“The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.”

Bertrand Russell
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Editor’s Note

Our last volume ended with the challenge to deliver a new edition within the year; a challenge which my predecessors had consistently been unable to meet. Well, I am proud to say we have risen to the occasion and met our deadline thus ending the long-standing tradition of delay. With a little luck and the dedication of the new editorial staff, hopefully this is the beginning of a new tradition of consistency.

With that said, I am pleased to present the seventh edition of Harvest Moon: Berkeley’s Undergraduate Philosophy Journal. I think this volume testifies to the talent, rigor, and commitment of Berkeley’s philosophy students. With essays ranging in topic from philosophical logic to Heidegger, these selections not only circumscribe both analytic and continental traditions but also demonstrate careful exegesis as well as inspired and original thought. The papers contained in this journal represent some of the best philosophical work written by undergraduates in the Department and I think they speak to the diversity of subject matter and style of philosophy which goes on here at Berkeley. The Harvest Moon, unlike any other undergraduate journal of its kind, is entirely written, edited, and published by Berkeley undergraduates. It is an important and long-standing practice of our journal to not only allow our peers to see their work in print but to engage in philosophical dialogue with them through the editing process. We need to look no further than south of the Campanile to find some of the most promising philosophers of tomorrow.

Of course none of this would be possible without my editorial staff and especially my production editors who certainly did more than their share of the work. I think we can safely say that the Harvest Moon is here to stay.

Laura Davis
April 2010
Reading the papers in this issue of *Harvest Moon* has filled me with both pride and nostalgia. I’m proud because our undergraduate majors are clearly some of the best philosophy students on the planet (and the philosophical talent and power of our undergraduates is—once again—evidenced by this terrific collection of essays). I’m nostalgic because (alas) this will probably be my last semester interacting with Berkeley undergraduates. As many of you probably already know, I will be taking up a professorship in the Philosophy Department at Rutgers University this fall. And, I can honestly say that it is the Berkeley undergraduates that I will miss the most. I’d like to take this opportunity to talk about some of my most memorable experiences at Berkeley—as an undergraduate teacher.

I remember preparing for my very first lecture at Berkeley. It was Fall 2003, and I was teaching an upper-level Metaphysics course (125). This was my first time teaching such a course. And, although I had had many semesters of teaching experience before arriving at Berkeley, I remember being nervous on that day. I was nervous not only because this was my first time teaching Metaphysics, but also because this was Berkeley, and I had heard that Berkeley’s philosophy undergraduates were super-smart. I was not disappointed. In my usual style, I had prepared (at least) 75 minutes worth of material for a 75-minute lecture. I’d say I got though maybe 20 minutes of that material. The rest of the time, I was responding to a series of deep, probative, and challenging questions from the undergraduates in the course. That was like nothing I had ever experienced before. I have since grown accustomed to this phenomenon. Indeed, I have gotten used to it. And, I will sorely miss it.

Since that very first lecture, the teaching of undergraduate courses
has been my most cherished experience at Cal. I’ve lost count of how many times an undergraduate student (in my logic courses, or my probability course, or my epistemology and metaphysics courses) has “blown my mind” with a question. In each of the semesters I’ve taught here (including this final semester), there have been several of these “mind blowing” questions. These are the sort of questions that (a) stop you in your tracks, (b) make you completely re-think some crucial argument or explanation, and (c) make you appreciate just how wonderful Cal undergrads are.

It’s been a great pleasure (and privilege) to be able to give lectures to (and to talk philosophy with) such a bright, prepared, and motivated body of students. I want to thank all of you (especially those few that I was fortunate enough to have developed long-lasting, individual relationships with) for what will likely be some of the most rewarding and memorable undergraduate teaching experiences of my career. I will carry your infectious passion and enthusiasm for the study of philosophy with me always.

Branden Fitelson
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Violence, Fear, Terrorism

“Fear dominates and reduces a person. A life of fear is scarcely a life at all.”

Samuel Scheffler
I. Introduction

The meaning and significance of the term ‘terrorism’ has been obscured by its frequent use in everyday life, resulting in debate over the proper application of the term. Many philosophers’ attempts to define and categorize what exactly counts as “terrorism” or “terrorist acts” seem to fall into vagaries, failing to identify the term’s morally salient features. In this paper, I analyze the interpretations of terrorism offered by Carl Wellman, Igor Primoratz, and Samuel Scheffler. My hope is that by drawing upon some of their insights, as well as critically assessing what I believe to be their shortcomings, I can develop a view that more accurately describes what is morally distinctive about terrorism.

My conception borrows most heavily from Scheffler. I adopt his approach of searching for the morally distinctive features that all terrorist acts share, rather than attempting to formulate an overarching definition of the term, as Wellman and Primoratz do. Perhaps more importantly, I believe that one of the criteria that Scheffler identifies as morally distinctive about terrorist acts has been both overlooked and underappreciated: the fact that terrorist acts are committed for the purpose of degrading or reinforcing a social order by instilling fear in a population. Like Scheffler, I draw upon the work of social-contract theorist Thomas Hobbes to explain the significance of this point. Hobbes believes entering into a social contract with a society to be the only way to escape the fear of violent death that comes with living in a “state of nature.” It follows that one of the most beneficial elements of being in a society is the protection that it affords. The protection of a state diminishes people’s fear of others. This allows people to enjoy their lives. Scheffler’s significant insight is that the goal of many terrorist acts is to call the security offered by a society into question. This in turn stokes a particular type of fear in its population: that the state may not actually be able to protect them. As a result, the population is in constant fear of violent death. The means by which this end is achieved is typically, but not limited to, an attack (or threat thereof) on a small random group within the targeted society.

Even though Scheffler gives significant weight to this Hobbesian aspect of terrorist acts, I don’t believe that he gives it all the weight it deserves. In fact, my central contention is that it is the defining feature of terrorist acts. I argue that several other criteria, offered by Wellman, Primoratz, and Scheffler respectively, either expand or narrow the class of cases of terrorism in ways that obstruct a clear understanding of
what it is about terrorist acts that makes them distinctively morally objectionable. They either allow acts that shouldn’t count as terrorism to count as such, or restrict the term to a class that doesn’t include acts that should.

After presenting my account of “terrorism,” I test its application by providing an example of a group to which the label “terrorist,” in my view, should apply, despite the fact they aren’t commonly regarded as such. I then do the opposite, explaining why I believe that a typical category of actions that is commonly referred to as “terrorist,” should not be. I conclude by offering several potential objections in an effort to further clarify any remaining ambiguities.

II. The Concept of “Terror”

In “On Terrorism Itself,” Carl Wellman defines ‘terrorism’ as “the use or attempted use of terror as a means of coercion” (258). As defined, acts of terrorism would include (as Wellman readily admits) the use of fear to motivate students to turn in homework on a specified date. This broad categorization of terrorism would also include most forms of blackmail and extortion. Even though Wellman does make the important point that fear must be a fundamental aspect of terrorism, the particular exploitation of fear that he identifies as ‘terrorism’ doesn’t seem to allow us to distinguish a set of features that separates ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorist acts’ from any other way in which fear can be exploited to achieve some end. Instead, his definition of the term seems to put sole emphasis on the etymological root of the word ‘terrorism’. While this is an important feature of terrorist acts, it shouldn’t be considered the only, or even the central feature. Instead of creating a new, separate set of criteria for terrorism, Wellman’s definition simply assimilates familiar exploitations of fear into a new overarching category called “terrorism.” This dilutes or obscures the special features of terrorist acts that make terrorism so morally repugnant. If Wellman’s conception is accepted, the term “terrorism” loses its potential for this sort of special force. It becomes nothing more than a synonym for fear-based coercion. Because of this, it seems as though the attempt to define a separate and specific category of acts never really gets far off the ground. We need to say more about what it is about a particular type of fear-based coercion that makes it “terrorism.”
The account of terrorism provided by Igor Primoratz suffers from a similar sort of ambiguity. Primoratz defines terrorism as “the deliberate use of violence, or threat of its use, against innocent people, with the aim of intimidating some other people into a course of action they otherwise would not take” (1). This definition seems to be nearly as open-ended as Wellman’s. The problem is that Primoratz’s view doesn’t take into account the fact that terrorists stoke the fear of violent death within a population as a means of pursuing a particular type of end. The phrase “some other course of action they otherwise would not take,” sounds similar to Wellman’s coercion-based definition. It misses the point that the purpose of terrorism is undermining an established social order.

However, Primoratz makes an important stipulation that Scheffler doesn’t: the mere threat of violence is still terrorism if it has the effect of terrorism (undermining an established social order). Indeed, several aspects of Primoratz’s view take steps toward what I believe is the correct conception. For one, he contends that violence or the threat of violence play an integral role in terrorist acts. This limits the class of acts that are “terrorist” to those in which the fear in question is specifically that of harm or violent death, an improvement on the more general and open-ended “fear” proposed by Wellman. This means that the use of fear to motivate students to turn in assignments punctually won’t count as terrorism, unless one is threatening his students with violence. This is, in fact, a point that Primoratz explicitly makes about Wellman’s view.

Scheffler’s account takes another step in the right direction by identifying what he believes are the distinct features that make an act count as “terrorism.” Rather than simply adding to the list of definitions of the term ‘terrorism’, Scheffler’s aim in “Is Terrorism Morally Distinctive?” is to investigate the concept of terrorism in an attempt to find “a familiar pattern to which terrorist actions often conform,” and to establish that acts that fit within this “pattern” have a morally distinctive quality. As he states, “it is a mistake to begin an inquiry into the morality of terrorism by endorsing a broad definition” because “such a starting point may lead us to overlook relevant distinctions and to give an oversimplified description of the moral terrain” (Scheffler 2-3).

Scheffler’s description of what he considers to be a ‘standard case’ of terrorism is heavily influenced by the social contract theory of Thomas Hobbes. According to Hobbes, non-societal life, or ‘the state of nature’, is a state of war of “every man against every man.” This constant
struggle for survival creates the perpetual fear of “imminent violent
death.” The corrosive power of this fear dominates all elements of
life. In the ‘state of nature’, “there is no place for industry, because
the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no culture of the earth
. . . no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no
letters; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent
death. And the life of man, solitary, brutish, and short” (Hobbes 76).

Scheffler relates three specific points that Hobbes makes about fear
to the subject of terrorism. The first is simply, “how bad a thing fear
is” (Scheffler 4). Its power to degrade quality of life is unmatched. As
Scheffler says, “a life of continual fear is scarcely a life at all” (4). Be-
ing in a constant state of fear “dominates and reduces a person” (4).
The second point is that fear gets in the way of interpersonal relations.
When everyone must constantly be wary of being injured by others, it
is unlikely that people will engage with one another in any way that
will put them at risk. Social programs that rely on cooperation are
impossible. “In addition to being worse than various forms of poverty
and deprivation, it also contributes to them, by destroying the condi-
tions that make wealth and ‘commodious’ living possible” (4). It is the
miserable life that comes along with living in a constant state of fear
that leads people to seek the protection and benefits associated with
life in society. Hobbes says: “[the] desire of ease and sensual delight
disposeth men to obey a common power, because by such desires a
man doth abandon the protection might be hoped from his own in-
dustry and labour. Fear of death and wounds disposeth [man] to the
same” (Hobbes 58). The third and related point is that it is “only” a
stable political society” that can relieve people of this fear. “It is the
inevitable fate of pre-social human beings” (58).

According to Scheffler, terrorism is morally distinctive because it
exploits fear through acts of violence intended to undermine a social
order. Terrorists commit seemingly random acts of violence that harm
or kill a small group of people, which in turn creates a looming sense of
fear in the wider population of the targeted society. To account for the
infectious nature of this fear, Scheffler cites Hobbes’ concept of ‘chronic
terror’, which involves “fear without apprehension of why or what. . . the
rest run away by example, everyone supposing his fellow to know why.”
In other words, if one person sees that another is scared, they usually
assume that they are in danger as well. The fear of individuals is
directly effected by the threat, which induces fear in those who surround
them, setting off a chain reaction.
While the intention behind the instigation of fear may not be to reduce the targeted society to a Hobbesian ‘state of nature’, it is most certainly intended to interfere with the society’s normal activity by calling into question the sense of protection that the society is supposed to provide. Scheffler gives several examples: “the fear that terrorism produces may, for example, erode confidence in the government, depress the economy, distort the political process, reduce associational activity and provoke destructive changes in the legal system” (5). This is the point that Wellman and Primoratz, among others, seem to miss. Terrorism is so bad because it targets one of our most foundational levels of security: protection provided by the state. This takes many forms. The primary protection called into question may be the physical protection from great harm and death provided by laws, a police force and an army. However, as Scheffler suggests, the kindling of this sort of fear can lead to the collapse of other sorts of comfort that the state provides. The fear of violent death has a destructive influence on all elements of the state’s apparatus that provide other sorts of protection, such as economic stability.

Based upon these considerations, Scheffler posits that the ‘pattern’ to which ‘standard cases’ of terrorism adhere will consist of three ‘minimum features.’ These features are: 1) the use of violence against civilians or non-combatants, 2) the intention that this violence should create fear in others, including other civilians and non-combatants, and, 3) the further intention that this fear should destabilize or degrade an existing social order, or at any rate should raise the specter of such destabilization or degradation (Scheffler 6). In addition, Scheffler suggests several similar exploitations of fear that are variations on the standard case. ‘State terror’ can roughly be seen as a variation of the ‘standard case’ in which criterion 3 is altered slightly. Instead of seeking to destabilize an existing social order, a state regime uses fear as a tool to “preserve the established order” (11). Also considered briefly is “sub-state” terror, in which a non-state entity acts according to the ‘pattern’ of ‘state terror’. Their aim is also to create fear in a population “to police the boundaries of a social hierarchy, to block the development of new movements, or to inhibit social change” (16).

Scheffler’s significant insight is identifying the particular connection that fear has to an individual’s desire for the protection of a society, and then describing how a society’s vulnerability to the creation of that same fear in its population can be exploited in an attempt to either undermine the current political or social establishment, or rein-
force its policies. Also important is noting a distinction between state and non-state involvement, as well as the different ways that a state may manipulate terror for its own gain. However, I believe that there is a question as to whether the “minimum conditions” for terrorism need include the use of violence as the exclusive means of inducing the fear of imminent violent death in a population with the intended purpose of undermining or reinforcing an established social order. If the particularly objectionable feature of terrorism is the creation of a looming, debilitating fear of violent death for the purpose of affecting a political structure, the relevance of the source of this fear should be brought into question. That, of course, is not to deny that the means by which the fear is created should be assessed morally in their own right (most people consider it morally wrong to violently kill for many reasons), it is only to question whether that assessment has a morally significant role in a ‘pattern’ of “standard cases” of ‘terrorism’, ‘state terror’, or ‘sub-state terror’.

Scheffler invokes some particularly graphic imagery when describing the kinds of fear that terrorists may instill in a general population: “living each day with the vivid awareness that one’s children may be killed whenever they leave home, or the decision to meet one’s friends at a restaurant or caf may result in violent death, or that an ordinary bus ride on a sunny day may end with lumps of flesh raining down on a previously peaceful neighborhood” (8). While these are all examples of atrocious violence, what makes them terrorist acts is the fact that the acts create the fear in others that they will suffer the same fate. They are the types of acts that instill the kind of fear that affects a person’s daily, if not moment-to-moment, existence. That doesn’t, however, mean that the life-altering fear of a similar violent death can only be created by the occurrence of an actual violent act. Why isn’t a convincing threat or portrayal of violent death that creates the relevant fear enough? Take the following example: a group of terrorists uses a missing persons list to convince a select group of the people’s family members that they were, in fact, kidnapped for political reasons, and stage a mock execution using members of the terrorist group as actors. If this inspires fear in and affects the targeted society in the same way as a real execution of real political prisoners, it doesn’t seem that it would lack the salient qualities of an act of terrorism. This is why I believe that, with the addition of an important stipulation to Scheffler’s ‘standard case’, we can come up with a more accurate view of the ‘minimum features’ that are shared by all acts of terrorism: 1) the use
of, \textit{(or the creation of a perceived threat of)} violence against civilians or non-combatants, 2) the intention that this violence \textit{(or perceived threat thereof)} should create fear in others, including other civilians and non-combatants, and, 3) the further intention that this fear should destabilize or degrade an existing social order, or at any rate should raise the specter of such destabilization or degradation.

III. Implications of the ‘Modified View’

If this modified view is correct, then there are groups in our current society that are responsible for acts that qualify as “terrorism.” I don’t believe that many of these groups have, to this point, been identified as terrorist groups. In this section, I discuss one. I then identify a type of case to which the term “terrorism” is frequently misapplied. Because many have preconceptions about what constitutes a terrorist act, some may initially view some of my claims with a degree of skepticism. However, I believe that if the salient features of what constitutes a terrorist action or group are taken into consideration seriously, my conclusions should, at the least, seem less controversial.

For one, various media outlets (similar to, but not necessarily News Corp. or Viacom), for example, use their power to instill fear in large populations, including the fear of “imminent violent death.” The sensationalist, “if it bleeds it leads” media mentality is powerful because it targets the very foundational sense of safety that society is supposed to provide. In our current culture, mass media has a very intimate role in most people’s lives. Being the main source of news and information, media outlets have the ability to influence most individual’s perception of their own status within a society, as well as the society’s status in the world. This is a significant position of power.

Another insight of Hobbes is useful for elucidating this point. Hobbes describes the “curiosity to know for care of future time... Anxiety for the future time disposeth men to inquire into the causes of things, because the knowledge of them maketh men the better able to order the present to their best advantage” (Hobbes 62). To a very significant extent, we rely on our media organizations to supply “the causes of things” so we can “order the present to our best advantage.” By focusing their content on stories of violent death with dramatic emphasis on graphic content, and then stressing the fact that the viewer or listener may be in a similar sort of danger, these organizations not only con-
vince large populations to “tune in,” but also instill a constant fear of imminent death that motivates interest in their product. It is a cycle: the creation of fear motivates interest in the product, which is more of the same. This leverage is exploited for many reasons, including “policing the boundaries of a social hierarchy,” “blocking the development of new social movements,” and “inhibiting social change” (Scheffler 16). While this isn’t necessarily their only aim, Scheffler grants that “terrorist violence may have many other aims as well” (6).

My claim is not that media organizations in general have a primary “aim” of “policing the boundaries of a social hierarchy, blocking the development of new social movements, and inhibiting social change.” The claim is only that these are among the many possible aims that media organizations may have, and that these aims are achieved by the exploitation of fear. There is no doubt that, in accord with common belief, one of the primary aims of these organizations is financial gain. However, it must be recognized that financial gain is possible because of certain “boundaries in the social hierarchy” that dictate how wealth and power are to be distributed. Media groups can, and do, use their ability to instill fear in a population to “police” these boundaries, and in turn to secure their place in the social hierarchy, as well as all of the benefits that come with a powerful place in society.

It is not my intention in this paper to draw attention to a specific action by a specific media outlet in an attempt to prove that they are engaging in terrorism. Rather, I will simply provide a general example of a major event in which many acts of the kind in question took place: September 11, 2001. The media’s coverage of the events that transpired on September 11 amplified the country’s panic, fear, anger, and patriotism all at once. The images of planes flying into significant American landmarks and large populations fleeing rolling clouds of the resulting debris amidst horrified screams were paired with apocalyptic music, made into montages, and then played repeatedly for days. While these graphic images, and more importantly, the way they were intentionally presented in such a constant, horrific manner, steadily induced a fear of imminent violent death in the population, contrasting images of American patriotism (the waving of American flags, large aircraft carriers filled with planes, kids playing baseball, etc.) evoked very different feelings: America is still strong and powerful, and everything will be okay because we are Americans, and do things the American way. This type of mixed message scares a segment of the population into conformity in an attempt to reinforce the existing social order in
much the same way that the terrorist act was meant to destabilize it, and in cases such as September 11, may be a direct response to an initial terrorist attack of some sort. However, that doesn’t mean that the response by a group with a vested interest in sustaining a particular social hierarchy isn’t morally objectionable for some of the same reasons as the initial terrorist attack.

Conversely, I believe that many uses of the word ‘terrorist’ don’t actually fit the bill. I’d like to focus on a particular type of casual misuse of the term: when someone in a position of authority calls a violent act that scares a community “terrorism.” On February 4, 2009, Dr. Trent Pierce, a physician in West Memphis, Arkansas was seriously injured when a small bomb planted in his car exploded. Shortly after the incident, the chief of police, Bob Paudert, addressed the major media outlets with a summary of what transpired. In his explanation, he deliberately called this a ‘terrorist act’. Whatever his reasoning, this is an example of how the term ‘terrorism’, has turned into a buzzword for seemingly random attacks that scare a community or a society at large. When the facts surface, I seriously doubt that this car bomb will turn out to be the work of a group like Al-Qaeda, or even Viacom, for that matter.

It is fascinating to note, however, that though the bombing of Dr. Pierce’s car itself was probably not an act of terrorism, the presentation of the event to the public by the news media may actually be terrorism. Shortly after the incident, an article written by Woody Baird appeared on the news portion of AOL’s website. The article’s headline read: “Doctor Badly Injured in ‘Terrorist Attack’” (Baird). If it turns out that Police Chief Paudert, Mr. Baird, or AOL misrepresented the incident by labeling it “terrorism,” and their misrepresentation creates a fear of violent death within the population that reinforces or degrades the social order, it follows that they are engaging in some form of terrorism. As I said, I suspect that this conclusion, like the previous contention that the media frequently engages in terrorism, will be met with a degree of skepticism and several potential objections. I take some of these into account in the following section, in which I try to expand on my initial modification of the “standard case” of “terrorism” by offering several distinctions within the category of “terrorist acts.”
IV. Further Clarification and Possible Objections

The first objection that I anticipate was addressed to some extent in the previous section. As I said, certain actions perpetrated by various media outlets can be classified as terrorism, even though their “primary” or “direct” aim is not destabilizing or reinforcing the social order. The point is that the ultimate goal of a terrorist or terrorist group may be economic gain, religious reprisal for a government’s foreign or domestic policy, or any number of other things. Ultimately, however, if that end, whatever it may be, is pursued by means of an act or series of acts that evoke a fear of violent death in a population, which in turn reinforces or degrades the social order, then the act(s) used as a means of pursuing that end are terrorist act(s). Take the following example: a corporate executive at a company that manufactures home security systems tries to increase his company’s total sales by airing a commercial that depicts a series of particularly heinous burglaries. In the commercial, the burglar attacks sleeping children. As the commercial comes to a close, a narrator explains how the innovative new security system offered by this company can protect you and your loved ones from suffering a similar misfortune. If this video actually creates a fear of violent death within the target population that affects the social order, then the CEO has committed an act of terrorism. It makes no difference that his ultimate goal is financial gain. Taking this into consideration, there may be a need to make a distinction between terrorist acts that are perpetrated purely for the purpose of degrading or reinforcing the social order, and those that are merely a vehicle for a further goal. This distinction may be necessary to elucidate divisions within the category of terrorist acts. However, this doesn’t mean that using a terrorist act or acts as a means of pursuing a further goal is necessarily more or less morally objectionable than terrorist acts that are done for the sole purpose of affecting the stability of a society. I believe that we can morally assess the pursuit of further ends, and even those ends themselves, separately from the terrorist acts that are perpetrated to achieve them.

