

PRISM



**A Student Journal of the
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies**

**Volume VI
2003**

Editorial Staff
James Brummer, Editor
Lori Rowlett, Co-editor
Charlene Burns
Ned Beach

2003, *Prism*, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

PRISM is a student journal published by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire. All manuscripts are submitted by students who are enrolled in departmental offerings. Differential Tuition monies provide the funding.

Copyright 2003 by the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire. Permission to copy any portion of this material is granted, provided that: such reproduction is not done for direct commercial purpose; the *PRISM* copyright notice, the title of the publication, and its date appear; and notice is given that reproduction is done with permission of *PRISM*. To copy otherwise requires explicit, written permission. Requests for permission to reprint should be addressed to: Editor, *PRISM*, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI 54701. Call 715.836.2545, or inquire at www.uwec.edu/academic/philrel.

***PREFACE* • Dr. James Brummer, Editor**

It has been six years since the journal *Prism* was first published. Were it not for the generosity of the faculty, staff, and students in the department and the availability of Differential Tuition funds on campus, the venture might never have been started. The funds from Differential Tuition have paid for the preparation and publishing of *Prism* over these years, although recently the amount available for *Prism* has been supplemented by donations from former colleagues and students. Of particular mention in this regard is the generosity of Dick and Judy Behling whose donations now account for approximately half of the budget for *Prism*.

I feel that I have been fortunate to oversee the articles contained in this year's volume. It is perhaps the finest volume of *Prism* yet produced. In saying this, I do not mean to compliment my talents as an editor, such as they are. I mean rather to point out that we are fortunate to have such gifted students and faculty mentors in the department. The reader will notice that the articles contained in this volume come from both the disciplines of religious studies and of philosophy, and they range from expository to analytic to comparative studies of their topics. Most of the articles were written by seniors, but several come from juniors. All began as papers written for specific classes. It is fitting then to thank those faculty and staff members who were instrumental in providing the initial inspiration for these works.

More particularly, I would like to thank Lori Rowlett who served as Capstone Coordinator in the fall term. Not only did she mentor two of the students whose work appears in this volume, she also played an important role in providing three added articles contained here in her capacity as Co-Editor in the fall term. I would also like to thank Charlene Burns whose mentorship through her classes gave inspiration and support to five students whose work is contained here. In addition, the contributions of Ned Beach, who mentored one contribution here, and Brett Greider, who provided intellectual stimulation for another contribution, should be mentioned.

I have already noted the importance of the financial contribution of Dick Behling. But he also provided significant assistance in further editing all of the essays contained in this issue. He has been a very strong supporter of this project from the beginning. Finally, the department owes a great debt of gratitude to Joanne Erickson, our Program Assistant, who helped to edit every essay in this volume and who formatted and transcribed them to the software program Pagemaker so that they would be prepared for publication and they would then also be available on-line.





Table of Contents

<i>The Divine Light Behind the Veil: Augustinian Mysticism and Tennyson's "In Memoriam" - A Comparative Essay</i> Jacob Bodway	11
<i>Incarnation in Buddhism</i> Justin Lehmann	25
<i>Augustine's View of the Good</i> Andrew Ruggles	35
<i>On The Yoruba Culture and Religion</i> Jeannine Stucklen	43
<i>The Historic Socrates and Plato's Apology</i> Joseph Braun	51
<i>Serpentology: Voodoo</i> Lawrence Troyer	59
<i>The Gift of Tears: When Such Spiritual Favors Cannot Be Restrained</i> Allison Schultz	65
<i>A Response to Levinas and Kierkegaard: Hegel's Concept of Geist</i> John Timmers	77
<i>Three Views of Ritual</i> Jeanne Peterson	85
<i>Importance of Nature in the Ethical Views of the Stoics and the Epicureans</i> Courtney Rump	93
<i>Thoreau and Buddhism</i> Jenna Maack	101



The Divine Light Behind the Veil:
Augustinian Mysticism and Tennyson's "In Memoriam" - A Comparative Essay •
Jacob Bodway

Jacob (Jake) Bodway graduated in December 2002, with a major in English Literature. Jake's paper comparing Augustine with Tennyson was first written for the Early Christianity course he took with Professor Burns in the fall term of 2002. It went through further revision in the spring term of 2003.

I. Introduction

Painting a picture of Saint Augustine's¹ Christian philosophy would require a canvas as large as the universe and all the colors therein. It is the "openness" of his philosophy I plan to examine. My objective is to highlight the striking similarities between the thought of Augustine and that of the 19th century English poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson.² Tennyson's poem *In Memoriam*,³ begun in 1833 and published in 1850, closely mirrors Augustine's philosophical thought. Like Augustine, he repudiates the senses and internalizes perceptual capabilities. By doing so, he experiences an intellectual awakening through what he believes is the necessary assistance of God's Divine Light. Like Augustine, Tennyson turns to mysticism to stretch the boundaries of his mind, to overcome the limitations of reason and to discover the Self and the Understanding (*intellectus*) within his soul. It is as though Tennyson stands at the precipice of a large promontory that extends over the gulf of Christian historical thought – he speaks the lines of *In Memoriam*, but the returning echo is of the soft-spoken voice of Augustine.

Both Augustine's conviction on Divine illumination and Tennyson's *In Memoriam* were given life from the soul-searching occasioned by the death of a close friend. Augustine's friend in *The Confessions* is unnamed, but Tennyson's friend was not. He was Arthur Henry Hallam. The death of a friend not only caused a change in the daily experiences of these men, it also brought about a change in their self-awareness. They came to believe that the perceptual world is but an illusion in comparison to the hidden



truths found in the soul. By incorporating themes also found in Augustinian philosophy into his own quest for intellectual wisdom, Tennyson crafts a mystical poem that tackles metaphysical issues⁴ — a poem that stresses the need for a spiritual rejuvenation in Victorian England. Moreover, it is important to note that Tennyson likely never read Augustine, but he still closely followed the doctrine on Divine illumination developed by Augustine.⁵ This suggests an even more powerful and intriguing idea: the possibility of a mystical communion with God when Augustine’s mystical guidelines are followed.

II. Augustine’s Divine Illumination

In order to compare Tennyson’s and Augustine’s mystical experience, it is imperative to examine⁶ first the basic elements of Augustinian mysticism. These elements are: (1) the presence of Faith and Love (which must be there *before* the mystical process); (2) the presence of Grace and Memory (which occur both *before and during* the process); (3) the moment of mystical certainty itself; followed by (4) the feeling of disbelief, as the soul is thrown back into the lower half of our reason (*ratio inferior*) or mind (*mens*). I shall discuss each of these elements in order.

1. **Faith** - Faith is the backbone of Augustine’s philosophical approach; it is man’s “faith [that] seeks, [and] the understanding [that] finds.”⁷ For us to wield the sword of faith, there must first be doubt, because for faith to be abiding it must go through the rigors of doubt. I interpret Augustine’s view of doubt as a two-tier structure or process that is available to everyone. This structure holds the same elements on each tier, but the first tier is temporally orientated, while the second tier is eternally orientated. Thus, the second tier is more profound, and it requires substantially more faith than does the first — it requires a choice, one that most people avoid.

a. Augustine’s First Tier of Doubt — [self + truth + love = God]⁸

The first tier of doubt is found in the lower half of our reason (*ratio inferior*), which is the knowledge we obtain through our senses, and the judgments based on these. The knowledge gained through our senses is called *scientia*, or, the “science or knowledge...concerning the bodily things which are perceived by the bodily sense[s].”⁹ This involves all temporal objects, including the data of introspection or the basic elements involved in our sense of self. Augustine begins by doubting the self. But if one doubts the self by postulating the possibility of deception, then, he concludes, it is necessary that one must exist.¹⁰ Thus, Augustine affirms the truth of his temporal existence through the act of doubting.¹¹ However, this is not yet the immortal self that is established, but only the temporal self whose existence is reaffirmed through each momentary act of doubting. Augustine continues by doubting other temporal truths, such as the existence of bodies and even mathematical truths, which, for him, are immutable but which are viewed as being created by God as part of the temporal order.¹² The temporal realm thus inspires doubt and knowledge, and it additionally inspires love – love of self, of temporal objects and laws, and also of the knowledge that obtains in the temporal level.¹³ All of this leads lastly to the tentative conclusion that God is the cause of the three elements – self, truth and love – because it is evident that God made the self and all sensible and temporal truths, and that God is the basis for our love of the created world.¹⁴ Thus, the first tier leads to knowledge (*scientia*), but doubt still remains—a doubt satisfied through faith in the existence of self, in temporal truths and in love.



b. Second Tier of Doubt — [Self + Truth + Love = God]

The second tier of doubt is found in the upper half of our reason (*ratio superior*), which is the wisdom we obtain purely through the mind alone. The wisdom gained through our *ratio superior* is called *sapientia*, or the wisdom of “spiritual things, which are eternal and unchangeable.”¹⁵ If it can be said that the first tier of doubt came from the eye of our senses, then it can be said that the second tier comes from the eye of the mind. But the mind must first be healthy to see that which is eternal and unchangeable.¹⁶ We must surpass temporal knowledge and focus entirely upon the intelligible nature of our mind. In this contemplation, Augustine believes we find God, for God is always with us (first tier), but we must *choose* to discover God (second tier). Augustine writes, “You were with me, but I was not with you.”¹⁷ First, one doubts the Self (as the immortal essence of the soul) or the eternal nature of the inward man.¹⁸ Further:

...[i]n the inward man dwells truth. If you find that you are by nature mutable, transcend yourself. But remember that in doing so you must also transcend yourself as a reasoning soul. Make for the place where the light of reason is kindled...so that the inward man may agree with the indwelling truth in a pleasure that is not low and carnal but supremely spiritual.¹⁹

Second, one doubts the existence of the Truth in God as being the only truth (that is, Truth).²⁰ One must undergo continual doubt in God as Truth and follow it with continuing faith. Thirdly, we doubt our Love of the immortal Self and immutable Truth even though we have faith that God is the foundation of both Self and Truth. We are led by faith to reaffirm our Love of these things that transcend our senses and even our reason. This is because we come to believe that God is Love.

The God in the second tier is the same as the God in the first, except that, in the second tier, Augustine tells us that we acknowledge God’s infinite nature and our connection with God through the infinite capabilities of our understanding.

2. Love – Augustine tells us that the amount of Love required for illumination must be boundless. One must infinitely love God, who is the infinite Creator/Being of Self, Truth, and Love. This type of love is called *caritas*.²¹ *Caritas* is the act of loving God not as “bodily beauty...[or] temporal glory...[or] the clear shining light...[or] the sweet melodies of many-moded songs...[or] the soft smell of flowers.”²² This lower type of love is called *cupiditas*, or temporal love. *Caritas* is the act of loving the God of the inward Self and, by doing so, one realizes that “...the inward man is reborn, and the outward man decays day by day.”²³ By loving God through *caritas*, one must abort the old and temporal, outward self and embrace the birth of a new and infinite inward Self – *amo ergo sum*. Augustine states, “Embrace the love that is God: through love embrace God...he who is filled with love is filled with God...[and] ‘God is love.’ He who loves love, assuredly loves God: he who loves his brother, must necessary love love.”²⁴ Thus, in loving others, one loves only love (*cupiditas*), which is not the same as loving the God of the inward Self (*caritas*) – one must have a more profound Self-Love if one is to love God.

3. Grace – For Augustine, grace is given to us through Jesus Christ. Grace enables us to harken to the Word of God within our hearts: “I sought you outside myself, but I did not find you, the God of my heart.”²⁵ Augustine believes that it is the Word of God within our hearts that serves as the impetus for the discovery of God within the infinite realm of the understanding: “For as man he[Christ] is mediator, but



as the Word, he is in no middle place, since he is equal to God, and God with God, and together with God.”²⁶ As Grace, Jesus becomes the mediator who guides our souls to the Light of God; he acts as our soul’s Virgil as he leads our mind to Immutable Truth. Augustine asks, “What shall an unhappy man do? ‘Who shall deliver me from the body of this death,’ unless it is through your grace, ‘through Jesus Christ, our Lord’?”²⁷ Thus, grace holds two-fold significance: it enables us to search our hearts for the Word of God, and it also serves as a guide through the presence of Christ to the Divine Ideas. One must find the Word to find the Guide, to find God.

4. Memory – Memory is the inward process of Augustinian mysticism. By the term “inward process,” he means *the internal search for the presence of both the Self and the Word within our heart and soul*. However, the search for the Self and the Word is a step-by-step progression that takes the searcher through the “fields and spacious palaces of [the] memory, where are treasures of countless images of things of every manner, brought there from objects perceived by sense.”²⁸ The first step in this progression is memory of sense, which is memory of the past.²⁹ By “memory of the past,” Augustine means *the remembrance of every object, and the emotion directed toward those objects, within our past experiences*.³⁰ However, in this realm of the memory, neither the Self nor the Word is present.³¹ Augustine states, “But you were more inward than my inward self, and superior to my highest being.”³² Since God is not accessible to the senses, we cannot find God within the realm of memory of the past. When we realize this, we realize the existence of God in the memory of the *present*.³³ And by finding the God of the present, we find the intimate relationship between God (as Creator) and the Self.³⁴ By “remembering the present,” Augustine means that when one discovers the Self and its relationship with God, one remembers the eternity of the present—for being with God today is being with God in eternity.³⁵ Perhaps he means that, when one discovers the Self, he or she sees the Word of God, not as a potential of humanity, but as an acquired reality.

5. Illumination – When one has discovered the Self within the innermost faculty of memory—the “memory of the present”—Augustine tells us that the soul is ready to direct its gaze upward and to receive the necessary light from God in order to understand the Divine Ideas. Thus, the process is first inward *and then* upward. According to Augustine, Divine illumination does not involve seeing God directly; instead, it is our way of *glimpsing* the light of God. When we glimpse the light of God, we discover the truths that were placed within our souls by Him.³⁶ God “beats back [our] feeble sight, [by] sending down beams most powerfully upon [us]”³⁷ “...Just as [the soul] cannot of itself enlighten itself, so it cannot of itself be sufficient to itself.”³⁸ We need the light of God because it enables us to glimpse the original light of our minds.³⁹ Moreover, “I had found that immutable, true and eternal truth which exists above my changeable mind”⁴⁰ “... You have blazed forth with light, and have shone upon me, and You have put my blindness to flight!”⁴¹ Thus, when we glimpse the light of God, we do not see God in God’s fullness; instead, we glimpse the eternal truths that were placed within our own understanding – it is the “Eureka moment” of the mystical experience.

6. The Descent Back to Body – The descent back to the body is the end of the mystical experience. By descending back to the body, Augustine does not mean that the soul returns to the body; instead, he means that the soul returns from glimpsing the wisdom (*sapientia*) found in its understanding (*intellectus*) and returns to the knowledge (*scientia*) of the sensible/rational realm of the mind (*spiritus*). When the



soul returns from the understanding, the person who experiences the illumination is unable to elucidate verbally the experience. The American philosopher William James states: “The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words.”⁴² Augustine wrote that the mind of the person is able only to bring back “...a memory, loving and longing for what I had, as it were, caught the odor of, but was not yet able to feed upon.”⁴³

III. Tennyson’s Trials with Positivism

The arduous climb Tennyson underwent to reach a more profound sense of his own spiritual self owed partially to Hallam’s death and also to the new developments in the Victorian natural sciences, namely, geology. In his poem, Tennyson first looks to nature as if it could relieve his longing for a heightened sense of self; but, instead, he found that scientism had severed the spiritual connection we originally shared with the earth, as found in *Genesis*.⁴⁴ Naturalism seemed to prove that the earth cared little for humanity: we are only temporary inhabitants, and our lease could be terminated at any moment.

Although positivism mocked Tennyson’s hope for immortality, he stood firm, trusting that “...[n]o life may fail beyond the grave.”⁴⁵ Science’s depiction of nature, however, was “red in tooth and claw” and “shriek’d against his creed.”⁴⁶ If the geological findings were true, then those facts had spiritually *de-evolutionized* us. Geology implicitly proved that our race is only

...A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime,
That tare each other in their slime.⁴⁷

Tennyson then began to doubt reality by wondering if “God and Nature [were] at strife, / That Nature lends such evil dreams?”⁴⁸ It was at this point that his faith was put to the test: he could have accepted the physical evidence demonstrated by geology or he could have chosen God. Tennyson chose God and, in doing so, he also chose Self, Truth and Love:

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world’s alter-stairs
That slope thro’ darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.⁴⁹

He maintained that “this is a terrible age of unfaith”⁵⁰ and that “nothing worthy proving can be proven.”⁵¹ He came to believe that “the love of God is the true basis of duty, truth, reverence, loyalty, love, virtue and work”⁵² and that “God reveals Himself in each individual soul.”⁵³ In order for God to be revealed in each individual soul, Tennyson understood that self-consciousness was the key to understanding God in a more profound sense: “...[t]ake away [the] belief in the self-conscious personality of God and you take away the backbone of the world.”⁵⁴ Thus, *In Memoriam* became a testament to his “conviction that fear, doubts, and suffering will find answer and relief only through Faith in a God of Love.”⁵⁵



By choosing God, Tennyson realized that he must unbind the fetters of reason and overcome the specters of doubt—he must climb to a higher consciousness of Self. Tennyson, like Augustine, used the hope found in faith and love to guide him on his climb:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,⁵⁶
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove....⁵⁷

It was through an intense conviction of an Augustinian mode of faith and love that Tennyson was able to achieve a connectedness with God. He had it that his most “passionate desire [was] to have a clearer and fuller vision of God.”⁵⁸ By accomplishing his vision of God through a mysticism also endorsed by Augustine, Tennyson accepted the doctrines of positivism as feeble attempts to explain reality, but he never adopted science as an explanation of his personal, ultimate reality:

Not only cunning casts in clay;
Let Science prove we are, and then
What matters Science unto men,
At least to me? I would not say.

Let him, the wiser man who springs
Hereafter, up from childhood shape
His actions like the greater ape,
But I was *born* to higher things.⁵⁹

IV. Tennyson's Mystical Experience

After grieving Hallam's loss for nine years, in 1842, Tennyson finally encountered what was for him a proof of immortality; he glimpsed mystical certainty. While visiting his family's estate at Somersby, Tennyson and some friends were on the lawn singing “old songs that peal'd / From knoll to knoll.”⁶⁰ However, Tennyson's friends soon “[w]ithdrew themselves from [him] and night, / And in the house light after light / Went out, and [he] was all alone.”⁶¹ It was then, in these moments of solitude, that Tennyson's mystical experience commenced:

A hunger seized my heart; I read
Of that glad year which once had been,
In those fall'n leaves which kept their green,
The noble letters of the dead:

And strangely on the silence broke
The silent speaking words, and strange
Was love's dumb cry defying change
To test his worth; and strangely spoke



The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell
On doubts that drive the coward back,
And keen thro' wordy snares to track
Suggestion to her inmost cell.

So word by word, and line by line,
The dead man touch'd me from the past,
And all at once it seem'd at last
The living soul was flash'd on mine,

And mine in this was wound, and whirl'd
About empyreal heights of thought,
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out
The steps of Time – the shocks of Chance –
The blows of Death. At length my trance
Was cancell'd, stricken thro' with doubt.

Vague words! but ah, how hard to frame
In matter-moulded forms of speech,
Or even for intellect to reach
Thro' memory that which I became.⁶²

V. The Comparison

1. **“A hunger seized my heart...”** – “The hunger” Tennyson felt owed partially both to the longing to feel the love of *cupiditas* toward Hallam and to the power emitted by the Love of *caritas* toward God – or, more accurately, toward the Word of God within his heart. One must be “pure at heart and sound in head”⁶³ in order to have “[a]n hour’s communion with the dead.”⁶⁴ However, “when the heart is full of din”⁶⁵ the dead “can but listen at the gates.”⁶⁶ Thus, the clearing of his heart of all temporal pleasures and the seeking of the Word of God within initiated Tennyson’s mystical experience. Augustine states, “He is within our very hearts, but our hearts have strayed far from him...and he departed from our eyes, so that we might return into our own hearts and find him there.”⁶⁷ It is important to note that, by hearing the Word of God within his heart, Tennyson did not yet follow its advice – he heard only the call. But the call has been made to him, *through grace*.

2. **“I read / Of that glad year which once had been, / In those fall’n leaves which kept their green, / The noble letters of the dead:”** – The beckoning from the “hunger that seized his heart” forced Tennyson to recall the happy lives that he and Hallam had together. The remembrance of the happy life was the beginning of the inward process of memory – Tennyson remembered that the sensible object (letters) brought him happiness. Augustine states, “Since this is the case...[the happy life] is therefore found in memory and recognized when the words ‘happy life’ are heard.”⁶⁸



3. **“And strangely on the silence broke/The silent speaking words,”** – By remembering the happy life, Tennyson began to read Hallam’s letters, and the words on the page strangely broke the silence of the night with their own silent language – they spoke to him through his memory. The words came to him as if he heard them on “a wind / Of memory murmuring the past.”⁶⁹ Augustine states:

The things themselves [objects of perception] do not enter there [in the memory], but images of things perceived by sense are kept ready there for the thought of the one recalling them...sounds too are there and lie hidden and set apart, as it were...when another stock of images, which flowed in through the ears, is drawn forth.⁷⁰

4. **“And strange / Was love’s dumb cry defying change / To test his worth;”** – It is in this portion of Tennyson’s inward process that he realized his love must turn away from *cupiditas* (the memory of Hallam) and embrace *caritas* (God). However, his love did not want to part with the temporal pleasures of *cupiditas*; it cried out, defying the change it must undergo. According to Augustine, the mind’s love has always been devoted to spatio-temporal objects (like Hallam), and it loves the objects so intensely that it becomes attached to them.⁷¹ It was imperative that the love within Tennyson’s mind must detach itself from the love it felt for all temporal objects (including Hallam and the memory of him) and direct its Love toward the inward Self as an independent and infinite substance – as a model of God. For Tennyson, however, temporal love served as a springboard for eternal Love, because he realized the worldly magnitude of love—“Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all”⁷²—could lead to a realm of spiritual Love:

And love will last as pure and whole
As when he loved me here in Time,
And at the spiritual prime
Reawaken with the dawning soul.⁷³

Augustine states, “What is it about bodily pleasure that holds us fast? You will find that it is agreeableness.”⁷⁴ In essence, Tennyson’s mind had to devote all of its Love to the God of the inward Self.

5. **“And strangely spoke / The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell / On doubts that drive the coward back, / And keen through wordy snares to track / Suggestion to her inmost cell.”** – The voice that “strangely spoke” was again the voice of Love, suggesting to Tennyson that Augustine’s second tier of faith and *caritas* is preferred. The prerequisite to reach the more profound tier of faith requires one to have complete “faith and vigour” toward the belief in an ubiquitous God. The “doubts that drive the coward back” were occasioned by the magnified doubts found on the second tier of faith. Our Love must *choose* to have faith in these doubts, because it is faith’s job to seek the highest truth and, thus, the highest happiness. Since the basis of faith is inquiry, the doubt that is raised can elevate us to a higher realm of faith. Augustine states, “Love is impatient, and there is no limit to tears until love is given what it loves.”⁷⁵ And then, “The eternal law bids us turn our love away from temporal things, to cleanse it and turn it towards eternal things.”⁷⁶ This was an important step for Tennyson, because Love was suggesting that he turn away from the “wordy snares” of the temporal world to find God. According to Augustine, we cannot search the “secrets of nature”⁷⁷ to find God, because the realm of our senses is a “vast forest, filled with snares and dangers”⁷⁸ that can deter us from our search. Tennyson thus mirrored Augustine’s perspective on finding God:



That which we dare invoke to bless;
Our dearest faith; our ghastliest doubt;
He, They, One, All; within, without;
The Power in darkness whom we guess,

I found Him not in world or sun,
Or eagle's wing or insect's eye,
Nor thro' the questions men may try,
The petty cobwebs we have spun.⁷⁹

6. **“So word by word, and line by line, / The dead man touched me from the past,”** – As Tennyson reads, the *memory* of Hallam touches him from the past. Augustine states, “From that same abundant stock [of memory], also, I combine one and another of the *likeness of things*...and from them I meditate upon future actions, events, and hopes, and all these again as though they were present.”⁸⁰ Tennyson combined the “likeness of things,” that is, Hallam’s handwriting and Hallam himself, and with this connection he was able to meditate upon the past as though it were occurring in the present. By closely following the same view of memory that was also put forth by Augustine, Tennyson was able to meditate on future actions as though they were present:

Descend, and touch, and enter; hear
The wish too strong for words to name,
That in this blindness of the frame
My Ghost may feel that thine is near.⁸¹

7. **“And all at once it seem'd at last / The living soul was flash'd on mine,”** – The immediacy of Tennyson’s illumination occurred “all at once” – he found God, that is, Truth. Augustine writes:

Ask not, What is Truth? *At once* will rise the fogs of material images, the thick clouds of phantasm, and darken that clear empyrean which shone forth from a *single instant* upon your sight at that word “Truth.” *In that instant*, that *flash of vision* that touches you with the word “Truth...”⁸²

Notice that the “living soul” which was the memory in God of the *present*, “flash’d” on Tennyson’s soul; thus, it came from *above*. Again, Augustine states, “I saw *above* that same eye of my soul, *above* my mind, an unchangeable light...it was *above* my mind, because it made me, and I was made by it.”⁸³ Moreover, “the living soul” was given to him through grace because, owing to the “hunger” of finding the Self, one finds the Word of God: “...[T]he soul of man, although it gives testimony of the light, is not itself the light, but the Word, God himself, is ‘the true light, which enlightens every man who comes into this world’.”⁸⁴ For Tennyson, “the living soul” was God even if he could not understand it:

*The living soul, perchance the Deity – the first reading was ‘His living Soul was flash’d on mine’ – but my conscious was troubled by ‘his’. I’ve often had a strange feeling of being wound and wrapped in the Great Soul.*⁸⁵

8. **“And mine in this was wound, and whirl’d / About empyreal heights of thought, / And came on that which is, and caught / The deep pulsations of the world,”** – If Tennyson’s soul was “wound” *in* the light of God – the “living soul” – does this mean he was seeing God directly? Augustine



answers this question: “Let us apply all our powers to the question, invoking the everlasting Light to illuminate our darkness, that we may see in ourselves as may be permitted to us the *image* of God.”⁸⁶ Thus, the Wisdom that the Divine Light reveals in our soul is not a vision of God directly, or even a vision of God’s ideas; instead, it is a vision of an *image*, or a model, of God. Just as Michelangelo’s marble statue, *Risen Christ*, is a mere copy of Jesus, the Wisdom in our minds is a mere copy of God’s Wisdom, for “the soul is creature, God [is] creator.”⁸⁷ Tennyson understood that his wisdom could never equal that of God’s: “High wisdom holds my wisdom less.”⁸⁸

Notice that Tennyson’s vision occurred in the “empyrean heights of thought”; his soul never left his body, but instead it came to what Augustine referred to as *the soul’s eye* – or *the mind’s eye*. Augustine states that we can “see God with [our] mind as the sun is seen with the eye.”⁸⁹ As Tennyson’s soul was “whirl’d” about in this vision, he came upon **τι τῶν ὄντων**—“that which is”—an expression used in Greek philosophy that means *the Supreme Truth*.⁹⁰ The Supreme Truth for both men is God. This closely mirrors Augustine’s vision when he states, “Thus in a flash its trembling sight it [his soul’s *intellectus*] came to that which is.”⁹¹ It is here that the eye of Tennyson’s mind caught the “deep pulsations of the world,” or, as Augustine states, “Thus, in that realm of eternal truth from which all things temporal are made, we behold with our mind’s eye the pattern upon which our being is ordered.”⁹²

9. “Æonian music measuring out / the steps of Time – the shocks of Chance – The blows of Death.” – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”⁹³ It is here that Tennyson’s Wisdom showed him God’s creation in its entirety. Is this possible? Augustine states, “It is Wisdom, Wisdom itself, which shines through me...I will cry out bodily words from your oracle: ‘How great are your works, O Lord; you have made all things in wisdom!’ That wisdom is the beginning, and in the beginning you have made heaven and earth.”⁹⁴ Tennyson discovered the Self, Truth, and Love; and, by doing so, he was with God in the realm of eternity.⁹⁵

A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me thro’ repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were, out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life.⁹⁶

10. “At length my trance / Was cancell’d, stricken thro’ with doubt. / Vague words! but ah, how hard to frame / In matter-moulded forms of speech, / Or ev’n for the intellect to reach / Thro’ memory that which I became:” – The information overload that Tennyson’s mind endured induced the end of his illumination. Augustine states, “But I was unable to fix my gaze on them [Immutable Truths]. In my frailty I was struck back, and I returned to my former ways.”⁹⁷ When the soul returns to the faculty of its *ratio inferior*, it finds itself unable to express the vision it just witnessed. Tennyson wrote about his mystical experiences:



I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said the state is utterly beyond words? But in a moment, when I come back to my normal state of 'sanity,' I am ready to fight for *mein liebes Ich*, and hold that it will last for æons of æons.⁹⁸

Augustine states, “No, we contemplate that imperishable truth, from which we derive our more or less adequate definition, not of that which the mind of any individual man *is*, but of what in the everlasting order it *ought* to be.”⁹⁹ Lastly, the entire experience is committed to the memory, wherein it is stored for the intellect to find again. Augustine states, “And yet this transient thought is committed to memory through the instructions by which the mind is taught; that the mind which is compelled to pass from thence, may be able to return thither again.”¹⁰⁰ The beauty of Tennyson’s experience was evidenced by his inability to explain it or even to grasp its meaning fully. It was a perfect closing to a heavenly manifestation of a mental/spiritual awakening.

