Logos : λόγος

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Editors' Introduction

"Philosophy" is a challenging word to define. It can refer to an academic discipline, a way of doing things, a personal credo, or even a brand of skin care products. Philosophy is a word that covers a wide variety of material, and we hope that this journal represents some of the breadth of what philosophy has to offer. You will find in these pages works that touch on topics as abstract as Leibizian metaphysics or the power of God, and as concrete as what to have for dinner. On behalf of the entire editorial board, I am pleased to present the twentieth edition of *Logos: The Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy.*

This year, *Logos* received 101 submissions from undergraduate philosophers at institutions across the world. Of these submissions, 10 advanced into our final round of consideration. It was difficult to choose between the many exemplary pieces we read, but ultimately, we feel that the five papers selected for publication represent some of the best that undergraduate philosophy has to offer. Each of these papers has a unique voice and original perspective, and all are commendable for their clarity, rigor, and creativity. I would like to express my utmost gratitude to the five philosophers who have allowed us to showcase their work.

I would like to thank my peers on the *Logos* editorial board for their diligent efforts over the course of the last five months. This journal is a product of their insight, open mindedness, and attention to detail. Additionally, I would like to thank the Sage School of Philosophy for their two decades of generous support. In particular, I would like to thank Pamela Hanna, Dorothy Vanderbilt, and Melissa Totman for their unending helpfulness and unsurpassed kindness. Many thanks as well to our faculty advisor, Harold Hodes, for his continued efforts on behalf of our organization.

Finally, we at *Logos* would like to express our warmest well-wishes to Dorothy Vanderbilt; we thank Dorothy for her service to *Logos* and to Cornell philosophy as a whole, and we wish her a joyous and fulfilling retirement!

Ethan Kovnat
Editor-in-Chief

"I Do Not Want to Choose the Restaurant, Honey"

Oliver Vonnegut
Tufts University

FOREWORD

Editors: Shriya Desai, Sophia Gottfried, Allie Pallotta, & Jordan Richards

When our Editor-In-Chief first learned Logos had received a paper that mentioned BDSM in the first line, one of the things he said first was, "Who am I going to assign to read this paper in round 1? It'll be awkward." When we were told we got a paper on BDSM, our first reaction was "oh gee golly, this should be entertaining, we can't wait to write a rejection letter for Bargain Bin Philosophy Fifty Shades of Grey." What we were not expecting was a nuanced examination of why people relinquish control. "I Do Not Want to Choose the Restaurant, Honey" is not constrained by BDSM as a topic. The paper examines the way people live, why they behave how they do. It challenges our understanding of subjecthood and objecthood, in a way that many editors found personally meaningful. Some felt that this paper helped them understand their own struggles with mental health better. Others felt that this paper showed them a more healthy way to exist in the world than a never-ending quest for mastery. And others still just found it an enjoyable read, filled to the brim with quips and insights. This paper embodies the philosophical values of clarity and argumentation, while also being an accessible read. It takes on the assumption in the wide philosophical canon that the most morally important part of being a good human being is to be a subject, and the will to objecthood is either perverted or just fundamentally not part of the human experience.

Seldom does stylistic form so uniquely complement the content of a paper. While challenging the assumption that subjecthood is the sole mode of human existence, the writing itself seemed to tackle another: the understanding of the paper as an object rather than an expression of subjecthood. Our discussion on whether or not to publish this paper was a heated debate about the place of "excitable little guy[s]" in philosophy. Were the strict guidelines on academic style necessary for academic rigor and clarity? Or, were they simply tools? Ultimately we determined that the style of this paper aided its academic ends. Beauvoir would be proud.

We hope you are as bemused, entertained, and endeared by this paper as we are. Perhaps, it will help you, as it helped us, to better find your footing in the world. Read on, and enjoy.

ABSTRACT

A greater understanding of the dynamic between the Subject and Object within us all could help many people with their daily struggles. Countless existential and psychological struggles in daily life are caused by an imbalanced understanding of ourselves within this dynamic. At times, we Objectify ourselves too much, saying, "oh, I can't stop [insert bad behavior] because my brain makes me do it." At others, we make ourselves out to be more Subject than we are, attempting to eliminate perfectly ordinary limits and drives through pure

willpower. In this paper, I attempt to explore the dynamic and its relationship to our existential struggles through the contexts of BDSM and fascism.

I. INTRODUCTION

BDSM[1] is the cure to fascism.

Look, look—just hear me out on this one. Okay, I know that it's actually strong community ties and support; but BDSM can at least *help*. People talk about fascism and BDSM in similar ways: they focus on dominance. For BDSM, people are most interested in asking, "Why would anyone want to do that to someone?" Kink is often seen as an aggressive release of one's personal restraints, an embrace of the primal "inner beast." For fascism, people focus on the fanaticism for power, the death-cult aspects rather than the subsumption of the will. For the Nazis, giving up their individual wills to be controlled by a larger movement was not just a side-effect in their quest for power; it was a primary motivation. While these explanations make sense for the dominant and the dictator, they do not explain the desire to submit oneself to another. This focus on domination rather than submission, then, is incomplete. It does a grave injustice to BDSM and a great favor to aspiring fascist leaders.

Philosophy, I believe, at times mirrors this issue. Many philosophical models leave little room for submission, sexual or otherwise. Not only do they not explain it, but they focus so hard on describing and extolling our more dominant tendencies that the desire to submit is an insensible idea within these theories. Even when acknowledged, submission is often condemned as the product of a defective will. Existentialism and Stoicism in particular, two of the more popular philosophical schools of late, often extol the individual and their drive to mastery.

At first glance, Simone de Beauvoir's Subject-hood shares the Existentialist drive to power. Beauvoir identifies Objectification as the primary challenge facing women and sees embracing an active, powerful self-understanding as crucial to the movement of liberation. Today we see women, on the heels of massive social advancements and looking to make many more, still having fantasies of sexual submission and Objectification. Somewhat suprisingly, men, placed in the dominant social position by patriarchal institutions, fantasize about sexual submission and Objectification more than women (Hawley and Hensley 2009, 573). Do these numbers mean anyone wants to be oppressed? No, just that they want to submit. There is a difference, I promise. A close reading of Beauvoir's theory of the Subject v. Object dynamic reveals a fluidity of the self; she portrays us as a blurred mix of Subject and Object.

Before explaining what my mission in this paper is, I shall begin with what it is not. I do not seek to explain the experience of every BDSM practitioner or everyone who has ever desired submission, sexual or not. Rather, I am seeking

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[1] If you do not know, look it up. The internet will provide a far more effective definition than I ever could.

to describe and unpack just one of many processes by which I believe the desire for submission may come to be in some individuals. As I hope only to explain the experiences of some, there are many with whom this paper will not resonate. I consider this limit to be a strength; what could be the use in saying something so vague that it applies to everyone? A wise professor has many times told me that the purpose of a good philosopher is not to come down the mountain with all the answers and ultimate truth, but to ask, "But what if we looked at it this way?" I believe philosophy exists to wrestle with a *perspective* rather than give an answer, and that is what I seek to do. Henceforth, when I speak about my theories and it seems as though I am saying, "The world is this way," please understand me as saying what I truly mean to, which is, "It helps me understand the world if I think of it as being this way." I will strive to avoid repeating myself on that point as such disclaimers would be exhausting for me to write and for you to read every other sentence, so heed that warning. If this approach means my perspective only resonates with a few people, so be it. If it only resonates with me, well… won't *I* feel special.

I also do not seek to offer much in the way of commentary or analysis on philosophical literature. This paper has inspirations from Hannah Arendt, Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, Georg Hegel, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Søren Kierkegaard, but it will not purposefully comment on their theories. They are inspirations, not topics. The topic of this paper is the metaphysics of submission and what makes it desired. I consider myself a remorseless (if somewhat clumsy) thief; I will snatch what tidbits of theories I find shiny (likely fumbling a few, leaving them scuffed and worn in my clumsy hands) and give nothing in return. I will be using the most simplistic version of these concepts I could find: my own. This paper is not about any philosophical constructs or theories; it only uses them. They are a stolen and modified lens—nothing more. I am not even sure this paper is about BDSM; it is more the setting I have chosen for exploration than the topic. I think this paper is about the relief I feel when my boss tells me what today's project is. I think it is about the freedom I want to find in my worst memories and the sickening allure of depression. I think it is about the time I was sixteen and struck myself in the temple half a dozen times over a math test. And I am pretty damn certain it is about the love I feel when a friend tells me who they see in my eyes.

Above all, this paper is about trust and desire.

But enough about me; I promised a roadmap!

This paper will be a collection of definitions mixed with defenses and groundings. I will go through the terms—Subject-hood, Object-hood, the Will to Subject-hood, the Will to Object-hood (no spoilers yet!), Submission, and Oppression—that I wish to use. Secondly, I will ground these ideas in research, personal accounts, and my observations of submission and oppression, tying them together in a discussion of BDSM and fascism and how they interact with the Will to Object-hood. Though I view this paper as an attempt more to grapple

with and reach out towards the topics at hand than to define a self-contained argument, I will still arrive at a conclusion: the characteristics of BDSM make it a space to express the Will to Object-hood while ultimately validating Subject-hood, whereas the characteristics of fascism make it alluring to the Will to Object-hood but ultimately self-sabotaging and ungratifying, analogous to an addiction.

Good luck to us both!

I. SOME WORDS THAT I LIKE

One of the primary dynamics I think BDSM can play with is that between our roles as Subjects and Objects. In explaining her view that philosophy and society cast men as Subjects and women as Other, Simone de Beauvoir says, "[Woman] is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute… the Subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as the inessential, as the Object" (Beauvoir 2011, 26). Wise-enough (considering her unfortunate profession) Philosophy Professor Nancy Bauer in her analysis of Beauvoir describes a Subject as, "a self-conscious being capable of moving beyond what nature and the world give to her, including her desires as they stand" (Bauer 2011, 125). This idea of movement brings us to Beauvoir's conception of transcendence, whereby a Subject is supposed to transcend their nature and exist in a constant state of change, of becoming, of *action*. "Every Subject posits itself as a transcendence concretely, through projects; it accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing toward other freedoms; there is no other justification for present existence than its expansion toward an indefinitely open future" (Beauvoir 2011, 37). Indefinite expansion through projects, and constant change through action. Through the pursuit of freedom. This fate awaits every Subject who wishes to justify their existence.

The Objectified human, meanwhile, is inessential. As Beauvoir said, they are defined in relation to the Subject. They are entirely reliant upon it for any sense of meaning, purpose, or role. Indeed, Beauvoir says that the role of Object has taken the burden of existential justification off of women, noting it as a sinister allure of Object-hood. She also describes the socially assigned place for women as being irresponsible; therefore, she is passive. We are responsible for what we do; so if women are supposed to be irresponsible, then they are not supposed to do anything. This is the role of the Object: to be while the Subject does, to exist while it acts. Bauer describes the Object as "an embodied being with characteristics, a style, appetites, and a history, all of which invite the judgments of others" (Bauer 2011, 125). The Object is rooted and grounded in what Beauvoir would call their immanence; they exist as a fixed and definable point.

So now we have a basic conception of Subjects and Objects. Subjects reach out into the abyss to act, observe, judge, and influence, while Objects stay

constant within themselves to be acted upon, be observed, be judged, and be influenced. However, already there seem to be several contradictions within the dynamic itself. Firstly, no one can wholly be Subject or Object; humans are embroiled in a constant limbo between activity and passivity. We are at all times Subjects even as we are Objects. Beauvoir explicitly affirms this ambivalence in the conclusion to *The Second Sex*, saying, "Man is, like woman, a flesh, thus a passivity, the plaything of his hormones and the species, uneasy prey to his desire; and she, like him, in the heart of carnal fever, is consent, voluntary gift, and activity; each of them lives the strange ambiguity of existence made body in his or her own way" (Beauvoir 2011, 859). Even in the most patriarchal, dichotomous, or self-segregating of societies, we could never be truly one or the other. Indeed, Beauvoir shows that quite the opposite would happen. In being so heavily cast as Subjects, men are Objectified by the need to live up to a transcendent ideal that only becomes more unattainable the more separated it becomes from Object-hood. Women, too, are more likely to rebel against Object-hood the more extreme it becomes. The more passivity is forced upon women, the more likely it is that they will recognize the difference between their assigned role and their lived experience as actors with influence on the world. The more we attempt to separate ourselves into Subject or Object, the more unreachable and stifling they both become.

Bauer also states, "Part of being a Subject, Beauvoir thought, is allowing yourself…to be the Object of other people's judgment, rational or irrational: to risk being ridiculed or condemned or ignored or…to discover that, after all, you don't know who you are" (Bauer 2011, 128). Subjects inherently open themselves up to Objectification merely by being Subjects. To act and influence and have power invites the gaze of others, the gaze that reduces you to an embodied person rather than a perpetual evolution. Not only do we hold contradictory, fluid senses of Subject and Object within us, but the very dynamic cannot exist without dialectically pushing back against itself.

I think, however, that there is at least one more contradiction here, and it exists in the will. If Subject-hood is a constant evolution—an eternal becoming through active projects and outward reaching in opposition to the stasis of Object-hood—it would follow that there is some drive or will associated with Subject-hood (hereafter creatively referred to as "the Will to Subject-hood"). Whether this Will to Subject-hood is innate in humans or intentionally developed by those who seek to justify their existence[2], whether it is metaphysical or phenomenological, it certainly in some way must exist if we are to accept such an insatiable image of Subject-hood. But what would a Will to Subject-hood look like? So far, we have established that a Subject "[is] capable of moving beyond… her desires" and "accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing toward other freedoms" (Bauer 2011, 125; Beauvoir 2011, 37). If a Will to Subject-hood is a will to achieve freedom through surpassing freedom and to move beyond one's desires, it seems inevitable to me that such a will would turn upon itself.

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[2] Everytime I type that phrase, I am overcome with such indignant wrath that God takes five hours off my life as punishment.

There are two types of freedom that one can pursue: freedom to and freedom from[3] (McKay 2012). I will now divide the Will to Subject-hood into what I believe to be two useful sub-wills[4]: the Will to Act and the Will to Escape, drives which correlate respectively to freedom to and freedom from. The Will to Act can be understood as the drive to be a Subject, whereas the Will to Escape is the drive not to be an Object. The Will to Act wishes to extend into the world, whereas the Will to Escape seeks to resist and throw off all shackles and influences—influences that are not always external to the individual. I believe that at times, something happens within us that, from my perspective, can be understood as the Will to Subject-hood rebelling against itself. Specifically, I believe the Will to Escape clashes with the Will to Act, creating an *illusory*[5] inversion that I will call the Will to Object-hood.

So, how might this illusory inversion work? According to Beauvoir, "Every individual concerned with justifying his existence experiences his existence as an indefinite need to transcend himself" (Beauvoir 2011, 37). Eventually, this insatiable drive--as all such drives do--must become exhausting. Take, for example, a person who is climbing the corporate ladder. They seek promotion after promotion so they can get more promotions and perhaps even a raise or two, but in this case, they are very much a Subject acting on their Will to Act. They are getting out into the world, making moves, and pushing ever outward. This phenomenon is not uncommon today, but it is not for everyone. This type of person often gets burnt out. You yourself have probably had a similar experience where you just kept pushing and pushing for more and not only grew tired of it but became resentful. Why *should* I keep pushing myself so hard for a damn grade? What is wrong with me that I can't seem to give it up? *I want to give it up*. At this moment, I see the Will to Escape turning on the Will to Act. The Will to Act has pursued so much dominance and left such emotional, intellectual, and at times physical carnage in its wake that we *hate* it. The Will to Act no longer represents desires to be attained, but a damaging process to be rebelled against. We feel as though we are "uneasy prey to [our] desire," and wish to be "capable of moving beyond what nature and the world give to [us], including [our] desires (Beauvoir 2011, 859; Bauer 2011, 125). Our very wish to "[accomplish our] freedom only by perpetual surpassing toward other freedoms" pushes us to overcome transcendence and be content, in some small way, with stasis (Beauvoir 2011, 37).

Freedom from transcendence, transcendence of freedom—call it what you like, it makes no difference here. All we know is that we want the ceaseless drive to expand to *STOP*. We don't care how. Can anyone honestly say that they have

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[3] I was very proud of myself for coming up with this idea a few months before writing this paper, and then exceedingly disappointed just a few weeks ago by the discovery that apparently about half a dozen thinkers thought of it before me. This left me quite perplexed about how to properly cite such an idea. While I believe at this point it could constitute common knowledge and while I did come up with it without being inspired by any particular source, I have found a far more satisfying solution than leaving it uncited.

[4] I here invite the reader to appreciate this hilarious but unfortunately accidental pun. Sub-will. Submissive will. It's foreshadowing because I am going to talk about how the will to Subject-hood can actually lead to submission. Hilarious, right? Laugh, damn you.

[5] I use this word to emphasize that the Will to Object-hood is not truly a new will, it is just a manifestation of the Will to Subject-hood.

not felt the urge to stop trying to justify themselves and simply *be*? Building off of Bauer's point, it is not just the judgment of others that the Will to Act invites, but the pushback of the world itself. The more we act, the more consequences we must accept. The more we seek Subject-hood, the more the world attempts to push us towards Object-hood. The corporate go-getter's action may enable them to exert influence outward and gain promotion after promotion, but it burdens them with more and more responsibilities, external judgments, and external considerations. They must shoulder the weight of moral responsibility for every small change they push upon the world.

