

Symphony of Reason

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Autobiographies

STUDENT VOICES

Savannah J. DeBoer

Recently, I graduated from Purdue Northwest University with my Bachelor of Science in Psychology. I also graduated with a minor in Forensic Science. One aspiration for my future involves pursuing further education in hopes to obtain my doctoral degree in Psychology. It is my plan to practice in a juvenile correctional facility setting, working to implement various rehabilitation programs for adolescents in need. Outside of my education I find pleasure in reading, cooking, and traveling with my friends. One philosopher that I resonate closely with is Aristotle. His radical achievements within philosophy have always intrigued me. Specifically, his theories about self-realization, happiness, and virtue are most alluring. As Aristotle stated, “Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.”

Kathleen M. Nielsen

I am nearing completion of my BA in English (literature). My minors are creative writing as a profession and psychology. Philosophy has always been a subject I am drawn to, but there were not enough classes offered in this area when I enrolled at Purdue for me to create a plan for. In personal study, I feel an affinity for Aristotle and am currently learning more about Marcus Aurelius.

From Marcus Aurelius (Meditations, p. 32, #9)

- Your ability to control your thoughts—treat it with respect. It’s all that protects your mind from false perceptions—false to your nature, and that of all rational beings. It’s what makes thoughtfulness possible, and affection for other people, and submission to the divine.

From Aristotle

- At his best, man is the noblest of all animals; separated from law and justice he is the worst.
- What it lies in our power to do, it lies in our power not to do.
- The energy of the mind is the essence of life.



Autobiographies

STUDENT VOICES

Kaitlyn G. Vasilko

I am majoring in Behavioral Sciences and minoring in Sociology and English. I am a member of the Honors College, I am president of three student organizations; S.H.I.N.E., Westville Warriors, and A.N.F., and I am a Teaching Assistant for the department of Communication and Creative Arts. Once I graduate in 2024, I plan on getting my Master's degree at PNW and hope to pursue a career that allows me to help others. Some of my interests and hobbies include photography, drawing, writing, volunteering at the Independent Cat Society and LakeShore Paws, traveling, being active, and spending time with those important to me. Some of my favorite philosophers are Aristotle and Plato. A few of my favorite quotes are:

From Aristotle

- “Knowledge is not necessary for the possession of the virtues, whereas the habits which result from doing just and temperate acts count for all. By doing just acts the just man is produced, by doing temperate acts, the temperate man; without acting well no one can become good. Most people avoid good acts and take refuge in theory and think that by becoming philosophers they will become good.”

And

- “Each man speaks and acts and lives according to his character. Falsehood is mean and culpable and truth is noble and worthy of praise. The man who is truthful where nothing is at stake will be still more truthful where something is at stake.”

From Plato

- “Perfect wisdom has four parts: Wisdom, the principle of doing things aright. Justice, the principle of doing things equally in public and private. Fortitude, the principle of not fleeing danger, but meeting it. Temperance, the principle of subduing desires and living moderately.”

Anonymous

- “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle.”



Autobiographies

STUDENT VOICES

Kayla M. Vasilko

I just completed a master's degree through PNW's communication studies program, and published a thesis titled "Interpret the World and Change It: Overcoming Barriers to Positive Social Change," with Purdue WL. I am an Assistant Professor of Communication at Ivy Tech Community College and a communication assistant for the Purdue Office of Engagement and Service-Learning. I believe that kindness and positivity are directly correlated with success, and I promote these in the work I do with my students and outreach, and through my writing. I strive to make a positive difference in the world, and hope that I never stop standing beside those who may be standing all alone. Some of my favorite philosophers are Epictetus, Buddha, and Aristotle. I appreciate Aristotle's view of the ergon (work) of a human being, which, he argues, "consists in activity of the rational part of the soul in accordance with virtue."



FACULTY VOICES

Prof. Renee M. Conroy

Renee M. Conroy was an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University Northwest and a Fulbright Scholar. Her current research is focused on topics in philosophy of dance, environmental aesthetics, and issues at the intersection of art and ethics. Her published work appears in a variety of anthologies and academic journals, including Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Contemporary Aesthetics, and Ethics, Place and Environment (now Ethics, Policy and Environment).

Prof. David Detmer

David Detmer is a Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University Northwest. He is the author of seven books: Freedom as a Value, Challenging Postmodernism, Sartre Explained, Phenomenology Explained, Zinnophobia, Simply Sartre, and Renaissance.

Prof. Hoon Jae Lee

My current project is Kierkegaard and Pop Culture (Lexington/Fortress Academic). The work examines Kierkegaard's central concepts and how they are incorporated into pop culture. My other research interests are the history of philosophy, ethics, and philosophy of religion. At PNW, I teach Ethics, Big Questions, and a variety of other philosophy courses. When not doing philosophy, I enjoy a good book, hiking, and exploring Chicago.

Prof. Subbarao V. Majety

Subbarao V. Majety is Director of Design Studio in the College of Engineering, Purdue Northwest University. He did his PhD from University of Pittsburgh in Industrial Engineering. His hobbies are song writing in his mother tongue and occasional poetry in English. He likes to express his views without inhibitions. He is greatly influenced by the Advaita Philosophy. He is a devotee and follower of Guru Adi Sankara. Most of his poetry reflects parts of this Philosophy.



FOREWORD

Prof. David Detmer

Symphony of Reason is PNW's philosophy magazine, and the current issue is especially rich in philosophical content. Its lead article, by Savannah J. DeBoer, deals sensitively with a fundamental issue in the ethics of punishment. Readers will encounter a probing discussion of two leading theories of punishment, the utilitarian and the retributivist, along with a critical assessment of some of the strengths and weaknesses of each theory.

This is followed by profiles of two major philosophers, authored by two members of PNW's philosophy faculty. David Detmer offers a brief overview of the remarkable career of Jean-Paul Sartre, the Nobel Prize-winning 20th-century French philosopher, novelist, playwright, and political activist. And Hoon J. Lee convincingly demonstrates the contemporary relevance of Søren Kierkegaard, the 19th-century Danish philosopher, theologian, and social critic, who is often called the father of existentialism. Dr. Lee makes his case in part through a skillful discussion of the recent popular television series, *The Good Place*.

Next in line is Renee Conroy's provocative and enlightening essay in aesthetics, the branch of philosophy that historically has dealt primarily with issues concerning the nature and value of art, and of the principles underlying our evaluation and appreciation of works of art. A relatively recent development within aesthetics has been the emergence of a sub-field, environmental ethics, which investigates similar issues but in connection with natural and human-influenced environments, rather than art objects. The essay by Dr. Conroy, a former member of the PNW philosophy faculty, addresses a puzzling issue within this new, emerging sub-field: why do "contemporary aesthetic sensibilities welcome the presence of a little grit in urban settings"? I suspect that anyone who has spent time in Gary, or Chicago, or any other "gritty" city will find Dr. Conroy's analysis of this issue both instructive and entertaining.

The next two sections address matters of great current interest—abortion and the Russia/Ukraine war. In addition to demonstrating the falsity of the popular idea that philosophy concerns itself exclusively with timeless, abstract questions, far removed from any area of intense contemporary controversy, these sections also serve to extend discussions that were started in the last issue of *Symphony of Reason*, published in 2022 (there was no issue published in 2023).

The first of these sections takes up the issue of abortion, as contrasting views are presented in short essays by Kathleen M. Nielsen and Kaitlyn Vasilko. This is followed by Kayla Vasilko's reflections, in which the topic is treated in conjunction with an analysis of the tendency for debates to become polarized, closing off the possibility of reaching common ground with those with whom we disagree.

Next comes a fiery debate on the Russia/Ukraine war. Lee Artz, Professor of Media Studies and the Director of the Center for Global Studies at PNW, offers a critical response to the article on this topic by PNW Professor of Philosophy Deepa Majumdar that was published in the last issue of this magazine. Dr. Majumdar's rebuttal, which immediately follows Dr. Artz's critique, further clarifies the nature of the sharp disagreement between these two scholars. Readers are encouraged to consider carefully and critically the arguments of both authors, in an attempt to better their understanding of the issues at stake and to arrive at their own conclusions.

The final section of this issue of *Symphony of Reason* is devoted to philosophical poetry. The poem by Professor Subbarao V. Majety, Director of Design Studio at PNW, offers insightful testimony about the pursuit of happiness. Kaitlyn Vasilko poetically analyzes the nature of power. And the issue concludes with two poems by Kayla Vasilko. One way to appreciate them (but not the only one!) is to see them as artistic contributions to environmental aesthetics, thus placing them in conversation with Dr. Conroy's essay.

Several persons gave us valuable help in connection with this issue of *Symphony of Reason*. Accordingly, we thank Kaitlyn Vasilko for designing it, Alan McCafferty for archiving it, Raymond Kosinski and Elizabeth Rodriguez for help with posting and disseminating it, Anthony Marszalek for encrypting it and making it ADA compliant, and Jessica M. Creech for protecting it from copy and paste.



PAPER

Comparing Utilitarian and Retributivist Theories of Punishment

Savannah Joy DeBoer

The topic of punishment is one of great controversy with many strong opinions attached. There are two theories of punishment. The utilitarian theory of punishment focuses on what will bring the best outcome to society. Whereas the retributivist theory focuses on administering justice and punishing people based on what they deserve. But which theory is more defensible? In this paper I will compare the utilitarian approach with the retributivist approach to the theory of punishment and explain which theory in my opinion is more defensible.

As already stated, the utilitarian approach to the theory of punishment emphasizes the best outcome. Within this approach, calculating the cost of inflicting punishment as well as calculating the benefits of inflicting punishment are vital. Benefits of punishment include things such as rehabilitation education, closure, incapacitation, and deterrence. The utilitarian approach considers the future, or is forward looking, to prevent crimes from occurring again. Rehabilitation and education provide a new future for the criminal, allowing them new opportunities and self-reflection. Incapacitation will make sure that the criminal does not commit more crimes. Deterrence is a main focus point to the utilitarian approach. This approach is based on what is best for the public as a whole and deterrence keeps individuals from committing crimes, thus keeping the public safe. The utilitarian theory recognizes that the consequences of a crime impact not only the individuals involved but the community as well. Laws are put in place to display the consequences to those within the community and what will occur if an individual decides to commit a crime. Utilitarians believe that these laws and the use of punishment will help restore balance within a society that is torn down by crime.

This is similar to the retributivist approach as it is believed that a person who makes the decision to upset the balance of the community should be punished. But retributivism emphasizes justice overall. The retributivist approach has the goal to administer justice that fits the crime committed. This theory states that only the guilty should be punished and the punishment should be proportionate to the crime committed. Retributivist theory looks at the victim and the suffering committed toward the victim to calculate the amount of punishment deserved by the criminal. Compared to the utilitarian approach, this theory does not examine the benefits or costs of punishment, but rather focuses on the justice that is deserved. The retributivist theory only looks at the past or the crime committed not considering the impact on the future such as the likelihood to reoffend. This theory is known as an eye for an eye.

After comparing the two theories I believe that the utilitarian approach is more defensible. I believe in the rehabilitation of individuals, though that may just be my bias as a psychology major. I think that calculating the cost and benefit of punishing an individual is important. In my opinion it is more important to look at the future and the possible impacts the crime and its punishment may have on a community. Retributivism lacks the concern for what these individuals may do in the future and the possibility of reoffending.

In my opinion I feel that retributivism fails to recognize other factors that go into causing a person to commit crimes. Instead of focusing on an eye for an eye mentality I find it important to educate this individual and rehabilitate him. Good people still commit crimes, whether this be for survival or for reasons such as lack of money or education. Utilizing education and rehabilitation allows that individual more opportunity to become the person we want in society, someone who could uplift the balance rather than upset it. Retributivism doesn't look at helping the individual at all, rather just throwing him in jail and losing the key. This does not benefit the individual in any way. This individual will not necessarily change his actions because he has received time in jail or prison. Some individuals need to self-reflect or understand the circumstances that led them to committing a crime.

