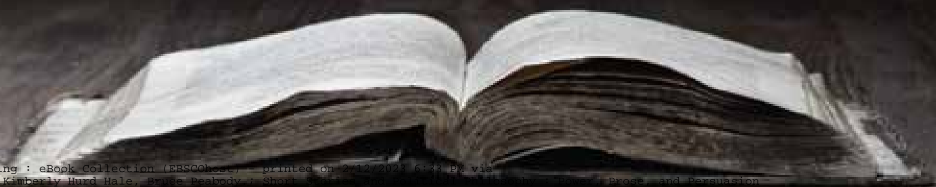
SHORT STORIES AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Power, Prose, and Persuasion

EDITED BY
ERIN A. DOLGOY, KIMBERLY HURD HALE,
AND BRUCE PEABODY



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Short Stories and Political Philosophy

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To our teachers and our students

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Bruce Peabody, Kimberly Hurd Hale,
and Erin A. Dolgoy

This edited volume explores the relationship between short stories and political philosophy, broadly understood. More specifically, each chapter analyzes a single, brief fictional narrative and addresses the innovative ways that short stories grapple with the same complex political and moral questions studied in political theory and ethics. We have selected short stories as our medium because they offer specific pedagogical advantages to teachers and students of political philosophy. Our baseline assumption is that we can learn new lessons about even the most widely read works and ongoing debates in political philosophy by turning to the short story. While not our focus, we are also confident about the inverse proposition: that the political theorists examined in this volume can offer fresh interpretations of and insights into select works of fiction.

We have designed this book to model various ways in which the short story may be used as an access point for the challenging works of political philosophy encountered in a wide range of higher education courses. In this way, we present this project as a resource for recent students of politics and established scholars. We intend this book to stimulate classroom conversations, and to encourage instructors to reexamine how they teach the great thinkers and debates of political theory, especially by incorporating short stories in their own classrooms. In addition to these teaching objectives, we hope that *Short Stories and Political Philosophy: Power, Prose, and Persuasion* will be of use to future researchers in political theory and the various disciplinary fields that draw on its bountiful tradition of writers and ideas. In particular, we believe that political science subfields such as American political thought, politics, literature, and film, cultural studies, and science, technology, and politics will all benefit from considering the edifying uses of fictional narratives.

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The breadth and flexibility of our goals inform this diverse collection. The contributors to this volume do not adhere to a single theme or intellectual tradition. Rather, taken together, their work is a celebration of the intellectual and literary diversity available to students and teachers of political philosophy. With this context in mind, this edited volume strives to illuminate the varied, rich potential of the short story as a medium for political discussion and teaching.[1]

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND FICTION: THE CASE FOR CONGRUITY

At this point, a skeptical reader might wonder: what distinctive returns can we hope to get from a volume dedicated to the study of short stories and political philosophy? At first glance, one might discern a sizable gap between the means, and ends, of fiction and political theory, a gap that has been debated at least since Plato's *Republic*.[2] After all, these two enterprises have discrete purposes, canons, tools of engagement, and accepted forms. Much of fiction, for example, is designed simply to entertain, not an attribute traditionally associated with the core ambitions of tracts of political philosophy, which seek to educate and persuade.

Moreover, short fictional stories tend to be rooted in a singular, if not idiosyncratic, tale, "generally fasten[ing on] to a moment or an incident or a few moments and a few incidents."[3] Through this relatively narrow focus, the short story can achieve what Edgar Allen Poe identified as "a certain unique or single *effect*," providing the reader with a powerful sense of purpose and satisfaction.[4] But such emphases seem divergent from political philosophy's aspiration to provide typologies, to universalize, or at least to offer enduring arguments about the complexities of human existence and the best political order. In other words, if short stories achieve much of their power through individual narratives dense with "authenticating detail,"[5] political philosophy, in contrast, is marked by the "abstractness of its generality."[6] For these and other reasons, one might well concur with Irving Howe that *political* fiction "is peculiarly a work of internal tension."[7] Mitchell Cohen arrives at a similar point in identifying the "political short story" as producing a collision of two "realms," that come together, at best, in an "uneasy" fashion.[8]

The contributors to this volume have a different perspective. We find a great deal of overlap and affinity between the concerns of fiction and political philosophy. The agendas of poets and philosophers are much more shared than oppositional, and the overall purposes of political theory and short fiction narratives are not only compatible but often interdependent. While drawing on different assumptions about how we express what it means to be

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human, what serve as our best sources of knowing and meaning, and even the nature of beauty, there are good reasons for reading philosophy and literature as part of a common project. And where the relationship between literature and political thought seems unavoidably "uneasy" or even orthogonal, we think this tension can be productive.

COMMON ENDS, DIFFERENT MEANS

While we hope to illustrate the congruity and utility of reading short stories alongside political philosophy over the course of this volume, one may ask: what is the preliminary evidence to support these claims? Consider, first, the contention that the broad concerns of political philosophy and the short story as a literary device are shared and even homologous. Generally speaking, political philosophy is comprised of at least three central, and often intertwined, threads of intellectual thought and related research programs. The first strand draws specifically on the field's philosophical orientation by engaging in "the search for certainty and truth, not merely by the pursuit of methodological purity or self-critical understanding," and by attempting to identify reliable if not "unshakeable" knowledge about political phenomena.[9] A second, cognate tradition of political philosophy focuses on specifically normative questions, especially debating and proposing "forms of the good life" (for individuals, communities, and states), identifying "what is morally proper" behavior, and providing "yardsticks for public conduct."[10] The third strand relates to the history of political thought, especially by situating the different thinkers who have contributed to the first two projects into a "sequenced story" or conversation.[11]

With respect to fiction, the characters, conflicts, societies, and worlds depicted within short stories are microcosms, controlled by authors, but designed to be engaged by readers. This engagement occurs through numerous means, but at least one strategy includes building trust between author and reader through narratives, characters, and settings rooted in "verisimilitude" and authenticity, that is, showing what is true about our shared experience, struggles, and values.[12] As Cohen puts it, political fiction "endeavors through imagination to discern some truth(s) about political reality and the human condition."[13]

This common interest in elucidating human truth(s) can be found in a variety of forms. Certainly, a mainstay of both political philosophy and literature is revealing the recurring sources and stakes of conflict between individuals, society, and the state. As Mary P. Nichols notes in her contribution to this volume, "Conflicting Moral Goods: William Faulkner's 'Barn Burning,'" "for the characters in William Faulkner's corpus, "truth-telling involves telling

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stories." Another truth-seeking approach common in both traditions entails examining the multiplicity and paradoxes of human nature and desires. Literary critic and short story writer Lionel Trilling explains that fiction can reveal "to us the complexity, the difficulty, and the interest of life in society, and which best instructs us in our human variety and contradiction."[14]

Indeed, both political philosophy and fiction explore not just what is *true*, but what is *real*, which historian Hayden White distinguishes as an interest not just in "what we can assert to be true about something," but "everything that can be truthfully said about its actuality plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could possibly be."[15] In other words, both political philosophy and fiction are interested in exploring the range of plausible and interesting interpretations of complex social and political phenomena.

Given its specificity of setting and characters, not to mention its status as invented storytelling, it might initially seem odd to think of fiction (especially short stories) as building unshakeable or at least enduring knowledge. But as Irving Howe points out in *Politics and the Novel,* works of fiction use distinct tools to access reality and human existence, trying "to confront experience in its immediacy and closeness" rather than through generality and abstraction.[16] Vivid description that awakens the five senses "makes the reader a sensory participant" in a story, but is most effective as a technique when it rings true, comporting with readers' experience with the actual (or an imagined) world.[17]

Moreover, fictional narratives uniquely convey facets of human identity of concern to political philosophy. Thus, as Alasdair MacIntyre has famously argued, "Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth."[18] In this way, studying fiction is an unavoidable part of wrestling with our self-expression and it can be a necessary basis for understanding distinct concepts of political philosophy, such as MacIntyre's nested, "narrative" notion of the self, or Anne Norton's claim that writing serves as a signature activity through which we become confined by modern practices of "our own construction."[19] According to Robin Bates, the romantic poet Percy Shelley understood great literature as a way to access our "best selves" and overcome "social institutions [that] impede humans from reaching their greatest potential"—certainly the perennial concerns of political philosophy as well.[20]

One might also note that much of fiction is designed to be popular and widely consumed, and in this way it can help surface and capture aspects of human nature, including the hopes, fears, and limitations of a given people. As Hannah Arendt contends, "The literature of science fiction . . . [serves] as a vehicle for mass sentiments and mass desires" including the persistent "rebellion against human existence as it has been given," which we wish to exchange for conditions of our own creation.[21] In a similar vein, Kimberly

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Hurd Hale reminds us that "unlike philosophy . . . literature does not necessarily seek to improve man or the city; it rather serves as a mirror for the audience," even if it is sometimes a funhouse mirror (that plays with and exaggerates our traits) or a magic mirror (that allows us to transmit features of ourselves to imagined settings).[22]

Both political philosophy and fiction evince recurring interest in specifically normative concerns as well. Numerous novels as well as shorter fictional works provide indispensable, vivid, and contained frameworks within which to consider enduring and emerging questions of justice and political ethics. Indeed, this has arguably always been a core concern of fiction. As Annie Lamott explains, works of fiction "help us understand who we are and how we are to behave. They show us what community and friendship mean; they show us how to live and die."[23] Moreover, Shelley's famous claim that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" is, in part, a reflection of how fiction authors have long expressed "visions of equality and liberation" in, for example, promoting women's emancipation and attacking slavery.[24] As we will see in this volume, short stories can communicate a writer's political and social values, depict (intractable) conflicts between our cherished ideals, criticize existing institutions and conventional norms, and show us the stakes of the status quo or of revolutionary change.

Indeed this last point reveals another way in which the agendas of (political) fiction and philosophy often merge: they both help to isolate and inspect settled epistemological and moral assumptions—and imagine alternatives. As Ann Pellegrini puts it, poetry and literature can be a "resource for imagining and engaging in civic life . . . part of why poetry and the other arts are so valuable is that they can open spaces of imagination counter to the way things are or must be."[25] Ever since Plato asked his interlocutors in the *Republic* to dream up cities in speech, political philosophers have attempted to transcend the here and now in search of a better, if not the best life. Indeed, as Michael Sandel argues, the job of the political theorist is to assume the challenge of "taking what we know from familiar unquestioned settings, and making it strange. . . . Philosophy estranges us from the familiar, not by supplying new information, but by inviting and provoking a new way of seeing."[26] Similarly, fiction writers have often found, as Trilling explains, that an invented story can be "an especially useful agent of the moral imagination."[27] The authors of short stories and novels create characters and conditions that reveal possibilities that are otherwise hidden. These authors use their knowledge of "things as they are" as springboards of change and choice. Works of fiction, since they are not bound by extant social and political conditions, provide a mirror to draw out our own preconceptions, and a projector through which we imagine things as they can be. Political and ethical philosophy demands self-reflection and self-improvement for individuals and societies, as does the best fiction.

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SHORT STORIES: ADVANTAGES OF FORM AND FUNCTION

As we have discussed, one broad reason to examine or study short stories in the context of political philosophy is their many shared goals (such as describing and accounting for the human condition, prescribing ideals and preferred ways of life, and imagining alternatives). Another central rationale focuses, somewhat paradoxically, on what novel things we can learn with renewed (and original) pairings of stories and theory. Moving beyond the overlapping agendas of fiction and political philosophy, we can identify a number of ways in which these works complement, complete, and even challenge one another.

At a minimum, reading fiction can deepen and reinvigorate our interpretation of important political thinkers and enhance and refine our understanding of major contributions to the history of political thought. A story can ground, test, and apply the abstract precepts of a political philosophy, and, perhaps, work out contradictions or competing ideals illustrated by the theorist. In these ways, short stories can help us sympathetically consider different philosophers' claims and moral systems, and give them the fairest and most serious consideration, if only by temporarily leading us to spend a hypothetical day in the life of these thinkers' imagined worlds. Thus, as Erin Dolgoy demonstrates in her chapter, "Big Data for the Good Life: Ken Liu's 'The Perfect Match,'" Jeremy Bentham's recommendations for an architectural panopticon, as a more efficient means of disciplining and surveilling prisoners, is explicitly applied to contemporary technologies in Liu's story. Similarly, as Kimberly Hurd Hale argues in "Paolo Bacigalupi's "Pop Squad" and the Examined Life Worth Living," Bacigalupi's "Pop Squad" situates Socrates's discussion of memory and legacy in Plato's *Symposium* against the twenty-first century's possibility of a radically extended human lifespan.

More broadly, the seductive form and compelling craft found in well-executed fiction can subtly induce readers to take seriously ideas they might otherwise reject outright if introduced as ideology or straightforward prescription. Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel, *The Jungle* and Jean Anouilh's play *Antigone* (first performed in France during the Nazi occupation) are two well-known examples of this phenomenon. Edward Alexander makes the case that writers like Irving Howe and Lionel Trilling were able to introduce ideas antagonistic to prevailing "social and political views" (including critiques of liberal democracy) because so many admired their style and "literary qualities."[28] Cohen makes a similar point in noting that political fiction in its various forms can ask "questions that Power prefers to avoid"—sometimes masking overt critiques or commentary through analogy or symbolism (Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* stand as two such illustrations separated by nearly two millennia).[29]

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Of course, as this last point suggests, short stories not only reinforce and develop the lessons and tenets contained in the works of political thought, they also induce us to reexamine, transcend, or overtly criticize these works, perhaps because we recoil at seeing their operation in (imagined) practice. For example, as Christopher Sardo argues in his chapter, "'The Terrible Justice of Reality': Suffering, Structural Injustice, and the Dilemmas of Political Responsibility in 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas'" students generally accept the principles of utilitarianism (usually eager to embrace any effort to simplify or quantify difficult ethical decision-making), until they are confronted by phenomena like the abused child that makes possible the happy city in Ursula Le Guin's tale. As Abram Trosky makes clear in "Jumping at our Reflection: American Dystopia and Reaction in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" reading a story like "The Lottery" can spur students to question the traditions and customs they unthinkingly accept in their own lives.

Why does fiction, in general, and short stories in particular, leverage these peculiar analytic, epistemological, and critical contributions? To begin with, we note the advantages that accrue from the distinctive form of the short story, especially its brevity. There are practical advantages to this succinct quality (it is easier to assign and teach contained readings), but there are also more far-reaching intellectual returns. Especially in contrast with the sometimes sprawling and dense works of political philosophy (Hobbes's *Leviathan*, for example, exceeds 200,000 words), the works of short fiction referenced in this volume are more circumscribed and accessible. While we in no way argue that short stories can take the place of the protracted study of the classics of political philosophy, they can serve as a supplement, or enhancement, to students' engagement with the canon. For readers, undistracted immersion in a short story facilitates an immediacy and thoroughness of comprehension—what Poe called "the immense force derivable from *totality*."[30] To the extent that political philosophy and brief fiction are both interested in world-building, the short story has a clear pedagogical advantage, if only because it is likely to command readers' attention and communicate the "unity of impression" and "fullness" of the author's intention. As Poe puts it, "During the hour of perusal [demanded by a short story,] the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences—resulting from weariness or interruption."[31] In contrast, even the most committed scholar will surely need to take at least a short pause between, say, reading Volumes I and II of *Das Kapital.* But once the fiction reader's attention has been grabbed by the foray into the world of the short story, he or she will, we hope, be inspired to continue the search for wisdom through increased engagement with the works of political philosophy.

As this discussion suggests, the dividends of the shorter read are psychological as well as intellectual. The self-contained structure of short stories

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assists us in overcoming the interpretive challenges posed by textual exegesis, including what Charles Taylor and others have famously labeled as the conundrum of the "hermeneutical circle," that is, the problem of how to read a text intelligibly as a whole without reference to its constituent parts, components that are themselves imperfectly understood without reference to the whole.[32] Such a puzzle is arguably lessened in succinct works that can be read, and even reread, in one sitting. The brevity of such works also forces us to become more exacting and careful readers, a skill that improves our ability to understand and analyze complicated philosophical arguments.

Moreover, the distinctive methods embraced by fiction of all kinds furnish it with singular means to awaken the understanding and sympathies of readers—and to spur them to make unexpected connections. As Carol Muske-Dukes puts it, the fictional "imagination is a protean force. It creates metaphors—linking unlike things, spinning analogies, spinning insights—remaking the world."[33] In addition, as noted earlier, even when it seeks widely shared or comprehensive truths, creative writing typically resorts to particulars as a span to universals: individual narratives, characters, personalities, conflicts, settings, and details that suggest greater depth of meaning and provide an intimate and instant source of connection for readers. In the context of short stories that are either overtly or implicitly political (and, therefore, interested in wider observations about ideology or ideals) this tension between specific form and general content can be provocative and productive. As Howe exclaims, "It is precisely from this conflict [between the immediate and universal] that the political novel gains its interest."[34]

The broad license of fiction to draw on fantasy, speculation, explorations of conscience and inner life, contradiction, and imagined lives and worlds also gives it a special purchase to awaken our senses and engage our emotions. In traditional political and ethical discussions, interlocutors are held to a certain standard of rationality and logic. Reason is paramount, and emotions are regarded as impediments to be overcome. However, for most individuals, our political and ethical opinions about the world are informed by our (irrational) passions or inherited (and mostly unexamined) predispositions. In this regard, literature allows us catharsis; it presents a framework within which to examine our reason and confront our passions. Moreover, the appeal to emotion through expressive narrative is a way to link artist and reader in a manner that is more approachable and intelligible than the esoteric and sometimes impenetrable language and forms of formal philosophy.[35]

Somewhat related to this argument, fiction writers possess a distinctive capacity to enter the thoughts and evaluate the interests of each character they present—potentially offering both these figures' own subjective interpretations of their lives (and consciousness) and a more overarching authorial narrative, a "god's eye" view of their thoughts and behaviors. Among other

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benefits, these competing orientations can provide readers with a kind of Weberian *verstehen*, a sympathy for and purchase on the motivations of subjects, of which even the authors themselves may not be fully aware.[36] Stated differently, "By enabling us to identify and sympathize with the characters and the situations in which they find themselves, the story invites us to reflect also on ourselves and our own personal and civic experiences."[37]

Taken together, then, creative and fictional works can uniquely teach us about ourselves. As Hale notes, "[a] marriage of philosophy and poetry is necessary to understand the full depth of human nature."[38] Through revealing elements hidden, submerged, or elided in traditional political philosophy and other works, fiction can give us a more complete understanding and picture of our essence, experiences, frustrations, and aspirations. In turn, this helps us understand and imagine political life as it might become, for better or worse. As Susan McWilliams summarizes, both creating and consuming fiction engages us because we

> perceive it as novel and personal, and it offers . . . the opportunity to connect to important (and often abstract) disciplinary conversations in new and immediate ways. It helps [us] . . . wrestle with the complications of political narrative, and makes [us] better readers and critical thinkers . . . [and more] effective citizens.[39]

THE ENDEMIC TRADITION OF STORYTELLING

Even if one accepts that short stories have the potential to help us understand, criticize, and even disrupt political philosophy, a dubious observer might still demur that such a task is too demanding, requiring a fusion of incompatible if not outright alien materials and points of view. A wider perspective on this subject suggests, however, that the posited links between shorts stories and political philosophy are unsurprising, longstanding, and somewhat unavoidable.

In this regard, we first note that the use of mythical, historical, and wholly imagined narratives is endemic to political philosophy, serving specific and important functions in this disciplinary approach. Perhaps the most well-known and enthusiastic proponent of this tradition is Plato, whose work is rich with such tales, stretching from the brief allegories of the Ring of Gyges and the Myth of Er in the *Republic* to the creation of the lost island of Atlantis in the *Timaeus* and *Critias*. But this basic turn to invoking illustrative and evocative stories is recurring if not omnipresent in the history of political thought. Augustine's *City of God* draws on a tale of the (physical and spiritual) fall of Rome as a prompt for explaining the fate of the wicked. Immanuel Kant and Benjamin Constant famously debated the strict demands

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of the categorical imperative by teasing out the implications of an imagined, dramatic encounter in which "a murderer [has] asked us whether a friend of ours whom he is pursuing has taken refuge in our house."[40] Indeed, theorists' varied invocations of the "state of nature" and other thought experiments amount to descriptions and accounts of mostly imagined settings, as a way to unspool the shortcomings (and capacities) of humanity and the basis of our need for political and social organization. And the modern era is rife with philosophers' imagined utopias espousing the benefits of science, technology, and progressivism, as well as their corresponding (and perhaps inevitable) warnings about dystopias.

What accounts for the persistent allure of deploying self-contained stories in the great works of political philosophy? While we concede the obvious—it is impossible to summarize fairly or accurately millennia of different traditions of thought drawn from across the globe—we point to several factors that explain this gravitational pull. Perhaps most obviously, many works of political philosophy have either an explicit or implied agenda of world, or state, building. The philosophers' episodes, anecdotes, analogies, and hypotheticals encourage us to consider alternatives to the status quo, and to begin this process of shifting from the world we inherit to a new universe in which our self-awareness and moral lives are more informed, rational, or freely chosen. Stated differently, in the context of political philosophy, short stories help us travel to new places, locales that are morally unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and even outright alien to our current vantage points. As the novelist M.T. Anderson explains, one of the purposes of travel, whether in life or in fiction, is "to remind ourselves of the potentialities of people, how many different ways there are of being."[41]

We can also understand the stubborn link between political philosophy and short stories through a previously mentioned point: philosophers turn to fictional and imagined narratives to connect with their readers. The very novelty and abstractness of political philosophy requires some grounding or application. Myths or fables (re)introduce or underscore a philosopher's ideas and ethical beliefs in more familiar, universal, and timeless forms. Through this approach, readers can be coaxed into a shared space in which they can develop comfort and facility with a political thinker's overall project. Self-contained stories enable political theorists to emphasize points that might otherwise be lost or have their impact diminished. It is one thing for Niccolò Machiavelli to write that wickedness can be an effective, albeit dangerous, tool for acquiring power, and quite another proposition for him to recount the tale of Agathocles the Sicilian, the "son of a potter" who "led a foul life" at every stage of his career. In Machiavelli's indelible telling, Agathocles rose from "the very dregs of the people, to be King of Syracuse." He seized power decisively and memorably, at one point assembling "the people and senate of

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Syracuse as though to consult with them on matters of public moment" but, instead, put many of them to death.[42]

Beyond this mechanism of intense illustration, a story within a theory can also psychologically and morally orient readers. John Rawls described his process of reflective equilibrium as involving a "back and forth" between our moral instincts, particular cases or dilemmas, and more overarching precepts of justice and morality.[43] In a similar manner, reading a short story in the context of a more encompassing political philosophy or social theory can serve as an instant prompt to test our own views of right and wrong. In other words, the narrative can give us license to depart the familiar world entirely, or to keep one reassuring foot in it while exploring alternatives to the status quo.

DISRUPTING DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES

Beyond these diverse benefits for readers, scholars, and teachers, we note a final potential (and potentially rewarding) consequence of reading short stories in conjunction with political philosophy and ethics. Such an approach encourages us to bridge and even disrupt various disciplinary divides, thereby drawing on the insights of research and scholarship from across the academy. Furthermore, we have already seen some of the ways in which the distinct forms and techniques of political science (such as its interest in systematic deductive and inductive analysis, generalization, and abstractions) can come into productive tension with the more sui generis and individual experiences communicated to readers through fiction.[44]

Understood in this way, this volume's situating of short stories alongside major works of political philosophy can be thought of as its own exercise in cross-disciplinary studies, as well as being part of a more general invitation to trace the far-reaching roots of political philosophy through myriad fields of study and creative enterprises. Indeed, a number of chapters in this volume depict common fictional and philosophical interest in particular puzzles of human existence, organization, and evolving society—such as the ways we reconcile our increasing reliance on technologies that seem to reduce individual agency with our continued desire to preserve limited government and civil rights. To some extent, then, this book can be read as a series of diagnostic reflections on these challenges—an approach that calls for varied perspectives on a single issue, rather than disciplinary adherence to method or ideology. Thus, while our project is primarily focused on political philosophy and short stories, we imagine and hope that some of the chapters and arguments that follow will bring a diverse group of colleagues in such areas as politics, literature, communications, film, popular culture, and science and technology, into collusion, collision, and mutual fructification, especially

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in the context of wrestling with both longstanding and emergent political problems.[45]

EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP AND THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS VOLUME

Given the commonalities and complementarity of short stories and political theory, there is a surprising gap in scholarship which systematically discusses the political and moral applications of individual short stories. Cohen's *Rebels and Reactionaries*, for example, assembles a laudable collection of "political short stories." But aside from the author's brief but rewarding introduction, his volume does not offer readers sustained insight into how the assembled stories relate to the texts most often included on political philosophy syllabi.[46] More recently, Amy A. Kass, Leon R. Kass, and Diana Schaub have added their work, *What So Proudly We Hail: The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*, to the list of resources for educators interested in incorporating nontraditional materials into the theory curriculum. *What So Proudly We Hail* is specifically intended as a reader for a (national) civic education. It is, the authors explain, "a book about America for every American."[47] And again, the focus of their text is on the primary readings, rather than independent analysis.

Our project attempts to redress this dearth. Each chapter in this collection considers a single short story, analyzed through the lens of political philosophy. Some chapters investigate the links between an individual political theorist and a specific story, while others apply multiple philosophers, engaging whole categories or traditions of political thought. In general, the contributors do not claim that fiction writers are explicitly or consciously adopting (or rejecting) a specific philosopher's perspective or credos (unless there is specific evidence to this effect). For example, Bruce Peabody's chapter, "From the Iron Cage to the 'Waters of Babylon': Rationalization and Renewal in a Weberian World," which analyzes Stephen Vincent Benét's story "By the Waters of Babylon," does not assert that Benét is an informed adherent of the ideas of Max Weber. Rather, each chapter makes the case that we can understand both political philosophy and our aggregated collection of short stories in a deeper and more profound way by reading them together, and, along the way, our different contributors trace some remarkable affinities (and important differences) in the concerns and insights both of fiction and philosophy writers.

The individual contributors to this volume come from diverse scholarly orientations and intellectual traditions within the field of political science, illuminating the capacity and productiveness of the short story as a crucible

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for testing and applying core ideas from political philosophy. Over the course of the entire collection, therefore, we are able to engage a wide range of political and ethical questions. Our authors have varied styles and emphases, sometimes advancing a single continuous thesis, at other times using their featured stories to engage in a series of mostly separate ruminations or interpretations.

We do not, of course, ask or expect our readers to agree with all of the conclusions or interpretations reached by our volume authors; indeed, the editors of this volume do not share a consensus on all of these points. But we anticipate that the many discrepancies and disagreements between readers and authors fostered by this project will lead to productive discussion, and will mimic some points of contention and debate in the classroom. Stated differently, we hope our readers will critically evaluate this volume and use it as a prompt to reexamine their own approaches to the featured philosophers, and as an opportunity to rethink how they teach these seminal figures.

As noted, while differing in their intellectual priorities and approaches, each of the ensuing chapters is self-contained, tied together through the project of using literature to teach politics. With the exception of this introduction and the editors' conclusion, our contributors begin by outlining their overall argument before moving into a brief summary of the plot, and characters, of the short story under consideration. We note in this regard that each chapter's ensuing analysis and focus centers on the short story under review, rather than the philosopher(s) being invoked. This means that readers less familiar with a particular theorist or theory may wish to do additional reading of the relevant primary texts. Indeed, while our contributors provide sufficient background and context so their arguments can be readily adapted for research or class use, their investigative essays are not intended as replacements for or complete accounts of the original, featured short stories or the associated works of political philosophy.

The settings of our showcased stories range from the wholly familiar, drawing on the assumption that we are more trusting when we "observe similarity between the fictional and the real worlds," to the unsettling and uncanny, to the wildly fantastic.[48] Through these varied landscapes and dreamscapes our fiction authors use their stories to conserve, warn, cajole, disrupt, and innovate. But each story contains a core meditation on universal questions asked by each society, and each generation, throughout human history. The chapters in this volume examine stories penned by a wide variety of authors from different eras and cultures, who draw upon diverse intellectual traditions. For simplicity's sake, we have ordered our chapters alphabetically, by the chapter contributor's last name.

In "Big Data for the Good Life: Ken Liu's 'The Perfect Match,'" Erin Dolgoy considers the social and political implications of ubiquitous technology

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through the lens of Liu's 2012 short story, "The Perfect Match." The chapter draws from contemporary literature on online technologies, as well as theoretical works, including arguments presented by Socrates, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Niccolò Machiavelli, Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, Immanuel Kant, Max Weber, Martin Heidegger, and Michel Foucault. The chapter begins with a discussion of self-knowledge. The second section turns to the relationship between knowledge, more generally understood, and politics. The third section examines the role of digital technologies in our quest for self-knowledge. And the fourth section considers digital surveillance.

Kimberly Hurd Hale's "Paolo Bacigalupi's 'Pop Squad' and the Examined Life Worth Living" presents a harrowing tale of a future world marked by environmental degradation, radical advancements in anti-aging medicine, and an absolute ban on human procreation. This chapter places Bacigalupi's "Pop Squad" (2006), in which the characters' search for immortality forces the reader to examine what it means to live a human life, and what it means to make human life worth living, in conversation with political philosophy's greatest exploration of this subject, Plato's *Symposium*. If Socrates is correct in his famous assertion that "the unexamined life is not worth living,"[49] then teachers and students of political philosophy ought to make such an examination, and determine what, exactly, makes a life worthwhile.

In "All the World's a Cage: Franz Kafka's 'A Hunger Artist,'" Timothy McCranor and Steven Michels explore the nature of art and the artist rejected by the modern world. The unnamed title character in Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" (1922) has the uncommon ability to abstain from food. The first section of this chapter includes the obvious comparison between this Artist and Friedrich Nietzsche's account of human nature and the manner in which the masses can be resistant to messages that challenge commonly held notions of justice or ethics. The analysis also draws upon Plato and Aristotle and their teachings on virtue as it concerns the body and the soul. Next, the chapter turns to Jean Jacques Rousseau's teaching on natural man to discern Kafka's lessons on modernity and the human condition.

Mary P. Nichols' "Conflicting Moral Goods: William Faulkner's 'Barn Burning'" analyzes the story of a ten-year boy growing up in the post-Civil War South, who is torn between his loyalty to this father and family and his repugnance at what his father does, asks him to do, and tries to teach him. In Faulkner's 1939 work, Sartoris "Sarty" Snopes is "pulled two ways like between two teams of horses," yet by the end of the story Sarty betrays his cruel and revengeful father by revealing to his father's "enemy" that his father is about to burn his barn. Faulkner's story is more complex, however, than any simple opposition between family ties and individual freedom. Faulkner presents a larger and more intricate moral world than one marked

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solely by conflict between individual freedom and authority. How do we live in that larger world, his story asks us to consider, while giving its due to both constitutive ties and freedom?

In "From the Iron Cage to the 'Waters of Babylon': Rationalization and Renewal in a Weberian World," Bruce Peabody draws on Stephen Vincent Benét's apocalyptic short story "By the Waters of Babylon" (1937) to illustrate fundamental precepts of Max Weber's political and social theory. "By the Waters of Babylon" helps readers see and understand the power of Weber's typology of political authority, and appreciate his account of the relentless, iconoclastic power of rationalization as an organizing force in our modern lives. Ultimately, both Weber and Benét grapple with an especially salient and troubling question in the twenty-first century: how can we balance our endless hunger for technical mastery of the world with our human nature and needs?

Christopher Sardo's contribution in "'The Terrible Justice of Reality': Suffering, Structural Injustice, and the Dilemmas of Political Responsibility in 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas'" and the Dilemmas of Political Responsibility" looks at Ursula K. Le Guin's short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973), which describes a utopian city, free from political, economic, or clerical oppression, where citizens live lives of perfect happiness. Their happiness, however, is made possible by the perpetual suffering of an innocent child, every citizen knowing that their lives "depend wholly on this child's abominable misery." Read through the lens of Hannah Arendt's and Iris Marion Young's theories of political responsibility, "Omelas" asks: what does it mean to be responsible in an unjust world that has preceded and will outlast one's life?

In "Kinship, Community, and the Bureaucratic State: A Study of Wendell Berry's 'Fidelity,'" Drew Kennedy Thompson investigates the agrarian essays, poetry, and fiction of contemporary author Wendell Berry, which engage political questions surrounding the legitimate basis for authentic community. His short story "Fidelity" (1992) illustrates the confrontation of authentic community with the divergent values of the rational bureaucratic state. In "Fidelity," the membership of a small town implicates itself in the "kidnapping" of a dying man from a hospital and returns him home to spend his final hours restored to his *place*, surrounded by neighbors and relatives. The story illustrates the competing political demands of the family and the modern industrial state, and the uncertain limits of moral and legal obligations owed to each. Negotiations between the public and private aspects of death and dying can call into question the moral legitimacy of any civil code inserting itself where it does not belong. As Thompson argues, the debt of love owed by the living to the deceased answers to a transcendent ethic beyond the scope of rational calculation or political expediency. The obligations of kinship and the necessities of modern civil society, then, inevitably come into conflict.

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Natalie Fuehrer Taylor's "'The Incarnation of My Native Land': Clover Adams in Henry James's 'Pandora'" offers an analysis of Marian "Clover" Adams, an often overlooked and unappreciated figure in American political history. Immortalized by Henry James as the inspiration for the character of Mrs. Bonnycastle in his story "Pandora" (1909), Clover Adams exemplified the patriotism, keen wit, and independence of thought unique to American women of the time. Drawing on "Publius'" comments in the *Federalist Papers*, and Alexis de Tocqueville's analysis of American women in *Democracy in Ameri*ca, this chapter examines the importance of a female perspective to American political thought, and the relationship between women and democracy in the American republic.

In "Jumping at Our Reflection: American Dystopia and Reaction in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" Abram Trosky explores the tensions at the heart of Jackson's iconic story, and perhaps political philosophy itself: the urban/rural divide; the putative need for myth and sacrifice to effect and maintain social cohesion; and the challenges and temptations that culturally embedded creatures face in introducing more individualistic or cosmopolitan narratives. "The Lottery" (1948) has shocked generations of readers with its pithy portrayal of the easy coexistence of folksiness and barbarism, and the inertial power of tradition over familial or other moral commitments. This chapter examines the story's ability to serve as an entryway into discussions of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and Immanuel Kant's deontology.

Finally, in the conclusion the editors of this volume offer a brief discussion of pedagogical strategies for using the individual chapters, theorists, and short stories discussed in this book in the classroom, especially focusing on undergraduate courses in political philosophy and ethics.

It is our sincere hope that the chapters contained in this volume either introduce readers to new stories that help us understand the enduring questions of political life, or illuminate familiar tales in new ways, deepening our appreciation for the role of literature and fiction in the study of political philosophy.

NOTES

1. For the purposes of this volume, we understand a short story as a literary narrative of 30,000 words or less. We adopt this (admittedly arbitrary) figure from multiple sources, including the *Writer's Digest*. See http://www.writersdigest.com/.
2. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 607b.
3. Mitchell Cohen, *Rebels and Reactionaries* (New York: Dell, 1992), xiv.
4. Edgar Allan Poe*, Selected Poetry and Tales*, ed. James M. Hutchisson (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012), 526.
5. John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 25.

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6. Michael Freeden, "Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy," in *Handbook of Political Theory,* eds. Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kukathas (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004), 6; Joanne Brown, "Historical Fiction or Fictionalized History? Problems for Writers of Historical Novels for Young Adults," *The ALAN Review* 26 (1998), http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/fall98/brown.html.

7. Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 20.

8. Cohen, *Rebels and Reactionaries,* xiii.

9. Freeden, "Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy," 4–5.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 3.

12. Rick W. Busselle and Helena Bilandzic, "Fictionality and Perceived Realism in Experiencing Stories," *Communication Theory* 18 (2008): 268.

13. Cohen, *Rebels and Reactionaries,* xv. William Wordsworth arrives at a similar conclusion in his description of poetry as "the most philosophic of all writing . . . [since] its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion." William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 105.

14. Lionel Trilling, *The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent: Selected Essays* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 510.

15. Hayden White, "Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality," *Rethinking History* 9 (2005): 147.

16. Howe, *Politics and the Novel*, 20.

17. Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 173.

18. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 216.

19. Anne Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 25.

20. Robin Bates, "How Poets are the Legislators of the World," September 3, 2015, https://betterlivingthroughbeowulf.com/how-poets-are-the-legislators-of-the-world/.

21. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 2–3.

22. Kimberly Hurd Hale, *The Politics of Perfection: Technology and Creation in Literature and Film* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 6.

23. Annie Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), 15.

24. Quoted in Robin Bates, "How Poets are the Legislators of the World," September 3, 2015, https://betterlivingthroughbeowulf.com/how-poets-are-the-legislators-of-the-world/.

25. Carol Muske-Dukes, "Obama + Shelley Get it Right: Poets ARE the Unacknowledged Legislators of the World!" *HuffPost,* August 23, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/carol-muskedukes/obama-shelley-get-it-right_b_1620590.html.

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26. Michael Sandel, "The Moral Side of Murder," accessed June 5, 2018, http://justiceharvard.org/themoralsideofmurder/.

27. Trilling, *The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent*, 510.

28. Edward Alexander, *Lionel Trilling and Irving Howe: And Other Stories of Literary Friendship* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers 2009), 26.

29. Cohen, *Rebels and Reactionaries,* xxii.

30. Poe*, Selected Poetry and Tales*, 526.

31. Ibid.

32. Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences, Philosophical Papers*, *Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), 18.

33. Muske-Dukes, "Obama + Shelley Get it Right."

34. Howe, *Politics and the Novel*, 20.

35. As Wordsworth explains in the context of discussing the relatability of poetry, if the poet "is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings" this difference is only a matter of degree since each of us shares these same "general passions and thoughts and feelings." Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads,* 108.

36. Basit Bilal Koshul, M*ax Weber and Charles Peirce: At the Crossroads of Science, Philosophy, and Culture* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 21.

37. Amy A. Kass, Leon R. Kass, and Diana Schaub, eds., *What So Proudly We Hail: The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2011), xix.

38. Hale, *Politics of Perfection,* 8.

39. Susan McWilliams, "Creative Writing and the Study of Politics," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50(4) (2017): 1097.

40. Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy," in *Practical Philosophy,* ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 611.

41. Sue Corbett, "Children's Bookshelf Talks With M.T. Anderson," *Publisher's Weekly,* October 4, 2006, https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/11669-children-s-bookshelf-talks-with-m-t-anderson.html.

42. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince,* trans. N. H. Thompson (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 21.

43. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), 20.

44. Cohen, *Rebels and Reactionaries,* xiv.

45. The physicist Freeman Dyson has offered a somewhat related argument in encouraging us to return to a romantic-age conflation of science and poetry, when "scientists and the poets belonged to a single [productive] culture." Freeman Dyson, *Dreams of Earth and Sky* (New York: Review Books, 2015), 128.

46. Cohen, *Rebels and Reactionaries,* xiii.

47. Kass, Kass, and Schaub, *What So Proudly We Hail*, xi.

48. Busselle and Bilandzic, "Fictionality and Perceived Realism in Experiencing Stories," 268.

49. Plato, "Apology of Socrates," in *Four Texts on Socrates: Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito and Aristophanes' Clouds,* trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West, 1st ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 38a.

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Chapter 2

Big Data for the Good Life

Ken Liu's "The Perfect Match"

Erin A. Dolgoy

In his short story "The Perfect Match," Ken Liu describes a world (perhaps even our own) in which human beings have ceded control over their lives to big data, algorithms, and corporations. Human beings, as Liu understands us, desire the good life: we seek comfort, enjoyment, companionship, pleasure, and self-knowledge. Contemporary digital technologies appear to provide an opportunity for individuals to hack the process of living a good life, so that the acquisition of self-knowledge need not be a matter of introspection, self-restraint, and overcoming. In the digital age, human beings simply need to live. Our data is recorded by apps—programs that perform specific online applications or tasks—ostensibly designed to make our lives easier. That information is then aggregated and interpreted for us. As a result, we live healthier, more comfortable, and more enjoyable lives without having to do the philosophic labor of self-reflection. Liu's prescient analysis establishes a framework within which we can consider our personal digital behavior. Liu presents online technologies as ubiquitous. He reminds us that our desires to know more about ourselves and our longings to be understood serve as our impetus to participate in online networks. While we go online to connect with other people and gain self-knowledge, this process is ultimately self-defeating. The ease and comfort that online technologies provide us belie the loss of liberty, individual and collective, that results both from allowing corporations to control our personal information and from the ensuing illusion of our own personal control. At stake in current debates surrounding ubiquitous technology are not only the ways humans mediate relationships with digital interference, but also the very possibilities of self-understanding, free choice, and democracy.

Liu's protagonist Sai is a paralegal in Las Aldamas, California. Sai's entire life is monitored and organized by Tilly, a personal information assistant

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(PIA) much like Apple's Siri, Google's Home, Amazon's Alexa, or Microsoft's Cortana. Tilly knows her users' "tastes and moods better" than anyone else knows them;[1] in fact, Tilly knows everything about Sai, including "likes and dislikes, secret desires, announced intentions, history of searches, purchases, articles and books read, pages browsed . . . . Collectively, the bits ma[k]e up a digital history of him, literally."[2] Tilly is the PIA of the Centillion Corporation, which happens to be a client of Sai's employer. Centillion has grown quickly. The company's mission is "to 'arrange the world's information to ennoble the human race.'"[3] Christian Rinn, the company's founder and director, is young; he is "barely in his forties and look[s] fit and efficient."[4] Sai describes Rinn as "a very creepy [despicable] man."[5]

Rinn's company is now "bigger than governments."[6] "Centillion is in the business of organizing information."[7] Through interfaces, including Tilly and ShareAll (a social media platform, much like Facebook), Centillion collects and organizes user information. It is able to use its data to stop child pornographers, murderers, "drug cartels, and terrorists"; it topples "dictators and strongmen . . . by filtering out [the dictators' and strongmen's] propaganda and magnifying the voices of those who oppose [the dictators and strongmen]."[8] It also influences its users by controlling the type of information that they access online and by encouraging certain behaviors and preferences. Centillion even has audio and video interfaces, so that Tilly can interact with users by speaking directly into an earpiece. Centillion, Rinn boasts, practices "cultural imperialism": Rinn admits that he "will happily arrange the world's information to ennoble the human race" and "to make the world a better place,"[9] according to his specifications. There is, Rinn reminds us, "no such thing as neutrally offering up information."[10]

As a devotee of Tilly, Sai experiences distinct benefits. He believes that Tilly increases his self-knowledge and helps him to live a better life. He is woken each morning at "the optimal time" in his sleep cycle to a playlist curated by Tilly. He wakes up "refreshed, optimistic, ready to jump out of bed."[11] Tilly reminds Sai to "wear [his] new shoes," sets him up with women, "guide[s] him through" his breakups, manages his work schedule, makes food recommendations, updates him on the traffic, provides coupons,[12] memorizes and replays information, finds lost work files, coaches him through his dates,[13] and monitors his finances.[14] Without Tilly's assistance, Sai is unable to "do [his] job . . . remember his life, . . . [or] even call [his] mother."[15] While Centillion's services may benefit its users by increasing their opportunities to understand themselves, providing unlimited access to information, and increasing the ease of their lives, human beings, Rinn explains, have become "a race of cyborgs."[16]

Sai begins to question the role that technology plays in his life after he meets Jenny, his new, eccentric neighbor. Even though they are about the same age,

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Sai likens Jenny to "one of his grandmother's friends."[17] Sai believes that Jenny "somehow ha[s] missed the ethos of sharing."[18] Unlike Sai, who has been raised in the United States, Jenny "grew up in China," where "the government watched everything you did on the Network and made no secret of it."[19] As a result of her early exposure to online oppression, Jenny understands that surveillance is never benign. She does not distinguish between government and corporate observation. Jenny believes that "Centillion owns all of [them]."[20] Centillion, through the Tilly interface, tells users what to buy and read, and who to date.[21] Centillion gets richer and more pervasive, and users become more dependent. Sai "remembers how it had felt to have Tilly lead him by the nose on every choice, how he had been content, like a pig wallowing in his own enclosure."[22] Jenny has a plan: she and Sai are going to infect Tilly with a virus, destroy Centillion, and free humanity.

Although Sai believes that he and Jenny met by accident, Jenny targets Sai in order to exploit his connection to Centillion. Rinn, because he has access to substantial amounts of data, has detected a pattern. Sai is not the only paralegal at his firm to have a new neighbor. Five of Sai's colleagues "had new neighbors. . .th[e] same week. . .all sworn to destroy Centillion."[23] Rinn has determined that all five of these new neighbors are insurgents. Sai and Jenny's attempt to liberate themselves and others from their technological dependence and to dismantle Centillion's monopoly of information is, of course, unsuccessful. In fact, Sai and Jenny's attempted rebellion only serves to increase Centillion's power and efficiency. How does one even begin to destroy an organization that knows every person better than he or she knows himself or herself and is able to access all their compiled and aggregated information? Even if Sai and Jenny had been successful, Rinn suggests, "a replacement will arise to take [Centillion's] place. It's too late; the genie has long left the bottle."[24]

In this chapter, Liu's short story is used to elucidate some of the central themes in political philosophy—including the importance of self-knowledge, the relationship between the individual and the collective, the tension between privacy and surveillance, and the fragility of democratic freedom—as they are affected by our increasing dependence on ubiquitous digital technologies. This chapter does not focus on a particular political philosopher; instead, it draws widely from the history of political thought and contemporary literature. The first section considers the importance of self-knowledge. The second section further develops this theme focusing on the social and political necessity of self-understanding. In the third section, the promises (or at least possibilities) of online technologies are presented. The fourth and fifth sections turn to digital surveillance. The sixth section presents the economics of data creation and considers the beneficiaries of our online behavior. The final section returns to the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter,

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encouraging us to reconsider our interactions with technology and the social and political implications of our technological dependence.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND THE GOOD LIFE

Humans are knowledge-seeking beings.[25] The history of philosophy is concerned with understanding the human condition. Inscribed at the temple at Delphi are two maxims: "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess." Socrates's assertion in Plato's *Apology* "that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being" shows that he would rather die than be prevented from living a life of reflection and contemplation.[26] Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, echoes Socrates's sentiment that human virtue is only possible with self-knowledge.[27] In modern political thought, Niccolò Machiavelli argues that one who desires political power must study the examples of the past in order to reflect on one's own nature and determine how to act in order to achieve one's ends.[28] Francis Bacon expands on the argument presented by Machiavelli; Bacon suggests a rubric for self-understanding in his *New Organon*, under the title of Idols of the Mind, and explains in his *Essays* that knowledge of one's own self is essential for one to have knowledge of other human things.[29] René Descartes proclaims, "Je pense, donc je suis," which translates as "I think, therefore I am."[30] Thomas Hobbes suggests that the accuracy of his arguments in *Leviathan* can be assessed through one's self-examination, once one learns to "*read thyself*."[31] The essential tenet of Hinduism is the liberation of the soul, attained through self-knowledge and knowledge of one's true self. For Buddhists, the goal of life is *bodhi*, a spiritual and literal awakening of one's self achieved through wisdom (*prajna*) and compassion (*karuna*). While the sentiment is common—it is best to have knowledge of one's own self in order to live a better life—there is little agreement on (1) how one even begins to obtain this knowledge and (2) whether or not one even can attain this knowledge.

Part of the challenge of acquiring self-knowledge is our own inescapable subjectivity. Socrates is correct: all human beings develop in caves,[32] including, as Bacon adds, caves of our bodies.[33] Of course, these caves are not literal, but they are fundamental to our development and self-understanding. Jacob Klein explains that all individuals are born into families that they did not choose, into communities that they did not choose, into countries that they did not choose, and into times that they did not choose.[34] Our early-childhood political, social, and religious exposures are all beyond our immediate control. Moreover, all these foundations are established before we are able to evaluate the veracity or viability of such accounts of the world. These formative exposures influence all aspects of our subsequent social, political, emotional, physical, and intellectual lives.

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Our ability to experience the world accurately and test the validity of our experiences is essential to all human interaction and moral reasoning. Not all philosophers and not all cognitive psychologists agree on how we acquire knowledge. On one end of the spectrum, some philosophers argue that human beings are born with certain types of *a priori* knowledge about the world. Immanuel Kant's account of universalizable principles suggests that all human beings subconsciously experience the world in similar ways. As a result, all human beings have the same innate knowledge of moral principles.[35] On the other end of the spectrum, some philosophers, including Aristotle, argue that we are, in fact, empty vessels that are shaped and changed by external stimuli.[36]

"The Perfect Match" encourages us to confront our presuppositions concerning knowledge as evidenced by our desires for (easy) self-knowledge, companionship, and human connection. Our willingness to know ourselves, Liu suggests, is our impetus for going online. Online technologies provide a particular type of data concerning our most basic behaviors. We often incorrectly assume that this data is knowledge. Centillion and Tilly exploit our desire to understand ourselves and to be understood by others, even if those others are digital: "It [i]s a truism, that what a man wouldn't tell his best friend, he'd happily search for on Centillion."[37]

In order to evaluate our own experiences, make decisions about our own lives, and determine particular courses of action, we must behave as though our subjective experiences are, in fact, objective. All human interactions are premised on shared experiences. Democratic politics, in particular, demands shared political ideals and the freedom to actualize those ideals. We must believe that our observations or expectations about the world are similar to those of other individuals.[38] As Rinn explains to Sai, "You can't resist the pull of information. If it's possible, you always want to learn something new; we're hardwired that way. That's the drive behind Centillion, too."[39]

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, OBSERVATION, AND JUSTICE

Since liberal democracy requires that individuals collectively make decisions, political society is premised on certain expectations concerning how other individuals will behave. Regardless of whether our knowledge about the world is innate, acquired, or both innate and acquired, we must be able to test and to modify our expectations. This process of observation, evaluation, and modification occurs in two ways: first, one can attempt to observe one's self and others; second, one can be observed by others, either with or without one's knowledge or consent. For example, Socrates, in *Republic*, tells the

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story of the Ring of Gyges which, when twisted in a certain way, makes its wearer invisible.[40] Gyges's ancestor pried the ring off the finger of a corpse, placed it on his own finger, and proceeded to "commi[t] adultery with the king's wife and" assist her in regicide.[41] Socrates asks his interlocutors to consider how they would behave if they had no fear of repercussions. That is, Socrates suggests that the reason individuals follow the rules and behave justly is their fear of the negative consequences of being caught deviating from the rules. As another example, the Christian religious tradition is predicated on the belief that an individual is always under observation by God. The Benedictine morality demands the public confession of one's sins and grievances in order to enhance one's piety and virtue.[42] Hobbes notes that the foundation of the political community is reciprocal observation of and by one's neighbors and by the sovereign.[43] John Stuart Mill concurs with Hobbes's assessment. In order to maintain and enforce social norms, it is essential, Mill argues, that one observes and is observed by one's neighbors.[44] While the Platonic, biblical, Benedictine, Hobbesian, and Millian accounts of observation differ in how and by whom one is observed, they agree in their understanding of incentive: observations by one's neighbors and one's god serve as a source of one's self-knowledge and one's longings for justice, thereby increasing the likelihood that one will live a good life.

In our own times, we have taken the idea of observation one step further. We willingly use online applications to observe, gather data, and identify patterns in our behavior. We seem to believe that these online apps and programs will help us to better understand ourselves. We are especially interested in the opportunities that biophysical data offer to increase our self-understanding. Advances in technology allow researchers to examine physiological responses to applied stimuli. Psychology, especially neuroscience, attempts to measure the human condition and the specifics of each human's experiences. As the precision of evaluative tools has increased, empirical evidence has been presented that questions the very possibility not only of knowledge, but also of accurate belief.[45] Although our techno-empirical efforts of observation may increase the data available for evaluation, these efforts have not necessarily effectively increased our meaningful self-knowledge. Despite all the tools at our disposal and all the time that has been invested, we do not seem to understand ourselves any better than did our predecessors, nor do we seem any better at living a good life or at being happy (if happiness is actually the goal). Survey research, an example of a techno-empirical effort, suggests that human beings lack basic knowledge about both themselves and the world.[46] Neuroscientific experiments show a disconnect between what human beings think they are doing and experiencing, and what their brain imagery suggests. Machine-mediated experiments reveal a distinction between the reasoned responses humans provide regarding how they believe that they experience

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stimuli and the evidence that is suggested in our bodies. The proliferation of self-help books, of varying quality and assistance, indicates that many people seem to be searching for something that they do not yet have. We, as human beings using only self-examination, do not seem especially skilled at knowing our own selves.

HACKING THE HUMAN CONDITION: ENTER BIG DATA

Perhaps our lack of objective data is the reason that human beings struggle to acquire accurate self-knowledge. Knowledge is contingent on the quality of one's information. Online technologies are premised on the belief that better (and more) data will yield better conclusions. Big data promises to collect our behaviors and preferences so that we can accurately observe our actions, predilections, choices, and values. Proponents argue that, unlike our own self-reporting, big data is not aspirational: it does not reflect our, often incorrect, understanding of ourselves; it reflects what we actually do. It is true, however, that many digital apps involve an element of self-reporting. Since we seek patterns that help us to understand both ourselves and the world, we relate what is happening, and our expectation for what will happen, to what we think has happened. For most of human history, we were limited in our ability to collect data. We had our own patently subjective experiences of the world and whatever lessons we could systematically glean from history. Big data promises to provide a larger, systematic sample for our analysis of ourselves and other human beings.[47]

Digital technologies are touted as a more objective means of understanding human behavior and human desires than are human-mediated forms of analysis. Erez Aiden and Jean-Baptiste Michel liken computer-assisted data analysis to glasses or microscopes. Big data helps human beings to see patterns with increased precision.[48] Computer algorithms reveal patterns that are invisible to humans through the naked eye or through unassisted human reason. As Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths believe, "Living by the wisdom of computer science . . . unlike most advice, [is] backed up by proof."[49] Advocates argue that big data offers "a new vocabulary for the world around us, and a chance to learn something truly new about ourselves."[50]

The benefits of big data are well documented. Big data allows human beings to examine significantly more data in a shorter period of time than would be possible without computer assistance. The benefits of big data are evident in the study of the universe, nature, and medicine. In political science, big data provides sources for unprecedented research.[51] As a result of big data, researchers are able to see complicated trends in areas such as policing,

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policy preferences, voter behavior, representative action, and judicial decision-making.[52] The analysis of big data allows us to see patterns and relationships that are not easily visible to human beings and then, theoretically, apply our new knowledge to the creation of better public policies.

There is a common belief that digital data is more easily obtained, maintained, and analyzed than is non-digital information,[53] and that more observations reveal more accurate results: "Statisticians count on large numbers to balance out anomalies."[54] If the sample is too small, the results are less accurate. Statistical validity suggests that the larger the sample, the more accurate the results, as long as the observations remain consistent and are not erroneously included in order to increase sample size. Human beings seem to believe incorrectly that if we want more accurate results, we simply need more data.[55] Big data, however, is no different than any other methodological approach to improve human understanding. Human beings need to be as critical of data-driven results as they are of qualitative or anecdotal results.

Digital technologies have turned humans into data-generating beings. Embedded within every online technology is a record of use. Internet-based technologies are "part of the invisible communication sphere which surrounds us now."[56] Daniel Solove states, "The past few decades have witnessed a dramatic transformation in the way we shop, bank, and go about our daily business—changes that have resulted in an unprecedented proliferation of records and data."[57] In 2005, roughly 16 percent of the world population had access to and used the internet; by 2016, over 50 percent of the world population had access to and regularly used the internet; in North America, roughly 89 percent of the current population has regular access to the internet.[58] Solove explains that as a result of our online activities and the information stored online about us, we accumulate "digital dossiers," detailed records of all our online and offline activities.[59]

The proliferation of online access has given rise to countless online applications. While the explicit purpose of many of these applications is to increase the ease of our interpersonal transactions by tracking our interests and the products that we believe we need or want, it is not clear that these companies are actually retaining information for the benefit of their customers.[60] The most frequently visited sites in the United States are Google, YouTube, Facebook, and Amazon;[61] in Canada, Amazon is less popular.[62] Digital technologies are not simply a source of information for the user, but also a source of information about the user. Nothing that an individual does on the internet is entirely anonymous. Even incognito browsing, while preventing a website from accessing or tracking your information, does not prevent your service provider from accessing or tracking your behavior. Some companies are more forthcoming with their tracking policies than are others.

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Google, as of February 2016, reports over one billion active monthly users, which is more than double the number of active monthly users reported in 2012.[63] Nearly one-third of all worldwide internet users have a Gmail account.[64] According to Google's privacy statement, Google saves user information in order to improve the user experience. It maintains the following demographic information: "Name, Email Address and password, Birthday, Gender, Phone Number, [and] Country"; it records all the "Emails you send and receive on Gmail, Contacts you add, Calendar events, Photos and videos you upload, Docs, Sheets, [and] Slides on Drive."[65] Google also saves all typed and voiced searches, links clicked (including ads), pages visited, videos watched, as well as location and internet protocol (IP) information, which is the unique identification number of each internet capable device.[66] While it is possible to turn off some of these features, Chrome, Google's industry-leading web browser, tracks, by default, all its users' online activities.[67]

Amazon is the largest online retailer. It is a marketplace for buyers and sellers. Some of the products are sold directly through Amazon, while other products are sold through third parties. Amazon, much like Google, is aware that users "care how information . . . is used and shared."[68] According to Amazon's web page, "The information we learn from customers helps us personalize and continually improve your Amazon experience."[69] Amazon retains information that is provided by users, including "when you search, buy, post, participate in a contest or questionnaire, or communicate with customer service," as well as any data that users input, including email addresses, phone numbers, and street addresses (both billing and mailing). It also maintains records of the videos that you watch; reviews that you post; questionnaires or contests, reviews, and alerts that you sign up for, along with your personal information, profile pictures, "and financial information, including Social Security and driver's license numbers."[70] In addition, it captures IP and computer information (browser type, operating system, plugins, and cookies). Amazon claims not to sell user information, but does share it with third parties, affiliates, and law enforcement (when necessary).[71]

Although some may view this pervasive data collection as benign, since it, of course, is intended to benefit the individual, the comprehensiveness of the collected information is alarming if one considers the ways in which this personal data can be used and by whom: your contacts, the frequency with which you send and receive email, your email content, everything (even those embarrassing things) that you have ever searched, all the links that you have ever clicked, every picture that you have posted, every video that you have watched, the content in each of your documents, the events and activities listed on your Google calendar, and all the items that you have purchased or searched and have had shipped to yourself or to other people. In isolation,

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much of this information is likely trivial and, in fact, can even benefit the individual; however, in the aggregate, all this data presents a detailed picture of your online behavior, as well as your offline behavior, such as where you go and with whom you spend time.

Most individuals do not contemplate the amount of data that they are creating when using online technologies. Aiden and Michel provide a clear explanation of the amount of data the average person produced in 2013:

> Right now, the average person's data footprint—the annual amount of data produced worldwide, per capita—is just a little short of one terabyte. That's equivalent to about eight trillion yes-or-no questions. As a collective, that means humanity produces five zettabytes of data every year: 40,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (forty sextillion) bits.[72]

Since the amount of data that is produced doubles every two years, this number is already inaccurate (and low).[73]

The volume of personal data that human beings generate is, in one respect, irrelevant; only once personal data can be studied systematically does it become both useful and informative. Machine-assisted programs use algorithms to study data systematically. What is an algorithm? Simply defined, "An algorithm is just a finite sequence of steps used to solve a problem, and algorithms are much broader—and older by far—than a computer. Long before algorithms were ever used by machines, they were used by people."[74] In the context of big data, an algorithm is the set of steps used by a computer to accomplish a task.

Critics of big data cite concerns about (1) applicability and (2) privacy. Those critics contend that algorithms are often "self-perpetuating" and that the models come to "define their own reality and . . . to justify their results."[75] Data analysis may not actually yield results that correspond to the specific questions that are being studied. Roger Scruton discusses this particular issue in his analysis of neuroscience. Scruton explains that researchers become attached to a particular method of inquiry and that their preferred method becomes more essential than the results. Any question that cannot be studied by a particular researcher's preferred method is either abandoned or altered to fit the method.[76] In the case of big data, many advocates argue that as more refined algorithms are developed, more precise human concerns can be analyzed. Yet, many human concerns do not easily lend themselves to algorithms.

