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Reconstructing Photohumanism: Pluralistic Humanism, Democracy, and the Anthropocene

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ABSTRACT

Roy Scranton argues for a new philosophical humanism as the best response to the existential crisis of the Anthropocene, the new geological epoch for which human industrial activity is responsible. This threat from climate change, Scranton argues, is better met through what he calls *photohumanism* than by science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) alone. This new humanism shares many affinities with pluralistic humanism. A key concern is political action, which is problematized by what Tschaep calls dopamine democracy. Scranton shares this concern, but his approach puts too great an emphasis on binaries, such as culture and nature, mind and body, and life and death. I offer the philosophical method of reconstruction, as situated within pluralistic humanism and the philosophy of John Dewey. In introducing the need for reconstruction as a method for doing philosophy in a new but ancient sense of learning to die, I reconstruct photohumanism and offer the Deweyan ideal of democracy for overcoming the problem of the Anthropocene.

Keywords

Humanism, Environmentalism, Pluralism, Climate Change, Anthropocene, Democracy, STEM, Humanities

Roy Scranton proposes a new form of humanism, *photohumanism*, as an alternative conception of human being in the age of climate change. In *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization*, he argues that humans are living in the most philosophical of times because the ancient view of philosophy as preparation for death is now scaled up from an individual life to a global way of life, namely Western civilization in its neoliberal and carbon-fueled form. Where most of our culture takes the position that not only is climate change a problem with a solution but also a problem whose

solution is to be found in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), Scranton challenges this orthodoxy by claiming that the problem is wicked, which is to say not solvable in the manner most Westerners (especially Americans) believe, and that the response to this problem is not found in STEM but in the humanities generally and philosophy particularly.

As a philosopher, I find such a line of thought pleasing, but I also, as a philosopher, find aspects of his position, especially his philosophical position of *photohumanism* problematic (if promising). Scranton is not the only person from the humanities to reflect upon the significance of the Anthropocene; his reflection, however, does offer a new role for the arts and humanities generally and philosophical humanism particularly. Given what I have introduced as *pluralistic humanism* (2015), I believe there are important affinities and interesting contrasts to be made between Scranton's position and mine. In what follows, I explore the two positions in an effort to embolden the larger concern for both Scranton and myself: What does it mean to live a meaningful human life in which community precedes ethics and the human-environment relationship is reimagined?

The discord between photohumanism and pluralistic humanism is that despite Scranton's best efforts there remain atavistic binaries between peace and war, mind and body, reason and causation, culture and nature, life and death. Undoubtedly, he makes poetic use of the polarities, leaving open the possibility of continuity. But he only leaves it open. I argue that what is lacking but possible in his project is the philosophical method of reconstruction. John Dewey saw it as integral to philosophical practice, and it remains so for pluralistic humanism. In fact, many of the key characteristics of philosophical practice for Dewey are not only so for pluralistic humanism but also are consistent with Scranton's general view of philosophy as learning how to die. Scranton's project falls short, however, in its maintenance of problematic binaries, which can be overcome with help from the tools of philosophical reconstruction available in pluralistic humanism.

I make my case by providing a critical articulation of Scranton's book. The summary I provide is not a book review. Rather, I highlight specific themes I find importantly problematic. So the criticism is constructive. Throughout, I refer to my work in *pluralistic humanism* (2015), Mark Tschaepé's criticism of dopamine democracy (2013b and 2016), and my response to that democracy with what I call Deweyan creatures (2016a). In drawing together these related but myriad threads, I seek to braid a cable with which to anchor further philosophical work in response to the challenge of the Anthropocene. The aim is to improve Scranton's thought by reconstructing the tensions so that they may become tools for navigating between the old and the new—for learning to die in the Anthropocene.

I have argued (2016b) that philosophy is well characterized as the navigation of the tension between old traditions and new ideas. Broadly speaking, this is how Dewey saw the philosophical method of reconstruction, which takes the analytical results of scientific inquiry and synthesizes them into the unproblematic remainders of our belief systems. The familiarity with many disciplines (in a general sense, as only the disciplined expert can have specialized knowledge) marks the philosopher from specialists (Solymosi 2016a). But this general familiarity serves as a means for provoking new perspectives better suited to addressing the problems of human beings in their lived experience. The development of new perspectives comes from the tension between the old and the new. This development is creative and relies on the potential of human imagination to redescribe through critical thinking a more just world (Solymosi 2016b). This capacity is an evolved trait, the recognition and deliberate utilization of which is the hallmark of Deweyan creatures (Solymosi 2016a).

Deweyan creatures recognize not only that they are products of evolution but also are active participants in that process. This participation affords Deweyan creatures greater means to deliberately modify themselves and their environments in order to ameliorate problematic situations as they arise. This ameliorative process is not strictly scientific nor artistic. Rather it is technoscientific. The double-meaning of technoscience comes from its etymology (*techné* is ancient Greek for *art*) and the chronological relationship between science and technology. As described by Larry Hickman (2001), the orthodoxy that science discovers reality and technology is applied science is misguided. Modern science, Hickman argues, is impossible without the tools (both material like beakers, and ideational like mathematics) that were present as artifacts of previous inquiries. These tools were solutions to previous problems that are no longer problematic. Through creative imagination, they are put to new uses. This retooling is indicative of the philosophical method of reconstruction. Dewey saw this method as the means of navigating the tension between the old and the new. Deweyan creatures understand this reconstruction of art and science as technoscience—of philosophy as navigating the tension between old and new—as an illustration of their key characteristics. They revolve around the experimental attitude of both art and science (viz., technoscience); they include: Fallibility, conscientiousness, and imagination. Whether it is to state a solution (science) or to express it (art),¹

1. This distinction between science and art is Dewey's (1934) but it should not be taken as a binary. In fact, as Mark Tschaepé has argued (2013a), Dewey's aesthetic theory chisels away at the atavistic opposition between science and art, such that both are not only experimental but also aesthetic. Distinguishing between one or the other is a matter of particular goals: Science typically is

there is a difficulty in lived experience that requires attention, first to recognize and articulate, then to inquire into, and ultimately to be resolved (which is by no means guaranteed). This process is experimental because a possible solution is tried in experience in the world. It is artistic because the proposed solutions are products of creative imagination. It is scientific because it builds on established knowledge; yet it is aesthetic because the success of inquiry brings about a consummatory experience that is felt among the affected parties as harmony is (re)established in their lived experience. Deweyan creatures take this experimental attitude as integral to personal and public life, especially in its democratic features.

Deweyan creatures adhere to Dewey's conception of democracy as primarily a personal and moral way of life in which a religious faith in the capacity of human experience to generate novel solutions to the problems of life resists treacherous attitudes and behaviors that discriminate against human difference (Solymosi 2015 and 2016a). Such a view of democracy is always creative because it is a constant task for humans to reimagine how to live their personal and public lives in response to a dynamic and precarious environment. This reimagining requires a letting go or dying of the old self conceptions to make way for the new self conception that grows out of the old but is not limited to nor identified with it. Creative democracy is inherently evolutionary because of its recognition and utilization of the dynamic and precarious environment in which we live.

For Tschaepé (2013b and 2016), one of the most immediate challenges to such a creatively democratic ideal is the informational-technological version of Plato's fears about democracy. Tschaepé draws from contemporary neuroscience to enrich Plato's concern in the *Republic* that too much freedom produces slavery and tyranny. For Tschaepé, he sees the current use of smartphones and other information technology as encouraging greater distraction and thus greater division among people. Instead of these tools being designed to ameliorate problematic situations in a democratic manner to an end of greater democratic experience, these tools are designed to encourage ever more consumption. Tschaepé, following Plato, sees people, like cattle, staring down toward the ground (at their devices) concerned only with feeding, fattening, and fornicating (2013b). Plato could not have anticipated the Internet, smartphones, or cognitive and behavioral neuroscience; but he did imagine, in the myth of Atlantis (cf. *Timaeus* and *Critias*), the genuine possibility of an environmental catastrophe due to tyrannical appetites unchecked by intelligence.

generic and impersonal, whereas art is specific and personal. There is a larger discussion to be had on how these ideas relate not only to Deweyan creatures but also to confronting the Anthropocene. Such a discussion, however, exceeds the limits of the current argument.

Scranton continues the mythico-philosophical work of Plato and, like Tschaepé and myself, situates the humanistic concern within contemporary global neoliberal culture. Scranton is quick to review the science and policy literature on climate change. He rejects outright any denial of the science:

Global warming [...] is a fact. And we have likely already passed the point where we could have done anything about it. From the perspective of many policy experts, climate scientists, and national security officials, the concern is not whether global warming exists or how we might prevent it, but how we are going to adapt to life in the hot, volatile world we've created. (2015, 17)

Scranton provokes, however, with his proposed solution that rejects the primary importance placed on STEM. He writes:

In order for us to adapt to this strange new world, we're going to need more than scientific reports and military policy. We're going to need new ideas. We're going to need new myths and new stories, a new conceptual understanding of reality, and a new relationship to the deep polyglot traditions of human culture that carbon-based capitalism has vitiated through commodification and assimilation. Over and against capitalism, we will need a new way of thinking our collective existence. We need a new vision of who "we" are. We need a new humanism—a newly philosophical humanism, undergirded by renewed attention to the humanities. (2015, 19)

Scranton immediately acknowledges the obvious response that there is no serious way that having a better understanding of esoteric centuries-old debates is going to directly improve our ability to handle the already occurring effects of climate change.

This obvious response, however, misses the more significant point Scranton makes throughout his argument: The Anthropocene threatens our self-conception to the point at which the science itself is useless without our wrestling with larger philosophical questions, whose perennial answers can no longer be taken for granted or dismissed as impertinent leisurely speculation. Scranton elaborates,

[T]he conceptual and existential problems that the Anthropocene poses are precisely those that have always been at the heart of humanistic inquiry: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to live? What is truth? What is good? In the world of the Anthropocene, the question of individual mortality—What does my life mean in the face of death?—is universalized and framed in scales that boggle the imagination [...] Whether we are talking about ethics or politics, ontology or epistemology, confronting the end of the world as we know it dramatically challenges our learned perspectives and ingrained priorities. What does consumer choice mean compared against 100,000 years of ecological catastrophe? What does one life mean in the face of mass death or the collapse of global civilization? How do we make meaningful decisions in the shadow of our inevitable end? (2015, 20)

These reflections may utilize science and logic but require more. What they require is creativity. As such, Scranton argues, “These questions [...] are philosophical problems *par excellence*. If, as Montaigne asserted, “To philosophize is to learn how to die,” then we have entered humanity’s most philosophical age, for this is precisely the problem of the Anthropocene. The rub now is that we have to learn how to die not as individuals, but as a civilization” (2015, 20–21). This move away from philosophy as strictly an individual exercise to the necessity of philosophy also as a socio-cultural activity signifies an important shift from the backward looking reflections of Western philosophy (concerned with first causes or principles but not with effects or consequences) to a future-oriented imagination. This shift I take to be integral to understanding the significance of Scranton’s larger argument, particularly in its resonance with the Deweyan creature. Yet this shift is not fully utilized by Scranton.

To be fair, this shift is not easy to make, in part because the need for this shift is difficult to articulate. As Scranton notes, “The greatest challenge we face is a philosophical one: understanding that this civilization is already dead. The sooner we confront our situation and realize that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves, the sooner we can get down to the difficult task of adapting, with mortal humility, to our new reality” (2015, 23). Scranton believes we can do this by returning to the old view of philosophy as preparation for death. He states “that humanity can survive and adapt to the new world of the Anthropocene if we accept human limits and transience as fundamental truths, and work to nurture the variety and richness of our collective cultural heritage” (2015, 23). This backward glance resonates with the traits of fallibility and conscientious of Deweyan creatures. This glance is important for Scranton’s project because we are disoriented by neoliberal global capitalism’s monoculture that causes us to forget our histories and thus inhibits our imaginative capacities. But the necessary shift to the forward orientation I emphasize is hampered by Scranton’s specific view of philosophy. Scranton concludes that “two ways of learning to die [as an individual and as a civilization] come together in the role of the humanist thinker: the one who is willing to stop and ask troublesome questions, the one who is willing to interrupt, the one who resonates on other channels and with slower, deeper rhythms” (2015, 23).

This conception of the humanist follows Peter Sloterdijk’s view of the philosopher, which Scranton periodically discusses. My concern is that there is an acknowledged tension between interrupting and resonating, especially with regard to how we think about these “slower, deeper rhythms.” Two such rhythms at the core of Scranton’s position are “our innate violence and our inescapable mortality” (2015, 26). The entirety of chapter 4, “The Compulsion of Strife,” explores the human fear of violence and mortality. Scranton rightly challenges an essentialist variety of progressivism that takes humans as infinitely

perfectible, especially that belief's dependence "on carbon-fueled capitalism's promises of infinite economic growth" (2015, 26). Scranton recognizes that given the circumstances humans are likely to continue in their violent ways. However, the innate violence he ascribes to humans needs interruption.

The evolutionary conception of human being underlying Deweyan creatures rejects, in good Darwinian fashion, essentialism. Innateness, however, is not so easily eliminated because what differentiates species, at least in part, from each other are their innate qualities. Where essentialism denotes fixity without possibility of change or modification, innateness could afford the possibility of change. Consider the phenomenon of neuroplasticity. All organisms with a nervous system innately have this trait. Neuroplasticity, however, is not something that is, by its very definition, eternally fixed. Rather, it is a dynamic trait responsive to the organism's life function within its environment. Since animals, including humans, are plastic, our natures are not fixed and final, but modifiable. Scranton has many good reasons to believe that humans will continue to behave in violent ways; but such behavior is well understood as a result of our environmental conditions. After all, as Scranton argues and as Plato noted long ago, competition for resources is the origin of war and violence. We humans have long been able to imagine universal and peaceful ideals that hold true for all of us; we have fallen short in achieving these ideals because they were inadequate to the situation, including the economics. I suggest their inadequacy is the result of the ideal being insufficiently democratic (in the Deweyan sense) and/or insufficiently evolutionary. In describing violence as innate within humans, Scranton unnecessarily and perhaps dangerously limits his cause: just because violence is likely, given the circumstances, does not mean that we cannot strive for peaceful alternatives. Such alternatives require a critical reimagining of what it means to be human: a task for realistic, scientifically-informed but ultimately humanistic inquiry.

Nevertheless, I resonate with Scranton's larger goal. His frankness about the situation is admirable, particularly with regard to how we need to face it. He contends:

The crisis of global climate change, the crisis of capitalism, and the crisis of the humanities in the university today are all aspects of the same crisis, which is the suicidal burnout of our carbon-fueled global capitalist civilization. The odds of that civilization surviving are negligible. The odds of our species surviving are slim. The trouble we find ourselves in will likely prove too intractable for us to manage well, if we can manage at all... Our future will depend on our ability to confront it not with panic, outrage, or denial, but with patience, reflection, and love. (2015, 26–27)

This recognition of our species' likely extinction resonates with Deweyan creatures. The philosophical method of reconstruction offers the means of

resolving the tension of how to live in a radically new world with only old tools and ideas.

Scranton provides even further context for this tension. Chapters 1 and 2 describe, respectively, the problem of climate change ecologically and politically. From his analysis, Scranton concludes, “We are living *right now* in the midst of a global climate emergency and social crisis that demands immediate response and long-term adaptation. We must prepare for the coming storm—not in thirty or forty years, but today” (2015, 51). And yet this problem for us right now appears a catch-22 because the very conditions that produced it—carbon-fueled advanced industrial and informational civilization—seem to be the only means available to resolve it (2015, 53). How people are framing and using the situation and the tools therein further problematize and create the possibility for genuine despair.

The third chapter describes the desperate global situation of humans. Scranton anticipates his photohumanism by characterizing politics in terms of energy. “Politics,” he writes, “whether for bees or for humans, is the energetic distribution of bodies in systems” (2015, 55). These bodies may resonate with one another creating larger energy fields that affect a wider range of the environment. The problem is that our current global order has made it practically impossible for these energetic resonances to sufficiently interrupt the status quo to deliver genuine transformation. Scranton reviews a litany of proposed techno-fixes that are insufficient given the time scales of the problem. This listing illustrates the inadequacy of protest movements (so effective throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to bring about social change) to address the intricacies and complexities of the Anthropocene.

Be it the People’s Climate March, Flood Wall Street, the United Nations, or Wall Street itself, Scranton provides examples from the political left and the political right that illustrate the wickedness of the problem (2015, 53). Some argue that capitalism is the problem while others argue it is the solution (2015, 66). Corruption, disagreement, lack of innovation, et cetera are indeed difficulties humans face. But they are not the core problem. Scranton argues that

The problem with our response to climate change isn’t a problem with passing the right laws or finding the right price for carbon or changing people’s minds or raising awareness. *Everybody already knows*. The problem is that the problem is too big. The problem is that different people want different things. The problem is that nobody has real answers. The problem is that the problem is us. (2015, 68)

Hence the need for a new humanism that re-envision who we are so that we may no longer be a wicked problem. In other words, we—how we conceive of ourselves—need to die so that something new may come to be.

How things so far have come to be is the focus of chapter 4 in which Scranton argues that the human capacity for violence has been, at times, a productive force. Consider the following:

Some like to say that “violence never solved anything,” but this is a comforting lie, and it’s comforting to precisely the wrong people. The real reason that non-violence is considered to be a virtue in the powerless is that the powerful do not want to see their lives or property threatened. As a matter of fact, violence has solved many conflicts. Violence defeated fascism and Nazism in World War II. Violence enforced the end of slavery during the Reconstruction following the American Civil War. Violence freed the American colonies from British rule, just as it freed numerous other colonies across the world from imperial domination. Violence deposed the malignant French aristocracy in 1789 and overthrew the despotic Russian aristocracy in 1917. Violence was central to the successes of the labor movement, and the threat of violence was key to the struggle for Civil Rights. Violence has also been used to conquer vulnerable nations, oppress the weak, torture innocents, threaten critics, force women to submit to rape, pillage cities, and eradicate entire populations. A sword is a sword, whichever way it cuts. (2015, 74–75)

Indeed, Scranton continues, “Our future promises to be as savage as our past” (2015, 75).

The savagery is the result of competition over a limited set of resources. For Scranton, the savagery continues because of how the current neoliberal elite controls resources primarily to keep the masses in a delicate balance of freedom and trepidation: Fear is socially regulated to keep people from taking action against the interest of the rich and powerful. Scranton argues that such a feat is accomplished in a fashion that resonates strongly with what Tschaepé and I have called dopamine democracy (Tschaepé 2016 and Solymosi 2016a). Scranton describes it as follows:

More than in any other way, fear comes to us in images and messages, as social media vibrations, products of cultural technologies that we have interpolated into our lives. Going about our daily business, we receive constant messages of apprehension and danger, ubiquitous warnings, insistent needling jabs to the deep lizard brain. Somebody died. Something blew up. Something might blow up. Somebody attacked somebody. Somebody killed somebody. Guns. Crime. Immigrants. Terrorists. Arabs. Mexicans. White supremacists. Killer cops. Demonic thugs. Rape. Murder. Global warming. Ebola. ISIS. Death. Death. Death. (2015, 78)

These jabs to the deep lizard brain produce incessant anticipation—a process in which dopamine plays an integral role—that when left unconsumed leads to unhealthy and addictive behavior, including paranoia and political paralysis. The actor is crippled by fear and becomes incapable of the marriage of imagination and action required for problem solving.

Tschaep describes the matter in terms of neuroscience and incentive salience; that is, “the immediacy of wanting and seeking, without critical reflection or deliberation” (2016, 32):

There are multiple neurochemical systems implicated in the processes of liking, commenting, and sharing within social media activity. For instance, the opioid, endocannabinoid, and GABA-benzodiazepine neurotransmitter systems are all involved in the pleasure associated with making choices [...] The mesolimbic dopaminergic system has greater influence on motivation, especially with regard to wanting and reward, embodied in the seeking activities. Seeking is directly influential to attention, wanting, and anticipation [...] The type of wanting specific to the dopaminergic system does not require awareness—cognitive expectation—or particular long-term goal-seeking, but is rather incentive salience, which is focused on the immediacy of reward-related stimuli or objects of gratification. Incentive salience has been linked with the irrational wanting associated with addiction, wherein the desire is not for something cognitively wanted [...], but is desired regardless of a cognitive want [...] [Behaviors] within social media, such as liking, sharing, and commenting on Facebook, are linked to both pleasure and to incentive salience, but it is the dopaminergic activity—the reinforced feelings of focused attention, incentive salience, and anticipation of pleasure—that are especially surreptitious within a neoliberal context in terms of democratic choice. What appear to be choices brought about by cognitive want are in fact irrational choices motivated by incentive salience. (2016, 35–36)

Without intelligently reflecting about our circumstances, a sufficient number of us are left prey to the neoliberal elites for incessant exploitation of our baser fears and desires. For Plato and Tschaep, such behaviors set the stage for demagoguery and tyranny.

Scranton continues his description of our reaction to such circumstances, writing:

Sometimes when these vibrations shake us, we discharge them by passing them on, retweeting the story, reposting the video, hoping that others will validate our reaction, thus assuaging our fear by assuring ourselves that collective attention has been alerted to the threat. Other times we react with aversion, working to dampen the vibrations by searching out positive reinforcements, pleasurable images and videos, something funny, something—anything—to ease the fear. We buy something. We eat food. We pop a pill. We fuck. (2015, 78–79)

The masses resonate with one another, seeking homeostasis without critical reflection. The only cognitive work done is palliative, not transformative of the situation that brings about the fear and danger. Scranton continues,

In either passing on the vibration or reacting against it, we let the fear short circuit our own autonomous desires, diverting us from our goals and loading ever more emotional static into our daily cognitive processing. We become

increasingly distracted from our ambitions and increasingly susceptible to such distraction. And whether we transmit or react, we reinforce channels of thought, perception, behavior, and emotion that, over time, come to shape our habits and our personality. As we train ourselves to resonate fear and aggression, we reinforce patterns of thought and feeling that shape a society that breeds the same. (2015, 79)

Tschaepse sees such a society as resembling the licentious democracy Plato describes in the *Republic* (2013b and 2016). This is not least because of the humans looking downward at their devices. Scranton describes the situation:

Our consciousness is shaped daily through feedback systems where some post or headline provokes a feeling and we discharge that feeling by provoking it in others. Social media like Facebook crowdsource catharsis, creating self-contained wave pools of aggression and fear, pity and terror, stagnant flows that go nowhere and do nothing. (2015, 83)

What drives this violence seems quite independent, however, of whether it is innate in humans. Scranton describes these devices as “not neutral, but have been developed to serve particular interests” (2015, 84). These interests are not by any means that of the demos; rather they are of the few, the neoliberal corporate elites who determine through the production (from coal and oil) and control (through consumerism) of energy. Through the vibrations produced and spread through this power, Scranton argues, “the more we strengthen our habits of channeling and the less we practice our autonomous reflection or independent critical thought. With every protest chant, retweet, and Facebook post, we become stronger resonators and weaker thinkers” (2015, 84–85). Since the neoliberal elites have managed to control energy to the extent that the resonances between humans and their myriad groups keep them from thinking and only interested in attaining security and escaping the feeling of fear, people are incapable of taking power: for they only consume but do not produce it (2015, 59–60, 85). Without the ability to think independently, abstractly, and imaginatively, the problem of global warming becomes more daunting precisely because of its nature, for it “offers no apprehensible foe” against which to unite (2015, 85).

Scranton’s response to the problem of the Anthropocene is to put to new use an old view of philosophy. Scranton’s use of Sloterdijk’s view of the philosopher as interrupter resonates with philosophical reconstruction. In taking the two together, I hope to present a reconstructed photohumanism that is emphatically pluralistic because it interrupts the dualisms upon which Scranton plays.

Elaborating from his view of politics as the energetic distribution of bodies in systems, Scranton discerns philosophy as interruption from disruption, “which shocks a system and breaks it into pieces, [whereas] interruption sus-

pends continuous processes” (2015, 87). Through reflecting upon and sitting with one’s situation, Scranton finds a way toward learning to die. According to Scranton, “Sloterdijk sees the role of the philosopher in the human swarm as that of an aberrant anti-drone slow-dancing to its own rhythm” refusing to be taken up by the whole or by dogma. In doing so, the philosopher resists the hegemonic homogenization of neoliberal monoculture that “mak[es] all of us more susceptible to such viral phenomena as nationalism, scapegoating, panic, and war fever.” Indeed, Scranton continues, “Interrupting the flows of social production is anarchic and counterproductive, like all good philosophy: If it works, it helps us to stop and see our world in new ways. If it fails, as it often and even usually does, the interrupter is integrated, driven mad, ignored, or destroyed” (2015, 87).

