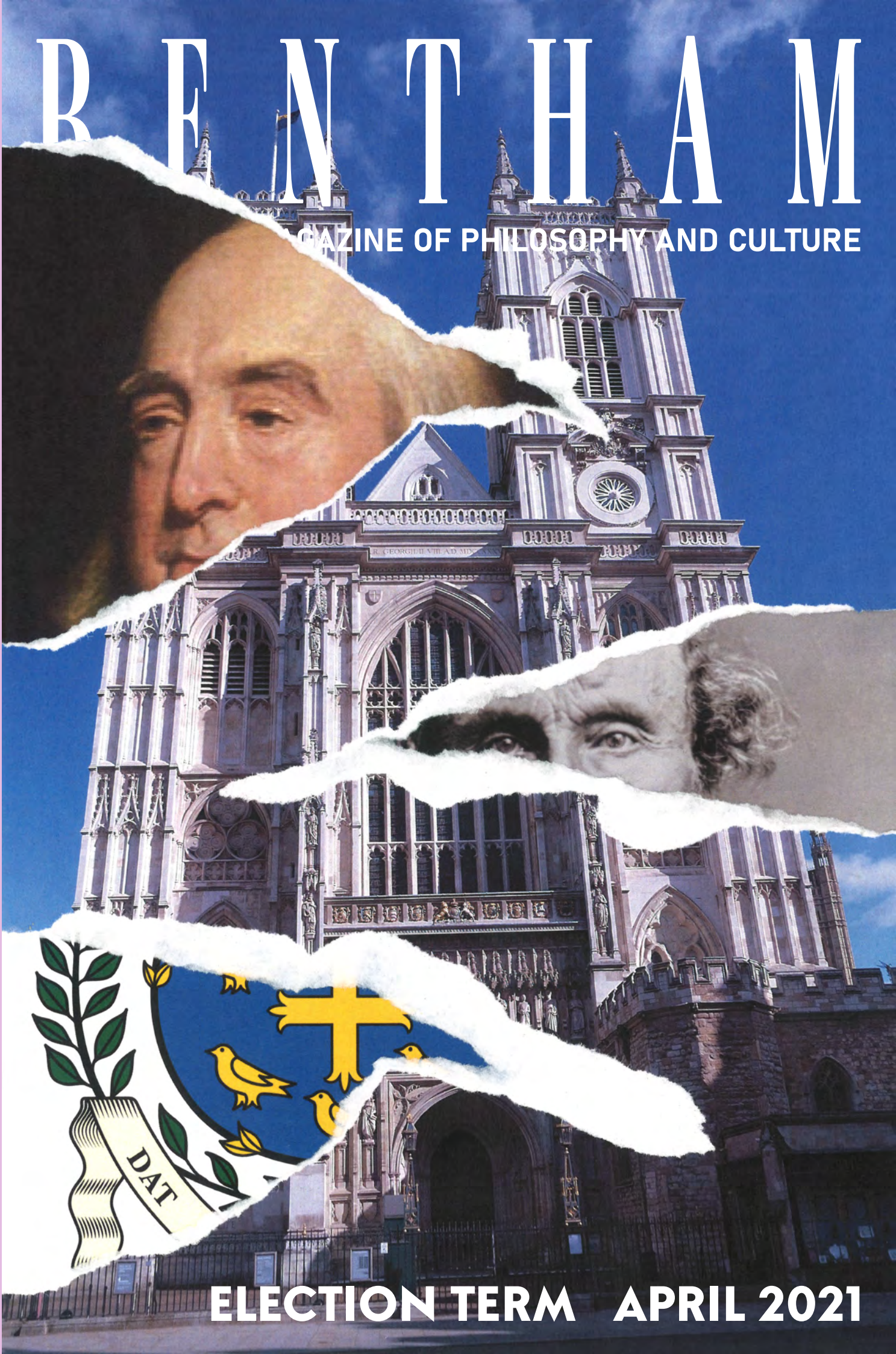
Westminster School Philosophy Magazine

BENTHAM

GAZINE OF PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE



ELECTION TERM APRIL 2021

Leaders

Ethics

Epistemology and Belief

Artificial Intelligence

Review

A Note From the Editors

Welcome to the first edition of *Bentham,* named as such in the stead of the great *Jeremy Bentham,* a pioneer of Utilitarianism and alumni of Westminster School. Bentham was a controversial figure to his contemporaries, illiciting both sycophantic adulation and scathing character-assasination. It is the great hope of the editors that the articles that follow can draw out, hopefully to a lighter degree, the same polar responses from those who read on, for it is our opinions that drive debate and progress. For that to happen, however, opinions must be open to change: an open mind is not just a trite platitude, it is a necessity.

It has been a great deal of fun preparing this edition, which we will continue to do each term. As such, we hope that you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed receiving, editing and formatting your submissions. There are several cliches lurking in this note, the biggest of which shall be: there would be no magazine with no articles, and so, we would like to thank very much those who put aside time to write for this magazine.

We hope you enjoy it,

Andrew Alam-Nist & Theo Naylor Marlow

TOM WYNNE-BAERWALD / THEO NAYLOR MARLOW

Editor
Andrew Alam-Nist

Associate/Design Editor
Theo Naylor Marlow

Many thanks to those who submitted articles:

Aidan Abraham
Adi Raj
Alex Taylor
Claire Zhao
Clara Hartley
Clio Grana
Edmond Wang
Flora Prideaux
Jiayi Li
Marcus Khullar
Philip Yanakov
Titus Parker
Towa Matsuda

A Note From our Proprietor

The magazine that you are about to read is an extraordinary achievement on a number of counts. It is, to wit, the very first collection of philosophical writing by Westminster pupils. Not only this, but the quality of the writing in these pages is quite remarkable, taking in everything from A.J. Ayer to AI to fictional realism. The sheer diversity of thought attests to the fact that, at the school of John Locke and Jeremy Bentham, philosophical curiosity continues to be in rude health. It is, of course, long overdue that Bentham should be commemorated at Westminster. Before the arrival of the recently opened Bentham room, there was very little celebration of this most important of Old Westminsters. Bentham also speaks to our current moment. He was a true radical in every sense of the word – an opponent of slavery, an early supporter of animal rights, the rights of women and one of the first English writers to advocate for what we would today call LGBT rights. There is an important lesson in Bentham's progressivism for all of us as we face the seemingly insurmountable challenges of the 21st century. None of this would have been possible without the single-minded enthusiasm of Andrew and Theo and this magazine should be seen as an immense credit to them.

Read on to find out how in the mind of contemporary Westminster students, the active inquiry into foundations of thought feeds the social, ethical and political life. These young minds are evidencing the dexterity of thought and passionate curiosity as they go about the type of ascent that another Old Westminster and fellow Utilitarian, J.S. Mill would be very proud of. Could we say that we find in these pages the nobility of character that Mill was so fond of? Yes, indeed, but as with all things Westminster, not in the typical form that you might expect.

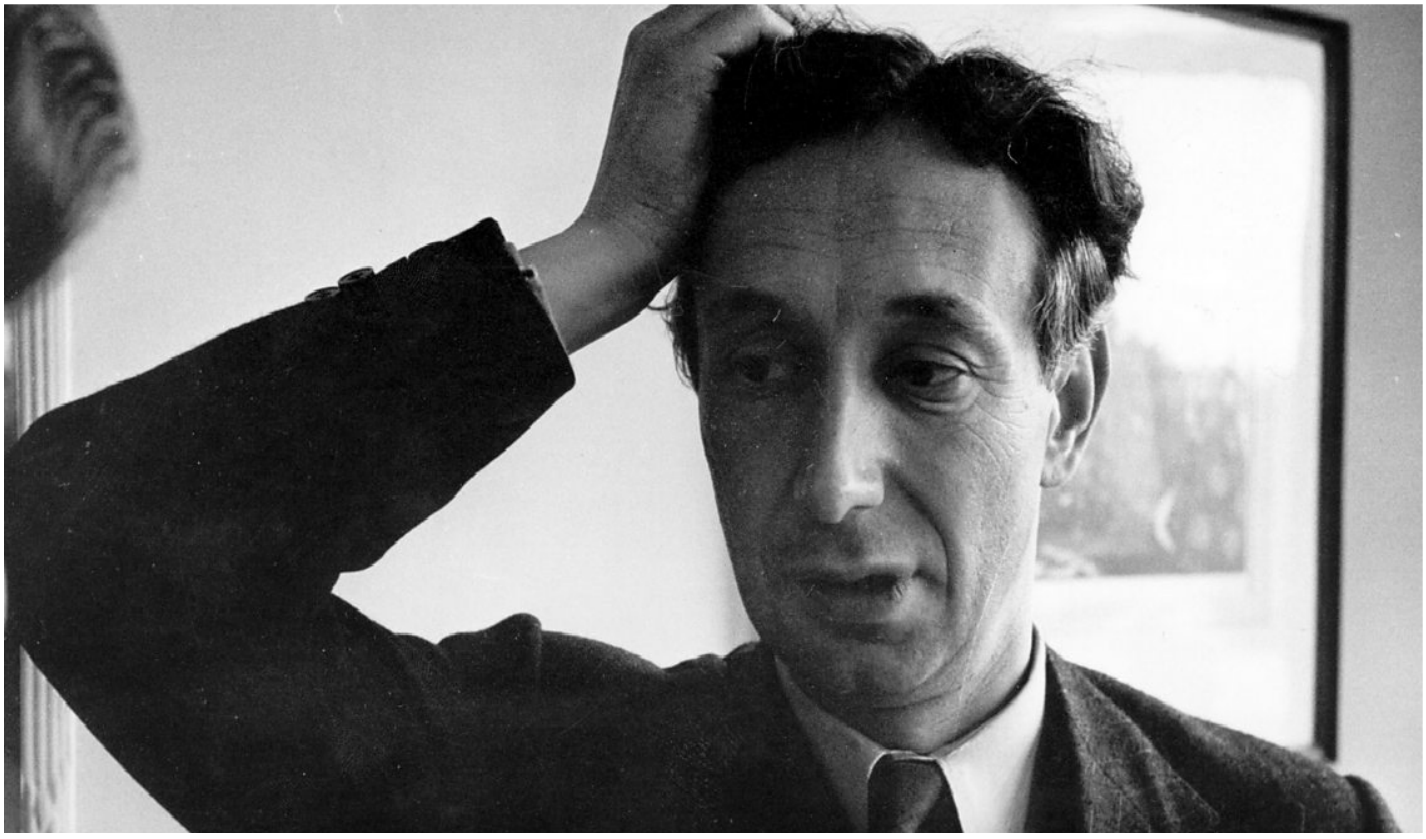
Be inspired and be encouraged to think deeply.

Mr. Bailey & Mr. Woodroofe

Cover art
Theo Naylor Marlow

Cover image
Theo Naylor Marlow

LEADERS



A. J. Ayer

Critical Remarks on *Language, Truth, and Logic*

Titus Parker

As a person with an almost fervent interest in German intellectual history and continental philosophy, seeing a summarised copy of A J Ayer's 'Language, Truth and Logic' piqued my interest as almost an 'enemy text', so opposed to my philosophical interests that I must read it – a book so firmly in the analytic tradition that, as one of my philosophy teachers says, its own logical positivism 'eats itself'. The book, in short, seeks to do away with all of metaphysics using what Ayer terms a 'weak verification principle'.

This looks something like 'a proposition is only meaningful if it is theoretically possible to empirically verify the said proposition'. For example, a statement such as 'there are 7.6 billion people in the world' is meaningful, because even if it is not practically possible to count every human on earth, it is theoretically possible to do so, and the way of verifying this statement is conceivable – to count every human on earth. However, Ayer uses a single out-of-context sentence from Francis Bradley's Appearance and Reality to demonstrate the supposed 'pseudo-propositional nature' of all philosophy regarding metaphysics – it is a 'pseudo-proposition' because there is apparently no conceivable way of verifying the validity of this statement. Ayer then goes on to use this verification principle to draw out further arguments, with each chapter's argument building upon the next, leading to claims about everything from subjectivist ethics to everything a priori to God. As such, because each argument rests upon another, the most effective way to critique the book is to take out the 'bottom'/base argument. In this essay, I shall present a number of fallacies and errors that Ayer makes in his work. However, due to the technical nature of dissecting a whole text's arguments in one essay, this piece will doubtfully be an accessible essay if you have not got a basic understanding of Ayer's work first. Nevertheless, I will structure this essay as a list of errors and assumptions he has made in his work to try and make the essay as accessible as possible.

Against his falsification criterion

Within the first two chapters of Language, Truth and Logic, Ayer reveals his central claim of the work: that empirical falsification is the only valid system to use to argue and to evaluate arguments. This is a direct rejection of the claim that a priori arguments without empirical basis are valid as an argumentation method. Ayer uses these pieces of logic:

1. A priori truths are necessarily true, so to make an argument out of them is a tautology
2. A supposed conflict between a priori truths is actually down to the errancy of humans at evaluating a priori truths.
3. Because a posteriori / empirical truths can be theoretically verified, they are of 'literal significance' whilst a priori truths are not.
4. Because a priori truths are not of literal significance, they are of no worldly significance and do not/cannot interact with the world and should thus be ignored.

There are other lines of argumentation he builds in the first two chapters (entitled 'The Elimination of Metaphysics' and 'The Function of Philosophy' respectively – they are in my opinion the most crucial chapters in the book to his thesis) but they are of little importance at this point in the essay. The first premise here does stand. However, Ayer misunderstands the nature of a priori argumentation – metaphysicians do not prove using evidence with logic and reason (as opposed to literal scientific fact) but rather attempt to unearth the truth about reality; the notion that metaphysical a priori claims are necessarily true is by no means a revelation, and yet there is still disagreement between philosophers. What, then, explains the contradictions between differing schools of metaphysical philosophy? Later on, this essay will touch upon the problem with there being

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multiple different schools of metaphysics and the contradiction Ayer makes there, but already, a tension should be becoming apparent with the relationship between the first two premises. If there are conflicting metaphysical claims that rely on a priori argumentation, then what mechanism is there for differentiating between a 'true' metaphysical claim with a 'false' one. Whatever this looks like, there must be one. Therefore, there is another verification apparatus that is not predicated on a statement's literal and empirical significance. I would posit that this looks like a human capacity to filter arguments, perhaps either based on the ability to recognise these very same 'logical errors' that Ayer talks about, or a probability-based verification apparatus such as Ockham's razor as a final resort. Regardless of what this looks like, Ayer necessarily gives way to a verification principle's existence that is applicable to metaphysics.

A further possible example of a verification principle would be within art. Comparative statements that are not 'empirically verifiable' lies within the realm of aesthetics. Denying all non-scientific comparative claims and calling them 'meaningless' is ridiculous. Consider this statement: 'Reagan was a better president than Johnson'. The way to resolve this affirmation is through argumentation. While the conclusion is not 'absolute', neither are empirical claims, and it is valid to believe or deny a comparative claim such as 'Guernica is a better piece of art than my 3-year-old's sketch'. His verification principle necessarily denies all non-empirical comparative claims meaning, which is intuitively too extreme.

Furthermore, Ayer cements the connection between his own verification principle and some other a priori one by talking about probability. He states that it is possible to believe one of two conflicting a posteriori claims by analysing the probability of these claims and then deciding based on their respective probability. However, this same probability mechanism that is employed on conflicting a posteriori claims can also be employed on conflicting a priori claims. This is crucial – Ayer gives no comparative analysis about possible other verification principles, nor does he explain why his verification principle rules out arguments that do not fall within the principle and thus why his verification principle is important.

Performative Contradictions

Ayer also commits numerous performative contradictions – contradictions that arise when the assertion of a proposition contradicts its very own content. By employing a verification principle that is inherently unverifiable by his metric (though possibly convincingly verifiable using the above criteria outlined), he commits a performative contradiction as his entire book rests on a premise he is trying to argue against. What's more, by recognising multiple schools of metaphysical philosophy, and crucially recognising that they're all different, he thereby concedes that there is a single a priori metaphysical truth: there are no metaphysical truths. This is still a metaphysical stance that requires philosophical justification. This contradicts not only his argument in chapter 3, 'The Nature of Philosophical Analysis', which posits that philosophy's only purpose is to define language and concepts for scientific usage, but his central thesis.

