

Symphony of Reason

PNW Philosophy Magazine

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AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Seven PNW student contributors introduce themselves

Diana Bolanos

I am currently a student here at PNW majoring in biological sciences with a concentration in health sciences. I am also in the honors college here at Purdue. I am going into my senior year this year with hopes of moving onto veterinary school in the year 2021. Two of my favorite philosophers, both of which I included in this piece, are Buddha and Gandhi. This is because they both have a unique amount of compassion for other humans. They have been great influences on the world and have spread love instead of hate.

Kevin M. Calderone

My favorite philosophers are Jean-Paul Sartre, Gottfried Leibniz, René Descartes, and Plato. The works of Sartre, Leibniz, and Descartes bring a modern lens to Plato's original ideas. That is my reason for placing them in such high regard.

Martina S. James

I graduated in May with a BA in both Philosophy and Spanish. Currently I am in the Transition to Teaching program here at PNW, hoping to become a certified foreign language teacher before pursuing a Master's degree. Translation is one passion of mine, and being able to translate works of great philosophers is especially enjoyable to me - because sometimes the process of translating reveals a lot about the author and his or her thought process and emotions at the time of composing the text in question. Translation can do that. It is not simply a mechanical switching of text from one language to another, but often a much deeper endeavor in which it is of great importance to relay the cultural and linguistic nuances just right. It is not always easy but illuminating and satisfying every time. Plotinus is one of my favorite philosophers and the philosophy of religion is of special interest to me. In addition, I am also invested in the study of the philosophy of politics, ethics, and aesthetics. I enjoy the readings of Catherine of Siena, Hildegard von Bingen, Meister Eckhart, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Leibniz, and, contemporary philosopher Precht. There are many others, but this is a good list.

Hunter S. Saporiti

I graduated from Purdue University Northwest with a B.A. in Psychology, in 2019. Currently, I am a second-year MD/MPH dual degree student at Indiana University School of Medicine. I was introduced to the field of philosophy through the works of Soren

Kierkegaard, whose sincerity and humanistic approach resonated with me. And ever since, I have sought out writers and philosophers, including Albert Camus, Simone Weil, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who share in this approach.

James Seward

I am currently a sophomore at Purdue Northwest. I'm in the process of acquiring my bachelor's degree in Psychology with aspirations for graduate school. I hope to use my education to become a psychologist with a focus on therapy. My favorite philosophers are the Stoics. The works of Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius may be thousands of years old, but they are more relevant than ever in our fast-paced modern world. 'The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.' - Marcus Aurelius

Faith C. Taylor

I am a sophomore and I am a second year English Teaching major. I hope to one day be a high school English teacher, and later on hope to enroll in a Master's program. I cook and bake for my family and friends in my free time. My favorite modern philosopher is Alison Jaggar, because of her modern outlook on philosophy and feminism. Jaggar likes to highlight the differences between the genders, while trying to break an overly sexist system. Another one of my favorite philosophers is René Descartes because he explains in some of his works that it is okay to question who you are and what you believe. Descartes overall uses his work to humble himself and it gives one the opportunity to do the same. Overall, Descartes' urging us to believe in nothing but the truth, is quite admirable, especially in the modern world that has the media taint what is true, and some allow for those falsehoods that are portrayed to cloud their minds.

Kayla M. Vasilko

I am a PNW senior Honors College student majoring in English writing and minoring in Spanish. I believe that kindness and positivity are directly correlated with success and promote them in the work that I do for S.H.I.N.E (students helping ignite needed esteem), the community, and my writing. I write to better understand the world, and have written 13 novels, 4,000 poems, and dozens of essays and short stories thus far. I hope to earn my degree in 2021 and reach a platform where I can continue to bring kindness to the community, share my writing, and make a positive difference in the world. Some of my favorite philosophers are Epictetus, Buddha, and Aristotle. I appreciate Aristotle's view of goodness as an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.

Foreword

On the Value of Philosophy: A Student Voice!

Deepa Majumdar, Faith C. Taylor

In an age when utilitarian principles rule unchecked over moral values and virtues, it is inevitable that the academic field of philosophy will be seen as useless. Unlike other disciplines, philosophy is not immediately useful in tangible materialistic or career terms. It does not lend itself to data or empiricism. Yet this rejection is cynical, short-sighted – even dangerous. A populace bereft of philosophical thinking becomes pliable in the hands of authority figures. When it protests, nobody listens – because it speaks in blind anger, instead of reasoned responses. As a result, its protests fail to make their mark on history. Philosophy inspires in us, not only wisdom and the highest moral values, but the power of contemplation – teaching us, not only what to think, but *how* to think. Philosophy may therefore be defined as an exercise in *thinking about thinking*. It is in this intangible sense, which cannot be measured in material terms, that philosophy derives its pre-eminent usefulness. Certainly greater than our cynical age would ever admit, the value of philosophy is therefore perennial and immeasurable.

In western civilization, the charge that philosophy is useless, is an ancient one. We know from Aristotle (*Politics* 1259a 9), that the Presocratic philosopher, Thales of Miletus, who lived around the beginning of the 6th century BCE, was reproached for his poverty, “as though philosophy were no use.” His response was typically philosophical! After studying the heavenly bodies, he prophesied that there would be a large olive crop, and “raised a little capital while it was still winter” – which he invested in olive presses. Hiring these presses out on his own terms and cheaply (because nobody bid against him), he made a “large profit” – thus demonstrating that “it is easy for philosophers to be rich, if they wish, but that it is not in this that they are interested.”¹

In America today, this charge against philosophy is bold, unabashed, clamorous – a sign of a civilization in crisis! The rise of advanced capitalism and the spectacular success of the techno-business world have brought about a resulting materialism that has made this ancient charge all the more plausible. As already stated, unlike other disciplines and forms of knowledge, philosophy

¹ R. E. Allen, ed., *Greek Philosophy Thales to Aristotle*, 3d ed. (The Free Press, 1991), 27.

does not produce tangible material gains. It is contemplative. So why should it be studied? This line of thinking, which arises from the raging cynicism of our times, should not be given any credence at all, but rather, a fitting rejoinder. How should we respond to this soul-searing cynicism?

Whether or not our response is compelling in its philosophical worth, depends on the quality of the intellectual instruments we choose to defend philosophy. Like conscience, whose immeasurable worth cannot be gauged in market terms, so also the immeasurable value of philosophy cannot be defended in materialistic terms. It is therefore incumbent upon us to defend philosophy *philosophically*. For, the cynical state of mind, which rejects philosophy, cannot be quelled by further cynicism – quite as fire cannot douse fire, but calls for its curative opposite – which is water. Acquiescence, apologetics, or appeasement cannot quell the current market-driven rejections of philosophy. The curative rejoinder for this type of cynicism is philosophy itself – at its most profound level.

In the twentieth-century, we find an elegant defense of western philosophy in the writings of British philosopher, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970). In his essay, “The Value of Philosophy,” he asks what the “value of philosophy” is and “why it ought to be studied.” Unlike contemporary defenses of philosophy, which amount to market-driven apologetics that betray its high ideals, by arguing that philosophy is valuable because it leads to jobs and material success – Russell’s defense is characteristically *philosophical*. Promising neither jobs nor material success, Russell spells out the inherent worth of philosophy in terms of its unique qualities of inwardness and introspection:

“Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.”²

² B. Russell, “The Value of Philosophy,” in *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912), 249-250.

Inspired by Russell, PNW student, Faith C. Taylor articulates her own view of why philosophy is valuable:

“Bertrand Russell raises two questions: what is the value of philosophy and why should it be studied. I would not have been able to answer these in the beginning of the semester, but through all the readings, I think I can finally answer these two questions. The value of philosophy is to look at the world with impartiality and find a deeper meaning to life. In the modern world, material goods have become the main focus, and this is a crisis. These things do not last forever; they can be taken away, lost, or broken. But your mind and knowledge are things that you are in possession of, and these are things that no one can take away from you. You have the power to control what you believe, and contemplation can shape you into a citizen of the universe. Philosophy should solely be studied to become a more realistic, just, and selfless person. Philosophy shows you to have a mutual respect for all, and to not confine to ideas that may be considered easier to identify with. Deeper thought isn't something that is meant to come easy to one. It is something that one really has to work for. Philosophy is truly unique because, there are no definite answers to any questions raised, and philosophy allows for those who study it to reach their own understanding because there is no set formula to the science.”

