WHAT IS SPECTRUM?

*SPECTRUM* is an annual competition in academic essay writing sponsored by the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee at Saint Mary's College. Submissions are read by a panel of faculty judges and cash awards are given at the end of each spring semester. All winning essays are published in *SPECTRUM* the following fall. All students at Saint Mary's College are encouraged to submit work for consideration.

Submissions for the 1999-2000 contest may be sent via Campus Mail to the Director of Composition or may be placed in the *SPECTRUM* mail box on the 3rd floor of Dante Hall, opposite the elevator. All submissions should be accompanied by a letter of nomination from a faculty sponsor. Please mark all submissions with "Attn: *SPECTRUM,*" and make sure they contain the author's full name, a local phone number, and the name of the professor and the course they were written for.
SPECTRUM 1999

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As the new faculty moderator for SPECTRUM, I was overwhelmed by the number and quality of the essays entered in this year’s 1998-1999 writing contest. Thank you to all those who submitted their work and to all of the professors who encouraged students to submit their finished essays to SPECTRUM.

Thank you to our panel of faculty judges:
  Brother Kenneth Cardwell, Integral Program
  Barbara Cole, Extended Education Degree Program
  John Fleming, English Department
  Kathy Porter, Mathematics Department
  Denise Simard, MFA graduate
  Howard Turetsky, Accounting Department
  Jodi Wesemann, Chemistry Department

Together we worked to select essays that not only displayed intellectual sophistication, excitement, and precision but also reflected the range of disciplines, approaches, and styles of the essays received.

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Lisa Manter
Faculty Moderator
SPECTRUM 1999

FIRST PRIZE WINNERS

ANDREW DENMAN, “Young and Old: Conflicting Paradigms of Justice in The Eumenides”
Seminar 120, Professor Kathy Roper

LINSEY ELLTIN, “Amalia’s Transformation as a Character in the Margin”
Contemporary American Women Playwrights, Professor Rebecca Engle

SECOND PRIZE WINNERS

MICHAEL KROM, “Evil and Free Will: A Discourse on the Connection of Evil and Free Will and the Necessary Implications Thereof”
Christian Ideas: Belief and Unbelief, Professor Paul Giurlanda

BRIAN McNUTT, “A Meditation on Plato’s Meno”
Greek Thought, Professor Joan Peterson

TRICIA O’BRIEN, “Far From the Traditional Family”
Angels and Aliens, Professor Barry Horwitz

LISA-MARIE SALVACION, “Pip and His Helping Hands”
Major British Writers, Professor Sandra Grayson

HONORABLE MENTION

NICOLE BAILEY, “Out of Step with the World: An Examination of Straight Edge Philosophies”
Argument and Research, Professor David DeRose

SARAH CAHN BENNETT, “The Symbiotic Guide Dog”
The Symbiotic Universe, Professor Gerald Capriulo

TIAH MARIE CARLETON, “The Circumstances of Capitalism”
Major British Writers II, Professor Sandra Grayson

LINH DICH, “Walking to Get Lost”
Renaissance, 17th and 18th Century Thought, Professor Dow

LUPITA SANCHEZ, “Las Meninas”
Seminar, Professor J. D. Phillips
Young and Old: 
Conflicting Paradigms of Justice in

THE EUMENIDES

by
Andrew Denman

Throughout Aeschylus's trilogy The Oresteia, conceptions of justice are numerous and varied. In the final play of the trilogy, The Eumenides, the conflicts between these perspectives reach their culmination; it is here that two opposing paradigms of justice are juxtaposed. Within this final play, the Furies, or old gods, and the Olympian gods, the young gods, exhibit a dichotomy of paradigms of justice in a fascinating study of conflicting perspectives, and Aeschylus argues for the necessity of a single, comprehensive paradigm for an ordered society.

Before contrasting these viewpoints, one must examine the division between the upper and lower worlds and the young and old gods that Aeschylus establishes. The Furies are referred to as the "older gods," the "ancient children" of Mother Night (270, 890; 234, 73); Athena herself states that they are older and wiser than she (269, 857). The Furies claim to have been "disgraced, far from god to a sunless, Earth," the realm of Hades, home (248, 395-6; 276, 1032). is not entirely clear, but their gods, seen in the use of "banish" and the leader's brought them down, the strongly suggests that at gods were instrumental in degraded (and) banished torchlit dusk," to "the core of which they now call their How they came to be there resentment of the younger such strong language as assertion that "You (Apollo) oldest realms of order," least some of the younger the Furies' relocation (264, 742-3). The Olympian gods are the "young gods," and with the exception of Athena, they hold the Furies in contempt (238, 162-3). Apollo states that the Furies "disgust" him and that they are "loathed by men and the gods who hold
Olympus" (234, 72-6). Any dislike expressed by Apollo is reciprocated by the Furies who describe him as a "whelp"; they "want no part" of the Olympian gods with "their pious white robes" (245, 325; 246, 351). Clearly then, Aeschylus not only establishes the division between the young and old gods and the upper and lower kingdoms but emphasizes the animosity between said generations. The cause of this animosity it would seem is primarily an ideological one, namely the clash between differing notions of justice.

For the Furies, justice is revenge, but it is not solely, or even primarily, revenge itself that most defines the Furies form of justice. It is the instances for which revenge is exacted that distinguish the justice of the Furies from that of the young gods. "Every mortal who outraged god or guest or loving parent," explains the Leader, "each receives the pain his pains exact" (243, 267-9). The emphasis the Furies place on retribution in instances when offence is given when respect is due is deeply rooted in the wounds that they themselves have suffered, namely the disrespect of the Olympian gods. Respect is obviously very important to the Furies; indeed Athena is the only young god they respect because she respects them, and it is only the promise of respect and reverence for themselves that eventually causes them to change their ways (251, 449). For the Furies, respect is manifested in the responsibilities of mortals to gods, men to guests, and, most significantly within The Eumenides, child to parent (blood to blood). The Furies despise the matricide of Orestes because his crime involves the destruction of "one's (own) flesh and blood," the ultimate expression of disrespect and betrayal (240, 210). Unlike the young gods, the Furies are not concerned with avenging crimes such as Clytemnestra's, which defile the artificial covenant of marriage. It is disregard for the much older, and ostensibly more sacred, ties between a mother and her son that incur their outrage. Indeed, motherhood is held in special reverence by the Furies, exhibited by their constant invocations of "Mother Night" and by their pursuit of justice so zealously in cases of matricide (268, 853). Ultimately, the Furies' model of justice is one of unmitigated revenge in cases involving the violation of blood ties and comparable displays of disrespect for the ancient laws.
The young gods' conception of justice is not as simple as that of the Furies. The role of the court of law in this model of justice is difficult to ascertain because the court is established only towards the play's end. Besides, there was no trial that dealt out justice to Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. Still, Apollo implies that "Justice and bloody slaughter" are synonymous with the Furies but do not apply to him (239, 184). All things considered, the young gods' notion of justice is still revenge, but it is not unmitigated revenge; the court mitigates in cases of revenge. Even before the court is established, however, Athena expresses a sentiment akin to due process when she desires that both sides of Orestes' story be heard (250, 440). In the case of the Furies, it is the crimes for which retribution is sought that most dramatically distinguish the model of justice from the opposition. For the young gods, the viewpoint of the Furies is hopelessly anachronistic; as a younger generation with a greater degree of contact with mankind than the Furies (through their "world dominion"), their experience dictates different priorities, a reconsideration of what is most sacred (283, 163). Their paradigm of justice is rooted in the more modern social constructs, such as marriage, rather than the age-old responsibilities of children to parents. Apollo certainly makes this point clear when he rails against the Furies' disregard for the sacredness of marriage:

"Why, you'd disgrace—obliterate the bonds of—Zeus and Hera queen of brides! And, the queen of love you'd throw to the winds at a word, disgrace love, the source of mankind's nearest, dearest ties. Marriage of man and wife is Fate itself, stronger than oaths, and Justice guards its life." (240, 211-16)

For Apollo, love and marriage are stronger than the bonds of blood. Apollo's contention that marriage is "Fate itself" is meant to be a blow to the Furies who claim Fate as their source power (246, 352). His claim that justice is the guardian of marriage serves the same purpose as the Furies' claim to be hunting Orestes on behalf of Justice herself (241, 228-9). The gods of Olympus share Apollo's position. The Furies' repeated cry—"You, you younger gods!—you have ridden down the ancient laws"—suggests a good degree of solidarity amongst the younger gods (266, 792-3). Even Athena sides with Orestes, though it is her
parthenogenetic origin (rather than a conception of women as passive incubators for a man's seed, as in Apollo's case) that justifies her decision (264, 750-756; 261, 688-9). This leads to another significant issue: contrary to the emphasis on motherhood in the Furies paradigm, the Olympian paradigm seems to bolster not just husbands and fathers, but males in general. Athena votes to acquit Orestes not only because his actions punished Clytaemnestra's defilement of the institution of marriage but also because she "honor(s) the male in all things but marriage." Only marriage, because it is so sacred, is defended regardless of her pro-male bias (264, 752).

Ultimately, Aeschylus' point is that these two paradigms cannot exist together in an ordered society. Both the Furies and the Olympian gods stand between mankind and "a lethal tide" of disorder; yet when their differing methods collide, both fail to hold back that tide (253, 517). Revenge cannot be exacted on behalf of one notion of justice if that act of revenge must in turn be punished on behalf of another notion of justice; the result is an endless, vicious cycle. Thus, with the acquittal of Orestes, the justice of the young gods is made universal, and a court of law is established to uphold it in a more orderly fashion. The Furies are no longer separate from the young gods. Athena's persuasive speeches cause their fury and hate to "slip away" (271, 907-8). They even expound on the "deep joy of wedded life" and pray that "the good Greek soil never drinks the blood of Greeks, shed in an orgy of reprisal, life for life," in direct contrast with the Furies' earlier demand for "blood for blood" (273, 970; 274, 993; 243, 262). Previously they were described as the ancient children of the night; now they become "Daughters of Night, her children always young" (276, 1043).

Aeschylus shows that justice, though an intrinsically relative term, cannot be treated as such in society; choices must be made and standards must be set, for when everyone seeks his own brand of justice, no one will ever find it.

Works Cited

I want you to imagine for a moment a blank piece of notebook paper. Visualize a pink line running down the left-hand side of the page about an inch from the edge. This is the margin. And if the entire universe is the page of paper you have just visualized and the center of the page all the aspects of the hegemonic society then the margin is where women stand. It is where we have always stood, and through mediums like poetry, novels, film, and theatre, women in the margins are choosing to tell their stories and thereby create a space that validates and substantiates their existence. Women playwrights especially have used the medium of theatre to proclaim their voice and add a different dimension to what we've come to take for granted as the 'standard' story or way of telling a story.

"Our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting." This quote from bell hooks' article "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" describes a journey that we embark upon every day: the process of trying to define ourselves. In her semi-autobiographical essay bell hooks describes the journey she undertook in order to come to a definition of herself and a realization of the transformation she has undergone. The character of Amalia in Rita Dove's *The Darker Face of the Earth* embodies aspects of this journey and transformation as she struggles to define herself as a character living in the margin.
There can be no doubt that The Darker Face of the Earth is a story told from the margins, mainly from the perspective of a slave. Dove explains why she incorporated the tragedy of Oedipus Rex into the play; she saw the institution of slavery as "an allegory for the Greek Pantheon, the gods who control everything from the beginning" (Berson). This unique juxtaposition of slavery and Greek myth gives the play an unsettling and powerful story line. According to the circumstances the characters appear to transform and move as they vacillate between the center and the margin. bell hooks describes that movement by saying, "For many of us, that movement requires pushing against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex, and class domination. . . . Moving, we confront the realities of choice and location" (hooks 145).

Throughout this script, readers encounter numerous instances where Amalia challenges stereotypical boundaries. This pushing back against oppressive boundaries becomes apparent in the first scene of the play where the audience is presented with Amalia, who has violated society's definition of morality by giving birth to the illegitimate child of one of her slaves. She staunchly defends her actions by scathingly pointing out the double standard that exists between men and women. She confronts her husband's anger over her promiscuity by accusing him of the same: "but it's all right for you to stroll out by the cabins any fine night you please? . . . Not even Daddy suspected where you would seek your satisfaction. It was your right to pull on those riding boots and stalk little slave girls. God knows what you do to them in the name of ownership" (17,18). By asserting her sexuality, or at least putting herself on equal ground with her husband, Amalia has stepped out of the role society has defined for her. Her belief that her feelings and actions are validated by the actions of others leads her to a new understanding of herself. This brings up a unique point about the character of Amalia: the decisions she makes weave a web throughout the story that both defines and traps her.
She has moved from what would be considered the center of society to the margin through her obvious display of sexuality, and that movement has put her in a position where she is forced to make a choice. I find it very interesting that at this point in the play Dove chooses to highlight Amalia's infidelity and contrast it with Louis' infidelity, which is deemed acceptable by dominant culture. As we see, the doctor has no harsh words for Louis as he does for Amalia on the subject. Instead, she is compelled to make a decision about how she is going to live for the rest of her life. She can choose to continue to defy social convention and risk having her child killed and herself shunned for being "tainted with slave funk" (24). Or, she can decide to give up part of herself, literally and figuratively, in order to become what she is expected to be. I believe Dove's decision to have Amalia give up the child serves as a reminder that despite the bravado Amalia displays, she is still fairly powerless as a woman, and this moment of weakness and helplessness determines her fate. I use the word "determine" in this instance because the decision to give up the child isn't entirely in her own hands, and therefore she doesn't have complete control over her destiny.

