Final Year Anthology
Department of Philosophy 2021/2022
A Selection of Undergraduate Dissertations and Digital Inquiry Projects

The University of Liverpool

This is the Final Year Anthology of work from undergraduate students at the University of Liverpool's Department of Philosophy in 2021-2022.

Included are a selection dissertation extracts from students who spent part of the final year working on an in-depth piece of research, and completed a dissertation essay of around ten thousand words. The three dissertations receiving the highest marks are presented at the end, with the top marked dissertation presented in full.

Also included are two Digital Inquiry Project excerpts, from a module that was offered as an alternative to the dissertation. Here, the students had to analyse a philosophical problem and produce a piece of work on an online platform, and hyperlinks have been included so they can be viewed.

    If you have a smartphone, the adjacent QR codes can be scanned with your camera app and the projects will appear. If you are reading this book in centuries to come, please consult your local Artificial Intelligence for more information about how this data from our era may be accessed.

Gillian Howie House
Department of Philosophy
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Summer 2022

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Foreword, from the Head of the Department of Philosophy

Dissertations are very special. It takes courage and determination to write one, and it requires genuine research unlike anything most students will have done before. And very often the results are impressive, the crowning achievement of a student's undergraduate career, something to be rightly proud of.

I am very pleased that this year some of the best dissertations have again been collected in an anthology. Many thanks to Rhys Jones and Jonnie Mills for putting it together. The topics show an astonishing variety of interests, mirroring the breadth of the Department of Philosophy's teaching portfolio. It's also good to see that many have a decidedly applied angle, dealing with problems and new developments that we all have to grapple with in one way or another, such as climate change, artificial intelligence, racism, or death and disease.

And this is as it should be, at least here at Liverpool in our Department. Earlier this year we moved into a new building, which last month we officially renamed the "Gillian Howie House". Gillian Howie was the first (and so far only) female professor of Philosophy at the University of Liverpool. She was also Head of the Philosophy Department until her untimely death of cancer at the age of 47. Throughout her life, Gill Howie was committed to social and political activism. This commitment was at the centre of her philosophical work. Even in the most theoretical of her writings her underlying concern lay with praxis-related questions revolving around the politics of justice.

Her philosophical work delved deeply into the territory of political and social science, cultural studies and literary criticism. She created the at the time hugely influential *Institute for Feminist Theory and Research* at the University of Liverpool, seeking to develop feminist philosophy and to consider how this would change and respond to wider social developments for women and feminists. She also made a significant contribution to the philosophy of education.

More recently and in the light of her own illness, she led a research project, *New Thinking On Living with Dying*, in which she explored the philosophical significance of life-limiting illness. She brought her own feelings to the project with typical candour. A lecture she gave as part of the project can be watched on YouTube[1]. In it, she considers questions such as whether knowledge of impending death gives enhanced or reduced meaning to the actions taken in one's life.

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[1] How to Think about Death: Living with Dying, 21/03/12
https://youtu.be/czaaTDr09bc

Philosophy, for her, was not detached theoretical reflection, but deeply personal and an essential means of coping with the contingencies and challenges that life throws at us, or as she put it[2]: "If philosophy has a role to play in our lives at all it must be that it can help alleviate our suffering during times of crisis and fear. (…) Philosophical reflection – if nothing else – ought to be able to relieve anxiety, to provide the conceptual clarification that could be placed as a series of stepping-stones through any dark night. (…) For Epicurus there is no point to philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul. Perhaps if the question were rightly asked, philosophy could settle this question: how can I suffer with this? Our question, simply put, is: how can we live right up to dying?"

Just as Gillian Howie as a person and a philosopher, the dissertations collected here represent what we aspire to be as a Department, standing for a commitment to go beyond the traditional core areas of philosophy and engage with the wider, discipline-transcending issues relating to individual and collective well-being, inclusion and diversity, and equality and social justice.

Professor Michael Hauskeller
July 2022

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[2] Professor Gillian Howie …*Death; you can't live with it, you can't live without it.* https://newthinkingaboutlivingwithdying.wordpress.com/2012/06/28/death-you-cant-live-with-it-you-cant-live-without-it/

Editor's Introduction

I'd like to give thanks to all the academics and students who have helped me with my studies, and for allowing me to be the editor of this Anthology. As a mature student it's been an enlightening and humbling experience to study philosophy alongside brilliant people who are virtually all younger and smarter than me, in a subject that I knew little about but felt would improve my thinking, writing, and understanding of the world. It undeniably has.

I'd also like to emphasise that the great individual achievements this Anthology represents come from the next generation of philosophers, and I feel that isn't a word to be taken lightly. Going forward, a degree such as ours now qualifies us, at all times and in all situations ***to be philosophers*** – people trained to appreciate the fundamental difficulties and great joys all human beings encounter. I trust that we will all rise to the challenge and be proud of that label we have worked so hard to achieve.

I wish to dedicate my work here to one of us who didn't make it on the journey. Ceara Thacker (1999-2018) was one of our fellows who passed away in tragic circumstances on the final day of my first-year of study. In the brief time I knew her she was always a bright, sparkling presence, and her ongoing gift to me has been to appreciate what philosophy and university means on a more profound level than I'd ever intended. After her passing, continuing with my philosophy studies seemed like a pointless exercise, but I'm now glad that I took the time to reassess and finally end up completing my degree this year, amongst this wonderful cohort, some five years after starting it.

Often the deepest philosophical insights will be found in the most unexpected places. I've realised that the most cunning philosophers come in disguise – as homeless addicts, schoolchildren, penniless Austrian billionaires, even locked inside secure institutions. I hope you meet some great ones along your way, and can embrace the lifelong endeavour of someday completing your unique studies toward wisdom and truth.

Rhys Jones
Student Editor
21 May 2022

Reality is what you can get away with.
– Robert Anton Wilson

Introduction from the President of the Philosophy Society

The aim of the Philosophy Society is to create a social space for students that runs parallel to the academic side of the course. The students involved in this Anthology have experienced unprecedented disruption in every year of study, due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as industrial action. When our campus re-opened at the beginning of this academic year, the committee and I believed that continuing to provide the opportunity for students to socialise with one another was of paramount importance. Philosophy, by its nature, is a subject that benefits from informal discussion as well as academic research. This community-based approach to the course is an integral part of the philosophy department at the University of Liverpool, and one we were keen to preserve.

This Anthology is as much a part of this approach as the social events that run throughout the year. Each extract in this book is taken from a year-long research project into a topic of the student's choosing, and is a product of curiosity, and consistent hard work. As such, it should be appreciated not only as a showcase of the academic talent of those involved, but also as evidence of the passion for the subject that is necessary in order to complete a dissertation.

I hope that the Anthology also serves as a gesture of thanks to the academic advisors on the module for their advice and guidance. The diversity of topics in the Anthology and the depth in which they are explored, is testament to the expertise and professionalism of the entire faculty. On behalf on the Philosophy Society, it's been a pleasure to be part of such a close-knit and amiable department, and I hope it continues to attract and inspire many more philosophy students in the future.

Jonnie Mills
Philosophy Society President
July 2022

Are There Wittgensteinian Problems for Artificial General Intelligence?

Rhys Jones

Abstract

In this dissertation, I present an analysis of the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, alongside that of some of his followers, and present linked monographs on what I believe to be problems on the path toward producing, and socially accepting, an Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). I believe the goal of creating a machine mind that can be properly recognised as possessing the sentience that AGI entails could be impossible, or at the very least, its realisation may be a supertask magnitudes more difficult to overcome than solutions currently proposed by futurists. I therefore critique their expectation of its occurrence in the near future from several different angles using exegetical approaches, rather than critiquing one single argument from the field at length, like Searle's Chinese Room or the Turing Test. I believe that certain ways of reading Wittgenstein's philosophy highlight the potential difficulty inherent within our intersubjective recognition of any such agent in the language-games we play, and thus may illuminate why the goal of producing a minded superintelligent agent could continue to elude us.

This extract is chapter three of my dissertation. Chapter one outlined Wittgenstein's position on thinking machines, and was compiled from his comments in his various posthumous works, alongside later analysis and exegesis of them. His focus on language as being the root of many philosophical problems extends to our misattribution of exclusively human predicates to non-human systems, as well as regarding the whole human being as a complete system, not necessarily reducible to its parts. Investigating the usage of words such as 'mind' can reveal them as not possessing the deep ontological significance considered by earlier philosophers, the grammar itself creating the appearance that the referent of 'mind' is akin to 'tree' or 'car'. The second chapter analyses deficiencies inherent within current approaches toward AGI.

What I want to teach is: to pass from unobvious nonsense to obvious nonsense (PI §464).

> A philosopher easily gets into the position of an incompetent manager who, instead of getting on with his own work and just keeping an eye on his employees to make sure they do theirs properly, takes over their work until one day he finds himself overloaded with other people's work, while his employees look on and criticize him (CV p. 16e).

In this final chapter, following the concerns of the previous two, I would like to address the pragmatic concerns towards solutions on the various roadmaps

to AGI proposed by futurists. As Wittgenstein points out, these should be a target for philosophical thinking, not something that should be overlooked:

> If we look at things from an ethnological point of view, does that mean we are saying that philosophy is ethnology? No, it only means that we are taking up a position right outside so as to be able to see things more objectively (CV, p. 37e).

I would like to suggest here that attempts at realising AGI are ultimately not a problem with available computing power – the world already produces billions of microchips each year which could be combined to exaflop scale today if we were so inclined. Instead it rests as a serious problem with our ability to define and programme solutions in an effective way: the language-game of solving problems with computers. In his use of graphs charting the increases of computing power available to us, Kurzweil (2012, pp. 258-9) suggests that the increase in power alone is sufficient to predict that AGI will emerge by 2045, but it remains the case that nothing of the sort will happen unless it the task is perfectly described and then purposefully programmed. This is a task which resists being divided between teams of programmers, and philosophers seem to overlook the difficulty of dividing labour and communication, as if it was a minor concern that is not important to the philosophical enterprise, whereas I propose that it indeed is, and to say that it is something that will resolve itself is to overlook the mode of life which we are in. In his book on software engineering, *The Mythical Man Month*, Frederick Brooks makes this relevant and prescient observation:

> When a task cannot be partitioned because of sequential constraints, the application of more effort has no effect on the schedule. The bearing of a child takes nine months, no matter how many women are assigned (1995, p. 17).

Brooks highlights that in large-scale software engineering tasks, of which creating an AGI is perhaps the largest there could be, adding manpower generally serves to make the project later. In the task of solving AGI, solutions will have to come from groups of scientists, engineers, programmers, philosophers, and linguists all working together in tandem, and using complex terminology from their individual fields to partition the problems into ones that can be solved computationally, yet seventy years of slipping deadlines in this area has still never given us anything like a system that could be classified as self-aware or possessing understanding. It is also the case that programming is as much a creative activity as it is a logical one, with, as Brooks observes, one good programmer having ten times the ability of an average one, despite possessing similar levels of experience. 'Because the programmer builds with pure thought-stuff, we expect few difficulties in implementation. But our ideas themselves are faulty, so we have bugs' (Brooks, 1995, p. 231). In essence,

"Moore's Law" is in permanent tension with "Brooks' Law": 'Adding manpower to a late software project makes it later' (1995, p. 232), and with this consideration, Kurzweil's exponential "Law of Accelerating Returns" could easily turn into an asymptote and flatten off, as the profound difficulties in the challenge of programmatically implementing and then socially accepting potential sentience in machines becomes increasingly relevant in the face of readily available computer power. While programmers building with pure 'thought-stuff' are optimists, there is no magic bullet that will get us out of the 'tar pit' of difficulty, with Brooks commenting: 'How does a project get to be a year late? One day at a time' (1995, p. 153). As Wittgenstein comments: 'If you want to know what is proved, look at the proof' (PG p. 369) and it remains that our collective project of AGI is already some thirty to forty years behind schedule, in a field that, while achieving limited parts of our sapience, has also only recently delivered an improved games-playing machine, a better Markov-chain, a semi-accurate simulation of the structure of an amino-acid, and a car that can drive itself in a straight-line under ideal conditions. Yet we are asked to believe superintelligent general machines will be with us in around two decades, and even that they will somehow exceed the limitations in their data and programme themselves toward sentience.

As way to get around the difficulty of the task of programmatically building a sentient intelligence, an alternative has idea has come from philosophy, in the categorically nebulous idea of "mind uploading" by 'Full Brain Emulation':

> The basic idea is to take a particular brain, scan its structure in detail, and construct a software model of it that is so faithful to the original that, when run on appropriate hardware, it will behave in essentially the same way as the original brain (Bostrom & Sandberg, 2008, p. 7).

Not only does this idea barrel straight into Hacker's mereological fallacy, I would like to suggest that in programming terms this idea is about as far from 'basic' as it could possibly get. It is perhaps a nightmarish-level of difficulty on the software side, combined with limitations in silicon hardware, such as communication between parallel processors, that no manner of roadmap provided by philosophers will deliver free of profound obstacles not trivially overcome. As Penrose (1989) highlights, there is no reason to believe we have an adequate and complete enough understanding of the laws of physics to say whether such computational simulation is viable, but Bostrom assumes a fairly coarse-level of granularity at the neuron-level as all is required, whereas following Penrose I believe that a perfect emulation would be required, which may not be achievable with computers in any sort of reasonable horizon. Advocates of mind-uploading regard neurons as thinking, contra Hacker and Wittgenstein, so all that is required to replicate thought in a machine is to accurately simulate the exact connectome of those neurons and thought will

emerge. Hauskeller comes to a particularly Wittgensteinian conclusion in challenging the philosophical assumptions of mind-uploading: 'For what we think of as ourselves is very much tied to our bodily existence and as such far more comprehensive and richer than a mere mind can ever be' (2012, p. 199). His paper suggesting that the very idea of "mind uploading" rests on questionable philosophical assumptions, and will only be possible if a formalist theory of mind is true, and even if it turns out to be, we have no reason to believe that the mind scanned will preserve that of the human being that brain belonged to, or give rise to any kind of recognisable self in the machine.

It also remains the case that current computers are of a fundamentally different type to brains, even if just for the fact that they operate on discrete clocks, switching between states of algorithmic computation on the ticking of a gigahertz square-wave. Unaddressed by Bostrom and Sandberg is how this discrete-time model will capture the continuous nature of the brain's chemistry. If temporality is quantised, then it is so at a level far deeper than one digital computers will be able to replicate in any realistic horizon. One might say that the digital map is not the continuous territory, or as Wittgenstein points out:

> Of course, if water boils in a pot, steam comes out of the pot, and also a picture of steam comes out of a picture of the pot. But what if one insisted on saying that there must also be something boiling in the picture of the pot? (PI §297)

A simulation of a hurricane sinks no boats. A simulation of fire does not burn. An emulation of a pancreas produces no insulin. There is also the matter overlooked that a dead brain is not a *res cogitans*, neither "thinking" nor "intelligent" or possessing of a mind, and so no manner of reductively scanning it and then simulating its chemistry in a computer gives us reason to believe that it will later give rise to sentience within the machine.

      To illuminate this, I would like you to contemplate a related idea, which is also a way of electronically "producing" a thinking brain akin to the one Bostrom proposes. While "body uploading" seems like a term without proper sense and so is not used by him, an alternative approach I could suggest would be one along the lines of "Womb and Ovary Emulation". This is actually a more parsimonious solution: the 'basic' thing here simply involves creating an accurate computer simulation of a female womb and ovaries – an ostensibly less complex structure than the brain – by scanning them into a computer and then fully replicating their chemistry in the machine. All that would then need to be done would be to digitally replicate a spermatozoa, introduce it at the appropriate time in the simulation, and this emulation would in a short time produce a *whole baby* in the machine, that we could then feed with suitable inputs, rapidly simulating its growth by increasing the speed of computation, and duplicating it in the machine to create abundant numbers of intelligent

minds. I am, of course, highlighting an idea that seems patently and obviously absurd, in a way that the analogous "Full Brain Emulation" seems to avoid.

Machines can only solve problems we can define. We cannot define things that are outside our own intelligence or ability to divide between teams of experts. The optimistic speculations from futurists are at times senseless, or casually mix what might seem realistic with that which is wholly unrealistic, with very little differentiation, and they appear to frequently lapse into science-fiction, not sound, well-justified philosophy or computer science. Desire and suffering are the roots of thought, not computation, and it seems no amount of computing will replicate them. Love, compassion, and empathy will also resist solutions in mathematics for the foreseeable future. Without these, it seems hard to know how we could produce a generally intelligent machine worthy of the name.