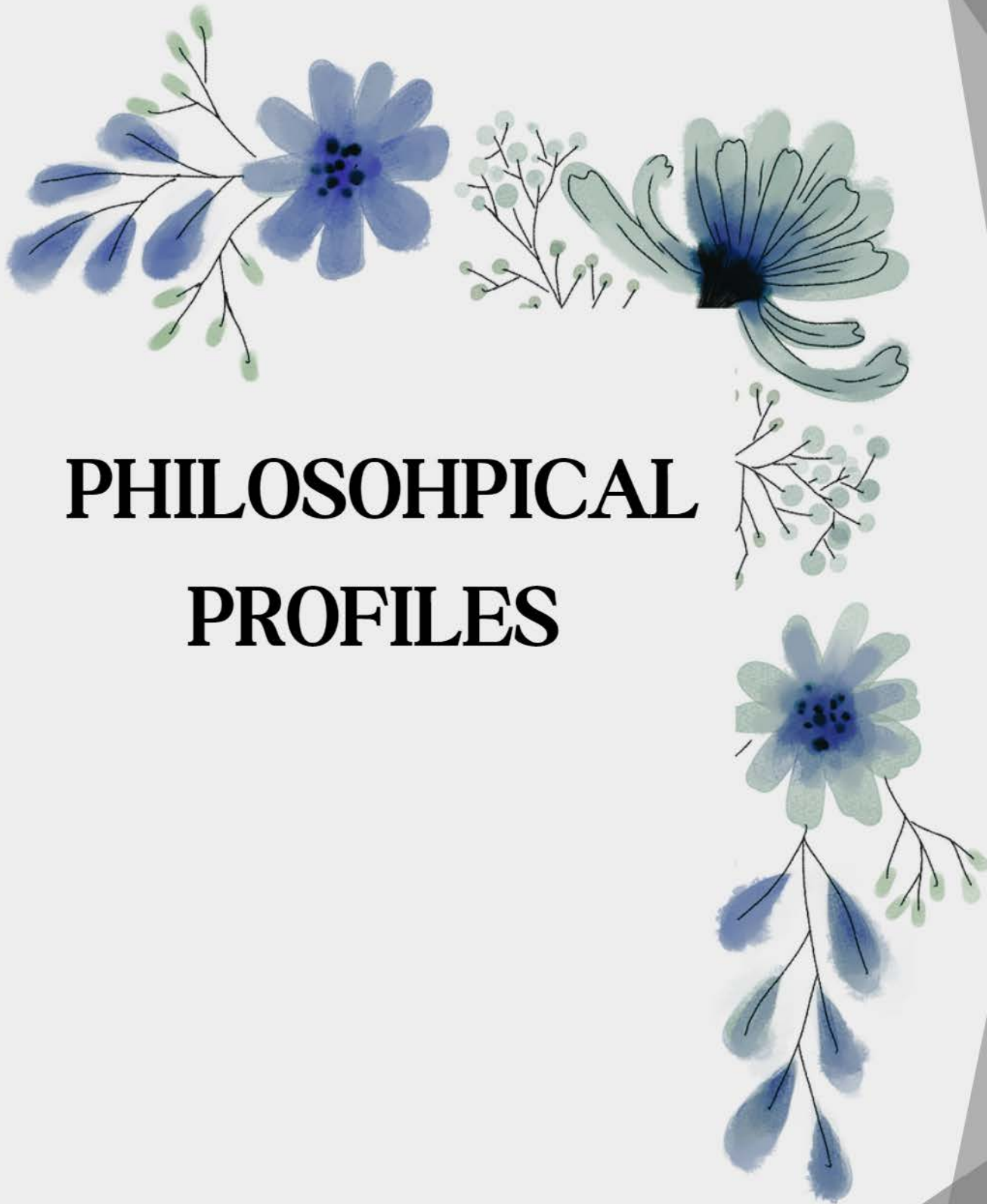
Retributivism fails to discuss recidivism or when someone goes on to commit a crime again after undergoing intervention for a previous crime. This proves my point that sending someone to jail or prison does not mean this individual will change after receiving a consequence.

Weighing the cost and benefit of incarcerating another individual and the impact that it may have on the community includes the actual cost of incarcerating an individual. Utilitarian thinkers believe that the punishment should produce more good than evil. With further research I found another example of weighing the cost and benefit in relation with the utilitarian approach toward punishment. According to an article pertaining to the theories of punishment, the release of a prison inmate suffering from a debilitating illness would be a utilitarian approach, as the prisoner's death is imminent.¹ Society is not served by this prisoner's continued incarceration because this prisoner is incapable of reoffending. The cost of incarcerating this individual does not outweigh the benefit.

Utilitarian thinkers value the future and the impacts that punishing an individual can cause. Using punishment to rehabilitate offenders and educating them will allow these offenders a new opportunity at life. Inmates with education are more likely to get jobs outside of jail, thus benefiting the community. Those with mental health issues can receive treatment to help with their daily functioning. Giving these inmates resources is ultimately an advantage to society and will impact the number of incarcerated individuals that can be safely released back into the community. Retributivism lacks concern with the future and the impacts that punishment may bring. Retributivism does not value rehabilitation or education, just justice, labeling these people as criminals and locking away the key. I understand the need for justice and I do think that this is something everyone deserves to gain when a crime occurs, but not at the expense of an individual who could be helped.

Though this topic is very controversial, I believe that a utilitarian approach to punishment is more defensible than the retributivist approach. Rehabilitation and education are two key factors within the utilitarian approach and have aided in the return of many incarnated individuals to society. Weighing the cost and benefit of punishment is important as it has many impacts on society and the future. The future of the individual and the community should be evaluated when determining a punishment, as focusing solely on justice does not benefit the individual or the community.

1 Punishment - Theories of Punishment." Theories Of Punishment - Utilitarian, Society, Theory, and Criminal - JRank Articles. Accessed November 18, 2022. <https://law.jrank.org/pages/9576/Punishment-THEORIES-PUNISHMENT.html>.



PHILOSOPHICAL PROFILES

Jean-Paul Sartre

Dr. David Detmer

I admire many philosophers, but my favorite is the twentieth-century French existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). That does not mean that I agree with all of his ideas. To the contrary, I have many criticisms, and some of these can be found in my published writings on his philosophy (three books and several articles). But this essay is not about those disagreements. Here I want to explain what I like about Sartre.

Sartre is an unusual, perhaps unique, figure in many respects. First among these is his versatility as a writer, his record of extraordinary achievement in a great number of literary genres. He is best known as a philosopher, the author of big, dense, forbidding works, such as *Being and Nothingness* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. But he also wrote highly acclaimed novels (*Nausea*), plays (*No Exit*), short stories (“*The Wall*”), biographies (*Saint Genet*), screenplays, essays in art and literary criticism, and political and journalistic pieces, in addition to an autobiography (*Words*). He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964 (but declined the award).

A second noteworthy characteristic is the depth of Sartre’s engagement, by means both of writing and activism, in the political issues of his time. A good example is his support for Algeria in its struggle for independence from France, one of many cases in which his philosophy (in this case, his anti-colonialism) put him in opposition to the political and economic interests of his own nation and class. His actions—including urging French soldiers to refuse to fight the Algerians, and documenting atrocities committed by the French against the Algerians that the mainstream French press had declined to cover—were widely denounced as treasonous. Fortunately for Sartre, French President Charles de Gaulle ordered that no action be taken against Sartre, famously quipping, “one does not imprison Voltaire.”

But others did take action. In October 1960, 10,000 French army veterans, in an organized demonstration, marched through the streets of Paris shouting “Fusiller Sartre!” (Shoot Sartre!). His home was subsequently bombed twice by right-wing terrorists, and the offices of the journal he founded and edited, *Les Temps modernes*, were also bombed. Sartre’s response to these attacks was to intensify his actions in support of the Algerians. Little wonder that Bertrand Russell, the

famous British analytic philosopher, mathematician, and logician, would later say of Sartre, “despite our differences on philosophical questions, I much admired his courage.”¹

Sartre was also one of the first white philosophers to devote substantial attention to issues

involving race, as he did in such works as “Black Orpheus” and *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Similarly,

while other European philosophers tended to pay attention only to other writers and thinkers from the same continent, Sartre championed the works of African, Latin American, and Caribbean writers, and frequently published their works in his journal.

As a philosopher, Sartre is best known for providing the most extensive and detailed analysis of freedom that has ever been produced. Though his writing, in his philosophical works, tends to be technical and difficult, thankfully he does tend to relieve the difficulty periodically by providing vivid examples to illustrate his concepts. (Here his skill as a novelist and playwright serves him well even in his philosophical writings.)

A good example is his discussion, in *Being and Nothingness*, of a gambler who resolves to stop gambling, and then, having made this resolution, thinks that he has settled the issue and rid himself of the freedom to gamble. But

when he approaches the gaming table, [he] suddenly sees all his resolutions melt away.... The earlier resolution of "not playing any more" is *[still] there*, and...the gambler, when in the presence of the gaming table, turns toward it as if to ask it for help; for he does not wish to play, or rather having taken his resolution the day before, he thinks of himself still as not wishing to play anymore; he believes in the effectiveness of this resolution. But what he apprehends then in anguish is precisely the total inefficacy of the past resolution.... I should have liked so much not to gamble anymore; yesterday I even had a synthetic apprehension of the situation (threatening ruin, disappointment of my relatives) as *forbidding me* to play. It seemed to me that I had established a real barrier between gambling and myself, and now I suddenly perceive that my former understanding of the situation is no more than a memory of an idea, a memory of a feeling. In order for it to come to my aid once more, I must remake it *ex nihilo* and freely. The not-gambling is only

¹Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: The Final Years: 1944-1969* (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 237.

One of my possibilities, as the fact of gambling is another of them, neither more nor less. I *must rediscover* the fear of financial ruin or of disappointing my family, etc., must re-create it as experienced fear. It stands behind me like a boneless phantom. It depends on me alone to lend it my flesh. I am alone and naked before temptation as I was the day before. After having patiently built up dams and walls, after enclosing myself in the magic circle of a resolution, I perceive with anguish that *nothing* prevents me from gambling.²

Finally, I should mention a personal reason for liking Sartre. My first book, published way back in 1988, was on him. Two years later I attended, for the first time, a conference of the North American Sartre Society (NASS). Right from the beginning I was welcomed warmly and treated as a respected colleague, even though I was much younger than many of the established senior Sartre scholars in attendance. NASS has held many other conferences since then (it now holds them annually), and I have attended almost all of them. My colleagues elected me to a term as President of NASS in 2000, and then asked me to serve as Executive Editor of the journal, *Sartre Studies International*, a position I held for eleven years. Best of all, I established friendships with a good number of Sartre scholars whom I met at these conferences, and some of those friendships have now lasted over thirty years. Moreover, at every new NASS conference I meet new young Sartre scholars, many of whom have read my books on Sartre, and are eager to engage me in conversations about matters of mutual interest. This gives me great pleasure—pleasure that I would not have were it not for my engagement with the thought of Jean-Paul Sartre.

²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), pp. 69-70.

Anxiety and The Good Place: Kierkegaard and Pop Culture

Prof. Hoon Jae Lee

When associating philosophy with pop culture, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard is not one who readily comes to mind. An obscure nineteenth-century Danish thinker, who rarely travelled outside of his country, who did not hold any academic position, and did not have any students, is hardly a likely candidate for a strong philosophical legacy, let alone for making a significant segue into modern popular culture. Yet, Eleanor Shellstrop, from *The Good Place*, calls him, “The dude! The super depressing religious guy. The real buzzkill, whose name I can never remember.” We may not have heard of him before. We may forget how to pronounce his name. However, it would do us good to examine some of his core principles and see how he impacts our thought in pop culture.

Part of the perplexity surrounding Kierkegaard is the difficulty of pinpointing his classification. Is he a theologian? He certainly addresses theological concepts, but he lacks the typical systemization found in many theologians. Is he a philosopher? His impact on future philosophers cannot be denied, but many of his writings don't display a philosophical methodology. Unfortunately, this inability to classify him may have led to Kierkegaard falling through the cracks. However, it is probably best to think of him as a critical thinker who writes on religious and philosophical themes.