A second and somewhat related objection is that, for an act to be an act of terrorism, the responsible individual or group must actually be aware of the fact that they are committing a terrorist act. I believe that this need not be true. Taking this into consideration requires a second distinction within the category of “terrorist act.” Perhaps there is a moral distinction between witting and unwitting acts of terrorism that
takes into account a terrorist’s *intent*. This would help explain why it seems right to say that Police Chief Paudert committed a terrorist act by claiming that the attack on Dr. Price was a “terrorist attack,” even though he wasn’t trying to reinforce or degrade the social order, to the extent that he did so unintentionally, it wasn’t something he did as means of pursuing any further goal. This distinction also explains why Mr. Baird’s deliberate use of the words “terrorist attack” in his headline, as well as AOL’s choice to publish it, *can* be classified as acts of terrorism, even if they weren’t aware that they writing and publishing material that was reinforcing or degrading the social order by striking fear of violent death into a population.

Of course, it may turn out that unwitting acts of terrorism are less objectionable than those perpetrated deliberately. The moral distinction between unwitting acts of terrorism and those that are carried out intentionally seems roughly analogous to the legal distinction between manslaughter and murder. Some cases of criminal homicide may be, on some level, accidental. According to the Model Penal Code, “criminal homicide constitutes manslaughter when (a) it is committed recklessly; or (b) a homicide which would otherwise be murder is committed under the influence of extreme mental or emotional disturbance for which there is a reasonable explanation or excuse” (Denno 42). If we apply this definition to our understanding of terrorist acts, it becomes clearer why we can make the claim that Chief Paudert, Mr. Baird, and AOL are committing terrorist acts, even if they are doing so unwittingly: unintentional but reckless acts of terrorism may be less morally objectionable than those perpetrated intentionally, but they are still *terrorism*. I think it is reckless at best to go on national television and make a statement, or write and publish an article on a website as widely depended upon for news as AOL, and misrepresent a situation by characterizing it as “terrorism” without being fully informed of the all relevant information.

Taking into account the distinctions I’ve drawn above, we can distinguish 4 different types of terrorist act. First, there are cases in which violence, or the threat of violence directed towards a small group or individual is intentionally used as a means of creating fear within the larger population of a society, as a means of reinforcing or degrading the social order. Second, there are cases in which violence or the threat of violence directed towards a small group or individual *unintentionally* creates fear within the larger population of a society, reinforcing or degrading the social order. In a third type of case, the fear created
in a large population, and the corresponding shift in the social order that are the result of violence or the threat of violence directed at a small group, is intentionally used as a means of pursuing a further goal. The fourth type of case is similar to (3), with the exception that the violence or threat of violence directed at a group or individual, and the resulting fear that affects the social order, are a means of pursuing a goal but used as such unintentionally.

V. Conclusion

The search for a proper understanding of the term “terrorism” has been a topic of much recent debate. Approaches to the problem differ: while Wellman and Primoratz each try to form a broad definition of the term, Scheffler to attempts to identify the ‘morally distinct qualities’ that make an act count as “terrorism.” While both Wellman and Primoratz have significant insights that contribute to a proper understanding of terrorism, their attempts to formulate a satisfactory definition ultimately fall short. And, though I believe that Scheffler’s method of searching for the morally distinct qualities of terrorism is a more fruitful way to approach the relevant issues, his insistence that terrorism must involve acts of violence is unnecessary. I agree with Scheffler that an oversimplified definition of ‘terrorism’ “is liable to miss some of the moral salience towards which the word ‘terrorism’ gestures” (17). However, it is important to account for all cases that seem to be objectionable for the morally salient reason. As Scheffler’s ‘pattern’ currently stands, many acts that seem to have this ‘morally distinct quality’ aren’t included, because the offenders don’t commit any acts of violence themselves. In light of this, it is my belief that engaging in violent behavior should not be a necessary criterion for the ‘pattern’ of “standard cases” of terrorism, if the Hobbesian insights noted by Scheffler are going to be understood as the basis of terrorism’s ‘morally distinct quality’.

Also, it may be necessary to make two further distinctions within the class of acts of “terrorism.” First, we can acknowledge that some terrorists perform acts of terrorism with the sole intention of either reinforcing or degrading social order, while others commit terrorist acts in order to pursue another goal, such as financial gain or religious reprisal. This is a purely formal distinction. The goal(s) that motivate a terrorist act should not be used as a criterion for judging one terrorist act to
be worse than another. Rather, I believe that the motivating factors behind a terrorist act, as well as the methods employed to actualize the attack itself, should be morally assessed on their own terms. Second, an individual’s awareness that they are engaging in an act of terrorism isn’t necessary for that act to be terrorism. However, it may be necessary to acknowledge that unwitting acts of terrorism aren’t as morally objectionable as those that are committed deliberately. The addition of these criteria helps elucidate the nuances that must be involved in a proper moral assessment of terrorism. It provides justification for the claim that media outlets frequently engage in terrorism, and explains why we may consider the acts of Chief Paudert, Mr. Baird, and AOL acts of terrorism.
References:


Evan Claudeanatos

Philosophers and Their Masters
An Interpretation of the Gods in Plato’s Phaedo
Early in the *Phaedo*, it looks as though the gods are to play an essential role in Plato’s vision of the philosopher’s life and afterlife. In one display of conviction, for example, Socrates\(^1\) insists that upon death he “shall enter the presence of gods who are very good masters, be assured that if there is anything I should affirm [about the afterlife] it is that” (63c).\(^2\) Yet by many appearances his enthusiasm quickly fades. He goes on to say that the philosopher’s sole aim during life and the afterlife is to gain knowledge of the forms, and nowhere does he return to explain his initial claims about the gods. As a result, a series of questions arise for us about Plato’s attitude toward the gods in the *Phaedo*. Of what concern are they given the eminence of the forms? If they are of no concern, why does Plato initially stress their importance? If they are, why do they lack a substantial role in the discourse that follows? I maintain that these are questions we ought to take seriously; however, the current literature has generally not been concerned with them, and where it has, its answers seem largely inadequate. I will argue that the lack of satisfying answers to these questions is the result of a reasonable, though flawed, assumption about the gods—that they are altogether distinct from the Platonic forms. I reject this assumption and defend an alternative reading on which the gods in the *Phaedo* are, in fact, identical to the forms.\(^3\)

**Preliminaries**

Socrates initially suggests that his convictions about the gods are fun-

\(^1\)Given that the *Phaedo* is a middle-period dialogue, I treat it as one in which Socrates is a spokesperson for Plato’s views. This is to say that I assume there is no significant difference between Plato’s views and those expressed through Socrates’s words. In general, I try to remain faithful to the following convention: When I quote the words or discuss the actions of Socrates as a character, I use his name, and when I speak more generally about the ideas expressed in the dialogue, I use Plato’s name.

\(^2\)Unless otherwise stated, quotations are drawn from David Gallop’s translation (see references). Acknowledgments: David Ebrey deserves my thanks on several counts. In a graduate seminar, it was he who first suggested the reading I defend in this paper. He has, in addition, provided helpful comments throughout the writing process. I am also much indebted to Dorothea Frede, who has generously obliged my requests for comments on several drafts of this paper. Finally, I would like to thank Laura Davis, my editor at Harvest Moon, for her many insightful and well-placed suggestions.

\(^3\)In what follows, I examine this alternative reading in light of evidence from the *Phaedo* alone. I do refer to other dialogues but only by way of illustration and never to make any central claims. Consequently, I do not intend to deal with the question of whether the reading holds in dialogues other than this one.
damental to his confidence in the face of death. This stands in contrast
to the way the dialogue proceeds, as he quickly moves toward a view
on which the gods’ role is at best uncertain. In this section, I begin
by laying out this progression in more detail and calling attention to
some of the problems it raises. Then I discuss how these things have
commonly been treated in the secondary literature.

At 61b-c, Socrates expresses his delight at the prospect of dying,
which prompts his friends to accuse him of taking the matter of leaving
them and his masters, the gods, too lightly. Socrates responds by
pledging to defend himself against this accusation:

Let me try to defend myself... Because if I didn’t believe,
Simmias and Cebes, that I shall enter the presence, first,
of other gods both wise and good, and next of dead men
better than those in this world, then I should be wrong not
to be resentful at death. (63b)

So the initial claim is that his not resenting death depends upon his
expectation that he will enter the presence of gods and dead men in
the afterlife. If he is to defend this claim, we will expect him to say
why he believes he will enter the presence of gods and dead men and
why his not resenting death depends on this fact. Yet he does not
continue in this light. Instead, Socrates immediately reduces the scope
of his defense by admitting that he is uncertain of his claims about
dead men (63c). What follows is a brief digression in which Socrates’s
friend suggests that he refrain from speaking for fear that the hemlock
will take several doses to kill him (63d4-63e7). Socrates dismisses the
suggestion and begins his defense anew:

With you for my jury I want to give my defense, and show
with what good reason, as it seems to me, a man who has
truly spent his life in philosophy feels confident when about
to die, and is hopeful that, when he has died, he will win
great benefits in the other world. (63e-64a)

Perhaps what he means by “great benefits in the other world” is just
that the philosopher comes to be in the presence of the gods. If not, has

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4 At the end of the Apology, Socrates maintains that it would be a blessing to
engage in discourse with gods and dead men in the afterlife (40e-41c); however, he
is uncertain about whether or not he will have the opportunity to do so. For the
moment, he appears surer of himself than he was then.

5 I use phrases such as “Socrates’s defense” and “the defense” frequently in this
paper to refer to the text spanning 63b to 69e.
he changed his mind about them? We do not get a clear answer to this question, as the defense that follows focuses largely on the philosopher’s need to purify the soul—something he achieves by rejecting his bodily desires for food, drink, sex, and the like. But Plato’s claim is not that purification brings the philosopher nearer to the gods as we may have come to expect. Rather, it is in the service of the philosopher’s search for wisdom, and he defends an account of death on which the philosopher can expect to obtain this prize in the afterlife (66a).

There is no more substantial talk of the gods until the end of the defense, where Socrates offers a rather puzzling conclusion:

So it really looks as if those who established our initiations are no mean people, but have in fact long been saying in riddles that whoever arrives in Hades unadmitted to the rites, and uninitiated, shall lie in the slough, while he who arrives there purified and initiated shall dwell with gods. (69c)

This passage appears to contain the conclusion he had promised to defend; Socrates claims that he was right all along to think that philosophers shall dwell with gods in the afterlife. Still, it is not immediately clear how this follows from the defense, not least because it is devoid of any substantial discussion on the gods. Suppose, however, that certain assumptions were to reveal a means of establishing this conclusion; it would remain the case that our picture of the gods is quite limited. Who are they? How do they relate to humans? Why should the philosopher wish to have them as masters? These questions have gone unanswered, which leads to the further question of why Plato never completes his picture for us. His not doing so leaves us having to reconcile two apparently disparate claims: one, that it is important for Socrates to show that he will be in the presence of gods in the afterlife, and two, that all the philosopher desires is access to the forms. Provided that Plato is concerned to present a general account of the philosopher’s afterlife in the Phaedo, he owes us an explanation of how these claims fit together.

Now, with these questions and worries laid out, we ought to inquire into the sorts of responses available to us. An obvious place to begin

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6It is helpful to think of wisdom (φρόνησις) as a certain state of knowledge that the soul gains via the forms. In his notes on his translation, Gallop has the following to say about the term: “Here, and generally in [the Phaedo], phronēsis is a solemn term for the condition of the soul for which the philosopher yearns (66e3, 68a2, 68a7, 68b4), attainable only in communion with the forms (79d1-7). It has been translated ‘wisdom’ throughout” (102).

7Plato defines death as the soul’s separation from the body (64c).
is in recent commentary on the dialogue, some of which I will discuss in what follows. As we shall see, commentators have recognized the above worries, although I believe their responses turn out to be largely unsatisfying. They have typically treated Socrates’s early discussion of the gods in one of two ways: Either they avoid it entirely, or they claim that he is making faith-based, philosophically-vacuous assumptions that require no elaboration. The implied sentiment in the former is likely similar to the overt one in the latter—philosophical treatment of the dialogue need not take the gods seriously. And anyway, even if Plato himself takes them seriously, the thought is that his claims are simply to be accepted by the reader just as they are accepted by Socrates’s interlocutors.

My sense is that both of these reactions should seem disappointing to us. If we take the questions I have posed about the gods seriously, then the former reaction—setting aside the troubling passages and moving on—cannot be of help. It would be to ignore the very passages that led to our questions in the first place. The latter confronts the passages that the former ignores but still does not get us closer to our answers. Rather, it leads to the conclusion that we ought to disregard our questions, for neither does Socrates need to answer them nor do his interlocutors press him on the matter. This strikes me as an undesirable position for two reasons. First, as I have said, Plato has already created a reasonable expectation that he will tell us more. Second, the fact that Socrates’s interlocutors avoid questioning his claims about the gods cannot be enough to deter us from expecting that he will elaborate, as Socrates does not seem to limit the discourse

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8For example, David Gallop’s notes on his translation are generally quite thorough and helpful but contain no commentary on the passages where the gods appear (63b, 63e-64a, and 69c). Another example is David Bostock’s commentary, which is again quite thorough yet contains nothing substantial about the gods. Bostock does not mention them in his summary of the defense (21). He later admits the omission but only in passing (27), immediately turning to other matters.

9A common practice is to cite Orphic and Eleusinian influences on the passages in question (e.g. in Bluck, Hackforth, Eckstein, and Lindforth). That such influences exist is not terribly controversial, but some have used their presence to make striking conclusions. Jerome Eckstein seems to go the furthest in saying that “[the essence of Socrates’s defense is] no more than a declaration of faith...not a logical rejoinder to Cebes’ and Simmias’ objections” (54). Richard Gotshalk claims that Plato uses the passages in question (e.g., 63b and 69c) to create a “mythologizing” framework for other, more serious, discussions (35). David White’s *Myth and Metaphysics in the Phaedo*, one of the most extensive treatments of the role of myth in the dialogue, takes what seems to be the same stance. In both cases, Plato’s early discussion of the gods is taken as making certain aspects of his doctrine more palatable to his readers while remaining philosophically insubstantial in itself.
in this way. For these reasons, I think we ought to be skeptical of the reactions in question.

Yet if it is true that such reactions are disappointing and worthy of skepticism, why are they prevalent in the secondary literature? My suspicion is that something like the following occurs in many instances. Having read the dialogue in its entirety, one comes to realize that Plato’s claims about the importance of the gods go unsupported. In fact, on the most obvious interpretation—one in which the gods are distinct from the forms—Plato’s claims about the two appear inconsistent. To minimize the impact of these worries, one can either dispense with the obvious interpretation or try to downplay the role of the gods. It seems uncontroversial that the gods are distinct from the forms, so it would be best to downplay the role of the gods. One way to do so is by supposing that Plato’s claims about them are merely token expressions of faith.

I want to call particular attention to what I have labeled “the most obvious interpretation.” That such an interpretation of the gods exists and is widely accepted by commentators as the default is, I think, relatively uncontroversial. It does not turn up as a matter of much dispute in the literature, and it is certainly reasonable that one might believe that the gods and the forms are distinct. On this latter point, Plato never explicitly unites the two, and those who have a prior understanding of Greek mythology will note that those gods seem rather unlike the Platonic forms. Even so, however tempting it may initially seem, I believe that the default interpretation proves more problematic than helpful.

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10 Take, for example, the claim that there is no accuracy in the sensible world, one which Socrates initially makes in his defense (65b). Socrates’s interlocutors never ask him to develop this thesis in more detail; however, this does not prevent him from doing so in his arguments for the immortality of the soul. In the recollection argument, we learn that sensible things always fall short of perfectly embodying the forms (74D-75B). Also, in the affinity argument, we find something similar to the doctrine of flux attributed to Heraclitus by, among others, Plato (Cratylius 402a) and Aristotle (De Caelo A10.279b12).

11 A full treatment of this claim is beyond the scope of this paper. The default interpretation is not necessarily something that commentators have explicitly defended; rather, they appear to take it for granted. This is evident in the work of Hackforth, F. C. White, Eckstein, and others I previously mentioned wherein religion and philosophy are treated as distinct and absolutely separable aspects of the Phaedo.
The Troubled Orthodoxy

My goal in this section is to reveal a series of problems that issue from the default interpretation, which in turn will help to motivate my search for an alternative. Now, I have said that we ought to take seriously various questions about Plato’s initial account of the philosopher’s life and afterlife, and I will use these as a starting point for the present discussion. They will give us an opportunity to evaluate the default interpretation’s shortcomings. At the same time, I will briefly assess how we might answer these questions on the alternative reading I mentioned earlier—that the gods in the \textit{Phaedo} are identical to the forms. For now, I only introduce this alternative tentatively and set aside the matter of defending it until later sections.

Recall that one of our questions asked why the philosopher should wish to have the gods as masters in the afterlife. On the default interpretation, an answer to this question proves elusive, as Socrates’s defense does not account for any desire the philosopher might have other than for wisdom. So F. C. White is right, at least in a sense, to say that the defense is “disappointing precisely because the hope of being with other friends and gods is trivial compared with the hope of attaining to wisdom, the love of the philosopher’s life (White 457).” He is quite uncharitable to Plato here. After calling Socrates’s conclusion disappointing and trivial, he adds that it is redundant, bewildering, and ill-supported. I am unsure about all of this, but for my purposes we need only accept the weaker claim that, on the default interpretation, the gods’ role is unclear. He is right in that the defense renders the gods superfluous. Although we must qualify this by saying that he is only right if we assume the gods and the forms are distinct sets of entities, each to be desired independently if it is to be desired at all. On the other hand, if it turned out that the gods were the forms, Socrates’s hope of being with gods would in itself be a hope of attaining wisdom.

One might be tempted to try to answer the previous question and at the same time preserve the default interpretation by supposing that the philosopher somehow requires the gods to access the forms. White and others have been right to avoid this temptation, as it is unfounded. At 79d, we learn that the soul is similar to the forms and that it communies with\textsuperscript{12} them by its very nature when separated from the body.

\textsuperscript{12} \epsilonφαπµένη, which has been variously translated “communes with” \cite[e.g., H. N. Fowler]{12}, “in contact with” \cite[e.g., Bluck and Gallop]{12}, and “in touch with” \cite[e.g., G. M. A. Grube]{12}. (Fowler’s translation may be in light of phrases such as \textit{της του σώματος κοινωνίας} at 65a, often translated “communion with the body”,}
Additionally, the defense shows us that there are different degrees of separation which directly correspond to different degrees of communion (65a1). While alive, the philosopher’s body is a distraction that prevents him from grasping the forms entirely, but he can mitigate these distractions by eschewing the corporeal world (65a-b). Thus, the highest degree of wisdom is only attainable in death, while there is some hope for knowledge via communion with the forms during life. All of this roughly constitutes Plato’s picture of how the philosopher gains access to the forms, and nowhere does it imply the need for gods, like so many Saint Peters at heaven’s gate, to grant him access. Instead, all that is required is some degree of separation between the body and the soul.

What then of the other questions we originally asked? For instance, why does Plato mention the gods at all if he does not intend for them to play a substantial role in the dialogue? One who holds the default reading might answer that Plato simply wanted to show that Socrates was pious (F. C. White, for one, suggests this),

apparently to reinforce the defense Socrates mounts against his accusers in the Apology. If so, then Plato never intended to defend his claims about the gods. They are simply a device to ensure that history would look kindly upon his mentor. In the interest of this end, someone such as White would say that Plato was willing to accept the apparent inconsistency between his claims about the gods and his subsequent picture on which the forms take precedence.

It is not difficult to see why this might be an attractive position. It is indeed the case that Plato has an interest in portraying Socrates as pious, and as a result, we can expect that he will be careful about the claims he puts in Socrates’s mouth. However, it is another thing to say that this is all there is to his claims about the gods, and for reasons that I discuss in what follows, I think that this is too quick. For one thing, there is an intuitive point that such an explanation is not completely satisfying given the deeply philosophical nature of the

and ῥαμθεὶς τε κοινωνουσίω τοῦ σωμάτως at 81c, often translated as some variation on “intercourse and communion with the body.” Thus, he keeps Plato’s terminology consistent.) A helpful definition is Liddell and Scott’s “to lay hold of (with the mind).” For simplicity, I shall generally use “communion,” which I take to be an interaction between the mind and the forms in which the former grasps, or tries to grasp, the latter. This is how the philosopher gains wisdom (79d).

13White, F. C. 458.

14Socrates was indicted on an accusation of, among other things, not believing in the same gods as the Athenians did. In the Apology, he defends himself against this accusation.
Phaedo, although this is no argument in itself. Perhaps we can at least agree that we should be open to the possibility that there is, in fact, more to Plato’s claims about the gods than that they bolster Socrates’s image. If it turns out that the alternative reading I have proposed is defensible, then it is indeed the case that there is more to them.

A further question we had was about the identity of Plato’s gods. On the default reading, one obvious answer is just that they are the traditional gods of Olympus and Hades—Zeus, Hera, Apollo, and the rest. This, however, turns out to be an implausible view. For one, recall that Socrates claims to be uncertain about whether he will enter the presence of dead men in the afterlife while certain that he will enter the presence of gods (63c). This would be an odd turn if he were taking for granted the traditional view of the underworld, for if anything is certain on that view, it is that, upon death, one will be in contact with the dead. Second, at 80d, Socrates says that the soul enters “the invisible” (το αιδες) after death and subsequently refers to “Hades” in the true sense (αιδουαληθως). A play on words between αιδες and αιδου reveals that the “true Hades” is the invisible realm he spoke of just before. Socrates is not explicit about what “Hades in the false sense” would be, but I think the implication is just that it is the ordinary Homeric Hades. Indeed, the invisible realm Socrates has in mind (as we shall see, a realm of intelligible things), is nothing like the visible yet other-worldly Hades of traditional Greek mythology (Dorter 21). So here it seems that, if anything, Plato is inviting us to set aside our initial assumptions about the underworld. For these reasons, I think it is a mistake to simply insert what we know about Greek mythology into the Phaedo without taking a great deal of caution in doing so.

So our question remains: Who are Plato’s gods? They are not likely the traditional ones, and I am unsure of whether there is another plausible answer that one who holds the default interpretation could offer here. I have found none in the secondary literature. The answer, however, turns out to be trivial on the alternative interpretation; the gods are identical to the forms.

It seems the default interpretation has made it increasingly difficult

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15 For a more thorough treatment of this issue, see Kenneth Dorter’s book Plato’s Phaedo: An Interpretation (19-22).
16 See, for instance, book eleven of Homer’s Odyssey wherein Odysseus meets all manner of dead people during his trek through the underworld.
17 This has been noted a number of times in the literature (e.g., Bluck pg. 197 and Gallop pg. 143).
to make sense of Socrates’s early claims about the gods. It does not produce satisfying answers to obvious questions we might have about them, and furthermore, it leads us to the thought that his defense is wavering and inconsistent. Whether by accident or on purpose, Socrates first professes the importance of the gods as wise masters, and then he develops an independent picture on which the philosopher need only concern himself with wisdom. Perhaps Socrates never intended to defend his claims about the gods. Even if that were so, we might still wonder about them, and an analysis using the default interpretation does not reveal much. On the other hand, if the gods are the forms, no such problems exist. Plato is no longer inconsistent on such a reading, as his explanation of wisdom’s importance is at the same time an explanation of why he needs the gods. In fact, my original claim that the gods make an early appearance in the *Phaedo* and then disappear would no longer be true. They may disappear under one name but remain as the forms.

Having said all of this, we are now to the point where we ought to consider the grounds on which such a reading is defensible. The following section is devoted to this project.

A Second Voyage

The alternative interpretation of the gods helps us to answer our initial questions and makes some of Plato’s claims appear more coherent than they do on the default interpretation. Yet so far I have not given the alternative interpretation any textual basis for our accepting it. I believe that such support does exist, the most promising of which we find in Plato’s third argument for the immortality of the soul—the affinity argument (78b-83e). Let us begin by examining some of this argument’s general features.

