

TELOS



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Feeling Art: Experiencing Art in its Contextual Interpretation

Gustavo Garcia

Various philosophers and artist have developed theories of art that seek to address matters such as beauty, purpose, and meaning. Plato proposed a theory that has definitive parameters, which provide uncompromising answers to the three topics above. Contrary to Plato, art critic Clive Bell rejects the notion of an empirical standard that supplies a conclusive purpose and meaning to art independent of a perceiver. In this essay, I examine Clive Bell's theory of art and demonstrate how his account fails to recognize a transcendent aspect to art criticism.ⁱ Plato's theory of art will serve as a contrast to Bell's, and this will allow us to see the deficiencies of Plato's perspective as well. Although both theories have some merit, their overall emphasis leads each one to a false dichotomy, which I hope to resolve with the help of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of art. A theory must recognize the intricate relationship between artist, spectator, and the context in which art is both created and encountered. Using the cave paintings on the walls of

Lascaux, I will show that the beauty, purpose, and meaning of art are relative to the viewer, but the viewer's experience of art is also intertwined with a context that exceeds the individual's experience, and this objective standard makes one's experiences coherent.

In his book *Art*, Clive Bell notes that people delineate "works of art" (exceptional art) in distinction from all other classes of art.ⁱⁱ This distinction, Bell says, is due to provoked *aesthetic emotions*ⁱⁱⁱ that accompany exceptional art (Bell 186). In addition, Bell asks if there is a common quality to all works of visual art that provide aesthetic emotion. Thus, he identifies the necessary component as *significant form*, which he defines as "lines and colors combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions" (Bell 187). Consequently, these two requirements identify exceptional art. This system of Bell does not make room for an exceptional piece of art that is void of aesthetic emotion and significant form. Therefore, Bell refrains from using the word "beautiful" to describe exceptional art because he claims that beautiful is colloquially used for objects that do not provoke aesthetic emotion. Bell distinguishes between two types of such objects: nature, which some occasionally perceive in it what

they perceive in art, and the “desirable.” In brief, Bell says that neither provides aesthetic emotion that a cathedral or statues afford because their beauty is not one of aesthetic quality (Bell 188–89). He recognizes, however, that it is possible for a cathedral to be void of aesthetic emotion, but this reduces the cathedral to mere art. A critic of art might inform someone about the various forms and relations of forms a cathedral has, but the academic explanation of the cathedral’s structure does not make it exceptional art unless one *feels* it for oneself—that is, feels emotionally stirred by it (Bell 187). If personal experiences can be detached from the world wherein one’s encounters with art take place, then Bell’s aesthetic system makes sense because it asserts that one’s subjective experience determines exceptional art, and that we only evaluate an encounter with art or exceptional art. We shall see that the evaluations one makes are not simply between two types of art, however, precisely because no experience is ever detached from the world in the manner that Bell claims. I will analyze a problem this raises for Bell’s theory, but now I will briefly explore the art theory of Plato.

I would like to highlight three distinct qualities found in Plato’s *Republic* that succinctly summarize his theory of art. First,

Plato presupposes a dualism between *reality* and *appearances of reality*. This metaphysical dichotomy can be seen in common names we recognize for several individuals (Plato 33): “Let us take any common instance; there are beds and tables in the world—plenty of them. . . . But there are only two ideas or forms of them—one the idea of a bed, the other of a table” (Plato 33). Therefore, the idea of beds or tables are what really exist, and the expressions of these ideas are only semblances of existence (Plato 34). Hence, Plato concludes that a carpenter can rightly be said to create or make something because the product is based on an idea of reality; on the other hand, the painter is neither a creator nor maker of anything but an imitator of what others makes (Plato 34–35). Second, Plato’s metaphysics serves as the grounding for what art is supposed to do. In book 2 of the *Republic*, Plato points out that a most serious fault is to tell a lie. We participate in this error when we create things that do not correspond to the likeness of the original (Plato 10–11). Therefore, the purpose of art is to educate the soul, to conform the perceiver into an ideal citizen of the state. For this reason, Plato states that the dissident painter is to be censored and expelled from the state because his art will corrupt souls through depictions of “vice,

intemperance, meanness, and indecency” (Plato 31). Although I agree that art can have a pedagogical function, I believe this enterprise runs the risk of being propaganda. For example, art as propaganda has largely been used in politics to advance a biased cause that will sway the viewer’s perspective. Nevertheless, Plato’s concern is to protect the young who are impressionable and lack the judgement necessary to discern between truth and lies (Plato 11); thus, the aim of art is to promote virtuous thought (Plato 11). Herein lies Plato’s standard for what constitutes art as beautiful, which is the third point I will explain. Beauty, says Plato, has the presence of grace, harmony, simplicity, which is characteristic of a right and ordered mind (Plato 31). As mentioned above, art must not promote moral deformity, and it must not corrupt the perceiver through inaccurate representations of the *real*. Consequently, Plato’s believes that beauty depends on a correct representation and knowledge of the objects we paint.^{iv} Per Plato, beautiful art should promote self-control, temperance, and decency (Plato 31). One of the best ways to accomplish this says Plato, is through the art of measurement, numbering and weighing, which rescue the human understanding (Plato 39). Measurements allow for greater accuracy in representing the real. Therefore,

the work of a carpenter is beautiful so long as its dimensions match the reality of the ideas they embody. The main point within Plato’s theory is that the standard for what is and is not beautiful art depends on a dualistic perspective that assigns a universality to beauty, and the purpose of art. This is one of the appealing characteristics of Plato’s dualism because a piece’s beauty can be judged based on its accurate portrayal of an idea. This dualism is appealing for arguing against the subjective system of Bell, yet I will show that it is not necessary to embrace Plato’s dualism as an alternative to Bell’s relativistic art theory.

Both theories ignore a crucial point about one’s experience with *art in general*^v and that is that all experiences are interpreted. When one encounters art in general it is not some copy of a copy as Plato suggest. Plato assumes a distinction that, according to Hannah Arendt, causes us to leave the world of appearances, which is the realm that we know, for some unknown realm of forms (Arendt 23). On the other hand, Bell’s error is that he narrowly conceives of art as having the forms and relations of forms. Hans-Georg Gadamer shows us, however, that we encounter a defined world in art because it is “the bearer of a meaningful life-function within a cultic or social context” (Gadamer

97). Since experience is not detached from the world that supplies the meaning for a given encounter, I find Plato's assumed realm of ideas and Bell's insistence on a subjective aesthetic problematic. Arendt states the reason that our experiences cannot be detached from their contextual existence^{vi} in the world is that nothing exists in isolation to everything else: "nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*. . . . Nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular" (Arendt 19). One's interactions with art are not in the singular, there is no person who has a naked encounter with art. *Naked* implies no covering, and by this Bell seems to conclude that if one is to distinguish exceptional art from other art, they must uncover art of its context to encounter it for oneself. If art in general and interpretation cannot be separated, what is the source of one's aesthetic emotion? Does personal preference or interpretation provide the aesthetic emotion? The problem with Bell's theory is that it assumes exceptional art provides an aesthetic emotion only, whereas Gadamer correctly states that art *speaks* something about us and the world we inhabit: "when we say that the work of art *says* something to us and that it thus belongs to the matrix of things we have to understand, our assertion is not a

metaphor, . . . the work of art is an object of hermeneutic" (Gadamer 98). This might appear to be Cartesian in nature because art represents us and the world we inhabit, but this would be an exaggeration of the point I am making. My point is that art presupposes a context within which we as humans understand art. The paintings on the cave walls at Lascaux are a great example of what I am saying. We analyze these images and claim that they are paintings, but why do we say they are paintings and not the Schrödinger equation in quantum physics? We *interpret* the images to be of certain animals and not others; therefore, no one walks away from the Lascaux cave paintings and says they saw images of the Loch Ness monster. Yet why is this the case? The world we are involved in has meaning, and this meaning is applied to understand our current context and the past as well. This is not a static one-way process and, as we will see in the next section, the past influences our current understanding of the world.

Like Gadamer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that our perceptions become an "interpretation of the signs that sensibility provides in accordance with bodily stimuli" (*Phenomenology of Perception* 35). Merleau-Ponty is saying that what we see is interpreted by our bodily existence in the world;

therefore, art is experienced, and in this regard, Bell rightly declares that we *feel* exceptional art. Nevertheless, Bell leaves out interpretation that is vital to the experience of art. Case in point, Charles Taylor states that we can sometimes be at a loss for words when asked “why do you dislike that painting?” (Taylor 24). Taylor captures the fact that one may or may not *feel* an art piece without being able to articulate why one likes it;^{vii} but this does not nullify an experience that is grounded in the world.^{viii} Bell would assert that one did not *feel* the art. But that is obviously why Taylor’s question is asked, and remains an issue. Why do we have aesthetic emotions with exceptional art and not with unexceptional art? This can be seen in the problem I have sought to highlight; Bell gives no reason for why some objects recognized as beautiful could be void of aesthetic emotion, he just asserts that exceptional art must have aesthetic emotion. The stronger case seems to be that Bell’s subjective theory lacks a recognition of a person’s involvement or contextual existence that provides the meaning for our experiences. As mentioned already this is problematic for Bell’s perspective because without a definite separation between art, individual, and the contextual existence it is nearly impossible to know whether the art or

interpretation of the art is the source for aesthetic emotion. Consequently, prior to an introduction to the Lascaux cave paintings, I could have encountered these objects on my own and claimed to be emotionally moved by them, but such an encounter is not void of past experiences and influences that I obtain from my contextual existence. The point is that no one ever has an unadulterated experience with art. Bell argues that the point is not whether one is coached or not in one’s experience of art, but that one is moved by it (Bell 188). I have contended, however, that one can never know; Bell claims that the work of art is the source of the aesthetic emotion, yet interpretation can equally be the cause. I say *equally* because I recognize that Bell makes a good point in observing that humans have preferences, and we appropriate certain art because it appeals to us. Although I agree with Bell, his perspective falls short due to its exclusivity, and this is the problem with Plato’s theory of art as well.