In this dangerous age, which hoists the utilitarian far above the moral, vesting the practical man with untrammelled powers, philosophy becomes, as Faith suggests, all the more valuable. Given the inordinate amoral power that science and technology have put into our hands, we have, today, enough weapons to destroy this world in a matter of minutes. Metaphysically blinded by materialism, we have relied on ethics to keep us afloat morally and spiritually. But now, even our grip on ethics is weakening – so that we are sitting on a volcano that may erupt at any moment. With loss of higher faith, the political has eclipsed the numinous. Almost the only solution is to convert the heart of what Russell calls the “practical man.” In these extraordinary times, Russell’s unvarnished words, which in no way seek to “sell” philosophy, sound prophetic:

“The ‘practical’ man, as this word is often used, is one who recognizes only material needs, who realizes that men must have food for the body, but is oblivious of the necessity of providing food for the mind. If all men were well off, if poverty and disease had been reduced to their lowest possible point, there would still remain much to be done to produce a valuable society; and even in the existing world the goods of the mind are at least as important as the goods of the body. It is exclusively among the goods of the mind that the value of philosophy is to be found; and only those who are not indifferent to these goods can be persuaded that the study of philosophy is not a waste of time.”³

³ Ibid., 239.

How should we apply these words of Russell? How do we salvage the environment and assuage an aggrieved nature? How do we purify a youth culture by treasuring our youth like we should? It seems to me the only and ultimate way is to convert the heart of man, by turning it radically inward – from that of the practical man to his true nature – which is contemplative. For, changing the world by first changing the heart of man constitutes a more reliable and definitive transformation than seeking to change man by first changing society. Although merely discursive, and therefore inherently limited in its powers, the field of philosophy is nevertheless a powerful source of inspiration and one way of beginning this feat – of transforming the world by first transfiguring the heart of man.

In Issue 2 (Volume I) of our PNW philosophy magazine, *Symphony of Reason*, we attempt to revive philosophical or contemplative thinking, by publishing the works of our gifted students. This issue contains student writings in five genres – short essays (on the twin pandemics of Covid-19 and racism), reasoned responses (to Gandhi’s views of non-violence and self-defense), long essays (on income inequality, and irrationality in politics), papers (on utilitarianism and Kant, and on the mysticism of St. Catherine of Siena), and philosophical poetry. Our PNW student authors (current and alumni), for whom we have autobiographies, are Diana Bolanos, Kevin M. Calderone, Martina S. James, Hunter S. Saporiti, James Seward, Faith C. Taylor, and Kayla M. Vasilko. Our PNW student authors, for whom we do not have autobiographies, are Corinne E. Lynema, Corina I. Cabrales, Morgan M. Cooper, Abbey Babe, Lajanice G. Montgomery, and Sarah Forsythe. We thank our thirteen student authors. We also thank Maria Watson and Rachel Pollack for helping us disseminate this magazine.

We hope you enjoy reading Volume I, Issue 2 of *Symphony of Reason*.

On the Twin Pandemics

PNW students share short essays on Covid-19, racism, and anti-racism. They also share reasoned responses to Gandhi, on non-violence and self-defense.

The Two Pandemics of 2020

Diana Bolanos

The world is currently facing a viral pandemic caused by covid-19. While this is dangerous enough in itself, there is also a second pandemic blazing in the United States, a social pandemic of racism. It seems that even in a modern society like ours, racism continues to be a widespread issue. Although to some, equal rights – no matter a person's race – seem to be common sense, to others it's an actual confliction. While it seems easy to fight racism with anger, a more wise and efficient approach may be to avoid feeding the fire. What I mean by this is instead of shouting back at a person who has wrongful views about other humans and society, try to understand that this person is clearly lacking a very important teaching in his or her life. Instead of being taught to love everyone as an equal, somewhere in their lives they were wrongly informed. While it may seem appropriate to become irate given that racism feels like an injustice – to respond in anger only reinforces their views. To put it in other words and use a different approach, think of it this way. In nature some organisms mimic others in an attempt to appear as threatening as their look-alikes. A great example of this is the king snake. Although nonvenomous, it is commonly mistaken for the coral snake, which is in fact venomous. Think of a person's wrongful views as one may view this nonvenomous snake. Such racially prejudiced people are strictly going on looks and misconceptions and not seeing the bigger picture. You cannot judge something by simply looking at it. There will always be more than what meets the eye. In the case of racism, people are blinded by false views. They let their eyes make the decision instead of true thoughts. Our capacity for thinking and reasoning is what sets humans apart from most other animals. It's almost a shame that we choose not to use these powers when they matters the most. To become angry and possibly even go as far as harming the person believed to be racist, is like the nonvenomous snake suddenly spitting out venom. It is contradictory. Instead of fighting intolerance and racism with hate and anger, these prejudices should be fought with love and understanding. As the Buddha says in *The Dhammapada*, "Hate never yet dispelled hate. Only love dispels hate" (*Dhammapada*, 3). In other words, one cannot expect to erase hatred by adding more hatred to the mix. This simply doesn't add up.

Today we are facing a great viral pandemic. This is something that affects everyone no matter what your race is. The pain and suffering it has caused is universal. Nobody is exempt from

catching it. This is a time where we as humans should put aside our differences and heal as one. But somehow in the midst of all this suffering, we found more to fight about and more to destroy. A movement for equality has been occurring in America. However, along with this movement, there have been riots and destruction. While to some, such violence may seem necessary to gain justice, how could these violent acts be justified when they harm the innocent? While some may say the collateral damage is necessary to meet the bigger goal, I would have to disagree. As Gandhi said, “If one does not practice non-violence in one’s personal relations with others and hopes to use it in bigger affairs, one is vastly mistaken... you have to practice it towards those who act violently towards you; and the law must apply to nations as to individuals. If the conviction is there, the rest will follow” (*World Ethics*, 223, passage I-187). In other words one must not choose when to be non-violent and when non-violence is exempt. One must use non-violence in the smaller affairs just as much as one would in the bigger battles.

There is currently a lot going on in our world and while it is easy to get caught up in the crossfire, we must try to remain kind to one another. The satisfaction one may feel from harming someone who may have harmed us is nothing compared to the satisfaction we will all feel if we choose to spread love instead of hatred. Judging someone by his or her looks is like standing at the doorway of an enormous, pitch-black room and thinking you see everything in it. You're simply refusing to dig deeper than what meets the eye. On the other end, punishing those who you believed have punished you is never the answer either. Nor does the answer lie in using the suffering you have endured as an excuse to cause that same suffering to others. To be filled with hatred on either side of the movement does more harm than good. We should instead make an attempt to understand one another and begin the healing process so we can one day live with love and peace instead of hatred and intolerance.

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Covid-19 and the Philosophy of Change

Kayla M. Vasilko

As we began the year 2020, the world looked on with excitement for the prospect of new growth, advancements, and positive change to come along with the start of a new decade. Heraclitus once stated that “everything flows and nothing remains still,” and that change is central to the universe (*Wikiquote*). Furthermore, Aristotle’s principle of non-contradiction states that: “it is impossible to hold the same thing to be and not to be,” and Buddha asserted that the secret to the good health of mind and body is to live in the present, and to not look ahead to trouble, stress about the future, or mourn the past (Weber, Gottlieb). Hence, great philosophies considered, the world was right to anticipate a change (going by the words of Heraclitus), was not incorrect when selecting to assume the *connotation* of growth (going by Aristotle’s view that *one* stance must be chosen), and did not err in having confidence that that change should be *positive*, (going by Buddha’s advice to not anticipate peril).

However, arguably, the world advanced into unrest and uncertainty against all assumptions of prosperity and sanguinity. Life was lost in excess and the definition of loss was redefined. The first drop of change occurred in December of 2019 when the first sign of COVID-19 surfaced. Then as fast as fire it rippled into affecting the rest of the world and propelling it into what can be considered chaos. Had we instead ignored Buddha’s counsel by not anticipating peril, would we have been better prepared for this great sickness? Epictetus stresses that we can only be one person, either good or bad, implying Aristotle’s philosophy that both opposites cannot at once be assumed. Should we have anticipated the negative and opened our minds to the prospect of disease even if doing so would have sickened the body and mind still further (Burton, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Gottlieb)? How could we have fathomed it when the peril that we faced in the course of time was unlike any that could have been predicted?