Broadly speaking, the goal of the affinity argument is to show that the soul is most similar to that which never perishes. Without enumerating all of its parts, here are seven central claims that I think are of particular interest for our purposes:

1. The equal itself, the beautiful itself, what each thing is itself (i.e., each form) never admits of change, and is uniform alone by itself, unvarying, constant, and is never altered in any respect. (78d)

2. The many beautiful things, equal things, and so on, are the opposite—always changing, inconstant, varying, and alterable.
3. The forms are intelligible and unseen, and the unseen is always constant. The many things are grasped by the senses, and such things are constantly changing. (79a)

4. The soul is akin to the unseen while the body is akin to the seen. (79b)

5. When the soul studies on its own, it comes into contact with the pure, always existent, and immortal as a result of its similarity to those types of objects. When it is near those objects, it is always constant and unvarying by virtue of its contact with similar things. This is called “wisdom.” (79d)

6. The soul is similar to the divine while the body is similar to the mortal. (80a)

7. The soul is most similar to the divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, unvarying, and constant in relation to itself. (80b)

It will help to unpack some of this. From the outset, Plato depicts the forms as constant and unvarying (1). At 79d, he associates constant and unvarying objects with those that are pure, always existent, and immortal, as all of these are similar to the soul (5). He then introduces divineness as a further property to which the soul is similar (6). Finally, Plato joins all of these properties under a single heading, “that to which the soul is most similar” (7), and associates them with a realm of unseen things (3, 4). At the same time, Plato reveals a separate realm that contrasts sharply with the first. This is one of sensible objects that bear the opposite properties: mortal, mercurial, and varied (2, 3).

Plato is clearly making a strong distinction between two broad ontological categories in this argument. With respect to the sorts of things that populate each category, Plato’s joining of the properties of unseen things at 80b strikes me as telling. This makes it seem as though these properties are characteristic of the unseen in general, and Plato does not intend for us to distinguish between different types of unseen entities bearing different properties within this realm. Instead, it is constitutive of something’s status as unseen that it embodies all, not some, of the properties Plato lists. If this is so, then it follows that the forms are divine given that they are unseen. Plato’s identification of wisdom with a state of constancy and invariance (79d) lends support
to this conclusion. We know from the defense that wisdom is a state in which the soul grasps the forms. If we associate being constant and unvarying with being divine, then here the forms are again linked to divinity.

Suppose I am right that Plato uses these terms—divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, unvarying, and constant in relation to itself—to describe universal properties of unseen entities and that the forms are thus divine. If so, then we now have the following four claims:

1. All the philosopher truly wants during the afterlife is to be in contact with the forms.
2. The philosopher wants to be in contact with the gods in the afterlife.
3. The gods are divine.
4. The forms are divine.

We have already noted that the first two are inconsistent; this turned up as a problem for the defense. The third is trivially true, and we derived the fourth from the affinity argument. Now, we can make the first two consistent without altering them by supposing that the gods are in fact the forms. The final two provide a means to accept such a claim on the grounds that the gods and the forms share the same divine status. Thus, one reading of the affinity argument gives us room within the text to accept the alternative reading. That we should accept such an interpretation is strengthened by the fact that it is the only apparent way to avoid an inconsistency among Plato’s prior claims.\(^{18}\)

I want to be absolutely clear about the scope of my claim here. I lack incontrovertible evidence for the thesis that the gods are the forms. There exists, so far as I can tell, neither a passage that plainly confirms this thesis nor a definitive proof by which to defend it. I am pointing out something more subtle—that given the substantial problems met by the default reading and a textual basis on which we might accept the alternative, the alternative reading is the more plausible and charitable of the two readings we have discussed. Even so, such a reading

\(^{18}\)It seems to me a telling point that the forms are the only intelligible entities to which Plato refers directly in the affinity argument. There is no talk of any gods (just “the divine”). The status of the soul is unclear, as he has only said that it is akin to the forms.
will create a number of potential worries, some of which I will address in what follows.

**A Fresh Set of Puzzles**

Even if we accept that the alternative interpretation is defensible on a certain reading of the affinity argument and that it has allowed us to avoid many of the problems of the default interpretation, one might think that it will likely produce new problems even more bewildering than those it avoids. If so, then the default interpretation, imperfect as it is, may still turn out to be preferable. In this section, I assess this possibility by considering a series of problems that arise for us on the alternative interpretation.

The first of these is about how we are to understand Socrates’s claim that the gods will be good *masters* in the afterlife (63c). Since on the alternative interpretation we are now supposing that it is the forms that are to be the philosopher’s masters, a problem arises from the thought that mastery involves agency—to master is just to engage in the *act* of mastering. The forms make unlikely agents, and this is confirmed when we note that acting involves an agent undergoing some mental or physical change, while Plato believes that the forms are completely unchanging (78d). On the other hand, none of this should present a problem for a god. So the objection is that the alternative reading runs up against problems from the very start when Plato introduces the gods as masters, as this is a role the forms cannot properly fill.

Something to recognize about this worry is that it is not solely a problem for the alternative interpretation; we can direct it toward the default interpretation as well. If we suppose that the gods are distinct from the forms, and if one finds it difficult to see how the forms could be active, the affinity argument makes it similarly difficult to see how the gods could be active. Recall that we found unseen things in general to have the same properties: divine, unchanging, uniform, and constant. If this is true, then provided the gods are among the unseen, a claim to which Plato seems committed, they are perfectly unchanging and constant as well.¹⁹

¹⁹There is a related concern about the sorts of activities in which the soul could be engaged in the afterlife. In particular, if the soul is an unseen thing, then what hope can the philosopher have that he will engage in any sort of activity at all in the afterlife? This is something that commentators have recognized. Bostock, for example, argues that Plato’s view makes it seem as though the soul is capable of
Another thing to recognize is that there is at least some plausible sense in which we can call the forms “masters.” It is indeed true that we commonly build agency into the concept of mastery; mastery, it seems, often involves the imposition of one will upon another in a way in which only an agent is capable. But consider something like a universal law (e.g., Kant’s categorical imperative). These are not agents nor do they act, nor again are they representations of the will of an agent or agents (as is the case for an institutional law). Still, universal laws impose limitations on us and have power in this respect while remaining unchanging and inactive. In some manner of speaking, we might say that we are mastered by such laws, and if so, it seems we can say something similar of the Platonic forms. At 100d4, Plato assures us that beautiful objects are beautiful because of the presence of the beautiful itself (i.e., the form of the beautiful). The form of the beautiful is something that makes beautiful objects beautiful. In this way, the forms are, on a very fundamental level, the causes of the way things are. Perhaps this gives us a plausible way for us to think of them as masters. I am sure that there will be conflicting intuitions about this line of thought, but I mean it only as a suggestion, not as something on which the alternative interpretation depends. For even if one simply rejects the possibility of reconciling the forms with our concept of mastery, there is still the fact that the affinity argument renders dubious a similar reconciliation with the gods. In any case, let us turn to an altogether different sort of worry.

A further, more general source of conflict is likely to come from other passages—ones I have not yet mentioned—where Plato discusses the gods. So far I have been selective in the passages I have quoted for the sake of revealing those that are most informative for our purposes. Even so, Plato says little of substance about the gods beyond these passages, although a survey of some of the other passages where Plato mentions them will be helpful. Take, for example, one that appears near the end of the dialogue:

[Cebes:] it could hardly be that anything else wouldn’t admit of destruction if the immortal, being everlasting, is going to admit destruction. “Well God anyway,” said Socrates,

pure reasoning and nothing else (25-30). We should note, however, that Plato stops short of completely severing the soul from the visible realm in the Phaedo, which is perhaps why he only says the soul is “akin” to the divine. The same sentiment is expressed elsewhere in Plato’s works. In the Phaedrus, for example, he describes the soul as being forever in motion (245c), not constant and unvarying like the intelligible things of the affinity argument.
“and the form of life itself, and anything else immortal there may be, never perish, as would, I think, be agreed by everyone.” (106d)

On one interpretation, Plato means to separate God from the form of life itself in some substantial way here. There is, however, no need to think that this is the implication, and since Plato does not elaborate, this passage admits of a number of different interpretations. One is that the form of life is a token of the kind God as in the parallel phrase “well numbers anyway, and Pi itself, and anything else where the infinite is involved.” Another is that God is a paradigmatic form similar to that of the good in the Republic. It is certainly plausible that the phrase “and anything else immortal there may be” serves to link God and the form of life under the common heading of immortal things. If they are linked, then this passage is more likely to fall under one of the latter two interpretations than the first.\(^\text{20}\)

In another passage, Socrates speaks of a particular god by name (84e-85b). Here he offers an account of the songs of dying swans, describing them as signs that these animals have received the gift of prophecy from their master, Apollo. Socrates claims to have the same master and to possess the same gift.

Earlier, I discussed why any reading of the Phaedo will come up against problems when trying to explain the activities of the gods. Whatever reading we take, it remains the case that the gods are undoubtedly part of the intelligible realm and that intelligible things are not likely to give anything in the literal sense. This, in addition to the problems I discussed earlier with thinking that Plato’s gods are the traditional ones, makes it likely that there is more to this passage than we might at first suppose. Let us take a moment to consider what more there could be.

Socrates calls Apollo’s gift of prophecy a sort of foreknowledge of what is in store in the afterlife (85b7). Note that Socrates attributes this very same knowledge to philosophers in his defense, where it is the pursuit of wisdom that assures him that he will have a sublime afterlife (64a). Thus, Apollo need be nothing more than personified wisdom in this passage; he is a metaphor for Socrates’s life pursuit. With this in mind, it is telling that Socrates says, “mankind, because

\(^{20}\)We need not be worried about Plato’s use of “God” (ϑεός) as opposed to “gods” (ϑεοί) here. Θεός can simply mean “the nature of god” or “divinity” and should not be taken as a sign of monotheism. In any case, whether they are the forms as I have suggested or something else, Plato seems committed to the existence of a plurality of gods in the Phaedo.
of their own fear of death, malign the swans”(85a3), for the Athenians have malignedit Socrates as well, and certainly not for being devoted to Apollo. So it seems that, if anything, the alternative interpretation has more to say about this passage, and is more accurate in that respect, than a literal interpretation.

The final passage I will discuss is the one in which Plato makes the most substantial claims about the gods outside of the defense—the passage on the prohibition against suicide (61c-63b). Here he calls the gods keepers who would be vexed if one were to end one’s life without their permission. However, as with the previous passage, this one does not admit of a literal interpretation of the gods as well, which Plato himself signals in the following:

But perhaps there is some reason for [not committing suicide]. The reason given in mysteries on the subject, that we men are in some sort of prison, and that one ought not to release oneself from it or run away, seems to me a lofty idea and not easy to penetrate. (62b)

Plato is alluding to Orphic traditions here, something that readers of his time would have understood well. Yet he calls the Orphic mystery doctrine “lofty” and “not easy to penetrate” (or “not easy to understand” ; οὐ ποδιος δειδείν). This language reads, for one, as a caution against a hasty, literal reading of Socrates’s words, and second, as an invitation to interpret them. I believe that Plato is challenging the reader to take the traditional doctrine beyond a cursory analysis and suggesting that there is a deeper meaning to be found therein. Consequently, the present passage may be seen as inviting the alternative interpretation rather than threatening it.

None of the passages I have mentioned clearly contradicts the alternative reading, and I have encountered none that seem more promising for that task than these. At worst, we might see Plato as being indifferent on the matter, but some passages might just as well be seen as pushing us away from the default interpretation.

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21 Socrates says that the philosopher welcomes death, but ought not to commit suicide for fear of angering the vengeful gods of whom we humans are possessions. He describes life as a sort of prison that one should only escape with the gods’ permission.

22 Dorter. 19. and also Lindforth. 15-16.
Conclusion

At the very least, it should be clear that the alternative view of the gods would have been a sensible one for Plato to have held. Though there is a question as to whether it actually reflects Plato’s intended meaning in the *Phaedo*. This question, like others of its type, does not admit of a categorical “yes” or “no” answer, so it is difficult to see how we might progress beyond speculation. I do, however, have two general observations on this point with which I will conclude.

The first is that it seems a telling curiosity about the *Phaedo* that one can discuss the gods extensively without once mentioning the final myth (107c-115a). It is one of Plato’s longest, yet it is also devoid of any mention of the gods. One might think that if he had intended that the gods be of independent and notable concern to the philosopher, a lengthy myth at the conclusion of the dialogue would have been an obvious place to secure their status. It does nothing of that sort. Instead, it focuses on an allegorical description of hellish and heavenly geography.

Second, there is the thought that if Plato means for us to believe that the gods are the forms, he has not been forthcoming enough about it. Such a thesis, if true, has a considerable affect on how we read the dialogue, thus one might think that Plato should have been more explicit in laying it out. This is not, however, a reasonable expectation. I have argued that Plato’s desire to bolster Socrates’s image falls short as a reason to dismiss the gods as philosophically inconsequential, but this is not to say that he lacked concern for such things. Plato undoubtedly did have such a concern, so whatever his beliefs, it is unlikely that he would have put heretical language in Socrates’s mouth. This would not have been for Socrates’s sake alone. If Plato himself were seen as holding the view I am suggesting, the Athenians may well have persecuted him with the passion they had once reserved for his mentor.
References:


JEAN HYUNG CHOI

Rethinking Heidegger

Rethinking Heidegger: A New Interpretation of the Account of Death in *Being in Time*

“...como un naufragio hacia adentro nos morimos, como ahogarnos en el corazon, como irnos cayendo desde la piel del alma.”

“...like a shipwreck we die going into ourselves, as though we were drowning inside our hearts, as though we lived falling out of the skin into the soul.”

Pablo Neruda
Introduction

This paper consists of a thorough study of Martin Heidegger’s account of the phenomenon of death as it appears in *Being and Time*, an exhaustive investigation of known interpretations of Heidegger’s view of death, and my own interpretation and thoughts on Heidegger’s conception of death. My hope is to advance a new interpretation of Heidegger’s conception of death in *Being and Time* that provides substantial improvements over other well-known interpretations of Heidegger’s views on death in *Being and Time*. This may sharpen our understanding of the phenomenon of death that Heidegger was after; it may also lend more credibility to *Being and Time* (particularly the sections on death) by defending it against alleged paradoxes or difficulties that have been considered as weaknesses to Heidegger’s own view.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part concerns a textual analysis of Chapter 1 of Division II in *Being and Time*. Here I will cover how Heidegger approaches the question of death, discussing both successful and unsuccessful ways to understanding death. Then I will delineate the positive conclusions that Heidegger makes concerning death. What arises is an interpretive dilemma: if death is neither the event at the end of life that he calls ‘demise’ nor the way of being which we are towards our death that he calls ‘dying’, then what is it? In the second part of this paper, I will present the various contemporary scholarly interpretations of Heidegger’s account of death. Here, I will argue for what I believe to be a new and better interpretation. This interpretation is superior in two ways. First, it is the interpretation that best relates to the text: it better accounts for the whole range of textual evidence in *Being and Time*, does not yield contradictions, and does not dismiss key passages. Second, it is asymmetrically situated with respect to competing interpretations: it can explain the failures of the competing interpretations, whereas those interpretations cannot in turn explain or demonstrate failures in the new interpretation, if there are any.

Part I.

*Section A. Heidegger’s Method of Studying Death*
The Dilemma: Is Death Perishing, Demise, Dying, or Something Else?

To begin, Heidegger examines various phenomena that may or may not be death. Heidegger addresses these phenomena in “How the Existential Analysis of Death is Distinguished from Other Possible Interpretations of this Phenomenon” (Heidegger 290), implying that “other,” faulty interpretations of death are to be presented in this section. First, Heidegger argues that death is clearly not “perishing.”

Dasein’s going-out-of-the-world in the sense of dying must be distinguished from the going-out-of-the-world of that which merely has life. In our terminology the ending of anything that is alive, is denoted as ‘perishing’. We can see the difference only if the kind of ending which Dasein can have is distinguished from the end of a life. (Heidegger 284)

Heidegger defines perishing as the ending of a life, but ascribes this to beings that are not “Dasein.” What does Heidegger mean by “Dasein”? This is a tricky question to answer because Heidegger describes Dasein in a way that has been frequently misread. He begins by identifying Dasein as an entity. “...the manner of being which this entity—man himself—possesses. This entity we denote by the term ‘Dasein’” (Heidegger, 32). So “Dasein” is the term that Heidegger uses to refer to us human beings. Thus it is appropriate to consider individuals as individual Daseins, but this is not how Heidegger himself uses the term, which has led to various brilliant but misguided interpretations of the whole of Being and Time. Instead, Heidegger uses the term “Dasein” to refer to the manner of being that human beings have, not to the human beings themselves. “And because we cannot define Dasein’s essence by citing a ‘what’ of the kind that pertains to a subject-matter, and because its essence lies rather in the fact that in each case it has its Being to be, and has it as its own, we have chosen to designate this entity as ‘Dasein’, a term which is purely an expression of its Being” (Heidegger 32-3). So when we read Being and Time, does “Dasein” refer to the entity itself or to the “expression of its Being”? The following quote supports the latter. “So when we designate this entity with the term ‘Dasein’, we are expressing not its ‘what’ (as if it were a table, house or tree) but its Being” (Heidegger 67). Thus, while Heidegger introduces the term “Dasein” to denote persons, there is strong textual evidence that suggests that the term is better understood as referring to the being that persons have. So while “Dasein” can refer to individual entities, in Being and Time it refers to its kind of being—this suggests
that “Dasein” refers to something (namely, being) that is shared by all persons in general.

Essential to Dasein is “Being-in-the-world,” which refers to a person’s existence within the world—that a person is such that he is necessarily situated within a world (Heidegger 77-90). This existence is not one of consciousness but familiarity and concern. A person is such that it is familiar and concerned with the world and understands itself in light of the world and the entities within it. Yet what distinguishes a person from other living things such as plants is that for a person its own being is an issue for it. A person must, so to speak, take a stand on its own being. In other words, as a person, my own being is something that I work out and explore. I work to resolve this question of being within this world that I am situated in. For example, I understand myself as a student. That is, at the very least, a large part of who I am. With that in mind, things such as laptops, books, and desks have significance for me in that they help me be a student. I am familiar with the world of such entities and can only understand myself as a student through these entities. Furthermore, I concern myself with these entities because I understand that such entities enable me to understand my own being. With this notion of the person as the being who must take a stand on his own being, Heidegger claims that the ending that a person has is not perishing because a person does not merely “have life.”

Heidegger then introduces the terms ‘demise’ and ‘dying’. The following quote relates them to each other and to perishing.

Dasein too ‘has’ its death...we designate this intermediate phenomenon as its ‘demise’. Let the term ‘dying’ stand for that way of being in which Dasein is towards its death. Accordingly we must say that Dasein never perishes. Dasein, however, can demise only as long as it is dying. (Heidegger 291)

Thus, the ending of a human life is what Heidegger calls “demise” and “dying” is the way of being in which a person is towards death. Human beings, as persons, must question and stake out their own existences, unlike other living beings. As we shall see, death is understood as a “constant threat” (Heidegger 310); as such, it is an issue that a person must constantly struggle to resolve as a key element of his existence. The way in which a person concerns himself with his own death is dying—dying is, as Heidegger says, the “way to be” towards death. This does not refer to how a person chooses or prepares its death, but
to the attitude or mindset a person has in understanding and coping with death as part of its being. Heidegger believes that this distinguishes a person enough from other living things in that when a person encounters his end, we cannot merely call that even perishing. Instead, according to the text, he calls the phenomenon 'demise' and deems it an “intermediate phenomenon” because it is the end of a living thing, yet it is a distinctive kind of living thing—a person. Persons, unlike animals or bacteria, grapple with the question of their own existence; thus, a person never perishes. Yet, if we return to Heidegger's quotation, a person can demise only if it is dying, implying that a person is always dying. What this suggests is that, if we understand dying as being-towards-death, death is always an issue for a person.

What, then, is the phenomenon of death? Is it demise? Is it dying? Heidegger does not specify if demise or dying are among the “other” possible interpretations of death that fall outside of the “existential analysis” of death that he is seeking. Death, then, could be equated with either demise or dying, or it could be a phenomenon that they both fail to properly interpret. In fact, we shall see that Heidegger understands death as a “possibility”: “Death reveals itself as a possibility” (Heidegger 306). We will soon discover that Heidegger’s notion of possibility is such that it precludes the equation of death with demise and dying. So for now, we can hold on to the fact that Heidegger distinguishes death from demise and dying. Yet, if death is not the same as dying, how can it not be the event of demise? If it is not demise, then how is death an event that is different from demise? Does death even relate to demise at all, if they are distinct phenomena? These are the issues that make up the dilemma that Heidegger faces. He insists, at the very least, that there are important distinctions to be made between perishing, demise, and dying, and death.

An Incomplete and Unsatisfactory Way to Study Death: Observing the Death of Others

Heidegger begins his study of the question of death by presenting a way to understand death that is unsatisfactory. It is important to walk through this method before moving on to Heidegger’s positive formulations. Heidegger notes that death is a transition to no longer being a person. As such, a person “gets lifted right out of the possibility of experiencing this transition and of understanding it as something
experienced” (Heidegger 281). Given that we cannot experience this transition, it appears to be a good idea to observe the death of others. This move, at first, seems to make sense: when others die, they are no longer in the world. We can observe another person’s “change-over” or transition from being a person to no longer being a person. Yet Heidegger holds that in the death of another we do not grasp the authentic “coming-to-an-end” of the deceased. This is because in observing another’s death we cannot properly experience the loss of being that the deceased has suffered. We can experience the loss of the deceased with respect to ourselves, as if we had lost a friend or family member, but observing the death of others does not illuminate us to the transition to no longer being Dasein. An analogous case emerges with marriage: we can observe someone get married and transition from bachelorhood to non-bachelorhood, but we ourselves do not experience this transition. In this case and, more importantly, in the case of death, at most we are just “there alongside” (Heidegger 282)—we observe the other’s change-over, but nothing more. At best we witness the other’s leap from one mode of existence to another but cannot experience it. Therefore, the change-over of another cannot be equated with my own change-over. The mere observation of another’s death, then, cannot properly illuminate the fullness of my own death to me because I do not experience my own transition or have access to the other’s transitional experience.

Furthermore, even an experience, as opposed to a mere observation, of another’s death as transition from being to no longer being is insufficient for understanding my own death. Even if death were to be “represented” through such an experience of another’s death, I would have an experience of the other’s death but not of my own. I would experience the loss of the other’s being, but because the other is not me, I do not experience the loss of my own particular stand on my being, along with my own concerns and pursuits. This death that I experience in the death of another is not, in this sense, my own. Yet Heidegger insists that death is “mine.” Heidegger writes, “By its very essence, death is in every case mine, in so far as it ‘is’ at all” (Heidegger 284). What I would experience, then, in the transition from being to non-being of others, is merely that—the transition of another, not death itself. I cannot experience my own transition through observing the transitions of others—what transition I can experience in this case is not my own. Because the experience does not capture the “mineness” of death, it does not inform me of death in the full, particular sense, but merely of the transition from being-alive to being-not-alive.
The failure to capture death through observing or experiencing the death of others leads Heidegger to the following formulation: “In dying, it is shown that mineness and existence are ontologically constitutive for death. Dying is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially” (Heidegger 284). Here there are two separate claims: (1) dying is not an event and (2) we must attempt to understand death “existentially.” What does Heidegger mean by ‘existentially’? To form an existential conception of death means to understand death within the framework of existence, or a person’s stand on its own being. We cannot merely view death as an event—death is not merely something that coincidentally happens or occurs to a person. Instead, death is an end—namely, the end of a person’s concerned stand on his own being. More specifically, death is something to be worked out within our existence as a possibility. These points will be elaborated upon later—for now we must understand that experiencing the death of others (what I shall call the “representative method”) does not provide adequate means to understand our own deaths and therefore death in general.

