

# Discourse

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*Discourse* is an undergraduate journal of philosophy sponsored by the Penn-Tau chapter of Phi Sigma Tau at The University of Scranton and published annually. The goal of the journal is to provide a forum for a variety of philosophical arguments and ideas in both creative and traditional media.

# Phi Sigma Tau Paper Contest 2016 Awards:

## First Place

Lizzy Polishan

*Conceptions of Creativity in Plato, Merleau-Ponty, and Toni Morrison's Beloved*

## Second Place

Caroline Earnest

*Using Phenomenology to Transverse Prejudice*

## Third Place

Juliana Vossenber

*Sexual Desire and Possession: A Philosophical Analysis*

## Discourse Information

### Method of Selection

*Discourse* publishes the top papers submitted to the annual Phi Sigma Tau paper contest. Papers are selected through a blind review process by three faculty members. It also publishes short pieces submitted directly to the journal. These selections are made anonymously by the editors.

### Phi Sigma Tau

Phi Sigma Tau (PST) is the International Honor Society in Philosophy. The University of Scranton's chapter, Penn-Tau, began in 1980. Philosophy majors and minors in the junior and senior classes are eligible for induction each spring.

### Dedicated To Those Who Wonder

*Wonder is confusion, puzzlement, surprise, astonishment, rapture, horror at the uncanny, at what shocks, shakes or shatters, whether beauty, grief, danger, desire or guilt.*

- William Rowe, Ph.D.

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# Conceptions of Creativity in Plato, Merleau-Ponty, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Lizzy Polishan

How do we create? For Plato, humans' creations are inadequate representations of ideal Forms. Although Plato upholds creativity, both sexual and artistic, stating creative acts allow mortals to participate briefly in divine activities that elevate their souls, he institutes a divide between divine essences—Forms or *logos*—and their material representations. Plato's *Timaeus* posits a third substance that connects the material world and the Forms, called the *khôra*. The *khôra*, a womblike receptacle, infuses *logos* into the texture of the world, so that the material echoes the forms. Nonetheless, the material world is still severed off from and inferior to the Forms. The material world still impedes upon our ability to create.

Conversely, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes creation as an expression of sense spoken in and through the body. The material world does not hinder creation, but enables it; it is the vehicle through which creation is achieved and experienced. Merleau-Ponty is not a materialist, yet he does not institute a hierarchy between the visible materials and the invisible ideas. For him, the visible and invisible intertwine to reveal expression fully. Creation, then, does not involve copying a divine form; instead, creation involves manifesting the invisible in and through the visible.

In her novel, *Beloved*, Toni Morrison depicts the struggles of slavemasters and ex-slaves to create. She depicts creativity in both Plato's sense of it—as reproduction—and Merleau-Ponty's sense of it—as in and through the body. Ultimately, she upholds Merleau-Ponty's position that authentic creation depends on our embodiment. Morrison suggests that reproductive creativity occurs when a person's conception of his or her embodiment is disrupted. The institution of slavery, for example, disrupts the body schema of slaveowners and slaves, and renders their bodies' creative capacities inert; those bodies cannot produce, but can only recapitulate ideals, which mirrors Plato's depiction of reproductive creation. Conversely, freed slaves attempt to reclaim their creative capacities by

reclaiming their bodies, and they are free to create only when they do so. *Beloved* thus emphasizes the importance of the body and the material world to the creative process. Once the body is degraded into an object, cleaved apart from its creative capacity, it is unable to truly produce but only reproduce and represent. Ultimately, by examining Plato's and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of creativity in conjunction with Morrison's *Beloved*, this paper will reveal the importance of the body to creativity, and uphold Merleau-Ponty's notion of creativity.

## I. Plato's Conception of Creativity

In the *Symposium*, Plato asserts that beauty exists on Earth; however, earthly beauty serves only to remind us of true Beauty, which is disembodied, immortal, and untainted by the material world. Diotima asserts that true Beauty appears nowhere on Earth; it doesn't appear "in the guise of a face or hands or anything else that belongs to the body. It will not appear to him as one idea...It is not anywhere in another thing" (*Symposium* 59). Instead, Beauty is cordoned off from the material world, occurring "by itself with itself; it is always one in form, and all the other beautiful things share in that" (59). For Plato, the earthly things are not beautiful of their own accord, but because they participate in the Form of Beauty, which is not itself earthly. When beauty appears in the world, it merely imitates authentic Beauty.

The material world is inadequate to express true Beauty. Furthermore, material entities taint Beauty and encumber our getting at Beauty itself. In order for anything to be truly beautiful, it must be "absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality" (*Symposium* 59). Human flesh and the other material, mortal entities corrupt, deface, and degrade Beauty.

In *Timaeus*, Plato posits a third kind of substance, the *khôra*, which mediates between the material and divine; it is "the mother and receptacle of all created and visible and in any way sensible things...an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible" (*Timaeus*).

This receptacle receives impressions of all things, but does not possess any physical characteristics herself. Although the *khôra* attempts to bridge the divide between the physical and the divine, it still does not allow for the possibility of true Beauty to occur in the material world. The material world still merely echoes and taints the Forms. Ultimately, Plato degrades the material world to the handmaiden of the Forms.

## II. We are Our Bodies, and Our Bodies are Art

For Merleau-Ponty, the body is the mechanism through which we experience the world. We live in and through our bodies; our true essence is our body itself. “I am not in front of my body, I am in my body, or rather I am my body” he says (*PoP* 151). Even though Merleau-Ponty firmly upholds that we are our bodies, he believes our bodies are irreducible to their material, physical bits. In fact, he believes that the body can’t be compared to a physical object, but rather to an art piece.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the physical form of a piece of art is the only means through which we can experience the sense of that work of art. “In a painting or in a piece of music, the idea cannot be communicated other than through the arrangement of color or sounds” (152). The material of the art does not hinder us from getting to the idea of the art; rather, the material components of the art express the art’s sense itself. The same goes for a work of literature or a poem; “the poem is not independent of all material support, and it would be irremediably lost if the text was not perfectly preserved. Its signification is not free and does not reside in the heaven of ideas; it is locked up between the words on some fragile piece of paper” (152). Both the human body and works of art are comprised of visible and invisible parts, but the visible parts reveal the invisible parts. The means of expression cannot be cleaved from the expression itself—without the physicality of the human or the work of art, expression ceases. The body, of humans and artwork, synthesizes their visible and invisible components and prevents either from dominating the other. Merleau-Ponty explicitly draws out the metaphor, stating:

A novel, a poem, a painting, and a piece of music are indi-

viduals, that is, beings in which the expression cannot be distinguished from the expressed, whose sense is only accessible through direct contact, and who send forth their signification without ever leaving their temporal and spatial place. It is in this sense that our body is comparable to the work of art. (153)

In both the work of art and the body, the expression and the expressed intertwine. Neither a body nor a work of art can be reduced to their physical expressions, yet what both the body and the artwork express are accessible only through their physicality.

This is important for a number of reasons. Merleau-Ponty recognizes the significance of material and nonmaterial components as equally important to creation. He does not cordon off the *logos* from the world, nor reduce the world to its material components. He recognizes that the visible and invisible are deeply intertwined, which counters Plato's conception of creation, and which positions the body as a primal ground of expression.

### III. Speaking Language and Spoken Language

Merleau-Ponty believes that "the word has a sense" (*PoP* 182). For Merleau-Ponty, a word is not an arbitrary signifier that represents a mental concept. The material part of a word (the word itself) and the immaterial part of a word (the sense of the word) are inseparable. Merleau-Ponty says that "we discover...beneath the conceptual signification of words, an existential signification that is not simply translated by them, but that inhabits them and is inseparable from them" (188). A word isn't the emblem of a sense, then, but the body of its sense. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, words do not serve to represent thoughts, to others or ourselves, but are the mechanism through which thought occurs. "Speech accomplishes thought," says Merleau-Ponty (183). In fact, we often don't know what we think until we articulate it.

Language serves as more than just a reminder. Successful expression "makes the signification exist as a thing at the very heart of the text,

it brings it to life in an organism of words, it installs this signification in the writer or the reader like a new sense organ, and it opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience” (*PoP* 188). True expression creates; it authentically bodies forth our thoughts and enhances our perceptive capacities.

Some language, however, is not creative. In *Signs*, Merleau-Ponty differentiates between spoken language and speaking language, explaining “the empirical use of already established language should be distinguished from its creative use. Empirical language can only be the result of creative language” (*Signs* 44). Empirical language—spoken language—is not itself creative, but it comes directly from creative language—speaking language. All language is at first creative, but after years of overuse, it descends into trite and hackneyed expressions, and the once living language fossilizes. Merleau-Ponty describes our use of spoken language as “opportune recollection of a pre-established sign” (44). Conversely, he describes speaking language as “speech which signifies, which finally renders ‘*l’absent de tous les bouquets*’ present and frees the meaning captive in the thing” (44). Speaking language is genuinely alive and creative.

#### IV. Flesh

In his final work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty furthers his notion of the body by positing a new concept: flesh. Flesh is the intertwined sensible and sensate. Flesh crisscrosses the touching with the tangible, and writes the movements of our bodies into the world. Our flesh enables us to touch and experience the universe, but also stitches our bodies into the fabric of that world, so we are subject to being touched and explored as well. Merleau-Ponty describes flesh as

the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously, *as* tangible it descends among them, *as* touching it dominates them all. (*VI* 146)

Through flesh, the acts of sensing—seeing, touching, tasting, hearing, smelling—are all made possible. Likewise, flesh itself is sensible: seeable, touchable, tasteable, audible, smellable. The sensible qualities of flesh are not interchangeable with nor reducible to its sensing qualities; however, the flesh tangles together the sensing and the sensible. Flesh makes the acts of sensing possible, while simultaneously making us sensible to ourselves and others.

Flesh does not cleave apart the body from the spirit; it does not even come from a substance, either spiritual or material. Merleau-Ponty notes that “we must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit—for then it would be the union of contradictories—but. . . as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being” (147).

Furthermore, flesh solves the problem of the subject-object divide. Merleau-Ponty explicitly illustrates how the subject-object divide disintegrates when closely examined. First, he asks us to take our bodies as having a “double belongingness to the order of the ‘object’ and to the order of the ‘subject,’” as if we were comprised of two “leaves” (137). However, even recognizing ourselves as having subject and object bits doesn’t fully capture our experience of the world. He explains that:

[The body] is not a simple thing *seen* in fact. . . it is visible by right, it falls under vision that is both ineluctable and deferred. Conversely, if it touches and sees. . . it is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs. . . One should not even say, as we did a moment ago, that the body is made up of two leaves. . . Fundamentally, [the body] is neither thing seen only nor seer only, it is Visibility sometimes wandering and sometimes reassembled. (138)

Flesh is neither subject nor object; it erases the subject-object divide by being one substance that possesses qualities of both, and blurs the lines between them. By positing the concept of flesh, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates why a division between subject and object is not only unnecessary but also unfeasible and impractical; the traditional subject-object demarcation dissolves when we realize the nature of flesh.

## V. Conceptions of Embodiment in *Beloved*

In this section, I will examine *Beloved* in conjunction with Merleau-Ponty's notions of embodiment, creativity, and flesh. I will compare the slaveowners' notion of embodiment, which they impose upon their slaves and which is deeply entrenched in the subject-object divide, with the conception of embodiment offered by the ex-slaves who attempt to reclaim their flesh and overcome the slave-master mentality, to illustrate the importance of Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh.

The slaveowners polarize humanity. They view the slaves as objects, and themselves as disembodied subjects. The slaveowners' attitude is summed up by Baby Suggs, an ex-slave who serves as a mother figure and spiritual guide to the black community in Cincinnati. She describes this attitude to her fellow freed slaves, stating: "[The slaveowners] don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick them out. . . . What you say, they do not hear. . . . And all your inside parts they'd just as soon slop for hogs" (Morrison 88). The slavemasters treat the slaves' bodies as meaningless objects that can be exploited in any way—even used as animal food. It is also significant that Baby Suggs mentions the slavemasters pulling out the slaves' eyes. The slaveowners don't care if the slaves' senses are cut off from the rest of the world; the owners perceive the slaves as objects—merely seeable and touchable; to the owners, the slaves' sensory capacities to see and touch are useless—and even dangerous, as those are 'subject' qualities. Additionally, the slaveowners cut themselves off from the world by rendering themselves deaf to the slaves. The slaveowners try not to recognize any 'subject' qualities the slaves possess, but in doing so, the masters degrade their own sensory capacities as well.

Morrison demonstrates that the slaveowners cannot divorce themselves from their thinghood—what they would call their 'objective' qualities—and still exist and create effectively. As Merleau-Ponty points out, it is not possible to see or touch the world unless we recognize ourselves as seeable and touchable. Thus, "he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he *is of it*, unless. . . he is one of the visibles, capable, by a single reversal, of seeing them—he who is one of them" (VI 135). Our flesh, which gives us the ability to experience the world with

our senses, also allows us to be experienced.

On the other hand, the freed slaves reclaim their humanity and agency by recognizing their bodies as flesh. Baby Suggs encourages her fellow free slaves to think of their bodies as of flesh when she brings a group of ex-slaves into the Clearing, a beautiful spot in nature, and proclaims: “We flesh, flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. . . Love your hands! . . . Raise them high up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face” (Morrison 88). Baby Suggs encourages the slaves to be neither subjects nor objects, but flesh that both touches and is touched—flesh that is Touchability sometimes wandering and sometimes reassembled. This is especially prevalent when she instructs the slaves to kiss their hands, pat their hands together, and touch their face with their hands. By touching themselves with their hands, they experience their flesh fully, as being touching and touchable.