For, the death caused by the COVID-19 virus cannot be measured in conventional terms. It cannot be faced or overcome in ways that we call standard. Why should it, if it represents only one side of the coin of change?

In the face of COVID-19, many people could not and cannot visit sick loved ones, for fear of risk of infection. Many could not and cannot hold proper funerals or services of remembrance even for those who have passed away, not from the virus or any other ailments. *And still*, the fire cannot

be contained. The impactful losses brought on by the virus are *not only* losses through death. The virus has expanded loss through death to losses in choice of stable employment, joyful celebrations, freedoms, securities, and abilities. Those who are gravely ill have had to spend the last days, weeks, or months of their lives alone, without being able to go out and see the best of the world. Many others have had to experience feeling trapped alone with their depression and no support. Many have been lost to suicide as a result. ***And still*** many are judged for these trials, which is its own form of loss – loss of one’s integrity.

There is currently no cure for this multifaceted malady. In many areas of the world, it continues to worsen with no sign of relief. Is it possible to start rebuilding and healing when the disease is still deconstructing? In *Charmides*, Plato asserted that it “is best to cure the soul before the body” – that the state of the soul is directly correlated with happiness and health (Burton). Aristotle reaffirms this belief, with his term, *eudaimonia*, which, in this context may be understood as the association of health with the supreme good of men (Burton). Considering these principles, it stands to reason that violence, negativity, and controversy worsen the damage – that the pain that arises from both sides of the arguments on the war on racism (i.e. anti-racism), on political party views, and on proposed pandemic relief can only further sicken the already diseased.

John Dewey wrote that “to live full, meaningful lives, we must educate ourselves for the entirety of life.” Why then, do we greet ideas that are different than ours so immediately with hatred? Why then, do we look to the future with optimism, choose good when implementing Aristotle’s principle of non-contradiction, and see positive change when we look to the future – yet when the future’s changes bring peril (which it would have done us no good to imagine), we wage war on solutions that might mean the change that separates us from our original ideals? After all, did we not seek change, growth, progression, and a departure from prior heights (Hildebrand)?

Stoic rationality seeks to eliminate destructive thoughts and emotions, by creating a mental box to help us direct our output in a positive direction. Stoicism asks us to create a mental box that is impenetrable by unhappiness and negativity, such that it deflects our output and reactions, in a positive direction. All that belongs in these boxes are our internals – or what is within our power to control. Stoic rationality therefore seeks to eliminate destructive thoughts and emotions by creating a mental box that shields our mind, turning it in a positive direction.

For no externals – not the world, nor famine or disease, nor personal plight or tragedy – are in our control, but only our internals – like opinions, desires, thoughts – and our resulting actions are

subject to our will. If *eudaimonia* is happiness, or the definition of human flourishing as Aristotle believed so fully, and if it leads to the ability to develop stronger powers of reasoning and thought, and the ability to seek out the right contemplation and reach the highest pleasure – then the key to happiness is happiness itself (Burton). In other words, *choosing* to promote happiness instead of hostility is the key to happiness.

Crantor, a Greek philosopher whose work, *On Grief*, created a new literary genre, the consolation, claimed that *life* was actually punishment, so that there should be no lamentation in death, because it is release of the soul (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). There is so much beauty in the life of this world to conflict with that thought, but considering all of the suffering and fueling of hostility that we have seen this year, perhaps this extraordinary state of the world is the model that he used. Hatred did not create COVID, but furthered (concurrently) and expanded the definition of disease, quite as the pandemic multiplied the meaning of loss. “All things appear and disappear because of the occurrence of causes and conditions. Nothing ever exists entirely alone; everything is in relation to everything else.” This is what the Buddha proclaimed and it applies to Covid-19.

As we seek to create a cure then for COVID-19, inequality, and unrest, shouldn't we also construct those internal Stoic boxes to help us propel our reactions towards change and the solutions we devise, to a position far above hatred? Might we not thereby also seek to heal our souls?

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Plato and the Twin Pandemics

Faith C. Taylor

For many, 2020 has been a whirlwind of chaos. People have lost their jobs, family and friends, and even their homes. Throughout my nineteen years of life, this is by far the most unpredictable year that I myself have encountered. The year has been full of anxiety and the fear of the unknown for many. We have all encountered a pandemic and we have witnessed a fight aiming to end generations of racial hatred.

I know for myself, 2020 has not been my favorite year, though, this year is undeniably going down in history. I have worked through a pandemic where people have quite frankly been selfish. People have decided not to wear masks because “if you’re wearing a mask then you’re protected.” Sure, that could be true, but studies have shown that if everyone wears a mask, the transmission of COVID-19 is more unlikely.

Philosopher Plato claims “good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws,” by which he means, if you are inherently good, you do not need guidelines to direct you on how to be an understanding and level-headed being who will perform acts of kindness on his own terms, but those who are not inherently good will disregard laws regardless, and commit evil acts.¹ I am not claiming people who refuse to wear masks are evil, but they are selfish. Voluntarily putting one at risk because a mask is “uncomfortable” is not an acceptable excuse. I do not think anyone necessarily likes to wear a mask, but the ones who have put up no argument throughout the mask regulations are aware and concerned of others’ safety and wellbeing. In today’s world, hatred and selfishness is so common. Factors like materialism and the media widely influence this.

Racism in today’s day and age is still prevalent sadly. The Black Lives Matter Movement that has been very active throughout 2020 is combating eons of systematic oppression. The movement is voicing its opinions, and fighting peacefully against that same hatred and oppression. Racism is still prevalent because it is an indoctrinated mindset. No one is born to hatred. It is just something that is learned through one’s environment. Once again the great Plato says, “Don’t force your children into your ways, for they were created for a time different from your own,” which is a very

¹I decided to use Plato quotes in this paper because his mindset was ahead of his times.

fitting way to put it. Parents often teach their children their beliefs, and that is harmful for a young being. Things that are learned at a young age will stick in a child's cognition forever. We live in a changing time, and it is important to advocate for your child to find its own views. It is just as important to guide children into becoming respectful beings.

Overall, 2020 has been a very eventful year for most. It has had its ups and downs, but it is not a year that will be forgotten. We have encountered a global pandemic, and a war against hatred that runs far back. We need to advocate for a more accepting and simplistic world. As a whole, the world needs to focus more on the wellbeing of others instead of the material things that we most strive for. People need to realize that everyone's life is important, and that we need to be more aware of the wellbeing of others around us. Most importantly, people need to take a step back and cherish the relationships they have with those around them, and even cherish small things in life.

Reasoned Responses to Gandhi on Non-violence and Self-defense

Quotations from M. K. Gandhi (1869-1948)

- *“There is no half way between truth and non-violence on the one hand and untruth and violence on the other. We may never be strong enough to be entirely non-violent in thought, word and deed. But we must keep non-violence as our goal and make steady progress towards it. The attainment of freedom, whether for a man, a nation or the world, must be in exact proportion to the attainment of non-violence by each.”¹*
- *“The sword of the satyagrahi [practitioner of truth-force] is love, and the unshakable firmness that comes from it.”²*
- *“He who cannot protect himself or his nearest and dearest or their honor by non-violently facing death, may and ought to do so by violently dealing with the oppressor. He who can do neither of the two is a burden.”³*
- *“It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of non-violence to cover impotence. Violence is any day preferable to impotence. There is hope for a violent man to become non-violent. There is no such hope for the impotent.”⁴*

Reasoned Responses

Corinne E. Lynema

On most levels, I believe that Gandhi would endorse self-defense in the case that the person being threatened stands at risk of death or otherwise severe harm should he refuse to act. Self-defense does not arise from an innate desire for violence, but instead from a person's instinct to protect his or her personal wellbeing. As a result of this, self-defense does not necessarily encourage violence. Also, the majority of people have not achieved the deep capacity for non-violence as Gandhi and other masters have, and so it would be unfair to expect complete non-violence in cases where self-defense would be needed without encouraging cowardice.

