for the growth of profound human connections. hooks looks at both the past and future to argue that this ethic is a necessary duty for progress and justice. "All the great social movements for freedom and justice in our society have promoted a love ethic. Concern for the collective good of our nation, city, or neighbor rooted in the values of love makes us all seek to nurture and protect that good. If all public policy was created in the spirit of love, we would not have to worry about unemployment, homelessness, schools failing to teach children, or addiction."<sup>9</sup> Now that is a loaded three sentences. But the quote is pertinent, as it explains that a mutual commitment to a love ethic would protect that very good. Whether done through public policy or social movement, addressing issues requires a collective commitment to principles that prioritize the common good and respect for everyone. hooks herself exemplifies decentering herself in commitment to universal nurturing by opting to not capitalize her name to focus the message on her work instead of herself.<sup>10</sup> Her focus remains steadfastly on the substance of her writings, valuing their impact on society over individual acclaim. Embracing a love ethic, hooks exemplifies in both her name and writings, advocates for solutions that elevate entire communities, echoing universal principles that harmonize with the ideals of a kingdom of ends.

Kant and hooks reach the similar conclusion of universalizable duty to others that respects their humanity despite having different identities and living during different times. And how these characteristics have created their opposing views on race. This is crucial as racial hierarchy is a key obstacle in a broader love ethic in society. bell hooks was born in 1952 in

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<sup>7</sup> Kant, 40

<sup>8</sup> Hooks, 159

<sup>9</sup> Hooks, 98

<sup>10</sup> McGrady, Clyde. "Why bell hooks didn't capitalize her name." The Washington Post, December 15, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/12/15/bell-hooks-real-name/>



Kentucky. In all her writings, including “*All About Love*”, hooks advocates for a feminist perspective that centers the experiences and struggles of marginalized groups, particularly Black women, and calls for solidarity and coalition-building among oppressed communities to challenge systemic inequalities. She is known as one of the prominent feminist scholars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Immanuel Kant was born in 1724, in what is now Russia. Kant's racial views are primarily expressed in his anthropological writings, notably in his work “*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.” He articulated a perspective that denied non-white individuals access to essential goods such as recognition, respect, and eligibility for cultural and moral accomplishments. They were not included in his conception of a rational being whose “nature already marks them out as end in themselves, i.e., as something which is not to be used merely as means and hence there is imposed thereby a limit on all arbitrary use of such beings, which are thus objects of respect.”<sup>11</sup> Despite advocating for the universal dignity of all human beings, Kant held despicable views about non-white people. This could indicate a flaw in Kant's moral philosophy or merely point to a personal failing on his part, as scholars such as Charles Mills have researched in depth. And yet both hooks and Kant with vastly different backgrounds identified the need for duty in our interactions with each other and ourselves. According to Kant, morality is a type of inner fortitude or tenacity of the will to carry out duties in the face of both internal and external obstacles, and it must be led by reason. He writes, “The moral imperative must therefore abstract from every object to such an extent that no object has an influence at all on the will, so that practical reason (the will) may not merely show its own commanding authority as the supreme legislation.”<sup>12</sup> Kant argues genuine morality requires having a good will that is strong and skilled at using reason to withstand temptations towards immorality and this is exactly where Kant has failed his own writings. Systemic racism, with its deeply entrenched biases and structural inequalities, cannot be attributed any moral worth, as its foundations are rooted in the pursuit of self-interest rather than ethical principles. By perpetuating theories that endorse racial hierarchies, Kant indeed neglected his moral duty. His writings, which contribute to the justification and maintenance of such hierarchies, reveal a prioritization of personal advantage over universal principles. In upholding systems of oppression, Kant's actions demonstrate a failure to uphold the moral imperatives he himself espoused.

Some may contend that his philosophical contributions are now ruined by this inconsistency. However, by presenting a theory that prompts individuals with the choice to either adhere to or ignore duty, Kant himself illustrates how even those who know the good will may succumb to temptation over reason. Hence, the pursuit of morality is a challenging undertaking that requires a significant amount of time, deliberate effort, and self-reflection to develop. In a similar vein, hooks considers the necessity of the practice of love, writing, “To open our hearts more fully to love's power and grace we must dare to acknowledge how little we know of love both in theory and practice. We must face the confusion and disappointment that much of what we were taught about the nature of love makes no sense when applied to daily life.”<sup>13</sup> To genuinely commit to living a love ethic, one must be rigorous in self-realization and knowledge of their duty to others for it to be extended universally. Understanding love is like understanding the good will and duty in that it must begin from within. Kant posits that regardless of one's inherent dispositions or emotions, anyone has the capacity to be moral and progress to the “kingdom of ends” by choosing to embody the good will. hook extends this

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<sup>11</sup> Kant, 36

<sup>12</sup> Kant, 45

<sup>13</sup> Hooks, XXIX

connection of individual study to responsibilities including loving one another. She writes, “The more we accept ourselves, the better prepared we are to take responsibility in all areas of our lives.”<sup>14</sup> Viewing love as a responsibility emphasizes its position as an active force that leads one to a greater connection with the world. Participating in acts of love is not solely about boosting personal gratification; it's celebrated as the primary approach to challenge and overcome domination and oppression. By loving one another society may begin to practice a maximization of well-being that allows for a dismantling of hierarchies that people like Kant upheld.

Kant largely argues that emotions ought to be subservient to reason and moral principles. Central to his ethical philosophy is the elevation of rationality over impulsive emotional reactions and desires, all the while recognizing that emotions can serve as motivational forces for fulfilling moral duties. And that is why it is all the more important to delineate love from its conventional portrayal in the media. Contrary to the portrayal of love as a capricious emotion that simply befalls individuals, a more profound understanding aligns with a commitment and a deliberate practice oriented towards advancing the well-being of others. Within the framework of a love ethic, the emphasis lies not on the fleeting emotions we commonly witness in popular culture but on the conscientious dedication to a standard that prioritizes the betterment of others. hooks quotes a 1967 lecture by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declaring, “When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response...Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality.”<sup>15</sup> In this light, the connection between a love ethic and Kantian duty becomes apparent. When individuals are guided by a love ethic, they not only hold themselves accountable to this elevated standard but also expect others to adhere to similar principles. Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* states that every person must be regarded as an end in themselves, and only societies and actions that uphold this principle possess genuine moral value. This ideal is attainable when both individuals and societies are guided by pure reason. As a more perfect society emerges and hierarchies dissolve, individuals can increasingly embrace the steadfast and duty-bound principle of love. This interdependence between personal dedication, ethical conduct, and communal aspiration reflects the core of Kantian duty, in which moral behavior is guided by rational principles and a universal commitment to the well-being and dignity of every individual. Despite their distinct backgrounds, both authors grasp the significance of universal principles that recognize the intrinsic worth of humanity. Kant and hooks both fundamentally understand the value of universalized principles that see human beings for their inherent value and converge in understanding citizens duties to one another.

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<sup>14</sup> Hooks, 57

<sup>15</sup> Hooks, 75

# BEYOND LIBERALISM AND COMMUNISM

Tyler Holbrook

## ABSTRACT

This article seeks to expose the shortcomings of liberalism and communism. I do so by critiquing the foundational texts of both philosophies and reveal their underwhelming logical consequences. Liberalism and classical political economy, and communism give important points about abuse of power. However, neither ideology provides an ideology that the political body should live by. Liberalism and communism are based on negative freedom, freedom from something bad. They do little to describe positive freedom; freedom to do something good. One's ideology should propose a vision of what society will look like once negative freedom is achieved.

## Introduction

The modern debate over the political economy is one mostly between intellectual descendants of John Locke and Adam Smith on the one hand, and Karl Marx on the other. The first group can be understood as those in favor of a liberal political economy, while the other can be categorized as those in favor of a communist political economy. It is important to note that most people in these two camps are not ideological purists. Most people descending from Marx don't argue for class revolution, and most people descending from Locke and Smith would be in favor of certain traditionalist pursuits such as classical education. What unites these two groups is what they fear. Liberal political economy is a perspective united by the fear of state power being used to abuse the individual. Communist political economy is united by the fear of economic power being used to abuse the proletariat. When this article uses the terms 'liberal' and 'communist', it does not mean to describe everyone in these camps as self-identified liberals or communists. Rather, I am describing people who align with the fears that each bloc has. In fact, this point, that most people arguing for liberal political economy on the one hand and communist political economy on the other deviate substantially from those philosophical traditions, is the argument of this article. While these two ideologies are helpful perspectives on the function of the economy, they do not put forward any substantive view of human well-being, and thus should not be considered comprehensive philosophies that we base the political community on.

## An Overview of the Two Ideologies

In 1690, John Locke published *The Second Treatise of Government*, a work that went on to have an incredible influence on American liberal democracy. In it, Locke describes a political society that comes together to "preserve his property, that is, his life, liberty and estate, against the injuries and attempts of other men". Locke says that in the political society, man cedes his ability to protect these rights, an ability he has in the state of nature, to the state, which acts as a common arbiter between men in political society by setting common laws that apply to all equally and indifferently.<sup>1</sup> Locke is often associated with liberalism, a political philosophy founded on one's liberty from authoritative power, except when restricting one from imposing

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<sup>1</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government*. 1980.p. 46

power over another. Liberalism holds ideas such as the rule of law, natural rights, and individual freedom as fundamental to human well-being. Human well-being for liberalism is thus freedom from arbitrary and abusive power that aims to infringe on one's individual rights.

Karl Marx offers a harsh criticism of the economic implications of Locke's political society. In a piece titled "Alienated Labor" he describes that by presupposing "private property, the separation of labor, capital and land, hence of wages, profit of capital and rent", workers become, not the liberated, protected individuals that Locke sees, but a "miserable commodity".<sup>2</sup> In Marx's view, classical political economy produces a system that alienates the workers from their labor and uses them as means to increase production for the wealthy.<sup>3</sup> The prescribed antidote for this issue, which Marx thinks is an inevitable conclusion, is given the name 'communism'. "The Communist Manifesto" by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels says that "the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property".<sup>4</sup> The society that develops from this revolutionary act of abolishing private property is one where nearly everything is held in common. Differentiation and individuality are abolished as well. Communism dissolves countries and nationality, for example, as these are remnants of the bourgeois, divisive power structure.<sup>5</sup> Human well-being in communism is thus freedom from the bourgeoisie.

Liberalism and communism present a version of human well-being that is focused on a kind of negative freedom. That is, freedom from something. Both political philosophies view the key to human well-being as something that will naturally unfold if a certain oppressive power structure is removed, and the people are protected from it. Additionally, Marx and Locke see property as pivotal for the human experience. For communism, once bourgeois private property and bourgeois institutions are abolished, relinquishing their power over the proletariat, human well-being 'happens'. For liberalism, as long as one's individual rights to life, liberty and property are protected, human well-being will naturally occur. Both communism and liberalism present important analyses of political economy that one should take into account. On their own, however, neither will produce human well-being because they don't give aim towards substantive freedom once one is liberated from the abusive force. They also overemphasize the role of property in achieving human well-being. This essay will criticize liberalism as well as its proposed alternative, communism through their interactions with property. For the purposes of this paper, property involves the final product of human labor as well as the justified ownership over that product. Classical political economy and communism take different stances on property revealing their position on what constitutes human well-being. Ultimately, this paper will take a more substantive approach to human well-being, one that is closely aligned with Aristotle and the ancients. Aristotle believed that the political community was not primarily about freeing one from power but organizing power towards a good.<sup>6</sup> Human well-being is achieved when individuals are able to meaningfully contribute to the common good of a community.

