Authors, Editors and Supervisors

Authors

Stephen Arkley  Mia Renshaw
Ashley Bonnell  Anna Ross
Joe Boyland  Sarah Sharp
Georgie Campbell  Justine Solano
Lucy Chambers  Eddie Southcombe
Anna Nunez de Croker  George Wood
Harry Dayman  Sam Wootton
Marcus Desai  Abi Hamilton
Alice Goodwin  Josh Hibbert
Josef Grover  Jemima Hunt
Linton Newton

Editors

Alice Goodwin  Dr Rachael Wiseman

Supervisors

Chris Bartley  Jan Jobling
Rob Booth  Ilias Markolefas
Barry Dainton  Robin McKenna
Rebecca Davnall  Stephen McLeod
Richard Gaskin  Thomas Schramme
Daniel Hill  Vid Simoniti

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Editor’s Introduction

This Dissertation Anthology is a celebration of our achievements, and a guide for future dissertation students. Above all else, this collection will be a permanent reminder for the Philosophy students of 2019-20 that their hard work has been acknowledged, and that their diligence should be celebrated not just by other students, but by themselves. PhilSoc kindly paid for the printing of this book, as a show of their heartfelt support and of how impressed they are with our accomplishments, especially considering the Covid-19 pandemic we all had to work through. I chose to put together this Anthology with the help of Dr Rachael Wiseman because I am proud of what we have achieved.

To all the students who contributed:
You have all done something amazing and it has been a joy to work so closely with all of you to make this Anthology a reality.
Thank you for sharing your work with me.
Thank you for carrying on even when times got tough.
Thank you for putting up with my endless messages.
Thank you.

To the future students:
As a final compassionate act, each student who has been included in this Dissertation Anthology, has offered a few words of advice to future dissertation students. Every student has a completely individual writing process, and so these comments are not meant to replace the formal advice and information provided by the module. Rather, they are a realistic look into what planning, creating, and writing a Philosophy dissertation is like.

Every student who has been included in this Anthology started from the same position as you may be in now: a blank page. Writing a dissertation is a lot of work, but if this Anthology proves anything, it is that you can do it too.
Good luck.

Alice Goodwin
Student Editor
For the purposes of space, we were not able to include full versions of every dissertation. To ensure that the aims, argumentation and structure of each dissertation is clearly understood, we have included both the abstract and a chosen section from each dissertation, with a short introduction in between, explaining the section’s position and purpose within the wider dissertation. We have also included short reflections provided by each student, commenting on their experience that led to the creation of their dissertation. All of the students involved are excellent writers, with an immense well of knowledge and opinion on their chosen topic, and so I hope the sections we have selected successfully convey the ability and passion of each student.
Selling Sex or Selling Self: Is Harm Inherent or Contingent to the Sex Industry?

Stephen Arkley

Abstract

In this dissertation, I will investigate whether harm should be considered intrinsic or contingent to sex-work. First, I will outline the current debate. I will investigate both Feminist and Kantian claims that sex-work involves selling the self. I will ultimately argue that these claims are mistaken and that there is no intrinsic wrong to sex-work. I will then discuss contingent harms in the sex industry and how these harms are best reduced. In the second part, I will counter some criticisms that prostitutes are unable to consent in any meaningful way. I will reject both the view that patriarchy and commodification of sex make consent meaningless and argue that a form of constrained agency can be retained so long as the sex-worker maintains their 'sexual jurisdiction'. In the final section, I will argue that the state has a responsibility to ensure that this 'sexual jurisdiction' is maintained and that a fundamental shift in the sex-work debate is necessary to bring this about.

The following extract examines the argument that harm is contingent to the sex industry, and the aspects of prostitution that must be focused on in order for harm to be reduced.

Harm as Contingent to the Sex Industry

There is a myriad of problems faced by prostitutes, that while contingent, are still significant enough to warrant concern and potential regulation. In a 2002 study in Merseyside, 54% of sex-workers interviewed had been physically assaulted and 43% sexually assaulted. Many in the industry will experience extortion of money, imprisonment or violence.

Many radical feminists call for various methods of regulation in order to curtail these contingent harms. However, it is not apparent that these forms of regulation do anything to stop violence and in many cases, it is the police rather than clients that sex-workers identify as threats. Sex-worker Melissa Gira Grant highlights how 70% of sex-workers in New York have had run-ins with the police. As sex-work is criminalised, if a sex-worker experiences sexual assault and goes to the police for help they will either be ignored or criminalised themselves. As one sex-worker Carol remarked 'If I call them, they don't come

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...After a girl was gang-raped, they said, “forget it, she works in the street”\(^3\). A common attitude expressed by the police in such cases is that rape by a client ‘simply comes with the job’\(^4\).

In response to current models of regulation, Julie Bindel calls for the adoption of the ‘Nordic Model’: a model which decriminalises selling sex but criminalises its purchase\(^5\). This approach is laden with problems. The approach simply pushes sex-work into seedier corners. As sex-worker Laura Lee remarks: ‘people are not willing to use online booking forms, not willing to divulge their details... there hasn’t been a reduction in demand, but it is far more difficult to keep myself safe’\(^6\). It would thus appear that whether sex-work is criminalised or a Nordic-style model is introduced, sex-workers will still face significant social harm and stigma.

There are many who argue that violence is best reduced by decriminalisation and ‘sex-radicalism’. According to sex radicals:

> the position of prostitution cannot be reduced to one of a passive object used in a male sexual practice, but instead can be understood as a place of agency where the sex worker makes active use of the existing sexual order.\(^7\)

According to this view, the dangers attached to sex-work only exist because of a patriarchal culture in which the ‘feminine has been coded to mean weak’; the challenge then is to ‘change what it means to be female in relation to the male’\(^8\). So, if Dworkin is right to suggest that what it means to be a woman is determined through the existence of the sex industry, then sex-radicals argue that ‘women should be given more control, rather than less, over areas where they can and are expected to negotiate the sex acts involved’\(^9\).

Consider, for instance, the general expectation that a woman should marry. Many sex-radicals argue that this is ‘no less a denial of agency’ than prostitution\(^10\). As Emma Goldman famously remarked, for many women it is merely a question of degree whether she sells herself to one man, in or out of marriage, or to many\(^11\). Indeed, many of the problems prostitutes face, such as physical abuse, control of earnings and entrapment have also historically been features of marriage. Historically, men have been granted sexual right to their wives and it was only in the 1990’s that marital instances of rape became

\(^3\)Ibid, 5.


\(^6\)Gentleman, A. (2016). ‘Sex worker and activist Laura Lee: It’s now far more difficult to stay safe’. The Guardian.


\(^9\)Ibid, 153.

\(^10\)Ibid, 144.

criminalised. Even today, women are still forced to remain in marriages unless they are able to prove ‘irretrievable breakdown’ and it is only in the past year that a no-fault divorce bill has been put before the Commons¹². As Nussbaum points out however, ‘to rule that marriage as such should be illegal on the grounds that it reinforces male dominance would be an excessive intrusion upon liberty’¹³. Therefore, she argues that just as how law and social change were able to change the ‘most inequitable features’ of the institution of marriage, so too can it change the most inequitable features of prostitution¹⁴.

While sex-radicalism is a useful cultural strategy, when asked why they entered sex-work, most sex-workers will reply that they entered it for financial reasons. Showden thus suggests that the sex-radicalism position is best used in ‘conjunction with the sex-as-work’ analysis¹⁵. Sex-as-work proponents are not concerned with the meaning of sex itself, but merely the right to exercise their labour in a free and safe manner. The social meanings of sex are thus ‘outside the scope’ of the sex-as-work argument; though prostitution may be exploitative in some cases and challenge the status quo in others, ‘neither of these is due to anything about sex work itself’¹⁶. It would appear that, once again, it is consent and safety that remain the paramount concern in the ethics of prostitution.

**Student Reflection**

Writing my dissertation was an incredibly interesting and enlightening experience. I had always held an interest in the philosophy surrounding gender and sexuality and after an interview I conducted with a sex-worker the previous year, I was eager to investigate the ethical issues involved in the sex industry. I’d recommend writing a dissertation to anyone who has the opportunity as it gets you to constantly think about and reconsider your fundamental positions.

¹⁴Ibid, 295.
¹⁶Ibid, 152.
Becoming Ecosynchronus: A Promising Solution to the Current State of the Environment

Ashley Bonnell

Abstract

The environment is in a current state of deterioration as a consequence of the activities of humans. For a promising solution for this crisis to develop, humanity’s mindset must change so that we no longer view ourselves as superior and dominant over nature. This change would enable us to consider the impact we have on nature when acting. To develop this promising solution, I will discuss arguments from ecofeminists such as Plumwood, Hawkins and Warren, as well as the practical guidance of those in the standard Anthropocene rhetoric, such as Cruzten and Steffan. In order to successfully fulfil practice-orientated guidance, provided by the standard narrative, our mindset must change, and this will be the main theme of this dissertation. The combination of these two aspects will be discussed before proposing the solution of becoming Ecosynchronous, presented by Robert Hay. It should become clear that Hay’s argument can incorporate both the requirements of ecofeminists and those in the Anthropocene’s standard narrative, these requirements being the need for our mindset to change as well as humanity carrying out practical activities to restore the environment.

The first extract is an account of Ecofeminism and the relationship it proposes between humans and nature. The second extract is an examination of general solutions that Ecofeminists propose for the protection of nature.

What is Ecofeminism?

Ecofeminism analyses the relationship between humans and the natural world and theorises that the oppression of nature has a common root cause with the oppression of women. As Hawkins argues, ecofeminists suggest that ‘structures in western patriarchal culture contribute to ongoing domination and oppression... of nonhuman “nature”’.¹ The definition of ecofeminism that I will be focusing on emphasises parallels between feminist concerns and concerns for the natural world, as both respond to the same abuse and dualistic suppression². Ecofeminists, on this definition, are those who view the problem for both women and nature as stemming from a set of dualisms, originating in classical philosophy and traced throughout history to the present.

Dualisms are the division of concepts into a logic of contrasting aspects, such as the man/woman and human/nature dualism. Throughout time, there has been a dominant tradition where men are identified with reason and women with nature. A dualism, on Plumwood’s account, originates when there is a ‘denied dependency on a subordinated other’³. It is the division of something which essentially contains two opposed and contrasted aspects in that one would be viewed as dominant and the other viewed, consequentially, as inferior. Reuther explains that the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature is central to the notions of hierarchical dualisms in Western culture. These dualisms divide ‘feminized nature from masculine culture’⁴.

The focus of the ecofeminist argument is to employ the thought that the male-dominated Western or neo-Western socioeconomic systems are the reason for the dualisms, and to draw parallels between the hyper-separation we see between men and women, and that we see between humans and nature. A gendered reason/nature dualism appears as the most important, basic and connecting form of oppression in western culture. This dualistic mindset is present in the Anthropocene and identified as the cause of humanity’s lack of serious practical environmentalism: because of the dualism, we view nature as inferior to us. Evidence of this can be seen in the irrational use of fossil fuels, deforestation and other human activities. Thus, in order to act more responsibly towards nature, we must change our mindset.

General Solutions that Ecofeminists provide for the Protection of Nature

Ecofeminists are typically more interested in providing solutions in critical metaphysics than in practical guidance. Their focus is on avoiding dualistic tendencies in human thought, with the further aim of protecting nature (and other inferior elements in counterpart dualisms) and preventing further oppression.

One of these solutions comes from Ruether. Ruether’s suggestion is that we need to create a sustainable balance between humanity and nonhuman nature, as there is a difference between the two which calls for egalitarianism⁵. This form of sustainability may have similar aspects to that discussed by the standard narrative, as both arguments claim that we need sustainable living to restore the balance between humanity and nature. However, as with other ecofeminists, Ruether argues that this imbalance occurred through dualisms and patriarchal systems. The present structure of inequality within our current relationship with the environment is not sustainable. Humanity is destroying ecological nature and the species around it. The crisis calls for something to be done drastically and efficiently. Re-establishing the ecological balance will achieve this⁶. She criticises mainstream ecological theories, such as deep

⁶Ibid.
ecology, as they do not acknowledge the effect patriarchal systems have had on the environment. She further criticises feminist ideologies for not understanding and including the relationship between women and nature; this relationship being that both were oppressed by a patriarchal society.

However, on what basis can an ecological balance be achieved? Mathews provides a related solution to our current ecological crisis by recommending that we adopt a mindset of 'interconnectedness'. This essentially goes against the dualistic qualities previously mentioned, where men view themselves as distinct and superior over women, and humans also view themselves as distinct and superior over nature. We need to abandon these dualisms and advocate for a sense of interconnectedness where we are no longer separated from nature. Plumwood advocates for the reconstruction of identities where we understand the 'non-hierarchical concept of difference' as the denial of difference is a main factor in forging dualisms. Understanding differences and adopting this account of interconnectedness will also address the side effects of dualisms, such as hyperseparation and backgrounding, as we will recognise that we are not hierarchically different from nature. To investigate and essentially undermine the many dualisms, we must make distinctions and 'recognise dichotomies'. This doesn't necessarily oppose Mathews view of establishing a sense of 'interconnectedness', as it still identifies the idea that despite natural dichotomies, we can recognise similarities between humans and non-humans.

**Student Reflection**

With the help and guidance from my supervisor, I was able to successfully complete my dissertation at a grade I am satisfied with. Despite the disruption of COVID-19, I still managed to research and analyse useful articles and books relevant to my topic which is of great importance. My planning beforehand set the basis to my dissertation as once I was satisfied with the structure, I began writing draft after draft until I was happy to submit.

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8 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.


Joe Boyland

Abstract

In his book *Free Market Fairness* and accompanying works John Tomasi provides a new interpretation of John Rawls’ theory of justice as fairness. Based on an account of self-respect as ‘self-authorship’, Tomasi argues that justice as fairness recommends the strongly capitalist regime he calls ‘market democracy’, rather than Rawls’ favoured property-owning democracy and liberal socialist regimes. His ‘fast track to capitalism’ lies in establishing two free-market liberties as basic rights – a right to privately own productive property, and a right to ‘earn a living’. In this paper, I review two as yet untreated arguments for the basic right to privately own productive property. The first argument, which I call ‘The Argument from Asymmetry’, is that a basic right to property is necessary to secure individuals’ ability to choose for themselves the ownership structure under which they labour. The second argument, which I call ‘The Argument from Affirmation’, is that a basic right to privately own productive property is necessary public affirmation of citizens’ ‘status’. I will show that both arguments are unsound. The Argument from Asymmetry is both self-defeating and based on an untenable characterisation of liberal socialism. Meanwhile, The Argument from Affirmation rests on a misunderstanding of the bases of citizens’ status and is likely to result in more harm to citizens’ status than benefit. Therefore, I conclude that Tomasi’s defence of a basic right to privately own productive property, and, by implication, market democracy, is unsuccessful.

The following extract examines the effect that public subsidy can have on co-operative workers. According to Tomasi, this sort of external assistance will undermine the workers’ sense of achievement and self-respect.

The Subsidy Argument

In his review article on the theory of the ‘labour-managed’ (that is, co-operative) firm, Gregory Dow states that ‘the question [as to why co-operatives are so rare] has had a central place in the history of the subject’¹. What has been shown is that co-operatives are not rare because they are dysfunctional. In fact, co-operative firms seem to be both long-lived and productive². Rather

co-operatives ‘are rare [simply] because they are seldom created,’ says Dow\(^3\). Specifically, the ‘usual theoretical explanation’ for the very low birth rate, and thus rarity, of co-operatives compared to conventional firms ‘is that workers tend to be poor and cannot easily finance [co-operatives]’\(^4\).

What this gives rise to, one might argue, is a situation in which co-operative working preferences are often underserved – that is, to a situation in which the demand for co-operative workplaces is higher than the supply. Take the UK, for example. While some 10% of the global workforce labour in co-operatives\(^5\), providing evidence of vigorous demand for co-operative working arrangements, there are currently only 500 to 600 co-operatives in the UK\(^6\).

Now, if co-operative workplace preferences are, indeed, underserved, and if this is, indeed, in large part due to a lack of capital, then self-authorship surely mandates public subsidies for starting co-operatives. First, the state, with its unique fiscal capacity, is the most logical source of the required capital. But, second, one might also argue that, given the claimed importance of self-authorship, leaving this matter up to market forces exposes the fulfilment of co-operative preferences to an unacceptable level of risk.

According to Tomasi, the (fiscal) institutions of a market democratic society operate under two ‘parameters’; this protects an acceptable ‘range of self-authorship’\(^7\). On the one hand, at the lower bound, self-authorship requires that citizens be guaranteed both a social minimum and an education as ‘poverty and lack of education...may render people incapable of developing their capacities to live as responsible self-authors’\(^8\). More problematically for our purposes, however, Tomasi also worries that, at the upper bound, ‘tax rates and economic regulations can become so burdensome that they impinge on the responsible self-authorship of citizenship’\(^9\). Thus, what the idea of the range of self-authorship purports to do, as Bird\(^10\) puts it, is ‘to explain why redistribution and regulation beyond what is required to support the basic liberties and a social minimum must itself be unjust.’ Yet, this being so, public subsidy for co-operatives does not appear necessary to ‘support’ any of the basic liberties as either Rawls or Tomasi define them, nor to ‘support’ a social minimum. As such the taxation needed fund a public subsidy seems forbidden.

Now, this depends, of course, on how one interprets the term ‘support’. Indeed, elsewhere Tomasi\(^11\) does state that ‘the core purpose of the tax system’ to ‘give substantive value to citizens’ rights and liberties.’ Therefore, Tomasi may well object at this point that, unlike taxation for the purpose of redistribution, taxation for the purpose of subsidizing the expansion of co-operatives is.

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\(^4\)Ibid, 71.
\(^8\)Ibid.
\(^9\)Ibid, 94.
\(^11\)Tomasi, *Free Market Fairness*, 112.
operatives, by expanding workplace choice, is not, in fact, disallowed by the range of self-authorship.

Yet, it might be remembered that the key way that the market democratic interpretation of justice as fairness improves upon the social-democratic is, Tomasi claims, by providing the conditions necessary for citizens to feel that their achievements are genuinely their own. Indeed, as he affirms in *Free Market Fairness*, people have a ‘fundamental interest not simply in doing well in life (say, in the sense of possessing certain goods) but in doing well as a consequence of their own activities’¹². This sentiment leads him, for example, to reject more generous, European-style social welfare arrangements, since they ‘take the trouble out of the stuff of life,’ and thereby sap citizens’ sense of achievement¹³. This being so, however, it seems that even if permitted, a market democracy would not undertake a programme of co-op subsidies. For having been given seed funding by the government to start their successful co-operative, workers will trace their business achievements back to the initial government support. To some extent then, reflecting on the success of their firm, co-operative workers will have to acknowledge the pivotal role of public subsidy and the external assistance for which this stands. This will, according to Tomasi, undermine their sense of achievement and self-respect. A just society is, however, committed to ensuring citizens’ self-respect.

**Student Reflection**

Overall, I found my dissertation very rewarding, despite the process having its moments! Since I enjoy reading and researching, and probably overdid this part of essay-writing all the way through uni, becoming a ‘mini-expert’ in my (narrow) field was pretty easy and really stimulating. On the other hand, one big error was taking a break in the middle of drafting; it was a real slog to pick everything back up following this. In addition, critiquing an article without any secondary literature ended up causing me interpretative problems; one such problem led, in the end, to a hefty re-write of the dissertation. Approach with caution!

¹²Ibid, 83.
¹³Ibid, 80.
Abstract

When faced with the issue of sexism in society, the discussion is often centred on women’s emancipation and liberation from patriarchal structures. Speech is a powerful tool which is harnessed when demanding societal change. In this essay, I concentrate on the more subtle inequalities which are a result of feminist speech. I will be analysing powerful feminist statements and slogans to determine which of these are successful for the feminist fight for social equality. With the use of theories from the philosophy of language, I will construct an argument that certain feminist statements actually oppose the values of the feminist movement. It is undeniable that in order to reach social equality, liberation is necessary for women, but is it possible that certain feminist expressions can also be discriminatory? I will show that this, surprisingly, can be the case and can actually undermine feminist intentions.

This essay is not a critique of feminism, it simply aims to explore the framework which is embedded within speech and apply this to feminist speech. The underlying message within political speech is paramount to the movement’s success. Therefore, in order for feminist emancipatory speech to be successful, discrimination must be absent from this.

The following extract is taken from the final chapter, and its purpose is to show how some feminist speech can be discriminatory, and how this is not the direction that feminist emancipatory speech should take if it intends to be successful.

‘The Future is Female’

For decades ‘The Future is Female’ has been printed onto t-shirts and worn by feminist supporters¹. In recent years, this statement has been used as a political slogan for the rise of female presence within politics. This statement is pronounced with the sentiment that women require emancipation. Both in general society and in the political sphere, male patriarchy still presides, and equality has yet to be achieved. To achieve equality, a rise in female presence and power is necessary. This particular slogan unapologetically addresses this issue by stating that the future of politics and society will see the rise of the ‘female’. Stating ‘The Future is Female’, this suggests that female dominance will prevail and that men will be at an inferior position within society as women have been throughout history.

Oppressive gender roles are imposed upon people on the basis of the apparent physical sex of their bodies. Therefore, when considering specific terms that are used within feminist speech, these could be criticised using Butler's line of thought. Butler advocates the commonly known belief which has emerged in recent years that 'male' and 'female' are not the only genders with which a person can identify. Therefore, the slogan 'The Future is Female' is not only discriminating towards men but is actually discriminatory towards all genders other than female. The exclusivity of this slogan for the future being 'female' results in implicitly excluding all other genders from the conversation, although this may not have been the intended effect of this slogan.

The statement 'The Future is Female' is endorsed by women who believe that in order for equality in society to be achieved, women require a greater presence in politics and other areas of society. Stating that 'The Future is Female', is preaching a necessary message that the world requires a shift in gender roles. This slogan is not explicitly discriminating against a particular group. It may be argued that asserting that this slogan is discriminating against all social groups other than the 'female' is taking this slogan out of context. To feminist thinkers, it may be clear that this is not the intention of the slogan and that the intention is simply for a rise of female presence within these social and political spheres. Although this may be clear to women who promote this slogan, this may be lost to groups of people who do not identify as female such as people who identify as transgender and genderfluid. Consequently, there are two aspects of this statement which are problematic; the promotion of gender stereotypes and the suggestion that the female gender should supersede all other genders.

'The Future is Female' clearly uses language which is pro-women, as does the slogan 'women's rights are human rights'. This slogan also clearly uses language which is identifying the issue of human rights as limited for women in particular. These two slogans appear to be conveying a similar message, for the emancipation of women. However, this is not the only feature of 'The Future is Female', as this slogan is also somewhat discriminating to groups of people who are not female. 'Women's rights are human rights' is a feminist slogan which is commonly used by feminist activists and has been a widely used slogan in protests and by other movements which are in support of feminism. The aim of this slogan is to promote women's rights as equal to the rights of any other person. The fundamental difference between this slogan and 'The Future is Female' is that it is not excluding other social groups from the conversation as 'The Future is Female' does. Both slogans mention the female/women; how then is one discriminatory towards other groups and the other not? 'The Future is Female' is stated in a way that this is a proclamation of the future, implying that the 'female' will exercise control over the other members of society. In contrast, 'women's rights are human rights' is not a proclamation of this kind, rather it is a plea for women's rights which does not entail that women's rights should be greater than anyone else's rights. Furthermore, gender roles within society are not so heavily or negatively affected by the slogan 'women's rights are human rights' as they are with 'The
Future is Female'. Although ‘women’s rights are human rights’ entails gendered speech, it does not convey that there is a superiority to the female gender. This slogan addresses the need to recognise women’s rights as equal to the rights of any other gender as within human rights. Gender roles within society are not being re-substantiated by this slogan as no role of women is being stated; therefore, there is no negative effect on other genders. Consequently, ‘women’s rights are human rights’ is a slogan which successfully emancipates women without discriminating against other genders or further endorsing dated gender roles within society.