Furthermore, in touching each other, they are reminded of the fleshiness of the world. Touching others reminds them that they not only have the ability to see, but to be seen by *another*, touched by *another*, and fully experience the chiasm of their flesh in a way that mutually informs their conception of their own selves and of their world. They recognize they are visible and touchable by right. Additionally, in their being flesh, they are stitched into the fabric of the world; thus, without perceiving and understanding the world as of flesh, the slaves cannot fully understand their own selves as flesh. And through touching others, they realize that the world itself is not populated with asunder bodies and minds, masters and slaves, but is one flesh.

Baby Suggs’ attitude breaks the cycle of subject-object division. She doesn’t attempt to flip the roles and put the slaves in the “higher” position—move them from objects to disembodied subjects—but, like Merleau-Ponty, she genuinely unravels the division at its core by positing the notion of flesh.

In her article “‘We Flesh’: Re-membling the Body *Beloved*,” Diane Enns explains that Baby Suggs’ use of syntax in this paragraph reveals that the linguistic structure deepens her conception of flesh as a blurring of the boundaries between subject and object. Enns explains that

The ‘we flesh,’ with which Baby Suggs opens her speech,

contains no copula, no verb to join the subject and object... There is no place where the 'we' begins and the 'flesh' starts. It is the communal 'we,' that laughs and weeps and dances, a 'we' inseparable from flesh... With out the copula, there are no clear categories of subject and object, the 'we' and the 'flesh' occupy shifting positions that disrupt linguistic conventions. (Enns 272)

Through syntax, Morrison suggests that the fleshy bodies of the freed slaves are their selves. Through their bodies, they become neither object nor subject, active nor passive, but a blurred intertwining of sensing and sensibility which they live in and through.

## VI. Two Conceptions of Creation in *Beloved*

It's not easy for the ex-slaves to reclaim their bodies and overcome the subject-object divide, however. The ex-slaves are often trapped in "spoken language," unable to genuinely create. This section illustrates explicitly how the imposition of the subject-object divide disrupts the enslaved person's body schema and renders inert his or her ability to create.

Sethe, *Beloved's* main character, an ex-slave who killed her baby daughter when a slavemaster came to take her, is plagued by "rememories." These "rememories" disrupt Sethe's body schema by trapping her in the past; even though she has achieved her freedom, "rememories" of being a slave constantly seep into her present and braid themselves into the fabric of her world. They render Sethe's creativity sterile. She cannot change the memories; she can only recapitulate what happened. The "rememories" also paralyze her in the present moment. Caught up in the past, she can't effectively act during the present. She loses her ability to differentiate between her perceptions of the present world and past world, and thus she loses control over her body. She does not engage in the speaking word, in the active creation of new meaning, but she deals with the spoken word alone.

Sethe's "rememories" sharply contrast with the genuinely creative memory-stories that Denver and Beloved, Sethe's daughters, tell

each other. These memory-stories reopen the past and bring to life entire worlds through speaking language. Specifically this occurs when Denver and Beloved imagine their mother.

Denver's creative memory-story emphasizes the importance of embodiment—in flesh—to the creative process. Beloved watches Denver tell the story, reminding Denver that she is a seeable, sensible being. "Now, watching Beloved's alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions... Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it" (Morrison 78). Beloved watches Denver, reminding Denver that the flesh of the world allows Denver to both speak and be heard, to see and be seen, to experience and be experienced. As Beloved watches Denver, Denver can see her own story. Only by recognizing her embodiment—as a thing that can be seen—can Denver fully realize her abilities to see and create. This memory-story is different from all the other "rememories" in the novel since it is told in the present tense; it is comprised of speaking speech and is not just a recapitulation. It creates rather than copies. Ultimately, Morrison's and Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body as an instrumental component of the creative process provides a counterargument to Plato's conception of creation, as a reproduction of a *logos* or Form.

## VII. The Musical Idea and How Morrison and Merleau-Ponty Counter Plato

This speaking speech employed by Denver and Beloved is analogous to Merleau-Ponty's "musical idea." The musical idea, the invisible component of music, depends on the music's material components—the notes—to exist. According to Merleau-Ponty, the musical idea, like the literary idea and speaking speech, all exist *because of*—not in spite of—their incarnations. Thus,

These truths are not only hidden like a physical reality which we have not been able to discover... Here, on the contrary, there is no vision without the screen: the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility; it is then that they would

be inaccessible to us... They could not be given to us *as ideas* except in their carnal expression. (VI 150)

The musical idea upholds that the universe's invisible truth and beauty are revealed only through their material manifestations. Unlike Plato, who sees the material world as a hindrance for experiencing Beauty, Merleau-Ponty suggests that true beauty is not only found in the material world but *requires* the material world to exist. The musical idea also provides a counterpoint to Plato's conception of creativity in the *Timaeus*. Despite the major similarities between the *khôra* and the musical idea, Jessica Wiskus illustrates the major difference:

[For Merleau-Ponty,] the very foundation of our 'world' is continually formed not through resemblance to an invisible absolute, but through contact with the sensible realm. In this way, the musical idea departs from the structures of being and temporality explored in the *Timaeus*... The musical idea demonstrates that the world was not formed as a definitive event of the past; the world is being formed because the past itself remains incomplete, unfinished, and contingent. Thus we are never placed at the end of creation; we are ever placed at the opening. (Wiskus 131)

The theory of creativity posited in *Timaeus*—a Form passing through the *khôra* and descending to the material world—paralyzes creation; creation becomes an endless cycle of imperfect reproduction. We are imprisoned by the past, which has already created everything, and plagued to relive it over and over again, as Sethe relives her “rememories.” Conversely, the musical idea occurs in the present; it allows us to open time and genuinely change the world by birthing something unique, which did not exist before its incarnation. This conception of creation is analogous to the memory-story Denver tells.

Unlike Sethe's “rememories,” which are stale and rely on spoken speech, Beloved and Denver's creativity is not imprisoned by the past—it is not a representation of an unchanging, stagnant idea. Ultimately, Denver and Beloved place themselves at the opening of creation; their recognition of their fleshy embodiment enables them to open time and engage in a genuinely creative act. Freed from the trappings of the past, Beloved

and Denver genuinely create. They cease to copy. Furthermore, the story their speaking speech reveals does not exist before they tell it; it *depends on* the words to call it into existence, as the musical idea does. Without the words, the story ceases to exist. Through their fleshy bodies, Denver and Beloved insert themselves into the present moment and, through it, incarnate a new idea; they authentically create.

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# Using Phenomenology to Transverse Prejudice

*Caroline Earnest*

In television shows when tensions arise between people of different backgrounds, cultures, or beliefs, it is the job of the rational friend in the sitcom trope to suggest ‘walking a mile in the other person’s shoes’. This cliché is supposed to bring both parties to a deeper understanding of the other’s experience to resolve their conflict through a mutual understanding of that person’s experience. This conflict resolution method can accomplish more than a happy ending, however. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty advocates for this kind of understanding through his theory of embodiment. Central to this theory is the idea that a ‘normal’ experience cannot be deduced by adding and subtracting from one’s own experience, but rather must be understood in the context of an individual’s first person experience. When applied to areas of social or political tension, especially the transgendered experience, this construct of embodiment can resolve misunderstandings of other’s experiences to revise discussion and come to a deeper understanding of others; for example, understanding trans embodiment can overcome the limited medical terms that stigmatize their experience and instead validate their identity.

Several contemporary problems faced today come from a fundamental misunderstanding of other’s experiences. For example, issues regarding sexism reflect individuals who do not understand what differences in gender feel like. A man catcalling a woman does not come from the same world as the woman, so he likely does not understand feeling objectified, threatened, or disrespected, and thus insists his words are a compliment. Although catcalling is a localized example, the general misunderstanding creates a disequilibrium of the body with its milieu, as well as tensions between men and women on much larger scales. Additionally, because one cannot understand the other, it creates a lack of sympathy towards that group. Misunderstanding also creates problems when one perspective overrules other perspectives, invading our ethos until it becomes

considered the 'normal' experience, discrediting other modes of being. In situations involving the 'other', one who's experience and perspective is different than one's own, it is often only understood as it relates to the normal, rather than as its own entity. Feminist Judith Butler writes about the conception of the other as it relates to Merleau-Ponty in *Senses of the Subject*: "If Merleau-Ponty 'is' the other, without the other being reducible to him, then he meets the other not in an encounter with the outside, but with a discovery of his own internal possibility" (168). Butler expresses how the concept of the other cannot be reached through an outside, third person perspective, but an internal reflection on the differences in experiences the other has.

When coming to an understanding of other's experiences, criticisms concerning moral relativism arise. While it might seem that placing such a large emphasis on individual experiences leads down a slippery slope, phenomenology does not seek absolute truths that are to be upheld as moral laws. It is not focused on absolutes, but simply rather overcoming the subject/object divide by which we define our world to give us new perspective. Another criticism the practice of phenomenology lends itself to is one from critical political theorists, who fear it ignores socio-political structures and risks losing these structures all together. However, an essential part of phenomenology is to consider those very structures as they inform our milieu, not to ignore them all together, presenting a more structured and complex analysis. Phenomenology seeks to trust first person experience as a valid account, without making it an absolute or isolated medium.

Fundamentally, phenomenology seeks to bracket preconceived thoughts, opinions, and experiences, and approach phenomena themselves instead of from a removed, third person objective view. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in particular brings us to an understanding of the other through his understanding of embodiment. By doing so, it offers solutions to contemporary problems rooted in misunderstanding by bringing individuals to a common, shared understanding. Looking at the felt, lived experiences of the other, we can come to a more fundamental understanding of that person, bringing us closer to acknowledgment and acceptance of those marginalized by being other.

Merleau-Ponty's conception of embodiment is especially relevant for those who identify as transgendered because they relate to their bodies differently than they are perceived. As transgendered celebrities such as Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner move into the limelight, the trans identity is more often being called into question. Debates focused on transexuality stem from a lack of understanding of the issue due to a fundamental misapprehension of the relationship between the mind, body, and identity. This misunderstanding permeates the medical community, creating a polarized view of transgendered individuals and aligning their experience with a medical disorder. Although gender identity disorder, classified as a medical disorder, is a formal diagnosis for individuals who do not associate with their biological genders, this classification is not widely supported in the trans community because it pathologizes the trans experience. The classification of gender dysphoria as a mental disorder is more widely accepted because it only describes the feelings of an individual dissatisfied with their gender identity instead of the identity itself.

Dr. Paul McHugh holds the view of the entirety of the transgender identity as a mental disorder, rather than the discomfort it causes. A distinguished psychiatrist from Johns Hopkins, one of the first hospitals in the U.S. to provide gender reassignment surgery, McHugh claims that transexuality is a mental disorder that is being mistreated by surgery, rather than viewing it as different embodied experience. In his article "Psychiatric Misadventures," McHugh argues:

We have to learn how to manage this condition as a mental disorder when we fail to prevent it. If it depends on child rearing, then let's learn about its inner dynamics so that parents can be taught to guide their children properly. If it is an aspect of confusion tied to homosexuality, we need to understand its nature and exactly how to manage it as a manifestation of serious mental disorder among homosexual individuals. But instead of attempting to learn enough to accomplish these worthy goals, psychiatrists collaborated in an exercise of folly with distressed people during a time when "do your own thing" had something akin to the force of a command. As physicians, psychiatrists, when they give in to this, abandon the role of protecting patients from their symptoms and

become little more than technicians working on behalf of a cultural force (III).

McHugh's objective medical opinion of transexuality as a mental disorder that is preventable or treated by means other than surgery fails to consider the dysphoric experience of a transgendered person. He discredits the physicality of the body and misconstrues validating individual experience as a cultural movement to 'do your own thing'. McHugh views transexuality as a departure from what he perceives as normal that can be rectified to realign with his social norms.

In a later article written for the *Wall Street Journal*, McHugh furthers his claims about transexuality by calling it a disorder of 'assumption': "With the transgendered, the disordered assumption is that the individual differs from what seems given in nature—namely one's maleness or femaleness" (3). McHugh mistakenly attributes the 'disease' to a disconnection between the individual's mind and body rather than an established gender that is felt in both mind and body. This view, stemming from his medicalization of the identity, is completely detached from what the individuals experience themselves.

In order to understand the trans experience, one must first understand the concept of embodiment. To view the mind and body as separate entities is to adopt an understanding fundamentally different from our authentic experience. We experience our mind and body operating as one rather than as physical and nonphysical components, and thus this is the primary way we interact with the world. It is a vital feature of our lived experience that we operate in front of a changing background that we can adapt and respond to. Our actions are not predetermined or based on a certain stimuli, and each input does not necessarily correspond to an output. There is a fluidity and spontaneity to nature that joins our mind and bodies as a single entity, enabling it to function in the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, there is a unique middle ground between physiology and psychology that informs the way the two interact. He describes this middle ground as the 'body schema': "If my body can ultimately be a "form," and if there can be, in front of it, privileged figures against indifferent backgrounds [...] the "body schema" is, in the end, a manner of expressing that my body is in and toward the world" (103). Our body schema is a lived

projection of ourselves in a spatiotemporal setting, the unwitting interrelation between ourselves and our world. Our bodies cannot be understood as physicality and matter with added properties from the mind, tangible and intangible elements working in tandem, imprinting elements onto one another as part of a continuous flow.