### **Critique of Liberal Political Economy**

First, let's examine liberal political economy. Liberal political economy has its roots in the work of thinkers such as John Locke and Adam Smith. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith

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<sup>2</sup> Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings*. Edited by L. H. Simon. Hackett, 1994, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Id. p. 64

<sup>4</sup> Id. p. 170

<sup>5</sup> Id. p. 174

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle. *Politics*. Edited and translated by Carnes Lord. 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press, 2013.p.1

states that “the great object of the political economy of every country, is to increase the riches and power of that country”.<sup>7</sup> A society where the free market dictates the rules of commerce instead of the state aligns the self-interest of the seller with the self-interest of the buyer. The seller desires to maximize profit. To do this, they will produce what participants in the free market desire. In addition, a competitive market keeps prices low because of the buyer’s self-interest in spending the least amount of money possible.<sup>8</sup>

A key aspect of liberal political economy is the presupposition of an individualist approach to property, which Locke describes as something that exists in the state of nature. Locke views ownership of property as an extension of God giving the world to Adam to make use of. Locke describes this as God giving the world to humanity collectively.<sup>9</sup> And yet, there is property that is individual. While the principle of property is universal to humanity, man as an individual has property for himself, chiefly in his own person. Locke believes that an individual owns the result of his labor mixed with what exists in nature.<sup>10</sup> Locke adds that when one labors and alters nature in accordance with his own desire and reason, he benefits all mankind because the new property is useful to both himself and his community.<sup>11</sup> Can nature, untouched by human hands be nearly as valuable as the property that results from one’s labor? The answer in liberal political economy is no.

The logical foundation for self-interested, individual ownership of property is faulty. In the following paragraphs, I will lay out three critiques of Locke’s conception of property.

The first critique for Locke’s natural, individual right to property is a rejection of Locke’s logical progression to this conclusion, which is as follows. One has property “in his own person”.<sup>12</sup> Labor flows from the individual. The result of one’s own labor and the resources in nature, which has been given universally to man, is ‘x’. Since one owns himself and thus must be in control of his own labor, one has ownership over x. The logic of Locke is clear if one accepts the indicative. However, it is not obvious that one has property in himself. The concept of personhood is a result of natural tendencies, individual choice, and socialization. While the proportion of these factors can be argued, it is almost ubiquitously understood that a significant portion of ‘the person’ is constituted by the society that one was brought into. Therefore, the concept that man has a total and complete ownership of himself is logically indefinite.

Secondly, if property is merely up to one’s self, then the level of property that one accrues and the wealth it produces is a reflection on the productive substance innate to the individual. This too is illogical. In Locke’s story of individual property, nature plays a contingent role. While the individual’s labor plays a larger role in the final product, without the individual discovering and claiming a part of nature there is no property. While nature may make up, say, 10 percent of property, there is no property if one does not discover nature. This discovery of nature is often out of one’s control. Suppose that one had the potential to be a great metal worker but was born into a region that did not naturally contain metals. The labor which in theory constitutes one’s property goes unused. In another possible scenario, the very same individual is born in a region with naturally occurring metals and is then able to mix his labor with nature, the product of which Locke would deem the individual’s property. However, because this individual

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, Adam. *The Wealth of Nations*. Edited by Edwin Cannan. Modern Library Classics, 2000. p. 403

<sup>8</sup> Id. p. 372-373

<sup>9</sup> Locke, John. *The Second Treatise of Government*. 1980.p. 18

<sup>10</sup> Id. p 19

<sup>11</sup> Id. p. 23

<sup>12</sup> Id. p. 19

is not necessarily born into a region with naturally occurring metals, the individual's property is contingent on the chance of their geographic location. One could respond that this individual is able to acquire metal from another region through the process of free-market exchange. The individual then acquires the resources from another geographic location and mixes his labor with it to create property. This, however, is no longer natural property because it requires exchange with others. In this particular understanding of Locke's natural, individual right to property, property becomes a social principle as a result of free market exchange.

The last critique of the natural, individual right to property is about Locke's understanding of labor. If labor is natural to humans - which both Locke and Smith would argue it is - and one's person is at least in part constructed by one's community, then an individual cannot have complete ownership over the product of his labor. More accurately, the individual does not mix his labor with nature, but the community mixes its understanding of the 'good' with the talents and desires of the individual to produce the capacity for productive labor. For this, I will use myself as an example. In my childhood I played basketball and baseball. I had a baseline amount of athleticism that was natural to me. However, the sports I chose, the skills I developed (which can be seen as labor), as well as the further athleticism I focused on because of those sports was in many ways determined by my community, not just my individual desires. Perhaps if I had grown up in India I would have played cricket and soccer and developed differently. The skills that I have are not just my own, but were both taught to me by others and encouraged by two sports that were prominent in the community I was raised in.

All three of these critiques, the rejection of one's ownership in his own person, the 'chance' involved in discovering nature, and the communal aspect to one's labor is to refute the central premise of liberal political economy, which is the protection of a natural, individual right to property. The protection of property rights cannot be the purpose of government because property rights are not natural. It may be decided that individual ownership of property is a functional right, but this would be something that is socially constructed for the purpose of some prior understanding of 'the good' instead of a natural right that does not need to be justified. While Locke may be right to suggest individual ownership of property, it can only be instituted in so far as it serves a 'good' in the eyes of the political community. This requires that the political community be involved in discussing morality, or as I will later state, a positive construction of human well-being, instead of merely focusing on restricting power that would take away a natural right (negative construction of human well-being).

### **Critique of Communist Political Economy**

The communist critique of classical political economy stems from the experience of many in the laboring class that do not own property and yet still mix their labor with nature. Under Locke's conception of property these people, which are called 'the proletariat', should own the things they make. Even if one considered a kind of dual labor between the bourgeoisie that owned the capital and the proletariat that produced the goods, the laborer should still own at least part of the product. The fact that workers have no ownership over the fruit of their labor suggests that they are being stolen from and separated from the goods they make, what Marx calls 'alienated labor'. He continues in a later manuscript titled "Private Property and Communism" to describe how private property is intrinsically tied to "unfree labor".<sup>13</sup> One could establish a similar line of reasoning to Locke's in relation to labor and property. The logic put forth by communism is as follows. Private property exists, and only the bourgeoisie own private

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<sup>13</sup> Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings*. Edited by L. H. Simon. Hackett, 1994, p. 69.



property. Line B; since the proletariat labors but does not gain from the product of his labor <sup>14</sup>, he is unfree. Line C; to free the proletariat, one must abolish private property. It seems difficult to refute the indicative in this case. Line B may be less obviously true, but still a strong point. Many have countered Line C, that the only way to freedom for the proletariat is revolution. However, let us assume that this logic is sound.

The greater problem with communism is not the description of liberal political economy, but the prescription for what is considered a ‘free society’. Marx rightly describes the individual’s experience, saying of himself that his “existence is social activity; what I make from myself I make for society, conscious of my nature as social”. <sup>15</sup> This attains a part of human well-being, the aspect that one ‘contributes to the community’. However, Marx leaves the other aspects of human well-being up to chance. The proletariat will free itself from “all the other spheres of society”, which results in “the complete loss of humanity and can only redeem itself through the total redemption of humanity”. <sup>16</sup> In his essay “On the Jewish Question”, Marx describes a revolution that not only destroys unfair power dynamics, but eradicates civil society, along with all the institutions that create meaning, with the intent of creating a new society. <sup>17</sup> The things that constitute the human individual are destroyed and rebuilt in a communist conception of a free world. Although Marx’s prescriptions may be helpful in certain situations, they don’t apply universally as he asserts, nor is human well-being exclusively tied to a revolution of the oppressed.

First, it is possible for an oppressed community (here I am expanding Marx’s analysis beyond class) to find significant well-being without a revolution. To give one example, Black people were able to meaningfully contribute to the common good of their community through the existence of the Black church in post-Black Codes America. In all likelihood, a significant portion of the Black community today would entirely disregard that they would have been better off if the church was abolished because of its ties to bourgeois oppression. Instead, the Black community was able to re-define the church to constitute meaning and a common good. Some institutions may need to be abolished for the freedom of the oppressed, but this is not necessarily the case in all situations.

Second, it seems entirely plausible that in this new society where private property has been abolished, different systems of oppression will manifest. While abolishing private property and all other bourgeois institutions may be necessary in certain cases, doing so does not prevent the natural phenomenon of men acting in their self-interest at the detriment of others. This may not show up in ways that are as obviously economic in nature, but in all likelihood, certain groups will experience oppression at the hands of others. Thomas Hobbes worries about the inevitability of human violence and self-interest in Chapter 13 of *Leviathan*. <sup>18</sup> The state he prescribes is based upon the safety of the state from outsiders, but also the safety of individuals from each other. This state is one where a sovereign is given total power to ensure peace. <sup>19</sup> Hobbes may be overly pessimistic about the nature of man, but he still has a point. Man’s capability to oppress others will always exist. No revolution can stop that. The class revolution

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<sup>14</sup> Id. p. 61

<sup>15</sup> Id. p. 71

<sup>16</sup> Id. p. 38

<sup>17</sup> Id. p. 18-19

<sup>18</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan: Or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*. Edited by Michael Oakeshott. Atria Books, 2008. p. 21-96

<sup>19</sup> Id. p.134-137

that Marx describes can never entirely be solved, and his prescriptions don't guarantee the possibility of meaning within oppression either.

## Conclusion

Liberalism and communism have one common quality. They both view human well-being as the expulsion of authoritative power relations. They have important points and one must take their arguments into account. However, by only focusing on negative freedom and not giving enough attention to substantive freedom, liberalism and communism leave human well-being up to chance. The institutions and processes that give the individual meaning and constitute a common good develop outside of liberalism and communism at best, and despite them at worst. In the end, Aristotle was right when he said that "while the city comes into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well".<sup>20</sup> 'Living well' is not just the freedom from oppression, but a positive freedom, a freedom that is of substance, a freedom that produces meaning and defines good. This freedom allows one to live well. The true political economy is one that allows the individual to pursue what is meaningful to them as it contributes to the common good of one's community. This is the political freedom that leads to human well-being.

Instead of liberalism and communism, I propose two ideologies, one on the left and one on the right, that more adequately propose a vision of positive freedom. These are communitarianism and left-wing nationalism. Communitarianism takes certain analyses from liberalism. However, while liberalism leaves the individual alone to construct his meaning, communitarianism views human well-being as something that the individual finds within his community. Communitarianism accepts the negative freedom described by liberalism while proposing a view of positive freedom. There will be important differences between liberalism and communitarianism as ideologies. This isn't a problem for communitarianism, however, because liberalism isn't given equal weight, but serves as a secondary helper to communitarianism.

The ideology on the left that is concerned with positive freedom is left-wing nationalism. Left-wing nationalism accepts many points of communism, specifically the concern with economic power, the imperialist project, and support for the proletariat. However, they differ strongly from communism on their national focus, as opposed to the international revolution proposed by communism. Left-wing nationalism accepts the importance of national and local traditions and their role in providing purpose and meaning.