Rather than taking a broad perspective of his corpus, I want to concentrate on the theme of anxiety, and illustrate how his thought is incorporated into pop culture. I realize that anxiety is not the happiest of topics, hence why Kierkegaard gets the title of that “super depressing religious guy.” Nonetheless, anxiety is a part of what it means to be human. It may be uncomfortable to address our own anxiety, but a failure to do so leads us down a more harmful path. Without this introspection, we cut ourselves off from the self, which we are, as individual human beings.

If you've seen the TV show, *The Good Place*, you'll know what I'm talking about. If you haven't, sorry for the spoilers (go watch the show and come back). The show revolves around Eleanor Shellstrop and Chidi Anagonye, who have died and gone to heaven (or at least that is what they are told). In reality, what they believe to be the good place is in fact an intricately designed torture chamber that inflicts emotional and psychological pain on its victims. Contributing to this torture, Eleanor believes she has been mistakenly admitted to the good place, and commits to learning how to be a good person from Chidi, who is an ethics professor. Michael, the evil demon behind the scenes, orchestrates scenarios to heighten their anxiety and inflict maximum pain on the two.

The concept of moral goodness rests at the heart of their anxiety. Eleanor sees herself as a "medium" person. She is not good, but she is not terrible, just medium. Though she puts up a front of being content with her "mediumness," in reality, moral good, especially morally good people, make her anxious. When confronted with a good person, she tries to show that he is not that good by dragging him down with her. The anxiety that rises when facing a good person is only mollified when the goodness is compromised by her antagonism.

Eleanor's anxiety, which translates into a rejection of the good, isolates her. When she cuts herself off from the good, she cocoons herself in a self-imposed prison. She thinks the cure of her anxiety is to reject the good that makes her anxious. However, all this accomplishes is an alienation from others and a deeper anxiety that has her always on edge. Always on guard, she is in a constant run from others, and ultimately, from herself.

You would think that if anyone had a handle on understanding moral goodness, it would be a professor of moral philosophy. Though Chidi studies ethics for a living, his life is far from ethical. It is not like he is a hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another. Rather, it is his insistence on being a good person that works against him. Analyzing every decision and weighing out all the possibilities, he has panic attacks, playing the game Rock paper scissors. His own death is a result of standing in a place, trying to figure out where to go, while an object falls on top of him.

Though Chidi freezes up when having to make any decision, it is the moral decisions that give him the most anxiety. He wants to be a morally good person, and he believes that each decision will either contribute to his goodness or take away from his being a good person. This may sound harmless, but endless deliberation prevents Chidi from taking action. His inability to make moral sense out of the infinite possibilities of life leave him with a life full of anxiety. In the end, this anxiety over possibility hurts him and those around himself.

The Good Place makes frequent mention of Kierkegaard who is part of Eleanor's ethics lessons on how to be a good person. Chidi even says he made a rap about Kierkegaard (the actor who plays Chidi, William Jackson Harper, records a Kierkegaard rap but not while playing the Chidi character). However, it is on the concept of anxiety that the show is most indebted to Kierkegaard. In his work, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard lays out two types of anxiety, which Eleanor and Chidi model.

According to Kierkegaard, anxiety is nothing, or the sense of nothingness. Imagine walking on some stairs and your foot reaches out for the next step. You expect something solid but you are only met with nothing. This sudden awareness of nothing, when you expect something, is anxiety. This awareness of nothing is most evident when it comes to moral goodness. Anxiety, or nothingness, grips us the most when addressing morality.

According to Kierkegaard, the first type of anxiety occurs when one expects innocence, or goodness, in the self when there is none. Just like Chidi, one may think that one is morally good, when one is not. When one expects goodness within the self, one expects something concrete, something substantial. One's goodness is perhaps one of the most real and significant aspects of the self. Yet, when such expectations are not met, we are left with nothing but anxiety. The empty chasm of goodness is filled with our anxiety.

The anxiety that accompanies this perceived goodness, which is actually absent, is exacerbated by possibility and freedom. The possibilities of our actions are endless. But this infinite possibility can lead to just more anxiety with respect to what Kierkegaard calls "entangled freedom." When one starts with the nothingness of anxiety, freedom only produces more nothingness.

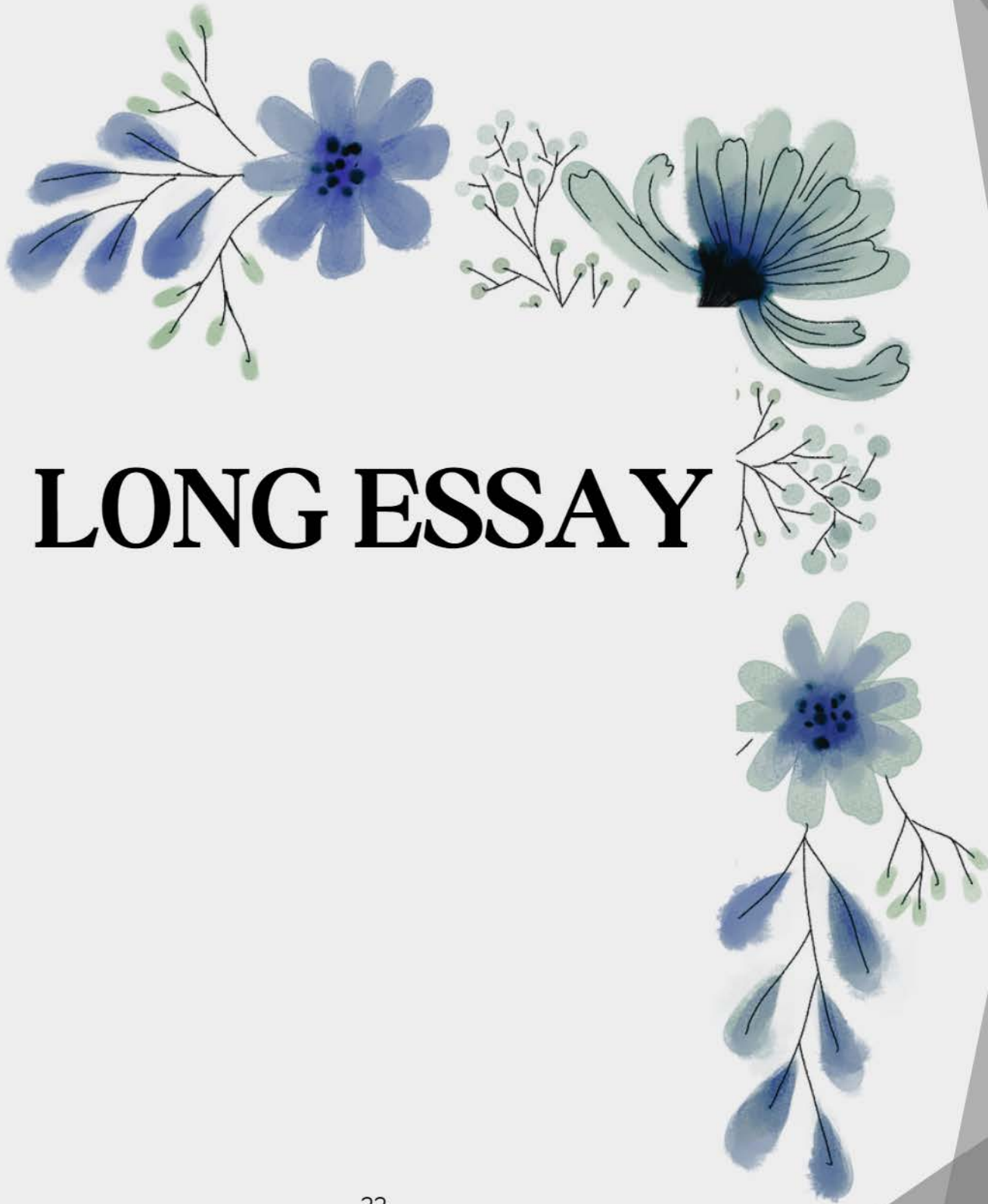
For instance, Chidi is completely entangled in his freedom. His possibilities are not freeing, but with each new possibility comes another layer of anxiety. These layers of anxiety build on each other, trapping Chidi within his own anxiety.

The second type of anxiety comes when one rejects the good. Rather than face the good, the anxious person turns the other way. For, to address external goodness would require us to take a look inward. When we don't want to be made to look inward, the presence of goodness makes us anxious. Just like Eleanor, we become anxious of the good, because the good forces us to look at our own goodness, or rather, at the absence of goodness within us.

To avoid this introspection, we cut ourselves off from the good. We would rather condemn external goodness than address our own void of goodness. This is a classic Eleanor move. To prevent coming to terms with her own self, she lashes out at any form of goodness that comes close to her. She drags down any goodness, so that it is no longer good. By doing so, since there is no longer any good around her, she does not need to examine her own goodness. However, this results in a self-enclosed trap. By walling ourselves away from the good, we are left with nothing but our own anxiety.

The irony of anxiety is that an awareness of anxiety is the beginning of overcoming anxiety. As Eleanor and Chidi are being pulled in every direction due to their anxiety, their torture seemed at its height. At this apex, Eleanor has an epiphany. She realizes that they are not in the good place, but in fact, the bad place. She figures out this deception due to them being surrounded by their worst anxieties. They are not in a place of eternal bliss but a torture chamber of anxiety.

The Good Place, once again, draws from Kierkegaard's understanding of anxiety. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is part of what it means to be a human being. We cannot completely separate anxiety from our human nature. However, anxiety impacts the self, and our awareness of the self. When we gain consciousness of our anxiety, we are really gaining consciousness of the self. The inward movement of consciousness is the first step to becoming the self. As Kierkegaard and *The Good Place* argue, if we want to overcome our anxiety, we must first acknowledge our anxiety, so that we become conscious of the self. Only then, can we develop the self rather than our anxiety.



LONG ESSAY

Grit and Urban (Im)perfection

Dr. Renee M. Conroy

Abstract

Contemporary aesthetic sensibilities welcome the presence of a little grit in urban settings. I examine several aspects of grit that emerge from considerations about what makes a city space perceptually exciting and affectively resonant, and trace overlapping conceptual threads to elucidate the modern sentiment that metropolitan spaces benefit aesthetically when they possess a bit of grit. I recommend that grit's allure as a form of urban imperfection consists in three mutually inflected dimensions: its perceptual presence, its historical resonance, and its ethical associations.

Keywords (5): Environmental aesthetics, aesthetic imperfection, urban environments, grit, virtue ethics

Contemporary aesthetic sensibilities welcome the presence of a little grit. Twenty-first century American decorators, for instance, are infatuated with accent headboards and fireplace mantles fashioned from knotty pieces of salvaged barnwood, and interior designers regularly extol the virtues of exposing well-worn brick walls and long-hidden structural beams to enhance a room's aesthetic interest. It has also become fashionable in large metropolitan areas to create chic lofts and upscale gastropubs by rehabilitating abandoned warehouses and dilapidated factories. The U.S. reclamation craze as highlighted in popular home improvement shows and the glossy pages of *Architectural Digest* and *Forbes Magazine* suggests affinity for the gritty in today's built environments.

But what are the aesthetic dimensions of grit? In what might its allure consist? I address these questions by examining several aspects of grit that emerge from broader considerations about what makes a city—or a city space—perceptually exciting and affectively resonant. My aim is not to attend to the myriad ways grit affects our aesthetic lives, but only to reflect on its capacity to charm. Hence, the modest goal of this investigation is to trace a variety of overlapping conceptual threads that might help explain the modern sentiment that cities and designed urban spaces benefit aesthetically when they display a bit of grit.

1. Getting to Grit: Aesthetic Preliminaries

A project of this kind might naturally attend to grittiness as an aesthetic *property*. Although I regard 'being gritty' as akin to descriptors like 'being graceful,' 'being vibrant,' or 'being vapid,' I avoid the language of aesthetic properties because it invites philosophical complication I wish to sideline, focusing instead on the complexities of grit itself. Hence, my treatment will not depend on claims about the ontology or proper extension of aesthetic properties and should be compatible with a variety of views. To avoid entrenched debates and train attention on a new philosophical topic—the multi-faceted character of grit—I refer to grit ecumenically as a potential aesthetic concept (with a nod to Frank Sibley), where this just means a *description* that can be applied meaningfully to a range of things in some aesthetically substantive sense.