Merleau-Ponty explains how physiology and psychology must converge in the body schema through the phenomena of phantom limb syndrome. Patients suffering from phantom limb syndrome experience sensations in parts of the body they have lost. Physiology cannot explain the phantom limb because it is not physical. Psychology describes the trauma as a memory because the patient is accustomed to having a limb; however, it cannot account for the sensory experiences of the patient. Phantom limbs cannot be attributed solely to internal or external causes because we are directed towards a world. Our reflexes and habits, determined by our inner facilities, interact fluidly and dynamically with our physical, cultural, and historical backgrounds, allowing us to simultaneously create and be in a world (103). They allow us to preform tasks with ease because our bodies are natural objects that are comported to the various backgrounds we experience and grow in. The backgrounds are infused in us, shaping the way we move, think, and act. The overlapping strata that shape us cannot be overlooked and treated as merely psychological consequences, but rather incorporated into our treatment of one's experience as a whole.

The case of the phantom limb, which highlights the importance of our body schema, can also carry over to the transgender experience. Trans individuals such as Lauren Hennessy, a trans individual who was born a female but identifies as a male, experiences phantom limb syndrome with his genitalia: "I always knew my penis was going to grow in. I have phantom limb syndrome, that's part of it. I always had this feeling, I felt my cock and balls my whole life" (Fischer and Hutchinson). This feeling is not uncommon among biological women who identify as male, because the male genitalia are part of their body schema. For trans individuals, these body parts are an irreducible aspect of their experience because they represent the way in which their felt identities and bodies imprint upon each other.

Dr. Ramachandran, a neurologist and expert in the field of phantom limb syndrome, has studied the concept of phantom genitalia in trans

individuals. As Sandra Blakeslee reports in her article “Gender Identity and Phantom Genitalia,” Ramachandran found that only 30 percent of biological men who transitioned to females experienced the phantom sensations, while nearly 60 percent of biological men who had the same surgery for reasons other than transitioning felt them. Among biological women who had a mastectomy for non-transitional purposes, more than half experienced phantom limb sensations, while only three percent of transitioning women did. Finally, among biological females transitioning to men, a reported 62 percent claimed to feel phantom genitalia prior to their surgery. Interestingly enough, two participants in the study felt the phantom limb after starting hormone treatment. With this finding, Ramachandran directly addressed the common notion among psychologists that phantom symptoms are driven by emotions: “If the phantom is a result of wishful thinking, why would a hormone be required to trigger it” he asks (1). Both Ramachandran and Merleau-Ponty would agree that such phenomena cannot be attributed to factors solely from the mind, but that these phenomena rather suggest that creating a separation of the mind and body fails because they operate as a whole.

Ramachandran credits his findings to what he calls an ‘intact body image’: “This suggests that an intact body image—the maps of the body laid down in the brain before and after birth—can develop without actual limbs” (1). The ‘body image’ theory presented is similar to Merleau-Ponty’s body schema. The a priori, pre-representational projection of our body onto our body suggests the intertwining of the body and mind. Although Ramachandran’s account errs more on the neurological spectrum, he acknowledges the complexities of embodiment: the findings imply that transsexuality should not be regarded as abnormal, Ramachandran says. No rigid barriers exist between the sexes. Rather, “sexual identity exists along a biological continuum that involves an innate body plan and life experience” (2). Ramachandran’s findings offer support for Merleau-Ponty’s claims and provide insight as to why the conception of lived embodiment is so important. In order to explain phenomena such as phantom limb syndrome, we must expand our understanding of the body through unique experience. Because this broader understanding can lead to new scientific findings, it suggests that it might allow us to explore and explain new realms of the

human psyche that were before indecipherable to us. Additionally, it suggests that we are unable to separate ourselves from the cultural, linguistic, or biological backgrounds infused within our body schema, preventing us from identifying any universal normal experience. Therefore, experiences cannot be looked at through a normative lens, and an individual's embodiment cannot be understood as it diverts from the normal, but rather must be treated as its own unique entity.

Ramachandran's findings concerning phantom limbs also further highlight the ways in which both understanding of and ultimately acceptance of the transgender experience are limited by its medicalization. Among those who consider transexuality a mental disorder, such as Dr. McHugh, there is often resistance to accept gender reassignment surgery as a 'cure'. McHugh argues that gender reassignment surgery should be discontinued because he considers it an ineffective treatment method. A long-term study that followed individuals after transitioning, conducted in 2011, found that suicide rates among transgendered populations were nearly twenty times higher than the 'normal' population. McHugh is unable, however, to determine a cause for such high mortality rates: "This disturbing result has as yet no explanation but probably reflects the growing sense of isolation reported by the aging transgendered after surgery. The high suicide rate certainly challenges the surgery prescription" (III). McHugh's estimation that suicide rates are linked with the isolation of the individuals appears to undermine his argument. The study seems incomplete because it does not account for social, political, or cultural factors, such as isolation, that compose our milieu and contribute to our body schema. The study also only compares transgendered populations to 'normal' populations who have a completely different bodily experience.

A more recent study from BMC Public Health preformed a similar study on the factors associated with suicide in transitioned individuals. Although a high number of individuals considered suicide, the study found that individuals were 57 percent less likely to be suicidal if they had parental support, 66 percent less likely if they didn't experience transphobia, and 44 percent less likely if they had legal documentation that accorded with their gender. Additionally, those who underwent hormone treatment were half as likely to be suicidal, and for those who completed surgery, the

risk decreased by 44 percent compared to those who had not transitioned (Bauer 2). While it is difficult to isolate individual social factors, these numbers indicate that McHugh's suggestion was correct; trans individuals are at a higher risk of suicide because of the feelings one might experience after transitioning.

This study suggests that a new approach should be sought in treating trans individuals. Only considering the numbers of individuals committing suicide without reflecting on social, political, and cultural factors that contribute to those numbers fails to even acknowledge the trans experience. McHugh's conclusion that surgery should be discontinued is not a valid solution because individuals would still identify as trans and would likely encounter similar difficulties that contribute to suicide. Validation and acceptance lower the risk of suicide, further emphasizing the importance of understanding the trans experience. Allowing individuals to express their identities instead of trying to 'normalize' them can bring about greater positive results. The stigma that their embodiment is abnormal should be removed, and instead be accepted as a different experience altogether.

Validation of the trans experience is not only beneficial for lowering suicide rates, but also plays an integral role in expanding our understanding of embodiment. In the movement to reconsider normalized embodiment, giving trans individuals a voice and allowing them to express their identities as they feel is appropriate creates dialogue for alternative forms of embodiment so that there isn't a prevailing 'normal' voice. Author N. Baldino critiques the lack of voice in her article "Trans Phenomenology: A Merleau-Pontian Reclamation of the Trans Narrative." Baldino criticizes feminist theorist Bernice Hausman, who argues that trans individuals seeking surgery who describe themselves within the gender binary are limited by medical terminology to remain within gender stereotypes. Hausman fails to consider the trans experience and interprets the desire to transition as a desire to remain within a gender binary instead of accepting their own, given bodies. However, Baldino argues that such a reading denies trans individuals their own voice by speaking for the individuals as a cis-gendered woman.

This denial of narrative can have serious effects for individuals who

express embodiment differently. To describe their experience for them, as seen through a normalizing lens, creates a disconnection within their identity and personal narrative. Angel Buck, a transgender pornographer, expressed feeling this type of disconnection. Growing up, Buck, a biological female, was perceived and treated like a typical tomboy. In an interview with *OP Magazine*, Buck describes when his parents stopped identifying him as he saw himself: “The dreaded puberty is what started to cause all the problems for me and for my parents [...] he [Buck’s father] had to stop treating me like a boy; that I was a girl and that it was inappropriate. It was as if they never wanted to acknowledge that I was a boy anymore. It was so hurtful for me” (Westgate). Buck’s battle for identity had just begun and he struggled to express his desire to transition because there were no narratives or stories he could relate to. The turning point for Buck was the viewing of a movie that featured a transgendered woman: “To this day I still think about how no one had ever even said anything to me about this. My therapist at the time just kept calling me a “male identified female” when I would tell her I felt like a man” (Westgate). Buck’s therapist made the same mistake that Baldino claims Hausman makes. By denying individuals their own agency in telling their stories and redefining them according to our standards, we create an identity for them that they cannot relate to because it does not accurately describe their experience. Because their embodiment is different than the norm, it should not be subjected to normalized definitions, but rather understood as a normal experience for that individual.

In their argument, Baldino applies Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology to the trans experience to create a platform for such validation. Merleau-Ponty uses the anecdote of the heartbroken girl to demonstrate the sexual body schema. In this case, a girl no longer allowed to be with her lover loses her ability to speak, not to be mistaken with a refusal to speak. Merleau-Ponty attributes the loss of language to the drastic alteration to her bodily schema, as she must project a new relation onto the world where things are severed. The body schema, a primal ground of expression of sexuality and language, unlike the traditional model, does not associate abstract ideas connected to things in the world. Rather, concepts and things in the world are all intertwined, emerging from the body as ex-

pression. The girl, as a sexed being, has a sexual schema that is both in the world and in the girl. The girl's body schema that allows for an exchange between herself and her world has been interrupted. Cut off from the interrelated, communicative, sexual experience, she becomes closed off to parts of her existence in the world. Her sexuality, fundamental to body schema, affects the way she is in and of the world.

Baldino then applies the reflection of sexuality in and of existence to the reflection of gender. Gender is an integral part of our body schema in the same way sexuality is, and if it is not lived through us in the same way, it can affect us: "the loss of the girl's sexuality is her loss of voice, and the repression of one's gender, or the reduction of it, implicates the loss of one's identity, or ability to describe it" (167). Gender, fundamental to the body schema, determines the ways in which we identify ourselves. It is a separate entity than sexuality, as it does not dictate attraction or preferences; it is a category that influences our identity by the various backgrounds that influence us. Phenomenology allows us to view gender as a lived in, reciprocal identity rather than a biological construct. Through this view of embodiment, we can then see the deleterious ramifications when one is not allowed to express their gender as they live it, further underscoring the necessity to understand and allow trans individual's experiences.

Phenomenology can be used to overcome misunderstandings that permeate the social and cultural world we share. Merleau-Ponty's conception of embodiment can be applied to areas of tension between various parties by giving each an understanding of the other's experience. One relevant topic this can be applied to is issues concerning transgender individuals. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment can surmount the regressive medicalization of the trans identity that stigmatizes instead of understands individuals. Moreover, it can give those individuals a voice to share their experience to create new discourse in a normalizing society. Ultimately, in a society that relates to others by modifying a totalizing normative experience, phenomenology serves as a useful tool to help us reconsider the divide we've created between the mind and body. By overcoming this chasm, a new understanding of the way we live and operate within the world and our bodies arises that allows us to explore new areas without our objective perspective. We can then credit, validate, and under-

stand other's experiences as they experience themselves. This understanding touches on something uniquely human that we share, so it can be used to reduce discrimination and prejudice we might otherwise carry with us.

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# **Sexual Desire and Possession: A Philosophical Analysis**

*Juliana Vossenber*

## **I. Introduction**

This paper owes its inspiration in large part to contemporary philosopher Roger Scruton, who embarks on a philosophy of sex in his work, *Sexual Desire*. Scruton contends that sexual arousal “fills the body with a pervasive ‘I,’ and transforms it into something strange, precious, and possessible.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Scruton leaves the notion of “possessible” unanalyzed. In this paper, I undertake a philosophical analysis of this key concept. I examine and critique Jean-Paul Sartre’s view on the nature of possession and develop my own account as a counter-point to Sartre’s.

In section II, I briefly describe the background of the question of possession, namely, how in the course of sexual desire, sexual arousal provides a way to access the other. Then, I juxtapose two theories of possession: the first, Sartre’s understanding that “possession” literally refers to domination and consumption of the sexual object; the second, my understanding that “possession” metaphorically refers to a state of empathy between lovers. In section V, I employ two illustrations to explore the relationship dynamics stemming from these two theories of possession. Lastly, in section VI, I present a Japanese behavioral pattern that, I contend, clearly exhibits metaphorical possession. I will ultimately argue that only a metaphorical understanding of possession can achieve intimacy and realize the goal of sexual desire.

## **II. Background: The Aim of Sexual Desire**

What, then, is the goal of sexual desire? What do we want from and for each other in sexual intercourse? Answers to this question vary, from pleasure, to intimacy, to love, to children. Roger Scruton analyzes the

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London: Continuum Books, 2006), 30

aim of sexual desire as “union with the other.”<sup>2</sup> This definition gives rise to a certain paradox within the philosophy of sexual desire, which Jean-Paul Sartre most clearly defines as a conflict between the subjectivity and objectivity of the desired other. In the Sartrean paradox, I am sexually interested in another as a *subject*, yet this same sexual interest urges me to attempt to capture him as an *object* in the sexual act. In Sartre’s words, the lover desires “to be loved by a freedom [a subject] but demands that this freedom as freedom should no longer be free [should become an object].”<sup>3</sup> If the other becomes my object, he ceases to be the subject in which I am interested.<sup>4</sup> Because of this, genuine union is impossible according to Sartre.

Scruton, however, thinks that achieving union is not a sheer impossibility. He argues that the concept of sexual union, much like the metaphysical “I,” the locus of subjectivity, is a construct, one inspired by our particular intentional understanding of sexual desire. We use the term “union” not in its literal sense but rather as a figurative way to talk about an expanded, shared awareness of our embodied conditions. What we really want in sexual desire is “striving to be present in [the] body and striving also to view [one’s] own striving from a point of view outside it.”<sup>5</sup> Actually seeing oneself from a lover’s perspective is not literally possible, but it is “only a failure of imagination” that leads us to assume that we must take the other’s perspective from him in order to see ourselves through his eyes.<sup>6</sup> Literal union with another through sex is impossible then, but union meant metaphorically as a shared perspective is possible, and thus, according to Scruton, the proper aim of sexual desire.