VI. Conclusion

Divine illumination, as these men saw it, is an ontological process that requires the necessary assistance of God’s Divine Light. The light that illumines the mind is the light of God, but the intellectual vision to which our minds are exposed is a *model* of the eternal ideas that God placed in our minds when He created us in His image.¹⁰¹ In a sense, the dark mirror of our mind’s eye is cleansed and we see, “face-to-face”, the original intention God had for our minds.¹⁰²

Poetry has the ability to encompass all knowledge regardless of its aim. Let science attempt to prove our natural mysteries, and let philosophy attempt to prove the lofty expectations of rational thought. But let poetry embrace these other forms of thought as brethren. This occurs, not because poetry is the all-powerful medium of communication and thought, but because poetry *allows* it. It is poetry’s flexibility that allows it to blend into both the concrete and the immaterial structures of thought.

The “openness” of Augustine’s philosophy allows us to interpret it in many ways, and I believe its “openness” allowed Tennyson to follow its pattern without likely having read it. By reading *In Memoriam* through the lens of Augustinian thought, we can glimpse a fuller and richer religious meaning from the poem. It is at the poem’s climax, when Tennyson is illumined at Somersby, that Augustine’s doctrine of mysticism shines brightest. Perhaps at this climactic moment, Augustine was admiring Tennyson from the heavenly realm, and at the instant of Tennyson’s illumination, a smile *flash’d* across the Saint’s face.

¹ Saint Augustine: (354 – 430).

² Alfred Lord Tennyson: (1809 – 1892).

³ *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* states that *In Memoriam* was the “finest poem the world has seen for many years.” *Hoggs Instructor* stated that it contained “high merit” and the poem focused on a “general tone of lofty spiritualism.” The *Eclectic Review* commented that the poem held an “expression of a cycle of experience common to thoughtful humanity.” And the *North British Review* went on to say that *In Memoriam* seemed “to us to be one of the most perfect rhymed measures for continuous verse ever invented.” See Edgar Finley Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers: A Study of His Literary Reputation and the Influence of the Critics upon His Poetry 1827-1851*. (United States: Archon Books, 1967) 145-148.



⁴ There is a stark difference between “mystical poetry” and “metaphysical poetry.” Mystical poetry deals with the soul’s intimate communion with God and God’s creations; metaphysical poetry deals with the unexplained workings of God – the incorporeal. Mystical poets include: William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Walt Whitman, and T.S. Eliot. Metaphysical poets include John Donne, Richard Crashaw, George Herbert, and Andrew Marvel.

⁵ Although Tennyson likely never read Augustine, he was familiar with philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, Berkeley, Kant, Schlegel, Fichte, Hegel, Hume, Descartes and Bentham. See Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir* (New York: The Macmillan Company 1911) 43, 308.

⁶ For more information on Augustine’s doctrine on divine illumination, the following works provide helpful information: Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism* (United States: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1968); Ronald H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge* (United States: University Press of Kentucky, 1969); Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*. Trans. L.E.M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960).

⁷ Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, in *Augustine’s Later Writings* Vol. VIII, Ed. John Baillie (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press) XV, 2, ii, 129.

⁸ The “self, truth and love” found in the first tier of doubt is in small case letters, while the same elements in the second tier are capitalized. This is done because it is not only important to distinguish the difference between the two, but also the capitalization makes the elements on the second tier more prominent because of the profound faith that the second tier demands.

⁹ Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, Vol. II, Ed. Whitney J Oates (New York: Random House, 1948) XII, 12, 819.

¹⁰ Augustine proved his existence with the doctrine “*si enim fallor sum*” – “if I am deceived, I exist.” See *De Civitate Dei*, in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine* vol. II, XI, xxvi, 168. One can easily see the influence this doctrine had upon Rene Descartes’ “*cogito ergo sum*.”

¹¹ *De Vera Religione*, in *Augustine’s Earlier Writings*, Vol. VI. Ed. John H.S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press) xxix, 73, 262.

¹² *De Libero Arbitrio*, in *Augustine’s Earlier Writings*, Vol. VI, II, 33; 156.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, xv, 31, 131

¹⁴ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Trans. John K. Ryan. (New York: Doubleday, 1960) X, 6; viii, ix, 233-234.

¹⁵ *De Trinitate*, in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, Vol. II, XII, xii, 819.

¹⁶ Augustine states, “It is impossible to show to God a mind vitiated and sick. Only a healthy mind can see Him.” *Soliloquia*, in *Augustine’s Earlier Writings*, Vol. VI, I, vi, 12, 30.

¹⁷ *Confessions*, X, 27, xxxviii, 254.

¹⁸ The term “inward Self” is analogous to the “Atman” found in the *Upanishads*. One main difference, however, is that while the *Upanishads* teach that all humans share the same “Atman,” Augustine’s “Self” is individualistic because we are created separately by God.

¹⁹ *De Vera Religione*, in *Augustine’s Earlier Writings*, Vol. VI, xxix, 72, 262.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 262.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, Ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott & Judith Chelius Stark (United States: The University of Chicago Press 1996) 17.

²² *Confessions* X, 6, viii, 233.

²³ *De Vera Religione*, xl, 74, 263.

²⁴ *De Trinitate*, in *Augustine’s Later Writings*, Vol. VIII, 12, viii, 52-53.

²⁵ *Confessions*, VI, 1, i, 133.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, X, 43, lxviii, 274.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, VII, 21, xxvii, 180.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, X, 8, xii, 236.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

- ³¹ *Ibid.*, X, 24, xxxv, p. 253; 25, xxxvi, 254.
- ³² *Ibid.*, III, 6, xi, 84.
- ³³ *De Trinitate*, in *Augustine's Later Writings*, Vol. VIII, XV, 40, xxi, 168.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, XIV, 15, xii, 113.
- ³⁵ *Confessions*, XI, 13, xv, 287.
- ³⁶ By this, I do not mean that these truths are accessible by the mind alone; instead, they are in the mind innately but can only be brought forth from the darkness by God's Divine Light.
- ³⁷ *Confessions*, VII, 10, xvi, 171.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, XIII, 16, xix, 347.
- ³⁹ *John* 1:4-5.
- ⁴⁰ *Confessions*, VII, 17, xxiii, 175.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, X, 27, xxxviii, 254.
- ⁴² William James, "Are Men Ever Directly Aware of God?" in *The Problems of Philosophy*, 2nd Edition, Ed. William P. Alston & Richard B. Brandt (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc. 1974) 48.
- ⁴³ *Confessions*, VII, 17, xxiii, p. 176.
- ⁴⁴ "Positivism" is the view that all knowledge claims are to be confirmed or disconfirmed by the methods of science. "Naturalism" is the view that all phenomena can be accounted for by concepts that arise from this realm, as opposed to those that are said to arise from a supernatural realm. For more information on Catastrophism, Geology and Evolution see Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, and Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, (New York: Mentor Books, 1958). (First published in 1859.)
- ⁴⁵ Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Ed. Susan Shatto & Marion Shaw (Oxford: Clarendon Press, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) LV, 2.
- ⁴⁶ LVI, 15-16.
- ⁴⁷ LVI, 21-23.
- ⁴⁸ LV, 5-6.
- ⁴⁹ LV, 13-20.
- ⁵⁰ *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, 309.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 311.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 318.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 324.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 304-305.
- ⁵⁶ The "Immortal Love" Tennyson referred to was taken from *I John*, chapter iv.
- ⁵⁷ "Prologue," 1-4.
- ⁵⁸ *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, 319-20.
- ⁵⁹ CXX, 5-12.
- ⁶⁰ XCV, 13-14.
- ⁶¹ XCV, 18-20.
- ⁶² XCV, 21-48.
- ⁶³ XCIVV, 1.
- ⁶⁴ XCIV, 4.
- ⁶⁵ XCIV, 13.
- ⁶⁶ XCIV, 15.
- ⁶⁷ *Confessions*, IV, 12, xix, 105.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, X, 21, xxxi, 250.
- ⁶⁹ XCII, 8.
- ⁷⁰ *Confessions*. X, 8, xiii, 237.
- ⁷¹ *De Trinitate* in *Augustine's Later Writings*, Vol. VIII, X, 7, v.; 8, vi, 81.



- ⁷² XXVII, 15-16.
- ⁷³ XLIII, 13-16.
- ⁷⁴ *De Vera Religione* in *Augustine's Earlier Writings*, Vol. VI, xxxix, 72, 262.
- ⁷⁵ *Soliloquia* in *Augustine's Earlier Writings*, Vol. VI, II, 1, I, 41.
- ⁷⁶ *De Libero Arbitrio* in *Augustine's Earlier Writings*, Vol. VI, xv, 32, 131.
- ⁷⁷ *Confessions*, X, 35, lv, 265.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, X, 35, lvi, 265.
- ⁷⁹ CXXIV, 1-8.
- ⁸⁰ *Confessions*, X, 8, xiv, 237. (*Italics mine.*)
- ⁸¹ XCIII, 13-16.
- ⁸² *De Trinitate* in *Augustine's Later Writings*, Vol. VIII, VIII, 3, ii, 41. (*Italics mine.*)
- ⁸³ *Confessions*, VII, 10, xvi, 170-171. (*Italics mine.*)
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, 9, xiii, 168.
- ⁸⁵ Susan Shatto and Marion Shaw, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1982) 255.
- ⁸⁶ *De Trinitate* in *Augustine's Later Writings*, Vol. VIII, IX; 2, ii, 59. (*Italics mine.*)
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, IX; 16, xi, 68.
- ⁸⁸ CXII, 1.
- ⁸⁹ *Soliloquia* in *Augustine's Earlier Writings*, Vol. VI, I, vi, 12, 30.
- ⁹⁰ Shatto and Shaw, 255.
- ⁹¹ *Confessions*, VII, 17, xxiii, 176.
- ⁹² *De Trinitate* in *Augustine's Later Writings*, Vol. VIII, IX, 12, vii, 65.
- ⁹³ *Genesis* 1:1.
- ⁹⁴ *Confessions*, XI, 9, xi, 284.
- ⁹⁵ Augustine states, "But perhaps it might properly be said that there are three times, the present of things past, the present of things present, and the present of things future. These three are in the soul, but elsewhere I do not see them: the present of things past is memory; the present of things present is intuition; the present of things future is in expectation." *Confessions*, XI, 20, xxvi, 293.
- ⁹⁶ *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, 320.
- ⁹⁷ *Confessions*, VII, 17, xxiii, 176.
- ⁹⁸ *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, 320.
- ⁹⁹ *De Trinitate* in *Augustine's Later Writings*, Vol. VIII, IX, 9, vi., 64.
- ¹⁰⁰ *De Trinitate* in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, Vol. II, XII, 14, 823.
- ¹⁰¹ *Genesis* 1:27.
- ¹⁰² *I Corinthians* 13:12.



Incarnation in Buddhism • Justin Lehmann

Justin (J.J.) Lehmann graduated in May 2003, with a double major in Biology and Religious Studies and a minor in Anthropology. J.J. wrote this paper on Buddhism and incarnation as part of a seminar course in religious studies he took with Professor Burns in the spring term of 2002 entitled “The Biology of God.”

*For as long as space endures and for as long as the world lasts,
May I live dispelling the miseries of the world.*

*Whatever suffering there is for the world, may it all ripen upon
me. May the world find happiness through the virtues of the
Bodhisattvas.*

...Shantideva,¹

I

The Buddha taught that compassion comes from true understanding; however, some Buddhists have been unable to understand fully the idea of incarnation in other religions, as well as in Buddhism itself. In order to be compassionate towards others, Buddhists need both to have a clear understanding of what incarnation means and to acknowledge and accept it within their own faith. The Buddhist/Christian dialogue serves as one example of the many possible inter-religious dialogues and, in turn, as one of the many possible ways to understand incarnation. This dialogue has a history that stretches back to the first century C.E., and throughout its time there has been much admiration for the other’s beliefs, yet there are still points of strong contention and debate.²

Many of the problems and points of contention in this dialogue focus on the question of incarnation, including Jesus’ primacy for salvation.³ The incarnation of God into Jesus of Nazareth (along with Jesus’ subsequent death and resurrection) is the central tenet of Christianity. Buddhists, however, tend to shy away from any discussion of incarnation within Buddhism, and they do not accept the doctrine of a permanent, transcendent God. According to Paul Ingram, Buddhists tend to express more problems with



concepts within Christianity than Christians do about Buddhist concepts. And Buddhists are also much less critical of Buddhist exclusivist views than are Christians.⁴ Because of this, Buddhists have been limited in their ability to understand fully other religious traditions.

The exchange between Buddhists and Christians demonstrates that, when approached from an exclusivist viewpoint, these dialogues can lead to contention and to misunderstandings. Instead, Buddhists must take a more inclusive or parallel/pluralistic approach to this important dialogue.⁵ However, being so inclusive that Buddhism begins to resemble a cafeteria-like religion is not the best approach either, as this has the potential to lose the concepts that make Buddhism unique. Instead, Buddhists should take a strengthened, pluralistic approach to this dialogue. For in this vastly interconnected world that has come with modernity, these two religions will encounter each other with much greater frequency. In order to be fully compassionate towards Christians and people of other faiths, Buddhists need to attempt to understand fully concepts that at first seem inconsistent to the Buddhist worldview. An examination of incarnation within Buddhism can serve to dissolve some of the reservations that Buddhists have about Christianity and other religions. If Buddhists can understand the concept of incarnation from their perspective, they will perhaps be more open to understanding the Christian belief in Jesus' incarnation as well as incarnations in other religious traditions. This would fulfill the true understanding that Buddha taught.

In order to address this concept, we must first define *incarnation* and what the characteristics of incarnations are. To introduce certain important concepts within Buddhism and to obtain a point of comparison and contrast, I shall outline the Theravada ("Way of the Elders") school of Buddhism. I will then discuss the Mahayana ("Greater Vehicle") school. Further, I will demonstrate that incarnation is part of the Mahayana doctrine. I shall then turn to discussing Vajrayana and Dzogchen and demonstrate Tibetan Buddhism's concept of incarnation. Contained within this I shall discuss bodhisattvas and their implications regarding the matter of incarnation. Throughout, by employing concepts already present within Buddhism and within recent Christian theology, it will be demonstrated that incarnations do, in fact, occur in Buddhism.

II

Incarnation literally means *in the flesh*. Incarnation in religion is the bodily manifestation of a supernatural being or the divine in human form. This means simply that the divine or God becomes manifest in flesh.⁶ It can also be defined as *a non-physical entity assuming a physical body*.⁷ The doctrine of incarnation is found throughout the major religions of the world. From the cave art of the Paleolithic Age and Greek mythology through Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, incarnation is found throughout. Even Judaism is not wholly free of the notion of incarnation. Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner notes that many have found evidence that the god of the Hebrew Scriptures is open to incarnation.⁸ He has found that "incarnation as a concept is integral to Hebrew Scripture." So, because this concept in some form is found in most, if not all, religious belief systems, it can be deduced that the concept of incarnation is of central importance in the study of religion.⁹

Incarnations and Avatars have several common characteristics. These become important when one is considering whether or not something or someone is an actual incarnation. Through analysis of the world's major religions during Dr. Charlene Burns' undergraduate seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, it was suggested that the following characteristics are found in most true incarnations.



Incarnations are real or historical; they involve an unusual birth; they result in beings who are fully human; they involve beings who can identify with the divine; they concern beings who experience a natural death and are resurrected; they involve the possibility of the repetition of the lives of these beings; they can take non-human forms (as in Hinduism and the Jataka tales of Buddhism); their lives manifest docetic elevation; moral rectitude is important in their existence; there is a miraculous nature in their work; and they possess self knowledge of their divine nature. Many so-called incarnations can be ruled out if we use these criteria. It is accepted that not every incarnation will possess all of these characteristics. But, using these criteria, we can rule out incarnation in non-Mahayana Buddhism, Jainism, and Judaism. Keeping these in mind, we can evaluate whether genuine incarnations occur within other forms of Buddhism.

III

The concept of God in Buddhism is complicated. Many have it that Buddhism is an atheistic religion and, therefore, that there is no god in Buddhism and thus there is no incarnation. Others claim Buddhism is non-theistic because Buddha himself avoided discussion of the existence of a god or of many gods. Still others say that Buddhism is transpolytheistic; this means that, although there are gods, Buddha surpasses them all and they are merely supporters for him.¹⁰ I believe that Buddhism may be all or none of these.¹¹

The “Jataka Tales,” which are part of the *Sutta Piataka* in the Tipitaka, are the tales of the previous lives of the Buddha. In the 547 Jatakas, these lives are recounted.¹² The Jatakas are thought to have been told by the Buddha himself, as he recalls his former existences. He appears in both human and animal form.

It is said that Buddha “. . .took a vow under a previous Buddha, *Dipankara*, to become a buddha himself.”¹³ After this vow, Buddha returned in many forms. The *Mahapadana Sutta* tells of six previous buddhas: Vipassi, Sikhi, Vessabhu, Kakusandha, Kongamana, Kassapa, and Gotama.¹⁴ Other texts mention Metteya, a future buddha. Later, eighteen other buddhas were added.¹⁵ Buddhists believe that the Buddha is not the sole Buddha, but rather one of many. Although this may give more support to the belief in reincarnation than in incarnation, it does set up some interesting groundwork for the belief in actual incarnation.

During its first 500 years, Buddhism experienced tremendous growth, but it also split into two major sects. The split concerned doctrinal differences regarding how one attains Buddhahood or enlightenment. The majority believed that it was achieved by the “strict observance of the rules” as found in the *Vinaya*. The minority believed that Buddhahood was already a part of everyone and that one only needs to develop his or her Buddha nature.¹⁶ The minority was defeated, but it held a council of its own, and it eventually split off from the majority. Thus, the two major sects of the Hinayana or Theravada and the Mahayana were formed. Each of these major forms has many sects within it, including Vajrayana. Vajrayana was formed when Buddhism entered Tibet, and it is now commonly viewed as a separate school. Thus, today, there are three major schools of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.



IV

Theravada means *Way or Doctrine of the Elders*, and it is the oldest school of Buddhism. It is found throughout Southeast Asia. This school is distinguished in that it draws only from the Pali Cannon or *Tipitaka*. Theravadans emphasize Buddha's humanness; they assert that he is fully human, rather than divine. The "Jataka Tales" are found in the *Tipitaka*, but Theravadans interpret these texts as proof of reincarnation, not incarnation, because the Buddha himself tells these tales of his past lives. "The Buddha, as occasion arose was accustomed throughout his long career to explain and comment on the events happening around him by telling of similar events that had occurred in his previous births."¹⁷ Theravadans believe that all worldly phenomena are impermanent and transient and that they are ultimately unsatisfactory. Because of this, the Theravadans focus on this world and on manifesting ethical conduct, meditation and insight-wisdom.

In light of the above characteristics, it is difficult to see how the Theravadans could possibly accept the concept of incarnation. The Theravadans "...emphasize the historicity of the Buddha – the Buddha is not God, in his essential being transcendent of man, not to be worshipped but followed."¹⁸ Theravadans believe that Buddha is not divine, but that he is "the Perfected One, a Superman (*mahapurstia*), the Buddha for this age, whose final birth is virgin and occasions a disturbance and rejoicing of cosmic proportions."¹⁹ Therefore, he is not the Divine Incarnate, but an enlightened human.

V

Mahayana Buddhism arose out of the *Mahasanghikas* sect; this was the earliest break from original Buddhism. Along with the disagreement over Buddhahood, Mahayanists and Theravadans also disagreed on what to do with the wisdom that comes with enlightenment. The Buddha is said to have had two choices after achieving enlightenment: to keep it for himself, or to spread this knowledge to others and help them attain enlightenment.²⁰ The Buddha chose the latter course, and this leads the Mahayanists to stress compassion for others rather than individual enlightenment. This has also led to the development of the Bodhisattva path.

Bodhisattvas are those who are enlightened, but they delay their own entrance into Nirvana to return to earth to help all sentient beings. A bodhisattva can also be one who delays his or her own enlightenment so as to keep returning until all are enlightened. The Mahayanists and Vajrayanists believe that the *Sambhogakaya* is the realm of the Bodhisattvas; they maintain that only adherent bodhisattvas and fully realized human beings can glimpse and conceptualize this realm. As mentioned above, many lamas in the Vajrayana tradition are considered bodhisattvas, like the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, who is the incarnation of *Manjushri*, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom.

The Mahayanists reinterpreted many sutras and rejected some of the established canon. In addition, a great deal has been added to the Mahayana canon. Accepted as integral are the sutras written by Nagarjuna, Asanga, and Vasubandhu.²¹ Perhaps the biggest break from the Theravadans and the most important for this discussion is the belief in the buddhas as supramundane beings. The Buddha is celestial or "above this world", conceptualized as the *Dharmakaya*.

As stated above, the most important distinction within Mahayana Buddhism is the supramundaneness of the Buddha. The Buddha exists in three bodies or forms, called the *trikaya*:



*Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Dharmakaya.*²² The doctrine of the *trikaya* was first enunciated in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, and it was later developed by the *Yogachara* school. This concept proposed a solution to the problems of the absolute and relative natures of the one and the many buddhas.²³

The *Nirmanakaya* is the human form of the Buddha: Siddhartha Gotama. The human Buddha possessed an "...earthly body yet maintaining purity. He is the representative of the Absolute in the human world, bent on teaching sentient beings in order to relieve them from suffering."²⁴ We see in Mahayana, as well as many other religions, a tendency to idealize the religion's founder. Rather than seeing him as a "man among men" like the Theravadans, the Mahayanists idealize the Buddha. They prefer to see him as "the *Sambhogakaya* who preaches to the Bodhisattvas as the *Nirmanakaya* preaches to the ignorant mankind."²⁵ They believe that the *Nirmanakaya* is also "...of the same nature as the *Dharmakaya*, indeed a *manifestation* of him."²⁶

The *Sambhogakaya* is the "bliss body" form of the Buddha. It is the "symbol of the transcendental perfection and personifies Wisdom"; this is the Buddha who teaches the other Bodhisattvas.²⁷ The *Sambhogakaya* is said to lie between the *Dharmakaya* and the *Nirmanakaya*. It is the Buddha, unlike the *Dharmakaya*, that can be conceptualized; the *Dharmakaya* is beyond the human ability to conceptualize. It is believed that the *Sambhogakaya* "...takes the form of Amida in his Pure Land, [but] to others, he is the Christian God."²⁸ Many Mahayanists turn to the *Sambhogakaya* for help rather than look to the *Nirmanakaya*. This is so because it is said that "the substance is preferred to the shadow." They insist that the *Sambhogakaya* was incarnated in the *Nirmanakaya*.²⁹

The *Dharmakaya* is the "permanent, undifferentiated, comprehending Truth."³⁰ It is common to analogize the *trikaya* to the Christian doctrine of the trinity. According to this, the *Nirmanakaya* would be Jesus Christ, the *Sambhogakaya* would be the Holy Spirit and the *Dharmakaya* would be God the Father. However, the *trikaya* may be more similar to Hindu beliefs found in *The Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The *Dharmakaya* is the monistic conception of *Brahman*, the *Sambhogakaya* is Vishnu and the *Nirmanakaya* is Krishna. Krishna is a living human, and at the same time he is also God; he purports to be the ever-pervading *Brahman*.³¹ Buddha is all of these as well. The difference is that, in the Hindu conception of this trinity, the *Brahman* is impersonal. In Buddhism, the *Dharmakaya* is often seen as the "personal, manifesting compassion and activity."³² Buddha is, of course, a human, but he is also a manifestation of the *Sambhogakaya*, both of which are infused and interconnected with the *Dharmakaya*. He is not three separate bodies; rather, he is three in one and one in three. Thus, if we conceptualize the Mahayanist belief in the *Sambhogakaya* as the bliss body, perhaps taking the form of a heavenly Amida in his Pure Land, and as analogous to the Christian God. We can easily see the incarnation concept present in this form of Buddhism.

VI

Vajrayana was formed when Buddhism was brought to Tibet by Padmasambhava and syncretized with the indigenous religions already there.³³ It is frequently called the "Diamond or Thunderbolt vehicle" because of its use of the *Vajra*, which is a symbol of the imperishable diamond or of thunder and lightning. *Vajrayana* is characterized by its use of symbolism and art to bring about awareness of one's enlightenment and for its central focus on the Lama (teacher). Most important of the Lamas is the Dalai Lama of the *Gelug-pa* lineage. He is the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva *Avalokiteshvara*, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.



Several sects arose out of Tibetan Buddhism. Among the most prominent of these are the Nyingma, Kadam and Sakya, Kagyu, and the Geluk lineages. More recently, a non-sectarian movement, Ri-Me, has arisen.³⁴ In all of these sects, the head lama is both the reincarnation of some ancient Bodhisattva and the spiritual leader of each of these lineages.

Tibetan Buddhism's conception of the *trikaya* is quite similar to the Mahayanist's. Buddhahood has the three dimensions of *Nirmanakaya*, *Sambhogakaya*, and *Dharmakaya*. The *Nirmanakaya* is the most accessible and is the Buddha in human form.³⁵ The *Nirmanakaya* is one who is "in the world but not of the world."³⁶ This gives the Buddha a docetic feel: only apparently human, like a god wearing a human costume. The *Sambhogakaya* is the "body of enjoyment."³⁷ There are many buddhas "...who live in the timeless realm of the *Sambhogakaya* ...who can be seen by people who have realized their spiritual nature."³⁸ Both celestial buddhas and elevated humans exist in the *Sambhogakaya* realm. These buddhas are what give us the many Tibetan deities. The *Dharmakaya* is "beyond all physicality"; it is the "state of unimpeded emptiness and clarity."³⁹ The Tibetan conception of the *trikaya* is similar to the Mahayana version and, thus, the same conclusions can be drawn. The *Sambhogakaya* is the realm of Gods, and these are incarnated into human flesh in the *Nirmanakaya* form. Again, *Dharmakaya* is seen as the ultimate non-duality, beyond all form. In a sense, Vajrayana is a step forward in the belief in incarnations. Vajrayana Buddhists view the physical world as sacramental. The physical nature is a vehicle for the Buddha nature. Therefore, the incarnation of bodhisattvas is an important tool to realize Buddha nature. The Dalai Lama is the (re)incarnation of Avalokiteshvara made manifest so as to help us realize our true Buddha natures. The Dalai Lama is here to help us in ending our suffering.

Another form of Tibetan Buddhism is the tradition of Dzogchen, "the essence of the Great Perfection." It was founded by Garab Dorje and is for "people whose principal defilement is delusion."⁴⁰ Dzogchen accentuates the closeness of enlightenment: the thought is that everyone is already enlightened: everyone must simply become aware of this. Like a child's hidden picture drawing, the ice cream cone is already in the picture; one simply has to find or to acknowledge it. This omnipresent enlightenment can be achieved by rearranging one's perspective so as to see the interdependent forms emerge, by shifting one's focus to the constant change and transformation of all forms. It is everywhere at every moment; every minute we breathe in the universe and exhale enlightenment. It is believed to be covered up by the conceptual mind.⁴¹ Through the practices of Dzogchen, the mind that is covering up the awareness of our already enlightened self is made transparent and eventually one awakens to his or her own enlightenment.

Yogachara is a meditative technique used by the Dzogchen practitioner. In this, one focuses so intensely on a yidam deity that he or she fuses with it. "A yidam is an enlightened being whom one takes as the subject of one's Vajrayana practice."⁴² These are thought to be manifestations of "one's own inner realized nature."⁴³ The goal is to manifest this yidam as a real being. The practitioner brings this deity into the material world, then fuses with it; in a sense, he or she becomes an incarnation of the deity. However, this incarnation is dependent upon perceptual relationships. The last part of the exercise is to eliminate fusion so as to realize the emptiness of all forms. Thus, there is belief that one can manifest a deity, but this manifestation is impermanent, as are all incarnations.



VII

In Hinduism, the monistic Brahman is not worshipped; rather, it is the more personal god (namely, Vishnu) who is worshipped. Similarly, in Buddhism the *Dharmakaya* is not sought after for guidance or help. It is the bodhisattva, who has pledged to help all, that can be approached and who is often worshipped. Bodhisattvas are seen as more approachable than is the Buddha, and in fact they are considered inferior to Buddhas. It is difficult to find scriptural reference to the divine nature of the bodhisattva. But, since the bodhisattva resides in the *Sambhogakaya* realm and is manifested in human form, it can be seen as a god. And, in fact, in popular Buddhism, many bodhisattvas are viewed as deities and are worshipped. The bodhisattvas are worshipped to a much greater degree than is the Buddha himself, since it is believed that the Buddha entered Nirvana and is thus unapproachable.⁴⁴

Whether or not the bodhisattva is considered a god differs according to sect and lineage. Many believers claim that they are simply humans, while others venerate them as deities. What is clear is that bodhisattvas are higher than ordinary humans, but lower than the celestial buddhas. This is especially evident in Vajrayana. There, the bodhisattva can manifest either as a celestial being or as a human being.⁴⁵ The Bodhisattva vow does not make one divine. However, the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri are considered divine, and they are manifested in human form (as the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, respectively). The celestial bodhisattva can become incarnate in human form.

VIII

Although incarnations have traditionally been thought of in the material or physical form, they can be thought of in terms of intersubjectivity. If we define *incarnations* in this context, the divine can be said to be made incarnate in, and through, participatory relation. It is participation in the lives of others and in the ability to empathize with others that the divine manifests itself in this world. By acting in a way that is altruistic and selfless, one truly reveals the divine in physical form in this physical world. The bodhisattvas, Jesus of Nazareth, and the Buddha all show this type of altruism. Even when one takes away the believed divine nature of any of these beings, we can still witness the divine nature within.⁴⁶

Understood in this way, incarnation is even more clearly a part of Mahayana Buddhism. The bodhisattva vow is deeply selfless and altruistic. To refuse Nirvana until all living beings have been led to enlightenment through compassionate action is the ultimate form of participatory relation. Buddha can also be viewed as fully divine. In Buddhist terms, he is one who has achieved complete liberation from suffering and samsara. He is seen as the manifestation of the *Sambhogakaya* as well as the *Dharmakaya* in the form of the *Nirmanakaya*. Thus, Buddha can be seen as god incarnate because of his ability to empathize fully with humanity and with the *Dharmakaya*.