Student Reflection

Throughout the course of my dissertation, I had found a new love for research and writing. I was told by my professor that a dissertation is the module you will remember the most and that you will have the opportunity to write about something that you have a real passion for - they were absolutely right. Being given the opportunity to devise your own question and learn in-depth about a subject which you have a real passion for is very rewarding. It is a great feeling being able to leave university having completed a dissertation which you can be very proud of.
Abstract

In this dissertation, I will provide a critical analysis of Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of Women’s Otherness within her 1949 text, *The Second Sex*. First, I will outline Simone de Beauvoir’s argument that women are seen as the ‘Other’ in relation to the male absolute within a patriarchal society. With reference to the text as a whole, as well as the feminist sex-gender distinction and contemporary examples of the subordination of women, I will show how this text is still largely influential in twenty-first century society. Second, I will address the question of whether women are complicit in their Otherness. I will critically assess the extent to which this is true of women and whether they can be held accountable for this in the way that Simone de Beauvoir suggests. Lastly, I will ask the question of whether Simone de Beauvoir presupposes a sexist view of women throughout the text. I will address this question with reference to possible Sartrean influences throughout the text.

The following extract, taken from the final chapter, presents the arguments for whether Jean-Paul Sartre’s position in Simone de Beauvoir’s life lead to a masculinist bias within de Beauvoir’s work.

Does Simone de Beauvoir Presuppose a Sexist View of Women?

One of the reasons why it can be claimed that male values are dominant in de Beauvoir’s work is because ‘she is believed to place consciousness above the body, thinking above feeling, activity over passivity and transcendence over nature’¹. Her use of the hierarchical nature of transcendence and immanence, in particular, with reference to the complicity of women with being the Other, can be said to be an example of masculinist thinking. This is because de Beauvoir argued that transcendence is typically associated with the working male, while immanence is associated with the passive woman. This can be seen as masculinist thinking as it represents the patriarchal society in which we live which promotes the viewpoint that women are passive in comparison to men. When discussing the Sartrean influence over Simone de Beauvoir, we can look to Sartre’s discussions of bad faith within his texts. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre claimed that humans are always situated beings and that our consciousness does not exist independently from our ‘bodily position in the

world'. He states that our pure conscious existence, or our transcendence, is the only authentic type of human existence and opposes 'all bodily incarnation as immanence, and thus, bad faith'. Sartre's concept of an individual adopting bad faith means that they have adopted false values and, in turn, begin acting inauthentically and denying their own freedom. Sartre proposes examples of two women who adopt bad faith. The first of these is the 'frigid woman', who he uses to claim that the 'unconscious does not exist'. It is claimed that this 'frigid woman', from the perspective of her husband, has been ignoring the pleasure that she gains from sexual experiences with her husband. He claims that by assuming this position of frigidity, the woman has fallen back on a fixed identity and places herself on the 'side of the en-soi', this meaning becoming a being-in-itself. The second woman in Sartre's example has accepted a man's invitation to go out with him with the knowledge of what the man is after, however, she chooses to ignore this and postpones her decision on whether or not to accept the sexual advances from the man. Sartre argues that this woman, alongside the previous woman, is 'shirking her responsibilities' and that 'although potentially woman has a consciousness, in Being and Nothingness we see her continually in the role of an être-en-soi'. For Sartre, this idea of a being-in-itself refers to physical objects in the external world to human beings. Here, Sartre is stating that, in these examples, the women have lowered themselves to becoming objects compared to man being subject. The use of these examples of women show that the être-en-soi for women is always associated with their sexual behaviour.

On the other hand, Sartre also uses an example of a male café waiter within his body of work. This waiter has an eagerness to please, 'his movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid'. This behaviour shows that he is acting as a waiter, acting as an object. However, the fact that he is acting as a waiter shows that he is aware that he is not just a waiter but is rather a conscious being deceiving himself. Sartre is arguing here that by acting in bad faith, the waiter is denying his own freedom by using his own freedom to do this. The waiter knows he is a free being but is actively choosing to ignore this. Although this example is aiming to show the same misuse of bad faith as the previous examples of the two women, the example of the waiter is tied to a profession. This is significant as Sartre has portrayed the women as merely sexual beings, whereas the man is seen in a professional setting. Even though it may seem that Sartre's account, in all examples, is primarily concerned with elucidating what 'bad faith' means in general, it is highly telling that his examples reveal a highly gendered outlook. Therefore, Sartre's conceptual framework is plagued with masculinist thinking that is a result of the patriarchal

²Ibid, 50.
³Ibid, 50.
⁴Ibid, 50.
⁵Ibid, 50.
⁶Ibid, 51.
society in which he lived in that views women as simply objects of the man’s desire.

Despite this view of Simone de Beauvoir seeming to take a negative view of female biology, it can be argued that de Beauvoir’s argument is ultimately not sexist due to the fact that she breaks down Sartre’s dualistic ontology. Therefore, de Beauvoir does not share the rejection of the female body that is made by Sartre. This is because she ‘removed the female body from Sartre’s dualistic ontology and ranked it at a sociocultural level’⁴. Therefore, de Beauvoir has ‘disaggregated Sartre’s series of equivalents’, these are ‘nature/female body/immanence/en soi’. She breaks down this antagonism between the ‘female body and transcendence’ present in Sartre’s work and the simplistic ontology used, whereby Sartre viewed the human mind as primary, and the human being as fully free to oppose the body⁵. The claim that de Beauvoir uses Sartre’s Existentialism in order to oppose the female body ignores the ‘main thesis in The Second Sex’⁶. This main thesis being explaining the theory of woman as being the Other.

Student Reflection

One of the most challenging parts of the dissertation process for me was choosing the right topic. I had a number of ideas but I wasn’t sure how to narrow down my ideas to a main research question. After reaching out to my supervisor and talking about each of my ideas I found it a lot easier to make a decision about what topic was best for me. In the end I chose to write my dissertation on a topic from one of my third year modules. The most beneficial aspects of the writing process were maintaining contact with my supervisor and making several drafts of my work, as well as making sure not to worry about how much progress I was making throughout the year.

⁴Simons, Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir, 56.
⁵Ibid, 56.
⁶Ibid, 57.
Why the Non-Existence of Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence is the most Coherent Answer to Fermi’s Paradox

Harry Dayman

Abstract

I will be arguing that the non-existence of extra-terrestrial intelligence is the most coherent answer to Fermi’s paradox. I begin by providing an account of what Fermi’s paradox is and why it has remained unsolved for so long. Following on, I shall outline the three forms of possible solutions to the paradox: (i) arguments maintaining that extra-terrestrial intelligence does exist and, at least once, they have made contact with us, (ii) arguments maintaining that extra-terrestrial intelligence does exist, but we have not made contact with them, and (iii) arguments maintaining the non-existence of extra-terrestrial intelligence. We shall assess each form of solution in detail, demonstrating why options (i) and (ii) cannot possibly provide coherent answers to Fermi’s paradox. Finally, I shall put forward three arguments maintaining that the most likely scenario is the non-existence of extra-terrestrial intelligence. In assessing these arguments in favour of option (iii), I demonstrate why these arguments are more credible than any of the previously discussed option (i) and option (ii) solutions. Therefore, we shall be able to conclude that the non-existence of extra-terrestrial intelligence is the most coherent answer to Fermi’s paradox.

Fermi’s paradox is the apparent contradiction between the lack of evidence for extra-terrestrial civilisations and various high estimates for their probability. The following extract is from the concluding chapter and details the arguments that lead to the conclusion that the non-existence of extra-terrestrial intelligence is the most coherent answer to Fermi’s paradox.

Conclusion

So, as Fermi asked, ‘where is everybody?’¹. The first potential answer to Fermi’s paradox that I considered was the UFO approach, a Type-1 solution. Like all Type-1 solutions, the UFO approach maintains that, at least once, humanity has been contacted by at least one extra-terrestrial civilisation (ETC). This places the approach in opposition to all current scientific data, and as we currently have no reliable evidence of any ETCs, let alone UFOs, any evidence put forward in favour of this approach had to be very strong, otherwise, we simply have no reason to believe it over our empirical evidence. However, I found the quality of evidence in favour of the UFO approach to be very poor. Thus, through the use of Occam’s Razor, I was able to provide alternative explanations for the supposed ‘evidence’ of UFOs without needing to

hypothesise an ETC to do so. Therefore, such little credible evidence to support
and approach which is in opposition to all our current scientific data, I was able
to conclude that Type-1 solutions, such as the UFO approach, are simply not
credible answers to Fermi’s paradox. I then moved onto the Zoo, Interdict,
Simulation, and Dark Forest hypotheses, all of which are Type-2 solutions,
maintaining that, although ETCs do exist, they are yet to make contact with us,
hence our lack of scientific evidence of them. After having discussed all four
hypotheses, highlighting any specific problems each individual argument had, I
then turned to my most important overall criticism of the Type-2 approach: due
to the structural similarity in all Type-2 solutions, because all Type-2
approaches anthropomorphise potential ETCs in order to provide theoretical
‘evidence’, we are left with no method of deciding which hypothesis is best.
Simply, because the evidence in favour of each hypothesis is so structurally
similar, and because we have no way of confirming which of these theories
(hypothetically) is correct, the only reason why one could possibly choose a
particular theory, over any other, is due to personal preference (as opposed to
reason and the assessment of evidence). Thus, because we cannot decide which
is best, out of all Type-2 approaches (of which there are many), we cannot
possibly conclude that any randomly selected Type-2 solution is the most
coherent answer to Fermi’s paradox. Therefore, I was able to reject all Type-2
solutions from possible answers to the Fermi’s paradox, allowing me to move
onto the discussion of Type-3 solutions.

Type-3 solutions maintain that the reason behind our lack of evidence of
any ETCs is due to their non-existence. In particular, I discussed three Type-3
approaches: dangerous-universe arguments, rare-Earth arguments, and rare-
consciousness arguments. The dangerous-universe arguments, which
maintained that the reason why ETCs may not exist is due to the many dangers
posed by the universe (such as magnetars, supernovae, and GRBs),
demonstrated to us that the number of habitable planets is fewer than we had
previously estimated, meaning that the number of ETCs must be fewer too.
Following on, I found that the number of habitable planets (and, therefore,
potential ETCs) is reduced further when we consider the rare-Earth arguments.
The two rare-Earth arguments I discussed, rare-moon arguments and habitable
zone arguments, demonstrated that in order for life as we know to develop
elsewhere, a series of very specific, and rare, life-supporting conditions must be
met. Thus, I found that Earth has been incredibly fortunate in order to possess
these rare traits, which means that, as Earth is indeed rare, the amount of
habitable Earth-like planets in the universe is reduced further, consequently
resulting in a reduced number of potential ETCs.

Finally, I then discussed a third Type-3 solution: rare-consciousness. This
approach maintains that, although humanity has reached the evolutionary state
of consciousness, there is no reason to assume that any other species will ever
attain this evolutionary trait. I argued that this could indeed be the case because,
from an evolutionary point of view, if the purpose of life is to survive until one
can reproduce, then consciousness is not necessary, meaning that we (conscious
beings) are the evolutionary anomaly. Consequently, the rare-consciousness
arguments allowed me to conclude that, although there do still exist habitable planets in the universe (despite their estimated number having been reduced due to the dangerous-universe and rare-Earth arguments), even if life has developed on one of these planets, there is no reason to assume that this life is conscious. This means that, again, the number of potential ETCs has been reduced. Therefore, due to the strong evidence and argumentation found within the dangerous-universe, rare-Earth, and rare-consciousness arguments, we can conclude that, currently, the non-existence of extraterrestrial intelligence is the most coherent answer to Fermi’s paradox.

Student Reflection

If I could go back to the beginning of the dissertation process, I’d tell myself two things:
1. Take your time in choosing a topic. This is something which, initially, I rushed, causing problems for myself later on.
2. Do not be afraid to change your topic! I soon realised my topic wasn’t for me, but was worried about changing it. However, after changing topics (late in February) I was still able to attain a first.
Does the Utility of Plantinga’s Free Will Defence need to be reconsidered in a way which reflects beliefs about the Diseases of the Mind?

*Marcus Desai*

**Abstract**

The problem of evil has been one of the key problems for most monotheistic religious thought. Some have suggested that the inadequacy of solutions to this problem show certain religious endeavours to be improbable or irrational; however, many defences and theodicies can be given to the problem. Of these solutions, some are predicated upon queer assumptions that many would reject. This essay seeks to show that one of the most prevalent defences, the ‘free will defence’, relies on queer assumptions. Consequently, the free will defence is both less intuitive and less useful than many might assume.

An agent is transworld depraved if, in any possible world in which he is created, he freely performs at least one morally reprehensible action. The following extract presents Plantinga’s argument for the possibility of transworld depravity and suggests some possible problems with his approach.

**How is Plantinga’s claim of Transworld depravity best interpreted?**

Plantinga argues for the possibility of transworld depravity by arguing for the possibility of transworld depravity for an individual, whom he calls Curley:

Perhaps what God knows in advance is that no matter what circumstances he places Curley in, so long as he leaves him significantly free, he will take at least one wrong action. And the present claim is not, of course, that Curley or anyone else is in fact like this, but only that this story about Curley is possibly true.¹

This claim seems to present possible problems. Let us suggest that: there are infinitely many possible versions of Curley and that Curley’s decisions are probabilistic. If for any given decision there is a possibility Curley chooses rightly, then of the infinite versions of Curley there will be at least one that always chooses rightly. This is true unless: (a) Curley is always free to choose rightly yet it is impossible he always does rightly in any world instantiated by God, (b) there are only finitely many instantiations of Curley, or (c) transworld depravity is essential to Curley.

First (b) shall be considered. If God can actualise anything possible, it follows that as long as Curley’s always choosing rightly is possible then even if

there are only finitely many worlds this finite number includes the world in which Curley always chooses rightly. The antecedent condition of the prior conditional is a fairly common understanding of God’s omnipotence. (Plantinga questions this assumption, but for now, it will be assumed.) Following this assumption, Curley’s Transworld depravity would require (a) or (c) to be true.

(c) is possible for the individual, but it would not be compatible with the suggestion of universal transworld depravity. When I say transworld depravity is essential to Curley I am following Plantinga’s definition of essential properties to mean it is a property that individuates him as an essence. Curley’s essence is the property, or set of properties, where, anything which has it, or them, is Curley and anything which does not is not Curley. If this is the case it seems perfectly reasonable to say that Curley possesses the property of transworld depravity, owing to the fact that anything which does not is not Curley. The suggestion of universal transworld depravity is not aided by such a reason; because, while it does suggest why transworld depravity is necessary for Curley, it gives no reason for the impossibility of Curley, a being like Curley in every way except for having transworld depravity. Following this, the unintuitive claim (a) is the only potential solution, for defending universal transworld depravity.

It is reasonable to suggest (a) is actually the argument Plantinga attempts to provide, this can be seen from De Florio and Frigerio’s exploration of Plantinga’s paper. Their paper presents Plantinga’s claims as such:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{TD}(x) & \equiv \Box (Fx \rightarrow \exists y (Ey \land D(x, y))) \\
Mx & \equiv (Fx \land \exists y (Ey \land F(x, y))) \\
\text{TD}(x) & \equiv \Box Mx
\end{align*}
\]

where:

- Fx : x is free; Ey : y is an evil action; D(x, y) : x does y; and TD(x) : x has transworld depravity \(^2\)

Their presentation seems strange. Plantinga never states that transworld depravity means that a free existence necessarily entails an actor doing evil; however, this is an acceptable suggestion within present assumptions. Plantinga defines transworld depravity for essences as such:

An essence E suffers from transworld depravity if and only if for every world W such that E entails the properties is significantly free in W and always does what is right in W, there is a state of affairs T and an action A such that:

1. T is the largest state of affairs God strongly actualizes in W,
2. A is morally significant for E’s instantiation in W, and

(3) if God had strongly actualized T, E’s instantiation would have gone wrong with respect to A.³

This definition uses the words ‘for every world W’, where W is a world which God actualises the contingent states of affairs. At present it is being assumed God can actualise any possible world; Plantinga rejects this proposition but this will be returned to later. Given both the assumption concerning God’s power and Plantinga’s definition of transworld depravity, De Florio and Frigerio’s premises are an accurate depiction of Plantinga’s premises within forms of modal logic which rely on possible worlds. This is because the assumed premise means that W is any possible world and Plantinga states the relation is true for every W. Consequently, the claim presented by Plantinga is one of necessity. De Florio and Frigerio present one more assumption, which shows that Plantinga’s claim is less innocent than it seems.

\[ \Diamond \exists x \text{TD}(x) \leftrightarrow \Diamond \exists x \Box Mx \]

Assuming S5 the \( \Diamond \exists x \text{TD}(x) \) is also equivalent to \( \Box \exists x M(x) \) and \( \exists x M(x) \).⁴

That is to say, if, transworld depravity means going wrong with respect to at least one morally significant decision in every possible world; then, the possibility of transworld depravity under S5 entails the actuality and necessity of transworld depravity. The claim (a) is a consequence of the claim \( \Box \exists x M(x) \), a fact which seems undesirable for Plantinga considering his statement of ‘the present claim is not, of course, that Curley or anyone else is in fact like this, but only that this story about Curley is possibly true.’⁵

Student Reflection

Whilst writing a dissertation it is feasible to hole up in a bunker with books and articles and write a serviceable piece. However, this is a terrible idea, trust me it’s what I did! Talking with your supervisor, someone with in-depth knowledge of the field will help you structure ideas and get a separate insight into the texts you are reading. You’ll probably be less of a bother than you think you are!

³Plantinga, The Problem of Evil, 188.
⁴De Florio and Frigerio, A Logical and Metaphysical Analysis, 84.
⁵Plantinga, The Problem of Evil, 186.
An Answer to the Paradox of the Stone

Alice Goodwin

Abstract

I am searching for an answer to the Paradox of the Stone: Can God create a stone that He cannot lift? A satisfactory answer is one that does not diminish the omnipotence that God possesses or detract from the rest of His character. I will consider three main positions, each arguing for a specific definition of omnipotence. The first is that God is able to perform only logically possible actions (supported by Aquinas, Mavrodes, and Schrader). The second is that God is able to perform both logically possible and impossible actions (supported by Descartes, Frankfurt, and Burgess-Jackson). The third is that God is able to rewrite the laws of logic so that the logical impossibility is removed from the action. I will argue that the first and second positions fail as answers to the Paradox of the Stone because they place limits on God’s omnipotence and allow other characteristics He possesses to be negatively affected, which is an unacceptable result. I will show that for God to be truly omnipotent, He must be able to rewrite the laws of logic that would have previously made actions logically impossible. I will conclude that the third position is the only satisfactory answer to the Paradox of the Stone, as it maintains God’s omnipotence without subtracting from the rest of his character.

The following extract, taken from the final chapter, summarises a satisfactory answer to the Paradox of the Stone that was examined in the previous chapter, and combats the objections it faces.

God Can Rewrite the Laws of Logic

A God who can do the logically impossible is a God who must acknowledge the existence of the laws of logic. The implication in this conception of God’s omnipotence is that He is unable to change the laws of logic; He can only defy them. This forces the thinker into admitting that God’s power is limited by the existence of the laws of logic. An understanding of omnipotence that is limited by some external force cannot be the type of omnipotence that God possesses, and so an argument with this definition of omnipotence would be an unsatisfactory answer to the Paradox of the Stone.

An alternative position would be that God does not simply defy the laws of logic, but is able to completely rewrite and replace them as if they were like that from the beginning. It must be the case that God created the laws of logic, as nothing could have been prior to God. Therefore, it must also be the case that God is able to change His creations as and when He chooses. A criticism arises here, that questions why God, an all-knowing being, would need to change His
creations at all: if He knew everything, surely He would have known that He eventually change his mind. However, for God to be truly omnipotent, his power must include the ability to remove His own omniscience temporarily, so that He is able to learn new things and forget past things, whilst always remaining omniscient at the same time. If God is able to rewrite the laws of logic, this sort of contradiction would no longer be a contradiction, and so the objection is absolved.

Another potential objection to this position is that if God were changing the laws of logic, surely we would observe these changes. However, if God is able to rewrite the laws of logic as if they were always the case, then our perception of those laws would be rewritten with it. We would not perceive a change from round circles to square circles, because it would have always been the case that circles were square.

In conclusion, God does not perform logically impossible actions, but removes the impossibility of the action as He performs it, by rewriting the laws of logic that apply to the action. Therefore, God would be able to create a stone that He cannot lift (and the secondary action of lifting the stone), without compromising His omnipotence. God is not performing the logically impossible action of creating a stone He cannot lift, but making the action possible by rewriting the laws of logic that would have previously made it a contradiction, as He performs the action.

By adopting this definition of God’s omnipotence, I am able to answer affirmatively the Paradox of the Stone, without compromising on the character of God. His omnipotence is not limited by the existence of the laws of logic, as He is able to rewrite them as He acts. His omniscience also remains intact, as His omnipotence allows Him to suspend His omniscience whilst also remaining all-knowing at the same time. The surrounding characteristics of God remain intact, and He is able to perform the action of creating a stone He cannot lift, without limiting His omnipotence. A satisfactory answer to the Paradox of the Stone has been reached.

Student Reflection

As soon as term started, I reached out to the person I wanted to supervise my dissertation and asked to meet with them to discuss my ideas. This was a really valuable meeting for me, as it helped me to narrow down my thesis and gave me a good starting point for research. Try and maintain contact with your supervisor as much as you can, and don’t worry if you feel like you aren’t progressing as much as you should be. Once you write your introduction, the rest will fly out.
In Defence of Compositional Pluralism as a Proposed Answer to the Special Composition Question

Josef Grover

Abstract

Compositional pluralism is a theory that accounts for more than one fundamental parthood relation. This allows for abstract objects to exist in an ontologically sound way. The existence of abstract objects, especially in a similar way to concrete objects, is a contentious topic. In this work, I will be focusing on the debate that surrounds the concrete/abstract dichotomy and arguing, on the side of friends of structural universals, that not only do these abstract objects exist, they exist in a form of non-mereological composition that necessitates the existence of fundamentally different parthood relations between concrete and abstract objects.

The following extract examines whether compositional pluralism can be considered an acceptable answer to the Special Composition Question (SCQ). The SCQ is as follows: under what conditions do some objects compose something?

Can Structure-Making Help to Answer the Special Composition Question?

Armstrong argued in *Classes are States of Affairs*¹: if there are two parts, a and b, then the mereological whole is formed automatically and supervenes on the parts; however, this adds nothing to the world that was not there before; for parts a and b to properly form a whole, they must be externally related by some R; this R forms a fact that is required, by Armstrong, for composition to occur. In other words, mereological composition occurs automatically otherwise the concrete world would not exist. However, mereological composition does not add anything to the world because it already is the way it is. For concrete objects to have properties or relations there must be an external relation, an abstract object, that acts as a truth-maker for the contingent truth that holds the xs together and forms a whole.

Armstrong posits that it is not just that concrete objects exist, it is that these objects exist and there is a reason for their existence. That reason is itself potentially completely random, the fact is that if there was a different reason then these objects would not be the way they are. These reasons are truth-makers for the facts of mereological composition. These truth-makers are states of affairs and structural universals. Believing in a mode of composition that runs parallel to mereological composition means that there is some valid ontological reasoning behind the existence of concrete objects. States of affairs are not some abstract metaphysical exercise into composition, they are useful.

tools of analysis to have in an ontology and offer a large degree of insight into causality.

To properly answer the SCQ we need an example of when a composite object can be said to be composed of, or is extensionally equivalent to, an aggregate of mereological simples. Compositional pluralism goes beyond the mereological account of existence but in doing so, it provides a basis for reality that is much more difficult to find in a purely concrete world. Because s-composition involves a non-mereological mode of composition, the original SCQ needs to be reworded to account for this. In doing so we get the Special S-Composition Question (SSCQ), which requires a true and informative answer in the form of:

(SSCQ): The xs s-compose a y if and only if ...

