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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

This issue of *Florida Philosophical Review* marks the beginning of our third year of publication. As in the past, the summer issue contains selected proceedings of the Florida Philosophical Association meeting held the previous November, including the presidential address by Martin Schonfeld and the graduate paper (by Elisabeth Shortsleeve) and undergraduate paper (by Christian Williams) selected for awards. Also included here are the proceedings of two symposia—a book symposium featuring a Florida author (Charles Guignon) and a topical symposium on contemporary African philosophy featuring three eminent scholars (Barry Hallen, D.A. Masolo, and Kwasi Wiredu). This issue again represents the wide diversity of interests and styles to be found among Florida philosophers. The papers included here address interests in metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, drawing on both historical and contemporary sources and methods from both the analytic and continental traditions and examining philosophical topics from both western and non-western perspectives.

In his presidential address to the 48th annual meeting of the Florida Philosophical Association, Martin Schonfeld of the University of South Florida discusses “Kant’s Thing in Itself, or the Tao of Königsberg.” In this address, Schonfeld suggests that western and eastern ideas may not be altogether disparate, arguing that Kant’s work was indirectly influenced by Chinese thought and that the ideas Kant inherited from Chinese thought are responsible, in part, for the longevity of his (western, enlightenment) ideas. In particular, Schonfeld speculates that Kant’s thing in Itself “is a bond of forces in space; that this structural-dynamic pattern governs nature; and that this perspective not only unifies Kant’s insights [for example, his metaphysical and ethical claims] but also supplies an ontological narrative that integrates our scientific knowledge.” The historical record suggests, according to Schonfeld, that Kant’s idea of structural dynamics arrived originally from China with the Rites Controversy.

Elisabeth Shortsleeve, winner of the 2002 FPA Graduate Student Essay prize for her paper, “Reconciling Coherentist and Reliabilist Intuitions: A Hybrid Account of Epistemic Justification,” writes that coherentist and reliabilist accounts of epistemic justification are both flawed. She proposes, in place of these conceptions of epistemic justification, her own account of justified belief that incorporates the intuitions and strengths of coherentism and reliabilism yet avoids the difficulties with each of them.

Christian Williams, winner of the 2002 Edith and Gerrit Schipper Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Paper, writes on the moral theory of David Hume in his “Towards a Procedural Deontology: Desire and Transparent Contexts in the Humean Model of Motivation.” Williams argues that moral theory should rest on a strong and plausible moral psychology, but that David

Hume's theory, which is often taken to be a plausible account, is subject to serious objection. Hume's position is that it is our desire, not our reason, which motivates us to act ("reason is, and ought only to be, a slave to the passions"). While not disagreeing completely with Hume's contention here, Williams takes issue generally with Hume's claims about moral motivation, suggesting that the Humean account of our moral psychology can lead to some "unacceptably morbid desires" and that Hume's account is, therefore, flawed. Williams' position is that there is a better account of moral psychology explaining moral action that is connected both to desiderative beliefs and a commitment to "objective rights and wrongs."

Charles Guignon of the University of South Florida discusses with audience members some of the important themes and concepts involved in the 1999 book, *Re-envisioning Psychology: Moral Dimensions of Theory and Practice*. Guignon and his co-authors, Frank Richardson and Blaine Fowers, take a hermeneutical approach to psychological counseling, adopting the notion that all "human beings must be understood as always caught up in webs of significance of their own making." This hermeneutical approach is contrasted with the modern (western) worldview of ontological individualism, the sort of individualism expressing the notion that human beings are isolated, atomistic individuals who are self-sufficient and have no necessary associations with each other. It is the sort of view expressed by Thomas Hobbes in *De Cive* where he thinks that we can understand the nature of the human being by considering "men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly (like mushrooms) come to full maturity, *without all kind of engagement to each other*" (emphasis added). It is this kind of unrealistic and plainly false thinking about the nature of the individual human being that, Guignon and others argue, is "at the root of some of the most distressing psychological problems in the contemporary world." Guignon et al.'s position is that a hermeneutic outlook on counseling "makes it possible to see an approach to . . . counseling that is historically situated." At least one result of this kind of counseling is that people can find meaning in place of meaninglessness through recognition of themselves as relational beings. By providing narrative explanations of behavior, the hermeneutical approach offers more than scientific explanations of behavior; it offers meaning and hope. While ontological individualism emphasizes negative freedom (to be left alone), Guignon et al.'s preferred theoretical framework emphasizes the freedom to do what is worth doing.

We are especially pleased to conclude this issue with a symposium on African philosophy. Barry Hallen, D.A. Masolo and Kwasi Wiredu present separate but related discussions about the nature of contemporary African philosophy. All three of these prominent theorists on African thought and culture speak of the relationships between language, knowledge and morality in an African context. Hallen argues that the application of ordinary language philosophy applied to the Yoruba shows that there are distinct differences between Western and Yoruba conceptions of the nature of knowledge and that there are moral implications of the Yoruba way of understanding that

differ significantly from Western claims about language and morality. For the Yoruba, whose primary source of “second-hand” information is other people in an oral tradition, the reliability and character of the speaker makes all the difference in one’s assessment of the reliability of the information obtained from them. With this in mind, it is clear that moral epistemology for the Yoruba is essential in characterizing and judging the value of the information one receives from others. In Yoruba culture, speaking well, hearing well, and having patience are not simply moral virtues, they are epistemological virtues also; the reliability of one’s information is judged by the character of the speaker from whom it was obtained.

D.A. Masolo argues that African philosophy centers today on a conception of the importance of the sociability of persons that goes beyond the Western conception of communitarianism to “relationism.” This concept is distinct from the common “communitarian” notion in that relationism (also put forth by Kwasi Wiredu) is a position that lends to the African notion of a person. In African thought, one becomes a person by learning to respond to peculiarly human stimuli and one hones and develops the ability to respond through association and communication with others. Much like Hallen’s position, this implies that there is a very clear connection between morality and knowledge and the community and the development of personhood. (It is also interesting to compare and contrast the position of “relationism” to the ontological and ethical perspective advocated by hermeneutical counseling as described by Guignon et al.)

Finally, Kwasi Wiredu discusses the notion of “conceptual decolonization” in African philosophy and the benefits that such decolonization will have not only for understanding African thought in its own right, but for all of humanity. Wiredu notes, for example, that there are many concepts in African languages that have no counterparts in Western thought. Since our concepts are “bound up with our fundamental ways of existing and interacting with our environment and our kind,” it is important to understand that human beings may conceptualize their worlds in diverse ways. Acknowledging a type of descriptive relativism with respect to various cultures assists us in realizing that the western paradigm does not apply to African thought and culture. This does not mean that there can be no communication across cultures—especially given Wiredu’s contention that there is a common biological unity among human beings—but it does mean that there are some concepts that have no application or meaning in some cultures. Recognizing this can be beneficial, Wiredu contends, in that it challenges us to reconsider the way(s) we think and to realize that there are different ways not only of understanding the world in which we live, but of understanding human experience itself.

We hope you enjoy this issue and encourage you to contribute to *Florida Philosophical Review*. Volume III, Issue 2 (Winter 2003) will be devoted to papers written by graduate students. We invite students from Florida and elsewhere to submit work on any philosophical topic. We also invite

philosophical reviews of recent books dealing with topics related to graduate study, mentoring, and more generally, higher education, for this issue. Volume IV, Issue 1 (Summer 2004) will contain selected papers from the (upcoming) 49th annual meeting of the Florida Philosophical Association. Volume V, Issue 2 (Winter 2004) will be a special topic issue on metaphilosophy. Calls for papers, deadlines for submissions, and lists of suggested books for review may be found on the journal's homepage ([click here](#)). We welcome your suggestions for future special topics issues, as well as your feedback on this and other issues of *Florida Philosophical Review*.

Shelley Park and Nancy Stanlick, Editors

Florida Philosophical Review: The Journal of the Florida Philosophical Association

June 30th, 2003

Kant's Thing in itself, or the Tao of Königsberg

Presidential Address of the 48th Annual Meeting
of the Florida Philosophical Association

Martin Schonfeld, University of South Florida and National Taiwan University

Introduction

It is time to take another look at Kant. His philosophy took quite a battering in the past century. First analytic critics bruised and pummeled it, and then postmodern critics tried to finish it off. Yet Kant keeps bouncing back. Why is this? Why does he not go away, despite such efforts? Is it because of his ethical ideas? That, perhaps, universal human rights, the categorical respect for humanity, are a rule worth remembering? That sustainable development, the replication of a practice through space and over time, is the only way to go, even though it tends to rub us the wrong way? Or is it because of Kant's political claims? That people should be critical citizens instead of loyal subjects, even if this upsets the patriots? That "the supreme end: the happiness of all mankind," as he calls it, requires a United Nations after all? Or, finally, is it because of Kant's metaphysical insights? That our two poles are the moral law within and the starry heavens above? That there is only us, and despite our rational autonomy, we are links in the Great Chain of Nature? And that, regardless of what fundamentalists want us to believe, proofs of God and human immortality are over and done with?

Then there is Kant's context—the Enlightenment. A flower of civilization, this was the century when the grip of the Churches on reason was broken, when natural philosophy matured into science, bracketed by Newton at the beginning and insights into electricity and molecular bonds at the end—and the century that culminated in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. This was an excellent age, and for most generations in Kant's neighborhood, life was worse before and after. Before this time, there were witch-hunts and the Thirty Years War. Afterwards, the French revolution was guillotined, factories produced masses of the poor, slavery became big new world business, the colonialist land-grab went in overdrive, and the Wild West turned genocidal. And that was only the prelude to the twentieth century—trenches, flags, gas chambers, soldiers, and the Bomb. The time under Frederick the Great was better. Calling the Enlightenment "the Age of Reason" is not exaggerated. People, at least some of them, had their act together. And a few, like

Kant, had mind-blowing ideas—ranging from the structure of galaxies to the categorical imperative. Research in cosmology and ecology reveals an astounding convergence of our knowledge and Kant's ideas. What inspired this man? And what was his basic angle—what ties the vast range of his ideas together? What about the notorious thing in itself? Kant says it is unknowable, but surely he must have had opinions on it. What were they? Kant keeps bouncing back; his narrative looks fresher every day; and this makes the questions compelling.

We may never know for certain what Kant's ultimate inspiration and basic insight were. We are free to guess, although scholars should not do this. Academics ought to be critics, not artists. The philosophers, however, did not share our qualms. They wanted to know, and so do I. Thus I will follow my hunches in this essay; perhaps they will lead somewhere. I will paint a portrait of the thing in itself based on an unknown root of Kant's thought.

In the first section, I will speculate on the essence of reality. I argue that Kant's thing in itself is a bond of forces in space; that this structural-dynamic pattern governs nature; and that this perspective not only unifies Kant's insights but also supplies an ontological narrative that integrates our scientific knowledge. In the second section, I will interpret the historical record. I argue that the structural-dynamic perspective was a driving idea in the Enlightenment; that it arrived from China with the Rites Controversy, and that this idea, mediated by others, informed Kant. In the third section, I will examine Kant's first book, *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces* (1747). I argue that this idea is the core of his dynamics, and that (as has only recently become known) the key claims of his earliest theory have withstood the test of time. I will conclude my conjectures with questions, as is only fitting: queries about the influence of the structural dynamic perspective on Kant overall, and about the merit of this idea in general. If my questions are sufficiently reasonable to provoke further investigations, then I will have reached my aim.

The Consilience of Structural Dynamics

I suspect that Kant's thing in itself, or the natural essence alluded to from his pre-critical beginnings to his late *Opus Postumum*, is an interactive bond of forces in a continuum. As this bond is not static but dynamic, one could regard it as an energetic activity within its generated field. The particular form of this activity is interaction.

A consequence of this reading would be that the categorical imperative is the normative vector of this interactive bond. This would imply that Kant's imperative reflects the given in functional practice, as the algorithm of constructive and sustainable interactivity. This would further mean that the fact-value distinction would have to be qualified. Collapsing this distinction has been

called the naturalistic fallacy—but perhaps it is the stance of keeping facts and values apart that is misguided here: the fallacy of the bifurcation of nature.¹ Kant's case may be subtler than commonly held. Although his bifurcation of empirical facts and intelligible values leaves the impression that Kant maintained such a distinction, this ignores two points. First, Kant's bifurcation arose from an epistemic context, separating it from ontological dualisms, and second, his early and late ontology were emphatically monist. Trying to characterize the thing in itself is thus no idle game. It suggests not only a general description of reality-patterns, but also a reassessment of the quality of value, because these patterns are not pointless: they are dynamic and often self-organizing.

The verdict of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87) is that the thing in itself is not cognitively accessible, and no verifiable description of its nature can be given. Yet Kant repeatedly suggests characterizations of a universal matrix. He does so not only in the early works and the late reflections, but also in the critical texts—even in the *Critique* itself (A 212-15/B 258-62). What makes these characterizations intriguing is that they are quite unified and startlingly similar for the early, critical, and late Kant.²

Kant's universal matrix seems more than “invention” but less than “discovery”. By invention I mean something created freely, something that is arbitrary. By discovery I mean something proven by our standards of justification. Kant's characterization of essential reality is of the same type, it appears, as the insights that were his forte: it is an *aperçu*—it is unsubstantiated and yet fertile. Its details, primarily the descriptions in his first book, anticipated later discoveries and informed Kant's further ideas, those that have been confirmed as well as those that we now accept as trivially true. Kant characterizes the essence of nature as a sort of dynamic interactivity. This may well be the keystone of his thoughts, binding his other *aperçus* together.

Successful scientific *aperçus*, for example, are Kant's explanations of the coastal winds (1:223-4, 1:492-4), of the cycles of the monsoon (1:494-500), of the slow-down of the Earth's rotation (1:187-90), of the formation of the solar system (1:263-9), and of the structure of galaxies (1:248-56).³

Successful philosophical *aperçus* are Kant's conclusions that traditional metaphysics is over (Aviii-x, Axix-xx/Bxiv-xv), and that arguments for God's existence and the soul's immortality are done with (A631-42/B659-70; A395-6/B421-28). *Aperçus* successful in the interdisciplinary brain sciences, emerging in good measure from philosophy, are the conclusions in the first *Critique* that perception results from interaction, whereby invariant pathways organize affecting data (B1; A15/B29; A50-1/B74-5; B113; B148-9), and that the subject of organized sense-impressions—the synthetic unity of apperception—poses, to use Dave Chalmers' expression, the hard problem of consciousness (B154-9).

Successful historical aperçus, at last, are Kant's arguments for gender equality (8:35-6), for the cross-cultural universality of reason (4:428; 8:17-19), for the end of imperialism (8:344-6, 354-7), for the resilience of tolerant societies whose peoples interact as citizens (8:367), for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (4:429), for the emergence of the United Nations (8:355-7), and for the categorical imperative of sustainable development (4:421). No doubt, Kant was good at guessing! The identity of the thing in itself, I suspect, binds his lucky guesses together. And if this royal aperçu is more than an invention, it will explain their extraordinary predictive and explanatory success.

Crucial for the appreciation of the noumenon is to avoid viewing it as a thing. It is not shaped like books or people. The *Ding an sich* is not in any sense thing-like—it is neither blocky nor solidly inert. Spatially and temporally, it is the opposite of an empirical object. Whereas such objects are definite and formed, the thing in itself is pure form, thus prior to formation and accordingly boundless.

More precisely, it is a force knitting its exterior into a field, individuating the original force into more localized dynamic centers. The “knitting” is essential: the thing in itself is neither force nor exterior, but instead their interplay. It is an interaction between entities. These are opposites: as force is “something” (a primal energy), its exterior is “nothing” (a void that is not yet space). The interplay of “something” and “nothing” is harmonious. It generates nature. Hence the noumenon can be likened to a dynamic interactivity, which is a harmony of opposites.

The dynamic interactivity or harmony of opposites generates the spatial field. Dynamic radiation expands into the void exterior to the force-source, thereby structuring the void into a plenum. This field is in dynamic stasis, but at any instant, it pulses, develops, and structures itself to ordered wholes. The wholes allocate energy. The more complex the generated systems are, the more flexible resource allocations become. At higher orders of complexity, the natural systems manage themselves, some of them evolving to autonomous organisms. The free wills of rational individuals are bound by a categorical duty to act in line with the natural vector toward sustainable self-organization.

Kant was not the first to entertain such views. Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), inspired by Proclus, described a “music of the spheres” in the *Harmonice Mundi* (1619), a work that has been called the *summa* of the Renaissance.⁴ Kepler's attempts at modeling nature's chorded harmonies and elegant beats resulted in the third planetary law. The Harmonic Law has been fertile, preparing universal gravitation, and its stated period-distance regularity is accurate. Kepler's Pythagorean music is a resonance of the structuring interactivity. Described in the terms of early modern philosophy, this interactivity is the entelechy's force in the plenum.

In the early Kant, interactivity emerges as the attractive-repulsive coexistence of bodies in space, explaining the immanent causal development of nature to reason. Ultimately it is a divinely warranted schema (1:413.1-2, 413-16). In the critical period, Kant warns that it is beyond the bounds of sense, but nonetheless argues that it is practically intelligible, morally an imperative, and dynamically a plenum. Later he would explicate it as an ether that sustains physical and cognitive patterns.

Historically, this perspective originated in the Tao; that is, Laozi's ontological principle of the harmony of opposites, and its implied naturalistic ethics. Christian Wolff (1679-1754) interpreted the principle as a harmony of normative action and factual evolution. Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693-1750) appropriated the harmony of opposites as a heuristic rule for philosophy of nature. Kant applied Bilfinger's rule to ontology and cosmology, thereby arriving once more at the original sense of the Tao.

The Taoist tradition, undergirding Confucianism and abstracted to Chan (Zen), emerged in tonal languages. When morphemes are sung instead of spoken, it is easier to communicate a structural-dynamic perspective. Like Kant, Laozi, the author(s) of the *Dao De Jing*, asserts a noumenon, the Tao or "way," which orders nature towards complexity, life, and freedom (e.g. cf. verses 1, 6, 25, 30, 81).

The *Tao Te Ching* (verse 4) suggests that Tao "fills" (*dao zhong*) and, in doing so, becomes "usable" (*yongzhi*) "without limit" (*bu yin*). Translators commonly propose "Tao is empty—its use never exhausted" or "the Tao is an empty vessel; it is used, but never filled."⁵ Although "empty" is implied in *zhong*'s connotations ("to make void" or "to neutralize"), *zhong* is a verb with a dynamic meaning. In English, it corresponds to "flush," "soar," "pour," "infuse" or "dash against."⁶ These words evoke water, a symbol of Tao because of its life-sustaining force and its properties of universality and expansion.⁷ Tao is a primal energy that creates space by structuring it as a presence. Tao individuates this presence into objects and guides the development of nature. Its initial action is expressed in the phrase *dao zhong*, the "flushing" of the Tao into its exterior, a filling of the void that results in a cosmic plenum.

The "filling" is "usable" to nature. The filling, which initiates self-organization, serves nature's goal of viable structures. When the Tao expands, its boundless activity covers or contains everything; there are no points or interstices not infused by it.⁸ As a dynamic *primum* structuring nature, Tao serves as the cosmic vector which points to unfolded nature. It remains beyond sensible access, but externalizes itself as the matrix of nature. It is the *dynamis*, whose realization is the self-organization of the universe.

Moreover, the *dynamis* is not only the physical thrust of the universe, but also the normative form of conduct. Good actions, in this view, harmonize with the overall momentum of nature. As

Tao orders the cosmic development toward increasing complexity, good actions mirror this process by benefitting life and freedom. Such conformity is the appropriate response to the given. Laozi summarizes (v. 25) that people (*ren*) are patterned (*fa*) after the Earth (*di*), the Earth after (*fa*) the cosmos (*tian*), the cosmos after (*fa*) Tao, and Tao after (*fa*) nature (*ziran*).⁹

Like Kant's noumenon, Tao is a pulse—filling space, weaving the cosmos, and branching into discrete rhythms or things (*wan wu*; v. 1). The interactive, autonomous, and self-organizing rise of complexity is its goal (*fu mo zhi ming, er chang ziran*; v. 51). Instantiations of maximum complexity are life, sentience, and reason. Their emergence is the descriptive-normative point of the cosmic vector. Moreover, like the *Ding an sich*, Tao is an unformed form that is neither blocky nor solid (*wu zhuang zhi zhuang, wu wu zhi xiang*, v. 14). Viewed as a dynamic, Tao is a harmony of opposites that promotes life (*tian di xiang he, yijiang gan lu*, v. 32). Viewed as an order, Tao is the entelechy of nature's self-organization (*wan wu jiang zhi bua . . . tian xia jiang zhi ding*, v. 37).

The similarities of *Ding an sich* and Tao raise the question of why they have not been discussed. There may be several reasons. Kant research is an ongoing effort. The global productivity of Kant scholars is reflected in the parallel publication of three leading journals, *Kant-Studien*, *Studi Kantiani*, and *Kantian Review*. The studies are not done, and our accounts are not graven in stone.

Language barriers pose a separate problem. The primary sources, of Kant in context, are in Latin, German, French, and English. Little is available in translation; even the English Kant is incomplete. Substantial research is published in German, Italian, French, and Spanish. The option of nonwestern influences throws Chinese into the fray too. The study of Kant is a multilingual scholarship on a multilingual topic, and accessing the polyglot data is not easy.

Yet doing so is necessary. Heidegger calls language “the house of being” when pondering the essence of action.¹⁰ His simile is poetic but to the point, because languages convey information while confining it. By “housing” being, languages impose models. Conceptual and formal frameworks make aspects of reality accessible to us, but any given framework is just one room of a larger house, as it were. I suspect we will see more if we open doors and survey other rooms as well.

Finally, these claims have not been discussed because ontological syntheses are discouraged. The humanities are in ironic reserve. Philosophers today are either pragmatic, analytic researchers who pride themselves on being skeptics in a rigorous way, or postmodern, continental researchers who pride themselves on being skeptics in a deconstructive way. Skepticism is basic to good science. But good science is not reducible to it. The colleagues in the sciences puzzle things out and put stuff together. Recently, with the revolutions in astrophysics, biology, and information technology, several workers have been trying to put it “all” together, it seems—Hawkins, Murray-Gellman, Penrose, Greene, the late S. J. Gould, and Wilson. Edward O. Wilson scolds us scholars

for our ironic reserve¹¹—asking us, why aren't you folks giving us a hand? We are making connections, we are not sure what they mean, and we are saddened by the loss of life's diversity; we need your help! But engaging with ontology and synthesizing tends to make members of our guild look foolish or naive, all the more so if such pursuits go beyond standard eurocentric discourse. Hence the trails I explore lead into uncharted territory. Kant scholars are not done; they need many dictionaries; and the arts are jaded.

I worry Wilson may have a point. Hence I argue for “consilience,” literally a “jumping together of knowledge”—or simply meaning, as Rodney King, after his beating, said so wisely (particularly in light of 9-11), “why can't we just all get along?” Because these ideas define the Enlightenment and Kant, consilient trails are perhaps not dead alleys after all.

The Transmission of Taoist “Seeing the Nature” (*guandao ziran*) to Kant

The subtitle of this investigation is “The Tao of Königsberg,” despite the incontrovertible facts that Kant never refers to Laozi's *Tao Te Ching* and had not read it. The questions of how matters East reached the West, what matters they were, and when they happened, require a closer look.