IX

Buddha has at least ten of the attributes that are identified as characterizing incarnation. This does not automatically qualify him as an incarnation, but we also cannot rule out this possibility. It is believed within the traditions of Buddhism that the Buddha was historical or real; he had an unusual birth; he was fully human; he identified with the divine; his life was repeated; it took non-human forms;



there was docetic elevation; moral rectitude was important in his teaching; there was a miraculous nature to his work; and he possessed self knowledge of his divine nature. Final proof of the incarnation of the divine form will most likely never be found, but the reality of incarnation is here accepted. Although Theravada Buddhism is best understood as an atheistic or non-theistic religion, one still needs to understand incarnation from a Buddhist perspective in order to understand incarnation in other religions. (Some popular practitioners of Theravada Buddhism do worship deities, but I here choose to focus on the views of the monks and nuns of Theravada, not on those of the laypeople). Mahayana and Vajrayana emphasize Buddha's supramundane nature, and they incorporate the concept of incarnation within the belief systems; however, this is most often ignored by practitioners.

X

Although one major branch of Buddhism is non-theistic and/or atheistic (and therefore does not allow for the religious concept of incarnation), other branches have a central focus on incarnation. Through the belief in the trikaya, the possibility for incarnation was demonstrated from the perspective of the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions. By understanding incarnation within our own tradition and from our own perspective, Buddhists would have the ability to understand better the concept of incarnation in other religions. It was demonstrated that Buddhist incarnation can be understood from a Christian theological perspective. Perhaps now the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism can come from a deeper understanding and lead to more openness and compassion. In a world wherein cultures are intermixing at a rate never experienced before, compassion for others stemming from true understanding of their belief systems is the ultimate expression of the Buddha's teachings.

¹ Shantideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lions Publications, 1997) 144.

² Paul O. Ingram, "Buddhists Talk about Jesus, Christians Talk about Buddha," in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 21, no. 1 (2001): 76.

³ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵ R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) xiv-xix.

⁶ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation: The Divine in Human Form in the World's Religions* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997) 14.

⁷ *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. "incarnation."

⁸ Jacob Neusner, *The Incarnation of God: The Character of God in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

⁹ Charlene P. E. Burns, *Divine Becoming: Rethinking Jesus and Incarnation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) 22-25.

¹⁰ Parrinder, *Op. cit.*, 131-132.

¹¹ When Buddhism is seen as one entity, it can be viewed as atheistic, non-theistic, and transpolytheistic, and it can be viewed with or without incarnation. However, no single tradition within Buddhism is all three and therefore there is also a sense in which it is none of these.

¹² *The Jataka Tales*, trans. H. T. Francis and E. J. Thomas (Bombay: Jaico, 1970) ii.

¹³ Parrinder, *Op. cit.*, 135.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149, 151-156.

- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.
- ¹⁶ Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* (London: Cassell, 1962) 45.
- ¹⁷ T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Birth-Stories* (Dehli: Indological Book House, 1973) i.
- ¹⁸ Robert C. Lester, *Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973) 15.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ Beatrice Lane Suzuki, *Mahayana Buddhism: A Brief Outline* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972) 21.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 28.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 52.
- ²³ *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. “triads.”
- ²⁴ Suzuki, *Op. cit.*, 53.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavagita* (India: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993) Ch. 7.
- ³² Suzuki, *Op. cit.*, 57.
- ³³ Reginald A. Ray, *Indestructible Truth: The Living Spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2000) 94-95.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 103-227.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 358.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 359.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 360.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 126.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 35.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Burns, *Op. cit.* 115-146.





Augustine's View of the Good • Andrew Ruggles

Andrew (Drew) Ruggles graduated in May 2003 with a Philosophy major and a Religious Studies minor. Drew began this paper on Augustine's theory of good and evil while taking a course in the Psychology of Religion with Professor Burns in the fall term of 2002. It was further revised and developed while working with Professor Brummer in the Writing and Research in Philosophy and Religious Studies course in the fall term of 2002. And it went through further revision in the spring term of 2003.

I

Evil has been a constant in the human experience, and its persistence and scope, despite the actions of many active, compassionate, and intelligent people, have been deeply vexing to many. Both Carl Jung and Augustine wrote at length and passionately on the topic of evil, although their methods and conclusions are profoundly different. One suggestion made by Augustine, namely, that evil is privation or lack of good, not as a being in itself, has been very controversial. Several theorists question the usefulness and validity of this suggestion, considering it to be a throwback to a medieval pietism that endeavored to keep God away from any responsibility for evil no matter what the cost to reason. Not the least of these dissenters is Carl Jung, who writes in "Christ a Symbol of Self":

Today as never before it is important that human beings should not overlook the danger of the evil lurking within them. It is unfortunately only too real, which is why psychology must insist on the reality of evil and must reject any definition that regards it as insignificant or actually non-existent.¹

However, the conceptualization of evil as privation is only one of Augustine's views on evil. And this view helps to broaden many concepts associated with it and thereby endows the discussion with a subtlety not always found in the concept of evil, *qua* reality. In Jung's analysis of this concept and in his rejection of Augustine, he misses essential parts of Augustine's views on evil, and he thereby fails to grasp the



context and psychology of Augustine's theory. In the end, Jung erroneously equates evil's lack of substance, one of Augustine's ways of dealing with the concept, with evil's lack of importance.

I here propose both to summarize Jung's views on evil and to present his criticisms of Augustine's theory. I shall then examine Augustine's position on the matter of the nature of good and evil. Three rather distinct views of good will thus emerge. We shall see that, in the end, the depth and richness of Augustine's theory can successfully respond to the challenge put forth by Jung.

II

Jung developed his picture of evil by considering the psychological symbolism and relationship of Christ and Satan. In order to understand Jung's conception of evil, one must first understand what these archetypes or universal symbols represent. Christ is the archetype of the Self. But one should be careful not to conflate the Self with the ego. The Self, as an archetype, represents the totality of the psyche; it is the being on the edge of consciousness and unconsciousness. The Self is often represented as a manifestation of a divine unity within us all. It is not the ego. To Jung, this unity must also include the shadow self. Therefore, the picture of the Self as represented only by the purely good and holy Christ is not complete; it must be balanced by the inclusion of Satan. As Jung writes, "...the coming of the Anti-christ is not just a prophetic prediction, but it is an inexorable psychological law."²² But the Self in Christianity is not unified; it is split between Christ and the competitor Satan. This Christ/Satan then "...might easily be a *yang-yin* relationship."²³ Because Jung is also very interested in maintaining the symbolic identity of Christ and God, Jung consciously presents God as an opposition of good and evil. Although this brings evil into the person of God, his view also makes it a real, psychic being in the totality of God with which the human can and should grapple.

A complicating factor in Jung's thought is the requirement of keeping the context of his ideas clear, being careful not to misapply his thoughts to other categories. He is careful to state that he has "...neither the inclination nor the competence to mix [himself] up with metaphysics."²⁴ Therefore, none of Jung's statements about the aspects of religion (evil, Christ, God, the cross, etc.) is to be taken as a description, properly so-called, of worldly affairs. Instead, he describes how they are in the mind. However, his statement, quoted in my introduction, seems to be an obvious metaphysical declaration of the being of evil. It is often difficult to tell what Jung means by *metaphysics*, if this and other statements do not involve him in the philosophical enterprise. However, a defense of this passage could be that the evil Jung envisions does not necessarily exist in the world, but it certainly does exist in the mind. He then seems to assume a metaphysical difference between objects in the mind and those in the world; perhaps he does this inaccurately, but it is not something he considers in detail. Still, it is the psychological being of evil with which he is concerned, and that entity is a "given" to him. Further, his ideas are not to be taken as mere psychologizations, either. He does not deny the presence of his symbols as metaphysical realities; he simply does not deal with them as such. Therefore, the non-existence of evil may obtain metaphysically, but to him to declare it as such is counter-productive to his avowed purpose of eschewing metaphysics.

In comparing Jung's theory with Augustine's, then, it would be easy to say that much of Augustine's theory is metaphysical and, thus, that it does not apply to the structure of the mind described by Jung. However, Augustine's view of the privation of good has very strong psychological and normative aspects



And, it is this view of evil that seems most analogous to a disease or disruption about which I am here most concerned. It conflicts markedly with Jung's view.

Jung's implied claim that Augustine considered evil to be insignificant (in the earlier-presented quote) seems now to be flatly ludicrous. Not only does Augustine not say that evil is unimportant, but he expressly accuses Pelagius of dismissing evil. In response to Pelagius's statement, "How could that which lacks all substance possibly have weakened...human nature?,"⁵ he states that Pelagius does not understand the effect of the "wound" of sin. He replies a guilty person would, "...worn out with the anguish of his wound...briefly answer and say, 'Go from me, I beseech you' rather [than] discuss the point [of whether a thing without substance can weaken human nature.]"⁶

III

Augustine's theory of evil, as partially a privation, needs to be prefaced by a description of his project in developing the theory of good and evil, because his reasons for thinking along these lines shed much light on the terms he uses. On one level, he wanted to refute the cosmic dualism of the Manicheans, a sect that used much Christian imagery but saw creation as stemming from a conflict between a god of light and a god of darkness. In observing this project, Jung ascribed the development of the theory of evil as a privation to a sectarian resistance to the Manicheans.⁷ The second project in which Augustine was engaged involved refuting the contemporary philosophical notion that physical nature is the root of evil. He maintained that all things in the universe in their proper order are good. As he says in *The City of God*, "It was not the corruptible flesh that made the soul sinful,"⁸ and again in *The Nature of Good*, "...that all nature, that is, every spirit and every body, is naturally good."⁹

The first point to raise about Jung's criticism of Augustine's theory of evil, then, is that it misses the complexity of the theory; it treats Augustine's view as simply a privation theory when, in fact, it is more. Augustine addresses the question of the nature of good and evil in at least three ways. These approaches are not self-conscious on his part, but they do provide a helpful rubric when wading through his complex lines of reasoning. He addresses the question in terms of considering or judging (1) ontologically between things (on their levels of reality), (2) the relation of things to their environments (that is, their fittingness), and (3) the level or degree of integrity of a choosing being (namely, its normative integrity). His thought on the nature of good and evil is generally considered descriptive (meaning it does not rely on any assumption of what is higher or better than something else or what ought to be), but we shall have reason to point out normative aspects (meaning, he relies on a conception of what ought to be and not just what is) of his view. To put it another way, it has been suggested that what he is describing are merely gradations and movements along a scale of more and less substantial being – some things are more ontologically substantial than others. And it is this aspect of Augustine's theory upon which Jung focuses his criticisms. This approach applies to larger classes of things. But there are considerations that do not strictly fit his scale of assessment of greater or lesser degrees of substantial being. For these latter aspects, he relies more upon normative assessments, something that Jung does not seem to notice. Still, these three approaches are highly interrelated; it seems impossible to understand what Augustine has to assert about goodness and evil without touching upon aspects of all three of these considerations.

As has been suggested, there is a certain gradation of both normative and descriptive components in Augustine's work. In general, as Augustine approaches the particular, his orientation relies more on normative arguments. His more expansive judgments, such as the distinction in the levels of being, are



clearly based on some metaphysical (that is, descriptive) propositions. With more particular judgments, however – for instance, the focus of the particular soul towards and away from the divine (the third approach, mentioned above) – the basis and implementation of his judgments between good and evil require a system of “oughts.”¹⁰

Augustine’s first way of looking at good and evil – a consideration of the order amongst things and of their levels of being – is an aspect of his ideas that has received much attention. As we have noted, it was the main target of Jung’s criticisms. The celebrated “hierarchy of being” that was so popular in the Middle Ages (and is so distant from modern thought) has its footing in this idea. The basic idea is that there are some natures whose beings are simply more substantial, and, thus, better than other natures. “Of course it is possible that one nature, even when corrupted, may still be better than another nature which has remained uncorrupted,”¹¹ states Augustine. Although there is an aesthetic continuum for this approach in *The Nature of the Good*, it seems to be glossed over and used as an example for other points. The two more interesting continua involved here are that of corruptibility and of capability. Further, these two continua lay out a clear hierarchy to Augustine along which various things are seen to have a certain position. As such, these two dimensions probably involve his most descriptive lines of thought.

The first of these, the continuum of corruptibility, both appeals to the broadest categories and describes the highest part of Augustine’s cosmology. It defines the three basic levels of being: corporeal, spiritual, and divine. On this continuum, it seems safe to assert that being is not only a good, but it is the root of all goodness. Augustine says of the divine (God), “Every change causes that which was to cease to be. Therefore he truly is who is unchangeable.”¹² From this perspective, the differences between the three levels are based upon the different types of mutability or changeability they display. Corporeal (physical) things are mutable in time and place; divine things are only mutable in time, and God, the infinitely divine, is immutable.¹³ Being changeless and therefore eternal, God is the paragon of being itself (and thus also of goodness). And all other things, especially sensible things, are changeable in various ways; thus, they are capable of being deceptive. As he says “Nothing keeps us further from the truth than a ...mind crowded with the deceiving impressions of sensible objects.”¹⁴ He also seems to assume some type of principle of entropy, believing that everything corruptible will, at some time, actually be corrupted.

The next dimension to defining *good* within the first approach – the continuum of capability – is not purely descriptive. It insists that if one class of things (that is, spirits) orders or has augmented abilities for another class of things (that is, bodies), then that first thing is at a higher level and is more excellent. For example, spirit enlivens and orders body,¹⁵ and rational spirits can be happy or miserable while “other things... which are inferior to rational spirit can be neither happy nor miserable.”¹⁶ Thus, he has established through two considerations from the perspective of the first approach that spiritual things are inherently better than physical things.

The second general approach mentioned above – the fittingness of a thing to its environment – brings us closer to earth and farther from the more descriptive elements that ground his work in the first approach to defining *good* or *evil*. The general statement of this view is that one can also evaluate things as to how well their properties fit their environs. Or, when all things interact well together, there is an order that is good. He writes: “There is a specific beauty in the temporal order...[as] a well prepared speech is beautiful even though all its syllables and sounds pass in succession as if they are born and die.”¹⁷ Because a thing can become more or less incorporated into its environment, its relation to its environment or its fittingness involves normative considerations. It concerns matters that ought to be.



Further, he challenges the idea that judgments between things (the first approach) are the ultimate measure of the good; he does this in his assessment of the beauty of the human and of the ape. For, according to the common opinion, the beauty of a human is greater than that of an ape, "...and this misleads the unknowing. They think that the one is good and the other bad. They do not notice that, the body of the ape has its own proper measure... concord of all its parts, readiness in self-defense, and other qualities which it would take a long time to pursue."¹⁸

There is then a fitting order (a right relation) between a thing and its environment from which it can change for better or for worse (the second approach), even though it has an apparent lack according to the order or goodness of things in general (the first approach). In terms of the second approach, then, things are still to be considered good or beautiful in their own ways. The eternity of God and the order of sensible things are each good in its own way. Individual sensible things have their own goodness, but this is a lesser and more transient good than either the eternal good or the good of the sensible realm as a whole.

IV

The third approach to defining *good* or *evil* – the normative integrity of a being – addresses the way in which a person, a rational soul, navigates between these lesser and greater goods of the first two approaches. It is here that Augustine addresses the nature of evil, especially at the personal level, and as such this approach has specific application to the power of choice within rational souls or the intellect.¹⁹ Augustine's view within this approach is that an evil will is one that knowingly chooses the lesser alternative. To refer back to his first and most ontological approach, there is a difference in goodness between God, the soul, and physical things. For the soul to turn to the divine and away from the physical is *conversio* (representing both a better focus of thought and a better fittingness in the soul), and for the soul to turn to the physical and away from the divine is *adversio* (representing a poorer object of choice and a lack of fittingness in the soul).²⁰

Thus, Augustine's three levels of being (discussed as part of the first approach) are still useful here, for he does not stop with a statement about the level of good of a cosmos ordered by change, but he continues on to express how one should relate to the three levels of being – whether one should turn mentally toward the physical or turn mentally toward God.²¹ The person, as soul, is suspended between two levels of being (the first approach). He asserts that humanity should turn its mind to what is immutable, because the mutable, by definition, changes and therefore it is deceiving.²² So a person should not only focus on the more permanent or sustained thing but on the more permanent or sustainable order. Augustine's concern is thus centered, not only upon a good physical order in nature, but also on a good spiritual order in humanity (the third approach). In fact, he very often uses the former to illustrate the latter.

As we have seen, evil enters into existence through weakness of the will. Augustine states, "But if the character of the will is of moment because if it is wrong, [the] motions of the soul will be wrong, but if it is right, [the] motions of the soul will be right. For the will is in them all; yea, none of them is anything else than will."²³ *Will* in this sense can be understood as it is commonly defined: *the volition to have or pursue a thing one way and not another*. The disease of weakness of the will is a propensity toward the temporary over the permanent; it is especially the tendency to pursue one's own benefit to the



exclusion of other ends or the good of other beings. A proper will is the integration of one's self into the order of the whole – in Augustinian terms, *into the order of God*.

We can see, then, that the simple identity between being and goodness does not need to be defended. Augustine's theory of good and evil is not simply an ontological position. It is a proposal that evil be defined in part descriptively and in part normatively, always against the backdrop of an otherwise good order. The basis of evil, then, resides in the soul's knowingly choosing the lower order over the higher, the lesser good over the greater, the changeable over the immutable. This is not to say that change is itself bad or evil, for a thing may change for the better by adapting more effectively to its environs, for example. But when one chooses that which is changeable by nature over the immutable, this indicates the failure of that being to adapt appropriately to its characteristic ontological environment. We see, then, that one does not need to consider solely what a thing is as such, because ontology does not undergird the whole of Augustine's position.

V

This, then, is one advantage of Augustine's theory over Jung's: Augustine unequivocally locates the source of evil in the person, while Jung's picture of the devil maintains the possibility that evil can be something alienated from the person. On Augustine's view, this is impossible. A will or psyche is a unified whole that instances no devil/angel dichotomy. Whatever comes from the will truly comes from the will. As he states, "He who lives according to God ought to cherish towards evil men a perfect hatred, so that he shall neither hate the man because of his vice, nor love the vice because of the man, but hate the vice and love the man."²⁴ Vice does not then have a positive or ontological being (the first approach), but it is seen negatively or relationally as a weakness of the will (the third approach).

The question now arises: What is 'Satan' in Augustine's theory? The concept of Satan, being evil incarnate, simply does not work within Augustine's position. Taken as a literal being, Satan cannot be viewed as evil in itself. Augustine endorsed the idea that being as such is good, so the simple being of Satan is a good possessed by him. Equally so the dark god of Manicheism (as discussed in Chapter 41 of the "Nature of Good"). The answer lies in part in the etymology of the word *Satan*. The word used in Hebrew in the book of *Job* is "satan," which means "the adversary," which is very closely related to "s'tinah," which means "an accusation." The close relationship between these two words is difficult to make clear in translation. First, consonants are the only things that can be properly considered letters in Hebrew. So, the two words are actually spelled "stn" and "stnh", respectively. Second, vowel points (added for correct pronunciation) often change internally in Hebrew when moving between forms. ("He walked" is "halak," but "she walked" is "hal'kah"). And "S'tinah" is merely a feminine version of "satan."

What this suggests is that Satan is the one who by a consistent exercise of will is in opposition and accusation to all (the third approach). The accusation is that of being flawed and weak. He puts humanity to the hammer in order to point out wherein it is lacking. As is illustrated in *Job*, this type of investigation and challenge can destroy its subject, giving one a picture more like the vivisections of the Nazi doctors than an observation in the interest of learning.²⁵

The normative definition of *evil* (as a disease or corruption of the will) still fits with the Augustinian project without many of the philosophical problems associated with the view that evil constitutes an ontological category – an absolute privation of being or goodness. It also takes evil seriously and has



value aside from keeping God away from being its cause. In his assessment of the Christian symbols of Satan, Christ, and God, Jung did not properly understand why they were arranged in the way they are. He instead forced them into his theory of how the symbols should be taken or organized instead of taking them for the expression of how one exercises choice and becomes united with the greater whole.

¹Carl Jung, "Christ, the Symbol of Self," in *Jung on Christianity*, Murray Stein, ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999) 90-91.

²*Ibid.*, 81.

³*Ibid.*, 94

⁴*Ibid.*, 91.

⁵Pelagius was a 4th century BCE thinker who sought to reform Christianity on such issues as the presence of original sin, the importance of human free will and the nature of evil. But, based largely on the arguments of Augustine against his ideas, he was branded a heretic. Augustine of Hippo, "On Nature and Grace, Against Pelagius," in *The Basic Writings of Augustine*, ed. Whitney J. Oates, trans. P. Holmes (New York: Random House, 1948) 534.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Carl Jung, "Christ, the Symbol of Self," in *Jung on Christianity*, Murray Stein, ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999) 94.

⁸Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1993) 14:3.

⁹Augustine, "The Nature of the Good," in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. John H. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953) 326.

¹⁰In *The Nature of the Good*, 327, Augustine describes good and evil in terms of the concepts of "measure, form, and order." These three terms do not come up in all of his writings on the subject and it seems as if he uses them to unite the surface of the different directions in his thought. What he meant by these three terms is also frustratingly vague, and I do not believe he needed them in order to say something interesting about the nature of the good. So, for the purpose of this paper, I will put these specific terms aside.

¹¹Augustine, "The Nature of the Good," in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. John H. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953) 327.

¹²*Ibid.*, xix, 331.

¹³Augustine, "Three Levels of Reality," in *The Essential Augustine*, Vernon J. Bourke, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974) 45.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Augustine, "The Nature of the Good," in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. John H. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953) viii, 328.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 327.

¹⁹Without wading too deeply into the quagmires of free will and the difference between people and animals, it can be stated that even if free will does not exist, the common illusion of choice is enough to get the present point across.

²⁰Augustine, "Three Levels of Reality," in *The Essential Augustine*, Vernon J. Bourke, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974) 43.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, 48. As we have indicated, he says: "Nothing keeps us further from the truth than a . . . mind crowded with the deceiving impressions of sensible objects." We should also point out that this concept is not unlike the Buddhist understanding of impermanence strongly influenced by the Platonic concept of the over arching form of the good.



²³Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIV: 6, 447.

²⁴*Ibid.*, (Book XIV: 6)

²⁵The existence of a Satan character at all as a source of evil lends an interesting support to Jung's archetypes; the totality of the Self must deal with the shadow somehow. What it does not do well is explain Satan's expulsion and his extreme distance from God. It seems like an act of bad scholarship, especially in light of Jung's project of not trying to gain meaning from the symbols as they occur but instead state that this or that is the way things should occur.



On The Yoruba Culture and Religion • Jeannine Stucklen

Jeannine Stucklen graduated in May 2003 with a Music major and a Religious Studies minor. Jeannine wrote this paper on the Yoruba religion as part of an independent study project that she had with Professor Rowlett in the fall term of 2002.

Introduction

Between the years of the development of indigenous traditions and the rise of Western traditions and ideas in Africa, there have been many changes in Yoruba life. One might think that these changes would affect the religious life of this tribe in major ways, but in actuality the changes have been rather insignificant. Some gods have been transformed into saints, while others have been turned into evil, Western figures like Satan. But many of the key deities have retained their traditional functions. Western medicine has, however, encroached upon the native herbalisms in Nigeria.

The most significant problem in Nigeria today, however, concerns abuses of the land, water, and earth. Natural resources are being depleted and exported faster than the Earth can replenish them. Clear cutting has caused the disappearance of the forestlands, and the wetlands are being destroyed to create space for farms. Finally, bad farming practices are creating useless patches of land. Because of the mismanagement of the land, the roles that the gods (“orisha”) have traditionally played in the Yoruba religion are changing, and this change affects their religious beliefs and practices.

It is very important, then, to come to an understanding and appreciation of the Yoruba culture and religion. But we must also become aware of some of the main ways in which the culture and religion are changing in response to the influence of the West, from the traditional roles of women and men in the society to the potential loss of orishas. If the aspects of nature that they oversee become contaminated or eliminated, other important changes will occur.

In this examination of the Yoruba people, I will discuss several key points. First, I shall consider the socio-cultural and geographical backgrounds of the tribe. Along with this, I will provide a brief history of the land, people, and their religion. Next I will touch upon some religious celebrations and



deities in this culture. I will then consider how certain aspects of Western civilization are affecting the Yoruba people. Finally, I will maintain that it would be better if the Yoruba people would work to retain their traditional cultural values and religious beliefs.

The issue here presented is very important, not only for the Yoruba, but also for other threatened tribes and cultures in the developing world. Western civilization has a tendency to push some societies to change to more “modern” ways and beliefs. If, as people of the Earth, we continue to discourage or to prevent indigenous peoples from practicing their religions through pressure and ecological crises, we might not only lose the knowledge that these tribes possess, but we might lose the knowledge of their cultures as well.

Socio-Cultural and Geographical Background

The Yoruba is a diverse group of people who are connected by “geography language, history, and religion.”¹ Western civilization has changed life for these people in many ways. The slave trade of the 18th century created relative chaos for those who lived in the area. Nigeria has since changed from being dominated by the presence of indigenous religions to being under the greater influence of Islam and Christianity.

The Yoruba tribes lived in Southwestern Nigeria, in Benin, and in Togo. Their homelands were about the size of England, and they ranged from rainforest to savannah. There is evidence of the presence of Yoruba civilization in the Stone Age from around 1000 to 200 BCE. Remnants of blacksmithing and agriculture dating back to 900 CE have been found. Yorubaland reached its peak somewhere between the 12th and 14th centuries in the Common Era. Urbanism became the way of life for many during this time, and advancements in technology were highly valued. An unfortunate side of Yoruba history is that many of the wars between tribes resulted in the slave trade to Europe and the U.S. colonies. In 1861, Great Britain decided to annex a small part of Yorubaland into its country; it was named “Lagos”. With the growth of this population, Great Britain dominated the entire area by the 20th century.²

In the settlements in this area, the early city-states ranged anywhere from having small hunting and farming camps to having cities of 20,000 to 60,000 people in the 1850’s. These communities were divided into small kingdoms. The city-states were circular in layout, with markets in the center. The land was split up in pie-shaped wedges. The houses were made from mud bricks covered with thatch. The Ile-Ife kingdom was considered to be the oldest of the Yoruba city-states, and it was central to ritual and folk tales. Oyo, a nearby kingdom to the northwest, also had great spiritual importance.³ Today, Nigeria, with its population of about 6 million, has more people than any other African country.

In Nigeria, marriage has not changed significantly since the arrival of Christianity and Islam. Although polygamy is highly discouraged by these religions, it is still practiced.⁴ If the family lines of a couple are known to converge, their union is not allowed. Once married, women and men do not sleep in the same room, but the husbands will come to their wives for the purpose of intercourse. This sleeping situation is not uncommon in tribal societies around the world. In Nigeria, most marriages are arranged, but there are some marriages today that are chosen, and these marriages usually occur within the educated class. With the number of chosen marriages increasing, the Western idea of divorce has also started to become more common.⁵

There is some evidence that indicates that, in ancient times, the Yoruba might have been a matri-archal society. A goddess named “Oduduwa” was a very important deity who later had her name changed



so she could become a male figure. Today, Nigerian women have many obstacles to overcome in order to assure their rights. There are clearly witnessed prejudices in the Yoruba religion. Women are not allowed to speak publicly or to challenge male authority. Women's duties are mostly religious.⁶ There are, however, exceptions to the situation about women's rights in the Orisha-Oko cult and others. Within this small division of the Yoruba religion, the Orisha-Oko priestesses outnumber the priests. The priestesses are considered to be almost a separate society, and they are extremely secretive. No man is ever to injure or to insult these holy women. It is said that the Owe cult is patriarchal, but within this group the women who practice spirit possession are considered to be wives of the divine.⁷

Families are very important in the Yoruba religion, as descent lines must be carried out through the next generation. Descent groups are important for status and inheritance. Elder males act as the decision makers and administrators for the family group. Women are not able to receive titles, but their sons can receive the honors that would have been theirs. When someone dies, the property is split equally among male family members. The women and the elderly get nothing unless someone's will so specifies. Social status is defined on the basis of sex, age, wealth and family lines.⁸ Although Yorba practice does seem skewed toward a male-oriented society, the elderly and the women are revered for their age and experience. Women can receive status from trading, skills, and wealth, and many are not dependent on men for money.⁹

The Nigerian lands where the Yoruba lived varied greatly before the influence of Western civilization. In these regions, one could find savannah grasslands, swamps, and many types of forest. Typically, the lowland forests tended to grow along streams and rivers.

The climate in the eastern area of Nigeria tends to be cooler, while the northern parts tend to be more humid. In the northern states, there is heavy to moderate rainfall during part of the year, while the dry season is from July to September.¹⁰

Agriculture is a vital part of the Nigerian economy. The many rivers that flow through the land create fertile areas that are ideal for agriculture. The area of the Yoruba alone produces 95% of the country's cocoa. Beans, yams, and cotton are also a major part of the economy, since they grow so well in this region. And the post-colonial crops, such as maize and tobacco that used to be imported, have also done quite well.¹¹

Deities and Religious Celebrations

Religion is an extremely important aspect of the Yoruba peoples. Festivals are practiced throughout the year, and burial rites bring many people together. The old gods and goddesses still play a vital role in the lives of the Yoruba. Along with these gods and goddesses are the things they represent, such as nature and the spirit world. Although Western civilization has brought the influence of Islam and Christianity, the Yoruba people still celebrate religious festivals in their old ways – ways that predated these more modern influences.