It seems to me that at some point in life, everyone has wished to be smaller, less important—to disappear, even. Everyone has made a mistake and wished for freedom from the consequences their autonomy elicited. Everyone has wished someone had stopped them from making that choice. This is the Will to Powerlessness. It is the result of, as Kierkegaard would say, "the dizziness of freedom" that we get when we feel the burden of our active expansion (Kierkegaard et al. 1980, 61). Even as a child, I can distinctly remember wanting to be less of an influence on the world. When I got angry at my parents, my parents got angry at me. When I was sad, my parents were sad for me. When I was happy, my parents were happy for me. The weight of being empathized with, of knowing that I was the determinant factor in my environment, was deeply painful. All I wanted, all I still sometimes want, was to **STOP**. Stop expanding, stop influencing, stop changing myself, and thereby stop changing the world around me. I willed towards Object-hood.

If we truly craved constant Subject-hood, we would relish in every responsibility. Every moment that your boss gave you control over a team project, that your partner said, "No, honey, I don't have a clue what I want for my birthday; surprise me!" would be euphoric. While we crave choice and freedom, we still resent the Objectifying responsibility that our Subject-hood creates.

Beauvoir fully admits to this allure, but condemns it. "Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into 'in-itself,' of freedom into facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the Subject consents to it; if this fall is inflicted on the Subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression; in both cases it is an absolute evil" (Beauvoir 2011, 37). I am inclined to sympathize with the Will to Object-hood. I do not praise it as a virtue, but neither can I bring myself to condemn it. It is a distress response to true anguish. I agree with Beauvoir that it is harmful for an individual to fully Objectify themselves, to destroy themselves as Subject and attempt to live purely as an Object, just as it is foolish and damaging to try living fully as Subject. However, the Will to Object-hood cannot be ignored. It is a true and persistent drive that lovingly and desperately seeks to free us from the anguish of an existential plight. We must not dive into it, but we must express it.

Now, we come to the directions in which that Will to Object-hood can go, and I believe that it is useful (if not ultimately true) to think of two directions: Surrender and Oppression. The primary difference here brings us back to the difference between Subjects and Objects. Surrender is freely chosen, whereas

Oppression is forced. The effect of this difference, I believe, is that the submitter validates their Subject-hood while expressing their Object-hood, but the oppressed emphasizes only their Object-hood. To express Object-hood is an inherently Subject thing to do because it is to *do*; it is to express oneself in the world, even if that is in withdrawing one's influence from it and choosing to let it act on you. Oppression, however, is the state of having Object-hood chosen for you. As Beauvoir says, "If this fall is inflicted on the Subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression" (Beauvoir 2011, 37). This frustration is not necessarily recognized by the Object, however. Having choice taken away from you can have many of the same allures as giving it up freely. Think of the burnt-out corporate climber who reaches a ceiling on their ascension, where it is made clear that they may ascend no further up the ladder. There will be no more promotions, no more grasping, no more politicking. This individual may find relief in having the choice to continue expanding or lapse inward taken away from them, for they were caught between the Will to Act and a rebellious Will to Escape. However, importantly, this individual's journey stops there. If the corporate climber chooses to deny their ambitions and lapse into immanence, they have still ultimately acted. Their Subject-hood has been validated because, as I emphasized earlier, the Will to Object-hood is only an *illusory* inversion of the Will to Subject-hood; it ultimately continues to will towards freedom, not truly Object-hood. This is not to say that Surrender is always good and healthy, only to say that Surrender actually achieves its true end—validating Subject-hood through Object-hood—whereas oppression only works on a surface level, upholding only Object-hood without going down to the further layer where it can achieve Subject-hood as well. Surrender, for this reason, is satiating, while oppression is not.

So, that was a lot. For your convenience, the terms you should take away from this section moving into the second half of the paper are as follows:

1. *Subject-hood and Object-hood*—two modes of existence between which we fluidly and ambiguously drift. Subjects reach outward to act and influence the world, justifying themselves in a constant state of change, while Objects remain static and immanent, embodied within their present, defined state.

2. *The Will to Subject-hood, composed of the Will to Act and the Will to Escape*—a faculty that drives individuals to embrace and assert their Subject-hood and flee Object-hood.

3. *The Will to Object-hood*—a byproduct of the Will to Escape viewing the Will to Act as a restrictive influence and seeking to escape it, thereby creating an effect where the Will to Subject-hood turns upon itself and seems to invert, willing towards Object-hood.

4. *Surrender and Oppression*—two potential expressions of the Will to Object-hood, the former being freely chosen and therefore enabling the Will to Object-hood to overcome itself and once again will towards Subject-hood, and the latter being forcefully imposed and therefore reinforcing Object-hood within the individual.

II. SOME MORE WORDS THAT I LIKE, AND SOME THAT I DO NOT[6]

Have you ever sat by a window—in your car, your home, wherever—during a rainstorm or hurricane? Have you ever felt the urge to reach out and touch the window? I love rain storms for this exact reason. I find immense reassurance in getting so close to something that could literally freeze me to death, but staying just out of reach—knowing that I have that window between us, that the cold can only get to me if I let it. As a child, I would love running out into rain storms. It would chill me to the bone, but it was *fun* because I had the power, because I had chosen the cold. It was reassuring. This behavior, to me, shares many similarities with BDSM-style submission.

Yes, it is finally time to talk about BDSM. My apologies to those of you who have been waiting patiently for the exciting bit. Before getting into things, I should note that I am not a member of any BDSM community or scene. The information I have is based on personal interpretations and the first-hand accounts of others, but I am by no means an expert on BDSM communities. I am merely an excitable little guy who has been obsessed with this topic for a few months. That being said, I will do my best to portray those communities as fairly and accurately as I may as I explore why BDSM can be so helpful on an existential level.

BDSM is popular, the submissive side in particular. As noted above, large numbers of men and women greatly enjoy fantasies of sexual submission (Hawley and Hensley 2009, 573). Submission within BDSM can be understood as a dynamic wherein one individual, through rigorous negotiation and with multiple safety nets in place, cedes a certain amount of autonomy over to their dominant. This negotiation is key to why I believe BDSM works: it gives the submissive an extraordinary amount of power and say in their own Surrender, taking it as far from Oppression as possible. Indeed, due to the highly risky nature of some BDSM fantasies (e.g. knife-play, rape fantasies, etc.), consent is central to the lifestyle, especially when participants pretend to withhold or revoke it as part of a scene. Like all sexual experiences, BDSM can be deeply traumatizing if it goes wrong and can cause lasting harm of many kinds. To deal with this risk, practitioners have developed an intense sense of responsibility and built tons of scaffolds to safely support their activities. If you examine the websites of professional dominatrixes, many will clearly note that they do not do any BDSM activities in an initial session. Rather, the first session might be one where you meet up at a cafe in normal clothes for a friendly but serious conversation about what you want out of working with them. This is an example of a negotiation. Negotiations, safewords, check-ins, and aftercare are the four main BDSM scaffolds of which I know.

> 1. Negotiations are the intensive and thorough discussions before an experience wherein both agree on the details of what they wish to do together and, most importantly, set boundaries on what they do not wish to do.

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[6] Fascism. It's fascism. I do not like fascism.

2.   Safewords are words decided upon during negotiations which, if said during an experience, shut everything down and start an immediate check-in.

3.   Check-ins are when one participant, subtly or directly, checks to ensure that other participants are enjoying the experience.

4.   Aftercare is the period after an experience when participants allow each other to recover mentally, physically, and emotionally from an experience and make sure that there are no lasting ill effects.

All of these protocols remind the submissive, even in the throes of Surrender, that they are ultimately in control. Indeed, the more intense a scene is, the more power a submissive has, logically speaking. If two people are engaging in a scene with some light choking, and the submissive uses the safeword, then they have just stopped some mild choking. If two people are engaging in a rape fantasy with a dash of knife-play, and someone uses the safeword, then they have just stopped so much more. Like dancing in a rainstorm, you can always go back inside. There is enormous power there that validates the Subject but in a setting that still allows for the exploration of Object-hood. It's safe.

In their blogpost, "My Nonsexual Submission," sex blogger Queer Earthling speaks of their submission and offers an account that blends Subject and Object in fascinating ways. "I've always been a people pleaser, and someone who soaks up praise, basks in it," they say. "Having someone in a position of authority praising me and telling me I've done good gives me a lot of joy and validation, particularly if it's a person I chose to put in a place of authority. (Forced authority I tend to resent. Funny how that works.) Serving someone voluntarily makes me feel useful, needed, and accomplished" (queerthling 2019). Even just the final adjectives blur the lines, showing how Queer Earthling's choice to become a useful Object makes them feel needed—a Subject. Here we see true Surrender, chosen and reveled in, and the importance of differentiating between Surrender and Oppression. If this dynamic was not freely chosen, it would not work. "If I dislike it, if I have a problem, then I can take my power back. As with any healthy D/s relationship, that power was given to [my partner], not taken from me by force, and therefore can be reclaimed at any time," they say (queerthling 2019).

Queer Earthling also describes their difficulties with anxiety, mental illness, and self-care. A coping mechanism they emphasize they have freely chosen is to have their dominant wield their influence to order Queer Earthling to take care of themselves. They end the paragraph with this: "It's very freeing, and in many ways, has helped me to become better at doing these things on my own. I've become more decisive and better at scheduling tasks for myself since starting this dynamic" (queerthling 2019). Other BDSM practitioners report similar experiences. In an interview with her former dominant and professional dominatrix Mistress Blunt, professional switch Emmy Lewis notes that her experiences as a submissive taught her to stand up for herself. Lewis also says of her experiences with Mistress Blunt, "two things happened when we played together: physical tension was released through impact and pain, and mental tension was released through submission. Being able to relax into a submissive

mindset, instead of being dragged into it. Handing over control gives you a lot of control" (MistressBlunt 2020). In embracing Object-hood, Queer Earthling and Emily Lewis have affirmed and heightened their ability to act on and pursue Subject-hood.

Empirical research backs up these accounts. Studies have shown BDSM practitioners—submissives and dominants alike—to score higher on many indicators of mental health related to Subject-hood than the rest of the population. In the results of a 2013 study, "BDSM practitioners were less neurotic, more extraverted, more open to new experiences, more conscientious, less rejection sensitive, had higher subjective well-being" (Wismeijer and Van Assen 2013, 1943). Causation is always difficult to establish in the social sciences, but I would speculate that, since BDSM practitioners have more experience reflecting on and experimenting with their Subject-hood, they are more likely than the general population to achieve a healthier internal balance in how they understand themselves as both Subjects and Objects. Not only are BDSM practitioners more capable of embracing Subject-hood, they are better equipped to handle its drawbacks. As discussed earlier, general anxiety and fear of judgment and rejection are two of the consequences a Subject must accept if they are to reach out into the world. These results show that if anyone can take that burden, it's a BDSM practitioner.

Another concept in the BDSM world is that of "sub-space," a state of altered consciousness that sometimes occurs within and/or after a submissive experience. Brad Sagarin, a psychologist who has researched BDSM, believes sub-space to be the result of reduced prefrontal cortex activity. Sagarin has been quoted as stating, "one of the things that resides in the prefrontal cortex is our sense of self. When that area of the brain gets down-regulated, we can lose the distinction between ourselves and the universe" (Morin 2015). Once more, the line between Subject and Object is blurred. In the throes of extreme Surrender and Objectification, their will having been completely subordinated to that of another, the submissive achieves ultimate Subject-hood: they reach out into the universe further than most Subjects could ever dream of going. They take three lefts, add three more for good measure, and end up going right.

To be clear, none of this invalidates the submissive experience as such. While Subject-hood may ultimately be validated, it is not in opposition to Object-hood but through it. The fact that Surrender is chosen does not make it any less Objectifying or submissive, just domesticated, controlled. Indeed, it is that element of choice which grants BDSM one of its most powerful attributes: the ability to help practitioners work through trauma. In another interview, Mistress Blunt speaks with BDSM journalist and author Nicolle Hodges. Mistress Blunt describes her own issues with maternity and nurturing due to her experience being forced into those roles as a woman and how she has been able to work through that by embracing a "Mommy" role in BDSM scenes, to which Hodges responds, "I think [BDSM can be] cathartic in the way too where you can almost rewire certain associations that you have with events in your life or roles that have been thrust upon you…or assumptions that have been made

of you based on your gender" (MistressBlunt 2021). In his piece on attempting BDSM therapy[7], Roc Morin describes meeting several practitioners. One woman experienced great catharsis from reenacting the time she was truly sexually assaulted but within the safe frameworks of BDSM. Another used BDSM to intentionally trigger panic attacks and better learn how to manage them (Morin 2015). Professional dominatrix Mistress Scarlett describes clients who have her recreate molestations, neglect, and humiliation but with that one important change: now, instead of enduring Oppression, they were choosing Surrender (Mistress Scarlett 2021). Leslie Rogers—one of the professionals with whom Morin worked—states, "Whether they are soldiers or victims, there is nothing that binds people together better than war. What I'm re-creating in BDSM is like war—but in re-creating war, I'm ending it. I'm going to a place with you where I shouldn't go, and we'll meet there, and in the end we'll realize that we are still capable of being loved" (Morin 2015).

All of these stories emphasize how important Object-hood is to our identities. When these individuals tried just ignoring pasts and remaking themselves purely as Subjects, they failed. When they pursued Subject-hood through Object-hood, however—remaking themselves through acknowledging and embracing their embodied histories—they found peace and freedom. They willed towards Object-hood, and came out the other end as Subjects.

Despite all of these amazing results, the Will to Object-hood is like any other drive: dangerous. For some, BDSM-style submission can provide the Will to Object-hood with a safe and even restorative form of Surrender. However, the Will to Object-hood can also enable Oppression. As I noted earlier, the first moment of the Will to Object-hood is one of distress and anxiety. In the right circumstances and the right person, that can be dealt with and directed in mature, beneficial ways. In the wrong circumstances and the wrong person, it can lead to a wide range of destructive tendencies. Morin identifies another professional working with Leslie Rogers, his partner Leslie Thole, whose Will to Object-hood dragged her straight into multiple abusive relationships (Morin 2015). I have several times Objectified myself, allowing myself—in a misguided attempt to help—to be dragged into the role of underqualified therapist by distressed friends. This did not affirm my Subject-hood because I did not freely, truly choose to help. The burden was thrust upon me, and I ceded to enormous internal pressure. It filled nothing.

If one represses the Object in them for long enough, someone else will come to let it out. Fascism grows out of a dissatisfied, anxious populace lacking in identity and feeling enormous burdens. 1930s Germany was in the middle of a massive economic failure coupled with a loss of national identity, crises on which the Nazis were all too happy to capitalize. Like any cult, they came and soothed the worries of the people, saying, "Don't worry; you don't have to know who you are. You don't have to justify your existence. We know who you are. We will take you from you. You are us now. You are ours now." When Adolf

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[7] It is worth noting that, while practitioners extol the mental health benefits of BDSM, many draw the line at calling it therapy, fearing that this association will lead people to believe they can replace therapy or psychiatric help with BDSM or that the two are analogous.

Eichmann was tried in Jerusalem for his role in the Holocaust, he said of his mindset after Germany's defeat, "I sensed I would have to live a leaderless and difficult individual life, I would receive no directives from anybody, no orders and commands would any longer be issued to me, no pertinent ordinances would be there to consult—in brief, a life never known before lay ahead of me" (Arendt 1963). Eichmann's greatest fear was to once again become a Subject. Whereas Surrender can grant an Object the tools they need to once again pick up the mantle of Subject, Oppression leaves just… this. An Object who cannot conceive of anything more terrible than stepping back out into the abyss. It leaves an addict who no longer knows what it would mean to be sober, but knows that they cannot stand that which they do not know. Where Surrender can give the Subject a reprieve and soothe their fears through careful confrontation, Oppression can only take and take and take, leaving still more fear in its wake.

III. CONCLUSION

Oppression becomes a greater threat everyday. In the West, we are validated only as Subjects, never through our Object-hood. We are constantly told that we are the masters of our own destiny and we must lift ourselves up by our bootstraps. Be free and autonomous. Take charge. Go forth and make your mark on the world. The Will to Object-hood thrives today because Oppression forces us into constant Subject-hood; we do not have the tools to express ourselves as Objects and therefore we cannot truly be Subjects. We are Objectified into Subject-hood, but it is ultimately only our Object-hood which is validated. Fascism, mass movements, cults, and abusive partners all benefit from more distressed, anxious Subjects whose wills have begun to turn on themselves.

If this paper is to have a point, let it be this: pay attention to yourself. We cannot just be one thing or another, we must always be a jumbled mess of Subject and Object. So be it! Just be careful, because the drive behind those pushes outward and inward is strong[8], and it can take you anywhere. It can take you to blissful harmony with the universe, to a cult's doorstep, to an abusive relationship, to your own CEO name plaque, to Canada, to stabbing a knife into a counter while screaming, "Stop looking at me!" at an empty house[9], to your dream job, to your grave. It can take you anywhere. Be careful of where you let it take you, but let it take you somewhere; there are some really great options.

<div align="center">THE END</div>

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[8] I feel like I could make some sort of sex joke here, but it's too hard. Oh well!
[9] Weird time. Don't ask.

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Is Everything Necessary? A Response to Karofsky

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FOREWORD

Editors: Alexander Daniels, Laren Kim, & Rachel Kodysh

The concept of possibility is one often taken for granted by metaphysicians. Amy Karofsky's book *A Case for Necessitarianism* questions this orthodoxy and provides reasons to favor the previously unpopular view of necessitarianism against the assumed (and previously unnamed) view of Contingentarianism. Contingentarianism is best characterized as the view that there are some contingent facts or non-necessary truths, or that there is more than one possible world. Based on the reasoning that contingent facts, unlike necessary facts, require an explanation of why they are the case rather than not, and that an infinite series of contingent explanations or a brute contingent explanation would be inadequate, she concludes that necessary facts would be required to explain contingent facts. Furthermore, she argues that anything explained by a necessary fact would itself be necessary, removing anything for contingency to explain.