The trade routes to Taiwan and Macao had been opened when Copernicus was a young man and Galileo had not yet been born. The Christian mission began at the end of the sixteenth century. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) arrived in 1583, won his green card in 1601, and lived in China until his death. But Ricci's efforts backfired. Instead of the Chinese becoming Christian, the Jesuits became Confucian, including Ricci, who began to dress up like a Mandarin official.¹² The sinofied Jesuits advocated a spiritual synthesis of East and West, organizing an ecumenical worship of Confucian ancestors and the Christian God. This upset the other missions, staffed by Latin-speaking Franciscans and Dominicans, Bible-thumpers who did not bother studying the languages of their hosts. The Rites Controversy began in 1610. Ricci, as well as his successors, wrote texts on China and mailed them home. The Manchu Emperor Kangxi (r. 1662-1722) protected their freedom with his famous Edict of Tolerance (1692).¹³

The Jesuit Philippe Couplet published a translation of three Confucian Classics, the *Analects*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, and *Great Learning* (1687). The Jesuit François Noël published an edition with the *Mencius* (1711). Leibniz supported the Jesuits in the continuing Rites Controversy. Christian Wolff reviewed Noël's books in the *Acta Eruditorum* (1711-12). Completing his term as Halle's vice-president (*Prorektor*), Wolff gave a speech on Chinese philosophy (1721, *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia*

practica). He began and ended his address by declaring that Confucius rocks, and that Confucius is right.¹⁴

The backlash happened immediately. In Germany, the Pietists went on the warpath, slandering Leibniz (who had died in 1716) and his followers as atheists and spinozists. Wolff was driven out of Halle in 1723. The presidential address was dynamite. Wolff had explicitly said (7, 13, 65) that oriental pagans ignorant of the Bible comprehensively figured out the difference between right and wrong. This message questioned authority and had to be suppressed.

In Italy, Pope Clemens XI had already issued an infamous Edict of Intolerance and closed the flourishing Jesuit China mission in 1715. In China, the Manchu Emperor Yongzheng (r. 1722-36) responded by banishing Christianity in 1724. The Rites Controversy continued in Europe. Pope Benedict XIV announced a gag-order, stopping the controversy to the satisfaction of the Bible-thumpers in 1742, but this was just a formality, because all missionaries had already been expelled. The encounter of Confucius and Christ had ended with the defeat of the latter. The Chinese considered the Holy Trinity contradictory and the Cross, a henchmen tool, barbarian. The Christians had been embarrassed to find out that Chinese historiography contained no record of the Biblical Deluge, although this history reached deeper into the past than their own.

In the 1730s the backlash was failing. Wolff's expulsion from Halle had been a media event. Wolff was as much leader of German philosophy in the eighteenth century as Hegel would become later. Wolff's *German Metaphysics* (1719) was a runaway bestseller racking up ten consecutive editions. Halle had aspired to be the Princeton of Europe, and Wolff had been its vice-president. All over the continent academics were talking about this scandal. More than four hundred treatises were written on Wolff's quarrel with the Pietists. The Confucian-Wolffian message—that *only reason and observation are needed to determine the good*—was heard loudly and clearly, and Wolff's students were propagating it.

Add to this the scientific paradigm change happening at the same time. The success of Newton's *Principia* (1687) was proving unstoppable. Its second edition (1713) had been reprinted twice (1714 and '23) in Amsterdam (the freest place on earth). The definitive edition of the *Principia* appeared a year after Kant's birth, in 1725, which is also when John Keill's physics textbook was published in the Netherlands (*Introductiones ad veram physicam et veram astronomiam*). Wolff and his German students embraced Newtonian physics, and (after Maupertuis' conversion in 1732) the French Cartesians followed suit. Once again, all over Europe intellectuals were talking about this. Newton's message—that *only reason and observation are needed to elucidate nature*—was heard loudly and clearly too.

The Pietists, who had driven out Wolff, rejected Eastern philosophy and Western science, and insisted that all you need to know is in the holy texts. Their skepticism deflated their own authority. Galvanized by the encounter with Confucius' philosophy of the good and the

appropriation of Newton's philosophy of nature, the Age of Reason had come into its own. The two sets of data now being disseminated—Eastern ethics and Western physics—resonated with each other, mutually reinforcing the message of the power of the human mind. Now the Enlightenment had arrived.

Taoism, in one sense, arrived later. A translation of the *Tao Te Ching* was presented to the British Royal Society in 1788; it had no effect on Kant. Taoism became better known after his death (in 1804), as Hegel's writings show, and a Latin *Tao* appeared in 1823.¹⁵

But in another sense, Taoism arrived already with Couplet (1687) and Noël (1711). It enjoyed a free ride on the Confucian Classics. Their characteristic feature is a holistic inclusiveness. Chinese philosophy began with Confucianism and Taoism (5th and 6th C. BCE), followed by polytheist Buddhism (2nd C. CE). Zen (*chán*) emerged in the seventh century in China (not Japan). The spectrum from Confucianism to Taoism to Zen forms a philosophically consilient continuum.

Confucian scholars would have told you then, as they would tell you now, if your concern is the “ought” for public life, read the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. If your concern is the “ought” for private life, read the *Doctrine of the Mean*. And if your concern is the “is,” then read *Mencius*, and *Doctrine of the Mean* once more, and study the *Great Learning*. The is-ought-distinction is a dogma of Western skeptics and foreign to the East. Like Russian dolls, the *Analects* and the *Mencius* nestle in the causal ontology of the *Great Learning*, which nestles in the cosmology of the *Doctrine of the Mean*. The *Doctrine of the Mean* explains humanity or benevolence (*ren*) in terms of integrity (*cheng*), and integrity in terms of following the Tao. This was the crucial link. Before Kant's birth, the *Doctrine of the Mean* had been translated twice. The Tao is explicit here; it is the first verse of the Third Classic:¹⁶

What heaven [cosmos] imparts to man is called human nature [vitality]

(*tian ming zhi wei xing*)

To follow our nature [follow vitality] is called the Way

(*shuai xing zhi wei dao*)

Cultivating the Way is called education

(*xion dao zhi wei jiao*)

The Way cannot be separated from us for a moment

(*dao ye zhe, bu ke xuyi li ye*)

And what can be separated from us is not the Way

(*ke li fei dao ye*)

The Jesuit knowledge transfer from China to Germany was a success. Christian Wolff grasped, appropriated, and defended the essential unit of information. Wolff begins his vice-presidential address by relating the personal importance of the Taoist subtext of the Third Classic,

the dynamic resonance of natural structure with normative force. Wolff's training was in the exact sciences. Working with forms and functions had not only honed his cognitive abilities, but also supplied him with the only perspective that makes the Tao intelligible and precise.¹⁷

When I took on the arduous business [of applying the geometric method to philosophy], I had to learn that extraordinary progress is still needed in mathematics for the sake of its heuristic structure . . . I also understood that the entire philosophical canon had to be tied to mathematics. . . . Then I developed the ontological concept of perfection . . . and was blessed (*mibi datum fuerat*) to see in metaphysics the perfection of the entire universe . . . Afterwards I thought about the direction of free actions toward the perfection of the microcosm (*directionem actionum liberarum ad perfectionem microcosmi*). (l. 17-20, 24-6, 32-8)

When applying the heuristic structure of mathematics to philosophy, Wolff saw the limits of his tools. Still, philosophy must be tied to mathematics. Now Halle's mathematics professor was a bit stuck. But then he examined the definition of perfection and the dynamics of moral action—and had an insight:

I realized that this direction [of free actions] is not different from the one prescribed by the laws of nature (*eam non diversam esse ab illa, quae lege naturali praecepta . . . habetur*). (l. 38-40)

A perfect cosmos is unified. Moral action in such a cosmos is deeply compatible with the regularity of natural events. In the unified continuum, the overall thrust of beautiful and good deeds lines up with the overall push of natural events, for the dynamic vectors of the good and nature are identical:

That is, the same direction that strives for the perfection of the microcosm also strives for the perfection of the macrocosm (*eandemque directionem, quae ad microcosmi perfectionem tendit, ad ipsam macrocosmi tendere perfectionem*). (l. 40-42)

Thus Wolff concludes:

So I was finally convinced that the first principle . . . of decorum itself is the direction of human activity to the perfection of the microcosm, and consequently to the perfection of the macrocosm. (l. 42-45)

Wolff's *primum principium decori* is the idea that the moral vector in the human sphere is the same as a putative cosmic vector that governs nature's development towards "perfection." Wolff as well as his eventual follower Kant understood cosmic perfection as nature's well-ordered abundance. As Kant would later point out, cosmic perfection is an evolving harmony, a diversity (*Mannigfaltigkeit*) according to a rule, or the greatest variety in the greatest order (2:33; cf. also 2:93-100). The unfolding (*Auswicklung*) of organized fruitfulness—what we now call biodiversity—is the

hallmark of nature's growth towards perfection; indeed, the more of it, the better (1:306, 319-21, 347; 2:96). This is the decorum of nature. Well-ordered complexity is its point, and whether one considers the vector's astrophysical-ecological momentum or its local moral thrust does not make any difference.

Although ridiculed in old age, Christian Wolff was a trailblazer in his youth, and Kant was fortunate to learn from him. Wolff brazenly pushed the ontological envelope. His views were so innovative because he derived them from outlandish sources:

Attentively studying the Classics . . . I was certain (*nullus dubitavi*) that the . . . Chinese, particularly Confucius, had the same notion, albeit confused and vague, a notion that can therefore be seen only by people who are getting it (*ut non agnoscat nisi a possidente*). (l. 46-49)

Now Wolff had his audience's attention. His remark was politically incorrect in Pietist Halle, part of authoritarian Prussia, ruled until 1740 by the pious soldier-king Friedrich Wilhelm I. Wolff did not care whether his admission of "seeing the nature" (*quandao ziran*) provoked his listeners—including the fundamentalist Joachim Lange (1670-1744) who was to be inaugurated as Wolff's successor at the end of the speech. Wolff would not pull any punches. Now he would come to the point, the topic, and the beginning of the scholarly part of his speech:

After I rationally confirmed the doctrines and facts of the Classics, I understood that my ethics and Chinese ethics match (*praxin Sinarum a mea abluere intelligebam*).¹⁸ (l. 49-52)

Wolff's declaration was intolerable to the Pietist fundamentalists. They plotted revenge and drove him into exile two years later. In 1723, Wolff fled to Hesse to avoid execution. Halle University was purged. Wolff's assistants were fired; his students were dismissed; and his books were removed from the library shelves, as were the Confucian Classics. An indirect victim of the fall-out from Wolff's speech was his student Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693-1750); he would be fired from Tübingen University for standing up for Wolff. Bilfinger published a book on Chinese philosophy (*Specimen doctrinae veterum sinarum moralis et politicae*, 1724) and a defense of Wolff's metaphysics (*Dilucidationes philosophicae de Deo, anima humana, mundo et generalibus rerum affectionibus*, 1725), both of which were deemed unacceptable by the evangelical administrators of Tübingen's university.

Bilfinger engaged with *quandao ziran*, nature's dynamic structure and its functional algorithm; and once again a memetic transfer—now from Wolff to Bilfinger—occurred. Coincidence helped. Three influences shaped Bilfinger's views: the entelechy, interpreted by Leibniz as the force of any substance; substances, defended by Wolff as force points organizing a cosmic grid; and the grid, the *nexus rerum* or universal web, which Bilfinger interpreted, in an earlier tract, as the harmony of the

entelechies. This tract (*De harmonia animae et corporis humani maxime praestabilitate*, 1723) wound up on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1734 as a warning to all Christians. Bilfinger was guided by entelechies, force points, the web of nature, and the harmony of all things, and he was an expert on Chinese thought. Such a reader of Confucius, cognizant of the dynamic harmony in the web, could decode the Taoist subtext—and be helped along by the Third Classic, the speech of his advisor, and the principle of decorum.

Bilfinger went to St Petersburg in 1725. The Russian Academy was dominated by Leibnizian dynamics, and when Bilfinger joined in, the ingenious Daniel Bernoulli (1700-82) did so too, the founder of fluid dynamics. Bilfinger was exposed to the *vis viva*-problem in natural philosophy. This was the question of whether there exist “living forces” that govern bodily motion and possibly everything else, and how to prove their quantity advanced by Leibniz. (This quantity, “mass” times speed squared, would join science as kinetic energy, the space integral of force.) He turned to the problem with a treatise called *On Forces* (w. 1725, p. 1728). It inspired Kant in not-too-distant Prussia eighteen years later. Now the transmission was complete. Kant states that Bilfinger’s approach informs his first book, *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces* (1747), and he says he always uses Bilfinger’s research-rule: Truth is to be found in the harmony of opposites. Thus began Kant’s career.¹⁹

Kant’s Force-Space-Bond and the Tao

In the first ten paragraphs of the *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces*, Kant lays out his ontology. Nature consists of force points, whose activities are goal-directed, causal, and harmonious. The ultimate elements are active forces (§ 1-3; 1:17-18). They govern everything that happens—not only motions of bodies (§ 2; 1:18.6-8), but also the activities of all objects (§ 3; 1:18.27-36). This includes materially produced ideas as well as mentally intended actions (§ 6; 1:20.35-21.1; 21.14-16). Forces govern mind-body interaction.

Interaction turns out to be fundamental. Interaction governs dynamic action, Kant claims. In interacting with the outside, a force acts external to itself (§ 4; 1:19.4-11). The capacity for *outside* effects associates the presence of force with *location* (§ 6; 1:20.36-21.1). The force acting external to itself affects its own vicinity. The vicinity affected by radiation locates the acting source within its region. That force, in virtue of external action, is put “somewhere,” suggests a bond between force and space. This bond is productive. Multiple localized forces constitute the world (§ 7) such that their interaction forms a network (§ 8), which is by definition order (§ 8) and in fact space (§ 9). Kant concludes that extension results from the external action of force (*außer sich wirken*, § 9; 1:23.5-8).

From the start (§ 1), Kant insists with Leibniz that “there is something over and above extension, indeed prior to extension.”²⁰ This “something” is force. Its effect (*Wirkung*) is radiation (*Ausbreitung*). Force spreads, affecting its vicinity. The affected vicinity structures the spread, shaping force. As the effected shaping occurs through the affecting spread, dynamic action is acted upon, changing the action. Dynamic action is governed by interaction. As Kant sees it, radiation and interaction govern each other. He analyzes this interaction in § 10. Force turns “nowhere” into “somewhere”. A void is structured into a field. This structuring is lawful, Kant insists: substantial forces, when united by interactions, propagate their strength in inverse proportion to the square of the distances traversed (1:24.19-23).

Kant may have learned the inverse square from the *Principia*; as the rule governing gravity, it is hard to miss. But he does not credit Newton. He uses it in a way that would have made the sober Brit (dead since 1727), who hated feigning hypotheses on the cause of gravity, dryly turn in his Westminster grave. For the cause of gravity is now identified: it is space-structuring force—Aristotle’s entelechy that Leibniz had grasped first (§ 1), and in whose analysis the sinologist Bilfinger shows Kant the way (§ 20).

Johannes Kepler—founder of celestial dynamics and for Leibniz an incomparable man—formulated the inverse-square law as the principle of photo measurement. Kepler showed that the intensity of light decreases with the square of the distance (1604).²¹ He viewed light as the primordial living force; he suspected the structural identity of the radiation of light and gravity, and he qualitatively applied the inverse-square to gravitation (1605).²² Newton tied the inverse-square to Kepler’s planetary laws (*De motu*, 1684) and proved it for gravity (*Principia*, 1687). Kant’s use of the law is as basic as Kepler’s. It governs the radiation of force, energy, or light. But Kant interprets the law in a way that put his vision even beyond the ingeniously far-sighted Kepler (who, actually, had eye problems).

In § 6-10, Kant identifies a force-space bond. Force is the *primum*, determining space. Once space is there, the bond is bidirectional. Force fills space, ordering it; space places force, governing it. Space dynamically expands; force structurally acts. Each needs the other. Without force, space lacks enframing dimensionality and thus fails to place a world (*Abmessungen* or *Dimensionen*; § 9-10, *passim*). Without space, force lacks acting location and thus fails to radiate a field (*ausbreiten*; § 10, 1:24.23). Radiation and continuum are what they are, because force is spaced, and space is forced. This is their ontological bond. This first *aperçu* has been confirmed. Today we know that gravitating mass curves spacetime, and that spacetime grips gravitating mass. Bypassing Newton, Kant anticipated Einstein.

Then, according to § 10, the inverse square represents force propagation. The law governs the radiation that structures space (1:24.15-16). Because this law rules the interactivity of substances

in general, it accordingly also (*auch*) determines their accretion and composition (1:24.12-18), which entails that universal gravitation is subject to the law as well. This second *aperçu* is correct, just as the first. The inverse square proportionality of dynamic strength and structural distance marks out multiple fields. Because Kant found this out, and because it is true (within appropriate limits; his third *aperçu*), it deserves to be capitalized as *Kant's Law*. We can state Kant's Law in modern terms:

The pressure of any point source radiation in a free field drops at a rate inversely proportional to the square of propagated distance.

Kant's Law governs various instantiations of free point source radiation. The law holds for light (Kepler), gravity (Newton), sound, electrostatic force (Coulomb), radioactivity (Röntgen), radio waves, and, with qualifications, for magnetism (Gauss and Ampere). As the history of physics illustrates, Kant's Law illuminates the bond of force and space in nature. Gauss' and Ampere's work helped Maxwell and Lorentz, whose work guided Einstein. Kant's Law also underlines the relevance of Hawking's work on black holes, the spikes of the force-space bond. A dramatic application of the law, in its Keplerian instantiation, was Hubble's measure of the luminosity of Cepheid variables in 1924, the first step toward Hubble's Law of cosmic expansion and the Big Bang.

According to the conclusion of § 10, the inverse-square governs the three-dimensionality of the continuum (1:24.24-6), but, as Kant insists, this regularity is contingent; other relations between strength and distance would result in different continua (1:24.26-30). The scientific place of this *aperçu* today is not in fertile Minkowski space and solid accounts of the strong nuclear force. Its place is now in quantum geometry and inchoate approximations to Calabi-Yau spaces, whose topologies involve fluid regularities of the force-space bond. The final idea of § 10 is not confirmed. We only know this: Kant's ontology culminates with the *aperçus* of the bond, and the claimed contingency is assumed by superstring theory.

Perhaps superstrings will lead to the master equation of the matrix. Kant implored Leonhard Euler to read the *Living Forces*. His effusive praise shows he saw the significance of Euler's work. He wished Euler would see that he and Kant were on the same track. Euler's work in mathematical dynamics was just as seminal as Kepler's, and his derivation of force would end the *vis viva*-controversy in a formally elegant way. Kant writes that he thinks Euler is the only one able to resolve the disharmony over force.²³ Since Euler coined the beta-function (the trigger of the superstring revolution), Kant's hope is prophetic.

The sciences support Kant's ideas of the bond—and remarkably, even on the deepest, ontological level. As mentioned, Kant suggests that force is the *primum*, determining space, and that force spreads, stretching space out. That is, space is not a void as Newton thought but instead a dynamic expansion. Space is not empty; the void is energetic, this energy expands, and the more expanded energy there is, the faster the void keeps expanding. In what has been hailed as “the

number one scientific discovery of 1998 in any field of research”, Kant’s odd metaphysical claim has now been confirmed.²⁴ So Kant is right—but to what extent does his insight correspond to its root? Bilfinger studied the Classics and formulated a rule, the harmony of opposites, which guides the *Living Forces*, as Kant says. To decide whether Kant’s ideas qualify as a Taoist “seeing the nature” requires comparing his force-space bond to the Tao.

According to the *Tao Te Ching*, something profound exists (*xuan*, v. 1 and v. 6), which is nature’s creative principle (*tiandi mu*, v. 1 and v. 25). Nature obeys a lawful patterning (*fa*, v. 25; see note 8). The cosmic law (*tian li*, see section 2) is the “law of nature” (*dao ji*, v. 14). Since it shapes nature, Tao is form and hence not formed itself (*wu zhuang zhi zhuang*, v. 14). As unbounded form, Tao patterns nature by acting *external* to itself—it “fills” (*dao zhong*, v. 4; see note 7); it “flows,” “goes out,” or “reaches” (*shi*, v. 25). Tao’s dynamic filling is “far reaching” or “flows distant” (*shi yuan*, v. 25). The distant flow always returns, always comes around (*shi yuan fan; zhou xing er bu dai*, *ibid.*). Elsewhere in the *Tao Te Ching*, the action or motion of the Tao is described as a reversal (*fan zhe dao zhi dong*, v. 40). That is, the unbounded form fills space by pushing outwards and by pulling inwards—it is a structural-dynamic pulse. Laozi thus likens the plenum (*tian di zhi jian*, v. 5) to a bellows (*tuo*, *ibid.*).

Because of the continuous character of nature’s unfolding it is a bit arbitrary how finely one parses the process. A four-step model works for our purposes (cf. v. 1, 40, 42). The first stage of nature’s self-organization, prior to the cosmic process, is Tao as a plain energy or a nonspatial void (*wu*). The second stage, the start of the process, is Tao patterning itself into a plenum, thereby generating the field between “heaven and earth” (*tian di*). The third stage, emerging in the field, is the existence of placed presences (*you*) in the fabric. The fourth stage is the progressive ordering of the places from local charges to discrete objects (*wan wu*). The totality of objects is empirical reality, structured by the energetic potential that Laozi calls Tao and Aristotle *dynamis*.

For Aristotle, *dynamis* is a potential that, when put in (*en*) action (*ergon*), is *en-ergon* or *energeia*; energy. (The standard translations, “actuality” for *energeia*, and “possibility” for *dynamis*, fail to retain the Greek flavor.) Aristotelian energy is *dynamis* put into operation, or, in the Latinized Aristotle, a *potentia* put into *agere*, a potential acting. This potential has a *telos* guiding the *energeia*. Thus it has (*echein*) a goal (*telos*) within (*en*). If one applies Aristotle’s claim to force points, with Leibniz, the resulting model involves *entelechies* that have their goals within, and that are describable in quantitative and dynamic terms. It is thus understandable why Kant begins his career (§ 1) with complimenting Leibniz on his useful model of Aristotelian entelechy.

Force creates *Ausdehnung* (§ 9; cf. Laozi’s *zhong*) or extension. The “ex” of “extension” means “out” or “outwards.” The Latin root *tensio* is reminiscent of “tension” because it derives from *tensum*, the participle of *tendere* meaning “to tighten,” to expand,” or “to stretch.” Thus

extension or *wu* is the result of *dynamis* or *dào*, *stretched out* as a charged void. The result is captured in the German *Ausdehnung*, the “out-stretching”. Out-stretching results from the outwards-directed “filling” of the force (cf. Laozi’s *zhong*, v. 4, and *shi*, v. 25). The *Ausdehnung* of space is due to the *Ausbreitung* of force. Kant’s term, *Ausbreitung* (§ 10), “out-broadening,” conveys Laozi’s dynamic idea. For Kant, force can stretch out, creating location and place-change (§ 4, 1:19:5, 32). This initial extension constitutes subsequent interaction. Force out-broadens itself (§ 9-10; cf. Laozi’s *shi*, v. 25) such that its grip is inversely proportional to its squared stretch. This lawful out-stretching creates space (*Raum*), which is order (*Ordnung*). Order locates the out-broadening (*ausbreiten*). Force then radiates from local presence (Laozi’s *you*, v.1). Now copresent points act locally.