Liberalism and communism are important parts of the Western philosophical tradition. They have given important critiques of the abuse of power. However, they do not do anything to propose a version of freedom and human well-being that comes after the abuse of power has been dealt with. The debate between left and right should not be between liberalism and communism, but between communitarianism and left-wing nationalism, going beyond a debate about negative freedom to one about positive freedom, giving a truer vision for human well-being.

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<sup>20</sup> Aristotle. *Politics*. Edited and translated by Carnes Lord. 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press, 2013.p.3

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## Peter Singer's Contribution to the White Savior Industrial Complex

*Sharit Cárdenas López*

### ABSTRACT

The approach of Peter Singer on the topic of moral philosophy and global inequality has many similarities with author Teju Cole's idea of the White Savior Industrial Complex. Singer believes the Global North has a moral responsibility to help the Global South, especially with famine. His approach creates a harmful contrast between the Global North and the Global South in which the North must save the poor and "savage" South. This harmful contrast and the combination of guilt and moral obligation is at the core of the White Savior Industrial Complex and Peter Singer's work. While it might not be intentional, Singer's view of the Global South as needing saving and his glorification of the Global North has opened the doors for volunteer tourism perpetrating further harm globally. Moral philosophers and humanity must rethink moral theories and be more conscious of colonization and its lasting effects.

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The work of Peter Singer, specifically *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*,<sup>1</sup> influences the approach people from developed countries take to address global inequality. At the beginning of the 19th century it appeared that most countries were experiencing poverty; however, by the 1970's it became evident the world income distribution was extremely unequal.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this stark economic difference, the terms developing/underdeveloped and developed countries came to be.<sup>3</sup> Peter Singer, the famous utilitarian, in his work "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" claims global inequality is a moral problem and every individual in developed countries has the moral responsibility to help people abroad.<sup>4</sup>

Peter Singer's take on moral philosophy and global inequality blurs the lines between addressing inequalities abroad and opening the doors and justifying white saviorism such as volunteer tourism. This essay will create a connection between Singer's work on global inequality, moral philosophy, and his views of the White Savior Complex/colonial theories. This work will attempt to understand why many scholars from developed countries feel the need to save others and propose using postcolonial theory to develop new methods and ideas to address global inequalities.

### Peter Singer's Views and Claims - An Overview

The author Peter Singer is known for his work on moral philosophy and global inequality. In his piece *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*<sup>5</sup>, he highlights individuals from developed countries having the responsibility to support underdeveloped countries economically.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Singer, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> Max Roser, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Max Roser, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Singer, 1972, page 231.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Singer, 1972.

Singer sees suffering and death caused by the dearth of food, shelter, or medical care as fundamentally wrong<sup>6</sup> and preventable if humans made better decisions.<sup>7</sup> He claims individuals in developed countries should feel the same sense of moral responsibility for an individual across the world as we do for our next-door neighbor<sup>8</sup> and without regard to how many others are taking the same actions as us.<sup>9</sup> The last point Peter Singer raises is that privileged individuals should give as much as possible to the extent of not compromising the well-being and survival of themselves<sup>10</sup> and their dependent(s), also referred to as reaching marginal utility.<sup>11</sup>

The work of Peter Singer on moral responsibility and equality has many aspects of dualities perpetuated in colonial theories such as the belief that more affluent countries are superior to poor countries. This is evident from his belief that some countries have more to offer than others, embracing ethnocentrism. He further perpetuates this comparative mindset by encouraging involvement in international affairs to bring/create equality. He creates an obligation to people we do not know<sup>12</sup> and normalizes behaviors to fulfill that obligation - behaviors such as giving money, creating films on the lives of people, or providing physical labor.<sup>13</sup>

In general, the various claims Peter Singer makes throughout his work align with colonial theories, for example, his belief in economic globalization as something positive,<sup>14</sup> that will bring civilization, economic opportunity, and economic growth to the country. In his book *One World Now* he states, "Economic globalization may give to the rich, but it does not do so by taking from the poor. It does so by increasing the size of the pie. The rising tide of economic globalization has lifted all boats."<sup>15</sup> His statement fails to acknowledge the harm economic globalization has caused such as increasing income distribution and poverty in underdeveloped countries.<sup>16</sup> His mindset is limited to his experience as a member of a wealthy country that benefits from globalization, completely dismissing the experience and needs of the communities he wants everyone to save.

Lastly, by using the terms "we" and "other" Peter Singer, along with other authors, insinuates a clear divide by attaching the idea that "we" are the affluent people who can save the "other" who needs our privilege and wealth.<sup>17</sup> Using these terms is demeaning to the "other" while stroking the ego of the "we."

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Singer 1972, page 231.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Singer 1972, page 229.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Singer 1972, pages 231-232.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Singer 1972, page 234.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Singer 1972, page 231.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Singer 1972, page 241.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Kohn, 2013, page 189.

<sup>13</sup> Although Singer does not speak beyond giving money. I think it is fair to state that he would be okay with any actions that lead to mouths being fed and people from developed countries fulfilling their obligation abroad.

<sup>14</sup> I, and I am certain other scholars, consider economic globalization to be a part of colonialism as it presents the interdependence of world economies as positive. Although economic globalization, or globalization in general has proven to have some positive impacts for developing countries, developed countries get the most out of it. Overall, economic globalization has been known for causing low wages, increasing wage inequality, and changing the country's culture (National Geographic, n.d.).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Singer, 2016, page 102.

<sup>16</sup> Kang-Kook Lee, 2014, 122-123 & 125.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Kohn, 2013, page 189.

Although *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*<sup>18</sup> and other pieces of his work have contributed to the field of moral philosophy and altruism, are thought-provoking, and were insightful at the time published, his work lacks practicality and are tone-deaf in a postcolonial period, like the one we are in now. Overall, the work and ideas of Peter Singer, especially his work around global equality, embody and justify contributing to the white savior complex and colonialist discourse.

### **The White Savior Complex**

The idea of the White Savior Complex can be traced back to a poem called “The White Man’s Burden” written by Rudyard Kipling in 1899. In this poem, Kipling calls for the United States to colonize the Philippine Islands. Kipling states:

Take up the White Man’s burden—

Send forth the best ye breed—

Go send your sons to exile

To serve your captives’ need

To wait in heavy harness

On fluttered folk and wild—

Your new-caught, sullen peoples,

Half devil and half child<sup>19</sup>

In this poem Kiplin labels Philippine citizens as the “other” and the “savage” and United States citizens as the “savior” and the “civilized.” The idea of white Americans *having* to hold the “burden” of mankind and civilize or save the “half devil and half child”<sup>20</sup> harbors racist and colonialist ideals.

These types of thought processes normalize and even encourage a few things. The first thing it does is normalize the labeling of less elite individuals as “uncivilized” or “half devil and half children.” The second thing it normalizes is the idea that there must be a savior in this case white Americans. Lastly, it normalizes interference in affairs abroad and considers it a moral responsibility while it is related to saving or civilizing. Given the many dynamics of inferiority and superiority along with the racial connections attached, this poem is one of the first places where the white savior complex was written about.

However, the term White Savior Complex was not coined until 2012 upon the publishing of the film *Kony 2012*.<sup>21</sup> This film was produced by a white person and focused on African warlord, Joseph Kony, who forcefully recruited young children to fight in the region. As a response to the 30-minute film, Teju Cole a Nigerian American author and photographer<sup>22</sup> made a 7-tweet series in which he claimed that the fastest growing industry was the “White Savior

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Singer, 1972.

<sup>19</sup> Rudyard Kipling, 1899.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Invisible Children*, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> New York State Writers Institute, n.d.



Industrial Complex.”<sup>23</sup> In his tweets he calls out film directors, writers, activists, and even Oprah for viewing the world as “nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm.”<sup>24</sup> This was the first instance in which someone had named the idea Peter Singer and many more scholars had presented and grounded in humanity, equality, and moral responsibility.

For Teju Cole, American people have normalized the idea of “saving” people abroad, especially in countries in Africa. This continent has been deemed adjacent to the idea of poverty. Teju Cole states the following about an activist named Kristoff who received an award for humanitarianism abroad, “His good heart does not always allow him to think constellationally. He does not connect the dots or see the patterns of power behind the isolated ‘disasters.’ All he sees are hungry mouths, and he, in his advocacy-by-journalism way, is putting food in those mouths as fast as he can. All he sees is need, and he sees no need to reason out the need for the need.”<sup>25</sup>

While Peter Singer might not be stationed abroad filming himself feeding kids, he too is not able to think constellationally and misrepresents what “saving/rescuing” entails. For example, Peter Singer’s example of a drowning child to support his claim that we have moral responsibility over people regardless of what others around them are doing is problematic. It encourages people from developed countries to see themselves as saviors, as people who were brave enough to get their clothes dirty and to do something no one else around them was willing to do. Framing the act of “rescuing” someone as something that requires sacrifice and is a sign of strength and bravery are actions that would be seen as white saviorism.

Furthermore, Peter Singer's inability to think constellationally is evident through the ban-aid solutions he proposes (donating money to people who cannot afford to buy food or pulling a child out of the water) for obvious issues (famine or drowning) rather than focusing on why people are experiencing famine or how the child ends up in that body of water. Because of his inability to see the importance of addressing root causes, it is not surprising he cannot see the connection between abusive and exploitative actions by developed countries, famine, and underdevelopment. Not being able to think constellationally is preventing Peter Singer from truly tackling the root issues and proposing long-lasting solutions. Instead, he is encouraging people to become white saviors.

Since the creation of the phrase “White Savior Industrial Complex,” most often referred to as the white savior or white savior complex, the idea has become more and more popular.<sup>26</sup> There is not one clear definition of what the white savior complex means but there is an understanding that it has a negative connotation. To some extent, there is also a sense of the individual being ignorant, especially in understanding the series of events that led to the country's state and the role of larger identities (external government, debt, political instability, etc.). People who participate in white saviorism abroad or encourage the white savior industrial complex tend to be focused on the obvious problems, like hunger, victims of abuse, or child soldiers, but fail to see the complexity of the problems in democracy, laws, and overall governance.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Teju Cole (First X post from Threat), 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Teju Cole (Third X post from Threat), 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Teju Cole, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Thiessen 2020, page 22.

<sup>27</sup> Teju Cole, 2012.

As such, “white savior” at its core is a negative moral evaluation, the term views and labels the actions or individuals as negative.<sup>28</sup> As author Taylor Thiessen clarifies, “... if the deeds or practices referred to as ‘white saviorism’ are actually morally objectionable, then use is correct.”<sup>29</sup> Although terms and ideas like “wanting to make a difference” seem innocent they stem from mindsets, like Peter Singer’s, demanding people in developed countries to give as much as they can, and from colonial ideas like that of Rudyard Kipling.

### **Opening the Doors to White Saviorism – Volunteer Tourism**

The work of Peter Singer on moral philosophy and global inequality is not only problematic because it subscribes to labels deeming developed countries as saviors and undeveloped countries as “the other,” but also because he phrases participation in the white savior industrial complex as a moral responsibility. The idea of saving others as a moral responsibility is not new, humanitarian aid work and service trips are part of white<sup>30</sup> American and European culture.<sup>31</sup> It has been normalized for people from the Global North to flock to the Global South<sup>32</sup> when they feel a sense of responsibility to “help,” to “do their part,” to “change the world.” Continents like Africa and the Global South, in general, have become huge saving projects for people from developed countries. It has become a place where their emotional needs are satisfied<sup>33</sup> by knowing they are fulfilling their responsibility of helping the poor. The popularity of volunteer tourism has increased over time because of theories like Peter Singer’s, that force white Americans (and others) to embrace the moral responsibility of saving people in underdeveloped countries to counterbalance being lucky and privileged.