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Reflective Comment

I initially spent three months of my dissertation period working on a completely different idea – exploring Mark Fisher's analysis of post-capitalism, and what he and allied philosophers consider to be a deep societal malaise resulting from the collapse of alternatives to capitalist metanarratives. When I was part-way though this project, it occurred to me that it was too deep a topic to fit into the dissertation word-count.

Working with my supervisor, Richard Gaskin, allowed me to reflect on what would make for a tighter piece of work, and I had enjoyed his module on Ludwig Wittgenstein so much that it seemed worthwhile combining the philosophical analysis I learned there, with the topic of Artificial Intelligence that I had investigated on Laura Gow's module Mind, Brain and Consciousness. I'd received a great mark for the essay on AI on that module, so it made sense to fully utilise what I was learning across third-year, and flesh-out those ideas into a longer piece of writing.

My advice for future students is to not be afraid of changing your dissertation ideas as they develop over the course of working with your supervisor. University time-pressures being what they are meant that I ultimately went on a huge tear and worked on the dissertation solidly for the final month, after getting all of my other work out of the way. The word count initially seems daunting, but once writing gets underway, it soon fills up, and one has to start tightening arguments and honing one's ideas. My earlier research was not a wasted effort, because I now intend to incorporate it into an MRes next year, having recently received the John Lennon Memorial Scholarship to fund my postgraduate studies at Liverpool.

Is Leadership a Skill or a Role?

Jonnie Mills

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the concept of leadership; it is a discussion of the interpretation of leadership, and the qualities one needs in order to lead successfully. I begin by discussing the evolutionary roots of leadership and the effect this has on the practice of leadership today, before turning to the ancient philosophers of both the Eastern and Western traditions to learn how one should lead. This will involve a discussion of authority and the dangers that can come with careless followership, leading on to the question of whether a leader is permitted to act in ways they would not wish their followers to act. Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that leadership is not a role or a job that one must fulfil, but rather is a characteristic that can be developed and practiced in all areas of life. Role-based leadership is the fulfilment of individual desires through the achievement of a group aim, and is insufficient for the modern society.

This extract explores the main idea in Confucius's philosophy of leadership – leading from the front. At the beginning of my dissertation, I define leadership broadly as the "leading of others along a path". This idea is constant throughout my argument that leadership is a skill one carries through life, rather than a role embodied temporarily.

Lead from the Front

Confucius puts huge emphasis on 'leading from the front', in other words leading by action rather than instruction. His philosophy is unique – he didn't have a word for 'leader', using *junzi*, or 'gentleman' instead. *Junzi* meant 'ruler' at one stage, later referred to a good and just person. This etymological progression perfectly summarises Confucius's views on leadership; to be 'upright' and to be a leader are one and the same. He moves on from what has been called the 'shepherd' view of leadership; this was the biblical idea that people can be led like sheep, as is evident in the way some churches call their leaders 'pastors' (Truscott, 2006, p. 2). This comparison insinuates that like sheep, people need to be led, or they will be lost. It also implies that the position of leadership comes with a lot of pressure – if a shepherd were to fail at their duties, their sheep will starve. As such, the leader must unite and protect his or her followers. The shepherd model is clearly a role-based interpretation of leadership; either the leader is shepherding the followers, or they are not. Confucius however, preferred something of a father-son model instead, treating leader and follower as equals. The Confucian leader would

embody the following characteristics regardless of whether or not they were being followed.

Confucius's model of leadership rests on the assumption that human nature is inherently aimed towards goodness. Like Mencius, he believed that through ritual we are able to cultivate and refine our inner virtue, rather than receive it from external sources. If one is able to become *junzi*, leading should come effortlessly to them. It's important to outline a specific path by which to lead others. In theory, the Confucian leader is a prime example of how to follow this path, and it will be evident in their actions rather than their words. They walk along the path themselves, and expect the follower to copy them. Confucius believed that the higher the leader's position, the longer their shadow – any shortcut they take will also be taken by their followers. As a result, if a leader is seen to be avoiding taxes, the follower will take this as a cue that theft is permissible. These shortcuts can apply to any area, for example respect and treatment of others. On the other hand, the opposite is also true. Followers will naturally want to adopt the virtue of the leader. The leader need only exemplify virtue; they need not impose harsh rules and punishments to control the population, as through shame the people will regulate themselves, given an example of virtue in their leader. Confucius was said to be a highly optimistic individual, believing that all he needed to do was act in ways that brought about Heaven's will, which will eventually come into being anyway. John Adair stated that 'Confucius created hope for China and ultimately for all of mankind. And hope is the oxygen of the human spirit' (Adair, 2003, p. 38). An optimistic leader has great belief in their own vision, and in turn inspires their followers in a similar fashion. Optimism and courage are highly valued in leadership; as long as one possesses them, followers will come. 18th Century Scottish historian and philosopher, Thomas Carlyle, writes that when we are around great people, it is impossible not to adopt their qualities that we most admire. This was exactly Confucius's idea of leadership – become *junzi* and leadership will come naturally. Carlyle saw leadership as a kind of hero-worship, believing that a leader can become something of an 'eternal cornerstone' and inspire people to rebuild themselves when discouraged. Much like the Greek and Pagan Gods, the Confucian leader is an ethical guide for followers to look up to. Carlyle compares the great leader directly with the Norse God, Odin:

> *Every true Thinker to this hour is a kind of Odin, teaches men his way of thought, spreads a shadow of his own likeness over sections of the History of the world. (Carlyle, 1841, p. 34)*

In leading through their actions, one can inspire followers just as the Gods do. By taking the view of leadership not just as a role but rather as a way of being, one eventually becomes a leader in themselves. Confucius taught that

leadership is not a series of actions, but the embodiment of the characteristics that make a leader great; the Confucian leader doesn't put on a mask to lead, they wear their own face instead.

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Reflective Comment

I wanted my dissertation to involve some sort of character analysis, as it allowed me to draw upon a wide range of interests, from music to sport. I found leadership to be a great topic for this. However, I struggled to develop a strong argument early on, and found that my chosen readings weren't quite specific enough until later on in the process. Were I to rewrite my dissertation, I'd have chosen a more precise position from which to argue. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the process of researching and writing this dissertation – I think that the most important thing in choosing a topic that allows you to incorporate your interests.

Racialized Tropes in Fictional Media: An Existential Analysis.

Jack Morris

Abstract

In this dissertation, I will investigate how, and why, certain racist tropes in fictional media come to be, and how they become popular enough to be considered tropes, through use of Franz Fanon's work. First, I will offer three examples of racist fantasy tropes that I have identified. Then, I will introduce the concept of racial Othering within black existentialist thought to offer an explanation as to how these tropes come to be in the first place. From here, I will draw a parallel between Frantz Fanon's discussion on the importance of language and its use with the importance of a particular kind of writing-style for success in the world of literature to offer an explanation as to how one-off instances of racist tropes become tropes, meaning conventions of certain genres or settings. In the final section, I will attempt to offer a method by which future authors may seek to weaken and abolish racist tropes in fantasy media, by drawing inspiration from the works of Paulo Freire and bell hooks.

The extract below discusses Frantz Fanon's view on the importance of language, especially in relation to one's racial identity. There is particular emphasis on racial 'Othering' through language usage, and I apply Fanon's discussion of this to the work of J.R.R Tolkien in his The Lord of the Rings trilogy.

Returning to Black existentialism, it is crucial to understand before continuing that some key Black existentialist thinkers argue that Blackness itself is a social construct pushed upon Black people, including the key thinker for this paper, Frantz Fanon. Fanon makes it explicitly that Blackness is a construct; 'for not only must the Black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man' (Fanon, 1967, p. 110). Of course a Black person has darker skin than a white-skinned person, but Black is a category laden with stereotypes and assumptions pushed onto the dark-skinned person from others, or, as Fanon puts it, from 'the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories' (Fanon, 1967, p. 111). Whiteness in the white-dominated West is perceived as the One, the default, the neutral state of humans, and to be non-white is to be the Other, a fundamental negation of whiteness, a strange, contradictory force.

Fanon is no stranger to how stories can perpetuate this dichotomy. In his time of writing, it was not uncommon to see Black People or Native Americans as the antagonistic forces of comics and stories (Fanon, 1967, p. 146), and he thinks that this is because these stories act as a kind of 'catharsis' for the

'collective aggression' (Fanon, 1967, p. 146) that is latent within the young boys and men of society (in this Fanon was influenced by the psychoanalytic work of Freud and Jung, although this is not necessary to go into detail on). It is then understandable why these stories contain racialized images, for they are 'put together by white men for little white men.' (Fanon, 1967, p. 146) White authors, as the majority, settle themselves as the default, or even the positive, and thus are likely to present whiteness/white people as the forces of good/the protagonist(s), as this is their personal paradigm, and they are writing largely in the interest of those who they see as similar to themselves.

How is this Othering confirmed to occur? Fanon makes many references to feeling scrutinized by white people, feeling 'dissected under white eyes' (Fanon, 1967, p. 116). White people observe and engage with other white people casually and normally, as if they are speaking to an equal. With Black people, however, (and by extension, non-Black people of colour), the white gaze turns surgical. It examines the person's behaviour, appearance, and motivations against the background of anecdotes and tales that 'Blackness' conjures up. It leaves Fanon feeling 'sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning' (Fanon, 1967, p. 113), for he is not being viewed as a person in his own right, but as a creature of incorrect assumptions the white gaze forces upon him.

This, I think, is how racist tropes creep into fiction, and it is helpful here to return to my examples of these tropes.

The heroes of the Lord of the Rings trilogy are largely white. The human Aragorn, the dwarf Gimli, the elf Legolas, and the hobbits Merry, Pippin, and Frodo (along with most hobbits) are light-skinned and are our heroes. Gimli and Legolas, microcosms of the race they hail from, are emblematic of the whiteness of their respective races. Elves are light-skinned and fair-haired, such as Galadriel, or Elrond, the latter managing to break the mould simply by being dark-haired. (Tolkien, 2011)

This outcome is little surprise, given that white authors tend to pull from their own perspective, and thus Tolkien will write from a white perspective. Echoing Fanon, Tolkien's tale is 'put together by [a] white [man] for little white men' (Fanon, 1967, p. 146, my adjustments). Thus, whiteness is the default, the de facto setting for our protagonists and their aligned races.

The enemy races, by contrast, are quite literally the default races but warped, and blackened. As Frodo states to Sam: 'the Shadow that bred [the orcs] can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them' (Tolkien, 2011, p. 914).

Orcs are literally the whiteness of the heroes but vilified and made ugly. They are plagued by intrinsic aggression, a love of war, and slavery to an iron-handed master. Considering Tolkien's explicit connection between orcs and Mongolians, it is apparent that racial Othering manifests here by pulling from assumptions of Asians as subservient and meek in the face of authority, yet also as warriors and violent soldiers. Here, too, Fanon makes a point; the white gaze bleeds the history of a particular race into each of its members, as if somehow the acts of their ancestors forge their essence. He speaks of such in his own experience: 'some identified me with ancestors of mine who had been enslaved or lynched: I decided to accept this… I was the grandson of slaves' (Fanon, 1967, p. 113). Similarly, the history of Mongolians as a war-faring people, which informs the stereotype of them as simple-minded and battle-loving individuals, infects Tolkien's work.

Just as the Shadow takes a perfectly good person and taints them into something else, something dark, something Other, a person of colour's history and physicality 'taint' them into an Other, forcing an essence onto them that is entirely untrue. It denies them the ability to self-determination and makes them merely an object in the eyes of the author's white gaze.

This, then, is the way in which racist tropes enter literature. Now that they've polluted the system, the question turns to how they not only subsist within the system, but flourish, and establish themselves as important and paradigmatic fixtures of literature.

It is firstly crucial to recognize that Fanon 'ascribe[s] a basic importance to the phenomenon of language' (Fanon, 1967, p. 17, my alterations). Language is not merely a tool for communication for Fanon, it reflects who one is, and how others interpret the speaker. All speech is indicative of how one identifies, and one must assimilate/ascribe to a certain way of being when one commits to a particular manner of speech: 'to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture' (Fanon, 1967, p. 37).

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Reflective Comment

I've always been a massive fantasy nerd, and so I knew instantly that writing a dissertation on a philosophical analysis of the failures of the genre would be a rewarding and enjoyable task. After all, if you truly love a piece of media, you should be willing to scrutinise and criticise it, in the hopes that it can be perfected by your analysis.

I'd already read articles discussing the anti-Asian imagery within Lord of the Rings, and how H.P. Lovecraft's xenophobia was a cornerstone in his development of the genre of cosmic horror, for example (the latter being a later section of my dissertation), and so I had a cursory knowledge of the role of racism in certain fantasy works. Yet my reading of Fanon offered me a deeper understanding of the exact mechanisms by which racism infests fantasy, and thus I not only have applied my philosophical theory to something practical, but I feel my own creative writing abilities have improved as a result!

Varieties of Beauty: From Commodity to Virtue.

Amber Pool

Abstract

This project will take on an interdisciplinary approach, drawing research from philosophy, sociology, psychology, business and art. I will explore the various manifestations of beauty, seeking to define its existence in the world and understand how it exerts influence over the individual and society. Ultimately, I will defend the claim that beauty is a socially valuable and philosophically good entity. Beauty, in the guise of social beauty standards and commodification, is undoubtedly linked to numerous modern social issues such as sexism, racism and xenophobia. Throughout this discussion I will demonstrate that beauty is not itself the cause of these social issues, rather it is the vehicle with which they arise. Furthermore, I will persuade the reader that beauty is the key to solving these issues.

The following passage is extracted from Chapter Three, which discusses the philosophical relationship between the Good and Beauty. I have attempted to explain how beauty can be misunderstood and misrepresented, finally arguing that the Good and Beauty are closely entailed and that each necessarily entails the other. The overall argument is that Beauty, intrinsically, is a force for good and ought to be cherished.

Certainly, there is a close relation between one's outward presentation and one's inner identity, so it is understandable that one may explore and experiment with one's identity by first expressing one's own unique individuality through, say, fashion and makeup. Both Taylor (1999) and Doran (2020) support this idea; that we pay such attention to physical and aesthetic *Beauty* because we regard it as a reflection of the person themselves, and we treat it as a vehicle to communicate our identity to the rest of the world. Of course, the reflected image created by physical beauty may be an illusion and could have no correlation to a person's true self. Doran's (2020) argument is that moral *Beauty*, or inner *Beauty*, exists entirely independently while physical beauty does not, as it is heavily influenced by moral *Beauty*. For example, our first impression of someone may be that they are underwhelming in appearance, but as we get to know them as a person their character shines through and transforms their outer appearance into one of great *Beauty*. Or vice versa, an outwardly beautiful person can become unappealing once their personality emerges. This seems to suggest that moral *Beauty* is a kind of personal *Beauty* that exists in reality, whereas physical beauty exists as a perceptual illusion. His argument represents the thesis that *Beauty* is determined from the inside out, rather than the other way around. However, we must admit that there are instances where our perception of moral *Beauty* is influenced by our perception of physical *Beauty*. As Taylor (1999) points out, we form our first impressions of people based on

their outward appearance, and from this we infer what their personalities are like. Of course, we have highlighted the deceptive and problematic nature of first impressions and concluded that, although they are unavoidable and often useful, we should not always trust them. Regardless of this, the very fact that our first impressions are so powerful proves that the causal relationship between *Beauty* and morality acts in both directions, at least perceptually. This aligns with Eaton's (1997) conclusion and satisfies Plato's (Siorvanes, 1998) thesis that *Beauty* and the *Good* are ontologically the same.