There is a prevailing belief that data does not lie. However, the results of an algorithm are only as accurate as the data available and the specificity of the model. Without a doubt, "many poisonous assumptions are camouflaged by

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math and go largely untested and unquestioned."[77] Many social and political policy issues are now decided using mathematical models:

> Increasingly, the data-crunching machines are sifting through our data on their own, searching for our habits and hopes, fears and desires. With machine learning, a fast-growing domain of artificial intelligence, the computer dives into the data, following only basic instructions. The algorithm finds patterns on its own, and then, through time, connects them with outcomes. In a sense, it learns.[78]

Many people now regard mathematical results that are evidenced by statistics and graphical representations as accurate, despite the fact that most of us do not (1) understand which data is collected, (2) how the data is collected, or (3) how that data is analyzed.[79] Many individuals regard mathematical outputs as "dictates from the algorithmic god."[80] Yuval Noah Harari argues that we are living in the age of "dataism."[81] In "its extreme form, proponents of the Dataist worldview perceive the entire universe as a flow of data, see organisms as little more than biochemical algorithms and believe that humanity's cosmic vocation is to create an all-encompassing data-processing system—and then merge into it."[82]

DIGITAL NATIVES

In "The Perfect Match," Sai and his neighbor Jenny, Liu's protagonists, are digital natives. Like most individuals who "were born after 1980, when social and digital technologies, such as Usenet and bulletin board systems came online,"[83] they "have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age."[84] Digital natives not only accept online technologies as "integral parts of their lives,"[85] but also "live much of their lives online, without distinguishing between the online and offline."[86] As a result of their early exposure to online technologies, digital natives "think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors."[87] Marc Prensky, who coined the term "digital native" in 2001, explains:

> Digital Natives are used to receiving information really fast. They like to parallel process and multi-task. They prefer their graphics before their text rather than the opposite. They prefer random access (like hypertext). They function best when networked. They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to "serious" work.[88]

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In contrast to their predecessors, digital natives

> are joined by a set of common practices, including the amount of time they spend using digital technologies, their tendency to multitask, their tendency to express themselves and relate to one another in ways mediated by digital technologies, and their pattern of using the technologies to access and use information and create new knowledge and art forms.[89]

John Palfrey and Urs Gasser acknowledge the distinctions between digital natives and digital immigrants—those individuals who were not raised with online technologies. Online technologies, they explain, offer unique arenas of human interaction and provide distinct measures of human popularity, success, and contentment.

While there have always been questions regarding the potential effects of new stimulants and new media, concern about the internet is different in both kind and degree. Over the last thirty years, online technologies have become a new type of stimulant with an unprecedented degree of pervasiveness.[90] Marshall McLuhan, writing about the implications of television in the 1960s, argues that it is the medium that influences our acquisition of knowledge.[91] Since we tend to focus on the content of our media, we ignore the structural influences that the medium has on our social and political behaviors.[92] If early exposure to different types of stimulants changes the ways in which we interact with other individuals and the world around us, it stands to reason that we also develop different expectations and concerns about the world. Unlike Sai, Jenny did not grow up in the United States, but rather in China. Digital technology, in Jenny's experience, is a tool of government surveillance and a means to oppress citizens. Jenny understands surveillance and privacy in a more nuanced way than does Sai.

When we first meet Sai, he is not alone. Sai is never alone; Tilly is always with him, involved in every aspect of his life. Tilly, however, is not human; she is electronic. She speaks to Sai "from the camera/speaker in the nightstand,"[93] from his phone, or through an earpiece. Sai has allowed Tilly complete access to his life. Sai, like other digital natives, is part of "a 24/7 network that blends the human with the technical to a degree we haven't experienced before."[94] While we come to know Tilly as a part of Sai's life, everyone who uses the Centillion operating system has his or her own version of Tilly.

Like other PIAs, "Tilly is very good at detecting patterns."[95] In order to "make the best life recommendations,"[96] Tilly must "have complete knowledge of [her user]."[97] Incomplete data compromises the accuracy of the algorithm. Individuals willingly provide Tilly access to all their information and activities, since "in order to make the best life recommendations, [Tilly]

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need[s] to have complete knowledge."[98] Tilly is "like having the world's best assistant."[99] She provides dating advice, leisure recommendations, and financial planning. As the story progresses and Sai learns more about Tilly, he comes to realize that "*Tilly doesn't just tell you what you want. She tells you what to* think."[100] Through Tilly, Centillion curates all the information that is filtered to the individual and monitors each individual's behavior in return.

Unlike Sai who has fully embraced the digital lifestyle, Jenny resists. She is part of a small, but active group of individuals who "have all sworn to destroy Centillion."[101] Jenny "refuses to use Centillion email or get a ShareAll account because [she is] afraid of having 'the computer' know 'all [her] business.'"[102] Jenny uses a voice modulator to disguise her speech patterns, wears baggy coats to disguise her frame and gait, and has draped the walls of her car and apartment with "fine metal mesh" in order to prevent digital surveillance.[103] Unbeknownst to Sai, Jenny has become Sai's neighbor in order to use him to gain access to Centillion's mainframe. Although Sai initially believes that Jenny is a "freak,"[104] their friendship develops.

After he meets Jenny, Sai changes. He begins to see Tilly, Centillion, and his own actions in a different light. In advance of a date with Ellen, a woman who has been vetted and selected for him by Tilly, Sai is excited to study the dossier that Tilly has compiled on Ellen and to purchase flowers for Ellen with one of Tilly's coupons. Tilly not only knows Sai, but also knows everyone who uses her services. While on their date, both Sai and Ellen are being counseled by their own versions of Tilly through their earpieces. Despite the fact that a computer-mediated date ought to be perfect, Sai turns off Tilly. Perhaps as a result of his previous interaction with Jenny, Sai now believes that he is "*being treated like a child*."[105] While he once viewed Tilly's recommendations as helpful, he now appears to regard them as intrusive. Although Sai admits, "Tilly was right. Ellen was exactly his type,"[106] he nonetheless is bored in Ellen's company. Something is missing. One's perfect match may not actually be one's most desired partner.[107]

The interaction between Ellen and Sai points to the subjective complexities of human desire, courtship, love, sex, and companionship. While the "unsuccessful" date between Sai and Ellen is not a focal point of the narrative, it is a reminder of our most human desires. In the age of the PIA, is there room for excitement and uncertainty? According to Centillion's dating algorithm, "Tilly seemed to have found the perfect match for him,"[108] as if we are all blob halves, as Aristophanes suggests in Plato's *Symposium*, waiting to be reunited with our other halves.[109] Sai's boredom, however, reveals that human beings long not simply for perfection, but also for a challenge. Sai has read Ellen's dossier, and Ellen has likely read Sai's dossier: "It was as if they already knew everything there was to know about each other. There were no surprises, no thrill of finding the truly new."[110] Perhaps the lack of excitement

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between Sai and Ellen, coupled with chemistry, helps explain the reasons that Sai is instead attracted to Jenny.

John Stuart Mill suggests that satisfaction requires "tranquility and excitement. With much tranquility, many find that they can be content with very little pleasure: with much excitement, many can reconcile themselves to a considerable quantity of pain."[111] These two requirements, he notes, are not mutually exclusive: "Since the two are so far from being incompatible that they are in natural alliance, the prolongation of either being a preparation for, and exciting a wish for, the other."[112] Sai and Ellen's match has neither excitement nor uncertainty. The example of Sai and Ellen's date in Liu's story raises a question: could Centillion effectively program uncertainty into its matches? There are at least two clear reasons that algorithmically derived uncertainty is insufficient for Sai: first, he knows that the uncertainty has been curated and is, therefore, not authentic, and second, whoever is selected also has to be discontent with Tilly's intervention. Curated uncertainty is just the illusion of excitement, challenge, and choice.

Jenny is neither curated nor has she been vetted. She is an independent thinker with a plan: "We're going to kill Tilly."[113] Jenny has access to a virus that will "create new, fake profiles," thereby compromising the validity of Centillion's data.[114] She convinces Sai to insert a thumb drive into a Centillion laptop. The next morning, Sai and Jenny are abducted. Sai is awakened by "four burly, very serious men."[115] Despite Sai's request, Tilly does not call the police, as she is sure "these men are here to help [him]."[116] Tilly's refusal to summon the police indicates that she is not actually working for Sai; rather, she is a tool of Centillion, promoting the interests of the company over those of the individual user. Sai is then taken by these men to a meeting with "Christian Rinn, Founder and Executive Chairman of Centillion."[117]

Liu encourages the reader to root for Sai and Jenny. "The Perfect Match" is a classic story of the underdog. Although they "got pretty close. . . . Closer than almost anyone," Sai and Jenny not only fail to destroy Centillion, but, as a result of their actions, help the company become even stronger.[118] It is Jenny who asks the futile question: "What was the mistake that gave us away?"[119] In fact, they have made no specific mistake. Centillion has been monitoring Sai and Jenny since their first meeting. As Rinn explains, when Sai turns off his phone, it is marked as an anomalous event by Tilly. All of Jenny's precautions—her refusal to use Centillion products, her makeshift internet connection, and her Faraday Bag—are useless. Centillion accesses the accelerometer on Sai's phone, even though it is turned-off, and uses it to "detec[t] and recor[d] the vibrations from . . . typing . . . and [since] it's possible to reconstruct what someone was typing based on the vibration patterns alone," Centillion is able to create a transcript of Sai and Jenny's conversation.[120] While eavesdropping on civilians is not the original use of the technology—"It's an old technology . . .

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developed for catching terrorists and drug dealers"[121]—it can now be applied to different purposes. Once the phone is in the room, regardless of whether it is on or off, it is still recording all the information. Consequently, as Rinn explains, "the right alert algorithms were triggered, and we focused surveillance."[122] Centillion "parked a traffic observation vehicle a block away and trained a little laser on Jenny's window."[123] Centillion is aware of the pair's plan from the start. Jenny and Sai are allowed to proceed so that they can provide more data to Centillion. From their unsuccessful attempt to crash Centillion's mainframe, Centillion learns both about the gaps in its security and about user dissatisfaction with the algorithm. The Centillion Corporation can now improve its algorithm and increase its users' satisfaction. Neither Jenny nor Sai are punished. In fact, Centillion relies on individuals like Sai and Jenny to reveal the limitations of its program.

In many respects, Centillion has created a high-tech version of Max Weber's "iron cage"—although the rational-scientific approach to the world is intended to free us from the irrationality of myth and religion and to protect us from ignorance and injustice, it has become an all-encompassing social and political system from which we cannot escape. With the tools of technology, Rinn has further entrenched the spirit of capitalism. Weber's concerns regarding "machine production" in the Industrial Age are exacerbated by digital technologies.[124] The lives of individuals who are born under Centillion's reach are "now bound to the technical and economic [and even social] conditions" that Centillion controls.[125] Centillion's power, similarly to Weber's iron cage, is inescapable. Unless one is willing to forgo completely all modern, digital amenities, as well as forfeit one's ability to work, socialize, communicate, and learn, it is impossible to live off the grid and avoid Centillion's detection.

Liu leads his readers to believe that "The Perfect Match" is a love story. It is not about Sai and Ellen, nor is it is about Sai and Jenny. Rather, "The Perfect Match" examines the ethos of ubiquitous technology, and, therefore, the love story may involve Sai and Tilly (or Centillion). But this is certainly not a love story, and there is no happy ending. Ultimately, Liu suggests that escape from digital technology is futile. At the end of the story, Jenny and Sai are offered jobs by Centillion. All "statistical systems require feedback—something to tell them when they're off track. Statisticians use errors to train their models and make them smarter."[126] In the age of ubiquitous technology, all errors and anomalies must be removed and the program must be improved in order to prevent similar errors and anomalies in the future. Sai and Jenny are statistical errors, and their rebellion merely helps Centillion improve its model. With their assistance, Christian Rinn explains, Centillion can make its program stronger, more efficient, and more adaptive: "It's the perfect match" for Centillion.[127] Jenny and Sai attempt to beat Centillion. They endeavor to hide from the company's surveillance and defeat its algorithms, but Centillion

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is too powerful, too pervasive, and too dominant to be defeated by any of its users. Adaptive technology responds to and learns from its interactions with users. It is continually evolving to become more perfect. Sai and Jenny fight a perfect match and lose. They overestimate their own freedom and underestimate their opponent. Like Sai and Jenny, most of us do not even begin to understand the intrinsic nature and pervasive capacity of the technologies that we use every day.

SURVEILLANCE AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

One of the primary reasons Sai and Jenny are unable to defeat Centillion is that Centillion knows what they are planning to do, even before they know what they are planning to do.[128] All their precautions to remain "unobserved" register as deviant behavior and signal to Centillion that they are a potential threat. Individual human beings have no real power against Centillion. Unless one argues that there ought to be absolutely no surveillance in society, two issues regarding surveillance must be resolved: first, where, how, and how often an individual is to be observed; and second, who is to be the observer and to what end. After all, in his discussion of the commonwealth, Thomas Hobbes explains that in a political community, it is *necessary* to watch one's neighbors.[129]

Sai likens Centillion's surveillance program to a panopticon: Centillion has "turned the whole world into a Panopticon and all the people in it into obedient puppets that [they] nudge this way and that just so [they] make more money."[130] In his seventeenth-century analysis of penitentiaries, Jeremy Bentham recommends a panopticon: an architectural design that allows the guards to view any inmate at any time.[131] Each inmate is aware that he or she could potentially be under constant surveillance, but does not know, for a fact, that he or she is actually being watched. An inmate, therefore, always behaves as though he or she were being observed. Bentham's panopticon, however, is intended for an incarcerated population, not for civilians. Michel Foucault explains the purpose of the panopticon: "To induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."[132] The panopticon, therefore, can be used for experiments, or for observation and manipulation. Foucault argues that the model of the panopticon is no longer confined to penitentiaries, but now extends to civilian populations.[133]

Digital technologies, since they permeate almost all aspects of human life, create a virtual panopticon. Unlike Bentham's inmates, many contemporary users of digital technologies seem unaware or unconcerned that their activities are recorded. Foucault's warning is unheeded. Some of our data is willingly provided for public (or semi-public) consumption, including photos, posts, tweets, and check-ins. Some of our data is uploaded for personal benefit,

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such as any personal tracking that is done, including exercise information, weight, caloric intake, or sleep patterns. There is also all the data connected to and included in our texts, Skypes, and emails (sent and received, including content), as well as geographic and tracking data from online map programs (which record movement, stops, duration of travel, and what is passed along the way). There is data from your phone that includes wherever your phone is (and by extension you are). There is a record of everything you purchase online or search for online. There is a digital record of everything you purchase with a credit card or debit card, or through PayPal or money transfers. All new cars include tracking information about location, speed, and stops. Facial recognition data tracks you throughout your day in most major cities (even though it is unable to distinguish certain types of faces).[134] Any record about you is stored online, including health records. If a physical person were actually to follow us around all day cataloging such information, we would panic. Even though "at no time in human history has information about a young person—or anyone, for that matter—been more freely and publicly accessible," many of us are largely ambivalent.[135]

At the outset of Liu's story, Sai distinguishes between government surveillance and corporate surveillance. We tend to be vigilant about political freedom. Socrates warns about the decline of a democracy into a tyranny.[136] In agreement with Socrates, Alexis de Tocqueville shows how those who inhabit democratic countries ought to protect against tyranny.[137] While Americans tend to be concerned about government surveillance, they are less vigilant when it comes to corporations.[138] The liberal democratic model of government involves a fear of authority, but not necessarily a fear of industry. In general, human beings are less concerned when they are watched by a company than when they are watched by a government.[139] Adam Smith's presentation in *The Wealth of Nations* makes this point clear: free market economies will self-regulate.[140] Sai, who is raised in America, fears government but not corporations, as he explains to Jenny soon after they meet:

> *Centillion* is not some big scary government. It's a private company, whose motto happens to be 'Make things better!' Just because you want to live in the dark ages doesn't mean the rest of us shouldn't enjoy the benefits of ubiquitous computing.[141]

Sai believes that Centillion is concerned with making his life better and is working in his best interests. Jenny's response to his admission is an important reminder about the nature of power:

> Surveillance is surveillance. I can never understand why some people think it matters whether it's the government doing it to you or a company. These days,

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> Centillion is bigger than governments. Remember it managed to topple three countries' governments just because they dared to ban Centillion within their borders.[142]

Regardless of whether one is surveilled by the government or by a private company, being watched is being watched.

Evgeny Morozov details how big data endangers democracy. He contends that private corporations and governments can no longer be viewed as distinct entities and suggests that they are working in concert.[143] As technological expertise becomes more necessary for the management of politics, Morozov explains, governments are advised by technocrats and eventually will be run by technocrats. Big data will enable the merging of "the messy stuff of coalition-building, bargaining, and deliberation with the cleanliness and efficiency of data-powered administration."[144] There must be a balance, Morozov argues, between too little and too much privacy.

THE ECONOMICS OF BIG DATA

Even though Sai is not initially concerned that his data will be used for nefarious purposes, Tilly certainly influences Sai's behavior. On the morning that we meet him, Sai would like "to make his own coffee" before he goes to work and asks Tilly if he has time to do so.[145] Although he does have time, she suggests that he purchase a smoothie instead; she even provides a coupon. Tilly is in the business of making suggestions. For example, Tilly provides him with a coupon to purchase flowers for Ellen and suggests he take Ellen to a specific dessert restaurant for which she can provide him another coupon.[146] Later in the story, Tilly suggests that he go kickboxing to manage his aggression; again she offers him a coupon.[147] It seems likely that Centillion has agreements with the smoothie company, the flower company, the dessert restaurant, and the kickboxing gym (or it may even own these establishments, a trend we see with organizations such as Amazon and Google). It is in Centillion's interest to filter the information that Tilly provides to Sai; Tilly encourages Sai to frequent certain establishments and provides incentives to do so. Sai drinks a smoothie, and Centillion likely receives a monetary benefit.

Data collection and analysis is big business.[148] The results of human behavior are commoditized. We are, as Martin Heidegger has predicted, standing reserves.[149] Companies such as Centillion have the opportunity to collect and organize individuals' data and sell it to marketing departments. Many companies are interested in information about their consumers. The more detailed the data is, the more refined the marketing strategy and product development initiatives can be. It is in the interest of companies to learn about possible

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consumers: "Centillion is in the business of organizing information, and that requires choices, directions, inherent subjectivity."[150]

INCREASED DATA, BETTER ALGORITHMS, MORE PERFECT MATCHES

Liu's short story is a reminder that we must critically consider the ways in which each of us interacts with technology. As Liu suggests, technology is neutral, how we use it is what matters. Sai is completely dependent on technology: "Without Tilly, [Sai] can't do [his] job, [he] can't remember [his] life, [he] can't even call [his] mother."[151] Without technology, many of us would be unable to contact our friends and family, access basic personal information, or complete basic tasks.

Christian Rinn represents the voice of the future. We are, he explains, past the point of no return:

> We are now a race of cyborgs. We long ago began to spread our minds into the electronic realm, and it is no longer possible to squeeze all of ourselves back into our brains. The electronic copies of yourselves that you wanted to destroy are, in a literal sense, actually you.[152]

It is impossible, as Jenny's example shows, to live off the grid and unsurveilled. Digital technology has infiltrated every aspect of human existence: "The genie has long left the bottle."[153] Human beings made machines, and now the machines will make us.[154] Many people believe that because computers and algorithms are human designed, they are also human controlled. Although we may not have digital implants, we are digital dependents. In the hypothetical fight between Jean-Jacques Rousseau's natural man and civilized man, civilized man is weakened by technology.[155] Rousseau's teaching resonates even more in our own time. In order to be social, productive, or even employed, modern human beings require technological interventions; as a result, we must create a digital footprint. We are, in many ways, physically enervated by our digital dependence, as we spend more time online and less time outdoors. We become socially isolated from actual human beings, as we spend more time digitally communicating. We become more searchable and accessible, as we produce more information that can be used by others. As our online activity increases, we become increasingly dependent on the technologies that we use and on the corporations that produce them. Liu does not reveal whether or not either Sai or Jenny accepts Centillion's offer of employment. Instead, he leaves his readers with a warning: "In the face of the inevitable, the only choice is to adapt."[156] In "The Perfect Match,"

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Liu suggests that human beings have compromised freedom and privacy for the promise of comfort and ease. We are left to consider whether or not big data is a threat to human freedom and human autonomy, and whether or not ubiquitous digital technologies actually threaten the foundations of liberal democracy.

The ease and comfort that digital technologies afford are both socially and politically pernicious and illusory. First, true friendship and meaningful political engagement require both vulnerability and sacrifice. Second, efforts at self-improvement require that we recognize a lack in our own actions, characters, or knowledge. That lack must be something we value enough to want to remedy. Improvement of oneself is not an easy or comfortable process: it is painful and unpleasant. All personal improvement, all knowledge, and all political change require that one "mov[e] against the ordinary course of nature."[157] Third, the health of any democracy is contingent on the ability of citizens to make political decisions that are in both their own interests and the interests of the whole. If we lack meaningful knowledge about ourselves, our democracy and our freedom are in jeopardy.

In order truly to improve the human experience and relieve the human condition, we need to understand the human experience and what relief entails. Data does not seem to help us meaningfully reflect on this philosophic question: what does it mean to live a good life? Further, while data may help provide us with insights to particular behaviors, it does not necessarily help us better understand ourselves. Self-knowledge and self-understanding require the labor of examining one's self. Infographics and digital outputs may provide us with answers, but cannot identify the questions (let alone the value, logic, and limits of the response). Our humanness seems to be tied to the actual efforts that are involved in examining our behaviors and our most deeply held beliefs. There is no online application or digital interface that can help us better understand ourselves in a fundamental way. While we may willingly relinquish our freedom and grant digital platforms (and the corporations and governments that own them) access to private information about ourselves, we do not gain truly meaningful self-knowledge in return. There is no easy way to hack the human condition.

NOTES

1. Ken Liu, "The Perfect Match," in *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* (New York: Saga Press, 2016), 26. All references to "The Perfect Match" are reproduced with the permission of Ken Liu. I am thankful to the Institute for Humane Studies for their financial support in securing copyright permissions. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the "Flattering the Demos" workshop at Concordia

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University (2017). Special thanks to Kimberly Hale, Bruce Peabody, and Frances Ratner for their helpful comments on this chapter.

2. Liu, “The Perfect Match,” 39.
3. Ibid., 29.
4. Ibid., 45.
5. Ibid., 46.
6. Ibid., 37.
7. Ibid., 48.
8. Ibid., 47. Rinn remains silent on the alternative; Centillion is also able to amplify the voices of strongmen and dictators and suppress the voices of those who oppose them.
9. Ibid.
10. Liu, “The Perfect Match,” 47.
11. Ibid., 26.
12. Ibid., 27.
13. Ibid., 29.
14. Ibid., 32.
15. Ibid., 48.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 27.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 42.
20. Ibid., 35.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 40.
23. Ibid., 46.
24. Ibid., 48.
25. Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. Joe Sachs, 2nd edition (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 1999), 1028a.
26. Plato, “Apology of Socrates,” in *Four Texts on Socrates: Plato’s Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito and Aristophanes’ Clouds,* trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West, 1st edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 38a5–6. Socrates makes this statement during his trial after he has been found guilty. The statement is a clear indication that he would rather die than leave Athens and be forced to live a life in exile.
27. Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins, reprint edition (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2012), 1166a–1167a.
28. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, 2nd edition (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1998), 3 and 60. Machiavelli indicates that he has undertaken this program of study himself and recommends it to all princes.
29. Bacon introduces the Idols of the Mind in Aphorism 23 of *New Organon*. The primary discussion of the Idols occurs between Aphorisms 38 and 69. The theme of self-knowledge occurs throughout *Essays*. As an example, in the twenty-third essay, “Of Wisdom for a Man’s Self,” Bacon commands each reader: “Be so true to thyself.”

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Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, eds. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, 14 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, reprinted in 2011), *New Organon* 4:52–70; "Of Wisdom for a Man's Self" 6:432.

30. René Descartes, "Meditation Two: Concerning the Nature of the Human Mind: That it is Better Known Than the Body," in *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 4th edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 63–69.

31. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), Introduction, 4–5.

32. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 514a–520a.

33. Bacon, *New Organon*, Aphorism 53, 4:59.

34. Jacob Klein, "The Idea of Liberal Education," in *Jacob Klein: Lectures and Essays*, eds. Robert B. Williamson and Elliott Zuckerman (Annapolis: St. John's College Press, 1985), 157–170.

35. Disentangling the human cognitive process is the subject of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996).

36. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, in *Aristotle VIII: On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath*, trans. W. S. Hett (London: Loeb Classica Library, 1986), 429a10–430a9.

37. Liu, "The Perfect Match," 29.

38. The difficulty (or incredulity) of realizing this claim is the motivation for John Rawls's thought experiment: the veil of ignorance. According to John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions," which necessitates that no individual will lose freedom so that "a greater good [of freedom may be] shared by others" (3–4). In a well-ordered society, according to Rawls, "(1) everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, and (2) the basic social institutions generally satisfy and are known to satisfy these principles" (5). Yet, Rawls concedes that "existing societies are of course seldom well-ordered in this sense, for what is just and unjust is usually in dispute" (5). As a theoretical solution, although a practical impossibility, Rawls proposes the veil of ignorance, under which all individuals are unaware of "how the various [political and policy] alternatives will affect their own particular case and [as a consequence] they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations" (136). Under the veil of ignorance, individuals have the knowledge and capacity to evaluate different policy alternatives, yet do not know the precise ways that they will be affected by their choices. The presumption, then, is that individuals will make decisions that are in the best interests of all individuals and the society as a whole, since no individual will select an alternative in which he or she would not want to live. In the end, Rawls's veil of ignorance clearly calls to question the very possibility of liberal democracy, since the only way that individuals will make just political choices is if they do not know how they will personally be affected.

39. Liu, "The Perfect Match," 46.

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40. Plato, *Republic*, 359c–360d.

41. Plato, *Republic*, 360b.

42. Saint Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. Timothy Fry (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), Ch. 7 and 46.

43. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* II.xvii.1–2.

44. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty,* in *Mill: The Spirit of the New Age, On Liberty, the Subjugation of Women,* ed. Alan Ryan (New York: Norton, 1997), Ch. 1 and 5.

45. Roger Scruton, "My Brain and I," *The New Atlantis* (spring 2014): 35–48.

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47. Ian Ayres, *Super Crunchers: Why Thinking-by-Numbers is the New Way to Be Smart*, 1st edition (New York: Bantam, 2007).

48. Erez Aiden and Jean-Baptiste Michel, *Uncharted: Big Data as a Lens on Human Culture*, reprint edition (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014), 5–8.

49. Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths, *Algorithms to Live By: The Computer Science of Human Decisions* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2016), 6.

50. Christian and Griffiths, *Algorithms to Live By*, 7.

51. As an example, see Burt L. Monroe, Jennifer Pan, Margaret E. Roberts, Maya Sen, and Betsy Sinclair, "No! Formal Theory, Causal Inference, and Big Data are Not Contradictory Trends in Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 48 (2015): 71–74. Also see Niels Goet, "What Big Data Can Teach Political Scientists," *OXPOL: The Oxford University Politics Blog*, accessed March 23, 2017, http://blog.politics.ox.ac.uk/big-data-can-teach-political-scientists.

52. Cathy O'Neil's book, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown, 2016), addresses this particular issue. Also see Tafari Mbadiwe, "Algorithmic Injustice," *The New Atlantis* (winter 2018): 3–28.

53. Aiden and Michel, *Uncharted*, 12.

54. O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction,* 6.

55. Nate Silver, *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—but Some Don't*, 1st edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2015).

56. Jayne Gackenbach, "Introduction," in *Psychology and the Internet: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Transpersonal Implications*, 2nd edition, ed. Jayne Gackenbach (New York: Elsevier, 2007), 1.

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58. "World Internet Users Statistics and 2016 World Population Stats," accessed February 7, 2017, http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm; "Global Internet Usage," *Wikipedia*, accessed January 18, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Global_Internet_usage&oldid=760720724.

59. Solove, *The Digital Person*, 1–10.

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60. Consider the recent Facebook and Cambridge Analytica scandals. Kevin Granville, "Facebook and Cambridge Analytics: What You Need to Know as Fall-out Widens," *The New York Times*, accessed March 21, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/19/technology/facebook-cambridge-analytica-explained.html.

61. "Top Sites in United States - Alexa," accessed February 7, 2017, http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/US.

62. "Top Sites in Canada - Alexa," accessed February 7, 2017, http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/CA.

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68. "Amazon Privacy Notice," accessed February 1, 2017, https://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=468496.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Aiden and Michel, *Uncharted*, 11.

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Chapter 3

Paolo Bacigalupi's "Pop Squad" and the Examined Life Worth Living

Kimberly Hurd Hale

Paolo Bacigalupi's 2006 short story "Pop Squad" presents a harrowing tale of a future world marked by environmental degradation, radical advancements in anti-aging medicine, and an absolute ban on human procreation.[1] Many of these themes are common to Bacigalupi's writings, most notably including his Hugo, Locus, Nebula, and John W. Campbell Memorial Award-winning novel *The Windup Girl* (2009). A rising star in the world of science fiction literature, Bacigalupi crafts haunting depictions of possible futures in which genetic modifications, transhumanist technologies, and the search for immortality force the reader to examine what it means to live a human life, and what it means for a human life to be worth living. This chapter places Bacigalupi's "Pop Squad" in conversation with political philosophy's greatest exploration of this subject, Plato's *Symposium*. If Socrates is correct in his famous assertion that "the unexamined life is not worth living,"[2] then it behooves teachers and students of political philosophy to make such an examination regularly, and determine what experiences, characteristics, or endeavors make a human life worthwhile. These issues have an added urgency in our own century in which humans and their technology, including the types of technologies Bacigalupi includes in this story, continue to interact, and even merge, in increasingly intimate ways.

"Pop Squad" opens at a crime scene. An unnamed detective, who will serve as our narrator, walks into an apartment teeming with unpleasant smells and sights. There is food on the floor, overflowing piles of garbage, a strong stench of rot and feces, and, most disconcerting to the detective, pregnant women, mothers, and children. According to the narrator, these women are physically disgusting. His obvious revulsion at the women's "fat thighs," "swaying breasts," and clothing "spackled with spaghetti remains"[3] offers the reader the first clue that, in this world, pregnancy is not venerated as a sacred

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condition, or even respected as a difficult, but necessary, biological process. Instead, in the world of "Pop Squad," pregnancy and motherhood are illegal. To be a mother in Bacigalupi's world is to possess a "furtive nasty life of rotting garbage and brief illicit forays into daylight."[4] The reader's true insight into this state of affairs comes moments later, after the women are arrested and the "crime" scene is secured. Women who choose to become pregnant, birth babies, and raise children, not only violate the state's most fundamental laws, but also irrationally reject its cultural norms and values. Thus, the women in Bacigalupi's opening scene are not only physical aberrations, they are social deviants. The narrator then performs his next task as a member of the pop squad efficiently and without fanfare: "I pull out my Grange. Their [the three children] heads kick back in successive jerks, bang, bang, bang down the line, holes appearing on their foreheads like paint and their brains spattering out the back."[5] Children are the dirty, illegal byproducts of the criminal act of procreation; as such, they are appropriately disposed.

As the story continues, the reasons for this shocking policy become clearer. The world as we know it in the early twenty-first century no longer exists. Environmental degradation and climate change have produced cataclysmic weather events, eliminating much of the habitable land on earth and dramatically changing the ecosystem.[6] Though the story is set in North America,[7] the landscape is dominated by the flora and fauna of a tropical jungle, mixed with towering skyscrapers, monuments to human engineering. As is the case in many contemporary metropolitan centers, in the imagined society of "Pop Squad," one's economic and social status can be partially determined by the height of one's domicile. The lower classes (and fugitive mothers) live "in the dark under wet jungle canopy" while our narrator and his friends live "up in the light and air" in gloriously sterile skyscrapers.[8] By all indications, habitable land is at a premium, and further overpopulation must be strictly guarded against.

Complicating this situation even further, the society of "Pop Squad" has developed a totally effective anti-aging serum called rejoo. Taken every eighteen months, rejoo halts aging immediately and completely. The characters in the story are described as anywhere from age nineteen to seventy. Rejoo was introduced to the population at large, meaning that once a person begins taking rejoo, he or she remains in a condition of physical stasis, no longer physically aging. Bacigalupi's rejoo innovation is unique in several respects to science fiction literature. Normally, societies that have halted the aging process are portrayed as uniformly young and beautiful.[9] This is not the case in "Pop Squad." Those, such as the narrator's girlfriend Alice, who were lucky enough to be young and beautiful when rejoo was developed will remain so. Everyone else, on the other hand, will have chosen to live indefinitely as middle-aged or elderly human beings, with all the attendant aches and pains.

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This innovation renders the society of "Pop Squad" more complicated, and nuanced, than is typically seen in such narratives. Bacigalupi's physically immutable subjects challenge the commonsense trope of age bringing wisdom: Does long life, in itself, bring wisdom? Or is wisdom somehow related to the physical aging and degeneration of the human body?[10] Is Aristotle correct that young people are not suited to study politics simply because they have not lived long enough?[11] Or is Aeschylus correct that "wisdom comes alone through suffering"?[12]

Rejoo is enormously popular (especially since it now comes in a Medicaid generic form[13]). Everyone from artistic geniuses to drug-addled degenerates sign up for immortality. The fact that Medicaid supplies rejoo to low-income citizens further suggests that it has become a standard of medical care. As in our own society, if healthcare practitioners are tasked with "doing no harm," and death has been classified as the ultimate harm, all human beings have the duty to prolong their own lives, and the lives of others, indefinitely. In fact, in our own society, choosing not to prolong one's life is seen as a sign of mental illness, and assisting a person who has chosen to die is classified as a criminal act. "Pop Squad" takes the consequences of this attitude toward mortality and dying to an extreme.

Since the vast majority of the population is not aging, and therefore will not die natural deaths, procreation is outlawed, with severe prejudice. Since human bodies are not aging, diseases in which age is a primary factor (heart disease, certain types of cancers) have likewise been eradicated from the society. It is also reasonable to extrapolate that a society that can cure aging will have also cured many other diseases and medical conditions. Though violent crime still exists in the society, and the narrator expresses concern about drug addicts called "nitheads" on several occasions, for the most part, citizens of this society will live indefinitely. Combined with the severe environmental degradation on display, it becomes clear that Earth is only capable of supporting a very limited population of human beings. In order to make room for new people, that is, children, existing people would have to voluntarily choose to die. The presence of the pop squad indicates a strong unwillingness on the part of citizens to participate in this generational cycle. While parents *might* choose to die for their children, most people simply are not willing to give up a coveted spot in this immortal city.

In his writing, both in general and especially with regard to "Pop Squad," Bacigalupi offers no easy moral resolutions to his dystopian futures. Yes, the reader should be horrified at the casual execution of babies and toddlers. But Bacigalupi also explores whether the potential social and intellectual returns produced by immortality without aging represent a satisfying tradeoff for such brutality. Rejoo has made it possible for humanity to achieve astounding heights in the fields of science and art. Those touched by genius

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now have the ability to continue their work indefinitely, spurring one another to greater heights of achievement through collaboration and competition, without end. Alice, the narrator's long-term girlfriend, is one such person. She is introduced as giving a virtuoso viola performance, a piece she has been practicing for fifteen years. The performance is declared a monumental success, as composer, conductor, and violinist have spent decades perfecting a single piece of music.[14]

At the symphony's afterparty, it is further noted that the composer's archrival, Banini, has no current response to the masterful performance, but will surely develop one in time. The hostess, Maria Iloni, declares, "I expect the next eighty years are ours! And Alice's!"[15] The partygoers can look forward to centuries of witnessing these rivals spur each other to ever greater artistic heights. The party itself takes place in a beautiful mansion, whose garden is a masterpiece of art and time. The landscaping is a forest of century-old bonsai sculpted by the hostess's partner. He spends his life studying the branches, and "occasionally, perhaps every few years, wiring a branch and guiding it in a new direction."[16] In our current world, such projects would have to be multigenerational. The idea of building on the legacy of past artists has its own charm, of course. However, anyone who has endeavored to create something ambitious and beautiful, with a singular vision, would see the vast appeal of having infinite time to achieve perfection. Usually, literature addressing immortality in its characters ultimately concludes that a finite lifespan is essential for human life to have meaning.[17] Bacigalupi's story, on the other hand, indicates that finitude is not necessary for true greatness. Borrowing from Malcolm Gladwell, in Bacigalupi's future everyone is able to invest the 10,000 hours needed to become proficient in a variety of endeavors.

THE *SYMPOSIUM* AND THE SEARCH FOR IMMORTALITY

Plato's *Symposium* is deservedly one of his most studied dialogues, though in my experience it is rather difficult to teach at the undergraduate level. This is due to several factors, including the dialogue's length, its intricacy, and its rather racy subject matter. The *Symposium* investigates the nature of *eros*, and consequently, the relationship between love, philosophy, and the city. It is not a respectable topic of public debate among reasonable men. Rather, the dialogue conveys a dream-like, hedonistic exchanging of speeches at a drunken party. The *Symposium* is a recounted dialogue; Apollodorus, one of Socrates's followers, recalls the story as it was told to him by Aristodemus, another of Socrates' followers. Aristodemus was present at the party, but does not himself participate in speech-making.[18] The dialogue

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takes place at a party in honor of Agathon, the very beautiful winner of Athens's prestigious tragedy competition. The festivities celebrating Agathon's victory have evidently lasted several days, as the revelers admit that they are all, with the exception of Socrates, in no condition to continue heavily drinking.[19]

Given the intellectual and rhetorical prowess of the party guests,[20] and their various states of inebriation, it is soon suggested by the doctor Eryximachus that, instead of playing drinking games, each attendee should give a speech praising Eros, the god of erotic love. Socrates, who is uncustomarily adorned in fine clothes and slippers, is enthusiastic, noting "I claim to have expert knowledge of nothing but erotics."[21] This statement is noteworthy, as it directly contradicts Socrates's more well-known assertion in the *Apology of Socrates* that his only wisdom is that he is aware of his own ignorance.[22]

The guests proceed to take turns giving speeches purporting to praise Eros, with Socrates giving his speech last. Immediately after Socrates concludes his speech, the party is interrupted by the boisterous arrival of Alcibiades, the infamous, talented, volatile student of Socrates.[23] Alcibiades is deep into his revels, and immediately becomes jealous of the attention Socrates pays to Agathon. Alcibiades proceeds to give a speech, not in praise of Eros, but in praise of Socrates, the object of his own erotic longing. It is unnecessary in the context of this chapter to examine each speech in the dialogue; let it suffice to say that they are all unsatisfactory in some way.[24] The speeches prior to Socrates's speech either focus too narrowly on *eros*'s political value, or they focus on praising the beauty of their beloveds. None get at the truth of *eros* itself, as an expression of longing for that which a person does not have. As a result, Socrates's speech is most applicable for study alongside Bacigalupi's story. Socrates leads the reader through an expansive journey up the "ladder of love,"[25] demonstrating how erotic love is the key to understanding both philosophy and mankind's longing for immortality.

Rather than speak in his own words, Socrates's speech consists of yet another recounted story, within the recounted story of the party, this time of the lesson he received from Diotima, a fictional woman described as uniquely wise concerning *eros*.[26] Diotima, according to Socrates's account of her speech, characterizes *eros* as essentially engendering:

> "All human beings, Socrates," she said "conceive both in terms of the body and in terms of the soul, and whenever they are at a certain age, their nature desires to give birth . . . . This thing, pregnancy and bringing to birth, is divine, and it is immortal in the animal that is mortal . . . . And why is eros of engendering? Because engendering is born forever and is immortal as far as that can happen to a mortal being . . . . So it is necessary from this argument that eros be of immortality too."[27]

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Socrates thus establishes that his speech praising Eros will actually be an examination of the nature of *eros*, and its importance to philosophy. Diotima characterizes Eros as an in-between *daimon*, existing to bridge the gap between human beings and the gods.[28] The concept of the *daimon* will be familiar to readers of Plato as the not-quite-a-god who guides Socrates through his life, combining divine revelation with Socrates's own rational observances.[29] Philosophy likewise exists in this in-between space, somewhere between ignorance and objective truth (which is only known to the divine). Philosophy is a quest for wisdom, not possession of wisdom, just as *eros* is a quest for beauty, not possession of beauty. Both aspire to the immortal, eternal things.

It is this speech of Diotima's, linking philosophy with pregnancy, that likely leads to Plato's identification of Socrates's profession as an act of midwifery in the *Theaetetus*.[30] His interlocutors are at first highly amused by this career choice, which Socrates inherited from his mother. Socrates answers that his art of midwifery differs from his mother's in that he is "a midwife to men and not to women, and by looking to their souls when they are giving birth, and not to their bodies."[31] Socrates evidently absorbs Diotima's lesson that philosophers deal with erotic longing, but here Socrates characterizes himself as unable to birth his own offspring.[32] Both professions, midwife and teacher of philosophy, assist others in achieving immortality; the practitioners do not partake of eternity themselves.

At this point in this chapter, it is essential to include Hannah Arendt's distinction between eternity and immortality, articulated in *The Human Condition*. The difference between eternity and immortality concerns the nature of the divine. The Abrahamic God is eternal; He exists outside of time and space. Immortality, on the other hand, concerns limitless life in the world as comprehended by human beings. Arendt argues,

> Immortality means endurance in time, deathless life on this earth and in this world as it was given, according to Greek understanding, to nature and the Olympian gods . . . . Men are "the mortals," the only mortal things in existence, because unlike animals they do not exist only as members of a species . . . . The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things—works and deeds and words— . . . so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves. By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave nonperishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a "divine" nature.[33]

Arendt's argument can thus be summarized: human beings seek immortality through one of two ways: 1) giving birth to children, or 2) creating great

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works. Once successfully accomplished, both endeavors allow us to leave behind an enduring memory of ourselves after our deaths. Both allow us to transcend the natural limits of human life, and partake of the type of immortality usually reserved for the divine. As Mary P. Nichols notes, "By generation, by leaving behind something new in the place of the old, mortal beings partake of immortality."[34] Though this type of immortality is certainly different from actually living forever, it is the closest analog that we can currently achieve.

Socrates's self-characterization as a midwife is particularly interesting in this context. As Arendt argues, Socrates's refusal to write down his thoughts speaks to an unconcern with his own immortality. She maintains that he is instead concerned with eternity, with contemplating the good, and truth in its pure form.[35] She argues,

> It is obvious that, no matter how concerned a thinker may be with eternity, the moment he sits down to write his thoughts he ceases to be concerned primarily with eternity and shifts his attention to leaving some trace of them. He has entered the *vita activa* [active life] and chosen its way of permanence and potential immortality.[36]

While Socrates may be unconcerned with immortality, he achieves it nonetheless through the efforts of his students Plato and Xenophon. Indeed, Plato deliberately obfuscates his own beliefs with that of his teacher by writing in a dialogue form, with Socrates as the lead character. Whatever Socrates's personal concerns with writing, memory, and legacy, he nevertheless finds himself immortalized posthumously.[37] Plato, therefore, is intensely concerned with immortality, for both himself and his teacher.

CHILDREN OF THE BODY

With the context provided by the *Symposium* and *The Human Condition* in mind, how can we better understand the human pursuit of immortality through the lens of "Pop Squad"? Biologically, children are created by two human parents. However, if one believes in the presence of an immortal soul, then the physical act of conception connects erotic lovemaking to the divine in a very specific, definite manner. The act of sexual congress carries the potential to create life, life that contains the divine spark of personhood. Even if one rejects the notion of an immortal soul, procreation still creates a creature of reason, capable of forming long-term memories, and capable of developing technologies that allow for memories to be preserved through writing, photography, or films. Parents become immortal by passing on their

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genetic code, as well as their stories and accumulated wisdom to their children. They live on in their children's memories, and in their children's DNA. Parenthood is both a figurative and literal embodiment of life after death. Moreover, it is an avenue to immortality that will be available to the majority of human beings at some point in their lives.

In "Pop Squad" Bacigalupi acknowledges the very real importance of parenthood to the individual parents. Parenthood is not framed as a religious or social duty, nor is it framed as a natural consequence of sexual desire. Instead, the story shows parenthood, motherhood in particular, as an experience for which people are literally willing to die. Rejoo offers indefinite life; for those who would be young enough to conceive a child it further offers eternal youth. Rejoo also acts as a fail-proof contraceptive for those who take it.[38] One can be eternally youthful, or a parent, but not both. It is not mandatory that citizens take rejoo; single-sex farming colonies exist for people who are caught procreating or who simply wish to live out the remainder of their natural lives.[39] If one wishes to remain a part of civilization, however, rejoo and the resulting pharmaceutical sterilization are required. The society evidently has no desire to prohibit or closely monitor sexual congress; sexual relationships simply cannot include the possibility of conception.

The detective is at first confused and disgusted by the increasing number of pregnant women and mothers that he encounters in his job. He rages,

> The whole breeding thing is an anachronism—twenty-first century ritual torture that we don't need anymore. But these girls keep trying to turn back the clock and pop out the pups, little lizard brains compelled to pass on some DNA. And there's a new batch every year, little burps of offspring cropping up here and there, the convulsions of a species trying to restart itself and get evolution rolling again, like we can't tell that we've already won.[40]

Those who stop taking rejoo in order to conceive are forced into hiding; they must live in squalor, only leaving their residences for necessary supplies. The women generally live together in groups of two or three. They share childcare and scavenge for resources together. An illegal mother obviously could not hire childcare workers without risking arrest, and children left alone for even short periods of time, while the mother acquires food or supplies, would be susceptible to injury or discovery. The children live their lives in hiding. As the narrator notes, the children he finds have never been outside their homes, or even breathed fresh air.[41]

The women also inherit little or no cultural knowledge about childcare. Though mothers surely exist in the society, from the time before rejoo, there is no reason to share their wisdom. There is no reason to risk the social and legal consequences of discussing pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing.

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This lack of skill, combined with the secrecy of their existence, leads to a desperate, squalid life for the young families.[42] Though the detective praises the mothers' ingenuity in making cribs and other necessities, he does not understand sacrificing one's life for a child that, statistically, is not going to survive to adulthood.

Throughout the story, the detective is haunted by the memory of a toy dinosaur belonging to one of the children he killed in the story's opening scene. He tracks the toy to Ipswitch Collectibles, an antique store run by a woman who "must have been ninety when rejoo hit."[43] In the store, he encounters a young woman posing as a "collector" of antiques. Of course, all children's toys are considered antiques at this point, as there is no reason to manufacture new ones. The detective knows that this "collector," who is young and pretty, but whose food-stained clothes don't quite fit (unlike the perfectly put-together women of mainstream society), and who sports "the tired look of a person at war with the world"[44] is likely a mother on a supply run. She selects a toy trainset, reminiscent of one the owner's grandchildren used to play with, and quickly leaves the store. It is implied that the elderly owner of the store knows exactly what type of people make up the majority of her clientele. She maintains a connection to an earlier time, a time when a child's joy was a valuable, noble pursuit. Moreover, the store owner has children and grandchildren; she understands the allure of motherhood. And, thanks to rejoo, she gets to spend her immortality surrounded by her loved ones. It is little wonder she pities the young mothers and supplies toys for their children. The shop owner is evidently somewhat uncomfortable with the state of society, but not so uncomfortable that she will forego rejoo.

Eventually, the detective tracks the young mother to her house on the outskirts of the suburbs, a house that would, in our own time, be seen as an ideal "family home." In the context of the story, the house is "as close to the wilderness as it is possible to live." The woman's isolation allows for a better quality of life for her child, as there are "no neighbors to hear the screaming."[45] The woman has a toddler daughter, who unlike the previous children encountered in the story, seems clean, healthy, and happy. The detective hesitates, reluctant to kill the child. Instead, he sits with the mother and daughter, and talks to the woman about why she made the choice to forego rejoo. After all, she will be forced to live in hiding until her child reaches adulthood, aging all the time, and will then need to forge identification papers in order for the child to assimilate to mainstream society. It is a monumental task, and the odds of successfully evading the pop squad for that many years are extremely low.

Despite his incomprehension at the woman's choice, the detective finds himself charmed by the child, who is cute and curious, and behaves as a typical child from our own society. Before, he never spent time with the children

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he discovered, "never really looked at them."[46] This time, however, the detective observes the child as he talks to her mother. He wonders if the child is different from other children, if she is "special somehow."[47] Eventually, the detective leaves the mother and daughter alone, determined not to kill them. He does not go so far as to actively hide or help the pair, and he recognizes that their chances of survival remain very slim. He also does not pledge to stop taking rejoo, or declare an intention to father a child. However, he maintains that it will not be he who kills this child or condemns this mother.[48] He understands why the mother made her decision, and finally sees the power and beauty of parenthood. In the end, the narrator embodies the principle of classical liberalism: he will not interfere with the mother's right to order her life as she sees fit, even if it leads to her ruin.

CHILDREN OF THE SOUL

Though Arendt's first path to immortality, procreation, is available to the majority of human beings, the same cannot be said of the second path. The second path to immortality, producing lasting works of art, science, politics, or philosophy, requires technical skill and rational mastery of theory; it also requires something of divine/extra-rational inspiration. It is this extra-rational aspect of *poesis*[49] that Socrates describes as erotic in nature. "Pop Squad" allows the reader a chance to contemplate the effect of an unlimited lifespan on the type of human greatness that deals with creation. As discussed earlier, Bacigalupi's story is fairly unique among dystopian tales. It offers a distinct upside to the pursuit of physical immortality. Yes, the detective ultimately becomes disillusioned with the extreme population-control methods deemed necessary by the society; he no longer wishes to kill children in cold blood. However, the detective is also not touched by genius, or even passion. He possesses no (or I suppose very, very little) possibility of making a radical breakthrough in science, philosophy, statesmanship, or art. He has no overarching purpose that can be pursued unto perfection. Contemplating Alice's "challenge for a place in the immortal canon of classical performance,"[50] the narrator muses that "for me, competing against that much history would be a heavy weight. I'm glad I've got a job where forgetting is the most important part."[51] He is not capable of the type of dedication needed for true greatness, nor does he wish that he was so constituted.

This disregard for excellence is not the case for everyone in his society. Alice is a virtuoso diva viola. She is one of the biologically youngest people in the society, having begun taking rejoo at nineteen years of age. Her mind will acquire experience and perspective, but her brain and body will remain at their physical peak, unless she decides to discontinue the drug. She has

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infinite time to practice her craft and pursue technical perfection. As she exclaims to the narrator, "Can you imagine trying to perform Telogo [her composer] without rejoo? We wouldn't have had the time. Half of us would be past our prime, and we'd have needed understudies, and then the understudies would have had to find understudies. Fifteen years . . . . How can they [mothers] throw away something as beautiful as Telogo?"[52] She understands that true genius requires not only the time to acquire expertise, but also the time to maintain excellence. In many cases, as individuals age and their bodies decline, they are no longer able to perform as they could in their youth. In the most difficult fields of study, such as classical music or mathematics, gifted practitioners may only have a handful of years at their peak. Alice's character presents an oft-overlooked twist in the discussion of mortality's importance: Is genius more valuable because it is fleeting, in addition to being rare? It is valuable solely for what it produces, or does genius create for the sake of the genius?

When discussing geniuses, artistic or otherwise, conversation often focuses on either the genius as prodigy (e.g., Mozart), or the genius's premature death (e.g., Alexander the Great). Both aspects of a person's life are important because they determine the amount of time the person in question had to create. Prodigy and long life in a creator means that we the public are able to enjoy more fruits of creation. Yet, there is something worth contemplating in that even people who care little for classical music are fascinated by the fact that Mozart composed his first symphony at the age of eight, or that artwork becomes exponentially more valuable after an artist's death, regardless of the relative merit of each individual piece. Perhaps the rarity of genius is predicated on our mortality. Currently, the highest strata of accomplishment are reserved for true, natural geniuses, because human beings have a very limited amount of time to master any field. Unless one possesses *both* an *eros* for a subject, and a natural affinity for the *techne*[53] of the field, it is unlikely that a work of lasting memory will be produced.

Alice and her contemporaries face no such limitations. It is worth considering whether near-geniuses, the Christopher Marlowes rather than the William Shakespeares of the world, would be the greatest beneficiaries of rejoo. Given unlimited time to practice and study, could very talented, dedicated people rise to the level of genius? Or is divine inspiration an innate characteristic, akin to madness and impossible to acquire? Rejoo offers the world the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of genius for hundreds of years, and offers talented, but unextraordinary, artists the opportunity to transcend the natural limits of their talent. As discussed, Alice and Telogo spend decades perfecting a single piece of music. Banini will have an equal, or greater, amount of time to prepare his response. They will keep pushing one another to new heights of success, indefinitely. Of course, the tradeoff for this luxury is that no new

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geniuses will be born. But, we see through the example of Alice that the existing geniuses are not content to rest on their laurels; they will continue to push one another, and themselves, to create new modes of expression. The muses must content themselves with the currently available human mediums, and trust that those mediums will continue to bring new works into being.

MEANINGLESS LIFE

"Pop Squad" provides a window into the lives of human beings who have achieved immortality through technology. They do not *need* to give birth to either children or great works in order to approximate immortality through genetics and memory; they can simply extend their lives as long as they wish to do so. Yet, as it turns out, true immortality is not sufficient for happiness. The immortal humans in the story still feel the pull of both creation, in the case of Alice, and procreation, in the case of the mothers. The narrator of "Pop Squad" also makes repeated references to large numbers of people who take rejoo, yet fall into drug or gambling addictions. These people do not use their lives well, by any metric. They are "a bunch of starving gamblers and nitheads and drunks who all still want their rejoo even if they're wasting every day of their endless lives."[54] They do not produce, or even appreciate, art; they do not engage in political life; they do not contemplate the eternal questions of human existence. And, as anyone familiar with addiction knows, they are not leading lives of endless, Epicurean pleasure. Yet, these people also do not quit rejoo and seek a natural ending to their lives. Rejoo becomes just another substance for which they must earn money by unsavory means. They pursue life itself, rather than life for any discernable purpose. Though the possibility of reform is always present, so is the alarming possibility of an endless life of addiction.

By the end of the story, the narrator finds himself questioning this pursuit of endless life for its own sake. He loves Alice, but their relationship is, according to both parties, not meant to last "forever." In a romantic moment, Alice jokes that "if we weren't going to live forever, I'd marry you." The narrator responds laughingly, "If we weren't going to live forever, I'd get you pregnant."[55] But because they *are* going to live forever, marriage carries a significantly different scope of commitment than in our own society.[56] It is unclear if marriage has been eliminated entirely from the society, but it does seem as though even very loving couples are skeptical of their ability to make a life-long commitment to one another, where life-long could mean infinite. Since they are not forming a life partnership, and are not going to raise children together, their relationship seems to lack both gravity and urgency. They enjoy one another's company, but do not view the relationship as the

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centerpiece of their lives. The narrator is reluctant to share with Alice his increasingly troubled thoughts on his work as a member of the pop squad.[57] Alice, for her part, is consumed by her art, fitting in romance between practice sessions. The narrator experiences sexual desire and companionship with Alice, but does not experience the satisfaction of sharing a complete life with one's chosen partner.

In light of this observation, it is worth returning to the speech given by the comic poet Aristophanes in the *Symposium*. Aristophanes relates a wild myth about the original condition of mankind, asserting that originally, human beings were globular in shape, with four arms, four legs, two faces, and so on. These globular creatures were "awesome in their strength and robustness, and they had great and proud thoughts, so they made an attempt on the gods."[58] As a punishment for this attempt, Zeus splits each creature into two separate halves. Some pairs are split into two males, some into two females, and others into a male and a female. Zeus's punishment is devastating:

> When its nature was cut in two, each—desiring its own half—came together; and throwing their arms around one another and entangling themselves with one another in their desire to grow together, they began to die off due to hunger and the rest of their inactivity, because they were unwilling to do anything apart from one another.[59]

Zeus finally takes pity on the divided creatures, and moves their genitals to a position on their bodies that will allow them to come together and procreate (in the case of heterosexual couples), or at least achieve "satiety in their being together"[60] (in the case of homosexual couples). In this way, the halved couples will be able to stand being apart from one another long enough to feed themselves, and engage in productive work. Human beings, however, will spend their whole lives searching for their other halves, the "soulmate" taken from them by the gods. Aristophanes, as a gifted comic poet, thus paints a picture that is visually absurd, yet also deeply sad in its implications for human love and longing. If one is able to find one's "soulmate," happiness is possible, as the two are able to share a life together; otherwise, no amount of sexual gratification or companionship will satisfy true erotic longing. The depiction of love and marriage in "Pop Squad," as nothing more than pleasant but temporary domesticity, denies the narrator the possibility of such fulfillment.

The narrator is surrounded in the story by women who lead meaningful lives on both sides of the rejoo divide. Alice experiences none of the existential angst of the narrator; she knows her life's purpose and fulfills it beautifully. A week after her virtuoso accomplishment, she will "be back at worrying, doubting herself, thrashing herself to work harder, to practice longer, to listen

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and feel and move inside of music that's so complicated it might as well be the mathematics of chaos for anyone but her."[61] The mother the detective tracks down likewise fully understands the purpose of her life: to protect and raise her daughter. The narrator finds himself erotically drawn to both women, though his interest increasingly shifts toward the mother as the story progresses. After Alice's performance, he is dazzled by her beauty and talent, yet he is put off by the admiration she receives, noting, "It's obvious Alice is one of the best in the world. Talking about it just makes it seem banal."[62] Though the audience loves her for her accomplishment, the narrator believes they do not truly understand the powerful motivation behind Alice's dedication to music. The detective is furthermore increasingly disturbed by his job, unable to forget the sight of the children he has killed and unable to dismiss the mothers as simply insane.

Though he is at first disgusted by the bodies of the women who forego rejoo in favor of motherhood, he finds himself sexually aroused at the home of the mother he tracks from the toy store. While they sit and talk, the woman's daughter begins to nurse; the sight of the mother breastfeeding her daughter causes the narrator to get an erection. His reaction is strange; though the breast is exposed during breastfeeding, it is not a sexual act. Yet, he "can barely sit [his pants are so tight]."[63] The narrator does not use titillating language to describe her body: "Mammaries and fatty limbs and a frightening sort of wisdom, maybe coming from knowing she won't last forever . . . . This woman is fecund . . . a damp Gaia creature."[64] Though he does not view the woman as objectively beautiful, motherhood has made her deeply erotic. He is not just intellectually fascinated with the woman's choice to pursue motherhood at any cost, he is now erotically drawn to that choice. Unable to build the enduring legacy of great works or artistic accomplishment, the detective reluctantly embraces the idea of progeny as the key to giving one's life meaning.

Under the narrator's interrogation, the mother finally gives a sufficient answer for why she has made this choice:

> "You know what I'm thinking? I'm thinking we need something new. I've been alive for one hundred and eighteen years and I'm thinking it's not just about me. I'm thinking I want a baby and I want to see what she sees today when she wakes up and what she'll find and see that I've never seen before because that's new. Finally, something new."[65]

Even if humanity solves the "problem" of death and aging, endless life will not be sufficient for individual happiness. Happiness is something more than contentment, more than having one's physical needs met and experiencing physical pleasure. Stasis is only appealing in utopia, and utopia is always a

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hair's breadth from becoming dystopian.[66] An unlimited lifespan is not sufficient to satisfy the human craving for immortality. Just as Eros is always pursuing the beautiful, not becoming beautiful himself,[67] a meaningful human life is found in the pursuit of immortality, not in its literal acquisition.