*Death as “not-yet” and “end”*

After rejecting the representative method, Heidegger then calls to question many traditional notions of death. Death is traditionally viewed as something that has “not-yet” happened, or as an “end,” but Heidegger rejects these understandings of death. Traditionally, death is not-yet as something that has yet to take place; it has “not-yet” taken place. Another way Heidegger describes it is as something “outstanding.” There are several ways to interpret this not-yet that Heidegger thinks are inadequate for describing death. First, the not-yet is not like the paying off of a debt (Heidegger 286). The sense that the debt has not-yet been paid implies that there are both a sum and parts of a payment. Both sum and parts consist of money, a tangible object that carries value. With this in mind, Heidegger does not think that viewing our death as the completing of a sum is accurate. In our deaths it is not the case that, like in the payment of a debt, everything “comes in” or “comes together” since we cannot view our lives as somehow coming together only in death. We already live as complete human beings and do not need any outstanding elements or more time to become more fully human. Next, the not-yet is not like the filling of the moon. From our point of view, the new moon waxes until it is full. We can grasp
how and when the moon becomes full; we cannot do the same with our death (Heidegger 287) except in rare cases like suicide or terminal illness. That is because our death is not something that we grasp conceptually in that we cannot grasp when our lives will be “full” and when it will be time for us to die. Lastly, the not-yet is not like the ripening of a fruit. Fruits ripen and fulfill themselves (Heidegger 288). But we do not necessarily “fulfill” ourselves in death; in many cases we understand that someone’s life went unfulfilled or wasted. Also, what is to be fulfilled in the end of a life is never apodictic or absolute but open to doubt and change, unlike the ripeness of fruit.

Heidegger then rejects three notions of “end.” The “ending” of a life is not properly understood as a stopping, finishedness, or disappearing (Heidegger 289). These three words adequately describe the event of being at death when it happens, but Heidegger is not interested in this. Heidegger is not concerned with what happens during the change-over from being to non-being. Instead, Heidegger makes a critical move: he says that we are our not-yets, and we are so constantly. We are also our ends. Heidegger puzzles that “Just as Dasein is its ‘not-yet’, and is its ‘not-yet’ constantly as long as it is, it is already its end too” (Heidegger 289). What does this mean? How can we be what is not-yet or an end? Heidegger claims that if we properly view death, when we think of our ending we do not think of being at the end. We cannot experience for certain what it is like when we are at the exact moment of our end, and because this is the case, being at an end is not fruitful to Heidegger’s study of death. Being at an end only demonstrates elements of Dasein’s death that are concerned with the event of demise—that Dasein’s existence can be seen to have stopped, finished, or disappeared. It does not describe what death means to us as the ending of Dasein.

Heidegger continues: “The ‘ending’ which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein’s Being-at-an-end, but a Being-towards-the-end of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is” (Heidegger 289). This claims that we should understand our not-yet and our end as something we exist towards. The “towards” could be understood in two ways, both of which are helpful. First, we are heading towards death in a temporal sense. Our existence is directed by time towards death in that, as opposed to our birth, we constantly move closer to it, eventually reaching it. Second, we exist in light of our death; we orient ourselves toward it. Heidegger thinks that “Being towards this possibility, as Being-towards-death, is
so to comport ourselves towards death” (Heidegger 306). This suggests that we take our mortality into account through our attitudes and perspectives when we take a stand on our own being. Therefore, in these two ways we can “be” our ends in that we orient ourselves towards it as something that approaches in time.

Can we understand being-towards as not orienting ourselves towards an event, but something else? More importantly, why does Heidegger prefer understanding the ending of a person through being-towards instead of being-at in the first place? Heidegger justifies the latter claim with two separate statements. First:

Ending, as Being-towards-the-end, must be clarified ontologically in terms of Dasein’s kind of Being. And presumably the possibility of an existent Being of that ‘not-yet’ which lies ‘before the end’, will become intelligible only if the character of ending has been determined existentially. (Heidegger 289-290)

A person’s ending must be understood in the proper context—in the context of the person himself as a being who is concerned with his existence. Properly grasping that death is not-yet requires that the ‘ending’ of that person be understood “existentially”—that is, with relation to or pertinent to a person’s existence. Second, “Being-at-an-end implies existentially Being-towards-the-end. The uttermost ‘not-yet’ has the character of something towards which Dasein comports itself” (Heidegger 293). To attempt to understand a person’s end as related to his existence implies being-towards that person’s end. Understanding the ending of a person in the context of his concerned stand on its existence entails that that person will comport himself towards death—death will be an issue for his existence. This is the way to grasp the not-yet character of a person’s ending. Instead of attempting to understand what it means for death to be “not-yet” by experiencing the occurrence of that end, it is more proper and meaningful to explore death within the realm of existence as an issue of comportment. Death, understood as such, is an issue for a person that should not be understood as an event.

Being-towards-death, therefore, is the way that death can be understood as a matter pertinent to our existence. Death will emerge as the issue or focus of what Dasein is being-towards; dying, as we have already discussed, refers to the particular “way of being in which Dasein is towards its death” (Heidegger 291). Dying is a way of being towards death. Yet, if we return to Heidegger’s own words, death is also a “way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is” (Heidegger
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289). It appears that both dying and death are “ways to be,” although dying, if anything, is a way to be towards the way to be that is death. This will become clearer once we come to understand the nature of the way to be that death is. Properly understanding death is only clear through studying death by being-towards it. Therefore, let us examine death as a matter pertinent to existence by understanding how we can be towards it.

Section B. The Existential Structure of Death Revealed Through Being-Towards

The phenomenon of death is to be understood as mattering to a person’s existence. Instead of using the representative method of experiencing death (attempting to “experience” the death of others by witnessing their deaths), Heidegger opts for understanding death through being-towards one’s own death. In other words, instead of merely describing what happens when someone dies, Heidegger attempts to draw out the phenomenological aspects of death that emerge when we comport ourselves towards it. What does being-towards-death reveal about death itself? Various characteristics of death are revealed, and all are important and central in Heidegger’s view of death. An adequate interpretation of Heidegger’s views of death will have to make sense of these characteristics in a way that can also substantiate the distinctions between perishing, demise, dying, and death itself.

Death as Possibility

Heidegger begins by describing death as a possibility. “Death is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case” (Heidegger 294). Death, then, is a “possibility,” and it is “mine” in that I have to take over my own death. Yet what does it mean to say that death is a possibility? What prevents one from saying that death, then, is the possible event of demise or the possible way of being towards one’s end? And, if death is neither demise nor dying, how is death a ‘possibility’ in a way that is distinguished from the event of demise or being towards death as a possibility? This is resolved when one considers what Heidegger means by “possibility.” “Possibility” does not refer
to merely logical possibilities or actual possibilities such as a possible event or possible comportment, but to ways of being or ‘potentialities-for-Being’ (I will generally refer to potentialities-for-Being as ‘ways of being’).

[Possibility] is that wherein Dasein as Being-in-the-world understands itself...Dasein has assigned itself to an ‘in-order-to’ and it has done so in terms of a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which it itself is. (Heidegger 119)

This way of being is what a person is in that he takes it up as one of many possible ways to understand and resolve his own being. It is more meaningful than normal possibilities in that it stands in as how that person sees or understands himself. For example, the fact that I am a student is one wherein my potentiality-for-being is that of being a student. I do many things ‘in-order-to’ work out my existence as a student, such as study, attend class and take notes, and write philosophy papers. I do these things ultimately because I have taken up the way of being a student. I understand myself as a student—my being-a-student stands in for a way in which I understand my existence. The same cannot be said for other possibilities like whether I should eat a hamburger or a hot dog. For example, in choosing a hot dog, I do not understand myself as “a person who chose a hot dog.” I would still understand myself as a student, and my having chosen a hot dog over a hamburger would be a minor if not negligible element of my existence. What matters are life-organizing possibilities.

With this distinction between ways of being and normal possibilities in mind, Heidegger then states that ways of being, understood as possibilities, are the most basic way to understand Dasein. “[P]ossibility as a [feature of existence] is the most primordial and ultimate positive way in which Dasein is characterized ontologically” (Heidegger 183). Fundamentally, Dasein is its possibilities. This understanding of possibility is distinct from a merely possible event or comportment (such as the event of choosing a hot dog, or the predilection for hot dogs over hamburgers); thus death is not the “possibility” of the event of demise, but some other kind of possibility.

In fact, death is a special possibility. Specifically, it is “the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (Heidegger 294). What is possible is that a person’s existence as Being-in-the-world is “absolutely impossible”. Another way to put it is that Heidegger sees that “[death] is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-
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to-be-there” (Heidegger 294). Heidegger’s notion of death does not just describe an absence or end, but a person ceasing to be a person. This separates death from dying: death is the possibility of being no-longer-a-person; dying is the way to be towards that very possibility by comporting oneself towards it. This way of ceasing to be a person, if we are to understand it properly, is a way of being pertinent to one’s existence, not an event. The German term Nichtmehrdasein that constitutes the “no-longer-able-to-be-there” is directly translated as “no-longer-Dasein” and thus implies that a person’s “end” is an end of a particular existence or being, not just the end of a life. Not only do things in the world or the world itself not matter to me anymore, but the very possibility of mattering itself ceases. Thus death is an “absolute” impossibility in that I can no longer be a person—I can no longer be a concerned being-in-the-world. No longer can I interact with other entities and be familiar with them as I was. And, no longer can I attempt to understand myself within this world by taking a stand on my being. A potential paradox arises here. Death is revealed as a way of being, although death implies the end of any way of being. How can we attribute to a person that no longer exists in the world with others and no longer has possibilities a way of being called death? Is death as we understand it a way of being, or exactly the opposite, the absence or inability to be? By describing death as the “possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (Heidegger 294), Heidegger seems to indicate the latter, although he insists upon the former—that death is a way of being (Heidegger 289). Let us call this apparent paradox the Possibility Paradox. A proper interpretation will be able to explain the Possibility Paradox.

In addition, further criteria of death emerge from treating it as a possibility. Understanding death as a possibility allows us to make more sense of the “mineness” of death. We already acknowledged that death was “mine”: “by its very essence, death is in every case mine, in so far as it ‘is’ at all” (Heidegger 284). Yet, through understanding death as possibility, we can discover exactly how it is that death is mine. Heidegger describes three aspects of the possibility of death: death as the possibility of a person that is his “ownmost,” is “non-relational,” and is “not-to-be-outstripped.” All three features are clumped together in Heidegger’s description of the possibility of death on page 294 of Being and Time. They describe the ways in which death is always “mine.” Understanding them is dependent upon understanding the possibility of death; however, we will not be clear on the best interpretation of
the possibility of death until later in this paper. Therefore, we will refrain from deciphering exactly what is meant by these terms and instead merely delineate how Heidegger relates them to the possibility of death. With this in mind, how does Heidegger present these three features? First, death is a person’s “ownmost” possibility.

Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer being-able-to-be-there. (Heidegger 294)

We must understand death as a person’s ownmost because it is the possibility wherein that person is no longer able to be there. Second, death is “non-relational.” Death is such that it “must be taken over by Dasein alone” (Heidegger 308). Death, as Heidegger puts it, “lays claim” to a person as an individual (Heidegger 308). Each person resolves his own death by himself, devoid of any relation to other people or entities in the world. Lastly, death is “not-to-be-outstripped.” Heidegger goes on to say that “Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (Heidegger 294). “Not-to-be-outstripped” is also understood as “uttermost” or most extreme. “[Death] is not-to-be-outstripped. Being towards this possibility enables Dasein to understand that giving itself up impedes for it as the uttermost possibility of its existence” (Heidegger 308). Thus, the mineness of death is further clarified as ownmost, non-relational, and not-to-be-outstripped.

**Being-certain and Death as Certain**

Next, Heidegger reveals the uniqueness of the possibility of death vis-à-vis other possibilities by introducing the concept of certainty. Heidegger begins by noting that there are two meanings for the word ‘certainty’.

‘Certainty’, in its primordial signification, is tantamount to ‘Being-certain’, as a kind of Being which belongs to Dasein. However, in a derivative signification, any entity of which Dasein can be certain will also get called something ‘certain’ (Heidegger 300)

Thus, certainty is a state of being that Heidegger calls ‘being-certain’ and it also describes a condition or fact that a person takes as true. Indeed, Heidegger substantiates this when he sharpens his treatment
of certainty by defining it as a “holding for true,” or, “To be certain of an entity means to hold it for true as something true” (Heidegger 300). Heidegger then relates being-certain with what is certain when he says, “Holding something for true is adequate as a way of maintaining oneself in the truth, if it is grounded in the uncovered entity itself, and if, as Being towards the entity so uncovered, it has become transparent to itself as regards its appropriateness to that entity.” A person, in holding something for true, must be “grounded” in what he holds for true and also “become transparent” to himself. Heidegger continues: “The kind of truth, and along with it, the certainty, varies with the way entities differ, and accords with the guiding tendency and extent of the disclosure” (Heidegger 300). How something is certain, then, “varies the way entities differ” and corresponds with how it is “disclosed” or understood.

Heidegger then examines how we can be certain of death. He makes two moves. First, he asserts that the certainty of death may be empirical when he says, “Taken strictly, a certainty which is ‘only’ empirical may be attributed to death” (Heidegger 301, italics added). Empirical certainty, as Heidegger says, may be attributed to death, but as we shall discover later, the proper understanding of death includes more than empirical certainty, as evidenced by “The fact that demise, as an event which occurs, is ‘only’ empirically certain, is in no way decisive as to the certainty of death” (Heidegger 301). To make this point clearer, consider the following example. I show a baby an apple. The baby has never seen or eaten an apple, so all he sees is a green-colored ball. This perception of the apple is correct and true—the apple is green and spherical; however, people who have eaten apples must acknowledge that there is far more to understand about apples than that they are merely green balls. That apples are tasty, nourishing, and a Christian symbol of temptation are among the many elements of an apple that we attribute to it. Thus, the baby’s observation that the apple is green and spherical is correct but falls far short of the most complete and rich way of understanding what an apple is. Heidegger’s treatment of the certainty of death is similar; one can be content with empirical certainty in the same way that a baby can be content with understanding an apple as a green ball, but Heidegger believes that there is far more to the certainty of death. While we only first become aware of death through observing or hearing about the demise of others and

\[1\] Empirical does not carry any special connotations or meaning to Heidegger. Heidegger understands the empirical as one traditionally would—induction or reasoning based on experience.
thereby induct an empirical certainty, we eventually learn to become certain of death in an even stronger way, like a baby that eventually learns to eat apples and associate them with Adam and Eve’s temptation in the Garden of Eden. Heidegger agrees with this: “[Dasein] acknowledges a ‘higher’ certainty than one which is only empirical. One knows about the certainty of death” (Heidegger 302). Thus, Heidegger contends that the certainty of death is more than merely empirical; a person “knows” of the certainty of death in a stronger sense than mere empirical conviction.

Lastly, Heidegger links the certainty of death with the indefiniteness of death. “Death’s certainty... is possible at any moment. Along with the certainty of death goes the indefiniteness of its ‘when’” (Heidegger 302). This indefiniteness describes not just that I do not know when I will lose my being in death, but also that this way of being is always one that I can take up. Death, then, emerges as a constant threat: “In anticipating the indefinite certainty of death, Dasein opens itself to a constant threat arising out of its own ‘there’. In this very threat Being-towards-the-end must maintain itself” (Heidegger 310). Death, then, is a constant threat. In addition, it is also something that constitutes a “higher” certainty than mere empirical certainty. Yet we cannot treat the certainty of death as the empirical certainty that the event of demise occurs. This presents another interpretive dilemma: if we take all these criteria for certainty into account, what does Heidegger mean when saying that death is “certain”? This question, like the question of understanding death as possibility, is open to interpretation. We will discuss ways to make sense of Heidegger’s treatment of certainty later; for now, let us understand that a correct interpretation will have to account for the dilemma we have just raised.

Part II.

Section A. Interpretations of Death

Heidegger’s analysis of death as it pertains to the question of existence has revealed that death is a possibility that is certain. Specifically, it is the possibility of a person’s absolute impossibility wherein that person is no-longer-able-to-be. This possibility is that person’s own-most, is non-relational, and is not-to-be-outstripped. That person is
certain of the possibility, and this possibility is more than empirically
certain and is not understood as the certainty of an impending event,
yet that person sees it as a constant threat. The following interpre-
tations will attempt to address the above features of death. I will
examine them mainly by questioning whether they meet the following
criteria: (1) whether they adequately address the various interpretive
dilemmas we have encountered from these features of death or not and
(2) if they emerge with an understanding of death that is distinct from
both demise and dying and can explain these phenomena. A successful
interpretation will meet these two criteria.

In covering the various interpretations of death I will lean on Hu-
bert Dreyfus’ work, specifically his Forward to Carol White’s Being
and Finitude: Heidegger’s Analysis of Finitude. Here he provides an
accurate analysis and typology of the known interpretations of death,
ranking them from what he deems are the least to the most accurate.
I will walk through his typology and most of the interpretations he
includes in it. I intend to demonstrate that all of the interpretations
covered in Dreyfus’ typology fail to properly address the criteria and
that his typology does not consider a category of interpretations that
includes unique features that are constitutive of a proper understanding
of death I will introduce later.

Dreyfus begins with what he considers the least accurate of the
known interpretations of death. They are characterized by a funda-
mental misreading of death as the event of demise.

Death as the Inevitable Event of Demise

Both Jean Paul Sartre and Paul Edwards equate death with the event of
demise. Consequently, to both thinkers dying is the process of reaching
that ultimate event. Sartre in Being and Nothingness both expounds
his understanding of Heidegger’s account of death and provides a cri-
tique; for now we will focus on Sartre’s interpretation of Heidegger.
Sartre begins by treating death “as an event of human life” (Sartre
531). He then goes on to reject death as both a possibility and as
“mine,” constituting a break with Heidegger. But he considers himself
in agreement with Heidegger when he mistakenly equates death with
demise, which is, as I contend, precisely what Heidegger is trying to
avoid. Paul Edwards also sees Heidegger’s treatment of death in the
same way in Heidegger on Death: a Critical Evaluation. Although he
does not come up with his own interpretation of death, Edwards, like Sartre, rejects Heidegger’s analysis of death based on an erroneous understanding of death as the event of demise. Dreyfus points out the error in this view of death: how do they account for the fact that Heidegger calls death a “way to be” (Heidegger 289) and that a person is a “being-towards-death” (Heidegger 277)?

Charles Guignon takes up this question while holding onto the interpretation that death is the event of demise. He interprets the event of demise as the end of Dasein’s possibilities, where dying is a way of life that takes that into account. In *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* Guignon understands Heidegger’s stance on death as referring

...Not to some future event but to the essential finitude of our Being. As contingent entities, we constantly stand before the possibility of having no more possibilities. Our Being has a teleological structure precisely because, as finite beings, our lives will have a final configuration of meaning, and we care about that final configuration. (Guignon 134)

Death, to Guignon, is to run out or have no more possibilities. This happens or occurs in demise—when one no longer is in the world, one can no longer live out any more possibilities, making death the end of all possibility. With this framework in mind, Guignon believes that a proper understanding of dying can lead to a complete and meaningful understanding of one’s life, wherein one understands the finitude of possibilities and thereby pursues them with new perspective and vigor. This interpretation, however, runs into the following problem: if Heidegger were to accept this interpretation he would be contradicting himself. Death is not something that we can or even need to conceptually grasp in a framework like Guignon’s. In discussing how we should not understand the not-yet as the filling of the moon, as Heidegger writes, “Our problem does not pertain to getting into our grasp the ‘not-yet’ which is of the character of Dasein...Dasein must, as itself, become—that is to say, be—what it is not yet” (Heidegger 287). In addition, death is not something to be fulfilled, as we discussed in the problems with understanding the not-yet as the ripening of a fruit. The analogy Heidegger uses is that “With ripeness, the fruit fulfills itself. But is the death at which Dasein arrives, a fulfillment in this sense?...Even unfulfilled Dasein ends” (Heidegger 288). Taylor Carman spells this problem out more fully; he and William Blattner make up the second group in Dreyfus’ typology.
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Death as the Closing Down of Possibilities

Taylor Carman, in Heidegger’s Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity in Being and Time, rejects viewing death as the event of demise and proposes understanding death as the “closing down” of possibilities. He begins by denying that death can be “some contingent and impersonal event of demise” (Carman 279). Carman defends this by appealing to the “mineness” of death. He moves on to claim that death involves possibilities closing down to Dasein. Heidegger understands “death as a kind of bereavement. Existential bereavement is neither the loss of vital functions nor the end of a life story, but a deprivation of possibilities constitutive for one’s existence” (Carman 284). Death, then, consists of the closing down of possibilities that Dasein could have taken up for its existence. But this view of death as the closing down of possibilities fails to account for how death is both the “absolute impossibility of Dasein” and the possibility that Dasein is “no-longer-there.” (Heidegger 294). The condition wherein possibilities are constantly closing down is not the same as the loss of the capability or being-able to take up those very possibilities; death as possibility is better understood as the latter, constituting a problem for Carman’s view. Because Carman does not account for the possibility of death as the absolute impossibility of Dasein wherein Dasein is no-longer-able-to-be, his interpretation fails to meet our criteria for an adequate interpretation of Heidegger’s account of death in Being and Time.

Death as Anxiety Attack

William Blattner presents a careful and detailed yet, as we shall see, mistaken interpretation of death. In his commentary Heidegger’s Being and Time, Blattner grapples with the dilemma involving how death is the way of being wherein Dasein can no longer have ways to be as possibilities. Blattner questions, “Death is a way to be? One would think that death is a way not to be!” (Blattner 146). He attempts to resolve the dilemma by interpreting that death does not refer to the termination of life when he says, “The possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there’ and ‘the absolute impossibility of Dasein’ do not refer, then, to the termination of life. They refer to some condition in
which we can live, but in which we cannot exist, conceived existentially” (Blattner 146). To Blattner, death then is the inability to exist in an “existential” sense—death is an “existential” death. In death we do not lose our lives as much as our ability to exist as Dasein who take a stand on our own beings. Blattner analyzes it as follows, “If existing in the distinctively existential sense is to go forward with life, to answer the question of identity, then to die existentially is to be unable to answer this question. In anxiety we are unable to do this, which implies that death is another facet of the experience Heidegger calls ‘anxiety’” (Blattner 146). Death, then, is a way to be—it is being-anxious. Such being-anxious constitutes an inability to be a person. Blattner introduces Heidegger’s technical term ‘anxiety.’ What does ‘anxiety’ mean? It does not refer merely to a psychological state. Instead, anxiety is the state of mind wherein death is revealed to a person. As Heidegger puts it, “Throwness into death reveals itself to Dasein in a more primordial and impressive manner in that state-of-mind which we have called ‘anxiety’ (Heidegger 295). That we are “thrown” into or subject to death is revealed in anxiety; thus, our awareness or being-towards death first arises from anxiety. More important to Blattner’s interpretation, however, is Heidegger’s further claim that a state of anxiety also does not allow us to understand ourselves. “Anxiety thus takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself” (Heidegger 232). This is what allows Blattner to claim that anxiety constitutes the inability to be a person that he equates with death. But how can Dasein cease to be existentially (in an anxiety attack) yet exist as a person in some capacity? Does Blattner’s equation of death with anxiety attack really avoid the Possibility Paradox?

