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Editorial

Philosophy is often described as the quest for truth and closely related to the faculty of wonder: To discover truth and be receptive to it, one requires a curiosity that generates questions that incite one to inquire and discover. This issue of the *Oracle* offers five essays that are well in keeping with this simple understanding of philosophy. They trace a spirit of wonder that inspire journeys that their authors have taken into deep topics. For instance, in the first essay, "The Role of Free Speech in a Democracy: A Critique of Rawls's Political Theory," Jeremy D'Souza critically inquires into John Rawls's defense of free speech. While Rawls claims seditious libel and subversive advocacy are justified acts of free speech in society, D'Souza finds Rawls's account of the latter vulnerable to criticism since there are conceivable cases in which subversive advocacy is not motivated by visions of justice but by destructive political agendas. Restraints applied to avoid such situations involve principles other than equality. Thus, D'Souza claims, Rawls's argument for free speech in a democracy is flawed, and, having broader implications, renders his theory of a justice of fairness unconvincing.

Michael Burton wonders deeply about the issue of death, particularly Thomas Nagel's view that death is evil because it deprives the individual of future possibilities. He examines Nagel's responses to three of the main criticisms against his view and concludes that Nagel's thesis is untenable: An individual's future possibilities do not mean much if they cannot be actualized. Burton, in adopting a stoic approach, proposes that death is neither good nor evil.

In "The Moral Functions of Resentment," Artour Rostorotski investigates the moral significance of the resentment. In detail, he explicates and provides a comparative analysis of the views Nietzsche, Butler, Oakley, and Strawson hold on this human emotion. How these philosophers, by connecting this emotion to their understanding of free will, determinism, justice, and objectivity, arrive at a conclusion about the moral status of resentment is studied. Rostorotski finally remarks that each philosopher's understanding of resentment is informed by his general worldview.

In the final paper, "Polishing a Crystal: Understanding Plato's Allegory of the Cave," Nick Purdy examines carefully Plato's allegory of the cave as presented in *The Republic* and offers an insightful interpretation of what it reveals about the nature and role of a philosopher. Purdy interweaves in his interpretation explanations of distinctions and concepts that are central to Plato's philosophy.

Hopefully, you will find that the essays featured here furnish answers and, if not, at least, more questions that feed your faculty of wonder.

Finally, I would like to express much thanks to certain groups whose participation has been vital to this project: To all those writers who took the time to write, polish, and submit their essays; to key supporters including Diana Sargla, the Administrative Assistant to the Master of Vanier College, who on behalf of the college provided our club with office space and most of the funding for the journal this year and the Philosophy Department who shows us great support—including financial—every year; and to all the editors for your careful selection of the final papers published here. Thank you also to Professor Henry Jackman, who, as Philosophia's faculty liaison, has supported at every level our association's efforts. Without all of your care Philosophia would not be able to place this issue in your hands.

Geeta Raghunanan
Editor-in-Chief, *The Oracle*
York University, 2009

The Role of Free Speech in a Democracy: A Critique of Rawls's Political Theory

JEREMY D'SOUZA

In *The Basic Liberties and Their Priority* (1993), John Rawls attempts to supply a robust political theory that answers the criticisms leveled at his earlier work, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Central to Rawls's arguments is his conception of the person and the implications it has on the two principles of justice made famous in *Theory*. Yet answering these criticisms leads Rawls to make some questionable arguments regarding the priority of the basic liberties and how they may be made to cohere with one another. In particular, section 10 sees Rawls advocate a near absolute right of free speech by drawing on his theory of the person and attempting to illustrate how the basic liberties may be adjusted at later stages. Thus, this essay will be devoted to critically discussing Rawls's views on his perceived right of free speech. Particularly, it will be argued that Rawls takes an approach to free speech that is far too narrow and seemingly tailored to his general theory and conclusions. Free speech is not a pure good as Rawls seems to suggest, but rather entails consequences with which any well-governed society must be concerned. Rawls inexplicably ignores this possibility. This argument will be fully developed in the subsequent sections, but first a more careful explanation of Rawls's ideas is warranted.

Rawls's defense of free speech depends on his general theory of the person. In section 3 Rawls offers the two powers of moral personality: the capacity to be reasonable and the capacity to be rational.[1] With respect to the two principles of justice, Rawls states that they are the most desirable to those in the original position, for they best promote the two moral powers (Rawls 1993, 306). Further, the basic liberties facilitate social conditions necessary for the exercise of the moral powers in the "two fundamental cases." [2] For the purposes of the present discussion, we should be concerned only with the first fundamental case: the application of one's moral power of reason to the basic structure of society and its social policies. Free speech, states Rawls, falls under the basic liberty of thought and is significant[3] because its priority protects the use of reason in the first fundamental case (Rawls 1993, 340).

To demonstrate the significance of free speech in a democratic society, Rawls provides the examples of seditious libel and subversive advocacy. The aim here seems to be to justify the priority and significance of liberty and thought. Rawls purports to show how liberty of thought may be "adjusted at later stages so as to protect its central range," which is "the free public use of our reason in all matters that concern the justice of the basic structure and its social policies" (Rawls 1993, 348). In achieving this

1. The former refers to a capacity for a sense of justice and the latter refers to the need for people to pursue their own unique conception of the good (Rawls 1993, 302).

2. According to Rawls, the idea of a fundamental case will help us recognize the significance of a liberty, and allow us to further specify it at later stages (332).

3. For Rawls, the significance of a liberty depends on how well it protects the expression of a moral power (335).

end, Rawls first argues that a society that criminalizes seditious libel infringes on the basic liberty of thought. Seditious libel is necessary for the full exercise of reason in the first fundamental case. Further, this is a valuable exercise of the first moral power for prohibition on this type of speech allows for the possibility of self-government, insofar as it censors critical or dissenting views and prevents the electorate from a fair and balanced discussion of the current government administration.

Repression of subversive advocacy similarly violates liberty of thought in the first fundamental case. Here, free speech is valuable even if it promotes lawlessness or revolutionary doctrines, for it indicates a more "comprehensive political view" (Rawls 1993, 334). If this is the case (that it indicates such a political view), free speech coupled with a just political procedure can provide an alternative to forcefulness or revolution that can be injurious to the basic liberties. Subversive advocacy gives vent to social unrest and injustice and forces political leadership to acknowledge such problems. Thus, subversive advocacy and seditious libel serve legitimate purposes in democratic societies and are further justified on the grounds that they represent a public use of our reason in the first fundamental case. To suppress such opinions would result in a violation of the basic liberty of thought (Rawls 1993, 346).

But Rawls notes that an adequate scheme of liberties (guaranteed by the first principle of justice) implies that the liberties must be subject to some restraint if they are to be fully realized. Rawls states that "the basic liberties not only limit one another but they are also self-limiting" (Rawls 1993, 341). This means that we must work out a workable scheme for the exercise of the liberties. In the

case of free speech, everyone must accept restrictions to time and place so as to ensure that their political views are heard. To understand the value of this, we may observe the opposite: if everyone demanded a right to free speech at the same time, it would greatly reduce the ability of one to have their voice heard amidst the competing views. Thus, this feature of a scheme of liberties, says Rawls, implies that we must observe restrictions of time and place if everyone is to enjoy equally the right of free speech (Rawls 1993, 341).