NOTES

1. Paolo Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," (c) 2006 by Paolo Bacigalupi. Originally published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (October/November, 2006). Reprinted by permission of the author. All page numbers in this chapter refer to the following edition: Paolo Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," in *Pump Six and Other Stories*, edited by Paolo Bacigalupi, 134–162 (San Francisco: Nightshade Books, 2008). I would like to thank Erin A. Dolgoy and Bruce Peabody for their tireless work on behalf of this volume, and for their insightful comments on this chapter.
2. Plato, "Apology of Socrates," in *Four Texts on Socrates*, trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 38a.
3. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 136.
4. Ibid., 137–138.
5. Ibid., 139.
6. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 142. The narrator attends a party at the home of a woman, Maria Iloni, who made her fortune on "global warming mitigation for New York City before it went under [water]." Though the environmental disaster happened sometime in Iloni's lifetime, thanks to rejoo, it is impossible to pinpoint a date, as the reader does not know exactly how long rejoo has been available. What is certain, however, is that "New York obviously never got its money back."
7. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 147. The narrator makes reference to the "humidity and swelter of Newfoundland."
8. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 138.
9. For example, Michael Anderson's *Logan's Run* (1976), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932).
10. For an extended discussion of the relationship between an aging body and the acquisition of virtue or wisdom, see the discussion between Socrates and Cephalus in Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), Book I.
11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2002), 1095a.
12. Aeschylus, "Agamemnon," in *Aeschylus I*, trans. David Grene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 40.
13. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 145.
14. Ibid., 140–141.
15. Ibid., 145.
16. Ibid., 142.
17. As children of the past few generations can attest, Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting* (1975) is a particularly devastating and effective illustration of this trope.

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18. In his well-known interpretive essay, "The Ladder of Love," Allan Bloom pinpoints the date of the retelling as around 404 BCE. This date is significant, as the fortunes of many of the dialogue's participants have changed since the events of the party. By 404 BCE, Agathon is in exile, Alcibiades is dead, Athens's empire is in tatters, and Socrates is hurtling toward his trial and execution. Perhaps the dialogue, situated on the eve of the Sicilian expedition, reveals clues to Plato's views on the real-world characters of Alcibiades, Agathon, and Socrates. Allan Bloom, "The Ladder of Love," in *Plato's Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete with commentary by Allan Bloom and Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 72–73.

19. Plato, "Symposium," in *Plato's Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete with commentary by Allan Bloom and Seth Bernardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 175e–177e.

20. The guests who give speeches include Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades.

21. Plato, *Symposium*, 177d–e.

22. Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, 21b–23c.

23. In fact, the events of the *Symposium* are meant to take place as Athens is preparing to embark on its expedition to conquer Sicily (Bloom, "Ladder of Love," 72–73). Alcibiades, one of Athens's leading generals, is historically accused of defacing (via castration) several religious statues on the eve of the expedition's departure. He is subsequently recalled from Sicily to stand trial, and the military campaign fails. Alcibiades, exiled from Athens, proceeds to offer his considerable military and political talents to the city's enemies (Sparta, then Persia). The timing of the dialogue is important, as Bloom argues that it shows that Plato is "hinting that what was most radical and suspect in Alcibiades had something to do with Socrates" (72), and Socrates's understanding of *eros* in particular.

24. Seth Benardete, "On Plato's *Symposium*," in *Plato's Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete with commentary by Allan Bloom and Seth Bernardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 179–199.

25. Bloom, "The Ladder of Love," 55.

26. Diotima is a fictional character, whose name indicates knowledge of divine things (Bloom, "Ladder of Love," 129; Benardete, "On Plato's *Symposium*,"192). Nevertheless, it is important to examine why Socrates chooses to portray his teacher in erotics as a woman. As both Bloom and Mary P. Nichols note, the previous speeches all portray masculine homosexual relations as inherently superior to both female homosexual and heterosexual relations. This perhaps simply reflects the sexual preferences of the partygoers, but it also indicates a prioritization of masculinity and love of one's own. Bloom, "Ladder of Love," 129; Mary P. Nichols, "Socrates' Contest with the Poets in Plato's *Symposium,*" *Political Theory* 32 (2004): 198.

27. Plato, *Symposium*, 206c–207a.

28. Ibid., 202d–203a.

29. Plato, *Apology*, 31c–34b.

30. Plato, *Theatetus*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2004), 148e–151d.

31. Plato, *Theatetus*, 150b.

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32. As Radcliffe G. Edmonds, III argues, "Most commentators on the *Symposium* . . . attribute to Socrates the role of active begetter and producer of ideas instead of the role of the midwife." Radcliffe G. Edmonds, III, "Socrates the Beautiful: Role-Reversal and Midwifery in Plato's *Symposium*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974–2014),* 130 (2000): 265. This is a serious error, as it misses an essential point that is only comprehensible through a return to Socrates's contention in the *Apology* that he knows nothing. Socrates may be an expert in the nature of erotics, and be able to lead others toward immortality, but he cannot attain it himself.

33. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 18–19. Arendt further argues that the fall of the Roman Empire proved conclusively that no work of mankind could be immortal, allowing for the ascendance of the Christian conception of eternity (21). But that discussion is for another time.

34. Nichols, "Socrates' Contest," 198.

35. While it is true that Socrates has children, he seems spectacularly unconcerned with them throughout Plato's dialogues.

36. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 20.

37. Socrates does, in fact, predict that the memory of his trial and execution will become a powerful condemnation of Athens in the hands of his students and followers. Plato, *Apology*, 38c–42a.

38. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 156.

39. Single-sex colonies are necessary to prevent procreation among the newly refertile rejoo dropouts.

40. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 150.

41. Ibid.

42. I use the term "family" loosely here. Though the narrator does mention that the mothers will occasionally live with the biological fathers of their children (Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 150), usually a group of mothers will live together and share childcare duties.

43. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 152.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 154.

46. Ibid., 158.

47. Ibid., 160.

48. Ibid., 162.

49. The process of making.

50. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 139.

51. Ibid., 140.

52. Ibid., 143.

53. Craft, or skill.

54. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 145.

55. Ibid., 144.

56. Of course, spouses who believe their marriages last into an eternal afterlife are already making such a commitment.

57. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 146.

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58. Plato, *Symposium*, 190b.
59. Ibid., 191a–b.
60. Ibid., 191c.
61. Bacigalupi, "Pop Squad," 150–151.
62. Ibid., 144.
63. Ibid., 157.
64. Ibid., 156–157.
65. Ibid., 159.
66. For an excellent extended discussion of this idea, see L.E. Hough, "Disaffected from Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 3 (1991): 121.
67. Plato, *Symposium*, 200e–201b. Socrates persuades Agathon to agree that Eros loves beautiful things, and that one only loves that which one needs, not that which one already has. Therefore, Eros loves the beautiful, but is not beautiful himself.

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Chapter 4

All the World's a Cage

Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist"

Timothy McCranor and Steven Michels

As a master of the short story, Franz Kafka (1883–1924) could pack more into a few thousand words than others could in a massive tome. He is one of the handful of literary figures whose name has an adjectival form—with "Kafkaesque" denoting a brand of bleak hyperrealism that scratches at the surface of society to reveal hidden and perhaps painful truths.[1] Kafka is best known for "The Metamorphosis," a 1915 novella in which a salesman wakes one morning to find himself changed into a giant insect. "A Hunger Artist" (*Ein Hungerkünstler*), first published in 1922, is lesser known but equally important, and it builds on the themes from this earlier story. "A Hunger Artist" is one of Kafka's later works and perhaps his most biting social and political commentary.[2]

Throughout the story, the unnamed title character appears on display in a cage—and voluntarily goes without food as part of his craft of "professional fasting." Dressed in black tights and sitting on scattered straw, the Hunger Artist at times answers questions or lets onlookers feel his emaciated arms; at other times, he withdraws entirely into himself, "so that he paid no attention to anything," not even to the clock, the cage's sole adornment. The Artist does not long for food but is troubled by the lack of interest in his art, which has dwindled considerably from its heyday, when there were many similar artists, most of whom could make a living in performances like these. In that sense, the source of his suffering is not physical but psychological. The crowd's interest in him mostly concerns the integrity of his act and their suspicions that he is likely cheating.

The shrinking crowds lead the Hunger Artist and his manager, referred to only as "the impresario," to hit the road. Traveling throughout Europe, they find that some cities and countries have more of an interest than others, but even the most populated areas lose interest after about forty days. Ultimately,

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the Artist and the impresario part ways, and the Artist signs on with a circus, where he is free to perform his art, but is less tended to than the animals. Just before the Artist reaches the pinnacle of his performance and starves himself to death, he utters his first and only words in order to explain the motivation behind his art: he could not find anything that he liked to eat. After the Hunger Artist is buried, in the final scene of the story, a young panther is put in his place. Apparently undisturbed by its imprisonment, the panther's strength and vitality give it an obvious nobility, we are told, and the guards have no trouble finding it food. The crowds gather around the cage to observe the panther, and, in contrast with their fickle interest in the Artist, they "had no desire at all to move on" from the animal.

To explore the meaning of the story and where Kafka might fall in the tradition of political philosophy, we will make use of two great critics of modernity: Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. With his attention to asceticism and the primacy of the body, art and aesthetics, and the decadence of Western civilization, Nietzsche, who had a likely influence on Kafka, is an obvious point of comparison. As Patrick Bridgwater concludes, "the world of Nietzschean ideas is very much a part of Kafka's world."[3] Kafka's panther also provides an opportunity to discuss Rousseau's teaching on modern social existence, freedom, and happiness. In addition, we will consider Kafka in relation to Plato and Aristotle, as premodern philosophers, who can help us explore the nature of democratic society and culture, virtue and happiness, and the relationship between body and soul. Although the exact nature of Kafka's political philosophy is ambiguous, the targets of his critique are plentiful, which places "A Hunger Artist" high on the list of critical political theory and literature.

MEANING AND THE MASSES

This first section of this chapter covers the story up until the time the Hunger Artist joins the circus. Here we explore issues raised by public (dis)interest in his art, especially by making connections to the general decline of society and culture chronicled by Nietzsche and Rousseau. The Hunger Artist has a remarkable knack for starving himself. But his concern is not the lack of food; it is the lack of a crowd he is drawing. "In the last decades interest in hunger artists has declined considerably," the narrator begins. It used to be that performances of this sort would preoccupy a city for days. Ticket holders, curious children, and fad followers could keep a hunger artist happily employed, if not well fed. It is perhaps curious that an artist qua artist would be so concerned with public adoration. Indeed, the Artist could have fasted in private. Readers can also wonder at this early stage

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of the story about whether the crowd or the Artist is the primary focus of Kafka's commentary.

Two comparisons or contrasts introduced in the first paragraph of the story suggest a sense of wider decline or corruption in society. The first is between the past and present and the sense that things are not as good as they used to be. The city's attention to hunger artists has waned from earlier times, when the whole city would take an interest in these performances. This is not a positive development for hunger artists—there are fewer of them, and they cannot afford to live on their talents alone. The specific reason for the decline in interest is unclear. This change could be due in part to the novelty wearing off, or it could be a more significant reason. The children, the other point of comparison, are an exception. Many of the adults attend because others attend, and they are merely conforming to the norms and behaviors of the community. But the children are genuinely astounded and somewhat frightened by professional fasting. They offer a certain amount of awe if not respect for the Artist.

The despair on display in the first paragraph suggests that Kafka is a member of that diverse tradition of modern discontent, which, in many respects, was started by Rousseau. In the *First Discourse*, Rousseau argues that the progress of the arts and sciences have corrupted rather than purified the morals of Europe. But Rousseau is not simply scrutinizing how the arts and sciences corrupt society, but also how the latter corrupts the former. Rousseau's celebration of Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Isaac Newton, together with his critique of the *philosophes*, indicates that he is equally concerned with the way in which the popularization of the arts and sciences leads to a distorted distribution of honors, one in which artists and scientists are more concerned with fame than truth or beauty.[4] Kafka shares a similar dual concern: with society's degrading effects on art, and with the role of an impure artist in debasing society. Insofar as he presents the Artist as a hapless, talented victim, Kafka seems concerned with a decayed or decaying world no longer capable of appreciating high art. But to the extent that the Artist appears shallow and narcissistic, Kafka's focus is on artists who care more about the popularity than the quality of their art.

The interest of the children fades not because they get older, but because they get older in a city where decadent adults are responsible for the education and moral upbringing of their children. They too will be unable or unwilling to look upon anyone who challenges their comfort. Although Kafka lacks a definite positive program, he would perhaps endorse Socrates's proposal in *The Republic*, where, in order to rid the city of its bad habits, it expels everyone older than ten.[5] The difference, of course, is that Plato's Socrates is constructing a city in speech and needs an affirmative teaching, while Kafka is using a critical short story to pull at the loose threads of a civilization.

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It is also noteworthy that in Kafka's created world, fasting had been a profession practiced by many and in different cities. The Hunger Artist is not unique, but he continues long past the time when it is profitable. His motivations are unclear. Since he is there voluntarily—we would not call a prisoner an "artist"—we might infer that he has no other talents or opportunities. It could also be that he is unmotivated by the "good money" that used to be available for performers like him. His motivations could be different—and perhaps purer. It is an open question how many such performers are left, but we are given the impression that this hunger artist is perhaps the best and even the last of his kind.

Among the public, there is the question of whether the Hunger Artist is actually going without food. A rotating group of "watchers" has been assigned to make sure no one is surreptitiously feeding him. They are usually butchers—that is, the profession most invested in what the city eats and most at odds with professional fasting. Yet, even the butchers cannot be trusted, which is why three are assigned at any one time. The surveillance is mostly to appease the masses, who are likely too directed by their own appetites to understand how anyone could deny themselves; however, "those who understood knew well enough that during the period of fasting the hunger artist would never, under any circumstances, have eaten the slightest thing, not even if compelled by force." In that sense, the Artist is not celebrated out of a sense of awe; he is surveilled for a suspected lack of integrity. These suspicions and precautions torment the Artist far more than the fast itself.

Most distressing to the Hunger Artist is how the watchers neglect their own duty. The watchers assume that he is going to cheat and have no problem with letting him, preferring instead to play cards. The way that most of them go about their business is depressing and even painful to the Artist. The Artist prefers the watchers who take their task seriously and are aggressively skeptical about his ability to go without food. He asks this group stories about their lives and takes an interest in them as people. He does not see much point in being watched, but having them around helps him to stay awake. If the Artist is superhuman in his ability to forego physical needs, they are subhuman in their inability to understand anything other than desire and instinct, including their duty. Kafka's concern for duty resembles what we find in the order of the just city in Plato's *Republic* and the critique of modernity in Rousseau's *First Discourse* and elsewhere.

Kafka's emphasis on duty also helps to explain why the Hunger Artist pays for the large breakfast for the dedicated and dutiful watchers. It is another opportunity to demonstrate his resolve, much to the dismay of the others, who see the breakfast as a bribe for the watchers' silence, even though they themselves would never agree to taking the night watch. Nietzsche might describe the act or the feeling as a "petty pleasure" related to the will to power—that

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is, one that is easily satisfied and habituated.[6] But if, as Nietzsche explains, life is a moral standard, the Artist is willing to put his to the test, as he risks his life in a public manner. It is the passive and goalless crowd that is truly lacking. This means, somewhat counterintuitively, that the Artist is "the only spectator capable of being completely satisfied with his own fasting," as Kafka tells us. In that sense, even with an empty stomach, the Artist can still be a man in full.

The Hunger Artist's discerning appetite would seem to be a virtue in the manner of the ancients who favored strict control of one's passions. Indeed, he does not seem to be directed by the lower parts of the soul. But as Plato would observe, he is not guided by the pursuit of truth, either. There are ideals worth risking your life for—the good, the just, the beautiful—but the Artist does not seem to be after any of these. His denial of the body is an aimless pursuit, not a philosophic one. And since his pose is immoderate, it would not be endorsed by Aristotle. In fact, as he asserts in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, there is not even a name for this rare type of "far from human" person.[7] For Aristotle, philosophy is as close to godliness that humans can get, but he also understands that virtue and happiness require external goods—including food, no doubt.

Yet, foregoing food is actually quite easy for the Hunger Artist. "It was the easiest thing in the world," the narrator tells us. It is an intriguing detail, leaving readers to wonder what the Artist is really up to. He does not keep that fact to himself, but that does not stop anyone from believing him or thinking it is just pretense. We have reason to suspect that the people who are present for the Artist's performance are the ones who doubt him the most. Their interpretations range from seeing him as wanting attention or just being after the money. In that sense, their disbelief gives them the strength to observe him. Conversely, the ones who stay away might be the ones most convinced of his integrity and thus most shocked by the horror of his performance.

After forty days, the impresario calls an end to the performance. From the Hunger Artist's perspective, he is being forcibly stopped before he has hit his stride. The crowd is taking from him the glory of becoming recognized as the greatest hunger artist of all time, which he probably was already. He is equally troubled, if not more so, by being denied the ability to surpass his previous accomplishments. The Artist is bothered more by what he deems the irreverence of the unappreciative crowd than his physical needs and interprets their behavior as not just boorish but insulting. If they really admired him, they would endorse his self-destructive plan. The crowd thinks they are helping him return to freedom, when they are more accurately using force to deny his rightful control over his body and his choices. With the control of his body, the Artist had conquered the basest parts of his humanity and in turn had become little more than a prop. He is carried from a cage he did not want

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to leave and fed a meal he did not want to eat. When the crowd disperses, the Artist is the only one who "had the right to be dissatisfied with the event." As the narrator tells us, "The hunger artist endured everything."

When some suggest that his depression might result from fasting, the Hunger Artist "responded with an outburst of rage and began to shake the cage like an animal." Even though it is a relative loss of control for the Artist, and since he is given to a base impulse, this is also his most human and spirited reaction. The impresario would intervene in these situations, calming the frightened crowd by recognizing the Artist's "lofty striving, the good will, and the great self-denial" but blaming his anger on his lack of food and apologizing on his behalf. The Artist deplores this contradictory message, which extols his talent, while also blaming it for his unruly behavior and not appreciating the beauty that results from his virtue. "It was impossible to fight against this lack of understanding, against this world of misunderstanding," the narrator explains.

This regular mode of affairs changes when the crowd of "pleasure seekers" begins to direct its attention elsewhere. "There may have been more profound reasons for it," the narrator notes, "but who bothered to discover what they were?" The suggestion is that a society sufficiently aware enough to discern the reasons for its decline would also be capable of staving off that decline. There were signs of the change, which were easy to ignore and more obvious only when it is too late. The impresario takes the Artist around Europe to no avail. The result is that the decline of popular interest happens quickly, even if the cause was long coming, and nothing much can be done until the popularity of professional fasting returns.

Implicit in Kafka's story is an appraisal of democratic society. Everyone in the story, from the crowd to the impresario, is simply unable to imagine how the Artist might have different goals or greater talents than they have. Sameness is assumed. They are satisfied with their lives and interpret the Artist's self-imposed deprivations as curious and abnormal. The masses have normed their passions and expect conformity. As Nietzsche puts it in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse."[8] That is why the Artist's crowd moves and speaks as one and has no need for a leader; there is no standard to distinguish one from another or any reason to do so. The Artist, however, has appetites that are different and indeed greater than those around him.

Had the Hunger Artist lived in a different time or in a different place, he might have found food to his liking. He might have also found an audience able to give him his due. As Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, when discussing the difference between master morality and slave morality, "it is the powerful who *understand* how to honor; it is their art, their realm

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of invention."[9] These are also world historical figures who are the founders and preservers of civilization, without whom comes an inevitable decline. As Bridgwater says of Nietzsche and Kafka, "Their inevitable starting-point as writers is the point which the cultural tradition has reached in their time; indeed, the state of the 'cultural tradition,' of 'civilization,' is the nodal point of both men's work."[10]

Kafka describes a mass that has lost its sense of awe or reverence, and its interest in aesthetic development. Insofar as the crowds have become passive and incapable of recognizing greatness, this is a moral failing. They are for the most part incapable of appreciating the great virtue of individuals who are able to forego the needs and pleasures of the body.

SOUL MEETS BODY

With the Hunger Artist's move to the circus, the second part of the story turns the focus more explicitly to the question of human nature, especially related to the needs and pleasures of the body. Whereas the first part of the story focuses on the Artist's relation to and difference from society, his time at the circus allows us to compare him with the animals.

Moreover, the revelation behind the reason for his fasting invites questions of judgment and taste. In his confession, the Hunger Artist explains the true motive behind his fast. "I couldn't find a food that tasted good to me," he explains. "If I had found that, believe me, I would not have made a spectacle of myself and would have eaten to my heart's content, like you and everyone else."[11] The Artist has a choice about fasting, but does not feel that he has, given the food that is available to him.

The Hunger Artist's decision to go without food illustrates Nietzsche's criticism of asceticism. In a physiological sense, asceticism, as a denial of the body, is rooted in "a certain *impoverishment of life*."[12] Yet asceticism, he explains, means different things and has been used for different purposes—among artists, philosophers, and priests. The fact that it is so variable but constant, Nietzsche concludes, reflects a fundamental aspect of human nature, which requires an aim of some kind. The will, like nature itself, abhors a vacuum, so much so that it would "rather will *nothingness* than *not* will," he declares.[13] Starving in a cage would be torture for most of us. But the Artist imagines it as a release. His asceticism is a simple and convenient reaction to a society so lacking in nourishment.

Nietzsche recognizes what the Hunger Artist could not: like all art, his has a morality or philosophy behind it. "Let us, first of all, eliminate the artists," Nietzsche implores; "They do not stand nearly independently enough in the world and against the world for their changing valuations to

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deserve attention in themselves!"[14] This is the likely reason that the Artist eventually apologizes for his fast. He is not a purist; he is an extremist and a reactionary—that is, not the stuff of a founding or moral reawakening. For Nietzsche, it is not a question of whether the will is free or unfree, but whether it is strong or weak. Asceticism offers mankind a meaning for its suffering and can require great effort, but it is not a worthy goal. Nietzsche equates the will to power with the "will to life."[15] But the Artist's will is the will to death.

Like Plato and other normative philosophers, Nietzsche understands that the lower impulses ought to serve the higher. But unlike Plato and other idealists, Nietzsche was unwilling to deny the primacy of the body.[16] For him, philosophy is partly a function of what you do with your body. Nietzsche, more than any philosopher, is mindful about the physiology of philosophy. He wrote about the importance of diet and proper rest as a daily activity—for the purposes of creation. Self-denial or self-abuse of the body leads to a brand of philosophy that does the same. Instead, Nietzsche would endorse a discerning palate and attention to how we satisfy our physical needs. As he writes, "A strong and well-constituted man digests his experiences (his deeds and misdeeds included) as he digests his meals, even when he has to swallow some tough morsels."[17] In that sense, Nietzsche's admonition to the Hunger Artist is clear: if you can't find anything good to eat, you should learn how to cook.

The shocking revelation regarding the Hunger Artist's motivation (he fasts simply because he can't find foods he likes) also brings the question of culture and taste to the fore. As José Ortega y Gasset contends in *Revolt of the Masses*, "The form most contradictory to human life that can appear among the human species is the self-satisfied man."[18] Ortega especially targets the bourgeois class, who believe their specialized education and narrow accomplishments give them special insight over other, unwarranted areas. It is a morality of mediocrity that denotes not the beginning of civilization, but the end of it. For his part, the Artist assumes the contrary position, using his low evaluation of society (in the form of its food) against himself. He is the never-satisfied man.

At the circus, the Hunger Artist is even less regarded than he was in the cities. He is put outside near the animals, rather than as a main attraction. Nor does he warrant any watchers. His crowds mostly consist of passersby who are on their way to the animals. There are large, colorful signs that inform them about the contents of the cage. Some people would have remained longer, had not the push of the crowd been so strong. The Artist yearns for these times until he realized that their interest is almost solely in the animals. For even the late-arriving crowd made their way quickly past him and headed for the animals.

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The Hunger Artist is holding out for a time when professional fasting is again appreciated, and he sees children as that chance. As the narrator notes, "The brightness of the look in their searching eyes revealed something of new and more gracious times coming." There is real hope. Once these children can shrug off their miseducation and recover more of the way things used to be, the situation might be less bleak. The notion that the children could recover something of the old ways suggests on the part of the Artist not so much a wishful thinking or naiveté as much as a profound faith in fasting as part of the natural order of things.

This optimism makes the Hunger Artist ponder how his crowds would be larger if he were located further away from the fervor and stench of the animals. The sight and sound of the feedings does not help. He is not so bold to request a change, for fear of being moved to a worse location or being put out altogether. Instead, he focused on the incidental foot traffic he receives because of his proximity to their cages.

People soon become accustomed to ignoring him and passing judgment on the futility of his fast. "Try to explain the art of fasting to anyone!" the narrator exclaims. "If someone doesn't feel it, then he cannot be made to understand it." After all, their misunderstanding stems not from a poor technical education but a poor cultural one. Eventually, the once-beautiful circus posters become worn and are torn down. Days come and go without notice, including by the Hunger Artist himself. Every so often someone will notice the improper date on the sign and again accuse him of cheating. He is being doubly denied—not only the length, but also the integrity of his feat. He is finally free to pursue his passion without constraint, but his record is not properly chronicled or celebrated, such that his "heart grew heavy." The world, the Artist laments, is "cheating him of his reward."

Moreover, the crowd's fascination with the animals stems from the easy sense of superiority that the circus's zoo permits. Watching the animals out of their natural habitat allows onlookers to feel satisfied in a way that watching the Hunger Artist would not allow. If the crowd had not become corrupted, it would not have turned on him; they would have not lost their ability to appreciate the difficulty of his performance. The crowd no longer engages in the rituals related to watching the Artist because it lacks the strength to do so. The Artist demands their attention, whereas the animals allow them to be mere spectators. Perhaps the people are fascinated by the simplicity of how the animals live by instinct, an interpretation Rousseau might endorse. They have not been corrupted by society because they are immune from the ill effects of reason. It could also be that they were, in effect, moving as an involuntary herd past the only genuine individual among them.

That is not to say that the Hunger Artist's talent goes unrecognized. There are rare instances where a father, who was perhaps one of the delighted

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children from the opening scene, would happen by and use the occasion to explain to his children about the glory days of the Artist. The lesson is lost on them, however. “Because they had been inadequately prepared at school and in life, always stood around uncomprehendingly.” Now that a generation has passed, the rot begins sooner and runs deeper. The virtue that remains is present in those who can remember the time before the corruption. In David Riesman terminology, articulated in *The Lonely Crowd*, the mass is very much other-directed, taking their cues and their values from society.[19] There remain some however—perhaps the Artist himself—who are inner-directed and capable of independent thought and behavior.

THE END OF ART

The third and final act of the story concerns the appearance of the panther following the death of the Hunger Artist, which raises interesting questions about the meaning of freedom, the importance of recognition, and the purpose of the artistic life. Kafka’s panther invites comparison with Rousseau’s natural man, who is depicted in Rousseau’s investigation into the origins of inequality, an investigation that requires understanding human nature, or man unaffected by convention. Disentangling nature from convention requires an investigation into the effects of “the sequence of times and things.”[20] Accordingly, it is necessary to consider man prior to his entry into society, an inquiry, according to Rousseau, inadequately carried out by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who simply consider man without government, not man without society.[21]

Natural man is a being with few needs, which are easily satisfied. He subsists on a great diversity of food. He has a robust physique. Without technology, culture, or a social order as a basis for moral comparison, he always exists entirely within himself. In addition to having few needs, natural man has few fears; he fears neither illness nor death. He lacks language, reason, imagination, foresight, and curiosity. He is concerned neither with the intentions nor qualities of another. He experiences not *amour-propre*, but love of oneself—that is, a healthy form of selfishness that does not depend on the opinions of others.[22] In his natural state, man’s “desires do not exceed his Physical needs . . . the only goods he knows in the Universe are nourishment, a female, and repose; the only evils he fears are pain and hunger.”[23]

Rousseau’s natural man seems hardly distinguishable from an animal, and thus bears certain similarities to Kafka’s panther. Despite being confined, the panther “never seemed once to miss its freedom.” It “lacked nothing,” and “even appeared to carry freedom around with it,” we are told. In imagining natural man, Rousseau sees “an animal . . . satisfying his hunger under an

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oak, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that furnished his meal; and therewith his needs are satisfied."[24] Most importantly, Kafka's panther suggests an argument made implicitly by Rousseau's natural man: the natural balance between our needs and our ability to satisfy them leads to a certain level of contentment, even joy. "A being endowed with senses whose faculties equaled his desires," Rousseau writes in *Emile*, "would be an absolutely happy being."[25]

The transition out of the state of nature disrupts this balance, however. To satisfy natural needs in changing circumstances, natural man develops reason, imagination, foresight, and society. In the process, however, his needs expand and new, conventional desires are created. Social man becomes miserable because he possesses desires he cannot satisfy. "Our unhappiness consists, therefore, in the disproportion between our desires and our faculties," Rousseau argues.[26] Such a being has more in common with Kafka's Artist, at least in his final, dying days, than with Kafka's panther.

But comparing the Hunger Artist with Rousseau's social man is more difficult. The Hunger Artist fasts because he cannot find anything he likes. Rousseau's social man derives much pleasure, though little satisfaction, from a great variety of food. He enjoys eating an apple, but he knows it is not a steak; or, he enjoys steak, but he knows he needs more tomorrow. In this sense, Kafka's Artist and Rousseau's social man are both hungry, but the Artist knows why he is unnourished and has stopped looking for a meal.

Perhaps more than anything, however, Rousseau's natural man helps us to appreciate Kafka's ambivalence toward human freedom. The panther's purported freedom makes us wonder how a caged panther could be described as free, or better yet, why Kafka might think that the panther is free in a way that the Hunger Artist is not. After all, not only is the Artist freely choosing to fast in his cage, he maintains that his performances are driven by a desire for self-overcoming or self-mastery. At the same time, such a desire is anything but natural, and perhaps insatiable.

More importantly, the Hunger Artist is deeply affected by, and persistently dissatisfied with, his audience. He repeatedly speaks of their incomprehension, incredulousness, ingratitude, impatience, and indifference. At the outset, he bemoans his inability to capture "the attention of the entire city." The "unjust" suspicions of the "groups of spectators" depress and anger him. He accuses a fickle crowd, which "pretended to admire him," of robbing "him of the fame of fasting longer." Before his tour, he speaks of being "in the spotlight, honored by the world." Defending his decision to join the circus, he says that the "man whom thousands of people had cheered on could not display himself in show booths at small fun fairs." While performing at the circus, he confesses that the "visiting hours" used to be "the main purpose of his life." Moreover, the circus spectators doubted his performance, once

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again "cheating him of his reward." His demand for fame, honor, and reward is hardly modest; he demands to be recognized as "the greatest hunger artist of all time, which, in fact, he probably was already." But is the fact of greatness meaningful without its recognition?

The Hunger Artist, in other words, is infected with *amour-propre*, "a relative sentiment, artificial and born in Society, which inclines each individual to have a greater esteem for himself than for anyone else." This sentiment cannot exist in the state of nature:

> For each particular man regarding himself as the *sole Spectator* to observe him, as the sole being in the universe to take an interest in him, and as the sole judge of his own merit, it is not possible that a sentiment having its source in comparisons he is not capable of making could spring up in his soul.[27]

Amour-propre comprises two elements: the first involves comparing oneself with others; the second involves the observation, interest, and judgment of other spectators, that is, concerning oneself with whether others recognize the inequality disclosed by the comparison. Moreover, this sentiment creates a desire that cannot be satisfied. "Love of oneself, which regards only ourselves," Rousseau explains, "is contented when our true needs are satisfied. But *amour-propre* is never content and never could be, because this sentiment, preferring ourselves to others, also demands others to prefer us to themselves, which is impossible."[28] The Artist may greatly develop his faculties as an artist, but the desire for such development to be recognized contributes to, perhaps even causes, his unhappiness.[29]

Kafka's panther is surely caged, but it is not consumed by a spiritual need to overcome its bodily instincts, nor is it shackled by the opinion of others. It can therefore experience a sort of contentment, even joy, that Kafka's Artist cannot. Allen Thiher aptly remarks that Kafka ends both "The Metamorphosis" and "A Hunger Artist" with "an image that presents the antithesis of a withered speechless beetle and an emaciated hunger artist; he presents the image of animal self-sufficiency that the sensual sister or the sleek panther proposes." Each image "shows that the contrary of spiritual fulfillment in Kafka is mere animal plenitude . . . a natural state devoid of the sin of self-consciousness."[30] Dimitris Vardoulakis makes use of Emmanuel Levinas's account of the Other, whose presence "makes it impossible to assert one's freedom."[31] The border between freedom and imprisonment, Vardoulakis explains, "collapses through the intervention of the others," made manifest by the "commercial aspect" of the performance. "As an exhibition artiste," he argues, "his freedom is conditioned by the audience's interest." Hence, the Artist must stop fasting after forty days lest the crowd grow bored. However much the Artist transcends his bodily needs, the "public represent an other

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that figures merely as a constraint, a contingent limitation."[32] Vardoulakis persuasively suggests that the panther's freedom-clenching jaw "is also a smile at the previous occupant of the cage, whose body was held captive by an illusion of freedom."[33]

In addition to their comparable diagnoses, Kafka and Rousseau seem to suggest comparable prescriptions, in part because neither thinker is clear. Rousseau anticipates and dismisses the accusation that he is advocating a return to the pure state of nature.[34] A more accurate account of Rousseau's solution would be his case for the nascent society, which was "the best for man" because it maintained "a golden mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our *amour-propre*."[35] But this, too, would be inadequate, and not simply because returning to nascent society is impractical. For to speak of the species is not to speak for the individual. While the nascent society is best for man, as a species, it is not the stage at which Rousseau himself, or someone like him, wishes to stop. After all, the nascent society cannot produce a Rousseau.[36]

With his concerns over *amour-propre* and personal dependence, and his democratic sympathies, Rousseau seems to defy the agonistic and glory-ridden spirit of Nietzsche's teaching. "Struggle and the joy of victory were recognized," Nietzsche writes, admiringly, of Greek antiquity. Jealousy, hatred, and envy were deemed good, for each "spurs men to activity: not the activity of fights of annihilation but the activity of fights which are *contests*."[37] Rousseau, too, does not altogether deny the allure and goodness of strife and glory. In the *First Discourse*, he writes that the wise man "is not insensitive to glory."[38] His account of distributive justice in a well-constituted state is inconceivable without public distinction and recognition.[39] The "ardor to be talked about," or the "furor to distinguish oneself," he insists, "*nearly* always" leads to misery.[40] And, of course, the very denunciations he unleashes against the arts in the *First Discourse* and the *Letter to d'Alembert* are themselves public acts of artistic genius. Rousseau, then, has a case for and against the artistic life, for and against the pursuit of glory and public esteem.[41] Moving beyond the nascent society does not necessarily entail developing certain faculties at the price of generating insatiable desires; everything depends on the individual, and on the community in which he or she lives. Part of Rousseau's task is to reveal the benefits and detriments of artistic, even social, life.

It is tempting to treat the panther's appearance as nothing but the final nail in the Hunger Artist's coffin. He and his art cannot simply die and be buried; they must be replaced, by a nonartist and nonart. "Even for a person with the dullest mind," the narrator notes, "it was clearly refreshing to see this wild animal prowling around in this cage, which had been dreary for such a long time." The panther is more appealing because, unlike the Artist, it can be observed without guilt.

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In addition to preferring the panther, there is also sufficient reason to reject the Hunger Artist qua artist. In the section "What one should learn from artists" from *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche explains the purpose of art in relation to its ability to "make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not."[42] Mostly, things are not beautiful. It is from the "subtle power" of artists that we can learn from artists what makes life so worth living. The particulars of Nietzsche's aesthetic philosophy changed since he first articulated them in *The Birth of Tragedy*, most notably his very public rejection of Richard Wagner, whose Christian moralizing he would interpret as a source of decline. He never wavered from the notion that art could be the source of beauty. What the Artist produced was not art—not because it ultimately led to his death, but because it led to something far worse: something that was ugly, even in the eye of its beholder.

CONCLUSION

The Hunger Artist's slow demise, to say nothing of his rather unceremonious death, raises the question of whether his story is a tragedy. A second, perhaps unavoidable, question is whether the reader is intended to identify the Hunger Artist with Kafka the artist. Kafka identified "A Hunger Artist," along with "The Metamorphosis" and three other stories, as one of his few writings that contained anything of value. As a late work published shortly before his death, the story can be read as a statement about his own professional dissatisfactions and disappointments. It is difficult to deny that Kafka's writings failed to find a large audience during his lifetime; much of his public notoriety, especially in the English-speaking world, arrived only after his death. Much like the Hunger Artist, then, Kafka performed and died without receiving the recognition he thought he deserved. Unlike the Artist, however, Kafka was never popular and thus never experienced a declining interest in his work. Moreover, Kafka produced material work, while the Artist's talent lies in his ability to not consume, and to leave us with nothing.

Another view has Kafka as little more than an observer of other artists and wishing he could have better appreciated them and their art. The Artist's confession is Kafka's recognition of his own failing, not as an artist, but as a supporter of the arts, more generally; it is more about self-criticism rather than artistic self-pity. But to equate the protagonist of the story with Kafka himself is rather uncharitable to Kafka's talents. It too much resembles that tendency to presume that the interpretation of a text can be found in the author's personal life, or that a piece of literature is nothing more than an autobiographical account. Just because it is interesting does not make it true.

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There is also the possibility that "A Hunger Artist" is Kafka's commentary on what it means to be an artist. For instance, the Hunger Artist represents the artist as such, a tragic hero, at odds with an ignorant and indifferent world. The crowd in particular fails to appreciate high culture as the result of a growing democratic sense of taste. The story is still tragic, though Kafka's own personal life story isn't the tragedy, but modern art itself, if not art period. Kafka, like Rousseau, and unlike Nietzsche, seems to appreciate that such pursuits have their disadvantages and are likely to bring misery to many, if not most, people.

Even so, the story contains a fair amount of cynicism concerning the Hunger Artist, if not criticism, related to his character, motivations, and actions. Kafka repeatedly stresses the extent to which the Artist is concerned with how he is perceived by the public. The Artist desires, perhaps not food, as much as recognition. In that sense, he is a slave in a way that the panther could never be. Kafka's cage is not the cage in which he fasts; his cage is other people—a form of bondage in which social men alone can be placed. It was the reason Kafka could write, "I have never been under the pressure of any responsibility but that imposed on me by the existence, the gaze, the judgment of other people."[43]

To adopt this view is to suggest that "A Hunger Artist" is Kafka's critical commentary on certain artists. Much like Rousseau's critique of the *philosophes*, who cared more about being recognized for bearing the truth than actually being bearers of truth, Kafka is criticizing certain artists whose need for an audience seems to outweigh their appreciation of art for its own sake. Yet, it is not a stretch to make the leap from the quality of food to the quality of culture, more generally.

Such an interpretation, which deprecates the importance or need of public recognition for the artists, seems to find support in Kafka's own approach to his work. According to Michael Hofmann, Kafka is someone "we are encouraged to think of as a publication-averse recluse."[44] In this view, Kafka wrote for the sake of writing or for his personal pleasure, not for fame. Indeed, Kafka exhibited, at times, a rather strong disinclination to publish his writings. "In general," according to Max Brod, a lifelong friend of Kafka, his

> hopes and fears were directed towards quite other things than literary reputation, which was not exactly unpleasant to him, but unimportant. The whole business of publicity didn't interest him very much, did not occupy his feelings very much—so that his shrinking from publication (apart from certain later periods in his life) was a matter of no great fuss, no passion.[45]

One of the better-known stories about Kafka involves the purported betrayal by Brod, whom Kafka asked to burn all of his existing manuscripts, unread, knowing that Brod was unlikely to follow such a request.

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Criticizing a need or a desire to be recognized by the popular public is not the same as criticizing such a need or desire to be recognized by the right people for the right reasons. Kafka was notoriously self-critical but not adverse to publication. After all, "A Hunger Artist" was also one of four short stories that he included in the last work he prepared for publication. The title of the collection is *A Hunger Artist: Four Stories*, which was published in 1924, the year he died. Kafka provided more than enough reasons to think that he was not opposed to publishing, but that he was opposed to publishing inferior works, even when they were popular. In this way, Kafka's somewhat tortured self-consciousness follows the agonies of the Hunger Artist, one of his most memorable characters.

NOTES

1. For the meaning of "Kafkaesque," consider Frederick R. Karl, *Franz Kafka: Representative Man* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1991), 7–8, 757–760. The authors would like to thank the editors for their many helpful suggestions and comments.
2. Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" is in the public domain; therefore references to the story do not contain page numbers. In this chapter, all references to the story's text are drawn from Franz Kafka, "A Hunger Artist," translated by Ian Johnston, *Franz Kafka: Index of Selected Shorter Writings*, http://johnstoniatexts.x10host.com/kafka/hungerartisthtml.html; for the original German, see Franz Kafka, "Ein Hungerkünstler" (1922; Project Gutenberg, December 12, 2009), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/30655/30655-h/30655-h.htm.
3. Patrick Bridgwater, *Kafka and Nietzsche* (Bonn: Bouvier, Verlag, Herbert, Grundman, 1974), 7.
4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Collected Writings of Rousseau," In *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts (First Discourse) and Polemics*, edited by Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, vol. 2 (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), 38, 58, 59, 62–63.
5. Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Book, 1991), 540e–541b.
6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), §3.18.
7. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), 1119a6–10.
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 5.
9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), §260.
10. Bridgwater, *Kafka*, 8.
11. Translation corrected.
12. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §3.25.

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13. Ibid., §3.1.
14. Ibid., §3.5.
15. Ibid., §259.
16. See for example Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 47.
17. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §3.16.
18. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1994), 102.
19. David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
20. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau, edited by Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, vol. 3, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (Second Discourse) Polemics, and Political Economy* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), 12.
21. Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 18.
22. Ibid., 91.
23. Ibid., 27.
24. Ibid., 20.
25. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or, On Education*, translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 80.
26. Ibid.
27. Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 91; emphasis added.
28. Rousseau, *Emile*, 213–214; translation altered.
29. See also Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau,* edited by Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, vol. 3, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (Second Discourse) Polemics, and Political Economy* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), 12.
30. Allen Thiher, *Franz Kafka: A Study of Short Fiction* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 90.
31. Dimitris Vardoulakis, "'The Fall is the Proof of our Freedom': Mediated Freedom in Kafka," in *Freedom and Confinement in Modernity: Kafka's Cages*, edited by A. Kiarina Kordela and Dimitris Vardoulakis (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 87.
32. Vardoulakis, "'The Fall is the Proof of our Freedom,'" 97.
33. Ibid., 99.
34. Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 79.
35. Ibid., 48.
36. Ibid., 3–6, 20, 48.
37. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 35.
38. Rousseau, *First Discourse*, 19.
39. Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 94–95.
40. Ibid., 63; emphasis added.
41. Consider Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One's Life to the Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 53, 83.

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42. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kauffman (New York: Vintage, 1974), §299.

43. Franz Kafka, *I Am a Memory Come Alive*, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 192.

44. Michael Hofmann, "Introduction," in *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, translated by Michael Hofmann (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008), viii.

45. Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, translated by G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1995), 61.

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Chapter 5

Conflicting Moral Goods

William Faulkner's "Barn Burning"

Mary P. Nichols

In "Barn Burning,"[1] William Faulkner tells the story of a ten-year-old boy growing up in the post-Civil War South, who is torn between his loyalty to his father and family and his repugnance at what his father does, asks him to do, and tries to teach him. In Faulkner's words, the young Colonel Sartoris Snopes (Sarty) is "pulled two ways like between two teams of horses."[2] Sharecropper Abner Snopes tells his son, "You got to learn to stick to your own blood," and he demands his son's unswerving loyalty as he exerts his "ravening and jealous rage" against the world.[3] Faulkner's story is in fact a series of conflicts in which Abner Snopes demands his son's sympathy and even complicity. We first meet the older Snopes in court when he is sued by his neighbor Mr. Harris for burning his barn, and Abner thinks that his son should lie for him on the stand. Later, when sharecropping for Major de Spain, Snopes deliberately besmirches the planation owner's rug, after insisting that Sarty accompany him to de Spain's home. Finally, Snopes asks for his son's assistance in burning de Spain's barn.

Since Sarty longs to "break free of the old habit" of obedience, of "the old blood which he had not been permitted to choose for himself,"[4] it is tempting to read Faulkner's story as a conflict between authority and individual freedom. By the end of the story, Sarty is able to "break free" to warn de Spain that his father is about to burn his barn. The story ends when Sarty finally walks away and "[does] not look back."[5] Critics have therefore understood the story in the American tradition of a "self-reliant" individualism that breaks from the past and "forge[s] a new world spiritually."[6] Sarty is like Huck Finn, who "lights out for the territory ahead."[7]

From this perspective, Faulkner's story aligns itself with John Locke's objections to the rule of the father in the family, rule based on blood ties and kinship, and by extension to rule in the political community grounded in

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patriarchy. Almost as if anticipating Sarty's lament that he was not permitted to choose his blood ties, and his chafing at the obedience they compel, Locke founds his political thought on an unencumbered individual freedom and consent, with implications for a more liberal family structure. Locke derives a father's authority over his children not from "his begetting them," or from ties of blood or "right of nature," but from his duty to care for them until they are able to care for themselves. His authority is therefore temporary, and limited by its purpose, the care and education of his children for responsible adulthood. Moreover, the father shares authority over them with their mother. Parental authority therefore looks forward to their children's freedom and independence, which provide its limits and goals.[8] Locke's liberal family derives support from his liberal politics, which attacks "absolute, arbitrary power" in rulers, and bases authority on the consent of the governed.[9] Locke might have even appealed to Faulkner's portrayal of Snopes, who exercises absolute, arbitrary power over his family, had the story been available to him, to illustrate the dangers that patriarchy posed for human life.

Faulkner's story is more complex, however, than any simple opposition between family ties and individual freedom. After all, the patriarch Abner Snopes himself is a symbol of bristling autonomy; he asserts his "independence" and "conviction in the rightness of his own actions." In spite of the sharecropper's limp from an old Civil War injury, he holds "an undeviating course," never "chang[ing] stride." He is "not dwarfed" even by Major de Spain's stately plantation house,[10] which he regards with disgust rather than awe. The wealthy planter "aims" to "own" him "body and soul" during the planting season, he tells his son. But no one will "own" Abner Snopes, either body or soul. His insistence on self-possession is reminiscent of Locke's argument that "every man has a *property* in his own *person*: this no one has a right to but himself," and thus "the *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands are properly his."[11] Abner Snopes's protest against being "owned" echoes the American protest against Southern slavery. The injustice and oppression of the past are perpetuated in new ways, Snopes's language suggests; they can be found in the postwar economic system of sharecropping, and they are suffered by both white and black people. Snopes's defiance, however, is not simply against the wealth, property, and privilege of the South, as some critics understand or wish it to be,[12] but against any community or standards that define who he is. Abner Snopes's own resistance to being "owned" by anyone is as much in the American tradition as Sarty's own break from Snopes himself. One is not owned by another, for one owns oneself. Faulkner captures Abner Snopes's own refusal to look back, as Snopes leaves one community after another, with burning barns behind him.

At the same time, Faulkner shows his reservation about Snopes's "independence," when he describes it as "wolflike," and Snopes's conviction in

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the rightness of his actions as "ferocious." His walk may be "stiff" from his old injury, but his limp is also "ruthless" and "implacable." Snopes's protests are destructive and violent, as in his characteristic act of burning barns. His words are few, some muttered below what anyone can hear, and typically issued in brief commands to his family members.[13] More generally, Snopes recognizes no principles of truth or justice that he shares with others in the community and that limit his actions. Since only blood ties define friend and enemy for Snopes, he cannot be part of any larger community. His radical individualism does not lead him on a Lockean path of consenting to a commonwealth that establishes laws, including those of property, and punishes their infractions.[14] Nor does his individualism qualify his absolute, arbitrary dominion of his family, but rather supports it. No one can tell Snopes how to manage his family. The community looks on. It does not interfere.

Moreover, Faulkner presents the limits of individualism in Sarty's actions as well as in his father's. Although Sarty breaks from his father's authority while recognizing principles of truth and justice, his act of warning de Spain to protect his barn is ultimately, as far as Sarty knows, much more destructive than any act his father commits. He assumes, as must the reader, that the gunshots he hears mean the death of his father and older brother. Sarty does not run to see what has happened; he does not even return to his family. However much he may love his father and his family, his attachment does not in the end prevent him from walking away, without looking back. Faulkner's ending is chilling, for Sarty does not try to find out whether his father and older brother are alive or dead, and he abandons his mother and aunt. In spite of his sympathetic portrayal of Sarty's plight, Faulkner does not present his "breaking free" as an answer to the oppressions of his father. For Faulkner, freedom must be nurtured by the ties of family and community, even the blood ties that are so defining for Snopes, as well as principles of truth and justice that hold a community together.

With this lesson, Faulkner cautions proponents of the American liberalism that is derived from Locke, insofar as they neglect the formative role of families and communities in developing the virtues that guide individual choices and thereby contribute to the education of good human beings. Thus, Faulkner's understanding has more in common with Aristotle than with Locke. To be sure, Aristotle also objects to the abuses of patriarchy, for example, to the monstrous Cyclopes, who give laws to their wives and children, absent any larger political community to restrain them.[15] Aristotle would agree with Locke that there is something monstrous about Abner Snopes's assertion of absolute authority over his family. For Aristotle, families represent an early stage of human development toward political and civilized life, and eventually find their proper place in a larger community.[16] Just as important for Aristotle as the restraint on tyrannical fathers that

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communities provide, however, is the affection or friendship that holds political communities together and that gives support to the ties between family members.[17] In "Barn Burning," Faulkner shows us the community's respect both for such family ties and for standards of truth and justice that members of the community share. He shows us as well the efforts of the community to understand and even accommodate Snopes, however unsuccessful they prove to be. Faulkner's story of those efforts, as well as his reservations about Sarty's "walking away," serve as a nod toward Aristotle's argument.

My chapter traces these connections to ancient and more contemporary political thought through Snopes's assertion of himself against the world, his demand for Sarty's support and complicity, and Sarty's response. The first section focuses on the events that revolve around Harris's suit against Snopes for burning his barn, including the trial where Sarty is called to testify against his father. There Sarty faces a conflict between his loyalty to his father and his own sense of what is just. In my second section, I turn to Snopes's encounter with Major de Spain, his destruction of de Spain's expensive rug, and Snopes's own suit against de Spain over the fine the planter imposes on him for ruining his rug. Here we see Snopes's assertion of his own integrity—in the face of everyone and everything. Finally, Sarty decides to warn de Spain that his father is about to burn de Spain's barn and experiences terrible consequences as a result of his decision, as I discuss in my third section, along with Faulkner's reservations about Sarty's action. Faulkner defends communal ties, not only those of family, but more importantly those of justice and truthfulness that hold together the larger community. In this way, his vision encompasses the conflicting moral goods—family loyalty, individual integrity, truth, and justice—that move his characters.

FIRST INCIDENT: GOING TO COURT

The story opens in a country store in which the Justice of the Peace presides. A boy crouched on a nail keg in the back of a crowded room has limited vision of the proceedings, a suit brought against his father by a Mr. Harris, a man he thinks of as his father's "enemy," and therefore his enemy as well. "*Ourn! Mine and hisn both! He's my father!*" he thinks. But while the boy recognizes "the fierce pull of blood," he also feels "frantic grief and despair." The boy's distress only increases when he is called to testify about the burning of Harris's barn, with Snopes as the sole suspect. "*He aims for me to lie*," Sarty thinks of his father, "*And I will have to do hit.*"[18]

We learn the boy's name only when Sarty is asked by the judge to identify himself before testifying. "Anybody named for Colonel Sartoris in this country can't help but tell the truth, can they?" the judge asks him when he hears

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his name. "The boy said nothing," Faulkner tells us.[19] Names call one to live up to the person one is named after, as the judge hopes, but what that means depends on how one understands one's eponym. To the judge, the honor that Colonel Sartoris represents demands that his namesake tells the truth. To Sarty, the honor of a Civil War colonel might very well mean standing up for one's own against enemies.[20] Faulkner does not tell us the meaning of his silence when queried by the judge. Could he be affected by the judge's understanding of his name? Regardless, the judge's comment about his name suggests that Sarty's dilemma arises from having to choose between truth and loyalty to his father.

In spite of the boy's thoughts that he will have to lie, we do not really know what young Sarty will say when questioned by the judge, and perhaps he does not either, for he breathes "as if he had swung outward at the end of a grapevine, over a ravine, and at the top of the swing had been caught in a prolonged instant of mesmerized gravity, weightless in time." Only when Harris, hesitant to ask a boy to betray his father, tells the judge not to proceed in questioning him, does time "rush" beneath Sarty again.[21]

Although the judge in the country store finds in favor of Snopes for lack of evidence against him, he does offer advice: "Leave this country and don't come back to it." Only then does Snopes speak for the first time, his "voice cold and harsh, level, without emphasis," almost as if he were speaking only to himself. Snopes's reply manifests a man who will be ruled by no one: "I aim to. I don't figure to stay in a country among people who . . .", his unprintable final words "addressed to no one." He need not be banished from the community, he implies, for the community is not one in which he would live; he removes himself of his own volition. Nor was he waiting for the result from the trial to determine anything he does, for Snopes's "black Sunday coat is donned not for the trial, but for the moving." He dresses not out of respect for the court proceeding, but for their trip, for his wife, sister-in-law, and two daughters are already waiting in the wagon parked outside the store, with all their belongings. Snopes later asks Sarty, "Don't you know all they wanted was a chance to get at me because they knew I had them beat?"[22] He leaves town victorious, needing no one to recognize his victory, unless it be Sarty, who if he recognized it would not have to be told of it.

As they leave the makeshift court, a boy in the crowd hisses at Snopes the words that Sarty was released by the judge from having to utter: "Barn burner." Sarty attacks the boy, truth or no truth, and must be pulled away by his father. Although Sarty had defended his father against the insult, Abner Snopes does not trust that he would have been loyal to him on the stand: "You were fixing to tell them," he reproaches his son, and strikes him with the back of his hand "hard but without heat." If Sarty doesn't "stick to [his] own blood," no one else, "not any man there this morning" will stick up for

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him. It is a lesson Snopes delivers, because Sarty is "getting to be a man." Faulkner, however, has a different vision of Sarty as a man, an older Sarty who twenty years later was to tell himself "If I had said [Harris and the judge] wanted only truth, justice, he would have hit me again."[23]

On their way to the new farm they are renting, this time from Major de Spain, Abner Snopes and his family camp for the night. The night still being cold, "they had a fire against it, of a rail lifted from a nearby fence and cut into lengths—a small fire, neat, niggard almost, a shrewd fire." Such frugal fires were customary for Snopes, Faulkner observes, and offers several explanations of why a man who "had not only seen the waste and extravagance of war, but who had in his blood an inherent voracious prodigality with material not his own," should not "have burned everything in sight." Or, rather, he speculates about how Sarty might have understood his father over the years. Perhaps Snopes's meager fire was the habit of the war, the boy might have later thought, when his father hid with his stolen horses "from all men, blue or gray."[24]

Moreover, Snopes's experiencing the waste and extravagance of a war's destruction of life and property might make all waste and extravagance repugnant, even with regard to his own fires, and even with regard to the waste and extravagance he sees in the aristocratic South.[25] From this perspective, "the jealous rage" that Faulkner attributes to him is not greed to possess what others possess, but a disgust almost at possession itself, which seems to him unnecessary or superfluous, and hence a sign of unmerited pretension. Snopes does not crave possessions. He is too independent for that.[26] He and his family own only what they can take with them, when they move in their wagon from one place to another.[27] When they arrive at their next "home," one of his daughters remarks that "Likely hit ain't fitten for hawgs," but Snopes insists that "fit it will and you'll hog it and like it."[28] Snopes is more content with his lot than his daughters are with theirs. Dissatisfaction reveals weakness. He defends his integrity, but he is not the individualist Locke describes who mixes his labor with what he is given for the sake of increase.[29] Labor bespeaks need, and possessions make one vulnerable. From this perspective, Snopes's "niggard blazes" indicate not his poverty or timidity but his pride. Abner Snopes does not use the word "nobility," or think in such terms, but Faulkner suggests that Snopes ennobles necessity in making it a standard by which he can reject waste and extravagance. The "niggard blazes" that Faulkner attributes to him characterizes his barn-burnings as well. Snopes attacks property, specifically, "out-dwellings" or additions unlikely to be inhabited, not human life itself. As Faulkner says about his campfires, he does not burn everything in sight.

Faulkner further ruminates about Snopes's frugal fires, and Sarty's understanding of them: "older still, [the boy] might have divined the true reason:

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that the element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being," and thus as "the one weapon for the preservation of his integrity, else breath were not worth the breathing, and hence to be regarded with respect and used with discretion."[30] Although Faulkner at times shows omniscience about Sarty's thoughts and feelings, even in later life, he leaves open whether Sarty ever divined the reason for his father's economy with respect to fire. Regardless, however momentarily, the author gives us a glimpse of Snopes's inviolable sense of integrity and his awareness that breath is not worth breathing without it. In this light, Snopes's neutrality between "blue and grey" in the war seems less like a betrayal of his people than a refusal of the extravagance of taking a side in a cause not his own. He is his own man, to such an extent that he can find no place in any of the communities in which we see him briefly settle before moving on.

SECOND INCIDENT: MEETING MAJOR DE SPAIN

Sarty's lessons from his father continue when they arrive at their destination. Snopes insists that Sarty (rather than his older son) come along when he goes to "have a word" with the man who aims to own him body and soul for the planting season, the man on whose land Snopes has contracted to work as a sharecropper. As they approach Major de Spain's columned home, a house larger than Sarty has ever seen, the boy feels "a surge of peace and joy," that causes him for a moment to "forget his father and the terror and despair both," for "people whose lives are a part of this peace and dignity are beyond his [father's] touch," even if it were "capable of stinging them for a little moment but that was all." This is hardly the lesson for which Abner Snopes brought his son to the plantation house. Indeed, when he passes through the front door, Sarty is "deluged as though by a warm wave by a suave turn of carpeted stair and a pendant glitter of chandeliers and a mute gleam of gold frames."[31] He seems to experience the house's elegance, not its extravagance or waste.

Although Sarty hopes that his father will also feel "the spell" of the plantation house and that it will somehow bring him peace, Snopes is unmoved, and tries to dispel its effect on Sarty. Having deliberately stepped in horse manure in the drive, Snopes pushes his way into the house, and tromps on "a blond rug," which Major de Spain got "all the way from France." Whereas for Sarty the sight of the plantation house evokes peace and dignity, for his father it evokes contempt. He seems to understand de Spain's owning the expensive rug (and by inference his plantation house) to be as much of an affront as his owning him body and soul. As he remarks about the plantation house to Sarty as they leave, "Pretty and white, ain't it? That's sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain't white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix

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some white sweat with it."[32] And when Major de Spain insists that Snopes clean the rug, he "cleans" it, beyond any mending. Those who live in such apparent "peace and dignity" are not as impervious to Snopes's touch as Sarty initially supposes.