Blattner addresses this paradox by appealing to the “thin” and “thick” senses of being. To Blattner, the “thin” sense of being refers to a person’s essence: that the person’s very being is an issue for him. “The “thin” or less robust sense of existence is that we always stand before the question, Who am I?” (Blattner 144). A person usually concerns himself with his being in the “thick” sense: by pursuing his possible ways to be. We “take a stand on who we are, making or constituting ourselves in the process. This is the “thick” or more robust sense of existence” (Blattner 144). While addressing the general issue of existence, we take on our own particular ways of addressing that issue. We work in different fields, we interact with certain people and do certain activities. The entirety of our particular way of spending time and grappling with our existence makes up Blattner’s “thick” sense of
existence and constitutes each person’s unique answer to why they exist. With this distinction between thin and thick in mind, Blattner can say that in death, the thick sense of being vanishes, thus constituting an “existential” death, while the thin sense of being survives, since a person’s being still is an issue for it. Blattner elaborates the point by clarifying that “In anxiety we are no one. We are mere being-possible (thin existence), with no determinate life (thick existence)” (Blattner 144). Thus, by appeal to the thin and thick senses of existence, Blattner has found a way to explain the Possibility Paradox.

Blattner’s interpretation of death as anxiety attack, however, fails to properly account for other features of death. First, how can a person be certain of death as an anxiety attack? Anxiety attacks are rare phenomena that few people experience, yet if we hold to Heidegger’s own words, every person is capable of “holding for true” the possibility of anxiety attack with a “higher certainty than one which is only empirical” (Heidegger 302). This takes the form of a tacit acknowledgement or understanding that death is an essential element of existence that one cannot escape. Blattner can contend that a person is “certain” that anxiety attack can befall him as a possibility, proposing that death is “certainly possible.” But this would be mere wordplay that ignores Heidegger’s use of the term “possibility” and thereby distorts what he means: that death is a way of being (possibility) that is certain. Anxiety attack is not certain in this sense, and therefore Blattner’s interpretation fails to properly account for Heidegger’s notion of certainty.

In addition, how can an anxiety attack constitute the absolute impossibility of Dasein (Heidegger 294)? In anxiety attack a person may be unable to be a person in a thick sense; yet the fact that he still retains a thin sense of existence suggests that if he were to escape or be released from an anxiety attack that he would resume being a person. If this were the case, then anxiety attack could not be understood as a person’s “absolute” impossibility unless anxiety attacks were to permanently incapacitate him. But this would relegate anxiety attacks to extremely rare and special cases, and it would be difficult for Blattner to argue for why a person must understand his end as such. If we assume that Blattner concedes that anxiety attacks are merely temporary, then in anxiety attacks a person’s continued thin existence betrays that he has not undergone death—being a person is not an absolute impossibility. Anxiety attacks are phenomena that are structurally similar to death in that they share some features in common,
but because they cannot constitute the absolute impossibility of being a person we cannot equate them with death. Coupled with anxiety attack’s inability to account for Heidegger’s notion of certainty, we can now say that Blattner’s interpretation fails to meet the features that Heidegger attributes to death.

Death as Formalized Structure of Existence

Dreyfus’ in Being-in-the-World views death as a “limiting” feature. Dreyfus rejects equating death with demise by appealing to Heidegger’s assertion that death is an existential structure. Dreyfus argues that “Death is an existential structure that defines what Dasein is; it cannot be some event that is possible but not yet actual, or even the possibility of that event. The event of death when it comes must manifest what Dasein has been all along” (Dreyfus, Being-in-the-World, 311). Death, then, must be a person’s condition or structural element that he constantly deals with or lives in light of. This reading is compatible with Heidegger’s assertion that death is a “way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is” (Heidegger 289). Dreyfus then moves on to define death as a person’s structural lack of his “own” possibilities. Dreyfus believes “Dasein can have no concrete possibilities of its own on which to project; it can have no fixed identity; indeed, its only essential or ownmost possibility is nothingness” (Dreyfus, Being-in-the-world, 310). This is what Dreyfus means by a “limiting” feature. It does not mean that a person lacks possibilities but that no possibility can always define him, independently of circumstances and changes, as something that is his “own” possibility. All possibilities fall short of that. A person’s possibilities, then, are limited in that they are unable to be that person’s own possibilities.

Yet, Dreyfus’ interpretation does not properly account for Heidegger’s statement that death is the absolute impossibility of being a person. If we take Dreyfus’ account of death as an existential structure wherein a person cannot own his possibilities, how do we explain that that constitutes the “absolute impossibility of Dasein” (Heidegger 294)? In other words, how is a person’s existential feature equated with the absolute impossibility of being a person? This is not possible, and what follows is that Dreyfus’ interpretation cannot properly explain how death is the absolute impossibility of being a person; therefore, it

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2Dreyfus rejects his own view here in his Forward to White’s Time and Death.
Like Dreyfus, Julian Young attempts to relate death with nothingness. In Heidegger’s *Later Philosophy*, he equates death with nothingness, identifying it as a formalized structure of existence, or, “The ultimate threat to one’s security is, of course, death; death understood as annihilation, nothingness” (Young 65). To Young, *Being and Time* treats death as a person’s encounter with nothingness. This nothingness is understood in the context of Heidegger’s later works. Under Young, the nothingness of death is a plentiful nothingness, in that new worlds are to be disclosed in it. Death “is indeed the ‘nothing’, nothing knowable or comprehensible by us—in other words, ‘the mystery’—it is not the ‘empty’ of ‘abysmal’ nothing but rather the concealed side of the ‘globe of Being’, something which, though unknown, is nonetheless ‘positive’” (Young 68).

The problem with Young’s view is that death, when understood as this ‘nothingness’, is difficult to grasp as something that relates with the human subject discussed in *Being and Time*—“Dasein,” or what we have called “person.” To Young, “Dasein” refers to the manner of being that human individuals have; nothingness discloses the “concealed side of the ‘globe of being’,” a concept that involves the question of being in general and not particular persons. Thus, elements of death such as its “mineness,” especially its non-relational component (Heidegger 294), is at odds with Young’s interpretation. That I die my own death and cannot relate with others are facts about death that are not even intelligible if we understand death as a cultural or world (and not individual) phenomenon; understanding death under Young’s view is not even a phenomenon that befalls individuals. Young can reply that this treats death as a phenomenon that befalls individuals, while his own view attributes death to cultures instead. He can construct an interpretation of the “mineness” of death that would apply to the death of a culture. Under such a view, death can still be understood as a person’s “ownmost” because cultural death does threaten his being-in-the-world since the very world that he is in has collapsed; if we remember that Heidegger relates “ownmost” with no-longer-being-able-to-be-there, Young can contend that a person is no longer able to be in a world that has collapsed. Also, death can be non-relational because a person’s being-in-the-world is something that belongs to him alone; it cannot share or replace someone else’s. When that being-in-the-world is threatened, what is threatened is a being-in-the-world that is unique to each individual in a unique and irreplaceable way. Lastly,
death is not-to-be-outstripped. Young can read the phenomenon of culture collapse to refer to a person’s utmost possibility: in context of the question of being, no phenomenon is more extreme than the death of one culture of being and the impending birth of another. Thus Young can capture the “mineness” of death in his interpretation. However, by treating death as a cultural phenomenon, he runs into problems with Heidegger’s notion of certainty. Because White also treats death as a cultural phenomenon, we shall examine the problem with this view in the next section.

Death as Cultural World-collapse

White presents a rich and complete interpretation of death in *Time and Death*. She begins with a study of what Heidegger means by “existence” in *Being and Time*. White writes, “Existence formally indicates that Dasein is as an understanding and makes an issue of that understanding” (Heidegger 274). Unpacking this difficult quote allows us to see that our being is understood as a possibility and we concernedly take up that possibility—it is a possibility that matters to us. To White, this informs us of how we should understand death: it is, as ceasing to be, that wherein possibilities end, or the limit of our taking a stand on our being (White 53). White then asks, what is the condition of the possibility of having an understanding of our being (White 66)? White answers her own question by appealing to Heidegger’s later works. Existence entails a “standing open” towards the openness of being. In other words, we do not seek out being; instead, being is disclosed or revealed to us as we maintain an open stance towards it. Furthermore, what is revealed is not just the understanding of being for a single individual, but of a whole society or culture. To White, this open disclosing provides a person his possibilities within a cultural world, which he endeavors to understand as a way to be that he takes up. And, while there is a realm of open possibilities revealed to him, death encompasses what is still concealed. However, as White notes, what is concealed can be illuminated (White 74). Thus death, in later Heidegger, is concealedness that can be illuminated and brought into understanding. As we have already discussed, Julian Young also makes this equation in his interpretation when he equates “nothingness” with “concealedness.”
To reconcile this with *Being and Time*, White contends that for a person “not to be” is for him to lack an understanding of a possibility of being in a time when one culture or understanding of being is meeting its end. This condition is compatible with death as concealedness: a person encounters the limits or end of an understanding of being wherein he can no longer understand himself within the cultural world that is dying. The practices and reasons for which he had taken up a possibility to understand himself are becoming meaningless as a new understanding of being is revealed. White summarizes this picture in the following:

However, we should also remember that Heidegger speaks of the possibility of the impossibility of existence. Authentic Dasein is the one who reaches into the depths of this well to find the new star a new way of understanding the being of its old world and the new way of disclosing its world that glimmers on the horizon. Nietzsche could see in a lightning flash that God was dead, that will to power ruled what-is, but it took the thunder, the shattering impact of this revelation, another half century to reach the ears of the Anyone. (White 75)

Thus, death is not the physical end of an individual’s existence. In fact, it does not primarily concern the individual. Instead, death is the collapse of a culture, which brings about the condition where a person can no longer take up the possibilities that he previously had. For example, the world of people such as the Aztecs collapsed with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores. Not only did their practices and institutions cease to be; more importantly, Aztec people could no longer understand themselves as previously because they could no longer cope with the things, practices, and institutions necessary to make a stake on their being. A religious leader could no longer understand himself as such if the religion being practiced had died off with the collapse of the empire. The individual is not dead, but the world that he inhabits is.

White then presents her interpretations of dying and certainty. Dying, as we have discussed, is the way a person relates to or is towards his death. The person, through dying, lets things be as understood in an understanding of being, yet at the same time is open to a radical change or replacement of that very understanding of being. If a new understanding of being is to be revealed, the authentic person anticipates it. This is done as the person heeds the call of conscience, thus
becoming certain of the death of one culture and the birth of the next (White 85). The person, then, is still open for a “still outstanding” possibility of existence that can come into being with the death of one cultural world and the arrival of another.

White concludes her study convinced that her reading is better than associating death with demise. To her, terms such as the “possibility of the impossibility of Dasein” are much better explained if we treat death as the death of a culture rather than an individual, wherein the individual survives and can take up an understanding of being of the new culture. White contends that her interpretation fits the text of *Being and Time* better than a demise-based reading and that it includes Heidegger’s later works (White 89). Indeed, it is a strong interpretation; it can, at the very least, survive the Possibility Paradox. Death as world-collapse passes the Possibility Paradox. White can utilize Blattner’s distinction between the “thin” and “thick” senses of existence by redefining them in terms of understanding death as cultural world-collapse. Under this view, the “thin” sense of existence entails a being-able to take a stand within any particular world; the “thick” sense of existence entails an actual stand on a particular world. World-collapse, as death, would entail the loss of the world and therefore the loss of the thick sense of existence, but the thin sense would survive. Thus, in world-collapse a person would be in a way that it could not be a person.

However, White’s interpretation fails to meet two key elements of Heidegger’s existential analytic of death. First, death as world-collapse cannot account for Heidegger’s criteria for certainty. A person need not be certain that the culture that he is in will collapse. White has demonstrated that so far all cultures collapse and are replaced; however, this does not guarantee that all cultures are such that they will eventually collapse. A culture need not be understood as one that must eventually collapse; that a culture collapses is not essential to our understanding of culture. Thus, at best, White operates on empirical certainty that cultures collapse- because all the previous cultures have collapsed, cultures as a whole collapse. But we must remind ourselves that according to Heidegger, “[Dasein] acknowledges a ‘higher’ certainty than one which is only empirical” (Heidegger 302). If we take this into account, both White and Young (since he holds to the same treatment of death as a cultural phenomenon) fail to stay true to Heidegger’s views on certainty.
White’s view fails for another reason. First, for the same reason as interpreting death as anxiety-attack, death as world-collapse fails to properly account for the absoluteness of the impossibility of being a person. In avoiding the Possibility Paradox White’s interpretation must concede that a thin sense of existence survives culture collapse, prompting the objection that in this interpretation, particular people that die still have possibilities. Specifically, how is it the case that a person is no-longer-able-to-be in death when, in cultural collapse, he can be a person once a new culture emerges? That person’s inability to be a person is not absolute in this scenario; this constitutes another flaw in White’s interpretation. All in all, with these two problems in mind, we can reject White’s interpretation.

Death as Individual World-Collapse

The combined work of both John Haugeland and Hubert Dreyfus paves the way for another interpretation of death based on world collapse. However, unlike White, Haugeland’s interpretation treats world-collapse as the collapse of an individual’s understanding of the world. Dreyfus takes Haugeland’s essay “Truth and Finitude: Heidegger’s Transcendental Existentialism” and, in his Forward to White’s Time and Death he purposely distorts it to fit into an interpretation of death as individual world-collapse (Dreyfus, “Forward,” 35). What emerges is the following: Haugeland sees reason to interpret Dasein to refer not to individuals at all but to a way of life. “[Dasein’s] disclosedness is not even primarily private or individual. Rather, in the first place and usually, it is cultural and historical, hence public” (Haugeland 351). The term “Dasein” then, refers more to cultural or public ways of life. Dreyfus takes this idea and applies it to death: death refers to a person, and understood in Haugeland’s way, refers to a way of life such as a culture. Yet, unlike White, Dreyfus relegates the way of life that death threatens to the way of life of an individual because, as interesting as White’s culture-based theory is, Being and Time does not discuss cultures but the being of persons. Thus, what undergoes death is the way of life of individual persons (but not the individual). To understand an individuals world collapse, consider the following: a broken marriage or midlife crisis would mark the end of a way of life; in some cases, a person’s way of life has died because of these incidents. People would say things like “Joe the carpenter is dead” not to say that Joe has
ceased to live, but that the way of life of Joe as a carpenter has ceased to be.

Thus death refers to the end of a person’s cultural or public way of being. It is specifically the condition wherein a person cannot be because his way of life has ended. This is similar yet distinct to Blattner's anxiety attack. "The important difference between Blattner and Haugeland/White is that, for Blattner, death as an anxiety attack is an unmotivated and sudden collapse of all meaning, whereas for Haugeland and White death as world-collapse takes place gradually" (Dreyfus, “Forward,” 22). Furthermore, unlike anxiety attack, in individual world-collapse it is not the person that is paralyzed or incapacitated from taking a stand on his own being but instead it is the world within which that person takes a stand that collapses. Regardless, both individual world collapse and anxiety attack share an inability to account for both the certainty and “absolute impossibility” of death. First, individual world collapse is not a phenomenon that a person can be certain of with a certainty “higher” than empirical certainty (Heidegger 302). Individual world collapse may be a phenomenon that does occur and it may be a threat to all persons, but is it certain for all of them? Much like anxiety attack, individual world collapse is, in fact, not certain for everyone. There are persons that may never undergo individual world collapse. As such, the Haugeland-Dreyfus account cannot explain the “higher” notion of certainty; for some persons, individual world-collapse does not constitute an “end” for them. Second, in individual world collapse, a “thin” sense of person still survives the death; the world-collapse of an individual still leaves a thin sense of being a person that is not dead in an “absolute” sense. That a person can still be a person means that it is not impossible to be a person anymore. Thus Haugeland-Dreyfus’ individual world-collapse interpretation, like Blattner’s, fails to explain how death is an absolute impossibility of being a person. For this reason and because it cannot properly explain Heidegger’s notion of certainty, the Haugeland-Dreyfus interpretation fails as a whole to constitute an adequate interpretation of Heidegger’s account of death.

Section B. A New Interpretation: Death as Physically Terminated Being-in-the-World

None of the above interpretations satisfactorily meet the criteria I have
established as necessary for an adequate account of Heidegger’s view of death. As a reminder, here are the two main criteria: (1) That they adequately address the various interpretive dilemmas we have encountered from the features of death. Specifically, they address the Possibility Paradox, explain the three features of mineness, and the features of certainty. (2) That they emerge with an understanding of death that is distinct from perishing, demise, and dying, and can be used to distinguish perishing, demise, and dying from each other.

A successful interpretation will meet these two criteria. I will now propose my own interpretation of death as Physically Terminated Being-in-the-world; I will describe this interpretation and cover how it fulfills both criteria. What I will conclude is that because death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World can fulfill these two criteria, it is more faithful to the text than any of the other proposed interpretations and is asymmetrically situated above them in that it can explain their flaws.

Death as Physically Terminated Being-in-the-World

My interpretation of death focuses on the fact that death is a way of being. This way of being (death) is distinguishable from the way of being called dying. Dying is the way of being towards the distinguishable way of being called death. Death, as distinguished from dying, is a way of being wherein a particular person ceases to be in the world. As such, it is no longer with others in the world in a physical sense. It relates to demise in that demise is the event wherein a particular individual person undergoes his death—he ceases to be a person. The event of demise coincides with the change-over from being a person to no longer being a person. That former person, then, has undergone physically terminated being-in-the-world—they have ceased to exist as a physical entity within the world that interacts with other beings and takes a stand on his own existence. Death, then, is the way of being, namely physically terminated being-in-the-world, that immediately results from demise. Dying, then, is a way of being that consists in comporting oneself towards this physically terminated being-in-the-world. This takes the form of comporting oneself towards the possibility of having your Being-in-the-World physically taken away from this world.

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3 The term “physical” is not meant to connote anything about the kind of being that is terminated (Dasein), but merely to specify that physically terminated personhood has nothing to do with anxiety attacks and instead describes the existential phenomenon behind a person’s loss of physical life.
of understanding and living in light of the constant threat of no longer being in the world. Yet, how is it possible to attribute a way of being to a being that is no longer there—namely, a person that has undergone death? Other interpretations (such as anxiety attack and culture collapse) have avoided the Possibility Paradox by defining death as the collapse of a “thick” sense of being but the survival of a “thin” sense of being. We have also seen how such interpretations then run into problems with the absoluteness of death. On the other hand, my interpretation appeals to Heidegger’s notion of Mit-Dasein. An essential part of being-in-the-world as a person is that he is “being-with” (Mit-Dasein) others. “The world is always the one that a person share with others, a “with-world” [Mitwelt]. His being within such a world is “Dasein-with” [Mit-dasein]” (Heidegger 155). As Being-in-the-world, I share the world with other people individuals who also take a stand on their existence and comport themselves with other beings. When an individual undergoes death, even if that individual never experiences no longer being a person as a way of being, the other individuals who persist can rightly attribute to that individual that way of being wherein he/she is “no longer in the world with them.” This mode of being (physically terminated being-in-the-world) is attributable to the person that has ceased to exist as a person (ceased to have possibilities and exist as a physical being taking a stand on his own existence in the world) to those people that persist. Physically terminated being-in-the-world, therefore, is what persisting people refer to dead persons as. Thus, death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World is distinct from both demise and dying and is a way of being even though the person that is dead can no longer be.

Death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World, then, is a possibility. It is a way of being, as we have discussed, wherein an individual who once had Being-in-the-World as his kind of being is no-longer, from the point of view of persisting persons, in the world as he formerly was a person. Being a person, in this condition, is an absolute impossibility, one in which the individual is no-longer-able-to-be-there. In death, dead persons can no longer return to be persons again; death is irreversible, absolute. The “terminated” in the name of my interpretation captures both this sense of absoluteness and that it is to the other, persisting persons that a dead person is no-longer-with. Furthermore, understanding death as the absolute impossibility helps us understand the “mineness” of death. In the mineness of death, death as a possibility is my ownmost, non-relational, and not-to-be-outstripped. Death
is my ownmost in that what I most essentially am- a being that can take up particular ways of being- is at stake in death. This is why Heidegger relates death as ownmost with death as the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there (Heidegger 294). Death, then, is the way of being wherein I lose not just my ways of being but Being-in-the-World itself-that very capacity to take on ways of being and exist as such in the world. This loss is mine, and in this loss, I cease to be a person and cannot ever be a person again. It makes sense to think of this loss as “mine” even though I will not experience or have phenomenological access to it, as other persons that persist will correctly attribute this death to me as “mine” after my demise. Also, death is non-relational in that it “lays claim” to me as an individual (Heidegger 308), meaning that in death I become physically terminated but other individuals remain persons; as such, the possibility of death “must be taken over by Dasein alone” (Heidegger 308). Lastly, death is not-to-be-outstripped as a person’s most extreme or “uttermost” possibility. Death is the most extreme possibility in that what is at stake is the most fundamental way for me to understand myself- being a person itself is at stake. My possibilities can go no further than the possible way of being wherein I no longer am a person. Death, understood as physically terminated Being-in-the-World, makes sense of the mineness of death as ownmost, non-relational, and not-to-be-outstripped.

Next, I am certain of this possibility. I observe the demise of others and induct an empirical certainty of demise, and thus of the ensuing state of being called death; however, I have a “higher” certainty of death than this. What I observe is that from empirical certainty of the event of demise arises a higher certainty, revealed through the state of mind of anxiety and through anticipation. “But the state-of-mind which can hold open the utter and constant threat to itself arising from Dasein’s ownmost individualized Being, is anxiety. In this state of mind, Dasein finds itself face to face with the ‘nothing’ of the possible impossibility of its existence. Anxiety is anxious about the potentiality-for-Being of the entity so destined, and in this way it discloses the uttermost possibility” (Heidegger 310). The possibility of death is first exposed as such (and not as the event of demise) through anxiety. Demise does happen, but what ensues is the termination of my Being-in-the-World. Anxiety exposes persisting me to this possibility. Particularly, what is revealed is that I am destined to no longer be a person; death is an essential part of my being- namely, its end. Death, as such, is not an event. Next, I can only see death as a possibility through what
Heidegger calls “anticipation.” “But Being towards this possibility, as Being-towards-death, is so to comport ourselves towards death that in this Being, and for it, death reveals itself as a possibility. Our terminology for such Being towards this possibility is “anticipation” of this possibility” (Heidegger 306). Death, therefore, is exposed to me as the uttermost possibility in anxiety, but I must anticipate death to see it as such. That is how I can be-certain of death. This corresponds with the following statement about being-certain: “the way to be certain of [death] is determined by the kind of truth which corresponds to it (disclosedness)” (Heidegger 309). Anxiety and anticipation disclose death as a possibility; death is not inducted through empirical study. Furthermore, it is through anticipation that death emerges to me as a constant threat. “In anticipating the indefinite certainty of death, Dasein opens itself to a constant threat arising out of its own ‘there’” (Heidegger 310). Death, then, is not an event and it is more significant than a mere event—it is a constant, indefinite threat. All in all, instead of understanding death as something that “happens” (as if it were demise), I understand through anxiety that I am destined to lose my Being-in-the-World and, through anticipation, am certain of the constant, indefinite threat of death as the end of my existence. We have covered how a person can be-certain of death, how death is not merely empirically certain, and how we do not arrive at certainty of death through the empirical observation of demise. Interpreting death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World, therefore, can explain all of Heidegger’s features of certainty. More importantly, death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World can be understood in a way that meets the second criteria for adequate interpretations. All in all, this interpretation has met both criteria for adequate interpretations.