Yoruba festivals are more like social events than religious ones, in much the same way that Christmas and Easter are for many in the United States. The festivals are celebrations of ancient mythic and traditional figures of history. Even many of the Islamic and Christian groups living in that area celebrate these gatherings. Much of the reason for keeping the traditional festivals alive rests with the Yoruba belief that they will bring economic success. One such festival is that of the orisha, or lesser god,



Oduduwa, a warrior leader who was eventually deified. Another festival that is celebrated is the festival of Moremi, a female orisha who represents beauty and wisdom. Moremi is said to have saved the tribe of Yoruba from the nearby tribe of the Igbo.¹²

The Gelede is a festival celebrated in honor of the ancestral spirits, female elders and deities. Within this festival, two main elements – earth and water – are associated with the female aspect. Celebrating womanhood and motherhood are the two most important ideas in the Gelede festival.¹³ The Great Mothers, the goddesses who give life, are worshipped and respected. This occasion can be seen as an ecologically respectful festival, because the Earth itself is a life giver and sustainer, much like the Great Mothers.

Death rites are taken very seriously; they tend to bring entire communities together. There are many different ways of celebrating someone's death; during this time many people put away their differences out of respect for the dead and their families. Much of the time, there are interfaith funerals to accommodate differences in religions for the family and the community. For funerals, some families will bring in traditional or modern singers. If individuals are skilled musicians, they are more likely to be hired for this event. Decisions on how to organize the funeral are made by the survivors of the deceased.¹⁴

Perhaps the most fundamental being in the Yoruba religion is Olodumare. He is seen as the “God-over-all”, and he has many titles and names. There are no images of him, no temples dedicated to him, no symbols that represent him. No sacrifices or ceremonies are done in his name. To the Yoruba, he is ever-present, much like nature, but he is not a god who can appear as an orisha, or lesser god. Olodumare is more like “the aspect of being.” He just is. To honor Olodumare, the Yoruba will sometimes make ash circles and offer nuts and food to animals. Also, they worship the orisha daily by shooting arrow prayers skyward. The Yoruba believe that Olodumare gave life to the orisha or divine beings. Orisha-Nla was given the job of creating animals and plants and organizing them. Then, it is said that he molded the humans out of clay, which shows another relationship of the Yoruba religion to the Earth. Olodumare did not allow Orisha-Nla to give life to humans, but he himself gave it to us.¹⁵

The idea of Olodumare essence is very similar to the idea of James Lovelock's “Gaia Hypothesis.”¹⁶ Olodumare is everything: the Earth, the stars, and the connections between animals, humans, and plants. To the Yoruba, Olodumare can only be respected, but not worshipped, because one cannot worship all that is, all that was, and all that will ever be. Lovelock explains that everything is connected, and if one part of the Earth is hurt, we will all begin to suffer. The Yoruba would probably agree that if an orisha of nature were to disappear, it would eventually hurt us all.

The Orisha

There are many orisha in the Yoruba religion, and each of the orisha pertains to a certain aspect of nature, to heroes or to very old deities. All the orisha are interconnected. Eshu is an orisha who tries to figure out a person's true character, and he will test a person until his or her true nature is revealed. Many Christians and Muslims will compare Eshu to the *Bible's* Satan. Eshu does play a role that is very similar to that of Satan in the *Book of Job*. Eshu is very clever, and he takes his job seriously!

Shango is the orisha of lightning; he was an actual person who was later deified by the people. A long time ago, there was a king of a nearby tribe, the Oyo, called Shango. Shango committed suicide, and



the people didn't want to bear the stigma of their king having done this. Therefore, a story developed to the effect that he arose from the dead and that he reigns in heaven. With the exception of the suicide, this account is, of course, similar to the Jesus story.

To the Yoruba, Ogun is a very important orisha because he represents iron, a tool of technology. The story goes that when the other orishas came to the earth, Ogun made a path for them by using an iron cutlass. Ogun is said to be present during surgery, circumcision, and when tribal cut marks are made by the use of a metal scalpel. If believers of Ogun are made to stand trial in Nigeria, they must place their hand on a piece of iron and swear before the court. Today, Ogun is the god of hunting, automobiles, trucks and theater. In early times, people were sacrificed to him, but today only dogs suffer this fate. Unfortunately, Ogun could lose his status as a god of hunting if the surrounding forests become depleted.¹⁷

Many of the female orisha are associated with the rivers. The first female orisha so associated is Yemaya, or Yemoja. She is declared to be the mother of fishes, and she represents water itself. It is said that she fell backward from exhaustion and formed a lagoon. The other female river deities all form from her.¹⁸ Oya, who was the wife of Shango, is said to be the orisha of the Niger River. Her name also relates to a nearby city, Oyo. Oya is described as a fierce woman who wears a beard.¹⁹ Osun is the goddess of the River Osun, Oba is of the River Oba, and Olosa is the goddess of the lagoons.²⁰ And there are many more goddesses for bodies of water. The rivers and their respective deities need to be respected, because they provide water for the cities that are near them. If they become polluted, not only will the orisha be offended, but also the people living near them will become sick.

Today, because of the influence of Western civilization, many of the orisha have become official Catholic saints, but their names have changed. Ogun has become St. Anthony, the patron of lost things. Shopara, because he rose from the dead, has been equated with St. Lazarus. Shango is now St. Jerome, and the ever-present Yemaya has become the Virgin Mary herself. Traditional festivals for these orisha, however, have not really changed. The Yoruba who still celebrate and respect the old ways can still celebrate using Western religious ideas.

Traditional Medicines

Because of the rich and diverse ecological life in Nigeria, the Yoruba have developed their own herbalisms and traditional medicines. Indeed, many Christians and Muslims patronize the herbalists. Although many Nigerians are familiar with Western medicine, many today still prefer to use the traditional techniques along with new medicines. Some Nigerians, however, will go as far as to say that the herbalists are witches or evil beings. Today, the Nigerian government has given official recognition to natural ways of curing diseases and ailments; it has also given Western medicine a chance to co-exist with the traditional ways.²¹

As it was noted earlier, Nigeria has more people than any other African country. The country is ecologically diverse, but with the rising population, this ecology is already being threatened. The logging industry of Nigeria clear-cuts the dwindling forests both for plantations and for fuel wood, and therefore habitats are daily being lost. Wetlands are being exploited for their rich, fertile soil, and plantations that use bad farming practices are creating patches of land that can have no use. Hunting for the traditional peoples is becoming more and more difficult as land is developed for Western civilization.



There are groups today that are working to prevent an ecological disaster in Nigeria. The Afforestation Programme Co-ordinating Unit (or *APCU*) is a global, regional, and sub-regional set of groups that works with scientists in addressing issues involving environmental protection. The Nigerian Conservation Foundation (or *NCF*) is the largest private conservation organization in Nigeria. It works to protect the genetics, species, and diversity of plants in the country, and it encourages the use of sustainable and renewable resources. Its belief is that we should work in harmony with nature.²²

Conclusion

Being in harmony with nature is nothing new to the Yoruba traditions. The Yoruba orisha tradition states that we, as humans, are part of a complex organism called “the universe”. The orisha were sent to the Earth so that we could live with them in harmony. But when we ignore them or abuse them, we begin to suffer. This position goes hand in hand with Lovelock’s “Gaia Theory”. On this view, we are all interconnected. When we damage the environment, we all begin to suffer.

In conclusion, then, one can see that the environment is a key issue in the Yoruba religion. In fact, it is so important that I believe that if the Yoruba people are unable look back to and capture more of their ancient traditions and values, the environmental damage being done to their society may not be able to be abated. Whereas it is unlikely that Western civilization has directly hurt the religion itself, the environmental practices of Western civilization have begun to change the face of nature where the Yoruba live. And, in doing so, they have threatened the traditions of these people. This can be seen in several cases. Since orisha worship, for example, depends on the plants and animals that make up the ecology of these lands, in order for the orisha to survive, the aspects of nature they represent must be respected and allowed to live. If rivers are polluted, disrespect to the female orisha is shown. Through the loss of respect for the female deities, women could lose more rights. Or, again, if there becomes a shortage of iron in Nigeria, Ogun’s festivals may begin to disappear. And these are just a few illustrations of the challenges that the Yoruba face. If they fail to retain their religious beliefs and traditions, their culture and environment could suffer. Thus, the prospects of a return to their traditions could create a better environment for the Yoruba. It is my belief that, before it is too late, something must be done in order to correct this situation.

¹ <http://kubrick.fa.indiana.edu/~conner/Yoruba/cut.html>

² *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, vol. 9. (New York, Macmillan Library Reference, 1999) 391.

³ <http://kubrick.fa.indiana.edu/~conner/Yoruba/cut.html>.

⁴ Rosalind I.J. Hackett, “Revitalization in African Traditional Religion” in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. by Jacob K. Olupona (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1989) 140.

⁵ *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, vol. 9, 392.

⁶ Joseph Akinyele Omoyajowo, “The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion and Among the Yoruba” in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. by Jacob K. Olupona (St Paul: Paragon House, 1989) 77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸ *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, vol. 9, 392.

⁹ <http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Yoruba.html>.



- ¹⁰ Reuben K. Udo, *Geographical Regions of Nigeria* (Berkeley: University of California, 1970) 27.
- ¹¹ *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, vol. 9, 391.
- ¹² Wande Ambimola, "The Place of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Africa: The Yoruba Example", in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. by Jacob K. Olupona (St Paul: Paragon House, 1989) 51.
- ¹³ <http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Yoruba.html>
- ¹⁴ Ambimola, *Op. cit.*, 55-56.
- ¹⁵ Noel Q. King, *Religions of Africa*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970) 15.
- ¹⁶ James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) viii.
- ¹⁷ King, *Op. cit.*, 19-21.
- ¹⁸ Omoyajowo, *Op. cit.*, 75.
- ¹⁹ King, *Op. cit.*, 20.
- ²⁰ Omoyajowo, *Op. cit.*, 75.
- ²¹ Ambimola, *Op. cit.*, 55-56.
- ²² Linda S. Katz, Ed, *Environmental Profiles: A Global Guide to Projects and People*. (New York: Garland, 1993) 371-374.





The Historic Socrates and Plato's Apology • Joseph Braun

Joe Braun is a Senior and a double major in History and Philosophy. Joe began work on this paper on Socrates and the Apology while taking the Writing and Research in Philosophy and Religious Studies course with Professor Brummer in the fall term of 2002. It went through further revision in the spring term of 2003.

I. Introduction

Plato in many ways is an authority on Socrates. He was in close contact with Socrates for approximately the last eight years of Socrates' life, and he was sufficiently moved by Socrates' trial and execution to leave Athens for several years after Socrates' death. He was an eyewitness to the trial of Socrates and was so influenced by Socrates' philosophy that he recorded it in dialogues. In each of his Socratic dialogues, Plato displays his great gift as a writer, usually making Socrates not only the main character but also empowering him with nearly superhuman wit and argumentative ability.

Most commentators agree that Plato's earlier works most likely portray a more accurate picture of Socrates than Plato's later works. In many ways, then, Plato's *Apology* should be the definitive source on Socrates' trial and personality since it is believed to be the first, or one of the first, of the Socratic dialogues written by Plato. These works were written before Plato had established the Academy; it was thus a time in his life when he would be more interested in preserving the memory of Socrates than in establishing and defending the doctrines of a school. Also, the *Apology* is the only complete, eyewitness account to have survived to the modern period. However, there are also other writers who discuss Socrates. These sources present a somewhat different view of Socrates than Plato presents in the *Apology*, raising the issue of the accuracy of Plato's account both of Socrates' trial and of his personality.

Plato's gift as a writer makes difficult the task of deriving an accurate picture of Socrates. Not knowing the true nature of Socrates leads to a lack of understanding of those individuals with whom he interacted, for example, Plato, Xenophon and Aristophanes. These individuals went on to make contribu-



tions in their respective fields beyond their writings concerning Socrates. A lack of understanding of their relationships with Socrates leads to a lack of understanding of the individual in general and also of his works. It is therefore necessary to understand Socrates' life and trial so as to help to understand better these other important figures. These men were affected by Socrates in one way or another, and they cannot be understood completely without understanding their relationship to him.

Despite the impossibility of creating an accurate representation of an individual from one source, it is my thesis that Plato's *Apology* must be considered the authoritative source on Socrates' trial and general character/personality. Plato's representation of the chronology and events of Socrates' trial in the *Apology* appear to be accurate, being confirmed by analyses of the writings of Aristophanes, of Xenophon and of Diogenes Laertius. Recognizing the fact that there are differences of style and emphasis in these writings, it can yet be asserted that most of these writings confirm what Plato said about the events that happened before and during the trial. What they cannot confirm about Socrates or his trial are such things as what, exactly, he said in his defense or what he really was like as an individual. Each author creates a Socrates who is representative of the author's experiences and opinions of the man; none appears to represent the total truth about him. Although Plato's representation of Socrates' speech must have been distorted by time, by his admiration for his dead master, by his choice in the use of the dialogues to tell Socrates' story, and by his own gifts as a writer, it appears that Plato's representation of Socrates' trial and personality in the *Apology* is generally accurate.

II. Aristophanes

Both Plato and Xenophon challenged the playwright Aristophanes' depiction of Socrates. Plato's Socrates begins his defense in the *Apology*, not by responding to the immediate charges brought against him by the court, but rather by trying to explain his unpopularity with the people of Athens. In this section of the *Apology*, Plato responds to Aristophanes' representation of Socrates in *The Clouds*. *The Clouds* is a comic play that was first performed at the annual dramatic festival in Athens, circa. 423 B.C.E., approximately 24 years before the trial of Socrates. It is the earliest surviving document dealing with Socrates. This is chronologically important because it provides a glimpse of Socrates at an early stage of his intellectual development. Plato was approximately 40 years younger than Socrates, and he was not familiar with Socrates until the later years of Socrates' life. Therefore, despite the satirical and comic nature of *The Clouds*, it does have value in putting Socrates' life in historical perspective. The features of Socrates that Aristophanes exaggerates likely possessed a factual basis in the philosopher's life. Therefore, *The Clouds* can hint at Socrates' nature during the period before Plato knew him. The play also shows that Socrates was a sufficiently well-known personality in Athens so as to be satirized in a play.

The Clouds satirizes Socrates as "The Thinker," a derogatory name meant to suggest that he wasted his time, being engrossed in inconsequential thought. The play depicts Socrates inquiring as to the nature of the heavens and of things below the earth. He is depicted as one who makes weaker arguments defeat stronger ones. He is thus seen as a sophist – a paid teacher of rhetoric – and as a philosopher of nature. The play is an attack on Socrates, but, as Xenophon points out, it is preferable to be called "The Thinker" than it is to be called "Thoughtless."¹

While this hyperbolic portrait of Socrates is most likely proffered for comic effect, it probably was grounded in fact; otherwise, it would not have been entertaining to Athenian audiences. Aristophanes' subject is a younger Socrates whom Plato and Xenophon did not know. At this point in Socrates' life, it is



possible that he could have been more concerned with natural philosophy and more focused on rhetoric than he was later on. In fact, Plato and Diogenes Laertius both record periods in Socrates' life when he was not focused on issues of moral philosophy. In the *Phaedo*, Plato's Socrates recounts how, as a young man, he was not interested in moral questions; rather, he possessed "an extraordinary passion for... natural science; I [Socrates] thought it would be marvelous to know the reasons for which things come and cease and continue to be."² Diogenes Laertius, the ancient historian of philosophy, tells us that Socrates was a pupil of the physicist Archelaus.³

Aristophanes' characterization of Socrates provides an important foundation for understanding both Socrates' trial and the events leading up to it. Insight is also given into Socrates' life before Plato and Xenophon came into contact with him. It becomes evident that Socrates' thought underwent a transformation between the period portrayed in *The Clouds* and his trial and death. Understanding these events and the perspectives of the individuals involved in the trial and the events leading up to it helps to put this entire portion of Socrates' life into focus. Aristophanes' representation of Socrates, whether accurate or not, provides insight as to why Socrates may have chosen to deal with his defense in the way he did, and it also provides valuable background information about the origins of the charges against him. Although *The Clouds* does not provide information that can either confirm or confute what Plato writes of Socrates in the *Apology*, it does provide important information for understanding Socrates' trial from the perspective of the Athenians who tried and convicted him.

III. Xenophon

Xenophon was a military man and a contemporary of Plato. They were most likely born within a few years of each other, and both came from aristocratic backgrounds. It is unclear as to how long Xenophon's acquaintance with Socrates lasted, but it is conceivable that it could have been as long as Plato's association with Socrates. Regardless of the length of their association, Socrates left a deep impression on Xenophon, one that is displayed in his writings.

Xenophon's writing style is simple and clear, lacking much of the artistic character and philosophical depth seen in Plato's dialogues. Xenophon's Socrates is concerned with many of the same issues with which his Platonic counterpart is concerned: piety, education of the youth, ethical issues of all kinds, putting moral men into public office, and fulfilling what he perceives to be his duty to the gods. Also, Xenophon's method of discourse, when using dialogues, is similar to Plato's. Both employ dialectical conversation in their dialogues for which a universal definition of philosophical terms is the goal, and both Plato and Xenophon usually employ Socratic irony. The dialectical method employed by Xenophon is less sophisticated than that used by Plato, but it is still present. However, Xenophon's Socrates lacks much of the philosophical content of Plato's Socrates. In Xenophon's writings, there are no developed positions of ontology, epistemology or ethics as there are in Plato's works, making Xenophon's writings much easier to grasp. Xenophon's Socrates is portrayed as being more of a prosy preacher of morals when compared with the Plato's didactic and witty Socrates.

Because of his simple and blunt style of writing, some scholars have been critical of Xenophon, reluctant to trust his portrayal of Socrates. In his *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell maintains that Xenophon is not to be trusted to represent Socrates accurately in philosophical matters;⁴ while W.H.D. Rouse in his introduction to *Great Dialogues of Plato* describes Xenophon's perceptions of



Socrates' conversations and actions as "...looking on all in a blunt man's way."⁵ It appears that both Russell and Rouse are willing to take Plato's claims concerning Socrates over Xenophon's, owing to the latter's writing style and the content of his work. Both critics prefer Plato's Socrates, with his philosophical depth, to Xenophon's simpler and less philosophical Socrates. Only Russell is willing to be even-handed in his analysis; he considers the possibility that Plato's extraordinary Socrates is more fiction than fact. While Plato's Socrates might be more appealing to philosophers, in some ways Xenophon's Socrates is much more believable. Both present Socrates as an amazing, clever, intelligent and ethical human being, but Xenophon does not endow him with the superhuman dialectical ability that Plato attributes to him from time to time. In some ways, Plato's Socrates is too superb as a dialectician. Because of this, one must not disregard Xenophon's work simply because of his writing style and outlook. Likewise, one must not favor Plato as a source of information because of his obvious gifts as a wordsmith.

While not all of Xenophon's writings deal with Socrates (*Anabasis* and *On Horsemanship* are examples of works not dealing with Socrates) Socrates is the subject of four works: *Oeconomicus*, *Symposium*, *Defense of Socrates* and *Memorabilia* (sometimes referred to as *Recollections of Socrates*). These works deal with a variety of subjects, and some scholars have speculated that Xenophon used Plato's works both as inspiration and as a source of information.

Oeconomicus is a Socratic dialogue, wherein Socrates discusses the management of the home and farm with a character named "Ischomachus". *Symposium* is a dialogue set at an Athenian dinner party, in which Socrates and the guests discuss a variety of topics; indeed, several topics overlap with Plato's dialogue of the same name. Initially, the topics of beauty and righteousness are discussed briefly, with comic scenes separating the topics. Eventually, the conversation leads to discussions of love and the act of boy-loving, wherein Xenophon makes claims similar to those expressed by Plato in his *Symposium*, namely, that love of the soul and heavenly love are better than their earthly counterparts, and that boy-loving should be avoided. Xenophon's *Defense of Socrates* deals both with the charges brought against Socrates at his trial and with what Socrates said in his defense. It differs from Plato's account of the trial regarding how it was that the oracle at Delphi is used to attempt to explain what motivated Socrates to speak with such a confident, if not an arrogant, tone in front of the jury. The first two chapters of *Memorabilia* expand on what Xenophon writes in the *Defense*, and it continues to relate Socrates' conversations and deeds.

Essentially, most of Xenophon's writings are apologetics, defending Socrates from the charge of impiety and revealing his philosophy through recounting his speeches and conduct. Xenophon refrains from using negative characterizations of Socrates, and he makes it clear that he intends to show both Socrates' good character and the error of the Athenian court. Writing in *Memorabilia*, he notes: "In order to support my opinion that he benefited his companions, alike by actions that revealed his own character and by his conversation, I will set down what I recollect of these."⁶ Xenophon begins both the *Memorabilia* and the *Defense of Socrates* by repeating the charges against Socrates, namely that he "...[rejected] the gods acknowledged by the state and [that he brought in] strange deities: he is also guilty of corrupting the youth,"⁷ followed by a discussion of their implications and contradictions. To Xenophon, the most important of these charges is the first – rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state – which is tantamount to a charge of atheism and impiety. Xenophon devotes the majority of his writings to refuting this charge in both *Defense of Socrates* and *Memorabilia*. Like Plato, Xenophon also recognized the inconsistent nature of the first two charges, taken together. Also consonant with Plato's ideas, Xenophon claims that Socrates was both the most moral of men and an excellent teacher of the youth of Athens.



Interestingly enough, Xenophon did not witness the events on which most of his writings focus. At the time of Socrates' trial and execution, Xenophon was on a military expedition, and he could not have witnessed the events of Socrates' trial. Xenophon's *Defense of Socrates* is constructed from interviews with others and from various accounts of the trial; conceivably, Plato could have been used as one of his sources. Xenophon cannot be relied upon to provide a firsthand account of what Socrates actually said at his trial, owing to the fact of his military absence. However, Xenophon accurately represents Socrates' general lifestyle and habits, and the trial. Xenophon's writings were available to his peers, and, in the case of his *Defense of Socrates*, he relied on interviews as the basis of information on it. It is therefore unlikely that Xenophon would either intentionally misrepresent others or exaggerate the events, since the individuals who either witnessed or were involved in the trial were still alive at the time of his writings.

IV. Plato

Plato is the best known of Socrates' followers, in part because of his writings on Socrates. According to Diogenes Laertius, Plato, at age 20, became a follower of Socrates, and he was associated with Socrates until his death (*circa*. 400 BCE). Although about forty years separated the two, Plato became deeply influenced by Socrates' thoughts, and Plato became close to the man himself.

In his Socratic dialogues, Plato demonstrates his gifts as a writer. Each dialogue gives life to the memory of Socrates. By recording Socrates' thoughts and conversations but avoiding a straightforward history, Plato adds a human and dramatic touch to his portrayal of Socrates. The dialogues allow for the expression of humor and irony much more readily than do other forms of narrative writing. However, the use of the dialogue form also creates the problem of separating Plato from Socrates, and it brings up the issue of the accuracy of Plato's representation of Socrates.

Plato wrote approximately 25 dialogues, most of which featured Socrates as the main character. The dialogues do not record actual conversations by Socrates; rather, they are a representation of what Socrates *might* have said. Most commentators agree that the earlier dialogues represent Socrates more accurately than do the later ones. If this position is correct, the *Apology* should be one of the most accurate dialogues in its representation of Socrates.

The *Apology* is credited with being one of the first dialogues written by Plato. In this well-written piece of literature, Plato gives his version of Socrates' defense before the court in Athens. Plato's Socrates appears as an extremely witty and occasionally arrogant speaker. Like a good chess player, Socrates anticipated which arguments his opponents would present in response to his questions, and he knew just how to trap them with their own thoughts. Therefore, Plato's *Apology* with its very articulate speeches presents a Socrates who easily outwits his opponents. It most likely provides an accurate portrayal of what Plato thought of Socrates, but Plato's presentation is likely not a word-for-word account of what Socrates actually said. The speech given by Plato's Socrates most likely captures either the spirit of what the real Socrates said or possibly that which Plato *wished* he had said. So, the *Apology* and Plato's other dialogues cannot be thought of as transcriptions of conversations.

However, the *Apology* can give us some important information about the historic Socrates. Although differences exist between Xenophon's and Plato's account of Socrates at his trial, in many ways they agree and complement each other: both accounts record the same charges against Socrates, both authors record Socrates' concern for educating the youth, and both of the authors recount the proposal of



a punishment of a fine instead of the death penalty for Socrates. Also, there is no reason to doubt the biographical information in Plato's *Apology*; Diogenes Laertius' representation of Socrates generally confirms what Plato and Xenophon both report about Socrates' character and his trial. For instance, all three authors agree that the charges brought against Socrates involved the corruption of the youth, rejecting the gods of the state, and introducing new gods. Plato states these charges very clearly in the *Apology*.⁸ Xenophon states these charges twice in his writing: at the beginning of the first chapter of the first book of the *Memorabilia*⁹ and also in his *Defense of Socrates*.¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius includes the affidavit sworn by Meletus against Socrates, citing the same three charges against Socrates that were also recorded by the other two authors.¹¹

Whereas it is true that Plato provides the only remaining eyewitness account of Socrates' trial, the most information in the *Apology* can be confirmed by other sources. This suggests that most of the material events and the character of Socrates are accurately represented in the *Apology*. Having been written for an audience that could have easily sought out other eyewitnesses and accounts of Socrates and of his trial provides a compelling incentive for Plato to provide an accurate depiction of Socrates' trial. While it is true that the speech given by Socrates was not likely as polished as the one written by Plato, it would seem safe to assert that Socrates must have said something of a similar nature. The general character of Socrates in the *Apology* is most likely accurate, although the speech Socrates gives is likely Plato's embellishment of Socrates' words.

V. Diogenes Laertius

Diogenes Laertius produced one of the few histories of philosophy from the ancient world that has survived to today mostly intact. His work, entitled *Lives of the Philosophers*, was written in the early third century C.E. Unfortunately for modern readers, most of the work relies for its information on the accounts of other authors. Diogenes cites freely and often from other sources, but not infrequently he fails to include analyses of his sources; sometimes he even neglects to provide information about the sources themselves. Therefore, Diogenes' work is only as accurate as are his sources. Because of this less-than-rigorous approach to the history of thought, it seems advisable to trust this work only on minor issues that his sources would have no reason to misrepresent. Or when his claims have independent support.

Diogenes' account of Socrates is basically a biographical description that includes numerous sayings of Socrates, as presented by various sources. They provide very little additional information concerning Socrates' trial, and most of what he says can already be found in Plato's and Xenophon's writings. However, Diogenes does provide an additional source of biographical information about Socrates: entertaining sayings that are attributed to Socrates. Most of Socrates' sayings that are included are pithy, ethical comments or comical statements. For example, when Socrates is asked if he found offensive a certain individual, he is said to have replied that, "No, for it takes two to make a quarrel."¹² Or after having been yelled at by Xanthippe, his wife, who then drenches him in water, Socrates is reported to have said, "Did I not say that Xanthippe's thunder would end in rain?"¹³ Diogenes draws these quotations from the works of Plato and Xenophon, Aristophanes, Ameipsias, Philochorus and others, but he fails to provide a critical analysis of their works. Instead, Diogenes seems content to cite some of the more amusing passages, and he takes it as an article of faith that Socrates' biographers were speaking



truly. Diogenes gives an analysis of his sources only when they are in conflict, and he is then forced to make a judgment call. His explanations for his decisions are rarely lengthy, and they tend to agree with what appears to have been the majority opinion on the issue.

Thus, Diogenes Laertius provides a means to verify other sources, but he should not be heavily relied upon as a primary source. While he does succeed in providing his reader with some very basic biographical information about Socrates and some witty sayings, his writings lack in-depth explanations and philosophical insights found both in Plato's and in Xenophon's writings. Unfortunately, concerning Socrates' trial, Diogenes does not elaborate beyond the basics: what charges were brought against Socrates, who his accusers were, the jury's voting, and some very basic information about who was there and about what was said. In short, Diogenes adds little information about Socrates' trial that cannot be obtained elsewhere, and what information he does add cannot be fully verified.

VI. Analyses of Plato's Representation of Socrates in the Apology

There will always be some ambiguity concerning Socrates since he himself did not write anything. And the only extant information that can be gathered about him comes from people who wished either to venerate him or to condemn him. Because of the extreme views of Socrates' biographers, finding the truth can be difficult. However, Plato's representation of Socrates in the *Apology* is most likely accurate, because it is one of his first dialogues, being written when many of the other people who witnessed the trial were still alive and could have contested inaccuracies, if any. Also, in many ways it is supported by other sources. It was also written before Plato had established The Academy, making it less likely that Plato would be concerned with advancing his own arguments over remembering Socrates' views accurately. Other accounts of Socrates' trial suggest that Plato embellished Socrates' words, but he was likely true to the man's history, character, and the general content of his speech before the jury.

In conclusion, we can see that Socrates was an extraordinary individual. In the closing paragraph of his *Defense of Socrates*, Xenophon writes of him, "And so, in contemplating the man's wisdom and nobility of character, I find it beyond my power to forget him or, in remembering him, to refrain from praising him."¹⁴ Likewise, Plato writes in the death scene of *Phaedo* that Socrates "...was, we may fairly say, of all those whom we knew in our time the bravest and also the wisest and the most just."¹⁵ Even Aristophanes, as Diogenes Laertius points out, accidentally pays Socrates a compliment. In *The Clouds*, he writes:

O human being, desiring great wisdom...how happy you will become among Athenians and Greeks!—if you have a good memory, and are a thinker, and have a hard labor in your soul, and aren't wearied either by standing or walking, and aren't too much annoyed when you shiver with cold, and have no desire to dine, and keep away from wine and gymnastics and other mindless things....¹⁶

All of these writers were moved to an extreme by Socrates. Plato and Xenophon loved him; Aristophanes apparently wanted to burn down his house.¹⁷ These strong feelings for Socrates are what make discovering the true Socrates difficult. An objective, critical opinion by a neutral party, a dissenting view of Socrates' defense or writings by Socrates, would be invaluable in a search for the true Socrates. However, none of these exists. Plato's *Apology*, with its confirmation by other sources, becomes the authoritative source on the events at Socrates' trial and Socrates' general character at that point in his life.



However, the arguments presented by Socrates in the *Apology* most likely reflect on how Plato would like to remember his master's defense in court; and this presentation of Socrates' speaking is most likely tainted by its author's admiration for the speaker.