During the twenty year time gap in the play, an unusual transformation occurs that depicts the effect giving up her child has had on Amalia. After being forced to confront her own powerlessness as a female in a male-dominated culture, we find that Amalia has searched for a way to empower herself as the white owner of a plantation. Amalia discovers she can wield the power and the dominance that she lacked by defining herself merely as a woman. The author makes a point of noting the physical changes in Amalia's character over the time span. For example, she confronts the slaves wearing riding clothes with a whip in her hand (39). This is an interesting contrast to the first scene in which Louis is the one who wears riding boots and carries the whip (18). This change in attire symbolizes her new assertion of power as a more masculine figure. Her walk is even described in masculine terms as we are told she "strides off" (410). This metamorphosis is probably the most fascinating change of character Amalia undergoes throughout the entire play. It is as if somewhere over the course of
that twenty years Amalia manages to emasculate Louis and don the cloak of power he once wore. This change is noted particularly by the slaves, who comment, "Miss Amalia hiked up her skirts and pulled on man's boots. . . . Woman? She's more man than woman" (38, 34). They also remark that "Massa Louis took off his riding breeches . . . and shut himself upstairs" (38). This move towards masculinity on Amalia's part is an attempt to gain power and control over her life. The only chance she had of achieving that goal was by emasculating the dominant presence in her life (Louis) and adopting his qualities as her own.

The character of Amalia undergoes one more major transformation in the play as we find her character challenged by the arrival of Augustus. His presence in Act 1, scene 8, where he comes to the house for the first time, causes Amalia to lose her composure. The audience is aware of the conflict of emotions she undergoes as she tries to discern whether to define herself to Augustus as the plantation owner or as a woman. As the scene progresses, we find Amalia realizing that she is more likely to be dominant by defining herself as a woman in this particular situation. We see her assert this power over Augustus by exploiting his desire, for instance when Augustus sits on the floor near her feet and we are told "She starts to pull away--then slowly extends her feet again"(85). Amalia invites him to be aware of her body. Later in that same scene Amalia touches Augustus on the wrist and begins to caress him as she "traces the vein up his arm until she touches his cheek"(93), once again using her body and her sexuality to dominate him.

Two sides of Amalia's personality are exhibited in her encounters with Augustus. Not only do we see her wielding her sexuality through acts such as initiating the kisses between the two characters (130), we also see her return to a sort of motherly doting. She worriedly comments, "You look tired," and instructs him to "Come and get warm," as a mother would say to a child (126). Of course this maternal element, which emerges in her encounters with Augustus, foreshadows the infamous scene where Augustus and Amalia discover that they are really mother and son. I feel it is important to note these two conflicting
definitions of self Amalia presents in this scene because it shows that her character is more than one-dimensional, and, she has an acute sense of her own feelings and emotions.

Standing in the margin of society, Amalia essentially attempts to create a space for herself through the choices she makes, which at times move her closer to the center, at times closer to the margins of society. However, every transformation Amalia undergoes is connected to the theme of power. Amalia's power in this play emerges on two different levels. On one level she has power as a woman, both sexually and emotionally, and on another level she possesses power because the color of her skin is white. However, the power she possesses as a woman is far less than the power she possesses as a slave owner. As a woman, we see her status is limited. Amalia bitterly describes her childhood: "All morning he'd teach me to calculate inventory, but he expected his slippers darned come evening! And when I refused, off I went to finishing school and the Charleston society balls" (20). As a white, her sex doesn't matter; she is still dominant over a black person, whether the black is male or female. We see this dominance expressed through her use of language when she talks to and refers to the slaves. She says things such as "Lazy pack! I swear I've seen cows smarter than you!" and "Get these niggers in line!" (40). I think Dove does this purposely to show us that Amalia has to define herself in two ways—as a white and as a white female—and the amount of power she is allowed to exert in each of these role varies significantly. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that she exerts her power from the margin.

Power varies in accordance to self-definition in this play. Even as Amalia gains power through her transformations, she still resides in the margins as a woman and more especially as a woman plantation owner, which paradoxically makes her power powerless. The final scene of the play drives this fact home—Amalia's last words exhibit her helplessness against the powers of fate. "Poor baby! I thought I could keep you from harm and here you are, right in harm's way" (159). This scene serves as a reminder that it is the choices we make
which weave the web in which we live, and if we don't struggle to transform and define ourselves through those choices, we end up powerless against our own destiny.

Works Cited


A DISCOURSE ON THE CONNECTION OF EVIL TO FREE WILL 
AND THE NECESSARY IMPLICATIONS THEREOF 

by 
Michael Krom 

There might, indeed, be very great value in a universe of created beings who respond to God in a freely given love and trust and worship which He has Himself caused, to occur by His initial formation of their nature. But if human analogies entitle us to speak about God at all, we must insist that such a universe could be only a poor second-best to one in which created beings, whose responses to Himself God has not thus "fixed" in advance, come freely to love, trust, and worship Him. (Hick, Evil and the God of Love 274)

We cling for dear life to the free will that God granted us. A world without the freedom to choose our own personal fate seems like a puppet show. Yet, we also must accept the consequences of this choice; if we attempt to convince ourselves that free will is good, a dire problem crushes us almost unbearably, namely evil and suffering as direct results of this seemingly good free will. In this essay, we will see that it is only when one fails to recognize Man's purpose on earth that one is overcome with doubts. Using the arguments of John Hick, as well as the definition of evil provided by Saint Augustine, I will attempt to show that evil and necessary free will, that free will is necessary for humankind to respond freely to God, and that this free response can be seen as justifying the sometimes "unbearable" burden of the suffering caused by free will.

Perhaps the strongest attack on the belief in a benevolent God is the existence of evil. Who can deny the very real presence of evil in this world and this as a strong attack on a God who is the Creator of everything? If God created everything, then surely that very same God is responsible for the evil in the world. Further, if He is benevolent, surely He would want to destroy it. "If God is perfectly good, He must want to abolish all evil; if He is unlimitedly powerful, He must be
able to abolish all evil: but evil exists; therefore either God is not perfectly good or He is not unlimitedly powerful" (Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* 5). In addressing this issue we must (before attacking the real problem) be careful in defining the word "evil." It is immediately apparent that if evil were something (as good is something), then God would have created it. But God, being absolute good, could not, by definition, have created evil. If we accept this proposition, then there must be (as many religions claim) an opposing Being responsible for evil. In fact, this was the view of the Manichees and was the very problem that tormented Saint Augustine before his conversion to Christianity. In the early part of Saint Augustine's life, he was a Manichee. The Manichees held that there were two opposing forces that governed the universe: good and evil. Saint Augustine came to the realization that evil is merely an absence and is only understood in relation to the good. He, in opposition to the Manichees, presented a very different take on evil, which I believe successfully solves the problem.

When we speak of lightness and darkness, it is immediately apparent that darkness is only understood in relation to light—or what is darkness but the absence of light? Thanks to science, we know that light is the release of energy, whereas darkness we cannot know because it is nothing. The same holds true of sound. Can we ever define a sound by the absence of sound? This would be absurd, and we can imagine the difficulties of explaining the sound of a cello to a deaf person. By the same token, what do we mean when we use the word "evil"? In this matter we shall take the view of Saint Augustine in saying that evil is the absence of good: "But although no one can doubt that good and evil are contraries, not only can they exist at the same time, but evil cannot exist without good, or in anything that is not good. Good, however, can exist without evil" (Augustine 15). When we say someone commits the sin of lust, we surely do not mean that copulation, a natural act, is a sin. What instead is implied is that choosing love of bodily pleasures over the infinite Love of God is evil. Thus we see that this evil act is considered as such with respect to the greater good that has been denied. The sinner freely chooses a lesser good and is hence considered evil:

Now, what is an evil man but an evil being? For a man is a being. Now, if a man is a good thing because he is a being, what is an evil man but an
evil good? Yet, when we accurately distinguish these two things, we find that it is not because he is a man that he is an evil, or because he is wicked that he is good; but that he is a good because he is a man, and an evil because he is wicked. (Augustine 14)

Evil is a result of free choice; in other words, we are entrusted with the ability to choose and can freely choose for or against Nature. All beings are good insofar as they exist, but as humans, we are the only beings that can commit evil acts because we have the ability to choose between goods.

All things that exist, therefore, seeing that the Creator of them all is supremely good, are themselves good. But because they are not, like their Creator, supremely and unchangeably good, their good may be diminished and increased. But for good to be diminished is an evil; although however much it may be diminished, it is necessary, if the being is to continue, that some good should remain to constitute the being. (Augustine 12)

Before answering whether or not a world without evil is more perfect, it is necessary to point out where I stand in regards to the origin of evil by focusing on "the fall." I do not hold (as Saint Augustine did) that Adam and Eve were entirely responsible. To say that God created humans in His image and likeness as finitely perfect beings (in a perfect creation) that somehow fell from grace is not logically consistent:

the idea of a perfect creation going wrong entirely on its own is self-contradictory. That finitely perfect creatures with no taint of evil in their nature should proceed willfully to commit sin would amount to evil creating itself out of nothing. . . . We must reply that man would never in fact choose wrongly unless there were some flaw either in himself or in his environment. (Hick, The Center of Christianity 84)

Instead, I hold the view that Adam and Eve were the children of Humanity and, therefore, were symbols for the beginning of Human existence. The fall shows that, as a race, we are born in His image but need to reach the state in which we are truly His likeness: "The image means man's character as an intelligent social animal, while the likeness represents the eventual perfected human nature which God is seeking to form in us" (Hick 85). Evil, then, is a part of God's plan: "Almighty God, who, as even the heathen acknowledge, has supreme power over all things, being Himself supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil among His works, if He were not so omnipotent and good that He can bring Good even out of evil" (Augustine 11). While it seems an impious assertion to say that God would
allow for evil in His creation, this appears to be the only logical explanation as to how His created beings could commit evil acts. At face value, this proposition seems to claim that humans are not guilty for the sins they commit, and instead, the blame lies on God, the creator of evil. This is a completely misconstrued argument. God is responsible for the potentiality of evil, which He only allows for the sake of free will, and is not responsible for the actuality. As a matter of fact, God only allows the potentiality of evil in hope that humankind will reach the state where the actuality is completely absent.

Now that we see why evil is a necessary part of God's creation, it is important to point out the relationship of free will to suffering. As anybody can easily see that suffering is a part of everybody's life, I do not find it important to detail the argument against suffering. The general proposition asks why God does not directly intervene in the world to prevent suffering. This argument, however, proves to make certain assumptions that do not coincide with that of a coherent Maker. Specifically, there are two underlying problems. First, this argument boldly assumes that the most important aspect of life is pleasure and pain. Unless we are Epicureans this view poses a problem. If, however, we believe that pleasure and pain do not compare with the infinite Love of God and that God created "a natural order which is not built so much to comfort as to challenge us" (Hick, The Center of Christianity 86), then the reward of God's Love far surpasses and reconciles any suffering we, as humans, would ever have to endure. This suffering is even more endurable when we recognize that God, himself, in the form of Jesus Christ, took on the burden of humanity by dying on the cross and in this act took on more suffering than any mortal could comprehend. Second, we could make little sense of a world in which suffering was completely absent:

It would mean that no wrong action could ever have bad effects, and that no piece of carelessness or ill judgement in dealing with the world could ever lead to harmful consequences. We can at least begin to imagine a world custom-made for the avoidance of all suffering. But the daunting fact that emerges is that in such a world moral qualities would no longer have any point or value. There would be nothing wrong with stealing because no one could ever lose anything by it; there would be no such crime as murder because no one could ever be killed; there would be no such thing as morally wrong action. And for the same reason there would be no such thing as morally right action. (Hick 324-5)
When we consider the evil or suffering we must endure as humans, this seems like a sorry state to be in. Whether or not God ordains the use of evil (and hence suffering), its presence is contingent upon free will, and it seems only logical that a more perfect universe would be one in which God eradicates the burden that is free will. The proposition that a more perfect universe would be one in which its constituent beings are controlled by the creator of that universe presupposes that the most important relationship is that of created beings among themselves. "If man is to be a being capable of entering into personal relationship with his Maker, and not a mere puppet, he must be endowed with the uncontrollable gift of freedom" (Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* 266). If, instead, the most important aspect of a human's life is to seek the good, which God has revealed through His creation, the proposition that a completely controlled universe surpasses that of the universe in which we live (which allows for free will) is dead from the start:

It seems that there would be no point in the creation of finite persons unless they could be endowed with a degree of genuine freedom and independence over and against their Maker. For only then could they be capable of authentic personal relationship with Him. (Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* 275)

This argument, however, does not seem to be a matter of much dispute; a more difficult problem looms ahead: "Why wouldn't God allow us free will but create us so as to always 'freely' choose Good?" This surely would be a more perfect universe! Quite truthfully, granted that He did allow for free will, He surely could have chosen beings who would always choose the Good. However, I reject this argument for three reasons. First and foremost, I deny that this situation would still fall under that of free will. The proposition is self-defeating in that the terms are contradictory. What is presented, it seems, is the illusion of free will and asks God to do the impossible. Even God cannot perform certain feats (such as making a round square), not because He is limited, but because they cannot be done: "Clearly this does not involve any limitation upon God's power such that if He had greater power He would be able to accomplish these logical absurdities. Not even infinite might can adopt a meaningless form of words as a programme for action" (Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* 265-6). Second, this proposition assumes (as the previous proposition did) that the most important aspect of a human's life is his or her human-human relationships. "According to Christianity, the divine purpose for men
is not only that they shall freely act rightly towards one another but that they shall also freely enter into a filial personal relationship with God Himself (Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* 272). Finally, when we say that an animal is good, we mean this is in a different way in which we would say the same of a human. The animal has no choice! An animal lacks the ability to choose between goods and does not choose its nature. Humans, on the other hand, do choose their nature by making the decision between goods. Because God has granted us this immense freedom, He expects much more of us. In this way, we have the ability to become morally good, an honor that the savage beast can hold no share in. "A creature not subject to temptation, or to fear, lust, envy, panic, anxiety, or any other demoralizing condition, would no doubt be innocent but could not justifiably be praised as being morally good" (Hicks, *Evil and the God of Love* 270-1). While this argument is perhaps not as strong as the first two, it does point to the fact that freewill is necessary for a relationship with God.