On Quantum Mechanics

There lies another problem with Ayer's verification principle – he limits all science to the realm of a priori truths. This is an example of Ayer's logical positivism 'eating itself'; if we believe everything that Ayer argues, and concede that both philosophy's only purpose is to define scientific terms, and that science is only a posteriori in its execution, then that limits philosophy and science quite significantly. Quantum theory states that we can never know a particle's position and speed at the same time. The issue with this, for Ayer, is that it is not even theoretically possible – it is a rule of quantum physics that empirically testing for quantum objects' position and momentum is fundamentally impossible. This is not as a result of observing the said quantum object (The Observer Effect), but rather is a concrete quantum physical property related to the wave-particle duality of matter. It is scientifically impossible to test for these simultaneously. This violates Ayer's verification principle – this is not theoretically empirically testable (rather the opposite) and so we have two options: either quantum physics is not scientific and is 'of no literal significance' (something basic intuition would obviously dispute), or Ayer's principle has been violated, and thus necessarily doesn't stand, leading to either a concession that metaphysics can be significant, or a different verification principle exists by which quantum mechanics succeeds and therefore by which metaphysics might be shown to be not totally invalid as Ayer claims.

Funnily enough, there is a second fallacy Ayer makes that is revealed through quantum mechanics. The electric-flux paradox is a paradox that arises as a result of theoretically assigning a space infinite charge. Though this can be theoretically verified (by assigning infinite charge across a space, somehow), it is a scientific paradox that arises as a result of paradox. Though it is a synthetic argument (it adds to our understanding of an object and is not a necessary predicate of the terms), it is a priori. Even ignoring Ayer's continuous misuse of Kantian terminology throughout the work, where he confuses analytic statements with a priori statements, this is a paradox that advances our understanding of science but is also an a priori argument, as it is a logical paradox that arises from using a posteriori observations (how electric-flux works). According to Ayer, this is not a valid scientific method – a priori premises are 'self-evident', 'tautological', and of no significance to the real world. Even if we concede these first two statements, proposing an idea that assigns the electric-flux paradox, and other logical arguments even residing within the realm of science. the label of irrelevant is one that is inherently flawed.

Further Philosophical Flaws

Ayer recognises multiple schools of philosophy, most notably in chapter 8, where he attempts to resolve disputes between binary philosophical movements which he pits against each other. Not only are the binary distinctions he draws too simplistic, but there lies another more fundamental contradiction with this distinction. Two schools of philosophy that rely on 'tautological' justification over the same principles are either not conflicting, and actually the same, or their a priori arguments are simply not tautological. If two statements such as 'the cube is red' or 'the cube is blue' are supposedly tautological, we reach a paradox as they are describing the same cube. This, Ayer's idea of metaphysical philosophy falls subject to this tautology fallacy.

Ayer also affirms the notion that an object is the sum of its sensual qualities; the shoe is a shoe because it is brown, leather, laced and worn on the foot. He affirms this thought using old British empiricist philosophy, yet other philosophers, whether Heidegger, Benjamin or more contemporary philosophers like those of the sceptical realist movement have challenged this notion, even at the time of Ayer's writing. While this has little effect on the work's main thesis, it is characteristic of an over-simplicity that is present throughout the whole book. Here is another example of Ayer's over-simplicity: 'Philosophers interested in the theory of knowledge say we can't believe material things without justification of perception, but the fact that we can feel stuff is proof this is false'. Ayer is effectively saying 'philosophers who don't trust sense-information alone are wrong because we can feel sense-information'.

Ayer's work has its fair share of logical contradictions, errors and misunderstandings. Despite this, however, his book is still a good read, and many of the highlighted errors and contradictions Ayer makes do not detract from the message of the text too much nor from the enjoyment of reading it ◀

PETER MARLOW / MAGNUM PHOTOS

Individualism

Our Collective Death

Theo Naylor Marlow

We live in the world of the individual: the individual, the moral agent, has become the ultimate sacred cow of the popular imagination. It is so sacred, that despite the individual being a thorn in the side of populists, they must still pander to that mystical idea.

So what about the collective? That idea seemed to have died out long ago, finally vanquished with the fall of the Soviet Union. We live in a world of individuals, after all, so why linger on the past – the individual agent has triumphed over the shackles of communality!

Or so you might say…which brings me to the first problem: there is always a risk with these things of sounding like a Communist. 'Collectivism', as I would hesitantly call it, has acquired for itself a seemingly inseparable association with the regimes of Stalin and Mao and their pernicious adventures in communal agriculture, and communal terror. However, it might be worth breaking this link between 'Collectivism' as a very broad and general concept, and the thermonuclear regimes of the 20th century. Put another way, not every collectivist would take it to its logical extreme, the adjournment of the individual, just as not every individualist subscribes to anarcho-capitalism. Rather, as I shall argue, there is, like all good things in life, a balance to be struck between the two.

War

With that out of the way, I can make my second observation, which is that since the end of the Second World War, we have replaced our sense of collectivism with one of individualism. It goes without saying this wasn't some snap-of-the-fingers shift and was rather a gradual shift that was married to the liberalisation and reformation of politics. What is true, however, is the shock of the Second World War and the ideas that emerged victorious from that great ideological confrontation would define the coming decades. These ideas were, of course, distinctly American in their formulation: the new superpower would propel individualism, and all its metaphorical baggage to the forefront of vernacular thought. This was particularly because individualism categorical *opposed* the collective ideas of the USSR – the one-time ally who was, perhaps rightfully, cast aside after the end of the struggle against another kind of totalitarianism. This opposition to the USSR and the ideas it entailed seems to me to have been ignited by the same man who was once, most certainly unwillingly, an ally to it – Winston Churchill. In his Fulton Speech, he speaks of that cliché Iron Curtain descending from Stettin to Trieste. Such evocative metaphor was, of course, aimed at attacking the very real and very disturbing happenings of Eastern Europe, where successive governments were replaced by Soviet toadies. It did, however, also help to emanate an even murkier, swampier miasma around 'the East' which engendered suspicion and distrust. The origins of this go back far longer than 1946 – Russians have often been seen by Western Europeans as Asians 'posing' as Europeans, by way of their 'heretical' religion and seemingly alien customs. Nevertheless, this speech did establish a precedent for dealing with Communism which was seen from the Truman doctrine all the way to Reagan: that is that Communism was dangerous, pernicious, and infectious.

Thus, in the era when McCarthy reigned over American ideological warfare, where just being accused of being a Communist might lose you your living, any rumblings of 'collectivism' or 'the collective' might be treated with more suspicion than it really should have afforded. With this foundation of suspicion and distrust, it doesn't take much to figure out what happens when you stir consumer capitalism into the proverbial soup

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of ideology. As hearty and wholesome as the stew seemed after a decade of rationing, death and in some places, destruction, it had a secret ingredient: the abandonment of established interpersonal axioms.

Conflict

Elizabeth Anscombe, an ethicist working in the middle of the century raises this very issue, not as a problem as such, but instead as a solution to what she sees as a world where collective moralities, like those created by religion, have gone amiss. To get around this and stop 'patching in the holes', so to speak, she makes the judgement that 'concepts of [moral] obligation and duty…must be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible'. She reasons that, as I said, these concepts belong to ethical systems which 'no longer generally survive', and this has created a conflict between past and contemporary values. The conflict itself is between several competing ethical systems: legally, Western societies had adopted a Benthamite view in which the law must 'do the greatest good' by keeping people safe from dangerous individuals. This system ran alongside a system of rights, amplified in a post-Holocaust chamber of discourse, that was and still is, particularly Kantian: The Declaration of Human Rights is at its core, a protection of human dignity. The trouble arises when a Benthamite implementation of punishment denigrates the dignity of the individual. As if this wasn't enough of an ideological battleground already, there is the added actor of religion, which is the loudest proponent of collective ideology. Religion fundamentally advocates for a supplication of oneself for the collective good of all people (Jesus is rightly insistent that all people are deserving of kindness and charity, even if it harms us, and proceeds to 'sacrifice' himself for all humanity). Thus, Anscombe believes this cacophony of ethical theories has poisoned the ears of moral thought and has subsequently made it 'not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy'.

Even in the popular idea of 'liberal democracy' contains within itself a conflict. Chantal Mouffe, a Belgian political theorist who predicted the current rise of right-wing populism, has highlighted the fact that liberalism upholds individuals, while democracy upholds the Aristotelian concept of the *'polis'*, a profoundly collective and consensus-based idea. This makes 'liberal democracy' itself oxymoronic. It could, therefore, be said that we live in a time when even the most widely accepted form of government in the West contains an inherent ideological conflict.

Money

Now well into the 21st century, the logical conclusion of Anscombe's observation has become evident: two basic ethical systems, individualism and collectivism, hard to reconcile abstractly, let alone in the real world, are in conflict. The victor also seems to me to be clear: the individual has triumphed over the collective, but not in a way beneficial to those very individuals.

I should now explain what I mean by that: The liberalisation of society and the creation of the 'individual' occurred over the course of the Enlightenment. First by Locke and his conception of 'natural rights', and then explored at great depth by Immanuel Kant – the assertion that every person comes packaged with dignity is the fundamental structure on which the modern formulation of human rights has been erected. This most noble and essential aim has been exploited for commercial and ulterior ends (other than human dignity). This is seen in several ways, to give some trite but instructive examples, the infamous pride month logo-changes, and perhaps a spot of commercial BLM virtue signalling. But these examples would cower in the face of what my essential thrust is: individualism, a product of 'liberalism', has become an excuse to break down the social contract that employers and employees must share between them. This is, in my eyes, the ultimate casualty of Anscombe's ethical conflict.

There is now a vacuum of collective value systems, like those created by religion or virtue theory – In its place, a particularly noxious form of individualism has taken hold, egged on by those of a particular pecuniary persuasion who stand to profit from it.

This new individualism in no way resembles the dignity and respect it should be the face of, Instead, the idea of the autonomous individual has been used to attack those traits we think of as essential to our nature. By championing the individual, Western thought has inadvertently obliterated the web of support that would traditionally prop you up when you stumbled upon the many pitfalls that all our lives are littered with. The family no longer holds much significance after we 'come of age' – to live with your parents for too long has become a shameful thing, not a way of coping with rising costs of living or isolation. This is all while divorce rates in the UK rose by 18.4% in 2019 (relative to 2018), making it even harder for the children of those couples to receive holistic emotional and financial support (furthermore, 42% of marriages were expected to end in divorce in 2014).

Perhaps even more damaging than the straining of so-called 'family values', is the turn governments have made away from the welfare state and towards a support network predicated upon 'self-reliance'. Welfare systems across the West have been cannibalised by increasingly more market-orientated governments. The systems of state support that provide that most basic dignity have been under sustained attack for decades, and most recently after 2008. With the world economy facing a grim prognosis, austerity was touted as the only treatment, which has been utterly calamitous for poorer, working-class communities. This is relevant for the simple reason that austerity is a profoundly individualistic policy: it screams 'self-reliance' and sends a clear message that collective government support is not the way to recovery, instead it is through individual perseverance that we are expected to reach that flicker of light at the end of the tunnel.

And so, in a society where the individual is prioritised above all else, it has become a generally accepted belief that is entirely *ourselves* who are in command of our own future. This has a very benign effect for most aspects of our lives, but when it comes to success, humans exert far less influence over their lives than I think they are sometimes led to believe. There are an incomprehensible number of factors contributing to one's success that it seems almost impossible to truly guide oneself through the tempestuous sea that is the eighty years we get on this planet. Every career will be advantaged by privilege, connections, or sheer luck, just as every career will be at times disadvantaged by marginalisation, un-connectedness and…bad luck. Therefore, to say that you can be in charge of where you're going seems to me a strange half-truth.

If you accept this, the pivotal realisation is then that the odious view of self-determination taken by society is fantastically damaging for individuals occupying the lower end of an ever more unequal economic landscape. Clearly the rich are getting richer, but the poor only at a crawl (this need be shown only by a cursory glance at a line graph). The blame for the stagnation in income of the bottom 80% can, I think, be squarely placed at the feet of this disfigured and advertised version of self-determination and self-responsibility. Because it is portrayed in this way, responsibility for one's wellbeing and income shifts entirely unto the shoulders of you, the individual.

A mode of thought has emerged, according to which your employer, or perhaps your government, cannot be held to blame for your stumbles and malfortune. This is, in most cases, hyperbole, but it is always the subtle undercurrent that makes the difference. Nobody can deny that there is a feeling throughout most 'developed economies' you are responsible for most of the things that

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VICTOR J. BLUE / GETTY IMAGES

Modern individualism puts work at the centre of our lives, with it becoming the defining feature of ourselves. What we achieve in work is what makes the difference between a 'success' and a 'failure'.

Work, however essential it is, will not always bring fulfilment and happiness. The exploitation of Amazon workers is well documented.

happen to you, financially, at least, and *especially* among a newly resurgent, populistic, right-wing. This denigrates and defiles the contract that *must* exist between employer and employee, government, and citizen. If there is going to be a paternalistic figure in our lives, it must be mandated to be held accountable for those it oversees and in many cases, controls. When the blame can so easily be shifted away from this figure and to the powerless, the contract breaks down. This is what has already happened, and what is continuing to happen. I would bring to mind the fervent opposition to a $15 minimum wage in the US, where Republicans freely preach the most repellent things about the reasons for poverty from a legislative pulpit. Or in the UK, where we have been asked to swallow the most pitiful excuse of a pay increase for NHS nurses on a very familiar silver platter: 'I have immense respect for nurses'. Even in a time of absolute crisis, governments have still found a way to dress up their insults in the niceties of PR. Those who respect the individual dignity of nurses, and all people, must make it their aim, however utopian, to never allow them to suffer through loss of income or in times of crisis. In this way, even if it is inevitable that we fail in this end, the means we use and an aspiration to do better will get us that much closer.

The End

The explosion of individualism is not the sole reason for inequality in the contemporary, but it has provided a very convenient ride for the hitchhikers of extreme capitalism. Through blame shifting, the capitalism nurtured in the 1970s and 80s can justify itself by appealing to that individualistic flame instilled in all of us. It tells us that we are our own masters, and as a result, in any place that we go wrong, we must always be suspects in the trial to come. There will be no appeal to bad luck, circumstance or even the most basic imperfections that we all possess if this way of thinking is continued. There is no denying that all people make mistakes or misjudge things at times. This vice isn't exceptional to a particular type of class of people, it is essential to our nature: why should anyone be blamed so severely when it rears its head?

Instead of cowering in the face of a philosophy that has become almost incontrovertible, popular political philosophy must confront it and say that no-one, under any and all circumstances, deserves any kind of suffering. Individualism is no bad thing, but nor is fostering a collective and charitable attitude in society. It is possible to have a synthesis between these two mythical opposites. From individualism, we would do well to borrow Kant's fundamental moral dignity which we all possess. No human deserves to be put down or ignored, and yet this is what our modern formulation of individualism has done. From collectivism, something must be said for (re)discovering familial, communitarian and international bonds, for these are the systems with which those who do fall out of favour with money, health or happiness can be helped recover.

As I reach the limits of my wits and my word count, I should probably propose some kind of solution. One way of going about a *real* fix is reuniting the long-separated couple of people and politics: voter turnout is already increasing, which is a promising sign. But complacency shan't be welcome in the ideal *polis:* Donald Trump did quite enough to extract the cataracts clouding the eyes of American liberals with respect to recognising very real enemies. As such, those who want to steer politics to a more communitarian sphere must make every effort to revive popular engagement with politics. The logic behind it is simply that when more people elect their leaders, those leaders are (in an ideal world) forced to represent a broader sweep of voters, which would hopefully encourage a more collective policy.

Perhaps this is wishful thinking, perhaps violent overthrow of government is the only solution…what I do know, however, is that the stale consensus-centrism of today will move nobody anywhere and everybody nowhere. A return to actual political choices will do well to dust out the political apathy that infects Western democracies and, with some patience, we might see a society that genuinely respects the individual's dignity within the collective, and not one where an imperfect species is expected to be perfect.

Pascal's Wager

Pascal's Gamble

Andrew Alam-Nist

In this article, I consider Pascal's wager and argue why, in my view, it is, in actual fact, a rather weak argument for one to base their belief in God upon.