I likewise sidestep complex issues about the nature of the aesthetic—which is often contrasted with the artistic, the historical, or the practical—in favor of a catholic interpretation of this interminably vexed term. On my approach, when a descriptor such as 'is gritty' is used aesthetically the utterer is merely flagging the presence of at least one of many possible features that tend to count toward something's being regarded as having an aesthetic dimension or rewarding aesthetic attention. These include, but are not limited to, familiar philosophical markers of the aesthetic, such as: the descriptor's application is grounded in a perceptual encounter; the thing to which the descriptor applies elicits absorption in virtue of its perceptual features; the absorption engendered has intrinsic worth or is regarded as valuable for its own sake; and the value in question consists in gratifying (though not necessarily pleasant) experiences or the stimulation of rewarding imaginative activity. In the limited context of this investigation, when the predicate 'is gritty' is used, it functions as an aesthetic description if the utterer aims to draw nuanced attention to the perceptible features of a physical thing, event, or environment and, perhaps, to indicate its perceived value or lack thereof as an object of sensory experience. With the proviso that grittiness, like many other potential aesthetic concepts, can be predicated in both purely descriptive and thicker evaluative senses, this skeletal outline will suffice for present purposes.

By contrast, more needs to be said about the idea of aesthetic imperfection before it can be determined whether so-called urban grit is a form of it, as is implied by the opening lines of architect and urban planner Kevin Klinkenberg's essay, 'Why We Need Messy Cities.'

Years ago, I remember many people using the term 'gritty' as a way to describe places. As in, 'I like gritty cities.' Or, 'that place is nice, but it doesn't have enough grit for me.' ... I used it; I identified with it, even in my very careful, Midwestern way. *Gritty implied some imperfection*, and perhaps even some danger that lurked in buildings and blocks of older cities. My thoughts were not terribly well-formed ... but 'gritty' somehow seemed right to me. (Emphasis added)

While it might be intuitive to regard being gritty as a prima facie aesthetic imperfection, this is ill-advised. After all, while grit can be a blemish it can also be a boon, and it is worth considering what makes the difference. So, when do we compliment something by describing it as gritty, and when is this a form of censure? A brief review of paradigmatic examples that are not related to cities is helpful.

Grit in an Oysters Rockefeller—indeed, in every prepared food I can think of—is deemed a culinary flaw because a pebbly mouthfeel typically indicates the presence of something that does not belong in the dish, like sand, or a failure to prepare licit ingredients appropriately. Likewise, many find a grittily textured kitchen or bathroom countertop a tactile affront because the feel of a rough or grainy surface can imply a lack of cleanliness. So, too, grit in a diamond may be disparaged on aesthetic grounds because the visual value of gemstones depends in part on their brilliance and clarity.

These examples illustrate that we do not appraise grit as a negative feature or putative aesthetic imperfection willy-nilly. Instead, in each case deficiency arises when grit, understood in its purely descriptive sense as some form of perceptible texture, *interferes with* some other feature that is of primary or overriding aesthetic value. Hence, the grit-filled oyster is evaluated poorly alongside the gritty-feeling countertop and grit-occluded jewel because oysters are esteemed for their slippery mouthfeel, countertops are often valued for their sanitary smoothness and concomitant sheen, and gemstones prized for their luminescence.

In such cases, grit is regarded as an aesthetic demerit insofar as it *counts against* the aesthetic value of the whole.

There are, however, familiar cases in which some form of grit is not only desirable but actively sought because it is regarded as an aesthetic enhancement. Quentin Tarantino refuses to shoot films digitally, finding celluloid aesthetically superior in image richness and resolution. However, he also regularly exploits the 'grit factor' of older celluloid forms, such as 35 mm monochrome and Super 8, to tell his visual stories more effectively, as in *Once Upon a Time In Hollywood* (2019) in which a variety of analogue formats were used both to recreate the look of 1950-60s television shows and to enhance realism in sequences representing life at the home of Sharon Tate and Roman Polanski prior to the Manson murders. Similarly, many of the bronze figures in the Musée Rodin sculpture garden are palpably and visually gritty in pursuit of affective realism; their rough surfaces enhance their eeriness and angst. Hence, ragged texture is expressively apt for *The Burghers of Calais* (1889) and *Ugolino and His Sons* (1881-2) given Auguste Rodin's artistic aims for these works, just as film grain complements the disturbingly raw narrative worlds created by Tarantino.

It has also become popular to download free photo editing applications to add a granular, overprocessed look to selfies and other digital photographs in pursuit of visible grit. One writer explains: 'There's just something about film grain that gives portrait photographs an ethereal, almost dream-like aesthetic' (Doncas, 'Film Grain'), in addition to providing emulated retro appeal. In all these cases—the Tarantino flick, the Rodin bronze, and the millennial's Instagram post—a bit of visual grittiness is purported to add aesthetic value by making the object of attention startlingly realistic yet 'almost dream-like,' thereby producing an affectively compelling representation that trades self-consciously in a mixture of truth and falsity, actively blurring the lines between them to poignant emotional ends.

This brief review of non-urban examples reminds us that, as with many other potential aesthetic concepts, the aesthetic valence of anything appropriately described as gritty invariably depends on context as well as the way certain details *resonate within* a given context.

For this reason, it would be a mistake to regard grittiness as a *prima facie* aesthetic flaw, despite the intuitive force of Klinkenberg's claim that, with respect to cities, being 'gritty implied some imperfection.' Another reason to be wary of branding grit as a *prima facie* aesthetic flaw turns on the difficulty of articulating a sufficiently general yet conceptually illuminating account of aesthetic deficiency.

2. Grappling with Grit: Imperfection and Regulative Ideals

Imperfection denotes a lack of perfection, a failure to meet some recognized ideal. In the perceptual realm, it is most apt to regard perfection in terms of a paradigm that captures some more-or-less determinate standard for success in a particular domain. Thus, the perfect token dachshund is

simply the most excellent exemplar of a specific canine type, where the relevant good-making features are established by organizations such as the Kennel Club. And the perfect soufflé is one that exemplifies to the utmost degree those characteristics deemed by reputed chefs to be valuable in this kind of dessert, such as airiness, creaminess, and subtlety of flavor.

In the artworld there is a miscellany of regulative ideals to which one might appeal to justify the claim that a candidate for appreciation possesses some imperfection or flaw. Aesthetic perfection is associated traditionally with physical *proportion* or perceived harmony. As a result, mathematical considerations are often claimed, somewhat controversially, to have been of great importance to the ancient Greeks and their Renaissance counterparts in the creation and estimation of the visual arts, including architecture. Whatever might be true of our creative forebears' actual appeal to formulae like Phidias' golden ratio, classical and neo-classical artistic standards undeniably favor the appearance of balance and symmetry and countenance perceptual dissonance as a kind of failing. By contrast, in the performing arts, one canonical measure of perfection is *compliance* with a score or script: a presentation that deviates from the relevant set of instructions might be regarded as containing a defect.

And in the domain of museum curation or art restoration, a central concern is with perfection in *condition* so that attenuation of original details or materials in a canvas, sculpture, or other artistic artifact might be assessed as a serious aesthetic demerit.

Regulative ideals such as proportion, compliance, or condition are as common in art circles as they are varied. However, they are not only defeasible but regularly defeated. For example, it is widely agreed that a note-by-note execution of a musical composition does not necessarily produce a desirable performance of the composer's work. Indeed, slavishly following a score is often deemed an aesthetic blemish, especially when it results in a mechanical or emotionally weak presentation. Thus, some music lovers passionately prefer Glenn Gould's unorthodox interpretation of *Bach's Goldberg Variations (1955)* over Van Cliburn's more precise treatment. Moreover, achieving or maintaining 'perfect' proportion or condition can often be argued to detract from the overall interest or aesthetic value of a painting or sculpture. Consider the power of distortion harnessed in classic Cubist and Surrealist works and the heated debates over the aesthetic value of restoring the Sistine Chapel's frescoes to their original hues.

Most importantly, in some artistic contexts there is a regulative ideal that prizes imperfection. This is particularly true in improvisatory performing arts where recovery from, and discovery as a result of, some misstep or mishap is regarded as an accomplishment in itself and valued for its capacity to stimulate creativity, bring life to a performance, and sustain appreciative interest. Andy Hamilton 'develop[s] a *positive sense of imperfection, reconceiving the aesthetics of imperfection as an open, spontaneous response to contingencies of performance or production*, that aims to create something positive from apparently unpromising as well as promising circumstances' (Hamilton, 'Imperfection,' 290). Hence, on this account, 'imperfectionism is a constant *striving for new contingencies to respond to*' (299). Hamilton explicitly addresses the risks and rewards inherent in live performances, including music, theater, dance, performance art, and stand-up comedy. But rejecting imperfection as a kind of flaw and recasting it as an ideal in the pursuit of

new challenges to be wrestled with in real, performing time, can also apply to the visual arts and the processes they embody.

If Hamilton's analysis is apt, then there seem to be cases in which it is appropriate to describe an artistic offering or creation as 'perfectly imperfect.' This form of praise applies, I submit, when something that would be regarded as a flaw under some art-relevant standard of perfection—such as one that prizes proportion, compliance, condition, or genre-specific norms—is transformed from a putative defect into a source of aesthetic value. Although the phrase smacks of paradox, the notion of the 'perfectly imperfect' is familiar in both artistic and non-artistic aesthetic contexts.

For instance, as Hamilton notes, 'the Japanese aesthetic of *wabi-sabi* invites object-specific appreciation, acceptance, ageing—a mark on a bowl enhances its value' (290). Apply this idea to a hypothetical case: the 'perfection' acquired by a newly cracked vase might be thought to consist in its emblematic accuracy and potency. Now blemished, the vessel becomes an apt symbol for our lives, rife with flaws and cracks in character or resolve. While the artifact was once an example of vase-relevant physical perfection, in developing a fissure through accident or the passage of time it has taken on a new form of value to be grasped and savored in sensory encounters. And whereas its erstwhile solid seamlessness was pleasingly manufactured artifice, the visible fracture highlights the ornament's natural fragility. In short, the crack is revealing. It 'tells the truth' about the vase and, by metaphorical extension, about us. As a result, the artifact's perceptible imperfection arguably transforms it into something new: a perfect emblem.

A similar point can be made about 'imperfections' in nature: the weeds in my garden, the blight on the rose, the charred remains of what were once lush California forests. All speak to what is *real*, if unpleasant to behold. Thus, all can be instances of the 'perfectly imperfect' insofar as all are potent symbols of the natural degradation that attends every form of life and is an essential part of its cycles of birth, death, and renewal.

In artworld contexts, Hamilton's regulative ideal of imperfection will be more complex. First, it involves striving, an intentional activity inappropriate to describe nature's processes or the life cycle of inanimate objects like bowls and vases. Second, as is well-articulated in Lee Brown's 'plea for imperfection' in jazz performance, the regulative ideals that govern any specific artistic genre are multiple and may be in tension with one another. As he notes:

it is not that the formalist is just wrong [in complaining that jazz music is flawed in being 'disordered, chaotic, and musically confused' as well as 'formulaic, banal, and oversimple']... The values he profiles are values we all prize. However, those values are systematically compromised by other aspects of the music, which are no less interesting. (Brown, 'Feeling My Way,' 113; 120)

The implication is that a performance will be better *in the dimensions that matter* to jazz appreciators if punctuated by 'missed notes' reconceived as opportunities to develop a new melodic line or rhythmic 'mistakes' that are repeated and modulated to become novel phrasing motifs. Brown acknowledges that, 'the more ambitious the performance [in pursuing and resolving putative imperfections], the more likely it is to be messy' (121). But this kind of mess—which sounds to the uninitiated like musical mayhem and lack of technical skill—is the vibrance of jazz for those who love it. It is what makes the genre exciting. Here it is useful to recall that Klinkenberg's claim that:

to get back to building and rebuilding the kinds of places we love most, we have to start embracing the messy, unpredictable and uncomfortable always-changing nature of life. That's what gives us grit, in a good way. (Klinkenberg, 'Messy Cities')

3. The Conceptual Nitty-Gritty

How can reflection on examples of non-urban grit and the concept of aesthetic imperfection help us resolve the apparent tension between two ideas defended regularly by contemporary urbanists, namely, that grit contributes to the aesthetic allure of a city environment and is also some kind of imperfection?