In a roundabout way, we have seen why evil and suffering are necessary in God's creation, but we are still troubled with the question of how to choose the good, which is not as easy as we would like. While I do not pretend to have a deep understanding of God's purpose for humanity, first off, we must remember that, in order to fulfill His plan, we must freely enter into a relationship with Him: "The ideal relationship of a human person with God would consist in a vivid awareness of Him, at once joyous and awesome, and a consequent wholehearted worship of the infinite Goodness and Love by obedient service to His purposes within the creaturely realm" (Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* 262). While this seems to beg the question of whether or not existence is worth the price, I think that there are reasons to believe that the infinite reward of God's love holds no comparison to any evil or suffering we are asked to endure, the most obvious being that we lead finite lives. Much like Pascal's choice between an infinite gain and a finite loss, the reward we can expect for returning God's love is immeasurable. However, I do not intend to reduce life to a cost/benefit analysis, and instead hope that the individual will look to the source of all in prayer. A trouble arises immediately that there will be those who will not (or cannot) see this as reconciliation and remain indignant towards the Creator. This
problem I will leave for the believer/unbeliever to decide. For me the answer seems to lie in the goodness of being and the evil of nothing.

There is a strategy at work of forcing evil, against its nature, to serve indirectly God's purpose of good. Indeed the meaning of our present earthly life lies precisely in this struggle. Within this warfare there is for each a crisis which is traditionally called salvation; and it does not consist in becoming insulated from the world's evil but in enlisting in the campaign to overcome evil with good. As a member of the campaigning army one may in fact be hurt worse than as a neutral civilian; for salvation does not mean to be suddenly made perfect or to be magically protected from all evil but simply to be on the right side in the battle and to know that we shall participate in the final victory. (Hick, The Center of Christianity 87)

Notes

1 For our purposes, we will define "Nature" as that which is ordained by God. Someone contrary to Nature denies the purpose or law established for them by God in choosing lesser goods.

2 To claim that an animal killing another is evil is to assume that either evil exists as a distinct entity or that an animal is, in some sense, contrary to Nature; both of which are clearly false, the former due to the definition of evil, and the latter due to the fact that animals, by definition, are part of nature. Therefore, an animal cannot commit an evil act (nor be evil).

3 This view was first proposed by Irenaeus and is shared by John Hick.

4 Keep in mind that the evil He allows is only considered as such when seen with respect to the greater good denied. God allows for the choice between two goods, one of which is the lesser good that we call evil. "Evil enters in only when some member of the universal Kingdom, whether high or low in the hierarchy, renounces it proper role in the divine scheme and ceases to be what it is meant to be" (Hick paraphrasing Saint Augustine, Evil and the God of Love 47).

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The argument I chose to think deeply about begins after Meno comes to the realization that he does not know what virtue is. "I have made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions, very good speeches as I thought, but now I cannot even say what it is" (13). As Socrates has already admitted that he does not know what virtue is, he invites Meno to join him in trying to discover the answer for themselves. "I want to examine and seek together with you what it may be" (13). But this request perplexes Meno: for if neither of them knows the answer, how will they be able to discover it for themselves? Meno says, "If you should meet with it (the answer), how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?" (13). This sets the stage for Socrates' argument that a person can discover what he or she does not know by simply searching for it, that is by engaging in deliberate thought.

Socrates begins by dispelling the popular argument that a person cannot search for what he or she knows--"since he knows it, there is no need to search"--nor for what he or she does not know--"for he does not know what to look for" (13). Socrates learned from priests, priestesses, and poets that "the human soul is immortal" (14). The soul dies and the soul is reborn, but it is never destroyed. "As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned" (14). Socrates is saying that a person's soul was somehow brought into being many generations ago, perhaps an infinite number of generations ago. The soul has been on earth and in the underworld so many
times that it has seen everything there is to see, and it knows everything there is
to know. So when humans think they are learning something new, they are in
fact only recollecting something they had already learned in a previous life.
Therefore, there is only recollection. Learning, apparently, was something carried
out many generations ago.

The obvious flaw in Socrates' argument is that who is to say at what stage
any particular soul is at in this process. Based on Socrates' own explanation, the
souls know everything because they "learned" it before. So how does he know
Meno's soul is not at an early stage of learning? I think the assumption that
Socrates must be making in order for his argument to be valid (a truth that must
be so self-evident he does not even share it with us) is that the world is very old,
and the number of souls allowed to populate it is finite. If the world is very old
and there are only so many souls on it, then of course each soul as it is in its
present state has already gone through many generations of learning, probably
many thousands of years ago. If this was given, that every soul reborn existed
thousands and thousands of years ago, then the question of where in the
process any particular soul is becomes moot. Socrates does not say that there is
no such thing as learning. All he says is that he and Meno and all other men
(and women) do not learn, they only recollect, even if their souls did learn at one
time or another.

Socrates proves his point by asking Meno's slave a series of questions. This
slave has never been taught geometry, nor has he had occasion to learn it on
his own. But through a series of questions posed by Socrates, the slave
demonstrates knowledge about certain geometrical truths. He figures out that a
figure based on a line twice the length is not double but four times as big. That
is, if a square is two by two inches, and we doubled it while keeping the integrity
of the square, then naturally we would have to not only double in one direction
but in four directions. There are four sides to a square, doubling a square entails
multiplying the length of each side by two. So if we had a two foot by two foot
square, we would have to multiply two feet by two, four times, to get the
square's double. So the figure based on a line twice the length is not double but
four times as big. This is an example of the geometric knowledge Meno's slave "recollects" under the questioning of Socrates.

After this display, Socrates makes an important point. At one point in the questioning Meno's slave answers a question confidently, only to find out that he was wrong. Thus, he went from a state of confident knowing to a state of perplexity quite suddenly. This is the same experience Meno had when Socrates challenged him to define virtue and he could not. Meno complained that Socrates made him feel numb "as a broad torpedo fish" (12). Now, when the slave is surprised by his wrong answer, Socrates suggests that he also feels numb as a torpedo fish. But Socrates asks if this numbness has done the slave any harm. In fact, Socrates goes one further by suggesting that the slave is in a better position than before, since now he knows that he does not know, that he was mistaken, and that he needs to do some more searching in order to find the truth. Again, Socrates suggests that the slave is in the same position Meno was in when Meno realized that he had given many speeches on a subject about which he knew nothing.

Socrates concludes by pointing out that the slave knew nothing of geometry before Socrates' questioning. And, because Socrates told him nothing, because he merely asked for the slave's opinion, the slave must have known the answers before and only needed to recollect them. So if he never learned geometry before, and Socrates told him nothing, yet in the end could demonstrate knowledge of geometric truths, the slave must have been recollecting knowledge he had learned in a previous life. Socrates says, "If the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present—that is, what you do not recollect?" (20). Socrates has proved, through the questioning of Meno's slave, that the debater's claim—that a person cannot search for what he or she does not know—is false.

Interestingly, Socrates takes the argument one step further by suggesting that we would be better people, "braver and less idle, if we believe(d) that one
must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe (d) that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it" (20). Imagine a world in which everyone believed knowledge was beyond his or her grasp. I have met people who live in such a world. Books are foreign to them. Newspapers are intimidating beyond belief with their pages and pages of words and ideas. These people find school alienating; they remember it with scorn and embarrassment— it is where they learned all they could not do and how much they did not know. They are happier living in a world where images and opinions are given to them. They are seldom asked to think or create. Perhaps they have forgotten, or never knew, that they have knowledge within themselves. Socrates says that we would be better people if we knew that. If my sister, for instance, knew the amount of knowledge waiting within her to be set free, perhaps she would be more willing to search for it.

Furthermore, Socrates says, "one must search for the things one does not know." He is not simply saying that it is possible to do so. He is saying that one must search for the things one does not know. Socrates invites us all on a quest for knowledge and learning. If Socrates knew my sister, he would burn her couch and destroy her television. He would replace her shelves of Precious Moments collectibles with shelves of books. He would instill in her, in a way I have not been able to do, a love for learning. He would say it is possible. And he would say it is not only possible, it is necessary.

This is a wonderful concept, one of my favorites in Meno. But I must admit, the way Socrates reaches it is problematic. Key to his argument is his claim that he gave the slave no new knowledge, that he was only asking his opinion. But any modern reader will find flaws in that. The method Socrates used, allowing the student to come to his own answers by guiding him, is a well known teaching technique. The slave would have not been able to come up with the answers that he did without Socrates' guidance. That is obvious. And because Socrates knew the answer all along, it wasn't as though Socrates and the slave were searching for the truth together, as Socrates claimed. Of course, I will concede that there are some geometric truths (as well as other kinds of truths) that can be
found by deliberate thought. Maybe the slave could have figured out those truths if he had the will, and thought about it long enough. But does that mean he must have learned it in another life? I don't think so. Socrates' example evokes more questions than it offers answers.

Another issue a modern reader might have trouble with is Socrates' idea of reincarnation. I have always enjoyed reading Plato, but whenever the divine or the metaphysical enter the argument, I sigh. There have been times when I have been enthralled by his argument and captivated by where he is going with it or what the conclusion will be, only to be let down by some cosmic cop-out. For instance, at the end of *Meno* Socrates says, "Is it right to call divine these men who, without any understanding, are right in much that is of importance in what they say and do?" (31). What? You mean this is what I've been waiting for?

So what if the soul is not reborn? What if there is no finite number of souls? What if a soul does not know everything from previous lives? Does that mean that people should not try to seek out what they do not know? Does that mean that Socrates' claim that people would be better off if they searched for these things is wrong? Must we search for that which we do not know? These are difficult questions for me to answer. I, of course, believe deeply that a person should seek the truth. I believe that people are capable of finding answers and truths for themselves and that it is a very personal and self-driven process. But how do I argue that point? I imagine Plato had the same dilemma.

As I am writing this and thinking about it more deeply, I wonder just how much I really do believe in Socrates' conclusion. *Meno* asks, as I previously mentioned, how, if you don't know the thing you are looking for, will you know it when you see it. I must now ask a similar question, perhaps even the same question, worded a bit differently: if all you have is what is in your own mind, your own knowledge and experience, but no directly pertinent knowledge from which an answer could be derived, then how will you know that the truth you come up with is the actual truth, the only truth? How do you know you are not simply wrong? That you haven't mislead yourself? There have been times in my
life when I was absolutely sure about something. I would have been able to give many beautiful lectures about these things because of how sure I was about their truth. But I was wrong. Sometimes I was only partially wrong. Other times I was gravely mistaken. And each time this happens I become a little less confident in my ability to discern the truth, to distinguish what is correct thinking from what is illusion, from what is only partially true, or from what is naive.

But, nonetheless, I went through the laborious process of thinking about each possible solution. I considered multiple points of view. I thought deeply about these things and only reluctantly decided on the truth. Once I reached this point, I was confident that I was right. But not having known what the truth was to begin with, how was I supposed to know it once I found it? I have learned that even those opinions I cling to most passionately are sometimes wrong. So, how did I know I was wrong? Either an experience exposed my flaw or the truth was revealed by someone or something else. But, usually, I did not discover my error on my own.

Socrates says we can discover the truth on our own. He is obviously speaking from the point of view of a philosopher. A philosopher can rationalize universal truths. That is what philosophy is all about. If a person could not seek the truth on his or her own, there would be no such thing as philosophers, for that is how they work. On the other hand, I suppose if we all could seek and discover truths on our own, there would be no need for philosophers like Plato and Socrates. If we could all do what they do, that is, uncover universal truths through rational contemplation, we would all be Platonists and Socratics. We cannot all be like Plato or Socrates. But I find satisfaction in the thought that such a thing is possible. Even if I can't always do it and get it right, there are some who can. And maybe, if I keep at it, some day I will better at distinguishing truth from illusion.

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Growing up I was glued to the TV, fascinated by shows like "The Donna Reed Show" and "Leave it to Beaver." These were among the few programs that received the thumbs up from my parents because they believed they would teach children suitable, wholesome values and portray life the way it "ought" to be--without divorce, teenage pregnancy, or runaways--with the language being "dork." If Shakespeare into my those many years ago, he would have scoffed at night line up. Although during the Renaissance, familial relations was more contemporary than the vision of the 20th century family portrayed on those television shows. Shakespeare refused to sugarcoat family values, preferring that we witness the rebellion and pain that is part belonging to a family. Like Shakespeare, the 20th-century playwright Tony Kushner also gives us a peek into family life behind closed doors, as he explores the dynamics of relationships, uncovering the struggles and sacrifices of love.

Why do we have idealized views of "family values" in history? Perhaps because we hear over and over from our parents' generation that our generation is disrespectful, stigmatized by the rebellious images associated with "Generation X." We think back to the days when a boy would court a girl, beginning the night by meeting her father and ending the night with a cordial handshake. We remember the obedient Victorian days when lust was suppressed and public display of affection was foreign. We see the old black and white photographs of the perfect family--erect postures, men in the back and women in the front, and no one so much as cracking a smile.
Shakespeare, however, allows us to take a closer, more realistic, view of family life in history. Beginning with Portia in *Merchant of Venice*, we discover a distraught young woman bound resentfully to her father's will, which dictates whom she is to love and marry. Tormented by the theft of her freedom to love, she finds herself miserable:

O me, the word "choose"! I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike. So is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one, nor refuse none?