We often approach aesthetical theories in art with false dichotomies, assuming that the purpose and meaning of art must be one thing or another. Although I agree with Bell that an encounter with art will be subjective because individual selves with varied likes and dislikes experience art, I am concerned when people distort this to

promote a radical relativism that does not allow for standard judgments of art. After all, art itself is rendered unintelligible if we separate it from its interconnectedness with the world we co-inhabit. Plato seems to be helpful by providing an objective standard that reveals a purpose and meaning to art, but the consequence is a system based on the presupposition of a dualism of true reality and mere appearance. We will now examine the phenomenological account of art in Merleau-Ponty's essay, "Eye and Mind," which shows how art is more than an internal emotion or a mere representation of something real.^{ix}

Merleau-Ponty begins "Eye and Mind" by describing two ways of understanding our being in the world. The first perspective he calls *scientific thinking*, which suspends the world by objectifying it; this perspective parallels Plato's theory of art. On this view, our bodies function as information processing machines that are uninvolved in the world (EM 282); the body does not influence reality but simply takes in information of the world and accesses it. Thus an artist, per the scientific view, copies the world onto a canvas, and excellent art would probably be that which can copy the world exactly. Merleau-Ponty believes this perspective is an unnatural way of

understanding our being in the world, however. Because there is a mutual influence between ourselves and the world, the painter is what he sees and does and the painting itself is the embodiment of the painter's perception: "with no other technique than what his eyes and hands discover in seeing and painting, he persists in drawing from this world" (EM 283). This seems a bit confusing but Merleau-Ponty's second paragraph clarifies what he means by our involvement in the world.

According to the scientific perspective, the mind is responsible for the things it does in this world. Merleau-Ponty responds by saying that "we cannot imagine how a *mind* could paint," but we know that artists transform the world into paintings by "lending their body to the world" (EM 283). He explains this body-lending process over against scientific thinking, which claims we formulate ideas about the world and act accordingly;^x moreover, as I mentioned already in connection with Plato, one's actions are successful as far as they accurately represent the world. Merleau-Ponty points out that there is no contact between the world and the mind in a scientific approach. This is something Bell fails to consider because in his theory the only encounters that matter are the ones between

the art and the viewer, and everything else is insignificant. Contrary to Bell, Merleau-Ponty claims that painting the world is only possible because our movement and sight are intertwined as being in a human body (EM 283–84), but I would go as far as to suggest that even one's preferences can only be possible in the intertwined occurrence Merleau-Ponty is describing. For example, he says, "my mobile body makes a difference in the visible world, being part of it; that is why I can steer it through the visible" (EM 283). What he means is that action in the world is not the process of calculating actions before they're actualized; thus, Merleau-Ponty describes our movements as effortless: "I have only to see something to know how to reach it and deal with it, even if I do not know how this happens in the nervous machine" (EM 283). Merleau-Ponty goes on to say that this "extraordinary overlapping" between vision and movement forbid us from thinking about vision as a mental representation of the world for two reasons. First, the body is not a subject among objects but "a thing among things" because it sees and is seen, touches and is touched (EM 284–85). Bell ignores this and primarily recognizes art to be something subjects perceive. Second, the body is "caught in the fabric of the world" (EM 284), meaning that our bodies are made

of the same stuff as the world. What's important to understand is that Merleau-Ponty is conveying the fact that there is no separation between contents of the mind and the world outside of the mind. Rather, the nature of our being is embodied in human flesh, and this body is so involved with the world that it is the world. Bell on the other hand, limits the phenomenon of viewing art to a mere emotional experience, which undervalues the richness of our bodily interactions with art. Some might object that I am exaggerating the experience of viewing art because there is nothing more to this experience than the perception and evaluation of what we see (art), but this criticism presupposes the dualism that both Bell and Plato hold.^{xi} Plato's theory of representation and Bell's subjective approach both necessitate a bodily encounter with the world if they are to be sensible. In order to further clarify the richness of the intertwined experience that both Bell and Plato lack, I will now describe this process in the act of painting.

Merleau-Ponty proceeds to explain how his prior description of our bodily nature and its involvement in the world produce paintings. Since the body and *things* (a reference to everything other than the body) are "made of the same stuff," Merleau-Ponty

states that nature exists inside us (EM 285). The concepts of quality, light, color, depth are not tangible objects we can touch but this does not mean they do not exist. Merleau-Ponty says they exist in us, and we know this because they “awaken an echo in our body . . . things have an internal equivalent in me” (EM 285). As he mentioned before, these *things* are not mental representations that take the place of the actual thing as it is in the world. If these things are equally in us, we should not look at the world as a suspended object just like Bell and Plato. Merleau-Ponty says the same is true regarding paintings because we do not look at paintings as we do things (EM 285). For example, he speaks of the animals painted on the walls of Lascaux and how they are not *there* in the same way certain rocks are present to form the walls.^{xii} Consequently, he suggests that we should not ask *where* a painting is, as if we were looking at a thing, rather we should adjust our perception to see according to, and with the painting (EM 285). One thing Merleau-Ponty cautions is that we shouldn’t conclude that a painting would convey a single reality like a photograph (EM 294–95). He goes on to say that “nothing is ever finally acquired and possessed for good” (EM 297), and this includes what we perceive through paintings. The reason being that paintings are “the

inspiration and expiration of Being,” and so much so that Merleau-Ponty says, “it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted” (EM 288). Merleau-Ponty ends by saying that just as we cannot encapsulate being into one specific thing, we should not seek to do the same thing with the world in painting (EM 297). However, we can continue to lend our body to the world to explore aspects of being we have yet to know.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological account of art clearly shows that Bell and Plato have a simplistic and deficient understanding of our experience with art. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty serves the purpose of reminding us that a theory of art need not resort to extremes such as representationalism or subjectivism but only to recognize that our encounters with art are multifaceted, meaning that there is slight room for both. We must recognize that it is not enough to accept their accounts of art; we must consider our contextual experience with art. This point brings me to where I cautiously side with Merleau-Ponty. It seems that Merleau-Ponty opens the door to a sort of relativism by suggesting that reality does not convey a single meaning, and if this is the case then ultimately his theory does lead to a subjective relativism, and one interpretation

of the cave paintings at Lascaux is no more consistent than the interpretation of the paintings being about quantum physics. The overall emphasis on our bodily existence that I have outlined in Merleau-Ponty's essay, however, serves as a boundary mark that rules out arbitrary interpretations of art. The body must be kept central to any theory of art in order to avoid the notion that art has only one meaning or no meaning at all.

9–44. Print.

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ⁱ Art criticism does not involve a single human's experience. I reject the idea that art criticism is merely subjective. There is a standard that is beyond our mere encounter with art.

ⁱⁱ Bell does not specifically use *exceptional art*; however, I think the word *exceptional* succinctly clarifies for the reader the distinction Bell intends to make between art that emotionally moves one, and thus stands out in a way that other art does not.

ⁱⁱⁱ Regardless of the type of emotion, what is central to aesthetic emotion is the emotional stirring that occurs when one perceives exceptional art. Bell does distinguish these emotions from the desirability of an object (189).

^{iv} Yet this raises a problem for painting because it is understood to be a copy of "shadows" that represent the forms themselves; therefore, painting can never step into the realm of creating objects like a carpenter. As a result, Plato's ideas of what art should do appear to exclude painting from the discussion.

^v *Art in general* does not exclude Bell's dichotomy between art and exceptional art; however, art in general does not separate one's experience with any type of art from the interpretation of such an experience that makes the event sensible and thus possible.

^{vi} An experience occurs in a context that preexists the encounter, which makes my encounter coherent. The idea of painter, painting, that humans analyze art with certain language, for enjoyment and other reasons provides the context for our worldly involvements.

^{vii} There is also the possibility of considering physical touch as a manifestation of what I am trying to convey regarding a contextual existence of art. People often say of an event that "you had to be there" to get the experience, and this is often said about something that we can mentally grasp through prior experiences. Yet, we know that a mental grasp still lacks

what only a physical participation affords. Moreover, the more humanity surrounds itself in technology, it seems we lose an experience of an album when it no longer has a tangible product with art on the cover and instead download an mp3. The same can be said of this loss in reading a book mediated by a device over against an actual book I would hold in my hands. I do not think these are subjective preferences but objective qualities in an experience we lose. Case in point, to see Led Zep-Again perform at the Hermosa Beach festival is not the same thing as seeing Led Zeppelin.