When Snopes returns the ruined rug to de Spain, he insists that Sarty accompany him again, and even ride the mule that carries the rolled rug, almost as if he wants Sarty himself to feel the oppression he feels and to see his father once again standing up to the South's propertied wealth. Sarty sits on the mule in front of de Spain's house, watching his father move "with clocklike deliberation," drop the rug on the porch, descend with "unhurried" step, and mount the mule himself. "Together," father and son ride home, with Snopes keeping the mule "to a walk."[33] Snopes's unhurried movements suggest that he is less affected by de Spain and the task the planter imposed upon him than is de Spain by Snopes himself. De Spain appears shortly at Snopes's farm, "collarless, and even bareheaded, trembling, speaking in a shaking voice."[34] At first de Spain supposes that Snopes did not ruin his rug intentionally. "Wasn't there anybody here, any of your women," de Spain begins to ask him, but falters. He ceases speaking, "shaking" again, almost as if he has a sudden glimpse that the man he is trying to deal with is more than he can handle or even understand. Faulkner showed us a similar reaction in de Spain's wife, when she looks at the tracks on her rug in "incredulous amazement," and her voice too shakes.[35] Neither she nor her husband fathoms Abner Snopes. He is not part of their world, just as he looks like a monstrosity in their living room. De Spain tries to regain control by imposing a penalty of twenty extra bushels of corn to be paid when Snopes's crop comes in, not because the bushels will pay for the rug, he explains, and not even to keep Mrs. de Spain quiet, but because he wants to "teach" Snopes to wipe his feet before coming into his house.[36]

Sarty is outraged on his father's behalf, telling "Pap" that "You done the best you could! . . . If he wanted hit done different why didn't he wait and tell you how?" Since de Spain's fine for the rug is unjust in Sarty's mind, his father should not pay it: "He won't git no twenty bushels! He won't git none! We'll gether hit and hide hit! I kin watch"[37] Even the young Sarty has a sense of justice. He is eager to act on it when it does not conflict with his loyalty to his father, but rather allows him to take up his cause. His very defense of his father in the matter of his "cleaning" the rug betrays his innocence, however, for he thinks his father "done the best he could." The irony of this remark at the boy's expense cannot be lost on the reader, for it is true in a way the boy does not imagine. His father did his best not to remove his tracks from the rugs, but to ruin the rug. To do his best in the circumstances for Sarty is to correct the harm his father did to the rug, while for Snopes it is to take it to a

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new level. Sarty nevertheless hopes that the "twenty bushels that seems hard to have to pay for just a rug will be a cheap price for him to stop forever and always from being what he used to be."[38] He yearns for the "peace and dignity" that he earlier experienced upon arriving at the plantation house—the very illusion that his father sought to dispel. Sarty imagines that if his father pays the twenty bushels "maybe it will all add up and balance and vanish corn, rug, fire; the terror and grief, the being pulled two ways like between two teams of horses gone, done with for ever and ever."[39]

Sarty's wish that his father might change seems no more plausible than de Spain's thought that his fining Snopes will teach him to wipe his feet before coming into his house. Snopes does not acquiesce to de Spain's fine. His initial response, instead of burning his barn, is to bring a suit against him in court over the twenty bushels. After all, he has prevailed in court before when Harris could not provide evidence against him. He seeks victory again—he "had them beat," he told Sarty after his first appearance in court[40]—rather than a determination of truth or justice. As it turns out, going to court proves not as reliable a form of defiance as burning barns.

Once again, as in the first court scene, the truth (he has destroyed the rug, just as he has burned the barn) and justice (he should pay for the property he destroyed) is not on Snopes's side, but this time there is evidence against him (the rug he "cleaned" *is* ruined). Snopes does not attempt to justify himself by claiming that he did the best he could to clean the rug, as Sarty had. Rather, he claims that he did exactly what de Spain asked him to do: "he brought the rug to me and said he wanted the tracks washed out of it. I washed the tracks out and took the rug back to him."[41] Whether Snopes rejects the law outright, as when he expects his son to lie for him on the stand, or he attempts to pervert its justice by appealing to its letter, he remains contemptuous of the law that supports the privilege and property of men like de Spain. The judge pushes him further by inquiring whether he returned the rug in the same condition it was in before he smeared it, a challenge that Snopes acknowledges by his silence. Had he restored its original condition, he would have erased any mark of his on the rug, even if his mark is now one of destruction. Sarty's outburst in court, "He ain't done it! He ain't burnt . . .", is what Snopes wanted to hear from him at the earlier trial, but now it is not only true but irrelevant to the case of de Spain's rug. Snopes has not burned de Spain's barn, at least not yet.[42] His outburst foreshadows the damage that is to come. It is the last time that Sarty defends his father.

Although the judge finds against Snopes, he does reduce his fine by half of what de Spain requested, for twenty bushels "seems a little high for a man in your circumstances to pay."[43] He does not ask Snopes to leave town, as did the judge after Snopes burned Harris's barn, but gives him an opportunity to make some return for what he has taken. His compromise would allow

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Snopes to remain in the community, to provide for his family, and to give compensation for the damage he has done. Snopes, however, does not want a place in the community. He has gone to court, but not because he recognized any authority its verdict would have over him, but only because he sought to score a victory. The judge tried to accommodate him, but Snopes does not give an inch, perhaps especially because the judge reduces his fine out of a recognition of poverty. He thus remains as unbending as his leg is stiff from his Civil War injury, and as "undeviating" in his purpose as was his course through the manure in de Spain's drive when it could have been "avoided by a simple change of stride."[44] This time he does not tell Sarty that he "has them beat," and that "they" know it, as he had after Harris's suit. Of course, *he* did not beat them even then, for the decision in his favor came when Sarty did not testify and the judge did not press him to do so. His "independence" is surely as much an illusion as the peace and dignity of the plantation house.

When the second trial is over, "the morning was but half begun," and Sarty thinks they will return home "and perhaps back to the field, since they were late, far behind all other farmers." Instead, Snopes and his two sons go by the blacksmith shop, where Sarty hears him tell "a long and unhurried story out of the time before the birth of his older brother even when he had been a professional horsetrader." Father and sons share a meager lunch and spend the afternoon at a horse lot, watching and listening to the swapping and buying that goes on there. The slow movement of the day, accentuated by the repeated refrain, "and still they did not go home," is the only time that Snopes enjoys spending time with others in the story, or at least seems to, for Faulkner leaves us as much in the dark about why they are staying in town as is Sarty. Only after sundown when they finally return home is the quiet of the day broken by his mother's desperate plea as her husband prepares to burn de Spain's barn, "Abner! No! No! Oh God. Oh, God. Abner!"[45] Abner Snopes was not enjoying—or wasting—time but abiding it, for he would hardly spend a day in a field he knew he was planning to abandon.

THIRD INCIDENT: BARN BURNING

Whereas in the first court scene Sarty faced the question of whether he should reveal or conceal what his father had already done, now when his father prepares to burn de Spain's barn, he faces the issue of whether he should help his father or take a stand against him. Sarty's moral dilemma is intensified, since the conflict between loyalty to his father and truth and justice demands not merely his speaking or remaining silent about what has been done already, but his acting. When his father first commands him to go to the barn to fetch an oil can from the wagon, he reflects on his obedience, thinking of it as

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an "old habit" stemming from "the old blood" he did not choose, but was bequeathed him." He longs to keep running: "I could keep on, he thought. I could run on and on and never look back, never need to see his face again. Only I can't. I can't."[46]

When Sarty returns to the house, oil can in hand, he asks his father whether he plans to send a message to warn de Spain, as he had to Harris before burning his barn. Presumably Sarty understands his father's message that "wood and hay kin burn" to be a way of giving fair notice.[47] For Snopes, however, it might have been only an act of bravado, an announcement of who will be responsible when Harris's barn burns. There seems to be less bravado now on Snopes's part than desperation. His own family is turning against him. Not only does Sarty challenge him over the issue of warning de Spain, but Snopes fears (correctly) that Sarty might warn de Spain about what he is planning. He therefore asks his wife to detain Sarty in the house while he and his older son accomplish their purpose. Sarty's aunt even cries out, "If [Sarty] don't go [to warn de Spain], before God, I am going up there myself!" Even his sister-in-law imagines rising up against him, and his wife in the end does not hold Sarty back.[48]

When Sarty tears free of his mother's embrace, he might have "run on and on and never look[ed] back," as he considered doing earlier when his father sent him to fetch the kerosene. But instead of running away, he runs to the plantation house to warn de Spain. His intervention has a terrible consequence for him. Whereas Snopes's warning to Harris involved some indefinite future for which he should be on guard, Sarty's frantic and hurried warning to de Spain involves the present moment. And for de Spain, protecting his barn means shooting the culprits. When Sarty hears the gunshots, he supposes the worst, that his warning de Spain has precipitated the deaths of his father and older brother. Faulkner describes his turmoil:

> Springing up and into the road again, running again, knowing it was too late yet still running even after he heard the shot and, an instant later, two shots, pausing now without knowing he had ceased to run, crying "Pap! Pap!," running again before he knew he had begun to run, stumbling, tripping over something and scrabbling up again without ceasing to run, looking backward over his shoulder at the glare as he got up, running on among the invisible trees, panting, sobbing, "Father! Father!"[49]

Sarty's distress might seem to indicate a new-found allegiance to his father under the weight of what he thinks is the consequence of his action, and his rejecting any concept of right and wrong severed from ties of blood, kin, and family. But his distress leads him to convert "Pap" into an abstraction, a formal designation rather than a personal one. Oliver Billingslea finds in Sarty's

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substitution of "Father" for "Pap" an intuitive recognition that he has severed his ties to his father.[50] This interpretation is confirmed when we see Sarty later that evening, "sitting on the crest of a hill, his back toward what he had called home for four days anyhow," and creating a myth that gives him a "father" he can admire, "My father, he thought, 'He was brave!' . . . 'He was in the war! He was in Colonel Sartoris' cav'ry!'"[51] Just as Sarty earlier defended his father as doing his best to clean de Spain's rug, he now defends his service as a soldier under the man for whom Sarty is named.

Faulkner immediately corrects Sarty's image of his father. The boy did not know, he tells us, that his father went to that war as "a private in the fine old European sense, wearing no uniform, admitting the authority of and giving fidelity to no man or army or flag . . . for booty—it meant nothing and less than nothing to him if it were enemy booty or his own."[52] Ironically, the boy who finally tells the truth about his father to de Spain—that he is a barn burner—does not tell the truth about him to himself—that he is a horse thief. When he utters these words about his father's wartime service, he sits on a hill with "his back toward home." And when at the end of the story dawn comes and he moves on, he walks "toward the dark woods" rather than toward home, where he can assume his mother and the other female members of his family are waiting with some anxiety for their return, the mother and aunt who "had saved money somehow" to give him for Christmas his "half-sized axe" for chopping wood,[53] and who have no harsh word for him anywhere in the story. But, as the last words of the story read, "He did not look back." At the end of the story, he suffers his father's characteristic "stiffness" after spending the night in "the chill darkness," without even the frugal fire his father had accustomed him to. His stiffness is one legacy, at any rate, that Sarty imagines "walking would cure."[54] When he does look back—twenty years later, as Faulkner imagines—he supposes that if he had mentioned truth and justice to his father, his father would have hit him again. He seems to have nothing else on which to look back.

Faulkner does not resume Sarty's story elsewhere in his corpus.[55] The author, in effect, leaves him walking into the woods, away from his family. We do learn from Faulkner's development of the history of the Snopes clan in other novels (*The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion)* that Sarty does not return to his family. In *The Hamlet*, the first of these novels, the itinerant salesman Ratliff relates Snopes's family history: "There was another boy, then . . . . A little one . . . . He must have been mislaid in one of them movings."[56] Faulkner underscores the bleakness of the ending of "Barn Burning" by leaving the fate of Snopes and his older son in doubt. Only later novels indicate that de Spain did not kill them, and that they moved on once again.

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Earlier when Sarty's father hit him, Faulkner noted "the terrible handicap of being young, the light weight of his few years, just heavy enough to prevent his soaring free of the world as it seemed to be ordered but not heavy enough to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events."[57] Faulkner leaves unclear even whether de Spain saved his barn or whether in spite of Sarty's warning it burned to the ground. The narrator simply says that after Sarty runs some distance "there was no glare behind him now."[58] In any case, Sarty will not be around to prevent future conflagrations. At the end of "Barn Burning," Sarty may have become light enough to soar free of the world, but still not heavy enough to stay in it, to resist it, and try to change it. The "heaviness" of the world seems more than Sarty can bear. Yet, the "lightness" of his attempts to soar above it leave no mark on the world. In contrast, his father's heavy-handed (and heavy-footed) attempts to leave his mark threaten to destroy rather than to change it. The story provides no resolution to this tension.

FAMILIES, JUSTICE, AND TRUTH-TELLING

Faulkner's stance in this story is best reflected in the exchange between the judge and Harris in the original trial scene, when Sarty is called on to testify against his father. Even though Harris has asked the judge to call the boy to the stand, the judge hesitates when he sees the boy's distress, and gives Harris the chance to change his mind: "Do you want me to question this boy?" he whispers to him. Faulkner highlights the importance of this moment by suspending the action: "During those long subsequent seconds," in which the judge waits for Harris's answer, "there was absolutely no sound in the crowded little room save quiet and intent breathing."[59] The stillness of the watching crowd shows that the people too feel the weight of the moment, and thus understand and sympathize with the boy's—and the judge's—dilemma. Harris concedes against his interest, and the judge concurs in his decision, in spite of his duty to apply the law. They understand that it is not right to ask the boy to choose between testifying against his father and lying for his sake. By sparing the boy, they acknowledge both blood ties and truth, and do what they can to prevent the boy from being pulled as if by two teams of horses in different directions. Harris does not insist on his due; nor does the judge exact what the law permits. They both consider the effect of doing so on the boy, who is named after an admired community leader of the past, who in the judge's mind stands for truth-telling and who also fought a war in defense of his own. The community is there to witness and affirm the event, which Faulkner underlines as a communal act by locating the trial in a country store,

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where the community obtains the provisions it needs for life and labor, as well as dispenses justice.

Faulkner's story, like the judge's decision, acknowledges both the claims of the family that prevent Harris from demanding the testimony he needs for his case against Snopes and the communal principles of justice, such as respect for the property of others, telling the truth when one testifies in court, and making judicial decisions on the basis of evidence that can be publicly recognized. His story also reveals the tension between those claims. This is Faulkner's own truth-telling. The judge has no perfect decision to make, no way to ask Sarty to tell the truth without demanding his disloyalty to his father. His decision gives Harris no recompense for his barn, and the reprieve it gives to Sarty is only temporary, for Sarty faces the conflict again at the end of the story, when his father requires his silence about his burning de Spain's barn. Nor does the judge resolve the tension between Snopes and the larger community: he asks Snopes to leave the community; he does not find a place for him in it. Just as Faulkner gives justice a human face, when he refers to the judge who must rule in Harris's suit as a "Justice," and describes him as "shabby, collarless, graying man in spectacles" with a "kindly face" (in contrast to Snopes's cold "gray eyes" and "inscrutable face"), Faulkner embodies the tension between family demands and justice in the conflicts that his characters face and their imperfect attempts to resolve them. For Faulkner, truth-telling involves telling stories.

Abner Snopes does not understand Sarty's conflict, or that truth and justice could pull against blood ties. He could not therefore be expected to do anything to spare his son. It does not occur to him to speak the truth, for example, so that his son would not have to do so. Even if the judge and Harris were Abner Snopes's enemies, as Sarty supposes, they are certainly not Sarty's. The lesson is lost not only on Snopes, but on Sarty as well, for the boy is so distressed when he steps forward to testify that he "could not see that the justice's face was kindly nor discern that his voice was troubled," when he spoke to Harris. It is Faulkner who discerns it, and reports it to us, and perhaps others in the crowded courtroom see it too, whose "quiet and intent breathing" provides the only sound in the suspended moment.[60] Regardless, Faulkner lets his readers see it. The judge would not be troubled if there were nothing troubling about either lying in court or testifying against one's father.

In "Barn Burning," Faulkner affirms family and tradition as well as the justice that binds together and makes the community possible. In this, Faulkner follows the path that Aristotle took in his political theory, in protecting the family for the sake of the virtues of human beings and citizens that it fostered, for example. At the same time, he demanded of the family that it fulfill its purpose by serving those ends.[61] Like Aristotle, Faulkner lets us see that diverse and potentially conflicting goods are necessary for human flourishing, and

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that it is our task to try to reconcile them, even when it is difficult to do so. His short story sets the stage for his pursuit of such themes in his novels, in which other characters come closer to fulfilling the promise of Sarty's name. Whereas Faulkner does not pick up the story of "Colonel Sartoris" Snopes in his corpus, he follows the story of Colonel Sartoris's own son, Bayard Sartoris, in his 1938 novel, *The Unvanquished*. We meet Bayard as a boy too young to accompany his father to war, who lives through its devastating toll on life and property. After the war he attends law school. His father's murder calls him home, and his family has dueling pistols loaded for him when he arrives for the funeral. Like Sarty, Bayard is expected to honor the name of Colonel Sartoris, although one of his father's friends offers "to take [your task of vengeance] off your hands," for Bayard is "young, just a boy." But Bayard "reckons [he] can attend to it."[62] He confronts the killer alone, his father's one-time business partner and then political opponent, with courage and honor, but unarmed, and shames him into leaving town without himself firing the shots the town is waiting to hear. He spares the life of his father's murderer, because "[he] must live with [him]self."[63] His father's friend later acknowledges that he himself would have "shot him at once," but Bayard nevertheless did what had to be done "[his] way" and that Bayard "ain't done anything to be ashamed of."[64] As one commentator formulates it, "Bayard does not so much reject the conventional dictates of his father's code as transcend that code to achieve a higher moral understanding without sacrificing his traditional understanding of personal honor."[65] Unlike Sarty, Bayard's step is light enough "to soar free of the world as it seemed to be ordered," and heavy enough "to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events." Bayard does not walk away, as Sarty did. Although he rejects the moral code that his society expects him to follow, he does stand up to his father's enemy. He finds a way to act, unlike Abner Snopes, without burning barns.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Denise Schaeffer, Rachel Alexander, and the editors of this collection for their help at various stages of this project.
2. William Faulkner's "Barn Burning," is in the public domain. All page numbers for references to "Barn Burning" in this chapter refer to the version in *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 17.
3. Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 8, 11.
4. Ibid., 21.
5. Ibid., 25.

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6. Oliver Billingslea, "Fathers and Sons: The Spiritual Quest," *Mississippi Quarterly* 44 (Summer 1991), 286–87, 289, 290, 292. See also Marilyn Claire Ford, "Narrative Legerdemain: Evoking Sarty's Future in 'Barn Burning'," *Mississippi Quarterly* 51(Summer 1998): 527–41. Jane Hiles also understands the conflict as one between the forces of the past and freedom, but she argues that the deterministic language in the story indicates that Sarty's walking away in the end is only an illusion of freedom. According to Hiles, "Sarty's heritage of 'outrage and savagery and lust' remains an innate, inescapable part of his being," and that he is "doomed to repeat the pattern established by his father." "Kinship and Heredity in 'Barn Burning,'" *Mississippi Quarterly* 38 (Summer 1975), 330–31, 336.

7. Billingslea, "Fathers and Sons," 303. Billingslea sees a connection as well between Sarty's freedom and the Emersonian tradition of being true to oneself (301). Karl F. Zender also notes the similarity between Sarty and Huck Finn (for example, a tyrannical father and "a journey into freedom"), but he argues that Twain's novel is "gentler and more optimistic" than Faulkner's story, in that Huck does not have responsibility for his father's death and that his destination in the end has "a geographical and temporal plausibility that Sarty's lacks." Sarty walks only into "the dark woods" ("Character and Symbol in 'Barn Burning'," *College Literature* 16 (1989): 55). While Zender does not go as far as Hiles's "determinist" interpretation, he too casts doubt on Sarty's "escape," when he argues that in the story Faulkner was unable "to accommodate the demands of psychic growth to the realities of social existence" (Zender, "Character and Symbol," 54).

8. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), ch. VI, 53, 58, 63–67.

9. Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, e.g., ch. IV. 22; ch. XI, 137–38.

10. Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 7, 5, and 10.

11. Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ch. V, 27.

12. See, for example, Richard C. Moreland, "Compulsive and Revisionary Repetition: Faulkner's 'Barn Burning' and the Craft of Writing Difference," in *Faulkner and his Craft of Writing Fiction*, eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989): 48–70; Mauri Skinfill, "Reconstructing Class in Faulkner''s Late Novels: *The Hamlet* and the Discovery of Capital," *Studies in American Fiction* 24 (1996): 151–69; Matthew Lessig, "Class, Character, and Croppers: Faulkner''s Snopeses and the Plight of the Sharecropper," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 55 (Winter 1999): 79–113; and Zender, "Character and Symbol." For discussion, see Ford, "Narrative Legerdemain," 536–37.

13. Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 7, 8, 10, and 5.

14. Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ch. VIII, 95, 96, 122; and ch. IX, 124–91.

15. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, Press, 2013), 1252b23–24.

16. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Politics*, 1252b10–30.

17. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1155a23–24; 1167a21–b12.

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Consider also his support of families in arguing in the *Politics* against the community of women and children proposed in Plato's *Republic* (*Politics*, 1262b1–24).

18. Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 4.
19. Ibid.
20. Billingslea speculates that Snopes may have named his son after the respected Civil War colonel "to disguise his own reprobate's career as a profiteer" during the war. "Fathers and Sons," 297.
21. Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 5.
22. Ibid., 5, 4, and 8.
23. Ibid., 5–6, and 8.
24. Ibid., 7.
25. Will Varner, another of Faulkner's characters who tangles with the Snopes in his later novels, ruminates on waste and extravagance when he contemplates the decay of a pre-Civil War mansion. "I like to sit here," he says. "I'm trying to figure out what it must have felt like to be the fool that would need all this . . . . just to eat and sleep in" (William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, [New York: Vintage Books, 1991], 6). Varner himself had purchased the decayed mansion, called Old Frenchman's Place, after the war.
26. The very incident that precipitated Snopes's conflict with Mr. Harris was Snopes's allowing his hog to roam free and damage Harris's property, even after Harris brought him wiring to patch up his fence in order to keep his animal confined. Harris notes that Snopes left the wiring untouched (Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 3–4). Whereas Snopes absolutizes blood ties, he does not build fences, or mark property as his own or others.
27. Faulkner describes Sarty's mother and aunt "sitting on and among the sorry residue of the dozen and more movings which even the boy could remember—the battered stove, the broken beds and chairs, the clock inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which would not run, stopped at some fourteen minutes past two o'clock of a dead and forgotten day and time, which had been his mother's dowry" (Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 6). Their possessions are more or less dysfunctional, the stopped clock suggesting that the Snopes are locked into the past, for time has stopped for them—and perhaps as well that the broken clock is all that is left to the marriage.
28. Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 9.
29. Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 19–24.
30. Faulkner, "Barn Burning," 7–8.
31. Ibid., 9–11.
32. Ibid., 10–13.
33. Ibid., 14–15.
34. Ibid., 16.
35. Ibid., 12. See also de Spain's incredulity when his own tenant sues him. "Barn Burning," 18.
36. Ibid., 16.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 17.
39. Ibid.

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40. Ibid., 8.
41. Ibid., 18.
42. Ibid., 16.
43. Ibid., 18.
44. Ibid., 10.
45. Ibid., 19–20.
46. Ibid., 21.
47. Ibid., 21, 4.
48. Ibid., 12.
49. Ibid., 24.
50. Billingslea, “Fathers and Sons,” 291.
51. Faulkner, “Barn Burning,” 24.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 16–17.
54. Ibid., 24–25.
55. While Faulkner mentions an intention to do so in a letter to a friend, he does not execute this purpose. William Faulkner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Random House, 1977), 108.
56. Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, 26.
57. Faulkner, “Barn Burning,” 9.
58. Ibid., 24.
59. Ibid., 5.
60. Ibid.
61. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1263b5–14.
62. William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (New York: Vintage Books, 1938), 268.
63. Faulkner, *The Unvanquished*, 276.
64. Ibid., 289.
65. Ritchie D. Watson, “Gentleman,” in *The Companion to Southern Literature*, eds. Joseph M. Flora and Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 294.

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Chapter 6

From the Iron Cage to the "Waters of Babylon"

Rationalization and Renewal in a Weberian World

Bruce Peabody

A common theme in literature, especially works with a dark or dystopian edge, is that our pace of technological change, scientific progress, and knowledge acquisition is out of step with our ethical strictures and self-awareness. In a literary arc extending from John Swift to Mary Shelley to Aldous Huxley and Margaret Atwood, we find recurring examples of a stubborn dread: that our boundless inventiveness is surpassing our capacity to make humane and moral choices. As the biologist E.O. Wilson characterizes the problem, humans face a "terrifically dangerous" future brought on by their unstable combination of "paleolithic emotions; medieval institutions; and god-like technology."[1]

But why *should* our endless hunger for technical mastery of the world be out of sync with our nature and needs? And if this disjuncture amounts to a crisis, as Wilson alleges, what is to be done? In this chapter, I plumb these issues by drawing on the social theorist Max Weber and the haunting short story "By the Waters of Babylon" ("Babylon") written by Stephen Vincent Benét.[2] Weber is especially instructive on these queries because he views the great economic and social upheavals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the by-product of a complex mix of technological, cultural, and organizational forces. For Weber, the course of industrialization, the spread of a "Western" form of reinvestment capitalism, and our increasing reliance on scientific techniques throughout society are all part of a process of "rationalization" that has shaped everything from our attitudes about work to our relationship with the divine.[3] While rationalization has served human needs in many ways (furnishing us with proficient institutional experts, political

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legitimacy based on knowledge rather than force, and fairer treatment by government entities), in other ways it has reduced our freedom and capacity for self-expression. Indeed, Weber ultimately warns us that the tightening hold of rational-scientific ways of understanding and organizing the world, and the concomitant retreat of religious meaning, threaten to leave us in an "iron cage." By this, he means that social and political arrangements once meant to serve humanity (such as government bureaucracies) have now become confining, in part because we experience these systems as imposed, iterative, and immutable. Put differently, the indisputable power and achievements of rationalization make it hard to offer alternatives or advance other aspects of human aspiration—such as spontaneity or creativity. As Weber explains, "When those subject to bureaucratic control seek to escape the influence of the existing bureaucratic apparatus, this is normally possible only by creating an organization of their own which is equally subject to bureaucratization."[4] For Weber, then, the relationship between human flourishing, freedom, and rationality is both problematic and intractable.

By the end of Benét's post-apocalyptic "Babylon," we find ourselves confronting a similar dilemma, keenly aware of the high human price paid for our insatiable love of technology and material progress. At first glance, pairing Weber, a German intellectual, with the popular American poet Benét might seem like a curious choice. But, like Weber, Benét was precocious, broadly educated, and endlessly curious. Both writers had abbreviated but influential stints in the military. While Weber was born more than three decades before Benét, they each published their most important work around the same time, in the interregnum between the two world wars. The roughly contemporaneous span of Weber's and Benét's upbringing, education, and period of authorship gives us a distinctive opportunity to compare two thinkers from the same era, who likely shared similar cultural norms, historical knowledge, awareness of current events, and concerns of the day. This commonality of experience and intellectual worldview helps us overcome the problem of temporal and cultural conflation in play when we otherwise compare disparate thinkers and theories from across the ages. In any event, as we will see, Benét's short story captures many of the themes and much of the underlying logic found in Weber's writings. Indeed, we can read "Babylon" as a dramatic extension of Weber's ruminations about the consequences of rationalization and its impact on an increasingly technocratic and "disenchanted" world. In other words, this chapter interprets Benét's work as a staging of critical scenes from Weber's oeuvre, including the theorist's final act: a grim vision of a rationalized, secular, and routinized world—the infamous iron cage of modernity.[5]

In the pages that follow, I begin by summarizing Benét's story, outlining the basic plot and dramatic tension points. Next, I turn to Weber's core theory of social and political development, highlighting his major themes and

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linking these to references and examples drawn from "Babylon." The chapter concludes by sorting through Weber's and Benét's projections about the future—speculating about the challenges these authors leave us with in their different accounts of worlds in transitions and a people still reeling from the profound (and sometimes traumatic) changes of modernity.

THE WORLD OF BABYLON: EXILE, GRIEF, AND RENEWAL

The title of Benét's story, "By the Waters of Babylon," recalls Psalm 137 of the Hebrew Scriptures.[6] This famous biblical passage recounts the grief of the Israelites after their expulsion from Jerusalem by the Babylonians.[7] With this initial reference, Benét foreshadows that his narrative will thread readers through themes of lost community and longing for a new covenant. As David Stowe argues, the exile of the Jewish people "served as crucible," compelling them to rethink their relationship with God and their "standing as a chosen people."[8] Benét's framing of his tale with Psalm 137 signals that his characters are both marked by a past-shattering event, but also that they will be forward looking, reflecting on how they can learn from their collective ordeal to "rewrite their history."[9]

Notwithstanding this titular orientation, Benét's "Babylon" begins in a geographically, historically, and psychologically uncertain place. The narrator, John (whose name may be meant to invoke the New Testament Book of Revelation, also known as the Revelation of John), reveals the details of his life and community gradually and sparingly, controlling the reader's consumption of information. At the outset, John simply tells us that while the "north and the west and the south are good hunting ground" it is "forbidden" to go to the east or to any of the "Dead Places" unless one is searching for "metal," which, in any case, can only be handled by priests or the son of a priest. We never learn the precise nature of these tribal restrictions, although the story implies they are in place, in part, to protect John's people from a world that has been "poisoned" by the fallout from advanced weaponry.[10]

John's early identification of these intricate prohibitions is significant as it signals both his awareness of the hazards of transgressing forbidden spaces (and cultures) and his special status as someone not fully bound by these taboos. John is the young son of a priest, and a member of a tribe known as the Hill People, who inhabit lands just beyond the Dead Places—a territory or space associated with a mysterious former people known simply as "the gods." Ancient rules regulate the Hill People's access to the foreboding Dead Places and their relics, although the ultimate source of these laws is never revealed. The privileged place of priests in navigating the gods' terrain

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is crucial because the Dead Places and their artifacts are purportedly (but ambiguously) dangerous; even priests must be "purified" after entering the Dead Places and handling metal.

Indeed, the first time John is proffered metal by his father, as an apparently ad hoc test of his character, lineage, and powers, it is not clear he will even survive. But John takes the object without harm, and thereby proves his bravery, his pedigree as his father's son, and his worthiness as a future priest. Of course, John's father's apparent willingness to risk his son's life is both striking and unexplained. Since, by the end of the story, we come to understand that metal is not inherently dangerous, Benét may be signaling that John's father has a similar awareness that he simply declines to divulge to the tribe (perhaps to maintain priestly power). Alternatively, this episode may demonstrate confidence that John is ordained to be a great leader, a possibility supported by the fact that John's father tests the "very young" John rather than his brothers (who are, presumably, older since they already "are good hunters"). A third interpretation of the incident connects John's father to the biblical Abraham, who is prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac to show obedience to God's command, thereby raising the challenges of reconciling faith, reason, and even morality.[11] As Søren Kierkegaard famously discussed, we might view Abraham's action not only as a choice of "absurd" faith over our conventional ethical beliefs, but also as a brave or even heroic deed insofar as it embodied the pain and difficulty of loving someone even while facing their inevitable mortality.[12] In a similar way, John's father represents both the uncomfortable relationship between reason and religion, and the challenge of love in the face of transcendent duty.

As intimated, the priests maintain their authority through the tribal laws as well as through incantations and magic. At the same time, they seek rational understanding of the world around them, in part by reading the "old books" left by the gods. This awareness of alternate sources of comprehension and meaning sets them apart from others in the tribe: "If the hunters think we do all things by chants and spells, they may believe so—it does not hurt them." The priests' reluctance to share all of their knowledge is not directly explained, although we come to understand they are the gatekeepers for making sure that the rest of the tribe does not consume information "too fast" and end up like the gods: intelligent without being wise, accomplished but dissolute. Overall, the priests' magic, knowledge, and status allows them some passage between their own community and the Dead Places, setting them apart from hunters and women within the tribe as well as from a hostile external group—the Forest People. The Forest People are "ignorant" of the practices of the Hill People and "afraid" of the Dead Places and the associated culture of the gods.

Despite the relative sophistication of the Hill People, John longs to know more about the world, specifically from the knowledge and lost civilization

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of the gods. He secures leave from his father to travel to the Place of the Gods, an especially sacred and proscribed area to the east, deep within the Dead Places. After a journey filled with portents and dangers, John arrives at the Ou-dis-sun, a great river that marks the border of the Place of the Gods. Although his tribe's laws bar John from traveling further, he presses on, anticipating death once he sets foot on the gods' magical lands.

But the Place of the Gods does not kill John. It turns out to be merely the ruins of an immense city, destroyed in what John recalls as the Great Burning ("when fire fell out of the sky").[13] As our protagonist explores this broken place, he finds fallen buildings, underground tunnels, and wild animals, including a pack of dogs that pursue him. He hides in a "dead-house" where he notices many strange objects including a cooking place without wood (a stove) and "things that looked like lamps but . . . had neither oil nor wick" (electric lights, presumably). While John sleeps, he has a vision of the gods as they once were: frenetic, numerous, and rich with "wonderful" achievements and machines. But then he sees the gods fall, the destruction of their city through the Great Burning, and its transformation into a Dead Place.

When John awakens, he discovers an actual corpse of a dead god, and has a revelation (as the reader already has) that these gods were just men and women, who achieved great things, but who also made mistakes and perished. No longer fearful, John returns home, eager to share his experiences and insights with the rest of his tribe. As the story closes, John plans to bring his people to the Place of the Gods to forge a new beginning. They will learn from the ancient tools and teachings of the Dead Places while building a new (and presumably better) civilization. With the concluding lines of the story, the reader discovers that the Place of the Gods is New York City and the gods, of course, are us—a people brought down by hubris and technological achievements gone awry.

MAPPING THE APOCALYPTIC

"Babylon" is a post-apocalyptic tale—reflecting three different notions of the "apocalyptic." The first is the most widely used, but also the most recent: an apocalypse is a catastrophic event, perhaps involving the end of the world as we know it.[14] We see this destruction in the wreckage of the Dead Places and the Place of the Gods, but also in the surrounding, surviving peoples who have clearly suffered a significant loss of knowledge, industry, and control.

Benét's story is also rooted in a second, older, etymologically based understanding of apocalypse derived from the Greek *apokalupsis,* referring to a revealing or an uncovering.[15] In the Jewish and Christian extensions of

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this revelatory tradition, the apocalyptic unveiling often comes "in the form of visions or dreams that are delivered to a righteous person" (a description that comports with John's experiences and character).[16] "Babylon" has several such revelations: the Place of the Gods is Manhattan (and the great Ou-dis-sun river is the Hudson); the gods are just men and women; their fallen civilization is a projection of our own self-inflicted doom.

Third and closely related, "Apocalypse" is a proper noun, serving as one of the alternate names given to the biblical Book of Revelation (also known in the literal Greek translation as the Apocalypse of John).[17] While there were numerous ancient apocalyptic tales that preceded the Book of Revelation, it is the most powerful and culturally influential account in modernity. John's biblical revelation describes an unfolding scenario of symbolic and catastrophic events, moving from war, famine, epidemics, earthquakes, and ill omens, to an eschatological battle between good and evil represented by the lamb (Jesus) and two "witnesses" on the one side, and a series of monstrous and horrific figures on the other. Significantly, the Book of Revelation includes a reference to a city of Babylon (destroyed by an angel for its moral lapses) and a narrative in which the prophet (John) recounts the end of a repudiated age and the founding of "a new heaven and a new earth."[18]

In sum, from its adapted title (Benét's short story was originally called "The Place of the Gods" when first published) to its narrator to its abundant biblical references and themes, "By the Waters of Babylon" is thick with religious (especially Jewish and Christian) symbolism.[19] This strong religious current, however, is not about promoting a specific set of theological precepts, but instead invites us to reflect on the push and pull between faith and knowledge, and how humans can simultaneously learn about (and master) the world around them while still finding transcendent (and moral) purpose to their actions. These problems are the keystone issues in Weber's most important political writings.

THE FATE OF OUR TIMES: RATIONALIZATION, DISENCHANTMENT, AND THE MODERN AGE

Max Weber wrote on a broad array of topics, spanning social science methodology, the religious roots of Western capitalism, and the forces driving the character of changing societies. Weber was less preoccupied with the traditional foci of political theory such as the proper normative concerns of rulers and subjects, or the best form of rule. For this reason, he is not typically regarded as a canonical political philosopher, at least not on the same plane as figures like Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, or Mill.[20] Nevertheless, in describing the distinctive qualities of modernity's complex and organized

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liberal communities, and in highlighting the purported spiritual and psychological maladies afflicting their citizens, Weber's core concerns intersect with many classical works of political philosophy.

At the heart of Weber's theory is an account of rationalization as a set of unrelenting principles for regulating human affairs. While we have been undergoing this process "for thousands of years," it has reached an intense realization in modernity.[21] Rationalization consists of four compatible and intertwined elements. First, it entails a "technique of mastering life," that is, providing tools and knowledge to help humans control, tame, and understand natural and social forces at play in the world.[22] This occurs by formulating and applying abstract concepts ("theoretical mastery") as well as through instrumental and "practical" control of reality through "precise calculation of adequate means" to a given end.[23] Rationalization also takes a second, specifically institutional form: humans fashion their political orders, laws and courts, military, and social structures on increasingly formal, logical, and efficient systems of organization (culminating, in modernity, with bureaucracies).[24] These rationalized institutions supplant more historical and personal arrangements, such as the ad hoc leadership provided by kings or the fealty ties formed by feudalism and party machines.[25] We can also see rationalization appear in a third form: through a rise in differentiated jobs, increasingly technical tasks, and an overall "functional specialization of work."[26] This entails not simply the division of labor, but our reliance on a class of trained professionals and experts in the public and private spheres. Fourth and finally, Weber describes rationalization somewhat indirectly and negatively: discussing its "disenchanting" effects in stripping away magical and mysterious explanations for human behavior and the natural world.[27] According to Weber, this element of rationalization is especially impactful with respect to religion. Instead of finding the sacred and spiritual in everyday activities (as the ancient Romans famously did), in rationalized society, faith is consigned to distinctive moments (major holidays) or sites (going to church or temple), and the overall importance of spirituality and religion recedes. As Weber explains, in modernity, "one need no longer have recourse to magical [or religious] means in order to master or implore the spirits [or natural world] . . . technical means and calculations [can now] perform the service."[28]

In "Babylon," we find a number of examples consistent with these claims. As mentioned, three different groups occupy Benét's world, forming what amounts to a hierarchy of ascending rationalization.[29] At the bottom are the Forest People: hunters and gatherers who "eat grubs from the trees." Through John's eyes, the Forest People evince no signs of developed human culture: they do not obviously have a tribal structure or religion, and they are unable to read and write and thereby appreciate the gifts and achievements of the

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gods. Indeed, their fear (and ignorance) of the Dead Places prevent them from even touching the gods' artifacts, never mind learning from them.

The behaviors and practices of the Forest People contrast with John's tribe, the more self-aware and technically accomplished Hill People. Unlike the Forest People, the Hill People visit the gods' abandoned homes in the Dead Places and recall some of their history. And the Hill People's connection to the gods is sufficient that they can learn, with difficulty, from their bygone knowledge. Moreover, the Hill People's (evidently patriarchal) society is organized and stratified: it is comprised of women who can "spin wool," hunters, and a group of priests (headed by a "chief priest"). As noted, priests use "chants and spells," can bind wounds, and are able to handle metal without dying. The contrast between the Forest and Hill Peoples is consistent with Weber's account of the creep of rationalization into all spheres of society, including magical and religious beliefs. As Weber explains, traditional magic allows (a wide array of) practitioners to be engaged in the direct and mystical manipulation of (unreliable, dangerous, and even "evil") natural forces (such as weather and illness) that impact everyday life.[30] As societies rationalize (becoming more organized, efficient, and knowledgeable), our day-to-day well-being is less dependent upon the fickle impact of these forces; magic becomes specialized, and eventually fades in importance. Priests, according to Weber, represent a modernization of traditional magic and the emergence of what he calls "professional magicians." Such figures devote themselves to developing complex rituals and having personal and sequestered transcendent (magical) experiences, thereby freeing up the time and energies of the general population, who previously experienced this primal religious "ecstasy [themselves] . . . in a [direct and] social form."[31]

While Benét indicates that both the Hill People and the gods share an affinity for "magic," for the latter group, this seems to be synonymous with technological achievement. In contrast, the Hill People's magic mixes fables, rituals, and charms with other practices that edge closer to science, like basic medicine. Over the course of the short story, John's belief in the priests' magical powers begins to falter because his experiences disprove the priests' teachings, and he moves further along Weber's path of rationalization. For example, John's trip to the Place of the Gods reveals that it is "not true," as the priests claimed, that the "ground underfoot" still burns, or that the island is "covered with fogs and enchantments." The reality is more prosaic: the roads and towers are "cracked and broken" and the gods are dead. These revelations—and John's budding awareness that the wisdom and prohibitions of his tribe have insecure foundations—serve as our preview that John's return to the tribe will be epistemologically disruptive.

As already suggested, Benét presents an extreme form of rationalization with the deceased "gods," figures who haunt "Babylon" with their legacy

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of material excess and the fragments of their broken culture. As John recounts, the gods' cities were once dense with great towers filled with artwork and books. Their "unbelievable tools" included airplanes, "god-roads" (highways), vast networks of streetlights, and countless "chariots" (cars).[32] However, this technically accomplished mode of life appears to have been insufficiently constrained by the gods' social and political institutions, bringing them to war, self-destruction, and the horror of the Great Burning.

POLITICS, RELIGION, AND SCIENCE AS VOCATIONS

Weber acknowledges that rationalization is a force of creative destruction: it penetrates almost every sphere of human existence, from factory organization to elections to education, and in the process, it shatters old norms, patterns of daily life, and even our understanding of the world.[33] Weber is especially interested in these dynamics in three pivotal areas: politics, religion, and science. At their heart, all of these activities are rooted in what he calls a "calling" or a "vocation," a sense of wider purpose if not "ultimate meaning" that informs and guides our everyday conduct.[34] This "fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs" promises to give us answers to what Weber (quoting Tolstoy) says is the "only question important to us: What shall we do and how shall we live?"[35] Thus, a vocation becomes "the highest form which the moral activity of the individual" can assume.[36] But vocations are also subject to the merciless effects of rationalization.

Consider the example of politics. For Weber, politics is famously built on the premise that the state can claim a "monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory," a notion that bears some resemblance to the theory of power annunciated by Thomas Hobbes.[37] However, unlike Hobbes, Weber acknowledges an inherent tension in the state's claims to authority, since it must simultaneously threaten violence on political subjects while also commanding their legitimacy. Thus, we need to know "what inner justifications and . . . what external means" make this coercive rule possible.[38] In other words, why does a populace accept "domination" and obey rulers' commands?

Weber points to three means through which leaders legitimate their relationships of political "domination": tradition (what he calls the "authority of the 'eternal yesterday'"), legal rules and contracts, and charismatic leadership.[39] In general, the forces of rationalization prompt societies to replace the first two claims to power (traditional and personal rule) with more stable and impersonal forms of authority. Thus, Western societies ultimately discard feudalism and monarchy for parliaments and administrative states, achieving

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domination over subjects through knowledge and expertise rather than coercion or custom.[40]

But even in the face of the unremitting forces of rationalization, charisma remains especially important, as it helps societies change. While there is nothing inherently beneficial about charismatic leaders' claim to rule (they can be visionary tyrants as well as visionary emancipators), these figures can counterbalance the stultifying institutions and ways of life that characterize (rational) modernity.[41] That's because these rulers, heroes, and prophets are driven by "some kind of faith" or "passion," and they attract followers by drawing on extraordinary qualities exhibited as a "personal gift of grace."[42] In this way, the allure of charisma necessarily stands "outside the ties of this world, outside of routine occupations" and, therefore, abrades against both inherited traditions and existing rational-legal relationships and organizations.[43] Indeed, charismatic leaders' innately personal and informal authority trumps and supplants conventional, orderly procedures for enacting policies, resolving disputes, and appointing subordinates.[44] Again, these traits position these figures to serve as agents of innovation if not revolution.[45]

Of course, a charismatic leader's idiosyncratic appeal is difficult to emulate, raising hurdles for those who wish to perpetuate their authority once they quit the political scene, through ouster, retirement, or death. In other words, charismatic leadership is fundamentally fleeting, unstable, and impermanent.[46] As Weber summarizes, "It is the fate of charisma, whenever it comes into the permanent institutions of a community, to give way to powers of tradition or rational socialization."[47]

In "Babylon," we find ready examples of both charismatic rule and Weber's other forms of political authority. As noted, the short story begins with the priests' prohibitions, their power derived from Weber's authority of "eternal yesterday": it is forbidden to go east or to travel "to any of the Dead Places except to search for metal." These and other tribal customs have been in place "since the beginning of time" and have been codified into the "rules and the laws." We might note that the implicit chronological account is somewhat curious: presumably, the proscriptions against traveling to the places of the gods were formed only after the Great Burning. However, John's reference to "the beginning of time" underscores the short history of the Hill People and reminds us of the nonrational basis of traditional authority.[48]

In addition to these references to traditional and legal authority, Benét repeatedly establishes John's credentials as a charismatic figure who "stands outside the ties" of the regular world by challenging the tribe's most sacred mores and rules. As noted, at its outset, "Babylon" describes how, even as a very young child, John takes metal provided by his father but does "not die." While this outcome does not make John unique (priests can hold metal) and is

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even consistent with the Hill People's customs (the son of a priest is allowed to handle metal), the episode still sets up John as a distinctive figure. As John tells us, his brothers would not have taken the metal even "though they are good hunters." And when John's father approaches the boy, "he looked at me with both eyes but I had not run away." After this trial by metal, John seems marked: his brothers subsequently give him "the good piece of meat and the warm corner of the fire" and his father watches over him carefully and punishes him "more strictly" than his siblings.

This initial indicator of John's special status introduces other, similar signs. For example, in one recalled incident, John eats the forbidden "food of the gods." Even though "often, that food is death" he survives and finds it sweet.[49] Separately, the narrative implies that he has handled the bones of the gods, even though this "is a great sin." And when it is time for John to go on his journey, his father seems to anticipate his son's imminent contravention of the tribe's norms. When he reminds John, "it is forbidden to travel east. It is forbidden to cross the river. It is forbidden to go to the Place of the Gods," it reads more like a coded invitation than a warning. He blesses his son's aspiration for greatness by telling him that "once I had young dreams [like you]. If your dreams do not eat you up, you may be a great priest. If they eat you, you are still my son. Now go on your journey." John promptly violates each of the tribal prohibitions in turn: traveling east, crossing the river, and visiting the Place of the Gods.

John's association with transformative leadership continues once he traverses the great Ou-dis-sun river and travels through the Place of the Gods. One of the first "gods" he encounters is a damaged statue of the American icon George Washington, located outside what we can identify as the Federal Hall building on Manhattan's Wall Street.[50] This site, where Washington took his first oath of office and the federal government was initially housed, eventually served other functions, including becoming part of the United States Sub-Treasury (a detail alluded to in the story).[51] Lest we miss the link between John and the founding fathers as charismatic leaders, Benét ends "Babylon" with his protagonist musing about the challenges of forging a new society. His thoughts run from Washington to "the others—the gods Lincoln and Biltmore and Moses." These figures, John concedes, were not actually gods or demons, but "men who built the city."

Although Benét does not elaborate on these names, the Washington-Lincoln connection is clear enough, with the former credited as the nation's "political father" and the latter as its savior and redeemer.[52] "Biltmore" is a hazier reference, although we can reasonably speculate that Benét is gesturing to the Biltmore Hotel, a luxury building finished in 1913 and set close to Grand Central Terminal (which appears in the story). John's confusion of a hotel with a deity is perhaps a reminder that John's historical vision (like

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his tribe's) is fragmented and passed through the broken lens of the gods' devastated culture.[53]

Finally, and most interesting, is John's self-association with "Moses" as a community-builder. This is a likely double entendre meant to encompass both the biblical prophet and lawgiver Moses (who, similar to John, leads his people within sight of the promised land), and the controversial urban planner Robert Moses, who had been especially active in politics and building projects in the years leading up to the publication of "Babylon."[54] In these two "Moses" figures we have the promise and peril of John's future political project—his calling to serve as a transformative leader who will "build again."

Once he returns to his tribe, John knows he will become the new "chief priest," displacing his father and upending the beliefs and patterns of the Hill People. He will make a new social order, even form a new kind of people, who will strive to learn from the gods, and perhaps even repair their sundered "magic tools." But on what terms will John serve as this new Washington? While we know John is slated to be the next chief priest, what role, if any, will magic and religion continue to play in his future community? How will the tribe's traditional beliefs blend (or clash) with John's interest in building new knowledge from the ruins of the gods? Once again, Weber gives us a pertinent intellectual framework for thinking about these questions.

RELIGION, SCIENCE, AND DISENCHANTMENT

According to Weber, rationalization pushes into the religious sphere as well as politics. Just as charismatic leaders offer the prospect of filling our daily lives with significance through a revealed "personal mission," religion provides cognate answers about our purposes and earthly tasks.[55] Priests and prophets serve as conduits for the "annunciation and promise of religion," but the process of rationalization helps bring their revelations into concrete form and fills out a detailed map for how we should live and inscribe meaning on the world.[56] While faith and reason might seem to be at odds, Weber tells us, instead, that "the driving force of all religious evolution" has been providing order to our "experience of the irrationality of the world."[57]

Weber's classic, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is a monograph-length case study of the complex interplay of religion, culture, rationalization, economics, and historical idiosyncrasy. In this work, the theorist both counters Karl Marx's structural understanding of economics and offers his own explanation of the supposedly unique rise of "modern rational capitalism" in the West.[58] Weber also traces how the original disruptive visions of religious founders (like Martin Luther and John Calvin) became organized and rule-laden belief systems. More broadly, Weber

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shows the role of rationalization in how institutionalized religions (especially monotheistic creeds) repudiated paganism and "all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin."[59] Not surprisingly, rationalization ultimately poses challenges for religious belief systems. The codification and routinization of faiths can undermine their founders' original purposes, spirit, and meaning, following a sequence similar to how a charismatic leader's initial ideas are transformed and even betrayed in political praxis.[60] Moreover, in emphasizing officially prescribed rules over mystical and spiritual experiences, religious rationalization plays a role in the demystification and "disenchantment of the world."[61]

In "Babylon," we do not see the full outlines of the religious beliefs of the Hill People. Nevertheless, we know that their faith has been sufficiently rationalized that it rests on a well-developed system of rules and a hierarchical division of hunters and priests. At the same time, unlike Weber's portrayal of (rationalized) Calvinism and Puritanism, the Hill People still rely upon and defer to some less routinized "magical and sacramental forces."[62] We see this in the priests' purification incantations and other spells, in their association of religion with the natural world, and in the polytheism and dark mystery associated with the Dead Places. Both before and during his journey to the Place of the Gods, John experiences omens and mystical visions, and he seeks spirits of ambiguous moral standing. These and other aspects of the Hill People's convictions suggest they have not fully undergone religious rationalization. While their faith is somewhat organized, it still possesses unpredictable and magical elements, such as when John feels himself in the grip of the great river: "That was magic, for the river itself is wide and calm. I could feel evil spirits about me, [as] I was swept down the stream . . . and I felt small and naked as a new-hatched bird—alone upon the great river, the servant of the gods."[63] The world of "Babylon," unlike Weber's modern world, is still—or perhaps once again—"enchanted."

In Weber's analysis, rationalization's challenge to religion reaches perhaps its most pure and extreme form with scientific inquiry. Scientific tools, techniques, and findings teach us that "there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play [in the universe], but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation," observation, and experimentation.[64] The ongoing promise of scientific discovery, and the technological advances it yields, bring us to a point where we no longer need "magical means in order to master or implore the spirits" as did our ancestors.[65] Put differently, while science increases our understanding and control of the world, it also threatens to strip it of wider purpose, especially by displacing religious beliefs. Weber claims that the open-ended nature of scientific investigation and its disinterest in value questions leaves its adherents solely pursuing "infinite 'progress,'" with the resulting (unfulfilling) sense that life consists of little more than

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endless puzzle-solving.[66] Those who swap religion or other transcendent sources of meaning in favor of science as a vocation have potentially busy but barren careers; they may be productive and even accomplished, but their achievements, lives, and deaths lack wider significance.[67] In sum, science as a vocation destabilizes other sources of transcendent meaning but ultimately provides no substitute meaning on its own.[68] Science can provide us with the godlike powers to control (and destroy) nature, but it does not provide an accompanying moral structure or ethics to ensure that we do not destroy the world around us.

Weber's assessment of the toll of scientific investigation is not, of course, a foregone conclusion: diverse voices from Nikola Tesla to Freeman Dyson to Pope Francis have argued that scientific and religious practices are complementary.[69] But for Weber, the reductionist techniques of science, its emphasis on removing values from inquiry, and its restless criticism of inherited paradigms, makes science as a vocation (not just a job, but a way of life) hostile to moral and religious systems. Thus, we might say that Weber's true target is "scientism" (a wider ideology applied far beyond scientific inquiry) rather than the practice of science per se. Seen in this light, the physicist John Polkinghorne comes to a Weberian conclusion when he asserts that "from its own unaided resources, natural science can do no more than present us with the contrast of a finely tuned and fruitful universe which is condemned to ultimate futility."[70]

In "Babylon," Benét captures the supposedly irreconcilable differences between faith and science with his opposition of the ritualistic Hill People and the technologically accomplished and secular gods of the Dead Places. The tribe's mastery of the world is mostly limited to making basic tools and scavenging metal. John can start a fire, lash together a raft, and assemble a bow. But on his journey east, to the Place of the Gods, he finds another weapon, a knife, recovered from a god's "dead house." Unlike ordinary tools, this object makes his "heart feel big." Moreover, as we have seen, John and his tribe explain much of the world with reference to "spirits," "demons," and "magic." Before his journey to the Place of the Gods, John looks for and receives premonitions that he follows: these include a vision in a fire, and the "great sign" of three deer heading east with a white fawn.[71] But, significantly, John expresses contentment, personal confidence, and a sense of place arising from his people's (semi-magical) conception of the world:

> My [tribal] knowledge made me happy—it was like a fire in my heart. Most of all, I liked to hear of the Old Days and the stories of the gods. I asked myself many questions that I could not answer, but it was good to ask them. At night,

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> I would lie awake and listen to the wind—it seemed to me that it was the voice of the gods as they flew through the air.

He is proud of his somewhat cabined but diverse tribal knowledge: a mix of stories, basic science, and sorcery.

That said, John is irreducibly an emissary between two worlds. As "Babylon's" narrative progresses, he is no longer satisfied with the Hill People's paradigms and modes of life. As he eventually articulates, "my hunger for knowledge burned in me—there was so much that I could not understand." The discontent of self-aware ignorance displaces his enjoyment of wonder. Consequently, he knows that he must travel east to learn from the gods.

While John and his group operate with limited technical prowess but genuine purpose, the reader comes to associate the gods with excessive and empty achievements. John's description of the Place of the Gods during its prime includes inhabitants "beyond number and counting" who "turned night to day for their pleasure" but were always "in motion." The gods' energies and accomplishments are untethered to a clear sense of flourishing. As John summarizes,

> Restless, restless, were the gods and always in motion! They burrowed tunnels under rivers—they flew in the air . . . no part of the earth was safe from them . . . . [But] were they happy? What is happiness to the gods? They were great, they were mighty, they were wonderful and terrible . . . but a little more, it seemed to me, and they would pull down the moon from the sky.

In the end, John sees the gods as possessing "wisdom beyond wisdom and knowledge beyond knowledge"—capturing Weber's depiction of science and the "life of civilized man" as a vortex of "infinite 'progress.'"[72] John also discovers that the former residents of the Dead Places are not gods, but mortals, now as dead as the sites they once occupied. From a Weberian perspective, John's discovery that the gods are human (and mortal) shows the impact of rationalization in stripping the gods of their divinity. John's newfound knowledge replaces his mystical beliefs and in so doing "kills" his (and our) belief in the gods qua gods.

But even in life, these false gods were caught up in ceaseless activity without a sense of its ultimate value. And they were not obviously happy. John tells us that their works were not clearly beneficial, wholesome, or "well done." Indeed, in such a moral void the gods' "wisdom could not but grow until all was peace," that is, until their knowledge and achievement had destroyed itself. The gods' ultimate fate "was terrible past speech" and brought on by their own technological expertise. In sum, while John

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admires the power and material products of the gods, he also comes to see that their technological and engineering feats are catastrophic:

> When gods war with gods, they use weapons we do not know. It was fire falling out of the sky and a mist that poisoned. It was the time of the Great Burning and the Destruction. They ran about like ants in the streets of their city—poor gods, poor gods!

John is perplexed and distraught by the fate of the gods, in part because he cannot understand how such an accomplished and knowledgeable people could come to such an end. As he puts it, "I knew the reason for the Dead Places but I did not see why it had happened. It seemed to me it should not have happened, with all the magic they had." In this way, too, Benét captures a Weberian idea: the problem of "theodicy," which the theorist describes as the "question of how it is that a power which is said to be at once omnipotent and kind could have created such an irrational world of undeserved suffering, unpunished injustice, and hopeless stupidity."[73] When faced with this dilemma, Weber observes, we either conclude that the higher power is not omnipotent or good, or that wholly "different principles" of justice govern the world, principles that may "forever escape our comprehension."[74] John arrives at a similar moment of disorientation and uncertainty when confronting the mortality and tragedy of the gods:

> I went through the [god's] house looking for an answer. There was so much in the house I could not understand—and yet I am a priest and the son of a priest. It was like being on one side of the great river, at night, with no light to show the way.

POST-APOCALYPSE NOW: TO BABYLON AND BEYOND

So what happens next? Both Benét and Weber present somewhat unresolved narratives. In "By the Waters of Babylon," John travels back and forth across the great river (serving as a geographic, cultural, and epistemological divide). He ultimately promises to make a new beginning by bringing his people to the island of the gods. Nevertheless, he has already previewed that this will be challenging, with "no light to show the way" forward. How can John, bound by the perspective of a Hill Person and a priest, avoid the excesses and amorality of the gods? How can he convince his own people to cross the river and not execute or shun him for impiety and corruption? In other words, how will John avoid the fate of Socrates, who, perhaps, tried to change his fellow citizens' minds too quickly?

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With respect to Weber, some commentators contend that his theory places us on the brink of an "impending cultural crisis."[75] Ceaseless waves of rationalization have washed over society and left us with a disenchanted world, where traditional sources of meaning are in decline.[76] In particular, religion's claim to offer up comprehensive organizing and moral systems for guiding people's day-to-day lives is attenuated. Indeed, today's (secular and materialistic) "routines of everyday life challenge religion" rather than reinforce its tenets, as they once did.[77] As a result, we are moving into a "prophetless" age, in which the great gods of monotheism and the "grandiose moral fervor of Christian ethics" are enfeebled, at least in "Western Europe" and the United States.[78]

Weber, however, does not think we are consigned to nihilism in the face of these developments. Instead, he tells us that in the space created by rationalized religion's retreat we face a "polytheism" of diverse "orders and values."[79] As he puts it, in modernity, "many old gods ascend from their graves."[80] In the place of dedicating our lives to a single god and value system, we live like the "ancients," at times sacrificing to "Aphrodite" (by cherishing, say, love and beauty) and "at other times to Apollo" (perhaps emphasizing truth and the arts), as we see fit.[81] Today we can again turn to numerous pagan gods, but because the world has been disenchanted, these figures assume the form of "impersonal forces" and individual value choices rather than the objects of formal, religious worship.[82]

Weber's account of this secular polytheism is not fully harmonious. The waning of traditional religion's role in prioritizing values (and giving us specific ethical commandments) puts us in a new landscape marked by what the scholar Fredric Jameson calls "not peaceful coexistence but a Homeric battlefield."[83] Without comprehensive, organized, and common faiths to guide our choices, we face constant conflict over different and irreconcilable "attitudes toward life," a struggle that "can never be brought to a final conclusion."[84] As the philosopher Guy Oakes explains, the "resolution of conflicts between final values [in modernity] cannot be derived from a theory or deduced from an argument" because we lack a secure vantage point from which to offer this normative guidance.[85]

But why is that? Even in an era where religion's unifying hold has loosened, couldn't we turn to some other foundation for ordering our different attitudes toward life? As noted, Weber considers and rejects science as a candidate for filling this role. While scientific training and methods furnish us with the "technology for controlling life," a disciplined way of thinking, and even "clarity" in how we can instrumentally achieve a set of values once we identify them, he thinks it cannot provide us with guidance regarding our *telos,* or the best way to live our lives.[86]

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But if science cannot fill the void of religious significance, can Weber's other famous vocation: politics? At first glance, this seems like a promising move. After all, charismatic rulers rely upon personal and "irrational" sources of support (such as grace, heroism, or revelation) that seem capable of transcending and bringing peace to the battle of the (value) gods.[87] Such figures can provide a centering worldview to their followers—a paradigm of meaning that at least resembles the spiritual and ethical sustenance once provided by religious systems. As the political scientist Robert Tucker explains, a charismatic leader presents herself to "sufferers" as a savior, "one who can lead them out of their distress by virtue of special personal characteristics or [a] formula for salvation . . . arous[ing] their intense loyalty and enthusiastic willingness to take the [leader's chosen] path."[88]

But charismatic leadership, too, encounters distinct hurdles in a rationalized and disenchanted world. As we have seen, even if a leader can initially provide guidance and a defined "path" for adherents, over time this authority is necessarily forgotten—or institutionalized in ways that dull and even undermine the leader's original vision of salvation and significance. The sui generis and "supernatural" character of charismatic leadership will not endure without impersonal rules and stable modes of administration including a "rationally ordered system of officials" that replace the "personal piety" demanded by individual leaders.[89]

These observations about the taming of charismatic leadership fuel another anxiety coursing through Weber's writings about the future. Weber is not just concerned that, following rationalization, we are unable to answer Tolstoy's great questions (what shall we do and how shall we live?) with any confidence or consistency. His second, related worry is that distinct forces born of rationalization, chiefly the rise of bureaucracy and a routinized work environment, will necessarily stunt our humanity and individuality.