(I.ii.19-23)

Unfortunate Portia is expected to honor her father's instructions and is at the mercy of her undesirable suitors' wit—merely a prize to be won by the shrewdest. Portia wrestles with the two choices before her: to defiantly disregard her father's wishes to ensure her own happiness and self-worth or to renounce one of her personal rights as a human—the liberty to love. What Portia does next, manipulating her father's will to secure her future, is disputed by many:

Therefore, for fear of the worst, I pray thee set a deep glass of Rhenish wine on the contrary casket, for if the devil be within and that temptation without, I know he will choose it. I will do anything, Nerissa, ere I will be married to a sponge.

(I.ii.80-83)

Portia, an early feminist, and maybe a "naughty child," does indeed attempt to persuade her suitor to chose the wrong casket, but in the slyest of manners. Perhaps her father is writhing in his grave yelling, "You know better than that, Portia!" But for Portia, her own happiness is more important. She made a conscious decision to do what is best for her. Even more importantly, she is one step closer to finding the love she yearns for, Bassanio. And while Portia may not be featured on "Nick at Night" as the ideal and obedient daughter, she may be featured in literature as the ideal model of an independent, free-thinking woman.

Portia is not the only wild child Shakespeare features in *Merchant of Venice*; Jessica, Shylock's daughter, is even more defiant. Although the daughter of a Jew, Jessica loves and yearns to be with a Christian, Lorenzo, her father's worst nightmare. Shylock, the overly protective father of Jessica, actually keeps her under lock and key to prevent her from so much as gazing upon Christians. Jessica, not wanting to be disloyal to her father, but craving a new life, is torn:
Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my father's child?
But though I am a daughter to his blood,
I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,
Become a Christian and thy loving wife.  

(II.iii.15-20)

Like Portia, Jessica is willing to sacrifice obedience in order to gain the love and freedom she yearns for. Unfortunately for Jessica this means renouncing her relationship with her father and abandoning what was once her traditional family in order to begin life with a new family, with a Christian.

Tony Kushner, in *Angels in America*, introduces us to Joe, a character faced with a moral dilemma similar to Portia and Jessica's. Joe also agonizes over the decision whether to respect his family's values and not make waves or to finally follow his own heart and seek out his beloved. To make matters even more complicated, however, Joe not only has a wife, but this new sweetheart of his happens to be another man, Louis. Just revealing this suppressed truth that he is gay jeopardizes any relationship he once had with his mother. Joe, however, in order to be honest with himself and needing to confront his homosexuality, understands that a sweat-filled phone conversation is really his only option:

Hannah: Oh now really. This is maudlin. I don't like this conversation.
Joe: Yeah, well, it gets worse from here on.  
(Pause)
Hannah: Joe?
Hannah: You're old enough to understand that your father didn't love you without being ridiculous about it.
Joe: What?
Hannah: You're ridiculous. You're being ridiculous.  

(Kushner 75-76)

Joe finally crosses his own barrier of denial, chancing his mother's devotion in the process. Like Portia and Jessica, Joe realizes that in order to find himself he cannot continue playing the role of the perfect son in a fictitiously ideal family. Only after Joe makes the leap and tells his mother he is gay is he liberated to seek out his true love,
Louis, and be at peace at last. Interestingly, this dreaded confrontation between Joe and Hannah is actually based on the playwright's real life. In The Making of Angels, Kushner talks about how a similar scene actually occurred between his mother and him. This very real scenario is, unfortunately, probably all too familiar to many, as is the rebellion of Jessica and the disobedience of Portia. Parental ties, however, must sometimes be broken in order for the children to spread their wings and find their own, possibly more suitable, families.

While the term "nontraditional family" is fairly common, "nontraditional marriage" is heard a little less frequently. Kushner, however, reveals how nontraditional marriages are also a reality, and in some ways even harder to deal with. Kushner illustrates an atypical marriage, ironically through the very traditional religion of Mormonism. This struggling couple, Joe and Harper, play the role of the perfect Mormon husband and wife. They are under the illusion that if they just call each other by pet names, then maybe they really will become that perfect Mormon couple:

Joe: Buddy? Buddy? Sorry I'm late. I was just... out. Walking. Are you mad?
Harper: I got a little anxious.
Joe: Buddy, kiss. (They kiss.)

(Kushner 18)

Sadly, however, these polite kisses and cute nicknames only damage their relationship even further until the moment comes when they, too, must break their bond in order to progress with their own lives. In many ways Joe and Harper have been tied to their marriage, and while on the surface it makes perfect sense, in their hearts it's far from ideal. Joe and Harper are good friends but not lovers. Only when they're both true to themselves are they allowed to do what is best for both of them—separate:

Harper: Oh God. The moment of truth has arrived.
Harper: No, I don't like the sound of this. I'm leaving.

(Kushner 76)
Joe is forced to confront Harper because of his feelings for this other man, Louis, and severs his bond with Harper in order to form an even less conventional relationship. One can only imagine Joe's anguish as he breaks from not only his mother but also his wife and even his religious values on a lonely quest to finally experience authentic love.

Despite Joe and Harper's less than magical marriage, even some of the most loving couples in literature, like Portia and Bassanio in Merchant of Venice contemplate separation. While Bassanio goes to great lengths to capture Portia's love—"If you do love me you will find me out" (III.ii.43)—an even stronger love calls Bassanio away—Bassanio's love for Antonio. The mutual love between himself and his friend means the world to Bassanio, and there's little he would not do for Antonio. Bassanio describes Antonio as:

The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,
The best conditioned and wearied spirit
In doing courtesies, and one in whom
The ancient Roman honor more appears
Than any that draw breath in Italy.

(III.ii.291-95)

Unfortunately for Portia, she plays second fiddle to Bassanio's love for Antonio. In fact, Bassanio even risks sacrificing his relationship with Portia for Antonio. Antonio's request that Bassanio give up his precious ring, a symbol of his love for Portia, allows us to witness this strong allegiance to his dear friend. While Bassanio isn't eager, he is, nonetheless, agreeable:

Bassanio:  Good sir, this ring was given me by my wife,
          And when she put it on, she made me vow
          That I should neither sell, nor lose it.
          (IV.ii.437-39)

Antonio:  My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring.
          Let his deserving and my love withal
          Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment.

Bassanio:  Go, Gratiano, run and overtake him.
          Give him the ring, and bring him if thou canst
          Unto Antonio's house. Away make haste.
          (IV.ii.445-50)
There is no doubt Bassanio cares for Portia, but when Antonio speaks, Bassanio fails to heed Portia's warning words about the importance of the ring, "Which, when you part from, lose, or give away, / Let it presage the ruin of your love" (III. ii. 172-73). For Bassanio, the fear of disappointing Antonio is of far greater concern than his fear of disappointing Portia. These two illustrate yet another example of a couple that falls short of bliss, with a husband quite willing to break his marital bonds in order to deepen an even greater love, his love for his dear friend Antonio.

The situation that many do not think about is the rejected state of those on the other side of the relationship, those who did not leave but were left. What new families or partners do they turn to, if any at all? How do these characters cope with abandonment? For Harper in Angels, her new "family," or love, is merely her imagination combined with her Valium addiction. When Joe tells her he is leaving she turns to these fictional "friends" to escape from the situation:

Harper: Mr. Lies.
Mr. Lies: Right here.
Harper: I want to go away. I can't see him anymore.
Mr. Lies: Where?
Mr. Lies: Absolutamente.

(Kushner 80)

Harper, left by Joe for another man, finds she has no choice but to fill this pain. Unfortunately for Harper, she has a little more trouble than Joe in finding someone to ease and comfort her; therefore she creates a less than conventional support group led by Mr. Lies.

Prior, in Angels, also seeks companionship and support after his love, Louis, leaves him. Prior doesn't find this security in drugs but in an old lover, friend, and ex-drag queen, Belize. Luckily Belize, being a supportive friend, comforts him in his time of need, saying, "Whatever happens, baby, I will be here for you" (Kushner 61). Belize has become Prior's adopted family. Perhaps an ex-drag queen doesn't conjure that image of Mrs. Cleaver with her full skirt and pearls, ready with a box of kleenex
and a batch of fresh cookies to drown one's sorrow, but for Prior the most dependable equals the least traditional.

Often on our journey toward happiness and love incredible pain exists, as bonds are broken in order to create new ones. As a result, many families get termed "dysfunctional," some marriages end in divorce, and numerous children become runaways. Shakespeare and Kushner not only recognize these realities but highlight them for the world to see—understanding that the "Waltons" are really the atypical ones.

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It is often said that the eyes are the windows to one's soul. But in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* a person's soul is revealed through their hands. A source of cultivation and power, the hands help distinguish who a person is. Pip sees the world with an artistic eye, his ideology revealed in the description of his surroundings and the people he encounters. However, perception does little to formulate one's character. Instead, Dickens develops Pip's character in two contrasting stages: using the imagery of hands to compare Pip's changing philosophies during childhood to his maturing attitudes through adulthood.

Dickens outlines the first stage of Pip's life by focusing on the hands that cultivated him. As a child, Pip understands little of his existence, trusting only the words of the people who raise him: his sister, and her husband, Joe. Pip's sister gives herself credit for raising Pip "by hand" (7). Pip comments:

> Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand (8.)

As opposed to a soft shoulder to rest upon, Pip remembers the hard hand of his sister scrubbing him down. When his sister cleans his face, Pip comments, "I may here remark that I suppose myself to be better acquainted than any living authority, with the ridgy effect of a wedding ring, passing unsympathetically over the human countenance" (53). For Pip, Mrs. Joe's hand represents the uncomfortable nurturing of a woman, forced into the responsibility of caring for a child who
is not her own. Constantly reminded by Mrs. Joe that he was raised "by hand" fosters guilty feelings in Pip, making him conscious of being unwanted.

In spite of an abusive mother figure, Pip finds an ally and friend with his brother-in-law, Joe. Joe represents a "helping hand" to Pip, having also taken part in Pip's upbringing. Dickens describes Joe as a caring parental figure, but one who lacks effectiveness as Pip's protector. Rather than protecting Pip from Mrs. Joe's abuses, Joe remains passive, choosing to camouflage uncomfortable situations with games:

Joe . . . drew back the back of his hand across his nose with a conciliatory air when Mrs. Joe darted a look at him, and, when her eyes were withdrawn secretly crossed two forefingers, and exhibited them to me, as our token that Mrs. Joe was in a cross temper. This was so much her normal state, that Joe and I would often, for weeks together, be, as to our fingers, like monumental Crusaders' as to their legs. (22)

In the passage, Dickens demonstrates that Joe symbolizes a soft hand, which lacks the ability to guide. Dickens compares their fingers to "monumental Crusader's legs." Through the simile, Dickens indicates that Joe is somehow destroying something in Pip. Dickens further illustrates Joe's deficiency when Pip questions his place in the world and Joe accepts his own. Although constantly overpowered by his wife, and living a modest life as a poor blacksmith, Joe defends his situation. He says:

"I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest heart and never getting no peace in her mortal days that I'm dead afeerd of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t'other way, and be a little ill-convenienced myself." (49-50)

Young and impressionable, Pip later imitates Joe's passive behavior when he subjects his will to Estella, who treats him deplorably. Unintentionally, Joe influences Pip to accept a submissive role in an abusive relationships.

Other figures outside of the immediate family also contribute to shaping Pip's life. In addition to the two parental figures in Pip's life, the confrontation with the
convict also helps to change Pip's perception of the world. By assisting in the convict's escape, Pip develops a strong sense of guilt, symbolized by the entrance of the soldiers at the door. Pip writes: "But I ran no further than the house door, for there I ran head foremost into a party of soldiers with their muskets: one of whom held out a pair of handcuffs to me, saying, 'Here you are, look sharp, come on!' (30). Using again the imagery of hands, Dickens uses the presence of the handcuffs as an externalization of Pip's guilty feelings. Pip has always felt like a burden all his life, and the opportunity to finally help someone inspires compassion in him. For once, Pip desires to be of some assistance, rather than a burden. However, harboring the criminal influences Pip's "first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things" (3). Pip's entire ideology changes after his encounter with the convict, and because of his association with the escape, he identifies himself as a criminal as well.

As Pip matures into adulthood, Dickens continues the imagery of hands to contrast Pip's childhood ideology. When Biddy marries Joe, she replaces the role of Mrs. Joe as the matriarch of the family. Pip respects Biddy for her advice and wisdom, whereas Mrs. Joe never provided guidance for Pip as a child. Pip says, "Biddy looked down at her child, and put his little hand to her lips, and then put the good matronly hand with which she had touched it, into mine. There was something in the action and in the light pressure of Biddy's wedding-ring, that had a pretty eloquence in it" (481). Dickens establishes Biddy as the comforting mother figure Pip never found in Mrs. Joe. Biddy's touch is gentle, compared to the rough, scrubbing hand of Mrs. Joe. Even the wedding ring, exhibiting "light pressure," is different from Mrs. Joe's ring, which Pip remembers as "ridgy." For Pip, Biddy represents the "guiding hand" he has always lacked throughout his life.