Why Death as Being Physically Terminated Being-in-the-World is a Better Interpretation than Existing Interpretations

It can even be argued that interpreting death as physically terminated Being-in-the-world avoids Sartre’s criticism of Heidegger’s views of death as explained in Being and Nothingness. Sartre rejects Heidegger based on the insistence that death must be equated with demise and that therefore it is an “annihilation of possibles” and as such is not possible for Dasein. Thus, any notion of being-towards-death is impossible, providing grounds for Sartre to criticize Heidegger’s views on death. However, because it is possible to interpret death as a possibility (instead of equating it with the event of demise) yet escape the possibility paradox, we now have an interpretation of death (namely, physically terminated personhood) that is more true to Being and Time than Sartre’s own understanding of Heidegger’s views. as such, it is an adequate account of Being and Time’s account of death.
There are two reasons why death physically terminated peronhood is a better interpretation than the ones at hand. First, it stays true to *Being and Time* without yielding any contradictions or rejecting important passages. Specifically, it properly addresses the two criteria for adequate interpretations. Death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World arises from an existential analytic and fulfills all of the positive characterizations of such characteristics as possibility, mineness, and certainty found in *Being and Time*. It makes clear and substantiates the distinction between demise, dying, and death itself. And it avoids what seem to be contradictions or flawed readings raised by interpretive dilemmas such as the Possibility Paradox. Death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World then, sufficiently explains the entirety of the death chapter in *Being and Time*.

Furthermore, death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World holds an explanatory superiority over the rest of the interpretations. This means that if we take death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World for true, we can demonstrate the flaws of other interpretations such as death as world-collapse or death as anxiety attack. In fact, this has taken place in the paper: the criteria for a full understanding of Heidegger’s treatment of death in *Being and Time* are, as we have seen, resolved in death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World. Reading *Being and Time* as such results in the arguments we have raised against the rival interpretations. This explanatory superiority, along with the fact that it is the most accurate treatment of *Being and Time*, make death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World a coherent interpretation that is comparatively better than the existing interpretations.

**Conclusion**

I have established that death for Heidegger is best understood as being no-longer-Dasein. Such an interpretation meets the two criteria for adequate interpretation of *Being and Time*’s account of death: it makes sense of the interpretive dilemmas found in Heidegger’s treatment of the notions of possibility and certainty and it substantiates the distinctions between death, demise and dying. We have examined how other interpretations have failed to meet these two criteria. The result is that *Being and Time*’s account of death can be understood
in a more robust way by interpreting death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World.

Death is not the event of demise. Death is not the comportmental attitude or lifestyle of dying either. Instead, we have discovered that death is best understood as the way of being wherein an individual Dasein is no longer Dasein anymore; his physically terminated Being-in-the-World. This is useful for three reasons. First, it makes sense to attribute this way of being to the Dasein that dies, because other Dasein survive that death. From the perspective of persisting Dasein, it is proper to say of a Dasein that died that its way of being is “physically terminated.” Second, it makes sense to think of death as the absolute impossibility of Dasein. Furthermore, this way of being called death and understood as physically terminated Being-in-the-World can be described as Dasein’s ownmost, non-relational, and not-to-be-outstripped. Third, it makes sense to think of this as a certain possibility that is stronger than mere empirical certainty, and that does not depend on observing the demise of others but instead on the disclosing of death through anxiety and anticipation.

In contrast with existing alternative interpretations, interpreting death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World generates fewer inconsistencies, can account for the relevant textual evidence, and can asymmetrically explain the inability of alternative interpretations to make sense of the full range of text. The interpretation of death as physically terminated Being-in-the-World calls for a new way to think about how Being and Time describes the phenomenon of death, and my hope is that it can both help sharpen our understanding and encourage more thinking and questioning on this topic.
References:


JOSEPH DOWD

Aristotle and the Mind-Soul-Body Problem

“The Brain—is wider than the Sky—
For—put them side by side—
The one the other will contain
With ease—and You—beside—

The Brain is deeper than the sea—
For—hold them—Blue to Blue—
The one the other will absorb—
As Sponges—Buckets—do—

The Brain is just the weight of God—
For—Heft them—Pound for Pound—
And they will differ—if they do—
As Syllable from Sound—”

Emily Dickinson
I. Introduction

In his writings, the *De Anima* in particular, Aristotle makes some confusing remarks about the soul. He defines the soul as the form of the body (*De Anima* 412a20-21) and lists the intellect as part of the soul (*De Anima* 413b11-13, 24-27), but he suggests that thinking is not a bodily activity (*De Anima* 403a7-8). Furthermore, he says that the soul cannot exist without the body (*De Anima* 414a20), and yet he suggests that the intellect can exist separately (*De Anima* 413a4-8), calling it indestructible (*De Anima* 408b19) and everlasting (*De Anima* 413b24-26). Thus, one faces a difficult question: For Aristotle, what is the relationship between body, soul, intellect, and thinking?

In an effort to answer this question, scholars have often downplayed or loosely interpreted some of Aristotle’s claims. According to some scholars, when Aristotle calls the intellect “indestructible,” he is referring to God’s intellect—not to the human intellect, which perishes with the body (Caston, 207-211). According to others, the human intellect really is indestructible, but it is not, properly speaking, part of the soul (Gerson, 349). Still others conclude that the intellect is a part of the soul that does not fit Aristotle’s definition of the soul. Some even suggest that Aristotle did not really mean that thinking is a non-bodily activity (Magee, 25-26).

I do not believe that these interpretations are necessary. In this paper, I will argue that Aristotle’s claims about the soul and the intellect, taken literally, fit together into a coherent theory. Aristotle really does believe that the soul and the intellect are everything that he says they are. Specifically, he really believes that (1) thinking is a non-bodily activity, (2) the entire soul is the form of the body, (3) the intellect is part of the soul, and (4) the intellect is separable from the body.

II. Matter and Form

Before discussing Aristotle’s theories, one must understand two basic Aristotelian concepts—*matter* and *form*. Aristotle says that matter is potentiality and form is actuality (*De Anima* 412a9). In other words,

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1In this paper, I use the term “soul” to refer specifically to the human soul, except where otherwise indicated. (Aristotle speaks of animal souls and even plant souls as well as human souls.)
X’s matter is whatever is potentially X, and the corresponding form is what X’s matter needs in order to be X. (Notice that something need not be corporeal in order to be matter; for example, letters are the matter of syllables (Physica 195a16). Aristotle uses a bronze sphere to illustrate what he means by the terms “matter” and “form”: if bronze is the matter of a bronze sphere, then roundness is the corresponding form (Metaphysica 1045a26-29). Bronze is potentially a bronze sphere, and roundness is what bronze needs in order to be a bronze sphere.

Roundness is a shape, but forms are not limited to shapes. According to Aristotle, the senses perceive an object by receiving the object’s form (De Anima 424a19). Our senses receive colors, sounds, and flavors (De Anima 418a11-12). What do colors, sounds, flavors, and shapes have in common? They are all properties (Cross 13). As Richard Cross points out, the Aristotelian concept of form seems equivalent to the modern concept of properties. Thus, X’s matter is potentially X, while the corresponding form is the missing property—the property that X’s matter needs in order to be actually X.

III. Soul and Body

What is the relationship between soul and body for Aristotle? Aristotle defines the soul as the form of a living body (De Anima 412a19-20). As we have seen, forms are properties. Thus, the soul is a property of a living body. Aristotle also defines the soul as that which separates the living from the non-living (De Anima 413a20-21). In other words, X’s soul makes X alive. Therefore, the soul is a property that makes the body alive.

The soul need not be the only property of a living body. When Aristotle says that roundness is the form of a bronze sphere, he does not mean that roundness is the only property of a bronze sphere. Now, Aristotle says that the soul relates to the body as form to matter (De

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2 The sense in which I am using the term “potentially” should be fairly clear from the context, but I will explain it here. When I say that X’s matter is potentially X, I do not mean that it is potentially X in the same way that a bronze cube is potentially a bronze sphere. Granted, a bronze cube is potentially a bronze sphere in a sense, because one could melt the cube and recast it as a sphere. However, the bronze cube cannot continue to exist as a cube when it turns into a sphere. Thus, insofar as it is a cube, the bronze cube is not potentially a bronze sphere. For Aristotle, it is not the bronze cube but the bronze that is the matter of a bronze sphere. So, to clarify, when I say that X’s matter is potentially X, I mean that, if M is X’s matter, then M has the potential to be X while remaining M.
Harvest Moon

Anima 412a18-20, 412b5-7). In other words, if we start out with the body, then the missing property—the property that the body needs in order to be a living body—is the soul.

IV. Soul and Intellect

What is the relationship between the soul, the intellect, and thought? According to Aristotle, the soul thinks (De Anima 429a23). The intellect is the part of the soul (De Anima 429a21-22) by which the soul thinks (De Anima 429a22-23). Therefore, according to a literal reading of Aristotle, thinking is an activity that the soul performs by means of the intellect, which is part of the soul.

But what is the intellect? Aristotle says that the intellect has “no other nature than this, that it is potential (De Anima 429a21).” He adds that the intellect “is actually none of the existing things before it thinks (De Anima 429a23-24).” In other words, the intellect is pure potential. If the intellect is pure potential, and the soul thinks by means of the intellect, then the intellect must be the potential to think. Thus, the intellect is a property of the soul—the soul’s potential to think.

The intellect includes the potential to receive intelligible properties. According to Aristotle, thinking is like perceiving (De Anima 429a13). Moreover, he says that the intellect is to its objects as the senses are to their objects (De Anima 429a16-17). To perceive X, a sense-organ must receive X’s perceptible properties (De Anima 424a18-19). For example, to see X, the eye must receive X’s colors. Therefore, to think about X, the soul must receive X’s intelligible properties. Aristotle seems to think that the same property can come in different “versions.” Consider the property of redness. According to Aristotle’s theory, when I see a red object, my eyes receive redness, and when I think about redness, my intellect receives redness. But redness obviously does not exist in my intellect in the same way that it exists in my eyes. It exists in my eyes as a sensation, whereas it exists in my intellect as a concept. Thus, a property (e.g. redness) can come in at least two versions—perceptible and intelligible. The concept of X consists of X’s intelligible properties.

For Aristotle, the body does not participate in thinking. He says that thinking seems like an affection “peculiar to the soul itself (De Anima 403a7-8).” Because we can think about all things, Aristotle argues, the part of us that thinks “should not be mixed with the body; for in that case it would come to be of a certain kind, either hot or cold
As we have seen, to perceive their objects, the sense-organs must take on the objects’ perceptible properties. For example, the eye sees objects by taking on the objects’ colors. Hence, the eye has no inherent color (De Anima 418b26). If it had an inherent color, then it would not be able to take on all colors. Because we can think about anything, our thinking part must be able to take on the intelligible version of any property. Thus, our thinking part cannot have any inherent properties (aside from its ability to receive properties). For example, it cannot be either hot or cold: if it were, then it would not be able to take on both (intelligible) heat and (intelligible) coldness. But anything made of bodily matter must have some inherent properties. So the part of a person that thinks cannot consist of bodily matter. Therefore, the body does not participate in thinking.

I must be clear about what I mean here. When I say that the body does not participate in thinking, I do not mean that the body is irrelevant to thinking. Perception requires a body (De Anima 429b5), and perception is necessary for thought: “Unless one perceived things one would not learn or understand anything (De Anima 432a5).” Moreover, Aristotle says that thinking cannot occur without images (De Anima 431a17), and that only beings capable of perception can experience images (De Anima 428b11-16). In short, thinking depends on the body.

Why does thinking depend on perception and images? Aristotle says that images act like sense-perceptions for the thinking soul (De Anima 431a14). He seems to mean that the intellect receives information from images, just as the senses receive information from sense-objects. Sense-objects create images by imprinting their perceptible properties onto the sense-organs. Only then can the soul go to work, extracting intelligible properties from the images. Without perception, there would be no images, and without images, there would be no thinking. Thus, thinking requires bodily sense-organs.

In fact, according to Aristotle, images always accompany human thinking: “When one contemplates one must simultaneously contemplate an image (De Anima 432a8-9).” For example, we can think about a triangle only by placing a diagram before our eyes (De Memoria et Reminiscentia 449b31-450a7). Even after the soul has received intelligible properties, it can make use of that information only by turning to images. (Fortunately, we do not need to currently perceive X in order to experience an image of X. As we have seen, an image of X can persist after the sense-organs have lost contact with X, and we can recall images from the past.)
Nonetheless, for Aristotle, thinking is not a bodily activity. To give an analogy, consider seeing. When I say that external objects do not participate in seeing, I do not mean that external objects are irrelevant to seeing. External objects are obviously relevant to seeing: I can see only if there are some external objects around for me to see. When I say that external objects do not participate in seeing, I mean that seeing is an activity that takes place only in my eyes, not in external objects. Likewise, when Aristotle says that the body does not participate in thinking, he means that thinking is an activity that takes place only in the soul, not in bodily organs. When a person thinks about a chair, no part of his body receives the intelligible properties of a chair, but his soul does.

In fact, Aristotle does not think that images are necessary for every kind of thinking. On the contrary, he believes in a God that is pure actuality (Metaphysica 1072b26-27). This God cannot have a body, because it has no potentiality and is thus immaterial. Being bodiless, it cannot experience images. Nonetheless, it thinks (Metaphysica 1074b15). It seems that only embodied thinking requires images. If a bodiless entity can think, then thinking clearly cannot—or at least need not—be performed by some bodily organ.

V. Two Objections Addressed

Aristotle’s theory of thought may seem puzzling, even incoherent. According to Aristotle, the soul receives intelligible properties. But Aristotle thinks that the soul is itself a property. If the soul is a property, then how can it receive properties? A property is simply not the sort of thing that can possess properties of its own. A red thing can be hot or fast, but redness itself cannot hot or fast. Properties can belong to material objects, but no property can belong to another property.

Here, I think, our metaphysical assumptions simply differ from Aristotle’s. As Christopher Shields and Robert Heinaman have shown, some forms can qualify as substances in Aristotle’s metaphysical framework (Heinaman 102, Shields 142), and, as substances, these forms can have properties of their own (Shields 144). So, for Aristotle, there may not be a problem with saying that the soul receives intelligible proper-

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3I am ignoring the usual skeptical worries about whether the external objects that I see really exist. They are irrelevant to the current discussion, because Aristotle clearly believes that perception is caused by external objects. The issue in this paper is what Aristotle believes, not what is actually true.
ties. Yes, the soul is itself a property. But it is also a kind of substance (Heinaman 88, Shields 142), and thus it can possess properties of its own.\footnote{According to my interpretation, Aristotle sees thinking as a state of the soul itself. If I understand Shields and Heinaman correctly, they think that Aristotle sees all psychological states, not just thinking, as states of the soul itself. How do they explain the passages in which Aristotle distinguishes thinking from other psychological states by calling thinking non-bodily? Don’t such passages imply that the other psychological states are bodily states? Shields and Heinaman would presumably explain such passages by noting that most psychological states consist at least partly of bodily processes. For example, Shields argues that anger consists of a bodily process as well as an activity in the soul (Shields 148). Heinaman explicitly says that, ”with the possible exception of thinking,” psychological events involve both a bodily change and an activity in the soul (Heinaman 92). Because bodily processes necessarily accompany most psychological states, Shields and Heinaman would argue, Aristotle can say that those psychological states are bodily whereas thinking is non-bodily. Fortunately, I need not either accept or reject Shields’s and Heinaman’s interpretation of Aristotle when it comes to psychological states other than thinking. For the purposes of this paper, I need only show that Aristotle sees thinking as (1) an activity of the soul itself and (2) an activity which could, in principle, occur apart from bodily processes. To see why (2) is important for my argument, see §6.}

An objector might point out that Aristotle sometimes seems to attribute thinking to the body. For example, in one passage, Aristotle makes two puzzling remarks. First, he says: “Thought and contemplation decay because something else within is destroyed (De Anima 408b24-25).” In other words, the ability to think deteriorates as the body’s internal structures break down. Doesn’t this mean that thinking is performed by some internal bodily organ? Second, Aristotle says: “Thinking and loving and hating are not affections of that [i.e. the intellect], but of the individual thing [i.e. the body-soul composite] which has it (De Anima 408b25-27).” He seems to be saying that thinking is performed by the body-soul composite, not the intellect alone.

The first part of the objection is easily answered. The intellect cannot think without turning to images, and images require the body. As the body’s internal structures break down, a person’s ability to experience images deteriorates. Thus, his ability to think deteriorates as well. That does not mean that thinking is performed by some internal bodily organ.

The second part of the objection is a bit harder to answer. It seems to contradict passages of the De Anima that I have already cited, which insist that thinking is an activity limited to the soul. To respond to this part of the objection, we must examine the whole passage in question:
Thus thought and contemplation decay because something else within is destroyed, while thought is in itself unaffected. But thinking and loving or hating are not affections of that [i.e. thought, the intellect], but of the individual thing [i.e. the body-soul composite] which has it, in so far as it does [my italics]. Hence when this [i.e. the body or body-soul composite] too is destroyed we neither remember nor love; for these did not belong to that [i.e. the intellect], but to the composite thing which has perished. But the intellect is surely something more divine and is unaffected. (De Anima 408b24-30)

In this passage, Aristotle concludes that the body’s deterioration does not affect the intellect. Thus, this passage strongly suggests that thinking is non-bodily. So why does Aristotle say that thinking is an affection of the body-soul composite, rather than the soul alone? Presumably because images must accompany embodied thinking. Images are bodily. Thus, insofar as thinking belongs to the body-soul composite—insofar as thinking depends on images—thinking deteriorates along with loving, hating, memory, etc. as the body deteriorates. However, this does not mean that thinking is bodily in the relevant sense—i.e. that the body, rather than the soul itself, receives intelligible properties. It does not even mean that thinking cannot continue in some form when the body is destroyed and the soul is no longer embodied.5

VI. Separating the Intellect

On a number of occasions, Aristotle suggests that the intellect can be separated from the body. In fact, he offers an argument for this conclusion: “Not that anything prevents at any rate some parts [of the soul] from being separable, because of their being actualities of no body (De Anima 413a6-8).” In other words, if some part of the soul is not a property6 of the body, then that part could be separated from the body. The intellect is a part of the soul, but it is not a property of the

5Note that Aristotle says, “When [the body] is destroyed, we neither remember nor love,” rather than “[w]hen the body is destroyed, we neither remember, love, nor think.”

6For my purposes, I am using “property” as a synonym for “actuality.” As we have seen, forms are properties, and Aristotle says that form is actuality. However, Aristotle’s concept of actuality is actually broader than the concept of properties. In an odd remark, he even says that a sailor is the actuality of his ship (De Anima 413a8-9). Nonetheless, I take it that Aristotle is mainly concerned with actualities
body. Therefore, the intellect could be separated from the body.

Some readers may object that the intellect cannot exist on its own, apart from anything else. The intellect is merely the ability to think, and a free-floating ability is unintelligible. Every ability is the ability of something. To exist at all, an ability must belong to something else. Therefore, the intellect must belong to something else.

But Aristotle is not claiming that the intellect can exist on its own. He is simply claiming that it can exist apart from the body. In one striking passage, Aristotle suggests that the soul can be separated from the body: If some affection of the soul is peculiar to it, Aristotle declares, then the soul can be separated from the body.\(^7\) Thinking is an affection peculiar to the soul. Therefore, the soul can be separated from the body. And if the soul can be separated from the body, then the intellect might be separable too, because it is a property of the soul.

There is an obvious objection to this conclusion. In one place, Aristotle says that the soul cannot exist without the body (\textit{De Anima} 414a20). If that is true, then how can the soul be separated from the body? To answer this question, we must understand Aristotle’s notion of identity. According to Aristotle, X is X only as long as X can fulfill the role of X (\textit{Meteorologica} 390a10-11). For example, a blind eye is no longer really an eye (\textit{Meteorologica} 390a12-13), because an eye’s role is to see. Now, Aristotle defines the soul as a property of the body. Once separated from the body, the soul is no longer a property of the body. Therefore, the separated soul no longer fulfills the role of the soul. So the separated soul is no longer a soul.\(^8\) Thus, Aristotle can say both that (1) the soul does not exist without the body and (2) the soul is separable from the body.

Are there any other objections to this interpretation of Aristotle? One obvious objection, which does not rest on any specific Aristotelian concepts, is that a property of X simply cannot be separable from X. For example, it makes no sense to imagine the roundness of a bronze sphere separating from the bronze to which it belongs. If a property of X cannot be separable from X, and the soul is a property of the body, then the soul cannot be separable from the body.

\(^7\)One might question the validity of this reasoning. Flames undergo an affection, leaping, that is not an affection of the logs to which they are attached. Yet that does not mean that the flames can exist apart from the logs. (\textit{De Anima} 403a10)

\(^8\)For convenience, I will continue to refer to the separated soul as a “separated soul,” even though it is no longer technically a soul.
Unfortunately, this objection rests on a false premise. Modern physics has shown that, in some cases, a property is separable from the object to which it belongs. For example, an electron can emit some of its energy in the form of a photon (Gribbin 53). In this case, a property of the electron—namely, its energy—can separate from the electron. Therefore, the premise that a property of X cannot be separable from X is simply false.⁹

A more promising objection would have to appeal to Aristotle’s theoretical system; it would have to show that the soul’s separability is incompatible with some specific Aristotelian principle. After all, we are not discussing whether the soul really is separable. Rather, we are discussing whether Aristotle saw it as separable. What Aristotelian principle might conflict with the soul’s separability?

According to Aristotle, plurality requires matter (*Metaphysica* 1074a 32-33). I will call this the Plurality Principle. If multiple things have identical properties, then what makes them distinct things? Their properties cannot distinguish them, so their matter must be what distinguishes them: they are distinct things because they are made of different collections of matter. Thus, if X and Y have identical properties, then X cannot be distinct from Y unless X and Y consist of matter.

The Plurality Principle seems to conflict with the soul’s separability. Imagine a human being named Sam. Sam’s body is distinct from every other body, for it consists of different matter than every other body. Thus, we can say that Sam’s soul is distinct from every other soul: Sam’s soul is a property of Sam’s body, whereas every other soul is a property of a different body. But what happens to Sam’s soul when it separates from Sam’s body? Once separated, Sam’s soul no longer belongs to any matter. Thus, given the Plurality Principle, one might argue that there is nothing to distinguish Sam’s separated soul from any other soul. In short, given the Plurality Principle, one might argue

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⁹One might object that energy is a separable property whereas the soul is not. This might be true if the soul were the body’s structure. According to one common interpretation, Aristotle sees the soul as the body’s structure (Heinaman 88). It is hard to see how X’s structure could separate from X. What would it even mean for X’s structure to separate from X?

However, Aristotle does not seem to think that the soul is the body’s structure. As Heinaman points out (Heinaman 88-89), Aristotle explicitly denies that the soul is a “harmony” or “attunement” of the body’s parts. Once we reject the theory that the soul is the body’s structure, it becomes harder to argue that the soul cannot be a separable property. Aristotle denies that the soul is a “harmony” or “attunement” in *De Anima* 407b30-408a5, a passage not included in the translation that I am using in this paper. For a translation of the *De Anima* that includes this passage, see Terence Irwin and Gail Fine, *Aristotle: Selections* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995).
that Sam’s soul cannot exist—at least as an individual soul—apart from Sam’s body.