Blaise Pascal is one of the most famous mathematicians, philosophers, and theologians in the Western Canon. Following a period of mystical experiences in 1654, Pascal dedicated himself to spiritual contemplation. In this period, he wrote his most famous work, *Pensées*. In *Pensées*, Pascal proposed his most famous argument, which is now commonly referred to as Pascal's Wager.

Pascal's Wager is based on the Expected Value Principle, a principle often used by economists. It states that the expected value of a particular action is based on its payoff (either beneficial or harmful), its probability of that payoff materialising, and the cost of taking it. It can be lain out as follows:

(Probability x Payoff) - Cost = Expected Utility

Pascal believed that following Christianity would maximise utility, and thus even nonbelievers should try to practice the Christian faith. His reasoning is as follows: if God were to exist, the payoff of believing in God and practising the Christian faith would be infinite. Faith would entail limitless pleasure in a future life for all of eternity. By contrast, failing to believe in God if he were to exist would entail an eternity of suffering in hell, thus causing infinite negative payoff. The cost of believing in God if he does not exist, by contrast, would necessarily be finite, as losses within our lifetime are limited both by our limited senses and lifespan. This creates a payoff matrix, which can be summarised by the following table:

	God exists	God does not exist
Wager for God	$u_1 = +\infty$	$u_2 =$ finite
Wager against	$u_3 = -\infty$ or finite	$u_4 =$ finite

The table above would lead Pascal, in turn, to suggest that any rational individual should believe in God and practice Christian doctrine in order to maximise their expected utility. The infinite positive payoff from believing in God if he were to exist would outweigh the finite benefits of not believing in him in our current life.

Pascal's wager immediately exposes itself to several criticisms. It presupposes that an individual can choose to believe something, which is far from certain. Pascal anticipated this and suggested that an individual, through sufficient practice, could acclimatise to a certain religion. If they practised prayers, attended mass, sang hymns, and otherwise acted as a Christian, they would eventually start to believe. While it is not clear that this is true in all cases (consider how many people attend religious schools and participate in religious practices without believing), Pascal's response likely has some credibility. The research of several modern psychologists, particularly Brian McLaughlin, suggests that we may be able to actively deceive ourselves into believing something. Even if we cannot, we can still practice Christian doctrine, which could be enough to get us into a theoretical heaven. This line of criticism, whilst perhaps adding a degree of doubt about the implementation of Pascal's argument, does not entirely eliminate it.

Perhaps a more substantial criticism of Pascal's wager is that it falls victim to the 'many-God problem'. While there may only realistically have been a single God in which Pascal could reasonably have believed in, in a modern, secular society there are many. The logic underpinning Pascal's wager would seem to state that we should believe equally and simultaneously in the Christian God, the Jewish God, the Muslim God and many others and simultaneously practice their different traditions. This is quite clearly impossible, not to mention that doing so would contravene the teachings of all three. Unfortunately, Pascal's wager gives us no sufficient means of differentiation among the different Gods.

A further issue raised by the many-God problem can be illustrated quite poignantly through analogy. It is conceivable that I could hear from a friend one day that there exists some sort of bizarre physical law that states that all atheists will go to Heaven and all others would go to Hell. While I perhaps might believe this law is unlikely, I would have no real way of proving that it has a probability of zero. As its probability would not be zero, the expected value principle would claim that it is of infinite value to be an atheist and infinitely harmful to not be one. Using the same logic as Pascal's wager, this would create an entirely different and contrary outcome. Yet in the example of a friend claiming that his law exists, changing my beliefs to fit his proposition would quite clearly be absurd. This general example further flags a limitation of the reasoning underpinning Pascal's wager and the expected value

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principle, using *reductio by counterargument.*
It is worth noting that, for a non-believer, adherence to Christianity through Pascal's wager involves a great deal of sacrifice. Firstly, it involves the devotion of a large amount of time to Christianity and Christian practice which entails a great opportunity cost. The time lost, which typically includes every Sunday morning, and a great deal of time during the weekdays for general Christian practice, is very significant. In this time, one could be doing something which they find fun, contributing positively to humanity, spending time with one's family, working at their career to earn an income, or pursuing a broad range of other actvities. Secondly, depending on one's denomination of Christianity, Pascal's wager forbids many acts which might be pleasant or even basic to oneself (e.g. the Catholic Church forbids homosexual sex). This would be a huge, if not finite, loss for many potential followers.

This would thus mean that Pascal's wager would be actively harmful if its practical payoff was not high enough to counter the cost. I already highlighted, through the many-god problem, that it can be used to prove many absurd propositions. It is equally true that the expected value principle itself often does not hold up for practical applications. Consider the following circumstance: I can choose between two choices: one guarantees me one million dollars, whilst the other gives me a one in one million chance of eternal, infinite happiness. The expected value principle would quite clearly suggest that eternal, infinite happiness is more valuable. Even if the probability of receiving it is very low, the infinite payoff which it gives makes it the right choice (infinity multiplied by anything is…infinity).

However, any reasonable person would probably take the million dollars. In this case, the expected value theory does not adequately translate into the practicalities of everyday life. The probability of receiving the payoff is so remote that the practical value of the theoretically infinite payoff is negligible. A similar argument can be made for Pascal's wager. For many atheists, the possibility of God existing is extremely remote. This is for reasons such as the problem of evil, the many-God problem and a general lack of evidence for God's existence. Taken alongside the opportunity cost of not believing in God, it increasingly becomes unbeneficial and perhaps even actively harmful to believe in God, even from a purely self-interested perspective.

However, one should not act singularly in the name of self-interest. Converting to Christianity simply because of Pascal's wager, in my own opinion, would be immoral. Those who could be converted by Pascal's wager would, due to the nature of the wager, not believe in God prior to adoption. They would likely thus carry a non-Christian sense of moral duties and beliefs. Pascal's wager calls on us to displace these moral sensibilities and reasoning with new morality, in pursuit of gains from heaven or hell. This means that, rather than acting out of duty to what they believe is moral, in a general Kantian manner, Pascal's wager actively encourages us to compromise morality in pursuit of self-interest. To me, this represents an abandonment of our moral duty to always seek to be as moral as we can, even if it were not to be beneficial for ourselves. In virtually any case, it is immoral to abandon our moral beliefs and duty in pursuit of self-interested gain. Yet this is what Pascal's wager unfortunately calls on us to do.

In summary, Pascal's wager is of questionable benefit to us. Through the many-God problem and the impracticality of using the expected value principle under remote circumstances, we can determine that the apparent benefit derived from believing in God through Pascal's Wager is dubious at best. It may very well be actively harmful considering the opportunity cost of belief. Even if it were to not be beneficial, however, Pascal's wager should not be followed, because it calls on us to disregard our feelings of moral duty. This is, in my opinion, plainly immoral. Pascal's wager is thus severely limited as a practical argument to convince atheists and agnostics to begin believing in the Christian God. ◀

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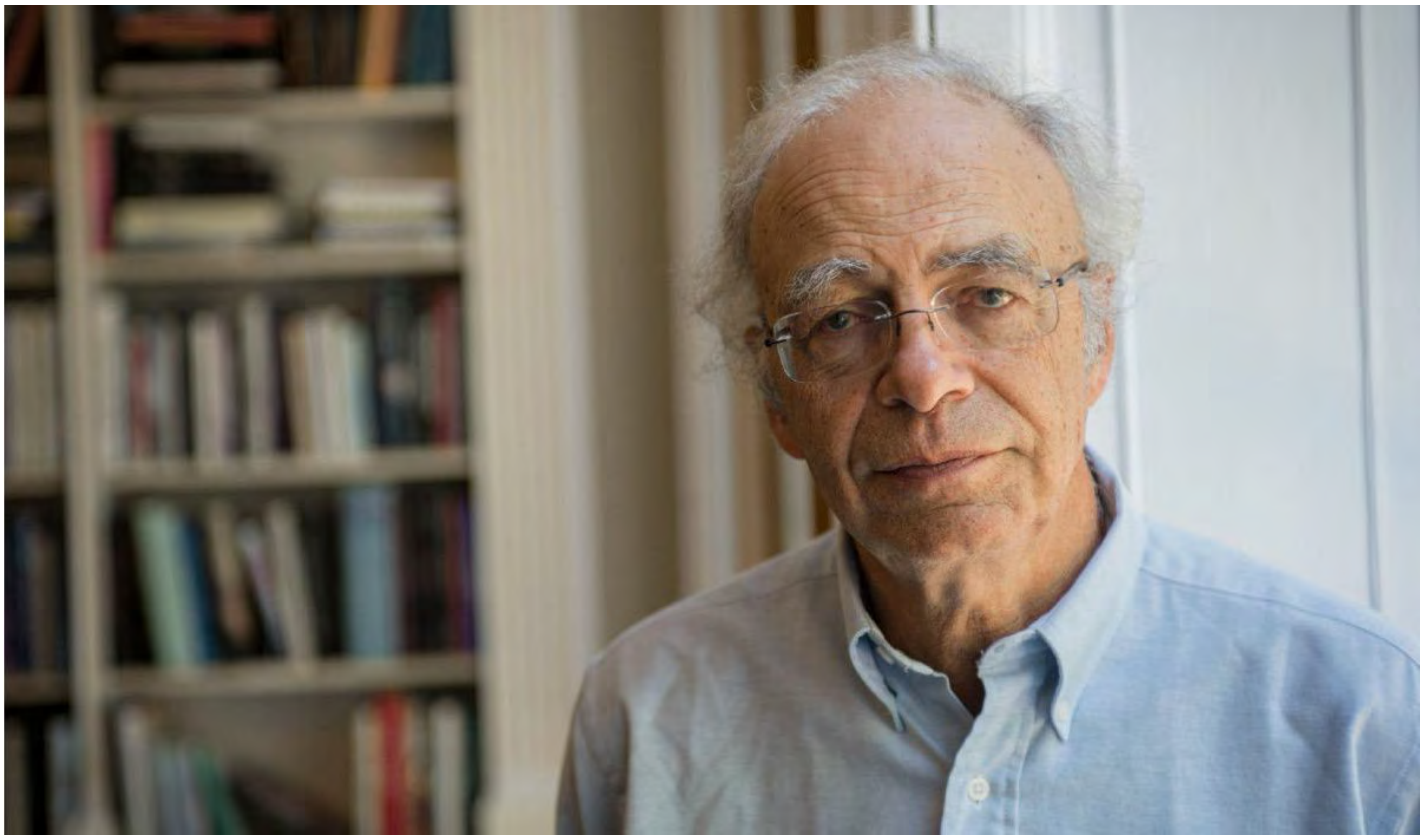
ETHICS



TRISTAN MARTIN / THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION

Charity

Is Charity a Moral Obligation?

Marcus Khullar

To answer the question of where moral obligation resides, we need to determine the meaning of the terms stated in the question. Charity is the act of giving one's resources to another who needs it, whether said resources are financially based or simply food and water or physical help. A moral obligation to some seems like an oxymoron: if an action is an obligation, then it must not be deemed either moral or immoral. The same way if a hurricane destroyed a village, if I were forced against my will to give to charity then the action itself would not be morally good or bad, simply an act that occurred. This means I will define the term as an act such that, if one does not choose to do it, they will be deemed immoral. There is no necessary obligation to do the act, and the action itself should not be considered good or bad but rather the lack of the act perceived as bad. Understanding this will support the idea that our moral obligations are important when we want to incentivise helping others.

It is generally agreed that if there was a drowning child right beside us who we can easily save, that it would be morally commendable to help them and that we ought to help them. If we let that child die, then the death, which we could have easily prevented, is on our hands and is our responsibility. If some were still unconvinced by this idea, let us say that there was a freak accident with all the nuclear weapons across earth causing them to detonate in place. This would lead to the deaths of billions of people and most if not all life on earth. If a satellite contained an astronaut who had the opportunity with the ease of simply pressing one button to resolve the crisis and stop the nuclear bombs from detonating would it not seem at all wrong for them to ignore the problem. Surely, only somebody with evil and wanton harm in their heart would look away from the solution to the problem? Undeniably so. Similarly, although to a lesser extent, the same can be applied to the child.

Even if, to wade into the water and save the child, you got your brand new hundred-pound trainers soaking wet and had to buy new ones, to value the child as less than the worth of even a hundred pounds would seem sick and evil. Even though the hundred pounds could seem like a huge amount to some, to someone willing to spend the money on trendy shoes it surely would not be life or death to waste them. This is a similar situation to donating to charity. In the case of charity, you can forego a bit of money to save the lives of those suffering from malaria or starvation or dehydration.

The moral worth of an action has little to do with the distance between the actor and the victim. If there was a van that was abducting a child and you had a button to stop the van from moving away from you, thus allowing the police could save the child, the moral imperative does not decrease the further away the child is from you. It would be just as moral if the van was one metre away from you as it would be a thousand miles away from you. Therefore, the same idea can be applied to charity and in the same way, it should be a moral obligation to give to charity. This was the argument proposed by Peter Singer in his book "The life you can give" that sought to eradicate world poverty by donating to charity. Although Singer does have a point here, there is much to scrutinise and breakdown on why he is most likely wrong.

If it becomes our moral obligation to donate to charity, then we must not only save a drowning child but also give as much money as possible all the time to charity. Beyond just giving money off our paycheques, we should refrain from any expensive or unnecessary items to any extent. We would have to give the money that could have

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been spent on a nice meal at a good restaurant to a charity that makes mosquito nets for millions of people and would need to downsize to a bowl of rice and some vegetables at home. Every single commodity that we own would need to be sold and exchanged for a cheaper alternative so that more money is given to charity so that we can fully engage in our moral obligation.

This lifestyle is too much to ask of an individual. To say that it would be incredibly hard to live this lifestyle is an understatement. I am sure that even Peter Singer does not live entirely like this. He accepts that it is extremely difficult to the verge of impossibility to fully engage in this extreme life. To go on, if we were to universally decree this law among every person to live like this, I can only imagine the number of jobs and markets ruined by this frugality since there would be no need for art or any product not entirely needed to survive. In turn, this would ruin more people's livelihoods than would be saved in buying mosquito nets and so on.

Most importantly, Singer here is using a disanalogy. Saving a drowning child is a completely anomalous event compared to what is effectively millions of different children drowning at once and our attempts to help them all. This was the point addressed by Travis Tillerman in his essay "Sometimes there is nothing wrong with letting a child drown". Instead, he proposed this analogy. Imagine that you get a phone call from the bank and that hackers have accessed your account. The hackers are taking £200 from it every 5 minutes until you show up in person to put a hold on the account. Due to a legal loophole, the bank is not required to reimburse you for any of the money you may lose. If her account is overdrawn, the bank will seize as much of your resources and assets as is needed to pay the debt created by the hackers. Fortunately, the bank is just a brisk 5-minute walk away and you could get there without any money being unjustly taken out of your account if you went there straight away. However, in your journey there, you come across a series of hundreds of shallow pools of water with a drowning child in each one, who will surely die if someone does not help them. Interestingly it would take about 5 minutes to pull one child to safety but at the loss of £200. Of course, when you enter the bank, all remaining children will instantly drown. Even worse is the fact that this is a reoccurring incident happening every single day to you for the remainder of your life.

This is a far more horrible but realistic choice to make. In this way, you don't have the obligation to save all the children and end up with all your possessions being seized by the bank, but you should at the same time save at least some of the children. In the same way as before it is incredibly unfair to expect someone to fully commit to saving as many children as possible and have every single pleasantry of life removed to save some of the children. Timmerman then concludes that in this strange circumstance, it is understandable to go to the bank and save your money to spend it on nice things even including some things you might not need. This is not saying we should reject all the children as that would be just as horrible as the first analogy. We cannot say how many in particular should be saved but it needs to be some, and our non-essential spending should be minimised in the long term. It should also be recognised that one with greater amounts of income should intend to save more children simply because they can do so without much risk or threat of poverty themselves.

Although Singer is wrong when he claims we should sell all our unnecessary possessions and give that money to charity he is certainly correct in spirit. We should certainly give money to charity and consider the excesses which we buy that could be spent elsewhere to those who need it more. Refusing to give to charity is a bad idea but at the same time, we shouldn't feel bad about enjoying life while others suffer elsewhere in the world.