This being said, I do also think that there are ways in which a truly self-mastered individual could respond to one of these scenarios with non-violence. It would only be

¹ “Gandhi on Non-violence,” in *World Ethics*, ed. W. Torres-Gregory and D. Giancola (Belmont: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2003), 222.

² *Ibid.*, 223.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

difficult for others to think up how to do this because we don't possess that deeper understanding.

Corina I. Cabrales

I believe that if one cannot defend oneself without violence then violence should be used – however, not to attack but just to defend oneself. Violence should only ever be used in self-defense to lower the chances of violence being used for other reasons. To show one is not cowardly, one should use violence to show bravery. As Gandhi exclaimed, “War is an unmitigated evil. But it certainly does one good thing. It drives away fear and brings bravery to the surface.” I agree with this because I believe that if one shows one is weak, this will make the other believe that as well. Using self-defense helps those who have a fear of violence. Sticking up for yourself can give you self-confidence.

Morgan M. Cooper

I enjoyed this reading because it was very easy to follow and comprehensible. I agreed with Gandhi on his take that non-violence should always be something we strive for. I was both shocked and pleased to find Gandhi was not extreme in his non-violent stance, but that he understood that violence was sometimes, albeit rarely, necessary. I also enjoyed the thought non-violence was the stronger, braver route to take because in today's society we often find violence portrayed as the “brave” action. I also find comfort in Gandhi's thought that we all have divinity in us. For some reason, this seems like a logical conclusion to me and I find it much easier to accept a God as infinite and everywhere as opposed to one magical being somewhere.

Abbey Babe

Gandhi discusses Ahimsa (non-violence) and also violence in this writing. Gandhi's view on non-violence makes sense and is very deep to me. However, I feel in our world this level of inner peace is very hard to achieve, and it seems that Gandhi knew this. He makes the statement that if you house violence in your heart, it is better to be violent than hypocritical. When reading as a whole you can tell Gandhi does not mean blatant violence, but self-defense. He expresses that self-defense is an acceptable form of violence and can be practiced when needed. I really like that in this reading Gandhi acknowledges that not everyone, nor every situation can be non-violent and expresses that in certain cases it is okay, and we are not bad people for it.

Furthermore, I feel that when self-defense is used many people have the feeling of if the perpetrator is not caught, at least he received some form of justice from you. When reading the Buddha's Dhammapada we see that a person cannot escape his or her own mischief. The Buddha notes that a person who harms a pure and innocent person will have his mischief blown back at him by divine justice. To me, this notion makes it seem

as though it may be easier to become non-violent with the assurance that the harming person will receive justice in some form for his actions.

Lajanice G. Montgomery

Gandhi believed in non-violence but was an advocate for self-defense. Violence can be a necessary evil in many interactions such as life / death, injustice, etc. Gandhi says that in non-violence, courage lies in dying – not killing. This means that the reason for your violence should be established. One shouldn't participate in violence to "even the score" but rather for protection. He also condemns those who aren't willing to act violently when necessary. He believes a coward is worse than a violent person because at least there is hope for the violent one to reform.

Sarah Forsythe

Gandhi believes wholeheartedly in non-violence at its very core as proven when he says, "non-violence is not a garment to be put on and off at will." However, he would much prefer violence than inaction. This is shown when he said, "violence is... preferable to impotence." As it pertains to self-defense, I believe Gandhi would allow for violence only when non-violent actions have been taken and proven to be ineffective. Non-violent actions should include trying to talk the person down, show him compassion, or simply walking away. Only then may someone turn to violence while keeping his virtue.

Essays

Enough is enough!

Kevin Calderone

As the gap between rich and poor in the United States widens, a question that has now come to the forefront of public perception is the moral relevance of income equality. While there are heavy discussions over fair employment practices, minimum wage requirements, and several other topics relating to the issue, underneath each of these discussions' various informed opinions are the different conclusions reached in answering this question. Despite a vast number of individuals who might argue otherwise – given the principles civilization is founded upon, the grave implications of a grossly unequal society, and the inherent value of a human life – it is the highest moral obligation of a society to ensure a standard of living to all its citizens and providing conditions for individual and communal prosperity.

This is not a defense of the idea that all wealth in a society should be distributed equally. It is not necessary that all citizens earn an equal amount of income for a society to be capable of functioning, or even prospering (the distinction to be made here is that a functioning society is one that is only meeting the bare minimum requirements to operate as a unit, and a prospering society is one that does so while fostering the moral, spiritual, and intellectual components of its citizens). No more proof of this point is needed than to look at our current society. Given that the top 0.1 percent of the United States population controls approximately the same amount of wealth as the bottom 90 percent, and there are still communities growing, functioning, and in some cases prospering, a high degree of income inequality is still capable of producing a working economy (“How America became a 1% society”). The aim though is not to merely function but prosperity, and while there are varying degrees of prosperity and functionality for both the individual and the community, our modern times show it is nonetheless possible to have not only a functioning but prospering society while individuals earn unequal incomes.

Instead of championing the absolute equal distribution of wealth, I borrow a notion presented by Harry Frankfurt – the principle of sufficiency, or rather that all are given “enough,” rather than the same. Societies, by nature of their founding, aim to continue into perpetuity, and so it would seem rather self-evident that a society must practice sustainable behavior to do so. Included in this behavior is ensuring that those who live in a society earn enough to continue to do so. While what is “enough” is and should always be a continuing discussion, if a society is to endure in any fashion, it must build a sustainable scheme of wealth distribution. The only avenue through which any sustainability can be reasonably expected from any wealth distribution system is from one that has sustainability as one of its foundational characteristics. With this in mind, necessary aspects of a

sustainable system of wealth distribution must include: awarding more to those who do more (those who work harder deserve more than those who do not), providing to all citizens reasonable means of offering more (those who want to give more should be able to), and providing for all reputable citizens a minimum income level capable of supporting the entirety of the individual's needs (all citizens working towards the betterment of society must be capable of continuing their position(s) in society).

There is however another reason that enough for each member of society must be provided. Without doing so, any hope of achieving true equality of opportunity, a near incontestable virtue of a prospering society, will be impossible. By not providing to each citizen of society a reasonable means to achieve personal (and with it occupational) advancement, there can be no equality of opportunity. As an example, the United States provides public universities (one of the many means of personal advancement), but, while there are scholarships and loans aimed at helping an individual pay for colleges, many are often still incapable of attending without suffering crippling costs to their future. Providing to all a conditional opportunity (the condition in this and many other instances being to pay the capital necessary to invest in oneself) when only a few have the means to satisfy the condition is not equal opportunity. Moreover, the future children of any individual(s) not receiving enough often bear the greatest cost, because from birth, having done nothing wrong themselves, they suffer as a result of their parents' not having the proper means of supporting them. And this further limits their opportunities. Not only does failing to provide enough for members of society exclude them from opportunities in society, but, according to Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, the level of trust, and rates of mental illness (including drug and alcohol addiction), life expectancy and infant mortality, obesity, children's educational performance, teenage births, homicides, imprisonment rates, and social mobility of a society are all negatively impacted by higher rates of inequality. If this is true – for elected representatives to fail to provide a relatively equal society (not necessarily perfectly equal, as these negative impacts noted by Wilkinson and Pickett are most prevalent in countries with gross inequality) – should be seen as no different than condemning future persons to indirect torture, because it causes more future persons to suffer a vastly greater likelihood of mental illness, shorter lifespans, poorer living conditions, and alienation from society by the lawmakers' decisions. To fail to provide relative equality for the people of the present is to lessen the quality of life for the people of tomorrow.

Lastly, providing enough for each member of society is fundamentally necessary for the continuation of a democracy. Democratic leadership, being the only just form of governance, must be protected. A true democracy can only function if each voter has equal power. It is well documented that this is not the case in our society. As Martin Gilens defends in his article "Inequality

and Democratic Responsiveness,” the current financial oligarchy is incompatible with the American system of democracy. In his article Gilens argues that a comprehensive analysis of the available data shows that senators are “consistently and substantially more responsive to the opinions of high income constituents.” This should come as no surprise, since the political system of America is largely driven by private investment. Needing to raise money for television ads, transportation, event planning, and numerous other political necessities, politicians are economically motivated to serve the interests of those who can afford to donate, and given the sheer amount of money some donors contribute (tens of millions of dollars in some cases), it is hard not to believe that donors might anticipate some type of return (especially since many of the multimillion dollar donors are business-oriented individuals) (“Million-Dollar Donors in the 2016 Presidential Race”).