My response to this objection may explain why Aristotle sees a connection between thinking and the soul’s separability. As we have seen, Aristotle says that the soul is separable precisely because thinking is a non-bodily activity. If thinking is a non-bodily activity, then Sam’s soul might continue thinking after separating from Sam’s body. And if Sam’s separated soul continues thinking, then it has matter. (Remember, something need not be corporeal in order to be matter.) If M is potentially X, then M is X’s matter. A soul is potentially a thinking soul, so a thinking soul has matter—namely, a soul. Thus, if Sam’s separated soul continues thinking, then Sam’s separated soul has matter. And if Sam’s separated soul has matter, then the Plurality Principle does not prevent it from continuing to exist as an individual apart from Sam’s body. (Note that this is true even if all separated souls have identical thoughts and, thus, identical properties.)

VII. Killing the Passive Intellect

Our interpretation of Aristotle faces a final major objection. In one passage, Aristotle says that the “passive intellect” is perishable (De Anima 430a25). This claim is ambiguous, but I take it to mean that the passive intellect perishes along with the body. In that case, the passive intellect is not separable from the body. Doesn’t this contradict with my conclusion that Aristotle sees the intellect as separable from the body?

To understand Aristotle’s claim about the passive intellect, we must investigate the challenging passage in which it occurs. In this passage, Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of intellect. Following the traditional terminology, I will call them the “passive” intellect and the “agent” intellect. For every class of things, Aristotle states, there is some matter that can become those things and some agent that produces them (De Anima 430a10-13). For example, pottery requires both clay and the art of pottery. Clay can become pots, and the art of pottery produces pots from clay. Thus, Aristotle argues, in the case of the soul, there is an entity that can become all things, and there is another entity that produces all things (De Anima 430a15-16). The first entity is the passive intellect, while the second entity is the agent intellect.
What is this passive intellect that becomes all things? Here “all things” presumably does not literally mean all things. We must keep in mind the structure of Aristotle’s argument. For any class of things, Aristotle argues, there is some matter that is potentially all of those things. In this case, we are discussing the intellect. So we are concerned with the class of things called intelligible properties. As we have seen, the soul can receive intelligible properties. Moreover, the soul can think about anything, so it must be able to receive all intelligible properties. The passive intellect, then, is the soul’s potential for all intelligible properties. The passive intellect can become all things in the sense that it can become all intelligible properties.

The agent intellect must be an entity that imposes intelligible properties onto the passive intellect. Again, recall the pot analogy. Clay receives the properties of a pot, and the art of pottery imposes those properties onto clay. Likewise, the passive intellect can receive intelligible properties, and the agent intellect imposes those properties onto the passive intellect. Aristotle compares the agent intellect to light (De Anima 430a16-18). Light illuminates visible objects, imprinting their colors onto the eye. As we have seen, the intellect—that is, the passive intellect—receives intelligible properties from images. Just as light illuminates visible objects, so does the agent intellect illuminate images, imprinting their intelligible properties onto the passive intellect.

Scholars strongly disagree about the nature of the agent intellect. Many think that the agent intellect is a substance separate from the human intellect. Some even identify it with God’s intellect (Caston 199). Others argue that the passive intellect and the agent intellect are two aspects of the individual human intellect (Caston 202). Fortunately, for our present purposes, we do not need to take sides in the debate over the agent intellect. Aristotle does not say that the agent intellect perishes with the body, so there is no possible contradiction between Aristotle’s description of the agent intellect and my claim that Aristotle sees the intellect as separable from the body.

We are finally in a position to answer the question that was posed at the beginning of this section: If the intellect can exist apart from the body, then why does Aristotle say that the passive intellect perishes with the body? To answer this question, we must realize that the separated soul is deprived of images. Images are impressions that sense-objects produce in bodily sense-organs. Thus, there can be no images apart from the body. As we have seen, the soul receives intelligible properties from images. Thus, deprived of images, the separated soul
cannot receive intelligible properties; it no longer has the potential for any new intelligible properties. By definition, the passive intellect is the soul’s potential for all intelligible properties. Therefore, the separated soul no longer has a passive intellect; the passive intellect has perished with the body.

It might seem that I have undermined my own argument. According to my interpretation of Aristotle, the human intellect is immortal and separable from the body. But I have just admitted that the passive intellect perishes with the body. As for the agent intellect, it may not even be part of the human intellect. Because the passive intellect perishes with the body, many interpreters have concluded that Aristotle sees the human intellect as inseparable from the body. According to this interpretation, when Aristotle says that the intellect can exist separately, he is referring to God’s intellect, not to the human intellect.

However, this interpretation will not do. “Concerning the intellect and the potentiality for contemplation,” Aristotle declares, “it seems to be a different kind of soul, and this alone can exist separately (De Anima 413b24-26).” In this passage, Aristotle says that the intellect can exist separately, and he cannot be referring to God’s intellect. Aristotle’s God has no potentiality at all: it is pure actuality (Metaphysica 1072b26-27). Thus, the phrase “the potentiality for contemplation” cannot refer to God’s intellect. Moreover, Aristotle calls the intellect that can exist separately “a different kind of soul.” Here he seems to be speaking somewhat loosely: properly speaking, the intellect is a part or property of the soul, not a soul in its own right. Nonetheless, one thing is clear enough: Aristotle cannot be referring to God’s intellect, for Aristotle’s God has no body, and a soul is, by Aristotle’s own definition, a property of a body. In short, Aristotle does not think that God’s intellect is the only intellect that can exist separately.

This conclusion finds support from Aristotle’s discussion of reproduction. In his De Generatione Animalium, Aristotle says that semen contributes to reproduction by forming some of the mother’s matter into a child (De Generatione Animalium 735a10). The child’s soul exists in the semen in a latent form (De Generatione Animalium 737a8-9) and enters the mother’s womb along with the semen. This proto-soul is partly separable from the body in organisms that have intellect (De Generatione Animalium 737a9-10). Here again, Aristotle suggests that the intellect is separable from the body, and he cannot be talking about God’s intellect. Surely Aristotle does not mean that God enters the mother’s womb along with the semen!
Aristotle seems to use the term “intellect” in at least four different senses:

1. the soul’s potential to think (I will call this the “intellect proper”); 
2. the passive intellect, the soul’s potential for all intelligible properties; 
3. the agent intellect, which imposes intelligible properties onto the soul; and 
4. God’s mental state, which is pure actuality with no potentiality at all.

We are currently concerned with the first two items.

The intellect proper might be separable from the body even if the passive intellect is not. The separated soul cannot receive any new concepts. Thus, it no longer has a passive intellect. However, by itself, this fact does not prevent the separated soul from thinking. Perhaps the separated soul retains the concepts that it had received before death.\(^{10}\) If so, then it should be able to think about those concepts. Or perhaps the separated soul thinks the way God thinks. Aristotle’s God thinks about itself, and “its thinking is a thinking on thinking (\textit{Metaphysics} 1074b34).” If the separated soul can think, then it has an intellect proper.

But what about the separated soul’s lack of images? Doesn’t that prevent the separated soul from thinking? Not necessarily. Granted, Aristotle says that images must always accompany embodied thinking. Yet, as we have seen, he believes in a God who engages in imageless thought. While the soul is embodied, images must always accompany its thinking. But bodiless thinking may be a different story.

In the end, Aristotle’s views about the separated soul are not very well developed. This is not surprising. After all, Aristotle has very little to information go on. However, he apparently believes that the soul

\(^{10}\)This is doubtful. Aristotle seems to think that the soul retains a concept only as long as it is thinking about that concept. According to Aristotle, images are remembered in their own right (\textit{De Memoria et Reiminiscentia}. 450a23), but “objects of thought” (i.e. concepts) are remembered only “in virtue of an incidental association” (\textit{De Memoria et Reiminiscentia}. 450a14). In short, Aristotle seems to think that, whenever a person wants to think about X, he has to recall an image of X and extract the concept of X from that image; a person cannot remember the concept of X directly.
can separate from the body because it performs a non-bodily activity—thinking. And if thinking is a non-bodily activity, then it should—so Aristotle thought—be able to continue in some form after the soul separates from the body. And if the separated soul can think, then it possesses an intellect, for the intellect is the soul’s potential for thinking.

VIII. Conclusion

Aristotle means what he says. The entire soul is a property of the body. The intellect is a property of the soul. Specifically, the intellect is the soul’s ability to think. Thus, the intellect is part of the soul. Because the intellect is a property of the soul, thinking is an activity performed by the soul itself, not a bodily activity. When the body dies, the soul lives on, separated from the body. When separated from the body, the soul is no longer a property of the body and, therefore, no longer a soul. Thus, Aristotle is quite right when he says that the soul cannot exist apart from the body. Only a person’s intellect survives death, carried away by the ex-soul, “and this alone is immortal and eternal (De Anima 430a24).”
References:


“The urbane eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume seldom put a foot wrong, but he did say that while mistakes in religion are dangerous, generally speaking mistakes in philosophy are merely ridiculous. I believe he was mistaken about this, as does anyone who supposes that there is something diabolical in the region of relativism, multiculturalism or postmodernism, something which corrupts and corrodes the universities and the public culture, that sweeps away moral standards, lays waste young people’s minds, and rots our precious civilization from within.”

Simon Blackburn

1Quoted from Truth: A Guide for the Perplexed, 2005
Introduction—the Trouble With Predicates of Personal Taste

George Bush and Mohandas Gandhi walk into a bar. As it happens, the only dish served is chili and the waiter puts forth a sample. Bush takes a spoonful and says with a folksy chuckle, “Man-alive, I’ll tell you what—This chili is tasty.” Gandhi, a life-long vegetarian, finds beef especially nauseating. Nevertheless, Gandhi takes a spoonful and reports, “My friend, it is not the case that this chili is tasty.” Indeed, for Gandhi the chili is not tasty and for Bush it is tasty.

The matter presents a problem for semantics when it comes to evaluating what is said in asserting sentences containing predicates of personal taste, *i.e.* ‘is tasty’, such as (1).

(1) This chili is tasty.

What makes (1) problematic is the basis on which we determine whether what is said is true. Semanticists have traditionally taken sentences such as (2) to be paradigmatic.

(2) This object’s mass is greater than 30 kilograms.

But evaluating (1) in the way we evaluate (2) would presuppose some fact of the matter that would determine the truth of (1) in some “absolute” sense. But there does not seem to be any such fact of the matter. If there were any fact of the matter as to what is “objectively” tasty, this would suggest widespread epistemic malfunction across the population. After all, judgments about matters of taste are wildly diverse. Instead, it seems that tastiness depends on something about us—what our preferences, likes, and dislikes are. That is, matters of taste are subjective.

These seemingly incompatible desiderata—an explanation in line with the assumption that the truth or falsity of an assertion is in some sense “absolute”, and an account of subjective matters of taste on the other—present a difficulty for orthodox semantics. As a result of such seemingly incompatible desiderata, semantic theories tend to teeter between accounting for one at the cost of the other. The approach that

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2In using (1), I follow Lasersohn’s chili example. For further examples of taste-predicates contained in the recent literature, see: Kölbel’s *Picasso was a better artist than Matisse* (2003), Lasersohn’s *Rollercoasters are fun* (2005), MacFarlane’s *Helen was beautiful at the beginning of the Trojan War* (2005), Keshat’s *John thinks he is handsome* (2008).

3By “standard semantic theories”, I refer to invariantism, expressivism, and contextualism. I do not consider invariantism or expressivism. Invariantism does not
treats (1) no differently than (2)—a type of semantic invariantism—does not seem to account for the subjectivity associated with predicates of personal taste. Contextualism aims to capture this subjectivity by fixing what is said by ‘is tasty’ across speakers’ preferences, likes, and dislikes at the time the sentence is asserted. Drawing on Peter Laser-sohn and John MacFarlane’s work on relativism, I will argue that a reason to reject contextualism is its inability to account for disagreement concerning matters of taste.

In defense of contextualism, Cappelen proposes Pluralistic Content Relativism (PCR) as a methodological principle that affords contextualism the capacity to secure disagreement. PCR challenges the widely held assumption of monopropositionalism—that token speech acts express no more than one proposition. According to PCR, a token speech act expresses indefinitely many propositions of which at most one is salient interpretation. A PCR-informed contextualism assigns some propositions a role in handling subjectivity, and assigns some propositions a role in accounting for disagreement. Cappelen claims that PCR thereby undermines relativism’s unique capacity to furnish a semantics for ‘is tasty’ and adequately account for both disagreement and subjectivity.

I contest this claim. I argue: (i) that there are simple cases of disagreement that evade PCR-contextualist treatment, (ii) that what PCR-contextualism predicts is said in assertion wildly exceeds speakers’ epistemic access, and (iii) that because PCR-contextualism predicts that disagreement is illusory, it offers no reason for semanticists already committed to genuine disagreement to prefer it. Moreover, in order to explain how disagreement could possibly be illusory, PCR-contextualism commits itself to employing semantic blindness—an error theory already central to PCR. Employing semantic blindness opens the door for competing theories to match the explanatory force of PCR-contextualism. If successful, my essay strikes a blow against one of the most explicit defenses of contextualism against relativist semantics.

I. Speaker-Indexical Context-Sensitivity

seem capable of making sense of the subjectivity involved in predicates of personal taste. Expressivism characterizes the subjectivity of taste assertions as in some way continuous with experience. However, because expressivism resists assigning truth conditions to utterances, expressivist treatments seem to have difficulty accounting for embedded sentences and modal operators. For an expressivism that purports to address these worries, see Gibbard (1990).
If taste-talk is subjective, in what does this subjectivity consist? Initially, we supposed that whether or not something is tasty depends on the person doing the tasting and that tastiness varies across agents. One proposal is that an assertion of some token sentence is subjective if its truth-value may vary across agents—if the expression may be true for some but false for others. Following this line of thought, let us call the subjectivity that an adequate semantic theory ought to capture the **Subjectivity Desideratum**.

**Subjectivity Desideratum:** the truth-value of a taste-predicating expression may vary across agents.

An adequate semantics ought to explain why Bush evaluates (1) as true and Gandhi evaluates it as false.

One proposal aims to capture SD as the consequence of the diverse standards of taste ranging across agents. The approach is semantically formalized by building off of the context-sensitivity exhibited by indexicals. The orthodox semantic framework for handling such indexicality is found in the theory of demonstratives proposed by David Kaplan.\(^4\) Kaplan’s framework is sensitive to the fact that sentences containing indexical pronouns such as ‘I’ are true in some contexts, and false in others. An obvious example is sentence (3).

\[(3) \text{ I am George Bush.}\]

Central to Kaplan’s framework is the distinction between two types of meaning: *content* and *character*. Insofar as two agents independently asserting (3) utter the same expression, the expressions they respectively assert have the same character. Yet in another sense, what (3) means depends on who asserts (3). If George Bush asserts (3), it means that *he* (George Bush) is George Bush. And if Gandhi asserts (3), it means that *he* (Gandhi) is George Bush. Call this sense of meaning ‘content’.

According to Kaplan’s framework, characters are functions from context to content whereby contextual factors are taken as input and semantic content is output. The indexical pronoun ‘I’ in (3) encodes a rule that assigns the relevant contextual factor—the agent responsible for the utterance—a role in determining the content expressed in assertion. Because the relevant contextual factor varies across Gandhi and Bush’s respective contexts of use, their respective assertions diverge with respect to content. Given the facts of the matter, Bush’s assertion

\(^4\)See Kaplan (1989).
(3) evaluates as true and Gandhi’s assertion (3) evaluates as false—(3) is true for George Bush and false for Gandhi. Kaplan’s framework for indexicality thereby captures SD for ‘I’. If talk about truth for an agent leaves you uncomfortable, the indexicalist can explain: ‘S is true for A’ amounts to ‘S, as uttered by A, is true’.

Following this line of thought, the speaker-indexicalist explains that predicates of personal taste encode a rule that indexically fixes the semantic contribution of ‘is tasty’ to the speaker’s standards of taste operative at the context of use. So, George Bush’s asserting (1) fixes the content of ‘is tasty’ with respect to George Bush’s standard of taste, and Gandhi’s assertion fixes the content of ‘is tasty’ with respect to Gandhi’s standard of taste. The contextualism that models ‘is tasty’ after the indexicality exhibited by ‘I’ identifies the content expressed by assertions (1) and (4) with the content expressed by assertions (5) and (6) respectively.

(1) This chili is tasty.
(4) It is not the case that this chili is tasty.
(5) This chili is tasty for me.
(6) It is not the case that this chili is tasty for me.

Due to their respective tastes, Bush evaluates the content expressed by (1) as true, and Gandhi evaluates (1) as false. Speaker-indexical contextualism thereby captures SD.\(^5\)

However, the speaker-indexical treatment faces counterexamples. Speakers often realize their standards of taste are deviant or unique, and resort to standards they themselves do not hold. Gandhi may reflect, and utter (7) or (8).

(7) Although I hate it, most people would find it tasty.
(8) Although I hate it, maybe the chili is tasty and you will like it.\(^6\)

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\(^5\)This approach treats ‘is tasty’ as an indexically context-sensitive predicate. This is not to say that contextualism amounts to indexicality. MacFarlane considers non-indexical contextualism. According to non-indexical contextualism, it is the circumstance concerning which the content is evaluated that is context-sensitive. However, as MacFarlane argues, non-indexical contextualism cannot make sense of genuine disagreement. So, non-indexical contextualism should not evade the argument forwarded by the relativist. See MacFarlane (2009).

\(^6\)One might find the construction of sentence (8) to be pragmatically incoherent as a variant of Moore’s paradox. In such a case, it may be helpful to read ‘I’ with emphatic stress. For example, consider servers that often assert sentences...
In counterexamples (7) and (8), the operative standards of taste seem to be determined by a party other than the speaker who may or may not be involved in the conversation.\(^7\) So, a speaker-indexicalist treatment does not seem to explain (7) and (8).

The speaker-indexicalist can propose two solutions here: (i) explain why (7) and (8) seem unpalatable by arguing that we are in some sense semantically blind to what is actually being said. Semantic blindness is the phenomenon by which language users are unaware of the relevant context-sensitivity exhibited by an expression. An error theory may explain that the speaker-indexical treatment of (7) and (8) seems implausible only because we are blind to the actual semantic content of (7) and (8). Semantic blindness will be at the center of Cappelen’s defense of contextualism, so, for now, I will bracket (i). Alternatively, the contextualist might propose (ii) that predicates of personal taste do not exhibit the indexicality of ‘I’, but perhaps some other form of indexicality. As I will argue in the next section, any such proposal that captures SD by relativizing content across contexts of utterance will not be able to account for genuine disagreement.

II. The Relativist’s Argument From Disagreement

Suppose Bush and Gandhi respectively assert (1) and (4), only this time suppose that (1) and (4) express minimal propositions. By ‘minimal proposition’, I mean a proposition that is not context-sensitive beyond the syntactically triggered context-sensitivity exhibited by pronouns such as ‘I’ and ‘this’. The contextualist may rightly interject that a minimalist semantics fails to explain SD. However, there is also something we lose on the contextualist reading as well. Namely, the minimal (1) and (4) contradict one another, whereas (5) and (6) do not.

This turns out to be a problem for contextualism because conflict at the level of content seems central to disagreement. By disagreement, such as (8) to make operative the normative take on the matter, the server’s own tastes notwithstanding. If one does finds (8) to be simply incoherent, my argument remains sound on the basis of counterexample (7).

\(^7\)Here, (7) and (8) invert a counterexample that Lasersohn puts forth. Lasersohn’s ‘This is fun, but most people would hate it’ counters a contextualism that generically quantifies a hidden argument place set to ‘is tasty’. Lasersohn’s counterexample is meant to undermine a type of contextualism that yields Roller coasters are fun for people in general (or, This chili is tasty for people in general). Lasersohn thereby aims to show that whether something is tasty may be local to the speaker. These counterexamples are inverted in (7) and (8)—whereby the operative standard of taste in (7) and (8) is generic, the speaker’s dissent notwithstanding.
I mean genuine disagreement—disagreement in which one party rejects what the other party asserts. To be sure, if George Bush asserts (3) and Gandhi asserts (8), the two are not disagreeing.

(3) I am George Bush.

(8) It is not the case that I am George Bush.

Conflict at the level of content requires George Bush asserting (3) and Gandhi asserting (9).

(3) I am George Bush.

(9) You are not George Bush.

Given that the speaker-indexical treatment of (1) and (4) loses the disagreement, what would it take to contradict (1) at the level of content? Mimicking the form of (3) and (9) are (1) and (10).

(1) This chili is tasty.

(10) It is not the case that this chili is tasty for you.

Here, the contextualist would have to propose that syntactic triggers (i.e. by a ‘for n’ phrase) override indexicality in fixing the semantic contribution of ‘is tasty’. Let us grant this. Even so, this does not afford contextualism an explanation of the disagreement that does arise from Bush’s (1) and Gandhi’s (4).

Contextualism’s inability to account for conflict at the level of content follows from its bottom-up approach by which the context of use fixes content. It is this relativized content that is evaluated for truth. In order to capture the disagreement, an adequate semantic theory ought to capture SD without relativizing content to the context of use.8

Enter the relativist. The relativist’s argument is that only assessment sensitivity will do justice to the linguistic data, whereas indexical context-sensitivity generates the “problem of lost disagreement.” Relativism maintains a minimalist semantics furnishing contradiction between Bush’s (1) and Gandhi’s (4). Having secured contradiction,

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8Note that this is a stronger claim than Lasersohn’s. Lasersohn couches the “dilemma” as presenting an epistemic problem, stating, “This is our central dilemma. It seems intuitively like sentences containing predicates of personal taste could be true relative to one person but false relative to another, but if we analyze them in this way, it appears to force us into claiming that they express different contents for different speakers, and then we no longer seem to be able to explain accurately which utterances contradict each other and which don’t.” See Lasersohn (2004).
relativism aims to capture SD by appealing to the context of assessment—the concrete context in which the sentence is evaluated.\textsuperscript{9} The context of assessment includes a pragmatically determined \texttt{<taste>} parameter that fixes the standards of taste operative in evaluation. So, (1) evaluates as true from Bush’s context of assessment and (1) evaluates as false from Gandhi’s context of assessment. This amounts to the context-sensitivity of the very assignment of truth-values and captures SD for the relativist.

According to standard views, propositions take truth-values relative to circumstances of evaluation—which are usually taken to be possible worlds. For instance, (2) may be true relative to a world in which there are objects more massive than 30 kilograms, but is not true relative to a world lacking any objects more massive than 30 kilograms. The Kaplanian framework goes further and takes circumstances of evaluation to be \texttt{<time, world>} pairs, according to which (2) is evaluated relative to the relevant world and time. For example, if Jim asserts (2) before the 31 kilogram dumbbell shatters into dust, (2) evaluates as true relative to the \texttt{<time, world>} of use but false relative to the \texttt{<time, world>} of assessment. Relativism proposes that sentences containing predicates of personal taste express propositions that take truth-values relative to \texttt{<time, world, taste>} triplets. The non-standard parameter of evaluation captures the notion that assessors evaluate sentences relative to a standard of taste apart from any fact of the matter concerning the world.

The proposal amounts to an argument to the best explanation: if we want an adequate semantics of taste-predicates, then we must take expressions containing taste-predicates to be assessment-sensitive. Having only a bare-bones sketch of the relativist framework, we are now in a position to approach Cappelen’s defense of contextualist semantics in the face of relativism.

III. Contextualism Appropriates Pluralistic Content Relativism

By orthodox frameworks, it is assumed that the single proposition as a theoretical apparatus can sufficiently handle any semantic explanan-

\textsuperscript{9}This does not commit the relativist to rejecting that (1) could ever be use-sensitive. Recall that minimalism already commits relativism to the context-sensitivity of pronouns such as: ‘I’, ‘this’, ‘that’. In addition, insofar as agents do express the subject-indexical ‘is tasty’, a relativist may piggyback off of contextualism.
dum. This assumption underlies the very contextualist and relativist semantics that we have so far discussed. Cappelen parts ways with monopropositionalism by reversing the order of explanation. He proposes one of the few, albeit (by his own admittance) radical, contextualist defenses against relativism in the literature.