Given that moral *Beauty* occupies a far more stable existence than physical beauty, we ought to conclude that moral *Beauty* is closer to the ultimate, perfect *Beauty* described by Aristotle and Plato (Siorvanes, 1998). I argue this because we have already accepted the general premises of subjectivism (Eaton, 1999), that the private and subjective nature of beauty ties it to the flaws and inconsistencies of human beings; the subjective kind of physical beauty only exists in our consciousnesses whereas the objective *Beauty* of character, morality and nature exist in their own right. Certainly, any mode of beauty whose existence is contingent must be farther away from perfect *Beauty* than any mode of *Beauty* whose existence is absolute. Furthermore, it could be argued that physical beauty is not good at all, given that it can often deceive us as to the reality of things, and surely anything that is dishonest cannot be *Good*. However, I challenge this, using ethics as an example: evil and immoral means can be justified because they lead to ethical ends. One simply has to pick up a history book to find examples of this, such as the Christian Crusades, the Jim Crow laws in the United States or the censorship of Communist Russia. Just as the negative implications of ethics in these cases cannot be denied, I do not attempt to deny that physical beauty has negative implications. Merely that we should consider whether the negative significance of ethics and *Beauty* is truly down to their being intrinsically bad, or perhaps that it is the human means of utilisation that are bad. My support is for the latter, certainly we should not disregard the tool just because the result of its labours is distasteful, rather we should solve the issue of its method. Sircello (1975) suggests something similar as he attempts to dissect the relationship between *Beauty* and the *Good*. He argues that a moral person and a good person exhibit the same set of moral virtues, whereby the moral person exercises these virtues to a minimum and the good person does so to the extreme. However, courage, for example, exercised to the extreme would surely cease to be a virtue, perhaps such an abundance of courage translates to arrogance or stupidity instead. Nonetheless, it is not the case that courage ceases to be a virtue overall, simply that the way in which one interprets and presents courage is misguided. Therefore, one would conclude that it was not courage that was the vice, but the method by which courage was manifested.

I argue this point because I have already stated that the commodification of *Beauty* is the source of much of the social problems we associate with personal *Beauty*. As highlighted by Meinhold (2013) and Bordo (1999), the commodities we are sold, which are labelled *Beauty,* are in fact things that cannot be bought: feelings, symbols and virtues. In the pursuit of sales and wealth, social media influencers, advertisers and TV and film directors' bombards one with dreams of affluence, luxury and admiration. While at the same time convincing one that one's individual worth is dependent on one's conformity to dictated standards of physical appearance, such that one forgets that *Beauty* is influenced from the inside out and not from the outside in. This doubled edged sword, wielded in the name of *Beauty*, represents the root cause of problems with self-image, with self-determination and identity, with gender and racial stereotypes and with discrimination and prejudiced attitudes.

Through this analysis of the *Good* and its relation to *Beauty* I have endeavoured to prove that *Beauty* is not only valuable, but good. The conditions for obtaining the *Good* and living a good life have been presented in philosophical terms and related to a modern way of life, and despite the apparent moral drawbacks of *Beauty* it should now be clear that they are not in any way due to the intrinsic nature of *Beauty* itself. Perhaps the most relevant aspect of living a good life is to be authentic and true to oneself, certainly embracing *Beauty* in its highest form, moral *Beauty*, allows one not only to be, but express one's authentic self. Finally, I have demonstrated how the commodification of *Beauty* has misinformed our opinions and impacted the social struggles we experience today. Such struggles are the problems that need to be solved, and contrary to the view that *Beauty* is root of the problem I argue that it is actually the solution.

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Reflective Comment

I won't deny that writing my dissertation was insanely difficult and at the beginning I thought it would be impossible. However, I can honestly say that researching everything, discussing my thoughts with people, and finally composing the end product was the most enjoyable part of my entire third year! Obviously, I could not have achieved it without the help of my supervisor Dr Nikos Gkogkas, and my Dad, but I've ended up with a piece of work I am genuinely proud of. My advice to anyone who thinks its impossible is firstly, don't restrict yourself! Think about something you find really interesting and run with it, you don't have to have anything planned or mapped out, just find a vague idea and see where it leads. Secondly, don't underestimate the power to constantly discussing your ideas – telling other people what you're thinking and hearing their views will be invaluable. Good Luck.

A Panpsychist Approach to The Hard Problem and External World Scepticism.

John Ryan

Abstract

Our current philosophical and scientific approaches have been challenged by the issue of explaining why feelings are associated with certain physical structures and not others. In the philosophy of mind there has been a dualist/ physicalist dichotomy. This was due to the failure of dualism in the wake of the scientific revolution leading to a physicalist predominance. I will display how due to physicalism's issues with accounting for the hard problem of consciousness, external world scepticism, and contradicting advances in science, we should expand our horizons when it comes to theories of consciousness. I will propose panpsychist arguments that I believe to be more effective responses than those provided by physicalist and dualist accounts. I finish by discussing Tononi's Integrated Information Theory and its panpsychist entailments.

The following extract examines some of the issues of taking a reductionist approach towards our conscious experience with reference to external world scepticism, the combination problem, and the explanatory gap. This extract highlights the problematic assumptions of physicalism and dualism while arguing for a form of panpsychism.

Panpsychism and External World Scepticism

Philosophy of mind generally considers consciousness to be software and the brain hardware, panpsychism switches these positions to address the hard problem of consciousness. If consciousness is an emergent or constitutive property of matter then we can be as sure of the reality of the external world along Cartesian grounds. *Cogito, ergo sum:* I think, therefore I am.

Descartes was a substance dualist, he believed there were two kinds of substance: matter, which has the essential property of spatial extension; and mind, which has the essential property of thought (Robinson, 2020). Joseph Levine claims that for a physicalist theory of nature to be true, then an account for how the mental arises from the physical must be provided: he terms this a realisation theory (Levine, 2001). Associations between sensations and physical structures in the the brain are causally closed from the feeling of a sensation. We discussed earlier how conceivability arguments such as philosophical zombies can be used to highlight the implications of physicalism. Understanding the causal mechanisms of physical structures fails to inform us

about the nature of associated qualia. If we invert this statement it states: our experience of qualia fails to inform us about the nature of the physiological structures that realise them.

When I jump and feel my body being pulled down to earth this sensation doesn't inform me of its physical cause. I could make radically incorrect assumptions, for example believing that the centre of the Earth played some special causal role in generating this force. Aristotle believed that cosmological objects and their motion is the result of a uniform system of transparent spheres surrounding the Earth. Earth is placed at the centre based on the observation its position is stationary using the following logic: the shape of constellations would change considerably through the year if the Earth was moving and this was not the case. In the mind of the panpsychist, the explanations for consciousness provided by physicalists are flawed in the same way as Aristotle's geocentric model of the universe. Consciousness up until recent developments in neuroscience and quantum physics had little room within physical models: discounting the importance of the mental in favour of the structural and empirical. Aristotle lacked an understanding of the great distances involved causing the constellations to appear stationary.

Physicalist theories similarly operate on the assumption that one day it will be possible to gather sufficient empirical evidence to reduce consciousness down to biochemical processes in the brain. In a world that is explainable through physical processes and their resultant behaviours, the human mind sits above all other animals making it the standard by which all is compared. However, our complex minds are the tip of an iceberg of consciousness that is hidden by our conceptual failure to account for other physical structures and their potential to manifest mental events. A consequence of epistemic structural realism is that the limits of empirical observation have caused us to favour brains with similar structures and functions to our own. If consciousness is a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of all physical matter then we account for other structures that give rise to consciousness and whether damaged structures still host some experience.

A physicalist struggles to address the doubts of the external world sceptic – any empirical datum they appeal to must be interpreted by the senses and these senses could be deceived. This allows Cartesian doubt to find a home within the explanatory gap. Panpsychism, unlike dualism or physicalism, can offer solutions to their respective weaknesses and offer a middle way. Panpsychism maintains a naturalistic account of nature by acknowledging the epistemic role of qualitative experience without mind-body dualism. If mental events are intrinsically linked to physical matter, then our qualitative experience is not just evidence of an internal mental world but entails that some physical structure

exists as well. Unlike dualism, under panpsychism consciousness is not divisible from matter: meaning that the presence of consciousness requires the presence of matter. This could be developed further into a panpsychist proof of the external world. In addition, by explaining how physical structures such as our nervous system produce the sensation of pain without reducing it to C fibres firing. A criticism of panpsychism is that they are simply moving the goalposts as now they must explain how the simple experiences of micro-consciousness (particles) can give rise to macro-consciousness (the human mind). Critics consider this task to be just as difficult to address as the hard problem. Why there is a need for consciousness at the fundamental level and what nature is the relationship between our experienced consciousness and the simple experiences of particles.

In response, two explanations can be posited by the panpsychist: constitutive panpsychism and emergent panpsychism. Constitutive panpsychism can be defined as the view that macro-level consciousness is constituted of micro-level consciousness (Chalmers, 2013). Emergent panpsychism claims that animal and human consciousness are derived from simple micro-level conscious subjects and emerge upon reaching certain levels of complexity. It can be argued that the ability to avoid the combination problem should be the goal of any panpsychist view that aims to make progress on the hard problem, hence there will be a focus on the emergentist approach. As discussed in the first chapter, the fusion view proposed by Hedda Hassel Mørch seems to offer an intuitive account. Doing so by claiming that micro-conscious particles are fused into macro-consciousness in a process that erases them from existence: allowing for a causal account of combination without entailing epiphenomenalism (Mørch, 2014). In the following section we will see new approaches to neuroscience that can support this view.

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The experience of researching and writing my dissertation was the highlight of my time at university as it provided me the opportunity to deeply explore a topic that fascinated me. Begin your research and writing early, as even a 100 words here and there add up over time!

Can We Be Anthropocentric in the Face of The Climate Crisis?

Joe Thompson

Abstract

There has been an ongoing debate in environmental ethics about our valuation of nature and the way that we treat it. Anthropocentrism has long been criticised as egocentric and based on nothing but speciesism. Our human-centeredness has also been viewed as the cause of the environmental crisis we find ourselves in today. Alongside debates of nature's value, there have been some who have criticised environmental ethics for being stuck in axiological debates which do not matter due to their failure to change public opinion and policy. Does the arguments of these 'environmental pragmatists' have increased poignancy with the ever-looming threat of the climate crisis? I argue that the pragmatist position is wrong, that the value debates of the field are always important and that we should aim to avoid and reject our anthropocentric treatment of nature. Whilst social change is more important than ever given the limited time we have to act; part of this action relies on critically assessing the values and actions that put us in this position.

In this section of my dissertation, I discuss some of the many criticisms with anthropocentric views of nature. The climate crisis is a global threat, but like any crisis one that raises important ethical considerations we must ask how we got to this situation in the first place.

Epistemological Anthropocentrism is a form of anthropocentrism that we cannot avoid. All of our knowledge and understanding of valuation of existence will always be human-centred because we will always be human. We cannot escape our own perspective of the world. As such, the only values that we can really understand and compare to are our own values: human values. We cannot truly ever put ourselves in a non-anthropocentric position, we can never have that knowledge. It makes it difficult to understand value outside of our own perspective, as the only concepts of 'value' come from our personal terms and understandings. When applied to Routley's last man example, one could argue that we are the only 'valuers' in nature, so how can we talk of a loss of value once all life is gone?

The fact we cannot ever see things from nature's perspective is an objection put forward to Arne Naess' non-anthropocentric account of deep ecology, from 1973. Naess puts forward a non-anthropocentric account of the world that argues for the recognition of our holistic relationship with the natural world, and an identification with all of nature. (Naess 2005). However, whilst we cannot ever really identify with all of nature, or imagine ourselves to be a bat,

this does not stop us from attempting to empathise with a non-human's perspective and act accordingly.

If we see nature purely as instrumental to us, then the loss of any animal would be ethically inferior to our own values. This leads to illogical consequences, as displayed by Routley (Now Sylvan) in his famous Last Man Argument of 1973. We are presented with the hypothetical scenario in which the last human alive in the world, decides to destroy every plant, animal and ecosystem he encounters, "What he does is quite permissible according to basic chauvinism, but on environmental grounds what he does is wrong" (Routley, 2009; p.487). Routley's use of human 'chauvinism' is identical to the term anthropocentrism used in this discussion. The aim of this scenario is to display the inadequacy of anthropocentric ethical accounts. How can it be acceptable for a man to destroy a planet? Yet if only human values matter, then an anthropocentric ethic cannot account for this seemingly abhorrent act.

Val Plumwood and others have criticised anthropocentrism for perpetuating 'dualist' thought (Plumwood, 1993). Dualism is the line of thought that creates hierarchical pairings, separating certain qualities as secondary, or weaker than the other. Just as androcentric society has historically placed a dualist separation between man as higher and woman as lower, other separations include mind and body, reason and emotion, and crucially humanity and nature. Plumwood also shows how women have historically been described with natural, animal-like qualities, whilst men have been typically been associated with culture (p.20). Rather than reject as repressive the associations with nature that women have faced, Plumwood's ecofeminist account argues for embracing the connection with nature, to redefine and improve our conceptions of what it is to be human.

Alongside these objections, one of the most crucial flaws of anthropocentrism comes from a lack of justification. What logical reasons do we have for defining and limiting our ethical considerations? One could argue there is some special quality of being 'human' that excludes the rest of nature. However, if we argue that it is our rationality or self-consciousness that makes us worthy of moral consideration, we end up excluding members of our own human race. Within our moral community, there are two key roles. There is the moral agent, a person with the capacity and agency to make moral actions and the decisions, and the moral patient, a person to whom we owe moral obligations. 'All known moral agents are moral patients as well. But not all patients are agents' (Nolt, 2013; p.444). This is because there are members of the human race, such as new-born children or those suffering from dementia or another mental disability, that are not capable of free moral decisions. If we are to argue for rationality being a prerequisite for moral consideration, then we have to claim

that these groups are unworthy of inclusion: a claim no moral person would make. This exclusion is one built into Rawls' theory of justice discussed in section one; he states that all persons in the veil of ignorance are rational and yet this requirement excludes members of society that we do owe justice to.

Many have argued that the reason animals are excluded from consideration is not due to some special virtue we possess, but 'Speciesism', a term popularised by Peter Singer. Speciesism, like racism or sexism, is mere prejudice; 'an attitude of bias in favour of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species' (Singer 1995; p.6). As such, not only does anthropocentric ethical reasoning align itself with forms of ethical egoism and perpetuate dualist assumptions, but the exclusion of other animals is based purely on speciesism, and no relevant moral criteria.

With all these issues, it seems unsurprising that people have identified some of the impacts of this way of thinking. As previously mentioned, Lynn White Jr. argued that our exploitation of nature in science and technology, justified by our anthropocentric beliefs, is the root of the ecological crisis. Mass deforestation and factory farming are clear examples of this, as processes for which the main motivator is profit, with no concern for the welfare of nature. Naess also argues a similar point, that our science was 'guilty of reduced nature to a lifeless reserve of resources so that man, once his "abstract structures" were known, could use it at his will' (Valera 2019; p.299). One way in which we can certainly see objectification of nature is in factory farming. As a consumer, we are completely separated from the systematic slaughter of animals in a factory farm, turned into the most effective, profitable mass-production system of food.

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Reflective Comment

I have greatly enjoyed exploring the field of environmental ethics. I had previously seen the climate crisis as a primarily political and scientific endeavour. However, through the exploration of the field I have come to reassess my own environmental values, and I have a greater appreciation of nature than I did before. I think (or maybe just hope) that anyone who tries to properly examine our relationship with nature, and the value they extend to it, will abandon at least some of their previously held beliefs.

Should We Fear Death?

Joseph Westall

Abstract

This dissertation will discuss ideas surrounding death and whether as beings with finite lifespans, we should fear it, or if this is an irrational thing to fear. Primarily addressing the argument as to why fear of death is irrational as argued by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, I will explore his book 'The Art of Happiness' to investigate why death should be nothing to us. Making reference to a variety of literary sources, I will critique Epicurean thought and explore how although Epicurus is correct in assuming that death cannot harm us, this does not justify the fear that stirs within us at the thought of one's own death. This will then lead to discussion upon the badness of death, and how death deprives us of the possible good that may happen to us if we were to continue to live and avoid death. I will draw upon literature form David Benatar to explore the deprivation account and use this work to reinforce the conclusion that ultimately, death is something we should fear.

       Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to address why the loss of self and total annihilation that comes with death are of such great concern to us. It aims to assess whether the inevitability of death is something we should fear and whether this fear is rational. There will be some solutions given for fear of death in the shape of religion and faith and immortality through technological advances and the connotations that are ultimately attached to these 'solutions' making them insubstantial in quenching the fear attached to the greatest of evils- death.

The extract I have chosen to add to this anthology comes at the beginning of my dissertation – it is Epicurus's argument for why fear of death is irrational. Epicurus held that death should be nothing to us as when death comes, we no longer exist. My dissertation argued for fear of death being rational.

Extract from Chapter II: Epicurus 'Death is nothing to us' – fear of death is irrational.