The reorientation Scranton is after in his reading of Sloterdijk’s conception of philosophy leads to a new humanism that aims at balancing memory of the past and the energetic potential of present technologies. Throughout, Scranton dramatizes his position with the use of binaries. Oscillating between pole and antipode surely resonates with many others for whom dualistic thinking is natural. But the oscillating becomes problematic in the discussion of humanism. For example, from the start Scranton introduces perhaps the most pertinent dualisms, mind/body and life/death, writing: “We are mortal, material, corporeal beings, blessed with quickening but doomed to decay. In a very important sense, we don’t need to learn anything at all about dying: it’s the one thing in life we can absolutely count on getting done” (2015, 89). Scranton goes on to wax poetic about how humans are, on the one hand, “compelled to live,” but on the other hand, “born to die” (2015, 90). On its own, such a juxtaposition may seem harmless, but it serves as the launching point for the main theme of the book, philosophy as learning to die.

Scranton discusses the men who had written about philosophy as preparation for death. He reviews Montaigne, then Cicero, and, ultimately, Plato and his *Phaedo*, “where Socrates argues that philosophy is the practice of learning how to separate the soul from the body” (2015, 91). As any reader of the dialogue readily understands, Socrates is not arguing for a detachment that conceives of the soul or the self as illusory. Quite the contrary, as Socrates’ joking answer to Crito’s question about what to do with Socrates’ body after he dies illustrates: Socrates is not identical to his body but is, always has been, and always will be distinct from it (115c–d). In other words, this view of philosophy as learning to die maintains an inescapable mind/body dualism.

This historical review of philosophy as the practice of dying immediately leads to Scranton’s advocacy of philosophical humanism as the best response to the existential challenge of the Anthropocene. Scranton writes:

Philosophical humanism in its most radical practice is the disciplined interruption of somatic and social flows, the detachment of consciousness from impulse, and the condensation of conceptual truths out of the granular data of experience. It is the study of “dying and being dead,” a divestment from *this* life in favor of deeper investments in a life beyond ourselves. In recognizing the dominion of death and the transience of individual existences, we affirm a web of being that connects past to future, them to us, me to you. (2015, 91)

Historically, this detachment is predicated on distinctions that are reified into dualisms. Reason ought to control emotion; the mind ought to control the body; mind abstracts truth from the ambiguity of experiences; one ought to divest from this life for the sake of the next. Scranton is right that death dominates and individual existences come and go, leaving only a pattern of life cycles to connect one moment of time to any other.

However, he is wrong to so simply take up this form of humanism without accounting for his underlying naturalism as integral to the view of a philosopher as interrupter. This naturalism resonates with Deweyan creatures. Interrupting and resonating are natural for Scranton, yet his discussion of transcendence overlooks its historical connotation as predominantly otherworldly or supernatural, viz., dualistic.

After reviewing the stoicism of Marcus Aurelius and the dialectic of Hegel (2015, 92–93), Scranton develops further the connection between humanism and learning to die. The lesson, as he sees it, is to let go of oneself in order to recognize, understand, and participate in a larger collective, “a kind of human existence transcending any particular place or time” (2015, 93).² This transcendence is not supernatural or metaphysical, like a Kantian transcendental realm of things in themselves nor does it refer to a Platonic heaven of the Forms. Rather, it is a humanism that results from the active cultivation of individual consciousnesses and freedom that inevitably yields the recognition of a deep continuity between humans as well as the plurality.

Scranton connects this pluralism to freedom, wisdom, and narrative, writing:

We face this freedom as individuals, fully in the present, yet our actions are determined by the past and take on their full meaning only in the future. As we gain wisdom, individual consciousness reveals its complex entanglements with collective life, history, and the universe. We live in and orient our existence through conceptual and narrative structures that rationalize our impulses, pattern our habits, and connect our behaviors to collective rhythms. These conceptual and narrative structures are the cultural technology through which we make meaning and shape our desires. Facebook shapes desire differently than does the Koran, each of which shapes desire differently than does

2. This is an interesting move to make following a discussion of Hegel, for whom, as Rorty (1999) puts it, “philosophy is holding one’s time in thought”—in other words, philosophy is always done and never escapes its local context.

a West Elm catalog, Emily Dickinson's poetry, Tai Chi, the Igbo New Yam festival, democracy, Passover, "the market," or Mexican *telenovelas*. (2015, 94)

Scranton weaves together earlier themes of energetic bodies vibrating and resonating together with the political concerns of protests and social media as well as the need for rich humanistic study, be it religion, poetry, or pop culture.

Indeed, Scranton refers to Homer and Aeschylus, as so many Westerners have done since the days of Aeschylus himself (2015, 95–97) before moving, unlike so many Westerners, toward a cultural pluralism. Scranton draws on contemporary biology and anthropology to recognize first how similar *Homo sapiens* are to other forms of life in how we communicate, socialize, build, and emote (2015, 94). But what distinguishes our species from all others is "our knack for collective symbolic manipulation" that empowers us with "our greatest treasure and most potent adaptive technology the only thing that might save us in the Anthropocene, because it is the only thing that can save those who are already dead: memory" (2015, 94–95).

Memory affords humans the means of imagining possibilities based on how things were and how things are, such that things could be. Still moving toward pluralism, Scranton writes:

Attending to the historical and philological genealogies of our current conceptual, symbolic structures of existence helps us recognize who we are, who we have been, and who we might become. The comparative study of human cultures across the world and through time helps us see that our particular way of doing things right here, right now, is a contingent adaptation to particular circumstances, yet at the same time an adaptation built with universal human templates of meaning-making and symbolic reasoning, with tools and technologies we have inherited from the past. I've relied mainly on Greek examples, but the roots of our contemporary global civilization are also Akkadian, Sumerian, Chinese, Indian, Mesoamerican, Judaic, Egyptian, Nubian, Thule, Dorset, and Finno-Ugric. Anywhere humans live, we make meaning. The record of that wisdom, the heritage of the dead, is our most valuable gift to the future. (2015, 98–99)

This view of humanistic study is quite novel, yet this novelty is unrecognized by Scranton. For he takes an evolutionary view of how to study our past—these are various forms of how humans have adapted to particular environments—and goes on to advocate a purpose for the study. They are instrumentally useful for thinking about how to live meaningfully in our circumstances. For all his contention that humanistic study is most important, more vital than technoscientific inquiry, his conception of humanistic study is strikingly technoscientific in its evolutionary and experimental attitude. This evolutionary and experimental technoscience is yet another characteristic of the Deweyan creature.

Such an attitude resonates with the pragmatist tradition I advocate. My point, however, is that it is detrimentally unacknowledged by Scranton. He implicitly illustrates it, however, in the following: “The study of the humanities is nothing less than the patient nurturing of the roots and heirloom varieties of human symbolic life. This nurturing is a practice not strictly of curation, as many seem to think today, but of active attention, cultivation, making and remaking. It is not enough for the archive to be stored, mapped, or digitized. It must be *worked*” (2015, 99). Scranton then takes up *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to illustrate his point, as he reworks it as a lesson in climate change (2015, 100–104).

Following his reworking of *Gilgamesh*, Scranton reworks the history of writing as a way of remembering that began with clay and moves to light. He acknowledges the elite role literacy has played historically and how literacy became tied to “[t]he fullest expression of human life” (2015, 106). But things have rapidly evolved in the last century and thus demand a new name: “With the advent of mass-produced sound and image reproduction technologies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (phonograph, radio, film, television), humanism-as-literacy was superseded, but with the rise of personal computers and the Internet, it has been re-integrated and transformed into humans-as-digital-literacy, or what we might call photohumanism” (2015, 106–107).

Thanks to the dopaminergic democratic effects of photohumanist technologies, Scranton suggests we are able to discern a new variety of human, *Homo lux*, which “remains biologically reactive, easily panicked, all too quickly stirred to hatred [...] The dangers of collective madness, witch hunts, and totalitarian war exist in new social networks as much as or even more than they did in the early twentieth-century radio broadcasts, newspaper stories, and cinema reels” (2015, 107).

In refusing to abandon the memory of the dead—“our few thousand years of hard-won knowledge, accumulated at great cost and against great odds” (2015, 109)—we philosophical humanists must interrupt the energetic flow of *Homo lux*. Scranton’s suggestion is that we build biological and cultural arks “to carry forward endangered wisdom” (2015, 109). Such libraries are “the seed stock of our future intellectual growth” as well as “its soil, its source, its womb” (2015, 109). The future of humanity, Scranton argues, is the future of the humanities (2015, 109): of an evolutionary and naturalistic humanism that sees humans as products of and participants in the evolutionary process—a key characteristic of Deweyan creatures. Indeed, the future of humanity would benefit from the fallibilism, the conscientiousness, the imagination, the experimentalism, and the democratic faith of Deweyan creatures. Such traits are integral for the philosophical work of not only dying but also birthing new ideas out of the old.

The cyclical patterns of time frame Scranton's outlook and bring about a tranquil acceptance of the situation at hand. "Life," Scranton writes, "whether for a mosquito, a person, or a civilization, is a constant process of becoming, a continual emergence into patterns of attraction and aversion, desire and suffering, pleasure and pain." He goes on, "Life is a flow. The forms it takes are transient. Death is nothing more than the act of passing from one pattern into another" (2015, 113). The living machines we are, according to Scranton, "seek[...] homeostatic perpetuation" through the resistance of death (the life form itself must perpetuate) and through the acceptance of death (only through such acceptance can a life form recognize that the perpetuation of its kind is made possible) (2015, 112).

This tension between the old and the new continues in Scranton's further elaboration of his evolutionary photohumanism in the Coda. He moves from a cosmic evolutionary scale to a planetary to a biological to a cultural one. Scranton describes the origins of explanation and understanding. At first, the whole of nature, including humans, is personified and so explained. In time, a distinction emerges between the human, in which free thought accounts for the reasons humans do what they do, and the natural (or scientific), in which a causal determinism accounts for all (2015, 113–114). Scranton returns to the need for reconstruction with this tension between the old and the new, between causality and reason, between nature and culture. Such is the photohumanistic condition, he writes:

And even as we try to make sense of our lives, we are harried on all sides and at all hours by stimuli, possessed by yearnings and passions we wouldn't choose, don't understand, and can barely control. As we practice interrupting circuits of reaction, however, striving to recognize the forces that work on and through us, we come more and more to see how these forces are the very wiring that connects us to each other and to the universe. (2015, 114)

This connection is one of evolutionary continuity. In the following passage, however, Scranton goes from emphasizing such continuity naturally to overstepping it culturally:

We are finite and limited machines, but we are not merely machines: we are vibrating bodies of energy, condensations of stellar dust and fire, at once matter and life, extension and thought, moment and frequency. The iron in our blood, the oxygen we breathe, and the carbon of which we are composed were all created in the dying hearts of stars. We are creatures of light, and can find in our history the lineaments of a photohumanism going back to ancient days, a form of thought more powerful than any electronic web, more profound than any merely social media. As was written in the Book of Proverbs, "The human spirit is the lamp of God, searching all the innermost parts." (2015, 115)

Yes, we are all “starstuff,” as Carl Sagan put it (2006, xii–xiii). But to declare that photohumanism harkens back to the Old Testament misses the radical nature of Scranton’s argument. In appealing to scripture in this way, he passes over the tension there is between dogma and free thought. As presented, it is as though the ancients already had the knowledge it took science centuries to recognize, thus granting the old an unwarranted supremacy. But it may not matter at this point in Scranton’s concluding thoughts. For such freedom may well be illusory, given the determinism Scranton embraces in the end. “Whether we survive or not, however, has already been laid out in the explosion of quantum energy that, more than thirteen billion years ago, began the chain of events and reactions that have led to this moment: me writing this page, you reading it” (2015, 116). He concludes, “Nothing went wrong. No mistakes were made. There was no sin, no error, no fall. There was only necessity” (2015, 117).

With such a conclusion, Scranton misses what is most crucial for his endorsement of humanistic study: In learning to die, the philosopher becomes accountable and thereby free to act justly without concern for personal consequence. Without the elbow room for making mistakes, of room for error, there can be no genuine learning, most especially, of how to die.

One aspect of our self conception that needs to die is the belief that causation is ontological. Scranton believes that it is, as his conclusions reveal. Thinking about causation has a storied history, from Aristotle to Kant. The strength of modern science is largely due to its focus on efficient causality over other forms, which were eliminated or reduced to the efficient. Our commonsense view of causation is not only efficient causality but also a linear one (for example, billiard balls clanging into one another, or the links of a chain) in which a cause has its effect locally in space and proximate in time. Such a conception of causation is the foundation of the determinism Scranton embraces and which alarms many humanists because of the apparent consequences for freedom and responsibility.

Yet this conception of causation as only efficient and linear is at odds with the ecological systems thinking behind not only climatology but also cognitive and behavioral neuroscience and ecological psychology. Causation, for these approaches, is also circular and non-linear. Moreover, the science of light as a quantum phenomenon challenges the commonsense belief that a cause’s effect is both local and proximate. Similarly, sciences of life and mind demand a reimagining of the nature of causation. Dewey articulated this demand in his 1938 treatise, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, writing that:

The view that the category of causation is logical, that it is a functional means of regulating existential inquiry, not ontological, and that all existential cases that can be termed causal are “practical,” is not a view that will receive ready acceptance.

Indeed staunch Darwinians like Daniel Dennett have complicated their projects of reconciling the scientific view with our humanistic ones by maintaining the ontological status of causality, despite the lessons of Darwin.³ Dewey continues:

But there was a time when species and essences were also conceived to be ontological. There was a time when purpose or end was taken to be an ontological property of Nature. Again, there was a time when *simplicity* was thought to be an ordering principle of Nature. Nothing in science happened save relief of inquiry from incubi when these notions were so changed that they were understood to be directive methodological principles of inquiry—logical rather than ontological. There is no risk in predicting a similar thing will happen with the conception of causation. Already difficulties have arisen in actual scientific findings which have caused some persons to believe that the whole idea of causation must be thrown overboard. But this is a mistake. The conclusion to be drawn is that the ontological interpretation is to be abandoned. Recognition of the value of the causal category as a leading principle of existential inquiry is in fact confirmed, and the theory of causation is brought into consonance with scientific practice.

In doing so, Dewey argues, the apparent conflict between science and art is eliminated because the relationship between quantity and quality is no longer reductive. Science is quantitative but not at the expense of qualitative aspects traditionally associated with the arts.

The institution of qualitative individual existential situations consisting of ordered sequences and coexistences is the goal of all existential inquiry. “Causation” is a category that directs the operations by which this goal is reached in the case of problematic situations. (1938, 456–457)

In reconstructing causation, we also reconstruct the nature of inquiry both scientific and artistic. Deweyan creatures consider the products of scientific inquiry to be recipes for solving generic problems (*cf.* Dewey 1938, 451, n.12, and Solymosi 2011, 363–365). Artistic inquiry utilizes these recipes to produce new particular experiences. This technoscientific enterprise becomes philosophical when we deliberately exercise our intelligence in order to creatively imagine new ways of living in light of the old, not to forget the old but because our experiences have changed as we and our environments have through their dynamic and at times chaotic relations.

Scranton issues a clarion call for action in the Anthropocene. Contrary to cultural orthodoxy that sees STEM as the savior, Scranton argues that the arts and the humanities are not only better suited to but also imperative for humanity’s survival in this new world. I have argued that Scranton’s photohumanistic project has strong affinities with the Deweyan philosophy of reconstruction

3. This point goes well beyond the limits of this essay, but I direct the reader to Dennett 2003 and Zawidzki 2007. See also Deacon 2011 and Dennett 2013.

as I have described it in pluralistic humanism and Deweyan creatures, and it shares a concern for dopamine democracy as Tschaepé has discussed. Scranton's unaddressed tensions between binaries also benefits from this affinity. One such binary is the one between reason and causation or culture and nature. Dewey focused much of his career on dissolving the tension and illustrating a continuity instead. For Dewey and Scranton alike, the challenges that face civilization require not only our very best knowledge but also an imaginative capacity that affords new ways of organizing our lives. I believe that the ideals of Deweyan creatures—fallibility, conscientiousness, intelligence, experimentalism, and democracy, to name a few—are our best way forward for learning how to die.

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The Economics of Exceptionalism: The US and the International Criminal Court

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ABSTRACT

This article is a response to a call for a study of international criminal law as an economic phenomenon, going beyond addressing administrability, commensurability, and interpersonal comparison of utility, and instead focusing on problems of institutional choice. This approach differs from the typical methods of normative and descriptive scholarship of international criminal law. An institution like the International Criminal Court (ICC) can be usefully examined as an international public good, and as such offering little incentives for states such as the United States of America to join as they can enjoy benefits without costs. This article examines the economic basis for the US non-participation in the ICC and grapples with future prospectives.

Keywords

International criminal law, international criminal court
international public good, economics, free rider, institutional choice

It is a vicious circle. Negative US attitudes lower the incentives international courts have to tread carefully when US interests are at stake. This, in turn, gives more voice to opponents and further alienates the United States from the process, leading to harsher criticism down the line. Its military and economic preponderance and unilateralist stance forces other nations to try to find alternative ways to challenge it, but the United States, having little confidence in these mechanisms, and its own capacity to control them, resents it. (Romano 2009, 443)

Introduction

This essay proposes an introduction to the United States of America (US) position towards the International Criminal Court (ICC) from an economic perspective. It constitutes a first pass in canvassing the relevant literature, isolating economic aspects of what are considered traditionally normative or

political problems, and proposes some avenues for further analysis. The history of the US position towards the ICC is presented in some detail in order to show (and not assume) US constraints, preferences, and the perception of costs in joining the ICC. The current policy of partial reengagement is presented to underscore the strategies employed in foreign policy to remain outside the ambit of the law, thereby curtailing (some) costs, while pursuing preferences through the institution.

The issue in 2010: The Obama Administration's National Security Strategy (NSS) signaled a shift from a policy of hostility toward the International Criminal Court (ICC) to one of reengagement in cases that further American "values and interests," while maintaining (at least tentatively) the policy of not joining as a member state (Obama 2010, 48). The problem for the United States is to avoid having US citizens or officials subject to the ICC's jurisdiction, pursuant to the American Servicemembers Protection Act (ASPA), while undertaking strategic international activity and promoting international criminal law, acknowledged to be in the national interest (Fairlie 2010, 538). The policy is thus currently to participate in ICC activities strictly on a case-by-case basis (Fairlie 2010, 538).

US foreign policy aims for leadership in international criminal law, but hostility to the ICC, as a result of the refusal of successive administrations and Congress to risk the prosecution of American citizens by an international body is now set to evolve. Justifications for the refusal to participate in the ICC include the idea that the US has unique responsibilities in international peacekeeping and concerns about politicized prosecutions (Prosper and Newton 2002, 894).

Early US policy support for an international criminal court was reflected in US leadership and strong participation in the Rome Conference (Scheffer 1998), as well as policy statements—short of law and implementation—from the executive branch as well as Congress (Wedgwood, *et.al.* 2001, 124). Ultimately, however, and despite having been a major participant in the Rome negotiations, the United States voted against the Treaty (Elsea 2006, 3). In what might appear to be a reversal, President William Clinton signed the Rome Treaty near the end of his presidency. He described the document as flawed, however, and wrote that he would not submit the treaty to the Senate for advice and consent, further recommending that his successor withhold it from the Senate as well (Elsea 2006, 3). The shortcomings of the treaty from the perspective of the Clinton administration are set out in President Clinton's signing statement, and concern, in particular, the possibility that the court might eventually undertake proceedings against nationals of non-member states (Scheffer 2001, 63–64). David Scheffer, former Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues and US delegate at the Rome negotiations, refers to the delegation's failure to obtain "the silver bullet of guaranteed protection" for

all US nationals as having influenced the Clinton administration's attitude towards ratification of the Rome Statute in the Senate (Scheffer 2001, 63).

The Bush administration's stand toward the ICC was one of more formalized hostility, marked by the administration's "unsigning" of the Rome Treaty, in contrast to the Clinton view that as signatory, the US could nonetheless "stay in the game" by participating in the various Assembly of States mechanisms, in particular in the definition of the crime of aggression (Scheffer 2001, 67). Shortly upon taking office, the Bush administration sent a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations clearly expressing that the United States had no intention of ratifying the Rome Treaty, and therefore would have no obligations towards it or its resulting institutions (Elsa 2006, 2). Congressional action on this policy resulted in the addition of the American Servicemembers' Protection Act (ASPA) to the supplemental appropriations bill for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2002, H.R. 4775, 107th Congress (ASPA 2002, 10).

The ASPA was the legislative enactment of the US government policy to protect American citizens, in particular (but not exclusively) active members of the military abroad from potential prosecution by an international body. Policy concerns most commonly expressed were the ICC's power to direct investigations of citizens of non-treaty member parties, lack of accountability of ICC judges and prosecutors, perceived erosion of the Security Council's jurisdiction over peace and security, and finally, the potential constraint to the US's willingness to conduct activities abroad in the pursuit of its national interests (Arieff *et. al.* 2011, 3). The ASPA prohibits the use of appropriated funds to the ICC or the transmission of any intelligence or law-enforcement information to the tribunal, and authorizes the President to take "all means necessary" to secure the release of American citizens if they are detained by, or at the request of, the ICC. The ASPA has thus been nicknamed the "Hague Invasion Act" (Fairlie 2010, 538).

The Senate version of the bill was enrolled, and included a new provision (known as the Dodd Amendment) stating that the ASPA will not prevent the United States from cooperating with the ICC if it prosecutes persons such as Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic, or Osama bin Laden (Fairlie 2010, 538). This piecemeal approach—and the cooperation with the ICC in specific cases where individuals are characterized by notoriety—seems to have persisted through the Obama administration, and is reflected in the 2010 National Security Strategy.

US policy as an economic problem

Paul W. Kahn describes an American nation that considers itself the center of law, of human rights norms, and of due process institutions, from which

these goods (or some similar to them) have radiated outward, to the benefit of others (2000, 5). This would explain, he argues, why the US is reluctant to sign human rights treaties and conventions, as these commitments are not perceived as adding any substantive improvement to existing American laws, nor do they reflect the self-perception of a nation that considers itself not a subject of law, but as an example to others. This, writes Kahn, “appears to the rest of the world as a form of political hypocrisy masquerading as acceptance of international law” (2000, 5).

While this sentiment may be justified, it nonetheless appears to be somewhat of an impotent critique, lacking, as Jeffrey Dunoff and Joel Trachtman have put it in their critique of contemporary international legal scholarship, “persuasively articulated connection between description and prescription” (1999a, 3). Dunoff and Trachtman call for an economic study of international law, and indeed one that is not merely satisfied with conducting cost-benefit analyses (however complex)—which struggle, in any event, with problems of “administrability, commensurability, and interpersonal comparison of utility” (1999a, 3)—but in addressing problems of institutional choice. This, according to Dunoff and Trachtman, would contribute to a “progressive research program,” and the approach appears particularly well suited to exploring the problem of the US position towards the International Criminal Court.

The dysfunctions observed in some international bodies as well as the relations of states’ policies towards those institutions can be fruitfully examined from an economic perspective, (Dunoff and Trachtman 1999b, 394) as these types of institutions—including courts—overcome transaction costs (Abbott and Snidel 2000, 421), as well as strategic problems. A permanent criminal court can be examined as a venue that permits states to cooperate to create joint gains (Dunoff and Trachtman 1999b, 395; Slaughter *et al.* 1998, 367), in particular when contrasted to ad hoc courts, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, widely considered to be unwieldy, expensive, ineffective, and inefficient (Zackin 2004, 541; UN 2004). The professed goals of normative institutions—as well as those goals advanced in the National Security Strategy, among them “ending impunity,” “promoting justice,” or enhancing “accountability”—are not, however, as obviously or immediately quantifiable as goals in other policy areas, and considerable methodological challenges beset the examination of the costs and benefits of initiatives supporting (or rejecting) international criminal justice (Shany 2010, 8). Difficulties in assessing (very real and often steep) costs as well as highly desirable benefits can be overcome, and cost-benefit analyses to measure normative foreign policy goals and objectives are not out of reach. Such analyses have employed analogies (*ceteris paribus*) to the assessment of similar policies in

comparable areas (Shany 2010, 8), as means of evaluating how the policy, and policy alternatives, measure up to the economic efficiency and equity criteria in international law.