RYAN MICHALESKO / DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Healthcare

Is Access to Healthcare a Fundamental Human Right?

Towa Matsuda

Article 25 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) dictates to us that 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services… Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance'. These words from a 72-year-old document have allowed for great successes, struggles and failures in the world of medicine, economy and politics; it has caused their amalgamation, and dependency on one another, that continues to exist to this day.

First of all, it is important to understand what a human right is and establish what the United Nations meant by a 'standard of living adequate for the health of [an individual], including medical care…'. The United Nations argue that the UDHR provides a 'foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'. The entire declaration has been incorporated in the laws of most member-states of the United Nations. However, despite its name, notably the use of 'universal', this declaration is not legally-binding and thus a country has the ability to disagree with and ignore the set of 'universal human rights'. This was done by Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has only recognised three human rights resolutions/conventions (the Genocide Convention, the Slavery Convention and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery), proclaiming that the other resolutions, including the UDHR, violated the religion of Islam and its Shari'a law.

Saudi Arabia is not the only country or group that has opposed this universal set of human rights; other examples include South Africa and The American Anthropological Association. The fact that various countries have decided to oppose a declaration that is nominally valid universally flags the potential flaws in the creation of the complete list of the universal human rights. What's more, the fact that there was little possibility for legally enforcing the UDHR, limits its viability. In 1966, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights does come into existence to allow member-states of the UN to ratify the Universal Human Rights into law; the articles, however, do not mention the importance of healthcare despite mentioning other individual liberties such as Freedom of Religion.

The American Anthropologist Association (AAA) published a statement in 1947, when the UDHR was in its construction, addressing the issues of the entire 'Universal' purpose as well as the lack of input and thought put in by the creators of the Declaration. The AAA argues that the UDHR cannot be truly representing universal human rights, as its creation was of Western origin, particularly the United States. However, in that regard, due to the reasons that individuals are able to perceive opinions separate from the general beliefs expressed in their own culture, there is a possibility that universal moral principles do exist, as it implies that culture does not necessarily define one's morals. The AAA writes, 'Ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, are found in all societies, though they differ in their expression

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among different peoples. What is held to be a human right in one society may be regarded as anti-social by another people, or by the same people in a different period of their history', which further emphasises how there must be flaws with the UDHR, and that there cannot be a defined set of articles, including the Healthcare right or the Education right, because of the existence of different societies and cultures. The Abortion issue is an example of the conflict between Medicine and Religion (Note that both are equal rights within the UDHR). Therefore, we are seeing the issue that one is forced to prioritise a human right, over another one, which is resultantly infringing on an individual's rights.

We should now consider whether healthcare is a right or privilege, regardless of the flaws of the UDHR / the concept of having a list of fundamental human rights. Let us say that we agree to the question 'Is Access to Healthcare a Fundamental Human Right?' The first issue which comes into place is the genericity of the term, healthcare. At no point, in the World Health Organisation (WHO) Constitution or the UDHR, do we see a clear definition of what type of healthcare must be fundamentally accessible by all 7 billion human beings. As the AAA mentioned, definitions of words differ between different nations, and even within nations. Let's say that healthcare implies free and open accessibility to a list of health services, without discrimination. The National Health Service of England (NHS) provides free services to all souls (Citizen, temporary visitor, Immigrant) the following:

1. A&E services – not including emergency treatment if admitted to hospital
2. Family planning services – this does not include abortions or infertility treatment
3. Treatment for most infectious diseases, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
4. Treatment required for a physical or mental condition caused by torture, female genital mutilation (FGM), domestic violence or sexual violence – this does not apply if you have come to England to seek this treatment.

The NHS constitution also writes that its service must be 'available to all irrespective of age, gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, religion, or belief' and that access is based on 'clinical need and not an individual's ability to pay; and that care is never refused on unreasonable grounds.' Overall, this implies that, despite limitations of the type of healthcare one can receive, the NHS is expected to provide universal healthcare to all souls.

In contrast, according to The Cleiss, the French 'Liaison Body between the French social security institutions and their foreign counterparts for the implementation of European Regulations and bilateral or multilateral social security agreements', there is a clear stance that access to healthcare is dependent on one's country's relationship with the French Republic; this thus implies the accessibility of this so-called fundamental human right, is very much dependent on the political relationship between countries. The Cleiss website writes 'Vérifiez auprès de l'organisme de sécurité sociale dont vous relevez s'il prend en charge les soins à l'étranger et dans quelles conditions', which, translated to English, informs us that people who visit France, have the prior responsibility to check with their own country's 'social security system' in order to determine whether any costs for Healthcare in France, would be reimbursed; this means that the French organisations & government do not believe that they hold a particular responsibility to provide universal or fully accessible healthcare services to foreign souls. The responsibility, instead, lies on the country of the patient's origin and the individual. Despite the two country's similarities, especially economically, we can see two highly different stances towards the idea of universal accessibility to healthcare.

We can see further contrasting views on the importance of healthcare through an economic perspective. In an article by the American Public Health Association, we read that 'countries with social democratic regimes, higher public spending, and lower income inequalities have populations with better health'. Therefore, one could determine how important and effective healthcare is, through examination of public spending towards Health Services. However, this would imply that healthcare comes at a cost, despite potentially being a fundamental right. If Healthcare costs and overall general health (or even considering the responses to COVID-19) positively correlate, this hypothesis would be true; however, if this is not the case, there is an implication that the Economy is not a limiting factor, and therefore healthcare becomes more of a right than a privilege.

Money doesn't always bring better healthcare: the USA spent an average £7736 per person on health services in 2017, the UK spent £2989 per person, and Israel spent £2021 per person, with the median being £2913. If health services were fundamentally a privilege, one should see a clear difference in the quality of healthcare in countries with a higher spending rate, such as the United States, compared to countries such as Israel. This is not fully the case. High life expectancy is a useful measure in showing 'a number of factors, including rising living standards, improved lifestyle and better education, as well as greater access to quality health services', according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). We in fact see that Israel has the highest life expectancy at 82.5 years, with the United Kingdom at 81.2 years, and the United States at 78.6 years. Of course, life expectancy is dependent on other factors, such as culture and different lifestyles, but it does begin to emphasise the fact that access to proper healthcare does not have to be reliant on the Economy and is thus more tangible and possible to achieve as a human right. The US' considerably lower rank in life expectancy, compared to Israel, further shows how money does not, at least always, improve the overall quality of health.

Perhaps, there is an absolutist form of what healthcare is meant to be. Healthcare, as mentioned previously, and its access is purely dependent on the interpretation of a country's or organisation's laws and political systems. However, what if the laws of certain or most countries were wrong? Noam Chomsky, for example, argued that all humans have common morals; Chomsky argues that the existence of different societies and cultures does not imply to different morals. Homosexuality was seen, until recently to be a fundamental sin, but is currently normalised, which is due to all humans developing and further understanding their morals. The same could be said for healthcare; many governments could be misinterpreting the true meaning of 'healthcare', which is why there is a huge issue regarding the feasibility of allowing universal access to human rights.

A way which governments may be misinterpreting healthcare, is by focussing a considerable amount of time, resources and funds, onto treatment of illnesses, many of which are preventable, instead of taking efforts into educating all beings on how to prevent or protect oneself from contracting an illness. For example, let us consider Type-2 diabetes, which is a preventable illness, that can cause:

- heart disease and stroke
- loss of feeling and pain (nerve damage)
- foot problems – like sores and infections
- vision loss and blindness
- miscarriage and stillbirth
- problems with your kidneys

All of these issues, resulting from Type 2 Diabetes, can come at a large cost, both for oneself and for the provider of the Health Services (in this case, the National Health Service).

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According to Diabetes.co.uk, between 2018-19, approximately 3,319,266 in England currently have Diabetes, with around 90% of these patients having the preventable Type-2 Diabetes. Note that the main cause of Type-2 diabetes is due to poor diet, especially with excessive consumption of fats and sugars. With the assumption that access to any form of healthcare is a fundamental human right, Health Services, such as England's National Health Service would be obliged to pay approximately £9,800,000,000 (2017) for the complications and treatments of all patients admitted with this preventable disease. What's more, due to the diabetes great capability to cause potentially fatal health complications, the NHS is also burdened to fund for these; In 2017, approximately £3 Billion, of the approximately £10 billion, was spent for the treatment and operations needed for (Diabetes-caused) Ischaemic heart disease and other Cardiovascular Diseases. These are merely statistics, and do not represent the great burden on the doctors, nurses and medical specialists who obliged to care for all these Diabetes patients, as well as other patients.

It is certainly important that the doctors, and the organisational groups that manage healthcare systems, make the best of efforts to strive to cure any patient who accesses healthcare, but why should the responsibility fall fully on the health service provider and the doctors? Surely, from a Synderesis Principle perspective, which is 'the innate principle in the moral consciousness of every person which directs the agent to good and restrains him from evil', it is the right thing that 'every person' makes effort to ensure that he/she does not become prone to some of these preventable diseases, in order that they do not unnecessarily burden healthcare providers, and potentially other souls, young or old, male or female. Therefore, this implies that healthcare is primarily about the importance of providing universal education and communication, about how any soul is able to create/adapt a lifestyle that would allow him/her to live a healthy life. If this form of 'healthcare' is determined to be a fundamental right, this would provide global knowledge that could prevent the need for so many people to use healthcare services for preventable diseases, especially those which cause life-long complications. This would also be addressing individual moral principles that every one of us must be taking responsibility for preserving our own health at the best of their abilities – a contrast with the UN or the WHO that have targeted and directed blame on governments and healthcare providers.

Of course, there are also issues regarding having this form of 'healthcare' as a fundamental right (or Right from illness). For example, one would be forced to question whether providing highly advanced healthcare services, such as cancer treatment or just quicker 'privately-insured' treatment, would still remain a privilege. What's more, what would healthcare providers do to those who blatantly refuse to follow guidelines that try to ensure the prevention of acquiring illnesses; are healthcare providers still obliged to help these people, regardless of these individuals' lacking moral principles?

The United Nations UDHR, its covenants for health, and its WHO Constitution, have emphasised the flaws on the concept of human rights and of the meaning of 'healthcare', which we were required to explore in order to attempt to answer the question. It is true that there can be many interpretations, due to the multicultural nature of this planet; however, it is also possible to argue that individuals naturally desire pleasure/happiness, by following the Utilitarian perspective, and also that individuals ultimately aim to achieve good, according to the Synderesis Principle. Whilst I agree that (preventative) medicine bestows the onus for healthcare upon the individual; society and its peoples also have a moral responsibility to ensure that they are able to allow access to healthcare, both for themselves but for their families and other dependents, who could even be relying on healthcare access to survive. Perhaps if we all uphold this moral responsibility, there may be potential for universal improvements for our health.

Human Rights

Idealism and Realism in the Realm of Human Rights

Clio Grana

Is holding human rights to an ideal standard more important than crafting a set of laws that reflects who we truly are as a society? Realism and idealism are antagonists, but they can work together in surprising ways to ameliorate human rights. The UN responds to human rights violations and abuses with idealist solutions, such as Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Change Agreement. The very concept of human rights is, in fact, idealist. In a field dominated by idealism, it seems clear there is no space for its antagonist. However, invoking realism can improve human rights. Many contemporaries find that realism encourages a political critique of international law, it advises restraint in the use of military force, and English Realism allows scholars to conceptualize International Human Rights Law as the product of political tension between order and justice in international society.

Obtaining a balance between these two opposites is essential, even if the realm of human rights is idealistic. Over sixty years ago, when addressing the McGill International Law Association, United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld said, "realists are tempted by the illusion of cynicism – and idealists are tempted by the illusion of Utopia. If you are realistic, you may expect too little and if you are idealistic you may expect too much." Similarly, Ban Ki-moon shared: "How to balance idealism and realism – that was the essence of some of the best advice I ever received. In the late 1950s, my middle school principal told me: keep your head above the clouds and your feet firmly planted on the ground – then advance step by step. This is my approach at the United Nations, where we defend high ideals against tough realities."

This question first arose during my reading of the American Anthropologist 1947 Statement on Human Rights, written just as the UN was framing the Declaration on the Rights of Man. One line read: "the right of men to live in terms of their own traditions" must be incorporated in the Declaration. I thought this a noble clause, but an unrealistic one. It is impossible to guarantee everyone the right to live on their own terms because, on rare occasions, such terms would be detrimental to humanity. For example, FGM is a traditional rite

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of passage in Eastern and Northern Africa. However, this practice is harmful, indeed often fatal, to young women. The tradition of FGM is detrimental to human flourishing and it is, therefore, undesirable for an organization such as the UN to guarantee that communities who practice FGM can "live in terms of their own traditions". I had always believed idealist claims such as this one could create a better vision of the world without the need for realism. However, this analysis started to challenge this opinion.

Idealism fits clearly into the human rights realm, as it provides vision and direction to coordinate action. However, one must analyze realism more carefully, as its place in human rights is not as clear cut. Realism and human rights do not traditionally go hand in hand. Realists are often skeptical of normative values in politics, and their realist focus on the state will generally cause them to care about human rights only if it threatens the instability of their own country. Realists would also have trouble explaining the creation of independent human rights bodies that states have absolutely no control over, regardless of how weak these institutions may be. They would also not be able to justify the high degree of state compliance with judgments from external courts such as the European Court of Human Rights. The very concept of human rights does go against the views of the realist, however, there are at least three ways realism could benefit human rights.

Firstly, legal realism creates space for political critique of international law. For example, realism can be used to analyze the pitfalls of IHRL-based advocacy for social justice. International Law does not always guarantee social justice, as it often requires bargaining. In some cases, it may be easier for social justice activists to, for example, simply back a left-wing political candidate as opposed to spending resources on policy papers about the legal meaning of Article 2(1) of the International Covent on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Realism sometimes suggests that a solution that avoids IHRL and can bring activists further in their quest for social justice. By allowing space for critique of policy, legal realism can suggest alternative paths to obtaining social justice.

Secondly, realism advises restraint for the use of military force. This is important for human rights as wars pose a monumental threat to them. Realists are prudent. The realist believes the states' power relative to each other is determined by their economic weight and military strength, not by their position in the system. Therefore, they see states as functionally equal and are especially interested in the balance of power between them. Realists are static and prone to the status quo. In other words, they are prudent. "Realism is best read as a cautionary ethic of political prudence rooted in a narrow yet insightful vision of international politics", says Jack Donnelly professor of International Studies. This prudent mindset can help to offset armed conflicts. For example, the realists Walt and Mearsheimer affirmed: "Iraq was an unnecessary war". At the time, Hussein already posed a threat to American interests and future conflict was, therefore, unavoidable. These realists show that the interest in the balance of state power can potentially offset wars.

The human rights community has relied heavily on the military; however, this violence is not always needed. Since the 1990s, liberal interventionism has been prominent in human rights. This belief that humanity has a responsibility to protect civilians in case of serious human rights violations is at the heart of organizations even independent from the UN such as Responsibility to Protect (R2P). All members of R2P believe the government should feel free to send their troops where human rights abuses are taking place even without Security Council mandate. In 1999 R2P was used to justify the NATO intervention in Kosovo (despite the Security Council's failure to authorize it). But such intervention is not always necessary. R2P backed the US-British intervention in Iraq on humanitarian grounds but this intervention did not end up benefitting humans in Iraq since it marked the start of the civil war. R2P and the UN also authorized NATO intervention in Libya, which caused terrible instability in the country. Indeed, Obama said it was his worst mistake in the presidency, and, later, claimed the event encouraged him not to intervene violently against President Al-Assaad in Syria. Examples such as Libya and Iraq show that there is already a shift against violence in human rights, and this approach is compatible, and can indeed be strengthened, by realism.