¹ Xenophon, *Anabasis, Books IV-VII and Symposium and Apology*. trans. Carleton L. Brownson and O.J. Todd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961) 453.

² Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant (London: Penguin Books, 1993) 159.

³ Richard Levin, ed., *The Question of Socrates* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.) 184.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945) 83.

⁵ Plato, *Great Dialogues of Plato*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) IX.

⁶ Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus*, Trans. E. C. Marchant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965) 45.

⁷ Xenophon, *Op. cit.*, 3. and Richard Levin, *Op. cit.*, 163.

⁸ Plato, *Op. cit.*, 46.

⁹ Xenophon, *Op. cit.*, 3.

¹⁰ Richard Levin, *Op. cit.*, 163. And there are these added similarities and differences between Xenophon's and Plato's works on Socrates: they use Socrates' daimon differently in their accounts; Xenophon makes only a brief reference to Plato in his *Memorabilia* (III, vi, 1), while Plato does not seem to mention Xenophon at all; Plato does not explain his motivation for writing *Apology*, while Xenophon discusses his motivation to write about Socrates; finally, both authors recount how Socrates saved Alcibiades' life and armor in battle.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 188. Diogenes Laertius also claims that Socrates saved Xenophon's life at the battle of Delium. If this is true (and he did not save the life of another man named Xenophon), this would alter the traditional chronological view that Plato was about the same age as Xenophon.

¹² *Ibid.*, 187.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 187. All three authors poke fun at Socrates' wife, Xanthippe, in various places in their writings.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁵ Plato, *Op. cit.*, 185.

¹⁶ Plato and Aristophanes, *Four Texts on Socrates*, trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) 133.

¹⁷ In the final scene of the Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, a disgruntled student burns down Socrates' thinkery and chases him out of the theater.



Serpentology: Voudoun • Lawrence Troyer

Lawrence (Larry) Troyer is a Senior and major in Religious Studies; his minor is in Philosophy. Larry, a McNair Scholar, began work on this paper as part of his McNair project with his faculty mentor, Professor Rowlett in the fall of 2002. It was further revised and developed while working with Professor Brummer in the course in Writing and Research in Philosophy and Religious Studies in the fall term of 2002. And it went through further revision in the spring term of 2003. He also read the paper at the Undergraduate Papers Session at the Upper Midwest Regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion in May.

I. Introduction

References to snakes and serpents is widespread in the religious literature throughout the world. According to Balaji Mundkur, "...no cult animal except the bird is as widely distributed as the snake which extends as far north as the Arctic Circle and as far south as the tips of the continents...."¹ Snakes and serpents represent a variety of things in various religions. In some religions, they represent wisdom and compassion, while in others they are tempters and workers of evil (as is, for example, the serpent in the Garden of Eden). Buddhism has its own snake symbolism. According to the author of *The Buddhist Religion*:

An account in the Vinya states that, during the third week after his Awakening, the new Buddha was sitting absorbed in the bliss of emancipation when a great storm came up. Mucalinda, the Naga King, came out of his abode, coiled himself around the Buddha, and protected him with his great hood against the wind and rain for seven days.²

Like many other religions, Voudoun has a plethora of snake and serpent symbolism. This has created problems both with understanding and with appreciating Voudoun because, despite the fact that few loa³ have negative functions, the Western view of snakes and serpents tends to be negative (whereas



elsewhere in the world this is not the case). And this negativism has had its effects. But by failing to understand the importance and role of snake and serpent symbolism in Voudoun, we might never understand or appreciate, not only this religion, but others as well.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the role that snakes and serpents have played in Voudoun; thus, it will try to provide a more balanced view of this religion. To begin, I will give a brief history of Voudoun, its origins, and how it came to the Americas, as well as how it grew. Then I will discuss the snake and serpent symbolism that can be found within Voudoun.

II. Brief History of Voudoun

The word “Voudoun” brings to mind multifarious images ranging from Satanic worship to rhythmic dances to Christian saints. Most people tend to think of Voudoun as an evil kind of religion in which practitioners either sacrifice humans or turn people into zombies. This misconception is most likely attributable to Hollywood’s inaccurate portrayals as well as to a lack of the American public’s knowledge. Voudoun is not a dark and sinister religion. Quite the opposite.

Voudoun was brought to the Caribbean through the slave trade when the Fon, Yoruba, and Ibo people were brought over from Africa. The relevance of the snake can be traced to Western Africa and especially to the Fon people. Although there is no way to know how many people were brought over, there are some estimates. For example, Rod Davis states that:

The precise numbers have been raised and lowered over the years; 15 million enslaved humans delivered to the New World has generally been the accepted figure, though the total was revised down to 9.5 million (with an error range up to about 12 million) by Phillip D. Curtin in *The Atlantic Slave Trade* in 1969.⁴

Thus, through the process of bringing slaves to the Americas, the religions of the slaves were also brought here. According to Benjamin Ray, “It is generally recognized that there are two fundamentally different types of divinity in African religions: The one creator god, who is usually remote from daily religious life, and the many lesser gods and spirits which are constantly involved in everyday religious experience.”⁵ Unlike many other religions, then, African religions have both monotheistic and polytheistic elements.

The mixing of these African religions with the dominant religion of the regions to which the slaves were brought – especially the religion of Roman Catholicism – resulted in an interesting syncretism. The practitioners of Voudoun converted their loa into the Catholic saints because the Verdouns were not allowed to practice their own religion, which was looked upon as barbaric. Because of the large numbers of saints and loa, the slaves changed the physical appearance of their loa to match that of the saints. Thus, different saints came to represent different loa. By syncretizing their loas into saints, Voudoun practitioners were allowed to continue to worship loa because the Verdouns appeared to be orthodox Catholics. These syncretisms were based mostly on how the saints looked, but not on that for which they were known. Claude Jacob and Jacob Kaslow state that “The snakes at the feet of St. Patrick suggest an association with Damballa-Wedo, the Dahomean serpent god, while the keys in the hands of St. Peter suggests Legba, the Dahomean guardian of crossroads and entrances.”⁶ Occasionally, Legba was associated with the Devil, owing to Legba’s trickster nature. Some saints – for example, the Virgin Mary – had



multiple loa associated with them. This was determined by how the Virgin Mary was represented; by looking a little different, she could come to represent a different loa. Thus, whereas practitioners were able to worship, their religion was also forced to be secretive to some extent.

III. Snake and Serpent Symbolism

Snake and serpent symbolism is part of almost every religion. Snakes or serpents in most indigenous religions are symbols of rebirth and fertility. Snakes can also represent wisdom and power. Bobby Joe Neely notes that "...research [has] revealed that ancient serpent worship was symbolic of the Universal Spirit, reincarnation, and sun worship."⁷ Another use for snakes and serpents in religions is to represent life. Neely states:

The African-Egyptian mysteries sought life beyond death and change, a collective and individual continuation of life through procreation, symbolized by the Holy Kiss. It was for this reason that phallic representations (e.g., the serpent) symbolized God and religious piety.⁸

Snakes, it seems, were not considered evil until the advent of Western religions. In Western religions, the serpent⁹ was the tempter of Eve and Adam. This seems to come as a direct response to the previous religions of the times. Riane Eisler states:

Clearly the serpent was too important, too sacred, and too ubiquitous a symbol of the power of the Goddess to be ignored. If the old mind was to be refashioned to fit the new system's requirements, the serpent would either have to be appropriated as one of the emblems of the new ruling classes, or alternately, defeated, distorted, and discredited.¹⁰

As we can see, the religionist's view of snakes¹¹ and serpents is not uniform; it is in fact quite diverse.

According to Priestess Demaris, snakes are also considered to be teachers. She points out that this view owes to the belief that snakes came from the earth to teach humans, and that is why they live in the ground. Snakes represent an "earthly" knowledge that they have chosen to impart to humans.

In Voudoun, the snake is used in certain dances to help entice male loa from the sky. Snakes play an important role in one's becoming possessed by a loa. According to Albert Raboteau, snakes are involved in Voudoun in some of the following ways. Snakes can represent...

...the god Li Grand Zombi; [they can be involved in] possession, which usually begins when the priestess comes into contact with the snake god; oracular statements by the possessed priestess and priest; possession of the devotees; [or] the pouring of rum or other liquors as libation to the god; [or] the spewing of liquor from the mouth of the priest as a form of blessing; [and] Catholic syncretistic elements such as candles, an altar, prayers to the Virgin.¹²

Bobby Joe Neely states: "In Africa, the Voudoun ritual 'possession dance' climaxed the ceremony of religious worship to God, symbolized by the sacred snake, which the dance emulated."¹³ The use of snakes and other animals in rituals is also very important. Mambo¹⁴ Merium, when asked about ritual sacrifices of animals (usually chickens), replied that one does not need literally to sacrifice the animal.



Rather, through proper visualization of the different energies that need to be manipulated, the ritual can be just as successful.

We see, then, that snakes and serpents have played a role in various parts of Voudoun. Snakes and serpents are used to represent various loas like Damballa-Wedo and Li Grande Zombi. They are also shown in many traditions prior to the rise of the Western religions to be symbols of great power – from fertility to rebirth to wisdom and the power to affect events in one’s life. Snakes and serpents are also shown to be teachers, as they can represent an intermediate between the earth and its people. They also serve as a connection to the divine via possession.

IV. Conclusion

Because of the persecution and the false accusations against Voudoun, many people began to view Voudoun as evil and wrong. There are various reasons people provide in defense of this position. Some claim that Voudoun is the worship of Satan, which simply is not true. Others claim that Voudouns sacrifice humans or have group orgies. Once again, not true. In the past, many people did not understand Voudoun, and therefore it was used as a scapegoat because it was foreign to them. This remains a problem, although more people are learning that there is a plethora of respectable indigenous religions. But it may take a little longer for the truth about Voudoun to come out. This is partly because the practitioners of Voudoun have been persecuted for an extended period and because the true nature of the religion has always been hidden from the public eye. Because of the chances of being persecuted for their religious beliefs, most practitioners of Voudoun still seek anonymity. Ina Fandrich states that “...the public dances on Sunday afternoons in Congo Square were important for keeping African cultural heritage alive, but it is generally agreed that these dances were leisure activities, not religious ceremonies.”¹⁵ This reinforced the idea that the belief and practices of Voudoun should be kept hidden from the public view.

Snake and serpent symbolism seems to emanate from this religion – from possession to the representation of different loas to incorporating the symbolism even into the creation story.¹⁶ Voudoun is an interesting religion that has received a dark and sinister reputation. This may be because it was different than the dominant religion of the times or because it was the religion of the slaves. Simply having an emphasis on snake and serpent symbolism that is prevalent would probably be enough to make many people say that it is evil, owing to the attitudes toward snakes and serpents prevalent in Western religions.

¹ Balaji Mundkur, *The Cult of the Serpent* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983) 41.

² Richard Robinson, *The Buddhist Religion*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1997) 80.

³ A loa is something which one can consider to be either a spirit or deity.

⁴ Rod Davis, *American Voudoun: Journey into a Hidden World* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1999) 7.

⁵ Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1976) 50.

⁶ Claude F. Jacob and Andrew J. Kaslow, *The Spiritual Churches of New Orleans: Origins, Beliefs, and Rituals of an African-American Religion* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991) 5.

⁷ Bobby Joe Neely, *Contemporary Afro-American Voodooism (black religion): The Retention and Adaptation of the Ancient African-Egyptian Mystery System* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988) 223.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 421-2.

⁹ I use the word “serpent”, not “snake”, even though the Hebrew lexicon has the same word for both. It is more likely that it should be “serpent” because of the acknowledgment that other serpents (such as the Leviathon) exist. Also, it should be noted that there is a difference between a snake and a serpent. According to *www.webster.com* a *snake* is “1: any of numerous limbless scaled reptiles (suborder *Serpentes* syn. *Ophidia*) with a long, tapering body and with salivary glands often modified to produce venom which is injected through grooved or tubular fangs”; while a *serpent* is “1 a *archaic*: a noxious creature that creeps, hisses, or stings b: snake”. Thus, Serpents comprise a much larger class, including snakes.

¹⁰ Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Publishing, 1987) 87. Eisler argues that there is evidence that a more matriarchal form of society and religion may have predated the more patriarchal religions of the West. In this earlier culture and religion, the snake was a revered animal, and symbol. But with the rise of patriarchal religions that sought to overthrow this earlier type of belief system, the patriarchal religions transformed a positive symbol into a negative one as a way of suppressing the temptation to go back to some of the earlier beliefs and ways. Thus, the story of the snake in the Garden of Eden may have come about for this reason.

¹¹ In an interview I had with Mr. Charles Gandolfo, the curator of the Voudoun Museum in New Orleans, LA, he mentioned that, even in Voudoun, it is possible to find “evil” snakes.

¹² Albert Rabouteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 79.

¹³ Neely, *Op .cit.*, 438.

¹⁴ *Voudoun Priestess*

¹⁵ Ina Johanna Fandrich, *The Mysterious Voudoun Queen Marie Laveux: A Study of Power and Female Leadership in Nineteenth-century New Orleans* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994) 201.

¹⁶ In the creation story, Damballa-Wedo and Aida-Wedo mate, and the world egg emerges from the mouth of Damballa-Wedo.





The Gift of Tears: When Such Spiritual Favors Cannot Be Restrained •
Allison Schultz

Allison (Ali) Schultz graduated in May 2003, with a Religious Studies major and a Biology minor. Ali wrote this paper on the tearful responses of medieval mystics as part of an independent study project that she had with Professor Rowlett in the spring term of 2003.

Sometimes our hearts are so awakened, have such strong apprehensions of the divine presence, are so full of deep compunction for our sins, that we cannot confess them in any language but tears....

—William Law

The cure for all things is salt water: sweat, tears, the sea.

—Isak Dinesen

***Tear:** A drop of limpid fluid secreted by the lachrymal gland appearing in or flowing from the eye; chiefly as the result of emotion, esp. grief, but also of physical irritation or nervous stimulus.*

—O.E.D.

I

The phenomenon of mystical weeping appears in moments of conversion, contemplation, devotion, or any moment when the grace of God wells up in the mystic so deeply as to bring tears. Tears flow from wellsprings of deep love and understanding and association with Christ. There have been mystics blessed with the gift of tears since the early Church. Margery Kempe, a 15th century mystic, is known for her dramatic and plenteous sobbing in medieval Europe. As Steven Fanning states:



Margery Kempe has a reputation as a great weeper, yet tears and loud crying is also found among many other Christian mystics, for St. Dominic’s “roaring and crying” could be heard some distance away, Marie d’Oignies and Catherine of Siena disrupted church services with their loud weeping, Ignatius of Loyola reported his own frequent visitation of tears, while Nilus of Sora, Gregory the Great and Francisco de Osuna affirmed tears as one of the essential gifts of the Holy Spirit and not to be discouraged.¹

Although Margery’s tears seem to have precipitated from the nature of women’s spirituality in medieval culture, they are no doubt part of her vivid and dramatic mystical experience. As with other mystics, such as Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Therese of Lisieux, profuse tears became an expressive part of the mystical experience, and their tears blotted the pages of their writings and stories about them. The trail of mystical tears is traceable in the writings and accounts of the mystics. The phenomenon of mystical tears belongs to a multiplicity of historical, social and psychological contexts that must be examined so as to shed light on what tearfulness meant for the Christian mystics.

Although the mystic’s tears come to be recognized and understood as gifts of the Holy Spirit, the tears themselves remain a mystery. The phenomenon of mystical tears has not been studied directly, so there is no current analysis that contributes to a greater understanding of the condition, although tearfulness has been studied under the umbrella of a more “mundane context.”² W.W. Meissner, who has recently written a compelling psychological study of Ignatius Loyola, states:

In general, tears were found to express emotional impotence, inadequacy, the feeling of being overwhelmed, failure, angry frustration, or fear. Often tears served a more positive cathartic function, even being accompanied by feelings of hopefulness. Generally tears seemed to reflect a condition of affective excess due to intrapsychic conflict or needs compromise.³

The presence of feelings affects the eye, much like a physical irritation or trauma would affect the eye, to produce tears. An eye that fails to find an object that it is looking for becomes a weeping, disappointed eye as the sought-for object continues to be unseen and missing. Researchers Wood and Wood (1984) summarize their findings about the important function of tears in compensation and communication:

In our view, the tearful feeling state is occasioned by the ego temporarily threatened with being inundated by complex memories and affects.... The tearful feeling, a step in the direction of overt weeping, primitively expresses the frustration of an early wish for relief from pain, the pain of the imbalance of a complex conflict. The tearful feeling both expresses the wish for relief from pain and, at the same time, interrupts current verbal expression until the needed defense operations reduce the threat of ego disruption by working through old conflicts once again.⁴

The intense experience that fosters mystical weeping might not be susceptible to analysis in the mundane context of non-mystical tears unless all tears bear resemblance to a mystical experience. In light of Loyola’s tears, W.W. Meissner speculates that “...(w)ith this vast mystical panorama before us, we can only wonder at the power and spiritual richness, defying our experience and understanding.”⁵

Perhaps tears blur what is too beautiful or painful to see. The intense piety of the mystics and saints aided their ability to sense the sacred, and that piety was an important component of their tearful



experiences. In the sacred or spiritual context, and in the case of Ignatius, the experience of tears could have been a result of “God’s making himself present with such overwhelming and loving self-communication that [his] psyche couldn’t handle it.”⁶ And such could have been the experience of other mystics as well. James Elkins feels that St. Catherine’s experience in front of the image of the crucified Christ was an experience of the presence of the image, a presence that he calls “God”. Likewise, other mystics appear to have had similar feelings of grace, expressed through their emotional incontinence. Elkins considers other names for the “angelic” term *grace* that perhaps describe the sense of ‘presence’ in a different light. He suggests a mystical vocabulary to explain the presence of God with ‘empathy’ and the ‘numinous’. Empathy indicates an “unwanted, uncontrollable flow of emotions that merges the viewer and the viewed,” whereas the numinous connotes “the frightening, intimate, overwhelming presence of the sacred.”⁷

I believe, as certain other theorists have suggested, that as the ‘Gift of Tears’ is examined in various contexts, relatively distinct patterns can be seen to emerge from the experiences of male and female mystics. In the cases of women mystics, tears appear to flow from empathy with the passion of Christ and the suffering body, whereas the tears of the male mystics flow from the experiencing of the transcendent power of the numinous.

I shall here examine the cases of three women mystics, with special attention given to one. I shall then compare their cases with the experiences of two male mystics. I shall examine certain explanations of these cases and the differences between them, and I shall conclude by considering some of the factors that likely played a role in the experiences of these mystics.

II

In the case of Margery Kempe, her fits of tears, accompanied by visions of the suffering Christ, shed light on the experience of the gift of tears often had by other mystics of the Middle Ages. In reading *The Book of Margery Kempe*, one finds that Margery lived in a world that responded to her as though her tearful displays were an obnoxious form of madness, yet it was Margery’s tears that left a watermark on her character as a medieval feminine mystic. Margery was filled with an extreme love for Christ that overwhelmed her with compassion, and it manifested itself with a response involving voracious tears and tumultuous cries. Passages from *The Book of Margery Kempe* contain verses describing her teary tantrums from the subtle to the extreme:

...with plenteous tears and violent sobbings, with loud cryings and shrill shriekings....⁸

...and therefore she cried many times... and wept and sobbed full sorely... so that those who saw her wondered full much on her, for they knew not the cause.⁹

These outbursts were, I believe, dependent both upon the status of women in medieval Europe and Margery’s physical empathy with the Passion of Christ. But, moreover, her episodes became an exhibition that may have given an autonomous voice for a medieval woman who exclaimed her experience with the divine through a waterfall of teardrops.



What about the Passion that resonates so deeply within Margery so as to inspire such a performance? Did she associate the pressures of her culture upon women with the persecution of Christ's body? Or were her experiences a psychosomatic response from a focus that became an obsession? Maureen Fries attempts to defend the latter view in her essay, "Margery Kempe,"¹⁰ in which she differentiates between the visions of the medieval male and female mystics, asserting that the women's visions focus upon the Passion of Christ. Fries quotes Anne Matter, who suggests that female mystics focus upon "the *object* of the Passion of Christ," so that "the ubiquitous vision of the crucified Jesus" creates a female tradition of "masochistic...experiences."¹¹ In other words, the female mystic holds a focus on the experience of Christ's Passion, whereas the male mystic tends to focus the point of spiritual attention beyond "the *exemplum* of suffering [in Christ] to find a mystical unity."¹² Fries further supports Matter's in suggesting that Margery's sufferings in her life, as in her vision, acted as an extreme form of a sex-linked and "self-fulfilling prophecy about the role of women" in the Christian tradition.¹³

However, Margery might not have welcomed these wet experiences from the outset:

And yet she might not weep but when god gave it to her. And oftentimes he gave it so plenteously that she could not withstand it. But the more that she would have withstood it or put it away, the more strongly it wrought in her soul with such holy thoughts that she should not cease. She should sob and cry full loudly, all against her will, so that many men and women also wondered on her therefore.¹⁴

It was later that she came to understand the purpose of the tears. Likewise, as much as one would like to doubt Margery's mystical status because of the melodramatic aspects of her story, her experience is similar to the experiences of other mystics. Persons encountering the transcendent had a desire to bequeath their revelations because they were brimming with love. As Elizabeth Alvida Petroff explains:

...the mystic saw and felt truth, saw God or Christ or the saints, and was flooded with love for what she saw. So powerful was this love that she felt compelled to share it with others, and so effective was the transformation created in her by her mystical experiences that she discovered and invented new ways to communicate her insights.¹⁵

Margery's mode of communication created a spectacle of sobs and convulsions, yet she welcomed the experience. For her these tears were a gift from God, although to others around her, she appeared to be cursed or possessed.

Margery's emotional affliction was acutely tied to Christ's Passion. Indeed, her first gush of emotion was in Jerusalem, as the friars were leading the pilgrims on the journey through the setting of Christ's suffering:

And the foresaid creature wept and sobbed so plenteously as though she had seen our Lord with her bodily eye suffering his passion at that time. Before her in her soul she saw him verily by contemplation, and that caused her to have compassion. And when they came up onto the Mount of Calvary, she fell down so that she might not stand or kneel but wallowed and twisted with her body, spreading her arms abroad, and cried with a loud voice as though her heart should have burst asunder, for in the city of her soul she saw verily



and freshly how our Lord was crucified. Before her she heard and saw in her ghostly sight the mourning of our Lady, of St. John and Mary Magdalene, and of many others who loved our Lord. And she had so great compassion and so great pain to see our Lord's pain that she might not keep herself from crying and roaring though she should have died from it. . . . And this was the first cry that ever she cried in any contemplation. And this manner of crying endured many years after this time for aught that any man might do, and therefore suffer she much despite and reproof.¹⁶

Margery appears to have empathized with Christ's passion so completely that it was as if she were herself experiencing the crucifixion. Margery's dramatic association with Christ's Passion seems to have been excessive and histrionic. The agonizing depictions of Christ emphasized his pain and suffering in an unsettling human way during the late medieval period when associations with the physical suffering of Christ were more common.

Christ's Passion would have been appropriated by Margery to her degree of tearful empathy as a sign of what Evelyn Underhill, who wrote a classic early study of mystical consciousness, calls "mystical ill-health."¹⁷ In the case of Margery, the "ill health" is her deluge, a seemingly constant affliction. Likewise, in symptomatic mystical fashion, such physical associations with pain are often accompanied by overwhelming sensations of love for, or from, the beloved divine character that cause states of ill health for the mystic. In the case of Margery, she cried profusely:

Her soul [was] so delectably fed with the sweet dalliance of our Lord and so fulfilled by his love that, like a drunken man, she turned herself, first on the one side and then on the other, with great weeping and great sobbing, unable to keep herself in stableness for the unquenchable fire of love that burnt full sorely in her soul.¹⁸

Margery brimmed with so much love that "the foresaid creature followed, full of tears and devotion, with holy thoughts and meditation, sore weeping and violent sobbing,"¹⁹ much of which was instigated by associations with the Passion. As the many onlookers wondered about her and inquired as to what ailed her, Margery, "as a creature all wounded with love and as reason had failed, cried with a loud voice, 'the Passion of Christ slays me'."²⁰

III

The tear-streaked face of Margery might have been a self-induced state that occurred because of the focus of her devotion. Moreover, Margery's relation to the suffering of the Passion might be the striking similarity between Christ's circumstance and the second-rate status of non-conformist, medieval women mystics (or the second-rate status of women in general in patriarchal societies). Women were both denied any voice in patriarchal European society and denied an autonomous voice in the midst of Church hierarchy. Margery could have been searching for something more, for a purpose that was contrary to what her culture provided for her, a married mother. She wanted to be in a position of authority, a position that she, as a woman, was denied. And her episodes of psycho-physical suffering can be viewed, as Carolyn Walker Bynum sees it, as "a positive and creative manipulation of the body that resulted in self-empowerment, self-affirmation, and religious transcendence."²¹ Seen in this light, Margery



was seeking independence in a patriarchal society. Marie-Florine Bruneau emphasizes that "...mystical union allowed women to experience a direct contact with God that was analogous to or even more privileged than that of the priest who touched the Eucharist."²² Thence, Margery's drama was not only a demonstration of her desire for God, it was a demonstration of her desire to move beyond the conventional boundaries that restrained her as a woman in the Fifteenth Century.

Margery sought for her personal experiences to be appreciated. The dramatic incidents recounted by Margery in her book resulted from her recollections of Christ's Passion followed by the utterance of turbulent weeping, cries and convulsions. Besides her confessor-penitent dialogs, her tears were the telltale sign that referenced and announced her relationship with God. Petroff explains, "All of Margery's verbal constructions are counter-pointed by an inarticulate voice – the sound of Margery's weeping – which characterized her and made her visible."²³ The tears and cries that exasperated Margery's contemporaries were indeed her most visible voice. And "...the intensity of her cries may be related in part to the depth of her need to prove her link with divinity, in the face of public scorn and disbelief."²⁴ Dhira Mahoney asserts that, like the dialogs with those around her, Margery's tears "...are the signs of the visionary experiences that she alone is privileged to witness."²⁵ Until Margery could write her book, her tears were her voice "...in a world that would deny that voice."²⁶ Her tears made her real, they validated her experience. In this sense, Margery's tears were her power, for they proved that she was a participant in the divine world.²⁷ Roy Porter states that she not only had a method to her madness, but that "...it provided a source of strength through which she came to terms with and helped resolve the key dilemmas facing all pious women in the late Middle Ages."²⁸ In that way, the episodes were her escape. She wanted something more than what her culture offered her, and her tears bore witness and voiced authority to her divine experience.

IV

Margery was not alone in her world of divine tears. Other medieval women mystics were also graced with the gift of tears, and many demonstrated empathy with Christ's physical suffering. These women could relate to God through the terms and contexts of their own experiences as women. This meant that women would naturally be able to associate more closely to the physical suffering endured by Christ, more so than men ever could. In the context of a patriarchal society, asceticism and physical suffering amongst woman were viewed as a mark of holiness. Women, so inextricably tied to the "other," were associated closely to the body. And all too often they were denied validity in the realm of the soul. Therefore, it is the close association of women to the body that became a point of correlative unity to the bodily suffering of Christ. Within the late medieval period, the valorization of suffering of the mystic or holy woman herself became the experience of a believer who, "...through suffering identification with Christ, hoped to share in his redemptive activity and divine self-birth."²⁹ For some women, such an intense identification with the suffering of Christ would become obsessive to the degree of fixation and to the point at which they would wish for more suffering as a penitent act for holy worthiness. The masochistic extremes to which certain women desired more suffering seemed excessive in reaction to Christ's Passion. Amy Hollywood notes:

Similarly, some late medieval men and women seem to have worried that Christian soteriology, and particularly the gendering of that redemptive nar-



rative, demanded the intense physical suffering of women and made it the sole means by which women might share in Christ's work. Angela of Foligno continually wishes to suffer with Christ—and even more than Christ—in order to be worthy of salvation, to become one with him, and to participate in his saving work. *As Carolyn Walker-Bynum shows, Angela's desire for suffering made perfect sense within the religious world in which she lived. Women, associated with the body and hence with the body of Christ, took part in Christ's redemptive work by sharing in the body's suffering.*³⁰

Women came to experience Christ on the grounds of their understanding and their own experiences as women. Indeed, during the early to late medieval periods, women mystics bore the suffering of Christ, and many were given the gift of tears. The Beguines, a religious association of women in the Middle Ages in Europe, were especially devoted to contemplation. It was among the Beguine women mystics that Bridal Mysticism developed from a desire both for the courtly love of Christ and for the ideal of being wedded to Christ. Among these women were Marie of Oignies (1177/8-1213) and Lutgard of Aywieres (1200-1264), both of whom were known for their commitments to Christ, as well as for their tears.³¹ These women empathized with Christ's passion as much as they desired to be with him. Marie was devoted to a life imitating the poverty of Christ, and she was "...given to abundant tears that flowed down in streams, covering the ground of the church in her muddy footprints, and her weeping became so loud that a priest had to ask her to control herself."³² Lutgard wept with such abundant tears that the spectacle amazed her biographer. He wrote: "I myself once saw such floods of tears that one could scarcely bear it without weeping oneself."³³ Another of the early Beguines who was visited by tears was Margaret of Ypres (1216-37); she was also devoted to a life of poverty and mortification of the flesh. Her devotion was such that she once spent three days and nights "in continuous grief for her sins."³⁴ All of these women often had semi-erotic visions of Christ, and all had an intense desire to be worthy to encounter his mystical union. And it was the intensified nature of their devotion that ignited their desires to share in the experience of Christ.