Elrod attempts to save possibility from Karofsky's challenge by appealing to the universal scope of logic. In his view, possible worlds are simply logically consistent while impossible worlds are logically inconsistent. With this move he provides a resource for contigentarians to explain the open space of modality, namely the numerous potential descriptions of complete logically coherent worlds. After showing that Karofsky's necessitarianism implies that the actual world is the *only* logically consistent world, he rejects necessitarianism by demonstrating the existence of multiple logically consistent worlds, utilizing Conway's *Game of Life*.

This paper succeeds in presenting the natural next step for contingentarians to take in response to Karofsky's argument, providing a timely and relevant addition to a developing area of philosophical debate. Its invocation of logical possibility opens up a multitude of options for contigentarians to develop their new accounts of modality without needing to abandon the old assumptions Karofsky criticizes. Elrod also provides a great example of charity, by both taking Karofsky's argument seriously and by taking significant care to accurately detail her argument and defend it from unwarranted criticisms. In addition, his argument for contingency is a lesson in clarity, providing a thorough walk through of its mechanics, and which controversial premises require further analysis. We are excited to see what other contigentarians and necessitarians have to say, and what further insights John will have in the future.

I. INTRODUCTION/ABSTRACT

In her recent book, *A Case for Necessitarianism*, Dr. Amy Karofsky gives a fascinating defense to an unpopular thesis known as *necessitarianism*. This is the view that the actual world is the only possible world, or that everything true of our world is true by necessity. Necessitarianism, if veracious, should have a profound impact on our conception of metaphysical modality, affecting fields as large and varied as philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, and ethics. This, combined with the overall cogency of Karofsky's argument, makes for an important challenge to contemporary philosophical thought that deserves our sincerest engagement. Here, I will first outline her main argument. Then, I will develop my own argument for the opposing view - which she has dubbed *contingentarianism* - with the hope of demonstrating that there are, in fact, non-actual possible worlds, and that supposing otherwise entails an absurdity.

II. KAROFSKY'S CHALLENGE

First, we ought to explicate what is meant by necessitarianism. In Karofsky's own words, it is "the thesis that absolutely nothing about the universe could have been otherwise in any way whatsoever" (Karofsky 2022, p. 1). This idea can be further articulated in a variety of ways, among them: that there are no unactualized possibilities,; that all counterfactual statements are necessarily false/meaningless,; that all that is must be,; and that the actual world is the only possible world. These statements, I take it, are all functionally equivalent, though for the purposes of this paper I will focus on the last formulation.

What is *not* meant by necessitarianism is the thesis known as *determinism*. Loosely, determinism states that, given the nature of our world, there is one, fixed way for it and everything in it to be. While necessitarianism does entail some form of determinism, they are two distinct views, and they differ as suchin just this way: Necessitarianism goes a step beyond mere determinism to state that, not only does the nature of the world strictly entail such-and-such outcome, but *the nature of the world itself is fixed such that it could not have been different from what it actually is*. The determinist can allow, say, that the gravitational constant could have been different than it happens to be, or that the electron could have been lighter or heavier than it is. The necessitarian cannot; for himthem, such facts are as altogether immutable as any law of logic or morality.

Lastly, contingentarianism, is simply the negation of necessitarianism, and so amounts to the thesis that there is at least one thing in the world that could have been otherwise. Typically though, contingentarians have wanted to argue that there exists many more than one contingent thing, and that our world lies fundamentally on a (largely) contingent foundation.

Karofsky presents two versions of her main argument that are, in essence, quite similar. I will address only the first version in this paper, though all that I have to say of the first should apply equally as well to the second. She states her argument thus:

1.   Every entity is such that it is *necessary* and could not have been otherwise in any way, whatsoever; or it is *contingent* and could have been otherwise in some way.

2.   What is contingent requires some explanation for the possibility that it could have been otherwise than it actually is; such an explanation would indicate that in virtue of which a contingency is such as it is *rather than not*.

3.   The contingency of an entity cannot be explained by appeal to another contingency (because neither can there be an infinite series of contingent entities (each of which is contingent by virtue of some other contingent entity), nor can there be any brute or fundamental contingent entities).

4.   The contingency of an entity cannot be explained by a necessity (because what is rooted in necessity is, thereby, necessary).

5.   Because there is *nothing* that can account for the contingency of any entity, no entity can be contingent, and contingentarianism is false.

6.   Therefore, every entity is necessary, and necessitarianism is true. (Karofsky 2022, p. 91; emphasis in original)

I will take it that Karofsky's argument here is valid in that the premises together entail the conclusion. The question then becomes whether the premises are true or not. In particular, we must examine the first four premises, as the other two simply follow from them. Karofsky is obviously correct to state that an entity must be either contingent or necessary— - that is, it either could or could not have been otherwise (Premise 1). She also seems correct in stating that a contingent entity cannot be explained by a necessary entity, as anything ultimately explained by a necessary entity must itself be a necessary entity (Premise 4). To illustrate: If proposition y is a necessary truth (i.e. it is true in all possible worlds), and y entails proposition z (i.e. z is true in all worlds in which y is true), then it follows that z is true in all possible worlds, and therefore, z is a necessary truth. These two premises appear unassailable by my lights, and I am happy to take them both on board.

This leaves us with Premise 2, which states (effectively) that a brute contingent entity— - that is, a contingent entity which lacks an explanation for why it is the way it is— - cannot exist; and Premise 3, which states that an infinite regress of contingent entities each explaining the one before it also cannot exist. Given the importance of both of these claims to her argument, Karofsky provides us with a couple of sub-arguments to support them. However, they are both rather flawed. Concerning brute contingent entities, she writes

It can be shown that no contingency can be fundamental or brute. Take a brute contingency, *C*. As *an actual entity, C is*, and it is *such as it is*, and as *a contingency, C* could have been otherwise than it actually is in some way. But because *C*

is *brute*, there can be no further reason or explanation for the possibility that *C* can be *otherwise than it is* and nothing that grounds the contingency of *C*. In the absence of *anything* that provides for the possibility that *C* could have been otherwise than it is, there can be no such possibility. Thus, it is not possible that any brute entity could have been otherwise, and no contingency can be brute or fundamental. (Karofsky 2022, p. 59; emphasis in original)

There is not much to say here other than the argument is plainly circular. Karofsky dismisses the idea of brute contingent entities because the contingency of such entities lack explanation or grounding— - but to lack explanation or grounding for one's contingency is precisely what it means to be a brute contingent entity! If Karofsky wishes to demonstrate that such entities are impossible and thus support Premise 2, she must provide more compelling evidence than this - but she unfortunately does not.[10]

Her reasoning for the impossibility of an infinite regress of contingent entities, while not circular, is also fallacious. She summarizes her argument thus:

In the case that it is contingencies all the way down, the series of questions and responses described above would go on and on and on, without ever reaching a final response to the question *How do we know that any given C is contingent?* because there will always be another *C* for which that question arises, and another, and another, *ad infinitum*. It follows that there is insufficient evidence that any particular *C* is contingent, and it must be conceded that it is possible that at least some *C* is *not* contingent and possible that some *C* is necessary. But if any *C* is possibly necessary, then that *C* is necessary and not contingent. So, not only would it need to be shown that every *C* is contingent, it would also need to be shown that it is *impossible* that any given *C* is necessary. Thus, until it can be shown that each entity in the series is contingent and that it is impossible for any entity to be necessary, there is no good reason to believe that an infinite grounding series works as an adequate metaphysical explanation of the contingency of any entity. (Karofsky 2022, p. 61; emphasis in original)

Karofsky is right to say that an entity which is possibly necessary is in fact necessary, i.e. that it is impossible for a contingent entity to be necessary. However, this claim is only true if we are speaking strictly in terms of *metaphysical*

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[10] For those wondering if I am perhaps omitting portions of Karofsky's argument here so as to make it appear thinner than it is: The above quotation comes from Section 2.5, titled "No Contingency Can Be Fundamental or Brute," ostensibly the section in which she would produce her best evidence for the impossibility of brute contingent entities. This quotation makes up the entirety of this section, save for the introductory sentence which I omitted as it simply restates the thesis of the previous section.

possibility, not *epistemic* possibility. For instance, one cannot legitimately infer from the statement, "It is epistemically possible that entity x is metaphysically necessary," to the conclusion that, "Entity x is in fact metaphysically necessary." It would be just as fallacious to infer from the (probably true) statement, "It is epistemically possible that Kennedy was assassinated by the CIA," to the (probably false) conclusion, "Kennedy was in fact assassinated by the CIA." The point is that what is or is not epistemically possible bears little to no weight on what is or is not metaphysically possible; thus, if Karofsky wishes to show that some C in the infinite regress is metaphysically necessary (which is what she needs for Premise 3 to follow from this argument), then she must show that this C is possibly necessary in the metaphysical sense, *not* the epistemic sense.

So does she do this? The short answer is no. When she states that "it must be conceded that it is possible that at least some C [in the infinite regress] … is necessary" due to the "insufficient evidence that any particular C is contingent," she is quite clearly using "possible" in the epistemic sense. If she were not, then her claim here would be outright false: It *does* indeed follow from the fact, "There is insufficient evidence that x is not metaphysically necessary," that therefore, "It is epistemically possible that x is metaphysically necessary" - but it does *not* follow that therefore, "It is *metaphysically* possible that x is metaphysically necessary," which, again, is the claim that Karofsky needs for her argument here to work. And so her demonstration of the impossibility of such infinite regresses (and thus her demonstration of Premise 3) seems to trade on an equivocation between epistemic and metaphysical possibility, and thus fails.

Though her arguments for both Premise 2 and 3 are (I hope I have shown) ultimately unsuccessful, that does not necessarily mean that these premises are false. We should ask ourselves: Might there be some other justification for these premises? In my viewBy my lights, there is but one option, and that is to appeal to some variation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). Karofsky admits at the beginning of her book that she is partial towards the PSR, though she claims that her argument in no way depends on it (Karofsky 2022, pp. 6 & 49). It is true that she never explicitly appeals to the PSR, but she does flirt quite heavily with it on several occasions (Premise 2 being the most obvious example). In my opinion, she would do well to embrace it more fully, as it provides what is probably the most plausible justification (perhaps the *only* plausible justification) for accepting Premises 2 and 3. Of course, doing this has its drawbacks. The PSR has lost a lot of its former currency in recent times, and it is difficult to find compelling evidence for it beyond mere intuition pumping. Nonetheless, it would seem to provide the steadiest available ground for the necessitarian - though, of course, as a contingentarian myself, I hope to show that it is not enough to safeguard necessitarianism.

III. A CASE FOR CONTINGENTARIANISM

In modern times, contingentarianism has been the overwhelmingly popular view amongst metaphysicians, and is widely taken for granted in philosophical circles— - so much so, in fact, that no one before Karofsky had thought to name

it (Karofsky 2022, p. 1). So we should ask: Why is that the case? and should we adopt or reject it ourselves?

To an extent, the appeal of contingentarianism is unsurprising. It is the "commonsensical" view, being ostensibly assumed in our everyday contingency-talk (e.g. "We could do either this or that," "If such-and-such had not happened, that would mean so-and-so," etc.), talk which is incredibly useful and intuitive, yet difficult to express in strictly necessitarian language. Some philosophers have even cited our ability to make sense of contingency-talk as compelling evidence for contingentarianism (Karofsky gives Chisholm 1946 and Mackie 1974 as examples),; but as Karofsky points out, the fact that we regularly employ such talk and find it to be of great pragmatic value bears no weight on the actual truth-values of counterfactual/subjunctive claims; and furthermore, there are ways of understanding contingency-talk such that it remains useful and intelligible under necessitarianism (Karofsky 2022, pp. 42-43). Likewise, the aforementioned popularity of contingentarianism does not by itself provide good reason to adopt it, as some have maintained (pp. 41-42). Clearly, neither truth nor philosophy are democratic matters; the majority does not rule. The other positive arguments for contingentarianism which she discusses (those from change, probability, and intuition) are similarly unsatisfying, as are the counterarguments raised against necessitarianism at the end of the book. And so Karofsky concludes that "the support for [contingentarianism] … is seriously lacking" (p. 44).

My hope in the section is to remedy this perceived lack of support. I concur that the counterarguments she raises (mostly) all fail, but there seems to me a couple of points which she does not address that are potentially problematic for the necessitarian. I will present my main argument for contingentarianism in the first three subsections, and then in the fourth I will explore a corollary point regarding the issue of monism.

3.1. What Possibility Entails

The first three premises of my argument are

1. x is possible (in the broadest relevant sense)[11] iff x is logically possible.
2. x is logically possible iff x is logically consistent.
3. Therefore, x is possible iff x is logically consistent (from 1 and 2).

The idea behind Premises 1 is simple and, I take it, fair enough. However, it is sufficiently subtle and important so as to deserve more than a brief passing-over. Essentially, the claim is that *logical possibility is equivalent to possibility simpliciter, or in other words, that logical possibility is the broadest and highest*

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[11] Throughout this paper, when I use the terms "possible" or "possibility" without modifier, I always mean it in the broadest relevant sense, i.e. x is possible if, and only if, there is a possible world, actual or non-actual, in which x is true. A broader but irrelevant sense in which x may be possible is the epistemic sense. Clearly, some non-actual x being *epistemically* possible does not in and of itself harm the necessitarian thesis.

type of possibility. By *broadest and highest type*, I mean that every other set of possible propositions (e.g. the set of all metaphysically possible propositions) is a proper subset of the set of all logically possible propositions. If this is correct, then anything that is metaphysically possible, nomologically possible, etc., must also be logically possible, and anything that is logically impossible (i.e. does not belong to the set of all logically possible propositions) must therefore be metaphysically impossible, nomologically impossible, etc. TAnd this would also apply equally to all possible worlds, not just the actual world (assuming that it is not the only one), so whatever is nomologically possible in those worlds must also be logically possible, and so forth. Clunky formalization aside, I believe this thought to be intuitively obvious to all. Indeed, it is difficult to see how one could object without questioning the veracity of logic itself.

To drive the point home, let us consider what one would have to say in order to deny Premise 1. There are two options: Either one could argue that (1) there are logical impossibilities which are possible in some broader sense, and so logical possibility is not the highest type of possibility; or (2) there are logical possibilities which, for whatever reason, can never be actualized, and so the scope of logical possibility expands beyond possibility simpliciter. Of course, the former option would only help to expand the number of possible worlds, and so would actually serve the contingentarian. So for the necessitarian, this leaves only Option 2. The issue with this option is that it appears hopelessly *ad hoc*. What reason could we have for believing that there are logical possibilities which, as a matter of principle, could never come to fruition? What world-independent factors could there be, besides logical truths, that demarcate what is possible or impossible? The answer to both of these questions would seem to be *none*.

Premise 2, I presume, is also quite simple and intuitive. It asserts that a proposition belongs to the set of all logically possible propositions just in case it does not entail a logical contradiction, such as $y \land \sim y$ - this is virtually a definitional truth. And of course, if these first two premises are true, then it follows that a proposition (or set of propositions) is possible if, and only if, it is logically consistent - hence Premise 3.

Simple though they may be, these will prove to be the most crucial premises of my argument, as will become apparent.

3.2. Possible Worlds and Impossible Worlds

The next premises contain terms, *P* and *W*, in need of definitions. Here, I define *P* as *P* - the set which contains all propositions or sets of propositions which fully describe the natural laws and initial conditions of a singular *possible world*, and from which all other true propositions about said possible world can be derived.

and *W* as

W - the set which contains all propositions or sets of propositions which fully describe the natural laws and initial conditions of a singular *world*

(possible or impossible), and from which all other true propositions about said world can be derived.

And so *P* is a subset of *W*, such that anything that is a member of *P* must also be a member of *W*, but not *vice versa*.[12]

With that, our next three premises are

4. *x* is a member of *P* iff *x* is a possible member of *W*.
5. Therefore, x is the only member of P iff x is the only possible member of *W* (from 4).
6. Therefore, *x* is the only member of *P* iff *x* is the only logically consistent member of *W* (from 3 and 5).

To return to our definition of *W*: Though the concept of impossible worlds might seem strange, it is, of course, implied by the concept of possible worlds. We can make better sense of the idea if we apply Premise 3 from the previous section. Doing so, we see that a possible world is simply a logically consistent world, and an impossible world is a logically inconsistent world.

So if a proposition or set of propositions describes a world that is logically consistent (i.e. contains no contradictions) and therefore possible, then that world belongs to both *P* and *W*; but if it describes a world that is logically inconsistent (i.e. *does* contain a contradiction) and therefore impossible, then it belongs to *W* but not *P*. It follows from all of this that if there is only one member of *P,* then there must be only one *logically consistent* member of *W,* and vice versa. This is precisely what Premise 6 states. In essence, Premise 4 and 5 are entailed by the definitions of *P* and *W*, and Premise 6 simply applies Premise 3 to these definitional truths.

Implicit in these premises is the thought that a world, possible or impossible, can be effectively reduced to a set of propositions. Perhaps this idea is in need of some explanation and/or justification. The standard definition of "world" as it is used in modal logic and metaphysics is something along the lines of *a comprehensive state of affairs*. But one might reasonably wonder whether a set of propositions which describes or otherwise entails a comprehensive state of affairs is truly equivalent to it, and if so, in what sense. I contend that there is at least one important sense in which they are equivalent: A comprehensive state of affairs contains no impossibilities just if the set of propositions which fully and accurately describes it also contains no impossibilities, i.e. is logically consistent; and so, for the purposes of tracking possibility and consistency, we can treat any comprehensive state of affairs as functionally equivalent to its corresponding set of propositions.