Because spatial order patterns the pulse to a plurality of local charges, force unfolds to the set of points. The points act, emitting effects. The effects reach other local charges, affect them, and pattern them to responses. The process from original extension to eventual response leads to copresent charges whose radiations mutually pulse. Interaction ensues; like love, the closer, the hotter. Ongoing interactivity generates lingering webs of pulses and counterpulses. Viable webs of interactive substance-neighborhoods format themselves into engaged communities. Neighborly interaction turns into communal “intra-action.” If harmonious, intra-action sustains the communities as resonating structures, hence as things (*Dinge; wan wu*).²⁵

A look at the lexical roots of the words clarifies what is meant. *Ausdehnung, extensio*, or out-stretching, derives from *dehnen, tendere*, “stretch”. At the third stage of the process (when the already outstretched plenum acquires places), extension does more than stretch. Structuring itself, force is placed. Through places, extension contains substances; it has and holds them. Laozi uses *you* for this stage (v.1). “Have” or “hold” is the basic sense of the morpheme.²⁶

The Latin root of “extension” is *tendere*’s participle, *tentum* or *tensum*. *Tendere*, “stretch,” shares its supinum with *tenere*, which meant originally “to be stretched out” and later “hold” or “grip.” “Stretch” and “grip” have a familiar resonance in the word “entertain” (derived from the Middle English *entertene*, meaning “to hold mutually,” descended through the Middle French *entretenir* from *intertener*, a medieval compound of *tenere*). When we entertain an idea, it has hold on us—as we on it, since the idea and we interact. To get hold of something, we first need to stretch and reach it. This applies to the force-space bond, organisms, and minds. Extended stretch becomes place when force reaches, grips, and holds other forces, structuring the fabric.

Laozi and Kant share the same idea. What makes their insight compelling is that the established scientific description supports it. It is unclear how the cosmos expands (slowing down, speeding up, or moving at constant speed), but we know that it does. The Big Bang started with a singularity. In terms of its nature, the singularity was sheer *energeia*. In terms of its activity, it

exploded as a *dynamis* and then patterned itself to nature. It remains measurable as universal 3-K background radiation.

Historically, the *Living Forces* was an embarrassment for Kant. Because of ignorance (he was young) and irritation (he was passed over by his pious mentor Knutzen, who liked Newton), he failed to jump on the bandwagon of Newtonian mechanics. By describing force partly as Descartes' *vis mortua* ('mass' times speed) and partly as Leibniz's *vis viva* ('mass' times speed squared), he exposed himself to ridicule, for force is Newton's product of mass and acceleration. That he approached force in ontological terms made it worse, because his peers heeded d'Alembert's injunction to reduce dynamic discourse to mathematics and experiments. Worst of all, the factual and logical faults make the book turgid, and Kant was laughed at upon its publication.

But who laughs last, laughs best. Throughout the book Kant studies the harmony of opposites, dead pressure and living force, trying to marry Cartesian momentum (mv) to Leibnizian energy (mv^2). And he was right. With the *Living Forces* Kant grasped the fundamental unity of momentum and energy. And with the interactive spatial beat of § 10, he intuited that *momenergy*, in harmony with mass or E/c^2 , is the conserved pulse of spacetime.²⁷

Conclusion

If my conjectures are plausible, then a curious picture of Kant will have emerged by now. Over several intermediate steps, Kant had been inspired by a Chinese idea—even though he may not even have been aware of it. Although he may never have looked into the Classics and certainly never read the *Tao Te Ching* (not published during his lifetime), his earliest and decisive inspiration was an idea he got from the China-expert Bilfinger, who had it from Wolff and Leibniz, and who, in turn, reacted to the Jesuit translations of the Confucian Classics.

The idea that inspired Kant had several aspects: Nature is energy; energy is a dynamic interactivity; and dynamic interactivity is a harmony of opposites. These are facets of the Tao. The Tao was not unique to Laozi's *Tao Te Ching*. It haunts the canon of ancient Chinese literature, from the *I Ching* to the *Book of Rites* (two of whose chapters are Confucian Classics, the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Great Learning*). It is an element of Chinese culture—as Confucian humanity is the stance governing ethics and anything social, the Tao is the idea governing the universe and anything natural.

The information traveled. It was passed on, just like any other commodity. When it arrived in Königsberg in 1745, it had already traveled a long way, on a journey that had begun in 1601, when Ricci was admitted to Beijing, trying to preach the Gospel, while absorbing Chinese culture. Through letters, tracts, and eventually translations, the Tao traveled from the Jesuit mission in

Beijing to the Portuguese and Dutch traders at the port of Macao. From there it sailed with the mail to Lisbon in Portugal and Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Portugal was barren ground; too conservative and Catholic. The Netherlands, however, was then the freest society on Earth (it remains so today), and here the information could be communicated. Perhaps it infected Spinoza in nearby Amsterdam; we do not know. It certainly intrigued Leibniz, who passed by Amsterdam on his way from Paris to Hanover. The Paris-Hanover road extended to Leipzig, a commercial center situated at the crossroads with Prussia (Berlin), Bohemia (Prague), and Russia (St. Petersburg). Thomasius may have been exposed to the idea in Leipzig, his decorum makes one wonder, but once again, we do not know. But Wolff's decorum is a different story—we know the Tao fascinated him in Halle, only ten miles from Leipzig. Wolff's scandalous speech led to a major infection, and now the vector spread with Bilfinger first to Tübingen and then to St Petersburg, at whose academy the Leibnizian researchers on dynamics were gathering. And St Petersburg at the western end of Russia is not far from Königsberg at the eastern end of Prussia, where Kant studied Bilfinger's research. Information spreads, and during the Enlightenment information traveled quickly.

During its travels, the information changed. Communication is inevitably interpretation, and interpretation is transformation. The Chinese "way" (*dao*) was rendered as "nature's reason or rational nature" (*natura rationalis*). The Jesuit translators had read it to mean that nature, created by a benevolent and omnipotent Christian God, is consistent and accessible to reason. At its Eastern departure, the Tao was paradoxical and elusive; at its Western arrival, it had become uniform and rational—so much the better for scientific investigation. That things change when the travel is not limited to ideas, it affects other commodities too. Marco Polo had brought rice noodles from China to Italy—where one subsequently cooked spaghetti. But as rice noodles and spaghetti are still noodles, the Tao was still energy. In Kant, in particular, dynamic interactivity had still retained some its dialectical flavor: the harmony of opposites.

In Kant's first book, the information—disguised as Bilfinger's rule of the middle way and as Leibniz's dynamic reading of entelechy—blossomed into the ontology of force. Reality is a dynamic between the bond of energy and continuum, momentum-energy and spacetime. Force pumps out nature. When concentrated to a focal point (Kant's "burning point" or *Brennpunkt*; cf. 2:334.7), the energy is as hot as it gets. It pulses outward toward complexity. Was this just an odd beginning, a first false step for Kant?

It seems fitting to end this speculative quest with questions. If his earliest vision, of an energetic bond flaring out structure, was just a first false step, why would Kant, of all people, earn his Master's degree in philosophy (1754), with *Meditation on Fire*, of all things? Why would he then turn to investigate anything that moves, shakes, pushes and pulls—from the fate of Earth's rotation governed by tidal beats (*Spin Cycle* essay, 1754) to earthquakes (three tracts, 1756) to winds, storms,

and weather pumps like the monsoon (*Theory of Winds*, 1756; *West Wind* essay, 1757)? Why would he, in his second book, *Universal Natural History* (1755), explain the self-organization of the cosmos from chaos to complexity with the interplay of pushes and pulls, repulsion and attraction, antigravity and gravity? And be so certain that he is right that he proclaims proudly, with Voltaire, to just give him matter, and he would build a world with it (1:229)? While warning Christian zealots against opposing science—if they did, he declares, they would be defeated (1:222, 225)?

Why would he earn his doctorate (1755) with a dissertation on metaphysical cognition—while stating, as the first principle of his *New Elucidation*, an identity-pair of opposites, “whatever is, is, and whatever is not, is not” (1:389)? Why would he state, as his final principle, an interactive harmony, the principle of coexistence (1:412)? While, in passing, solving the problem of freedom in nature dynamically? Why would he harmonize the opposites of freedom and necessity over force—defining a free will as something that is not being pushed around, but that is a “determining power” instead, a power that can withstand impulses and remain spontaneous (1:404)?

Furthermore, why would Kant earn his professorial degree (1756) with a *habilitation* over elementary particles—that are physical, but energetic monads? While explaining how indivisible force points can create spatial things by pulsing out active spheres, dynamic spacelets, the tiniest dimensional spheres of nature (1:481)—thus anticipating the Calabi-Yau spaces in the superstring and M-theories of today?

Or why would Kant, in his third book, *Only Possible Argument* (1763), turn to reflect on God, describing It as a necessary, unified, and constant being, deriving Its existence from possibility, visible in nature in the design resulting from the “inner possibility of things” (2:91-2)—“possibility,” which, as we have seen, is *Möglichkeit* in German, *possibilitas* in Latin, and *dynamis* in Greek?

Understandably having second thoughts, knowing he had gone too far (it is one thing to get from force to fire, tides, and winds, but quite another to get from force to God), he retracted, became a critic of metaphysics and a geographer of cognition next. So he bifurcated nature, in the *Inaugural Dissertation* (1770), into the sensible and the intelligible. But do not these opposites harmonize, and harmonize over interaction? Why would Kant then account for knowledge, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), by determining it as the result of the interaction of sensory information and intelligible tools?

And why, even there, would he insist that cognitive interactivity—knowledge—is grounded in dynamic interactivity, the spatial plenum or force field (A 212-215/B258-262)? And when he turned to ethics, in the *Foundations of Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)—why would this foundation with absolute worth be a good will (4:393)? Why would it be neither a deed nor its outcome, but instead its intention, its impulse, its dynamic thrust? In its thrust, a conscious force stretches out from the subjective center. It encounters the other; and pays attention (*Achtung*; 4:436); and responds, as a

good will, interactively and appropriately, granting the other her dignity.

And so the circle closes. Kant set out with the force-space bond when he was young and forty years later arrived at respect for humanity. A student once asked Confucius what humanity means. Confucius replied, “Don’t do to others what you don’t want to be done to you”. The student was not happy. “That’s quite a mouthful,” he said, “isn’t there, like, a shorter version?” Confucius said: *shu!* Translated: “reciprocity” or “light-hearted forgiveness.”

Notes

¹ The phrase is by Shi-Chuan Chen, "How to Form a Hexagram and Consult the I Ching," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92 (1972): 248. Explaining non-Western realism, he writes: "There is a deep conviction of the Chinese that no lines of demarcation exist between man and heaven and earth [the so-called Principle of the Three Participants] . . . Because of this principle the ancient Chinese avoided becoming victims of the fallacy of the bifurcation of nature. The derivatives from the bifurcation, namely, the separation of the subjective from the objective, the distinction of the primary and secondary qualities, and the confrontation of the ego and non-ego, have not tortured the Chinese mind."

² I am grateful to many colleagues for their ideas. I would like to thank Karl Ameriks for identifying Kant's early monism (Karl Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of the Mind*, [Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1982] 29-30, 85-86); Sidney Axinn and Ivan Marquez for discussions on the dynamics of ethics; Fred Beiser for fleshing out Kant's love for metaphysics (Frederick Beiser, "Kant's Intellectual Development: 1746-1781," *Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. P. Guyer [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1992] 26-61); Andrew Carpenter for discussions on Kant's inverse-square law; Jeffrey Edwards for discovering the implications of Kant's Third Analogy (Jeffrey Edwards, *Substance, Force, and the Possibility of Knowledge* [Los Angeles and San Francisco: California UP, 2000] 1-8, 46-7, 165-6); Paul Guyer for pointing to Kant's reflections on animal souls (Paul Guyer, "Organisms and the Unity of Science," *Kant and the Sciences*, ed. E. Watkins [Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2001] 268; see also Immanuel Kant, *Werke*, ed. W. Dilthey et al. [Berlin: Reimer, later De Gruyter, 1902ff] 28:275); Kenneth Westphal for encouraging my Keplerian hunches; Kwasi Wiredu for stressing the relevance of nonwestern monism; and Manfred Kuehn for discovering Kant's disbelief in an afterlife and in a monotheistic God (Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2001] 2-5, 382, 369-78, 385-92). I also thank Jau-Wei Dan (Taipei Teachers College, Taiwan) for his insights on Zhuangzi; Diane Nai-Yu Schönfeld and Yung-Ming Shu (Hsinchu Teachers College, Taiwan) for discussions of the Taoist basis of Confucianism; and Master Jian-Mieng Liu (Zen Center Meinong, Kaoshiung, Taiwan) for most helpful clarification.

³ I quote from Kant, *Werke* (1902ff.; Academy edition) by volume and page. If applicable, line numbers are given. I quote from Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781/1787], trans. N.K. Smith (New York: St. Martins, 1965) by (A) and (B) paginations.

⁴ Max Caspar, *Kepler*, trans. C. D. Hellman (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1959) 290.

⁵ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. S. Addiss and S. Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993) 4; Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. G. Feng and J. English (New York: Vintage, 1997) 4. Compare also verse 25.

⁶Shi-Qiyou Liang and Fang-Jie Zhang, *Yuandong Han-Ying Da Chidian/Far East Chinese-English Dictionary* (Taipei: Yuandong Tushu Gongshi, 1999) # 2801, 843-4.

⁷Cf. *Tao Te Ching*, verse 8: “Water benefits all things and does not compete / It flows in lowly places men reject and is thus close to the Tao;” verse 32: “Tao in nature is like rivers running into the sea;” verse 34: “Great Tao flows everywhere / . . . / All beings derive life from it” (my trans.). Water is an apt symbol of Tao. Astrophysically, water is common in the universe, suggesting Tao’s universality. Environmentally, water forms the hydrologic cycle, mirroring Tao’s animating pulse. Chemically, water is the only compound that expands when it crystallizes, thus evoking the spatial swelling of Tao’s natural self-organization.

⁸“Dao . . . yuanshi ji kongxu de, wu suo bu bao, wu wei bu ru;” commentary by Ren-Gong Liang in Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, ed. Yu-Tang Lin (Taipei: Wenzhi, 1992) 9. Compare also Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, verse 32. I would like to thank Guan-Xiong Xu, Nangong Taoist Institute, Mucha, Taiwan, for his assistance.

⁹*Fa* is “institution, law” (as in *fajia*, Legalism), as well as “method” or “way of doing things.” As a verb, *fa* means “to pattern or model after, to emulate”; cf. Liang and Zhang, # 2832, 854-6. The semantic key of *fa*, just as the key of *zhong* (“fill”) is *shui*—*water*. For this symbol of Tao, see note 6. One should not read too much into Chinese characters (not every stroke is there for a reason), but examining *fa* is interesting. Given its semantic key, one could conceptualize *fa* as the water-like action pattern that mirrors Tao’s pulse. The dynamic aspect of *fa* is depicted in the character’s main part, which, sans water-radical, is pronounced in modern Mandarin *qu*—*go*. The top segment of the “go”-part of *fa* exists as a free graph as well and is pronounced *tu*—the *Earth*. *Fa*, the lawful patterning, evokes a “going” ruled by “earth”. The patterning, the vector denoted by *fa*, would thus be a lawful way, ruled by nature or earth, going “somewhere.” As the second meaning of the “go”-component *qu* is *leave*, nature’s vector is transcendent, pointing from the rule of the Earth to the Tao, the highest good (v. 8).

¹⁰Martin Heidegger, “Brief über den Humanismus”[1946], *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1996) 313. Compare Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. D.F. Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1993) 217.

¹¹Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage, 1998): 294; see also 10-14, 43-8 and 227-8.

¹²S. J. Yves Raguin, *Ways of Contemplation East and West* (Taipei: Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies, 1993-2001) vol. 4, 323. I would like to thank the Ricci Institute, Taipei for its assistance with documents on the Jesuit China mission.

¹³Michael Albrecht, “Einleitung,” Christian Wolff, *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia practica*, ed. Michael Albrecht (Hamburg: Meiner, 1985) xvi; compare David E. Mungello, *Leibniz and Confucianism: The*

Search for Accord (Honolulu: Hawaii UP, 1977) 5, 19-20; John K. Fairbank and Merel Goldman, *China: A New History*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1992) 147-61, 480.

¹⁴ The translations are S.J. Philippe Couplet, *Confucius sinarum philosophus, sive Scientia Sinensis Latine exposita* (Paris 1687) and S.J. François Noël, *Sinensis imperii libri classici sex, nimirum Adulorum Schola* [the *Da Xue* or “Great Learning”], *Immutabile Medium* [the *Zhong Yong* or “Doctrine of the Mean”], *Liber Sententiarum* [the *Lun Yu* or “Analects”], *Mencius* [the *Mengzi* or “Book of Mencius”], *Filialis Observantia* [the minor *Xiao Jing* or “Book of Filial Piety”], *Parvulorum Schola* [the medieval *Xiao Xue* or “Youth Learning”], *e Sinico idiomate in Latinum traducti* (Prague 1711). Wolff reviewed Noël’s China-handbook (1708) in the journal *Acta Eruditorum* in 1711, and Noël’s translation in a two-part essay in *Acta Eruditorum* in 1712. His reviews appeared anonymously. Compare Albrecht xxii-xxviii, liii-lxii. For details on the works mentioned, see Albrecht 305-312. For Wolff’s superlative praise of Confucius in the *Oratio*, see Christian Wolff, *Oratio de Sinarum Philosophia Practica* [1723], ed. M. Albrecht. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1985) 7-13, 19, 65.

¹⁵For the translation history, see James Legge, “Preface,” *The Texts of Taoism* [1891], ed. James Legge, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1962) xii-xiii.

¹⁶Translation by Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1969) 98. Additions in brackets are mine. The pinyin transliteration is based on *Zhongyong Jiyi* (Taipei: Sangyang, 1985) 2, 6.

¹⁷The subsequent citations are from Wolff 4-6. Line numbers are indicated with “l” followed by numeral. My translation.

¹⁸ The match between Wolff’s and Chinese ethics turns on what Wolff calls the decorum. It helps to remember that the term derives from Latin *decere*, “to befit.” Decorum is manners and the same as Confucian Ritual (*li*), which gave its name to the Rites Controversy. *The Analects* (1.12) defines ritual (*li*) as harmony (*he*) or “the fitness of things” (*shi zhi yi*). See Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. R. Dawson (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1993); compare James Legge, ed., *The Confucian Analects, the Great learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean* [1893] (New York: Dover, 1971) 143 note, and Confucius 4. As a fitness of things, decorum is “the Tao of the ancient kings” (*lao wang zhi dao*; *Analects* 1.12); see Legge 143. Neo-Confucianists named it the “decorum of heaven” (*tian li*). Confucius defines it as a form of humaneness (*ren*) and explicates it as the negative Golden Rule, “do not impose on others what you would not like yourself” (*ji suo bu yu, wu shi yu ren*; *Analects* 12.2, 15.23). Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), the father of the German Enlightenment, Halle’s president (*Direktor*) in 1721, and probably in Wolff’s audience too, had repeatedly defended the decorum. Thomasius defines it as the positive Golden Rule (*quod vis ut alii tibi faciant, tu ipsis facies*) in *Fundamenta Juris Naturae et Gentium*. See Christian Thomasius, *Fundamenta Juris Naturae et Gentium* [1705] (Aalen: Scientia, 1963) 177. To my knowledge, the historical influence of Confucius on

Thomasius, if any, has not been investigated.

¹⁹Bilfinger's *De viribus corpori moto insitis et illarum mensura* appeared in the journal of the Russian Academy at St Petersburg, *Commentarii Academicae Petropolitanae* in 1728. For Bilfinger's rule in *De viribus*, # 16, see Juan Arana Canedo-Aguelle's commentary in Immanuel Kant, *Pensamientos Sobre la Verdadera Estimación de las Fuerzas Vivas*, ed. and trans. J.A. Canedo-Aguelle (Bern: Lang, 1988) 354. For Kant's adoption of Bilfinger's rule, see *Gedanken zur wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte*, # 20, in Kant, *Werke* (1902ff.) 1:32.5-7.

²⁰*Gedanken zur wahren Schätzung der lebendige Kräfte*, # 1, in Kant, *Werke* (1902ff) 1:17.22-23. All further references to this text indicate the pagination of this edition.

²¹Johannes Kepler, *Astronomia pars optica* [1604] prop. 9, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Max Caspar et al. (Munich: Beck, 1937ff.) 2:22. For the dictum of the "incomparable man" (*vir incomparabilis*), see Max Caspar, "Einleitung," Kepler 1:vii.

²²*Astronomia pars optica*, ch. 1 "De natura lucis," margin: "Lucis encomium," Kepler 2:19.31-9. Kepler characterizes light as the principle of all that beautifies the world, the instrument of the Creator, the matrix (*matrix*) of animal faculties, and the bond (*vinculum*) of body and mind. For Kepler's gravity-aperçu, see the letter to David Fabricius (11 Oct. 1605), Kepler 15:240-80 (# 358), esp. 241.67-73; and *Astronomia nova* (1609), "Introductio," margin: "Vera doctrina de gravitate," Kepler 3:25.19-24.

²³See Kant's letter to Euler, 23. August 1749: "I dare to submit my tract to the judgment of a person, whose extraordinarily sharp mind is far more adept than others at leading this initial striving (*den Anfang der Bestrebung*) in these bad essays to the final and complete resolution of the disharmony (*Uneinigkeit*) among such great scholars." My translation. Not in Kant (1902ff.). For the original, see Harald-Paul Fischer, "Kant and Euler," *Kant-Studien* 76 (1985): 217. Compare Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, ed. and trans. A. Zweig (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1999): 45-6.

²⁴ See Martin Rees, *Just Six Numbers. The Deep Forces that Shape the Universe* (London and New York: Phoenix/Basic Books, 2001) 106. Rees refers to a 1999 ranking by the journal *Science*. The discovery was the effort of teams by Saul Perlmutter and Brian P. Schmidt, who measured supernovae, saw that they were dimmer than expected, and concluded that they were more distant than their redshifts suggest. After eliminating rival hypotheses, Perlmutter and Schmidt recognized that the cosmos had expanded more slowly in the past than previously assumed: cosmic expansion is now speeding up. See Saul Perlmutter et al., "Discovery of a Supernova Explosion at Half the Age of the Universe," *Nature* 391 (1998): 51-54 and Adam G. Riess et al., "Observational Evidence from Supernovae for an Accelerating Universe and a Cosmological Constant," *Astronomical Journal* 116 (1998): 1009-1038. Summarizing the discovery, Rees notes, "an unsuspected new force—a cosmic 'antigravity'—controls the expansion of the universe" (3). John D. Barrow, *The Book of Nothing* (London: Vintage, 2001) gives an account of this discovery and its background worth quoting in full:

“The quantum revolution [in physics] showed us why the old picture of the vacuum as an empty box was untenable. Henceforth the vacuum was simply the state that remained when everything that could be removed from the box was removed. That state was by no means empty. It was merely the lowest energy state available. . . . Gradually, this exotic new picture of quantum nothingness succumbed to experimental exploration. . . . Physicists discovered that their defensive definition of the vacuum as what was left when everything that could be removed had been removed was not as silly as it sounds. There *was* always something left: a vacuum energy that permeated every fiber of the Universe. . . . Last year [1998], two teams of astronomers used Earth’s most powerful telescopes together with the incomparable optical power of the Hubble Space Telescope to gather persuasive evidence for the reality of cosmic vacuum energy. Its effects are dramatic. It is accelerating the expansion of the Universe” (10-12).

²⁵Laozi’s *wanwu*, verse 1, is “ten thousand things.” It denotes everything, from noble gases to biospheres to minds. For Heidegger, *wanwu* is *alles Seiendes*, from *Zeug* to *Dasein*.