Before this can be answered properly, it again needs to be broken down because s-composition involves two distinct forms of abstract objects in structural universals and states of affairs. This leaves us with:

(Universals): The xs s-compose a structural universal if and only if ...
(SOAS): The xs s-compose a state of affairs if and only if ...

Armstrong does not supply an answer to Universals, but I would suggest, maybe in danger of oversimplifying the problem, that because we know structural universals to be composed of simpler universals and states of affairs, an answer may look like this:

(Universals): The xs s-compose a structural universal if and only if some state of affairs constitutes multiple instantiations of simpler universals or states of Affairs.

We are given an answer to SOAS, which is reliant on three basic steps of understanding. The first step is that ‘everything s-composes itself’. Then we treat ‘structural universals as states of affairs’ as Armstrong does. Finally, we understand that ‘the xs s-compose a state of affairs if at least one of the xs is a property or relation, and the other xs instantiate it.’ From these steps, we end up with an answer:

(SOAS): The xs s-compose a SOA if and only if either (a) there is exactly one of the xs and it is a state of affairs or (b) some of the xs s-compose some property or relation R such that the remaining xs s-compose some ys such that the ys instantiate R.

Using this answer, we can return to the SCQ and propose an answer that

³Ibid, 258.
⁴Ibid, 259.
accounts for the composition of mereological wholes:

(SCQ): the xs compose a y if and only if there is only one of xs or some state of affairs constitutes the xs.

From what has been examined of the necessary aspects of the existence of abstract objects and how they relate to concrete objects, I would argue that this answer supplies a concept of unity that is not found in other proposed answers. It could be objected that compositional pluralism is attempting to do too much and loses validity through the potentially infinite extent of composition that it claims to account for.

My reply would be that although it is a complicated and ambitious theory, it rests on a fairly simple concept. How objects, concrete or abstract, are composed depends on the relative circumstances in which they are said to exist. Compositional pluralism is in no way perfect and I am sure that it will be improved upon, although, unlike most other proposed answers, it does not claim to be able to universally answer the SCQ. It allows for distinct entities to be validly ontologically defined whilst accounting for the inherent relativity that permeates all levels of existence.

Student Reflection

A project of this length contains a surprisingly large learning curve and, although we are constantly warned about it, it took a lot more planning and organising than I first thought it would. Despite the huge amount of work that needs to be done to complete a dissertation, it is definitely worth the time you put into it when you've got a final draft to look over. Completing the process really feels like an achievement once it's finished.
The Presentation of Women in Fantasy Fiction and How to Move Forward

_Linton Newton_

**Abstract**

In this paper, I will be discussing the developments of the fantasy genre. I believe these developments have been influenced by social movements in our society. In particular, feminism has influenced fantasy in the development from the traditional to the modern stage. Traditional fantasy included a male-centred perspective that allowed for sexism. By contrast, modern fantasy has allowed for many perspectives which give women a voice within the world. I will be using these developments as a model to predict how fantasy will develop in the future. I believe that gender theory will be the most influential social movement to impact the development of fantasy beyond the modern form.

_The following extracts explore the problem within traditional fantasy, which is the male-centred perspective, and what may happen if ‘The Female Author’ is embraced in literature._

**What Is Meant By ‘The Female Author’?**

Virginia Woolf first voiced the problem when discussing the influence of patriarchy on literature:

> Only Jane Austen did it and Emily Bronte. [...] They wrote as women wrote, not as men write. Of all the thousand women who wrote novels then, they alone entirely ignored the perpetual admonitions of the eternal pedagogue – write this, think that.¹

Woolf claims that women can write differently than men. In particular, Jane Austen and Emily Bronte wrote as women and did not allow any patriarchal influence over their writing. It would be natural to then assume that women’s writing style differs in some way to a man’s writing style. This would prove to be useful for presenting characters in a new way or writing a new type of story.

**Applying ‘The Female Author’ To Fantasy**

The problem within traditional fantasy is the male-centred perspective. This is summarised by Millett who says fantasy: ‘involves itself with a point of view nearly exclusively masculine. It often expresses the unconscious emotions of

male response to what it perceives as feminine evil, namely, sexuality." Traditional fantasy has ignored women in their fiction or presented sexuality as evil and associated it with women. In Lord Of The Rings women are very rarely present and there is no sexual activity. Inversely, Storm Front contains many women who are repeatedly sexualised by the perspective character. In many instances of women being sexualised, they are also presented as evil.

By presenting a woman’s perspective within fantasy (i.e. through female authors) many of these problems would not occur. The tenuous connection between women and sexuality would be severed. Sex itself would be represented as part of life rather than as something evil or feminine. I believe that this view is represented within modern fantasy. For example, Priory of the Orange Tree represents sexuality between two couples frequently. One relationship between two men contains sexuality but it is never presented as evil nor as something feminine. Similarly, the other relationship between two women is presented as natural, not as something evil, by the perspective character. Sexuality has been liberated from its associations of femininity and evil through modern fantasy and the female author. It is no coincidence that feminist thought had a significant impact on the development of modern fantasy.

The Problem of Essentialising Gender

The female author has helped the development of fantasy from traditional to modern. This is due to modern fantasy representing women as ordinary people rather than as something that is ignored or sexualised. Though I do not believe that the theory of the female author can develop fantasy beyond the modern iteration. The main issue with the theory of the female author is that it essentialises gender. As Cixous notes: ‘woman must write woman. And men, men.’ Though the issue now is deciding what a woman is and what a man is.

The two authors that presented the theory of the female author have in some way defined gender. Woolf states that ‘it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so’. Here Woolf claims that it is natural for women to have different values from men. It is true that in women’s oppression they have defined themselves in opposition to men’s values. Though the use of ‘naturally’ here leads to the idea that the values between men and women are essential in some sense. Cixous presents a similar view to Woolf: ‘When I say “woman,” I’m speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man, and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning within history.’ Women for Woolf and Cixous are defined in contrast

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4Woolf, A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas, 72.
5Cixous, The Laugh of the Medusa, 875-876.
to men. However, by essentialising qualities of women they are asserting that there is an existent thing which is woman. Thereby women can be defined, categorised based on qualities, and most importantly they are defined in contrast to men and therefore cannot adopt qualities of men. This leads to an issue of reinforcing gender stereotypes.

If we were to follow the example of Woolf and Cixous by stating that genders are essential to a person, e.g. that a person is a man or woman, then there are defined qualities for each person. In patriarchal society women are associated with housework and raising children. If there is a societal movement away from these associations then other associations will still exist, e.g. women being emotional, or bossy, or any other fallacious association. By essentialising gender, it leads to associations with those genders. In other words, there must be substantial differences between men and women for each gender to be essential. Though this appears to be opposing the aims of feminism in desiring equality between the genders. By essentialising gender, the theory of the female author only serves to reinforce patriarchal notions of gender. To actually begin to move beyond modern fantasy gender must be reinterpreted and not reinforced.

**Student Reflection**

Reading fantasy is a personal hobby, while feminism is a movement that inspires me. Blending these two subjects together for my dissertation was enjoyable. Though I have to say that it was difficult to build a main argument while conducting extensive research. The further reading that was recommended didn’t fit the kind of discussion that I wanted, and the secondary literature available was limited. For these reasons, I would recommend choosing a dissertation topic more ‘ordinary’.
Is It Morally Acceptable to Sell a Kidney?
Anna Nunez de Croker

Abstract

This dissertation shows why it is not morally acceptable to allow people to sell their kidneys. It does so by adopting a Kantian view that nobody should be treated as a means to an end. I argue that if kidney sales were allowed, most vendors would be poor, and likely to be consenting from coercion, and such consent is invalid. It would also exploit the desperation of the poor to escape their poverty. Despite all the promises kidney sales hold, it would not truly make life better for the poor; in fact, it would widen the gap between the rich and the poor. I conclude that an opt-out donor law is a preferable alternative, as it does not involve exploitation or invalid consent.

The following extract presents the argument that the sale of kidneys is not morally acceptable. In this specific section, the argument is that allowing the sale of kidneys would lead to the exploitation of the poor.

Exploitation of the Poor

Kidney sale is not morally acceptable since impoverished people cannot fully consent; allowing kidney sales would exploit the poor sellers. ‘Exploitation’ used in the ‘normative sense’ expresses moral disapproval - in other words, it is equivalent to ‘wrongful exploitation’, which occurs when ‘one party takes unfair advantage of another party by failing to benefit the disadvantaged party as fairness requires’¹. Loh details two conditions necessary for a transaction to be exploitative: it must ‘benefit the exploiter’ and is ‘unfair to the exploited party’². Applying this to kidney sales, to be exploitative, the ‘purchasers gain’ while the ‘vendors are harmed’³.

To show this applies to current kidney sales I will evoke the example of transplant tourism, a ‘popular means by which those in need of a kidney acquire one’⁴. These cases usually occur between a ‘patient’ from a ‘developed nation’ and an impoverished vendor who is ‘procured for the patient by a broker’; motivated by the promise of a cash payment and here, the broker is using the ‘seller as a means’⁵. In the United States it is currently ‘illegal to buy an organ

²Ibid, 3.
³Ibid, 3.
⁵Ibid, 147.
on American soil’ so one would assume that it is also illegal for an ‘American citizen to buy one in the Philippines, from a labourer who earns $1 per day’: however currently it is not. This has led Kerstein to claim that such scenarios should be ‘illegal’ too.

Let us examine a particular case of exploitation in transplant tourism detailed by Rohter. The buyer was a ‘desperately ill’ American patient, and the vendor was a poor kidney seller who had heard he could ‘make lots of money’ through the process, which to him seemed ‘the opportunity of a lifetime’. The recipient’s decision to ‘go abroad for a kidney was not an easy one but necessary nonetheless’ having been on ‘dialysis for 15 years’ and on two transplant waiting lists for seven years. She had been advised by her Doctor to acquire a kidney by any means or ‘expect to die’. The doctor seemed to advocate an illegal route as time was running out for. This recipient had witnessed acquaintances ‘pass away while they waited for donors’ and therefore understandably desperate for a kidney. The seller shared ‘a slum near the airport’, a ‘flimsy two-room shack’ with ten other inhabitants. As Rohter indicates ‘six grand is a lot of money, especially when you don’t have any’. Desperately poor; he agreed to a sale, believing it would significantly improve his situation.

However, the sale did not improve his situation. Despite the recipient paying ‘over $60,000’, the vendor received only ‘$6,000’, via the ‘middlemen in an international organ trafficking ring’. The seller was wrongly treated, he endured the operation, yet the majority of the money was taken by individuals who did not endure the same operation, and who exploited his desperation for ‘money’.

The seller has without a doubt been exploited here, violating the Kantian principle of treating ‘humanity always as an end, never merely as a means’. The seller has been used as a means to an end, a means for the organ trafficking ring to profit and a source of a healthy kidney. The traffickers’ underpayment denied the seller the money which ought to be his; the monies paid will not last long.

The concern here is that legalising kidney sales will only further exploit the ‘economically desperate’ who ‘cannot afford not to sell’, further ‘widening the gap between the affluent and destitute members of society’. This is evident in the described case: the seller clearly believed he could not afford not to sell.

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7Ibid, 148.
9Ibid.
10Ibid.
11 Ibid.
13Kerstein, Kantian Condemnation of Commerce in Organs, 148-149.
his kidney, evident by his phrase that it seemed 'the opportunity of a lifetime'. There are also cases which demonstrate that brokers exploit the fact that the sellers are very poor and unlikely to understand the consequences. Here an 'agent intentionally does something to someone in order to secure, or as a part of securing, one of his ends'. This shows that the seller is treated 'merely as a means'; there is a total lack of regard for his own welfare as a fellow human being; he is being deceived into a sale without awareness of future consequences. I believe allowing kidney sales would lead to many more similar cases which society would not wish to encourage, and such a policy would ensure that the poor remain poor.

Student Reflection

My guidance is research areas of interest over the summer and select a topic at the start of the year. Meet with your supervisor early to discuss ideas and translate these into a specific question. This sharpens the focus, targets research and enabled the development of a detailed plan. Present this plan to your Supervisor for feedback. This gives a more realistic understanding of what can be included – lots of ideas cannot be explored in depth even with the generous word count!

15Rohter, The Organ Trade: A Global Black Market; Tracking the Sale of a Kidney On a Path of Poverty and Hope.
16Kerstein, Kantian Condemnation of Commerce in Organs, 152.
17Ibid, 152.
Is the Catholic Church's Stance on Abortion a Means of Controlling Women?

*Mia Renshaw*

Abstract

In this paper, I shall argue that the Catholic Church’s rejection of abortion is a means of controlling women. Extending Simone de Beauvoir’s insights from *The Second Sex*, I will argue the Church manifests androcentrism in its teachings and practices, which licenses the Hegelian logic of Othering. Othering occurs when men are depicted as the norm, and women are seen to deviate from the Self and are thus Othered. Within the Catholic Church, this accumulation of Othering leads to the shared and internalised belief that women ought to be controlled. Abortion is the epitome of such control; it is illustrative of my argument since abortion primarily concerns women and their bodily autonomy. While there has been a lot written on Beauvoir and androcentric Othering with its relationship to abortion, this analysis has not typically been extended to Catholicism’s viewpoint. I argue this is due to the apparent theological grounding that I will reject as a full, transparent account of what is going on. Further reinforcing, it is a means of control.

*The following extracts are a response to the argument that the Catholic Church’s stance on abortion is not a means of controlling women, rather, it is the word of God. The Catholic teachings on abortion will be analysed and found to be the basis for the enforced continuation of anti-abortion measures, which are a means of controlling women.***

Catholic Teachings on Abortion

Catholics generally deem abortion to be murder based on the premise life begins at conception; a sentiment that was seemingly introduced in 1558 by Pope Sixtus V. Before this, many attached the start of life with ‘quickening’-fetal movement that occurs around 18-20 weeks¹. Quickening was seen to symbolise the soul entering the fetus and the beginning of its life. Following this, the Catholic Church held abortion was only a sin post-quickening. However, in 1558 Pope Sixtus V commanded that anyone who had an abortion at any stage was to be excommunicated; excluded from the Church. Similarly, in 1869 ‘Pius IX issued a Papal Bull, Apostolicae Sedis, stating the soul is present from the moment of conception, and therefore abortion is murder’². This has remained as the general Catholic doctrine on abortion since it is still

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²Ibid, 12.
declared to be a ‘crime against human life’.

The Catechism, a summary of the Catholic faith promulgated by Pope John Paul in 1992, outlines their rejection of abortion based upon the arguments previously stated. There is no aspect of ambiguity within the Catechism with regards to abortion: ‘Since the first century, the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable’. It’s clear in its absolutism. Further, suggesting how one may argue the stance on abortion taken by the Church is purely theological.

Moreover, the Catholic Church firmly holds the stance that abortion is a human rights issue, not a woman’s issue. This is to say everyone - including an unborn person - has a fundamental right to life, this core belief is under the Catechism’s ‘Dignity of the Human Person’. This is understood to mean to respect people in the broadest sense: to respect their soul, health, bodily integrity and death. Abortion would be denying a person this right; within Catholic understanding, personhood extends to the fetus. Again, portraying a pivotal aspect of their faith which is incompatible with abortion since abortion is murder. This falls under the Fifth Commandment; ‘You shall not commit murder’. Some build upon this and argue the Catholic Church does not see abortion as solely a matter of ending an individual life but as a matter of devaluing human life as a whole. They see abortion as a means of directly offending God. Thus, it is radically non-individualistic, so it is not about the entrapment of individual women within their immanence but is about respecting God and human life. The suggestion is that the Catholic Church’s stance on abortion is purely theological.

Does this response suffice?

Fundamentally, although I understand the Catholic belief that everyone has a necessary right to life and abortion would be to deny someone this right, it is implausible to suggest it is not a woman’s issue. While understanding the integral stance on human rights, I also appreciate a woman’s life ought to fall under such a category. Such a distinction, although the Church does not explicitly state, falls under my previous account of women being deemed less than men, less than human. This is based on the distinction between human rights and women’s rights; are women’s rights not equivalent to humans? Looking deeper into the ‘Respect for the Dignity of Persons’, it states we ought to respect people’s bodily integrity. Although the examples provided take the extreme measures of kidnapping and torture, it does state it is wrong to ‘subject their victims to intolerable pressures’. This is to mean we should respect the bodily integrity of others and not put them in harm against their will, such as

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4Ibid, 2271.
6Catechism of the Catholic Church.
7Exodus 20:13.
8Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2297.
taking someone hostage. I argue forcing a woman to continue a pregnancy against her will does subject her to intolerable pressures and can be likened to being held hostage.

Yet in the case of abortion, it seems the respect of dignity to a woman’s bodily integrity is absent. I argue this causes further ambiguity regarding the motives of the absolute stance on abortion since it seems women are exempt from the protection of the Church. This is more problematic in cases of rape. In Argentina, an eleven-year-old child was raped and fell pregnant, which she was too young to comprehend, but Catholic Priests still stood in opposition to even the option of abortion. They placed the burden of the fetus’ life on a child and ignored the fact ‘there was not one of Lucia’s rights that were not violated’.

Thus, their teachings are ambiguous as to what qualifies for the ‘Respect for the Dignity of Persons’ - by overlooking female bodily integrity illustrates arguable uncertainty in theology.

Student Reflection

The part of the writing process I found to be the most important and most helpful was the redrafting process. I originally found it hard to get going - I found it daunting and ultimately scary. It wasn’t until I started writing and submitting work to my supervisor that my ideas started to fall into place and my argument started to flow. The first draft is just a first draft, but it gets the ball rolling and is the first crucial step, once you take it the rest will become easier.

The Self, Buddhist Mindfulness Meditation and Mental Suffering: Does the Idea of a Permanent Self lead to Suffering and is Buddhist Mindfulness Practice the key to alleviating it?

Anna Ross

Abstract

The Four Noble Truths acknowledge there is dukkha (suffering or dissatisfaction) in everything, this suffering has an origin and it can be relieved. Mindfulness meditation, which involves recognising impermanence and change in everything including the self, has traditionally been used as a way to be liberated from mental suffering. Buddhist mindfulness practices have been developed into different types of psychological therapies with studies showing great benefits to mental health in a variety of different aspects. This suggests a connection between distancing from a sense of a permanent self and having improved mental health. There may be multiple factors that contribute to dukkha, but clinging to a permanent self is a big contributor.

The following extract examines the three types of mindfulness-based practices that are currently used in the psychological field and makes connections with Buddhist teachings.

Buddhist Meditative Practices in Psychological and Therapeutic Field: The Three Types of Mindfulness used in Psychology

According to Cassell, in the past the idea of suffering in psychology was defined as threats to the facets of personhood. In more modern psychology, some have argued that we need to reevaluate the way that the self and suffering are perceived within psychology. William Shaver¹, in his article ‘Suffering and the Role of Abandonment of Self’, states that there has been a recognition that a strong sense of personal self develops in early childhood and abandonment of this self occurs as a result of the influences society and culture, and the incapabilities of handling negative emotions.

In this loss of the original self, two different types of self emerge - the illusory self and the abandoned self. On this model, the illusory self is the part of the self which is composed of eternal expectations that function in society and are imposed by the child’s environment. The abandoned part of the self is the part that is lost due to negative responses from the child’s environment. This understanding of an unstable self can be described as a shift of the balance between the conscious and unconscious states, as labelled a ‘psychospiritual crisis’ by Groff. The crisis can be an opportunity for emotional healing.

Shaver concludes that the way suffering has been identified in the psychotherapeutic field must change. He argues that what Cassel defines as suffering (a threat to personhood) isn’t really suffering itself, but rather damage to or loss of the abandoned self. Suffering, Shaver proposes, is in the revealing of the illusory self and is a ‘dynamic and transforming process in which the incomplete, fractured nature of the self begins to re-emerge into consciousness’. Suffering can be nurtured in one sense by experiencing moments in the present. Overall, its recognition can be seen as a trigger for the path to healing.

Viewed in this light, suffering is comparable to the Buddha’s teachings of the Four Noble Truths. These teachings recognise that suffering is the first step on the Buddhist path to enlightenment. The idea of the illusory self is comparable to the Buddhist view of the self is an illusion made up of five skandhas. Where Shaver’s view differs is that Shaver identifies the perspective of the abandoned self as the true self, whereas for Buddhists, there is no abandoned self, rather, there is no concrete self at all.

In recent times practices of mindfulness meditation have been used in therapy, particularly in relation to stress reduction. Many studies have been conducted that have explored the positive effects of using these religious techniques on people’s state of mind. Willam R. Marchand identified three types of mindfulness-based practices that are used in the psychological field. The first is the incorporation of Zen meditation practices in psychotherapy, specifically psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Psychoanalyst and humanist philosopher Eric Fromm studied Zen Buddhism and stated that, even though on the surfaces the methods appear completely different, Zen can:

...have a most fertile and clarifying influence on the theory and technique of psychoanalysis. Zen ... can sharpen the focus, throw new light on the nature of insight, and heighten the sense of what it is to see, what it is to be creative, what it is to overcome the affective contaminations and false intellectualization which are the necessary results of experience based on the subject-object split.

This highlights how Zen Buddhist meditative techniques appear to have a great impact on the goals and progression of psychotherapies.

The second type of mindfulness that Marchand identifies in the psychological field is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) which was first developed by Dr Kabat-Zinn as a way to utilise Buddhist meditation in mainstream psychology. The mindfulness aspect of this includes sitting

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid, 52.


meditation, yoga, and a body scan (which involves focusing on bodily sensations). Throughout the process of a body scan, the person’s attention is moved from region to region of the body. The yoga part of the mindfulness involves different postures, stretches and breathing techniques. MBSR also incorporates certain attitudes such as being an impartial witness to one’s experience and allowing thought to come and go as they please, focusing on the present moment instead of attaching oneself to any particular thought. These attitudes distance one from a permanent self, as one lets go of the aggregates that make up what the Buddha taught as the illusion of the self.

The third type, developed by John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Mark Williams, is Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) which combines cognitive therapy with mindfulness and has been used to prevent future bouts of depression in patients that have been depressed. It is based on the mindfulness techniques used in MBSR. Like MBSR, it aims at using Buddhist mindfulness in a secular context. Seated meditation is also part of this therapy, and it focuses on recognising moods and thought patterns that lead back to a depressed mindset. There has been research done on these methods that show clear improvements in mental health.

Student Reflection

One part of my dissertation that I could have improved on is managing my time. Finding a specific topic I wanted to do was difficult, and this led to me falling behind in my writing process. On reflection, I would organise deadlines with my supervisor to keep me more on track.
An Assessment of Plato’s Ideas Concerning Knowledge and Ruling in The Republic

Sarah Sharp

Abstract

In The Republic, Plato wrote about what he believed to be the ideal organisation of the state. In Plato’s state, he argues that only those who possess the highest possible level of knowledge should rule and he describes a rigid societal structure that would ensure optimal state functioning. This essay will outline the core elements of The Republic such as Plato’s analogy of the ship and the cave and how he believed the state should be organised. This essay will then criticise Plato’s proposals by calling into question whether any leader in Plato’s state could be considered to possess the highest knowledge as he had intended them to and accuse him of stunting intellectual development and defending intellectual complacency. This essay will also consider the main doctrine of Plato’s Republic, that the highest level of knowledge should rule, and argue that although Plato failed on how to achieve this, ultimately he is right.

The following extract lays out the issues that Karl Popper has with Plato's System of Education. The discussion of these issues contributes to the wider conclusion that Plato failed at creating a method for establishing the highest level of knowledge.

Popper’s Issues with Plato’s System of Education

Plato’s fundamental question in his political philosophy, according to Popper, concerned ‘who should rule the state?’¹. The question of who should rule the state, for Plato, is fundamentally intertwined with the issue of education: Plato believed that education should be the major responsibility of the state. The future of any state depends on the younger generations ‘and it is, therefore, madness to allow the minds of children to be moulded by individual taste and force of circumstance’². As Sedley noted, for Plato, the ideal city will have an education system that will bring about the release of the suitably gifted, while ‘in the non-ideal city, there is nothing about the civic conditions as such that can account for the emergence of a philosopher’³. Equally disastrous for Plato was the equalitarian philosophy which suggested that each man’s opinion was as good as any other man’s which destroys respect for authority and ‘had turned democracy into licentious anarchy’⁴. The city-state can be saved only if kings

⁴Crossman, Plato Today, 75.
become philosophers or philosophers become kings.