If a cost-benefit analysis of the President's policy of limited reengagement with the International Criminal Court is considered a useful starting point to establish a basis for a more refined study, a preliminary analysis of the manner in which the goals set out in the National Security Strategy (NSS) can be translated into benefits, and the means chosen in attaining them to costs, is required. Costs and benefits are not always mere inputs and outputs amenable to monetized quantification; in this instance, indeed, the primary goods at stake constitute public or collective goods, namely national and international security (Grayson 2010, 131), and are thus rarely amenable to a market evaluation (Dunn 2012, 207); furthermore, they are nonexclusive, which signifies that once they are provided, they are provided to all, and non-rival, which means that the use of the public good by an individual does not decrease the availability of the good for others (Friedman 2002, 596). Public goods cannot be supplied privately (or at least not reliably); thus, this type of good (which includes justice) constitutes a solution to a collective action problem (Posner 2009, 3). In developing a wider argument about international law, Eric Posner has coined the phrase "global public goods" to designate those public goods that "exist at a scale that transcends national borders" (Posner 2009, 3). One of the crucial properties of global public goods is that they can be enjoyed by individuals who do not pay for them or contribute to their purchase; these individuals (or in the case of global public goods, states) are known as free-riders. Free-riding, in turn, is one important reason why the market fails to provide public goods efficiently (Friedman 2002, 596).

A cost-benefit analysis might consider whether US participation in a piecemeal manner with the ICC is Pareto efficient, or explore the influence of a theoretical Kaldor-Hicks compensation to those who would be made worse off by the policy. Equity can relate to an ethical, legal, or social standard (Friedman 2002, 200). The US reengagement with the ICC presents ample opportunity for the examination of standards of justice, as it is explicitly devoted to questions relating to international criminal law. Equity, however, should not be confused with justice (certainly a broad concept); while an iniquitous policy will necessarily be unjust, it does not follow that equity (or fairness) exhausts the full content of justice. Equity refers to fairness in the distribution of a good (upon a given conception of fairness) but does not by necessity include or require other properties of justice such as procedural fairness, deserved rewards and punishments, formal or positive law, equality, impartiality, or universal application. Equity typically attempts to remedy political, economic, or policy choices that may deprive certain sectors of soci-

ety of opportunities and benefits, or apply disproportionate burdens to some individuals or groups. Equity is a consideration when seeking to evaluate a society's satisfaction beyond some aggregate measure, and serves to assess the manner in which a policy impacts on the welfare of society.

Equity considerations might explore whether Rawlsian distributive principles have been—or ought to be—observed behind an international “veil of ignorance,” in an “original position,” from which states would, for example, determine what international criminal justice could eventual become (Sadat 2010). Two postulates emerge from Rawls' theory based, it should be mentioned, on the same economic assumptions regarding individuals rationally maximizing self interest and utility that underpin other public choice theories (Rawls 1971, 183–192). First, each person (in this case, state) would chose the right to the most extensive freedom provided it is compatible with a similar liberty for others (Rawls 1971, 60); second, “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged” so that they are to the greatest advantage to the least advantaged, and they be attached to offices and positions open to all under fair and equal conditions of opportunity (Rawls 1971, 83). The “maximim” approach to justice as fairness (maximizing potential rights and prospects of the least well off) derives from the assumption that in the original position, members entering into a society without knowing what their attributes will be tend to be risk averse, as so much is at stake for themselves and their descendants (Rawls 1971, 169; Sterba 1978, 294). Leila Sadat has recently urged states to view their eventual commitment to the ICC in Rawlsian terms; however, Sadat's appeal seems to rest on the normative assumption that an international legal system should be fair, and protect the weakest among its citizens from the gravest offenses. Standard legal scholarship can already accomplish analyses of this type. Economic approaches to law, to advance knowledge about international institutions, agents, incentives, and preferences, should probably not be used if they do not add to standard normative statements of approval or disapproval for a given state's policies towards international law. Trivial statements about the nature of justice hardly require the assistance of economic approaches.

Application to the reengagement policy

Measures of efficiency in the context of international criminal law have proven vulnerable to the criticism that much of the literature conflates efficiency with compliance (Shany 2010, 7). Compliance, in turn, may not come close to measuring efficiency, if understood, as previously defined, as a relation between a goal and a measure of success in its achievement, as compliance before international legal bodies, may be more frequently noted before institutions where stakes are trivial, and remedies inconsequential

(Guzman 2008, 187). Yuvul Shany has argued that compliance also fails to assess other international court functions, such as dispute resolution, or the development of law, and that an inadequately defined standard of efficiency (as well as the theoretical and practical difficulties inherent in establishing its measure) leads to misunderstanding about the nature and functions of international courts (2010, 8). Shany proposes a research design that borrows approaches from the organizations literature and is focused on the two types of goals typically present in organizations. Following Charles Perrow, Shany distinguishes between “official goals”—the broad objectives explicitly expressed by an institution—and its “operative goals,” those that regardless of its *stated* goals, the organization actually appears to be prioritizing (2010, 10–12; Perrow 1961, 855).

The effectiveness of the US policy of reengagement with the ICC would thus be examined first in light of its explicit goals, namely the strengthening of international criminal justice, and in particular the engagement “with State Parties to the Rome Statute on issues of concern and are supporting the ICC’s prosecution of those cases that advance US interests and values, consistent with the requirements of US law.” Specific policies have been formulated and acted upon in the furtherance of this explicit goal among which are participation of the US as an observer at the Assembly of State Parties conference in Kampala, Uganda, in 2010 (Weed 2011, 18), implementation of the Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009 (the LRA Act), signed by President Obama in 2010,¹ which (in section 4) directs the President to develop a strategy to implement the law, which was transmitted to the House and to the Senate on November 24, 2010. The strategy refers to the ICC warrants against Joseph Kony and the leadership of the Lord’s Resistance Army, and states that the United States “will continue to be supportive of ICC cases against the LRA leaders.” In 2011, the United States voted in favor of Security Council Resolution 1970, referring the “situation” in ac to the ICC prosecutor and simultaneously securing recognition that non-member states have no obligations to the international court.² The

1. PL 11–172. § 3 (“Statement of Policy”) points out that this legislative effort follows the Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act of 2004 (Public Law 108–283) and subsequent resolutions, including Senate Resolution 366, 109th Congress, agreed to February 2, 2006, Senate Resolution 573, 109th Congress, agreed to September 19, 2006, Senate Concurrent Resolution 16, 110th Congress, agreed to in the Senate March 1, 2007, and House Concurrent Resolution 80, 110th Congress, agreed to in the House of Representatives June 18, 2007.
2. Security Council, Department of Public Information. In Swift, Decisive Action, Security Council Imposes Tough Measures on Libyan Regime, Adopting Resolution 1970 in Wake of Crackdown on Protesters.” SC/10187/Rev1, 26 February, 2011; SC/RES/1970.

goal of cooperation with the ICC on issues of interest to the US appears to be efficiently addressed by the policy actions mentioned above.

Operative goals, however, though efficiently supporting the piecemeal, interest-based goal evident in the NSS, may not efficiently promote international criminal law, another NSS goal. The LRA Act targets some of the same individuals against whom warrants have been issued by the ICC (Joseph Kony and the leadership of the Lord's Resistance Army), but the law, and its subsequent implementation—in particular with the President's War Powers Act Notification of October 14, 2011, announcing the deployment of combat-equipped special forces to Central Africa (Goldsmith 2011)—contains provisions calling on officials to “apprehend or remove” (referred to before the House Foreign Affairs Committee as “kill or capture”) (Bennett 2011)³ those individuals sought by the ICC. The problem that emerges is that operationally, the policy appears to run afoul of basic international criminal law norms prohibiting extrajudicial killings.⁴ The previously mentioned Security Council referral to the ICC of the Libya situation has not resulted in trials as of yet; a single suspect remains alive, while all others were killed extrajudicially near the end of armed hostilities in Libya, in circumstances—for instance in the case of Muammar Gaddafi—that may, according to former ICC Prosecutor Moreno-Ocampo, rise to the level of war crimes (Reuters, 2011). Operative goals suggest that the interest-based component of the NSS regarding international criminal law has priority over the normative objectives supporting international criminal law. The efficiency of the policy regarding the protection of US personnel and the advancement of US interests may undermine and thereby reduce the efficiency of the normative component of the policy. If the broad policy seeks to preserve both the interest-based and the normative components, subsequent policies, to be efficient, would have to pay closer attention to objectives that support and promote international criminal law, while advancing US interests and values.

Beyond cost-benefit analysis:

Economic problems, market failures, and the turn to prescription

A cost-benefit approach to international institutions seems unnecessarily constrained. Of greater analytical interest are the more tractable questions of

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3. Testimony of Don Yamamoto, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African Affairs Testimony Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Washington, DC October 25, 2011. Available at <http://www.state.gov/p/af/r/rm/2011/176160.htm>
 4. Statement of Professor Philip Alston, John Norton Pomeroy Professor of Law, NYU School of Law, former U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions (2004–2010), discussed in Chesney 2011, 13–14.

institutionalization. As Dunoff and Trachtman argue, there is a near perfect analogy between states acting as self-regarding maximizers in the international arena and individuals in the market (1999a, 14). The same problems occur: Of particular interest is the case of externalities. Refugee movements caused by wars, for example, or the broader externality consisting in the destruction to human capital caused by genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the Geneva Conventions (war crimes) may cause states who cannot on their own regulate these practices across the surface of the globe, to enter into attempts to coordinate through institutions. This approach reduces the transaction costs inherent to coordination on the “spot market” (Dunoff and Trachtman 1999a, 14–15) and can result in economies of scale and scope (Dunoff and Trachtman 1999a, 16).

A crucial question emerges regarding what, precisely, is being traded or leveraged in international transactions. Dunoff and Trachtman are uncompromisingly clear in defining the assets peculiar to states: these are components of power (Dunoff and Trachtman 1999a, 13). “In a legal context,” they write, “power is jurisdiction, including jurisdiction to prescribe, jurisdiction to adjudicate, and jurisdiction to enforce” (1999a, 13). This point is related, in turn, to the key economic assumption that preferences are exogenous, that is, that they are given, and in the case of international coordination, those interests would consist in the maximization (principally) of power. This assumption has been challenged by influential work in international relations and international legal scholarship, which argues that international preferences are “constructed” and tend to evolve positively through “socialization” (Dunoff and Trachtman 1999a, 21; Koh 1997, 2599; Ruggie 1998; and Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Endogenous preferences would, Dunoff and Trachtman concede, pose a theoretical challenge to an economic approach to international law. The matter of whether or not states “socialize” to rules is, however, subject to empirical verification. The behavior of the US in first assuming leadership in international law, then “exiting” from the ICC institution, then attempting spot transactions in international criminal initiatives (enforcement, arrest) as well as opting for the unregulated use of force dampens somewhat the claim that the US has been, through a complex series of interactions, somehow socialized. In this instance, it appears that the assumption that preferences are exogenous is fairly robust, and thus that economic theory can contribute to better understanding problems of coordination in international law.

Prescriptive literature urging the US to join the ICC typically emphasizes the virtues of power to shape the institution from within (Romano 2009, 37). In an editor’s note published in the *American Journal of International Law*, Michael Reisman, rather than adopting the pleading tone of the entreaties

frequently published about the American position, instead points to a phenomenon familiar to economists: The free-rider problem (2005, 617). Reisman was reacting to the UN Security Council's recent referral of investigations about the Darfur situation to the Prosecutor in Resolution 1593, which contains a clause *externalizing costs* to member states of the ICC (of the five permanent members of the Security Council, in addition to the US, China and Russia have both declined to join the ICC) as well as to the United Nations. Reisman writes that the drafters of the Rome Statute had decided, "not unreasonably, that when the Security Council 'leased' the Court for prosecutions that the Council wished the ICC to pursue but the Office of the Prosecutor itself had not initiated, the United Nations, which otherwise has no financial obligations to the ICC, would bear the expenses. (For a case like Darfur, the costs could be hundreds of millions of dollars.)" At least, in the case of Darfur, the US would be easy-riding rather than free-riding since it pays contributions to the United Nations, a portion of which will be devoted to the Darfur cases. Reisman expressed concern that perhaps, in the future, an "ironic" situation might arise when the Security Council members most hostile to the ICC would also become its free-riders, forcing member states of the ICC to pay for cases about which they were not consulted. Reisman was prescient, as the situation further deteriorated in 2011 with the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1970, which referred the Libyan situation to the ICC and included a provision explicitly setting out that no costs would be borne by the United Nations, but by member states of the ICC alone. In the international sphere, as opposed to the domestic market, there is no supranational mechanism (except the UN Security Council, and only in matters of limited jurisdiction; that is, threats to international peace and security, and in this instance the Council is composed of a majority of veto-wielding of free-riders) that could act to force potential free-riders to comply. There is no authority that can act in a manner analogous to the state that compels rational individuals to serve on juries, an action that, short of legal obligation, it is not rational to participate in (Romano 2009). This explains, to a large extent, the fact that international legal scholarship has resorted to appeals to morality and some pragmatic considerations that seem defeated by the fact that the US (as well as Russia and China) simply are not required to join the ICC, yet may employ it through the Security Council, provided that none among them (France or the United Kingdom) vetoes their attempt to pursue others through a Security Council referral.

It has been argued that a step towards an improvement of the situation would be to shift the view of the relation of the US to the ICC as one of principal-agent to that of principal-trustee (Alter 2008, 33), where instead of thinking of the court as an institution to which power has been delegated,

it is recast as one with expertise and legitimacy to which the principal would entrust, in this case, issues to adjudicated based on the trustee's moral authority (Romano 2009, 41–42). Of course, moral authority is weakened if the most powerful states do not trust the trustee, thereby fueling the circular nature of the problem. Matters of trust, subject to Albert O. Hirschman's framework of "exit and voice" (Friedman 2002; Hirshman 1970), lead to the kinds of results we observe in the normative entreaties for participation. Since the US has already exited, its opportunities for voice are dramatically reduced.

To further add to the pessimistic picture, game theoretical models would predict precisely the type of defection effectively carried out by the US. Game theory—or more precisely the prisoner's dilemma—assumes that players do not communicate. Robert Axelrod has shown that iterated games can evolve towards cooperation when players employ a tit for tat strategy, an insight that has been fruitfully adapted to international relations scholarship on institutions (Axerod 1984; Keohane 1984). Arguably, however, the problem of the US position toward the ICC is not lack of communication, but rather a problem of costs as well as the ability to free-ride without constraint. The costs to the US in joining the ICC as a member are perceived as extremely high. Liability for servicemen and women has been deemed by successive Republican and Democratic administrations alike to be out of the question. Some kind of positive price discrimination (analogous to affirmative action in favor of the world's sole superpower) might be conceived of to coax the US into the ICC. For example, member states could agree to immunities for American soldiers for missions, say, deemed consistent with international law. (The US already enjoys such immunities in United Nations peacekeeping and responsibility to protect initiatives.) But price discrimination, or something like Ramsey pricing, cannot compete with the current situation that features costless action, as well as an ability to refer cases to the Prosecutor of the ICC.

Conclusion

Further research should be conducted into pricing mechanisms, and institutional redesign, in particular at the Security Council level. At first blush, the latter proposal does not appear feasible or plausible, but given its current power-over jurisdiction, including jurisdiction to prescribe, jurisdiction to adjudicate, and jurisdiction to enforce vested in the Security Council, its members have little incentive to enter into credible and costly commitments such as joining the ICC.

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Poems of Man: Thomas Mann's Ideas About a New Humanism

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ABSTRACT

The questions “What is man?” and “What is Europe?” were among the main interests of Thomas Mann. In dozens of his essays and speeches as well as in some of his major novels Mann searched for the essence of European culture. In this paper we discuss Mann's ideas about humanism, which he considered to be the core of the European identity. In both Mann's novels and his essays he investigates the opposition between Enlightenment values and Romantic thinking. Mann believed in the necessity of a fusion of these two, a synthesis in which a belief in reason, morality and the possibility of progress go hand in hand with an awareness of the dark and tragic side of the human condition. “Dostoevsky in moderation,” as one of his essays is titled. This synthesis, which he named a “humanism of the *homo Dei*,” is Mann's proposal for a renewed European identity. Mann's ideas about a revived humanism as the foundation of the European identity are both interesting in the context of his literary *oeuvre* as well as inspiring in the light of our contemporary debates on European and Western values and identity.

Keywords

humanism, European identity, idea of Europe, Western values,
Romanticism, Thomas Mann

Introduction

In an interview near the end of his life, Thomas Mann explained that his ambition as a writer had always been to contribute to “a new belief, a new religion and a new feeling for humanity and personality. That is my literary aim, and if my work has a value, it has value on this basis” (Clark 2006, 113). In fact Mann referred to his novels as “poems of man” (1963, 5). Indeed Mann's novels as well as his essays can be read as reflections on man and on a

new humanism. Although an impressive number of studies have been written on Mann's life and his literary work, his ideas about a revived humanism as a possible foundation for a renewed European and Western identity have received relatively little scholarly attention.¹ In our view, these ideas are both interesting in the context of his literary *oeuvre* as well as highly relevant in the light of our contemporary debates about European and Western identity. This article aims to fill a gap by exploring Mann's ideas about what he called a "humanism of the *homo Dei*." Humanist ideas manifest themselves time and again in Mann's work, in his fiction and essays as well as his letters and diary notes. Therefore we have chosen a broad approach, in which novels as well as essays, speeches and personal documents are researched.

Between optimism and pessimism

Thomas Mann (1875–1955) was a Janus-faced writer. Rearward facing was the rather pessimistic novelist, influenced by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, fascinated by the inward intellectual and artist who are unfit for life. Everywhere in his work we meet this type: From Hanno Buddenbrook, Detlev Spinell (in the novella *Tristan*) and Tonio Kröger by way of Gustav von Aschenbach (*Death in Venice*) and Lodovico Settembrini (*The Magic Mountain*) up to Serenus Zeitblom and Adrian Leverkühn in *Doctor Faustus*. All of them fare rather badly.

In Mann's early years his rearward facing view was not yet corrected by a forward-looking counterpart. His point of view was apolitical, German and Romantic, culminating in *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man* (*Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*), written during the war and published in 1918. This work includes the essay in which he contrasted German *Kultur* (stressing values such as tradition, aristocracy, the organic community and the spiritual life) with West-European *Zivilisation* (championing values such as individualism, democracy, science and progress) and himself took the side of *Kultur*. In an era of nationalism, the essay's line of thinking was a most dangerous one. A few years later Mann distanced himself from the book and characterized it as "a rearguard fight in great style" ("*ein Rückzugsgefecht großen Stils*") (1984b, 260). Klaus Mann wrote in his autobiography *The Turning Point* (*Der Wendepunkt*, 1942) about the *Betrachtungen* that "from a literary viewpoint, it was a masterpiece [...] from a political viewpoint, a catastrophe" ("*literarisch beurteilt, ein Meisterstück [...] vom politischen Standpunkt, eine Katastrophe*") (Klaus Mann 1952, 62).

In the early 1920s however, the forward-looking and optimistic half of Mann's Janus head began to take shape. "Long live the Republic!" is the

1. In Vanheste (2007) Mann is discussed as one of the main European humanist thinkers of the Interbellum years.

final sentence of his speech “The German Republic” (“*Von deutscher Republik*,” 1922) in which he surprised his audience by giving his adhesion to the Weimar Republic (1942, 45). From that moment on, there is a continuous development in Mann’s speeches and essays towards an engaged, democratic and European standpoint, a development that appeals to the European-humanistic rather than the German-Romantic cultural tradition.² Gradually he becomes an advocate of an internationally oriented Germany, a Germany that is inspired by the inheritance of the cosmopolitan Goethe rather than by that of the German and inward-looking Luther and Bismarck. Among the most important essays and speeches with this purport are “An Appeal to Reason” (“*Ein Appell an die Vernunft*,” 1930), “Europe, Beware!” (“*Achtung, Europa!*,” 1935), “The War and the Future” (1943), “Germany and the Germans” (1945) and “Goethe and Democracy” (1949).

In his literary work as well Mann expressed his ideas about European culture, although his novels remain more pessimistic and ambiguous than his essays.³ *The Magic Mountain* (1924) pictures the impotence of classical humanism and the dangers of the German-Romantic line of thinking. The novella *Mario and the Magician* (1930), written on the occasion of personal experiences during a holiday in Italy, is an evocation of fascist demagoguery: The hypnotist Cipolla is playing the masses the way Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin did. In *Doctor Faustus* (1947) Mann investigates how fascism could spring from German culture. A talented composer sells his soul to the devil in order to be able to create immortal works of art and win eternal fame: The Faust motif of the devilish pact is used as metaphor for Germany selling its soul in order to rule Europe. Whereas *Doctor Faustus* can be read as a cultural diagnosis, the earlier novel *Lotte in Weimar* (1939) suggests a cure by reminding Germany of its true cultural inheritance. George Lukács considered this novel to be “a monumental song of consolation for a people that in nihilistic intoxication plunged itself into the abyss of fascism” (“*ein monumentaler Trostgesang für ein Volk, das sich im nihilistischen Rausch in den Abgrund des Faschismus stürzte*”), a book that “saved Germany’s honor in the time of the most horrible self-humiliation” (“*eine Ehrenrettung in Deutschlands gräßlichster Selbsterniedrigung*”) by reverting to the past as an inspiration for a new future (1957, 34). So we see that Mann, from the early 1920s on, continuously and consequently exposed his views in both his nonfiction and his literary work.

2. In his essay “Goethe and Tolstoy” (1922), Mann writes: “It is the time for us [Germany] to lay all possible stress upon our great humane inheritance and to cultivate it with all the means at our command” (1957b, 176).

3. One of the characteristics of Mann as a novelist is the ever-present irony of the narrator, as stressed by Erich Heller in his classic study *Thomas Mann: The Ironic German*.

Rejection of German “inwardness” and Romanticism

Now what are, according to Mann, the admirable and the dangerous elements in the German cultural tradition? Where in its cultural inheritance should Germany look for inspiration to build the new future of which Lukács wrote? And what parts of its inheritance should it reject? Central in the development of Mann's thought is an increasing rejection of the German tendency towards “inwardness” (*Innerlichkeit*). Mann elucidated his ideas about this in his speech “Germany and the Germans,” which he delivered in 1945 at the Library of Congress. In this address he defines the relation of the German to the world as “abstract and mystical, that is, musical” (1963, 35). The German people consider itself superior to the world for the “depth” and “musicality” of the German soul.⁴ This inwardness is a consequence of “the divorce of the speculative from the socio-political element of human energy, and the complete predominance of the former over the latter” (1963, 36). On the one hand, German inwardness has produced brilliant results in fields such as philosophy and music, but on the other hand it has had a fatal influence on politics and society.

As a first and extremely influential example of German inwardness, Mann mentions Martin Luther. His “anti-political servility” and his preaching of a dualism between spiritual and political freedom was responsible for “the centuries-old, obsequious attitude of the Germans towards their princes and towards the power of the state” (1963, 38). Mann points to the fact that all German revolutions (those of 1525, 1813, 1848 and 1918) failed and suggests a direct connection with the patriarchal monarchism of Bismarck's era. What comes to mind as well in this respect is the flight of many German intellectuals in an “inner emigration” during the years of the National Socialist regime. The continuity between the Germany of Luther's time and that of the twentieth century is expressed in *Doctor Faustus*. In the novel, the sixteenth century is constantly present: In the references to the Faust legend of the 1587 *Volksbuch*; in that to the work of Dürer (especially his engravings of the Apocalypse); in the disguises in which Luther appears (as Schleppfuss and Leverkühn); and in the archaic language used in crucial passages such as the closing chapter.