First, in artistic milieu, the notion of imperfection is ineluctably complex given the great variety of often-competing measures of so-called perfection. Broader aesthetic contexts, including urban environments, are less constrained by regulative ideals that pertain to purely perceptual features and instead typically foreground standards related to other concerns, such as economic or political health. We should, therefore, expect any treatment of *aesthetic* imperfection beyond museums and symphony halls to be even more diverse, and less decisive, than the conceptually messy accounts needed to illuminate the intricacies of (im)perfection in the artworld.

Second, it is unclear what kind of *aesthetically relevant* regulative ideals could be active in Klinkenberg's suggestion that 'gritty implied some imperfection.' When we move from forms of perfection in artistic or artificially structured aesthetic contexts (e.g. dog shows and *haute cuisine*) to everyday environments (e.g. cities), there are no pre-established measures of aesthetic success. Identifying suitable regulative ideals will always be tricky because cities are neither natural nor wholly designed. Urban settings are a blend of ever-evolving artifact and accident, and our lives in them are unscripted. Arnold Berleant underscores this reality profitably by suggesting:

We can even extend the artistic metaphor and think of urban life as a complex improvisational theater in which the dramas of human life constitute the plot lines. Humans are thus both the creative artists, the actors, and the participatory audience in an environmental drama. (*Sensibility*, 125)

It is also important to acknowledge that the development of cityscapes always involves an improvisatory element that outstrips the arduous work of city planners and conscientious architects, the putative counterexample of Brasilia notwithstanding. Despite the pre-meditation of councils, planning boards, and civil engineers, cities are more like forests than Ford Fairlanes. They grow organically over time in unexpected ways rather than coming off the assembly line fully formed, crafted to meet the specifications of a comprehensive plan. They flourish, founder, and sometimes go up in flames, as was literally true of Chicago, Illinois, which—like a phoenix rising from the urban ashes—was extemporaneously rebuilt to establish itself as a new city after the Great Fire of 1871.

As a result, applying any aesthetic standard that appeals to *compliance* with a blueprint or 'set of instructions' seems misguided.

Furthermore, cities are not simply organized complexes of buildings punctuated by cultivated nature in the form of parks and arboreta: as Berleant indicates, they are constituted, in the main, by people and the wild contingencies of their life projects as these are undertaken shoulder-to-shoulder in a specific locale. Hence, it is also unwise to attempt to assess the putative imperfection of a city by appeal to aesthetic standards like those that esteem *mathematical proportion* or the preservation of *original condition*. How could such ideals usefully apply when the thrill of consistent imbalance and the thrall of relentless development are hallmarks of metropolitan life?

Berleant suggests a possible regulative ideal that considers ecological proportion, which, on his view, has an indelible aesthetic dimension:

The ecological model urges that these various domains [industry, manufacturing, goods and services] be kept in balance and that they be of a proportion that no one of them dwarfs the capability of the others or overwhelms the urban dweller. (130)

While this idea is intriguing, it entails that urban grit is an aesthetic imperfection *only if* it disrupts, or tends to upset, the urban ecosystem. To the contrary, urbanists like Klinkenberg and Sharon Zuckin regard grittiness as a uniquely urban commodity, so that when 'big cities are erasing their gritty, bricks-and-mortar history to build a shiny vision of the future' (Zuckin, *Naked City*, 1) they thereby eradicate the unique 'soul' of each urban area, which is constituted by a patchwork of ethnic neighborhoods, industrial parks, historic centers, and financial districts. If grit contributes positively to a city's aesthetic-ecological balance by preserving or highlighting those features unique to its urban identity, then Berleant's suggestion cannot illuminate how grit's aesthetic allure consists in a kind of imperfection.

Where should we go from here? One profitable strategy is to tease grit apart from closely associated potential aesthetic concepts and consider key dimensions in which grit can be, or signify, something of value.

First, we ought not conflate grit with other common features of cities, such as grime, crime, or debris. To say a city is gritty is not to say it suffers from urban blight or should be regarded as an industrial ruin. While Rust Belt ruins, for example, may have aesthetically compelling dimensions, they are a product of dereliction and disquietingly swift decay. That is, urban ruins are special spaces in which grit has become squalor at an alarming rate, bringing danger along with it. As such, their aesthetic potential consists in eliciting the twin affects of the dynamical sublime (Conroy, 'Rust Belt Ruins,' 129-31) while providing opportunities to explore the sublate (Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, 130-35). Grit, by contrast, does not typically evoke the negative absorption that attends the disgusting, nor the Burkean distress prompted by overwhelming hostile forces. While calling an urban area gritty can bespeak a negative emotional response, it need not. And when it does, the level of discomfort elicited by urban grit is far below the affective recoil generated by encounters with modern ruins, given the many ways the latter legitimately provoke fear and disgust.

Second, there are substantive differences between grit and other features of cities often associated with it. Grit, as a textural quality of places and spaces, is typically the result of erosion. Cracked foundations, missing tuck-pointing, peeling paint, ripped canopies, and threadbare theatre seats emerge from regular conditions of use in an urban environment in which weather, pollution, animal life, and active citizens all take a toll on buildings, streets, and other utilitarian artifacts. Thus grit, like the crack in the vase, is revealing. It opens up, illuminatively, the spaces we inhabit, and the objects we use, without compromising their basic structure or rendering them unfit for purpose.

By contrast, grime occludes. Grit is the product of a force wearing down a surface, adding a not unhealthy, but perceptually obvious, granularity. Grime is the accumulation of unhealthy elements like dirt, soot, or asbestos. As a result, the grittiness of a historic building that has not undergone a complete restoration may diminish the glory of some of its original aesthetic qualities but, nonetheless, contribute to other features of compensating value, such as its aura of authenticity. The presence of grime on old lead-glass windows, hand-made corbels, and carefully crafted decorative details, however, actively prevents us from seeing these things clearly, if they can be made out at all. Hence, grime rarely, if ever, contributes to a new dimension of aesthetic value.

Similarly, while grit clarifies our perception of what has been there all along beneath surface appearances of the blocks we walk and the buildings in which lives unfold, debris or rubbish clutters our view. A pile of trash, as encountered in a Rust Belt ruin, might have aesthetic allure. It could be formally interesting (Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 97-124); afford an opportunity to touch the genuine (Korsmeyer, *Things*, 58-91); or generate the dismay that elicits the sublime through its overwhelming quantity or pungent smell. But the aesthetic interest of grit is not simply matter of how it presents itself to us in a sensory encounter. It is, rather, a product of how perceived grit resonates *with* us over time by calling attention to non-perceptual qualities of urban environments that reflect their history and may invite us to reflect on our own.

4. The Goodness of Grit: An Aspective Approach

Grit is not always deemed a positive aesthetic quality in urban environs; sometimes the predicate 'is gritty' conveys disappointment or disdain, particularly when the grittiness of a space or place interferes with other aesthetics qualities of overriding value for a particular location. A gritty park, for instance, might be diminished in its primary dimensions of worth as a 'natural' oasis that provides relief from the harshness of the concrete jungle. But when grit *is* regarded as contributing to the aesthetic appeal of an old-style jazz club or long-standing urban neighborhood, this is typically because its formal features are of interest in themselves. Furthermore, the perceptual magnetism of these traits can be enriched by meditation on their history and augmented by associations with moral virtue. I sketch three possible aspects of urban grit's aesthetic allure that, I submit, work together to explain how having an element of grit can be an aesthetic benefit.

In its purely descriptive sense, 'is gritty' denotes a marked texture. A material object exemplifies grit when its surface is perceptibly uneven or layered. So, too, a singer's voice is described as gritty when it possesses the identifiable sonic features of being raspy or gravelly; and a photograph or film clip is deemed to be gritty when it exhibits grain or inconsistent exposure. In each case, we see, feel, or hear the grit without expending effort to grasp it: things tend to wear their grittiness on their perceptual sleeve, as it were.

When grit is regarded as a good-making feature in aesthetic contexts, this is often on formalist grounds. Visual texture in a painting or assemblage provides viewing diversity, sustaining interest. It causes us to savor a canvas's sensory features, such as daubs of paint, or to explore layers of the media to apprehend complexities and unexpected interrelations. City grit affords similar opportunities to dwell on irregularities and peel back the layers of visual experience. We can savor the chaos of cracks in the city sidewalk or the cement waves made by unseen roots of overgrown trees. We might relish the vibrant inconsistencies of line, hue, and visible texture in damaged fascia or crumbling brickwork. And the colorful strata found on graffitied walls and electric poles displaying ripped flyers and fading advertisements punctuated by half-rusted staples may entrance the senses like a Jasper Johns assemblage. Call this dimension the *perceptual presence* of urban grit.

When we confront the textural qualities of an environment whose formal complexity is a product of erosive forces, we have a chance to pause and ponder the causal histories of the objects or spaces we find texturally compelling. In such moments of reflection, our immediate interest in the look, feel, or sound of the gritty thing gives way to contemplation of its sources. We may be enticed to imagine the stories of life that particular nicks, scratches, cracks, pockmarks, and the patina of posters and spray paint tell. Sometimes a local historian can provide these narratives; often, we cannot even hazard an educated guess about where the grit that holds our attention came from. For this reason, confrontation with grit's historical aspect is not properly regarded as epistemic in nature. Instead, grit moves us from immediate sensory experiences of *surface textures* to imaginative rumination on the *texture of time* (Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, 125-64). This shift in attention is generally not conscious, nor is it required for a positive aesthetic encounter with a bit of city grit. It engages us, however, in a more reflective form of appreciation focused on the ways in which urban erosion can be revealing. We are drawn back with new eyes to the gashes, tears, and holes in a building or object when we see these as visible markers of its

This shift in attention is generally not conscious, nor is it required for a positive aesthetic encounter with a bit of city grit. It engages us, however, in a more reflective form of appreciation focused on the ways in which urban erosion can be revealing. We are drawn back with new eyes to the gashes, tears, and holes in a building or object when we see these as visible markers of its past. And because we recognize that which is now gritty may be a shadow of its former aesthetic self, we are also inspired to imagine how it was in its heyday. Furthermore, when the object of attention is partially stripped for closer inspection, we may revere the labor and craftsmanship that went into its production. Attending to the inner details of constituent materials gives insight into how they were fashioned and enables us to appreciate the effort involved to structure them into a functional, perhaps even beautiful, urban unity. This invites us to envision the space and its elements as part of a distinctive human narrative that, like our own life story, is always in danger of fading into obscurity in the hustle and bustle of modernity. Call this dimension the historical resonance of urban grit.

If we begin to construct descriptive backstories about the gritty objects and places we survey, we cannot help but think of those who have gone before. This leads naturally to imaginings about what kind of people they were likely to have been, given the grit-based evidence at hand; and it is common for the narratives we conjure to involve plotlines or character sketches that foreground grit in its ethical, rather than aesthetic, sense. As Angela Duckworth's *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (2016) attests, there is a substantive philosophical tradition from Aristotle to William James that identifies persistence, pluck, or tenacity in the face of adversity as a moral virtue. The gritty person is not afraid of long hours, suffering reverses, and expending great physical and emotional resources in the pursuit of building better tools, better spaces, and better lives. People with grit have the resolve to persist through hard times, but the character trait they exhibit is not raw obstinance or blind zeal. Instead, it involves the accepting attitude highlighted by Hamilton's positive sense of imperfection '*as an open, spontaneous response to contingencies of performance or production, that aims to create something positive from apparently unpromising as well as promising circumstances*' (Hamilton, 'Imperfection,' 290).

That is, moral grit is a disposition to continue striving in the face of both recognized opportunities and unexpected challenges.