Weber understands bureaucracy rather broadly, as "a permanent structure with a system of rational rules . . . fashioned to meet calculable and recurrent needs [of society] by means of a normal routine."[90] The peculiar tools of bureaucratic governance include value-free decision-making, "expert training, a functional specialization of work, and . . . habitual and virtuoso-like mastery of single yet methodically integrated functions."[91] Thus, bureaucracy is both one of the state's most mature manifestations of rationalization, and an arrangement that brings many returns to society, including predictable, stable outcomes and egalitarianism, at least when it is operating well.[92]

However, bureaucracy is also problematic. To begin with, it is at odds with the innovative spirit of charismatic leadership. Charisma and bureaucratic authority represent distinct and typically opposed claims to rule: individual authority versus rational-legal authority; "irrational," personal appeal versus clear, impersonal rules; and passion versus knowledge. Moreover,

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bureaucratic arrangements often represent the final phase in efforts to rationalize and institutionalize a leader's charismatic vision into a formal political program—but in so doing, they may undercut or at least enervate that original mission.

These dynamics cause the original adherents of charismatic leaders to experience bureaucracy (and by extension governance and the agents of the states) as alien, aloof, and unresponsive. More broadly, Weber contends, the monotonous, rigid, and penetrating nature of bureaucratic governance (affecting an ever-increasing swathe of our public and private lives) diminishes ordinary citizens' sense of agency, imagination, and spontaneity. As Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills summarize, Weber associates bureaucracy with "mechanism, depersonalization, and oppressive routine" that is "adverse to personal freedom."[93]

In addition to bureaucracy, modernity produces another obstacle to freedom: our experience with work. While religious and ethical beliefs used to undergird our "pursuit of wealth," and infuse it with a sense of calling, that backbone has disintegrated.[94] Today many individuals experience labor as increasingly organized, technically precise, and mechanized—but also as something alienating and "forced."[95] In our era of continued rationalization, "the performance of each individual worker is mathematically measured, [and] each . . . becomes a little cog in the machine."[96] Moreover, our race for "economic acquisition" and the "external goods" that paid work allows us to purchase "tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually give it the character of sport."

Taken together, these developments do not leave us anticipating a flourishing "summer's bloom" of freedom, thriving, and self-development brought about by rational governance and productive commerce. Instead, Weber famously warns, we face a "polar night of icy darkness and hardness." The rationalized organs and leaders of modern states treat individual citizens and subjects fairly and in a pragmatic, "matter-of-fact manner."[97] However, this impersonal relationship between governors and the governed lacks passion; officials regard us "without hate and therefore without love."[98] In the economic sphere, workers and employers face competition and pursue their jobs and professions to sustain their livelihood; but they have lost the inner sense of having a true vocation. In this environment, people become "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart." The process of rationalization creates well-ordered institutions but desultory and somewhat petty citizens who lack much capacity for individual creativity and self-expression. In the face of these constraints, citizens die weary of life but not satiated.[99] In short, Weber's picture of modern society is rationalized, secular, and spiritually adrift—and filled with a people who are ostensibly free, but confined by political and economic forces seemingly beyond their control.

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We find elements of this blemished portrait of ourselves in a number of passages in Benét's "Babylon." As we have seen, the physical destruction of the Place of the Gods corresponds with the annihilation of a way of life based on rationalization and technological achievement. John tells us that the huge ruins of the gods are still dense with "god roads," "high towers," and tunnels and caves (the subway system), all of which are "great . . . and wonderful" but also "broken." Even John's depiction of Manhattan at its peak is a place of tremendous energy, "giant works," and material mastery through "unbelievable tools"—but little contentment. The only "peace" these gods of science and technical achievement obtain is when they destroy themselves with advanced weapons far beyond the knowledge of the Hill People.

It is not too much of a stretch, therefore, to see the Place of the Gods as both a portrayal of rationalization run amok, and the dangerous returns of science as a "vocation" (with its associated commitment to discovery for its own sake, untethered from larger moral purposes). Among other signs of the gods' shortcomings is their failure to leave their successors any enduring laws or other institutions to build upon, a reflection of these old governing systems' inability to check rationalization and unsuitability for the world of John's people. The Hill People's rules and patterns of life are distinctively their own. While John prays to the "shattered image" of Washington, he confides that "I do not know that god" (a point reinforced by the fact that the founding father is only remembered as "ASHING").

If the gods of Manhattan are the agents of rationalization and science as a vocation, the Hill People embody a moral alternative. Their rules and traditions regulate and subordinate their consumption of knowledge, protecting the community and keeping it healthy. As John's father forewarns, "It was not idly that our fathers forbade the Dead Places." But Benét's sketch of John's tribe also hints at a restless yearning we associate with the moderns. Recall that for Weber, once rationalization displaces organized, monotheistic religion, we turn to a plurality of competing (and mostly secular) value systems, striving to return meaning to our lives.[100] While the Hill People have a complex relationship with rationalization (they feel its pull but are wary), we see Weber's value pluralism in their simultaneous attraction to science, magic, and the mythos of the gods. Moreover, the Hill People recognize a wide variety of everyday omens, demons, and spirits, and they worship promiscuously, as the moment seems to require.

In addition to offering what amounts to a critique of unbridled rationalization, "Babylon" contains an implicit evaluation of material acquisitiveness and work emptied of meaning. These concerns are similar to those expressed in some of Weber's writings including, most famously, his warnings at the end of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Benét's

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pre-apocalypse residents of Manhattan own "great riches" and beautiful things. In a reference to globalized trade (or perhaps in a prescient vision of Amazon.com), the author tells us that if the gods "wished for a thing, they summoned it from the other side of the world." But these potent consumers are also "restless" and "always in motion." Their wealth and commercial feats are more exhausting than fulfilling. Recall that John sounds a dubious note when considering the gods' "happiness" in the midst of all their industry and plenty. And, of course, the things the gods possess and "all the magic they had" does not save them from extinction.

ESCAPING THE IRON CAGE

For Max Weber, the process of rationalization, stretching across millennia of human existence, comes to something of a terminus in what he describes as an "iron cage" of "technical and economic conditions . . . which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism."[101] We find this in our modern reliance on bureaucratic institutions and expert, specialized knowledge, but also in the predictable and hollow routines of work, and, generally, in a society where rational technology at once smooths and limits our experiences. We moderns know more about the world than did our ancestors, but we are less satisfied with our place in it. Of course, as Weber points out, these outcomes are not strictly imposed or wholly iniquitous—rationalization produces many comforts and efficiencies, as thinkers like Roger Scruton frankly acknowledge.[102] Indeed, we might note in this regard that Weber's original reference to "stahlhartes Gehäuse," is better translated as a steel-hard casing or housing—rather than referring to a cage or prison. In other words, in Weber's original vision, the "iron cage" limits our movements, but it also protects us.

That said, we should not mistake Weber's ultimate diagnosis. As Kenneth Allan and Sarah Daynes summarize, rationalization

> leads inexorably to an empty society. The organizational, intellectual, and cultural movements toward rationality have emptied the world of emotion, mystery, tradition, and affective human ties. We increasingly relate to our world through economic calculation, impersonal relations, and expert knowledge.

But can we escape these forces? Is there a way out of the cage that allows for human revitalization, renewal, security, and comfort, all at once? What are our prospects for forging "an age of full and beautiful humanity" instead of remaining mired in mindless work, hollow public life, and the overall "mechanized petrification" of today's world?[103]

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Weber offers the possibility that we might still find "entirely new prophets" or "a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals" to fill our lives with meaning and counter the monotonous logic of rationalization.[104] This renaissance will require charismatic political leaders who can coax a reluctant and disengaged public to leave the routines of everyday life and "assume responsibility for moral judgments."[105] But how will these "heroic" individuals avoid the fate of transformative figures through the ages—who invariably see their initial innovations and dynamic projects compromised, disciplined, and even subverted by rationalization?[106]

While Weber's answer is not much more than a sketch, he unsentimentally characterizes politics as "a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards, with a mixture of passion and a sense of proportion."[107] A new era of reform politics will require gradualism, and some balance between the ideals of the leader and pragmatism about the constraints of the modern world. Charismatic leaders confronting the iron cage must strive to advance their own passionate "mission" while carefully contending with inherited institutions such as the thickened machinery of bureaucracy and the impersonal forces of the marketplace. Weber came to favor parliamentary democracies as the best way to bring forward politicians who could offer alternatives to the iron cage by directing the instruments of the state to the changing needs (and changing character) of the people.[108] However, as Gerth and Mills explain, he also recognized that the "drift towards ever-denser and indestructible institutions in modern society narrowed" these leaders' opportunities and impact.[109] And, inevitably, even a successful leader's vision would fade following her political or physiological death. Thus, as Weber reminds us, "charismatic authority is specifically unstable."[110] Perhaps the best we can hope for in this context is a cyclical or dialectic process. Our leaders press for change and greater human aspiration, and rationalization subsequently tempers and transforms their programs and agendas, perhaps even turning them into part of the grillwork of the iron cage. But this outcome sets the stage for a new group of political entrepreneurs to innovate and reform. In this way our institutions, our leaders, and our political and economic choices simultaneously serve our needs, organize our lives, and inhibit our freedom.[111]

How does "Babylon" fit into this Weberian tale of discontent, compromised autonomy, and political push and pull? As Anne Norton explains, the "anxieties and resentments born of [our modern] confinement have found their expression in a large literature of alienation."[112] We can count Benét's short story as a significant entry in this field. Like Weber, Benét offers some prospects of escaping the iron cage. By the end of "Babylon," it becomes clear that John represents both the literal and figurative way forward—the potential savior of his tribe, and an instructive moral figure for the Hill People and for readers. John's extraordinary, "supernatural gifts" (including

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his prolonged visions of the gods and ability to traverse their land without mishap) mark him as a person with charismatic authority—someone who operates outside the normal rules and expectations of his society.[113] Furthermore, once John returns from the Place of the Gods, we understand that he will answer Weber's call "to take a stand, to be passionate." He pledges to tell his people the truth about the island of the gods and forge a new "beginning." In this way, he will assume the duties of what Weber calls a genuine "political *leader"* who embraces "an exclusive *personal* responsibility for what he does, a responsibility he cannot and must not reject or transfer."[114] Thus, John tells us: "When I am chief priest we shall go beyond the great river. We shall go to the Place of the Gods . . . not one man but a company."

Readers of both "Babylon" and Weber's various works leave with several unanswered questions. What specific vision can charismatic figures (like John) offer followers to help traverse the "polar night of icy darkness?"[115] Whatever the leader's vision, how can she maintain her authority in the face of dynamic and unforeseen events, and ultimately feckless supporters?[116] On some level, the problem remains the core political question Weber begins with: how do we get people to accept domination, to obey states and their agents?

Detailed responses to these queries are beyond the scope of both Weber's and Benét's projects. Nevertheless, we can identify a few final connections between these authors to help to fill out the contours of the future they imagine. As noted, "Babylon" ends with the teasing promise that John will establish a fledgling society that will both phase out some of the superstitions and beliefs of the Hill People while elevating their condition with new knowledge, technology, and culture. It is significant in this regard that when John visits the Place of the Gods he is more transfixed and intrigued by their art, writing, and architecture than their material conquest or riches. In one passage, John describes his fascination at discovering a god's house filled with impressionist paintings, sculptures, and polyglot writings. Whoever lived in this place "must have been a wise god and full of knowledge. I felt I had a right there, as I sought knowledge also." With his appreciation of mystery, creativity, beauty, and knowledge, John offers some counterweight to rationalization's brutal force, and he may reintroduce what Weber calls our "most sublime values" back into public life.[117]

Furthermore, even if we are unclear on what specific form John's rule will assume, we can anticipate he will seek balance and dialectic change: channeling between the needs and expectations of the Hill People and the promise (and danger) of the gods' knowledge and culture. John will likely aim for a balance or third way between the unquestioned magical beliefs (and limited comforts) of the Hill People and the "wonderful and terrible" scientific achievements of the gods—at least at first. We will go to the Dead Places,

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John tells us, and study "the books and the writings." And even though the old "magic tools are broken . . . we can look at them and wonder" which is a different proposition than pledging to build everything anew. In sum, John promises to "make a beginning," constructing something distinct from both the Place of the Gods and the folkways of the tribe. In this fraught endeavor, we might presume that John will encourage in his people his own attitude of critical inquiry and questioning of inherited beliefs.

In a final, striking example of intellectual kinship with Weber, Benét reminds us at the end of his story that the process of political rebirth will need to be gradual. John's father convinces his son to share his insights "little by little," tempering John's excitement about the discoveries gleaned on his journey. We can understand this caution as a way to control the flow of rationalization; as John's father tells him, "If you eat too much truth at once, you may die of the truth" and end like the fallen gods, who "ate knowledge too fast."[118] Of course, as readers, we have been experiencing this mediated exposure to knowledge from "Babylon's" beginnings, through the first person narrative of John himself. He has been our protective guide to the world, only gradually revealing the terrible truth about the Place of the Gods (and, by extension, ourselves): that morally unfettered advancement is dangerous to our well-being and even our survival as a species.

And why, exactly, should we slow the pace at which we acquire and use knowledge and the principles of scientific mastery? "By the Waters of Babylon" suggests three answers to this question, each of which remain pertinent to our twenty-first-century lives. First, we need to control the flow of data so that we do not become overwhelmed psychologically and cognitively. One byproduct of rationalization in the modern age is the proliferation of information about products, institutions, and the choices we have as consumers and citizens (an effect certainly accelerated by the internet and new media). In the midst of this wash of data, we have difficulty making choices and can actually suffer cognitive dysfunction.[119] We get a sense of this problem in "Babylon" when John recounts a vision of the gods' civilization in full bloom: the resulting scene is kinetic and filled with sensory overload. John describes a saturating array of "circles and blurs of lights" greater than "ten thousand torches" and the noise of the city as "a roaring in my ears like the rushing of rivers." The scene is so powerful and overwhelming that John tells us that if he had been actually present to witness it "my body would have died."

A second reason we need to "eat" knowledge slowly is more practical: new ideas are dangerous and threatening. This is, of course, an ancient notion taking us back to Eden's tree of knowledge, and Plato's allegory of the cave, in which the prisoner who returns to share his knowledge of the surface faces hostility and the threat of violence by those still in darkness. In "Babylon,"

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John wishes "to tell all the people" about his new knowledge of the gods, but his father convinces him to share the information more deliberately and safely. It is only in the future, when John is chief priest, that he will be able to bring his tribe to the Place of the Gods to show them the truth, presumably after a lengthy re-acculturation process, in which John can methodically prepare his people to replace their past narratives, histories, and foundations of knowledge.

Benét (and Weber) point to a third reason why the Hill People (and we moderns) need to temper our pursuit of knowledge and technical achievement: so we can safely balance progress with morality. Weber's discussion of these issues takes place in the context of setting out two ethical commands that "genuinely human" leaders must wrestle with: what the theorist calls an "ethic of ultimate ends" (sometimes translated as an "ethic of conviction") and an "ethic of responsibility."[120] In politics, we must balance a commitment to high principles with a regard for the fallibility of decision makers and the real-life consequences of their policies. These twin obligations are not "absolute contrasts but rather supplements," and we must acknowledge that only a person with a true "calling for politics" can master the task of bringing these two ethical precepts into "unison" and cooperative tension.[121] The rest of us still have to identify these leaders and put them into positions of authority, so they can reconfigure Wilson's dangerous triad of paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology. Weber tells us that the leaders we need will be rare, and their challenges great, but at least the theorist has provided us with a sense of the scope of the job. In complementary fashion, Weber's literary counterpart, Benét, has rendered a psychological and emotional portrait of what such persons might look like, and sounded a warning about what happens to a civilization lacking such politically nimble and constructive figures.

Twenty-first-century readers of Weber and Benét are likely to be disturbed by the prescience of their interpretations of modern life, and the continued bite of their warnings. However, these readers will also likely discern the inherent humanism and aspirational tenor in these two authors' works. Weber and Benét give us admittedly imperfect directions to our future. But given the ongoing relevance of their insights (and anxieties) about human affairs, taking up their roadmaps seems like a good first step for steering clear of both the iron cage and the fate of "Babylon's" gods.

NOTES

1. "An Intellectual Entente," *Harvard Magazine.com* (September 10, 2009). The author thanks his coeditors for their many helpful insights and suggestions in improving this chapter.

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2. “By the Waters of Babylon” was originally published in 1937 in the *Saturday Evening Post.* The short story is in the public domain and is available online. Therefore, references to the short story in this chapter do not include page numbers.

3. Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 143. As we will see, Weber uses the term *rationalization* in multiple ways. Perhaps as a consequence, he is a bit unclear on the precise timing of the rise of rationalization, although some aspects of the phenomenon predate modernity. Stephen Kalber, “Max Weber’s Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 85 (March, 1980): 1148. Given this chapter’s focus on Benét’s short story, I will emphasize Weber’s account of the rise of rationalization in the context of modern, industrial societies.

4. Max Weber, *Economy and Society,* eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 224.

5. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons and Anthony Giddens (London & Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1930), 123.

6. Psalm 137: 1–9.

7. David Stowe, *Song of Exile: The Enduring Mystery of Psalm 137* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), xi–xii.

8. Stowe, *Song of Exile,* x.

9. Michael White associates the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple by the Babylonians with a new understanding of prophecy as introducing “a future-looking sense of history” as opposed to simply delivering the “word of the Lord.” L. Michael White, “Apocalyptic Literature in Judaism & Early Christianity,” *PBS.org*, accessed May 25, 2018, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/primary/white.html#ixzz1lwXqi9aI.

10. As the story eventually makes clear, the prohibitions of John’s tribe also keep people from learning too quickly from the departed and self-destructive civilization of the gods, and, closely related, they may be in place to keep the priestly caste in power.

11. Genesis 22: 1–18.

12. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* eds. C. Stephen Evans and Sylvia Walsh (New York: Cambridge University Press 2012), 65.

13. Among other uncanny features, “Babylon” seems to anticipate the horrors of World War II generally, and nuclear annihilation in particular; the short story was published eight years before the first atomic test in Alamogordo, New Mexico.

14. John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), 29.

15. Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins*, 29; L. Michael White, *From Jesus to Christianity: How Four Generations of Visionaries & Storytellers Created the New Testament and Christian Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 70–71.

16. White, *From Jesus to Christianity,* 70.

17. Revelations, 1–22; White, *From Jesus to Christianity,* 280; G. K. Beale and David Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015).

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18. Revelations 21: 1.

19. While "Babylon" references Psalm 137 directly, its suggestion of fallen humanity and the loss of a seemingly idyllic existence also conjures up Eden and Genesis. Indeed, John tastes a "forbidden . . . food of the gods" by sampling the contents of a jar left in one the Dead Places. The "sweetness" of this food and its association with divine death (which John is spared) is reminiscent of Adam and Eve's (successful) transgressions with the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2: 1; Genesis 3: 6.

20. As one measure of Weber's status in political science, one might note that only one of the dozens of syllabi gathered by the American Political Science Association references Weber. See American Political Science Association, "Online Syllabi Collection," accessed June 12, 2018, https://www.apsanet.org/TEACHING/Syllabi-in-Political-Science/Online-Syllabi-Collections.

That said, Weber is certainly represented in courses emphasizing progressive political thought and theories of society. With respect to normative political theory, Weber is interested in ethical questions, but his approach tends to be somewhat typological and applied. Thus, he discusses political ethics as components of responsible leadership, rather than offering substantive rules or theoretical structures for governing good behavior. This reflects, in part, his reluctance to weigh in on "value-questions." Max Weber, "The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality," in *Methodology of the Social Sciences,* trans. Edward Shils and Henry Finch (New York: Free Press, 1949), 8.

21. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 138.

22. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 143. In this way, Weber's "technique of mastering life" parallels Machiavelli's advice about controlling Fortune in Book XXV of *The Prince.* Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince,* trans. N. H. Thompson (New York: Dover Publications, 1992).

23. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 293.

24. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 196–211; 261–2.

25. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 103.

26. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 229.

27. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 357.

28. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 139.

29. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it might also be possible to analyze Benét's three groups via Weber's three dimensions of social stratification. Kenneth Allan and Sarah Daynes, *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2012), 165–9.

30. Allan and Daynes, *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory,* 154 ("Magic is the direct manipulation of forces. These forces are seen as being almost synonymous with nature") (bold type removed).

31. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 417; Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 3.

32. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 261. According to Weber, the process of rationalization is so powerful that it even contributes to adjusting the "psycho-physical apparatus of man" to conform to the demands of our refashioned world. We see this

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manifestation in "Babylon," where the gods power their city (and their lives) at all hours instead of following what John describes as the rhythm of the sun.

33. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 240–2.

34. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 128, 152; Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 19, 40 ("the valuation of the fulfilment of duty in [everyday] worldly affairs [served] as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume").

35. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 143.

36. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 40.

37. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 78 (italics removed).

38. Ibid.

39. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 78–9.

40. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 225.

41. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 245 ("Charisma . . . may effect a subjective or internal reorientation born out of suffering, conflicts, or enthusiasm. It may then result in a radical alteration of the central attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation of all attitudes toward the different problems of the 'world.'").

42. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 79, 115, 117.

43. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 248.

44. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 246.

45. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 296. As Anne Norton puts it, charismatic rule has the "antistructural character of revolution." Anne Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 159.

46. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 248.

47. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 253.

48. In Weberian terms, the Hill People's general reliance on nonrational tradition is a response to the destructive excesses of the gods' rational material mastery.

49. In this way food illustrates how John serves as a transgressive figure caught between worlds, in the tradition of the biblical Adam and Eve and Persephone from the Greek mythos.

50. Bill Harris and Jorg Brockmann, *Five Hundred Buildings of New York* (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2002), 546.

51. "Federal Hall: Birthplace of American Government," accessed June 12, 2018, https://www.nps.gov/feha/index.htm.

52. Richard Brookhiser, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 12; Gary Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 174.

53. Christopher Gray, "A Rendezvous With 1,000 Rooms," *New York Times,* March 21, 2013.

54. Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974).

55. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 249.

56. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 272.

57. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 123. For a related conception, see James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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58. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* xxxviii.

59. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 61. As Oakes puts it, "Magic, a technique for the manipulation of nature, was undermined by the religions of [spiritual] salvation and their theologies, which offered interpretations of the meaning of the world that magic did not possess." Guy Oakes, "The Antinomy of Values: Weber, Tolstoy, and the Limits of Scientific Rationality," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 1 (2001): 199.

60. Oakes, "The Antinomy of Values," 199. In the case of the Protestant ethic, Weber contends that rationalization gave rise to a "religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling" and a consequent form of reinvestment capitalism which undermined the moorings of religion by promoting consumption and materialism. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 70.

61. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 350.

62. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 61.

63. John's immersion in the waters of the Ou-dis-sun, and his self-description as an emergent, "new-hatched bird" make his experience on the river reminiscent of a baptism.

64. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 139.

65. Ibid.

66. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 139–40. Weber's skepticism about the inherent connection between scientific knowledge and human progress puts him at odds with American Progressives that were his contemporaries, figures such as Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, John Dewey, and Herbert Croly. Ronald J. Pestritto and William J. Atto, "Introduction to American Progressivism," in *American Progressivism: A Reader,* eds. Ronald J. Pestritto and William J. Atto (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 1–32.

67. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 140.

68. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 139–40. Moreover, in expressing skepticism about our capacity to anchor and defend values other than scientific ones, science as a vocation threatens to undermine its own "ultimate value—truth conceived as a product of empirical and logical analysis." Oakes, "The Antinomy of Values," 199.

69. Nikola Tesla, "A Machine to End War," *PBS.org*, accessed May 27, 2018, http://www.pbs.org/tesla/res/res_art11.html; Freeman Dyson, *The Scientist as Rebel* (New York: New York Review Books, 2008), 28–9; Jeffrey Kluger, "The Pope Makes Peace Between Science and Faith," *Time.com*, September 25, 2015, accessed May 27, 2018, http://time.com/4050465/pope-francis-us-visit-science-faith/.

70. John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 27.

71. "Babylon" is rich with animal life, including deer, panthers, and dogs. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to look at the symbolic importance of each of these life forms, it seems plausible to argue that an eagle John spots flying east (which he identifies as a "sign") serves as a representation of the United States.

72. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 139.

73. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 122.

74. Ibid.

75. Richard Bellamy, Jeremy Jennings, and Peter Lassman, "Political Thought in Continental Europe During the Twentieth Century," in *Handbook of Political Theory,*

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eds. Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kukathas (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004), 396.

76. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 124.

77. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 149. As Weber puts it in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* "Since [religious] asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history." Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 124.

78. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 153, 149; Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 53; Karel Dobbelaere, *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2004).

79. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 148; Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 124.

80. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 149.

81. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 148.

82. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 149; Iain Wilkinson and Arthur Kleinman, *A Passion for Society: How We Think about Human Suffering* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 137–8.

83. Frederic Jameson, "The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber," *New German Critique* 1 (Winter 1973): 61.

84. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 152.

85. Oakes, "The Antinomy of Values," 196.

86. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 143–53.

87. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 295–6.

88. R. C. Tucker, "Personality and Political Leadership," *Political Science Quarterly* 92 (1977): 388.

89. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 229.

90. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 245.

91. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 229.

92. As Weber puts it, bureaucracy eliminates "from official business love, hatred, all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation"—and these traits are "appraised as its special virtue." Weber, *From Max Weber*, 216.

93. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, "Introduction," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, by Max Weber, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 50.

94. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 116, 124.

95. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 123.

96. Quoted in J. P. Mayer, *Max Weber and German Politics,* Volume 4 (NY: Routledge, 1998), 126.

97. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 334.

98. Ibid.

99. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 140. As Norton explains, we experience not just the market and bureaucracy but modernity itself as an iron cage that promotes a "loss of self," and we are especially disturbed because this confinement is of our own making. Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity*, 25.

100. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 148; Michael Symonds, *Max Weber's Theory of Modernity: The Endless Pursuit of Meaning* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 50–3.

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101. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 123.

102. Roger Scruton, "Hiding Behind the Screen," *The New Atlantis* 28 (Summer 2010): 48–60.

103. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 124.

104. Ibid.

105. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 342.

106. As Weber puts it, the "final result of political action often, no, even regularly, stands in completely inadequate and often even paradoxical relation to its original meaning." Weber, *From Max Weber*, 117.

107. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 127.

108. Lawrence A. Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics, and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1991).

109. Gerth and Mills, "Introduction," 43.

110. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 248.

111. In this way, Gerth and Mills argue, "democracy has to promote what reason demands and democratic sentiment hates." Gerth and Mills, "Introduction," 17–18.

112. Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity*, 25.

113. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 296, 248. In "Babylon," John returns from the Place of the Gods and admits he has transgressed tribal laws punishable by death. But his father greets this news with an acknowledgment of his son's extraordinary status: "The law is not always the same shape—you have done what you have done. I could not have done it my time, but you come after me." John is not bound by the law in the same way as ordinary men and women.

114. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 95 (emphasis in original).

115. Since Weber tells us that "charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint," it is perhaps not surprising that he declines to speculate about the precise substantive content of this form of authority. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 246.

116. Weber notes that part of the difficulty of maintaining charismatic leadership is attributable to its contingency, which puts great pressure on the leader to show "his strength in life" and "perform miracles . . . [or] heroic deeds" and guarantee that subjects who submit to him will "fare well." Weber, *From Max Weber*, 249.

117. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 155.

118. Benét's concern with the hazards of sharing knowledge too rapidly (in a fashion that upsets conventional opinion) echoes similar ideas from Plato, Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, and Machiavelli. In Plato, the warning is captured by the *Republic*'s allegory of the cave (discussed more fully later in this chapter), Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968). In *Agamemnon,* we find this phenomenon embodied in the figure of Cassandra, whose accurate prophecies are mocked by her contemporaries, who identify her as a liar and insane, Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, in *Aeschylus II*, 3rd edition, trans. and eds. David Grene, Richard Lattimore, Mark Griffith, and Glen W. Most (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). And for Machiavelli, an adept prince must not be hesitant to deceive his subjects, because they "are always taken in by appearances" rather than truth. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince,* trans. N. H. Thompson (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 47.

119. Richard Saltus, "Lack Direction? Evaluate Your Brain's C.E.O," *New York Times,* August 26, 2003.

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120. Weber, *From Max Weber*, 127.
121. Ibid.

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Chapter 7

"The Terrible Justice of Reality"

Suffering, Structural Injustice, and the Dilemmas of Political Responsibility in "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"

Michael Christopher Sardo

Ursula K. Le Guin's Hugo Award-winning short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,"[1] begins with a description of a seemingly idyllic city in the midst of a summer festival. There are no kings, slaves, or armed forces in Omelas; it has few, if any laws, and is unburdened by financial markets and advertising campaigns.[2] Its citizens engage in guiltless orgies, partake in pleasurable drugs without addiction, and drink fine beer. The children of Omelas—including the offspring of these orgies—are cared for communally. While its people engage in religious worship and meditation, they are free from the hierarchy of the priesthood.[3] Visitors to Omelas will find fine music, hearty laughter, and good food, and will also be impressed by the people's sophistication. The absence of pain and hardship has not impaired the intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional development of its people; scientific and technological progress has provided Omelas with free energy, public transportation, and the end to the cold and flu season.[4] To ensure that the picture of tranquility is complete, the narrator suggests to the reader, "Perhaps it would be best if you imagined it as your own fancy bids," for Omelas satisfies all desires, and mirrors each person's own utopian imagination.[5]

However, the story discloses one more fact about Omelas: in a dark, windowless basement broom closet, a young, frightened child sits in its own excrement. It—for the child is of unknown gender—is poorly developed physically and mentally, and expresses little more than quiet whines for help. It has no contact with other humans, except when the door occasionally opens and some citizens of Omelas enter the room. Most simply look at the pathetic creature; some kick and abuse the child, while others quickly fill its food

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bowl and water jug.[6] It is not mere cruelty that keeps the child locked in such a state. The happiness, prosperity, and very existence of Omelas depends on the subjugation of this child. While the precise mechanism underlying the city's horrific social contract is not made explicit, the reader is informed that the child's suffering is the guarantor of Omelas's splendor. Even a momentary respite, or a single word of kindness, would destroy the happiness of the thousands living in Omelas. Every citizen knows these terms, even if few understand why or how they hold. Every adolescent is told of the child, and a majority are brought before the child. Most come to accept, rationalize, and justify the terrifying terms of this bargain, inspiring them to greater aesthetic, intellectual, and moral virtue.[7] Yet some individuals, such as the story's titular characters, reject the terms. Without violating the contract by rescuing the child and dooming their city, they refuse to participate. The story ends as these individuals walk, in quiet solitude, away from Omelas into the unknown.[8]

Many readers, both casual and scholarly, interpret this story as a cautionary tale against utopian promises or utilitarian reasoning.[9] Such readings are justified, as Le Guin's authorial introduction to the story points to William James's essay "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," which warns against the dangers of totalizing ethical systems.[10] Le Guin has further engaged utopianism in stories, novels, and essays, further buttressing the standard reading that "Omelas" is a warning that, in Peter Fitting's words, "the utopian ideal is irrevocably flawed, that there can never be a utopia without some hidden evil."[11] However, such a simplistic reading of the story limits its political-theoretical implications to a general skepticism of totalizing or utopian thinking, a well-trod theme in twentieth-century political thought. Without rejecting this reading, I argue that "Omelas" is valuable not only for this warning, but also for posing a series of political dilemmas concerning our responsibilities as citizens. Drawing on the thought of Hannah Arendt and Iris Marion Young, I read Le Guin's story as an allegory for our own responsibility for injustice. By implicitly raising the question of who is responsible for the injustice of Omelas, this story forces us to grapple with our own complicity in human suffering and the challenges that political life poses for intuitive conceptions of moral responsibility. Just as the story refuses to explicitly resolve these dilemmas with an explicit moral lesson, the dilemmas of politics themselves cannot be solved like mathematical theorems. Any political settlement will necessarily require tradeoffs, benefit some at the expense of others, and generate unintended consequences as well as new dilemmas.

More specifically, in this chapter, I read "Omelas" as posing two dilemmas of political responsibility that we ourselves, in addition to the citizens of Omelas, must confront. The first dilemma describes the challenge posed

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by structural injustices, the suffering produced by the normal functioning of large-scale social processes. In such cases, common sense assumptions of responsibility—which foreground a single autonomous agent to be held accountable—break down in the face of injustices that lack a discrete guilty party.[12] Given that politics not only generates and entrenches structural injustices but also obscures them from public attention, "Omelas" suggests the need for developing standards of political responsibility beyond legal liability and moral guilt.[13]

The second dilemma intensifies the first, and should properly be understood as a trilemma. Rather than treating the citizens who abandon the city of Omelas as exemplars of political responsibility, I read the story as closing with three unsatisfying options: one could, following the story's title, refuse to participate in the social contract and walk away; one could stand against the unjust splendor of the city and rescue the child; or one could, as most citizens do, accept the terms and attempt to justify the child's suffering. I contend that, despite the story's title, Le Guin does not clearly favor the first option. Rather, the story demonstrates the challenges of taking political responsibility for structural injustices. Because of the complexity of political relationships and the uncertainty that action in the political world generates, a universal theory of political responsibility that defines and explicates our political obligations cannot be developed *a priori*. Instead, the political-theoretical lesson of Omelas is that taking political responsibility requires responding seriously and honestly to the dilemmas, and trilemmas, of politics. Citizens take responsibility by working collaboratively to reform unjust structures, while acknowledging the risks that such action necessarily entails: their success is never guaranteed and political dilemmas lack costless solutions. Thus, the lesson of "Omelas" is far more challenging than sanguine, as political responsibility not only demands the difficult and often fruitless work of identifying and organizing around sites of injustice but also requires citizens to negotiate the unpredictable, and potentially dangerous, results of political action.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, drawing on theories of structural injustice and Le Guin's own account of the story as a "psycho-myth,"[14] I reconstruct the city Omelas as a parable for structural injustices that adhere in every society rather than as a critique of utopianism. In the subsequent two sections, and in dialogue with Arendt and Young, I reconstruct the two dilemmas of responsibility at work in "Omelas", demonstrating the aporetic quality of the story: it is neither obvious who is responsible, in a causal or moral sense, for the injustice of Omelas nor what course of action political responsibility demands in this case. Finally, I conclude with some lessons that "Omelas" offers for political thought and action.

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FROM UTOPIA TO EVERYDAY INJUSTICE: "OMELAS" AS PSYCHOMYTH

In her introduction to the story, Le Guin describes "Omelas" as a "psychomyth," which she distinguishes in the foreword to *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* from her more narrative works that take the form of speculative or future history. Instead, the psychomyths are "more or less surrealistic tales, which share with fantasy the quality of taking place outside any history, outside of time, in that region of the living mind which—without invoking any consideration of immortality—seems to be without spatial or temporal limits at all."[15] This framing of the story suggests that Omelas is less a fictional place in a fantasy setting, than a symbolic representation of fundamental aspects of moral psychology. As Le Guin writes in an essay on science fiction, the "mythmaking faculty" is a necessary mode of apprehension, needed to supplement an overly reductive and scientistic worldview, because we are, in addition to rational creatures, "also sensual, emotional, appetitive, ethical beings, driven by needs and reaching out for satisfactions which the intellect alone cannot provide."[16] Le Guin's psychomyths are aesthetic representations of aspects of the collective human condition that resist rational or intellectual presentation, and as such are well suited to political-theoretical analysis. While Omelas's social contract may fail to satisfy many, if not most, theories of justice, the persistence of injustice in our own world suggests a fundamental gap between cognition and action. Stories like "Omelas" mine this gap, uncovering the affective and experiential elements of political life that inhibit or encourage the recognition of injustice and motivation to take action.

In her introduction to the story, Le Guin references an essay by the American pragmatist William James, in which James criticizes abstract ethical theories that define ethical principles without reference to the concrete world of human experience.[17] To demonstrate the importance of moral intuitions and sensibilities, he suggests that the offer of a utopian world where "millions [are] kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torture" would instinctively cause revulsion despite its appeal.[18] Le Guin describes this offer as "the dilemma of the American conscience," further suggesting that "Omelas" should be read as a representation of contemporary ethical and political predicaments.[19] Rather than reading "Omelas" as an exploration of the human desire for utopia, the story can productively be read as a mythic representation of what political theorists, following Judith Shklar and Iris Marion Young, have called "structural injustices." "Most injustices," Shklar contends "occur continuously within the framework of an established polity with an operative system of law, in normal times."[20] That is, injustices should not be understood as individual violations of the law or moral norms, but as

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the products of large-scale social processes which nevertheless differentially distribute harm to some populations while benefiting others. Young, through a study of the inhumane labor conditions in the global garment industry, defines structural injustices as follows:

> Structural injustice, then, exists when social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them. Structural injustice is a kind of moral wrong distinct from the wrongful action of an individual agent or the repressive policies of a state. Structural injustice occurs as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting to pursue their particular goals and interests, for the most part within the limits of accepted rules and norms.[21]

Individuals and communities produce structural injustices through ordinary participation in social, economic, and political structures that produce and reproduce systemic inequality in life opportunities, such as the global garment industry, the production and use of fossil fuels, racially discriminatory policing and education policies, and global financial markets. Law abiding and seemingly moral citizens, while pursuing legitimate ends, can be complicit in injustices without either directly causing or intending to cause suffering or erecting the unjust structures in the first place. Even more troublingly, structural injustices, unlike individual moral wrongs, both persist and intensify over time.

These injustices require aesthetic representations like "Omelas," because they operate as the seemingly neutral background conditions of individual action, over which there is little choice. Jade Larissa Schiff demonstrates the variety of means by which we evade our apprehension of structural injustices, and refuse to acknowledge our complicity in human suffering.[22] For Schiff, our ability to acknowledge such injustices is not a question of cognitive knowledge, of knowing that there is suffering in the world. Rather our experience of distant suffering is always mediated by different narratives that can render the complex social processes that connect our everyday behavior with human suffering visible or invisible.[23] For example, narratives about free markets, comparative advantage, and "rising tides" can render global economic inequality as the natural, if tragic, result of a globally connected economy rather than as an injustice.

When read as a symbol for structural injustice, Le Guin's depiction of Omelas renders such injustices visible by forcibly bringing the injustices from the background to the foreground. Just as adolescents are brought to the basement room where the suffering child languishes, Le Guin's narrator

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guides the reader from the joyous festival above, to the human suffering which makes such a celebration possible, hidden down below. As Shoshana Knapp and Kenneth M. Roemmer argue, Le Guin's narrative technique implicates the reader in the creation of this unjust city and calls us to account for the injustices of our own world that parallel Omelas.[24] Rather than intellectually rationalizing our participation in unjust structures, "Omelas" forces us, through a direct confrontation with an innocent victim to experience and apprehend our world in new terms.

FIRST DILEMMA OF RESPONSIBILITY: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR OMELAS?

Reading "Omelas" as an allegory for injustices in our own world is not a novel hermeneutic. Moira Rayner, for example, invokes it to describe the unjust removal and detainment of Aboriginal children in Australia,[25] while David Brooks reads the story as a broader critique of the human suffering that undergirds the affluence of developed nations.[26] In what follows, I expand on their analyses, by demonstrating how "Omelas" dramatizes two dilemmas of responsibility. The first, which occupies this section, considers who is responsible for the unjust suffering of the child. The difficulty in ascribing moral responsibility to any one agent points to a significant lacuna in our political and theoretical imagination, as our intuitive conceptions of personal responsibility are ill-suited for making sense of the structural injustices endemic to politics.

Conceptually and etymologically, responsibility is linked to the idea of answering; to be held responsible for something is to be held to answer or account for some action.[27] The idea of responsibility, therefore, presupposes an agent who can be called to account. Since Immanuel Kant, the subject of responsibility has been the autonomous individual, who is able to both determine and provide a rational account for their actions.[28] Responsibility is understood analogously to moral guilt, legal liability, or financial debt: it adheres to a single discrete agent who is culpable due to intentional action or knowing neglect. This link between the autonomous individual and moral responsibility remains ubiquitous in both political theory and popular political discourse, permeating the breadth of the political spectrum. Narratives of personal responsibility suffuse our political imagination, making it difficult to theorize responsibility without invoking the idea of a self-responsible individual.

Despite the ubiquity and historical tenacity of this commonsense thinking, the dilemma of structural injustice as portrayed in "Omelas" demonstrates the limitations of this trope. There is not a single, easily identifiable, agent in

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Omelas guilty of causing the child's suffering. That the psychomyth begins *in media res* adds to the difficulty. As readers, we are not told of the origins of the city. While "some of [the Omelassians] understand why, and some do not,"[29] the narrator does not explain either the historical or ontological foundations of the Omelassian bargain. It is impossible to ascribe responsibility to some ancestral king or founding community who initially developed this horrific social contract. In fact, there is no king in Omelas, nor are there soldiers or guards whom we could hold accountable for the child's state.[30] While the citizens who physically abuse the child could be punished, its suffering is irreducible to such moments of violence.[31] No individual citizen is morally responsible for the child's suffering, in a strict causal sense; yet, absolving them from responsibility is unsatisfying.

The systemic nature of structural injustices renders commonsense conceptions of responsibility inadequate. Whereas such notions of responsibility rely on what Young calls a "liability model" that "assigns responsibility to particular agents whose actions can be shown to be causally connected to the circumstances for which responsibility is sought,"[32] structural injustices are constituted by far more complex causal networks that generate emergent effects and unintended consequences. According to Young, there is no single individual who causes a structural injustice, as their actions are mediated through large, sometimes global, social processes that combine and amplify the actions of large numbers of other individuals. Furthermore, the very notion of personal responsibility casts individuals as solely in charge of their life outcomes, and in doing so "thinks away large-scale social processes as relevant to assessing people's responsibility for their circumstances and their responsibilities to others."[33] Returning to the story, this line of thinking can reach the conclusion that if no one in Omelas is responsible for the child's suffering, it must not be an injustice at all or must be the fault of the child itself. The child's fate is simply bad luck, "the terrible justice of reality."[34] Even more troubling are the citizens' rationalizations that the child is so damaged that any attempt to improve its condition would actually harm it.[35] Personal responsibility is simultaneously too narrow and too demanding to make sense of structural injustice: too narrow because it cannot make sense of structural harm; too demanding because its need to locate a responsible individual can easily transform into scapegoating and victim-blaming discourses.

As Le Guin's narrator reminds us, however, "theirs is no vapid, irresponsible happiness,"[36] suggesting that while no individual citizen can be held responsible, the citizens as a whole bear a *collective* responsibility for the child's suffering. This move is attractive, but not without its own challenges. As Young argues, theories of collective responsibility follow the same logic as individualized moral responsibility but are applied to a corporate agent. Those who knowingly participate in an endeavor that causes harm, under

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this model—even if their individual contribution does not directly cause it—should be held responsible. However, participants in structural injustices do not knowingly participate in a directly coordinated action with the intent to cause harm; there is a distinction between being complicit in unjust labor conditions by purchasing affordable clothing and joining an organization that expressly seeks to engage in violence, even if an individual avoids violent actions themselves.[37] Structural injustices require some alternative criteria in order to establish responsibility. Simply expanding personal responsibility will fail to capture the challenge of structural injustices, because the underlying logic still relies on establishing clear causal connections.

Without any knowledge of the nature of political authority in Omelas, or of the foundations of the terms that keep the child locked in the darkness, it is difficult to ascribe collective responsibility to the entirety of the citizens. There are unresolved questions of intergenerational responsibility: should the current citizenry of Omelas be held responsible for a system erected unknown generations ago? The shifting composition of the "collective" means that ascribing collective responsibility would be blaming the current citizens for something over which they had no control. Similarly, as Ludvig Beckman argues in the context of climate change, the quality of political institutions matters: if ordinary citizens had no say or part in creating the political system, it is difficult to hold them collectively responsible.[38] The opacity of the story mirrors the apparent opacity of our own political world. Just as readers enter the city of Omelas without an origin story, we ourselves are thrown into social structures that we did not create, but in which we must participate.

Given the apparent impossibility of ascribing responsibility for the suffering that underpins Omelas, it is tempting to give up on the idea of responsibility, and eschew moral and political judgment. We may be drawn to Gérard Klein's conclusion that the story's lesson is "social relativism." "All societies," he writes, "carry in their depths their own denial, a fundamental injustice. Not because humanity is bad (metaphysically) but because every society . . . tends within itself to recreate and to perpetuate difference, including the difference between that which is subjectively experienced as good and as bad."[39] Injustice is ubiquitous, not because of original sin or radical evil, but because we disagree over the terms of justice. Thus, while the city's secret generates outrage, there is no Archimedean point from which we could judge Omelas and ascribe responsibility.

While skepticism of moral absolutes is a persistent theme in Le Guin's writings, such a critical attitude need not require abdicating all standards of judgment and responsibility. Arendt suggests such a possibility by distinguishing collective guilt from collective responsibility: while "there is such a thing as responsibility for things one has not done . . . there is no such thing as being or feeling guilty for things that happened without oneself actively

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participating in them."[40] That is, the citizens of Omelas can be *responsible* for the suffering child, even if none of them are morally *guilty*. According to Arendt, guilt is always personal, but responsibility can be collective and political when one is held responsible for something one hasn't done by virtue of one's membership in a group.[41] Furthermore, this form of collective responsibility is distinct from corporate liability, as it is not based in a collective entity's intentional action, but on participation in a political community. The citizens of Omelas have, to borrow Arendt's words, a "collective and vicarious responsibility in which the member of a community is held responsible for things he did not participate in but which were done in his name."[42] In almost contradiction to commonsense conceptions of personal responsibility, Arendt's framework allows us to think of the citizens of Omelas as responsible despite being innocent. This vicarious political responsibility is, according to Arendt, "the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men."[43] While moral guilt applies to our actions as individuals, we are not only individuals, but live lives embedded in social networks with others. This aspect of the human condition, as thematized in "Omelas," generates a paradoxical burden of responsibility that seems to violate our moral intuitions. Yet, it is necessary to make sense of the structural nature of injustice. Where Arendt contends that the rhetoric of moral guilt and blame can alienate individuals and disempower collective action, the language of responsibility both better tracks the obligations of citizens to respond to injustices that they themselves did not directly cause, and encourages action and solidarity.

Building on Arendt's argument, Young expands this account of responsibility beyond national borders, through a "social connection model" of responsibility. Because in an increasingly globalized world, we often are connected to people far beyond our own political communities, Young pluralizes Arendt's account of vicarious responsibility. Thus, "individuals bear responsibility for structural injustice because they contribute by their actions to the processes that produce unjust outcomes." She continues, "Our responsibility derives from belonging together with others in a system of interdependent processes of cooperation and competition . . . [and] all who dwell within the structures must take responsibility for remedying injustices they cause, though none is specifically liable for the harm in a legal sense."[44] We are responsible for structural injustices because we participate in and benefit from them, even without intending, or directly causing, harm. The goal of this theory is not to distribute blame, however. Instead, Young argues that it is a "forward-looking" account that does not seek to "compensate for the past" but to "work to transform those processes" that generate injustice.[45] In this model, the citizens of Omelas are not individually guilty for the suffering of the child, but are politically responsible to make Omelas more just.

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Thus, Le Guin's story demonstrates the need for significant revisions of our moral intuitions. The assumed link between responsibility and the autonomous moral individual must be problematized and supplemented with a theory of responsibility grounded on human social relations. Politically, we are responsible precisely because we are embedded within and belong to social systems that precede us and will outlast us. "Omelas" shifts the perspective of responsibility from the self to the world, following Arendt's contention that "in the center of moral considerations of human conduct stands the self; in the center of political considerations of conduct stands the world."[46] Part of the political power of "Omelas" is its ability to represent structural injustice in a way that forces readers to acknowledge their connection to and responsibility for suffering.

SECOND DILEMMA OF RESPONSIBILITY: IS IT RESPONSIBLE TO WALK AWAY?

If the first dilemma of responsibility in "Omelas" describes the inadequacy of commonsense notions of moral responsibility when faced with structural injustices, the second dilemma concerns discharging this responsibility once it is acknowledged. How should the citizens of Omelas take responsibility for the child's suffering, a structural injustice from which they derive enormous benefit? How does one act responsibly when inhabiting an unjust structure? While many interpreters suggest that Le Guin favors walking away from Omelas, I challenge the dominant reading by suggesting that "Omelas" presents a trilemma without obvious solution. Omelassians are confronted with three choices: in addition to walking away from Omelas they could stand against the injustice by rescuing the child, thus ending the city's happiness, or they could accept the terms and remain in Omelas, bearing the knowledge of the cost of their joy.[47] Each choice carries its own moral promises and perils, demonstrating the resistance of political dilemmas to absolute moral resolutions. Le Guin does not instruct us on how to take responsibility for structural injustices; the story's aporetic conclusion offers the reminder that political responsibility requires acting, and claiming responsibility in the face of uncertainty.

The standard reading of the story favors the titular "walkers" as the exemplars of responsible conduct. The walkers, unable to reconcile themselves to the suffering of the child, walk alone through the street and depart Omelas into the unknown.[48] Refusing to either benefit from the child's torture or to rebel against the system and condemn their fellow citizens to suffering, they simply excuse themselves from the structure and walk away. As Knapp argues, this is a supreme act of responsibility, as the choice offered by

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Omelas—"between torturing a child and destroying one's society"—is "a diabolical choice."[49] By offering both the citizens of Omelas and the readers of "Omelas" the choice to leave, Le Guin, in the standard reading, gives them, and us, the option of taking responsibility for our own lives. Venturing out into the unknown, toward a place that may not exist, the walkers take full possession and accountability for their lives.[50] By leaving Omelas and removing themselves from the unjust structure, they extricate themselves from their complicity in the child's suffering. The risk they take only reinforces their heroic responsibility.

Many take this to be Le Guin's position.[51] Knapp defends this contention, by turning to Le Guin's introduction to her short story, "The Day Before the Revolution," in which Le Guin describes Odo—who is both the protagonist of the story and the revolutionary who founded the anarchist society on Anarres in the novel *The Dispossessed*—as "one of the one who walked away from Omelas."[52] Given the importance of *The Dispossessed* within her corpus, described by Charlotte Spivack as "the culmination" of both "the Hainish series of interplanetary works" and "her Taoist vision,"[53] such textual evidence is taken as proof that if Le Guin "identifies with anyone in our story, it is with the ones who walk away."[54] Similarly, in her essay, "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be," Le Guin suggests that "the utopist would do well to lose the plan, throw away the map, get off the motorcycle, put on a very strange-looking hat, bark sharply three times, and trot off looking thin, yellow, and dingy across the desert and up into the digger pines," further recalling "Omelas."[55]

The complexity of Le Guin's thinking, however, exceeds such statements. For instance, Odo, as presented in the story "The Day Before the Revolution," is herself ambivalent about the coming general strike as she faces her own loneliness and mortality. Furthermore, the society that pledges fealty to her, as described in *The Dispossessed*, is riddled with bureaucratic corruption that stifles the creativity of individuals. *The Dispossessed* itself is subtitled "An Ambiguous Utopia," and its protagonist, Shavek, finds himself isolated from both the communitarian life of the Odonians on the moon Anarres and the acquisitive and individualist society on the planet Urras. While Le Guin is certainly sympathetic to the Odonians, describing anarchism as "the most idealistic, and to me the most interesting, of all political theories,"[56] it is less than clear that we are to read the walkers, or any of her characters, as examples to follow. Le Guin herself warns against such didactism, and instead embraces a perspectival and experimental politics of writing. "To me the important thing is not to offer any specific hope of betterment," she writes, "but, by offering an imagined but persuasive reality, to dislodge my mind, and so the reader's mind, from the lazy timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live."[57] Similarly, in a later essay on utopianism, she

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argues for the necessity of imagining utopia with an "acceptance of impermanence and imperfection, [and] a patience with uncertainty and the makeshift" rather than as a blueprint.[58]

Roemer similarly warns against readings that idealize the walkers, contending: "Unlike Odo, the walkers have no commitment to reform since they have no concept of an alternative form of reality to commit to. They are more like Pontius Pilate than like Odo."[59] Invoking Pilate, who famously washed his hands to declare his innocence in the crucifixion of Jesus,[60] Roemer further challenges the idea that the walkers are acting responsibly. The walkers simply abdicate responsibility, abandoning the city without providing any material change to the child's condition. While refusing Omelas's terms may be morally justified, political responsibility cannot be resolved as easily. As Arendt writes, "We can escape this political and strictly collective responsibility only by leaving the community, and since no man can live without belonging to some community, this would simply mean to exchange one community for another and hence one kind of responsibility for another."[61] Opting out of political responsibility is never truly possible; we cannot wash ourselves clean of complicity with injustice. Following Young's argument, political responsibility can only be discharged through action in community to address injustice.[62] To walk away from Omelas is to disregard this responsibility in favor of moral purity.

This might suggest that taking responsibility requires correcting the injustice by freeing the child, even at the risk of Omelas's happiness. If, as Arendt and Young contend, the proper subject of political responsibility is not oneself but the social, economic, and political structures that organize the world, then taking responsibility must require eradicating unjust structures. There is a certain logic to this claim, but there are also significant tensions. To show the child a single moment of happiness would not merely mean the end to the excessive happiness of Omelas and remake it into an ordinary city. Instead, the narrator insists, "all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed" instantaneously.[63] To aid the child would not simply rectify the ill-gotten advantages of Omelas, but would eliminate the possibility of any happiness and goodness for its citizens. Such a move may be justified from a strict Kantian perspective, which refuses, regardless of consequences, to treat any human being as a means to an end. However, to destroy the very conditions of possible political relationships illustrates the disconnect between moral and political standards once again. To take such a risk individually, without engaging in collective deliberation and arriving at a communal determination to do so is even more troubling.

Furthermore, Le Guin's deliberate refusal to explain the origins, mechanisms, or rationale for the child's imprisonment mirrors the apparent opacity and tenacity of social structures in our own world. As Young contends,

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these social structures become reified, creating the feeling that "we confront forces that give us no choice but to act as we do."[64] While Young argues for the importance of dereification,[65] and Schiff develops different narrative strategies to counter such refusals of responsibility,[66] it remains challenging to identify specific courses of action in the face of structural injustice. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible for any individual or group to overthrow global systems of production, exchange, and distribution. Even if it were possible, such a radical transformation would have massive unintended and negative consequences, even for those being ostensibly helped. While the rationalizations of the child's suffering offered by the Omelasssians may be in bad faith, it is not implausible to believe that the sudden shock of being removed from the basement may cause additional harm or even kill the child.[67] Similarly, boycotting garments produced in substandard conditions or outlawing such factories would have the unintended consequence of eliminating one of the only sources of income for many poor women in the developing world.[68] While such structures are unjust, they cannot be eliminated whole cloth without creating new injustices, intensifying the dilemma.

Thus remains the third option, embraced by most of the citizens of Omelas, of living in the city, sublimating the burden of their knowledge into "the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their science."[69] The narrator insists that the citizens do not forget the child, and that their knowledge of the child affects every aspect of their social lives.[70] Roemer entertains the possibility that those who stay act with as much courage and responsibility as the walkers,[71] and Sarah Wyman contends that Le Guin would require us to stay in Omelas and participate in the political community.[72] Those who remain do not deny the injustice of the suffering child, but sincerely believe that destroying the city would cause greater injustice. Instead, they work to make the child's sacrifice meaningful, through both the greatness of their accomplishments as well as the kindness and generosity they show their children and other citizens. The citizens choose the lesser of two evils, but knowingly and willingly bear the burden of the choice. They dutifully explain to their children the source of the city's greatness and intentionally stand in witness to the child's suffering as an attempt to hold themselves and future generations accountable. They take responsibility not by admitting guilt or blame, but by living responsible lives, chastened by their knowledge of the child.

Yet, there is something intuitively unsatisfying about this choice. In choosing to stay, the citizens not only accept and reconcile themselves to injustice, but also perpetuate it seemingly indefinitely. As Carol D. Stevens argues in her critique of Roemer, this move is a sign that we have "institutionalized all that is worst in us."[73] By working to justify the sacrifice of the child, the Omelassians further entrench the injustice. The citizens are no longer making

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the best choice given their powerlessness to change the structure of Omelas, but come to positively justify the child's suffering as a necessary sacrifice for their own achievements. As Arendt contends, the idea of "lesser of two evils" is "one of the mechanisms built into the machinery of terror and criminality."[74] This logic inhibits the faculties of thinking and judging while training citizens to accept evil as such. Within this logic, greater and greater atrocities can be justified with reference to some greater evil being avoided.[75] Once accustomed to justify injustice, the citizens of Omelas may come to commit additional injustices to secure the serenity of their city. More children may be imprisoned within the basement closet. They may seek to subjugate and terrorize neighboring cities before they become a threat to Omelas's prosperity. They may prevent citizens leaving Omelas on account of their conscience. While such actions may be anathema to the kindness and generosity that constitutes their self-understanding, the risk of accommodating oneself to injustice is that over time it corrupts one's faculty for judgment, and thus one's sense of responsibility.

Thus, the trilemma of discharging political responsibility fails to admit easy resolution. Omelassians have strong reasons to take any of the three options; yet, each has significant limitations and risks perpetuating existing injustices or creating new forms of suffering. Resisting the urge to privilege the walkers and to dwell in the ambiguity and indeterminacy of this trilemma is critical. The true challenge of "Omelas" is that there is no single action or decision that can resolve this predicament without risking further harm. There is no moral principle that can be invoked that solves the city's injustice without complication or imperfection. This is at least part of Le Guin's point, as "Omelas" dramatizes James's assertion that "for every real dilemma is in literal strictness a unique situation; and the exact combination of ideals realized and ideals disappointed which each decision creates is always a universe without a precedent, and for which no adequate previous rule exists."[76] Taking responsibility for Omelas cannot be without risk and every decision, including the refusal to make a decision, will carry unintended and potentially unsavory consequences. However, a decision must be made and actions must be taken. This is the real challenge of political responsibility.

OMELAS AND US

True to its mythic form, "Omelas" provides a literary representation of the structure underpinning our own political world. As Arendt writes, "We all arrived at one time or another as newcomers in a world which was there before us and will still be there when we are gone, when we shall have left its burden to our successors."[77] All of us are complicit in and must respond

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to unjust structures despite the morally unsatisfying possibilities and uncertain effects they present. This is the nature of the political condition, and constitutes its irreducibility to moral reasoning. In politics, we cannot make decisions from the perspective of a moral person abstracted from social context, just as we must take into account the consequences of actions for others who share the world with us. Despite this almost paralyzing complexity and uncertainty, we are compelled to act. To refuse to make a choice is a choice, and we all bear vicarious responsibility for the social, economic, and political structures that constitute our world.

