

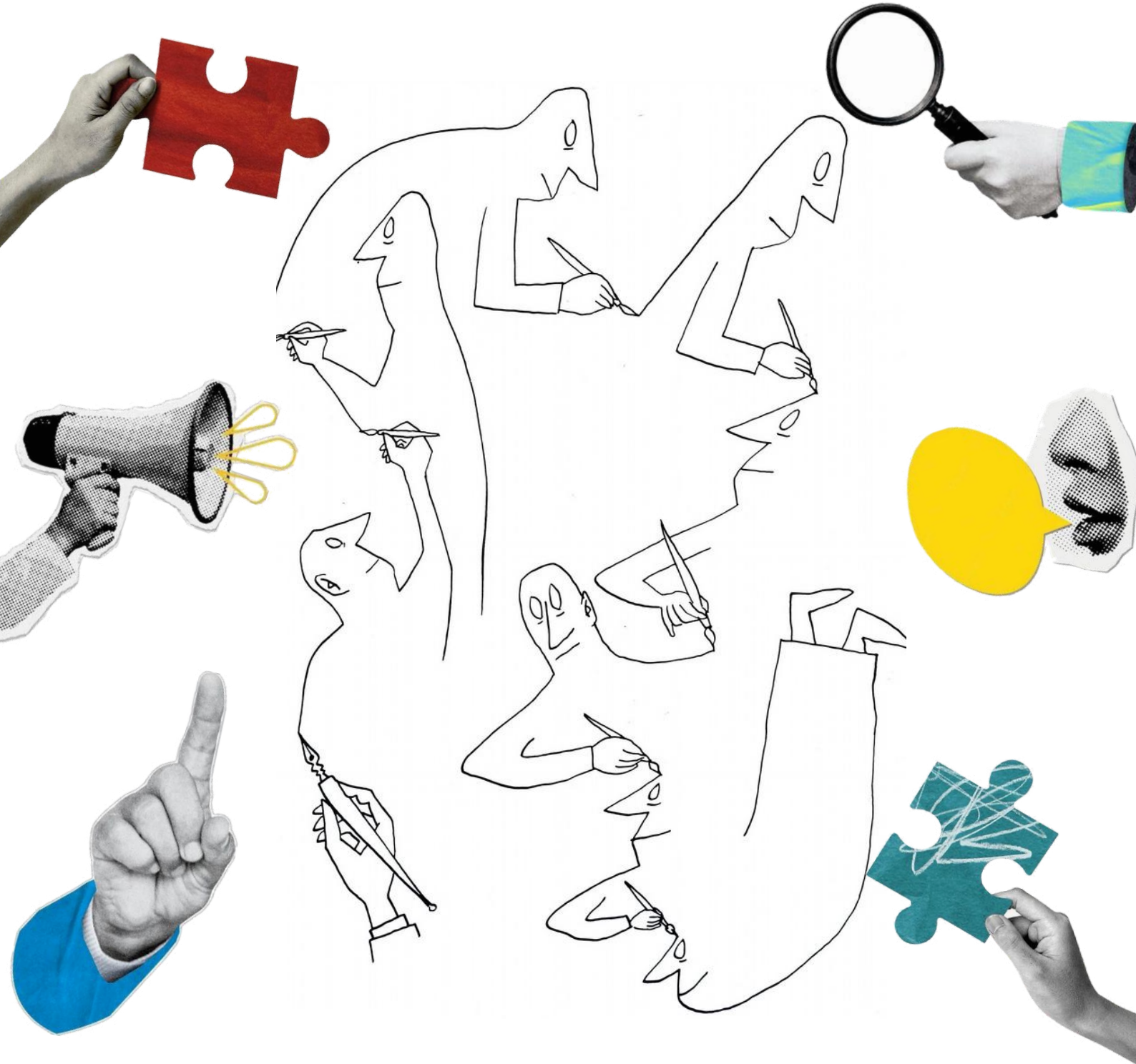
ISSUE 1 MAY/JUNE 2026



NEWSTEAD WOOD SCHOOL

KANT STOP

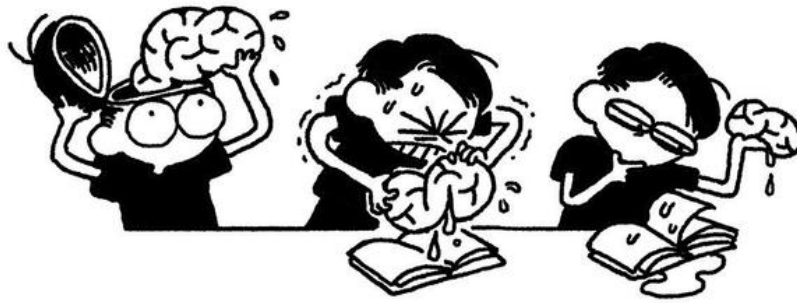
EXPLORING PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY AND ETHICS



ARTICLES ON: INFLUENCES ON HOW WE THINK, ACT AND BELIEVE; CONSIDERATIONS FOR A TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED FUTURE; CONFLICTING IDEOLOGIES BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT AND MORE

CONTENTS

- 01** Contents
- 03** Top 5 Philosophers
Xinyi L
- 05** Top Quotes
Lauren A
- 15** Upcoming Talks
Emma F
- 16** Website Recommendations
Xinyi L
- 17** Reading List and Watch List
Abigail O, Toni A and Xinyi L
- 19** Belief in God and Religion: Faith or fear?
Lauren A
- 25** Transhumanism: What does it mean for
traditional religion?
Xinyi L
- 29** Chappie: The Sentient Robot
Xinyi L
- 33** 'A Picture of Dorian Gray' is a Prophecy
of The Influencer Complex
Jasreet H



- 39** 'Moral Saints': a Susan Wolf Chapter Review
Isis S
- 41** The Pedlar: how art can teach us about theology.
Xinyi L
- 45** "Notes from the underground": Intellectualism and
Free Will
Toni A
- 51** Morality
Anna C
- 55** RPE Determinist Arguments in Regard to Law
Joy F
- 61** Nihilism
Hayley L
- 65** Is There a Moral Obligation to Push Oneself to the
Limit?
Sherine P
- 69** Voltaire & Rousseau: The Worst Couple
of the Enlightenment Period
Valen W
- 74** The Illuminati
Zara V
- 76** Credits

TOP 5 PHILOSOPHERS

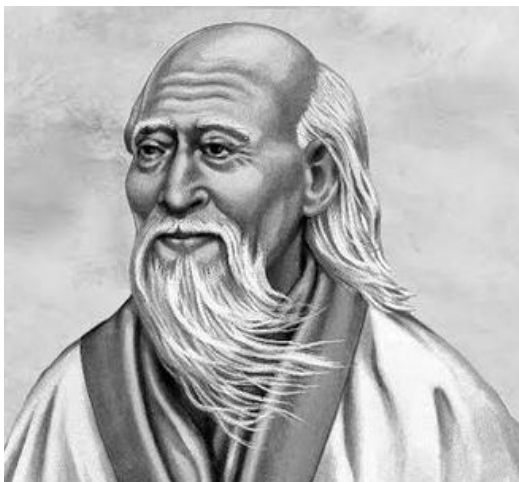
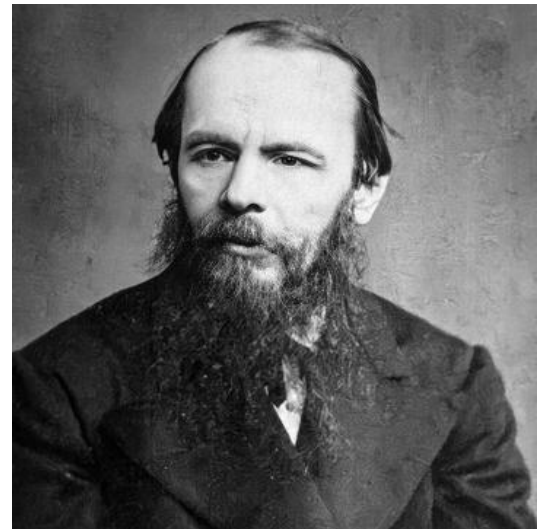
By Xinyi L

For this edition our team have selected five philosophers to spotlight, whose ideas continue to shape how we think about existence, morality and the human condition. In this section we will be exploring Descartes, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Laozi and Judith Jarvis Thomson, read ahead to find out more about these great thinkers.



Judith Jarvis Thomson (1929-2020) was an American philosopher who worked on ethics and metaphysics, she has been named one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century from MIT philosophy for her defence of abortion rights combining philosophical rigour with political engagement, her arguments eventually led to the Supreme Court ruling in favour of Roe V Wade. She also introduced the Violinist thought experiment to contribute to the debate, of offering your kidney to a world-famous violinist.

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) is regarded as one of the greatest novelists in Russian and world literature. As a philosopher, writer, essayist and journalist he explored human freedom, morality and the search for meaning in a world without God. He argued that true human dignity requires free will - even if it led to irrationality or suffering. His novels grapple with the internal conflicts of his characters through the lenses of existentialism. At the core of his narratives lies a tension between rationalism and irrationalism, faith and nihilism, individual and collective identity.

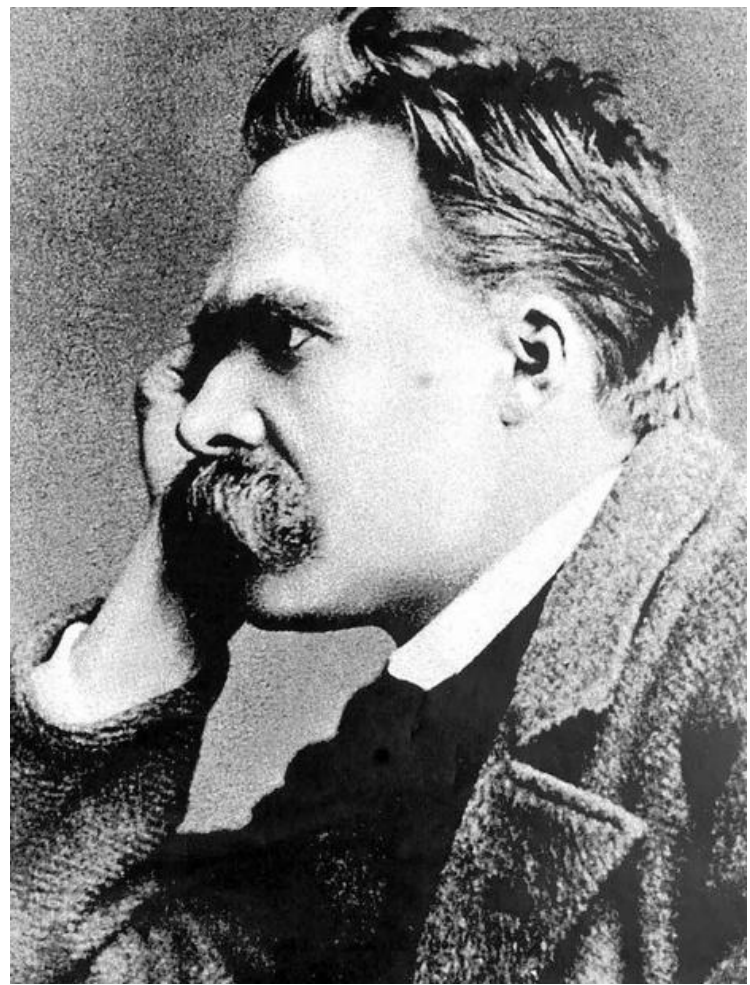


Laozi (571 -?) was a Chinese philosopher who wrote the Dao De Jing, one of the foundational texts of Daoism, advocating for a way of life that aligns with the natural rhythms of the universe (the Dao, an ultimate ineffable principle that underlies and governs the universe). He championed the minimal government approach to political philosophy, criticising authoritarianism and complex laws. The ideal leader for Laozi should largely be envious to the people acting as a steward rather than a master.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

(1844-1900)

Nietzsche is most well-known for his profound critique of traditional Western morality, religion and philosophy. Mainly referred to as 'existentialism', his philosophy focuses on man's existential situation, inspired by Greek tragedy, Arthur Schopenhauer, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Richard Wagner. He famously proclaimed 'God is Dead' and introduced concepts such as the Übermensch (overman) with their own values rising above 'herd morality' and 'Amor Fati,' an acceptance and love of one's life. His philosophical works have profoundly influenced 20th century existentialism, philosophy, literature and art.



“Cogito, ergo sum”

RENÉ DESCARTES

(1596-1650)



Descartes has often been called the father of modern philosophy, born in 1596, he was a French philosopher, scientist, logician and mathematician who refused to accept the authority of previous philosophers. His best-known philosophical statement is “cogito ergo sum,” (“I think therefore I am,”) establishing the act of doubting one's own existence as proof of the thinker's own existence, this statement, focusing on the certainty of individual consciousness in the 'mind-body problem', still drives modern debate in both philosophy and psychology today.

TOP QUOTES

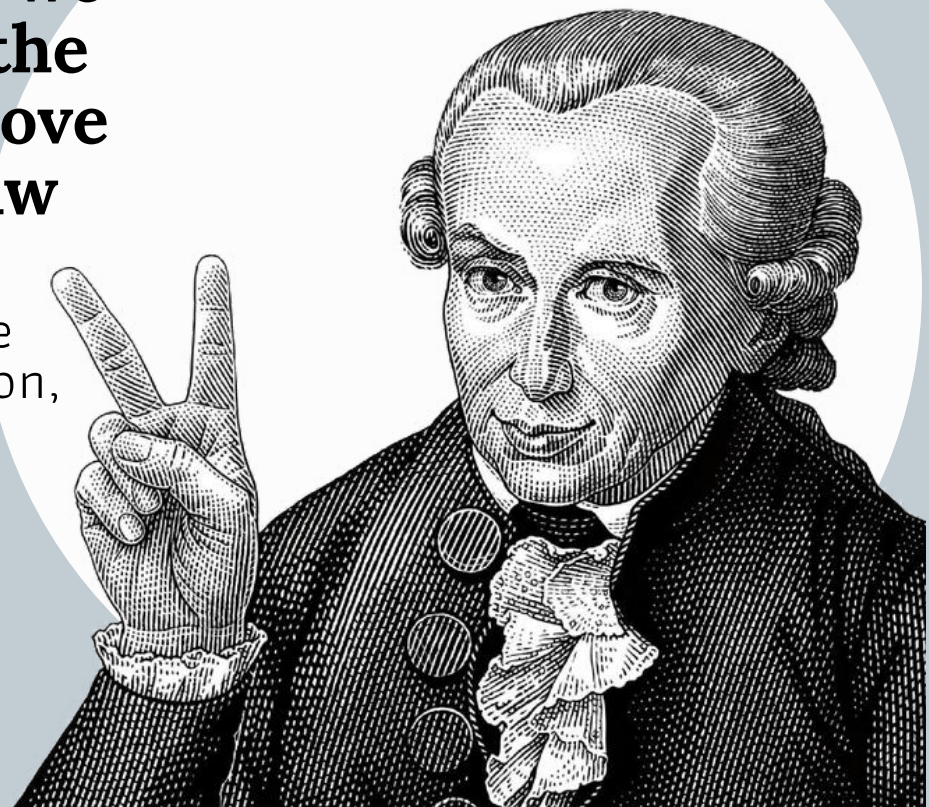
By Lauren A

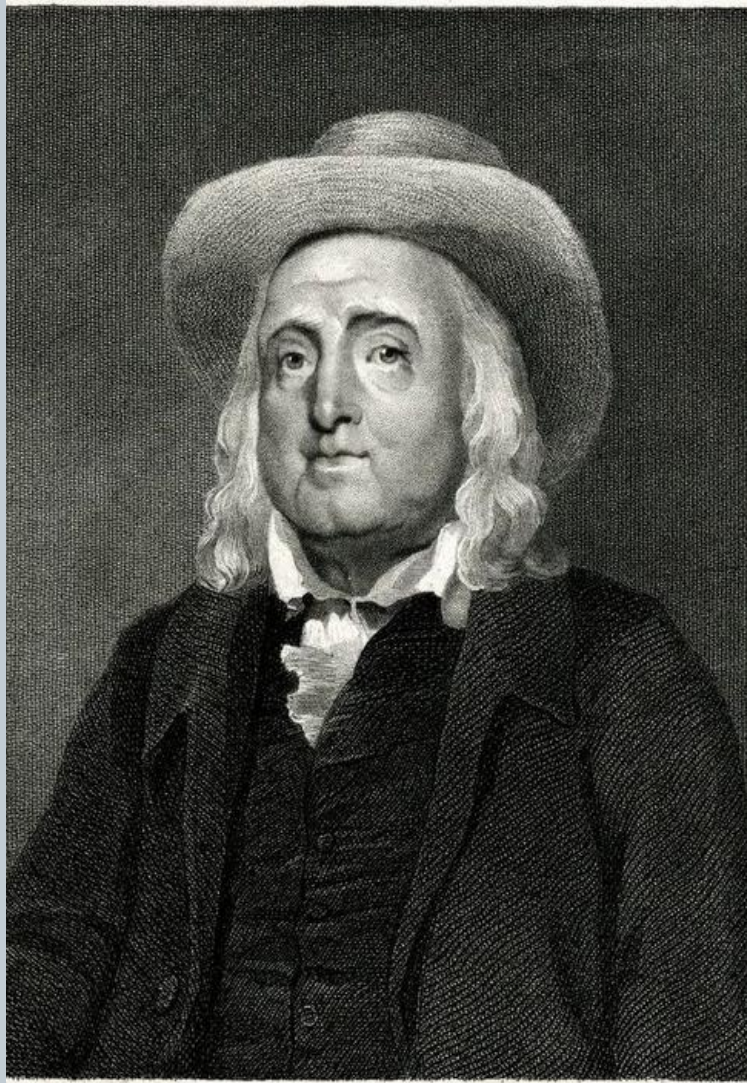
In Steinbeck's 'East of Eden,' the character of Lee says, "Any writing which has influenced the thinking and the lives of innumerable people is important." Many philosophers, theologians and thinkers say many influential things that have had a significant impact on the study of Religion, Philosophy and Ethics and have ultimately changed the course of how people think about them, as well as also changing lives. Here are some top quotes from thinkers that offer their different and perhaps a bit drastic perspectives and interpretations on the subject.

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above and the moral law within.”

Immanuel Kant [The Critique of Pure Reason, 1788]

In his deontological theory of 'Kantian Ethics', Kant emphasises the importance of using reason to come to moral conclusion. This in turn would help us to act according to duty which we must always adhere to. In this quote Kant shows us that we can naturally come to moral conclusions as reason is inherent within us.





“Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure.”-

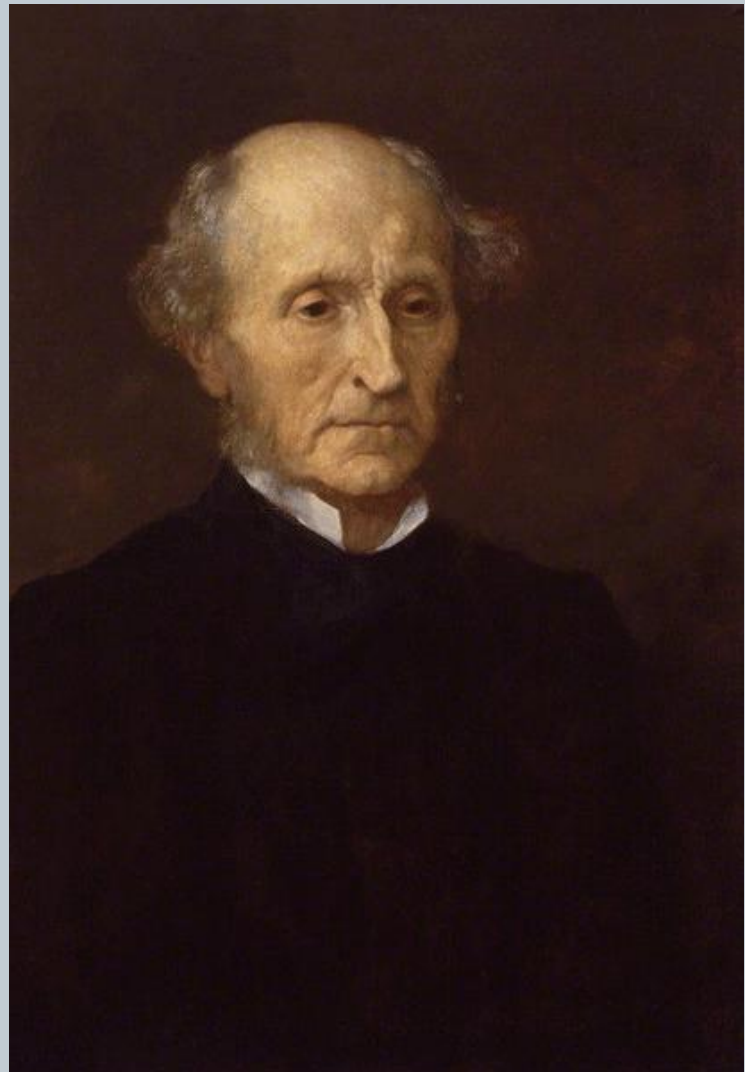
Jeremy Bentham [An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, 1789]

In his consequential ethical theory of ‘Act Utilitarianism,’ Jeremy Bentham argues that we should always seek to maximise pleasure for the most people. This is because, as the quote says, as humans, we are subject to emotions and they rule our lives. The emotions, pain and pleasure, are the strongest and therefore all moral decisions should also be subject to these two emotions.

“Better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied...better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.”

John Stuart Mill
[Utilitarianism, 1863]

In his ethical theory of ‘Rule Utilitarianism,’ Mill argues for the idea of higher and lower pleasures. Though pleasure should still be pursued, he encourages us to reflect on the quality of the pleasures we are indulging in. Perhaps, reading philosophy would be a better pleasurable endeavour than eating a slice of cake!



In the study of Natural Moral Law, Aquinas emphasises the importance of an unwavering natural law based on mankind's natural inclinations. Though writing at a time prior to Aquinas, Cicero would agree with him and his natural law. Furthermore, Cicero believed that divine providence governed and ordered the universe, reinforcing the idea that the law, the natural law, was unchangeable and not subject to change based on relative locations

**“There will not be one law at Rome,
another at Athens, one now,
another later, but one law both
everlasting and unchangeable will
encompass all nations and for all
time”**

Cicero, Roman philosopher and
politician, 106BCE - 43BCE






“If love is perfect then freedom is a good thing. But if there is no love, or if there is not enough love, then freedom can become license, freedom can become selfishness and even cruelty“

William Barclay [Ethics in A Permissive Society, 1971]

In response to Joseph Fletcher’s ethical theory of situation ethics which emphasises the importance of agape love, Barclay argues that acting with love may not always be a good thing. The wrong intention or the freedom that love gives can cause it to become dangerous.



“Life without reason and morality has no value”

Immanuel Kant

“Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau
[The Social Contract,
1762]

This quote from Rousseau shows the dichotomy between the natural state of human beings, ultimately being wild and free, and the building of societal constructs; the need to live in an ordered society and a civilised life contrasts with true human nature. Our obligation to adhere to rules, as we live in a society with protection from the state causes us to be trapped or chained. This links to Rousseau’s famous concept of the ‘noble savage’ where he argues that humans are inherently good in their natural state, but civilisation causes them to act evil.

**“A depraved soul,
falling away from
security in thee to
destruction in itself,
seeking nothing from
the shameful deed but
shame itself.”**

**“I become to myself a
barren land.”**

St. Augustine
[Confessions]

**“Satan, the eternal
rebel, the first
freethinker and the
emancipator of
worlds.”**

Bakunin [God and the
State]

Though we normally see Satan as a villain, Bakunin offers a different approach to how we should view him. Instead of blindly submitting to God for the rest of eternity, Satan encouraged Adam and Eve to be free from this and to use their reason to act against God. Satan is therefore seen, by Bakunin, as a symbol of liberation, as he encouraged humans to use their free will to pursue knowledge, even though God had specifically told them not to.



These quotes from Augustine show how dramatic he was. You would think that he committed the most heinous crimes for the way that he describes himself, but really, he just stole some pears from an orchard with his friends for the fun of it, when he was a teenager. We could all agree that Augustine may be taking the consequences of the act too far but actually he touches on a deeper issue - pure sin - stemming from the original sin inherent within us. Sinning for the sake of sinning. This was a serious issue for Augustine- no wonder he was so dramatic...

A man who was studying archery took two arrows in his hand and stood before the target. ‘A beginner should not hold two arrows,’ his teacher told him. ‘You will be careless with the first, knowing you have a second. You must always be determined to hit the target with the single arrow you shoot, and have no thought beyond this.’ With only two arrows, and standing before his master, would he really be inclined to be slapdash with one of them? Yet although he may not have been aware of his own carelessness, his teacher was. The same injunction surely applies in all matters.

A man engaged in Buddhist practice will tell himself, at night that there is always the morning, or in the morning will anticipate the night, always intending to make more effort later. And if such are your days, how much less aware must you be of the passing moment’s indolence. Why should it be so difficult to carry something out right now when you think of it, to seize the instant?”

Yoshida Kenko [A Cup of Sake Beneath The Cherry
Trees]



**“So why call her bad?
From her kings are
born”**

Guru Granth Sahib

**“I believe to think, not
think to believe”**

St Anselm [Proslogion,
1077-78]

**“Lex injusta non est
lex”**

**(an unjust law is no
law at all)**

Thomas Aquinas [Summa
Theologiae, 1265-74]

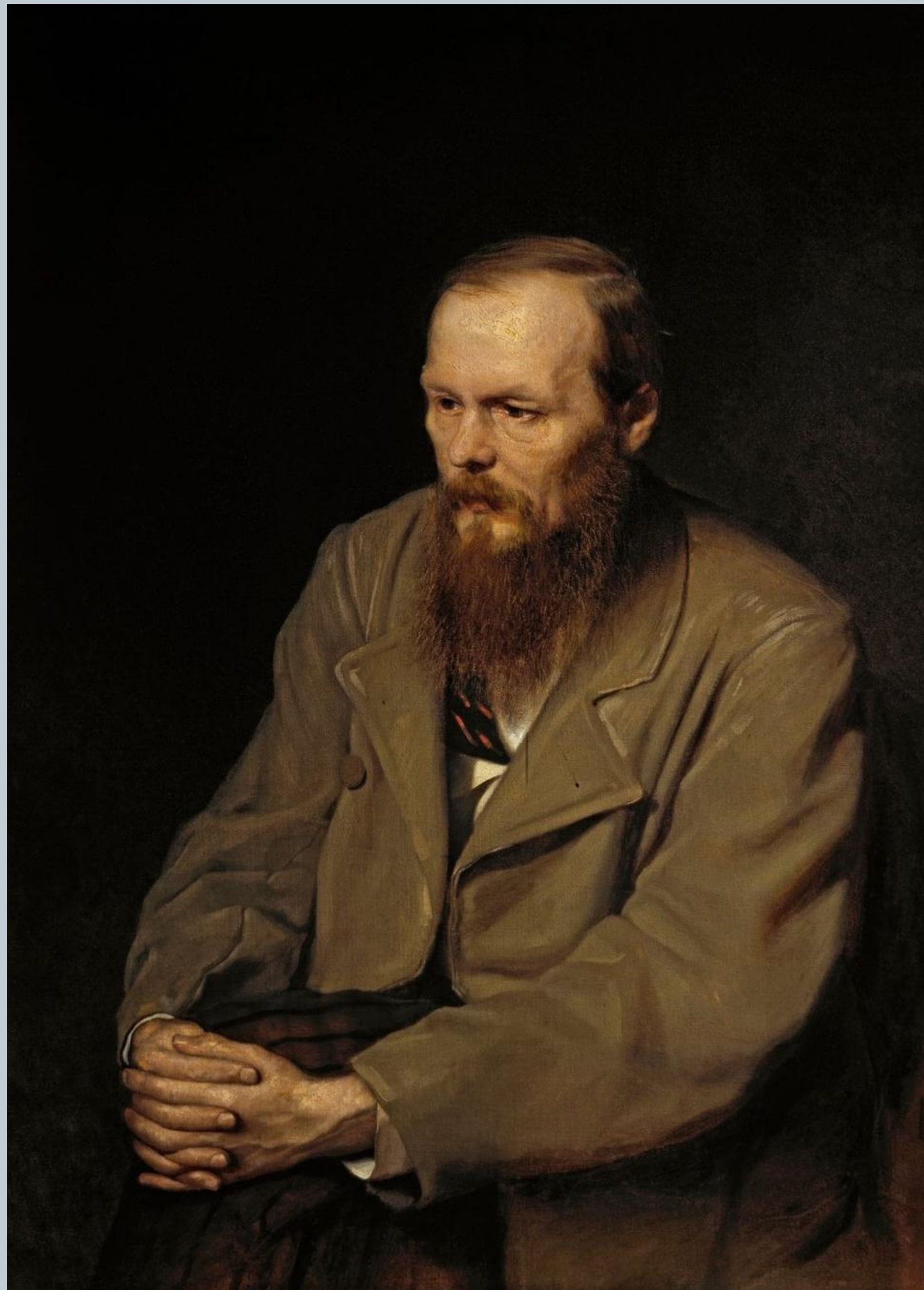
**“Whoever sheds the
blood of man by man
shall his blood be
shed”**

Genesis 9:6

**“What has made them
conceive that man
must want a
rationally
advantageous choice?
What man simply
wants is independent
choice, whatever that
independence may
cost and wherever it
may lead.”**

Fyodor Dostoevsky [Notes
from Underground, 1864]

Toni A: My interpretation of this was that so many philosophers, like Kant, like Aquinas, have venerated reason above all else and insisted that we must follow the most logical and reasonable path of action in every possible instance. Dostoevsky (through the Underground Man) subsequently launches a critique of the culture created by the Enlightenment, in which this endless pursuit of reason results in a strangely deterministic society; scientists claim to be able to predict the actions of large masses of people and some even aspire to be able to individually predict each human action. Thus through this quote Dostoevsky mounts a strong criticism of the uptick of determinist philosophies claiming to know what is most beneficial for all humans- specialists can give people "advantages" that allow them to own property and predict their actions etc., but the human will -human free will - wants to reassert itself over anything else because it is an undeniable part of human nature.



TEACHERS'

FAVOURITE QUOTES

MS KARMOCK-GOLDS':

“Don’t you see?” he cried. “The American Standard translation orders men to triumph over sin, and you can call sin ignorance. The King James translation makes a promise in ‘Thou shalt,’ meaning that men will surely triumph over sin. But the Hebrew word, the word timshel— ‘Thou mayest’—that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man. For if ‘Thou mayest’—it is also true that ‘Thou mayest not.’ Don’t you see?”

John Steinbeck [East of Eden, 1952]

This passage from Steinbeck’s ‘East of Eden’ signifies the importance of individual choice in decision-making. The Hebrew word ‘timshel’ translating to ‘thou mayest’ is a nice reminder that every human action is a choice. A choice to choose between good and evil. When you make a choice, you have the freedom to also not make that choice. It emphasises human accountability in decision-making. Further, it also offers a more optimistic interpretation of the Genesis account - Adam and Eve were not always predestined or doomed to sin, they chose to sin, but we too have the choice - to choose the good.

MR STONESTREET'S:

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is a fighting a hard battle”

Socrates / Iain Maclaren

This quote encourages people to look at the bigger picture and how kindness is always needed as you never know what someone is going through.

MISS SMITH'S:

“I think, therefore I am”

Rene Descartes

This famous existential quote from philosopher Descartes conveys that existence of a thinking being must be a necessary truth due to the ability to think of anything, let alone think of or question their own existence.

MS ROCHESTER'S:

‘Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not every man's greed’

Mahatma Gandhi

This quote from Gandhi criticises the modern problem of consumerism and how man places more importance on material things, leading to greed.

MS RICKETTS':

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthen me”

Philippians 4:13

This bible verse is used as a message of hope for Christian believers and can be helpful in times of trouble to be guided by Jesus.

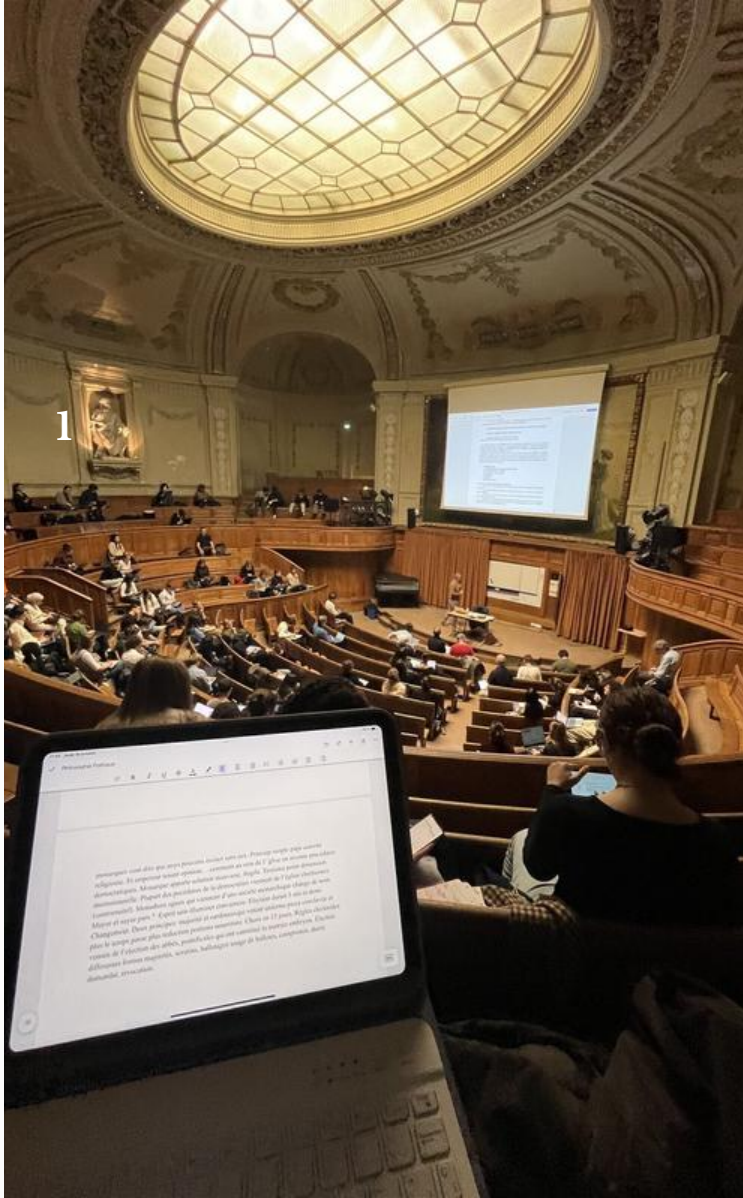


Thank you to Lauren for collecting these quotes and everyone else who contributed to this top quotes list! If you have a quote you would like to share with your peers and teachers feel free to email 20lengx@newsteadwood.co.uk so that your quote will be included in the next edition of the Newstead RPE journal!

UPCOMING TALKS

By Emma F

If you're interested in the diverse fields of philosophy, theology and ethics here are some upcoming talks you might want to check out to further your interests and understanding.



1 LAWS, ETHICS AND JUSTICE SEMINAR

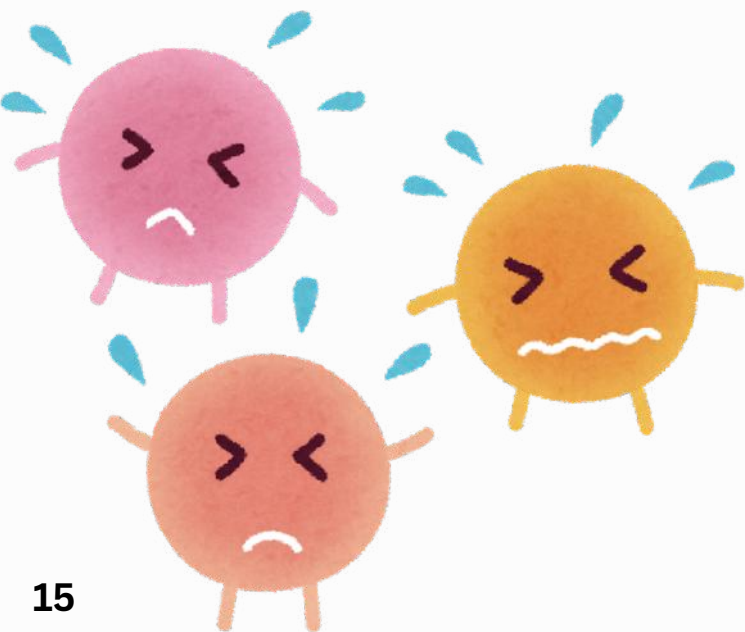
02/June, LSE

[<https://www.lse.ac.uk/philosophy/events/upcoming-events/law-ethics-and-justice-seminar-by-thomas-sinclair-university-of-oxford>]

2 WILLIAM BLAKE: THE CHRISTIAN MYSTIC WHO SPEAKS TO US NOW

20/June Westminster Abbey

[<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/events/koinonia-lectures>]



Thank you to Emma for finding all these talks for the journal, if you have any upcoming talks or competitions please let 20lengx@newsteadwood.co.uk know for the next edition.

WEBSITES TO CHECK OUT

With the widely accessible internet, there are many websites and online journals out there available for you to research or maybe even stumble into a new sub-topic of RPE you might be interested in. Here are some websites you might want to check out (in no particular order)!

1 STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY

Plato.stanford.edu

This online encyclopedia of philosophy organises scholars worldwide and related disciplines to create and maintain an up-to-date reference work.

2 THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY

Royalinstitutephilosophy.org

The royal institute of philosophy has a list of events, publications, outreach and holds an annual philosophy competition called the Think Essay Prize (closed at point of publication).

3 PHILOSOPHY COMPASS

Compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com

Philosophy compass is an online journal with the mission to provide peer-reviewed summaries of current topical and significant research and covers a wide variety of topics updated on a monthly basis.

4 INTERNET ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY

Ito.utm.edu

Similar to SEP, this is a peer-reviewed academic resource offering a database of different philosophical research and scholars to the wider internet.

5 THE SECULAR WEB

Infidels.org

The Secular web is owned and operated by Internet Infidels and is dedicated to promoting and defending a naturalistic worldview on the internet.

6 OPEN CULTURE

Openculture.com

This website offers 135 free philosophy ebooks from Aristotle to Wittgenstein and many other philosophers available to read on all devices including kindles. As well as free online philosophy courses, although not exactly an RPE website it provides many free resources

7 HISTORY OF WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS AND SCIENTISTS

Historyofwomenphilosophers.org

This website celebrates the past, present and future women in RPE and has both documentation of the past, a newsletter and courses.

8 A-LEVEL PHILOSOPHY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES

a-levelphilosophyandreligion.com

Even if you're not taking a-level RPE this is a great resource in developing your interests, it touches on possible exam questions and looks at the analysis of different concepts.

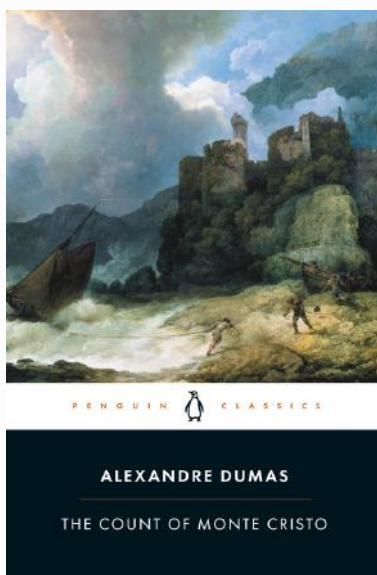
9 PHILPAPERS

Philpapers.org

Philpapers is an index and bibliography of philosophy including journals, books and open access archives.

