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... sic sapientia, quae ars vivendi putanda est, non expeteretur, si nihil efficeret;[1]

For wisdom, which should be considered the art of living, is no aspiration unless it accomplishes something.

[1]Translation by W. R. Delise. Cicero, Marcus Tullius, and H. (Harris) Rackham, *De finibus bonorum et malorum* (London: William Heinemann, 1931).

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Foreword

Andrew Fenton
Faculty Advisor
Dalhousie University

Academic philosophy largely consists of reasoned engagement with past and present "interlocutors" – not always philosophers – in such contexts as conferences, correspondences, department colloquia, journals, and books. As a consequence of this, it is at its root a social enterprise. This new issue of *Corvus* is a part of that social enterprise.

For academic philosophers, there is little that is as intimidating as putting your work "out there" for others to see and critically engage. In this case, it really does not matter whether we are talking about the editorial team of a journal issue or the authors of the papers contained in the issue. Consequently, this collective effort of undergraduate philosophers is a laudable act of both determination and courage.

Editing, peer reviewing, and, of course, authoring articles (among other things) are also a part of the duties of a professional scholar. All these parts of academic life are essential, but they are also chal-

lenging. So, not only is this issue of *Corvus* an important part of the professionalization of everyone involved but it is a distinct academic achievement. As this journal is not published regularly, I particularly congratulate the editorial team on this accomplishment.

The issue's topics and discussions engage arguments and perspectives drawn from the lineage of philosophy largely rooted in Greco-Roman thought and cultures (sometimes misleading described as "Western philosophy"). Some engage historically significant philosophers such as Plato, Immanuel Kant, and Anne Conway or more contemporary philosophers like Peter van Inwagen and David Lewis. Others engage contemporary societal issues such as human gene editing (a relative newcomer to modern eugenics), contemporary academic misogyny, possible ableism in BDSM, and the "attention economy." This very much reflects philosophy as a discipline, anchored as it is in a rather lengthy history starting, globally, in the classical period but with an eye to how to examine our lives in order to live them better.

I choose to think that the achievement of this issue of *Corvus* and the topics that are canvassed within it reflects the success of our undergraduate program in the Department of Philosophy at Dalhousie University. This is in no small part made possible by our valued faculty members and instructors with whom I am privileged to work. Although a key part of a Dalhousie philosophy education are the courses we offer, it is by no means limited to this. A number of those involved in this issue have also attended, and I hope benefited from, our department's colloquium series. This is a treasured, decades-old tradition and very much a key part of department life. It happens on most Friday afternoons during the calendar year, come rain or shine, and affords a space for both junior and non-

junior philosophers to present their work. Each colloquium also consists of a substantial question and answer period (typically, lasting slightly longer than the presentation itself). This harkens back to my mention of the deeply social nature of academic philosophy. It provides a useful "testing ground" for arguments or analyses but also a space within which philosophers and the philosophically-minded can gather to think together about a philosophical problem or issue.

Our colloquium series is open to anyone who wants to attend. This means a typical colloquium audience comprises not only faculty, instructors, and (both undergraduate and graduate) students from the department but often fellow academic philosophers from neighboring universities and colleagues from other disciplines. A legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health measures taken to protect various members of our publics is the ongoing online component of our department's colloquium series. This means that we have folks regularly participating from outside of Halifax or even Nova Scotia. For undergraduate philosophers in our program, this affords an opportunity to participate in quite a diverse intellectual community and benefit from a variety of perspectives, from both presenters (when they are not the presenters themselves) and other attendees.

This openness to all reflects the commitment to "engaged philosophy" that is very much a part of the history and current ethos of the department. Our department's social engagement includes both the philosophical problems that we address and the way we do philosophy. Members of the department have not only presented their philosophical work through traditional publications but also through blogs, podcasts, think tanks, reports, media interviews, and even amicus curiae briefs. Although we pride ourselves on be-

ing firmly rooted in the relevant philosophical literature (even as we endeavor to correct and expand it), much of our work is directed towards current social issues regarding such things as race, our treatment of other animals, neurodiversity, just war, gender, and anthropogenic climate change. This ethos of engagement, not only with relevant philosophical literatures but with pressing social issues, is very much on display in the current issue of *Corvus*.

The Dalhousie Undergraduate Philosophy Society (DUPS) is the driving force behind this journal. It, too, is an important part of department life and its membership draws from both Dalhousie University and the University of King's College. Though the editorial team are directly responsible for this issue, the DUPS executive and the society as a whole should also be acknowledged. A *Corvus* journal issue is a sign of an active DUPS and this is not possible without an effective executive. So, congratulations to all of the current members of DUPS!

Editorial

Alan Iturriaga, William R. Delise
Co-Editors
Dalhousie University & University of King's College

Having laid dormant for several seasons, it is our great pride and pleasure to resume the publication of our very own Dalhousie Philosophy undergraduate journal. As Professor Andrew Fenton reminds in his foreword, what follows is a collection of remarkable undergraduate scholarship on topics as diverse as the ontological status of fictional characters to a critical analysis of bondage, among others.

Following the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Dalhousie Undergraduate Philosophy Society (DUPS) receded in activity and has been slowly recovering its momentum.[2] This issue of *Corvus* is the culmination of a Herculean push by members of both the society and the community at large to reanimate the collective project of philosophy outside the regularly scheduled bustle of the department. We hold great pride in both the two memorable Jazz nights, or-

[2]Due to the dormancy of *Corvus* during the COVID-19 pandemic, we lost continuity of volume numbers. Hence this volume is numbered twenty-five, to mark the year of publication.

chestrated tirelessly by Sonnie Meltzer and Anika Panet-Carino, hosted at the University of King's College Wardroom, as well as our consistent 'Bagel Tuesday' lecture series, featuring both local and guest faculty–most notably, the exceptional turn-out for Gregory Radick's guest lecture on Charles Darwin's analogical thought, who visited us from the University of Leeds.

Behind the scenes we would like again to thank the members of the DUPS executive who made pins, rushed to pick up coffee and bagels, staffed society fairs, organized summer reading workshops, wrestled with banks over access to the society's funds, designed posters, and advertised events all across Dalhousie. Namely, but among others, we are grateful to Sonnie Meltzer, Larissa Wilks, Anika Panet-Carino, Amelia Bidini-Taylor, Ben Baxter, and Julia Chiavegato. In addition, we would like to thank all the faculty members at the department, as well as the tireless attendees and presenters at the departmental colloquia, who make the discipline and lifestyle of philosophy blossom–even amidst Atlantic winters–at Dalhousie.

We hope to have set the ball rolling once again for DUPS to be active and vibrant for years to come. It will be a great success to become a recognizable and constant feature of Dalhousie's academic landscape. Moreover, as funding and public opinion continually shift away from the kind of education that teaches how to think about or to construct simple arguments about problems, philosophy outreach will ever increase in importance. We take comfort in the idea that, now as we are leaving the university, students will, nevertheless, still be having bagels at the departmental lounge on Tuesdays.

In the Shadow of a Colossus: The Influence of Plato's *Timaeus* on Lucan's Cosmology

James Godsall
Dalhousie University & University of King's College

Lucan's *Pharsalia* reaches well beyond the borders of Latium in both the scope of its narrative and its sources of inspiration. Although Epicurean and Stoic philosophy played important roles in informing Roman thought and shaping Lucan's ambiguous cosmology, Plato's *Timaeus* warrants investigation. Superficially, these authors share little philosophically, yet they parallel one another in context. Both were writing during a time in which their republican and democratic political systems were in decline, scarred from a period of prolonged internal discord and war. Reflecting this context, both authors mobilize republics into cosmological wars. Hosting Timaeus and Critias, Socrates asks his guests to re-frame his Republic dialogue through a kind of war. Rather than the ideal city of the *Republic*, stable and pure, the *Timaeus* presents Athens as it is in its "true character"[1] made manifest in the cosmos, em-

[1]Plato, "Timaeus," in *Complete Works*, by John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, 1224-91, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 1997), 20b.

bodied like an animal "in motion or engaged in some struggle or conflict,"[2] sung into being in the register of epic poetry. In materializing the republic, the *Timaeus* contains the seeds of instability, with primordial chaos brought into a healthy constitution and order. Lucan's republic sees this noxious seed bloom, breaking out into corruption and abomination. The relationship between the *Timaeus* and the *Pharsalia* does not suggest a shared Platonic philosophical framework, but, rather, a potential thread of influence and resemblance. Bridged indirectly through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it will be argued that there is progression of logic of destabilization from the *Timaeus* to *Pharsalia*. An analysis of Lucan's proximity to Plato through Egyptology, Ovidian mediation, and bodily allegory, reveals how the *Pharsalia* draws poetic and literary inspiration from Plato's *Timaeus*, tapping an underappreciated vein of intertextuality.

The most direct connection between Plato and Lucan is found in Egypt. As Caesar begins his inquiry with the priest, Acoreus, Lucan nods directly to the *Timaeus* and its author: "If your ancestors taught their sacred matters / to Plato of Athens, was ever a guest here worthier to / hear them, or more able to grasp the world?"[3] Here, Lucan is drawing on a long tradition in Graeco-Roman Egyptology, one of sages who, seeking Egyptian knowledge, make their pilgrimage to this ancient land for lore,[4] while simultaneously setting Plato as the standard among them. Plato's pride and place within Egyptological tradition is corroborated by Dr. Jonathan Tracy, who comments that, if the well-educated Lucan were to be familiar with any Egyptology, he would have read

[2]Plato, "Timaeus," 19b-c.

[3]Lucan, *Civil War*, trans. Matthew Fox (New York: Penguin 2012), 10.302.

[4]Jonathan Tracy, "Science, Egypt, and Escapism in Lucan" (PhD diss., University of Toronto 2009), 148.

Herodotus and Plato's *Timaeus*.[5] By invoking Plato at the start of Caesar's inquiry, Lucan nods to this heritage. Whether or not it was his intention, this offers the audience a chance to reflect on the *Timaeus*' narrative and its conception of Egypt.

In the opening of the dialogue, Critias presents his kinsman, Solon, the "wisest of the seven sages," and his pilgrimage to Egypt,[6] where he learns from an Egyptian priest on their history, customs, and geography. This inquiry of a priest mirrors the activity of Caesar in book 10, who fills in for Solon, and briefly takes on an uncharacteristically philosophical disposition of intellectual patience and leisure: "I've always had free time for the powers above."[7] In the *Timaeus*, as well as in Ovid's Metamorphoses, Egypt is presented as resilient to change. It is a place of refuge during times of cosmic strife, safe in its geography, its distance, and the Nile's protected secret source.[8] This natural shelter from fires, floods, and war, are what the *Timaeus* suggests are the conditions for Egypt's unbroken traditions, preserving their civilization while others crumbled, creating a learned society of ancient wisdom and lore.[9] This is what Tracy describes as Egypt's "escape backwards,"[10] the idealized vision of Egypt as a repository of memory of ancient epochs, one which would be able to correct the errancies of the present age.[11] He suggests that Plato used this view of Egyptian resilience in his "pursuit of Athenian renewal," designed to "show his Athenian readership a way out from turmoil and civic strife [...] what

[5]Jonathan Tracy, "Science, Egypt, and Escapism in Lucan," 10.
[6]Plato, "Timaeus," 20d-26e.
[7]Lucan, *Civil War*, 10.231.
[8]Tracy, "Science, Egypt, and Escapism in Lucan," 146-7.
[9]Plato, "Timaeus," 22c-e.
[10]Tracy, "Science, Egypt, and Escapism in Lucan," 148.
[11]Tracy, "Science, Egypt, and Escapism in Lucan," 147-8.

Athens used to be but also what it can be again."[12] Plato's vision of Egypt provides Athens with a sense of continuity. Even if they are not the ideal city, there exists a stability within their republic that can weather the storms of strife. This reassuring vision of Egypt as a stabilizing point of reference is foiled in Lucan's Ptolemaic Egypt.

Just as Egypt presented as kindred in constitution to Athens, so too is it sympatico with Rome. However, rather than a refuge, Egypt shares Rome's sickness. Instead of reinforcing its constitution, it is infected with instability, embroiled in civil war: "discord in their hearts, their minds were split."[13] Something has gone wrong. While Tracy suggests that the utopian vision of Egypt is preserved, underlining several dialogues,[14] he makes it clear that, "within the moral economy of the Pharsalia [Egypt is] an accursed land."[15] Lentulus' suasoria to Pompey follows the old fashioned belief found in the *Timaeus* that Egypt will be a place of safety and stability.[16] However, he draws false hopes, as, rather than a hope for Roman restoration, it is Egypt's very kinship with Rome that heralds their shared decline. Rather than being governed by a conservative and pious priestly class, as in the *Timaeus*, here, Egypt's social order revolves around the corpse of "Philip of Pella's crazy offspring," the man who "[spurned] Athens,"[17] and captured the world through hateful envy. Rather than a refuge from disaster, or a repository of old ideals, distanced from the world's calamities, Egypt houses imperial exemplars of corruption, vice, and civil discord. With Caesar taking the role of sage, the premature ending of

[12]Tracy, *Lucan's Egyptian Civil War*, 5.
[13]Lucan, *Civil War*, 295.
[14]Tracy, "Science, Egypt, and Escapism in Lucan," 152.
[15]Tracy, "Science, Egypt, and Escapism in Lucan," 151.
[16]Tracy, "Science, Egypt, and Escapism in Lucan," 152.
[17]Lucan, *Civil War*, 296.

Pharsalia provides us with an opportunity to reflect on Caesar's pilgrimage, learning the lessons of a dystopian society, and reconsider the epic poem through the foil of its reassuring Timaen counterpart.

Returning to the linchpin of their relationship, Lucan's intertextuality with the *Timaeus* is informed by Ovidian precedence. Dr. Peter Kelly refers to G.B. Conte's remark on aemulatio as being as much a "system of differences"[18] as similarities. In this way, Lucan's absence of divine agents stands out from the wider epic genre. In particular, the absence of a demiurge or a divine arbiter of his epic chaos sets the *Pharsalia* in direct conversation with the *Metamorphoses* and, by extension, the *Timaeus*. Like Lucan, Ovid is ambiguous in his philosophical perspective and eclectic in his influences. However, Kelly suggests that the *Metamorphoses* should be considered a "synthesis of many major cosmogenic works [...] to match textually his all-encompassing history,"[19] and focuses on the intertextuality between Ovid and Plato's *Timaeus* which, among all his influences, holds a "programmatic position" in the cosmogony of the *Metamorphoses*.[20] In both *Metamorphoses*[21] and the *Timaeus*,[22] the universe begins in chaos, a primordial state in which the world is disordered and with opposing qualities of four elements in conflict with one another, with no stability or fixity. Chaos could be evocative of a host of traditions, such as Hesiod's *Theogony*, but the introduction of a demiurge overtly aligns Ovid with Plato. Kelly picks up on the shared language used to describe this divine agent,

[18]Peter Kelley, "Crafting Chaos: Intelligent Design in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Book 1 and Plato's *Timaeus*" *Classical Quarterly* 70, no 2 (2020): 747.

[19]Kelly, "Crafting Chaos," 734.

[20]Kelly, "Crafting Chaos," 743.

[21]Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Stephanie McCarter (New York: Penguin, 2023): 1.6-20.

[22]Plato, "Timaeus," 49a-53a.

the "craftsman," through Ovid's choice of opifex and fabricator, and the directly correlating 'artificer' of the *Timaeus*.[23] These titles of the 'craftsman,' and their underlying artistic quality, lend support to Kelly's interpretation of Ovid's use of Plato's for designing a cosmogony which blurs art and reality.[24] Rather than maintaining Plato's distinctive boundary between the divine model of the demiurge and its material copy, Kelly suggests that Ovid creates a dialogue between them, with the effect that both the poem's text and the cosmos it creates become transgressive and mutable.[25] The effect of this instability is that, unlike the fixed and ordered world of the *Timaeus*, the demiurge of the Metamorphoses only establishes an uneasy and impermanent peace. Chaos is not confined to the primordial past: "it is an ever-present threat throughout the rest of the poem."[26] By incorporating Plato's demiurge into the cosmogony it is meant to shape, Ovid is creating the conditions for the divine artificer to be changed by its art, and thus be subjected or violated by it.