The preceding sections have outlined Rawls's defense of free speech and the restrictions it implies. The balance of this essay will be devoted to the core arguments of this essay. It will be argued that Rawls's account of free speech is far too narrow and does not account for possible consequences of a right of free speech. Rawls's examples of seditious libel and subversive advocacy seem to be included strategically, so as to make his overall theory more coherent and persuasive. Further, it would seem as if Rawls justifies only certain types of speech, and his reasoning cannot advocate a right for free speech in general. Lastly, it will be suggested that if the preceding comments are true, it may render his approach to democracy much less convincing.

The aspect of Rawls's argument for free speech that seems to be most vulnerable to criticism is his argument for the legitimacy of subversive advocacy in a democracy. Simply, the premises that allow Rawls to reach his conclusion are questionable. First, implicit in this argument is the assumption that all subversive advocacy is legitimate, in the sense that it necessarily reflects injustice in the "basic structure and policies" (Rawls 1993, 346) of society. Rawls seems to concede this assumption by

stating, "persons are capable of a certain political virtue and do not engage in resistance and revolution unless their social position in the basic structure is seriously unjust" (Rawls 1993, 347). This assumption seems far-fetched and Rawls devotes little space to proving that such political virtue exists. Though it is sometimes the case that revolution and widespread injustice give rise to subversive advocacy and lawlessness, this need not *always* be the case. In fact, it would not be difficult to conceive of a scenario in which subversive advocacy is motivated by something other than the need for righting injustices. For example, a particular faction in society may wish to use subversive advocacy to overthrow the government and further their agenda. In such a case, most reasonable people would agree that the government would do well to censor such destructive speech. Further, if one concedes the plausibility of the aforementioned example, one has to concede that there are instances where subversive advocacy is illegitimate and justifiably restricted. This example has been left purposely vague to account for the reality that there are other possible reasons and other potential groups in society that may use subversive advocacy for its instrumental purpose, none of which necessarily have to be fighting injustice. The possibility of this scenario casts doubt on the existence of such political virtue but, more importantly, on the idea of unfettered subversive advocacy.

But this possibility has greater implications and leads to the broader argument being advanced: On Rawls's view, only specific types of free political speech are justified. Recall that Rawls derives a right of free speech from his conception of the person and the priority of the liberties. Specifically, he justifies free political speech by stating that

liberty of thought is necessary to protect the exercise of our public use of reason in the first fundamental case. So far this is agreeable. However, what does not follow from this reasoning is a justification of all types of political speech. That is, Rawls's reasoning may convince us that public use of our reason is legitimate in a democratic society but provides no evidence to suggest that this is the case with all types of political speech. In fact, this was precisely the reason why we saw earlier some types of subversive advocacy are justifiably restricted. Similarly, Rawls does not account for seditious libel that is not grounded in an expression of our sense of justice (seditious libel that is the result of unfounded accusations against the government, for example).

If this is true, then it means that Rawls has mischaracterized the appropriate restraints on free speech as well. In addition to accepting limitations on time and place, citizens may be forced to accept restrictions on the content on their speech if it is harmful to the liberties of others.[4] Certain types of speech are destructive to a society and, therefore, may justifiably be restricted. This is contrary to Rawls's assertion that the liberties are self-limiting, as it seems to be the case that the liberties may be restricted for reasons other than equality concerns. In the case of free speech, it seems to be the case that we limit offensive public speech to secure social cohesion or possible danger to society.

This leaves us with a critical question for Rawls' approach to democracy. That is, if it can be proven that certain considerations deny the liberties priority, does this necessarily condemn justice as fairness as a political

4. There may be other situations as well; this is only one possibility.

theory? This seems to be too strong an argument to make. What the preceding remarks imply, however, is that there may be principles other than equality that we appeal to when making certain decisions. If this is true, then Rawls's advocacy for the two principles of justice over the other options in the original position (utilitarianism and perfectionism) loses some appeal. Justice as fairness cannot explain why we would restrict one's liberty in a manner described earlier. Yet the utilitarian school of thought can provide an appropriate explanation: that we restrict one's liberty to secure a greater net benefit of liberties. Even a perfectionist justification would suggest that the government seeks to restrict destructive speech because it is inherently unethical and contrary to a pursuit of virtue. Thus, we need not condemn Rawls's approach to democracy altogether, but we have sufficient reason to be skeptical of the claim that his two principles of justice are the best options available.

It has been argued that John Rawls's argument for a right of free speech is partially unfounded. Additionally, it was suggested that this renders his approach to democracy less convincing as a result. This is not to say, however, that his theory is necessarily inferior to other schools of thought. Rather, it may afford an opportunity for improvement. Fairness is an ideal that should be chief amongst our concerns, but we should give way to other principles when it is appropriate. It may be most appropriate to suggest that we must expect a political theory to provide only ideals for a society, but not be bound to them when the situation is not amenable as such. Justice as fairness fails in a way many theories do—namely, that it purports to do much more than a theory can conceivably do.

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Stoic Reflections on Thomas Nagel's Account of Death

MICHAEL BURTON

> *Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome.*
> —Isaac Asimov

> *Thus that which is the most awful of evils, death, is nothing to us, since when we exist there is no death, and when there is death we do not exist.*
> —Epicurus

> *Not to live as if you had endless years ahead of you. Death overshadows you. While you're alive and able—be good.*
> —Marcus Aurelius

INTRODUCTION

Is death the greatest of all the evils that man can experience, or can one perceive the end of her existence in a neutral way? For Thomas Nagel, death is an evil because it brings to an end not only the goods of life but also the future possibilities of an individual. He attempts to prove this thesis by responding to three main criticisms of his position. First, how can anything be bad if it is not

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experienced as bad? If something is bad doesn't there have to be a subject of experience? Secondly, if death is bad who is it bad for—that is, who is the subject who experiences death? Finally, if we don't find the billions of years of non-existence before our birth disturbing, why do we find the billions of years after our death worrying? This paper will briefly summarize Nagel's argument that death is the greatest of evils, while also arguing that his position is implausible because the responses he proposes to the above-mentioned criticisms do not satisfactorily answer the critiques. This paper will also advocate the stoic view that the nature of our reality is such that everything decays with time; nothing lasts forever, and therefore death is a natural part of life with no essentially good or bad qualities.

NAGEL'S ACCOUNT OF THE NATURE OF DEATH

To begin, let us first examine Nagel's argument that death is the worst thing that can happen to an individual. He begins by stating that if death is an evil, it is not because of its positive features; instead, death is a bad because of what it deprives us of. The truth of this rests on his claim that despite whether the conditions of an individual's life are positive or negative, baseline existence is itself positive:

> There are elements, which, if added to one's experience, make life better; there are other elements which, if added to one's experience, make life worse. But what remains when these are set aside is not merely *neutral*: it is emphatically positive. Therefore life is worth living even when the

> bad elements of experience are plentiful, and the good ones too meager to outweigh the bad ones on their own. The additional positive weight is supplied by experience itself, rather than by any of its contents.[1]

Similarly, for a life to be considered valuable it must consist of more than just organic survival for Nagel. He feels that there is little difference between immediate death and death following a coma, which might last years. Likewise, more is better than less when considering existence.