Pip returns home to find not only a change in Biddy, but a change in Joe as well. Independence can reshape the course of a
person's life, and when Pip's sister dies, a newfound freedom introduces Joe to a life of liberty and free will. Without the tyrannous oppression of his first wife, Joe establishes his own sense of identity and character. During Pip's illness, Joe offers his services to Pip, taking on the dominant role of a parent: "whether I felt inclined to or not . . . I was to submit myself to all his orders. So, I kissed his hand, and lay quiet" (464). By caring for Pip, Joe proves capable of being an effective parent. Pip acknowledges the change in Joe, saying:

For the tenderness of Joe was so beautifully proportioned to my need, that I was like a child in his hands. He would sit and talk to me in the old confidence, and with the old simplicity, and in the old unassertive protecting way, so that I would half believe that all my life since the days of the old kitchen was one of the mental troubles of the fever that was gone. (466)

Now Joe has the power to comfort Pip in the way he never was able to back in the old days of Pip's childhood. The union of Joe and Biddy finally allows Pip to know how a real family should function. Pip writes, "Biddy held one of my hands to her lips, and Joe's restoring touch was on my shoulder" (478). Finally, Pip understands how it feels to be truly loved in return.

When Pip first learns of his benefactor's identity—the convict from his childhood—a horrible realization comes to him: he was never meant to fulfill his one "great expectation" to marry Estella. Old feelings rush back to him; the belief that he is a tainted criminal revives his guilty conscience. But Pip comes to terms with his connection to Magwitch, saying, "He smiled, and I understood his touch to mean that he wished to lift my hand, and lay it on his breast. I laid it there, and he smiled again, and put both his hands upon it" (460). Pip abandons his shame of being associated with Magwitch, providing a comforting touch to someone he knew needed it badly. As Magwitch lies dying, Pip remembers the reason he had helped Magwitch escape in the first place: for although he had felt fearful at first, his compassionate nature and desire to feel needed ultimately fueled his decision. Pip continues, saying, "With a
last faint effort, which would have been powerless but for my yielding to it and assisting it, he raised my hand to his lips. Then, he gently let it sink upon his breast again, with his own hands laying on it" (460). Pip offers his own helping hand for once, giving a person comfort rather than receiving it himself.

Finally, Pip gains independence, starting a new life by working his way up the corporate ladder. Now able to seek his own identity, it is ambiguous as to whether or not Pip actually does find himself. Pip returns eleven years later to Estella's home to confront old feelings. Encountering Estella, she agrees that they will be friends, though "apart." To this, Pip replies, "I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so, the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw the shadow of no parting from her" (484). Even though Estella tells him that there would be no future for them, he chooses to believe the opposite. Dickens' imagery of the shadows and evening mists suggests a veiled ending, and the question of whether Pip does establish his own identity goes unanswered.

Through the imagery of hands, Dickens exhibits Pip's development from a child into a man. Pip moves from the hands that help him to a stage where he helps others. Dickens teaches that hands have the power to shape people's lives, cultivating a person as a gardener tends to his garden. Treated roughly, the plants tend to weaken and eventually die. But once treated with a gentle touch, they can grow stronger and eventually flourish to their full potential.

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"One, two, three, four..." The sound of blaring guitars, pounding bass, and rapid drums fill the small, sweaty room. The singer, typically a scrawny young man, grabs hold of the microphone and pours out all of his aggressions in quick sharp lyrics. The kids, who had before stood idle beneath the stage, quickly catch the energy that is apparent in the band and begin to move to the music. Many choose to slam into each other with great force in the mosh pit that has begun in the center of the room. As the chorus to each song comes along, the room fills with voices as the crowd participates along with the singer, as if the song is a well-known anthem. This is a typical scene at a punk show where each song lasts about a minute, with only a couple of seconds between each one so as not to lose the energy and momentum that many deem so essential. The kids in the crowd all appear to be homogeneous, dressed in the stereotypical punk uniform of black ragged clothes and dirty hair. A couple of kids in the crowd stand out from the rest having marked each hand with a large black X. The others in their singing and are very different from the Xs that they wear signal to the different lifestyle from their who choose to be straight punk movement, straight edge is a small subculture that greatly affects those who decide to embrace it.
Punk rock can trace its roots back to the garage bands that began appearing in the sixties, as young kids attempted to imitate their favorite band of the moment (Ennis 367). In the mid-seventies punk began appearing in nightclubs, mostly found in New York. Parallel to this American movement, British punk was also emerging. Such bands as the Sex Pistols and the Clash began to find notoriety in Britain as well as the U.S., and the punk persona had a full-fledged following; this time is now referred to as the Golden Age (Alt.Culture: Punk). In the eighties, punk began to find its way out of New York and into other arenas. On the West Coast, bands such as Black Flag and the Dead Kennedys developed, along with a strong hardcore scene in Washington D.C., out of which came the influential band, Minor Threat. It was from Minor Threat, and the D.C. hardcore scene, that the straight edge subculture sprung.

Along with the punk lifestyle come many stereotypes. Characteristics such as disrespect, extreme reactions, and violence are often part of the general public's mindset regarding punks. In every aspect of the punk lifestyle, elements of reactionism are apparent:

By vehemently rejecting standards of respectability, beauty, and taste, all of which helped to conceal the inhumanities of the at-large culture, the punks invented a stylistic mirror reflecting the ugly truth. At the same time, they cast themselves in the role of the despised and discarded, proud to be repulsive and unacceptable in every way. (Seay 293)

Punks are unconcerned with the general public's view of them. Because punk is such an independent movement, they have no problem doing their own thing and show blatant disregard for the opinions of the general public: "In its lyrics and implied in its whole ethos--language, clothes, hair, postural stance, excessive sound levels, and grungy venues--punk and its contemporary version, hardcore, have only this to say: 'Fuck you: get off my back" (Ennis 366). While the general public views punks
almost as a spectacle, they have trouble recognizing the tremendous inner workings of the movement.

For the most part the general public associates negative connotations with the punk rock lifestyle. However, those within the movement understand that this is far from the truth. At its lowest form, punk ideals consist of a reaction to the norm and sheer fun. When it comes to punk rock music itself, it is passion that takes over, and skill is no longer important (Seay 290). The music survives on the energy and devotion of the musicians, rather than their talent. Punk stemmed from the lack of culture prevalent in suburban America. Kids were in search of something to hold on to, something to identify with, something for themselves (Arnold 186). As an uprising against the norm, punks have chosen to act on their own. Many take on extreme political beliefs and take pride in a do-it-yourself attitude. For many, punk is a life choice, almost a religion, and for these reasons it has a profound impact on its followers.

For those kids who choose to embrace punk there are extreme benefits. It is a support group in a sense, giving individuals a positive community in which to exist, while at the same time inspiring them to think and act for themselves (Arnold 82). Punk has become a positive influence in many peoples lives. As one punk states: "Punk rock may not be able to liberate a nation, but it sure has liberated me. And maybe that's all a person can ask of art: for the occasional moment of noisy solace, for an instantaneous shot of hope--and a lifetime of inspiration" (Arnold 198). Those punks who choose to embrace the straight edge lifestyle have been extremely impacted.

During the early eighties drugs and alcohol were prevalent at most punk shows. However, Minor Threat, a punk band formed in Washington D.C. in 1980, changed this. Due to a 46-second song titled "Straight Edge," the band found an
instant following and is now termed by many to be one of the most influential punk bands ever. With lyrics such as "Always gonna keep in touch, / never want to use a crutch, / I've got the straight edge," Ian Mackaye, the lead singer, changed the course of many people's lives. It was at this point that straight edge (also represented like this: sXe) began. Punks, reacting to the hedonism and self-destruction that had come to characterize the punk scene, now had a name for their philosophy. Many youths embraced the movement that Minor Threat portrayed in their lyrics. The band can also be credited with the symbol used by sXe kids to identify other members of this new counterculture, a black X drawn on each hand. Still used today, the symbol takes its origins from the all-age shows where people under twenty-one had an X drawn on their hand, indicating to the bartender that they could not drink alcohol (Straight-Edge.Net).

The basic straight edge ideology comes from Minor Threat's song "Out of Step (with the world)": the song's lyrics claim: "(I) Don't smoke, don't drink, don't fuck, at least I can fucking think." The lifestyle that straight edge individuals choose to lead is without intoxication: they do not smoke, drink, use drugs of any kind, or engage in promiscuous sex. Another large part of being sXe is to put something back into the community, either by actively supporting a chosen cause, playing in a sXe band, or most commonly producing a sXe "zine" (an underground, independently-produced magazine). Like punk itself, straight edge is a purely individualistic lifestyle, but all
of its members are working towards a common goal: to lead a positive, self-controlled life. As one straight edge individual puts it: "sXe isn't just about being drug-free; it's about making positive changes in life" (Retrogression 10). These individuals work to improve their communities as well as themselves, both physically and mentally. Straight edgers understand what they are choosing to embark on and must embrace the philosophy wholeheartedly; as one such individual states: "Straight edge is not a fashion; straight edge is not only at a concert with X painted on your hand. Straight edge is all the time, for your own satisfaction, not for others" (Retrogression 15).

Since straight edge is purely an independent movement, there have been adaptations to its principles through the years; however the same basic ideals still apply. Politics have become an extension of the sXe lifestyle. Since contributing to one's community plays such a large role in the sXe counterculture, involvement in politics has become an increasingly popular action. Once an individual has gained control over his or her life the next step is to reach out to the community by addressing issues of social injustice (Straight-Edge.Net). Just like politics, many other trends have emerged from the basic straight edge lifestyle: "It seems every year the trends change and you go to a show and can visibly observe that. Three years ago everyone was into Krishna Consciousness, two years ago everybody turned vegan, last year feminism was the big thing, now it's 'emo' [meaning emotional]" (Retrogression 11). Most of these trends did not have much staying power within the sXe community; however, veganism has. Although it has little to do with the basic sXe ideals, veganism has steadily become an extension of them because it "seems logical to look at everything you put into your body once you start examining external factors" (Straight-Edge.Net). There are straight edge individuals who choose to vehemently embrace both the original sXe philosophies as well as strong environmentalist beliefs. This small faction is referred to as hardline and is
extremely controversial. Not only do hardline individuals choose to take on these philosophies, but they embrace them with a militant outlook, opting to arm themselves in order to "defend 'innocent life ... against attack" (Retrogression 15). Paralleling the rise of hardline is an increase in a generally close-minded attitude throughout the sXe subculture. In response to this phenomena, one straight edge youth states: "The only time we reach unity is when we stop putting others down for how they live their lives and stop judging others by their like and dislikes" (Extent 3). Individuals will continue to work towards the cause, making this characteristic a thing of the past; however, for now close-mindedness is a prevalent stereotype.

This characteristic of intolerance is not the only one that sXe youths tend to share. Many take on the punk ideal of individualism: "blindly following me and taking my thoughts as your own defeats the entire purpose of punk and straight edge" (Retrogression 12). When focusing on a particular cause to support, sXe youths become very knowledgeable about different issues. Because of this knowledge, they form strong opinions and thus are eager to share them. Many write to sXe zines and have their letters published; one particular zine features letters about veganism, a Stop Rape benefit CD, and an independent record company supporting a racist band amongst other topics. Along with these strong opinions comes a positive attitude. Many straight edgers believe a good outlook is one of the fundamentals of sXe; as one youth states: "We all believe in the same things, just be positive, and do something with your life and have as much fun as possible" (qtd. in Extent 25). With all of this positive eagerness, many sXe individuals work to have their voices heard within their communities through bands and zines. By getting the message of the straight edge philosophy out into the public it can be adopted by more individuals.
Since straight edge is a purely individualized movement the reasons kids might choose to follow this philosophy are varied. Some of the most common reasons are that they want to have control of their own lives, that they see the effects of intoxication on others, and that they identify with the sXe philosophies. Another common reason for joining the movement is that they tend to feel alienated from their peers (Buckley 2). Straight edge is, and always has been, about personal choice in all aspects of the philosophy. No matter what the reasoning behind one's adoption of the sXe philosophy, when they embrace the lifestyle they do so wholeheartedly.

The most prominent way of spreading the straight edge counterculture has been through the formation of sXe bands. Many recognize music as being a powerful voice in the lives of most youths so they incorporate straight edge beliefs into the lyrics of songs, figuring the message will reach a greater number of people. Straight edge bands generally tend to follow the path of Minor Threat, the first of their kind; they play hardcore punk and only produce their music through independent record labels. Currently two new bands predominate the sXe scene, Gorilla Biscuits, who "lay out their message with open arms, instead of closed minds," (Gorilla Biscuits) and Earth Crisis. Earth Crisis' "raw music and bold lyrics have become anthems for a slew of followers" with songs such as "The Discipline":

Straight edge--the discipline:
The key to self-liberation is abstinence from the destructive escapism of intoxication.
I separate from the poison—a mindlessness I've always abhorred.
Usage will only increase the pain, a truth I constantly see ignored.
The pollutants that 1611 the body breed apathy within the mind.
The substances that once brought release in the end will always confine.
From drug-clouded lungs and veins motivation dissipates.
Imprisoned within addiction, abuse increase until death overtakes.
Enslaved by concupiscence, promiscuity leads to despair.
Victims used and abandoned by liars who professed to care.
Self-exiled from their insanity. Striving to attain higher levels of purity. The beauty in life is mine to know. Amidst the ruin I survive. I've got to stay free. Damage everywhere-infections at every turn. Through my refusal to partake I saved myself. Abstinence was the beginning. What's important is what's done with the freedom step by step I overcome. Alone I climb the staircase to edification. (Brace 1)

Straight edge bands can be found in just about every city, playing small, all-age shows. Their music is commonly introduced to the public through CD compilations put out by independent record labels, as well as through advertisements in sXe zines. One sXe band's advertisement consists of the following slogan: "gay positive, anti-fascist, animal-friendly, pro-feminist" (Extent 6). In another sXe zine, an independent record label put forth the following advertisement: "if you play in a band and you have something constructive to say—please write us or send us a demo-tape" (Retrogression 17). These zines not only promote sXe bands, they also openly voice the sXe philosophy while commenting on other issues of interest.