A second manifestation of German inwardness was Romanticism. In “Germany and the Germans,” Mann writes:

German Romanticism, what is it but an expression of this finest German quality, German inwardness? [...] The Germans are the people of the romantic counterrevolution against the philosophical intellectualism and rational-

4. In *Doctor Faustus*, Zeiblom says: “We are a people quite different from all the others, scornful of everything sober and normal, with a mightily tragic soul” (Mann 1951, 176).

ism of enlightenment [...] Romanticism is anything but feeble sentimentalism; it is depth, conscious of its own strength and fullness. It is pessimism of sincerity that stands on the side of everything existing, real, historical against both criticism and meliorism, in short, on the side of power against the spirit, and it thinks very little of all rhetorical virtuousness and idealistic disguising of the world. Herein lays the union of Romanticism with the Realism and Machiavellism that celebrated its triumphs over Europe in the person of Bismarck, the only political genius that Germany ever produced. (1963, 43)

Romanticism prefers the vital, “Dionysian” and irrational forces of feeling and “life” above those of the “Apollonian” human reason and morality. In *The Magic Mountain*, the forces of Romanticism are manifested in several of the main protagonists. Naphta represents a militant irrationalism: His erudite and acute sophisms are a rebellion of reason against itself, a figurative suicide that becomes literal when Naphta at the end of the novel shoots himself. The beautiful Clavdia Chauchat and the charismatic Mister Peeperkorn represent the full flowering of life: Emotions, intuition, love, eating and drinking. “Feeling, you understand, is the masculine force that rouses life,” Peeperkorn teaches Hans Castorp, continuing: “Life slumbers. It needs to be roused, to be awakened to a drunken marriage with divine feeling. For feeling, young man, is godlike. Man is godlike, in that he feels” (Mann 1962, vol. II, 255).

But precisely because of its cult of life, precisely because of its surrender to the vital and irrational, Romanticism has a paradoxical affinity with death. Inspired by Schopenhauer and anticipating Freud, Mann argues that life, love and death share something: A loosening of bounds, a loss of individuation and a surrendering to “The All.”⁵ The Romantic motif of the joining of love and death, exemplified by the *Liebestod* in Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, is a major theme in *Death in Venice* and plays a role as well in *The Magic Mountain*. Herein lays the danger of Romanticist thinking: It constantly risks the abyss of aestheticism and decadence, the sympathy for sickness and death. This is what Hans Castorp experiences while listening to Schubert’s *Der Lindenbaum*. “To him the song meant a whole world” and he “desperately loved that which it represented and symbolized to him.” But at the same time this enchantment endangers him:

This was a fruit, sound and splendid enough for the instant or so, yet extraordinarily prone to decay; the purest refreshment of the spirit, if enjoyed at the right moment, but the next, capable of spreading decay and corruption among men. It was the fruit of life, conceived of death, pregnant of dissolution. (Mann 1962, vol. II, 303, 304)

As the narrator comments, Castorp “might have had a different fate if his temperament had been less accessible to the charms of the sphere of feel-

5. Compare the discussion in Kurzke (2002, 60).

ing, the general attitude of mind, which the *lied* so profoundly, so mystically epitomized" (303). For a long time Thomas Mann himself was, like Hans Castorp, fascinated by Romanticism. In "Germany and the Germans," Mann says that every German, including himself, bears the inheritance of inwardness, of Luther and Romanticism: "It is all within me, I have been through it all" (1963, 45). He spoke of a *Sympathie mit dem Abgrund*, a sympathy for the abyss, which was a major theme in his novella *Death in Venice* (1911), where Gustav von Aschenbach does not fight his ruin.⁶ But, as we have seen above, over the years Mann gradually took a different course, distancing himself from the Romanticist fatal attraction. This personal struggle is reflected in some of the characters in his books. "For the sake of goodness and love, man shall let death have no sovereignty over his thoughts" (1962, vol. II, 150), thus the insight that comes to Hans Castorp in an epiphany, the only sentence in Mann's entire oeuvre put in italics.⁷ Time and again Mann would return to the theme of the danger of Romanticism, in both his essayistic and his literary work.

So the "anti-political servility" and the "sympathy for the abyss" are reasons why Mann warns against the German inwardness. But there is another and related aspect he stresses as well. In the 1920s and 1930s, Mann increasingly realized that the Romanticist relativization of reason and Enlightenment values and its subjugation to power was grist to the mill of the irrationalist philosophies of nationalism, fascism and Nazism. As Kurzke says, in the twenties Mann understood "that sympathy with the abyss serves fascism politically" (2002, 214). In *Doctor Faustus* Zeitblom says that he has "experienced in his very soul how near aestheticism and barbarism are to each other: Aestheticism as the herald of barbarism" (Mann 1951, 373). He describes how in the home of Sixtus Kridwiss, in an environment of Munich artists and scholars, feelings of a most dubious kind find acceptance:

A many-sided, yes, all-embracing critique of the bourgeois tradition [...] the values of culture, enlightenment, humanity [...] They who practiced this critique were men of education, culture, science. They did it, indeed, smiling; with a blitheness and intellectual complacency which lent the thing a special, pungent, disquieting, or even slightly perverse charm. It is probably superfluous to state that not for a moment did they recognize the form of government which we got as a result of defeat, the freedom that fell in our laps, in a word the democratic republic, as anything to be taken seriously as the legitimized frame of the new situation. With one accord they treated it as ephemeral, as meaningless from the start, yes, as a bad joke to be dismissed with a shrug.

6. See for example Mann 2004, 20, 135, 137. The theme of the *Sympathie mit dem Abgrund* in German modernist literature is the subject of Stephen Dowden's book *Sympathy for the Abyss* (1986).

7. According to Henry Stuart Hughes (1974, 409).

[...] It was an old-new world of revolutionary reaction, in which the values bound up with the idea of the individual—shall we say truth, freedom, law, reason?—were entirely rejected and shorn of power, or else had taken on a meaning quite different from that given them for centuries.

(Mann 1951, 365, 368)

With some, like those in the circle around Kridwiss, inwardness was expressed through sympathy for antidemocratic politics and a subjugation of reason to power and authority. With others, it led to the passivity and lethargy of intellectuals, artists and *Bildungsbürger* who let politics run its barbaric course. In his literary work Mann time and again shows the sterility and impotence of the unworldly artist and intellectual, in such characters as Hanno Buddenbrook, Von Aschenbach, Spinell, and Zeitblom. To Settembrini, humanism is “love of human kind, and by that token also political activity” (Mann 1962, vol. I, 157), but still he remains aloof and passive on the mountain, failing to engage with the world and its politics until finally the war breaks out. Hans Castorp and the other patients in the *Berghof* sanatorium, keeping themselves occupied with card games, séances, stamp collections, puzzles and love affairs and taking their temperature four times a day: They can be interpreted as a symbol of the blindness and apathy of the German *Bildungsbürger* that did little to prevent the barbarism from happening. Something similar seems to be the case with the passive manner in which Zeitblom watches the development of his friend Adrian Leverkühn and the sympathies of the Munich Kridwiss circle. Lukács writes “that this [social] struggle is nonexistent for intellectuals and artists of the type Adrian-Serenus; In their living, thinking and working they remain prisoners of the small world of their study room” (“*daß dieser ganze Kampf für den Intellektuellentypus Adrian-Serenus überhaupt nicht vorhanden ist; daß sie in ihrem ganzen Leben, Denken und Schaffen Gefangene der Kleinen Welt der Studierstube bleiben*”) (1957, 81–82).

Mann as an engaged intellectual

In his early years, Mann himself had been quite like Settembrini and Zeitblom: An inward intellectual failing to face the problems of his time. In his *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*, he held the view that the artist and intellectual should refrain from politics. In a speech held in the early 1920s, he still said:

Playing politics makes people coarse, vulgar and stupid. Envy, insolence and rapacity are the lessons it teaches. Only the cultivation of the mind makes men free. Institutions matter little, convictions are all-important. Become better yourself! and everything will be better. (Bruford 1975, 231)

But as Bruford notes, Mann showed a “steady development from a position of Romantic disdain for politics to a public-spirited concern for the enlight-

enment of the German people about politics, as essential part of a humane life" (1975, ix–x). Stuart Hughes too finds that *The Magic Mountain* "marked the transition between the early Mann in his self-consciously alienated and unpolitical guise and the later Mann of humanist affirmation" (1974, 406–407). Mann had come to believe that the political is not opposed to humane culture, but rather a part of it. He became increasingly engaged with politics. In the address "An Appeal to Reason," delivered in 1930 in Berlin, he warned of the political developments in Germany. Having fled his country in 1933, Mann kept on criticizing the National Socialists in speeches like "Europe, Beware!" (a 1935 address for the League of Nations) and, after emigrating to the United States in 1938, in his yearly lectures for the Library of Congress; in particular "The War and the Future" (1943) and "Germany and the Germans" (1945). Significant as well were his monthly radio speeches "*Deutsche Hörer!*" that were broadcasted by the BBC over Nazi Germany during the war. In these speeches, Mann turned himself directly to the German public and spoke about subjects such as the state of the war, the concentration camps, the persecution of the Jews and the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Mann had thus definitely rejected his former "delusion that one can be a man of culture and unpolitical," a delusion from which "much harm to Germany has ensued" (1942, 95–96). He had come to realize, as he said in "Germany and the Germans," that the musicality of the German soul had to pay a heavy price in the field of politics and society. Mann's rejection of inwardness and the view he came to hold for the rest of his life is well summarized by the words he spoke in a 1944 speech held during the election campaign of Roosevelt, whom he greatly admired:

That the man of culture, the so-called intellectual, performs a big mistake, a grave sin of negligence when he rejects the political and social problems of the time, looking down on these with contempt from his ivory tower and cherishing himself in the delusion that one can be a man of culture without including the political in the idea of culture. Such an intellectual does not yet know, as we now know, that a culture is very close to barbarism when it excludes the political and the social from its horizon. That is what the educated German middle class, the German citizenry, has done, and that is what has ruined it. (Mann 1986, 680)

A European cultural diagnosis

Mann's essays and novels may have a German *couleur locale*, but their significance transcends the German context and concerns European culture as a whole. *The Magic Mountain* and *Doctor Faustus* picture the condition of both Germany and Europe. *Faustus* is not only a tragedy of music, art and Germany, but a diagnosis of Western bourgeois culture as such; thus Lukács comments: "It is about an international development in which Ger-

many plays a prominent as well as tragic and grotesque part” (1957, 66–67). Already in 1934 Mann had played with the idea of using the Faust theme and mentioned it in his diary as a “symbol for the character and fate of Europe” (1982, 195). “The themes of the book, crisis themes, had an extremely German coloration,” he writes in *The Story of a Novel* (his book about the genesis of *Faustus*), but the intention was “to fuse them in the universalities of the era and of Europe” (1961, 55). The novel contains a cultural critique that concerns Germany as well as Europe as a whole. This critique is targeted at the influence of Romanticism, the current that caused, as Zeitblom says, “a sense that an epoch was coming to a close [...] the epoch [...] of liberal humanism” (Beddow, 92).

Romantic thinking and the *Lebensphilosophie* that sprung from it may have had their roots in Germany, but their influence reached much further, as appears for example from the immense popularity of the French philosopher Henri Bergson in the beginning of the twentieth century. As we have seen above, according to Mann this influence had been disastrous in a number of ways. He mentions in particular the connections between Romanticism and inwardness, the flight in aestheticism, and the upswing of irrationalism. In “Europe, Beware!” Mann states that the First World War had been a result rather than a cause of the problems of European culture: “The war did not make our world, but merely clarified, strengthened, and brought to a head tendencies which already existed before it [...] the decline of culture in Europe was not caused but merely accelerated and steepened by the war” (1942, 73, 74).

The root of the “tendencies” Mann refers to in the quotation above is in the Romanticist revolt against reason and the popularization of irrationalism. Initially, the intentions of Romanticist thinking had been justified: It wanted to be a correction to the pride of the Enlightenment rationalism that tended to forget that man is more than his ratio. But there had been an overreaction: Reason “has turned on itself, has first mocked at and then denied itself in favour of life and the life-giving forces, of the unconscious, the dynamic, the darkly creative, the earth-mother, the holy and creative underworld” (1942, 75, 76). By all too sharply criticizing itself, reason forgot its responsibility. Mann strongly warns against “the dangers to humanity and culture which lie in all intellectual anti-intellectualism [...] a license for the purest un- and anti-intellectuality, for every human indecency, every base contempt for truth, freedom, justice, self-respect” (1942, 76–77). Romantic thinking had jumped into the hole that originated with the decline of religion. The Occident had lost its intellectual and moral compass and sought an alternative for the big void. National Romantic thinking offered such an alternative, but at the expense of a *sacrificium intellectus*. This led to the barbarism of fascism

and Nazism— thus the analysis of Mann, which is by no means specifically German in its implications: “Fascism, of which national socialism is a peculiar variation, is not a specialty of Germany,” Mann said in 1943 in “The War and the Future” (1963, 25).

In search of an intellectual compass

As we have seen, in his novels as well as his essays Mann distances himself from Romanticism, *Innerlichkeit* and the apolitical aestheticization of life. “Romanticism is a foul world. I don’t want to have to do with it anymore” (“*Die Romantik ist eine unsaubere Welt. Ich will nicht mehr viel davon wissen*”), he writes in his diary in 1936 (1978, vol. 3, entry 27.11.1936). Romanticist aestheticism, inwardness and reveling in the emotional life, the militant irrationalism of Naphta and the Dionysian intoxication of Peeperkorn: These were the factors that led Hans Castorp into the mud of the trenches, Schubert’s *Der Lindenbaum* on his lips. Thus the criticism, but what alternative did Mann offer Germany and Europe?

Mann proposes a return to the mainstream of the European cultural tradition as he sees it: The tradition of European humanism, a philosophy in which reasonableness, human growth, universalism and tolerance are key words. But in order to revive this humanism, it will have to reinvent itself: The old-fashioned humanism had been unable to prevent the disasters of the twentieth century. So Mann does not only criticize the irrationalism and *Innerlichkeit* of Romanticism, he also criticizes traditional humanism, because it had shown to be both naïve and powerless. The impotence of this sterile and worn out humanism is embodied by the thoroughly good Settembrini and Zeitblom, who from their mountain and study room do nothing whatsoever to prevent the collapse of the outside world. Everything that Settembrini stands for is admirable as well as a bit pompous. “I am a humanist,” he says, “because I am a friend of mankind [...] a lover of humanity and human nobility. That nobility is comprehended in the mind, in the reason” (Mann 1962, vol. I, 248). Settembrini believes in the human freedom to do the good: “Imprint it upon your minds: The mind is sovereign. Its will is free, it conditions the moral world,” he teaches (Mann 1962, vol. II, 67). His optimism concerns the individual as well as society as a whole, for which progress is always possible: “Our Western heritage is reason—reason, analysis, action, progress” (Mann 1962, vol. II, 33), he orates, and in another of his sermons he preaches: “Humanity had sprung from the depths of fear, darkness, and hatred; but it was emerging, it was moving onward and upward, toward a goal of fellow-feeling and enlightenment, of goodness and joyousness” (Mann 1962, vol. I, 155).

Serenus Zeitblom is of a same kind, although his style is somewhat more formal and less brilliant than that of the Italian. Zeitblom, who calls himself “a son of humanism” (Mann 1951, 340), is a most erudite and keen classicist. He shares Settembrini’s confidence in “literature [...], humanistic science, the ideal of the free and beautiful human being” (Mann 1951, 365, 368), although he seems more aware of what happens in the world around him than the former. Zeitblom looks in horror at the conversations in the Munich intellectual salons, quits his job after Hitler’s takeover of power, refuses to join in the Nazi propaganda and becomes completely estranged from his collaborating sons.

Now what exactly is at fault in the humanism of Zeitblom and Settembrini? What makes them so powerless against the forces of the outside world, forces that eventually lead to war and barbarism? Undoubtedly, the main problem is in their naïve and overly optimistic perception of man. Reason and free will are not all there is to man. In spite of all their knowledge of culture and literature, Settembrini and Zeitblom seem to have forgotten what the poets, novelists and philosophers of all times have shown time and again: That man has weak, dark and tragic sides and that human behavior cannot be calculated. They could have learned something as well from their own time and culture, where authors such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Freud had explored the psychic depths of man and dethroned reason. Lukács points out that Zeitblom rejects every appeal to a psychic underworld and that this is the reason why his reaction to Leverkühn’s music is not only one of enthusiastic admiration, but above all one of a profound distrust: For music is, like no other medium, capable of descending into the human underworld (1957, 74).

The other mistake that Settembrini and Zeitblom make and which constitutes the sterility and impotence of their humanism is already mentioned above: They remain aloof in their ivory tower of *Innerlichkeit*, closing their eyes to the barbarism outside of their inner citadel.

A humanism of the *homo Dei*

So we see that Mann criticizes Romanticist thinking as well as the classical and naïve humanism of Settembrini and Zeitblom. At the same time Mann feels attracted to particular elements of both Romanticism (its love of art and music and its regard for the tragic side of man) and humanism (its reasonableness, tolerance and belief in the possibility of progress). In his work Mann therefore seeks to find a new humanism, a synthesis of Western-rational and German-Romantic thinking, of reason and life, Enlightenment and Romanticism. In his essay “What I Believe” (1938), Mann writes:

I believe in the coming of a new, a third humanism, distinct in complexion and fundamental temper from its predecessors. It will not flatter mankind,

looking at it through rose-coloured glasses, for it will have had experiences of which the others knew not. It will have stout-hearted knowledge of man's dark, daemonic, radically "natural" side, united with reverence for his super-biological, spiritual worth. The new humanity will be universal, and it will have the artist's attitude; that is, it will recognize that the immense value and beauty of the human being lies precisely in the fact that he belongs to the two kingdoms of nature and spirit. It will realize that no romantic conflict or tragic dualism is inherent in the fact, but rather a fruitful and engaging combination of determinism and free choice. Upon that it will base a love for humanity in which its pessimism and its optimism will cancel each other.⁸

(Mann 1942, 165)

Mann is thus concerned with a humanism that starts from a perception of man that is not naively optimistic and does justice to the complex nature of man. A similar search for a new humanism is found in *The Magic Mountain*, where Hans Castorp tries to find his own position amidst the classical humanism of Settembrini, the militant irrationalism of Naphta and the Dionysian influence of Peeperkorn. Referring to his ideas about a "middle way" between these currents of thought, Mann said in "Lübeck as a Spiritual Way of Life" (a speech he delivered in 1926 in Lübeck) that Hans Castorp chooses the "the idea of the middle" ("*die Idee der Mitte*") (1926, 50). When Castorp gets lost in a snow storm and loses his consciousness, he hallucinates a "dream of humanity:"

Disease, health! Spirit, nature! Are those contradictions? [...] The recklessness of death is in life, it would not be life without it – and in the center is the position of the *homo Dei*, between recklessness and reason, as his state is between mystic community and windy individualism. [...] Man is the lord of counterpositions, they can be only through him, and thus he is more aristocratic than they. More so than death, too aristocratic for death – that is the freedom of his mind. More aristocratic than life, too aristocratic for life, and that is the piety in his heart. (Mann 1962, vol. II, 150)

Hans Castorp dreams of a *via media* between Naphta and Settembrini: "They are both talkers; the one luxurious and spiteful, the other for ever blowing on his penny pipe of reason" (Mann 1962, vol. II, 149) he ponders, but there should be a human and reasonable medium course between these two extremes:

They forced everything to an issue, these two [...] and strangled bitterly over extremes, whereas it seemed to him, Hans Castorp, as though somewhere between two intolerable positions, between bombastic humanism and alphabetic barbarism, must lie something which one might personally call the human. (Mann 1962, vol. II, 176)

8. In his 1943 speech "The War and the Future" Mann used almost identical words (1963, 31).

Mann finds this intermediate position in his concept of the “*homo Dei*,” a term used by Hans Castorp in his snow dream. What does it mean? Mann described the *homo Dei* as: “Man himself with his religious questions about himself, about his whence and whither, his essence and goal, his place in the All, the secret of his existence, the eternal mystery and quest of humanity” (“*der Mensch selbst mit seiner religiösen Frage nach sich selbst, nach seinem Woher und Wohin, seinem Wesen und Ziel, nach seiner Stellung im All, dem Geheimnis seiner Existenz, der ewigen Rätsel-Aufgabe der Humanität*”) (1984a, 106). With “*homo Dei*” Mann thus refers to his perception of man: Man is not only characterized by the natural, the biological, but as well and in particular by that which transcends the natural, the spiritual. Man is divine, but not in the sense of being a creature of some God, and even less in the sense that he is something particularly good. Rather, Mann stresses the fact that, after all the horrors of the twentieth century, there remains very little reason to uphold any belief in human goodness. When Mann writes about the “divine” in man and points to the fact that his humanism contains a “religious” element, this must be interpreted in the sense of an awe for the mystery in man. In a 1936 essay Mann writes about this:

For man is a mystery. In him nature transcends; she issues in the spiritual. There is [...] today a tendency, heroic or cynical as you like, to consider him pure nature. The tendency is strong, but I think it is false. Since man is—man, he is more than nature, and this more is part of his whole. He is animal with part of his being, yes. But with another part he belongs to the world of the spirit [...] The Absolute is given to him in his thoughts of truth, freedom, and justice, and with these thoughts there is implanted the dream of redemption from the natural and the partial: The dream of perfection. (1942, 97–98)

Ideas such as those of human dignity, freedom, truth and justice belong to a supra-biological sphere: Culture and humanity cannot be reduced to the natural. Thomas Mann’s humanism is therefore a form of belief. It comes from a high esteem for the mystery of man, who has a “double nature,” transcends the immanent, and must therefore be distinguished from the rest of nature. “Religion is reverence, reverence first of all for the mystery that is man,” Mann said in his 1947 Library of Congress lecture “Nietzsche’s Philosophy in the Light of Contemporary Events” (1963, 73). When the protagonist in Mann’s late novel *Confessions of Felix Krull* visits professor Kuckkuck’s Museum of Natural History he watches the dinosaurs, the mammoth, and the saber-toothed cat with interest. But when he enters the section about prehistoric man, he sees a man with his arms raised, offering flowers to the sun. And this makes him ponder:

Had anyone ever seen anything like it? The man was not a greybeard and not a child. He was in the prime of life. And it was just the fact of his vigour and strength that lent his action its peculiar delicacy. He and those who, living with

him, had for some personal reason chosen him for this office did not yet know how to build and to roof; they could only pile stones on top of one another into pillars, and with these construct a circle wherein to perform ceremonies such as this powerful man was enacting. The burrows of fox or badger, the splendidly constructed nests of birds showed far more art and ingenuity. But they were useful and nothing more—a refuge for themselves and their broods; beyond that, the creatures' thoughts did not go. The circle of piled stone, however, was something else; refuge and brood had nothing to do with it; they were below the attention of one who had freed himself from crude necessity and risen to a nobler need. Just let any other creature in Nature come along and hit on the idea of making a formal gift of flowers to the rising sun! (1957a, 276)

Zeitblom in particular seems to be quite close to Mann in this regard. Some of his reflections almost literally match passages in Mann's essays:

Piety, reverence, intellectual decency, religious feeling, are only possible about men and through men, and by limitation to the earthly and human. Their fruit should, can, and will be a religiously tinged humanism, conditioned by feeling for the transcendental mystery of man, by the proud consciousness that he is no mere biological being, but with a decisive part of him belongs to an intellectual and spiritual world, that to him the Absolute is given, the ideas of truth, of freedom, of justice; that upon him the duty is laid to approach the consummate. (1951, 273)

Mann's religious humanism is not Christian, but it recognizes its affinity with Christianity: In a sense, it is its secularized continuation, wherein the Christian dualism of body and soul, of the earthly and the divine, is transformed into a "mind-body unity." In 1919 Mann writes in his diary, reflecting on the novel he is writing:

It is a matter of perspective vis-à-vis the renewal of the Christian *civitas Dei* in humanist guise, a human City of God somehow imbued with transcendence, that is to say oriented toward the mind-body unity. Both Pastor Bunge [as was Naptha originally called] and Settembrini are equally right and wrong in their viewpoints. (1982, 47)

Mann's humanism is not a mere reverting to an earlier tradition, neither to Christianity nor to the naive humanism of earlier times. It builds on the European cultural tradition of Christianity and humanism, but at the same time it aims at a renewal. Due to its secular character it differs from Christianity, and as a result of the experiences of the twentieth century it knows the abyss and holds a more tragic and less optimistic perception of man than classical humanism did: Man has become "the problem child of life" (*das Sorgenkind des Lebens*).⁹ Working out this program of a new secular humanism became a life's work for Mann.