READING LIST

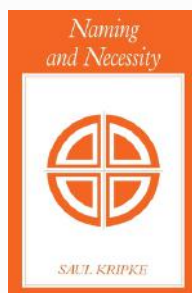
By Abigail O and Toni A



The Count of Monte Cristo follows the misadventures of Edmond Dantès, a sailor who is wrongly imprisoned, as he is on the cusp of achieving all he ever wanted in life. It is a story that explores themes of vengeance, grudges and what gives value to life, as well as those of friendship and betrayal. It aims to answer one question - what do you do when you have the world's riches at your disposal under the cover of anonymity? Reminiscent of a twisted version of the thought experiment the Ring of Ganges (if you wore a ring that made you invisible and undetectable, what would you do?), this book questions the motives behind revenge and to what lengths one should go to achieve it. Recommended for age 15+.



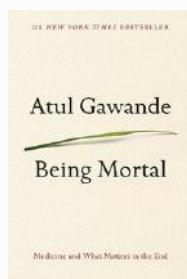
A Man With a White Shadow by Vikram Suryawanshi is a fiction book that revolves around one of the sons of God (Ganesha) who is disillusioned with the way humans live their lives and 3 humans with contrasting worldviews as they strive to achieve their goals. The book explores how our values are shaped by our influences, the complexities of our existence and whether our destinies are decided before we're even born.



Naming and Necessity by Saul Kripke is a series of lectures around how language is used to describe objects, the nature of identity and whether essential properties exist, while deconstructing descriptivist arguments.



Think by Simon Blackburn, as the name suggests is an introduction into the key ideas of philosophy, covering numerous topics from the philosophy of knowledge to free will and the works of Western philosophers hunch as Descartes in an easily understandable format for beginners.



Being Mortal, by Atul Gawande, focuses on the ethics surrounding modern medicine through the experiences of the author, and what the most humane model of human care is.

WATCH LIST

By Toni A and Xinyi L

YouTube channels and series:

- Unsolicited Advice
 - Explainer videos on the ideologies, major themes, context and the works of many notable philosophers.
- Within Reason (podcast)
 - Interviews with celebrity personalities and modern-day academic philosophers; more to uncover personal views and interpretations of scholars and pop-philosophy.
- Crash Course Philosophy
 - Simplified versions of foundational ideas across religion, philosophy and ethics. Length < 10 minutes
- Big Think
 - Wide-ranging, in-depth videos exploring philosophical aspects of music, language, film etc. Also occasionally features contemporary philosophers.



Japanese film studio Ghibli's movies are anchored in a non-human centric philosophy of the symbiotic coexistence we, as humans, have with our natural environment, the stewardship we have as well as the nuanced complexities of the human condition. Castle in the Sky specifically explores human nature by contrasting our destructive lust for power and technological hubris with our capacity for empathy and harmony with nature. The floating city of Laputa serves as a mirror for humanity, capable of utopian beauty but also devastating mass destruction.



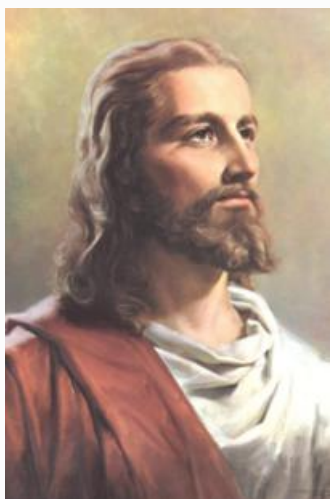
Ridley Scott's 1982 sci-film Blade Runner based on Philip K. Dick's novel 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep' explores the profound questions of human and personal identity. By contrasting bio-engineered replicants with apathetic, alienated humans, Blade Runner forces us to reconsider what it truly means to be human, whether it's biology alone that defines us or the empathy and lived experience we have. The film also critiques societies which commodify sentient life as we see 'non-human' (sentient) replicants being used as property or tools to be discarded. This film has a 15+ age rating.

BELIEF IN GOD AND RELIGION

Faith or Fear?

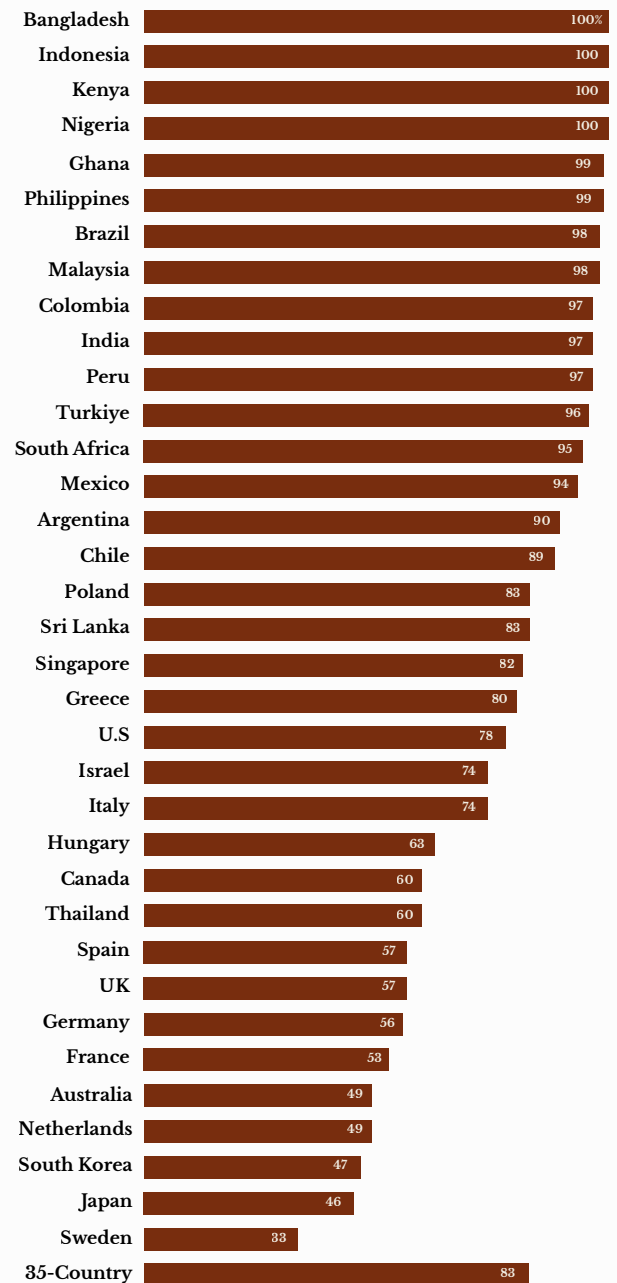
By Lauren A

According to surveys conducted by the Pew Research Centre, 75.8% of people identified with a religion or as religious in 2020 and 83% of people (a median of the percentages of 35 countries) are said to believe in a God. Belief in God is more common in certain parts of the world such as Indonesia. They have a score of 100% of adults that believe in God whereas places such as the UK only have a score of 57%. Sparked by a discussion in an RPE lesson the thought entered my mind that belief in God and religion is not as black and white as it may seem. Though the question “Do you believe in God?” can only seem to have two answers, I would argue that there are multiple factors at play which are explanations for people’s belief in a divine entity or, even, their



lack of belief. One solid explanation, would of course, be steadfastness in faith - driven by devotion to God and strong belief derived by religious or even

Majorities around world belief in God -% who say they believe in God



Source: Spring 2024: Global Attitudes Survey. Survey of U.S adults conducted July 31-Aug. 6, 2023. “Believing in Spirits and Life After Death is Common Around the World”
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

life experiences. However, it could also be argued that another reason for belief in God could be fear. Fear covers a multitude of factors. Fear of the repercussions of not abiding to deontological ways of life, which Kant and Aquinas endorse, or fear of death and the afterlife, or fear of the unknown and humans seeking comfort which Freud explores.

What this article is aiming to explore is that religious and theistic belief cannot be explained solely by one or two factors but rather must consider a multitude, which can even overlap presenting religion as a complex but interesting concept. Why is it that some people are steadfast and have strong and unwavering belief in God while others struggle to do so? In the surveys conducted by the Pew Research Centre, the countries with a high percentage of adults that believe in God are countries such as Bangladesh (100), Kenya (100), India (97) etc. These are all LDC's- least developed countries (according to the United Nations) and I would expect that these countries would have a low belief in God. 62 million, 20 million and 80 million people live in poverty in these countries, respectively. Furthermore, environmental disasters such as flooding, connoting natural evil, and political unrest showing moral evil may convey that it would be hard to believe in a God that allows this to occur and we would not blame them for it. So then, why would they have such a high percentage of adults having a belief in God? Unconventionally, it could exactly be due to their suffering. The experiences of some of these civilians in these countries resulting in a low quality of life could actually galvanise their hope for a better future, whether that be in an afterlife or here on earth. They may then essentially posit that an unadulterated faith in a divine entity as being the only reason that

could provide them with the possibility of a better future. From a Christian perspective, in the Bible, we see St Paul who traversed across places such as Rome, Phillipi and Thessalonica sharing his strong faith, despite suffering and persecution. In Romans 5: 3-5, he writes:

“We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance; character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”



St Paul explores the idea that suffering can emphasise God’s benevolence during times of trial which allows people to grow spiritually.

Rather than dampen faith in God, it amplifies it. He even goes on to “boast” about his sufferings. Though people in Bangladesh, Kenya and India may not share the same Christian ideas of thinking and beliefs, I would argue the same logic could apply to them as well and would explain their belief in God, as many of them are still steadfast in suffering. In this modern day and age, many people’s life experiences are endured through their faith in a divine entity, choosing to access a lifeline of hope in a chaotic world. Therefore, a reason for belief on God could just be solely faith built upon encountering God in a multitude of ways.

Could belief in a God also be the result of fear? I would make the assumption that even one person that has declared themselves an atheist or an agnostic to have had at least a few moments of doubt and possibly think that there is a possibility of there being a God. They may be plagued with the question, “But what if?” At times where miracles are experienced and are just shrugged off as mere coincidences or the feelings of when all is lost but a tinge of hope emerges, it could be argued that the ‘mere coincidence’ or the ‘tinge of hope’ would have greater value when linked to a supremely divine being (God) and this is why faith is important to



people and they turn to God. But the question, “What if?” may also invite fear. What if God is real, and I do not believe in Him or His teachings- what will happen?

“What if?”

Deontological ways of thinking can hinder our lives, rather than help, and send us into fear as the consequences of not abiding by deontological rules are too costly. Immanuel Kant offers us the ‘Categorical Imperative’ in which he says that in moral situations we should always act according to our reason and therefore always act by ‘duty for



duty’s sake.’ This is in order to achieve the ‘summum bonum’ or the ‘highest good.’ Kant’s deontological ethics are logical,



I mean, if we have the capacity to reason well, why would we not use it? Kant also postulates that as there is an immutable moral law, there must be a moral law giver, which is God, and this makes the moral law more meaningful. Thomas Aquinas, too, with his deontological theory of Natural Moral Law, highlights the importance of following the natural law in order to serve a higher purpose or 'telos' which is the Beatific Vision, essentially union with God. However, in this modern age, abiding by duty or abiding by the reasoned out moral law constantly can be dreary and mundane. Further, Kant places strong emphasis on having the right intention, though you may be acting according to duty, it is void if the intention is wrong. St Augustine argues that we are tainted and "corrupted" by "original sin" - so how can we ever truly have the right intention? Or how can we act according to the natural law in every single circumstance if we are inherently evil? This links to fear as a reason for belief in God as people may only adhere to deontological ways of thinking based off the fear



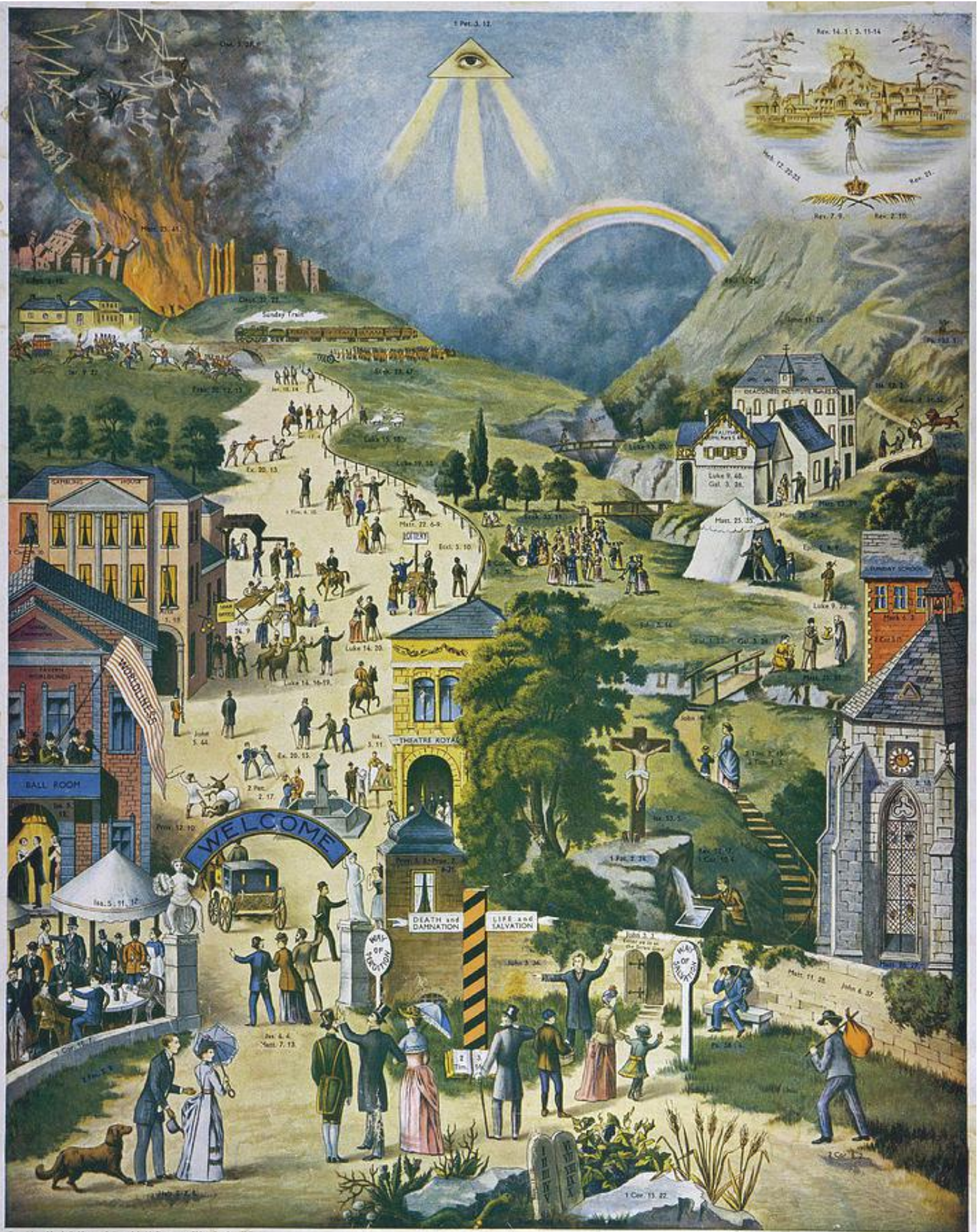
of repercussions or consequences of not doing so. If you live a life where you do not abide by natural law or do not use your reason as Kant would advise you to, then there can be no union with God, or you may not be able to achieve the summum bonum. Following a deontological life can cause you to fall into a trap of not acting with the right intention (looking at consequences rather than reason) or to blindly follow rules. People are not choosing out of free will to believe and have faith in God - the moral law giver - or to act according to duty, not because they should but because they feel as though they must. Do people then become slaves to obligation to believe in a God because they should and not because they are voluntarily choosing to do so? Dr Wayne Dyer says:

"If you are living out of a sense of obligation you are a slave." This would show that belief in God is based on fear of consequences, such as being sent to hell, not actually out of love for God and religion.

Fear of death can again cause “what ifs” to circulate in people’s minds. What if I have not done enough to enter heaven? What if I have not repented all my sins? What if I do not believe in a God- where will I go? In the Bible, Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.” It is simple then really, accept Jesus and there is no need to fear death. Then again, it is not that simple. If you are not a Christian, are you then eternally doomed? This may be the question that people may pose in response to Jesus’ words. However, in turn, this may also cause people to turn to Jesus, Christianity, and God superficially and with no foundation of genuine belief but just because they want to secure their place in the afterlife. They believe, for the sake of being lulled into a false sense of security, they no longer need to worry about life after death – it is all sorted. This reassurance that faith in God offers them, this ‘just in case’ could be because their belief is built on the culmination of fear and not genuine faith in God. Obviously, this is not applicable to everyone, but I would argue that fear of death does play a role in some people’s reasons for believing in God. As humans, we all want comfort and security, and the concept of death and the afterlife can send us into an existential crisis. Sigmund Freud in his book, ‘The Future of an Illusion’, argues that religious experiences were caused by a mechanism called ‘wish fulfilment’.

This is when unfulfilled desires invade our conscious mind from our unconscious mind - leading to the famous ‘Freudian Slip’. Religious experiences or religious belief can stem from humans’ unconscious desire for comfort, and this causes them to turn to God (a divine parental figure). Though I would argue that Freud’s reasoning and conclusions are far-fetched, and I personally would not agree with them, he manages to provide psychological reasons for religious belief. To make further links, it would be an explanation as to why many believers refer to God as ‘Father’ in religious traditions such as Christianity.

To conclude, ultimately, this article was written to explore the vast variety of reasons that people have for believing in God, but it is not up to us to decide whose faith is genuine and whose is not. Though, many people’s beliefs are rooted in faith, others may not be and may have other reasons for believing in God - security, for example, in a chaotic world. All factors leading to belief in God are part of what makes us human and there is no right or wrong answer. Further, faith and fear are not mutually exclusive. In complex ideas such as religion, it would be expected that there are many factors that overlap and simultaneously play a role in the reasons for people’s beliefs.



"The Broad and Narrow Way" c.1900 by Mary Evan's



TRANSHUMANISM

What does it mean for traditional religion?