Popper argues that 'Plato utterly corrupted and confused the theory and practice of education by linking it up with his theory of leadership'\textsuperscript{5}. The educational department of the state is the most important institution in Plato’s society. It moulds and takes care of future leaders and holds the key to power. Popper argues that the assumption made by Plato that it is the task of education to train and select future leaders burdens societal institutions with a task ‘that goes beyond any institutions scope’\textsuperscript{6}. Plato’s demand, according to Popper, that the wise possessor of truth, the fully qualified philosopher, should be the one to rule raises questions of the problem of educating and selecting rulers. ‘Is the wise man enough to choose his successor?’\textsuperscript{7} this doesn’t seem plausible to Popper, as it would leave too much depending upon uncontrolled circumstances and an accident could possibly destroy the future stability of the state.

So, Popper presents the fundamental difficulty of the leader principle as the issue of selecting or educating future leaders because he finds it to be contradictory\textsuperscript{8}. The secret to intellectual excellence is the spirit of criticism; ‘it is intellectual independence’\textsuperscript{9}. This leads to problems for any kind of authoritarianism, as the authoritarian will generally select those who obey, believe, and respond to their influence when selecting others to hold positions of power. In doing this, argues Popper, one is bound to select mediocrities. This is because they will exclude those who dare to resist their influence. Never could an authority admit, or even accept, that an intellectually courageous individual, one who is willing to defy their authority, could be the most valuable type of leader\textsuperscript{10}. Popper goes on to argue that institutions for the selection of outstanding leaders can hardly be devised. Institutional selection may work well if we are happy to accept the arresting of change that Plato had in mind, but it could never work if we demand more than that\textsuperscript{11}.

Popper’s analysis of Plato led him to argue that Plato does not wish for his leaders to possess the capacity for originality or initiative. This is because Plato was opposed to the idea of change in his perfect society, he didn’t want to see that re-adjustments may become necessary\textsuperscript{12}. The leaders in Plato’s society are forced to study for the sake of career, not because of their real love of the subject. Plato’s leaders are led to acquire simply the knowledge that is serviceable in getting him past obstacles which must be cleared for the sake of personal advancement\textsuperscript{13}. ‘The impossible demand for an institutional selection of intellectual leaders endangers the very life not only of science, but of intelligence’\textsuperscript{14}.

\textsuperscript{5}Popper, The Open Society, 127.
\textsuperscript{6}Ibid, 127.
\textsuperscript{7}Ibid, 132.
\textsuperscript{8}Ibid, 133.
\textsuperscript{9}Ibid, 133.
\textsuperscript{10}Ibid, 133.
\textsuperscript{11}Ibid, 133.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid, 133.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid, 133.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid, 136.
Student Reflection

Throughout the year I spent working on my dissertation, my supervisor was able to suggest reading that would help me in areas where my own research had been lacking. These suggestions ended up being very helpful as they led me to further literature that I may not have found otherwise. I definitely recommend speaking with your supervisor as soon as possible to see if they have any reading suggestions for you to make a start with. Throughout the process I also learnt not to be afraid of criticism. Remember that any critiques your supervisor gives your work, although it may not be nice to hear, they will ultimately help you produce the best piece of work you can.
Abstract

The relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to human rights is grounded in a shared pursuit of human dignity. This is an analysis of their interactions and an investigation of their compatibility. I explore Church teachings in the Catechism; I look at how well they promote liberties and directly analyse their compatibility with Articles 1, 2, and 3 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I examine the way Pope John Paul II and Francis have addressed the discourse. I analyse how well Church teachings allow women to live a dignified life in the Philippines and discuss the political, social, and moral consequences of Catholic ethics when applied.

The following extract is an examination into which of Pope Francis' views are compatible with Article 3 of the universal declaration of human rights. It is then followed by another extract which shows some of the shortcomings of the Catholic Church's new approach.

Pope Francis

Having been recognised as a less conventional pope than his predecessors, Pope Francis' Papacy is characterised by a more open approach to religion's relationship with the world. Like John Paul, the progressive ideals distinguishing his pontificate are largely hinged on his interactions with human rights.

Article 3 says: liberty is more than just positive freedom. It also enshrines the right to life which is a right to the fundamental enjoyment of what life has to offer in order to live it with dignity. The Catholic view on the right to life is stressed on the issue of capital punishment, as exhibited by Pope Francis.

The Church changed its views on capital punishment in 2018 and revised Catechism 2267 to advocate for the inadmissibility of the death penalty. Francis approved this new draft to reflect the utmost importance of human dignity, and said that it is not lost even after committing a serious crime: 'No man, “not even a murderer, loses his personal dignity”'.

He has taken steps towards bridging the moral gap between Church teachings and human rights philosophy. Capital punishment violates a right to life, and Francis further explains that it is "contrary to the Gospel, because it

¹Holy See Press Office.
²Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council for promoting the new Evangelization. (2017).
entails the wilful suppression of a human life that never ceases to be sacred in the eyes of the Creator and of which – ultimately – only God is the true judge and guarantor'. He asserts that we are all equals therefore we have no right to impose death upon one another. This notion is also compatible with Article 2.

It is not just internal changes that he has mobilised. His influence on the route to détente between the USA and Cuba led to the end of more than five decades of hostile relations. [...] As Dwight comments, 'The patience and persistence the Catholic Church is capable of is what makes it an exceedingly effective diplomatic corps... Pope Francis has been described as a master builder of bridges who has started this work around the world already'. His approach of mediating negotiations between Havana and Washington for 18 months shows his devotion to the preservation of the First Article. His intentions signal to the world that the Church can be a force for good by galvanising leaders and others to seek solidarity. It is a representation of what the Church’s philosophy should work towards in terms of its relationship and interaction with the global pursuit and preservation of human rights.

His role as mediator shows that religion still has a place in an increasingly secular society. Religion and its ecclesiastic can enjoy a peaceful coexistence with the world through its devotion to upholding the dignity of the human being.

He has urged Catholics to end prosecutions of crusades against abortion, same-sex marriage, or the ordination of women 'in favour of a more expansive vision of Christian obligation in the public sphere, especially service to the poor'. His views on homosexuality are also quite the opposite of John Paul, even if confusing at times. His famous utterance 'who am I to judge?' in reference to homosexuality highlights his less judgemental stance than his predecessors. He expressed an unprecedented view that undercut the conservative crux upon which the Church built its constitution.

This is aligned with the ethics that sustain the importance and necessity of universal human rights, not just a selective one. The tolerant attitude which he displays can be beneficial to the evolving message the Church can and should convey in relating more to the world and its increasingly progressive approach to universal rights.

Shortcomings

However, with the reforms he deployed for the death penalty, there have been no changes made to doctrine on homosexuality. Progressive Pope Francis has been, it seems even his papacy will see no significant change to be made in

3Ibid.
Harvard University Press.
5Ibid, 7.
foundations of the Church’s moral constructions. The discourse on homosexuality remains stagnant with no real steps being taken to normalise it within. Thus, Francis’ stance on human rights is one that aligns with the Catholic Church’s archaic notions, upholding their essentialization of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ relative to monomaniacal heteronormative conventions.

Further, his views on women’s place in the Church also present no real progression other than mere words, no substance. He remarks ‘we cannot limit the role of women in the Church to altar girls or the president of a charity, there must be more’ but then affirms ‘but with regards to the ordination of women, the Church has spoken and says no... That door is closed.’ The change he is proposing has no real ground.

**Student Reflection**

The writing process was difficult, especially the planning stage and I re-drafted about ten times. However, once I had the final plan set, it helped to clear up my line of arguments and on deciding which parts were relevant and which weren’t. Obviously, not everything will be set in stone until the very final edit but it helps to have a clear plan from the beginning of the process so you aren’t panicking about what to read or write at the last minute.


Does the Problem of Evil mean that Belief in God is Unreasonable?  
Eddie Southcombe

Abstract

I am searching for an answer to the problem of evil that does not diminish God’s character. I will explain the nature of evil, referring to three established areas of thought: Monism, Dualism and the classical Christian view. I will examine the metaphysical ideology of evil and whether it can be said to be an entity or thing in its own right or alternatively the lack of good. I will consider a number of established theodicies from philosophers including Augustine of Hippo, John Hick and Alvin Plantinga, concluding that no theodicy can genuinely solve the problem of evil while maintaining the character of God. I will explore the role of faith in Christianity and show that not even faith itself is an adequate response to the problem of evil. I will be arguing against Christian philosopher C.S. Lewis who believes that faith is genuine and defendable. I will argue that faith can only be sufficient if one already believes in God. I will conclude that the God of classical theism would not, by definition, allow us to endure such extreme and often pointless evil thereby making belief in God unreasonable.

The following extract examines Saint Augustine’s Theodicy as a potential solution to the problem of evil. The problem of evil is the question of how to reconcile the existence of evil in the world with belief in an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient God.

Theodicy: Saint Augustine

Augustine (A.D. 354-430) is critical to the problem of evil as he is considered to be at the forefront of the argument in which God retains His omnipotence, omnibenevolence and His eternal being, whilst also noting that God created everything ex nihilo. Augustine argued that ‘whatever evil may be it neither comes from God nor detracts in any way from His sole and majestic sovereignty’¹. Augustine believed that evil was privatio boni, literally meaning an absence of good and that the problem of evil could be solved by accepting this theory. The idea that evil is a mere absence of good and since God creates everything good, He cannot be said to be the reason for this absence nor can He be said to have a duty to prevent evil. God created everything ex nihilo, therefore He cannot have a duty towards anyone as he is the sole creator and therefore does not have a duty to prevent evil.

Christians believe that the created world is wholly good. God created everything good, it is a richly varied good. This means that the world contains a

number of different kinds of creature, some on a higher and some on a lower scale of being. It is here that Augustine argues his critical theory about evil saying ‘But there is no level of being, however humble, which is, as such, evil. To be an inferior creature, low down in the scale of being, is not to be evil, but only to be a lesser good. For it is good that there should be beings of all kinds, forming a universe of wonderful complexity that reflects the Creator’s goodness from many angles and in every possible shape and colour’².

Augustine says that there is no evil being, just different degrees of good beings. I believe that you could accept Augustine’s premise that there are degrees of beings some good and some less good, but I find an issue in beings that to the best of our scientific knowledge do not seem to serve a good purpose in any form. For example, Augustine would argue that a cancer cell is a good being. Not as good as other beings of course but still relatively good insofar as it exists due to its creation by God. However, it seems troubling to call a cancer cell a good thing. Something which creates so much prolonged pain and suffering does not, in my opinion, deserve to be called good.

If we accept Augustine’s theory that God creates everything good, then the immediate question arises as to how evil comes about. Augustine answers by saying that evil is not a type of actualised power or force, but rather it can be contributed to the ‘going wrong’ of God’s creation. Hick says, ‘Evil is essentially the malfunctioning of something that in itself is good’³. But, surely the God of classical theism would have the foreknowledge to know that his creation would at some point be corrupted and malfunction? It then stands to question why such a being would create something with the knowledge that it would then malfunction. Augustine would reply that things can be corrupted because they are made out of nothing. God created everything ex nihilo apart from Himself and is therefore susceptible to corruption and mutation. Beings can be corrupted, the reason why this is so is that they were originally created from nothing.

However, this does not solve the problem for me, it is not adequate. Such a perfect, all-powerful being, as the one Christians refer to, should have the power to create things that are incorruptible. Augustine continues by arguing instead then that ‘evil enters in only when some member of the universal Kingdom, whether high or low in the hierarchy, renounces its proper role in the divine scheme and ceases to be what it is meant to be’⁴. Here again, is the idea that evil is a privation of good. Although Augustine does intend to represent the God of classical theism by not attempting to diminish His power, I would argue that inadvertently he does limit God’s power. By arguing that God created everything out of nothing and this nothing could then be susceptible to malfunctioning raises the question as to just how powerful God really is. Surely an all-powerful God could create the world and animals so they would not malfunction.

²Ibid, 44.
³Ibid, 46.
⁴Ibid, 47.
Student Reflection

Looking back at the process in which I wrote my dissertation, I believe that I carefully constructed a well-balanced argument concerning the problem of evil. I believe that extensive wider reading around my subject was critical to my success and I am certainly happy with the amount that I researched into my project. On further reflection, I would admit that I did not use my supervisor as extensively as maybe I should have and given the chance to redo my dissertation, I would use this great asset much more readily.
The Social Construct of Disability

George Wood

Abstract

This essay aims to demonstrate that disability is a socially constructed category. In section one, I clarify what is meant by the claim that something is socially constructed. I discuss the distinction between causal and constitutive construction, and give Haslanger’s account of gender as an example of a social constructionist theory. In section two, I reject naturalistic accounts of disability. In section three, I put forward my own constructionist account of disability based on Haslanger and Jenkins’ work on gender. Finally, in section four, I show how that treating disability as a natural category (instead of a socially constructed one) is linked to testimonial injustice.

The following extract demonstrates the way in which disabled people experience testimonial injustice.

Obscured Social Construction and Epistemic Injustice

Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker is given less credibility than deserved (suffering a credibility deficit). A credibility deficit can occur without constituting a case of testimonial injustice, because injustice requires that the credibility deficit is due to an identity prejudice held by the hearer. For example, being sceptical of a known liar is not a case of testimonial injustice (because it is evidence based). Being sceptical of a woman’s testimony (because she is a woman) is an example of testimonial injustice (because it is based on an identity prejudice). This is a type of epistemic injustice because the testifier is wronged specifically in their capacity as a knower. I aim to demonstrate that disabled people experience a credibility deficit, and that this constitutes testimonial injustice, because this lack of credibility is due to an identity prejudice.

Goering argues that bioethicists overwhelmingly approach disability as a departure from being normal, make quality of life judgements on behalf of disabled people, and do so contrary to the direct testimony of disabled people. In the face of direct testimony from disabled people who claim they enjoy their life as is, rather than accepting disabled people’s testimony, there is an accusation of denial. Such bioethicists are usually not disabled but are still seen

as authoritative voices on the matter, whilst people with direct experience of living with disabilities are not.  

Here are some contrary testimonies from disabled people about their quality of life. Sherri Morris claims:

If I had a choice, I would not elect to be born without AIS [androgen insensitivity syndrome]. The challenges I have faced have contributed to who I am.

Similarly, some disabled people say they would welcome such a cure, but do not need one to be happy. Susan Wendell claims:

I cannot wish that I had never contracted ME [myalgia encephalomyelitis], because it has made me a different person, a person I am glad to be, would not want to have missed being, and could not imagine relinquishing, even if I were "cured."...I would joyfully accept a cure, but I do not need one.

Bioethicists imply that the only way disabled people can be happy being disabled is through denying the inherent limitations they experience due to their impairments. However, the above testimonies show that disabled people see their impairments as constituting their identity (rather than mere attributes). I do not see it as irrational to be happy with the person you are, meaning disabled people do not have to be in denial to be happy. However, so far, I have not demonstrated that this scepticism of disabled people's testimony constitutes a case of testimonial injustice. For scepticism like this to count as testimonial injustice, there must be a credibility deficit based on identity prejudice.

Bioethicists have traditionally used a medicalised model of disability that treats disabilities as a departure from normality. This way of understanding disability relies on normative assumptions that imply disabled people have less value inherently. As the bioethicists' scepticism of disabled people's testimony is influenced by normative assumptions that see disabled people as inferior, I think this should count as a case of testimonial injustice.

Earlier, I used the example of being sceptical of a woman's testimony (because she is a woman) as a case of testimonial injustice. Historically women have been excluded from academia (and intellectualism in general) due to the prejudicial belief that they are not worthy of inclusion. They were thought to be unworthy of inclusion and this unworthiness of inclusion was inherent to them as women. Similarly, the naturalistic understanding of disability sees disabled people as inferior and sees this inferiority as inherent to them as disabled people. But as I have argued, features of disability seem to be constituted by

4Ibid, 126.  
5Ibid, 129.  
6Ibid, 129.  
7Ibid, 128-129.  
8Ibid, 127.
social arrangements (and not inherent to disabled people). Therefore, I would class normative assumptions about disabled people being inherently inferior as prejudicial because (as demonstrated in section three) disabled people are not actually inherently inferior. Therefore, any credibility deficit applied to disabled people that is influenced by such naturalistic accounts should be classed as a case of testimonial injustice.

One reason why people might reject the claim that scepticism of disability positive testimony should count as testimonial injustice, is that disabled people do not know what they are missing by being disabled. For example, a blind person might say they are happy being blind and might even reject the magic cure put forth by bioethicists. But scepticism about this testimony is justified because the blind person does not know what it is like to be able to see. However, this scepticism is also rooted in a naturalistic understanding of disability (and is thus still a case of unjustified credibility deficit).

To say the blind person does not know what they are missing by not being able to see is to imply disability is a mere lack (rather than mere difference). We would not be sceptical of feminine or homosexual positive testimonies, because being a woman is not to lack maleness and being homosexual is not to lack heterosexual desires. Whereas (according to most people) to be disabled is to lack some ability. It is easy to see why this is used as justification for scepticism about disability positive testimonies. However, I rejected this way of understanding disability in a previous section and demonstrated in the previous paragraph that scepticism of disability positive testimonies based on naturalistic understandings of disability should be classed as testimonial injustice. This way of justifying scepticism about disability positive testimonies only works if we use a naturalistic account of disability, further demonstrating the link between obscured social construction and epistemic injustice.

**Student Reflection**

When I started the dissertation I was worried about the high word count and thought I would not be able to write enough about the topic. A useful piece of advice my supervisor gave me was to just develop every point you make as much as you can. Try and support everything you say with evidence, examples and replies to any possible or actual objections to your arguments. In the later stages of writing I had the opposite problem of running out of words. This meant the early sections are much longer than the later ones and I could not fit everything I wanted to include. If I was to write this piece again, I would work out how many words I want to allocate to each section before writing and try to stick to that in order to avoid this problem.

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10Ibid, 120.
An Account of Consciousness: An Argument for Panpsychism

Sam Wootton

Abstract

This paper attempts to provide an account of consciousness which can answer both the 'how?' and 'why?' questions of consciousness, whilst avoiding the problems implied by other theories of consciousness. I aim to demonstrate in this paper that current theories of consciousness fail to convincingly answer these questions. Whilst I argue that panpsychism gets close to providing a convincing account of consciousness, there are some problems implied by it. Therefore, I will propose and develop my own formulation of panpsychism that I believe provides an account which does not suffer any of the issues traditional panpsychism does and answers the questions of consciousness which I pose in this paper.

The following extract offers a solution to the combination problem, as well as an alternative account of consciousness that can successfully manoeuvre the issue, unlike the previous solutions. The combination problem refers to the question: 'how do microexperiental ultimates combine to form a macroexperiential, complex experiencing subject?'

My Solution and Account of Consciousness

One possible solution which I will advance does not seek to deny the combination problem (it would be a major problem for my account of panpsychism if I did believe microsubjective ultimates combine to form macrosubjectivity), but to posit that ultimates do not combine to form macrosubjectivity. There is, in fact, no such thing as macrosubjectivity (in the sense of a complex unified subject of consciousness) and it is only ultimates individually which are conscious. My solution to the problem involves the model which I discussed earlier, of there being an input-relationship between, in the example of a human, a brain and ultimates. The brain is responsible for the creation and inputting of experiential data into the ultimates which have an input-relationship with it. And so, I would propose that all of the ultimates which have an input-relationship with the same experience-generating system (in this example, the brain) experience everything which the brain outputs. So, I advance as a solution, that there could be any number of experiencing subjects per experience-generating system, with identical experiential contents. Every single ultimate which as an input-relationship with an experience-generating system is analogous to a radio receiver, and the experience-generating system the radio transmitter. And so, every ultimate which receives experiential data from the brain experiences all of the data that the brain transmits - any ultimates
which have an input-relationship with the same experience generating system are qualitatively indistinguishable. Instead of considering macrosubjectivity and microsubjectivity as different things, I consider the only thing to differ between ultimates, is the content of their experience, and the matter that they are composed of. If two ultimates have an input-relationship with the same experience-generating system, then they will be identical in every way except for the fact that they are different objects, and thus they are separate experiencing subjects. The brain outputs all of the data which it generates, and this data is then input into whichever ultimates have an input-relationship with this specific brain. I cannot describe exactly how an input-relationship may form, or exactly how it would look in the world (it may be that all of the ultimates which constitute a brain have an input relationship with it, or that they are created between ultimates and experience-generating systems within a proximity), but I merely intend to offer a model of consciousness which can account for consciousness in a comprehensive fashion but also does not imply all of the problems which the combination of microsubjectivity implies. This radical theory implies that each brain has an enormous number of experiencing subjects, whose experiences are qualitatively identical.

This model of consciousness accounts for the fundamental bases in which physics’ facts are instantiated but does not suffer the same issues that models of panpsychism that propose that microsubjective ultimates combine to form macrosubjective subjects of experience do. It would satisfy Swinburne’s argument, for if one attempted to describe the universe with reference to everything I have mentioned in my account (P phenomena, the intrinsic, the experiential subjecthood of all of the ultimates in the world and the input-relationships between certain systems and ultimates) then it would leave nothing unaccounted for. If we were to describe all physical substances, events and properties, the intrinsic, the experiential subjecthood of ultimates, and all input-relationships, we would be able to account for each experiencing subject, what he experiences, without them contradicting the descriptions of the physical world and without implying that consciousness is of a different substance to physical substances and properties, and also without positing that consciousness and mental states are reducible to P phenomena. An ultimate is experiential in its nature – it is characterised as the experiencing subject which is the recipient of experiential data from those experience-generating systems which it has an input-relationship with. It can account for all features of the world, even co-experience, for an ultimate experiences all the experiences generated by the experience-generating system with which it has an input-relationship. So, a description of the world which includes these features will also include in its description the fact that the ultimate co-experiences all the experiential data which it is the recipient of. I would argue that this model successfully deflects the combination problem, by denying that microsubjective particles combine to form macrosubjectivity. It also offers an account of consciousness with reference to which we can explain all features of consciousness. I believe that it successfully answers the why question of consciousness – we experience because everything experiences, consciousness is the fundamental basis of the
universe. The ‘how’ question can be answered with reference to input-relationships. Conscious experience, by this model, is generated when an ultimate receives experiential data from an experience-generating system with which it has an input-relationship.

**Student Reflection**

I enjoyed the opportunity to research a topic of my choice more deeply than writing my dissertation gave me. It allowed me to engage with material of specific interest to me very thoroughly and the larger word count meant that I could explore a more comprehensive discussion of the issue that I was considering.
We have included longer sections from the dissertations of three students, who have each displayed an extremely high level of skill and effort, which is reflected in the high marks they received. To congratulate them on their achievement, we have created this Special Commendations section, that will include a note from each of their supervisors and markers on what was particularly impressive about their dissertations.
Family Vlogging: A New Form of Child Exploitation?

Abi Hamilton

Abstract

The trend of family vlogging is yet to be discussed in moral academic literature. This dissertation examines family vlogging and argues that it presents a moral problem by exploiting children. To defend my position, I consider privacy rights and parental duty to protect children’s privacy in the digital age. By exchanging the child’s private information for social and financial gain, family vloggers disregard their parental duties. Children are entitled to equal moral consideration; the child’s right to privacy is not reduced in virtue of his childishness. Following Feinberg’s rights-in-trust framework, I argue the parent must refrain from prematurely establishing the child’s digital footprint. This violates the child’s privacy rights and restricts future options for the child; his digital footprint is inerasable. I conclude with recommendations to reduce harm created by family vlogging as the moral problem cannot be solved without eradicating the practice.

To vlog is to record one’s thoughts or experiences and publish the video online. There are obvious issues of privacy and exploitation when it comes to vlogging one’s own children. The following extracts examine the relationship between privacy and parenthood. The numbers before each heading have been left in to signify which chapter each section is originally from.