^{viii} We often lack the professional terms that go along with analyzing art, but it does not follow that because one lacks the verbiage, our experiences are purely subjective and separate from what I have called a contextual existence.

^{ix} Hereafter this essay is cited as EM followed by the page number.

^x Of course for Plato we do not create the forms, but they exist in contrast to the world that represents the forms.

^{xi} Although Bell rejects Plato's theory of art, both have in common the way they reduce our experience of art to an inside/outside distinction in reality. For Bell this comes in the form of the art outside of me producing some internal emotion. For Plato, reality exists more purely in the faculties of proper reasoning, which occur in the mind, as contrasted with the mere shadows of reality outside in the world of appearances.

^{xii} The paintings are present because they are in the caves of Lascaux and not on the walls of the Grand Canyon, but they are not only present in this way. They are also present from the perspective of these images, which incorporate a history that predates the viewer and artist. Their spatial location also adds to the way the paintings are present because one would not get the same experience by looking at a picture of the paintings at Lascaux.

The Ethical Validity of Euthanasia

Edwin Oyarce

When people think about the things they have control over in their life, one thing that is commonly believed is that you have autonomous control over your own body. It is generally agreed that nobody has a right to do anything to your body without your consent, and that you as an autonomous person have final say over your own body. This might stem from our American sense of individual freedom and liberty, and our rights declared in the Fifth Amendment of the US Constitution not to be deprived of life, liberty, or property. We usually forget about the next few words following that phrase: “life, liberty or property, without due process of law.” We might not think about them very often, but there are actually quite a few laws in place that regulate what we can and cannot do with our own life, liberty, or property. The consumption of certain drugs is illegal, you must wear a helmet when riding a motorcycle or even a bicycle, states have a right to regulate abortion, sex work, until recently marriage, and what some may consider the ultimate expression of bodily autonomy—the subject of this paper—euthanasia. All these actions are regulated by laws even though they only affect our own bodies and do not

greatly affect others. According to most, euthanasia is immoral, and therefore should be regulated, but its morality is something that can arguably be seen differently through the ideas of Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and James Rachels.

Euthanasia is the practice of intentionally ending a life to relieve pain and suffering. The word euthanasia is etymologically Greek for “a good death.” By voluntary euthanasia, I mean the decision to request euthanasia by a rational person. The idea of passive euthanasia “is that it is permissible, at least in some cases, to withhold treatment and allow a patient to die” (Rachels 863). Active euthanasia, by contrast, is held as a “direct action designed to kill the patient” (Rachels 863). It is my belief that voluntary euthanasia, both passive and active, while mostly illegal, is a morally acceptable act when viewed through the moral frameworks of both Mill’s utilitarianism and greatest happiness principle, and Kant’s categorical imperative and his views on autonomy. Euthanasia can be classified in three types, voluntary, nonvoluntary, and involuntary. Voluntary euthanasia can be further divided into passive and active. Informed consent is a key element of euthanasia, so for the purposes of this paper, I will be talking about voluntary

euthanasia, both passive and active, and will not discuss nonvoluntary and involuntary euthanasia which is usually deemed immoral because of the lack of informed consent on the part of the patient. The paper is from the perspective of the patient, a terminal, rational agent who is willing to die and who in fact is seeking to die because death would be preferable to the pain and suffering the patient is feeling. When I speak of euthanasia, I mean voluntary euthanasia, which for the purposes of this paper includes both passive and active types.

One moral framework I will use to evaluate euthanasia is John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism. This framework has what Mill likens to a first principle, which is the greatest happiness principle. The greatest happiness principle "holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure" (Mill 365). The more an action fits into this principle, the more "right" it is seen to be.

Mill further clarifies his framework by separating pleasures into two kinds, qualitative, and quantitative. Of these two, Mill states that "we are justified in ascribing

to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality so far outweighing quantity as to render it in comparison, of small account" (Mill 366). He then gives an example to prove this by saying that "few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures" (Mill 366). So, by this he means that quantitative pleasures of the sensual (of the senses) kind do not hold a candle to the higher, qualitative pleasures of an intellectual kind. Mill also specifies that the greatest happiness principle applies to everybody equally, so no specific person's happiness is more important than another's. He holds this to be "the dictate of justice. All persons are deemed to have a right to equality of treatment, except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse" (Mill 394).

Mill's utilitarianism also has a conviction that Mill calls the "ultimate sanction of the greatest happiness morality" (Mill 379). This conviction is the "deeply rooted conception which every individual even now has of himself as a social being tends to make him feel it one of his natural wants that there should be harmony between his feelings and aims and those of his fellow creatures" (Mill 379). This means that Mill believes that we all have a natural feeling

inside of us and that we all have similar feelings and goals. This is important because without this, the structure of our behavior would fall apart. Instead, we all work with each other in unison to achieve mutually beneficial ends which fulfill our interests. This is a sort of empathy that we should all have towards one another.

The other framework I will use to look at the issue of the morality of euthanasia is that of Immanuel Kant and his categorical imperative. Kant lays out the foundation of his ethics in his writing “Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals.” Kant believes that a metaphysics of morals is important and said that “A metaphysic of morals is thus indispensably necessary not merely because one wants to investigate and understand the source of practical principles which are present a priori in our reason, but because morality itself remains subjected to all sorts of corruption as long as this guiding thread, this ultimate norm for correct moral judgment, is lacking. For if any action is to be morally good, it is not enough that it should conform to the moral law—it must also be done for the sake of that law” (Kant 315).

Kant believes that our actions need to be guided by a moral law, and that our actions need to be done in accordance with this moral

law, out of duty to the law itself, not out of any inclinations we may have. He says that “if an action done out of duty is supposed to exclude totally the influence of inclination, and along with inclination, every object of volition, then nothing remains that could determine the will except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for this practical law. What is left therefore is the maxim, to obey this sort of law even when doing so is prejudicial to all my inclinations” (Kant 320). Therefore if actions are to have moral worth, neither the result nor the inclinations which are temptations that draw us from our adherence to duty should be considered. We should stick strictly to whether an action is done out of duty, in compliance with the laws. Kant also states that to follow the law, we must have autonomy, and a free rational mind. “Everything in nature works in accordance with the idea of laws. Only a rational being has the power to act in accordance with the idea of laws—that is, in accordance with principles—and thus has a will” (Kant 325).

The laws that Kant sets forth are his principles and imperatives, which affirm our autonomy and act as a compass to guide a person away from faulty actions. He defines a categorical imperative as “one that represented an action as itself objectively

necessary, without regard to any further end” (Kant 326). His first Categorical Imperative, also known as the Formula of Universality, is to “act only on that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (Kant 329). This is a simple and straightforward rule by which you can look at an action and universalize it to see if it leads to a self-defeating contradiction if everyone does it. The second formulation is his practical imperative, also known as the Formula of Humanity, which is to “act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in any other person, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (Kant 333). His third principle, otherwise known as the Formula of Autonomy, is the “principle of the will: the supreme condition of the will’s harmony with universal practical reason is the Idea of the will of every rational being as a will that legislates universal law. By this principle all maxims are rejected which are inconsistent with the wills own universal lawgiving” (Kant 334).

Kant views autonomy as a condition of utmost necessity for a person to be able to make laws. Lawgiving that determines the correctness of action cannot come from anyone except a rational person, so “autonomy is thus the basis of the dignity of

human nature and of every rational nature” (Kant 336). He also regarded freedom as a presupposed property of the will of all rational beings when he said that “It follows that reason, as practical reason, or as the will of a rational being, must regard itself as free. That is to say, the will of a rational being can be a will of its own only under the idea of freedom, and it must therefore—for purposes of action—be attributed to all rational beings” (Kant 342). So we see that freedom and autonomy are essential to Kant.

Now that we have identified a few basic tenets of the moral frameworks of both Mill and Kant, I will clarify why I consider the supposed distinction of active and passive euthanasia to be morally unequal as wrong. The difference between the two is well described by James Rachels in his essay “Active and Passive Euthanasia.” He clarifies the differences between the two by saying that “the important difference between active and passive euthanasia is that, in passive euthanasia, the doctor does not do anything to bring about the patient’s death . . . and the patient dies of whatever ills already afflict him. In active euthanasia, however, the doctor does something to bring about the patient’s death; he kills him” (Rachels 866). As Rachels says in his essay, most people have an issue with a decision to bring about

death and view it as a sort of murder. This is why active euthanasia is illegal in the United States, but passive euthanasia is legal in around 7 states. Passive euthanasia, however, is not as passive as we think; as Rachels says, “the decision to let a patient die is subject to moral appraisal in the same way that a decision to kill him would be subject to moral appraisal” (Rachels 866). If you really think about it, deciding to not do something requires the same rational deliberations as deciding to kill a person. You are still weighing the pros and cons of an issue before coming to a conclusion that it is better for this person to no longer suffer and be allowed to die. The only difference is that you are not getting your hands dirty and are saying that you did not make a decision you just passively chose inaction.