The absence of a demiurge in Lucan is an extension of Ovid's process of destabilization in an increasingly materialized world. A critical parallel between the demiurges, and crucial to the "threat" which Kelly presents, is one he is missing in his analysis. Both demiurges use the oral word in ordering the cosmos. In the *Timaeus*, the demiurge is described as "prevailing" over the material chaotic world by "persuading" it and subjecting it toward what is best.[27] The demiurge maintains a critical distance from the material world, literally 'ordering' to follow its design. In contrast to this top-down

[23]Kelly, "Crafting Chaos," 742.
[24]Kelly, "Crafting Chaos," 746.
[25]Kelly, "Crafting Chaos," 746.
[26]Kelly, "Crafting Chaos," 746.
[27]Plato, "Timaeus," 48a.

model, Ovid's "god and better nature" litigates the conflict,[28] suggestive of arbitration, even equality between order and chaos. Even as the demiurge descends closer to its subject, its voice maintains a sense of order as law. The importance of the demiurges, and their oral order is in their absence and silence in Lucan. Nothing "prevails" over the material world of *Pharsalia*, nor is there a divine arbiter to adjudicate the looming conflict. In this vacuum, Caesar fills the void. Rather than litigating the world, or persuading it toward order, Caesar's power of rhetoric perverts Platonic and Ovidian precedence, convincing a shaken cosmos into a gross reversal: conferring law on crime.[29] Caesar fulfills Kelly's threat found lurking within the *Metamorphoses*, with a material being usurping the demiurge's position within the cosmos and the return to chaos – a corporeal coup of heaven. The distance between mortal and divine collapses, ultimately metastasizing under Nero, whose very weight buckles the sky.[30] While Platonic philosophy does not guide Lucan's cosmos, the *Timaeus*' cosmology informs its process of divine degradation. As seen in Lucan, what remains in the absence of the demiurge is a colossus unbound, a cosmic body in metamorphoses.

The imagery of a cosmic body permeates Pharsalia. In Martin Dinter's "Anatomizing Civil War," he elaborates the corpus of the Roman bodily imagery at play within the poem, and characterizes it as the unifying literary image which acts as the "narrative glue that connects the many different episodic limbs of the epic body."[31] The language and imagery of the body is applied to nearly every aspect of Lucan's cosmos: the geography becomes personified in

[28]Ovid, "Metamorphoses" 1.20.

[29]Lucan, *Civil War*, 1.2.

[30]Lucan, *Civil War*, 1.59-62.

[31]Martin Dinter, *Anatomizing Civil War: Studies in Lucan's Epic Technique*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015): 10.

the gigantomachy;[32] the military corps is made a body of Pompey or Caesar, or a collection of his hands.[33] The Roman state, the *Orbis Romanus*, is a body in itself, a corporeal cosmos, with the conflict of the civil war being a contest for who will be its head (caput).[34] Similarly, in the Living Thing of the *Timaeus*, the material cosmos is embodied, in this case the body – an all-encompassing colossus.[35] Rome's *corpus* is a monstrous imitation of the Timaean body's smooth and seamless whole. Similar to the corruption of Nasidius,[36] Rome has congealed into a chaotic and "bloated body," a singularity lacking individuality or freedom, made passive in its disorder.[37] Akin to fate of Tullus,[38] Rome's whole body becomes the wound of *Pharsalia*. This contrast between the Timaean whole and the disfigured body of Rome is representative of what Dinter describes as the "dichotomy between a closed and open ideal."[39] Lucan presents a world which isn't disfigured, an epic body which "exposes the cracks and cracks and fissures in a genre that seeks to pass itself off as seamless whole."[40] This is a "vivisection of the Roman body"[41], and the fruit of Ovid's metamorphic process of transmuting the Timaean divine into the material world. In its construction of an ideal cosmic body, the *Timaeus* provides Lucan with an imagistic framework, a model to be mutilated.

Having established Plato's proximity to Lucan, one can imagine the Timaean body and its organs mapped onto the Pharsalian Ro-

[32]Dinter, *Anatomizing Civil War*, 11.
[33]Dinter, *Anatomizing Civil War*, 22-3.
[34]Dinter, *Anatomizing Civil War*, 19-20.
[35]Plato, "Timaeus," 33.
[36]Lucan, *Civil War*, 9.982-999
[37]Lucan, *Civil War*, 7.476-479.
[38]Lucan, *Civil War*, 9.1000-1009.
[39]Dinter, *Anatomizing Civil War*, 28.
[40]Dinter, *Anatomizing Civil War*, 29.
[41]Dinter, *Anatomizing Civil War*, 28.

man *corpus* and the characters who populate it. The significance of the *caput* imagery becomes ever richer and more versatile when considering the decapitation of the Timaean head, the center of intellect, and its potential cascading consequences and effects as a natural process. The inciting incident would be the chopping of the neck. Here, Plato and Lucan directly use the same language of "isthmus," with Plato using it to describe the neck as the boundary which separates the head from the "trunk" of the body,[42] and Lucan using it to describe the role of Crassus within this wider Roman body as the boundary between Caesar and Pompey.[43] With the death of Crassus, the isthmus collapsed. Its head now void, the newly automatized organs of the cosmic body would attempt to fill the gap, just as the leading figures of Rome assert their claim to *caput mundi*. The strongest to assert his claim is the "hard heart"[44] of Caesar. Like the Timaean heart,[45] Caesar controls the "guardhouse" of the Roman army, and heats the swelling passion of the spirit within the body, just as he inflames the whole Roman world with *furor*. Though not a valid replacement for the *caput*, in the absence of reason, there is nothing to direct the spirit, nor an authority to command the lungs to cool the body – there are no guardrails to contain him. On the other hand, "the mind of unconquered Cato,"[46] is the most valid candidate, being the most akin with the *caput*'s nature. Like the mortal head of the body, Cato embodies the closest imitation the divine.[47] His rebuff of Labienus' request for a divine "model,"[48] coupled with Lucan's near deification of his con-

[42]Plato, "Timaeus," 69d-e.
[43]Lucan, *Civil War*, 1.106-118.
[44]Lucan, *Civil War*, 10.87.
[45]Plato, "Timaeus," 70b-d.
[46]Lucan, *Civil War*, 9.19.
[47]Plato, "Timaeus," 60c-d.
[48]Lucan, *Civil War*, 9.710-34.

duct and *exempla*,[49] establishes Cato as a representative of the ideal Roman and arbiter of reason. However, in the absence of the old *caput*, Cato is anachronistic, ridiculous, a mind without a head. He is nothing more than an echo of an absent order. The last organ to consider would be the Pompeian liver. Although Lucan never uses the term "liver," Pompey is akin to it in nature. The Timaean liver is passive, anxious, and surrounded by "images and phantoms"[50], whether they be dreams of past glories[51] or the shades of dead wives.[52] Like Pompey, the liver is pathetic, but possesses a redeeming "grasp of truth," given that it is the center of divination. This art, however, is only useful insofar as it is interpreted by a sound mind.[53] In the absence of a *caput*, Pompey can only anticipate and then endure disaster, as he does at Pharsalia[54] and the banks of the Nile.[55] In this scramble to replace the decapitated *caput*, Rome's body politic is a horrific corpse vivified, and the *Timaeus* offers rich organic allegory to complement the elemental language of the Caesarian lightning and Pompeian Oak.

Given Lucan's familiarity with the *Timaeus* through Egyptology and Ovid, it is perhaps surprising that it has yet to be incorporated into *Pharsalia*'s intertextual cosmogony. Lucan's account of Egypt draws him into the realm of Platonic Egyptology and situates Caesar in the footsteps of Solon, contrasting Plato's resilient utopia with his Lucan's degraded dystopia. The risks of grafting Platonic ideals to Lucan's epic can be treated through examining their indirect relationship through the mediation of Ovid. Given

[49]Lucan, *Civil War*, 9.755-59.
[50]Plato, "Timaeus," 71a-b.
[51]Lucan, *Civil War*, 7.8-22.
[52]Lucan, *Civil War*, 3.8-36.
[53]Plato, "Timaeus," 71e-72b.
[54]Lucan, *Civil War*, 7.99-107.
[55]Lucan, *Civil War*, 8.706-8.

Ovid's direct and emphatic allusion to the *Timaeus*' demiurge, the absence of such a figure in Lucan' cosmogony can be seen as an extension of the *Metamorphoses*' process of increasing destabilization and materialization of the cosmos. The product is one in which Lucan's epic cosmogony, the Roman *corpus*, resembles a mutilated Timaean body. If read in concert with pre-existing interpretations of the Lucanian epic, intertextuality between the *Timaeus* and the *Pharsalia* offers complementary and expansive possibilities for new epic allegory. While we should remain cautious to conclude that Plato and Lucan were in direct conversation, the opportunity to prove that conclusion remains enticing.

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Individualist Fictional Realism

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MRS. PONZA. What? The truth? It is only this: I really am the daughter of Mrs. Frola, and also the second wife of Mr. Ponza, Yes– and for myself, no one! I am no one!

GOVERNOR. Oh, no, Mrs. Ponza: for yourself, you must be one or the other!

MRS. Ponza. No. For myself, I am the woman that I am believed to be.[1]

Most philosophers consider the status of fictional characters a non-issue, or if an issue at all, then an issue for the philosophy of language to address. However, there has been frequent ontological debate about fictional characters and whether they obtain as existent objects in any sense. The last quarter of the twentieth century consisted mostly of realist approaches to the issue, whereas the first

[1]Pirandello, Luigi. *Right You Are, If You Think You Are*. Trans. Stanley Appelbaum (New York: Dover Publications 1997).

quarter of this century consisted of mostly anti-realist approaches to the issue. The aim of this paper is to defend fictional realism by advocating for an individualism as well as an infinity of fictional characters.

I will begin by giving accounts of the two kinds of fictional realism, proceeding to discuss two criticisms fictional realism has received. Discussion of these criticisms gives way to discussion of alternatives to fictional realism, and the problems with those alternatives. Finally, I will give my argument for a version (or versions) of fictional realism that potentially sustains criticisms and addresses the challenges that alternatives both pose for my theory and themselves falter to. The approach of this paper is intended to be modest.

A comparison of two of Stuart Brock's accounts of realism about fictional characters exposes an interesting difference. Both accounts posit that all realists of fictional characters accept two theories. In each account the first theory is the exact same:

- *Ontological thesis*: There are fictional characters. A fictional character is an individual (or role) picked out by a name or description which (i) is first introduced in a work of fiction and (ii) does not pick out a concrete individual in the actual world.

But then the accounts differ as to the second theory. The earlier account from 2002 posits the

- *Principle of Plenitude*: There is an abundance of fictional characters.[2]

Whereas the later account from 2007 posits the

[2]Stuart Brock, "Fictionalism About Fictional Characters," *Noûs* 36, no. 1 (2002): 1.

- *Objectivity thesis*: Fictional characters do not depend on anyone's attitudes, linguistic practices or conceptual schemes. Fictional characters would continue to exist (or be) even if there was nobody to think or talk about them.[3]

It is possible that the principle of plenitude is not included in the later account because the objectivity thesis addresses the concerns the absence of the principle of plenitude produces.

The principle of plenitude is important for distinguishing the theory proposed by Gottlob Frege in 1892 from a realist position.[4] According to that theory, all fictional names designate a singular object, perhaps the number 0. Brock is wanting to make a distinction between Frege's theory and fictional realism, and it is for this reason that he posits the principle of plenitude. In an endnote, Brock indicates that the number of fictional characters can be any finite number greater than 1 (as well as that the principle "must be refined," though also that such refinement is "no easy task").[5] This is significant in relation to the aims of this paper as rather than settling with any finite number greater than one, I am positing that it is necessary that infinitely many fictional characters exist. This is the case so as to maintain the objectivity thesis while also positing that the individual agent determines what is the case regarding the specific characters that they are entertaining, referring to or receiving the reference to. Rather than it being decided by any individual the details of the fictional character, individuals decide (or non-cognitively cause) which character of infinitely many is being referred to by each reference to a fictional character.

[3]Stuart Brock & Edwin David Mares, "Fictional Characters," in *Realism and Anti-Realism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007): 199.

[4]Brock, "Fictionalism About Fictional Characters," 2.

[5]Brock, "Fictionalism About Fictional Characters," 18-19.

It is not a facet of fictional realism that the number of fictional characters is finite. However, this is something that the objectivity thesis requires objectivity about; it must be objectively the case that there are infinitely many fictional characters. Arguably, the objectivity thesis cannot succeed without there being infinitely many fictional characters, because a finite number of fictional characters will be dependent on someone or some group of people. This is perhaps the root of Brock's ongoing qualms with fictional realism, but problems with fictional realism are to be discussed later in this paper. The objectivity thesis also avoids identifying fictional characters with something like the number 0 because for Frege references are of the most significance, yet references cannot be said to "continue to exist (or be) even if there was nobody to think or talk about them." For Frege, a reference to a fictional character is only a reference to a fictional character when it is considered as belonging to the set of references that designate the singular object that is perhaps the number 0. Speech acts and written acts, which constitute references, are dependent on persons to exist.

In the theory being presented in this paper, an individual agent decides which of infinitely many pre-existing fictional characters are being referred to by each reference to a fictional character. Of note is that this does not entail an absence of argumentative truth in discourses about references to fictional characters, but rather that for each individual agent, each reference to a fictional character refers to a different fictional character among infinitely many. Before elaborating on this point, the way that fictional characters obtain if not in the actual world must be discussed. However, the assertion that infinitely many fictional characters exists is not contrary to the principle of plenitude, especially considering that, although when an agent holds a fictional character in mind they are actually

holding an infinite number of infinite sets of fictional characters given the openness of unaddressed details about a single fictional character, practically speaking there only needs to be any number greater than 1 of fictional characters at any given moment, as discussion of fictional characters, according to the theory being presented here, amounts to argumentation as to which of at least two fictional characters a referent is for.

Fictional realism is the position that fictional characters exist, although they do not obtain in the actual world. Brock, in both of his accounts, argues that there are two kinds of fictional realism, namely concrete realism and abstract realism about fictional characters. He also argues that there are two broad varieties of each kind, but I am inclined to for now focus on only one variety of each kind, because the second variety of concrete realism will come up later in the paper, and the second variety of abstract realism is not of enough difference from the version of the first that I am addressing to warrant consideration. Rather than considering the two kinds broadly, I will exposit a particular instantiation of each kind, each of which enjoys being of their earliest and most pleasant articulations. David Lewis' theory is the preferred version of concrete realism, and Peter van Inwagen is responsible for the preferred version of abstract realism.

Although Lewis' theory of fictional characters can be de drawn out of his major work, On the Plurality of Worlds,[6] it was articulated earlier by Lewis in the article "Truth in Fiction."[7] He begins this publication by addressing a theory that will be addressed again later in the paper, namely the second variety of concrete realism about fictional characters. This theory is associated with Meinon-

[6]David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1986).

[7]David Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1978): 37-46.

gian thought. It is that fictional characters may be referred to as having the properties ascribed to them, but what they are is not something that exists. The problem Lewis identifies with this is that the properties cannot be inferred from, or, as Lewis puts it, "the Meinongian must tell us why truths about fictional characters are cut off, sometimes though not always, from the consequences they ought to imply."[8] He then begins his description of his alternative thesis with the move that nearly all realists and antirealists alike make, the assertion that descriptions about fictional characters have implicitly or explicitly begin with the operator "In such-and-such fiction." That is, almost any theory of fictional characters asserts that truths regarding fictional characters are pertaining to the stories they belong to and not the world generally. Part of the thesis of this paper is that this operator ought to be replaced with 'In my conception of such-and-such fiction...,' but this will be returned to later as it is outside the scope of Lewis' theory, which deserves full exposition.

As Lewis describes, the presence of the prefixed operator changes the truth value of the proposition about the fictional character. Significant to his argument as a whole, what makes a prefixed sentence true for Lewis is if there is a set of possible worlds that is somehow determined by the fiction in which the proposition is true. Important to note is that for Lewis possible worlds are real and concrete, although they are isolated to us, whereas philosophers like Saul Kripke and Alvin Plantinga discuss possible worlds as if they are hypothetical products of our speculations, rather than as concrete existents independent of speculation as Lewis does.

The first approximation of that set of possible worlds is "those

[8]Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," 37.

worlds where the plot of the fiction is enacted,"[9] but a couple of problems arise with this approximation. The first brought up by Lewis is that it is not automatically known from a text what the plot of the fiction is. Second, stories are told from a person's perspective. Whether that perspective is in the first or third perspective, it is always the imaginative perspective of a storyteller, and as such the plot will vary from each occasion of telling (it does not matter whether that telling is vocal or written). Thus, Lewis arrives at the conclusion that the worlds we ought to consider as the worlds in which prefixed sentences substantiate truth in is "the worlds where the fiction is told, but as known fact rather than fiction."[10] The denotationless name that a storyteller in our world uses denotes an actually existent person when used by storytellers in the set of possible worlds.