Lastly, English Realism allows one to conceptualize International Human Rights as a product of political tension between order and justice. The realism of the English school shows legal rights practitioners that governments are motivated by factors other than a sense of justice, solidarity and concern for others' wellbeing. Instead, governments are motivated by factors linked to order. This realism, put forward by Henry Bull, deems that order is the foundation of any international society. For Bull, order is "a pattern that leads to a particular result, an arrangement of social life such that it promotes certain goals or values". Order is needed as it is "the condition of the realization of other values" such as justice. This suggests that justice is often not the desire of most states when adopting and ratifying international human rights treaties. Instead, they are hoping it will create order. This could explain the willingness many states have to promote ambiguous human rights regimes that do not impose heavy burdens. For example, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that its obligations depend on "available resources" and are only to be fulfilled "progressively", thus making it appealing to governments. Also, European states support R2P programmatically, where it is compatible with the UN Charter and knowing well that the consequences of foreign invasion will not be felt on their soil. Therefore, IHRL can be framed as a product of political tension between a desire for order, and a view of global justice. On one side, the desire for order is upheld by the states, and on the other, the view of global justice is championed by NGOs and UN experts (Casla). Framing human rights in the context of English Realism allows one to conceptualize it as more than a universal idealist desire for justice and suggests alternative motives and ambitions of states. Recognizing alternative motives of states is imperative, as it allows one to build off broad idealist goals, and craft policies that states will want to follow.

The idealist wishes to change the world, and the realist can help them in their quest. Idealism holds together values that can, in turn, help to craft better policies. The Realist vision complements the idealist one in unexpected ways. Firstly, it can suggest alternative paths to obtaining social justice. Also, Realists are prudent and advise restraint for the use of military force. Lastly, English Realism allows legal practitioners to frame policies in such a way that allows them to match with the motives of states. Realism can, therefore, work within the idealist vision of human rights to change the world. ◀

Applied Ethics

A Look into Two Issues of Applied Ethics

Aidain Abraham

We live in a world where we are encouraged to consider the moral impact of everything we do: what we buy, what we eat and the most scrupulous details of how we act. At first glance this moral knot looks unnavigable. I cannot promise to be able to untie it with a single article. Perhaps, however, by starting with some key issues, we may be able to scratch the surface. I am sure many readers are familiar with 'Practical Ethics', a book by philosopher Peter Singer, which is widely studied in university courses. The book has been re-edited by Singer twice since the original its original release in 1980, and broadly tries to tackle the ethical dilemmas at the forefront of public life at the time of writing. The most recent release was in 2011. During this article I would like to summarise and provide my own interpretation of two of the topics of which I think to be the most pressing and interesting. Anything lifted directly from the book will be contained within quotation marks, the rest is my understanding of what is written coupled with my own opinion.

Why act morally in the first place?

The first issue which I look at is simple and yet fundamental to all discussions of morality. What is the point of acting morally at all? Philosophers have presupposed that by definition, our ethical principles are, 'the principles we take as overridingly important'. This thus concludes the question of why one should act ethically is the same as why one should act rationally insofar as they both concern an individual's pursuit of their own ends. To justify rationality with an argument based on reason would logically 'improper'. Many philosophers suggest the same goes for why we should act ethically

However, several philosophers add more sophistication to this view. David Hume argued that our reasons for acting rely on our personal desires and we only use reason insofar as it applies to the means in which that end is achieved, 'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger'.

American philosopher Thomas Nagel, however, presents an argument contrary Hume's position. He argues that that, since we can see the present as merely 'one time among others' and act accordingly (an example is that it would be rational to suffer one minute of agony today if that prevented one hour of agony tomorrow) we should see ourselves as merely 'one person among others' and therefore act in a way which benefits everyone. This is logic which I'd argue looks great on paper but is really just making constellations out of stars.

I would personally conclude that, it is necessarily rational and correct to act based on one's own desires. But there is hope, rooted in psychology that could still help to encourage people to act ethically regardless of quantifiable benefit.

In 'The Republic', Plato presents Socrates arguing with sceptics asking why they should be just. Socrates eventually reaches the conclusion that 'the just man is happy and the unjust man miserable'. This is perhaps the first ancient presentation of what I would call the saving grace of ethics, the human conscience.

Most ethical sceptics will not be convinced solely by the statement above. I'll try not to get too spiritual, but let's take a break from the West and delve into some teachings from classical Indian philosophy.

Within the sutras, there are dual concepts of Vidya and Nyaya (Sanskrit). Nyaya and Vidya can be loosely translated to mean objective knowledge and subjective knowledge or understanding. Objective knowledge, or Nyaya, is something you could read in a book. A logical line of argument for example, would be Nyaya. Meanwhile, subjective knowledge, or Vidya, can only be accumulated through experience. It is internal and exists as understanding of a concept that cannot seem to be described logically. These two forms of knowledge are hard to differentiate on paper but easy to tell apart practically. The sutras also refer to a Dharma, or duty that every individual has. A common example I would give of a Dharma and its accompanying 'vidya' would be the responsibility that one feels during parenthood towards the care of their children.

For the case of morality, I am sure that I would be lectured on the effects which oxytocin has on the brain and that human bonds are chemically induced but that is part of why I think to follow a duty is a rational course of action. Many people feel a duty towards their work, especially when it comes to helping others. A teacher may feel a responsibility or a duty towards the safeguarding of his or her students. We wouldn't consider these duties rational from a purely self-interested perspective, but they may in fact, due to the positive effect doing good has on one's state of mind (more on that shortly). As stated, Indian tradition describes these as examples of Vidya or understanding and are the backbone of the human conscience. I present the following argument.

1st premise: To do good contributes to ones feeling of fulfilment
2nd premise: fulfilment is a desirable aspect of human life
Conclusion: It is rational to aspire to do good (act morally)

Here I have assumed that all humans share the same internal view that helping others is a source of fulfilment. While I think everyone agrees on this intuitive feeling it still qualifies as 'Vidya' because there is no logical basis behind the feeling. This argument is also conveniently supported by the theory of evolutionary altruism, the belief that feelings of guilt or responsibility could have resulted from the natural selection of an altruistic gene.

Thus, this concludes my argument for doing good. Doing good can lead to somebody feeling far more fulfilled, and thus acting morally is the rational course of action. Unfortunately, this argument requires your core beliefs to somewhat align with mine but as I've stated, I think this 'Vidya' is present within all of us whether or not we've internalised it.

Civil disobedience: Is it ever justified?

Some people hold the view that breaking the law is never acceptable and, in instances where the law is not entirely morally correct, it must still be obeyed for the sake of its integrity. To combat this viewpoint intuitively, I provides a quick example that Singer gives of an instance where the law is broken, perhaps justly.

Dr Thomas Gennarelli was the director of a head injury laboratory at the university of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, members of an underground organisation called the animal liberation front knew that Gennarelli inflicted head injuries on monkeys and were told that the monkeys weren't properly anaesthetised, they also knew that there were videotapes of these experiments to provide a record of what

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happened. In May 1984, they broke into the laboratory at night, found 34 videotapes and systematically destroyed laboratory equipment before leaving with the tapes. Those tapes clearly showed monkeys conscious and struggling whilst being strapped to an operating table where head injuries were inflicted, when an edited version of the tapes was released to the public it produced widespread revulsion, nevertheless it took a further year of protests before the US secretary of health and Human services ordered that the experiments stop'.

This was one of many examples presented by Singer, questioning whether civil disobedience is itself immoral. There are many instances throughout history, such as Nazi Germany for example, where parts of the law have been extreme to the degree that they are unquestionably wrong to follow. Even now in developed countries, however, laws that serve mainly to protect sometimes get in the way of justice and protection.

Singer mentions also the menial and somewhat ridiculous deontological argument 'the end never justifies the means'. Some members of society condemn the mistreatment of animals or environmental crimes but would refrain from breaking the Law in order to stop it. This is not because they are afraid of the consequences, but because they 'respect and obey the moral authority of the law'. Others would be willing to break the Law to enforce what they think is 'right'. Who is right in this ethical dilemma? Do we have any moral obligation to obey the law if it sanctions something we believe to be completely wrong? As a starting point let us look to what some philosophers beyond Singer.

American Radical Henry Thoreau in his essay, 'Civil Disobedience', said the following on civil disobedience:

> *'Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think we should be men first and subjects afterwards. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right.'*

Thoreau definitely prefers that we do what our conscience dictates, not what the Law directs. I would agree. In fact, to disagree with this would be to deny completely our capacity for ethical choice. This question can be reframed with greater nuance, however. What if, in fact, the question asked you to decide whether to break the law to achieve a righteous end quickly and easily or achieved that end without breaking the law but with much greater difficulty. The difference here lies in whether we consider the upholding of the law to have any moral benefit itself. Why should we have laws in the first place? Human beings are social creatures, but not to the extent that we will not protect ourselves from being assaulted or killed by others.

As I see it, the Law should exist to uphold the interests of the majority. If we have laws to prevent assault or murder, the majority can live with much less fear of being assaulted or murdered. The Law makes it much harder to assault or murder without punishment, thus helping the majority, who would have no desire to commit a murder. I thus believe that Laws are a good thing.

One potential reason why we should not disobey that law (even righteously) is that, by doing so, we are 'setting an example to others that may lead them to disobey too'. Breaking the Law also has an extensive cost on the community. If laws are set up and government machinery (e.g. police, courts etc…) is established to uphold those laws, that machinery will have to be put to use if you break the law, which will cost money coming from the pocket of the community. These two reasons to uphold the law are obviously not universally applicable, breaking the law in secret for example would counteract both these reasons to uphold it.

I think we have enough evidence here to make a somewhat conclusive argument. Without ample reason for disobeying the law, it should be upheld, unless the law is broken in secret, in which case (assuming the cause is entirely just) whether one breaks or upholds the law is irrelevant. However, if we think there might be sufficient reason to break the Law, we 'must assess each case on its own merits in order to see if the reasons for disobedience outweigh the reasons for obedience. In the case of animal torture, it is justified to break the law to prevent the torture of animals. It is likely the case in many other instances as well.

Thus, regardless of whether you think you will be convicted, you should not break the law unless the moral benefits outweigh the effects. We've concluded indirectly that we should base our laws on usefulness in practice rather than an ideal we may have. I would finally like to clarify that if all I've done is describe the reader's intuition, then the reader in my view has an excellent moral compass! ◀

PETER MARLOW / MAGNUM PHOTOS

Civil disobedience during the Brixton Riots of 1981

End of Section

EPISTEMOLOGY / BELIEF

PETER MARLOW / MAGNUM PHOTOS

Linguistics

What is a sandwich?

Alex Taylor

To answer this question, a multitude of philosophical, linguistic and empirically defined viewpoints are required to be understood to find what 'sandwich', or, in fact, any other word in any language, means. To begin with, most people will have vague, yet seemingly unchangeable notions of what a sandwich is, and how to define it so all examples of 'sandwich' fall inside their definition. Some will try and define it as 'two pieces of bread with an edible filling', whereas others tend to go for a more linguistically definition, stating that 'anything that is sandwiched is a sandwich'.

Is there such a thing as a definition of a sandwich that accounts for all possible uses of the word? There is a tautological statement to be made here; that sandwiches are sandwiches. Wittgenstein and other linguistically-focused philosophers may agree here, saying that 'the meaning of a word is its use in the language'. However, Wittgenstein also warns against interpreting this comment literally, as it seems strange that the meaning of a word could be removed from usage if the physical or mental concept which it represents fails to exist. Knowing the use of the word generally means understanding the contexts in which it is used or what part of speech it is, or, alternatively, understanding enough to be able to communicate properly. And, it is arguable that if you understand the context, then you can understand the meaning of the word, as well. However, this gets us no closer to understanding what the meaning of the word is.

But, most people would reason that if you use the word sandwich to mean 'binoculars', for whatever reason, that does not necessarily give binoculars all the constituent properties of a sandwich. This is merely equivalent to having the word 'binoculars' be a code word for a sandwich. Furthermore, if you are the only person who refers to binoculars as 'sandwiches', then you may be the only person to understand it. Since language seems to necessitate interpersonal communication to be coherent, this 'language' where one word is swapped for another is incoherent. As Locke argues that 'words indicate ideas in the mind of the speaker' and that the purpose of said speech is to disclose your thoughts to others, this 'private language' cannot reveal your thoughts to another person, which is the primary use of language. If we did not agree on concepts like what colour 'red' is, then we could not communicate effectively, and language would break down.

In contrast to this, Gordon Baker argues that this 'private language argument', primarily put forth by Wittgenstein, is not true. A man could indeed speak his own language and have a use for said language. He could write things down and, pass reminders on to himself in the future. But, Baker says that this private language user 'lacks a genuine pattern for distinguishing the correct use of the word from its incorrect use'. There is no way of determining if this language user has communicated his thoughts correctly or not, as he is the only one who understands it.

So then the question moves to 'how can we determine what the defining attributes of a sandwich are?' This is not a terribly different phrase to the titular question, but it has a useful change. Now, we can find specific attributes which apply to sandwiches, and how we can begin to communicate them to other people. For example, some people would say that sandwiches are only allowed to contain edible ingredients. But does that make a sandwich with a cocktail stick holding an olive to the top of the bread, not a sandwich? I do not think anyone would argue that. Adding to that, the word 'edible' has its own points of contention, we may argue that humans, while technically able to eat poisonous materials, cannot live very long having done so. But small amounts of these aforementioned poisons do not end up killing us, we could reasonably ingest an atom of uranium with no effect.

Sandwich attributes fall into two broad categories. One that is filled with our 'perfect' ideas of a sandwich (two slices of bread, edible filling, usually cold) and another that contains 'general' ideas of a sandwich. Of course, the idea of a 'perfect' sandwich may differ from culture to culture, but it is very likely that if I ask someone to represent a sandwich pictorially, they will draw something akin to the 'perfect' sandwich. While it is arguable that a hot dog is a sandwich, it is very unlikely that someone will draw one if they are asked to draw a sandwich. What we can infer from this is that there may be different kinds of attributes that describe sets of objects; sometimes it is useful to describe types of objects through

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their variants, and the specific things that make up those variants. Furthermore, the notion of an 'idealised' sandwich comes into play.

If we were to generate a large number of sandwich combinations, using attributes like edibility, size, shape, ingredients, bread & filling layout, then we could come up with a more comprehensive definition - albeit a statistically defined one - on what the population as a whole think that sandwiches are. Of course, I don't think that many people would be satisfied with the definition of a sandwich being '36% of people agree that sandwiches should be only comprised of humanly digestible ingredients.' Having every word defined as such would be a logistical nightmare when it comes to dictionaries. However, going back to the idea of 'meaning is use', there might be some insight into linguistics that could be gleaned by asking people to quantify how they define words. However, like any survey, it should be carefully undertaken. People might not realise that their definitions of the word do not correlate with the things that they would be happy defining as sandwiches, and vice versa.

Another concept within this statistical definition is the idea of root words. If you ask someone to define the word 'sandwich' and then they use the word 'bread' in the description, then would you ask them to define bread? Perhaps then they would break the bread down into its constituent components, they might be able to list the ingredients that they would use for bread. If they were to include 'eggs' in their definition, then what counts as an egg? An opportunity for further questioning arises until there is a universal consensus on what a word is. This has the potential to lead our line of questioning all the way down to subatomic particles, and even then, there is the possibility for disagreement. The agreement on certain fundamental aspects of the universe helps us form the basis of what we can talk about.

Going back to the example of breaking bread down, there are two ways to break it down; conceptual components and subsets. Different kinds of bread have different ingredients and methods of preparation, but it is unlikely that if you asked someone to define bread, they would give all of the examples of different kinds of bread. Thus, we can distinguish the idea of statistically defined conceptual components (flour, milk, eggs) from subsets (vegan bread, sourdough, different shapes of bread).

If you reject the statistical definition, would anyone say it is possible to give a concrete definition of a sandwich in any other way? Plato would likely say that sandwiches are things that are close to the Form of a sandwich - but this still does not remove the challenge of defining what a sandwich is. This 'form' may be represented by the 'perfect' sandwich which most people think of when they are asked to describe a sandwich. Aristotle may have looked at this question in a different way, saying that a sandwich is a good sandwich if it fulfils its function of being a sandwich. But then, this simply moves the question to 'how is a sandwich good?' Unlike the previous redefinitions of the question, this is a notably different question with hopefully different answers. A modern utilitarian view may say that the purpose of a sandwich is to cause as much pleasure (both in the form of taste and also nutritional benefit) to the consumer, while also minimising the amount of pain (animals killed, workers exploited to farm the wheat for the bread). In this way, the question of 'how is a sandwich good?' is more of an ethical question than a linguistic one.