Margery was a soul sister to these mystical weepers. And while "weeping in compunction for one's sins or in recalling the wounds suffered by Jesus on behalf of all humanity was a common phenomenon among mystics," Steven Fanning says that Margery took weeping "to new decibel levels."³⁵ Margery's explosive episodes could happen anywhere, but a church service would almost certainly "prompt a manifestation," so much so that her disruptive noise once "led one Franciscan preacher in Lynn to ban her from his sermons while the entire town turned against her and insisted that she take up residence somewhere else."³⁶ Her fluid drama during mass bears comparison with the outbursts of Catherine of Sienna in Italy (1347-80). Catherine's letters were also full of tears. She was known to have shed tears over images or in recalling images such as those of the crucified Christ.³⁷ Before receiving the Eucharist, Catherine was said to have often fallen into "profuse weeping so loud that it drove her confessor to order her to stay far away from the altar in order not to disturb the other priests who were saying mass."³⁸ Catherine would obey by refraining from further disruption; however, she would pray that her confessor would realize that "some movements of the Holy Spirit could not be repressed."³⁹ For as ill-received as their tears were, both Catherine and Margery knew that the tears were more than mere hysterical outbursts. For those women, the tears were the flowing of something divine. In the face of scorn and doubt, Margery knew the vital spiritual implication of her tears:



...and the archbishop saying full roughly unto her, “Why do you weep so, woman?”

She, answering, said, “Sir, you shall wish some day that you had wept as sorely as I.”⁴⁰

V

It would seem as though the tears of the medieval women mystics were indeed “cries for help” from their cultural experiences. Yet just outside of the medieval context, the persistence of the role of women as “other” was sustained. And women were still denied authority in the face of the Tradition of the Church. Saint Therese of Lieseux, a Carmelite in the 16th century, often prayed that Christ would increase her suffering so as to come closer to Christ. Therese pushed herself to extremes of devotion, often finding herself in moments of fervent feelings of gratitude or awe, or in an intense state of grace. In her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, she often referred to her tears as “diamonds.” Twice, upon meeting with the Bishop over matters of entering the Carmelite Order at a young age, she became overwhelmed by the intensity of her desire to become a Carmelite, and she dispensed her diamonds in the presence of Church authorities. After being advised not to cry in front of the Bishop, Therese writes excitedly, “I did more than *show my diamonds* to the bishop. I *gave* him some!”⁴¹ Later, when the youthful Therese appealed to Leo XIII for entrance into the order, he granted permission. She was so moved that she had to be pulled from the feet of the Pope, and she was filled with at least as many diamonds as she had shed in front of the Bishop. Tears were of such importance to Therese that she once captured the tear of a saintly nun after she had passed away. And Therese saved that saint’s tear-stained cloth as a relic that she carried in the container that held her vows.⁴²

VI

Male mystics have also shared the occurrence of tears upon contemplation of Christ’s Passion. Yet the male experience is not related to the empathical experience of the body. It seems rather to be connected to an overwhelming sense of the numinous, the sense of an awe inspiring power that cannot be captured in words. In the Eastern Church in Russia, monk and Bishop Tikhon (1724-1783) had the gift of tears that was graced upon him by his meditations. These were very peculiar for a Russian; they were more in line with the meditative fashion of the Jesuits. Tikhon would meditate on the sufferings and Passion of Christ to the extent that, on one occasion of a mystical experience, “...he beheld Christ descending from Golgatha, having left that very cross, walking toward him, his tortured body covered with wounds and blood.”⁴³ Tikhon’s tears were also memorable. As one of his attendants recalled, it was a rare occasion on which he sang without tears: “It may be said that he had a special gift of tears granted by God. Two springs ever flowed from his eyes.” And even during mass Tikhon would “...weep and sob audibly even though many were in attendance.”⁴⁴

Visions and contemplations of Christ often preceded the abundance of teardrops. Yet in many instances the gift of tears occurred with placating feelings of beauty or sweetness, loving devotion, spiritual joy, *consolation or an overwhelming experience of the sublime presence of God that rendered speech superfluous*. In the experience of the male mystics, tears speak for the feelings of the transcendent en-



counter. In 1544-5, Ignatius of Loyola wrote in his *Spiritual Diary* about his mystical experiences. He tells of frequent visitations of tears and visions of Mary, Jesus or heaven, as well as insights and feelings of understanding that would leave him momentarily unable to speak. His experiences would come to him spontaneously, unannounced, as while walking down a street, when “Jesus represented himself to me and I experienced strong motions and tears.”⁴⁵ Other illuminations, such as understanding the deep mystery of the Holy Trinity, would be so profound that they would “flood his heart with such sweetness,” and “the mere memory of it in after times made him shed abundant tears.”⁴⁶

Tears flooded the text of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Diary* as he wrote of enduring tears as often as seven times daily. W.W. Meissner considers Ignatius’ tears as one of the most striking of his mystical gifts, for Ignatius was affected by overwhelming experiences of copious tears to the point of physical disability. The tears would come particularly during times of prayer, such as during the recitation of the breviary or while saying mass, times during which his devotion was “so intense that his eyes would be bathed in tears. He often had to pause between phrases or words because his eyes were filled with tears and he could not see.”⁴⁷ The obstructive nature of the profuse tears often led to prolonged sessions of prayers or mass, and they became painful for Ignatius to the point at which his disciples sought to lessen the duties of his office. Ignatius reluctantly refrained from saying mass and later confessed that he felt “disconsolate” if he “could not weep three times during one mass.”⁴⁸ Yet, his prolific tear ducts notwithstanding, Ignatius himself was wary and suspicious of the nature of tears, as he wrote in a letter to Nicholas of Gouda:

The gift of tears should not be asked for in any absolute way. It is not necessary, and it is not good or profitable either absolutely or for all persons.... Some have the gift because God sees that the gift would be profitable for them and grants it. But that does not cause them to have a greater charity, nor to do more good than others who do not have these tears, although their charity in the higher part of the soul is not less.... I tell Your Reverence that in the case of some persons, I would not grant them this gift to them, even if it were in my power to give it, because these tears do not serve to increase charity in them, and are harmful to their body and head, and consequently impede many practices of charity.⁴⁹

Although for the wrong person the gift of tears could be detrimental in Ignatius’ eyes, he still thought of his graced tears as “precious.”

VII

For mystics graced with the gift of tears, their tears were expressions of the experience of the divine that defies words. Ignatius distinguished between three types of tears: “Those that arise at the thought of one’s own or other’s sins, those arising from contemplation of the life of Christ, and those flowing from the love of divine persons.”⁵⁰ William Law, an English spiritual writer and mystic (1686-1761), wrote about the “extraordinary operations of God’s Holy Spirit and the wonders of His gifts and graces” in his work, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. He wrote:

Sometimes our hearts are so awakened, have such strong apprehensions of the divine presence, are so full of deep compunction for our sins, that we



cannot confess them in any language but tears. Sometimes the light of God's countenance shines so brightly upon us, we see so far into the invisible world, we are so affected with the wonders of the love and goodness of God that our hearts worship and adore in a language that is higher than that of words, and we feel transports of devotion which only can be felt.⁵¹

Tears express a knowing that is ineffable, an emotion deeper than direct sensory expression can comprehend. Knowledge of God is intuitive; as the American philosopher William James notes, although our immediate feelings may have “no content but what the five senses supply;...mystics may emphatically deny that the senses play any part in the very highest type of knowledge which their transports yield.”⁵² Evelyn Underhill has it that “...it is a matter of experience that in our moments of deep emotion, transitory though they be, we plunge deeper into the reality of things that we can hope to do in hours of the most brilliant argument.”⁵³ She claims that the heart has its reasons of which the mind remains unaware.

The tearful experiences of the mystics allow for patterns of understanding the nature of the gift of tears, yet explanations seem to be mere conjectures, and the tears continue to flow into the realm of the mysterious. Theories put forth by researchers proffer many explanations about tearfulness, ranging from calling each of them a catharsis or a release of emotional energy to calling tears “the special language of the eye, or the overflow from a reservoir of sadness that we all carry with us, or the only external proof of love.”⁵⁴ Indeed, tears do not make sense. James Elkins maintains that experience flies in the face of theory when it comes to experiences such as “the sharp surprise of tears.” He understands that the “sheer impenetrability of the teardrop is infuriating,” as we attempt to confine it to theory.⁵⁵ No one really knows what crying is. Elkins claims that a tear “doesn't speak in any human language” and that “a tear, like a blob of mercury, can't be pinned down,” yet “...tears are the best visible evidence that a person has been deeply moved.”⁵⁶ Tears remain significant as an indication of something touching the mysterious:

Not all tears signal deep disturbance, and most tears cannot be understood. Certainly, tears belong to a twilight tribe of thoughts and feelings so dim we hardly know them. They are kin to dull depressions, moods not given voice, gnawing discontents, hidden illnesses, instincts out of control. But tears do one thing that separates them forever from the inarticulate parts of our inner life: they leak from our eyes, and run down our cheeks. They show, without room for doubt, that *something* has happened. They are witnesses.⁵⁷

In the context of mystical weeping, tears bare witness to the divine presence, yet the meaning of the tears differs between gendered experiences. The divine presence touches women in the context of being a woman, through relating closely to the body and the bodily experiences. The tears of the male mystics flowed from a different wellspring – a wellspring of grace and power – for it is difficult for men to be touched in the same way as are women.

¹ Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 218.

² W. W. Meissner, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 340.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ As found in Meissner, *Op. cit.*, 341.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 342. In the case of Ignatius, the psychoanalyst in Meissner feels that his tears “may be an outpouring of intense infantile conflicts and needs based in unresolved mourning of the loss of his mother and frustrated yearning for love and intimacy with his unavailable father.”

⁷ James Elkins, *Art and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Pictures* (London: Routledge, 2001) 180.

⁸ Lynn Staley, ed. *The Book of Margery Kempe* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2001) 78. (Hereafter referred to as *The Book*.)

⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁰ Maureen Fries, in Paul Szarmach, *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984) 233.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Staley, *Op. cit.*, 72.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Alvida Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 6.

¹⁶ Staley, *Op. cit.*, 50.

¹⁷ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (Strand: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1962) 61.

¹⁸ Staley, *Op. cit.*, 72.

¹⁹ Staley, *Op. cit.*, 79.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

²¹ As noted in Marie-Florine Bruneau, *Women Mystics Confront the Modern World* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998) 8.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Petroff, *Op. cit.*, 152.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Roy Porter, “Margery Kempe and the Meaning of Madness” in *History Today*, Feb 1988, v38, n2, 44.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁰ Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) 95. (*Italics mine.*)

³¹ Fanning, *Op. cit.*, 95-96.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 128. And he continues: “By her own account she did not merely weep, for she cried, bellowed and roared. She admitted, “I cried out with an amazing great roar that could be heard a long way off. I simply could not prevent myself from doing so.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Elkins, *Op. cit.*, 168.

³⁸ Fanning, *Op. cit.*, 130.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁰ Staley, *Op. cit.*, 92.

⁴¹ Saint Therese of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976) 117.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 170.



⁴³ Fanning, *Op. cit.*, 51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁶ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: The Modern Library, 1936) 401.

⁴⁷ Meissner, *Op. cit.*, 293.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵¹ Quoted from Meissner, *Op. cit.*, 183.

⁵² James, *Op. cit.*, 396.

⁵³ Underhill, *Op. cit.*, 48.

⁵⁴ Elkins, *Op. cit.*, 24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.



A Response to Levinas and Kierkegaard: Hegel's Concept of Geist •
John Timmers

John Timmers graduated in May 2003 with a major in Philosophy and a minor in Music. John worked with Professor Beach on a faculty-student collaboration project on Hegel and his critics in the fall term of 2002 and the spring term of 2003. This project was sponsored by the Office of Research and Creative Activity. He read this paper as part of the Student Research Day, the statewide conference held in Eau Claire in April of 2003. He also presented this paper at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research held in Salt Lake City in March.

Introduction

Nearly all criticism of G.W.F. Hegel's Absolute Idealism aims in some way at the concept of *Geist*, which is usually translated as "Spirit" or "Mind." Since the emergence of the term *Geist* in the early 19th Century, its reception has been generally polarized: most people being in either the staunch advocate camp or in the ardent opponent camp, with few in neither. Often compared with the *Substance* of Spinoza and the *One* of Parmenides, *Geist* appears as yet another concept in the rationalist tradition that threatens personal autonomy, devours the individual, and reduces the manifold of experience to mere appearance and illusion.

Two of the most ardent and influential criticisms of Hegel's philosophy come from Soren Kierkegaard and Emmanuel Levinas, both of whom take aim at *Geist*. When Kierkegaard cries out for the individual against the System, it is *Geist* that must hear. When the Other of Levinas breaches the totality, refusing the "reduction to same," it is *Geist* that must rupture. And most interpretations of Hegel's thought depict it as being vulnerable to these criticisms. However, as controversial as *Geist* has been, and as fundamental as it is to Hegel's metaphysics, it is very difficult to understand precisely how he conceived of it, and no definitive interpretation has yet been realized.



In the eyes of many critics, Hegel's *Geist* seems to be nothing more than Spinoza's Substance covered with the mask of dialectical logic. *Geist* is the unifying principle of consciousness and the underlying force of which all in reality is a manifestation. And given the monolithic character that critics attribute to *Geist*, there seems to be no room for either genuine individuality or alterity — "alterity" meaning *radical other-ness*. The charge is that this vision produces a metaphysical "totality" that effectuates the ultimate reduction of individuals and alterity to *Geist*—and thus their demise as Levinas and Kierkegaard would claim. However, the trend in much recent Hegelian scholarship indicates a need to reevaluate his metaphysics and to reexamine whether his philosophy is indeed a "totality" that produces this effect. Further, there is a pressing need for this reevaluation in light of the fact that the exposure to Hegel's philosophy that most people receive is either pitifully limited or available only through his critics, scholars who cannot provide adequate knowledge of one of history's most extraordinary thinkers. And considering the influence of Hegel on contemporary philosophy, and considering the ever-increasing interest in and relevance of his philosophy, one cannot consider that the means of exposure generally available will provide an understanding of Hegel that is adequate for contemporary discussions.

We will here explore the concept of *Geist* and its role in Hegel's system; in addition, we will consider his treatment of some issues raised by Levinas and by Kierkegaard in their criticisms of his work. Finally, we will assess the aptness of their critiques.

Totality

To begin, we must discuss what Levinas means by "totality," uncovering its relation to Kierkegaard's earlier criticism of Hegel. Levinas couples the term "totality" with the terms "ontology" and "interiority." Each of these terms is given a somewhat technical use and, along with the other terms mentioned, "totality" is more of an action or way of experiencing something than it is a specific entity. Levinas describes the act involved in totalizing as the "reduction to the same," "adequation," "thematization," and "possession." Levinas uses each of these terms so as to portray different, yet related, aspects of the *Same*—the *Same* being *the subject* or *ego*, in Levinas' sense. In his own words, "(I)n a totality, the meaning of individuals is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to [in order] to bring forth its objective meaning. For the ultimate meaning alone counts...."¹ Further, a totality is geared toward comprehension, which is why Levinas couples it with "ontology." Ontology accomplishes comprehension by placing a third or, as he calls it, a neuter term between the knower and the known that deprives the known being of its alterity.² This term acts as a sort of cognitive intermediary. The knower places the known in a cognitive or mental box, so to speak: a construct that allows the knower to comprehend the known. Consider a pencil. We place the object that we call a "pencil" in a mental construct, a conceptual box, that defines it as a useful implement for writing or for scratching one's head or for erasing things. But, all of these usages refer to a third term—the "box" in which we place it—that the pencil *itself* does not determine. This need not be a significant matter when dealing with things, but, when dealing with other people, this construct constitutes a violence for Levinas because persons can speak and thus determine themselves. And in placing them in a conceptual or mental box – the third term of ontology – one does not allow other persons to speak for themselves. Levinas argues that the act of comprehension accomplishes this violence by depriving the known being – the other person – of his or her alterity.



Levinas observes that Western philosophy has historically been oriented toward comprehension and totality and, thus, toward divesting other people—specifically the *Other*—of alterity. This propensity toward comprehension has led the Western tradition to overlook the significance of the *Other* and to misunderstand the source of ethics. Ethics is accomplished, as Levinas claims, in a relation with the *Other* that preserves the alterity of the *Other*. He calls this relation *the face-to-face*, and this relation serves as the foundation for his entire philosophy.

Bypassing any controversy surrounding the claim that Western philosophy generally misunderstands ethics and suppresses the *Other*, one can see immediately that Hegel’s philosophy might fall prey to this criticism if we hold that *Geist* is ultimately one of these third, neuter terms.

Prior to Levinas, Kierkegaard objected to Hegel’s philosophy but on the grounds that the existing individual cannot be placed within the System. Kierkegaard held that placing the subject within a logical system (what Levinas would call *a totality*) turns the subject into a simple instantiation, or an “accident,” of that system, meaning that the subject is unimportant.³ Consider Kierkegaard’s evaluation of this tendency to objective reflection:

The way of objective reflection turns the subjective individual into something accidental and thereby turns existence into an indifferent, vanishing something. The way to the objective truth goes away from the subject, and while the subject and subjectivity become indifferent, the truth also becomes indifferent....⁴

Contrast this with Levinas’ own discussion of an objective panoramic perspective:

The metaphysician and the other do not constitute a simple correlation [that] would be reversible. The reversibility of a relation where the terms are indifferently read from left to right and from right to left would couple them the *one* to the *other*; they would complete one another in a system visible from outside.⁵

Both Kierkegaard and Levinas view the objective tendency, or ontology, as detached and separated from existents. The constructs employed by ontology in order to secure comprehension effectively turn the terms within their scope into accidents, into indifferent instantiations of the construct. As for Hegel, if he indeed is presenting an instance of this tendency, *Geist* would be the construct of which all existents could be said to be accidental or indifferent instantiations.

The above is not meant to indicate that Levinas and Kierkegaard are making essentially the same criticism of Hegel. Whereas Kierkegaard prioritizes the existential subjectivity of the individual (what Levinas would call *the Same*) confronting the world, Levinas prioritizes the transcendence of the *Other* that confronts the subject in the relation he calls the *face-to-face*.⁶ The similarity of these two critics lies rather in their approach to criticizing Hegel: both seek to explicate some instance in which the grasp of the totality is prohibited, an instance that cannot be reduced to *Geist*.



Hegel's Project

To begin our defense of Hegel, we must first uncover what he intends by (the term) *Geist*. Much of Hegelian scholarship tends to interpret *Geist* as something of an admixture of Spinoza's Substance and Kant's Transcendental Ego. Such an interpretation depicts *Geist* as an all-pervasive self-consciousness into which all diversity is ultimately dissolved. On this interpretation, entities become nothing other than the many faces of *Geist*. To consider oneself as an individual consciousness is something of a misapprehension, then; what is taken to be oneself is really the play of *Geist* alone. On this interpretation, which still dominates much of the current discussion of Hegel, there may be a measure of truth to the critiques of Levinas and Kierkegaard. However, there is also reason to believe that Hegel intended something wholly different by *Geist*.

Consider this now-famous passage:

To pit this single insight, that in the Absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfillment, to palm off its Absolute as the night in which...all cows are black—this is cognition naively reduced to vacuity.⁷

This passage is in reference to F.W.J. Schelling's conception of the Absolute as the supreme identity underlying all phenomena. The accuracy and fairness of Hegel's appraisal of Schelling is still a matter of scholarly debate—Schelling himself certainly protested that Hegel's assessment was grossly unfair.⁸ In any case, the issue is whether the criticisms of Levinas and Kierkegaard apply to Hegel's conception of *Geist*. It certainly applies to the interpretation of *Geist* as discussed in the preceding paragraph. However, considering Hegel's appraisal of pawning off the Absolute as the night in which all cows are black, or rather the denial that differentiation occurs within the Absolute, one cannot help but question the accuracy of this interpretation of *Geist*. Hegel criticizes the very same reduction of individuals to indifferent modifications of the Absolute or *Geist* for which Levinas and Kierkegaard criticize him. How, then, can the charge itself be considered just?

Moments of Thought

One of the main tenets of Hegel's philosophy is his principle of identity in difference. This principle captures the essence of Hegel's now-famous dialectic. Hegel found very problematic such oppositions as humanity and nature, thought and being, individuality and universality, and subject and object. For all intents and purposes, these oppositions seem absolute and irreducible. However, Hegel sought to reconcile these oppositions by introducing the doctrine of identity in difference, or perhaps expressed just as well, the doctrine of difference in identity. To aid in expounding the doctrine of identity in difference, he separated thought into three moments: the first he calls *Understanding*.⁹ This moment is the source of oppositions such as the above-named. Here, the conscious being views the world of phenomena as a plurality of mutually exclusive entities. Entities are understood as divorced from each other, unrelated, subsisting independently. Many modern-day sciences utilize this moment of thought when categorizing entities according to their specific differences. For instance, rocks are divided into the categories of *igneous*, *sedimentary*, and *metamorphic*. Each of these terms connotes differences in texture,



composition, and the way in which they are formed. Hegel does not intend to criticize this form of knowing or of viewing the world; in fact, he states that "...the merit and rights of the...Understanding should [be] unhesitatingly admitted. And that merit lies in the fact that apart from Understanding there is no fixity or accuracy in the region of theory or practice."¹⁰ There is no way to the Truth, or Absolute, without the Understanding. He would even cite the wealth of insight that geology has yielded through its methods as a testament to this fact. Yet, there is a tendency to consider Understanding to be the first and last step in knowledge; here, one simply accepts the myriad of mutually exclusive objects he considers to be bedrock. But Hegel urges that we must move beyond this moment, just as geologists have done.

The next moment of thought beyond Understanding Hegel calls *Negative Reason*. In this moment thought becomes skeptical, denying the legitimacy of the Understanding. It is for this reason that Hegel calls this aspect of thought "negative." Thought realizes its inability to penetrate to the very heart of its object, realizing its inadequacy, and, thus, it moves beyond its former stance to its negation. A characterization of the play between the Understanding and Negative Reason can be found in the opposition of two contradictory assertions. Borrowing one of Immanuel Kant's antinomies of pure reason will here serve us well. Consider the opposing assertions, "The universe is infinite," and "The universe is finite."¹¹ It was Kant's view that theoretical reason could never establish the truth of either assertion, and he made the further claim that such oppositions indicated the limits of theoretical reason, beyond which it could never reach. Hegel would agree that neither assertion can be established...but only at the level of Understanding. And, further, he denies that this inability marks a limit to theoretical reason.

Hegel realized that approaching philosophy as a method of establishing isolated assertions is ultimately doomed. One can never establish conclusively the truth of an isolated assertion, for the very meaning of such an assertion will always be indeterminate. Thought will always move, through dialectic, to its negation. Rather than to deny the possibility of absolute knowledge and to accept a limit to reason, Hegel proposed a new way of thinking. This new way is the moment of *Speculative* or *Positive Reason*. Speculative Reason is the source of Hegel's identity in difference: that, within identity, the difference is preserved. The principle states that rather than understand identity simply as the negation of difference, difference must be understood to be "sublated" within identity. What this means is that, as thought moves through dialectic to less abstract and more complete concepts, those preceding concepts are not simply negated; rather, they are included within a more complete concept. They are sublated. The concept arrived at, in turn, is sublated in another more complete concept. To use one of Hegel's own illustrations, the concept of Being implies its negation: Nothing. And these two are sublated in the concept of Becoming. To explain, Being is a very abstract concept; it can be used to describe anything from cars to D.N.A., to you and me, to everything. Thus the concept has no specific usage, and it is in a sense indifferent or seems to say nothing; and, as such, it passes into the concept of Nothing. These two concepts are then further interconnected and refined or sublated into that of Becoming. This latter concept contains both of the earlier concepts without disposing of them. Consider a seed that grows into a plant. The seed becomes a sapling, and its previous stage of being is now nothing. But the sapling cannot exist without having some reference to this earlier stage—these past stages are sublated in its process of becoming.

Hegel's intention is quite clear. He proposes a way of thinking that is beyond oppositions such as humanity and nature, individuality and universality, and subject and object. And, moreover, it is a way that does not simply negate their differences. It preserves these differences through further refinement and interconnection, through sublation.



Geist

So how does *Geist* fit into this picture? This is where some difficulty in interpretation arises, since Hegel never provides a simple, straightforward definition of *Geist*. Thus, any interpretation must be derived from its contextual development in his works. And this is certainly his intention. Hegel simply gives us the development of *Geist* in his works—in careful and often puzzling detail. He also insists that his position cannot be understood outside of its full exposition. [Too often critics latch on to isolated, out-of-context quotations in his philosophy, only to be corrected later for doing so. One must know the whole to comprehend the parts as well as know the parts to comprehend the whole.] Given this, and the synonymy of *Geist* with the Whole, the Truth, and the Absolute, any conception of *Geist* apart from this context would be flawed. However, we can at least come to a conception of *Geist* that is consistent with each stage of this development that offers a response to Levinas and to Kierkegaard.

Despite the difficulties inherent in Hegel's writing style, a workable interpretation of *Geist* can be rendered. As Frederick Beiser discusses in the *Cambridge Companion to Hegel*,¹² Schelling and Hegel sought to make an advance upon Spinoza's Substance by introducing a dynamic, organic element to the Absolute. Spinoza conceived of the universe as the singular Substance; he claimed that the multitude of entities we experience are mere modifications of this Substance, giving us the illusion that they are individual entities. Schelling and Hegel both considered this view unsatisfactory, as it effectively swallowed up all of nature into the lifeless self-identity of Substance. They sought to surmount this lifeless Substance by introducing an organic, dynamic principle to the Absolute. This element was meant to preserve the Absolute as that which has independent essence and existence; yet they conceived of it as being the living force in all of reality. In Schelling's philosophy, the manifold we experience is conceived of as being of different degrees of organization of this living force.

Hegel, however, considered Schelling's conception to be inadequate. To reiterate the above-quoted passage, Schelling's Absolute, as interpreted, perhaps unfairly, by Hegel, is effectively "...the night in which all cows are black." One cannot simply negate the bacchanalian revel that is experience and the richness of all things experienced. For Hegel, the whole of reality cannot simply be the varying degrees of the development or organization of *Geist*. This view is as yet too impersonal to be deemed his own. *Geist* is not the Being that is distinct from beings, nor is it the Existence that is distinct from existents, nor is it the Truth that is distinct from reality. Reality is no more the different degrees of development of *Geist*, just as *Geist* is the different degrees of development of reality. *Geist* is not simply a third term produced by an ontological tendency, as Levinas would claim. Nor is *Geist* simply the System that bestows the sole significance upon its indifferent and accidental products, as Kierkegaard would claim.

Geist is the unifying principle of reality, but the whole of reality is not then reduced to *Geist*. Individuals are manifestations of *Geist*, while *Geist* itself has no manifestations apart from these. The two are identical, but, within this identity, their difference is preserved through sublation. *Geist* and individuals are not separated by a chasm wherein one side is the ultimately real and the other side is the mere illusion that mimics or copies it. The Truth – the real – is the whole, and the whole is not only *Geist* and not only individuals. It is both.

Levinas would object at this point, wondering how this vision of *Geist* and individuals does not form a totality. Also, Kierkegaard would object at this point, asking how the individual is not made accidental and indifferent in this scheme. Hegel's response would be that, given that Levinas and



Kierkegaard would hold fast to the idea that the significance of individuals—if they are to have significance at all—must not come from their inclusion in a totality or logical system, these thinkers apprehend reality at some level akin to what Hegel calls the Understanding. Further, that they do so prevents them from grasping or accepting the notion of sublation.

As long as one remains at the level of abstract Understanding, the critiques of Levinas and Kierkegaard appear eminently plausible. At the level of Understanding, thought holds hard and fast to its fixed points of reference—identities—and denies their dialectical development. Here, identity is equated with the logical principle of identity, the $A=A$, the abstract idea that everything is itself.¹³ And at the level of Understanding identity is abstract, and a statement such as “*Geist* includes both the infinite and finite” is simply unintelligible. But Hegel would maintain that this is not the true concept of identity, for the true concept of identity must include and preserve difference. And, as he warns in his *Logic*, “It is important to come to a proper [conception] of the true meaning of Identity: and, for that purpose, we must especially guard against taking it as abstract Identity, to the exclusion of all difference.”¹⁴

Conclusion

Geist is the unifying principle of reality. However, Hegel does not conceive of *Geist* as an alien, “neuter” entity that stands apart from its manifestations and into which these manifestations are dissolved. Levinas and Kierkegaard cannot accept such a position because of their insistence that individuals must have significance apart from inclusion in a totality or logical system if they are to have any true significance at all. For them, comprehension acts always by way of reduction and, thus, by way of removing differences. And both cite instances in which such action is prohibited. Hegel was well aware of this issue, which is why he criticized abstract concepts and rejected the distinction between *Geist* and its manifestations. He sought to solve this issue by positing another level of thought: Speculative Reason. And by conceiving of knowledge as a development into more determinate concepts that sublated, rather than negated, difference. *Geist* is meant to unify individuality with plurality, freedom with reason, and humanity with nature—not to reduce these to a “neuter” term or to an indifferent perspective. Granted, Hegel’s concept of *Geist* certainly appears foreign to the way in which most of us are accustomed to think. But he definitely has a legitimate alternative to the thought of both Kierkegaard and Levinas. And although there may be an insurmountable *impasse* between the thought of Kierkegaard and Levinas, on the one hand, and Hegel, on the other, it is up to the reader to decide whether Hegel is allowed his principles. And this decision can only be reached by careful study of the development of *Geist*, as presented in Hegel’s own writings.

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 22.

² *Ibid.* (See especially Levinas’ discussion of “Philosophy of the Neuter” on pp. 298-299.) There is an ambiguity in Levinas’ theory of the nature and origin of the third term here. In general, he treats knowledge as a mode or aspect of the Same; it is said to be a free and spontaneous product of the Same. However, in his section on “Representation,” wherein he discusses what he thinks all knowledge is, he describes knowing as a state in which the Same experiences objects of knowledge *as if* [*Italics mine*] they were derived from itself. So, on the one hand, he describes knowledge strictly as a mode or product of the Same, as a sort of deficient mode in that it fails to recognize the alterity of the



Other. But, on the other hand, he implies that it has some sort of reality independent of the Same. This is indicated by his use of the phrase “as if.” If it is “as if” the objects of knowledge were derived from itself, this implies that they are not, strictly speaking, derived from itself. And we are left with what looks like an inconsistency in his thinking, or at the very least a serious ambiguity.