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[12] As an aside, defining *P* and *W* (and later on, *A*) becomes more complicated if we wish for them to include indeterministic worlds, i.e. worlds in which the truth-values of some propositions are not strictly entailed by the natural laws and initial conditions of that world. For the purposes of this paper, however, we can safely ignore this wrinkle, as the necessitarian is committed to the impossibility of such worlds, and my argument remains essentially unaffected if we suppose that they are correct on this point.

The validity of this claim, I take it, is readily apparent. There is, however, another point which should be addressed. Even if we agree that any world can be (for our purposes) translated into a set of propositions, can the reverse be said? - tThat is, can any set of propositions be said to describe a full-blown world? There is some reason to believe that the answer is no. Consider the Peano axioms. These postulates form the axiomatic underpinning of number theory, and from them (in conjunction with some basic logical truths) all the theorems of number theory can be derived. Certainly, the Peano axioms together form a set of propositions, but it is not clear that they describe a world in any meaningful sense. If we were to presuppose these and only these propositions as true, we could, at best, demonstrate only that certain numerical claims are truthful; and so a world which is fully described by the Peano axioms would house only these numerical truths. But some may think that this is not much of a *world* at all - it contains essentially nothing in it! Additionally, we could imagine an even more bare-bones "world" corresponding to the set containing the three so-called laws of thought (the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of excluded middle). Again, we have a set of propositions that does not seem to describe much of anything, much less a full-blown world.

Roughly, the thought is that (1) a world must contain *things*, and (2) numbers, truths, and other abstracta do not constitute *things*, and from this it follows that a world cannot contain only abstracta. Both (1) and (2) could be pushed back against, but the contingentarian need not commit themselves to disproving either. They can tentatively accept the argument, provided that, when providing examples of allegedly possible worlds, they ensure that they contain uncontroversial examples of *things*, and not mere abstracta.

3.3. What Necessitarianism Entails

We must define one last term, A, before moving to our final premises. Here, I define A as

> A - the proposition or set of propositions which fully describes the natural laws and initial conditions of the actual world, and from which all other true propositions about the actual world can be derived.

and so A would presumably contain the law of gravitation, Schrödinger's wave equation, etc., and/or the more fundamental natural laws from which these are derived, as well as propositions regarding the quantity of matter in the universe, its initial distribution throughout space, etc. The final premises are

7. Necessitarianism is true iff A is the only member of P.
8. Therefore, necessitarianism is true iff A is the only logically consistent member of W (from 6 and 7).
9. A is not the only logically consistent member of W.
10. Therefore, necessitarianism is false (from 8 and 9).

Considering the above definition of *A*, we see that Premise 7 states that necessitarianism is true if, and only if, the proposition or set of propositions which fully describes the actual world is the only proposition or set of propositions that fully describes a possible world. This is functionally equivalent to stating that necessitarianism is true if, and only if, the actual world is the only possible world - a fair explication of what necessitarianism states. For this reason, I do not anticipate anyone objecting to this premise. This leaves only Premise 9 in need of further defense, as Premises 8 and 10 follow from the premises before them.

To prove Premise 9 is, in principle, quite simple. All one must do is describe a world that is both consistent and not logically equivalent to *A*. Since we are unsure what propositions *A* contains exactly, we may instead opt to describe two or more separate, consistent worlds which are not logically equivalent to each other, as then at least one of those worlds must not be logically equivalent to *A*, and thus Premise 9 will have been demonstrated. In constructing these worlds, I will draw from John Horton Conway's famous Game of Life[13] (often shortened to Life). For those unfamiliar, Life is a computer simulation played on an infinitely large square grid. Every cell in the grid begins either dead or live. This initial configuration of dead and live cells is called the *seed*. Naturally, a cell cannot be both dead and live; if, at any point, a formerly dead cell becomes live, it ceases to be dead, and *vice versa*. At each "generation" (or, in more technical Life-lingo, "tick"), every cell becomes/remains dead/live according to a simple set of deterministic rules:

1. Any live cell with less than two live neighbors (orthogonal and diagonal becomes dead.
2. Any live cell with four or more live neighbors becomes dead.
3. Any live cell with exactly two or three live neighbors remains live.
4. Any dead cell with exactly three live neighbors becomes live.
5. Any dead cell without exactly three live neighbors remains dead.

Despite this simplicity, even initially uninteresting seeds can result in complex patterns or devolve into chaos. (Gardner 1970 contains some useful visualizations of Life. Alternatively, there are many internet videos and dedicated websites available.)

Now, the cells in Life would seem to constitute *things* under any plausible understanding of the term, and so any set containing the rules of Life[14] (the natural laws) plus a seed (the initial conditions) would describe a genuine world - let us call these Life-worlds. Furthermore, it is evident that the rules of Life entail no logical contradictions. Indeed, the game has long been the subject of serious academic research - as a recent example, Paul Rendell has published a proof that Life possesses, in theory, the computational capabilities

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[13] Not to be confused with the popular board game.
[14] To clarify, these rules would include not just the five rules listed above, but also the rules dictating how space (the grid) and time (the "generations" or "ticks") work in this world. To list them all out formally would be unnecessarily laborious and technical.

of a universal Turing machine (Rendell 2016) - and so it seems reasonable to conclude that, if there were an inconsistency somewhere, we would surely be aware. Since the rules are consistent, it follows that a Life-world is consistent just if its seed is consistent (i.e. no cells begin both dead and live, or neither dead nor live). But there are an infinite number of consistent seeds, as the grid on which Life is played contains an infinite number of cells, with no constraints on which or how many can begin dead or live. Thus, there are an infinite number of distinct, logically consistent Life-worlds, all of which are members of *W*; and so *A* is not the only logically consistent member of *W*, and Premise 9 is true. And of course, when taken with the preceding premises, it follows that necessitarianism is false.

To boil my argument so far down to its bare essence: A world is possible just if it is logically consistent, and there are, demonstrably, many logically consistent worlds; therefore, there are many possible worlds. From my experience, this line of reasoning is what has led many philosophers to embrace contingentarianism, though despite this, to my knowledge, the argument has not been written out in formal terms until now.

3.4. Further Considerations: Monism and Holism

Though I believe the above argument to be sufficient for proving contingentarianism, there is a corollary point which seems worth exploring. Towards the end of her book, Karofsky addresses the claim that necessitarianism entails a number of unusual monist theses, the most significant being *maximal holism*, which states that "there is just one fact about the universe" (Karofsky 2022, p. 137). Rather than refuting the charge, Karofsky embraces it, arguing that necessitarianism does in fact entail maximal holism, but that this is unproblematic. She writes

> I believe that there is just one true proposition that is the statement of the entire universe that is the combination of all of the statements that are true. But it also seems to me that there are simple expressions of the one statement, like: *there is one reality that is the universe, x = x*, and *it is*. Such expressions are complete and true, but they are not distinct statements; rather they are *different ways of expressing the one true proposition*, the truthmaker for which is the ultimate existence fact, namely the way that the one reality - the universe - is, where the *is* in that claim indicates that the universe: exists, is in fact the case, is real, is such as it is, and that propositions that correspond to it are true. (Karofsky 2022, p. 144; emphasis in original)

I do not wish to misrepresent Karofsky's argument here, but she seems to come dangerously close to suggesting that *A* is logically equivalent to the proposition $x = x$ - that from the law of identity, one can deduce all that is true of our world!

Contrarily, Whitehead and Russell required numerous independent postulates of greater substance (as well as several hundred pages) to demonstrate the simple fact that *1 + 1 = 2* in their *Principia Mathematica* (Whitehead and Russell 1925), and their work does not begin to touch on material matters. For this reason and others, it would appear implausible that from the simple statement it is, one can deduce, say, that *Pope Francis was born in Buenos Aires*, or that *there exists exactly three spatial dimensions*. More than implausible, it is manifestly untrue, and for those who wish to argue otherwise, the burden of proof lays quite heavily on their shoulders.

A more generous interpretation of the above passage (and the interpretation I believe Karofsky intended) reads that all of the true propositions of our world could be strung together into one, very large conjunctive proposition, thus forming the "one true proposition that is … the combination of all of the statements that are true." This statement, which comprehensively describes everything that is, can then be *metaphorically* expressed by saying *there is one reality that is the universe*, etc.[15] In this sense, Karofsky argues, maximal holism is true yet unproblematic. Note that this line of reasoning works just as well if necessitarianism is false, and is at best trivially true: Of course it is possible, in principle, to list all true propositions in a single, sufficiently long-winded statement - that seems hard to deny. However, the sort of maximal holism which necessitarianism entails is much stronger and more problematic than this.

To see this, let us first imagine a set, which we will call *S*, that contains two or more propositions which together entail no logical contradictions. From this alone we can deduce an interesting fact about *S*: Given that *S* is logically consistent, it follows that one cannot make *S* logically inconsistent simply by subtracting propositions from it. This is true no matter how large *S* is, what propositions it contains, or what combination of propositions you remove. If it was consistent before, it will be consistent after. One could make *S* inconsistent by *adding* propositions to it, but never by subtracting. I will call this *the Subtraction Principle*. Though it may not be initially obvious, the reason behind this is quite simple: By removing propositions, one is only reducing the number of "theorems" (i.e. extra propositions which are entailed by the given propositions) of the set, with no new theorems being created, only old ones being lost; thus, if there were no contradictory theorems to begin with, then there will be none afterwards.

So how is this relevant to necessitarianism? Consider: As I argued above, necessitarianism is true if, and only if, *A* is the only logically consistent member of *W* (Premise 8). If we apply the Subtraction Principle to this, we see that necessitarianism entails that *A* contains exactly one independent proposition.[16] This is because, if *A* contained more than one independent proposition, we

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[15] This interpretation is more or less confirmed in the endnote (#122) following the just-quoted sentence.

[16] The inclusion of the word *independent* is very much deliberate. If a set contains two propositions, but one proposition is derivable from the other, then the set effectively contains only one proposition, as applying the Subtraction Principle to remove the dependent proposition would not affect the truth value or derivability of any of the theorems of the set.

could easily generate a distinct member of *W* by simply removing a proposition from *A*, and we know that this new set would be logically consistent because *A* is logically consistent; thus, if *A* contains more than one independent proposition, then *A* is not the only logically consistent member of *W*, and necessitarianism is false.

Prima facie, this may not seem too serious, since, as Karofsky suggested, one could simply string together all the propositions in *A* to form a single, conjunctive proposition, thus avoiding the issue. However, the implications of the Subtraction Principle are more severe than this: If necessitarianism is true, not only must *A* contain exactly one independent proposition, but *A* must not be logically equivalent to any set containing two or more independent propositions. Otherwise, it once again follows that *A* is not the only logically consistent member of W. To illustrate: Let us assume that *A* contains exactly one proposition, $p \land q$. Given this, we can easily rewrite *A* such that it contains two independent propositions, the first being p and the second being q - let us call this new set *A'*. These two sets, *A* and *A'*, are logical equivalents. In other words, they entail one another, so if one is true, then the other must be as well. Here, the issue begins to arise: Given that *A* is true, *A'* must be true as well, as they are logical equivalents; and if *A'* is true, then it is also logically consistent; and if *A'* is logically consistent, then we can apply the Subtraction Principle to generate two other distinct, logically consistent worlds, one described only by *p* and the other only by *q*; thus, in this case, *A* is not the only logically consistent world, and necessitarianism is false. And so, again, necessitarianism, when paired with the Subtraction Principle, entails not only that *A* must contain exactly one independent proposition, but that it must not be logically equivalent to any set containing two or more independent propositions - in other words, the singular proposition in *A* must be indivisible. This means, amongst other things, that the single proposition in *A* cannot be a conjunction, as Karofsky would have it, since then it could be straightforwardly broken down into at least two new propositions.[17]

Lastly, and perhaps most interestingly, it follows from the above that if necessitarianism is true, then all true propositions are logically equivalent to *A*, and thus are all logically equivalent to each other. Recall that *A*, as defined earlier, is the proposition or set of propositions from which all other true propositions about the actual world can be derived. But as I have shown, if necessitarianism is true, then *A* contains exactly one, indivisible proposition; and the only propositions derivable from a single, indivisible proposition are that proposition's logical equivalents.[18] Thus, under necessitarianism, *all true propositions are logically equivalent to A and thus to each other.*

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[17] An interesting implication of this is that, if necessitarianism is true, all of the natural laws of our world must be reducible to one fundamental law. The unification of the natural laws is an idea which physicists have toyed with for a very long time, and perhaps it would not be too surprising if the laws were in fact unified. However, it obviously does not help the necessitarian that they are committed to this view. Furthermore, they would also seem obligated to say that the initial conditions of our world are in some way included in this fundamental law - a strange but perhaps defensible view.

[18] To see this, one may take the sole statement $g \lor h$ (or any single, indivisible proposition) and attempt to derive from it another statement that is not its logical equivalent. One will quickly realize that such attempts are futile.

This variation of maximal holism is clearly much stronger and more implausible than the variation which Karofsky addresses, and it has several immediate and very strange implications, such as that all true biconditionals are tautologies, all true conjunctions are redundant, etc. It also suggests that every true proposition entails every other true proposition, i.e. the fact that *some apples are green* entails (somehow) that *Hector Berlioz was born in 1803*, and so on. But this conclusion is simply untenable. If it were true, we could, in principle, derive the answers to the most difficult questions in science or philosophy from nothing but substanceless tautologies. We would no longer need researchers of any sort, as logicians would soon be replacing them all! But this has yet to happen, nor does it appear to be happening any time soon. And so we would seem justified in dismissing maximal holism as absurd, and, by extension, dismissing necessitarianism as false.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the sake of argument, let us momentarily assume that my case for contingentarianism is sound and necessitarianism is false. What are the consequences of this? and why should we care? The most obvious consequence would be that one or more of the premises in Karofsky's argument must be false. As previously discussed, Premises 2 and 3 appear to be the weak links. Thus, contingentarianism suggests that there exist brute contingent entities and/ or an infinite regress of contingent entities each explained by the prior one; consequently, insofar as the Principle of Sufficient Reason entails such things are impossible, contingentarianism would also suggest that the PSR is false (though that ultimately comes down to which variation one is concerned with). Both of these points have interesting and important ramifications, though I suspect neither are all too surprising to the majority of contemporary philosophers. By my lights, the most important consequence of my argument is that it reaffirms a key premise on which contemporary modal metaphysics, and by extension, much of contemporary philosophy, is based - a premise which, while good and sound, is too often accepted without sufficient reflection, especially given its importance. Indeed, before hearing Karofsky's argument, I had not adequately examined my own reasons for accepting contingentarianism. In this way, she has done me a great favor by waking me from my dogmatic slumber and spurring me to think critically through even the most seemingly basic of my philosophical presuppositions. Karofsky has pointed out a significant deficiency in the literature surrounding contingentarianism, a deficiency which I hope my argument here, as well as future contingentarian arguments, helps to fix.

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William of Ockham and the Primacy of God's Absolute Power

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FOREWORD

Editors: Louis Arnoult, Yehuda Holender, Aiden Sajadi, & Wyatt Sell

Synthesizing ideas from history, theology, and philosophy into a cohesive argument, this paper is an easy-to-read gateway into the thought of the fourteenth century's philosopher and theologian, William of Ockham. Being the only paper in this year's journal that touches on theology, Jordan Smith's "[T]he Primacy of God's Absolute Power" should be an extra enticing piece for readers curious about Christian theology and the important philosophical dilemmas that emerge.

The question of God's omnipotence and power in relation to human rationality perennially filled the minds of Medieval Scholastics, who aimed to reconcile Aristotle with the Bible. This paper focuses on a distinction made by many of those Scholastics between God's ordained and absolute powers (*potentia Dei ordinata* and *potentia Dei absoluta*, respectively), arguing that Ockham uniquely expanded our understanding of the latter power. Smith makes what initially seems like a semantic and inconsequential argument over this distinction both understandable and relevant to the reader — How can God be absolutely omnipotent and ethical at the same time?

Smith analyzes many contemporary interpretations of Ockham, discussing their efficacy and eruditely explains where they fall short. For Smith, Ockham's thought is far more radical than commonly recognised and as such, differs substantially from the earlier investigations of theologians, specifically Thomas Aquinas. Through a deep inquiry into Ockham's ideas regarding real relations and Smith's own excellent argumentation, he makes a compelling case for understanding Ockham's thought as prioritizing absolute will over ethical principles. Reading this paper, one will learn and understand the ethical consequences of Ockham's philosophical innovation, while, at the same time, likely gleaning something new about the problems that puzzled major theological thinkers of the past.

ABSTRACT:

In the wake of attempts to limit God's free will, William of Ockham presented a distinction to ensure divine freedom: The absolute power of God and the ordained power of God. The former of these two referred to God's ability to do anything He desired short of a logical contradiction. Ockham's affirmation of divine omnipotence, though traditional in one sense, also introduced a unique set of problems. Ockham's understanding of God's absolute power resulted in him denying the existence of real relations in creation, which for a previous generation of philosophers stood as the basis for the interconnected beauty of the cosmos. Perhaps even more damaging, Ockham's insistence on God's absolute power requires him to maintain an arbitrary theory of ethics wherein what is good and evil is determined solely by the will of God, to which Ockham gives priority over reason itself.