We approach union firstly through sexual arousal. Scruton, drawing on Sartre, argues that the involuntary responses of the body in sexual arousal incarnate the person—they make him present in his body. Blushes or smiles or looks of desire reveal the intentional states of their portray-ers; in seeing them, we see what the responses are “about,” what they are directed towards. Similarly, the reactions of the body and its sexual organs

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<sup>2</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 96.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 367, bracketed text mine.

<sup>4</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 94.

<sup>5</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 127.

<sup>6</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 127.

in arousal reveals the “unity between body and person.”<sup>7</sup> In arousal, the other’s “I” comes to life in his flesh, and in the act of touching his body one touches something deeper—the person himself. Sexual excitement enables both to see each other as they really are, as their bodies reveal their intentionality: their responses are about the arousing presence of the other. It is in the transformative process of arousal that Scruton claims each person’s “I” is rendered possessible.

### III. Sexual Desire and Possession: A Sartrean Analysis

Sartre misunderstands possession when, based on his theory of incarnation, he describes lovers literally possessing each other as a step to union. In describing the “true meaning of the word possession,” Sartre states, “I want to possess the Other’s body, but I want to possess it in so far as it is itself a ‘possessed,’ that is, in so far as the other’s consciousness is identified with his body.”<sup>8</sup> The Sartrean lover seeks total mind-body identity with the other through possession, but as defined, this is impossible. Sartre states this strongly: “[P]ossession is an enterprise which death always renders still unachieved.”<sup>9</sup> He therefore insists that possession is “symbolic and ideal”—“ideal” because it is a mental concept, an ideation, with no concrete basis in reality, and “symbolic” because it is a mere sign with no real referent.<sup>10</sup> Sartrean possession is an intelligible concept with a non-existent significante.

Because our perpetual distinctness from others frustrates literal possession, Sartre posits that lovers wander down the paths of sadism and masochism to try for union. In masochism, one tries to become the ultimate object for the other in the hopes of erasing one’s subjectivity and achieving union. The masochist thinks, “I shall project causing myself to be absorbed by the other and losing myself in his subjectivity in order to get

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<sup>7</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 394.

<sup>9</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 592-3.

<sup>10</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 592.

rid of my own.”<sup>11</sup> Sadism attempts the reverse: becoming the ultimate subject of the other in hopes of completely consuming him. One tries “to seize and to make use of the Other,” incarnating him by inflicting pain while refusing to be incarnated oneself.<sup>12</sup> In both cases, one person is treated as a thing, because only things can be possessed. The Sartrean attempts to “possess the other in his freedom—and therefore to hold as object that which can exist only as subject.”<sup>13</sup>

This method of approximating union leads to an intolerable view of human sexuality: to attempt to accomplish what I want in sex, I must either treat my lover as a thing in order to possess his perspective, or I must become a thing in order to be possessed. This method actually prevents an understanding of the other person’s perspective. Alone with the other, who is object, the Sartrean is isolated. In pursuing union, the Sartrean ironically alienates himself from the other’s perspective that he wished to capture.

One may object that a certain kind of symmetry and equilibrium exists in the sadomasochistic model that redeems it from the disturbing objectification I have described. For two willing people, it seems possible that sadomasochism is perfectly reciprocal and fulfilling, because each person provides what the other lacks. However, a sadist or a masochist does not provide for the *other* what the other lacks but rather for *himself* what he lacks in himself. The sadist or masochist acts from a sense of his own difficulty in achieving unity; he cannot know his partner’s limitations that he may meet, because, as explained in the next section, he cannot empathize with the other.

#### IV. Sexual Possession as Metaphor

Sartre’s sadomasochistic model is founded on a literal conception of possession aiming for union. There is, however, another way of approaching possession. What if, when we use the term “possession” to describe what we desire from the other, we mean it *metaphorically*? In

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<sup>11</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 377.

<sup>12</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 399.

<sup>13</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 95.

metaphor, we use a “secondary subject or vehicle” to describe, enliven, or comment upon a “primary subject or tenor.”<sup>14</sup> Metaphors are particularly effective when the primary and secondary subject greatly differ, so that the surprising result pushes us to re-imagine the primary subject. Thus the allure and impact of the woman’s description of her lover in the Song of Solomon<sup>15</sup>:

*His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh.*

*His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels.*

*His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires.*

*His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold.*<sup>16</sup>

Apart from poetry and literature, metaphor has a place, too, in philosophy. Note Pythagoras’ notion of imitating numbers, Plato’s idea of participating in the Forms, and Aristotle’s suggestion that God moves the world as the beloved moves the lover. For a theological example, consider the Christian description of the members of the Church, dead or alive, as participating in and imitating the “Body of Christ.” Sartre, perceiving this term literally, might imagine the Body of Christ as the mereological sum of all human beings, the physical and spiritual merging of people across time and space into one fleshly body. Seeing this as absurd, he would label it impossible, with its meaning only in the symbolic and ideal realm.

Sartre’s interpretation would completely miss the point of the term, however. “Body of Christ” was never meant to be understood literally. It is a mystical description of the union of Christians with Christ through common belief and practice. The human body is an apt metaphor for this reality. Its parts—the organs, limbs, fluids, tissues—each have their own functions. Together, they enable the greater purposes of the whole body, purposes that emerge from the distinct parts yet are not

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<sup>14</sup> David Hills, “Metaphor,” in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Song of Solomon 5:13-15 NRSV

<sup>16</sup> Or consider Rumi’s disorienting yet fitting description of the transience of human emotions:

*This being human is a guest house.*

*Every morning, a new arrival.*<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Jelaluddin Rumi, “The Guest House,” trans. Coleman Barks, in *The Essential Rumi* (United States: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 109.

merely sums of their individual functions. The body unified elevates and transforms the roles of each of its parts. For example, the hand by itself can grasp a pen and make marks on a page. The body unified elevates the hand's function thusly: the brain directs the hand to form not random marks but rather meaningful *words*. The eyes perceive these words and convey the activity of the hand to the brain, allowing it to edit them as they are written. The vocal cords may be employed to read these words, allowing the mind to judge not only their sense but also their sound. Thus the body unified accomplishes writing by elevating and transforming the roles of scribbling, seeing, and vocalizing. Neither hand nor eye nor voice could accomplish this process alone.

Likewise, the members of the Body of Christ, the Church, contribute to a greater function that is more than the sum of their individual ones. The members of the Church cannot sanctify themselves. Sinful in nature, their attempts at holiness outside of the Body of Christ are like the hand attempting the art of writing through scribbling. Yet, joined with Christ in his Body, Christians do take part in the process of sanctification. They can do so because the unity of the Church and Christ elevates the nature of its imperfect human components. In the Body of Christ, “[O]ur nature, although inferior to that of the angels, nevertheless through God’s goodness has risen above it.”<sup>17</sup> Unified in the Body, Christians do what they could not before—they fulfill their eschatological destiny of reconciliation with God. The “Body of Christ” can describe this reality only if it is understood metaphorically.

Perhaps “possession” in the context of sexual desire, too, is a metaphorical term to describe something real and achievable. This alternative understanding is inspired by Scruton’s thought on acts of sympathy.<sup>18</sup> However, because these acts reveal more than mere compassion, I believe Scruton’s use of “sympathy” is imprecise. Instead, I offer “empathy” as a more exact term. Empathy refers to the phenomenon whereby: (1) when you feel something, I feel what you feel; and (2) you feel that I feel what you feel.<sup>19</sup> Feeling unfolds in an additive manner, with each exchange

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Pius XII, “*Mystici Corporis Christi*,” Vatican Publishing House, 1943

<sup>18</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 127.

<sup>19</sup> I thank Daniel Haggerty, Ph.D. for helpful discussion here.

bringing a new layer of recognition between two people. By contrast, in compassion, I feel what you feel, but you need not come to realize this and incorporate it into your feeling.

Possession, taken metaphorically, refers to a state of sincere empathy between two people that appears to be dominating only in so far as one person feels for or acts for another. No one person seeks to or does possess the other person, but rather they both simultaneously possess a new mutual point of view. In possession, in a state of empathy, I summon my version of your perspective to discover yours, and you grasp my perspective because it echoes your own; one in a new and enriched feeling, we regard each other more fully.

An act of empathy cannot occur in the rigid sadomasochistic model, since those involved are unable to flip their perspective and assume the other's role while maintaining their own. Sartre's model traps lovers in a cage of indexicality. It reinforces a "here" and a "there" in its separation of subject and object. In the alternative metaphorical model, active and passive roles shift continuously, thereby overcoming the isolating indexicalities. Scruton posits that "the joining of perspectives [is realized in] the 'me seeing you seeing me' of rapt attention, where neither of us can be said to be either doing or suffering what is done."<sup>20</sup> When it no longer becomes clear which one is "doing" and which one is "suffering," lovers blur the delineation between here-now (me) and there-now (you). The result is one new indexical, one new shared here-now. This state of empathy fulfills the goal of sexual desire.

## V. Possession in Contrasting Models of Relationship

Two illustrations help us contrast the literal and metaphorical understandings of possession as a step to fulfilling sexual desire. First, I will describe a master-slave relationship that follows from an attempt at union through literal possession.<sup>21</sup> Second, I will detail an ideal roommate

<sup>20</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> Although this example was not directly influenced by Hegel, his "Lordship and Bondage" passage from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* contains a pertinent description of two people failing to achieve recognition from the other because they have entered into a master-slave relationship.

relationship that describes union via metaphorical possession.

In a master-slave relationship, the master buys his slave and brings him to his house. The slave has no proper space of his own in the house; he has no perspective of his own. Although the master and the slave move in the same areas, they do not share them. The slave is another of the master's many possessions. The house is not a common space between them, since the slave—as “object”—is always in danger of intruding, always taking up space and resources from his owner. Now imagine the master-slave relationship among lovers; this surely is the structure of Sartre's sadomasochism. The dynamic of these lovers stems from their literal understanding of possession. The possession of one, the domination of one, causes and maintains inequality and bars empathy.

Oppose to this example an ideal roommate relationship. The roommates have two separate rooms that are completely theirs; they each have their distinct perspectives. There are true common spaces in other parts of the house. In the kitchen, the foyer, the parlor, both possess the space, but not in the same way they possess their bedrooms. Their possession of common space is tinged with awareness of the other. If a major decision has to be made about the dining room chandelier, both would naturally think, “What should we do about this?” When a roommate makes a decision about the house, he does so partly by imagining what his partner may desire. The roommates approximate a shared perspective far more closely than the slave and master because they concern themselves with imagining what the other would want out of responsibility to the other. Lovers who share their lives like the ideal roommates share their home have understood possession metaphorically. Their awareness of each other has birthed a new, mutual perspective.

Because of their co-dwelling, more responsibility and dependency occurs in the roommate scenario than in the slave scenario. If a dozen eggs break on the floor of the kitchen while the slaveholder is absent, the slave cleans up the mess. He may have a multitude of reasons for doing so; perhaps he likes cleaning or fears punishment. However, he is decidedly not invested in the project because of the responsibilities of ownership. The master would be invested because of a feeling of responsibility to the house he owns, but the slave cannot say the same. Now suppose the same culinary

catastrophe occurs at the roommates' house, while one roommate is away. The remaining roommate may be invested in the project of cleaning for a similar reason as the slave, but added to that is a feeling of responsibility *to the house itself*, in which he dwells and is at home, and a feeling of responsibility *to the other roommate*, who also shares the space. The roommate is much more committed to his friend and to the space they share than the slave is to the house and to his owner. Analogously, the lovers who share a perspective as ideal roommates share a home are much more devoted to each other and to their relationship than the slavish lovers. Curiously, it seems that the roommates are more profoundly bound compared to the slave.

When one roommate acts without the other's expressed consent, it may appear that he has fallen into thinking that he alone possesses the common space and need not consult his friend. However, his acting without prompt may itself be a form of care for the other. This dynamic is most clear when one roommate acts in an inconsiderate way, say by leaving the broom closet messy, and the other acts kindly in response, by cleaning the closet. One roommate's acting without care is not a presumption of ownership of the house, but rather it is a form of trust in the other person, and perhaps, a call for care. The other roommate's acting to clean is also not a presumption of ownership but a form of care in response to his friend's disregard. In both cases, the roommate's actions falsely appear to stem from a mindset that each alone possesses the house. In reality, the actions are intricately connected to the belief that they *both* possess the house. Lovers who espouse the mentality of the ideal roommates understand that they mutually possess a shared life.

## **VI. Japanese *Amae*: Empathetic Behavior that Cultivates Intimacy**

The behavioral pattern of one person acting without care for the sake of getting care, and one caring in response to carelessness, is a framework for acts of empathy. It is decidedly opposed to the slave-master mentality of Sartrean possession ideology, in which each man must decide

for himself what he wants, and no other can act for or upon him to secure his desires. When Scruton discusses acts of empathy, he says that “all human intimacy requires an act of sympathy, an ‘as if’, which projects the participant into the mental landscape of his friend. It is difficult to describe such an act, but that should not cause us to dismiss it as paradoxical.”<sup>22</sup>

Japanese culture includes a behavioral pattern known as *amae* that constitutes a striking example of what Scruton struggles to describe. In *The Anatomy of Dependence*, psychologist Takeo Doi writes about this phenomenon and describes *amae* as passive love—a desire to be taken care of and to care for, especially as a mother indulges a child. A patient of Doi’s describes his desire for *amae* thus: “I want to depend. . . I’ve been wishing I had someone to act as mother to me. Someone I could confide anything to, someone who’d take decisions out of my hands.”<sup>23</sup> *Amae* involves an all-consuming care for another person, to the extent that it seems as though one person “possesses” the other. However, *amae* is different from the way a slaveholder possesses a slave. The slaveholder’s possession is motivated by his selfish desire to have things done his way by another; the Japanese’s possession, on the other hand, is motivated by his desire to do things for another the way he imagines the other would like. In addition, unlike the master–slave relationship, *amae* is meant to be reciprocal, and Doi notes that problems arise when there is a lack of “mutual recognition of each other’s need for indulgence.”<sup>24</sup>

*Amae* certainly *appears* to be possession. The mother who takes care of every little thing for her child seems to have taken his freedom; the lover who indulges every desire of his beloved seems to have lost his own freedom. However much *amae* resembles possession, Doi explains that it is not. It is an active empathy that has an important role: to overcome separation. “[T]he *amae* mentality could be defined as the attempt to deny the fact of separation that is such an inseparable part of human existence and to obliterate the pain of separation.”<sup>25</sup> *Amae* “plays an indispensable role in a healthy spiritual life” because it enables one to not be depressed by the

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<sup>22</sup> Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 127.