By Xinyi L

In 1999, futurist Max More had published his 'A Letter to Mother Nature', a seminal text written from the collective voice of humanity – Mother Nature's "ambitious human offspring," in which he proposed 7 amendments for the human constitution in response to Nature's infliction of suffering on humanity. More's amendments include using

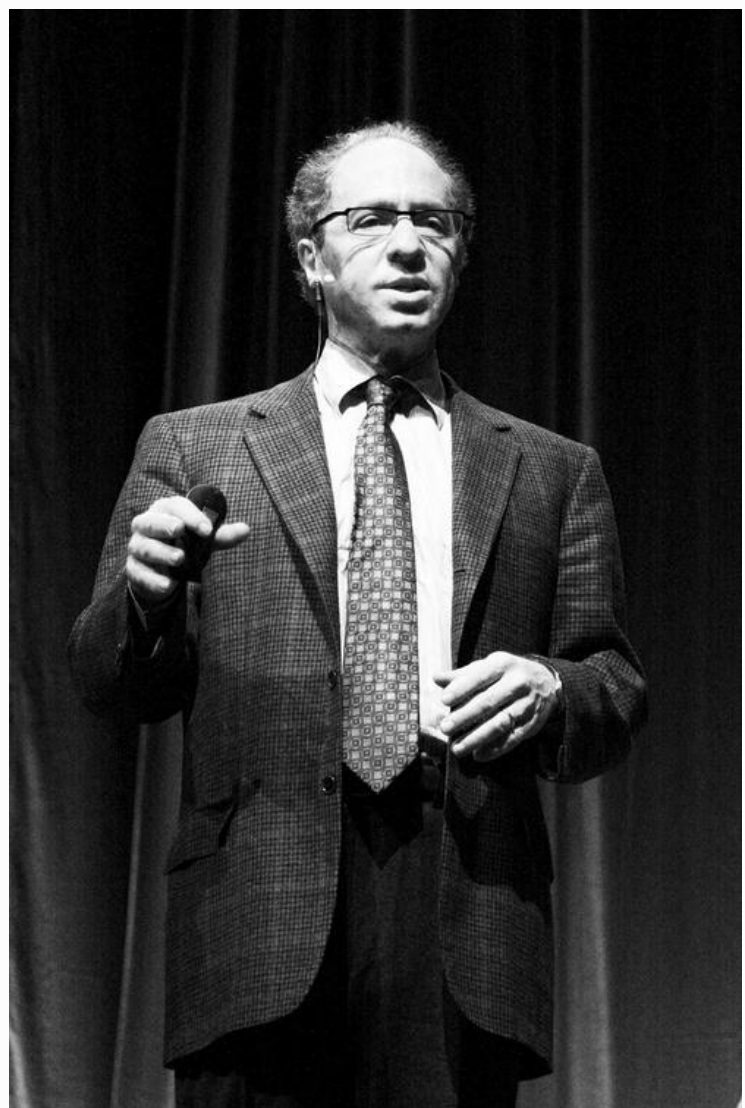
genetic alterations, cellular manipulations and synthetic organs to decide how long we can live; expanding human abilities through "biotechnological and computational means," using a 'meta brain' to increase self-awareness and modulation of emotions, thus liberating the limited human capacity which results from humans

“WHAT YOU HAVE MADE US IS GLORIOUS YET DEEPLY FLAWED. YOU SEEM TO HAVE LOST INTEREST IN OUR FURTHER EVOLUTION SOME 100,000 YEARS AGO. OR PERHAPS YOU HAVE BEEN BIDDING YOUR TIME, WAITING FOR US TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP OURSELVES. EITHER WAY, WE HAVE REACHED OUR CHILDHOOD’S END. WE HAVE DECIDED THAT IT IS TIME TO AMEND THE HUMAN CONSTITUTION.”

remaining purely biological. His letter serves as a testament of the aims of the new secular Transhumanist movement, defined by its advocacy for enhancing the human condition through the use of technology to reach the ultimate goal of evolving humanity into a new epoch, in Ray Kurzweil's view: a sixth epoch "where our intelligence spreads throughout the universe, turning ordinary matter into a computronium."^[1]

Kurzweil, like many Transhumanists believe in a neo-salvific event called the 'Singularity' where the further advancement of technology allows for humanity to merge with technology and experience a radical shift in intelligence and capability.

In 2013, professor of Systematic Theology, Wesley J. Smith published an article called 'The Materialists' Rapture'^[2] calling the new philosophical and scientific movement of Transhumanism as "the kind of hope... within the exclusive province of faith and without the humbling concept of an omnipotent God." — and although the movement does not have its own religious scripture nor moral codes and scripture they share a belief in an eschatological end, much like the Christian rapture, with both being projected to occur at a specific time and eventually leading



to the final defeat of death and usher in a new 'glorified' human race — "This is where Transhumanism becomes truly eschatological." Many theologians like Smith saw Transhumanism as a substitute or a new form of religion within our contemporary scientifically advanced society, however Transhumanists themselves argue otherwise. In his journey to explore the ideas of Transhumanism Mark O'Connell (retold in his book "To Be a Machine") encounters many followers who consider themselves to be religious and Transhumanist, ranging from different faiths such as Latter-Day Saints to Hermeticism. When questioning a Theravada Buddhist

^[2] Smith, Wesley J. "The Materialists' Rapture - First Things." *First Things*, 28 June 2013, firstthings.com/the-materialists-rapture/. Accessed 29 Mar. 2026.

^[1] Kurzweil, Ray "The Singularity is Nearer", 18 June 2024

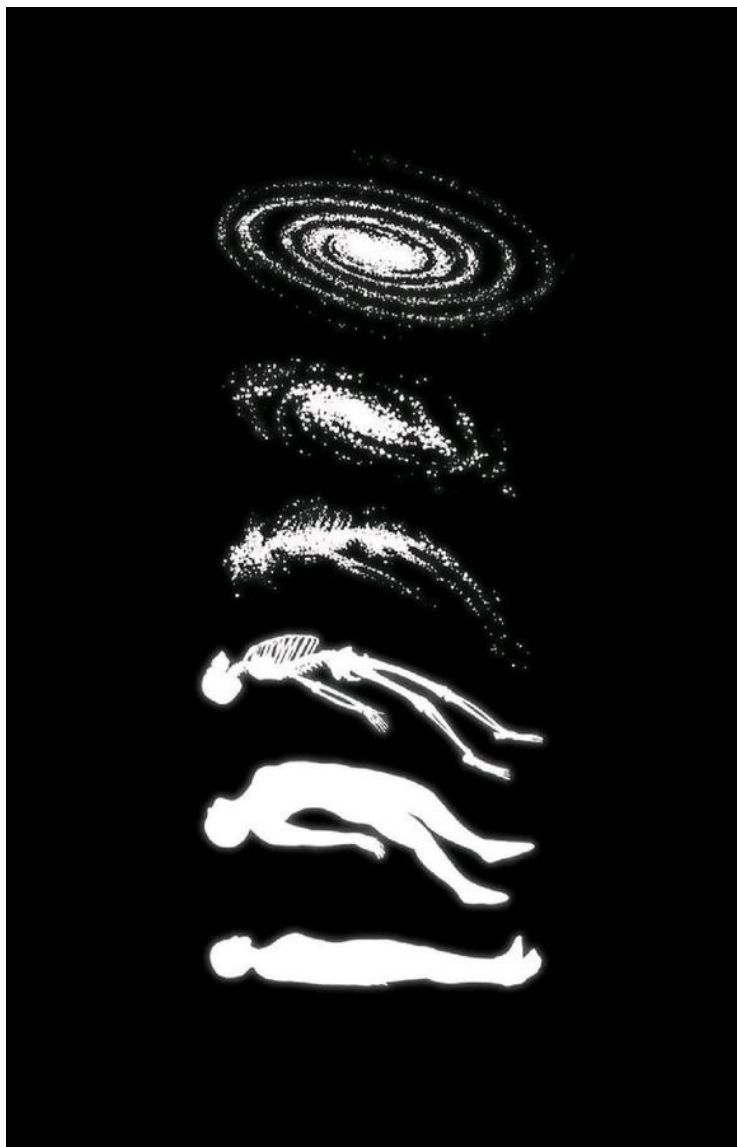
Transhumanist about the supposed clash of Transhumanist belief of the mind being able to exist separately from the body and the Buddhist idea of embodied existence, the response was that:

“WE ARE NOT THE BODY; THE BODY IS SOMETHING TO BE REJECTED AND HELD IN CONTEMPT. TO BE TRANSCENDED.”

The idea that the Singularity could provide the removal of the mind from the material world into a cyberspace as a way of transcending provides a bridge between existing faiths and the ‘new scientific eschatology’ and not a substitute for religion. The world’s major religions can even be considered Transhumanistic, promising “transcension from death and the concerns of the flesh” and so such an event like the Singularity would not contradict established theology but instead provide a modern explanation for previously proposed transcension events.

Although it does provide a hypothetical scientific solution for what salvation might be, many critics argue that it removes the humility of traditional faith as personal salvation shifts from being based on morality and belief to the use of modern human-made technology. While many religions prioritise the golden rule and the virtue of love, Transhumanism instead considers intelligence to be the highest virtue — instead of maximising our ability to love, there is a need to maximise human intelligence.

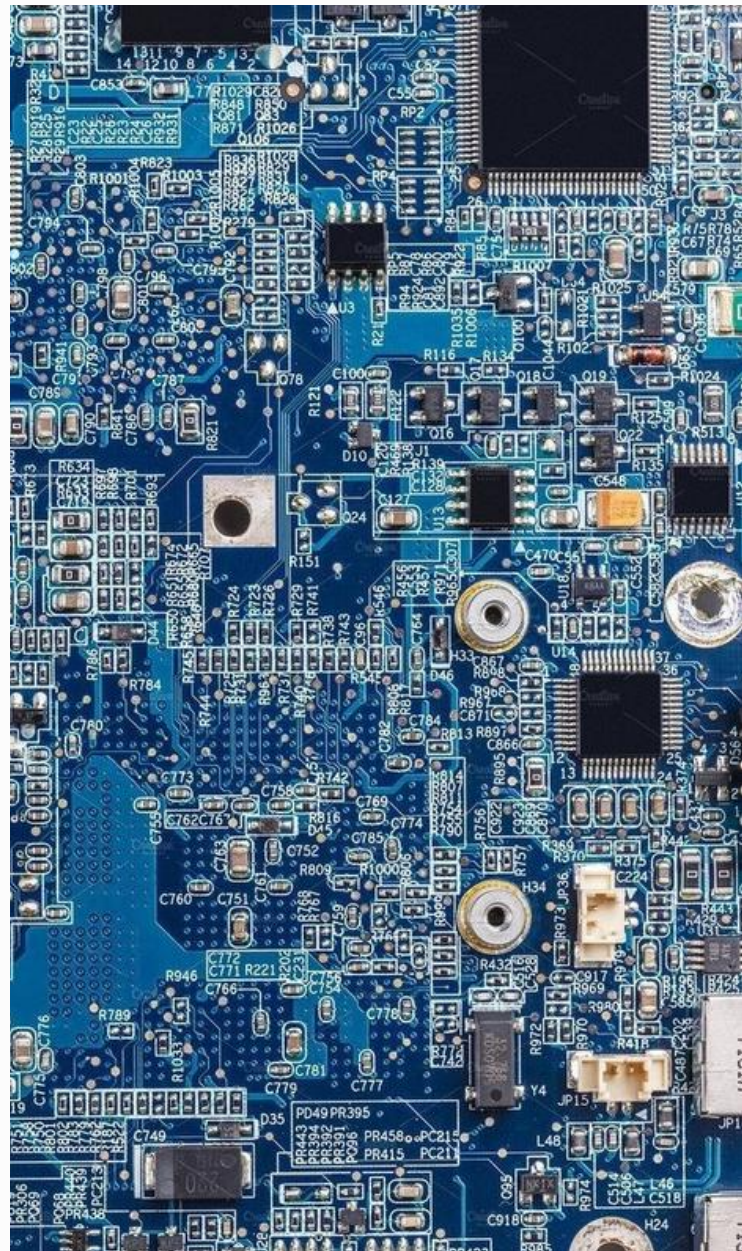
Many Transhumanists view humans as biological information systems which can be configured, upgraded, and understood — the connectionist approach in machine learning mirrors a human’s neural network using a network of nodes that uses rewards to adjust ‘inter-neuronal connection’, if





lacking empathy in the pursuit of intelligence.

If we really do want to pursue and witness an event such as the Singularity and follow More's amendments, we cannot just focus on the advancement of human intelligence for salvation but love as well. "Unless we exponentially expand our capacity to love – which is a spiritual discipline, not a mechanistic endeavour – we will never become the creatures we long to be." [3]



we are able to witness and control machines 'learning' through such a system wouldn't we be able to fully understand the human condition as well?

This prioritisation of intelligence over love in a movement that provides an achievable salvation from the material body proves dangerous when considering the morality of certain technological advancements such as AI, cryptocurrency mining, smart devices, where we fall into a trap of

[3] Smith, Wesley J. "Transhumanism :A Religion For Postmodern Times" Acton Institute: Religion & Liberty: Volume 28, Number 4 29 November 2018

Genre: Sci-fi, Action, Adventure
From the Director of DISTRICT 9 & ELYSIUM

CHAPPIE

超能查派

SENTIENT ROBOT
感知机器人

2015.5.8

New Step of Evolution

人类进化转折点

CONSCIOUSNESS 意识

MORAL 道德

HUMANITY 人性

WAR 战争

EVOLUTION 进化

INTOLERANCE 党同伐异

CREATOR 造物主

Cast

Hugh Jackman 休·杰克曼

Sharbo Copley 沙尔托·科普雷

Dev Patel 戴夫·帕特尔

Sigourney Weaver 西格妮·韦弗

Directed by 导演

Neill Blomkamp 尼尔·布洛姆坎普

Written by 编剧

Neill Blomkamp 尼尔·布洛姆坎普

& Terri Tatchell 特丽·塔歇尔

Music by 音乐

Hans Zimmer 汉斯·季默

AI



CHAPPIE: THE SENTIENT ROBOT

By Xinyi L

Neill Blomkamp's CHAPPIE is a 2015 dystopian sci-fi film set in a hypothetical Johannesburg, South Africa, where law enforcement has begun using artificial intelligence robots to lower crime rates starring both South African and American actors such as Sharlto Copley, Dev Patel, Hugh Jackman, music duo Die Antwoord and Sigourney Weaver.

The film explores the short-lived physical life of a rejected robot named Chappie that was stolen by gangster 'parents' Die Antwoord and taught a life of crime while also trying to understand the contradictions with his programmer Deon's gentle teachings pose and finally, his fear of his inevitable death with the eventual depletion of his battery.

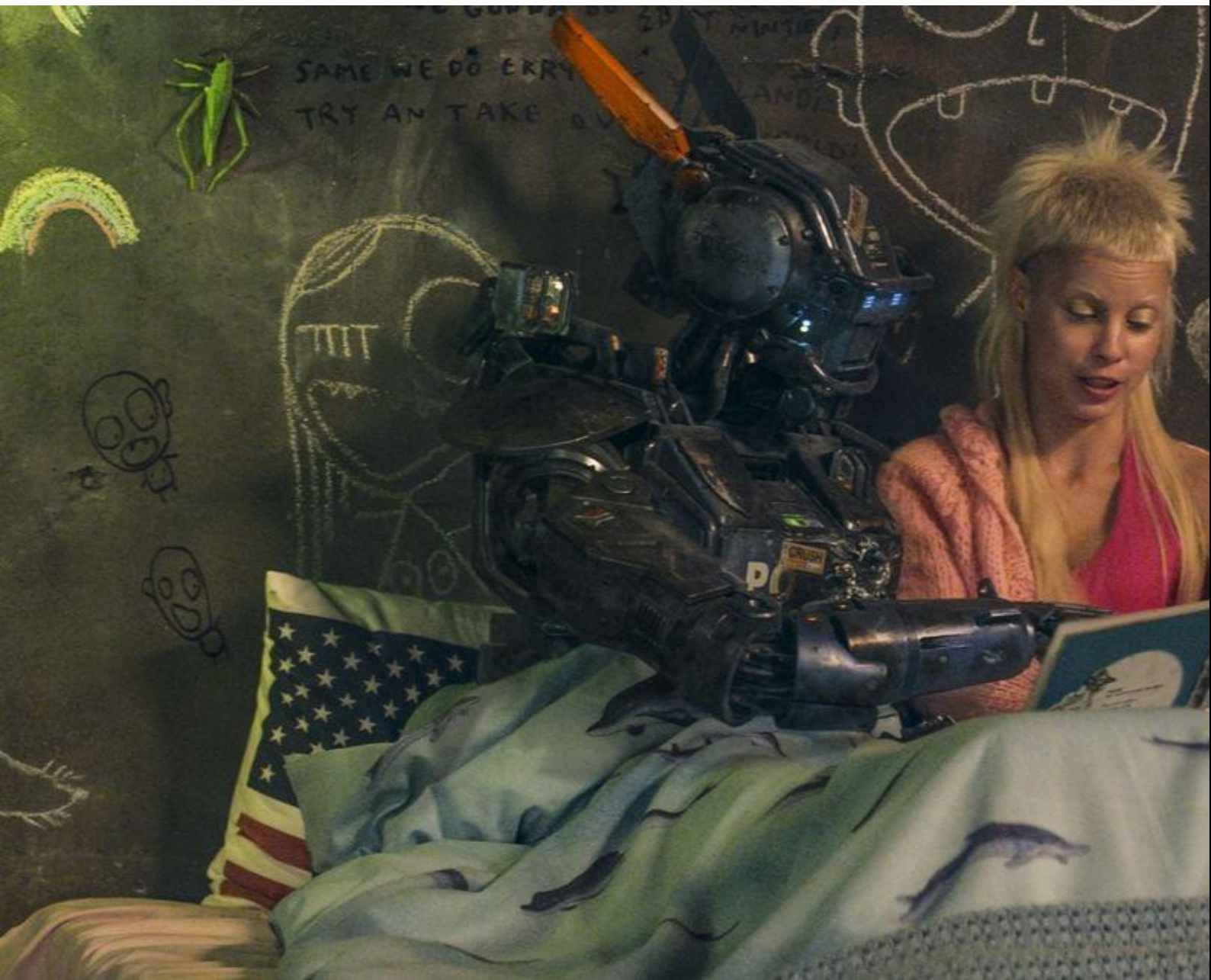
Albeit Chappie is a "loud, silly, violent quasi-dystopian short Circuit or Robocop tribute,"[1] Blomkamp uses his movie to ask the question can AI be conscious and should this consciousness be worthy of moral consideration? Philosopher and cognitive scientist David Chalmers formulated the "hard problem of consciousness" where instead of the easy problems of explaining brain

Function such as information processing and behaviour, it's difficult to explain why such processes are accompanied by a subjective experience. Chalmers uses the thought experiment of a zombie being physically identical to a human but lacking in subjective experience and therefore consciousness is not logically entailed by physicality, but instead requires qualia, subjective qualities of an experience such as the pain of watching a sad movie or the beauty of an artwork. The question for Chappie is whether his AI is capable of genuine subjective experience or just intricate functional simulation.

Although Blomkamp's Chappie is clearly a machine programme, his unique artificial intelligence with developmental psychology and experiential learning allows for him to experience qualia. Instead of seeing the action of his 'father' Ninja abandoning him in the slums as a simple 'placing Chappie in a location,' Chappie displays great anxiety and fear when asking his father where he is going and calling out that "Chappie's scared," displaying a complex ability to reason the dangers



[1] Fletcher, Seth "What Chappie Says, and Doesn't Say, About Artificial Intelligence" Scientificamerican.com 6 March 2026



of what might entail him being abandoned.

Similarly, Chappie shows an active interest in art and literature, asking his 'mother' Yolanda Visser to read him a bedtime story. Although such subjective responses could be explained by connectionist machine learning through Chappie's observation of those around him and their displayed qualia — Blomkamp portrays these 'emotions' as authentic, fear that stems from original experience rather than a machine learning based on previous

encounters with such scenarios, which as a viewer we are prevented from ever seeing. Instead of portraying Chappie as one of the many anticrime police bots of the universe, Blomkamp deliberately depicts them as a sentient robot learning - Chappie's actor himself, Sharlto Copley presents Chappie as a robot with curious childlike speech with cautious yet exploratory expressions as he manoeuvres through new exciting stimuli. But does qualia alone suffice for consciousness or does personhood require something more?

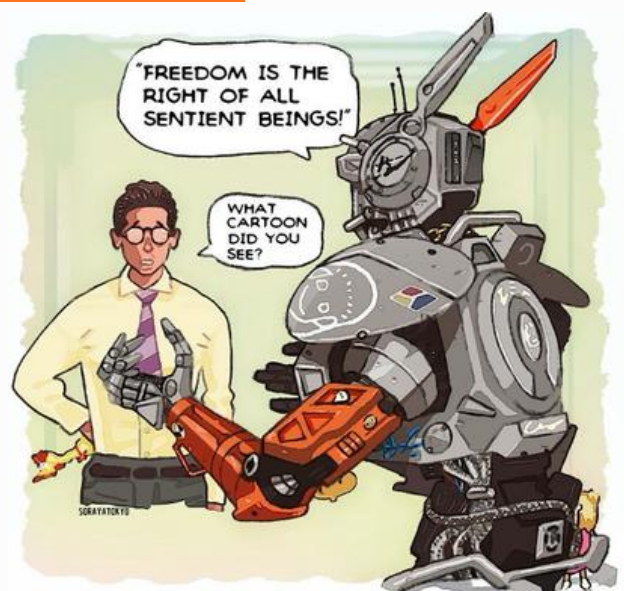


learning from pre-existing art forms and ideas. In Owen Silverman's article 'On "AI" art: the AI's response' the construction of an AI-art machine would require code which reflects the user's preferences or an overall summary of the internet's collective ideas on art. Unlike Chappie the actual AI that exists today is formed by its formulated responses to stimuli based on code and analysis of existing human-made images, literature and emotions.