Some may argue, however, that even though income inequality may carry negative implications, this is not a substantial enough reason to re-shape society in such a way as to curtail freedom. I do concede this point. Trading essential liberties and rights in the pursuit of social order and cohesion should never be tolerated, but it is not necessary to do so to achieve a more equal result. The gross inequality experienced today is very much the result of the stagnation of wages for most Americans. According to Drew Desilver, in his article, “For Most U.S. Workers, Real Wages have Barely Budged in Decades,” the real wages, and thus the buying power, of workers has not changed significantly in the past 40 years. In addition to this wage stagnation, Desilver also points out that benefits received by workers – such as insurance, retirement benefits, and tuition reimbursement – have also declined. Both these facts in conjunction with the fact that the real income of the top 1 percent of Americans has grown considerably – in fact over 157 percent since 1980 – simply indicate that the wealthiest Americans are taking a far larger cut than ever before. While many have argued that this increase in income must correlate to an increase in contribution, Joseph Stiglitz counters this claim, in his article “Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%,” by asserting that it was the actions of the wealthiest Americans that caused the events of the economic crisis of 2008, indicating that in recent history many of their contributions to society carried negative consequences. The wealthiest Americans are taking more and arguably contributing less, and the resolution of this issue is what is necessary to restructure society in a more operable way.

It is imperative that all citizens of any society be afforded the means to live a decent life. In an effort to ensure that a humane standard of living for all is achieved, it seems what is most necessary is to minimize gross differences in the income levels of all classes of a society. Doing so will not only serve to alleviate countless social ills, but also ensure that each member of society has an equal opportunity for long term personal and financial success and social contribution. If a society should fail to provide this need to its people, the society has simply failed its people entirely; for failure to

maintain relative equality means in the long term the failure to preserve health, opportunity, and democracy.

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Irrationality in Politics

Martina S. James

“Nothing could be further from the truth than the notion that man’s happiness resides in things as they actually are; it depends on opinions.” ~ Erasmus

It is a curious fact that politics, whether discussed in a bar, a classroom, a living room or at a conference, almost always turns into (more or less) heated discussions. The involved parties take one side or the other, and at the end of the battle neither side has changed its position. Friends sometimes become enemies, family members get angry at each other, and no one seems to be able to set aside his emotional involvement in the political issue that is being discussed and let reason and rationality guide his arguments, or receive arguments made by others positively, no matter how logical or reasonable they are. Why is that so? I believe there is more than one reason for this phenomenon.

Michael Huemer has written and talked about the phenomenon of irrationality in politics extensively and offered four broad explanations for the persistence of political disputes through four theories: Miscalculation, Ignorance, Divergent-Value, and Irrationality theories. He dismisses the Miscalculation and Divergent-Value theories, giving several reasons for why these two cannot explain the persistence of political disputes (Anomaly 456-467). In one of his talks, Huemer then focuses on political ignorance and political irrationality and finds the premises and conclusion for both theories to be the same.

Premises:

- Political information and political rationality are both costly.
- People accept costs only when the expected rewards exceed the costs.
- The expected rewards of political information and political rationality are negligible, and people realize that the possibility of an individual influencing or changing policy is near zero.

Conclusion:

- Most people will not be rational about political issues

At the end of his talk, Huemer does give some ideas on how to approach and possibly change the problem of irrationality in politics, such as practicing self-reflection, recognizing one’s own biases and irrational tendencies, and understanding that increased irrationality causes increased suffering in society (Huemer). These are wonderful suggestions; however, it is not that simple.

Rationality in politics is hard to achieve because irrationality, undoubtedly led by emotions, is more prevalent in human brain function than rationality in almost all instances of life, including political debates. Much like religious beliefs, political beliefs are part of who a person is. They are important for the social circle that a person moves in. Everyone feels safe within the circle of family

and friends that defines him. Considering an alternative view means having to consider an alternative version of oneself, which may cause anxiety.

"The amygdala is known to be especially involved in perceiving threat and anxiety. The insular cortex processes feelings from the body, and it is important for detecting the emotional salience of stimuli. That is consistent with the idea that when we feel threatened, anxious or emotional, then we are less likely to change our minds" (Seibt). The feeling of being threatened is the basis for fear, and according to psychologist Jonathan Apple fear leads to fast thinking, or system 1 thinking, which is automatic, frequent, emotional, stereotypical, and unconscious. Fear leaves no time for slow thinking, or system 2 thinking, which is slow, effortful, infrequent, logical, calculating, and conscious (quoted in Seibt). A threatening situation is not about this kind of thinking, but about fight or flight; it is about all or nothing. Fearful people tend to see everything in black and white terms because clear circumstances, which are what fast thinking creates, are comforting; they give people a feeling of security. So, in situations of threat and/or fear, the brain switches to autopilot (fast thinking).

This partly explains why political discussions often get heated quickly; it is in our "Homo Irrationalis" DNA, if you will, and innate. Emotions can be manipulated, and politicians know just how to do it. Political irrationality has been an issue for a long time and did not start with the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States or the resurfacing and success of populist parties all over Europe in recent years. Politicians have always known how to take advantage of the fearful and irrational thinking of the people they are supposed to represent. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of Turkey, and U.S. President Donald Trump are successful because they encourage and foster irrationality in politics in their followers through their rhetoric, which is all that populist politicians seem to need to convince voters.

America's two-party system is another factor that keeps irrationality in politics. It feeds the need of its people to belong, to feel validated and secure in the political choices they make. After all, there is not much thinking required when only two options are available – black and white or, to be politically correct, red and blue. The fact that the two options are as far apart as the North and South Poles these days increases the irrationality in the parties themselves as well as in their members and followers.

In his book *The Righteous Mind*, philosopher, psychologist and political scientist Jonathan Haidt offers the thesis that people do not vote for their economic best interest, but instead want to see their values represented when they choose their candidates (Haidt). Left or right, that is the only question. Morals are high on the list of both parties, but the right has an advantage over the left because it offers a bigger choice of values from which to pick. While the right routinely

propagates welfare, justice, freedom, loyalty, and religion, the left only has the first three in its program. This naturally gives the right an edge over the left, especially during election campaigns when voters are more interested in hearing about candidates' values than their political agenda. Among others, concepts like flag, tradition, responsibility, good vs. bad, honor, military, family, and God are always covered by the right in a calculated effort to reel in prospective voters through repeated rhetoric.

When Huemer suggests practicing self-reflection, recognizing one's own biases and irrational tendencies, and understanding that increased irrationality causes increased suffering in society, my answer to him is that the premises he laid out for political ignorance and political irrationality are the same premises that prevent people from doing all the things he suggests for tackling the problem.

Premises:

- Practicing self-reflection, recognizing one's own biases and irrational tendencies, and understanding that increased irrationality causes increased suffering in society, is costly, both monetarily and in terms of time.
- People accept costs only when the expected rewards exceed the costs.
- The expected rewards of practicing self-reflection, recognizing one's own biases and irrational tendencies, and understanding that increased irrationality causes increased suffering, are negligible, and people realize that the possibility of an individual influencing policy by personal change are zero.

I am adding one additional premise here

- Most people are unaware of their irrationality or rationally choose irrationality.

Conclusion:

- *Most people will not attempt the suggestions made by Huemer.*

Huemer's suggestions are great; however, I believe that external changes must be made before internal changes can work. What I suggest is that if circumstances in people's lives that prompt fear or hopelessness and in turn irrationality would be changed, then a change in people's irrationality in politics would follow because their psyche would change along with the change in circumstances. What kind of changes in society (the external factor) can be made to help people's brains' not have to reach the fight or flight status (the internal factor) when discussing politics? The mere fact that politics invokes such a reaction in human beings suggests that it is politics itself that needs to be changed. Incidentally, supporters of both parties agree that the system in the U.S. is broken. No wonder, the U.S., one of the oldest democracies, resembles a feudal state more than a democracy today. The two parties are like the Lancasters and the Yorks of England fighting for the royal throne in the castle on the hill, and even their subjects cannot stand the sight of each other and will hardly associate with each other. Thus, as Seibt says, "For the first time, the marriage rate between African Americans and Caucasians is higher than that of the marriage rate between

Democrats and Republicans in the U.S.” (Seibt). Everyone is part of the feudal state.