9. In *The Magic Mountain* Hans Castorp is called "*Sorgenkind des Lebens*" by Settembrini (Mann 2006, 198).

A European orientation

In thinking out a new humanism, Mann was inspired by major thinkers in the German cultural heritage that held a European orientation and rejected the inward and anti-European stance of, for example, Luther and Bismarck. In his 1949 address “Goethe and Democracy,” delivered to the Library of Congress, he said in this respect:

Those German figures whom I chose as my teachers and guides, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner, and, in later years above all, Goethe, all have a decidedly supra-German, European character. What I found in them was the European in German, a European Germany, the ultimate goal of my wishes and requirements—in contrast to a “German Europe,” the horrid aspiration of German nationalism which always disgusted me and finally drove me from Germany. (Mann 1963, 88)

Above all Goethe: For indeed it is Goethe who was increasingly put forward by Mann as Germany’s intellectual guide. In the open letter he addressed to Eduard Korrodi in 1936, a letter which instantly led to Mann’s “expatriation” by the Nazi regime, Mann warns of “a terrible alienation, fraught with evil potentialities, between the land of Goethe and the rest of the world” (1975, 209). In the years that follow, Goethe became ever more present in Mann’s work. In the novel *Lotte in Weimar* Goethe as a universalist thinker is contrasted with German-romantic thinkers of his time such as Herder and Klopstock. In the book, Goethe’s son says about his father:

He long ago rose above the individual, temporal, national point of view, to the human, universally applicable one—that was where the Klopstocks and Herders and Bürgers could not follow him. But their position was not half so bad as that of the people who imagine themselves far in advance even of the timeless! There are our romanticists, our neo-Christians, our neo-patriotic fanatics [...] can anything be worse than the spirit which would like to see the downfall of the eternal and the classic? (Mann 1990, 261–262)

Mann’s Goethe himself says about this:

The German, instead of confining himself to himself, must take in the whole world in order to have an effect on the world. Our goal must be, not hostile separation, but rather friendly association with all the world, cultivation of the social virtues, even at the expense of our inborn feelings or even rights.
(Mann 1990, 160–161)

According to Goethe, and Mann followed him in this, the German Romantic National track was a dead end, “the first manifestation, as yet quite high-minded and harmless, of something frightful, to be displayed some day by us Germans in the form of the crassest follies” (Mann 1990, 161). A similar warning was voiced by Mann in “Europe, Beware!,” the 1935 address we mentioned above. Humanism should have the courage and self-confidence to

differentiate between good and evil, since a posture of indecisive and hesitant benevolence may easily be hijacked by barbaric forces:

In all humanism there is an element of weakness, which in some circumstances may be its ruin, connected with its contempt of fanaticism, its patience, its love of scepticism; in short, its natural goodness. What is needed today is a militant humanism, conscious of its virility and inspired by the conviction that the principles of freedom, tolerance, and honest doubt shall not be exploited and destroyed by fanatics who have themselves no shadow of tolerance or doubt. If the idea of European humanism cannot be born anew [...] it will be destroyed; and a Europe will be born of which only the name will be preserved, and from which it would be better to seek a refuge outside of space and outside of time. (Mann 1942, 82)

Thomas Mann's humanism is thus a warning for Romanticist thinking: It preaches reasonableness and universalism and rejects irrationalism, inwardness and nationalism. At the same time Mann remains highly influenced by Romanticism, for example in his emphasis on the uniqueness of every individual and on the role of art: The attraction of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche never left him. Mann designates their thought as "the dark play of humanism" and a "pessimism written out by our great, humane cultural epoch" of which "its proud misanthropy never failed to pay its respect to an idea, to a higher calling, to the dignity of mankind" (2006, 198). Their pessimism is compensated by Mann through a greater optimism and emphasis on the role of human reason. For Mann, the individual is the synthesis of the uniquely personal and the universally human, wherein the forces of the Romantic *Innerlichkeit* are corrected by reason and political engagement. This way, the humanism of the *homo Dei* searches a middle course in between spirit and nature, religion and secularism, Romanticism and Enlightenment. Like Erasmus and Goethe, with whom Mann liked to be compared, he was a man of the middle. In Goethe, he saw a European humanist that was a true German at the same time: A synthesis of the specifically German and the generally European. And through Goethe Mann freed himself from the antithesis between art and life such as he found in with Wagner, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Mann's message to Europe

In his many novels, essays and speeches Mann was seeking new impulses for European culture. In *The Magic Mountain* Naphta challenges Settembrini to answer the question "whether the Mediterranean, classic, humanistic tradition was bound up with humanity and so coexistent with it, or whether it was but the intellectual garb and appurtenance of a bourgeois liberal age, with which it would perish" (Mann 1962, vol. II, 174). Settembrini remains tongue-tied, but not so Thomas Mann: His work was an attempt at answer-

ing Naphta's question and defining the essence of European culture. Mann felt it was necessary to reinvent humanism, for the Occident had lost "the moral and intellectual authority which formerly bound and supported everyone" ("*die sittliche und geistige Autorität, die ehemals jeden band, jeden stützte*") (1986, 673), and this loss had been one of the main reasons for the disasters of the twentieth century. In a speech held in Zürich in 1947, he said that the spiritual condition of the West is one of a desperate longing "for a new belief [...] [which] grants support to the life of the individual against nihilism" ("*nach einen neuen Glauben [die] dem Leben des Individuums Stütze gewährt gegen das gähnende Nichts*") (1986, 673). Because of his efforts to renew "the idea of Europe" and in this way provide a "new faith" to the Occident, Mann was introduced to president Roosevelt as the "incarnation of European civilization" (Riemen 2008, ix). If we agree there is some truth in this, Mann's "poems of man" and his ideas about a revived humanism as a new European moral compass may still inspire us in our current debates about European and Western identity and values.

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Do You Need God for Meaning and Purpose?

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ABSTRACT

While mainstream opinions and some scholarship suggests that we need God for a sense of meaning and purpose, this article proposes an alternative thesis. By digging into the data, it demonstrates how religious contexts provide the kind of atmosphere conducive to the development of meaning and purpose. Then, it shows that neither belief in God nor church attendance are needed for a strong sense of meaning and purpose. The article highlights how non-religious societies helped their members lead meaningful lives full of purpose. It ends with specific research-based strategies for reason-oriented people to develop a personal sense of meaning and purpose.

Keywords

meaning, purpose, religion, secularity, humanism, non-religious societies

Introduction

Religion is the key to having meaning and purpose in life, at least according to mainstream opinions typically presented in the media. Moreover, many studies confirm that frequent church attendance correlates with a stronger sense of meaning and purpose. However, correlation is not causation, and this article will dig deeper into the data to find out what actually helps people gain a deeper sense of meaning and purpose, both in the United States and other cultural contexts. We will first review thinkers on meaning and purpose in life, and then turn to studies to help answer the question above.

This article draws from my workbook, *Find Your Purpose Using Science*, which combines academic research, an engaging narrative, and stories from people's everyday lives. It also provides a set of exercises you can do to help you figure out your own sense of meaning and purpose (Tsipursky 2015). The workbook is informed by my own scholarship on meaning and purpose, my experience as a teacher, and my role as President of a non-profit

organization called Intentional Insights (www.intentionalinsights.org) that is devoted to providing strategies for reason-oriented people to reach their goals informed by psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and behavioral economics.

Thinkers on meaning and purpose

According to faith-based perspectives, the meaning and purpose of life can be found only in the divine. An example of a prominent recent religious thinker is Karl Barth, one of the most important Protestant thinkers of modern times. In his book, *The Epistle to the Romans*, he calls modern people's attention to God in Christ, where the true meaning and purpose of life must be found (1993). Another example is *The Purpose Driven Life*, a popular book written by Rick Warren, a Christian mega-church leader (2002).

But some thinkers disagree with the notion that religion is the only way to find meaning and purpose in life. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (1957), advances the notions of "existentialism," the philosophical perspective that all meaning and purpose originates from the individual. The challenge for modern individuals, according to Sartre, is to face all the consequences of the discovery of the absence of God. He argues that people must learn to create meaning and purpose for themselves. Another prominent thinker is Greg Epstein. In his *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*, he advocates striving for dignity as a means of finding "meaning to life beyond God" (2009, 93). According to Epstein, "we are not wicked, debased, helpless creatures waiting for a heavenly king or queen to bless us with strength, wisdom, and love. We have the potential for strength, wisdom, and love inside ourselves. But by ourselves we are not enough. We need to reach out beyond ourselves—to the world that surrounds us and sustains us, and most especially to other people. This is dignity." Likewise, Sam Harris, in his book, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion*, states that "Separating spirituality from religion is a perfectly reasonable thing to do" (2014, 6). It is to assert two important truths simultaneously: Our world is riven by dangerous religious doctrines that all educated people should condemn, and yet there is more to understanding the human condition than science and secular culture generally admit."

Are they correct? Can we have meaning and purpose, which fall within the sphere that Harris refers to as spirituality and Epstein terms dignity, without belonging to a faith-based community?

Research on religion's role in life meaning and purpose

First, it is vital to recognize that a strong sense of meaning and purpose correlates with strong religious belief according to various studies. Research on the psychology of religion illustrates that, "for many, the most salient core psychological function of religion is to provide a sense of meaning and pur-

pose in life” (Batson and Stocks 2004, 149). Survey-based studies affirm such individually-oriented psychological research. For example, a study of the population of Memphis found that the extent to which religion has salience in a person’s life correlates with a heightened sense of meaning and purpose (Petersen and Roy 1985). Another study used the General Social Survey, which tracks demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal questions across the United States. The researcher investigated how the degree of belief in God relates to a personal sense of life purpose. The data showed that people who indicated they are confident in the existence of God self-report a higher sense of life purpose compared to those who believe but occasionally doubt, as well as compared to nonbelievers (Cranney 2013).

Parallels exist in global comparative research on religion and life purpose. One study encompassed seventy-nine countries, using the World Values Survey. It found that more religious people in more religious countries experience a greater sense of life satisfaction across a variety of dimensions, including life meaning and purpose (Okulicz-Kozaryna 2010). A 2007 survey by Gallup of eighty-four countries used the following question: “Do you feel your life has an important meaning or purpose?” The report on this survey highlighted the following as the brief summary: “Takeaway: Regardless of whether they affiliate themselves with a religion, more than eight in ten respondents across eighty-four countries say their lives have an important meaning or purpose. However, religion does make a difference: Those who claim no religious affiliation are more than twice as likely as those who do claim one to say they do not feel their lives have an important purpose” (Crabtree and Pelham 2008).

Such generalized takeaways provide support for mainstream opinions and religion-oriented thinkers who use such findings to support their claims that religion is the way to gain meaning and purpose. Yet digging deeper into the data raises questions about the evidence for such claims. For example, the study on seventy-nine countries cited above also found that more religious people have less life satisfaction, including a sense of meaning and purpose, in less religious countries. Moreover, forms of worship that do not promote social connectedness do not correlate with a heightened sense of life satisfaction (Okulicz-Kozaryna 2010). Other studies illustrate similar findings. For instance, religious affiliation with community belonging leads to a higher degree of life satisfaction than religious devotion in private settings (Bergan and McConatha 2001). Another investigation underscored that extrinsic religious devotion, meaning a focus on religion for means such as in-group participation and social status, correlates with higher happiness and life meaning. However, intrinsic religious orientation, defined as religion that is deeply personal and defining one’s lifestyle, does not correlate with a greater sense of happiness and life meaning (Sillick and Cathcart 2014).

Psychology and neuroscience research on meaning and purpose

These results should give pause to any intellectually honest person examining the ties between religion, meaning, and purpose. After all, the data seems to show that socially-oriented religious practice in religious communities leads to a stronger sense of life meaning and purpose, while private and inner-oriented religious practice does not. In that case, is it religion or social and community bonds that lead to a deep sense of life meaning?

Research conclusively demonstrates that social affiliation is key to a deep sense of life purpose, regardless of religious affiliation. As an example, four studies showed significant correlation between people experiencing a sense of belonging and their perception of life meaning and purpose. Study 1 highlighted a correlation between questions asking for a sense of belonging and life purpose at the same time. Study 2 strove to remove the possible biasing that may occur by asking these questions at the same time. It first asked people about their sense of belonging, and three weeks later inquired into their sense of life meaning. The data was similarly indicative of a clear correlation between belonging and life meaning. Studies 3 and 4 primed participants to experience a sense of belonging and a variety of other experiences, and found that priming people to experience belonging resulted in the highest perception of life meaning for study participants (Lambert et al. 2013). A meta-review of many studies on life meaning and purpose similarly indicates social belonging as vital to a sense of life purpose (Steger 2012).

Such findings should not be surprising. Much recent social neuroscience underscores the vital role of social bonds in how our brains function. Indeed, our brain is inherently designed to be sociable, as part of our evolutionary development. The force of evolution selected for mutations that make our brains more social, as our human ancestors best survived in groups, and those most capable of being socially oriented tended to outcompete those who were not. Thus, social neuroscience research indicates that when we engage with others, we experience an intimate brain-to-brain linkup. That neural bridge lets us affect the brain and thus the body of everyone we engage with, just as they do to us. The more strongly we connect with someone emotionally, the greater the mutual force. The resulting feelings have far-reaching consequences that ripple throughout our body, as our brain releases hormones that regulate all biological systems (Goleman 2006). A sense of meaning and purpose is thus neurologically correlated to social connectedness, and consequently our mental and physical wellbeing.

Further support for this comes from research on life meaning, health and wellbeing. Research shows that people who have a clear and strong sense of meaning and purpose have better lives (Seligman 2002). They can deal much better with both everyday life and the most challenging situations. The clas-

sic research on meaning and purpose comes from Victor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist who lived through the concentration camps of the Holocaust. He described how those who had a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives were most likely to survive and thrive in the camps. He conducted research demonstrating this both during and after his concentration camp experience (1946).

Recent studies illustrate that people who feel that their life has meaning and purpose experience a substantially higher degree of mental well-being. For example, Michael F. Steger, a psychologist and Director of the Laboratory for the Study of Meaning and Quality of Life at Colorado State University, found that many people gain a great deal of psychological benefit from understanding what their lives are about and how they fit within the world around them. His research demonstrates that people who have a strong sense of meaning and purpose have greater mental well-being in general. They are more satisfied on a day-to-day basis, as well as at work (Steger, Dik and Diffy 2012). Adolescents, in another study, are shown to feel less depressed, anxious, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors the greater their search for, and sense of, meaning (Brassai, Piko and Steger 2011).

A deeper sense of life meaning and purpose also predicts better physical health. Greater meaning and purpose has been associated with a reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease (Boyle et al. 2010). An increased sense of life meaning and purpose correlates with reduced risk of heart attack, the leading cause of death in the United States, and stroke, another of the top five leading causes of death (Kim et al. 2013). With such benefits for mental and physical well-being, it is no wonder that a strong sense of life meaning and purpose predicts longevity, whether in the United States or around the world (Boyle 2009).

In fact, research shows that to gain such benefits, the important thing is simply to *have* a sense of meaning and purpose in life, regardless of the source of the purpose (Steger 2012). Going back to Frankl, his research suggests the crucial thing for individuals surviving and thriving is to develop a personal sense of individual purpose and confidence in a collective purpose for society itself, what he terms the "will-to-meaning and purpose." Frankl himself worked to help people find meaning and purpose in their lives. He did so by helping prisoners in concentration camps, and later patients in his private practice as a psychiatrist, to remember their joys, sorrows, sacrifices, and blessings, thereby bringing to mind the meaning and purposefulness of their lives as already lived. According to Frankl, meaning and purpose can be found in any situation within which people find themselves. He emphasizes the existential meaning and purposefulness of suffering and tragedy in life as testimonies to human courage and dignity, as exemplified both in the concentration camps and beyond. Frankl argues that not only is life charged with meaning and purpose, but this meaning and purpose implies responsibility, namely the

responsibility upon oneself to discover meaning and purpose, both as an individual and as a member of a larger social collective (Frankl 1946).

Frankl's approach to psychotherapy came to be called logotherapy, and forms part of a broader therapeutic practice known as existential psychotherapy. This philosophically-informed therapy stems from the notion that internal tensions and conflicts stem from one's confrontation with the challenges of the nature of life itself, and relate back to the notions brought up by Sartre and other existentialist philosophers. These challenges, according to Irvin Yalom in his *Existential Psychotherapy*, include: Facing the reality and the responsibility of our freedom; dealing with the inevitability of death; the stress of individual isolation; and finally, the difficulty of finding meaning in life (1980). These four issues correlate to what existential therapy holds as the four key dimensions of human existence—the physical, social, personal and spiritual realms—based on extensive psychological research and therapy practice (Cooper 2003).

Meaning and purpose in other cultural contexts

A central reason for the traditional depiction of religion as the primary source of meaning and purpose in the United States results from the predominant role of religion in our society. Religion provides the main venue for social and community bonding, and thus people experience such correlation as causation. Likewise, within religious circles in the United States, there is much more focus on finding meaning and purpose, and clear answers are provided. Moreover, religion is the most common sources of ritual experiences in the United States. Research on rituals shows their importance in maintaining and transmitting cultural values, including what a specific culture perceives as the key elements of meaning and purpose. Scholars also highlight how rituals serve as a vital contributor to social bonding and community belonging (Bell 1997).

Yet the fact that religious communities have come to provide the kind of things that contribute to a sense of life meaning and purpose in the United States is a historical accident, a contingent event. In other societies, religion had and has much less relevance, and those societies find other ways to provide meaning and purpose for their members.

How do people in more secularly-oriented societies than the United States gain a sense of meaning and purpose? Well, here is an example. Mike met regularly with friends and acquaintances from his neighborhood in a large building. There, he enjoyed listening to presentations about big life questions on the meaning of life, on the nature of morality, on ethical behavior, et cetera. He participated in study circles that engaged with these questions in more depth. Mike sang, danced, and enjoyed musical performances there. Together with others, he volunteered to help clean up the streets and build

housing for poor people in the neighborhood. Through these activities, Mike gained social bonds and community connections, a chance to serve others, and an opportunity to reflect on life's big questions—all the components that lead to a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Mike's full name is not Michael, but Mikhail, and his experience describes the prototypical experience of former Soviet citizens in state-sponsored community activities. The former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev described in his memoirs how much he and other Soviet citizens enjoyed such events. According to him, "everybody was keen to participate" (1995). The Soviet Union is typically perceived as a militaristic and grey society, with a government that oriented all of its efforts to taking over the world. Well, that is simply not true, as my research shows. The Soviet authorities put a lot of effort into providing its citizens with opportunities to find meaning and purpose in life, as well as fun and pleasure—although they also certainly wanted to spread communism throughout the world, and put a lot of efforts into this goal as well (Tsipursky 2014).

To understand how the USSR's government helped its citizens gain a greater sense of meaning and purpose, I spent a decade investigating government reports in archives across the Soviet Union, exploring national and local newspapers, reading memoirs and diaries, and interviewing more than fifty former Soviet citizens. The answer: To a large extent, through government-sponsored community and cultural centers called *kluby* (clubs). In many ways these venues replaced the social function provided by churches, offering Soviet citizens social and community connections, in a setting that combined state sponsorship with grassroots engagement. Soviet clubs also hosted rituals and celebrations, which served to help people enjoy themselves and find meaning and purpose, and also to further the government's political agenda (Tsipursky 2011).

Present-day societies with a more secular orientation than the US have similar stories to tell, as illustrated by research on contemporary Denmark and Sweden. Most Danes and Swedes do not worship any God. At the same time these countries score at the very top of the "happiness index," have very low crime and corruption rates, great educational systems, strong economies, well-supported arts, free health care, and egalitarian social policies. They have a wide variety of strong social institutions that provide community connections, opportunities for serving others, and other benefits that religion provides in the United States (Zuckerman 2008).

From another cultural perspective, a significant strain in Eastern worldviews holds the search for meaning and purpose itself as irrelevant. For instance, Legalism, a Chinese philosophical tradition, rejected the notion that one should even try to find a purpose in life, and focused only on pragmatic

knowledge. A more prominent and better-known Chinese belief system, Confucianism, holds that one should find meaning and purpose in everyday existence, focusing on being instead of doing, and not devote much effort to finding meaning and purpose outside of this everyday experience (Tu 1985).

Informed by an Eastern-based philosophy, Alan Watts promoted the idea to Western audiences that the sense of self is an illusion, that we are all part of a larger whole. He advocated abandoning the search for an individual meaning and purpose, which he perceived as a harmful western cultural construct (Watts 1966).

Another Eastern-informed perspective comes from Jon Kabat-Zinn. This prominent scholar and popularizer of meditation and mindfulness proposed relying on these practices to find your life purpose. Specifically, he discussed the importance of meditating on our personal vision and blueprint of what is most important in life in order to grasp our innermost values (2005).

Conclusion

As you see, there are a wide variety of perspectives on meaning and purpose. Believing in God and going to church is far from the only way to attain these qualities. You can gain them in non-religious venues that provide opportunities for community ties and a chance to reflect on life meaning and purpose, just as religious communities have traditionally offered. Certainly, some people can find meaning and purpose in life with little or no community ties, but research suggests such bonds are highly beneficial for most of those who are searching for a deep sense of life meaning.

While in the US religious faith communities provide the main venue for such community and social bonds, venues that welcome secular folks are growing in number. I belong to the Humanist Community of Central Ohio, an affiliate of the American Humanist Association. Other national secular groups have many local affiliates as well. Those in college and high school can go to Secular Student Alliance chapters, while children and teenagers enjoy lively discussions and fun activities at Camp Quest.

So if you want to gain a rich sense of life meaning and purpose, without an externally imposed and God-oriented framework, check out local secular affiliates of national organizations. You will find a place to reflect on deep life questions from reason-based perspectives, and gain an opportunity to enter communities where you can form strong social bonds and great friendships. These groups can help us as reason-oriented people find a rich sense of meaning and purpose and improve our mental and physical wellbeing.

The workbook this material is adapted from *Find Your Purpose Using Science*, provides a wide variety of strategies to choose in your meaning-making activities. The non-profit I co-founded, Intentional Insights, also offers a

wide variety of other content, products, and services that conveys research-based strategies relevant to daily life that help folks improve their mental well-being and reach their goals (www.intentionalinsights.org). Please reach out to me, gleb@intentionalinsights.org, to learn more about how to adapt recent scientific findings on life purpose and other questions to our lives as secular people.

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Humanism and Public Policy in Germany: The Point Is to Change the World

Interview with Frieder Otto Wolf

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ABSTRACT

Prof. Dr. Frieder Otto Wolf, President of the Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands (HVD), provides an overview of the main currents of modern humanism in Germany. He describes the central stream of German humanism as practical, in that it combines the principled imperative to overcome all structures and situations in which people are not treated as human beings with seeking to widen the horizons of humane existence in the arts and sciences and in capabilities of leading a fulfilling life. This humanism compels resort to other criteria than nature, such as those logical, emotive, cultural, in order to gauge the acceptability of value claims. The practical efforts to humanize society and widen human horizons requires engagement in public policy debates and social organizing and programming on consensus issues. Accordingly, the HVD works on such diverse issues as strengthening the rights to bodily integrity and sexual autonomy, preventing economic collapse, accommodating immigrants, protecting personal privacy, limiting the use of military force, building intra- and international peace, and exposing anti-humanist prejudice.

Keywords

humanism, Germany, philosophy, public policy,
practical, organizing

This interview with Dr. Frieder Otto Wolf was conducted in May and June, 2016. Dr. Wolf is President of the Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands (HVD), the national association of German humanists. He is also Honorary Professor in philosophy at the Freie Universitaet Berlin (Free University of Ber-

lin), and Founding President of the Humanistische Akademie Deutschlands, a humanist think tank. He was a member of the European Parliament for Die Gruenen (The Greens) (1984–1999), and founding chair of the Koordinierungsrat säkularer Organisationen, a coalition of German secular organizations (2008–2012). The interview begins with an overview of the philosophy of German humanism. It then focuses on what public policies German humanist values can support on a number of contemporary issues. Finally, it explores the context and extent of humanist political organizing in Germany.

Question: How do you define humanism?

Wolf: I do not think that definitions may be given as a first step in an argument: first you have to understand “how the relevant language games are being played.” With that caveat, my proposal for a provisional definition of humanism would be that humanism is a life-stance, a comprehensive attitude to issues concerning the conduct of our lives, individually and collectively. It takes its bearings from what we effectively know about the world we live in, including ourselves. It does not accept any higher authority or any traditional, respectively revealed truth to govern the conduct, or to explain the meaning, of our lives.