Rachels gives an example in the form of a thought experiment, where a man wants a child dead for his own personal gain and decides to kill the child while the child is bathing. In the passive euthanasia scenario, the child slips, hits his head and slowly drowns in the bath as the man watches, making the active choice not to help. In the active euthanasia scenario, the man walks in, strikes the child on the head, and watches him drown in the bath. I think that it is safe to say that when taking both situations into account,

we do not view the man as having behaved particularly better in either scenario. It is my opinion that the active euthanasia scenario is actually less cruel than the passive euthanasia scenario, because at least in Rachel’s example, the boy is unconscious and unaware of his predicament and hopefully not in pain or fear. When voluntary euthanasia is being considered, the person is awake and conscious, and usually in extreme pain. They do not have the benefit of being unconscious and drowning, and oblivious of their immediate pain and predicament, like the boy in Rachel’s active euthanasia scenario.

In my opinion, a better, more accurate scenario about passive euthanasia would be the situation of a worker at a magic show, where a person is dropped into an enclosed see through vat of water Houdini style, and the box is lowered below stage where a worker is waiting to open the container. In the active euthanasia scenario, however, the worker opens the top and shoots the person in the vat. But in the passive scenario, the worker merely stands outside, watching the person drown. The person drowning knows that there is a worker there to help them and can see the worker stand there and do nothing but watch the person drowning and struggling. To me this passive decision, when observed by a rational person who knows

they are going to die, is just as bad if not worse than that of the active decision in which someone puts the rational person out of their misery and saves them from going through unnecessary pain and suffering. Rachels observes: “Active euthanasia is probably preferable to passive euthanasia, rather than the reverse. To say otherwise is to endorse the option that leads to more suffering rather than less and is contrary to the humanitarian impulse that prompts the decision not to prolong his life in the first place” (Rachels 864). This is why, in addressing euthanasia here, I mean to include both active and passive euthanasia in the consideration of euthanasia as moral, rather than the commonly held belief that active euthanasia is immoral, and only passive euthanasia can be considered moral. And while I have come to agree that active euthanasia is preferable to passive euthanasia, I still believe that passive euthanasia should be allowed for those who autonomously wish for passive euthanasia to be an available option.

A key issue in euthanasia is the decision that life is no longer worth living, and whether euthanasia can be a rational decision. To rationally decide whether life was worth living, we need to consider what it is that makes life worth living in the first

place. In his article “Choosing Death: Philosophical Observations on Suicide and Euthanasia,” Matthews says that Camus and other existentialists claim that life is “absurd,” and that there is nothing external of our lives that makes life worth living for us. Amongst the things that make life worth living is for some, a theistic belief in God. The belief that we are given lives with purpose by God, however, would not necessarily mean that “our lives have meaning for us because they have a purpose in the eyes of God” (Matthews 3). There seems to be a lot of demand that the decision to end one’s own life be made only once a person is very clear about their wishes, and that they rationally decide that life is no longer worth living. Is it truly reasonable and fair, however, to expect a person to know whether life is worth living anymore? As Matthews points out in his paper, “As Albert Camus has said, ‘there is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy’” (Matthews 1). Maybe the basis of a person’s rational decision shouldn’t be as important as just making sure that they are rational when they decide that their condition in life is no longer preferable to that of death, whether they have

their own feelings in mind or the feelings of those around them.

The danger of this is a situation in which a person feels so much despair, that they become suicidal and see no more point in life. For this paper, there is no real difference between suicide and euthanasia. As Matthews writes, choosing to kill oneself is the denial that the value of life is preferred to death, “but if that denial of life’s value is what is significant about suicide, then it is something which suicide shares with other choices which we might make. For instance, those who choose euthanasia, whether active or passive, necessarily have the same view: they regard ending it all as preferable to going on living in their present condition” (Matthews 1). Matthews questions whether such despair can be justified. In some cases, such as that of a terminally ill patient who is in constant excruciating pain and who loses all hope that life is better than death, the despair can be justified. Sometimes the despair is not justified, however, such as the case of a young lover who thinks that the loss of their partner means that there is nothing left to live for in this world. Matthews looks at the rationality of suicide and says that deciding the rationality of the decision is not as easy as merely attempting to diagnose the person as rational or not. In the case of the

young lover who is in pain, while their decision to end their life was not rationally justifiable because we think that time will heal them, there is nothing clinically wrong with the young lover. If we consider a person clinically diagnosed with a major psychotic illness who wishes to end their own life, our initial thought is that they should not be able to make this decision for themselves because they are not rational. Their situation might be hopeless, however, if they are truly psychotically ill, and their hopeless situation would make their decision to end their own life more rational than that of the young lover. I believe that a rational mind free of clinical diagnoses is needed to make the decision to choose euthanasia, but this truly makes me wonder where that line of a rational mind needs to be drawn.

Michael Clark brings in an interesting objection to consequentialist views as the basis for denying euthanasia in his article “Euthanasia and the Slippery Slope.” He presents two arguments against euthanasia, the first being the slippery slope argument. “Once we permit any active voluntary euthanasia we have started down the slippery slope towards allowing other, unacceptable acts of euthanasia. Patients will opt for assisted suicide because of pressure from relatives, motivated by desire to save money;

or requests will be prompted by feelings that they lack worth, or manifest a protest against inadequate care” (Clark 1). The second argument he presents is that “if, even under the most ethically acceptable circumstances, we resort to killing, we will have taken steps which may divert us from the search for alternatives” (Clark 2). These arguments are common held beliefs against euthanasia, but Clark sees them as entirely consequentialist, “and to invoke them, not simply show the need for safeguards to prevent the dangers of falling too far down the slope, but to disallow voluntary euthanasia in these desperate cases, is to fail to respect those patients as an end in themselves” (Clark 2).

Clark’s argument points out the fact that the patients who are terminally ill and making a rational decision that their lives are no longer better than their continued life should not be denied, solely on the possible actions of doctors in the future, or what it might lead us to do in the future if we go down this path. The concerns about future decisions should be dealt with by those making the decisions, not by punishing the terminally ill patients and denying them their liberty and autonomy based on the consequences of their actions. Nor should we use their situation as stop gaps to not have to deal with the issues of when to stop sliding

down the slippery slope. Clark compares this to refusing a political refugee “on the grounds that this risks opening the door to many fraudulent asylum seekers whose motivation is solely ‘economic’” (Clark 3). Or refusing compensation to a plaintiff who suffered an accident “on the grounds that, though it would be just to do so, it incurs the risk that the courts will be flooded with less worthy claimants some of whom may nevertheless succeed, with adverse consequences for the community” (Clark 3). He points out that in each case, if adverse consequences were to occur, they would be the fault of those committing fraud, not with the victims seeking justice.

Kant argues against suicide, however—and by equivalence against euthanasia—by applying the Formula of Universality against it and saying that “a nature whose law was that the very same feeling meant to promote life should actually destroy life would contradict itself, and hence would not endure as nature” (Kant 330). He also uses the Formula of Autonomy against euthanasia by saying that “if he damages himself in order to escape from a painful situation, he is making use of a person merely as a means to maintain a tolerable state of affairs till the end of his life. But a human being is not a thing—not something to be

used merely as a means: he must always in all his actions be regarded as an end in himself” (Kant 333).

Clark, in response to Kant’s Formula of Universality argument against euthanasia, asserts that the argument that it is self-defeating is “not unlike the Hegelian objection that the universalization of ‘love your enemies’ would be self-defeating, since there would then be no enemies to love” (Clark 5). Clark argues that it actually isn’t self-defeating, “since the point of the maxim is to eliminate enmity. Equally, the point of assisted suicide in the desperate cases is to eliminate a condition that its subject would greatly disvalue, and it could not but succeed, since the subject cannot disvalue a condition if it is no longer around to disvalue it.” (Clark 5). In response to Kant’s Formula of Autonomy argument against euthanasia, we must first remember that how Clark identified objections to euthanasia as consequentialist in nature because of their concern with the consequences of the decision. In denying a person euthanasia because of potential future slippery slopes, instead of respecting the individuals as ends in themselves, we are actually using them as the means to protect those who might one day in the future be harmed by the slippery slope or lack of resources researching a treatment.

For example, if patient *x* is in so much pain that she requests a doctor to euthanize her, to deny her request because of future potential abuse of euthanasia for trivial pains would be a decision no longer based on the needs of patient *x* as an individual. The decision to deny patient *x* euthanasia would be done to prevent harm to future patients, making patient *x* a means to protect future patients instead of treating her as an autonomous individual. Clark points out that “the slippery-slope argument against assisted suicide in desperate cases itself incorporates a recognition of the ends principle. It is scarcely consistent, then to deny assistance to those in the desperate terminal states because of the fear of risk to others, at least without recognizing the tension between this consideration and the Kantian desideratum” (Clark 3).