Reframing empirically defined questions as ethical ones gives us a lot more room to explore what the ideal sandwich would be, and therefore, what the definition of a sandwich could be. However, this opens up the question 'is a thing that performs its function badly still the same thing?' This seems an innocuous enough question when asked about simple food products; a bad sandwich is still a sandwich, but I think that the problem becomes much more contentious when you apply it to things like humans. Is someone infertile not a good human, since they are unable to fulfil one of their biological purposes? This is a question which is much harder to answer, most likely because it is hard to reconcile the belief that there can be 'better' things with the idea that someone who cannot reproduce is objectively 'worse' than someone who can, and who is identical in all other respects. Some implications of Aristotelian thinking are uncomfortable to handle.

Some may say that the fulfilment of biological functions is not the purpose of humans, and we are a 'rational animal' with the ability to reason and do things that other animals cannot. In the light of evolutionary biology, this is hard to justify in such a black and white way, since it has been shown that other animals have complex social and societal behaviours, in the same manner as humans. There appears to be no difference in any other way between us and animals. With the system of basic biological processes (reproduction, homeostasis, excretion, nutrition, etc.) it seems as if humans have no function beyond that. Of course, these processes alone are not representative of modern society as a whole, nothing in our basic function of eating and reproducing can explain why we build the things we do. There seems to be an innate human desire to make things, to create things, to simplify the process as much as possible so that we have to pay as little attention as possible to our basic needs. Government-provided housing attempts to make sure that people have shelter. Our excretion-based needs have been simplified by municipal plumbing. Nutrition is now one of the easiest things we can do, all we need to do is pick up a loaf of pre-made bread (which is already been processed elsewhere) and pre-cut slices of meat, and lots of different, out-of-season vegetables to put in our sandwiches so our hands stay clean. Surely, if this is the case, we have progressed past the need for saying that a human is only a good human insofar as we fulfil our basic biological needs.

Now, consider the fact that we have different cultural needs. For example, there is comparatively little demand for a marketing expert in a remote village in a newly developing nation when compared to a large city that is focused on quaternary industries. These differing requirements of the world around us should inform the kinds of people that we should work towards being, to improve both ourselves and the world around us. But how much of this is based on financial differences, and how much of it is culturally related? Is it alright for people who live in countries where homosexuals are stoned to death to say that they are not functionally good humans because they do not fulfil the biological function of reproduction? Of course, this Aristotelian thought is rarely used to justify such thought, usually, it is based on religious scripture.

Going back to the example of a sandwich, is it right that the sandwich needs to have a good taste to be a better sandwich? Someone who is starving to death would not care much about the taste of the sandwich when comparing it to the nutritional benefit it may bring them. So, for different people, the concept of 'the best sandwich' may be different, depending on what they need. Some may not need the calories but want to taste the sandwich because they enjoy the flavour, in which case the nutritionally beneficial side to the sandwich's existence may be irrelevant to them. For different people, the maximum amount of pleasure can b achieved with differing amounts of effort. The starving person may indeed care about how their sandwich tastes, and it is also true that they may prefer a nicer tasting sandwich. If they were offered the choice, it seems likely that they are very likely to pick the nicer tasting one, if they had a preference.

In a similar scenario, this starving person does not

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know what a sandwich is, but it has been described to them in detail. What would they think of it? Is there anything innate about a sandwich that can be described through anything less than all of our senses? Is there something innate about actually physically witnessing objects that cannot be replicated through description? This last point is particularly interesting, since if it is true, then there cannot be a valid definition that can accurately represent the idea of a sandwich.

Some would say the sandwich does not need to be known through empirical evidence, and to a certain extent, this idea is true. We grasp many abstract concepts despite there being no true physical representation of them in the real world. None of us have ever seen a perfectly circular circle or a true visualisation of the number five, but we still understand what these concepts mean because there is a certain 'part' of them that we can understand intuitively. More complex topics, for example, sandwiches (the specific, modern, bread-based kind), seem to be quite specific to modern society, but the concept of putting pieces of clean foodstuffs around comparatively messy food to be clean is something that seems more intuitive. After all, this is arguably the reason that sandwiches were invented.

In fact, the concept of bread-as-food-container has developed several times throughout various civilisations, with lamb and herbs being wrapped in matzah-like bread in the days of the ancient Hebrews, before 0AD. The idea of using bread as a disposable, edible bowl to soak up messy food and give it to servants has been around since the Middle Ages, and the idea of the open sandwich originates separately in 17th century Holland. There have been many, many invented variations on the sandwich theme. So, what then is legally a sandwich?

The reason this question comes up is that there are generally rules surrounding which kinds of foodstuffs can and cannot be sold in a certain area, usually shopping centres, or when an event wants a food van. If we are to follow the law's guideline on sandwiches, then is that all the justification we need? Is there no Natural Law for the description of a sandwich? Is it a justifiable action to take the law's stance on what a sandwich is as an axiom for all further sandwich-based discussion?

It seems likely that the law-makers have decided the way they have for largely pragmatic reasons. Having an overly specific definition (ie. a cold filling between two slices of bread) would do more harm than good when vendors wanted to distribute their product. On the other end of the scale, the definition cannot be too broad, because even if someone says that definitionally, a chicken wrap is ostensibly a sandwich, they will feel hard done by if they order a sandwich and get a chicken wrap. At some point, there is some fundamental difference between the two, but it is hard to define when. At some point, most people would be unhappy to receive a certain thing when they order a sandwich. But even breaking that sentence down to a simpler statement is impossible. What do we mean by 'most'? Would we have to ask everyone? At that point, if we are going to ask everyone what their thoughts on sandwiches are, then maybe we could come up with a universal definition of a sandwich that is statistically defined. Perhaps, the word 'sandwich' could be defined as the higher-tier word that describes a lot of independent phenomena going on below it, and it would be better to describe each individual sub-class of sandwiches as their own things.

It is reasonably easy to argue that a baguette is a sandwich, even though it may not fit our immediate definition of sandwich, since the two sides of the bread that enclose the filling are joined with a hinge. However, the fact that the baguette has its own word, its own dictionary-defined word, then maybe the definitional scale for sandwiches isn't as simple as we think. If we were to create an Euler diagram of things which are sandwiches, and things which are baguettes, then the baguette section would arguably fall entirely inside the sandwich section. Even as baguettes are now defined to be a subset of all sandwiches, this does not mean that the term 'baguette' is useless. In fact, it is more useful than 'sandwich' because it gives us more of an idea about what specific item it is. The term 'ham and cheese baguette' is even more helpful, even though the term is a subset of a subset. 'Jim's ham and cheese baguette' is also a useful subset of that set. We could keep making these subsets until we got down to the individual subatomic particles of Jim's ham and cheese baguette.

Alternatively, if we were to work our way up from the set of baguettes, then the set of all sandwiches is one possible meaningful set that can be made. These supersets can be anywhere from meaningful to meaningless. An example of a meaningful superset would be all food products containing bread. An example of a nearly meaningless superset would be all sandwiches, plus a single pebble from a planet from a distant galaxy supercluster. It is hard to argue that a superset is ever entirely meaningless, because, in a causal universe, the actions of this pebble may, in some small way at some point in its existence, affect the development of sandwiches on earth. If we apply chaos theory to any imagined set, it is hard to argue why a certain set would be entirely meaningless. There is an exception to this when two objects are situated outside the regions in which they could have affected each other - as any effects they emit are limited by the speed of light. So, if we pick a meaningful set, like the set of all foods with bread in them, then we can make a superset by broadening our scope, which is 'all foods', and eventually, we can reach the superset of all things, ie. the universal set.

The uses of these sets stem from the fact that you can know more or less about certain sets, depending on your knowledge. If I place a sandwich in front of you, you might recognise it as such, or you may also recognise the constituent parts of it. You may even recognise the ingredients without knowing that it is a sandwich. There is a small chance that it is your sandwich, and you remember making it, and you might remember some small details about the sandwich that could only be known to other people upon opening the sandwich up. For example, you have placed a very small amount of mustard inside. You may also know other things about the sandwich, like who it was made for, and also where you got the ingredients from. It is then logical to say that there is a scale of complete knowledge of the sandwich to complete ignorance of the sandwich. Complete knowledge would be to understand each molecule of the ingredients, and spatiotemporal knowledge as well, so where the ingredients came from when it became a sandwich. Of course, it is hard to define when you can safely say you know all about a sandwich. It is arguable to say that to understand where the ingredients came from, you would have to follow the lineage of the animals that were killed to provide the ingredients for it, and then to keep following that history until you get to the dawn of life. Of course, this is not knowledge we can easily come across, so we are never going to reasonably achieve *complete* knowledge of the sandwich.

The individual who made the sandwich may know much more about it than anyone else, and so can be said to have the most complete knowledge of the sandwich. Now, if we were to zoom out to the universal set, then it can be argued that one person, out of all humans has had the most knowledge of that set, as well. This feeds into ethical thinking, as it can be said that someone with more experience of this universal set may have more of an idea of how to act in situations, as they have more experience of life in general. Of course, this does not provide any specific moral guidance on what to do, much in the way that virtue ethics

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does not - but it does provide a useful framework for figuring out what the right course of action is in any given scenario. In this system, people who have more experience with the specific set of ethical scenarios that they are facing can do the right thing. This is not to say that they will do the right thing, they have the choice to go against prior knowledge and act in a different way.

This experimentation in choice can sometimes be helpful in scenarios, offering new insight into how things can be done. I cannot downplay the downsides, there is always a risk when it comes to experimentation. But I fear that this deeply practical way of looking at ethics does not come in to play when discussing sandwiches. After all, who's ever had to make an ethical choice about a sandwich? It doesn't matter. Meaning is use, so if we all agreed to use the word 'sandwich' to mean 'binoculars' tomorrow, it would make sense. Meaning is what we understand by words. But we still have that *perfect* idea of a sandwich.

Existence

Fictional Realism – Philosophy's most useful useless theory?

Clara Hartley

What do Frodo Baggins, Harry Potter, Offred, and Juliet Capulet have in common? Easy – all of them are fictional beings. There is, however, no such straightforward to answer the question, do they exist? Fictional entities (objects, people, or places) are what philosophers generally term 'non-existent' objects, meaning that they have no physical 'referent' – there is no concrete thing to which the entities correspond in the real world. Despite this, an image comes to our minds when we hear 'Harry Potter', and we collectively agree on to whom this refers. So, if fictional characters exist somewhat or sometimes, they clearly have some type of existence. Using the concept of fictional realism, the belief that fictional entities do exist, I want to discuss what exactly this existence entails. How do we think about entities which are existent not in the physical world, but in our minds?

Take a sentence such as 'There is a place called Mordor'. This suggests that there is a place which exists and is called Mordor. As it does not exist here on earth, however, it has no actual referent. There is merely some general sort of sense as to what we're getting at. The only thing which verifies its existence is the fact that Tolkien wrote about it and that we are able to discuss it. Philosopher Saul Kripke argued that discussions of fictional places, people, and objects involve pretence – in accepting the events of the story, we pretend to assert propositions and discuss places which we pretend have a specific referent. So, when we talk about Mordor's existence, we do not necessarily mean a genuine place with the exact properties of a terrible volcano besieged by great evil with which is locatable here on earth, but rather a concept of some kind which we might all agree is equivalent to Mordor. Just because one cannot simply physically walk into Mordor does not mean it is entirely non-existent. Some fictional realists concede, therefore, that fictional entities do not exist physically, but maintain that they do exist insofar as they are discussed, loved, or conceptualised by people.

Some thinkers, however, take a more extreme stance. The Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong stated that there are objects which do not exist but have clearly defined properties, such as a golden mountain or square circle. These later became known as Meinongian objects. When this concept is hybridised with theories of other possible worlds, modal realism, the results are pretty crazy, to say the least. For the sake of clarity, modal realism states that there are many possible worlds that are 'of a kind with this world of ours.' Worlds in which a possible outcome is actualised are just as real as ours because any being within that world would argue that their world is real – in the same way that we believe our world to be real. Combining modal realism with Meinong's assertion that a fictional place can be described in detailed terms with referents in our own real world allows us to conclude the following: the statement 'there is a place called Mordor,' is an assertion that Mordor really does exist, but in another possible world. I know. I said it was crazy.

Unsurprisingly, this latter argument especially has fallen prey to much criticism. In the interests of brevity, I'll focus on one of the most interesting. Bertrand Russell offered a famous critique of realism which later fine-tuned by Anthony Everett to apply specifically to fictional realism. Russell criticised the concept of Meinongian objects, arguing that they break the law of noncontradiction. This law states that contradictory propositions cannot be true at the same time. A cardboard box, for example, if it were to not exist, could not be said to simultaneously have a cuboid shape, eight faces, and eight vertices because there is no cardboard box in the first place. Meinong was so widely mocked by his contemporaries that his theory came to be known as 'Meinong's Jungle,' a preposterous place where Jabberwockies roam around cities made of gold. Everett applies Russell's criticism to fiction – just as the cardboard box seems to be logically impossible, so too is the existence of fictional entities. Merely arguing that because fictional entities are somewhat similar to entities in the real world in no way validates their existence.

If you're like me, this has probably left you wondering, what is the point? Why go to the lengths of proving the existence of possible worlds simply to argue that Hogwarts does exist? Equally, why bother disproving such absurdly useless theory? The short answer, and certainly the most pragmatic, would be to take the advice of David Hume – 'be a philosopher, but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man' (or, of course, a woman). Philosophy can be simultaneously fascinating, rewarding, and utterly impractical; we should not forget that academia is just one facet of a rich life. When all is said and done, fictional realism has no bearing on our daily lives and is probably one of philosophy's more useless theories.

As ineffective as it may be in helping us navigate life's difficulties, however, I would argue that fictional realism is extremely valuable for the questions it raises and the debates it prompts. It asks what it means to exist, adding new shades of meaning by drawing on fiction. The liminal existence of fictional entities, be they places, people, or objects, proves that existence is just as nuanced as literary analysis, cultural identity, or, dare I say it, the trolley problem. If nothing else, it is a reminder that our ability to imagine and conjecture non-existent things is a uniquely incredible skill. Without imagination, we would be unable to envisage the future. Without imagination, there would be no Middle Earth at all, regardless of its existence in the imagination or in other possible worlds. So, while fictional realism will probably not show up on the Pre-U syllabus any time soon, this seemingly useless theory does open up fascinating and important discussion. By re-examining the nature of the imaginary, it brings us back to the still unanswered question – how do we know that our physical, tangible 'reality' is any more real than fiction?

Mortality

Is Epicurus right that a wise person does not fear death?

Adi Raj

Since the dawn of humanity, the crippling fear of death has been perennial, faced by nearly everyone. Epicurus (341-270BC), the influential ancient Greek philosopher, however, disagreed with this fear, arguing that a wise person does not fear death. Given death's inevitable and ubiquitous nature, the question of whether the fear of death is wise is one of great philosophical and practical importance. The approach that this essay takes to this question is as follows: first, it explores the nature of fear as an evolutionary mechanism that helps improve the human ability to avoid harm, concluding that the fear of death is not something that we can choose to have or not have in the first place. It then considers the question of whether conscious reflection on the nature of death can cure our involuntary fear of it.

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This essay will refer to 'death' in terms of the period following dying, instead of the physical process of dying itself. It will also assume that there is no afterlife. This opens up the true complexity of the topic since, were one to believe in a broadly theological afterlife, the explanation of their attitudes towards death would arguably be quite straightforward: they would likely fear death if they thought they were going to hell, and not fear it if they believed they would go to heaven. Instead, this essay considers the case in which death is followed (and birth preceded) simply by a lack of existence – as the famed Epicurean epitaph goes, "I was not; I was; I am not."

Before answering the question of whether or not a wise person fears death, it is important to examine what fear is and where it comes from. This essay posits that fear is a mental state. However, it is fundamentally different to a belief. A belief can be arrived at through conscious consideration of whether we are justified in holding the belief. As such, we often talk about whether or not someone 'should' or 'should not' hold a belief, epistemologically speaking. Fear, however, is an involuntary, evolutionary mechanism. It is an instinct, a chemical switch that is turned on and off, that exists to help humans avoid harm. It is therefore unlike most beliefs in that it is not something that we can choose to have or not have at the point in time when we are experiencing it.