I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO OCKHAM'S TWO POWERS

The fourteenth-century English logician and metaphysician William of Ockham was but one figure engaged in a centuries-long debate concerning the extent of God's power. Though God's omnipotence had been affirmed since the time of the earliest Christian intellectuals,[19] the twelfth century witnessed a reformulation of the problem, which presented a new set of issues and resurrected old ones. This shift in the discussion concerning God's omnipotence was spurred in large part by the introduction of Latin translations of Aristotle's works as well as those of his Muslim commentators, most notably Averroes.[20] Among others, Averroes took the work of Aristotle and attempted to harmonize it with the existence of a monotheistic god. In his work and those of other prominent commentators, Aristotelean natural philosophy was given priority over God's freedom. According to these philosophers, God could not, say, create a void in space, as this was in direct violation of Aristotelean physics.[21] Unsurprisingly, many Christian philosophers viewed this as a severe restriction of God's absolute free will and power. Debates raged in the major European universities and came to a climax in 1277 when Bishop Tempier, at the University of Paris, condemned 219 propositions, the thrust of which were to prevent "any limitation on the freedom of God."[22] Edward Grant notes that one long-term consequence of this highly influential condemnation was a tendency to "curb the pretensions of Aristotelean natural philosophy by emphasizing the absolute power of God (*potentia Dei absoluta*) to do whatever he pleased short of a logical contradiction."[23] Among the resulting generation of philosophers interested in vigorously defending God's power was William of Ockham, whose solution to the tension between freedom and necessity shall now be analyzed.

II. OCKHAM'S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S TWO POWERS

Ockham attempted to steer a middle course of sorts between divine capriciousness and natural necessity in his treatment of the freedom of God. To substantiate his claims, Ockham made use of a distinction dating back to the eleventh century in Scholastic circles, namely that between the *potentia Dei absoluta* (absolute power of God) and the *potentia Dei ordinata* (ordained

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[19] The second-century Christian philosopher Clement of Alexandria, for example, identifies God as omnipotent in Stromata, II.XVI and V.XII. Clement of Alexandria et al., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol: 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 777, 980. Marilyn McCord Adams, in her defense of the orthodoxy of Ockham's views concerning divine power, also cites the Nicene Creed's affirmation of "God, the Father Almighty" as well as certain Biblical passages. Marilyn Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 1151.

[20] Edward Grant, "The Condemnation of 1277, God's Absolute Power, and Physical Thought in the Late Middle Ages," *Viator* 10 (January 1, 1979): 211, https://doi.org/10.1484/j.viator.2.301526.

[21] This proposition was implicitly part of proposition 49 of the Condemnation of 1277 at the University of Paris. Grant, "The Condemnation of 1277," 217.

[22] Alexander S Jensen, "The Unintended Consequences of the Condemnation of 1277: Divine Power and the Established Order in Question," *Colloquium* 41 (2009): 60.

[23] Grant, "The Condemnation of 1277," 213.

power of God).[24] The former, to quote Ockham himself, refers to the set of acts which God is capable of doing "such that its being done does not entail a contradiction," whereas the latter only encompasses those acts performed "in accordance with the laws that have been ordained and instituted by God."[25] Thus, the distinction between God's absolute power and his ordained power is a difference between what is logically possible for God to do versus what God can actually do, given the rules He has established for Himself in the actual world.[26] Ockham provides the helpful example that "God can accept someone without grace inhering in [him], since this does not include a contradiction, and nevertheless He ordained this will never be done."[27] Putting this in terms of the two powers, God is capable of saving someone who does not have grace inhering in him or her solely according to God's absolute power. According to God's ordained power, however, one is always saved through the inhering of grace. Ockham applies this distinction to several other issues in order to safeguard both divine power and the reliability of the ordinary workings of the world. God can do anything that does not entail a logical contradiction according to His absolute power, thereby ensuring divine freedom, but one need not worry about God arbitrarily intervening in the affairs of the world because He has already established the cosmic order through his ordained power.

The success and importance of this solution is contested on many fronts. Ockham's defenders claim that he is maintaining a view of God's power completely consistent with the mainstream Scholastic tradition and that his views on this topic therefore do not face any novel philosophical challenges. Those who suggest otherwise, so Ockham's defenders maintain, must have misrepresented his thought in some way.[28] In this essay, it will be argued to the contrary that a careful analysis of Ockham's writings concerning the implications of God's absolute power reveals a clear break with his Scholastic predecessors, one which has serious ontological and ethical consequences for Ockham's philosophy. The reason Ockham's theory of the two powers of God is not as benign as his proponents claim is because this distinction ultimately collapses, as God's absolute power is given absolute precedence over His ordained power.

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[24] The standard treatment of the history of God's two powers can be found in Richard Paul Desharnais, "The History of the Distinction between God's Absolute and Ordained Power and Its Influence on Martin Luther" (dissertation, 1966).

[25] William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 491.

[26] Adams notes that there are exceptional cases in which Ockham believes something to be logically possible but beyond the scope of God's absolute power. Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 1151-1231, esp. 1152-1168. In support of this claim, she cites Ockham's *Scriptum in librum primum Senteniarum (Ordinatio)*, d. XX, q.1 where he affirms that "an omnipotent being cannot produce everything that does not involve a contradiction because it cannot produce God" (p. 1155). Such fringe cases are not relevant for the purposes of this essay and will therefore not be mentioned again.

[27] *Summa Logicae* III.4. Quoted in Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 1199.

[28] To take just one of the more prominent examples, Adams has claimed (not completely unjustifiably) that a wide range of scholars, whose publications span over 70 years, have all overemphasized the extent to which God's actions are arbitrary in Ockham's understanding. Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Structure of Ockham's Moral Theory," *Franciscan Studies* 46 (1986): 1–5.

III. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE CRITIQUE

Ockham's notion of the potentia Dei absoluta may seem to open the possibility of divine capriciousness. If God can do just about anything, then His commands and ethical standards may begin to appear arbitrary. Ockham himself goes so far as to say that God can will for someone to hate Him.[29] This and similar statements made by Ockham should not, however, give rise to concern over God arbitrarily making currently good actions evil and vice versa. Eliminating this possibility is precisely the role of the potentia Dei ordinata, which prevents God from changing His dictates once established. Of course, Ockham believes that God's foreordained will may manifest itself differently in the future than it does now, but this is nothing revolutionary. Since at least the time of Augustine, Christians had explicitly recognized the uniqueness (to say nothing of the surprisingness) of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, which inaugurated a completely new order of salvation and with it a radically innovative ethical system.[30] This new order, however, was understood to have always been part of the foreknown divine plan. This can easily be translated into Ockham's terms by saying that the incarnation and resurrection of Christ (and, for that matter, all acts of divine intervention) were always under the potentia Dei ordinata, even though they were only faintly foreseen by mankind. Accordingly, in this respect, Ockham is no more guilty than his predecessors of making the world we inhabit subject to seeming changes in the divine will.

To determine precisely where Ockham's theory of the two powers of God actually does result in philosophical innovations, we therefore cannot look to the temporal order of historical change; this belongs solely to the domain of the potentia Dei ordinata. We must instead turn our attention to the place where the two powers meet, namely prior to the moment of creation when the a priori possibilities of any given state of affairs are under consideration. Put another way, our concern is analyzing those issues in which Ockham's insistence on the potentia Dei absoluta eliminates the possibility of God creating a certain state of affairs. Such a scenario would entail that the reality of the potentia Dei absoluta rules out the possibility of some ways God can exercise His potentia ordinata. In particular, I would like to focus on two issues of significant philosophical importance, Ockham's beliefs concerning both of which are shaped by his theory of the two powers. The first issue is metaphysical: Ockham does not believe that the existence of real relations between entities can be rationally demonstrated, since according to His absolute power, God could create any

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[29] *Ordinatio* d. IV, q. 16. For a discussion concerning the possibility of God commanding this, see A. S. McGrade, "Natural Law and Moral Omnipotence," essay, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 279-280.

[30] Though Christians obviously always possessed a felt sense for the importance of the life of Jesus, St. Augustine highlights the uniqueness of this event precisely to refute those who believed that time was cyclical and that all historical events would therefore one day recur. See Augustine of Hippo. *City of God*. In *St. Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, Edited by Philip Schaff. Translated by Marcus Dods, vol: 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 534-535. Ockham himself traces this belief in the seeming mutability of the ordained order to John 3:5 where Jesus institutes baptism. William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, 491. For a discussion of this passage, see Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 1203-1204.

given thing in isolation from all other things. Hence, relations must, in any world God creates, be something imposed onto objects and not an intrinsic property of the object itself. The second area where God's absolute power constrains the manifestations His ordained power may take is in his ethical theory. Ockham holds a relatively voluntaristic theory of divine commands. That is to say, what constitutes a morally righteous act versus a morally repugnant one is ultimately determined by the will (as opposed to the intellect) of God, according to Ockham. Such an ethical theory, denying an intimate connection between goodness in the created order and the goodness of God's nature, goes directly against the Scholastic tradition. Ockham's insistence on the ultimacy of God's will in deciding what is good and evil is, I hope to show, a direct result of his views on the *potentia Dei absoluta*.

IV. OCKHAM ON REAL RELATIONS

Adrian Pabst has documented the central importance that the existence of real relations held for the Medieval philosophical tradition.[31] In particular, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity required the development of a robust theory of how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could in some sense be one and three at the same time. The affirmation of real relations, such as fathership and sonship, that were distinct from the three persons themselves provided this bridge which could unite while maintaining difference. Given the centrality of the Trinity in orthodox Christian thought, it is unsurprising that the belief in real relations would have far-reaching consequences. For example, Thomas Aquinas argues that all things exist by participating in *esse commune*, common being. But common being in turn "does not have existence or essence in itself but exists by participating in God's relational being."[32] For Aquinas, the entire cosmos exists as an extension of the original relational self-giving between each of the persons of the Trinity.[33] Thomistic philosophy, therefore, grants prime importance to real relations not only when discussing Trinitarian issues but also in explaining the interaction between creator and creation. For only a real relation can mediate between the infinite God and His finite creation. Given the broad implications of the existence of real relations as articulated by Aquinas and his predecessors, Ockham's skepticism towards reason's ability to demonstrate the existence of real relations constitutes a philosophically (as opposed to merely theologically) significant break from the Medieval tradition.

Ockham by and large accepted the strictly theological conclusions of his forebears, but he did so fideistically. Thus, he was willing to grant the existence of real relations with respect to the strictly theological doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Transubstantiation, but he maintained that reason will

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31 Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy (*Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 54-151, 201-271.
32 Pabst, *Metaphysics*, 209.
33 This is, of course, not a pantheistic relation of identity, but rather the relation of creation's participation in God's Being.

not permit any other exceptions.[34] Indeed, Ockham openly admits that natural reason "will find it easier to deny than sustain" the existence of real relations.[35] Though Ockham presents several arguments for why this is the case, one directly pertains to the issue of the *potentia Dei absoluta*.[36] Ockham maintains that God can, in accordance with His absolute power, create a world in which the only thing in existence is one individual entity. Since this entity would have nothing else in creation to which it could relate, it is obviously completely devoid of real relations.[37] For example, if Aristotle were to exist in a world with absolutely nothing else (and were miraculously given the ability to survive), then there would be no relation of, say, "discipleship" inhering in him which would actually relate him to Plato. All other relations would similarly be absent from such a world. Thus, it is perfectly feasible to conceive of a world in which absolutely no relations exist, so, by Ockham's razor,[38] we should assume that the positing of the real existence of these relations is unnecessary and ought to be rejected. Because any given thing that exists in the actual world could be the singular entity that exists in this hypothetical world devoid of real relations, it follows that anything and everything in our world could exist without real relations. It follows, therefore, that relations are not an actual feature of things in themselves, even as non-essential accidental properties; rather, they are reduced to abstractions of the mind, which merely "signify both relata."[39] Amos Funkenstein summarizes Ockham's whole train of reasoning well: "God creates only things, and real things can always exist without each other; hence statements about aggregates of things, about structure and natural sequences, can never be much more than protocol-statements without any intrinsic necessity."[40]

In his discussion of the (un)reasonableness of real relations, Ockham invokes the *potentia Dei absoluta* to argue, contrary to earlier Scholastic philosophers, that entities exist individually and that relations are mere products of the mind. This is a clear example where Ockham makes use of his theory of God's two powers to make a claim that is both philosophically innovative and momentous

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34 Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 268-269.

35 *Ordinatio*, d. XXX, q. 1. Quoted in Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 215.

36 For Ockham's arguments against the existence of real relations, see Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 215-276.

37 Ockham seems to think that there cannot be a real relation between the singular entity and the Persons of the Trinity because God, as transcendent, is not subject to any of the Aristotelean categories, including "relation." Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 276.

38 I am aware that terming the principle of parsimony "Ockham's Razor" is problematic, as essentially all Scholastic philosophers subscribed to the principle. Nonetheless, the content of the principle is the same regardless of what it be named, and Ockham most certainly did invoke the principle on several occasions. According to Ockham, however, the principle of parsimony does not apply to the activity of God, who is free to act inefficiently. Hence, Ockham is able to maintain the existence of real relations (as instituted by God's fiat), despite the irrationality of this supposition. For an analysis of Ockham's Razor, see Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 156-161.

39 More precisely, "According to Ockham, unaided natural reason would hold that relation terms are connotative terms that signify both relata, or signify one primarily and connote the other, and connote that the relata exist in a certain way." Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 251. Whether the relational term in question signifies both sides equally, as does "partners," or the term signifies one of the relata more than the other, as when "teacher" only indirectly connotes the existence of a student, the point is the same: All relations are mere abstractions of the human mind, because any given relatum can always be conceived independently of the thing to which it relates.

40 Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 134.

not only for some hypothetical world God could create, but also for the world as it exists. This case alone suffices to show that one cannot maintain that Ockham's emphasis on the *potentia Dei absoluta* has no implications for the operation of the universe according to the *potentia Dei ordinata*. Ockham uses the former power to demonstrate that real relations do not exist in our world (with minimal exceptions), as evidenced by their non-existence in some theoretical worlds. For Ockham, it is precisely because real relations do not exist in some worlds that he reasons they cannot be an intrinsic feature of our (or any) world. But this is not the only example of Ockham's two powers failing to remain in their supposed distinct orders; the same phenomenon can be observed in the ethics of Ockham.

V. THE RATIONALISM OF OCKHAM'S ETHICS

Multiple commentators on Ockham's ethical theory, especially those who focus on his political writings, have rightly argued that his philosophy contains strong rationalist elements. For example, Brian Tierney, drawing almost exclusively from Ockham's later political works, maintains that in the final analysis "Ockham clearly belongs in the rationalist camp."[41] Even those who do give proper consideration to Ockham's philosophical and theological works are capable of presenting a serious case for Ockham's rationalism. In these texts, one encounters numerous affirmations of the role "Right Reason" (Recta Ratio) plays in determining the moral worth of an action. Ockham plainly states that "[i]t is impossible for moral virtue to exist without Right Reason…"[42] The importance of Right Reason applies as much to moral agents, who ought to act out of a desire to be in conformity with Right Reason, as it does to the moral lawgiver. The claim that it is "impossible" for a virtue to exist contrary to the dictates of Right Reason (among several other similar claims) would seem to put a restriction even on God's absolute power, thereby ensuring that God's commands are always in accordance with what is rational. While this is technically correct, especially when only considering the potentia Dei ordinata, this assessment is true only because Ockham ultimately subserviates reason itself to the will of God and the potentia Dei absoluta. That is to say, the reason Ockham is able to maintain that all of God's actions are rational is because in Ockham's thought something is made rational because God wills it to be so.

VI. THE VOLUNTARISM OF OCKHAM'S ETHICS

Ockham maintains that ethical standards are ultimately determined by the will of God, since by His absolute power God is capable of making actions which are good in our world, evil in another, and those which are evil in ours, good in another. Though Ockham does make several references to the

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[41] Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law, 1150-1625* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 199.

[42] *Ordinatio* d. IV, q. 3. Quoted in David W. Clark, "Voluntarism and Rationalism in the Ethics of Ockham," *Franciscan Studies* 31 (1971): 76. For other quotes substantiating Ockham's rationalism see pp. 75-77.

important role reason plays in moral decision making, both on the part of God and created moral agents, this does nothing to undermine the fact that Ockham is ultimately a voluntarist. The primary reason to suppose that Ockham gives primacy to God's will over His reason is that the latter is actually determined by the former in Ockham's thought. He makes this very clear in certain passages, prime among them being his claim that it is "by the very fact that the divine will wishes it that right reason dictates what is to be willed."[43] That is to say, though right reason may dictate that the divine will ought to be followed, it only does so because this command is in accordance with God's utterly unconstrained will. God's will ultimately guides His reason, not vice versa. From this, it follows that all ethical imperatives, not just those instituted by express divine fiat (e.g. the Ten Commandments) but also those in accordance with Right Reason, will similarly be merely derivative of the divine will.

This voluntarism in Ockham's philosophy is further elaborated in his frequently discussed claim that God can, according to His absolute power, will that an action which is morally reprehensible in our world be virtuous in some theoretical world. So, to use Ockham's own example, adultery could be a morally righteous act in some world, despite being evil in ours.[44] The wide range of potentially moral actions Ockham permits entails that it is hypothetically possible for two individuals to act in accordance with Right Reason, even if they are performing precisely opposite acts (e.g. committing adultery and faithfully loving one's spouse), granted only that the two inhabit different worlds in which God has willed adultery to be good in the one and evil in the other. Such a dilemma highlights one of the central problems with attempts to portray Ockham as a rationalist by referencing his statements concerning seemingly a priori moral truths, such as that one ought always to act in accordance with Right Reason, goodness, and truth.[45] It might seem that these principles could provide a rational basis for God's activity. But, as David Clark points out, "these formal principles cannot be applied to a given situation without adding a positive judgement that 'This is conformed to Right Reason', 'This is evil', 'This is good', 'This is honest'."[46] The "contentless" character of Ockham's fundamental ethical principles requires that God's unconstrained will acts to specify what precisely will be good, evil, reasonable, and true in any given world He creates. Thus, even the most basic principles of ethics are, for Ockham, determined by the will of God.