Many authors such as Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, claim volunteer tourism is a form of neo-colonialism.<sup>34</sup> In his research, he finds similarities between colonization and the current practice of volunteer tourism.<sup>35</sup> Volunteer tourism creates a division in which the Global North is superior and the Global South is inferior, a division also present in the work of Peter Singer. Bandyopadhyay claims this division creates a narrative in which the Global South is seen as “ravaged, tormented and abused” while the Global North is the “male actors who rescue them.”<sup>36,37</sup> Thinking back to the act of colonization, the parallels between the colonizer/developed countries and the colonized/poor are undeniable. After all, volunteer tourism stems from the idea that affluent people have the moral responsibility to help the poor without questioning the negative impacts or the root cause.

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<sup>28</sup> Thiessen 2020, page 16.

<sup>29</sup> Thiessen 2020, page 22.

<sup>30</sup> It is important for me to acknowledge that participating in humanitarian aid work or participating in the white savior industrial complex is something all races and ethnicities have practiced. However, this essay mostly speaks about white American people or white Europeans because historically those groups have participated in the white savior industrial complex the most.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth S. Conney-Petro, 2019, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, 2017, 330.

<sup>33</sup> Teju Cole, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, 2017, page 330.

<sup>35</sup> Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, 2017, page 329.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> I am not claiming that being a woman naturally means you are inferior, but rather that societal norms stemming from colonization have framed women and undeveloped countries as inferior in comparison to them. While that is an issue I will not focus on that topic in this essay.

The ignorance referenced as central to the white savior complex is present in everything that stems from colonial mindsets and theories. As such it is not surprising the work of Peter Singer aligns so well with colonial ideals and encourages participating in the white savior complex through volunteer tourism. It is important for us to not forget that the history of colonialism is still intertwined in the ways the Global North sees itself as privileged and superior to all.<sup>38</sup> In other words, colonialism is part of the fabric of developed countries and naturally, they have the potential to impact other countries in the same way as colonization.

### Conclusion

At this point, this essay has argued that Peter Singer's take on moral philosophy is rooted in colonial ideals and racist beliefs that have blinded him from seeing how damaging his theories are. It has been argued that his work, predominantly, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*, is a great example of what other theories and intellectuals refer to as white savior. Finally, this work argues that the work of Peter Singer encourages people to embody white saviorism by participating in volunteer tourism. Although the work of Peter Singer has enhanced and contributed to the development of moral philosophy, many if not all his arguments and theories are no longer applicable in a culturally aware and empathetic world. In recent times, there has been a push to move away from colonial and white savior mindsets and to reimagine what it could look like for underdeveloped countries to address the root cause of many of the inequalities left behind by colonization. In times when it is encouraged to speak on how harmful international interference can be, the most impactful way of fighting for equality abroad is by adopting conscious mindsets like the ones presented by postcolonial theory. Author Margaret Kohn explains "The term 'postcolonial theory' describes two related approaches to the legacy of colonialism. The literary/humanist approach emphasizes the cultural legacies of colonialism and explores the relationship between knowledge and power. The political/economic approach focuses on the way that colonialism created an enduring global system of inequality."<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the famous philosopher and pioneer of postcolonial theory, Frantz Fanon argues that only the colonized people can liberate themselves and rebuild everything that has been taken from them.<sup>40</sup>

Although Peter Singer and the many people who participate in volunteer tourism might not mean harm by holding themselves accountable for making the world a better place, it is critical to stop subscribing to the white savior complex and perpetrating a classist division between countries. It is important for moral philosophers to rethink moral theories and be more conscious of the history of colonization in the process of doing so. Humanity's moral responsibility is bigger than creating change and feeding mouths. Humanity's moral responsibility is holding ourselves accountable for the damage that has been caused globally (through political interventions, wars, and volunteer tourism). Humanity's moral responsibility is to step back, in all aspects, and allow underdeveloped countries to rebuild their own identity, culture, and country. One in which developed countries are not at the center of it.

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<sup>38</sup> Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, 2017, page 340.

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Kohn, 2013, page 190.

<sup>40</sup> Frantz Fanon et al., 1961, page 23.

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# THE ELUSIVE RIGHTNESS

*Puneet Bhandari*

## ABSTRACT

Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics is an attempt at reasoning from rationality to rightness by digging into the roots of the idea of the good. The attempt starts by grounding the good as a sort of excellence of functioning and justifies this attempt by referring to ordinary usage and a form of essentialism. It concludes with the description of virtues that follow. It is shown that virtues in fact do not follow so easily and there are important logical gaps in Aristotle's reasoning which puts his project at considerable risk.

## Introduction

In his seminal work "Nicomachean Ethics" Aristotle provides answers to the fundamental moral questions viz.<sup>1</sup> What does the term good refer to? What is the chief good of a human being? What, if any, is the relationship between goodness and human nature? Which ends, choices, emotions and actions are good and which ones are bad?

Briefly the goal of this paper is to show that Aristotle's Grand Ethical Project is, in effect, an attempt to draw a necessary connection between Rationality and Rightness. We propose that, despite great promise and insight, this project suffers from serious gaps and inadequacies and the attempted connection remains elusive.

## Overview

As per Aristotle, the term good has two aspects.

First that it is end directed i.e., the good pertains to that for the sake of which things are done. For instance, we do physical exercise for the sake of health i.e., health is the end and exercise the means. (This does not mean that only ends are classifiable as good but rather that the idea of good is inescapably tied to ends).

There are many ends e.g., health, wealth, honor, pleasure etc. Some of these we pursue for their own sake and some for the sake of some other (ends). For instance, we seek pleasure for its own

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<sup>1</sup> The Ethics Translated by D. P. Chase Aristotle: Complete Works, Historical Background, and Modern Interpretation of Aristotle's Ideas (Annotated and Illustrated, Hyperlinked Footnotes and Navigation) (Annotated Classics) (Kindle Locations 73-74). Annotated Classics. Kindle Edition.

sake but wealth because of the benefits it brings (such as comfort, power, honor etc.). Thus, the ends are arranged in a hierarchy and the End to which all the other ends are subordinate is the chief good.

The second aspect of the good is that it relates to the natural function or purpose of a thing (which in turn is determined by the type of thing it is). For instance, a good doctor is one who excels in his work as a doctor and the function of a doctor is determined by that which makes him a doctor i.e., someone who practices medicine with a view to treat or eliminate disease.

So, what then is the function or the work of a human being?

This is to be determined by that which makes him a human being. In other words, by those essential or distinguishing characteristics which a human being alone possesses and which set him apart from other living beings. This is a human being's rational nature. Thus, the good of a human being is in the excellence of rational functioning.

Rational functioning pertains to the functioning of two aspects of the human soul. The first aspect deals with desires and appetites (for instance the desire for food or sex or money etc.). This aspect is non-rational per se but is capable of being controlled by or of obeying Reason. The second, purely rational aspect, deals with moral (practical) deliberation, acquisition of various skills such as architecture or medicine, acquisition of conceptual knowledge (e.g., scientific, or philosophical knowledge). In its highest form it is contemplative in nature.

Thus, rational excellence also has two aspects viz moral excellence which comes from exercising perfect rational control over the non-rational aspects of human nature (via moral deliberation) and intellectual excellence which comes from excellence in the pursuit of scientific knowledge and in contemplation.

These two excellences taken together determine what ends, choices, feelings, and actions are good or bad. Moral excellence involves being virtuous where virtue is a kind of state which regulates our choices, feelings, and actions. Specifically, virtue is a state that lies between two extremes. It is a state of mean, where the mean is judged relative to the individual.

The main virtues are Courage, Liberality, Magnificence, Great mindedness (Pride), Proper ambition, Meekness, Amiability, Truthfulness, Jocularly. In addition, Justness and Perfect Self-mastery are akin to Virtues.

### **Detailed Purpose**

The purpose of this essay is to examine whether the virtues and ends prescribed by Aristotle follow from his account of moral and intellectual excellence.

There are three main justifications Aristotle offers which tie moral excellence to virtues:



- a) The justification from Practical Wisdom
- b) The justification from the principle of Relative Mean
- c) The justification from individual reasons specific to each virtue

He also offers an account of Intellectual excellence and a separate justification of some ends such as pleasure etc. We examine each of these in detail.

### **Practical Wisdom**

Virtue is a state which regulates feelings and actions in accordance with “Right Reason”.<sup>2</sup> For instance, Courage is a virtue which regulates the feeling of fear i.e., what or whom to fear, when to fear, how much to fear. It also regulates the actions we take in response to fear i.e., run towards danger or away from it, go looking for danger or spend your time avoiding it etc.

Thus, the idea of virtue cannot be justified without specifying the meaning of the term Right Reason. Aristotle attempts to explain “Right Reason” by referring to practical wisdom, which is something that results from the operation of that part of the rational soul which deals with moral deliberation.

The deliberative part of the rational soul deals with ends and means. Specifically, it deals with what means are conducive to a given end. For instance, if the desired end is a wealth, it is this part that calculates the strategy needed to acquire it. The end can be something general, like wealth, or it can be something specific, like getting a sandwich.

Practical wisdom is the kind of deliberation that aims at achieving good rather than bad ends and is distinct from cleverness, which is the ability to do what any end requires, good or bad. If practical wisdom deals only with noble ends, who or what identifies those ends?

In a puzzling claim, Aristotle suggests that it is Virtue that supplies the ends on which practical wisdom deliberates.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, it follows that practical wisdom cannot be the justification of Virtue or else it would be a case of circular reasoning.

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle: Complete Works, Historical Background, and Modern Interpretation of Aristotle's Ideas (Annotated and Illustrated, Hyperlinked Footnotes and Navigation) (Annotated Classics) Book VI (Kindle Location 844). Annotated Classics. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle: Complete Works, Historical Background, and Modern Interpretation of Aristotle's Ideas (Annotated and Illustrated, Hyperlinked Footnotes and Navigation) (Annotated Classics) Book VI (Kindle Location 1976). Annotated Classics. Kindle Edition.

Previous commentators have noted this puzzling circularity. Among them is Joseph Dunne who notes that practical wisdom “can exist in the rational part only if the nonrational part is already inclined to the ethical virtues”<sup>4</sup>

Some other commentators hold that this gap or circularity can be overcome by providing a different interpretation in which practical wisdom and virtue are integrated as “convex and concave in a curved surface include each other mutually and do not come into existence independently of each other”<sup>5</sup>

### **Individual Reasons**

In Book 3,4 and 5 of Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle provides a detailed account of each of the Virtues i.e., what they are and why we should follow them.

In general, virtues are states that facilitate right feelings and right actions, done with the right motives, in the right circumstances, in the right proportion, towards the right objects, in the right amount etc.

But what exactly is rightness? And why should the specific actions, motives, circumstances, proportions, objects and amounts that Aristotle lists in his account of virtues be considered right?