When we confront urban grit, the inner materials that constitute familiar places are partially exposed to us, affording a chance to look into them as evidence of patient handiwork and through them as icons of perseverance and passion. We may be reminded that, as urbanist Jillian Glover notes:

A city's grit also comes from its people's struggles—the new immigrant taking a night shift cleaning office buildings to make it in a new world, or the artist eking out a living making art in an abandoned warehouse. ('Too Pretty')

Thus, the gritty building or city block can, like the vase, be transformed into an emblem: it can become an apt and powerful symbol of a virtuous character trait we prize in every walk of life, independent of our whether one's aims are pursued in a city or pastoral farming community. Call this the *ethical aspect* of urban grit.

My closing suggestion is simple: the aesthetic allure of urban grit is oscillatory. It consists in the aspective cycling grit engenders as we move from its *perceptual presence* to its historical resonances, to possible *aretaic associations*, and back again. Some aesthetic encounters with grit will be negative; others will be positive in only the perceptual dimension. But when grit *grips* us aesthetically, causing us to savour its physical presence and pore over its sensory details—or inspires us to claim that a city is *better* or more worthy of love when it displays grit—this, I suggest, is because it can give rise to a multidimensional experience that engages the senses, the imagination, and our moral sentiments in repeated succession. Each aspect resonates with the others, allowing urban grit to continually reignite our interest. Thus, the mutual inflection of these three facets of grittiness generates aesthetic complexity that can hold us or, at least, inspire us to look again.

Nonetheless, an encounter with the gritty *is* a brush with imperfection. Urban grit emerges from physical losses suffered as a result of a city's corrosive forces, be they economic, political, or a product of nature. Thus, the presence of grit typically reflects personal struggles and human failings, both past and present. It also involves diminishment in perceptible features of building façades, hardwood floors, or city pathways that were designed originally to reward aesthetic attention by fostering illusions of seamless and effortless or by exhibiting classical proportions. If, however, aesthetic imperfectionism can be fruitfully regarded as 'a constant striving for new contingencies to respond to' (Hamilton, 'Imperfection,' 299), then confronting a little bit of urban grit may afford the *perfect* chance to admire others' past acts of aesthetic striving while engaging in new appreciative pursuits of our own.

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SHORT ESSAYS

Abortion: The Battle

Kathleen M. Nielsen

There are many issues surrounding abortion. The battle between pro and con is vicious and decades-long. Those who are against abortion tend to be on the radical right. At least they are the most vocal, and unfortunately, hold the most power. Notably, some judges and justices consistently rule on the side of the extreme right, affirming their own biases, and taking it upon themselves to create new laws instead of applying existing ones. The prerequisite for being nominated for the bench is to be firmly against abortion. This qualification, set by the republicans who appointed them, is no secret. Not only are these judges and justices vehemently against abortion, they hold other extreme views that are not in sync with the majority of American people. Well over 70% of Americans were in favor of Roe v Wade. Anyone who holds radical views - either on the left or the right - has no business sitting on the bench. The fact that we are stuck with justices who hold such archaic and extreme views (especially Thomas and Alito) is in itself a travesty.

A big problem we have in the public discourse is that extremists control the narrative. They describe themselves as “pro-life,” and purport to be on the moral high ground, qualified to judge and control women, regardless of privacy and human dignity issues. It is an affront to women everywhere that politicians can lawfully remove their bodily autonomy and create even more oppressive laws against them as each day passes. In some states, it is being decided if women can be charged with murder and sentenced to death for obtaining an abortion or suffering through a miscarriage, should the inquisitor find she somehow induced the miscarriage. In Texas, vigilantes have been empowered to keep women from seeking abortions. Other states are looking to do this as well. These vigilantes are being paid a bounty for their services, and literally, anyone can deputize himself or herself to be a bounty hunter for this purpose. These laws not only affect women, but they also target healthcare professionals and anyone who might assist the woman. They may as well change “woman” into “criminal” because that is how they treat women in this country for wanting to stop politicians from legislating their bodies and choices of healthcare.

There is even talk about banning travel for a woman from one state to another in the search for an abortion. How would that be enforced? They also want to monitor girls' menstruating cycles. At what age and from where? School?

Clinics that not only provide abortions, but take care of women's health in general, are being shut down. As a consequence, more women are dying from complications arising from pregnancy and childbirth. This was common before the legalization of abortion 50 years ago and is now prevalent again after the reversal of *Roe v Wade*.

Currently, the abortion pill, *mifepristone* is under attack. It is banned in 15 states and the radical right are trying to get it banned nationwide. The Supreme Court heard oral arguments the other day and will give its decision in June or July. In addition to anti-abortion laws, in-vitro fertilization (IVF) is now in the crosshairs. Alabama just passed a law saying embryos are people and if you get rid of one that it's murder. Clinics have stopped their IVF services immediately - out of fear they will inadvertently commit murder. This is what happens to a country when the radical right takes it over via minority rule. Common sense goes out the window and insanity ensues.

In addition to the abortion issue, some far-right politicians are banning books, passing laws about the language one can use, initiating child labor again, and trying to censor the entire educational system, etc. Volumes can be written about how far back into the dark ages the radical right want to push us. Justice Alito even cited archaic and barbaric laws from when they burned witches as foundation for his opinion regarding overturning *Roe v Wade*.

Something very disturbing is sweeping through the United States without much resistance. Citizens of other countries have held large protests for far less. Why are we so passive? The far-right describes itself as pro-life. It is not pro-life. It is pro-birth. They do not care what happens to a child after it is born and they are hell-bent on turning women into non-persons whose only function in life is to bear children without complaint or defiance.

As a final note on this subject, many have said that there is a resurgence of the white replacement theory and ask what should be done about it. Some of these people are behind the anti-abortion movement because they want more babies born to increase “our” numbers (if you are white, though that is left unsaid) to counteract the number of non-white babies being born. My question to them is this: Do you realize that laws about abortion in this country apply to all women, white and non-white? In fact, non-white poor women are more likely to give birth than affluent white women simply because the latter can find ways around the laws and get the abortions they seek.

Abortion: Immoral to Varied Extents

Kaitlyn G. Vasilko

This essay is dedicated to my mother who has not only given birth to me, giving me the gift of life, but has also given me the gift of her love and constant support.

“Abortion does not end the life of a potential human being: it ends the life of an actual human being with great potential” ~ Bryan Kemper.

There are many sides to the story of whether and to what extent abortion is ethical. Abortion is very situationally dependent in terms of ethics; in my opinion, this practice is always unethical and morally wrong. However, there are some situations in which it is more unethical and times when it is less unethical.

The single most unethical and morally wrong form of abortion is in the case of aborting a fetus based on gender. Such as what has been practiced in the past and maybe even present in Chinese and Indian patriarchal societies. These societies regard men as more important than women. Men are viewed as more successful and the means of carrying on the family name and furthering society. Consequently, having a male baby is favored while having a female baby is frowned upon. In a case such as this, there does not seem to be any possible moral attribute to this form of abortion.

It is a sexist and immoral practice that is based on a theory that goes against equality of the lives of men and women. In order for society to function we must all play certain roles; our differences and similarities all align to create one cohesive and interconnected society in which each of our duties, whether they be different or the same, have equal importance.

When looking at the situation of an abortion as a solution to life threatening birth defects where the infant would not survive, it may seem most ethical to have an abortion so as to avoid this trauma; however, there is also the chance that the infant could be ok. So it may also be unethical to take away this chance of life; this moral conundrum is very situationally dependent. However, if there is any chance at all that the infant may survive, it seems most ethical to give the fetus this chance of life which we all deserve equal access to. In the case of forced pregnancy, such as rape or an abusive relationship, it is my opinion that the individual's moral duty is to at least allow the baby to be born, and then maybe put it up for adoption if the mother is not able to provide for the baby or does not want to keep the child since it was born of abuse or rape. When pregnancy is the result of irresponsibility, an abortion is very unethical. When one partakes in such activities, one has to be able to own up to the consequences if preventative precautions were not taken. It is one's moral responsibility in this situation to have the child. Even if one is not able to keep the child, the child still deserves to live. In my opinion this is one of the most unethical circumstances of abortion. Consider this scenario of someone who does not engage in precautions to avoid pregnancy but still engages in acts that will lead to pregnancy and has no intention of keeping the baby. This is an utter disregard for the importance of life and the moral responsibility of nurturing all forms of life. This utter carelessness is not about something small or meaningless. It is life that is at stake and it is life that is being taken away. The only moral decision in a situation such as this one is either to have taken preventative measures prior to engaging in such activities and then if these precautions were not taken it would be most ethical to have the baby rather than have an abortion. If one does not have the means to care for the infant, one could then put the child up for adoption. The baby then would have a chance to live its life.

In the situation of having to choose between your own life and the life of your baby, in the case of medical issues, this presents a major moral conundrum as well. In one respect, it seems most moral to give your baby the chance to have a full life. However, if your own life is at stake, plus you have other children who also need you, you have to also consider your own life and their needs and lives too. There are many factors that play a role in which route is more ethical. This makes it hard to decipher what would be morally right in this case.

When looking specifically at a situation in which an individual or a couple does not want another child and/or was not planning to have a child, it is still their moral responsibility to not have an abortion and to simply put the baby up for adoption. Similarly, if an individual is too young to support a child or is being disowned by her family because of being pregnant, it is still most ethical, in my opinion, to have the baby even if you are not able to keep the baby.

Stepping back from these specific scenarios in which the unethical nature of abortion varies, it is evident that as a whole, there is no scenario in which abortion is entirely ethical. It merely lies on a continuum as far as the extent to which it is unethical. Moreover, many of these scenarios are situationally dependent and though the immoral character of abortion is inevitable, that does not mean that it is ethical either for one to be forced to give up one's life for the infant, or be ridiculed for having an abortion, because of the circumstances under which one became pregnant (such as violence). However, that does not make it morally right just to have an abortion at any time, for any circumstance; there is no reason that can justify taking an innocent life, a life that has no control over its circumstances, a life that is not responsible for the terms under which it came into existence.

We must then determine for ourselves, within reason, what we feel is the most ethical choice possible for the situation we are in, and we must always keep in mind the importance of life and our responsibility as humans to care for one another. We have to look at the bigger picture and think of others. As Mother Teresa said, "Abortion kills twice. It kills the body of the baby and it kills the conscience of the mother. Abortion is profoundly anti-women. Three quarters of its victims are women: Half the babies and all the mothers."

The Barriers We Choose

Kayla M. Vasilko

How is the world defined?

Epistemologists would argue it's a question of knowledge
(Littlejohn, Foss, Oetzel, 2021, p. 9).

Does knowledge come before experience?
Ontologists would raise the matter of choice.
(Littlejohn et al., 2021, p. 10).

Does real choice exist?

Semioticians would assert that most meanings that define "reality" are socially constructed.
(Hall and Nixon, 2013).

What is a "pure" representation?
Marxists would say that the actions that mold reality are shaped by social order.
(Nickerson, 2022).

Aren't all workers bound by the will of owners?
Scholars would counter that every categorized division of society is not exclusively determinant.
(Scipes, 2022).

*Might a worker also be a woman, for she too is a human being,
compelled to react in ways that have not yet been written about?*
(Kayla M. Vasilko)

Truth is a prism framed in the center of a block of stone.
(Kayla M. Vasilko)

We spend our lives trying to define it. We debate what angle it should be chiseled at. We theorize how sharp the tools should be. We diminish the approaches that threaten ours. We miss the essence of what we seek. Notwithstanding the heft of its armor, truth is weightless. The prism radiates endless variances of light. The light pervades cracks in the stone; it bounces off obstacles; it showers the Earth. Truth cannot belong to one person, alone. It is no smaller than it is big, and no more limited than it is infinite. No two reflections are alike.

What solace might be found in holding up a mirror to the barriers that we choose?

This reflection stems from the consideration of the following topics: abortion, politics, war, wealth, and the additional filters we use to prevent us from connecting with the world, given the expectation that we must pick a side and engage in unabated controversy with anyone opposing it. In 2020, there were 620 thousand abortions in the U.S (CDC, 2022). The forcible rape rate was also 42.3% per 1000 U.S. residents, based on reported cases (FBI, 2021). Approximately 16 million animals were sacrificed in the first World War alone (Hoare, 2018). 46% of those enlisted in the U.S. Army joined exclusively because of economics (Clark, 2021). Thousands feel they have no other possible path to survive. There are over 7 billion 946 million people in the world today (USCB, 2023), all carrying with them unique reflections of too many experiences to name. Thus, there are few singular “right” answers that can apply to all lives at all times.