²⁶Laozi’s *you* means “to have, to be present, to exist, there is;” see Liang and Zhang # 2315: 727. A typical usage is in “*you meiyou*”—“*you,*” “you have it?”—“I have it.”

²⁷Momentum and energy are the quantities describing masses moving through space and time. In collisions, the values of momentum and energy differ before and after impact, but their sum remains the same. They form a union; momentum and energy (or “momenergy,” a term coined by J. A. Wheeler) hang together just like space and time do. Put differently, momentum-energy is the correlate to spacetime. Dynamically, momentum-energy is as fundamental as it gets: it is proportional to mass, it is conserved in the universe, and it is invariant in relativistic frames of reference. That matter “somehow” contains energy actually means that mass is momentum-energy. This is Kant’s force. A weak aspect of momentum-energy is gravity (noticeable only in very large masses), the organizing force of the cosmos. Kant’s force-space bond, in modern physics, is a bond of momentum-energy (gravitating mass) and spacetime. As John A. Wheeler puts it: mass grips spacetime, telling it how to curve; spacetime grips spacetime, transmitting curvature from near to far; and spacetime grips mass, telling it how to move. See J. A. Wheeler, *Gravity and Spacetime* (New York: Scientific American 1990) 3, 11-13, 114.

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Reconciling Coherentist and Reliabilist Intuitions: A Hybrid Account of Epistemic Justification

Graduate Essay Prize Winning Paper
of the 48th Annual Meeting of the
Florida Philosophical Association

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Introduction

In this essay, I present two thought experiments that respectively cast doubt on the adequacy of the coherentist and reliabilist approaches to epistemic justification. Next, I propose an account of justified belief that accommodates coherentist and reliabilist intuitions and avoids both difficulties. Finally, I test this account by measuring its verdicts against my intuitions concerning wishful thinking and induction and answer three objections to this account.

I should start by setting down the definitions of justified belief that I shall respectively count as coherentist (CJ) and reliabilist (RJ) in the present discussion:¹

CJ: S's belief B is C-justified just in case it is a member of a set of beliefs that combines in an optimal fashion the features of coherence, comprehensiveness and explanatoriness.

RJ: S's belief B is R-justified just in case B is produced by some token process P such that P is of a type that is reliable and P's being of that type is causally relevant to the production of B.

Tweddledum and Tweddledee

The following two scenarios, with respect to which CJ and RJ in turn issue intuitively inappropriate verdicts, raise some doubt concerning the adequacy of coherentism and reliabilism with respect to justification.

First, CJ is indicted by the following thought experiment: Suppose Tweddledum, a scientist, has an overall set of beliefs that combines in an optimal fashion the features of coherence, comprehensiveness and explanatoriness. This set contains a subset of beliefs T whose contents are

the propositions of a well-tested empirical theory, T , and the belief, B_T , that the conjunction of all the propositions in T is true. Now, suppose Tweedledum encounters some appropriately obtained, apparent empirical evidence that is such that, *ceteris paribus*, if Tweedledum were to believe that this apparent evidence is evidence that a given set of events occurred and B_T , his overall set of beliefs would become incoherent, and if Tweedledum were to believe that this apparent evidence is not evidence that this set of events occurred and B_T , his overall set of beliefs would remain coherent. Let us call 'E' the proposition that the given set of events occurred, ' B_E ' the belief that this set of events occurred, and ' $B_{\text{not-E}}$ ' the belief that this set of events did not occur. Suppose also that Tweedledum believes that the apparent evidence was gathered appropriately but does not have any additional beliefs about appropriate scientific procedures that would be inconsistent with either believing or disbelieving E. Tweedledum accepts $B_{\text{not-E}}$ and does not add any other belief to his overall set. By stipulation, his overall set of beliefs remains coherent. Further, it remains adequately comprehensive because it now includes a belief about E. It remains explanatory because not-E is entailed by T , where the entailment is explanatory in the sense that the truth of the well-tested empirical theory T provides a reason for rejecting E that could be cited as an explanation of the falsity of E. According to CJ, then, $B_{\text{not-E}}$ is C-justified. Intuitively, however, one would judge that, under such conditions, neither $B_{\text{not-E}}$ nor B_T is justified for Tweedledum. Rather, it seems that he should either accept E at face value and modify B_T accordingly, or disbelieve E for some appropriate reason other than his belief in the truth of T . It seems, then, that 'C-justified' and 'justified' denote distinct properties.

RJ, on the other hand, is indicted by the following thought experiment: Suppose Tweedledee, another scientist, believes that the same theory T is true. Suppose that Tweedledee's B_T is R-justified. Tweedledee encounters the same appropriately obtained apparent empirical evidence for E, whose truth is inconsistent with the truth of B_T . Suppose also that, if Tweedledee were to accept E, his belief B_E would be produced by some token process P_E of a reliable type and P_E 's being of that type would be causally relevant to the production of B_E in Tweedledee. Tweedledee accepts E and does not effect any further modification to his overall belief system. According to RJ, Tweedledee's B_E is R-justified. Intuitively, however, one would judge that B_E is not justified for him because it is inconsistent with his belief B_T . Instead, he should either accept B_E and replace B_T by a belief in some appropriately modified theory T^* , or reject B_E for some appropriate reason. It seems, then, that 'R-justified' and 'justified' denote distinct properties.

A New and Improved Account of Justification

Our discussion of these two thought experiments suggests an account of justification that is more in keeping with our intuitive responses to each case. It seems that in both cases we find that it

is appropriate to reject (or modify) an empirical theory because it conflicts with apparent empirical evidence, while it is inappropriate to reject apparent empirical evidence for the mere reason that it conflicts with an accepted empirical theory. CJ is not well suited for motivating the discrepancy between our intuitive assessment of the two options available to Tweedledum in the first thought experiment. Although the coherentist demands for comprehensiveness and explanatoriness seem tailored for this very sort of case, they ultimately fail to yield the appropriate verdict. Indeed, it is conceivable that if Tweedledum were unable to explain E away, he would—and should—replace T by T*, a theory of far lesser explanatory scope that is consistent with E, thus reducing the overall comprehensiveness and explanatoriness of his beliefs. In such a case, however, we should have to conclude that believing E and T* is not C-justified for Tweedledum. RJ, on the other hand, offers not only a criterion that enables us to reach an intuitively appropriate verdict, but also explains this verdict: Tweedledum's belief $B_{\text{not-E}}$ is not R-justified because taking our acceptance of empirical evidence as a basis on which to ground our epistemic economy regarding empirical matters is presumably generally reliable, while taking our acceptance of empirical theory as a basis on which to ground our epistemic economy regarding empirical matters is presumably generally unreliable. This, of course, is not to say that our theoretical beliefs should not be involved in our interpretation of empirical evidence. The claim is merely that our theoretical beliefs alone do not provide a sufficient justifying reason to deny apparent empirical evidence that conflict with them because doing so is generally epistemically unreliable.

However, in both cases we also find that merely accepting an empirical belief that is produced by a token of a causally relevant and reliable cognitive process-type does not guarantee that this belief is justified. In addition, such a belief should cohere with other beliefs that are accepted by the believer (either all of her beliefs, or some appropriate portion of them). While CJ captures this intuition, RJ does not. Indeed, in an attempt to accommodate this requirement, reliabilists would have to show that process-types that maximize coherence are generally reliable. In particular, they might argue that in the case of independently well-supported empirical theories facing apparent recalcitrant empirical evidence, process-types that result either in revising one's theory in the light of the evidence, or in explaining the evidence in a manner that is consistent with one's theoretical beliefs, are generally more reliable than process-types that result in holding inconsistent beliefs about the matter at hand. That this is so, however, is far from obvious. Indeed, it seems that process-types requiring that the coherence among one's beliefs be maximized are reliable provided that one adjusts one's beliefs so that they cohere with one's true beliefs, and unreliable otherwise. Such a reliabilist account of a positive coherence requirement is clearly much stronger than our intuitive notion, which merely asks that a justified belief cohere with some relevant subclass of one's beliefs, rather than some relevant class of one's true beliefs. Accordingly,

our revised account of justification will consider coherence as separate from the reliability requirement.

In an attempt to reconcile CJ and RJ with the intuitions discussed above, I propose the following hybrid definition of justification:

RCJ: S's belief B is RC-justified just in case

B is produced by some token process P such that P is of a type that is reliable and P's being of that type is causally relevant to the production of B, and

B is a member of a set of beliefs that combines in an optimal fashion the features of coherence, comprehensiveness and explanatoriness.

RCJ's verdicts line up with our intuitions concerning the two cases discussed above: We judge that Tweedledum's belief $B_{\text{not-E}}$ is not justified because it seems to have been produced by a token of the causally relevant and unreliable process-type "if some empirical evidence that P disagrees with the predictions of some believed well-tested empirical theory, simply deny that P." If Tweedledum's belief $B_{\text{not-E}}$ was indeed so produced, then it is not RC-justified. On the other hand, we judge that Tweedledee's belief B_E is not justified because, although it seems to have been produced by a token of the causally relevant and reliable process-type "if empirical evidence that P is appropriately obtained, believe that P," his continued belief in B_T results in the incoherence of his overall set of beliefs, and thus in both B_E and B_T being unjustified for him. According to RCJ, these beliefs also fail to be RC-justified for him. The courses of action that were intuitively suggested to both Tweedledum and Tweedledee were the following: Each should either believe $B_{\text{not-E}}$ for some appropriate reason other than B_T , or replace B_T with B_{T^*} , where T^* is some appropriate modification of T that is consistent with B_E . According to RCJ, both courses of action are also RC-justified, provided of course that the beliefs in question are produced by tokens of some causally relevant and reliable process type. According to RCJ, then, the recommendation is that believers acquire their beliefs via tokens of causally relevant and reliable process-types that ultimately maximize the coherence, comprehensiveness and explanatoriness of the believer's overall set of beliefs.

RCJ Tested: Wishful Thinking

In "What is Justified Belief,"² A. I. Goldman discusses various cases in which wishful thinking is a reliable cognitive process and yet results in beliefs that one would intuitively judge unjustified. The last case presents a scenario in which a benevolent lazy demon, who has so far been inactive, becomes involved in our world and starts arranging things so that all of our wishes come true. Although in this case, wishful thinking has become a perfectly reliable cognitive process in our

own world, why are we tempted nonetheless to call it unjustified? In order to answer this question, we need to understand wherein wishful thinking differs from appropriate thinking.

Let us first consider wishful thinking in the context of a world that is much like the one we normally take ourselves to inhabit—in particular, benevolent demon free—in order to explain what motivates our intuitive reaction to Goldman's case. The epistemic blameworthiness of wishful thinking obviously does not arise merely from letting one's wishes guide one's thinking. Indeed, if such were the case we should find ourselves compelled to criticize the thinker who lets her wish to discover truth guide her thinking. Rather, wishful thinking consists in letting one's thinking be guided by her wishes in a manner that either (i) leads her to believe that P when she does not possess sufficient evidence that P is true or (ii) leads her to believe that P when she possesses evidence that P is false. Goldman correctly stresses that under normal circumstances, wishful thinking is an inappropriate cognitive process because it is unreliable. However, I believe that in addition to being unreliable, wishful thinking is epistemically blameworthy because it tends to promote incoherence in our overall belief system.

That this is so is obvious in cases of type (ii) above. Indeed, in such cases the believer presumably has beliefs concerning the evidence that P is false which are incoherent with her belief that P. Should a believer engage in wishful thinking of type (ii) and modify her beliefs in a manner that maximizes the coherence, comprehensiveness and explanatoriness of her overall belief system and that is consistent with her believing P, however, it is no longer so clear that we should intuitively deem her belief that P unjustified. In particular, let us imagine that a believer does so in Goldman's benevolent demon-infested world in which wishful thinking is a reliable cognitive process. It is certainly no longer intuitively obvious that her belief that P is epistemically unjustified in such circumstances. If it is the case that adding a clause which safeguards coherence changes our intuitive response to the case at hand, then it seems that coherence is indeed a concern that motivates our original judgment. It is less obvious that wishful thinking of type (i) above always promotes incoherence in one's overall belief system. A threat to coherence does arise, however, in that evidence to the contrary of the culpable belief might come to be believed in the future, at which time the believer's overall belief system will be incoherent unless she revises her beliefs so as to maintain coherence. Generally, since there is no rational prohibition against incoherent wishing, letting one's wishing guide one's thinking is liable to threaten the overall coherence of one's belief system unless a special effort is made to maintain it. Let us imagine, once again, that a believer engages in wishful thinking of type (i) in a world where wishful thinking is a reliable cognitive process. If we add that all beliefs she acquires via such wishful thinking maximize the coherence, comprehensiveness and explanatoriness of her overall belief system, it is no longer so clear that we should intuitively deem that the beliefs in question are not justified.

This, in my opinion, is the reason why we intuitively judge that wishful thinking is inappropriate even in a case when it is a perfectly reliable cognitive process. Even if a benevolent demon were to become involved in our world, wishful thinking would tend to promote incoherence in our overall set of beliefs, once again most obviously so in cases of type (ii) above. Further, as noted above, the rational permissibility of incoherent wishing jeopardizes the overall coherence of our beliefs even in cases of type (i) above. For these reasons, wishful thinking is an inappropriate cognitive process even when it is reliable.

To conclude our reflections on wishful thinking, let us consider the following case: One can imagine that the very meddling of the benevolent demon might cause our world to be such that a believer who had a sufficiently large number of true beliefs about our world would have an incoherent overall belief system, so that coherence among one's beliefs could be maintained only through deliberate disbelief of discrepant empirical evidence, which is a species of wishful thinking. Some of the beliefs thus obtained could meet both requirements for RC-justification. Does this verdict accord with our intuitions? The case is a little confusing, partly because it seems inappropriate to say that the propositional attitudes at issue are "beliefs" in the usual sense of the term. It seems to me that an essential ingredient of believing that P consists in assigning to P the truth-value that one *perceives* P as having. In other words, it seems to me that a necessary condition for something to count as a belief is that it purports to represent something that is perceived as independent from our representing it. In such a benevolent demon-infested world, the propositional attitude resulting from deliberately denying discrepant empirical evidence seems to create rather than represent what is perceived as true, and for this reason seems not to count as a belief in the first place, let alone a justified belief. If so, the attitude in question is neither justified, nor RC-justified.

RCJ Tested Again: Induction

I now propose to test RCJ against my intuitions concerning induction. The well-known problem with induction is that for any appropriate inductive argument such as:

GREEN:

P(1) All emeralds so far observed are green

C(1) All emeralds are green,

one can construct an inappropriate counterpart such as:

GRUE:

P(2) All emeralds so far observed are grue

C(2) All emeralds are grue,

where ‘grue’ means green and observed on or before 12/31/2003 or blue and observed after 12/31/2003. The availability of a GRUE-like counterpart to any appropriate inductive argument is thought to show that induction is not a reliable cognitive process.

Let us start by consulting our intuitions regarding this matter. If there were no GRUE-like counterparts, when would belief in the conclusion of an inductive argument be justified? Would it be justified merely in virtue of being about the conclusion of an inductive argument of the form of GREEN? Consider the following inductive argument:

P(3) All rational creatures so far observed are humanoid

C(3) All rational creatures are humanoid

Clearly, belief in C(3) is not justified. I think that the reasons that belief in C(3) is not justified are (i) P(3)’s report concerns a sample that is too homogeneous to be an appropriate basis for induction and, more importantly in this context, (ii) there is no independent reason to accept C(3). Suppose now that the following were available to us: first, a powerful scanning device capable of detecting rational life and humanoid life within a range of a few thousand light-years whose result are reported in P(3); and, second, a justified (i.e., RC-justified) scientific theory of rationality of broad explanatory power that indicates that the material ingredients required for rationality are sufficient for humanoidness. If such were the case, I believe that one would intuitively judge that belief in C(3) is justified because it is a generalization based on an appropriately varied sample and independently supported by theoretical beliefs. Reflection concerning the reliability of induction seems to confirm these preliminary results. Indeed, although mere induction is clearly an unreliable cognitive procedure, induction that is based on an appropriately varied and appropriately sized sample and that is independently supported by a justified theory of appropriate explanatory power is likely to be quite reliable—provided, of course, that we spell out what we mean by appropriate. Let us call the cognitive procedure just outlined “reliable induction,” to be contrasted with “mere induction.”

Do GRUE-like counterparts throw doubt on the justifiability of beliefs acquired via reliable induction? It is clear that mere GRUE-like counterparts will not do. What we should need is a beefed up version whose conclusion is independently supported by some theory of appropriate explanatory power. The kind of theory required would need to be such that belief in it can be RC-justified, that is, belief in it can be a member of a set of beliefs that maximizes coherence, comprehensiveness and explanatoriness and can be produced by some token of a reliable and causally relevant type of cognitive process. Now, it seems to me that GRUE-like terms are not the kinds of word that can be used in explanatorily powerful theories for the same reason that makes them unsuited for induction. Nonetheless, suppose that a theory about which an RC-justified belief can be formed and which contained the term ‘grue’ is available and is suitable for predicting the color of emeralds (let us call this the grue theory). Then, it is highly unlikely that such a theory

would offer independent support to C(2) above (All emeralds are grue). If it did offer independent support to C(2), the grue theory would be inconsistent with the beliefs “All emeralds are green” and “No emeralds are blue.” This, of course, can be taken to incriminate the beliefs that all emeralds are green and that no emeralds are blue just as much as it incriminates the belief that the grue theory is true. If the belief system of the individual in question includes the former two beliefs, it is most likely that accepting them rather than the grue theory would be optimal for her in terms of the coherence, comprehensiveness and explanatoriness of her overall belief system. If so, the belief that the grue theory is true is not RC-justified for her after all. If her belief system does not include these two beliefs, then perhaps the belief that all emeralds are grue is RC-justified for her. In either case, then, it does not seem that we have found a GRUE-like counterpart that incriminates reliable induction. It is likely, then, that finding GRUE-like counterparts to reliable inductive arguments is far from easy. At this point, it seems appropriate to lay the burden of providing such a counterpart on the shoulders of the critic of reliable induction who claims that such counterparts can be constructed.

If our account is correct, then, it seems that our definition of RC-justification enables us to discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate induction in a manner that agrees with our intuitions and avoids GRUE-like traps. Since RC-justification has been shown to agree well with our intuitive verdicts, I propose to adopt the following as a definition of justification *tout court*:

S’s belief B is justified just in case:

B is produced by some token process P such that P is of a type that is reliable and P’s being of that type is causally relevant to the production of B, and

B is a member of a set of beliefs that combines in an optimal fashion the features of coherence, comprehensiveness and explanatoriness.

RCJ Defended: Three Objections

Appeal to reliability can do it all

I must now defend my proposal against obvious objections. First, someone might protest that one of Goldman’s reformulated reliabilist definitions of justified belief can accomplish as much as our RCJ above, namely,

(10) If S’s belief in p at t results from a reliable cognitive process, and there is no reliable or conditionally reliable process available to S which, had it been used by S in addition to the process actually used by S, would have resulted in S’s not believing p at t , then S’s belief in p at t is justified,³

(11) where a process is conditionally reliable when a sufficient proportion of its output-beliefs are true *given that its input-beliefs are true*.⁴

It seems that Goldman's (10) is likely to yield verdicts that agree with RCJ in many cases. Indeed, the process through which one would satisfy RCJ's second condition seems to fall within the type of conditionally reliable processes covered by the second clause in Goldman's (10). However, I think that the verdicts of Goldman's (10) and RCJ would diverge in some cases. Indeed, in the process of making one's overall beliefs meet RCJ's second condition, the relevant set of input beliefs is her current overall set of beliefs other than p (let's call this set Z). Her set of output beliefs satisfies RCJ's second condition if that set is:

- (i) p , if p given Z meets RCJ's second condition, or
if p given Z does not meet RCJ's second condition, either
- (ii) *not- p* , or
- (iii) p and Z^* , where Z^* is a set of beliefs such that, if Z^* were substituted for Z , p would meet RCJ's second condition.

Goldman's second clause is inappropriately more stringent than RCJ because it rules out (iii) above. Indeed, according to Goldman's second clause, the reliability of the process in question is conditional on the truth of Z . Accordingly, if $Z \cup \{p\}$ is incoherent, one can only come to believe p if she fails to employ any conditionally reliable process that would lead her to reject p .

It is possible that some reformulation of Goldman's (10) could yield verdicts that agree with RCJ. For example, one that changes the second clause of (10) to something like

... and there is no reliable or conditionally reliable process available to S *which is more reliable than all other reliable or conditionally reliable processes available to S* and which, had it been used by S in addition to the process actually used by S , would have resulted in S 's not believing p at t .

It seems that, thus reformulated, Goldman's (10) will yield verdicts that are in agreement both with RCJ and our intuitions. If so, RCJ would nonetheless retain one advantage over the reformulated Goldman's (10), namely, the advantage of greater simplicity.

Unholy internalist/externalist marriage

Second, it might be objected that even if RCJ does present the advantage of greater simplicity over Goldman's reformulated (10), the former is unacceptable because it strives to forge an unholy marriage between internalist and externalist requirements for justification. In defense of RCJ, I shall maintain that the marriage is not unholy and that it is routinely consummated in our intuitive judgments concerning justification. It seems to me that even if one were able to show that,

in most cases, beliefs that meet the two conditions for RC-justification were produced by a token of a causally relevant reliable process-type, the coherentist clause in our definition of RC-justification is not reducible to reliabilist concerns. As our earlier discussion of the benevolent demon-infested world shows, a reliably produced belief that fails to meet the coherentist condition for RC-justification is intuitively judged unjustified. I think that our intuitive judgments about the justificatory status of beliefs are motivated precisely by the two very different concerns that are expressed in the two requirements for RCJ-justification. That is, they are motivated by an internalist concern with whether the belief in question bears the appropriate relationship to other beliefs that are accepted by the believer *and* by an externalist concern with whether the belief was acquired in an appropriate way, i.e., in a way that is truth-conducive under normal circumstances. It is true that, given that a belief that is acquired in a way that maximizes appropriate relations among one's beliefs can be expected to be truth-conducive under normal circumstances, the coherentist condition can often be satisfied by merely satisfying the reliabilist condition. However, it seems to me that the coherentist concern is not reducible to the reliabilist concern because the former is interested primarily in assessing whether the cognitive methods used by the believer in acquiring the belief in question tend to generate beliefs that are appropriately related to the world while the latter is interested primarily in assessing how acquiring this belief affects the overall cognitive state of the believer. I hope that the foregoing discussion was successful in showing that both concerns routinely motivate our intuitive evaluations of the justificatory status of beliefs.

RCJ is too stringent

The third and last objection I wish to discuss is that, since most of us have at least some incoherent beliefs, most of our beliefs do not meet the first condition for RC-justification. Accordingly, RCJ is too stringent. I agree that the coherentist condition for RC-justification requires a more careful formulation in order to circumvent this last objection. An improved formulation of RCJ should meet the following two objectives. First, it should prevent the incoherence of a single belief from infecting all other beliefs. This could be achieved by circumscribing the requirement for coherence to a subset of beliefs that are more closely related to the belief whose justificatory status is at issue. Second, however, it should require some coherence among various subsets of beliefs. I am not certain how one can best meet these two seemingly conflicting desiderata. It might be that in most cases, the requirement that the belief in question maximize not only the coherence, but also the comprehensiveness and explanatoriness of the believer's belief system works well enough to bypass this last objection. I do not doubt, however, that pointed thought experiments can be constructed in which RCJ fails to satisfy one or the other of these desiderata. If it can be reformulated in a manner that circumvents this last objection, I believe that RCJ would offer a very satisfactory account of justification.