1.1 Privacy

Privacy is a condition and a right. Legally, privacy can be separated into decisional privacy and informational privacy¹. Decisional privacy encompasses the right to make personal decisions without interference; informational privacy protects an individual’s right to control access to their personal information. The latter protects negative liberties. I will apply the right to informational privacy to argue family vlogging is detrimental to its subject’s privacy. A child’s right to informational privacy is violated by family vlogging; the child did not choose to post the content revealing his private information.

Louis Brandeis and his associate Samuel Warren published The Right to Privacy², birthing the legal importance of privacy. Brandeis and Warren advocated for every citizens’ ‘right to be let alone’³. With the advent of

³Ibid, 195.
photography and salacious newspapers, the lawyers sought to define privacy, its limitations and value, and an individual’s right to disseminate what is theirs. When one’s private information is disseminated without approval, it can cause psychological distress and ‘results in the lowering of social standards and of morality’⁴. The unjust dissemination of information undermines the western ideal of privacy and the liberties it secures, and thereby harms the individual and compromises society’s moral values. The expectation of privacy has changed since Warren and Brandeis’s paper. The ordinary citizen, who would have been known only in his own community, now leaves a ‘trail of data’⁵. SNS (Social networking sites) encourage users to share private information; location, birthdate, workplace, etc., feature on social networking accounts. To connect with users on SNS, one must reveal some personal information (at minimum, one’s name). Without the publication of private information, SNS cannot be optimally used. Data protection regulations limit how personal data is used. It could be argued that data protection acts in lieu of one’s right to privacy. As private information is freely published by SNS users, data protection is better equipped to protect information than traditional privacy rights.

The digital economy is thriving and a career in social networking is appealing. When selling oneself on SNS, privacy is commodified. Influencers share aspects of their lives that are traditionally inaccessible to the public⁶; a personal good is sacrificed for career progression. The commodification of privacy is morally permissible, permitting the agent is an adult and *compos mentis*. They can then consent to the commodification and distribution of their private information. A child featured in online content cannot consent or comprehend the consequences of commodifying private information. Thus, the moral problem of family vlogging arises.

1.2. Privacy and Parental Duty

SNS are obligated to protect their users, to an extent. The aforementioned data protection regulations outline the duties of SNS to protect their users. When underage children create social media accounts, it is the duty of the child’s parents to prevent this from occurring. Likewise, when parents choose to share information about their children, it is the parent’s duty to consider potential dangers.

David Archard⁷ establishes two senses of parental duty: parental obligations and parental responsibilities. Parental obligation ensures that

⁴Ibid, 196.
someone acts as a parent to the child. Consequently, there are the responsibilities of acting as a parent. Archard defends a causal theory of parental obligation: ‘those who cause children to exist thereby incur an obligation to ensure that they are adequately cared for‘. I support Archard’s causal theory; a child might be reared by someone who did not cause the child to exist, e.g. adoption. Still, parental duty applies.

Legally, parental responsibilities include housing, protecting and maintaining the child. A parent is also responsible for protecting the child’s property. When protecting a child and his property, I presume private information is included. As established, the private information of children featured in vlogs could be exposed. Family vlogging might also negatively affect the child’s home environment. The child might constantly anticipate being filmed; he is denied downtime. The child is not granted personal space as his parents choose to film throughout the house at will. This could affect the child’s psychological health and ability to flourish. To family vlog could threaten the role of the home as a safe space for the child. Thus, negating parental responsibility to house, protect and maintain the child. Child protection laws enforce interventions if the home environment is not suitable. This is unlikely to happen in instances of family vlogging. Typically, the children are provided for. The longer-term psychological consequences are harder to clarify; hence the need for governmental regulations on family vlogging.

Parental duties are imposed to safeguard children. Noggle argues that children lack important aspects of moral agency. A child cannot relate to the community of moral agents in the same way adults can; adults are moral agents. The moral agent recognises how the sharing of private information might affect her future interests; the moral agent respects online communities. As children are not yet moral agents, the child will not consider the aforementioned; he lacks the necessary capacities. The agent with parental duty is responsible for preventing this; she understands the risks. Noggle’s approach stresses parental authority, as children are only partial agents. A child will become a full moral agent as he reaches adulthood. Consequentially, the parent ‘is not only the agent of the present child, but of the whole temporally extended person... she must be the advocate and protector of the child’s future self vis-à-vis the present child’. Yet, the parent might believe she is acting in the temporally extended child’s best interests, e.g. making the child an online celebrity (I will return to this issue).

1.3. A Parent’s Right To Share

One has the right to privacy; one also has freedom of speech. The child’s right to privacy and the parent’s right to freedom of speech conflict. I maintain

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8Ibid, 103.


11Ibid, 103.
that prioritising parental freedom of speech over a child's right to privacy presents potential harm. Should the parent wish to excessively post about the child on SNS, it could be defended by the parent’s right to share, included under freedom of speech. As aforementioned, this compromises parental duties to children. Children’s privacy expectations are inextricably woven with their parent’s expectations for the child’s privacy. I follow the common-sense view that the parent’s right to share is surrendered when the child’s right to be protected is violated. Yet, it is unclear whether publishing the child’s private information inflicts provable harm. Thus, government regulations would need to establish which right takes precedent.

Proud parents are known to share information or photographs of their children with friends and family. Now, modern technology has seen this proud sharing migrate to the internet. The term ‘sharenting’ merges the words ‘share’ and ‘parenting’; it refers to the practice of parents publishing images, videos and information about their children on SNS. Sharenting builds on family traditions of photo albums and home videos. Yet, the audience becomes exponentially larger. The child’s digital identity is likely to accompany him for life, but the parent is unlikely to note the longer-term implications for the child. ‘I Am Adam Lanza’s Mother’ is an impassioned essay by a struggling mother. Lanza perpetrated the 2011 Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings. The author is not Adam Lanza’s mother; she is the mother to another violent and mentally ill child. The essay documents the hardships of raising her child. By sharing her story, she probably comforted other struggling parents. She might have also offered a reality check to the leaders of public discourse on childhood mental health. Yet, the essay included the author’s name and her son’s photograph. While she advocated for improved mental health services, she also disclosed private information about her child. If the mother chose to vlog her son, this harm would be considerably increased; video reveals significantly more about its subject than a single image.

The following extracts examine a child’s rights and whether they can consent to being recorded. When the conclusion is reached that a child cannot provide informed consent, the parent’s power to consent for the child is then discussed. It is then argued that the child has a right to an open future and that the public sharing of their childhood takes away this right.

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2.2. Children and Moral Consideration

Children have legal rights as upheld by the UNCRC; most countries have ratified this treaty. These do not have to be accepted as moral rights as one could argue children do not deserve moral consideration. A morally considerable being is a being who can be wronged. To recognise a child’s rights is to recognise his moral status. I maintain children have both legal and moral rights. Adults and children do not have the same duties and rights, as evidenced by the distinction between childhood and adulthood. The child is not legally permitted to drink alcohol or expected to care for his parents. As an adult, he will be able to drink alcohol. If he becomes a parent, he will be expected to care for his child.

I argue that children ought to be treated with the same moral consideration as adults: the Equal Consideration Thesis. Brennan and Noggle theorise that some rights can be denied to the child whilst he is treated with equal moral consideration. Unlike basic (human) rights, some rights are constructed from basic moral rights, plus other factors. These other rights ‘depend in part on facts about the persons who bear them, facts about the relationships of which they are a part, facts about previous commitments they have made, and facts about the societies in which they live’.

Often, the rights denied to children are role-dependent rights; role-dependent rights apply when one can fill the role in question. For example, the right to drive an automobile is derived from the right to freedom of movement. Yet, it depends on more than one’s status as a person. The role of a driver requires certain qualifications and skills. As the child lacks these relevant qualifications and skills, he is denied the right to drive an automobile. Similarly, the parental role ascribes duties, like protecting the child. The parent can deny the child certain liberties to protect him. As the child enters adulthood, these liberties will no longer be restricted. The parent’s moral status is not greater than the child’s; the roles differ in rights and duties. Considering SNS, the parent’s right to share ought not to triumph over the child’s right to privacy; they have equal moral status. So, deserve equal moral consideration.

2.3. The Child’s Right To An Open Future

In ‘The Child’s Right to an Open Future’, Feinberg proposes a theory of rights. He distinguishes between A-rights (adult’s rights), C-rights (children’s rights) and A-C rights (adult and children’s rights). A-rights include the right to vote, to imbibe, and so on; the child will receive these autonomy A-rights as he becomes an adult. Children hold C-rights in virtue of their status as a child. C-rights include dependency rights, which can also apply to disabled adults.

Ibid, 7.
Ibid, 8.
Dependency rights entitle the child to basic goods, e.g. food and shelter, by the parent ²¹. Feinberg proposes a second moral class of C-rights: rights-in-trust (RIT). RIT look like adult autonomy A-rights but the child cannot exercise his free choice until he reaches adulthood. As established, he will then have the necessary dispositions to exercise these rights. As the child cannot yet exercise these rights, RIT ought to be saved for the future adult.

The child’s RIT can be violated in advance; to violate the child’s RIT now guarantees that certain options will be closed to the future autonomous adult ²². Feinberg maintains that it is the child’s right to have his future options kept open. RIT ‘can be summed up as the single “right to an open future”’ ²³. For example, the parent has an A-right to exercise her religious beliefs. Should the parent enforce her religious beliefs onto the child, this violates his RIT. Religious belief can greatly influence one’s choices and lifestyle. The child ought to be free to choose his religious beliefs; he will determine these beliefs as an autonomous adult. If the child was indoctrinated with his parent’s religious beliefs, this might affect his future options. For example, the child could choose to partake in Christian missions, as opposed to applying to university. Although he would not go on these missions until he is aged 18, the choices he made prior means he is unable to go to university. He focused on his faith, not his education. Thus, the parent’s actions have foreclosed or preempted the child’s future options. To respect the child’s RIT, the parent could exercise her religious beliefs without enforcing them onto the child. The parent’s beliefs will influence the child, to the extent he is exposed. If these beliefs are not enforced upon the child, his options remain sufficiently open.

The child’s right to an open future is demanding. To give the child a maximally open future is to demand the impossible from the state and the parent. Every day, our options close; we choose to pursue x rather than y ²⁴. It is unclear how literally Feinberg intended the principle to be followed. One could follow a strong interpretation, i.e. to give the child a maximally open future. I maintain that a moderate interpretation ought to be followed, i.e. children have the right to acquire a reasonable range of skills and options ²⁵. This range should prioritise the child’s fundamental RIT. Ideally, children have opportunities to learn different languages. To learn every language would be impossible. A strong interpretation of Feinberg’s principle would advocate that children ought to be offered the opportunity to learn every possible language. Suppose the child is not learning multiple languages, I doubt the future adult would be greatly disadvantaged. So, this is not a fundamental RIT.

Consider the parent violating the child’s RIT by revealing his private information. The parent is entrusted to protect the child’s private information.

²²Ibid, 77.
²³Ibid, 77.

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until he is old enough to responsibly disseminate it. By revealing private information, the parent could infringe on the child’s right to privacy, the right to respect for private life, the right to data protection, and the right to preserve one’s identity. The rights infringed upon by the parent would depend on the content and distribution of the vlog. I maintain that these are fundamental RIT. The aforementioned rights apply to children and adults. Adults can prosecute persons interfering with their entitlement to these rights. Children ought to be able to prosecute adults for doing the same. Primarily, the parent has access to the child’s private information. So, the parent is more likely to share it. Parents should realise that to infringe on these RIT is morally wrong. When this judgement is not made, the child should be able to take appropriate action. Likely, this would be state-mandated as the child might be unaware his RIT are being violated. Thus, increased regulation on parental duties to protect children’s private information would benefit children and future adults.

It is unclear whether the use of digital technology will ever be so influential to drastically infringe on a child’s right to an open future. This is becoming increasingly likely; a child’s digital footprint will follow them into adulthood. It is now common practice for employers to search the names of prospective employees online. In a professional context, to search one’s name online could provide all the necessary information to make a judgement on the person.

Consider a child featured in family vlogs; his private information is extensively shared. Depending on the vlog’s content, the child’s name, idiosyncrasies, interests, and so on, are shared. The information revealed in vlogs could foreclose his options. Say the child makes an unsavoury political statement and it is published on YouTube (public domain), this could limit his future job opportunities. It cannot be decisively argued that to vlog a child is to violate his RIT but it is probable, considering the prominence of digital footprints in modern society.

2.4. Consent and Digital Technology

Parental responsibilities require the parent to guard the child’s private information. Thus, the parent gives consent on behalf of the child to disseminate this information. Consider family vlogging or sharenting; the parent is the gatekeeper of the child’s private information and the public narrator of the child’s personal story. If the child is young or an infant, he cannot consent to this publication. Some children’s personal stories are shared from birth. A child who is vlogged from birth understands this practice as normal. He might express a desire to feature in the vlogs or consent to the publication of private information. I maintain that the child cannot give informed consent. As he has featured on SNS since birth, I doubt he is aware of the importance of privacy. Privacy infringements can present short-term and long-term harm of varying

26 Bessant, Sharenting: Balancing the conflicting rights of parents and children, 8.
27 Millum, The foundation of the child’s right to an open future.
28 Gligorijević, Children’s Privacy: The Role of Parental Control and Consent, 205.
severity. He might not be aware that vlogs can be accessed by anyone and that online content can never be truly removed.

Likewise, informed consent ensures that the subject can refuse to be featured, without consequence. The child’s special relationship with the vlogger (parent) could negate the ‘no consequence’ condition. Family members are not free, in the same way as strangers, to refuse requests from the vlogger. The special relationship might deter the child from refusing to be filmed; it could upset the parent. Family relationships imply obligations to support and help one another. It is likely easier to manipulate or exploit subjects who are also family members. For example, a child breaks his leg and is hysterical. The parent chooses to film the child; it will make for an interesting vlog. The child expresses disapproval about his parent publishing the footage. The parent reassures him, claiming that the vlog will be popular online, and it will pay for their next holiday. The child gives his consent; he is comforted and encouraged by the parent. These persuasions might not be direct. Perhaps the child goes to private school; he is aware this is costly. He feels obligated to consent as it will generate income to fund his education. As he is a feature of the family’s YouTube channel, he feels a responsibility to partake in the vlogs. Yet, a child’s duty is not to provide for the family. We ought to hold vloggers to a higher moral and legal standard than the average documentary or filmmaker, to whom the subjects are strangers. Considering family vlogs, the vlogger is usually the parent. When this parental responsibility is exploited, it is morally problematic and potentially harmful.

The following extracts examine whether vlogging is a form of child exploitation, and how monetising children in their ‘real-lives’ (as opposed to a movie set) can negatively impact the child’s mental health. An example is provided to demonstrate how the need for ‘shock-value’ can further harm the children involved.

3.1. Child Exploitation

Child exploitation is the act of using a child for profit, labour, sexual gratification, and personal or financial gain. It can result in cruel or harmful treatment of the child; he might be forced to partake in activities that are detrimental to his mental, physical and social development. Child exploitation laws in the UK prohibit and punish the act of exploiting children. The sexual exploitation of children online is clearly prohibited. The economic exploitation of children online is yet to receive equal prohibition. For children featured in vlogs, the long-term psychological consequences are yet to be known. Unless children are provably abused, the urgency to regulate vlogging practices remains lacking.

To prostitute or traffic a child is unambiguously detrimental to his well-being. To establish family vlogging as exploitative or harmful is more complex. Defenders of family vlogging could argue that the child’s exploitation is mutually beneficial. Although his private information is compromised, he receives luxuries unobtainable without the family’s YouTube channel. Both parties (the parent and child) could walk away better off than they were ex ante. Still, this defence would only apply if the parent valued material goods over the child’s welfare. Then, the parent would not be fulfilling her parental duty. The child is likely unaware of the transaction taking place; his privacy is commodified. One of the parties is misinformed so it remains unfairly exploitative. Although the luxuries afforded by family vlogging benefit the current child, I doubt this would continue into adulthood. His digital footprint is likely to hinder his future and online trends are fleeting. The success of family vloggers will dwindle as new entertainment practices emerge. It is unlikely that the family’s luxurious lifestyle will continue indefinitely; their digital footprint will remain.

3.2. Child Monetisation

Monetising children is an established practice. Film has utilised child actors since its advent. The child actor is protected by law, ensuring he is not unjustly used; any earnings are protected as rightfully his and he works restricted hours. These child labour laws do not yet apply to child filmed for vlogs. Perhaps, this is because vlogging is not viewed as traditional labour. Where a child is filmed frequently, it is published and monetised, this constitutes as labour. At minimum, it costs the child time and effort. Family vloggers often defend their practice by claiming that the child is not performing. Family vlogs are marketed as representational of real-life. Even so, the child is performing a version of himself hence he ought to be entitled to the same protection as traditional child actors. The adults monetising him ought to be restricted as those who use child actors are. For example, the child cannot participate in work that might be harmful to his health, well-being or education. Family vlogging is laborious and infringes on these criteria. As the practice continues, it ought to be regulated to honour restrictions on child employment.

In 2015, the Department of Education updated licensing legislation for child performance. It specifies that ‘this does not extend to user generated content, for e.g. where young people or a family record themselves and share it on a website or social media’. This omission was justified by claiming parents are trusted to act in the best interests of their children. As argued, parental duty can be warped by the lure of social or financial gain; the family can be commodified, without restriction. As the practice is unlikely to stop, I hope

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3Department of Education. (2015).
licensing regulations will swiftly be amended to include user generated content. This will not solve the moral problem of family vlogging but could reduce its exploitative features.

3.3. The Realities of Family Life

Family vlogs are claimed to be representational of real-life. Intimate family moments are not just enjoyed but filmed and published. Filming one’s family has occurred since the advent of accessible video recording equipment. Home movie footage typically comprises the kind of material made dealing with ‘the home’, the domestic and the familial; it is usually thought as private. These films are cherished as a visual record of important moments. Family vlogs are an evolution of the home movie, for an economy where privacy can be commodified.

Still, I doubt anyone outside of the family or their friends would find traditional home movies entertaining. The videos do not follow narratives or establish characters. Family vlogs and home movies differ in this aspect. To maintain a viewership, family vloggers sometimes create forged narratives and personas. As aforementioned, children featured in vlogs perform a version of themselves. Toddlers are encouraged to be cute, teens angsty, boys boyish, and so on. These exaggerated personas increase entertainment value. I imagine this would be denied by family vloggers. Still, by watching family vlogs, it is obvious parents and children perform somewhat for the camera.

Say I believe the account sold by family vloggers: they only film real-life. Where does the true-to-life vlog end and reality begin? For younger children or children born into vlogging, I imagine the distinction is non-existent. The child’s sense of self and grasp on reality would be damaged, affecting his psychological and social development. Accordingly, children featured in vlogs ought to be subject to child labour laws as well as psychological guidelines. The psychological effects of vlogging children are yet to be elucidated; I predict these will be abundant. The constant anticipation of filming could cause anxiety. The child could become depressed after reading vicious comments online. For children featured in family vlogs, the distinction between work and home is elapsed. They do not receive explicit breaks from work, as mandated by child labour laws. Yet, this would be near impossible to regulate, should we follow the account that family vloggers strictly film real-life.

3.4. The Attention Economy

FatheringAutism is a YouTube channel on which a father publishes vlogs about his life parenting an autistic child. The channel description reads: ‘Battling the stigma of ASD (autism spectrum disorder) with a first-hand look into the struggles, joy, and comedy of fathering autism’. FatheringAutism vlog titles


include: ‘Blood and Gagging...Everyday Autism’ and ‘Off Her Meds! ~ Autistic Girl Goes Wild!’.

The vlog’s content could be informative about his child’s autism diagnosis. Still, the vlog’s title is exploitative of her disability. This is a reliable method to gain views. To maintain a viewership, vloggers are encouraged to forge narratives or produce shocking content. (These titles are shocking enough grab my attention for this dissertation). If the content does not complement the title, viewership will quickly dwindle. Vloggers then are pressured to match this expectation of shock value.

Vloggers are competing for YouTube users’ attention but attention is a limited commodity. The attention economy views an individual’s attention as his most precious resource. Social media relies on its users’ attention; clicks generate revenue. Likewise, vloggers rely on views; views generate revenue. The attention economy is oversaturated as SNS are democratised platforms; all users are content creators. As more people create content, the demand for attention increases but attention is limited. So, online content will become increasingly dangerous, shocking, remarkable, and so on. This assumption can be defended by the concept of the positional arms race, e.g. in the acting sector, if someone undergoes surgery to look young then others will follow. When applied to family vlogging, this could further harm its child subjects. Should adults wish to partake in increasingly shocking content, it is within their rights. Children, however, ought to be protected.

As the threshold for shock value increases, harm is likely to follow. As more people compete in the family vlogging race, the parent will expect the child to rival other vloggers. This could be the child revealing further private information to entice viewers with gossip; the child could be encouraged to perform stupid or dangerous acts. If the parent is originally willing to exploit the child, I doubt her sense of parental duty will prevail to prevent the child from doing so. Shock value will ensure the vlogs sustain in the attention economy. Until the vlogging industry is regulated, these trends are unlikely to stop. We cannot rely on the consciences of parents willing to exploit their children. Ultimately, nobody gains from the positional arms race. Regarding family vlogging, the expectation of shock value will eventually yield more harm than gain. The family vlogging industry is unsustainable and likely to implode. Sadly, this will be at the expense of the children used for online content. Regulations will prevent further harm but it cannot remedy the damage already done.

The following extract, taken from the concluding chapter, puts forward some recommendations to eradicate the moral issues generated by family vlogging, and suggests ways to prevent further violations of children’s rights and misuse of parental responsibility.


Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

To eradicate the moral issues generated by family vlogging, the practice should cease. It would prevent further violations of children’s rights and misuse of parental responsibility. Although this will not remedy the harm already inflicted, it would prevent it from happening to further children. I consider this as the most efficient way to solve the problem from a moral viewpoint. While the digital economy is booming, this is solution unlikely. We cannot trust the parent to respect the child’s fundamental RIT. Still, Feinberg’s RIT framework is valuable. The privacy implications of his thesis ought to be implemented outside of moral discussions. I suggest a clean slate policy. This would free persons from the content they produced or featured in as children. Essentially, wiping digital footprints created before legal adulthood.

As digital footprints are entrenched online, the protection of privacy I propose is unattainable. We must turn to practical solutions. YouTube is aware of the issues surrounding children on the platform. Children under 13 cannot create an account. Still, parents can upload footage of their children. COPPA (Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act) prohibits content aimed at children to be monetised. I suggest this policy should apply to content featuring children. Although this will not eradicate the problem, it removes financial motivations and would eliminate family vlogging as a lucrative career option.

By contrast, UK child labour laws could include user-generated content. Legal and psychological guidelines would apply. Also, local authorities would be informed of family vloggers and licensing officers would be assigned to children featured in vlogs. This would allow the child an opportunity to express anxieties outside of obligations to the family; coercion is still is possible. The monetisation of family vlogs would continue but the child would be protected by legal and psychological guidelines. To demonetise content featuring children is the superior recommendation. To regulate family vlogging could encourage the practise; if it is government approved, more parents could see it as morally permissible and choose to family vlog.

Student Reflection

For my dissertation, I decided to write on a topic yet to be discussed in philosophical literature; I was unsure whether this was the right decision. The feedback I received praised me for rising “to the challenge and writing about the topic philosophically”. The risk of discussing an unprecedented topic paid off. Despite the doubt I faced throughout the dissertation process, I’m pleased I wrote about something not classically philosophical yet currently relevant and in need of moral examination.

Marker Comments

This is an excellent dissertation on the ethical failures of child video blogging. It inquires into an underexplored and current phenomenon, and analyses it methodically, with largely persuasive argumentation. A truly impressive depth/range of literature has been consulted, ranging from government documents to legal and sociological analyses. While there is no philosophical literature on this topic, Abi has risen to the challenge of writing about the topic philosophically.

Dr Vid Simoniti & Dr Ilias Markolefas
Can Kant’s Transcendental Idealism Be Considered Berkeleian?