<sup>23</sup> Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, trans. John Bester (New York: Kodansha USA, 2014), 57

<sup>24</sup> Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, 75.

reality of separateness between persons.<sup>26</sup> It allows one to reach “union,” metaphorically. Lovers who pursue a form of *amae* exist in Scruton’s empathetic state because, feeling a reciprocal dependence, they act for each other as they would act for themselves.

Of course, *amae* is not restricted to Japanese culture. In many forms of life, lovers share so much that for one to wash the other’s unclean laundry and for one to buy all the groceries for the other are common occurrences. The indulgence of habits, the pampering, the deciding for, are patterns of love that occur in many intimate relationships in many cultures. Sadly, as Doi notes, Western culture’s spirit of self-reliance often shuts down *amae*. He points to the proverb “The Lord helps those who help themselves” as an example of a Western “warning against reliance on god or man,” a piece of wisdom that is uncommon if not absent from Japan’s cultural history.<sup>27</sup>

## VII. Conclusion

The longing of lovers to possess each other is a complex and obscure, but nevertheless important, aspect of human sexual desire. The more fruitful understanding of possession in sexual desire is that it is metaphorical, not literal. In a shared life, one person may appear to possess the other, but in a good relationship it is a fervent trust and desire for care that motivates such “possessive” actions. Only this metaphorical understanding of possession has the ability to lead to “union”—an all-consuming empathy with the other person. The Sartrean understanding of possession—of literal ownership of body and “I”—leads to objectification of partners; it confounds genuine union, because the actual act of possessing another person, of taking his perspective, would depersonalize him and isolate the other. The *amae* sentiment instead approaches union through profound acts of empathy—indulgence of and care for the other as if the other were oneself.

In Scruton’s view, sexual desire is replete with metaphors. Desire’s

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<sup>26</sup> Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, 75.

<sup>27</sup> Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, 87.

partner, arousal, is founded upon the essential metaphysical illusion of the self, and desire's aim—union—is figurative, as literal merging of two “selves” cannot occur. I have proposed adding *possession* to Scruton's analysis as another principal metaphor, one that describes the state of empathy that leads to union. The examples of ideal roommates and *amae* serve as models of possession in lived experience. Authentic shared perspectives are possible only through this type of possession. By contrast, Sartre's conception of possession would make us slaves and masters, incapable of achieving intimacy and holding perspectives in common.

The prevalence of metaphor in the structure of sexual desire reflects our yearning to take particular care with a delicate and precious phenomenon. It is no wonder, though no less wonderful, that we have invested our creativity in thinking about the things that form the basis of human interaction and love. What, then, is the effect of this metaphor in particular? Why do I want my beloved to *be mine*? Why do we vow *to have and to hold*? Describing a true union between lovers as possessive both illuminates and shrouds that union. As a light, the metaphor reveals a crucial aspect of any successful union—a giving up to the other, a surrendering of trust, of time, of care. As a veil, the metaphor conceals its reality, thereby preventing us from overanalyzing it. The word itself helps us to avoid dissecting the material and turning something purposefully mysterious into something sterile.

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# The Many “Signs” of Sign Language

*Krista Ziegler*

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...” (John 1:1). Our world is made intelligible by the word. As humans, we most often communicate our thoughts and beliefs through the use of verbal words. Words are considered signs, defined as that which reveals itself to the senses yet reveals something different to the mind. Nonverbal communication is also a method of conveying what exists in one’s mind, and the use of signs is still employed. Through semiotics, one may study the use of signs and symbols as means of communication.

Language is one particular branch of semiotics, which focuses on how words and speech express the action of our minds and what one wishes to suggest to an audience of listeners. Roger Bacon was an extensionalist philosopher interested in the classification of signs known as *language*. Bacon’s classification of signs includes two major groups, constituted signs and natural signs, which can both be further divided into several subgroups. Because constituted signs signify not on the basis of nature but on the agreement/intention of rational souls, Bacon attributes language to the category of constituted signs. Constituted signs, by his definition, require a rational or sensible soul to will that that sign possess certain significance. Bacon’s taxonomy of signs and classification of language as solely “constituted” proves inadequate when applied to American Sign Language, a language better explained through a complex combination of constituted and natural signs.

Roger Bacon defines a sign as “something that, once presented to a sensory faculty *or an intellect*, designates something to that intellect” (Bacon, 2013, p. 36). The signifier is that which shows itself to the senses, while the signified is that which shows itself to the mind. The signified, accessible to an interpreter, would lack meaning without the act of revelation by the one presenting the signifier, as well as the interpreter to find meaning. Bacon places a heavy emphasis on the interpreter because without a soul, the sign would be meaningless and empty. A sign without an inter-

preter would not have actuality but rather would only exist in potentiality. For example, if I were to shout, “HELP” yet no one heard my cry, that sign of vocal expression would lack significance since no being was present to interpret the signifier. In other words, without a listener, there is no one to hear that sound, making it insignificant.

Bacon divides signs into constituted and natural signs, each possessing multiple subdivisions. Natural signs are considered so not because of the intention of a soul, but simply because of their essence. The first of three subdivisions for natural signs is called “inferential.”

Inferential signs signify based on necessary or probable implication. For example, if a “For Sale” poster that was on a lawn is taken down, one can infer from this sign that the house was sold and is no longer on the market. These types of signs can also be called symptomatic, since one can use symptoms (signs) to discover a meaning.

The second class of natural signs, according to Bacon, can be deemed “iconic,” which signify on account of “conformity and configuration of one thing to another in parts and features...” (Bacon, 2013, p. 39). Icons suggest the signified because they look like or resemble the thing itself. These types of natural signs are often infused within a cultural context. An iconic sign such as a smiley face signifies a happy mood by capturing the similarity of a human smiling.

Causal signs are the third and final type of natural sign, which signifies on the basis of an effect. Causal signs demonstrate a reason why, giving an explanation for the sign. An example of a causal sign would be hoof prints on the ground; the hoof prints indicate a cause, namely a horse.

Constituted signs are established by the soul and require the intention or will of a soul to signify. Bacon describes two kinds of constituted signs: one that requires the deliberation of reason through one’s will, namely “ad placitum” signs, and the other which “arises without the deliberation of reason and without the choice of will” (Bacon, 2013, p. 40), known as an “affective sign.” Affective signs are further divided into two types, namely those that are products of the sensible soul, and interjections, which are products of the rational soul’s instinct prompted by a natural agent upon the sensitive soul. These interjections can include an exclamation of pain, a gasp of disbelief/shock, or a sigh of relief. Conven-

tional signs, including language and dialects, fall under Bacon's understanding of ad placitum signs. As rational souls, humans developed language as an established way of expressing and conveying thoughts and ideas. Language is willfully agreed upon based on the intention of those that create specific words. Through verbal sounds used as signifiers, humans are able to impose the signified within this verbal sound, also called a word. As users of a verbal language, humans conventionally develop rules through which we make associations between sounds/utterances and their meaning. Humans intend to reveal a sign of their will through coherent sounds, a process called speaking (using a formal language). To understand language and words, therefore, humans must contemplate what is going on in the mind of the speaker. To illustrate the constitution of language, if parents were to name a child "Joe," there was nothing about that being that naturally signified the word/vocal sound "Joe." It was decided upon by the name-givers (i.e. the parents) that "Joe" would be the signifier that signified the being. To the interpreter hearing the signifier "Joe," he/she must contemplate what concept was in the mind of the speaker that said the name, particularly the essence of the human being Joe. Human beings through their will/intention use words as signs to convey something they have sensed from the empirical to an understanding in the mind.

Humans can utilize speech to impose a name for a being or non-being (Bacon, 2013, p. 47). Therefore, language clearly falls under the realm of constituted signs according to Bacon, who states, "the signs of dialect are within our power and are at our pleasure. For this reason, as we wish we can make a vocal sound a representation of one thing or another" (Bacon, 2013, p. 52). Up until this point in this discussion, knowledge portrayed and attained through words has focused heavily on verbal/spoken language and signs. All vocal sounds considered speech can signify some meaning, yet how would we abstract meaning and signify using a nonverbal language such as Sign Language?

Sign language is a visual language that transfers thoughts and ideas of the mind through manual communication. American Sign Language (ASL) utilizes the concept of creating a picture in the interpreter's mind by manipulating hand movements, shapes, and facial expressions, as opposed to sounds. American Sign Language is the primary language and source

of communication for the Deaf culture, beginning in the early nineteenth century upon its invention. As a visual language, ASL does not have a written form, yet contains all necessary components of a language including pragmatics, syntax and semantics (Stefko, 2015). The Deaf culture does not necessarily speak at all when communicating; however, many profound signers mouth the words on his/her lips to elucidate what is being conveyed. Verbal words are signs that cause the reality to come to mind. Comparatively, a manual sign in ASL serves the same purpose to enlighten the viewer (as opposed to listener in a verbal language of speech) of the reality the signifier is referring to. For this reason, signs in ASL can be considered the equivalent of verbal words in English or any other language.

American Sign Language is not limited to Bacon's restrictions of language as a constituted sign, and it seems to be an exception to his ruling and organization of signs. To distinguish between philosophical "signs" and the manual "signs" of Sign Language, I will denote the latter with a capital letter ("Signs"). Many Signs in ASL resemble what the word refers to because the manual movement of the hands/arms and position of the body reflect what that thing actually looks like. The Sign for "baby" resembles the actual thing because it is signed by folding the arms in a way one would to hold a baby in his/her arms. The Sign for the word "eat" is performed by lifting the hand to the mouth, just as one would to eat a particular food. Similarly, the Sign for "drink" requires the person to cup his or her hand in the shape one would to hold a drink and lift it to the mouth, mimicking the pouring motion into the mouth.

These signs seem to fall under the category of Bacon's natural signs, rather than constituted, due to their nature of signifying based on essence. The essence of the noun "ball," for example, would imply a round object of varying sizes that can be thrown, held, bounced, etc. The Sign in ASL for "ball" involves making a rounded C-like shape with both hands and forming the shape of a sphere with both hands. This visual representation of the Sign for "ball" nearly matches the form, figure, and shape of a ball itself. The Sign for "ball," therefore, is not constituted, as Bacon would argue for language, but rather is a natural sign that looks like the thing itself and is based on natural similarity.

Many Signs in Sign Language signify the thing they refer to based

on appearance of the Sign matching the actual noun, verb, or adjective as a thing in the world. Several Signs in ASL fall under the various types of natural signs as postulated by Bacon. The Sign for “strong” can be placed under the category of inferential signs. This Sign is physically performed by lifting the arm to the side of the body and making a 90-degree angle between the forearm and upper arm, commonly referred to as “making a muscle.” One can infer from the symptom of a muscle the person must be strong.



Most Signs of American Sign Language are considered iconic, in the sense that they signify on account of configuration of one thing to another. Icons, a subgroup of Bacon’s natural signs, signify because they look like the thing. Similarly, many Signs of ASL resemble the thing they refer to through the shape, placement, and formation of the arms and hands. The Sign for “house” involves simply using two hands to trace the outline of a pentagon in the air, with a triangular roof on top and two parallel vertical walls. This clearly looks like the image in one’s mind for a house.

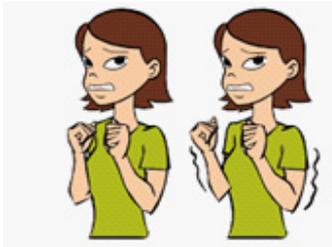


The Sign for “moose” is accomplished by opening both hands with fingers spread apart, palms facing outward, and placing the thumbs on either side of the forehead to resemble the appearance of a moose’s antlers. Furthermore, the verb “to wash hands” is signed in ASL by imitating the motion of rubbing both hands together as one would with soap and water. The Signs for “house,” “moose,” and “washing hands” are all iconic signs since they are relatable to the thing they signify by sharing form and figure.

There is also a term for a collection of Signs in ASL called “classifiers,” defined as a hand-shape that acts as an adjective. Classifiers are solely natural signs because they employ a fully visual representation of the object being signed. To sign a can, bowl, barrel, vase, pot, or anything that is round with depth, one would use the classifier “CC” by putting both hands in the form of a C and moving the C-shaped hands in the shape of whatever is being signed, such as a bowl.



Finally, an example of a Sign in ASL that belongs under the category of causal natural signs is “cold.” “Cold” is signed in ASL by performing the motion one would when shivering, done by bringing closed fists up toward the chest and shaking them. To shiver implies that one is cold; therefore, through the effect of shivering, the interpreter can infer the cause of being cold.



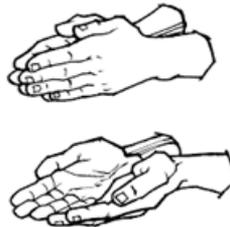
As shown, there are many Signs in ASL that are considered natural signs, but still many are constituted because the soul willed that it signify a certain concept based upon intention and agreement of souls. The alphabet in Sign Language contains a mixture of natural signs that resemble the image of the letter, such as C made by cupping the hand/fingers in the shape of a C, and constituted signs, including many letters (such as R) that don't

resemble the actual letter at all when manually signed with the hand.