Lewis uses the label Analysis 0 for the proposal that things are true in a fiction if they are true in every world where the fiction is told as known fact.[11] The trouble with Analysis 0 is that it 'ignores background', meaning that the content that is not explicit in the fiction, yet can be inferred as part of it, is disregarded, but also that the set of possible worlds includes many bizarre worlds that are contrary to what we would typically infer from the fiction. Lewis, in response to this, introduces Analysis 1, which relies on his treatment of counterfactuals by which counterfactuals are made "non-vacuously true if and only if some possible world where" the antecedent and the subsequent propositions "are true differs less from our actual world, on balance, than does any world where" the antecedent is true but the subsequent is not.[12] Analysis 1 then

[9]Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," 39.
[10]Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," 40.
[11]Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," 41.
[12]Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," 42.

becomes: a prefixed sentence (as a reminder, a proposition with the prefixed operator 'In such-and-such fiction') is non-vacuously true iff some world where the fiction is told as known fact and the proposition is true differs less from our actual world, on balance, than does any world where the fiction is told as known fact and the proposition is not true.

Although Analysis 1 removes the bizarre worlds from the set, there remains many unknown details about the worlds that do not change the extent to which the worlds differ from our own. Thus, a plurality is still necessary. However, there are cases in which there are details about our world that, because the creator of the fiction was unaware of them, cause there to be a greater difference between our world and a world in which the fiction is told as known fact and the proposition is true than a world in which the fiction is told as known fact and the proposition is false. Lewis' solution to this is the introduction of a set of what he calls "collective belief worlds of the community of origin,"[13] which are a set of worlds in which the beliefs overt in the community in which the fiction originated come true. Analysis 2 differs from Analysis 1 by comparing the worlds in which the fiction is told as known fact not with the actual world, but with one of the collective belief worlds of the community of origin.

Lewis concludes by addressing how the truth of a fiction may derive from other fictions, as well as, the relevance of impossible worlds, which are topics deserving of more treatment than they receive in this paper.[14]

The abstract realism as applied to fictional characters of van In-

[13]Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," 44.

[14]For a recent discussion of impossible worlds in this context, see Badura, Christopher, and Francesco Berto, "Truth in Fiction, Impossible Worlds, and Belief Revision," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 1 (2019): 178-93.

wagen is portrayed in his 1983 article titled "Fiction and Metaphysics."[15]

Van Inwagen applies Quine's meta-ontology, which he describes as comprising four propositions. The first is that "to be is to exist." That is, "there are no things that do not exist;" to say that something is, is to say that it exists.[16] The second proposition is that existence is univocal; it applies equally to both material objects and immaterial objects. His support for this is that numbers apply univocally to both.[17] The third proposition is that existential quantifiers posit existence.[18] The fourth is that determining 'What is there?', which for Quine is the aim of ontology, is a result of the process of deciding what theories to accept.[19] What these propositions result in, describes van Inwagen, is that in order to determine what exists, one must translate their held theories into the symbolism of modern formal logic, specifically to arrive at sentences that begin with an existential quantifier. There existing what the existential statement reports to exist confirms the truth of the theory, so that existence is ground for accepting the theory.

Van Inwagen then arrives at a conclusion as to what theories about fiction are, namely "theories that treat stories as having an internal structure."[20] He also clarifies that these theories are not present automatically from the presentation of a fictional story but result from addressing the story critically. We may then translate from those theories existential statements.

Van Inwagen's focus in this paper is the existence of fictional char-

[15]Peter van Inwagen, "Fiction and Metaphysics," *Philosophy and Literature* 7, no. 1 (1983): 67-77.

[16]Van Inwagen, "Fiction and Metaphysics," 68.

[17]Van Inwagen, "Fiction and Metaphysics," 68-9.

[18]Van Inwagen, "Fiction and Metaphysics," 69.

[19]Van Inwagen, "Fiction and Metaphysics," 69.

[20]Van Inwagen, "Fiction and Metaphysics," 72.

acters. He accepts that they do not exist spatiotemporally. However, if accepting Quine's meta-ontology, they must exist somehow, because there is nothing that does not exist, and fictional characters are. Fictional character in some sense be, possible due to our ascription of properties to them. Because they somehow be, they exist. And yet, we cannot say that they enjoy a special kind of existence, such as fictional existence, because 'existence is univocal.' Therefore, van Inwagen posits that fictional characters do exist though that existence is not spatiotemporal. What results is that, for van Inwagen, fictional characters are theoretical entities of literary criticism.[21] They are abstract objects not situated in space or time. An extension of this is that the properties that fictional characters have are not those provided by the story itself, but those provided by the literary theory concerning them, such as the archetypal role they play in the story or the part of the story that the character is introduced. Van Inwagen asserts that the properties that are provided by the story are things that the character "holds."[22] Thus, although the existence of fictional characters is not special, the relation they have to their properties is. What van Inwagen describes as an advantage of this is that the law of the excluded middle, which "requires that, for every property, an object have either that property or its negation" (typically expressed as that every proposition must be either true or false): applies to the properties something has, not to the properties it holds.[23] This allows for being able to find out what we do not know about fictional characters. So, although the relation is special, a special logic is not necessary.

Van Inwagen's abstract realism posits the existence of abstract en-

[21]Van Inwagen, "Fiction and Metaphysics," 75.
[22]Van Inwagen, "Fiction and Metaphysics" 75.
[23]Van Inwagen, "Fiction and Metaphysics," 76.

tities whereas Lewis's concrete realism posits the existence of concrete entities. Both contend that the entities they posit are isolated. One of the most common contentions of philosophy is whether it is acceptable to posit the existence of entities that do not belong to the actual world, though most often the concern with doing so is that those entities are typically non-physical or not spatiotemporally located. Abstract entities are non-physical. Concrete entities, however, are physical, even though the spatiotemporal worlds they belong to are not necessarily the world we ourselves belong to. Van Inwagen, three years after his 1983 article on fictional characters, criticized Lewis's arguments for the existence of infinitely many concrete possible worlds.[24] An argument against the existence of infinitely many concrete possible worlds is incredulity. However, abstract realism is subject to that same incredulity. It is difficult to accept that there are entities that are not spatiotemporally located in the actual world, whether those entities are abstract or concrete. The end result of this paper is a revision of both abstract realism as applied to fictional characters and concrete realism as applied to fictional characters. It is being contended in this paper that fictional realism is true so long as a few caveats or affordances are made. What is not contended in this paper is whether concrete realism that posits the existence of isolated possible worlds or abstract realism that posits the existence non-physical entities is the better over the other. The criticisms next addressed against fictional realism apply to both abstract and concrete realism.

However, a remark that I believe is novel to this paper, is that the discrepancy between accepting abstract and concrete versions is a matter of having the corresponding theory about two genres of

[24] Peter van Inwagen, "Two Concepts of Possible Worlds," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy Volume XI Studies in Essentialism* by Peter French et al.. (1986): 185-213.

fiction. According to concrete realism, fantasy is made subsidiary to science-fiction, meaning that every appearance of fantasy is an appearance of science fiction, but not every appearance of science fiction is an appearance of fantasy. It seems that Lewis suggests in his 1986 classic that scientific or natural laws are not fixed across all possible worlds, because "absolutely every way that a world could possibly be is a way that some world is."[25] This might be what makes "modal realism," the title he gives his theory that infinitely many isolated possible worlds exist, a "philosopher's paradise," because it accounts for what was 'incomplete' in his 1973 discussion of causation, namely a consideration of indeterminism.[26] An advantage of his account of counterfactual analysis of causation over a regularity analysis is "that it allows undetermined events to be caused."[27] If concrete modal realism is true, it may turn out to be the case that the apparent diversion from the natural laws of the actual world that happens in fantasy not merely happens in a concrete world (or infinitely many possible concrete worlds): but we may learn in the future that that diversion was not in fact a diversion from the natural laws of the actual world, but only our apprehension of the actual world when we encountered the 'fiction.' Genuine science fiction does not contradict the laws of nature of the actual world but speculates as to what might be possible once we reach beyond our current limited understanding of those laws. Fantasy does make this contradiction, but Lewis's account of counterfactuals leaves open the possibility that that contradiction is not a contradiction at all. Thus, if concrete modal realism is true, then there is no discrepancy between science-fiction and fantasy. This

[25]Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 2.

[26]David Lewis, "Causation," *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 1, Seventieth Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division (Oct. 11, 1973): 559.

[27]Lewis, "Causation," 559.

is a contentious claim. The contradiction of a fantasy with the actual natural laws may be evidence of a logical contradiction, but not immediately and only after inference from what the natural laws of the fantasy world might be, which must be inferred from accounts of the fantasy world.

Abstract entities, on the other hand, perhaps hold rather than have natural laws. If a contradiction is apparent in laws, which would be the case if comparing the laws held by abstract entities that are fictional worlds with the laws that obtain in the actual world, it does not result in the non-existence of that abstract entity, as a logical contradiction would, because, as van Inwagen argues is the case with the properties the original text attributes to fictional characters, laws of a fictional world that is an abstract entity are held rather than had by that entity. This permits an indeterminacy of natural laws for that fictional entity. However, it does not imply that those laws might turn out to be the laws of the actual, or real, world.

The first criticism toward fictional realism is that the anti-realist position called fictionalism is possibly superior. Fictionalists argue that if fictional realism is true, it entails that all statements of literary criticism presuppose its truth. That is, statements that begin with the prefixed operator 'In such-and-such fiction' and similar statements that indicate that the proposition is with reference to the fiction and not the actual world, must also either be prefixed with 'According to fictional realism' or in some other way indicate that the ontology of fictional realism is supposed. What fictionalism about fictional characters resolves to do is treat fictional realism as itself a fiction, and what fictionalism does generally is posit that fictions, of any kind, do not need to be ontologically committing (although fictionalism itself might be ontologically committing).

What is taken as the beginning point for fictionalists about fictional characters is that fictional statements are primary to statements of literary criticism. Thus, we are to observe foremost the assertions that a storyteller makes rather than the discourse surrounding the story. One variant of fictionalism about fictional characters posits that storytelling is a special kind of speech act that the statements of are not propositions or assertions, but commandments toward the experiencer of the speech act to imagine the statement as factual. This variety extends itself to critical statements, so that critical statements are not serious assertions either, but, like the fictional statements they are about, act as imperatives to pretend that something is the case.

Although there are other varieties of fictionalism about fictional characters, the issues I will address toward this variety carry over to other varieties, and though there are many other issues with fictionalism about fictional characters generally, the three that I am concerned about here are the most important and most helpful when it comes to defending fictional realism.

When it comes to prefixing a proposition about a fictional character with, 'According to fictional realism, in such-and-such fiction, ...' the problem arises that it seems that the proposition prefixed only by 'In such-and-such fiction' is entailed and determined by fictional realism, and that those who hold fictional realism to be true must also hold the (prefixed) proposition to be true. This may seem like only a minor nuisance for the fictionalist, but Marián Zouhar argues that this problem is more detrimental for the fictionalist than it may at first seem.[28]

Zouhar lists three problems for fictionalism that result from the

[28]Marián Zouhar, "On the Systematic Inadequacy of Fictionalism about Fictional Characters," *Philosophia* 47 (2019): 925-42.

fact that prefixing statements of literary criticism with that they are according to fictional realism seems to assert that all fictional realists believe those statements of literary criticism to be true. The first is that given that the fictionalist about fictional characters denies the truth of fictional realism, none of the propositions can be asserted as true. This of course gives recourse for fictionalists to the suggestion of understanding statements about fictions as imperatives, but more on this in a moment. The second problem Zouhar lists is that it represents fictional realism as a set of inconsistent statements. If a literary critic posits something contrary to another, both are regarded as belonging to the set of statements contained by fictional realism. It is nonsensical for a theory to affirm both a proposition and its negation. The third problem follows from the second. It is that the principle of explosion, by which any proposition can be inferred from a contradiction, leads to the proposition that 'there are no fictional characters' belonging to the set of statements that fictional realism consists of (given the position of fictionalism about fictional characters). This would contradict the most essential principle of fictional realism, that there are fictional characters. Essentially what this argument against fictionalism about fictional characters amounts to is that fictionalism about fictional characters results in an incoherence of fictional realism when fictionalism about fictional characters relies on the coherence of fictional realism to begin with. Thus, the approach of having the prefix 'According to fictional realism...' before statements of literary criticism does not succeed.

When it comes to taking fictional statements and critical statements as imperative statements, Moore's paradox stands in the way.[29]

[29]Zoltán Gendler Szabó, "Fictionalism and Moore's Paradox," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 31, no. 3 (2001): 293-307.

G.E. Moore claimed that it is absurd to assert that something is the case while also asserting that you do not believe it to be the case. If fictionalism were to translate fictional statements and critical statements into imperative statements outright, then the imperative statements would evade the issue being presented here, as truth is not involved in imperative statements. But to do so would be to eliminate the discourse altogether, and the theory would no longer be fictionalism, but a theory that asserts that we ought to translate fictional and critical statements into imperative statements. We would then have to prefix every fictional and critical statement with something like 'pretend that...' and 'imagine that...', something that is not compatible with how we actually tell stories and discuss literary criticism, namely as if they are in some sense true. Thus, when the fictionalist is suggesting that we ought to use fictional and critical statements as we would normally, but interpret them as not true, they are essentially arguing that the assertions are intended to be taken as truths but being invisibly suffixed by 'and I do not believe...." Or, to articulate this more clearly, fictionalists tell us that, because of the discourse such statements belong to, we should pretend to assert rather than actually assert fictional statements and critical statements. But for fictionalists to tell us this is to suggest that we also should make statements asserting something while also asserting that we do not believe that something, which is the very absurdity Moore's paradox is concerned with. Although this is rather a brief and crude articulation of the argument, it remains a demonstration of an issue with fictionalism. For more on this topic, see Zoltán Szabo, 2001.

The third and final problem with fictionalism (about fictional characters, but also generally) that I am addressing here is that Meinongianism has advantages over fictionalism. We have mentioned Meinon-

gianism briefly above. It posits that there are true statements about an object even if that object does not exist. In our case, it posits that fictional characters can be referred to as having properties ascribed to them, but they do not exist. Like fictionalism, Meinongianism refrains from positing the existence of the objects of the discourse (in our case, fictional characters) while retaining the ability to refer to them. As Nathaniel Gan described in 2021, an advantage over fictionalism that Meinongianism has is that it takes truth in a relevant discourse "at face value."[30] I will refrain from exhausting this point and remind the reader that this is a third argument against fictionalism. Gan does note that although Meinongianism does have advantages over fictionalism, "it should not be inferred from this that Meinongianism is superior to fictionalism," because according to Meinongianism, no reference is ontologically committing, which is an incompatible thesis with realism because "realists about a kind of object" affirm how "our affirmation of a sentence containing a singular term is usually thought to ontologically commit us to the referent of that term" if that term refers to the kind of object the realist is a realist about.[31] Fictionalists have an explanation for this commitment whereas Meinongians do not. For some fictionalists, the ontological commitment of statements is recognized, and as a consequence of recognition is made optional as being accepted or not. Meinongians do not leave open that option to any extent.

Although Lewis addresses a problem with Meinongianism about fictional characters, that it 'cuts off' characters from their implied consequences, another issue with Meinongianism is offered by van Inwagen's account. Meinongianism is contrary to the principle of Quine's meta-ontology that being is the same as existence. Meinon-

[30]Nathaniel Gan, "Fictionalism and Meinongianism," *Theoria* 36, no. 1 (2021): 59.
[31]Gan, "Fictionalism and Meinongianism," 59.

gianism is false because everything exists. One thing to note is that while the second variety of concrete realism mentioned above is based on Meinongianism, it is also true that Meinongianism is generally an anti-realist position as it opposes the first variety as well as abstract realism. A neo-Meinongian theory called 'Modal Meinongianism' has become the most prominent version of Meinongianism. It is an incompleteness of this paper that it does not address this theory. I am attracted to endorsing Niall Connolly's recent discussion of it that contends that "There is no defensible view that merits the name 'modal Meinongianism.'"[32]

The first criticism of fictional realism addressed in this paper was that alternatives exist and have advantages, but the inadequacies of the alternatives has been discussed, and more complaints can be had with them. The second criticism of fictional realism is more directly toward fictional realism itself. The theory that we conclude with is in response to this criticism, and, though by definition it is realism, it borrows from anti-realist tendencies.

The criticism is that fictional realism is committed to the claim that fictional characters can be indeterminately identical. That is, often it is indeterminate whether one reference to a fictional character refers to the same or a different character than another reference to a fictional character. This applies whether the reference uses the same name or not. Ben Caplan and Cathleen Muller affirm that this is an undeniable feature of fictional realism.[33]

Creationism is the variety of fictional realism that has been understood to withstand this criticism. It is the view that authors create their characters. Thus, whether a fictional character is or is not

[32]Niall Connolly, "Modal Meinongianism Doesn't Exist," *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 100, no. 4 (2024).