The inescapability of death lurks in the background of numerous people's minds and for many this causes anxiety and panic; knowledge of this is fundamentally why many think fear of death is rational. This chapter will outline and explore Epicurus' argument supporting the view that we should not fear death. Additionally, this chapter will address several glaring flaws that this argument is vulnerable to, namely that the argument only addresses the fact that we do not exist after our death, seemingly discounting the fear that arises

leading up to death and the foreknowledge that we will inevitably die. Central to Epicurean teachings is the idea that death should be nothing to us. Epicurus frames the fear of death as a futile thing that is not helpful to anyone during their life. Most famously, when discussing death, Epicurus is quoted saying, *"Death is nothing to us, since when we are, death has not come, when death has come, we are not"* (Epicurus, 2012).

This certainly seems as though death is not as bad as one would think, signifying why the fear of death could be viewed as an irrational waste of energy and time. Death causes the non-existence of the self. Therefore, it does not make sense to fear death as 'non-existence' entails 'nothingness'- no experience or experientially whatsoever. When an individual dies, one cannot share in the experience and it presumably has no sensation; death, being the great taker of sensation. This should not concern us because, without sensation or experience, we will not know anything. The state of being and death are understood to be very separate things, one cannot be while the other is. Primarily, 'death' is not something we can experience as when it does come, we will not know. This could be comparable to when we drift off to sleep, we are unaware and do not know it has come, and when we sleep there is no guarantee that we will ever wake up, and we would be unaware if we did not. Nevertheless, we do not often feel any fear when we sleep at a given time. (Epicurus, 2012).

The Epicurean view may seem initially persuasive because a person is not existing when death happens, so this means that we would have no reason to be afraid of not 'being', because we would not be aware or conscious. As a result, death cannot be bad for us. However, it is clear from the further examination that this line of argument is vulnerable to criticism.

One such criticism is that there are crucial differences between the state of actual death and the process of dying. We can experience one (dying), the other of which we cannot (death); Epicurus understood that there was a difference and thus directed his argument towards the actual 'death' part rather than the 'dying' part. Steven Luper gives an account of the Epicurean argument in standard form as follows:

  P1. We are not affected by an event or state of affairs before it happens.
  P2. Death is an event or state of affairs.
    C1. Death does not affect us before it happens (instantiation, P1, P2).
  P3. If death affects us while we are alive, it affects us before it happens.
    C2. Death does not affect us while we are alive (modus tollens, P3, C1).
  P4. If death affects us while we are dead, it can affect us when we do not exist.

P5. We are not affected by anything when we do not exist.
    C3. We are not affected by death when we do not exist (instantiation P5).
    C4. Death does not affect us while we are dead (modus tollens, P4, C3).
    C5. It is not the case that death affects us while we are alive or dead
       (conjunction, C2, C4).
P6. If death affects us, it affects us whether we are alive or while we are dead.
    C6. Death does not affect us (modus tollens, P6, C5).
P7. What does not affect us is nothing to us.
    C7. Death is nothing to us (modus pollens, P7, C6). (Luper, 2011).

Epicurus argues that we can only be harmed by what we can experience, and death cannot be harmful because it is not something we can experience. However, as one can see, this argument has some problems. One criticism of Epicurus' argument is that, although we may not directly experience the physical state of death when we do not exist, this does not necessarily entail that we should not fear it. We still experience death, albeit indirectly through witnessing its effects on our loved ones and other people, and we must face the indisputable and inevitable fact that we are also going to die, being annihilated in the process. The 'before' aspect leading up to one's death causes fear. It's not the actual death affects us but the prospect of death; Epicurus can argue that death should not affect us, but the idea of death is frightening. There is dispute that the physical state of death (not to be confused with dying) will cause harm to us. This is because it is held by some (such as Epicureans) that there will not be anything to feel as we will not exist, but it is the whole idea of being here one moment and then never existing again in another which is very scary for some. The deprivation account holds that death will harm us. Yet from this, it is evident that perhaps Epicurus' argument in support of the view that we should not fear death is not the most persuasive.

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Reflective Comment

Choosing the topic for my dissertation was certainly no easy task. I had so many ideas and avenues I wanted to explore. If there is any advice for future students that I could give it would be to read around all the things that really spark deep interest within you. Really delve into these concepts and give yourself time to think if it would be something you could really write 10,000 words about. Originally, I wanted to try and write about 'the limitations of being human' but found it was far too broad for a dissertation question. I then moved to another aspect I found interesting which was 'is mythology still relevant today?' Yet I found this concept to prove difficult to narrow down. I then sat down in a coffee shop one day and really thought about what I wanted the 'magnum opus' of my university degree to be. After much thought I realised that the reason I came to study philosophy was to answer the deeper questions that I'd always had growing up. For me the idea of death has always terrified and fascinated me, this led me to asking the ultimate question of *"Should we fear death?"*

Buddhism and De Beauvoir: The Existential Foundations of the Path to Liberation.

Elizabeth Wilson-Wood

Abstract

This dissertation discusses the remarkably fascinating and provocative similarities between European existentialist thought and Indian Buddhist philosophy by comparing each of the ideas that they posit concerning the ontologies of identity, existence, freedom, facticity, morality, and most importantly, the profoundly complicated interdependence of all people and phenomena, a concept known as *pratitya-samutpada* in Buddhism. In the end I aim to establish the ethical significance that the application of Buddhist philosophy may have on existential dilemmas, especially the application of the *anatta* or 'no-self' principle onto issues regarding the preservation of liberty.

This extract follows from an analysis of Nietzschean existentialism which details some of the shortcomings of Nietzsche's interpretation of Buddhism. Here I reveal how Nietzsche's views actually follow a similar pattern of thought to Buddhist philosophy, highlighting in particular the uncanny parallels between Nietzsche's conception of the Übermensch and the Buddhist ideal of the spiritually enlightened Bodhisattva.

Nietzsche's misjudgements about Buddhism may come as quite a surprise when one considers the plethora of Buddhist teachings and commentaries he had access to, particularly of the work of Oldenberg, but also because of the vast array of similarities between his philosophy and that of the Buddhists, the most obvious similarity being their shared insistence of "the centrality of man in a godless cosmos" (Morrison, 1997, p.63). Both Nietzsche and Buddhism make a strong point of not appealing to any external sources of power, such as divine beings, for solutions to the absurdity of existence, and both hold the view of humans as composed of a mass of constantly changing forces which lacks an "autonomous or unchanging subject corresponding to such terms as 'self', 'ego', or 'soul'" (Morrison, 1997, p.63). On top of that, Nietzsche's emphasis that humanity's end goal should be to become an *Übermensch,* a kind of highly realised 'super-human', directly corresponds to the Mahayana Buddhist goal of becoming a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being who strives to liberate all humans from suffering. The main difference between the two models is that in the case of the *Übermensch,* Nietzsche articulates that nobody has yet achieved the goal and it is only possible for some people, not all, whereas in Buddhism, the goal of becoming a Bodhisattva was first achieved approximately two-thousand-five-hundred years ago by an individual named Siddhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha, who specifically enumerated

that all human beings were endowed with the potential to become as he was (Morrison, 1997). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche describes the *Übermensch* as:

> The most world-approving, exuberant, and vivacious man, who has not only learnt to compromise and arrange with that which was and is, but wishes to have it again AS IT WAS AND IS, for all eternity. (Nietzsche, 2020. p. 43)

This description aptly parallels the enlightened Bodhisattva who is distinct from other enlightened beings, such as Arhats or *Pratekyabuddhas*, in that the Bodhisattva does not undertake the discipline entailed by the Buddha's Eightfold Path for their own spiritual gain, but for the sake of all living creatures. In Buddhist philosophy, it is believed that once a being becomes enlightened there is the chance to leave the cycle of rebirth after they die and instead remain in a state of eternal *nirvana* where they can 'enjoy the celestial bliss of undisturbed tranquillity in which all [their] worldly tribulations are forever buried' (Suzuki, 1963, p.279). This kind of being is known by Theravadins as an Arhat whose death enables them to fully reap the rewards of being devoted to the religious life as they accept freedom from cyclic existence, thus freedom from all suffering, by never assuming another physical form and instead resting in the *nirvana* that they have rightly earned. Nevertheless, such a break from suffering is said not to interest the Bodhisattva who is understood to be so perfectly trained in The Six Perfections of generosity, morality, patience, energy, absorption, and most importantly, wisdom, that their unconditional compassion for all living beings totally envelops them and they are simply unable to abandon *samsaric* existence without first assisting in the liberation of others. Thus, a Bodhisattva would not yearn for their own eternal bliss like an Arhat – instead they would deliberately re-engage "in the turmoil of worldly life and devote all [their] energy to the salvation of the masses of the people" (Suzuki, 1963, p.279) who would not be able to put an end to their suffering without this sort of help from the spiritually accomplished. The fate of a Bodhisattva is to be courageously thrown back into samsara time and time again in order to undergo numerous rebirths into physical forms so that they may utilise the skills and the insight they have cultivated for the sake of teaching and encouraging others who are yet to be enlightened so that they too may be brought closer to the cessation of suffering.

It is this sort of self-sacrifice and concern for the welfare of their fellow beings that sets the Bodhisattva apart from the Arhat who considers their spiritual journey complete once they reach *parinirvana*, and it is the Bodhisattva's wish to experience life and all of its struggles again that reveals their extremely close association with Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* as someone who has learned to deal with pleasant and unpleasant worldly affairs effectively and wishes to repeat this experience in exactly the same way, making no changes,

until the end of time. This desire to "have it again as it was and is" (Nietzsche, 2020, p.43) naturally emerges in the Bodhisattva due to their reflection on the ignorance and misery of the unenlightened which, on account of their infinite capacity for compassion, causes in them such a great sorrow that it "gives rise to the immovable resolution" that they "will not rest until all ignorant beings are freed from the entangling meshes of desire and sin" (Suzuki, 1963, p.285). It is easy to see how this reasoning follows from a fundamental belief in the *anatta* principle as a Bodhisattva, having dissolved the boundaries between internal and external and thus Self and Other, would not consider their path to liberation complete. That a Bodhisattva has achieved *nirvana* is true only for that Bodhisattva's particular conglomeration of thoughts and forms which have been identified conventionally as their 'self'. For the Bodhisattva, the Self does not end where their body ends but is extended to include all the other bundles of consciousnesses that share the same plane of existence, and because of the truth of *pratitya-samutpada* or dependent co-arising, everyone's freedoms are deeply intertwined such that one cannot be truly liberated until all are. For Nietzsche's *Übermensch,* one might argue that the wish to experience it all again is borne out of the view that life is perfect just the way it is and that the ultimate method of affirming one's existence and the existence of others is to be committed to its essence: to allow life to repeatedly run its course without any modifications to its features that may make the journey a little more comfortable or easy, and to not accept the total annihilation or "absorption into the absolute All" (Suzuki, 1983, p.279) that death offers.

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Reflective Comment

I wanted to write this dissertation because as a practicing Buddhist, I felt inspired by its beautiful philosophy and its approach to notions of the Self and Other and the relationship between the two. I felt disheartened at European existential interpretations of consciousness and intersubjectivity and the individualistic outlook they maintained on such important subjects as liberty - particularly of Sartre's suggestion that "Hell is other people" and of Nietzsche's condemnation of Buddhist teachings on the subject as annihilationist – yet there was one existentialist whose sharp identification of the interconnectedness of human relationships stood out for me: Simone de Beauvoir.

De Beauvoir's argument for a Buddhist-style morality and her ideas about the Self and the Other were able to overcome the issues faced by her existentialist contemporaries. From de Beauvoir, I felt determined to convey the enormous value that Buddhist philosophy can have on worries about the absurdity of existence and the threat of individualism, showing that we should be careful not to overlook the sophic and reflective teachings of Eastern schools of thought, however abstract and antithetical they may seem when compared to the more comfortably dualistic Western schools of thought.

Is Panpsychism a Viable Alternative to the Dualist and Physicalist Theories of Mind?

Miguel Rodrigues Gaspar

Abstract

Panpsychism presents itself as an alternative solution to the problem of consciousness, one that claims to have all the advantages of dualism and physicalism and none of their drawbacks. I am going to investigate whether or not this theory achieves that aim, whether it is a coherent and viable solution to said problem. I will argue that if we are realists when it comes to consciousness, that is, if we accept that there exists something as a quality of experience, then panpsychism does provide a new theoretical framework upon which a solution to the problem can be achieved. In doing this, I'll show that out of the three views, panpsychism is the only one equipped to deal with the problem of emergence, as well as providing the simplest and most explanatorily adequate response to the question of intrinsic natures. Finally, the so-called combination problem must be addressed. I'll argue that combination is a lesser challenge to panpsychism than those posed to dualism and physicalism and show how a possible solution could look like.

This extract represents the hardest intellectual challenge posed in my defence of panpsychism: a defence of realism about consciousness. This is a crucial premise in the Anti-emergence argument for panpsychism. I wasn't too keen on arguing against it, for that would set me on an entire new discussion altogether. Instead, I tried to show that its main motivation, that realism about consciousness is incompatible with a scientifically respectable worldview, was misguided.

b) Realism about consciousness and c) non-reductionism

A fundamental assumption underlying this discussion is that there is such a thing as experience and that it is a genuine property of material complex systems such as humans or birds. Most people accept this; in fact we could say that it is the thing we are most sure of in the world. In a cartesian way we could question the existence of everything in reality, but we cannot doubt that we are thinking; the reason we cannot doubt this is because we think consciously: we are self-aware of our thinking.

Nevertheless, some philosophers deny it, the so-called illusionists. Thinkers like Daniel Dennett, the Churchlands, Keith Frankish, and others assert that what we call phenomenal experience is an illusion brought about by introspection (Frankish, 2016). They say that if there is such a thing as experience, then it

does not possess the properties generally attributed to it like its subjective or intrinsic character. This is quite a radical proposition and has actually been dubbed "the stupidest idea anyone has ever had about the world" by Strawson (2018). Obviously, this is not a very enlightening response in the same way that dismissing panpsychism on the grounds that it is just crazy isn't either. Even though saying that consciousness is an illusion seems to be, at first glance, wrong, since this illusion isn't in any way different than the conscious experience we were trying to explain in the first place, illusionism is a serious challenge to the orthodoxy in philosophy of mind. However, I will not seek to argue against the notion that experience is not real, instead I will try to undermine one of its main motivations: that realism about consciousness is incompatible with a scientifically respectable worldview. By doing this I hope to show that by accepting premise b), we also have good grounds for accepting premise c).

Keith Frankish (2016) suggests that the scientific minded person when faced with a phenomenon that defies accepted laws of physics, instead of seeking to alter the way we understand the world by postulating "new physics", would simply deem this phenomenon an illusion and attempt to explain why it seems the way it does; the phenomenon in question is consciousness. Indeed, if illusionism is true, it would solve a lot of problems. The question that kickstarted this discussion would cease to be a sensible one; the mind's place in the world would be relegated to a misguided belief brought about by neurophysiological trickery in our brains.

Philip Goff (2016) writes that the reason phenomenal experience is taken to be anomalous is because of its irreducibility. He writes that something is anomalous by irreducibility if "it requires ontological commitments over and above those required by what we know (…) about reality through empirical methods" (p.2). Again, the transparency of mental states implies at least two things: qualities, like the redness when we experience the view of a cherry, and subjectivity, in the sense that knowledge of a mental state implies the adoption of the perspective of someone that has that mental state (2019, p. 81). Therefore, by accepting the reality of consciousness we are led to an epistemological gap between the objective first-person description of the physical world and the qualitative, subjective, first-person description of mental events. The illusionist then finds it problematic to go beyond the ontological commitments of the third person description of the world to explain this, it must be easier to assume its illusive character and work from there. But surely he must agree that if we have good reason to believe in phenomenal experience and that physical science cannot account for it, then we're warranted to go beyond the "postulations of third person science" (2016, p. 5). So, essentially,

the illusionist doubts that we have good reason to accept the reality of consciousness based on the first-person judgments of our own experience.

Frankish (2016) points to the fact that our own introspective awareness of consciousness is an unreliable datum, and we cannot use it to prove the existence of experience. It is certainly true that our introspection is not reliable with respect to what we are conscious of; however, neither are our senses when it comes to reality, yet we generally accept that there is an external world in spite of their unreliableness; in fact, it is the simplest explanation for the existence of sensory data. As far as I know, the illusionists aren't hardboiled sceptics, thus accepting the reality of consciousness based on our introspection isn't any harder than accepting the external world based on our faulty senses. Illusionism would solve some problems but would create others in the process; simplicity isn't guaranteed.