Josh Hibbert

Abstract

The notion that Kant’s transcendental idealism is fundamentally Berkeleian is a view that originated in the first reviews of the Critique of Pure Reason and remains popular today. By examining both the early reviews of the Critique and modern scholarship on it, I consider the arguments in favour of this view. After collating and examining Kant’s explicit responses to these accusations, which consist in arguments found in the Prolegomena and the second edition of the Critique, it is argued that these responses present meaningful points of differentiation between Kant and Berkeley. It is concluded that the conflation of Kant and Berkeley is erroneous and harmful to future Kant scholarship.

The following extracts set out Kant’s responses to the criticisms of his Critique of Pure Reason (which was written as an investigation into the faculties of human cognition). The numbers before each heading refer to which chapter the section originally came from, and have been left in for clarity purposes.

3. Kant’s Responses: The Prolegomena and the Refutation of Idealism

Kant, aware of the accusations of Berkeleianism made against the Critique, wrote several explicit responses. The most notable of these writings are found in the Prolegomena, published 1783, and the ‘Refutation of Idealism’, found in the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, published 1787. In the Prolegomena, Kant outlines several key points of differentiation between himself and Berkeley, while in the ‘Refutation of Idealism’ he offers a new argument that seeks to prove the existence of the external world. The purpose of this chapter is to collate and examine Kant’s direct responses to accusations of Berkeleianism, while the following chapters will consider the efficacy of these responses.

3.1. The Prolegomena

Throughout the Prolegomena one can find Kant writing with Berkeley and the accusations of the reviewers in mind, and this is especially true in the appendix to the work. Thus, we find Kant¹ arguing that one of the key differences between his philosophy and Berkeley’s is that transcendental idealism concerns not the existence of things in themselves, but, rather, ‘the sensory representation

of things’. Kant’s point here is that transcendental idealism has no interest in the existence of things, instead, it is concerned with the conditions of their representation and their sensible intuition. This is something that is central to the *Critique* and can be seen by Kant’s own distinction between the terms ‘transcendental’ and ‘transcendent’. For Kant, the term ‘transcendental’ refers to the faculty of cognition, that which precedes experience a priori². ‘Transcendent’, on the other hand, refers to propositions that concern objects beyond possible experience³. For example, Kant’s categories of the understanding are transcendental as they are concerned with the conditions of experience, while the cosmological argument for God is transcendent, as it goes beyond the bounds of experience⁴. From this we can see that by virtue of its very name, Kant’s idealism, unlike Berkeley’s, is not concerned with the existence or non-existence of objects, but rather, the conditions of their representation and cognition.

Kant does admit, however, that the neglect of this point probably arose from his use of the similar sounding terms ‘transcendent’ and ‘transcendental’, and so instead opts to refer to his idealism as formal or critical from then on⁵. This point, that the accusations of Berkeleianism involve a misinterpretation of the aims of transcendental idealism, can be further developed. This development involves closer examination the meaning of Kant’s use of ‘transcendental’, and his distinction between the transcendental and the empirical. This will be explored in chapter four.

Another distinction between himself and Berkeley, argues Kant, is the role of things-in-themselves. For Kant, things-in-themselves are genuinely existent, although unknowable⁶. Kant argues that, for idealists like Berkeley, ‘there are none other than thinking beings; the other things that we believe we perceive in intuition are only representations in thinking beings, to which in fact no object existing outside these beings corresponds⁷’. This is a reference to Berkeley’s belief that there are no mind independent objects, and that appearances, or ideas as Berkeley calls them, simply exist with no link to any mind independent object⁸. Kant contrasts this with his own position, that there do genuinely exist mind independent objects. These objects, or things-in-themselves, are objects which are, by their nature, unperceivable. For, if we were to perceive them, they would conform to the conditions of human sensibility and no longer be as they were in themselves. Things-in-themselves are objects as they exist without reference to human sensibility, cognition and experience, and so, are completely inaccessible to us. Kant justifies his belief in their existence since they are the explanation of our sensations. Although they are completely unknowable to us, we are nonetheless acquainted with things-in-themselves through the

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²Ibid, 88.
⁴Ibid, 492.
⁵Kant, ‘Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics’, 163.
⁶Ibid, 84.
⁷Ibid, 84.
representations they produce in us as a result of their affectation of our sensibility. The result of this is an important distinction between Kant and Berkeley; Kant affirms, while Berkeley denies, the existence of mind independent objects. There are immediate difficulties with Kant’s argument here, and his doctrine of the thing-in-itself is the subject of much controversy. The efficacy of this attempt of refuting accusations of Berkeleianism will be further examined in chapter five.

Finally, another difference between his and Berkeley’s idealism, says Kant, is the existence and function of the a priori. For Kant, the synthetic a priori is not only a valid philosophical function, but an important one. Obviously, the synthetic a priori plays a fundamental part in Kant’s critical project; in fact, he claims that ‘my idealism is solely for grasping the possibility of our a priori cognition of the objects of experience’. Berkeley, as an empiricist, would be inclined to reject the existence of the a priori altogether; for how could a concept, especially space and time (which are a priori for Kant), be prior to experience? There are, however, also more specific instances where the a priori puts Kant in direct conflict with a Berkeleian philosophy. The most notable of these is the criterion of truth for appearances. Kant writes:

Since truth rests upon universal and necessary laws as its criteria, for Berkeley experience could have no criteria of truth, because its appearances (according to him) had nothing underlying them a priori; from which it then followed that experience is nothing but sheer illusion, whereas for us space and time (in combination with the pure concepts of the understanding) prescribe a priori their law to all possible experience, which law at the same time provides the sure criterion for distinguishing truth from illusion in experience.

The point here is that, in virtue of Kant’s use of the a priori, he completely revolutionises how a truth criterion is to be understood. Traditionally, the criterion of truth involves reference to how an idea corresponds with its object by virtue of their resemblance. For Kant, however, representation is not a resemblance to an object, but a conformity to rule. Kant argues that the idea of an object as totally separate from its representation is useless as we cannot get outside of our representations to check their conformity. The criterion must instead be found within consciousness itself, and it is, for Kant, that which grants necessity to our representations and prevents them from being totally chaotic and arbitrary. Kant terms this necessity the unity of rule. A representation, then, corresponds with its object not insofar as it resembles it, but insofar as it conforms to the rules by which the manifold of sensation is

9Kant, ‘Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics’, 84.
10Ibid, 162.
11Ibid, 162.
13Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 231.
synthesised by the faculties of cognition. Berkeley, on the other hand, has no access to such a criterion and instead has to rely on empirical generalisations; Berkeley claims that the distinction between illusion and reality is that the ideas in reality are more consistent, orderly and distinct. This is why Kant believes that a key difference between himself and Berkeley is that the a priori allows Kant to have a criterion for the reality of experience, while Berkeley instead consigns experience to ‘sheer illusion’.

3.2. The Refutation of Idealism

In the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant introduced an entirely new section titled ‘The Refutation of Idealism’. This section is concerned with the rejection of the idealism of Descartes, and purports to show that ‘the mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me’. Kant intends to demonstrate that our inner experience, which is not doubted by idealists, is itself only possible with the presupposition of outer experience. Although aimed chiefly at Descartes, this is relevant for our purposes since Kant here seeks to demonstrate the necessary existence of objects of outer experience, rather than the existence of mere appearances. The difference between an object of experience and a mere representation for Kant is that the object of experience is actual; it involves systematic unity and locatability in a single, universal space. The actual object is one that ‘we judge to exist independently of our representation of it, even if we also know that the form in which were present the independence of such objects is itself dependent upon the constitution of our own sensibility’. In other words, the refutation, opposed to Berkeley, seeks to demonstrate the existence and experience of independent external objects, even if the representation of those objects is qualified as still being dependent on human sensibility. It is for this reason that the refutation has been called ‘Kant's ultimate attempt to prove that his idealism is merely formal idealism rather than the subjective realism of Berkeley’.

The argument of the refutation can be expressed simply in the following steps:

Step 1: I am conscious of my own existence as determined by time.
Step 2: All determination of time presupposes something permanent in perception.
Step 3: This permanent cannot be something in me, since it is only through

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14 Berkeley, 'A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge', 96.
15 Kant, 'Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics', 162.
16 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 327.
17 Ibid, 326.
18 Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 106.
19 Ibid, 106.
21 Ibid, 72.
it that my existence in time can be determined.

Step 4: Therefore, perception of this permanent is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me.

That we are conscious of our own temporally ordered experience is something no idealist would deny. Kant’s next step is to declare that this determination of time requires something permanent. This is due to the fact that we must have something permanent, at least relatively to the thing that is changing, so that we have a standard to measure change by²². Kant then argues that this permanent thing cannot be something within ourselves. This is because our internal representations themselves are always changing and therefore not permanent. Kant then concludes that since it cannot be inside of me, this permanent must therefore be an external object. This external object, he says, is not ‘the mere representation of a thing outside me’²³.

This proof of the existence of external things puts Kant in direct contrast with Berkeley. For Berkeley, there are no other things than mere representations, including outer objects.

There is an immediate problem, however: why can we not consider the experience of temporally ordered representations sufficient to recognise that temporal order? In other words, why do we need the persisting object? These questions will be further considered in chapter six.

The following extracts come directly after the previous section, and discuss some theories that Kant explicitly mentions in his work, namely Transcendental Idealism and Transcendental Realism.

4. The Transcendental and the Empirical: Realism Versus Idealism

In chapter 3.1 we saw that one of Kant’s responses to accusations of Berkeleianism is to assert that such accusations misconstrue the aims of transcendental idealism.

Transcendental idealism, says Kant, is not a philosophy concerned with the existence or non-existence of objects. It is instead one that aims at the conditions of human cognition and sensibility. This is a point taken up by Henry Allison who argued that transcendental idealism ‘must be characterised as a metaphilosophical or methodological assumption concerning the “standpoint” in terms of which human knowledge is to be analysed’²⁴. Indeed, this is the very point that Kant claimed had affected a Copernican revolution in philosophy²⁵. This distinction, that differentiates Kant’s idealism from Berkeley’s, is one that finds further expression throughout Kant’s system. In particular, his.

²²Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 110.
²³Ibid, 110.
²⁵Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 110.
conceptualisation of the opposition between transcendental idealism and transcendental realism, and in the emphasis that Kant places upon the transcendental and empirical viewpoints within his own writing. In this chapter, I will examine how fundamental these points are. I will argue that they are so crucial to the very functioning of transcendental idealism that Kant is correct to mark it as an important point against the equating of himself with Berkeley.

4.1. Transcendental Idealism and Transcendental Realism

Throughout his work Kant makes repeated reference to transcendental realism, contrasting it with transcendental idealism. In the first *Critique*, he writes that:

> Regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility). The transcendental realist therefore represents outer appearances (if their reality is conceded) as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and our sensibility and thus would also be outside us according to pure concepts of the understanding. It is really this transcendental realist who afterwards plays the empirical idealist.

Kant's point here is that the transcendental realist views appearances as things in themselves and given to us as they are in themselves. The transcendental realist becomes an empirical idealist (Kant is particularly referring to Cartesian scepticism) because once they make this assumption, they are forced into the view that our senses are not sufficient to ensure the existence of objects in themselves. If the object has an existence independently of our senses, then our representations are not enough to establish their reality as they are in themselves. This, Kant believes, is the genesis of Cartesian scepticism. Clearly, transcendental realism is the opposite counterpart to transcendental idealism, which holds that the objects of experience, along with space and time, are dependent upon our sensibility.

This does not seem to apply to Berkeley at first glance; Berkeley doesn't believe that objects exist independently of our senses. Although Kant does not explicitly say this about Berkeley, he does in fact declare that Hume 'took objects of experience as things in themselves' which means that he is a transcendental realist by the above definition.

Considering the similarity of Berkeley's doctrine of ideas and Hume's impressions, this will provide an avenue of analysis for the attribution of transcendental realism to Berkeley. Why does Kant describe such subjective objects as things-in-themselves?

The answer, I think, is because Hume treats these objects of experience as if they are given to the mind as they are in themselves. Neither Hume nor Berkeley held that appearances are produced by the a priori concepts of the

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understanding. It is true that they did not believe in a mind independent object, but since they cannot say that our representations aren’t given as they are in themselves, but as they are formed by and confirm to human sensibility, they treat appearances as things-in-themselves. This is a crucial distinction between Kant and Berkeley; Berkeley holds that the objects of experience are given as they are in themselves, while Kant believes that the objects of experience are given as they conform to human sensibility. This also means that Berkeley is a transcendental realist, for he believes that the objects of outer experience are in themselves as they are given. While we may pause at saying that Berkeley believes that the objects of experience would exist independently of our sensibility, I take Kant to be talking about independence from sensibility in the transcendental sense, that is, in the sense by which human sensibility produces our objects of experience.

Berkeley does not believe in the existence of the a priori concepts of the understanding, and so for him, the objects of experience are independent of sensibility insofar as they are not produced by it. In this way, Berkeley, like Hume, for Kant, is a transcendental realist and so is directly opposed to transcendental idealism.

The following extracts examine the efficacy of Kant’s thing-in-itself defence. The conversation then moves on to a specific part of the defence, known as the Affection Theory, and discusses criticisms and potential responses.

5. The Thing-In-Itself and Noumenal Causality

In chapter 3.1 one of Kant’s responses was the thing-in-itself defence. The defence claims that Kant’s system of philosophy entails the existence of mind independent objects, or things-in-themselves, while Berkeley denies the existence of such objects entirely. Kant’s argument is that the thing-in-itself must exist because it affects our sensibility in such a way that it produces the raw input that is then synthesised by the categories. In other words, the thing-in-itself must exist because it is the only explanation, Kant thinks, for the origin of sensations. This is known as the ‘affection theory’ of the thing-in-itself. This chapter will examine the efficacy of Kant’s argument by considering the main and most famous criticism of it before proposing possible responses.

5.1. Jacobi’s Criticism of the Affection Theory

One of the earliest and most influential criticisms of Kant’s doctrine of the thing-in-itself is found in Friedrich Jacobi. In the appendix to his dialogue David Hume, Jacobi argues that the idea that the thing-in-itself causes our sensations is one wholly opposed to the very foundation of transcendental idealism. The central problem is this: how is it coherent to speak about the thing-in-itself affecting our sensibility, or even anything at all, when to affect

something requires causation? Since Kant has argued extensively that causation is not something that can be applied to things considered apart from human sensibility\textsuperscript{39}, as it is a pure concept of the understanding, how can a thing-in-itself, which is by definition outside human sensibility, cause anything? Is this not an example of a transcendent application of the categories, which is to say, an application of the categories to objects beyond possible experience?

Furthermore, argues Jacobi, it seems impossible for transcendental idealism to function without such a presupposition (that the thing-in-itself affects our sensibility). For even the term sensibility does not have meaning unless there exists something exterior by which it is affected\textsuperscript{30}. In other words, sensibility must act as an intermediary between an external object and the subject, and so requires affection by the thing-in-itself.

It seems Kant is correct in a way; without the thing-in-itself affecting our sensibility, there can be no explanation for where sensations come from. Thus, we find Jacobi stating: ‘without that presupposition I could not enter into the system, but with it I could not stay within it’\textsuperscript{31}.

There appears to be a contradiction in the Kantian system here; on the one hand the thing-in-itself necessarily affects our sensibility because there is nowhere else that sensations can conceivably come from, and on the other hand the thing-in-itself by its own definition cannot cause anything. If the thing-in-itself is too inconsistent and contradictory with the rest of the Kantian system, it cannot serve as a meaningful point of differentiation between Kant and Berkeley. Indeed, this is one of the points where critics of Kant claim that he has simply introduced a transcendental object within a Berkeleian framework which has resulted in the inconsistency\textsuperscript{32}. The thing-in-itself defence, then, is not a useful argument for Kant, and even appears to strengthen the position of those who claim he is an inconsistent Berkeleian.

5.2. Thinking Noumena and Transcendental Reflection

There are a few possible responses to this line of criticism. The first I will consider is Kant’s own response. In the second Critique, Kant claims that although we cannot cognise objects beyond possible experience through the concepts of the understanding ‘objects may nevertheless be thought through them although not determined a priori’\textsuperscript{33}. Kant’s point here is that although it is true that we cannot know things-in-themselves as they are beyond possible experience, we can still think them through the concepts of the understanding, which are valid of objects in general\textsuperscript{34}. Famously, Kant describes the thing-in-itself as an object in general: ‘this object must be thought of only as something in general = X’\textsuperscript{35}. What results is not knowledge or cognition of the thing-in-

\textsuperscript{39}Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, 116.
\textsuperscript{30}Jacobi, ‘David Hume on Faith, or, Idealism and Realism: A Dialogue’, 336.
\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid}, 336.
\textsuperscript{32}Beiser, \textit{German Realism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism}, 96.
\textsuperscript{33}Kant, ‘Critique of Practical Reason’, 183.
\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid}, 180.
\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ibid}, 231.
itself but, instead, the thing-in-itself gains the status of a theoretical concept. In other words, it means that we can think of the thing-in-itself as causing our sensations, while not knowing it does, without being inconsistent with the rest of the critical project. The immediate difficulty of this response is that it relegates the thing-in-itself to a very flimsy position. Kant admits that we cannot know it causes our sensations, or even that it exists. He cannot know that the thing-in-itself causes our appearances, only that there is a possibility it does. It remains equally possible, then, that it does not; that there are only appearances, as Berkeley maintains. If Kant escapes the charges of inconsistency, he only does so at the cost of weakening his defence to the point of mere possibility. This is not an adequate response to the problem Jacobi identifies.

However, such a judgement would be too hasty. If we consider more closely Kant’s theory of transcendental reflection, then a more sophisticated interpretation may be available. Kant defines transcendental reflection as:

> The act by which I bring together the comparison of representations in general with the cognitive power to which they belong, and by which I distinguish whether they are to be compared as belonging to pure understanding or to sensible intuition[^36][my emphasis].

Although Kant has not developed his account of transcendental reflection in detail, he does state that such reflection is an unavoidable duty for anyone who wants to make a priori judgements about things[^37]. Transcendental reflection is the activity by which we reflect on the transcendental conditions of thought and cognition. The entire Critique, then, can be said to be an exercise in transcendental reflection. We can safely assume that transcendental reflection must be discursive, since Kant would not so vehemently reject the notion of intellectual intuition throughout his work only to fall back on it in the Critique[^38]. If transcendental reflection is discursive, as it must be, then there must be concepts that are engaged by it. Kant notes that even without any sensible intuition, the categories retain a logical significance due to their function as unifying structures[^39]. It should also be considered that if the categories had no content when divorced from sensible intuition, we would not be able to discern one from the other, even though they clearly have different functions. Kant also often refers to such logical significance as transcendental significance in other parts of the Critique[^40]. It follows that the categories, without sensible intuition, retain a logical significance that is either identical to or at least constitutive of a transcendental meaning or significance.

Kant holds that, through transcendental reflection, we know that sensibility

[^36]: Ibid, 367.
[^37]: Ibid, 368.
[^39]: Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 277.
[^40]: Ibid, 346.
is passive, that is, it requires input from something outside itself. Due to the ideality of space and time, the thing that affects our sensibility cannot have the temporal and spatial properties we intuit it as having. This result of transcendental reflection makes use of only a minimal concept of causation: it is only a reflection on what the grounds or conditions of the use of the faculty of sensibility are. This is little more than a reflection on the relationship between ground and consequent. It does not require sensible intuition as it only relies on the logical or transcendental significance of the category of causation and considers the conditions under which that significance operates. When Kant rejects the use of the categories for things beyond possible experience, he is referring to the generation of theoretical knowledge or cognition, which is noted above in that Kant says we cannot know things-in-themselves but can think them. There are other things that are legitimate objects of Kantian thought that are not objects of theoretical knowledge. These include Kant’s practical postulates, including the postulate for the existence of God. These postulates are designed in such a way that they generate objective reality for the particulars they identify, at least assuming the Kantian system is true. In this interpretation, the causality of the thing-in-itself can be legitimately postulated similarly to how God is postulated. For Kant, in the same way that God is a legitimately real and referable entity due to the practical postulate, so too can noumenal causality be legitimately referable.

A point of consideration here, however, is that the above account would require us to endorse an a-temporal and nonspatial notion of causality. Since, even if we accept that noumenal causality can be legitimately postulated, it remains difficult to see how causality can even occur when the ideality of space and time seems to preclude it. One possible response is to make a distinction between human spatiotemporal forms of intuition and spatiotemporality in general. It is entirely possible, logically and metaphysically, within the Kantian framework, that things-in-themselves have their own form or analogue of spatiotemporality. It would simply need to be different to how we intuit it. If it is possible for noumena to have an analogue to space and time, it is also possible for them to have an analogue to causality. It does not matter that we cannot imagine how these analogues would function, because what we can conceive or imagine is also restricted by the categories. Finally, to declare that such analogues to space and time are simply impossible would be to commit a transcendent use of the categories, because it is akin to saying that if noumena have a form of spatiotemporality, it must be the same as the subjective human forms of intuition. My point here is that the postulate of noumenal causality is not logically or metaphysically impossible, nor contradictory or inconsistent with the wider Kantian system.

5.3. Concluding Remarks


The issue of noumenal causality is one that has great importance for Kant’s thing-in-itself defence. The problem can be summed up as: how is it possible that a thing-in-itself affects our sensibility when causation is a pure concept of the understanding? I believe the difficulty can be defused, however, with careful consideration of Kant’s notion of transcendental reflection. By transcendentally reflecting on the faculty of sensibility, it is possible for Kant to postulate noumenal causation by reference to the transcendental significance of the categories. This means that noumenal causality cannot be an object of theoretical cognition but can be assumed to be the case regardless. This postulation is as legitimate and consistent as the rest of Kant’s postulates. Difficulties with non-spatiotemporal causation can be resolved consistently by acknowledging the possibility of noumenal analogues to spatiotemporality. In this way, the thing-in-itself as a concept is not contradictory or inconsistent, and Kant’s thing-in-itself defence holds as a point of meaningful differentiation between himself and Berkeley: Kant affirms, while Berkeley denies, the existence of mind independent objects.

A number of different discussions are then had, including The Refutation of Idealism (Proof of the External World), The Need for (what Kant calls) a Persisting Object, and Arguments and Exceptions for Internal Temporal Ordering. The following extract is the concluding chapter, which references the majority of these topics, before landing on the conclusion that the conflation of Kant and Berkeley is erroneous and harmful to future Kant scholarship.

Conclusion

The research presented in this dissertation aimed to provide a negative answer to the question of whether Kant’s transcendental idealism can be considered Berkeleian. Based on an examination of both the arguments presented in favour of such a comparison and Kant’s own defence against these points, it must be said that the conflation of the two philosophers is erroneous. While there are superficial similarities between transcendental idealism and Berkeley’s idealism, such as Kant’s doctrine of appearances and Berkeley’s theory of ideas, the more fundamental points are quite different.

Even only considering Kant’s own explicit responses, while requiring further elaboration, they do present meaningful points of differentiation with Berkeley. From the crucial and irreducibly transcendental aspect of Kant’s philosophy and the identification of Berkeley as a transcendental realist in chapter four, to Kant’s affirmation of mind-independent objects via the postulate of noumenal causality in chapter five, as well as the affirmation of external objects of experience in the ‘Refutation of Idealism’ in chapter six, Kant and Berkeley differ in fundamental ways. It has been shown that these points are not the trivial attempts at hiding a deeper affinity with Berkeley that some critics of Kant have dismissed them as. They concern the very purpose and metaphysical commitments of transcendental idealism. Nor are they incoherent or inconsistent with the rest of Kant’s system. These commitments
are irreconcilable with a Berkeleian idealism. Berkeley and Kant differ in purpose, method, and both metaphysical and epistemological commitments. Addressing this conflation is of utmost importance for a correct interpretation of the Kantian project. The standard picture of Kant, that he is essentially working within a Berkeleian framework, obscures the core value of transcendental idealism. It forces us to find aspects, even whole swathes, of Kant’s philosophy as inconsistent or even unintelligible. This finds expression in the work of commentators like Strawson who recommends we separate Kant’s analytic work from transcendental idealism entirely. Dispelling the notion that Kant is fundamentally Berkeleian allows for future scholarship on Kant to interpret him charitably and in the way he intended. Based on these findings, further research should focus on engaging with Kant on his own ground and explore the value of transcendental idealism without the shadow of Berkeley colouring that engagement.