[33]Ben Caplan & Cathleen Muller, "Against a Defense of Fictional Realism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 64, no. 255 (2014): 211-24.

identical with itself or another character is determined by the intent of the author. A problem with creationism was argued for by Brock in 2010.[34] It becomes apparent that a fictional character is not created each time the author uses the name nor the first time the author uses the name, as both cases would entail indeterminacy, but must be when the author intended to create the character and, as a consequence of their intent, pretended to refer to or uniquely identify the character. Brock's problems with creationism have to do with new properties being ascribed to fictional characters that were not present when the author created them and might even contradict properties that were ascribed to them at creation. David Friedell, in 2016, defended creationism rather well against Brock's arguments.[35]

However, there is another issue with creationism. This issue is obtuse in origin. Connolly's recent account of fictional characters, which untenably still treats them as non-existent objects, made recourse to structuralism,[36] whereas my account makes recourse to post-structuralism. Creationism, when it comes to determining the facts about fictional characters, gives priority to the author's intent. Roland Barthes, in his famous 1968 essay, "The Death of the Author,"[37] argued that priority ought to be given to the reader's interpretation. The essay is often interpreted as indicating the shift from structuralism to post-structuralism. Meaning is only given to a text when it is read. Thus, it is more sensible to say that the reader creates the fictional character than that the author creates the fictional

[34]Stuart Brock, "The Creationist Fiction: The Case against Creationism about Fictional Characters," *The Philosophical Review* 119, no 3. (2010): 337-64.

[35]David Friedell, "Abstract Creationism and Authorial Intention," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 74, no. 2 (2016): 129-37.

[36]Connolly, "Modal Meinongianism Doesn't Exist."

[37]Roland Barthes, "The Death of The Author" (1969).

character. But this position would be anti-realist; for the reader to create the fictional character is to violate the objectivity thesis.

The solution to this problem, and the ultimate thesis of this paper, is that infinitely many fictional characters exist and have always existed. What the reader does is identify specific characters as the fictional characters they are entertaining. This remains a realist position because it is objectively the case that there are infinitely many such characters. What little remains of this paper is to detail how this might work with both concrete and abstract realism.

Regarding concrete realism, there are two main points to bring up. The first has already been mentioned, that the prefixed operator 'In such-and-such fiction' ought to be replaced with 'In my (or someone particular's) conception of such-and-such fiction.' The second point is that it is not enough for the fiction to be told as known fact in the possible world, but it is necessary that if the reader were a member of that world, by any means, the reader would be in a position to report the fiction as known fact. Thus, taking Analysis 0 as an example, the principle would be that a proposition is true about a reader's conception of a fiction iff the reader would report the proposition as true were the reader in every world where the reader would report the fiction as known fact.

Fictional realism is true, and yet the reader has influence over what properties a fictional character holds. This is because infinitely many fictional characters exist, and the reader is who determines which fictional character and their counterparts are being referred to. Lewis already holds that infinitely many possible worlds exist. What is being suggested here is that the reader, rather than the author or the community of the author is determining which possible worlds are relevant.

Regarding abstract realism, in his essay van Inwagen held that it

is literary criticism that determines the properties of fictional characters. The literary critic is a reader, and the claim of this paper is that the reader determines, or perhaps even argues, which of infinitely many fictional characters a reference is of. But we also want to say that literary criticism is subject to being read, and that it is again the reader of literary criticism who determines which of infinitely many fictional characters are being referred to. In the case of abstract realism, those characters are abstract entities. When a property is ascribed to a fictional character that was not previously ascribed, if it does not contradict previously ascribed properties, then it may be said to still be referring to the same fictional character, but when it contradicts previously held properties, the ascription causes the replacement of the fictional character with the previously held properties with a fictional character that holds the newly ascribed properties.

Although much work remains to be done to develop this theory, it has been shown why such a theory is necessary. If developed correctly, it will withstand criticisms against it. Any ambiguities or indeterminacies that result from a fiction are to be resolved by the judgement of the reader. This theory should not create confusion when it comes to literary criticism because literary criticism does not need to presuppose an ontology of fictional characters.

The aim of this paper has been to begin to develop a theory as opposed to a practice, which is why the use of examples has been minimal throughout. However, the theory might explain why people benefit from entertaining fictions. Fictional characters exist and so do we; engaging in a fiction is an opportunity for practicing empathy. Reading novels has been shown to increase a person's empathy (or, at the very least, "exposure to fiction was more positively (or less negatively) related to [...] performance-based measures of

social ability than exposure to non-fiction").[38]

If the ontological status of fictional characters is considered the domain of pure reason, and Kant was correct about the limits of pure reason, then it can be asserted that despite being a theory, the real value and importance of the propositions that constitute this theory will not relate to our speculative interests, but our practical interests. Kant considers the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God as the three things that are usefully discussed in terms of practical interests rather than speculative interests despite their relation to the transcendental speculation of reason, because of the ceaseless struggle of transcendental investigation.[39] It would be interesting to apply the theory began in this paper to these issues, particularly their resulting suggestions as to how things ought to be. But to consider the practicality of the theory in its own right, as to what it suggests we ought to do, is to pluck the fruits of this labour.

[38]Raymond A. Mar, Keith Oatley, Jacob Hirsh, Jennifer dela Paz, & Jordan B. Peterson, "Bookworms versus Nerds: Exposure to Fiction versus Non-Fiction, Divergent Associations with Social Ability, and the Simulation of Fictional Social Worlds," *Journal of Research in Personality* 40, no. 5 (2006): 705.

[39]Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Marcus Weigelt (Penguin 2007).

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A Difference in Manner, not Matter: A Theological Defense of Anne Conway's Metaphysics

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In the 17th and 18th centuries, western philosophy saw an influx of metaphysical systems of philosophy and the natural world. New ideas, which challenged Aristotelian and scholastic thought formed the basis of a new approach to philosophy itself. Conway was one of these philosophers who, despite not being able to attend formal school, built a metaphysical system of the universe with the goal of uniting and reconciling several schools of philosophy. Conway's main philosophical influence came from the Cambridge Platonists. She was very interested in Cartesian philosophy and her philosophical system of the natural world attempts to resolve the issues of Descartes' mind-body dualism, while challenging the strict materialism of figures like Hobbes. In 17th century England, where Conway is writing, the overwhelming majority of those engaging in philosophy were less likely to accept or take seriously a system of the world which could not be reconciled to the Christian faith. I argue that this is a key goal of Conway's system, and provides a path

to defending her philosophical ideas. Although Conway's philosophy is extremely overlooked, it is well known as a key influence on the metaphysics of Leibniz, who is generally regarded as one of the more influential German philosophers of the 18th century. Conway's only work of philosophy, The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy, was published posthumously in 1690. It includes her metaphysics, an in depth theodicy, and a wide ranging critique of Descartes and Hobbes. I will first explain the key aspects of her metaphysics concerning natural substance, and then examine its compatibility with two specific Christian doctrines.

The first essential claim Conway makes is that there are only three substances in the universe: God, Christ, and the creatures. God is a single entity, who is immutable and wholly perfect. Christ serves as the mediator between God and the creatures, and can change only for the better. The creatures, or creation, which for Conway refers to everything on Earth, is infinitely mutable. Interestingly, Conway's metaphysics differs from other 17th century metaphysics in that she argues that all of creation is composed of one distinct substance: spirit. Everything on Earth is made of spirits, which are arranged in a multitude of ways. These spirits can differ greatly in manner from each other, making the immaterial and the material two ends of one continuum. I argue that Conway's metaphysical theory of physical substance successfully reconciles the natural world to two specific Christian doctrines. This makes her system of the natural world digestible to a large Christian audience, while also using the discussion of spirit to combat the problematic implications of Cartesian dualism. The first theological benefit of Conway's metaphysics is that it explains how apocatastasis—the Christian doctrine of infinite restoration—is possible. Because all aspects of creation are composed of a continuum of spirits, Con-

way argues that they are able to change within that continuum to become more or less perfect. The second theological benefit is that Conway's metaphysics provides an explanation of how creation executes Christ's second commandment: to "love your neighbor as yourself."[1] Because God made all of creation out of the same substance, there are natural sympathies between the species of creation, even if sin has made it more difficult for those sympathies to be actualized. These theological benefits provide the basis for a defense of her metaphysical system.

The first aspect of Conway's metaphysics concerns the way in which beings are "distinguished from each other in terms of their substance."[2] This point is essential for establishing the broader cosmos that her philosophical and theological theories exist in. Conway argues that there are only three of these beings: "God, Christ and creatures."[3] Not only are these entities distinguished from each other, they encompass the "vast infinity of possible things," meaning they are the only types of beings that exist in the universe. These three distinct beings exist in a hierarchy, descending from the wholly perfect God, through Christ the mediator, to the creatures, who Conway asserts as the "lowest order of being." Each of these three entities have distinct attributes, specifically with respect to their changeability. Because God is the "supreme being," He is "altogether immutable."[4] God is a wholly perfect being, meaning He is not subject to change. On the opposite end of that spectrum are the creatures, who are "altogether mutable," and can change "for good or bad." Christ serves as the mediator between God and

[1]Mark 28:31.

[2]Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, trans. Allison P. Coudert & Taylor Corse (Cambridge University Press 1996): 30.

[3]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 30.

[4]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 30.

creation, communicating God's nature to the creatures. Christ is "partly mutable" and can only change "in respect to good."[5]

For Conway, it is clear that both God and Christ are composed of only one distinct substance, as they are both single entities. It therefore follows that, "the whole of creation are also a single species in substance or essence."[6] For many readers in the Early Modern period, this conclusion would not have been intuitive. The notion that all of the natural world is composed of a singular substance is not self-evident, due to the varying states of matter, different species, and the complexity of living creatures. To respond to this potential objection, and help convince a potentially skeptical reader, Conway argues that all creatures are composed of a "body and a spirit."[7] More specifically, bodies and spirits are dispersed throughout the human body, forming a distinct whole. Conway argues that man, for example, is made up of a "countless multitude of bodies," and a "countless multitude of spirits,"[8] which can be arranged in a multitude of ways to form the different species that exist throughout creation. Moreover, the body is the "passive principle" and the spirit is the "active principle,"[9] meaning that the spirits make active decisions that the bodies receive. Conway goes on to assert that "every body is a spirit and nothing else, and it differs from a spirit only insofar as it is darker."[10] A body, then, is only a "darker"[11] type of spirit because it is more corporeal, receiving the light that emanates from the more active spirit. In this sense, body refers to all material substance, and spirit refers to all

[5]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 30.
[6]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 30.
[7]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 38.
[8]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 39.
[9]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 38.
[10]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 40.
[11]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 40.

immaterial substance. Consequently, Conway concludes that "the distinction between spirit and body is only modal and incremental, not essential and substantial."[12] In other words, the body—which refers to all material substance—and the spirit—which refers to all immaterial substance—are the same in essence, since a body is only a darker type of spirit. This makes the material and the immaterial two opposite ends of the continuum of spirits that compose the natural world.

I argue that Conway's metaphysics are defensible because of the theological doctrines they explain. The first theological doctrine that Conway's metaphysics explains is apocatastasis: the Christian doctrine of infinite restoration, in which all of creation can become infinitely more perfect. Conway argues it is in creation's fundamental nature to strive toward perfection. She asserts that "the divine power, goodness, and wisdom has created good creatures so that they may continually and infinitely move towards the good through their own mutability."[13] Because God—an infinitely perfect, immutable being—created the creatures to be mutable, it is necessarily in their nature to ascend toward His perfection. This also applies across different species, because for Conway, specific creatures can be reborn as different species.[14] Because different species or "entities" are not distinct in essence, the spirits that compose them can change into different species, and ascend through the hierarchy of creation. To articulate this, Conway uses the negative side of that argument: "For if a creature were entirely limited by its own individuality and totally constrained and confined within the very narrow boundaries of its own species [...] then no creature

[12]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 40.
[13]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 32.
[14]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 32.

could attain further perfection."[15] It would be against the fundamental nature of the creatures if they were unable to ascend toward God and perfect itself through this perpetual restoration. Furthermore, this "continual motion" of the creatures is more fundamental than their goodness, because they are mutable to the point where they can turn away from God. Conway argues that creatures will strive for their "further good," unless they "resist that good by a willful transgression and abuse of the impartial will created in them by God."[16] Because God also gave creatures free will, they can turn away from God. This is possible in the same way that ascension towards God is possible, but is distinct insofar as it is a willful act of the individual creature.

The second theological benefit of Conway's metaphysics is that it allows for creation to satisfy Christ's second commandment: to "love your neighbor as yourself."[17] Conway argues that this is possible because all of creation has the same essence: God "made all tribes of human beings from one blood so that they would love one another and be bound by the same sympathy."[18] Because all human beings are made from the same blood, they naturally have sympathy and love for each other. Conway extends this to all of creation, concluding that "God has implanted a certain universal sympathy and mutual love into his creatures so that they are all members of one body."[19] It is in the creatures' nature to love each other because of the mutual sympathies that God infused in them. Furthermore, Christ commands this to the creatures because "sin has weakened

[15]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 32.
[16]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 32.
[17]Mark, 28:31.
[18]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 31.
[19]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 32.

this love and sympathy [...] to an astonishing degree,"[20] inhibiting their natural capacity to love each other. Christ acts as a mediator by commanding the creatures to love your neighbor as yourself. Creatures can then follow this commandment because of the underlying natural love that already exists within them.

In conclusion, Conway's metaphysics provides a theory of physical substance that has positive theological implications. Conway argues that there are three beings in the universe that are distinct in essence: God, who is infinitely perfect, and unchangeable; Christ, who is the mediator between God and creation; and creation, which encompasses all of the natural world, and is infinitely changeable. Creation itself is also composed of one substance, which Conway calls spirit. Each aspect of creation is composed of a multitude of spirits, ranging greatly in manner from each other, with some being more or less corporeal. They can also be arranged in a multitude of ways, resulting in multiple species and entities with different appearances that are still the same in essence. Conway's metaphysics reconciles apocatastasis, the idea that all of creation is in perpetual restoration and can be infinitely more perfect. Because all creatures are composed of a substance that ranges in manner, they can either ascend or descend through the hierarchy of creation. While it is in creation's nature to emulate the perfect attributes of God, their free will allows the creatures to turn away from Him through active transgressions of God's laws. Conway also explains that creation is predisposed to follow Christ's commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself,"[21] as, being composed of the same substance, mutual sympathies exist between the different creatures throughout the hierarchy of creation. Sin has made mutual love more difficult,

[20]Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 31.
[21]Mark, 28:31.

but has not demolished it completely. The explanation of both apocatastasis and Christ's second commandment provide the basis for a theological defense of Conway's metaphysics.

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Claims Surrounding the Feminization of Higher Education: A Form of Misogyny

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In a recent opinion piece published by the National Post, Leigh Revers, a university professor in the department of chemical and physical sciences at the University of Toronto, criticizes the 'feminization of higher education.'[1] Leigh Revers holds a position of authority being a professor in a well accredited institution which makes his opinion piece very impactful at the expense of women seeking higher education. This paper argues that the phenomenon of misogyny in higher education exists and has occurred on a wider scale than just Revers' article. Research by Morley helps to frame this debate as a crisis rather than as singular events.[2] I argue that Revers' writing provides an example of misogynistic policing in higher education and Manne's ameliorative account helps to name

[1]Leigh Revers, "Leigh Revers: The dark side of the feminization of higher education." *National Post* (14 October 2024).