Most underground music zines consist of information about local shows, reviews of new CDs, and an occasional interview with a band. Straight edge zines have all of this alongside widespread issues of interest. Retrogression, one very prominent sXe zine, states on the cover: "Warning: May provoke thought," and lists its contents to be:

Articles and writings on: Pat Buchanan, the Communications Decency Act, Methadone maintenance, Third Party Politics, abortion, capital punishment, dishonesty, distrust, environmentalism, friendship, loneliness, major labels, politics, racism, rejection, sex, stupidity, violence, vegetarianism; columns on punk, techno and goth; plus letters, reviews, photos, and all the othershit you've come to expect. (1)

For the most part these zines tend to be put together by one individual but include
writings from others as well. Extent, another well-known sXe zine, includes random articles contributed by other sXe youths on any and all topics with this disclaimer attached:

The articles are the personal opinions of the writers only, and may not be the opinions of the other people that help out with or support Extent. Extent does not edit the subject matter of the articles, but in some cases may make suggestions and correct grammatical errors. After all, this is our zine, not yours. If you've got a problem, write a letter to the writer, care of this zine, or better yet, write your own damn article. (5)

These sXe individuals are willing to incorporate any, and all, issues of interest for their readers. For the most part, those people who produce zines do so to raise consciousness within their own communities. As one such individual writes about his work producing a zine: "I am much more concerned with the larger political issues I am dealing with: human rights, environmentalism, free expression, etc., than with which band is on which label and who is charging how much for a luxury item like a CD that no one needs to buy anyway" (Extent 10). All in all, zines are meant to bring knowledge to others, and this is just one way that sXe individuals work to make an impact.

Like punk, sXe has come to have a positive impact on many people's lives. Zines and bands work to educate individuals, and in turn, these individuals are positively influenced by what they learn. Karl Buchner, the lead signer of the band Earth Crisis, comments on the importance of positively affecting his fans:

When we get letters from kids all over the world or when we talk to them at shows and they say that the song "Discipline" helped change their outlook on a drinking problem that they have or that "New Ethic" helped someone understand what actually happens to animals in a slaughterhouse, when people let us know that we made a difference, that's what matters most. (qtd. in Buckley 3)
Those who choose to read sXe zines and/or listen to sXe bands find themselves affected greatly. As one such individual writes in a letter to their favorite sXe band: "Realize again what you do for everyone by putting this stuff out there. It is a voice that speaks beyond life" (Brace 3). Not only do the straight edge philosophies give individuals a positive alternative to our own hedonistic culture, they give people the ability to gain knowledge and to turn around and become a positive influence on someone else. In this way straight edge has been able to pass down its beliefs through the years and will continue to do so in the future.

The straight edge counterculture has continued as an offshoot of the punk movement since 1980. Although many trends have arisen, only the fundamentals set out by the punk group Minor Threat has kept with the movement since the beginning. Educating others, through such outlets as music and political as well as community action, has kept the sXe lifestyle alive. The guidelines are so stringent that many individuals find themselves dropping out; however, by reaching out to others, many youths choose to join the cause (Straight-Edge.Net). As political action on the part of straight edge youths increases, many government officials are becoming aware of this lifestyle (Buckley 6), and the generations of straight edge individuals are beginning to find themselves in places of power as adults. As one such individual states, this, too, will have an impact on other’s views:

As we all grow older, there are more and more straight edge people running businesses and starting families and people can see that the vast majority of straight edge people are doing things that ultimately benefit the community and the youth that are coming up. People’s views will change. (qtd. in Buckley 5)

If individuals are continually willing to live a positive, controlled lifestyle and promote their beliefs, then the straight edge tradition will continue.
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During my sophomore and junior year in High School, I was a 4-H Guide Dog Puppy Raiser for Guide Dogs for the Blind, in San Rafael, California. The majority of their dogs are Labrador Retrievers, and the dog's breeding is carefully regulated. Less than half of the dogs "graduate" at Guide Dogs for the Blind. In the spring of 1997, I handed over my Guide Dog to Howard Caler, a blind gentleman who works for the Social Security Administration in San Diego. Everyone at this event, as well as the puppy raisers and the blind recipients who were sitting on the stage, had a tear in their eye or at least a lump in their throat. Since then, Howard and I have kept in touch. He called me this Christmas vacation, and last year I met Howard and the dog I raised, Actor, at a political convention for the Blind in Sacramento. Anyone who saw Actor and Howard that day, or any of the other human-guide dog teams at the convention, could have little doubt that an intense, mutualistic symbiotic relationship exists between a blind person and his guide dog. As a team, Howard and Actor negotiate strange hotel hallways, busy traffic intersections, and large, noisy conference rooms. Actor interacts with an enormous number of living organisms. In this paper, I want to examine some of the mutualistic, parasitic, and commensalistic symbiotic relationships that I have observed in my friendship and relationship with this extraordinary dog.

In Lynn Margulis' book *The Symbiotic Planet*, she describes a concept called serial endosymbiosis theory. This theory essentially states that "New species arise from symbiotic mergers among members of old ones" (Margulis 6). Margulis describes this process as it exists over billions of years, from the very origins of the universe until this very moment in time. She describes the world as a "five kingdom" hand, with symbiotic relationships occurring between and among bacteria, protocists, fungi, plants, and animals. The symbiotic relationship between two relatively recently evolved animals, such as the two mammals Actor and Howard, reflects a
tiny, recent eye blink in terms of evolution since the Big Bang. Yet this particular symbiotic relationship is characteristic of and similar to many symbiotic relationships that exist in the vast network of the current universe and that have occurred over the evolution of the universe.

In terms of man's existence, dogs and humans are one of the most obvious symbiotic relationships that have occurred between species. "Possibly the oldest skeletal evidence of a special relationship between humans and canines comes from the Natufian site of Ein Mallaha in northern Israel, where the 12,000-year-old articulated bones of a young dog or wolf puppy were found resting beneath the left hand of a human skeleton" (Snyder). Although there are many forms of domestic dogs today, their predecessors, the wolves, still exist. Looking at the pre-Darwinian classification scheme of life, which was designed by Lynnaeus (1707-1778) over two hundred years ago, Margulis notes, "All dogs, for example, belong to the genus Canis. The species of domesticated dogs in familiaris. Wolves are Canis lupus and coyotes Canis latrans" (Margulis 59).

It seems that early on dogs that were bred to perform jobs for humans did not have a very mutualistic relationship with their human partners. The relationship was probably more commensalistic, with the human getting more benefits than the dog. Essentially, the dog gave up having to fight for shelter and food, which were supplied by the human. In exchange, the dog provided the human with help in getting a job like hunting done, which provided the human with sufficient excess food and shelter so that he could spare enough to sustain the dog. The emotional companionship between dogs and humans was undoubtedly a later evolutionary development. The work that a dog performed was uniquely suited to the particular environment in which they evolved. In fact, even today in environments with limited food and resources, dogs are seldom adopted as pets. In the dry grasslands of East Africa, wild dogs still live in packs and are rarely domesticated. In Indonesia, packs of dogs roam the streets and are considered by the Hindu Balinese as one of the lowest and dirtiest forms of life.

In many societies and ecosystems, humans control the breeding of dogs to help develop characteristics that would help humans with their jobs. These jobs have been as varied as the ecosystem. Some of the jobs have included hunting, running, fighting, scenting, tracking, herding, and swimming (Taylor 17). Amazingly, some domesticated dogs were even bred to fight their own evolutionary forefathers, the wolves. Pyrenees Mountain Dogs were raised in "the Pyrenees, where they were used as sheepdogs, protecting the flocks from the depredations of wolves and bears in the harsh mountain climate" (Taylor 80). Humans and dogs it seems are a wonderful
example of co-evolutionary forces. What started as an unequal relationship has, in the case of Actor and Howard, turned into a more mutualistic relationship, or at least a long-term stable coexistence. The book *Out of Control* by Kevin Kelly states, "win-win is the story of life in co-evolution" (89).

In exchange for their shelter and food, Guide Dogs have given up one of the most basic evolutionary freedoms, that of breeding freely according to the social hierarchy of the pack with no human interference. Almost all Guide Dogs are neutered with only a few females and males retained as breeding dogs. Hence, the gene pool for this particular dog has been narrowed considerably by humans to achieve certain characteristics that humans consider desirable. Sometimes undesirable characteristics, such as hip problems, come along with the good.

It is interesting to look into the history of this breed to see what characteristics are considered important for a dog to develop a mutualistic symbiotic relationship with a blind human. Labrador Retrievers were originally fisherman's dogs in Newfoundland trained to bring in nets in icy water. The Newfoundland fisherman traveled to England taking their symbionts along with them. In its new home, the Labrador Retriever was developed as a gun dog. Its name was coined in 1887 by the Earl of Malmesbury (Taylor 52). The Newfoundland had earlier ancestors, which may have been brought over by early Viking settlers. Another possible ancestor is the Pyreneese mountain dogs, those very dogs that were trained to fight off wolves from domesticated sheep. The main reason the Labrador is so successful as a Guide Dog, in addition to being sighted, is its good temper, loyalty, and reliability. Companionship itself became a desirable characteristic in the co-evolution of humans and Guide Dogs.

Actor, of course, has many relationships with organisms other than humans. One of my jobs as a puppy raiser was to be sure that parasitic pests were minimized in Actor's life. This included heart worms, fleas, ticks, tapeworms, hookworms, parasitic mites, roundworms, and whip worms (Keasberry 17-22). That is not to say that every worm or bacteria in Actor's body is bad for him. Like humans, Actor's guts and eyelashes are covered with bacterial and animal symbionts (Margulis 5). Some of these bacterial symbionts are similar to the earliest bacteria, which developed a symbiotic relationship with single-celled life as they emerged from the earth's primordial soup.

It seems obvious that humans have benefited from their association with dogs. What is less obvious is that dogs, too, have benefited, in most cases, from their association with humans.
Humans and wolves evolved as successful hunters, and the resemblance between the two species is striking. Both humans and wolves live in family groups and spend a large portion of their life as infants and adolescents. Loners are uncommon in both groups, and antisocial behavior causes the individuals to be ostracized. Both have elaborate ceremonial rituals, especially gathering and singing before hunting and after eating. Social order in both wolves and humans is based on a hierarchy, which requires following a leader. Aggression occurs toward unfamiliar individuals to defend territory. In hunting, early humans, like wolf packs, would sometimes break into small groups to hunt separately at certain times of the year and then reform later when resources were more plentiful. Both humans and wolves have high levels of intelligence and depend upon coordinated movement of individuals in the group to pursue their prey.

Two species with so much in common could probably not remain apart since they shared territory that was becoming more and more crowded. One theory regarding the relationship between the species is that humans originally followed wolves and chased them from their kills in order to eat the leftovers. As humans became better hunters, the roles may have been reversed. As men evolved into upright beings, their vision improved, and their sense of smell and hearing diminished. It may be that man's improved sense of vision, when combined with the wolves strong sense of smell and hearing, made them more effective as a team searching for prey. They could use each other's strengths to locate food.

Mary Thurston asserts that domestication of early dogs exploded at the time when a greater division of labor occurred along gender lines in human culture. It is her theory that women were the first real domesticators of dogs. Prehistoric women did not hunt in order to take care of human babies, which like wolves have a relatively long period of infancy and adolescence. Orphans or abandoned wolf pups may have been nurtured and adopted by women as they nurtured their own children. There is even evidence today that mothers in primitive societies would suckle a pup: "Polynesian women frequently suckled puppies at the breast" (Serpell 250). As humans developed village cultures, certain dogs lived around the edges of the village to salvage food. This relationship was mutually beneficial. It cleaned up the human waste and minimized disease while providing early dogs with a way to feed their offspring.

One of the remarkable phenomenon regarding domestic dogs is the concept of "neoteny." Domestic dogs that evolved successfully from wolves have retained juvenile physical and behavior characteristics as compared to adult wolves. This means that in the co-evolution of wolves and humans the animals that continue to act like puppies were better able to survive as
they developed a sense of kinship with humans rather than with their wild relatives. Some of the 
endearing characteristics, which exist socially in all domestic dogs of today but especially in 
"lap" dogs, include soft, spotted coats, big eyes, droopy ears, and shortened baby-like faces. The 
fact that I adopted Actor as a baby contributed to the emotional ties that make him at home with 
humans. It is just as likely that I have inherited an evolutionary agenda in my DNA that makes 
me respond to a puppy in a caring way—an obvious benefit to the dog.

This long co-evolution has made the language of dogs extremely easy to interpret by 
humans. In a successful dog/human relationship, the dogs and humans become members of the 
same pack or family. In general, the human has become the "Alpha," or lead member, of the 
pack. Being the pack leader implies considering the welfare of the whole family, thus protecting 
the more "submissive" and childlike members. The ability to become a Guide Dog starts when 
the puppies are only six weeks old. This early stage of socialization and play is extremely 
important in order for the dog and blind person to eventually effectively work as a family or pack. 
In training a Guide Dog, we are not talking about the same kind of Pavlovian behavioral 
modification that teaches a circus dog to jump though hoops. This is simply a case of associative 
rewards being granted to the dog, which reinforce specific behavior. The relationship between a 
Guide Dog and his owner is based on a long genetic inheritance, which allows the two species to 
communicate non-verbally in a shared "animal" language. For example, when a dog places his 
paw in your lap, it is reproducing the kneading motion of a nursing pup. The two species share 
an evolutionary history that makes these gestures easy to interpret, along with numerous other 
expressions such as growling, whining, and sniffing.

Because Actor has a complex symbiotic relationship with humans, does that mean he 
ceases to have relationships with other dogs? Howard's wife is also blind, so two Guide Dogs 
live in the Caler household. From a very early age, Actor wore a Guide Dog jacket to 
differentiate between when was working and when he was playing. His behavior totally changes 
when he is in a harness and not allowed to play with Nell, the other dog in his household. When 
Actor was in my household, he had two Australian Shepherds as intra species companions.