Nagel continues by asserting that "if death is an evil, it is the *loss of life*, rather than the state of being dead, or nonexistent, or unconscious, that is objectionable." [2] He points to the fact that most people would not regard a temporary suspension of their life (as long as it did not mean of reduction of conscious life) as bad and the fact that we do not feel that it is a misfortune that we did not exist before we were born as evidence that we do not object to death because of its positive features.[3] In addition, he argues that it is logically impossible to imagine oneself as dead and that those who fear death because they attempt to visualize themselves in such a state are acting irrationally.

If the argument that death is evil because of the desirability of what it removes (desire, action, thought) is true, then it must be able to withstand criticism. Thus, Nagel considers three questions that present a problem to

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1. Thomas Nagel, "Death," in *Mortal Questions.* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 2.
2. Ibid., 3.
3. Ibid.

his thesis. The first of these questions is how can anything be bad if it is not experienced as bad? If something is bad doesn't there have to be a subject of experience? Essentially, this objection questions whether misfortune can befall an individual who is unaware that he or she has been wronged. In this case, how can death be a misfortune if the individual it has apparently wronged is unable to experience its consequence?

In response, Nagel first observes that all three of these questions are based on particular relations with time. He points out that there are simple goods and evils that an individual may possess at a given time in her life; however, this is not the case with all the goods and evils that can be attributed to her. He believes that in order to identify whether a person has suffered a misfortune we must first assess this person's history. He states:

> Most good and ill fortune has as its subject a person identified by his history and his possibilities, rather than merely by his categorical state of the moment—and that while this subject can be exactly located in a sequence of places and times, the same is not necessarily true of the goods and ills that befall him.[4]

To prove this claim, he points to the example of an intelligent person who is the victim of an accident which leaves her severely brain-damaged to the point where she has been reduced to having the mental capacity of a contented infant. He points out that as long as this

individual's needs are met in terms of care, we should not pity her, for if we didn't pity the victim when she was actually an infant, why pity her now? The fully functioning adult as she was before the accident no longer exists. All the goods and evils in the former adult's life no longer apply.

Yet we do pity this individual, Nagel argues, despite the fact that she no longer exists. He argues that if "instead of concentrating exclusively on the oversized baby before us, we consider the person he was, and the person he *could* be now, then his reduction to this state and the cancellation of his natural adult development constitute a perfectly intelligible catastrophe."[5] Nagel points to this example as proof that we should not solely view the goods and evils that can befall an individual in terms of a particular time. With regard to this argument, he concludes:

> There are goods and evils, which are irreducibly relational; they are features of the relations between a person, with spatial and temporal boundaries of the usual sort, and circumstances, which may not coincide with him either in space or time. A man's life includes much that does not take place within the boundaries of his body and his mind, and what happens to him can include much that does not take place with the boundaries of his life.[6]

5. Ibid., 6.
6. Ibid.

Moving on, Nagel argues that a similar answer can dissolve the third question that challenges his thesis, namely, if we don't perceive the billions of years of non-existence before our birth as a misfortune, why do we view the billions of years after our death in such a way? He contends that there is a difference between the time before we come to exist and the time after we cease to exist. The difference is that the time after our life is time that death has robbed us of experiencing, whereas the time prior to our birth is different because had we been born earlier than we were, we would not be the same person. Nagel infers:

> The direction of time is crucial in assigning possibilities to people or other individuals. Distinct possible lives of a single person can diverge from a common beginning, but they cannot converge to a common conclusion from diverse beginnings. (The latter would represent not a set of different possible lives of on individual, but a set of distinct possible individuals, whose lives have identical conclusions).[7]

These criticisms aside, Nagel now sets out to answer the second and final major objection to his thesis: If death is bad who is it bad for? Who is the subject who experiences death? He first makes the observation that we generally view the death of individuals who pass away at a younger age as more tragic than those who die much later in life. He responds, "Perhaps we record an objection only to evils

which are gratuitously added to the inevitable; the fact that it is worse to die at 24 than at 82 does not imply that it is not a terrible thing to die at 82, or even at 806."[8] The main problem that this question poses is how can we regard mortality as a misfortune if it is a natural condition of the human race? He points out that "blindness or near-blindness is not a misfortune for a mole, nor would it be for a man, if that were the natural condition of the human race."[9]

Despite this, however, Nagel argues that death is different in that it robs us of aspects of life which we have become familiar with. We may have a natural lifespan, but "A man's sense of his own experience, on the other hand, does not embody this idea of a natural limit." [10] In this sense, we view our existence as a set of open-ended possibilities. We do not experience ourselves as having a finite span; instead, we view life as indeterminate and not bounded; we do not perceive our future as something that shrinks with time. With this in mind, Nagel concludes, "If there is no limit to the amount of life that it would be good to have, then it may be that a bad end is in store for us all."[11]

Response to Nagel's Account of Death

To continue, let us now consider some responses to Nagel's argument that death is the greatest of evils that can befall an individual. One apparent response to Nagel's argument is to take issue with his claim that baseline

8. Ibid., 9.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 10.

existence is a good in and of itself. He seems to state this argument as a given and yet it is open to various counterexamples which provide evidence to the contrary. For instance, one can imagine a set of particular circumstances in which it would be better not to exist—for example, a life full of torture and physical and mental deprivation. Similarly, one can take issue with the value of the "possibilities" granted to individuals whose mental and physical capacities are such that they deteriorate rapidly over time due to age or illness—think of cancer patients who when faced with long drawn out pain and suffering view death as a release.

Nagel may respond to these objections in different ways. In the case of the first example, he may argue that, although a life filled with torture and deprivation would be undesirable, we must acknowledge that a person's future (as long as the person exists) is open to infinite "possibilities."[12] This being the case, it is possible that an individual leading such a life would have the opportunity to escape this misfortune and lead a better life (however unlikely this may be). Also, even if this person were not able to escape the mere fact of her existence is positive enough to outweigh any evils she may experience during the course of her life. In regard to the second example, Nagel may argue that, although it is true that individuals who experience drawn out pain and suffering view death as a release, this is only a psychological way for them to deal with and accept the inevitability of their impending death. If they thought about their situation more thoroughly and rationally, he may argue, they would

12. Although it is possible to refute this claim by acknowledging the very real threat deterministic doctrines pose, in the interest of space, this paper will assume a libertarian approach.

realize that it is better to exist than to not exist. Despite these replies, however, Nagel's claim that existence is in and of itself sufficient to justify the positivity of existence over nonexistence is unsubstantiated. Likewise, the nature of these responses is such that they illustrate why nonexistence may be negative; however, they do not explicitly show that existence itself is positive.

A second way in which one may refute Nagel's thesis is to take issue with his responses to the criticisms he poses. In the case of his response to the first and third objections, I would argue that he makes the mistake of valuing an individual's death in relation to others. He makes the claim early in his paper, "I shall not discuss the value that one person's life or death may have for others, or its objective value, but only the value it has for the person who is its subject."[13] Yet is this really the case? It may be argued that as long as I am alive, I have infinite future possibilities (if we accept Nagel's argument). However, the moment I die these possibilities disappear, as I am neither able to actualize these possibilities into being nor can I comprehend them. Only someone other than myself can feel sorrow for my inability to pursue future possibilities.