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[43] *Super Quatuor Libros Sententiarum* I, d. xli, q. 1 K. Quoted in Francis Oakley, "Medieval Theories of Natural Law: William of Ockham and the Significance of the Voluntarist Tradition," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 1961): 70, https://doi.org/10.1093/ajj/6.1.65

[44] *Ordinatio*, d. II, q. 19.

[45] Linwood Urban makes the mistake of equating what Ockham refers to as ethical principles known *per se nota* (i.e. self-evidently) with what philosophers today call analytic truths, which are necessarily true. Prima facie, this assessment is problematic, as "Some statement, s, is known self-evidently" is not equivalent to "The state of affairs to which s refers obtains necessarily." In assuming that these two ideas are equivalent, Urban begs the question, since if there are moral truths which are analytically true, then obviously God is bound by them. Linwood Urban, "William of Ockham's Theological Ethics," *Franciscan Studies* 33 (1973): 310–50, esp. 322-326.

[46] Clark, "Voluntarism and Rationalism," 85. Clark takes this mixture of formal ethical imperatives and concretizing divine volitions to represent a harmony between rationalism and voluntarism in Ockham's thought. I, however, disagree with this assessment since Ockham's nominalism only grants real existence to particular individuals. The merely formal commands, which Ockham relegates to the level of connotative (i.e. relational) terms, therefore do not possess any ontological backbone, so to speak. They are merely abstractions derived from the real, specific rulings of the divine will.

Even granted the absolute centrality of the will in determining ethical norms, there are still objections to my claim that Ockham's emphasis on the *potentia Dei absoluta* results in an arbitrary voluntarism that constitutes a significant break from the bulk of the Scholastic tradition. One uncontroversial part of this thesis, however, is the significance of God's absolute power. There is a general consensus concerning the central role of the *potentia Dei absoluta* in the debate over Ockham's ethical system. All of his controversial claims that lend themselves to a voluntaristic interpretation are directly related to possible worlds subject to the absolute divine power. In our world, adultery (among other things) will always be evil in accordance with the *potentia Dei ordinata*.[47] The potential points for attack, therefore, are reduced to my claims that (1) the supremacy of will in Ockham's understanding of how God determines what is good versus evil entails that Ockham is a voluntarist, and (2) Ockham's system represents a meaningful departure from much Scholastic thought.

Against the claim that Ockham is ultimately forced to maintain that God's commands are arbitrary, Marilyn McCord Adams responds that "[a]ccording to Ockham, God's policies are nonarbitrary in that they serve His purposes."[48] While McCord's response does technically provide a reasonable account of why God commands as He does (namely, because He simply wills to do so), it fails to address the central problem of why God wills what He wills. As we have already seen, however, God's will is not constrained by Right Reason or any other ethical norm. Thus, it remains the case that, in Ockham's system, God's commands are in fact arbitrary due to the unconstrained nature of their source: the unlimited will of God.

Another attempt to exonerate Ockham from the accusation that his God acts arbitrarily comes from Kevin McDonnell. Interestingly, he concedes that Ockham believes "[t]he principles of right reason are also dependent upon the will of God," but McDonnell additionally maintains that "dependence upon the will of God, as Ockham conceives that will, does not necessarily imply arbitrariness."[49] McDonnell reasons that, if God is the creator of all things (including rational and ethical rules), then there can be no standard against which to judge if God is acting arbitrarily. Therefore, McDonnell charges that those who accuse Ockham's God of acting arbitrarily are guilty of "imposing the present structure of human reason upon God."[50] In this critique lies an important distinction. When I claim that Ockham must maintain the arbitrariness of God's commands, I do not mean to say that there is a deviation from what humans in our world have come to expect under the potentia Dei ordinata. Rather, it is the very fact that there can be no standard to which God is beholden that makes His

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[47] This universal claim does, of course, exclude any foreknown exceptions in accordance with the divine plan. But these exceptions, as previously discussed, are still in accordance with God's ordained power.

[48] Technically, McCord brings up this point in refutation to Etienne Gilson's assumption that "only natural necessity could provide God with a sufficient reason for ordaining that one creature coexist with, precede, or follow another." But as McCord's own reference to God's "policies" indicates, this general problem of the arbitrariness of what God creates also applies to ethical policies. Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols., 1235-1236.

[49] Kevin McDonnell, "Does William of Ockham Have a Theory of Natural Law?," *Franciscan Studies* 34 (1974): 386.

[50] McDonnell, "Does William of Ockham Have a Theory of Natural Law?," 387.

actions arbitrary. My claims concerning the arbitrary nature of God's actions in Ockham's thought, therefore, ought to be understood in the sense of a lack of conformity to a standard of behavior, not a deviation from such a standard (since its existence is impossible, as McDonnell rightly points out).

Even granted the voluntarism of God in Ockham's ethical theory, the question of whether this primacy of the unfettered will constitutes a deviation from the Scholastic tradition still remains contested. Linwood Urban, for example, attempts to show the similarity between the thought of Ockham and his thirteenth-century predecessor, Thomas Aquinas.[51] To do so, Urban quotes Ockham's affirmation that God is not required to act in any particular way vis-à-vis the created order: "God does nothing outside himself from necessity, nor does he will anything other than himself necessarily."[52] This statement is, of course, consistent with the voluntarist interpretation of Ockham's ethics presented in this essay; God can will whatever ethical imperatives He so desires, since anything besides God Himself is willed by God unnecessarily. The problem only emerges when Urban equates this articulation of divine freedom with that of Aquinas: "God owes nothing to anyone other than himself. So that when you speak of his not being able to do except what he ought to do, you only mean that he cannot do other than what for him is fitting and just."[53] Urban trivializes the difference between Ockham and Aquinas to "only a matter of emphasis" when, in fact, there is (quite literally) a world of difference.[54] While Urban is correct in affirming that both Ockham and Aquinas believe God wills only Himself necessarily, Ockham believes that this entails God can will anything whatsoever outside of Himself, whereas Aquinas maintains that there are nevertheless restrictions on what God can create.[55] Ockham claims that God can, by the *potentia Dei absoluta*, create a world in which only a single real thing exists whereas Aquinas adamantly rejects this possibility (though Urban fails to appreciate this nuance in Aquinas' position). As Funkenstein explains: "Thomas admitted that God could have created other worlds, but each of the worlds that God could have created, much as ours, is such that the singular things that inhabit it are necessarily bound by some mutual reference-structure."[56] Aquinas maintains that each possible world must have a harmonious order between all its parts and that this order will, to one extent or another, reflect divine goodness. Accordingly, in comparison to Aquinas, Ockham has a much broader understanding of the range of possibilities for God's creative activity. The same applies, a fortiori, to any given ethical system God might construct, but a less constrained ethical system means a

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[51] Aquinas is an apt choice for our purposes, as he is often treated as the benchmark for Scholastic orthodoxy.
[52] *Quodlibetal Questions*, VI, q. 2. Quoted in Urban, "William of Ockham's Theological Ethics," 329.
[53] *Summa Theologica* I, q. 25, a. 5, *ad* 2. Quoted in Urban, "William of Ockham's Theological Ethics," 330.
[54] Urban, "William of Ockham's Theological Ethics," 330.
[55] Urban clearly misses this point, as he summarizes Aquinas' view as follows: "Whatever world he [i.e. God] creates must be a good world, but since he does not have to maximize goodness, and since all possible worlds contain some goodness, he is free to choose to create any one of them." Urban, "William of Ockham's Theological Ethics," 329.
[56] Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 135.

more arbitrary one.[57] This last point raises an even more fundamental difference between these intellectual giants: Aquinas, when compared to Ockham, would be much less comfortable with the idea that God "constructs" ethical norms in the first place.

As previously affirmed, Urban is correct in claiming that both Aquinas and Ockham agree that God wills only Himself necessarily. He is mistaken, however, in further claiming that this constitutes a shared basis of morality between the two philosophers in virtue of the objectivity of God's nature. Urban misses the important difference that Aquinas sees creation as a participation in that very nature, whereas Ockham makes no such claims. In his recent survey of the idea of divine freedom in the Christian philosophical tradition, D. C. Schindler has aptly summarized Aquinas' understanding of God's relation to creation: "the world in its own being is not just an external effect of God's adventitious will but in some respect *a revelation of God's nature*."[58] Thus, for Aquinas, the structure of any given world (and, by extension, its governing ethical norms) is bound by God's goodness. For Ockham, as we have already demonstrated, God can will total opposite ethical norms in different possible worlds, thereby denying the intimate connection between God and His creation that characterized so much of Medieval philosophy. For Aquinas, God's goodness naturally overflows into all of creation. For Ockham, goodness has to be constructed and imposed onto creation.

VII. CONCLUSION

I have attempted to demonstrate that Ockham's theory of God's two powers has serious implications for his philosophy. Specifically, I wished to show that the supposedly purely hypothetical *potentia Dei absoluta* actually overrides the *potentia Dei ordinata* in certain cases. By permitting that God could, in accordance with the *potentia Dei absoluta*, create a world composed solely of one entity, Ockham concludes that the existence of real relations cannot be rationally demonstrated in any world *including ours*. Additionally, because Ockham believes that God must be able, again by His absolute power, to command radically different ethical norms in various possible worlds, He must maintain that such ethical standards are determined arbitrarily by the will of God in any world *including ours*. In the end, Ockham gives singular priority to God's will and absolute power against earlier Scholastic thinkers such as Aquinas who maintained that things always exist in a broader context, both in the ontological sense of relationality and the ethical sense of openness to the infinite horizon of God's goodness.

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57 The arbitrariness of ethical norms must be at least as arbitrary as the structure of the world in which they hold authority, since the whole basis of the genuinely rational elements in Ockham's thought is that the world can reveal truths about ethics. If this is the case, then an arbitrarily constructed world leads to an arbitrarily constructed ethics.

58 D. C. Schindler, *Retrieving Freedom: The Christian Appropriation of Classical Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), 231-232.

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AGAINST NOMIC INTEGRITY

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FOREWORD

Editors: Benjamin Dever-Mendenhall, Finn Horn, & Richard Zhang

In "Against Nomic Integrity," Lucas Strader develops a novel criticism of a form of priority monism termed Spinozan monism propounded by Jonathan Schaffer, by interrogating the central notion of Leibnizian substance. The Leibnizian definition of substance holds that something is a substance only if it evolves by the fundamental laws, and Schaffer argues that the cosmos is the one thing that meets this definition, thereby arriving at the conclusion that Spinozan Monism, the view that there is only one fundamental substance, is true. After giving Schaffer's reasons for holding this view, Strader sketches out philosopher Max Siegel's criticism of Schaffer's views and identifies a shortcoming in this criticism. Siegel's criticism, which focuses on the possibility of there being multiple causally independent island universes that constitute what exists, is a demonstration of the metaphysical contingency of Schaffer's claim that this universe is the singular fundamental substance. Strader demonstrates that Siegel's metaphysics, which still accepts the Leibnizian definition of substance, encounters a problem as it indicates redundancy in mereological levels on which fundamental laws hold. Strader contends that the set of issues which arise from the two author's metaphysics can be attributed to their shared acceptance of the Leibnizian definition of substance and accordingly advocates for rejection of this definition.

We valued this paper because of its level of detail and demonstrated command of the philosophical literature surrounding the notion of substance. While much of the piece centered on debates in contemporary and early modern metaphysics — two topics often considered less accessible to undergraduates outside of philosophy — it also drew inspiration from physics and cosmology, which infused the work with added nuance. We appreciated the extent to which Strader engaged with source material while developing an original argument.

This paper spectacularly builds upon the current understanding of substance by questioning the validity of deriving everything from the universe as the only fundamental substance. Indeed, in our daily lives, we often have trouble connecting abstract thoughts to physical objects; Strader has provided a compelling reason that these differences should be better explained through arguments by pluralism rather than monism. As we struggle to define our knowledge of reality, such reasoning can only serve to let us think more deeply about our place in the universe.

ABSTRACT:

In *The Action of the Whole*, Schaffer (2013) advances a form of priority monism by which the cosmos, or whole material universe, is the one fundamental, basic *substance* through what he terms the nomic integrity argument. This priority substance monism relies on a definition that he refers to as "*Leibnizian*

Substance," by which something is a substance if and only if it evolves by the fundamental laws. While past authors have criticized Schaffer's nomic integrity argument on the basis of its supposed contingency (Siegel 2016), Schaffer's notion of *Leibnizian Substance* has not faced criticism in the literature. In this paper, I aim to critique *Leibnizian Substance* by presenting a dilemma–drawn from inverting Siegel's (2016) Island Universes argument – through which the priority substance monist cannot hold *Leibnizian Substance* to be a candidate definition of substance. In doing so, I argue not only that *Leibnizian Substance* cannot be said to hold as a candidate definition of substance but also that Schaffer's overarching nomic integrity argument cannot hold either.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will present a dilemma for Schaffer's (2013) notion of *Leibnizian Substance, LS*, through which I argue that (1) *Leibnizian Substance* does not hold as a candidate definition of a substance, and (2) Schaffer's nomic integrity argument for priority monism fails.

Section II presents Schaffer's (2013) nomic integrity argument for cosmic priority monism, or the view that "there is necessarily one fundamental thing," which is "the whole material universe," i.e., the cosmos (Cameron 2010, 178; Schaffer 2013, 74). *Section III* identifies why Schaffer (2010; 2013) holds that (i) *if monism is true, it is necessarily true*, and (ii) *if pluralism is true, it is necessarily true. Section IV* articulates Siegel's Island Universes counter-argument to nomic integrity, which challenges the "necessity of Schaffer's monism," suggesting that Schaffer's priority monism is not true via its contingency (Siegel 2016, 25). *Section V* inverts Siegel's Island Universes counter-argument in order to demonstrate that, when defining a substance via *LS*, it presents a dilemma by which either pluralism *and* monism are false, or *LS* does not hold. *Section VI* responds to Schaffer's modalized version of *LS* as an anticipated counter-argument to said dilemma. *Section VII* briefly considers and rejects Schaffer's (2018) reasons for still holding the nomic integrity argument to be true, concluding that *LS*, and thereby, the nomic integrity argument, does not hold.

II. SCHAFFER AND NOMIC INTEGRITY

The current section presents and explains Schaffer's nomic integrity argument for cosmic priority monism. Priority monism holds that "exactly one *basic* concrete object exists" (Schaffer 2018, 3.1.1).[59] While priority monism allows for the existence of other concrete objects – or real, physical objects – these concrete objects are held as derivative from a single *basic* concrete object. Thus, some basic concrete object, x, is fundamental insofar as (1) all other concrete objects are grounded in, dependent on, and exist in virtue of, x; and, (2) x is not grounded in, dependent on, or exists in virtue of, another concrete

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[59] My emphasis on "basic."

object. Schaffer advocates a form of priority monism by which the cosmos is the only fundamental entity or the one basic concrete object (2010, 42; 2013, 67).[60] In *The Action of the Whole*, Schaffer (2013) advances this view through his argument from nomic integrity. Where (3) is the conclusion of premises (1) and (2), he presents the argument as follows:

Argument I

1. *Leibnizian Substance [LS]*: Something is a substance if and only if it evolves by the fundamental laws.
2. *Russellian Laws [RL]*: The cosmos is the one and only thing that evolves by the fundamental laws.
3. *Spinozan Monism [SM]*: The cosmos is the one and only substance (from 1 and 2). (Schaffer 2013, 67)

According to the premise *LS*, something is a substance if and only if, for any given time, it evolves, meaning that the behavior it "actually displays" is the same as the prediction fundamental laws would output for its fundamental, intrinsic character at that time (Schaffer 2013, 69–70). In other words, *LS* connects substance to "lawhood," whereby something is fundamental "if and only if [a] fundamental equation applies to it with full accuracy" (Schaffer 2013, 68). As such, to evolve by the fundamental laws is, according to Schaffer, to form an "internally comprehensible and self-contained system," i.e., a causally closed system (2013, 72).[61]

For Schaffer, the only thing that evolves by fundamental laws is the cosmos, forming premise (2), or *RL*. This is because the cosmos – the whole material universe – is the only internally comprehensible and causally closed system. There are two relevant, interrelated reasons for which he holds this to be true. The first is that "local subsystems are always liable to outside disruption," meaning that they cannot be said to evolve according to fundamental laws; i.e., their predictions from fundamental laws are liable to not match their behavior, as external disruption modifies their behavior (Schaffer 2013, 75). The second is that "local subsystems are, in fact, constantly disrupted;" thus, it is not a mere liability on which local subsystems cannot be said to evolve by fundamental laws but an empirically observable phenomenon (Schaffer 2013, 76).

For example, if a particle, *a*, is at rest, it would be predicted within a Newtonian framework that the particle remains at rest. However, this is not the behavior that *a* actually exhibits, as there would be a mutual attraction between *a* and some other particle, *b*. Therefore, *a* cannot be said to evolve by the fundamental laws in that its behavior does not match its prediction, meaning that it cannot be considered a substance by *LS*.

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[60] I will discuss the scope of "the" in *Section III*.
[61] The reasons for why he thinks *LS* is plausible are not relevant to the present paper at this moment. I will present and discuss the relevant reasons when I critique *LS* in *Section V*. See Schaffer, 2013, pp. 71–2 for the full range of reasons.

In contrast, the cosmos is not liable to outside disruption insofar as there is nothing outside of itself. As such, it is only the cosmos that can be said to "evolve by strict laws" in the sense that its predictions necessarily match its behavior (Schaffer 2013, 75). Therefore, the cosmos is the one and only object that satisfies *LS*, meaning that it is the one and only substance.