If I were to apply the Formula of Universality to euthanasia, I would say that a person who is terminally ill, with no hope of recovering, who is living in a situation in which death is preferable to their continued life should be allowed to make the voluntary decision to turn to euthanasia. If I were to universalize this, then all people who felt this way would be allowed to make the decision to end their lives, and I do not see this as leading to a contradiction. It is my opinion

that Kant's imperative to treat persons as ends in themselves and not means is the strongest argument to approve the moral value of euthanasia. Why should we keep a person alive if they can no longer have a life worth valuing? What if they lose their rational mind? What about their autonomy? Their freedom? In what way would keeping them alive be treating them as an end? An end to what? The only thing I can think of is an end that affects us, because once that person loses rationality, their mind or their will, they no longer have the power of reason, which Kant claims "distinguishes himself from all other things" (Kant 344). It is my opinion that to allow a person the choice to voluntarily request euthanasia is to respect the value a person holds in what is left of their life, their value in a life without a painful brutal end; it is to respect their autonomy and their dignity.

When we apply the greatest happiness principle to euthanasia, the most obvious rationale we can see is that the person has decided that they have lost the happiness in their life, and that to continue their existence would be to extend their pain. The purpose of the greatest happiness principle is to avoid pain and the privation of pleasure; however, by forcing a person to continue their life and suffering, we are forcing them to experience pain and privation of pleasure. To force

treatment upon them, we are actually doing the opposite of the greatest happiness principle where the patient is concerned. Even if we were to consider those around the patient in general, we see that the only positive value of keeping the patient alive, is that the family gets to experience the patient for more time. However, while some treatments may extend the life of the patient, if the patient is terminal, the extended life of the patient is not necessarily one of happiness and enjoyment, and if the patient is in excruciating pain, it could very well be painful to watch. Either way, extension of life cannot be guaranteed, the patient will eventually die, and in whether or not treatment is forcefully administered, the family and friends will eventually suffer through the death of the patient. By allowing euthanasia, however, we can arguably shorten the suffering of both the patient and the family, successfully minimizing pain for the many.

A utilitarian argument against the single patient opting for euthanasia based on their own singular feelings is that "the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent's own happiness but that of all concerned" (Mill 370). This means that when a person considering euthanasia uses their

lack of happiness as a reason to end their life, they might be wrongly assuming that their happiness is the standard of what is right in conduct, and are forgetting that it is not only their happiness that matters, but the happiness of the many that are in their group. While the greatest happiness must be taken into account, so too must the happiness of all the others affected by the decision be considered. Also, as noted earlier, “All persons are deemed to have a right to equality of treatment, except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse” (Mill 394). The harm to many of a group might be considered by some to be great enough that social expediency requires the consideration of the many overrule the individual’s right to equality of treatment.

Mill himself praised the voluntary actions of a martyr. He said that, “though it is only in a very imperfect state of the world’s arrangement that anyone can best serve the happiness of others by the absolute sacrifice of his own, yet, so long as the world is in that imperfect state, I fully acknowledge that the readiness to make such a sacrifice is the highest virtue which can be found in man” (Mill 370). I believe that a person’s world in which they are in constant pain, are terminally ill, can no longer find joy in life, have to watch their loved ones crying and

suffering at their side and all the while knowing that the constant medical attention and care are depleting the family resources leaving them in even more pain and suffering which they will have to eventually face no matter when the person dies would qualify as an imperfect state of the world’s arrangement. Why then, should this not be a situation in which a person is not merely worried about their happiness lack of happiness, but the happiness of many? Would such a person not be similar to the martyr who sacrifices their own life to better serve the happiness of others, and therefore be worthy of through the self-sacrifice of euthanasia be seen to have the highest virtue which can be found in man?

It is my opinion that when seen through both Kant’s and Mill’s moral frameworks, voluntary euthanasia is morally acceptable. There are issues that need clarifying, such as whether or not a rational decision should be required of a person to make the decision. But I am rational, not clinically diagnosed at this moment, and even I find it hard to truly define what the value of life is. It is also easy to pass judgment and say that euthanasia is morally wrong while you rationalize with a healthy body and calm mind, but the amount of excruciating pain some terminally ill people go through is

impossible to understand, and we must be empathetic to their situation and respect their autonomy to make a decision about their own life based on their worlds conditions. The greatest happiness principle supports euthanasia, as does Kant's imperative to treat people as ends in themselves instead of means.

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On Holy Friendship

Sister Pia St. Romain

Acquaintances are a passing delight. Friendship is pleasant. Holy friendship, however, is eternally satisfying. In his work “Spiritual Friendship,” Aelred of Rievaulx asks, “Shall I say of friendship what John, the friend of Jesus, says of charity: ‘God is friendship’?” (Aelred 144). Holy friendship is more than a human friendship. It is both human and divine. God wants to share his own “friendship,” the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with all humanity. Humans can participate in the life of the Trinity through their relationships with each other. God created humanity for the purpose of receiving this life as a gift. He gives humanity his divine love so that they may share in his own oneness, a deeper connection than mere human friendship. This paper intends to describe the aspects of the oneness that distinguish holy friendship: relational trust, accompaniment, mutual recognition, encounter, interdependence, holy intimacy, sacrifice, encouragement, sacred space, and fruitfulness.

In relational trust, a friend honors the other friend’s freedom and autonomy and lets go of fear and suspicions that arise in the

course of the friendship. In accompaniment, the friends grow alongside each other without trying to solve each other’s problems or putting themselves above each other, each allowing him or herself to be accompanied. In mutual recognition, friends enter the reality of the other through vulnerable sharing and compassionate, nonjudgmental listening. In encounter, friends become calm and still to be able to feel the beauty and sacredness of the other and thank God that the other exists. In interdependence, friends help each other sustain and grow in dependence on God, reaching out to each other to share doubts, insecurities, and weaknesses and being willing to feel and recognize the commonalities of expressed brokenness. In holy intimacy, friends mutually participate in God’s longing for each other, communicate their need for love, and acknowledge the inability to satisfy this infinite desire apart from God. In sacrifice, friends are willing to apologize and forgive each other when they do not act like a holy friend. In encouragement, friends support each other’s noble endeavors, acknowledge the gift of their weaknesses, and guide each other gently when they make questionable choices despite their feelings towards each other. In sacred space, friends remain united in spirit whether in physical proximity or distance. In

fruitfulness, friends depend on God as the source of the holy friendship, sharing the gift of oneness with others so that they may also participate in God's love and the gift of holy friendship.

Even atheist Ludwig Feuerbach, who reduced theology to anthropology, a mere projection of humanity, recognized a vital truth in Christianity's conception of God as community in the Trinity. Feuerbach, in "Principles of the Philosophy of the Future," explains:

The *essence* of man is contained only in the community, in the *unity of man with man*—a unity, however, that rests on the *reality* of the *distinction* between "I" and "You" For *himself* alone, man is just man (in the ordinary sense); but man *with man*—the *unity of "I" and "You"*—that is *God*. . . . The *Trinity* was the *highest mystery*, the *central point* of the *absolute philosophy* and *religion*. But the secret of the Trinity, as demonstrated historically and philosophically in the *Essence of Christianity*, is the secret of *communal* and *social life*. . . . Hence, the highest and ultimate principal of philosophy is *the unity of man with man*. All essential relationships—the principles of various sciences—are only *different kinds of modes of this unity*. (Feuerbach 244–45)

Feuerbach beautifully describes the dialogical relation of a self with another self as amounting to God, though this is not possible without God. Only by remaining in

God can holy friends participate in the community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the divine life of God, in their relating with each other.

God placed within our nature a need that is only fulfilled by the gift of divinity. God fulfills humanity's desire for friendship through holy friendship. Where did this need for others come from? Aelred replies:

Finally, when God created man, in order to commend more highly the good of society, he said, 'It is not good for man to be alone: let us make him a helper like unto himself.' . . . As a clearer inspiration to charity and friendship he produced the woman from the very substance of man. . . . Hence, nature from the very beginning implanted the desire for friendship and charity in the heart of man. (Aelred 142)

Holy friendship is the ultimate answer to our neediness for authentic love.

Kierkegaard, in *Works of Love*, unfolds the gift of allowing ourselves to be needy:

Need, do you have a need, to be a needy person—how reluctant a person is to have this said about him! Yet we are saying the utmost when we say of the poet, "He has a need to write;" of the orator, "He has a need to speak;" and of the young woman, "She has a need to love." Ah, how rich was even the neediest person who has ever lived, but who still has had love, compared with him, the only real pauper, who went through

life and never felt a need for anything! This is precisely the young woman's greatest riches, that she needs the beloved; and this is the devout man's greatest and his true riches, that he needs God. (Kierkegaard 10–11)

Some have said that to embark on the path of holiness requires complete detachment from all people, or suggested that anything reminiscent of a friend would automatically be labelled as inefficient or selfish. Kierkegaard says that to be a person, is to be perpetually in need, and to depend on God and others for authentic support. Although it is uncomfortable for a person to remain needy it is essential to receive love from God and others. When we acknowledge our human weaknesses and neediness we open to the gift of our human receptivity. If on the other hand we deny our neediness, we close ourselves to companionship, love, and help from God and others. God delights in communicating Himself through relationship and coming into our lives by our need for one another. To receive the gift of holy friendship, one must resist attempting to fulfill this need with human relationships alone or through one's own power and abilities.