[2]Louise Morley, "Misogyny posing as measurement: disrupting the feminisation crisis discourse." *Contemporary Social Science*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2011).

the misogyny.[3] In taking Manne's account of misogyny as a law enforcement tool of the patriarchy, one which works to police women, we can see that hostility towards women involved in higher education is an attempt to enforce gendered norms.[4]

I will begin the paper with an outline of Manne's ameliorative account of misogyny.[5] I will then outline the article written by Leigh Revers and his position that higher education has become feminized, using his writing as an example of misogyny.[6] I will tie in the research by Morley to explain the feminization debate on a larger scale and how Manne's account helps us to see it as a pervasive issue rather than an individual example.[7] I will combat arguments made in favor of Revers' writing, specifically that he is just stating statistical facts. I will conclude by returning to Manne's account to highlight how it is beneficial in naming acts of misogyny in the system of higher education but it is limited in its ability to find a solution. Here I will connect chapter ten from Manne's work Entitled to her ameliorative account which provides a solution to the issue.[8]

In Kate Manne's work Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny, she develops an ameliorative account of misogyny arguing that her account will be more useful than what she calls the 'naive conception' of misogyny.[9] The naive conception argues that misogyny is "primarily a property of individual agents [...] who are prone to feel hatred, hostility, or other similar emotions toward any and every

[3]Kate Manne, "Down Girl," *Oxford Academic* (2017).
[4]Manne, "Down Girl," 63.
[5]Manne, "Down Girl."
[6]Revers, "The dark side of the feminization of higher education."
[7]Morley, "Misogyny posing as measurement."
[8]Kate Manne, "Entitled," *Brightspace* (2020).
[9]Manne, "Down Girl" 60.

woman [....]"[10] In her eyes, where the naive conception fails is in its focus on psychology and problems of epistemology.[11] Similarly to Manne, I view this account as limiting in its focus on the individual disposition of the person perpetuating misogyny. Manne argues that misogyny can occur even if the perpetrator does not feel hatred towards women.[12] She states that misogyny is more of a political phenomenon than a psychological one.[13] The political nature of misogyny is evident in Revers' argument as he is attempting to gatekeep an institution from women that would provide them socio-political advancement.

In contrast, Manne's ameliorative account is an attempt to remedy the aforementioned limitations she saw. Manne argues that misogyny is the "'law enforcement' branch of a patriarchal order, which has the overall function of policing and enforcing its governing ideology."[14] The social forces of misogyny, in Manne's view, target women for the actual or perceived violations of established patriarchal norms.[15] Manne describes how it is expected that those who act in misogynistic ways would simultaneously have psychological issues.[16] Yet the focus on psychologism is limited in helping us know how to remedy the impact that misogyny leaves on women, and in turn, it takes women out of the account. In describing misogyny as a policing and enforcing tool of the patriarchy, Manne effectively remedies the issue of psychological effects that are present in the naive account. We should be emphasizing the effects of misogyny on women instead of what men are feeling

[10]Manne, "Down Girl," 33.
[11]Manne, "Down Girl," 60.
[12]Manne, "Down Girl," 39.
[13]Manne, "Down Girl," 33.
[14]Manne, "Down Girl," 63.
[15]Manne, "Down Girl," 63.
[16]Manne, "Down Girl," 59.

when they decide to act in misogynistic ways. This argument from Manne is beneficial as it shifts focus from the mentality of men to a more broad sociopolitical analysis. Manne's ameliorative account of misogyny is useful in that it frames the patriarchy as a pervasive entity in our society, rather than merely the emotions of a few men.

Leigh Revers recently wrote an opinion piece for the National Post called, The dark side of the feminization of higher education. In this article Revers goes on a disorganized rant about why he believes higher education has become "[...] matriarchal enterprises run by women for women, in pursuit of retribution for the patriarchy of the past."[17]

Even in the very opening he states that the patriarchy is something of the past, when the recency of this article signals it is very much alive and well today. He begins his argument by claiming that having an increased female population in the university setting is a direct issue for the already declining fertility rates in the west.[18] University, in his mind, is a space for "[...] star-crossed coupling across campuses." Without an equally gendered environment there can not be coupling on campuses, nevermind the existence of the LGBTQ+ community as they do not provide relief for the dropping fertility rate that Revers expresses such concern for.

As Revers is a professor, he provides evidence from his own teaching field to concur that there are more women than usual in male dominated spaces. Revers references an image that was taken of the current students studying Management and Innovation at the University of Toronto, using it as a guide for how many women are in the program. He claims that it is 50 percent more than what

[17]Revers, "The dark side of the feminization of higher education."

[18]Revers, "The dark side of the feminization of higher education," para. 2.

is normally expected.[19] He goes on to argue how the traditionally masculine degrees have now been overrun by women. Revers states that "[...] there are gender-linked personality traits that attract men and women to different professions. But management and innovation? Surely one would expect much the opposite. Then again, down with the patriarchy!"[20] Revers continues his bio-essentialist reasoning as explanation for gender specific degrees. According to Manne's ameliorative account it makes sense that Revers is acting out misogynistically because he is attempting to reinforce the laws of the patriarchy. Women are taking up space that he believes rightfully belongs to men.

As a result of the overly female population in male degree pathways, Revers believes this has led to men staying away from their typical fields of study.[21] He attempts to explain the reason behind men being a less dominant population in the university setting. Revers cites "[t]he pervasive and now deeply entrenched culture of kindness, empathy and academic limp-wristedness [...] is anathema to the young, testosterone-charged male psyche, governed as it is by genetically embedded tendencies for boundary-pushing and risk-taking."[22] As a result of the overly empathetic educational system men no longer want to take part in such an environment as it does not provide a challenge to their "testosterone-charged male psyche." If we take Revers' writing to be a valid argument then we could raise a counter question, is tolerance of a system that functions outside of one's own expertise not a challenge to these young men? Revers argues that the feminization of higher education is problematic to fertility rates, has led to increased numbers

[19]Revers, "The dark side of the feminization of higher education," para. 6.
[20]Revers, "The dark side of the feminization of higher education," para. 7.
[21]Revers, "The dark side of the feminization of higher education," para. 8.
[22]Revers, "The dark side of the feminization of higher education," para. 9.

of women in male dominated fields and caused men to no longer attend university.

The debate surrounding the feminization of higher education is not limited to the article written by Revers, but also exists in wider academic literature. I argue that research by Louise Morley helps to highlight the debate as a wide phenomenon, along with Manne's ameliorative account of misogyny proving that this is a pervasive issue. The very fact that Morley's research was published in 2011 and Revers had just recently published his opinion piece in 2024, provides an example that this debate regarding education's feminization has been a long standing one. Morley argues that the feminization debate is partial and exclusionary. She clearly defines five reasons why she believes the debate to be limiting.[23] She argues that it limits women to low roles in education, it is debatable whether quantitative change has even allowed for women to have more space in universities, it lacks intersectionality, it confuses the terms sex and gender, and finally, it reinforces the gender dichotomy that when one group is up another group must be down. I believe this last argument to be the most prominent in not just Revers' writing but also in the feminization debate on a wider scale.

Women's engagement in higher education is assumed to be lowering men's dominant status simultaneously. Morley cites multiple studies that have perpetuated the feminization debate in their research, which signals to us that this is not a one off argument made by some people in some places, but rather a global debate on the topic. Morley analyzes the HEPI report, a report based in the UK.[24] The report analyzes "[...] male and female participation and

[23]Morley, "Misogyny posing as measurement," 227.
[24]Morley, "Misogyny posing as measurement," 228.

progression in higher education [...] and concludes that we need to change the mindset that continues to see males as advantaged and females as disadvantaged."[25] Not only does this report maintain the gender dichotomy, when one group is dominant the other must be beneath, but it also describes these gender differences as solvable through cognitive changes.[26] Further the report argues that "[...] a ceiling needs to be set on women's current success by assuming it must have come about by disadvantaging men." This report, despite being a formal academic source, is perpetuating the very same feminization debate that we saw in the very current article by Revers. The only difference is that the report was published in 2009 and is based in the UK. This gives us evidence to the global and phenomenal aspects of the feminization debate.

I would like to connect Manne's account to the pervasiveness of the feminization debate. Manne's ameliorative account argues that misogyny working as the law enforcement tool of the patriarchy "[...] has the overall function of policing and enforcing its governing ideology."[27] Seeing as the patriarchy is a large structure under which we all exist, it is nearly impossible that women could avoid misogynistic backlash when they participate in any setting outside of their prescribed domain. I believe that universities are synonymous with power and status, therefore women are attempting to obtain something that they are not entitled to under patriarchy. Misogyny will always be required to police women out of the spaces they do not belong, in this case it is higher education. As long as the patriarchy exists, so will the misogyny in higher education and the feminization debate will flourish.

[25]Morley, "Misogyny posing as measurement," 228.
[26]Morley, "Misogyny posing as measurement," 228.
[27]Manne, "Down Girl," 63.

I will now combat Revers' assertion that it is factual that universities have become female dominated. It is quite possible that some may see Revers' point, after all he is providing statistics from known sources. Revers describes how, "[i]n the United States, women have long been outpacing men in college graduation, with the proportion of 25-34 year old females holding a bachelor's degree eclipsing males in the same age category as far back as the mid-1990s. For the academic year that began in the fall of 2021, Statistics Canada reported that enrolment of women was a full 18 percentage points — almost a whole quintile — ahead of men."[28] Revers cites Pew Research Center in his argument that women have been outpacing men in college graduation for a while now. This may be true, however Revers argues for a different conclusion as to why this is than the conclusion I came to. When I looked into the source on my own I found many other facts of information that had been conveniently left out by Revers. Pew Research Center highlights how a third of men who did not get a bachelor's degree just 'did not want to' while women's main reasons are that they (a) could not afford it and (b) that they had the responsibility to support their families financially. In each of these two causes, men were statistically lower than women in citing this as a reason for not getting a bachelor's degree.[29] In Revers' writing he leaves out the reasons that were given by both men and women on why they did not get a bachelor's degree. Instead Revers begins by stating the fact that women are outpacing men and concludes that it is because men's testosterone is not being challenged in a feminized environment. When women don't attend it is due to structural restrictions, how-

[28]Revers, "The dark side of the feminization of higher education," para. 5.

[29]Kim Parker, *What's behind the growing gap between men and women in college completion?*, Pew Research Center (2021, November 8): para. 3.

ever, when men do not attend it is due to the fact that they did not want to or did not need to for the career they wanted. Revers ignores that the data proves that women face higher systemic challenges in accessing education than men do.

Revers goes on to cite Statistics Canada as a source for women's enrollment rates in comparison to men, women's being 18% higher. Again Revers is using a source that is intended to display the gender diversity in Canada's higher education, yet he takes the statistics and uses them as proof that something sinister is going on. When looking at the numbers, men make up 40.80% of the population in higher education while women make up 58.56%.[30] The numbers are incredibly close which in my opinion does not signal cause for concern. Despite this difference being very slim, only 17.76%, Revers is troubled now that women are in larger numbers than men. In my opinion there is only cause for concern when the discrepancy is larger. For example if women were leading in educational enrollment by 35% or higher there would be a need for increased research on why this is occurring. Yet Revers is only truly concerned by the fact that men are no longer outnumbering women in educational attainment.

Revers is only raising the alarms and calling out women in the education system in an attempt to enforce women back into their patriarchal order. This directly correlates to Manne's establishment of misogyny as the law enforcement tool. Society and the higher education system has been built by men for men, thus Revers feels entitlement to the space and takes up a sense of victimhood when women take what he sees as mens rightful possession. Looking past these two examples of statistics which Revers has failed to critically and accurately analyze, the majority of his proof rests on infor-

[30]Statistics Canada, *Gender diversity of Canadian postsecondary students*, (2021, June 25).

mation he has received from colleagues without a cited source for the claims he is making. To me this raises concern regarding how truthful he is being with the 'data' he has acquired from colleagues. With the absence of sources for what he claims, it requires readers to be wary of his arguments. While Revers uses statistics, he does not analyze the data accurately and simultaneously he uses information he has received from colleagues, therefore, I argue that his writing can not be taken as fact without a deeper analysis of the claims.

In Manne's ameliorative account of misogyny, while I find it beneficial in naming examples of misogyny, she leaves us without a solution in her initial work Down Girl.[31] In the concluding chapter of Down Girl called "The Giving She," Manne states "[...] I give up. I wish I could offer a more hopeful message. Let me close just by offering a postmortem."[32] Here, after leading her readers through her ameliorative account of misogyny, Manne quickly abandons her audience leaving them with a postmortem. Manne goes on to give an overview of the many themes she has discussed in her work. Her ameliorative account of misogyny is useful in that it helps to frame misogyny as something pervasive through the patriarchy's existence, without need for feelings of hatred, and as something that acts to police women. Where Manne's account fails is that we are now left with a strong understanding of misogyny as it acts yet we do not know what to do to prevent or solve its effects.

I argue that Manne remedies her previous conclusion in her newer work called Entitled, which acts as a continuation of her original account of misogyny. Specifically, I will centre on chapter 10 of Entitled called, "Undesparing - On the Entitlement of Girls." Manne

[31]Manne, "Down Girl."
[32]Manne, "Down Girl," 300.

opens the chapter by directly addressing how she finished Down Girl. Manne states "[...] I concluded by offering a postmortem-a grim overview of the reasons I was pessimistic about getting people to take the problem of misogyny seriously, or even to face it as a problem whatsoever."[33] She continues by stating that since she finished Down Girl she has changed, while still not being entirely hopeful, she is less pessimistic. Manne determines that she was confusing "[...] intransigence of some people with the unwillingness of most people to think soberly and deeply about the problems facing girls and women."[34] Her pessimistic outlook stemmed from conflating a minority of people who are opposed to changing misogyny with most people who are merely unengaged. The Latter, as I see it, has the capability of change while the other group simply does not want to change. After making this connection and reflecting on her past mistakes, Manne attempts to redeem herself.

In a manifesto style, she offers actionable 'entitlements' that girls must be taught that they are allowed to have. Manne declares that she wants her daughter to "[...] be clear about her entitlements, and to be prepared to assert them when conditions make that possible. And when they do not, I want her to feel lucid anger, and to push for structural changes [....]"[35] Here we find the crux of Manne's claim, she is writing this manifesto in order to have women and girls feel entitled to what the patriarchy has denied them of and to use their anger as power towards creating structural change. Manne lists the things her daughter should know she is entitled to: bodily autonomy, to change her gender presentation, to enjoy and use her body, to her sexuality, to speak her mind, to not have to tailor her body for

[33]Manne, "Entitled," 184.
[34]Manne, "Entitled," 184.
[35]Manne, "Entitled," 187.

other people, and finally she is entitled to be powerful. The most useful claim for our purposes is the entitlement to speak her mind. Manne describes how "...studies show that in the classroom, boys continue to be called on vastly more than girls—a pattern that is particularly entrenched in STEM fields."[36] This is a key root in the educational misogyny Revers is exemplifying. Due to educational misogyny women are left feeling unentitled to their knowledge or more broadly their space in the institution. In Entitled, Manne is giving an actionable list of things that we must teach our daughters that they are entitled to.

I believe it is important to use Manne's ameliorative account of misogyny in order to understand the debate surrounding the feminization of higher education. It is also important in order to call out misogyny in cases like Revers' writing which is an explicit misogynistic rant. This issue is not an isolated one, and has been getting called out in academia for years, since 2011 at the very least which was evident in Morley's research. It is also not an issue that is secluded within Canada but instead has also been an issue in the UK, as outlined by Morley. I countered arguments in favor of Revers by analyzing the statistics he provided in his argument. I concluded that while men may be attending university in smaller numbers than women, what is left out is that women face higher systemic barriers to education than men. When he is not inaccurately referencing data, Revers uses anecdotal evidence without proper sources. I then returned to Manne's account to highlight its limits in providing actionable solutions to misogyny. I see her more recent work Entitled as an extension of her original account, this time providing us with entitlements that girls should be taught they deserve to have.

[36]Manne, "Entitled," 190.

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In the Pursuit of Ecstacy

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The use of bondage by non-disabled participants may run the risk of supporting problematic ableist stereotypes that frame disabled bodies as sexually deviant, while perpetuating cure ideologies for mobility-based disabilities. Through the practice of bondage, non-disabled participants can adopt temporary disability for the purpose of enhancing sexual pleasure. While this association may not be calculated, it nonetheless possesses the potential for harm. Additionally, it would be unjustified for me to assume that all non-disabled individuals approach bondage play with the intention of co-opting disabled identity or that they are even cognizant of the role disability plays in this form of sexual activity. Much like other forms of microaggression imposed on marginalized communities, I argue that this naivete is a product of vast, institutionalized ableism that encourages the "out of sight, out of mind" mentality that is often directed toward disabled identity. It is exactly the innocuous nature of these missteps that make them so insidious, as they strengthen commonly held beliefs through repeated action, devoid

of critical thought. The transitory nature of this form of "temporary disability" has the potential to reinforce the objectification of disabled bodies, while also reifying the ableist belief that disability as a permanent state should be avoided at all costs.

First, I will explain the concepts of bondage and its capacity to enhance sexual pleasure through the employment of disability. I will explore the potential harms from this act using Kafer's[1] definition of disability as "relational." I will also differentiate between the conceivable desire to temporarily assume a disabled state for pleasure and the fetish for disabled people (devoteeism). I will then explore the categorization of disabled bodies as "deviant" and how this idea contributes to the taboo nature of both bondage and devoteeism as sexual acts.