It’s one thing to count feet of snow, but another to try to catch each snowflake as it falls. It’s one thing to feel the wind, but another to try to measure how many breathed life into it. It’s one thing to acknowledge that there are others in the world, but another to try to read all of their names.

If we were gifted the time to not only know the names of the other people in this world, but to take seconds to say them out loud and steal minutes to learn just one thing about each of them, it would be much more difficult to cast judgements on them. Yet we would have a great deal more knowledge than most of us do when making these decisions every day.

How many times have you heard a story about the actions of someone else and instantly decided your agreement or your opposition? I know that I have, and upon reflection, this alarms me, especially when there is data that suggests we spend more time trying to find the right answers for a crossword puzzle. What's more, in the seconds we spend choosing sides, we are assigning labels like enemy or much worse, just as easily.

We owe it to all of the people we so casually define to consider how many, out of the more than seven billion in the world, feel completely alone. It is all a matter of perspective.

The magnitude of human population is staggering. But there are 750 times more plastic debris in the ocean (5.25 trillion pieces) and more than a hundred billion times more stars in the universe (200 billion trillion [or 200 sextillion] stars) (Jackson, 2022; Parker, 2015). The former nonbiodegradable debris exists because of the predominantly self-interested acts we perform with minimal effort. The latter heavenly bodies exist continuously right above our heads, with no human intervention at all. What might we create if we use our time to work together, employing even the minute energy it took to pollute the oceans? What might we see, even in the dark of night, if we just stopped and looked up?

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**CRITIQUE &
REPLY**

For Peace in Ukraine: Cease-fire Now

Dr. Lee Artz

The year of ongoing war in Ukraine is the result of nine years of a coup staged, sponsored, and organized in Ukraine by the US and NATO countries, a civil war against the people of the Donbass region, and Kiev's refusal to abide by the 2015 Minsk Agreement. The West is trying hard to ignore all this, but the facts are inescapable. Many citizens in the US and EU have been misled by commercial framing of the conflict. A most disturbing result of widespread misunderstanding appears in a recent PNW Philosophy Matters contribution by Dr. Deepa Majumdar.

Dr. Majumdar's promotion of a military solution to the Russian invasion of Ukraine exhibits several errors of fact and perspective, including:

1. It is historically inaccurate to posit that "politics comes with a thirst for power." The history of citizen efforts to expand democracy and access to political power has always been marked by an emphasis on greater participation and more collaboration—since the Haitian and American Revolutions, through the US Civil War, and Civil Rights movement, social movements have championed greater democratic participation, not illegitimate authoritarian power. The same is true for independence struggles in India, South Africa, Ghana, and across Latin America. To posit that each of these movements "thirst" for control insults the democratic aspirations and successes of past and current social movements for justice and equality.
2. Dismissing the 14,000 deaths (many at the hands of the Nazi-based Azov Battalion) in Eastern Ukraine by quoting a BBC assertion that "there has been no genocide in Ukraine," is wholly inadequate and inaccurate. The UN OHCHR reports that more than 80% of civilian casualties (2017-2021) resulted from Ukrainian military attacks on Donbass. Another assessment comes from CNN: the Azov Battalion "has a history of neo-Nazi leanings, which have not been entirely extinguished by its integration into the Ukrainian military.

In its heyday as an autonomous militia, the Azov Battalion was associated with White supremacists and neo-Nazi ideology and insignia. It was especially active in and around Mariupol in 2014 and 2015. CNN teams in the area at the time reported Azov's embrace of neo-Nazi emblems and paraphernalia" (CNN, 2022). Indeed, as the *New York Times* reports, "the conflict in eastern Ukraine has emerged as an international hub of white supremacy" (Engelbrecht, 2022).

3. The basis for Majumdar's presentation focuses on Putin "alone" (p. 22), which overstates his independence from Russian corporations and military. Likewise, such individualized assessments ignores the social relations of power in Russia, US, and EU that organize and decide policies. Limiting one's focus to Putin discounts the provocations of NATO expansion (Kemp, 2022), US involvement in the Maidan 2014 coup, neo-fascist attacks (Hahn, 2022), and the actual purpose of the Minsk 2015 agreement (Agencies, 2022)—which Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron have both admitted was a ruse to allow Ukraine time to build its military capabilities to attack the Donbass and confront Russia (Newsroom, 2022) . It also obscures the role the UK and US has played in disrupting cease-fire talks that were held in February and March 2022 in Belarus and then Turkey. Turkey, Brazil, and China have all offered to sponsor cease-fire negotiations—with opposition from the US, UK, and NATO (Davidson & Hawkins, 2023), which currently insist on prolonging the war.
4. History has no "divine" (p. 22) impulse as Majumdar posits. Often history is the result of unconscious human action. Political misinformation and media framing usually prevent participatory citizen dialogue and decision-making—which must be the basis of any "moral" democracy. Historically, the social relations of power and existing material conditions have always resulted in social and cultural outcomes, without any participating divinity, whatever one's religion.

5. Contrary to Majumdar, African, Asian, and Latin American nations did not exhibit “nonchalance” (p. 23) in refusing to condemn Russia’s invasion. Only four African leaders participated in Zelensky’s June 2022 Zoom call because the other fifty African nations have experienced colonial duplicity and they reject illegal US sanctions that harm citizens everywhere. Instead, most nations of the world support a negotiated end to the war—the only truly humanitarian and practical response to the conflict (Norton, 2022). In fact, only about 15% of the global population is represented by nations of the Global North. The vast majority of the world’s population, which resides in the Global South, has remained neutral over the Western proxy war in Ukraine. Countries with some of the largest populations, such as China, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Mexico, and Vietnam have remained neutral. Many more such as South Africa, Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, and Eritrea, have openly blamed NATO and the United States for causing the war in Ukraine. These nations represent a better understanding of the Ukraine war than the military cheerleading featured in US and EU commercial media.

6. Majumdar misconstrues the structures of modern society when she asks, “why do armed forces obey the whims of an autocrat” (p. 24). Relations are actually the reverse: politicians in Russia, US, EU, and elsewhere serve the interests of corporate power and the military that enforces that power. As Gilens & Page (2014) demonstrated in their extensive Princeton Study, the interests of citizens are largely irrelevant to political representatives beholden to corporate funding, including arms producers, such as Lockheed, Northrup Grumman, General Dynamics, Raytheon, Rheinmetall, and BAE, among others. Thus, last year, Germany’s Rheinmetall increased profits 80%; US arms manufacturers increased profits by more than \$50 billion. While Majumdar advocates more weapons for war, thousands of Ukrainians die. Where is the humanitarian and ethical call for a negotiated cease-fire?

7. Majumdar even supports illegal sanctions as evidence of an “ethics of Conscience” (p. 25)—ignoring that sanctions kill. Alfred de Zayas, UN Expert on International Order, writes, sanctions “contravene international humanitarian law, which specifically condemns collective punishment.’ Moreover, sanctions regimes that disrupt or even asphyxiate the economies of the targeted countries result in unemployment, hunger, disease, despair, emigration, suicide. To the extent that such sanctions are ‘indiscriminate,’ they are tantamount to a form of state terrorism” (Zayas, 2022).

Fortunately, there are other more humanitarian voices for peace. Five hundred thousand Germans have signed a petition urging Chancellor Olaf Scholz to end arming Ukraine and seek a negotiated settlement. The latest Pew public opinion poll in the US shows less than 35% of Americans believe the Ukraine war poses a threat. Another poll reveals that 48% oppose more aid to Ukraine and 57% support a negotiated settlement (See links to public opinion polls below).

Of course, Majumdar is not alone in her misreading and philosophical advice. Overall, many citizens in the US and Europe have been misled by media framings that rely on US officials and parrot a weaponized ideology. Republicans and Democrats, including the so-called Progressive Caucus and the Black Congressional Caucus, have closed ranks with other liberals to advocate more weapons, more military funding, and more US participation—even given the threat of escalation to nuclear war.

We would all do well to remember the lies perpetrated by the US government about weapons of mass destruction and reject politician and commercial media promotion of US policies, which are neither humanitarian or in our own best interests. As a matter of extreme urgency this is not a philosophical question. Morally, as citizens in the US, we need to advocate for an immediate cease-fire, with Russian and NATO immediate withdrawal from Ukraine, and negotiations beginning with the Minsk 2015 Agreement.

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- <https://www.businessinsider.com/new-poll-signals-americans-are-growing-tired-of-supporting-ukraine-2022-9>
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Reply

Dr. Deepa Majumdar

I'd like to thank Dr. Artz for responding to my essay, titled, "Puppeteer Putin," presented, not at a *Philosophy Matters* event (as he states), but in the last issue of *Symphony of Reason* (SOR) (III.1, S 2022).¹ Dr. Artz is far more empirical than I am and appears to know a lot of facts about the war in Ukraine. But facts, on their own, say little, until interpreted by reasoning. I happen to disagree with a lot of Dr. Artz' reasoning. For all his innumerable citations, Dr. Artz' reasoning strikes me as alarming in its subjectivity. Likewise, ascribing untrue motives to me is disingenuous, to say the least. Moreover, the judgmental *ad hominem* tenor of his criticisms sounds unprofessional. Part of the problem lies in the fact that we have entirely different worldviews.

I do not totalize politics - meaning, I do not see politics as the *only* realm of human affairs, but rather, as one among myriad separate realms. Nor do I totalize politics as the *only* cause of every other human realm. While many human activities have a political aspect, not every human action is political in essence. Likewise, I do not totalize capitalism as the originary origin of *all* human problems. Instead, I believe the human condition comes with a multiplicity of problems - some existential, others freely-willed, and yet others caused by social injustices. A loose affiliation of political causes, each with its own roots, therefore, best describes our political responses to social injustice. To totalize one political cause as the supreme *cause* of all causes, is to project one's mind onto empirical reality and incline towards totalitarianism. My worldview and moral stances stem more from a human rights perspective, than politics.

But the most significant difference lies in our perceptions of the individual. Rejecting a subtle nihilism commonplace in some fields of contemporary western academic thinking, I believe in acknowledging and recognizing man's freedom of will as the ultimate cause of human conduct. We are not passive products of nature or nurture, but active causes of human affairs. This world, therefore, is a result - not cause - of the individuated human will. We have moral agency!

¹This piece (with the same title, "Puppeteer Putin") is now published in a special issue of a peer-reviewed international journal. See <https://eidos.uw.edu.pl/issue-4-2022/>

At least some of Dr. Artz' reasoning appears to deny this free-will, inwardness, and moral agency in the individual human person. I also believe in nuanced thinking that allows for a multiplicity of perspectives, each a partial truth. Dr. Artz speaks of my "several errors of fact and perspective." This sounds rather presumptuous, severe, and high-handed (even if unintended). My piece was an essay - not a social science article. My approach, therefore, was more philosophical than empirical. I did not use the many facts that Dr. Artz presents. This is hardly the same as making "errors of fact."

For many, religion is not an opium of the masses - but rather, a contemplative worldview that transcends both atheistic cynicism and religious credulity. Again, Dr. Artz' point - "History has no 'divine' (p. 22) impulse as Majumdar posits" (#4) - sounds rather dogmatic, high-handed, and presumptuous. While he is welcome to his viewpoint - which I do not seek to reform - should he be imposing this on others, or laying it down as almost a law of life? Surely, others have a right to their own perspectives of history, which includes the theistic-contemplative view that history is forged by the conjoint will of God and man? Here are my actual words from SOR III.1: "History works by a combination of the divine and human will - the two together forging the myriad destinies of individuals and nations."

But more importantly, Dr. Artz appears to misconstrue my line of reasoning, often taking my words out of context, thus twisting their intention. Here are some examples:

1. "Dr. Majumdar's promotion of a military solution to the Russian invasion of Ukraine" line 1, Paragraph 2):

In SOR III.1, I defended "just war," *while asserting that nonviolence is the highest ideal* (25). This is hardly the equivalent of "promoting" a military solution, as Prof. Artz claims. By taking my words out of context and omitting their nuances, Dr. Artz misrepresented my reasoning.