Moreover, there seems to be a misunderstanding with regards to what science can do. John Searle (1998), in a review of Daniel Dennett's book *Consciousness Explained*, mentions that those who deny the existence of consciousness make a category error. Even though physical science can't grasp the nature of consciousness in a satisfying way, they dismiss it outright since science presupposes objectivity. However, according to Searle, science is concerned with what is epistemically objective and that includes making epistemically objective claims about what is ontologically subjective. After all, this is part of what goes on in medical diagnosis, a serious doctor wouldn't doubt that his patient is really in pain, even though it is subjective to the patient; how would our medical and ethical judgments fare if consciousness were an illusion? Searle concludes that "where consciousness is concerned, the existence of the appearance is the reality". We aren't betraying our scientific picture of the world by being realists.

That said, if we are going to accept the reality of consciousness, we're left with the aforementioned epistemological gap: how can two things with different ontological properties be identical to each other? The materialist believes that there is a bridge between the subjective qualities of experience and the objective qualities of matter, that the mental is reducible to the physical, whereas the panpsychist rejects it. However, it is noteworthy that both the materialist and the panpsychist position uphold the realism of experience. I argue that the panpsychist position faces simpler and lesser challenges than the materialist's with reduction.

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Reflective Comment

During the summer of 2021, I stumbled across Philip Goff's book *Galileo's Error* in a Portuguese book shop. I had heard about panpsychism before, but it seemed to me an outlandish idea. I had a generally physicalist intuition about consciousness, even though I hadn't thought about it in depth. So, I was very curious to read Goff's book. Not only did it dispel my misconceptions about panpsychism as well as provided a good introduction to the field of philosophy of mind. Around that time, I set my mind to writing my dissertation about panpsychism. Looking back, I am not so convinced of it as I was at the beginning of the year, even though I defended it in the dissertation. The more I read Goff, Searle, Chalmers, Dennett, and others the more confused and split I became. Nevertheless, I do think panpsychism does one thing right, which is, assuming realism about experience, to look for the solution to the problem of consciousness in the nature of matter.

The Pursuit of Thinness and Involuntary Intervention: Can We Ever Justify the Use of Coercive Methods in the Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa?

Ruth Drury

Abstract

The coercive treatment of anorexia is a contentious issue within contemporary bioethics yet remains understudied relative to other clinical populations. This dissertation examines the coercive treatment of anorexia and argues that it can be justified in some cases, using a combined nuanced-capacity and ethics of care approach. In defending this position, I consider the role of patient autonomy and illustrate that patients with anorexia often lack the capacity to make autonomous treatment decisions. Following this, I discuss concerns surrounding the potentially harmful nature of coercive treatment and the role of the clinician as a facilitator for harm. I resolve these concerns by demonstrating that, in cases where the benefits of employing coercive methods outweigh the harms incurred through doing so, coercive treatment can be regarded as an act of beneficence and long term nonmaleficence and can thereby be justified. I then highlight the significance of the therapeutic relationship and argue that coercive treatment should be implemented in the context of a caring and supportive therapeutic relationship that is guided by the ethics of care.

Many ethical concerns arise in the coercive treatment of anorexia. Chapter 3 examines ethical concerns surrounding patient autonomy and a patient's capacity to consent to treatment. It seeks to resolve these concerns by illustrating that patients with anorexia often lack the capacity to make autonomous treatment decisions. This extract highlights the inadequacy of the traditional account and means of assessing capacity in anorexic patients.

3.3. The Traditional Account of Capacity

Determining capacity in patients with anorexia is 'by no means a straightforward task' (Tan et al., 2006, p.4). This is partly due to the complex presentation of anorexia but can be mainly attributed to the inadequacy of the traditional account and means of assessing capacity in anorexic patients (Martens, 2015, p.187).

According to the traditional account, capacity consists of the following abilities: understanding, reasoning, appreciation, and expressing a choice (Grisso et al., 1995, p.129). The 'understanding' criterion dictates that an individual must be able to comprehend the 'factual information relevant to the decision they are

being asked to make' (Culver and Gert, 2004, p.260). In the context of treatment refusal in anorexia, this encompasses the ability to understand the nature of anorexia and the risks and benefits of proposed treatment strategies. 'Rationality' is a reasoning criterion which demands that an individual must be capable of engaging in reasoning processes such as 'weighing and comparing alternatives' (Martens, 2015, p.184). 'Appreciation' refers to the ability to apply information to oneself and one's circumstances (Grisso et al., 1995, p.129). Finally, 'expressing a choice' refers to the ability to communicate one's decision in some way (Grisso et al., 1995, p.129). According to the traditional account, if a patient with anorexia possesses these abilities, they have the capacity to make treatment decisions.

One prominent issue with the traditional account of capacity is that it focuses predominantly on cognitive or intellectual abilities. This is problematic because the treatment refusal of anorexic patients cannot be fully explained in terms of cognitive or intellectual deficits (Martens, 2015, p.187). To elaborate, evidence shows that patients with anorexia generally demonstrate a strong understanding of the facts of their disorder, its consequences, and proposed treatments (Tan et al., 2003a, p.701). According to the traditional account, the aforementioned patients possess the capacity to refuse treatment. However, at the same time, these patients often arrive at 'prima facie unreasonable' and potentially fatal treatment decisions (Martens, 2015, p.186). This suggests that the traditional account of capacity 'fails to capture' the difficulties that anorexic patients experience when making decisions regarding their treatment (Matusek and O'Dougherty, 2010, p.443).

3.4. Evidence of a Lack of Capacity Relevant to Making Treatment Decisions in Patients with Anorexia

Very few studies have examined capacity to consent to treatment in patients with anorexia. Apart from the work of Tan et al. (2003a, 2006), there have not been any studies generating empirical evidence regarding capacity in the anorexic population. Despite the limited research on the matter, we can still observe evidence of a lack of capacity relevant to making treatment decisions in patients with anorexia. For example, evidence demonstrates that organic impairments that affect reasoning and cognitive abilities are often found in patients with anorexia. Organic impairments may include: cerebral pseudoatrophy (loss of brain volume), hormonal imbalances, or biochemical changes (Vitousek et al., 1998, p.393). These impairments are caused by the nutritional deficiencies that arise in cases of severe anorexia and can adversely affect a patient's ability to make rational, informed decisions regarding their treatment (Matusek and O'Dougherty, 2010, p.442).

Further evidence of a lack of capacity relevant to making treatment decisions in patients with anorexia comes from a study conducted by Tan et al. (2003a, p.698). In the study, capacity to consent to treatment was assessed in 10 female patients with anorexia (Tan et al., 2003a, p.699). The patients were aged between 13 and 21 and had BMIs in the range of 12.57 to 19.62 (below normal) (Tan et al., 2003a, p.699). The patients were interviewed on a broad range of topics that were relevant to capacity and were asked to complete a psychopathology questionnaire (Tan et al., 2003a, p.700).

The results of the study indicated that most participants showed 'significant levels of psychopathology' as determined by their self-completed questionnaires for depression, anxiety, and eating disorders (Tan et al., 2003a, p.701). The interview aspect of the study generated clear evidence of compromised capacity in patients with anorexia. For example, many patients described experiencing alterations in their attitudes towards the risk of death and disability following the onset of anorexia, such that the risks of death and disability were less important than losing weight (Tan et al., 2003a, p.702). As stated by one patient: 'although I didn't mind dying, I didn't really want to, it's just that I wanted to lose weight, that was the main thing' (Tan et al., 2003a, p.702). A similar attitude that emerged was that death and disability had a certain meaning in the context of anorexia that compromised the perception of these risks. As one patient recalled: 'I remember getting some tests back saying how my liver was really damaged […] it really felt like quite an accomplishment!' (Tan et al., 2003a, p.702).

Many patients also described a shift in values following the onset of anorexia. Several participants described valuing anorexia more highly than their familial relationships, friendships, and academic achievements. As one patient put it: 'it's awful to admit, but in general it's [anorexia] the most important thing in my life […] In comparison with relationships, it's much more [important] than that' (Tan et al., 2003a, p.702). Some participants even went so far as to link anorexia to their personal identity; one patient expressed the view that if their anorexia 'magically disappeared', their 'entire personality would be different' (Tan et al., 2003a, p.702).
…
The evidence presented here demonstrates that capacity to consent to treatment is often lacking or significantly compromised in patients with anorexia in ways that are not captured by the traditional account of capacity. Considering this, I propose that the traditional account of capacity should be supplemented by an evaluative element that considers the role and influence of organic impairments and pathological values (values that 'can be clearly determined to arise from a mental disorder') (Tan et al., 2006, p.278).

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Reflective Comment

Although writing this dissertation was one of the most difficult things I did in my time at university, it was without question the most rewarding. Choosing a topic that had real personal significance to me meant that I found working on this project not only fulfilling, but cathartic. That being said, if I ever have to read the words 'coercion' or 'capacity' again, I will cry myself to sleep.

Does the Notion of a Buddhist Transhumanism Represent a Fundamental Misunderstanding of the Buddhist Teachings?

Mathew Hagar

As the essay that received the highest grade, this dissertation is presented in full.

Abstract

The burgeoning embrace of meditation practice in the west has led to the creation of myriad devices, apps, and digital resources, designed to aid the practitioner in the absence of access to traditional methods of transmission. As a result, there is a growing body of discourse dedicated to understanding the roots and benefits of such practices. It is hoped that, by understanding them more deeply, meditation practices can be optimised, or their results replicated as a means to reduce suffering in our increasingly complex world. One such pursuit involves the synthesis of Buddhist teachings with that of the Transhumanist endeavour to accelerate human development using science and technology. Buddhist Transhumanists argue that, whilst the two paths differ in method, they are unified in their fundamental aspiration to end unnecessary suffering. Nevertheless, if such a movement is to be successful it must not only avoid justifications in conflict with the scientific worldview but incorporate the key Buddhist teachings which inform all traditions. Insofar as Buddhism is centred around the subjective investigation of one's psychophysiological experience, it makes sense to survey the use of cognitive enhancements within the Buddhist framework. Unfortunately, the use of such enhancements seems to be in conflict with core Buddhist teachings and representative of a misinterpretation of *nibbana*. As such, the notion of a Buddhist Transhumanism appears to represent a fundamental misunderstanding of the Buddhist teachings.

Contents

1. Introduction

The following analysis will argue that, insofar as the use of enhancements is inseparable from *dukkha* and derived from a misinterpretation of *nibbana*, the notion of a Buddhist Transhumanism represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the Buddhist Teachings. The burgeoning embrace of meditation practices in the west has led to a number of devices, apps, and digital resources, designed to aid the practitioner in the absence of access to traditional methods of transmission. As a result, there is a growing body of discourse dedicated to understanding both the roots, and benefits, of these practices. It is hoped that, by deepening our understanding of them, practice can be either optimised, or the results replicated in order to reduce unnecessary suffering in our increasingly complex world. One such pursuit involves the synthesis of Buddhist teachings with that of Transhumanism. Transhumanism can be described as an endeavour to accelerate human development, using science and technology, toward a post-human state. Buddhist Transhumanists argue that, whilst the paths differ in method, Buddhism and Transhumanism are united in their fundamental aspiration to end unnecessary suffering. That said, if this movement is to be successful, it must avoid justifications that conflict with the scientific worldview, whilst incorporating the key Buddhist teachings which permeate all traditions. Fortunately, the Buddhist Eightfold Path provides a solid and rational framework upon which Transhumanists can base their efforts. Nevertheless, Buddhism is founded upon the subjective investigation of one's psychophysiological experience, as it manifests in the mind. As such, our inquiry will focus on the use of enhancements which target this modality, namely, cognitive enhancements. After exploring the use of

chemical cognitive enhancements, insofar as they are the most plausible solution at present, it will be found that their use is problematic on two counts. Namely, their potential to hinder the development of certain aspects of the Eightfold Path, and their inseparability from the perpetuation of suffering, or *dukkha*. Nevertheless, the Eightfold Path is one of inter-related development. As such, we will consider an attempt to facilitate the states which comprise *samma-samadhi,* by way of an intelligently designed neurodevice, insofar as its mastery is wholly necessary for *nibbana*. That said, whilst the neurodevice will initially appear well-equipped to facilitate the states which characterise *samma-samadhi*, it can only do so by virtue of grounding one in the phenomenal realm of *samsara*. As a result, insofar as *nibbana* refers to the ceasing of consciousness within *samsara*, any pursuit founded upon a misunderstanding of this concept will invalidate all efforts toward its realisation. Unfortunately, Buddhist Transhumanists appear to make this fatal error as they posit *nibbana* as an individual conscious experience. Consequently, the Buddhist Transhumanist project seems to represent a fundamental misunderstanding of what the Buddha taught.

2. Buddhist Transhumanism
2.1 Transhumanism and Buddhism
Before one can properly assess the notion of a Buddhist Transhumanism, one must construct a coherent synthesis of both paths. I will begin by outlining both Transhumanism and Buddhism, before highlighting the parallels which give rise to the idea of compatibility. That said, for Buddhist Transhumanism to be successful, it must conform to the scientific worldview upon which Transhumanism is founded. Therefore, it is necessary to dispense with justifications, specifically references to mysticism, which are outside the realm of reason and science. Similarly, it must also conform to that which unifies all Buddhist traditions. Namely, the Four Noble Truths, Three Marks of Existence (herein, Three Marks), and the Eightfold Path. Consequently, one can establish a reliable framework upon which to base our inquiry, which will focus on the use of cognitive enhancements.

In essence, Transhumanism is an intellectual and cultural life philosophy which seeks the acceleration of human evolution toward a post-human state. It affirms the desirability of human enhancement through applied reason, science, and technology; and advocates radical cognitive, physical, and emotional improvements, with a view to extending life indefinitely. As such, Transhumanists actively explore the use of neuroscience, regenerative medicine, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and cognitive enhancement. Nevertheless, the movement acknowledges the risk involved in such pursuits. Therefore, it emphasises careful deliberation in application in order to mitigate negative outcomes and expedite those beneficial. Although critics express

concerns regarding its apparent rejection of the human condition, proponents argue that the philosophy is optimistic at heart. That is, it imagines the possibilities available when we overcome our biological limitations, and pictures a state of exponential improvement in human foresight and wisdom. Ergo, Transhumanism seeks wellbeing for all, envisioning a future whereby every individual has the morphological freedom to determine the length and quality of their life (More, 2013 pp.3-5; 13-15; More *et al*, 2013 pp.54-55).

The heart of the Buddha's teachings is encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths and the Three Marks. Buddhist Transhumanist proponent Michael LaTorra (2015 p.221) describes the former as:
   - (1) There is suffering.
   - (2) There is a reason for suffering.
   - (3) There can be an end to suffering.
   - (4) The Eightfold Path leads to the end of suffering.
We will consider (4) in isolation shortly. Nevertheless, it is worth elucidating (1) and (2) to avoid any oversimplification. The late Buddhist scholar and monastic Walpola Sri Rahula (2000, p.16) outlines the truths more accurately as:
   - (1) *Dukkha.*
   - (2) *Samudaya*, the arising and origin of *dukkha.*
   - (3) *Nirodha*, the cessation of *dukkha.*
   - (4) *Magga*, the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha.*
Commonly translated as suffering, *dukkha* has a much wider scope in Pali. Whilst it is inclusive of suffering in the conventional sense (i.e., psychological and physical pain), it also encompasses much deeper notions such as insubstantiality and impermanence.

According to the Buddha, all compounded things are characterised by the Three Marks. Namely, *anicca, anatta,* and *dukkha.* That is, insofar as everything is fundamentally impermanent (*anicca*) and without persisting identity (*anatta*), the phenomenological realm of temporary composite things (*samsara*) is inherently ill-equipped to provide lasting fulfilment. As such, it is fundamentally unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) (Bartley, 2015 pp.25-27). From this perspective, the unenlightened mind naturally abides in a state of *avidya.* That is, it resides completely unaware of the true nature of reality as described in the Three Marks. Consequently, we live our lives in a way which assumes that the inverse is true. Specifically, insofar as we assume ourselves to possess a fixed and eternal identity, we grasp at elements of *samsara,* attempting to preserve and sustain it, in the belief that lasting satisfaction is attainable.