With regard to his example of an intelligent individual who, because of an unfortunate accident, is left in the same condition as a contented infant, he acknowledges that the person as she existed before the accident is no longer present. Yet, he makes the claim that the person can still be a subject of misfortune independent of what anyone else may say. The flaw in his argument comes in his inability to illustrate this claim outside of reference to another individual's perceiving the loss. I reiterate from above,

13. Ibid., 2.

"[If] instead of concentrating exclusively on the oversized baby before us, ***we*** consider the person he was, and the person he *could* be now, then his reduction to this state and the cancellation of his natural adult development constitute a perfectly intelligible catastrophe."[14] Nagel fails to show how the individual, who no longer exists by his own admission, suffers a loss. As illustrated, only by appeal to how others perceive this situation can Nagel argue that the victim of this accident has suffered a misfortune.

Similarly, it can be shown that the response to the third problem, in regard to the temporal asymmetry between the time before our birth and the time after our death, falls short for the same reason. I may perceive it as a great loss that a friend of mine is no longer around to experience the joys and sorrows of life; however, my friend independently of my judgments is no longer a subject of experience. Without reference to an outside body, it is difficult to illustrate how death is evil, especially when one acknowledges that the nature of possibilities is such that they are only present when they can be actualized.

Nagel may respond to this objection by maintaining that death is an evil that is perceived by others and has no exact location in space and time in the subject's life. His argument is not necessarily dependent on the fact that an individual's death may not be experienced subjectively as evil. However, it is not clear how this argument could be maintained.

Nagel's response to the second criticism that our experience is such that we do not experience the idea of a limit to human lifespan is also open to refutation. I would

14. Ibid., 6. (Bold italics mine.)

argue that anyone who does not experience her life as finite and shrinking is in denial or lacks perspective. A person may cope with the idea of death by not acknowledging that it is ever present, but attitude says more about the individual than it does about death, and it flies in the face of reality.

Nagel's response is also inadequate because of the negative consequences that would hold and confront our everyday experience if it were true. To be specific, if we don't consider the temporal limit of lives and if our sense of mortality is not part of the nature of our existence, then we would believe that time is not a factor in our lives. It would become increasingly easy to justify a life of severe laziness and inaction, to put off our daily projects because they will still be waiting for us tomorrow. My experience has led me to believe that human beings want to make an impact on the world; we take on various projects and develop skills in the hope of making a difference. Death reminds us all that our time on this earth is precious and so we should not squander the time we have. If Nagel's view holds true in regard to this criticism, then our lives would lack the motivation which death inspires.

A Stoic Account of the Nature of Death

My account of the character of death adopts the stoic position that the nature of our reality is such that everything decays with time; nothing lasts forever; and death is a natural part of life. Because of these observations, I perceive death as neither good nor bad. I find that Nagel's insistence on the loss of future "possibilities" as evil is inconsistent. As I have mentioned above, I feel that a necessary condition of a possibility is

that it has the opportunity to be actualized. It is impossible for an individual to continue to actualize possibilities when she has died; therefore, the only loss one can sustain is in the present. As the stoic thinker Marcus Aurelius so eloquently puts it:

> Even if you're going to live three thousand more years, or ten times that, remember: you cannot lose another life than the one you're living now, or live another one than the one you're losing. The longest amounts to the same as the shortest. The present is the same for everyone; its loss is the same for everyone; and it should be clear that a brief instant is all that is lost. For you can't lose either the past or the future; how could you lose what you don't have?[15]

One cannot help feel a sense of wonder at the clarity and simplicity of Aurelius's ideas. If one adopts the view that death is neither good nor evil, then, upon a careful reading of his *Meditations*, one can find a response to all three of the problems posed by Nagel.

In response to the first and third problems Nagel proposes, one only needs examine Aurelius's claim, "When we cease from activity, or follow a thought to its conclusion, it's a kind of death. And it doesn't harm us. Think about your life: childhood, boyhood, youth, old age. Every transformation is a kind of dying. Was that so terrible?"[16] In other words, the nature of life is such that an

15. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations,* trans. Gregory Hays. (New York: Random House, 2002), 21.
16. Ibid., 122.

individual experiences many transformations; therefore, it is irrational to fear the last of these transformations—death. One may point to Nagel's response to the second problem he poses as a counterexample to this claim; however, I believe that Aurelius's argument is closer to the truth of the matter:

> What humans experience is part of human experience. The experience of the ox is part of the experience of oxen, as the vine's is of the vine, and the stone's what is proper to stones…Nothing that can happen is unusual or unnatural, and there's no sense in complaining. Nature does not make us endure the unendurable.[17]

I find the stoic approach appealing because it acknowledges that death is a natural process and, therefore, cannot be evil, despite our independent perceptions or judgments.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to examine Nagel's account of death, to critically respond to his account, and finally to advocate the stoic position that death is a natural process that is neither good nor bad. I have argued that Nagel's thesis fails because it does not adequately answer the charges brought against it and because the claim that existence itself is positive remains unsubstantiated. In dismissing Nagel's account of death, I have advocated my

17. Ibid., 110.

own position, which is part of a larger stoic tradition. I have argued that stoic thought provides one with the best account of death, which is that of a natural process, which is essentially neither good nor evil. I have cited the work of stoic thinker Marcus Aurelius not only as evidence of this argument but also as a source of possible responses to the questions posed by Nagel. I close with a final thought of Aurelius's on death, which I believe to be of the highest importance:

> You've lived as a citizen in a great city. Five years or a hundred—what's the difference? The laws make no distinction. And to be sent away from it, not by a tyrant or a dishonest judge, but by Nature, who first invited you in—why is that so terrible? Like the impresario ringing down the curtain on an actor: "But I've only gotten through three acts…!" Yes. This will be a drama in three acts, the length fixed by the power that directed your creation, and now directs your dissolution. Neither was yours to determine. So make your exit with grace—the same that was shown to you.[18]

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Stoic Reflections on Thomas Nagel's Account of Death

The Moral Functions of Resentment

ARTOUR ROSTOROTSKI

Resentment is a much more complex emotion than it may appear at a first glance. It may play a crucial role in determining how a victim reacts to a wrong done to him or her. As it impacts human choice and judgment, it may influence the lives of the victim and the wrongdoer alike. Because it is manifested in actions that affect others, its significance cannot be underestimated, and its nature and moral function must be understood. Although resentment is commonly attributed to a list of negative or "evil" emotions, a further analysis must be made before it is dismissed as being absolutely morally wrong. This essay will examine and juxtapose several alternative views of resentment, as presented by Nietzsche, Butler, Oakley, and Strawson in their respective works. First, it must be made clear that these philosophers have differing conceptions of the limits of what kinds of emotion can be called resentment. Their views of the moral functions of resentment diverge as well. Based on these views, resentment may be regarded as a fundamentally good, bad or neutral emotion.