³ Also, for Kierkegaard, the logical system turns the subject into a necessary and non-free component of a greater whole.

⁴ Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 193.

⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-81.

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 9. (It should also be noted that for the purposes of this paper the terms “*Geist*” and “the Absolute” have the same meaning, the same use, for Hegel.)

⁸ Already in 1802, seven years before Hegel penned the above passage, Schelling had written: “Most people see in the essence of the Absolute nothing but empty night, and they can distinguish nothing within it; it contracts for them into a bare negation of differentiation, and it is for them a purely private experience.” Cited by Professor Edward A. Beach in his *The Potencies of God(s): Schelling’s Philosophy of Mythology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994) 105.

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). The following discussion of the three moments of thought is a summary of sections §79-§82.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, §81, including the section *Zusatz*.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965). This is an abbreviated version of Kant’s first antinomy. The opposing theses as they appear in the *Critique* are: “The world has a beginning in time, and is also limited as regards space” and “The world has no beginning, and no limits in space; it is infinite as regards both time and space.” p. 396.

¹² Frederick Beiser, “Introduction: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics,” in *Cambridge Companion to Hegel*. ed. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 1-22.

¹³ *Hegel’s Logic*, 166-168.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.



Three Views of Ritual • Jeanne Peterson

Jeanne Peterson is a Senior and a Religious Studies major; her minor is Business Administration. Jeanne wrote this paper on three views of ritual as part of the seminar in Religious Studies entitled “The Biology of God” taught by Professor Burns in the spring term of 2002.

I

Ritual is an important part of everyday life, and it likely has been ever since the beginning of human existence. But how and why have ritual and worship come to be? Modern rituals have rather mundane origins, ones that have roots in eating, death, sex, and even in inebriation. What we have today are “cleansed” versions of these early rituals.

In fact, ritual regulation is addressed in the Old Testament book of *Leviticus*. The promises made to those who followed these regulations involved such things as peace, a successful harvest, and victory over enemies. Indeed, those who dared to violate the prescriptions needed to be prepared to suffer the consequences. It appears that these early human rituals arose as a result both from the need for survival and from the sense of common destiny that rituals encouraged in society. A traditional view is that rituals aided the survival of the society by strengthening the bonds within the community, by leading people to work together for the good of the society. Therefore, it seems that rituals likely arose and evolved out of cultural necessity.

There is, however, a rival view of rituals that has been advanced by Eugene d’Aquili and Andrew Newberg. Their view is that ritual and worship arise because of physiological processes and needs: that ritual is the result of nature rather than of culture. In other words, ritual practice is something we do naturally, automatically, instinctively.

One could, however, speculate in this matter from yet a third, “hybrid” perspective. It is also possible that ritual and worship are the result of a combination of cultural and natural factors. Looking at the initiation of ritual as based purely on nature or brain function eliminates the possibility of outside sources, such as society, family or friends. But, then too, looking at the initiation of ritual as being purely



a response to cultural stimuli eliminates the possibility that some aspects of ritual behavior might result from natural instinct, an instinct that may have been necessary for survival.

In advancing the position that ritual arises out of a combination of natural and cultural factors, I begin by briefly summarizing the work of d'Aquili and Newberg. I will then bolster my view by showing why I find their thinking to be too narrow – what I believe their approach has left out – and I will discuss how others have interpreted the data upon which these authors rely. I shall conclude with my suggestions about the nature of ritual.

One advantage of examining and assessing the work of d'Aquili and Newberg is that it encourages us to become more sensitive to the powerful effects that both nature and culture play in our ritual and religious lives. Their work helps to explain the nearly universal appeal of ritual, while the inclusion of cultural factors can help account for the relative strength or weakness of one's urge to engage in ritual behavior throughout his life. And it can direct our attention to how ritual conduct becomes linked to other psychological and sociological factors, such as the presence of guilt when not engaging in ritual behavior or the preference to be involved in public, not merely private, forms of ritual.

II

According to d'Aquili and Newberg,

Ritual is a sequence of behavior that: (1) is structured or patterned; (2) is rhythmic and repetitive; (3) acts to synchronize affective, perceptual-cognitive, and motor processes to generate powerful unifying experiences within the individual; and (4) synchronizes these processes among the various individual participants creating a strong sense of group unity.¹

Ritual takes a “bottom-up” approach: it causes stimulation first in the autonomic nervous system and then it gradually moves into stimulation of the higher brain structures. They write:

...selective stimulation and deafferentation of various brain structures accompanied by various patterns and degrees of intensity of emotional stimulation may hold the key to explaining most, if not all, religious experiences....²

With “rapid” ritual, such as that found in dance or rapid drum beating, there is a dominance of the arousal system, and with “slow” ritual, such as that found in quiet prayer or meditation, the quiescent system is the dominant one. They tell us that the amygdala appears to have a significant role in the human reaction to ritual.³ It is more responsive during ritual than usual, thereby producing sustained attention. The amygdala is also aroused by the sense of smell. Therefore, the use of scents and incense might cause an even greater response, and the different “tones” used during religious ritual can create a sense of awe, fear, joy and harmony with the universe, or a sense that death is not to be feared.

Through their research, d'Aquili and Newberg have attempted to reduce the reason that humans feel the need to perform rituals to a basic conflict between the arousal system and the quiescent system of the brain. The arousal system controls such things as reception and avoidance of stimuli. It is also respon-



sible for increasing the heart rate, blood pressure and respiration. And these are just a few of the arousal system's functions. The quiescent system has an opposing function. It is the quiescent system that allows us to relax and to sleep. It also regulates cell growth. Under normal circumstances, increased activity in one of these systems begets decreased activity in the other. But, because of our highly developed system of cognition, we need to create myths so as to help explain why such things as illness, pain, stress and death occur. And that presents problems. Ritual practice, then, is the purported antidote for these conflicts and problems.

There are those who have come to conclusions similar to those voiced by d'Aquili and Newberg. One example is anthropologist Barbara Lex, who maintains that the purpose of religious ritual is to restore the balance between the parasympathetic (*trophotropic*) and the sympathetic (*ergotropic*) nervous systems. She maintains that "...no other approach in the psychology of religion promises as revolutionary a future as the biological one."⁴

III

Barbara Lex is nearly a lone voice amongst anthropologists, however. Most have come to the conclusion that ritual practice is the result of culture more than of biology. Others have gone so far as to assert that ritual is the starting point from which other aspects of religion arise and that religious beliefs come about as rationalizations of ritual. In other words, they theorize that ritual is a coping mechanism that grew into something much bigger, that engaged individuals both cognitively and affectively.

Obviously, other psychologists or researchers have not completely ruled out the notion that the brain plays a part in why human beings perform rituals as they do. As a matter of fact, rituals are not limited to humans. Animals, too, perform rituals. Animals, especially the young, will follow the lead of others of their species; it often is a matter of survival for them as they learn practically important behavioral patterns. In some cases, it is not so different for humans.

Life revolves around rituals, especially during the important times of our lives. We use religious rituals, for example, to help ourselves cope with death and grief and with illness and stress. As one theorist has pointed out, "...human beings tend to respond to unpredictable or uncontrollable situations with ritualistic behavior."⁵ The use of religious and non-religious ritual for significant events is clearly evident. Examples include weddings, baptisms, and funerals. By performing rituals at these events, we allow others to share our joys and sorrows, and we develop a sense of community. We no longer feel alone. As Gordon Allport comments, "Ritual is a form of social facilitation which intensifies the comparable attitudes and sentiments of all participants."⁶

Religious ritual is full of symbolism. Western rituals performed during worship services on Sundays often involve burning candles so as to represent the presence of the Divine/God and the use of incense to show how our prayers rise to heaven. Bells are used so as to call people to worship, and sacred music is used so as to express the emotions of worship. The list goes on and on. Prayer itself is a ritual because it is both rhythmic and designed to help the participants to keep focused their attention. This suggests that there is a blend of behavior – emotion and cognition that takes place in ritual – and it indicates how ritual relies on enculturation and heritage for much of its meaning and significance.



IV

George Vetter is a researcher who has applied behavior theory to religious practice. In a case study, he uses prayer so as to show how human beings learn by association. Vetter says that children are taught prayers and, as they learn them, they win the praise of their parents. Thus begins the conditioning process. He tells us that, eventually, satisfaction fits into the association puzzle in the form of the hunger satisfaction that comes as a result of eating after reciting a prayer at the table. Bedtime prayers become associated with sleep and with the “going away” of the day’s worries. So, over time, these associations lead to the individual’s coming to the realization that prayer is an effective way of easing the stresses of daily life. Vetter also claims that the beliefs come after the learned behaviors. The beliefs then provide an explanation or a rationalization for the ritualistic behaviors.

It can be argued that, ultimately, ritual becomes a coping mechanism or a way to attempt to control that which is otherwise uncontrollable. Harvard psychologist B.F. Skinner writes, “Ritual is important because it helps us understand the script of life; it helps us understand the mood of our own experience.”⁷ Skinner also claims that traditional rituals are the result of conditioning. They are learned, and we then must create more elaborate myths in order to explain our rituals. He goes on to maintain that faith and beliefs are, thus, by-products of the learned behavior. Skinner also states that things such as a sense of piety, conscience or morality, and sinfulness, typically associated with religion, really come about as a result of behavior shaped by society, not by religion practice itself. On the topic of religious ritual, Swedish psychologist of religion Hjalmar Sunden writes, “Without a religious reference system, without religious tradition, without myth and ritual, religious experiences are unthinkable.”⁸

Still, some believe that humans, like animals, respond instinctively to the ritual behavior they observe in others. This means that humans tend to act in a “programmed” way to observed behavior. This is the result of lower-brain function. However, these same “scientists” claim that specific ritual is culturally learned. This is the result of higher-brain function. Could they have it both ways?

There are those in the scientific community who believe it is through a “schema” [*an organized cognitive structure of knowledge and rooted in experience*] that we experience religious ritual. Because a schema is something that is part of us, and because it is an automatic response, we humans have the root of religious experience within ourselves at all times. As a result, those subscribing to this position maintain that: “...(it) is through a schema that events are interpreted, that their meaning and significance are assessed in light of pre-existing knowledge.”⁹

It is through these two interpretations of what causes us to behave as we do regarding religious ritual that things begin to gel, so to speak. It becomes apparent that the brain function and the culturally learned experiences can both play a role in worship and in the symbolism of religious ritual experience. These factors need not be mutually exclusive.

The way in which the liturgical church year unfolds is certainly no simple act of a biological brain function. Rather, it occurs as it does because of logic or necessity. Depending on the culture, the important rituals may fall near the prime harvest time or, to use an example from Christianity, near the times of the spring equinox and the winter solstice. The two most important events in the Christian liturgical year coincide rather nicely with the seasonal changes. Christmas comes during the darkest days of the year, bringing with it a time of light. Easter arrives after the long, gray emptiness of winter; it brings the spring renewal of life. And the Church celebrates its establishment at Pentecost at a time when the earth has reestablished itself and has come back to life.



V

It would appear, then, that “...ritual attaches itself to the basic activities and events of life, which are naturally those that affect the emotions most deeply – eating, drinking, intercourse, birth, death.”¹⁰ And this is where the function of the autonomic nervous system fits in. Basic emotions such as fear, joy, and shame are controlled by the autonomic nervous system.

Ritual creates a sense of community, togetherness, and belonging. Often, humans feel the need to express religious devotion publicly so as to make events seem more meaningful. But in order for events to be truly meaningful, there must be a group or a community with shared values. And this is where our church “families” come in. It is through this shared experience that human beings often find the power, the strength, to transform their lives.

Religious myth goes much deeper than a biological “brain accident” might explain. When myth is told through ritual, we learn about our history and about ourselves. The experiences of past generations have resulted in the addition of “layers” to our rituals. “The data of religion, then, are the characteristic experiences, stories, and rituals of particular religious communities.”¹¹

VI

So, between these opposing viewpoints, what conclusions can be gleaned? There appears to be some basis for d’Aquili’s and Newberg’s stance that religious ritual is connected with biological, brain functions. But that is only a portion of the complete story. There is also much to be said for the roles of cultural conditioning, learned experiences and positive association reinforcement in ritual.

It is interesting to note that more than one researcher has come to the conclusion that rituals existed before beliefs and that beliefs came about as a result of trying to rationalize rituals. If this view is correct, something proposed by d’Aquili and Newberg nicely sums up the situation: “Religious ritual aims at existentially uniting opposites in an effort to achieve some form of control over what appears to be an essentially unpredictable universe.”¹² When a person declares that he or she is of a particular religious persuasion, certain behavior then becomes expected: *ritual* behavior. “Various religions teach that specific behaviors should be performed, both as visible evidence of belief and as a stimulant to faith and commitment.”¹³

At times, we don’t even know why we perform certain rituals; we may not understand the symbolism. Yet we perform because we are told to or because it is a required element of our religious denomination. Sometimes we perform just because “everyone else is doing it,” and we don’t want to be conspicuous by not following the group. One of the purposes of ritual is to encourage the individual to submit to, or to become part of, the group.

I have come to the conclusion that ritual is primarily a coping mechanism created by humans so as to assist them in dealing with the stresses of daily life; and, secondarily, it derives from a biological function of the brain. Certainly, brain function is a part of the process, because it plays a part in how we come to know, in how it is that we remember what we have done, and in why we do things in the first place.



VII

Keeping all of this in mind, I conclude by using myself as a “case study” in support of my thesis in the biology *and* in the learned experience of ritual debate. Having been raised Catholic, I long performed the actions of an adult. Then I finally decided, about a year ago, to leave the Church. Why did I stay on so long?

I believe it is because of learned experience and cultural conditioning, not solely because of any biological brain function. I was trained from a very young age to believe that the Catholic Church was where I belonged. That was where my “community” was. It was the society of which I was an integral part. Is this simply something that my brain chemicals determined for me? Was it only an automatic response of my nervous system? Not entirely. Rather, it was what my parents taught me, and, by following their rules, I received the praise and positive reinforcement that I sought from them. So, as a result of this process of cultural nurturing, I learned both what was, and was not, acceptable behavior, and then my brain function took over and my actions became automatic responses.

When I mentioned to my parents that I wanted to leave the Church, as I had wanted to do for years, I suffered their wrath. Gone was the praise and rewards I so desired; my parents’ anger and disappointment directed at my “bad behavior” replaced their approvals. As a result, I decided to remain “a member of the faithful”. I might have been unhappy, but my parents were pleased, and, once again, there was harmony within the family. The bottom line? I believe that this autobiographical tale illustrates the point that the reason some participate in religion/religious rituals is more the result of culture or society than it is rooted in biology. I do, however, believe both factors play a role.

So where do I think d’Aquili and Newberg went wrong? They attempted to oversimplify human behavior. Especially so, because they attempted to explain our behavior by reducing its causes to chemical impulses in the brain. Indeed, what about the function that subjective factors play in various rituals? If religious experience were simply brain chemicals interacting, it would be likely that all of us would have the same, or very similar, religious beliefs. Why so many religious denominations today? They would not be necessary, because people would not have the impulse to seek out different ways of worship. D’Aquili and Newberg either ignored or discounted the cultural and societal influences of ritual in their study.

By taking an “either / or” approach to the reason why humans perform rituals, one leaves out a vital piece of the puzzle. For instance, if we say it is simply nature, we then leave out the possibility for growth and change through experience. But, then too, if we say ritual is simply a cultural experience, we completely lose the idea of the relation between natural instinct and ritual. However, if we accept the argument that it is a combination of both nature and culture, we leave the door open to *evolving* rituals that reflect the societal changes that inevitably occur. At the same time, we also understand that some rituals probably will remain relatively unchanged, because they have appeared as a result of physiological needs.

¹ Eugene d’Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 89.

² *Ibid.*, 103. (“Deafferentation” is defined as “the freeing of the motor nerves from sensory components by severing the dorsal (having to do with what is on or near the back of an animal) root central to the dorsal ganglia.”)



³ The Amygdala is an almond shaped structure in the brain involved in producing and responding to nonverbal signs of anger, avoidance, defensiveness and fear. It is thought to cause aversive cues, such as freeze reactions, sweaty palms, and tense mouth and to prompt the release of adrenaline and other hormones into the blood stream. It is closely involved in the presence and expression of certain emotions.

⁴ David M. Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991) 105.

⁵ Raymond F. Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996) 120.

⁶ Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion: A Psychological Interpretation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950) 151.

⁷ Quoted in Allport, *Op. cit.*, 139.

⁸ Quoted in Allport, *Ibid.*, 151.

⁹ Raymond F. Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996) 189.

¹⁰ Mortimer Ostow and Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *The Need to Believe: The Psychology of Religion* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1954) 85.

¹¹ Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997) 115.

¹² d'Aquili and Newberg, *Op. cit.*, 87.

¹³ Paloutzian, *Op. cit.*, 17.



Importance of Nature in the Ethical Views of the Stoics and the Epicureans •
Courtney Rump

Courtney Rump is a Senior and major in Philosophy; her minor is Spanish. Courtney began work on this paper on Stoic and Epicurean ethical theory while taking the course in Writing and Research in Philosophy and Religious Studies with Professor Brummer in the fall term of 2002. It went through further revision in the spring term of 2003.

Introduction

When the prosperity of Greek civilization was weakening during and after the fourth century BCE, several new schools of thought came about that changed the course of ancient philosophy. These schools turned philosophy away from its focus on the individual's place in society and onto a path of encouraging an individuality that was independent of society. Two branches of this new philosophy are the Epicureans and the Stoics. Both schools advanced theories of logic, physics, and ethics; they incorporated their own ideas with ideas that came before. And, while their views in general are noteworthy, their positions in ethics are what have endured – so much so that the very names of the schools carry with them contemporary associations based on their ethics. But in order to understand these two branches of ancient philosophy, one must first look past these associations. Commonly held conceptions of the Epicureans and the Stoics suggest that these schools give very different advice on how one should lead a good life. But, upon closer examination, their ethical philosophies are, in many respects, quite similar. One can see this by looking at the importance both place both on living according to nature and on pursuing simple pleasures, in living a life in which virtue and self-sufficiency play crucial roles.

I shall here focus upon Stoic ethics. I shall begin with some main similarities between Stoic and Epicurean ethics; these concern the dispositions, behavior and values that both schools emphasize. Because a fundamental conception that both emphasize is that of doing, or following, what is natural, I shall then examine more carefully the meaning of this concept in Stoic ethical thought. Finally, I shall con-



clude with a consideration of a few of the differences between these views, and I shall caution the reader to avoid some of the more commonplace, contemporary stereotypes about these positions that persist centuries after they made their mark on Western civilization.

Common Conceptions

Although the best known philosophical positions of the ancient world are those of Plato and Aristotle, dicta from these lesser-known branches of ancient philosophy have also found their way into our everyday vocabulary. To classify someone as ‘an Epicurean’ in today’s terminology would basically involve an accusation of self-centered hedonism. One of the chief ideas in Epicurean philosophy – promulgated by its founder, Epicurus – is that the focus of one’s life, simply stated, should be to seek pleasure. And those who are not privy to Epicurus’ intent envision as an ideal then a pleasure-seeker who values nothing else in life. The word ‘Stoic,’ however, is more commonly used today than is ‘Epicurean’, but it carries with it just as much stereotyping and repute. ‘Stoic’ or ‘stoical’ have come to be synonymous with *inexpressive*, *solemn*, and *passionless*. Another common contemporary use of the term *Stoic* connotes being passive and uncomplaining, accepting anything that comes one’s way. This attitude derives from the Stoic ideal of not worrying about anything over which one has no control. Neither of these preconceptions is entirely mistaken, of course; they are simply exaggerations of the basic beliefs of these philosophies. They also suggest a reason as to why most people would assume that the Epicureans and the Stoics present contrasting views on living a good life: “pleasure seeking” and “passionlessness” hardly suggest similar ethical principles or lifestyles.

Ethical Parallels

When reexamined, there are several ways in which the Epicurean and Stoic ethics seem to be more alike than one might first think. Essentially, both philosophies hold that people should strive to live as nature intends; the schools’ ethical ideals seem to run parallel on this issue. One example of this similarity can be found in the way that Epicurus classifies pleasures; it can also be seen in the Stoic belief that appears to correspond to these classifications. Epicurus divides pleasures into three categories: natural and necessary, natural and unnecessary, and neither natural nor necessary.¹ The first and most basic type of pleasures – the natural and necessary ones – is provided by nature and is needed by all people in order to live, making instances of this type the most vital and simplest of all pleasures. Included are pleasures arising from the satisfaction of bodily needs,² from physical security and from companionship.³ The second type is natural, meaning that these pleasures are easily accessible. But they are unnecessary, that is, they are just as easily ignored as they are sought. These include the pleasures of gaining attention and having social status. The third type, being neither natural nor necessary, should, according to Epicurus, be ignored, avoided. These include pleasures associated with having wealth or worldly power.⁴

Placing the highest importance on the simplest pleasures is an ideal that is fundamental to the Stoics as well. The Stoic belief is that one should live according to nature – partaking in only those things that are natural, avoiding all that is not. This is similar to the idea presented in Epicurus’ natural-and-necessary pleasures. Parallel to the natural-and-unnecessary pleasures are things about which the Stoics are indifferent. These “indifferents” include things, conduct or experiences that can be either good or



bad, both in themselves and in their effects. The Stoic definition of an *indifferent* thing or act is that it “...contributes neither to happiness nor to misery,” and under its purview fall things such as “...health and disease and everything bodily and most external things.”⁵ Both Stoic indifferents and Epicurean natural-and-unnecessary pleasures are things both that need not exist in order for people to live and that need not be acknowledged if they do exist. The way Stoics value living ‘in accordance with nature’ relates to Epicurus’ third type of pleasures, namely, those that are to be ignored. Stoics believe that one should avoid that which goes against nature, just as Epicurus teaches that one should ignore unnatural-and-unnecessary pleasures. Epicurus’ tripartite division of pleasures and its parallel concepts in Stoic belief emphasize living in harmony with nature by living for the simple pleasures. This is a fundamental ethical notion of both schools.

Natural Pleasures

As we have seen, living for nature is important to both the Epicureans and the Stoics, although the comparison is often overlooked owing to differences in linguistic formulations. The Epicureans maintain that the *summum bonum* – the highest good – is the seeking of pleasure and the avoidance of pain,⁶ while the Stoics define the *summum bonum* as “a life in agreement with nature”. The bedrock of each of these definitions, however, lies in virtue. Epicurean ‘pleasure’ and Stoic ‘nature’ are essentially paths to the same standard of virtue. Epicureans live in order to seek pleasures, namely, the simplest of pleasures, which they believe is the way to live a virtuous life. They believe that, as Epicurus maintains, “...only virtue is inseparable from pleasure.”⁷ In seeking virtue, they contend that pleasure is the highest good. Similarly, Stoics believe that living according to nature will lead them to virtue. Indeed, Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, has it that “... ‘to live according to virtue’ is equivalent to living according to the experience of events which occur by nature.”⁸

Another reason to believe that pleasure and nature are ethically comparable is seen in the way that the Epicureans envision a life of pleasure. As we have already noted, they emphasize seeking only the most natural and necessary pleasures, which in turn leads them to idealize a life according to nature, an idea similar to that advocated by the Stoics. The natural-and-necessary pleasures include all those things provided by nature, which makes the sought-after pleasures purely natural. Epicurus advises:

We must not violate nature, we must obey her, and we shall obey her if we fulfill all necessary desires, including those of the body, that is if they bring no harm in their train, for if they do we must reject them.⁹

In other words, seeking and avoiding pleasures should be done only in accordance with the dictates of nature. The Stoics denied that the highest goal of life should be to seek pleasure, but, in the case of the Epicureans, the simple pleasures they sought are closely aligned with the natural life sought by the Stoics.



Self-Sufficiency

According to one Epicurean philosopher, “Self-sufficiency is the greatest wealth of all.”¹⁰ Similarly, the Stoic philosopher, Seneca, defines *the happy life* as one of “self-sufficiency and abiding tranquility.”¹¹ This ideal of self-sufficiency is an important one for both schools. It goes back to the importance of living in accordance with nature, for both schools maintain that relying only on what nature has provided will make a person self-sufficient. For the Epicureans, this means not giving in to desires but maintaining a natural life. They believe that this is the simplest course of action, for all things needed for survival are provided by nature, while all things unnatural are more difficult both to attain and to sustain. Self-sufficiency, then, is attained easily, and it begets the greatest wealth: a *natural* wealth.

The Stoics’ adherence to natural self-sufficiency is perceived slightly differently than the appeal of the Epicureans. For the Stoics, nature is one and the same with God or reason. They see self-sufficiency as a life lived in accordance with reason, which is the equivalent of a life according to nature.¹² For the Stoics, living a rational or natural life means much the same as it meant for the Epicureans – living according to the simple things presented in nature.

Stoic Ethics

Having considered some general similarities between Stoic and Epicurean ethics, it is important to examine more carefully the central tenet of each view. Just like the Epicureans’ ethical emphasis is upon simple, natural pleasures, Stoic ethics is firmly grounded in the idea of nature. By living a life according to nature, one is living the most virtuous life possible. This seems to be a rather comprehensive, simple idea, but there are many details that must be fleshed out in order to see just how painstaking and difficult the attainment of virtue really is. The specifics of the Stoic ‘natural life’ include these four components: the five stages of a life according to nature, the theory of the good of the part and of the whole, the need to seek preferable or natural advantages, and, finally, the Stoic definition of *virtue*.

Cicero, a later Stoic thinker, defined *the five stages of a life according to nature*. These stages are conceived of as a progression that must be accomplished in order to achieve the final state of true virtue. Professor A. A. Long defines the goal of this progression as “...a life in accordance with mature human nature, that is, a life governed by rational principles which are in complete harmony with the rationality, goals and processes of universal Nature.”¹³ The first and most basic stage involves staying alive and fulfilling the most fundamental need required to do so. It is assumed that this stage applies mostly to newborns and to young children.¹⁴ The second stage is meant to apply to older children, and it involves learning to choose things that are in accordance with nature and rejecting those which are not. Stage three, meant to apply to young adults, derives from stage two; it involves learning to make such choices correctly on one’s own. The fourth stage, then, involves making these correct choices consistently. Stage five, which is rarely achieved, is living a life that is complete in its accordance with nature. The Stoics created a model to detail the actions of one who has attained this final ideal. The ‘sage’, as they called him, acts in perfect accordance to nature at all times and in all respects. Although they realized that the attainment of this ideal is most difficult, the sage is the example of a person whom they strive to follow; they try to come as close as is possible to the fifth stage of Living a Life According to Nature.



The second component of the Stoic ethical theory helps to address the question of how to determine what ends are good and natural in the life of an individual; this is the view of the good of the part and its relation to the whole. This brings to Stoic ethics an understanding of how moral agents relate to other things in the universe and to nature itself. Nature is thought to have a perfect rationality (its *logos*), and Stoics believe that all things that happen do so in contribution to the whole of nature's perfect design and well-being. This is not something that people can come to grasp fully, however, for they see things only from their own perspective – only partially. This is why they believe that some things happen to them that are not for the best. But were they to see nature from the perspective of the whole – if they were to ask how the pursuit of their own ends contributes to the good of the progressively greater wholes to which they belong – people would realize that everything that happens is for the best. That it is in accord with nature. This is because all events come from nature, and nature would not put them into effect were it not for the best. For example, a natural disaster or a devastating accident would be seen—*partially* seen—as an horrific event that was not in mankind's best interest. But looking at it from the perspective of the whole, Stoics believe that one would see that such an event is not unnatural, that it is, in fact, an event that is in the best long-term interests of mankind or nature. Professor Long further explains:

From the perspective of the whole nothing which befalls a man is disadvantageous either to himself or to the whole. Certain things can be called disadvantageous which are contrary to Nature from the perspective of the part. If Nature could have arranged a perfect world without such things this would have been done. Nature does not ordain suffering for its own sake, but it is necessary to the economy of the whole.¹⁵

All beings tend to view the world from their own limited, individual perspectives. Only when one has reached the level of the sage can one understand the inner workings of nature, reckoning how he or she, as a part, fits into the harmony of the universal whole. The sage then is able to endure what others may view as the seemingly tragic with composure, tranquility and even gratitude!

On the path to reaching the fifth stage of a life according to nature, one must learn to accept those things that are natural advantages (and thus contribute to the good of the whole), rejecting those things that are not. One uses reason to distinguish the preferable from its opposite. One should always strive to reach the fifth stage, the stage of highest virtue in which one knowingly and willfully chooses that which is best for the whole or for all of nature. But obviously one will encounter things of lesser importance along the way. These are things that can be pursued as ends within one's life, such as education, marriage, and family. But they can be pursued without being chosen self-consciously or because of the role they play in contributing to the good of the whole. In relation to the aim of virtue, then, one is ultimately indifferent to these things in themselves, but one must deal with them in some way as pursuits. As these more concrete matters of ultimate indifference come along, one must choose the most preferable outcome, or natural advantage, in order to understand better the ultimate goal of virtue. Although these natural advantages are important, they have no actual or ultimate ethical value of their own. They are simply unavoidable, instrumentally-valuable goals on the path to achieving the ultimate goal: the self-conscious pursuit of what is best for all of humankind and of nature. A mistake that is frequently made by most people, then, is to treat these goals as ends-in-themselves. In this way, wealth, sensual pleasures, fame and status, for example, can come to interfere with the pursuit of the goal of being virtuous.



The Stoics believed, then, that, “Nature is a perfect being, and the value of anything else in the world depends upon its relationship to Nature. Accordance with Nature denotes positive value and contrariness to Nature the opposite.”¹⁶ Therefore, that which has the greatest accordance to nature has the highest value. The Stoics sought to attain the greatest accordance with nature in order to live the most virtuous life possible. This goal is not easily attained, as the Stoics well understood. They created the image of the sage – a man whose life is in perfect harmony with nature – and they realized that such a man does not actually exist in the world. It was simply a model after which they could pattern their lives. Many things must be understood before this harmony can be reached, but the ultimate principle is that a natural life is a good life.