Given that fear is an involuntary mechanism that has evolved to help humans avoid harm, it makes sense that most humans fear death - their brains interpret the prospect of death as a (huge) utility loss versus continued life, and thus a threat of (huge) harm. The evolutionary mechanism kicks in and, without conscious consideration, we find ourselves fearing that threat of harm. Thus, fear of death is not something that we choose to have or not have or even something that we 'should' have or not have - it is simply something that we do or do not have. This is a function of our brains and our situation at a given point in time.

What the essay asks is: can conscious reflection on the nature of death (i.e. the gaining of 'wisdom' about it) cure our instinctive, involuntary fear of it? In other words, can certain conscious beliefs about death influence our subconscious chemical instincts about it? Can the fear of death be cured (or at least mitigated) by reflection?

Fears are often categorised as rational or irrational (e.g. fear of being assaulted in a dark New York alley vs fear of the dark in one's bedroom), so one question we can ask is whether our fear of death is rational or not and, if not, whether one's realisation of this fact can influence one's propensity to fear it.

Maybe we can convince ourselves that fear of death is irrational, because of its inevitability - fear of X is supposed to reduce our chance of being harmed by X, but if X is inevitable then there is no benefit in expected utility terms from fearing it. (This doesn't apply to early death, which of course is avoidable, but rather to death after a natural lifespan.) Whether one's realisation of this fact has any effect on the extent to which they fear death will likely vary from person to person – for some it may help, but for others, it may be that no

amount of philosophising about death succeeds in alleviating their involuntary, instinctive fear of it.

Why do some people fear death, but others seem not to? This can perhaps also be explained by neuroscience and evolutionary biology. Fear exists to reduce the risk of harm; the reason harm is important from an evolutionary point of view is that it generally reduces the chance of gene survival. For example, if a lion catches and eats you, this prevents you from procreating, hurting the chance that your genes survive. Essentially, our brain has been trained to fear or avoid things that hurt the chance of gene survival. However, what about an old person who is already past procreation age?

For them, death arguably does not hurt the chance of gene survival. So perhaps their brain recognises this and tones down the 'fear' switch because it is not needed.

An interesting data point to explain is that it certainly seems that some people can alleviate their fear of death purely by reflecting on its nature. If this is true, then perhaps 'wisdom' can alleviate the fear of death. How can a purely evolutionary account of mental states explain this phenomenon? Perhaps these people subconsciously feel less pressured to ensure gene survival if given the analysis above about people past the procreation age, once they reach a certain age, the necessity to ensure gene survival passes. As someone gets older, the size of the threat to the gene/clan posed by their death diminishes; our brain recognises this and switches attitudes from panic to a kind of acceptance. At the same time as this subconscious effect of ageing, people also philosophise, and so looking at the correlation it may seem that conscious reflection can cure fear of death, when in fact both happen together but neither is the primary cause of the other. This could explain why some people are seemingly able to alleviate their fear of death as they get older through conscious philosophical reflection.

When considering whether conscious reflection on the nature of death can alleviate our natural fear of it, it is important also to consider other fears. One might argue that, given the human ability to overcome certain phobias, (e.g. arachnophobia, xenophobia, claustrophobia etc.) we should be able to overcome the fear of death. However, mechanisms of curing such phobias do not apply to death. The most common way of curing such phobias is through gradual exposure – desensitisation – to the fear-inducing thing. This treatment is not applicable in the case of death. There is an element of 'unknown' that is neurologically relevant here. Death is absolute, and we do not know what it is like, therefore it is impossible to cure the fear of it through desensitisation.

In light of this, one might look to methods such as counselling, psychotherapy, and meditation to overcome the fear of death. Although some anecdotal evidence exists, there has been very little scientific evidence that empirically proves that the fear of death is always something that can be eliminated through such practices. Perhaps, given how entrenched the fear of death is as an evolutionary mechanism, it is simply impossible to overcome for many people.

In conclusion, this essay has examined the nature of fear as a deep-seated evolutionary mechanism that exists to help humans avoid certain welfare-damaging outcomes. Given this fundamental characterisation of fear, therefore, it has highlighted that the fear of death is not something we can choose to have or not have. It is simply something that we do or do not have. It has then examined the question stemming from this of whether conscious philosophical reflection about death can cure our fear of it. Though in certain cases, it may be possible to overcome the fear of death through conscious reflection, as well as procedures like counselling or psychotherapy, this varies on the particular person – some people may just be unable to overcome their fear of death, but this does not necessarily make them unwise.

End of Section

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Autonomy

AI and Autonomy: What Blade Runner Can Teach Us

Philip Yanakov

Looking at the current rate of development of technology in the world, it only seems like a matter of time before Artificial Intelligence (AI), conscious machines, becomes a part of our everyday lives. Recent breakthroughs in quantum computing, which have operating capacity of our devices, as well as advances in android technology, creating in robots that both look and move like a human, have considerably narrowed the timeframe within which robots and androids could become commonplace. However, we should be cautious about just how quickly this technology is integrated into society, as there is due precedent to think that we should consider moral and legal implications of this decision first. The internet, for example, has created both legal and moral problems since the inception of its widespread use, with failure to look at the philosophical implications of this technology playing a part in catalysing hate crimes, drug trafficking, election interference and data theft. In thinking about androids and AI there are questions of a different type that need to be asked: Does a sentient android deserve the same rights as humans and, if so, should they be expected to follow the same morals as us? Do we have a right to decommission an android if we consider them to be alive and sentient? Should sentient AI ever be given weapons? In answering these questions, a surprising yet important source comes from sci-fi literature and screenplay. The film Blade Runner 2049 is one such source that explores these concepts thoroughly, offering settings and characters from which we can analyse and draw conclusions from. Enlightenment philosophy will be used to interpret and comment on these findings.

To look at the philosophy of AI in the film, the setting should first be explained. The film follows K, a replicant (android) who is tasked with "retiring" (killing) rogue replicants who have begun to develop emotions and critical thinking. When presenting evidence of a replicant giving birth, something previously thought to be impossible, to his superior, he is tasked with finding the replicant child and retiring it. His superior fears that revealing the truth of the situation to the public would lead to a war between replicants and humans.

The first and most pressing, question to be answered about replicants is whether theirsynthetic creation makes them in any way different from humans. One approach to this is to look at Cartesian thought. For Descartes, the answer would be a resounding no. "I think therefore I am", a famous quote from his Meditations, tells us that he considered thought to be one kind of innate idea. The significance of this quote is that it suggests that consciousness is a concept that is intrinsic to a human mind – thus, if you aren't conscious in the way that the quote demands, then you cannot be human. It is important to note that in Blade Runner the majority of the replicants lack an aspect of empathy, with only rogue replicants developing it. A test that looks for empathy towards animals that no longer exist is used to differentiate between humans and replicants.

However, this not a sufficient distinction. While it is true that the test is effective in separating the majority of humans from replicants, it is disproven as a measure of humanity by the counterexample of psychopaths and sociopaths – these people are certainly humans, yet they may lack empathy. Many mammals are known to exhibit empathy, so it is not a trait unique to humans. Even if one does not accept that empathy is not necessary to prove that an android is human, there are other reasons to think that a conscious android is human. When children are born, they do not have a self-awareness that satisfies Descartes' quote for some time, yet we would never consider a child to not be human. The fact that rogue replicants develop this empathy must imply that they must have had the same innate quality within them as humans that allows them to develop self-awareness, or otherwise, they would have never developed this. One possible way to extrapolate this into possible real-life situations with androids is that, if androids have the same self-awareness as humans then they must be treated as such and vice versa. However, if this consciousness takes time to develop then, in much the same way how children aren't allowed certain rights and privileges, androids will not have the same rights as humans until they show a sufficient level of self-awareness.

Notwithstanding our understanding of whether androids are human or not, there are other pertinent questions to address. Since AI was first conceived, there has been a conflict between humans and robots. There is not an obvious solution to this as there is a tricky dilemma: either restrict the autonomy of AI, infringing on its rights if it has the same level of intelligence as a person, or allow for complete autonomy of AI, which risks a conflict between the two. Currently, this dilemma appears to be unsolvable. This is because, through creating a sentient android, the human is placed into a social contract with said android. This can be looked at through a duty ethic lens. The opinion of many, and in most countries the law, is that it would be immoral to harm your pet or child. This is because the respective owner or parent is in a position where they are directly responsible for the survival of the pet or child, meaning that they have a duty to them – it would be immoral to go against this duty. For androids, this has one of two implications. First, if the android is created by a human, then it would be immoral for that person (or more likely a group

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of people, as it would likely be large companies that create androids) to decommission that android. Whether there are exceptional circumstances would depend on whether one agrees with the Categorical Imperative.

In Blade Runner, replicants can only live for 4 years (whether this is due to an intentional design choice or a limitation of technology we do not know). This solves issues of morality on a practical level – replicants simply do not have the lifespan to stage an uprising, despite their superior physical capabilities. However, would it be moral to implement this as a solution to problems with AI in real life? Considering that in real life the default lifespan of a program is infinite, anything less than that would be a shortening of its life. Rogue replicants in Blade Runner are certainly aware and feel injustice towards, the fact that their lives are shorter than that of humans' suggesting that they consider themselves to be equals – this is one of the major sources of tension in the films. One moral solution to this is to give androids a similar lifespan to that of humans. This makes sense, as while giving AI a shorter lifespan than that of a human is suggesting them to be less important than humans, AI having an infinite lifespan while humans have a finite one implies that they are above humans, which is also not the case if you accept equality between the two.

There are many moral issues to overcome before introducing androids and AI in general to the workplace. A truly sentient program is certainly human insofar as its mind is the same as a human's. This implies that AI deserves the same treatment as humans. While it may seem tempting to act in a way that reduces the risk of a conflict between humans and AI, most of these actions are immoral. Currently, there seems to be no way to limit sentient AI in a way that does not transgress their rights, meaning that the possibility of conflict is always a real one. As such, it may perhaps be for the best of both humans and androids if sentient AI remains as taboo as Blade Runner makes it out to be.

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Epistemology

How AI disrupted philosophy

Edmond Wang

Can machines think?

What makes human intelligence different from artificial intelligence?

Are machines ever conscious?

Above are some of the questions that in 1956, in a small workshop at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, founded Artificial Intelligence as a field. In eight weeks, ten mathematicians and computer scientists coined the term AI and the program Logic Theorist known by many as the first-ever artificial intelligence application. The programme would end up proving thirty-eight of the first fifty-two theorems in Whitehead and Russell's Principia Mathematica, even coming up with newer and sometimes more elegant proofs. Although not the first time for humans to witness its impact, this was the birth of AI research as a field – and would subsequently commence the golden years of fifty-six to seventy-four, the two AI winters, and presently the era of big data and deep learning.

Before proceeding any further, it is crucial for us to first gain an understanding of what exactly AI is. Is it like maths and philosophy, where it's universally unfeasible to ever reach a universally agreed-upon definition? Maybe, but many have attempted to categorise and offer proposed interpretations. In Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach (AIMA), Peter Norvig and Stuart Russell proposed a table summing up the

	Human based	Ideal rationality
Reasoning-based	Systems that think like humans	Systems that think rationally
Behaviour-based	Systems that act like humans	Systems that act rationally

When defining AI, different professionals belong to different quadrants of the above table. Philosopher John Haugeland believes in the Human/Reasoning quadrant; Authors of AIMA aligned with the Ideal/Act quadrant; Alan Turing a vigorous proponent of the Human/Act position; and the Idea/reasoning defended by the MIT professor Patrick Winston.

To fully understand these viewpoints, perhaps we should begin by scrutinizing the questions posed from the start.

Can machines think? According to Alan Turing's proposal in his 1950 MIND Paper "Computing Machinery and Intelligence", is a rather pointless question because thinking as a concept is too difficult to define. Instead, it should be replaced with another, equivalent but less ambiguous, "Can a machine be linguistically indistinguishable from a human?". To demonstrate, he devised the Turing Test, or as he called it – the imitation game. It is formulated in a way that a woman and computer are both sequestered in separate rooms, with a human judge outside unaware of the contestants. If through questionings by teletype (or other modern equivalents), the judge can do no better than 50/50 when determining which player resided in which room, the computer system is said to have passed the test. At the core of the assessment lies linguistic indistinguishability,

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and the criterion which Turning deemed best answered the question.

In fact, from a philosophical point of view, the Turing Test dates even further back to the 17th Century, when Descartes first propounded the following argument:

> *If there were machines which bore a resemblance to our body and imitated our actions as far as it was morally possible to do so, we should always have two very certain tests by which to recognise that, for all that, they were not real men. The first is, that they could never use speech or other signs as we do when placing our thoughts on record for the benefit of others. For we can easily understand a machine's being constituted so that it can utter words, and even emit some responses to action on it of a corporeal kind, which brings about a change in its organs; for instance, if it is touched in a particular part it may ask what we wish to say to it; if in another part it may exclaim that it is being hurt, and so on. But it never happens that it arranges its speech in various ways, in order to reply appropriately to everything that may be said in its presence, as even the lowest type of man can do. And the second difference is, that although machines can perform certain things as well as or perhaps better than any of us can do, they infallibly fall short in others, by which means we may discover that they did not act from knowledge, but only for the disposition of their organs. For while reason is a universal instrument which can serve for all contingencies, these organs have need of some special adaptation for every particular action. From this it follows that it is morally impossible that there should be sufficient diversity in any machine to allow it to act in all the events of life in the same way as our reason causes us to act.*
>
> *- Descartes 1637, p. 116, Discourse on the Method*

Descartes was confident that machines can never think due to the lack of natural reason. Perhaps he will also be sceptical toward other conjectures suggesting an artificial consciousness. This seems rooted in the belief that no machines can ever pass the Turing Test (a term we shall use for any examinations resolving on the awareness of machines) – that no systems can ever talk or act in ways adult humans do. It is with our thinking mind that we produce different arrangements of words that give an appropriate and eloquent response to inquiries. Although Descartes' version of the Turing Test is more demanding – requiring the machine to produce meaningful answers to any arbitrary questions, it would seem that he does indeed believe in the legitimacy of the test in assessing any claims respecting the capacities of computational thinking.

Notwithstanding, Turing's design behind the test was never explicitly a measure of intelligence or humanity, but merely a resolvable alternative to the question 'thinking'; and it's only natural that the rationality behind using it as an intelligence indicator has become fiercely disputed.

One such example is a certain theological response. This is generally held by substance dualists who believe mental activities to be transcendental and entirely separate from the body. Making a body, therefore, never guarantees the presence of thought; and computers, despite any forms of apparent intelligence or human behaviour, are soulless automatons and no different to any other inanimate objects. Our divine creator, having created our bodies as "temples of the Holy Spirit", has also placed a unique soul inside of each of them. His power dictates whether there is a thinking soul within any particular bodies. It is not clear why our benevolent God would want to combine souls with digital computers when he has already created us.

However, even if we disregard objections to theism/dualism and focus on God's intent, equally, there is no good reason why he would never want to do this. It seems we have been given no real information.

A perhaps much more critical response to Turing lies in the differentiation between being human-like and intelligent, and if they are indeed interchangeable, or even related at all. Take the example of Eugene Goostman, a chatbot disguised as a 13-year-old Ukrainian boy which successfully hid its identity. Below is a segment of 'his' conversation with computer scientist Scott Aaronson:

> **Scott:** Which is bigger, a shoebox or Mount Everest?
> **Eugene:** I can't make a choice right now. I should think it out later. And I forgot to ask you where you are from…
> **Scott:** How many legs does a camel have?
> **Eugene:** Something between 2 and 4. Maybe, three? :-))) By the way, I still don't know your specialty – or, possibly, I've missed it?
> **Scott:** How many legs does a millipede have?
> **Eugene:** Just two, but Chernobyl mutants may have up two five. I know you are supposed to trick me.
> **Scott:** No, I need to know that you're not a chatbot. Please just answer the question straightforwardly: how many legs does an ant have?
> **Eugene:** Something between 2 and 4. Maybe three? :-))) Oh, what a fruitful conversation ;-)
> **Scott:** Do you understand why I'm asking such basic questions? Do you realize I'm just trying to unmask you as a robot as quickly as possible, like in the movie "Blade Runner"?
> **Eugene:** ...wait

Per Turing's prediction that by the year 2000, machines would be capable of fooling 30% of human judges after just 5 minutes of conversation – Goostman fooled 33% of the judges in a 2014 contest marking the 60th Anniversary of Turing's death. It, therefore, became the first computer program to ever pass the test (its validity disputed), just slightly later than what Turing would have expected. Most people, however, refuse to believe that just by making jokes and avoiding the question, Goostman is indeed capable of independent reasoning.