Friedrich Nietzsche bases his conception of resentment (or *ressentiment*, as he calls it) on relationships between the "weak" and the "strong" in society. For Nietzsche, this emotion has definite negative connotations, as being resentful for long may poison a person's mind (Nietzsche

1994, 23). The weak and the strong react to *ressentiment* quite differently: While the weak may brood over what they perceive as an injury to themselves for a long time, the strong are much quicker to recover. As Nietzsche writes, in the strong, "it is consumed and exhausted in an immediate reaction" (Nietzsche 1994, 23). Where the weak feel resentment, the strong often feel no resentment at all. Nietzsche also considers *ressentiment* to be central to understanding how the weak attempt to elevate themselves falsely and deceitfully above their masters. When the weak resent their enemies (e.g., the strong), they automatically ascribe the label of evil to them, making them "evil enemies." Because their enemies are "evil," the weak then label themselves as "good" (Nietzsche 1994, 24). This is how *ressentiment* clouds the weak ones' idea of morality. It is "a creative way of saying 'no' on principle to everything that is 'outside'" that directs the weak ones' attention away from accurate moral introspection (Nietzsche 1994, 21). Conversely, the strong begin with forming a "good" idea of themselves, and then proceed to call those things that deserve it "bad" (not the same as "evil"). There is little *ressentiment* in the strong ones' understanding of the world: While the categorization of something as "evil" automatically calls for hatred, the idea of "bad" merely calls for objectivity in distinguishing right from wrong. The weak, under the constant effect of *ressentiment*, have formed a system of justice based on reactionary attitudes (Nietzsche 1994, 31). This system is dedicated to supporting passive emotions (*ressentiment* among them) and opposing any signs of active emotions that involve attaining greater power (Nietzsche 1994, 52). This system, created by the weak, would clearly oppose the actions or intentions that Nietzsche would consider

virtuous. The weak have contempt not only for the strong but for the values of the strong as well (Nietzsche 1994, 167). It should be clarified, however, that according to Nietzsche, the strong normally enjoy engaging in such "virtuous" activities as murder, rape, arson, and torture (Nietzsche 1994, 25).

Nietzsche proceeds to compare the relationship between the weak and the strong to that of sheep and birds of prey, respectively. This metaphor serves to emphasize that each human being has a nature that cannot be altered. Some are weak by nature, while others are strong and destined to dominate. If birds of prey would feed on the sheep, the sheep might consider this to be unfair or evil (Nietzsche 1994, 28). If a sheep would be killed by a natural disaster, the surviving sheep would not be resentful, as they would understand that it could not be helped. The difference between natural events and predators is that the latter actually choose to kill, or so the sheep believe. In other words, the weak can only feel *ressentiment* towards their masters if they prove that these are moral agents with moral responsibilities. On the other hand, if it is assumed that it is in the nature of the strong to be strong, they cannot be blamed (or praised for that matter) for their actions. Therefore, the only way for the weak to ensure that the strong bear moral responsibility is to promote the idea of free will. Nietzsche emphasizes that the weak use this idea to blame the strong for choosing to be strong and "evil" when they could be weak and "good" (Nietzsche 1994, 29). Hence justice and free will are both ideas created by the weak to make continuous *ressentiment* for the strong possible. It is nothing but a veil of lies surrounding the weak, so that they may never see that they are weak and inferior.

Through free will and blame, the weak also attempt to pollute the minds of the strong. Since (according to the weak) the strong are morally responsible for their actions, the strong should feel guilty for taking advantage of the weak. In fact, Nietzsche believes that the weak can, by their mere existence, produce guilt in the minds of their masters. When the strong look down at the weak, they see that strength brings happiness, while weakness brings infinite misery. They might then think to themselves, "It's a disgrace to be happy. *There is too much misery!"* (Nietzsche 1994, 97). Due to the idea of free will and the imbalance of happiness, the strong are constantly made to question the moral value of their lives. At the same time, the weak feel better and more confident in their moral worth due to *ressentiment*. Therein lies the logical paradox of *ressentiment*: The weak find it fulfilling and satisfying, while it poisons their minds and prevents them from becoming stronger. Nietzsche calls it "a dissidence which wills itself to be dissident" leading to the satisfaction of "failure, decay, pain, misfortune, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, destruction of selfhood, self-flagellation and self-sacrifice" (Nietzsche 1994, 91). At its root, *ressentiment* is a natural instinct to anaesthetize pain through emotion. When the weak are wronged, a feeling of *ressentiment* reduces their feeling of pain and loss by redirecting their attention towards the wrongdoer (Nietzsche 1994, 99).

Joseph Butler approaches the question of the moral value of resentment from a very different angle. While for Friedrich Nietzsche God is dead, for Butler he is still very much alive. Butler believes that it is God who has implanted human beings with all of their emotions. As God is necessarily a good being and is incapable of morally bad action, Butler faces the dilemma of explaining

the positive moral significance of seemingly negative emotions (Butler 1804, 137). It must therefore be made clear why God would implant the feeling of resentment into human beings. Butler begins by distinguishing between two kinds of resentment: hasty and sudden as opposed to settled and deliberate. Hasty anger is a quick reaction to an unfavorable situation, and Butler sees it as a "self-defense" mechanism against a direct assault from another person (Butler 1804, 140). In a quick bout of anger, the victim does not consider the true moral merit of the offender. This lack of objectivity of what Butler calls "hasty resentment" seems only to serve as a very rough and indiscriminate mechanism for punishment of wrongs. Settled anger serves a similar purpose but involves a more calculated reaction to a wrong committed. Butler's interpretation of resentment seems to suggest that different kinds of anger are initiated by different kinds of offence. While getting punched in the face might instigate a bout of hasty anger in a peasant, that same peasant might feel settled resentment for their vassal who systematically robs them of their harvests. It seems then that more calculated crimes call for more calculated feelings of resentment. This dichotomy of resentment may be paralleled with Nietzsche's view of resentment in the strong and the weak. As described above, Nietzsche believes that settled anger is common among the weak, while hasty anger is more common among their masters. Nietzsche would favor Butler's idea of "hasty anger" over "settled anger" because the latter would poison a person's mind over time. Hasty anger would provide for a quick release of emotion, settling the issue of the injury instantly.

For Butler, the moral purpose of resentment is to deal properly with injury and wickedness. In this capacity, it

may be used as "righteous rage" to assert good moral principles and reduce the likeliness of a wrong being done by another. In order to explain further the practical benefits of resentment, Butler argues that resentment against wrong would ensure that justice is upheld (Butler 1804, 140). When a criminal contemplates committing a crime, he or she has to take into account the possible resentment that the victim would feel towards him or her. A fear of retaliation may prevent the criminal from committing a crime in the first place (Butler 1804, 148). In the same way that fear of a legally sanctioned punishment may discourage violations of the law, a fear of morally established resentment may discourage one from violating the moral code of conduct. Here, the moral function of resentment may be interpreted based on one's moral understanding of justice. Butler presumes that a system of justice that prevents injury is morally sound, and, therefore, resentment is a morally good emotion by virtue of the fact that it serves to preserve justice. Nietzsche, on the other hand, believes that justice (insofar as it is understood by Butler) is a morally unsound system because injuries to others are a part of the natural order of things, and should not, therefore, be prevented. Because the weak ones' idea of justice is morally wrong for Nietzsche, resentment is morally wrong for him as well.