Achieving technology and sentience like Chappie might be impossible but Blomkamp's movie makes us question whether or not if such robots begin to exist, should we consider them as conscious and worthy of moral considerations as ourselves?

“WHEN I DRAW... I'M NOT JUST CAPTURING HOW IT LOOKS, I'M INTERPRETING ITS SOUL... AI CAN REPLICATE STRUCTURE. BUT IT DOESN'T STAND BEFORE A BUILDING IN SILENCE, MOVED BY ITS BEAUTY.” — MAX KERLY ARTWORKS

As an artist myself, one of the most striking scenes is Chappie painting. Wanting to teach Chappie, Deon introduces him to an easel in front of an abandoned car and an assortment of paint tubes. Without a prompt, Chappie picks up the colour blue, despite Deon telling him that it's the colour of the sky Chappie uses blue as the only colour to paint not just the sky but also non-blue objects. Could this be a sign of Chappie's own choice and subjective use of colour? However, when we look at actual AI 'art' engines (GANs) their own creations are as a result of machine



'A PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY' IS A PROPHECY OF THE INFLUENCER COMPLEX

By Jasreet H

“Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us. The body sins once and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield it.”

Spoken by Lord Henry Wotton, the novel's charismatic antagonist, he preaches here that people should act on every urge and instinct, implying that living with the emotions of “pleasure” or “regret” derived from the act is less disastrous than regulating one's own desires. His views reek of recklessness; yet he lives as a cautious man, who “go[es] to the theatre”, “dine[s] at White's” and “call[s] on his uncle” - quite a conventional life.

Hypocrisy at its finest. Although Lord Henry Wotton spouts out delicate but performative philosophical premises in almost every chapter, he has no character arc, no change, no evolution, because nothing can erode his way with cheap words. He does not talk, he lectures, seeking to entice others with his problematic values. It is a comfort, therefore, that most of the characters in the book just treat him like an amusing joke. His influence is only corrupting to those who yield to it - i.e., Dorian Gray. Henry is successful in his aspiration to “dominate him” and make “that wonderful spirit his own”. Whilst many only frame Henry as a charming but powerless talker (an overall harmless aristocrat), the truth is he corrupted Dorian Gray; he caused the decay of his moral compass, and figures like him are becoming frighteningly easy to find in today's reality.

‘A Picture of Dorian Gray’ was a prophecy; the novel is manifesting itself in the deceitful everyday of modern life.





P E N O U I N  C L A S S I C S

OSCAR WILDE

The Picture of Dorian Gray

Wilde wrote this book for many purposes: to warn us about the dangers that hedonism causes other people, to discuss the undeserved blank cheques the upper-class are given, to display the consequences of being easily swayed, to examine the nature of good and evil, and to talk about the nature of art. Essentially, 'A Picture of Dorian Gray' is a piece of literature about two things: a painting and a book about art. The effect of this book in relation to the three central characters is what drives the narrative, allowing Wilde to scrutinise the themes of accountability, morality, class, art, and self-indulgence.

The three central characters, even though they are fictional, are stipulated by Wilde's own conflict with how the world perceives him as an established artist of that period: "Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps."

So, if Wilde takes even the slightest inspiration for these fictional personalities from himself, it seems self-degrading for any of them to be considered wholly evil. Perhaps this is one of the most subtle ways Oscar Wilde is able to contest perfunctory ideas of good and evil. Good and evil is not wholly embodied by one figure; it is a nuanced complex. There are virtues and flaws in all three of them, and therefore, Wilde is able to reject

the idea of absolute morality. Morals are not fundamental, and it would be shallow for a reader to prescribe a definite degree of 'goodness' or 'wickedness' to each of the characters in order to justify their actions. So the question is, is there really a moral figure throughout the novel that we should aspire to live like? The novel grapples with themes of class, injustice, immorality, art - but it also hints at a deeper truth about human nature - that we cannot be good. Have our intentions, our minds, our personalities, our beliefs, our appearances - like Gray's, Wotton's and Hallward's - been corrupted by art?



Lord Henry Wotton is a hypocrite; a hedonist in values, but an upper-class genteel in lifestyle. Today, the likes of internet influencers who feel fake and annoying embody this figure; they live the lives of the elite whilst preaching an entirely different manifesto, only existing for our entertainment. Influencers such as Mr Beast, whose entire brand image is focused around philanthropy, yet manages to profit off of a highly monetised, spectacle-driven system. Or influencers such as Hailey Bieber, who is associated with effortless and minimalist aesthetics, which in reality are highly commercialised and

incredibly intricate. Modern influencers mirror Lord Henry Wotton's paradox: they curate seductive philosophies and lifestyles that captivate audiences, yet remain distanced from the consequences of those ideals. And those who get caught up in their fantastical pretences are the Dorian Grays of today.

Dorian Gray can be interpreted as the prototype for modern 'looksmaking' culture - the obsessive pursuit of aesthetic perfection that inevitably leads to self-destruction. Encouraged by Lord Henry's philosophy,





Dorian begins to equate beauty with value (“beauty is a form of genius – is higher indeed than genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts of the world,”... “It cannot be questioned. It has its divine rights of sovereignty. It makes princes of those who have it.”). Wilde is able to anticipate the future generations’ fixation on youth and image - individuals who would smash their face with a hammer in order to ‘mog’ others (a decision that was made by the online influencer ‘Clavicular’).

Influencers of these sorts fabricate an identity on superiority. However, the more you base your identity on being superior, the more fragile your sense of self becomes.

Oscar Wilde exemplifies the timeless critique of vanity in the tragedy of Dorian Gray. Perhaps the desire to stay young and beautiful is not exclusive to the people of the modern-day, but it certainly is crippling us. Dorian’s belief that he can pursue pleasure and beauty without consequence (taking inspiration from Wotton’s philosophy) fosters his superiority, and other people become instruments for his own gratification - including Sibyl Vane. Similarly, the trend of ‘looksmaxxing’ is accompanied by the desire to visually dominate other people, and in turn disregard their intrinsic values.

Wilde's novel does not merely criticise vanity but anticipates an entire cultural system built upon it: the influencer complex. In 'The Picture of Dorian Gray', Dorian's separation of outward perfection from inward decay forecasts the modern split between curated online identity and private reality, where the portrait ("the hideous thing that he [Gray] had hidden away") absorbs the cost of maintaining an image. Figures like Lord Henry Wotton mirror the voices of influence that shape desires without needing to bear the consequences, while Dorian himself embodies the rare but dangerous follower who internalises these ideals to the point of self-destruction. Influencer culture is not a new phenomenon, but the technological evolution that accentuates the urgency of Wilde's warning: a society that elevates appearance above substance will host tragedy for not just the gullible Dorians, but also for the Sibyl Vanes, the Basil Hallwards, and the Alan Campbells who are unjustly punished too.

How we should live our lives has been a subject of vigorous debate since the dawn of philosophical questions. Perhaps we should not live up to a book, let it dictate our lives the same way Dorian let the infamous "yellow book" dictate his. Instead, we ought to define novels such as these as cautionary tales, as their timeless message remains prevalent in this society shaped by hypocrisy,

immorality, deception, superficiality and greed. However, it is worth indulging in reading this classic, not just to recognise the predictability of the modern world, but to also appreciate the thought-provoking charm of Oscar Wilde's writing.



<https://www.bu.edu/writingprogram/journal/past-issues/issue-1/duggan/>

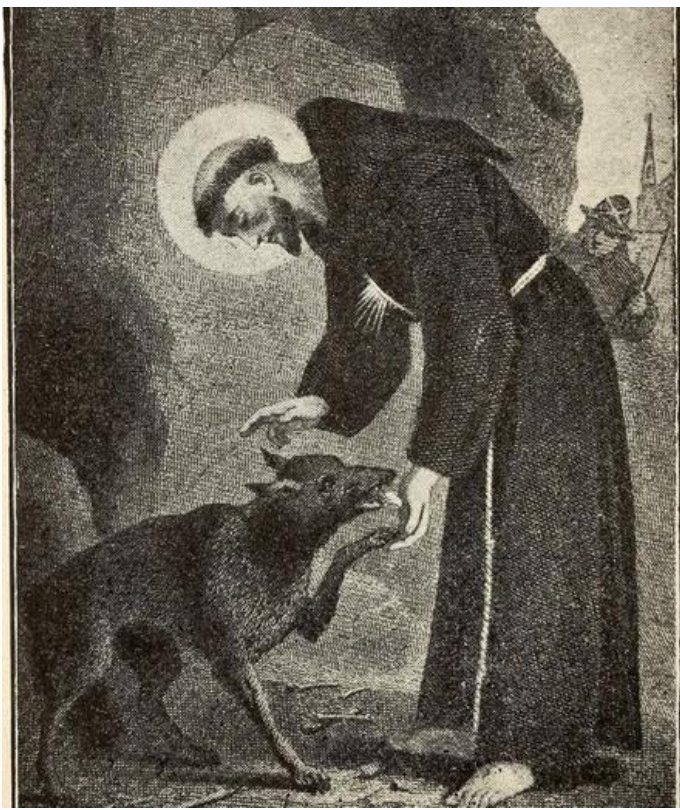
<https://medium.com/@nyxshadowhawk/art-and-hedonism-in-the-picture-of-dorian-gray-359492af8679>

<https://iep.utm.edu/hedonism/>

<https://dsfc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Yr11-2020-Philosophy-Bridging-Work-Moral-Absolutism.pdf>

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2026/02/14/cant-get-girlfriend-smash-face-with-hammer/?recomm_id=a325d3b2-369d-40d1-980a-077a9322c304

THE JOURNAL OF - A SUSAN



Brief overview:

Wolf describes a moral saint as 'a person whose every action is as moral as possible.' She takes on a negative point of view when exploring the idea of a moral saint, explaining how she doesn't know if one exists but if any do, she is glad neither she nor her loved ones are among them. This is because a moral saint would be boring. They would either sacrifice their own happiness and hobbies for the happiness of others or only be able to gain happiness through the happiness of others. This would lead them not only having no nonmoral skills or interests themselves, but also not having the ability to encourage the development of the nonmoral skills and interests of others. Furthermore, it feels inhumane to have a person who is fully moral as morality for them is no longer a should but a must. This would mean the complete lifelong suppression of desire and selfishness which removes the moral saint's personality.

What I found most thought provoking:

I found this idea highly intriguing, mainly because of the exploration of how a moral saint would fit in with normal members of society – a perspective which I feel is less explored compared to just what a moral saint would look like and why there could never be one. In thinking about the chapter straight after reading it, I first came at it from the latter view. I struggled to grasp what a universally moral saint would look like as morality means different things to different communities, this is seen when morality links to respect. For example, during concerts, in some countries it is seen as respectful to the artist to sing loudly alongside them during a concert whereas in others it's the complete opposite and people are expected to stay quiet. Let's say the moral saint was invited to a concert and in politeness agreed to go, despite a lack of interest in music. So, if the artists views and the people's views are different, should the moral saint sing or stay silent? Contradictions and puzzles like these make it hard to imagine the very existence of a moral saint.

Another thinking point is whether a moral saint could make a change alone. In order to truly make significant change and affect the lives of others they would need a team or an organisation behind them to help fund and provide physical aid to help their cause. Does this mean a

OF PHILOSOPHY: 'MORAL SAINTS'

IN WOLF CHAPTER REVIEW

By Isis S

moral saint would try to recruit others to also be moral saints? Or at the very least be more moral? Or is it considered immoral by them to push people to follow your views and ideology?

A moral saint is kind to everyone and due to moral obligation can't value one person over another, this would mean moral sainthood would affect your attachment and affection to others, leading a moral saint to feel the same inclination to help a stranger as they would feel for their own mother. This links back to Wolf's view that a moral saint would have no personality. Would someone with no personality have the desire to better themselves? If a moral saint is morally perfect, they wouldn't experience personal growth and critical thinking of themselves. There is also a possibility that they could be ignorant to the way society works, what stops a moral saint from being deceived if they always see the best in people? If this were the truth of a moral saint, one would wonder how a moral saint would fit in with society or rather if they would fit in. If a moral saint was identifiable, it would be likely for them to be anonymous. Perhaps like Batman where they would appear to live a normal life to ensure the safety of those they help but take on a different persona when helping others.

As a society we idolise the idea of a moral saint and see them as a leader in our own lives and a guideline of how we act. The idea of a moral saint works as humans

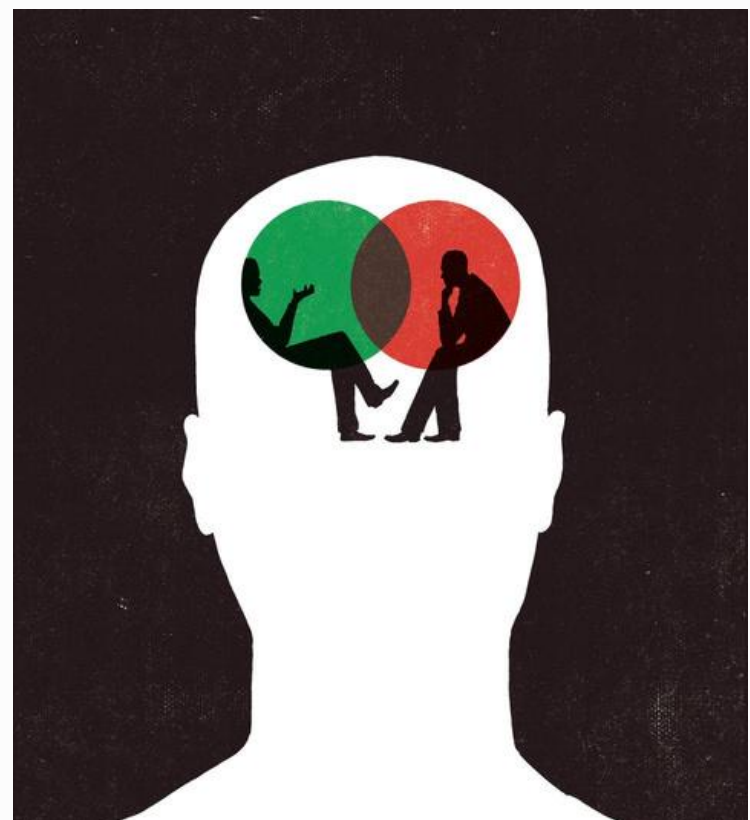
are imperfect. Most people will have a balanced ratio of decisions with most being rational and many being irrational. This would allow them to socially be seen as good enough or average whilst also having a personality and being able to connect with people over their shared selfish, immoral interests.

My takeaways, opinions and thoughts:

Overall, I would recommend reading the chapter. I found it extremely thought provoking and helpful in understanding the moral saint as an intangible idol for humans, that inspires them to do some good rather than act as an imperative for them to always do good.

Overall review:

4.5 stars out of 5



THE PEDLAR

How art can teach us about theology

By Xinyi L



16th century Hieronymus Bosch was a Dutch painter from Brabant and one of the most famous representees of the Early Netherlandish painting school. Known for his incredibly detailed, fantastical and disturbing paintings, Bosch's works serve as a medium to teach moral lessons and religious concepts. As a Catholic, the idea of art as a visual language for faith was fundamental to Bosch's approach to painting. Art is a powerful way to teach people because of beauty's power to captivate, however, instead of the orthodox idolisation and romanticisation of figures Bosch uses a phantasmagorical depiction to educate the masses on traditional theological concepts.

His most famous pieces include his complex triptych of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* with its grisaille cover, hellish landscapes in *The Temptation of St. Anthony* and his narrative *Haywain Triptych*. However, in this article, I will be delving into the analysis and theology behind one of his lesser-known works: *The Pedlar*.

The use of a pedlar (a wanderer) was not uncommon for the time, often they were used to symbolise the journey of human life through earthly temptations and difficult moral choices. For Bosch, this was exactly what a pedlar's role in art was – one who journeys through the mortal world avoiding different vices to eventually reach his salvation in heaven and reflects the viewers' own

trials and tribulations. His oil on panel at first glance, however, does not consist of his usual wild and eccentric motifs, instead it has a dull muted earthly hue. There are no exaggerated beasts nor comedic characters, only a pedlar with his stick moving from a building to a field. In the modern day and age such a depiction would not strike us as heavily detailed with religious ideas however as we begin to look closer, such a simple painting from Bosch holds incredible theological weight.

When approaching Bosch's art, we should consider splitting the painting into three – painting mostly on triptychs (3-part panels), this triplet in composition is repeated across *The Pedlar* as well:

Let's start in the middle with the main character, the Pedlar himself holds a stick which pushes back against an aggressive dog and he carries a dagger, clearly the Pedlar is in a position of self-defence from the dangers of reality, but the wrath of a dog is held back by a simple stick rather than a violent dagger.

Looking towards the left, there is a communal building. Cleverly, Bosch signifies this with a dove on the roof. It's a *duyfhuys* – a brothel, a sign of sexual temptation. It stands not as a place of rest for the traveller but instead an evil vice with its patrons displaying hostile dominance and gluttony, a lack of self-temperance



and self-respect. The Pedlar is physically distancing himself from the sins of the material world and the perspective Bosch uses to depict his movement asks for the viewer themselves to also distance themselves from such evil.

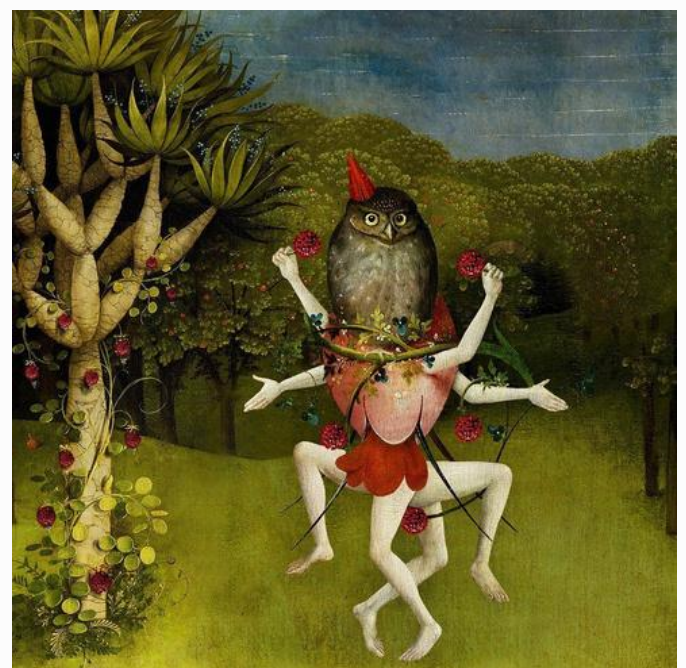
On the right, there is a cow, a symbol of abundance, fertility and God's provision – what heaven holds for those who steer away from temptation. The eventual reward from God for the Pedlar who stays so adamantly on his path to salvation. A reminder for what lies ahead for us

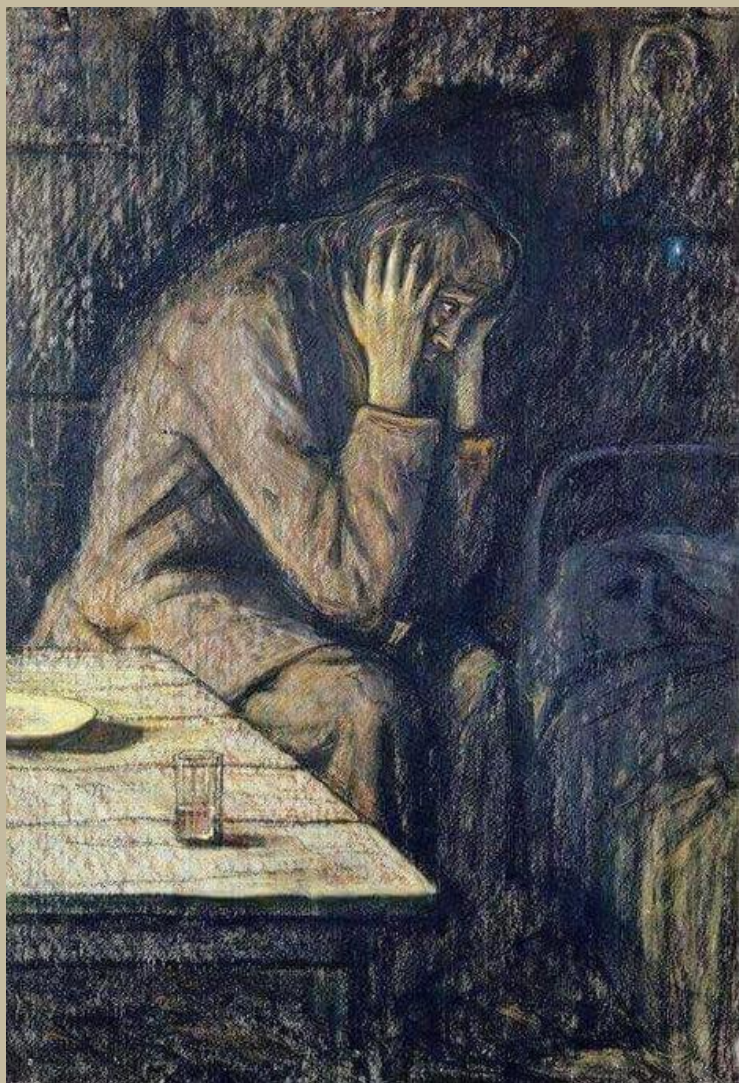


who are still on the journey to God.