Aristotle provides five kinds of justifications:

- 1) Reasoning from specific ends (or the hierarchy among ends)
- 2) Reasoning from human distinctiveness
- 3) Reasoning from self-preservation
- 4) Reasoning from rational identification
- 5) Reasoning from moral categories such “fitting” or “unseemly” or “noble” or “just”

Specific Ends:

Honor is the end that Aristotle invokes the most to justify virtues. For instance, courage lies in placing honor over life (when facing danger) and in not escaping from the pain of unrequited love or other such failures by ending life. Thus honor, life, avoiding pain is the hierarchy of proposed ends. Similarly, the (proper) love of honor itself is a virtue. Magnificence is justified as expenses on honorable things etc.

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<sup>4</sup> Dunne J (1993) Back to the Rough Ground: practical Judgment and the lure of the technique. University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana

<sup>5</sup> Holst, J. Rationality, Virtue, and Practical Wisdom in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. Topoi(2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-024-10010-5>

But what makes honor a necessary part of rational excellence? And why is it rational to risk your life in pursuit of honor? Why is it rational to spend large amounts of money on “honorable” things like public works or on ceremonies to gods or to fund public arts. Why is it rational to tell the truth (even if it is noble and honorable)?

These are the most significant of the “missing reasons/gaps” in his account. Honor is the lynchpin of Aristotle’s account of Virtues and without a strong justification for it everything else is at risk too.

There are other ends invoked in his account which are also not easily traceable to rational excellence.

For instance, giving pleasure to others (or avoiding giving pain to others) which is involved in the virtue of amiability. Even if we grant that pleasure for one’s own self is a justified end, how does being pleasant to others count as rational? Is this because of instrumental reasons e.g., if we are not pleasant to others, they in turn will not be pleasant to us? Again, Aristotle does not make clear but only states that we are allowed to give pain but only when it is honorable to do so.

Human distinctiveness:

This is used to justify Perfect Self-mastery, which is a virtue like state that refers to control over Bodily pleasures (such as food, sex etc.). The argument here is that bodily pleasures are things that we share with animals and are therefore not distinctively human pleasures. To indulge in these pleasures without control is ipso facto to become closer to a non-rational being.

Self-Preservation:

Self-preservation is the justifying reason for pursuing Bodily pleasures that are conducive to good health (Perfect Self-mastery) or in not being Prodigal in unrestrained gratification of passions (which leads to self-wastage). Similarly, the justification of jocularly involves amusement and pause which are necessary for life. Spending within one’s means (part of Liberality) can also be taken to be a part of self-preservation.

There are many ends however which cannot be justified simply by Self-Preservation. Greatness for instance (which is a precondition for the virtue of Great-Mindedness) or Glory or Honor or Truthfulness or even love, authority, influence, wealth (beyond the amount needed for needs) etc.

These are part of the “missing reasons or gaps”.

### Rational Identification:

Rational identification is to recognize things for what they are, and it is an elemental aspect of rationality. This plays a role in the virtue of Great-Mindedness (rational recognition of one's own greatness or lack of it) and in Truthfulness (since recognizing truth is a precondition of telling it). It also plays an important role in Justness.

The Aristotelian conception of justice can be summarized in the following principle “To treat equal things equally and unequal things unequally”. This devolves into proportional equality in case of distributive justice (proportional to the merit of the person involved), unqualified equality in case of corrective justice (for involuntary transactions) and reciprocal equality for voluntary transactions.

This principle of justice is intuitively rational but, strictly speaking, rational identification requires only that things which are equal be recognized as equal and unequal as unequal, not that they be treated as such. That requires a separate justification.

Similarly for Truthfulness, rational identification can only require a person to recognize the truth, not necessarily to speak it.

Thus, there is only partial justification for these virtues and that is part of the “missing reasons”.

### Moral Categories:

In explaining or justifying many of virtues Aristotle invokes terms such as fitting, unseemly, noble, praiseworthy. These are plainly moral terms, and his argument is therefore circular to the extent it invokes them to justify virtues.

We have summarized the arguments in this section in the form of a table (see below)

*Table 1 List of Virtues and Missing Justifications*

<b>Virtue/Vice</b>	<b>Good (i.e., the End that is relevant to the Virtue)</b>	<b>Reasons (offered by Aristotle)</b>	<b>Missing Justification</b>
Courage/ Cowardice/Rashness	Honor	Value Honor over Life, Value Life over escape from Pain (of poverty or Unrequited Love),	The justification for hierarchy of honor, life, painlessness. Isn't some fear of externally caused

		Not fear things not caused by viciousness or self-fault (e.g., poverty and disease)	events justified?
Perfected Self Mastery	Bodily pleasures (arising from Touch and Taste), Health	Excessive enjoyment makes us closer to animals, pleasures that are conducive to health and good condition of body, Pleasures that are not disproportionate to means, unseemly enjoyment is unjustified	What is the justification for not being unseemly (without circularity)?
Liberality/Prodigality/Stinginess	Honor, Wealth, Self-Preservation	Unrestrained Gratification of Passions is a wastage of Self, spending in proportion to means and from one's own property, helping others in need and giving not to flatterers but respectable people	Why is helping others or receiving from others a rational excellence at all? Why are some sources, even those unrelated to justice, (e.g., brothels etc.) improper?
Magnificence/Meanness/Vulgarity	Great Wealth, Honor	Great expenses on things done fittingly and beautifully, Expenditure on honorable things e.g., public works, aimed not at display of wealth but honor	What is the justification of "fitting" and "beauty"? Also, the hierarchy and relationship between honor and wealth or display of wealth?
Great Mindedness/Vanity/Small Mindedness	Great Honor, Greatness	Rational recognition of one's own greatness, requires doing difficult things because greatness cannot come from easy things, no external good is too great for him since virtue is the source of greatness	If greatness is perfect virtue, then it cannot be justification for virtue. If greatness comes from external goods or achievements, how does that follow from rational excellence?
Proper Love of	Honor		Why is honor an

Honor/Ambition/Too little love of honor			independent good?
Meekness/Choleric/Anger-lessness	Friends, Self- worth	To tolerate insults to friends or to Self is being slavish or lacking perception and desire for revenge	The justification for revenge.
Amiability/Over Complaisant/Cantankerousness	Giving Pleasure, Avoiding Pain, Honor	It is better to give pleasure than pain except when it is honorable or when pain is short term necessity for long term pleasure	Even If we accept pleasure as a good why is the giving of pleasure to others or avoiding giving them pain a good?
Truthfulness/Boastfulness/Reservedness	Truth, Glory, Honor	Truth is noble and praiseworthy while falsehood is blameworthy	Recognizing the truth is clearly a rational activity: Why is telling the truth a rational excellence? What is the fundamental justification for honesty?
Jocularly/Buffoonery/Humorlessness	Amusement and Pastime, Giving Pleasure, avoiding Pain	Amusement and pause as necessary for life, Low comedy, and Buffoonery as unseemly, Tact as avoiding Pain	For pleasure and pain see remarks on Amiability(above) For unseemliness see remarks on self-mastery above.
Justness	Various Goods (wealth, sex, etc.)	To treat equal things equally and unequal things unequally. To not grasp after things that are not our fair share. To be lawful. Distributive Justice: Proportional Equality Corrective Justice (Involuntary): Unconditional Equality Corrective Justice (Voluntary): Reciprocal Equality	Lawfulness is rational if laws are in accordance with the requirements of happiness but if laws promote virtue, we still need to know why virtue promotes happiness? Why is it irrational to pursue “somebody else’s share”?



### **Principle of Relative Mean**

Virtue, as per Aristotle, is a state of mean, where the mean is judged relative to the individual. For instance, courage is a mean between cowardice (which is to run from all dangers and fear everything) and rashness (which is to fear nothing and go up against all dangers).

The justification for this principle of relative mean is that both kinds of extremes “spoil things”. Aristotle offers the example of too little and too much training, both of which spoil health. Also, too little, or too much food both spoil health. Similarly, a person who pursues all pleasures indiscriminately loses all self-control and one who doesn’t pursue any pleasure becomes dull.

So how does this apply to each virtue? What is it that is spoiled by the vices that are relevant to each virtue?

Reasoning by analogy from Aristotle’s example we can say that there are certain ends inherent in actions/feelings relevant to each set of virtue/vices and that vices spoil the achievement of these ends.

Secondly, that there are certain consequences in practicing a vice that brings human beings closer to animals (e.g., dullness) which is also a kind of spoiling.

We have analyzed both types of justifications already in the section above and identified their inadequacies.

### **Pleasure**

For Aristotle pleasure is a good but not the chief good. His main justification for this is the claim that all men seek pleasure, which automatically makes it a good.

But is this true? For instance, Indian culture has produced and idealized renunciates, whose goal in life is to achieve a state of complete dis-attachment from all worldly concerns including the pursuit of pleasure. Similarly, many Christian saints valued suffering more than pleasure. For instance, can we say of Mother Teresa that she sought pleasure in life?

The other issue regarding pleasure is whether it can be used to justify moral excellence in the form of Virtues.

Aristotle himself addresses this issue claiming that “...that pleasures do follow on these (excellences) naturally makes no difference, because we should certainly choose them even though no Pleasure resulted from them.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, pleasure cannot act as the justification of Virtue.

There is, however, another sense in which pleasure is a necessary part of “rational excellence”. Taking pleasure in any kind of work or functioning increases the effectiveness of that working since when the person doing that work takes enjoyment in it, it affects his performance. Thus, if rational excellence is a kind of work, taking pleasure in it would make it better, thus adding to its perfection, so to speak.

However, what follows from this argument is only that we must take pleasure from virtue but not that virtue itself follows from pleasure.

### **Intellectual Excellence**

Intellectual excellence, in its highest form, is the excellence of that part of the rational soul which deals with conceptual (i.e., scientific) knowledge and contemplation.

As per Aristotle, it is the highest excellence possible to human beings because unlike moral excellence, which necessarily requires society and significant external goods, it is self-sufficient. Moreover, it is something restful (which moral excellence may not be) and pleasant.

Unlike moral excellence it is easy to classify Intellectual excellence as “Rational Excellence”, since the pursuit of scientific knowledge is simply a form of rational identification, which is an elementary aspect of rationality.

The ends contained in Intellectual excellence (other than the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual pleasure) are the ends that Self-Preservation requires.

### **Conclusion**

Aristotle’s identification of Virtue as being co-extensive with moral (i.e., rational) excellence has serious gaps and inadequacies. These are the failure to justify certain ends (e.g., Honor, Glory, Wealth, Truthfulness, Authority, Love, influence etc.), the use of circular reasoning (“unseemly”, “noble”, praiseworthy”, “fitting”) and failure to make strict distinction between cognitive and prescriptive rationality (e.g., recognizing truth vs telling it).

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<sup>6</sup> Aristotle: Complete Works, Historical Background, and Modern Interpretation of Aristotle's Ideas (Annotated and Illustrated, Hyperlinked Footnotes and Navigation) (Annotated Classics) Book VI (Kindle Location 844). Annotated Classics. Kindle Edition.

This problem can more generally be described as the central problem of rationality itself. Is rationality something purely cognitive and instrumental and containing no justification of ends or is there a prescriptive element to it?

Applying the former view to Aristotle would suggest that rational excellence refers only to the way in which the goal of “living well” is to be accomplished and that the ends themselves are contained in “living well”.<sup>7</sup> This however would eviscerate the central promise of Aristotle’s endeavor, which is to provide not just a manual of instruction for “living well” but rather the justification for the belief that “living well” is the same thing as goodness.