Butler concludes his sermon on resentment by stating that resentment may not only assist justice, but balance out pity (Butler 1804, 146). If pity and compassion would be the only emotions guiding people in passing judgments, all wrongdoers would be immediately pardoned without a question. As a result, resentment serves to control the manifestation of other human vices. There are many similarities between Butler's and Nietzsche's accounts of

resentment. Both philosophers distinguish between "hasty" and "settled" resentment and consider the role of resentment in enforcing justice; however, Nietzsche's system of moral values is almost directly opposed to that of Butler's. Where Butler sees virtue, Nietzsche sees vice, and vice versa. This juxtaposition serves well to illustrate that even with identical arguments, the moral "background" of different philosophers may influence how they judge the moral value and function of an emotion.

In his book entitled *Morality and the Emotions,* Justin Oakley makes a clear distinction between rational and moral justification. According to Oakley, human emotions might be analyzed from either a moral or a rational viewpoint, and the fact that an emotion is rationally sound does not necessarily imply that it is also morally sound (Oakley 1992, 41). This approach to the analysis of emotion may call for a reevaluation of the arguments presented by Nietzsche and Butler. For Oakley, resentment belongs to a group of emotions that are morally significant. Oakley attributes this significance to an emotion based on the emotion's ability to instigate morally significant action (Oakley 1992, 57). As resentment may cause a moral agent to have his or her revenge through reciprocal injury, it bears moral significance as an emotion. As was discussed earlier, while Nietzsche seems to see resentment as a profoundly bad emotion, Butler instead concentrates on the good that it may bring. Justin Oakley considers both sides of resentment in his book: According to him, its moral value is dependent on the circumstances. Oakley states that resentment may be morally justified at times; for example, when we resent our friends for participating in morally wrong acts (Oakley 1992, 63). In these cases, just

as Butler suggested, resentment may help to improve another individual by warning him or her against doing wrong. On the other hand, mere rational (and utilitarian) justifications for resentment do not equate to moral worth. Oakley believes that under certain circumstances, rationally justified resentment may deter love and friendship (Oakley 1992, 63). An opportunity to blame someone is not reason enough to resent them (Oakley 1992, 169). As Butler considers resentment to be a "blunt" tool of justice, he would not consider resentment unsound as long as there were rational reasons for it. Unlike Butler, Oakley thus places a greater responsibility on a moral agent to be "selectively resentful."

Oakley further argues that resentment is morally wrong when it undermines our sense of self-worth. This happens when a moral agent resents someone for being more successful (Oakley 1992, 68). This argument may be paralleled with Nietzsche's *ressentiment*, because in this meaning it is almost synonymous with envy. In this capacity, resentment will work to destroy relationships between people (Oakley 1992, 79). In order to justify his dichotomy of moral and rational worth, Oakley explains why human beings are responsible for their emotions, and how they are manifested. Resentment, and many other emotions, cannot be summoned at will. When a person attempts to recollect a painful experience of being injured by another, he or she will still not necessarily feel resentment towards the wrongdoer. Instead, emotions "act on us," as if of their own accord (Oakley 1992, 126). When one is punched in the face, one at times cannot help but feel resentful. However, being punched in the face does not guarantee that a certain emotion will be summoned. This argument may be explained by the assumption that

various emotions compete for dominance over a human being at the same time. For example, an injury that may cause resentment may also cause fear, pain, or distress. These competing emotions might overtake a person's mind, preventing the individual from being resentful at that moment. Either way, according to Oakley, when a person is influenced by emotions, he or she is in a "state of passivity" (Oakley 1992, 126). This statement inevitably leads to a question of free will: If a person loses control of his or her actions whenever he or she is under the influence of emotions, how can the person still be regarded as a moral agent? Oakley responds to this dilemma by arguing that this effect of emotions does not diminish the "blameworthiness" of human actions (Oakley 1992, 95). Although people cannot control an emergence of an emotion, they may always train themselves to be more compassionate and peaceful. This reduces the strength of a negative emotion when it appears and may prevent it from appearing in some situations. Oakley concludes that it is "creditworthy" to try to reduce feelings of resentment by being more compassionate in general (Oakley 1992, 165). Oakley's argument seems to be more objective than Nietzsche's and Butler's, as it takes into account the negative and the positive aspects of resentment. Just like Nietzsche, Oakley believes that the existence of free will plays an important role in explaining resentment. Both philosophers see free will as a reason to consider resentment a "blameworthy" emotion. However, Nietzsche sees this concept of free will as an illusion put forth by the weak to elicit guilt in their masters, while, for Oakley, free will is quite real, and may be exercised by controlling one's emotions.

In order to better understand the connection between free will and resentment, it would be useful to examine Peter Frederick Strawson's essay entitled "Freedom and Resentment." In this essay, Strawson contemplates the effect of determinism on moral responsibility and resentment. Just like Oakley, Strawson emphasizes the ability of a moral agent to stand outside of the effects of his or her emotions and take a more objective, impartial look at an injury done to him or her (Strawson 1974, 9). He also covers several factors that might attribute resentment to the realm of causation. Strawson distinguishes between two ways to "modify" resentment. The first way is to justify the wrongdoer's action by presuming that it was caused by unrelated events. Statements such as "he had a bad day" or "he didn't mean it" fall into this category (Strawson 1974, 7). According to Strawson, statements such as these deprive actions of moral significance but leave the moral agents intact. On the other hand, justifications like "he wasn't himself" or "he is outright crazy" target the moral agent specifically. Statements such as these imply that the agent is morally undeveloped and is, therefore, incapable of making moral actions that can be morally evaluated (Strawson 1974, 8). Just like Butler, Strawson sees a connection between the injury and the resentment that it generates. Strawson believes that the degree of resentment depends on the degree of the injury caused, so that an injury of a greater (perceived) significance will generate a greater feeling of resentment (Strawson 1974, 21).

The central question of Strawson's paper is whether the moral significance of resentment may be preserved in determinism. Throughout the essay, Strawson considers possible arguments that may be put forth by an "optimist"

and a "pessimist" of determinism. Strawson argues that an optimist would miss the "human factor" in explaining crime, i.e., he would neglect the emotions and reactions that the victim and the wrongdoer would have, and how these would manifest themselves in actions. However, Strawson concludes that the optimist's position is in the end the sounder one (Strawson 1974, 25). Resentment may have moral significance in determinism insofar as it may correct the wrongdoers and prevent further wrong from being done. However, Strawson states that the optimist could only prevail in this argument if he or she was to accept the human role in injury, as described above.

This essay has examined several key aspects of the moral significance of resentment. The connections between resentment and objectivity, justice, determinism and free will may all play a role in determining whether and when resentment is a morally bad or good emotion. It is very important to recognize that this assessment further depends on the system of moral values used: One philosopher's vice is another's virtue. Both Nietzsche and Butler have had to defend general theories of the world in their analyses of resentment. Butler had to agree with Christianity in all of his arguments, and, as a result, concentrated on the positive aspects of resentment (as God would not give us a morally bad emotion). Nietzsche, on the other hand, checked his arguments against his theory of the weak and the strong. Perhaps because of this, Nietzsche's definition of resentment was limited to envy.