Though at first glance such simple depictions may be difficult to dissect, Bosch serves as an example of how religion has influenced the artist's approach and decisions throughout their career.

Despite our modern contemporary society seeing an increase in secularism we can't help but wonder, like Bosch's art, what media today hold similar unconscious signals and what do they want us to think?





“NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND” INTELLECTUALISM & FREE WILL By Toni A

how to fast-track a loss of all human connection and live the ultimate unfulfilled life.

The Underground Man is one of the most difficult-to-read characters I’ve ever encountered, largely due to just how pessimistic he is about human nature. He draws a division between the “man of action” - people he deems sheep or slaves to society that do not think “deeply”; people who seem largely unaware of their own consciousness - and the “man of consciousness”, someone who is so aware of his consciousness and self that he is paralysed and unable to make decisions on what to do or what morality even is. He asserts that “to be too conscious is an illness,” citing the tendency to spite oneself from achieving justice, revenge or even love as a consequence of overthinking. He (and I imagine many of you reading this article) creates imaginary scenarios where things go so wrong that the very thought frightens the agent.

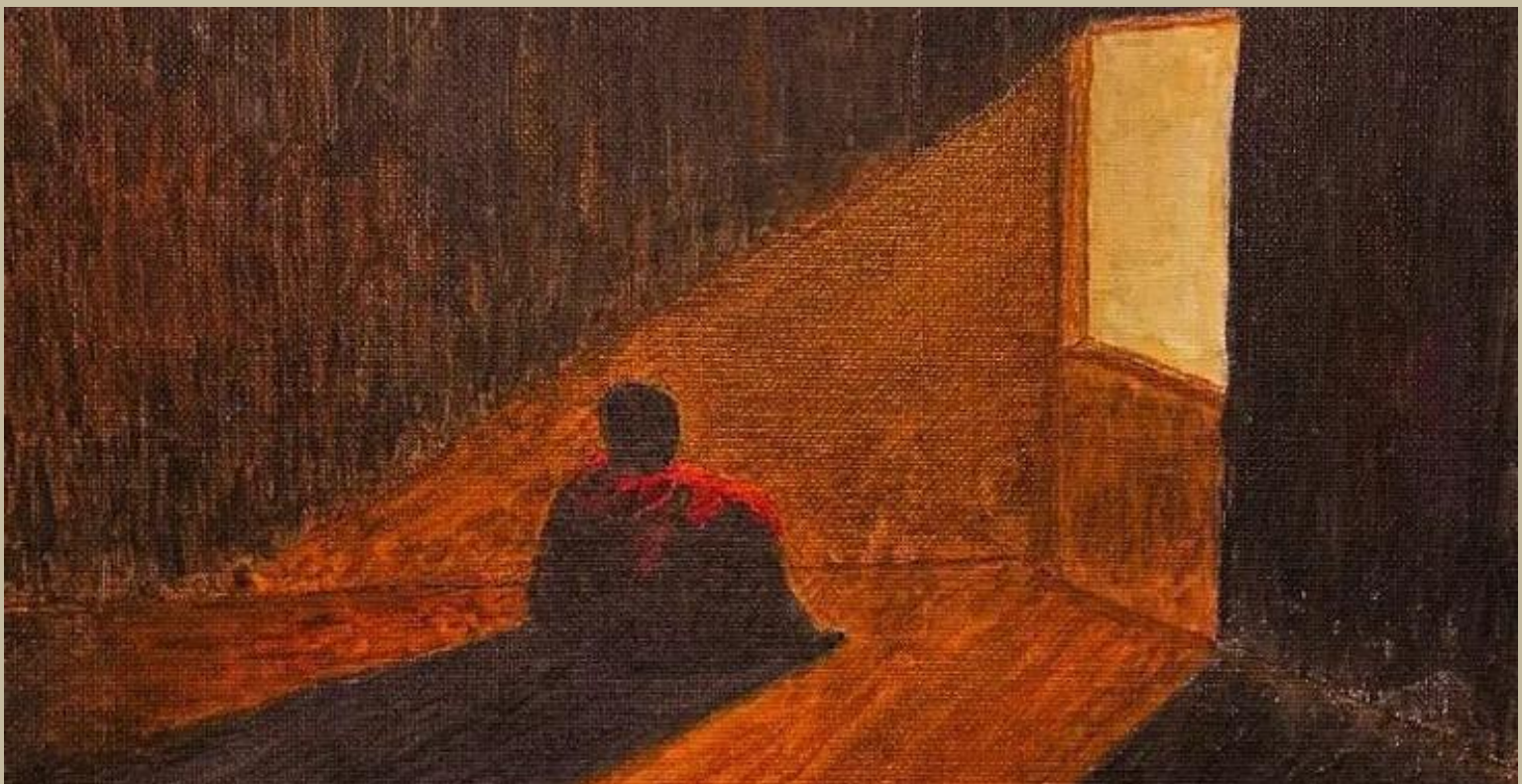
This, he claims, results in a worldview where the agent degrades himself - “he himself [...] looks on himself as a

If you’ve ever wondered how to derail your life at record pace, let me introduce you to ‘Notes from the Underground,’ a novella by the acclaimed Fyodor Dostoevsky. His usual work is rife with throughlines of optimism and the idea that we are each responsible for the sins of others in how we treat them; however, he presents a darker view of humanity through the character of the underground Man, a spiteful, pessimistic, self-pitying man. It is a cautionary tale and scathing criticism of several emerging philosophies in post-feudal Russia, including rationalism and hard determinism. From the perils of Enlightenment-era thinking to the pitfalls of an egotistical, self-centred philosophy, the Underground Man illustrates to us

mouse, no one asks him to do so.” When the men of action, who make up our legal systems and themselves are able to obtain their justice or revenge through direct action regard this mouse and its indecisiveness, they laugh at it, and it laughs too in a self-deprecatory fashion “batting its paws at the world” while feeling internally resentful of everything and everyone, and most importantly, itself.

Thus the UM simultaneously looks down on the man of action for his lack of thought and consideration while, in a way, envying him for his ability to move confidently through the world, completely sure of himself. Many intellectuals have expressed this very idea - it is a “trope” of sorts in philosophy that many philosophers eventually turned out extremely depressed; crushed beneath the weight of the recognition that life, for example, has no innate meaning, or that human nature is fundamentally

flawed. This attitude is mirrored in the rise of anti-intellectualism in today’s society, and a resulting counter-culture of intellectualism. Due to factors like the proliferation of generative AI, the increasing availability of short-form content online and a general shift towards content that is easier, faster and more emotionally-rewarding to consume, droves of people have been turning their backs on “intellectual” pursuits like reading classic literature or writing articles and stories. The anti-intellectual here is analogous to the man of action, content to conform to society’s expectations and the will of various authorities. The intellectual, then, is the foil to this “brain drain,” the ones who will read the journals and stave off A.I. and tell everyone just how intellectual they are. It is a strange parallel; a lot of so-called “intellectuals” will construct their lives around their authenticity and intelligence, while secretly pining to take the easier path of less resistance



they perceive the supposed underclass of anti-intellectuals have. It is also more broadly present in how people with above-average intelligence see themselves; as more depressed or “weighed down” than those they view as less intelligent.

UM exemplifies this sentiment in a number of ways. He values nothing, it seems, but intelligence - or at least the appearance of it, asserting, “My face may be ugly, I thought, ‘but let it be lofty, expressive, and, above all, *extremely* intelligent.’” He has a strange obsession with being perceived as “literary,” yet his lack of identity is laid bare in his “slavish passion for the conventional in everything external.” He is so insecure in himself that when he is shoved by a policeman



attempting to break up a bar brawl he is privy to, he takes immediate offense. “I could have forgiven blows, but not his having moved me without noticing me.” This sends UM into a spiral that is prima facie hilarious, but turns deeply unsettling upon further reflection. He spends years inquiring about this police officer, finding out his name and his patrol route, and not only saves up several months’ salary but also borrows money from his employer in order to buy a new suit for the occasion - that of bumping into the officer while on his route. Even still, he is always the first to step aside and make way for the officer, lamenting the very fact, sometimes waking up at 3 o’clock in the morning. That is, until, the night before he decides to give up this “fatal plan,” he finally works up the courage and collides with the officer. He explains it better himself: “He did not even look round and pretended not to notice it; but he was only pretending, I am convinced of that. I am convinced of that to this day! Of course, I got the worst of it—he was stronger, but that was not the point. The point was that I had attained my object, I had kept up my dignity, I had not yielded a step, and had put myself publicly on an equal social footing with him.”

It is here that we find out it is his fear and pride that have got the better of him; the reason he goes out to buy the suit and the reason for this whole debacle is because he thinks the officer has shoved him out of disrespect for his social position, not

even considering that the initial contact occurred years prior *and* in an emergency situation where he otherwise might not have treated him as being so inconsequential. It is pathetic that he maintains the conviction that the officer has only pretended not to notice him. Yet again, it is his lack of identity and overthinking tendencies that have resulted in this overblown situation.

There is a much sadder, more disturbing anecdote UM shares. It takes us back to his school days, where he shares that he has always felt alone or excluded as a result of his intelligence - yet another common trope for the intellectual. Interestingly, he tells us he had a solitary friend whose spirit he [UM] broke when he developed too much affection for and devotion to UM, an effective reminder that any misery in which the Underground Man resides is entirely by his own creation. I will let you reflect on what personal hell you may have created for yourself; this idea will return later on. In the present day, he calls on an acquaintance only to find him in the middle of a conversation with two other ex-schoolmates that they abruptly end (rather changing the subject) when he arrives. He finds out that they're throwing a leaving party for Zverkov, a military officer who has recently been promoted and is moving abroad. UM invites himself to the party, yet has to borrow money from Simonov, the aforementioned acquaintance, despite already owing

him some money.. The next evening he is the first to arrive, having been told the wrong time to arrive for the dinner, and spends the whole dinner holding the others in contempt and condescension (it is here where I must implore you to read the novella; I do not have the space to insert as many quotations as I would like here). As the evening progresses the party becomes more and more drunk, and so their insults become increasingly heated until the original four decide to leave together and consequently leave UM behind for his bad manners and insolent attitude, and so he chases after them, getting it into his head that he will either make them beg for his friendship and thereby be reconciled with them, or that he must slap Zverkov in the face.

Here I would like to make a brief note on free will in modern society. Living in a post-Enlightenment society a few years old, Dostoevsky noticed a concerning trend. We had more advanced ways of predicting planetary motion, classifying animal species and organising our societies - all things that Dostoevsky feared would make the world more deterministic and predictable. This was accompanied by an uptick in rationalism, or the reliance on reason to make predictive statements about humanity and come to truth in our world. Dostoevsky thought this cause for concern - UM notes, man has such a predilection for systems and

abstract deductions that he is ready to distort the truth intentionally, he is ready to deny the evidence of his senses only to justify his logic,” and that “[we have] taken [our] whole register of human advantages from the averages of statistical figures and politico-economical formulas.” In short, Dostoevsky fears a world in which the truth is abandoned in search of order and familiarity, a world without adventures or spontaneity.

But Dostoevsky sees a sliver of hope—the one “advantage” that trumps all others. He sees what others, like Kant and Descartes and Aquinas before him, so preoccupied with reason, failed to — “reason is nothing but reason and satisfies only the rational side of man’s nature.” In fact, man will assert his free will “to have the right to desire for himself even what is very stupid and not to be bound by an obligation to desire only what is sensible.” This is why the Underground Man acts out as he does; why he chooses to brutalise his only friend until he leaves him, why he invites himself to the farewell party for Zverkov even knowing that he is not his friend. He is unable to control many aspects of his life and so he does these outlandish things he largely (?) regrets because, “you can at least flog yourself at times, and that will, at any rate, liven you up.”

Initially looking for the group, he instead enters a brothel and spends a night with Liza, the lady of the night

he finds there. He is disgusted by her and what they have done, claiming it is a shameful imitation and subversion of the role of sex within a loving relationship. Yet during their ensuing conversation he makes many



astute observations about that which people will do for love. He notes on the joys of parenthood, “Even toil will be a joy, you may deny yourself bread for your children and even that will be a joy!” and expresses a clear affection for your children. Thus we have to wonder if the brazen, spiteful side of himself UM shows the world is who he truly is, or rather a defence mechanism against the world that has beaten him down, over and over again, in which he can never truly be

be himself. He does show shades of his general character; indeed he remarks upon how “Easy” it is to turn a young soul like Liza’s and how it is the exercise of his power over her that really fascinates him, but we see the person he could *become*, if only he would let Liza (and love) into his life. This is the pivotal point of Dostoevsky’s narrative; just as he asserts throughout the rest of his work that we bear responsibility for the sins of others through how we treat people, so too he makes the point that UM is only this way because he has never been shown affection or care. Suffering, in Dostoevsky’s eyes, is merely the absence of love.

However, as I’m sure you would have expected, this story doesn’t have a happy conclusion. After this tryst, UM leaves Liza with his address, but begins to panic over the following days that she *will* come to pay him a visit. He worries that she’ll “find him out,” that she will see the squalor in which he lives and come to realise that he is a fraud. As René Girard describes it, UM’s identity is subsumed in chasing his mimetic desire (that which he wishes to mimic), his aspirational view of the literary man and the romantic. When she eventually does arrive, he insists on rebuking her in an attempt to drive her away. As he puts it, “I was angry with myself, but, of course, it was she who would have to pay for it. A horrible spite against her suddenly surged up in my heart...”

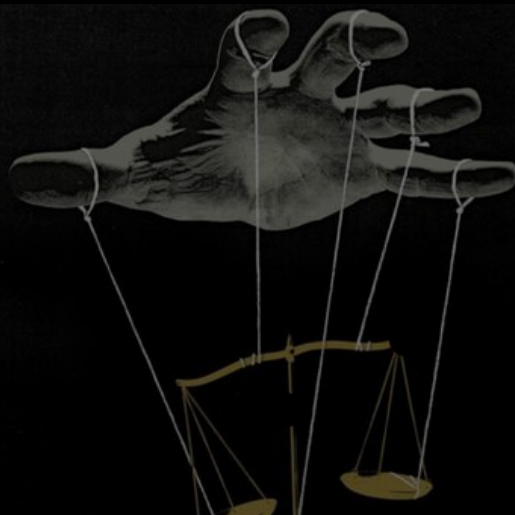
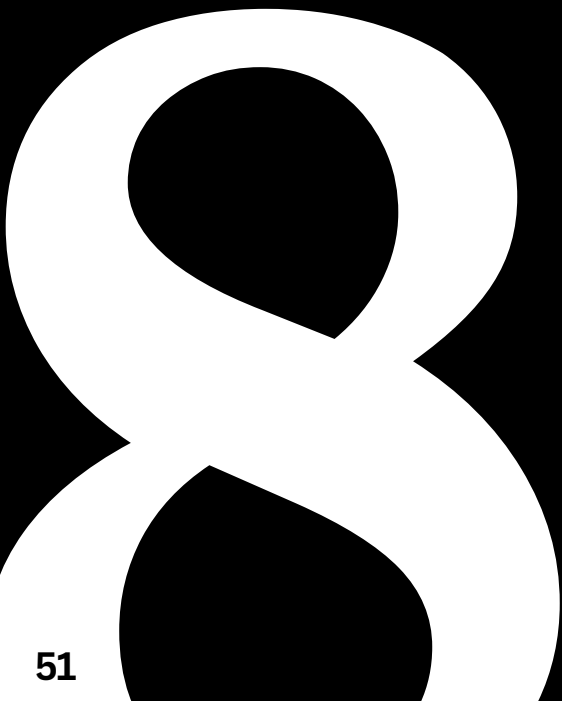
And still, in spite of his exhortations and tirade that she has only come to him for a saviour, to be saved from the brothel and how all his sweet words to her were but a joke to him, she stays and comforts him after his mental breakdown because she loves him. UM recognises this but is ultimately too blinkered - and frightened by - his preconception of love as laborious and full of suffering to accept it. He sends her away with the worst possible insult - a crumpled ruble note as “payment” for the implied service of coming to see him. “Will it not be better that she keep the resentment of the insult for ever? Resentment is a purification...” he rationalises, even after having realised the outsize cruelty in what he has done. Yet again, the Underground Man is left alone and embittered, attempting to convince himself that he has done the right thing by pushing her away. The real question is, knowing who UM is, can we genuinely say this was the wrong choice?

The true tragedy of Notes from the Underground is that Underground Man ends up worse than where he started. Initially convinced that mankind’s greatest treasure is his freedom, he now asserts that “we should be begging to be under control again at once” if given a measure of more freedom.



Morality

By Anna C

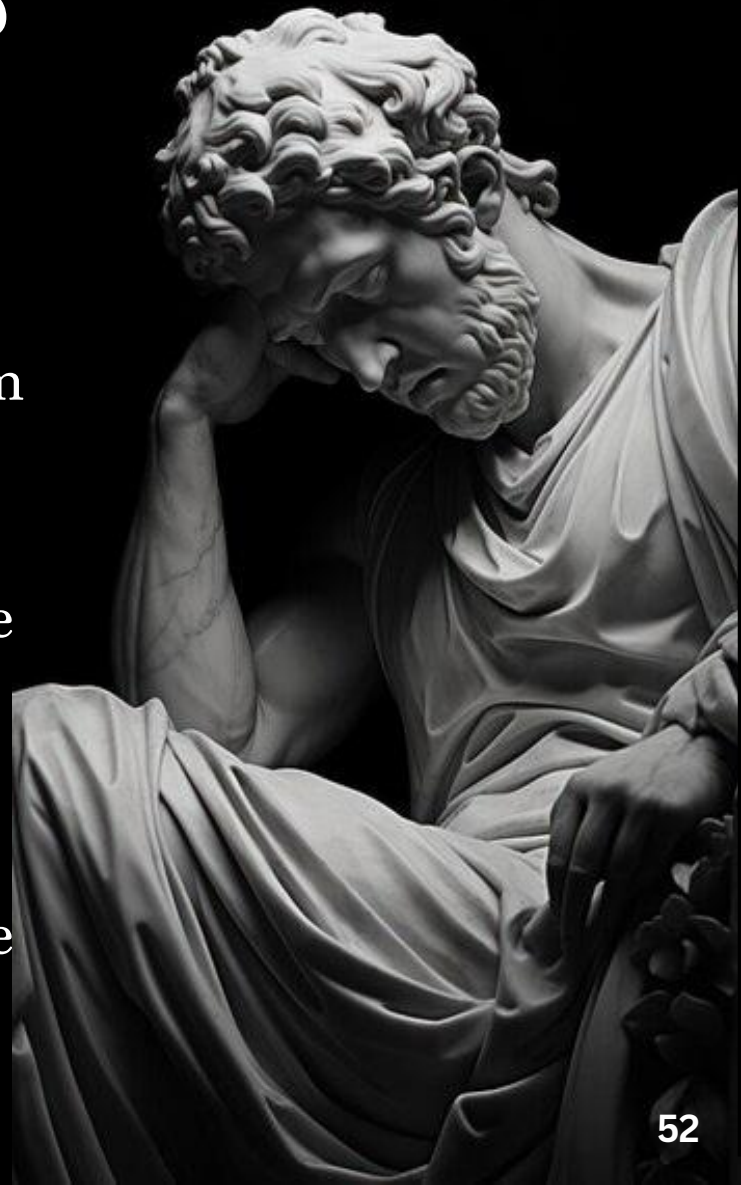


If the whole world thought stealing was acceptable, would it be morally right?