What does holy friendship look like? Holy friends share in the same mission. Holy friendship can take many forms of expression and can be imagined as a quiet lake in the

hearts of friends constantly flowing and quenching. Holy friends mother and father each other and others as a team in the ways that didn't happen perfectly while growing up. Holy friendship is stronger than emotional ups and downs. Holy friends are kind and forgive trespasses. Holy friends can be gently confrontational with each other. Holy friends cry and rejoice with the each other. Holy friends safeguard each other's goodness. Holy friends listen and share their neediness with each other. Holy friends share in each other's healing process. This is all possible in as much as each person is willing to be friends with the source of friendship: God. Kierkegaard helps to make the case that holy friendship is eternally satisfying if connected to the eternal waters, "But the quiet lake can dry up if the gushing spring ever stops; the life of love, however, has an eternal spring. This life is fresh and everlasting" (Kierkegaard 10). The life of love is synonymous with the Life of God.

In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard explains that the self is established by another. "The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can be done only through relationship to God" (Kierkegaard 29–30). Humanity encounters God in Christ,

and he may also encounter Him incarnationally through Christ dwelling in another. Holy friendships can be a means of helping each other to be established more firmly in their selfhood before God. God created and sustains the self by grace, and coming into relation with Him creates new potentialities. “This self takes on a new quality and qualification by being a self directly before God. . . . And what infinite reality [*Realitet*] the self gains by becoming conscious of existing before God, by becoming a human self whose criterion is God!” (Kierkegaard 79). The self receives its criterion and goal, what it is to be a human being, by entrusting itself to the love of God, resting in the power that established it, and receiving forgiveness. Kierkegaard calls this relation of entrusting oneself to God “faith.” “Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God” (Kierkegaard 82). In holy friendship, friends share and encourage each other in their relational trust with God. To hold on tightly to fears and anxieties is to actively distrust God and to despair. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, speaks to the need to let go and trust God, to open our hands, release control, and to rest in God. Holy friends must be transparent, revealing and exposing their brokenness, in trust, while resting in God. To

become more firmly constituted in their own selfhood, holy friends must be vulnerable before God and to share in relational trust with Christ.

Holy friends help each other to be more constituted in their selfhood through what G. W. F. Hegel calls mutual recognition, a need and desire within every person. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes the human need to be known, seen, and loved by another person. Hegel explores how the self becomes conscious through mutual recognition. “Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself. . . . They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another” (Hegel 111–12). If we approach the desire for recognition as merely a lack seeking to be filled, it will be self-defeating. Hegel points out that if we intend to identify with a holy friend by esteeming, valuing, and acknowledging their worth, we will have mutually recognized each other in the same manner that God recognizes us. The needs to be known, seen, and loved by another, allow for self-consciousness to blossom. Mutual acknowledgement, recognition, and being understood by another is essential to being self-conscious. Everyone doesn’t have to know, love, or understand a person, but someone does.

M. Jamie Ferreira peers into the desire for mutual recognition in her essay “The Problematic Agapeistic Ideal—Again.” Ferreira states:

God wants to be loved and . . . God desires intimacy with us. Kierkegaard writes in a late journal entry that “God loves—and God wants to be loved. . . . Our Lord Jesus Christ, even he humanly felt this need to love and be loved by an individual human being” (*Works of Love* 155). Christ’s “craving to hear” that Peter loved him “more than these” is paradigmatic of human love: “to love humanly is to love an individual human being and to wish to be that individual human being’s best beloved” (*Works of Love* 155–56). (Ferreira 101)

Jesus in his humanity needed to be loved by others. This need is an expression of how our humanity needs to be loved by others too. Ferreira is attempting to reflect on this exchange between Jesus and Peter as a natural and beautiful depiction of mutual enjoyment with another on the path to holiness. Ferreira believes that this holy conversation is a manifestation of God’s desire for our love. Taking this a step further, this exchange can take place between holy friends through experiencing the love God has for the other and seeing the other through God’s eyes. The human need to be loved by another is thus fulfilled in participation in divine love.

David Hume argues that because all human action is selfish, friendship cannot be selfless. Eric Entrican Wilson, in his article “Kant and the Selfish Hypothesis,” states:

In his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume distinguished between two versions of the selfish hypothesis. According to one version, “no passion is, or can be disinterested” (EPM 296). That is, all our passions have reference to our own interests; none are genuinely other regarding. When we pity another’s misfortune, for example, it is because we fear a similar fate. According to a second, more extreme, version of the view, “all benevolence is mere hypocrisy, friendship a cheat, public spirit a farce, fidelity a snare to procure trust and confidence” (EPM 295). . . . We can add some detail to Hume’s taxonomy by distinguishing among four related claims: (i) Self-love motivates all human action. Whenever we act, our actions are ultimately explained by self-love. (ii) None of our passions is purely other-regarding. Whenever we seem to feel something for others, that feeling is ultimately explained by a self-regarding feeling. (iii) Moral judgments are ultimately expressions of self-love. Whenever I judge someone’s action “good,” I really mean “good for me.” (iv) The rules of morality and the practice of virtue are merely a cover for self-love. (Wilson 5)

Hume is right: Merely human friendships are always at least partially motivated by self-love. Holy friends, on the other hand, make space for God in their friendship. With his

love as the source of their bond, they receive the grace to resist their egoistic tendencies to use each other for self-gain.

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard illustrates the transformative power of God. “Love is a change, the most remarkable of all, but the most desirable—in fact we say in a very good sense that someone who is gripped by love is changed or becomes changed. Love is a revolution, the most profound of all, but the most blessed!” (Kierkegaard 265). God desires to purify and transform us to be love, as he is. If we allow Him to receive our human love and capacity for holy friendship, then he can teach us how to receive his love and allow it to overflow to others. Kierkegaard reserves most of his praise for neighbor love or *agape* and is fairly critical of the two forms of preferential love: *eros* and *philia*. Holy friendship is an incarnational sharing in *agape*, the love of God, with another person. God’s love transforms and fulfills preferential or human love. Holy friendship is a source of God’s love. Kierkegaard helps explain the definition of this gift of holy friendship:

Love’s hidden life is the innermost being, unfathomable, and then in turn is in an unfathomable connectedness with all existence. Just as the quiet lake originates deep down in hidden springs no eye has seen, so also does a person’s love originate even more

deeply in God’s love. If there were no gushing spring at the bottom, if God were not love, then there would be neither the little lake nor a human being’s love. Just as the quiet lake originates darkly in the deep spring, so a human being’s love originates mysteriously in God’s love. (Kierkegaard 9–10)

Holy friendship is a participation in heaven while on earth. God gives holy friends the ability to appreciate the world, nature, and all people. Holy friends are a source of life giving waters from which to draw and invite others to partake. The human need to love and to be loved is taken up into the mystery of God’s Love.

Brian Gregor in his article “Friends and Neighbors” argues that when friends stand in relation to God, human or preferential love, *eros* and *philia*, is integrated into self-less, divine love, or *agape*. Preferential love and self-less love are not absolutely opposed. Gregor states, “It is God who is to teach each individual how he is to love. Because every relation is rooted in the God relation, and because God stands between the self and the other, it is only in the God-relation that we learn how to love” (Gregor 218). Holy friendships are holy because God is between the friends, helping to integrate all that constitutes each self into his love.

Gregor brings out the role of human friendship in mediating the formative effect of God's love on the human capacity to love. "But if this formative love originates in God, we must not overlook the role that friendship plays in mediating this love and forming our own capacity to love. Love does not only transform friendship; love also transforms selves according to and through friendship. This is why friendship is not merely given moral sanction, and is not merely an option. It is expected of us" (Gregor 228). Holy friendship is thus necessary for love to be transformed. Creating a space for God in the midst of friendships purifies the friendships, making them holy.

Ferreira emphasizes the need for inclusiveness in preferential bonds. "Moreover, insofar as a preferential bond excludes others as neighbors, it is morally bad; but if a preferential bond exists in a context in which others are not deliberately excluded, it is not morally bad" (Ferreira 96). Holy friends look outward and find ways to receive and share divine love with others. Ferreira shares about the responsibility that a holy friend has in the appropriate integration of *eros* and *philia* into God's transformative love. Ferreira states, "[Kierkegaard] elsewhere speaks of our willingness to give up a 'claim' on 'the happiness of erotic love

and friendship' (*Works of Love* 90). The demand of love is that we must be willing to forego the fulfillment of our desire in the context of a relationship in which fulfillment of this desire is harmful to the beloved" (Ferreira 100). Holy friends ask God for help in the realignment and transformation of the desires that they discover are unbecoming of holy friendship, integrating the two types of preferential love, *eros* and *philia*.