The humanism that HVD is based upon and that we are trying to put into practice and to promote within Germany can be described as a modern practical humanism operating on the following lines. It is a more or less articulated life-stance, not just a philosophy. It shuns authority and revelation, and it relies on our capacity for contradictory argument in order to settle issues in doubt. It is modern, because it differs from traditional humanism deriving its orientation from an idealized European antiquity, in which individual philosophical self-cultivation defined the horizon of humanist thinking. It stresses the inter-cultural and political dimensions of a humanist culture and practice not restricted to philosophical articulation. It is practical in a specific way, in that it does not base its propositions and orientations on some theory of what humanity purportedly is, but rather asks how humanity can be developed and even invented in its own right. It thereby keeps its distance from all kinds of reductive naturalism, on the one hand, and from all kinds of spiritualism or transcendentalism, on the other. We do not construct a theory of human nature or of what is truly human as a more or less scientific or philosophical basis and framework for our thinking, but rather look to examples of human and humanly enriching practice for winning reliable orientation for humanist thinking. This practical outlook involves striving to combine the principled imperative to overcome all structures and situations in which people are not treated as human beings, i.e., as an end in themselves. Conversely, it seeks always to

widen the horizons of humane existence—in the arts and sciences, as well in capabilities of leading a fulfilling life.

Since the night of the twentieth century, it is aware of the dangers of sectarianism and totalitarianism, without giving up on the tasks of achieving humane progress in human history, contributing to establishing a common ground for political projects of humane societal improvement. As long as major historical progress seems out of reach of humankind, or cannot be broadly agreed upon, we see the priorities of humanist practice in the humanization of our societies and cultures. We therefore, on the one hand, defend human dignity and human rights and, on the other hand, actively develop an everyday culture focusing upon human self-realization.

What types of humanism are there in Germany?

The modern practical humanism that HVD defends is itself a broad concept that admits of an important diversity that we carefully cultivate in order to avoid sectarian uniformity. Thus, individual views of it range from a more naturalist, to a more culturalist perspective, to a stronger focus on political commitment, and to the development of humanist life-styles, common symbols, or rituals. It differs, however, as I should think, rather profoundly, from the traditional “elite” humanism that still exists in Germany. HVD’s humanism does not accept the underlying elitism (and euro-centrism), which in the dark past of Nazi Germany made those self-styled “humanists” accomplices to the crimes committed by the German regime. HVD’s humanism also differs from reductionist naturalists who reduce the social sciences (including economics, sociology, and politics) to some pseudo-science under the name of sociobiology, thereby totally disregarding the emergent nature of human history and society, and who tend to have an idea of a humanism based on the biology of the human species, as defended by the late Julian Huxley. The inherent danger in the latter is of lapsing into an “eugenics” that we consider to be profoundly anti-humanist in the normative sense. It also leads to the tendency of taking refuge from the problems of biological reductionism by imagining a mostly fanciful “transhumanism,” instead of soberly examining how new technologies can be harnessed to improving humane possibilities within modern societies and within individual lives.

I find it interesting that the only person you mention in discussing humanist philosophy is Julian Huxley. He categorized his evolutionary humanism as religious, i.e., a religion, albeit nontheistic and nonsupernaturalistic. To what extent is religious humanism still prevalent in Germany? My impression very simply is that “religious” is used here only because “world view” (*Weltanschauung*) is not a current English term that non-

philosophers will understand. In fact, we do affirm that world views are more than just summing up scientific knowledge. They somehow attempt to make sense of the world and of life within it. This “excess element” is then called “religious” by people like Julian Huxley. I’d therefore tend to think that this is a mere question of wording.

There are, however, two types of a “religious” humanism that do pose real problems. The first type is, as I think, an effect of the secular “taming” of the established religions, as it has been realized in Europe since the nineteenth century. That is, it is an historical effect of Christians from diverse denominations rallying to the elementary values of humanism. The second type is more interesting and more ambiguous, but I tend to think that it is now only of historical relevance. Early humanist associations since the nineteenth century have seen themselves forced to adopt outward forms of religious life, modes of organization, ceremonies, and rituals. Often their still persisting traditional organizations call themselves “free religious,” which to my mind is a contradiction in terms. But such groups still exist in Germany.

You use the word “practical” to describe the humanism of the HVD. That word is often used in US humanism to signify a connection to pragmatic thought rooted in John Dewey’s approach to philosophy. Is your use meant in a similar kind of way?

I value John Dewey as an important democratic philosopher, and I especially appreciate his contributions to a modern democratic humanism. I am not referring to pragmatism here, however, but I try to distinguish our approach from a “theoretical humanism” claiming to be based on some kind of “philosophical anthropology.” The latter does not start from accepting all that is human—as in *nil humani a me alienum puto*—but tries to establish some “human essence” first. Not surprisingly, that established essence normally entails discrimination, androcentrism, eurocentrism and/or anthropocentrism. In contrast, practical humanism addresses the humane element in all its variety and tries to defend it against inhuman situations wherever they arise. The idea of “humanization” is therefore central to it—and this does not presuppose any idea of a human essence.

In describing humanism, you’ve used a number of value terms, such as “dignity” and “humane” and “self-realization.” In the absence of a theory of human nature, where do those values originate?

A theory of human nature cannot fulfill this function. Either it is strictly naturalistic, in which case no values may be grounded by it, or it is articulating human values, on the same level as all other ways of articulating or grounding them. The recourse to nature as such does not give any superior validity

to value claims. Therefore, we have to argue about such claims by other criteria, i.e., logical, emotive, cultural, and try to gauge the acceptability of our claims to others. Importantly, this opening to the perspective of the others is the most elementary operation of practical humanism, as I understand it.

Humankind does not start this debate today or from zero: the UN declaration of human rights and the ensuing conventions on further generations of human rights present a solid first layer of elementary values on which to build the values of modern practical humanism in further practical experience and open debate. Humanist organizations have already built a tradition of criticizing inhuman situations and finding ways of overcoming them by humanization. Our generation can build on that by extending it to new problems and practices.

The political dimension of humanism of course brings humanist values to the wider societal debate about public policy. What kinds of initiatives is the HVD working on?

The HVD, in many cases through its regional member organizations that are bearing the brunt of our practical work, is actively engaging in politics wherever *humane minima* are being threatened or wherever it seems possible to achieve further humanization of situations and relations within our societies and cultures. For these purposes, we enter and occasionally forge larger alliances, in order to build a capacity for changing the course of events. As our organization is still rather limited in its scale, we either are just one small participant among many larger ones—as in our defense of the free Sunday as a common day of repose—or concentrate on very specific questions, such as defending the (rather limited) right to abortion achieved in the 1970s or the right to self-determination with regard to medical treatment and dying. In recent years, we have had to participate in hard struggles in both latter cases against a new right wing cum religious ideology trying to mobilize against individual self-determination in both respects.

The German Parliament recently outlawed assisting suicide. What are the prospects for physician-assisted suicide in the face of this law?

This has been, in fact, a major defeat for our movement—and the prospects for re-opening the case in the immediate future are rather grim. I tend to think, however, that this defeat has been occasioned strategically by the lingering of an older pro-religious sentiment among political office holders. I see reason for hope, however, because this sentiment is in an unstoppable process of waning. Further, various groups of Members of Parliament opposing this project of law have been disagreeing on rather minor issues, and therefore have been unable to really mobilize strongly among their col-

leagues. Therefore, I am convinced that last year's legislation will not be the last word on this matter.

Just for clarification, I should add that the basic situation within German law in this respect has not been changed by that law. Suicide is not a criminal act, and therefore "aiding and abetting" such an act cannot be criminalized *per se*. And it still remains to be seen whether the attempt to criminalize "professional" assistance to suicide will be held up by our Constitutional Court. Still, in the immediate future, the prospects for having a physician-assisted suicide within Germany will be grim—if you do not happen to be rich and well-connected, so that the law will not reach you.

Humanism in the US has been criticized for not engaging economic issues. To what extent are economic issues, such as income and wealth inequality, corporate hegemony, or the solvency of banks across Europe, addressed in HVD advocacy or organizing?

We cannot, as humanists, define a common ground for Marxists, Keynesians, and Neo-classical economists (who tend to advocate neo-liberal economic policies). But we can put our finger on economic problems—from the growing misery in the Southern Hemisphere due to increasing poverty, to volatility on the financial markets destroying pension systems—and ask for at least emergency measures and first steps towards solutions. In this sense, we are participating in broad socio-political alliances against growing poverty, financial insecurity, and unemployment. We do not campaign for specific political strategies, but ask for effective solutions to problems felt in our everyday lives.

That said I am convinced that we have a clear and urgent humanist task here: to substantially improve popular economic literacy, so as to not leave political deliberation on economics to the self-styled "experts."

How has HVD responded to the large influx of refugees from the war in Syria? Is there a focus on countering anti-immigrant actions? Does HVD support changes to the citizenship laws?

In Berlin, we have taken over the task of organizing a home for incoming refugees. Wherever we are, our organization is participating in building civil alliances against racism and anti-immigrant action. We are certainly an active and conscious part of the "culture of welcome" still existing in Germany, which is actively fighting against the racist and German-centric minority that has clearly emerged on the German political scene.

How can humanism best fight the rise of anti-immigrant mobilization in Germany?

I would say by continuing to engage in two directions of action. First, by being part of the practical support work required, in the form of both

professional services and volunteer work, with a special awareness for the problems of secular refugees among so many refugees from rather backward religious communities. Second, by being an active part of the political alliance defending and renewing the German culture of welcome.

Germany has not been the subject of attacks by terrorists such as Al Qaeda and Da'esh (Islamic State). Why is that? Has humanism in Germany helped achieve that?

I am very much in doubt whether this state is really more than contingent. There simply are many more Middle Easterners and North Africans with such ideological leanings in France and in Belgium. Certainly, the German police have caught a number of German groups before they could commit acts of terrorism. It may be true that the integration of (or just respect for) Turkish Muslim minorities that the German administrations have been developing has helped to provide a somewhat less catastrophic ideological climate among Islamic groups in the German population. Germany has avoided the ghettoization prevailing in Belgium and in France with regard especially to Muslims from Algeria and Morocco. The ongoing attempts to extend the German system of cooperation between the state and religious or world-view communities to Islamic groups may also have been helpful to limit the numbers of young Germans mobilized for Al Qaeda and Da'esh. But it would be ludicrous to claim that we as a humanist organization had any part in these developments. I am convinced, though, that the presence of a significant proportion of humanists in the German populations has been helpful for making our politicians aware that simple traditional models of politics centering on the large Christian churches are no longer adequate to German reality.

For decades, Germany has been in the forefront of protecting individual privacy. Is there growing support in Germany as the result of attacks like those in Paris and Brussels to give government security police more power to surveil and collect data on the activities of private individuals?

As far as I know, this debate is just being started again. Fortunately, that is happening without a real sense of urgency, so that panic will not bring about a rapid putting aside of all the individual rights that we strongly defend. But in this respect, we still have to build our capacity for participating in the debates on the new digital dimension of reality, with its new potential towards a security and surveillance state, which we criticize on human dignity and human rights grounds.

Does existing German law adequately protect individuals' right to privacy from privately operated drones?

In principle, yes. It is illegal to violate other people's privacy as a private person. But the new technological possibilities present problems of adequate application that need adequate solutions. They have not yet been implemented with regard to this type of problems. At HVD, we should certainly support a solution here, in the direction of the defense of human dignity and human rights.

What position does HVD take on sending German military forces abroad into war zones?

As a principled stance, we do not see (or accept) waging war as a way of solving any political problem. Yet, we are not unilateral pacifists. We do accept that there are historical circumstances in which waging (or participating in) war is in fact the only possible option. Such situations—genocide, wars of aggression, civil wars—should be avoided, in the first place. But if they do occur, military intervention may be the least objectionable reaction to them—after all other means of overcoming a given situation have failed.

We are convinced that German imperialistic history obliges us specifically to be extra careful in this respect. For example, in regard to Srebrenica, which the Netherlands sent troops into after reflecting upon the situation, Germany would still have reasons to doubt that engagement of its troops could be justified.

Has HVD advocated particular principles constituting a humanist foreign policy?

Of course, we do advocate the binding observance of human dignity and human rights also in this field of politics. We do see the priority of peace building in this dimension. Perhaps, in addition, our awareness of transnational cooperation and solidarity on the level of nongovernmental organizations and activists makes us reject the idea of foreign policy as a government affair alone. That does not even begin to speak to the claims of government privilege and "Reason of State" expediency common in this area. But all this does not constitute more than the beginnings of a humanist approach to foreign policy. We do hope that it will be discussed transnationally in the near future.

On the international front, has HVD built bilateral relationships with national humanist organizations in other European countries?

Our cooperation with other national humanist organizations in Europe is very largely taking place in the contexts of International Humanist and Ethical Union and the European Humanist Federation. We have, however,

occasional meetings and more or less continuous communication with humanist organizations in our neighborhood, especially with our colleagues in the Netherlands, in the Flemish region of Belgium, in Switzerland and in Austria, as well as with some Polish organizations. There certainly is much more to be done in this respect, especially with regard to the integration processes of the European Union and their present crisis. But we still have to strengthen our own federal organization in order to reinforce our transnational cooperation.

You mentioned the intercultural nature of humanism. Humanist culture also operates within the existing, wider culture. What kinds of prejudice or discrimination is there generally in Germany against humanists and other secular people?

There still seems to be a lot of prejudice within the established churches, which tend to stick to the idea that “There is no morality without God.” That idea is certainly a reactionary delusion, evident even from only looking at the crimes condoned by Christian churches, and to the long history of ethics and morality before these churches were founded (and alongside their not so ethical real history). Reflecting the prevalence of this delusion in Germany, there still is quite a lot of everyday and institutional discrimination going on. The HVD recently revealed the extent of it in a report on the “walls of glass” humanists and other secular people are still running up against. But there are hopeful signs that this is beginning to lose popular acceptance. For example, when the large established churches campaigned for a popular vote in a referendum in Berlin, trying to impose obligatory religious instruction upon all pupils in state schools, we roundly defeated them as part of a broad alliance that included enlightened Christians.

I must say, however, that this is just Berlin. It was dubbed “the world capital of atheism” already in the 1920s. But according to what we know from opinion polls and our own experience as an organization, the situation in the other regions of Germany is clearly developing in the direction of secularization. Even within the churches, debates have at least begun about giving up a front of official clericalism that has long ceased to be tenable, and to reorganize as a church within a clearly secular society.

What is the environment like in Germany for individuals who are openly humanist, atheist, or secular, and who are some of the prominent figures who are?

I do not think being a humanist public figure is specifically difficult in Germany. There are prominent examples, like a philosopher (and former federal minister of state for cultural affairs) who is an active and confessed humanist, as well as several singers and actresses. The small number of these figures is,

however, a symptom of the remaining “walls of glass” that non-religious people face in many German institutions as well as the social scene in Germany.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for humanism in the world, and what do we need to do to meet it?

This is, of course, the billion-dollar question! Maybe it is sufficient to answer that we humanists have an obligation not to pursue a separate agenda, but to fully participate in finding solutions to the complex crises of humanity that are still unfolding—from the on-going wars, to the continuing deep global economic depression that broke out in 2008, to the latent crisis of gender relations or the open crisis of our planetary environment. On these issues, humanists could become an integrating force in building the broad alliances humankind needs in order to overcome these crises with the requisite urgency.

The Problem of Evil and Liberal Theologies

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ABSTRACT

The Problem of Evil (POE), the idea that inexplicable human and non-human suffering is inconsistent with the existence of a benevolent, omniscient and omnipotent God, stands as one of the greatest challenges to classical theism. Many philosophers and theologians have offered theodicies, defense of God, in an attempt to blunt the force this problem. Others, however, believing that those theodicies have been effective have abandoned the classical definition of God and have embraced more liberal theologies, including deism, pantheism, process theology, and alterity theism. Theists of this sort argue that their theologies are immune from the POE. This is so because the POE derives its force from the supposed attributes of God. If God is not omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, the problem disappears. So rather than seek to resolve the POE, theists who hold one or the other of these non-classical positions seek to walk around it altogether. The problem simply dissolves, it is claimed, when these alternative theologies are embraced. This article critiques the most prominent liberal responses to the POE and demonstrates how they fail.

Keywords

problem of evil, liberal theology, process theology
pantheism, deism, alterity theism

Introduction

The Problem of Evil (POE), the idea that human and non-human suffering is inconsistent with the existence of a benevolent, omniscient and omnipotent God, stands as one of the greatest challenges to classical theism. It has flummoxed theists since at least the time of Epicurus, who first outlined it in logical form in the third century BCE. Old Testament stories, such as those presented in the book of Job and the Genesis story of the Fall, are evidence that the problem was perceived even at the birth of the monotheistic tradition. Throughout Western history, theologians such as St. Augustine and phi-

losophers the likes of Gottfried Leibniz have engaged in a persistent struggle to defend theistic belief in the teeth of the counter-evidence that the existence of evil, particularly gratuitous evil, represents. Such theists recognized that the problem is a serious one that demanded a response. The original POE has been updated by more contemporary thinkers like J.L. Mackie and William Rowe and classical theists, such as Alvin Plantinga, continue to devise theodicies (defenses of God) in an enduring attempt to demonstrate that the simultaneous existence of both evil and God is not inconsistent. The most prominent examples include various versions of the Free Will Defense, the Greater-Good Theodicy, and Soul-Making Theodicy. Critics have continued to rebut those defenses, however, and none of them have convincingly ended the debate.

Another group of theists, having accepted the futility of classical theodicies and given up on them, has attempted to side-step the issue altogether by abandoning the attributes of God as presupposed by classical theists. The “liberal” theologies and philosophies that they variously embrace include deism, pantheism and panentheism, process theology, and alterity theism. It is often argued that these types of theology are immune from the POE. This is so because the POE derives its force from the supposed attributes of God. It’s God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence that makes God’s existence problematic given the degree of evil that we experience in the world. But if God is not a being that cares about us, knows about our condition, or has the power to do anything to improve that condition (or is not a being at all) than the contradiction disappears. So rather than seek to resolve the POE, theists who hold one or the other of these non-classical positions seek to walk around it altogether. The problem simply dissolves, it is claimed, when these alternative theologies are embraced.

This move is not, however, itself without problems. The first problem is definitional. Classical theists didn’t attribute the characteristics of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence to God arbitrarily. They did so because, as St. Anselm made clear, God must necessarily be the greatest of all conceivable beings. If not, then there could be a being greater than God, which is absurd. The greatest being must at least have the above listed attributes because without them, another being could be more loving, more powerful, or more knowledgeable, thereby making God inferior to that being. Furthermore, it is arguable that by the time liberal theologians are done whittling away God’s attributes there is nothing left to believe in, at least not something worthy of worship. If the cost of avoiding the POE is that one has made God, as God, disappear, only a Pyrrhic victory has been achieved.

A second problem is moral in nature, or perhaps it would be better to say an aesthetic problem, a matter of bad taste. This problem is that even

with the very different definitions that liberal theologians apply to the word “God,” there is still a notion that God—however defined—should be worthy of worship, or at least devotion. God as an object of devotion or worship is what distinguishes it from secular concepts or beings. Yet if the universe is characterized by evil to such a degree that the existence of the classical God is called into question, then it also draws into question the appropriateness of the worship of God as defined by various liberal theologians. If one takes a pantheist position, for example, a position that views God as the universe itself, one is left with the question of why one should view a universe possessing so much evil as being deserving of the label “God.” Should the universe be described in exalted terms when it is so characterized by suffering and pain? Is it moral to sanctify something that is so characterized by evil? These are the sorts of questions that will be explored in the rest of this essay.

Deism

Deism has had a variety of forms. Originally a synonym of theism (the two words are etymologically alike, theism coming from Greek and deism from Latin) it later took on crucial differences and was viewed by the majority of theists as unorthodox. Though deists have come in a variety of guises, the label has become most prominently associated with Enlightenment thinkers who used the term as a description of their “belief in a God, or First Cause, who created the world and instituted immutable and universal laws that preclude any alteration as well as divine immanence—in short, the concept of an ‘absentee God’” (Mossner 1967, 327). Historian Christopher Grasso defines it as “belief in a noninterventionist Creator, reliance on what reason can discern in the natural world, and skepticism about miracles, the scriptures as divine revelation, and the divinity of Christ” (Grasso 2008, 44). This was the God of the rationalists in the vein of Thomas Jefferson and Voltaire. Such a God was seen as necessary due to the force of the Cosmological Argument and its conclusion that there must be a Creator of the universe, but dispensed with notions of revelation, divine interventions in the goings-on of human beings, and personal relationships between humans and God. This God was indifferent to, or at least inactive in, the affairs of humankind. God started the clock and then went about its own business.

From the deist point-of-view, the evil experienced in the world is simply the result of the workings of “les lois generales de la Nature”¹ (qtd in Whelan, 1992, 37) as early French deist Jacques Abbadie put it. As a natural by-product of the laws of the universe, natural evil is not to be blamed on anyone. It just happens. God is not to blame because God isn’t involved. As theologian John Thiel explains this position, “Natural suffering in the context of divine

1 “The general laws of Nature.”

indifference or absence is neither innocent nor guilty, since it lies beyond the personal agency of both the divine person and human persons” (1992, 56).

From the deist standpoint then, God is to be absolved from responsibility for the existence of evil due to God’s general indifference to that evil, and to human life generally. It isn’t that God’s not able to intervene—there is not necessarily any limit to God’s power under deism—God just isn’t interested. So from the classical theist notion of God, the deist would seemingly drop the attribute of omnibenevolence. The deistic God may be omnipotent and omniscient (probably necessary characteristics of a being powerful enough to create the universe) but not loving or good (though also not evil).

Yet, isn’t this problematic? Is indifference to evil an excuse? Does it relieve one of responsibility for its occurrence? Would we not judge someone harshly if they stood idly by while another human being, or even a non-human animal, suffered and died unnecessarily when that person had the power to easily stop it? Such indifference is a demonstration of evil, not a defense from it. People recoiled when they came to believe (though probably wrongly)² that numerous of Kitty Genovese’s neighbors did nothing while they witnessed or heard her being assaulted and murdered in her New York City neighborhood in 1964. In fact, the social psychological phenomenon known as the bystander effect (also known as “Genovese syndrome”) became an object of intense research in the wake of that event. It’s not considered to be a positive effect, to put it mildly. God as the divine bystander is not a flattering picture.

Even beyond the evil of indifference, God can be positively blamed for the botched design of the universe. Philosopher Michael Martin argued that there is “no reason to suppose that *if God was powerful enough to make laws at all*, He could not have made laws with fewer evil consequences than there are now” (Martin 1990, 438). Were earthquakes and tsunamis absolutely essential to the functioning of the cosmos? Could not the laws of nature have been devised in such a way as to preclude such disasters? Was evolution the only mechanism by which this God could allow for the development and propagation of life? As I have written elsewhere,

Evolution is perhaps the worst example of the cruelty of nature. It places all living creatures in a contest of strength, wits, and good luck. Those who have the skills and the luck to survive are spared, though their lives may be plagued by illness, hunger, and despair; those who lack the requisite skills or simply have a run of bad fortune are exterminated, often in the most malicious and horrifying manners conceivable. Evolution pits living creatures against each other in a gladiatorial competition for food and the other necessities of sur-

2 The facts of the Genovese case have been drawn into serious question (see Manning, *et al.*) yet the lesson remains the same for our purposes. Indifference to evil is rightly seen as an evil itself.

vival; the winners are able to eke out a meager existence while the losers are condemned to death. (Patterson 2005, 82)

Some might wish to withhold praise for the Creator of such a system. Thomas Henry Huxley, known as Darwin's Bulldog and one of the theory of evolution's earliest and most tenacious defenders, argued that evolution, if viewed in a moral light, could itself be seen only as evil. Evolution could not be held up as a model for human behavior, as the social Darwinists claimed, but only as an anti-model. Huxley wrote imploringly, "Let us understand, once for all, that the ethical process of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it" (1989, 141).

An aggrieved deist might here object, however, that this excoriation of the bystanding God assumes that God *should* care about us or take our judgments of the world into account. Spinoza, defending his pantheism (which will be discussed in a subsequent section), wrote:

For many are wont thus to argue: If all things have followed from the necessity of the most perfect nature of God, whence have so many imperfections in nature arisen? For example, the corruption of things even to rotteness, the ugliness of things which often nauseate, confusion, evil, wrong-doing, etc. But as I have just said, these are easily confuted. For the perfection of things is estimated solely from their nature and power; nor are things more or less perfect according as they delight or disgust human senses, or according as they are useful or repugnant to human nature. (1997, 37)

In other words, humans are not the measure of things and God need not take our preferences into account. Because the world seems imperfect to us, does not mean that it is so. Yet this is to say that suffering, whether by humans or non-human animals, is something not worthy of attention to any but those who themselves suffer, and can therefore rightly be ignored. Such is a callous philosophy indeed. Just as a rich and powerful human being would not be excused for ignoring suffering because she herself did not suffer and viewed such suffering to be beneath her, neither should a deity be so excused, no matter how much more powerful and superior that being is to us. Suffering demands attention by its very nature and providing that attention is one of the things we mean when we speak of the good.