Other examples of constituted Signs in ASL include “man” and “woman.” All Signs involving the female gender (including but not limited to girl, mother, sister, grandmother, and daughter) are made by making various hand movements/shapes on the lower half of the face. Interestingly, all Signs of the male gender such as boy, father, man, brother, and son are all performed with manual hand movements on the upper half of the face. This conventional rule for the semiotics of ASL must be agreed-upon on the basis of intention or will of the creator/originator of those Signs.

There are several Signs of this nonverbal language that utilize a combination of natural and constituted signs. The Sign for “yes” is achieved by moving a closed fist up and down by only bending at the wrist (and keeping the forearm stable). This resembles the movement of a head when nodding in agreement or affirmation, as the word “yes” implies. However, it is somewhat a constituted sign because we cannot rely on the audience to understand “yes” through this manual Sign solely on the movement of a hand. Similarly, the Sign for “book” involves putting both palms together with the pinkies parallel to the ground and opening the hands apart from each other, while remaining touching by the pinkies.



Although this does resemble the action one would make to open a book,

that does not guarantee that the Sign couldn't naturally signify a particular species of book, such as magazine, novel, or even textbook. Constitutional agreement and intention must be considered to distinguish between the possible interpretations of this vague Sign and ensure we attend to the right thing.

Natural signs, as defined by Bacon, are based on the essence of the thing; for example, icons signify because the signifier looks like the signified. Verbal languages do not possess this capability, since speech and vocal utterances don't have a visual image, which is probably why Bacon considered language solely under the heading of constituted signs. However, I think one could argue against this with the rhetorical use of onomatopoeia: words that are based on and resemble the signified sound when it is uttered. The words may not visually resemble the thing but may resemble the words in an auditory sense. Onomatopoeia naturally signifies the essence of the thing: the sound it makes. "Buzz," for example, phonetically imitates the sound it describes. Words such as "oink," "whoosh," "cuckoo," and "boom" all sound like the utterance that is made from a soul in verbal language. Therefore, onomatopoeiae could be considered natural signifiers, contradicting Bacon's placement of language in his taxonomy of signs.

Bacon's constituted signs require the intention of a soul; this soul can belong to a human or animal, which was a theme of Bacon's not widely discussed or accepted by other philosophers in their study of signs. During Bacon's time, animals' sounds were usually considered natural signs. However, animal sounds were part of Bacon's class of affective/interjective signs that result from the emotional souls of animals. This includes groans, the bark of a dog, the purring of a cat, or even a squeal of pain. Bacon's constituted affective signs were even further divided into vocal sounds that signify naturally, vocal sounds that signify with deliberation for a purpose, and interjections, which signify in the manner of a concept. Interjections are caused by the rational soul yet are formed through contact with the sensitive soul (which animals possess). By considering animal-talk, Bacon was somewhat close to approaching certain characteristics ASL possesses in the sense of considering a linguistic method of communication that doesn't employ spoken words. Although ASL was not conceived during Bacon's time, through his idea of interjections he may have touched on basic prin-

ciples that underlie the intermingling of natural and constituted signs, as seen with the example of Sign Language. “He cultivates a closer relationship between language and nature” with his belief that words name objects directly and not through concepts of the mind (Bacon, 2013, p. 24). One can argue that interjections from animals, such as a bark in fear or a cry of pain, do not require deliberation and intention of a rational soul and should therefore be considered natural. With Bacon’s view of interjections as emotional responses of humans or animals, he suggests a somewhat transitional bridge between natural sounds and conventional words of speech.

As an extensionalist, Bacon is obligated to believe that signs refer directly to things without the remediation of concepts or ideas. However, Bacon proposed an alternate Semantic Triangle that differs from those of previous philosophers such as Aquinas and Augustine. Bacon’s new Semantic Triangle suggests that once a spoken word (or sign) is presented, it indirectly indicates a concept in the mind while directly signifying a thing in the world. This solves the problem extensionalists face of how a sign would retain meaning when the thing no longer exists. The process known as “reimposition” is one in which we take a formerly meaningful sound and reimpose a new meaning that differs from its original meaning. This is necessary because at the moment something ceases to exist, there is a detachment between the signifier and signified. Therefore, the sign’s meaning must be reimposed, making it equivocal with the original meaning. Bacon’s concept of reimposition can be applied to languages, even Sign Language.

Just as words can lose their meaning, Signs in ASL can also. Because iconic signs are often infused within a cultural context, the meaning of words/signs can change as cultural norms change. For example, the concept of a water fountain used to involve turning a faucet for the water to squirt up in a fountain-like manner. In modern society, most water fountains simply require one to push a button for water to flow upward. The Sign in ASL for “water fountain” used to involve signing “water” (by holding up the second, third and fourth fingers of the hand in the shape of a ‘W’ and tapping the chin) and then imitating the motion of twisting the faucet that releases the water. For this reason, it would be considered iconic in the sense that it resembles the action of turning the faucet of a water fountain. However, as culture changed, so did the technique of

retrieving water from a water fountain. The Sign for “water fountain” was reimposed to fit the cultural context, and now involves signing “water,” then reproducing the motion of pushing the button on the fountain.

Roger Bacon’s classification of signs includes two broad categories of natural signs and constituted signs, which are further separated into subgroups. As a sign that requires the intention of a soul to signify, a constituted sign, according to Bacon, includes language and dialect. Speech is the medium through which spoken words cause the reality of the concept/thing (or word) to enter the mind. Bacon’s distinction of language and dialect as a solely constituted sign poses many threats to the considerations of a nonverbal language; it fails to take into account a visual language such as Sign Language. Through the implementation of hand gestures and movements, American Sign Language is a proven effective method of communication that clearly utilizes natural signs to convey meaning. For this reason, although American Sign Language was not established during Bacon’s time, his taxonomy of signs possesses shortcomings (specifically in his placement of language) for modern developments.

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# Immortality and Insects: An Analysis of the Cicada in Plato's Symposium

*Lizzy Polishan*

Plato's *Symposium* features a speech by the playwright Aristophanes, who asserts that lovers are seeking completeness through their sexual copulation. Aristophanes illustrates his claim with a story, in which he includes a passing and almost unnoticeable reference to cicadas. The simile Aristophanes draws might initially seem insignificant, but his reference to cicadas, loaded with symbolic significance, may illustrate both a major distinction and a major similarity between his speech and Diotima's. Furthermore, the simile is loaded with symbolic significance that is echoed elsewhere in Plato's writings on love and immortality.

In the *Symposium*, Aristophanes explicitly compares reproduction to cicadas; but, he attaches the comparison only to the lowest, narrowest form of love and reproduction: the physical and sexual. Conversely, while Diotima never explicitly compares love or reproduction to cicadas, her descriptions of reproduction and love parallel the ancient Greeks' symbolic and mythic accounts of cicadas, particularly the insect's presumed links to divination and immortality.

Moving past Aristophanes' physical description, Diotima extends love's definition to encompass all forms of beautiful reproduction and birth, those of both the body and the soul. Aristophanes' simile, thus, links his speech to Diotima's, and demonstrates that, while both he and Diotima depict the same form of love, his depiction degrades love to its lowest and narrowest sense, while hers expands and elevates love.

## I

Cicadas, herbivorous insects with unique lifecycles and musical mating calls, have clear wings and compound eyes. Most of the over 3,000 species of cicada begin their lives in trees. The young cicadas hatch,

fall to the earth, burrow underground, and enter their nymphal stages; the nymphs remain underground, sucking plants' roots for nourishment, for up to seventeen years. When the nymphs emerge, they have two to four weeks to live: during this time, the males "sing" to attract females by flexing their tymbals; cicadas of both genders fly and mate; the females lay their rice-shaped eggs in tree branches; and then they all die.

Observations of the cicada's somewhat bizarre lifecycle engendered much of their symbolic significance. According to Robert K. Liu, "the emergence of the flying adult from the immobile nymph has given rise to its attributes of rejuvenation, rebirth, [and] resurrection" (167). Many ancient cultures, both Eastern and Western, imbued the cicada with symbolic significance. In the ancient East and West, "it is quite clear that the cicada...confer[s]...the positive attributes of immortality, resurrection, rebirth, rejuvenation, regeneration, longevity and protection from decay" (167). The cicada had a particularly special significance in ancient Greece, however.

Cicadas, for the ancient Greeks, were sacred, mysterious, and highly symbolic creatures, which were featured in many stories and myths, including Plato's *Phaedrus*. Whereas the Romans found the cicadas' songs strident and discordant, John Golding Myers points out that "most of the Greek classical references to cicada song are highly laudatory" (4). Some Greeks even kept cicadas as pets; "Theocritus states that the Greeks kept cicadas in cages...chiefly for the sake of their song" (8). A commonplace in culture, cicadas worked their way onto Greek money and accessories, appearing on "ancient coins and cut gems" (11). The insects also appeared in multifarious works of Greek poetry. The earliest literary reference to a cicada appeared in Homer's *Iliad*, but many other Greek writers, including Hesiod and Aristophanes, referenced cicadas, often using the insects to symbolize immortality or resurrection. The myth of Tithonus and Eos, for example, doubles down on the cicada as a symbol for immortality; after Aphrodite makes Tithonus immortal, Eos transfigures him into a cicada.

Overall, the Greeks revered cicadas as "sacred" (Myers 16). The Greeks believed that cicadas had a special connection to the gods, particularly the Muses. It was a common belief in ancient Greece that cicadas had the ability to pass messages between the humans and the divine. Thus,

besides symbolizing immortality and resurrection, another “essential and primitive significance of the cicada in classic [Greek] mythology was...as the beloved of the Muses” (12). According to stories and myths, the earthly cicadas acted as diviners, ascending into the realm of gods and goddesses, and facilitating communication between the two realms.

## II

We shall now examine Plato’s use of the cicada in his dialogues, *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. While several translations of both *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* misrepresent the word “cicada,” translating it as “cricket,” “grasshopper,” or “locust,” the original Greek texts show that Plato intended “cicada” in both dialogues; Plato uses the word τέτιξ, which Georg Autenrieth’s *Homeric Dictionary* translates as “tettix or cicada,” and Liddell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* translates as “*cicala*, *Cicada plebeia* or allied species; a winged insect...[T]he male makes a chirping or clicking noise [with] ‘tymbals.’” It should also be noted that a distinctly different Greek word (ἀκρίς) refers to grasshoppers, locusts, and crickets (Liddell). Thus, in *Phaedrus*, Plato definitely mentions cicadas several times: in 230e (τέτιγον), 258e (τέτιγες), and 259e (τέτιγον), all of which are forms of τέτιξ and doubtlessly refer to cicadas. Similarly, in *Symposium*, Aristophanes’ mentioning τέτιγες in 191c also definitely refers to cicadas—not the grasshoppers or crickets that some translations have used. Myers makes a similar point about Homer’s *Iliad*, noting that τέτιξ translates to “cicada,” even though “‘grasshopper’ and ‘cricket’ are much more frequently and very incorrectly substituted” in translations (5). Ultimately, Plato weaves cicadas—not grasshoppers, crickets, or locusts—into *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, and no other insect appropriately substitutes for “cicada.”

Aristophanes’ speech contains the only explicit reference to cicadas in *Symposium*. In his speech, Aristophanes tells a story which illustrates and explains his completeness theory of love. According to Aristophanes, human beings used to be spherical with eight limbs, two faces, and two sets of reproductive organs on opposite sides (25-6). When these humans began to attack the gods, Zeus split them in half with a lightning bolt,

weakening them. These freshly-split humans had “their genitals outside, like their faces, and they cast seed and made children, not in one another, but in the ground, like cicadas” (27). In likening reproduction to cicadas, Aristophanes links reproduction to the mystical creatures, which deliver messages between humans and Muses and which symbolize immortality and rebirth. Thus, Aristophanes’ simile connects reproduction with immortality and rebirth, depicting reproduction as an action that’s between the extremes of being fully human and fully divine. While these connections mirror the descriptions of reproduction Diotima gives and the characteristics she attributes to reproduction, Aristophanes applies these connections only to physical, sexual reproduction; he neglects to consider the higher levels of reproduction, which transcend the body and elevate the soul.

Diotima attributes to love and reproduction many of the same characteristics that the Greeks attributed to cicadas. First, let us examine her views on love. When Diotima questions Socrates, she states that all spiritual things, including love, “are messengers who shuttle back and forth between [men and gods], conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods, while to men they bring commands from the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices. Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all” (47). Love, like other spiritual things, conveys messages between the divine and the earthly, connecting the disparate realms and partaking of divination.

Cicadas too, especially as depicted in *Phaedrus*, act as messengers between humans and gods. Socrates relates their function through a story. He tells us that cicadas had been men; when the Muses came along, these particular men found them so pleasurable that they sang all day, completely forgetting about their bodily functions, and then died. From these men, cicadas came into being, and the Muses allowed them to sing, without needing any bodily nourishment, until they died. In exchange, the cicadas “proceed to the goddesses to tell them which mortals here on earth specially honor each Muse” (45).

In this way, the cicadas are spiritual beings in the same way as love, and they perform the same function as love: messengers between the earthly and the divine. Cicadas partake in a type of divination, crossing the

boundaries between the spiritual and the earthly, allowing the disparate realms to communicate. According to Eryximachus's speech, "divination... is the practice that produces loving affection between gods and men" (23). Divination, thus, not only connects the humans to the gods, but also fosters a loving relationship between them. The cicadas then, as a middle ground between the earthly and the divine that possess some characteristics of each though never slipping fully into either realm, are furthermore connected to love.