Actor's relationship extends beyond Howard, parasites, and other dogs. He attended 
Anderson Valley High School for a year and a half and was well known as an important character 
in my small community. He went to every basketball game, every class, and every pep rally. He 
even had his own photo entry in the school year book. From what Howard tells me, he is just as 
well known at the Social Security building in San Diego. An amazing number of people say hello
to him as he gets in the elevator every morning. Although these relationships are not as mutualistic as the tight bond between Howard and Actor, there is something about Actor's friendly and lovable demeanor that makes his relationship with the community mutualistic. Actor makes people smile. People cause Actor to wag his tail. The two species are genetically equipped to communicate as mutual pack members. Actor causes a "ripple" in the universe, which has extended far beyond his birth in San Rafael in 1996.

Although some people are surprised that I could give up a Guide Dog puppy that I spent a year and a half raising, I consider my relationship with Actor symbiotically mutualistic. In return for food, medicine, shelter, and love, Actor opened up a whole new world of friends to me. Not only did I become friends with some blind people, I realized I like working with people with disabilities and learned American Sign Language so I could communicate better with people in the deaf community. A side benefit, which I did not expect when I took on the puppy raising project, was that my work with the blind and deaf helped me get a community service scholarship to attend Saint Mary's College.

Gerald M. Capriulo ends his book with the sentence, "We will, along with our creator, forever experience ending, and new beginnings, improving with each cycle as mutualistic symbiosis drives us. It is our collective journey, together, with all that is, that is our paradise gained" (Capriulo 204). When I handed over the puppy that I loved to Howard in 1997, I felt like it might be an ending to my relationship with Actor. However, when Guide Dogs have passed their usefulness as work dogs, the original puppy raiser is offered the choice to take back the dog in retirement. The truth is that if Actor comes back to live with me in five or six years we both will have evolved to a new place in our personal lives. I will probably be a college graduate and may not be living on a farm like I was in high school. Actor will be an old dog with the personality and characteristics that come with aging. If and when we live together again we will have a whole new beginning to our symbiotic and loving relationship, based on our two species' co-evolution.

Works Cited

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Bernard Shaw’s Mrs. Warren’s Profession offers an argument against the life and values that a capitalist-based economy promotes. Shaw is upset not only with how people compromise their morals in order to meet a financial ideal, but with how women are expected to exist in such an economic environment. It has been written that Shaw believed women were presented only two choices in life, each containing an immorality of its own, for "starvation, overwork, dirt, and disease are as anti-social as prostitution" (1714). Although Vivie tells her mother, "Everybody has some choice... I don't believe in circumstances," the play demonstrates that Mrs. Warren and Vivie are, indeed, products of circumstances (ll. 1732). In a world where the male-constructed capitalist economic system dictates lives, the power of money determines the definition of values and morals.

Capitalism creates a need for money. It depends upon a large overworked, underpaid class of people who work to produce a profit for an elite portion of the society. It is this money that dictates if it is possible to marry, what type of education one acquires, and who can afford to eat. Mrs. Warren is the symbol of what society forces a woman to do if she wishes to survive in a capitalist economy and not become a living sacrifice. As a poor, unmarried woman, Mrs. Warren was left with the options of "scrubbing floors for one and six-pence a day and nothing to look forward to but the work house infirmary" or being "independent and able to give (her) daughter a first-rate education" (ll. 1734). Mrs. Warren sells the only economically profitable thing she, as a woman, has to give—her body.
Prostitution, although not a socially acceptable occupation, is the only labor that will provide Mrs. Warren with the income she needs to create the quality of life she wants for herself and Vivie. Although many people felt that factory work, which was available to women, was a nobler and more respectable way to survive, Shaw reveals that factory work is merely prostitution by another name. Mrs. Warren lives a "classy" life by selling her body, whereas the life of a factory worker would have left her poor and subjected to an environment such as "the factory where Anne Jane got poisoned" (I. 1733). Women were forced to choose between selling their bodies and, thereby, their self-respect, or selling their lives, their health, and their children's futures. In order to survive, they needed to engage in prostitution of themselves or of their social morality to an economic system.

Vivie's education and lifestyle, which was provided by Mrs. Warren, allowed Vivie to avoid the hard choices that poor women, such as Mrs. Warren, were forced to contend with. However, Mrs. Warren's absence from her daughter's upbringing caused Vivie to grow up into an emotionless woman. Mrs. Warren is appalled at Vivie's decision to sever all ties with her, but that is what Vivie has been molded into—a capitalist worker, committed to a life without distractions. She declares, "I don't want a husband." due to the emotional and time commitment such an endeavor would involve. Instead, she chooses a traditionally male life. Vivie does not yearn for romance and beauty, stating, "I don't care for either"; rather, she prefers a lifestyle that features "a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it" (I. 1717). Capitalism sucks emotion from life and replaces values with money.

Vivie's workaholic attitude is simply a reflection of her circumstances. Her mother states, "I brought you up well, didn't I, dearie?" and she did, in respect to the capitalist ideal (I. 1735). In her mother's constant absence, her only companions were her books and mathematics. Consequently, Vivie becomes the praised capitalist worker. Vivie embraces the capitalist notion of "work as pleasure" and "no work, no gain." Her dedication is limitless; even after putting in a full day's work she believes that she must "put in another six hours work
before I go to bed" and vows that she "will never take a holiday again (IV, 1744, 1745). Her whole self has become devoted to work. When asked "Why don't you employ a woman, and give your sex a chance?" she has no answer, and instead, changes the subject (IV, 1744). Vivie no longer identifies herself by her education, family, gender, or social standing but only sees herself as a worker. Capitalism endorses an attitude that bridges the gender gap. For, although Vivie is a woman, her work ethic is meant to represent that of a true capitalist worker, not the female capitalist worker.

All the play's characters participate in the capitalist system. Even Praed, the play's most sympathetic character, possesses the disturbing characteristic of being adverse to knowing the truth. Despite his declaration of being an artistic sort, an "anarchist" who "hate(s) authority," Praed does not challenge capitalism (l. 1716). Although Praed views himself as a radical, his behavior reveals him to be a tolerant and conventional being. Praed is surprised by Vivie's unconventional ways, and unable to address this difference of opinion, he manages only to babble in response, "Modern ladies are splendid; perfectly splendid!" thus, smoothing over a difference of opinion (l. 1716). He co-exists with capitalism by living his life in denial of its effects on the people around him. This supposed anarchist, who ought to confront and clash with authority, is actually passive and avoids conflict. Praed cannot even muster the courage to acknowledge the nature of Mrs. Warren's life, so he allows himself to be oblivious to the identity of Vivie's father, saying, "of course I have never spoken to her about it" (l. 1721). His choice to deliberately ignore the true origins of Vivie's existence allows Praed to live in a reality that exists exclusively in his own head, a world where capitalism has no side effects.

All of Praed's illusions would be shattered if he knew the identity of Vivie's father. Reverend Samuel, the head of the institution that condemns Mrs. Warren's occupation, is the father of Vivie. This man, who now fears having a public luncheon with Mrs. Warren, at one time sought her services. Reverend Samuel lives his life to preserve his image. He became a preacher not because he felt a calling from God but because he was "the fool of the family dumped
on the Church" (I. 1722). Reverend Samuel does not spend hours writing his sermons but instead "He buys em" (III. 1737). In this, he symbolizes the subservience of morality to capitalism. This preacher uses his occupation to survive financially and capitalizes on the social standing that such an occupation brings with it. Ironically, Reverend Samuel, although socially above Mrs. Warren, is actually at the mercy of her whims because of the incriminating letters she possesses. Luckily for him she need never sell the letters he once wrote to her because her money gives her financial security. Capitalism gives power to whomever has top dollar.

Crofts, the most distasteful character in the play, promotes Mrs. Warren's endeavors not because of a gentlemanly duty to keep her from poverty but because of the high profit in investing in such a business. Being a man with so much wealth to begin with, Crofts has no need to earn money off such a profession, unlike Mrs. Warren, "a very poor woman who had no reasonable choice but to do as she did" (III. 1740). Crofts did have a choice, yet he capitalizes on the difficult situation in which women of that day found themselves. He is the ultimate capitalist; he puts no labor into his financial endeavors but is the one who reaps the spoils. Mrs. Warren and her working girls create the money, but Crofts is the prime profiteer. The suppression of the working women does not weigh on his conscience, for he declares, "While we're in this world we're in it; and money's money" (II. 1740). This belief is so ingrained in him that even the subject of marriage is approached in a manner that resembles a business proposal. Crofts offers a cheque to Mrs. Warren for Vivie's hand, while he attempts to persuade Vivie by pointing out "I'm a good deal older than you . . . shan't live forever; and I'll take care that you shall be well off" (II. 1729, III. 1741). Crofts proves that a capitalist is nothing more than a money sucking machine. Even Vivie, a model capitalist worker, does not approve of Crofts, calling him a "capitalist bully" (III. 1743). Life to Crofts is strictly evaluated according to cost, not according to what is right.

The women and men in Mrs. Warren's Profession have all structured their lives around the principle of earning money. They allow the dollar to decide
whether to get married, with whom to socialize, and how to live life. Women are the victims of a patriarchal economic system—capitalism, a system in which men, themselves, do not fare well. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* sympathizes with these women by showing that, although they are selling their bodies, they are no worse than those who are selling their health, virtues, relatives, and dreams to the capitalist system. It is not that prostitution should be a revered occupation; rather, it is an evil by-product of a greater evil. Shaw is simply illustrating how capitalism is making prostitutes out of us all; we are all selling ourselves, just some more blatantly than others.

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I woke up to a beautiful, yet strange, morning. The sun shone brilliantly from a cloudless sky, and at the same time the brisk air invigorated my mind. It was a Saturday morning and I hardly saw a soul about on St. Mary's College campus. Half the student population was still comatose in bed from the excess socializing the night before, and the other half had left to go home for the weekend. I decided to take this opportunity for a stroll down a scenic and fairly unused trail.

There I was, content with a bit of physical activity, the warm sun shining on my face, the morning air refreshing my body. I was not even ten minutes into my walk when I heard a strange shuffling by the side of the trail. Having a curious nature, I diverged from the path and headed into a cluster of trees and towards the noise. It was not long until I found the source of the commotion. Apparently, a cat had maimed a mouse and was playing with the poor creature. I had to admit I was fascinated by the game the cat was playing. The mouse tried to scurry away in vain before the cat pounced on it once more. The life and death drama amused me, that is, until the mouse looked my way. In the fraction of a second the mouse fixed its eyes upon me, I felt my emotions turn from amusement to shame. I felt rather bad for being a silent witness to an impending murder. So in disgust, I grabbed a broken tree branch and chased away the vexed kitten. The mouse quickly skirted into a nearby hole, and without another thought I made my way back towards the path.

By this time, masses of clouds were sweeping in and the earth shook slightly with the distant rumbling of thunder. My beautiful morning turned into a stormy mid-afternoon. I did not mind the light sprinkles that started to fall. I figured there was enough time to run back to my dorm room, take a nice hot shower, and curl up with a good book. Due to my total lack of directional skills, I lost my way back to the trail. The mere sprinkles soon turned into wet bullets, the gusting winds tore at the dead maple
leaves, and the sun-filled world I lived in just a brief moment ago transformed into a swirling vortex of raindrops and golden leaves.

With the ground carpeted with torn victims of the howling wind, I lost all hope of even following my footprints back to the mouse hole. And since all the trees looked exactly the same to me, I could not rely on using them as landmarks. Realizing my grim situation, I panicked and ran about in a frenzy, searching for a familiar site. In a blind state of fright I smacked dead into a tree. Imagine my amazement when the tree stretched out arms and caught me before I fell. I looked up and the tree had a face, and the tree was not really a tree, as I first assumed, but only a man.

"There you are my dear," he remarked with a twitch of his mustache. "It has been quite a chore finding you in such dreary weather, and your frantic running about did not help either. No, it certainly didn't. But that is perfectly fine, for the committee will be so pleased to see you." Without another word, he turned around and led me through the deepening forest that seemed like just a mere patch of trees that morning. Confused and tired, I obediently followed my only link to civilization. As we walked along, I inspected the man in detail and found him to be stranger than I initially thought. He wore a tweed suit with a matching cape and a walking cane. His whole persona shouted British, and I realized that he spoke with an English accent. Occasionally the man would turn around to make sure I still followed, and I cannot help the feeling of him assessing me with his beady, black eyes. I noticed that every time he talked his gray mustache would twitch along with his weather-bitten nose.

"Sorry to rush you, my dear," he announced. "The committee has been waiting so long for someone like you, and we must not keep them waiting."

"What committee?" I thought, and where was this strange English man taking me?" Before I could voice my questions, the man introduced himself.

"My name is Gerald Vermin, and I have been appointed to be your guide. I know this may seem a tad bit confusing on your end, but please do not fret. Everything will turn out fine." Who was I to argue? So I followed Gerald through the forest and we finally arrived at a small clearing with a stone cottage set in the middle. Upon entering the cottage, I was struck dumb at the site before me than meeting with Gerald in the
forest. A melange of strangers was sitting around a circular table with their eyes intently fixed upon me.

"This is the judge? But she is only a girl!" remarked one of the men with an Italian accent and fifteenth-century Italian apparel. He expressed his views rather rudely, and I took great offense at his sexist views (although I knew not what the Italian meant by indicating me as judge). It was not long until the whole room filled with polite oppositions of opinions, for everyone seemed too proper to raise their voices. Yet, they all had an inclination for using large words in an attempt to impress each other. I could not make out what the hubbub was about and decided to brave the storm instead of standing around in a cottage full of oddly dressed strangers. Besides, I did not see a phone I could use to call home. To keep me from rushing out the door, Gerald stopped me and promptly sat me down on one of the empty chairs of the circular table.