Unfortunately, this pursuit conflicts with the way things really are and thus, these strivings only lead to the perpetuation of *tanha.* Namely, the craving, or thirst, for a particular kind of existence. It is *tanha* then, that characterises (2),

samudaya. For example, in consuming food to pacify the experience of hunger, one simultaneously stimulates the process of digestion and thus, instantaneously re-creates the conditions for further hunger. As digestion occurs, and hunger gradually rearises, fuel is provided for *tanha* which, in this case, is the craving for the cessation of one's psychophysiological experience of it. This process can be applied to all aspects of *samsara*. With this in mind, one must cultivate an experiential understanding of the Three Marks through the restrained contemplation of, and mastery over, every area of one's psychophysiological experience through the practice of meditation. Consequently, one is able to gradually dissolve *tanha*, put an end to *dukkha,* and realise *nibbana*. Namely, the ceasing of experience within the realm of *samsara*. I will explore *Nibbana* in more detail in 4.4 (p.31).

At this stage, one can see how the notion of Buddhist Transhumanism might emerge. For example, both share in their assessment that the human condition is unsatisfactory. Moreover, this un-satisfactoriness is inseparable from impermanent existence. Therefore, it is desirable to transcend the limited self-experience and subsequently, death, if one is be liberated from unnecessary suffering. However, despite these parallels, Transhumanism aims to achieve the above through the radical enhancement of human faculties using science and technology. Contrastingly, Buddhism seeks to alleviate suffering through an experiential understanding of its causes, from the vantage point of our current biological state. In other words, whilst the former focuses on altering the material components of reality, the latter is concerned with transforming one's relationship to them (Humphreys, 1990 p.242; Lam, 2018; Ross, 2020 p.147).

Nevertheless, despite these differences, Buddhist Transhumanists argue that, insofar as they are primarily concerned with the practical application of a particular means to reduce and eradicate suffering, the two paths are easily reconcilable (LaTorra, 2015 pp.221-224). For LaTorra (2015 p.219), 'this particular movement seeks to attain the traditional Buddhist goals of reducing suffering and realising Awakening, but with the assistance of scientific knowledge and technological means'. This view is shared by fellow proponent James Hughes (2018 pp.656-657), who likens the synthesis of Buddhism and science to that which took place as the early Buddhist schools moved through, and adapted to, the varying cultural contexts of Tibet, China, and Japan. That said, before we consider the practicalities of a Buddhist Transhumanism, it is important to dispense with any justifications which might rely on mystical aspects of the Buddhist teachings.

2.2 Appeals to Mysticism
At present, Buddhist Transhumanist literature somewhat lacks in uniformity. That is, the idea neither conforms to the teachings of a particular tradition, nor

does it propound a specific position grounded in the teachings common to all schools. As such, there is a tendency for proponents to sporadically cite aspects from a number of traditions, constructing a mosaic form of Buddhism depending on the enhancement they wish to justify. These justifications often cite scriptural references to supernatural occurrences which appear to offer anecdotal support for heightened human abilities. Whilst Hughes (2018, pp.656-657) openly laments the emphasis on non-secular practice at the expense of mysticism, for a movement grounded in applied reason, empirical science, and the use of technology, it is important to focus on what is compatible with this worldview. One common example is reference to the *bodhisattva* ideal.

In short, a *bodhisattva* is an enlightened individual who intentionally postpones their full liberation in order to help other beings attain realisation. Reference to such notions is often used to justify a prolonged embodied existence with heightened faculties. However, one must note here that I do not intend to devalue such concepts. In fact, the *bodhisattva* is particularly significant in the Mahayana schools of Buddhism. Nevertheless, the importance of these 'periodically advanced super beings' (Hughes, 2018 p.655) differs depending on the tradition. Moreover, anchoring justifications for enhancement in such ideals could also be morally problematic. For instance, if the *bodhisattva* postpones his/her liberation to assist other beings, and an enhancement proposed by the Transhumanist is said to facilitate such ends, then the Transhumanist almost implies that they are spiritually qualified to make such judgements. However, if this is not the case, then concerns arise regarding the implementation of potentially harmful practices by those without the necessary authority. Therefore, it is sensible to avoid the advocation of enhancements based solely on reference to such concepts.

Another example is that of justifications which refer to supernatural abilities as described in the Pali Canon, the scriptural authority of the Buddhist teachings. Referring to reports of telepathy, Hughes (2018, p.655) argues that Buddhist practices were taught so that we might all eventually achieve transcendence and its 'superpowers'. Although he fails to cite specific sources, one can assume that he refers to abilities garnered from abiding in particular states of meditative absorption, as described in the *Iddhipada-Vibhanga Sutta* (SN 51, pp.1718-1749) and the *Sammanaphala Sutta* (DN 2, pp.105-109). In short, the Buddha describes how, when certain qualities are developed, one experiences manifold supranormal powers such as hearing divine sounds, knowing the awareness of others, recollecting past lives, and witnessing the arising and passing away of all beings (SN 51, pp.1726-1728). That said, the Buddha also specifically warns against pursuing the path based on the desire to attain such abilities.

In *Kevaddha Sutta* (DN 11, pp.175-185), the Buddha is challenged to direct a monk to display psychic powers as a means of increasing faith among the laity. Despite his initial refusal, he is pressed and so proceeds to outline three miracles he has known and realised himself. Psychic power, the power of instruction, and telepathy. He then invites his interlocuter to imagine that an individual, with faith already established in the teachings, were to witness his wielding of the manifold powers, before recounting these events to a sceptic. The latter might proclaim 'It is wonderful, sir, it is marvellous, the great power and skill of that ascetic' (DN 11.5, p.176). Nevertheless, their subsequent motivation to walk the path would be rooted in their craving for a particular kind of ability (*tanha*) which is inseparable from *dukkha*. In contrast, one's motivations should be derived only from one's own experience in practice and not from reports, inference, or blind appeals to the authority of a teacher (AN 3.65 pp.279-283). Hence, any reliable Buddhist Transhumanism would refrain from using these justifications by virtue of their having no first-hand experience of such, alongside little-to-no empirical data. Fortunately, their use is unnecessary. For the Buddha provided *magga*, or the Middle Way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. Alongside, the Four Noble Truths and the Three Marks, this Eightfold Path forms the basis of all Buddhist traditions and practice. Hence, a viable Buddhist Transhumanism need only incorporate these three teachings to be successful.

2.3 The Eightfold Path

Upon his discovery of *nirodha*, the third noble truth, the Buddha formulated the Eightfold Path, which characterises *magga*, as a means of realising it. LaTorra's (2015 pp.221-222) understanding of this is uncontroversial. That is, the Eightfold path is designed to enable the practitioner to perfect the three essential components of the Buddhist training, necessary for the realisation of *Nibbana*. Namely, *sila*, or morality; *samadhi*, mental discipline; and *panna*, experiential wisdom. The path itself can be divided into these three parts, with each being comprised of the qualities one must cultivate in order to master each aspect. These are:

- *Sila*
    - Right Speech (*Samma-Vaca*)
    - Right Action (*Samma-Kammanta*)
    - Right Livelihood (*Samma-Ajiva*)
- *Samadhi*
    - Right Effort (*Samma-Vayama*)
    - Right Mindfulness (*Samma-Sati*)
    - Right Concentration (*Samma-Samadhi*)
- *Panna*
    - Right Understanding (*Samma Ditthi*)
    - Right Intention (*Samma-Samkappa*)

It must be noted, however, that whilst arranged in this way, the Eightfold path is not one of linear progression whereby one component is necessarily mastered to cultivate the next. Rather, it is one of inter-related development, insofar as the cultivation of one area is inseparable from that of others. Although *sila* is generally considered the foundation for all higher spiritual attainments, this is not *necessarily* the case.

Consider Right Understanding and Right Intention. Namely, an understanding of the Four Noble Truths, and the intention to renounce one's attachment to *samsara* and seek the end of *dukkha*, respectively (Rahula, 2000 pp. 45-50). If one is to exercise Right Intention by engaging in aspects of *sila* in order to cultivate *samadhi*, then one must first possess some degree of Right Understanding, even if this is only intellectual at first. Similarly, to cultivate Right Mindfulness; namely, bringing direct awareness to one's subjective, psychophysiological experience; one comes to understand the experiences of other sentient beings. As such, by developing Right Mindfulness, one inadvertently develops Right Understanding. Thus, whilst *panna* arises out of *sila* and *samadhi*, it also supplements and supports them. This process is applicable to all areas of the Eightfold Path.

At this point, the significance of volitional action, or *kamma*, and its resulting impressions on the mind can be seen. It is in light of this that *sila* is considered crucial for one's spiritual development. In fact, it can be argued that spiritual development is not entirely possible without this moral basis, an assessment shared by Buddhist Transhumanists (Hughes, 2012; 2013; LaTorra, 2015). As such, *sila,* as an ethical framework, is not guided by normative theories derived from conventional notions of morality and justice. Rather, the moral quality of *kamma* is defined by the psychophysiological conditions it creates for both the practitioner and other beings, alongside the degree to which it hinders the ability of such parties to realise *nibbana*. For instance, imagine I intentionally injure another being by punching them in the torso. As a result, I might give rise to a particular set of subjective conditions characterised by feelings of guilt or worry, for example. Similarly, my actions might garner similar outcomes for the recipient, even if they are qualitatively different. Consequently, and as we shall see in the following chapter, the presence of these mental hindrances has a significant impact on one's ability to cultivate the path and thus, put an end to *dukkha*.

Whilst Transhumanism and Buddhism differ in method, they appear unified in a fundamental value. Namely, the aspiration to end unnecessary suffering through the transcendence of a limited, and temporary, experience of self. That said, it was argued that, for a coherent synthesis of the two to be achieved, it must conform to both the demands of the scientific worldview and

incorporate the core teachings of all Buddhist traditions. Namely, the Four Noble Truths, the Three Marks, and the Eightfold Path. Fortunately, this latter seems to provide a solid framework upon which Transhumanists can base their efforts. In 3.0, I will discuss *sila* and its aspects in more detail, before exploring how the use of chemical cognitive enhancements might expedite the development of it, and consequently, *samadhi* and *panna*.

3. Medication for Meditation
3.1 The Moral Path
Toward the end of the preceding chapter, we considered the importance of *kamma* and its relation to the cultivation of the Eightfold Path. It was argued that the moral quality of an action is determined by the conditions it creates for future *kamma*, and the degree to which these are conducive to the realisation of *nibbana*. That said, Buddhism is fundamentally founded upon the subjective investigation of one's experience as it manifests in the mind. Thus, it is more accurate to assert that the moral quality of an action is determined by the mental state, or intention, by which it is preceded (Bartley, 2015 p.31). In light of this, wholesome acts are those which create conditions in the mind that are conducive to the cultivation of the Eightfold Path. As such, unwholesome acts are those which gives rise to the inverse.

From the Buddhist perspective, all unwholesome acts are grounded in one or more of the Three Poisons. Namely, *raga* (greed), *dvesha* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion). Insofar as these roots are representative of *avidya* (see 2.1, p.8), actions derived from them only perpetuate *tanha* and are thus, inseparable from *dukkha*. Actions grounded in the poisons manifest in the form of particular mental states which cloud the mind, hindering one's ability to cultivate *sila*, and thus, *samadhi* and *panna*. These states, the Five Hindrances, can be described as follows:
- (1) Worldly desire
- (2) Ill-will and hatred
- (3) Sloth-and-torpor
- (4) Restlessness-and-worry
- (5) Doubt

For instance, on the surface, the donation of a large sum to charity by a CEO may not appear unwholesome. However, imagine that the act is motivated by a desire to improve one's public image and vilify a competitor, insofar as the latter has recently reduced their market share and profit margin. This act, grounded in the Three Poisons by virtue of one's intention to solidify their illusory self-experience, might manifest in the form of hindrances (1), (2), (4), and (5). As a result, *avidya* is reinforced and so the mind continues to crave the continuation of these circumstances. As such, the act is inseparable from

dukkha. Therefore, it is necessary to purify the mind of these hindrances and uproot the Three Poisons if one is to progress on the Eightfold Path.

In light of this, the Buddha prescribed a basic framework for the cultivation of wholesome action, in order to purify the hindrances and facilitate adherence to *sila*. Namely, *panca-sila*, or the Five Precepts. That is, one must abstain from:
- (1) Taking the lives of beings
- (2) Taking that which is not given
- (3) Sexual misconduct
- (4) Engagement in false speech
- (5) Taking intoxicants which cause heedlessness (Rahula, 2000 p.80).

By adhering to *panca-sila*, one simultaneously cultivates Right Speech, Right Livelihood, and Right Action, freeing the mind of unnecessary fetter through this habituation of mindful conduct. In turn, the practitioner develops a solid mental base from which to cultivate *samadhi* and, in particular, *samma-samadhi*. In short, mastery of *samma-samadhi* is characterised by a state of contemplative absorption; whereby one experiences neither thought nor feeling; and where the mind does not cling to, nor strive to accomplish, anything. This state, also known as *samadhi*, is wholly necessary for *nibbana* and will be particularly important in 4.0 (p.25). That said, to avoid confusion I will hereby refer to this state as the *state of samadhi*, with *samadhi* referring to the relevant aspect of the Eightfold Path.

As we have seen, purification of the Five Hindrances is necessarily desirable insofar as it facilitates the cultivation of *sila* and thus, *samadhi,* and *panna*. This is best achieved through adherence to *panca-sila*. That said, it is difficult to imagine how a Buddhist Transhumanism might achieve this without intrusive or coercive measures. Nevertheless, one could argue that if *panca-sila* facilitates purification of the hindrances, then purification of the hindrances can also facilitate adherence to *panca-sila*. Luckily, the Buddha describes the antidote for each of the hindrances outlined above. He states:

> *Abandoning worldly desires, he dwells with a mind free from worldly desires [...]*
> *Abandoning ill-will and hatred…and by compassionate love for the welfare of all*
> *living beings his mind is purified of ill-will and hatred. Abandoning sloth-and-*
> *torpor [...] mindful and clearly aware, his mind is purified of sloth-and-torpor.*
> *Abandoning worry-and-flurry…and with an inwardly calmed mind his heart is*
> *purified of worry-and-flurry. Abandoning doubt he dwells [...] without*
> *uncertainty as to what things are wholesome, his mind is purified of doubt*
> (DN 2.66 p.101).

In essence, the purifications refer to one's being mindful, aware, inwardly calmed, and having an experiential insight into what is, and is not, beneficial for spiritual development. As such, the Transhumanist might argue that these are

easily achievable by way of chemical cognitive enhancement (CCE). Namely, the heightening of particular cognitive faculties using pharmaceutical stimulants. Consequently, a Buddhist Transhumanism could be justified in utilising CCE's as a means of cultivating *sila*, providing a solid foundation for the development of other aspects of the Eightfold Path.

3.2 Chemical Cognitive Enhancements

In 'Buddhism and Neuroethics: The Ethics of Pharmaceutical Cognitive Enhancement', Fenton (2009 pp.48-49) describes cognitive enhancement as a positive change to the efficiency of a relevant cognitive mechanism in an individual. Enhancement here refers to that which is necessary for one to live a life free of unnecessary suffering. He then proceeds to highlight a number of Buddhist practices alongside their function. Namely:
- *Samatha*: a breath focused technique establishing concentration.
- *Vipassana*: the cultivation of experiential insight through the equanimous observation of one's subjective experience.
- *Maranasati*: a reflective meditation on death and impermanence, reducing attachment to the material world.
- *Metta:* the cultivation of loving-awareness and compassion for all beings.

It is subsequently argued that, if CCE's can purify the hindrances in a similar way to the above, then their use would be compatible with a Buddhist framework. With this in mind, he argues that existing CCE's, such as Ritalin, could be beneficial for those on the Buddhist path.

In short, Ritalin functions by stimulating the central nervous system, targeting regions of the midbrain involved in reward. As such, it implicates pleasure as a proximate cause of continued use, temporarily reduces the need for sleep, heightens attention, and facilitates concentration. Although it fails to address every hindrance, one could argue that by increasing concentration and awareness, and thereby reducing sloth-and-torpor, Ritalin facilitates a standard of experience whereby one can develop other practices, such as *metta* and *maranasati,* to target those remaining. That said, whilst this might appear promising, it is important to determine whether 'the drug intoxicates, creating stupefaction and chemical pleasure which delays efforts to eliminate dukkha' (Hughes, 2013 p.310). To do so would be to violate the fifth precept (see 3.1, p.16). Nevertheless, Buddhist Transhumanists suggest that using a CCE to sharpen the mind is no more or less natural than utilising meditation practice. Moreover, if Buddhism permits the consumption of caffeine for wakefulness, for example, then it might also permit the use of other stimulants for similar ends (Hughes, 2012 pp.30-31; 2018, pp.659-660).