Social upward mobility in the U.S. is harder to achieve than in any other First World country. Congressmen are sidling up to the K... [King], I mean President, as though not to fall out of grace. The land of the free and home of the brave is now a royal household. “Liberals and conservatives in the U.S. do not have different views on reality, they have two different realities with their own TV stations, newspapers, Internet platforms, their own facts, experts, statistics, prognoses and think tanks” (Seibt).

To change this system, requires a complete overhaul. From education to public policy and economy, things would have to change fundamentally to create citizens that will not break out in fear when thinking about their own and their children’s futures. The change would have to be slow but consistent – closing the income gap, ensuring livable wages, providing free healthcare and higher education for all, as well as opening the doors for a multi-party system with coalitions. How will this help, some may ask. When people do not have to worry about living from paycheck to paycheck, when they are educated, when they have more than two political choices and are respected by their employers with access to quality healthcare, livable wages and generous vacation time, so they can recharge and come back to work with energy and enthusiasm, their mindsets will change; they will not need to fear losing their standard of living and will have much less anxiety. Then, they will be able to have fewer irrational political discussions, maybe not always, but often. It may sound like a Utopia, but it is not. It works in other countries. I know I often bring up western European countries, but they are my reference point because I have lived in such a society before. Nothing is perfect, but surely the U.S. could do better. The question is: “Do the elite and politicians want to risk it?”

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Papers

Utilitarianism v. Kant

James Seward

Utilitarianism says that an act is right if it brings about the greatest net balance of happiness over unhappiness of any act that can be performed in the circumstances. Kant's theory of deontology takes a wholly different approach by insisting that the most distinguishing feature of being human is our innate ability to possess reason. To clarify his theory, Kant distinguished between the ways in which we use the word, "ought." A nonmoral way that we'd use this would be to say "If you want to go to college, you *ought* to take the SAT." This is an "ought" that tells us how to act in order to achieve something one desires. Kant makes a point to distinguish the hypothetical imperative's relation to desire from the central idea his ethical theory revolves around, the Categorical Imperative, which states, act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become universal law. It's very important to Kant to differentiate these two "oughts" in that the hypothetical imperative is a nonmoral, circumstantial imperative that is tied to one's desire for something. The Categorical Imperative is tied to our duty as humans to reason and is not circumstantial. It is therefore universal in its implementation. Kant's theory tells us that the only way to be truly moral is to act from a good will, through which one does what is right simply and singularly because it follows the moral law. It would be difficult for these two theories to be less alike. This essay will compare and contrast the two theories on the topics of lying, as well as, punishment and touch on their application in the real world.

The topic of lying is one where there are clear differences between Kant and Utilitarianism. Kant takes a very hard and clear line when it comes to lying. According to Kant, we should never lie under any circumstances, describing the act as "the obliteration of one's dignity as a human being." When telling a lie, we must hold this act up to the standard of the Categorical Imperative and ask if this practice should become a universal law. If lying to another person whenever it benefitted one's self became a universal law, eventually no one would believe each other and the practice of lying would become pointless because no one would pay attention to what was said, expecting it to be a lie.

Utilitarianism has a less absolute approach to the topic of lying. If one was to tell a lie, it would have to be evaluated based on the particular circumstance. If by telling a lie it brought about greater overall happiness, Utilitarianism would say that this was a moral act. On the other hand, Kant digs

in with his unwavering stance on the absolute “evil” of lying and decries it in any circumstance, where Utilitarianism takes in the whole picture and then evaluates whether the consequences would be good or bad.

Kant’s insistence on absolute rules, especially when it came to lying, was questioned by many at the time, including his peers. One reviewer wrote to him with a particular consideration that can be called the Case of the Inquiring Murderer. In this case, a hypothetical scenario is posed to Kant for his consideration in which someone is fleeing a murderer who is trying to kill them. The person fleeing tells you that he is going home to hide, soon after the murderer comes to you looking for this person and asks you where he is. By telling the murderer the truth, you feel that you would be helping him kill this person, so you lie in an attempt to save the other person’s life.

In his response, Kant wrote an essay titled, “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives,” essentially expressing that one can never truly know what the consequences of an action will be and describes a similar situation to the one posed to him, in which you lie to the murderer and tell them that you don’t know where the person is. As a result of your lie, the murderer wanders around the night instead of going to the person’s house like he would have if you had told the truth. The murderer ends up finding the other person because he never actually went home and he is killed. Kant is unmoved by this argument for lying in special circumstances. In his essay, Kant leaves no doubt on his view of the morality of lying, stating, whoever lies “must answer for the consequences, however unforeseeable they were, and pay the penalty for them.” In reality, if someone were to die as a result of you telling the truth instead of lying to save his life, Kant would tell you that it is not your fault and that it doesn’t matter what the consequences are. What matters is that you have done your duty to reason and acted with a good will.

A utilitarian would strongly disagree with Kant’s view of this scenario. He would argue that by lying you would be saving someone’s life, which would bring about a greater amount of happiness in the world because that person would still be alive, and a horrible crime would have been avoided. In respect to the topic of lying, Utilitarianism holds the stronger argument over Kant’s absolute objection. Kant fails to prove the unrealistic view that lying is always wrong in any circumstance. When faced with a scenario where lying could save a life, Kant loses the argument with his unwillingness to amend his view in the face of common sense, instead choosing to double down on what some would call a mildly absurd notion that our duty to reason can be more valuable than human life.

Seeing that Utilitarianism and Kant's theory are so fundamentally different from each other, it is not surprising their views differ on the concept of punishment. Kant's view of punishment is called Retributivism. This theory of punishment, according to Kant, follows two principles. One is that people should be punished simply because they have committed crimes and for no other reason. The second principle is that punishment should be proportionate to the seriousness of the crime. To sum it up, retributivists believe that the severity or lightness of punishment should fit the severity or lightness of the crime that has been committed.

One of the conceptions of the Categorical Imperative states, "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only." Kant viewed humans as the pinnacle of existence and saw them as the only rational agents on Earth, so that in his words, human beings are valuable, "above all price." This is in contrast with nonhuman animals, who lack free will and the ability to reason because of their limited rational capacities. Kant viewed human beings as intrinsically valuable because they are rational agents, capable of making their own decisions, setting their own goals and are able to guide their conduct by reason. If humans disappeared from the planet, so would the entire framework of morality. This idea is a central one to the deontological theory and helps explain why Kant's view on punishment is strict and unforgiving. In valuing humanity above all and its exclusive capability to act from a good will, committing a crime against your fellow rational agents would be most egregious from this perspective – among the worst things you could do – and therefore should be met with a punishment that matches the crime because it is good that those who do wrong pay the price for it.

In the eyes of the Utilitarian, "all punishment is mischief: all punishment in itself is evil" (Bentham).¹ If achieving the greatest amount of overall happiness in the world is the benchmark by which we measure morality, then according to Utilitarianism, punishment can only be justified if it does enough good to outweigh the bad. Unlike Kant's Retributivist theory of punishment, the Utilitarian theory of punishment, known as Deterrence, must be validated by several benefits, other than punishment for the sake of itself, in order for the punishment to bring about a greater level of happiness than unhappiness. The first benefit of punishment is that it provides comfort and gratification to victims and their families. Also, by putting criminals behind bars, we take them off the street, preventing them from committing more crimes. Thirdly, punishment reduces overall crime by deterring prospective criminals. Lastly, a system of punishment that is well thought out

¹ James and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2018), 48.

might help to rehabilitate those who have broken the law. The theory of Utilitarianism, in accord with the “Principle of Utility,” justifies punishment as a moral act by using it to deter people from committing crime. Therefore reducing crime brings about more overall happiness.