"May I please have your attention," he announced. "This committee has been waiting a very, very long time for this moment. Can we at least be civil enough to introduce ourselves to the guest without delving into further arguments?" The six members of the table introduced themselves to me one by one, starting with Machiavelli, by whom I had the pleasure of sitting. Around the table sat Voltaire, Jonathan Swift, Jean-Jacques Rosseau, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and to my amazement, William Shakespeare! How was it that I became lost in a clump of trees and ended up in this predicament? And what was my purpose here? These questions I asked the members once we had introduced ourselves.

"Why, this is where all great thinkers go after they have died. We were sent to dwell here and discuss "metaphysico-theologico-cosmogonology" all the long days, which proves my point that paradise after death is a farce and religion a continual mockery..." replied Voltaire.

"I think we are here for penance," Shakespeare leaned over and whispered as Voltaire discussed his point some more. Apparently this "committee" of intellectuals had been arguing on the subject of human nature for quite some time and, having not agreed on one single conclusion, decided to appoint me as sole judge of their debate. I figured it was a Saturday and I had nothing better to do than my homework, so I agreed to stay and listen to their debate on what defines human nature.
"Humans are by nature predators," Machiavelli proclaimed, thus starting the discussion. "Kill or be killed, that is my motto. Take the situation this morning with the cat and mouse. It is our nature to eat the weaker. It is the only way to survive in this harsh world. The cat is like a prince, do you see? It will do whatever it takes to keep alive and, if possible, stay ahead of the other felines. If successful, the cat will reign over a well-endowed territory with plenty of power and prestige. But it takes fortune and experience to stay the leader. One slip can lead to the prince's downfall. What the cat did to the mouse is perfectly moral. It was another way of honing its hunting skills for future kills, and if torture is what it takes to succeed, then so be it.

"The only mistake the cat made was to torture the mouse in the presence of our guest. She, obviously, represented the masses, and the mouse symbolized the occasional individual a prince needs to abuse in order maintain his title. The masses, being more powerful in numbers, but lower in intelligence, than the prince has the capability to destroy the prince by rebelling. In this way, the masses follow the rules of survival. Once the people feel threatened by the ruler, they would do anything to keep their illusion of freedom alive." To all of this I agreed, except for the analogy between the masses and me. I was once again offended by the presumptuous Italian for comparing me to a mindless mob with less than normal intelligence. The floor was then given to Voltaire.

"Human nature. What is human nature, we presume to ask? I agree with Sir Machiavelli that mankind is immoral when the need arises. But it is not only when the need arises that men are immoral. Bad things happen to good people by chance, by fate, or maybe by God's decree. Earthquakes occur leaving innocent babes dead, and the country victorious in bloody battle defines righteousness. What can one do but enjoy what one has and make the best of all possible worlds one happens to come across? Too much time is spent on analyzing why certain things come to pass when mankind could solve half their woes if everyone just cultivated their gardens." And with that thought Voltaire finished his speech. I thought Voltaire was very wise and logical. I wondered myself why mankind would wage war on each other if mankind were not innately evil.
"It is true, my pessimistic comrades, that mankind possesses a bad streak. But it is irrelevant whether we as part of humankind are innately evil or born innocent. God has granted us a wonderful gift of reason, and if not used, we are no better than cats and mice. Nay, I say humans without reason are worse off than the most contemptible of beasts. Beasts do not have the many lecherous vices humans bear. It is through the grace of God that humans are endowed with reason, for reason is the only tool mankind has to improve their moral situation from being lower than a beast. But seeing as my pessimistic comrades do not agree, I have a proposal— a modest proposal—to make. To test the goodness or evilness of human nature, let us kill off all the good people of the world. That way only the bad people of the world will exist. We can then wait and see if the people are truly evil, if chaos and corruption reign, ending with the annihilation of the human species. But if some goodness and order come from what may seem to be evil people, we can deduce that humans have the ability to rise above wickedness." Swift was very persuasive in arguing his point, but I could not decide if reason was after all a gift or a curse. God is unable to blame a beast for its nature, whereas humans are able to distinguish between right and wrong and therefore can be held responsible for their actions.

Rousseau started his argument by stating, "I believe you are all wrong!" His opposition baffled me and startled Swift into silence. Intrigued, I focused my attention onto Rousseau. "Man was never evil and man was never innocent. It is foolish to believe man possessed any characteristics of this sort other than animal instinct. Mankind sprung from savages and only with the dawning of civilization did humans learn the vices of hate, jealousy, and greed. The primitive race had no property or obligation to fuss over; no temptations existed except for food and the drive to procreate. The natural state of man gave rise to freedom and happiness. But reason created inequality, some groups having more wealth, power, and prestige than others. I say, the privileged will constantly fight to maintain their status, while the poor will constantly struggle to gain a higher position. And in our constant fight to maintain or obtain property, mankind learned to be evil."

Swift

Rousseau
By this time I became thoroughly confused. I had trouble deciding who had made the best argument thus far when Mary Wollestonecraft, the only female in the group other than myself, started on her address. "How barbaric of you, sir, to propose that man evolved from savages! Have you no proper upbringing? Obviously not, for if you, or any of these gentlemen, had been taught correctly you would know that man was never born with evil. I agree that man became evil--he cannot help but be a slave to his appetites--but to suggest that civility brought about wickedness is preposterous. Mr. Rousseau, sir, I have read that you adored virtue, yet how is it that you do not practice what you preach? I have heard you love often and fondly, and I am not insinuating that your love was of the neighborly type."

At this remark, Rousseau turned a few shades redder and mumbled an inaudible comment about how women should stay in their place. I fully enjoyed Wollestonecraft's tart assertion and how it made all the men in the room squirm in their seats. I thought the men were too presumptuous anyhow, and anything Wollestonecraft said to make the Italian beside me uncomfortable was enough to make me adore her no matter what her position was on the subject. The silent tension was soon shattered by Shakespeare's oration.

"The world is just a stage," Shakespeare eloquently began. "One man's exit is another man's entrance. Take Hamlet, for example. Was it fate that destroyed the royal family of Denmark, or was it a judgment flaw on Hamlet's part that caused the death of his friends, family members, and himself? His decisions affected the lives of many, and yet he was only one person. I imply that any present action taken by one man sets the stage for future situations. Our guest is a prime illustration of my point. Her decision to walk this morning predetermined that a mouse lived, a cat go hungry, and our discussion on the nature of man take place. As to the nature of man, I discern that it is up to each individual to discover his or her own definition of man's nature. Situations differ from person to person; thus no single definition can fully encompass the true meaning of
human nature. Besides, would it not be horribly boring if we did determine the meaning of human nature and every other philosophical inquiry?"

On this note, Shakespeare finished his brilliant speech, and I was the only one left to voice my thoughts. From the collection of arguments I had heard, I was suddenly struck by inspiration. I was to bring enlightenment to these fellow intellects. The world would rid itself of crime, hate, and suffering from my profound wisdom. The mysteries of the universe would soon be revealed. But before I could utter sound, the scene in front of my eyes swirled into a rainbow of psychedelic colors. I blinked a few times and found a strange face floating above my own. The cottage, Gerald Vermin, and the committee were gone, and an anxious biker was left hovering in their place. The speeding biker had evidently collided into me while I was walking and knocked me unconscious by the side of the road. Satisfied that I had neither broken any bones nor received a concussion, the biker pedaled off and left me to contemplate my bizarre experiences on the way home.

To this day, whenever a person asks me for the meaning of life, I smile and tell them to take a walk and get lost.
Viewing Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, the audience takes a journey through the question of who is the most important figure in the painting. In my own search, I found an answer that was as unexpected as it was delightful. Velasquez plays an elaborate and artificial game with our perception of the relationships in the portrait. In *Las Meninas*, he has inverted all of the conventional rules and expectations and, in doing so, subtly comments on the whole art of depiction and the role and status of the artist.

At first glance, I was sure that the little princess, the Infanta, was the most important character in this piece. She is in the center of the painting, making her the focal point of attention. The colors Velasquez used to paint her also highlight her centrality. She is wearing a very light colored dress, and the look and tone of her face adds a dimension to the painting that none of the other characters do. She is flanked by her maids of honor—*las meninas*—who give the painting its title. These maids of honor give her an undeniable air of importance. In addition, Velasquez gives her two direct foil characters: the female dwarf and the little boy. The dwarf is dressed in colors that contrast those of the Infanta, with the dark and
sultry blue playing an antagonistic role to the innocence and purity of the Infanta's pale yellow dress. The facial features also create a very obvious incongruity. The extremity of the dwarf's muddled and sullen face gives the princess' refined and precise features even greater clarity than if the dwarf were not present at all. The little boy, who has been called Nicolasito, is the other foil character in the painting used by Velasquez to deceive us. In many interpretations, he has been identified as the court jester, and so the boy "child" is juxtaposed with the "adult" little girl. Nicolasito is shown playfully treading on the sleepy dog; his mischievous action contrasts the little girl's very still and mature pose. His pants are also a symbolic representation of his ability to play, and because of this, his clothing is in sharp opposition with the inhibiting dress of the Infanta.

Due to the pains Velasquez took to portray the Infanta as the most important character in the piece, it would be fairly easy for the audience to conjecture that Velasquez is portraying the importance of the social position the Infanta holds. One could say the painting speaks of the different social status levels present at the time and the different ways children moved from childhood to adulthood in each level. However, one look at where Velasquez is standing and the angle of his face leads the viewer to a new point of interest—the figure that the majority of the painting's characters look towards.

The King and Queen, who would be standing where we are, are next in line to be the most prominent and important figures in Velasquez's piece. Indeed, the scrutinizing and thoughtful look on Velasquez's face brings the reader to a realization that they are the subjects of his painting and the figures that are being painted on the large canvas that stands before him. Velasquez makes sure that we are drawn to the mirror in the back of the room, which
frames the bodies of the King and Queen. The reflection of the King and Queen and the gleam of the colors in their dress in contrast to the darkness that surrounds them make them stand out. In the background, the mirror their image is reflected in could easily be swallowed up by the surrounding shadows were the colors not easily distinguishable from the rest. The placing of the two large paintings directly above in the region of shadows causes the mirror to stand out that much more.

The exact placement of light and darkness is very important in the piece as a whole. To the right of the painting, one can see an immense stream of light filtering in through an extension of the wall that lies beyond the frame of the painting. This source of light directs the audience’s eyes to fall on the only other source of light, which enters through the door at the back of the room. This source of light then proceeds to direct the viewer’s attention to the mirror, bringing the audience’s focus to the image of the King and Queen reflected in it.

The play of light and dark make the most important figure the man standing on the stairs right outside of the doorway. The backward facing stance he takes in the hallway creates the feeling that he has just left the room of action and is turning back once more either to receive instruction or merely to enjoy one last glance at the objects of the portrait being painted. Without him leaving and the door being left open, the last stream of light in the back of the room might not have been cast. He is the cause that led to the entrance of light at that specific and crucial area in the room. The aesthetic form and position of his arm also
highlights his importance. In the hallway, he seems to be holding on to a curtain or edging of some sort. His silhouette next to the image in the mirror closes the space, and the placement and angle of his arm points to the mirror and appropriately, once again, directs the viewer's attention to the King and Queen. Without his presence in the doorway, the King and Queen might otherwise go unnoticed.

Velasquez's portraits are a result of a unique and engaging blend of qualities that are often inconsistent, and the two qualities that most stand out in this particular portrait are grandeur and realism. Very generally, the portrait illustrates the image of a life of grandeur, and the characters in this piece help to accentuate this quality by their attire and countenance. This life of grandeur is presented as the would-be reality of the painting, and this is where Velasquez's genius takes flight. With this orientation, the audience considers the Infanta to be the reality in this portrait. However, upon seeing the image of the King and Queen in the mirror at the back of the room, viewers shift their attention to the King and Queen. But the only King and Queen that we as an audience see is the image we are given in the mirror. This image, being merely a reflection, cannot possibly be reality, but only a reflection of reality. This would make the man in the doorway irrelevant and would completely eradicate the significance of his presence because he is drawing the audience's attention to something unreal—the "depth" of the painting. The only real thing in this painting is art, and therefore, the most important figure would have to be the creator of art, the artist. Velasquez, by putting himself in the portrait, shifts our focus to the art and the artist as we move beyond our initial perceptions and primary expectations.
The size of the canvas Velasquez is painting on is a symbolic representation of this idea. Its exaggerated size would make the viewer question its importance, and with careful thought, the viewer might venture to say that what he is painting is the most important thing. We have already discovered that the King and Queen are illusory figures created by the artist; therefore the importance of Las Meninas is what the painting as a whole is saying. Although Velasquez is painting a portrait of the royal couple, it is not the portrait that he is commenting on but art itself. However, art in and of itself does not have the capacity to create—it needs a creator, and this in turn makes Velasquez the most important figure in the painting.

His painting of the King and Queen and their daughter is a tool used by the artist to immortalize himself, placing his own importance above that of the subjects of the portrait. I am sure Velasquez was pleased to have an opportunity to encourage the King and Queen to reflect favorably upon his status as a painter of the royal household (another reason for placing himself in the portrait along with the members of the court) and indeed upon the status of painting in general. Velasquez, through this painting, makes a powerful remark about the deceptive nature of portraiture and the significance of the artist. In touching on his brilliant use of deception in Las Meninas, I can only hope to have uncovered one part of this multi-faceted jewel.