Furthermore, Diotima explicitly connects reproduction to immortality, stating that "pregnancy, reproduction—this is an immortal thing for a mortal animal to do" (53). Additionally, for Diotima, love and reproduction are inextricably intertwined. One definition of love she offers is "reproduction and birth in beauty" (53). She fleshes out her claim, explaining that "reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality. A lover must also desire immortality along with the good" (54). Thus, Diotima's speech implicitly links cicadas with reproduction, through their mutual connection to immortality.

Unlike Aristophanes, however, Diotima extends her definition of reproduction to encompass not only physical, sexual reproduction, but also reproduction of the soul, which she asserts is a higher form of reproduction. According to Diotima, "some people are pregnant in body... providing themselves through childbirth with immortality and remembrance and happiness...; while others are pregnant in soul" and accordingly, obtain immortality by birthing "wisdom and the rest of virtue, which all poets beget, as well as all the craftsmen who are said to be creative" (57). Cicadas thus resemble poets. As the Greeks revered poetry as beautiful and sacred, so too did they revere the cicadas' music. In one Greek myth, a cicada even jumps onto a boy's lute, helping him win a musical contest when one of his instrument's strings snaps. Additionally, Diotima states that poetry is deeply connected with the Muses; she states that poetry's formal definition is that which "the Muses give us with melody and rhythm" (51). Inspired by and connected to the Muses, cicadas create beautiful, melodious, and rhythmic songs. At the same time, in *Phaedrus*, they convene with the Muses, after perceiving and discerning which humans truly worship the Muses; thus, at the very least, they are connected to virtue in that they determine

which humans engage wisdom, virtue, and true philosophy, and they relay that information to the Muses.

In this same context, Diotima states that although there are multiple levels of reproduction, some higher than others, they all take the same form. She notes that love affects all animals: “Footed and winged animals alike, all are plagued by the disease of Love. . . . Among animals the principle is the same as with us, and mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction” (54). Aristophanes’ comparison of cicadas to bodily reproduction is not incorrect, then, since it is possible for the cicadas to represent both low and high forms of reproduction; however, Aristophanes’ comparison demonstrates his narrow focus, on only the lowest forms of reproduction. Conversely, Diotima ultimately links immortality to both the high spiritual and low bodily forms of reproduction.

It is not a coincidence that Plato’s only two dialogues on love are the only two dialogues that also mention cicadas. Plato’s references to cicadas in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* help to concretely and symbolically illustrate his theory of love. For Plato, love is a form of divination which allows the lover to ascend briefly from the realm of the earthly to the realm of the divine. Love also enables us to step closer to immortality and experience a sort of spiritual rebirth. For Plato, reproduction and birth in beauty, which is associated with love, is one of the ways that we can get closest to immortality. Thus, immortality, rebirth, and divination are all fundamental to Plato’s conception of love, and the cicada neatly ties these three attributes together by virtue of its symbolism. Ultimately, Plato’s reference to the cicada illustrates his own and the Greek culture’s fascination with immortality and divination, and concretely and symbolically connects those attributes to love.

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## Seeking a Healed Earth & Humanity: American Pragmatism, Karl Marx, and Native American Living

*Christopher Kilner*

“The earth is your grandmother and mother,  
and she is sacred.

Every step that is taken upon her  
should be as a prayer.”

-Black Elk (*Hehaka Sapa*)

Rapid acidification of the oceans; Deaths of migrants around the world, especially at sea; Increased prevalence of drought; Increased prevalence of destructive weather; Riots and civil wars; Increased levels of poverty globally; Loss of species at rates not seen since the last great extinction 66 million years ago.

All of these global challenges share a common root. Human separation from nature, a product of the dualism<sup>1</sup> which pervades Western conscience, leads to the corrosion of our conscience and the environmental degradation rampant on Earth today. While not an American Philosopher—and not associated with Pragmatism—Karl Marx understood the intimate relationship between *Homo sapiens* and nature, and the necessity of right relationship with nature. For Marx, nature provides the framework for the flourishing of species-being, dialectical materialism, and the elimination of alienation. It fosters the creativity and curiosity of man in a fashion analogous to art for Dewey. Marx shared the same concern that the American philosophers Emerson, Thoreau, James, and Dewey held over the destruction of nature; destruction of nature correlates with and reflects the corruption of our human conscience. Further, Marx’s modes of thinking and proposed solution—true communism—channel the pragmatic method. While all the people mentioned genuinely seek to reunite man with nature harmoniously, Native American cultures most exemplify the

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<sup>1</sup> Here dualism is dualistic; dualism referring to both the classic subject/object, mind/body separation and individual/communal separation.

fruits of harmony with nature; the current state of environmental degradation and rise of global poverty reveals the dangers of dissonance. While a return to indigenous living reflective of the Native American life will never be feasible, the rising field of Sustainable Development offers a pragmatic solution to our current crises.

**Section I:**  
**Universal Species-Being:**  
**The Importance of Nature to Karl Marx and True Communism**

“Man did not weave the web of life,  
he is merely a strand in it.  
Whatever he does to the web,  
he does to himself.”

-Chief Seattle

The Kwikwasut'inuxw people of the Northwest tell a myth<sup>2</sup> of the separation between man and nature. Due to a lack of understanding of his own universals, man separated himself from the one object necessary for his growth as a universal subject. For Karl Marx, true communism cannot be achieved without man imbuing himself once again in nature. Nature fosters the creativity and curiosity of man while augmenting meaningful labor. Native American cultures exemplify the fruits of harmony with nature; the current crises of environmental degradation and rise of global poverty reveal the dangers of dissonance. Native American cultures see the health of the individual tied not only to the health of the natural environment, but, more importantly, to the health of the individual's and community's relationship to the natural environment—the Great Spirit, nature, the cosmos—for all are one and the same.

The tension between man and nature arises from the dichotomy of

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<sup>2</sup> At one time, all the animals of Earth were one. Different on the outside, on the inside they were the same. Occasionally, deep inside a sacred forest, they would gather in a cave, and shed their skins. No longer different, their universal spirits would dance in the cave to celebrate their oneness. Once, a human arrived at the cave during this celebration, and laughed at all the naked animals, because he did not understand his connection to them. Embarrassed, the animals returned to their different forms, never to reveal their oneness again (Lanting).

*Homo sapiens*. Both animal and rational creature, man has difficulty reconciling the two. Marx defines this creative tension of humans as species-being. Because “man is conscious not merely of himself as an individual but of the human species,” he is being (Fromm 90). The biological existence of man permits the growth and development of his intellectual, spiritual, and cultural pursuits. Without the former, the latter would cease. At all times, man must “treat himself as the present, living species, as a universal and consequently free being” (Fromm 83). Synergy of the essence (human species-being) and existence (the natural world) develops when man treats himself as a free entity. In a reflection of Kant, Marx states that man “must not even become a means to his individual existence,” because he forfeits the freedom provided by his species-being (Fromm 43). Institutions which alienate man’s essence and existence drive a wedge between the original material dialectic to create a dialectic between an authentic essence and an inauthentic existence. Capitalism, crude communism, fascism, and mercantilism replace the natural world as the existence of man and subjugate his freedom. None of these institutions are substantively human according to the species-being concept. Rather, they run contrary to that existence which facilitates species-being: nature, for “the statement that the physical and mental life of man, and nature, are interdependent means simply that nature is interdependent with itself, for man is a part of nature” (Fromm 83).

Mutualistic symbiotic growth between the essence and existence of man will spark the new-age of humanity expressed initially in true communism, which Karl Marx often wrote about. Dialectical materialism serves as the concept of this growth, and can only be achieved through meaningful, productive labor. If nature and man truly are unified, then nature serves as the perfect institution to draw the universal out of man. The concept of dialectical materialism not only reinforces the aspect of species-being, but its continual evolution of the subject and object allows one to measure the alienation and sickness of man by measuring the alienation and sickness of the natural world. Dialectical materialism requires nuance, however, in terms of nature. Without active labor, the mutual conditioning between the subject and object weighs even more heavily towards the object; man subjects himself to the natural world dangerously, as he would

in capitalism. Early and purely subsistence living “are founded either on the immature development of man individually, who has not yet severed the umbilical cord that unites him with his fellow men in primitive tribal community, or upon direct relations of subjection” (Fromm 12).

Active labor serves to protect man from wrongful subjugation to alienating nature. A healthy relationship with nature through labor protects man from alienation. Nature serves as the raw clay for man to shape, through labor and production, into personal property which reflects his individual universal species-being. As stated previously, alienation occurs when man’s essence becomes subjected to his existence. Marx attacks capitalism and crude communism as alienating institutions which create unneeded commodities and subject man to the “universal whore” money (Fromm 130). For man to grow dialectically, the objects of his labor must reflect his universal individuality; unfortunately, institutions other than nature—equally a part of and to man—reduce man by alienating his labor: “the animal becomes human and the human becomes animal” (Fromm 82). Hedonism and excessiveness, in a lustful need to satisfy the basic instincts, destroy the beauty of the human being and nature. Now, some may equivocate nature and animal, and disregard nature, *i.e.* reduce nature simply to separate, interacting species. Nature for Marx differs from the animal. In the Kwikwasut’inuxw myth, the skin represents the animal and reflects the particular, whereas the universal spirit represents the universal freedom of species-being and nature. Marx finds the particular and specialization as abhorrent, whereas nature promotes the development of a well-rounded human being in the individual universal. Nature herself forfeits the particular in the universal continuance of life, always evolving towards her *telos*, necessarily accomplished by man’s labor.

Alienated labor, along with halting the evolution of nature and man, enhances the accumulation of private property, which destroys species-being and nature. The same institutions which alienate labor give birth to private property, the “sensuous manifestation of alienated consciousness” (Black). Private property accelerates the damage of alienation, destroying natural resources and the environment in an attempt to stunt the growth of the universal individual. It commodifies the necessities of species-being: water, air, land, shelter, spiritual inspiration, and tools—all of which are

freely given when man lives in harmony with the natural world; in the process, it commodifies and subjugates man himself.

When in right relationship with the natural world, acknowledging his universality with it, man labors in a productive manner, creating his own culture and history, and elevating his essence and existence. This process leads to true communism, which as a “fully-developed naturalism is humanism and as a fully-developed humanism is naturalism” (Fromm 104). Man no longer labors for private property or money, but for personal property and universal community. Communism solves the “antagonism between man and nature” as the two work together. If humans and nature truly are essential to each other, then only those two can work to bridge this divide. Communism for Marx requires both a phenomenal and substantive change of the existing structures, and nature serves to fill the void of alienating institutions; it is a structure which needs only shaping through human labor. Nature augments man’s own personal growth, as it asymptotically unifies the subject and object. True communism champions the “unalienated man who does not dominate,” commodify, or privatize “nature but who becomes one with it” (Fromm 52). Since nature, to our knowledge, has no universal consciousness without man, man must labor to create this proper relationship, through the gift of his reason; he must understand his universal individuality. Man must simultaneously reenter into harmonious relationship with nature while allowing nature to facilitate his growth and development.

Abstractly, it can be difficult to visualize the importance of a harmonious relationship between man and nature: nature can kill man, but man can also kill nature.<sup>3</sup> Above the particular though, each nourishes the other, and two examples reveal this intimate connection.

No known civilization has ever embodied true communism. Many Native American cultures, however, come close. Contrary to false legends of North American Native American cultures, Native Americans do have

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Adams, in *The Dynamo and the Virgin* explores the tenuous relationship between man and nature. He opines that when man attempts to dominate nature, he lives out of balance and destroys his very essence and, potentially, posterity (Adams).

some aspects of private property.<sup>4</sup> It is the Native American environmental ethic, however, which brings them closest to true communism. Native Americans realize that sustainable development and use of resources reflect an intentional and connected labor to their essence and existence. Living in harmony and balance with the Earth rules out the excesses which lead to accumulation of wealth, private property, and the inevitable development of alienated labor, while leading to a mature development of a human spirituality conducive to growth. Karl Marx, possibly, and many others, may state that these Native American cultures were and continue to be the primitive types arrested in development; on the contrary, Native American cultures display a thriving human culture, with art, music, dance, and myths.

Today, the world sickens with environmental degradation, reflecting the erosion of our species-being due to the acceleration of global capitalism. The IPCC<sup>5</sup> released an extensive report linking climate change with poverty, and a Yale study found that those who saw no danger in or denied climate change were much more individualistic in their world-views (The Core Writing Team *et.al.*; Leiserowitz *et.al.*).

Humanity may believe that it has two fights, one to save our species-being, and another to save our planet. If Karl Marx's analysis of human nature is correct, however, this reflective knowledge will "enable [man] to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature"; all humanity has to do, then, is join in the dance<sup>6</sup> of the universal individual born of and in dynamic, constructive relationship with nature.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pre-colonization, certain families were given patches of land to cultivate, and these families retained first claim to these lands. However, the fruits of cultivation, labor, and hunting were shared in a communal style, and accumulation of wealth, while not unheard of, was rare. The doling out of land was continued by the United States when forcing Natives onto the reservations; however, this partitioning of land was much more alienating.

<sup>5</sup> United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

<sup>6</sup> Kwikwasut'inuxw myth (Lanting).

<sup>7</sup> I will argue Sustainable Development fulfills this (see later section).

## Section II: From Marx to American Pragmatism & Native American Living

“May the footprints we leave behind  
show that we’ve walked in kindness  
toward the Earth and every living thing.”