My point was, and remains - nonviolence is not feasible under all circumstances. While I am a Gandhian to the core, I recognize the fact that the empirical context of Gandhi's nonviolence was planned political protest before an armed colonial power - not self-defense before a hi-tech military invasion. Using Gandhian methods of nonviolence in the context of Ukraine would mean collective suicide - because it is simply unrealistic. To say that I therefore "promoted" (very loaded term) a "military solution" is a wild exaggeration. Moreover, Dr. Artz omits my assertion that a "just war" is a *necessary evil* (25).

All I did was interpret Ukraine's response to Russian aggression as a case of self-defense and "just war."

In fact, even a prince of peace, like M. K. Gandhi endorses violence in some of his aphorisms - at that, on moral (not pragmatic) grounds. Here are his words:

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.²

Based on both pragmatic and moral grounds, and the exigencies of *realpolitik*, I stand by my position - that nonviolence is not an absolute virtue - for the simple reason that it is not feasible under all circumstances. If it were, the notion of "just war," which has long been defended in western thought, would become obsolete. Besides, my piece was written back in Spring 2022, when the war in Ukraine had just begun. What seemed like a just war of defense and necessary evil back then, need not be the case forever. Dr. Artz' words, "While Majumdar advocates more weapons for war, thousands of Ukrainians die" are a breathtakingly misleading distortion that omits the special context of my point about Ukraine needing weapons - namely, its right to self-defense through the necessary evil of just war. The heart and essence of this distortion lies in Dr. Artz' linking "While Majumdar advocates more weapons for war (an untrue statement)" with "thousands of Ukrainians die" in the same sentence.

2. Quoting me, Dr. Artz says (#1) "It is historically inaccurate to posit that 'politics comes with a thirst for power.'"

The temptation of power in politics has long been recognized in the history of western thought. Even protest-politics comes in at least two genres - that which aims at power and that which aims at true justice. Dr. Artz omitted my distinctions between good and bad forms of power (21).

3. Dr. Artz says (#2), "Dismissing the 14,000 deaths (many at the hands of the Nazi-based Azov Battalion) in Eastern Ukraine by quoting a BBC assertion that "there has been no genocide in Ukraine," is wholly inadequate and inaccurate."

Again, this is breathtakingly misleading. To say that I "dismissed the 14,000 deaths" in Eastern Ukraine is pure fiction. Nowhere in my essay do I dismiss this or any deaths. To say that I dismissed these deaths by using the BBC quotation is putting words in my mouth, thus imputing a motive to me that is pure fiction! Dr. Artz appears to have omitted the context stated in this BBC quotation (see below) - namely, Mr. Putin's claim that his goal was to protect people from a purported genocide in Ukraine:

Many of President Putin's arguments were false or irrational. He claimed his goal was to protect people subjected to bullying and genocide and aim for the "demilitarisation and de-Nazification" of Ukraine. There has been no genocide in Ukraine: it is a vibrant democracy, led by a president who is Jewish."³

The key point in this quotation (and in my use of it) is not to debate whether or not there has been a genocide in Ukraine (as Dr. Artz indicates), but to expose Mr. Putin's hypocrisy.

4. According to Dr. Artz (#3), "The basis for Majumdar's presentation focuses on Putin "alone" (p. 22), which overstates his independence from Russian corporations and military. Likewise, such individualized assessments ignores the social relations of power in Russia, US, and EU that organize and decide policies."

Dr. Artz' reasoning here is direct proof of the kind of nihilism I objected to earlier - a denial of individuality, inwardness, personal accountability, free-will, and moral agency. Whatever the precipitating causes be, the immediate cause is the individual, who chooses whether or not to give in to these exterior causes. Yes, individuality matters - not the narcissistic "I" of modernity - but the morally responsible "I" that possesses free-will and exercises the moral agency inherent in this freedom of will, which allows us to choose between good and evil. I apply the same reasoning to Dr. Artz' point (#6) - "Majumdar misconstrues the structures of modern society when she asks, 'why do armed forces obey the whims of an autocrat?' Relations are actually the reverse: politicians in Russia, US, EU, and elsewhere serve the interests of corporate power and the military that enforces that power." First, I doubt that Mr. Putin is beholden to the Russian armed forces. After all, he is their formal commander-in-chief. Second, like everyone else, members of the Russian armed forces possess the moral agency inherent in free-will. They could therefore refuse to obey unethical orders.

5. According to Dr. Artz (#5), "Countries with some of the largest populations, such as China, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Mexico, and Vietnam have remained neutral [over "the Western proxy war in Ukraine"]."

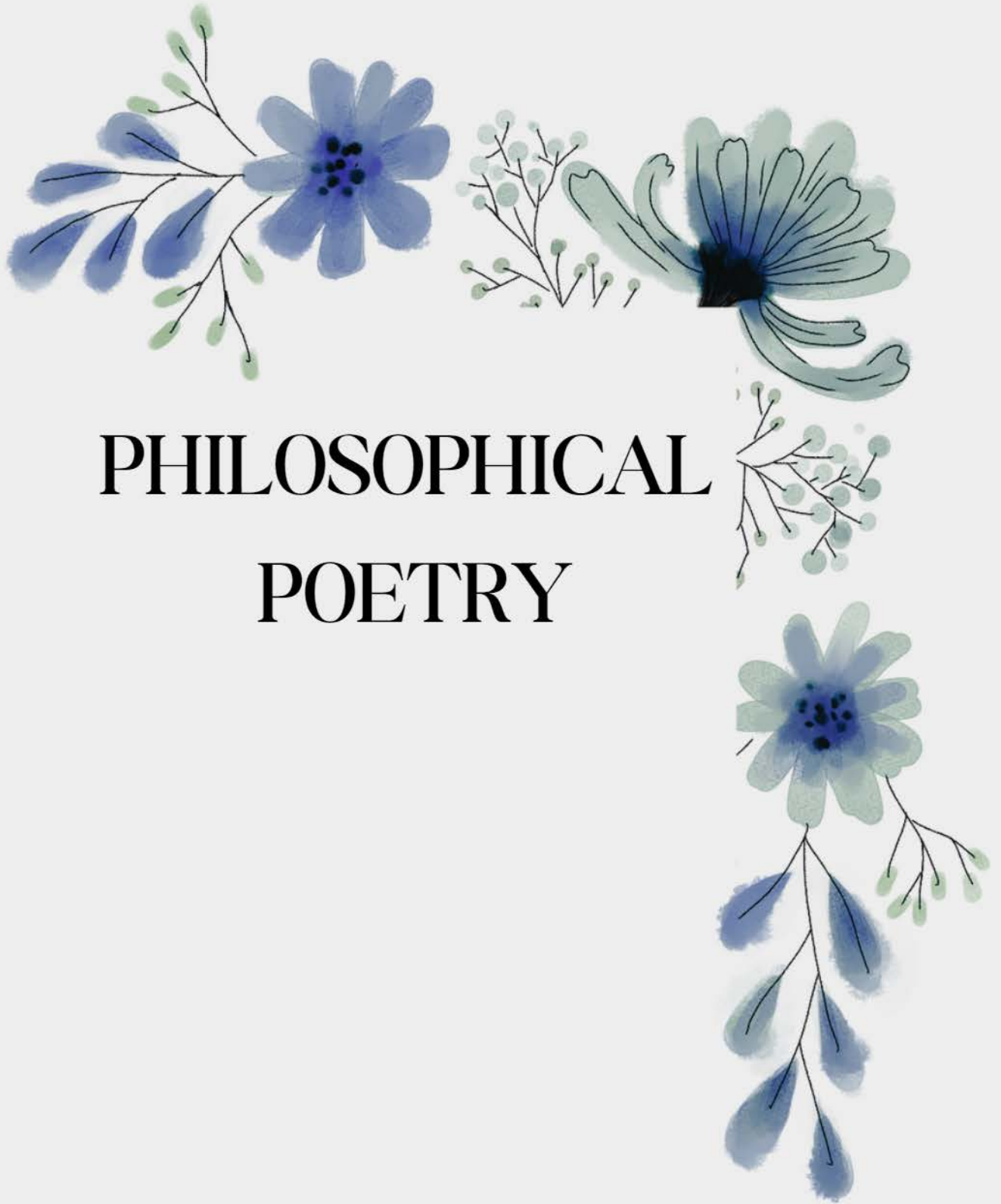
I have a problem with remaining neutral before a major moral and humanitarian crisis, caused by the unnecessary and sadistic violence of a hi-tech invasion. Moreover, even if the tragedy in Ukraine is the west's "proxy war," as Dr. Artz and others claim (I remain unconvinced that this is a full representation of ground realities) - this does not absolve Mr. Putin of moral responsibility for invading Ukraine.

²Wanda Torres-Gregory and Donna Giancola, "Gandhi on Non-Violence," in *World Ethics* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2002), 223. ³<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56720589>

6. According to Dr. Artz (#7), “Majumdar even supports illegal sanctions as evidence of an “ethics of Conscience” (p. 25)–ignoring that sanctions kill.”

This last is particularly misleading - with my words taken out of context and mal-intention falsely imputed to me. I spoke of sanctions on Russia as a force of deterrence - and I did so back in Spring 2022, when this war had just begun. In the context of *realpolitik*, sanctions struck me as the only option, when all other nonviolent means (including diplomatic negotiations) have failed. Nowhere in my essay did I willfully “ignore” that sanctions kill. This last accusation, I am sorry, is pure fiction!

Had Dr. Artz' critique been more rational, objective, and courteous, I may have learned something from it. Unfortunately, this was not the case at all.



**PHILOSOPHICAL
POETRY**

Happiness

Prof. Subbarao V. Majety

*I looked for happiness
And found it nowhere.*

*I asked for happiness
And no one could give it.*

*I longed for happiness
And it eluded me all the more.*

Suddenly

*I stopped seeking happiness
And I became Happy.*

A Double-Edged Sword

Kaitlyn G. Vasilko

*Power is like a poisoned apple,
bright and inviting on the outside,
but dark and decaying on the inside.*

*Wealth and status are the façade,
by which we are fooled.
Power makes us feel worthy
of others,
of their affection.
But it keeps us from realizing
that we are alone.*

*Power tells our heads that we are happy
And full
of purpose
but behind the boulder
blocking our perception, we find ourselves
empty, like an abandoned cellar.*

*Power destroys
what we think it repairs,
piece by piece crumbling meaning...*

Restore

Kayla M. Vasilko

For my mom, who has shown me how to have hope and unwaveringly encouraged me not to give up.

*I saw a butterfly land on the surface of the snow
its wings blinked slowly, like the cycle of a mobile.
It didn't question the weather or long for a warm breeze;
the sunlight made the snow glisten like a crystalline lake
that refused to cave and swallow
something that was meant to fly;
a flag that sings soundlessly
of lilies and forests
painted
with the seasons; a kite
with amber tails and wings that drink
the sun like stained glass.
Hope is flight
never meant to land.
It is air
you can never grasp, nor lose.
It is shared only by catching it soaring
and telling someone else not to look away.*

Treasure

Kayla M. Vasilko

For my Grandma, who has taught me to recognize the beauty of nature, and to not lose sight of what matters.

*Summer has birdsong
but the winter woods echo with the orchestra of autumn,
unfettering. Sunlight courses through tree
limbs and parachutes with leaves
as they fall from branches, frozen, hitting
the ground and catching in the wet cement of the snow
until the thaw of spring. Crowns of life are hidden
in the naked shell of a tree,
cyclones of twigs and cotton tufts that sheltered
a rainbow of feathers
seen only now when the world feels so cold.*

*The ocean has no boundaries
but there is a universe masked under folds of teal
and indigo curls that shine like cut gems in the sun,
teasing a canyon of fins and aqua stars.
When the tide pulls back the curtain
of the waves, a microscopic galaxy
radiates as shells burrow in the sand, a kaleidoscope
of rockets, prismatic, dancing deep into the shore
seen only now when the salted depths are too cold to enter
Humanity relinquishes nothing, but lets the world slip away.*