Thus, political responsibility cannot be reckoned, decided, and accounted for in advance. As Max Weber writes, "The ultimate product of political activity frequently, indeed, as a matter of course, fails utterly to do justice to its original purpose and may even be a travesty of it."[78] Political life is structured by a fundamental disconnect between actions and intentions, and moral principles, following both James and Arendt, provide little more than rules of thumb and often come into conflict. Yet, despite all of this we cannot abdicate our political responsibility, and therefore must respond to the dilemmas with which we are faced. Taking political responsibility is to act in spite of uncertainty, with full knowledge that every action will incur costs for some party, that every deed will always risk unintended consequences, and that every solution to one dilemma will inevitably create some new dilemma. Politics requires what Weber calls an "ethic of responsibility," or a disposition that acknowledges the uncertainty of all action yet nevertheless claims and bears responsibility for such unintended consequences, rather than invoking the wickedness of humanity or the unfairness of the offered choice to eschew responsibility.[79]

Just as the Omelassians must choose whether to walk away from Omelas, and bear responsibility for that choice, we too are faced with dilemmas of structural injustice. Climate change, global economic inequality, and institutionalized discrimination all confront us as structural injustices lacking a guilty agent but requiring a political response. And yet our predicaments differ from the Omelassians' in two important respects. First, they have full knowledge of their complicity in a structural injustice, being brought as adolescents to see the child in its plight. We are in a far more difficult position; those who benefit from unjust structures diligently work to mask and hide the suffering these structures create from public scrutiny. Second, we face far more constrained choices, as the possibilities of exit are vanishingly small, if not entirely nonexistent. These differences should not minimize the value of Le Guin's meditations on responsibility, as the psychomyth forces us to find the children hidden in the basements of our own world and confront our own responsibility for their suffering. "Anyone who wishes to engage in politics at all," Weber writes, "must become conscious of these ethical paradoxes

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and of his own responsibility for what may become *of him* under the pressure they exert."[80] Because we cannot escape the dilemmas and responsibilities of politics, Weber's demand is universal. While "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" does not and cannot provide a blueprint for political action, Le Guin's myth attunes us to these paradoxes, preparing us for the challenges and burdens of political life.

NOTES

1. Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," Copyright © 1973 by Ursula K. Le Guin. First appeared in "New Dimension 3" in 1973, and then in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, published by HarperCollins in 1975. Reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd.

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2. Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters: Stories* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 278. Throughout this chapter, "Omelas" refers to the story, while Omelas (without quotation marks) refers to the titular city.
3. Le Guin, "Omelas," 279.
4. Le Guin, "Omelas," 277–279.
5. Le Guin, "Omelas," 278.
6. Le Guin, "Omelas," 281.
7. Le Guin, "Omelas," 283.
8. Le Guin, "Omelas," 283–284.
9. On the former, see: Frederic Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia: Or, Can We Imagine the Future?" *Science Fiction Studies* 9 (July, 1982): 158 n. 11; Peter Fitting, "Readers and Responsibility: A Reply to Ken Roemer," *Utopian Studies* 2 (1991): 24–29; and Heinz Tschachler, "Forgetting Dostoevsky: Or, The Political Unconscious of Ursula K. Le Guin," *Utopian Studies* 2 (1991): 63–76. On the latter, see: Charlotte Spivack, *Ursula K. Le Guin* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 84; and Moira Rayner, "Walking Away from Omelas: What Price a Just Society?" *Newcastle Law Review* 8 (2004–2005): 16–31. For a discussion of scapegoating within "Omelas," see: Jerre Collins, "Leaving Omelas: Questions of Faith and Understanding," *Studies in Short Fiction* 27 (Fall, 1990): 525–535.
10. William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," *International Journal of Ethics* 1 (April, 1891): 147–158.
11. Fitting, "Readers and Responsibility," 28.
12. More specifically, this conception of responsibility is a commonsense in contemporary liberalism. For a discussion of the unique liberal characteristics of this form of responsibility, see: Chad Lavin, *The Politics of Responsibility* (Urbana:

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University of Illinois Press, 2008), 6–8. This commonsense is neither ahistorical nor universal. Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo traces the development and transformation of responsibility in the history of political thought from Aristotle, through the Roman thought and the Christian natural law tradition, up to Italian Republicanism. See: Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, *Political Responsibility: Responding to Predicaments of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 65–78. For historical accounts of the development of this conception of responsibility in American political and legal culture, see: Susanna L. Blumenthal, *Law and the Modern Mind: Consciousness and Responsibility in American Legal Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); and Thomas Andrew Green, *Freedom and Criminal Responsibility in American Legal Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). The liberal priority of the self-responsible autonomous individual is not without its critics in contemporary political theory either. For example, Michael J. Sandel contests the liberal conception of the unencumbered, voluntarist self with an account of the self as constituted "in part by our aspirations and attachments" formed by social ties of community, language, and history, while Sharon R. Krause argues for a "non-sovereign" conception of agency, in which agency and freedom are social rather than individual achievements. Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 172; and Sharon R. Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty: Reconstructing Liberal Individualism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015). Such accounts expand the scope and subject of responsibility to include such constitutive aspects of our agency and identity.

13. Scholarship has not completely ignored the theme of responsibility in "Omelas." For two exemplary articles, see: Shoshana Knapp, "The Morality of Creation: Dostoevsky and William James in Le Guin's 'Omelas,'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 15 (Winter, 1985): 75–81; and Kenneth M. Roemer, "The Talking Porcupine Liberates Utopia: Le Guin's 'Omelas' as Pretext to the Dance," *Utopian Studies* 2 (1991): 6–18. As will be subsequently discussed, Knapp and Roemer focus on the relationship between Le Guin's narrator and responsibility, and do not, therefore, engage the specific question of political responsibility.

14. Le Guin, "Omelas," 275.

15. Ursula K. Le Guin, "Foreword," in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters: Stories* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), x.

16. Ursula K. Le Guin, "Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction," in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 69.

17. James, "The Moral Philosopher," 330–331.

18. James, "The Moral Philosopher," 333.

19. Le Guin, "Omelas," 275.

20. Judith N. Shklar, *The Faces of Injustice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 19.

21. Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52.

22. Jade Larissa Schiff, *Burdens of Political Responsibility: Narrative and the Cultivation of Responsiveness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

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Schiff identifies three dispositions that inhibit such acknowledgement: "Thoughtlessness," through a reading of Hannah Arendt; "bad faith," through a reading of Jean-Paul Sartre; and "misrecognition," through a reading of Pierre Bourdieu.

23. Schiff, *Burdens of Political Responsibility*, 39.

24. Knapp, "Morality of Creation," 78–79; and Roemer, "'Omelas' as Pretext to the Dance," 15–16.

25. Rayner, "What Price a Just Society?" 23–25.

26. David Brooks, "The Child in the Basement," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2015, A27 https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/13/opinion/david-brooks-the-child-in-the-basement.html?mcubz=1&_r=1.

27. Richard McKeon, "The Development and Significance of the Concept of Responsibility," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 39 (1957): 3–32.

28. Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1797] 1996), 16.

29. Le Guin, "Omelas," 282.

30. Le Guin, "Omelas," 278, 280.

31. Le Guin, "Omelas," 281.

32. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 97.

33. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 11.

34. Le Guin, "Omelas," 283.

35. Ibid. These arguments mirror assumptions about liability in many legal spheres, in which liability is attached to a cause but not an omission, unless a duty to provide care is explicit, as in the case of a medical professional. While "Good Samaritan Laws" exist to shield bystander intervention from liability created by reasonable attempts to provide assistance, they create no positive legal obligation to render aid.

36. Ibid.

37. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 103.

38. Ludvig Beckman, "Democracy, National Responsibility and Climate Change Justice," *Democratization* 19 (October, 2012): 843–864.

39. Gérard Klein, "Le Guin's 'Aberrant' Opus: Escaping the Trap of Discontent," trans. Richard Astle, *Science Fiction Studies* 4 (November, 1977): 288.

40. Hannah Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Shocken Books, [1968] 2003), 147.

41. Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," 149.

42. Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," 154.

43. Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," 158.

44. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 105.

45. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 109. As such, Young introduces several parameters of reasoning that distinguish the degree to which one is responsible and thus how obliged one is to take action. These are based in the positions different individuals occupy within these structures and include power, privilege, interest, and collective ability (144–147). For example, in the case of low-cost clothing produced by sweatshop labor, a wealthy lawyer who has the ability to research the sources of their clothing and the financial resources to choose more expensive, ethically sourced clothes has a greater responsibility to do so than a person working a minimum wage job struggling to clothe their children.

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46. Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," 153.

47. There are clear parallels to be drawn with John Locke's discussion of the distinction between tacit and expressed consent and the trilemma of responsibility presented by "Omelas." According to Locke, an individual who "hath any Possession, or Enjoyment, of any part of the Dominions of any Government, doth thereby give his *tacit Consent*, and is as far forth obliged to Obedience to the Laws of that Government" even if that individual did give expressed consent to the social contract. John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government in Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), §119. While express consent binds individuals to the commonwealth and its laws "perpetually" and "unalterably," an individual who have given only tacit consent can withdraw it, forgoing the benefits of membership and divesting oneself of any property within the commonwealth's territory, and again be "at liberty to go and incorporate himself into any other Commonwealth, or to agree with others to begin a new one" (§121). Those who walk away from Omelas can be seen as exercising this right reserved to individuals by Locke. While only tacitly consenting to remain citizens of the land of their birth, upon realizing the true terms of the social contract, they forsake the glories and happiness of Omelas and withdraw their consent. As long as one consents to a political order, even if only tacitly, they have an obligation to submit to its authority and share a responsibility for its actions and structures. Withdrawing consent, by walking away from Omelas, provides an intuitive way to escape complicity for its injustice. However, I complicate this intuition in this section.

48. Le Guin, "Omelas," 283–284.

49. Knapp, "Morality of Creation," 79.

50. Le Guin, "Omelas," 284.

51. On this consensus in the literature, see: Spivack, *Ursula K. Le Guin*, 84; Collins, "Leaving Omelas," 531–532; Tschachler, "The Political Unconscious of Ursula K. Le Guin," 65; Knapp "Morality of Creation," 80; and Elizabeth Cummins, "'Praise then Creation Unfinished:' Response to Kenneth M. Roemer," *Utopian Studies* 2 (1991): 22.

52. Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Day Before the Revolution," in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters: Stories* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004): 285; Knapp, "Morality of Creation," 80.

53. Spivack, *Ursula K. Le Guin*, 74.

54. Knapp, "The Morality of Creation," 80.

55. Ursula K. Le Guin, "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be," in *Utopia* (New York: Verso Books, 2016), 193.

56. Le Guin, "Day Before the Revolution," 285.

57. Ursula K. Le Guin, "A War Without End," in *Utopia* (New York: Verso Books, 2016), 208.

58. Ursula K. Le Guin, "Utopiyin, Utopiyang" in *Utopia* (New York: Verso Books, 2016), 198. See also: David L. Porter, "The Politics of Le Guin's Opus," *Science Fiction Studies* 2 (November, 1975): 243–248.

59. Roemer, "'Omelas' as Pretext to the Dance," 14.

60. Matthew 27:24 (New Revised Standard Version).

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61. Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” 150.
62. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 111–112.
63. Le Guin, “Omelas,” 282.
64. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 154.
65. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 157.
66. Schiff, *Burdens of Political Responsibility*, chapters 3 and 5.
67. For these rationalizations, see Le Guin, “Omelas,” 283.
68. Sajeda Amin, “Responding to Rana Plaza: a made-in-Bangladesh boycott won’t help girls,” *The Guardian*, April 30, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/apr/30/rana-plaza-boycott-bangladesh-garment-factory.
69. Le Guin, “Omelas,” 283.
70. Le Guin, “Omelas,” 282–283.
71. Roemer, “‘Omelas’ as Pretext to the Dance,” 79.
72. Sarah Wyman, “Reading Through Fictions in Ursula Le Guin’s ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,’” *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 25 (2012): 228–232. Wyman draws on Le Guin’s own invocation of James to argue that James’s own pragmatism insists that ethical dilemmas have no easy resolution. Rather than indulging in escapist fantasies, by walking away from Omelas, Wyman contends that both Le Guin and James would favor dwelling in the imperfection of the city and working to reform its injustice.
73. Carol D. Stevens, “A Response to Ken Roemer,” *Utopian Studies* 2 (1991): 32.
74. Hannah Arendt, “Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Shocken Books, [1964] 2003), 36.
75. Arendt, “Personal Responsibility,” 37–38.
76. James, “Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” 350. See also: Arendt, “Personal Responsibility,” 26–27.
77. Arendt, “Personal Responsibility,” 28.
78. Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” trans. Rodney Livingston, in *The Vocation Lectures*, eds. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, [1919] 2004), 78.
79. Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” 83–84.
80. Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” 90.

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Chapter 8

Kinship, Community, and the Bureaucratic State

A Study of Wendell Berry's "Fidelity"

Drew Kennedy Thompson

Wendell Berry's short story "Fidelity" calls into question basic assumptions about the legitimacy of state power and the proper reach of civil law.[1] The story sets up a confrontation between two competing and incompatible notions of patriotism. On the one hand, Berry presents a model of devotion to one's homeplace and family circle and, on the other, an increasingly dominant, though less explicitly acknowledged form, understood as an unquestioning adherence to the abstract authority of the state and the norms of modern liberal society.[2] The rites of death and burial are the focal points of this conflict and lend to the story a sense of timelessness and universality. Nevertheless, "Fidelity" is very much a story of *our* time, and its political implications remain both poignant and provocative. The essential conflict between the story's protagonists (it has several) and its antagonist (a lone man acting as a stand-in for a host of impersonal, abstract forces typified in this chapter as the *rational bureaucratic state*) centers on a case of the competing obligations one has to the government and the community in which one lives.

On one side of this dichotomy we find a community of people whose lives are fundamentally oriented toward their place—understood in a holistic sense to encompass both a specific geographical location and the generations of people who have made their lives there. In opposition to this community is "the organization of the world," as one character terms it, indicating the broad aims of the modern industrial power state. Berry uses the tension between these two positions to raise essential questions about the nature and purpose of community. Read as a political text, "Fidelity" offers a dramatic and cautionary insight into certain truths the modern liberal regime is inclined to overlook or discredit altogether. In a story about the death of an old man and,

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in broader sense, a dying way of life, Berry points out some of the unforeseen casualties our society has accrued in the course of "progress." This lament is not Berry's final say on the matter, however. "Fidelity" also presents a salient political critique of the modern state and the kind of citizen it produces. Moreover, in illustrating a moment of conflict between the divergent values of two incompatible ways of life, "Fidelity" identifies a latent blindness of the state to essential and enduring truths of our humanity: our isolated, fragmentary existence; our failure to appreciate the relationship between this fragmentation at the individual and societal level and our destruction of the planet through pollution and the misuse of resources; that the increasing incursions by the state into our lives undermines our ability to create and sustain communities of memory and hope connected to particular places that are neither as backward-looking nor unpatriotic as they are perceived.

Born in 1934, Berry is an author, essayist, poet, farmer, activist, and critic. Over the course of his literary career, he has upheld a persistent commitment to agrarian philosophy and practice. Thus, Berry continually examines and reexamines the question of humanity's proper relationship to nature, the role of place, and the function of community. He offers a strong and stirring critique of the misplaced values and bad choices that have led to the corporatization of American farming and the decline of rural communities in the last century. In his elegies for the loss of traditional patterns of life and labor in rural America, Berry taps into a common, and surprisingly current, anxiety that is best described as an estrangement of the self from the life of the world around it.

Writing in the tradition of agrarianism, a philosophic and literary movement concerned with the relationship between society and agriculture, Berry examines ethical relationships between man and nature. Berry, a farmer himself, finds inspiration in the natural cycles of fertility and renewal. Perhaps more importantly, his writing explores the way these cycles have continually shaped and reshaped human understandings of food, labor, and, above all, the metaphysical wholeness of the Creation, understood in a biblical (if not altogether orthodox Christian) way. "By understanding his proper place in Creation," Berry writes in his essay "The Body and the Earth," "a man may be made whole."[3]

Berry is widely regarded as one of America's greatest essayists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A writer keenly attuned to the power of language, he often speaks in terms of philosophical binaries and practical contradictions within the prevailing culture. As a (somewhat uneasy) critic from within the classical liberal tradition, Berry articulates a needed perspective on some of the often overlooked costs of modernity, even if he is not as widely recognized as other American writers of political fiction such as Mark Twain, Jack London, or John Steinbeck. The connections he draws

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between the ethos of the modern industrial state, the global ecological crisis, and the deterioration of community life, have endeared Berry to audiences at both ends of the liberal-conservative spectrum. He argues that contemporary society must look at itself more critically and act in a manner consistent with both reason and reverence toward the mystery of the Creation.

All of Berry's fiction is set in his imagined community of Port William, Kentucky, a small town "of about a hundred people . . . and a few small farms in its neighborhood."[4] Expressing his vision of the democratic ideal of a small, organic community, The Port William Membership, as he terms it, endures the perennial losses and gains felt throughout rural America between the years 1888 and 2008.[5] Throughout his career, Berry continually reexamined and refined his vision of a rightly ordered community. As Berry sees it, a healthy, coherent community is ideally "a place and all of its native or benevolently naturalized inhabitants," invoking the wholeness of the human and ecological spheres.[6] In an essay titled "Conservation and Local Economy," he describes his outlook on community in terms of health:

> A healthy community is a form that includes all the local things that are connected by the larger, ultimately mysterious form of the Creation. In speaking of community, then, we are speaking of a complex connection not only among human beings or between humans and their homeland but also between the human economy and nature, between forest or prairie and field or orchard, and between troublesome creatures and pleasant ones. *All* neighbors are included.[7]

In political terms, Berry's vision embraces the classical liberal element of voluntary association while at the same time it harkens to the classical republican tradition of civic virtue. The human component of community "would be responsibly conscious of the having-in-common of which the community is composed."[8] A community requires a particular geographical location, but it also requires a choice on the part of the citizen. His agrarian vision of community does not require native birth, "but we need to have settled into [a place] conscientiously as our permanent home. We have to give up the idea of going to 'a better place' or of 'going west' to escape our troubles and our messes."[9] It speaks to the correspondence of obligations between members, as well as between man and nature, strengthening the bonds of a community within itself and toward its place. This idea of the community's consciousness, of its *having-in-common*, as well as the conscientious decisions of joining and staying, are hallmarks of the communitarian strain found in Berry's work.

Membership, in Berry's thought, connotes wholeness and unity between the human sphere and the natural or ecological sphere, as well as between the human communities of the past, present, and future. For Berry, the ideal

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community “would include not just the living; it would include the unborn. It would be aware, with a clarity and concern which the best of us have hardly imagined, that the living cannot think or speak or act without changing the lives of those who will live after them.”[10] Membership is particular or local, but also transcendent. The very term, *Membership*, connotes the oneness of a particular group of people, their triumphs and their losses, their hurts and their hopes. Over the generations, through individual and communal remembrance of the Membership’s own story, the community strengthens and clarifies the bonds of affiliation, its ways of saying and doing, living and working, and dying.

In Port William, this sense of belonging within the collective identity is intensified by the understanding that one’s place is not lost even in death. Perhaps the most iconic statement on membership comes from Berry’s memorable character Burley Coulter. In another of Berry’s stories, “The Wild Birds,” Burley lays out Berry’s vision succinctly, with the biblical overtones speaking to Berry’s careful reading of the Gospels: “The way we are, we are members of each other. All of us. Everything. The difference ain’t in who is a member and who is not, but in who knows it and who don’t.”[11] The problem Berry never quite solves (both in this story and elsewhere) is the matter of how to reconcile, within a modern framework, the needs of the human community with natural harmony. What Berry’s vision does offer, however, is a too-often overlooked critical vocabulary suited to making connections between the excesses of self-interest and the opposing “small fidelities” of which he often speaks.[12]

“Fidelity,” then, is one of Berry’s tales about the Port William Membership and concerns the last day in the life of this same Burley Coulter (b. 1895, d. 1977).[13] In the story, a rural family, struggling with a profound sense of guilt, retrieves “Uncle Burley,” a dying family elder, from a hospital in a nearby city, and absconds with him in an effort to restore him to his proper place as he dies. The primary narrative strand focuses not on Burley, but on his family who initially—out of a dual sense of duty and helplessness—take their ailing uncle to obtain the care of specialists at a “big city” hospital in Louisville. The old man’s hopeful prognosis is short lived and he slips into a coma, leaving the family unsure of what to do but place trust in the doctors who advise them to wait and see. His life, they assure the family, can be prolonged. Upon returning home, however, the family experiences unbearable remorse at the creeping realization that they have abandoned Burley, taken him away from his proper *place* and separated him from those who know and love him. This sense of collective guilt distances the family not only from their loved one, but from each other, as each wrestles independently with guilt over what they have done to Burley. Eventually, this remorse gets the better of them. And so, in the pre-dawn hours, Danny Branch—Burley’s “illegitimate” son

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and recently acknowledged heir—rises, dresses, packs a few provisions, and tells his wife, Lyda, that he is going to get him. To this she responds, "Good."[14] Just before he leaves, Danny tells her that if she is asked where he has gone, to respond only that he said "something about Indiana."[15] Improvising his plan as he goes, Danny then walks into the hospital, dons a white lab coat, disconnects Burley from the various tubes and machines that are keeping him alive, loads him onto a gurney, then his truck, and drives him back to Port William. The two spend their last night together in an old barn on the Coulter property, a place they have slept many times before while out hunting with their coonhounds. As dawn approaches, Burley's breathing begins to slow and Danny, having selected a spot beneath the trees he knew the old man would like, begins to dig his father's grave. When the time comes, Danny, a man of few words, places his father into the grave and offers a simple benediction. "Be with him, as he has been with us."[16] In his analysis of this moment of the story, Caleb Stegall adds: "Membership means *being with*."[17] The scene is infused with guileless beauty and quiet reverence. Having restored Burley to the place he belongs, Danny has acted with the tacit approval of Burley and the rest of the Membership and, in doing so, has honored his father's legacy with love and dignity, bringing reconciliation and closure to those who remain.

For the world of twentieth-century professional medicine, however, the case of Burley Coulter's disappearance is not so cut and dried. While he was in the hospital's care, Burley's life was being sustained through the assistance of life-supporting medical technology. His doctors were confident that, after being strengthened for an operation, they might add months—if not a year or more—to his lifespan. The rightness of this course of treatment was taken as a matter of course, and at first the family defers the doctors' specialized knowledge, albeit with some misgivings. And here, in opposition to the Membership's beliefs, another system of value arises, one in which the ability to sustain a life takes precedence over any question of the suitability of sustaining a life. Not knowing (and perhaps not even caring) much about Burley or the way he had lived when young and healthy, the doctors approached his condition as a collection of symptoms and an intellectual puzzle. They had proceeded with treatment, with the family's reluctant acquiescence, in the hope of "healing" him. From the standpoint of the modern American medical practitioners, apparently, no alternative courses of action would bear consideration, as they would not make medical (or commercial) sense. And if the hospital likely would have regarded the Coulter and Branch family's refusal of such treatment as inconceivable, they were even less prepared for the possibility of their patient disappearing from under their noses. Thus, the story's second act begins with a kidnapping investigation, a marker of the medical establishment's surprise at and incapacity to deal with the Membership.

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The comic overtones with which Berry introduces Detective Kyle Bode of the Kentucky State Police strikes a contrast with the story's pastoral opening. His entrance—stepping awkwardly around the barnyard mud in polished shoes, a tacky blue suit, and a foppish haircut—paints him more a stock character than a principal antagonist. And yet, all similarity to the bumbling detective archetype notwithstanding, it is Bode's arrival in Port William that sets the main conflict of "Fidelity" into motion. And it is there that the full weight of the story's political and philosophical questions come to bear. Embodied in the characters and revealed primarily through scenes of dialog, Berry puts representatives of his vision of authentic community into direct confrontation with the rational bureaucratic state, which can neither comprehend nor tolerate acts of nonconformity, opposition, or resistance. Indeed, it is ultimately from Bode's own mouth that we learn one of the story's primary insights for political philosophy, when he refers to these acts (and those who endorse them) with the term "anarchist."[18] For Bode, "anarchist" simply means rejecting the law's absolute moral authority over citizens' behavior, even when the law contradicts the dictates of reason and conscience. Viewed as a kidnapping, Danny Branch's action, and no less so the community's effort to conceal and protect him, raises the question of transgression and culpability. The story presents this question to the reader's political imagination: whether the community of Port William's complicity in Danny's "kidnapping" of Burley, and their lack of cooperation with the investigation constitutes not merely a crime, but an act of rebellion against the authority of the state.

The story's political questions are revealed throughout the course of Bode's investigation. Berry paints Bode as a stereotype (if not caricature) of the kind of citizen produced by the modern state. Much more than Bode's inability to solve a simple kidnapping by a group of rustics, his utter lack of comprehension of their actions offers glimpses into his character, if not his soul. He knows of no precedent for such a "crime," and describes the possible motive as a sort of reactionary assault on modern technology, possibly motivated by backwoods religious fanaticism.[19] Perhaps owing to some deeply internalized prejudices, Bode consistently demonstrates an attitude of moral and intellectual superiority to the rural people he interrogates in his visit to Port William. And in this outlook, he reveals insights into his character essential to Berry's political teaching in the story. In an essay on the changes to American culture brought on by the modern industrial economy, Berry makes a similar observation about the fear, hatred, and intolerance modern liberal society directs toward those who resist it: "To this day, if you say you would be willing to forbid, restrict, or reduce the use of technological devices in order to protect the community . . . you will be called a Luddite, and it will not be a compliment."[20]

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Thus, by the end of the story, two conflicting systems of value emerge, that of the community of Port William and that of the state and the state's laws. Despite its momentary victory in preserving its way of life in this instance, Port William is dying. A declining population, a struggling economy, and the gradual encroachment of the modern state have all conspired to render the town, and its denizens' way of life, critically endangered. Through the Membership's decline, Berry dramatizes key elements of his criticism through a tragic parable of the dominant trends in twentieth-century culture toward industrialization, urbanization, technology, and consumerism. Bode acts as a surrogate for these opposing values of the modern state. This is seen most clearly in his unreflective embrace of the doctrine of progress and his lack of understanding of the community he investigates. Perhaps this is why his pursuit of Burley Coulter's kidnapper ultimately proves unsuccessful. As these values clash, we see the social and political teaching of "Fidelity" most clearly in the community's commitment to assist and protect Danny Branch in defiance of the law and, to an equal degree, in the angry and bewildered reaction of Detective Bode. Examining Bode first, as the embodiment of Berry's critique of modernity, I next turn to examine the manner in which the struggle of Port William corresponds to Berry's broader agrarian vision.

THE ARCHETYPAL MODERN MAN

One of Bode's signature traits is his desire for approval and admiration, to be seen as impressive by those whom he encounters. The question arises whether his motives are psychological or philosophical. Berry repeatedly references Bode's need to apologize for his presence in terms of carrying out his duty. Bode displays a certain idealism with regard to the powerful abstractions of modern medical science and industrial technology. It is evident in the comfort he takes in the ability of these forces to impose legibility upon an otherwise inscrutable landscape of diverse local practices, traditions, and interests. In this regard, he bears a remarkable similarity to Hannah Arendt's profile of Adolf Eichmann in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.[21] Both characters value order. Both are career civil servants living out unremarkable careers. Thoroughly mediocre, both men appear to have an inflated sense of their own importance and are given over to the crude vices of brown-nosing their superiors and engaging in braggadocio toward those of equal or lower status.[22] Both display an inability to look at things from another person's perspective. And, when taken to task for their inhumanity (Eichmann) or lack of scruples (Bode), both hide behind the excuse of merely doing their duty.

Of course, Eichmann's crimes, and alienation from the world, are far, far more severe than those of Bode. Bode, who is plainly incapable of

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understanding Danny's world, is the soul of a soulless state. He is unable to think, to conceive of a community such as Port William. Indeed, Berry's complaint about the modern world is that it has lost the capacity for such thought or, it can only think in terms of order. Its only "affection" is for that order, which blinds it to the human desire and need for love and for one another, in life and in death. As Arendt argues, this sort of surrendering of one's morality to the state inevitably leads to the *inability* to make moral judgments when faced with immoral laws.[23] Bode is in a state of moral paralysis that Arendt equates with an inability to think.

Bode's career has been a disappointment to him, not merely for his lack of promotion, but for his realization that the world is not as he had thought it would be. Where he had seen himself as someone who could impose order or intelligibility or *legibility* on chaotic or uncertain situations—and be publicly recognized for this ability—he has been thwarted by a world steadfastly resistant to conforming to tidy categories.[24] And people, for Bode, continually pose the most frustrating challenge of all, particularly those he encounters in this investigation. They do not seem to have any regard whatsoever for established symbols of state power and authority. And, as he increasingly suspects to be the case, often they are smarter than he is.[25]

Bode's near impenetrable self-regard, however, is eclipsed by his outright disdain for the people he interviews in his investigation. He dismisses Danny as a redneck, incapable of pulling off a professional kidnapping. Bode dislikes farmers and farming. Indeed, his disdain for the people extends to their places. The general ambivalence of the Port William people for the broader trends of contemporary society perplexes Bode, making him uneasy and a little bit irritated. He cannot reckon with their contentedness to live apart from the dominant culture, their preference for a life without modern conveniences and the novelties of contemporary culture. He finds the world of farms—of hills and hollows, of mud and caring for animals, of hard work—objectionable, their irregularity and lack of predictability offensive to his more "sophisticated" (or even "evolved") sensibilities of propriety and order; and, of course, there is also the smell. Bode sees the investigation as beneath him, and his interviews with the people of Port William only add to his disillusionment as a career public servant. For Bode, "these" people ought to have *moved on*.

Bode's condescension, however, is not merely benign. Having turned his back on his family's tractor dealership to pursue "higher aims," such as law enforcement, he has a somewhat heroic sense of himself, his behavior to the contrary notwithstanding.[26] Whenever his ambition comes into conflict with his lazy side, he is prone to "sudden onsets of violence."[27] Bode is, in short, at war with himself and, by extension, with everyone else. He is defined by certain tendencies: an unreflective embrace of libertinism, moral autonomy,

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and the frenetic pursuit of novelty. His lack of satisfaction renders him self-obsessed, image-conscious, and insecure. He's directionless and without purpose in a spiritual sense, so he pursues distractions to cure his malaise. His second marriage falls apart due to a mutual sense of this dissatisfaction, but Bode finds consolation in the possibility that he and his ex-wife have found freedom at last: the freedom to be themselves without regard for the other's needs nor those of their young daughter. This total liberty, however, leads him to ponder the possibility of never finding the ultimate satisfaction he so desires. This is a fearful prospect for Bode. His proxy for a longed for "place to stop," we learn, is frequently in the smoky, anonymous comfort of beer halls like the "Outside Inn."[28]

As a stand-in for modern rational man, Bode embraces his individuality, looking at the web of voluntary associations as purely optional, and frequently constricting. In his atomization, Bode displays some of the excesses of classical liberalism, which likewise tends toward radical individualism at the expense of community. And in his outlook on the world, he incorporates elements of a variant of the classical liberal tradition known as corporate neoliberalism. Citing works by Gabriel Kolko and James Weinstein, Dale Snauwaert offers the following instructive analysis: "Instead of political organization being founded upon negative liberty, corporate liberalism employs a distorted notion of positive liberty as self-mastery (as opposed to self-determination), wherein rational experts control the irrational masses."[29]

As Berry presents him in "Fidelity," Bode, then, is not so much comic relief as an agrarian's stereotype of modern man. He fulfills all the basic requirements: a dogmatic adherence to the authority of an abstract and impersonal state, an unqualified admiration of new technology, a preoccupation with the norms of order and legibility, and an inability to account for the inordinate particularities of people and places beyond the scope of his limited worldview. He becomes insecure when his sense of order or isolated individual autonomy is threatened, mirroring the modern or postmodern unease with agrarian values and alternative systems of order. Michael Walzer's communitarian critique of the supposedly unburdened liberal subject could be readily applied to Detective Bode. Walzer writes, "Each individual imagines himself absolutely free, unencumbered, and on his own—and enters society, accepting its obligations, only in order to minimize his risks."[30] Bode, as a freedom-seeking individualist, cannot imagine accepting the extra-legal responsibilities that come with membership in the Port William community. He is dogmatically loyal to the state, so long as it is a state that provides him with clear standards of behavior that do not diminish his moral isolation.

Politically, Berry's agrarianism is not simply a general preference for policies that make things easier for small communities, or for farmers. It is also a call to moral action, to take responsibility for our neighbors. He calls for a

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level of intimacy in social affairs, even public affairs, that is likely to make us squirm. Berry's social vision imposes requirements that will be difficult for moderns to embrace. It would mean laying aside certain material conveniences and moral bromides that typify our existence. It insists on an ethic of stewardship for the earth and its inhabitants that might seem overly intrusive for conventional, liberal notions of individual autonomy.

Berry's formulation of fidelity to a community, affirming its legitimate moral claims, echoes the thought of modern communitarian thinkers, exemplified by Walzer.[31] Walzer maintains that the problem with modern liberalism is that it causes us to forget both our situatedness, or embeddedness within a specific time and place, and to ignore "unorthodox" solutions for ways we might reknit our fragmentary society.[32] "Fidelity" successfully elucidates both aspects of this communitarian challenge to the prevailing currents of modern liberalism. First, it critiques liberalism's lack of consideration for exceptions to the trend toward standardization, and is suspicious of the general claim that legal norms always lead to more just outcomes. It points the way toward a different path by showing the Port William Membership's dedication to one another's welfare above and beyond the law. Simultaneously, the story tries to make the case for an obvious loss of perspective on the part of Bode. Similarly, communitarianism holds that liberal separatism, or individualism, is the cause of a fragmentary modern society filled with citizens who may be fundamentally incapable of democratic public life. What is lost, then, can only be regained (however implausibly) by some kind of reintegration that would impose "substantive conceptions of the good" in the place of procedural justice.[33] Berry's vision of community rejects the requirements for state neutrality, which Walzer sees as definitive of liberal society.[34]

Berry does not quite show his readers the path out of this dilemma or impasse, but he does articulate a new conservative ethos that is anathema to conservatism as it is conventionally understood in America. It is a conservatism deeply concerned with preservation of both community and nature, placing it at odds with most factions of modern American conservatives. While this agrarian conservatism cannot *force* the continuity of economic growth and healthy rural communities, it can and should consider it. The small victory of the Port William Membership in "Fidelity," in thwarting Bode's investigation, is not to be understood as the triumph of one superior ideal over an inferior one, but rather as a small, limited gain by a specific community. This gain, however, may only be a momentary one, as Port William is dying.

Yet, Port William's death is not at the hands of a more skilled, or worthy, adversary. The story's great weakness, one might say, is that Detective Bode is not a more potent villain. The story sets up a false dichotomy in which those who are right are doomed to fail, and those who are wrong succeed, though they know not why, to the detriment of everyone involved. Nevertheless, the

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story successfully highlights one significant point about the communitarian critique of liberalism. It illustrates the nature and extent of the lack of comprehension the rational bureaucratic state has for the authentic community, an ignorance exemplified by the detective.

Ultimately, we come to pity Bode when we realize how trapped he is. Bode is a man who does not see an alternative because he's contributing to the debasement of his own soul.[35] It would be overly reductive to assume that Berry's intention here is to assert that modernity has misplaced values, or that the detective is simply a bad liberal (though he may be). Berry is instead implying a deeper, and more political possibility: that the modern state, and the economy it serves, has lost sight of several fundamental questions, among them: Why is life itself given preeminence, and quality of life only rarely discussed? Why is it assumed (by both parties in the story, significantly) that experts (such as people with medical degrees) have the final say on what's ultimately best for the rest of us (including Uncle Burley)? Why does the family initially remit on something so fundamental as where and how and when their uncle should die? How is it possible that they don't even realize they have—and, by rights, ought to have—some say in the matter?[36] The lack of regard for these questions tells us something not only about the modern liberal project (and how far it has reached), but also about how it might be corrected, especially by reexamining, if not reinterpreting, our perception of nature.

In Jerry Weinberger's analysis of the monumental changes modern technology has brought to modern politics, he attributes one particularly radical critique to a loosely defined confederation of "participatory democrats."[37] Their critique, Weinberger contends, focuses less on the undeniable power and prevalence of technology in modern life, but rather in basic tropes of rationalist politics, including "abstract individualism . . . the distinction between the state and civil society, . . . and, perhaps, most important, bureaucracy and bigness."[38] Detective Bode comes remarkably close to a walking, talking embodiment of what participatory democrats most revile:

> [They] are revolted by the kind of human being supposedly produced by liberal rationalism: a morally denuded creature for whom there is no possibility of meaningful place and location, no possibility of loyalty and reverence, no possibility of genuine participation in common life, and thus no possibility of genuine creativity. In the world of such "individuals," most have ample opportunities for being oppressed and all suffer from a deformation of the soul.[39]

Nonconformity—any action in which an individual might exert ethical choice in the place of unquestioning adherence to the implicit values and norms of modern society—would be viewed in such a context as an act of outright

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defiance and even anarchism. Bode's modern liberal state thus becomes something radically different from the one envisioned by thinkers such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill. Rather than establishing a society wherein individuals could develop and assert independent moral and political opinions, we have arrived in a society where any "non-rational" dissent is viewed as inherently dangerous, and must be suppressed. In this way, Bode's confrontation with the seemingly idiosyncratic Port William family provides us with an occasion to reflect on the nature of patriotic obligation and dissent.

A MATTER OF PATRIOTISM

Patriotism, as Henry Catlett, a family friend and local attorney, explains to Detective Bode, comes to represent the strength of communities to provide justice, instill virtue, and to preserve and protect the family. At its most fundamental level, the story asks us to consider whether Danny Branch and his band of confederates are justified in disobeying the law. To what source of authority is the primary allegiance owed? The state or the family? Most importantly, why does the state fail to comprehend the basic need of the community to reclaim one of their own?

When Henry tells Bode that he and his neighbors will not cooperate with the detective's investigation out of a sense of "patriotism," Bode is baffled by this alternative understanding of love of one's country. '"Are you some kind of anarchist?'" Bode asks, not understanding Henry's position.[40] Clearly, he assumes that Henry, and by extension the whole community, including Danny, acknowledge a different and conflicting view of the good apart from that of the state and its established, impersonal rules. In this he is correct. Henry continues, "We know that for a hundred years, the chief clients and patrons of that state of yours have been in the business of robbing and impoverishing the country people and their places."[41] To this extent, the Port William Membership is in a limited rebellion against the state. They have no desire to take up arms and overthrow the regime. Yet, they are also not content to adhere to the philosophical, or moral, norms of state when these conflict with more sacred obligations. Since the beginning, citizens of the United States have balanced the dual influences of classical liberalism's veneration of individual rights and the remnant of close-knit communitarianism inherited from pre-industrial life. In "Fidelity," Berry illustrates the inevitable, periodic conflict between these two ideals.

The great value of "Fidelity" as a text for teaching politics can be traced to Bode's question about Henry's purported anarchism. Stated differently, for Bode, Henry represents a problem: people can do things outside the normal, even outside the law, in service of an ethical system that does not prioritize

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the claims made by the state. Bode's choice of the word *anarchy* implies a worldview in which any exceptions, any actions other than total compliance with the laws of the state must be regarded as revolutionary.

In contrast, Henry (speaking with Berry's voice here, or one very like it) is putting forward a doctrine of resistance, but not necessarily organized movement politics. He is not going to help the detective. He is not going to make it easier. And yet, neither is Henry trying to overthrow the state. He is not trying to impose another vision of order on the world. In his speech he articulates an aspect of Berry's thought that has not been fully appreciated by scholars of Berry's work. One of the most insidious ways the rational, bureaucratic state entrenches its power (and robs us of our own value choices) is through a *soft despotism*, to use Alexis de Tocqueville's term, built on centralization and the quiet dissemination of a certain kind of philosophy, exerting an imperceptible form of despotism.[42] It creates a certain kind of person and, for Berry, this person is Bode.

"Fidelity" illustrates how basic, humane notions of care and love can get overlooked in the effort to establish institutionalized norms of moral behavior. It is, then, both a critique of the status quo and a call to reassert the primacy of familial and communal bonds. Bode is, I conclude, an effective character because he is so remarkably ordinary. Berry gives us a way to see this problem more clearly than we otherwise might and empowers us to resist it on moral grounds. This conclusion, that one owes stronger allegiances to a dying family member than to the rules and regulations of the modern healthcare system, is easier to stomach than the alternative. Leaving Burley to die slowly in the hospital with the best of modern medical care represents an unacceptable abandonment of familial obligation for the main characters in this story. The unaccountable otherness of the hospital room, with its tubes and lights and whirring motors, seems alien and anathema to all they know and to leave Burley in such a place seems wholly unaccountable to the members of Berry's "authentic community." The upset to their membership, a harmony of its own kind, is clearly disorienting for the family, causing them to feel helpless as they "enact again the strange rite of offering themselves where they could not be received."[43] Berry's language here clearly suggests that the natural feelings of labor and love that are a part of their family life are disrupted by the mechanics of the modern hospital room. The family's sense of obligation requires the labor attending to Burley's "last things" and the healing act of returning his body to the soil. This obligation, it appears, supersedes any authority on the side of the state to claim responsibility for him.

"Fidelity" also raises the question of to what or to whom people belong. The kidnapping of Burley Coulter throws the issue into stark terms. Burley has been a lifelong citizen of the Commonwealth of Kentucky as well as of the United States. His citizenship entitles him to the protection of his rights by

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the state, but it also seems to import a set of expectations by the state's agents (Detective Bode and the "big city" doctors) about what values (e.g., life for life's sake, technological improvement) he should cherish. Berry's discussion pits communitarian and agrarian values against modernity's preference for order. The state's claim is that it speaks for Burley Coulter, particularly so in this case because Burley cannot speak for himself. Both parties in this dispute regard him as a victim. Both parties would acknowledge that the fault lies with Burley's family. Where they differ is in their respective understandings of the nature of the offence.

The state, however, does not own Burley any more than it knows anything meaningful about him. Since his body can be sustained through the aid of medical technology, it is assumed that his wish would be to continue his "life," as this is now the unquestioned legal and moral principle. Burley's family intuitively knows this assumption is false. It is because he has owned them that they cannot bear to watch him die without doing whatever they can to help him. It is because they belong to Burley in like manner that the members of the family realize their obligation to tend his body in death and to attend to his life as he dies.

The extended ownership of people within the community is reinforced by the obligation the community feels to protect Danny and defend his decision to provide for Burley's death himself. Berry's descriptions of the Port William Membership, as a rule, depict a law-abiding, virtuous group of people who are generally responsible citizens of the state. But when the state comes to collect one of their own from the hands of his family, the community is united in its willingness to dissent. Burley Coulter is not a random object for the state to come collecting. He has a place and is a part, a member, of his circle of family and neighbors. It is because of their own understanding of families that the rest of the membership unites in its steadfast resolve to hinder the investigation and protect Danny. They do so in obedience to a higher law.

The larger Port William community owns Burley as well, which is to say, as a part of their Membership, he *belongs* to them.[44] In life, he has lived among them as a committed member of the community of families in Port William. In describing his old friend and cousin Burley to the young detective from the city, Wheeler Catlett, Henry's father and law partner, paints a portrait of a complicated man who required much understanding and forgiveness. That this forgiveness was freely given and respectfully received, however, indicates the deeper principle found in Berry's concept of community.

Throughout the story, Berry's unflattering descriptions combine with Bode's own pronouncements to paint an underwhelming portrait. Bode's backstory can be summarized as one of listless, unfulfilled striving for abstract, protean, and unattainable goals. His attitude toward the case reveals

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a man deeply in thrall with the bourgeois ideals of the rational bureaucratic state. Thoroughly mediocre in every way, he makes an unlikely antagonist. For all his devotion to instrumental reason, he seems ineffective, even impotent, as a detective. And his failure to make any headway in a fairly open-and-shut case marks him more as a buffoon than a villain. Thus, while Bode functions in the story as a foil for the Port William characters—particularly Henry and Wheeler Catlett—he is less a potent expositor of a coherent and opposing worldview than a pitiable victim of a larger crisis of culture and of politics. Indeed, Bode can be seen as a particularly clear illustration of the manner in which the excesses of modern politics undermine our essential humanity. His professional conduct speaks to a vision of justice that serves the administrative needs of the state rather than the life and health of a community.

The social and political critique delineated in "Fidelity" contrasts the divergent goals of the community with those of the state. Since the community functions as a supra-familial agent of justice and virtue, it is necessarily a servant of those who compose it. The state, quite differently, has become a servant of power. Its willingness to look past the sacrificing of knowledge, the environment, the family, and the basic demands of neighborliness are all symptoms of this same corruption. The community, then, stakes out its own claim, resisting the encroachment of the bureaucratic state into a matter that lies beyond its understanding and authority. The community, as a group of people tied together in mutual respect and love for each other, for the land and for the labor that unites these loves, stands in opposition to the agglomeration of government's authority. For Berry, the family, as a political institution, is a sacred and primal structure that when properly constructed, is capable of sustaining itself through generations, maintaining balance and health, and reflecting natural harmony.

BERRY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN AGRARIAN THOUGHT

Political scholars have approached Berry's work with a number of different theoretical lenses. The comparison most easily drawn, perhaps, is between Berry and the Jeffersonian ideal of a secure and enduring yeomanry (and suspicion of centrally organized, urban life) at the heart of American culture. Berry's agrarianism resonates with this sentiment and then pushes beyond it to explore not only the possibilities of reinstituting the yeoman farmer in contemporary society, but also (and more poignantly) illustrates the consequences of the absence of such people on the American landscape. Berry's essays, explicitly directed toward social and political topics, point toward

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a strain of conservatism that has largely been abandoned in contemporary practice.

In his essay "Wendell Berry and the Alternative Tradition in American Political Thought," Patrick Deneen cites Berry's description of "two fundamental tendencies" in the development of our national culture. The first, and dominant, tendency is the "mobility and restlessness," of acquiring and expanding toward new frontiers. The second, alternative, tendency is seen in those citizens who establish communities and pass their localized traditions down through the ages, staying put and caring for one's place. The sources of these "tendencies," Deneen argues, arise in philosophical traditions based on "early modern" liberalism, as well as the "tradition of colonization qua exploitation," and finally, another "contending republican or communitarian tradition that had its deepest sources in ancient philosophy and the biblical tradition."[45] Deneen delineates a "dominant tradition" within American political thought and criticizes it along the lines of other familiar critiques of liberalism. This tradition, Deneen contends, is inextricably rooted in modern notions of "man vs. nature," in the acquisition of property, which is a logical outcome of the old Cartesian dualism of *subject* and *object* or *self* and *not-self* (other).[46] The alternative to this view, typified by Berry, is more in line with classical political philosophy and the biblical and Christian tradition, with its "call to reverence toward the divinely created order, its injunction against avarice and self-aggrandizement, its insistence upon self-sacrifice, and its commandments enjoining humility and love."[47]

Calling Berry a "Kentucky Aristotelian," Deneen paints Berry in the terms of classical philosophy. "Nature—of which humanity is a part in both Berry's and Aristotle's reckoning—is the whole that governs all of its constitutive parts."[48] Among their convergences in thought is a shared view of nature as the foundational standard for politics. And while Berry, of course, has a more twentieth-century understanding of nature (and therefore the term "ecology" is a more accurate descriptor), the two share a common value of the harmony of natural cycles and the observance of limits, so as to maintain these balances.

Berry, with a regional perspective that emphasizes *place* as a necessary component of authentic culture, social order and personal obligation, draws his life *as well* as his work into contrast with other figures in the agrarian tradition. Thus, he has stated both appreciation and criticism of the Vanderbilt Agrarians, whose landmark manifesto is often cited as a seminal work in promoting the agrarian values of maintaining a connection to the land and local community. Observing that the majority of their literary production was conducted in absentia and the fact that they were not working farmers, Berry is resistant to being grouped among the Vanderbilt contingent unqualifiedly. His philosophic agrarianism differs from the earlier generation because it

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refuses to restrict itself to mere literary concerns but provides the basis for a practical mode of living with an eye toward the future.

Noting this forward-looking aspect of Berry's thought, political theorist Kimberly K. Smith attempts to place Berry's rather novel approach to agrarianism into wider streams of political discourse in her book *Wendell Berry and the Agrarian Tradition*. Smith explores Berry's philosophic forebearers, including Thomas Jefferson, John Taylor of Caroline, Thomas Malthus, and the Twelve Southerners. Smith challenges the persistent objections of certain critics who find a thinly veiled utopianism or romanticism latent in Berry's and, indeed, all agrarian thought. Smith defends Berry from this criticism. Drawing on G.E.M. Anscombe's postulation of character, Smith's approach dictates that we should "investigate how culture shapes our moral characters."[49] Placing Berry in the tradition of "virtue ethics," Smith's formula for interpreting Berry's thought is instructive:

> I suggest we read Berry's novels and essays as offering contextual justifications for his moral and social theories . . . . His starting point is always our current social and political situation: a complex combination of cultural, ecological, and economic practices and institutions that are, he claims, resulting in ecological decay. He compares this state of affairs with his own richly imagined alternative, a set of social practices that embody a different moral vision, most fully drawn in his novels about the fictional Port William. He then suggests that his alternative is preferable to our current state of affairs—once we consider more thoughtfully what it is we really want.[50]

The social and moral theories Smith finds in Berry's work are not as clearly delineated as one might anticipate, most likely because Berry's so-called "moral vision" is an even broader philosophy of ecological, social and personal health. Smith does, however, provide a substantial insight into Berry's critique of "rugged" individualism. Long a cornerstone of the agrarian stance, Berry parts ways with other agrarians who embrace the rugged ideal of autonomy. On the other hand, he complains that government intervention has the tendency to foster a state of overreliance and oppression.

Berry's social critique often draws unexpected connections—parallels between religion and ecology, personal morality and public land use, the commoditization of energy and gender inequality—a critique of contemporary society, if not modernity itself. In some way, each of these examples illustrates how modern society's lack of a holistic vision of health has inaugurated an era of unprecedented waste and destruction. He is fearful of a widening distance between the modern techno-state, with its industrial economy and consumer culture, and the Creation. The consequences of this rift, Berry argues, are dangerously misunderstood. He warns us that our society fails to see the interconnectedness between ourselves and the ways and means of our

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subsistence. Our heedless overuse of natural resources mirrors our destructive and frequently bloody history, and both are symptomatic of a "radical disconnection"—a profoundly disordered political and moral culture perpetuated by the disintegration of community life.[51]

Within the context of "Fidelity," Berry's argument can be summarized thus: a crime in which a family breaks the rules to honor a dying man's last wish, is no crime. Further, Berry maintains that it should be no surprise that the civil servant, Bode, who comes looking into the matter of Burley's disappearance from the hospital regards his "perps" (the citizens of Port William) as luddites, religious fanatics, or outright anarchists. He has a woefully deficient frame of reference for them. While a better detective might have the needed intuition or empathy to see the futility (and absurdity) of the state's case in this matter, Bode isn't simply a bad detective. He is the victim of a kind of illness, the same illness that permeates modern political life on a global scale.

Berry's concern with the fragmentation of the modern citizen and society stands as the touchstone of his political imagination. The lack of unity at any level (personal, familial, agricultural, political) causes overall confusion and fear and a general resistance to the natural order. Again and again, Berry analyzes the cause and consequence of a "destructive schism" between body and soul in the American mentality.[52] For Berry, "character and community"[53] become the "first casualties" in the battle between the divergent standards of value of care and order. Thus, Berry's readers, and even his critics, find common ground in recognition of a mutual longing for a more authentic culture and the need for a fuller sense of community in a world that seems openly hostile to such a possibility.

NOTES

1. Wendell Berry, "Fidelity," © 1992 by Wendell Berry. Reprinted by permission of Counterpoint Press. All page numbers in this chapter refer to Wendell Berry, "Fidelity," in *Fidelity: Five Stories*, ed. Wendell Berry (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993). In addition to the editors of this volume, I am grateful for the assistance of Dr. Cecil Eubanks and my wife Dana Statton Thompson in the preparation of this chapter. I would also like to dedicate this chapter to the memory of WGH, 1949–2015.

2. Wendell Berry writes, "The patriotism, say, that grows out of the concern for a particular place in which one expects to live one's life is a more exacting emotion than that which grown out of concern for a nation." Wendell Berry, "The Loss of the Future," in *The Long-Legged House*, ed. Wendell Berry (Washington, DC: Shoemaker and Hoard, 1969), 49.

3. Wendell Berry, "The Body and the Earth," in *The Art of the Commonplace*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Emeryville: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2002), 94.

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4. Wendell Berry, “Imagination in Place,” in *The Way of Ignorance and Other Essays*, ed. Wendell Berry (Berkeley: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005), 40.

5. Berry, “Imagination,” 50–1.

6. Wendell Berry, “The Short Answer: An Exchange with Wendell Berry” *Preservation* 57.2 (March/April 2005), in *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, ed. Morris Allen Grubbs (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 178.

7. Wendell Berry, “Conservation and Local Economy,” in *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community: Eight Essays*, ed. Wendell Berry (New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993), 15.

8. Berry, “The Short Answer,” 178.

9. Ibid., 178.

10. Berry, “The Loss of the Future,” 63. This concept is commonly referred to as “intergenerational justice.” Cf. Edmund Burke: “[Society] is a partnership . . . in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership not only between those who are living, but also between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Thomas H. D. Mahoney (Indianapolis and New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1955), 110.

11. Wendell Berry, “The Wild Birds,” in *That Distant Land: The Collected Stories*, ed. Wendell Berry (Washington, DC: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), 356.

12. Berry, “Conservation and Local Economy,” 14.

13. Wendell Berry, “Port William Family Tree,” retrieved from http://www.wendellberrybooks.com/pdf/portwilliam_tree.pdf.

14. Berry, “Fidelity,” 114. In the story, Burley never marries Kate Helen Branch, Danny’s mother. After they conceive Danny, however, Burley devotes himself to her care and takes an active role in raising their son. Due to concerns for propriety, Danny grows up calling his father “Uncle” Burley. This changes after Kate Helen’s death, when Burley formally acknowledges his paternity and names Danny his heir.

15. Ibid.

16. Berry, “Fidelity,” 169.

17. Caleb Stegall, “First They Came for the Horses,” in *The Humane Vision of Wendell Berry*, eds. Mark T. Mitchell and Nathan Schlueter (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2011), 103.

18. Berry, “Fidelity,” 164.

19. Ibid., 162.

20. Wendell Berry, “Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community,” in *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community: Eight Essays,* ed. Wendell Berry (New York and San Francisco: Pantheon Books, 1993), 131.

21. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

22. Arendt, *Eichmann*, 47.

23. Ibid., 8.

24. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 22–7.

25. For his part, Bode assumes the rationality of obedience to the laws and norms of the state and cannot put himself into the community’s shoes. The narrative

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describes how Bode is waiting for someone in Port William to make a mistake. He assumes they are both unintelligent and amateurish in this foray into crime. Suggestively, this proves to be his great limitation.

26. Berry, "Fidelity," 146.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 148.

29. Dale T. Snauwaert, "Wendell Berry, Liberalism, and Democratic Theory: Implications for the Rural School," *Peabody Journal of Education* 67 (Summer, 1990): 120.

30. Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 18 (February, 1990): 8.

31. In opposition to theorists of social democracy, Walzer's critique points toward the equally non-neutral position of the participatory democrats. Sheldon Wolin writes, "The central challenge at this moment is not about reconciliation but about dissonance, not about democracy's supplying legitimacy to totality but about nurturing a discordant democracy—discordant not in the flashy but empty ways of latter-day Nietzscheans but discordant because, in being rooted in the ordinary [or, as Berry might say, being rooted in natural harmony] it affirms the value of limits." Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, 7th ed (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 605–6.

32. "The central issue of political theory is not the constitution of the liberal self but the connection of constituted selves, the pattern of social relations. Liberalism is best understood as a theory of relationship, which has voluntary association at its center and which voluntariness as the right of rupture or withdrawal." Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique," 21.

33. Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique," 9.

34. Ibid., 16–7. "The standard liberal argument for neutrality is an induction from social fragmentation. Since dissociated individuals will never agree on the good life, the state must allow them to live as they think best, subject only to John Stuart Mill's harm principle, without endorsing or sponsoring any particular understanding of what "best" means. But there is a problem here: The more dissociated individuals are, the stronger the state is likely to be, since it will be the only or the most important social union. And then membership in the state, the only good that is shared by all individuals, may well come to seem the good that is 'best.'"

35. This is the argument made by adherents to participatory democracy like Wolin.

36. It should be noted that modern hospice care has restored this question to a place of prominence in the discourse surrounding end-of-life care.

37. Jerry Weinberger, "Technology and the Problem of Liberal Democracy," in *Technology in the Western Political Tradition*, eds. Arthur Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 256. See Weinberger's footnote 4 (257) for a detailed overview of this "broadly mixed group."

38. Weinberger, "Technology and the Problem," 257.

39. Ibid., 258.

40. Berry, "Fidelity," 164–5.

41. Ibid., 165.

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42. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, eds. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), II.IV.III–VI.
43. Berry, “Fidelity,” 108.
44. Ibid., 174.
45. Patrick J. Deneen, “Wendell Berry and the Alternative Tradition in American Political Thought,” in *Wendell Berry: Life and Work*, ed. Jason Peters (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 300–1.
46. Deneen, “Wendell Berry,” 301–3.
47. Ibid., 303.
48. Ibid., 304.
49. Kimberly K. Smith, *Wendell Berry and the Agrarian Tradition: A Common Grace* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 122. Cf. Smith’s footnote 4 referencing G. E. M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
50. Smith, *Wendell Berry*, 122.
51. Berry, “Conservation and Local Economy,” 8.
52. Wendell Berry, “A Native Hill,” in *The Long-Legged House*, ed. Wendell Berry (Washington, DC: Shoemaker and Hoard, 1969), 199.
53. Wendell Berry, “The Unsettling of America,” in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry,* ed. Norman Wirzba (Emeryville: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2002), 40.

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Chapter 9

"The Incarnation of My Native Land"

Clover Adams in Henry James' "Pandora"

Natalie Fuehrer Taylor

In May 1882, Henry James left America after a five-month stay in his native land. Prior to his homecoming, it had been six years since the novelist had been back in the United States. While born in New York and raised in Boston, James had, in effect, made England and Europe his adopted home. His ailing family seemed to be his only, ever weakening, tie to the country of his birth. Indeed, with the exception of a short visit after his father's death in December 1882, it would be another twenty years before James returned to America. Upon his departure in May 1882, James already knew that his farewells would be significant. He saved his final goodbye for Marian Hooper Adams, known as "Clover" to her family and friends. Clover was married to Henry Adams, a descendent of two American presidents and a historian of the early republic. In her weekly letter to her father, Clover wrote, "I had a farewell from Henry James, Jr., written Tuesday night on the eve of his sailing. He wished, he said, his last farewell to be said to me as I seemed to him 'the incarnation of my native land.'"[1] Always quick to defend America with her sharp wit, Clover immediately took advantage of the ambiguity of this description from James' pen:

> Am I then vulgar, dreary, and impossible to live with? That's the only obvious interpretation, however self-love might look for a gentler one. Poor America! She must drag on somehow without the sympathy and love of her denationalised [*sic*] children. I fancy she'll weather it![2]

Humorous as it may be, Clover's self-deprecation conceals James' sincere regard for her. Indeed, James saw Clover as a key representation of the critical role American women played in the American republic.

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James had known and admired Clover since she was a girl—prior to her marriage to, and his friendship with, Henry Adams. After Clover and Henry Adams' marriage, Henry James and the Adamses had been together frequently during their trip to Europe in 1879 and during James' stay in Washington during January 1882. Later, when James thought to "do [sketch a portrait of] the 'self-made girl'. . .to make her a rival to D[aisy] M[iller]" (the titular character of the novella he had published in 1879), he had the idea to place the new story, and the new female protagonist, in Washington.[3] Setting the tale in the American capital had the benefit of allowing James to revisit "my very lovely memories of last winter. I might even do Henry Adams and his wife."[4] James did base two of his fictional characters, Mr. and Mrs. Bonnycastle, on Henry and Clover Adams. Indeed, James' affection for Clover, the woman he once dubbed "a Voltaire in petticoats," is evident in the short story that he eventually wrote in 1884, "Pandora." Moreover, James' portrayal of Clover as Mrs. Bonnycastle illuminates the meaning of his description of her as "the incarnation of my native land," and as a consequence, brings into sharper focus this enigmatic woman and offers new insight into American democracy—especially by grounding and contextualizing some of the more abstruse elements of political philosophy.