From that point, I will delve into the ways bondage (when used by non-disabled couples) can perpetuate the assertion that disability requires cure and that to be returned to a non-disabled state is not only ideal, but euphoric. By implementing strict safety nets intended to mitigate the risk of harm, non-disabled play partners who partake in bondage are acknowledging the possibility of long-lasting physical harm, while simultaneously framing it as antithetical to pleasure. This can then be extrapolated to assume that disability can only be pleasurable when it is completely under control of a non-disabled hand. From there, I will address a possible objection which argues that the general bondage user does not explicitly associate this form of sexual play with disability and thus the connection between the two is weakened. In response, I will compare these acts with Butler's[2] exploration of gender performativity, showcasing the establishment of social norms through repetitive

[1]Alison Kafer, *Imagined Futures, Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indiana University Press 2013): 1-24.
[2]Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge 1993).

subconscious action. I will argue that, while bondage users may not intentionally seek exploration of disabled states of being, the underlying motif remains rooted in a longing for normalcy.

Bondage is defined in the dictionary as, "the state or practice of being physically restrained, as by being tied up, chained, or put in handcuffs, for sexual gratification." As a sexual tool, bondage can enhance pleasure, often by playing on ideas of helplessness and humiliation. Though bondage has been sensationalized recently through the genres of adult fiction and film, it and other kink-related sexual play is still regarded largely as "outside the norm" and maintains an association with shame. Physical disability, through an ableist lens, is already considered deviant through its departure from normative physicality, and associating disability with bondage and non-normative sex practices then solidifies that deviancy. In this exploration, I will be focusing solely on physical disability, which is described by the Ontario Human Rights Commission as, "any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness...."[3] Notably, the terms used in this definition emphasize the aberrant nature of disability, holding these physical states in opposition to the normative "healthy" body. It is no question that disability, as we have come to know it, is undesirable. This then begs the question, how is it capable of producing pleasure in any capacity? The answer, as I will argue, comes from the provisional nature of the act.

Kafer defines the relational disability model in her book Feminist, Queer, Crip as, "one that builds on social and minority model frameworks but reads them through feminist and queer critiques of identity." By looking at disability through this lens, we are avoiding the pitfalls of an entirely medical view that frames disability as

[3]Ontario Human Rights Commission, *What is Disability?* (Retrieved December 2024).

an illness to be cured, while also avoiding the social view that social impairment and the embodiment of disability are entirely removed from one another. Kafer highlights the importance of this framework by arguing that through common disability awareness tactics, non-disabled individuals are encouraged to use mobility aids to experience disability, which hinges on disability as a purely physical experience. She goes on to argue that "there is no accounting for how a disabled person's response to impairment shifts over time or by context, or how the nature of one's impairment changes, or, especially, how one's experience of disability is affected by one's culture and environment."[4] It is this designation of physical disability as only concerned with mobility limitation that allows for the possibility of harm in non-disabled bondage play.

It is also significant that due to sexual normativity, disabled bodies are marked as "asexual" or incapable of experiencing or producing pleasure. This ties into the earlier notion of disability being a marker for deviancy. While this is factually incorrect and disabled individuals desire and have sex much in the same way non-disabled individuals do, the assumption permeates our collective Westernized understanding of disability. Devoteeism emerges as the exception to the rule. Devoteeism, as described by Shakespeare,[5] is a "...type of atypical sexual desire (or paraphilia) [marked by] a strong sexual attraction to other people, mostly women, who have missing limbs." Shakespeare goes on to say that devoteeism can be directed to any physical disability, but for the purposes of this argument I will focus on the missing limb/amputee portion. It is crucial to identify the differences in the harms perpetuated by devoteeism

[4]Kafer, *Imagined Futures. Feminist, Queer, Crip.*

[5]Tom Shakespeare, "Sex and Disability," *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Sex and Sexuality* (Routledge 2022): 271-85.

with the potential harms perpetuated by non-disabled bondage use. I propose that the temporal nature of the disabled experience during bondage play contributes to the pleasure achieved, allowing one to reassume their mobility-privilege post-orgasm; devoteeism derives its pleasure from the objectified disabled body directly. As Shakespeare indicates, "at the extremes of this attraction, the only relevant attribute for the desiring partner is the stump or lack of limb, not the whole person.[6] The individual is considered purely as a sex object, not as a person." Devoteeism fetishizes the physically disabled body as an object of desire, removing the personhood from that embodiment, but still requiring a disabled body to be present. Non-disabled bondage allows for simulated impairment on an otherwise non-impaired body (whether that is the intentional goal or not). Thus, while both scenarios present an opportunity for harm through the objectification of disabled bodies, one must involve a disabled individual, while the other eliminates the need for disabled inclusion entirely.

A key element of bondage play (and by extension, most kink-related sex) is the extensive safety nets implemented to keep all parties safe. This preparation can take many forms but often includes detailed discussion of limits, the use of quick-release knots, hand signals, safety scissors, and particularly a safe word.[7] Information on how to perform bondage "safely" is readily available online through a quick search, providing tips and tricks on how to avoid causing lasting harm. Notably, these guides are predominantly targeted toward non-disabled individuals. The websites frequently lack accessibility functions, the marketing photos feature exclusively non-disabled participants, and most importantly, there

[6]Shakespeare, "The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Sex and Sexuality."
[7]Rope365, *Safety* (Retrieved December 2024).

is a constant focus on the avoidance of permanent bodily injury. These cautionary recommendations depend on the participant being non-disabled when they begin the activity. For example, one website warns that a possible side effect of bondage use is nerve injury and states that "this occurs when a nerve receives an extensive pressure that damages it and prevents it from functioning normally even after the pressure is removed."[8] They also assert that "nerves take a long time to heal" and that the best course of action is to take precautions beforehand, arguing that "the faster you catch the problem, the faster it will heal."[9] This sort of language ignores the possibility of a participant coming into the situation with pre-existing nerve injury or a body that is more susceptible to nerve damage. To be clear, it is not the inclusion of safe practices that makes this inherently ableist, but rather the exclusion of disabled bodies from the conversation entirely. There is no question that disabled individuals partake in bondage play, so the omission of alternative forms of play that include disabled bodies speaks volumes about who is "allowed" to partake and who is not. By focusing safety measures so heavily on maintaining and returning to the "ideal" non-disabled body state, bondage practitioners are justifying the exclusion of disabled bodies within the practice by promoting a conclusion that is simply out of reach.

In addition to the safety nets, one of the main appeals of bondage is its impermanent nature. Non-disabled individuals largely take part in bondage with the confidence that they will return to a non-disabled state post-play. Though this motive is not necessarily stated plainly, one only needs to suggest a non-disabled person maintain their bound state indefinitely to see the almost instantaneous

[8]Rope365, *Safety*.
[9]Rope365, *Safety*.

change of desire. I would go as far to suggest that if the risk of permanent disability from bondage play was higher, we would see a drastic reduction in non-disabled participants. The appeal, then, appears to be situated in how far one can push their non-disabled body's limits (which are predicated on the ideal of "health" and the absence of pain) without tapping out. The goal isn't to genuinely become disabled; it is to play into a fantasy of an altered (deviant) state to heighten one's arousal. This can be put in conversation with other forms of "deviant fantasy" like "gay4pay" (which is the adoption of a fantasy coerced form of queerness): in which both provide pleasure through temporarily adopting unwanted and "indecent" forms of identity.[10] Naturally, not all bondage play seeks to explore the limits of one's physical and mental ability, but there remains a comfort in the knowledge that eventually the impairment will cease.

Furthermore, it is the reaffirmation of the non-disabled body at the end of the act that I suggest can function as an "intellectual orgasm." Bondage implements both physical and mental stimulation to provide a pleasurable and fulfilling experience. Mentally, bondage requires the bound subject to find new forms of movement, grapple with their loss of agency, react to the implementation of pain or discomfort, and accept their imposed impairment. This forced disablement then has the potential to generate feelings of humiliation and helplessness, which can then be explored with the assertion that it will eventually end. For those that experience this emotional turmoil, the cessation of the impairment allows for additional pleasure at the return to normalcy, as the threat of bodily harm or helplessness without end crosses into the realm of torture. Upon reaching the conclusion of play, the bound subject

[10]"Gay-for-pay," in *Wikipedia* (Accessed October 31 2024).)

is released from their bonds and often provided "aftercare," a set of steps that ensure the comfort of the participant.[11] There is often a heavy focus on providing physical care to the body and a debrief to ground them mentally. It is this mental aspect that I refer to as the "intellectual orgasm," the post-sex assurance that one's personhood has not been altered permanently and that they overcame the imposed disability.[12] This validation of the non-disabled identity provides the greatest safety of all, the confirmation that they are once again "normal." While this may be acknowledged subconsciously, this affirmation of a non-disabled state can be crucial to the wellness of the participants. In play where aftercare is not administered, participants have often reported experiencing "subdrop" which is characterized by feelings of emotional and physical pain, embarrassment, anxiety, fatigue, and depression.[13] If the pleasure attained through bondage play was purely physical, I venture to argue that "subdrop" would not be a common phenomenon. Instead, I propose that the "intellectual orgasm" provided through aftercare, which affirms the absence of disability, grants an additional level of euphoria and the permission to embrace relaxation.

The most relevant objection to this argument, which was thankfully posed to me by the reviewer, claims that it is unlikely that all bondage participants are deliberately associating disability with kink. Because of this, the argument that bondage play causes harm to the disabled community is weakened. I counter this objection by drawing on Butler's work Gender Trouble and their exploration of the reification of socially constructed gender norms through the act of performativity. Butler argues that gender, as we understand

[11] Adriana, *The Complete BDSM Aftercare Guide: Learn How To Do It Right*, Bad Girls Bible (October 30 2020).

[12] Adriana, *The Complete BDSM Aftercare Guide*.

[13] Kate Balestrieri, *Understanding and Addressing Sub Drop*, Modern Intimacy (June 16 2022).

it, is not a naturally occurring identifier but rather one that is constructed through socially accepted norms that are repeated and reconfirmed subconsciously. They say that "...performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration."[14] For example, the subconscious adoption and application of socially constructed ideas of femininity, which are repeated over time, give credence to the original acts and then encourage the performance of those same acts by others, which in turn then affirms the "naturalness" of the acts once again. It becomes a cyclical relationship of "performance - actualization" until it is unclear what acts are inherent, and which are manufactured. I believe this concept can be attributed to the social construction of disability as well. Western culture is ingrained with ableist notions of being and relies on a cure-focused approach to health. This is then continuously repeated and reified through socially constructed norms which concentrate on avoiding disability and pushing "cure" as a necessity. Through the cyclical confirmation of the "ideal" quality of the non-disabled body via an excessive push toward "health," western culture has become inundated with internalized ableism and an obsession with staving off aging and death. We are generally terrified of growing old, which naturally assumes the slow degradation of our physical bodies and the move toward disability.

By associating Butler's theory of performativity with the concept of ableism, I aim to highlight the subtle way in which ableism is internalized and reified through our everyday actions. Conscious intention is not required to uphold socially constructed belief, rather, it is the suppressed manner that allows non-disabled bodies to be

[14] Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

viewed as "natural" and disabled bodies to be deemed "fixable." Then to transpose this onto my argument, temporarily disabling someone (putting them in bondage) reifies ableist notions of "cure" through the unspoken assertion that they will be returned to a "normal" state (in which they are released from said bondage). The performativity (if you will) of non-disabled identity subconsciously states that to be non-disabled is not only natural but is a preferable state of being. The harm comes from the subconscious repetition of these ableist norms.

Another point to consider is that disabled people can (and do) take part in bondage play. The question then becomes, is the potential for harm altered or negated by this participation? In "using pain, living with pain" Sheppard[15] talks about the use of kinky sex by those with chronic pain as a means of reclaiming sexual pleasure (amongst other reasons). While she focuses on the implementation of pain in kink-related sex, there is sufficient overlap between pain-play and bondage that her argument remains useful. She goes into detail describing the relationship that her disabled interviewees have with pain and pain-play and highlights the ways in which these individuals reconcile these two aspects of their lives. In one of the accounts, she states, "[Pain-play] reminds Natalie of her body's capacities rather than of its incapacities; in 'taking' a spanking, in enduring the acute pain it causes, Natalie is able to re-establish her body as capable."[16] She also states that a commonality in the use of pain-play is as a distraction from a disabled state. Sheppard argues that "while BDSM might be read as a means by which people living with chronic pain reclaim 'normal' humanity through rationalising pain, the structures of normativity make it impossible for my

[15]Emma Sheppard, "Using Pain, Living with Pain," *Feminist Review* 120 (2018): 54-69.
[16]Sheppard, "Using Pain, Living with Pain."

participants as disabled and chronically in pain to ever reach what is conceived as 'normal' ideals of able-bodymindedness."[17] While I agree with Sheppard that the structures of normativity make this reclamation of normalcy unattainable for disabled individuals, I argue that the harm is situated not in the achievement of normalcy but in the pursuit.

By focusing the positive aspect of bondage (or in Sheppard's case, pain-play) on its ability to either provide respite from a disabled state or as a means of regaining strength and self-confidence that was "taken" by disability, the normative concept for an "ideal" sexual body continues to be reified. If pleasure can only be obtained when one is distracted from their disability, then by normative standards, they are drawing pleasure from the idea of no longer being disabled. If orgasm is only reachable because one is "capable" of taking a spanking, then we must question who decides the "proper" way to take a spanking. While the goals between the disabled and non-disabled uses of bondage seem inverse, both engage in the use of fantasy identity for the sake of pleasure, and significantly, both rely on normative values to build that fantasy.

Bondage, as it is described in this paper, allows for the possibility to perpetuate harm against the disabled community in that it requires the existence of normative sexuality to reinforce its deviant nature. By upholding the ideal normal, healthy body, non-disabled individuals can step outside of that norm, adopt disability in short, contained scenarios, and return to their "healthy body" afterwards. In moving forward, my hope is that a dismantling of ableist thinking that supports an "ideal body" occurs, allowing for the exploration of alternative sex play without the subconscious reliance on the promise of "normalcy" to be what gets us off.

[17] Sheppard, "Using Pain, Living with Pain."

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Be No Man's Lackey? Kantian Duties of Parenthood and Self in the Face of Coercive Labour

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In his *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant states that while human beings as a species are merely beings of "an ordinary value," a human being "as a person," is to be "exalted above any price."[1] He defines the person as a subject "of a morally practical reason" and that they carry an inherent 'humanity' within that "is the object of the respect which he can demand from every other human being, but which he must also not forfeit."[2] This frames Kant's concerns regarding servility, that in an attempt to surrender one's humanity by subordinating their needs and autonomy to another, they will not be able secure the amount of respect they are owed as a person qua person. As Kant himself states so succinctly, one ought to "Be no man's Lackey."[3] This tenet of his, however, may be in tension with

[1]Immanuel Kant, "The Metaphysics of Morals" in *Practical Philosophy: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, trans. & ed. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 6:434.

[2]Kant, "The Metaphysics of Morals," 6:434-435.

[3]Kant, "The Metaphysics of Morals," 6:436.

the realities of life for those of lower socioeconomic standing, for whom submitting to forms of 'coercive labour' may be their only means of survival. And this tension would be further exacerbated by the Kantian duties of parenthood. For Kant, one's duty to their child does not merely fall into the category of 'duties towards others,' as this child is not only a product of their parents' procreation, but also of their rational autonomous decisions. It is a "necessary idea," says Kant, "to regard the act of procreation as one by which we have brought a person into the world without his consent and on our own initiative, for which deed the parents incur an obligation to make the child content with his condition so far as they can."[4] It is this tension that will be the focus of this paper, asking: can Kantian Ethics be seen to permit a parent to enter into the servility of coercive labour in order to provide for their child? Through an investigation of the limits of parental obligations as well as the harms of servility, I will argue that the conception of parenthood as 'procreation without consent of the child,' can prove to be a mitigating factor that permits servility in order to honour these obligations.

Nicola Phillips describes the relationship between coercive labour and poverty as a "circular" relationship.[5] Poverty produces vulnerabilities that "necessitate the prioritization" of immediate goals at the expense of savings and financial stability and this exposes workers to exploitation which "in turn serves as the key mechanism of impoverishment."[6] Not only are there immediate moral harms

[4]Kant, "The Metaphysics of Morals," 6:280.

[5]Nicola Phillips, "Unfree Labour and Adverse Incorporation in the Global Economy: Comparative Perspectives in Brazil and India," *Economy and Society* 42, no. 2, 175.