By *LS* and *RL*, Schaffer concludes that the cosmos is the one and only substance, or fundamental, basic concrete object with a natural unity. *LS* states that x is a substance, Sx, if and only if x evolves by the fundamental laws, Ex, $\forall x(Sx \Leftrightarrow Ex)$. By *RL*, there exists some cosmos, c, which is the one and only thing that evolves by the fundamental laws insofar as it is the only thing whose predictions necessarily match its behavior, $\exists c(Ec)$. Additionally, local subsystems, s, do not evolve by the fundamental laws insofar as their predictions are liable to and do empirically differ from their behavior due to outside disruption, $\forall s(\neg Es)$. Therefore, we arrive at conclusion (3), *SM*: the cosmos is the one and only substance, as $\forall s \exists c(\neg Ss \wedge Sc)$. Further, because the cosmos is the one and only substance, there exists one fundamental, basic concrete object, while each and every other concrete object is dependent on the cosmos. Therefore, priority monism is true according to Schaffer's argument from nomic integrity.

Siegel's (2016) Island Universes argument will present a conceivable case in which there are causally closed local subsystems. This would mean that each system evolves by the fundamental laws, indicating that each would be a substance as per *LS*. The aim of this case is to establish the contingency of *RL*, demonstrating that *SM* is contingent, thereby calling Schaffer's monism into question. In order for this argument to work, however, it must be the case that *if monism is true, it is necessarily true*. The following section will aim to establish this premise, as well as the complimentary premise that *if pluralism is true, it is necessarily true*.

III. NECESSITY

The current section explains Schaffer's reasoning for holding that (i) *if monism is true, it is necessarily true*, and (ii) *if pluralism is true, it is necessarily true*. Additionally, I will provide a direct reason to hold that if *SM* is true, then it is necessarily true through Broome's (2007) account of wide-scope conditional requirements. In *Monism: The Priority of the Whole*, Schaffer accounts for claims (i) and (ii) as follows:

> Now I take it that Monism and Pluralism, though defined as doctrines about the actual world (§1.4), are metaphysically general theses, in the sense that whichever doctrine is true, is true with metaphysical necessity…Either it is metaphysically necessary for the cosmos to be a fundamental whole, or it is metaphysically necessary for the cosmos (if it has proper parts) to be derivative. (Schaffer 2010, 56)

There are two relevant reasons for which Schaffer holds that pluralism or monism are necessarily true should either be true. The first is that monism and pluralism are "rival doctrines about the *laws of metaphysics*," which indicates their metaphysical necessity via Rosen's (2006) 'standard' conception (Schaffer 2010, 56).[62] The second is that, pragmatically, Schaffer's earlier (2010) argument for priority monism requires (i) and (ii), meaning that the rejection of these premises in light of Siegel's (2016) Island Universes argument would still call Schaffer's monism into question.

To the first reason, monism and pluralism are competing doctrines about the laws of metaphysics, meaning that their truth entails their metaphysical necessity according to Rosen's 'standard' conception. Rosen holds that the laws of metaphysics are necessary principles that "specify the categories of basic constituents and the rules for their combination. They determine how nonbasic entities are generated from or 'grounded' in the basic array," being some concrete, basic object or set of facts (2006, 35). By this conception, the laws of metaphysical dependence are counted as metaphysical necessities in that they determine how nonbasic entities are grounded in (a) basic entities (or entity); thus, to say that x depends on y is to say that it is necessarily the case that x depends on y.[63]

In considering Schaffer's definitions, "something is a substance if and only if it is a fundamental thing," where "x is fundamental if and only if x depends on nothing further" (Schaffer 2013, 68). Therefore, should x be a substance, it is to say that x depends on nothing further, indicating its metaphysical necessity as a substance as per Rosen's 'standard' conception through the necessity of its dependence. As such, it follows that if (priority) monism is true, meaning that there is one thing that depends on nothing further, then monism is necessarily true; additionally, it follows that if (priority) pluralism is true, meaning that there is a plurality of things which depend on nothing further, then pluralism is necessarily true.

To the second reason, one of Schaffer's earlier (2010) arguments for priority monism in *Monism: The Priority of the Whole* depends on the premises that (i) *if monism is true, it is necessarily true*, and (ii) *if pluralism is true, it is necessarily true*. Consider premises (9) and (10), and conclusion (11) from said argument, represented as "1," "2," and "3," respectively:

Argument II

1. It is metaphysically possible for the cosmos to have proper parts but be a fundamental whole.

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2. Either it is metaphysically necessary for the cosmos to be a fundamental whole, or it is metaphysically necessary for the cosmos (if it has proper parts) to be derivative.
3. The cosmos is a fundamental whole [from 1 and 2]. (Schaffer 2010, 55–6)

In explaining why (3) follows from (1) and (2), Schaffer writes, "in short, if Pluralism is true, then it is necessarily true, by [2]. But by [1], Pluralism is not necessarily true. So [pluralism] is not true" (2010, 56).[64] Therefore, Schaffer's (2010) argument for priority monism requires (i) and (ii). As such, the denial of (i) and (ii) in light of Sigel's (2016) challenge to nomic integrity would undermine Schaffer's priority monism as a whole.

Further, in considering the conditional scope requirement of the definite description "the" Schaffer's notion of "*the* cosmos," it must be of a wide-scope conditional requirement given premise (i). Where $R(w)$ expresses that at "each world w there is a set $R(w)$ of propositions that specify what rationality requires of you at w" and "the function R from worlds to sets of propositions is the code of rationality for you," to say that a definite description carries a wide-scope conditional requirement is to say that,

> For some pair of propositions p and q, it may be the case that at all worlds rationality requires of you the material conditional proposition that if p then q. That is: $p \rightarrow q$ belongs to $R(w)$ for all w. In that case, it is necessarily true that rationality requires of you that if p then q. (Broome 2007, 362–3)

Because (i) *if monism is true, it is necessarily true*, for the pair of propositions expressed by *LS* in conjunction with *RL*, and *SM*, it is necessarily true that it is rationally required that if the conjunctive conditions that "something is a substance if and only if it evolves by the fundamental laws" (*LS*) *and* "the cosmos is the one and only thing that evolves by the fundamental laws" (*RL*) are satisfied for all worlds, then "*the* cosmos is the one and only substance" (*SM*) (Schaffer 2013, 67).[65]

As such, the establishment of *RL* as contingent would render SM untrue. As shown above, if the conjunction of *LS* and *RL* is true across all worlds, then it is rationally required that SM be necessarily true, as the cosmos would necessarily pick out the one and only thing which is a substance as per *LS*. Siegel (2016) expresses this notion as:

> *Necessary Spinozan Monism* (□SM): Necessarily, the cosmos is the one and only fundamental entity. (24)

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[64] Schaffer relies on Rosen's standard conception of the laws of metaphysics. The reasons for which are not necessary to the present paper, as I am only making the claim that the rejection of these conceptions would undermine Schaffer elsewhere, highlighting a possible contradiction should these conceptions be called into question by a proponent of Spinozan Monism.
[65] My emphasis on "the."

If there is a conceivable world in which *RL* is contingently true, then □*SM* would not hold as *SM* would not necessarily follow across all worlds. Additionally, as *SM* is the only form of monism that definitionally satisfies *LS*, by (i), if *LS* holds and *SM* is true, then □*SM* is true. Therefore, given the contingency of *RL*, *SM* would be untrue.

IV. SIEGEL AND ISLAND UNIVERSES

As demonstrated in the previous section, if □*SM* does not hold given a conceivable world in which *RL* is contingent, *SM* is false. In *Priority Monism is Contingent*, Siegel presents a conceivable "hyper-expansion world" in which *RL* is contingent, from which it follows that Shaffer's nomic integrity for *SM* fails insofar as □*SM* is not the case (Siegel 2016, 26). This counter-argument comprises Siegel's "Island Universes" argument (Schaffer 2018);[66] the current section will articulate said argument.

Siegel (2016) first considers a world similar to our own in which *LS* holds, writing:

> Suppose our world is a world in which no proper part of the cosmos evolves according to the fundamental laws in Schaffer's sense. Now consider a world similar to our own, in that the laws of physics are both true and operative. Particles exist and behave as contemporary physics predicts. (26)

However, in this hypothetical world, there is one difference: at the beginning of spacetime, subsystems *s* and *s'* were "propelled away from each other faster than the speed of light during the universe's period of hyper-expansion" (Siegel 2016, 26). As such, *s* and *s'* become causally isolated, meaning that the evolution of each can be described without reference to the other. Thus, both *s* and *s'* evolve by the fundamental laws in the sense that their behavior matches their prediction and, therefore, by *LS*, *s* and *s'* are substances.

Siegel's hypothetical Island Universes world demonstrates that *RL* is contingent. Such a hypothetical world is rationally conceivable insofar as the inflation theory in physical cosmology–which holds that the universe underwent an "inflationary epoch," or period of hyper-expansion, from between 10^{-36} and 10^{-32} seconds after the Big Bang–is seen as credible.[67] Thus, it is rationally conceivable that there is a world in which *RL* is not true, as there would be three things that evolve by the fundamental laws and, by *LS*, are substances: subsystems *s*, *s'*, and the cosmos.

Given Siegel's rationally conceivable Island Universes world in which pluralism arises from the application of LS to a plurality of causally closed systems, SM is false. His argument may be reformulated as follows:

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[66] Siegel does not refer to his (2016) hyper-expansion world argument as the "Island Universes" argument; this name has been given to the argument in reference to Lewis' (1986) discussion of island universes.
[67] See Gruth's (1997) *The Inflationary Universe*.

Argument IIIa

P1: If *SM* is true, then $\square$*SM* is true.
P2: $\square$*SM* is false.
C1: *SM* is false.

As discussed in *Section III*, premise (1) is necessary given Schaffer's underlying 'standard' conception of metaphysical laws, as well as his reliance on the premise that *if monism is true, it is necessarily true* in his earlier (2010) argument for priority monism. Additionally, premise (2) holds insofar as there is a rationally conceivable world in which *RL* is contingent as following from *LS* holding as a definition of substance. Finally, conclusion (1) follows from premises (1) and (2) via modus tollens.

Despite rejecting *SM*, Siegel maintains that "conditionals like *LS* might be eligible as metaphysical necessities" (2016, 30). In support of this claim, he writes,

> Being a general claim about the nature of fundamental entities, *LS* tells us how to locate the fundamental entities at any given world. Monism and pluralism are the outputs of *LS* applied to a particular world. Given that features of a specific world figure in Schaffer's argument for monism but not in his argument for *LS*, it should be unsurprising that only the latter is a metaphysical necessity. (2016, 30)

However, Schaffer is dismissive of Siegel's Island Universes on the basis of not challenging *LS*, as

> It is hard to see how an argument premised on the claim [*LS*] that it is necessary that basic objects evolve by the fundamental laws could refute priority monism in the end, given the claim [*RL*] that the cosmos is the one and only thing which actually evolves by the fundamental laws. That much at least gets us the actual truth of priority monism. (2018, 3.2.7)

Therefore, it is integral to interrogate the metaphysical necessity of *LS* in order to provide a more conclusive case against nomic integrity.

V. A DILEMMA FOR LEIBNIZIAN SUBSTANCE

In inverting Siegel's (2016) argument from Island Universes by assuming and subsequently arguing against 'Island Pluralism,' a dilemma appears for the underlying notion of *LS*: either (i) monism *and* pluralism are false, or (ii) *LS* does not hold. The current section presents an argument by which this dilemma emerges and analyzes the implications of this dilemma on Schaffer's notion of *LS*, as well as his overarching nomic integrity argument, concluding that each should not be said to hold.

Assume that Siegel's hypothetical hyper-expansion world is metaphysically true of the actual world. This assumption is possible, given the aforementioned credibility of hyper-expansion. In this world, Schaffer's (2013) argument from nomic integrity may be inversely reformed as to reflect our new assumptive metaphysical conditions:

Argument IV:

1. Leibnizian Substance (LS): Something is a substance if and only if it evolves by the fundamental laws. (Unchanged).
2. Plural Russellian Laws (PRL): There is a plurality of closed systems, $s_1, \ldots, s_n$, that evolve by the fundamental laws.
3. Island Pluralism (IP): Closed systems $s_1, \ldots, s_n$ are the only substances (from 1 and 2).

As discussed in *Section III*, *if pluralism is true, then it is necessarily true*; further, in the satisfaction of the conjunctive conditions of *LS* and *PRL*, it is rationally required that if *IP*, then $\square IP$. Therefore, if premise (1), *LS*, and premise (2), *PRL*, hold, then

$\square IP$:*Necessary Island Pluralism* ($\square IP$): Necessarily, closed systems $s_1, \ldots, s_n$ are the only substances.[68]

Now, suppose a world, w, consists of a single system that is not propelled away from another faster than the speed of light during the universe's period of hyper-expansion; in other words, suppose Schaffer's cosmic monism. By w, it is rationally conceivable that there is a world in which *PRL* is not true, as there would be only one thing that evolves by the fundamental laws and, by *LS*, is a substance: w. As such, *PRL* is contingent, meaning that it may be argued that:

Argument IIIb

P3: If *IP* is true, then $\square IP$ is true.
P4: $\square IP$ is false.
C2: *IP* is false (from 3 and 4).

For the same reasons that were identified that *SM* fails according to Siegel, *IP* fails; i.e., *PRL* is contingent, *IP* requires $\square IP$, and, therefore, *IP* is false.

Should *Argument III* hold, then both *SM* and *IP* are false as per *C1* and *C2*, respectively. However, this is only the case should *LS* hold, as it is through *LS* that evolving by the fundamental laws was identified with being a substance, entailing *SM* and *IP*. In other words, should priority monism or pluralism be true in accordance with *LS*, then they would definitionally take the forms *SM* or *IP*, respectively. As such, the proponent of Schaffer's nomic integrity argument

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[68] One could argue that it is not necessary for pluralism that $s_1, \ldots, s_n$ *in particular* are necessarily the only substances. However, allowing for a change in the number of substances would still mean that *RL* and *PRL* are contingently true; therefore, the dilemma for *LS* still arises.

and, by extension, *LS* is left with two options: (i) *LS* holds, and both priority monism and pluralism are false, or (ii) reject *LS* and, thereby, the nomic integrity argument.

A proponent of Schaffer's priority monism would need to take (ii). There are two reasons for this. First, if *LS* is preserved, then *SM*, as the form of priority monism that follows from LS, would not hold as per *Argument III*. Second, as identified in *Section III*, the premise that *if pluralism is true, it is necessarily true* is required for Schaffer's earlier (2010) argument for priority monism, meaning that even if *Argument III* is rejected on the grounds that its *SM* and *IP* do not entail □SM and □IP, respectively, then Schaffer's earlier (2010) argument would fail. Therefore, the proponent of Schaffer's priority monism must accept (ii) rejecting *LS*, even if it means that the nomic integrity argument would fail.

VI. A RESPONSE TO MODALIZED LEIBNIZIAN SUBSTANCE

In his original paper presenting the nomic integrity argument, Schaffer anticipates a "two-monad" world in which "prediction and behaviour match at multiple mereological levels" as a counter-argument to nomic integrity (2013, 84). He responds to this anticipated counter-argument by presenting a modalized version of *LS*, as well as a modalized version of what he terms the "*Aristotelian Principle*:"

> *Leibnizian Substance, [LS], Modalized* It is metaphysically necessary that something is a substance if and only if it has an evolution governed by the fundamental laws.
> *Aristotelian Principle, [AP], Modalized* It is metaphysically necessary that if there is no redundancy then no proper part of a substance is a substance. (2013, 84)

By these premises, Schaffer holds that a supposed plurality of closed systems, $s_1, ..., s_n$, would not be considered substances in an *IP* world. This is because (i) only the mereological level of the cosmos is "*governed*," in that "governing is always restricted to a single mereological level (to avoid overdetermination of fundamental powers)," and (ii) the introduction of differing mereological levels being "governed" by the fundamental laws would introduce a redundancy, meaning that the proper parts of the cosmos, being $s_1, ..., s_n$, would not be substances (Schaffer 2013, 84). Therefore, "because governing is restricted to one mereological level, it cannot be that both of the monads and the whole cosmos are fundamental entities" (Siegel 2016, 28).

While Siegel (2016) offers his own response to Schaffer's two-monad world,[10] a more concise response may be made. To (i), it is reasonable to conclude from *IP* that the cosmos is not to be considered as a substance by *LS*, as any consideration of the cosmos' evolution would have to defer to the evolution of systems $s_1, ..., s_n$ in that behavior only occurs in these systems; thus, prediction must be made at the level of systems and, by extension, only the

systems can be said to evolve. Therefore, it does not definitionally[69] follow from *LS* that the cosmos is a substance. As such, it is permissible that there is only one mereological level which is governed by the fundamental laws, being that of $s_1,...,s_n$.[70] Additionally, to (ii), given the affirmation of a single mereological level, being that of $s_1,..., s_n$, there would be no redundancy; even so, as Schaffer writes, "overdetermination of fundamental powers—so long as they cohere—yields a redundancy that seems not metaphysically impossible but merely methodologically dispreferred," which leaves open the possibility of IP and, thereby, the contingency of *RL* and the subsequent rejection of *SM* regardless (Schaffer 2013, 84).[71] Thus, Schaffer's *modalized LS* and *modalized AP* do not discredit the dilemma drawn for *LS* and, thereby, the nomic integrity argument.