**Student Reflection**

When writing my dissertation there were a couple practices that helped me the most. The first was to start planning early. It helps to focus your research and the dissertation deadline comes around faster than you think! The second thing was to maintain consistent contact with your supervisor. I found it best to get feedback on my work chapter by chapter. The more feedback you get the better your work will be!

**Marker Comments**

Exemplary work, beautifully written and a fantastic springboard to postgraduate study.

In general this is excellent, sophisticated, well written, and rigorous. There were some gaps in the argumentation, I think. And for a full treatment you would need to consider Kant’s discussion of causation in the Analogies and Strawson’s take on that. Still, for an undergraduate essay this is terrific.

Dr Rebecca Davnall & Professor Richard Gaskin

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Should Antenatal Screening For Disability Be Made Mandatory?

Jemima Hunt

The following dissertation has been printed in full, as it was when submitted. The original structure has been left to give future students an idea of what a full, completed dissertation may look like. The only section that has been removed is the table of contents, which originally came between the abstract and the introduction, and gave the names and page numbers of the headings and subheadings for each chapter.

Abstract

Antenatal screening is used to identify fetal abnormalities. Currently, they are offered as a choice, but should they be made mandatory? The relationship between disability and well-being is one that has been discussed extensively, yet it is often assumed that disability negatively impacts well-being. Within this thesis, I aim to defend the notion of choice by exploring this correlation. I will establish an argument that favours mandatory antenatal screenings by asserting disability as a harmed condition using Savulescu’s Principle of Procreative Beneficence and John Harris’ theory of bio-enhancement. I will then refute these claims and appeal to the mere-difference view of disability provided by Elizabeth Barnes to defend the notion of choice for antenatal screening. I will furthermore argue that if antenatal screening for disability were to be made mandatory, then it would only perpetuate the existing stigma against the disabled community.

Introduction

Antenatal screening for disability is currently available on the NHS, and despite their encouragement to screen for fetal abnormalities, screening is a choice. In making antenatal screening for disability mandatory, it can be argued that individuals can make educated decisions about whether to progress with pregnancies and either prepare for having a child born with a disability or terminate the pregnancy. Disability is, first and foremost, a lack of or reduced ability. The assumption that there is a necessary connection between disability and a reduced sense of well-being is one that has been taken for granted as common-sense in modern-day society. It is often supposed that a reduced ability to live independently and a constant need for care leads to a diminished sense of well-being, not only for the individual living with the disability but also those who are involved in their care.

However, the connection between disability and well-being is much more complex than it seems on the surface. In this paper, I seek to explore this connection, and defend the notion of disability as a mere-difference, as opposed to being intrinsically attached to negative value. With this being the case, I will
argue that there is no reason for disability screening to be made mandatory and that we should embrace disability not as a negative aspect of society but as a difference. The best way to do this is to establish a balanced argument and thereby determine which side has more substance.

Chapter one briefly outlines the necessary background information on antenatal screening, identifying the most common forms of screening available. I will briefly explain how the techniques of ultrasound, blood tests, amniocentesis, and Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS) works in identifying fetal abnormalities and I will give examples of physical, intellectual, and life-limiting disabilities that are identified using these techniques.

My second chapter provides an argument in favour of making antenatal screenings mandatory. I will delve into the idea that prospective parents have an obligation to choose the best children via Savulescu’s ‘Principle of Procreative Beneficence’. This holds that parents have a duty of care towards their unborn children and are obliged to select the best possible child, one which is fully able. I will develop this concept by using John Harris’s bio-enhancement theory, which asserts that we must ensure humans continue to flourish. He believes that disability hinders human flourishing, and should, therefore, be avoided. At the centre of these ideas is the concept of well-being and how it is affected by disability. I will assume the hedonistic view when assessing Harris’s argument. I will assert that the hedonistic theory is most relevant to the principles I have studied, and explore disability viewed as a ‘harmed condition’ which increases suffering and decreasing quality of life. I will discuss Harris’ view on the obligation to abort babies with disabilities based on the concept of maximal good, which lends its support to the notion of mandatory antenatal screenings.

My third chapter refutes the claims made in the previous section. I will contest the claim that disability is detrimental to quality of life and attempt to redefine disability concerning well-being, in asserting that disability is not an absolute harm. I will then question the remaining claims made by Savulescu by holding the pursuit of the good life as self-defeating and dissatisfying. After successfully contesting the claims made by Harris and Savulescu, I will seek to defend the ‘mere-difference’ view as proposed by Elizabeth Barnes. In comparing the notion of ‘bad-difference’ and ‘mere-difference’, she asserts that non-disabled individuals are very bad at predicting how disabled individuals view their own disabilities. I will explain how if antenatal screening were to be made mandatory, then it would adversely impact the disabled community by ranking their lives as inferior to the non-disabled, subsequently propagating the existing stigma against disability.

In its entirety, this paper seeks to defend the notion of procreative choice and provide a new concept of disability.

Chapter 1: Introducing Antenatal Screening

1.1. Screening Techniques
Antenatal screenings are important throughout a pregnancy as they are used to identify fetal abnormalities and can be used to diagnose a range of infectious diseases, genetic conditions (including chromosomal abnormalities), and physical conditions. If a test yields a positive result for any abnormality, disease of genetic condition, parents can try to take preventive action. Actions at their disposal may include post-diagnostic treatment for the fetus—such as surgical intervention, changing the diet of the mother, aiming to reduce disruption to family lifestyle by preparing for a disabled child, or in some cases, an abortion (Kaplan, D., 1994)¹. In this chapter, I will go through the primary screening techniques and highlight some of the fetal abnormalities that they can identify.

During the first trimester, an initial risk assessment is completed which identifies pregnant women who are at a higher chance of having an affected baby. The risk assessment includes ultrasound scans, blood tests and assesses determinants such as age, ethnicity, BMI level, and smoking status, all of which can be a predisposition to a higher chance result. The ultrasound scans are essential for checking the baby’s healthy development and can be used to identify physical abnormalities such as Spina Bifida (NHS, 2017). There are two kinds of blood tests, the PAPP-A, and the hCG test. Pregnancy Associated Plasma Protein A (PAPP-A) is a hormone produced in the placenta during pregnancy. Low levels of PAPP-A in the blood is an indication of a fault with the placenta. It causes disruption of growth in some babies and has been associated with Down’s Syndrome (NHS Trust, 2019). Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin (hCG) is another hormone produced during pregnancy. Abnormal levels of hCG are linked to a higher chance of the baby having a chromosomal disorder (Wu, B., 2018). Once screenings have been performed, the result comes back as either a higher or lower chance. For those results that fall into the higher chance category, parents are offered further testing and counselling to diagnose specific conditions.

One of the standard diagnostic techniques is Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS). During this procedure, a fine needle is passed through the woman’s abdomen into the uterus, and a sample is collected of the developing part of the placenta called the chorionic villi, which contains the same genetic material as the developing baby (Harding, M., 2016). This is a technique used to diagnose chromosomal abnormalities, such as Down’s Syndrome. The other standard diagnostic method is amniocentesis. Here, the same technique as the CVS is used but instead collects a sample of amniotic fluid from which fetal cells are extracted, allowing to test for chromosomal abnormalities (Cuckle, H., 2018). These are the primary forms of prenatal testing currently available on the NHS. They can be used to test a vast range of conditions, diseases, and disabilities.

1.2. Identifiable Disabilities

Within this thesis, I will refer to three examples that are testable using these

¹As this full-length dissertation has been printed with the original structure, the original referencing style (Harvard) will also be used, and the bibliography will be printed at the end; replacing the footnoting style that has been used thus far.
techniques; Spina Bifida, Down’s Syndrome, and Edward’s syndrome.

Spina Bifida is a physical disability that – if present – will be detected by the 20-week ultrasound scan. It occurs when the baby’s neural tube does not develop properly, leading to the spinal cord or vertebrae failing to grow as they usually would. The disability is treatable through fetal or post-birth surgery, depending on how severe the condition is. However, children that are born with spina bifida may have problems in walking or may be unable to walk, and they may also suffer learning difficulties (PHE, 2020). I will use Spina Bifida as an example of a detectable physical disability.

Down’s Syndrome is a chromosomal condition caused by having an extra copy of chromosome 21 in the cells of the body. The screening performed is a combined test of an ultrasound and a blood test, which determines the risk of Down’s Syndrome in the fetus. If deemed high chance, the pregnant woman will be offered the diagnostic test, and a CVS or amniocentesis will be carried out (PHE, 2019). People with Down’s Syndrome may struggle to manage every-day tasks, as it causes some degree of learning disability within all cases. This means that they may struggle to grasp new information, and may endure some communication issues. Opportunities for individuals with Down’s Syndrome are becoming more readily available as the research into the condition advances, and the life expectancy is rising with most living past 60. In most cases, during adulthood, they can live semi-independently, but still require a certain level of care (PHE, 2019). Unfortunately, despite high life expectancy, there is a stigma attached to Down’s Syndrome, and 90% of women who test positive during their prenatal screening end up having an abortion. I will use Down’s Syndrome as an example of an intellectual disability that has a long life expectancy.

Edward’s Syndrome is also a chromosomal condition where babies have an extra copy of chromosome 18. Unfortunately, the survival rate is very low, with only around 13% being born alive. If the baby is born alive, they will have learning disabilities and be physically challenged, both of which can be very serious, and it is rare for babies to survive to adulthood (PHE, 2019). I will use Edward’s Syndrome as an example of a life-limiting condition, where survival rates are very low.

This is the necessary background information. Disabilities are often viewed as having inherent negative value attached to them, and it is taken as intuitive that disability reduces well-being. Disabilities can be seen as disruptive to normal family lives. Making antenatal screenings mandatory could be considered necessary preventive action to reduce the harm to those affected. I will now explore the reasoning behind this concept in investigating the obligation to select against disability.

Chapter 2: Selecting Against Disability

In this chapter, I aim to outline an argument in favour of making antenatal screening for disability mandatory, primarily by exploring the connection between disability and well-being, and the duty to avoid unnecessary harm. I will discuss Savulescu’s ‘Principle of Procreative Beneficence’ (PPB) regarding
the notion of selecting the best possible children. In highlighting how the benefactors can be interpreted differently, I will assert the potential benefit antenatal screening would offer to all parties involved equally. Using Harris’ bio-enhancement theory to develop Savulescu’s argument by considering disability and its broader effect, I aim to emphasise the importance of screening for the benefit of parents and others affected by disability. By placing Savulescu’s PPB within the scope of a more general theory of bio-enhancement, his principle can be used to support the notion of mandatory antenatal screenings with its capacity to increase well-being and reduce harm. Following this, I will examine the relationship between disability and hedonistic well-being. In evaluating disability as a harmed condition, it can be said that disability fundamentally reduces well-being. This will lead me to draw the conclusion that antenatal screening for disability is necessary to reduce suffering and increase welfare, meaning that disability is fundamentally undesirable. Harris believes that it is, therefore, immoral to bring a disabled child into existence. This will lead me to discuss a strong utilitarian view on the obligation to abort babies with disabilities. On the basis of Harris’ view, screening for disability is, therefore, necessary for congenital disabilities to be eradicated – something that he believes to not only be morally permissible but a moral obligation.

2.1. Savulescu’s Principle of Procreative Beneficence

In his paper ‘Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children’ Julian Savulescu argues that we have a moral obligation to select the most favourable children. He focuses on complex non-disease traits – particularly intelligence. Currently, the screening tests are not advanced enough to test for complex non-disease characteristics, however, antenatal screenings can identify specific disabilities such as Down’s Syndrome, which causes learning difficulties (Carter, A., Gordon, C., 2013). Savulescu’s principle is still applicable in arguing that we should identify disabilities that he would consider to be detrimental to well-being. Savulescu defines the principle of procreative beneficence (PPB) as:

Couples (or single reproducers) should select the child, of the possible children they could have, who is expected to have the best life, or at least as good a life as others, based on relevant, available information (Savulescu, J., 2004).

Savulescu believes there are specific factors that directly impede living a ‘good’ life and disability is one of these factors (Savulescu, J., 2004). He believes that if the resources are available, we have a moral obligation to select against embryos that carry factors that will inevitably impede living a good quality of life. Savulescu uses an example given by Derek Parfit to illustrate how prospective parents have a duty of care towards their unborn children. A woman who has contracted rubella decides that she wants to conceive. If she were to
conceive during her illness, her child would likely be born deaf and/or blind, with other potential disabilities. He asserts that the child would be living a more reduced quality of life in comparison to a child conceived if she were cured of rubella (Savulescu, J., Kahane, G., 2009). When considering the question of whether the woman with rubella should conceive when ill or wait until she has recovered, most would agree on the latter.

This leads Savulescu to assert that a desire to have a fully-abled child who is likely to lead a good quality of life is inherent in common sense reasoning and reproductive decision making and is therefore consistent with the notion of cherishing a child (Savulescu, J., Kahane, G., 2009). Although it may not seem intuitive, he believes that his principle is one that is grounded in altruism and is attuned to unconditional love for a child, as a concern for the well-being of the potential child is paramount (Hauskeller, M., 2016). Savulescu adopts the disability-free intuition, which holds that if you were to create a child, you would intuitively create it free of any disability (Barker, M.J., Wilson, R.A., 2019). Savulescu uses this intuition as a foundation for establishing his position with the PPB, and henceforth the PPB can be used to suggest that screening for disability is of the utmost importance to reduce the number of children born with disabilities and increase chances of individuals living a good life.

Savulescu believes that disability is a ‘harmful condition’, as it fundamentally reduced welfare. He, therefore, asserts that it should be selected against, yet the harm invoked by disability is not strictly limited to the fetus. Harm also extends to the negative impact on the well-being of all those involved in caring for the disabled person. Savulescu’s PB, therefore, allows for different interpretations of the benefactors. If the benefit is considered and applied solely to the well-being of the fetus and the potential life it will live, then it leads to the complex issue of a wrongful life. Would Savulescu argue that a disabled child should be aborted based on its reduced well-being if it were to be born? Surely living with a disability is better than not living at all? Savulescu recognises that this stance is difficult to defend (Savulescu, J., Kahane, G., 2009). If the benefit is understood more broadly considering all parties involved equally, then the issue of a wrongful life becomes redundant. For example, consider the wellbeing of prospective parents. The PPB can be used to argue that screening will be beneficial in providing the relevant information needed to assess how their lives will be impacted; in turn, this information can be used to inform reproductive decision-making.

Therefore, the broader effects that a disabled child may affect the lives of parents, family members, and other parties involved are of equal importance as the well-being of the disabled person. Consequently, the PPB is best understood as a utilitarian argument when maintaining selecting against disability, as it seeks to achieve maximal good for the greatest number. Savulescu’s principle, therefore, works successfully in arguing for making screening for disability mandatory within its more general capacity to maximise well-being and reducing harm. For this reason, within the subject of disability screening, the PPB is to be applied more broadly to consider the benefit to all those affected equally.
2.2. John Harris' Bio-Enhancement Theory

The concept of having a duty to select against disability can be developed using John Harris' bio-enhancement theory. Harris suggests that a real concern for well-being is synonymous with the moral obligation to strive for human enhancement. For Harris, this involves anything that enables human flourishing, and any factor that hinders this should be avoided. He believes that we have a responsibility to utilise all relevant information possible to make decisions that are most likely to cause human enhancement (Chan, S., Harris, J., 2007). This can be used to argue that antenatal screening should be used to gather information about the fetus and assess the effects that a disabled child may have in preventing human flourishing. This would enable an educated decision to be made on whether to continue with the pregnancy. Harris says that using this information is no different from using readily available medical advice to determine a child's fate - he gives the example of how pregnant women are encouraged to manage a healthy diet and avoid alcohol to promote normal growth of the fetus (Chan, S., Harris, J., 2007).

Harris' bio-enhancement theory can be used to develop and strengthen Savulescu's PPB to further consider more the benefit to the parents. If we assess Savulescu's principle within the scope of a general theory of bio-enhancement, then the principle works in asserting that screening for disability would provide benefit to the prospective parents in enabling them to establish - if the diagnostic screening results are positive - how far having a disabled child will prevent them in living their life as planned. Therefore, all discussed previously can be used to argue that reproducers have a moral obligation to use the relevant information gathered from antenatal screening about the risk of the child being born with a disability to make an educated decision about terminating or continuing the pregnancy. Decisions will be made with increasing human enhancement and well-being in mind so that all those involved will still live the best possible life. With antenatal screening being able to identify disabilities such as Edward's syndrome where most babies die before they are born, prenatal screening would give the option for reproducers to terminate the pregnancy, saving them the distress of a likely still-birth. However, babies who are born Down's Syndrome have a much longer life expectancy, and so the notion of selecting children based on welfare requires more analysis.

2.3. The Relationship Between Disability and Well-Being

At the centre of the notion of selecting against disability is a concern for living a 'good' life and increasing welfare for all those affected. I now move on to explore what constitutes a good life, and whether having a disability necessarily impairs quality of life. The disability-free intuition, adopted by Savulescu and Harris, assumes that disability reduces well-being. The need for medication, check-ups, and constant care seems to challenge the aim of living an enhanced life of flourishing for all those affected. Consequently, most would agree that what is conventionally viewed as a 'good' life is less attainable if affected
Desire Fulfilment Theory
2. Objective List Theory

Although all three ideas may be considered, I will focus on the hedonistic view of well-being, as I believe it to be the most successful in identifying a disability as harmful and most plausibly holds disability to be detrimental to well-being. 

Hedonism is centred around pleasure, so on this view, a ‘good’ life is a pleasurable one. Experiences that give pleasure are positive ones, and those that create discomfort, pain or suffering are negative. With this being the basis of valuable experiences, we act to maximise those that are pleasurable.

Famously argued for by John Stuart Mill in his theory of utilitarianism, there are higher and lower pleasures (Mill, J.S., 1859). Lower pleasures are ones of bodily experiences such as drinking alcohol or engaging in sexual activities. They do not sufficiently contribute to human flourishing and tend to be fleeting. However, higher pleasures are ones of intrinsic value involving activities such as learning or being physically active. These are ones which allow us to exercise our human capacities (Brink, D., 2018). Maximising pleasure is pivotal in hedonistic theories, but minimising pain, suffering, and harm are of equal importance. If disability causes harm or hinders accessing higher pleasures, the value of the lived experience of those affected by disability is negatively affected, and it follows that their quality of life is significantly reduced. Measures should be taken to avoid it. In this view, to live a good life, one must primarily prevent unnecessary harm and increase valuable experiences. 

Savulescu and Harris are clear in stating disability as a harmful condition, meaning it hinders accessing higher pleasures and valuable experience. I believe that the hedonistic concept of well-being is the one that is most plausible in arguing disability as a condition of harm. When referring to well-being, welfare, and the good life, I will, therefore, restrict my argument to the hedonistic view discussed above, as a more exhaustive discussion would be needed to consider the desire fulfilment and objective list theories.

This leads me onto a hedonistic discussion of disability as a ‘harmed condition’ – a phrase coined by Harris to maintain that disability invokes harm and detriments quality of life (Harris, J., 1998). Harris gives an account of disability in terms of the limited opportunities and unachievable worthwhile experiences. He asserts that disability incurs harm for the individual because it hinders a maximally good life through deprivation of positive, rewarding experiences (Edwards, S.D, 2014). These positive, rewarding experiences are those he considers to be meaningful. In hedonistic terms, these are achievable via exercising higher pleasures. If a disability prevents achieving higher pleasures, then experiences within the life of a disabled person are not maximally meaningful.
Harris simply believes that a healthy individual is likely to lead a far more fulfilling life than that of a disabled person. He talks specifically of deafness as a disability. The inability to listen to music, the limited aesthetic pleasure, not knowing the sound of your own or other people’s voices is something he believes to be a harmed condition (Edwards, S., 2013). I would assume that this is because aesthetic pleasure – learning about music and the arts – is something he considers to be a worthwhile experience. Based on what Harris believes about deafness, it is not far fetched to assume he would say the same about physical and intellectual disabilities too. A child living with Down syndrome would be less able to achieve advanced experiences that involve higher levels of emotional and mental maturity and will suffer from learning difficulties, which in turn may cause distress for family members. Disabilities fundamentally prevent worthwhile experiences for all those affected; hence, Harris labels it as a harmed condition. If the individual is precluded in completing tasks that exercise higher pleasures due to living with a disability, then they live a reduced quality of life than if they were otherwise unaffected by disability. They are prevented from exploring enriching opportunities and experiences and therefore are more “disadvantaged on balance” (Vehmas, A., Shakespeare, T., 2013). Ultimately, disability is something that causes disadvantages in comparison to the life of an individual unaffected by disability. On balance, those affected by disability are disadvantaged in the sense that it is significantly much harder to achieve enriching, worthwhile experiences. Therefore, disability leads to a more reduced quality of life.

In bringing these points together, antenatal screening identifies babies at risk of being born with disabilities, and to argue that they must be made mandatory, there must be a clear correlation between living with or being affected by disability, and reduced quality of life. I believe that in exploring Harris’ theory of bio-enhancement and placing the principle of procreative beneficence within its scope, the connection has been made. In asserting disability as a ‘harmed condition’, Harris develops an argument that highlights the adverse effect that disability has on a hedonistic account of well-being, that which seeks to maximise utility and reduce harm for the greatest number. Mandatory antenatal screening for disability is therefore consistent with Harris’ bio-enhancement theory and Savulescu’s principle of procreative beneficence. Their position supports the benefit of obtaining the knowledge needed to determine the negative effect that a disabled child will have on well-being, and subsequently aiming to reduce harm by using the information to make educated decisions about continuation or termination of the pregnancy.

2.4. Aborting Babies with Disabilities

Savulescu has been criticised for his principle of being cold. However, studies show that more than 90% of women who are identified as carrying a fetus with Down’s Syndrome chose to terminate the pregnancy (Shakespeare, T., Hull, R.J., 2018). This highlights how the disability-free intuition is inbuilt into conventional thinking, supporting Savulescu’s claims that we instinctively
want the most favourable child. With so few women choosing to continue the pregnancy, there can be made a utilitarian argument concerning abortion after a positive diagnostic screening test. The utilitarian theory works in accordance with hedonism and holds that ethical decision making should be guided by what is maximally good or pleasurable for the majority of the people. When we consider disability as a harmed condition that reduces well-being, then it is apparent that the life lived of those affected is not maximally good.

Harris believes that there should be an effort to eradicate disability. Not only is it moral to wish for a non-disabled child, but it is immoral to bring a disabled child into existence knowingly. He draws on the disability-free intuition asserting that there is a rational preference to be non-disabled, stating that it is morally required to prefer to produce a non-disabled child where there is the decision to do so (Harris, J., 1998). The suffering invoked by disability where it could have been otherwise avoided is one that is needless, and parents should act to prevent all unnecessary suffering. Therefore, based on the principle of utility, Harris asserts that not only is the abortion of disabled children morally permissible, but it is a moral obligation (Edwards, S.D., 2001). This leads to the utilitarian conclusion that aborting a disabled child should be carried out based on screening test results, as it will maximise well-being and significantly reduce unavoidable harm.

In summary, the PPB understood concerning the benefit to all those affected by disability, and the theory of bio-enhancement shows a clear connection between disability and a reduced sense of well-being. I have highlighted the role that the welfare of all those who will inevitably be affected by disability plays in reproductive decision making. The argument for mandatory screening for disability, therefore, lies in its ability to identify disabilities that hinder living a good life. Using Harris’ concept of disability as a fundamental harm and in arguing that we must seek to reduce unnecessary harm where possible, I have provided a utilitarian argument for the selective termination of pregnancies. For the benefit to the prospective parents and their welfare, I believe that this argument is successful in providing a reason for the notion of mandatory antenatal screenings. However, this reasoning is based on the idea of disability having inherent negative value – this is the ‘bad-difference’ view which is often assumed as opposed to argued for.