In the *Pamadaviharin Sutta* (SN 35.97 pp.1179-1180), the Buddha describes the experience of heedlessness. Namely, when one dwells without restraint over

sense faculties, including the mind, one is without joy, rapture, or serenity, and thus, experiences *dukkha*. Suffering in this way is to experience an un-centeredness of mind, whereby the individual does not exercise full conscious control over his sense faculties. As seen, Ritalin operates by stimulating the central nervous system. It does this via the release and increase of dopamine in the body. The wider debate regarding the use of Ritalin is beyond the scope of this analysis, however, it is important to reflect on some key implications of its therapeutic use. Whilst there have been positive outcomes in a wide number of cases, the long-term effects of Ritalin use, beneficial or otherwise, are largely unknown. As such, a number of countries and organisations have discontinued its use due to concerns over adverse side-effects including violence, dysphoria, excitability, hostility, and suicidal thoughts. Moreover, it has also been acknowledged that prolonged use may cause or worsen psychiatric disorders such as depression, psychosis, and mania (Bratter, 2007 pp.7-8; EMEA, 2009).

In light of this, the potential downsides of Ritalin appear reflective of the uncentred mind characterised by the loss of full conscious control over one's faculties. Moreover, states like hostility appear inseparable from hindrances such as ill-will and hatred. As such, any action that arises from such a state is also likely to violate the very precepts that Ritalin would be employed to assist in the cultivation of. Therefore, the potential side-effects of Ritalin as a CCE appear inextricably linked to the perpetration of *dukkha*. That said, the Transhumanist might argue that future incarnations of the drug would be thoroughly tested, and the side-effects reduced, if not completely eradicated. In fact, Ritalin itself was developed as a safer alternative to amphetamine-based treatments of which the downsides were far worse. For example, it has been argued that Ritalin lacks the addictive qualities of its predecessors (Stanislav *et al,* 2007 pp.2-4). Therefore, it is conceivable to assume that future incarnations of the drug, which enhance the qualities conducive to hindrance purification, without severe side-effects, are likely.

That said, even if this latter is the case, its use within a Buddhist framework is still problematic. For example, as a drug which involves the systematic increase of dopamine in neural pleasure centres, its half-life inevitably reduces over time. As such, if one is to maintain the same effects, an increase in dosage is necessary in long-term therapeutic use. This raises further concerns insofar as the possibility of addiction and substance dependency is increased, and consequently, the potential for *tanha*. In fact, the US Drug Enforcement Administration has previously identified Ritalin as a nervous system stimulant with a high potential for abuse. These concerns were echoed by the European Medicines Agency in their recommendation that, for patients prescribed Ritalin for more than a year, physicians should interrupt treatment at regular intervals to determine whether continued use is wholly beneficial (Bratter, 2007 p.9;

EMEA, 2009 p.1; Keane, 2008 p.407). Ergo, even if violation of the fifth precept could be avoided, the use of Ritalin still appears inseparable from the very cause of *dukkha*. Whilst one could argue that use would be merely supplementary, the fact that it is intended for those 'normally considered healthy' (Fenton, 2015 p.49) suggests that it may be wiser to cultivate the path from this existing state of wellbeing.

3.3 Future Chemical Cognitive Enhancements

As we have seen, the use of existing CCE's like Ritalin for hindrance purification is problematic on two counts. Namely, (1) it violates the fifth precept by virtue of its potential side-effects; and (2) the necessity of increased dosage over time suggests that its use is inseparable from the perpetuation of *tanha* and thus, *dukkha*. Nevertheless, one could still argue that it is only a matter of time before such issues are solved through advances in neurotechnology. For example, it is reasonable to assume that, like Ritalin, a future CCE could be developed to function without the adverse side-effects listed in 3.2 (p.19), possess a significantly longer half-life, and avoid violating the fifth precept by inducing an evenness of mind within the practitioner. In fact, Buddhist Transhumanists have already explored the use of hypothetical CCE's which are reflective of the above.

Buddhist Transhumanist proponent James Hughes (2013 pp.31-33) eagerly anticipates the development of safer, more powerful, and targeted mood-altering drugs, imagining CCE's which function in a similar way to anti-depressants. These stimulants would not be dopamine-driven happy pills. Rather, they would work to 'smooth out' mental maladies like depression and enhance the practitioner's mood to induce a stable state of happiness (SSH). As such, this *Hughes CCE* would achieve the increased mindfulness, awareness, and stimulation offered by Ritalin; whilst also possessing a considerably longer half-life, significantly reducing the potential for *tanha*. Moreover, by virtue of its being specifically targeted toward the eradication of psychological disorders, it would mitigate the problematic side-effects, like depression or psychosis, which might lead one to violate *panca-sila*. Consequently, the practitioner would be induced with a base-level of experience conducive to both the purification of the Five Hindrances, and proper cultivation of *sila*.

Unfortunately, the *Hughes CCE* is problematic in two fundamental areas. First, the artificial 'smoothing out' of particular psychophysiological experiences is in direct conflict with the Buddhist teachings. As stated in 2.1 (p.8), Buddhism emphasises the experiential mastery over all aspects of one's subjective experience. More specifically, in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the Buddha outlines eight stages of mastery on the path to *nibbana*. The first four involve:

Perceiving forms internally, one sees external forms, limited and beautiful or ugly, and in mastering these, one is aware that one knows and sees them […]
Perceiving forms internally, one sees external forms, unlimited and beautiful or ugly, one is aware that one knows and sees them […]
Not perceiving forms internally, one sees external forms limited and beautiful or ugly, and in mastering these, one is aware that one knows and sees them […]
Not perceiving forms internally, one sees external forms, unlimited and beautiful or ugly, and in mastering these, one is aware that one knows and sees them (DN 16.3, pp.249).

In other words, the experience and equanimous acceptance of *all* subjective phenomena; irrespective of scope, perceived desirability, and location, is wholly necessary if one wishes to realise *nibbana*. As such, the intentional suppression of any aspect of experience is merely a manifestation of *tanha*, insofar as it signifies a craving for a particular state of affairs. Therefore, any CCE which seeks to deny an element of one's subjective experience is likely to obstruct their ability to realise *nibbana* in the way the Buddha taught.

This brings us to the second issue. Namely, that SSH is actually attainable. One must note that Hughes (2013 p.31) derives his notion of SSH from his likening of the Buddhist moral path to that of Aristotelian virtue ethics. In brief, the latter involves the perfection of specific virtues as a means to achieving a stable state of wellbeing, otherwise known as *eudaimonia*. Similarly, he argues, Buddhism emphasises the use of morality as a means to freeing oneself from *dukkha*. Insofar as freedom from *dukkha* is analogous to *eudaimonia* then, if this state can be induced by a *Hughes CCE*, its use is justified. However, this line of reasoning highlights a much wider issue concerning attempts to synthesise western philosophical concepts with those of eastern religions. Aristotle's *eudaimonia* refers to an embodied state of individual flourishing achieved within the phenomenal realm (i.e., *samsara*). It is the result of the habituation of specific character traits (or, virtues), in line with what is considered the *telos* for human beings, namely, rationality. However, the virtues themselves are relative to a very specific cultural, social, political, and philosophical context. This is evident in virtues which demand the cultivation of *justice*, for example, a concept which is almost always defined by the context in which it is applied (Karut, 2018). Contrastingly, Buddhism denies the existence of enduring values, essences, or ways of being that can facilitate lasting satisfaction in *samsara* (see Three Marks in 2.1, pp.7-8). Therefore, pursuing SSH is but a reflection of *avidya* which, in turn, will always lead to *dukkha*. Moreover, it is not the case that *eudaimonia* and *nibbana* are analogous. As we shall see in 4.4 (p.31), *nibbana* is not a state of wellbeing in the world, but quite the opposite. Therefore, the use of a *Hughes CCE* appears incompatible with a coherent Buddhist Transhumanism.

In this chapter, we explored *sila* in more detail. It was argued that, insofar as *panca-sila* serves to purify the Five Hindrances necessary for cultivation of *sila*, if purification could be achieved using CCE's, then their use might be justified within the Buddhist framework. However, after exploring the use of an existing CCE, Ritalin, this was deemed problematic by virtue of its violation of the fifth precept, and perpetuation of *tanha*. As an alternative, we explored the use of a hypothetical, *Hughes CCE,* which might avoid these pitfalls. That said, as it was founded on the notion of inducing SSH, the very reasoning behind this solution conflicted with the core Buddhist teaching of the Three Marks. Hence, insofar as their use necessitates the violation of precepts, is in conflict with the Three Marks, and is inseparable from the perpetuation of *dukkha*, CCE's would be unable to form part of a coherent Buddhist Transhumanism. Nevertheless, as outlined in 2.3, the Eightfold Path is one of inter-related development. As such, Buddhist Transhumanism might seek instead to expedite *samadhi* and consequently, develop *sila* and *panna*. In 4.0, we will explore how this might be achieved by way of physical cognitive enhancements such as neurodevices.

4. Programming Peace
4.1 Physical Cognitive Enhancements
In the previous chapter, it was argued that the use of CCE's within a Buddhist framework was problematic by virtue of its being inseparable from *dukkha,* and in conflict with the Three Marks. Nevertheless, the Eightfold Path is one of inter-related development, as opposed to being strictly linear. Whilst *sila* is generally considered the foundation for spiritual progress, this is not *necessarily* the case. For instance, one could argue that if the cultivation of *samadhi* (see 2.3, p.12), through the practice of meditation, is conducive to both *sila* and *panna*, then if this could be achieved artificially one might yield similar outcomes. As such, this pursuit would simultaneously be an expression of *samma-vayama*, or Right Effort. That is, the energetic will to uproot, and prevent, unwholesome mind states and cultivate those that are wholesome (Rahula, 2000 p.48).

In service of such ends, and in light of the limitations of CCE's, one might suggest an alternative in the form of a physical cognitive enhancement (PCE), such as a neurodevice implanted directly into the brain. According to Hughes (2013 pp.30-31; 37-38), such devices would continuously monitor, and direct, our thoughts and behaviour to facilitate the states which characterise *samadhi*. As a result, PCE's would create surer, longer lasting, and more targeted changes. Consequently, they would eventually supersede the need for traditional practices, before becoming the principle means of spiritual transformation. That said, he does stop short of describing exactly what these devices might look like. Thus, if we are to properly assess the use of a PCE within a coherent

Buddhist Transhumanism, it is useful to understand the intellectual foundations of this idea. From this, we can construct a hypothetical PCE, upon which we can base the remainder of our inquiry.

In a paper entitled 'Trans-Spirit: Religion, Spirituality and Transhumanism', LaTorra (2005 pp.41-42; 49-53) attempts to justify the use of enhancements by virtue of their ability to produce the psychophysiological states derived from existing practices. He argues that, whilst practices such as meditation are useful, they ought eventually to be superseded with something better designed to facilitate a more *intense experience of enlightenment*. Thus, any synthesis of Transhumanism and spirituality would aim for the complete scientific understanding of spiritual phenomena, developing technologies that could then induce these experiences at will. Moreover, science and technology would ensure that enhancements could be personalised based on an individual's specific psychological and neurophysiological needs. As such, and insofar as our inquiry is concerned with expediting *samadhi*, we can interpret these *spiritual experiences* as those which characterise this particular aspect of the path.

4.2 Samma-Samadhi

From the Buddhist perspective, *samma-samadhi* is arguably the most important aspect of the Eightfold Path, insofar as its mastery is wholly necessary for *nibbana*. As such, it is important to understand the distinct states which characterise it. Namely, the four meditative absorptions, or *jhanas*. In short, the *jhanas* describe one's progressive deepening into *samma-samadhi*, through the practice of meditation, which ultimately culminates in the *state of samadhi* (see 3.1, p.16). Established in *samma-sati*, or Right Mindfulness, one 'abides contemplating body as body […] feelings as feelings […] mind-objects as mind-objects ardent clearly aware and mindful, having put aside hankering and fretting for the world' (DN 22.21 pp.348-349). As a result, the practitioner is able to enter into and progress through the *jhanas,* one-by-one, as outlined below:

- *First Jhana*
    detached from sense-desires, detached from unwholesome states, he enters and remains in the first jhana…and so suffuses, drenches, fills and irradiates his body, that there is no spot in his entire body that is untouched by this delight and joy born of detachment (DN 6.16 pp. 146-147).
- *Second Jhana*
    with the subsiding of thinking and pondering, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, enters and remains in the second jhana, which is without thinking and pondering, born of concentration, filled with delight and joy (DN 2.77 p.103).

- *Third Jhana*
  > with the fading away of delight remains imperturbable, mindful, and
  > clearly aware, and experiences in himself that joy of which the Noble
  > Ones say: "Happy is he who dwells with equanimity and mindfulness",
  > and he enters and remains in the third jhana (DN 2.79 p.103).
- *Fourth Jhana*
  > having given up pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of former
  > gladness and sadness, enters and remains in the fourth jhana, which is
  > beyond pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness.
  > And that, monks, is called the way of practice leading to the cessation of
  > suffering (DN 22.21 p.349).

In other words, once established in *samma-sati*, the practitioner begins to advance through a series of specific states which culminate in a set of psychophysiological conditions, void of distinction, from which *nibbana* can thus, be realised.

That said, before we can determine whether a PCE can actually facilitate these states, it is important to reflect on the wording of scripture. That is, in his description of the *jhanas*, the Buddha is quoted as referring to the 'delight and joy' experienced as a result of abiding in each. In light of this, one could question my earlier rejection of the *Hughes CCE* on the grounds that SSH refers to something similar. However, it is important to understand that the *jhanas* are the result of one's equanimous investigation of all subjective phenomena. As we saw in 2.1 (p.8), one should not crave for, nor seek to perpetuate, any particular kind of experience; positive, negative, or neutral. To do so would be an expression of *tanha*. Therefore, insofar as the *Hughes CCE* intentionally seeks to perpetuate a specific and continuous state of abiding, it would be inaccurate to suggest that experience of the *jhanas* bears any significant similarity.

It must be noted that the Buddha is referring to experiential states which cannot be accurately described in language. Moreover, the ancient language of Pali, from which my source is translated, is comprised of many terms which have no direct translation into English. One need only to refer to the inaccuracy of describing *dukkha* as suffering in the conventional sense to see that this is the case (see 2.1, p.7). In contrast, the *jhanas* refer to an ever-deepening stillness of mind, experienced as a result of a sustained familiarisation with its activity through meditation. As a result of the experiential wisdom gained from this practice; the mind, no longer concerned with attaching conceptual thought to physical phenomena, decreases in agitation and thus, arises stillness. Accordingly, this absence of concern with phenomenological conceptualisation gives rise to the conditions for one-pointed concentration. As such, the mind of *avidya* gradually begins to soften,

thinking and pondering over aspects of the world subsides, and the mind deepens in this stillness. Consequently, the mind becomes imperturbable. Tranquil. In light of this, if a PCE is to be successful in its endeavour to facilitate these experiences, then it must focus, not on the description of the state itself, but on that which creates it.

4.3 Neurodevices for Nibbana

As we have seen, scriptural descriptions of the *jhana* states, which characterise *samma-samadhi,* are an attempt to refer to that which is beyond the scope of conventional language. Therefore, if a PCE is to expedite *samma-samadhi*, it must seek to facilitate the qualities which give rise to such states, as opposed to the states themselves. As such, it must aim to facilitate (1) detachment from sense desires; (2) one-pointed concentration resulting in the absence of habitual thought; and (3) the equanimous, imperturbable mind. Consequently, one might artificially replicate the results of progression through the first, second, and third *jhana*s. With this in mind, the Transhumanist might argue that this is realistically achievable, by way of an intelligently designed neurodevice. Unfortunately, the practicalities involved in both engineering and implanting such a device are beyond the scope of my knowledge. Nevertheless, let us suppose that it can be done so we can imagine how it might function. For convenience, we will call this neurodevice *iAttain*.

Let us imagine that *iAttain*, implanted directly into the brain, has the ability to stimulate every region deemed to play an instrumental role in our conscious experience of the world. Its operating system, tasked with the real-time monitoring of our mental operations, would be also connected to an external server. This server would simultaneously collect the data of practitioners to develop a comprehensive understanding of their subjective experience. As such, *iAttain* would create a personalised map of each practitioner's habitual thought patterns, cognitive tendencies, and emotional profile, alongside their psychophysiological effects. With the ability to directly influence our cognitive experience, it could detect deviations from wholesome states and redirect them where necessary. Moreover, with a wealth of real-time data derived from its users, *iAttain* might also be able to induce specific meditative states based on the maps of more experienced practitioners. As such, the device would function in the way described by Hughes (see 4.1, p.25) and, by virtue of its personalisation, be able to engineer specific psychophysiological experiences 'at will' as envisioned by LaTorra (2005 pp.41-42; 49-53).