In their argument for including literature in the study of politics, John Horton and Andrea Baumeister take seriously the criticism that political theory is abstract:

> Here critics have tended to focus on the abstract, decontextualized and ahistorical character of much of contemporary political philosophy. Problems are posed in a form which makes them look timeless. Political issues, however, are in some significant part about a particular time and place.[5]

The inclination of political philosophers is to return to first principles, "to a general theory of political morality, utilitarianism or a theory of rights or justice for example, which have universal validity."[6] The abstract character that Horton and Baumeister attribute to political theory also describes the political philosophy of the American Founding and Alexis de Tocqueville's observations about American democracy just over fifty years later. The danger is that these and other works of political philosophy, in aspiring to timelessness, will become more and more detached from political experience and reality. Horton and Baumeister suggest literature as a complement to the standard treatises on political philosophy. "Novels and plays . . . seem much better at exhibiting the complexities of political experience and the open-textured and necessarily incomplete character of real political arguments."[7] In many works of political theory, we experience this incompleteness or abstractness quite clearly in their accounts (or non-accounts) of the emotions, experiences, and

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perceptions of American women. In contrast, James' character, Mrs. Bonnycastle (Clover Adams), not only provides much needed insights into the role of women in the republic generally, but also reveals how a particular individual honors the first principles of the American regime in a particular political and historical context.

To advance this perspective, this chapter draws on works of political philosophy, such as the *Federalist Papers* and Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, as well as Clover Adams' letters chronicling political and social events in Washington during the early 1880s—roughly the time of James' visit there. Through these texts, we can more fully appreciate James' short story as a work of political philosophy, with important contributions to our study of American political thought. The chapter begins with a summary of the short story "Pandora," followed, second, by a consideration of its significance in relation to American thought. In the third section, I turn to Clover's biography, including excerpts from her letters, to better understand the woman who inspired Henry James and led the novelist to his insights into the unique character of American women and their importance to the democratic republic. James' story, and his fictionalization of Clover, also helps to reveal one of the fundamental paradoxes of liberalism—the neglect of emotion in favor of reason. With this historical and theoretical backdrop in mind, the chapter then returns to Mrs. Bonnycastle and her moral and patriotic character. This portion of my argument makes the case that, since American political theory runs the risk of examining only part of American democracy, it is also in danger of misunderstanding American citizens by concentrating on a very narrow range of emotions. And, finally, the last section of the chapter considers how "Pandora" offers us an example of a particular person in a specific political context upholding the abstract principles of the American regime. In all of these ways, Henry James' short story provides a corrective to potential deficiencies in our understanding of American democracy.

HENRY JAMES' "PANDORA"

"Pandora" is the story of a European aristocrat's encounters with Pandora Day, James' "self-made" American girl. The short story takes place in two parts or chapters. It begins with an encounter between Count Otto Vogelstein and Pandora Day on a steamer to America, and ends in the drawing room of the famous Washington, D.C. hostess, Mrs. Bonnycastle. At the outset, Vogelstein is onboard the ship, ready to assume his position as part of the German legation. Vogelstein believed "the German Empire places in the most striking light the highest of all the possibilities of the greatest of all the peoples."[8] In contrast to this empire, Vogelstein "thought modern

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democracy a temporary phase and expected to find many arguments against it in the great [American] Republic."[9] Nonetheless, Vogelstein, like Tocqueville half a century earlier, also believes that the United States "offered a vast field for study."[10] And, like the French aristocrat, Vogelstein is curious about the social conditions of equality. Standing on the ship's deck, watching new, mostly American, passengers board the steamer, Vogelstein is struck by the number of young girls travelling. A lady in Dresden had told Vogelstein "that America was the country of the Mädchen [the German word for girls]. He wondered whether he should like that, and reflected that it would be an aspect to study, like everything else."[11]

Vogelstein meets Pandora Day while reading James' popular novella "Daisy Miller," the story "of a flighty forward little American girl."[12] Vogelstein picks up "Daisy Miller" as a way to pass the time and learn more about America. Although Vogelstein initially compares Pandora with Daisy Miller, "he satisfied himself in a very short time that Miss Day had nothing in common with the heroine of that work save certain signs of habitat and clime—and save further, the fact that the male sex wasn't terrible to her."[13] Vogelstein does not confine his study of America to James' novella, and his personal observations. He also seeks help from another passenger on the boat, Mrs. Dangerfield, "a handsome confidential insinuating woman" as a way to understand American girls and the republic's social conditions.[14] However, Mrs. Dangerfield's snobbery and attention to American social distinctions only further confuse the young German diplomat. As James tells us, "American life was full of social distinctions, of delicate shades, which foreigners often lack the intelligence to perceive."[15] When the passengers disembark and go their separate ways—Vogelstein to Washington, D.C. and Pandora to Utica, New York—Vogelstein has little expectation that his path will cross with Pandora's in the future.

In the second part of the story, after spending several months in the American capital, Count Vogelstein finds himself socializing in the drawing room of Mr. and Mrs. Bonnycastle in April 1882.[16] Mrs. Bonnycastle's "husband was not in politics, though politics were much in him,"[17] and we can be sure that politics dominated the talk in the Bonnycastles' drawing room. Overall, James notes, the Bonnycastles' "receptions were the pleasantest in Washington."[18] To his surprise, Vogelstein learns from Mrs. Bonnycastle that Pandora, the intriguing girl from the boat, is also at the gathering. He seeks her out and finds her seated next to the president of the United States, on a sofa. In this pose of equality, Pandora "ministered freely and without scruple"[19] and manages to exact unknown "promises from the ruler of fifty million people."[20] Even more so than when he was on the boat, Vogelstein is captivated by Pandora Day. He appeals to Mrs. Bonnycastle to tell him "something more" about the American girl. Mrs. Bonnycastle informs Vogelstein she invited

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Pandora ("the lovely Day") to the party because Pandora is an intriguing phenomenon in American society. Pandora is "the new type"[21]—a phenomenon written about in newspapers: "the self-made girl."[22]

> She [the self-made girl] didn't cringe, she didn't make herself smaller than she was; she took on the contrary a stand of her own and attracted things to herself. Naturally she was possible only in America—only in a country where whole ranges of competition and comparison were absent.[23]

The self-made American girl is independent and charismatic; she is unafraid to show her spirit and her nature. Vogelstein is captivated by "the latest freshest fruit of our great American evolution." Vogelstein discovers that he moves in the same social circle as Pandora and he looks on as Pandora gracefully secures a diplomatic position for her beau, "Mr. D. F. Bellamy of Utica." The short story ends with the report that after "a thousand other duties performed," Pandora "finally 'got round' to the altar of her own nuptials."[24]

"PANDORA" AS A COMPLEMENT TO AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

The study of women and America in Henry James' "Pandora" complements the conventional study of American political theory in three important ways. As a keen observer of manners and mores, James reveals to us the unique American character, particularly the winsome character of American women. Second, James' character Mrs. Bonnycastle (the stand-in for Clover Adams) evinces a love of both democracy and her country. In fleshing out this emotional state, James gives expression to an aspect of women's political engagement and citizenship that, while necessary for the perpetuation of the republic, was rarely considered by our Founders. Third, James introduces us to situated, political individuals, demonstrating how these characters uphold the first principles of the American regime in a particular context, sometimes far outside of the formal corridors of power.

Of course, these varied issues of American political character, the role of women, and how to best perpetuate the fledgling republic have deeper roots than "Pandora." At the start of the *Federalist Papers,* Alexander Hamilton, writing as Publius, notes the profound significance of ratifying the new Constitution, which is both a model of rational deliberation (by the young country's leading statesmen) and pragmatic political architecture. As Hamilton states, "It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been left to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing government

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from reflection and choice."[25] The Constitution, and the republican institutions that it established, would distinguish the United States among nations. In particular, in contrast to all the republics that had come before, the Founders had established a republic that did not require the virtuous participation or the constant vigilance of its citizens. As Hamilton further explains, the Founders' aim was to "arrange the several offices in such a manner as that each may be a check on the other; that the private interest of every individual may be centinel over the public rights."[26]

The *Federalist Papers* are mostly concerned with the abstract figures who walk the halls of government: the president, representatives, justices. These essays defending the Constitution explain how the branches of American government were uniquely conceived to ensure self-government. However, the American regime—any regime—is not limited to its form of governmental institutions. A regime also entails "the form of life as living together, the manner of living of society and in society."[27]

Indeed, it is this "manner of living of society and in society" that captured Tocqueville's attention when he visited the United States in the early nineteenth century:

> Soon I recognized that this same fact [the equality of conditions] extends its influence well beyond political mores and laws, and that it gains no less dominion over civil society than over government; it creates opinions, gives birth to sentiments, suggests usages, and modifies everything it does not produce.[28]

Tocqueville, following several of the arguments advanced in the *Federalist Papers* (most famously those found in *Federalist 10*), reminds us of the importance of the private sphere or civil society to understanding the (maintenance of the) American regime:

> The Americans have a democratic social state that has naturally suggested to them certain laws and political mores. This same social state has, in addition, given birth to a multitude of sentiments and opinions among them that were unknown in the old world aristocratic societies of Europe. It destroyed or modified relations that formerly existed, and established new ones. The aspect of civil society has met with change no less than the visage of the political world.[29]

In Tocqueville's vision, democracy as social state comprehends both state and civil society. Indeed, attentive and penetrating theorists of the American regime must undoubtedly heed both of these components of American democracy, paying particular attention to the wellsprings of healthful republican behavior in both spheres. As we will see, these concerns are central to James as well as Tocqueville.

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For Tocqueville, the maintenance of our democratic republic depends upon "mores" which govern civil society.[30] As he elaborates, these are what "one could call habits of the heart . . . [ranging from] the different notions that men possess, to the various opinions that are current in their midst, and to the sum of ideas of which the habits of the mind are formed."[31] Critically, Tocqueville also tells us that it is women who make these mores. "Therefore, all that influences the condition of women, their habits, and their opinions has great political interest in my eyes."[32] Even the education of girls has political import to Tocqueville. In contrast to European girls, Tocqueville is struck by the freedom that young American girls enjoy: "nowhere is the girl more promptly or more completely left to herself."[33] While European girls are protected from social vices, American girls are informed of them and taught to temper their own passions lest they become vulnerable to vices. In this way, American girls build confidence in their own ability to protect themselves morally and to perpetuate the mores essential to future generations. For the young American woman, "the vices and perils that society presents are not slow to be revealed to her; she sees them clearly, judges them without illusion, and faces them without fear; for she is full of confidence in her strength, and her confidence seems to be shared by all those who surround her."[34] The American girl is self-governing.

The confidence of the American girl allows her to choose a husband and enter into marriage without illusion. In so doing, she loses the freedom that she enjoyed as a girl, but Tocqueville assures his readers that, though "the role has changed, the habits differ, the spirit is the same."[35] The combination of freedom and submission that characterizes the American woman contributes to democratic progress. Tocqueville concludes his treatment of the American woman with a bold claim about her political importance: "if one asked me to what do I think one must principally attribute the singular prosperity and growing force of this people, I would answer that it is to the superiority of its women."[36]

AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION

In his reflections about the famous "habits of the heart" and the role of women, Tocqueville concerns himself with the political significance of the private sphere. Yet, his ideas, especially regarding American women, are somewhat abstract and general, as befitting a philosophical text. Fortunately, as claimed earlier, literature such as James' "Pandora," can correct these limitations to American political thought by creating specific (female) characters to be analyzed and evaluated alongside great philosophic ideas and

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principles. Like Tocqueville, Henry James is concerned with the private sphere and with the women who govern it. But unlike Tocqueville, who must speak of American women generally, James articulates his thoughts by situating unique characters in particular circumstances. In this respect, James' "Pandora" complements and gives fuller expression to the conventional texts of American political theory. Furthermore, we can add to James' situating of characters (and themes) in "Pandora" by scrutinizing the context in which he wrote the short story and created his memorable characters.

Marian "Clover" Hooper Adams was born on September 13, 1843, to Ellen Sturgis Hooper and to Robert William Hooper. She was the couple's third and unexpected child. Marian's mother considered the child lucky—like a four-leaf clover. The nickname that Ellen Hooper gave her daughter lasted beyond her own death. Sadly, Ellen Hooper died when Clover was just a small child. Clover grew up with the wealth and privilege that had been accrued by her family for generations. In addition to financial resources, Clover inherited great intellectual gifts. Ellen Sturgis Hooper and her sister, Carrie Sturgis Tappan, moved in the circles of such Transcendentalist luminaries as Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Clover was fortunate to be able to attend the Agassiz School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The school was run by Elizabeth Cary Agassiz, the second wife of Louis Agassiz, Harvard professor of zoology and geology and later the first president of Radcliffe College. As a young woman, Clover assisted in the American Civil War effort and made a Grand Tour of Europe. By marrying Henry Adams (a famous intellectual and descendant of two American presidents) in June 1872, she wed into a family that was nearly synonymous with the American republic. As newlyweds, Clover and Henry Adams were at the very heart of the Boston scene. They supported Charles Sumner's radical Reconstructionist program and worked with Charles Eliot on the great reform of Harvard. Yet, they were somewhat dissatisfied in Boston and left their native city for a more politically engaged life in Washington, D.C. émigrés from Boston like James, the Adamses, unlike James, moved deeper into the heart of the American political scene rather than farther away from it.

That said, Clover and Henry Adams maintained an intellectual distance from politics, from which they could critique American democracy, even as they hosted the day's political and cultural leaders in their home just across from the White House. Hard at work on *The History of the United States During the Jefferson and Madison Administrations*, Henry Adams found diversion by publishing two anonymous novels that satirized both domestic and public life. The emerging art of photography also gave Clover a medium to share her perspective. In the last years of her life, Clover trained her objective but compassionate gaze on both domestic and public figures. In addition

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to Clover's photographs, her weekly letters to her father provide her unique view of Washington society. They are chatty, full of personal details, and capital gossip, but they also contain astute political observations. Writing at the end of 1881, Clover instructed her father to "Save this . . . . My facts are facts too, which all the correspondents' are not."[37]

Tragically, the strain of distance from Boston and the sudden death of her father led Clover Adams, after a brief struggle against depression, to suicide in 1885. Henry found her lifeless body. Perhaps moved by his unbearable grief or his concern for their privacy, Henry burned his wife's letters the night of her death. *The Education of Henry Adams*, which is often described as an autobiography, makes no explicit mention of Clover. Henry Adams profound grief following her death led him to remain silent about her. Furthermore, he does not say anything regarding the years they were married. The only account of Clover's life that Henry offered the world was a statue that he commissioned from Augustus Saint-Gaudens. It is a shrouded, androgynous figure seated—resting?—against a granite block. Despite the public's impulse to know the meaning of this enigmatic statue, Henry Adams understood that it should only raise questions about our mortality, not provide answers. And, so, Clover Adams' life was quickly veiled in mystery.

In her recent biography of Clover, Natalie Dykstra regrets that when Clover "was remembered at all, it was most often as the wife of a famous man or as a suicide."[38] Yet, Henry James knew and admired Clover long before he met Henry Adams. Even after her death James remembered her as a vivacious individual. Indeed, one might say that he knew Henry Adams as the husband of an uncommon woman. Upon hearing the news of Clover's death, James offered his condolences to Henry Adams:

> Is it any consolation to remember her as she was? That bright intrepid spirit, that keen fine intellect, that lofty scorn of all that was mean, that social charm which made your house such a one as Washington never knew before, and made hundreds of people love her as much as they admired her? No, that makes it all so much harder to bear.[39]

James' short story, "Pandora," captures Clover as the celebrated Washington hostess in his fictional character of Mrs. Bonnycastle, and James' realistic literary style helps to vividly portray his version of Clover and honor her despite her husband's silence following her death. In contrast to many twentieth-century novelists, James did not consider fiction a license for prurient or conspiratorial speculation. In his 1884 essay, "The Art of Fiction," James refuted the supposition that fiction is "only a 'make believe.'"[40] James insisted, "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt

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to represent life."[41] In order to dispel the notion that fiction is "make believe" James compared the novelist to a historian:

> The only effectual way to lay it to rest is to emphasize the analogy to which I have just alluded—to insist on the fact that as the picture is reality, so the novel is history. That is the only general description (which does it justice) that we may give of the novel. . ..The subject matter of fiction is stored up likewise in documents and records, and if it will not give itself away, as they say in California, it must speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian.[42]

The novelist, like the historian, is "occupied in looking for truth."[43] Written a year before Clover's death, Henry James' "Pandora," contributes to the "history of those who would otherwise have no history."[44] It offers us a portrait of Clover Adams, as seen in Mrs. Bonnycastle, and an uncommon landscape of America and its underlying philosophical beliefs.

THE PARADOX OF LIBERALISM

In the preface to *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*, Lionel Trilling noted,

> The paradox is that liberalism is concerned with the emotions above all else, as proof of which the word happiness stands at the very center of its thought, but in its effort to establish the emotions, or certain among them, in some sort of freedom, liberalism somehow tends to deny them in their full possibility.[45]

Trilling explains that liberalism denies particular emotions their full possibility by seeking to temper emotions. While liberalism allows for the expression of emotions, not only does it concern itself with a relatively narrow range of emotions but is also neutral or agnostic about which emotions matter for preserving democracy. It is reason that ensures that individuals and societies are self-governing, not emotion. Indeed, we see the paradox that Trilling notes at the very start of the *Federalist Papers*. While acknowledging the inevitability of passionate self-interest, Hamilton hopes that the reason of his readers will prevail over these sentiments: "Happy will it be if our choice should be directed by a judicious estimate of our true interests, uninfluenced by considerations foreign to the public good."[46] Happiness, according to Hamilton, is associated with reflection and judiciousness. The happy choice is made by an individual who has a tranquil, serious state of mind, marked by balance or equilibrium. Strong passions are threats to happiness. Political life is dominated by "Ambition, avarice, personal animosity, party opposition, and many other motives not more laudable."[47] As Hamilton's first *Federalist*

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essay comes to a close we are assured that the Constitution provides "the safest course for your liberty, your dignity, and your happiness."[48] Happiness—defined by tranquility and equilibrium—is a consequence of the American Constitution's capacity to temper "malignant passions" and to protect citizens from their potentially harmful effects.

The Constitution does this by channeling and tempering ambition, avarice, and personal animosity. "So far as liberalism is active and positive, so far that is, as it moves toward organization, it tends to select the emotions and qualities that are most susceptible of organization."[49] It reduces human intellect to calculation, which satisfies ambition or interest, and renders human beings predictable and manageable. "And in the very interest of affirming its confidence in the power of the mind, it inclines to constrict and make mechanical its conception of the nature of the mind."[50] In *Federalist 9*, Hamilton argues that the capacity of the new Constitution to provide for happiness of the people is due to the great improvement to "the science of politics." Hamilton goes on to describe the basis of this rational, emotions-channeling system. "The *regular* distribution of power into *distinct* departments; the introduction of legislative *balances and checks*. . .are wholly new discoveries, or have made their principle progress towards the perfection in modern times."[51] But, the powers given to each branch of government to thwart the overreach of the others—popularly known as "checks and balances"—are not enough to preserve a republican form of government. The "personal motives" of office holders had to be deployed to ensure the rule of the people. As Madison inimitably puts it in *Federalist 51*, "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition."[52] The interest of the man, must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place.[53] The political world, to use Tocqueville's term for the public sphere, concerns itself with the "malignant passions." The Constitutional design constricts these passions, and channels them through the machinery of government, thereby rendering their influence mechanical (and beneficial). In this way American constitutional politics, seems to fit Henry Adams' description: "Politics, as a practice, whatever, its professions, had always been the systematic organization of hatreds."[54]

However, the perpetuation of the institutions responsible for this organization of passion requires a cultivation of salutary emotions in addition to moderating the malignant ones. In "Pandora," James appreciates Clover's love of American democracy and gives this attribute to his character based on Clover, Mrs. Bonnycastle. Again, by inviting us to consider situated (including female) characters and an expanded understanding of their political and emotional roles, fiction helps us transcend or at least ground the political theory of the American founding, which has the tendency toward abstraction or conceiving individuals outside of a particular political and historical context. For example, the Declaration of Independence explains political life

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by situating human beings outside of political society. It goes on to articulate how governments are made, for what purposes they are formed, and under which circumstances they may be dissolved. The Declaration establishes first principles by which subsequent political decisions will be made and judged. The view of human beings in the Declaration is radically autonomous. They are genderless and ageless.

Linda Kerber has observed that eighteenth-century Americans were drawn to the political theory of the British Radical Whigs. They were "largely concerned with specific issues of opposition to crown policy; it rarely needed a prosocial family to make its argument."[55] One of the consequences of the influence of the Radical Whigs "was that American political theory was rooted in assumptions that never gave explicit attention to basic questions about women."[56] The genderless society of the Founding, was a society governed by men. The perspectives were male and the interests were determined by men. As a consequence, the depiction of women was based on male perceptions of women. Women were dependent on being remembered, often in abstract and general terms, by the men who held political power. Yet, as Abigail Adams anticipated when she implored her husband to "remember the ladies"[57] on the eve of the American Revolution, women would play an important, distinctive role in maintaining the republic.

THE LADY OF INFINITE MIRTH

While Pandora Day is charming and would be of interest to those who are familiar with Tocqueville's American girl, it is Mrs. Bonnycastle's character, and more particularly Clover Adams, that James considers emblematic of America. As noted, he described Clover Adams as the "incarnation of my native land." James attributes three important traits to Mrs. Bonnycastle, which also apply to Clover Adams. He describes Mrs. Bonnycastle as "the lady of infinite mirth,"[58] who practices "an active patriotism,"[59] and who is a discriminating hostess.[60] By systematically analyzing James' account of Mrs. Bonnycastle and then returning to Clover's own letters, we obtain a deeper understanding of the American woman and, consequently, American democracy.

Before Count Vogelstein even arrives in America, he has presumptions about the manners and the mores of the American people, and his preconceptions are quickly confirmed. In America, he expected to find "a society abounding in comic aspects."[61] Vogelstein "was a highly upright young man, whose only fault was that his sense of comedy, or of the humour of things, had never been specifically disengaged from his several other senses."[62] Count Vogelstein recognized this shortcoming and sought to correct it. Observing

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Pandora's brother in the smoking room of the boat, Vogelstein was impressed by Pandora's brother's ability to make others laugh. "Vogelstein, well as he knew English, could rarely catch the joke; but he could see at least that these must be choice specimens of that American humour admired and practiced by a whole continent."[63] The nation and its people, Vogelstein observed, have a unique capacity for amusement. Mrs. Bonnycastle exemplified this capacity. She "had a fund of good humour, which. . .was apt to come uppermost with the April blossoms."[64] It was for the sake of their own amusement and not an adherence to social custom that Mr. and Mrs. Bonnycastle invited people into their home. "When as the warm weather approached they opened both the wings of their house-door, it was because they thought it would entertain them and not because they were conscious of a pressure"[65] Indeed, it seemed to Vogelstein that everything was something "for her [Mrs. Bonnycastle] to laugh at."[66] To Vogelstein, it seemed that Mrs. Bonnycastle was "the lady of infinite mirth."[67]

Clover Adams shared her fictional counterpart's capacity for mirth, as is revealed in weekly letters to her father. She seemed to easily find amusement in the circumstances and the people around her. Clover's sense of humor had an irreverent streak that punctured pretenses. Clover asked her father to "think of us tomorrow at the christening of a brat whose mama rejoices in the pen-name of 'Bessie Beech.'"[68] Clover went on to explain to her father that she would have declined the invitation to the baptism, but she had been rude at "Bessie Beech's" last party. "If I had not disgraced myself by convulsive laughter at her literary party I would not go this time."[69] Clover did not recount the circumstances that led to the convulsive laughter, but she acknowledged that it was inappropriate for a literary party, presumably where one is expected to assume the posture of intellectual seriousness. Although Clover seemed ready to atone for the social sin she committed at the literary party, the tone of the letter is light hearted. She conveyed her amusement with her own social gaffe and, therefore, her disregard for the intellectual pretenses that were expected from the well-educated wife of a man of letters. Clover made fun of the snobbery she encountered—snobbery that has traditionally been attributed to her and both Henry Adams and Henry James.[70]

In fact, Henry James shared his fictional characters' fascination with the young women of America. Writing to a friend abroad, James reported that what he "liked best in Washington society were certain girls." They were "very charming with a *dèsinvolture* rather rare *chez nous*."[71] They had an air of confidence that Tocqueville had also found unique to American women. Among the young women that James would likely have met in Clover's drawing room was Emily Beale—or "the fair Emily" as Clover sometimes called her—the daughter of General Edward Fitzgerald Beale a Washington neighbor of the Adamses. Emily had a nonchalance, even glibness, which

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James admired. Clover included a funny anecdote regarding "the fair Emily" in a letter to her father in January 1881 (a year before James' visit to Washington):

> Here is Emily Beale's last. She tells me that a few weeks ago she came back from Philadelphia under ex-secretary Robeson's care. . . . She says that Allison [U.S. Senator from Iowa] sat with them in the car. Speaking of the lost chance of the New Jersey senatorship, Robeson said: "Miss Emily, I want a permanent place. Don't you know of one for me?" and Miss Beale says without forethought or afterthought she answered: "Why, you know the penitentiary has been yawning for you for years." Robeson said never a word, but she said, "Allison gave me the most vulgar wink I ever received from a Western senator."[72]

Emily is an example of the American girl's social agility and assertiveness described by Tocqueville. As he put it, "I was often surprised and almost frightened on seeing the singular dexterity and happy audacity with which these girls of America knew how to conduct their thoughts and words amid the pitfalls of playful conversation."[73] Indeed, the reader of Clover's letters can almost hear Clover trying to catch her breath through her laughter as she concluded in a note to her father, "For goodness sake don't tell Ellen Gurney this; she will blush for our surroundings."[74] Clover recognized and delighted in the "comic aspects" of society—especially when a confident young woman punctured polite pretenses.

It seemed to Vogelstein that Mrs. Bonnycastle, much like Clover in real life, saw everything in terms of her own amusement and that it was all "but for her to laugh at." However, we should not infer that everything was a joke to either Mrs. Bonnycastle or Clover. As Emily Beale's example shows, her "happy audacity" leavens a sharp rebuke about political corruption. Indeed, through this and other passages in "Pandora," James reveals an additional, singularly important trait of American women: their moral seriousness. James associates Mrs. Bonnycastle's moral seriousness with her "active patriotism" and her discrimination as a hostess. In discussing these characteristics, James demonstrates the wide range of emotion necessary for citizens of a republic and offers an example of an American woman upholding the principles of the American republic in a particular context.

"ACTIVE PATRIOTISM" AND MORAL SERIOUSNESS

At a number of junctures, James offers evidence of Mrs. Bonnycastle's moral seriousness in "Pandora." To begin with, he attributes to Mrs. Bonnycastle what he calls an "active patriotism."[75] As discussed, Trilling has noted that

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liberalism is concerned with emotions, but within a relatively narrow range. Indeed, students of the Founding are familiar with the "malignant passions" that threaten the Constitutional order. However, the American Constitutional order also depends on a love of American democracy, not just American identity. During the Gilded Age, when wealth and technology made travel easier and more common, this patriotism is first of all characterized by James as a preference for America over Europe—a preference that must have seemed very curious to one of American's "denationalised [*sic*] children."[76] James describes the Bonnycastles' patriotism at length:

> The couple had taken upon themselves the responsibilities of an active patriotism; they thought it right to live in America, differing therein from many of their acquaintances who only, with some grimness, thought it inevitable. They had that burdensome heritage of foreign reminiscence with which so many Americans were saddled; but they carried it more easily than most of their country people, and one knew they had lived in Europe only by their present exultation, never in the least by their regrets. Their regrets, that is, were only that they had lived there, as Mrs. Bonnycastle once told the wife of a foreign minister.[77]

Although James does not tell us more about the Bonnycastles' time in Europe, which fueled their patriotism, Clover's letters to her father from Europe survive and we are able to get a sense that a love of democracy informed her love of country. Clover and Henry Adams had spent a year abroad following their marriage in 1872. They also lived in Europe in 1879 so that Henry could do archival research for his *History of the United States during the Jefferson and Madison Administrations.* During their travels, they were witness to the decay of aristocracy, and their "active [American] patriotism" was marked, not only by the love of one's own, but also by a democratic sentiment that scoffs at hierarchical pretensions. As a new bride, Clover reported to her father that she and her husband Henry offered one of their English friends some advice on his inheritance:

> We advise him to invest in something in America or out of England, so that when the social fabric, which is even now wabbling, crashes over he may have something to eat. . . . England is charming for a few families but hopeless for most. . . . Thank the Lord that the American eagle flaps and screams over us.[78]

Despite her observations about the rending social fabric, Clover appreciated her time in England and the English people's willingness to indulge her democratic spirit:

> I like the people and they stand American "sass" very good-humouredly. There was a question of precedence at our dinner Friday as to which ought to take me

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> in, so I told them they might fight it out among themselves, that their "effete monarchical customs were a matter of no concern to me!"—and they enjoy such chaff.[79]

Clover also noted the superiority of America not only in meeting the material needs of the American people, but also in meeting their moral needs:

> The more we travel, the more profoundly impressed we are with the surpassing-solid comfort of the average American household and its freedom from sham. They beat us on churches and pictures in the Old World, but in food, clothing, furniture, manners, and morals, it seems to us that we have the "inside track."[80]

Clover's patriotism also remained active once she returned home. In a letter to her father in January 1882, Clover recounted "a feast at Mrs. Bancroft's," the wife of historian George Bancroft. This dinner took place during the month that James spent in Washington and, although Clover did not mention James' presence at the gathering, it seems likely that Clover would have told him the story viva voce. Among the dinner guests was Edward Augustus Freeman, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford and author of the fifteen volume *History of the Norman Conquest*.[81] Clover's patriotism was initially inspired by Freeman's unfavorable comparison of Niagara Falls to the "Falls of Slap Dash—or some such name"[82] and could not be contained when the historian implied his superior civility to Americans. Clover continued her story:

> The canvasbacks entered. *Three* of them—fresh and fair, done to a turn; and weltering in their gore. Says Mrs. Bancroft, with a growing hauteur of manner as of a turning worm, "Do you appreciate our canvasbacks, Mr. Freeman?" "I cannot eat raw meat," he said angrily, while a convulsive shudder shook his frame. Then the *picador*, which is latent in me when nature is outraged, rose in me, and I said to him, all unconscious of his theories and the scheme of all his writing, "I wonder that you do not like rare meat. Your *ancestors*, the Picts and Scots, ate their meat raw, and tore it with their fingers." At which he roared out, "O-o-o-o! Whur did yer git that?" Unheeding, careless of consequences, I said, "Well, your Anglo-Saxon ancestors, if you prefer."[83]

This anecdote may seem like nothing more than the account of a famed Gilded Age hostess. However, it also reveals the character of Clover Adams' patriotism. It is not merely a reflexive love of her own country, but is marked by a democratic spirit that disdains aristocratic pretensions. For Clover's

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"sass" is deployed to not only defend her country, but also puncture the more civilized pretensions of Europeans.

HER HOUSE LEFT OUT MORE PEOPLE THAN IT TOOK IN

After conveying her good humor and patriotism, the third detail about Mrs. Bonnycastle that James gives his readers is that she is a "discriminating hostess," welcoming only guests she thought to be of substance, rather than inviting whoever happened to be fashionable at the moment. James describes the fictional Bonnycastle house at 1607 H Street:

> If [Mrs. Bonnycastle's] house wasn't the pleasantest there it was at least difficult to say which was pleasanter; and the complaint sometimes made of it that it was too limited, that it left out, on the whole, more people than it took in.[84]

This is the detail that commentators most often appropriate from "Pandora" to illustrate the Adamses' life of Gilded Age privilege. Indeed, this account does lend itself well to their idiosyncratic personalities and pedigree as Boston Brahmins. But James also tells his readers who Mrs. Bonnycastle left out of her drawing room and dining hall: "representatives of the people."[85] Keeping in mind specifically *who* is left out of the Bonnycastle home (and why) offers us further insight into Clover's character and its contributions to our understanding of the nature of American democracy.

After Vogelstein is befriended by Mrs. Bonnycastle, he considers the circumstances of one of Mrs. Bonnycastle's springtime gatherings. "The legislative session was over, but that made little difference in the aspect of Mrs. Bonnycastle's rooms, which even at the height of the congressional season could scarce be said to overflow with the representatives of the people."[86] James goes on to indicate the dubious character of the few legislators who *were* admitted to Mrs. Bonnycastle's home:

> They were garnished with an occasional Senator, whose movements and utterances often appeared to be regarded with a mixture of alarm and indulgence, as if they would be disappointing if they were weren't rather odd and yet might be dangerous if not carefully watched.[87]

The nineteenth century's transformation of the early American republic to a large-scale democracy, which also drew the attention of Tocqueville, fostered a certain kind of populist politician of which, people like the Adamses were wary. Henry James' account of Clover's fictional counterparts suggests that

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Clover and her husband shared those suspicions. The principles on which Mrs. Bonnycastle excluded people from her drawing room were opaque to Vogelstein, the young aristocratic diplomat. "American promiscuity, goodness knew, had been strange to him, but it was nothing to the queerness of American criticism."[88] This detail does not merely illustrate the Adamses' "special brand of snobbery," as Henry Adams' biographer has described their apparent aloofness,[89] it also points to a thread of republican virtue running through Clover's love of American democracy.

Although the European aristocrat may not appreciate America's transformation from a republic to a large, modern democracy, the Adamses were keen observers of this transformation. On the eve of independence, Henry Adams' great grandfather, John Adams, argued that a republic would most likely foster the virtues becoming of a self-governing people. "But a Republic . . . will produce Strength, Hardiness Activity, Courage, Fortitude and Enterprise; the manly noble and Sublime Qualities in human Nature in Abundance."[90]

Such virtues, of course, could be undone by parties and self-serving officials. From the very beginning of the American republic factions began to form and self-interest, not virtue, began to govern. Factions were eventually tamed into organized political parties during the first half of the nineteenth century. While political parties fostered the expansion of political participation and democracy, they also encouraged political corruption and Adams' "systematic organization of hatreds." For generations, the Adams family had watched the transformation take place and lamented the decline of the republic that John Adams had helped to found. Henry Adams' grandfather and father, John Quincy Adams and Charles Francis Adams, both fell to party intrigue.

As a young, newly married, Harvard professor of medieval history and editor of the *North American Review,* Henry Adams was active in a faction of the Republican party, the Liberal Republicans. It is easy to imagine that Clover would have been as attentive to the political debates in Boston as she would later be in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, we do not have a record of her observations from the early years of the Adamses' marriage in Boston. Clover would have been living nearby to her father and would not have reason to write letters filled with astute political observations to him as she would later do in Washington. From Henry Adams' perspective, the incompetence and the corruption rampant in government could be attributed to the breakdown of the Constitution.

> In Grant's administration the spoils system had finally captured all branches of government and had thus broken down the system of checks and balances inherent in the Constitution. The party leaders in caucus now constituted

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> an invisible and rival government which controlled all branches of regular government.[91]

Civil service reform was a central tenet of the Liberal Republicans' agenda. Carl Schurz, German-born Senator and long-time friend of the Adamses, explained the Liberal Republicans' position on civil service reform: "as the functions of government grow in extent, importance and complexity, the necessity grows of their being administered not only with honesty, but also with trained ability and knowledge."[92] In addition to this position, Liberal Republicans "favored laissez-faire social policies, leniency toward the white South, free trade (or at least a lower tariff), [and] hard money."[93] The party machine had prevented the most virtuous men from seeking and obtaining office because successful candidates in the political machines required the very attributes, "Servility and Flattery," that John Adams found so degrading to the free citizens of a republic.[94]

As the Centennial year and presidential election approached, reformers imagined that it might be possible to advance Henry's father, Charles Francis Adams, for the presidency:

> The elder Adams [Charles Francis Adams], who had already seen so many political bubbles burst, showed no enthusiasm for the project. Like his forebears he would accept public office, but he would not seek it. Even his strongest supporters could not argue that he would be a truly popular candidate.[95]

And, so, the scheme to advance Charles Francis Adams for the presidency in 1876 was abandoned. Henry Adams was relieved. "As he told Schurz, 'I am not sorry for it. I do not like *coups de main*. I have no taste for political or any other kind of betting, and for us to attempt forcing ourselves on a party convention, necessarily entails jockeying of somebody.'"[96] Other overtures were made by the Liberal Republicans, including one to Senator James G. Blaine. Adams believed that Blaine had misled the reformers by "pretending interest in civil service and revenue reform" and Adams considered him dishonorable.[97] Blaine had also been implicated in political scandal, from which he managed to masterfully extricate himself during a speech in Congress. Observing Blaine's rhetorical contortions, Henry Adams commented that Blaine could "squeal louder than all of the other pigs."[98] Rutherford B. Hayes was eventually elected president and Henry and Clover decided a change was necessary. Frustrated by the academy and by his failed efforts to reform political parties, Henry Adams gave up his position at Harvard in order to write *The History of the United States During the Jefferson and Madison Administrations*.

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The Adamses also gave up Boston for Washington, but they did not give up their contempt for Senator Blaine. After a short period in Washington and then a year in Europe, the Adamses returned to Washington in the fall of 1880. James A. Garfield had just been elected president; yet, the Republican Party remained divided by two factions, the Stalwarts and the Half-Breeds. The Stalwarts were fiercely protective of the spoils system—none more so than Roscoe Conkling, the senior Senator from New York. In exchange for his loyalty Grant had given Conkling control of the New York Custom House, which collected seventy percent of the country's customs. The men who Conkling appointed were expected to make generous contributions to the Republican party in exchange for their lucrative jobs. In this way, Conkling had garnered great political power.[99] At the 1880 Republican Convention, Conkling supported Grant for another term in the presidency. The Half-Breeds, on the other hand, were inclined to reform, but they did not have a clear leader when they went to the Republican convention in June of that year. John Sherman and James G. Blaine had presidential ambitions but stepped aside when it became clear that support for Garfield was spontaneously building. Garfield went on to secure the nomination and to beat Winfield Scott Hancock for office.

As the Adamses settled into 1607 H Street in the fall of 1880, the political talk was of Garfield's cabinet appointments. Garfield felt some obligation to include Stalwarts in his cabinet and the Adamses were interested to see the degree to which Garfield would resist party pressure, with Clover noting, "No one seems to put much faith in the future strength of Garfield's spine; he is thought to be too much inclined to conciliate."[100] Of course, the Adamses had contempt for Conkling, whom Clover referred to as "asinine and offensive."[101] Still, they continued to nurse their hostility toward Blaine, and condemned Garfield's choice of Blaine for Secretary of State. Clover wrote to her father,

> It is a strong measure to make Blaine Secretary of State, with his stained record. No one doubts his ability and that Mrs. Blaine is well suited to the place, but it's a gross insult to the moral sense of the community. . . . Blaine represents the corruption element as thoroughly as any man can.[102]

Clover recognized that Blaine's appointment as Secretary of State would lead to some social discomfort, as the Adamses and the Blaines certainly had many mutual friends and acquaintances.

> For us it will be most awkward; never having called on them before, it will simply be impossible to make up to them now, and as we are on terms of great

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> intimacy with several of the head officials in the State Department the position is not easy.[103]

Still the Adamses would not compromise their republican principles and overlook Blaine's corruption. Henry had been afforded the use of a desk at the State Department in order to conduct his research, but intended to forfeit it when Blaine took office. As Clover relates, "Henry will hurry up his work there so as to finish by March 4th [Inauguration Day], not wishing to be a protégé of a man he does not recognize socially."[104] True to the Liberal Republican faction, Clover believed that the spoils system had captured (and compromised) all branches of government. She condemned the legislators for their lack of public virtue, proclaiming that "no Republican of sufficient independence and pluck having come to light to inform his brother Senators that the country sends them here to perform public service and not to wrangle and haggle over petty patronage."[105] Lacking "independence and pluck" the representatives of the people were simply not interesting or amusing to Clover, and they were thus excluded from her salon on this principle. What Samuels referred to as the Adamses' "special brand of snobbery" "that left out, on the whole, more people than it took in" was actually an adherence to public virtue, which whole generations of Adamses had relied upon to sustain the republic.

CONCLUSION

James' thinly veiled portrayal of Clover Adams in "Pandora" illuminates the meaning of his description of her as "the incarnation of my native land," sheds light on her irrepressible character, and provides a fresh perspective on James' understanding of America. James' fictional rendering of Clover as the character of Mrs. Bonnycastle brings into focus a woman who had great capacity for amusement as well as nimble social criticism, a love of American democracy, and uncompromising republican virtue. The traits are also those of the country that Clover loved, but are not easily captured in the abstractions of American political theory. America, from this perspective of James' vivid and political characters, is far from "vulgar, dreary, and impossible to live with."[106]

Stated differently, reading "Pandora" with special attention to Mrs. Bonnycastle leaves us with an alternative to the common impression of James' view of America. The story also contributes to our understanding of American democracy by revealing the manners or mores of the people, the full range of emotions of American citizens, and, finally, by suggesting how particular individuals honor the fundamental principles of American democracy in a

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particular political and historical context. It also allows us to consider the oft overlooked female perspective on American democracy and the contributions of women to our narrative of (healthful) civic life. As a novelist who is "occupied in looking for the truth," James gives us a portrait of Clover and a fuller understanding of American democracy than is gained by studying the workings of government alone.

NOTES

1. Marian Hooper Adams, *The Letters of Mrs. Henry Adams* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 385.
2. Ibid.
3. Henry James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, eds. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 56.
4. James, *Notebooks*, 56.
5. John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister, "Literature, Philosophy, and Political Theory," in *Literature and the Political Imagination*, eds. John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister (London: Routledge, 1996), 12.
6. Horton and Baumeister, "Literature," 12–13.
7. Ibid., 13.
8. Henry James, "Pandora," in *Daisy Miller and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 86. "Pandora" is in the public domain and falls under fair use. All citations refer to this edition.
9. James, "Pandora," 87.
10. Ibid., 86.
11. Ibid., 88.
12. Ibid., 92.
13. Ibid., 94–95.
14. Ibid., 95.
15. Ibid.
16. Although James tells us that the second chapter of his short story takes place in April, he does not indicate the year. However, James does tell his readers that Count Vogelstein and Pandora Day cross the Atlantic in the fall. He later tells his readers "Count Otto had the advantage, during the first eighteen months of his stay, of seeing an electoral campaign, a presidential inauguration and a distribution of spoils." James, "Pandora," 115. Given that James himself had visited Washington in January of 1882, we might infer that James refers to the election, inauguration, and distribution of spoils of James A. Garfield. Henry James does not, however, mention the assassination of Garfield and the politics that surround the new Arthur administration, developments that the Adamses would have followed during James' stay in Washington.
17. James, "Pandora," 112.
18. Ibid.

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19. Ibid., 121.
20. Ibid., 122.
21. Ibid., 128.
22. Ibid., 129.
23. Ibid., 131.
24. Ibid., 147.
25. Publius, *The Federalist*, eds. George W. Carey and James McClellan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 1.
26. Ibid.
27. Leo Strauss, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, ed. Hilail Gildin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 32.
28. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.
29. Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 399.
30. Ibid., 274.
31. Ibid., 275.
32. Ibid., 563.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 567.
36. Ibid., 576.
37. M. Adams, *Letters*, 301.
38. Natalie Dykstra, *Clover Adams: A Gilded and Heartbreaking Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), xvi.
39. Patricia O'Toole, *The Five of Hearts: An Intimate Portrait of Henry Adams & His Friends* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 160.
40. Henry James, "Art of Fiction," in *The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel*, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert, Hart-Davis, 1957), 25.
41. James, "Art of Fiction."
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 26.
44. Eugenia Kaledin, *The Education of Mrs. Henry Adams* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), xi.
45. Lionel Trilling, *The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent*, ed. Leon Wieselter (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2000), 546.
46. Publius, *Federalist*, 1.
47. Ibid., 2.
48. Ibid., 3.
49. Trilling, *Moral Obligation*, 546.
50. Ibid., 547.
51. Ibid., 38.
52. Ibid., 270.
53. Ibid., 268–269.
54. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), 7.

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55. Linda Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 52–53.

56. Kerber, *History of Women*, 53.

57. Abigail Adams, "Letter to John Adams," March 31, 1776 (https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760331aa).

58. James, "Pandora," 141.

59. Ibid., 114.

60. Ibid., 112.

61. Ibid., 86.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., 99.

64. Ibid., 114.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., 142.

67. Ibid., 141.

68. M. Adams, *Letters*, 239.

69. Ibid.

70. In his biography of Henry Adams, Ernest Samuels shrugged at "Pandora." Here and later in this chapter, I offer a different impression of Clover than Samuels. Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams: The Middle Years* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 168.

71. James, "Art of Fiction," 31.

72. M. Adams, *Letters*, 253.

73. Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 564.

74. Ellen Gurney was Clover's sister. She married Harvard professor Ephraim Whitman Gurney. Both husband and wife were devoted to women's education at Harvard.

75. James, "Pandora," 114.

76. M. Adams, *Letters*, 385.

77. James, "Pandora," 114.

78. M. Adams, *Letters*, 127.

79. Ibid.

80. M. Adams, *Letters*, 197.

81. Freeman argued for the "permanence of Anglo-Saxon elements in spite of the Conquest, and their continued importance as the basis of constitutional development." Henry had reviewed "very sharply" two of Freeman's books while at the *North American Review*. M. Adams, *Letters*, 331.

82. Ibid.

83. Canvasbacks are a type of duck, which are common in the mid-Atlantic. In the nineteenth century, they were a good source of food in winter months due to their quality.

84. James, "Pandora," 112.

85. Ibid., 115.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

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88. Ibid.

89. Samuels, *The Middle Years*, 168.

90. John Adams, "Letter to Mercy Otis Warren," January 8, 1776 (https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-03-02-0202).

91. Ernest Samuels, *The Young Henry Adams* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1948), 279.

92. Daniel DiSalvo, *Engines of Change: Party Factions in American Politics, 1868–2010* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 34.

93. DiSalvo, *Engines of Change*, 35.

94. Adams, "Letter to Mercy Otis Warren."

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97. Neil Rolde, *Continental Liar from the State of Maine: James G. Blaine* (Gardiner: Tilbry House Publishers, 2006), 186.

98. Samuels, *The Middle Years*, 90.

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Chapter 10

Jumping at Our Reflection

American Dystopia and Reaction in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"

Abram Trosky

Since its publication in 1948, Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery" has shocked generations of readers with its pithy portrayal of the easy coexistence of folksiness and barbarism in an otherwise recognizable small-town America.[1] This collision of Orwell and Rockwell in the pages of *The New Yorker* magazine was met with disgust, even outrage, generating "the most mail the magazine had ever received in response to a work of fiction."[2] Even Jackson's mother disapproved, writing, "it does seem, dear, that this gloomy kind of story is what all you young people think about these days. Why don't you write something to cheer people up?"[3] Hundreds cancelled their *New Yorker* subscription; several others assumed it was non-fiction; still more simply wanted to know, like many contemporary readers of "The Lottery," what does it *mean*?

The "gloomy" story was inspired by Jackson's outsider view of her adoptive home town of North Bennington, Vermont, which she later fictionalized in *Life Among the Savages*.[4] "The Lottery" draws the reader into a familiar town gathering for the titular rite. Excited children play and pile rocks; villagers gossip and make small talk, "speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes."[5] The town's coal man, Summers, and its postman, Graves, preside over the annual ceremony, the centerpiece of which involves a black wooden box that houses paper lots, one for each household. When the town is gathered together in the square, the designated head of each household draws in alphabetical order, with one Bill Hutchinson drawing the lone paper with a distinguishing coal mark. The reader first gets the sense that Hutchinson's family "winning" the Lottery is inauspicious when his wife, Tessie, a late arrival to this year's proceedings, protests vehemently (if belatedly).

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In desperation, she claims her husband was rushed, then suggests that their married adult daughter and/or Bill's sister be included in the next round of family drawing, presumably to reduce the chances that either Tessie or her three younger children will be selected. All of these objections are to no avail: following the "head of household" drawing, each Hutchinson family member now draws to select a "winner" within the family. This time, it is Mrs. Hutchinson whose paper bears the black spot. The crowd, so genial moments earlier, ominously encircles her, stones in hand, "and then" Jackson tells us, "they were upon her."[6]

That chilling line, that searing image, are emblematic of "The Lottery's" staying power despite, or because of its polarizing effect on readers. In spite of the initial furor, the story has been embraced, adapted for stage, screen, and television several times, as well as, however improbably, opera and ballet. Widely anthologized, "The Lottery" is now read in many, if not most, American middle and high schools.

Jackson's contrarian rendering of romanticized rural life courted controversy years after publication among the American political and cultural mainstream, signaling that she had tapped into an enduring cultural current. In 1978, the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union brought a case against a school district which had acceded to a "Citizens Request" by concerned parents to have the film version of "The Lottery" removed from a Minnesota high school's American literature course. The district's Committee for Challenged Materials had previously decided by a—vote to restrict use of *The Lottery* film and its trailer at the *junior* high school level, but leave the book available. The summary of the Citizens Request in the case articulates what some readers find objectionable in Jackson's creation:

> The Citizens Request to remove the main film from the curriculum stated that the 'theme or purpose' of this film was 'the breakdown of family values and tradition' and that viewing the films may cause students to 'begin to question their own family loyalties.' It also stated that 'the matter of fact way in which the ceremony proceeds accentuates its brutality and senselessness in our times.'
>
> The Citizens Request regarding the trailer film stated that the 'theme or purpose' of the trailer was a 'subtle way of accomplishing destruction of family unit. Causing them (the students) again to question their values, traditions and religious beliefs.' This Citizens Request also objected to the portrayal of a 'vengeful God' rather than a 'loving God.'[7]

Students who were freshmen the year the case was brought would have already graduated by the time it reached the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, and would have been successfully insulated from its decadent

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influence. However, the three justices of the Circuit decided to uphold the lower court's decision against the school board, with Circuit Judge Gerald Heaney writing:

> The board—not this Court—has the authority to determine that a literary or artistic work's violent content makes it inappropriate for the District's curriculum. But after carefully reviewing the record, we must agree with the district court that the board eliminated the films not because they contain scenes of violence or because they distort the short story, but rather it so acted because the majority of the board agreed with those citizens who considered the films' ideological and religious themes to be offensive. . ..
>
> This approach inevitably suggests that the Board [sic] acted not out of its concern about violence, but rather to express an 'official policy with respect to God and country of uncertain and indefinite content which is to be ignored by pupils, librarians and teachers at their peril.'[8]

This exchange, which touches nearly every node of authority in society—parental, familial, educational, elective (municipal, state, regional, and national), judicial, religious, and poetic—recapitulates a millennia-long debate over the core questions of political philosophy: What is the basis of authority or power? What bestows its legitimacy? How do we arbitrate competing claims? This chapter explores the way "The Lottery" continues to raise these questions, what audiences' reactions might reveal about their own political situation and socialization, and how great works of political philosophy can help clarify each.

"CLASSICS IN SOME CATEGORY:" "THE LOTTERY" AND *REPUBLIC*

In a letter to Jackson's husband, literary critic Stanley Edgar Hyman, *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross prophetically wrote of "The Lottery," "I don't know quite what it is, but it was a terrifically effective thing, and will become a classic in some category."[9] Ross did not use "terrifically" in its original sense of "causing terror," and did not clarify what, exactly, "The Lottery" was "effective" at, besides selling magazines. The "effect" on audiences, after all, was and is highly divergent, perhaps a sign of Jackson's genius. The story's virality goes beyond entertainment value, garnering the kind of attention more often associated with investigative reporting or the cultural critique of op-eds. Beyond entertainment value, what, if any, values *does* the story express? Was there an intended political commentary or philosophic takeaway?

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Jackson's characteristic reclusiveness and the general difficulty of divining author intent makes these questions tough to answer, but we can hazard that, contrary to the Citizens Request claim in the *Pratt v. Independent School District* case, her aim was something other than the "destruction of [the] family unit." The second part of *Pratt*'s complaint, however, cannot be so easily dismissed, and may help to focus these questions. In that complaint, the parents and board pose a version of the core questions of political philosophy, broached in the last section, regarding the basis or bases of authority and legitimacy. Recognizing that education and the arts are institutions that communicate values, the parents' and citizens' court appeal can be seen as challenging the authority of the teachers', schools', and lower courts' interpretation of those values and, more generally, the proper role of art and education in politics—specifically, the vital process of political socialization through which societies and cultures reproduce themselves.

Given these stakes—the reproduction and survival of one way of life or worldview over another—we should ask: *Do* stories like "The Lottery" cause citizens, young or old, to question their "values, traditions, religious beliefs, or official policy" as the claimants contend? If so, *is* such questioning a net good, or harm for society as a whole? Are answers to these questions *always* relative to the societal perspective of those asking and answering?

These are philosophic questions, so it is unsurprising that their most famous posing comes from the life of that first political philosopher, Socrates. A sometime stonemason and soldier known for both his fierce loyalty to his city of Athens, and his devotion to philosophic inquiry, Socrates shares with the unfortunate protagonist of "The Lottery" death at the hands of his polity. These capital decisions were democratically decided, arrived at by a group of representative citizens in the agreed-upon manner, and they proceeded, putatively, for the good of the whole.

These facts leave us with the uncomfortable question: *Were* these executions, in fact, legitimate—that is, not just lawful, but in some sense fair or just? Strangely, Socrates himself seems to answer in the affirmative: he was given the opportunity to escape but chose to submit to Athens' decision, not because it was right or correct but because he was possessed of an irrevocable, filial respect for the city that made him.[10] The town of Jackson's creation is far more modest than the city-state-cum-empire that Pericles praised, but if its denizens are no less its products, its children, wouldn't they owe the same unflinching obedience?

For all its wealth and artistic, architectural, and literary splendor, Athens' most persuasive argument for deserving loyalty unto death is, ironically, the fact that it was free enough to produce a person like Socrates. A rural, American hamlet like that which Jackson imagined might pride itself on economic freedom and a certain self-sufficiency, but she gives no indication

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there exist any villagers remotely as inquisitive, courageous, or free-thinking as Socrates. Some similar contemporary American towns might number more than the 40,000 citizens of Socrates' Athens; what distinguishes the latter is the openness and cosmopolitanism that allowed for forms of love and loyalty beyond the concentric circles of family, tribe, and faith—friendship, for example. Then, as now, cities like Athens, and open societies generally, breed not only new forms of cultural and subcultural partiality, but an overall ethos of tolerance, individualism, and *im*partiality.

This tension between plural and fluid individual allegiances and unwavering respect for the political system that allows such pluralism helps demystify the paradox of Socrates' dual civic identity—his alternating docility and self-defense, compliance and critique. Socrates the citizen and soldier owes fealty to Athens unto death but Socrates the *daimon*-led individual and philosopher is loyal to the truth and continues in his duty to criticize ignorance and injustice to the last.

Socrates' student Plato wrote of his teacher's life and method of exposing the gaps in officials' and experts' knowledge through simple questioning. Plato avoided a similar fate by pioneering the "dialogue" as a literary form. The Platonic dialogues fictionalized real people and conversations, and immortalized Socrates and his philosophy. Readers then and now know that Athens had not only democratically voted to execute Socrates, but supported reckless and unsuccessful imperial expansion that incited war, exonerated a turncoat general who again betrayed them (Alcibiades), and voted to hand power over to tyrants after losing the war.[11] The genius of the dialogue as a literary form is that it manages to prick the conscience of Athenians for being such poor judges while, in true democratic style, leaving the reader to judge what is true and useful in the story. Like democracy itself, however, this freedom opens the possibility of misunderstanding, ignorance, and abuse, the implications of which will be discussed in the following section.

Plato's dialogue *Republic* is considered first among works of political philosophy. Still read widely in both politics and philosophy classes, it remains a "classic in some category." As with "The Lottery," reactions to *Republic* continue to serve as a sort of Rorschach test of reader and society. Like "The Lottery," this ten-book tome begins with a crowd gathered outside the city's walls for a religious rite, but a *new* rite, which leads to alternating confrontation and conversation amongst Socrates' visiting band from Athens about the relationship of religious and political authority.[12] Initially at issue is whether property and the law are functions of power, or subject to some other standard of good or right, perhaps a democratic standard of equality?[13]

In this microcosmic democracy, tempers flare and insults fly. Thrasymachus, the loudest of the lot, asserts that power, not propriety or popular sentiment, decides what is right.[14] Like a wrestler, Socrates turns these cynical

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claims that "might makes right" back on his opponent, catching him in contradiction: rulers or politicians are not engaged in a competitive endeavor that seeks to enrich their friends and bankrupt or otherwise harm their foes, but in a fundamentally *cooperative* one that benefits their fellow citizens.[15] Good government, Socrates shows, if it is to mean anything, means doing good for the governed. All of them. Similarly, "justice" must mean giving each their due. And who is to decide? The only acceptable answer is a neutral and impartial party: qualities of a judge and of justice itself.

Plato suggests through his characters' conversation that in the best political arrangement (aristo-cracy), all office holders would be judgelike; in a democracy, *all* citizens would have to be judgelike—too much to ask, in his opinion. Either delegation of power comes with great responsibility, as well as trust, which, history then as now seems to confirm, is rarely exercised purely in the public interest. So while Socrates' opponents may be silenced, Plato and the characters in *Republic*, as citizens of a failing democracy, are, like anyone who might have recently read "The Lottery," understandably skeptical.[16] After all, doesn't Thrasymachus' definition better capture how the rough and tumble of politics *actually* works? Socrates' friends point out, for example, that those who act justly are frequently unrecognized or mistreated. Not only do they not get their due, but they are often unjustly punished![17] Socrates' steadfast rebuttal, that one must be just even in the face of injustice, argues that justice is its own reward, and nothing—neither poverty, nor imprisonment, nor death—can harm a just man. His friends want to support him, but yearn to be convinced on the merits of the argument, not blind loyalty. For the next eight books of *Republic*, the audience to this debate, and readers themselves, become "interlocutors," or partners in argument, and participants in a thought experiment: Socrates suggests that by imagining a utopia, what a perfect city or state would be like and how it would be governed, we might deduce what justice is and what it requires in the real world.[18] The presumption is that the concept of justice defines the law and legitimacy, as well as power and authority, not vice versa as Socrates' opponent Thrasymachus had argued.

Plato, via Socrates, draws the interlocutors' attention from persuading each other to the more basic question of what persuades: how the books, music, and media to which citizens are exposed, especially when young, shape their identities, allegiances, and values.[19] As the arguments in the *Pratt* case over the appropriateness of "The Lottery" demonstrate, these identic moral categories are vitally important because they reciprocally determine what citizens view as necessary and desirable: not only their tastes—what art or literature is pleasing to them, for example—but their attitudes toward risk and sacrifice as well. Cumulatively, these beliefs and values determine the judgments and actions of state, as well as its health and longevity.

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However, the interlocutors in *Republic* illustrate the constraints of socialization. Even less diverse than the town in "The Lottery," these well-intentioned but privileged young Athenians are inadequately critical of the slaveholding, superstitious, decadent, and misogynistic empire into which they have been born. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their quest to birth a republic of perfect justice produces instead a misshapen caste system of perfect obedience, reproduced biologically through strict eugenics and culturally through unimaginative, unidimensional art and storytelling.[20] What began as a healthy debate about political authority nearly ends in bland authoritarianism and the absence of debate.

Socrates indulges the interlocutors for some time, perhaps hoping they will become aware of their excesses, but eventually diverts from the thought experiment into an incandescently beautiful story of an out-of-body experience related by a soldier named Er.[21] Left for dead on the Anatolian plain, Er's soul leaves his body, passing through cosmic rivers and joining innumerable others in a heavenly expanse. There, they draw lots and choose their next life from a field of future biographies spun by the Fates. Seeing these lives, many choose one opposite of that just lived, some grander, some quieter. Those who choose best are those souls disciplined enough to remember that they have been there before. These shades drink less of the water of forgetfulness (Lethe), and therefore better recall the lessons from their past life or lives when choosing the next.

The moral of Plato's Myth of Er seems more straightforward than that of *Republic*: disciplined, contemplative people make wiser decisions, and are more likely to get what they deserve, at least in the long run. Plato offers a reassuring reconciliation of free-will and fate, if not the mystery of the afterlife: that justice, getting one's due, has something to do with an individual's choices, however seemingly far removed—including their reaction to the life or lot they have been dealt. But what does this consolation of philosophy have to do with the often disorderly and cutthroat world of politics that Thrasymachus describes? Power remains a real consideration when one returns from contemplating justice, one that Socrates seems to sidestep.