Notes

¹ I owe these definitions to Dr. Gene Witmer.

² A. I. Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?" *Epistemology*, eds. Ernest Sosa and Jaegwon Kim (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000) 340-353.

³ Goldman 351.

⁴ Goldman 347.

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**Towards a Procedural Deontology:
Desire and Transparent Contexts in the Humean Model of Motivation**

Winner of the Gerrit and Edith Schipper Undergraduate Award
for Outstanding Undergraduate Paper at the
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Introduction

There has recently been a great deal of debate in philosophy concerning the cogency of Hume's thesis that only a desire may constitute a moral motivation. Specifically, some have begun to wonder whether, in moral circumstances, a desire might take on a cognitive role, be motivated by a belief, or perhaps be identified as a desiderative belief or "besire"—that is, having elements common to a belief and a desire.¹ In what follows I contribute to the sparse pro-cognitivist literature by pursuing precisely this line. The main difficulty for the anti-Humean is to develop some theoretical space for such entities as desiderative beliefs given recent plausible characterizations of mental state types and their directions of fit. My analysis will consider such an argument and show that, as an argument against belief motivation, it runs into difficulties when one begins to trace a line from a presently motivated and motivating desire to a previous desire needed to motivate the first. More specifically, I will show that a Humean cannot avoid insisting on the instantiation of some rather morbid and unlikely desires. The argument against Humeanism leads directly to a more substantive understanding of desiderative belief and provides reasons that the concept is needed for a proper account of moral action.

The paper proceeds in four sections. The first section briefly frames the implications of the debate for practical reasoning in general. Here, I discuss the concept of action as well as the difference between a moral reason and a normative reason, and how these ideas affect a practical conception of morality. The second section of this paper gives an explication of Hume's views and how he arrives at them. With the third section comes the first main point of interest. Here I present Michael Smith's argument against the possibility of belief motivation. I then examine a case of conflict that arises with the operation of transparent contexts in general desires for the good. This conflict leads me to develop new conclusions about moral motivation in the final section,

specifically that desire is not alone in its motivational powers. Desiderative beliefs, so it is argued, do a better job of explaining how an individual's commitment to a value plays a part in moral reasoning and moral action.

Implications of the Debate for Practical Reasoning

Consider, for a moment, what is required to act intentionally. A person walking aimlessly through a park with no goal or purpose seems to fail as an example of one who intends to be at some specific point in the park at some precise time. A man being restrained and pinned to the ground after a gas station robbery does not intend to occupy such a position. A woman who lowers her feet into a murky pool of water filled with crabs does not intend to have her feet nibbled. Contrariwise, a man who removes one hundred dollars from his wallet and hands it across a counter in exchange for a product does seem to act intentionally. What is present in the last case and not present in each of the former is a distinct belief about an outcome of an action coupled with a desire for that outcome. One might also separate the two sets of actions in terms of a presence or a lack of motivation. The man who takes the money out of his wallet and hands it across the counter is motivated to do so by his desire for the product. The woman who dangles her feet in the water may have been motivated to cool her feet and if so, she intended to do precisely that, but she was certainly not motivated to have them nibbled by the crabs. Thus we say that if a person is motivated to do A, then there is some B such that the person intends that B come about, so long as the very same person believes that by doing A, B will happen.

The man who hands his money to the clerk has a reason to do so.² This is called a motivating reason since it is the man's desire for a certain product that motivates his handing the money to the clerk. However, it is important to distinguish this motivating reason from another sort of reason. Suppose the clerk is really just a fellow customer of the shop who accidentally wandered behind the counter. From his perspective, the man does not have a reason to give him the money. To such a person, it might appear as if the man were just giving away his money to any random passerby. This action would be judged from the outside as irrational and done without reason. It is in this spirit that philosophers have urged a distinction between a normative reason and a motivating reason. For the man at the counter certainly does have a motivating reason for his action. He desires a product and he believes that handing one hundred dollars to the man in front of him will bring it about that he has the product. However, he is not normatively justified in his action since the man to whom he is handing the money is not the type of man who will be able to satisfy the desired state of affairs.

The implications of this distinction between normative and motivating reasons yield grave consequences for a practical morality. In the above case, the man is motivated towards an

inappropriate action because of a false belief, and if that belief had been corrected, the action would have been adjusted to fit. But, in general, it would prove difficult to adjust the man's desire for the product unless he is convinced that there is something more desirable for which he should save his money. This difficulty shows itself more fully when applied to moral situations. Consider, for instance, the man who robbed the gas station. If one were to tell the man beforehand that he would be arrested, perhaps one could dissuade him from action, assuming he found the idea of jail deplorable. But if unable to instill him with this belief, what sort of work could any other belief do to prevent the action? Shouting, "Stealing is bad!" may work if the individual has some desire to be good, but otherwise, such a declaration appears to be of a normative category, and thus cannot essentially constitute a motivating reason for the man. This motivating reason is needed for the agent to act intentionally, and given the dual composition of a motivating reason—that is, the belief-desire pair constitutive of it—there is no clear way of instilling another with a motivating reason since there is no clear way of instilling another with a desire.

The foregoing account suggests that moral action is determined, by and large, through personal taste. Some person *s* might have a desire for B, and thus do A, but this has little bearing on *n*'s doing C because she desires D. Certainly, *s* might suggest that B is a better way to get to D, and so coordinate the actions of the two, or perhaps convince *n* that she misunderstands D and its undesirable nature, but there is no way for *s* to motivate *n* directly to not C but through a highly complex network of belief, persuasion and luck. Thus, assertions such as "D is bad," whether believed or not, will likely fall on deaf ears. This is what comes with a Humean view of moral motivation, because for the Humean, desire is constitutive of motivating reason. For the Humean, a person's belief that B is good, and that A-ing will get one to state B, is not enough to motivate that person to A. One must also have a desire to do good things for this particular belief to motivate.

But why should a belief not carry a certain motivational force? In day-to-day experience, it certainly seems as though beliefs provide motivating reasons for action. For instance, when the poor man on the street asks for a few dollars, one does not feel smitten with a desire to give the man money or even to see him do well. Rather, it would seem that a belief is present to the effect that, "This man could get more from these few dollars than I could." In the next section, Hume's argument against the accuracy of this description will be reconstructed, thus showing exactly why so many have found the idea of desire as constitutive of motivating reason so plausible.

Hume's Argument Against Motivational Beliefs

To gain a fine appreciation for the neo-Humean arguments for non-cognitivism, it will be instructive to examine the original classical Humean arguments for the position. The classical

account is more robust than the contemporary argument considered in the third section, so this section will help provide a deeper understanding of just what is at issue. Also, it will be interesting to see how little has changed since Hume's own arguments.

Hume considers the cognitive operations of the human mind as dealing with exactly two realms. Both uncover truth and falsity. What he calls *relations of ideas* are the cognitive processes that discover analytic a priori truths. The truths of mathematics and geometry are examples of this category under Hume's view, since these can be discovered and conceived in pure abstraction, and all truths of the systems follow by necessity given the fundamental axioms. *Matters of fact*, according to Hume, are synthetic and a posteriori. The apprehension of these truths requires information from experience. Some of Hume's own examples of truths in this category include ideas that represent relationships of contiguity, distance, identity, and causation. In the former case, that of matters of fact, the understanding is nothing more than a demonstrative tool and Hume rightly notes that "demonstration and volition seem upon that account to be totally removed from each other."³ In the latter case, the understanding does nothing more than piece together experiences, and this quality makes it quite different from the passions, which are not truth-seeking entities. As Hume puts it:

A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possessed with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five feet high. It is impossible, therefore, that this passion can be opposed by, or be contradictory to truth and reason; since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, considered as copies, with those objects which they represent.⁴

The above argument is intended to establish that passions cannot conflict with matter of fact reasoning and this is generally understood within the context of deliberation. When one deliberates over whether it is better to A or to B, one uses reason to determine which action will better satisfy a passion or the greatest number of passions. So, if Joe is deliberating about whether it is better to study for a test or to go out drinking with his buddies, the Humean account says that Joe will have exactly two desires—the desire to go drinking with his buddies and the desire to, say, do well in school—and Joe may reason that studying for his test will help bring it about that he does well in school, while going out to drink will do the opposite. So, it is not that Joe has, on the one hand, an inflamed passion to drink and a cognitive disapproval of it. Rather, Joe's faculty of understanding has revealed that beer drinking before a test night is a cause of test failure, and that test failure is, at least in part, identical with doing poorly in school. Joe does not have a desire to do poorly in school.

In fact, he has the opposite desire. So, what Joe experiences in this deliberation is not the contrary motivational forces of reason and passion. What he experiences is the disagreement between his desire to do well in school and his desire to go out drinking, as reason shows the former desire to be opposed to the latter.

But how does one account for the feeling one gets in these situations? For instance, it would be quite in keeping with common life for Joe to say to his friends, “Well, I really don’t think I should since I have a big test tomorrow,” and for Joe and his friends to take this as his reason for not going out, and even explanatorily sufficient for his subsequent actions. Is it really plausible that they could be completely deceived about the cause of his action? As discussed in section one, this is a normative reason, and for the Humean, normative reasons are never explanatorily sufficient for intentional action. Hume explains the phenomenon as follows:

It is obvious that when we have the prospect of pain or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or propensity, and are carried to avoid or embrace what will give us this uneasiness or satisfaction. It is also obvious, that this emotion rests not here, but, making us cast our view on every side, comprehends whatever objects are connected with its original one by the relation of cause and effect. Here then reasoning takes place to discover this relation; and according as our reasoning varies, our actions receive a subsequent variation. But it is evident, in this case, that the impulse arises not from reason, but is only directed by it. It is from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object: and these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience. It can never in the least concern us to know, that such objects are causes, and such others effects, if both the causes and effects be indifferent to us. Where the objects themselves do not affect us, their connection can never give them any influence; and it is plain that, as reason is nothing but the discovery of this connection, it cannot be by its means that the objects are able to affect us.⁵

So for the Humean, the appearance of reason as carrying some motivational force can be explained by the content of the cognitive state that reveals a certain action having, or being thought to have, a causal connection with some state of affairs that is desired by the agent. Where the content of the cognitive state would typically be regarded indifferently, the emotions expressed for the desired state of affairs “extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object.”

So, Hume’s proof for the motivational inertness of reason runs roughly as follows. Reason is representational, as it seeks to represent true states of affairs. The passions are nonrepresentational, as they are reflective impressions that stir an agent upon a perception. It is

impossible for any nonrepresentational entity to conflict with any representational entity; therefore, the passions cannot conflict with reason. Aversion or propensity towards any object arises from the prospect of pain or pleasure. When an agent feels the prospect of pain or pleasure associated with any object, this is a reflective impression, and thus, a stirring of the passions. Therefore, a stirring of the passions is required for an aversion or propensity towards any object. Since this aversion or propensity is all there is to motivation, it follows that only the passions can motivate, and further, that reason cannot contradict this motivation.

However, Hume's account is unsatisfactory insofar as he poses reason, a representational faculty, against the passions, a nonrepresentational one, while contemporary accounts consider the possible conflict of beliefs and desires—propositional attitudes that are both taken to have representational dimensions. A desire is always a desire that *P*, where *P* represents some state of affairs *X*. Beliefs have the same sort of representational dimension, so one must find a new way to express the disparity that prevents beliefs from carrying motivational weight. The following section considers an argument that does precisely that.

The Neo-Humean Argument

In "The Humean Theory of Motivation," Michael Smith presents an account of beliefs and desires, showing a disparity between their direction of fit with the world, and he thereby seeks to demonstrate the motivational inertness of belief. The argument is fairly simple and powerful, but as I will show, the resulting model runs into problems when one begins to ask questions about where certain desires come from and what sorts of mental states motivate them. I argue that the best way to avoid these problems is to allow some place for desiderative beliefs in a complete account of motivation.

In Smith's account, based on Anscombe's⁶ work, the principled difference between a belief that *p* and a desire that *p* is found in their direction of fit with the world. A belief that *p* is said to have a mental state to world direction of fit, since beliefs are mental states that seek an accurate representation of the world. Conversely, desires have a world to mental state direction of fit, since the role of a desire is to have the world match the propositional content of the desire. This account is intuitively appealing, but remains a bit loose for a thoroughgoing theory of motivation. Smith makes the distinction more formal by showing the counterfactual dependence of these mental states on perceptions to the contrary.

For the difference between beliefs and desires in terms of direction of fit comes down to a difference between the counterfactual dependence of a belief and a desire that *p*, on a perception that *not p*: roughly, a belief that *p* is a state that tends to go of

existence in the presence of a perception that *not p*, whereas a desire that *p* is a state that tends to endure, disposing the subject in that state to bring it about that *p*. Thus we may say, attributions of beliefs and desires require that different *kinds* of counterfactuals are true of the subject to whom they are attributed. We may say that this is what a difference in their directions of fit *is*.⁷

Thus one would explain the difference between Joe's belief that he has a purple house and his desire that he have a purple house by saying that, upon seeing that he has a green house, Joe would no longer believe that he has a purple one, but he would still desire that he have a purple one. Also, we construe this desire as a disposition to bring it about that the house is purple.⁸

It should be clear that this account preserves the spirit of Hume's own arguments while allowing similar representational properties for beliefs and desires. A belief and a desire can have exactly the same content, but because of the different functional roles played by each, the Humean can still argue for the motivational inertness of belief. This is easily carried out, claims Smith, because of the nature of a motivating reason. Motivating reasons share something very important with desires that threaten to establish the Humean theory of moral motivation, and eschew any hopes of a cognitive view of morality. Smith argues as follows:

. . . having a motivating reason just *is, inter alia*, having a goal. But what kind of state is the having of a goal? It is a state with which *direction of fit*? Clearly, the having of a goal is a state *with which the world must fit*, rather than *vice versa*. Thus having a goal is being in a state with the direction of fit of a desire. But since all that there is to being a desire is being a state with the appropriate direction of fit, it follows that having a goal just *is* desiring.⁹

Thus, Smith is able to conclude that having a motivating reason is having a goal and having a goal is having a mental state with the same direction of fit as a desire. Thus, since a world to mental state direction of fit is constitutive of a desire, it follows that desires are constitutive of motivating reasons. This excludes the possibility of having a belief that motivates, since as shown earlier, the direction of fit of beliefs is converse to that of goals and desires.

Smith goes on to say that it would be impossible for there to be a mental state with a bi-directional fit, since this would require that such a mental state both endure *and* go of existence in the presence of a perception that $\sim p$. But consider the following account of desiderative belief, a mental state that has a bi-directional fit with the world.¹⁰

(A) Joe believes that it would be nice if his house were purple.

Or more formally,

(A') (B) if (Joe has a purple house) then (there will be an additional good state of affairs) and (Joe's purple-house-painting caused this state of affairs).

Here, (B_i) is read “Joe believes that.” It is clear that this state would satisfy the requirement of a belief through its counterfactual dependence on a contrary perception, because one could imagine that if Joe were to see a computer-generated model of his house painted purple, and were he to see this as horribly unattractive, he would cease believing that it would be nice if his house were purple. However, in the absence of such a perception, it is quite plausible that this belief could motivate Joe to go and buy a few cans of purple paint; thus, it is a disposition to bring it about that he have a purple house. Smith suggests that such a belief has not been analyzed and broken down into its constituent parts. A proper analysis would show that Joe has a belief that having a purple house is a state of affairs that he desires. Thus, if he should find out that he does not desire to have a purple house, he will cease to believe that it would be nice to do so. The desire, which is the content of the belief in this case, is what motivates Joe to paint his house purple.

It should be clear that overcoming the Humean arguments for the motivational inertness of belief will be extremely difficult. Smith’s account is highly plausible, and it does seem to capture something essential about the contrary natures of standard beliefs and desires. Here, I suggest we stick with this Humean account of motivation for a moment and see where it takes us by performing a case study.

Consider Charlie, a lonesome farmer in a distant land. Ever since Charlie was a little boy, he knew he was going to be a farmer. He did not want to be a farmer, in fact, he wanted to be a painter, but in his country occupations were government mandated and his was decided before he was strong enough to pick a carrot. Although he did not like the idea of being a farmer, Charlie believed that his government was good and that they knew what was best for him, so he did not put up a fight. Now, when it comes time for Charlie the farmer to perform his first farming action, the Humean will say that he is motivated by his desire to obey the government, and that by farming, Charlie has temporarily satisfied that desire. However, this is not a good enough explanation since the question still remains as to why Charlie desires to obey his government. According to our story, Charlie desires to obey his government because he believes that they command good actions. So far, this poses no problem for the Humean account, since one need only say that Charlie desires to do good actions. Once this is established, it is quite clear that Charlie has a motivating reason to farm in virtue of his desire, and thus his goal to do good actions, and that a relatively short chain of beliefs connects the action to the goal. But consider this link of the chain—where (D_c) is read “Charlie desires that”:

(B) (D_c) (Charlie obeys the government)

Does (B) provide the most appropriate phrasing of Charlie’s desire? The answer must be no, since it does not allow for clean syllogistic reasoning from his motivating reason of desiring to do good

actions to the performance of his first farming action. To see that this is so, we need only note the difficulty in arriving at (3) below from premises (1) and (2).

- (1) (Dc) (Charlie does good actions)
- (2) (Bc) (government commands) is a subset of (good actions)
- (3) (Dc) (Charlie obeys the government) (?)

It might appear as though what is needed here is a premise claiming that obeying one's government and doing what one's government commands are one and the same, and that this is obtained easily enough. However, this is not what is needed. What is needed is a premise to the effect that a desire to obey one's government is the same as a desire to do what one's government commands. This is not obtained so easily since the proposition, "Charlie desires that he does what his government commands," which would supply a valid conclusion, must be read with a transparent context.

So,

- (C) (Dc) (Charlie does what his government commands)

should be read as,

- (C') Charlie desires that p, where p is determined by Charlie's government.

By this reading, Charlie desires that p, where p could be anything from "Charlie goes fishing on Saturday, and afterwards helps Joe paint his house purple" to "Charlie throws himself from a bridge." Who would want to ascribe these desires to Charlie? The ascription seems unavoidable so long as one assumes the Humean position that all action must eventually lead back to a desire. One says that "Charlie desires the good and believes that the government commands it," and anything follows for Charlie's desires. In this case,

$$\mathcal{A}:\{C \text{ fishes on Saturday, } C \text{ jumps from a bridge}\} \subset B:\{\text{government commands}\}$$

so Charlie desires everything in set \mathcal{A} .

Unfortunately, this looks like the best way to unravel the chain of reasoning from Charlie's action to his goal, and so (B) should be replaced with (C) as the conclusion of Charlie's deduction. But is it really plausible to suppose that Charlie could desire his own death or even something worse? This seems to be a natural consequence of the Humean position once one begins to ask questions about desires motivated by other desires. My own opinion is that transparent contexts and desires do not mingle very well. I imagine this sort of multi-level motivation is present in nearly all moral considerations, since such deliberations typically rest on a value chain and, under the Humean view, this value chain must be undermined by a very general desire to do good or to be good. In the next section, I will propose an alternative conception that does not result in Charlie's accidental desire for his own self-annihilation.

Suggestions for a New Model of Belief Motivation

The argument in the third section was intended to show why it might be profitable to allow room for desiderative beliefs as motivational entities in a multi-level motivational model. However, the argument is incomplete insofar as it does not offer a positive account of what desiderative beliefs can do for a theory of motivation. Rather, taken by itself, the argument might be seen as evidence for the inconsistency of human desire construction, and perhaps even for the inability for any motivational theory to account for such a random process. One might suggest, for instance, that analysis can only proceed for a limited number of levels. In what follows, I will provide a more substantive model for desiderative belief motivation.

First, I would like to clarify what I take to be Charlie's attitude when he hears of the government's plan. I do not think we should think of him as being unmotivated to jump off of the bridge, though I do think it would be wrong to suppose that he desires that state of affairs. That this motivation may be present should be clear if we imagine that the government has captured Charlie, and through complex surgical methods, removed all of his desires and beliefs except for his belief that the government commands only good actions. When surgery is complete, the prime minister says, "Charlie, go jump off of a bridge." At this point, Charlie forms the belief that it would be good to jump off of a bridge, and I imagine him doing so, though nothing depends on this intuition.

However, quite a bit does depend on just how desiderative beliefs motivate, so it will be necessary to explicate this. As I argued in the third section of this paper, transparent contexts and desires about "the good" do not mix well, but insofar as people have a tendency to objectify value, it would appear that desiderative belief and transparent contexts work quite nicely together. First, consider a mundane non-moral case where Joe believes that all fish live in the water.

(Bj) (all fish) \subset (water-dwelling creatures)

Thus Joe also believes,

(Bj) (bass, trout, salmon) \subset (water-dwelling creatures)

We can say this of Joe because the bass, trout, and salmon are types of fish and the very property of "fish-ness" requires that those who have it live in the water. Joe knows this and he thereby *commits* himself to the belief that whatever fish we discover in the future will be water-dwelling creatures. Perhaps someday, someone will discover a tree-dwelling fish that has gills and a refillable water-sack from which to breathe. Suppose that Joe hears of this fish, without hearing *of* the fish *that* it is a fish, but he comes to believe *of* the fish *that* it is a tree-dweller. According to the popular view of metaphysical necessity regarding natural kinds¹¹ we will have to regard Joe as temporarily holding

contradictory beliefs, but once confronted with this inconsistency, we can rest assured that Joe will remedy the situation by adapting his belief about fish to the following:

$$(\exists x) (Fx \cdot \sim Wx)$$

Now my proposal is that desiderative beliefs work in a similar way. Whether correct or not, when people use the word “good” in the moral sense, they mean to pick out some objective property. The fact that moral goodness might not be an objective property does not matter for this analysis. What matters is that when Charlie believes of the government’s commands that they are good, as we should say in the *de re* formulation, he makes a certain *extensional commitment*. It is interesting that the *deontic* notion of commitment should turn up here, since contexts in which people defer to a higher power for their moral beliefs are fairly pervasive. Consider church-goers who adopt their preacher’s interpretation of a difficult and nebulous text; or young adults who, not settled into their own political views, adopt their parents’ stance on controversial issues like abortion and argue for them outright. More positively, consider the torn individual who, being forced to make a difficult decision, says to herself “I will figure out which of these is the right thing to do.” When she finally makes the decision her criteria will be finding the property of *rightness*. Call this extensional commitment to the unseen moral answer *procedural deontology*. Now, supposing for a moment that objective value does exist, we call it “the oasis of the good,” and adopting the popular phraseology “the magnetism of the good” leads the agent to engage in procedural deontology, and this, upon discovering to what one is committed, leads to action. Supposing that objective value does not exist, we can perfectly well imagine “the mirage of the good,” and this is no less magnetic.

Thus, my understanding of a desiderative belief is not one that requires an explicit desiring or wanting of the state of affairs, but it does require some commitment on behalf of the agent to bring that state of affairs about. This personal commitment is often parallel to the normative reasons that, by the Humean account, provide no motivating reason for the agent, but with one important caveat. For a normative reason to provide motivation for the agent, the agent must believe that it expresses a moral truth. We then develop the following normative to motivating reason conversion principle:

(DP): N at *t* constitutes a motivating reason for S to *A* at *t* if and only if S believes at *t* that it would be good if *X*, where *X* is the state of affairs expressed by N, and S *A*-ing at *t*, is required to bring it about that *X*.