[6]Phillips, "Unfree Labour and Adverse Incorporation in the Global Economy," 176. Coercive labour, or as it is labelled in its more systemic form 'adverse incorporation,' deserves far more attention than can be given in this paper. While it is a varied and wicked problem, for this paper it will be defined as teh circular relationship where impoverished people are exploited for labour at unfair wages or conditions which serves to further entrench their poverty.

then, but economic trappings one may be unlikely to escape. In allowing oneself to be used as a means only to further the interests of their employer, the 'Coerced Parent' appears to disobey Kant's Formula of Humanity and submit to a life of servility.[7] Kant states that as a necessary duty to oneself, they must ensure "their action can be consistent with the idea of humanity as an end in itself."[8] What makes this so harmful may seem murky at first. As Thomas E. Hill observes, while the Coerced Parent disavows her moral rights as a person in submitting to coerced labour, "the rights which [she] denies are [her] own."[9] And so following, even if it is a moral failing, it is perhaps a failing that deserves pity only. Hill, however, pushes back on this assertion by reminding us of the essential connection between duties to self and duties to others. "A person who fully respected a system of moral rights," observes Hill, "would be disposed to learn his proper place in it" and this is the "disposition that the servile person lacks."[10] A person who allows an abuse of their own rights of humanity would be less likely to uphold the rights of others, something that cannot be allowed within the Formula of Humanity.

Turning to the Formula of Humanity, we see that the obligation to "as far as one can [...] further the ends of others" is a meritorious duty.[11] This means that there is leeway in both how one pursues

[7]"So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means." Immanuel Kant, "The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" in *Practical Philosophy: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, trans & ed. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 4:429.

[8]Immanuel Kant, "The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," in *Practical Philosophy: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, trans. & ed. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 4:429.

[9]Thomas E. Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect," *The Monist* 57, no. 1, 97.

[10]Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect," 99.

[11]Kant, "Groundwork," 4:430.

this duty and to what extent. This leeway appears to be constrained, however, by Kant's duties of parenthood. As observed by Heiko Puls, conceiving a child is "usually based on a free decision" and therefore "subject to the parent's rational control."[12] Puls continues, stating that because of this, the "capacity for procreation" has a "transcendental dimension" as well as a "merely biological" one.[13] Following this, sexual partners as rational persons understand that even if they do not intend to procreate, their autonomous actions may result in procreation. And they must, therefore, at least acknowledge the potential person that may come about from their sexual act. As Puls describes of this child that may come into being, their "existence is only due to a free action of [their] makers" choice.[14] This is why the obligations of parents can be set more rigorously than the standard duties towards others. The leeway to help 'as far as one can' is normally defended by the fact that the other is an autonomous person, who ought to define their own (permissible) happiness and seek it. Meaning that our duty to aid them is by helping to remove undue obstacles from their path. In the case of one's child, however, the act of procreation "has to be understood as bringing someone into a condition to begin with" and because of this, parents "have to make [that child] content 'with their condition'."[15] The potential personhood of a 'theoretical child' has been actualized through the autonomous sexual act of their parents who now have an obligation to 'make good' on those actions by securing that child's contentment with their condition of existence."[16]

The tension presented then can be summed up as two potentially

[12]Heiko Puls, "Kant's Justification of Parental Duties," *Kantian Review* 21, no. 1, 55.
[13]Puls, "Kant's Justification of Parental Duties," 55.
[14]Puls, "Kant's Justification of Parental Duties," 56.
[15]Puls, "Kant's Justification of Parental Duties," 57.
[16]Puls, "Kant's Justification of Parental Duties," 58.

conflicting maxims:

a) 'I will not allow myself to be forced, nor will I willing enter, into a compact of servility that would harm my autonomy or diminish the dignity that my personhood demands'.

b) 'I am obligated to care for my child and will endeavour not only to provide that care, but to ensure their contentment and happiness with the conditions of their existence'.

While usual circumstances would allow both of these maxims to be followed, in severe socioeconomic situations as described by Phillips, parents may seemingly be forced to choose.

Erica A. Holberg touches on this tension, arguing that Kant "cannot countenance a certain kind of failure to respect oneself that can occur within oppressive social contexts."[17] She worries that because "oppression can deform a person's growth into autonomy," one may act servile not in conflict with their value of personhood, "but because apprehension of this value has gone missing."[18] Holberg continues, stating that we may hold "a fantasy of moral agency as always achievable independently of social conditions" and that this may lead us to unfairly blame servile actors.3 In holding to this fantasy we would hold persons accountable for actions they performed through a 'learned ignorance' that they therefore should not be held culpable for. This is an imperfect argument, however, to defend the Coerced Parent as I define them. While the Parent may be performing their servile role through a learned ignorance, they may also know fully well that their personhood demands more

[17]Erica A. Holberg, "Kant, Oppression, and the Possibility of Nonculpable Failures to Respect Oneself," *The Southern Journal of Philosophie 55*, no. 3, 285-6.

[18]Holberg, "Kant, Oppression, and the Possibility of Nonculpable Failures to Respect Oneself," 286.

and still choose to subordinate themselves to coercive labour. And furthering the argument of nonculpability, even if the Coerced Parent could permissibly subordinate themselves to ensure their legal obligations to provide food and shelter are met, what about their obligations towards contentment and happiness? Let us say that the Parent could provide the basic legal requirements without entering coercive labour, but not in a manner where their child's contentment could be realized. Either by having to work so many hours in a non-coercive environment that the child would be neglected or by needing to move to a remote area where the child would become alienated from society. To justify the knowingly servile parent then, who may attempt to secure for their child even more than is legally (versus morally) required, merits further argument.

In 'The Right to Lie', Christine Korsgaard may present an argument sufficiently analogous to serve in this context. In citing Kant's 'murderer at the door' example, she argues that from the perspective of the Formula of Universal Law, the breaking of a perfect duty by lying to the murderer "can be shown to be permissible."[19] Korsgaard maintains that lying as a general principle could not be universalized as lies are meant to "deceive, but if they were universally practiced they would not deceive."[20] Korsgaard uses this observation to her advantage, however, by arguing that when the murderer is at the door, deception is already at play, as the murderer is unlikely to openly announce their intentions. "A murderer who expects to conduct his business by asking questions," she contends, "must suppose that you do not know who he is and what he has in mind."[21] This would mean that lying to murderers at the

[19]Christine M. Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 15, no. 4, 327.

[20]Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," 328.

[21]Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," 329.

door could be universalizable because the murderer believes you are unaware of their intentions and therefore are unlikely to lie. As Korsgaard continues it is then "permissible to lie to deceivers in order to counteract the intended results of their deceptions."[22] We are allowed to lie because we can see it to be universalizable and because without the ability to lie, evil people would be able to use our morality against us.

Korsgaard expands this argument to include coercion, saying that it "and deception violate the conditions of possible assent, and all actions which depend for their nature and efficacy on their coercive or deceptive character are ones that others cannot assent to."[23] And it is this expansion that may be of use to permit the actions of the Coerced Parent. Korsgaard utilizes her above arguments to present a concept of Kantian Ethics as a 'two-level theory'. Kant holds that "we are always to act as if we were living in a Kingdom of Ends," notes Korsgaard, but this could lead to "disastrous results" such as allowing ourselves to be manipulated by the murderer at the door.[24] Instead of always working from this 'ideal state', she contends that we must depart from the stricter directions of the Formulas of Humanity "when dealing with evil" because it is incapable of doing so, it was "not designed for use when dealing with evil."[25] And so because of this, we might adopt an ideal/non-ideal conception of Kantian Ethics where we may treat the Formulas of Humanity as a guide to work towards while not doing what is at all times impermissible, violating the Formula of Universal Law.[26] If the above is true, it does indeed arm the Coerced Parent with fur-

[22]Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," 330.
[23]Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," 333.
[24]Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," 340.
[25]Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," 346.
[26]Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil," 348.

ther options to protect herself from servility. But Korsgaard's arguments imply that the Parent would be permitted to resist the coercion in question. Much as the person who lies to a murderer, the Coerced Parent may be allowed to break away from perfect duties as the maxim; 'I will disobey laws that entrench coercion in order to safeguard the autonomy of myself and others of lower socioeconomic status' could be seen as permissible. But this is quite separate from the question I have posed. In asking whether it could be permissible to submit to rather than resist coercive labour, this argument again seems insufficient. Further, in saying that one's only allowed action in the face of coercion is resistance, one might be required to perform in ways that are 'morally extraordinary'. And, as discerned by Holberg, the fact "that some individuals manage to be morally extraordinary does not impose on all of us the moral duty to be extraordinary."[27] In sufficiently oppressive conditions, resisting may place the Coerced Parent in a situation where they are unlikely to be able to fulfill their obligations to their child.

Returning to Thomas E. Hill, his concern is that the harm of servility is that the servile person "does not satisfy the basic requirement to respect morality."[28] It is one's lack of demanding the respect their humanity dictates that demonstrates that they do not understand the moral system around them and could not then meaningfully contribute to it. This would indicate, however, that according to Hill acting in a servile manner may not be the same as being truly servile. If someone acted "servile despite their moral knowledge," states Hill, whether they are actually servile "should depend upon why the deferential role is played."[29] And he continues that

[27]Holberg, "Kant, Oppression, and the Possibility of Nonculpable Failures to Respect Oneself," 296.

[28]Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect," 99.

[29]Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect," 96.

"[i]f the motive is a morally commendable one" then they could be found to not be servile. In engaging with this argument from Hill, we can see how, while Holberg's and Korsgaard's arguments are not sufficient on their own for our purpose, understanding them is necessary for seeing the possibility that such conduct is permissible. That the Coerced Parent must understand that they are not acting from 'learned ignorance' or maladaptive preferences but from their own fully rational capacities. And that while oppressive situations may allow the suspension of perfect duties in order to resist, that is not the same as suspending duties to self in order to submit. But, if Hill is correct and the greatest danger of servility is a lack of understanding of moral worth, then the Coerced Parent, operating from a rational and clear-headed view of their own worth and the oppressive situation they are in, may be seen as not truly servile. And this would allow the Parent to prioritize maxim b and earn a (coercive) living that can fulfil their obligation to ensure their child is content and happy with their existence. To this, however, Hill adds a caveat. That there may be "some minimum degree of respect from others," a respect where others "acknowledge fully, in words as well as action, the person's basically equal moral status as defined by his other rights."[30] To give "even tacit consent" to the denial of this respect, asserts Hill, would be to surrender rights one "cannot give up" and "[t]o do this, barring special explanations, would mark one as servile."[31]

The above may demonstrate that in certain extreme cases of coercive labour, the Coerced Parent's maxims remain intractable, but I contend that the obligation of parenthood meets this stipulation of 'special explanation.' That while disobeying maxim a or b would

[30]Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect," 101.
[31]Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect," 102.

result in a diminishing of one's autonomy, favouring maxim b's obligations of parenthood presents a perhaps novel situation where one's humanity is disavowed, but is also exercised. Procreation, as outlined by Puls, has a transcendental component within Kantian Ethics. Parents have a duty to ensure their child is content and happy with their existence "because the parents are causally related to the existence of the need for happiness of the person they created."[32] Meaning that even in subordinating themselves to extreme forms of servility, the Coerced Parent may still be seen to be exercising their humanity by continuing to fulfil the obligations that came from their autonomous decision to procreate. An 'ideal state', as highlighted by Korsgaard, would provide that all are able to fully follow the Formula of Humanity and so the potential necessity of servility would be removed. In the harsh situations of lower socioeconomic status, however, entering into coercive labour may be permitted provided the Coerced Parent understands the rights that they actually deserve and knowingly accept less only to fulfill their obligations of parenthood. And finally, even in extreme cases of servility where the Coerced Parent waives rights that they 'cannot in fact give up', they may still be permitted to submit. As, in doing so they diminish their autonomy but also affirm their understanding of morality by honouring the rational consequences of their autonomous decisions.

[32]Puls, "Kant's Justification of Parental Duties," 58.

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The Existential Gene: Existential Ramifications of Genetic Intervention on the Child

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There are few examples of good existentialist parents. For example, Søren Kierkegaard and Arthur Schopenhauer were notoriously childless, while other existentialists famously abandoned their children to strangers. However, existentialist philosophy itself is deeply rooted in conceptions of human development, the child and adolescence. Consequently, existentialism may be a fertile area for assessing the philosophical ramifications of modern gene editing technologies which aim to change the child as we know it. This is evident in Jurgen Habermas' book *The Future of Human Nature*, where he examines the ways embryonic genetic intervention will intrude on the parent-child relationship and threaten the individual existential freedoms of both parties. The purpose of this essay is to further situate Habermas in reference to the existential works of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Satre, and to show that embryonic genetic intervention is impermissible from an existential perspective.

Embryonic gene intervention contradicts Sartre's fundamental existentialist principle that "existence precedes essence."[1] According to this principle, humans do not possess an innate nature or predetermined purpose. Rather, man is responsible for his own existence, and only becomes what he "wills himself to be."[2] Man's ability to wholly define himself is due to the fact that he does not have a creator. Sartre's atheistic account of existentialism presupposes a godless world, where humankind materialized into existence, rather than being carefully manufactured by a divine being with a determined vision of human nature. As a non-created being, man represents a new beginning — a clean slate — upon which only he can write. Sartre describes this self-determinative condition as "radical freedom." He writes that "man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does."[3] This radical freedom to shape the world, and oneself, is the basic characteristic of man.

However, Habermas shows that genetically programmed children may not have this basic characteristic of humanity. In contrast to Sartre's description of man, genetically programmed children are created beings, and do not represent a clean beginning, as they are born in continuity with their parents' preexistent goals and visions.[4] The inception of genetically programmed children can be understood through Sartre's comparison of humans to a manufactured object such as a paper knife. He writes:

"We note that this object is produced by a craftsman who

[1]Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Yale University Press, 2007): 20.
[2]Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 22.
[3]Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 29.
[4]Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Polity, 2016): 52.

> drew his inspiration from a concept, [...] and to a known production technique that is part of that concept and is, by and large, a formula. The paper knife is thus both an object produced in a certain way and one that, on the other hand, serves a definite purpose. We cannot suppose that a man would produce a paper knife without knowing what purpose it would serve. Let us say therefore that the essence of the paper knife [...] precedes its existence."[5]

Sartre uses the paper knife to represent the opposite of human freedom, but unwittingly provided a useful analogy to understand the situation of genetically programmed children. Like the paper knife, these children are created through a "known production technique" such as in-vitro fertilization paired with preimplantation genetic diagnosis. Genetically programmed children are also conditionally created to serve a particular purpose. While the purpose of a child is less clear than that of a paper knife, Habermas argues that assisted reproductive technologies create an environment where parents can choose to have a child solely if the child will fulfil some expectation. He quotes Nicholas Agar, writing that, "genetic therapies will allow prospective parents to look to their own values in selecting improvements for future children."[6] Such values may include success, intelligence, or athleticism, and parents may choose one embryo over another in order to ensure the child they conceive will have their desired characteristics. For example, a parent may only want a child if they will become a successful physicist. Any embryo that does not display the intelligence to succeed in this mission will be aborted – just as a paper knife that cannot cut will be melted down. Therefore, unlike Sartre's free man, whose "exis-

[5]Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* 21.
[6]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 49.

tence precedes essence," programmed children's "essence precedes existence." The reversal of these conditions show that the circumstance of genetically programmed children is more akin to an object, than another free, subjective human.

The disruption of a child's existential freedom through genetic intervention is no accident. Habermas hints that parents may use genetic intervention as a protective tool when he writes about the "programming intentions of parents who are ambitious and given to experimentation, or of parents who are merely concerned."[7] Habermas does not specify what concerns parents may have, but common knowledge appreciates that parenting comes with a plethora of anxieties. Parents must be concerned for the safety of their children, their health, their development, their future successes, and their overall happiness. Above all - as Simone de Beauvoir writes in her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity* - parents are responsible for protecting their children from their own radical freedom. De Beauvoir writes that upon birth, the helpless child is "cast into a universe which he has not helped establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit."[8] The child's belief that the world is an objective place is corroborated by the adults in his life, who firmly state what is good and bad, what is allowed and what is not, when bed time is, when dinner is, and other important rules. To the child, these rules are as factual as gravity. Unchangeable and universal. These rules allow the child to believe that he too is an object, and he feels "protected against the risk of existence by the ceiling which human generations have built over his head. And it is by virtue of this that the

[7]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 51.