The ending to *Republic* also seems to ignore so many salient political realities: that the fortunate and powerful—aristocratic men like Plato and the interlocutors—not only control resources, but tend to control social narratives; that stories like Er's are of limited value to those facing immediate hardship, or condemned to die an untimely, cruel, and senseless death as those in "The Lottery;" and that the many might be lulled by opioid tales, such as Er's, to tolerate the worst injustices, to themselves and others.[22] These are fantastic stories, but as the fantasy writer Ursula Le Guin said of her father's reaction to "The Lottery," juxtaposing a familiar world with such an unfamiliar moral universe can feel as if the author is "pulling a fast one."[23]

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Why does Plato cap this highly ironic and subversive work of political philosophy with an exotic fairy tale—a florid, monologic myth of the kind Socrates and friends were moments ago deriding as dangerous? Plato's *deus ex machina* has its mirror image in Jackson's plot twist of a bucolic "town hall" meeting turning into a ritual murder, and they have been puzzling and outraging readers for decades and centuries, respectively. This discomfort is, perhaps, precisely the authors' objective, but it doesn't preclude either work serving its own didactic function. Audience reaction to each belies precisely the kind of "democratic" expectations with which these authors were playing: that stories are or ought to be the literary equivalent of a Thomas Kinkade painting or a Disney movie in which hardship is temporary and all's well that ends well. *Republic* only *seems* to endorse this kind of virtue-promoting storytelling. Both Socrates and Plato work by manipulating readers' expectations of where virtue and viciousness reside. Socrates, rather than *indulging* these young men's control fantasies of social engineering and indoctrination, can be seen as mocking both this wish and the interlocutors' ignorance of their own social conditioning. Plato does so in the hope that when ambiguity gives way to absurdity, the reader, at least, will come to recognize the conditioned nature of humans' social existence and political life. But socialization is not determinism. If there is redemption, it is not in escapist superstition or other palliatives, but in Plato's early realization that even in an empire, "*Caesar non Supra Grammaticos*"—power dictates neither interpretation, nor meaning.

Republic and "The Lottery" serve as cautionary tales against the kinds of sacrifices that those who benefit and those who suffer each countenance in the name of political order. In each case, when "justice" is misconstrued as "obedience"—blindly following or enforcing the law and keeping order—it leads characters to suggest or carry out disfiguring inhumanities. In these cautionary tales, law and tradition are only *qualified* goods; those laws or traditions that do violence to more fundamental goods, such as freedom or equality—or, perhaps, faith, family, loyalty, or love—ought to be open to revision. Revision, in turn, requires the freedom of an open society.[24] If authorities prevent the public from revisiting the conditions or limits of government, justice might require resistance: disobeying the law, protesting practices like the Lottery or other extrajudicial killings—perhaps even taking up arms. Antecedent to any of these outcomes, Plato demonstrates in *Republic*, is a public and leaders who are wise and courageous enough to question and to judge and to act rightly—a function of a liberating education.

Advocating for open society requires this caveat: freedom of interpretation and expression entail the possibility of misinterpretation and disingenuous or ill-informed speech, which can also move the masses. Ironically, smart, well-intentioned people regularly misread *Republic* and "The Lottery" as

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advocating for the very things the stories warn against![25] As we have seen, some readers of these works go as far as to seek censorship, the irony being that stories like "The Lottery" would undoubtedly have been censored in the repressive City of Speech imagined in *Republic*. Similarly, we might reasonably assume that Jackson's imagined town would be the kind of place where the parents' Citizens Request and the board of education's decision would stand and stories such as hers would be banned. Had the children and citizens depicted in "The Lottery" been socialized into a culture of critique, they would, like some of their neighboring villages, have been more likely to have obsolesced the dreadful practice.

The artist does not create *in vacuo*; it may shock, but should not surprise, that both the ideal state in *Republic* and the controlled chaos of "The Lottery" have historical antecedents in human society, all of which end badly. But before we turn to the wider application of these stories to the perennial questions of political philosophy, let's consider some of the history and mythology that went into their setting, action, and the seemingly irrational human practices that directly and indirectly influenced the authors.

CULTURAL UNIVERSALS AND THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY

"The Lottery" takes place at the end of June, corresponding to the summer solstice—an annual astrological event when the sun is highest and the day is longest. Winter solstice, when the sun is lowest, days shortest, and weather coldest, marks the other extreme of the seasons and their cyclical change, while the equinoxes of late March and September mark the other two seasons. Just as country folk in "The Lottery," for longer than anyone can remember, had gathered each summer, settled agrarian *homo sapiens* in all hemispheres have marked the solstices and equinoxes with humanity's oldest festivals and holidays. From Britain to Bolivia, and New Mexico to the Nile, megaliths signaling the path of the sun and, crucially, rituals ensuring its return, are common across human culture.[26]

This kind of superstition might seem strange today, but examples of such "magical thinking"—prayers or offerings that attempt to control natural phenomena like death or the weather—are so pervasive around the world that some anthropologists refer to them as "cultural universals."[27] "Cultural," or "human universals" include inventions as varied as music, marriage, metaphor, morality, law, taboo, shame, or religion and are observed everywhere our species have congregated. They are therefore sometimes referred to in the aggregate as "the human condition."[28] This phrase has bleaker connotations in the humanities, where the operative "condition" usually refers to fallenness

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or some other insurmountable conflict, deficiency, force, or problem halting or limiting human progress.[29]

The ubiquity of cultural universals indicates that each must have originated as a survival-oriented social adaptation, even if some "vestigial" practices or institutions lose their function amidst evolutionary and social change.[30] Jackson's characters Mr. and Mrs. Adams note that some nearby towns "have already quit lotteries," to which another, the aptly named Old Man Warner, mounts a petulant defense of the Lottery as linked to a bountiful harvest, industriousness, and progress.[31] Paradoxically, scientific awareness of cultural universals promises an escape from traditional limitations and error, both cultural and cognitive. Progress *should* simply be a matter of preserving helpful beliefs or universals and altering or eliminating less helpful ones. But as social scientists and other students of human behavior are painfully aware, this is far more easily said than done.[32] Disagreement over *which* practices are helpful versus harmful can itself drive conflict within and between cultures, which may be a permanent feature of the human condition as well. This observation need not be taken as confirmation of the permanence of war and strife, however; it can as easily confirm the earlier observation that openness to revision—the *way* in which elements of a society disagree—may be the most important practice or adaptation of all.

These archetypal behaviors, practices, and institutions are not only of interest to evolutionary psychologists and scholars of comparative mythology, but to political theorists as well. From Plato's student Aristotle, to the influential early-modern English statesman and scientist Thomas Hobbes, political philosophers have for millennia thought of human nature as governed by "natural laws" which, not unlike these universals, determine the modes and limits of communication and society. Other political theorists, most famously Karl Marx and his followers, suspect that the contours of norms, laws, and moral codes are not fixed by nature but created or co-opted by power structures in society.[33] While neither view seems particularly rosy, Marxists share with classical liberals a certain scientific optimism, typical of the European Enlightenment, that some more universalistic entity than one's own tribe, town, or country (or economic class, like the working proletariat, or economic system, like capitalism) is capable of remaking these structures or their interpretation in such a way as to end conflict. This borderline religious faith in ideas or institutional change resulting in what Alexandre Kojève called "the end of history"[34] might itself represent an instance of the cultural universal, "magical thinking."

Speculation about the end of history through perfectly ordered earthly society is a relatively recent belief. More common are rituals and festivals harkening back to a time, place, or force prior to, or separate from, law and society. These are commonly idealized as either perfect or perfectly horrible.

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Archeological evidence from a range of Stone and Bronze Age cultures and later, pre-Columbian American civilizations, points toward a prehistory and history closer to the latter: the belief that human sacrifice could ensure victory in battle or successful harvest was widespread enough for consideration as a cultural universal.

This destructive practice was largely displaced or domesticated by new practices and beliefs of the various Axial Age religions and relative prosperity of Iron Age cultures. For example, the substitution of an animal for human sacrifice among ancient Hebrews, represented in the story of Abraham and Isaac and formalized in the Mosaic Law of Atonement, was later displaced by one last symbolic human sacrifice in the New Testament, commemorated in the act of communion.[35] Catholicism, in turn, absorbed a number of pagan holidays and practices in its conquests in the process of "religious synchronization." Assimilation of indigenous culture, as Marx and others have observed, is a common strategy for reinforcing the social or political authority of the dominant power structure. Imagine a "civilized" region, somehow untouched by this sublimating process, that maintained a barbaric practice, and you have the conceit of "The Lottery."

One real-world example of the permutation of social practices amidst political change is Athens' City Dionysia festival. At its peak in 6th century BCE, Greek chroniclers portray the Dionysia as an annual, city-wide dramatic competition from which the genre of tragedy was born. However, the Greek name *tragōidia*, or "goat-song," and the namesake god of wine allude to the festival's wilder origin. In its older form, celebrants would crown a goat king, and proceed to heap scorn and blame for that year's tragedies and losses. This symbolic "scapegoat" would be sacrificed in a great spectacle, representing a purgation of grudges from throughout the year and a clean slate from which to begin the next. The ritual murder in "The Lottery" has preserved, we presume, a similar function as the scapegoat, in addition to ensuring a good harvest in the minds of the town folk (see Old Man Warner's comment, "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon").[36]

The idea of the necessity of sacrifice to maintain social or political order would not have been alien to the Bronze Age Greeks of the Heroic Age, or to their Athenian descendants who developed the political order "democracy," or "rule by the people." Plato's dialogues, like Jackson's short story, problematize the value of this accomplishment by illustrating that not every sacrifice is noble, and not every democratic decision, just. We might profitably compare these critical art forms of dialogue and short story with the "official" art form of tragedy, which celebrated democracy. Tragedians, like Olympic athletes then and now, were the entertainment stars of their day. They were highly influential in democratic taste and society, but were also somewhat bound by its expectations and sensibilities. No tragedian was more influential,

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or more representative of democratic taste, than thirteen-time winner of the Great Dionysia drama festival, Aeschylus.

Aeschylus is chiefly remembered for his *Oresteia* trilogy, which portrays a cascade of woeful events resulting from King Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia to appease the gods and gain fair winds and victory at Troy. In the first two dramas, Iphigenia's mother, Clytemnestra, who had avenged the sacrifice of her daughter by killing Agamemnon, is herself killed by Iphigenia's brother, Orestes. Aeschylus' third play in the *Oresteia* trilogy, *The Eumenides*, finds Orestes hunted by the Furies—elemental goddesses representing primal female power—who seek to revenge his matricide. This cascade of eye-for-eye justice, driven by a cosmic battle among gods partial to the named characters, finally ends when the goddess Athena suggests to the Furies that Orestes be put on trial on Athens' Areopagus.

The *Arios Pagos* or "Ares' Rock" had for centuries been the meeting place of city elders to try homicides and conduct other city business. In Aeschylus' striking portrayal, Athena convenes the first jury trial by peers on this sacred spot. When the twelve Athenian citizens split their vote, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, finds in Orestes' favor but, importantly, also persuades the Furies to abandon their wandering quest for vengeance and instead, watch over Athens as the Eumenides, or "kindly ones."

This arc may not seem riveting enough to enrapture an audience of an entire city, but *The Eumenides* dramatizes an event pivotal to both Athenian and American history. That event is the 6th century BCE reforms by Solon (ancestor of Plato) that replaced the code of Draco, (from whom the adjective "draconian," excessively severe or harsh, derives). Solon's reforms were truly revolutionary in that he was, like Athena, able to use rational argument in lieu of violence to replace the Aeropagus—the powerful *appointed* body of aristocrats like him—with the *Ekklesia* and *Heliaia*, an assembly and court comprised of representative Athenian citizens chosen at random, thereby implementing a more just legal order. This model of representative democracy bloodlessly replacing aristocracy would later inspire the creation of the American democratic republic. As each political experiment demonstrates, however, establishing a more just constitution does not itself guarantee justice will be enjoyed by all that polity's citizens. Without some mechanism for deliberation and occasions for self-scrutiny and critique, even smaller, cautious polities can fall back into draconian habits.

WHOSE JUSTICE?

The preceding section illustrates the historical basis of the cultural practice of purgative festivals and the political institutions of representative democracy.

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While each has salutary societal effects, they are also subject to irrational or arbitrary elements that can work at cross purposes to the institutionalized rationality of the court system Solon implemented and Aeschylus mythologized, and its end of justice. Qualities like "fair," impartial," "universal," and "rational," are used to describe a just political and legal system. But what, exactly do we mean by "just?" What is the standard used to judge both within and between governments?

To point back to "democracy" would be tautological, an insufficient answer. What values does rule by the people express? Certainly, equality seems to have something to do with it. Rule by one, or a few, is not only unequal in terms of power or wealth, but in rights and duties; individuals can be made to fight, serve, surrender property, or be killed at the whim of a tyrannical authority. The idea of delegating authority by lottery, or "casting lots," as the Athenians did to select citizens for civic service, is instructive. Lotteries are set up in a way to ensure every participant has an equal chance of selection. It is no different when selection is seen as a punishment rather than a prize, such as in a military draft, jury duty, or Jackson's imagined town: random selection ensures that the "winner" is chosen fairly, without animus or collusion, and that each citizen has "skin in the game."

"Freedom" is another category that is frequently invoked when judging political systems, but it is in the very nature of the concept that this can mean different things to different people. Absolute freedom would seem to require the absence of all law, government, or other constraints. However, as Hobbes argued, to live in a lawless "state of nature" preceding government would be a fate far worse than enduring an arbitrary sovereign who could at least keep order.[37] To guarantee security, the sovereign remains above the law, per Hobbes, and can licitly use the law and its force to wage war and prosecute criminals as s/he sees fit. This scenario, while perhaps superior to the law of the jungle or state of nature, is no better than that against which Socrates argues in *Republic*: law as the advantage of the stronger, used to benefit friends and harm perceived enemies.[38]

The objective of politics, or at least good government, would seem to be maximizing the goods of equality and freedom while avoiding these two extremes of anarchy and authoritarianism. Does the village depicted in "The Lottery" achieve this balance? They seem to enjoy civic goods of equality, including equality in decision-making, and relative freedom, as far as we can tell, without the trappings of government. Readers find no mayor, judge or police, just stand-in officials for Lottery Day. Children still misbehave, but parents, the childless, the elderly are all respected. The residents seem, until that frightful finish, friendly enough with each other to self-govern, but the price of this relative freedom, equality, and political order, we find, is the annual spasm of violence in which every town member must participate.

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Perhaps *some* violence, *some* sacrifice, is always necessary to maintain political society. If these people *consent* to this practice, should they be left alone? According to pioneering social scientist Max Weber, the role of the state is not to eliminate violence; rather, the state is defined as the entity enjoying a monopoly on *legitimate* violence.[39] The question is whether a given use of force is legitimate *because* it is used by the state (i.e. once consensually established, it is unlimited, per Hobbes and legal positivism) or whether the state is constituted and constrained in such a way as to only use necessary (and therefore legitimate) force. Asking which violence is legitimate is like asking which evil is necessary—we would prefer the answer be "none" and, second best, that it only be accepted as a defensive last resort to *il*legitimate or *un*necessary instances of the same. This framing reiterates the core question of *Republic*, political philosophy, and this chapter: Who or what counts as an authority? In a world of diverse interests, who could possibly be entrusted with this axiomatic power—more powerful than even the law—to *define* legitimacy? Is it the state? The town? A judge? A majority? An. . .author?

Plato's answer in *Republic* is that the only party that can be entrusted with using political power justly is the one least interested in power: the philosopher.[40] Having no set allegiance aside from the truth, in other words, gives a philosophic person the right to command, and a judge the right to decide, dispassionately and disinterestedly, responsible only to truth and fact. (Mrs. Hutchinson, by contrast, is quite passionate and terribly interested in the integrity of the Lottery process, once her family name is drawn.) Does Jackson's story therefore represent a warning against *all* political allegiance or sacrifice, *all* authority, or against political ideals or patriotism generally? Likely no more so than *Republic* presents a genuine warning against all myth and poetry, or a genuine advocacy of philosopher-kings; both signal the importance of awareness of being "always already" embedded in some social and political arrangement and attuned to its deficiencies and the difficulty, and necessity, of change.

Another way to frame the paradox of justice and political change—that justice seems to be both what the law dictates and what dictates the law—is to examine their relationship to morality and ethics. Moral philosophy, however, is also fraught with dilemmas and paradoxes. To better understand puzzles and paradoxes—things that seem unlikely but true—and help clarify the appropriate baseline or standard to begin to answer such difficult questions as "what is just," philosophers often look at extreme cases. War is one such example of *extremis*; another comes from strandings or shipwrecks in which individuals are sometimes forced to choose violence and survival over a just death.

There have been several instances of stranded parties resorting to a lottery to distribute scarce resources, or even select who is to be killed to save the

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rest. There are also precedents of casting lots or drawing straws being used as pretext for murder. In the case of the survivors of the whaleboat *Essex*, whose travails were fictionalized in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Nathaniel Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea*, the journals of the surviving cabin boy and first mate confirm that the four black sailors were intentionally given short straws, and eaten during their near one hundred days adrift.[41] In the case of the 1884 *Mignonette* sinking, the crew vetoed the captain's suggestion of casting lots, settling instead on dispensing with the youngest and weakest, the orphaned cabin boy, Richard Parker, sickened from drinking seawater and in a coma.[42] Despite prior courts finding in favor of defendants in similar cases (most of whom *had* cast lots), *The Queen vs. Dudley and Stephens* set a new precedent establishing that "necessary killing," was legally indistinguishable from murder.[43] Dudley and Stephens' capital sentence was commuted by the Queen to six months, perhaps confirming Hobbes' and earlier observations that the crown ultimately decides justice temporal.

The salience of these examples to the action of "The Lottery" is this: even if a majority agree that certain members of a group must be sacrificed for the good of the rest, it is difficult to call such decisions truly "democratic" or "just," especially when made in *extremis*. It is telling that many who survive war or shipwreck engage in self-deception to avoid moral injury or survivor's guilt: they *need* to believe that decisions were not their own and actions were beyond their control. Psychologist Albert Bandura identifies this "diffusion and displacement of responsibility" as one of his eight cognitive mechanisms of moral justification for violence.[44] A lottery allows this obscuring or erasure of agency in the same way that execution by firing squad allows each member to rest on the possibility they did not fire the lethal shot.[45] The cognitive psychology of these well-documented mechanisms of moral disengagement go far in explaining how a killing like that at the center of "The Lottery" could fail to raise objections.

Revolting as the details of such stories can be, real and hypothetical examples of "lifeboat ethics"—how different people justify the distribution of scarce resources in an emergency situation—are a staple of philosophy, ethics, and political and legal theory because they reveal principles at work in everyday moral and political decision-making as well. These principles, not always explicit to the person or group, nonetheless determine the relationship and ranking of just (moral), legal, and justifiable (morally permissible) acts. More than specific laws, prohibitions, or moral codes, it is *principles* embedded in beliefs, norms, and identity that predict both individual behavior and how others' actions are judged.

Because judgment, responsibility, and meaning extend to the actions of fictional people, the next sections explore six normative questions regarding "The Lottery" to help readers identify the principles they use in judging

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meaning, permissibility, and blame:[46] Is Mrs. Hutchinson's selection *fair*? If the process is fair, is the killing *legal*? If legal, is it *democratic*? If democratic, is it therefore *permissible* (that is, moral, just, or right)? Whether morally permissible or impermissible, who, if anyone, is *responsible* for Mrs. Hutchinson's death? Finally, would witnesses of this situation have a responsibility to *intervene* to help its victims or an obligation to leave it alone?

FAIRNESS, LEGALITY, LEGITIMACY, DEMOCRACY

Our attention at the start of "The Lottery" is initially drawn to Mrs. Tessie Hutchinson for being late, claiming she "Clean forgot what day it was." Forgetting such a sacred day in town life might make her suspect among her peers, perhaps even a candidate for punishment or elimination via Lottery. As one critic writes of her fate, "Tessie questions the tradition and correctness of the lottery as well as her humble status as a wife. It might as well be this insubordination that leads to her selection by the lottery and stoning by the angry mob of villagers."[47] But motive does not prove guilt; even if Mrs. Hutchinson's levity made her a target, there is no obvious way that the selection process could be rigged. The Lottery's "black box"—an expression used to describe a process that is poorly understood—is kept by the postmaster, Graves, and the coal man, Summers. The Lottery has universal popular participation, and is fair in a statistical sense, with every man, woman, and child having an equal chance of selection. The officiating and the process as a whole seem have the support of the crowd, including Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson. Is it therefore democratic, and the outcome legal?

The bar for legitimacy of an election result is a majority or plurality—quite a bit lower than universal participation. A separate issue is whether participation is truly free. Children have to attend because of their parents, though the boys seem to look forward to the event. Adults participate out of a sense of obligation, as we see with Old Man Warner. Other characters' nervousness might belie reluctance, but people attend out of fear, since their absence would result in social death, if not literal execution.[48] There is consensus in legal and moral theory that a "choice" made out of fear, under duress, is no choice at all and that individuals are therefore not responsible for the outcomes of acts performed under duress. Participation out of fear of reprisal would compromise the democratic value of universal participation. But as Hobbes' intellectual successor John Locke argues, unanimous consent (including via representatives) is only necessary for the initial establishment of legitimate government through social contract. Descendants of these signatories are never consulted, but each assents to government authority insofar as they continue to reap the benefits of association (protection, public works,

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et cetera). "Consent of the governed" is assumed until one is subject to harm that is worse, or as arbitrary, as those suffered in the state of nature prior to government. Decisions arrived at in the prescribed fashion ("constitutionally," in our parlance) need not be expressly consented to, so long as they fulfil the original purpose of protecting life and property.[49]

In a direct democracy, as in a jury's deliberations, the dissent of just one on procedural grounds could be enough to nullify a decision. The same is true in certain federal or power-sharing arrangements that stipulate for minority veto. In these cases, as in representative democracy, there needs to be a forum in which dissent can be heard and deliberation take place. Both Plato and the American founders were highly skeptical of unchecked or direct democracy, precisely because this form of government is generally less deliberative, and more susceptible to demagoguery, rash decision-making, and the oppression of minority groups.[50] The reader is not sure whether Jackson's imagined town is one governed by representative town meetings, like her adoptive New England hometown, or by open town meetings in which each citizen has a voice. This town of three hundred has a bank and a post office, but seemingly no courthouse or council to which Mrs. Hutchinson could plead her case. The custom of the Lottery *is* itself the law; the old black box, the judge, and the villagers, the executioners.

It is possible to say the town enjoys a kind of "*procedural* democracy," which refers to expressions of political equality such as the principle of "one person one vote," or the equal chance of each to be chosen in a lottery. But procedural democracy can exist without the "*substantive* democracy" that people generally mean when using the word "democracy" or "democratic." The "substance" in substantive democracy goes beyond the guarantees of equal protection under the law and trial by peers, to positive, constitutional protections of life, liberty, *and* the means to enjoy these (e.g. education, a lawyer, and, under certain conditions, providing or subsidizing necessary goods). To use "democratic" *normatively*, as it is commonly deployed, is to judge what a law, custom, or practice *ought* to be like given foundational principles of liberty, equality, and equality of opportunity. "Ought" signifies a moral claim, and a standard of justice independent of government (or the existing political authority, be it Graves, Summers, or the entire town). It is in this sense that Plato and the American founders argue for democratic principles like self-determination, equal protection, and positive rights and duties even as they argue *against* particular forms of procedural democracy.

Still, these historical examples also serve to highlight the point that reasonable people disagree over the good and the right. Even if there is agreement about the best political solution to a problem, the result might be morally or ethically questionable, meaning right *might* be on the side of the minority, who protests, even if it is a minority of one. What irks some readers of

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"The Lottery" is the pervasiveness of the bystander effect: that there is not one person willing to stand up in the face of a clear, if sanctioned, wrongful harm of an innocent. The injustice only occurs to the victim at the moment of reckoning, and to the friends, neighbors, and family that set upon her, not at all. Nor, we presume, does it trouble the town folk that day at lunch or the other days of the year enough to question the social order under which they live. Whether readers can rightly sit in judgment, however, when they might be silently complicit in the injustices of their own communities is one of the troubling questions raised by Jackson's incisive story.

HISTORY AND HYSTERIA

This analysis gets us to the fourth and fifth question posed before the last section regarding moral permissibility and responsibility. Determining responsibility depends on prior questions about knowledge and intention, which are also relevant to permissibility. If villagers are socialized into a culture that normalizes human sacrifice or ritual murder, there is a sense in which they are divorced from, and innocent of, the "baseline" standards of morality. If we cannot identify (living) leaders who inspire or perpetuate "The Lottery," how do we apportion blame for this group act?

The public's initial concern after an act of mass violence is often motive. Because many such acts defy rational explanation, this concern frequently gives way to the explanatory power of "othering." Perpetrators are deemed so "evil," "monstrous," or "mad" as to no longer be relatable and their rarity becomes a sort of reassurance. Jackson's eminently believable portrayal of mindless, routinized collective violence might chill modern readers not because they imagine they are likely to become a victim of such an act, but because it makes them secretly wonder if they or someone they know could become the perpetrators of violence.

The appalled reaction of "The Lottery's" readership seventy years ago might be interpreted as a resounding "no" to such a query, but their offense at the suggestion that evil may not be limited to "others" represents a failure to grapple with the political implications of the events of that decade. Fascism's defeat had the effect of buoying faith in democracy, itself anchored by the Enlightenment belief in human rationality and goodness of collective decision-making. Liberal faith typified the science and social science of the time, and this might have something to do with Jackson' motive in penning "The Lottery." According to her son, "Shirley would typically present scenes of seeming tranquility, whether in the city or the country, and then would go on to find, as one of her stories puts it, 'The Possibility of Evil' within her characters."[51]

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Beyond an aesthetic choice, Jackson's "gothic" fascination with human depravity can be seen as a critique of the prevailing "liberal consensus" of the postwar period. Like Flannery O'Connor, Jackson's short fiction exposes her readers' smugness, naïveté, and prejudices in idealizing themselves or others as rational and well educated, or as "good country people." Their problematization addressed American intellectual and middle classes who, like the Athenians before them, took victories in war and subsequent economic success as evidence of personal and institutional rectitude.

Revelations in the years around "The Lottery's" publication should have been sobering. 1948 was the year the Nuremberg Trials concluded, sentencing German officers and ministers who, by "following orders," became complicit in the gravest war crimes and crimes against humanity—the systematic killing of millions of civilians in the Holocaust. It was this period in which Hannah Arendt, later known for her description of "the banality of evil" in the trial of Adolf Eichmann, was writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Arendt's later dive into the mentality of an ideologue like Eichmann explained how he, along with lower level German functionaries, normalized and even valorized participating in systematic atrocity. Like the landmark psychological research of the Cold War era such as the Milgram Experiment and Philip Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment seemed to confirm, evil was an "environmental factor"—people can be *made* to do wrong, if coerced, brainwashed, tricked, or triggered by conditions or some unscrupulous authority.[52]

Yet the process of "The Lottery" and the villagers who participate in this ritual killing are thoroughly mundane, and they do not seem to be brainwashed or coerced by an outside authority. Legal historian Douglas Linder's description of the events in Nuremberg during the time Jackson was conceiving her short story describe her characters as well:

> Those who come to the trials expecting to find sadistic monsters are generally disappointed. What is shocking about Nuremberg is the ordinariness of the defendants: men who may be good fathers, kind to animals, even unassuming—yet who committed unspeakable crimes.[53]

Notwithstanding her description of the boys' enthusiastic stockpiling of rocks and gruesome anticipation of Lottery Day, Jackson does not suggest that any *single* one of the townsfolk who perpetrate this act are themselves evil. In fact, it is precisely this paradox—that decent, well-intentioned individuals are capable of tolerating or perpetrating inhumanities—that offends those who see such groupthink as typical of the totalitarian or fundamentalist regimes, never democracy.

Another danger of this "othering" is its ability to conjure monsters where there are none. "The Lottery" also proved prescient on this count, appearing

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as it did just one year after a World War II veteran named Joe McCarthy was elected to the U.S. Senate, and just before the red scare he fomented against suspected communist sympathizers took hold in the United States. "McCarthyism" has, like the infamous Salem witch hunt, become shorthand for the kind of mass hysteria and unthinking crowd psychology at work in "The Lottery." The stultifying conformity of the 1950s, earlier anarchist scares and ongoing lynching born of nativist paranoia and a culture of white supremacy, all demonstrate that democracy is just as susceptible to spasms of symbolic, oppressive violence as any communist dictatorship. Centuries of demonizing Catholics and Jews, enslaving and terrorizing millions of African Americans, sterilizing hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples, and the ongoing dehumanization of women, taken together make "The Lottery's" selection of one random scapegoat appear humane by comparison. The commonality is that the process of normalization and institutionalization aid cultures in forgetting or ignoring their manifest injustice.

If mass media initially amplified American exceptionalist tendencies at home and abroad, television and photojournalism eventually led to increasing consciousness of America and her allies' own reprobation. Images of atrocities against Vietnamese civilians and Civil Rights activists contributed to the cratering of public trust in the decades after, which one political scientist described as "among the largest [declines] ever recorded in opinion surveys."[54] In this climate, "The Lottery" only gained relevance as an allegorical warning against the political evils that love of democracy, country, or community *seem* to permit or demand.

BLAME, OBLIGATION, INTERVENTION

Are the villagers in "The Lottery" responsible for this terrible act? Since the victim is randomly selected, and the killing is executed by the entire group, it seems either none or all is responsible, which poses a special problem for justice. Holding the entire town and their culture responsible leads to absurdities like that uttered by one American officer in Vietnam, "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it."[55] Setting aside retributive justice, the preferred route of restorative justice and reform also seems unlikely without known dissenters; the community is more like a cult than a polity.

With change unlikely to come from within, are outsiders morally obligated and legally warranted to intervene to halt such a situation? Americans face this question regularly, internally and externally. From Waco to Rwanda, hindsight frequently offers different answers than those initially provided by government and public opinion. If "The Lottery" scenario were taking place in the United States, with fellow citizens killing and dying, the answer would

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be unambiguously affirmative, though the "how" remains a challenge: if confronting the problem on Lottery Day, the necessity of force would precede that of "reprogramming" and perhaps more than one would die.

Where a shared constitution or citizenship does not exist, there is only the tenuous and untested legal mandate of the Responsibility to Protect. But wouldn't the moral obligation to protect the innocent persist? Or would it be morally permissible and preferable to simply leave this strange place to reform or perish?

To get at the difficult question of cultural difference and intervention, let's examine suttee—the Indian custom of burning a widow on her husband's funeral pyre if he precedes her in death. Encountering this ritual, a British officer was told it was custom, and not to intervene. He responded that it was custom in *his* country to execute murderers.[56] But *is* it murder? If the widow volunteered, or if Mrs. Hutchinson behaved more like selectees of lotteries past and went quietly and "honorably," would *their* consent absolve anyone from responsibility? Might it even make the sacrificial act. . .praiseworthy?

The British officer's pithy rejoinder was not merely a statement of preference or an appeal to conscience, like Mahatma Gandhi's later letters to Adolf Hitler, but an assertion of right backed by the might of the British imperial Raj. The proof of this right is that it stood even when that power receded and India outlawed suttee shortly after gaining independence. Suttee counts as murder, not suicide, because it is reasonable to assume that "consent" to burning alive—like the torture of female genital mutilation or the discomfort of wearing a full burka in 100+ degree heat, or participating in a lottery in which the prize is death by stoning—is not really consent at all.

Contrary to the curatorial instinct of anthropologists that all human practices ought to be catalogued and preserved like exotic species, the named customs are identifiably manifestations of patriarchal societies that abuse their monopoly of violence. We expect such barbarism in a state of nature, where the only law is the law of jungle, but we rightly expect more from politics. Rather than the caricature of "who gets what when" or the science of power, politics represents an abrogation of the arbitrary power of strong over weak, or male over female. Cultural universals are culled over time to map onto moral universals, such as individual equality, opportunity, and autonomy.

The political theorist John Rawls agreed. His famous thought experiment, used to clarify the basis of political rights and the duties and limits of government, begins with a lottery as well. His book *A Theory of Justice* imagines a pre-political condition like the state of nature that he calls "the original position." Before any social contract has been agreed to, land claimed, or fortunes made, he asks citizens engaging in this thought experiment to imagine a "veil of ignorance" that masks their qualities—gender, race, ability, economic position, and political power (everything beyond their capacity for rational

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decision making)—and to imagine humans are without quality other than self-interest.[57] The remaining qualities are to be distributed randomly by lottery (controversially, like "The Lottery," to heads of households). *Before* the lottery begins, however, participants are told they must work out the details of their political and economic system.

Rawls' gambit is that rationally self-interested individuals are risk averse, and will create a political and economic system with hedges against the worst-case scenario of being born into disadvantage or poverty or discrimination. They would do so, he wagers, by establishing 1) a menu of basic political liberties and 2) what he calls a "social minimum" guaranteeing some economic security.[58] No rational individual, Rawls argues, would assent to a game in which destitution, untreated disease, discrimination, or premature death, are real possibilities. He joins Locke, against Hobbes, in arguing that humans would generally rather try their luck in nature than agree to a social contract with such high stakes as arbitrary execution.

However, characters in "The Lottery" behave otherwise. Perhaps Jackson's purpose in crafting such a strange world is, like Plato's "City of Speech" in *Republic* and Rawls' "original position" in *A Theory of Justice*, to test our intuitions about justice and clarify its limits in our own. Rawls' thought experiment also reveals that existing societies, even those democracies displaying aspects of procedural justice, rarely have a just distribution of goods, real enjoyment of rights (the outcomes we earlier called "substantive democracy"), or even equal treatment under the law. Similarly, societies and nations who lose the lottery of natural resources, geography, or population often lack opportunity, which can exacerbate social-political divides, and even "winners" can fall prey to the corruption associated with the so-called "resource curse." In either case, governments often fail to establish social institutions and political cultures that promote reflectivity, empathy, or equal opportunity and in so doing, find themselves with citizens, like those villagers in "The Lottery," who lack the education, compassion, or courage to stand up when confronted with a clear evil.

This leads us back to the question of intervention: do witnesses of oppression outside their national community have a responsibility to help its victims? If "The Lottery" were ripped from the headlines, a bizarre tradition of random killing in some far-flung place, is there a duty to verify and intervene? Liberalism has at least two answers to this question. Liberal internationalism is traditionally interventionist, not hesitating to mobilize force to right wrongs, especially when occurring in a place whose people or culture are seen as similar, or one whose location or resources are seen as contributive to the national interest. Political liberals in the United States, by contrast, question American authority and motives in intervening, and increasingly espouse non-interventionism, isolationism, and tolerance of questionable

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moral practices in the name of respect for cultural difference—a view known as moral or cultural relativism.[59]

Liberalism traditionally espouses some set trans-cultural human universals, such as the political goods of freedom and equality discussed earlier. Cultural or moral relativism, by contrast, cleaves to the belief that good, right, and wrong are always relative to the cultural, legal, and moral standards internal to a given society or tradition. Taken to its logical conclusion, however, this stance obviates even internal critique, civil disobedience, and domestic reform. On the relativist view, laws are in most cases reified traditions, norms, or mores. No individual or group would have the standing to argue that generations or centuries of tradition are incorrect, immoral, or unjust.

Relativism begs the question with which this chapter began, regarding the origin of authority, standard of legitimacy, and mechanisms of political change. If change did occur per relativism, it would not be *justified*—a matter of progress—but simply an accidental or reactive change in power relations or conditions—a matter of evolution, and reversible. The relativist account implies that a society with an unjust law or practice like suttee, or a death lottery, would be doomed to repeat it without outside intervention or revolution, with revolutionaries' deviant ideas making them legitimate targets.

It is hard to imagine that both stasis and historical change are simply matters of power. Examples of reform occurring from within, from civil rights, to the women's movement, to religious toleration, driven by nonviolent protest as well as reasoned argument ought to be enough to disprove relativism. As wrongheaded as moral relativism seems upon reflection, the surety of moral absolutism is just as dangerous. Still, we ought to ask: *is* there an ethical standard, or moral authority that applies at all times, in all places?

Jackson's inclusion of a character "Bentham" in "The Lottery" reminds readers of one such possibility. Social reformer Jeremy Bentham devised an ethical system with the express purpose of negotiating between religion and superstitions' warring conceptions regarding morality (which he notoriously called "nonsense on stilts").[60] Bentham, and his intellectual successors James Mill and John Stuart Mill called their system "utilitarianism," proposing it as a kind of cost-benefit analysis for calculating the most beneficial policies in any society. They called this special kind of efficiency, "utility."

In practice, maximizing utility means not only benefitting a great number, but inconveniencing or even harming a few. When building an airport or highway, for example, some might be forced to move through eminent domain, or be subject to noise pollution. As Rawls demonstrated, no citizen would willingly engage in a game in which they might lose their home, greater good be damned. Depriving citizens of their property, even if they are remunerated, may seem unfair, unjust, or undemocratic, yet giving up property for the greater good is something asked of citizens in the United States

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fairly regularly. Some varieties of libertarianism go as far as to suggest that taxes represent such an infringement, especially when the great good they are serving seems distant from state and local life, values, and concerns, or are public goods that require government intervention and regulation.

This raises the question of *which* whole we ought to contemplate in decisions that purport to favor the greater good—State? Nation? World? Humanitarian utilitarianism demands we take into account the good of every human in our decisions. As admirable as sentiment is, trying to benefit the most with every choice proves impossible as a practical maxim for action.[61] States, non-unitary actors that they are, prove even less adept at consistently implementing utilitarianism, humanitarian or otherwise.

To connect utilitarian ethics to Jackson's story, what if the "hedonistic calculus" of the overall pleasure and pain resulting from a ritual culling of one member a year from this small community in "The Lottery" served the greater good, by helping maintain population equilibrium amidst scarce resources, or promoting social cohesion with its ethos of obedience and sacrifice? Would the Lottery *then* be (morally) justifiable?

Deontology, the competing ethical system that preceded utilitarianism, answers a resounding "no." Derived from the Greek *deont/dei* for "needed" or "necessary," deontology eschews utilitarianism's concern with consequences for questions of intention and duty, namely: What does right action require of humans, irrespective of outcomes? Following its most noted philosophical proponent, Immanuel Kant, deontologists argue that moral duties are "categorical imperatives," universal obligations owed to every rational being. Conscious creatures, like ourselves, are capable of both recognizing these capacities in others, and legislating for ourselves the kinds of actions consistent with their dignity, and ours.[62] Thus, no matter how much good the harm of even one innocent might bring to a great many, it would never be morally permissible to condone the practices depicted in "The Lottery" or in Ursula Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas."

Kant's philosophy is usually interpreted as pacifistic, but a strong case can be made that his conception of duty requires citizens in one country to actively stop the intentional harm of innocents in another country whose citizens are unable to do so. Put another way, those who enjoy freedom have an obligation to help those who have lost their liberty to recover it. There are at least two problems with putting deontological moral theory into practice in international politics, however. First, it remains morally impermissible for the intervening party to also intentionally harm an innocent in the process of intervention. Yet it is almost certain in intervening with armed force that innocents will be harmed, and the fact that this harm is foreseeable but unintentional is of no consequence to the civilian victims. Second, what if "victims" are blissfully unaware of their lack of freedom and never ask for

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help, as is likely in the case of “The Lottery” or Plato’s cave in *Republic*? In the spirit of autonomy, consent seems necessary; assuming that people do not know what is best for themselves (or would ask to be rescued) harkens to the bad old days of colonialism.

There is no single person, party, or group that is oppressing citizens of Jackson’s town. If some force came to “liberate” it, would the villagers pick up rocks, pitchforks, and rifles to defend their way of life, or decide the time was ripe to reform? If the former, who could that force target to quell resistance and “enlighten” the rest? If this place existed in America, the same courts that compelled school boards to lift the ban on Jackson’s story could prevail on these hypothetical citizens to desist. If this ill-understood practice existed abroad, however, it is less clear what justices or generals could do. Minds and cultures change incrementally, if at all, and are more likely to do so through the influence of provocative stories like the ones this chapter has examined.

CONCLUSION

As the preceding discussion illustrates, the impulse to have art explained, categorized, censored, or banned can reflect an authoritarian tendency to divide artistic creation into deviant art, which corrupts the youth, and official art that promotes the values and interests of the whole (or at least the majority). To make artists account for themselves, or otherwise qualify freedom of expression (beyond the no harm principle) subverts critique and promotes self-censorship—the famous “chilling effect” discussed in First Amendment court cases.[63] Plato, writing in an unsafe time, still managed to provide a critique of censorship in *Republic*, the lessons of which were heeded by the judges who vindicated Jackson’s and other works in court challenges on school censorship 2,400 years later.

Beyond entertainment value, fiction—and the short story and dialogue form in particular—can be the occasion for philosophic reflection and discussion. As we’ve seen, by arranging familiar elements in provocatively unfamiliar ways, stories serve as thought experiments that help readers gain critical perspective on their own situatedness—their history, socialization, political allegiances, and cultural prejudices. By catching sight of people similar to ourselves engaged in unthinkable acts, we jump at our reflection. Questioning cultural taboo and power structures in this way is an antidote to the comfort and complacency that can blind people to the suffering of others, perpetuate structural violence, and in the worst cases, catch up ordinary people in the terrible inertia of real-life atrocities.

Plato and Jackson were not writing in the most open of times or societies, but their missives made it out and found life, if not immortality. Indeed, no

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one who reads either seems to able to forget them. The barest familiarity with their plot provides fertile ground for discussion of the merits and demerits of moral and political philosophies of all description. One hopes that this recollection and thoughtfulness extends to divisive times such as the present populist moment when clarity about that most vital political virtue, justice, is needed most.

NOTES

1. I acknowledge the aid of my brother Adam Trosky in providing a commodious California retreat to complete this chapter, and the suggestions and encouragement from each of this book's three editors.

2. Ruth Franklin, "'The Lottery' Letters," *The New Yorker*, June 25, 2013. George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written that same year, three years after his *Animal Farm*. All three works explore the unchecked evil that can arise amidst "herd" society.

3. Shirley Jackson and Stanley Edgar Hyman, *Come Along with Me; Part of a Novel, Sixteen Stories, and Three Lectures*, second edition (New York: Viking Press, 1968).

4. Judy Oppenheimer, *Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989).

5. Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery," *The New Yorker,* June 19, 1948, 291. All references to "The Lottery" in this chapter fall under fair-use policy.

6. Jackson, "The Lottery," 27.

7. From the opinion of Circuit Judge Gerald Heaney, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. Submitted October 14, 1981. Decided January 13, 1982. *Pratt v. Ind Sch. Dist. No. 831, Forest Lake, 670* F.2d 778 (1982), footnote 1.

8. *Pratt v. Ind Sch. Dist. No. 831, Forest Lake,* 670 F.2d 778 (1982), 779. Capitalization of "board" in the context of the Independent School District No. 831, Forest Lake, Minnesota is the Justice's error. He had just referenced a different Board in a similar case regarding First Amendment rights (*Keyishian v. Board of Regents* 385 U.S. 589, 603, 87 S. Ct. 675, 683, 17 L. Ed. 2d 629 (1967)). In his decision in that case, Justice Gerald Heaney cited and italicized the now-classic lines "When one must guess what conduct or utterance may lose him his position, one necessarily will 'steer far wide of the unlawful zone'….*The danger of that chilling effect upon the exercise of vital First Amendment rights must be guarded against by sensitive tools which clearly inform…what is being proscribed*" (italics in original).

9. Franklin, "'The Lottery' Letters."

10. Plato, "Crito," in *Plato in Twelve Volumes,* Vol. 1, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 50a–54, especially 50d–e in which Socrates imagines a dialogue with the city's laws, personified: "What if the laws then said, 'Socrates, did we agree on this, we and you, to honor the decisions that the city makes?' And if we were surprised to hear them say this, perhaps they would say, 'Socrates, don't be surprised at what we're saying but answer, since you are used to

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participating in questioning and answering. Come then, what reason can you give us and the city for trying to destroy us? Did we not, to begin with, give birth to you? And wasn't it through us that your father married your mother and conceived you?...' Well, then. Since you have been born and brought up and educated, could you say that you were not our offspring?"

11. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Thomas Hobbes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 6.15.

12. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 327a–b, 331c.

13. Plato, *Republic*, 332a.

14. Ibid., 338c.

15. Ibid., 342e.

16. Ibid., 358b.

17. Ibid., 359a.

18. Ibid., 359c, 368e.

19. Ibid., 377a–c, Socrates:

"And tales are of two species, the one true and the other false...we begin by telling children fables, and the fable is, taken as a whole, false, but there is truth in it also? And we make use of fable with children....Do you not know, then, that the beginning in every task is the chief thing?...For it is then that it is best molded and takes the impression that one wishes to stamp upon it...Shall we, then, thus lightly suffer our children to listen to any chance stories fashioned by any chance teachers and so to take into their minds opinions for the most part contrary to those that we shall think it desirable for them to hold when they are grown up?....We must begin, then, it seems, by a censorship over our storymakers, and what they do well we must pass and what not, reject. And the stories on the accepted list we will induce nurses and mothers to tell to the children and so shape their souls by these stories far rather than their bodies by their hands. But most of the stories they now tell we must reject."

20. Plato, *Republic*, 423c through end of Book IV.

21. Plato, *Republic*, 614b until end of Book X.

22. This willingness to endure earthly suffering for a heavenly revenge is Friedrich Nietzsche's chief complaint against Christianity, which he calls "Platonism for the people," and its legacy of *ressentiment*. See his *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); and *Beyond Good and Evil*, eds. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman and trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xv.

23. Franklin, "'The Lottery' Letters."

24. Karl Popper, who advocated for the open society in a book of that name, viewed his work as a rebuttal of Plato in *Republic*. His reading of the middle books as Plato *advocating* for a closed society typified by state censorship and eugenics is less persuasive than interpretations of Socrates' ironic assent to these immoderate policies of the interlocutors as the primary political lesson. See Allan Bloom's excellent translation of *Republic*.

25. See previous endnote. For a more recent literalist misreading of *Republic*, see Alan Ryan's treatment in his otherwise impressive *On Politics: A History of Political Thought: From Herodotus to the Present* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2012).

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26. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion: A New Abridgement from the Second and Third Editions*, reissued edition, ed. Robert Fraser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [Originally published1890]), 60–82.

27. Eugene Subbotsky, *Magic and the Mind: Mechanisms, Functions, and Development of Magical Thinking and Behavior* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2010), Ch. 6, 5–60.

28. "Human condition" in anthropology refers to specific "causal processes or *conditions* [that] appear to account for most if not all universals." Anthropologist Donald Brown counts four: "1) the diffusion of ancient (and generally very useful) cultural traits, 2) cultural reflection of physical fact, 3) the operation and structure of the human mind, and (behind the latter) 4) the evolution of the human mind." Donald E. Brown, "Human Universals, Human Nature & Human Culture," *Daedalus* 133 (fall, 2004): 47–54; and Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals* (New York: McGraw-Hill and Temple University Press, 1991).

29. Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

30. "But just as the clavicle in the cat only tells of the existence of some earlier creature to which a collar-bone was useful, precedents survive in the law long after the use they once served is at an end and the reason for them has been forgotten." Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Common Law* (Minoela: Dover Publications, [1881] 1991), 35.

31. Jackson, "The Lottery," 297.

32. Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature: With a New Preface*, revised edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

33. Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings,* second edition, ed. David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Susan Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy provides a contemporary fictional illustration of how such events serve the ends of national power and unity.

34. Alexandre Kojève*, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*: *Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 160.

35. See *Genesis: 22*, *Leviticus: 16*; and Nahum S. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schoken Books, 1970), 154–62.

36. Jackson, "The Lottery," 297.

37. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, reprint edition, ed. Michael Oakeshott and intro. Richard S. Peters (New York: Touchstone, 2008).

38. Plato, *Republic*, 338c.

39. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, eds. David Owen and Tracy Strong and trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 33.

40. Plato, *Republic*, 499a.

41. Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*, reissue edition (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 172–73.

42. A. W. B. Simpson, *Cannibalism and the Common Law: The Story of the Tragic Last Voyage of the Mignonette and the Strange Legal Proceedings to Which It Gave Rise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

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43. *R v Dudley and Stephens,* 14 QBD 273 DC (1884).

44. Albert Bandura, Claudio Barbaranelli, Gian Vittorio Caprara, and Concetta Pastorelli, "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71 (1996): 364–74.

45. Benedict Carey, "In the Execution Chamber, The Moral Compass Wavers," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2006. http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9906E0DA173EF934A35751C0A9609C8B63.

46. T. M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 57–60.

47. Fritz Oehlschlaeger, "The Stoning of Mistress Hutchinson: Meaning of Context in 'The Lottery'," *Essays in Literature* 15 (fall, 1988): 259–65.

48. "Ostracization" was an ancient Greek practice, contemporaneous with democracy, through which the city could vote to banish unpopular citizens—another possible inspiration of Jackson's.

49. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980).

50. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist*: *A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States*, ed. Edward Mead Earle (New York: Modern Library Series, 1937), 53–62.

51. Cressida Leyshon, "This Week in Fiction: Shirley Jackson–An Interview with Shirley Jackson's Son Laurence Jackson Hyman," *The New Yorker*, June 26, 2013.

52. Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67 (1963): 371–78.

53. Douglas Linder, "The Nuremberg Trials," in *The Great Trials of World History and the Lessons They Teach Us* (The Great Courses, Audiobook, 2017).

54. Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded American is Tearing Us Apart* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 94.

55. Peter Arnett, "Major Describes Move," *New York Times,* February 8, 1968, 14.

56. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, annotated edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 25.

57. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971), 12.

58. Rawls, *Theory,* 276.

59. James and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, fifth edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2016), 15–30.

60. Jeremy Bentham, "Anarchical Fallacies; Being an Examination of the Declarations of Rights Issued During the French Revolution," in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, Vol. 2, ed. John Bowring (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1838–1843), 501.

61. Appiah and Gates, *Cosmopolitan*, 155–75.

62. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: With On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns*, third edition, trans. James W. Ellington, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 55–60.

63. "The Chilling Effect in Constitutional Law," *Columbia Law Review* 5 (1969): 808–42. https://doi.org/10.2307/1121147.

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Chapter 11

Conclusion

Kimberly Hurd Hale, Bruce Peabody,
and Erin A. Dolgoy

This volume demonstrates the value of using short stories to understand the questions and concerns of political philosophy. Scholars and teachers interested in political philosophy should be able to use either individual chapters or this book, in its entirety, as a resource for both research and teaching in the fields of politics, ethics, or literature. We further hope that the readers of this collection are inspired, as we have been, to think more systematically and creatively about the role of literature in political science.

We recognize that teaching and research are individualized and even idiosyncratic practices. Therefore, we have tried to let the stories and chapters in this book stand on their own, without additional commentary from us, the volume editors. Each reader can judge for himself or herself the merits of the individual chapters' analyses of our assembled short stories. We anticipate some readers will disagree with the interpretations, claims, and emphases in our individual chapters, but we also hope this divergence of views will be productive in sparking scholarly debates in classrooms and dorm rooms, and guide these discussants to clearer and more informed expressions of opposing viewpoints. With these aspirations in mind, we conclude this volume with a few thoughts on how we imagine one could use this book in the context of teaching, both for organizing an entire course as well as for individual classroom discussions.

We begin by noting that the study of political philosophy is often difficult because of the density of the texts involved, the necessity of connecting with thinkers from different centuries and cultures, the seeming inscrutability of many of the underlying ideas, and the challenge of threading together themes across varied works and styles. Amidst these obstacles, we believe short fiction can be an especially valuable, albeit non-traditional, teaching tool.

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For students new to political philosophy, short stories serve as a reassuring safe harbor and an accessible medium for introducing the complexities inherent in political and moral reasoning. The careful study of short stories provides students with an opportunity to develop the strategies and skills necessary for reading longer works, including works of political philosophy. For more experienced and confident students, bringing theory and fiction together can be the basis for making exciting connections across disciplines and authors, or for teasing out the limits of standard philosophical fare. And for every reader, works of popular fiction can reinforce the idea that the most important questions of political life are far from settled. When students see that stories written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries express themes and describe problems similar, if not identical, to philosophical treatises of ancient Greece or eighteenth-century France, they better understand that there are no easy solutions to enduring political problems such as scarcity, injustice, and tyranny.

SHORT FICTION'S PEDAGOGICAL EDGE

The stories contained in this volume, and others like them, are especially promising vehicles for engaging students and promoting their fluency and comfort with ethical and philosophical argumentation, imagination, and judgment. We believe this claim is defensible for a number of reasons. To begin with, as scholars from a wide range of disciplines have long argued, people are especially responsive to narrative communication. According to the psychologist Jonathan Haidt, the "human mind is a story processor, not a logic processor. . .every culture bathes its children in stories."[1] On a daily basis, most people don't regularly think in the abstract and theoretical terms of philosophy; but we do constantly, if perhaps unconsciously, tell ourselves stories: about ourselves, our loved ones, our society, and even our most cherished belief systems.[2] In contrast to the often abstruse and invariably demanding works of political philosophy, fictional short stories, especially when spun with vivid settings and memorable characters, are potent instruments for engaging the senses and sensibilities of readers.

Moreover, as noted, teaching students how to unpack, interpret, and appreciate fiction can be a good way to introduce them to (or reinforce) sophisticated reading and analytical skills in the larger field of political science. A good short story, like a good political theory, has a level of nuance that reflects the complexity of the human experience and our most ambitious political projects. Our best and most rewarding narratives about politics are worth reading and re-reading because they possess multiple themes and allow for several interpretations and emphases. The first time a student reads Plato's

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Republic, for example, he or she may leave with the impression that Socrates functions simply as Plato's mouthpiece, and that Plato straightforwardly recommends the type of authoritarian censorship and eugenics found in the "just" city. It is only upon careful, repeated readings of the dialogue that we come to grasp the extent of Socrates' irony, the importance of the dialogue's setting to its teaching, and the complicated relationship between Plato and his characters. Or consider the close reading required to understand fully one example we referenced in our introduction. Niccolò Machiavelli's narrative of Agathocles' ascension to kingship in *The Prince* includes an admiring homage to his "great vigour both of mind and body" and "valour" as well as a stern assessment that "his unbridled cruelty and inhumanity, together with his countless crimes, forbid us to number him with the greatest men."[3] The seemingly brutal statesmanship of *The Prince* is thus quietly inflected with Machiavelli's stubborn humanism, and the republican aspirations of the *Discourses on Livy*.

This leads us to a final general observation about the pedagogical returns from reading short stories alongside great works of political philosophy: such an approach helps us in the inevitable but difficult work of encouraging reasoned political debate and judgment. A student reluctant to consider the implications of Michel Foucault's discussion of surveillance, may be more willing to confront his or her unease when presented with similar themes in a short story such as Ken Liu's "The Perfect Match." Conversely, an initial, enthusiastic advocate of utilitarianism may recognize the theoretical limits of his or her position, or at least be compelled to strengthen it, after considering Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." In these and many other ways, we hope, this volume provides a valuable resource for those wishing to supplement their own teaching and research into the greatest political questions with the offerings of some of our greatest literary minds.

Of course, many of the points about teaching made here apply to fiction generally. So why privilege the short story? We are certainly not averse to incorporating, say, novels into teaching political theory courses. But, that said, the immediate and practical pedagogical advantages of using short stories are numerous. First, short stories, unlike novels are self-contained and can be read in a single sitting. Practically speaking, therefore, students are able to finish stories in a reasonable timeframe prior to organized class discussion. Second, and related, the plot of a short story is typically less complex than that of a novel. The short story allows more time to be spent discussing the assumptions, implication, and meaning of a story rather than the *minutiae* of its action. Third, the brevity of short stories allows teachers and students to focus on a finite set of themes, disciplining readers to spotlight specific issues and make relatively discrete comparisons between different works. Fourth, employing short stories in teaching allows an instructor to include a greater

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number of works and authors which, in turn, promotes greater diversity: in style, themes, structure, and ideology.

SHORT STORIES IN THE CLASSROOM

How should a person actually teach with *Short Stories and Political Philosophy*? In general, we anticipate that teachers can either use the volume as a background pedagogical resource (as an intellectual aid in preparing lectures and discussions) or as an assigned secondary text, that is, as a formal part of required course reading and study materials. In the former usage, we underscore an obvious point: while each of our chapters provides a stand-alone argument for how to situate a specific short story relative to important works of political philosophy, individual instructors will still need to reflect on how to use these tools in light of their students' specific needs and understanding. As Mitchell Cohen reminds us, "political stories cannot—and don't aim to—give us the fictional version of a political treatise."[4]

In its other capacity, as an assigned secondary text, *Short Stories and Political Philosophy* can serve as a supplemental reader for both undergraduate- and graduate-level classes in political theory. Over the course of this volume, our authors address both a wide range of ancient, modern, and contemporary thinkers, as well as engage a series of overarching and recurring debates and topics in political theory. These include such issues as social contract theory; deontological, consequential, and virtue ethics approaches to normative thought; political liberalism and its critics; epistemology and social science methodology; the nature and limits of rationality, and many others. In passing, we also note that, given the influences of many of our featured thinkers in fields extending beyond political science (areas such as sociology, literary studies, film studies, and others), this book and its chapters can certainly be adapted to many other contexts.

After considering the issue of whether to use this volume as a background resource or a classroom text, instructors will want to think through how they conceive of the relationship between our book and the primary philosophical texts they assign. Most straightforwardly, the preceding chapters (and their accompanying short stories) can be used to apply, probe, and point out shortcomings of individual, featured theorists. Thus, while Hale's chapter by no means plumbs the depths of Plato's *Symposium*, she uses Paolo Bacigalupi's "Pop Squad" to introduce students to the dialogue's treatment of the human desire for immortality. Similarly, Peabody draws on the tale "By the Waters of Babylon" to set out some of the major points in the political and social thought of Max Weber, while also surfacing unresolved questions that Weber, and the story, leave us with. Under these and comparable approaches

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throughout this volume, each political philosopher can be regarded as creating his or her own intellectual world; the short story serves as an entry point to understanding and evaluating this world and its limits. Such a focus on individual theorists will be especially attractive for broad survey and chronologically organized courses.

But this book also invites a second, more thematic orientation. Instead of concentrating on particular philosophers in a sequence, an instructor might instead use combinations of the chapters in this volume to explore major problems or grouped debates. In this regard, we can think of this book's referenced political philosophers as offering a series of different takes or prescriptions concerning more or less discrete concepts (why do we even need government?), trenchant challenges (what do we do about social and economic inequality?), and perceived human and social crises (is individual autonomy fundamentally compromised in modernity?). This volume is especially suited, for example, to a protracted discussion about the relationship between individual morality and the force of tradition, norms, and law. In some cases, the thinkers our contributors discuss are in explicit debate with one another on these topics; in other cases, we can coax them into this conversation with just a bit of imagination or license. *Short Stories and Political Philosophy* is conducive to teachers interested in finding these thematic links within and between chapters. For example, an instructor who wishes to engage questions about the nature (and limits) of modern liberalism could draw on Michels and McCranor's analysis of the role of art in an increasingly materialistic world, Nichols' examination of the tension between individual conscience and family loyalty, or Thompson's distinct ruminations about liberalism's prioritization of individual moral agency over the good of the community. Those interested in examining questions of structural injustice could draw on Dolgoy's discussion of ubiquitous technology, Sardo's investigation of political responsibility, or Trosky's concerns regarding global inequities.

These are simply a few of the ways the preceding chapters can be combined to better elucidate the conversations populating every course on political philosophy. Of course, the chapters in this volume are just a sample of the ways in which short stories can be incorporated into the classroom; our volume is illustrative not exhaustive. We are certain that readers will come up with distinctive connections between their own favorite works of fiction and select writings or ideas in the history of political thought.

While the authors of the short stories our contributors' highlight do not offer solutions, or even definite opinions, on the political challenges facing our society, they do offer a series of gateways for helping students become more nuanced, thoughtful, and attentive political actors and philosophic thinkers. We hope our readers pass through these gates, and leave this volume

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seeking, and finding, connections to political philosophy in every corner of the world.

NOTES

1. Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Religion and Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 281.

2. Christian Smith, *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 78–79.

3. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince,* trans. N. H. Thompson (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 21–22.

4. Mitchell Cohen, *Rebels and Reactionaries* (New York: Dell, 1992), xiv.

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