Hence we can also see that, while this account does require Charlie to have some motivation to throw himself from a bridge should he continue to believe that this is the right thing to do, we should also note that, upon perceiving that the government would like him to do this, his belief that the government commands only good actions may well go of existence—in which case Charlie would be left without motivation. This can happen when the former belief encounters, for instance,

a belief that it is not good for governments to require their citizens to jump from bridges. So, we can see that by this account, desiderative beliefs are more malleable motivational entities in a broad moral system than Humean general desires for good. The Humean route leads to over-commitment on behalf of the agent, while the desiderative belief route allows for cognitive correction of false desiderative beliefs. In other words, a desiderative belief can turn out to be false and believed by the agent as such, while a desire cannot.

In conclusion, I would like to note two cases in which desiderative belief shows itself in the phenomenology of motivation. First, it is difficult to reconcile the Humean account with what happens introspectively in cases of strength of will. Desiderative beliefs, on the other hand, explain the phenomenon quite nicely. When one chooses to stay home and study rather than to go out for a drink, one feels as if she has made the right decision, not the more desired one. In retrospect, an agent in such a situation might say that what she really wanted was to go out drinking, though it would have benefited her more to stay home and study. Second, and I think this aspect is more powerful, the phenomenon of obligation squares quite well with my account of desiderative belief. When one feels that it his duty to, say, contribute some amount of money to a charity, it is very difficult to discern any desire that might constitute the underlying motivation. Even if there is some desire buried deep within the psyche, it is nearly impossible to imagine that this desire somehow outweighs desires to spend the money elsewhere. What appears to motivate in this circumstance is the belief that parallels the normative requirement. For, if this belief were motivationally inert the scales would have to be tipped in favor of the stronger desires. These considerations, in addition to the conceptual points regarding difficulties with general desires in a reasoning chain, and the more plausible results that accompany their replacement by desiderative beliefs, should show where the latter type of mental state is vital to an accurate theory of motivation. Contrary to Hume, I take it that their place is reserved quite close to the very center of our moral concerns, and that they provide a means to moral correction through rationality and reason.

Notes

¹ David Lewis and John Collins offer objections to the notion of a “besire” from the standpoint of quantitative and nonquantitative decision theory respectively. Their rejection of besires stems from a failure of the attitudes to conform to the proven models of decision theory. Huw Price offers rebuttals from within the paradigms, but my own intuition is that if these attitudes exist and can improve our theoretical model of human moral motivation, then so much the worse for decision theory. See David Lewis, “Desire as Belief,” *Mind* 97 (1988): 323-332; John Collins, “Belief, Desire, and Revision,” *Mind* 97 (1988): 333-342; and Huw Price, “Defending Desire-as-Belief,” *Mind* 98 (1989): 119-127.

² See Donald Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes,” *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001).

³ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1961) 374.

⁴ Hume 376.

⁵ Hume 374-375.

⁶ See G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1957).

⁷ Michael Smith, “The Humean Theory of Motivation,” *Mind* 96 (1987): 54.

⁸ For an interesting and strong objection to the notion of a desire as a functional disposition, see P. Pettit and H. Price, “Bare Functional Desire,” *Analysis* 49 (1989): 162-169.

⁹ Smith 54.

¹⁰ See especially Philip Pettit, “Humeans, Anti-Humeans, and Motivation,” *Mind* 96 (1987): 530-533.

¹¹ See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972). See also Hilary Putnam, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning,’” *Mind, Language, and Reality: Philosophical Papers Vol. 2*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979). The arguments should be familiar enough. Recall that in Putnam, the Frege-Carnap thesis that two terms cannot differ in extension without differing in intension is shown to fail through two logically possible worlds— W_1 , the actual world and W_2 , a counterfactual world—which are absolutely identical except with regard to the microstructure of water. In the actual world the microstructure of water is H_2O , and in the counterfactual world it is XYZ. This affects beliefs in the above way when one accepts that extension constitutes a part of the meaning of a rigid designator term. Of course, one accepts that the extension constitutes a part of the meaning because we would not want to say that “water” in the actual world and “water” in the counterfactual world have the same meaning.

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Book Symposium

Frank C. Richardson, Blaine J. Fowers and Charles B. Guignon, *Re-envisioning Psychology: Moral Dimensions of Theory and Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

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I am very pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words about *Re-envisioning Psychology*. The book is a collaborative effort by three authors: Frank Richardson, a professor in Educational Psychology at The University of Texas at Austin, Blaine Fowers, in Educational and Psychological Studies at the University of Miami, and myself, the token philosopher. What we share is a belief that psychology in particular and the social sciences in general can be effectively criticized and rethought from the standpoint of what is called “philosophical hermeneutics.” The loosely knit approach to philosophy called “hermeneutics” is primarily a continental movement, developed over the last hundred years or so by such thinkers as Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, and Paul Ricoeur. But a number of English-speaking philosophers also have either explicitly or indirectly aligned themselves with this movement—I am thinking of Charles Taylor, Bert Dreyfus, Alasdair MacIntyre, Thomas Kuhn, Michael Walzer, Georgia Warnke and others.

The core assumption of hermeneutics is that human beings must be understood as always caught up in webs of significance of their own making. Humans are beings for whom things *matter* or have *relevance* in various ways. So any attempt to make human phenomena intelligible in a reductionist way by describing them in statements referring only to physical objects and causal interactions must fail to account for what is peculiarly human about our lives together. One of the things we criticize in our book, therefore, is reductionism in psychology. Hermeneutic thinkers also recognize that, insofar as contexts of significance emerge and evolve over the course of history, any attempt to understand human phenomena must be sensitive to the historical and cultural context in which those phenomena show up. So a crucial aim of our book is to develop what has been called a “historically situated psychology.” That is, we think it is important for practitioners in the field of psychology to recognize that human agency, as well as our attempts to make sense of human agency, are always situated in and so reflect a particular historical constellation of meanings. It follows that the dream of discovering timeless, unchanging truths about humans on a par with the promised findings of the physical sciences is made problematic. What we need are not universally valid

generalizations, but concrete descriptions and narratives about historically and culturally situated humans winding their ways through a world of meanings.

In our book, we try to understand both our contemporary self-understanding and the enterprise that tries to make sense of it—psychology—as products of what has been called the “rise of the modern worldview.” The outlook of modernity is a framework of ideas that emerged slowly and fitfully from the time of the Renaissance through such pivotal figures as Montaigne and Shakespeare, up to the ways of thinking that dominate the present day. The most important development in this story is, of course, the Enlightenment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Hermeneutic theorists point out that the emergence of the modern worldview has led to an outlook very different from that characteristic of earlier periods in Western thought and quite different from the worldviews of cultures such as those found in traditional Africa, China, Japan and India.

One of the central assumptions built into the modern worldview is what Robert Bellah and his colleagues, in *Habits of the Heart*, call “ontological individualism.”¹ The term “individualism” has a number of meanings, but for Bellah et al. it is used to refer to a specific conception of the nature of human reality. Ontological individualism is the view that human beings at the deepest level are discrete, self-encapsulated individuals, distinct centers of experience and will, with no inherent or defining relations to anything outside the boundaries of their own skin. On such a view, social groups—what are typically called “associations”—must be regarded as products of purely contractual arrangements entered into by individuals for their own personal purposes. This conception of the nature of human existence is evident in Hobbes and Locke, and you can also see how it is presupposed in Adam Smith’s project of laying the theoretical foundations for capitalism. It is a conception reinforced by the tendency, found in Descartes and his successors, to see the human self as a knowing subject only contingently related to a surrounding world.

Ontological individualism is so deeply engrained in our thinking that it has come to seem self-evident in our thinking today. Our view of reality, in the broadest sense of that word, is based on a distinction made between, on the one hand, subjects of experience, regarded as autonomous and self-defining units, and, on the other hand, a world of material objects. Most hermeneutic theorists agree that achieving this distinctively modern conception of reality has brought tremendous gains. It carries with it the distinctively modern ideal that Martin Schönfeld speaks of in his Presidential Address published in this volume, that is, the Enlightenment ideal Kant formulated with the injunction, *Aude sapere!* Dare to know! Have the audacity to question and find out for yourselves! The emphasis on individuals courageously questioning age-old traditions, superstitions, and prejudices reflects the spirit of anti-authoritarianism that runs through the whole modern period ever since the Enlightenment. The commitment to emancipation has driven the commitment to religious freedom in America, the anti-slavery movement, the fight for women’s suffrage, and the

extension of rights to people of diverse ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations. No one questions the good effects that the modern outlook has brought in its wake.

At the same time, however, hermeneutic theorists have noted some baleful and generally unnoticed side effects of the new, modern way of thinking. In our book, we suggest that the ascendancy of the self-responsible individual has been accompanied by pervasive feelings of isolation, as well as alienation from nature, others and even one's own self. It has been argued that this extreme ontological individualism is also at the root of some of the most distressing psychological problems in the contemporary world—for example, narcissistic personality disorders. In addition, hermeneutic thinkers have noted that this individualistic outlook seems to be connected to another fundamental problem in modern life. Given this view of life, it becomes very hard to see how *moral commitments* can be binding or authoritative for individuals. If it is the case that I am an absolute center of agency and decision and nothing is binding for me unless I *choose* that it be binding for me, then it seems that the commitments I make are on shaky grounds. For my commitments are something I opt into, and so they are something I can just as easily opt out of. Nothing holds me to a commitment except my will, and that will is obviously changeable given different vicissitudes of circumstance and mood.

The problem ontological individualism poses for morality is highlighted in a famous quotation from Iris Murdoch we use in our book. She describes the negative impact of ontological individualism in this way:

Philosophy . . . has been busy dismantling the old, substantial picture of the “self,” and ethics has not proved itself able to rethink this concept for moral purposes. The moral agent then is seen as an isolated principle of will, or as a burrowing principle of consciousness, inside, or beside, a lump of being which has been handed over to the other disciplines. . . . On the one hand a Luciferian philosophy of adventures of the will, and on the other natural science. Moral philosophy, and indeed morals, are thus undefended against an irresponsible and undirected self-assertion which easily goes hand in hand with some brand of pseudo-scientific determinism²

As this quotation suggests, the ontology that is taken as self-evident in contemporary life is not only morally problematic, it is one that leads to deep tensions. For it seems to offset an unquestioned faith in free will against an equally deep-seated commitment to scientific determinism.

Throughout the course of our book, we discuss a number of problems that arise within the distinctively modern conception of the self and its relation to the world. These include the loss of a sense of belongingness, a reduced ability in modern circumstances to feel indebted to anything outside oneself, and a loss of willingness to participate in public life or care about the traditions of one's own historical culture (where the word “tradition” is used in MacIntyre's sense to refer to an ongoing argument about what is really important in life).³ Philip Rieff has described the condition

of modern life as one in which we have been freed to choose, only to find that we then have no choices worth making.⁴ The radical autonomy we have gained through modern individualism has been purchased at the price of losing any strong sense of community or involvement in the larger whole.

Our worry is about what this image of life might entail in terms of what people actually experience in their relationships. One of my co-authors, Blaine Fowers, is a specialist in marriage counseling, and some of my favorite chapters in this book consist in his accounts of the shortcomings of contemporary marriage counseling. In his attempt to work out a historically situated psychology, Fowers considers some of the recent historical accounts of how the experience of marriage has evolved in the last couple of centuries. According to these accounts, in earlier periods in Western history, and in fact well into the nineteenth century, marriage was experienced in terms of what is called the “companionate marriage.” At the heart of a marriage is companionship between two people functioning together in a wider setting. In these earlier periods, the basic unit of social life was the *household*, a form of life in which man and woman worked side by side, usually in the context of an extended family that included grandparents and children and aunts and orphaned nephews and so forth. Marriage was experienced as a shared enterprise aimed at sustaining the life of the household.

With the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, however, the traditional household came to be replaced by a new social unit, what we today experience as the *family*. In this new social structure, men and women are segregated into distinct social roles. They are to a great extent cut off from the wider extended family, and are confined to living units made up of two adults and two little ones, all caught up in what Rieff calls a “not so civil war.” In the context of this new social unit, marriage has come to be thought of in terms of what Bellah and his colleagues call “therapeutic contractualism.” The basic idea of therapeutic contractualism is this: I agree to marry you and to remain with you so long as I continue to feel good about myself and feel that I am fulfilled and am growing in the relationship. If at any time it is apparent that I am not reaping those benefits from the marriage, then I am free to cancel the contract and opt out of the marriage. Those are the terms of the contract.

It should be obvious that this contemporary conception of marriage presupposes the understanding of the human condition of ontological individualism. Marriage is an association entered into by two individuals that is based on contractual understandings. What Blaine Fowers points out here is how this understanding of marriage can have certain bad consequences. People enter into marriage with a set of expectations that will be hard to satisfy. Marriage is all about one’s own feelings of happiness, fulfillment and well being as an individual. It is hard to see, on this interpretation, how the marriage unit is part of a larger cultural reality, even when children are involved. It is hard to see that the marriage is not just about a couple of individuals who agree to

stick together so long as it is to their benefit as individuals. In older ways of experiencing things, marriage could be seen as a sort of organic unity with a life of its own in a wider environment. But this older way of experiencing things is closed off to ontological individualism, for this tells you that reality consists of nothing other than essentially isolated individuals who have no real or inherently binding connections to one another.

The hermeneutic outlook formulated in our book makes it possible to see an approach to marriage counseling that is historically situated. When Blaine meets with couples, he talks to them about how they understand marriage. Surveys have shown that most people in America think they already know what marriage is all about; they think of it according to the therapeutic contractualist model. On this view, the aim of counseling should be to enable individuals to figure out how to make it work for themselves. Blaine's approach is to get people to move toward alternative ways of thinking about marriage. Without being explicit about what he is doing, he talks about the Aristotelian conception of *philia*, saying, "Here is another way of understanding a relationship between two people." He evokes conceptions of love or friendship from the *Nicomachean Ethics* or ideas from other cultures and historical periods. In the course of these conversations, it becomes clear that, although most people initially think of marriage in contractualist and individualist terms, they nevertheless have access to deeper resources of understanding that lie beneath of surface of those initial responses. This is what Bellah, et al. refer to when they say that beneath the "first language" of individualism, people have access to a "second language," built on civic humanist and biblical ideals, in which they can articulate a sense of their lives as deeply connected to the lives of others. Seeing their lives and their relationships in the light of these older ideals, couples often can achieve a richer and more enduring sense of what marriage is. This is not to say, of course, that all married couples should stick it out no matter what. If the marriage is miserable, then it probably should be left behind. But it does show that sometimes people can find new resources for understanding through a historically situated approach.

Blaine Fowers' approach to marriage counseling provides one example of the concrete practical implications of the hermeneutic outlook. Another practical application can be found in the way it enables people to find meaning in life where before they had encountered only meaninglessness. Frank Richardson has spent years as a practicing therapist, and tells the story of a client who was experiencing a deep depression. This man could see no reason to go on living. He was very successful in his work, he had a wife and children, and so on. He had considered devoting his life to helping his children, but then decided that that would be co-dependent and enabling. As a result, he felt a pervasive sense of futility; all he could see in his life was hopelessness and pointlessness.

The way Frank dealt with this man was to ask him, "Do you ever feel deeply about anything?" The man thought for quite a while and finally said, "You know, although it makes me

feel foolish to admit it, when I go to baseball games and they play the national anthem, I sometimes feel tears welling up in my eyes.” Frank zeroed in on this one vestige of commitment and care, taking it as a key to opening this person to a range of other things he cared about. By making clear how such commitments are always already there, part of our being-in-the-world, the man came to see that there are things of which he felt a part that were not just matters of arbitrary choice. Through a therapy that involved gaining ever deeper insight into the resources of meaning embedded in the historical culture in which we are rooted, the man was able to find reasons to go on living.

Another benefit of the hermeneutic approach is that it expands our sense of what psychological counseling should produce. It enables us to see that what is therapeutically effective is not a scientific explanation of behavior, but rather narratives that convey intelligibility and make things clear to people. An important branch of hermeneutics is narrative theory. In an essay titled “Narrative Explanation in Psychotherapy,” I have tried to figure out how narrative works in the therapeutic process.⁵

I could go on further about narrative theory, but instead will say one last thing. One of the central works we rely on in our book is Jerome Bruner’s *Acts of Meaning*.⁶ Bruner points out in this book that it is essential to understand humans as beings for whom things have meaning—that humans are interwoven with a world in which things have significance. The best way to get clear about this background of significance is not through the sorts of reductionist accounts characteristic of the natural sciences, but rather through what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls “thick description.”⁷ In this sort of description, you use your own sense of what is important and what things mean in order to gain insight into how the other person encounters the world. I know that, put baldly, this view is not very clear or satisfying. But the idea of developing a deeper sense of the complexity and density of real life situations is all part of our attempt to emphasize the idea of *situated freedom*, freedom that is embedded in a context that defines what sorts of choice make sense. The vision of autonomous agency we are working toward is that of what political theorists call *positive liberty*, a freedom *to* or *for* doing what is genuinely worth doing, not freedom understood a *negative liberty*, mere freedom *from* constraints.

Discussion

Audience Member: I have been preoccupied with a statement that you made concerning radical individualism, namely, that nothing is binding unless I choose for it to be and that if I am the sole determinant of what I am bound by, of what I find valuable, then I can always choose to opt out. I remember that there was a quotation from Mill in your book and this was quoted disapprovingly—

“Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest.”⁸

Guignon: I can’t imagine disagreeing with that.

Audience Member: My point here is, what is the alternative? How is it that we become bound by things, aside from compulsion or force, unless one chooses them? And if one doesn’t choose them, if one is simply compelled, is one really bound by them? Is there any other way to somehow take on a set of values?

I also have a second concern, best illustrated by a specific case. I got home very late last evening. On my message machine, was a message from my mother. The message from my mother started out, “Hi sweetheart, I’ve been trying all week. Beep.” The tape was full. My mother has just recently moved to Florida. She is in remission now from ovarian cancer. I hadn’t talked to her all week. There was also a message from a close friend of mine from graduate school. Same thing, “I haven’t heard from you. Why don’t you call me? Don’t you like me anymore?” Is it my sense of individualism that is the problem here? Are the people I care about suffering because I am somehow too taken with the idea of rugged individualism?” This doesn’t strike me as the correct diagnosis. Instead, it seems the problem resides in my membership in different communities. I share a community with my colleagues. This community has both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. It’s not just a paycheck, but has some intrinsic meaning. I have a community with my family—in fact, several different communities, as there have been divorces and so forth. I have a community with my friends. I have to be able to choose autonomously how to navigate through all of this or I can’t participate. But, by definition, I’m part of a collective with my family, with my mother. I stand in a relation to her, a relation that no one else in this world does. It is because I see myself as an individual that I see myself in relation to her as something that has value. The same holds true regarding my relationships with my colleagues, with my friends. It is simply a matter of overlapping communities with sometimes conflicting demands. This seems to me a more appropriate diagnosis of the problem than to say that the problem resides in individualism. Perhaps you could comment on that?

Guignon: One of the central ideas of hermeneutics is the idea of historical and cultural situatedness or belongingness. The point is that, as we grow up in the world, we grow up into a dense, rich cultural context where there are already practices in place, practices that embody understandings of what things mean that have evolved over extended periods of time. These understandings always embody some sense of what is really worth pursuing, of how people should be treated, of what levels of importance can be assigned to things, and so on. So anyone who grows up into an

established culture has already absorbed a tacit, perhaps inchoate background of understanding of what life is all about. It is true that this background of understanding is contingent in the sense that it could have been different from what it is. But it is nevertheless binding on us in this sense: the collection of traditions that inhabit us tends to be binding because it is not something that we simply pick out from a smorgasbord of possibilities, but something that is incorporated into us as we grow up into the world. Its power lies in its concrete embodiment in our lives.

One of the great things about becoming a mature individual is that you can start to objectify or thematize bits of this background sense and reflexively ask yourself whether you still want to sustain these particular involvements that you have internalized. You can ask, for example, whether you want to go on being a Catholic or would rather be an atheist, whether you want to hold to the New England customs you grew up into, and so forth. What hermeneutic theory insists on, however, is the fact that you can only evaluate and question some particular set of self-understandings from the standpoint of other commitments that are taken as steady. There is no way to make sense of the idea of an “I” or a self that somehow can step outside of *all* attachments and traditions in order to put them all in question at once. The modern conception of self as a detached subject with no ties to anything creates the illusion that such a standpoint of total critique is possible. To say that we are always already enmeshed in a shared background of understanding and evaluation is to say that there are a number of traditions that intersect in us, and that we have internalized these without being able to be explicitly aware of them. As reflective, mature people, we can prioritize different commitments and demands. But this is always done from *within* a background of concerns that are crucially important to us because they make us the people we are.

What is necessary is to see that there are two dimensions of life that play a role simultaneously. There is the dimension of belongingness, embodiment, embeddedness, which provides us with the standpoint or orientation for our actions. But there is also the dimension of mature reflection and autonomous choice available to us as reflective beings. It is up to us to make decisions about how the things we care about are going to play a role in our own life stories. What we are arguing against in our book is the danger that people will lose sight of the dimension of embeddedness and embodiment and start thinking that it is all just a matter of choices being made by a disengaged subject.

Audience Member: You talk about individualism being a risk. However, I think the challenge for the next few decades is actively to strive to become more able to distance ourselves from our communities and traditions. We speak as a member of a “we” that has to go to war with a “they.” This is very dangerous. We have to get to the level where we can make individual choices. Our “us” attitude is dangerous to the planet. We need to admit how little we live like individuals now.

Guignon: That's a very important point. From my standpoint, what you are pointing toward is a cosmopolitan ideal that was a crucial part of the Enlightenment. We are constantly expanding our sympathies outward. The ideal of freedom, for example, came to be expanded from something that was given only to white male property owners to African-Americans, to women, and so on. So there is this ideal of greater inclusiveness. But this has also been criticized as leading to assimilationism.

Audience Member: I was disappointed that there wasn't *Habits of the Heart Part II* in which there was an analysis of ontological corporatism. I think of one of your mentors, Heidegger, and his explicit decrying of the individual in the Enlightenment and the perhaps consequent attraction to the corporatism of National Socialism, which leads to weird psychologies—Adolf Eichmann, for example. It seems you risk negative consequences with both individualism and corporatism.

Guignon: To speak metaphorically, when you have a map that has been rolled up in the closet for a long time, you can't make it lie flat just by spreading it out. If you do that, it will curl up again. You have to roll it in the opposite direction a bit. I think this is what we are trying to do—to call attention to the other side. But certainly we recognize that there are dangers to any extreme view. What is really necessary is to bring together both of these dimensions.

Audience member: It is not obvious to me precisely how the notion of “disorder” ties to ontological individualism. There are clearly multiple connections, but I'm worried about this normative and potentially problematic notion of disorder. Can you say something about how you see the connections between the potentially problematic, but potentially liberating notion of disorder and the notion of individualism?

Guignon: The notion of disorder is certainly problematic. The DSM-4, purportedly the complete catalogue of all mental disorder which is published by the American Psychiatric Association, defines a mental “disorder,” in part, as a condition that causes distress or impairment in functioning for a specified period of time.⁹ That definition recently served as the basis for an essay by Stephen Wilkinson titled “Is ‘Normal Grief’ a Mental Disorder?”¹⁰ In this essay (which won *The Philosophical Quarterly* Essay Prize for 1999), the author considers every possible way one might argue that ordinary grief is *not* a disorder, and then shows that every one of them is wrong given the DSM definition of “disorder.” All the characteristics of grieving are comparable to chicken pox or some other familiar disease, i.e., they are “normal,” but they are still a disease or disorder. He concludes that, therefore, normal grief is a mental disorder. As he points out in his essay, you can read this in one of two ways: (1) as a proof that we should do more to provide medical treatment for people

who grieve, or (2) as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole notion of disorder—which is the way I tend to read it.