Is a being that ignores suffering worth worshipping, worth exalting as a God? Philosopher Frank Dilley says no. "Some theists have argued, I think correctly, that for a conception of God to be religiously adequate, it is not required that God be absolutely unlimited in power and knowledge, so long as God not be too limited, that God not have less knowledge and power than other beings. What is not acceptable is for God to be limited in goodness" (2000, 34). Goodness was identified by classical theists as a necessary attribute of God for an important reason. God is the perfect being or, as

St. Anselm put it, that being which no greater can be conceived. Moral goodness is a primary quality of perfection. A morally flawed or indifferent being would not be as great as one not so flawed, and therefore cannot be considered divine, no matter how amazing it may be in other ways. What would there be to distinguish such a being from a powerful alien? If our suffering means nothing to God, why should God's magnificence be recognized as Godhood by human beings? As Cardinal Avery Dulles put it, "If God never intervened in the world, His existence could only be, from a human perspective, superfluous. It would be pointless to pray to Him or expect any blessings from Him" (2005, 28). Such a being, if it were to exist, may be of scientific interest to us, but hardly of religious interest.

Deism, therefore, fails to resolve the POE. Indifference is itself a form of evil and cannot excuse the deity's lack of involvement in the world. That indifference also renders the word "God" unworthy of it. Worshipping such an immoral being would perhaps itself be immoral, or at least be in bad taste. Deism both dwindles God's nature to an un-Godlike level and it sanctifies indifference to suffering. Even if the deist's God exists (for which belief there is no evidence) the label God is misapplied to it.

Process theology

The indifference attributed to God by the deists is problematic. But what if it is not indifference that prevents God from intervening in the world, but powerlessness? This is the tack taken by process theologians. While they do not deny that God is maximally powerful, they contend that even maximal power is not limitless. God is constrained by the free choice afforded to human beings—and to all other entities in the universe. Philosopher and process theologian Charles Hartshorne uses the analogy of the child/parent relationship. A parent that controlled all of her child's behavior in order to protect that child from evil would in fact be inflicting an evil, the evil of preventing the child's growth and extinguishing its autonomy as a free agent. Not controlling the child's every move, however, invites risk and it is inevitable that the child will make poor choices and suffer for them. Hartshorne:

If the parent does not decide everything, there will be some risk of conflict and frustration in the result. The children are not infallibly wise and good. And indeed ... even divine wisdom cannot completely foresee (or timelessly know) what others will decide. Life simply is a process of decision making, which means that risk is inherent in life itself. Not even God could make it otherwise. *A world without risks is not conceivable*. At best it would be a totally dead world, with neither good nor evil. (1984, 12)

Process theology originated with Alfred North Whitehead's 1929 book *Process and Reality* and was later developed by Hartshorne and David Griffin,

among others. It was Hartshorne and Griffin who most explicitly championed process theology as a defeater of the POE. It is worth quoting Griffin's explanation of process theology at length:

Process philosophy returns to the Platonic view according to which our world was created in time but the world, in the sense of a multiplicity of finite actualities, has always existed. This position provides the basis for a distinction between cosmological principles, which are distinctive of our particular cosmos, and metaphysical principles, which would necessarily be embodied in any world that God could create. According to process philosophy, one of these metaphysical principles is that the actualities making up a world have their own power. This is because the formless stuff of which all finite actualities are composed is not passive "matter," as Plato said, but active "creativity," which means the twofold power of self-determination and efficient causation. The doctrine, more precisely, is that any actual entity is a momentary "actual occasion," which first exercises a degree of self-determination in creating itself out of the causal influences it has received from prior actual occasions, then exerts efficient causation on future occasions. This twofold creativity of each actual occasion can be influenced but not completely determined by divine power, this being the principle that lies behind process philosophy's well-known dictum that divine power is persuasive, not coercive. Whereas traditional theism says that all creative power belongs essentially to God alone, so that any creative power in the world is a loan that could be withdrawn at any time, process philosophy says that creative power is inherent in the world as well as in God. (2001, 134–135)

On this view, God has only persuasive, rather than coercive, power and therefore cannot, as Griffin puts it, "unilaterally effect states of affairs in an actual world" (2004, 4). Coercive efficient causation is defined as occurring when "the effect is unilaterally determined by the causation exerted upon it" whereas with persuasive efficient causation "the effect is not thus fully determined but is partially self-determined" (2004, 5). In order for the universe to be infused with creativity all aspects or events of nature must be at least somewhat self-created. God seeks to maximize harmony and goodness, but because God does not have complete control over anything in the universe, but must rather work in partnership with other entities, God cannot impose a divine will but is limited to exerting influence. Other entities are free to reject God's influence and persuasive efforts, however, and such freedom is the well-spring of evil. "The root of evil, suffering, misfortune, wickedness," says Hartshorne, "is the same as the root of all good, joy, happiness, and that is freedom, decision making" (1984, 18).

Similar to the Free Will Defense offered by classical theists, this theodicy traces the origin of evil to free choice. It differs, however, in that this free will is said to be existent in all aspects of the universe, not just what are typically

seen as biological organisms. The universe itself is infused with at least some degree of consciousness and free choice. This is necessary in order to account for natural evils (such as earthquakes, tornadoes, and the like). Hartshorne explains:

There is only one solution of the problem of evil “worth writing home about.” It uses the idea of freedom, but generalizes it. Why suppose that only people make decisions? People are much more conscious of the process of decision making than the other animals need be supposed to be; but when it comes to that, how conscious is an infant in determining its activities? If chimpanzees have no freedom, how much freedom has an infant, which by every test that seems applicable is much less intelligent than an adult chimpanzee?...There are many lines of reasoning that support the conclusion to which theology has been tending for about a century now, which is that our having at least some freedom is not an absolute exception to an otherwise total lack of freedom in nature, but a special, intensified, magnified form of a *general principle* pervasive of reality, down to the very atoms and still farther. (1984, 13)

God is omnipotent, in terms of possessing the maximum amount of power possible for any entity to possess, but that power is necessarily circumscribed by the freedom infused in all of reality. While God’s influence and persuasion is substantial, and God’s aims are intuitively understood by other entities, it cannot extend to the level of coercion. As Dillely put it, “There are things that even a God cannot do. God not only cannot make two plus two equal five, or undo the past, or make a stone so heavy that God cannot lift it, or have a detailed knowledge of future free acts, or impose the divine will upon free creatures while still leaving them free, but God cannot impose form perfectly on matter or make perfect creatures out of that matter” (2000, 34). Hence, process theologians argue that they have defeated the POE while still maintaining all of the characteristics of God traditionally posited by classical theists. God cannot do everything conceivable, but God can do anything that is possible given the freedom possessed by other beings.

Griffin further explains natural evil by following an argument first laid out in Plato’s *Timaeus*, that God did not create the world *ex nihilo* but only brought order to an originally extant chaos. “Hence, even apart from the creation of souls, God’s power in the universe is not absolute. God is not the sole power in reality. The creation of the world involves a victory of persuasion over reality (*Timaeus* 47–48), and as such is not a total determination of all the details of the world” (2004, 39).

Despite these novel divergences from classical theism, the theodicies presented by process theologians are not persuasive. The biggest problem is that under the process view of God, God’s power seems not just limited, but virtually non-existent. One might say that God isn’t omnipotent but rather

omni-impotent. God does not seem to have even the amount of power that human beings, and even non-human animals, have. Humans are able to alter the world in ways that thwart evil and increase the good. Similarly, God would not need to possess complete control over other entities, or the shaping of the universe, in order to achieve a better world than we currently experience. Nancy Frankenberry points out that, "Entirely absent from the literature of process theology is any discussion of the possibility that God's power might be conceived as causally efficacious without its being completely determinative, thus allowing the creature more or less ontological power of self-determination" (1981, 182).

To return to Hartshorne's parent/child analogy, a parent need not be completely determinative over the child's behavior in order to have very considerable control over it. And in some cases, determinative control is the necessary and proper thing to do. If a child picks up a knife with the desire to stab a playmate a parent would be remiss indeed not to intervene, with absolute physical force if necessary. So the analogy crumbles since God does not, under process theology, seem to have the same power over individual beings of creation that a parent has over a child but is much more circumscribed.

Process theologians argue that God cannot be held responsible for evil because God does not exercise unilateral power over other beings in the universe. God cannot act coercively. In order to maintain God's maximal power, Griffin further argues that no entities are completely determined and that therefore no entity, including God, can have complete control over any other. David Basinger, however, points out that this contention is not supported by our everyday experiences. He points out that,

If Griffin is correct, then we should obviously be able to cite no examples from human experience in which one person is unilaterally controlled by another person. But let us consider the case of a parent who, after trying unsuccessfully to convince a child to go to bed, finally picks up the child and takes him or her into the bedroom. Or let us consider the case of a parent who finally ends a fight between siblings by forcibly separating the children. Do we not here have two counter-examples to Griffin's argument? For do we not here have two common cases in which a parent (one entity) unilaterally controls the behavior of a child (another entity)? (1984, 335)

Basinger goes on to argue that if it were granted that God could not completely determine the actions of other entities, that would not excuse God's seeming lack of ability to intervene at all. Go back to the analogy of the child/parent. It would indeed be inconsistent with the proper parenting role for the child to be continuously controlled and dominated, but occasional control and domination may be exactly what is required. Basinger provides a similar analogy with law enforcement. We don't want them to absolutely control our

lives, but we do want them to intervene in order to prevent certain behaviors that go beyond the responsible use of freedom and cause harm to others. Basinger writes:

It may well be that no being can unilaterally control another in the sense that the former can cause the latter to be devoid of all power of self-determination. But it is not with this form of coercion that we as humans are primarily concerned. When, for example, we as members of society commission our police force to protect us from thieves and rapists, we are not asking (and may not even be desiring) that such felons be made devoid of all power of self-determination. We are asking that our law enforcement agencies unilaterally control the behavior of such individuals in the sense that such individuals be denied the ability to act out certain anti-social desires. In a similar fashion, those who contend that God ought to do more to curb the moral evil in the world are not generally arguing that an all-powerful, perfectly good being should bring it about that those who desire to perform evil acts are devoid of all power of self-determination. They are arguing that God ought to bring it about unilaterally that potential evildoers are unable to act out certain antisocial, dehumanizing desires. (1984, 336)

It would not be inconsistent with general human freedom and autonomy for God to interfere in human affairs to prevent egregious evils. Interference with Hitler's freedom to initiate the Holocaust would certainly not have threatened overall human autonomy. On the contrary, to the millions who suffered imprisonment, torture, and murder under his regime, such autonomy would have been immeasurably enhanced. Divine intervention, therefore, is not inherently inconsistent with human autonomy and in many cases would enhance it. This is even more the case when involving non-human animals and the rest of what is ordinarily thought of as the non-living universe (but which is supposedly conscious from the standpoint of process theology, at least in its Hartshornian variety), for example, by interfering when a bear is attacking a small child or when a volcano is about to erupt.

Michael Martin proposes a further thought-experiment for demonstrating the true extent of God's impotence if we were to accept a version of process theodicy. He asks us to consider the case of a toddler lost in the woods. The child, if not found, will die of exposure. Martin argues that it would take no extraordinary exhibition of power on God's part to effect a rescue. Nor would it impede anyone's autonomy. God would not need to exercise any coercion at all. In fact, those looking for the child would be infinitely grateful for assistance. God could, for example, help direct the toddler out of the forest, or use signs to direct those searching for the child in the proper direction. Martin argues that a God without the power to do even this is a limited deity indeed. He points out that even the child's ten-year-old sibling could likely lead the toddler to safety if she knew where the child was. "But God does not act, nor

does He give the older sister the necessary information to act. To make sense of the death of the child by exposure, we seem to be forced into assuming something that is absurd. We must suppose that God does not have the power of a ten-year-old or the knowledge that ten-year-old could obtain” (1990, 438).

Process theology so weakens God that He is not only no longer omnipotent, but doesn't seem to have any power at all. While it may be easily granted that God should not wield power in such a way as to constantly control the world and its inhabitants as so many puppets on strings, such a coercive use of power would not be necessary for many interventions that would make the world a better place. Any decent human being would lead the lost child out of the forest if she could, why does God not? We expect law enforcement officers to use physical force and coercion to restrict the freedom of other human beings that irresponsibly use that freedom to harm others, and for parents to do the same with their children, why should it not be acceptable for God to do so? The attempt by process theologians to circumvent the problem of evil by claiming that while God possesses maximal power, God still can't defeat evil because it would encroach too far into the freedom of autonomous creatures, fails. In order to explain the real evils of the world it would necessarily place God not only in a position of limited power, but of having essentially no power at all. Such a being would not be the greatest that can be conceived, and therefore would be unworthy of the title of Godhood.

Pantheism and panentheism

Pantheism and panentheism are related but slightly different ways of looking at God. I will define each here and draw out their subtle differences. Though pantheism likely predates him, Baruch de Spinoza is typically seen as one of the earliest and most fulsome proponents of the idea. He said that, “By God (Deus) I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence” (1997, 3). Furthermore, the universe is only consistent of that one absolutely infinite substance and, hence, “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God” (1997, 9, 13). On this view, God is the universe and the universe is God.

Daniel Dombrowski points out the difference between pantheism and panentheism (a view of God often subscribed to by process theologians). In pantheism, God is identical with the universe whereas in panentheism God is composed of the universe but is also independently existent (1994, 133). The difference between the two positions can be most clearly seen in the distinction between the two claims: (1) “God is all things” and (2) “God includes all things” (1994, 133). The practical difference (though perhaps slight) is that on panentheism God can be influenced by the constituent parts (the indi-

vidual entities within God) while in pantheism this is not possible since all is God. Dombrowski draws the analogy of a human being and the cells of her body. A human being can be influenced by one's cells, but that same human can also influence each of those cells since "we are 'omnipresent' in each part of our bodies" (1994, 134).

Though perhaps slightly different (panentheism doesn't appear in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and is not recognized by all philosophers or religious thinkers to be an independent position) from hence forth I will refer to both positions generally as pantheism, since the distinction is of little importance in terms of the POE and my critiques will apply to both with equal force.

There are at least two options which pantheists have open to them when confronted by the POE. One is to deny that evil exists at all and the other is to say that while evil exists, God can't be held responsible for it. The first argument is simple and runs like this: God is, by definition, perfect and since God is all things, all things must be perfect. As Spinoza put it, "things were produced with extreme perfection by God, since they followed necessarily from a given most perfect nature" (1997, 28). Evil, therefore, is unreal and is the product only of faulty understanding by the fallible human mind. "...if the human mind had only adequate ideas," Spinoza tells us, "it would form no notion of bad" (1997, 182).

This might be seen as a forerunner of skeptical theism, the position that human beings are too mired in ignorance of the larger universal whole to be able to make sufficient moral judgments between good and evil. What we think is evil we would recognize as good if we only had God's knowledge. Though I argue against this position more fully elsewhere (Linford and Patterson 2015), I will here point to some problems with this view as it relates to pantheism.

First, it is simply implausible. The wickedness that we see around us on a daily basis, and throughout the history of humankind, and even of the whole history of life, cannot be so flippantly denied. To do so is not only intellectually disingenuous but is itself immoral in so far as it fails to take seriously the true pain of those who suffer. I for one, could not look into the eyes of a mother whose child just starved to death and tell her that her child's, and her own, suffering are mere illusions and need only be seen in their larger universal context in order to be seen as true goods. To seek to justify such suffering by denying it would be to compound it.

This position is worsened on pantheism since God is identified with nature and everything that happens in it. John Stuart Mill's indictment of deifying nature is worth repeating here:

Nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another, are nature's every day performances. Killing, the most criminal act

recognized by human laws, Nature does once to every being that lives; and in a large portion of cases, after protracted torture such as only the greatest monsters whom we read of ever purposely inflicted on their living fellow-creatures [...] Nature impales men, breaks them as if on the wheel, casts them to be devoured by wild beasts, burns them to death, crushes them with stones like the first Christian martyr, starves them with hunger, freezes them with cold, poisons them by the quick or slow venom of her exhalations, and has hundreds of other hideous deaths in reserve ... All this, Nature does with the most supercilious disregard both of mercy and of justice, emptying her shafts upon the best and noblest indifferently with the meanest and worst. (1998, 29)

If we aren't to consider such things evil then the word becomes bereft of any meaning. At least the classical theist only had before her the task of explaining why God would allow such torments. The pantheist is in the position of claiming that God *is* those torments—that they are inclusive with God's being. To accept pantheism is to venerate the killing and the torture that Mill points to. If God is nature, than God is all of the horrible things that happen in nature. To accept pantheism is to deify evil and to make it sacred.

The eminent philosopher of religion John Hick points out the second problem with Spinoza's view, and that is even if one were to intellectually accept Spinoza's position that evil is an illusion, it wouldn't necessarily take us very far in resolving the POE. This is so because,

“In showing that the evils that we human beings experience are the illusory products of confused and inadequate ideas Spinoza has not made those evils any less dreadful and oppressive. For they are illusions only in a highly sophisticated sense. They are not unreal in the way in which a mirage, a dream, a hallucination, or an after-image is unreal. Pain, cruelty, and grief are still actual experiences, and they still hurt ... Thus one might accept Spinoza's metaphysic as a true picture of the universe, and yet still find that God or Nature is, to us, largely evil—largely such that it would be better if it could have been otherwise. For there is still wickedness and injustice, disease and pain, grief and despair. (1997, 23)

Suffering itself can never be an illusion. If one suffers, one suffers—the-
tensive evil that we experience in our world, is not to count against divinity, then what is? The notion of divinity that we are here led to is an arbitrary and impoverished one. According to Griffin:

For a theist to deny that the word “God” denotes a perfect reality would be to imply that the God which in fact exists is not as great as another reality which could exist but happens not to exist. And this would seem to ignore the central context of worship. Included in the formal essence of the meaning of the word “God” is the idea of a “reality worthy of worship.” And can one really worship, or give unconditional devotion to, a reality that is less than perfect? Accordingly, I think it would be impossible for the theist to solve the problem of evil by saying that God has “less” of some estimable attribute than

“a God” conceivably might have. Hence, if both power and moral goodness are estimable attributes, it is impossible for the theist to solve the problem of evil by denying that God is less powerful or less moral than “a deity” might have been. For this would be in effect to deny that there is a being worthy of worship, and hence a God. (2004, 20)

Henry Wieman draws out two additional problems evil poses to versions of pantheism that view divinity as conscious. The first is that the evils that result from the natural world move from the status of indifferent accidents of nature, to willful infliction of (or at least failure to prevent) those evils. Natural evil becomes moral evil. As Wieman puts it: “When the cosmos is said to have a conscious purpose of its own, this indifference becomes opposition. For example, if I fall from a height and am killed, I cannot say that gravitation is opposed to me, since it has no conscious purpose” (1969, 158–159). On the view of a conscious pantheism, however, that gravitational pull becomes willful, and therefore sinister.

The second problem Wieman points to involves the nature of the universe itself, specifically its general lifelessness. I shall quote him at length on this point, as I cannot put it better than he:

This “cosmic consciousness” has allegedly been in supreme control of the cosmos throughout time. Yet nowhere throughout the vast expanses of the cosmos has this supreme control allowed evolution to produce individuals who seek values outside their own bodies, except on rare planets that are infinitesimal specks compared to the total cosmos. Scientists speculate that other planets like ours may sustain a human kind of existence, although we have no knowledge of them. Probably there are such planets; but even if there are millions of them, their number, compared to all of the great star galaxies and the spaces between the galaxies, is infinitesimal. Even on this planet human life has appeared only very recently and is a very small part of the myriad forms of other life such as plants, insects, microbes and so forth. These have no sense of love and justice, history and society, science, philosophy, and religion. Human life, in contrast to all other forms of life, has these values; but only since civilization began has human life begun to dominate the earth. Even so, human life is minute in quantity and brief in time compared to atoms and molecules and other lower forms of life. Furthermore, all life on this planet is doomed to extinction after existing a lifetime that is scarcely an instant when compared to endless time. (1969, 159–160)

The way that the universe has unfolded is largely inhospitable to life, which has been able to exist only in a very tiny section of, and during a relatively small amount of time in, a largely inanimate universe. Why does this divinity so privilege non-life? One could, perhaps, deny that the pantheistic consciousness has “supreme control” but then one is left with the problems faced by the process theologians (many of whom take a pantheistic stance). If the

pantheistic unity has no agency, no control over how the universe unfolds, no ability either to advance or impede the welfare of the universe's living things, one is left wondering for what reason it deserves the title of divinity—especially considering the vast amount of evil that it contains. I don't believe that it does and argue that others should reject this conception as well, lest they make the evils of the world into God.

Alterity theism

The final version of liberal theism that I will consider here is a category of belief that some have labelled alterity theism. These are wispy forms of theism in which God is not a Being, but something else—perhaps Being itself, the ground of Being, perfect love, or something along these lines. Mikael Stenmark defines alterity theism as “roughly, the view that God is beyond or without being, but that it is nevertheless meaningful to talk about, believe in, or have faith in such a God” (4). He further claims that from this point of view (particularly following Paul Tillich) we should “declare that ‘God does not exist’, since ‘existence’ is an ontological category for objects and not for God. God is rather being-itself, an ontological category of its own—‘a radical Other who still has the power to surprise.’ It is a conception of God beyond cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments for God, and beyond the argument from evil” (2015, 2).

This view can be traced back at least as far as Thomas Aquinas, saw later development in the work on Being of Martin Heidegger, and was still further developed by theologian Paul Tillich.³ It is also apparent in the thought of other thinkers, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Karen Armstrong. Heidegger was concerned with the question of why there is something rather than nothing:

The *essent is*. It is given, it confronts us; accordingly, it is to be found at any time, and it is, in certain realms, known to us. Now this *essent*, from which we start, is immediately questioned as to its ground. The questioning advances immediately toward a ground. Such a method is only an extension and enlargement, so to speak, of a method practiced in everyday life. Somewhere in the vineyard, for example, the vine-disease occurs; something incontestably present. We ask: where does it come from, where and what is the reason for it, the ground? Similarly the *essent* as a whole is present. We ask: Where and what is the ground? This manner of questioning is represented in the simple formula: Why are there *essents*? Where and what is their ground? Tacitly we are asking after another and higher kind of *essent*. (27)

This higher kind of *essent*—the ground of all Being—is, according to theologians like Tillich, to be identified with God. Putting aside the question of whether or not this new ontological category is necessary, or even intelligible,

3 For a thorough explication of Aquinas' thought on this matter see Linford.

we are left with the same question that I previously argued fatally confronts deism and pantheism—why call this notion of God worthy of worship (a criterion that Stenmark also recognizes as a necessary one)? To see that alterity theism falls prey to this same pitfall, consider this quote from philosopher Jason Giannetti: “You and I are each manifestations of ‘God’ as Being, and everything you say and I say, as well as the songs of the birds and the screams of those dying in concentration camps, is ‘the voice of God’” (2008, 4). I, for one, would seek to avoid raising concentration camps to the level of divinity. If God, conceived as Being itself or as the ground of all Being, includes, or undergirds, the existence of evil, why should God be considered worthy of divine status and therefore worship? Why not rather just recognize Being as something that *is*—Being is just a brute fact? A Wittgensteinian approach to answering this question would be that this divine assignation derives from our thankfulness and is an expression of that gratitude.

Here’s how Giannetti puts it: “The universe, life, and particularly my life, are absolute gifts—yet gifts which, unlike our usual way of thinking, require no “gift-giver.” To follow Wittgenstein’s suggestions in his lecture, religious language is, in some strange sense, an attempt to express the ineffable which stems from the (strictly speaking) illogical thought of wonder at the existence of the world” (2008, 4). Another follower of Wittgenstein in this approach is William H. Brenner, who writes similarly that: “Our life, our being in the world, is seen as a free, unearned and—yes—amazing grace. And some of us learn to express gratitude for this gift when we learn how to thank God in prayer. Nourished by religious instruction, the initial reaction may grow into a way of being in the world—‘a faith to live by.’ Such a faith will become for the believer part of that ‘given’ for which she thanks God in prayer” (2009, 19).