Differences

It has been my contention that, upon closer examination, the Epicurean and Stoic schools of thought are quite similar in their ethical precepts. However, there are dissimilarities as well. In the Epicurean division of pleasures, the most basic type is the most vital and easiest to attain, much like the Stoic ideal of living according to nature. However, abiding by only the natural and necessary pleasures means more to the Epicureans than simply sticking just to those pleasures. It also involves the avoidance of pain. By seeking natural-and-necessary pleasures, one may avoid the pain of unfulfilled desires, and this brings the greatest happiness.¹⁷ The Stoics disagree on this point, for they think that happiness will come from living according to what is natural; for them, the avoidance of pain is not an issue! In fact, they believe that experiencing pain may at times be a way of developing a more inclusive perspective. Indeed, what may be painful to the individual (or part) may nevertheless be best for nature (the whole). Pain, then, may be part of an instrumentally necessary, transitional stage on the way to attaining the life of the sage.

Another difference comes from the Stoics’ taking an element of their theory one step further than do the Epicureans. There are certain pleasures that the Stoics see as ‘indifferent’, an idea that is consistent with the Epicurean classification of natural-but-unnecessary pleasures. Stoic indifference, however, reaches to the point of passionlessness: Stoics aim to ignore that over which they have no control. To live ethically as a Stoic, then, one must embrace that which is in accordance with nature, avoid that which opposes nature, and appreciate those things that are out of one’s control. The Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, expresses how to live so as, “...to make the best of what is in our power and [to] take the rest as it occurs.”¹⁸

A final difference in the two positions is found in the ideal of self-sufficiency. When self-sufficiency is attained by the Epicureans, it means that they have complete freedom from all earthly things and desires; they can live simply on what nature provides for them. For the Stoics, however, self-sufficiency means a closer identification with the divine. By living in a self-sufficient manner according to nature, their free will aligns with the will of the divine, nature. Though self-sufficiency is an important ideal in both schools, its ultimate application is seen differently. For the Stoics, the ideal has a more metaphysical, or even religious, foundation.



Conclusion

Because of their similar views on the themes of living a life according to nature, on virtue, and on self-sufficiency, the Epicurean and Stoic branches of ancient philosophy give comparable advice on how one should live an ethical life. The common conception, however, is that the two are very different, that they advocate very different lifestyles. But, whereas there are some differences in the two ethical philosophies, a close examination reveals that they actually seek very similar ends. Only when the stereotypes carried by the names ‘Epicurean’ and ‘Stoic’ have been lifted can the actual ethical similarities be seen.

¹ Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson, trans. “The Testimony of Cicero: Ethics” in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1988) 46.

² Epicurus has been quoted as saying: “the principle and root of all good is the pleasure of the belly; and the sophisticated and refined [goods] are referred to this one.” Quoted from Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophists*, 12, 546f (409 U) in *Hellenistic Philosophy*, trans. by Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988) 66.

³ Epicurus praised friendship. He wrote, “Of all the things that wisdom secures for the attainment of happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the greatest is the possession of friendship,” in *Principal Doctrines*, xxvii. Quoted from A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974) 69. And, even with the death of a friend, they believed, “Sweet is the memory of a dead friend.” Quoted from Plutarch, *The Pleasant Life*, 1105e (213U), in Inwood and Gerson, 65.

⁴ Plutarch has written, “It is not great sums of money or a mass of possessions, nor even certain political offices and powers, which produce happiness and blessedness, but rather freedom from pain and gentleness in our feelings and a disposition of soul which measures out what is natural,” in *How to Listen to the Poets*, 37a (548U) in Inwood and Gerson, 69.

⁵ Inwood and Gerson, trans. “Stoicism: Ethics” in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1988) 156. One can see the difference between the Epicureans on bodily pleasures and some of the Stoics. The Epicureans typically believed that certain bodily pleasures were natural and necessary and thus should be pursued. But they were like the Stoicism in insisting that these pleasures should bring no harm or imbalance to the individual after pursuing them.

⁶ Inwood and Gerson, trans. “The Testimony of Cicero: Ethics” in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1988) 45.

⁷ Inwood and Gerson, trans. “Epicureanism: Doxographical Reports” in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1988) 35.

⁸ Inwood and Gerson, trans. “Stoicism: Ethics” in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1988) 136.

⁹ Henry Dwight Sedgwick, “On the Passions” in *The Art of Happiness (or the Teachings of Epicurus)*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1933) 75.

¹⁰ Inwood and Gerson, trans. “Epicureanism: Ethics” in *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, 67.

¹¹ Moses Hadas, trans. “The Happy Life” in *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958) 239.

¹² Moses Hadas, trans. “Stoicism” in *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca*, 24.

¹³ A.A. Long, “Stoic Ethics” in *Hellenistic Philosophy* (New York: 1974) 188.

¹⁴ Note how at this point in the historical development of Stoicism there was the recognition of the importance of satisfying bodily pleasures and having good health. But these goals came to be de-emphasized as one progressed to the higher stages of life.



¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁷ Russel M. Geer, trans. "Translator's Introduction: Epicurus" in *Epicurus: Letters, Principal Doctrines, and Vatican Sayings* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964) xxxiv.

¹⁸ Thomas Gould, ed. "Of the things which are, and the things which are not in our own power" in *Moral Discourses: Epictetus* (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1964) 6.



Thoreau and Buddhism • Jenna Maack

Jenna Maack graduated in May 2003 with a major in Philosophy and a minor in Religious Studies. Jenna wrote this paper on Thoreau and Buddhism as part of a “Transatlantic Romanticism” course she had with Professor Joel Pace in the English department in the fall term of 2002.

I. Introduction

The American Transcendentalists,¹ poised on the border of a vast wilderness to the West, viewed their wondrous world through both the lens of the European imagination and its intellectual perspective. Emerging knowledge of Asian culture and religion intrigued both the Romantic writers and continental philosophers of nineteenth-century Europe. Henry David Thoreau and other Transcendentalists learned about the “exotic East” through poets and romantic writers, adopting an “Orientalist” understanding, filtered through the European mind. Yet, in spite of the distortions of Asian thought by dilettante writers, Thoreau seemed to understand Eastern thought accurately. As Rick Fields, an historian in the development of Buddhism in America, has noted:

[Thoreau] was certainly not the only one of his generation to live a contemplative life, but he was, it seems, one of the few to live it in a Buddhist way. That is to say, he was perhaps the first American to explore the non-theistic mode of contemplation that is the distinguishing mark of Buddhism.²

Thoreau’s later writings developed more explicitly. He was concerned about the reaction of some of his readers to the mention of love of Buddha alongside of that of Christ, but he maintained that the common theme of love was the main thing, whoever should be one’s primary religious guide. Thoreau, I will argue, was likely the first American to understand Buddhism in a contemplative or experiential way, using nature and a limited number of Asian texts as his fundamental tools. This new perspective can give



us a deeper understanding of a timeless writer, while also shedding light on the emerging field of study that focuses on the syncretization of Buddhism into America.

II. Orientalism and Nineteenth Century America

The skeptical way that the remote religion of Buddhism was viewed in cultural context of Thoreau's New England was even further distorted by reports from travelers and missionaries and from occasionally misinformed scholarly studies. The majority of Americans had never heard of Buddhism, and, when they did, it was understood through travelogues, novels, poems, and stories written mostly by Europeans who had traveled to India, China, Japan, and other South Asian countries. Based on their presuppositions and zealous efforts in evangelizing Asians, missionaries and theologians were especially guilty of distorting Buddhism, describing it as a "pagan" or "idolatrous" religion.

On the Pacific coast of America, Asian immigrants were forming the first Buddhist Sanghas³ and temples. A different Buddhist cultural climate arose there, and distinctively ethnic, Asian Buddhists informed Americans interested in the religion. But not so on Thoreau's Atlantic coast, where he, Emerson and other Transcendentalist writers learned of Buddhism from the Europeans; this interpretation later came to be called "elite Buddhism." This was a version translated through the Trans-Atlantic exchange of literature and art and an Orientalist lens rooted in travel writings and imaginative journeys. For example, Coleridge had never traveled to Asia, but wrote "Khubla Khan," inspired only by his imagination of the exotic East. And Thoreau mused about "Oriental" contemplation in *Walden*, writing:

Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise til noon, rapt in reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumacs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in my west window, or the noise of some traveler's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than the work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance. I realized what the Orientals mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works.⁴

In 1849, after leaving Walden, he wrote to H.G.O. Blake: "Depend upon it that, rude and careless as I am, I would feign practice the yoga faithfully. To some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a yogi."⁵ But, in his later writings, such as his essay, "Walking," Thoreau demonstrates more explicitly developed learning from contemporary scholarship on Buddhism. Thoreau struggled to overcome the biases and distortions of his times out of an authentic thirst to know and to practice Buddhist thought with his own contemplative approach to nature. Perhaps this is because he felt it would draw him closer to genuine awareness of the natural world, liberated from the dualism of his contemporaries – one that separated them from nature.

Asia was far to the East – "Oriental" – as opposed to "Occidental," meaning "West". And it was thus implied that the appetite for the "exotic" cultures of Asia was exaggerated by the imagination of the Romantics. Asian scriptures, such as the teachings of the Buddha in the *Dhamapadda* and the *Bhagavad Gita* of Hinduism, were often not fully translated by French, German, or English linguistic scholars of



Sanskrit and Chinese who lacked cultural knowledge and sophisticated language analysis.⁶ Thomas Tweed described the resulting misconceptions about Buddhism that existed in America between 1844 and 1877. He wrote: “Buddhism was ‘strange’ and ‘singular.’ Its doctrines were not only ‘atheistic’ and ‘nihilistic’ but also ‘quietistic’ and ‘pessimistic.’”⁷ He also noted that this general attitude came directly from the European influence on East Coast intellectuals: “...mid-century European scholars were increasingly inclined to employ a language of ‘otherness’ and a rhetoric of negation to describe many of [Buddhism’s] most basic beliefs.”⁸

As we have indicated, some of these cultural prejudices and misconceptions were biases that reflected the pervasive religious orientation of Europeans and Americans. Most of the accounts of Buddhist thought and culture in the nineteenth century were compared to Christianity; they were explicated using Christian terminology. Thus, accounts of Buddhism, which arose mostly out of the travelogues of European traders and missionaries, were distorted by a predisposed Christian influence. For example, Professor Tweed reports:

The Portuguese Jesuit Gaspar Vilela (d.1572) even claimed that followers of Japanese Shingon Buddhism worship the devil. But the point was the same: although some aspects of practice and organization suggested Catholic parallels—the missionaries found a pope, monks, rosary beads, and penitential rites—Japanese Buddhists could be lumped with ‘idolaters’ or ‘heathens’ from other false traditions around the world.⁹

This example of cultural misinterpretation fits exactly the framework of “Orientalism” (as described by Edward Said) that shaped American misconceptions about Asian traditions.¹⁰

An important exception to the widespread nineteenth-century European Orientalist perspectives was the view of the European Romantics, particularly those of Byron and Coleridge. The Romantics held views more consistent with the earlier version of Orientalism – they did not accept the prevailing Western view that the East was a less-developed version of the West. Instead, they continued to be fascinated by the “exotic Orient” and the Asian wisdom traditions.¹¹ There still exists, of course, a misunderstanding of the East by the Romantics, but they expressed a more accepting, embracing attitude toward this mysterious “Other.”

III. Thoreau’s Exposure to Buddhist Teachings

The complexity of Orientalism in Europe further complicated the trans-Atlantic exchange of ideas that influenced the American Transcendentalists’ views of the East. Writers like Thoreau and Emerson had little on which to base their understandings, and the texts they used were tainted with European Orientalism—both the older and the modern constructions commonly found in publications. European Romantics fueled a fascination and interest in the Orient, but many European scholars, Christian travelers and merchants provided quite a different, and usually colonial, account. Rick Fields describes their situation in this early period of Buddhism in America:

Though Thoreau always thought of the Orientals in the present, neither he nor Ralph Waldo Emerson had ever met a practicing Hindu or Buddhist.... They knew the Orientals from books, almost all of which were the results of the labors of the small band of Englishmen.¹²



The first work to be translated from English into Sanskrit was a Hindu classic, the *Bhagavad Geeta*, by Charles Wilkins, which both Thoreau and Emerson read. Of it, Emerson wrote: "...the much renowned book of Buddhism, extracts from which I have often admired but never before held the book in my hands."¹³ Thoreau wrote of another Indian book, *Laws of Manu*: "[It] comes to me with such a volume of sound as if it had been swept unobstructed over the plains of Hindustan."¹⁴ Apparently, based on contemporary publications, Emerson was misinformed about Buddhism. But, in spite of the misinformation purveyed in New England at the time, Thoreau managed to overcome this limitation to sense the significant implications of Buddhist thinking in relation to nature. The fascination, but also the lack of knowledge about these cultures and religions, poignantly demonstrated the intellectual climate and isolation of the mid-nineteenth-century Transcendentalists, something that Thoreau had to overcome in his quest to understand Buddhism. Thoreau was very avant-garde. He challenged contemporary opinions and assumptions, I believe, and he understood Buddhist philosophy at a truly deep level. And he incorporated this more profound understanding in his writings.

Although Thoreau had limited information, resources, and knowledge – not to mention a distorted perspective from which to approach Buddhism – he was important in spreading the Buddhist worldview in America. He expressed deeply profound Buddhist teachings in his writings. Evidence for his fascination with Asian consciousness may be found in *Walden*, but the Buddhist influence on his thinking becomes more evident in his later writings. These reflect the influence of his writings, as resources were becoming increasingly available. Thoreau's writings reflect some of the earliest positive interpretive understanding of Buddhist thought, plowing fertile ground for transplanting Buddhist perspectives in the native soil of America. He provided a philosophical opening or "Dharma Gate" for understanding "foreign" and "exotic" religion and culture.

A closer look at Thoreau's more explicitly Buddhist sentiments (found in writings such as "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" and "Walking") demonstrate that his philosophy corresponds to some of the Buddhist views to which he was exposed, to writings that influenced his work. It shows furthermore that his approach to "wild nature" led him to an awareness and experience that paralleled Buddhist thought.

Buddhist philosophy of nature provides a more integral, or ecological, framework for Thoreau's observation of the details of nature than did the more dualistic modes of thought pervading nineteenth-century America. These can be seen in such forms of thought as New England Christianity and the evolving empirical/scientific worldview that emphasized the distinction between nature and the human, and between body and mind.

Thoreau helped to make Buddhism relevant and available to Westerners. He influenced many subsequent thinkers to pursue further the study of Eastern culture and Buddhism.¹⁵

IV. The Sun, the West, and the Wild In Thoreau's "Walking"

To what extent did Thoreau consciously incorporate key Buddhist principles in his writings? Although not explicitly a Buddhist text, one can discern Buddhist themes in "Walking." This work expresses some basic Buddhist principles in the "Western" context of the New England Transcendentalists. To illustrate this point, some of the spiritual symbols in this work will now be discussed, and their connections to Buddhism will be explored.



The journey of the golden sun, as it continually “travels around our planet” and brings forth life in all its beauty, is creatively transformed into a metaphor for the ever-lasting search for the transcendent. The sun never really “sets” because it is always shining on some part of the earth. To chase the setting sun — to turn one’s spiritual path to face the sun—is to seek eternal illumination: Paradise or Elysium.¹⁶ Were one to carry Thoreau’s idea to its completion, one can conceive of someone’s always “Stepping Westward,”¹⁷ never stopping, and never letting the sun go down. If one followed the sun around the earth, time would essentially stand still—it would be perpetual daytime, and time as we now experience it would cease to exist. Transcending time in this way is akin to immortality, which is the essence of spirituality: attaining that which is eternal and perfect. Thoreau uses the phrases “the West” and “the Setting Sun” in a visionary way so as to evoke great spiritual awareness in the reader, who cannot help but imagine the very wildest and elusive Western destination where the sun sets, if indeed it sets at all!

With that ever-present moment in the light of the sun, as the Earth rolls, Thoreau explores the “gospel of the present moment.” He writes:

Above all, we cannot afford not to live in the present. He is blessed over all mortals who loses no moment of the passing life in remembering the past. [This is] the gospel of this moment. He has not fallen astern; he has got up early, and to be where he is is to be in season, in the foremost rank of time . . . to celebrate this last instant of time.¹⁸

In his quest for experiencing the eternal moment in time, Thoreau explores nature in this wild form as the teacher of this version of “mindfulness” (a key Buddhist term).

Thoreau’s wild, westward gaze reaches even farther West in search of transcendence: beyond the expansive Pacific Ocean and into the lands of the setting sun – India, Japan and China – where the ancient religious philosophies of Buddhism were widespread and popular.

For Thoreau, the Asia of Europeans is no longer “East” but “Westward.” Their mythologies inspire the possibility that, some day, America will also raise a mythology to join theirs. He believed that the West was preparing to add its fables to those of the East. This was not an actual journey, of course, but Thoreau’s scholarship of the Buddha’s teachings carried him “westward” when he became the first to translate the *Lotus Sutra* into English. Translated from the French *L’introduction a l’histoire du Buddhisme indien*, by Eugene Burnouf, Thoreau published this in 1844 for *The Dial*, a periodical distributed in New England to nearly 300 subscribers. One can sense the source of Thoreau’s inspiration in this sample of his translation:

Those who solicit the rank of heroes, saying, I will be a Buddha, I will be the chief of gods and men, and who cultivate energy and contemplation, these are the most elevated plants. And the sons of Buddha, who quietly, and full of reserve, cultivate charity, and conceive no doubt concerning the rank of heroes among men, these are named trees. Those who turn the wheel of the law and look not backward, the strong men who possess the power of supernatural faculties, and who deliver millions of living beings, these are named great trees. It is, however, one and the same.¹⁹

This *sutra* – one of the central texts of Mahayana Buddhism²⁰ – focuses on emptiness and form. This teaching emphasizes that emptiness is form and form is emptiness, which is to note that nothing possesses a permanent essence. It also teaches that everything is interconnected; time is continuous, yet



it is contingent upon the now. Nagarjuna, the genius of Mahayana philosophy, presents these ideas about time and contingency in his *Verses of the Center* in which he poetically states:

If I had a past,
What is now and yet to come
Would have already happened.
Were there no now and future then,
How could now and future
Ever have a past?²¹

This is a declaration of the eternal moment. Integral to Mahayana philosophy, and important in the understanding of Nagarjuna's poem, is the profound idea of "interdependent co-arising" (*Pratitya samutpada*), meaning that everything is interconnected and cannot exist without everything else. One small daisy cannot exist without everything else in the Universe.²² One small change anywhere ripples everywhere.

These sentiments are echoed in memorable language by John Muir, a contemporary writer and admirer of Thoreau. He maintained that nothing can simply be removed from nature because "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."²³ To some extent Thoreau inspired Muir in his crusade to conserve wilderness in National Parks, where nature is protected from destruction. Muir recognized the truth of Thoreau's view in "Walking" that in the wildness is the preservation of the world. The present moment – the now – also cannot exist without every past and future moment. The past and the future is contingent upon the now, and time is continual. This is what Nagarjuna meant in his poem. Since everything is so fully connected and dependent upon all else, no independent thing can exist. (This is "no-thing-ness"!) If everything is interdependent, how can a solitary, never-changing entity exist? This contradicts the prevailing view of Thoreau's contemporaries that Buddhism was nihilistic and pessimistic. With the exception of Thoreau, those European and American Orientalists who encountered Buddhist philosophy mistranslated *sunyata*. Thoreau demonstrates that his emptiness is positive and allows one to live in the moment with full awareness. He illustrates this view throughout "Walking," noting at one point that "Nature is a personality so vast and universal that we have never seen one of her features."²⁴ We cannot see one separate thing because everything is connected in a large web of life that expands throughout the entire cosmos. When we are completely absorbed in wild nature, we are reminded – in fact, forced – to notice this interdependence and the sense of timelessness that comes out of the experience at that wild moment of immersion. This "eternalness" is Paradise, the Holy Land, represented by the never setting Westwardly walking sun. Thoreau emphasizes this in the soft conclusion of "Walking," which represents the setting of the sun in itself, thus:

When we reflected that this was not a solitary phenomenon, never to happen again, but that it would happen forever and ever an infinite number of evenings, and cheer and reassure the latest child that walked there, it was more glorious still.²⁵

We are awakened to the timelessness of the present moment by the gloriousness of nature.

To be awakened, we must be ever mindful. This is a core practice of Buddhism. Mindfulness is the path to enlightenment – it is through the mind that one is awakened. Immersion in Nature, especially for the Zen Buddhist, is the great, important teacher of mindfulness. This practice could include taking



long walks and journeys, paying attention to delicate beauties and imperfections, or engaging in austere natural exercises such as mountain shrine pilgrimages. The nature both of awakening and of the mind is beautifully articulated in the last lines of “Walking”:

So we saunter toward the Holy Land, till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light, as warm and serene and golden as on a bank-side in autumn.²⁶

Here, nature is a reflection of the mind – nature is infinite and eternal, as is the mind. The state of reaching the Holy Land, where the sun shines brighter in our heart and minds, is the “luminous awareness” one attains when one becomes enlightened. Awareness of the eternal moment is experienced as a beautiful, blissful luminosity that can be compared only to the golden light of the sun.

V. Blending Buddhism with Transcendentalism

Thoreau had a deep understanding of essential Buddhist principles and eloquently combined them with transcendentalist observations of nature as a reflection of our awakening minds. His philosophy of time is interlaced with a Romantic naturalist’s experience in “Walking.” But it is very “Buddhist” in his own way. It is his “Buddhist-like” awareness – a luminous mindfulness of Nature – at once awakened by a soul-searching interest in Buddhism, and by his intuition that revelation comes through participation in nature’s light, that establishes Thoreau as an original American Dharma Gate. In John Weiss’s 1865 eulogy, he described Thoreau, thus:

His countenance had not a line upon it expressive of ambition or discontent; the affectional emotions had not fretted at it. He went about like a priest of Buddha who expects to arrive soon at the summit of a life of contemplation.²⁷

Thoreau, unlike Emerson, was immersed intimately in Nature, and he contemplated the intricacies and details of nature. Emerson tended toward elitism with more lofty, philosophical ideas of nature. It is interesting to compare Thoreau to Ryokan, a Japanese Buddhist and Thoreau’s contemporary, who lived among the village people in Mount Kugami. Larry Smith wrote an interesting comparison of the lives of Ryokan and Thoreau, finding that, not only did they lead similar lives, but they both kept journals with profound and intricate observations of nature, life, and spirit. He writes:

Ryokan’s *Kanshi* poems in Chinese are best seen as an undated journal of poems that correspond to his life’s development, much as Thoreau saw his journals as publishable records of an authentic life. Fundamentally both men sought to live in the moment and record in their writings the relationship between everyday life and enlightenment. Neither achieved fame in his day, yet both have become popular mentors of an authentic life stressing simplicity, trust, humility and finding truth in the details. These two great teachers and writers reveal how close American Transcendentalism was to Buddhism, and the truth that all pretense must be dropped in order to truly awaken.²⁸



Ryokan's poetical descriptions express the beauty of simplicity in life and nature that goes unnoticed by writers like Emerson, but closely parallels Thoreau's observations:

Now in August a cool breeze arrives.
Wild geese head south across the waters.
Like them I wander, a flask in hand,
down green and hilly roads, full of joy.
If I meet a priest, I stop to join him.
If I meet another wanderer, I offer my company.
With what can I compare this life –
weeds floating on water, blown by a gentle breeze.

- Kanshi #70²⁹

Time is but the stream I go a 'fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always regretted that I was not as wise as the day I was born.

- Walden³⁰

America's natural beauty and wildness are a perfect setting for the Buddhist teachings of contemplation and deeper awareness of landscapes and ecological detail. Japanese Buddhists, for example, were influenced by the nature religion of Shinto, and Chinese Buddhists by their Taoist ancestors. Dogen (a Japanese Buddhist, *circa* 1200 ACE), for example, understood nature as an alive and continually dynamic world of intricate energies and relationships. Buddhist landscape paintings of China demonstrate the human relationship with the natural landscape as smaller parts of a magnificent whole – humans are part of nature, not above or dominant to it. Buddhism is easily syncretised into a culture that has a deep appreciation and reverence for the natural world.

And America, in the time of Thoreau, was deeply affected by the vast expanse of wilderness and the "Wild West." Explorers such as John Muir were eloquently expressing profound, sacred beauty found in America's natural landscapes. Along the same lines, American painters of the Hudson school were discovering similar qualities of overwhelming natural beauty and untamed paradise in which humans were only participants. This intellectual response to America's natural environment proved to be a familiar setting for the Buddhist approach of appreciating nature as an integral whole. In the Christian view, human beings, created in God's image, live in dominion over the rest of God's creatures, which are distinguishable, if not separated, from nature in human civilization. The Buddhist view is that humans are simply interconnected with nature, part of the whole, miraculous web of life.

The Transcendentalists sought to discover a more "Buddhist" philosophy. They were inspired, not so much by accurate knowledge of Buddhism, but more by the vast "wildness" and beauty of the American landscape. They were influenced by imaginative writings about Asia and the somewhat misrepresented knowledge of Buddhism filtered through Europeans. Perhaps more than any of his contem-



poraries, Thoreau led the way to an American experience of wilderness, drawing upon his budding knowledge of Buddhism to help enlighten his naturalist's eye for integral details through the mindful contemplation of Nature.

¹ American Transcendentalism was an intellectual movement in 19th Century United States made of a number of heterogeneous thinkers that was influenced to some extent by Platonism, Unitarian Christianity, German Idealism and European Romanticism. The recognized leader of this movement was Ralph Waldo Emerson. The movement was a reaction to what members took to be the narrow rationalism, pietism and conservatism of early American thinkers. The term "Transcendentalism" comes from the philosophy of Kant and refers to those contents of consciousness that do not arise from experience as such. These include ideas having to do with religion, ethics and aesthetics, for example. Transcendentalism sought to organize itself around such ideas in its theory of nature, reality, values, art, poetry and literature and in its programs for social and political reform. Even in its secular form, it was influenced by broadly religious concerns. The movement can be called a "school of thought" only in a loose sense because each thinker advanced aspects of these "transcendental" ideas in relatively unique ways.

² Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1981) 54

³ A *Sangha* is a Buddhist community.

⁴ Fields, *Op. cit.*, 64.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ For example, the Sanskrit term *sunyata*, meaning "the continuity, impermanence, and emptiness of all things" in Mahayana Buddhism, was often interpreted as meaningless "void." And "nirvana" was often negatively construed as "annihilation" instead of "extinguishing the flame of desire" in order to attain enlightenment.

⁷ Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter With Buddhism: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Tweed, *Op. cit.*, 5.

¹⁰ It is important to note that this over-generalized account of the European or West's version of Orientalism is not altogether accurate because, as Saree Makdisi claims, "In the early nineteenth century, a new version of Orientalism began to emerge, through which the Orient was altogether reinvented." He furthers Edward Said's concept of Orientalism with this claim, and he argues it with four main points:

...first, that the Orient does not exist 'as such' and was brought into existence by Europeans at a certain moment in European cultural history; second, that existence has been continuously renewed in a political and historical process; third, that the modern version of Orientalism emerged in the late eighteenth century, and is conceptually, politically, and culturally distinct from and discontinuous with earlier versions; and finally, that Orientalism is part of the process that brings those fluid and dynamic identities, 'the Orient' and 'the Occident,' not into being, but into an endless becoming...

Thus, the Orientalism that preceded the late eighteenth century clearly differed from the Orientalism that developed in Europe during the Romantic period. To summarize Makdisi: the earlier Orientalism was characterized by a fascination with the exotic – the "Otherness" of the Orient – while the modern Orientalism (developing out of a mixture of factors, most notably England's economic interest in India and China) retained some of the earlier assumptions, it was essentially a world-view arising out of a need to justify economic, social, and cultural subjugation and control of India by England. See Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 115.



¹¹ For example, Byron viewed the Orient as “a place to which one could flee from English domesticity, from Christianity, from modernity: a space in which one could critique these emergent constructions, and in which one could celebrate alternatives to them.”

¹² Fields, *Op. cit.*, 55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ For example, many of the “Beat” writers, such as Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg, were inspired by Thoreau to learn and incorporate Buddhism into their own lives, and Jack Kerouac expresses a New England Buddhism that engages the Asian Buddhism of his friend Gary Snyder who was exploring Asian languages and landscapes.

¹⁶ *Elysium* means “Paradise” in Greek mythology; Thoreau uses this word throughout “Walking.”

¹⁷ This is the title of a poem by William Wordsworth. I use the phrase, not as a reference to Wordsworth, but because it beautifully expresses the idea here.

¹⁸ Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” 2171.

¹⁹ “Thoreau’s Translation” of the *Lotus Sutra*. Published first in *The Dial* in 1844. It was the first translation into English of the *Lotus Sutra*.

²⁰ Mahayana is one of the three major sects of Buddhism. It is the most popular Buddhism because it reaches out to all people and teaches that the mutual paths of compassion and wisdom will lead one to enlightenment. *Mahayana* literally means “the greater vehicle.”

²¹ Nagarjuna, *Verses From the Center*, 117.

²² Consider Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem, “Flower in the Crannied Wall” (1868):

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower – but *if* I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

²³ John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (originally published 1911) 157 (page number will vary, but the date [July 27th] will not).

²⁴ Thoreau, “Walking,” 2176.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2178.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Fields, *Op. cit.*, 59.

²⁸ Larry Smith, “Thoreau and Ryokan: Two Voices of Solitude.” Date accessed: 10/19/02. www.shambhalasun.com/archives/features/2000/sep00/thoreau.htm. Shambhala Sun Online.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