Holy friends humbly recognize that we are mysteries to ourselves and that we are interdependent to help each other know ourselves better. According to Kierkegaard we cannot fully know ourselves because of despair, which is a misrelation within the self (Kierkegaard 14–28). So how can a misrelated self, help itself in any significant way? This impossible task opens the door to the need for something outside of the self. Walter Percy, in his book *Lost in the Cosmos*, explores how we are a mystery. Percy asks, "Is it because you know what you present to the world is a persona, a mask, that it is a very fragile disguise, that God alone knows what is underneath since you clearly do not, perhaps nothing less than the self itself, and that if the persona fails, what is revealed is unspeakable" (Percy 30). Percy is illustrating the interior response a person can have in an embarrassing situation. This example and his

book convey the idea that “self-help” is not possible. Percy states that we need God and others to help us because we can’t fully know or help ourselves by ourselves. A holy friend can help a person to be willing to take off their mask and to not be fearful of the imperfections that exist, because divine love accepts all brokenness.

In “Spiritual Friendship,” Aelred of Rievaulx argues that holy friends in mutual holy intimacy have the capacity for affection, gift of self, and sacrifice. Michael Pakaluk summarizes Aelred’s idea of what holy intimacy includes. “A friend is a ‘guardian of love,’ a ‘guardian of the spirit’; a friend is above all one to whom you reveal the secrets of your heart” (Pakaluk 130). He exalts the mutuality of sharing one’s heart with another and the need to gently care for the other’s spiritual life on the path to holiness. Thomas Aquinas, in his essay, “Questions on Love and Charity,” tells of the abiding quality of affection between the self and God as well as between holy friends.

It is written (1 John 4:16): *He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him.* Now charity is the love of God. Therefore, for the same reason, every love makes the beloved to be in the lover, and vice versa. . . . In the love of friendship, the lover is in the beloved, inasmuch as he reckons what is good or evil to his friend, as being so to himself; and his

friend’s will as his own, so that it seems as though he felt the good or suffered the evil in the person of his friend. Hence it is proper to friends to *desire the same things, and to grieve and rejoice at the same*, as the Philosopher [Aristotle] says (*Ethics* 9.3 and *Rhet.* 2.4). Consequently, in so far as he reckons what affects his friend as affecting himself, the lover seems to be in the beloved, as though he were become one with him. (Aquinas 164–65)

Through God’s love, a holy friend can experience the suffering of another and share in their joys. The intimacy that holy friends experience through this sharing forms a holy bond and oneness.

Holy friends can make a gift of themselves to God and each other in mutual holy intimacy. Love is not self-serving. Kierkegaard explains, “Love does not seek its own; it rather gives in such a way that the gift looks as if it were the recipient’s property” (Kierkegaard 274). Holy friends desire to give their lives in radical availability to God, each other, and the broader community. M. Jamie Ferreria describes the seeming absurdity and gift of being able to sacrifice oneself, in her book *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love*:

For us, love must involve the abandonment of a search for love; it must be a ‘sacrificial giving of oneself.’ But at the same time as he

says this, Kierkegaard reminds us that our sacrifice does not mean that we lose all possibility of being loved by others. . . . He makes it clear that ‘in the eyes of the world,’ we will look like the ‘unconditionally injured,’ the ones made fools of, tricked, and deceived. . . . Sacrifice and self-denial are not a goal in themselves but the substance of forgetting one’s own in loving the other. (Ferreria 152–53)

For Ferreria, others may think holy friends lose out by choosing to become poor and being willing to feel their woundedness and need for God. They are mistaken. In giving oneself as a sacrificial offering to God, the self becomes more receptive to love and to the gift of receiving another in holy friendship. If holy friends are to abide in love, they must sacrifice continually by forgiving. Aelred explains this necessary disposition and act of the will. He states, “For ‘he that is a friend loves at all times.’ Although he be accursed unjustly, though he be injured, though he be cast in the flames, though he be crucified, ‘he that is a friend loves at all times’” (Aelred 135). God gives relational trust, or faith, as a means to share in his forgiveness when one is wounded. Holy friends must remain in love no matter what.

Holy friends encourage each other. Gregor states, “people can help each other to love God, and this is what it really means to love someone. . . . Friends hold each other

accountable for their actions, and build each other up through prayer, exhortation, and encouragement” (Gregor 225–26). Holy friends are only able to encourage each other through relational trust to love God and to be willing to be seen as imperfect and in need of spiritual coaching. These gentle corrections done in prayer can only occur when the self is secure in God’s Love and the incarnation of that same love in a holy friend. Kierkegaard describes the necessity of the strength of security. “*Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured.* This security of eternity casts out all anxiety and makes love perfect, perfectly secured” (Kierkegaard 32). He is saying that fears will melt away when there is a sense of security about love itself and in a holy friendship. The exposing of and helping with one’s weaknesses doesn’t result in the loss of love. Ferreria explains, “Our loving acceptance of others in their wholeness does not preclude challenging their weaknesses” (Ferreria 180). Holy friends challenge as an expression of love, an accompaniment on the path to holiness.

Holy friends must allow for sacred space and holy longing. Aquinas unfolds the mystery of physical and spiritual presence to another:

For absence is incompatible with union. But love is compatible with absence; for the Apostle says (Gal. 4:18): *Be zealous for that which is good in a good thing always . . . and not only when I am present with you. . . .* The union of lover and beloved is twofold. The first is real union; for instance, when the beloved is present with the lover. The second is union of affection. . . . When a man loves another with the love of friendship, he wills good to him, just as he wills good to himself. Hence a friend is called a man's *other self* (*Ethics* 9.4), and Augustine says (*Confess.* 4.6), *Well did one say to his friend: Thou half of my soul . . .* love remains whether the beloved be absent or present. (Aquinas 162–63)

For Aquinas, holy friends need not always be physically present to each other. Perhaps they require detachment from when and how those moments occur for a deeper spiritual union to mature. In order to bear fruit, they must continually make an act of faith in receiving the gift of oneness with God and each other with gratitude. They must trust so as not to succumb to moments of darkness, loneliness, and seeming abandonment.

Holy friends bear fruit when they participate in the life of the blessed Trinity with others. How can holy friendships bear fruit? Aelred replies, “The Lord in the Gospel says: ‘I have appointed you that you should go, and should bring forth fruit,’ that is, that you should love one another” (Aelred 140).

To elaborate, holy friends are a source of life for others and show others how to be in right relation within themselves, with God and with others, and to be able to participate in holy friendship themselves. Their openness to receiving, maturing, and inviting others into this gift of divine love can allow for God to bear divine fruit in others' hearts and in the world. The aspects of the oneness that distinguish holy friendship are: relational trust, accompaniment, mutual recognition, encounter, interdependence, holy intimacy, sacrifice, encouragement, sacred space, and fruitfulness. In sharing the gift of communion in God's love with others, holy friends transform the world around them. What an eternally satisfying blessing to need God and others, and to be able to share in holy friendship in community in the life of the blessed Trinity.

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Garden Dwelling

Regina Harders

“A tranquil eye, an unruffled consistency in doing, each season of the year, each hour of the day, precisely what needs to be done, are perhaps required of nobody more than they are of the gardener.”
—Goethe

During the housing crises in Germany following WWII, Martin Heidegger wrote a piece entitled *Building Dwelling Thinking*. In it, he traces the origin and meaning of the words build (*bauen*) and dwell (*wohnen*). For Heidegger, building is not only the making of things, but “to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine” (Heidegger). Both meanings of building are encompassed by the idea of dwelling, which again is more than it first appears and includes the actions of sparing (leaving things in their own nature) and preserving peace. Furthermore, in dwelling, humans are in the fourfold, that is on the earth and under the sky, before the divinities, and with one another. Recently, Albert Borgmann incorporated these ideas about the fourfold and Heidegger’s assertion that technology is the force that eclipsed the focusing powers of pretechnological times, to argue for the development and use of focal practices to center one’s orientation, see how

the force of nature can be encountered, and achieve the reflective care of the good life (Borgmann 329-330). This essay is an exploration of how gardening can be a focal practice that encompasses Heidegger’s dwelling as it simultaneously forces a break with the pervasiveness of technology and provokes intelligent thought about nature, bringing one into a good life in attunement with truth.

To begin with, one must answer the question, “What is a garden?” They tend to be beautiful areas with clear boundaries, but for the present purpose gardens cannot be defined only in terms of aesthetics. If they were, one might consider lawns and golf courses to be gardens. While lawns and golf courses might be beautiful to some, their product-intensive care does not require much thought or engagement and encourages practices antithetical to nature. As Pollan says, “lawns, not allowed to grow tall enough to flower and set seed and force-fed nitrogen to stay alive, are nature purged of sex and death” (Pollan 62). Growing nonnative grasses to be as bright green as possible requires a host of modern technologies: chemical fertilizers, herbicides (e.g., 2,4-D selective developed during WWII as a means to starve enemy troops into submission (Steinberg 45), and pesticides, machinery

(much of it dangerous and run on gasoline, 17 million gallons of which are spilled by Americans while refilling lawn equipment every summer (Steinberg 8), and even computerized irrigation systems. Additional developments include the use of sod for those who cannot wait for their grass to grow, and lawn care services who oversell chemical applications. These “scientific” reductive practices, not a means to furthering human ends, foster detachment from the land and are clearly averse to Heidegger’s idea of tilling the soil.