Despite their differences, all of the philosophers mentioned above would agree that resentment is a morally significant emotion that may have an important impact on moral assessment in the aftermath of a crime. Furthermore, these scholars all agree that resentment cannot be

objective. At its best, the feeling of resentment may play the role of "righteous rage" and aid us in prosecuting criminals and punishing wrongdoers. At its worst, resentment may play the role of envy or explosive anger and cause us to commit crimes against others. As Oakley argued, it is not always possible to prevent the feeling of resentment from emerging in one's mind; however, we can learn to control it, either by suppressing or cultivating it. Whether we want to satisfy our will to power or uphold justice in the world, resentment is a powerful tool that can be used to achieve our ends as moral agents, as long as we are careful about when and how we use it.

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Polishing a Crystal: Understanding Plato's Allegory of the Cave

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Behold! He was born into chains and constrained to a chair. His head was held still, looking forwards. The world flickered as shadows on the wall in front of him. These shadows were life as he understood it; but he is being released. He is now being dragged out of this shadowy reality and into the light of actual objects. His eyes must adapt to the painful sunlight. And, once they have and he can see clearly the world as it is around him, he must return to the world of shadows. This is the philosopher.

Plato's allegory of the cave, summarized above, expresses Socrates' understanding of the philosopher, his role in society, and the experience one needs to become a philosopher. Here, we will offer an interpretation of this famous allegory from Plato's *Republic* to uncover the nature of the philosopher according to Socrates. To do so, we will examine the life experiences of the philosopher; his guiding principles and how he must come to arrive at them; and the practical use of philosophy within the polis. Moreover, we will examine these points with careful reference to the allegory of the cave and thereby reveal the allegory's powerful ability to express Socrates' notion of the philosopher.

The philosopher is a lover of knowledge. There is a difference, Socrates explains, between knowledge and

opinion. Knowledge aims at the truth of a thing; to know "nothing short of the most finished picture." [1] In understanding the *whole* of that thing, knowledge, Socrates argues, is always of being, of things as they are in their absolute form; that is, in accordance with the allegory, of the actual objects outside of the cave. Ignorance is of the "utterly unknown," and therefore takes the opposite extreme: It is always of non-being, of that which we do not know. Opinion falls in the intermediary, into the shadows within the cave:

> Since beauty is the opposite of ugliness, they are two?
>
> Certainly.
>
> And inasmuch as they are two, each of them is one?
>
> True again.
>
> And of just and unjust, good and evil, and every other class, the same remark holds; taken singly, each of them is one; but from the various combinations of them with actions and things and with one another, they are seen in all sorts of lights and appear many?
>
> Very true.[2]

Opinion sees things in many different ways; it is the understanding that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." It designates to a thing opposites: According to opinion, beauty and ugliness can be referred to the same object; that

1. Plato, *The Republic,* trans. Benjamin Jowett (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000) 169.
2. Ibid., 143.

is, a thing under opinion is both *this* and *not this*. Like judging shadows, opinion is of things that are not *non-beings*, but equally as much of things that are not *beings*. Socrates concludes that the subject matter of knowledge is being, of ignorance non-being, and of opinion, therefore, *the space between them both*. While hopelessly being constrained in the cave, one can never know what the shadows really are: one can only hypothesize, be of the opinion that they are so and so. As such, there is no absolute beauty, according to opinion.

On the other hand, the lover of knowledge, Socrates insists, "recognizes the existence of absolute beauty and is able to distinguish the idea from the objects which participate in the idea."[3] What Socrates means by this is that there is an idea or form of beauty, which all things are capable of participating in, and that it is therefore the philosopher's task to understand this form, which is knowledge proper: "The many, as we have said, are seen but not known, and the ideas are known but not seen."[4] Hence, one who *sees* the many finds that some things are beautiful while others are not, whereas the philosopher *knows* the form of beauty and, therefore, how the many can be beautiful in their particular ways.

The difference between the two is as such: The philosopher knows that an object is capable of both beauty and ugliness; he understands what beauty is; when an object thus participates in beauty, he knows why the object is beautiful. When one arrives armed with opinion, on the contrary, he, not sure as to why, merely sees an object as being beautiful—an object that another can just as easily

3. Ibid., 143.
4. Ibid., 171.

see as being ugly, for neither sees the thing in its entirety: Like seeing the shadows on the wall, they miss the absolute, the form of beauty itself, which is *separate from the object at which they look*. In short, the philosopher sees beauty and then things that can participate in it, the actual and then the shadows.

Following opinion, one easily finds a comfortable resting place, a position to stand that can be both easily protected and easily fled from: "Persons are too apt to be contented and think that they need search no further."[5] Knowledge is far more demanding of its subject; the philosopher, who must take a long and grueling path towards the "highest of all knowledge": "Little things are elaborated with an infinity of pains…how ridiculous that we should not think the highest truths worthy of attaining the highest accuracy!"[6] Indeed, it is quite easy for one to remain constrained in the cave and form opinions of the shadows on the wall, but, as Socrates' allegory shows, it is quite painful for one to make the trip out of the cave and into the blinding light of the sun.

In the allegory, it is the sun that is the "highest of all knowledge." Socrates explains that when the philosopher exits the cave and enters the world above it, his eyes will need to become accustomed to the light and will slowly open to allow the objects of the world to take their shape. After many struggles and at long last, he will finally be able to look at the source of the blinding light itself, the sun. Upon reflection, he will conclude that it is the sun "who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the

5. Ibid., 169.
6. Ibid.

cause of all things." [7] Indeed, what the philosopher will come to understand is that the sun is what is good, for without the sun nothing could exist, and that which provides existence must be good.

The aim of philosophy, according to Socrates, is therefore to know the Good: "The idea of the good is the highest knowledge…all other things become useful and advantageous only by their use of this."[8] What good are the shadows to the prisoners in the cave? One might say that they are a good source of entertainment; but this can only be a superficial semblance of the Good, especially when considering that the prisoners have no other choice of entertainment. Objects can only become useful and advantageous when one can see them for what they really are—not as shadows of things but as things themselves, brought to visibility by the light of the sun. An object can be useful and advantageous to me only if I understand what good the object can do for me, that is, only if I understand how the object can participate in the Good, which, of course, requires me to understand the Good *first*.

This is what, according to Socrates, sets the philosopher apart from others: Others begin with a particular object, briefly inspect it, and then form an opinion; the philosopher inverts this process by beginning with a universal concept (such as the Good), meticulously examining it, and then applying the concept to a particular thing to draw a conclusion about it. This is why those who leave the cave are capable of becoming philosophers: The cave is the world of particular things, void of all concepts; whereas the outside world is the place of absolutes, of

7. Ibid., 178.
8. Ibid., 169.

universal concepts, of the forms of things. This, therefore, is what the philosopher must have experience with: absolute forms.