In our modern ontology, we operate with the idea that as humans we are essentially subjects, and that within the sphere of our subjectivity we have a number of things going on—thoughts and ideas, but also feelings. The feelings we have are either good or bad. If the feelings are bad, then we have a “mental disorder” and need treatment. And we have the notion that we have an entitlement to have feelings that are as good as they can be. This is the rough kind of connection between individualism and disorder I see. Does this get at what you had in mind?

Audience member: What I was asking about is how “disorder” functions as a normative notion. It seems like there might be a connection to individualism, but perhaps it doesn’t matter whether the individual is conceived as radically distinct from or connected to others. It is potentially problematic for whomever is the object of the diagnosis.

Guignon: The notion of “disorder” is clearly a normative notion. The word is used by the scientists who write the DSM to mean “disease” or “pathology.” I don’t think that the notion of a disorder as such is connected to individualism, though there may be some disorders that are caused by individualism.

In general, you might say that the notion of “disorder” as understood today is connected to the kinds of value problems that originate with the historical developments that led to individualism, among other things. To put it into MacIntyre’s vocabulary: In pre-modern periods in Western history, and in non-western cultures today, there is a vision of life in which what is really important is to follow the path that leads to the *telos* or goal for humans. In this way of seeing things, morality and virtues are understood as enabling conditions that help people along on the path to their *telos*. Since morality is seen as an enabling condition that makes it possible to be all you can be, there is a great deal of motivation to be moral. People in traditional cultures have a rich conception of what life is all about, a conception in which being moral makes sense. For example, as Aristotle says, what is important is not how you feel, but rather that you discipline and train your feelings so you feel the right way in the right circumstances at the right time. In other words, feelings are not just brute givens; they are things to be cultivated through a process of education and self-discipline.

When you lose that vision of what life is all about, there is a tendency for moral ideals and education and cultivation to not to have a very clear point. Now, feelings are regarded as something just given, and the goal of life is seen as having good feelings—maintaining a durable sense of well-being. The feelings are the determinant of what is worthwhile and what is worth pursuing. So you have people concerned with trying to get good feelings for themselves; the ultimate aim is self-enhancement, self-aggrandizement. In our book, we criticize this whole orientation as sometimes

very self-defeating. The notion of mental disorder, seen from a utilitarian standpoint, has to be at least partly defined by bad feelings. It was crucial to the outlook of the radical enlightenment and to the utilitarians that normativity in general be understood in terms of what is conducive to pleasure or pain—there can be nothing other than feelings to provide a basis for normativity. I think the notion of disorder as it is understood in psychology today is a product of this utilitarian way of thinking.

Notes

¹ Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley :U of California P, 1985)

² Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Ark, 1985): 26.

³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: U of Notre Dame P, 1984).

⁴ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 93.

⁵ Charles Guignon, "Narrative Explanation in Psychotherapy," *American Behavioral Scientist* 41 (Jan. 1998): 558-77.

⁶ Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Boston, MA: Harvard UP, 1990).

⁷ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in his *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁸ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, quoted in *Re-envisioning Psychology* 51.

⁹ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

¹⁰ Stephen Wilkinson, "Is 'Normal Grief' a Mental Disorder?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (July 2000): 289-90.

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What is in a Name

An Outline of Recent Issues in African Philosophy

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The point of this symposium is to address some of the features of contemporary African philosophy. Sometimes it is quite difficult determining precisely what time period terms like “recent” or “present” actually mean. So I want to assume some freedom here in defining for the purposes of this meeting what I will mean by “recent” African philosophy. My understanding will be that for a movement or theme so poorly known anywhere and still in growth, anything that may have happened within the last one thousand years could easily qualify as “recent,” so long as it is a factor in the memorable debates in the history of the movement. In actual fact, however, much of what I will talk about is what lies within almost everyone's vivid memory.

Many of the themes discussed by African philosophers, at the professional level, over the past six or so decades have been influenced by and address issues that emanate from Africa's own socio-cultural contexts, but in some ways also from Africa's more recent history since the nineteenth century, during which time Africa's societies have undergone tremendous transformations. In the first scenario, the application of customary standards and principles to the determination of the nature and solution of specific cases, of different kinds, point to or explicitly evoke matters of great theoretical concern which the contemporary academics have seen the interest to return to for more public debate and systematic understanding. For example, in the part of East Africa I come from it is not unusual to hear someone disapprovingly referred to as a “jajuok,” an attribution of character usually strongly objected to by those to whom it is given. In other contexts, variations of the term are used uncontestedly, and there are formal gatherings at which the circumstances to which those terms apply are put under great scrutiny to determine where and how they should apply to specific cases. Yet, neither at these fora nor in any other contextual uses of such terms is there great effort to determine the theoretical nature or conceptual contents of the terms themselves. In other words, everyday language, and the everyday practice of life generally, press on with other priorities in focus. Yet, upon a more deciphering attention to these everyday life practices and performances one notices unclarified assumptions, say, about the kind of entities things called “juok” are, or whether there are any connections between those assumptions, call them metaphysical assumptions, and the social uses to which varied forms of the same term are put. I think that African philosophers have tried to bring these discussions before greater audiences by exposing them to analytical scrutiny in

the classroom. As Okot p'Bitek tells us,¹ it is not just that in any given system many people overlook the importance of such conceptual clarification of the ideas of their everyday world, but that also, in many cases in African history, the mishandling, misconception or arbitrary misrepresentation of some of these crucial terms and concepts at the hands of sojourners of different interest groups like missionaries, and their influence on the perpetuation of those misrepresentations, make a focused and systematic scrutiny of these terms an even more interesting and worthy enterprise.

Another example is what one observes in local council processes to determine the propriety of claims brought to it by different claimants and in regard to different issues that may range from land use claims to the determination of rightful heirs to hereditary positions and roles. Again, such processes may reveal interesting elements of the understanding not only of the nature and value of the process itself, but also of the determination of what kind of things rights are, who can have or claim them, and how distinctions between rights of ownership and rights of use are made in different cases. This is especially an interesting area, and has been a focus of interest to many observers who have witnessed, with different views, the modern state apparatus defer matters of right claims to the authority of indigenous wisdom. Again, such cases, and their conclusions in non-classroom settings of institutional public arenas, like the courts, offer themselves to poignant classroom scrutiny of some of the basic assumptions underlying the arguments across different disciplines. For example, in a situation where p_1 , and her deceased male spouse, p_2 , are both members of the group p_n , the determination of who, between p_1 and the collectivity p_n , have rights over the body p_2 may depend on many factors, some of which may be so basic and axiomatic to the parties involved in the dispute that no commonly agreeable solution may easily or quickly come to mind, with each party claiming that the matter is “obviously” in their favor. Whichever way the disputation goes, it is important to note that questions about how the individual relates to her group, and the recognitions they owe each other, feature prominently in African social and political theory. A good example of this contrast and competition between the communal and a more libertarian considerations of axiomatic principles applicable to the judgment of what people can or cannot do is Kwame Anthony Appiah’s now famous epilogue on the confrontation between individual good judgment and the one determined by the authority of the matriclan.² The obvious fact of the individual’s social location on her being in the world is not the problem. But whether public ethical judgments should be based on the disproportional benefits which accrue to the individual or community vis-a-vis the other is what makes the difference between normative or axiomatic bases on or from which the structures of traditions differ from each other in varying degrees³ to which they blend the two. The social, moral and political landscape of much of the Africa that I know suggest a strong coexistence of the two models of public ethics, hence the continuous debate between people who from time to time argue for either one as the more appropriate norm to apply in making judgment in different circumstances and situations.

Since the nineteenth century, two transitions, first from the earlier indigenous systems to those imposed by colonial domination, and the second one back to sort of local conditions, albeit crucially different from the pre-colonial one, have resulted in experiences on which Africans in general, not just philosophers, have had the burden of having to reflect hard and critically. Among themes at the top of the list are those which address issues of national reconstitution, consolidation of new nations, definitions and pursuit of political and other values, and the design of workable political models capable of managing consensually identified public programs that could bring about, sustain, protect and help advance values and goods in the private and public domains.

As one can quickly and easily suspect, these were years of great expectations in Africa. It made some but also sank many, as intellectuals and politicians—at least those ideally positioned—debated the merits and demerits of concepts and their application to the fledgling nations yearning for liberation from long years of cruel colonial domination by a capitalist Europe. I say “ideally positioned” because, in evident departure from known indigenous norms, not everywhere in Africa did free public intellectual or strictly political debate happen or was allowed as part of the nation-building process. In fact, in many early, and in some cases even later postcolonial political processes, rule by the decree of the dictator became the way of life, and objections of any form were severely punished, sometimes even by summary execution. Paradoxically, the justification for these atrociously uncommunal and inhuman approaches to social and political order was the consolidation and preservation of the national community.⁴

In the East Africa where I grew up, the political idea of community as the basis of public ethics took a different and practical course. A radical group of intellectuals was formed and became manifest in the early years of independence in the region, led by people who later became notable African writers like Ali Mazrui, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ahmed Mohiddin among others. They found alliances among equally radical politicians in the region like Julius Nyerere, and together formed a quasi-school of thought in opposition to the non-progressive groups whose main position was the rationalization of the project to consolidate and build on what the colonial systems had left behind. These were the years when politicians became public intellectuals, or philosopher kings as Plato long ago envisaged their possibility, engaging, not in writing autobiographies and memoirs, but monographs of their conceptions of a world that would be ideal politically, socially, economically and morally for their people and others. For the conceptual merits that they may be worth, the works of such leaders like Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Agostinho Neto and Amilcar Cabral, among others, fall into this category.

There is another reason why I have dwelt for a while on this formation of African thought, and that is that it was within its execution that the idea of an alternative and distinctively African framework was hatched. This was the idea of African communitarianism as the distinguishing basis for a different definition of values and evaluation of their worth. Best known from its use by Julius

Nyerere, who used it only sparingly in preference for the term “African socialism,” communitarianism was associated with the brand of politics that was considered by its critics to be somehow decadent and inattentive to the organizational rigors of modern economies. It was finally abandoned even by one of its chief proponents in the public discourse.

The question about how important the principle of sociality is to an African reflection about the world can be answered by an examination of how central it is to how people view matters such as the nature of the person, or how it helps frame basic requirements in dealing with the world like knowledge, and so on. But the term can be, and I believe it is, detectable in some of the more visible and crucial writings in African philosophy today. But let me call it by another name so I don't invoke the idea of communitarianism as a political morality that is usually understood to abide on the other side from liberalism. That is not quite what I have in mind right now although I will refer to it a little later as well.

The name I propose as an alternative to “communitarianism” is “relationism” or, as coined in French, *le principe relationnel*, a normative assumption on the basis of which several matters can be explained or justified. A clear indication of the importance and use of this principle can be seen in reference to some metaphysical, epistemological and moral discussions by African philosophers. However, I must confess that although I am about to make reference to the work of my esteemed senior colleague, Professor Kwasi Wiredu, what I say here is, indeed, only a partial reading or rendering of the fine points in his intricate arguments, in other words, only an opinion.

By contrast to the idea of a person as a metaphysically pre-endowed and autonomous individual whose characteristics and capacities are considered to be revealed in rather than occasioned by their relational conditioning in society, Wiredu conceives a person to be intricately connected with others and to depend on them for what accounts as her basic and specific distinction from other species. This dependency, he argues, is dictated by the organically (that is, biologically) specific being that humans are: their dependency on each other for the all the needs of their organic type from physical nourishment to the needs for and provision of all those furnishings that we identify to be specifically human. It is this sociality that provides the channels that lead to the flourishing of personhood, understood as the state in which humans have attained at least the minimal level of ability to respond actively to stimuli around them, not only in the neurophysical sense (such as in the capacity *to* respond to differences or changes in atmospheric temperatures, especially now with travel from the frigid wintry North to the temperate South, or in the capacity to feel pain), but in the cognitive and moral senses as well, that is, responses to (conceptual) meaning and to situations of moral directives or guidance. I assume here that more morally competent performance, like the ability to deal with more complex concepts, sets on later in life.⁵ A person, then, is what we become after we have developed and are able to utilize the capacity to respond to all specifically human stimuli. These are established and gradually sharpen and grow

more complex with degrees of communication through which we interact with others.

Like communalism, personhood also has been a key topic of discussion in African philosophical texts for several decades. In comparison to the earlier writings on personhood, however, Kwasi Wiredu's position provides a theoretical articulation that the earlier and largely descriptive writings did not. Written largely from a theological perspective reflective of the post Vatican II cultural Ecclesiology, the latter aimed at asserting the African preparedness for the idea of the Church as community, thus reversing the expected flow of influence in the evangelizational enterprise. The Church had much to learn from Africa, they argued, and so had the task of adapting itself to the African "personality."⁶ For similar reasons, Wiredu's position differs from the political communalism of the sixties and seventies because, again, the latter failed to theorize the relational basis of human nature as a foundational principle and prelude to asserting the superiority of a properly conceived and applied relational approach to public ethics (that is, as underlying an envisaged political, social and moral order). Yet, despite the different styles, Wiredu shares with the African theologians and some political communalists, especially Nyerere, a crucial statement about the role of the community on the shaping of personhood. The role of community and the responsibility of the individual within it, are intricately intertwined. This sociality of personhood, says the theologian Francois-Marie Lufuluabo, for example, is at the very foundation of being human, part of the human ideal.⁷ Language and the logical structure in which communication takes place are all tools in service of this human ideal as expressed in Bantu language.⁸ At this point Wiredu and Lufuluabo perhaps would part ways in pursuit of opposing constitutive explanations of personhood.

While Lufuluabo will pursue a dualist constitution of the person, Wiredu stays put with communication and with the individual's responsiveness to her social world as the basis of her constitutive growth. The human mind develops in response to communication, a specific (i.e. of the species) capacity to process signs received from others and, by use of adequate conditions (i.e. functional or organizational capability) provided by the nature of her being, as *homines sapientes*, to convert such signs into meanings,⁹ and in turn to use them in effective communication to others. These conditions include "reflective perception, abstraction, deduction, and induction. They are sort of the laws by which the mind competently operates in cognition. According to Wiredu, "[m]ind presupposes communication . . . being a human person implies having the capacity of reflective perception, abstraction, and inference."¹⁰

Communication, a function of sociality, occasions our ability to cognize the world. But communication presupposes that our intentions, our meanings, are passed on to our interlocutors with some precision, but even more importantly, that they get precisely what we wanted to communicate to them. Hence communication flows and serves its purpose only if our cognition of the world and our communication of it to others have the same content, that is, when the

statements in our communication are true.

So, does truth refer to anything outside and independent of the statements by which we communicate with others? Perhaps this has been the most provocative among the many issues Professor Wiredu has written on over the years. My aim is not to discuss it here, because I have misunderstood it before, but to indicate how, in my opinion, it is part of the wider *principe relationnel* inside which he locates the emergence of personhood. Now, the saying that “there is nothing called Truth as distinct from opinion” is an assertion that has kept Professor Wiredu's readers uneasy, for one need not be a philosopher to note, quickly and *prima facie*, that the dictum goes against what our common sense tends to dictate to us: that while opinion is disputable on the basis of its diverse whims, Truth is that which imposes its authority on us. The common sense school tells us that we do not invent reality, but that it is right there, whether we like it or not, so all we need to do is to make statements about reality which say how or what it really is. There is no doubt that the correspondence theory of truth borrows heavily from this common sense teaching. But, since truth is a property of propositions, the distinction between true and false propositions lies in their warrantability. He says: “. . . of those actual and potential propositions, a large number, if studied, will be found to be warranted, and others not. This is what can be meant by the remark that there are truths that are not known to me.”¹¹ The knowledge we have is a set of (both affirmative and negative) propositions we believe in, such that to say “I believe that p,” Wiredu argues, is not to claim that p is a fact, but that “it is a fact that I believe that p.”¹² And attempts to check the truth value of these beliefs end only with other propositions, opinions or beliefs. We say a proposition or an opinion is true when we identify it with our own, and it is false when we dissociate our own point of view from it. Knowledge, then, appears to be a social enterprise, a function of communication, made of sets of concordant and discordant opinions.

The third element of Professor Wiredu's social basis of personhood concerns the development of human persons' moral capability. The development of personhood does not occur solely with respect to cognitive mental capacity such as the ability to make judgments and inference. In fact, the ability to make judgment and inference remain basic to both cognitive and moral development and are both functions of communication. But just as they need the “rules of the mind” to competently construct meaningful propositions as they communicate with others, human persons will need other criteria, developed as they grow and develop in their personhood, by which they will construct the laws of their moral conduct. Above all, Wiredu argues, it becomes pretty clear to humans that the survival of the species depends on the prevalence of tolerable conditions. Hence, to establish such tolerable conditions, a criterion or principle must be sought without which tolerable conditions necessary for survival would not obtain. Wiredu identifies this principle as “sympathetic impartiality,” what others have called the universal principle of practical morality based on mutuality or sympathetic awareness of others by which threats and abuses are contained.¹³ His

view is that morality derives from just such imaginative sensitivity, such as believing that we are better off in a just world than we are in an unjust one, and it is useful to note that the principle works only as long as there is a communal sense that respect and affection are worth keeping and cultivating. In the moral systems of many African communities, the corrective measure that ensues from this is shame, a recognition that other members of a group would not care for someone with mean qualities.

What we have, then, and if our opinion thereon is indeed warranted, is the striking emphasis on the social derivation of the category of personhood, the social sources of person and self, the *personne cognitive* and *personne morale*. The individual is not a passive bearer of personhood; she must appropriate the qualities and capacities, and the norms governing its expression to herself.

Notes

¹ See Okot p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971) and *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1979).

² See Kwame A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992): 181-192.

³ The view which rejects the classification of societies into either individualistic or communitarian as false on the grounds that both aspects are manifested in almost all known societies across the globe is itself flawed because it misses the fine line of separation that the proponents of such classification draw. The Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye, in *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), explains clearly that the difference is not in the absolute exclusion of one by the other but in the degrees of their blend, more this than that, or more that than this, what he calls "the relativistic language" (41) of referring to "the status of individuality and community."

⁴ In the recently translated *Combats pour le Sens (Struggle for Meaning)*, readers now will be able to read why, in defense of a libertarian understanding of the practice of philosophy, Paulin Hountondji was so critical of the anonymously authoritarian ethnophilosophy. In his view, it provided a legitimation of the dictator's claim to speak for the people and to defend, again on their behalf, what was their view of the world. He refers in particular to the extremely murderous regime of Sekou Toure of Guinea as morally indefensible yet sustained for a long time by a submissive chorus of cowered civilian and military citizens under the guise of national unity of vision. See Paulin Hountondji, *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture, and Democracy in Africa*, tr. John Conteh-Morgan (Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 2002).

⁵ This is the capacity to independently respond to moral situations or the ability to independently evaluate and competently make judgments and take action in regard to a moral situation.

⁶ Marc Ela, "L'Eglise, le monde noir et le Concile," *Personnalité Africaine et Catholicisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962): 19-41.

⁷ F. M. Lufuluabo, "La conception Bantoue face au Christianisme," *Personnalité Africaine et Christianisme*, ed. Hebga Meinrad (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962): 57-72.

⁸ Lufuluabo 62.

⁹ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1996): 22.

¹⁰ Wiredu 1996, 23.

¹¹ Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and An African Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1980): 191.

¹² Wiredu 1980, 190.

¹³ Michael Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1982): 27.

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Ethical Knowledge in an African Philosophy

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More than three decades ago a definite and deliberate consensus had been reached among philosophers in and of Africa that there had been enough second-order talk about whether there had been and was ‘philosophy’ in indigenous African cultural contexts. This meant that it was time to move on, and to produce individualized, specialized philosophical studies that arose from those cultural contexts. There was also a consensus that to ‘translate’ internationally in scholarly terms this material needed to be presented or at least introduced in and by formats that would not be entirely foreign to non-African audiences.

In my own case, I settled on an adaptation of what has come to be known in the Western tradition as ordinary language philosophy. One good reason for this choice was that it made sense, in practical terms for someone like myself who is not an African and who was coming to terms with a language culture that was not my own, to adopt an approach that essentially involved learning more about the language as well as the culture. Also, the ordinary language approach is implicitly conceptually oriented insofar as concentrating on correct and incorrect usage can involve identifying the criteria governing the usage of words that are targeted because of potential philosophical prepossession.

Another central interest I had at the time was to put W.V.O. Quine’s indeterminacy thesis of radical translation to some form of empirical test—particularly with regard to that aspect of the thesis he discusses under the heading of “radical translation.”¹ I found the open-mindedness of the thesis regarding the possibility of radically different meanings in radically different languages liberating. To someone who had been conditioned to regard paradigms espoused by English-language analytic philosophy as normative, it opened the door to the possibility of fundamentally different meanings of the terminology used in everyday, conventional situations—with their own intrinsic rational integrity—existing in languages that might not have reason to share a single cognate in common with English. This of course underlined the possibility that there might be theoretical networks intrinsic to Africa’s language cultures that, on philosophical grounds, had not received their just deserts.

Last, but far from least, the ordinary language approach gave me, as someone whose mother discipline was philosophy rather than anthropology, a methodology of philosophical origin that would entitle me to circumvent the rather loud objections of social anthropological colleagues who

insisted that I had no business undertaking any form of research that involved anything resembling fieldwork.

Those introductory points noted, let me proceed to the topic of ethical knowledge. The title does not imply, as perhaps some might think, that this essay's central focus will involve how it may be possible to establish ethical principles or moral values on some sort of secure objective basis, however tantalizing that prospect may remain. Indeed the dominance of that presumption, if anything, is one indication of how important it is to suspend the importation of pre-existing concerns when coming to terms with a 'radically' different language culture's conceptual system(s).

Abstract thought in Africa's indigenous cultures has been said to be expressed primarily in and by myths, stories, proverbs, and rituals. Comparative studies of abstract thought in the West and Africa supposedly suggest there is little point in asking whether its African forms are 'true' because, even if believed so by members of the relevant cultures, they are too obviously 'fictions' and 'exercises' invented to permit Africans at least to *feel* that they understand and thereby can exercise some control over the forces underlying life's sometimes paradoxical events. As such they are said to fulfill people's emotional needs as much or more than preeminently intellectual ones.

Many African intellectuals have protested that critical reasoning also has to play an essential role in African systems of thought and that, in any case, dividing the person up between a rational self and an emotional self is an hypothesis of Western cultural orientation.² Other African scholars (Wiredu 1980) have suggested that lumping all of African 'abstract' thought into a single category and then comparing it with the theories of so deliberately and painstakingly refined a subject as academic philosophy is not fair.³ Africa has its own folklore, folk thought or folk philosophy (relatively popular beliefs, superstitions, etc.), as is also the case with the West. This distinction in the two cultures' respective modes-of-thought or beliefs has first to be made clear before a neutral basis for intercultural comparisons will be established. Otherwise, elements of African folklore might end up being contrasted and compared (unfavorably, of course) with technically abstract, disciplinary-specific methodologies and theories. Indeed the disinterest in things African on the part of Western analytic philosophers was almost certainly a consequence of the fact that they passively (or perhaps impassively), tacitly, had acquiesced to the portrait of Africa as a place where people did not assign a high priority to reason, to critical thinking, in formulating their views of the world. For one oddity about the analytic tradition as practiced within the academy is that virtually the only language that it has been used to *analyze* is English. The most obvious explanation for this is that analytic philosophy is a product of English-language culture. But was this really sufficient to explain why its method and techniques had never been applied in even an experimental manner to any *non*-Western language? Was there not here also evidence, albeit implicit, of a tacit judgment on the part of the Western academy that such endeavors were likely not to be philosophically rewarding?