While the theories of Kant and Utilitarianism have value when it comes to the topic of punishment, a thoughtful, intentional mixture of retribution and deterrence into the justice system could be very effective in reducing crime – if implemented properly. Yet, on its own merit, Utilitarianism provides a stronger and more pragmatic argument in regards to punishment. There is something to be said for the retributivist approach to valuing punishment by itself. By punishing those who do wrong, we show society that there is a price to be paid for committing crime. Beyond this initial value, Kant’s take on punishment is less useful because it does not consider what to do after one is punished. Retributivism is uninterested in consequences and does not consider deterring crime. Retributivism only concerns itself with punishing those who are guilty and to what extent that punishment should go. It is because of this absolutism and lack of dynamic thoughtfulness that Kant falls short on punishment compared to the more pragmatic attributes of the Utilitarian theory.

Both theories have areas where their arguments are strong, where on other topics they fall short. Overall, Utilitarianism is the more defensible theory of the two. The ethical theory that Kant presents and its key component, the Categorical Imperative are wonderfully aspirational and it is clear Kant believed his way was the only way to achieve moral greatness. This being said, the concept that says there are absolute moral truths in a world with so many grey areas of ambiguity lacks insight into reality. Kant’s refusal to consider consequences in any circumstance is troubling and its lack of any forward thinking concepts inhibits Kant’s theory from being a progressive one because it doesn’t leave room for thoughtful adaptation. For a theory that champions the human ability to reason above all else, insisting on absolute rules seems quite lacking in reasonability, given that we live in a world where every circumstance is different from the next and where it is possible something like telling a lie can bring about a positive outcome.

Utilitarianism is a theory that says what brings about the most happiness is what is right. This is a theory that evaluates individual situations and circumstances, taking into account what the consequences of a particular action will be and weighing what the better outcome is. These attributes of Utilitarianism make this theory more practically malleable for application in everyday life and unlike Kant’s theory, will not stop you from lying when the person you have a crush on

asks if you're the one who farted, because there is greater overall happiness in a world that doesn't know you're capable of something that offensive.

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Love as a Unifier in Catherine of Siena (*Letter #58, The Dialogue*) and Bonaventure (*The Mind's Road to God*)

Hunter Saporiti

Through the edifying and intimate nature of *The Dialogue* and *Letter #58*, Catherine of Siena emphasizes and conveys the imperativeness of love in order to reach a union with God.¹ While the two texts authored by Catherine of Siena differ in writing approach, they are connected by similar themes such as the necessity of will and desire for God; the role of self-knowledge in spiritual ascent; the significance of divine charity; love in both its righteous and impious forms; and sin, suffering, and correction. *The Dialogue's* and *Letter #58's* emphasis on love and spiritual ascent is comparable to other noteworthy philosophical texts, such as Bonaventure's *The Mind's Road to God*. While Bonaventure writes logically and prescriptively in *The Mind's Road to God*, and Catherine of Siena utilizes a more empathic, sincere approach toward friends in *Letter #58* and a pedagogic approach in *The Dialogue*, the two authors answer – albeit in different ways – the same question: How can one reach and share in God? Excerpts from *Letter #58* and *The Dialogue* and *The Mind's Road to God* attempt to provide the two authors' answers.

Catherine of Siena, in *The Dialogue*, describes her “tremendous” desire for God² and, in *Letter #58*, similarly notes to a friend how God calls out for those who are “thirsty,” discerning that God calls only on those who truly desire him.³ Through the use of the word desire, Catherine of Siena emphasizes the essentialness of freely choosing to seek God. She writes: “So God insists that we bring with us the vessel of our free will, with a thirst and willingness to love.”⁴ The language used in this statement – namely, thirst and willingness – communicates Catherine of Siena's view that choosing to desire God is an essential first step toward achieving a union. In other words, a precursor to reaching God is the individual's initial upwardly desire and will; this is seen clearly in her writing: “...through desire...and the union of love he makes of her another himself.”⁵

¹ F. E. Baird, ed., *Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*, 6th ed., Vol II, *Philosophic Classics Series* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2011), 474-475.

² F. E. Baird & W. Kaufmann, ed. *Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*, 4th ed. Vol. II, *Philosophic Classics Series* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 506.

³ Baird, 476.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Baird & Kaufmann, 506.

For Catherine of Siena, knowledge of the self is paramount and is – similar to will and desire – a necessity in seeking union with God. In *The Dialogue*, Catherine of Siena notes how she had dwelled in “the cell of self-knowledge” to know God better, explaining the contingent relationship between knowledge and love: “upon knowledge follows love [for the divine].”⁶ Knowledge of the self, in this case, is not an end-goal, but rather, for Catherine of Siena, a means to an end – unifying with God. The precursory nature of self-knowledge is perhaps most apparent in *The Dialogue* when God explains to St. Catherine that He created her out of love, and that recognition of this through exploration of the self effectively leads His creations to cast away any self-serving behaviors and, ultimately, turn themselves back toward Him.⁷ Therefore, turning inward, to Catherine of Siena, provides an opportunity to discover the imprint of God within the self, which, ultimately, coupled with will or desire, allows for ascent toward God.

While important to Catherine of Siena, desire for God and knowledge of the self are, in many ways, peripheral to that which is most virtuous for her: love. For Catherine of Siena, much discussion is given to love, but it is important to note that she centers around a specific form of love, a transcendent love: divine charity. In *Letter #58*, divine charity’s ability to unify the individual and God, and its additional ability to unify individuals, is laid out metaphorically by St. Catherine,⁸ noting God as the “master mason,” she explains how stones are gathered and amalgamated through the use of mortar as a medium.⁹ While non-literal in its use, the statement serves as a precedent for what St. Catherine calls on those reading the letter to do: connect and fuse with fellow individuals by way of “desire for their salvation”¹⁰ – a desire which results from divine charity. Thus, this shared, unifying, communal love is that which follows the supreme love: divine charity; she writes: “any love not set in the true medium [of divine charity] does not last.”¹¹ Therefore, it is love, a specific form of love, that St. Catherine notes as wholly important to unifying with God and tending to those around her.

Catherine of Siena’s thesis on unifying or “fusing” with God rests on pure upward love, meaning it must be free of obstructions; to form a perfect fusion, she writes, “there must be nothing

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 508.

⁸ Baird, 476-477.

⁹ Ibid., 477.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 478.

between them.”¹² She notes that certain worldly acts or impulses can occlude the act of casting love upward (and eventually outward) – mainly, the act of choosing to love ourselves or others instead of God.¹³ Such love for one’s self or others is not to be perceived as forbidden to St. Catherine, however. In other words, loving one’s self and one’s neighbors is of value, but such love should result after first engaging in upward love of the divine.¹⁴ St. Catherine’s view on the hierarchy of love is evident when she describes how Mary and God’s disciples loved God: “For they did not love themselves or their neighbors or God selfishly...they loved God because he was supremely good ... and themselves and their neighbors and everything else they loved in God.”¹⁵ She calls on the recipients of her letter to strive for such unobstructed love – love that is born out of a primary love for God. Acting as an exemplar rather than a teacher, she writes: “This is why I don’t want you to clothe yourself with love for me or anyone else, but to be clothed only in love for God.”¹⁶ Love, thus, to St. Catherine, in its most virtuous, righteous form is divine charity, which she notes as the original virtue (or the virtue from which all others proceed) and that which enlivens all the other virtues; and in its most impious form is “selfish,” which she credits as that from which all vice proceeds.¹⁷

In contrast to *Letter #58*’s emphasis on love, Catherine of Siena’s *The Dialogue* centers more explicitly on sin and suffering, utilizing God’s voice to answer her questions on the purpose of punishment. St. Catherine, in the concluding paragraph of *The Dialogue*’s prologue, turns to God and asks Him to “punish” her (for she perceives her sins as an extension of herself) and describes feeling an emerging guilt and shame surrounding her sins – the sins that, she believes, contribute to her neighbors’ suffering.¹⁸ She writes: “... ashamed as she [designating herself in the third person] was of her imperfection, which seemed to her to be the cause of all the evils in the world.”¹⁹ The two concluding passages of *The Dialogue* act as God’s response to these comments, as noted in the text by way of the opening sentence: “Do you not know, my daughter...”²⁰ (Therefore, references from passages three and four will be attributed to God’s voice).