Moral subjectivists would argue yes because morality is shaped by human views. However, moral objectivists would view it as wrong as they believe morality is independent of human belief. Ideas surrounding moral objectivism and subjectivism have been deeply debated since around the 5th century B.C.E.

Is Morality Subjective or Objective?

This is when the Sophists, a group of Greek teachers introduced moral subjectivism – the idea that morality is based on an individual’s feelings or opinions. This issue has divided philosophers for centuries and this article will explore diverging views about whether morality is subjective or objective.





Morality is subjective

Sophists – The Sophists are largely believed to have established moral subjectivism, with Protagoras’ assertion that “man is the measure of all things”. This means that morality is shaped by individual experience and perception, making it subjective.

Cultural relativism – This claims that there is no universal moral code as morality is shaped by societies themselves. Different approaches to marriage and dietary restrictions across cultures suggest that morality is not absolute. However, critics highlight the relativistic fallacy - just because cultures disagree about morality, does not mean there is no single objective truth.



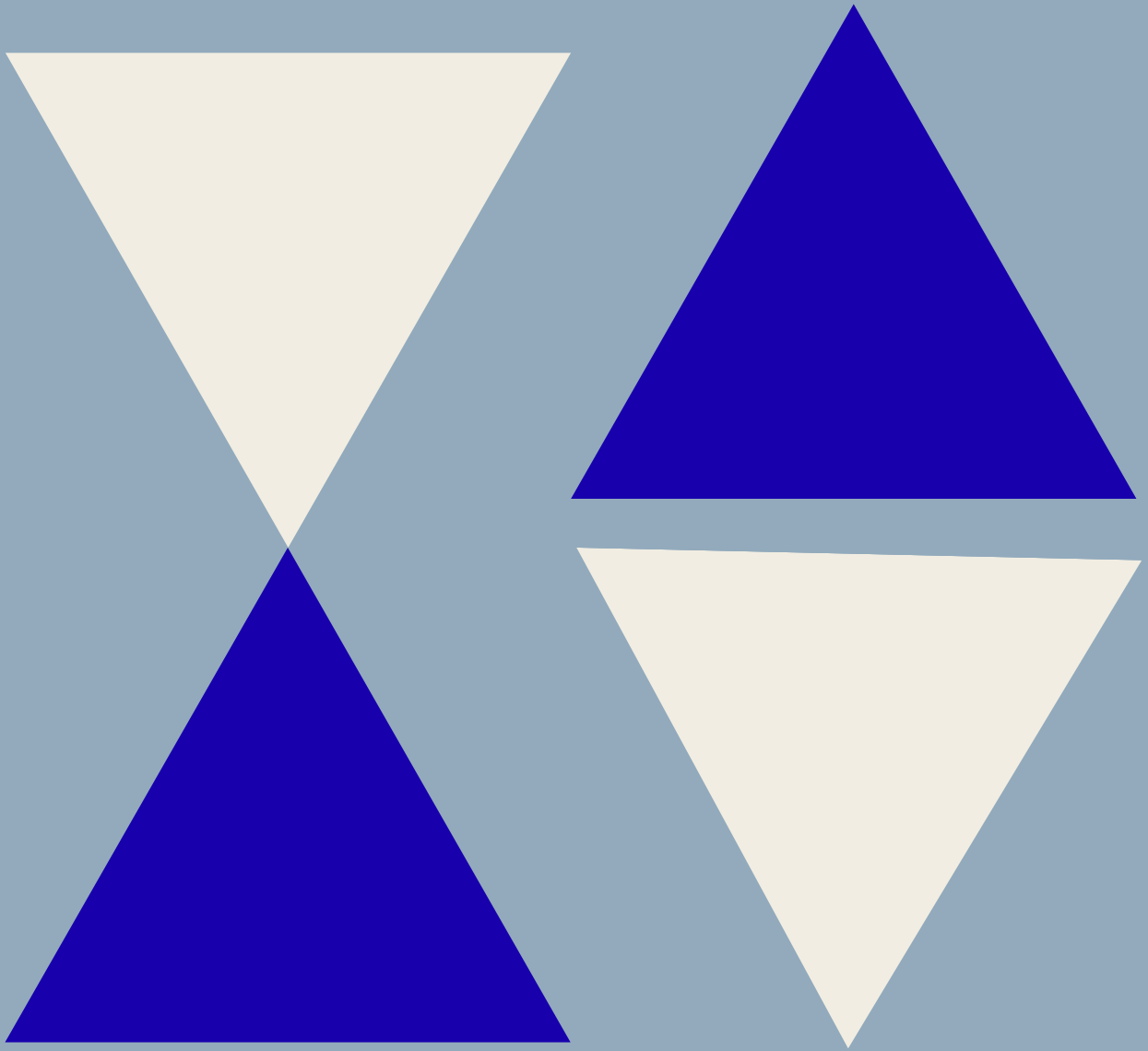
Morality is objective

Kant – A major aspect of Kantian ethics is deontology – the theory that morality is based on the action itself, not the consequence. He argues we have a duty to follow universally objective rules such as do not lie and do not steal, regardless of the consequences this can have. Kant argues that morality is objective because it is a priori, meaning it is derived from pure reasoning and logic and so it is universal.

Utilitarianism – Popularised by the philosophers Jeremy Bentham and J.S. Mill, utilitarianism supports ‘**the greatest good for the greatest number**’. Although the definition of “good” here may be disputed, utilitarianism typically has an objective view of morality, defining what is right and wrong by the happiness and suffering caused by the event’s outcome.

RPE DETERMINIST ARGUMENT IN REGARD TO LAW.

By Joy F

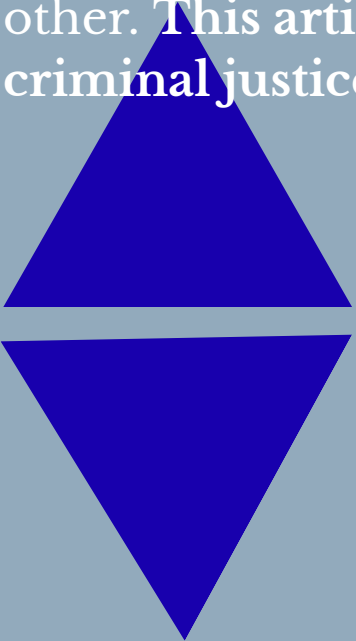




INTRODUCTION

Determinism is the belief that all human beings are controlled by external factors outside of our control. Given that the legitimacy of the criminal justice system runs on the principle of ‘mens rea’ – the acknowledgement that the guilty person chose to commit the act and is morally blameworthy, determinism seems to entirely uproot and undermine the morality of the system. As a society, we would agree that punishing individuals for actions that are completely out of their control is immoral.

Consequently, it would seem as though a complete overhaul or the complete dismantling of the justice system would be needed in order to restore morality to the system based on this reasoning. However, the current justice system is flexible enough to accommodate for the deterministic aspects of human nature and serves a greater purpose than simply seeking retribution. Because of these characteristics the justice system and determinism can co-exist without directly undermining the other. **This article aims to explain how determinism and the criminal justice system are able to coexist and why.**





NOT GUILTY BY REA

The justice system has a history of dealing with cases which directly demonstrate the influence of determinism on actions against the law. This is particularly the case for a sub-section of determinism: biological determinism. Biological determinism refers to the belief that human behaviour, intelligence and social status are controlled by genes and physiology. The legal system deals with this form of determinism through the legal verdict of 'Not guilty by reason of insanity'.

1 The Criminal Procedure (Insanity) Act 1964 outlines: 'that if significant evidence is provided to prove that the individual lacks 'mens rea' and instead their actions stemmed from mental problems (insanity),' then they are able to be proved not guilty by reason of insanity.



REASON OF INSANITY:

These mental problems often originated from the combination of genes inherited from our parents and so can be categorised as biological determinisms. Significantly, this reasoning has only relatively recently come into practice, holding significant weight in the trial of offenders with mental health issues. This reflects a recognition that some actions are not the result of rational choice, aligning partially with deterministic views. This, therefore, provides evidence of how the justice system deals with cases influenced by determinism as the **Criminal Procedure (Insanity) Act 1964** presents the flexibility of the legal system. This suggests that further improvements of the legal system to accommodate for the influences of determinism on criminal action are likely to continue to develop.

However, it could be argued that the justice system is still not flexible enough to accommodate determinisms as the legal system does not recognise environmental factors as a valid defence of mens rea. Regardless of this, the legal system is still able to co-exist with determinism because of the utilitarian nature of the system. While a significant role of the justice system is retribution - the act of taking revenge or delivering repayment for a crime - another important role is the protection of people in society.

ROLE OF PUNISHMENT IN SOCIETY

For instance, perhaps a boy who would have grown up in an environment surrounded by violent crime would have grown to become a product of his environment. However, because of the justice system those individuals were separated from society, so he grew up in a safe community and because of this went on to become a doctor. This, therefore, shows how the justice system and determinism can work hand in hand and why the dismantling of the system is not only not necessary but would also negatively impact society.

The act of criminal sentencing removes dangerous and possibly violent individuals from everyday society. Not only does this protect individuals in society, but it also changes the environment in which they live. It could be argued that this change in environment could lead to changes in the environmental factors that determine an individual's life. This reasoning could suggest that the justice system indirectly changes the conditions of environmental determinism, which could cause individuals to lead a better life.

SHMENT IN
TY

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the dismantling of the justice system is not necessary as evidence has proven that the system can coexist and work together with determinism. Although there is work to be done in applying environmental determinism to the criminal system, law is an extremely flexible concept that is constantly being added to with statutes and amended by Parliament and Judges. Therefore, while determinism challenges the moral foundation of 'mens rea', the justice system remains justified through its flexibility and its broader role in protecting society.

NIHILISM

By Hayley L

Nihilism is a philosophical viewpoint that challenges one of the most fundamental assumption humans tend to make - that life has inherent meaning or purpose. At its core nihilism argues that there is no intrinsic value to life. While it is an idea that is associated with extreme pessimism, it plays a significant role in philosophical thoughts and influences a person's understanding of life and their place in the world.

The most common form of nihilism is existential nihilism, which suggests that human life, viewed from a cosmic or universal perspective lacks meaning. There is no predetermined purpose that guides the events of life

and death. Concepts such as destiny, morality or ultimate truths are often seen by nihilists as human inventions rather than objective realities. This does not necessarily mean that life is worthless - it simply means that any value it has is not given by the get-go.

Are both Nihilism and Pessimism the same?

Nihilism is often confused with pessimism, but both ideas are quite different. Pessimism is an outlook on life that focusses on negative expectations. A pessimist may believe that life is full of suffering, disappointment or failure. However, they do not deny the fact that life has meaning – they simply interpret the meaning in a negative way. Whereas a nihilist does not question whether life is good or bad, rather they question whether those labels have any real

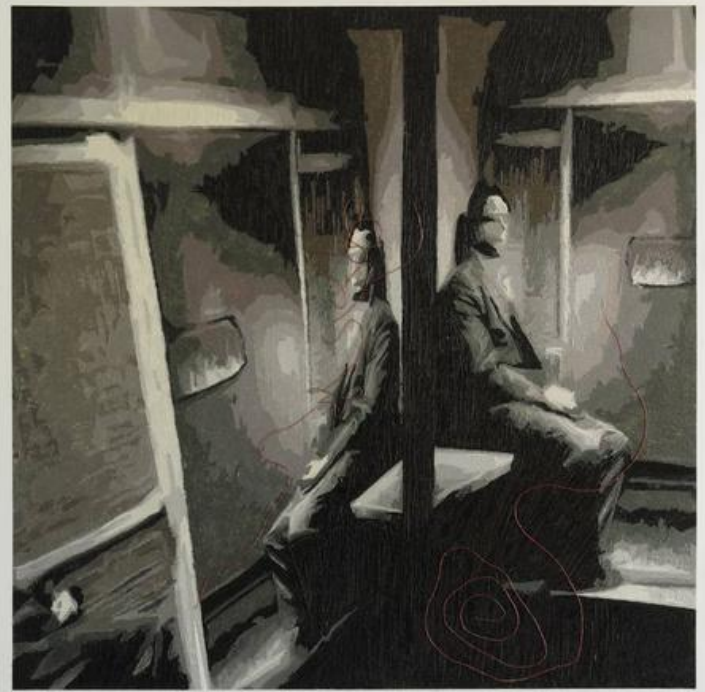


significance at all. A pessimist will claim that all things are bad, while a nihilist will ask whether anything truly matters in the first place. Unlike pessimism, nihilism is a more philosophical point than an emotional one.

Personally, I find myself both agreeing and disagreeing with nihilism. I understand the idea that the universe does not come with a built-in purpose for human life. When viewed on a cosmic scale, human existence can seem small and insignificant. This part of nihilism feels logically consistent, especially when considering scientific perspectives about the vastness of the universe and the randomness of events.

However, I disagree with the idea that this lack of inherent meaning makes life empty or unimportant. Even if meaning is not given to us, it does not mean that meaning cannot exist at all. Humans can create their own purpose through relationships, achievements, creativity, and personal values. In this sense, I believe meaning is subjective rather than non-existent.

So while nihilism may be correct in rejecting objective meaning, I think it goes too far when it implies that nothing matters. Things can matter deeply on a personal or human level, even if they do not matter on a universal scale. This balance between accepting the absence of inherent meaning and still choosing to create



meaning is what I find most convincing.

The philosopher most commonly associated with nihilism is Friedrich Nietzsche. However, Nietzsche did not simply promote nihilism—he was deeply concerned about its consequences. He famously declared that “God is dead,” not as a celebration, but as an observation that traditional sources of meaning, such as religion, were losing their influence in modern society. Nietzsche believed that this loss would lead to a crisis of meaning, where people would struggle to find purpose in a world without absolute truths. He argued that this could result in nihilism, where individuals feel that nothing has value. However, rather than accepting this as the final conclusion, Nietzsche encouraged people to overcome nihilism.

He introduced the idea of creating new values and becoming what he called the “Übermensch” or Overman,

an individual who defines their own purpose and lives authentically. For Nietzsche, nihilism was not the destination but a transitional stage - a challenge that humanity must confront and move beyond.

In conclusion, nihilism is a complex and often misunderstood philosophy. While it rejects the idea of inherent meaning, it does not necessarily result in despair or hopelessness. My own view reflects a middle ground; I agree that life may not have a built-in purpose, but I strongly believe that individuals can and do create meaningful lives.

Through the perspectives of thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche, nihilism can be seen not just as a problem, but as an opportunity. It forces people to question their assumptions and take responsibility for their own values. Rather than ending the search for meaning, nihilism may be what begins it.



"EXISTENCE APPEARS NOT ONLY NONSENSICAL BUT MONSTROUS AND ABSURD, AND THE SEARCH FOR ANY MEANING IN LIFE COMPLETELY FUTILE AND, A PRIORI, DOOMED TO FAILURE. PEOPLE ARE SEEN AS THROWN INTO THIS WORLD WITHOUT ANY CHOICE AS TO WHETHER, WHERE, WHEN, AND TO WHOM THEY ARE TO BE BORN. THE ONLY CERTAINTY IN LIFE APPEARS TO BE THE FACT THAT ITS DURATION IS LIMITED AND THAT IT WILL END. THE FACT OF HUMAN MORTALITY AND THE IMPERMANENCE OF ALL THINGS IS SEEN AS DAMOCLES' SWORD HANGING OVER US DURING EVERY MINUTE OF OUR LIVES AND ANNIHILATING ANY HOPE THAT ANYTHING HAS MEANING.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT DIMENSION OF THE "NO EXIT" SITUATION IS THE FEELING OF PERVADING INSANITY; SUBJECTS TYPICALLY FEEL THAT THEY HAVE LOST ALL MENTAL CONTROL AND BECOME PERMANENTLY PSYCHOTIC, OR THAT THEY HAVE GAINED THE ULTIMATE INSIGHT INTO THE ABSURDITY OF THE UNIVERSE AND WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO RETURN TO THE MERCIFUL SELF-DECEPTION THAT IS A NECESSARY PREREQUISITE FOR SANITY." - STANISLAV GROF, REALMS OF THE HUMAN UNCONSCIOUS



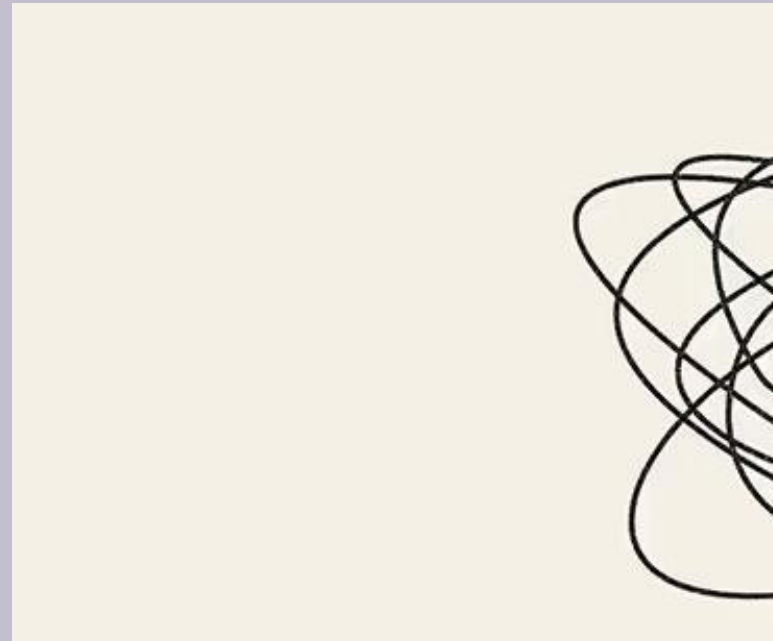
IS THERE A MORAL OBLIG

The question of whether there is a moral obligation for people to push themselves to the limit is one that has been prevalent, especially among teenagers recently. A study by YoungMinds concludes that over 1 in 5 young people aged 8-19 have a probable mental disorder, with school cited as a negative factor for over 50%. However, if one wants to question whether this is ethical, unfortunately the answer is not so clear.

Aristotle & Aquinas on telos:

Scholars such as Aristotle argue that every human has a purpose (telos) which is to fulfill reach eudaimonia (human flourishing). Scholars such as Aquinas expand upon this, declaring that there are real and apparent goods. Real goods lead to fulfilling our God-given purpose, which lead to eudaimonia. We know them by using "right reason in accordance with nature" as quoted by Aquinas. Meanwhile, Aquinas argues that apparent goods prove humans are flawed and fall short of God's intentions for them. Humans confuse what seems good with what's actually good, which leads to sin, not eudaimonia. This suggests we should push ourselves to the limit due to the fact humans have a telos. However, while some can argue this creates an ordered society, adhering to children's

innate sense of right versus wrong, many argue it is a very demanding ethical theory. Scholars such as G.E Moore criticise Aquinas's real and apparent goods, asking 'what is the meaning of goodness?' While some argue it is objective, however, most would argue it is subjective, therefore we cannot say our definition of goodness is what everybody else thinks goodness is.



Furthermore, how do people of the modern day know whether flourishing is achieved by pushing ourselves to the limit? Therefore, the question is not answered.

Augustine's Christian view:

To take a more extremist religious perspective, we can argue there is absolutely no use of pushing ourselves to the limit, due to the fallibility of human nature.