To this I would reply that this expression of thankfulness is expressible only by those fortunate enough not to be oppressed by the worst evils. Those who have not been beaten into despair by some great travesty or series of travesties. When looked at from this perspective, such thankfulness seems almost crass, as if to rub salt into the wounds of those not so untouched, or at least unbeaten, by evil. Religion scholar Bart Ehrman powerfully expresses this view in the following passage:

How can I thank God for all the good things I have while realizing that other people don’t have good things? How can I thank God without, by implication, blaming God for the state of the world? I’m reminded of the scene we have all observed at one time or another on the televised news, when there has been a major airline disaster, a plane wreck with hundreds of people killed, and one of the survivors comes on the air thanking God for being with him and saving him. You wonder what people are thinking—or if they are thinking. God saved *you*? What about those other poor souls who had their arms and legs ripped off and their brains splattered all over the seat next to you?

By thanking God for your good fortune, aren't you implicating him for the misfortunes of others?" (2008, 130)

Now this is not to advocate a pessimistic or defeatist attitude toward the world, nor to say that we should be ungrateful that the world, and we, exist. Rather, it is simply a reminder to keep the world in perspective and to maintain sight of the very real suffering that exists within it and that might properly prevent us from giving such hearty thanks. One might respond that this is merely a matter of aesthetic taste, but it seems to me that thankfulness in the face of the suffering of others is poor taste indeed.

Conclusion

My purpose in this paper has been to demonstrate that liberal theologies (in particular deism, process theology, pantheism, and alterity theism) do not successfully evade the problem of evil as thought by many of those who have accepted them for that very purpose. Having been forced from the position of classical theism by the strength of the POE, liberal theists have embraced positions that remain problematic in the face of evil, even if not quite as problematic as those who retain a classical theist position. Liberal theologies do not provide a viable escape to those who believe that the POE invalidates classical theism. If classical theodicies fail, which I believe has been amply demonstrated in the philosophical discourse on this matter over the past several centuries, then the only true way to avoid the problem of evil is to jettison a belief in God altogether.

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Naturalistic Transcendentalism

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ABSTRACT

Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement that arose prior to Darwin publishing *The Origin of Species*. It arose out of the Enlightenment, in which the importance of natural law in the working of the universe was recognized. Ralph Waldo Emerson was interested in exploring religious questions from the point of view of the Enlightenment. For him, the human faculty of intuition was very interesting. After Darwin was published, most of science lost interest in exploring human intuition partly because no naturalistic basic for it was known. Today, it is appropriate to return to the study of transcendentalism, building on what was done in the nineteenth century, but with a twenty-first century understanding of the laws of nature. Much work can be done from this perspective, possibly developing a new philosophy of the humanities. This is the defining work by the author of this approach to philosophy.

Keywords

naturalism, intuition, humanities, science, transcendentalism

Introduction

After a lifetime of humanist activism, I decided to transition out of my career in high technology into humanist philosophy. I decided to approach humanist philosophy as I had approached high technology: To think everything through from first principles. I have now discovered several things that I think are important philosophical perspectives for the twenty-first century. I can tie all of my discoveries together into a neat package by establishing a new school of philosophy called Naturalistic Transcendentalism.

Transcendentalism was an important movement that arose early in the nineteenth century prior to Darwin publishing *The Origin of Species*. It arose out of the Enlightenment, in which the importance of natural law in the working of the universe was recognized. Ralph Waldo Emerson was trained

as a minister before beginning his work as a philosopher. In his first philosophical work, *Nature* (Emerson 2014, 2–36). Emerson talked about his desire to achieve revelations. As he explored further how he could experience revelations, he soon talked about the human faculty of *intuition* (Emerson 2014, 54, 56, 85, 102). Emerson saw intuition as a key religious experience of knowing what is right, but without using a scientific reasoning process.

Transcendentalism emphasized the importance of human intuition in modern life, but was not opposed to the idea that human intuition is part of nature. As the transcendentalists continued to think about human intuition and the role human intuition plays in the forming of human judgement and the setting of goals, writers such as Thomas Carlyle, who lived from 1795 to 1881, talked about intuition (Goodman 2015) being a phenomenon of “natural supernaturalism.” After Darwin published *The Origin of Species* many people misunderstood the naturalistic leanings of Transcendentalism’s origins. As science and the philosophy of science continued to develop into the twentieth century, people stopped thinking along Transcendentalist lines, and began to think about things from a more humanist perspective. Humanist thinking downplayed the importance of human intuition in favor of reasoning and in favor of conclusions about how to live life that are closer to everyday applicability.

As we look at these issues today, our naturalism is much more complex than it was in the early nineteenth century. It is now time to admit that human intuition is important within two dimensions. First, it plays a central role in the making of human judgements, and is therefore worthy of study. Second, it is a very important part of the subjective life of human beings. It even underlies human creativity, which is utilized by scientists as they propose new hypotheses. Today, naturalism is so oriented toward scientific thinking that modern science has declared that human intuition should not be studied until we can understand the natural law that causes it to work. Naturalistic Transcendentalism takes exception to this view, and declares instead that it is appropriate to study human intuition using the most powerful observations that exist of human intuition: our subjective observations of our inner beings. Modern naturalism declares our human being and all our human experiences to be natural phenomena that are not well understood in detail. There is still debate about which branch of science is most important to shedding light on how human intuition, and the rest of our subjective being, works from a scientific perspective.

It is appropriate to take up this line of thought more or less where the Transcendentalists and some other philosophers of the early nineteenth century left off, but from a twentieth century perspective, in order to study the subjective human being and one of its most powerful faculties: human intuition.

Questions abound, from what role should human intuition play in our personal philosophies to understanding the nature of the humanities. Thinking since the early nineteenth century has resulted in a triumph of philosophy in a mature philosophy of science. Perhaps if we pick up from where the Transcendentalists left off, we can form an equally significant philosophy of the humanities.

Enlightenment

For now, let us revisit the Enlightenment and look at a few select issues that were important at that time. The idea that everything that happens in the world is due to the working of natural law became a founding principle of the Enlightenment. It was given great impetus when Newton published *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* in 1687, outlining the mathematical principles of classical mechanics and the law of gravity which, when combined, were able to explain the orbits of all of the planets and moons in our solar system. Even before Newton's discoveries were published, René Descartes had emphasized the importance of questioning everything, observing the external world, and using our very best skills at thinking to derive the theories of how the external world was working (Newman 2014). In addition, however, Descartes developed the idea of mind/body dualism: That although the human mind arises from the functioning of the human brain, the mind itself is not like other things and exists separately from the brain. Most important was the direction of causality. In nature, events are caused by the laws of nature. Descartes was convinced that there were no natural laws that "caused" our minds to arrive at the conclusions they reach. He felt that it was very important that human beings be free to follow their reasoning wherever it led. To him, the human mind causes us to do what we do because we decide to do it, and this required our minds to be fundamentally different from the rest of nature (Cunning 2014).¹ This idea is part of what is meant when we talk about Descartes' metaphysics. Descartes died nearly forty years before Newton published the *Principia*, which explains both the mathematics and science of the foundations of classical mechanics.

By the mid-eighteenth century, after Newton's ideas had been well digested, a new philosopher, David Hume, picked up from where Descartes left off, and

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1. I have added to Cunning's analysis of Descartes' thinking my own analysis of why Descartes went through so many logical contortions in order to ensure that human thought was not required to follow the laws of nature. From the perspective of the twentieth century, I believe we can now understand that my summary of why Descartes was so desperate to separate mind from body may be correct. Regardless of the correctness of my analysis, however, this description of Descartes' motivation helps us understand a key philosophical issue of the Enlightenment from a twentieth century perspective.

made a more modern attempt to cover the ground covered by Descartes. By now, the concept of the mechanical universe operating by the laws of nature was a widely held view among the philosophers of the Enlightenment. By this time, the metaphysics of Descartes was being declared to be a failure because he overemphasized the importance of the imagination and the will in the kind of reasoning used by scientists (Hatfield 2015). Hume wrestled with the same fundamental problem: Is the scientist free to follow his thinking, or is his thinking caused by natural law? On the one hand, it was fairly clear that the human brain is part of nature and that it operated by natural law, and that the human mind arose out of the operation of the brain. But for Hume, the key question was more a question of whether people, philosophers, and scientists are free to make the choices that they make (assuming they are not in prison, or being forced in some way). Hume concluded that people could only be held to be morally responsible for their actions if they were free to choose their actions. Furthermore, Hume really wanted to grant that scientists and philosophers were most able to make major headway in their thinking when they appeared to be free from external influences to their thinking processes. Hume was never able to show clearly how these two apparently contradictory properties of the mind could be reconciled. He was satisfied with declaring people to be free to make choices and to follow their own thoughts without being concerned about how this happened in the world (Hatfield 2015).

Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson enrolled in Harvard College in 1817, whereupon he started reading David Hume and learning all about Enlightenment ideas. Hume made such an impression on Emerson that he wrote to his aunt Mary about Hume's ideas (Goodman 2014). At this point, Emerson was actively studying to become a minister.

In 1819, William Ellery Channing gave his sermon, "Unitarian Christianity," in which he laid out the theological principles of Unitarianism. This document is remarkable in that it reveals the nature of religion in the opinion of the religious liberals of the day. At no time does he argue that Unitarian theology is more consistent with our observations of the world than the theology of the Trinity. Rather he argues for which theology will cause the members of the church to live better lives, choose better goals, and be better able to achieve their goals. He states that he wants to encourage his parishioners to use reason as they think about these issues, and he feels that Unitarian theology will make more sense to these people and will help them achieve their goals better than the theology of the Trinity.

In 1820, while Emerson was at Harvard College, he started writing a journal entitled "The Wide World" (Goodman 2014). After Harvard, he taught

at his brother's school for young ladies for a few years before enrolling in Harvard Divinity School in 1825, which produced many Unitarian ministers. Ralph Waldo Emerson continued to learn more about the ideas of the Enlightenment, while in an environment in which religion rather than science was his focus, but in which divinity students were encouraged to think for themselves. It was an environment in which change was in the air. What did the changes in thought during the Enlightenment mean for religion in the nineteenth century? In October of 1826 Emerson was licensed to preach to Unitarians. In March of 1829, he was ordained minister of Boston's Second Church and he married his first wife in September. In February, 1831, Emerson's first wife died of tuberculosis at the age of 19, and in 1832, Emerson resigned his post at Boston's Second Church because he no longer wanted to be a minister. He sailed to Europe on Christmas Day in 1832, where he traveled through most of 1833, meeting John Stuart Mill and Wordsworth, among others, and establishing a life-long friendship with Thomas Carlyle.

A couple of years after returning from his trip to Europe, and while Darwin was still visiting the Galapagos islands, Emerson published his first major work, *Nature* (1836), in which he declared a major theme of his life's work:

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? ... There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship. (2014, 17)

It is easy to forget that this was said at a time when Enlightenment thought had a very mechanistic view of the laws of nature, except that almost nothing was known about biology. This point is key if we are to understand what Emerson was talking about when he talked about "beholding God and nature." In Enlightenment terms "beholding" includes what occurs when a scientist observes phenomena in the external world, although it also refers to not just observing, but also experiencing in a more spiritual manner. Thus, God is "beheld," that is observed and experienced, by human beings. Not enough was known about the brain, biology, or the true nature of the powers of the human spirit to have a more scientific word for the widespread experience of God that prevented Descartes, Hume, Emerson, and even Thomas Paine, from declaring that God did not exist. Emerson, however, had become sufficiently steeped in the philosophy of David Hume to realize that this experience was an observation by human beings. Emerson did not have the skill or interest to ask the question: "What is it an observation of?" Instead, I think Emerson in this introduction to *Nature* is declaring that he wishes

to explore these experiences, especially from a modern perspective that takes into account the “new thoughts” of the early nineteenth century. Although Emerson had decided to stop being a minister, I suspect that he had decided to turn toward what we now call “research and development,” but to do this for religion. I think Emerson was concerned that the Unitarian approach did not go far enough. Most of the work in biology at this time was observing, describing, and classifying all of the plants and animals in the world. Emerson’s statement in *Nature* can be interpreted as declaring his intention to explore human experiences, whether religious or non-religious, from the perspective of the Enlightenment, to generate new poetry, and to articulate new revelations about our relation to the universe from the viewpoint of the Enlightenment.

Back to fundamentals

As I look at this from the twentieth century, however, I am inspired to return to a fundamental issue that both Descartes and Hume struggled with: What is the nature of the human spirit, the observer of science, that actor that appears to be the cause of its decisions which then result in action? Our technologies did not start giving us insight into how this might work until nearly the middle of the twentieth century with the arrival of the computer age. Finally, we saw technologies that could perform simple reasoning, could recognize objects in visual fields, could decide between alternative actions, and could carry out decisions once they were made. These technologies were all computer technologies. The achievements that were most similar to relatively simple tasks carried out largely by our brains were all coming from the field of artificial intelligence. Philosophers did not want to accept that information processing technology had any relationship to the human spirit (Searle 2004, 8). Even John Searle, as he struggled to understand how human consciousness works, preferred to claim that human consciousness was arising from biological phenomena rather than going beyond this observation to identify the information processing properties of the human brain as the phenomena that were underlying the formation of consciousness within the brain.

It is time to revisit this question. In order to do so, however, we must start by accepting the validity, as John Searle has done, of our subjective observations of our own beings.² We would prefer observations that were more objective, but these observations are good enough to allow us to make significant headway in understanding the nature of the human being. The challenge is to be careful in the judgements we make about just how much we

2. My approach is distinct from Searle, while building on much of his work, by not limiting the nature of the underlying technology to purely neurological technology, and, in addition, to open the possibility of gaining scientific knowledge of the subjective by simply observing our subjective being.

have learned that might be useful to other people, and not just to ourselves.

The first step is to acknowledge that the human spirit is real.³ Just as science requires observations of phenomena that we declare to be real, we must demand to know what observations of the human spirit we have made. The observations are multitudinous. As we search all of human literature, each book that talks about observations of the personal feelings, and the “spirit” of the writer, is an observation that has been made and recorded of the writer observing his or her own subjective being. If we interpret these observations as observations and do not leap to conclude that we know what they were observations of, we can remain on solid scientific footing. We can declare that something has been observed that we call the “human spirit,” without really knowing much more about it. The challenge is not to leap past these primary observations unduly. We face a challenge that many modern thinkers are not familiar with: We are unable to even define what we mean by “intuition” clearly. As we move forward from this starting place, we will try to understand more clearly what we are talking about, with an eventual goal of identifying the natural laws that cause the phenomena that we have observed and found to be interesting.

The next question is: What is the most important function of the human mind in the life of a person? This, also, is relatively simple: To make decisions about what actions the person will take in life. In addition, people observe the world and try to figure out how it is working. Scientists use their minds in creating the starting points for scientific work. Scientists observe phenomena in the external world, and then propose hypotheses to explain how these phenomena work.

Choosing actions

As a technologist with training in artificial intelligence, I think I bring a new perspective when I ask the question: What does our thinking look like when we make a choice? It is obvious to me that we use concepts such as values and priorities as we do this thinking. A central long-term task in our lives is to establish a “value system” that is basically a list of values. As we start to consider all of the different things that we are considering doing in our lives, we take each possible action and evaluate it relative to our values, and then place

3. Searle does an excellent job in *Biological Naturalism* of showing why consciousness is real. When I talk about the “human spirit” I do not mean anything beyond Searle’s term “consciousness.” I prefer to reserve the word “consciousness” for something more similar to what psychologists mean by “consciousness,” which Searle describes by saying the part of consciousness that is self-aware, and subjectively experiences its own existence. Thus, Searle prefers to include as part of his term “consciousness” what many psychologists have called the “unconscious.”

it in priority order with all of the other things we are doing in our lives. We then start working on the highest priority tasks first, working our way down the list until we run out of time or other resources. The tasks that cannot be done then fall off the bottom of the priority list.

A key property of this kind of thinking is that each action that we are evaluating will presumably promote some of our values, but it will also have a negative impact on others of our values. It is easy for values to conflict with each other. Sometimes any action that promotes one of our values will have a negative impact on another of our values. This occurs whenever the values themselves are in conflict with each other.

The natural reaction of a mathematician to this kind of situation is to declare that the system itself is flawed; that we must remove the conflicting values in order to understand properly our true values. Continuing my observations using my training in artificial intelligence, however, the question arises of how did we arrive at the list of values in our value system? It is at this point that we start to leave reason and mathematics behind, and start to depend more and more on our feelings.

From an artificial intelligence perspective, emotions are an interesting subsystem within the human brain that appears to be a primitive way of making decisions about what to do. The emotions themselves can be viewed as doing the analysis I describe above, but at a nearly unconscious level. The person selects the next action to perform based on competition between different levels of feeling of desire or other emotions that move the person to act. The more intellectual version of this using actual value systems seems, from an artificial intelligence perspective, to be another layer of the same type of analysis, but one step removed from the emotions.

The task of constructing the value system would then be more directly related to our emotions, but would also engage our reasoning as we do what we can to formulate values with minimal amounts of conflict between the different values. We add values to our system that our reasoning has proposed and our emotions have validated, or that our emotions have proposed and our reasoning has validated. Finally, as we get ready to choose an action, our reasoning attempts to evaluate our alternatives relative to our values. When two different alternatives have evaluations that are close to one another, our emotions will help us in the final steps of evaluation to select the alternative we will act on.

Intuition

At this point, it is interesting to return to the way Emerson might think about things. Descartes had emphasized the importance of the imagination in scientific thinking. Emerson approached all of these questions from more of a religious perspective in which ministers are concerned about the moral

systems that people also use while making decisions. Religious people know that people have an awareness of what is right and wrong. We sometimes call this our conscience, but at the beginning of this paper I talked about human intuition. As we observe our subjective beings many of us experience having a good idea about a problem we are thinking about leap into our mind without our having carefully built up the pieces of the idea as we often have to do. We tend to describe such an experience by saying that we got the idea “intuitively” or through inspiration.

From a twenty-first century perspective, it is obvious that such ideas are created by our brain, but that they arise within our brain in a way that is different from when we create ideas through a reasoning process. Since we do not observe how these ideas are formed, we cannot be sure how they came about. Standard scientific method requires that if we cannot observe the construction of something, then we should withhold judgement about how it was constructed.

From an artificial intelligence perspective it is not at all surprising that some of our ideas are created by processes in our brain that we cannot observe. Rather, the artificial intelligence worker realizes that performing reasoning in such a way that we can watch the steps in the reasoning process is more of a surprise, because this requires mechanisms in the brain that can perceive some of our thinking processes.

The human intuitive capacity, however, is very important as we think about people living lives from a subjective point of view. It means that if we ever develop a theory of how the human mind works, it must include an explanation of how intuitive thoughts are created.

Emerson preferred the term “intuition” over Descartes’ term “imagination” to describe the origin of ideas that scientists need to identify new hypotheses to work on. Scientists have also learned how to use standard reasoning processes to help them create hypotheses, so we must be careful not to overemphasize the role of intuition even in this process. It is not correct, however, to declare that new hypotheses arise only from conscious reasoning. Intuition is important in this task.

The Abacus and the Rose

Before we return to thinking about how to build on Emerson’s work, we have developed enough terminology to turn to a debate that raged especially strongly during the 1950s between academics in the humanities and academics in technology and science. Jacob Bronowski included a dialogue entitled *The Abacus and the Rose* on this topic in the second edition of his book *Science and Human Values*, written in 1965. This dialogue is a discussion among three people: an administrator, Sir Edward St. Ablish, a literary critic,

Dr. Amos Harping, and a molecular biologist, Prof. Lionel Potts. Together they form the British delegation to a Unesco conference. Sir Edward has asked Dr. Harping and Prof. Potts to dinner to try to get them to appear more friendly toward one another, at least in public. Before Sir Edward has finished pleasantries about the sunset, a debate ensues about whether the sunset is beautiful. Prof. Potts asks Dr. Harping if the sunset is beautiful and Dr. Harping replies that this question is meaningless because beauty needs to be experienced and is not really a property associated with an object or event that one finds beautiful at a particular moment in time. This discussion leads up to Dr. Harping saying:

“Beauty is not measured like splendor, by a comparison with the commonplace. It is felt in each of us by what is most individual in him. When we discuss beauty as we should, we are not looking for common ground, the way you are, Sir Edward, by profession—and the way Potts is always looking for common ground, too, because that’s all that scientists understand. My profession is to discuss beauty ... and ... when we discuss beauty in a work of art or of nature, we are looking for what is uncommon, what is personal, what we can see and someone else cannot. (Bronowski 1965, 85–86)

When Sir Edward asks why he should care what Dr. Harping thinks, Dr. Harping replies:

You want to hear what I say, not because it is better than what you say, but because it is different—minutely, subtly different, different in this personal foible or in that glimpse of another mind. And these differences, these small flashes of light behind the outline, they illuminate and enrich your own vision. You wanted to hear what I had to say, Sir Edward, because now that you have heard it, you will make it your own—a shift of emphasis, an infinitesimal enlargement of your apparently sacred and settled opinion of sunsets.

(Bronowski 1965, 86)

From here, the discussion rapidly goes downhill, with Dr. Harping emphasizing the professional importance of concern for the reader and the impact of Harping’s work on the world, and Prof. Potts explaining that his students also use very good judgement in their work. Potts does not have a good answer, however, for why science invents atom bombs and other things whose impact on the world can be questioned. Unfortunately, they never return to this critical difference between science and the humanities: Science is all about understanding the external world from an objective point of view, and the humanities all involve the impact of their work on the minds and lives of people. All of the arts and humanities have, as part of their task, impacting the subjective lives of people in some manner.

Philosophy of the humanities

Descartes began the work that eventually led to the development of a philosophy of science that has made it easier for scientists and engineers to teach each

other how to do scientific work. As we listen to Bronowski's dialogue, we see that although Dr. Harping was able to elucidate a key difference between the sciences and the humanities, he had to explain this from his personal perspective. He was explaining ideas with which neither Sir Edward nor Prof. Potts were already familiar. Due to his familiarity with the philosophy of science, Dr. Harping was already familiar with the general approach used by Prof. Potts.

I think it would be useful to create a philosophy of the humanities that explains more carefully that the humanities are more related to what people do as they live their lives, and that the principles of science are not as useful in the humanities as they are in science. There is a key property of the humanities that Dr. Harping explains as a difference between him and even Sir Edward, not just Prof. Potts: Disagreements within the humanities are less avoidable than they are in science. The fundamental reason for this is due to the fact that the humanities deal more with people's subjective lives than do the sciences. Each person's subjective life is different from every other person's subjective life. We call this the uniqueness of the individual.

The idea that all of our fields of study would lead to agreement among unique individuals is surprising. Is it possible that there is a greater degree of agreement within the sciences than is possible within the humanities? I think so. I think that the reason for this is the fact that the sciences do not really care what any person thinks. The sciences are all about describing the world outside of ourselves, and this external world is the same for all of us. This creates a mechanism for agreement within the sciences that does not exist within the humanities. Rather than declaring a need for a mechanism of agreement within the humanities, I think it is better to simply observe this difference, and then explore how work in the humanities is different from work in the sciences.

Future work

I have now touched briefly on some areas of thought that can benefit from my approach. All of the points I have touched on deserve papers of their own. Future papers will be aided by being able to refer back to this foundational paper on Naturalistic Transcendentalism.

Naturalistic Transcendentalism is firmly rooted in the twentieth century naturalism of humanistic technologists. I hope that in my efforts to stress the philosophical naturalism of Naturalistic Transcendentalism I have not downplayed the equally important role of the arts and the humanities, to which Emerson contributed during his lifetime, in the origins of Naturalistic Transcendentalism.

I hope my friends in the arts and the humanities will have the patience that is needed in order to deepen our understanding of subjective human life

in the twentieth century. Some of this approach needs to be from a scientific perspective in which we build on observations of subjective experience reported by people in the books they write.

Science prefers not to leap to conclusions. Emerson talks about wanting to have his own “revelations.” I think it is useful to listen to the revelations that have been shared with us by all people, but our scientific perspective needs to be engaged when we try to move from an observation of the human spirit to theories of objective reality that explain how such an experience could have occurred and been observed.

There have been too many debates among people in the arts and humanities and scientists and technologists in which each side has refused to respect the other side. It is time to create a dialectic that allows us to understand and respect people on both sides of this debate. Perhaps then we can all come to an even greater understanding of human life that helps all of us live better lives. Naturalistic Transcendentalism warns us that this new perspective will be subtly different from person to person rather than being the kind of theory, shared by all people, that science provides.

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