In any case, the point of the Hallen-Sodipo research project on African Thought/Philosophy was to apply the techniques of analytic philosophy, as adapted for use in a culture that was substantially oral in nature,⁴ to the language of the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. Some of the Yoruba fields of discourse preselected as of particular interest were those relevant to epistemology or the theory of knowledge and ethics. It is the *interrelations* between elements of the Yoruba conceptual system relating to these two special interests that has resulted in the coining of the expression “moral epistemology.”

In Western epistemological theory the most problematic and controversial sub-category of information is what has come to be known as propositional knowledge. Generally this is associated with information in written or oral propositional (sentential) form that is supposed to be knowledge and therefore true, but which the individual recipient is in no position to test or to verify. When one reflects upon what a member of Western society may ‘learn’ in the course of a lifetime, it becomes clear that most people’s ‘knowledge’ consists of information they will never ever be in a position to confirm in a firsthand or direct manner. What they ‘find out’ from a history book, ‘see’ via the evening news on television or ‘confirm’ about a natural law on the basis of one elementary experiment in a high school physics laboratory—all could be (and sometimes are!) subject to error, distortion or outright fabrication.

Propositional knowledge is therefore generally characterized as *secondhand*, as information that cannot be tested or proved in a decisive manner by most people who have it and therefore has to be *accepted as true* because it ‘agrees’ with common-sense or because it ‘corresponds’ to or ‘coheres’ with the very limited amount of information that people are able to test and confirm in a firsthand or direct manner. Exactly how this coherence or correspondence is to be defined and ascertained is still a subject of endless wrangling in (Western) epistemological theory. What is relevant to the present discussion is that this wrangling is evidence of the intellectual concern and discomfort (in academic parlance it becomes one of the ‘problems’ of philosophy) on the part of (Western) philosophers about the weak evidential basis of so much of the information that people in that culture are conditioned to regard as knowledge, as true.

The distinction made in Yoruba-language culture between putative ‘knowledge’ and putative ‘belief’ reflects a similar concern about the evidential status of firsthand versus secondhand information. Persons are said to ‘know’ or to have ‘knowledge’ only of experience they have witnessed in a firsthand or personal manner. The example most frequently cited by discussants, virtually as a paradigm, is visual perception of a scene or an event as it is taking place. ‘Knowledge’ is said to apply to sensory perception generally, even if what may be experienced directly by touch is more limited than is the case with perception. ‘Knowledge’ in a Yoruba context implies a good deal more than mere sensation, of course. Perception implies cognition as well, meaning that persons concerned must comprehend that and what they are experiencing. The terms “*ooto*”/“*otito*” are

associated with “knowledge” in certain respects that parallel the manner in which “true” and “truth” are paired with “know”/“knowledge” in the English language. In the English language “truth” is principally a property of propositional knowledge, of statements human beings make about something, while in Yoruba “*ooto*” may be a property of both *propositions* and *certain forms of experience*. Therefore in some contexts it is better rendered into English as being “certain” or “certainty.”

The Yoruba noun form that I am rendering as ‘belief’—“*igbagbo*” (and its verb form “*gbagbo*”)—does in fact arise from the conflation of “*gba*” and “*gbo*.” The two components are themselves verbs, the former conventionally translated into English as “received” or “agreed to,” and the latter as “heard” or “understood.” Yoruba linguistic conventions suggest that treating this complex term as a synthesis of the English language “understood” (in the sense of cognitive comprehension) and of “agreed to” (in the sense of affirming or accepting new information one comprehends as part of one’s own store of secondhand information) is perhaps the best way to render its core meaning. *Igbagbo* encompasses what one is not able ‘to see for oneself’ or to experience in a direct, firsthand manner. For the most part this involves things we are told about or informed of—this is the most conventional sense of ‘information’—by others.

What makes it different from the English language “believe”/“belief” is that *igbagbo* can apply to *everything* that might be construed as *secondhand* information. This would apply to most of what in English-language culture is regarded as propositional knowledge: the things one is taught in the course of a formal education, what one learns from books, from other people and, of particular interest in the special case of the Yoruba, from oral traditions. While English-language culture decrees that propositional or secondhand information, since classified as ‘knowledge,’⁵ should be accepted as *true*, Yoruba usage is equally insistent that, since classified as *igbagbo* (putative ‘belief’), it can only be accepted as *possibly true* (*o se e se*) or untrue (*ko se e se*).

The cross-cultural ramifications of these differing viewpoints on the truth status of propositional or secondhand knowledge are worth considering. Yoruba-language speakers would likely regard members of English-language culture, who are willing to assign so much certainty to and put so much trust in information that they can never test or verify, as dangerously naive and perhaps even ignorant. While members of English-language culture might criticize their Yoruba counterparts’ identification of optimal knowledge with ‘you can only know what you can see’ as indicative of a people who have yet to discover the benefits of institutionalized knowledge and formal education.

The criteria that define the respective extents of and the interrelations between ‘knowledge’ (*imo*) and ‘belief’ (*igbagbo*) in Yoruba stipulate that any experience or information that is not firsthand, personal and direct must by definition fall under the heading of ‘belief’ (*igbagbo*). The sense of ‘belief’ (*igbagbo*) may therefore be paraphrased as “comprehending, and deciding to accept as possible (as ‘possibly true’ rather than as ‘true’), information that one receives in a secondhand manner.”

'Knowledge' (*imo*; firsthand experience) and 'belief' (*igbagbo*; information gained on the basis of secondhand experience) together exhaust all of the information that human beings have at their disposal. If and when my 'knowledge' (*imo*) is challenged by other persons who have not undergone a similar firsthand experience and who therefore doubt what I say I actually saw happen, the best way to convince them would be to arrange for some kind of test whereby they will be able to see the thing happen for themselves.⁶ If I cannot arrange for this kind of direct testing, the next best I can do is to ask any others who may have personally witnessed my own or a similar experience to come forward and testify. In this case my firsthand experience cannot become the challengers' own 'knowledge' (*imo*), but if they are influenced by the combined testimony they may decide to 'believe' me/us and accept the information on a secondhand basis, as 'belief' (*igbagbo*).

A simple example may serve to clarify things. If I claim I have seen for myself (*imo*) that a certain friend drives a specific make and model of car and another friend challenges my claim, the best way to resolve the dispute is to visit the friend and see (*imo*) what kind of car she actually has. If the friend lives a thousand miles away, a more practical solution would be to ask other mutual friends who have seen (*imo*) the car themselves to tell us (*igbagbo*) what kind it is. Or perhaps to telephone my friend directly and ask her to tell us (*igbagbo*) what kind of car she is driving. Speaking to her directly by telephone still would not be firsthand 'knowledge' (*imo*) about the car because one is not actually seeing it. One is only hearing a further form of secondhand information about the car, another form of testimony—albeit a particularly relevant one given the circumstances.

If and when my 'belief' (*igbagbo*) is challenged by another person, again the best solution would be to arrange some form of empirical test. In this case since this is information I myself only know secondhand, the most reliable solution for all concerned would be to test it directly, so that the information would progress from being 'belief' (*igbagbo*) to being 'knowledge' (*imo*) for all concerned, myself included. Next best would again be to call upon all relevant witnesses who may have heard the same or similar secondhand information (*igbagbo*) or, even more definitively, have firsthand (*imo*) experience of what I can only claim to know on a secondhand (*igbagbo*) basis.

When agreement or a consensus among disputants is reached on the level of 'belief' (*igbagbo*), the applicable term (comparable to the role of "truth" with reference to knowledge, or of "ooto" with regards to *imo*) is "*papo*," which may be rendered colloquially as 'the words have come together.'⁷ The antecedent process of testimony, discussion and reflection on the basis of which the consensus is reached is described as "*mwadi*"—an expression whose meaning may be compared to the English-language 'let's get to the bottom of this matter.'⁸

The system that emerges from these criteria appears to be three-tiered. 'Knowledge' (*imo*) is the sole category of experience or of propositions entitled to be regarded as certain or as true (*ooto*). 'Belief' (*igbagbo*) that is in principle open to empirical testing, verification, and thereby transformed into 'knowledge' (*imo* that is *ooto*) is the next best. 'Belief' (*igbagbo*) that can never be verified and can

only be evaluated on the basis of testimony, explanation, discussion and reflection (*nwadi*) is the least certain.

The significance of all this for cross-cultural understanding and comparisons is complex. The most obvious and perhaps important point is that Yoruba discourse does employ terminology and systematic criteria for the evaluation of any type of information. This is a priority to which African systems of thought were once said not to attach special importance or about which they were said to be unclear.

The *moral* underpinnings to this discussion of Yoruba epistemology become evident once one recognizes that the primary source of propositional or *secondhand* information in a culture that is significantly oral is other persons. For, if that is the case, knowledge of those other persons' moral characters (*iva*)—their honesty, their reliability as sources of information—becomes a fundamental criterion to evaluating the reliability of secondhand information obtained from them.

Knowledge of another person's moral character is said to be obtained, most reliably, from observing (firsthand) their *behavior* (*isesi*). And in Yoruba discourse 'behavior' conventionally extends to 'what they say' and 'what they do,' which also pretty much corresponds to the standard Western notions of verbal and non-verbal behavior. But what is again in evidence here is the priority the Yoruba place upon hard evidence, upon only being able to 'know' what you witness in a firsthand manner. For the point is that a person's verbal and non-verbal behavior are construed as firsthand evidence (*imo*) of their moral character (*iva*).

Needless to say, a person's moral character (*iva*) is not as readily observable as everyday material objects, such as a tree or a table. Obviously a process of inference is involved in order to move from observing a multiplicity of individual actions to a generalization about character. But with specific reference to epistemological concerns—the person as a source of reliable secondhand information—the interplay between 'knowledge' (*imo*) and 'belief' (*igbagbo*) appears to be as follows. On the basis of a number of specific previous occasions when you have had the opportunity, firsthand (*imo*), to verify the truth (*ooto*) of a person's statements, you are justified in using these firsthand experiences as the basis for a generalization about their moral character. This generalization may then serve as a kind of character reference for evaluating the reliability of future statements made by this same person but, strictly speaking, such evaluations must remain hypothetical or tentative until also confirmed in a firsthand manner.

What the overall process appears to involve is a kind of sliding scale for gauging varying degrees of epistemic certainty about the moral characters of and/or information provided by other persons. Those you have associated with directly and therefore have had ample opportunity to observe in a firsthand manner are those whose character you are in a position to know best, and thereby to judge whether information of which they are the source is likely to be reliable or unreliable. Those you have not associated with at all and therefore have had no opportunity to

observe in a firsthand manner (or even to have heard at least something about in a secondhand manner) are those whose character you do not know, and thereby have no substantive basis on which to judge whether information of which they are the source is likely to be reliable or unreliable.

A person who makes an informative statement may be obliged to recount the precise circumstances in which he or she came by it. A person is expected to say whether there is any cause for uncertainty or imprecision about the information. Determining whether the information is derived from the speaker's firsthand (*imo*) or secondhand (*igbagbo*) experience is part of this process. A person's diligence in doing all of this also is considered important evidence of their moral character (*ima*). With specific reference to what is here being characterized as a "moral epistemology," at least four positive behavioral values are emphasized: (1) being scrupulous about the epistemological basis for whatever one claims to know, to believe, or to have no information about; (2) being a good listener, with the emphasis upon cognitive understanding rather than a polite and respectful demeanor; (3) being a good speaker, with the emphasis upon speaking in a positive, thoughtful, and perceptive manner rather than mere elocution; (4) having patience, with the emphasis upon being calm and self-controlled in judgment and intellect rather than merely in manner and demeanor.

The public in Western societies have become concerned about exercising control over the quality of information put out by the media. In an oral culture the media are people's mouths. These four values, in effect, set broadcasting standards for those mouths. 'Speaking well' and 'hearing well,' as values, further reinforce the importance of providing accurate information or reliable advice and being forthright about the epistemological origins of that information and advice. A consciousness that cultivates 'patience,' especially in difficult or problematic situations, is more likely to maintain self-control and thereby optimal communication with its environment. 'Speaking well,' 'hearing well,' and 'patience' are not, then, *moral* values in any conventional sense. They are rather *epistemological virtues* because of their *instrumental* value for promoting the accuracy of information.

One interesting philosophical consideration about this Yoruba alternative epistemology would be its consequences for the conventional definition of propositional *knowledge* as arising from 'justified, true belief.' Obviously the criterion of belief would no longer apply, since it would be pointless and confusing to say that one had secondhand, *possibly* true information about what one already 'knew' to be true on the basis of firsthand experience. Also, the notion of justification would seem to lose much of its significance since one is not obligated to provide the kinds of evidence associated with that criterion for information or experience that already has been validated in a firsthand manner.

All of this also could have substantive ramifications for the so-called Gettier counterexamples, since all or many of them would be de-fanged by the Yoruba stipulation that what is said

to be 'known' must have been witnessed in a firsthand manner throughout. And last, but far from least, these distinctive and different criteria for distinguishing expressions such as 'I know that' from 'I believe that' could justify the claim that the attributes of so-called propositional attitudes ("I know that," "I hope that," "I fear that," etc.) may be relative to particular language cultures (hence the use of 'fools' quotation marks' throughout my text).

Notes

¹ W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1960).

² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 1978); Barry Hallen, "Analytic Philosophy and Traditional Thought: A Critique of Robin Horton," *African Philosophy: A Classical Approach*, eds. P. English and K. M. Kalumba (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1996) 216-228 and *The Good, The Bad, and the Beautiful: Discourse About Values in Yoruba Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2000).

³ Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1980).

⁴ Barry Hallen, "Moral epistemology: When Propositions Come Out of Mouths," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38.2 (1998): 187-204.

⁵ The *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba* compiled by R.C. Abraham (1958) usually serves as the standard reference for Yoruba-English translations of this variety. Abraham treats "ooto" as a straightforward equivalent of the English-language "truth," and the same is the case with "igbagbo"/"gbagbo" (233) and the English-language "belief"/"believe." Both are examples of the understandably 'loose' translation equivalences that are a necessary evil for the conventional, cross-cultural translation of everyday equivalences that are a necessary evil for the convention, cross-cultural translation of everyday matters, and which cannot afford to take account of all semantic differences, even if they happen to be more than nuances.

⁶ One expression used regularly for testing was *danwo* ('try to do').

⁷ Since it may now be said that the various disputants are reconciled.

⁸ According to Abraham (1958), "*nwadi?*" is a participial conflation of the verb for 'looking' or 'seeking' with the noun "*idi?*" (272) for 'bottom,' 'base,' 'reason,' or 'cause.' See also Barry Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo, *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 70.

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Some Comments on Contemporary African Philosophy

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I would like to mention that Professor Masolo is the author of the first full-length history of contemporary African philosophy¹ and Professor Hallen has just recently written *A Short History of African Philosophy*² that brings us right up to today. So we have two historians and one layman on this panel. In my capacity as a layman, I would like to make one or two comments about contemporary African philosophy.

Contemporary African philosophy has a certain richness that derives from the comparative character of the discipline. This is due to the interesting fact that contemporary African philosophers belong to two traditions, the African and the Western. This can be an advantage because working in more than one tradition can broaden your mind by providing you with alternative conceptual options. But this also is a problem because African philosophers came to be situated in the Western tradition through the historical adversity of colonialism. In colonial times, African philosophy, at least in the British colonies, was not investigated in philosophy departments in Africa—it was left to departments of religion and anthropology to study African thought as best they could. Not surprisingly, the resulting literature often reflected the uncritical employment of foreign categories of thought. In talking of the uncritical use of foreign categories, I am thinking of concepts that are embedded in distinctions like the that between the spiritual and the physical, the natural and the supernatural, the religious and the secular, the mystical and the non-mystical, or, if you want substantives, the distinction between substance and attribute, mind and matter, truth and fact, and so on.

I have noted in various places³ that it is questionable whether the distinctions and concepts mentioned have any role whatever in African thought, at any rate, in the African thought I know from the inside. An interesting fact, then, about the colonial accounts written about African thought is that although the writers believed that they were giving accounts of African thought and showing how different it was from their own, in fact, there were lots of difficulties with those accounts, because they routinely formulated them in terms of their own conceptual frameworks, assuming serenely that those frameworks were universal to human thought. If one has been used to thinking exclusively in the languages in which the concepts just mentioned operate, it is likely to sound strange to be told that there are people in whose thought these concepts have no application. But I think it is exactly this that brings out the value of being exposed to fundamentally different ways of

conceptualizing human experience and the world. This challenges one to rethink the fundamental categories of one's own ways of thinking. This remark, of course, assumes that it is possible to evaluate categories of thought across cultures, and this means that we are assuming here that relativism is false. Relativism, in this sense, is the view that the soundness or the intelligibility of any sort of categories of thought is relative to its time, place, or context of origin. And this relativity is supposed to exclude the possibility of critical evaluation from the context of another time, place, or context.

Relativism is of great interest in itself. In contemporary African philosophy, it is an unavoidable issue. I think the most obvious argument against relativism is based on the empirically verifiable biological unity of the human species. A subsidiary premise is to be found in the actual fact of cross-cultural communication among the different peoples of the world, notwithstanding any difficulties of translation that might be brought out.⁴ The notion of the cross-cultural evaluation of thought implies the universality, at some levels, of at least some canons of thought. Such an idea is regarded as quite provocative among those African philosophers I will call "traditionalists." Among such philosophers, the term "universalist" is a term of disapprobation. On the other hand, it is not very clear that they would like to embrace relativism in an unlimited manner. Certainly, they do talk in a way that suggests relativism, and I think that in this they have had some foreign aid. You may recall Peter Winch's article, "Understanding a Primitive Society"⁵ in which he criticizes E. E. Evans-Pritchard for saying in his *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*,⁶ that the Zande belief that such forces can influence rainfall is not in accord with objective reality. And this is Winch's comment on this: He says that Pritchard is wrong, because "what is real and what is unreal shows itself in the use that language has."⁷ So, in Winch's opinion, Pritchard was trying to work with a conception of reality that is not determined by its actual use in language. I wish that rain-making was something that we could make effective through linguistic usage—then we could call upon it during times of drought in Africa.

But seriously, one might question what is wrong with relativism. One might answer: "Well, it depends on what you mean by 'relative to'." Suppose, for example, that one gets this answer: "What is intelligible or true or valid simply is, by definition, what is accepted in a given culture on the basis of the criteria that are operative in that culture." The problem that I see with this concept of relativity to culture would be that there will not be any intercultural communication, therefore there will not be any dialogue, and perhaps the only way open to us to interact might be by way of war. However, I think that relativity to culture can have another connotation. It might mean simply that the received ways in which *certain* aspects of life and reality are conceptualized, as a matter of fact, differ from culture to culture. You might call this "descriptive relativism," and I think that it is certainly correct. I suspect that this is the "relativism" that some of my friends espouse. Recognition of this kind of "relativism" is very important for intercultural relations, for inattention to it can

encourage some cultures to try to impose their modes of conceptualization on other cultures. As a result of colonialism, Africa has been at the receiving end of this conceptual malpractice, particularly, though not only, in the spheres of religion, morality and politics.

By virtue of some very meticulous research into Yoruba thinking Hallen and the late Sodipo showed that certain universalisms just do not hold. For example, they demonstrated that the notion of belief doesn't translate unproblematically across cultures.⁸ Similarly, I have suggested that some logical concepts do not translate unproblematically, or not at all, across cultures.⁹

Let me rapidly just mention, more concretely, a few concepts that do not translate across English and my own language. And, if I can take about two minutes to do this, perhaps, we can cover some considerable ground in the limited time at our disposal. They are, reality, being, existence, object, entity, substance, quality, attribute, truth, fact, opinion, belief, knowledge, faith, doubt, sentence, statement, proposition, idea, mind, soul, spirit, thought, sensation, matter, ego, self, person, subjectivity, objectivity, individuality, community, cause, chance, freedom, responsibility, punishment, democracy, justice, God, space, time, nothingness, creation, afterlife, morality. It is so easy to think that that all these concepts are right there in any conceptual framework. What's more, the accounts that were written of African thought by colonial scholars and even by some of us, African scholars, are generally based on the uncritical assumption that all these concepts apply across cultures.

It is worth noting that the conceptual issues in question are not just verbal issues, matters of "mere semantics," as some might be tempted to think. Our fundamental concepts are bound up with our fundamental ways of existing and interacting with our environment and our kind. These issues can therefore sometimes be intertwined with matters of life and death.

I think, therefore, that right now in African philosophy, one of the great tasks is what I have called "conceptual decolonization." This means scrutinizing fundamental Western concepts, such as those mentioned above, that have been used or implied in the characterization of African thought to see if they do, in fact, apply across the cultures involved. That is the first step, of course. If they don't apply, we are still in the same world together, and we will have to have a dialogue. Thus, we will have to see how these concepts can be evaluated inter-culturally because we need to communicate on all kinds of levels. And, perhaps, we can learn from each other. Some of the concepts, even though not home grown, may have to be appropriated for Africa's intellectual wellbeing, while others might need to be jettisoned for want of coherence. And the latter circumstance might run so deep as to cause the demise of the relevant ways of thinking in their Western place of origin itself. Accordingly, we might even say that conceptual decolonization is not just for the benefit of Africans, but also for the benefit of everybody. Wherever you may be from, if you are stimulated by that conceptual process to review your own fundamental modes of

conceptualization, then, even if at the end of the day you come back to reaffirm them, you can be satisfied that you have not lived an unexamined life.

Thank you!

Notes

¹ D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994).

² Barry Hallen, *A Short History of African Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002).

³ See, for example, Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), Ch.7: "Formulating Modern Thought in African Languages: Some Theoretical Considerations."

⁴ I have offered criticisms of relativism in Wiredu 1996, Ch. 3: "Are there Cultural Universals?" More criticisms may be found in Kwasi Wiredu, "Canons of Conceptualization," *The Monist* 76.4 (1993): 450-476 and Kwasi Wiredu, "Knowledge, Truth and Fallibility," *The Concept of Knowledge*, eds. I. Kucuradi and R.S. Cohen (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995) 172-148.

⁵ Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964): 307-324. Reprinted in B. Wilson, ed., *Rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974) 78-111. See page 82 of the reprint.

⁶ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1937).

⁷ Winch in Wilson 82.

⁸ Barry Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo, *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy*, rev. ed. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997).

⁹ See Wiredu 1996, Ch. 8: "The Concept of Truth in the Akan Language" and *passim*.

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Barry Hallen is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department of Philosophy & Religion at Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia. He is also a Fellow of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University. His latest book is *A Short History of African Philosophy* (Indiana UP, 2002).

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Christian Williams is an undergraduate student at the University of North Florida. His primary interests in philosophy include the fields of metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of mind. He has presented a paper at the Sixth Annual Northeast Florida Student Philosophy Conference held at the University of North Florida in 2002, has attended the 2002 Colorado Summer Seminar in Philosophy at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and has won the 2002 Gerrit and Edith

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Kwasi Wiredu has been Professor of Philosophy at the University of South Florida since 1987. He was born in Ghana and educated at the University of Ghana and at Oxford and was for many years Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Ghana. His publications include *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Indiana UP, 1996). He has interests in, among other things, African Philosophy, Philosophy of Logic, Epistemology and Metaphysics. He has been Visiting Professor at a number of universities including Ibadan (Nigeria), UCLA and Duke.