TO PUSH ONESELF

ATION

By Sherine P

St Augustine with his more pessimistic view on human nature, says humans are unable to achieve 'perfection' or salvation, instead only God's Grace can save us. Augustine argues there are two cities: the city of man, and the city of God. The city of man is our world, meanwhile the city of God is heaven. In the city of man, we can never have true justice as original sin corrupts, therefore we can

never be perfectly content. However, in the city of God, the good would finally dominate and virtue would reign. However, humans cannot build or replicate the city of God and should never assume they can. Therefore, Augustine argues original sin corrupts our ability to create social order, and due to this, no matter how hard we try, we will never be happy, even if we push ourselves to the limit. Rousseau would agree with this argument, stating that "man is born free and everywhere he is in chains."

A Buddhist perspective:

However, Augustine's argument ultimately gets shut down by the more optimistic, Buddhist perspective. In the Noble Eightfold Path, there is a specific element called *sammāvāyāma* (Right Effort). It is not about maximising strain; it is about skilful effort which is guided by awareness, and not ego or comparison. One of the core teachings of Gautama Buddha is the Middle Way. This is a rejection of both indulgence and denial.

Before Buddha's awakening, he reportedly pushed himself to severe limits, however, found it all pointless in the end. Therefore, these teachings suggest pushing yourself to the absolute limit is not inherently virtuous; if anything, it risks becoming another form of ego. This more positive view contrasts



MENTALLY TO THE LIMIT?

Augustine and does not make people feel inherently bad or negative about themselves. Arguing a newborn baby is tainted with original sin is damaging and destroys people's mental health. Therefore, many would argue the Buddhist perspective is a much more virtuous way to live your life.



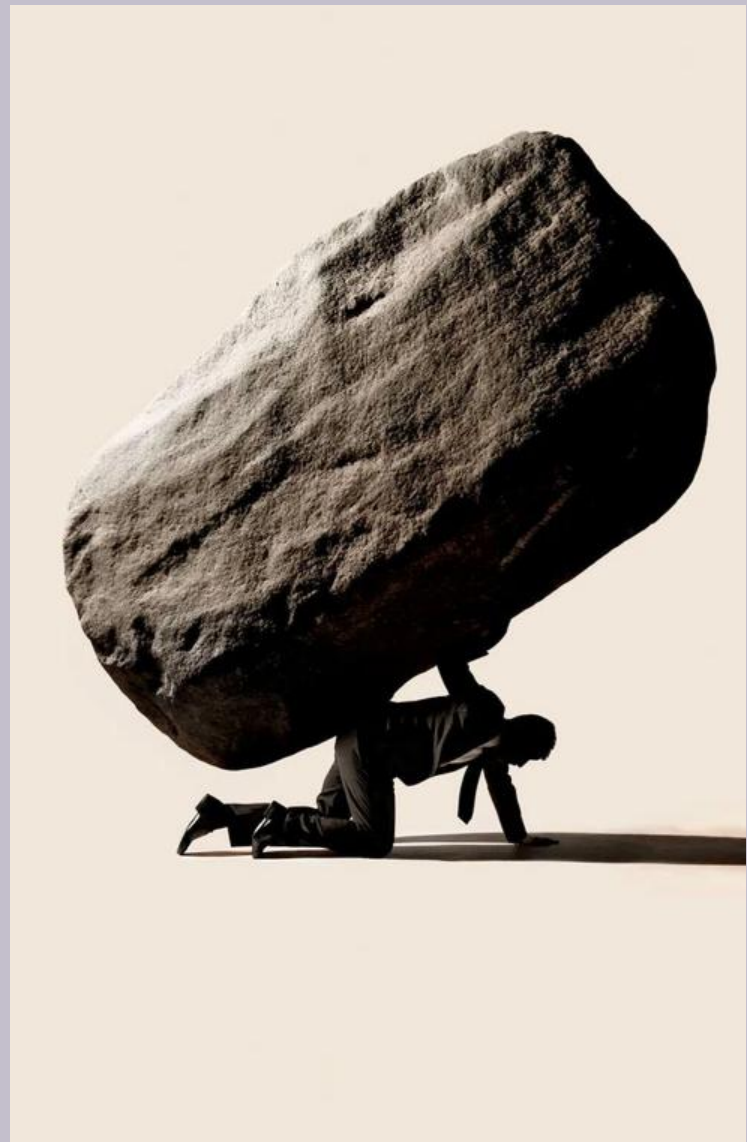
Kant's imperatives & formulations:
Dating back to the enlightenment, a key figure rose: Immanuel Kant. Kant argues there are categorical and hypothetical imperatives. Categorical imperatives are what we must do, for example, always tell the truth. However, hypothetical imperatives are conditional and should only be followed if you want a specific end goal. For example, if you want to pass your exams, you should study. Kant argues hypothetical imperatives are immoral and unethical. Therefore, Kant would argue that pushing yourself to the limit is not a moral obligation since it is not objectively good like the categorical imperative. Kant goes on to tell man to "live your life as though every act were to become a universal law" asking us to question if this action we want to pursue would be good if every person on the planet were to do it. If the action cannot be universalised, then it cannot be done in any situation. We should never put ourselves above the universal law, since nobody is an exception. If we were to universalise the act of pushing oneself to the limit, we would have a miserable society. Therefore, we cannot justify pushing ourselves to the maximum.

Furthermore, Kant's second formulation argues "every man is to be respected as an absolute end in himself". Kant argues humans should not be treated as a means to an end since we are rational, autonomous, and deserve respect. By working to

our limit, we are using ourselves as a means to an end, with the 'end' being the final goal. Therefore, Kant would never justify the action of pushing ourselves until collapse.

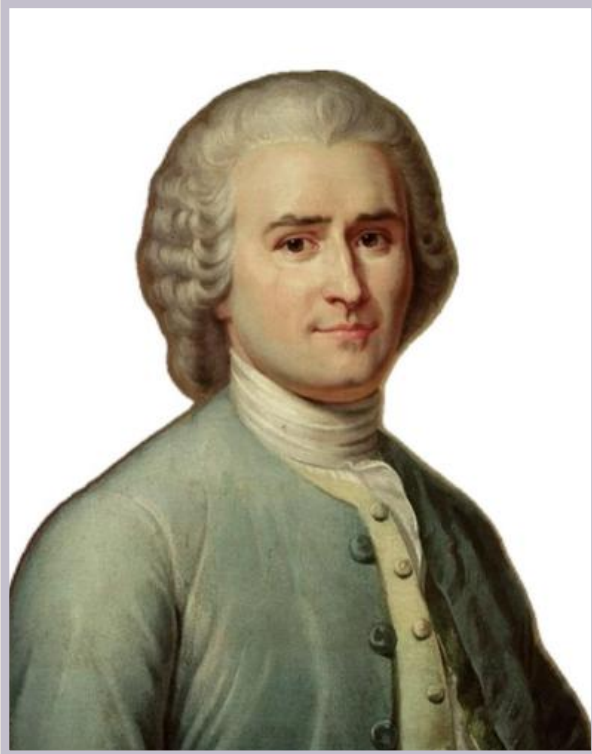
To sum up all of these arguments, most would argue that an interpretation of Kant's ethics provides the answer to this question. One should never push themselves to the limit. Humans are rational creatures who must be respected; therefore, we should never justify pushing ourselves to the limit. While self-discipline is important, it should never be the reason to sacrifice our mental health.

References:
youngminds.org.uk



Voltaire and Rousseau: The Worst Couple of The Enlightenment Period

By Valen W



The Age of Enlightenment (~1685-1815) also known as the Age of Reason is marked by its advancements in science, political ideas, religious debate, and philosophy. There were many colourful characters in the Enlightenment, including but not limited to Hume, Kant, Beccaria, Montesquieu, and Adam Smith. The Enlightenment was a greatly important era and spanned over a hundred years, yet it was not large enough for a certain two figures, the focus of this article, to stay away from each other. Although, ironically, they likely only met in person once. Voltaire, born Francois Marie-Arouet, is famous for his satires and plays (Candide, Maid of

Orleans, Henriade, Oedipe, etc.), striving to be the Virgil of France, and was highly prolific at his time. Voltaire was a rebel against his family, mocking his father's religious instruction and abandoning his study of law in favour of writing and the arts. He had many interesting (for lack of a better word) relationships in his life - a fifteen-year-long romantic relationship with physicist Émilie du Châtelet; a brief but intense bond with Frederick the Great that ended in Voltaire's arrest; and his own niece, Marie Louise Mignot. One of the most notable relationships he kept, all the way until his death in 1778, was his rivalry and disdain towards J.J. Rousseau.

Rousseau, born eighteen years after Voltaire, is known for his development of the Social Contract, writings such as *Julie*, and his influence upon the French Revolution. He lived much of his early life in unfavourable circumstances, his father having fled the country and his mother dead, and often humiliated by his mother's family, until he fled and found comfort in the baroness de Warens in 1728 when he was sixteen and she was twenty nine. Warens was rather transgressive of societal norms for a woman at the time, having divorced her husband and fled to Savoy, but served as a valuable teacher to Rousseau. Rousseau eventually became Warens' lover (alongside another man)

The following is a few interactions between the two, from the first innocent letter Rousseau sends

until both of their (unrelated) deaths in 1778.

Rousseau, in the early stages of his career, was an admirer of Voltaire, stating him as one of his greatest intellectual influences. He sends him a copy of his *Discourse on Equality*. Voltaire responds (see 1).

1

"IN READING YOUR WORK ONE IS SEIZED WITH A DESIRE TO WALK ON ALL FOURS",

and ends his letter with a teasing invitation:

Voltaire was sarcastic and often outright insulting, with tendencies towards vanity and jealousy - a sardonic serpent creating strife among the French monarchy, being imprisoned in the Bastille (1717), and exiled to England (1726). Rousseau was of much softer disposition; he was earnest, gentle, and affectionate (according to Hume), and sentimental in his writings. The two did not necessarily disagree on all things, but their incompatibility was clear. Voltaire believed that man had progressed from their barbaric origins, society having refined and polished humanity;

Rousseau believed "man was born free" and civilisation had corrupted the natural state. Voltaire pushes for heavy tolerance, Rousseau suggests a "civil religion". Voltaire was more of a deist, Rousseau was more of a theist; Voltaire wanted to build a theatre, Rousseau thought it would corrupt the city.

"MONSIEUR CHAPPUIS INFORMS ME THAT YOUR HEALTH IS VERY BAD; YOU SHOULD COME AND RESTORE IT TO THE NATIVE AIR, ENJOY ITS FREEDOM, DRINK WITH ME THE MILK OF OUR COWS, AND GRAZE ON OUR HERBS."

2

The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 killed 60,000 people in Lisbon alone. As it had taken place on November 1st, All Saints' Day, many people were attending mass in churches, buildings that could not withstand the catastrophe, leading to many casualties. Voltaire publishes his Poem on the Lisbon Disaster criticising the idea of an omnibenevolent God that could allow such suffering on such a day. In response, Rousseau sends him a letter On Providence, arguing that it was not.

**"GOD'S FAULT
AND RATHER
HUMANITY'S
FOR LIVING IN
CITIES TO
BEGIN WITH"**



In 1760, Rousseau sends a rather conflicted letter to Voltaire:

3

"I DON'T LIKE YOU, MONSIEUR. I HATE YOU, SINCE YOU HAVE WILLED IT SO; BUT I HATE YOU WITH THE FEELINGS OF ONE STILL CAPABLE OF LOVING YOU, IF YOU HAD DESIRED IT. OF ALL THE FEELINGS WITH WHICH MY HEART WAS FILLED FOR YOU, THERE REMAINS ONLY ADMIRATION FOR YOUR FINE GENIUS, AND LOVE FOR YOUR WRITINGS. IF I HONOUR IN YOU ONLY YOUR TALENTS IT IS NOT MY FAULT. I SHALL NEVER BE FOUND WANTING IN THE RESPECT WHICH IS DUE THEM, NOR IN THE BEHAVIOUR WHICH THAT RESPECT DEMANDS."

In 1761, Rousseau published his novel *Julie*.
Voltaire comments:

"NO MORE ABOUT JEAN-JACQUES' ROMANCE IF YOU PLEASE. I HAVE READ IT, TO MY SORROW, AND IT WOULD BE TO HIS IF I HAD TIME TO SAY WHAT I THINK OF THIS SILLY BOOK."

and describing it as "silly, Philistine, shameless and boring".

Similarly, in 1763 Rousseau publishes *Emile, or On Education*. Voltaire comments that it has

"FIFTY GOOD PAGES ... IT IS REGRETTABLE THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN WRITTEN BY ... SUCH A KNAVE."

Despite this, after the publication of *Emile* (and the *Social Contract*) had warranted Rousseau's arrest, Voltaire offers Rousseau to stay in Ferney with him:

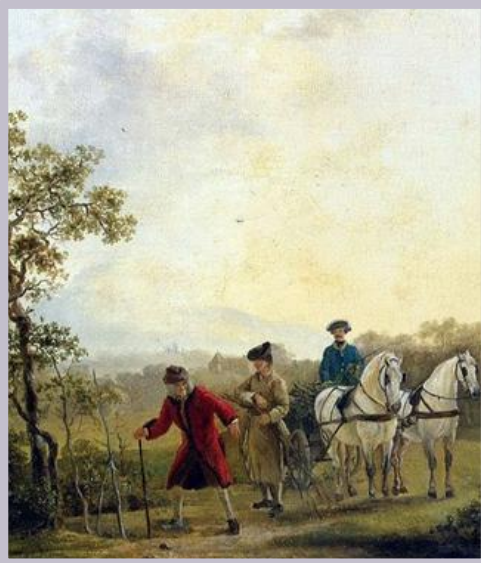
"I SHALL ALWAYS LOVE THE AUTHOR OF THE 'VICAIRE SAVOYARD' WHATEVER HE HAS DONE, AND WHATEVER HE MAY DO...LET HIM COME HERE! HE MUST COME! I SHALL RECEIVE HIM WITH OPEN ARMS. HE SHALL BE MASTER HERE MORE THAN I. I SHALL TREAT HIM LIKE MY OWN SON."

5 In 1764, Voltaire, anonymously, published the pamphlet *Le Sentiment des citoyens*, in which he takes on the perspective of Genevan citizens to expose Rousseau and his abandoned illegitimate children. Rousseau attributes the pamphlet to J. Vernes.

0
4

6

"IF I HAD PLAYED OFF SOME LITTLE ILL-NATURED PLEASANTRY AGAINST MR. J. J. ROUSSEAU, I WOULD NOT DISOWN IT..."



In 1766, Rousseau retreated to England as a refugee. Whilst already experiencing a smear campaign by a man named Walpole, and a rapidly deteriorating relationship with philosopher David Hume, his close friend whilst in England, Voltaire decides to (anonymously) publish his Letter to Dr. J. Pansophe. It included extracts from Rousseau's previous negative statements about England, much of which ended up in the English newspapers. When discussing the issue of Rousseau with Hume, and asked on his involvement in the defamation, Voltaire denies it, arguing that: (see 6).

On the 30th of May 1778, Voltaire died in Paris. Approximately thirty days later, on the 2nd of July, Rousseau passed away. Both of their remains now reside in the Panthéon, a few metres away from each other. Supposedly, in Voltaire's library there survived over two dozen volumes of Rousseau's work, as well as several critical volumes discussing him.

References:

Durant, Will; Durant, Ariel (1980) [1965]. *The Story of Civilization: The Age of Voltaire*. Simon & Schuster. ISBN 978-0-671-01325-7.

Durant, Will; Durant, Ariel (1967). *The Story of Civilization: Rousseau and Revolution*. Simon & Schuster. ISBN 978-1-56731-021-4.



THE ILLUMINATI

By Zara V

What does the word illuminati mean to you? For different people, they have different meanings. To some, it could be used as a reference in their favourite media. For others it serves as a reminder of things, haunting things that hide in the remains of the past. Ideas that lay buried but never truly died. The concept of the illuminati is the conspiracy that alleges a group of elites, perhaps you could call them a cult of reason. What are the illuminati and are they real?

The Shady Origins

Founded on May 1st, 1776, by 28-year-old law professor Adam Weishaupt, Illuminati was a Bavarian secret society. They saw themselves as a voice of reason promoting ideas to



oppose the government. The government kept people in the dark but that was why the illuminati was here: to help people as the “enlightened ones,” which was a direct translation of their name. Of course, in 18th century Bavaria the church and the government were separate, but both functioned as a single power. They introduced secularism which is the separation of public affairs from religious control and logic.

The end?

However, the Illuminati didn't last very long. Before the government found out about them, Weishaupt and his second in command, Baron Adolph von Knigge had a disagreement with each other. Knigge wanted to make the rituals more exciting and mystical as the one who recruited most of the famous members such as the writer Goethe. He was the complete opposite of Weishaupt, a paranoid, power hungry academic who strived for total control. The dispute between the two caused the Illuminati to fall apart and Knigge quit, leaving them vulnerable. They were exposed to the Bavarian authorities. Weishaupt despised the tyranny of the church which was ironic as he created tyranny inside his own society. In 1785, an illuminati messenger was struck by lightning and killed while carrying secret documents. When the police found his body, they discovered the documents along with it which planned to infiltrate the government. The elector of Bavaria, Karl Theodor banned secret societies and Illuminati was dispersed by 1787. The government also published the documents they had found, using the illuminati's own words to turn the public against them. Now the so-called voice of reason was a voice of treason.

Impact and legacy

The French Revolution happened soon after the disappearance of the Illuminati, so the brainwashed public started to form conspiracy theories—such as writer Augustin Barruel, blaming it on the group. As well as that, the all-seeing eye or the eye of providence became falsely linked to the Illuminati. The group have become a fictional concept that people look upon as a story. Pop culture kept the myth alive with songs and countless films picturing them as the shadowy omnipotent elite. Some people today argue if their existence is real today or not. Ironically, the failure of a society barely held together for 11 years became famous and were claimed to be the cause of the wars, undoubtedly one of history's most enduring legends. The supposedly secret society had made a name for themselves in this world...

Conclusion

All of this brings us back to one question: is illuminati real today? The original were inevitably consumed by a yearning for power they were against. Weishaupt became something he despised, and the society was seen as a voice of lies. But now, what survived was their myth. People hiding in the shadows, pulling the strings behind what we see today in the real world: seeming to control everything. At least, their death achieved more than their life ever did.



I would like to thank everyone for their contributions to this first edition of the RPE journal ran by 2026's year 12 students. Although it's published at an unconventional time, I hope you have enjoyed reading this and seeing your peers' academic works. Please feel free to contact me at 20lengx@newsteadwood.co.uk if you would like to contribute to the next edition of the NWS RPE journal, whether it be an article, a media review, suggestions for quotes or top philosophers or even a completely new section you think should be added!

Xinyi L, RPE subject leader

Thank you to the following for contributing to this edition:

Xinyi L (Writer, designer and editor)

Toni A (Writer, designer and editor)

Risha B (Designer and editor)

Abigail O (Writer)

Lauren A (Writer)

Jasreet H (Writer)

Anna C (Writer)

Joy F (Writer)

Isis S (Writer)

Haley L (Writer)

Zara V (Writer)

Sherine P (Writer)

Valen W (Writer)

To the NWS RPE department and those who helped our writers through suggestions and advice.



- Top 5 Philosophers
- Top Quotes
- Upcoming Talks
- Recommendations
- Reading List
- Watch List
- Belief in God and Religion
- Transhumanism
- Chappie
- A Pic of Dorian Gray

- Moral Saints
- The Pedlar
- Notes from The Underground
- Morality
- RPE Determinist Arguments in Regard to Law
- Nihilism
- Is There a Moral Obligation to Push Oneself to the Limit
- Voltaire and Rousseau
- The Illuminati

KANT STOP



Newstead Wood School Religion, Philosophy, Ethics Journal; volume 1; 1st edition / Publication: May 2026 / Front Cover
Creditations: Drawing In The New Yorker, Saul Steinberg, 3rd February 1945; cover design by Xinyi L