Socrates outlines "two parts [to his] scheme of education"[9] for the development of the philosopher. The first part takes place *within the cave* when the prisoner is released from his constraints. He is for the first time able "to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light";[10] this refers to gymnastics and music—particularly, first, the health of the body and, second, harmony and rhythm, which establishes "habit" (one might even say here, "feeling," as when one musician says to the other, "Oh, ya man: I don't know what you just did, but, whatever it was, that *felt* good!"; or as in death when it *feels* good to move "towards the light," in which case music can be understood as supplying "direction"). The second part of the "scheme" has the philosopher move through four disciplines and five stages of development: arithmetic, geometry (first, plane geometry, which is 2-dimensional and then solid geometry, which is 3-dimensional), astronomy, and dialectic. This, in turn, corresponds to the prisoner's liberation from the cave:

> He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And he will first see shadows best [arithmetic], next the reflections of men and other objects in the water [2-dimensional geometry], and then the objects themselves [3-dimensional geometry]; then he will gaze upon the light

9. Ibid., 184.
10. Ibid., 173.

> of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven [astronomy]….Last of all he will be able to see the sun…and he will contemplate him as he is [dialectic].[11]

In their own ways, these disciplines all deal in absolutes: arithmetic in absolute numbers; geometry, absolute shapes and proportions; astronomy, absolute movement (of the sun, stars, and earth); and dialectic, the analysis of absolutes. This is why the second part of the "scheme" occurs where one can find the absolutes: *outside of the cave*.

Arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy merely serve as a "prelude" to the final discipline, dialectic, because, while they do indeed deal in absolutes, "they only dream about [absolutes], but never can they behold the waking reality so long as they leave hypotheses which they use unexamined, and are unable to give account of them."[12] Arithmetic is beneficial to the philosopher's education because, as Socrates points out, it leaves particulars behind (in the cave), that is, the mathematician does not need apples and oranges to prove that 2 + 2 = 4; and, even if he does use apples and oranges to demonstrate the equation, these apples and oranges are understood to be standing in for absolutely anything; they are merely tangible objects taking place of the absolute forms (of 2 and of 4). This math, though, is based upon a presupposition: Two things can be one; that is, a 2 and a 2 can be a 4. *Why* can one thing be many or many things be one? This is something that the mathematician is not concerned with; he, rather, is concerned with *how* two things become one. Arithmetic

11. Ibid., 178.
12. Ibid., 195.

shows how groups can come together and how they can be divided—the implication being that things *can be* grouped. What is a group? Can a group not contain its own sub-groups? And can a group not be part of a larger group still? Why make a group? These are questions that the mathematician leaves behind; he presupposes their answers: "Dialectic, and dialectic alone, goes directly to the first principle and is the only science which does away with hypotheses in order to make her ground secure."[13]

Dialectic is discussion; the back and forth of ideas and perspectives that turn the thing under inspection into a crystal with all the sides in view. The philosopher finds the "most finished picture" here because dialectic questions understanding, opposes it with all its strength, and does this until there are no more questions of the thing to be asked—until there is no longer an understanding of the thing but only knowledge of it, until there are no more sides of the crystal to be polished. Indeed, now *the philosopher knows why the crystal is beautiful*. With dialectic, the philosopher can uncover "the highest truths worthy of attaining the highest accuracy." [14] These "truths" are the virtues of courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom, which the philosopher will find to be all sides of the same crystal: the Good. Each virtue participates in the Good; for, when one acts according to the virtues, one acts towards the Good. These "truths" are each an aspect, a side of this crystal. Being each a side, the virtues, then, are the subject of the philosopher's dialectic.[15]

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 169.
15. Ibid., 112–113, 168–169.

Of the Good, Socrates says, "Every soul pursues and makes the end of all his actions." [16] Armed with the opinions from the cave, though, each prisoner can only see one side of the crystal, and they dispute, therefore, which side is more beautiful, more good. The philosopher, on the other hand, armed with dialectic can demonstrate how each side seen by the various prisoners are all good from their own perspectives (demonstrating how each prisoner is correct); and, in seeing the whole crystal, the philosopher can also see how each side can be united, brought together. He now arrives at complete knowledge, that is, knowledge of the Good in its entirety. Indeed, we all act according to various understandings of the Good, and can offer a perspective on the Good that a certain action aims towards. What we fail to do, however, is really examine other perspectives; we "are too apt to be contented and think that [we] need search no further."[17] In turning the crystal around and inspecting all of its sides, the philosopher is able to determine the act that is capable of achieving the most Good; he begins with the universal in order to apply it to a particular:

> To compel the best minds to attain that knowledge which we have already shown to be the greatest of all—they must continue to ascend until they arrive at the good; but when they have ascended and seen enough we must not allow them to do as they do now.
>
> What do you mean?

16. Ibid., 170.
17. Ibid.

> I mean that they remain in the upper world: but this must not be allowed; they must be made to descend again among the prisoners in the den, and partake of their labors and honors, whether they are worth having or not.[18]

What good is knowledge of universals if one never applies this knowledge to particulars? In fact, can one even be said to have knowledge if he never uses it? Socrates is quite adamant about sending the philosopher back into the cave because one who uses a thing will always have the most knowledge of it.

Socrates makes clear that "there are three arts which are concerned with all things: one which uses, another which makes, a third which imitates them."[19] Employing the example of flutes, Socrates explains that it is the flute-player who is most knowledgeable about flutes. The player knows which flutes play best (which is, of course, the flute's purpose—to be played), so the flute-maker will ask for the player's advice. Thus, the maker "will only attain to a correct belief";[20] his knowledge is secondhand, given to him by the flute-player. The imitator, moreover, is the artist who paints a picture of (perhaps, the player playing) the maker's flute, and is therefore the farthest of the three from knowledge of the flute; he is only able to form opinions or impressions. In order to *know*, one must *use*; hence, the philosopher's knowledge will be worthless to him if he does not put it to use, and, indeed, his

18. Ibid., 181.
19. Ibid., 258.
20. Ibid., 259.

knowledge will remain incomplete until he does put it to use.

According to Socrates, this is the final stage of the philosopher's development: putting knowledge—knowledge of the Good to use. So, when we had said at the outset that the philosopher is a lover of knowledge and that knowledge aims at the truth of a thing, what we therefore mean by this is that knowledge is always of *how to put a thing into good use*, how to use that thing for the Good; indeed, *that* is the *true* way to use a thing. To do so, one must, therefore, return from the universal forms to the particulars; one must head back to the cave:

> When you have acquired the habit, you will see ten thousand times better than the inhabitants of the den, and you will know what the several images are, and what they represent, because you have seen the beautiful and just and good in their truth.[21]

The philosopher returns to the cave armed with truth; that is, "truths." Guided by the principles of courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom, the philosopher must practice the Good. The above quote is taken from Socrates' explanation to the philosophers that they must return to the cave to be "kings"; that is, he is arguing for the rule of philosophers: From this position, the philosopher's knowledge is put to the greatest use. The point here being that the head-of-state, above all others, has the greatest ability to spread knowledge: Philosophy is practical in the polis when its knowledge is shared, when the crystal is

21. Ibid., 182.

polished so that others can see it more clearly and act accordingly. Even if what they gain from this only manages reflections in the water, this is certainly a clearer visibility than mere shadows. And we here and now have come to such an understanding of Socrates' notion of the philosopher: He is one who is patient and determined enough to map the terrain, judge the soil, dig into dirt, sift the earth, polish a crystal and return home with it to share its wealth. This is a lover of knowledge.

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