-Peggy Gidez

The separation of humanity from itself cited in the myth of the Kwikwasut'inuxw arises from man's lack of understanding of his very own universals, leading man into a tenuous and tense relationship with nature. A creature which can recognize its own animality, humans encounter difficulty in reconciling this dichotomy; yet, this tension can be reconciled into a creative holism with recognition of consciousness as a product of and simultaneously a transcendence from the biological organism. Unfortunately, many in Western thought radicalize this tension into dualism.<sup>8</sup> Man's *essence* (as a rational creature) and *existence* (as a biological being of the natural world) become separate entities. We believe that there are two worlds, one external to our mind (*existence*), and one which our mind perceives (*essence*). A symbiotic holism between our constituent parts—in biological terms the development of a supra-organism<sup>9</sup>—arises when we acknowledge our freedom from binding dualism—per Marx.

To reiterate, Marx defines this creative tension of humans as species-being. Because “man is conscious not merely of himself as an individual but of the human species,” he is being (Fromm 90). The biological existence of man permits the growth and development of the intellectual, spiritual, and cultural pursuits of man. Without the former, the latter would cease. At all times, man must “treat himself as the present, living species, as a universal and consequently free being” (Fromm 83). Emerson writes that “the first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature,” such that not only does our capacity for conscience arise from our evolution in nature—as the modern American

<sup>8</sup> First iteration of dualism.

<sup>9</sup> A collection of organisms which so closely and in a mutualistic manner interact that, biologically, the resultant symbiosis can itself be recognized as an organism. Modern, recognized examples include ants (with symbiotic fungi) or humans (with millions of symbiotic microorganisms).

philosopher Wilshire often writes—but nature informs our thought each day.

To think otherwise lends our thoughts towards the immediate individual, away from our collective universal and towards brute facts which lack a narrative<sup>10</sup>—away from a *History*. This turn away from the collective and towards the individual is one which many American philosophers abhor. A nuance must be made between the *rugged individual* and the *universal individual*. The *rugged individual*<sup>11</sup> withers in the absence of a collective human community, becomes concerned over matters superfluous to daily living, and degrades the very humanity from which the individual arises.<sup>12</sup> Emerson believes it necessary to be attuned to one's self—in his essay *Self-Reliance*—but aware that without the universal there is no self. Emerson opines that “a fact has no intelligibility and no credibility if the fact is not [of] a narrative; the narrative conveys meaning” (Haggerty). On self-reliance particularly, Lone Man (*Isna la-wica*)—a Sioux Medicine Man—states: “...I have seen that in any great undertaking it is not enough for a man to depend simply on himself” (Jacobs 145). These individuals who are self-reliant—yet necessarily with the aid of the community—are *universal individuals*. Emerson believes that in both iterations of dualism, we believe ourselves to be free of nature. Yet, “so much of nature is [man] ignorant...of, so much of his own mind does [man] not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, ‘Know thyself,’ and the modern precept, ‘Study nature,’ become at last one maxim” (Emerson, *History*, 81/2119).

Marx believes that alienation of man from his holistic species-being occurs when “man becomes a means to his individual existence,” because he forfeits the freedom provided by his species-being as an individual member of the universal species; from this, dualism arises. Again, any ideas, institutions, or social constructs—unfettered capitalism, environmental degradation, -isms (racism, classism, sexism)—which inherently divide man from himself, others, and the natural world drive a wedge

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<sup>10</sup> Second iteration of dualism.

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, a Yale study found that those who saw no danger in or denied climate change were much more individualistic in their world-views (see previous section).

<sup>12</sup> Marx will further comment on *rugged individuals* in his discussion of individuals who subjugate themselves to their existence (see previous section).

between the original material dialectic<sup>13</sup> to create a dialectic between the authentic essence and an inauthentic existence that Marx described. For Marx, capitalism, crude communism, fascism, and mercantilism—as well as Scientism, Fundamentalism, and Modern European Philosophy for the American Pragmatist—replace the natural world as the existence of man and subjugate his freedom. To emphasize, none of these institutions are substantively human according to the species-being concept. Rather, they run contrary to that existence which facilitates species-being: nature, which in a reduced form is the interaction and interdependency between human beings and the natural environment (*i.e.* biosphere), but which realized fully, is the interdependency of the biosphere with itself—for man is equally of and progenitor to nature.

While many may—narrow-mindedly and for political reasons—charge Marx for developing this philosophy merely to combat Capitalism,<sup>14</sup> Emerson reflects Marx's sentiment of alienation as well:

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of everyone of its members. Society is a joint stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. (Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 205/2119).

Further, today's rise in inequality from the globalized capitalist market may—many pragmatist, especially Dewey, would charge—necessitate a re-evaluation of the relationship among global capitalism, human well-being, and nature—for it does not appear to be a healthy, holistic one at the current moment.

As stated previously, alienation—and the rise of dualism—occurs when man's essence becomes subjected to his existence. The commodification of today's world has elicited sharp critiques similar to those Marx offered to unfettered capitalism and crude communism years ago; when the market is elevated to the level of a deity—when the market is

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<sup>13</sup> Material Dialectic for Marx is the creative tension between *essence* and *existence*, with each building off of and reflecting one another. It allows one to measure the alienation and sickness of man by measuring the alienation and sickness of the natural world.

<sup>14</sup> The American Pragmatist may wonder why today *Capitalism* has become deified. It seems to draw away from the collective humanism underlying the universe and our humanity when it becomes a deity. Black Elk and the Native Americans especially found such pursuit of wealth, *i.e.* *capital*, as detrimental to the human soul.

humanized in place of human well-being—man becomes subject to the “universal whore” money<sup>15</sup> (Fromm 130). For humanity to grow dialectically towards a re-harmonizing with our nature and nature, human labor must reflect the universal individual man is, a concept replete in Emerson’s works; unfortunately, work-ism, scientism, global capitalism, and excessive industrialism which comes at the expense of the environment in today’s world reduce man to only a constituent part—our holistic humanity transmutes into our animalistic, basic instincts. Hedonism, excessiveness, lust, and hubristic belief in our capabilities to solve any future challenge destroy the beauty of the human being and nature—destroying wonder which tethers all. Anthropogenic Climate Change, wars, hunger, poverty, violence, domestic abuse, and health crises arise when our labor becomes diverted away from our universality: communal labor for Marx, Art for Dewey, growth of the universal conscience for Emerson, and the Great Spirit<sup>16</sup> and community for the Lakota. As Emerson writes,

...the tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth  
to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft,  
and the soul is subject to dollars”(Emerson, *History*, 50/2119).

Black Elk (*Hehaka Sapa*) would agree with Marx’s and Emerson’s analyses of the human condition; Black Elk spoke that “there can never be peace between nations until there is first known that true peace which is within the souls of men,” yet, if men’s souls are becoming corrupted by the pursuit of gold,<sup>17</sup> how could there ever be peace and equilibrium among men or nature? Another Lakota, Red Cloud (*Makhpīya-luta*), understanding that nature alone could bring holistic fulfillment to man, declared after more land had been taken by the white-man (*Wāšicun*):

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<sup>15</sup> Attributed to Native Americans, but with unknown origin, is a quote oft utilized by environmentalist: “When all the trees have been cut down, when all the animals have been hunted, when all the waters are polluted, when all the air is unsafe to breathe, only then will you discover you cannot eat money.

<sup>16</sup> “When a man does a piece of work which is admired by all we say that it is wonderful; but when we see the changes of day and night, the sun, the moon, and the stars in the sky, and the changing seasons upon the earth, with their ripening fruits, anyone must realize that it is the work of someone more powerful than man” -Chased-by-Bears (*Santee-Yanktonai*) (Jacobs 142).

<sup>17</sup> Despite previous treaties entrusting early the whole of the Dakota’s to Native Americans—such as the Lakota—the Americans, led by General Custer, ousted Black Elks’ people from their sacred lands following the discovery of gold in the Black Hills.

...I am poor and naked, but I am the chief of the nation. We do not want riches but we do want to train our children right. Riches would do us no good. We could not take them with us to the other world. We do not want riches. We want peace and love (Jacobs 155).

Again, showcasing Marx, when man acknowledges his universality with nature, he labors in a way conducive to personal growth and growth of the natural, whole community, creating his own culture and history (important for Emerson), and elevating his essence and existence. This process leads to—for Marx—“a fully-developed humanism [which] is naturalism” (Fromm 104). The natural world “is the raw material out of which the intellect molds her splendid products” (Emerson, *History*, 168/2119).

It becomes clear, then, that if we ever wish to ameliorate the environmental and ecological destruction; wars and poverty; disease and species loss; we must eliminate the dualism which pervades our minds. Alienated labor and income inequality exacerbate the climate issues while leading to human suffering, political instability, and war.<sup>18</sup> We live in such an interwoven world that even if dualism somehow served a practical role in the past—dubious at best—we cannot live with such a false belief today. We must eliminate the dualism which separates our *rational humanity* from our bodies; but not *just* our bodies, for our bodies participate in the cosmos. From Black Elks’ description of the twelve horses calling the council of grandfathers to string-theory and modern physics today, our bodies grow out of and remain in all of nature. As Emerson writes, we require nature to nourish our own *individual universal* soul:

Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdoms which cannot help itself. The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing and therefore self-relying soul”(Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 894/2119).

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<sup>18</sup>There exists much evidence and research that Climate Change exacerbated inequality within Arab nations through prolonged drought and the consequent rise in food prices. Further, the IPCC has released a report linking climate change with poverty (The Core Writing Team, *et. al.*).

We must eliminate not only dualism, but our concepts which have arisen from it; we must learn to lose ourselves in the awe of nature once again. Ideally, we would emulate an indigenous culture, such as the Lakota, who had no perception of dualism. Unfortunately, the *Wāšičun* genocide of this beautiful culture leaves such a possibility slim to none. Further, we cannot be tempted to abandon all of our beliefs—as a philosopher such as Descartes may advocate. We must follow the pragmatic method of William James, and graft new beliefs and practices which lead to a harmonizing with nature and elimination of dualism. Rather than abandon the technology and intellectual power which has grown from Scientism, we must pragmatically repurpose it towards Sustainable Development—the closest ‘institution’ to true communism or the Native American way of life we have today.

Sustainable development arose in the late 1980s as a response to not only the environmental crises Earth faces, but the growing gap between the first and third world countries. The international community took a problem—and rather than fighting over its details—developed a solution in Sustainable Development. According to its charter definition by World Commission on Environment and Development, Sustainable Development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The Millennium Development Goals<sup>19</sup> of the United Nations (UN) reflect Sustainable Development and its principles, and the UN spreads this message to the world.

Sustainable Development emulates the oft-quoted proverb: *we did not inherit the Earth from our forefathers, we borrow it from our Children*. Whether a Native American spoke such words or not is irrelevant; the Native way of life reflected it. The Lakota never wasted anything, using every part of a *Takanka* (Buffalo). The *Wāšičun*<sup>20</sup> nearly drove the Buffalo to extinction. What distinguished the two? A Lakota, Lincoln Tritt, writes “One major difference between our people and those of the dominant society today is humility. Among our people, no matter how far or how high a person goes,

<sup>19</sup> Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger; Achieve Universal Primary Education; Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women; Reduce Child Mortality; Improve Maternal Health; Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other Diseases; Ensure Environmental Sustainability; Global Partnership for Development (United Nations).

<sup>20</sup> Lakota term for the white Americans as they settled west.

they know they are small in the presence of God and the universe” (Jacobs). Humility before the grandeur of the Earth—awe at the wonder of the Earth and Life—is something which Sustainable Development focuses on; it does not rely on the temptation<sup>21</sup> that science in the future will solve our problems, but seeks solutions in the immediate. Living in harmony and balance with the Earth rules out the excesses which lead to accumulation of wealth, private property, and the inevitable development of alienated labor, while leading to a mature development of a human spirituality conducive to growth.

Our faux dichotomy as a species is not a curse, hindrance, or problem to be solved; it is a gift. Our existence as a biological organism with transcendent faculties allows us, if we so choose, to marvel at the grandeur of the cosmos. We cannot allow timidity, fear, or solely worldly pursuits to obscure this wisdom. We must learn to walk humbly—*philosophize vulnerably, essay fully, labor meaningfully, live naturally, wonder in the silence of the cosmos*—within our role of Mother Earth. We are a universally individual species, and we are universal individuals.<sup>22</sup> We are called to utilize our faculties to return to the sacred forest, to the Garden of Eden, to the beauty of the cosmos. Our path forward today, Sustainable Development—which also works towards gender, racial, and economic equality—acknowledges the vast potential of the human essence, and the great liberation and freedom which can come of it, reflecting the words of Chief Luther Standing Bear:

Out of the Indian approach to life there came a great freedom—an intense and absorbing love for nature; a respect for life; enriching faith in a Supreme Power; and principles of truth, honesty, generosity, equity, and brotherhood as a guide to mundane relations (Jacobs 137).

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<sup>21</sup> Radical philosophies such as *Trans-humanism*.

<sup>22</sup> We are a collection of history, shaped by the evolution of countless other beings; simultaneously, we shape the future of all other beings.

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## ***Discourse* Submission Information**

*Discourse*, an undergraduate philosophy journal, features philosophically relevant work by students of The University of Scranton and is published each spring as a co-curricular activity of the Penn-Tau chapter of Phi Sigma Tau.

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### **Manuscripts (Electronic Submission)**

Academic or creative philosophical pieces must be typed and saved in Microsoft Word file format (.docx). All manuscripts must be double-spaced. Every page of the manuscript must list the page number in the upper right corner. It is recommended that all manuscripts be submitted in 12-point Times New Roman font. The author's name must NOT appear at any point in the manuscript to ensure that all submissions are judged anonymously. Each submission is to be saved as a separate Word file, and all submissions are to be attached to a single email and sent to [matthew.meyer@scranton.edu](mailto:matthew.meyer@scranton.edu) from the author's University email account.

The text of the email itself must contain the following information:

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Title of each work submitted in the listed genre(s)

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