A garden, then, must have well-tended soil and the tending of the soil is one of the virtues of gardening (Brook). The world of soil and all its micro-organisms, many still quite mysterious, requires care and time, but is essential for healthy plant roots and water conservation—two important elements one cannot get from quick fix chemical fertilizers. Tending to the soil firmly grounds the garden and gardener in all that is good in the earth. Recognizing that man has yet to truly know the life of soil, is a reminder of the divinities. Good soil, itself an ecosystem, is attained by giving back to the land more than is taken away, acknowledging community of the earth and the gift of the earth’s bounty. In this case, the giving back is usually in the form of compost—itsself a

dwelling for microorganisms. It is powerful stuff, and as Pollan says, it “frees the gardener from the petrochemical industry” (70).

Advocating freedom from petrochemicals and spending time giving back to the soil takes away some of the temptation toward dominion over nature and creates an awareness of the codependence between human action and the natural world. A garden, then, ought to “refer to, body forth its dependence on nature” and “exemplify the codependence between human endeavor and the natural world” (Cooper 137, 145). A garden should find a way to harmonize nature and culture, allowing for the many things that are out of our control, e.g. the weather, as it acknowledges our need to act and the possibility our actions, in time, will make a difference.

This is not easy, nor for the faint of heart or the perfectionist. Gardeners, who like all “human beings experience time as the working out of one care after another,” are further pressured by the “intrigues of the garden’s developing plot” (Harrison 7). It is, however, possible, especially if one is open to the humility that comes with submitting to the order of caring for plants (e.g. pruning at the right time of year) and their garden as a whole and accepting the structure and pattern

on one's own life demanded by this care. Humility so acquired is related to hope, which saturates the garden. This kind of devotion and the humility and hope they engender stand in opposition to modern technology, the tendency of which is to take more than it gives as it encourages denial of intrinsic limitations against the powers of nature, therefore eschewing toil in natural life struggles. Dedication to the work of gardening is worth it for a number of reasons, not the least of which is by allowing things in the garden to be as they present themselves and letting them speak for themselves, the gardener himself resumes Being in Heidegger's terms. That is, the gardener becomes an opening within which the world reveals itself in the present—a present revealed, because as Harrison asserts, gardens have a way of slowing time down (39). A well-maintained garden, with clear boundaries, can do this for visitors as well as tenders, because they create space for thought, reverie, and deep time (Harrison 57). For the most part, gardens are places in which our attention is our own and give us the real option to attend to things in a deep and sustained way.

All of this is not to say that the garden, as embodiment of the codependence between man and nature, will contain no elements of

domination. For example, ornamental plants, originally fashionable and expensive signals of wealth, are now specially bred to be resistant to pests and diseases. The horticulture industry thrives on the sale of these unique, nonnative species. They are beautiful, one must engage in their design, cultivation, and care and many thoughtful gardeners feed them by providing well for the soil. The activities the gardeners engage in are complex and interesting, so must be credited as gardening. Yet the plants do not do their job.

Contemplating nonnative plants brings up a number of issues. St. John's wort, daisies, dandelions, crabgrass, clover, pigweed, mullein, and Norway maple are all nonnative plants brought here from Europe. Some—especially dandelions, crabgrass, and clover—were brought as food and feed. The Norway maple was planted for its full foliage. All grow invasively and replace many native plants. While some Americans still eat dandelions, most try to eradicate them, often with chemicals. The Norway maple, because it has so few pests on this continent, has replaced many of our native trees. At first glance it may seem like a plus to have a plant with so few pests, but the reality is, not being food for insects means fewer insects survive, and because native

insects are food for native birds and other native fauna, native bird and fauna populations dwindle. This happens because most insect herbivores can only eat plants with which they have evolved over a very long period of time (Tallamy 15). Consideration of native plants, and the ease with which they grow once nonnatives are patiently cleared, brings one to Borgmann's assertion that we must uncover the simplicity of things (331). Is nature the natural environment as it is visible to us, as Cooper asked, or is it the essential reality underlying all things which one tried to expose in a garden (34)?

This matters profoundly in terms of dwelling, caring, sparing, and preserving peace. I am not arguing that a space cannot be a garden if it consists of anything other than native plants. Pushed to the limit of that end, one would be arguing for preserving all nature in its pristine form—an impossible task given the level of development the world over. It is also beside the point as “most species can live with humans if their basic needs are met,” so that one goal for a “dwelling garden” is to change our own living spaces, our dwellings, into “sustainable ecosystems with high species diversity” (Tallamy 37).

Many gardeners are open to change. Generally speaking, gardeners believe gardens are long-term commitments of care, which do not culminate in a finished product but rather consist of a rewarding practice (Cooper 72). Examining prior and current practices of collecting ornamentals and providing chemical inputs, a gardener will “recognize the central vacuity of advanced technology, and that emptiness can become the opening for new focal things” (Borgmann 331) such as working toward a beautiful and balanced garden without the use of pesticides creating a healthier place for plants, animals, and people.

For what is a garden without people? People enjoy gardens, and especially when they are quite familiar with one, experience them as environments in which things have “their place relative to one another, to the whole and to themselves (Cooper 77). Because we usually experience a garden as we move around in it or are otherwise actively engaged, whether in gardening, sport, or a social event, we are provided a reminder that we are situated in the world that includes our embodiment, thus breaking from the mental world favored by modern technology. More of this kind of embodied engagement and seeing can only benefit people who are seeing less and registering

less as they focus in on small screens. Interacting with and in a garden may well be a good way to “recover orientation in the oblivious and distracted era of technology when the great embodiments of meaning have lost their focusing power” (Borgmann 330-331).

Here I do not claim that gardens are works of art. A garden will change, whether it is through the work of gardeners or the effects of nature or the time of day or season, while at the same time remaining the same garden. Also unlike art objects—a garden is never one object, nor is it ever finished or framed. But neither is a garden nature. Rather, as Cooper convincingly argues, because gardens are “transformations of natural places, containing natural things and subject to natural processes, while also being products of human artifice, they are art-and-nature (41). This might be their greatest strength—moving in and engaging with a garden, whether as the gardener or a visitor, all senses have the potential to interact with the identification of changes, provided one chooses to focus on Being in the garden. This kind of physical engagement in the world is profoundly different from the insidious patterns of modern technology. Furthermore, changes made by the gardener are, ostensibly, made to create enjoyment for

other people. Noticing changes made by another can spark joy and appreciation—or derision—but in either case one is acknowledging the action of another human being and the relationship of a part of the garden to the whole. In gardening, then, we have humans engaging with the nonhuman world, with each other, and with themselves.

There are some, particularly environmental ethicists, who hold that gardens are an indication of man’s problematic dominion over nature and creations of deceptive versions of nature. While some of their arguments have merit, it is also true that we cannot reclaim all natural lands. Instead, gardeners should engage in their practice with humility and an open mind. It is more productive to realize that “nature has its own order and gardens give order to our relation to nature” (Harrison 48) than to eschew attempts to care for it in our dwelling spaces. Along with this must come the realization that no matter how hard one works in the garden, the garden depends “on the cooperation of the natural world and its processes” (Cooper 152).

Gardeners understand this and share information about how natural processes affect their plants and dwellings in an effort to help other gardeners. Gardening is often a social activity, whether working together in a

garden or meeting to discuss successes and failures. Gardeners often share failures, with humor, and a look forward to the next year of gardening.

In gardening, we must guard all the elements of the garden—plants, weather, animals, soil, humans—in their depth and integrity and view them in their context and interrelation. Ambiguity will lead to failures, including failures in ecosystems, which can have far-reaching consequences. When done well, gardening is an activity that contributes to a good life, interspersed with moments of tranquility that have their source in virtuous activity (O'Brien 3). As suggested by Borgmann, it “sponsors discipline and skill which are exercised in a unity of achievement and enjoyment, of mind, body, and the world, of myself and others, and in a social union” (343).

To begin with, providing care to plants, fauna, and by extension to other human beings whose environment one is improving is an indication of respect for all life (Cooper 95). This kind of action is the self-affirmation of the human and when done with care is appropriate and gives gardening and gardens meaning. There is much patience required to garden well, and an optimism and willingness to look to the future. Often that means planting something, like an oak tree,

which one will not see through to maturity, but will nurture for future generations of humans to enjoy and fauna to be fed and protected by. One would not do this without the experience that the garden well done is greater and other than ourselves (Borgmann 338).

Planning and carrying out these kinds of gardening activities are an admission of one’s mortality and place in the world as well as an acknowledgment of how humans are positioned in the world. This contemplation of mortality brings one into the truth. And truth brings peace. It is powerful to know things are present just as they are, not despite the place they have in relation to our lives but through this (Cooper 148). To care for things without imposing our will, but listening to their needs, and thoughtfully cultivating, we must come to terms with the truth of our relation to ourselves, other human beings, our world, and the ground from which the gift of the world comes.

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