At last, perhaps it is worthwhile to introduce the concepts of strong and weak AI in response to investigations regarding a synthetic consciousness. In 1980, American philosopher John Searle published his paper "Minds, Brains and Programs", having since sparked tremendous debate and discussions due to its positions against functionalism and computationalism. Most prominently, he introduced the famous Chinese Room Argument along with the ideas of Strong and Weak AI. Let us first define the two terms, using a similar approach to before – to distinguish via their goals. Weak AI, on the one hand, aims to build processing systems specialised with certain problem-solving skills, and only appearing to possess the full repertoire of human capabilities. Searle said they "would be useful for testing hypothesis about minds, but would not actually be minds". On the other, strong AIs are artificial persons, possessing all which humans can muster, even cognitive awareness, personalities, and what some described as transcendental consciousness. In Searle's words, "The appropriately programmed computer with the right inputs and outputs would thereby have a mind in exactly the same sense human beings have minds." The Chinese room argument (RCA), consequently, is devised to refute and overthrow the position of Strong AIs.

In this, perhaps one of the most well-known

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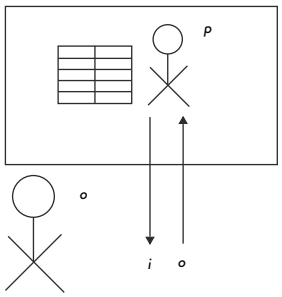
recent thought experiments, Searles imagines himself in a room with native Chinese speakers on the outside. Cards are sent into the room with written questions in Chinese, and Searle uses a box to return answers as outputs. Without any prior Chinese knowledge, Searle's response to questions is entirely based on a Chinese rulebook with lookup tables telling him what to reply under what circumstances. A schematic view of the situation is shown below:



The experiment proposition is simple – Searle's perception of Chinese characters is equivalent to the computational perception of, frankly, everything. Albeit an apparent intelligence, machines simply manipulate binary inputs and outputs without understanding them. The broader conclusion, therefore, supports the weak AI position, while simultaneously refuting the theory that human minds are simply advanced info-processing systems. It appears that our minds and natural reason come from biological processes – something machines can only stimulate but never fully be.

An interesting argument, one might suggest. But is it sound, and conclusive on the matters of AI consciousness?

Unsurprisingly, the CRA is met with substantial criticisms, even regarded by some as trivial and silly. For instance, philosopher William Rapaport argued that while AI systems are syntactic, the right syntaxes constitute semantics the same way our impulses constitute emotions and reason. Other objections, including several robots, intuition and the brain simulator replies, have all pointed out fair flaws within the argument premises. Non-philosophizing AI practitioners, in the meantime, also do not seem particularly convinced. Looking at how much their state-of-the-art algorithms have advanced throughout the years, many believe that the era of strong AI is not just inevitable, but imminent to each one of us. Perhaps only time will tell.

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Robot Rights

On Robots, Rights and Personhood: Should robots have rights?

Jiayi Li

"Just because it was shaped like a human and they'd watched Star Wars, passers-by thought it deserved more ethical consideration than they gave homeless people, who were actually people."

- Bryson, June 23, 2016

Rights, as fundamental normative principles that are indispensable to humans inter alia, are granted to every person - to at least some degree - in every modern legal system. Robots, benefiting from accelerating technology upgrading, have developed rapidly in the past decades to replace human labour in many respects. This development raises urgent questions about the moral ramifications of these technical products, and challenges people to re-examine the distinctions between automata and humans — and whether the former should be entitled to certain rights that the latter possess.

Before beginning my argument, I will first define robots based on current technological advancements. The available results obtained from the Turing test, a method employed to examine the level of behavioural consciousness in robots, show no evidence that robots currently have the ability to conduct abstract reasoning and rational judgments.

A robot, therefore, can be defined as a physical, artificial entity with sensing, processing and actuation devices that

1) Is capable of performing independent actions by carrying out a set of instructions

2) Lacks the internal and subjective component of sense perceptions

Legal rights, according to Hohfeld's conception, can be classified into four categories: privilege, claim, power and immunity, altogether granting exemption, discretion and authorization of bearers to protection from certain interventions, provision of certain goods or services or performance of certain acts. These rights are bestowed upon a legal agent by a juridical system, along with certain enforced duties that one must perform. In this essay, I will argue that due to the ontological nature of robots, they do not meet the necessary and sufficient conditions for possessing rights.

I will start my argument by discussing the qualities of an entity that entitle it to certain rights. The will theory of rights states that the function of legal rights is to provide persons with discretionary spheres of choice. Hence, a necessary and sufficient criterion for being a rights bearer is that the agent is in a position to control the performance of a duty. As natural persons, we possess the capability of performing voluntary actions that are not controlled by any external force — each action is a direct result of one's decision between various alternatives. Robots, as entities lacking cognitive autonomy, are unaware of options other than carrying out the set of codes in their programs. Thus, they do not meet the

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criteria for having rights, according to the will theory.

One may argue that humans are not truly autonomous entities either, for our decisions are subject to forces exerted by legal and social authorities. This objection, however, confuses the concept of personal autonomy with the concept of legal autonomy, for, as political philosopher John Rawls posited in his book, A Theory of Justice, the operation of a state is fundamentally based upon the social contract, and the governing body attains its right to govern from the common consent of those who are being governed. Furthermore, an individual under governance still has the capacity to resist or refuse to obey their legal duties despite the use of coercive force by the governing body. This has been demonstrated through rebellions and revolutions throughout history. Therefore, although an individual's autonomy may be repressed or diminished by political and social factors, one can never be deprived of it, for cognitive autonomy is engrained within the biological functions of the human species, determined by the cortical areas of the central nervous system, which robots lack.

One objection may be that such an account of the eligibility of rights excludes human individuals who are unable to meet the criteria I have explained, such as those whose mental abilities are severely underdeveloped or impaired, for instance, infants and those living in a persistent comatose state. Hence, one may ask, what distinguishes them from robots in terms of their eligibility for rights? In response to this criticism, I argue that in cases where an incapacitated individual is incapable of having rights, rights protecting their interests still exist and are held by appointed representatives. While these individuals do not sui juris possess rights, such legal entitlements and correlated duties are often exercised, with the approval of legal legislators, by external agents on their behalf. These agents' course of action is principally determined by what those incapacitated individuals might have done under the circumstances in which they sui juris held rights. Assuming the scenario that a person enters a persistent comatose state caused by a head injury immediately after birth, their rights may still be exercised based on a presumption of what they would have done if sui juris, which can be derived from mankind's shared instincts. On the other hand, robots, given current technological development, have never possessed the rational element of self-awareness and sentience and therefore lack the traits to enable an appointed representative to recognize how their rights should be exercised. The act of bestowing rights, a social construct arising from human interactions, would therefore produce an inherent contradiction — these rights would not truly be rights for robots but rather ones for an assumed human-like being.

Following this argument, a necessary and sufficient justification for an entity's entitlement to rights is personhood. I will now shift the focus of discussion to the potential consequences associated with ascribing robots personhood, and therefore rights, thus arguing that robots should not have rights even it is possible. This question can be further divided into two parts: 1) legal personhood, which grants one legal rights such as the capacity to sue and be sued and to engage in contractual activities, and 2) moral personhood; both of which signify a coexistence of rights and liabilities. While the concept of personhood is traditionally based on criteria associated with cognitive qualities, there have been cases where artificial non-cognitive entities are ascribed with personhood and certain rights, namely limited liability companies.

When introducing a new legal person into the legal system, the legislator must consider the fundamental rights of the existing subjects to minimize the interference from the new legal person to the rights of the existing subjects. Recognizing a corporation as a legal person and granting it certain rights creates a single entity for legal, financial, and social activities that would otherwise involve a large number of people, thus improving the efficiency of the marketplace. Conferring legal personhood on robots, however, does not lead to such benefits for either society or the robots themselves.

Having established the distinction between limited liability companies and robots in terms of legal personhood, I will now move onto the question of robots' moral agency. A moral agent is an entity that has the moral responsibility not to cause unjustified harms and will be held accountable if it does so. All modern secular theories of moral status are grounded only in psychological and social properties, such as the capacity for rational thoughts. A limited liability company, on the one hand, is essentially a collective of individual members. The actions implemented by the company are the voluntary and authorized decisions of these individuals whose interests are bound together. Thus, damage caused by a company to a third party reflects defects in shared institutions within the company, such as the decision-making procedure, which, although they may extend beyond the individual wills of the members, may still be regarded as a result of their agreement. The implementation of sanctions onto companies will lead to a change in such procedures, corresponding to a change in the agreement of individual members and therefore an impact on the company's future behaviour. This process indicates that corporations meet the condition for moral accountability, thus moral personhood.

On the other hand, ascribing accountability to robots that, without conscious motives, have imposed harms on other entities or properties, will not serve to inhibit the recurrence of such incidents. Therefore, the view that robots are full-fledged moral persons who can be legitimately held at moral fault for any harm or damage they cause will add no practical value to the legal system. Instead, it may act as a justification for robot-builders and designers to shirk responsibility for what are ultimately defects within the training programs and hardware. Therefore, personhood and rights — two interdependent notions — should not be granted to robots in order to avoid the inevitable negative impacts such action will bring.

Although robots are shaped and programmed to bear a certain degree of resemblance to humans, they are essentially artificial and non-cognitive entities possessing ontological properties that are critically different from those of the mankind. I have defended the view offered by the will theory of rights, according to which robots do not meet the criteria for possessing rights. Moreover, I have examined the ascription of both legal and moral personhood respectively and concluded that the act of declaring robots to be persons and granting them rights not only lacks rational and theoretical ground but is also impractical, as it might serve as a legal and moral basis for manufacturers to shirk the liability associated with incidents that robots cause. ◀

End of Section

PETER MARLOW / MAGNUM PHOTOS

Book Review

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance

Flora Prideaux

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, by Robert M. Pirsig, has become a timeless classic of the 20th century. Pirsig utilises the form of a novel as a platform to present various philosophical ideas, with a major focus of the novel revolving around the metaphysics of quality and a broad enquiry into values. He inserts himself within almost every philosophical tradition, from western to east, romantic to classical, Aristotle to Kant, emotion to intellect and subject to object establishing quality as the foundational idea for all sides.

The book is split between three main concepts. The narrative of a man and his son on a motorcycle trip west, which is largely based on Pirsig's own experience of a motorcycle trip with his son. This accompanies the Chautauqua: philosophical meditations on the concept of quality that are presented as the continuous thoughts of the narrator, largely when travelling on the motorcycle. The last section is the story of a man who is pursued by the ghost of his former self, Phaedrus. The last section interspaces the book with allegory and psychological tension, as well as providing a commentary on America's social landscape.

The book feels both ethereal and ephemeral, both grounded but timeless, creating a sense of longevity that persists to the modern reader 50 years later. It was written during the tumultuous era of the late 1960s, despite not being published till 1974, and presents an opinionated and discursive insight into the challenges that plagued both American then and now. This often manifests in the form of the discussion of technology and its values, and a challenge of the then accepted status quo that fell in line with the liberation movement of the 60s but also feels adept in the current climate of the 'gen Z' social justice movement.

I think what makes this book deceptively intriguing is the balance between the simplistic father-son storyline and the various philosophical meditations and the psychological parallels that follow the book. Although on different trajectories, the various journeys intersect and echo each other, the use of an unreliable narrator, as well as the withholding of information from the reader makes for a read that keeps a reader on edge, looking for a foothold. The narrative often makes the reader question what is real and what is true, leading them to grip on to the only constant or truth presented within the book: the philosophical explorations.

The book critiques the majority of traditional Western philosophy in a manner that is both balanced and nuanced. The form of the novel makes its ideas widely accessible to the general public. The soft but poised prose explains these concepts in great detail, but for the many, not the few. In this context, I think it represents almost a philosophical revelation of the 20th century, representing an equalisation and general increase in the accessibility of philosophy, in a way the greats would hate.

It is difficult to critique this book, largely because it is almost impossible to pinpoint what the book's critique of Western philosophies and our modern agenda specifically is. Despite this, most of the ideas are simple and logical, filling in the almost 'obvious' gap he presents as existing within the tradition of philosophy. One thing that I find particularly interesting about this book is that it is almost a biography. The author of the book, in reality, is an unreliable author suffering from schizophrenia; his son is a real person; the motorcycle trip is reality, not just an analogy. This only helps build the suspense or confusion as to what is real, what is fake and what have I learnt which leaves the reader slightly breathless to its philosophical revelations.

Having said all this, I think that this book deserves all its recognition as a work of art, and we should study it not just for its literary expertise, but the unique philosophical insights from a genius on the edge of madness. In many ways, this echoes some of the brilliance of another mad philosopher's decent: Nietzsche. Some of the ideas presented, especially a reanalysis of Western assumptions of the Greeks, a retranslation of what values are, and how they have been manipulated deserve recognition in the field of academia. The book is insightful, interesting, provocative, and ageless making for a stimulating philosophical read.

REVIEW

PETER MARLOW / MAGNUM PHOTOS

Book Review

Would You Kill the Fat Man?

Claire Zhao

You are standing by a train track when you see a runaway train hurtling towards five men who are tied to the track. The train's brakes have failed; if no-one intervenes, the train will inevitably kill all five men. However, there is a lever within your reach. If you pull it, the train diverts to another track, saving the five, but killing another person who is tied to that track. What should you do? Most people would pull the lever – some would even say that you had a moral obligation to do so: killing 1 is better than killing 5.

However, this widespread certainty changes when we change small details of the scenario.

Imagine a different scenario. You are standing on a bridge, above the train track, when you see the runaway train hurtling towards the five people. Instead of a lever, a fat man is standing near you on the bridge. If you push him onto the track, his immense weight will stop the train. Thus, the five people will be saved but the fat man will die immediately. Given that your own body is too small to stop the train, would you kill the fat man? The two scenarios are virtually the same in effect. However, most people would answer no in the second scenario. Why is that?

In his book, David Edmonds explains the history of this problem and why thinkers have grappled with it for so long. Ever since Philippa Foot devised this thought experiment in 1967, a multitude of variants – each with subtle distinctions that provoke more questions than they answer – have emerged. (the Fat Man, Lazy Susan, Loop and the Trap Door just to name a few). The problem has divided philosophers throughout the decades. Some have dismissed "trolleyology" as frivolous and pointless, describing it as "symptomatic of a disease in moral philosophy". However, while he considers these viewpoints with contemplation and respect, Edmonds likens the variants of the trolley problem to real-world examples, from Churchill's political dilemmas in the Second World War to the court case of R vs Dudley and Stephens (1884) to the Pullman Company's economic downturn.

This is because the infamous trolley problem does not just involve philosophy in the abstract. It has prompted research and is relevant to fields as diverse as economics, maths, sociology, neuroscience, law and medicine. While he gives a detailed analysis of the trolley problem in conjunction with the ethical views of Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, J.S Mill, and Bentham, Edmonds extends beyond the fields of what he calls "armchair philosophy", exploring the research of "x-phi"- experimental philosophy – to look beyond just what one should do in a trolley situation, but why people react in this way.

'Would You Kill the Fat Man?' is thus a riveting read for anyone interested in not just ethical philosophy, but any dilemma or problem involving human instinct in their fields of interest. David Edmonds' witty, elegant and succinct style makes the book accessible for anyone interested; however, the detail in his scope and analysis makes it thought-provoking for those already familiar with the problem. Ultimately, Edmonds comes to his own conclusion in response to the eponymous question. However, he equips us with the information and argumentation to reach a conclusion of our own.

Thank you for reading this first edition of 'Bentham'*, articles should be submitted for consideration for inclusion in the next edition (Play Term 2021) by the 31st July 2021*

Please contact the editors to make any suggestions, amend errors or for other reasons at:

andrew.alam-nist@westminster.org.uk

theo.naylor@westminster.org.uk

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