In my next chapter, I aim to show that the bad-difference view is not to be taken for granted as it is not the common-place view among the disabled community. I will provide an argument against the notion of mandatory antenatal screening for disability via refuting the claims above and providing a new concept of disability.

Chapter 3: Defending Choice for Antenatal Screening

In this chapter, I will refute the claims made by Savulescu and Harris in an attempt to argue against the notion of mandatory antenatal screenings. I will use Schramme’s article ‘Disability (not) as a harmful condition’ in response to the claims made by John Harris and explain why Savulescu’s theory is
unsuccessful. I will establish my position in agreeing with Schramme, moving on to discuss a new concept of disability. In her book, *The Minority Body*, Elizabeth Barnes draws a comparison between bad-difference – a position endorsed by Savulescu and Harris, and mere-difference – the view she upholds. Mere-difference maintains that although disability may entail some features that are considered harmful, this does not mean that the disability is ‘bad’ in and of itself. Barnes then offers a value-neutral model of the mere-difference view that interprets disability without attributing intrinsic disvalue. I will argue that this is a better model of disability than the one provided when considering the position of Savulescu and Harris, and as disability is no longer considered a ‘harmful condition’, the argument in favour of making antenatal screening mandatory is refuted. I will move on further to consider the implications of making antenatal screenings mandatory in perpetuating the existing stigma against disabled people leading me to assert that not only would it be unnecessary to make prenatal testing mandatory, but an inescapable prenatal diagnosis would be discriminatory.

3.1. Disability Not As A Harmed Condition

In his paper ‘Disability (not) as a harmful condition’, Schramme discusses the claim associated with John Harris, which asserts that disability is fundamentally harmful in decreasing quality of life. Schramme highlights how ‘Disability is first and foremost dis-ability, that is, lack of ability’ (Schramme, T., 2014, pp.72). The commonplace view is that loss of ability leads to a disadvantage in some way. This negative evaluation means that disability is rarely viewed as a neutral state – it is nearly always considered bad for the individual who has it. Schramme would like to redefine disability concerning well-being and refute Harris’s argument that disability is a harmful condition. Schramme argues that loss of ability is not only understood in terms of physical or intellectual ability, but also opportunity. Disability is, therefore, impairment of intrinsic features – such as the ability to walk or hear – and limited opportunity due to environmental factors. The discussion of disability understood as a medical concept as opposed to a social construct has been a topical discussion in recent years; Schramme regards it evident that disability being viewed in a negative light is a result of both factors. What he is concerned with, is the evaluative aspect of how value is attributed to disability (Schramme, T., 2014).

The concept of well-being and quality of life is a traditional philosophical notion. As exhibited in Parfit’s tripartite distinction of well-being, several theories aim to outline what constitutes the good life, however, ultimately, this means that there is no conclusive way of identifying what constitutes well-being. Therefore, the implications of evaluating disability in terms of quality of life are ambiguous. The leading theory of well-being discussed in the previous chapter is the hedonistic view – the view that maximisation of pleasure and reduction of pain is pivotal in constituting well-being. However, attribution of a positive and negative value is instantiated through individual conscious experience (Schramme, T., 2014). What is pleasurable for me might
not be pleasurable for you, so value in terms of hedonism is ontologically subjective (dependent on individual preference or experience). This means that if an individual does not experience living with the disability as harmful, then we cannot assume the ‘badness’ of living with it. Furthermore, lived experience is different for every person. So even if the disability has negatively impacted an individual’s life, then we cannot take this as a generalisation for all lived experiences.

Schramme argues that well-being can be reduced for an individual in two ways;

1. Harm induced by life-threatening disease or pain – a non-comparative idea of what is harmful.
2. The harm caused by a worsened situation – a comparative idea of what is harmful.

He gives an example where your home has been devastated by a fire, and mine is in perfect condition. Comparatively, your well-being has been reduced in that you are much worse off than me. This kind of harm is situational and subject to individual evaluation. This can be extended into the medical realm as it is plausible to say that I would rather not have the flu than have the flu. On the other hand, there are certain medical conditions viewed as neither good nor bad. Schramme gives the example of being dyslexic in a situation where reading and writing competency is irrelevant (Schramme, T., 2014). So, Schramme identifies comparative harm to depend on subjective evaluation and situational relevance. It is, therefore, plausible to assert that one would rather be healthy than living with a disability. However, for disability to be necessarily considered a harmful condition – as Harris argues – then disability would have to decrease well-being as non-comparative harm. The primary concern, then, is whether or not a disability is an absolute harm. For this to be true, it must be harmful not through means of comparison, but something that an individual would wish to eradicate from their lives. However, disability is something individuals are often born with, and it is something which – much of the time – fundamentally constructs their identity. Despite some people viewing it negatively, some embrace their disability as a part of their identity, meaning that it is up to the individual whether they chose to construe disability as positive or negative (Schramme, T., 2014). Ultimately then, this means that we cannot attribute absolute negative value to a disability, and disability cannot be viewed as a condition of harm.

I agree with this argument. The individual experience associated with a disability is entirely different from person to person – whether this is living with it or being part of the care and support team for a disabled person. The common-sense view of disability as harmful is a sweeping generalisation which is usually attributed to disability by individuals who do not live with a disability. Ideas of pleasure and pain are ontologically subjective due to individual lived experiences. So, for this reason, we cannot attribute positive and negative value to disability in terms of well-being understood
hedonistically. With Harris’s concept of the harmed condition failing, his bio-enhancement theory is undermined, and therefore Savulescu’s principle does not work when placed within its scope.

3.2. A Critique of Savulescu

The minimum requirement for Savulescu’s principle of procreative beneficence to work is being able to rank the lives of individuals as inferior or superior (Parker, M., 2007). To do this, we have to be able to understand the complex concepts of quality of life and well-being objectively. As I have shown, these concepts are much more complex than it seems on the surface. It has become apparent that it is difficult to pinpoint what it is within my life or that of my parents or friends that seem to make it go well. To establish what has made one’s life go poorly we reflect on the lives of others and our own, and although we may be able to identify some conditions that lead to a good life, we cannot use them in a determinate way (Parker, M., 2007). Therefore, the fundamentals that constitute well-being cannot be reduced to simple elements meaning that we cannot identify deterministic features that can be applied to embryos and fetuses. Furthermore, even if concepts of well-being could be reduced to testable features, they would still be derived from social practices meaning they would arise from intersubjectivity. Parker asserts that we have no concrete idea of what constitutes the ‘best possible life’, so we cannot use it as a deterministic feature in reproductive decision making – a position that Savulescu maintains of significant importance.

Parker also asserts that the pursuit of the best possible life is self-defeating. The hedonist will forever be seeking further pleasure in the pursuit of self-improvement. This is exhausting and will inevitably lead to dissatisfaction. These concepts that entail a good human life have come from relative social practices and intersubjective social value, and so the principle of procreative beneficence is necessarily tied to these notions. Parker argues that for Savulescu’s principle to work, he would have to successfully account for social and political dimensions and grasp an objective understanding of well-being (Parker, M., 2007). As the hedonistic view of well-being is individualistic and subject to personal preference, an objective sense of well-being is unachievable, and Savulescu’s principle of procreative beneficence is unsuccessful. I agree with this position. Savulescu oversimplifies complex philosophical ideas of well-being and the good life. His principle of procreative beneficence and Harris’s idea of disability as a harmful condition does not hold up to the criticism I have explored, and there is no longer a case for antenatal screenings being made mandatory. However, most people still find the disability-free intuition reasonable in assuming that a life with a disability is intrinsically worse than a life without. Although we cannot say that disability is an absolute harm, it might still be plausible to say that disability is still an undesirable defect. I now move onto a discussion of Elizabeth Barnes’ concept of how disability is valued and her defence of disability as a mere-difference. This makes the case against compulsory antenatal screenings and diagnosis.
3.3 Defending the Mere-Difference View

Elizabeth Barnes, in her book *The Minority Body*, argues for a different concept of disability. She asserts that disability is a social construct that has been determined by ignorance and prejudice, but disability is also defined as an objective physical condition. Between these two models, a concept of disability is formed (Barnes, E., 2014). Barnes distinguishes between the ‘bad-difference’ view (what she holds to be the standard intuition, and indeed, the one endorsed by Savulescu and Harris) and the ‘mere-difference’ view (the one she argues for). There is no easy way to characterise either view because it entails a complex discussion between disability and its relationship with well-being – of which we have no standard definition. I will now go through how she establishes the bad-difference view as the usual intuition, and why it is incoherent.

Barnes defines the bad-difference view as believing that disability negatively affects well-being. She considers four different ways of characterising the bad difference view:

1. Disability is something that is an automatic or intrinsic cost to your well-being.
2. Were society fully accepting of disabled people, it would still be the case that for any given disabled person x and any arbitrary non-disabled person y, such that x and y are in relevantly similar personal and socio-economic circumstances, it is likely that x has a lower level of well-being than y in virtue of x’s disability.
3. For any arbitrary disabled person x, if you could hold x’s personal and socio-economic circumstances fixed but remove their disability, you would thereby improve their well-being.
4. Consider two possible worlds, w and w*, which are relevantly similar to the actual world except that w contains no ableism and w* contains both no ableism and no disabled people. The overall level of well-being in w* is higher than the overall level of well-being in w, in virtue of the fact that w* contains no disabled people (Barnes, E., 2016, Pp.60-61)

None of these views are necessary for maintaining the bad-difference view, but any of them are sufficient. When I discuss the bad-difference view, I will do so regarding (iv), as it is the version that Savulescu would likely acknowledge. Savulescu compares a disabled and non-disabled child in the same way the above text draws the comparison between a world with and without a disability. The (iv) version of the bad-difference holds that world w* has a higher level of well-being in virtue of the fact that it has no disability – something I believe Savulescu would also suppose.

Barnes deems the bad-difference view to be the common-sense intuition. This is philosophically important because it is generally assumed rather than argued for by the non-disabled majority (Barnes, E., 2014). This intuition also claims that individuals are justified in believing that there is a negative
connection between disability and well-being. However, these judgements are taken from a social context in which disabled people have faced profound barriers due to a stigma induced by prejudice (Barnes, E., 2016). For the bad-difference view to be right, disability would have to detriment well-being without the social prejudices in place – something Barnes is sceptical about for two reasons.

Her first reason is empirical. Studies have shown that non-disabled people are very bad at predicting how disabled people view their disabilities. We assume that it is something they see to be undesirable and would rather live without, however studies have shown us to be wrong about that. As seen in Schramme’s article, a lot of the time an individual’s disability becomes a fundamental part of their identity. So, the intuition that disability is perceived as a negative aspect of an individual’s life has been proven to be wrong. Her second reason for being sceptical is philosophical. A claim based on intuition is an unreliable one. We have the intuition for a specific reason – perhaps it is because it may cause a shortened life span. Yet men have shorter life spans than a woman, but we do not consider gender to be a negative aspect of a man’s life, and the idea of a ‘substantially’ reduced lifespan is ambiguous. Perhaps we have the intuition because some disabilities are associated with chronic pain, yet research suggests that the best interpretation of well-being in respect of pain is the attitude towards the pain itself, which will also differ depending on individual pain threshold (Barnes, E., 2016). Barnes argues that the assumption of the correlation between physical pain and well-being has been grossly oversimplified. She says that even if these assumptions were to be accurate, they do not point to the truth of the bad-difference view, as they are still consistent with the mere-difference view.

As I have established, Barnes believes that disability has been labelled as a negative trait due to its social perception, yet this tells us nothing about the inherent nature of disability as damaging. Barnes uses the example of sexuality to illustrate how ‘gayness’ is perceived as a mere-difference despite its connection to depression, increased anxiety, and suicide (Barnes, E., 2016). Most would agree that any discrepancy in the well-being of a gay man in comparison to the welfare of a straight man would be as a result of the way that homosexuality is viewed within society. The same can be said for disability. The mere-difference view can maintain that disability entails a loss of intrinsic goods, but that this is not enough to label disability as unfavorable. It says that being disabled does not make you ‘worse off’, it makes you different. Often, it is the same thing that causes disabled individuals to lose out in some way that allows them to participate in other goods that are uniquely associated with the disability. However, the mere-difference view is not identical with the social construct view which states that ‘It is society that disables’ (Barnes, E., 2016). Although there may be aspects of a specific disability that are bad for the individual, the mere-difference view defines the disability itself as value-free. In the same way, it would be wrong to interfere with the life of a child who will grow up to be homosexual to ensure they will grow up to be heterosexual; we should not interfere with the potential lives of children to ensure that they will
Despite this forceful line of argument, a persuasive objection has been raised in response to the mere-difference view. This objection states that if the value-neutral concept of disability is true, then it would be morally permissible to cause disability in a fetus intentionally. Harris is one provocateur of this objection. He specifically refers to individuals that hold the disabled community to be differently-abled as opposed to subjects of a harmed condition and asserts that it is implausible to believe this. Harris states;

Would the following statement be plausible—would it be anything but a sick joke? “I have just accidentally deafened your child, it was quite painless and no harm was done so you needn’t be concerned or upset!” Or suppose a hospital were to say to a pregnant mother: “Unless we give you a drug your fetus will become deaf. Since the drug costs £5 and there is no harm in being deaf we see no reason to fund this treatment” (Harris, J., 2001, pp.384)

Harris believes that this clearly goes against disability intuition. Even if we are not to consider disability a ‘harmed condition’, Harris still finds it is implausible to think the mere-difference view, as it would morally allow to intentionally create disability which most would agree is fundamentally wrong. However, Barnes responds to this objection.

Barnes argues that Harris is incorrect when inferring the permissibility of causing disability from the truth of the mere-difference view. To refute this inference, she appeals to other features that are considered mere-differences. Replace disability with homosexuality in the objection. The objection would read ‘if there is no intrinsic “bad-value” attached to homosexuality, then it would be permissible to force an individual to grow up as a homosexual.’ Barnes appeals to a principle of non-interference where most of us would intuitively say that it is wrong to interfere with an autonomous life to alter and determine sexuality, yet this does not hold straightness or gayness with any superiority over the other (Barnes, E., 2014). It follows that inferring the permissibility of direct interference from asserting something as a mere-difference is not one that is generally accepted. The same reasoning should be applied to disability. I believe that Barnes successfully refutes Harris’ objection.

The mere-difference concept of disability is compelling, and I believe Barnes’ view to be correct. I think that the way she illustrates her view through contrasting sexuality and disability is a forceful comparison. When considering the historical relevance of the social prejudice that was held against homosexuality, it is clear that much of the discrepancy between the well-being of a disabled person and a non-disabled person is socially constructed. The treatment of the homosexual community has changed; what is now considered a difference was once considered an illness. There is no denying that disability is, first and foremost, a lack of ability, yet this is not enough to label it as a negative trait. We can use the mere-difference view to argue against the notion of mandatory antenatal screenings. Disability is a difference. It leads to living a
different life with different opportunities. This life is not one that is necessarily a bad life, nor is it one that is necessarily good – this is down to individual perception of one’s own disability. Having successfully refuted the claim that disability fundamentally reduces well-being, the argument for mandatory prenatal screenings on this basis fails. I now move on to argue that if they were to be made compulsory, then it would aggravate the existing stigma against disabled people so that it would do more damage than good.

3.4. Mandatory Antenatal Screening and Perpetuating a Stigma

It is apparent to me that there is a powerful connection between selective termination of pregnancy due to prenatal diagnosis and discrimination against disabilities. As I previously discussed, 90% of fetuses tested positively for Down’s Syndrome are aborted (Shakespeare, T., Hull, R., 2018). Critics claim that the link between positive diagnoses and termination of pregnancies sends a bad message to disabled people in assuming that the disabled-born child would undoubtedly be a burden to others – mainly family and primary carers. This is the burden assumption (Rubeis, G., and Steger, F., 2019). The problem, then, is that a compulsory prenatal diagnosis would perpetuate an existing stigma against disability, subsequently ostracising the disabled minority further.

Prenatal testing and diagnosis assume that disabled children would be a burden and aims to reduce the number of babies born with congenital disabilities. In making the burden assumption, prenatal testing is a discriminatory medical practice as opposed to a value-neutral one. There is no treatment for many of the fetal abnormalities that can be identified, so all a prenatal diagnosis does is provide prospective parents with information to decide on whether to terminate a life they deem to be ‘unworthy’ (Rubeis, G., and Steger, F., 2019). Not only does this send a message to those who exist with disabilities that their lives are less worthy than their non-disabled friends and family, but it also sends a message to parents with disabled children that they have produced a child that should have otherwise been prevented. Furthermore, social pressure may cause prospective parents to make a choice to abort a child that they otherwise would not have aborted, undermining autonomous choice (Rubeis, G., and Steger, F., 2019).

Two arguments can develop this further. The first is the expressivist argument, which is consistent with my previous discussions. Expressivist arguments hold that prenatal testing used to identify undesirable traits is discriminatory and hurtful to those who live with a disability. Put simply, they ‘express’ prejudiced views about disabled people (Shakespeare, T., 2006). This can be understood in consequentialist terms by saying that making antenatal screenings mandatory would only contribute to worsening the oppression and prejudice against disabled people, doing more bad than good. Shakespeare contends that instead of aiming to prevent the birth of people who would experience the oppression, we should channel our focus into removing the social exclusion within society. He also highlights that every person suffers at some point throughout their lives, and if the aim of making prenatal diagnosis
obligatory were to reduce suffering and increase well-being, then the only solution would be to abstain from reproduction all together (Shakespeare, T., 2016).

There have been attempts to combat this objection, firstly, by attempting to separate the disability from the person. In isolating the disability from the individual, it can be said that that screening does not imply any negative value on the lived experience of people with a disability (Edwards, S.D., 2002). However, as I have discussed, for many disabled people, they believe their disability to be a part of their identity in a metaphysical sense. Therefore, separation of disability and individual identity is not readily achievable. The second attempt to combat this objection is to say that the decision to terminate a pregnancy after a positive disability screen does not necessarily involve a negative attitude towards the disabled community and that it does not mean to convey a hurtful message. However, once more, this is unsuccessful in refuting the expressivist argument. Even if the negative message is not ‘meant’, the practice of screening for disability and the subsequent rise in abortions after a positive screen still lends itself to ranking the moral status of lives (Edwards, S.D., 2002). It is apparent that the process of screening for disability sends a discriminatory message to the disabled community in placing their lives as inferior to the non-disabled regardless of intention.

The second argument is the ‘parental attitude argument’, which asserts that selecting one trait over another is a poor concept of parenthood. It optimises, encourages, and justifies advances to create the perfect child, leading to the complex discussion of the so-called ‘designer baby’ (Rubeis, G., and Steger, F., 2019). On the parental attitude argument, the child is one that has been selected, not loved unconditionally, and cherished irrespective of the way they are born. Savulescu states that cherishing a child is synonymous with his principle of procreative beneficence, but it now becomes apparent that his principle is inconsistent with this notion.

After consideration of how enforcing antenatal testing as routine during pregnancy would result in discrimination against disabled people, I have come to conclude that not only would the notion of mandatory antenatal screenings be unnecessary, it would do more bad than good. I have refuted the principle of procreative beneficence in examining a different concept of disability provided by Elizabeth Barnes. I find myself drawn to her theory, and agree that disability is mainly viewed in a negative light due to the way society subordinates disabled people. Therefore, I believe that disability is a mere-difference, as opposed a bad-difference, and disability is not inherently bad, but some negative aspects may be associated with specific disabilities. Subsequently, I believe that routine antenatal testing is unnecessary. After examining the expressionist view and the parental attitude view, I have come to agree with the fact that obligatory antenatal screening for disability would send a negative message to those living with disabilities in identifying their lives as worth less than that of a non-disabled person.

**Summary and Conclusion**
There is no good reason for making antenatal screening mandatory. I have examined a position that would endorse mandatory screening by asserting the benefit that it has in identifying for disability and enables parents to assess the effects that bringing a disabled child into existence would have on their lives. I have developed this notion using John Harris' theory of bio-enhancement to suggest that a disabled child may hinder human flourishing for all parties affected. The disability-free intuition assumes a negative impact on the well-being of all those impacted. To understand and develop this intuition, I examined the relationship between disability and a hedonistic view of well-being.

I found that the argument for making antenatal screening for disability mandatory lies in the truth of a reduced sense of well-being as a result of a disability. Within the hedonistic view, disability is indeed a harmful condition, which hinders achieving fulfilling experiences and negatively impacts a life lived. I argued that it would be therefore necessary to make antenatal screening for disability mandatory to reduce unnecessary harm and suffering not only to disabled individuals but to all those affected. Harris believes that disability should be eradicated, which led to discussing the concept of selective termination against disability. This view is endorsed by Harris, who holds that we have a moral obligation to avoid bringing a disabled child into existence to reduce the level of avoidable and unnecessary suffering. In order to make this selective termination, there must be screening to identify fetal abnormalities in the first place. However, this is something I found to be inherently morally problematic, and the remainder of my thesis aimed to refute this claim.

I firstly contested the view that disability is a 'harmed condition'. I argued that disability could not be considered comparative harm, nor can disability be absolute harm, as disability fundamentally constitutes personal identity, which is often embraced by individuals who do not view it negatively. I then identified the minimum requirement for Savulescu's principle to work as the ability to rank lives as inferior. This is not possible, as what constitutes well-being is not reducible to simple elements. After successfully refuting the claims made in the previous chapter, I examined how value is attributed to disability and defended the mere-difference concept of disability, which is value-neutral. I defended the notion of choice by asserting that there is no inherent bad value that is associated with disability, and therefore disability does not necessarily reduce well-being.

I examined the issue of causing disability and refuted this objection. I used this concept of disability to assert that there is no good reason to make antenatal screening mandatory. I proceeded to use the expressivist argument to emphasise the bad message that mandatory screening for disability would send to the disabled community in ranking the moral status of their lives as inferior to the non-disabled. This leads me to conclude that not only is there no good reason to make screening for disability mandatory, but it would be immoral and discriminatory. Therefore, antenatal screening for disability must remain a choice.
Bibliography


Shakespeare, T., (2006), Disability Rights and Wrongs, Questioning prenatal diagnosis


Student Reflection

If I could give any advice it would be to do a bit of research into what the supervisors specialise in and try to find someone who will be as interested in your thesis as you are. Communicate with your supervisor and try to sort out some meetings, ask questions if you’re confused, all of the staff are lovely and I’m sure they would be happy to help. Work in whatever way works best for you, but don’t leave it until the last minute. I sorted out little deadlines throughout the year and focused on hitting those deadlines. It meant that I wasn’t overwhelmed when it came to finishing and finessing my thesis while also having other deadlines and revision for exams. I didn’t choose my final title until I had a first draft of my dissertation so it could be tailored specifically to what I had written, it also meant I could be flexible with my approach to the topic.

Most importantly, choose to do your thesis on something you are genuinely interested in. It makes up a big chunk of your final year and you’ll be researching your chosen topic throughout -- make sure you’re going to enjoy it and be proud of it when you’re done. Go steady and take your time, being organised is key. Good luck!

Marker Comments

This is a thoroughly-researched, sympathetic and responsible piece of work. Clarity of expression and organisation are admirable, and contribute to powerful arguments towards a reasoned conclusion. Jemima started planning her dissertation early and used the supervision sessions wisely. She listened closely to advice and feedback and used it to her advantage.

Prof Thomas Schramme & Dr Chris Bartley
This Anthology is a testimony to the effort, curiosity and philosophical creativity of the 2019/2020 dissertation students. The work is all the more impressive when we remember that it was completed during the Covid-19 pandemic. It shows that if you plan carefully, spread your research and writing over both semesters, and keep regular contact with your supervisor, you will be left with a piece of work you will be proud of long after your studies are over. Special thanks to PhilSoc for funding printing. Most importantly, congratulations to Alice Goodwin, whose hard work and enthusiasm as editor has brought this Anthology into existence.

Dr Rachael Wiseman