Cappelen argues that if we take the linguistic data afforded by indirect speech reports as primary, we would realize that token speech acts express a plurality of propositions. Call this Pluralism.

**Pluralism (PP):** An utterance U of a sentence S in a context C will (literally) assert (and say and claim) a plurality of propositions. Call this Pluralism.

The speech act pluralist’s explanatory strategy is simple: argue that the explananda, *i.e.* both the SD and disagreement, can be captured within the indefinite quantity of propositions expressed in assertion. A reason to reject relativism would be PCR’s ability to afford contextualism an account of the very linguistic practice that motivates relativism, *i.e.* disagreement about matters of taste, but without the extra theoretical baggage of sensitivity to contexts of assessment. I contest this claim—I argue that PCR does not afford contextualism an adequate account of disagreement concerning predicates of personal taste.

The argument for PP rests on an interpretation of indirect speech reports. Consider (12) through (16), the indirect speech reports of (11). The idea is that if (12) to (16) are indeed true reports of the terrorist’s assertion (11), then it follows that the terrorist’s speech act expresses a plurality of propositions including what is reported in (12) . . . (16).

(11) I will blow up the biggest building in the city and incinerate this city.

(12) He says that he will blow up that building and incinerate this city.

(13) He says that he will blow up the building.

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10*Pluralism* is taken directly from Cappelen (2008).

11(11), and (12) . . . (16) instantiate a version of Scott Soames’s terrorist scenario in Soames that is stripped down. See Soames (2002). Cappelen and Lepore use the terrorist scenario to propose that,

“. . . indirect reports are sensitive to innumerable non-semantic features of reported utterances and even on the context of the report itself. As a result, typically there will be indefinitely many correct indirect reports of any particular utterance.”

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(14) He says that he is going to destroy downtown.

(15) He says that he is going to kill civilians.

(16) He says that he is attacking us.

The approach depends on taking seriously the reliability of indirect speech reports: because the plurality of these reports are true, what is said by the terrorist’s assertion must therefore be pluralistic. Another argument for PP may be that monopropositionalism bears the burden of proof in justifying the seemingly extraneous theoretical mechanism—*the* underlying singular proposition—whereas PP does not.

Note that Cappelen owes an explanation as to why the total set of expressed propositions is not realized by individual interpreters. To address this concern, one must see PCR as a thesis continuous with a methodological approach that takes seriously semantic blindness:

“You’re in a fog of content where it’s hard (if not impossible) to distinguish the semantic content from all the other content that’s floating around. It is impossible to directly access semantic content in this fog—none of our intuitions about content come with “True Semantic Content” stamped on them.”

Here, Cappelen takes it to be a methodological mistake to determine semantic content by speaker or listener intuition. Call this **Fog Principle.**

**Fog Principle (FP):** It is impossible to directly access/distinguish the semantic content expressed by a token assertion.

However, FP seems to undermine the very capacity to discriminate true

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13 Cappelen and Ernest Lepore elsewhere distinguish semantic content from speech act content. According to Cappelen and Lepore, “The proposition semantically expressed...does not exhaust the speech act content...” See Cappelen & Lepore (pg. 144, 2004). However, in combining PCR with contextualism, Cappelen is forced to forego a minimalist semantics, saying,

“The semantic content of A’s utterance of “Roller coasters are fun” in C1 is *that roller coasters are fun by A’s standards*, the semantic content of B’s utterance of “Roller coasters are not fun” in C2 is that *roller coasters are not fun by B’s standards.*”

By combining PCR with contextualism, the distinction between semantic content and speech act content collapses.
from false indirect speech reports. For example, suppose a bystander asserted the indirect speech report (17).

(17) He says that we should expect atmospheric pollution, especially carbon emissions and sulfuric vapors to rise as a result of debris, which will result from his blowing up the building, but that we need not worry so long as it rains on Friday.

It seems that (17) is implausible—the terrorist did not say (17). However, any such attempt to determine what is not said is itself subject to FP. Echoing Cappelen, it is impossible to directly access semantic content in this fog—none of our intuitions about content come with “False Semantic Content” stamped on them. The argument employs a reductio ad absurdum. If FP is the case, it follows that it is impossible for agents to distinguish what is said from what is not said in assertion. However, we often do know what is not said in assertion, i.e. we know that (17) is not said in some assertion of (11). So, reject FP.

One might defend FP by appealing to the immediacy of “positive” indirect speech reports and the derivative nature of “negative” reports. Whereas indirect speech reports such as (12)…(16) tend to capture the plurality of propositions expressed by (11), reports of what is not said such as (17) are possible only inferentially given what is said and contextual factors such as assertor psychology and intention. However, FP itself undermines this defense, because the set of propositions expressed by an assertion is never entirely apparent (to anyone, including speaker and hearer). It cannot be ruled out that the negation of what is inferred is not contained in the set of propositions expressed in assertion.

As it stands, FP seems too strong by light of Cappelen’s own evidence. For, Cappelen does argue for PP on the basis of indirect speech reports. This assumes that interpreters responsible for indirect speech reports do have access to semantic content. What we would like is reason for PP without losing the possibility of determining true from false indirect speech reports. For now, let us assume Cappelen’s account gets off the ground.

In addition to PP and FP, PCR’s defense of contextualism requires a third principle—Content Relativism.

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14 The conclusion of my argument seems to be confirmed by Cappelen’s own admission. In response to the question of how semantics is possible given FP, Cappelen says, “I consider those proposals work in progress. So at this point, consider the claim that PCR does not mean the death of semantics a promissory note.” See Cappelen (2008).
**Content Relativism (CR):** What is said by an utterance \( U \) of sentence \( S \) in a context of utterance \( C \) varies across contexts of interpretation.

Behind CR, Cappelen explains, is a set of simple assumptions about saliency that explain the widespread assumption of monopropositionalism amongst philosophers as a tendency to fixate on the most salient and apparent proposition at the context of interpretation.\(^{15}\) Assertion at the context of use \( C_U \) expresses indefinitely many propositions for which the context of interpretation \( C_I \) plays a content determinative role by making salient a single element from the fixed set of propositions expressed at \( C_U \).\(^{16}\)

Cappelen explains that monopropositionalists fail to appreciate the plurality of interpretations of a speech act. It would be the result of the mistaken assumption of monopropositionalism that theorists find the semantics of predicates of personal taste so puzzling, having to adjudicate amongst semantic theories on the basis of explananda that resist subsumption under a single proposition.

PCR combines with contextualism to assign the context of interpretation a role in capturing SD: A token proposition expressed by asserting a taste-predicating sentence is salient only if the taste predicate has a hidden argument place set indexically to the interpreter/interpreter’s standards of taste. Consider sentence (1) asserted at Bush’s context of use \( C_{U,Bush} \). PCR combines with contextualism to predict that Bush interprets (1) at the context of interpretation \( C_{I,Bush} \) as (18), and that Gandhi interprets (1) at the context of interpretation \( C_{I,Gandhi} \) as (19).

(1) This Chili is tasty.

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\(^{15}\)For the sake of clarity, I will now conform to Cappelen’s way of talk. I refer to the ultimate truth-bearers expressed in assertion as ‘propositions’. I call ‘content’ the single proposition saliently singled out in interpretation. Note that semantic content is always propositional. Under monopropositionalist semantics such as relativism, ‘proposition’ is synonymous with ‘content’. I will maintain using the term ‘context of use’, although Cappelen uses ‘context of utterance’. I will use ‘the context of interpretation’ to refer to the concrete situation in which a speech act is interpreted. It is the concrete situation roughly equivalent to the relativist’s context of assessment.

\(^{16}\)It may be helpful to note that Cappelen at times prefers the more descriptive nomenclature “Two-Dimensional Contextualism” to describe PCR-contextualism. Here, the context of use fixes which propositions are expressed in assertion, and the context of interpretation plays a content determinative role by determining which of these propositions is salient in interpretation. For the purposes of this essay, I conform to Cappelen’s notation \( C_{<\text{context}>,<\text{agent}>} \). The \( <\text{context} > \) parameter takes use \( U \) or interpretation \( I \), and the \( <\text{agent} > \) parameter takes the agent, i.e. Bush or Gandhi, doing the asserting or interpretation. For example, \( C_{I,Bush} \) refers to the context in which Bush interprets the speech act.
(18) This chili is tasty for Bush.

(19) This chili is tasty for Gandhi.

In that Bush evaluates (18) to be true and Gandhi evaluates (19) to be false, PCR-contextualism captures SD.

What about the contradiction at the level of content necessary for disagreement? Cappelen turns to the minimal proposition that he proposes may be an element in the set of propositions expressed in assertion. Whereupon it is the minimal proposition that is salient across both $C_{I,Bush}$ and $C_{I,Gandhi}$. Bush and Gandhi furnish contradictory evaluations of (1) asserted at $C_{U,Bush}$. PCR thereby handles the SD motivating relativism by shifting the salience of content across contexts of interpretation.

First, an outcome of PCR-contextualism is that disagreement is illusory. What Cappelen seems to suggest is that when the disagreement is genuine, it concerns the same minimal proposition. The same minimal proposition (1) is evaluated as true at $C_{I,Bush}$ and false at $C_{I,Gandhi}$. Stopping here would resemble an invariantist treatment that seems to presuppose an “objective” account of tastiness that does not capture SD. However, only rarely do language users treat ‘is tasty’ to predicate such an objective property. Rather, Bush normally interprets an assertion of (1) as (18), and Gandhi interprets (1) as (19)—Recall that it is this move that captures SD for PCR-contextualism. Disagreement arises when Bush and Gandhi mistake their respective evaluations of (18) and (19) to concern the minimal proposition. As a result, Cappelen explains,

“...faultless disagreement is an illusion. There is no one proposition such that A commits to it, B commits to its negation, and both A and B are right. That’s impossible. We get the illusion that something like this is going on by shifting our attention...between different parts of asserted content.”

That is, when agents disagree, they mistakenly take themselves to disagree in regards to the minimal proposition although what they evaluated was the interpreter-indexical content.

One might just bite the bullet and be satisfied with illusory disagreement, but recall that what motivates relativism in the first place

\[17\text{See Cappelen (2008).}\]
is the intuition that the disagreement is genuine. It is difficult to discern what explanatory appeal, if any, Pluralistic Content Relativism offers to theorists committed to genuine disagreement. If the idea of illusory disagreement seems attractive, note that PCR affords no explanation beyond that of a parallel contextualist explanation. The orthodox contextualist might herself just explain away disagreement as the consequence of content blindness in which agents mistake the semantic content for character.\textsuperscript{18}

Second, perhaps the most implausible outcome of PCR is the quantity of propositions expressed by any token assertion. Recall that propositional salience at $C_I$ determines which proposition is “picked out” by way of salience—as opposed to how it is “fixed” qua monopropositionalist context-sensitivity. Under the PCR reading, asserting (1) expresses the many propositions captured by the generalized formula (20), in which $E$ refers to any agent interpreting the utterance at $C_{I,E}$.\textsuperscript{19}

(20) This chili is tasty for $E$.

This leads to a strange outcome—the set of propositions expressed by the speaker’s assertion includes propositions referring to all possible interpreters, including agents unknown even to the speaker.\textsuperscript{20} For, in the PCR framework, a condition for the very possibility of content determination at $C_I$ is that the content be an element of the set of propositions expressed at $C_U$.\textsuperscript{21} Cappelen seems to foresee the implausibility of such a view, conceding the radicalism of PCR, but ultimately claims that PCR is no more radical than relativism’s own parallel truth-determinative role assigned to assessors.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18}The monopropositionalist contextualist of course cannot explain semantic blindness as mistaking semantic content for the non-content propositions expressed in assertion. After all, for the monopropositionalist, ‘proposition’ and ‘content’ are co-extensive and identical. Rather, she will tend to explain semantic blindness, e.g. as in the case of illusory disagreement, as surface-contradictory—that semantic blindness arises from mistaking character for content. I develop semantic blindness and the problem of competing explanations more in section 5.

\textsuperscript{19}Cappelen explicitly commits to the generalized formula (20) in Cappelen (2008).

\textsuperscript{20}To illustrate this point, consider that the quantity of propositions expressed would principally number at least 6 billion propositions, one for each possible interpreter. This number blows up if we consider the possibility of addressing numerous agents and all possible combinations.

\textsuperscript{21}Here, it is important not to conflate PCR with another sort of content relativism Cappelen refers to as \textit{monistic content relativism}. Monistic Content Relativism is the view that an assertion at $C_U$ expresses exactly one propositional and the extension of this proposition is then fixed at the context of interpretation.

\textsuperscript{22}Cappelen states, “This would be surprising, of course. How could A and B make assertions about $E$? They might not have been thinking about $E$, they might not
However, there is an important sense in which relativism’s evaluator E differs from PCR’s interpreter E. Indeed the truth-determinative role relativism assigns to the context of assessment is a departure from orthodoxy. But what is implausible is not the content determinative role PCR assigns to the context of interpretation, but what is determined. In order to handle SD, PCR-contextualism proposes that the propositions expressed in assertion refer to all possible interpreters. For each possible interpreter E exists a proposition expressed in assertion referring to that E. PCR faces the problem that, in asserting (1), agents claim that chili is tasty with respect to the tastes of agents completely unknown to them.

Relativism, on the other hand, is immune to such “epistemic overreach,” because it assigns the relevant standard of taste operative at the context of assessment pragmatically. A wide array of factors may determine the relevant standard of taste operative at the context of assessment and relativism is not committed to any taste-standard determining rule. Nor is it certain that there is any such rule to be discovered. Recall that monopropositionalist contextualism, on the other hand, fixes the standard of taste speaker-indexically and consequently faces counterexamples such as (7) and (8).

It thereby becomes apparent that PCR-contextualism’s own interpreter-indexical treatment will face the very types of counterexamples that undermined speaker-indexical contextualism. For instance, PCR treats the proposition expressed by asserting (21) at $C_{U,Bush}$ and interpreted at the context of interpretation $C_{I,Gandhi}$ to be (22).

\[(21) \text{This chili is tasty and I do not care what your take about it is.}\]

\[(22) \text{This chili is tasty for Gandhi and I do not care what your take about it is.}\]

This is an implausible result. It is hard to make sense of any competent English speaker then interpreting (21) to concern one’s own standards of taste (discounting conversational implicature). In asserting (21), Bush commits himself to a judgment independent of Gandhi’s take on the matter. For another case, consider explicit disagreement. PCR-contextualism predicts that (23) asserted at $C_{U,Bush}$ ought to be interpreted at $C_{I,Gandhi}$ as (24).

\[(23) \text{I do not care what you think about chili.}\]

\[(24) \text{This chili is tasty for Gandhi and I do not care what your take about it is.}\]
(23) This chili is tasty and I disagree with anyone who says otherwise.

(24) This chili is tasty for Gandhi and I disagree with anyone who says otherwise.

What would actually be the speaker’s dogmatism, PCR treats to be blind fidelity to the interpreter (whom the speaker may not have even heard of). It seems plain wrong that Bush takes Gandhi’s side on the matter of chili (especially from the perspective of the interpreter Gandhi) as predicted in (22) and (24). Given Bush’s take on chili (especially as Gandhi would interpret the matter at $C_{I,Gandhi}$), it is hard to see why Bush’s dogmatic utterance would employ Gandhi’s standards of taste. Indeed, binding Pluralistic Content Relativism with contextualism does nothing to restrict the very types of counterexamples such as (7) and (8) that face orthodox contextualism due to speaker-indexicality. PCR-contextualism faces parallel counterexamples, *e.g.* (22) and (24), as a result of its interpreter-indexical reading. In both cases, it is fixing content indexically that precludes some obvious cases of taste-predication. Such expressions call for the standards of taste operative in evaluation to be fixed pragmatically.

I have now forwarded two arguments to reject the thesis that Pluralistic Content Relativism affords (indexical) contextualism an adequate semantics of taste predicates: *(i)* that there are ready counterexamples to PCR-contextualism such as (21) and (23) because PCR-contextualism determines the semantic contribution of taste predicates indexically, and *(ii)* that the propositions expressed at $C_U$ captured by the general formula (20) wildly exceed speakers’ epistemic access. I have also argued *(iii)* that Cappelen furnishes no reason to prefer PCR-contextualism if one is already committed to genuine disagreement.

The force of *(iii)* depends on one’s prior theoretical commitments. Argument *(iii)* only cuts against PCR, if PCR is to yield reason to prefer contextualism to some theory already committed to genuine disagreement. But if one is already a contextualist without an account of disagreement, an illusory disagreement does afford an explanans. Apparent disagreement is to be explained by appealing to some kind of

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23 Andy Egan proposes that the semantics of ‘you’ is interpreter-indexical. In his example, he considers the televangelist asserting ‘Jesus loves you’. Egan argues that interpreters take ‘you’ to refer to themselves as individuals, and that this is in line with the speaker meaning of the televangelist’s assertion. See Egan (2009). The problem with modeling the semantics of ‘is tasty’ with the semantics of ‘is tasty for you’ is that when Bush asserts (1), it seems obvious that he not employing Gandhi’s standards of taste.
error theory. Of course, error theory is not foreign to PCR. The semantic blindness apparent in FP affords PCR an error theory as to why philosophers tend to erroneously assume monopropositionalism.

Semantic blindness may yield a defense against arguments (i) and (ii). In regards to (ii), a PCR-contextualist may propose that assertions expressing propositions outside the epistemic grasp of speakers are actually more widespread than intuitions suggest. An adequate error theory may establish that agents tend to be semantically blind to this set of propositions, thereby explaining why intuitions about (20) tend to lead us astray. In regards to (i), an adequate error theory may explain that asserting (23) does in fact yield (24), that language users tend to be blind to that. With respect to (iii), semantic blindness may explain why agents tend to erroneously treat disagreement as if it were genuine. This seems to be the most viable employment of semantic blindness, so let us see what such a defense could look like.

IV. Recourse To Semantic Blindness

One direction towards which to develop semantic blindness is as the conflation between content and character. The content expressed in asserting sentences of the form (25), one might argue, is paradigmatically invariant in that predicates \( P \) are not generally “subjective.” Perhaps due to the common syntactic structure (25), language users anticipate (1) to yield the minimal proposition that evaluates absolutely in the way (26) and (27) evaluate absolutely.

(25) This chili is \( P \).

(26) This chili is made of beef.

(27) This chili is made in Texas.

For PCR, this would explain why it is that language users mistake (1) to express the minimal content and subsequently “fall for” the illusion of disagreement.\(^{24}\)

By erroneously mistaking the character of an expression for its content, language users mistakenly commit to the minimal proposition.\(^{24}\)

\(^{24}\)A systematic error theory explaining the conditions of illusory disagreement would allow the PCR theorist to fend off accusations of postulating invariant content \textit{ad hoc}. Recall that illusory disagreement otherwise falls out of PCR-contextualism’s postulating the minimal content concerning which agents do genuinely disagree. Indeed, the sketch I put forth below affords PCR-contextualism reason to introduce the minimal content as that in regards to which agents disagree.
The illusory disagreement resulting from mistaking character for content is in line with Keith DeRose’s coinage “surface-contradictory.”

DeRose also proposes that semantic blindness is responsible for the illusion of disagreement. DeRose argues that contrastive utterances of knowledge ascription highlight the role epistemic standards, i.e. what is at stake, play across contexts in determining what is said across contexts of use. So, as DeRose’s example goes, the skeptic claiming that you do not know that you have hands is making a claim under high standards of knowledge ascription, whereas Moore’s claim that he knows that he has hands is made under low standards. Call these S-HIGH (28) and S-LOW (29) respectively.

S-HIGH: (28) You do not know that you have hands.

S-LOW: (29) I know that I have hands.

Could the two be disagreeing here? No—And DeRose agrees. There is not contradiction at the level of content. Conflict in the case of S-HIGH (28) and S-LOW (29), DeRose argues, is “surface contradictory” in the way ‘I am hungry’ and ‘I am not hungry’ uttered by two agents respectively are surface-contradictory.25

However, opening the door to semantic blindness opens the door for competing explanations. It was purported that, in the face of relativism, PCR affords contextualism an account of disagreement. Such disagreement, PCR-contextualism explained, is illusory—it is not genuine. However, if an illusory disagreement is a viable option for one’s semantics, then a contextualism without PCR also enjoys the capacity to employ semantic blindness in explanation. The monopropositionalist contextualist simply explains disagreement about matters of taste as the erroneous conflation of character with content.26

A reason to prefer monopropositionalist contextualism to PCR-contextualism would be its capacity to handle the very same data without having to appeal to PP and FP. Moreover, because monoproposi-
tionalist contextualism does not hold PP, it is immune to argument (ii).

Interestingly, DeRose’s own appeal to context-sensitivity seems to resemble such a semantic blindness-wielding monopropositionalist contextualism. Consider DeRose’s response to the following question: Are we really to believe that speakers can be so blind as to what they mean when employing such quotidian words as ‘knows’? DeRose responds affirmatively. The argument is that, insofar as language users are presented correctly constructed cases, language users will be divided as to whether assertions of S-High (28) and S-Low (29) contradict. According to DeRose,

“...this is not a consideration that favors invariantism over contextualism, for speakers seem about equally afflicted by semantic blindness whether contextualism or invariantism is correct.”

So, if one’s preferred semantics is invariantist, it too must come to terms with semantic blindness. DeRose makes this explicit, “if invariantism is instead correct [the contextualist is] “blind” to the context-insensitivity of that same common verb [‘knows’].”

This confirms that even theories competing with contextualism, i.e. invariantism, may (even ought) to assign semantic blindness a role in explanation. Let us consider what such an invariantist approach would look like. The invariantist would assign semantic blindness the role of handling the very subjectivity contextualism purports to best explain. The monopropositionalist invariantist now equipped with semantic blindness proposes that there never was a problem of disagreement: (1) as uttered by Bush and (4) as uttered by Gandhi indeed evaluate absolutely in the way (2) evaluates absolutely.

(1) This chili is tasty.

(4) It is not the case that this chili is tasty.

(2) This object’s mass is greater than 30 kilograms.

The treatment captures contradiction by proposing that assertions of sentences predicating personal taste express the minimal proposition. So, (1) is not context-sensitive beyond the context-sensitivity exhibited by pronouns such as ‘I’ and ‘this’.

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
What about SD? The invariantist relegates subjectivity to be illusory, and subsequently puts forth an error theory accounting for the erroneous intuitions that taste is “subjective.” Here is one avenue of thought: agents are semantically blind to the invariant nature of content due to the population’s diverse standards of taste. Because language users often fix standards of taste in ways that are explicitly indexical, i.e. by uttering sentences such as (5), agents tend to conflate (1) with (5).

(1) This chili is tasty.
(5) This chili is tasty for me.

Invariantism explains that it is the subjectivity, not disagreement, that is illusory. Such an explanation does seem awfully ad hoc, because it is. However, it is no less ad hoc than PCR-contextualism and monopropositionalist contextualism’s own employment of semantic blindness.

V. Conclusion

Pluralistic Content Relativism purportedly afforded contextualism the capacity to handle the disagreement about matters of taste motivating relativism. This paper has shown that PCR leads to implausible predictions about semantic content, and that PCR’s commitment to semantic blindness allows for competing explanations. Relativism, it was shown, was immune to the arguments leveled at PCR and contextualism. Although this paper has not put forth decisive reason to prefer relativism, it has scrutinized the viability of one of the few defenses of contextualism in the face of relativist semantics.
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