Thus, unless these inadequacies in Aristotle’s account are addressed the link between Rightness and Rationality that he tries to establish will remain elusive.

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# THE VIOLENCE AND ECSTASY OF CREATIVE REBELLION WITH FRANZ FANON

Amanda Bosses

## ABSTRACT

The colonial system formed around Manichaeism's very binary views, which entail a binary system of thinking where everything is black or white, good or evil, and there is no middle ground. Because of this, decolonization is messy, destructive, and an agenda for disorder. Franz Fanon recognizes this and seeks ways the colonized can escape these systems through *The Wretched of the Earth*. The struggles of the Manichaeism viewpoint are introduced when Fanon emphasizes the crucial role of how different artworks, like dance, play into the coping mechanisms of the colonized to deal with their further dehumanization by the oppressor. However, these artistic and creative rebellions of the colonized, like dance, are taken and whitewashed by the colonizer because they feel threatened by the coping strategies that counter their Manichaeistic worldview.

Every culture has its myths, mystics, traditions, and dance. For example, dance and storytelling are found in parts of Nigeria where the "priest of the Yoruba god Shango dances into a state of deep trance at the annual festival, expressing the wrath of the god of thunder with the lightning speed of his arm gestures and the powerful roll of his shoulders"<sup>1</sup>. This is an example of religious storytelling through dance to cope with the unknowns of the world. Dance also expresses one's culture, like The Haka from New Zealand. The movement through the Haka shows a tribe's pride and strength with accompanying words that often "poetically describe ancestors and events in the tribe's history" (New Zealand). This dance is a coping strategy of intimidation "used on the battlefield to prepare warriors mentally and physically for battle" (New Zealand). Fanon recognizes this and knows that dance has always been around as a tradition deeply rooted in answering the unknown, celebrating tradition, and expressing oneself worldwide in places before colonialism and after colonialism.

Stepping forward, *In the Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *The Concept of Enlightenment* by Adorno and Horkheimer, discusses the Enlightenment and what it brought to society. For many, the knowledge from the Enlightenment equated to ruling with reason, but Horkheimer and Adorno have a more pessimistic view of Enlightenment knowledge. They argue that the Enlightenment did not rule with reason but rather claws to dominate other viewpoints to be the top or most accepted thought or idea. They say, "Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them ... as the same, a substrate of domination." (Adorno and Horkheimer 6)<sup>2</sup>. Beforehand, myths and mystics had controlled answers through belief systems, but Enlightenment brought to light the evidence that myth lacked and the narrative shifted. What these authors see when they

<sup>1</sup> "Dance Posture." Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed March 31, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/art/African-dance/Dance-posture>.

<sup>2</sup> Adorno, and Horkheimer. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *The Concept of Enlightenment*. 1947.

look at the Enlightenment is not new knowledge but Fear which sets in when a concept cannot be quantified in the way that Enlightenment's factual knowledge is understood; this fear makes humans want to control rather than rationalize.

Transitioning from the examination of fear and control in Enlightenment thought, this 20th-century analysis delves deeper into parallels between Enlightenment ideals and colonialist actions, echoing Fanon's observations on the imposition of categorical structures and violence as mechanisms of control. For Fanon, the colonists' mindsets "is precisely the organization of a Manichean world, of a compartmentalized world" where everything was organized into neat, fabricated categories and boxes (Fanon 43)<sup>3</sup>. This refers to when the colonized were encountered; they were so unknown to the colonists that they did not know how to decipher or depict who they were without a category. Through this instability and fear in their minds, the colonizers went back to what they first knew and used "violence as a cleansing force ... the elimination of regionalism and tribalism" to generalize, control, and colonize this unknown (Fanon 51)<sup>4</sup>. The degrading violence used by the oppressors gave the colonized no way to rebel, so instead, they turned to coping mechanisms to gain some control over themselves on a personal level. This is where the expression of dance comes through for the colonized.

Through his writing, Fanon treads the line between graphically violent and linguistically beautiful when describing "the ecstasy of dance" (Fanon 19)<sup>5</sup>. The words evoke this type of eroticism as Fanon describes the "way of relaxing is precisely this muscular orgy during which the most brutal aggressiveness and impulsive violence are channeled transformed and spirited away ... It protects and empowers" (Fanon 19-20)<sup>6</sup>. Fanon also notes that dance is not exclusive to just one sex as both "men and women assemble in a given place, and under the solum gaze of the tribe launch themselves into a seemingly disarticulated but in fact extremely ritualized, pantomime where the exorcism, liberation, and expression of a community are grandiosity and spontaneously played through shaking or the head, and back and forth thrusts of the body" (Fanon 20)<sup>7</sup>. Fanon's words jump off the page into a vivid arrangement of descriptives like brutal, aggressiveness, impulsive, violent, lanch, disarticulated, ritualized, pantomime, spontaneously, shaking, and thrusts that almost level to the freeing nature of dance on the mind, body, and soul. How he couples words with opposites shows the frustration and freedom dance gives, as seen with how he couples action and results with words like exorcism and liberation. The sublimeness of Fanon's words gives this array of convulsions the capability to peak the literary horizon of feelings of dance (Revalorized Black Embodiment: Dancing with Fanon).<sup>8</sup>

Dance is a rebellion of the flesh that complies with this overwhelmingly indescribable movement. It makes one feel so unrestrained by every circumstance that is happening in their life. Body autonomy of the colonized was stolen under the regime of the colonial world, and dance acts as a revolution for the colonized to take back control of their bodies. It allows them to do something with their bodies of their own free will and not what the colonizer wants them to do. Even if it's just one song, one eight count, or one second, dance is their escape from the reality of the unequal world they were forced to live in.

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<sup>3</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. Grove Press, 1968. 43

<sup>4</sup> Id. 51

<sup>5</sup> Id. 19

<sup>6</sup> Id. 19-20

<sup>7</sup> Id. 20

<sup>8</sup> Hall, Joshua M. "Revalorized Black Embodiment: Dancing with Fanon." *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 3 (2012): 274–88. Accessed December 14, 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23215213>.

This notion of artistic resistance finds contemporary resonance in works like Childish Gambino's "This Is America," highlighting the enduring relevance of these themes around dance and freedom across different historical contexts. In the years since the video was released in May

2018, the video gained over 912 million views and 12 Million thumbs up on YouTube, "This Is America"<sup>9</sup> spares no detail untouched about what it is like to be Black in America in the 21st century. Whether the artists are right in front of you or barely visible in the background for a split second, the video transcends time to show that not much has changed in America from the Jim Crow era and when Fanon is writing to 2018. The video makes it known that the problems Black American and the colonized faced are now just masked rather than addressed properly and systemically.

Few components and characters in the music video are seen twice except for Gambino, who represents America, and the five black teens dancing in the background of him. These kids' were deliberately cast as teenagers and dressed to look like they were high schoolers in school uniforms to show dance as an expression that doesn't have an age minimum. As well, it reveals that dance is still used as a coping mechanism because the systemic discriminations from colonization have not been addressed properly, making these teens still use dance as a mechanism to express themselves in a world where they are born disadvantaged. The dance moves shown in the music video are a mix of trending dance moves from black creators and dance moves rooted in different places in Africa. Trending Dance moves include the "juju on that beat" (1:07-1:18)<sup>10</sup> and the "shoot" dance moves (2:33-2:36)<sup>11</sup> and for African dance moves, Gambino references moves like the Gwara Gwara (1:35 and 2:23)<sup>12</sup>, a South African dance move. Referencing American and South African dance moves was Gambino highlighting the similarities between American racism and South African apartheid. Those three moves are the most recognizable and "label-able" dance moves throughout the music video, though most of the movements are in hip hop—another dance style which arose from Black Americans.



"Juju on that beat" (1:07-1:18)



Gwara Gwar with the kids(1:35)

<sup>9</sup> Childish Gambino. "This Is America" (Official Video). Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY>.

<sup>10</sup> Id. (1:07-1:18)

<sup>11</sup> Id. (2:33-2:36)

<sup>12</sup> Id. (1:35 and 2:23)



“Shoot” dance move (2:33-2:36)

There are other moments and gestures Gambino makes that point to Black American culture. In the way he sings, “I’m so pretty” (2:18)<sup>13</sup>, he has his hand on his hip and his other arm acting like it is going to snatch something in the air. While there is no actual name for this move, the most similar way to describe it is re-enacting a “sassy black woman with acrylics”. Equally important is the discussion of how this movement of this “sassy black woman with acrylics” gesture has been co-opted by the gay community, specifically white gay men. When someone sees a Black woman with her hand on her hip with her acrylics snapping, she would be called ghetto. But when a white gay man does that same movement, it would just be passed as a “part of their personality”. What all these moves have in common (the juju on that beat, shoot, “I’m so pretty”) is they are all the inventions of the colonized, but only gained popularity and social acceptability after white people did it.



“Im so pretty” (2:18)

Apart from the dance moves, as the video progresses, the violence and mayhem get worse for everyone in the background; the kids are the only ones seen unaffected by everything burning down in the background. The unaffected dancing kids nod to many different interpretations. One is how the unaffected dancing kids in the background indicate how people today's attention and eye always focus on the dancing, or “Black entertainment” first, and not the violence of what is happening in the background. This represents how the public takes pleasure in Black entertainment, but black issues fade into the background as long as the “colonizers” are entertained. The dancing is not only a distraction from Black issues but also a distraction for the kids from violence. Like what Fanon said above, Gambino goes one step forward with dance and

<sup>13</sup> Id. (2:18)

the colonized. In America, a Black body is seen as a target, but the dancing always causes them to move through the video unharmed. They will always be a target, but a moving one makes it harder to get shot. The movement represents dance as a way out of violence for Black people<sup>14</sup>. Dance not only mentally removes one from the world they live in but can also physically remove one through fame and recognition, such as gaining a following on social media or becoming a professional dancer. Nevertheless, the problem is not with these coping mechanisms developed but with how the colonizers saw and reacted to them.

Rebellions through creative art forms like dance and music helped the colonized rise and threaten the Manichaen worldview and labels they were forced into. However, there are two problems with how the colonizers see these rebellions and the violence to these rebellions ensured through components like whitewashing and communication.

One example is of whitewashing the colonized rebellions in American Country Music. Historically, country music's main star was the banjo, an instrument originating from enslaved people's cultures through the middle passage. Similar to the role of dance, the colonized played the banjo to get through the days and let the art form distract them from the realities of their life in the colonized world. For Americans, the banjo was never considered a "serious musical instrument" or an "educated sound" for a while. This was until American Musician Joel Sweeney rose to popularity through it. Sweeney was taught how to play the banjo by enslaved African Americans, and he was known as "the first master of the banjo". However, he was the one who popularized the instrument, and the only difference between him and the other banjo players was that they could not have the same opportunities as him because of Jim Crow (Yomary)<sup>15</sup>. Country is not the only music whose roots come from the colonized as different regions of the United States with different Black populations developed their own genres and sounds from their environment and time.