At this point, *iAttain* appears to possess the ability to direct our thoughts away from concerns in the material world. Moreover, if it can work to direct our thoughts away from mundane externalities, then it might also serve to establish one-pointed concentration. This latter would likely be supplemented by its real-

time monitoring function, which would allow it to maintain this one-pointedness of mind. As a result, according to the Buddhist teachings, the mind should then enter a state of equanimity and stillness. In addition, if, for whatever reason, one's current psychological and neurophysiological condition does not allow for this natural progression, *iAttain* could simply consult the map of a more realised practitioner, and gently engineer this latter. As such, *iAttain* seems relatively well-equipped to facilitate the first three *jhanas* without issue. However, as we shall see, progression through the fourth *jhana* presents a significant obstacle for our PCE.

The Buddha describes the fourth *jhana* as a state 'beyond pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness' (DN 22.21 p.349). More precisely, it is the *state of samadhi*, as described in 3.1 (p.16), from which the practitioner is able to incline the mind toward the realisation of *nibbana*. That said, the issue at hand is not whether *iAttain* could facilitate this state, by way of natural progression after establishing the third *jhana* or by inducing it directly. Rather, it is its seeming inseparability from the perpetuation of *tanha* and therefore, *dukkha*. It is important to note that the fourth *jhana*, that is, *the state of samadhi*, is not itself an enlightenment experience. Instead, it is merely the distinctionless and equanimous mind, which, when volitionally inclined in the right way, can penetrate the true nature of existence as outlined in the Three Marks, and thereby realise *nibbana* (DN 2, pp.104-108).

4.4 Nibbana and the Self
Until now, I have refrained from providing a detailed description of *nibbana*. In fact, any description I do give will likely be inadequate, as *nibbana* itself is necessarily beyond description. That being said, insofar as its realisation is the fundamental motivation for, and purpose of, the Buddhist endeavour, to misunderstand *nibbana* is to misunderstand the path entirely. In the Buddhist Transhumanist discourse, very little is said about the notion of *nibbana*. However, there are two particular descriptions which provide an insight into how it might be viewed. First, proponent Michael LaTorra (2015 p.219), describes *nibbana* as simply 'the deathless state of perfect liberation'. Evidently, this description leaves much to be desired. Fortunately, Hughes provides more insightful account in his description of the *bodhisattva*. He argues, that 'the bodhisattva's goal is not simply the gross happiness of all beings, but also their liberation to a higher state of consciousness' (Hughes, 2012 p.70). From this, we can ascertain that the Buddhist Transhumanist interpretation of *nibbana* refers to an ongoing conscious experience characterised by a particular state, or quality, of consciousness.

Unfortunately, this interpretation is not reflective of *nibbana*. First, it is incorrect to describe *nibbana* as a state of any kind. In fact, it is not a state or place, within or beyond, *samsara* (Bartley, 2015 p.93). According to the Buddha:

> *There is that dimension, monks, where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor staying; neither passing away nor arising: unestablished, unevolving, without support [mental object]. This, just this, is the end of stress* (UD 8.1 pp.111-112).

In other words, *nibbana* is the actualisation of non-experience through the extinguishing of the illusion of experience.

> *Where consciousness is signless, boundless, all-luminous, That's where earth, water, fire and air find no footing, There both long and short, small and great, fair and foul – There "name-and-form" are wholly destroyed. With the cessation of consciousness this is all destroyed* (DN 11.85 pp.179-180).

As we can see, the notion of one's *liberation to a higher state of consciousness,* or facilitating a more *intense experience of enlightenment,* is logically incoherent with what the Buddha taught (Hughes, 2012 p.70; LaTorra, 2005 p.50). Namely, that liberation can exist anywhere within the realm of *samsara*. Moreover, this misunderstanding highlights another issue. Namely, that there is a persisting identity which experiences *nibbana*.

I must concede here that a comprehensive outline of *anatta*, is far beyond the scope of this paper. However, some insight is essential if one is to properly understand *nibbana*. In short, *anatta* denies the existence of stable and persisting entities. In contrast, reality is but a flux of conditions upon which each seemingly stable entity, comprised of various elements, ultimately depends. From the Buddhist perspective, our conscious, embodied experience is merely the result of the co-arising of five aggregates, or *khandas*. Namely, forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. The temporary interplay of these factors, in a particular moment, gives rise to our experience of the self. This arising and interplay of the *khandas* is derived from the apprehension of phenomena by the six sense-bases to which they are related. That is, the auditory, visual, tactual, olfactory, gustatory, and mind consciousnesses. As such, the arising of one factor is conditionally dependent on that of another, and it is their seemingly simultaneous occurrence, derived from phenomenological stimulation, that gives rise to the illusory and stable self (Bartley, 2015 p.30; pp.35-36; Radhakrishnan and Moore, 1989 pp.280-288).

For instance, imagine a that particular set of phenomenological conditions make an impression on the six sense-bases. Auditory consciousness, with its function of hearing, perceives sound. Visual consciousness, with its function of sight, perceives form. Tactile consciousness, with its perceiving tactile objects, perceives tactility. Similarly, the olfactory and gustatory bases also experience relative contact. In that instant, the *khandas* of form and sensation are stimulated, and mind consciousness uses this data to infer a stable instance of experience. At the very same time, the *khandas* of perception, mental formation, and consciousness light up, and, in combination, give rise to the experience of a self that experiences reality as 'woman sitting on the couch', for instance. In addition, this constructive mental activity is simultaneously conditioned by traces of prior experience (or, *kamma*), which is accumulated to facilitate consistency in embodied experience. That said, at no stage of this process was there any intrinsic essence with which the woman could be identified. Rather, she is merely the result of an instantaneous series of separate occurrences, through varying faculties, which gave rise to an experience from which one can assert "I am a woman, sitting on a couch, at this moment". Nibbana then, is the *direct realisation* that this is the case.

Upon realisation of *nibbana*, there is no longer a thirst to perpetuate any aspect of phenomenological experience. To do so would be fundamentally unsatisfactory by virtue of its intrinsic insubstantiality. Thus, the cessation of *tanha* and therefore, *dukkha* is necessarily the cessation of phenomenological experience. As such, this has dire consequences for the use of *iAttain*, or any other physical enhancement. For even if it can firmly establish one in the fourth *jhana*, one's experience of it is inseparable from the realm of *samsara*. Moreover, as this experience would likely manifest in the form of a blissful state, one inadvertently reinforces *avidya* insofar it would appear as though lasting satisfaction is attainable. Furthermore, the use of a neurodevice also necessitates the maintenance of that neurodevice. This is also an expression of *tanha* as one is still seeking to maintain a particular set of physical conditions. Thus, if *iAttain* or its software were to malfunction, or cease to function altogether, the potential for *dukkha* increases exponentially. Whilst the Transhumanist might cite science and technology's supposed ability to overcome these issues, this would simply create circularity in argument. Ergo, this fundamental misunderstanding of *nibbana* appears fatal for both *iAttain*, and any form of Buddhist Transhumanism.

5. Conclusion

Our inquiry began by defining both Buddhism and Transhumanism, before considering the parallels which gave rise to the notion of compatibility. Whilst they differed in method, they appeared united in the aspiration to end unnecessary suffering through the transcendence of the limited self-experience. That said, insofar as Transhumanism is a movement defined by a commitment to applied reason, science, and technology, it was essential to dispense with justifications for enhancement that did not conform to this worldview. Fortunately, we saw that Buddhism provided a rational framework, in the form of the Eightfold Path, which made any appeals to mystical aspects of the teachings unnecessary. As such, it was argued that a successful synthesis of Transhumanism and Buddhism need only incorporate this Eightfold Path, alongside the teachings outlined in the Three Marks and the Four Noble Truths. In light of this, we turned our attention toward how a Buddhist Transhumanism might employ cognitive enhancements to facilitate cultivation of the Eightfold path and thus, the realisation of *nibbana*. First, we considered the use of chemical cognitive enhancements to supplement the development of *sila*. However, it was concluded that their use within a Buddhist framework was problematic. It was argued that existing solutions, such as Ritalin, appeared inseparable from (1) the violation of precepts designed to facilitate adherence to *sila;* and (2) the perpetuation of *tanha*. Similarly, future stimulants, like the *Hughes CCE*, also conflicted with core Buddhist Teachings (i.e., the Three Marks), even if they could avoid the pitfalls of their predecessors. Nevertheless, the Eightfold Path was identified as one of inter-related development. As such, if a Buddhist Transhumanism could expedite the development of another aspect of the path, in this case *samadhi*, then it would simultaneously involve the cultivation of others. With this in mind, we constructed and assessed the use of a hypothetical neurodevice, *iAttain*, as imagined by Buddhist Transhumanist proponents Hughes and LaTorra. By virtue of its intelligent design and cognition directing abilities, *iAttain* appeared well-equipped to facilitate the *jhana* states which characterise progression through *samma-samadhi*. This was deemed particularly important insofar as the latter is wholly necessary for *nibbana*. That said, it was found that, although *iAttain* could likely establish the practitioner in the *state of samadhi*, it inevitably tied them to the realm of *samsara* and therefore, *dukkha*. Moreover, upon further investigation, it was revealed that the Buddhist Transhumanist endeavour might be founded on a misinterpretation of *nibbana*. In contrast, *nibbana* is not a state that can be achieved in the phenomenological world but rather, it is the complete dissolution of experience altogether. As such, any pursuit derived from a belief in the inverse of this latter is unable to facilitate *nibbana* in the way the Buddha taught. Ergo, the notion of a Buddhist Transhumanism appears to represent a fundamental misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings.

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Digital Inquiry Project: Is The Relationship Between Landlords and Their Tenants Inherently Exploitative?

Freddie Brown

Research Report Extract:

Landlords exploit their tenants because the landlord benefits from the sacrifice of the tenant in the mortgage arrangement. The tenant pays the landlord rent, which is used to pay the mortgage on the house in which the tenant lives. The landlord receives all of the benefit from the mortgage arrangement – that is the equity in the house. As a result, the tenant is forced into the losing side of the mortgage arrangement – they get all of the cost and none of the benefits of owning part of a home (Gete & Reher, 2018). Some people might argue that the landlord takes on the risk in a mortgage arrangement, and they will be the one to lose the house if the payments are not made. As a result, they might argue that the landlord deserves to gain all of the equity reward for mortgage payments. This argument assumes the tenant will be able to easily move to alternative accommodation, which might not be true. The tenant loses the place they live if the house is repossessed by a financial body, while the landlord only loses money. Given the need of any human to have somewhere to live, it is more significant to lose the place one lives than to lose the value of the house itself. It seems that in this situation, the tenant has more of a risk staked in the mortgage payments than the landlord does (Gete & Reher, 2018). This is a key area in which the housing system could be improved, as giving tenants the benefits they ought to receive for paying a mortgage could improve their freedom, and give them greater ability to choose what their living situation is. One of the key benefits of paying a mortgage reliably is improving one's credit score. Unfortunately, in the UK rent payments are not included by credit authorities in credit assessments (Homelet, 2020). Changing this could improve a tenant's freedom to choose to buy a home, as poor credit could be one of the factors making it hard for young people to buy a home (McMullan et al., 2021). Another way to help young people escape tenancies would be to acknowledge that they should hold a share of the equity in the home on which their rent pays the mortgage. This could be a proportional transfer of equity that allows a tenant to get a kind of discount on a mortgage for their own home. Outside of these options to reduce the exploitation the tenant faces at the hands of the landlord; the solution would be to completely reorganise the housing system such that housing is not a profit-making industry. This would mean that houses would only be let out when selling and buying is genuinely undesirable for those involved, not for the sake of making profit.

Reflective Comment

I chose this project as an alternative to a dissertation because I felt that it allowed me to gain a bigger range of skills. I learned how to make a website that was themed, accessible, and communicated information in a clear and concise manner. I also felt that a single-semester module would be a more manageable workload than a dissertation. If I were to do it again, I would try to improve my time management on the project – and not leave it as the last piece of coursework I had to do. I think the most important piece of advice I could give to future students is to pick a topic you are truly passionate about – you will never run out of things to write when you truly care about the subject you are discussing.

Digital Project Link: https://sites.google.com/view/therightsoftenant/home

Digital Inquiry Project: Should The Government Be Able To Limit The Choice of Cars Consumers Can Buy for Environmental Reasons?

Kieran Perry

Abstract of Research Report

In this, I looked into some of the reasons why the government is introducing a ban on the sale of petrol and diesel cars in 2030, and some of the ways in which people will be affected by this. I looked at how people with lower incomes may be negatively impacted by this change, along with the potential limits to freedom of choice that it will cause.

This led me to consider whether the ban is right, questioning whether the benefits to the climate that it would bring outweigh the issues it will cause. With the environmental impact of millions of cars being relatively high, I concluded that the government ought to implement this ban, as it is important that we take steps to improve the future of the planet. I showed how this should improve the lives of many, and that the issues that may arise still have time to be worked on and eradicated.

Reflective Comment

The Digital Inquiry Project has simultaneously been one of my most enjoyable and most challenging modules, particularly because it requires much more independence and creativity. It has been difficult to adjust to doing something that does not simply involve essays and exams, yet it has been great to be able to learn new digital skills and to have space to focus on something that I am interested in, as well as having something tangible to show for it at the end. I often struggled to make sense of some of the website making tools, and spent quite a while adjusting my vision into something that was manageable in a website format, but in the end, I have created something that I am proud of and something that was very satisfying to see through to the finish.

I would highly recommend taking this module, particularly if you want to learn new skills and have much more creative freedom – it's a very different but very rewarding way to do Philosophy!

Digital Project Link: https://generationelectric943879646.wordpress.com/

Completed Student Dissertations in 2021/2022.

Ellie Amies-Nash	Is it Immoral to Eat Animals Raised and Slaughtered for Food on Factory Farms?
Frank Amundsen	An Argument for the Rejection of Moral Responsibility Independent of the Truth of Determinism.
Neal Anderson	Has Revolution Become and Existential Imperative? Reconceptualising Democracy in the Age of Global Climate Change.
Scarlett Anderton	Cosmetic Surgery, the Feminine Body and Artifice.
Aaila Ashraf	Do We Have a Moral Responsibility to Speak Up Against a Microaggressor?
Rose Bricknell	An Analysis of the Use of Animals in Zoos.
Georgie Brighouse	The Possibility of Living Authentically: Sartre and the Waiter.
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Afterword, by Dr Rachel Wiseman.

Writing a dissertation is an act of bravery. Even more so for this cohort, whose studies with us have been so disrupted and impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. To embark in their final year on an extended piece of independent research – one that requires high levels of motivation, organisation and self-discipline – took guts! Having read the contributions to this Anthology one can be in no doubt that the decision paid off.

The work of the 2021-22 philosophy dissertation students is some of the most creative, engaged and distinctive I have seen. Our students have tackled old topics in novel and surprising ways, and in many instances have brought areas of human life and experience into the scope of philosophical reflection for themselves. Each finished dissertation is the result of eight months of hard work by the student, as well as dedicated and careful guidance offered by their supervisor. Once again, I am amazed not only by the work that students put into their dissertations, but by the investment made by my colleagues.

The Philosophy Society, under the leadership of Jonnie Mills, has made an invaluable contribution to dissertation module this year. Along with Reuben Smart, Amy Oakey and Freddie Brown, Jonnie organised a brilliant Philosophy Showcase, at which students on this module shared their research. PhilSoc have collaborated to produce this Anthology.

Rhys Jones, the Anthology's editor, has worked tirelessly to bring this collection into being. His professionalism and care has been astonishing and without him there would be no Anthology. I am extremely grateful to him – this Anthology is not only an important memento for the students whose work in contains, but a source of advice and inspiration for future dissertation students. So, on all of their behalf: Thanks Rhys!

Dr Rachael Wiseman
Dissertation Module Convener

Final Year Anthology

A Selection of Undergraduate Dissertations and Digital Inquiry Projects

THE UNIVERSITY
of LIVERPOOL

Department of Philosophy
Academic Year 2021/2022

Produced by Rhys Jones and Jonnie Mills

Featuring submissions from:

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The University of Liverpool Philosophy Society