¹² Ibid., 476.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 477.

¹⁵ Ibid., 476.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 478.

¹⁸ Baird & Kaufmann, 507.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

In response, God discerns that the suffering individuals feel as a result of his punishments does not fully reciprocate that which is incurred when an individual sins against him – the Infinite; thus, the purpose of worldly suffering, which he inflicts, is to correct sin rather than truly punish the individual.²¹ He reasons the disparity to St. Catherine: “For an offense against me, infinite Good, demands infinite satisfaction.”²² God states that, while finite suffering fails to satisfy or atone, there is “satisfaction” through genuine, infinite desire for Him²³– perhaps because it signals remorse and, ultimately, love and affection for Him. The text states: “True contrition satisfies for sin and its penalty not by virtue of any finite suffering you may bear, but by virtue of your infinite desire.”²⁴ Therefore, suffering that is devoid of infinite desire does not atone as it is purely worldly, but suffering that accompanies infinite desire is of value and does atone as it is born out of that which God wants for us: true love or affection for him.²⁵

God displays the importance of desire, knowledge, unobstructed love, and suffering in the closing of *The Dialogue* as he notes the vast number of methods he uses to lead those who have wandered back to grace, such as his rousing the “dog of conscience” within humankind– methods which all arise “solely for love” and return those who have strayed back to Him, allowing for recognition of His truth.²⁶ He calls on St. Catherine to “feed the flame of your desire and let not a moment pass without crying out for these others in my presence with humble voice and constant prayer.”²⁷

Several similarities and differences surround Catherine of Siena’s and Bonaventure’s writings on reaching and sharing in God. Perhaps the most salient include: the shared emphasis on self-knowledge and internal exploration as a precursor to reaching God; the power of love and importance of charity; and how God unifies with an individual.

Catherine of Siena’s emphasis on the necessity of withdrawing to seek knowledge is evident in *Letter #58*: “[Y]ou will be better off than before, if you enter into yourselves to ponder the words and teaching you have been given.”²⁸ Such emphasis on turning inward before the upward is evocative of Bonaventure’s tale of ascent in *The Mind’s Road to God*, which explains that,

²¹ Ibid., 507-508.

²² Ibid., 508.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 509.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Baird, 478.

following the recognition of God in the corporeal, “[w]e ought next to enter into our minds,” thereby allowing for recognition of the image of God; he explains that to do so “is to walk in the truth of God.”²⁹ St. Catherine and St. Bonaventure, however, both explain that withdrawal into the internal is not the end of the journey, but a step toward God. St. Bonaventure explains that we “must strive toward the reflection of truth and, by our striving, mount step by step until we come to the high mountain where we shall see the God of gods in Sion.”³⁰

Love is a central theme of *Letter #58*, and it is, to Catherine of Siena, humankind’s “duty” (to love God) and that which allows for union with God.³¹ Similarly, such love is of crucial importance to St. Bonaventure, who writes: “The way [to God], however, is only through the most burning love of the Crucified...”³² Thus, to the two authors, love provides first, the path back to God, and second, the “medium” for unity. Moreover, God, in *The Dialogue*, states that, following the achieving of unobstructed love for Him, many virtues arise or are enhanced in the individual, noting: “They are united with me through love.”³³

St. Catherine and St. Bonaventure share the importance they give to union with God, but describe how God unifies with an individual in differing ways. Catherine of Siena provides several references to a complete union with God, noting “the soul becomes another himself.”³⁴ But perhaps her most descriptive writing on the topic shows that, while love does unify God and the individual, the individual remains distinct. She writes, “For then the soul is in God and God in the soul...” before utilizing a metaphor to explain further that complete union is not the case: “... just as the fish is in the sea and the sea in the fish.”³⁵ Bonaventure, in a similar but unique way, describes a difference between three types of beings: earthly things, celestial things, and supercelestial things (God), with earthly beings being “mutable and corruptible” and God being “immutable and incorruptible.”³⁶ Bonaventure’s description of the different beings suggests that the individual, despite reaching God, remains distinct from – or lesser than – the divine. Therefore, to

²⁹ Ibid., 278.

³⁰ Ibid., 279.

³¹ Ibid., 476.

³² Ibid., 276.

³³ Baird & Kaufmann, 507.

³⁴ Ibid., 506.

³⁵ Ibid., 507.

³⁶ Baird, 280.

Bonaventure, the path to God is most aptly described as a vertical journey or ascent to God instead of a complete union.³⁷

Catherine of Siena and Bonaventure thus share in emphasizing self-knowledge and internal exploration as a precursor to reaching God and, also, the power of love and importance of charity in their respective texts – *Letter #58, The Dialogue* and *The Mind's Road to God*. The authors share in noting an ultimate destination – God – but provide different descriptions of union and ascent. In the end, both remain committed to answering the primary question: How can one reach and share in God? For Bonaventure and Catherine of Siena, such a feat can only be described as a disciplined journey, equipped with love, through the self and then to God.

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³⁷ Baird, 277-278.

PHILOSOPHICAL POETRY

Veronica

Kayla M. Vasilko

*The meaning of love
is not found
in romance.
The definition is strong.
Unconventional. Often overlooked.
The support
of a family.
A hand outstretched.
Mountains of steps stretch too.
One soft, the other jagged, both strong.
Suddenly you're lifted to the top
because someone believes you can climb.
A grandmother's love.
Sincere and kind, real
without question. An honest
voice to ears
that need to listen.
The best humor. The greatest advice.
The only evaluation that counts.
A grandmother's love.
A ray of sunshine
through white sheers;
warm, shining in,
reminding you you're home.
A butterfly
that lands on your head
at the beginning of spring.
Both beautiful. Both gentle. Both missed too soon.
Then they're gone, faded
under darkened skies
and colder weather.
Fleeting; so fast.
A grandmother's love.
You would pass
a whole day to reach one moment.
You would discard memories*

*just to reminisce one.
The sun's brightest
parts happen only when the clouds
move slightly to the right.
Perfection is a wish
granted once.
Then clouds cover
again. Still, you are powered
the most by that brief sight.
She will share
your shortest days
out of everyone, but she has made
the biggest difference in your life.
A grandmother's love.*

Inner Truth

Kayla M. Vasilko

*The truth
is like a string,
so easy
to tangle.
So difficult
to free
after even small lies are woven
and the knots
become more and more firm.
When you're born, life is fed to you in lies with soft edges
so that you don't hit your head
on the sharp,
straight string and the blunt
end of the truth.
You are sheltered.
After a time, you leave the protection
of childhood and convince yourself
with a confidence that is not there
in complete truth,
that you are ready to face the world.
But, the world does not turn out to be what you told yourself
that it was.
You go through struggle.
You realize that sometimes small lies
are necessary. You tell yourself
you are strong
until it is what you become.
You learn that lies
can create new truths.
But they don't always.
In love,
you will lie to yourself to stay in it,
then you will be forced to lay*

*in the shock of betrayal
when the love
you worked so hard to stay
in lies to you.*

You experience heartbreak,

*Through all of this, what is left
of the truth becomes so knotted
and amassed that it turns
into a great, heavy pain.*

*From the weight, you force
yourself to settle
and continue to lie
in turn, saying that you are happy.*

*Still, all of this dishonesty
could never prepare
you for the day that your mind
lies to you. When the years
you have lived
through, the years you have lied
to yourself to endure, turn on you,
when they trick
you and steal
your memories,
when your thoughts
become lies
themselves and you can no longer understand the truth
even when you squint.*

You face the effects of time.

*Yet above all confusion,
the effect of time is great
because you had a lot
of time to live.*

*Because you experienced so much
and the echoes
of those choices, both good and bad,
are reverberating.*

*Now, even through the fog,
you know that the most false*

lie
of all is that everyone's hourglass
holds the same amount of time.
In truth,
there is no lie
large
enough to guarantee even one grain of sand.
There is no deceit
strong enough to hide
the scarcity
of the sand
or the fragility
of the glass.
Lies
then, are humanity's attempt
for protection.
Lies are life's attempt, wrong or right, to live
without the damage and pain
that are verily inevitable,
that not even time
itself can avoid.