Blue and jazz music originated from the vibrant cultural melting pot of New Orleans, with roots deeply intertwined in the African American experience. Emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these genres were born from a fusion of African rhythms, and American instrumentation, reflecting the diverse cultural heritage of the city's inhabitants, particularly those of African descent. Influenced by spirituals, work songs, and the improvisational nature of African musical traditions, blues and jazz became powerful forms of expression, embodying the struggles, joys, and resilience of Black communities in New Orleans and beyond<sup>16</sup>.

Up in New York City, The Bronx was the birthplace of Hip Hop music and dance through the vibrant streets of New York City in the late 20th century. Hip Hop music evolved as a form of artistic expression and social commentary, reflecting the struggles, aspirations, and resilience of urban communities where a majority of African Americans inhabited. Influenced by a diverse array and blend of musical genres, including funk, soul, jazz, and rhythm and blues, hip hop's distinctive beats and rhythms provided a platform for artists to convey their narratives and perspectives. Similarly, hip hop dance emerged as a dynamic and expressive form of movement, drawing inspiration from various sources such as African dance, breakdancing, and street performances. Through its fusion of music, dance, graffiti art, and spoken word, hip hop culture became a powerful vehicle for self-expression, empowerment, and cultural identity for Black

<sup>14</sup> Browning, Barbara. "Choreographing Postcoloniality: Reflections on the Passing of Edward Said." *Dance Research Journal* 36, no. 1 (2004): 164–169. doi:10.1017/S0149767700007622.

<sup>15</sup> Yomary, Tatayana. "Did Black People Start Country Music? All Signs Point to Yes." *Distractify*. April 27, 2022. <https://www.distractify.com/p/did-black-people-start-country-music>.

<sup>16</sup> Berendt, Joachim-Ernst. *The Jazz Book*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009.



Americans, resonating globally and shaping the landscape of contemporary popular culture<sup>17</sup>. The Effect that Black culture has had on America has echoed globally not only through music and dance but also in beauty.

In the beauty and fashion sector, one can observe the role of Black Americans pioneering and forging paths of self-expression and empowerment. Their bodies, curves, and lips are celebrated and desired by all, but they only become trends and aesthetics when put on a white face. For example, the “Clean Girl Aesthetic” was a makeup look popularized by beauty bloggers on social media in the early 2020s. The look involves light makeup, a full face of makeup (to appear like you are wearing no makeup), fluffy eyebrows, a lifting mascara, a glossy nude color lip gloss to accentuate your lips, a slicked-back bun, and medium-sized hoop earrings. This “Clean Girl” is praised for her minimalist beauty; however, for years, many POC women, most notably Black and Latina women, have executed this look for years without praise nor an aesthetic, aspiring to look like them. On them, big glossy lips and dangle hoop earrings were never seen as a beauty staple; instead, they were seen as ghetto, trashy, and unprofessional. But now, it is a simple, minimalist, modern, polished beauty trend on a white woman’s face. Is it only considered aesthetic or polished because it is on a white face?



Clean girl aesthetic, Hailey Bieber (white)<sup>18</sup>

Same look on an Indian<sup>19</sup> and Native American Women<sup>20</sup>

This connects to show that whether it was bringing the banjo across the middle passage or a simple makeup look, the Manichean worldview only praises the “colonizer” through their rebellions against them without due credit. Like what Adorno and Horkheimer said, when people do not understand why people act or do certain things, they resort to a power grab to take on as their own. That is why whitewashing is only the crust of the problem. The second problem is that because the colonizer feels threatened by the colonizer's coping mechanisms (dance, music, or other art forms), the colonizers take these coping mechanisms and put them into a box to stabilize their power and continue with their Manichean structured life. One example of this is the use of Black people and their rebellions as their entertainment.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "Origins of Hip Hop Music and Dance." Hip Hop Cultural Roots, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://www.hiphopculturalroots.com/origins>.

<sup>18</sup> "5 Steps to Getting That Clean Girl Aesthetic." Only Online Deals. Accessed March 31, 2024. <https://www.onlyonlinedeals.co.uk/5-steps-to-getting-that-clean-girl-aesthetic/>.

<sup>19</sup> "Portrait of Indian Woman in Saree c.1930s." Old Indian Photos. Accessed March 31, 2024. <https://www.oldindianphotos.in/2018/03/portrait-of-indian-woman-in-saree-c1930s.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Id.

<sup>21</sup> "Negative Racial Stereotypes and Their Effect on Attitudes toward African-Americans." Ferris State University. Accessed March 31, 2024. <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/links/essays/vcu.htm>.

Historically, when parties were thrown for the colonizers, they exploited Black people for entertainment. The colonizers would use “Black-made” Jazz and Blues as background music while people mingled at parties and entertainment through dance performances to impress their guests. Moreover, even if they were not on the physical stage, the performances were influenced by art forms of coping with colonization. Nevertheless, when Black artistry is displayed, like in “This Is America”, all people can hear and see are the inspiring sounds and movements of Black entertainment, not the black struggle that comes with it.<sup>22</sup>

In the modern world, this “box” of “Black people as entertainers” is seen firstly through the most popular sports in the United States like American Football and Basketball. In the NFL, “nearly 70 percent of players are Black” (NYT)<sup>23</sup>, 71.6% of players in the NBA are black (Statistic)<sup>24</sup>, and 74.5% of players in the NBA are black (The Hill)<sup>25</sup>. These statistics do not line up with the overall demographic stats of the United States because these were the roles that were “easily available” to POC through generational stereotypes. Similarly, when people are asked to name famous Black people, the first names that come to mind are entertainers like Will Smith or Labron James (actors and athletes). When asked the same question, but with famous white people, people turn to thinkers like Einstein or Jean-Paul Sartre. “This Is America” again echoes this idea of Black people as entertainers by having these black kids dance because the best way out of the violence is to go through the path that was already created for them by the old stereotypes through entertainment.<sup>26</sup>

Fanon says, “no one could wish for the spread of African culture if he does not give practical support to the creation of the culture necessary for the existence of that culture” (Fanon 170)<sup>27</sup>. This quote is a direct response to the whitewashing of black culture with people not recognizing its roots. People love the creations from the resistance of the colonized (dance, music, culture, etc.), but they prefer to see them on white people. After all, the colonizers get the credit for the trends and own the means by which they have the entertainment, so why do you have to listen to the past? (Welsh-Asante, Philosophy, and Dance in Africa: The Views of Cabral and Fanon)<sup>28</sup>.

The issue that Fanon wants to escape from is the power the colonizer still has on the boxes that organize black people into the Manichean system. He wanted to shake off this structure and be able to not only define himself, but all the other people colonized with these labels nonconsensually tattooed onto their skin.

Because of this, Fanon struggles with finding a way to decolonize under his own terms, the terms of the colonized. The first impression of the colonized was to conquer, control, and enslave; yet, the further one goes through the timeline, these structures are still seen in place within the minds of the colonized. Even if it does not have the same name, Jim Crow and

<sup>22</sup> “Systemic Racism in American Entertainment.” The Guardian, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/systemic-racism-american-entertainment>.

<sup>23</sup> “The Learning Network.” The New York Times. Accessed February 9, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/09/learning/does-the-nfl-have-a-race-problem.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Statista. “NBA Players Ethnicity.” Accessed March 31, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1167867/nba-players-ethnicity/>.

<sup>25</sup> Id..

<sup>26</sup> “Systemic Racism in American Entertainment.” The Guardian, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/systemic-racism-american-entertainment>.

<sup>27</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. Grove Press, 1968. 170

<sup>28</sup> Welsh-Asante, Kariamu. “Philosophy and Dance in Africa: The Views of Cabral and Fanon.” *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 2 (1990): 224–32. Accessed December 14, 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784475>.

Segregation are the same.

The question is how do you start a revolution and work on dismantling the system when “the colonized intellectual ... is using techniques and a language borrowed from the occupier” (Fanon 160)<sup>29</sup>. This is why the colonizers were so successful in colonization. By erasing the languages and the ways that Africans communicated during colonization, there was no other way to think besides through the colonizer's lens. The loss of their communication led to the loss of their history and unique way of thinking, which would make them come up with a system to decolonize without the constraints of the colonial system.

Making the colonized forget their culture, language, and how they interpreted the world to convert them to only think and interpret in the colonist's way makes them stuck thinking in a system that does not agree with them. Even if you take the example of learning to speak another language, the truest way to become fluent is by interpreting the world simultaneously through two (or more) linguistic codes with a single set of concepts. This means that you are learning about things through the first impression and not through the filter of another language. Each language has untranslatable concepts from one language to another, so there are ways of thinking the colonized will never get because they can only understand the language of their past through the colonizers' thinking structure. The erasure of the culture was the last frontier into further entrapping that colonized in the boxes and stereotypes. Is there a way out for Fanon to create a system outside the Manichaeism of the colonizers?

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<sup>29</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. Grove Press, 1968. 160

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# WHAT WILL YOU CREATE? A JACK MORMON'S ANALYSIS OF MORMON TRANSHUMANISM

*Braeden Watkins*

## ABSTRACT

This paper serves as a secular analysis of the philosophy and theology known as Mormon Transhumanism. It introduces the reader to the terms “Mormonism,” “Transhumanism,” and “Mormon Transhumanism,” noting the appreciable differences and connections between these terms. It expresses an argument for transhumanism by relying on the scripture of Mormonism and the interpretation and revelation that religious leaders within the denomination have presented. This paper contends that the special value of this philosophy as compared to other interpretations and denominations is that it makes room for the continuous involvement of God on earth leaves room for the existence of suffering, and is nevertheless appreciable for a secular audience. Then, the ethical theories at hand between Mormon Transhumanism and Secular Transhumanism are compared - it notes that Mormon Transhumanism involves a more novel virtue-based approach as compared to the typically utilitarian outlook of mainstream transhumanism. Finally, this paper makes notes on how the worldview of this denomination can inform human capacity to imagine our distant future.

## Introduction and Terms:

The purpose of this paper is to explore the ideas posited by the Mormon Transhumanist Association. This will result in an appreciably secular analysis that demonstrates respect for the metaphysics and beliefs of the organization at large. Specifically, the appropriateness of transhumanism given either a secularly or theologically informed view of the human condition will be analyzed. To suit this purpose, I will cite the definitions of the following terms as provided by the Mormon Transhumanist Association.

*Mormonism:* “Mormonism is a religious movement founded and developed by Joseph Smith in early 19th-century America. Its formal, proper name is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often abbreviated as simply the LDS Church. The name Mormon comes from The Book of Mormon, a new scripture which Smith claimed to translate from an ancient record with divine assistance.”<sup>1</sup> As a note on terminology, the LDS Church currently disavows the use of the term Mormon or Mormonism. I will continue to use this term because, while the LDS Church is certainly the largest organized denomination of Mormonism, it is not the only one. Further, the text from an organization that I am primarily analyzing makes use of the term Mormon, and so for the sake of consistency, I will as well. This Christian denomination is led by a President, who is regarded as a prophet in the modern day. The intro primer of this association also notes that Mormonism posits the belief that God was once a mortal in a community of mortals, and through a process that we might replicate, he became more godly. They cite one of

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<sup>1</sup> “Mormon Transhumanist Association.” Transfigurism. Accessed December 12, 2023.  
<https://www.transfigurism.org/library/primers/1-what-is-mormon-transhumanism>.

their Prophets, Lorenzo Snow, who writes: “As humanity now is, God once was; as God now is, humanity may become.”<sup>2</sup>

*Transhumanism*: “Transhumanism is a growing intellectual movement grounded in ideas about using science and technology in deliberate, ethical ways to improve and even transform ourselves and the world.”<sup>3</sup> Transhumanism has a long history, arguably starting with Julian Huxley, a British humanist. Huxley encompasses the romantic and ethically fraught past and present of Transhumanism. Transhumanism seeks the use of science to remove human fragility and/or radically improve upon the human condition. For Huxley, this often came in the form of the promotion of eugenics. He also advocated for ideas that remain popular among modern transhumanists, including the use of artificial intelligence and cybernetics to radically (or indefinitely) expand the human lifespan, remove unpleasant feelings from our experience, transcend scarcity, and otherwise enter into a god-like state.<sup>4</sup>

*Mormon Transhumanism*: “Mormon Transhumanism combines these two visions of potential human progress and the transformation of the human condition. Our potential to become gods is aligned with our potential to use science and technology in ethical ways to improve ourselves and attain a posthuman condition. We should use every resource at our disposal to improve ourselves and the world until we have achieved godliness.”<sup>5</sup> The argument at play here is both one of reason and revelation. It appeals to human ethical interests in reducing global suffering, and it appeals to the theological idea that God intends for us to follow a process that will enable us to become godly.