[8]Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Open Road Integrated Media, 2018): 38.

child [...] escapes the anguish of freedom."[9]

Existentialists have often characterized the acknowledgement of radical freedom as a terrifying event. Understanding one's sole responsibility as a free agent of change leaves no space for excuses about one's own failures. Consequently, parents attempt to hide this terrifying realization from their children for as long as possible. However, as de Beauvoir observes, the child will inevitably grow into young adulthood, and as he begins to recognize the instability of his world, "he discovers his subjectivity; he discovers that of others."[10] With this discovery comes the cruel understanding that his mistakes are his own, and that every choice he makes will have an impact on the world around him. It is this discovery that the concerned parent hopes to delay. With the advent of genetic interventions, parents can prevent this discovery indefinitely. When the genetically engineered child asks "why must I act this way?" as de Beauvoir says he inevitably will,[11] the parent may simply answer, "because I made you this way." This confirmation by the parent that "[the child's] hereditary factors were, in a past before [their] past, subjected to programming, confronts [the child] on an existential level, so to speak, with the expectation that [they] subordinate [their] being a body to [their] having a body."[12] The child will continue to feel as though the world was made before them, as even their own body was created in a "past before [their] past," and the control of that body still remains beyond their reach in the present. The child continues to view themselves as an objective body, rather than a subjective self. As such, the child's freedom is restricted, but they remain blissfully unaware of the yawning

[9]Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 39.
[10]Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 39.
[11]Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 39.
[12]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 54.

abyss of endless choice, just as their protective parent had hoped. Of course, while this end result may be more peaceful, it denies the child the ability to live authentically and independently.

The interference of assisted reproductive technologies is not exclusive to the child's existential freedom. The existential freedom of the parent, or "programmer," is also threatened by the use of genetic intervention technologies. Imperative to existentialist thought is the relationship one subject has to another. To accept one's own subjectivity, and live as a free human, one must also accept the subjectivity and freedom of others. One must relate oneself and one's actions to the wider community, and constantly ask, "'what would happen if everyone did what I am doing'."[13] Parents who genetically engineer their children refuse to ask this question, or refuse to analyze the possible consequences of their actions on the wider world. For example, a parent who uses preimplantation technology, and decides to abort an embryo because it is not the desired sex, must imagine themselves in the "quasi-subjective"[14] situation of the embryo and decide if they would have wanted their parent to make the same decision. Sartre would characterize any parent who avoids this uncomfortable question as living in in "bad faith" – a state of being where the actor lies to themselves about their own freedom and capability to make their own decisions.

Parents may also lose sight of their own authentic freedom because they lose the reminder of what it means to be free. As previously stated, man's radical freedom stems from the fact that humans are not created by a pre-existent being. As Habermas comments in his writing on Hannah Arendt, each new birth is meant

[13]Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 54.
[14]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 50.

to provides a poignant reminder of "something new."[15] A newborn child represents an entirely new subjective being that has entered the world, who will use their subjectivity to bend reality to their liking. The joy of birth ultimately lies in the "'expectation of the unexpected.'"[16] When babies are born without this radical freedom, adults are not faced with a reminder of their own radical freedom, and may forget the power they hold as subjective beings.

Additionally, parents who preordain certain characteristics for their children lose their sense of authenticity. In his book Being and Nothingness, Sartre argues that an individual who is authentic is someone able to follow their own subjectivities and desires, rather than conforming to common social convention, or letting themselves get swept up in monotonous facticity.[17] Parents who have "intentions which later take the form of expectations"[18] for their child are presenting a form of inauthentic parenting. They expect their child to display certain characteristics so that they might be perceived as a certain kind of parent. For example, a parent who wishes to be a "good parent" may modify their child to be genetically predisposed to obedience. With a permanently dutiful child in tow, they can claim the fixed role of "good parent" with ease. These parents are not respecting the muddled nature of freedom. They identify themselves with the socially constructed role of "good parent," and follow the social rules that come with this role. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir defines people who define themselves by these labels as "serious men," and argues that they

[15]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 58.

[16]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 58.

[17]Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, ed. Richard Moran, trans. Sarah Richmond (Routledge, 2020): 270.

[18]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 51.

are hiding from their own existential freedom.[19] Together, Sartre and de Beauvoir corroborate that parents interested in genetic intervention should heed Habermas' caution, if not for the freedom of their children, then for their own freedom.

In the chapter "The Grown and the Made," Habermas finally presents the critiques of liberal eugenicists who argue against his theories by claiming that "genetic modification of hereditary factors [are comparable] to the modification of attitudes and expectations taking place in the course of socialization."[20] This liberal position posits that altering through nature is no more harmful than altering through nurture. For example, a parent who selects for the "musical" gene in an embryo is comparable to a parent who sticks their child in piano lessons at a young age. However, popular opinion seems to agree that a parent is not unreasonably restricting the child's existential freedom by forcing them to attend music lessons. Liberal Eugenicists argue that just as a child could refuse to take piano lessons anymore, a genetically programmed child could choose not to heed the genetic modifications made by their parents. A liberal eugenicist who is familiar with existentialism could argue that the suggestion that genetically altered children cannot practice freedom is an argument made in bad faith. This rebuttal would be acceptable if it did not rest on the back of the existentialist conception of equality — a concept which is dissolved by introducing genetic programming.

As previously stated, the most basic presupposition of existentialism is that all men are radically free. With this acknowledgement of one's own freedom comes the acknowledgement of the freedom of others. This creates a mutual relationship of equality, where the

[19]Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 51.
[20]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 49.

capabilities of the other is acknowledged as equally influential with one's own. As de Beauvoir writes, "[the] privilege, which [man] alone possesses, of being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects, is what he shares with all his fellow-men. In turn an object for others, he is nothing more than an individual in the collective on which he depends."[21] Existentialism relies on this mutual subject-object relationship, where each human is born with the same capacity to imbue the world with their own subjectivity. Habermas argues that genetic intervention will suspend this mutualistic relationship, and "lay the grounds for a social relationship in which the usual "reciprocity between persons of equal birth" is revoked."[22] A parent who "performs treatment on an embryo approaches the quasi-subjective nature of this embryo in the same perspective as he would approach objective nature,"[23] and in doing so, "set[s] the course, in relevant respects, of the life history of the dependent person."[24] The parent imbues the "object" of the embryo with some of their own subjectivity, acting upon it without acknowledging it as a creature who will be subjective in the future. This sets up a permanently unequal relationship between the programmer and the programmed. While the programmed person may respond to the intentions of the programmer – as a child being pressured to attend piano lessons might – they can never "reverse or undo this intention."[25] The intentions of the parent — the intention for the child to be intelligent, athletic, or business-smart — is forever infused into the child. This allows the subjectivity of the parent to expand beyond its natural reach. It is as though the parent

[21]Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 5.
[22]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 64.
[23]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 50.
[24]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 64.
[25]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 64.

has intentionally replaced a piece of the child's brain with a piece of their own. The child's own subjective freedom is slightly reduced to make room for the expansion of the parent's subjectivity into their will, and the child ultimately becomes more of an object than their parents. These skewed levels of subjectivity and objectivity create an irreversible situation in which the designed can never hope to become the designer. Notably, this skewed subject-object relationship is not apparent in situations of social pressure. A child who has been nurtured to act a certain way may confront their parent about their intentions, and engage in a "revisionary learning process" by exerting their own will.[26] In contrast, a genetically altered child does not possess the same level of subjective will as their parent, and therefore cannot engage in revising the object that is their genetic makeup.

Although few existentialist philosophers have tried their hand at parenting, their exploration of freedom, authenticity and independence provide a helpful background to understand the difficulties of parenting. Parents are responsible for raising seemingly irrational creatures who display immense amounts of obstinate freedom – often to their own detriment. From stopping a toddler from running into the street, or making them eat their vegetables, the growth of one's child into their own independent being — who is radically free to make their own mistakes can be upsetting and confusing. The genetic programming of children prevents the traumatic break from dependent child, to free individual. Additionally, it prevents adults from having to face their own looming freedom. However, as de Beauvoir writes, "love is then renunciation of all positions, of all confusion. One renounces being in order that there may be that

[26]Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 62.

being which one is not."[27] To show the extent of their love, parents should not attempt to control the life outcomes of their children by inserting their own subjectivities into their child's genetic code. Rather, they should allow their child to fully explore the radical freedom shared by all.

[27] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 72.

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The Individual Harms of an Attention Economy: An Analysis of Castro and Pham's *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*

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Studying how individuals interact with the attention economy can provide inciteful information in establishing the harms and effects of this system. Within their paper Is the Attention Economy Noxious? Authors Castro and Pham set out to provide a detailed account on the harms of the attention economy. Castro and Pham introduce the attention economy as a system and market that exists based on a set of transactions between consumers and media agents.[1] The two types of transitions are defined as follows "Those in which consumers give new media developers their literal attention in exchange for a service (such as a news feed or access to pictures of friends): and those in which developers auction off consumer attention to advertiser."[2] Authors Castro, and Pham identify

[1]Clinton Castro & Adam K. Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, Philosopher's Imprint 20 (2020): 1-13.

[2]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 2.

the attention economy as a market that fosters transactions within a noxious system. This essay will analyse Castro and Pham's paper Is the Attention economy Noxious, placing a large emphasis on how they identify the harms of the attention economy. This essay will outline and dissect how they associate the attention economy with harms to individuals.

Throughout this essay, I will argue that Castro and Pham misidentify the individual harms of the attention economy by misaligning mental health symptoms as a direct cause of the attention economy itself, rather than identifying the qualities of the attention economy which cause individual harm. I will argue that the individual harms that develop from the presence of an attention economy can be further explained by social factors, including how the attention economy changes social human interactions. Therefore, Castro and Pham's argument is missing the step of social analysis when they are examining individual harms. They fail to account for the impact that the attention economy has on humans' social capacities. To support my thesis, I will first present Castro and Pham's argument.

Castro and Pham outline optimality and freedom as the two favorable characteristics of the attention economy. These qualities are contested by the authors, in their criticism on the system. Due to the favourable qualities of the design the attention economies flaws must directly negate or contest these qualities. The flaws outlined and supported by Castro and Pham are as follows: the harm criteria (split into Harms to the individual and harms to society): followed by a criterion that rejects and infringes upon autonomy.[3] This paper will focus specifically on the harm criteria, presenting how the authors separate the harm into two categories, the harms

[3]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 2.

to individuals and to society.

Castro and Pham primarily identify harm to individuals through the decline of emotional, psychological, and mental states. Individual harm as expressed psychologically is outlined by the authors and exhibited by the following quote: "Right around 2011. There began and unprecedented spike in mental health problems among teens and college students, a trend that has continued to the present."[4] The symptoms that the authors present as harms are symptoms of mental health. They explain that these harms are exponentially dependent on social media or exist in correlation to the attention economy. They provide data to support the correlation between detreating mental health and the rise of smartphones and digital use:

> "Twenge's data paints a clear picture of the correlation between new media consumption and poor mental health outcomes. Her analysis of the MtF database revealed that consumption of social media was associated with high revealed that consumption of social media was associated with high relative risks of unhappiness (greater than 50%): loneliness (greater than 10%): and high depressive systems (greater than 25%) (Twenge, 2017, pp. 78-82)."[5]

The data Castro and Pham present is particularly focused on individual teens and university students, equating their declining mental health with the prominent increase in smartphone use.[6] Because of the evident connection between a generational increase

[4]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 4.
[5]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 3.
[6]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 4.

in technology and declining mental states, Castro, and Pham refrain from providing any alternative explanations for this correlation. The authors go on to explain how a decrease in mental health from social media is dependent on generational use, and therefore cannot an experience that all users face. The authors claim that younger generations who have grown up within the attention economy experience large amounts of harms.[7]

Although Castro and Pham outline the mental health claims of harms, they fail to expand on why the attention economy does such a prominent job on harming individuals. Nor do they present a sufficient theory on how to negate these psychological harms. In this next portion of the paper, I will provide an account of the social connection to individual harms, expanding on how changes in socialization cause direct psychological harm. This opposes Castro and Pham's proposed idea that individual harms are outlined as dependent on declining mental health from exposure to the attention economy.[8] I will present the claim that individual mental harms are reliant on how the process of the attention economy is changing people's social capacities on an individual's social level. Castro and Pham fail to establish this connection in detail and thus rely on a separation between societal and individual context to make their claim.

A large portion of Castro and Pham's individual harm argument revolves around the idea of a generational argument of harm, illustrating that the attention economy differs in harm depending on the impacted generation. This shows that in its true nature, the attention economy is not necessarily noxious for the individual. This is represented by the positive outcomes older generations

[7]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 4.
[8]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 4.

experience when engaging with the attention economy.[9] However, when focused on younger generations the correlation was there. Since this correlation is not general or universal, Castro and Pham should have further explored why this connection is vastly different. It cannot be solely due to the attention economy in nature, but rather the saturation and further harms of growing up within a digital world. Regrettably the authors don't explore the different socialization patterns between generations, failing to account for how this can play a role in determining the individual psychological harms experienced within an attention economy-based system. According to Castro and Pham older generations show positive mental results when interacting with social media as it allows them to reconnect to people and expand their social circles. The social circles that they were able to form prior to social media and without the aid of the attention economy.[10] Whereas younger generations use social media to form their initial social circles and it informs a large portion of their socialization. There must therefore be a connection between the harms of the attention economy and the socialization of younger generations, leading to declining mental health.

The correlation between declining mental health amongst young people is not intrinsically connected to the attention economy, but also to the skills that many younger generations lack due to the social impacts of technology. "Bonfini, co-editor of the second edition of Casebook for DSM-5: Diagnosis and Treatment Planning, observes that Generation Z as a whole lacks many of the social skills that previous generations learned through face-to-face inter-

[9]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 4.
[10]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 4.

actions."[11] In an account of the harms of social media and the attention economy, Castro and Pham have neglected to create a holistic account that incorporates all the individual harms of social media. Specifically, how the attention economy affects social relationships, or how changing social skill could be the main source of declining mental health amongst younger generations. Harms to socialization are the driving force of the individual harms of the attention economy. When there are social harms to individuals and communities, psychological harms will develop since humans are inclined to engage in social and community-based activities. Castro and Pham are successful in outlining the negative qualities of the attention economy, however they put too much attention and value into individual psychological harm, without acknowledging the prevalence of the social harms that exist as a driving force for individual mental decline. Such as the changing nature of human interactions and how this would highly impact individual harm. The very nature of attention economy-based systems changes the precedent for socialization. How content is catered to individuals within an attention economy threatens the norms of digital media integration and distribution across social networks. This is exhibited by the following quote: "When people living in the same geographical area log into YouTube, by contrast, it is not at all likely that they will be offered the same content. Indeed, it is not at all likely that people living under the same roof will be offered the same content if they visit the site separately."[12] The attention economy changes how we view the digital content that is integral to our experience within the modern age. Non-attention economy systems of media include a representation of universal cross-community

[11]Lindsey Phillips, *The emotional and social health needs of gen Z* (2022).
[12]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 1.

sets of values. The attention economy therefore works to separate individuals from these inherit community-based grouping by individualizing content.[13] A positive symptom of this is that it allows individuals to being shown different perspectives. This could benefit individualization, especially if an individual is raised in a negative environment that is not suitable for their identity. The harm of forced individualization is the inability to be an active engaged participate within a community or social circle. An individual's social circle is greatly affected by the nature of the attention economy, resulting in changes to how younger generations socialize. Because Castro and Pham do not create the correlation between social factors and mental health, they do not form an adequate presentation of solutions, including community and social events to negate the use of social media. Social media can be a powerful tool for individualization and self-expression but needs to be met equally with other content that fills the gaps that social media performs.

In opposition to my argument that Castro and Pham's point is too narrow and misinterprets individual harm. One could say that their paper Is the Attention Economy Noxious? does discuss social harms as a separate system of harm formed throughout the attention economy. However, their argument for social harms is outlined as grand societal harms, represented by harms such as political threats, rather than the harms of individuals caused by changes in social interaction. Symptoms like isolation are analyzed through a societal impact by Castro and Pham, rather than as a force for individual decline in mental health. They view social harm through a large societal lens and fail to identify how social harms effect the individual. Their account on social harms is important, specifically for illustrating phenomena such as polarization and extrem-

[13]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 1.

ism, however, is not a complete account of the creation of harm as it does not connect the social to the psychological.[14]

An attention economy can avoid certain qualities of a noxious system if it fixes how individuals interact, therefore reducing the potential for individual harm. A large portion of Castro and Pham's argument revolves around data that shows a correlation between the decline in psychological state of teenagers and the prevalence of social media and technology. Teenagers, and young adults represent a generation where social interactions are based around the use of technology, forming a new precedent to the effects of living within a digital world.

Castro and Pham's paper Is the Attention Economy Noxious? presents a correlation between smartphone use and negative mental health. Within their account of individual harms, the authors fail to identify the harms of attention economy to social networks. Castro and Pham introduce the impacts of the existence of a new generation of people whose social interactions are online, yet within Castro and Pham's paper there is little to no discussion on how this might impact socialization and the harms that come with these changes. Their account of harms is incomplete as they fail further exploring these alternative connections.

[14]Castro & Pham, *Is the Attention Economy Noxious?*, 5.

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