VII. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Schaffer (2018) draws two options for the priority monist in preserving the nomic integrity argument and, thereby, *LS* in light of Island Universes. He writes,

> The main options for the priority monist seem to be [i] denying the modalized version of *LS*, and so claiming that priority monism holds even at island universes; or [ii] denying the final premise that if priority monism is true then it is necessarily true, and instead claiming that the matter is contingent. (3.2.7)

Neither of these options work. To (i), priority monism cannot be said to hold at island universes insofar as it definitionally follows from *LS* and *PRL* that *IP*; additionally, *IP* can and, by *LS*, definitionally must allow for a single mereological level at $s_1,...,s_n$. To (ii), if *RL* and *PRL* are contingent, then both *SM* and *IP* fail, meaning that neither priority monism nor pluralism can be said to hold –leading to the aforementioned dilemma – as well as challenging Schaffer's earlier (2010) argument for priority monism. Thus, the only reasonable option left for the priority monist is to reject *LS*, meaning that Schaffer's (2013) nomic integrity argument fails, and *LS* cannot be said to hold as a candidate definition for a substance.

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69 See Siegel, 2016, pp. 28-30.

70 A proponent of Schaffer's account of monism could claim in response that the single mereological level *must* be that of the cosmos despite this deference. However, *LS* does not lend itself to this view in that only $s_1,..., s_n$ can be said to evolve by the fundamental laws, meaning that this response would be begging the question.

71 My emphasis on "not metaphysically impossible."

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Peter Singer on Self-Awareness: Inconsistencies in a Hedonic Defense of Personism

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FOREWORD

Editors: Jiming Chen, Claudia Nesin, Sabina Schrynemakers, & Andrew Volynsky

The issue of animal rights has become an increasingly central topic in today's world. Movements promoting veganism and fighting against animal cruelty are growing more prevalent. At the core of these movements are people like moral philosopher Peter Singer. Speciesism, a view propounded by Singer, treats discrimination based on species membership as no different from racism and, as such, condemns the devaluation of animal lives, which results in abuses like animal testing and meat consumption. Instead, Singer presents a hedonic utilitarian defense of 'personism,' the idea that all self-aware lives, or 'persons,' ought to be attributed equal moral significance.

In "Peter Singer on Self-Awareness: Inconsistencies in a Hedonic Defense of Personism," Braden carefully dissects Singer's personism, showing that such a view contains the same prejudices as speciesism. We enjoyed reading this paper because of its clarity and originality in demonstrating that consciousness does not differ from traits like intelligence, which are not deemed relevant to the intrinsic values of human - or in the case of personism, animal - lives. Braden's effective use of thought experiments makes his central argument both powerful and easy to follow, qualities of great import in a composition so relevant to the actions of us all.

ABSTRACT

In *Animal Liberation Now*, prominent moral philosopher Peter Singer challenges the widely-held intuition that human lives are somehow more important than all other lives.[72] He argues that if we think it is wrong to discriminate between individual human beings on the basis of intelligence, strength, or wealth, then we ought to also find something wrong with preferring human lives because of human's normally higher mental capacities when compared to other sentient species. He calls this irrational prejudice "speciesism," and compares it to other forms of baseless discrimination, like racism and sexism. The implicit alternative to speciesism, introduced by Singer in *Practical Ethics*, is the view that *self-aware* lives, or the lives of "persons", should be valued above other lives, which he defends from a utilitarian perspective.[73] He finds personism to be able to escape the prejudices of speciesism by identifying a particular quality—self-awareness—that enhances the significance of certain lives, as opposed to arbitrarily placing one species above all others.

This paper is not a defense of speciesism; rather, it argues that Singer's "personism" is a moral framework with the same foundational flaws. I

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[72] Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation Now: The Definitive Classic Renewed*. (New York City, New York : HarperCollins, 2023).
[73] Singer, Peter. *Practical Ethics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 108.

demonstrate that to a hedonistic utilitarian, consciousness does not intrinsically make a life more valuable; thus, indiscriminately assigning comparatively higher moral value to self-aware lives than all other lives is a prejudiced worldview in the same way that speciesism is. If we are willing to accept personism despite the equally valuable lives it leaves out, we ought to accept speciesism on the same grounds: if we must reject speciesism because it irrationally excludes some beings, we ought to reject personism for the same reason.

I. INTRODUCTION

Intelligence may explain differences in the interests individuals possess—I desire an education and a meaningful career, while a cow does not—but when interests are the same between different species members, Singer posits that they merit equal consideration.[74] That is to say, given that the cow and I both want to avoid physical pain, experiencing physical pain is not inherently worse for me than it is for the cow. Beyond the claim that human suffering is not intrinsically worse than animal suffering, rejecting speciesism also leads Singer to reject the view that human lives in particular have "some very special value".[75] He writes:

> "The wrongness of inflicting pain on a being cannot depend on the being's species, and nor can the wrongness of killing it. The biological facts on which the boundary of our species is based do not have moral significance. To give preference to the life of a being simply because that being is a member of our species would put us in a position uncomfortably similar to that of racists who give preference to those who are members of their race."[76]

I argue that there is a logical inconsistency in denouncing speciesism as an irrational prejudice while arguing that hedonistic utilitarians ought to privilege self-aware lives. I am specifically talking about the speciesist belief that human lives are intrinsically more valuable than non-human lives; notably, one can hold this belief and still view animal suffering as something we ought to prevent.[77] I discuss where self-awareness as a criterion for determining which lives have special value may fall short and compare this to where speciesism as a criterion fails, concluding that Singer cannot use hedonistic utilitarianism to justify one framework over the other.

The working definition of self-awareness[78] that I will use is "the ability to regard [oneself] as a distinct entity with a life of its own to lead"[79], or the ability

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[74] Singer, *Animal Liberation Now*, 5.
[75] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 177.
[76] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 183.
[77] I.e., you can think factory farming is unjustified while thinking that you ought to save the life of any human rather than any non-human animal, if forced to decide between the two.
[78] This paper also uses the terms "conscious" and "person"/ "personhood" to refer to beings possessing this form of self-awareness.
[79] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 380

to conceive of oneself as a being existing over time.[80] This goes beyond the ability to experience pleasure or pain in a given moment: a merely sentient being will feel hurt when subjected to an electric shock, but a being who is also self-aware may suffer additionally because they anticipated the shock before it happened or fear additional shocks in the future. It is intuitive, then, that self-aware beings have distinct interests that may cause us to care more about causing them certain types of harm. But Singer extends this claim to suggest that we should care more about self-aware *lives* than other lives:

> "The principles that govern the wrongness of killing nonhuman animals that are sentient but not rational or self-aware must apply here too… This conclusion is not limited to infants who, because of irreversible intellectual disabilities, will never be rational, self-aware beings… No infant – disabled or not – has as strong an intrinsic claim to life as beings capable of seeing themselves as distinct entities existing over time."[81]

He reiterates this claim several times, including in his conclusion that "killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person" and his characterization of the point at which patients in persistent vegetative states clearly have no awareness as the point at which their lives have "no intrinsic value."[82]

It is important to be clear about what "intrinsic value" means to Singer. Hedonistic utilitarianism, which Singer adopts, looks to maximize pleasure and minimize displeasure. Pleasure, or happiness, is the only inherent good[83]— life itself, for instance, is only valuable insofar as it grants the living being the capacity to experience pleasure. For Singer to attribute "intrinsic value" to something, then, is to suggest that it is providing or is necessary to provide happiness. For instance, in order for a being to have any sort of moral status, hedonistic utilitarians generally reason that they must be sentient, because non-sentient entities cannot experience pleasure to begin with. So sentient lives could be construed as having "intrinsic value" because, and only because, of their capacity for happiness. All of this is to say that Singer's reasoning for giving some sort of special value to self-aware lives over all others must be based on maximizing pleasure or happiness. The question then becomes: how do we provide a utilitarian justification for prioritizing certain lives on the basis of self-awareness without also justifying prioritizing certain lives on the basis of species membership?

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[80] Singer, Practical Ethics, 380.
[81] Singer, Practical Ethics, 258-59.
[82] Singer, Practical Ethics, 273-275.
[83] Tännsjö, Torbjörn. "Classical Hedonistic Utilitarianism." Philosophical Studies: *An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 81, no. 1 (1996): 97–115. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4320640.

II. POSSIBLE APPROACHES: EXPLORING JUSTIFICATIONS FOR VALUING SELF-AWARENESS

Preference utilitarians, who measure well-being through preference satisfaction, can answer this question by asserting that personhood is what uniquely allows for forward-looking preferences. Understanding yourself as a being that exists over time is what allows you to actively *want* to wake up tomorrow or accomplish things in the future. Ending the life of a person means that these preferences go unsatisfied, a concern that does not exist regarding the death of entities that are not self-aware. By adopting a doctrine of hedonistic utilitarianism, though, Singer forfeits his ability to co-opt that rationale and admits that purely on the basis of calculated happiness, there is no direct reason to prioritize self-aware lives, saying:

> "I am currently inclined to accept happiness or pleasure as the ultimate good, rather than preference satisfaction. This eliminates the direct significance of the distinction between persons—defined as self-conscious beings who are aware of their existence over time—and sentient beings who are not persons."[84]

Singer's hedonistic utilitarianism, though, did not cause him to abandon the idea that self-aware lives had some degree of special moral value. Instead, he argues that there remain indirect reasons to support this distinction. One of such reasons—though not one that Singer ultimately endorses—is the notion that self-awareness enhances one's capacity for happiness. On a basic level, a hedonistic utilitarian would consider the loss of any life that would include future positive experiences to be bad, which evidently attributes value to the life of any being that is likely to have a happy future, regardless of their self-awareness.[85] If self-awareness, then, makes someone *more likely* to have a happy future, this would perhaps provide a reason to grant higher moral value to self-aware lives.

And indeed, there are special forms of happiness available to me as a result of my awareness. Because I understand that I exist as one cohesive person over time, I can take pride in accomplishing long-term goals, or appreciate developing a meaningful relationship because of not just the momentary joy that it provides me with, but the future significance I anticipate it holding. However, if my capacity for happiness is enhanced by my personhood, it seems likely that this is also true of my capacity for suffering. If falling in love is uniquely joyful when you have the awareness to view it as an existential commitment rather than a mere means of reproduction, then being broken up with and losing out on that existential commitment is a form of grief unique to self-aware persons. So the happiness that comes from my self-awareness is likely counterbalanced by the

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[84] Singer, Peter. "Twenty Questions." *Journal of Practical Ethics* 4, no. 2 (December 2016): 67–78.
[85] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 78.

suffering that is derived from it, such that my life experience is not inherently more likely to be positive than that of a non-self-aware being.

Recognizing this, Singer himself does not posit that self-awareness augments one's ability to experience happiness in a significant way. Instead, he advances two other justifications, both of which consider the external effects that a being's death may have on others. The first of these is that upon learning that some self-aware lives were lost, other self-aware beings would likely experience some degree of existential fear. Fear of death—that is to say, fear of the concept of dying in the future—is something that can only be felt by self-aware entities, and living in constant fear obviously curtails one's happiness. Singer asserts that "knowing beings like [ourselves] are very rarely killed" decreases the extent to which we, as self-aware entities, fear for our lives on a daily basis.[86] This is probably true—for example, part of the particular horror of violent conflict is that our normal assurance that we will not be killed is challenged, such that people live in continued fear for themselves and their families. This fear is not felt in a society where factory farming and abortion are prevalent, because although such death tolls are large, we as conscious persons know that these deaths happen to beings that are not "like us". The cows and fetuses for whom entities "like them" *are* being slaughtered do not have the requisite awareness to fear death, so this fear does not materialize among them either.

It is worth noting, though, that self-awareness is not the only category by which one can include or separate oneself from a group that is relevant in this context. Thus the fact that cows or fetuses are not self aware does not seem to be exactly why factory farming and abortion do not make me fear for my life. If I know that only members of a certain group are being killed—whether or not those members are self-aware—I will not fear for my own life unless I am part of that group. It is true that if the group contains persons, suffering is increased because the death of some group members will cause existential fear among the others. As a self-aware being, though, there are instances in which you group yourself together with other beings who are not persons. A family unit may be a good example of this: if someone came into your house and killed your infant child, it is difficult to believe that you would not fear that they may kill you too. Ultimately, the notion of existential fear explains why *threatening* self-aware lives is especially bad, but does not seem to demonstrate why *taking* self-aware lives is especially bad.

The second argument Singer proposes is that self-awareness allows us to form deep emotional connections with other persons who, upon learning of our death, will feel deep and persistent grief. This distinction, too, does not depend on the self-awareness of the being whose life is lost, but the self-awareness of the beings who love them. The question then becomes whether it is truly necessary for an entity to possess personhood in order for me, as a conscious person, to achieve enough of a connection with this entity that I feel

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[86] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 189.

significant and persistent grief when they die. There are many ways in which self-awareness can enhance our ability to form connections: I feel closer to people that I can have intellectual discussions with, talk to about my hopes and fears for the future, or relate to about problems that we share, all of which seem difficult to achieve in a relationship with a non-self-aware being. But surely connections can also be formed in different ways. Parents, for example, may feel incredibly strong connections to their child simply because they are their child. Very few parents would value their non-self-aware infant less than their conscious five-year-old, or grieve less at the death of the former than the latter. Research even suggests that the grief resulting from miscarriages can reach levels comparable, if not equivalent, to the grief felt when a person dies.[87] It is certain that the *nature* of connections between individuals changes based on one or both entities' levels of consciousness, but that does not necessarily mean that the relationships self-aware beings have with non-self-aware beings are always less significant than the relationships self-aware beings have with each other, and will always prompt less grief when they end.

Another thought experiment follows: you are very close friends with Charlie, who, unbeknownst to you, is actually a robot powered by artificial intelligence. He does not possess the quality of self-awareness, but is very skilled at imitating it.[88] When Charlie dies—or rather, is powered down—you feel an incredible loss. This loss may have something to do with the fact that you *assumed* Charlie possessed consciousness, but it does not rely on him *actually* possessing consciousness. So the ability to invoke lasting grief among self-aware entities does not seem to be inherent and exclusive to persons, either. It is only *my* self-awareness and resulting conception of you as a being who exists throughout time that causes me to expect my relationship with you to exist every day, and thus grieve when it ceases to exist.

Singer himself says that grief and fear are also contingent upon self-aware beings *learning* of the death of other self-aware beings, lending further support to the conclusion that a hedonistic utilitarian cannot ascribe *inherent* special value to self-aware life independent of the external implications of self-aware deaths. By way of illustration, consider a fully grown man who is friendless and entirely isolated from his family. There is no one who would grieve if he died, and few people who would notice that he is gone. Consider also an infant, who is not self aware, but is incredibly loved by a large family who would be devastated were it to die. If you are primarily concerned with grief and fear, you have to prefer killing the man over the infant, despite the former's self-awareness.

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[87] Kersting, Anette, and Birgit Wagner. "Complicated Grief after Perinatal Loss." *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 14, no. 2 (June 30, 2012): 187–94. https://doi.org/10.31887/dcns.2012.14.2/akersting.
[88] There is another philosophical discussion to be had about whether AI systems could possess consciousness and if so, what this would mean for their moral status, but this thought experiment assumes that there are at least *some* AI systems that do not possess self-awareness and that Charlie is one of those systems.

III. APPLYING UTILITARIANISM THROUGH GENERAL MORAL RULES

Recognizing, then, that fear and grief-based justifications for preferring self-aware lives would not hold in every instance, Singer says that "there is something to be said against applying utilitarianism… only at the level of each individual case".[89] Outlined above are exceptions to a rule that would likely hold true in most cases: generally, taking a self-aware life would cause more harm than taking the life of a being that was not self-aware. We then circumvent the theoretical pitfalls of a self-awareness criterion by adopting its special moral value as a broad rule, rather than using self-awareness as a distinctive value in rational utilitarian analysis on a case-by-case basis. That is, assuming that the average person is very unlikely to encounter anything similar to the fringe cases described in this paper, a rule that says "always prefer self-aware lives above non self-aware ones" will likely yield outcomes that maximize hedonistic utility.

It seems, though, that the same argument can be made in support of adopting the speciesism Singer denounces as an irrational prejudice akin to racism and sexism. Here, I am speaking specifically about the speciesist claim that human lives have a greater intrinsic value than other lives, which I believe that one can still defend while holding that animal suffering is bad and practices like factory farming are wrong. Singer is correct to observe that there are cases in which speciesism would lead us to discount lives with the same moral significance as those of self-aware humans: for example, we might prefer to kill a chimpanzee, even though that chimpanzee's family and friends *do* possess the quality of self-awareness and would feel grief and fear upon learning of its death.[90] But as we have seen, there are also cases in which self-awareness as a threshold for valuing certain lives more highly would lead us to discount lives that seem just as morally relevant; the lives of infants, for instance, or humans with profound cognitive disabilities such that they do not possess self-awareness but who belong to loving families that would never emotionally recover from their death. So, in varying instances, taking both anthropocentric speciesism and a personhood threshold as broad moral rules may be more or less consistent with hedonistic utilitarianism, and each rule seems to succeed where the other fails.

This does not mean that a speciesist view of the value of lives is necessarily justifiable, nor does it mean that self-awareness as a threshold is necessarily inconsistent with hedonistic utilitarianism. Rather, if we find speciesism unacceptable because it incorrectly devalues some lives, we ought to apply that same logic to self-awareness and reject it as an irrational prejudice, too. Conversely, if we find personhood to be a justifiable threshold for moral consideration because it minimizes grief and fear in the vast majority of cases, we ought to accept anthropocentric speciesism—as a broad moral rule—by the same logic.

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[89] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 191

[90] Anderson, James R. "Chimpanzees and Death." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 373, no. 1754 (July 16, 2018). https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2017.0257..

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