### **The Case for the Mormon Posthumanity:**

The organization makes clear that it does not wish to promote an image of transhumanism involving the individual’s ascension to godhood by themselves, but rather, developing a transhumanism that is relational. They cite the idea that God did not create the world from nothing, rather, Mormon doctrine contains the idea that the raw materials for existence, including our souls, existed alongside God and were not created by him. Godliness is a means of relating to the souls and materials around us, not a measure of individual capacity.

Examining their arguments as presented in their declaration, we find a group mindful of the rapid and exponential growth of technology with all of the promise and risk included there. Consider this quote from James E. Talmage in the Articles of Faith: “Some of the latest and highest achievements of humanity in the utilization of natural forces approach the conditions of spiritual operations. To count the ticking of a watch thousands of miles away; to speak in but an ordinary tone and be heard across the continent; to signal from one hemisphere and be understood on the other though oceans roll and roar between; to bring the lightning into our homes and make it serve as fire and torch; to navigate the air and to travel beneath the ocean surface; to make chemical and atomic energies obey our will—are not these miracles?”<sup>6</sup> To the Mormon Transhumanist Association, God’s answer to human suffering and the precariousness of

<sup>2</sup> In Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (1884), 46; see also “The Grand Destiny of Man,” *Deseret Evening News*, July 20, 1901, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Mormon Transhumanist Association.” Transfigurism. Accessed December 12, 2023. <https://www.transfigurism.org/library/primers/1-what-is-mormon-transhumanism>.

<sup>4</sup> “Transhumanism.” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, vol. 8, no. 1 (January 1968): 73-76. doi:10.1177/002216786800800107.

<sup>5</sup> Mormon Transhumanist Association.” Transfigurism. Accessed December 12, 2023. <https://www.transfigurism.org/library/primers/1-what-is-mormon-transhumanism>.

<sup>6</sup> Talmage, James E.. “Articles of Faith,” by James E. Talmage, Lesson 14 - The Book of Mormon.” *Relief Society Magazine* 29, no. 12 (1942): 871-873.

our condition has been instigating the rapid advancement of technology meant to address these harms, as well as a divine command to use our faculties for reason to analyze the natural laws that he developed and that enable technology that will radically improve our lives. Mormonism is distinct for its insistence on the continued involvement of God in the world through divinely connected prophets and more contemporary holy texts such as the Book of Mormon. If we are to be given a path towards becoming more godly, and if God continues to intervene in our world, what better way to account for what would be a radical change in our experience than what has clearly already done so and what to an outside observer might well seem magical or miraculous - technology.

According to Doctrine and Covenants 130:2, “That same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory.”<sup>7</sup> We must understand that, in Mormon theology, it isn’t that God will make us godly in reward for a dutifully lived mortal life, rather, we may become godly on earth through a process that will determine the kind of afterlife we may have. As such, the doctrine would insist that any divine intervention toward promoting godliness would surely occur on the plane on which we currently reside. Finally, another theologically based argument for Mormon Transhumanism is actually an argument for faith in god. Mormon Transhumanist Lincoln Cannon articulates an argument he labels the New God Argument. In this argument, he argues that faith in a future in which humanity does not go extinct, and therefore evolves into post-humanity. For this to happen, post-humanity must either have limited destructive capacity (Unlikely given what we can assume about the capacities of a futuristic post-humanity) or be compassionate. Therefore, a hypothetically evolved post-humanity is likely to be compassionate and, Cannon argues, likely to replicate or recreate their own evolution with their technology. Therefore, similar to the simulation argument, if we develop the capacity of posthumans and subsequently recreate ourselves, it is likely that we too are the product of such a recreation.<sup>8</sup> Cannon’s argument attempts to commit those who believe that humanity will continue to advance their condition using technology to a state of post-humanity to a probabilistic endorsement of God, or an entity to which we can afford a godlike status. In this way, Mormon theology does not merely point us to transhumanism, but transhumanism points us to Mormon theology.

### **The Ethical Theory at Hand**

It has been said that mankind’s condition has been one of limits and trying to transcend them. Indeed, perhaps we conceive of gods and religion as a way of aspiring to a state of limitlessness or transcendence. We may use religion as a means of explaining the awesome and dangerous natural world that forces us to submit to it, but in imaging our gods as benevolent, we make some assumption of either the worthiness of our limits or the possibility of transcendence. While many secular transhumanists rely on utilitarianism and imagining a world without suffering provided by technology, Mormon Transhumanism differs in that it instead creates a virtue-based approach centered around transcendence. The purpose of the figure of God in Mormonism is to offer a roadmap to transcendence - what one might imagine as a hypothetical “virtuous person” that one emulates in pursuit of developing a certain type of character. In a more orthodox Mormon view, this is accomplished by a certain kind of marriage and serving

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, Joseph, Jr. *Doctrine and covenants of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints*. Kirtland, Ohio: Printed by F.G. Williams & Co. for the Proprietors, 1835. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/02015094/>.

<sup>8</sup> “What is Mormon Transhumanism?” *Theology and Science*. 17 April 2015. Web. DOI: 10.1080/14746700.2015.1023992. [Free Accepted Manuscript]



various community obligations, such as undertaking a mission. In a transhumanist view, this is done by emulating God's act of creation in which he manipulated the natural world that existed before him just as it exists before us. A godly person contributes to the emulation of this act via technology which will provide for them immortality and the capacity to create life or transcend material limitations. While the prevention of suffering may well be on the mind of a Mormon Transhumanist, it is clear that there is a certain view of human excellence. Our purpose, according to such a view, is to become a kind of posthuman that doesn't go extinct and can replicate itself.

### **Implications and Conclusions:**

I am not a Mormon. I nevertheless am fascinated by apocalyptic thinking because I find my experience to be indicative of a world that is deeply flawed. Constant conflict, starvation, and death all serve as evidence that we exist in an arena of human brutality in which civilizations rise and fall through violence and inadequate material conditions. The realities of this present as war, starvation, global poverty, etcetera. Such a pessimistic view is mitigated by the idea that our history, while undoubtedly brutish, is developing in such a way as to resolve these problems rather than ending when the last man standing dies. If I were to commit to that possibility, I may well also be committing to the idea that post-humanity and the godlike status that it affords is a possibility, and perhaps then therefore has already occurred. If this is the case, then it seems the theology that one might develop as a result might appear very much like the theology found in the Book of Mormon - a once mortal entity underwent a process that afforded it godly status and this entity has created us, or at the very least manipulated the natural world in a very significant way that resulted in our current existence. By emulating the progress of such a being, we can achieve the transcendence that may be necessary to avoid a particularly tragic ending to the human condition. I am cognisant, however, of effective counterarguments to this claim. It cannot be certain that any entity has actually evolved to such a state. Perhaps all life before us has gone extinct, perhaps no other life, if it exists, has evolved to a state of post-humanity so as to be apparent to us. Even if such an entity did exist, or it was necessary for humanity to transcend its limits in order to exist indefinitely, it may be that one cannot replicate life again as it is suggested that God has done.

Despite these limits, there is a great secular ethical argument that can arise from a Mormon Transhumanist conception of God. If we are to persist as a species indefinitely, we must transcend certain material conditions that tie us to earth or otherwise promote war and human suffering. We have a clear tendency to imagine God or godlike entities that have accomplished this, and if we take virtue ethics seriously, the emulation of these beings may serve as an effective roadmap for the transcendence of humanity and the mitigation of existential risks. We imagine godlike figures to be immortal, benevolent, and unlimited by material concerns. As technology develops, we can attempt to emulate these conceptions by using that technology to pursue immortality or limitless and therefore continue as a species. The value of Mormon Transhumanism is that it offers a virtue-based approach to transhumanist ethics that more closely mirrors our capacity to imagine as demonstrated in religion, and therefore is more effective at promoting transcendence.

Hostility exists between secular and atheist transhumanists and Mormon transhumanists, and similarly, hostility exists between orthodox Christian/Mormon thinkers and Mormon transhumanists. This hostility results in part from the view that transhumanism is a project of secularization that may utilize religious notions but is ultimately designed to supplant it. The



existence of Mormon Transhumanism as a successful religious movement refutes this idea and demonstrates that theology has much to offer transhumanism, and vice versa. In their work contending that Transhumanism ought to be viewed as a secular faith, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson writes: "...advocates of transhumanism see it as an "extension of secular humanism" (Bostrom 2005, 19). Indeed, many members of the World Transhumanist Association define themselves as atheists and treat traditional religions (especially Christianity) with disdain because religious practitioners tend to ignore contemporary science and technology (Campbell and Walker 2005, ii–iv)" and "Conversely, advocates of transhumanism have presented it as a direct competition to traditional religions (Bainbridge 2005), further contributing to the perception that transhumanism is inherently secular."<sup>9</sup> The truth is that these beliefs seem to act as support for the so-called "opposed worldview."

Proponents of simulation theory, a line of thought that relies on entities like post-humanity, find themselves in a place of agreement with the theology of Mormonism. One such naturalist will believe in transcendent beings with specific motivations that can reveal a sort of communicable revelation to us. They might contend, just as Mormon theology does, that the entity responsible for our existence is itself the product of another such entity. Mormons, in obvious comparison, believe in "an alliance of divine beings stretching back in time"<sup>10</sup> If belief in Transhumanism and its subsets place one in agreement with Mormons on their most foundational theological beliefs, then there is little distinction left to justify animosity. Indeed, the central perspective of this paper is that the capacity to imagine inherent in Mormon Transhumanism and the fusion of these beliefs is extremely productive. One member of the Mormon Transhumanist Association was responsible for an analysis mapping possible pathways between stars that can be used for human travel through local regions of space, and this analysis was ultimately presented as a publication and presentation at a prominent annual conference and developed into a collaboration with a postdoc SETI researcher.<sup>11</sup> This same research contends that "due to economic and political shifts associated with neoliberalism, the near to middle-term future has become difficult to conceive of," while noting that works of Mormon speculative fiction can critically assist in addressing this problem. This is why viewing Transhumanism as a secular philosophy fit to replace or exclude religion is a fundamentally flawed view - it must be instead considered an ethical theory with profound capacities to improve human imagination.

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